

# ***The Flute, The Drum and How the Leopard Got His Claws* by Chinua Achebe**

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Achebe wrote his tales *The Flute*<sup>1</sup> and *The Drum*<sup>2</sup> in 1977. Both of these stories deal with greed and its consequences. Why should he write two different tales about the same subject in the same year? Why should he write his own versions of oral tales? On the following pages I will discuss these questions by comparing the texts of the two stories. I will be referring also both to essays by Achebe and to the end of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*<sup>3</sup>, the so-called great famine episode, which has much in common with *The Drum*; and also to the oral traditions by Rems Nna Umeasiegbu's *The Way We Lived*<sup>4</sup> and *Words are Sweet*<sup>5</sup>. At the end of this paper I will then discuss the tale *How the Leopard Got His Claws*<sup>6</sup>, which was written by Achebe and John Iroaganachi. Achebe's critics have almost totally disregarded these tales.

Achebe's tales<sup>7</sup> belong to written literature but also have many similarities to oral literature. The Nigerian folklorist H.O. Chukwuma<sup>8</sup> states that the oral tale is the traditional folktale and that it is still a popular genre in Africa. According to her, there are three kinds of oral tales, which are distinguished by the main characters

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<sup>1</sup> Chinua Achebe, *The Flute*. Heinemann Kenya, Nairobi 1988 (1977). (Elementary Readers 2) - I am grateful to Prof. Richard Taylor for access to this tale.

<sup>2</sup> Chinua Achebe, *The Drum*. Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu 1987 (1977). For access to this tale, I am also grateful to Prof. Richard Taylor.

<sup>3</sup> Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Dead's Town*. Faber Paperbacks, London, 1980 (1952).

<sup>4</sup> Rems Nna Umeasiegbu, *The Way We Lived*. Ibo Customs and Stories. Heinemann Educational Books, London 1981 (1969). Sixth edition. - In his foreword Umeasiegbu especially thanks Achebe for comments (x). - Umeasiegbu's background, that of most educated Igbos, is Christian. This comes out in certain words: as a synonym for 'chief priest' Umeasiegbu uses the concept 'juju priest' (19), and the practiser of traditional religion is for him 'a pagan' (29 and 31).

<sup>5</sup> Rems Nna Umeasiegbu, *Words are Sweet*. Igbo Stories and Storytelling. E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1982. - At the beginning of this work (unlike in *The Way We Lived*) Umeasiegbu outlines those Igbo areas, where he has collected the material: Nsukka, Aba, and Amesi (18).

<sup>6</sup> How the Leopard Got His Claws, story by Chinua Achebe and John Iroaganachi with 'The Lament of the Deer' by Christopher Okigbo. East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1976 (1972). I am grateful to Ass. Prof. Raoul Granqvist for access to this edition. This tale has also been published in *Voices From Twentieth-Century Africa; Griots and Towncriers*, selected by and with an introduction by Chinweizu. Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1988. The page numbers used here refer to the later edition. For convenience I use the abbreviation *The Leopard*.

<sup>7</sup> I use the words 'tales' and 'stories' synonymously.

<sup>8</sup> H.O. Chukwuma, "The Oral Tale". *Cowries and Kobos; The West African Oral Tale and Short Story*, 12-17. Edited by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford. Dangaroo Press, Denmark, 1981.

and the story line: (a) the animal tale, (b) the tale with human and supernatural characters interacting, and (c) the mixed tale with animal and human characters interacting. Types (a) and (b) are the most common.<sup>9</sup>

Although some animal stories are fables, the term "fable" is not appropriate for Nigerian stories. Sometimes animal tales are sometimes called "tortoise stories" because of the frequent portrayal of the tortoise. According to an Igbo saying, the tortoise is never absent from a folktale ("Mbe ako na iro"). The tortoise, slow in motion, small in stature, wrinkled in body, is the traditional animal trickster in Nigeria. He is intelligent, and compensates for his physical clumsiness with cunning. In these tales animals appear in distinctly human situations where they display a simplified form of human behaviour, although they retain their animal shape and behavioral traits. Most animal tales are aetiological.<sup>10</sup> Both *How the Leopard Got His Claws* and *The Drum* are aetiological tales and animal stories. The protagonist of *The Drum* is the famous tortoise, who acts on his own, whereas the leopard in the other story is complemented by a dog.

