

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. 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 in particular 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 see pain as an essential component principle operating in life. To the Greeks, tragedy involved catharsis.

Infact, the most seminal contribution of Aristotle to the concept of tragedy was his theory of catharsis. Tragedy was supposed to imitate actions that were grave and serious. In the process, it was also believed to instigate in the spectators, emotions of pity and fear. Such emotions were subsequently sublimated, as has been already said before. According to Aristotle, pity turned to fear when the suffering of great man appeared to be those of the spectators themselves. But because, Greek drama always projected the uncalled for sufferings of its heroes who in their dignity and humanity were raised above ordinary men, audiences in Greek theatre could objectively study their men on stage. Simultaneously, the distance between the actors and the spectators always gave the latter a chance to remove themselves from their immediate reality. The misfortunes of the heroes on stage were pitiable. But, it aroused no sense of personal disaster.

When Nietzsche gave expression to his concept of tragedy, he posited a relationship between ritual and drama. Drama, Nietzsche said, evolved out of the Dionysian dithyramb. Rituals were the symbolic expression of individual and universal conflicts in nature. Through dramas, an individual became aware of his membership in a community of people as also his separate identity from it.

The English critic, G. Wilson Knight accepted Nietzsche's concept of drama and the metaphorical links between theatre and the ritual. But, Knight extended Nietzsche's preoccupation with Greek theatre to investigate neo-classic, Wagnerian and Elizabethan plays. Moreover, he emphasized upon the psychological conflicts of the dramatic personas on stage, stressing also upon the psychosexual conflicts.

Aristotle's tragic conspectus however found its mainstay in action in and through the mental life of the heroes who expressed a rational persona. Actions in tragedy represented the inward and essential activities of the soul. External events were relevant in drama in so far as it helped to heighten the emotional and mental dilemmas of its characters. The imagination of the tragic artist helped him to accentuate the dilemmas of his heroes and so in tragic drama, reality was not only implanted. It was also enlarged and broadened. It was transmuted. Objects of the senses were fused with things of the thought. In the end, drama expressed the heightened awareness of its characters.

In Greek drama, the spectator is lifted out of himself. He becomes one with the suffering humanity. He forgets his personal sorrows. But he also knows that what he sees before him is inevitable. It stands in organic relation with what has gone before. Tragedy according to this idea, acts on the feelings, not on the will.

Soyinka's enlarged tragic conspectus incorporates the feelings as well as the will. Man should fight with himself, his inward desire for self-preservation to plunge ahead towards his dissolution and thereby acquire a new personal and communal identity. Consequently, action in Yoruba metaphysics has both an inward and outward manifestation. Placid resolutions of tragic dilemmas are not internally attained.

To the Greeks, the success or failure of a work of art depended upon the use of illusions. Art expressed, not the objective world, as it is, but only its sensible appearances. Consequently, it had to sever itself from material reality. Here lay the secret of its emancipating power.

A poet working with illusions preferred moreover probable impossibilities to possible improbabilities.

But, the Soyinkan aesthetic, which is inspired by the Yoruba metaphysics, has less scope for illusions at least in the European sense. Soyinka does not entrust himself with the task of embellishing the feelings of his spectators- their sympathies and detachment from the actor on stage with poetic novelties. Dialogues, songs and dances in his plays always project the difficulties encountered by the tragic victim and his followers in bridging the space that hold the key to a new order of being. The fecundity of the playwright consist in trying to express a numinous and incomprehensible reality against which man stands and has less to do with certainties. The imaginative heightening of reality in Greek theatre that supports the fictive scaffolding, "whereupon fictitious nature spirits" (ADO 22) are placed has a less sympathetic place with the Nigerian.

The chorus in Nigerian theatre is different in its function from the one in European drama. In Yoruba plays, it does not copy actualities (ADO 22). It contains rather the essence of that transitional abyss that Soyinka defines as the 'fourth stage'. The protagonist resists or at least attempts to do so, his final plunge into the chasm. At an individual level such a resistance defines the conflict in the person between two opposing value systems- his instinct of self-preservation with its attendant desires and then his community's claim upon him that desires his complete annihilation.

From the moment of his plunge into the chasm to his final observation of himself and resolution of his conflicts he has traversed many worlds. His initial hesitation to part with his individually and socially constructed persona is his human predicament. But, once he decides to let his earthly aspirations subside momentarily, he becomes the "mediant voice of the god" (ADO 23) with whom he has a parallel. The protagonist's final re-assembly is not without a consciousness of what he has achieved. It is through this awareness of his social role and his individual commitment to it, his convergence and disjunction from the world of the spirits and also from that of mundane actualities that he brings together aspects of his self that had no expression initially.

In Nietzsche's tragic vision, a tragic protagonist fights between his individual self and his self as part of the community. Nietzsche's community however is only those who live and does not have the variation of Yoruba plays, which talks of the living, the dead and the unborn. In Nietzsche's world-view again, there is no possibility for the embodiment of the transitional abyss as in Nigerian theatre.

European drama allows for the intuitive groping towards wisdom. Yoruba theatre dismisses such an opportunity for the tragic actor. The tragic actor must

undergo some painful ritual, socially organized to actually reach out to a new identity for himself and his community. His mental and emotional crisis must have a social expression. If in European drama, the link between the actor and the spectator is the dramatist himself who places his audience at a hierarchically superior position of vision in the theatre, Yoruba drama makes the author redundant in so far as such an opportunity for the playwright may ever arise. Every single performance is a new beginning for the actors as much as it is for the spectators. Moreover, the embodiment of the godly presences in Yoruba theatre only allows the audience to believe that newer identities are round the corner and may be reached easily.

Soyinka favors Ogun, the Yoruba god because the latter is the "first symbol of the alliance of disparities when, from earth itself, he extracted elements for the subjugation of chthonic chaos" (ADO 25). Ogun preceded the other deities when he plunged headlong into the cauldron of death and becoming. But, he could decide for himself to the point of his flight into the transitional abyss. After that, the only thing he was sure of was the possibility of his experience in the abyss.

When Soyinka began to write, he accepted the metaphorical relationship between the experience in drama and that in the rituals. But ritual was also the medium of bringing forth a revolutionary social, political and individual awareness in the spectators. In and through his participation in a ritual, a spectator first loses his sense of himself. Subsequently, he creates a new sense of his individuation based upon the evolving dramatic action, revealed cultural values, audience response and a mythic awareness.

But most importantly, rituals in dramas conveyed the tragic victim's anguished despair in trying to bridge the divide that lay between himself and his community

and a new identity. Rituals says Soyinka also transmit "the primal transmission of the god's despair" (ADO 25).

Myths in Yoruba theatre expresses at a cosmic level the disenchantments in the human psyche. Gods as much as the men are imperfect and must continuously interact with each other to attain a rounded wholeness of vision. For the gods, it is important to instigate themselves into a human order to bridge their imperfections. Men on their part must constantly reach for their gods to attain a new identity. Myths in Yoruba theatre are the organized communal expressions of some vast, numinous and incomprehensible reality. When incorporated in dramas, they naturally call upon the participant actors and the society that follows him, to accept and challenge the unknown. They institute change. Naturally, the language of rituals are "highly charged, symbolic and myth embryonic" (ADO 25). They do not have the one to one correspondence with the mundane actualities of life, as in European drama.

