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The Child hero: A Comparative Study of Ngugi's *Weep not, child* and Oyono's *Houseboy*

IN HIS WORK on Chinua Achebe's novels, entitled 'Chinua Achebe and the Tragedy of History',¹ Thomas Melone says that the content of literature ought to be judged as "a portion of his destiny" (T. Melone, 1973, 12). Explaining his reasons, the Cameroonian critic says that every authentic literature should be a "carrier of humanity" ("porteuse d'humanite"), since it should, whether it be African or European, "witness for man and his destiny"; because, continues the critic, "men are first of all men ... , their identity is fundamental, and their destiny human" (T. Melone, 1973.12).

More than any other form of literary criticism or appreciation, comparative literature highlights this universality of even creative literary art. Universality, however, does not mean that one must necessarily compare authors from different countries or different cultural backgrounds. It is possible to compare and contrast two or more writers from the same country, from the same village, even from the same family, and finally, an author can be compared to himself. One comes up with interesting findings, in comparing, for example, the Chinua Achebe of *No Longer at Ease* with the Achebe of *Arrow of God*. The young graduate returning from England, unable to find his feet in his former home, and the village of Umuaro no longer the same under sweeping religious attacks on the gods that had hitherto guaranteed its security and unity, both are witnesses

each in its own way to the same cracking society under the invasion of foreign culture. Does it mean that the celebrated Nigerian novelist has said everything when he published his famous *Things Fall Apart*, and that thereafter is he only repeating himself Far from it? The novelist is comparable to a surveyor, whose field is the human society; in each novel he observes society from a particular point of view. The product of his artistic (here literary) creation is a "portion" of man's struggle with life, i.e., with his destiny, and this "odyssey" reproduces, *mutatis mutandis*, similar characteristics, whether it talks of Achilles, of Antigone, of Hamlet, of Obi Okonkwo or Ezeulu.

The above considerations help us to better appreciate Ime Ikiddeh's definition of a novel as "fiction based on an historical event recreated in human terms" (Ngugi, 1962, xii). The particular point of focus of the two authors we are studying is the child in his relation to given certain "historical events recreated in human terms" in two different countries and at nearly ten years' interval in time. Before comparing these historical events viewed as recreated fiction, we should first of all ascertain why the two authors chose each a child to be his hero.

Why the Child as hero?

Poetry is best appreciated, not by reasoning, but by feeling, i.e. by entering into the ecstatic sentiments of the poet at his moment of writing. The poetic verse aims, therefore, at arousing these sentiments in the reader, and not at a logical understanding of the passage. Whereas prose may receive one clear interpretation or explanation, no one interpretation can ever exhaust the wealth of meaning couched in a few poetic verses. If

it is true that a piece of literary work escapes its author once it is set down on paper, it is even truer of poetry than of any other form of creative writing. There are certain experiences in life which, in order to retain one's mental health, were better felt than reasoned about. By his age, nature, and psychological make up, the child feels things and does not reason about them, at least in the cut and dry syllogism of the adult. The child's innocence, his openness to every instinct and desire his connivance with nature, his instinctive intransigence for purity and truth... are among the qualities that make Melone believes that the only poetic state is childhood; in the sense where the poetic state or condition may be interpreted to mean the ideal state of paradise lost. The first aim, therefore, of a novelist whose hero is a child could be the desire, conscious or not, to travel back along the slippery steps to his lost Garden of Eden.

The second reason -and this is nearer to two authors we are studying- is that the unreasoning attitude of the child, with whom the author often identifies himself, helps to rub off the sharp edge of the cruel experiences narrated in the book. The child is by temperament elastic, his own idealism is not the dangerously stiff rigidity of an Okonkwo who commits suicide in order not to witness what Melone calls 'the glorious funerals of a dying Africa' (Melone, 1973,77). Oyono's 'house boy,' Toundi, suffers series of humiliations, but does not commit suicide (he is actually killed by the whites while attempting to run for his life), and Ngugi's Njoroge is recalled from his suicide attempt by the voice of his mother. Okonkwo's adult pride stung him beyond recall; he had to die.