In "the tale with human and supernatural characters", Chukwuma writes, there is usually a central character, a hero, around whom the action revolves. The characters are here more numerous than in the purely animal tale. The evil counterpart of the hero, the villain, disturbs the well-being and obstructs the aims of the hero. But "poetic justice" prevails: evil is punished and good rewarded. In this "mixed tale" both animals and men interact on an apparently human level. The language of communication is human and there is no way of identifying the animals except by name. Both animals and men play key roles. These stories must be understood on the metaphorical level, for a literal meaning becomes absurd. The characters are mere agents embodying ideas. They develop only slightly or not at all.<sup>11</sup>

Chukwuma's findings concerning the two other story types are incommensurable, because she takes into account different parts of the stories. But in the light of her scattered claims, *The Flute* would represent chiefly "the tale with human and supernatural characters interacting", for in this story there are both human characters and spirits; and in the end evil is punished and good is rewarded. But the characters do not develop and they are mainly the agents of the ideas.

## THE FLUTE

In his essay on Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*<sup>12</sup> Achebe talks about "the theme of boundaries", which runs beside "the work and play -theme", confronts it and finally merges into it.<sup>13</sup> One can discern the same theme of boundaries in *The Flute*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Chukwuma 1981, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Chinua Achebe, "Work and Play in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. *Hopes and Impediments; Selected Essays 1965-1987*. Heinemann, London, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 74.

(the essay and *The Flute* were issued in the same year) where both space and time may function as boundaries. The narrator's claim that the farm of the family was at the boundary between the land of men and that of spirits implies that both men and spirits have their own areas. The family of the tale has its compound and farm, which are at a distance of "seven forests and seven rivers" from each other. The spirits come to their own farm by night. No one knows where they are at other times. Probably they are in their own domain under the earth's surface - an idea expressed, for example, both in *The Drum* and in *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe. Time thus works as a boundary: daytime is the appropriate time for men to plant their yams, and nighttime is for the spirits. Both men and spirits are aware of this.

"Long long ago there was a man who had two wives. The senior wife had many children but the other had only one son." The significance of the statement that the younger wife has only one child is underlined when the only son wants to turn back to the farm late in the evening to fetch his bamboo flute. The objections of his parents are connected with their fear of losing their only child. It is dangerous to meet the spirits on the journey, i.e., to cross the boundaries. So the spirits regard the boy's approach "with anger in their eyes". But then the spirits ask the boy to play the flute for them, and they are delighted by the boy's playing. There are tests of honesty, and the boy is given the chance to choose a gift from the spirits. Appropriately, of the two pots offered to the boy he chooses the smaller one. When opened at home, it contains all kinds of food, clothing and valuable metals.

The second part of the tale starts when the senior wife in her jealousy at the good luck of the other wife plans to use the same "trick" in order to obtain riches. The following situations and tests are about the same, with the difference that the eldest son of the senior wife acts just the opposite to the first boy. He proves to be untruthful, impudent, impolite and greedy. The gifts that at last come out of the pot are anything but lovely: leprosy, smallpox and all kinds of evil fill the hut, killing the woman and all her children. In plot *The Flute* is an aetiological story. Before the father of the family has managed to shut the door he has opened, diseases and abominations have escaped and spread throughout the world. The last sentence of the tale reads: "But luckily the worst of them - those without a name - remained in the hut."<sup>14</sup>

The only son of the younger wife represents the idea of the good youth; he embodies the attributes of a good young man. The son answers the questions of the spirits "gently but boldly". "Gently" is a characterization of the boy's attitude to others; "boldly" is a characterization of his uncompromising aim to get his flute back. The boy is brave, honest and tactful. He disobeys his parents, however, and leaves to retrieve his flute. He also defies the boundaries between men and the spirits. That is why the spirits first reproach him, although after a while they like his "spirit". On the other hand, the eldest son of the senior wife obeys his mother and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 27.

gets punished in the end. Obedience towards parents is a norm.<sup>15</sup> In practice, however, there is also disobedience, which can be conciliated through justification of the aim or the accomplishment.

