

**BETWEEN HEROIC UNIVERSALISM
AND PAROCHIAL MARTYRDOM:
THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHRISTOPHER OKIGBO**

by

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There are three underlying themes about the life, art and significance of Christopher Okigbo. The first proposition is that in his art Christopher Okigbo might have been the most universalist of all the post-colonial poets Africa had produced. On the other hand, in his life and personal behaviour, Okigbo might paradoxically have been one of the most parochial and tribalist of Africa's poets. The third proposition is whether this combination of intellectual universalism and parochial allegiance might be a prescription that the rest of Africa should study for its own survival. *We may also note that this tension between universalism and parochialism might still be an issue for the entire world – as Nobel Laureate Czeslaw Milosz pointed out in a 1996 discussion:*

*The question of universalism and particularism is at the center of our problems. You see, I would like to be a universal man, and I wouldn't like to be forced under the rubric of race, tribe or nationality. But particularism exists. It is a fact, and it often takes the form of nationalism.*¹

Let us first examine in what sense Christopher Okigbo was, in his art, among the most universalist of all of Africa's post-colonial poets. The most obvious aspect of his universalism was his refusal to be categorized as either an African poet or a Black one. *In a 1965 interview, Okigbo said that he was "just a poet" and that it was up to readers to decide whether the poetry was African or English, and in fact, there was no such thing as a "as a poet trying to express African-ness."*² Most post-colonial poets writing in a European language have manifested forms of cultural nationalism, or ethnic sub-nationalism, or political patriotism, or racial self-definition – either overtly or in much of the subtext. Christopher Okigbo was indeed greatly influenced by Igbo imagery and European classics, but he refused to have the work characterized as African, ethnic or racial.

The claim “I am a poet, not an African poet” is easy enough as rhetoric. The real test consists of what one is prepared to sacrifice for that claim. Okigbo’s test came in 1966 when Okigbo won the Langston Hughes Prize for African poetry at the Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, Senegal. It was the first international award for African poetry ever made. Christopher Okigbo turned it down precisely on the grounds that his poetry did not have a nationality nor a racial identity.³

Although he had denied a nationality to his poetry, he himself was ironically awarded the National Order of Merit of Biafra after his death.⁴ But since the Biafra Award was given for Okigbo’s patriotic service rather than for his poetry, there was in fact no contradiction. Together the two awards (Langston Hughes and the Biafra Award) simply reaffirmed that while Okigbo’s art was universalist, Okigbo’s life and death were ethnically specific and parochially committed.

There was another paradox in Okigbo’s art. While it was indeed universalist in orientation, it was elitist in articulation. Part of the elitism was Okigbo’s own emphasis that he read his poetry only to fellow poets.⁵ Although his message was universal, was the intended audience a literary elite? *Later on, Okigbo seemed to be less particular, indicating he did not care who read the poem, and also recounting an incident where he read a couple of his poems to schoolchildren who burst into tears.*⁶

Okigbo’s universalism was also involved in the contradiction that his art was in the English language. If he had written his poetry in the Igbo language, the art would indeed have been less elitist, but unfortunately it would also have become less universalist. The English language had become a vehicle of universalism, although Okigbo’s use was also in the idiom of literary elitism. Even the English poets who influenced Okigbo were not such linguistically accessible ones as William Wordsworth or Alexander Pope, but such linguistically challenging

ones as T.S. Eliot. *Other earlier poets who influenced him include Gerald Manley Hopkins, Ezra Pound and Garcia Lorca.*⁷

A third area of fusion between universalism and elitism concerned the impact of the European classics (Latin and Greek) upon Okigbo's intellectual development.⁸ In European intellectual history, those two ancient languages had indeed become joint symbols of both European elitism and European conceptions of what Leopold Senghor later called "the Civilization of the Universal."⁹ In English literature the genius of William Shakespeare owed very little to Greek or Latin.

In this respect Christopher Okigbo's art was more like that of John Milton's Paradise Lost – bearing the heavy stamp of the European classics.¹⁰

Of John Milton, T.S. Eliot had once passed a controversial judgment. Eliot regarded Milton as a great poet but not a good one. As great poetry, Paradise Lost "addressed the soul of man." But Milton fell short of being a good poet because he did not address "the heart of man."

