

Aesthetics in literature is a science of beauty. In dramatic parlance, it involves the use of stage machinery, spectacle, characterization and language to denote the pursuance of the same goal. Theatre had its beginnings in ancient Greece from the dithyramb. In its most primal form, it was an occasion for dance and laughter where the communities participated. But, as used by Sophocles in his play *Antigone* or in *Oedipus Rex*, it charted the tragic dilemmas of its heroes through poetic embellishments.

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher defined drama, tragedy especially as an art, which narrated a crisis befalling a man of high rank. The importance of tragedy according to Aristotle was that it sublimated the audience's passions that of fear and pity so as to help them accept pain as an essential component principle operating in life. To the Greek, tragedy involved catharsis.

In Aristotelian tragedy, the suffering of the tragic protagonist was due to his error of judgment. Moral perversion had nothing to do with his moral, spiritual or intellectual issues. The larger issues of his society did not find much relevance within his personal tribulations. Infact, the role of society was limited to only looking at him and commenting objectively on his lapses. The audience could pity the hero. But, there was no cause for personal disasters.

But, in his Poetics, he also suggested the ideal framework for a writer of tragedy. A tragedy involved a plot. But, most importantly, it should include a single action, by which is meant that tragedy must concentrate on delineating the events that are of relevance to the life of a hero. Aristotle again emphasized upon the unities of time, place and action, favoring besides the employment of a chorus to comment on the hero's fate.

Shakespeare composed his plays in league with the principles of Aristotle for tragedy. Nonetheless, he also made suitable modifications in the prescribed framework of the Greek critic. In lieu of Aristotle's emphasis on the triad of time, place and action.

Shakespeare chose to stick more upon the unity of action. Action under European terminology was a term for the events in a play that had a bearing upon the hero's fate. It enhanced the audience's perception of truth. Shakespeare added to the story of the protagonist, a comic underpinning, to nurture a multiple angle of vision on the essential truth of life. He had also a chorus as suggested by the Greek. But, for his stage, he had separate arrangements for the common man and for the gentry.

However, Shakespeare's social and political milieu was more or less placid. Art was not required to destabilize the status quo or even to question it. All was well in the Elizabethan social and political world and there was no need for the artist to prescribe his modification to the social norm.

Soyinka's world on the other hand, detours changelessness. Soyinka's heritage proposes instead a constant negotiation between present reality and what has been handed to his society through tradition. One of the reasons why the African had to emphasize upon a constant search for a mosaic of cultures and aesthetic horizons was because the cultural and political landscape of Africa was made complicated through the incursion of colonialism there. Moreover, there were writers and academicians in Africa, like Achebe, Thiong'o and Soyinka himself, who had been trained in the Universities of the West. These writers brought with them a conscious understanding of the use to which literature was put in the social and political milieu of Europe. Though, of course, most European dramatists, novelists, essayists and writers from other literary genres did not have to actually fight with such an evil as colonialism, most of them were aware of other social evils in their societies—corruption in public life, the fact of war, of the absurdity of man's material quest after his inwards spirits have been left desiccated, the Freudian territory of the ego and id, the problem of unemployment, of the promises of socialism and the increasing frustration of the young people of Britain and elsewhere who could not get

jobs because they were not educated in the traditional bastions of fame-Oxford and Cambridge. Most of these writers like Bertolt Brecht, Arnold Wesker etc were also moved to comment upon the problems of inequality, of labor, of the crisis of the workers as they fought to survive in a system that had nothing for them.

Soyinka, after he came back to Nigeria realized that the greatest crisis facing Africa was colonialism. As a writer, he had not only to express the dilemmas of individuals at a personal level but also point to the need of his society to confront the destabilizing of its culture, brought about by imperialism. As an artist, Soyinka needed to suggest the traditions of Africa to question the presumptions of the colonizers. As a dramatist again, he had to represent this confrontation in creatively adequate terms. Soyinka understood that for the African, a belief in their ancient responses to social and communal crisis should not tantamount to a return to a platonic idyll of a nation untainted by colonialism. Instead, it should bring people together. Soyinka makes his dramas a contesting ground of many ideologies. Also, he combines the aesthetic framework of the West with those of Africa and the Orient to suggest the common responses of societies to large and metaphorical uprooting of their mores, their stable conditions of life.

