☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC 177

## Volume 177

# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers









### Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 177

Project Editor
Janet Witalec

Editorial
Tom Burns, Jenny Cromie, Kathy D. Darrow,
Jeffrey W. Hunter, Justin Karr, Lemma Shomali

**Indexing Services**Laurie Androit

Permissions Lori Hines

Imaging and Multimedia Lezlie Light, Dan Newell, Kelly A. Quin **Composition and Electronic Capture** Kathy Sauer

Manufacturing Stacy L. Melson

© 2004 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design™ and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc.
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
Or you can visit our internet site at
http://www.gale.com

#### ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For permission to use material from the product, submit your request via the Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permisssions Department
The Gale Group, Inc.
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, the Gale Group neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132** 

ISBN 0-7876-6750-1 ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## **Preface**

Tamed "one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years" by Reference Quarterly, the Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC) series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of CLC in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. CLC, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today's reader.

## Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in CLC inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each CLC volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author's career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author's works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in CLC provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

## Organization of the Book

A CLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The Author Heading cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Singlework entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A Portrait of the Author is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted Criticism is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief Annotations explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent Author Interview accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of Further Reading appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

#### **Indexes**

A Cumulative Author Index lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A Cumulative Nationality Index lists all authors featured in CLC by nationality, followed by the number of the CLC volume in which their entry appears.

A Cumulative Topic Index lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800, Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, and the Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

#### Citing Contemporary Literary Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language As-

sociation (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Morrison, Jago. "Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction." Critique 42, no. 3 (spring 2001): 253-68. Reprinted in Contemporary Literary Criticism. Vol. 169, edited by Janet Witalec, 212-20. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 169, edited by Janet Witalec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 5th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Morrison, Jago. "Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction." Critique 42.3 (spring 2001): 253-68. Reprinted in Contemporary Literary Criticism. Ed. Janet Witalec. Vol. 169. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 212-20.

Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witalec. Vol. 169. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 3-8.

## Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Project Editor:

Project Editor, Literary Criticism Series
The Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)
Fax: 248-699-8054

## Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *CLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

## COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *CLC*, VOLUME 177, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

American Book Review, v. 23, January-February, 2002. Copyright © 2002 American Book Review. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature, v. 17, October, 1986. Copyright © 1986 The Board of Governors, The University of Calgary. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—Atlantic, v. 258, August, 1986 for "Comic Books for Grown- ups" by Lloyd Rose. Copyright © 1986, Atlantic. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Books in Canada, v. 31, September, 2002 for "Journeys across Time and Water" by Clara Thomas. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Callaloo, v. 13, Spring, 1990. © The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—Cambridge Quarterly, v. 31, 2002. Copyright © 2002 by the Editors. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press.—College English, v. 55, March, 1993; v. 57, February, 1995. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted by permission.—Comics Journal, no. 113, December, 1986 for "Maus and Other Topics" by Harvey Pekar; no. 114, February, 1987 for "The Dark Knight Reborn" by Gene Phillips; no. 214, July, 1999 for "Paranormal Popularity" by Gregory Cwiklik. Copyright © 1986, 1987, 1999 Comics Journal. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the respective authors.—Commonweal, v. 122, October 20, 1995. Copyright © 1995, Commonweal Publishing Co., Inc. Reproduced by permission of Commonweal Foundation.—Comparative Literature Studies, v. 32, 1995 for a review by Sanford Schwartz of Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State, by Tom Paulin. © Copyright 1995 by University of Oregon. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Critical Quarterly, v. 42, Spring, 2000. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers.—*ELT: English Literature in Translation: 1880-1920*, v. 36, 1993. Copyright © 1993 English Literature in Transition: 1880-1920. Reproduced by permission.—*Extrapolation*, v. 30, Winter, 1989; v. 39, Fall, 1998. Copyright © 1989, 1998 by The Kent State University Press. Reproduced by permission.— Financial Times, June 13, 1998 for "A Hack who Happened to Be a Genius" by Jon Cook. Reproduced by permission.— Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction, v. 71, Autumn, 1997 for "Of Parents and Children and Dreams in Neil Gaiman's Mr. Punch and The Sandman" by Joe Sanders; v. 83, Autumn, 2001 for "Visualizations of Cyber-Gothic Bodies in William Gibson's Trilogy and the Art of the Graphic Novel" by Tatiana Rapatzikou. Copyright © Foundation, 1997, 2001. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the respective authors.—Frontiers, v. 22, June, 2001. Copyright © by the Frontiers Editorial Collective 2001. Reproduced by permission of the University of Nebraska Press.—The Guardian, October 22, 1998 for "Woman: Mother Courage: Maureen Freely Talks to Marilyn French" by Maureen Freely. Reproduced by permission of the author; November 16, 2002. Copyright © 2002 Larushka Ivan-Zadeh, Reproduced by permission of Guardian News Service, LTD.—Image & Narrative: Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative, December, 2000 for "The Publication and Formats of Comics, Graphic Novels, and Tankobon" by Chris Couch; January, 2003, "Looking Inside Out: The Vision as Particular Gaze in From Hell" by Lisa Coppin. Copyright © 2000, 2003 by Image & Narrative. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the respective authors.—Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies, v. 1, February, 1994. Copyright © 1994, Inks: Cartoon and Comic Art Studies. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—International Journal of the Classical Tradition, v. 4, Fall, 1997 for "Talking amongst Ourselves': Language, Politics, and Sophocles on the Field Day Stage" by Richard C. Jones. Copyright by Transaction Publishers. Reproduced by permission of Transaction Publishers.—Journal of Popular Culture, v. 27, Winter, 1993. Copyright © 1993, Journal of Popular Culture. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers.—London Review of Books, v. 16, September 22, 1994; v. 24, May 23, 2002. Reproduced by permission.—Los Angeles Times Book Review, February 27, 1994. Copyright, 1994, Los Angeles Times. Reproduced by permission.-Massachusetts Review, v. 36, Spring, 1995 for "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo" by Anuradha Dingwaney Needham. Reproduced from The Massachusetts Review, The Massachusetts Review, Inc. by permission of the author.—Modern Drama, v. 43, Spring, 2000. Copyright © 2000 University of Toronto, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama. Reproduced by permission.—Mosaic, v. 34, December, 2001. © Mosaic 2001. Acknowledgment of previous publication is herewith made.—National Forum, v. 81, no. 3, Summer, 2001. Copyright by Laura J. Kloberg. Reproduced by permission of the

