

Wole Soyinka is not unjustly esteemed as one of the most famous thinkers and writers of Nigeria and the world to day, but for the literature he has produced, his novels, poetry and dramas, that already have earned for him an undying fame. Among all his writings, it is especially his Dramas that are not unduly esteemed and spoken of by the readers and critics of our Age, but for their intrinsic merit and the relevance they have with life and its truth. It is a matter of no less seriousness that his plays have been most critically debated over. Many of his admirers and readers have found his plays not easy to understand or appreciate. In his essays and novels and more so in his dramas, Soyinka dislikes to have his intellectual positions easily understood or falsified. He builds into each one, fine distinctions and subtle qualifications that challenge the complacency of orthodox judgments.

The slipperiness of Soyinka's moral and aesthetic framework for his dramas is partly a matter of content and partly of context. It must be remembered, while making an analysis of the dramas of this Nigerian writer that what he was trying to create had no equals even in the cultural context of his own country, and this despite the fact that the Nigeria of Soyinka retained even after the colonial upsurge, a honest recognition of metaphysical and moral roots of tradition and their importance of constantly building up to further and signify human actions and orient it in accordance with honored traditional perspectives.

In his essay 'Ambivalence in African Arts and Literature', included in his Art Dialogue and Outrage, Soyinka quotes from the Russian Kadinsky, a European exponent of Expressionism in the 1920's, which appears to address the syncretism of his own incrementally complex art form and representative dramas:

It can be imagined altogether without exaggeration that a science of art erected

on a broad foundation must be international in character: it is interesting, but certainly not sufficient to create an exclusively European art theory (228).

Kadinsky went on to declare that this science of art would lead to “ a comprehensive synthesis”, which will extend far beyond the confines of art into the realm of the ‘oneness’ of the human and the divine” (qtd. in ADO 228). What Kadinsky was referring to in response to the virile complexity of African arts was its complex and intricate references which dethroning the concept of imitation as a facile replication of the processes of human society and nature and coming in direct knowledge of itself, changed the responses in kind.

Euro-centric criticism, with all regards for it, has traditionally looked down upon the artistic achievements of Africa. Euro-centricism suffers from paranoia of racial desiderata, and cannot do complete justice to what is alien to its perspectives. African wisdom, with its paradoxical basis and orientations does not fit into the former's dialectics. It is with this mindset that some European critics have commented that the African arts as such, and this means all African manifestations of the poetic, are celebrations of the intuitive man where appearance becomes identified with essence.

Geoffrey Hunt has, for example, taken Soyinka to task. Hunt has categorized Soyinka's belief of the continuity of the empirical with the metaphysical, as “confusion and not complexity” (Marxism and African Literature 64). According to the critic, the flow of one idea into the territory of another is a grand homogenizing simplicity and not protean multifacetedness, an absorption of discrete knowledge into mystifying monotony of numen and essence, recommended for its “infinitely stressed spirituality” (Marxism and African Literature 65).

Soyinka has not helped matters himself in his definition of Ogun. In his essay And after the Narcissist? African Forum 1, no 4, (Spring 1996), he has said that Ogun is a singly comprehended essence. "There is no separation of the scientist from the artist in him, of the explorer from the warrior, the warrior from the artist, and so on. The face and the essence are the same" (59).

The dramatist, however, lays emphasis upon the dualities of his own culture to prevent the total abrogation of his own moral aesthetic and social values. His project of finding accommodativeness between tradition and modernity is to reconcile the present with the old. Besides, a sense of belonging is important to the survival of any society. Racism, which had its highest institutionalized form in apartheid ruled through obscurantism and by weakening the sense of the subdued people, of who they are. Tradition allows for psychological survival. In the face of a continuous onslaught by European colonizers on Africa, the role of an intellectual artist like Soyinka is that of an image-maker. Soyinka had to resist the violent mutation of his own people and his belief in tradition was one way of instilling strength and hopes in them.

At the same time, his belief in the complementarities of opposing viewpoints stems from his Yoruba outlook. Soyinka's vision of truth as an all-inclusive fact is arrived through his view of the world and its reality as penetrable from all directions:

A blacksmith's poker, an egungun dance, an Ifa prognostic verse, or a royal stool may simultaneously express the history of its makers, their concept of beauty, their propitiation of unseen forces, a statement of cosmic relativity and a mode of experiencing all these, of harmonizing them with the challenge of existence (ADO 108).