The third and final advantage of the child-hero is that, thanks to his naivety and undiluted reproduction of events, what he

narrates is nobody's exclusive property. The author can therefore use him (and how apt at the hands of Oyono and Ngugi!) and hide perfectly behind his translucent frankness to relate whatever happens. Who can accuse the child of fomenting trouble, or of inciting one particular political party or ethnic group against another? Does he even feel the pinch and sting of discrimination and racism as adults do? At best he feels shocked, and registers his shock like the faithful photographic paper that he is. The most salutary aspect of the child's character is that he is completely absorbed by the present, does not ruminate on the past as adults do, and has a carefree attitude about the future (*i.e.* when this even dawns on his consciousness).

It is true that the heroes of *Houseboy* and *Weep Not, Child* oscillate between infancy and adolescence, but their age and experiences in the two novels are still completely characterized, on their part, by innocence and naivety of childhood.

Comparative Study of the Experiences of Toundi, and Njoroge

Some of the points raised here above, about the artistic benefits of the child-hero, do not apply to the two novels under consideration. While one could describe Camera Laye's African Child as an unbroken chaplet of one nostalgic childhood memory after another, it would be almost impossible to imagine any atom of nostalgia in Oyono's mind, or Ngugi's either, when they bend over the creation of their Toundi and Njoroge respectively. For while *The African Child* affords the Guinean undergraduate in Paris a salutary fight into fancy from the cold, indifferent, lonely and capitalist atmosphere of the French capital - exactly as Louis Guilloux's 'Pain des Reves'² does for the novelist from Brittany in Nazi-occupied France of 1942- the

two novels being studied evoke rather the same bitter taste in the reader's mouth as Mongo Beti's *Remember Ruben*. If nostalgia there was, it is rather for a childhood that never existed, or rather that is not allowed to exist as it should. Toundi and Njoroge belong to the generation of African children who never had any childhood - a model of which one reads in the Edenic memories recounted by the hero of *The African Child*; they rather resemble the generation of those European children born in the late thirties, and whose childhood was spent in concentration camps or in cities terrorised consistently by Nazi brutality. A Sigmund Freud would have summed up all I have said here above in one short phrase: that sort of childhood is just a "reve manque" - a lost dream - if not a nightmare, like that of Morzamba in *Remember Ruben*. And who likes to recall a nightmare? Except, of course, for some very serious reasons best known to the author. These reasons already form the subject-matter of several commentaries on Oyono and Ngugi, and will only be very briefly dealt with here. We shall now examine and compare the nightmarish experiences of the two child heroes.

Resemblances

For purpose of clarity, we would like to start this comparative study by examining the areas of resemblance or similarity between Toundi's fate and that of Njoroge. The two heroes are both children, not just from the titles of the novels, but from indications about their age. Toundi, the personage-cum-narrator of *Houseboy* speaks about his age at the very beginning of his "dairy," explaining what - according to his own understanding - was his true reason for leaving his parental home.

In fact I just wanted to get close to the white *man* with hair like the beard on a maize cub who dressed in women's clothes and give little black boys' sugar lumps. I was in a gang of heathen boys who followed the missionary about as he went from hut to hut... (Oyono, 1956,9)

As for Njoroge, his age is indicated right from the opening of the very first chapter of the book where his mother, Nyokabi, asks him "would you like to go to school?" (Ngugi 1962 3).

Most Africans know the relative age of any child about to start school - exceptions being made for adult education. Later on, in flashback chronology, the author, explaining how Ngotho (Njoroge's father) had become a "Muhoi", says among other things:

Njoroge had never come to understand how his father had become a 'Muhoi.' Maybe a child did not know such matters. They were too deep for him (Ngugi, 1962, 13).