publishers.—New Statesman and Society, v. 5, February 14, 1992; v. 5, April 3, 1992; v. 7, July 22, 1994; v. 127, June 5, 1998; v. 131, March 18, 2002. © 1992, 1994, 1998, 2002 Statesman & Nation Publishing Company Limited. Reproduced by permission.—Novel: A Forum on Fiction, v. 26, n. 3, Spring, 1993. Copyright NOVEL Corp. © 1993. Reproduced with permission.—Observer, December 24, 2000 for "Strip Teasers" by Roger Sabin; September 2, 2001 for "Side by Side in the Fantasy League" by Roger Sabin. Reproduced by permission of the respective authors.; January 5, 2003. Copyright © David Thompson. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—Poetry Review, v. 84, Summer, 1994. Reproduced by permission.—Political Quarterly, v. 69, October- December, 1998. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers.—Publishers Weekly, v. 217, March 7, 1980; v. 227, May 3, 1985, Copyright © 1980, 1985 by Xerox Corporation. Reproduced from Publishers Weekly, published by R. R. Bowker Company, a Xerox company, by permission.— Research in African Literatures, v. 26, Summer, 1995 for "Caught at the Confluence of History: Ama Ata Aidoo's Necessary Nationalism" by Ranu Samantrai; v. 33, Summer, 2002 for "About Lovers in Accra'—Urban Intimacy in Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes: A Love Story" by Maria Olaussen; v. 33, Summer, 2002 for "Slavery and Etiological Discourse in the Writing of Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head, and Buchi Emecheta" by Modupe Olaogun. Published by Indiana University Press. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—Science-Fiction Studies, v. 21, November, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by SFS Publications. Copyright © 1994 by SFS Publications. Reproduced by permission.—Southern Humanities Review, v. 34, Summer, 2000 for a review by Christopher Hamilton of The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style, by Tom Paulin. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Spectator, v. 268, February 1, 1992; v. 281, July 11, 1998; v. 288, May 4, 2002. © 1992, 1998, 2002 by The Spectator. Reproduced by permission of The Spectator.—Studies in the Novel, v. 32, Summer, 2000. Copyright 2000 by North Texas State University. Reproduced by permission.—Studies in Short Fiction, v. 32, Spring, 1995. Copyright 1995 by Studies in Short Fiction, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—Studies in Twentieth Century Literature, v. 15, Winter, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by Studies in Twentieth Century Literature. Reproduced by permission.—Times Literary Supplement, no. 4571, November 9-15, 1990; no. 4701, May 7, 1993; no. 4762, August 7, 1994; no. 4988, November 6, 1998; no. 5056, February 25, 2000; no. 5179, July 5, 2002. © The Times Supplements Limited 1990, 1993, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2002. Reproduced from The Times Literary Supplement by permission.—Women's Review of Books, v. 12, November 1994 for "Culture Clashes" by Susan Gardner; v. 16, January, 1999 for "In Sickness and Health" by Kathleen Woodward; v. 20, June, 2003, for "Growing Up Graphic" by Debbie Notkin. Copyright © 1994, 1999, 2003. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the respective authors.—Women's Studies, v. 9, 1982. © Gordon and Breach Science Publishers. Reproduced by permission.—World Literature Today, v. 71, Winter 1997; v. 74, Spring, 2000. Copyright 1997, 2000 by the University of Oklahoma Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

## COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *CLC*, VOLUME 177, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Innes, C.L. From Essays on African Writing. Edited by Abdulrazak Gurnah. Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by C.L. Innes. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Harcourt Education Ltd.—Nash, Jesse W. From Popular Arthurian Traditions. Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992. Copyright © 1992, by Bowling Green State University Popular Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Blackwell Publishers.— Nwankwo, Chimalum. From Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature. Edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves. Africa Word Press, 1986. Copyright © 1986 by Africa World Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Africa World Press, Trenton, N.J.—O'Donoghue, Bernhard. From The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland. Edited by Neil Corcoran. Ormore-by-the-Sea Books, 1992. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Sabin, Roger. From Adult Comics: An Introduction, 1993, Routledge, 1993. Copyright © by Roger Sabin 1993. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—Sullivan, Mary Rose. From Mother Puzzles: Daughters and Mothers in Contemporary American Literature. Edited by Mickey Pearlman. Greenwood Press, 1989. Copyright © 1989 by Mickey Pearlman. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT.—Todd, Janet. From Women Writers Talking. Edited by Janet Todd. Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1983. Reproduced by permission.—Wilentz, Gay. From Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora. Indiana University Press, 1992. Copyright © 1992 by Gay Wilentz. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Witek, Joseph. From Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar. University Press of Mississippi, 1989. Copyright © 1989, by the University Press of Mississippi. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

## PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS APPEARING IN *CLC*, VOLUME 177, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Clowes, Daniel, illustrator. From an illustration in *Ghost World*, by Daniel Clowes. Fantagraphics, 1998. © 2003 Dan Clowes/Fantagraphics. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—French, Marilyn, photograph. © Najlah Feanny/

Corbis Saba. Reproduced by permission.—Gibbons, Dave, illustrator. From an illustration in *Watchmen #4*, by Alan Moore. DC Comics, 1987. *Watchmen #4* TM and © 1986. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

## **Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board**

The members of the Gale Group Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board—reference librarians and subject specialists from public, academic, and school library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature criticism products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

Dr. Toby Burrows
Principal Librarian
The Scholars' Centre
University of Western Australia Library

**David M. Durant**Reference Librarian, Joyner Library
East Carolina University

Steven R. Harris
English Literature Librarian
University of Tennessee

Mary Jane Marden
Literature and General Reference Librarian
St. Petersburg Jr. College

Mark Schumacher
Jackson Library
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

**Gwen Scott-Miller**Fiction Department Manager
Seattle Public Library

## **Contents**

#### Preface vii

## Acknowledgments xi

## Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xv

Ama Ata Aidoo 1942	1
Ghanaian novelist, poet, playwright, short story writer, and children's writer	3
Marilyn French 1929-	113
American novelist, critic, essayist, memoirist, historian, and nonfiction writer	n
Graphic Novels	
Introduction	
Representative Works	164
Overviews and General Studies	165
Critical Readings of Major Works	
Reviews of Recent Graphic Novels	
Further Reading	
Tom Paulin 1949	300
English-born Northern Irish poet, playwright, essayist, journalist, crit and editor	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 373

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 469

CLC Cumulative Nationality Index 479

CLC-177 Title Index 493

## Ama Ata Aidoo 1942-

(Full name Christina Ama Ata Aidoo) Ghanaian novelist, poet, playwright, short story writer, and children's writer.

The following entry presents an overview of Aidoo's career through 2002.

## INTRODUCTION

Best known for her short stories, novels, and plays, Aidoo embraces the devices of the African oral tradition in all aspects of her writing. Her works reflect a feminist and nationalist consciousness that links Africa's social problems and the decline of its oral tradition to past European colonial rule and Africa's present neocolonial economy. Different aspects of Africa's social history, particularly the legacy of slavery, are often the subject of Aidoo's work, and one of her more controversial recurring motifs is the exploration of the marginalization of educated African women. In such works as Anowa (1970) and Our Sister Killjoy: or, Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint (1977), Aidoo presents female protagonists who defy the stereotype of the submissive African woman despite strong male opposition and abuse.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Aidoo was born in 1942 to Chief Yaw Fama of the Fanti town of Abeadzi Kyiakor, Ghana, and his wife, Maame Abba Abasema. This royal environment exposed Aidoo to traditional African lore and literature which would strongly influence her later writing. She attended Western schools, completing her primary education at the Wesley Girls' School in Cape Coast and graduating with honors in English from the University of Ghana at Legon in 1964. She was later appointed as a Junior Research Fellow of the Advanced Creative Writing Program at Stanford University. While attending the University of Ghana, Aidoo participated in the school of drama and several playwriting workshops. The publication of her plays The Dilemma of a Ghost (1965) and Anowa later established Aidoo's reputation as a rising African playwright. After the success of Anowa, Aidoo turned her attention to different genres of writing, publishing novels, essays, poems, reviews, and, most notably, collections of her short stories. Her collection