Did Christopher Okigbo's poetry suffer from the same ambivalence? Addressing the human soul soared to universalism; addressing the human heart was a more intimate conversation.

From Universal Poet to Igbo Man

But in what sense is this most universalist of all African poets in his art simultaneously the most tribalist in his life? My novel about Christopher Okigbo started from the premise that poetry was universal, ethnic loyalty was parochial. By exposing himself to death in an inter-ethnic war, did Christopher Okigbo sacrifice the universalism of his poetry in pursuit of the parochialism of an ethnic homeland? My novel put him on trial in the hereafter on two counts –

first, that he had subordinated the vision of a united Nigeria to the Biafran ideal; and second, that he had betrayed his art by acting as an Igbo first and a poet last.¹¹

One area of evidence therefore about the supremacy of the parochial in Christopher Okigbo lay in the cause for which he died. He died fulfilling the prophecy he had articulated in his poetry when he said, in “The Passage”:

Before you, mother Idoto,
naked I stand;
before your watery presence,
a prodigal

leaning on an oil bean,
lost in your legend.

Under your power wait I
on barefoot,
watchman for the watchword
at *Heavens gate*;

Out of the depths my cry:
Give ear hearken¹²

The poetry of Okigbo was ironically the voice of universalism heard from the mouth of a village boy. As Paul Theroux put it about Okigbo:

You can see in his poems how devoted he was to his people, his region, his village. I imagine him to have been . . . the sort of child who believes his village to be the centre of the world . . . Characteristically-- in a war that few people here now remember -- he died fighting for his village.¹³

*This was even though he was seen as “lacking the cultural and racial chauvinism that made both imperialism and the civil war possible,” and accepted the complexity of values of modern Africans.*¹⁴

As a Roman Catholic, Christopher was introduced to the concept of a universal God, but as an Igbo he remained attached to a less expansive divinity. *In this – perhaps like many*

Africans – he did not see a contradiction between an exclusivist religion like Christianity and his own beliefs. As he himself put it:

I do not feel that as a Christian I have ever been uprooted from my own village Gods. We have a Goddess and a God in our family, our ancestral Gods, And although I do not worship these actively, in the sense of offering them periodic sacrifices, I shall feel they are the people protecting me.¹⁵

Paul Theroux tells us about some of Christopher Okigbo's supernatural beliefs. When Theroux and Okigbo were driving in a storm, and a tree fell across the road, Okigbo insisted that they turned back. Okigbo strongly felt that the fallen tree was a kind of sacred warning, an omen. According to Theroux, Okigbo also manifested numerological superstitions. For example, he would not touch his Jaguar car until the "unlucky number plate"¹⁶ was changed. Christian or not, Christopher Okigbo took some of the folk supernatural beliefs of the Igbo seriously.

Long before the Nigerian Civil War, Christopher Okigbo often made fun of the concept of Nigeria. Did he jeer hilariously that the country's name was reportedly coined in a dispatch in 1897 by a woman journalist who later became Lady Lugard? There is evidence that long before Nigeria truly betrayed the Igbo in the pogroms of 1966 in Northern Nigeria, Christopher Okigbo was an Igbo first and a Nigerian a distant second at best.

The man whose art soared to universalism remained parochial in his political loyalties.

Death as a Route to Immortality

Traditional African religions tell us that nobody is ever completely dead for as long as his or her blood still flows among the living. Today we would refer to the perpetuation of one's genes. This creates a premium for having many children and grandchildren to ensure that one's blood flows among the living generation after generation. Thus Nigeria's first post-colonial

Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, is assured immortality less because he was Head of Government and more because he fathered about twenty children.

But is not premature and violent death also an alternative route to immortality? That may be only partly true with regard to Tafawa Balewa, but it is indisputably true with regard to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. J.F.K. is counted among the greatest of America's Presidents less because of what he accomplished in less than one term as President and more because of the drama of his violent death in 1963. It is true that Kennedy had great and manifest promise. His immortality has partly depended on the drama of a promise which was brutally cut short in Dallas, Texas.

