

A Dot on the Map has its flaws. Some of the opaque stories, with their shifting tenses and stylistic oddities, betray Sait's notorious carelessness which can be quite irritating at times. The apologetics that such pieces are designed to reflect the flaws of human life through a pattern of anarchy, verges on the absurd. Besides, in terms of lucidity and vividness, the styles of different translators lack consistency and uniformity. Some of them tend to use American slang and colloquialisms, as well as a few remnants of the hippie lingo of the 1960s, which adulterate the atmosphere of the local environment. A superb work of fiction, nevertheless.

Benedict Chiaka Njoku

THE FOUR NOVELS OF CHINUA ACHEBE

New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1984. Pp. 200

Reviewed by Kalu Ogbaa

Njoku's book is loosely divided into six segments which include an introduction, four chapters (each devoted to each of the four novels), and a final segment titled "Chinua Achebe: A Postscript." The chapters are, however, not balanced in terms of length and contents, an imbalance that reveals that the author appears to understand *A Man of the People* and *Arrow of God* more than he does *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. As one considers the total contents of the book, one is baffled, for, right from the introduction through "A Postscript," Njoku neither states the object of the study nor indicates his critical bent; and both failures make it impossible for readers to realize what contributions, if any, he is making to the existing scholarship on Achebe's writings. On page six, for example, he attempts to distinguish the physical world from the fictional; but he hardly makes a good case of the argument before leading inductively into asserting that "the novelist creates an imperfect and fictionalized world in which people live, move, interact and have their existence." Again, without explaining what he means by that, he goes on to the next page to make statements that sound like conclusions to the study and that create a quality of open-endedness in his critical style.

The same weakness is continued in "A Postscript." In fact, one would have thought that the segment serves as a conclusion to the study but instead its contents reveal that it is a continuation of the introduction. A postscript, indeed! The unstated critical direction in the introduction as well as the critic's not-too-discreet use of critical terms seriously affect his overall analysis and argument of important issues of Achebe's novels (see, for instance, p. 7). Such critical inaccuracies abound in the study, and they result in erroneous interpretations of incidents and concepts of the novels, such as the wrestling matches, traditional Igbo religion and cosmology, leadership problems, and the role and meaning of *chi*. Also, Njoku compounds his grammatical errors with irritating typographical errors.

As it is, Njoku's *The Four Novels of Chinua Achebe* is a total disappointment, for, instead of being an improvement on Killam's *The Novels of Chinua Achebe* which came out fifteen years before, or an advancement of the scholarly discussions of Achebe's writings that exist in Carroll's, Wren's, and Innes and Lindfors's studies and critical perspectives (some of which he cites frequently and sometimes very poorly), it does a lot of harm to the novels that Njoku attempts to evaluate and a great disservice to his native Igbo whose fictional culture and civilization he has failed to interpret very well to non-Igbo readers.

Wayne B. Stengel

THE SHAPE OF ART IN THE SHORT STORIES OF DONALD BARTHELME

Baton Rouge; Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

Pp. 227, \$22.50

Reviewed by Catherine D. Farmer

Wayne B. Stengel's study of the short stories of Donald Barthelme is based upon this premise: "Reading the range of Barthelme's writing as it has appeared in his eight collections . . . yields evidence of a unity of idea and technique that establishes him as a writer of consistent vision and serious intent" (p. 5). That premise, which Stengel effectively proves in