For a writer in a post-colonial world, writing therefore becomes an act of negotiation between divergent cultural systems and representative arts. Art today has a social and moral relevance. It relies upon truth and beauty as always, but presents, both of these in a new light. To the Europeans, beauty and truth necessarily denote a mimesis of reality. Drama and literature describes life through a heightening of the imagination. Poetry is a metaphor and an addendum to experience. It concatenates the symbolic connection between an ideal and its routine manifestation.

In Soyinka's plays, the hero is a part of his society. He acts as the audience expects

him to. African drama, even before the arrival of Soyinka was a social act. Communities, organized theatres. Even in the performance of his dramas, Soyinka keeps his audience in mind. That is why, his images and sounds, use of lights and music in his plays incorporate Yoruba traditions of theatre.

In his acclaimed work Myth, Literature and the African World and even in his Art, Dialogue and Outrage, Soyinka states that tragedy for the Yoruba is a matter of regaining his lost essence. Infact, Soyinka's unique concept of theatre springs also from his people's belief that their gods are not perfect as the Greeks would believe it to be theirs and must constantly come in touch with men to regain their lost perfection. Ogun according to Soyinka is also the drive of man's ecstatic jouissance, and is therefore placed opposite to "Obatala"(ADO 21). Obatala, the Yoruba deity parallels Apollo the Greek god. Like Apollo, Obatala is serene and composed. But, Obatala is also the deity of "inner essence" and unlike Apollo, does not promulgate "illusions"(ADO 21). In this regard, it would clarify matters to quote Soyinka's own concept of tragic theatre:

Obatala finds expression, not in Nietzsche's Apollonian 'mirror of enchantment' but as a statement of world resolution [...]. Yoruba traditional art is not ideational however, but 'essential.' It is not the idea (in religious arts) that is transmitted into wood or interpreted in music or movement, but a quintessence of inner being, a symbolic interaction of the many aspects of revelations (within a universal context) with their moral apprehensions (ADO 22)

Within the accepted corpus of Yoruba theatrical space, that Soyinka calls the "chthonic realm," "the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate mix of death and becoming," (ADO 22) the dramatist incorporates elements of modern psychology. Infact, each of the gods that Soyinka

presents in his theatre, has a correspondence with a modern psychosexual principle, a specific aspect of Lacanian subjectivity. Orisa-nla's shattering in the void shows that like the old Yoruba god, modern people mostly carry their identity as given to them by the others. Yet, these 'others,' cannot give man a true idea of himself or what he truly is. Man becomes alienated from himself, and his identity is broken, as if into many fragments of a mirror. Obatala's drunken errors, while molding new human bodies, again show how difficult it is for man to get a real sense of himself, surpassing the ego, put on him by the others.

But, Soyinka's drama of ritual space and becoming also incorporates present social co-ordinates-the political troubles in Nigeria, and in other parts of the world. It negotiates between a society's concepts of itself as handed down to it by tradition, with newer modes of apprehending reality. In Dance and the King's Horseman, for example, the idea of ritual space is elaborated. In the drama, it has both a spiritual and essential matrix as much as a material one. Olunde's confrontation of the Pilkings, his challenge of their political ideologies based upon hatred and misrecognition of the black man's culture, puts forth the idea, that for a tragic protagonist, knowledge is not a matter of indecisions as in Hamlet, or for that matter of blind ego as in Lear. The Yoruba's tragic conspectus does not allow individuals to feel their way towards an unknown ideal. Destiny is as much social as it is political. Theatre shows the individual's response to his social commitments, his ability to get beyond the peregrinations of his fixity with himself, his body and its worldly needs.