The tale, written for children, in a way sets a great responsibility on them: they have to be wiser than their parents. The spirits give orders to children as well. They tell the boys to go to the bush when they hear **doom-doom** and to come back to the road when they hear **jam-jam**, but there is no obvious reason why they are expected to act in this way. Although the eldest son of the senior wife disobeys the order, nothing happens. Apparently, the spirits impose on them an obedience trial: one should do what they order even though one does not always realize why. In any case, according to the (Igbo) tradition, the ancestors have more knowledge and understanding than the living; and in general, the spirits should be feared.

*The Flute* also depicts human evil. It tells us that jealousy and greed may break up a family. These vices make man forget his morality and duty. Jealousy and greed are the ultimate reasons why there are diseases and abominations in the world. The end of the tale is a warning: the most dreadful things are unnamed and hidden. The question is whether man wants to release them into the world.

In *The Way We Lived* by Umeasiegbu there is a tale "The Result of Envy"<sup>16</sup> which represents those folk tale versions on which *The Flute* is founded. The basic design is the same: the first son who goes to fetch his instrument from the spirits will be rewarded because of his honest and pleasant behaviour; the other son who, instigated by his envious mother, goes to fetch his instrument - or to put it more exactly: his presents - from the spirits will be punished because of his dishonest and unpleasant behaviour.

In the folktale "The result of envy" the narrator states: "Oko was given the permission he wanted."<sup>17</sup> According to Achebe, the parents of the boy give in only in the face of the inevitable: "When father and mother found they could not move him, they let him go."<sup>18</sup> - In the folktale the danger of going to the spirits, crossing the boundaries between men and the spirits, is not emphasized; the boy sees the spirits dancing and asks his questions "melodiously". In *The Flute* the spirits are farming when the boy comes, and they watch the coming of the boy "with hatred in their eyes". According to the narrator, the boy stiffens from fear; and when after a while the leader of the spirits talks, his voice is "like the dry bark of thunder through a throat of iron".<sup>19</sup> The question of the leader of the spirits is threatening as well. - In the folktale the only description of the character by the narrator is: "The little boy's simplicity charmed the King."<sup>20</sup> The honesty of the boy and his devotion to his

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<sup>15</sup> See also the work of Umeasiegbu (1981, 82): there is a poem "Eight commandments for children", the beginning of which tells: "Little children love your mother/ Akpakoro - kpankoro/ fear your father and obey your seniors/ Akpakoro - kpankoro".

<sup>16</sup> Umeasiegbu 1981, 99-102.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>18</sup> *The Flute*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Umeasiegbu 1981, 101.

modest instrument are clear in the scenes of both stories. The narrator of the folktale does not state, let alone stress, that the boy has made the flute himself. Nor does the narrator mention the gentleness or pride of the boy.

In the folktale the miraculous pot given to the first son changes the mud hut into "a modern house". Achebe, who through his writings discusses the clash of old and new without having the opinion that "modern" is simply good, enumerates ideologically colourless goods instead. In the folktale the envious woman is not a member of the same family but one of the guests who is invited to celebrate the good luck that has befallen the family of the first son. In *The Flute* the senior wife envies the luck of the younger wife even though they are in the same family and even though this young wife shares good fortune with other: this is probably the way to stress the wretchedness of greed. And still, the ends of the tales differ: in the folktale only the greedy woman dies while the boy avoids all but bruises. In Achebe's tale, in spite of the fact that the boy "only" obeyed his mother, he will not be saved.

## THE DRUM

In his essay "Language and the Destiny of Man", Achebe explains that repetition of the phrases and myths ensures that the central message of a tale is understood.<sup>21</sup> In the same essay Achebe talks about the myth of the Igbos which describes the first encounter of men with death. There are more than seven hundred versions of this myth all over Africa, which again, according to Achebe, indicates its importance.<sup>22</sup> - Achebe wants to pass on the message that "greed leads to disaster". Therefore he writes two tales about the subject - in the same year.