It is also important to understand therefore that the incorporation of rituals in Yoruba theatre limits the scope for the tragic victim to act his part. As has been said already, an actor on stage may act his part to the point of his assimilation into some unknown sphere. In spite of this, an actor's Promethean urge to rebel against his incomplete identity says Soyinka, channels his despair into a creative purpose. His sorrows need not break him down. Rather, he may hope to combat an unexpected reality with vision, fortitude and conviction.

At this point it may be useful to bring to summary Europe's estimate of music. Music was held by Aristotle, as by other Greeks to be the most representative of the arts. It was a direct image, a copy of character. The emotion it suggested corresponded little with a reality outside itself. It could speak in favor of the

general and elementary moods of feeling- anger and mildness as well as courage and all their opposites. Music could again reflect character and could even mould or influence it. Each note was an indication of an inward agitation.

In Yoruba theatre, music does not merely express moods of anger and mildness, courage or fear. Instead, it expresses the severance between man and his essence that Soyinka talks of in his fourth stage. It similarly expresses the agitations of the gods to reach out to men. Tragic music says Soyinka is the "stricken cry of man's blind soul as he flounders in the void and crashes through a deep abyss of a-spirituality and cosmic rejection" (ADO 24). Moreover, "it is an echo from that void; the celebrant speaks, sings and dances in authentic archetypal images within the abyss" (ADO 24). Music is the resonance of this unknown gulf and not as in European theatre a direct expression of the will.

The conjugality between divine and human spheres in Yoruba society explains also why men look unto gods with camaraderie and irreverence, just as departure to ancestorhood is marked by bawdiness in the midst of grief. Consequently, music in Yoruba theatre is not merely solemn. It is also humorous and is embellished with irony.

Aristotle had a faith in the power of hearing and far less in the other senses, least of all in sight. Shapes and colors were not believed to illustrate the dimensions of the soul. But, dance was accepted as capable of imitating character and emotion. Moreover, it was supposed to harmonize the soul of the spectators and offer a curative value to their passions.

But the Greek had again no high regards for poetry. Like all Greeks, he did not consider poetry as capable of adequately illustrating reality already known.

However, it was expected to bring forth the inward emotions of characters in all their diverse manifestations. Poetry, music and dance constituted in Aristotle a triad that imitated by means of rhythm. A poet had to have a considerable understanding of the allied arts of painting and dance, which is why Aeschylus was the inventor of many orchestric attitudes.

As a post-colonial and post-modern again, Soyinka accepted the traditional forms of Yoruba theatre. But, he could also draw upon other sources of art- poetry, novel and the essay, influences of Shakespeare, Brecht and Artaud to say a few, to heighten and enlarge his humanistic and tragic vision. Ultimately, Soyinka writes out of his humanitarian concern. He desires to bring people and nationalities together. Nonetheless, the need to converge aesthetic resources is significant in view of the vast mass of humanity oppressed and coerced world over. The colors and manners of oppressive regimes in different parts of the sphere may be different. But the concerns of all writers is to truly illuminate the crisis underlying man's existence and survival in all corners of the globe.

It is not without reason therefore that Wole Soyinka remains one of the most respected and enigmatic literary figures in the firmament of post-colonial African writing today. Though he has written poems and fictions, it is his dramas that remain the epicenter of his moral and creative being and through them he articulates his visions of a new human society, free from the rampaging of human dignity and freedom that has become quite consistent with the dominant parlances of 'civilization' the world over. His creative position has involved a process of artistic and literary decolonization, involving a radical dismantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. This has frequently been accompanied with the demand of a new social

and political reality that would again be free from the colonial taint. But this affirmation of one's cultural values alongside acknowledging the staying power of European logic even in societies where formal colonialism has ended is desirable and at times inevitable. Consequently as a post-colonial, Soyinka is a hybrid of a writer allowing for the articulations of disparate communities and cultures, ignoring none and yet proposing that the process of change is through a dialogue between the opposites. Decolonization in his case becomes a constant process and not an arrival. As George Lamming says:

It invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversions of them: between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dismantling' (Post-Colonial Discourse 9)

What Soyinka challenges and combats about the Eurocentric discourses is its approaches towards literary and cultural absolutism. As a post-colonial, he fragments and disconcerts, such basic hegemonies and assumptions to unleash new grounds of looking at the order of things. For Soyinka literary discourses of resistance does not simply issue forth through narrative, against a clearly definable set of power relations. Instead it is produced and reproduced in and through communities of readers and through the mediating structures of their own culturally specific histories. As such, his project for a post-modern as different from a post-colonial world is not synonymous with the essentialist retrieval of his national essences howsoever charming they may sound, for there is always the abiding thought that essentialism is itself a form of hegemony and is structured around an incrementally monotheistic discourse that disembowels the hybridity that Soyinka favored and in fact practiced as a writer in the post-modern space.

This hybridity can also be restated in a different manner: through the critical parlance of post-structuralism. Post-structuralism declares the author dead, post-modernism does not admit any such thought. The authority of the post-modern texts on this count comes from the concept of ambivalence-the ability to see all sides of an image, to defer judgment and refuse agency. But, this ambivalence is not disruptive of social, political and even literary action. Soyinka does not give the impression that for him morality is non-existent, futile, a mere guffaw of words sliding into incremental regression. Indeed there is an affirmation of what is positive or at least wanted if humanity is to un-shuffle the debilitating categorization which racialism more often than not implants in the colonized and the oppressed.

But before one ventures any further in these terms it must be worthwhile to narrate in brief the socio-political conditions that led Soyinka to an affirmation of resistance to unshingle the possibility of new beginnings.

Social and Cultural conditions:

Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka was born on July the 13th, 1934 in Ijebu Isara. His parents, Ayo and Eniola, came from adjoining kingdoms Ijebu and Egba and his father was a school supervisor. One aspect of his mother is glimpsed briefly in a conversation Soyinka carried on with an interviewer

My own mother, for instance, was a terror. Not by nature, but she was a trader, and I know that even she, who was a rather gentle person, when she got fed up and wanted to collect her debts from her customers –it is no joke-suddenly she was transformed. (In Person 113-114)

Naturally, even as a child, Soyinka could feel in his pulse the throbbing vitality of his own people, their culture and social mores and the events of his childhood memories were grafted in his consciousness and this he could not negate. At home, however, he had a devout Christian upbringing and in his book, Ake: Years of Childhood, he recalls that how even as a child he would reach out and catch every whisper that figured an 'oro', or an egungun or an abiku. The masquerades of egungun attracted him the most and it was a concept, which the Yoruba people amongst whom Soyinka was born, revered and respected. Soyinka could feel that something was uncanny about it and when he looked for explanations then, he usually returned with unsatisfactory answers. His initial response to the enactment of egungun is narrated in his conversations with a young friend Osiki:

"Can I come back as an egungun if I die?"