Myths therefore comment using parallels. For a writer in a third world country, they examine the predominating culture of oppression, its monologic forms of narration. They articulate dissent and offer to have a dialogue with the entrenched power formations.

Soyinka's favored deity Ogun accommodates not only all "alien material or abstract phenomenon within his infinitely stressed spirituality," but "iron ore", "symbol of earth's womb-energies" (ADO 24-25). Ogun's is naturally a resident of the dual prefecture of the body and the spirit, which is why, his search for a new identity, is arrived through recognition of the material conditions of life. Unlike Obatala, Ogun is not content to merely feel his way to knowledge and wisdom. Ogun's expressive arc is therefore conducive to dance and laughter, to spectacle, sounds and theatre. It has place in it for a society's visualization of the actual process of negotiation between the tragic protagonist and a vast and "incomprehensible reality" (ADO 24).

Soyinka dramas has place in it for music and drums. But, his use of music is Yorubic and must be looked up as a part of the holistic oeuvre of language, sounds and poetry. Like Yoruba poetry, Soyinka's music is highly charged, "myth embryonic" and "symbolic" (25). But, as a dramatist aware of the theatrical patterns of other nations, including Europe, Soyinka makes his music various. To the drums and songs of Nigeria, he adds the sounds of the Europe's concert party. But, there is also the addition of the European brass band, the military tones of colonial and neo-colonial soldiers on duty.

As part of his overall strategy to disconcert and pulverize audiences from their tried inanity again, Soyinka infects his dramas with the sadistic noises of a toilet flushed as in A Play of Giants.

Sounds of bayonets, the opening and closing of iron doors, people salivating under mental and physical duress and the noise of bullets fired on political detainees magnify the overall sinister forces in his dramas that fragment societies in the wake of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Soyinka's achievement, however eschews the "sterile limits of particularization" (ADO 26). Instead it draws together possible responses to social and communal crisis through an intermingling of multi-racial and multi-ethnic aesthetic

frameworks, allowing nations and geographies separated from one another to come together in the common problems of man. Similar and more invidious gestures—the brilliant use of lights and darkness to allot spaces connotative of bondage and freedom, individual or the masses ensure a polygonal viewing.

There is in Soyinka's plays scope for the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and Artaudian voyeurism, Brechtian alienation and Beckett's absurdity. Through the atmosphere of the carnival, Soyinka alludes to the communal and social submergence of hierarchies in an atmosphere of songs, dance and camaraderie. But songs and dances in Soyinka's plays are not there for themselves. They actually respond to the intrusions and disruptions in the momentum of the carnivalesque. The manner in which the praise singers of Elesin deal with the interference of the colonial authority in their celebrations in Death is a case in point and has been elaborated in the chapter 'The Role of Myths in Soyinka's Aesthetics of Action' of the present work.

Moreover for the setting of the plays, Soyinka eschews any massive frameworks. In the Dance the main stage is the actual market place itself. Even when the Pilkings dance around a room, attention of the audience is fixed to their costumes and particular choice of partners in a ball. In The Road, the stage is complete with the church, the "Askident Store" and the road itself. Infact, it is the road that is a metaphor for Nigeria and other newly historically liberated colonies of Africa. In the Play of Giants, audience only must gaze upon the dictators on stage, study their words and gestures that refer back to some particular situation in their state or continent. But here the spectacle of the drama is enforced through the image of the sculptor wrapped in bandages from the beatings of the dictators.

Again like Artaud, Soyinka does not rely on set texts to enact his plays. Even when he adopts plays written by other writers, he modifies them to suit the particular social and

historical co-ordinates of Nigeria and other coerced people worldwide. But, in all eventualities, Soyinka's theatre creates its own "metaphysics of speech, gestures and expressions" (Bentley, Theory 56).