Dances and reveling submerge social and economic inequalities among men. As a means of social bonding, it expresses man's attempt to harmonize himself with his brethren. Men as post-modern subjects, continue to be traumatized both at the psychic and psychological level. In cities where identities are in flux, the need to challenge rational patterns of behavior becomes an emotional necessity. Organized modes of social ecstasy allow individuals to reach out for states of being outside rules. Society is no inhibition against individual expressions if the conduit for such expressions seep or address man's most primal wants-love of society, companionship etc.

Etherton in his book The Development of African Drama has analyzed some studies of writers and scholars on the dances in Africa. He speaks of K. Clyde Mitchell's study of the Kalela dance on the Zambian Copperbelt in the 1950's. Mitchell's work has shown that grass root dances among rival groups in Zambia "was a kind of metaphor for traditional animosities- in much the same way as some team sports are"(38). The writer goes on to say the following:

There is another dimension to the metaphor, which exists in the actual dance itself; its use of specific role play, costumes and dance-steps, all suggested the colonial authority, so that dance itself became a metaphor for colonial presence (38).

Again, the study of T.O. Ranger on the Beni dance of East- Africa has shown according to Etherton that rural dances there "first reflected the colonial authority, and then later mounted a satirical critique of it. The dance itself was a dazzling stylization of the colonial brass band"(Etherton 38). Scraps of metal were used as musical instruments. The dance parodied the short pants and white tunic of colonial

masters. Dancers used their whole bodies, giving rise to acrobatic embellishments.

Soyinka in his plays, in Death and the King's Horseman for example shows two different dance movements. In and through Elesin and his followers, the writer presents the dance of his native land. Elesin's dance has a trance like movement. It depicts him entering into the world of the spirits where conscious movements and accurate foot- stepping are unnecessary. The Pilkings on the other hand, dance in a ball. Unlike Elesin and his followers who put on their traditional dress that are also highly embroidered, the Europeans wear their own uniform suggesting that their dance in the play has less moral underpinnings.

In Soyinka's dramas however, dances not only qualify an African society's need to be well organized. It also implies that societies of the present need songs and dances too. A parallel between people and human societies are at once suggested. Naturally, the logic of dualism-civilization as against barbarity, whites vs. blacks, reason and objectivity as against sensuousness and instinct, is seen to be redundant.

A referential mode of analysis qualifies perception. The possibility of absolutes is rendered equally uncalled-for. For mankind, it implies his dependence on and responsibility for his fellow brethren and an acceptance of all sections of humanity as having an equal right to survive. At the psychological level, it renders an acceptance of the warring dualities of good and bad plausible. This is shown from the example of the Earth Mothers in Madman and the Specialist, who are ambiguous and serve as either poison or medicine.

Lewis Nkosi, has even seen these warring complementarities in Ogun, Soyinka's favored deity as merely a rival narcissism and private eccentricity on his part- that is another ultimately, one more polemical counterconstruct to Western mythologies in

which Soyinka outdoes the West at its syncretic best by incorporating scraps of Nietzsche, Blake, Dionysius, Zagreus, and Prometheus in order to transcend them (Home and Exile x).

Biodun Jeyifo, finds the narrow creative, destructive cycle of Ogun, to which Soyinka has virtually reduced the whole corpus of Yoruba myth as tragic (Essays in Sociology of African Drama 27-35). To this critic, Soyinka locks his vision of humanity into a fundamentally reactionary worldview.

However, Soyinka makes Ogun syncretic, because it is in the very nature of the deity to be so. Adaptability is also characteristic of the Yoruba knowledge on life and reality. In an interview given to Uli Brier for the Yoruba Magazine, Soyinka narrates his Yoruba view:

This seems logical, because whenever a new phenomenon impinged on the consciousness of the Yoruba whether a historical event, a technological scientific encounter - they do not bring down the barriers - close the doors. They look at the new phenomenon and see what they have that corresponds to it in their own tradition that is a kind of analogue to this experience. And sure enough, they go to Ifa and they examine the Corpus of proverbs and sayings; and they look even into their agricultural practices or the observation of their calendar. Somewhere within that religion they find some kind of approximate interpretation of that event. They do not consider it a hostile experience. That's why the corpus of Ifa is constantly reinforced and augmented, even from the history of other religions with which Ifa comes into contact. One has Ifa verses, which deal with Islam and then there are Ifa verses, which deal with Christianity. Yoruba religion attunes itself and accommodates the unknown very readily; unlike Islam because they did not see this in the Koran - therefore

it does not exist. The last prophet was Mohammed; anybody who comes after this is a fake. And Christianity! The Roman Catholics: until today do not cope with the experience and the reality of abortion! [...] (Iskon Yoruba Magazine Vol III, No. III).