I asked Osiki.

"I don't think so", he said, "I've never heard of any Christian becoming an egungun".

"Do they speak English in the egungun world?"

I now wanted to know.

Osiki shrugged. "I don't know. Our own egungun doesn't speak English"

It seemed important to find out. The stained glass window behind the altar of St' Peter's Church displayed the figures of three white man, dressed in robes which were very clearly egungun robes. Their face was exposed, which was unlike our very own egungun, but I felt that this was something very peculiar to the country from which those white people came (Soyinka, Ake14).

Soyinka's personal favorite was the figure in the middle.

Reminiscing his father he has this to say:

He was called S.A. from his initials [...]. For some reason few called him by his own name, and for a long time I wondered, I wondered if he had any.
(Soyinka, Ake 14)

This quote is important in illustrating the fact that even as a boy, Soyinka was becoming aware of the accommodative functions of Yoruba culture-its ability to withstand oppositions and yet retain the force of its beliefs. There was for example a colonial vindictiveness against native wisdom. Much western thought categorized African social, political and cultural values as driven by impulse and blind passions. Colonialism desecrated the black man's heritage because it was not driven by sheer objectivity. The real issue for an artist writing in a neo-colonial space was not that Europe's cultural vision was fundamentally different from that of Africa. Instead, the beauty of his craft had to be an address in the dialectics of a human art that without being parochial became in essence a repository of divergent forms and cultural aficionados. In a conversation at Washington Seattle, Soyinka has expressed this need to sum and integrate disparate political and cultural zones in an effort to usher the new man

My categories do not seek to eliminate the human being, or control the fluid operations of the creative mind, but rather to provide a context in which the man can be seen at work...I hope that at the end the reader will feel the current of a life which is not pursuing different courses separated by islands and delta flats, but a strong river, full of eddies and subtle flows. But all one stream, one river, one flow. (In Person 113-114)

At the University College of Ibadan, he met an eclectic band of friends: John Pepper Clark, Michael Echeruo and Nkem Nwankwo who turned the university into an intellectual center fostering the ethics of resistance against the exploitative and corrupt regimes of the time.

In the University of Leeds, Soyinka met Professor G. Wilson Knight whose philosophical and metaphysical ideas he found congenial. Professor Knight in his book The Golden Labyrinth mentions how an origin of an idea in his student Soyinka influenced him in the writing of an approach to Lear. But while Knights viewed the origin of tragedy of tragedy in the ritual dithyramb and was concerned with audience effects, for Soyinka, the basis of tragedy has been mediated upon by the ontological premises of Yoruba theatre which believes in the simultaneity of three strata of existence: the living, the dead the unborn. But Knights nevertheless inspired Soyinka to write dramas of action, which could be at the level of form and also technique.

After graduating from the University of Leeds, in 1957, he spent eighteen months as a play reader at the Royal Court Theatre in London, where he came into contact with the English dramatic revival of the late 1950's: John Osborne, John Arden, Arnold Wesker and Harold Pinter as well as with the traditional English drama and the new avant-garde influences, such as Samuel Beckett and Bertolt Brecht, that were arriving from the continent.

As Soyinka turned to look at the African continent, he discovered large scale uprooting of people from their own lands, a deepening political and human crisis, intimidation and assassination. Although he was radicalized by his later civil war experience and did not even consider joining a political party until 1979, his career

as a publicist, controversialist, and political activist began in the 1960's. He waged a fierce campaign in the Nigerian Press against censorship, corruption and repression; used his theatre group to produce satiric political revues, often in barricaded buildings against armed thugs. He also resigned from both his radio series, which he was doing for the local Nigerian station, and from his lectureship at the University of Ife in 1963, when he discovered that all forms of creativity and expression was constantly jeopardized and twisted by the power mongers, the neo-imperialists who were then merely doing what the colonialists had done before, berate human freedom and liberty all in the name of keeping the country in shape. He was subsequently arrested (and later acquitted) on a charge of holding up a radio station and substituting his own tape for Chief Samuel Akintola's victory speech after the rigger Western Region elections of 1965. Though he was not subjected to torture other than the chains round his ankles for a couple of days, he considered the detention itself as an offence. The chain was an affront to human pride and dignity and he recalls his reaction in finding himself in bondage:

I sensed a vivid contradiction in all this, [...] in my human self-awareness and self-definition. In fact one might say that never until this moment did that self-definition become so clear as when I viewed these chains on my ankles. The definition was a negative one: I defined myself as a being for whom the chains are not; as finally as a human being [...]. Abstract intellectual fetters are rejected as passionately (Soyinka, The Man Died 40).

But, he also understood that he could not remain silent over so much of depredation and spoil of human liberty. The reason that he gave for his political commitment was related to his insistence on human liberty and on his integrity as a human being. To this can be added his special sense of responsibility. In 1973 he

said, " I have a special responsibility, because I can smell the reactionary sperm years before the rape of the nation takes place" [interview article in the Guardian, quoted by Hunt]

The need to resist and confront then became a seminal principle with the writer, an abiding interjection for the defining of his identity as a human. At that hour of crisis, social activists and political thinkers all throughout Africa was beginning to streamline their strategy of opposing the façade of imperialism and neo-colonial subjugations.

Soyinka understood that it was futile to deny imperialism or its objective metaphors. It would be impossible again to blindly ape the West. If Euro-centric logic must be assimilated into African sensibilities, a means has to be found where native wisdom can co-exist with what has been imported from the outside. In his dramas for example, the Nigerian combines an objective mimesis of reality with some fast and furious African dances and songs. This is evident in the play The Lion and the Jewel, when Sidi and the other village girls mime the arrival of a photographer in his motor- car. The enactment of the girls is accompanied by the playing of African drums and Yoruba songs. But, there is also the ample use of dance on this occasion.

Soyinka's intellectual and aesthetic position may be understood however through a critical understanding of Fanon.

Frantz Fanon and his position on national culture as contained in the Wretched of the Earth, represents his most orchestrated articulation of the cultural implications of colonialism and its anti-thesis, the anti-colonial struggle. As is characteristic of the other phases of his writings, his views on colonialism and neo-

imperialism takes cognizance of socio-economic motives that shaped the process of exploitation and decided all aspects of the life of the colonized. Proceeding from the familiar premise that cultural emasculation of the subjugated group is the necessary correlate which makes colonialism successful, Fanon goes on to state his way of producing a pattern of cultural evolution among the colonized both during and after the colonial era.

His schema advances three distinct stages and they can be given as follows.

- 1) The assimilationist phase in which the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power.
- 2) The cultural nationalist phase in which the native intellectual remembers his authentic identity and kicks against attempts to assimilate him
- 3) The nationalist phase, which is also the fighting phase in which the native man of culture after having trying to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people. (Amuta, Post-Colonial Reader 158-159)

Soyinka was conscious of the hard-hitting dialectics of European logic. He also remembered the culture of his own people. But, he knew that it would be novice to seek every answer to the social and political turmoil of Africa in its own terms. At the same time, he had a responsibility of making his people aware of the drawbacks of their own thinking if there were any- to point to the schisms in the native armor: its manner of perceiving social and political realities other than that of Africa. Simultaneously, it was the prerogative of art to express a human world that accentuates variations and promote an exchange between nationalities divided from one another.