No Sweetness Here (1970) integrates African oral techniques with Western literary conventions and was warmly received by critics in Africa and abroad. Aidoo published her first novel, Our Sister Killjoy, in 1977 and did not release another work for eight years. This was due in part to the oppressive political regime in Ghana at the time, which was characterized by military brutality and the indiscriminate incarceration of Ghana's intelligentsia. Aidoo taught English literature at the University of Ghana, Cape Coast, from 1970 to 1983, and was a consulting professor in the ethnic studies program of the Phelps-Stokes Fund from 1974 to 1975. In 1982 Aidoo was appointed Minister of Education in Ghana under the government of J. J. Rawlings. Due to pressure from the increasingly conservative government, Aidoo was forced to resign the position and subsequently left the country in 1983. She settled in Zimbabwe, later serving as the chair of the Zimbabwe Women Writers Group. Aidoo is also the founder and executive director of Mbaasem, a foundation that supports African American women writers and their work. She received a short story prize in a Mbari Press competition and another from Black Orpheus for the title story in No Sweetness Here. In 1992 she was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize for African Literature for Changes: A Love Story (1991). She has travelled extensively in Africa, the United States, and Europe, and has presented lectures at universities throughout Africa and North America.

### **MAJOR WORKS**

Aidoo first attracted critical and popular attention for her dramatic works which examine the gender, racial, and intergenerational conflicts that African men and women are forced to confront in the modern world. The Dilemma of a Ghost focuses on a young Ghanaian, Ato Yawson, who was educated in America. He returns home with his African American wife, Eulalie Rush, whom he has married without forewarning his family. The cultural conflict, conveyed through the design of the family house, images of food, and distinctive levels of language, is exacerbated by the couple's decision not to have children. When Eulalie shows no sign of becoming pregnant, Ato's family assumes that she is barren. The core of the problem, however, lies in Ato's inability to bring about any meaningful reconciliation between his ancestral and adopted cultures. Only the strength and wisdom of Ato's mother helps to assuage a bitter confrontation between Ato's Western individual values and his family's traditionally communal African beliefs. In Anowa, a beautiful, talented young woman named Anowa rejects all the suitors her parents approve and instead marries Kofi Ako, the man of her choice. Anowa and Kofi quickly discover that they have almost nothing in common, and Kofi tries to drive Anowa away. Refusing to be divorced without reason, Anowa repudiates Kofi's insinuations of barrenness-a common accusation leveled against African women in childless marriages—and instead blames Kofi for the failure of their marriage. Completely deflated by this threat to his manhood, Kofi kills himself, and Anowa also commits suicide, overwhelmed by the futility of attempting to find meaning in life. Anowa is set during a significant period in the colonial history of Africa's Gold Coast, and the ethical implications of colonialism and slavery heighten the dramatic action, revealing conflicting attitudes toward such issues as wealth and slavery.

No Sweetness Here, Aidoo's first published work of prose, collects eleven short stories that emphasize Aidoo's concern with feminist issues. The stories focus on a range of diverse and often tragic topics such as sexism, degradation, feminine adolescence, and humanist values. "Everything Counts" and "For Whom Things Did Not Change" are primarily centered around the impact of modernization on both rural and urban women, while "The Late Bud" explores budding girlhood and the identity crisis emanating from growing up female in a sexist environment. Aidoo's novel Our Sister Killjoy blends traditional prose with poetry and passages written in the epistolary form. Consisting of a prologue and three chapters, the novel records the impressions of an African girl named Sissie during a visit to present-day Germany and England, noting the colonial histories of both countries and their governments' role as oppressor to African peoples. Sissie is the Ghanaian representative of an international group of young volunteer workers and, as she witnesses the economic exploitation of and racism against African immigrants in Europe, she loudly encourages her countrymen to return to Africa. In 1985 the College Press of Zimbabwe published Someone Talking to Sometime, the first collection of Aidoo's poetry, which contains forty-four original poems. Aidoo employs a conversational style in the poems to lend humor to the essentially tragic nature of existence, particularly in such poems as "From the Only Speech that Was Not Delivered at the Rally" and "Of Love and Commitment." Her second volume of poetry, An Angry Letter in January and Other Poems (1992), examines similar thematic material, while also presenting a series of existential questions regarding self-identity, exile, place, and belonging. In Changes: A Love Story, Aidoo explores the limited options retained by modern African women in regard to love and marriage. The female protagonist, Esi, an ambitious Ghanian careerwoman,

