

The novel, ostensibly, is about an untouchable's rise from messenger to master of a business empire, but the details of his career, his strategies, his conflicts, are more splotchy than a child's finger painting. Vague references to smuggled goods and government godowns and ministerial corruption are repeated just often enough to give the impatient reader the feeling he has glossed over some events. However, closer reading does not reveal any more knowledge or interest—Prem Naran, the business prodigy, keeps his Mafia secrets so well that the reader never comes to know anything clearly about any person, place or thing.

It purports to be an action novel with thugs unscrupulously wiping out lesser crooks and dealing with contraband commodities on a multimillion dollar scale, but all the action takes place offstage. All one hears are Prem Naran's commands to his commandos in tersely phrased sentences.

Characterization is not to be expected in popular fiction. But one does wish to be told at least in passing something about the philosophies held by Prem Naran's mentors—his guru, and his boyhood patron Mr. Raybould. A Freudian, probably, could say what makes Prem Naran tick by analyzing his sexual eccentricities which consist of slapping down a wad of currency bills on the table and insisting that the girl take off everything, a phobia for the "love-moss" (he sends packing girls who don't have a thick growth or have shaved it), and his preference for the sitting posture.

No, one does not expect any profound insights in a volume of popular fiction, but one does expect readability. The author's experimentation with language is unfortunate. Omitting articles, transposing words, literal translation from the vernacular, use of semiliterate officialese, all these can be and have been used by others to give a regional and linguistic flavor. But in this novel, the experimentation is disastrous. More than half the novel is in dialogue, and the dialogues tax the reader with their unfamiliar word-sequences. One who did not know the vernacular would think Llewellyn is making a fine effort to communicate the voice and idioms of Hindi into English, but we are told early in the novel that everyone is speaking in English. The problem of

ascribing a language to the dialogues of non-English speaking characters is a major one, but it is irrelevant here. Enough to say that it is highly unlikely that a man such as Prem Naran would speak (in the 1970's) to underlings, thugs, prostitutes, and even business associates, in English.

As the novel progresses, this stilted, telegraphic form of omitting articles and clauses, of contracting thought to a minimum, and of using jarring prose is carried over even to the narrative voice: "The assistant housekeeper had more notes, and another pat on backside jelly, very accommodating, and smile away, and promise to keep far, not seen, never mind if shouting, and no, absolutely and finally, no knowledge of outside activity of person or persons, strangers, in any manner. All in order." Even if the point of view were Prem Naran's, which it is not, three hundred pages of this kind of prose makes heavy, unrewarding reading.

Uma Parameswaran

CYPRIAN EKWENSI

Survive the Peace

London: Heinemann, 1976.

James Okonkwo Odugo, Radio-Journalist on the Biafran side, who had deserted his family and parents to work for the Biafra Radio wherever it is located, faces the fears, sufferings, and problems that beset the war-affected areas at the immediate end of the Nigerian Civil War. In the meantime his wife, Juliette, had run off to the city leaving their three children in Ogene Village. James now sets about to return to normal family life, but faces the ugly revelations and lessons of defeat and the brazen wartime immorality. He realizes, more than ever before, that he has fought "on the losing side of the no-victors, no-vanquished civil war" (p. 121) when he sees his wife heavy with another man's child. He too, has had affairs with Vic Ezenta, Radio Announcer, with Benne, and Gladys Nwike who gives birth to his child soon after his death at the hands of armed robbers who make an irony of his efforts to survive in peace time.

That is the central theme in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* set at a time which was probably more crucial to life in the former Biafran territory than the thirty months of the Nigerian Civil War. The daily happenings in the war-affected areas—rumors and rapes, panic and fear, looting and shooting—from the day Federal troops capture the Biafran Airport to a few weeks after, form the major focus of the novel. The various attitudes of the losing soldiers who discard their Biafran uniforms and the grief of thousands of refugees who take to the roads give the true picture of "the whole of Biafra in flight" (p. 24). The causes of death for Biafran soldiers and civilians were predictable while hostilities lasted—enemy bullets, air raids, starvation, etc. But civilians and former soldiers alike are subjected to other fatal risks in the weeks following the end of the shooting war when "every move was an event of great significance, a mysterious threat to safety" (p. 88). Federal troops loot and comb every corner with all kinds of weapons to find and rape young girls and women. It "was a time of lawless and violent acts, when a man's life could be wasted in some trivial encounter over a worthless matter" (p. 80). And as Pa Ukoha says, rape is "the price of defeat. You surrender your women" (p. 30).

Ekwensi's avowed interest, as a writer, in "the values or non-values in our society"—as he once stated in an interview given to the *Voice of America*—is given up, it would appear, to humor local readership. There is a compromise of the values of the Igbos as a people. In their culture the "surrender of your women" is not "a worthless matter." It is an indignity, a humiliation. That it can occur only in the context of an army of occupation ought to have been made clear by an artist committed to social values.

It is difficult for a reader who is familiar with the background to the novel to ignore the author's tacit attitude of pleasing a section of his immediate audience. One would not, for example, take as serious a historical view of Kole Omotoso's *The Combat* as one would of Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*. Firstly, Omotoso's form—the allegory—gives him more liberty with the historical sense of the Civil War. And again, Omotoso lacks Ekwensi's firsthand experience of the psychological, economic, social, and moral aspects of the conflict.

There is more fact than fiction in *Survive the Peace*. Although the simplistic presentation of what the author calls "Ibo optimism" (p. 70) may be seen as an exercise of the writer's prerogative, this work lacks the historical perspective that one would naturally expect in a realistic war novel. Incidents which are the communal experience of war-affected areas are not given any imaginative treatment. Ekwensi's book takes an explicit materialistic view of the war. The "attack" business woman, Gladys, who crosses into the Nigerian side to sell "her trade articles . . . had no deep interest in the causes of the war or its outcome . . ." (p. 83); nor unfortunately, has any other character in the story. In other words, the war has no deep significance for the characters. They have learned and lost nothing. Apart from the conventional denunciation of wars as senseless, the glaring facts on which the fiction is created do not suggest any critical evaluation of issues.

Paul O. Iheakaram

BRUNO SCHULZ

The Street of Crocodiles

Translated from the Polish by
Celina Wieniewska
New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Bruno Schulz is unknown to English-speaking readers; his only work to be translated into English is this one, which was originally published in Poland, in 1934, as *Cinnamon Shops*. His oeuvre is quite small, consisting of this and one other collection of "short stories," *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*; a novella, *The Comet*; and a translation of Kafka's *The Trial*. Schulz, a Jew, lived and worked in Drohobych, his native city in southeastern Poland, until 1942, when he was murdered by the Nazis. Drohobych is as central to Schulz's work as Dublin is to James Joyce's; the author knows his city thoroughly, intimately, and in his fiction, it becomes a universe in microcosm, a setting in which the tragicomedy of human existence is enacted. Schulz calls *The Street of Crocodiles* an "autobiographical novel