To this end, it is insignificant to define cultural nationalism through hatred. Predicated on a negation of racially inflicted insults and psychological injuries, such nationalism has political significance mainly at a racial or at best a continental level. The idea of creative revolution is not a teeth for a teeth or an eye for an eye. New ideas and social patterns require that hatred is disowned at all costs. But a certain amount of hatred against dominating hierarchies is inevitable in all coercive social configurations. Fanon was sufficiently realistic to admit the legitimacy and historical necessity of this phase in the consciousness of the native. But he also warned his countryman, not fall back on essentialism.

Like Fanon, Cabral too recognized the socio-economic determinants of colonialism and proposed a redefinition in the relationship between history and culture. The province of history according to the writer is to illustrate the contradictions and the conflicts in the life of a society. Culture has this prerogative that it can propose a dynamic synthesis to resolve conflicts. The main thrust of Cabral was then to suggest a reciprocal dynamics between culture and history, to a point when each term remains hardly distinguishable and their dimensions are blurred. Thus, the national liberation struggle as a historical act also becomes an act of cultural resistance.

At any moment, depending on internal and external factors determining the evolution of the society in question, cultural resistance may take on new forms in order to fully contest foreign domination (Amuta, Post-Colonial Reader 160).

Soyinka was influenced in this attitude by the works of Cabral. For Soyinka, cultural nationalism had more forms than a general love for Africa per se. Nationalism also did not connote a mere acceptance of foreign modes of social



renewal and progress, like Marxism for example. It could not be similarly other material dialectics that did not consider the particular conditions of Africa, when instituted. African must move forward and a vision for its progress must combine the best in the traditions of Africa with that of Europe.

Cabral was a Marxist and a Guinean intellectual, and Soyinka defines the former as a "theoretical pariah to Marxists" since he did not take the conventional theory of Marxism per se but rather sought to reconcile the dogmatism of Marxism "with the objective realities he had observed between received theory and observed reality" (ADO 293). That a mire of theoretical pretensions are in their own form, a dangerous extremism, snaring to destabilize human liberty is brought home by Soyinka when he alludes to the betrayal of hundreds of men in the Cuban Revolution, by their own comrades, "manipulated by theoretical purists" (Soyinka, ADO 295). That strict Marxism will not do for Africa and Nigeria for that matter has even been accepted and made aware by Mr. Geoffrey Hunt in his book Revolution in Guinea (56). Soyinka quotes the remark made by Mr. Hunt:

We agree that history in our country is the result of class struggle, but we have our own class struggles in our own country; the moment imperialism arrived and colonialism arrived, it made us leave our history and enter another history. Obviously we agree that the class struggle has continued but it has continued in a different way; our whole people, is struggling against the ruling class of imperialist countries. (ADO 295)

The location of the motive force of history is according to Soyinka an imperative in the process of liberation strategy of any serious revolutionary- it affects decisions on development, tempo, methods of indoctrination and even external alliances in the conduct of struggle.

But there is also Ngugi wa Thiong'o who predicates an anti-imperialist struggle on a socialist ideological leanings. He believes the colonial usurpation of native culture has meant an undermining of the people's belief in themselves and make them look up to European cultures, languages and the arts for a measurement of themselves and their activities. Unfortunately, he says, "the same continues in the Africa of today." (Thiong'o, Moving the Center 44)

Soyinka however does not accept Thiong'os political ideologies per se. Unlike Thiong'o, he finds any mechanism of social and political progress based upon isms, completely redundant.

Thiong'o laments the fact that independence has not really meant any real progress for the common man and replaced colonial hegemony by another one- a vicious neo-colonial arrangement. So defunct has been these new rulers that some of them even conceded their territorial integrity to U.S. military forces. At times they have done so only for a small fee paid by the erstwhile colonial intruders. The greatest onslaught of these new regimes of rule has been on the authentic culture of Africa with the result that a facetious parading of cultural objects became the norm. But against this hopelessness there was this consolation that there was another tradition of African culture. Even under colonial rule a part of the authentic culture of Africa survived and through the use of songs, dances and, poetry, drama, spoke of the traumas of the common man as he struggled against the appalling conditions of work demanding his rights. Whether in poetry or dance or drama, these cultural mores of the people looked to the past for inspiration. But traditional forms were always infused with new life.

At a time when the freedom of press was curtailed in most of the African nations, it was indeed difficult for the writer to write. One way left for him was to

remain silent. The other was to restrict him to use his craft to tune itself with the official machine. In either case he becomes redundant to new beginnings and fails to fulfill his functions. He courts despair and languishes to the end. Hence the way most of the intellectual workers living and writing in Africa, proposed themselves was to realign with the resistance patterns of the ordinary man: their political, economic and cultural process for survival.

But there were also other hopes at hand. Revolutions throughout the erstwhile colonial regimes proved that a people culturally and socially alive to their realities could refashion their survival patterns. Chief among these were the triumph of Chinese Revolution in 1949 and also the nature of Indian freedom struggle and its subsequent emancipation in 1947.

The fifties were also the decade of the Korean revolution, the Vietnamese defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu, the Cuban people's ouster of Batista, the stirrings of heroic independence and liberation movements in Asia, in Caribbean and Latin America. In Africa the same period saw the Nasserite national assertion in Egypt culminating in the triumphant nationalization of the Suez Canal, armed struggles by the Kenya Land and the Freedom Army, Mau Mau against British colonialism and by FLN against French colonialism in Nigeria. Besides there was also an intensified protest against apartheid in South Africa, a resistance it responded to with the Sharpeville massacre. Receiving his Nobel Prize, he delivered a lecture at Stockholm he referred to humanity at the threshold of twenty-first century, about to celebrate its coming of age. Appropriately titled 'Black Patience is not infinite', the address was dedicated to Nelson Mandela. Soyinka referred to the significance that a black African was receiving the award for the first time:

There is a gruesome appropriateness in the fact that an African, a Black man should stand here today, in the same year that the progressive Prime Minister of this country was murdered, in the same year as Samora Machel was brought down on the territory of the desperate, last ditch guardians of the theory of racial superiority which has brought so much misery to our common humanity (Africa Newsletter 66).

This speech of Soyinka is important in many respects. One: in alluding to honoring a black man at the same time that atrocities were going on against them. Two, his claim that humanity is really one and that it is the duty of all of us to see that no one suffers. Finally: his hope that colonialism is on its last foot and will be replaced soon.

However, much prior to this, Ghana became free in 1957, and Nigeria itself in 1960. In other words, the 50's and 60's in Africa was a period of an emergent liberating consciousness. It was a decade of possibilities. Kwame Nkrumah was the most important cultural representative of his generation. Towards Colonial Freedom was a book that Nkrumah published at the beginning of the fifties expressing his hope that a new Ghana would be born. Most of the other writers writing in this period were assertive and defined the cultural presence of their respective homelands with a deepening conviction of pride and hope. This was a break from the apologetic stance of the pre independence writers. This decade in literature and politics however, is best summed up in the title of Peter Abraham's autobiography, Tell Freedom. David Diop's poem Africa was full of optimism and confidence

Africa tell me Africa

Is this you this back that is bent

Is this you this back that is bent

This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation

[.....]