It must be admitted however that Soyinka uses drama to focus not on any facile explanation of social and political reality of his turbulent times but to give expression to the hybrid character of his art that combines traditional forms of art-drama, poetry, as it existed in Africa with such modern innovations in music as the jazz songs etc.

Some of the Nigerian playwright's detractors have however also condemned him for not explaining the contemporary scene in his country as the determination of complex social and political forces. Peter Nazareth (An African View of Literature 65,66) believes that Soyinka's definition of evil is obtuse and metaphysical. Corruption: political, social, individual or at the level of community is not well defined. Neither is it viewed as being made up of rival groups and interests who are themselves involved in the abuse.

But, A Play of Giants should prove Soyinka's detractors wrong. A Play of Giants shows three dictators Kamini, Kasco, and Gunema, vying for the control of African states. Their oppression of human potential shows in their treatment of the guerillas that carry out strikes against the dishonest regime of Africa. It even shows in the way the Dictators violate the basic human rights to get even with those who chose to escape from them.

GUNEMA. My subjects, they are very careful how they plot against Benefacio Gunema. When I look at each of my ministers, or army officer,

he knows I am looking into the heart, into the very soul of his village

(Giants 27)

The Western Press is aware of the topsy-turvy nature of African politics. But, they prefer to remain either non-interfering or worse side themselves with the politicians. Gudrum, a representative of such a press is a Scandinavian and prides herself as a liberal. She has still no compunction portraying Kamini in her book 'The Black Giant at Play', as a jovial family man and a "big uncle to everybody in the country" (Giants 12). The United Nations is also to be blamed too for the rot in Nigeria and other African states. Not only did the UN, not interfere positively in the crisis of Africa but also honored the political culprits by deciding to install their life-sized statues in its headquarters.

But, Africa's own people are also to be blamed for their sufferings. Much of the rot in the country has stemmed from their indecisions- the common men's ineptitude, their desire to remain subservient to the political class and surrender their rights to fight back. Small money and even smaller opportunity have made them so. The Department of History in all of Kamini's country devotes their time to trace the dictator's history. They concoct stories of his bravery, family history and how he killed a lion when he was five years old. There are also the aristocrats, Africa's traditional feudal lords. These men have enjoyed power for centuries. But, they are disgruntled to be left out of the newer equations of a neo-colonial regime. Gunema, one of the dictators, blasts them for conspiring against him.

GUNEMA. The plots of my supercilious aristocracy, the mestizos...They think that they are superior to Benefacio, because I, I am full of Negroid, and I arise from low background, poor environment (Giants 36)

Soyinka draws the attention of his readers to the faction ridden caste society of Africa. In and through the character of Jero for example, the dramatist focuses on the diverse social, political and economic determinants doing the rounds of the society in the corrupt regimes of neo-colonial Africa.

Brother Jero is a religious charlatan. Though belonging to the Church like Chaucer's Pardoner and Summoner, he uses religion for his personal gain. Chume's wife is under his influence and so is the politician, who is each manipulated by the devil in Jero. Particularly interesting is the manner in which Jero subverts the Christian thanksgiving theme to illustrate the greed and covetousness of the social and political mafia for whom self-acquisition is the most sublime religion. Jero knows that he is morally corrupt. Yet he indulges in his hypocrisy until proven guilty.

The political turbulence in the country is as much a result of the newer regimes of power as much as it is the result of traditional hierarchies. This situation is made more complex by the presence of rebels who interfere in the political mess to make matters worse for the common man. Life President Barra Tuboum, a ruthless dictator, speaks of a group of one such rebel who harbored the false hopes of upstarting his government. The rebels were from a place called Sabira and they decided to keep the contingent of a few living men to be exhibited at the UN and then to made the sport of his commando force which would later kill the hostages for sport or food.