Is Christopher Okigbo's immortality less because of an extensive bloodline (he left behind one distinguished daughter) and more because, like Kennedy, Okigbo was a case of promise cut-short, of a symphony interrupted? Here is a case of a trade-off. If Okigbo had lived to the age of seventy, and produced only the thin volume of poems we have, he would have been regarded as a good poet, but probably not an immortal one. In the words of K. L. Goodwin, "“though a tragic figure, he is not necessarily a good model for poetry.””¹⁷ On the other hand, if he had lived to the age of seventy and continued to produce the kind of inspired poetry we had already witnessed, he stood a chance of not only beating Wole Soyinka to the Nobel Prize for Literature, but of being recognized among the immortals of world literature for generations to come.

John Keats told us: “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.” Christopher Okigbo's small volume of poetry is indeed a thing of beauty. But would it have remained truly a joy forever without the drama of his premature death? Was this a case of “beauty which only death could enhance”? In reality only history can answer that question.

But some of us wish Christopher Okigbo had lived to write poetry about war. Was he a victim of Nigeria or a victim of warfare in the human experience? Some have compared Christopher Okigbo's fate to that of Wilfred Owen – who died as a victim of the First World War.

While still at war as a soldier Wilfred Owen became disenchanted with the brutal inhumanity of it all. He was initially quite enthusiastic about the war, but became disenchanted with the blood, “mud and thunder.”¹⁸ Okigbo died early in the Biafran War. If he had died later would he have evolved into an anti-war poet – in the tradition of Wilfred Owen? Would the following lines have equally described the suffering of Biafran soldiers?¹⁹

*Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.*²⁰

All too aware that war was often a case of older men sending younger ones to die, Owen reinterpreted the Biblical story of old Abraham on the verge of sacrificing his son to a higher divine cause. *In the Bible, Abraham is presented an alternative of a ram by the angel, and is able to avoid sacrificing his son. But in Owen's version, old men willingly sacrificed their sons:*

*Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son:
When lo! An Angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him, thy son
Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns,
A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead.*

*But the old man would not so, but slew his son . . .
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.*²¹

If Okigbo had survived the Biafra war, would he have become an anti-war poet? We do not know. But he did compose lines which fitted comparable brutal cruelty:

*Death lay in ambush that evening in that island;
voice sought its echo that evening in that island.*

*And the eye lost its light
the light lost its shadow.*

*For the wind, eternal suitor of dead leaves,
unrolled his bandages to the finest swimmer...*

*It was an evening without flesh or skeleton;
an evening with no silver bells to its tale;
without lanterns, an evening without buntings;
and it was an evening without age or memory--*

*For we are talking of such commonplaces,
and on the brink of such great events*

*And in the freezing tuberoses of the white
chamber, eyes that had lost their animal
colour, havoc of eyes of incandescent rays;
pinned me, cold, to the marble stretcher,*

*until my eyes lost their blood
and the blood lost its odour,*

*and the ever lasting fire from the oblong window
forgot the taste of ash in the air's marrow:*

*anguish and solitude
Smothered, my scattered
cry²²*

Okigbo did not intend these lines to be anti-war, but they are. There are other lines in Okigbo which are prophetic of the cruelty and pain of war!

*When you have finished,
and done up my stitches,
wake me near the altar,
and this poem will be finished²³*

In fact, some critics such as Robert Fraser have also seen these lines as foreshadowing both his own physical death as well as his the end of his creative efforts. Fraser said:

As he metaphorically loses consciousness, he brings the lid down on his own creative effort, thus signalling in the reign of the predators in “Fragments Out of the Deluge,” whose sacrificial victim he has become.²⁴

Did Christopher Okigbo really choose to go to war? In reality the Biafran side of the war did not draw any distinction between a volunteer army and the draft. Was the political atmosphere in Igbo land such that there was a defacto draft for all able-bodied young Igbos? We shall never know for certain whether Okigbo was at heart a volunteer or a defacto draftee.

Christopher Okigbo and My Muse **A CONCLUSION**

If Christopher Okigbo’s art was universalist and his life was fundamentally tribal, is that a combination which has lessons for Africa?