That is Africa your Africa

That grows again patiently obstinately

And its fruit gradually acquires

The bitter taste of liberty. (quoted by Thiong'o, Moving 62)

But what many writers of the moment failed to decipher was that colonialism is an Argus eyed monster and does not necessarily has to come from the white man alone. But the ordinary people could not be blamed for equating color with rewards and specially since the operative dialectics of colonialism was tilted towards a hierarchical structure. Labor was not just labor, but black labor and similarly capital was white. This was reductionism and translated to equating all blacks under a single canonical term, it envisaged a definition of the complex variables of experience into polarities. So when Julius Nyerere defined African socialism as the attitude of the mind, he was infact representing the limiting contours of definite beliefs that has no need to perceive the changing course of history. Socialism was therefore reduced to a set of constant beliefs, moral absolutes, and not that of a historically changing economic, social and political practise.

In the beginning of the sixties other dominated colonies, many of which were in the African homeland like Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Kenya and others became free. But there were also other territories where the old style colonialism was making a last ditch effort to cling onto its fortress of power. Thus Portuguese colonialism clung tenaciously to Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. But the common men realized soon enough that the end of formal colonialism had not sufficiently

delivered them of their misfortunes. The leadership was corrupt and aided with the big imperialist powers they were holding the country to ransom

Fanon summed the character of this emergent phenomenon.

Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete forms the needs of the people in what touches bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie (Post-Colonial Reader 157).

Chinua Achebe describes the general mood of disillusionment that engulfed the writer of the period in his book A Man of the People. Through the reflections of a fictionalized narrator, Achebe sums up what went wrong with the Africa of his day:

We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us—the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loud-speakers, that the first phase of the struggle was won and that the next phase—the extension of our house—was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the

door of the shelter would subvert and break down the whole house. (Quoted by Thiong'o, Moving 67)

Achebe's novel reflects the widening despair of the intellectuals, fragmented, and suffering the consequences of the latest misrule. The other important work of the time, Ayi Kwei Armah's Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born is similarly expressive in holding forth a glum vision of human civilization with its incisive horror at the wide spread moral decay that made the African states horrendously inhospitable.

But Soyinka's aesthetic position is different from that of Achebe's. Achebe or Nkrumah laments the loss of pristine African mores and ways of life because of the colonial infringement. They dig into an imaginary cultural past. Soyinka disembowels any belief in cultural straitjackets to put forward the idea that the African civilization can only move forward in tandem with others.

The glum and profound disarray of all humane mores was acerbated in the 70's. This was the time, which signaled the transition of imperialism from the colonial to the neo-colonial stage with a staggering speed and momentum. On the international level, the US-engineered overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile and proved at the world stage the arrival of a victorious neo-colonialism. The decade also saw the ascendancy of US-dominated transnational financial bodies that by giving aids to the lesser-developed nations of the world held them to ransom and imposed inhuman conditionalities towards fulfilling the terms of the agreement. At this hour of human and social peril- at a time when inhuman brutalities all the world became rampant, the USA established military bases in or around most of the African nations, all the way from Morocco via Diego Garcia to Kenya, Egypt and of course the Mediterranean sea. The formation of the Rapid Deployment Forces, with the

clear support of the big imperial powers intervened in the process of decision making of most of the underdeveloped nations. Indeed their functions were unashamedly stated as interventionist in Third World Politics.

The African people also became more newly aware of the possibilities of freedom achievable through vigorous resurgence of anti-imperialist struggles. The armed fighting of the people of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Zimbabwe made it clear that the opponents of human freedom were not merely the white colonialists, but could be the blacks as well. Imperialism, the people found out, is not synonymous with color. Instead, it is a mental make-up and might just as well crop up anywhere. The need is to identify the enemy, and trigger the necessary coups d'etat: moral, aesthetic and revolutionary to unhinge the inclemencies of misrule.

The full dawn of realizing the implications of imperialism came in the reflections of such writers as Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Dan Nabudere, Bala Mohamed and of course Amilcar Cabral. The Dar es Salaam debate now published as 'Debate on Class, State and Imperialism', stands out as an important benchmark arrival of new emergent anti-colonial and imperialistic manifesto. It also indicated that the writer of the day had to be more than ever vigilant of the machines of oppression-the way it controls all democratic aspirations of the masses, denying them any avenues, which they might think of. The impending onslaught of such oppressive disconcertions have been framed a la Marquez's novel, The Autumn of the Patriarch! Marquez's analysis of the factors responsible in keeping dehumanization alive bears the implication that the modus operandi of all hegemonic discourse is one party rule, and since in effect the party is only a bureaucratic shell, this means resorting to one man rule. All democratic institutions are outlawed or brought under one man in which case they become defunct.

deadpans of meaningless articulations, absolving the ruler and praising him instead.

Many of the important intellectuals of Africa who had chosen to go against the oppressive regimes of their own country understood by this time that to be conventional was despairing. It kept the status quo alive. An alternative to was to liberate their medium, incorporating newer ways of asking the old queries, much in the same way James Joyce in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man expounds:

I will tell you what I will do and what I will not. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church; an I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile and cunning (Joyce, Portrait of the Artist).

That indeed many of writers of black Africa could think only of a limited manner of articulations is borne by the fact that many a writer of the nation was born with the fact of captivity engrafted on him. He was a slave to the white masters and his narrative precedents were Africa as a nation of dancers, musicians and poets, very much in terms that would become the narrative patterns of the Negritude writers of the thirties and the forties. In his own essay, 'From a Common Black Cloth' (ADO 7), Soyinka expresses his outrage over the fact that many of the writers of the black subcontinent were displaying an imposed identity-primitivism, of localized historical and social causation, only in the lines dictated by the retarding thought of European condescension. Many of these testaments were to please the Western audience. Some other writers living and writing in Africa grouped their images of oilbean and nude spear around the images suggested by the modernist Ezra Pound. The Negritude writers, the essentialists as Soyinka calls

them, scorned this image making process that took inspiration from Europe, corresponding to the second category of poetic and artistic dissension as suggested by Fanon. But in affirming a pure African culture they showed themselves to be weaklings who continue to suffer excesses of an imposed European identity on them "the burnt offering, image of the charred skin on a defiant platter "(ADO 8). This was regionalism at its worst and subvertly its dark shadows bore on the true creative inspirations of writers as Amos Tutuola and D.O.Fagunwa who wrote in Yoruba.

Tutuola's, work, Palm Wine Drinkard remains his best. Suffering from no inferiority syndrome complex, this book is the earliest instance of the new Nigerian writer gathering multifarious experiences, assimilating forms and images both from Europe and Africa and exploiting them in one extravagant, confident whole. Amos Tutola, as long as he lived, responded to change and phenomenon and his work is in the best Yoruba tradition. Images of war, sex, violence all steam his works and as Soyinka himself points out "the result in Tutola is a largeness that comes from accepting life in all its manifestations" (ADO 11).