flouts convention by divorcing her husband and becoming the second wife of a more progressive man. Through Esi's struggle for self-respect within a relationship, Aidoo examines such issues as career choices, marital rape, monogamy, polygamy, and the toll of compromise in marriage. Her second short story collection, The Girl Who Can and Other Stories (1997), is written from a child's perspective, featuring young female protagonists who struggle to define themselves within patriarchal African society. In stories like "She-Who-Would-Be-King" and "Male-ing Names in the Sun," Aidoo subverts the traditional portrayal of adolescent African females, creating characters who question and challenge the role of the African woman in the twenty-first century. Aidoo has also written several children's works, including The Eagle and the Chickens and Other Stories (1986) and Birds and Other Poems (1987), a book of poetry for children.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Aidoo's work has garnered generally positive reviews throughout her career. The Dilemma of a Ghost has attracted high praise from critics, despite some negative comments about the play's structural weaknesses and Aidoo's attempts at blending the African oral tradition with Western literary elements. Several reviewers have lauded the stories in No Sweetness Here, noting Aidoo's skill at creating sympathetic characters as well as the social relevance of her prose. Fawzia Afzal-Khan has commented that, in No Sweetness Here, "Aidoo uses her dramatist's skills to create an immediacy of environment and experience into which the reader is drawn, almost as participant rather than observer." While many scholars have agreed on Aidoo's prominence as a social critic, some commentators have expressed uneasiness over what they describe as Aidoo's pointed attacks against the Western world in Our Sister Killjoy. However, other critics have rejected this assessment, favorably comparing the novel to James Baldwin's The Fire Next Time and Jean Toomer's Cane. Gay Wilentz has argued that Our Sister Killjoy deserves considerable praise for presenting "a rarely heard viewpoint in literature in English—that of the African woman exile."

### PRINCIPAL WORKS

Dilemma of a Ghost (play) 1965 Anowa (play) 1970 No Sweetness Here (short stories) 1970 Our Sister Killjoy: or, Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint (novel) 1977 Someone Talking to Sometime (poetry) 1985 The Eagle and the Chickens and Other Stories [illustrations by Paul Wade] (juvenilia) 1986

Birds and Other Poems (juvenilia and poetry) 1987

Changes: A Love Story (novel) 1991

An Angry Letter in January and Other Poems (poetry) 1992

The Girl Who Can and Other Stories (short stories) 1997

## **CRITICISM**

## Ebele Eko (essay date October 1986)

SOURCE: Eko, Ebele. "Beyond the Myth of Confrontation: A Comparative Study of African and African-American Female Protagonists." ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature 17, no. 4 (October 1986): 139-52.

[In the following essay, Eko examines how Aidoo subverts the traditional role of the African female protagonist in Anowa, comparing the play to several works from African and African American authors.]

Times have changed since the sixties, and a new breed of black women writers in Africa and America are giving creative birth to a new breed of female protagonists. One of their deep concerns, a point which Hoyt Fuller has stressed, is to help destroy degrading images and myths and recreate for black women images that liberate and build up self-identity. The myth of black mother-daughter confrontation, to which a whole volume of a scholarly journal has been devoted, is one such.

I intend to focus on the creative process of myth destruction and recreation in two works each from Africa and America. By comparing and contrasting the confrontation of daughters and their mothers and "totems" of that tradition—the reactions, the revelation of deep-seated mother-daughter resemblances, and the challenge the daughters become to those around them—I hope to prove a number of things. First that, far from being selfish, spoiled, and pugnacious, these daughters are budding activists, products of the times (all four works are published between 1959 and 1983). Second that their mothers too experienced similar frustrations in their youth but lacked a voice and silently conformed. Third that their conscious choice achieves a double goal: raising the level of their awareness, and challenging others to greater black consciousness. Fourth, these daughters are their writers' mouthpieces, used to address pressing problems in African and

African-American communities. In a sentence, I will try to show the crucial importance of female determination to stand for equity and choice.

The characters I discuss—Anowa in Ama Ata Aidoo's play, Anowa; Kiswana Browne in Gloria Naylor's novel, Women of Brewster Place: Margaret Cadmore in Bessie Head's novel, Maru; and Senna Boyce in Paule Marshall's novel. Browngirl Brownstones—reveal many bonds and parallels, despite obvious separations of time, space, and even genre. "You got to take vuh mouth and make a gun," says Silla Boyce, Selina's mother,3 a statement which finds ironic fulfilment in each of these four daughters under study. There are astonishing resemblances in their defiant utterances, their self-assertion, their committed and courageous opposition to the oppressive status quo. Each struggles to break free, to be herself, to be different from her mother's expectations. Nevertheless, each discovers in herself a mere extension of her mother's personality. They are similarly unified in their expressing and dramatizing what I may call "creative rebellion" against oppressive institutions and traditions. Their capacity for personal sacrifice and the challenges they pose to others demand that they be looked at seriously as catalysts for social, economic, and political changes.