The two child-heroes grew in a precarious atmosphere of colonial oppression and exploitation. Need it be stressed that this point is at the very core of the two novels under study?

Houseboy is set in the French Cameroons of between 1921-1939, i.e. between the placement of the former German protectorate(1884-1914) under French mandate, after the Allies had occupied it from 1914-1916. We have indications of this, first from the only direct allusion to "the War" in the novel from Mekongo, "the army veteran" (see Oyono, 1956, 57), and then

indirectly from the cook shocked by the boldness and unhealthy inquisitiveness of "youngsters of today" who pry into the secrets of the white man. Says the cook to Toundi: 'I don't understand you, you youngsters of today. In the time of the Germans we took no interest in the affairs of the whites.' (Oyono, 1956, 61).

Ngugi's *Weep not, child* is set in a Kenya where the indigenes return from the white man's wars of 1914-1916, and 1939-45 to find their land gone: the white settlers now own all their land.

The unsuccessful attempts to recover the lost land lead eventually to the terrorist underground movement called the "Mau-Mau". We are therefore in the Kenya of the fifties, of the liberation struggles by Jomo Kenyatta, in a Kenya as mercilessly exploited as the French Cameroon of Oyono's *Houseboy*. As a fitting explanation for the predatory appetite of the white settlers of this period, Ngugi explains, in a flashback, the genesis of the passionate love of Mr Howlands for the land (in Kenya) his almost sensual attachment to this "shamba" (Ngugi, 1962, 29). And the reason is that,

He (Mr. Howlands) was a product of the First World War. After years of security at home, he had been suddenly called to arms and he had gone to the war. With the fire of youth he imagines war a glory. But after four years of blood and terrible destruction, like many other young men he was utterly disillusioned by the 'peace.' He had to escape. East Africa was a good place. *Here was a big trace of wild country to conquer* (Ngugi, 1962, 30) -our own stress.

The theme of economic exploitation in the colonies has been

the most common among African writers, especially in this pre-independence era. And Mr. Howlands is presented to us as one among many who, "disillusioned by the 'peace'... had to escape". They were no longer coming as mere colonialists just to keep order and levy taxes for the Imperial Crown, they had emigrated in search of a new permanent home. And what better place than this unprotected "wild country," which was a prey "to conquer"? One is not surprised therefore to hear Mr. Howlands declare peremptorily to the despoiled Ngotho (father of the child-hero): "my home is here"(Ngugi, 1962,32). Ngotho tries gradually, and on several occasions to explain to little Njoroge how the land that was formerly their family property had passed into the hands of Mr. Howlands, and how he Ngotho had become a "Muhoi" (a sort of a vassal in feudal times) on his own land (see Ngugi, 1962, 26). But the best summary of the sad story of expropriation is given by Kiarie, one of the speakers at the rally in support of the strike embarked upon by the despoiled Kenyans:

All the land belonged to the people –black people. They had been given it by God. For even- race had their country ... Later, our fathers were taken captives in the first Big war to help in a war whose course they never knew. And when they came back? 'Their land had been taken away for a settlement of the white soldiers... . Our people were taken and forced to work for these settlers.... When people rose to demand their rights they were shot down... When the second Big War came, we were taken to fight Hitler -Hitler who had not wronged us. We were killed, we shed blood to

save the British Empire from defeat and collapse.
(Ngugi, 1962,57-58).

But now that "there was a man sent by God whose name was Jomo" (note the biblical language verbatim with the fourth Gospel), they "have gathered ... to tell the British... "The time has come. Let my people go... We want back our land! Now!" (Ngugi, 1962, 58).

Did they get it? The "Mau Mau" was the answer.

In Oyono's *Houseboy* the tragic experience of exploited Africans is, like everything else in this fundamentally satirical novel, presented in a rather ludicrous fashion. Since the "narrator" is Toundi himself, we are hemmed in with him in his little world of a child: we only see what he sees, and experience what he experiences. But childish and of little consequence as Toundi's experiences may be seen, they are nevertheless pointers to a similar spirit of merciless exploitation.