Tutola moves progressively from a consideration of his physical insufficiency, through the Quest into the very psyche of Nature. Hence his work The Palm-Wine Drinkard along with Fagunwa's Ogboju Ode becomes representation of man's eternal restlessness; his search for the meanings of existence, and by continuum expands into a commentary for the final Search. Its relevance for the reader is in this fact and indeed in many more-he can always begin his presumptuous search for meaning. Tutola's mythical interpretative is restive, formulates new beginnings for the literature of his nation, takes in traditional narrative mores without denying the accessories of day-to-day existence. There is a delectable tight web, enmeshing the

various levels of perception.

But Soyinka and Tutuola are still different writers. Soyinka accepts the cultural ethos of Africa and those of Europe, admitting none blindly. In Soyinka, the aesthetic principles of Europe is brought close with those of Africa. If Soyinka uses African dances and songs in his plays, those from other nations are not ignored either. Soyinka's use of masks in his plays is for example African. But, his comic invectives may be traced to Chaucer and Brecht.

Tutuola's creative inspiration on the other hand is predominantly African. Also, Tutuola does not say anything about a dialogue with entrenched power formations or having a re-look at old conventions. There is no intention to question or pulverize the narratives of imperialism. Unlike Soyinka, Tutuola has no inkling for the social commitments of art. There is hardly any conflict between the past and the present or between disparate ideologies as in Soyinka.

Soyinka also remembers Fagunwa and in his own work Art Dialogue and Outrage, he infact mentions the latter's Ogboju Ode. Fagunwa began with the idea that the literature of his country needed a vernacular medium. He also translated the oral tradition of his country into a written form, thus laying the basis for its transformation into a literate culture. His narrative techniques showed the influence of the oral traditions on him. But his achievement lay in trying to go beyond the limitations of traditions in the context of an extended literary medium. He drew from the rich stores of his native traditions and at the same time gave it a sufficient modern color to interest his readers. But while Fagunwa adopted his materials from the folk tales of his country, he reinforced them using images and symbols to produce what Soyinka calls Fagunwa's "vivid sense of event" (ADO).

But his language is only a minuscule part of his larger attitude, his humor and his visions of a grand concept of the universe, which dissolves the limiting frontiers between the living and the spirits, nature and super nature. But the world of the spirits, the realm of the fantasy, is made familiar and alive because it is mediated through from the perspective of an individual understanding of human life.

Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian writer of great distinction was a "chronicler, content to follow creases and stress lines, not to impose his own rearrangement on them" (ADO 11). Achebe's traditionalism manifested itself in many ways, one of which was his fictionalized enactment of the mysteries surrounding human life through the traditional Nigerian concept of 'chi'-the psychical influences on a man's daily routine, representative of the large and dimensionless forces of mother Nature at whose hands man's personal quest was itself shaky and meaningless. But, in this intricate hinterland of determinism and free will, it becomes impossible to find out at what point does a man really leave his fate to his chi and when he decides to defy the apparently inevitable and destroy himself in the process in which case again, he receives the adulation and respect of his onlookers. But to fall into the trap without the minimum resistance is not becoming of a proper human dignity, which is why readers of Achebe who witness the protagonist drifting helplessly to his doom become more than impatient. But, his other work, No Longer at Ease, is informed with the conjugal presence of tradition with resistance patterns through "individual depth in a incredible hero" (ADO 12). Okonkwo's shapes interest in his actions because he stands opposed to the overriding conventionalities of custom and social mores when they force a total subjugation of human dignity. The community members of whom Okonkwo is a part, speak the first sentence

When a man blasphemes, what do we do? Do we go and stop his mouth? No.

We put fingers into our ears to stop us hearing.

OKONKWO: If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No. I take a stick and break his head? (ADO 12).

But the play is remarkable in positing no definite conclusions about the parameters about the absolute good and bad. Instead, its moral logic is affirmatively human, communal, and universally conducive to the survival of a necessary order. Hence, its logic, far from being a fixed set of principles is self-evolutionary, a continuity of perception of what is useful to the community and that what is not.

Again for Achebe, artistic reality has a basis. Achebe defines his reality between a past, cut off from the present, which again provides the mode of allegory; and the present in which the ironic effects of the narrator is achieved. It is this acknowledgement of the present hour with a capacity for demystifying the same that Achebe moves literary history forward. But irony also suggests the latent possibilities of moral absolutes. Hence the stance of a speaker who exists in the present is that he is sure of himself. The irony with which he looks to those around him does not entrap him. To this extent he has the right to criticize those who have followed Europe firstly and when it came to Africa in the form of colonialism, accepted its ideology. This desire to persuade, and not simply present is due to the consequence of art being placed at the altar of social meliorism. Inherent in this attitude is an inherent hostility to romance or allegory, a stringent commitment of art to education, which is ironically enough at odds with the composite view of the world that is to be discerned in the traditional epical patterns of narration.

The historical experience of the Europhone African author then virtually argues a need for a process of mediation with each act of writing. Instead of a single process of mediation between opponent cultural dimensions, an assertion of

complex mediations become the motto. In fact this is necessary considering that the African writer is engaged in the struggle for power with each act of literary expression. The writer has the choice also of daring to express a sensibility and an outlook apart from, and independent of mass direction. This may require that a writer efface his definition as a writer as a matter of choice, to shape a re-examination of the facile role expected of him in a moment of crisis.

Soyinka's tirade against Negritude is a commonly known fact. But, to reassert, Soyinka's disliked Negritude because writers of negritude "accepted the grounds of cultural valuation from the racial deniers" (ADO 229). Moreover, Soyinka needed to deny the charge implanted against the black people even from such man as Sartre who said the following:

The being-in-world of blacks (according to Sartre), covers all the ways in which the black experienced his condition in the world: through rhythm, sexual pantheism, a cosmic sense, the indissoluble unity of suffering, the erotic, and joy. (ADO 230)

Soyinka had to prove charges against his people wrong. He had to define an aesthetic of defiance against the pre-pondering cult of colonialism. At the same time, he was morally and artistically responsible in fermenting a manner of writing that did away with all sentimentality accruing from a notion of the white vs. the blacks, objective reason as against passionate voyeurism etc.

A fuller survey of the Nigerian literary scene at its hour of independence and ouster of colonialism should clarify matters. At the juncture of an anti-colonial movement, it happened that the writer decided to identify himself with all manifestos that were doing the rounds and for him any -ism seemed valid and

could be embraced. Soon after Nigeria won its freedom, the writer dedicated himself to the political opportunists of the time the demagogic manipulators of human history and dignity. Reality was resigned to the new visionary -the politician. Cultural definitions became the new source of literature. There could now be two different ways to tackle the problem for the writer. One: he could stretch his accidental conditions to embrace the whole of society. The other, he could discover the fundamental truths of his community to inform his vision and provide him with the real know-how of how they lived. A writer had to evolve his art independently from the politician and to this end learn to identify the ways in which his art has been subverted and taken away from him.