In much of its post-colonial history, political Africa has been in denial about the tribality of its essence. Most African countries have pretended that they are ready-made nation-states, when in fact they have been collections of ethnic groups. At best they have been multinational states. African intellectuals have often forbidden the use of the word “tribe” partly because European usage had debased it, but also because European history had declared the nation-state the most respectable form of political formation.

Christopher Okigbo’s combination of intellectual universalism with tribal allegiance may be worth exploring as Africa yearns for a better balance than the European nation-state can afford. *It is also an open question as to whether Okigbo was, in the words of Okigbo critic Thomas Knipp, on a “cyclical journey” from one particular (“Africanness”) to another (West) and then back (Africanness/Nigerian/Igbo).²⁵ Indeed, is it almost necessary that poets must*

explore their own parochialness to appreciate the universal, as Nobelist Octavio Paz seems to suggest?

The function of the writer is to enter inside himself or inside others in order to express this unique particularity that is each person and each nation and each language. It is the only way to arrive at universality.²⁶

Certainly, literature has had a complicated situation with matters of nationalism, war, and politics in times of crisis.²⁷ Okigbo's relationship with his Igbo tribal loyalties and role in fighting for Biafra may have been part of the working out of his own complex feelings about the new nation-state of Nigeria. There have been many Africans who have started out being parochial but have accommodated themselves to the nation-state. Was Okigbo on that journey himself?

At the time I wrote the novel about Okigbo I myself was still mesmerized by the nation-state, but I was beginning to wonder if the whole Nigerian experience was not telling us the limitations of the European model. I regarded Nigeria as a work of art in progress – though the progress was painful. I still regard Nigeria as a higher form of tribality. I regard Pan-Africanism as a lower form of universalism. I regard the human race as the ultimate work of art in progress – the ultimate “Civilization of the Universal,” still in the making.

Christopher Okigbo might not have got the right balance between universal art and tribal allegiance, but his martyrdom was a challenge to Africa to explore better alternatives between the universal and the parochial than what we had inherited from the colonial experience.

The Trial of Christopher Okigbo (1971) was at once the shortest book I had ever written and by far the most emotionally charged in the process of being written. I wrote the novel as therapy. I was passing through a mental crisis which was partly caused by the Nigerian civil war and partly by the death of a friend in Kenya in a road accident. The Nigerian civil war was a

kind of public anguish which I had inexplicably privatized; the death of my friend Giraffe (as we called him because of his height) was a case of private anguish which I later publicized. To the present day I have not understood why those two very different shocks had reinforced each other in my psyche - and brought me literally to the brink of a nervous breakdown. For the first time in my life I consulted and was treated by a psycho-therapist. My base at the time was Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

Intellectually I was on the Federal side of the Nigerian civil war, but at the same time in sympathy with the reasons which had resulted in the Igbo's decision to secede. I loved the Igbo but was appalled by the concept of separatist Biafra.

My ambivalence was one reason why I invited Chinua Achebe to Makerere in 1969. I knew he was a spokesman for Biafra (a mission I hated) - but I gave him a platform to reach another audience. His very successful address to that Makerere audience in Uganda was a major blow against Nigeria's federal propaganda in East Africa - and yet I was the sponsor and the presiding officer for his talk. *This was perhaps an indicator of how schizophrenic I had become over the Biafran issue!*

And then I decided to write a novel in tribute to a martyr who had died for a cause I shrank from. I decided to write *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* - putting the martyred Igbo poet on trial in the Hereafter. He faced a dual charge. Christopher Okigbo had decided he was an Igbo first and a poet second. And Okigbo had also subordinated the vision of unity (one Nigeria) to the dream of freedom (a separate Biafra).

When I finally completed the novel, I offered it to Heinemann Educational Books in London for their African Writers' Series. This was my first novel ever. And the general editor

of the African Writers Series was Chinua Achebe. Would he recognize my hostility to Biafra without acknowledging my love for the Igbo?