In both *The Flute* and *The Drum* he also makes good use of repetition as a literary technique. The features of a character are revealed when a character in the tale is several times put on trial or in a situation where he must make a choice. The reader does not get the impression that the choice made in the matter in question is merely an occasional way of reacting. In other words, it is possible that the message of the narrator is understood in its "accurate" form, in the form the sender intended.

Although both of these tales begin by defining the time of action as far-away in the past, the action of *The Flute* does not necessarily take place in a more remote past than that of Achebe's countryside novels. In *The Drum*, on the other hand, the narrator refers to primordial times when there was harmony between animals, when the animals and the trees understood each other, and the rain and dry seasons changed in such a way that there was plenty of food for everybody. So the question concerns a mythical primordial time or paradisaic primordial state.

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<sup>21</sup> Chinua Achebe, "Language and the Destiny of Man". *Hopes and Impediments. Selected Essays 1965-87*. Heinemann, Great Britain, 1988, 93.

<sup>22</sup> Compare the myth told by Achebe with "The origin of death" in *The Way We Lived*, 94.

The motivating factor of *The Flute* is an individual act: forgetting the flute on the farm. The motivating factor of *The Drum* is famine, which concerns the whole population.

In *The Flute* there are two antithetical journeys to the spirits, the first taken by a "good" boy, the second by a "bad" boy. The tasks imposed by the spirits are the same, but the reactions of the boys are opposite. In *The Drum* there is a protagonist, a tortoise, who goes twice to the spirits. Although already during his first journey the tortoise is described as greedy and self-important, one can regard the journey as justified. The spirits also prove this with their gift. The second journey, on the other hand, is dishonest and unjust. The spirits also prove this with their punishment. In *The Flute* the writer needs two different characters for two different journeys. The design is black-and-white: the two boys represent opposing ideas rather than opposite characters. The tortoise of *The Drum* is described more realistically: at the beginning of the tale he is hungry. After certain choices the tortoise is no longer the same as earlier. Even at the beginning he exhibits greed, but in the course of the tale this feature becomes "political".

In *The Flute* the central characters are children, whom the parents try to guide. But because the child who is good does not obey his parents and the child who is bad obeys, in this tale the concept of obedience is problematized. In *The Drum* the protagonist is an independent adult. In *The Flute* good is rewarded and bad is punished. The gift given by the spirits consists of all kinds of riches. In *The Drum* the tortoise is not punished by death. Not only the tortoise but also the others are whipped. Here the gift given by the spirits is more concrete: food in time of famine.

In *The Flute* the writer concentrates on one extended family. In *The Drum* the writer describes the community, whose attitude towards the tortoise is at first skeptical (the tortoise is well-known by his people as a trickster), after some good actions, trustful, and after the setback, again skeptical, which also proves to be realistic. The people refuse to crown the tortoise king before he regains the ability to feed them. The greatest dream of the tortoise - to become king - fails.

In his essay "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?", Achebe points out the paradoxes of the Igbo political system: that "there is the absence of kings on the one hand, and on the other the presence in the language and folklore of a whole range of words for "king" and all the paraphernalia of royalty."<sup>23</sup> In Ogidi, where Achebe grew up, he heard two myths explaining the absence of kings. According to the first, once upon a time there existed the title of king. But it fell out of use, because it placed on the aspirant conditions that were too rigorous: he ought to settle all the debts owed by every man and woman in the kingdom. According to the second myth, there was indeed a king, who despised the people very much. When he one day was to break the ritual kola-nut, he cracked it between his teeth. The people could not think of eating kola-nut coated with the king's saliva, so they dethroned him and remained republican ever since. Achebe states that there is "a certain

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<sup>23</sup> "What Has Literature Got to Do with It?". *Hopes and Impediments*, 112.

philosophical appropriateness to the point that a man who would be king over his fellows should in return be prepared personally to guarantee their solvency."<sup>24</sup>

The people in *The Drum* follow the caution of the myth when they refuse to crown the tortoise too early. As in the myth, so in *The Drum*, the people have to experience the condescending attitude of the tortoise. And as the myths tell in general about the difficulty of becoming king, Achebe's tale tells the same story.