Side by side, the political mafia and academic saboteurs, Africa's financial recovery, has been made complicated with the presence of large industrial corporations. Professor Batey, who comes to meet the three dictators as they pose for their sculptor, blame the MNC's for their neo-colonial economic conspiracy. The

MNC's in Africa continue to play havoc with the country's mineral resources, plundering its rich mines for raw materials and then supplying the finished products through a chain of outlets in the same country.

The developed and industrially advanced nations of the world are equally implicated in the African crisis. Kamini speaks of America disgustingly. Gunema charges the Russians for troublemaking. The Russian delegate coming to meet the dictators, scorn the latter for watering down the principles of revolution which people like Lumumba's Nkrumah, and Jomo Kenyatta fought for. They term Kamini a buffoon. But, they lack the moral courage to owe up to their fury against the dictators. When confronted by the Professor who charges them for speaking slander against the African heads of state, they blame the Professor as an American spy and support Kamini instead. Their *raison d'être* is anti-Americanism. Russia equips Africa militarily, once the place as an arms supplier to the black continent is conceded to them by the Americans. The Russians on their part confirm that the British created Kamini and then the Russians took over. But they ditch the monster they helped to grow once Kamini fails to coincide with the interests of the socialist superpower.

Critics have also seriously considered some of the plays of Soyinka. Derek Wright while commenting on Camwood says that "beyond the battle between paternal dogmatism and youthful rebellion in the play lays a deeper conflict between Christian and African beliefs" (Soyinka Revisited 44). It would be however novice to argue that Camwood merely projects the differences between traditional African religion and Christianity. The play in fact explains the aberrations resulting from a circuitous representation of Christianity in colonial Africa along with the freedom promised by pagan religion. The arrival of Christianity in Africa brought about far

reaching changes in the continent. It not only implied a new religion for the masses, but also a new prestige, to be so. But religion is finally a social fact. Christianity that has had far reaching consequences in Europe helped to interpret man's relationship with his environment there. The importance of hard work, industry, and the like was important for the survival patterns in the climates of Europe. But, Africa had most of its resources in the forests. The only requirement for man there was to integrate himself with his surroundings. Society had to honor the traditional wisdom of its makers to be able to live in harmony. The pagan religions enabled the blacks to be a part of the environment and respect its dynamics. There has to be another reason why Isola loves pagan religion. An understanding of the same has to be grounded in the fact that paganism was more close to Isola's natural instincts of survival symbolized by his closeness to his mother and detachment from his father. However, a more serious criticism of the play by Mr. Wright is that it is an undeveloped dramatic script. The play according to the critic has scenes that fade in the flashbacks to Isola's traumatic childhood and the earlier events of the day are too fast and frequent (Soyinka Revisited 44).

The critic also believes that the play has certain unresolved puzzles, such as the violent opposition of the Westernized, socially aspiring families to a union of their offspring. Again, the snake and the tortoise, "though powerful general images for a predatory, life crushing religion, are the dark whimsies of his mental suffering and final madness, and do not blend with their human referents in the play" (Soyinka Revisited 44).

The symbols used by Isola are definitely unique. One of these is the tortoise in the jungle that he calls "Moji." "Moji," is again the name of his mother. To him both the tortoise and his mother are interrelated. Both are so overburdened that he cannot tell

their age.⁶“Erinjobi” is the name he calls his father by and he uses the same name to describe the snake in the bush. Both his father and the snake seek to victimize him. In his innocence, symbols from two different worlds are coalesced. His mind can see no difference between the tormentor of his person in society and his enemy in the jungle. His attitudes towards two recognizably opposing systems of human interpretation, where the jungle and human habitats are antipodal identities, question very the stringency of civilized beliefs by which society decides to place one fact as superior to the other.

To look at Isola’s use of symbols as the result of the protagonist’s mental suffering is again to ignore the basic fact that his pagan cult endorsed man to respect the relationship prevailing between various order of existing beings. In all traditional societies, the snake and the tortoise have been recognized as symbols intertwined with human perceptions. But looked merely as creatures of the wild, the snake stands for what is violent while the tortoise for a subdued, benedictory presence. Human societies need to respect the power and lethal destructiveness of the snake. But, the tortoise is due for a deeper respect by way of its power to help man equate with his environment. Isola equates his father with the snake because there was the myth of the snake in the jungles, known to him and his likes. The snake was known to harm the tortoise eggs for which reason it was the symbol of cruelty among the local people. Isola deconstructs the cult of civilized hierarchies. He turns the outside into the inside thereby dissolving the norm.