In the final verdict of the novel I do try to make my feelings clear. I declare all those who were opposed to Biafra (like my Ghanaian character Apolo-Gyanfi) as truly not guilty. I declare all non-Igbo who supported Biafra (represented in the novel by Hamisi) as guilty. But the charge against the Igbo themselves in their bid for Biafra is declared as not proven.²⁸ It was as if the novel forgave the Igbo for attempting secession - but could not forgive those who had aided and abetted them in their suicidal bid.

Would Chinua Achebe as general editor of Heinemann's African Writers' Series find it possible to associate himself with my first novel? Would he reject my draft completely? The moment of truth coincided with the final defeat of Biafra. Igbo feelings were high. Would Chinua Achebe's emotions be so bitter as to reject my psychic ambivalence?

At that time Chinua did not know that when I declared supporters of Biafra as "guilty", I had included my friend who had been killed in the road accident in Kenya - Giraffe! Hamisi in my novel was a character who was based on my real-life friend, Giraffe. My friend's death, when combined with the Nigerian civil war, had brought me to the brink of a nervous breakdown.

How would Chinua Achebe react to a novel which was anti-Biafra - even if ultimately pro-Igbo? I anxiously awaited his verdict. The novel was a salute to Okigbo, but was it judgmental on Ojukwu?

When Achebe's answer came, it was worthy of a great literary mind and professional integrity. The novel was published with Chinua Achebe's blessing. Chinua was simply worried as an editor about whether the novel was effective. He thought the novel was too slow in taking

off. The earlier chapters (written when I had not yet declared my political argument) were precisely the ones which bothered editor Achebe. He was not asking for censorship of the anti-Biafra portions. He was asking the author to shorten the preliminaries and get on to the crux of the matter, anti-Biafra or not.

I am not sure if Chinua realized that when I wrote the earlier preliminaries, I was in fact in the grip of my deepest psychological and emotional stress. When the author was at his most emotional, the chapters were the least effective in engaging the reader. I subsequently remembered William Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotions recollected in tranquillity."²⁹

When I began writing *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, I was in the grip of powerful emotions. But the emotions were not yet "recollected in tranquillity." Chinua probably recognized that the slow dullness of my earlier chapters was because my emotions were not as yet tamed into tranquility. The words were boring mainly because the real feelings were not yet disciplined.

As a result of Chinua Achebe's critique I bravely knocked out two or three chapters from my draft of *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*. Without being explicitly asked to do so by the publisher, I embarked on literary surgery. I shortened the preliminaries - so that I could plunge more directly into the ethics of Biafra and of Christopher Okigbo's ultimate choice.

Must a writer wait until his or her emotions can be "recollected in tranquility"? Chinua Achebe taught me to follow William Wordsworth's advice. I later discovered that Chinua too was following Wordsworth's advice. Why did Achebe take two decades before producing *Anthills of the Savannah*?³⁰ I suspect partly because the emotions of Biafra and the Nigerian civil war had been too strong. I believe that had Chinua Achebe written *Anthills* any earlier, his

earlier chapters might have been almost as weak as my own when I was on the brink of a nervous breakdown. Some distance is needed between tension and creativity, between madness and the Muse.

But why did I choose to focus my novel on Christopher Okigbo? Partly because I came from a culture in which great moments of anguish and pain are often dealt with by writing poetry. When two of my children went blind in the late 1970s, I received poems of sympathy from friends and relatives in Kenya. It remains part of Kenya's Coastal Swahili culture to mark great experiences with poetry.

Upon receiving the poems of sympathy about the blindness of my children, it was expected that I would try to reciprocate poetically. I did respond with an "Ode to the Optic Nerve", in Kiswahili.

It is against this background that one should examine my decision to write *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*. I had decided to deal with my own depression in the late 1960s with the therapy of writing a novel about a poet. Without realizing it at the time, I was manifesting Swahili ways of dealing with personal anguish. By writing a novel about a poet I was taking the Swahili cultural trait one stage further than its usual domain.

A second major reason why I chose to focus my novel on Christopher Okigbo was that he seemed to be a martyr to his cause, whether or not he shared my ideals.