One of imperialism's greatest ploys has been that it outsmarted the writer from his actual present. By allowing him to nurture dreams of a superabundant past, it blinded him to the consequence of denying the social anomalies, which really was to be investigated. The necessity of the writer living in the present hour is to inform his art with the throbbing vitality of a historic vision, which is of consequence, universal and re-examines the whole phenomenon of human heritage. To this effect Negritude becomes an enfeebled denominator, because it does not negotiate from a position of strength and consequently solidifies the boundaries which colonialism wedged between the discrete ethnic bases of Nigeria and the African continent as a whole. Hence Edward Said in his book Culture and Imperialism, says:

To accept nativism is to accept the consequences of imperialism, the racial, religious, and political divisions imposed by imperialism itself. To leave the historical world for the metaphysics of essences like negritude, Irishness, Islam, or Catholicism is to abandon history for essentializations that have the power to turn human beings against each other; often this abandonment of

the secular world has led to a sort of millenarianism if the movement has mass base, or it has degenerated into small-scale private craziness, or into an unthinking acceptance of stereotypes [...]. (276)

An important historic event of literary and social consequence was the arrival of iconoclasm whose chief priest Yambo Ouloguem in his work Bound to Violence makes a demolition act of all cultural presences in human history and even concludes that none of them has any value-eminence or indeed historic probity. Ouloguem described history in garish, clashing colors. What Ouloguem does is to show that all cultures of the world whether Judeo-Christian, Arab-Islamic, Black-Animist, European-imperialist, medieval-mystic are in the course of collision against one another. While Ouloguem destroys the intellectual edifice of western imperialism, at the same time pulling the assumptions of Negritude, he does not succeed, because of the very nature of his acerbic logic to give Africa any historical presence.

With Ayi Kwei Armah, the crisis of colonialism suggested a retreat to the mythical past of Africa as a potential model for the future. Decolonization in the cultural and intellectual terms, according to Armah in Masks and Marx, is "the search or research for positive African ideas, perspectives, techniques, values. That enterprise tautologically is centered on Africa" (Armah, Presence African 64). Decolonization therefore involves a parallel process of the re-Africanization, or a discursive formulation wherein the artist, in a conscious act, is building or reconstructing an identity he was hitherto denied or deprived of. The very act of writing becomes a means of self-realization.

While Armah signaled the need for the African to return to his cultural moorings in a simplistic call to come to being, Ousmane Sembene's evocation of an authentic tradition is in the cause of social transformation. Sembene's work God's Bits of

Wood rejects the pitfalls of sentimentality in tradition and offers an alternative to the extremist posturings suggested by the essentialists—a complete annihilation of modernism in the cause for a new radicalism. The importance of Sembene is therefore significant for he not only says that the new African should know of his cultural past and integrate himself with an organic vision of the universe which such a culture suggests, he also brings to light the fact that the old culture is not enough and must be reconciled with present necessities to enrich, crystallize and foreground the Africa of the future. Sembene's call is for harmonization: tradition with modernity, machine with organic coherence. This is what one of the characters in Sembene's work God's Bits of Wood, speaks:

The kind of man we were is dead, and our only hope for a new life lies in the machine, which knows neither a language nor a race. (Quoted by Soyinka, ADO 185)

This language, apparently paradoxical, is at the heart of Sembene's articulatory dialectics. It plays with opposites. But the real meaning lies elsewhere. The modern machine, symbol of a modern age incorporating technology and science, is the true neutral. It is at the same time an achievement of the conjugal existence of the head and heart.

But it is not enough says Soyinka in his Art Dialogue and Outrage to merely concentrate on the African political and cultural scene to propose even a tentative articulation of the new aesthetic enterprise of the new African writers. Without acknowledging constructs of other cultures and nationalities, an exclusivist passion for a pure African essence: its objective material reality, and literary phenomenon tantamount to an assertion of racial autonomy. This is not to deny however that like all nations, Africa deserves the right to forge its own aesthetic territory, and

selectiveness. Hence, the need to appreciate such works of national expressions as the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Gilgamesh becomes important. These works express of the craving of all humanity to discover sources of sustenance. Providing a wealth of creative and historical metaphors they maximize the "involvement of the oral, traditional specialist in the creative processes and concerns of the modern writer" (ADO 189).

Something must be said of the theatrical patterns of the Yoruba people which even at the heights of colonial and imperialist repression in Nigeria acted as the bulwark for the rights of the common man combining with its traditional expressionist components, forms and techniques of the modern theatre. In forging this eclecticism, it was of course responding to its environment and the fact that the colonial regime of the days maligned and restricted traditional narrative arguments of the theatre, this assimilation was seminal.

Theatre in Nigeria, made this possible by incorporating dance and poetry within its compounding metaphors, dance and music being more thoroughly expansive, they could disseminate even potentially dangerous sentiments under the watchful eyes of the oppressor. But, it also relied on the rituals such as those of egungun, associated with the Oyo monarchy in the Western Province of Nigeria. There was also the relevant presence of the cultic mores of expression-Agbegijo, Alarinjo, and the allied genres that more than their religious implication also suggested secular credentials viz their ability to posit parallels between the past, the present and the future, relating the materially mundane with the numinous and the metaphysical.

With the fall of the Oyo Empire against the more powerful military might of Hausa-Fulani in the North, most of the traditional expressive patterns were curtailed and restricted. The progeny of interference continued with the arrival of

Christians who banned indigenous musical instruments such as the bata, gangan, dundun and so on replacing them with musical instruments imported from Europe and enervating the traditional theater more by the introduction of Christian dramatic themes and Western forms.

But traditional forms of drama in Nigeria had its masquerades, the "Okumkpa" (ADO 193) event and the "Oje Ogwu" (ADO 193) both being part of a male initiation ceremony performed in the theatrical expansions of a native culture. While the former was basically balletic in form, the latter was mimetic. But both of them were more or less audience oriented and the spectators were used to boo, judge and approve them on purely aesthetic grounds-appreciate or condemn the leaps, turns and control of the performers.

The "Okumkpa" festival centers on the use of masks. These masks are intended for the purposes of satiric rendition of the events that took place in the neighboring places. It even ridiculed personalities, and the events in which they were involved were re-enacted. The purpose of this festival was therefore to produce a creative transformation of existing dramatic apparatus, and not to show them off literally. The performance was rounded with the parade of all the other actors on the stage. But the Afikpo festival was also important otherwise: in putting into perspective male prejudice.

Masks have a unique role in Soyinka's plays. Within the ambit of tragedy, they only indicate humanity's ability to parallel the Yoruba gods who charted a course through the void. Hence, an actor on stage while performing a tragic role does not need acting by putting on a mask. The spirits take him in their charge.

In Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, one notes the presence of a heroic

tradition known as "pakrouk" (ADO 329) among local people. Here the individual would emerge from his group and sing chants in his own praise. But he is contended by another and sometimes replaced too. This helps the audience to exercise their creative and participatory faculties either to support the truly eligible man or to decry the false boaster.