It has to be accepted here that Soyinka’s dramatic spectacle has a place in it both for men and creatures of the wild. Spirits, animals and humans are related to each other, which is why all have a voice and speak. Soyinka speaks for the silences, both at the human and metaphysical level using Africa’s unique cultural predilections that

see no ignominy in placing humans equal to the other orders of creation. Spectators watching Cam wood are may be divided from one another as they watch the play unfold. But, it would augur to both the camps that poetic justice is achieved once Isola kills his father. It may be said again that Isola's symbols are those of Soyinka's who uses tradition to comment upon the callous indifference of the present hour.

Again, Isola is certainly not mentally plugged. There is no indication in the play to believe this. Infact, the play weaves multifaceted characters to define the ultimate variety of social, economic and political configurations determining the African scene. Isola's father may be a Christian cleric. But, he is despite all limitations a family man and wants his son to follow his footsteps. He has ingrained himself with the formalized Christian Church and wants his son to follow suit. It is immaterial that Isola wants to be different. Erinjobi is a traditional African patriarch and he needs his young to ask him to guide them in their social and personal needs. The position of the woman is obviously minor in this conventional setup, which is why his wife is not due to be equated to him in all family decisions.

Soyinka's dramatic arguments strongly challenge the hierarchies established through the play simply because the power and the authority of the father is not always attuned in the best interests of his children and even to the fermenting of a new social order. The arbitrariness of its created momentum may be self-defeating as the play shows in the death of Erinjobi. Moreover, his union with Marounke is also not a whim. The protagonist loves his girl, wants her to bear his children and is also aware at the same time of the inclemencies of his social atmosphere. He impregnates Marounke in a natural consequence of his intimacy with her.

His obstinacy for his love for Marounke, even at the cost of defying his father

betrays a natural moral norm. Devotion for loved ones is not subservient to rules. At the same time, it expresses his angst at formal Christianity, its imposed rituals and colonial hangover. Infact the characterization in the play is complex and cannot be studied analytically.

The stubbornness of the Westernized families in not allowing Isola and Marounke to be united may stem from Isola's disrespect of ritualized and formal Christianity itself. Isola's parents felt that their daughter was beyond any malice and could be made to walk away from Isola. It was only the boy who was fermenting trouble for her. Finally, Camwood deals with a society in the throes of change. At one hand, it is a new religion, its new rules and behavioral patterns, and on the other, a primitive byway, more ancestral than any acquired branch of faith. The proposed novelty of Christianity is obviously resisted by the younger breed, which feels it has contaminated their personal and individual lives. If Erinjobi is a true Christian, liberal minded and imbued with the sprits of free enterprise, he should have supported Isola's choice. Instead, he decides to haunt his son down with weapons. In the end, he gives up his civilized pretensions. He embraces the rule of force. He triggers off a whimsy of bedlam, fortitude and chance survival, where death as much as life, becomes fortuitous.

Stanley Macebuh finds trouble with Soyinka elsewhere. He specially disparages the ambiguity in many of Soyinka's plays and though he acknowledges the Nigerian's astringent critique of the social parameters of Nigeria and of the overall African milieu, yet, he finds it hard to justify the Nigerian's use of harsh and difficult language, especially, at a time when the language of myth is typically unprompted. Macebuh imputes the writer's obscurity to his colonial distemper:

Soyinka's harsh inscrutableness may be seen as an exact equivalent in words of that unease of mind that is the lot of those who have suffered a modification of vision through colonialism (Critical Perspectives 209).