And the third reason was the fact that his death raised wider questions about justice, rights and genius. Did a very gifted human being have a right to sacrifice his or her life for such issues as ethnic separatism? Did Christopher Okigbo as a genius have a right to decide that he was an Igbo first and a poet second? My novel asserts "All life is sacred, but some lives are more sacred than others".

Christopher Okigbo's life was well above average in sacredness. Did he have a right to expose it to a sniper's bullet in conditions of warfare? The debate will continue to the end of time. But Okigbo has taught us to seek new alternatives between the universal and the parochial, and establish better foundations for the Civilization of the Universal.

The same forces of violence which killed Christopher Okigbo on the war front in October 1967, also killed my future father-in-law in the anti-Igbo pogrom in Northern Nigeria almost exactly one year earlier. I literally mean those forces killed Pauline's father. Pauline was the little girl who later became my wife.

I am not sure what Okigbo meant by the following observations:

*Scar of the crucifix
over the breast,
by red-hot blade,
on right breast witnesseth.³¹*

Okigbo may have been invoking Calvary with those words. But was he also prophesying the last hours of my future father-in-law?:

*The red hot blade on the right breast
the scar of the crucifix.*

Because of that fatal blade Benedict Osadebe Uti was not there for me to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. He was not there to bless my union with his daughter. He was killed in September 1966 during the anti-Igbo bloodbath.

As for his own body, Okigbo asked us that when we had done up his stitches, we were to wake him up near the altar, and his poem would be finished.

Well, at this fortieth anniversary of the bullet which hit Okigbo, we have indeed now done up his stitches. We have indeed woken him near the altar of the African diaspora

commemorating his life. What we do not accept is his last line. His poem is not finished. On the contrary, it is as he prophesied elsewhere:

*Elemental, united in vision,
of present and future,
the pure line, whose innocence,
denies inhibitions.*³²

No, Okigbo's poem is not finished. May it forever reverberate down the corridors of time. Amen.

ENDNOTES

¹ Quoted in a discussion by Nobel Laureates Octavio Paz, Czeslaw Milosz and Claude Simon in "The Universal is the Particular," *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Winter 1996), Volume 13, No. 1, p. 56.

² Marjory Whitelaw, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo, 1967," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, (July 1970), No. 9, p. 28.

³ See Öbüageli Ibrahimat Okigbo, "Christopher Okigbo," at <http://echeruo.syr.edu/okigbo/okigbobio.htm>, accessed September 11, 2007, and "Death of Christopher Okigbo," *Transition* (October-November 1967), Number 33, p. 18.

⁴ Okigbo, "Christopher Okigbo," at <http://echeruo.syr.edu/okigbo/okigbobio.htm>, accessed September 11, 2007.

⁵ "Death of Christopher Okigbo," *Transition* (October-November 1967), Number 33, p. 18, citing Lewis Nkosi's *Home and Exile*.

⁶ Whitelaw, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo, 1967", p. 34.

⁷ K. L. Goodwin's study of Christopher Okigbo reminds readers of the similarities between Garcia Lorca and Okigbo -- the fact that both were hesitant about the publication of their poetry, both died in their thirties, and both died in a civil war -- in his chapter on Christopher Okigbo in his *Understanding African Poetry: A Study of Ten Poets* (London and Exeter, NH: Heinemann, 1982), p. 34. A detailed comparison of G. M. Hopkins and Chris Okigbo is laid out by Romanus N. Egudu in his "G. M. Hopkins's "The Wreck of the Deutschland" and Christopher Okigbo's "Lament of the Silent Sisters:" A Comparative Study," *Comparative Literature Studies* (2003), Volume 40, Number 3, pp. 26-36.

⁸ Goodwin has discussed the European influence of his "poetic milieu" in his "Christopher Okigbo" in *Understanding African Poetry*, pp. 34-47, but see especially pp. 30-35.

⁹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry/ Léopold Sédar Senghor*, selected and translated by John Reed and Clive Wake (London: Heinemann, 1976, 1965), p. 98.

¹⁰ For some discussions on the influence of the classics on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, see William M. Porter, *Reading The Classics And Paradise Lost* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) as also John Mulryan, *"Through a Glass Darkly" : Milton's Reinvention of the Mythological Tradition* (Pittsburgh : Duquesne University Press, 1996).