But other sociological factors too contributed to the emergence of a new theatre in Nigeria. This was the complexity brought by the return of Western educated elites from the black continents, eager to prove their learning to the white settler colonies in their homeland. On the other hand, there were those people who despite staying back in their own land understood the various forms of Western theatrical implications, but unlike the former did not think of their own people as barbarians. It was this latter group who being dissatisfied with the Euro-centric resolutions of theatrical and social apparatus in their homeland, exploited their native forms for resuscitating their cultural presence and identity.

Much before Soyinka began to write, his country had its own dramatic corpus. Nigeria's theatrical culture had plays that communicated through the complex rhythms of the body and the sound, drums, laughter and music. It was impertinent to use lens, pigment and print and infact supercilious too. Its language was not the literal one of European plays. "Hubert Ogunde," says Wright, "fashioned his plays out of a broad cultural matrix of Bible drama and colonial concert party" (Soyinka Revisited 23). But even before Ogunde plays in Yorubaland were ceremonial masques:

Where personality transformations were conjured by costume, and vocal projections and distortions by masks, the effect was a powerful combination of the consecrated and the comic (Revisited 23).

One may also remember Baba Sala, whose real name was Moses Olaiya Adejumo, the most recent of the Yoruba traveling personalities. Baba Sala used the mass media as well as traditional songs and dances in his plays. At the same time, he used anything in his performances, which were likely to be popular with the audiences.

Thus there was always conflates between the traditional cultural patterns and the imported forms and this contributed to the mosaic of values that is the delectable Soyinka.

That the Yoruba world-view also contributed to the making of Soyinka need not be stressed. He has admitted this influence in his book Art Dialogue and Outrage.

I cannot claim a transparency of communication even from the sculptures, music and poetry of my own people the Yoruba, but the aesthetic matrix is the fount of my own creative inspiration; it influences my critical response to the creation of other cultures and validates selective eclecticism as the right of every productive being. (ADO 329)

Indeed the Yoruba culture testified for Soyinka a resilience of cultural patterns, having an in-built capacity to withstand coercive techniques applied on it: to assimilate alien national expressions; combine the traditional apprehension of the spiritual with a restorative analysis of the objectively real and the mundane.

But the Yoruba religious beliefs and mythology are also repositories of apparent contradictions. One of the reasons for this is that Yorubaland in Southwest of Nigeria is itself not a culturally monolithic body of beliefs. It comprises instead of a whole compounding of cult practices, with many local variations loosely organized around the Ifa Oracle. Translatable in social terms it has enabled the ordinary Yoruba to

capture within his system of beliefs a necessary pragmatism "underpaid by a belief in the indeterminate, many faceted nature of truth and its expression as a variety of emanations from a single irreducible essence" (Wright, Revisited 7).

Hence songs of praise that forms a part of the traditional Yoruba dramatic festivals are metamorphosized into satiric condemnations. Even in other social manifestations the Yorubas maintain a plurality of beliefs.

A brief survey of actual social formation with its structural configurations in West Africa should make this clear. Here for example, the spirit of the elder is revered and respected and in his death he is treated with care. There are specific ceremonies of burial and especially second burial that are intended to ensure the passage of an honored member of the society to an appropriate afterlife. The patterns are complex and cannot be justifiably put in this brief space. There are several spiritual components to one's being and each member of the society has his own destiny. He has also the chance to be reborn in his own descendents

Except for some communities who are hunters, institutions that admit of some degree of leadership generally rule traditional African societies. But outstanding individuals are allowed the chance sometimes to voice their opinions in important social matters. Hence as is shown by the character of "the Man" in Armah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born or Okolo in Okara's The Voice, whose individuality reflects to an original ethical impulse-corresponding to the sons who have attained their maturity, like Edogo in Achebe's Arrow of God, these men are not satisfied with restrictions placed on them by their elders and even rue the fact they are still under the tutelage from their elders. On the other side of the spectrum, one finds the traditional ruler who however cannot take independent decisions and

are under the watchful eye of the councils of elders. This council has not only the power to sustain tradition, but also has the capacity to dethrone the ambitious king

In the social structures, there are divisions of role. The young considering they are impetuous are often given works that requires them to learn completely the manners of their society. The young naturally resent this and often align with the rulers opposing the traditional authorities of the elders. But, happen what may, every individual has the responsibility to change with times and maintain order through his intrinsic sense of morality that is however taken care of the society as and when recalcitrance develops.

At the death of an elder, various age groups respond differently. So the elders presents gifts to the younger men and woman and even to those who have been without child to see that their passage to the other sphere is not blocked. At times as it happens in the case of the Nigerian Edo, there is a state of uneasy equilibrium between the different age groups.

The ambiguity in society is however not only restricted to political functions. Instead, it manifests itself even in the production and creation of the African people's body of literature and other cultural practise. One of this is that these people have not favored writing and this was a willing negative and not a historical failure on the part of the denizens of the African homeland. Writing, it was believed, could preserve in an indestructible form the laws or beliefs that inhered in a definite power structure and this was not commensurate with the requirement for balance and harmony in the actual social patterns of the Africans. Thus Duerden in his book, African Art and Literature goes so far as to say that in traditional Africa the permanent preservation of stored memories constituted a "sacrilege" (7). This

was also the reason that the masks and statues were hidden precisely from becoming a stored memory. The careful isolation of powers, the divisions between the man and the woman allowed this knowledge proper repositories and rather than being indefinitely enshrined in an indestructible form was inevitably consigned to loss and death with the passing of each elder. The loss of the elders was not to be lamented. Young men who are competent to carry the community forward would replace them. This also explains why most African communities did not land with positing fixed significations to masks or statues or to social roles. Similarly Duerden concludes "art must never become a frozen symbolism, must not make the structure of the present into a lasting and visible structure which takes too long to destroy." (24)

This is inevitably a pronouncement for the need of art and society to respond to one another and change over the times as a prerequisite to human liberty and freedom.

Soyinka draws upon the traditional frameworks of his culture to re-look and newly examine the social, political and artistic parameters in existence in and around Western Nigeria. He combines besides an aesthetic temperament that allows distant memories in art to have a place in his humanistic concerns. In Death and the King's Horseman, the myth of the follower accompanying his dead king to his heavenly abode through a ritual surrender of his physical self, encompasses within its spectrum the fact of the white man. In the Bacchae, ritual dances and merry making of the Dionysian revelers comment upon the qualities needed of a good leader of men, which of course Pentheus does not possess. But, again, Soyinka transforms Euripides work. Instead of putting an end to the play with blood sprouting through Pentheus' head and the abject ignominy of Agave at having killed his own son (an inversion of the Oedipus story as in Euripides), he shows Pentheus' head

turning out wine, which even Agave drinks. Soyinka's Dionysus is representative of nature and Tiresias' faith in him is because the new god can take his countryman to freedom and liberty. Tiresias addresses the baffled slaves:

You hesitant fools! Don't you understand?

Don't you know? We are no longer alone-

Slaves, helots, the near and distant dispossessed!

This master race, this much vaunted dragon spawn

Have met their match. Nature has joined forces with us (Soyinka, Bacchae 7).