An exciting starting point is the deceptive lull before the dramatic moment of confrontation over cultural and ideological values. A critic has summarized the situation thus:

The conflict is basically between the idealists (the daughters) and the pragmatists (the mothers). . . . [T]hey are grieved to see their children making choices that they do not understand, turning their backs on the things the mothers have struggled to attain.<sup>4</sup>

In Anowa, Anowa's mother Badua, a village woman of Ghana, wants her daughter to become a full woman in the village, "happy to see her peppers and onions grow."<sup>5</sup> In Women of Brewster Place, Kiswana's middle-class mother swears to whatever gods will listen to "use everything at her disposal to assure a secure future for her children." In Maru, Margaret's foster mother, the missionary Margaret Cadmore senior, who rescues and nurtures the orphan child of a dying Marsawa woman. raises her with great care to prove her pet theory that "heredity is nothing, environment is everything." Selina's mother, Silla Boyce, an ambitious Badjan immigrant to New York, labours and saves so that she can buy a brownstone house to pass on to her daughters. All of them are well-meaning mothers, who like Janie's grandmother in Their Eyes were Watching God, long for them "to pick from higher bush and a sweeter berry."8 They wish for their daughters what they missed, because in the words of the poet Tagore, "when you feel sorrow, grief and joy for someone you enlarge yourself, you enrich yourself."9

Ironically, the daughters refuse to conform. They rebel against their mothers, not *as* mothers but as representatives of societal authority and expectation. Bell Hooks explains this universal psychological phenomenon in terms of her personal experience with her mother:

She is also always trying to make me what she thinks it is best for me to be. She tells me how to do my hair, what clothes I should wear. She wants to love and control at the same time. . . . I want so much to please her and yet keep part of me that is my self my own. 10

The daughters want to be themselves. Anowa wants to choose her own husband in a conservative society where one's parents do the choosing. Her stubborn independence is nothing short of radical. In a language shockingly disrespectful in context, she declares her stand: "I don't care mother. Have I not told you that this is to be my marriage and not yours" (p. 17). Adding shock to shock, she proceeds to do what she pleases, leaving home with a promise not to return. Anowa's rebellion is a challenge to her entire community and evokes prompt reaction, not only from her parents but also from the elders of the village. Her mother's warning carries the potency of a collective curse:

It's up to you, my mistress who knows everything. But remember, my lady—when I am too old to move, I shall still be sitting by these walls waiting for you to come back with your rags and nakedness.

(p. 17)

Her father, Osam, wants her apprenticed to a priestess to curb her spirit. The village old woman laments that the age of obedience has run out, while the old man blames it all on fate, remarking that Anowa has the "hot eyes and nimble feet of one born to dance for the gods" (p. 20). Regardless of threats and curses, Anowa leaves with her head held high, promising to make somebody out of the husband they had ridiculed as a cassava man or a worthless fellow.

Just as Anowa's haughtiness shocks the entire village community, Kiswana in Gloria Naylor's Women of Brewster Place shocks her middle-class parents with her inflammatory denunciation of their status symbols and values: "I'd rather be dead than be like you . . . a white man's nigger who's ashamed of being black!"" (p. 85). Matching action to words in the vogue of black activists in the sixties, Kiswana chooses an African name (instead of Melanie), blows her hair into an afro, quits college, moves out of her bourgeois neighbourhood to a low-income project, decorates it with African artifacts, and gets a boyfriend in dashiki. The reaction she gets is as sharp as it is forceful. Her mother's lone voice carries with it the moral superiority and confidence of the self-made black middle class, whose hard-earned security has come under fire. She taunts Kiswana about her misguided zeal and mocks her foolishness:

Where is your revolution now Melanie? Where are those black revolutionaries who were shouting and demonstrating and kicking up a lot of dust with you on that campus, Huh? They're sitting in wood-panelled offices with their degrees in mahogany frames.

(p. 84)

She adds, "There was no revolution, Melanie, and there will be no revolution" (p. 84). The battle rages back and forth, each pointing to concrete actions to defend her stance. Denouncing her parents as "terminal cases of middle class amnesia," Kiswana declares that she is now physically near her people (the poor blacks) and their problems. Mrs. Browne counters by pointing to the solid achievements of NAACP, which she supports, as opposed to the futile dreams of those she calls "hot heads."

In the remote Botswana village of Dilepe, Margaret Cadmore in Bessie Head's Maru, like Kiswana, has to face a crisis of choice. She is alone, a new teacher in a strange village; her white foster mother has retired and gone back to England. She has been brought up like an English girl, with Western manners and impeccable English. Everyone who meets her assumes she is a coloured, a status not without prejudice in Botswana but certainly much better than that of the Masarwa, who are considered the lowest of the low, condemned to perpetual servitude to Botswana people. Against that background, Margaret Cadmore's firm and cool declaration in answer to her colleague's simple question, and later to the headmaster's inquiry, "I am a Masarwa" (p. 24), sends waves of shock the length and breadth of Dilepe village. With her one-sentence identification, Margaret confronts herself, her past, her upbringing, her future, and her society. She defies all assumptions, bursts out from the walls of her white foster mother's protection, and stands proud, aloof, and vulnerable.