The first instance of this which we meet in the novel is Toundi's joy at finding himself the boy of a white man (a rare privilege at the time!), and what is more one whom the white man has taught how to read and write. What did it matter to the child so raised in his expectations if he was paid no wages?

I am his boy, a boy who can read and write, serve Mass,
lay a table, sweep out his room and make his bed. I
don't earn any money. Now and then he gives me an
old shirt or an old pair of trousers (Oyono, 1956,15)

Exploitation of child labour? And by a missionary? Father Gilbert is only being true to a generally prevalent mentality

towards Africans at the period. The second is the symbolic episode of the nightly raids on indigenes' quarters by the chief of police, nicknamed the "Gullet" ("Gosier D' Oiseau" in the original French text) because of "his long flexible neck like a tickbird's neck" (Oyono, 1956,24). Toundi narrates one such visit to the house of his brother-in-law with whom he lived.

The door gave way before I could open it. Into the tiny house charged four Ful'be constables followed by Gullet. I slipped behind the door while my brother-in-law and sister, half dead with fear, watched Gullet ... and his men overturning the bits of furniture Gullet kicked a water jug that shattered into pieces. He told one of his men to turn over a pile of banana bunches. He pulled off a banana and gobbled it down... . he picked another banana and began to eat it. My sister's eyes grew round. I began to be afraid again. Gullet turned, bent his long neck and went out. The noise of the engines died away and then there was silence (Oyono, 1956,24-25)

The above clearly depicts the condition of the African terrorised by armed white settlers who destroy or appropriate his belongings.

Our third and last example comes to show what easily becomes of the salary of paid African workers who have the misfortune to damage anything while on duty. Mrs. Decazy, the wife of the commandant, like any other unfaithful wife (or husband) is ever jittery and her domestics naturally bear the brunt of her cantankerous mood. If they broke any plate or dish

their salary would go in compensation out of all proportion. In one of these moods, "she carried out in inspection and found a broken decanter. She fixed a price and deducted it from the cook's wages and mine. It came to half our month's earnings" (Oyono, 1956,74). Toundi is lucky this time to paid any wage at all, and he and all the other domestics are warned that "that's only a beginning... only a beginning"(Oyono, 1956, 74). It is the litany of similar humiliations, which, *mutatis mutandis*, provoke the ill-fated strike in *Weep not, child*. Jacobo's ignoble role in the latter novel is comparable, in its meanness, greed and treachery to a similar role by Toundi's repugnant uncle in *Houseboy*. Unable to resist his greed for the delicious porcupine prepared by Toundi's mother, the greedy uncle advises his brother (the hero's father) against Toundi's childish misdemeanour, saving, "if you want to make him obedient... take away his food.... This porcupine is really delicious" (Oyono, 1956, 12). Hence the hero, reduced to "peering through the cracks in the mud wall" of his parental hut at his father and uncle gulping down greedily his own share of the evening meal (cf. Oyono, 1956, 12), is a symbol of Africans despoiled of their lawful rights through the instrumentality of those fellow Africans who are supposed to protect and defend them. They are just like the Kenyans of *Weep not, child*, who through the treacherous puppetry of chief Jacobo (himself an indigene), become 'Muhoi' on their very ancestral lands.

The last important point of resemblance in the two novels is the use of child innocence and naivety to puncture the myth of white racial superiority. Oyono's naive Toundi leaves no aspect untouched, his symbolic "broom" sweeping through not only the official residence of the commandant and discovering

Madam Decazy's contraceptives... but also through the church and the prisons where hypocrisy equally held sway. Beneath the facade of a mythical racial superiority, Toundi finds the same lying, cowardly and unimaginative brutes as one could find anywhere. Madam Decazy is the highest lady of the land being the wife of the highest white official. Was her nymphomania not exactly the same as that of the professional Africa prostitute, Kalisa? The latter had at least the honesty to accept her place and keep it. Such a sacrilegious scrutiny could not go unpunished, and Toundi paid for it with his life.