Brechtian alienation techniques are again to be found in Soyinka's play The Road for example. The play is unique in raising the problem of communication itself. The Professor's quest for the "Word" in scraps of paper, his horseplay with the road sign "bend" which puts many lorry drivers to their deaths, illustrate that words by themselves are social constructs and must be constantly reimbursed in the depths of the human spirit to carry conviction in the heart of truth.

Again absurdity is obviously at stake in Madman and the Specialists. Soyinka's Madman summarily negates all prior assumptions of communities on which much of their conventions are built. For humanity, to arrive at a fuller comprehension of the real is through recognition of the multiplicity of all experiences, allowing opposites in terms of social and psychological parameters to clash and evolve something new. The absence of chronological sequence, melodramatic surprise, the loss of homogeneity of individual characters that change their natures in the front of our own eyes again characterize the play. This aspect of the play has been explained in the main chapters of the present work.

In addition, Soyinka's action has social and political intentions. It behoves syncretism and hybridism and disavows essentialism. It seeks to have a re-look at conventions both of Nigeria and Europe. At the same time, it brings home the point that the future of man rests upon a proper amalgamation of the European objectivity and African participatory reason and intuition.

In the introductory chapter entitled 'Frameworks of Soyinka's Ideology,' I have tried to show that for a dramatist writing in a neo-colonial phase, every act of writing becomes

in the end, an act of negotiation with entrenched power positions and so hobnobs with resistance. The socio-political and economic determinants which form the background of Soyinka's art is also the reason why his art is so deeply ingrained with questions of liberty and a possible human appraisal of dogmas and conventions. Consequently, the Soyinkan aesthetics evolves out of a belief that the traditional moorings of a nation need to be capitulated to the task of bonding people together. But a rational estimate of the lacunas underlying a nation's social configuration should be the benchmark of any applicatory determinants of art.

The second chapter entitled 'Critical Scene,' shows that a critical appraisal of the Soyinkan aesthetic must also take into consideration the fact that Soyinka was not out to evolve an ethical doctrinism to supplant the insidious incursion of colonialism. If his art is ambivalent and lack an easy correspondence with simplicity, it is because drama and literature in Nigeria places a supreme emphasis upon syncretism and hybridism to disembowel false axioms. Moreover, the thrust of Soyinka is that any resolution to the present crisis of neo-imperialism must be sought in a nation's own resources, without neglecting what is best in others.

Chapter three entitled 'Politics and Aesthetics,' discusses the responsibilities of a writer in a coerced society as he articulates for his people and other oppressed societies elsewhere, the idioms of liberation. The art of such a writer must however not merely delineate the complementariness of human societies across national and geographical divides, but also implant the idea that any resistance to oppression must eschew mere hatred. But, because regimes opposed to human liberty put a premium on art, drama, poetry or the novel must be so embellished as to convey the rot all around with as minimum apparatus as possible. Poetry must have the same privileges as dialogues and songs to disconcert the straitjackets of thoughts and conventional platitudes.

Chapter four is entitled 'The Role of Myths in Soyinka's Aesthetics of Action.' It shows how Soyinka uses myths to undermine the false hierarchies of racial divides between nations and societies. Soyinka relates tradition to the present turmoil of men. But, myths in Soyinka also bring home the point that people irrespective of their colors and complexities are fundamentally the same. Myths in the plays of the dramatist also disrupt the 'no' and 'negation' of rules, through a recourse to the preverbal chora of the mother, which though providing the foundation for the conscious world of the father, yet, disrupts the latter in uncanny ways.

The final chapter, 'Language and Style' brings opposite linguistic parameters. There is the use of Yoruba proverbs. The use of English is not given up either. Infact, Soyinka is supremely gifted of a writer in English as Achebe is in his own native language. Thiong'o would only prefer to write in Kenyan. Soyinka has no dislike for the English language per se. Soyinka does not write to express a wounded African personality. For him, writing is a social act. It brings people together.