Compared to Anowa and Kiswana, Margaret is like a lamb thrown to ravenous wolves. Pete, the school principal, Morafi, a cattle chief, and Seth, another totem in the community, all band together against the woman whose identification with Masarwa slaves has sent "thrills of fear down their spines" because they all own slaves. Margaret is seen as "a problem"; her statement is "a slap in the face'" (p. 44), and their response is therefore a vicious counter-offensive. Pete organizes Margaret's pupils to taunt her into resigning. "You are a Bushman" (p. 46), they chant to their teacher's face. Quiet but resolute, Margaret, with the aid of her friend Dikeledi and Maru, the brother, thwarts all of Pete's attempts to have her disgraced and dismissed.

Unlike Anowa, Kiswana, and Margaret, whom the reader meets at about the same age and comparable maturity, Selina's stubborn spirit grows slowly throughout Paule Marshall's *Browngirl Brownstones*. Even as a

little girl, her mother sees her as "her crosses," mischievously in league with her day-dreaming father, a disobedient and difficult child. Selina's total indifference to her mother's ambition of acquiring a brownstone house in New York culminates one day in her screaming rejection: "I'm not interested in houses." But her mother's dreams are only part of a larger community dream. Selina simultaneously deflates and demeans these aspirations by the hammer-blow criticisms she levels against the entire Badjan Association when given a chance to make a few remarks:

It [the Association] stinks . . . because it's a result of living by the most shameful codes possible—dog eat dog . . . it's a band of small frightened people. Clanish. Narrow-minded. Selfish. . . .

(p. 23)

Her dramatic storming out after her speech, like Anowa's precipitous departure from the village and Kiswana's move to a lower-class neighbourhood, leaves her mother shaken. Her announcement of her imminent departure for Barbados, the land her mother and the Badjan community had fled for New York, is a final slap in their faces. Unlike Badua and Mrs. Browne, Silla is drained by the confrontation. She pouts about her two daughters:

Gone so! They ain got no more uses for me and they gone. Oh God, is this what you does get for the nine months and the pain and the long years putting bread in their mouth . . . ?

(p. 306)

Unlike Badua, who sends Anowa away with a curse, or Mrs. Browne, who fights back, Silla resigns herself to the inevitable with some dignity and impatience:

"G'long," she said finally with a brusque motion.

"G'long! You was always too much woman for me anyway, soul. And my own mother did say two head-bulls can't reign in a flock. G'long!" Her hand sketched a sign that was both a dismissal and a benediction. "If I din dead yet, you and your foolishness can't kill muh now!"

(p. 307)

And yet, despite what appears on the surface as the open rebellion of daughters against their mothers, each mother, like Silla Boyce, somehow glimpses in her daughter "the girl she had once been." The daughters in turn discover that they are not "way out" after all, but extensions of their mothers, the "bridges over which they have crossed." Mary Washington has suggested that all blacks must find a way to their true identity through the community, and she believes that "for Black women, the mother is often the key to that unity." Anowa's boldness is clearly inherited from her mother Badua, who argues with her husband and gets her way

most of the time. In obvious reference to her mother's strong powers, Anowa asks Badua to remove her "witches" mouth from her marriage. Ironically, her husband and the village old woman later accuse her of "witchcraft" to explain her extraordinary strength of character. The tragedy of Anowa is her husband's weakness. Where Anowa's father argues with and respects his wife, Kofi Ako feels threatened by Anowa's boldness and sound advice. His moral weakness is their undoing, bringing about the double suicide that more than fulfils Badua's curse.

Kiswana no doubt believes herself the epitome of radicalism until she listens to her mother's theatrical recounting of her proud heritage and commitment to the black cause. Suddenly, she comes to understand and appreciate the source of her own dynamism, idealism, and dedication: her mother. The generation gap is finally bridged when Kiswana notices her mother's red painted toenails and realizes that they share similar tastes. It dawns on her that she is indeed a part of her mother:

She looked at the blushing woman on the couch and realized that her mother had trod through the same universe that she herself was now travelling. Kiswana was breaking no new trails and would eventually end up just two feet away on the couch. She stared at the woman she had been and was to become.

(p. 87)

To an even greater extent, Margaret Cadmore can be seen as her foster mother's programmed alter ego. The missionary gives the orphan her own name and proceeds systematically to fill her mind with "a little bit of everything." Much of her personality—her common sense, logic, resourcefulness, and resilience—filters into Margaret, enabling her to survive in the closed and prejudiced environment of Dilepe, much like the one the missionary had worked in. Her charm, her education, and her talent are all a heritage from her mother. Even their artistic abilities are similar:

The styles of both artists were almost identical, almost near that of a comic-strip artist in their simplicity, except that the younger disciple appeared greater than the master.