In *Weep not, child*, Njoroge and Stephen Howlands meet at an inter-schools' sports to discover to their mutual surprise that they had each secretly wanted to befriend the other, but had been held back by this mysterious "electric tension in the air..." which is nothing but racial prejudice and induced xenophobia:

'I used to hide near the road. I wanted to speak with some of you.'

Stephen was losing his shyness.

Why didn't you?'

'I was afraid.'

...

'I am sorry I ran away from you. I too was afraid.'

'A afraid?' It was Stephen's turn to wonder.

'Yes. I too was afraid of you.'

'Strange'

'Yes. It's strange how you do fear something because your heart is already prepared to fear because may be *you* were brought up to fear something, or simply because you found others fearing...' (Ngugi,

1962,110)

And thanks to their world of children, which "stood somewhere outside petty prejudice, hatred and class differences," "they felt close together, united by a common experience of insecurity and fear. no one could escape" (Ngugi,1962, 88 and 111). "No one" neither black nor white. This momentary freedom from the inhibitions of social and racial prejudices helps these two children (one white the other black) experience what is inescapably fundamental to even-human being in circumstances such as the Kenya of 'Mau Mau' terrorism, 'a common experience of insecurity and fear no one could escape.' Imprisoned hitherto in his ghetto-mentality, the black would have thought that the "superior" race should also be "superior" to feelings of fear and insecurity. After this discovery, they are never the same again, just like Toundi who, having discovered to his utter amazement that "a great chief like the Commandant (is) uncircumcised ... was relieved by this discover)'," because "it killed something inside (him)": fear. "I knew I should never be frightened of the Commandant again" (Oyono.1956,28)

Differences

From the above points which still do not exhaust all the aspects of resemblance, it is clear that there is much in common between *Houseboy* and *Weep not Child*. Let us examine the divergences in the experiences of the two child-heroes, because no matter how much destinies resemble, each is still unique in its own way. The fact that *Houseboy* is an English translation from the original French text, *Une vie de boy*, hardly merits any

mention, except to stress the different colonial backgrounds in which the two novels are written. If, according to an American proverb, "the first hour is the rudder of the day," we can hardly find a better way to start a study of the divergences in these two destinies than to go back to their origin, i.e. to their family background.

While Toundi evolves as an orphan, Njoroge, is all along surrounded and protected by the warmth of his parental home.

It is quite true that at the opening pages of *Houseboy* we find Toundi surrounded, like Njoroge, by the warmth of a family. But, like the "predestined personage" of Marthe Robert's "Family Novel," Toundi is not destined to "spend his childhood days with his parents, in the warmth of their common love" (Marthe Robert, 1972, 52). Because his father did not love (him) as a father ought to love his son, he had his mother's "blessing" for fleeing his parental home for good (Oyono, 1956, 13). A little further on, he writes: "My parents are dead. I have never been back to the village" (Oyono, 1956, 14). We shall see the disastrous consequences of this on his destiny at the end, when compared especially with that of Njoroge. The latter, as we have said, spent all his childhood with his parents.

Njoroge inherits his parents' lifelong ambition: to recover their lost land which, to his father, Ngotho, was "a spiritual loss" as well (Ngugi, 1962, 74). It is mainly for this reason that he was sent to school, for, as Ngotho himself says, "education was good only because it would lead to the recover)- of the lost lands" (Ngugi, 1962, 39). Right from the start therefore, Njoroge feels weighing on his young fragile shoulders the onerous task of playing a messianic role:

Njoroge listened to his father. He instinctively, knew that an indefinable demand was being made on him, even though he was so young. he knew that for him education would be the fulfilment of a wider and more significant vision a vision that embraced the demand made on him (...). He saw himself destined for something big, and this made his heart glow (Ngugi, 1962,39)

Little by little lie comes to believe that God may have chosen him to be the instrument of His Divine Service" (Ngugi, 1962, 94). Hence this prayer on hearing that he is going to go to High School: "Give me more and more learning and make me the instrument of Thy Light and Peace" (Ngugi, 1962, 104). The budding Moses was confirmed in this vision of his national messianic role on the occasion of his departure for High School:

Somehow the Gikuyu people always saw their deliverance as embodied in education. When the time for Njoroge to leave came near, many people contributed money so that lie could go.