Achebe has written an enthusiastic essay about the *Palm-Wine Drinkard* by Tutuola<sup>25</sup>. Tutuola has had so great an effect that, at the end of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, there is an episode about the great famine that resembles the story of *The Drum*, which appeared 25 years later than *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. The central motive in both is the thing (the egg/ the drum) which is first miraculous (in its ability to produce food during famine) and then disastrous (in its capacity to flog people heavily).

According to Tutuola, the quarrel between Heaven and Land is the cause (a trivial cause: a tiny mouse) of the famine, and only when this strife is over or Heaven and Land come to an agreement about the cosmic hierarchy, do the natural phenomena normalize and men start to feel all right again. When Achebe leaves this mythical quarrel outside his tale, he directs the emphasis towards so-called realism. He is satisfied with the starting point that the happy primordial state is changed with the coming of the long drought. He then concentrates on telling how a political climber can misuse famine among the people. Tutuola's narrator presents himself as the helper of his people. He gives them food and drink without any evident ulterior motive and at last resolves the cosmic strife.<sup>26</sup>

A folktale in Umeasiegbu's work *The Way We Lived* that is comparable to Achebe's *The Drum* is "A sumptuous meal"<sup>27</sup>. The title is symptomatic: in the folktale the stress is on the delicious meal and the aim of trying to get another portion of it. Achebe's title moves the stress from food to the instrument by which food is produced or the way in which an attempt is made to eliminate famine; it indicates the way the story should be read and the approach the reader should take. Whereas the animals in the folktale grant the tortoise chieftainship in honor of the food he arranged for them, in *The Drum* they are more skeptical, more realistic, and do not want to give him the kingship he strives after too early. By contrast, in *The Drum* the criticism is also aimed at the way the people adopt an attitude towards the drum in order to solve their problems. In the folktale the tortoise comes to the spirits while he follows a palm fruit that runs away from his own farm. The tortoise of Achebe's tale demands the fruit he has found in the forest even though originally it belongs to no one. In the folktale the narrator does not describe the famine as the starting point of everything as does the narrator in *The Drum*. As a whole, the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>25</sup> Chinua Achebe, "Work and Play in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*". *Hopes and Impediments*, 68-76. This is the longest essay on African literature in his essay collections.

<sup>26</sup> In any case, we must keep in mind the fact that the positive picture given in Tutuola's work is associated with the first person narration.

<sup>27</sup> Umeasiegbu 1981, 80-82.

folktale poses fewer questions and the emphasis is less a social criticism than Achebe's *The Drum*.

"Tortoise dies because of greed" is a very short tale in Umeasiegbu's work *Words Are Sweet* which is related to *The Drum*.<sup>28</sup> Its beginning is the same as in *The Drum*: the people are confronted with famine. The plot is as follows: the animals decide to divide the food among themselves but the tortoise deceives them, and at last they kill him. According to the narrator, the animals decide to be loyal towards each other, because such behavior benefits everybody: "To stave off starvation, they all agreed that as long as the famine lasted, all food items would be shared."<sup>29</sup> In both tales the greed of the tortoise also turns out to be unsolidarity because of the famine in the country. In the folktale the fate of the tortoise is in the title; Achebe, however, lets his greedy tortoise live. The folktale compared with Achebe's tale is like a proverb: an epitome of what happens to the greedy.

## HOW THE LEOPARD GOT HIS CLAWS

The story *How the Leopard Got His Claws* by Achebe and John Iroaganachi was published in 1972. The poem "The lament of the deer", which is included in the story, was written by Christopher Okigbo. The title of the work promises an aetiological story, an animal story for children. At the same time, because of its allegorical nature, this is the most political tale of the three and gloomiest as well. Biafra was defeated in the Nigerian civil war, and Achebe was on the losing side. Christopher Okigbo was a still greater loser than Achebe; he lost his life.

Like *The Flute* and *The Drum*, *How the Leopard Got His Claws* starts with a time definition. As in *The Drum*, there is an indication of the old harmonious state, of "the beginning" when the animals lived in peace. At the beginning only the dog has big sharp teeth, which the other animals laughed at and mocked. But the dog pushes the leopard aside from power. The leopard gets the blacksmith to make him sharp nails and teeth, asks the thunder for strength in his voice and then pushes the dog out of power to rule over the animals with terror.

The animals live at the mercy of nature, for both drought and hard rain cause trouble. In *The Drum* lack of rain is the primary cause of everything; in *The Leopard* the coming rainy season is the primary occasion.

The meeting of the animals is an allegory about the democracy of the Igbos. The suggestion for a common shelter comes from a deer, an "ordinary" villager. The square is the meeting place. Discussion meanders, as would be expected when different men who are used to talking - who have absorbed democratic ideals - take interest in some matter. The king's idea is supported; it is suspect (why should they need a common shelter?); it is justified (they will need a place to rest, they also need a shelter from rain); someone says he does not need any shelter; someone else says

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<sup>28</sup> Umeasiegbu 1982, 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

the matter is unimportant to him. The dog declares: "Those who need a shelter should build it. I live in a cave, and it is enough for me."<sup>30</sup> The dog goes away with the duck walking behind him. The king's statement is important: the villagers can leave or stay. All stay.

While describing the building work of the animals, the narrator presents his philosophy of work and praises hard work. The shelter is built cooperatively, and everybody does what he can do best. The tortoise plans the roof. This is work at its best: "As they built the house, they sang many happy songs. They also told many jokes. Although they worked very hard everyone was merry."<sup>31</sup> As cooperation is praised in the context of building the hall, so the wise leopard also appeals to the collective power of the animals when they try to push the dog from power. Although the animals were strong, fear of the dog's teeth makes them believe that the dog is too strong for them. There is already a marked change-over to the side of the dog: they criticize the leopard who seems "foolish" when he makes "a powerful person as the dog" angry. The dog is strong and now all at once handsome, too - all in all, suitable to be king.

The leopard realizes that the animals are cowards and he leaves. Then there is a scene that is antithetical to the earlier one: the dog wants to prevent his going-away, for "If we let him go, others may soon follow his wicked example until there is no one left in our village. That would be a very bad thing indeed."<sup>32</sup> He labels the leopard "a wicked animal", because he wants to go away from the group. The dog and the other animals think that their "duty" is to prevent the leopard from living alone. "Nobody has a right" to leave; the animals repeat in chorus the statement of the dog.

The folktale "How the dog became a domestic animal"<sup>33</sup> has similarities to Achebe's *The Leopard*. Also according to this folktale, the dog has previously lived in the jungle and has been a very wild animal, in this case wilder than the lion. All the animals, as well as men, lived together but these two communities were enemies. In the kingdom of the animals the population decreased because men hunted and shot its members.

Men promise to stop shooting the animals if the latter give away one of their members. The animals have a meeting, and decide upon the king dog, who had caused trouble in the empire. Among men the dog adopts their way of living and gives up his rough manners; it becomes a domestic animal. When men later break their promise and start to kill animals, the animals demand the dog back. The dog, however, refuses because he likes living in his new surroundings.

The starting point of the folktale is that the dog is the ruler; Achebe's tale describes how the dog, by using violence, becomes the ruler of the animals. Although both tales present the dog as a negative character, only Achebe concentrates on this more thoroughly. When the folktale depicts the strength of the

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<sup>30</sup> *The Leopard*, 182.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>33</sup> Umeasiegbo 1981, 45-46.

majority by showing that the animals are able to give away the dog in spite of resistance to this, in Achebe's tale the cowardice of the animals is emphasized, for they do not dare to threaten the dog, not even with the help of the leopard. In the folktale the two communities which are hostile towards each other are the communities of men and of animals. In Achebe's tale the emphasis is on the power struggle between the animals. The last sentence of the folktale reads: "[These] Two communities have not up to these days come to agreement with each other."<sup>34</sup> Achebe's tale ends in almost the same way: "Perhaps the animals will make peace among themselves some day and live together again. Then they can keep away the hunter who is their common enemy."<sup>35</sup> The folktale presents a state of affairs; Achebe's tale presents a hope, the fulfillment of which is the precondition for identifying the enemy, which the folktale also sees as essential.

## SUMMARY

In many connections Achebe has stated that the African writer should tell about the social and moral values of his community. It is illuminating that he entitles the article, in which he discusses the role of the writer, "The Novelist as Teacher". He is not at all of the opinion - as we often are in Western countries - that the relationship of didacticism to aesthetics of work is like relationship of water to fire.<sup>36</sup> It is not surprising that "the teacher" writes to the children.

In his "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation"<sup>37</sup> Achebe discusses what he thinks are the most important issues to write about. Most important is to point out that the Africans had culture before the coming of the Europeans, that they had philosophy and poetry and, above all, "dignity". When one is inspired to write his own versions based on the folktales, of course that is already a way to appreciate traditional African culture. During the colonial period, Nigerian schoolchildren were hardly able to read books about their own history and culture.<sup>38</sup> After Nigerian independence, education was emphasized. Reading material on the realities of African life was more needed than before. Achebe has promoted the state of children's books, not only as a writer but also as a publisher.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Umesiegbu 1981, 46.

<sup>35</sup> *The Leopard*, 188.

<sup>36</sup> "Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse - to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of the word.-- Art is important, but so is education of the kind I have in mind." - Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher". *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 71,72.

<sup>37</sup> Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation", *Nigeria Magazine*, 81, 1964, 157. See also "The novelist as Teacher".

<sup>38</sup> When Achebe went to teach in a private school [in the fifties] the "library" of the school consisted of the Holy Bible, five copies of "The Adventures of Tarzan" and one copy of a popular novel called "The Sorrows of Satan". - Achebe, "What Do African Intellectuals Read?". *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> In 1967, together with Christopher Okigbo, he founded a publishing house in Enugu. In an interview given in 1968 he states that it was necessary then to publish children's books, in particular, which had significance in

## *The Flute, The Drum and How the Leopard Got His Claws*

In this article I have tried to show how Achebe's tales are based upon oral tradition in both form and content. One can find primordial versions of the Igbo folktales that Achebe had in mind when he wrote his own tales.<sup>40</sup> The aim here has not, however, been to show exhaustively the effects of the folktales on Achebe's tales but rather to use comparison to bring out Achebe's own emphasis.<sup>41</sup> The famine episode of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* bears similarities with Achebe's tale. Achebe uses tradition to his own purposes. Where oral literature uses structural repetition and repetitive formulas extensively for mnemotechnical reasons, Achebe employs repetition to "drive the message home".

*The Flute, The Drum, and How the Leopard Got His Claws* are all aetiological tales; in the last-mentioned story this is even indicated in the very title. In *The Flute*, the question is not only what happens to the greedy, but the tale also draws attention to the different attitudes of men towards the flute. On the one hand, it is an instrument from the world of music, and the boy does not give it up, not even at the risk of falling into dangerous situations. On the other hand, it is an instrument that one could exploit materially. The spirits do not reward mechanical obedience to adults but - in addition to honesty - the "right attitude" towards the flute.

Both *The Flute* and *The Drum* tell us that it is useless to deceive the spirits. By showing the spirits to be righteous judges and by showing their influence on the lives of men, the tales thus strengthen the traditional world view of the Igbos. Although in *The Flute* greed and envy are manifested in the circle of the extended family, and goodness and evil are discussed on the private level, the spirits represent the moral norms of the community against which the morals of individuals are pitted.