(p. 87)

Despite the success of Margaret's environmental upbringing, she does not lose her identity as a Masarwa. It is this that gives originality to her art and upholds her commitment to common people. In a startling and ironic way, Margaret, whose mother has prepared her to help her people, fulfils that destiny not only through her symbolic paintings but also by her marriage to Maru, heir to the Dilepe chiefdom.

Even Selina, whose alienation from her mother starts early in *Browngirl Brownstones* and is underlined through her addressing Silla as "the mother" and associating her with winter colours, comes to acknowledge a union with Silla. She confesses that despite her love for her father, "there was a part of her that always wanted the mother to win, that loved her strength and the tenacious life of her body" (p. 133). Slowly but certainly, through exposure and some bitter experiences, the young rebel comes to understand, in Gloria Gayle's words, that "in the world of racism the mother is a fellow victim rather than a natural enemy." It is not till the end of the novel, however, that Selina identifies with her mother instead of her father as her source of inspiration, strength, and idealism:

Everybody used to call me Deighton's Selina, but they were wrong. Because you see I'm truly your child. Remember how you used to talk about how you left home and came here alone as a girl of eighteen and was your own woman? I used to love hearing that. And that's what I want. I want it!

(p. 307)

The mother's anger fizzles out because for her too it is a moment of truth. She has come to glimpse in Selina the girl that she once was.

Beyond the confrontations with and resemblances to their mothers, these daughters are seen by others as abnormal. They are ahead of their time, and they act as catalysts for changes that affect not only those around them, but the larger society. They are, in Kofi Ako's words of complaint against Anowa, "looking for the common pain and the general good," issues he believes should not concern any normal woman. But these are not ordinary women. Anowa's uniqueness is underlined throughout. Her father declares categorically: "Anowa is not every woman." Kofi Ako repeatedly echoes him: "You are a strange woman, Anowa. Too strange" (p. 36). In despair he asks if she cannot be like other women. Like a stone in a pond, Anowa sends ripples around her. She is a stumbling stone to many. Her parents often quarrel over her, taking sides with her in turns. The magic that seems to permeate everything she touches and, above all, her adamant moral and ideological stance against any form of slavery, shows her as a revolutionary, championing the cause of the common man, pleading for freedom and justice for the oppressed everywhere. She continues in the independent tradition that makes her reject an arranged marriage and with it other restrictions and oppressive traditions and taboos. She must be free to be herself. In a sense, Anowa is a political activist. She upsets her family, shakes the community out of its sleepy complacency, and the women especially out of their stupor of resignation. Her courageous, lonely stance reveals the spiritual dimension of her character. The village old man's comments (after her open accusation of impotence precipitates Kofi Ako to shoot himself and Anowa to drown herself) sum up her true significance and the importance of the selfcriticism her life provokes in others: "She was true to herself. She refused to come back here to Yebi, to our gossiping and our judgements" (p. 64). From indignation to self-justification to self-criticism, Anowa's village community is forced to initiate significant adjustments to its whole system of thought.

That cycle repeats itself in case after case. Mrs. Browne would never have narrated the highlights of her life to Kiswana had she not been frightened by the degree of determination and commitment she senses in her. She knows that despite her taunts, the Black Arts Movement of the sixties did give birth to a new breed of black men and women, "strange," zealous and, like Kiswana, concerned with the "common pain and the general good." Because of her choices and theirs, things can never be the same again in Kiswana's family, nor among middle-class blacks. The movement represented here by Kiswana has forced her parents and others like them to re-evaluate their lives, to see what they have lost and gained, to come to grips with crucial issues of unity and co-operation in the black community. Her actions are a direct challenge to her parents, telling them that there is much more than just making it in a white world. She challenges them to bridge the schisms along class lines. She calls for what W. E. B. Du Bois and other Pan Africanists have called for, a moral responsibility that blacks prevent their leadership from becoming as oppressive as that of whites. The cultural symbols of Kiswana's African name, hairdo, dress, and artifacts are her way of warning the upward-moving blacks not to forget their roots nor the bridge over which they have passed, that human bond and link to mother Africa that makes them a people. Nothing could be more political.

For African Totems of Botswana, who know their roots but cling selfishly to oppressive traditions and prejudices, Margaret Cadmore's embarrassing defiance causes an even greater political upheaval and challenge. Her quiet and placid surface hides a resilient and creative woman who is able to withdraw within herself from the fierce storm of love that she unleashes. Her strong influence on all the characters in the novel is decisive. The scheming Totems, Pete, Seth, and Morafi, who oppose her vehemently, are hounded out of town because of her. Maru, the heir, and Moleka, his powerful and sensuous friend, both fall in love with her at first sight, despite near-surgical implications for their status in society. Margaret turns two best friends into fierce rivals, vying for her sake to outdo each other in their generosity towards their Masarwa slaves, forced for the first time to come to grips with issues like Masarwa humanity, social responsibility, and the future of their community.

The sudden change in Moleka, that untamed human energy associated with solar images, may better illustrate the significance of Margaret's influence. At their very first meeting, the reader is told that: