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The Ogbanje in Little Bee by Chris Cleave

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THE *OGBANJE* IN *LITTLE BEE* BY CHRIS CLEAVE

A Thesis

Presented to

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Courtney A. Harler

Spring 2013

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract

In Chris Cleave's 2008 novel *Little Bee*, he offers readers a literary representation of the Nigerian spirit-child for the purpose of political and post-colonial examination. Cleave's intentions are revealed through a full study of this traditional Nigerian concept. The Nigerian spirit-child, known as the *ogbanje* in the Igbo language and the *abiku* in the Yoruba language of Western Nigeria, is imprisoned in an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The concept of the *ogbanje-abiku* is indeed related to the overall concept of reincarnation, but it differs in the sense that the child who is unduly linked to the spirit world cannot complete a normal life cycle, thereby challenging tribal fertility, one of the most fundamental principles of West African culture. The repeated pre-natal, neo-natal, or early childhood deaths of the *ogbanje-abiku* render useless the aim of procreation. In the rare case that an *ogbanje-abiku* reaches adulthood, by prior pre-natal agreement with her spirit brothers and sisters, she often will die suddenly at a major life event—a titling ceremony or marriage celebration, for instance. Because a child is normally seen as a boon in West African culture, the phenomenon of the *ogbanje-abiku* cracks the foundation of this traditional assumption. The *ogbanje-abiku* is, therefore, marginalized within society for *choosing* to be born to die, but this supposition of choice is often imposed upon the spirit-child. The *ogbanje-abiku* phenomenon is contingent upon a rigid set of traditional values and belief patterns, but many Nigerian writers seek to reveal the “other” side of the spirit-child's story. In essence, the *ogbanje-abiku* is a cultural enigma, seeming to unsteadily walk the line between life and death and good and evil.

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in infinite appreciation
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expertise, and encouragement.

And, to Chinua Achebe,
16 November 1930—21 March 2013,
with whom I share a birth day
and a love of Nigerian literature.

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Introduction

Today's European and American authors who wish to sensitively treat post-colonial issues in their work face a daunting task. In fact, leading post-colonial theorists, such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, even doubt the wisdom of such a proposal. For example, in *Orientalism* (1979), Said teaches us that all Occidental impressions of the non-West are filtered through our Western consciousness, altering our perception of the non-West to such an extent that no Western "representation" of the non-West can be accurate (21). Likewise in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak confirms that the true subaltern cannot speak through literature because the Western lens of academia must, by its hegemonic nature, color our perception of the original culture. In other words, both Said and Spivak argue that there is an essential gap between Western and non-Western cultures that simply cannot be bridged. However, Spivak also writes that "the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation," but to discover "with what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (80). Therefore, to address this cultural gap, the non-West needs to *speak*, but the West also needs to *listen*.

While Spivak emphasizes "speaking" in the text, J. Maggio shifts the focus to "hearing" or "listening." In response to Spivak, in his 2007 article "'Can the Subaltern Be Heard?,'" Maggio promotes "translation" as a solution, a faithful rendering of the subaltern's language and culture, to include even the minute details of daily rituals and activities (435). With due diligence, Maggio contends that the subaltern voice can indeed be heard if we in the West will only "listen" (437). Overall, Maggio's outlook is infinitely more hopeful than either Said's or Spivak's, as Maggio formally grants the contemporary writer (and by extension, contemporary reader) permission to explore

and examine the post-colonial world in which we live—that is, to at least *try* to bridge the gap.

Yet, while Spivak argues that we should indeed attempt to find the subaltern voice, and Maggio proposes success through “translation,” Said further addresses the basic “nature” of the “representation” itself. Again in *Orientalism*, Said writes:

My analysis of the Orientalist text therefore places emphasis on the evidence, which is by no means invisible, for such representations *as representations*, not as “natural” depictions of the Orient. This evidence is found just as prominently in the so-called truthful text (histories, philological analyses, political treatises) as in the avowedly artistic (i.e., openly imaginative) text. The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original. (italics in original, 21)

Here, Said acknowledges that the West is indeed speaking for the non-West, but that we can find still some truth of “representation,” even within an “artistic” text (21). I propose that it is this careful combination of “representation” and “translation” that allows the Western writer to respectfully depict non-Western characters. However, as demonstrated during Said’s 1988 interview with James Paul excerpted below, Said himself possibly takes issue with the idea of a direct “translation” of culture in literature.

Paul: Literature is able to look at society from the vantage point of individuals and their daily lives. Should MERIP¹ pursue some project with a literary side?

Said: Not uncritically. If you assume that literature is essentially about human experience, and that it's specific, you're really espousing a kind of realistic epistemology for literature. But most of the really powerful literature of say, Latin America is not about that experience at all.

We're talking about the fantastic. So we first of all have to separate literature from every-day life in that kind of one-to-one correspondence and think instead of literature as the inscription of certain kinds of forces: libidinal, psychological, historical forces.

I began my professional career as a scholar of Conrad. And one of the interesting things that I discovered, quite by chance, is that a significant number of contemporary African works, both in Arabic and English and French, were not about daily experience, but were really attempts to rewrite the colonial paradigm, to reinscribe it. Take *Heart of Darkness*. The most interesting novelists, like Chinua Achebe... were attempting not to tell about what we really did, but to rewrite Conrad so that the paradigm is not about daily experience, but the writer from the colonial era. There's a very sophisticated understanding that literature is about literature. These writers were trying to *reinscribe their own myths*. This other realm is more interesting—the realm of the fantastic, of the psychological, the unconscious and the historical. (emphasis added)

I agree with Said to the extent that post-colonial literature needs to be innovative to be viable, but I disagree that “daily experience” is not a critical part of this viability. Literature may be “about literature,” but it is also about people and their lives within

the post-colonial paradigm. Post-colonial writers are indeed “reinscrib[ing] their own myths,” but they are doing so through Said’s “representation” and Maggio’s “translation.” The details *are* significant.

Chris Cleave, author of the 2008 award-winning novel *Little Bee* (also published as *The Other Hand* in 2008 in the U.K.), is a contemporary British post-colonial writer who uses Maggio’s concept of “translation” to create a viable “representation” of the subaltern—in this case, his eponymous Nigerian female refugee, Little Bee. Specifically, through a dual narrative told by Little Bee and her British counterpart, Sarah O’Rourke, Cleave implicitly depicts the Igbo² folk tradition of the *ogbanje*, or mythic spirit-child—also known as the *abiku* to the Yoruba—to tell the fictional story of Little Bee as an asylum-seeker in the United Kingdom. Cleave’s literary representation is inspired by two factual events: First, in his college years, Cleave worked a day job at an immigration removal/detention center wherein he spoke to the asylum-seekers there. He was amazed and appalled by the stories of the refugees, by how ineffectual the U.K. government had been in helping them to reconstruct their broken lives. At that time, it appeared that the refugee had two main options—to be incarcerated indefinitely in the U.K., or to be deported to the home country, where the asylum-seeker allegedly faced mortal danger. Cleave remembers being greatly moved by the stories he heard in the center’s canteen but did not feel compelled to write about a refugee as a main character until he learned of the story of Manuel Bravo, who committed suicide on the eve of deportation in 2005. Bravo’s life and death provide the second and most important impetus to write *Little Bee*, Cleave’s exploration of the plight of the refugee in the U.K. To this end, Cleave uses the

stories of real-life individuals to create a post-modern representation of the post-colonial refugee as a spirit-child, perpetually caught between life and death.

In essence, Cleave “reinscribes” the “myth” of the *ogbanje-abiku*, and he is responding to those post-colonial Nigerian writers who have portrayed the *ogbanje-abiku* before him. The workings of Cleave’s particular “translation” are made visible through an intertextual analysis of Cleave’s *Little Bee* and several other post-colonial works: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1959), *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri (1991), and *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2006). All three Nigerian novels are listed on Cleave’s professional website as ways in which interested readers worldwide can further “explore the issues” represented in *Little Bee* (ChrisCleave.com). The specific *ogbanje-abiku* characters in these texts are as follows: Ezinma in *Things Fall Apart*, Azaro in *The Famished Road*, Amala and Baby in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and of course, Little Bee and her sister Kindness in *Little Bee*. In this study, I examine Little Bee, and by extension, Kindness, via their intertextual nature with Ezinma, Azaro, Amala and Baby. My examination necessarily begins with a thorough explication of the *ogbanje-abiku* concept.

The *Ogbanje-Abiku* Concept

The concept of the *ogbanje* or *abiku*, or spirit-child, exists among the Igbo and Yoruba peoples of southern Nigeria. These tribal people believe that any child who dies early in life, including a miscarried fetus, may be a spirit-child. In his book *Strategic Formations in Nigerian Writing*, Ato Quayson writes, “The *abiku* phenomenon refers to a child in an unending cycle of births, deaths and re-births” (122). According to traditional beliefs, spirit-children are unable or unwilling to break ties with the spirit world, thus compromising their earthly existence. *Ogbanje-abiku* are then fated or compelled, by themselves or others, to repeat life; the original impetus is debatable, though the Igbo believe in a deliberate, conscious decision made by the *ogbanje* to die again and again. However, as we shall see, the *choice* of repetition here is more so perceived than factual. Nigerian writers base their depictions in traditional lore, but also try to recreate or reform Igbo and Yoruba tribal perception of the *ogbanje-abiku* as a truly malevolent or disruptive force.

The communal perception of *ogbanje-abiku* is deeply rooted in cosmology. For example, drawing on similarities between Igbo and Yoruba tribal beliefs in “Yoruba Sacrificial Practice” (1973), Omosade J. Awolalu clearly explicates this aspect of Igbo religion and spirituality:

There is a belief in reincarnation. Not only are people believed to have been born again of the same or of another mother, but also children who die young are believed to have ‘decided’ beforehand...when they would die, especially if they do not like the family. These children are called ‘*ogbanje*’ (repeaters). (17)

The *ogbanje-abiku*'s supposed "decision" to die calls into question the child's innate sense of morality, as expressed in the idea of the *repetition* or even the *re-petition* of life. To repeat life is to reincarnate, but to also re-petition life repeatedly is to be *ogbanje*. Normally, the birth of a child is a boon to the tribal community, a symbol of the fertility necessary to the survival of the people. In his 2000 article, "Understanding *The Palm Wine Drinkard*," Patrick Colm Hogan stresses the centrality of fertility in Yoruba culture:

Life is sustained through the fertility of the soil—or, more generally, through nourishment recurrently provided by nature. And life is reproduced through the birth of children—or, rather, through the birth of children who themselves continue the cycle of reproduction. Note that each aspect of fertility (that which sustains and that which reproduces) is cyclical. Note also that in each case the cycle maybe broken. Nature may fail to provide food. A couple may have no children, or their children may die and thus fail to continue the cycle of reproduction. (34)

In other words, *ogbanje-abiku* who "have decided" to die are not only a burden and a sorrow to their parents, but they are also an unnatural affront against the community itself (Awolalu 17). Spirit-children break the cycle of fertility and render it useless: If a child can be conceived, but not successfully born, or successfully born, but not successfully grown, then the fertility cycle itself is fruitless. *Ogbanje-abiku* repeat life in an effort either to restore fertility or to destroy fertility entirely. This inherent duality within the spirit-children gives rise to their seeming moral ambiguity. As a result, as we will see in these textual representations, the *ogbanje-abiku* are alternately loved and despised,

honored and reviled, and cherished and dismissed, for their perceived indifference to the importance of fertility.

The *ogbanje-abiku*, through this ambiguity and duality, is a “liminal” character, who straddles the worlds of the living and the dead, and who is neither wholly good nor wholly evil. Briefly for the sake of continuity here, but to be explored more fully in the following literature review, Homi K. Bhabha defines post-colonial “liminality” as an “in-between” or “interstitial” cultural space (767). In *The World of the Ogbanje*, Chinwe Achebe explores the spirit-child’s liminal existence:

[The *ogbanje* are] part human and part spirit beings whose lives are confounded by the added loyalty which they owe to the spirit deities. A “normal” individual is born owning his loyalty to his “chi.” But an “*ogbanje*’s” life is complicated by being mixed up with the demands of the paranormal deities. The most notable of these demands is that the “*ogbanje*” will not be allowed to enjoy a full life circle. (27)

Not quite human, not quite spirit; not quite alive, not quite dead; not quite good, not quite evil—these are the dualities that define the *ogbanje-abiku*. Indeed, without a “normal” *chi*, or “personal god” (Achebe 20, *Things Fall Apart*), the *ogbanje-abiku* essentially become “Others” within a land already peopled by recognized “Others.” If the Igbo and the Yoruba are already marginalized by the West as post-colonial subjects, their tribal spirit-children are “othered” again by the sociocultural constraints of their liminality, by their questionable reputation even amongst their own people. Chinwe Achebe helps readers and researchers to better understand the *ogbanje-abiku*’s difficult predicament.

A thorough yet compassionate researcher, Chinwe Achebe treats the *ogbanje* phenomenon with the utmost clinical professionalism *and* cultural consideration. In her four-year psychological and cultural study (1982-1986), Achebe provides both a historical and contemporary examination of the *ogbanje*, further explicating the ambiguity, marginality, and duality of the *ogbanje*. As one of the most important researchers regarding the conception of the *ogbanje* itself, Chinwe Achebe concisely frames the *ogbanje* within what she calls the Igbo “world view,” which operates under the assumption “that there is a constant interaction between humans and spirits” (10-11). The Igbo universe is divided into three layers: 1) *Elu Igwe*, the sky, the home of the Supreme Deity, “*Chi Ukwu*” or “*Chukwu*,” 2) *Ala Mmadu*, the “world of the living,” and 3) *Ala Mmuo*, the “land of the spirits” (12-13). *Chi Ukwu*, the Supreme God, grants all humans their “*chi*,” their personal god or “creative spark,” at the creation ceremony of *Akpu Ojodogo* (18). After this point, *Chi Ukwu* generally steps back and lets his lesser deities manage humanity.

After negotiating and agreeing upon a life oath or *iyi-uwa* with *Chi Ukwu* and one’s *chi*, the “journey to earth is negotiated across a river” (17). The *iyi-uwa*, which constitutes an agreement as to one’s intended special abilities, aspirations, and accomplishments in life, can be renegotiated during this passing into life. Two lesser deities, *Nne Mmiri*, the water goddess, and *Onabuluwa*, the land goddess, are placed as sentries at the border between spirit and earthly life. *Nne Mmiri* and *Onabuluwa* are meant to first interrogate the crossers and then to tempt the individuals into renegotiating the *iyi-uwa* with the *chi*; those who finally succumb to these pressures become *ogbanje*, because their original pact with their *chi* has been compromised. These individuals then

owe personal allegiance in three ways: 1) to their *chi*, 2) to *Nne Mmiri* or *Onabuluwa*, and 3) to the group of spirits with whom they crossed. Spirits are ferried into *Ala Mmadu* in groups, and if a group of individuals overhears one another's conversations with the gatekeepers, they may all decide upon similar contracts. These spirit groups then often make pacts within themselves, to die at a specific point in life, and those who break the group pact are tormented by their spirit brothers and sisters. The traditional *ogbanje* doctor/diviner/healer, called a *dibia*, must first ascertain whether his or her client is a water or land *ogbanje* before prescribing treatment, which usually aims to break the pact made with other spirits during the crossing.

Symptoms diagnosed by the *dibia* are specific to the type of *ogbanje*, but to the layperson, symptoms commonly overlap and can include any or all of the following: multiple miscarriage, early infant death, frequent illness, sudden death at any given age, sudden madness or dumbness, long trances, recurring nightmares, inability to find sexual fulfillment with one's earthly mate (because one is already married to a water spirit by decree of *Nne Mmiri*), hearing voices, talking back to voices, lack of industry or laziness, inability to concentrate on a task at hand (especially in school children who are constantly being beckoned by their spirit friends to come outside to play), excess intelligence or stupidity, extreme success or failure in business, general irritability or quick and explosive anger, uncontrolled laughter or weeping, persistent introversion, and pervasive misanthropy. Generally, the Igbo world view frowns upon excess of any kind, so any "excessive" physical or personality trait could be construed as an *ogbanje* symptom.

Treatment for the *ogbanje* is tailored by the *dibia* for the specific client, whether *Ogbanje Elu* (land) or *Ogbanje Mmiri* (water).³ Diagnosis is made through

Afa divination, a complex type of structured prayer or supplication to the gods performed ritually by the experienced *dibia*. Clients, of course, must pay for a full treatment plan, which could include any of the following: simple *saraka* or food sacrifice; ritual bathing or anointing; incisions made into the flesh with or without sacred concoctions of herbs rubbed into the cuts; shock treatment with loud noises or explosions; the wearing of ritually prepared clothing, amulets, bracelets, or symbolic padlocks; or, specifically in the case of land *ogbanje*, the digging up of the *iyi-uwa*, a small pebble or other object that serves as the physical representation of the spiritual pact made during the crossing. All treatments are meant to signify a breaking of this pact, but no treatment is ever considered a permanent cure. The *ogbanje* chose to circumvent her original life oath with her *chi*, and she must suffer the consequences throughout this life, no matter how long or short life may turn out to be. Chinwe Achebe stresses that *ogbanje* may live into adulthood, as the spirit-child pact may stipulate a more dramatic, ironic exit at the height of earthly success. The *ogbanje* undoubtedly “die[s] before [her] time” (59), but this time is widely variable. Therefore, Chinwe Achebe asserts that the *ogbanje* phenomenon cannot be simply attributed to a high infant mortality rate due to malnutrition or to hereditary sickle cell disease (59). According to Achebe, many *ogbanje* symptoms often defy medical diagnosis, and the patient should certainly be referred to the *dibia*, with due respect for the client and her culture, because the *ogbanje*’s suffering is not only real and problematical to herself, but her personal predicament also impacts her family and community at large.

Indeed, the overall concept of the *ogbanje-abiku* is complicated by individual and collective interpretation. Alex Asakitikpi, in a more recent study, significantly builds

upon Chinwe Achebe's work. In his 2008 article, "Born to Die: The *Ogbanje* Phenomenon and Its Implication on Childhood Mortality in Southern Nigeria," Asakitikpi first neatly tries to explain away the *ogbanje-abiku* phenomenon through the lens of modern Western medicine, but he eventually reaches this conclusion:

It suffices, therefore, to say that this belief and other similar beliefs must not be disregarded as phantom ideas arising from simple minds [who reject basic hygiene and standardized health care, opting for traditional treatment instead]. Indeed, it is about time scholars in this part of the world started probing into the interface of religion and science and between traditional belief systems and Western rationality. It is only by doing so that we will begin to reconstruct traditional people's ideas and ultimately to understand the underlying reasons why they behave the way they do. One fundamental issue, which arises from the foregoing, therefore, is that local beliefs and traditional cosmology must be properly analyzed...to uncover the deep meaning they contain. (62-63)

Asakitikpi's tone is rather patronizing toward Nigerian believers in other parts of his article, though he seems to retract his imperialistic attitude in the summary passage quoted above. Asakitikpi is a professor of archaeology and anthropology at the University of Ibadan, and ostensibly (at least by name and location), a native of Nigeria, but his Westernized education seems to be at odds with his Nigerian upbringing.

This conflict between Nigerian cultural belief and Western medicine is rooted in other scholarship. In a study from 2001, "Malevolent *Ogbanje*: Recurrent Reincarnation or Sickle Cell Disease?", Esther Nwezi finds a statistical correlation between the

“malevolent [*ogbanje*]” and sickle cell disease. Of the 100 *ogbanje* children included in this study, 70 tested positive for the disease (hereafter abbreviated as SSD, 1403).

Nwezi also found a direct correlation between typical SSD symptoms and those presenting in the “malevolent [*ogbanje*]” (1404). The results of the study were received by Nigerian grandparents and parents with mixed reactions; the “elders” tended to still hold the *ogbanje* personally responsible for their “choice” to be ill and plague their families. An offered example: if a man hangs himself, do you blame the rope or the man? (1413). Nwezi thoughtfully comments on why the modern medical study would be received with dismissal:

The elders and traditional healers are the custodians of cultural beliefs and traditions. In current Igbo communities, with coexistence of traditional and Western values, they have the daunting roles of protecting cultural beliefs.... Infusion of innovative ideas and changes contradictory to Igbo cultural beliefs and customs have often been perceived by elders as destructive of cherished customs and values as well as devaluation of the indigenous cultural system. It is not surprising that they would resist ideas that seem incompatible with the epistemology of the Igbo. (1413)

However, thanks to this study, in contrast with the elders, some parents began to see their children more as unfortunate victims of incurable disease, and less “hateful and revenge-driven” (1413). If we think of the *ogbanje* as a marginalized subject in a post-colonial environment, as the “Other Other,” or what I would like to call Spivak’s “truest subaltern,” then using SSD as an explanation for the spirit-child phenomenon may paradoxically increase the agency of the *ogbanje* child. However, this is still imposing

current Western standards—medical, biological, psychological, and cosmological—onto Nigerian culture. We may find it easy to understand how the elders would resist Nwezi’s science, but it is also easy to understand how the parents of sick children might embrace these answers with hope for a cure. Yet, as biased Westerners, we cannot, nor should not, determine which reaction is morally correct for the Nigerian community.

Throughout my study of the *ogbanje-abiku*, I have been acutely aware of my own politics of location regarding traditional Nigerian belief. As a Caucasian American scholar, I have tried to temper my own original automatic responses of disbelief in the concept of the spirit-child to show respect for diversity, but there is no denying that I grapple with a certain lack of “authority” on African modes of thought. Said directly addresses the issue of authority in *Orientalism* with reference to the Orient, but his overall idea can be applied to my study of Nigerian literature as well:

My principal methodological devices for studying authority here are what can be called *strategic location*, which is a way of describing the author’s position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about, and *strategic formation*, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large. I use the notion of strategy simply to identify the problem every writer on the Orient has faced: how to get hold of it, how to approach it, how to not be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimensions.

(italics in original, 20)

Within my study of *Little Bee* as an *ogbanje-abiku*, Said's dual concepts of "strategic formation" and "strategic location" are related to Bhabha's concept of liminal space, Spivak's concept of the subaltern, and Maggio's concept of "translation": Even as *ogbanje-abiku* are relegated to the limited liminal space of Spivakian subalternity, always struggling to find a voice of their own, they can be "heard," if we as Westerners listen through Maggio's "translation." And Achebe, Okri, Adichie, and Cleave⁴ provide such "translations" within their individual "strategic locations." For even non-Western writers like Achebe, Okri, and Adichie, who have had full access to an English-language, Western-style education,⁵ must also "translate" their native languages and cultures to a greater or lesser extent. As I examine these four texts—specifically *Things Fall Apart*, *The Famished Road*, and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, as precedents, and with Cleave's *Little Bee* as my focus—I explore how Cleave, in this novel, reinforces the sensitive style of "translation" and "representation" that is practiced in the previous novels. These three Nigerian novels constitute *Little Bee*'s "strategic formation," and according to Said, it is insufficient to merely analyze *Little Bee* as a subaltern *ogbanje-abiku* without reference to her many literary predecessors. All four novels are united by their respective author's reliance upon his or her imaginative "translation" of Igbo and Yoruba traditional beliefs into literary, but not literal, "representation," whether Nigerian or not. However, this examination cannot be conducted without first further clarifying my critical methods.

Critical Methodology

Readers new to this study may wonder if the *ogbanje-abiku* critical lens can be a worthwhile method for literary analysis. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi first endows the concept of the *ogbanje-abiku* with true critical force in her book, *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* (1996). In her study of eight Nigerian female writers, Ogunyemi uses the Nigerian english⁶ term “*palava*”⁷ to mean Nigerian feminist thought. The term “*palava*,” originally used mockingly by Nigerian men, is appropriated by Ogunyemi to represent a specific style of female literary discourse. As part of this feminine discourse, in her first chapter, “An Excursion into Woman’s (S)(p)ace,” Ogunyemi includes a short section devoted to her conception of “The *Ogbanje/Abiku* Complex: Mother as Jinxed Care Giver.” In her interpretation of the *ogbanje-abiku*, not only does Ogunyemi develop the concept itself as a symbolic representation of the perpetual conflict between the Nigerian mother and spirit-child, but she also reframes it to include the layers of conflict between the colonizer and the colonized, and even the writer and her work. Just as the mother seeks to force her sickly spirit-child to live and thus meets with resistance, the colonizer tries to dominate her conquered subjects and thus meets with resistance, sometimes even violent rebellion. Just as the mother seeks comfort for the illness or death of her child in spiritual belief, the writer seeks affirmation of her work, her baby, in the world beyond her immediacy. The outer world of the writer, the world of publishing and readership, is invariably found in the West, rephrasing the mother-child struggle in clear post-colonial terms (61-74).

Ogunyemi’s reconception of *ogbanje-abiku* inspires further analysis of Cleave’s “strategic location” with regard to *Little Bee*. As the non-Nigerian, British “mother”

of his book, to what extent is Cleave seeking the approval of the colonizer, the West? Based upon my research and my conversation with him, I propose that Cleave is most concerned with reaching a Western lay audience, as opposed to those in academia, government, or even the Nigerians themselves. *Little Bee* is a political work, but Cleave contends that the primary goal of contemporary literature is to entertain, for readers will not duly consider or empathize with Little Bee's story unless they first find the novel enjoyable to read. The reader's consideration of sociopolitical problems is one possible result of a thorough reading or re-reading of the text, but Cleave's initial task, he asserts, is to tell a good story. However, with Cleave as a British male writer, albeit with some early childhood non-Western expatriation in the African Republic of Cameroon, Ogunyemi's trifurcated explanation of the literary *ogbanje-abiku* needs to be more carefully negotiated. Ogunyemi's three layers are difficult to consider in isolation; the term "mother" applies simultaneously to the "mother" of a child, the "mother" of a colony, and the "mother" of a book. Yet, for the sake of simplicity, I will focus on the third layer, given that the previous two layers are suggested within the third. To this end, I can indeed frame *Little Bee* the novel, and Little Bee the character, as Cleave's spirit-children, but this assignation of "motherhood" requires further consideration of Cleave as a non-Nigerian, and his character Little Bee as a Nigerian.

Cleave does not once explicitly state that Little Bee is Igbo, though there is much textual evidence to support a reader's assumption of Igbo heritage. For example, although the Nigerian sisters adopt English aliases for protection, Little Bee's given Igbo name Udo translates as "Peace" (Cleave 265) and Kindness' given Igbo name Nkiruka translates as "The Future is Bright" (Cleave 277). Furthermore, when the soldiers

overcome the sisters on the beach, Kindness recites an *Ave Maria* in Igbo (Cleave 123),⁸ possibly indicating that the extremity of her situation causes her to revert to her native language. Earlier in the novel, Little Bee states, “I think my ideal man would speak many languages. He would speak I[g]bo and Yoruba and English and French and all of the others” (Cleave 66). While Little Bee’s statement here is a bit ambiguous, Igbo is the first language stated. Furthermore, the reader later learns that Little Bee is probably from the inland Igbo areas of Nigeria, as she and her sister Kindness require several days travel on foot to reach the Niger Delta beach after their village is destroyed by “the oil company’s men” (Cleave 119). In light of this compelling textual evidence, as well as for the sake of clarity, I treat Little Bee and Kindness as Igbo, even though I will primarily use their English aliases here, as Cleave does so in the novel.

Regardless, this declaration of Little Bee’s Igbo identity does not limit my application of indigenous beliefs to only those elements of Igbo culture, for the Igbo and Yoruba tribes of southern Nigeria share many religious and philosophical traditions, given slight variations, as evidenced by the *ogbanje-abiku* concept. Whenever possible, I will rely foremost on each author’s specific use of Igbo or Yoruba terms, even though some commentary may necessarily become more generalized to Nigerian culture.

In addition to Ogunyemi’s work, Christopher N. Okonkwo provides a working theoretical framework for my study of Cleave’s Little Bee as *ogbanje-abiku* in his 2008 book entitled *A Spirit of Dialogue: Incarnations of Ọgbañje, the Born-to-Die, in African American Literature*. Although Okonkwo focuses solely on African American literature, his critical terminology can be directly applied to my analysis of this Cleave’s post-

colonial British text. Primarily, Okonkwo denotes explicit literary representations of the *ogbanje-abiku* as “imprinted” texts:

The phrase emphasizes that the cultural definitions and epistemological convictions that the ideas “*Ọgbañje*” and “born-to-die” encode are retained purposely in the narratives. It conveys also that the beliefs’ nominal presence in the novels is identifiable and “in print.” (xviii)

For example, both *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe and *The Famished Road* by Okri are imprinted texts. However, according to Okonkwo, other texts that evoke the cultural concepts of “imprinted” texts, but do not explicitly use the term *ogbanje-abiku*, are “imbricated” texts (xix). To “imbricate” connotes “to place so as to overlap like roof-tiles” (*OED.com*). Therefore, Okonkwo’s examples of imbricated texts include Morrison’s *Sula* and *Beloved*, and, by my argument’s extension, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Little Bee*.

Akin to my study, Okonkwo relies upon a study of earlier Nigerian texts to formulate his theoretical framework. In an article that predates his book, “A Critical Divination: Reading *Sula* as *Ogbanje-Abiku*,” Okonkwo discusses the major Nigerian texts that have historically established the concept of the *ogbanje-abiku* in literature: *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe; two poems, both named “*Abiku*,” by John Pepper Clark and Wole Soyinka; and *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri. Okonkwo’s comparisons of Morrison’s character *Sula*, the “New World *ogbanje*” (Okonkwo 665), to Achebe’s character *Ezinma* and Okri’s character *Azaro* are especially helpful as I use both *ogbanje-abiku* characters to make a similar case for *Little Bee* as a “new world” *ogbanje* in the U.K. Within my interpretation of Cleave’s text, *Little Bee*’s “new world” is both

her corporeal body and her host country, while her “old world” is both the spirit-child world and her native Nigeria. The world of the “corporeal body” is not directly equivalent to the U.K., nor is the world of the spirit-child directly equivalent to Nigeria. Moreover, these metaphorical delineations comprise layers of the “old” and “new” worlds, layers which can alternately invert, merge, or even do both, simultaneously. For the *ogbanje-abiku* is continuously transforming and reforming, forever negotiating the liminal space between life and death. The traditional Nigerian *ogbanje-abiku* is multifarious and multiplicitous by her very nature, and only sometimes *without* malicious intent. Consider Okonkwo’s poignant questions below:

Returning now to *ogbanje*, the question becomes: How can the same child bring promise and joy also cause uncertainty and grief? How, for example, can Ezinma the *ogbanje* girl...cause her mother Ekwefi, especially, and Okonkwo her father extreme anxiety and heartbreak and yet remain such a humanizing and constructively functional part of Okonkwo’s life, family, and the Umuofia village at large? How can, or cannot she, be such “diabolism” and “so much beneficence” all at once?
(657)

Much like Morrison’s Sula and Achebe’s Ezinma in respect to their biological families, Cleave’s Little Bee is both devil and angel to Andrew, Sarah, and Charlie O’Rourke, her “adopted” British family. Little Bee complicates their lives beyond accommodation—because of the horrific events on the Nigerian beach, Andrew eventually commits suicide, leaving behind his wife Sarah and their young son Charlie. Moreover, as Little Bee is both psychologically present in Andrew’s mind and physically present in his very

bedroom during the suicide act, we must question Little Bee's innocence. Later, while withholding this vital information about her witnessing of Andrew's suicide, Little Bee befriends Sarah and Charlie to such an extent that they both soon accompany Little Bee on her forced deportation flight back to Nigeria. Sarah thus becomes a surrogate mother to Little Bee, and Charlie an almost-replacement sibling. However, Little Bee's presence, from that very first fateful moment on the Nigerian beach, has created a torturous, irresolvable paradox within Sarah: Little Bee helps Sarah remember why she became a journalist, helps her to rediscover her true path in life, but Sarah literally loses her finger, and her husband Andrew, Charlie's father, in the process. Indeed, to echo Christopher Okonkwo, what single person can embody such "good" and "evil" all at once?

The answer is the very riddle of the *ogbanje-abiku*, who is herself an enigma—a hallmark of the spirit-child. In reality, the long-standing Nigerian folkloric tradition of the *ogbanje-abiku* is an attempt to explain why such children *seemingly* do what they do, and like the spirit-child, the only answers are ambiguous, fluid, and fleeting—at best. As evidenced in the literature review that follows, this type of inscrutability and ambiguity is apparent in virtually all literary representations of the *ogbanje-abiku*.

Literature Review

Christopher N. Okonkwo references four other Nigerian texts as important components of the literary history of the *ogbanje-abiku*, and as such, they deserve special attention here. Specifically, Okonkwo references the two “*Abiku*” poems by Clark (1965) and Soyinka (1967), a children’s story by Nathan Nkala called *Mezie, The Ogbanje Boy* (1981), and Amos Tutuola’s *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954). In his 1965 poem, John Pepper Clark depicts a concerned character imploring the *abiku* to “step in and stay / For good” (16-17), while Wole Soyinka, in his 1967 poem, presents the perspective of a rather mischievous *abiku* who seems to brag about his supernatural abilities.

Soyinka writes:

In vain your bangles cast
 Charmed circles at my feet
 I am *Abiku*, calling for the first
 And the *repeated* time.

Must I weep for goats and cowries
 For palm oil and the sprinkled ash?
 Yams do not sprout in amulets
 To earth *Abiku*’s limbs. (emphasis added in line 4, 1-8)

“Bangles” are bracelets meant to protect the *abiku* from her spirit brothers and sisters; “goats” and “cowries” are sacrifices made for the *abiku*’s protection. Yet, Soyinka’s *abiku* all but laughs in the face of these protective measures, mocking his earthly family. Clark’s earlier poem, told from the perspective of the family, relies more upon a personal

request made to the *abiku*: “No longer then stay on the threshold” (15), because logically, “Many more mouths gladden the heart” (26). The mother in Clark’s poem longs for the child to stay, but the *abiku* in Soyinka’s poem flouts this plea for inclusivity. In his 1970 literary analysis, “Two Incantations to ‘*Abiku*,’” Oladele Taiwo opines that “Soyinka’s attitude seems more favorable to the *abiku*” (221). Both Clark’s and Soyinka’s poems deeply inform my reading of the *abiku* concept, but I find Soyinka’s poem more useful because he psychologically attempts to clarify the motivations and frustrations of the *abiku* child. Due to the overtly antagonistic nature of the *abiku* speaker in Soyinka’s 1967 poem, the poet may be commenting upon historical and/or contemporary stereotypes and misconceptions of the *abiku*, i.e., issues that will be addressed throughout my analysis. Furthermore, Soyinka’s first-person *abiku* view, whether ironic or not, provides an important point of contextualization for my study of Cleave’s two *ogbanje-abiku* characters—Little Bee and Kindness. As Said argues in *Orientalism*, texts are strategically formed in “relationship” to one another (20), and Cleave’s *Little Bee* operates upon the same post-colonial continuum as the literary work of Clark, Soyinka, and Nkala, whose work is explicated next.

Nathan Nkala’s *Mezie*, a charming but lesser-known children’s book, is worth summarizing here. In the guise of a bedtime story told to Nigerian children, Nkala relates the early life of Mezie, the *ogbanje*, from the town of Umungodo. Mezie is a sickly child who does not learn to walk until well past three years of age. As the only surviving son, Mezie plagues his mother Mgbafo Ejeli by having “come to this world several times before” (3). When left alone, Mezie is visited by his spirit friends, all of whom possess the ability to take on animal forms. After Mgbafo falls deathly ill when covertly

witnessing Mezie's transformation into a boa constrictor, the doctor/*dibia* Okonkwo Nwaji is petitioned to "cut the bond that held Mezie to his *ogbanje* fellows" (12).

After Mezie is supposedly cured through ceremony, he is sent to live with his uncle Peter, his mother's brother, in Okigwe. There, Mezie first serves as a blacksmith apprentice and then attends school. Even though Mezie still battles his fellow spirits at night in dreams and during the day when walking too close to the forest, he soon begins to grow into a strong young man. His mother is very proud of his intellect, though the community still marks him as uncannily smart due to his surprising knack for invention: Mezie invents a "motor without engine" or a type of wagon, which becomes widely used for hauling water, wood, and children (54). Though Mezie tries to fit into mainstream society when he returns to Umungodo a few years later, he is still forever marked by his *ogbanje* status, a predicament that Nkala describes as follows:

Mezie was growing very fast. He was admired by everybody.

He threw himself even more into school activities, trying to behave like every other ordinary school child. But his *ogbanje* name hung on him. Everything he did was seen to be unusual. Without knowing it, he gave people reasons to feel like that.

Mezie brought his motor without engine back with him. It was the talk of Umungodo. People came from other villages to admire the wooden cart. The wonder of it was the clever way the wheels were attached to the steering so that it moved with ease. How did this young boy think of such a method? (54)

Mezie wants to be “ordinary,” but he will always be *ogbanje*, especially when he achieves something remarkable. Of all possible states of being, the *ogbanje* can never be merely ordinary.

In Nkala’s tale, the *ogbanje* can be both extraordinarily constructive and, in contrast, destructive. Mezie may be clever and inventive, but Nkala’s children’s story climaxes with a terribly destructive act: Mezie sets fire to the hut of the village outsider, a man named Okoye Nkpokiti who refuses to relinquish his land to the Church and its school where Mezie attends. Instead, Okoye Nkpokiti has chosen to stay on his land, selling the mangoes from his trees to meet his needs. The school children, including Mezie and his playmates, plot to steal Okoye Nkpokiti’s fruit; they view him as a bitter, crotchety old man whose “wickedness was very well known in Umungodo” (61). On the day that their plans succeed and they steal the mangoes, Mezie alone impulsively sets fire to the compound to cover their tracks. Mezie is at first elated, then confused, by the experience, which Nkala describes as follows:

Mezie had been in a different world ever since Okonkwo Nwaji got him through the terrible dreams, but he was still being treated as a wonder boy. Then came this fire incident. For the first time he planned and acted with people who thought like him. The flames had eaten Okoye Nkpokiti’s charms, removed his threat and nuisance to the school. But what would Teacher Okoli say to him? That thought brought a new wave of fear. What would happen to him and his other companions in this adventure? (66)

Mezie is conflicted, not because he recognizes that he has committed the crime of arson, but because he fears the consequences of his actions, which, like the *ogbanje*, are both constructive *and* destructive. If the village indeed views Okoye Nkpokiti as a villain, then Mezie and company have taken a proactive stance. However, their methods would also be condemned by the elder village community, particularly by their school teacher. Thus, Mezie himself as *ogbanje* is a symbol of moral ambiguity.

All in all, Mezie seems to escape any serious repercussions from the fire. In fact, at the end of this chapter, Nkala leaves the reader with a seemingly incongruent message: “Till today, children, you hear Umungodo people talking about Okoye Nkpokiti, the foolish man who chased mangoes while his house burned to ashes” (67). Does Mezie use his clever *ogbanje* nature to escape punishment? Is Mezie a good or bad *ogbanje*? Nkala leaves these questions purposefully unanswered, highlighting the perceived ambiguity and duplicity of the *ogbanje*, much like Soyinka’s “*Abiku*” narrator, who is both desired and reviled.

Mezie’s story concludes with two developments: first, Okonkwo Nwaji plans Mezie’s future marriage to his childhood friend, Ujumma; second, Mezie also learns to escape his *ogbanje* companions through “flying,” because “none of that group knew to change to a flying creature” (68). Both Mezie and Ujumma pass their Secondary School examinations, and their future looks bright. Mezie is still an *ogbanje* boy, but he is happy. The final question that lingers with the reader/listener is just this—does Mezie truly *deserve* to be happy, given his deeds? Yet, on a different level, do not all little boys and girls deserve to be happy, even if, or especially if, they are *ogbanje-abiku*? Sickness, strife, and suffering mark the life of the *ogbanje*, and so does persecution for perceived

malevolence. Yet, *ogbanje-abiku* find remarkable ways to survive, to fight back, in both life, and ostensibly, even from the grave.

Perhaps the best example of an ill-meaning *ogbanje-abiku* in an imprinted text predates even *Things Fall Apart*. Christopher Okonkwo only briefly alludes to Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) in *A Spirit of Dialogue*, but he calls Tutuola's "mesmerizing" work an "excerpted fabulation of the 'born and die'" (29). Tutuola's representation is indicative of just how evil and deceitful the traditional *ogbanje* is thought to be. In the chapter entitled "At a Ghost Mother's Birthday Function," the "homeless ghost" literally tells this fascinating story to the narrator:

"You see, the whole of us in this town are burglars and we have burgled uncountable earthly women in every earthly town, country and village. You earthly person, listen to me well, I shall tell you how we are burgling earthly women today. If an earthly woman conceives we would choose one of us to go to her at night and after the woman has slept then he would use his invisible power to change himself to the good baby that the woman would be delivered of whenever it is time. But after he has driven out the good baby that entered into the woman's womb, he would remain there and when it is time, the woman would deliver him instead of the good baby which had been driven out; and the wonderful secret which all earthly persons do not understand is that before two or three months that the woman bore him, he would develop rapidly as a year and a half old baby and would be very attractive to everyone, particularly the woman who bore him, as a good or superior baby. Having developed to that

attractive state he would start to pretend to be sick continuously, but as he is very attractive to this woman, then she will be spending a lot of money on him to heal the sicknesses and also sacrificing to all kinds of gods. As this inferior baby has invisible power or supernatural power, so all the money spent on him and also the sacrifices would be his own and all would be stored in a secret place with the help of his invisible power.

But after the woman has spent all she has and become poor, then one night he would pretend as if he had died, so that the woman who bore him as a superior baby, her family and other sympathizers would be saying thus: 'Ah! that fine baby dies,' but they do not know that he is not a superior baby. They would bury him as a dead baby, but the earthly persons do not know that he does not die but simply stops breath. But after he is buried, then he would come out of the grave at midnight, then he would go direct to the secret place where all the monies and the sacrifices as sheep, goats, pigeons and fowls, all would be alive and are stored by his invisible power, and he would carry them to this town. So you earthly person, if you reach your earthly town and if you hear that a woman is delivering babies who die always or continuously, then believe, we are those babies and all the earthly people calling such a baby 'born and die.' But if you do not believe this story of a 'born and die' baby dies from a woman, and after he is buried, watch the grave in which he is buried and after the second day try to go to that grave and dig it out; you would be very surprised that he would not be found in there any more, but he has

come back to this town. We have no other work to perform more than in this town, so that the whole of us in this town are called ‘burglar-ghosts.’”

(punctuation standardized from original, 53-55)

I include this lengthy passage primarily because, like Nkala’s *Mezie*, Tutuola’s *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* is a lesser-known text, and secondarily, because Tutuola provides such an excellent example of the “malevolent” *ogbanje*—one that lies, cheats, and steals, manipulating the mother and her entire community. The *ogbanje* in this instance willfully ruins the mother, both emotionally and financially, in order to sustain his true family, his ghost family. Even if this “burglar” *ogbanje* were to feel some pity for the mother, as Okri’s Azaro does in *The Famished Road*, he would still owe allegiance *first* to his pre-birth ghost family.

In Tutuola’s earliest *ogbanje* text, we see how the earthly existence of the spirit-child is both compromised and marginalized. In result, the *ogbanje-abiku* defies any direct, definitive characterization. This ambiguity is present throughout all of the imprinted works discussed presently—those of Tutuola, Achebe, Clark, Soyinka, Nkala, and Okri. Yet, Cleave relies upon the fraught nature of the spirit-child in his imbricated representation, as well. For example, Little Bee is also framed as a sort of thief. With her sudden appearance on the Nigerian beach, Little Bee forever robs Andrew and Sarah of their quiet Western complacency. When Andrew commits suicide, Sarah is consequently robbed of a husband, partner, and father to her child. Already, Andrew had lost his own sense of identity on the Nigerian beach when he failed to save Kindness through his sacrifice. Cleave symbolizes this loss of identity by placing Andrew’s U.K. driver’s license in Little Bee’s possession (15). With Andrew’s driver’s license as her one

remaining valuable item after being saved from death on the beach, Little Bee memorizes the address and then eventually makes her way to the O'Rourke's house in Surrey via a tea cargo ship. On the day she finally arrives at their home, Andrew commits suicide. Intentionally or not, Little Bee effectively "burglars" the lives of the O'Rourkes.

Given the questionable ethics of the *ogbanje-abiku* exemplified thus far, I propose that it is fully within the Western reader's scope to duly consider the morality of the *ogbanje-abiku*, even though the specific non-Western sense of morality involved may be beyond our capability to culturally understand. As in the earlier imprinted works, Cleave's depiction of Little Bee adheres to these culturally sensitive guidelines, while also providing a fully developed imbricated representation of the *ogbanje-abiku* concept. In addition to the repetition, ambiguity, and/or duality previously discussed, another key characteristic of the spirit-child, which results from and is connected to all of the former, is the overall position of liminality.

My application of liminality is based upon Homi K. Bhabha's "The Question of Agency" (2000). In this essay, Bhabha describes the innovative artwork of Renée Green in order to illustrate his conception of a liminal space. Bhabha writes:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white.

The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications

opens the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.... (767)

With the liminal space, Bhabha proposes an opportunity for political, social, cultural, and even psychological restructuring. A successful restructuring, or merging of cultures, would result in “hybridity” (767). However, before true hybridity can be achieved, Bhabha states that subjects enter a liminal space by being “unhomed,” or somehow removed from their accustomed time, place, and environment, such as within colonialism (772). “To be unhomed is not [literally] to be homeless” (772), although losing one’s home to violence or forced immigration and/or emigration, as in Little Bee’s case, could certainly play a factor. Instead, “the unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow...” (772). Bhabha then argues that to be “unhomed” is to experience a “displacement [wherein] the borders between the home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (772). Therefore, “unhomeliness” is defined by a painful confusion, a searching and striving for the “join” (781), a place to belong, with “place” more as a metaphorical rather than physical location.

Cleave’s Little Bee is a deliberate depiction of an “in-between,” “unhomed,” liminal character. Even more so than her physical “displacement” from her home village, Little Bee’s metaphorical status as an *ogbanje-abiku* marks her as liminal, for she concurrently straddles the old worlds of Nigerian Igboland and her fellow spirit-children, and the new worlds of the United Kingdom and her continued corporeal presence, despite her fervently repeated wishes to die. Though physically displaced as a refugee, Little Bee qualifies not as one of Bhabha’s literal “homeless,” but rather as one of the

“unhomed” (772), for she was “unhomed” by witnessing her family’s brutal murder, even before she left Nigeria. Little Bee’s once peaceful, private village life becomes a public matter when the “oil company’s men” commit public acts of violence against her people (Cleave 107), presumably in the name of the corrupt Nigerian government who is in collusion with the multinational oil corporations.

In the United Kingdom, Little Bee must continue to make public her private grief to successfully claim asylum; she is then further “unhomed” by public/private inversion. Even at the end of the novel, when Little Bee returns “home” to Nigeria, she is still “unhomed” because she and Sarah embark upon a quest to publicize the deeply painful, private stories of individual women affected by the ongoing oil wars in the Niger Delta. For this quest, Sarah resumes her role as journalist, while Little Bee acts as an interpreter. However, Little Bee plays alternating roles that severely limit her achievement of agency. In her roles as a hunted witness to oil war atrocities, then as an incarcerated asylum seeker in the U.K. who is summarily deported only to be hunted again in Nigeria, Little Bee never fully operates outside the power structures of the West *or* Nigeria. Yet, with Sarah’s help (and/or hindrance), Little Bee does challenge the hierarchical binaries of both from her “in-between” place as a displaced refugee—at least, that is, according to Cleave’s artistic vision. For Cleave’s novel ends with Little Bee’s “vision” of hybridity—ironically, just as Little Bee is rediscovered by the soldiers, Charlie finally removes his Batman costume, his Western construct of his own identity, in order to play with the Nigerian children on the beach. Although Little Bee is indeed recaptured by Nigerian mercenaries, Charlie, running and laughing in the waves with wild abandon, provides a vision of hope, both for Little Bee herself *and* Cleave’s readers. Even if Little Bee dies,

which is likely, young Charlie still survives as a symbol of hope. Cleave leaves the reader with this symbol, but chooses to omit the fate of Little Bee. Cleave's omission is indicative of Little Bee's liminal state as spirit-child, because before even the mere "hope" of hybridity can be achieved, Little Bee must suffer the heartbreak of the *ogbanje-abiku* existence. The *ogbanje-abiku* can *never* accomplish hybridity—only liminality.

Chapter 1—Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Cleave’s *Little Bee*: The *Iyi-Uwa*

Thus, after stating my methods and conducting a thorough review of the literature related to the concept of the *ogbanje*, my intertextual analysis of the *ogbanje* in *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave begins with Chinua Achebe’s seminal work, *Things Fall Apart* (1959). At first glance, *Things Fall Apart* seems the most “anthropological” of the four texts on which I will focus, i.e., a clear literary imprinting of the *ogbanje* concept. In contrast to his followers—Okri, Adichie, and Cleave—Achebe takes little liberty with the traditional spirit-child concept. We are tempted to read *Things Fall Apart* as only ethnography, yet, Aron Aji and Kirstin Lynne Ellsworth enhance reader comprehension of the text by highlighting Igbo cosmological conception.

Aji and Ellsworth focus on Ezinma as one of Achebe’s main characters in their brief but insightful study from 1993, “The ‘*Ogbanje*’ Child in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*”: “With the exception of Okonkwo [the protagonist], Ezinma is the most pivotal character in *Things Fall Apart*” (173). As textual evidence, Aji and Ellsworth cite Ezinma’s unique status as the spirit-child, which they argue grants her special importance within the text. Aji and Ellsworth contend that Ezinma’s privileged access to the spirit realm allows her to protect her community and perpetuate its traditional system of belief. Aji and Ellsworth offer four key insights: 1) Ezinma “[has] an unsettling sense of her environment; she is privy to the mysteries of both the human and the spirit realms” (171); 2) Ezinma “functions as a symbol for the resilience of the Igbo traditions in the face of staggering changes during British colonialism” (171); 3) Ezinma “[as] the *ogbanje* child [is] the tangible evidence of the intertwined Igbo cosmos, unifying the human and the spiritual in one earthly body” (174); and 4) Ezinma “bears the promise of continuity and

renewal [for her community]” (174) and “embodies both the cycle of rebirths...and the child who ultimately lives [much like the novel itself]” (174). In other words, Ezinma portrays the *ogbanje* characteristic of occupying a liminal space between spirituality and corporeality, all the while striving for agency within her community. The complexity of Ezinma’s character represents the rich complexity of Achebe’s novel itself.

With this new *ogbanje* lens, *Things Fall Apart* can be read as more than a mere “anthropological” snapshot of Igbo culture. Aji and Ellsworth convincingly argue that the novel cannot be read strictly as a cultural document because this simple type of reading ignores the cosmological implications of Ezinma as *ogbanje*. Although Achebe seemingly neglects the *ogbanje* after the first part of the book, Aji and Ellsworth argue that “Ezinma offers us a wonderful symbol for Achebe’s novel as a narrative that exploits the peculiar dynamics between culture and literature” (174). Achebe’s novel is, on the surface, a novel about the advent of British colonialism in Nigeria and its ramifications. However, through the creative literary “reinscription” of the spirit-child Ezinma (Said’s term), we as readers are given access to the Igbo world view—its own cultural conceptions of time, space, and spirituality. This access brings us beyond mere literary “anthropology” and into philology and cosmology. To echo Said, indeed these are the “things to look at” (*Orientalism*, 21).

Furthermore, Aji and Ellsworth’s reading of *Things Fall Apart* allows for direct comparison with Cleave’s *Little Bee*, specifically on the basis of the mysterious *iyi-uwa*. Most readers are familiar with Achebe’s imprinted representation of Ezinma’s “smooth pebble wrapped in a dirty rag” (74), which permits Ezinma’s continued connection with the spirit world. Okagbue, the *ogbanje* doctor skilled “in these matters” (74), insists that

Ezinma knows the whereabouts of her *iyi-uwa*, though she vocally professes ignorance. Okagbue states, “You know what it is. You buried it in the ground somewhere so that you can die and return again to torment your mother” (74). Interestingly, a clearly parallel—yet imbricated—scene occurs in *Little Bee*. Just after Little Bee appears at Sarah’s house on the morning of Andrew’s funeral, and then the somber undertaker ominously arrives, four-year-old Charlie (aka Batman) is sent outside to “play in the garden” by Sarah (79). Sarah asks the undertaker to wait while she pauses, and then she confusedly gathers Charlie and Little Bee to her. From Sarah’s first-person perspective in this chapter, Cleave develops the *iyi-uwa* scene:

I went out into the back garden. Batman was digging away at something under the roses. I went over to him. He had a trowel and he was lifting a dandelion, pulling its root to the tip. Our resident robin was hungry and he watched from six yards away. Batman raised the dandelion from the soil and brought it close to examine its root. Kneeling, he looked up at me.

“Is this a weed, Mummy?” he said.

“Yes darling. Next time, if you’re not sure, ask before you dig it up.”

Batman shrugged.

“Shall I put it in the wild patch?” he said.

I nodded, and Batman carried the dandelion over to small part of the garden where Andrew had given a home to such rascals, in the hope that they would attract butterflies and bees. *In our small garden I have*

made a wild place to remind me of chaos, Andrew once wrote in his column. Our modern lives are too ordered, to antiseptic.

That had been before Africa. (italics in original, 79)

Even though the words *ogbanje* and *iyi-uwa* are noticeably *not* imprinted in the text, the imbricated connections are telling to those intimately familiar with the traditional Igbo practice of digging up and destroying the land *ogbanje*'s *iyi-uwa*, the physical reminder of the life oath that has been renegotiated in the crossing through the spirit world (Chinwe Achebe 17). However, I do not suggest that there is a literal *iyi-uwa* in the O'Rourke's garden, neither of Little Bee or Charlie. Instead, I propose that Cleave reinscribes the function of the *iyi-uwa* to imply a metaphorical *ogbanje* representation. Cleave's novel is not only post-colonial, but post-modern in the sense that he reinvents traditional conceptions to suit his rhetorical purpose, which is to highlight the plight of the children—Little Bee and Charlie, in this scenario—as figurative spirit-children. Yet, Cleave's metaphor is fully grounded in Igbo cosmology.

For instance, in accordance with Dr. Taiwo's fourth category of *ogbanje* (by far Chinwe Achebe's most malevolent and formidable category), the "land dweller" buries her power deep in the ground. The land dweller's purification process is frequently hindered by the deception of the land *ogbanje*, and thereby must be expensively repeated many times. Parents not only have to pay the *dibia*, but to also buy the needed supplies—for example, according to Taiwo, "a white cock, a pen-knife, red-pepper, a yard of white linen, a white dress to be worn after the ceremony" (224)—over and over again. Presents are offered to the *ogbanje* afterwards, once the ritual is successful—that is, once the *iyi-uwa* is found. The recursive, repetitive process used to find the *iyi-uwa* is as

telling as the actual *iyi-uwa* itself, for we can detect repetition, ambiguity, duality, and liminality in the ceremony itself.

In *Little Bee*, the dandelion does not need to provide a literal, direct correlation to Ezinma's pebble, because metaphorically, any garden item that was meant to attract "butterflies and *bees*," such as Cleave's Little Bee, fits within the theoretical framework of the land *ogbanje*. Note also the symbolic exchange of a summer dress between Sarah and Little Bee. When first accompanying Sarah to Charlie's nursery school, Little Bee "was wearing a pink summer dress [Sarah] lent me. It was the prettiest thing I had ever worn. Around the neck it had fine white flowers stitched in, very delicate and fancy. I felt like the Queen of England" (Cleave 116). The yellow dandelion and pretty pink dress may be coincidental, but they are still indicative of the land dweller spirit-child, even within the imbricated text. In truth, it is these specific acts of digging (whether dandelion or *iyi-uwa*), and gift-giving (whether the dress is white or pink), that create the correlation between the traditional land *ogbanje* and Little Bee and Charlie.

Little Bee's imbricated association with the land *ogbanje* is also reinforced when Sarah tries to gather herself after the emotional turmoil of the funeral. Sarah sits "down at the kitchen table...watch[ing] Little Bee playing in the garden with Batman" (83).

Sarah reflects on the scene and considers her options:

I marveled at how quickly they had become a team. I wasn't sure I wanted them to be. But what was I to do? To stride out in the garden and say, *Little Bee, could you please stop making friends with my son?* My son would loudly demand an explanation and it would be no use telling him that Little Bee wasn't on our side. Not now that she and he had killed so

many of those baddies [imaginary villains] together. (italics in original, 83)

Given these passages from Cleave's novel, Charlie/Batman could metaphorically be either an Okagbue-like *dibia* or an Ezinma-like *ogbanje* himself. Sarah herself wonders how Little Bee and Charlie can be such good "friends" when they are so obviously not on the same "side" (83): Are Charlie and Little Bee "kin" in the spirit world of children? Conversely, is Charlie figuratively Little Bee's *dibia*, which may further explain why Sarah might regard Little Bee as a type of enemy? Here, Cleave utilizes the ambiguity and uncertainty of Little Bee's intentions not only to maintain dramatic tension, but also to allow the metaphorical representation of the *ogbanje* to reach its fullest potential. In Nigerian communities, the *ogbanje* is often perceived as mischievous or malevolent, but is Little Bee villain or victim? According to Nigerian literary tradition, she is both at once.

In truth, the actual distinction between *dibia* and *ogbanje* becomes less important within the overall pattern of imbrication of the spirit-child phenomena in Cleave's novel. Cleave's implicit representation echoes elements of Achebe's explicit representation; in both texts, the Western reader's sense of cross-cultural empathy builds concurrently with a sense of literary wonderment. Like Ezinma, Little Bee the *ogbanje* remains, by cultural necessity, a mystery. The *ogbanje* is simultaneously vilified, marginalized, feared, and admired because ultimately, she cannot be understood, even by her own people. For the Western reader/scholar, the *ogbanje* is particularly fascinating—not only must we first negotiate the many mysteries of the Igbo world view, but we must also confront the unsolvable enigma of the spirit-child.

Chapter 2—Okri’s *The Famished Road* and Cleave’s *Little Bee*: The Sacrifice

The novels of Ben Okri and Chris Cleave, *The Famished Road* (1991) and *Little Bee* respectively, are connected largely through the concept of the *ogbanje-abiku* ceremonial sacrifice, and to this end, both authors intimately explore the plight of the spirit-child from a first-person perspective. A parallel analysis of these two texts gives rise to questions regarding the basic nature of the *ogbanje-abiku*, and how that basic nature is reflected in the reader. For example, in a 2005 interview with Sachidananda Mohanty in *The Hindu*, Homi K. Bhabha states, “Psychoanalysis, connected to the issue of identity, suggests that all forms of identification are partial and ambivalent. All subjects are constituted in a liminal space.” Fifteen years earlier, in a 1990 interview with Jane Wilkinson, Ben Okri raised similar point with his question, “Isn’t it just possible that we are all *abikus*?” (84). The logical temptation is to equate all liminal subjects with *ogbanje-abiku*, and thus declare us all spirit-children in some fashion or another. We have all at some time felt ostracized, marginalized, or victimized; we have all warred with our own sense of spirituality. Yet, without taking the analogy too far, Okri reminds us of the fluidity and fragility of our earthly existence. Wilkinson and Okri discuss this conception of Azaro, the *abiku* boy, in *The Famished Road* here:

Wilkinson: This openness [of the novel] seems to flow over into the characters themselves, not only Azaro, the *abiku* protagonist, who obviously contains within himself all his past and possibly future lives, but also some of the other characters, who also have something of the *abiku* multiplicity....

Okri: This raises a question, from the main character's point of view. Isn't it just possible that we are all *abikus*? I don't say that of course, but why should there be some and not others? Why should the universe be distributed in that way? Essentially we're talking about reincarnation, though I don't want to use that word because it has metaphysical connotations. But it's impossible for a character like that, who sees that there are no divisions really in life, just a constant flow, forming and reforming, and who is looking at other characters, not to see that they themselves knowingly or unknowingly are flowing and reflowing, forming and reforming. That's why you have the three deaths of the father and the three births of the father. There are many, many ways in which the *abiku* set of variations takes place. It can take place on smaller, more visible levels and it can take place on larger levels, but it's all there. (84)

Okri's statements above help define and expand the concept of the *abiku*. He emphasizes not only the birth and re-birth and the formation and the re-formation of the *abiku*, but also the way in which the *abiku* "travels," figuratively and literally, in a shifting, non-linear pattern.

Specifically, in *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri expands upon Achebe's imprinted representation by using what has come to be known as magic realism. As winner of the Booker Prize for *The Famished Road* in 1991, Okri astounds the reader with his sheer creative ability. In *Research in African Literatures*, Olatubosun Ogunsanwo declares, "*The Famished Road* shows Ben Okri to be a neo-traditionalist, decolonized novelist who is, by the same token, a veritable postmodernist" (50). With this novel, Okri revives the

Nigerian novel by reframing the concept of the *abiku* in more contemporary terms than his predecessors—Achebe, Clark, Soyinka, and Nkala. Quayson agrees that Okri “pays homage to both” the burgeoning Nigerian literary tradition and indigenous belief systems through imaginative elaboration (122). As Okri both fundamentally relies on traditional concepts *and* reinvents them in this novel, his work provides a strong basis for comparison with Cleave’s *Little Bee*. For example, both authors explore the concept of the spirit-child in the form of first-person narration by the spirit-child him- or herself, expertly honing the voices of Azaro and Little Bee, but neither author limits himself to the strictly traditional conception of the spirit-child. Both Azaro and Little Bee are spirit-children reinvented to suit the needs of the narrative. However, while Okri’s Azaro is a modernized Nigerian representation of the Yoruba *abiku*, Cleave’s Little Bee is a Westernized, yet “translated,” representation of the Igbo *ogbanje*.

Furthermore, while Okri’s *abiku* Azaro is clearly announced to readers as such, imprinted much like Achebe’s *ogbanje* Ezinma, Cleave’s *ogbanje* Little Bee requires a great deal more interpretation to identify, as in Adichie’s dual imbricated *ogbanje*, Amala and Baby, in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Consider the introductory paragraphs of both *The Famished Road* and *Little Bee* as examples of the necessary rhetorical difference between the two novels, even though both center upon *ogbanje-abiku* protagonists. Okri writes:

In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because that road was once a river it was always hungry.

In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn.
 We could assume numerous forms. Many of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing, and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity. We played much because we were free. And we sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned from the world of the Living. (3)

Note the “road” that represents *travel*, the *abiku*’s ability to shape-shift into “numerous forms,” and the “sorrowing” associated with living. We now consider the first paragraphs of *Little Bee*. Cleave writes:

Most days I wish I was a British pound coin instead of an African girl. Everyone would be pleased to see me coming. Maybe I would visit with you for the weekend and then suddenly, because I am fickle like that, I would visit with the man from the corner shop instead—but you would not be sad because you would be eating a cinnamon bun, or drinking a cold Coca-Cola from the can, and you would never think of me again. We would be happy, like lovers who met on holiday and forgot each other’s names.

A pound coin can go wherever it thinks it will be safest. It can cross deserts and oceans and leave the sound of gunfire and the bitter smell of burning thatch behind. (9)

Reminiscent of Okri’s introduction of Azaro, Cleave’s *Little Bee* wishes to *travel* the “road” of the pound coin, to assume the “form” of the pound coin, to enable the “feast” of the cinnamon bun and canned pop, to forget the “sorrowing” of her life (Okri 3).

Yet, both introductions are bittersweet because we are impressed with the obvious impermanence, the transitory and transformative nature, the painful liminality of these two child protagonists. It is this painful need to belong, yet to be free to roam, that inspires the supporting literary characters of both novels to fight for the *ogbanje-abiku*, to try to rescue them despite themselves.

Above all else, Azaro and Little Bee are united in sacrifice—the sacrifice not only of their own happiness, but even the sacrifice of the well-being of the other people who both admire and fear them, yet want to protect them. For example, in order to ensure the health of the spirit-child in Igbo and Yoruba culture, a blood sacrifice, usually that of an animal, is made by concerned relatives to appease the tribal gods, the ancestral spirits, or even earthly witches or wizards. A sacrifice may or may not be ultimately successful, depending on the obstinance of the *ogbanje-abiku* or on the malevolence of her spirit brothers/sisters. In *Little Bee*, the brutal sacrifice of Sarah O'Rourke's middle finger that takes place on the delta beach is central to the narrative of Cleave's novel, though this sacrifice is not of an animal, as traditionally expected. In the "Author Q&A" section of the 2010 trade paperback edition of *Little Bee*, Cleave states that "the story is not told in linear time—the first half of the book is working backward into history, while the second half of the book works forward into the future"—with the beach scene as the central narrative point. Structurally, the narrative spirals out from Sarah's blood sacrifice, the machete chop, looping through past and present, but always maintaining its center. In yet another "Author Q&A" section on ChrisCleave.com, Cleave also tells readers that "[Sarah O'Rourke] sacrifices herself, both mentally and physically, in order to save the life of a stranger." Physically, Sarah cuts off the middle finger of her left hand to

appease the leader of the “oil company’s men” (91), who has demanded Sarah’s finger in exchange for Little Bee’s life. Mentally, Sarah suffers from the memory of the event for years to come. Her Western complacency “robbed,” as in Tutuola’s *Bush of Ghosts*, Sarah must renegotiate her global citizenship.

Sarah’s physical sacrifice constitutes a blood sacrifice of the highest degree; according to Awolalu, human sacrifice was reserved for desperate times of “national crisis and disaster” (87). Awolalu writes specifically about whole-body human sacrifice, that of the human life and not merely an appendage; nonetheless, Sarah’s finger is a symbol of her humanity. The “stranger” for whom Sarah sacrifices is indeed Little Bee, and the concept of *ogbanje* is integral to the sacrifice itself. Sarah’s sacrifice is made deliberately for Little Bee—primarily, on a literal level, to keep her alive, and secondly, figuratively, as a way of binding the *ogbanje* to the corporeal world, much in the same way that Azaro’s father sacrifices two white chickens to recall his son from the spirit world during a period of grave illness in *The Famished Road* (Okri 338-39).

As fellow spirit-children, both Little Bee and Azaro require a blood sacrifice to justify their continued existence. Again, according Awolalu, general sacrifices can be made to reconnect with the gods or to repel the evil advances of witches or sorcerers (82).

Awolalu cites a specific instance of a sacrifice made for the benefit of a child,⁹

A child was ill. His father, on the advice and guidance of the oracle, prepared some water in which special leaves had been crushed. In the dead of night, he took the sick child together with the concoction and a few days’ old chick. At a road junction (*orita*), the child was bathed with the concoction. Following this, the father held the chick by the legs and swung

it over his child's head three times. After the third time, the chick was violently dashed to the ground and died at once. The child and his father, not looking back, hastened home. The man who took this action did so because he had been told that his child's sickness was caused by witches (*àjě*). In order to appease the witches, therefore, and make them spare the life of his child, he had to make the sacrifice described above at a road junction (*orita*), one of the regular haunts of witches. The chick offered was a substitute for the man's child; the chick thus died... the child's death. (83)

Awolalu's detailed example bears a significant resemblance to scenes in Okri's *Famished Road*, given Azaro's precarious health and/or persistent link to the spirit world.

In applying Awolalu's passage to *Little Bee*, the crossroad or *orita* is not unlike the Nigerian beach where Sarah and Andrew first meet Little Bee and Kindness—a "road junction" of sorts between countries and cultures. The "witch" in *Little Bee* then might be the leader of the violent gang of men, who requires two white fingers to save the two sisters. Little Bee lives because Sarah makes the appropriate blood sacrifice, while her sister Kindness dies because Andrew's blood is not shed on her behalf.

Similar to the rest of the murdered "girls back home" (Cleave 12), who are already spirits, Kindness now joins Little Bee's other spirit-sisters in the spirit world, akin to Chinwe Achebe's "paranormal deities" (27) or Azaro's "spirit companions" (Okri 7). In *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, Francis Arinze states that an Igbo not properly buried in body will be unable to rest in spirit; without proper "funeral celebrations... the restless ghost of the deceased would return to haunt and harass his merciless

relatives” who neglected to bury him properly (17). When captured by the “witch” and his soldiers, Kindness is gang-raped, murdered, dismembered, and cannibalized; only the “parts that could not be eaten” were thrown into the sea (Cleave 144). Without any doubt, Kindness qualifies as a “restless spirit” without a proper burial. Not all restless spirits are *ogbanje-abiku*, but all spirits naturally inhabit the same spirit world. Little Bee’s friends and family from home, once killed, become the “spirit deities” to whom she owes her “loyalty” (Chinwe Achebe 27), again figuratively marking Little Bee as *ogbanje*.

Little Bee’s imaginary conversations with the “girls back home” and her vivid visions of her dead sister can be seen as metaphorical references to the unsettled spirits of the departed; yet, ironically,¹⁰ she uses these hauntings, so to speak, to ground herself, that is, to both comfort herself and to make sense of her new surroundings. Cleave states in the “Author Q&A” trade paperback edition that the “girls back home” function as Little Bee’s “Greek chorus,” her way of explicating and negotiating her culture shock. Yet, the “girls back home” also represent Little Bee’s link to her “old” world of Nigeria amidst the “new” world of the U.K. The common Western concept of the “Greek chorus” might be “translated” into the non-Western concept of the spirit-child. For the *ogbanje*, the “old” world is her ethereal home forever waiting for her among her spirit family, while the “new” world is her present reincarnation in a corporeal body. The “new” world must be re-navigated, re-understood, re-known for each and every re-incarnation; the essential task of the *ogbanje* is the re-petition of life—not just *repetition*, as in merely living and dying again and again, as in reincarnation, but *re-petition*, as in actively seeking to repeat the cycle. In *Little Bee*, there are two layers of “old” and “new”—the “old” spirit realm and the “new” earthly lifetime, the “old” Nigeria and the “new” U.K.

Little Bee as *ogbanje* is effectively caught within the double liminal space between two layers of two worlds.

Little Bee's *re-petition* of life also must be considered in metaphorical terms. When she is incarcerated in the immigration removal center in Essex, Little Bee commits suicide in her mind over and over again, imagining new scenarios each time she is placed in new surroundings, identifying which tools she would use to complete the task: morphine, bleach, boiling fat, a tall movie theater balcony, a restaurant refrigerator, a hijacked ice cream truck driven into the ocean, a handmade noose of vines hung from a tree (Cleave 46-47). So consumed with the idea of suicide as a means of saving herself from the killers on the beach, should they return for her, Little Bee even imagines how she would kill herself in different eras of U.K. history:

One day the detention officers gave all of us a copy of a book called *LIFE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM*. It explains the history of your country and how to fit in. I planned how I would kill myself in the time of Churchill (stand under bombs), Victoria (throw myself under a horse), and Henry the Eighth (marry Henry the Eighth). (emphasis in original, 47)

Darkly comic, Cleave's humor here has hidden meaning—the reality of Little Bee's impending death looms over the reader. Paradoxically, Little Bee says that she kills herself so often in her mind that she finally kills herself “back to life” (48), though there is no other direct evidence to indicate that Little Bee truly recognizes herself as *ogbanje*. However, readers familiar with the Igbo spirit-child tradition would recognize the imbrication. In contrast with Azaro from Okri's *The Famished Road*, Azaro knows himself to be *abiku*, yet he feels pity as he looks upon the “bruised face

of the woman who would become [his] mother,” finally deciding to stay, hoping this chosen life will last (5). Even with obvious difference, Cleave’s spirit-child still mimics Okri’s on this point, as the *ogbanje* Little Bee finds her own “hope” and “decides” to try to *live* (instead of just repeatedly dying) in her “new” world (Cleave 48, Awolalu 17), even if she must stretch her existence across two uncertain worlds—those of the spirit and body or spirit-world and earth, and those of Nigeria and U.K. or native and immigrant.

Infinitely more so than Little Bee’s “girls back home”/Cleave’s “Greek chorus,” Kindness is insistent upon Little Bee’s dual existence in her “old” and “new” worlds. Kindness follows or haunts Little Bee on her journeys through the U.K. and even upon return to Nigeria. In England, as a fugitive illegal immigrant without a better mode of transportation, Little Bee follows the Thames River on foot from rural Essex to Sarah’s house in Kingston, Surrey, a suburb of London. As she travels through the night after her fraudulent release from the immigration removal center, Little Bee is “very scared” but does “not feel alone,” because “all through that night it seemed to me that my big sister Nkiruka [Kindness] walked beside me. I could almost see her face, glowing in the pale orange light” (Cleave 71). As Little Bee walks further, Kindness’s spiritual presence appears even more corporeal in Little Bee’s nighttime experience: “Once, when we stopped to rest, [my sister] dug her toes into the earth at the edge of a field and smiled. When I saw her smile, I felt strong enough to carry on” (Cleave 71). Kindness at last leaves her strength with Little Bee even when she “disappear[s] with the night” (Cleave 71). Akin to Azaro’s innumerable visitations from his ever-persistent spirit-brothers and -sisters in *The Famished Road*, Little Bee remains tied to the spirit

world of the spirit-child through the appearance, reappearance, and re-disappearance of her sister.

In the end, despite Sarah's blood sacrifice, Kindness as a spirit-sister demands Little Bee's definitive return to both "old" worlds, those of Nigeria and of kindred spirits. The first return occurs after Little Bee is caught and deported by U.K. authorities to her physical "old" world of Nigeria, accompanied by Sarah and Charlie. There, as a team, Sarah and Little Bee begin to record the stories of women affected by the oil wars. After two weeks in Nigeria, Kindness again appears to Little Bee in a dream, seeming to call her to the sea. Little Bee wakes and begs Sarah to take her to the ocean to "*say goodbye to [her] sister*" (italics in original, Cleave 201). Sarah agrees to go to the coast, even though she knows the beach is dangerous territory for them both, especially for Little Bee as an oil-war witness. On the beach, Little Bee begins to contemplate a second return to her "old" world of the spirits, and then she is captured by hired soldiers, just after she accepts her inevitable fate, a life without "peace":

"Oh my god," Sarah was saying. "I think we need to get away from here."

I smiled sleepily. *Yes yes, I was thinking. We always need to get away from here. Wherever here is, there is always a good reason to get away from it. That is the story of my life. Always running, running, running, without one single moment of peace. Sometimes, when I remember my mother and my father and my big sister Nkiruka, **I think I will always be running until the day I am reunited with the dead.***

Sarah grabbed my hand and tried to pull me up.

“Get up, Bee,” she said. “There are soldiers coming. Up the beach.” (italics in original, bold emphasis added, Cleave 204)

Little Bee, as a metaphorical *ogbanje*, knows that her incessant *traveling/running* will only end with her own death—albeit a final, permanent death is ultimately inaccessible to her as a spirit-child.

Yet, compare Little Bee’s last thoughts to Azaro’s compulsive wanderings, to his *walking, walking, walking* in and out of the spirit world, and then envision Little Bee reclaiming her Igbo name, Udo, which means “Peace,” walking hand in hand in spirit with Azaro—*ogbanje* and *abiku*, one in the same. For Udo would concur with Azaro’s last pronouncement: “A dream can be the highest point of a life” (Okri 500). In dreams, the spirit-child accesses the eternal spirit world, and this is where she or he feels most at home, or at “peace” with the self and existence itself. For the spirit-child, physical life is a painful journey in a harsh world where she or he can never fully exist—the endless torture of liminality. *Ogbanje-abiku* forever long for the completion of life in death, but never, ever, achieve it.

Chapter 3—Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Cleave’s *Little Bee*: Subaltern Agency

Cleave’s *Little Bee* is connected to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) via the concept of subaltern agency. Adichie herself provides a theoretical framework for my exploration of the intertextual nature of these two novels. In 2009, Adichie gave a TED Talk entitled “The Danger of the Single Story” in which she argues that racial and cultural stereotypes can be dehumanizing, yet conversely, stories from writers around the world can help reestablish a compassionate sense of human dignity. In telling her live audience autobiographical stories, Adichie establishes her own politics of location. As a child, Adichie’s family was rather well-off in Nigeria, and Adichie was privileged enough to later attend university in the U.S. Adichie had started reading early, first devouring books and then writing her own stories, but when she finally encountered the works of Nigerian writers, she only then realized how her conception of “literature” could exponentially expand. Adichie concludes, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” In her talk, considered in conjunction with her novel, Adichie demonstrates that there should not be one “single story” of the *ogbanje-abiku*, either. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie’s two imbricated *ogbanje-abiku*, Amala and her daughter Baby, help to reveal the many subtleties of the spirit-child story. However, note that while Adichie does *once* explicitly use the term *ogbanje*, she presents the term only in a dismissive, peripheral way by Ugwu commenting on Amala gorging herself in the hot pepper patch; Adichie does not actively employ the term and its associations like Achebe and Okri. This type of post-modern imbrication is primarily why I want to consider Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* in

alignment with Cleave's *Little Bee*. Both novelists offer imbricated, innovative, reinscribed representations of the spirit-child that focus upon subaltern agency.

If we collectively consider all of the *ogbanje-abiku* discussed here— Little Bee and Kindness, Ezinma, Azaro, Amala and Baby—we can discern a remarkable lack of spirit-child agency, even though these children are often blamed or vilified for their very existence. Just as they are caught between the spiritual and physical worlds, *ogbanje-abiku* are compromised by their own liminal existence, effectively silenced by the families and communities, who under ordinary circumstances, should be most supportive. Ezinma is eyed warily by her mother; Azaro is beaten by both parents for wandering; Amala is used and discarded by Mama; Baby is watched guardedly by family for supernatural tendencies; and Little Bee, after losing her natural family to violence, is incarcerated by the British government and hunted by Nigerian soldiers. When Little Bee attempts to create a new family in the U.K., she is imprisoned and then deported. When Little Bee tries to return to Nigeria—her home where her fellow countrymen would supposedly treat her like “family”—Little Bee is pursued, captured, and imprisoned once again, and very likely executed for knowing the truth of what happened to her biological family. Here, Cleave is expanding upon the motif of *ogbanje-abiku* silencing. In fact, paradoxically, Little Bee is so effectively silenced that her lack of words becomes her only voice.

This facet of Cleave's representation is also grounded in traditional concepts. Alex Asakitikpi provides a new explanation for the spirit-child's negative reputation, which results in an acute lack of agency:

It is generally held among the Yoruba [and] Igbo...that in the distant past, some children were born into this world but realized, with their psychic power, that the world would be too difficult for them to make any significant mark due to the stiff competition that characterizes it. Acknowledging their laziness and their inability to compete with others, they decided to die and go back to heaven. On getting to heaven, the gatekeeper interrogated them and found that their lack of zeal to work had brought them back. To discourage indolence, this group of children was not allowed entry to heaven and was told to go back to the world. Not to be regarded as nonachievers in life, they decided to form a society in the spirit world with a selected forest as their abode. Their rendezvous is usually on big trees such as the baobab and other similar trees. But because they are spirit beings, they cannot be seen with the naked eyes. In this forest, they indulge in playful activities and once in a while may decide to be born into the physical world just to have a taste of it and after a while they would die and return to their spirit kins. An oath is usually sworn to keep the bond of comradeship perpetual while a pact is made with their spirit kindred in the spirit world detailing what they would do after their birth and the very day they would return to the spirit world. (60)

Originally in possession of “psychic power,” the *ogbanje-abiku* loses all agency in the physical world due to the perceived abuse of such spiritual power. As “nonachievers” unable to complete the cycle of fertility, *ogbanje-abiku* become what we will call the

“Other Other,” or Spivak’s truest subaltern, to expand upon Spivak’s original conception of the subaltern subject.

Yet, each individual *ogbanje-abiku* maintains the struggle to attain agency, despite societal constraint—sending a mixed message of hope and despair, of indolence and industry, of life and death. Indeed, it is this perplexing sense of ambiguity, duality, liminality, and inscrutability that renders the *ogbanje-abiku* such a truly intriguing literary character. In her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie attempts to demystify the plight of the spirit-child through an imbricated representation, that is, a representation set in modern terms that may be more accessible to the Western reader—an approach Cleave later emulates. Consider Adichie’s single use of the term *ogbanje* in her novel. Adichie writes:

The afternoon Mama left, Ugwu found Amala in the vegetable garden, crouched on the ground with her knees drawn up, arms around her legs. She was chewing peppers.

“Is it well?” Ugwu asked. Perhaps the woman was a spirit person and had come here to perform rituals with her fellow *ogbanje*. (244)

Here, Adichie’s description of the *ogbanje*, however brief, is congruent with other literary depictions of the spirit-child, but Adichie, like Cleave, also uses the layering of the imbricated approach to update the spirit-child’s story. To this end, Adichie’s first *ogbanje* is named Amala; she is a shy village girl who accompanies Odenigbo’s Mama upon her various visits to her son in the university town Nsukka. Odenigbo and his domestic partner both teach at the university. Although Ugwu, Odenigbo’s servant, refers to Amala as an *ogbanje* only in passing, his description of her is rather fitting.

Amala is a quiet girl; she only speaks when directly addressed, quickly but sullenly doing what she is told. On Mama's first visit to Nsukka, Amala stands with "downcast eyes" (95) and speaks only to agree with Mama; Ugwu notes Amala's unsure, "high-pitched voice" (96). Overall, Amala offers the impression that she generally would rather be somewhere else, or that she is neither here nor there, much like other the spirit-children in the other works I have analyzed here.

Amala's *ogbanje-abiku* story hinges upon Mama, for it is Mama who causes Amala to become detrimental in Odenigbo's relationship with his long-time live-in girlfriend, Olanna. After Mama accuses Olanna of being unnatural and infertile in her tense first visit to Nsukka, Olanna leaves Odenigbo's house and lives in her own flat until Mama leaves Nsukka. Ugwu fears that Mama will resort to black magic to expel Olanna from Odenigbo's life, but Olanna laughs at Ugwu's concerns about the "black cat" he spotted after Mama departed (106). As it turns out, Mama does work some type of black magic, because on a subsequent visit to Nsukka while Olanna is away, Mama orchestrates Amala's sexual encounter with the drunken Odenigbo, who has ingested some particularly strong palm wine that Mama brought as a gift. Consistent with her character, Amala does not act as agent in this encounter, but only as a dutiful servant to Mama. Olanna discovers the betrayal when she returns from abroad, then moves permanently into her own flat, and does not forgive Odenigbo for some time. Ugwu blames Mama, but Olanna blames Odenigbo for the infidelity. Not surprisingly, we do not know whom Amala blames, for she has no true voice.

Shortly after Odenigbo and Olanna reunite, they discover that Amala is pregnant with Odenigbo's child. This is why young Amala is found eating peppers in the garden;

she believes eating spicy peppers will abort the child. Amala's predicament is akin to that of the spirit-child who is often caught between two opposing ends—indeed, the most imperative of which is to live or to die—with little say in the matter. By trying to abort, Amala initiates her unborn fetus into the *ogbanje* tradition as well. In this liminal space, the *ogbanje* is often reduced to a tool to be manipulated by both human beings and her fellow spirits. For example, Ezinma is forced to reveal the location of her buried *iyi-uwa*, or her physical talisman that binds her to the spirit world (Achebe 74). Likewise, Azaro is mercilessly haunted by his spirit brothers and sisters, who solemnly vow, “If you don't come back we will make your life unbearable” (Okri 7). Little Bee herself is *haunted*, on two levels, both by her sister Kindness *and* the “girls back home (Cleave 70 and 12), as well as *hunted* by the “oil company's men” (Cleave 91). In the same manner as the other *ogbanje*, Amala too despairs her lack of agency, and though she unsuccessfully tries to assert herself in the pepper patch, Amala's *ogbanje* status is never more clear within the novel as when Baby is born. Because she failed to abort, because she failed to overcome the constrained agency of the *ogbanje*, Amala has not just solidified her own *ogbanje* status, but she has now, in essence, created two spirit-children instead of one. At the birth of Baby, Amala's lack of voice is painfully clear to the reader.

When Odenigbo and Olanna visit Amala in the maternity ward, she refuses to look at them directly. Mama has rejected the grandchild she previously promised to raise solely because she is a girl; Mama had wanted a boy to take care of her in old age (Adichie 253). Concerned, Odenigbo and Olanna visit the newborn baby girl, and then return to Amala's bedside. It is only then that Olanna truly sees Amala as an individual, and understands Amala, anew:

Amala mumbled something. Finally she turned her face toward them and Olanna looked at her: a plain village girl curled up on the bed as if she were cringing from one more furious blow from life. She never once looked at Odenigbo. What she must feel for him was an awed fear. Whether or not Mama had told her to go to his room, she had not said no to Odenigbo because she had not even considered that she should say no. Odenigbo made a drunken pass at her and she submitted willingly and promptly: He was the master, he spoke English, he had a car. It was the way it should be. (253)

After this inner revelation, Olanna sympathetically and poignantly concludes, “How much did one know of the true feelings of those who did not have a voice?” (253). And that is the last time the readers see Amala—in the liminal space of the hospital, refusing to eat, refusing to hold or nurse or see her own child. Readers never know if she lives or dies; Olanna and Ugwu inwardly remember Amala at times, but she never appears in person again in the narrative. She is effectively silenced, but hints of her *ogbanje* status live on through Baby, who is Adichie’s second spirit-child character.

After the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran War in 1967, Baby becomes gravely ill with a persistent cough. Even after she receives antibiotics and the cough begins to improve, Baby still refuses to eat. As Olanna’s thoughts turn to Baby’s biological mother, “she wonder[s] if she would be expected to tell Amala if Baby were to die” (Adichie 269). Baby’s precarious health links her to the concept of the *ogbanje*, but during the war many children are lost due to more obvious reasons—bombs, shrapnel, gunfire, or severe malnutrition known as *kwashiorkor* (303). It is conceivable

that Baby is marked for death in some way by Amala's failed abortion attempt, but Baby's link to the spirit world does not fully manifest for the observant reader until later in the novel when Olanna slowly begins to interpret Baby's optimistic questions:

“Will Aunty Kainene come to Nsukka?” Baby asked.

Olanna turned and looked carefully at Baby's face, to search for clairvoyance, a sign that Baby knew Kainene was coming back. At first she thought she saw it, and then she was not sure she did. (Adichie 407)

Olanna so hopes for her sister's return from trading beyond enemy lines that she sees “signs” in most everyday events; Adichie writes: “but she saw a sign in Baby's questions too, although she could not yet decipher its meaning” (425). Again, one major hallmark of the *ogbanje-abiku* is her inscrutability. Like Amala, Baby remains somewhat of a mystery to her adopted mother *and* the reader. Even Baby's formal name is never agreed upon, further signifying her own liminal existence. Without a name, Baby lingers in *ogbanje-abiku* limbo, uncertain whether to live or die. Earlier, Aunty Kainene grows weary of Baby's namelessness and begins to call her “Chiamaka,” meaning “God is Beautiful” (Adichie 257), but Kainene disappears from the narrative long before the name can be officially settled upon. In fact, the novel ends with both Kainene herself *and* Baby's real name still missing. The post-war famine still rages in the former Biafra, Baby's fate is still undecided, and Olanna's last conversation with Odenigbo reinforces Adichie's motif of the contemporary, imbricated *ogbanje-abiku*:

“I do believe in it. I believe in everything. I believe in anything that will bring my sister home.” She stood up and went to the window.

“We come back again,” she [Olanna] said.

“What?” [Odenigbo asks.]

“Our people say that we all reincarnate, don’t they?” she said.

“*Uwa m, uwa ozo*. When I come back in my next life, Kainene will be my sister.” (425)

Olanna’s belief in reincarnation, coupled with the idea of “spirit” sisterhood, *almost* renders Olanna *ogbanje-abiku* herself merely by association with Amala, Baby, and even perhaps Kainene. According to Okri, all literary characters (and all people) possess elements of the spirit-child. Yet, if the *ogbanje-abiku* is defined by her lack of agency and her constricting liminality, Olanna does not suffer for her compromised spirituality like Amala and Baby. By extension of our own Western privilege, we as readers do not suffer either, but openness to other world views, including the possibility of the *ogbanje-abiku* within ourselves, allows us to “hear” the subaltern speaking through these texts. In Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Cleave’s *Little Bee*, the question of subaltern agency becomes tantamount. By utilizing implicit imbrication as opposed to explicit imprinting of the *ogbanje-abiku* concept, the spirit-children in these novels—Little Bee and Kindness, Amala and Baby—are artfully rendered more “human” and less “spirit.”

Chapter 4—Conclusion: The *Ogbanje* in *Little Bee* by Chris Cleave

In *Things Fall Apart* and *The Famished Road*, Achebe and Okri formally introduce the *ogbanje-abiku* to the West. Yet, in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Little Bee*, Adichie and Cleave move beyond introduction; Adichie and Cleave want us to know and recognize the *ogbanje-abiku* as deeply as we know and recognize our true selves. It is in this “knowing” that we can begin to “hear” the voice of the truest subaltern. In *Little Bee*, Chris Cleave uses the concept of the *ogbanje-abiku* to create a viable “representation” of the Nigerian refugee, of what I call Spivak’s truest subaltern, via Maggio’s “translation.” Building upon the important work of Achebe, Okri, and Adichie, Chris Cleave reinvents the spirit-child as a comment upon the West’s current view of the non-West. Ultimately, Cleave seeks to bridge the gap between the West and non-West through the mutual education, awareness, and appreciation of those seeking cultural enlightenment through the understanding of post-colonial literature.

Viewed as a whole, *Little Bee* is an alternating dual narrative of two traumatized women desperately trying to process their reactions to life’s sometimes horrific events. In an online review of *Little Bee* published in 2009, Sarah Courteau describes Cleave’s book as “the best kind of political novel: You’re almost entirely unaware of its politics because the book doesn’t deal in abstractions but in human beings.” Like his Nigerian literary predecessors Okri and Adichie, Cleave reinvents the Igbo/Yoruba concept of the spirit-child in order to illuminate the complexity of the unique human experience. In post-colonial studies, the overused word “universal” is taboo, but Cleave *is* attempting to take his readers to a cross-cultural common ground. As Adichie fervently advises in her TED Talk, Cleave is trying to initiate “feelings more complex than pity,” to create the

“possibility of a connection as human equals.” Our humanity binds us, even when space, time, culture, and international politics divide us. Bhabha’s conception of hybridity, his most hopeful outcome for liminality, hinges upon our shared sense of humanity, our shared experience of the human condition.

In fact, Cleave was inspired to write *Little Bee* based upon the non-fiction story of one particular human being, the Angolan refugee Manuel Bravo. In a 2005 online article for *The Independent*, Ian Herbert North reports on the case of Manuel Bravo, who committed suicide so that his 13-year-old son Antonio could legally remain in England. After living productively for four years in the U.K., Bravo and his son had been abruptly scheduled for deportation, allegedly illegally because the Bravos had received no official ruling regarding their request for asylum. North’s sources contend that Bravo had been repeatedly “let down by the Home Office, the immigration authorities and the solicitors,” causing him to resort to suicide as his only alternative to save his son from deportation, knowing that, within the law, a minor could not be deported unaccompanied.

Cleave cites Bravo’s case as direct inspiration for *Little Bee* in the “Author Q&A” section of the trade paperback edition, maintaining North’s focus on inconsistencies in U.K. immigration practices. The facts of the story help define Cleave’s strategic location; Cleave is acutely sympathetic to the plight of the refugee, as well as highly critical of his own government’s problematic immigration procedures. Cleave’s humanitarian concerns are thus personified, with due deference and delicate sensitivity, in the characters of Little Bee and Kindness, through clear but imbricated representation of the spirit-child. If the spirit-child herself is an affront to the Nigerian cosmological focus on fertility, Western immigration practices are an affront to life itself.

We again see Ogunyemi's three layers of literary "motherhood" at work here in the form of 1) conflict between the Nigerian mother and spirit-child, 2) the colonizer and the colonized, and 3) the writer and his/her work. In theory, and by way of concluding, let us entertain the following scenario: 1) Manuel Bravo is the father/"mother" of his son, an *ogbanje-abiku* caught in the liminal space of the ineffective U.K. immigration system; 2) the U.K. is the imposing colonizer of the *ogbanje-abiku*, as well as the well-meaning "motherland" of several non-Western colonies, including nation-states in Africa; and 3) Chris Cleave is the metaphorical "mother" of his novel *and* his character Little Bee.

Given this imaginative scenario, we may then begin to see why Cleave would purport to reinscribe the traditional myth of the spirit-child in order to comment upon the painful predicament of the contemporary post-colonial subject. Cleave's novel is a political story with a human core, and he needs the inscrutable yet overwhelming humanity of the *ogbanje-abiku* to capture the concept of life as a repetitive act, full of moral ambiguity, internal and external duality, and the undefined, individualized constraints of liminality. For in some cases, such as Manuel Bravo's, "choosing" to die means choosing to live—to live on in the lives of "others," in the hope for successful hybridity, with the intent that we can one day operate as individuals in a world of truly unconstrained human equality. As a post-colonial novelist, Chris Cleave highlights his own humanitarian intentions with his post-modern representation of Little Bee, as an imbricated, translated *ogbanje-abiku*.

Endnotes

¹ Middle East Research and Information Project. James Paul's interview was published in this organization's journal, the *MERIP Middle East Report*, early in 1988.

² "Igbo" is often Anglicized as "Ibo." I will maintain the original spelling in this essay.

³ In his 1970 article, "Two Incantations to 'Abiku,'" Oladele Taiwo first examines the two poems by Clark and Soyinka and then delineates four types of *ogbanje* in Igbo belief: fire, sea, land, and "personal" (224). His analysis deals mostly with *ogbanje* diagnosis and treatment but is not wholly congruent with Chinwe Achebe's more exhaustive study. For the purposes of my present study, I work with only two types of *ogbanje-abiku*—sea/water and land.

⁴ In a personal interview with Chris Cleave via Skype in November of 2011, I learned that Cleave's "strategic location" is rather complex. Born in London, his family relocated to the African Republic of Cameroon when he was about six weeks of age. He returned to London at age eight, only to feel like a perpetual outsider in his home country due to his expatriate experience. Cleave claims that his time spent in Cameroon informed but did not necessarily directly influence his writing a novel about Nigeria, but rather more so, that feelings of "otherness" influenced his decision to become an "observer" of life, and by natural extension, to become a "writer" of his careful observations (Cleave 2011).

⁵ According to the Gale Literary Database, though all three Nigerian-born, Achebe, Okri, and Adichie have been intellectually influenced by the West through their upper level education. Achebe graduated from the University of Ibadan (under London University) in Ibadan, Western Nigeria, with a B.A. in 1953. Okri attended the University of Essex and was a visiting fellow at Trinity College in Cambridge, U.K. from 1991-1993.

Adichie holds graduate degrees from Johns Hopkins University (2003) and Yale University (2008). Chris Cleave earned a B.A. in Experimental Psychology from Oxford University, Balliol College, in June of 1995. See Appendix A for a full chronology of Cleave’s life, compiled from various sources—online interviews, brief biographical sketches, his column for online edition of *The Guardian* called “Down with the Kids,” and my personal interview with him in November of 2011.

⁶ As coined by the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, I use the modified term “english” here to denote a recognizable variation of English (21).

⁷ The Nigerian english word “*palava*” is derived from the English word “palaver,” which means lengthy, fruitless, idle, or even misleading talk. Also, according to the *OED Online*, a “palaver” in “West Africa [is] a dispute, quarrel, or misunderstanding; a matter for arbitration.” The word may have roots in the Latin word *parabola* (parable), which becomes the Spanish word *palabra* (word) and the French word *palabre* (grandiloquent speech). The authors of the *OED* surmise that “palaver” likely originated in early West African portuguese (note my non-capitalized use), and traveled to England via nautical slang.

⁸ In the “Notes” section of the 2010 Simon & Schuster trade paperback edition of *Little Bee*, Cleave indicates that he found the Igbo version of the *Ave Maria* on the *Christus Rex et Redemptor Mundi* website at <http://www.christusrex.org> (281).

⁹ Awolalu does not specifically state that the child in question is *ogbanje-abiku*, but based on the common cultural markers, I feel it is safe to assume a connection in this passage.

¹⁰ Given the Igbo world view, what is “ironic” to a Western reader may be no less than expected by a Nigerian reader.

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Appendix A

Chronology of Christopher James Cleave

- 1973 14 May—born in London, England
- 6 weeks old—moves to the Republic of Cameroon
- Father works for Guinness brewery firm as industrial chemist
- 1975 Brother Alex, only sibling, born
- 1981 Returns to United Kingdom
- Attends state school in Hillingdon, Uxbridge, Greater London
- Writes stories and draws funny cartoons throughout childhood and adolescence
- 1991 Attends Balliol College, Oxford University
- Initially enrolls in chemistry
- 1993 Reads *The Periodic Table* by Primo Levi, decides he wants to be a writer
- Switches to experimental psychology
- 1994 Summer—three-day job in the canteen at Campsfield House in Oxfordshire, detention (immigration removal) center for asylum seekers
- 1995 June—graduates from Oxford, B.A. of Experimental Psychology, with “first class class honors,” the British equivalent of summa cum laude
- June—begins work as barman in Australia on a one-year working holiday visa; works the night shift on weekends at a nightclub in Melbourne
- 1995-97 Works as a sailor, delivers yachts; intermittent work for approximately 2 years
- 1996 Autumn—begins working for *Daily Telegraph* internet site
- 1999 September—begins working for lastminute.com, a travel agency
- 2001 Marries French woman, Clémence, in Paris
- Moves to France

Chronology of Christopher James Cleave

- 2003 Leaves lastminute.com to write full time
- First son born
- Moves back to London
- 2005 7 July—début novel *Incendiary* hits bookstores on the same day as terrorist attack; 50+ people die in London bombings; novel pulled from bookstores
- Takes a 6-month break from writing to emotionally deal with terrorist attacks
- 2006 Second son born
- Re-release of *Incendiary*
- 2007 26 March—film production of *Incendiary* begins in London
- 2008 Publication of *Little Bee*; also published as *The Other Hand* in the U.K.
- 20 January—*Incendiary* at Sundance Film Festival (U.S.)
- May—*Incendiary* at Cannes Film Market (France)
- 18 October—*Incendiary* at London Film Festival (U.K.)
- 2008-10 Writes a Saturday weekly column for *The Guardian* online, focuses on family life, called “Down with the Kids”
- 2009 First daughter, third child, born
- 2011 *Little Bee* as Seattle Reads pick in Washington; Cleave attends as guest author
- 2012 July—publication of third novel, *Gold*, during London Summer Olympics
- October—*Little Bee* chosen as Spokane is Reading selection in Washington; Cleave attends as guest author; Cleave and Harler meet in person for first time
- Present Lives in Kingston-upon-Thames with wife and three children

VITA

Author:

Courtney A. Harler

Place and Date of Birth:

Waterbury, Connecticut; 16 November 1976

Undergraduate Schools:

Eastern Washington University, 2010-2011

Post-Baccalaureate Coursework in English Literature

Northern Kentucky University, 1994-1998

Major in Business Management, Minor in Business Administration

Degrees Awarded:

Master of Arts in English (Literature), Eastern Washington University, June 2013

Anticipated, Summa Cum Laude

Bachelor of Science in Business Management, Northern Kentucky University, May 1998

Graduated, Cum Laude

Honors and Awards:

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, Eastern Washington University, 2013

Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Eastern Washington University, 2011-2013

Presidential Scholar (Four-Year Scholarship), Northern Kentucky University, 1994-1998

Management Student of the Year, Northern Kentucky University, 1998

College of Business Student of the Year, Northern Kentucky University, 1998

Professional Experience:

Origin Technology in Business, Incorporated, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1997-2000

Information Technology Consultant as Technical Editor

Corporate Newsletter Editor

Community Service:

Vance Air Force Base Officers' Spouses' Club; Enid, Oklahoma, 2000-2005

La Leche League International; Enid, Oklahoma, 2000-2005

Mildenhall Air Force Base Officers' & Civilians' Spouses' Club; Mildenhall, Suffolk,
United Kingdom, 2005-2009

Professional Memberships:

National Council of Teachers of English, 2013

Phi Beta Lambda Business Leadership Organization, Professional Division, 1998-2000