¹¹ Ali A. Mazrui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971).

¹² Christopher Okigbo, "Heavensgate," *Collected Poems* (London: William Heinemann, 1986), p. 19.

¹³ Preface by Paul Theroux to *Collected Poems* by Christopher Okigbo (London: William Heinemann, 1986), pp. ix-x.

¹⁴ Adewala Maja-Pearce, "Introduction" to Christopher Okigbo, *Collected Poems*, pp. xvii-xviii.

¹⁵ Marjory Whitelaw, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo, 1967," p. 30.

¹⁶ Theroux, "Preface," p. ix.

¹⁷ Goodwin, "Christopher Okigbo" in *Understanding African Poetry*, p. 46.

¹⁸ The swift transition from Owen's enthusiasm for the war to his disenchantment is chronicled in Caryn McTighe Musil, "Wilfred Owen and Abram," *Women's Studies* (1986), Volume 13, Issue 1/2, p. 49.

¹⁹ See Edward R. F. Sheehan, "Death Watch in Biafra," *Saturday Evening Post* (October 19, 1968), p.48-49 for some descriptions of shell-shocked Biafran soldiers which could be quite similar to the lines of Owen in "Dulce et Decorum Est," cited below.

²⁰ Wilfred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est," in Jon Stallworthy, Ed. *The Poems of Wilfred Owen* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985, 1986), p. 117. For a critique of this poem, see John Hughes, "Owen's DULCE ET DECORUM EST," *Explicator* (Spring 2006), Volume 64, Issue 3, pp. 164-166

²¹ Wilfred Owen, "Parable of the Old Man and the Young," in Stallworthy, Ed. *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*. The emphasis is mine. For a gendered interpretation of this poem, see Musil, "Wilfred Owen and Abram," *Women's Studies* (1986), Volume 13, Issue 1/2, pp. 49-61.

²² Okigbo, "Distances: II," *Collected Poems*, pp. 70-71. Romanus N. Egudu has seen the "marble stretcher" as evocative of the altar in a church on which the dead body is laid as a Requiem Mass is said for the deceased; see his "Okigbo's Distances: A Retreat from Christ to Idoto," in Uzoma Esonwanne, *Critical Essays on Christopher Okigbo* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 2000), p. 114. Egudu's essay was originally published in *The Conch* (1973), Volume 5, Numbers 1-2, pp. 29-42.

²³ Okigbo, "Limits IV," *Collected Poems*, p. 43.

²⁴ Robert Fraser, "The Achievement of Christopher Okigbo," in Esonwanne, *Critical Essays on Christopher Okigbo*, p. 240. The essay was originally published in Robert Fraser, *West African Poetry: A Critical History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 104-137.

²⁵ Thomas R. Knipp, "Okigbo and Labyrinths: The Death of a Poet and the Life of a Poem," *Research in African Literatures* (Winter 1995), Volume 26, Number 4, pp. 197-205.

²⁶ Paz, Milosz and Simon in "The Universal is the Particular," *New Perspectives Quarterly* (Winter 1996), Volume 13, No. 1, pp. 56-57.

²⁷ Consult David Craig and Michael Egan, *Extreme Situations: Literature and Crisis from the Great War to the Atom Bomb* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1979).

²⁸ The "not proven" verdict – described as the "bastard verdict by Sir Walter Scott – has been a unique feature of Scottish law for over 300 years but has periodically provoked calls for its abolition; see Hamish MacDonell, "New Campaign Is Launched To Rid Scottish Legal System Of The 300-Year-Old 'Bastard Verdict,'" *The Scotsman* (March 1, 2007).

²⁹ William Wordsworth, "Preface" to D. S. Roper, Ed., William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads, 1805* ((London and Glasgow: Collins, 1968), p. 42.

³⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (London: Heinemann, 1987).

³¹ Okigbo, "Heavensgate: Initiations," *Collected Poems*, p. 22.

³² Okigbo, "Heavensgate: Initiations," *Collected Poems*, p. 22.