When *The Drum* is compared with the folktales "A sumptuous meal" and "Tortoise dies because of greed", one can state that *The Drum* is more complicated, has more social criticism and is also more gloomy as a whole. Already in the title, again, Achebe hints at a the way of reading in which the drum should be taken into account as essential. He is not interested in indicating how bad the lot of the greedy is because in the end it is not so very bad. Not only in *The Flute* but also in *The Drum* the writer wants to attract the reader's attention to the attitude of the characters toward the instrument. Although the basic task of the magical drum is to produce food, it clearly is not meant to solve the food problems forever. In *The Drum* the tortoise becomes a negative character but there is criticism towards the people as well, because they - although only partly - trust the tortoise and imagine that it is possible to solve the famine problem by magical means.<sup>42</sup>

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Nigeria. At the beginning of the 1970's Achebe became one of the leaders of Nwankwo Publishers in Enugu (later named Nwamife Publishers). - See "Chinua Achebe on Biafra", *Transition*, 7, No. 36, July 1968, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Rems Umeasiegbu thanks Achebe "for his extremely helpful comments" on his book *The Way We Lived*, x.

<sup>41</sup> I agree with Bernth Lindfors, who states that the question must not be put as to whether the artist borrows but rather how he uses the material he borrows. - Bernth Lindfors, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*. Africana Publishing Company, New York, 1973, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Achebe points his attention to the same thing, for example, in his essays. He sees in the 'Give and Take'-episode of Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* that the community which lets some invisible hand do its work

The different members of the folktale "How the dog became a domestic animal" are the king dog, animals, and the community of men; there is no contrast character to the dog in this tale. The picture of the dog in *The Leopard* is made more negative because there is the good-leopard as the contrast character and because the writer concentrates on scenes showing the negativeness of the dog. In *The Leopard* the negative picture is also made up - unlike in the folktale - of the people. The basic design of the folktale consists of the contrast between men and animals. The narrator of *The Leopard* also concedes that the basic conflict of interests is between men and animals, but at the same time he shows how the animals have forgotten that fact and fallen to struggling among themselves. So, the emphasis in *The Leopard* is also gloomier than in the folktale version.

Although gloomier than their folktale versions, *The Drum* and *The Leopard* are not, in any case, thoroughly gloomy. Of course the view that "development" has gone in a worse direction is not very light; but on the other hand, the tales begin with reference to a happy primordial time, i.e. once it was different. When giving space to a description of a "happy life together" - even though in the past - in *The Leopard* the writer shows his idea of how things could be. Doing something with one's own hands or working in general shows itself in all three tales, explicitly or implicitly, as the way to the good life, which is thus fundamentally available to everyone. The narrators of both *The Flute* and *The Leopard* perceive positive characteristics in an individual. Honesty, gentleness, friendliness, courage, diligence, cheerfulness - many characteristics which the narrator appreciates and finds in an individual are somehow universal. The characteristic that is especially important to Achebe must be emphasized here, however: the dignity of man. When using the characterization "proud" in a positive meaning, the narrator indicates by this an outer reflection of inner strength. "Pride" which comes out at the moment of trial is peculiar to the good protagonists in *The Flute* and *The Leopard*.

*The Flute* is a tale for children. Its world view is clear and just: good wins and evil will be punished. *The Drum* and *The Leopard* can be read both as tales and as allegories. The former way of reading is obvious. The latter can be supported because in *The Drum* the problem of hunger is not solved, just as it has not been solved in Africa today. There has also been speculation with hunger: it has been used as political tool, for example, in the Nigerian civil war. Gambling to reach political power by fair means or foul is not an unknown theme in Nigeria. And with the question of power seekers is connected the question of the people and their education. As for *The Leopard*, its function is better understood when we put it into focus against the background of the Nigerian civil war.

In the same year Achebe wrote two superficially similar tales; but when examined more closely, the tales differ from each other considerably. The tales are examples of how one can also send messages from earlier times by utilizing and working up older literature (oral and written). And simultaneously, one can create

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sooner or later forfeits its crop. - "Work and Play in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*". *Hopes and Impediments*, 75.

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texts which speak to a modern audience. The modernity of Achebe is in his problematizing of certain previously self-evident truths and in his way of also leaving problems unsolved.

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