

sections dealing with Arab fiction, I must say that the great Arab masters of the art are well represented, mostly Egyptian, but there are a few others from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian Najib Mahfuz is deservedly given twelve pages, the others an average of about four pages each.

The critical excerpts are not all equal in quality, many of them being descriptive or prescriptive. But there are quite a few that are analytical. It is a pity that most excerpts are too short (about three-quarters of a page each on the average), and they end almost before one can begin to form an idea of the novel criticized or of the approach of the critic. But the cumulative effect of several critical excerpts on one author, and of a succession of authors thus treated succeeds in showing how vibrant is the art of fiction in the Arab world; how well it reflects the concerns and preoccupations of Arab men and women, and the social conditions of Arab cities and villages; how innovative some Arab fiction writers are, particularly ones like Jamal al-Ghitani (Egypt), al-Tayyib Salih (Sudan), Zakariyya Tamir (Syria), and 'Abd al-Rahman Munif (Saudi Arabia/Resident of Iraq, then France); and how far Arab fiction has progressed since its beginnings early in this century. The selected critical excerpts do not reflect the new theories of literature and criticism adopted from the West by Arab critics, though one can sense the structuralist approach of Ceza Draz in her excerpt on Jamal al-Ghitani, and the social realist approach of Mahmud Amin al-'Alim in his excerpts on Jamal al-Ghitani and Sa 'allah Wannus.

Roger Allen offers a genially flowing translation of the selected Arab critics and, generally, a well-balanced picture of modern Arabic literature. One may quarrel with him regarding his choice of authors and of critics, but anthologies can hardly always satisfy all readers as he admits in his Preface. This reviewer would have preferred fewer authors covered and longer critical excerpts on each. Having said that, I must add that this volume remains a welcome addition to the field of literary studies on modern Arabic literature, and the Ungar Publishing Company is to be commended on including it in its acclaimed series, A Library of Literary Criticism.

Chinua Achebe

ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH

London: William Heinemann, 1987. Pp. 233. £10.95

Reviewed by Rudolf Bader

Chinua Achebe, emeritus professor of the University of Nigeria, one of the great pioneers of modern African literature in English, who published several outstanding novels, among which *Things Fall Apart* (1958), has already become something like an African classic, and who is not only known for his stories, essays, and children's books but also for his award-winning poetry, has given us another very fine novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*. This is an extremely well-written and balanced novel about the ugly contrast between idealistic aspirations and violent corruption in an imaginary but realistic postcolonial setting, a novel which enlightens the reader on many different levels.

Any appraisal of *Anthills of the Savannah* must penetrate through the powerful filter of irony which pervades the entire novel. This irony is thrown at the reader at the very outset of the book, it is a kind of entrance fee without which no reader may proceed beyond chapter one. Most elements of the surface plot, on the other hand, are contained in a nutshell in this first chapter, as it were. It opens with a difference of opinion between Christopher Oriko, Honorable Commissioner for Information, and his superior, His Excellency the President of the West African republic of Kangan. The setting is a cabinet meeting, and the prevailing tone and atmosphere suggest the real form of government, the irony revealing the terror and anguish in the face of brutal dictatorship. The fact that the President's power is not founded on his own merits but rather on the pure force of violence

is signaled by a careful combination of sly cunning, apparent stupidity, and a spoilt-child syndrome in his behavior towards his cabinet members. In contrast, Chris Oriko at once appears as a more intelligent, more honest and straightforward character with more moral courage. Sooner or later, so the reader feels, this must lead to an open conflict with fatal results. What will happen to Chris in the face of such ruthless power, Chris who functions as the narrator?

When chapter two introduces a shift of the narrative perspective from Chris to an independent omniscient authorial voice, the reader begins to have grave doubts about Chris's survival up to the last page of the book. The novel functions through several shifts of perspective. Out of the eighteen chapters, thirteen are told by the omniscient authorial voice, two (one and five) are handed over to Chris, two others (six and seven) to his girlfriend Beatrice Okoh, and one (four) to his best friend Ikem Osodi, a poet from Kangan's northern savannah province of Abazon, the critical editor of the *National Gazette*.

It is Ikem Osodi over whose head the evil clouds first seem to gather. The initial disagreement between the President and Chris arises over the neglect of Abazon, whence a small political delegation has come down to Bassa, the capital, to speak to the President, who is afraid of them. Professor Reginald Okong, Commissioner for Home Affairs-- who, ironically, was originally suggested for the cabinet by Chris--tells the President in confidence: "I don't want to be seen as a tribalist but Mr. Ikem Osodi is causing all this trouble because he is a typical Abazonian" (18). On the grounds of this vague accusation, the unrelenting machinery of dictatorial power is set in motion. The State Research Council (SRC), a Kangan variant of the KGB, under the brilliant and aggressive directorship of Major Johnson Ossai, knows no mercy and no limits in its efforts to eliminate any possible opponents of the regime. Thus, the surface plot is clearly marked out and merely runs its course: Ikem Osodi is rumored as "a Marxist of sorts" (78), suspended from his job, then murdered. Chris Oriko, who is connected with him, hides away just in time and finds himself reported as a coup plotter. He escapes from Bassa to Abazon, where he is unnecessarily killed by a corrupt policeman, while the news of a coup d'état has already spread.

The ingredients that make up this rather plain surface plot, however, are very rich in variety, full of irony and deep insight. In Anglophone literatures outside England, one can hardly come to terms with significant individual authors or with appraisals of large-scale characteristics of entire national literatures by means of a one-sided emphasis either on indigenous features or on elements imported from England. Therefore, it is extremely rewarding in the context of the discussions about the relative assessment of Anglophone writers outside England in a colonial or postcolonial setting, to look at the way in which Achebe manages to express the tensions and conflicts between African traditions and imported Western European culture in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

Chris Oriko, Ikem Osodi, the President, and Beatrice Okoh, to name just the four most prominent characters of the novel, can all be seen as different versions of personifications of the inherent conflict in postcolonial cultures. Africans all four, the three men even former classmates, they have all absorbed elements of Western European culture: Chris has been to the London School of Economics, the poet Osodi is well read in the European literary tradition, Sam, the President, has been to Sandhurst, and Beatrice Okoh has an honors degree in English from London University. But they apply their European elements in different ways in their lives and careers in Kangan, with the President emerging on top as the most obvious caricature of the worst marriage between the two cultures: an African upstart, a cynical tyrant, a great music lover (like some Nazi leaders), a perfect host at dinner parties, an avid admirer of the English, a man with morbid ideas on women, a choleric type who cannot digest criticism of any kind directed against himself, incapable of compromise, a poor, morally weak, frightened chicken who can only feel secure with a gun in his hand. Ikem Osodi can only see part of the danger in such a head of state and fails to draw the comparison with similar figures: "Perhaps I am so indulgent about Sam's imitation of the English because I believe that a budding dictator might choose models far

worse than the English gentleman of leisure. It does not seem to me that the English can do much harm to anybody today. . . . The real danger today is from that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire, America, and from all those virulent, misshapen freaks like Amin and Bokassa sired on Africa by Europe. Particularly those ones" (51-52). Whereas the worst African imitation of a European tyrant is overthrown in a coup d'état, the most promising hope for the future emerges in the person of Beatrice Okoh. After Chris's death and the coup, she keeps a long silence, then she decides to hold a naming ceremony for Ikem Osodi's orphan baby girl. This might be the answer to the question she asks her friends: "What must a people do to appease an embittered history?" (220). When it comes to the name itself, Beatrice picks up the tiny bundle from its cot and suggests: "There was an Old Testament prophet who named his son *The-remnant-shall-return*. They must have lived in times like this. We have a different metaphor, though; we have our own version of hope that springs eternal. We shall call this child AMAECHINA: *May-the-path-never-close*. Ama for short" (222). Perhaps this hopeful stance is vital for the surviving central characters of *Anthills of the Savannah*. It implies that a country like Kangan is able to go through a learning process based on experience. The rich variety of life in West Africa presented in the pages of this powerful novel may enable the reader to draw his own conclusions on that account.

Anthony R. Pugh

THE BIRTH OF A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU

Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1987. Pp. 143.

Reviewed by Germaine Bree

For Proustian scholars 1987 will probably be remembered as a banner year, the year that the unpublished corpus of Proustian manuscripts came into the public domain. This opened the way for a major breakthrough in Proustian studies, more especially for those increasingly numerous scholars engaged in the problems of the text itself.

From the very first, the task of editing and publishing *A la recherche du temps perdu* had proved notoriously difficult. The vicissitudes attendant on the publication of the first edition of the complete text (1913-1927) are notorious. We are all beholden to what is known as the "Pleiade edition," established with meticulous care in 1954 by Pierre Clarac and Andre Ferre, two highly competent scholars, an edition which, until now, has been considered "standard." Now, thirty years later, fueled by the freeing of what are usually referred to as the "pre-texts" to Proust's vast work, new editions are coming out: a "new Pleiade" edition in four volumes, offering some 400 pages of relevant notes, drafts, comments, the work of a team of research scholars, "l'équipe Proust" centered at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris; a more readable, but up-to-date text put out by Flammarion for more general consumption; and what is known as the Robert Laffont-Quid, which includes, it would seem, every item of the apparently inexhaustible fund of Proustiana.

These stages in the presentation of Proust's major work offer no radical changes in the overall organization of the text. Rather they incorporate revisions, duplications, better readings; or identify within the printed text the different layers of insertions, tracing their origin in the manuscripts. (See, notably Alison Winton's two-volume thesis, *The making of A la recherche du temps perdu*, typescript facsimile reproduction [Cambridge: University of Cambridge 1977]). A major impetus to this specific trend in textual research was the acquisition in 1962 by the Bibliotheque Nationale of a mass of manuscripts, typescripts and notes bequeathed by Proust's niece. But there seems to be no end to the underground life of the "pre-texts" or "parallel" texts of *A la recherche*; witness the emergence in 1984 of thirteen new notebooks, to add to those in the files, and, in 1986, the discovery of a complete typescript of *Albertine Disparue*. The wealth of documentation has complicated