He was no longer the son of Ngotho but the son of the land (...). Njoroge had now a new feeling of pride and power for at last his way seemed clear. The land needed him and God had given him an opening so that lie might come back and save his family and the whole country (Ngugi, 1962, 104-105)

The reader knows the disaster that put a tragic end to these dreams. The laconic manner in which the embittered child sums

up his sad story:

"I have now lost all my education, my faith and my family ... I, alone, am left" (Ngugi, 1962, 131). His dreams now behind him, "life seemed (to him) like a big lie where people bargained with forces that one could not see" (Ngugi, 1962, 126).

The hero of *Houseboy*, Toundi, for his part, is a blind victim of these invisible forces from the very beginning of the novel. Unlike Njoroge, all his "schooling" consists of learning how to read and write which the white missionary taught him with the sole aim of making him more useful as a houseboy.

"Father Gilbert says I can read and write fluently. Now I can keep a diary like he does" (Oyono, 1956, 9).

We know that this "diary" is actually the novel, *Houseboy*. Naive and imprudent, inexperienced and deaf to reason, Toundi commits one blunder after another, believing stupidly all the time that he enjoys the powerful protection of the commandant. Wasn't he "the dog of the king," and hence the "king" among his fellow "dogs"? Who would dare to harm the "chief European's boy?" (see Oyono, 1956.20).

Unlike Njoroge's, all his ambition for the future is a purely self-centred vague seeking to become like the white man he serves, without knowing too well how to go about it. When, one day, the commandant's wife advises him "to buy a wife"-flattering him that "as the commandant's house boy he is an attractive match he answers: "Perhaps, madam, but my wife and children will never be able to eat and dress like madam or like

white children" (Oyono, 1956,56).

Having severed the umbilical chord that links him with his ancestral "primitive" origin, he wants to become a white man with black skin. Subconsciously, he thinks he has become a member of the Decazy family hence "(he) could do what (he) like(d)" (Oyono, 1956,73) Even though he discovers the secret of the myth of the white man's "racial superiority complex": hypocrisy, he still aspires to resemble him. This infantile megalomania as madam Decazy points out to him (cf Oyono, 1956,56), coupled with his incurable naive confidence in the commandant's all-powerful protection, blinds him to the fact the he could one day fall victim to this hypocrisy, whose universally recognized stock in trade is treachery and betrayal.

This brings us to the last point of difference between Toundi and Njoroge, the last and in the fact the greatest, as it is a matter of life and death, a question of to be or not be.. "If water is polluted at its very source...", begins in Igbo proverb. Toundi's "source" [destiny] is vitiated right from his earliest childhood. Forced by the punitive brutality of an iron-fisted father to flee his parental home, he becomes literally prisoner of his greed which attaches him irresistibly to the world of the white man.

He grows deaf to all advice and warning to flee the residence "when the water [was] still only up to the knees" i.e. before the river swallows [him] up altogether - according to the time-tested saying of our ancestors (Oyono, 1956, 100). A few days after this warning, to which he paid a deaf ear, he is shot and killed at the Spanish Guinea frontier in a belated attempt to escape from his fate. He had left his destiny in the hands of the white man and the latter had disposed of it as his colonialist predatory greed

dictated.

Njoroge, as we have seen, goes from an optimistic vision of bright "tomorrow" to a bitter disappointment which finds hi in a situation, "to which 'tomorrow' was no longer answer. (Ngugi, 1962, 122). In such a bleak predicament, he has only just one ray of hope: in love. In his love for Nwihaki, he begs the latter to escape with him from the wicked reality of their country – a disguised form of suicide. He has lost all hope in any future; but Nwihaki opposes this cowardly escapism. "She sat there, a lone tree defying darkness, trying to instil new life. in him. But he did not want to live. Not this kind of life." (Ngugi, 1962, 133)

When Nwihaki bluntly refuses to yield to his own type of "life," his last hope vanishes with the dying steps of the retreating girl, symbolised by the last rays of "the sun (that) was sinking" (Ngugi, 1962, 134). He sinks into total despair. Pessimism and nihilism take control of him, and his attempted suicide is not a surprise in such circumstances. But he is timely saved from putting his neck in the noose by the voice of mother, Nyokabi, calling to him out of the darkness... (1962, 135-136). Suicide is the worst form of escapism, the last and final surrender of a coward before the challenge of living is the only irreparable failure in life. Njoroge therefore "feels a strange relief to have been saved *in extremis*, and as he humbly accompanies his mother home, he feels ashamed of his triple failure:

He followed her, saying nothing. He was only conscious that he had failed her and the last word of his father, when he had told him to look after the women. He had failed the voice of Nwihaki that had asked him

to wait for a new day. (... He) felt only guilt, the guilt of a man who had avoided his responsibility for which he had prepared himself since childhood (Ngugi, 1962,136)

Having accepted the challenge to live, he behaves true to a very wise saying of Igbo: *Kama aga amu ozum amu, si mua uzo msi gba oso* (which paraphrased in English means: better a living coward than a dead hero). He therefore ignores the "voice" rebuking him for being "a coward" (since he had also "failed" to hear "voice" too, by not committing suicide). He therefore accepts being a coward, "and ran home and opened the door for his two mothers" (Ngugi, 1962, 136).

Conclusion.

So much in common, and yet how dissimilar in the end or, are they really? All the differences between Toundi and Njoroge can be traced back to one that is fundamental: Toundi's deafness to advice and his escape from his parental home. He was like a young plant plucked from its roots and thrown on a rough river; how and where can such a plant ever take roots again? Both he and Njoroge represent Africa exploited and tortured in its infancy (we are in the pre-independence era). For, this we agree with the German philosopher, Nietzsche, who says that man's tragedy is that he was once a child, i.e. the last-comer to the adult world of scrambling humanity, and hence the victim of other' predatory greed.

But Toundi and Njoroge represent two faces of the same child Africa; one that imprudently breaks with all tradition in a naïve and blind chase after the white man's "better" way of life

[this is tantamount to cultural suicide, symbolised by Toundi's death at. cross-roads between two countries); the other which while holding solidly to tradition, seeks to acquire the white man's secret of domineering power: education. Njoroge's deliverance *in extremis* by his mother's voice is a ray of hope; telling a suffering 'and weeping Africa that "hope of a better day was the only comfort (one) could give to a weeping child" [Ngugi 1962, 111]. Will that "better day" come with the era of independence?

Even though Oyono and Ngugi each wrote in different countries, in different languages, and in slightly different, historical circumstances, and did not know (or have to know) each other's existence, they still gave to the child, Africa, the same message in tragically different ways. This comparative study shows that *Houseboy* and *Weep not, child* are two complementary novels, and could, with great benefits, be studied as such. There is no limit to what may be discovered by undertaking such a study of any authors or even the same author.

Notes and References

¹ This book is actually published in French, under the title; *Chinua Achebe et la tragedies de I' Histoire*. The English version, both of the title and the quotations from the book, are own translation.

² *Le Pain des Reves, (Bread of the Imagination)* (1942), a semi autobiographical novel, was like a bridge which the author (Louis Guilloux) built between the horror of 1942 France and his childhood in Brittany during Second World War. Guilloux

was born in Saint-Brieuc in 1899 and died in 1980.

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