Soyinka's difficult language is not a matter of choice. As has been said in the introductory chapter of this work, it is instead the natural outcome of his aesthetic focus. What the Nigerian presents in his works is the result of his tragic protagonist's awareness of a reality that is incomprehensible, weird and disruptive of rational conclusions. Tragedy in Soyinka's plays is the anguish of man's severance from his true essence. The linguistic parameters of European dramas are consequently inapplicable in Soyinka's dramas and eschews 'the sterile limits of particularization' (ADO 26). Soyinka also asks the following:

Is it really intelligent to demand that all poetry be simple? Not *all* experience is simple. More pertinently, not all *experiencing* is limited to a simple unilinear activity of the mind. And does any work which results from man's creative intelligence not become in itself a source of experiencing? That a creative intelligence should *communicate*, no one in his right mind would deny. But what should it communicate? The dictionary value of every word? Phrase? Stanza?...Or could it be that a mind does not demand a literal value out of every image? (ADO 101)

Again, Soyinka's disgust of the effects of colonialism is implicit in his desire to help his country regain faith in the honored beliefs of his land. His concept of dramaturgy takes its starting inspiration from the primitive ritual practices of his country. The tragic architecture for his plays is based on the same foundation too.

Rituals in the plays of Soyinka are a mere shell. They foreground the contours

within which the dramas are fundamentally worked out. But, within such a framework, one finds an engagement with the dominant social, political and economic realities of the times. The simultaneous co-existence of diverse societies and cultures in the dramas of Soyinka also mean a richer and fuller definition of the co-ordinate of artistic perception. It is also a way of recognizing an extra terrestrial dimension to man's problems, beyond the invidious cacophony of hatred, throw back and aggressiveness to alien events and milieus.

To again briefly recollect Soyinka's linguistic patterns, one finds therefore that the language of Soyinka addresses itself not just to an African audience but also to a European one. Yoruba proverbs converge with English. The blacks speak English as they would the Yoruba tongue. It would appear therefore that Soyinka is not trying to fight shy of the colonial reality. He is engaged in formulating a negotiation between the blacks and the whites.

Frantz Fanon describes the dialectic of language between the colonized and the colonizer bleakly. According to him, "the colonized is raised above jungle status [in the eyes of the colonizer] in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards." Fanon, who rejects the codified colonizer-colonized relationship, advocates total rejection of the standards of the colonizing culture including its language. Fanon believes that "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (Fanon, Post Colonial Literature Web).

Fanon reasons that he who has taken up the language of the colonizer has accepted the world of the colonizer and, therefore, the standards of the colonizer. Following Fanon, Ngugi Wa Thiongo also proposes a program of radical decolonization in his collection of essays Decolonizing the Mind, which points out

specific ways that the language of African literature manifests the dominance of the empire. He builds a powerful argument for African Writers to write in traditional languages of Africa, rather than in the European languages. Writing in the language of the colonizer, he claims, means that many of one's own people -- meaning those people with whom a postcolonial writer identifies by nativity -- are not able to read one's original work. About African literature written in European language Ngugi writes, "its greatest weakness still lay where it has always been, in the audience -- the petty-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language"(Brown, Post-Colonial Literature Web 22). According to him, literature written in a European language cannot claim to be African literature, and therefore he classifies the works by Soyinka, Achebe, and Okara as Afro-European literature. But, there were also other writers who believed, albeit theoretically in a dynamics of a meaningful confrontation.

As Chinua Achebe himself reflected, "we lived at the crossroads of cultures" (Post-Colonial Reader 190). Yet this vision, for him, is a hugely positive way of looking at things, for though "the crossroads does have a certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple-headed spirits . . . he [also] might be lucky and return to his people with the boon of prophetic vision" (Post-Colonial Reader 191). For Achebe the confluence of cultures creates a transcendent, new culture, somehow advanced beyond the sum of its parts, a prophecy.

But, Soyinka has shown that it is possible to interact at various levels with the idea of a powerful colonial one up-manship and to establish for the jaded and culturally subverted people a new identity of being. The requirement for such a position implies an aggressive dialogue with the entrenched power formations, to

build up the desired implications for change. If his poetry, or drama is obscure to a certain extent, it also implies that for the writer, a means of subverting cliché is through an allegorical instrument: through the creation of an intellectual parole to justify a langue of ulterior and clandestine possibilities. Such an implication is also ironical- the challenge to understand, bedeviling towards a better perceptivity of a commonality between ethnicities and diverse nationalities.

When G. Wilson Knight, objected to Soyinka's language, with specific reference to the latter's 'Idanre and Other Poems', he pointed to the difficulty of taking the Nigerian's image making process, beyond particular suggestions. The critic in his assessment of Soyinka has moreover found certain ambiguity in relating symbols used by the poet in question to their traditional and individual associations, "an inadequate working out of images and metaphors" (Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol VIII, No.1 p.69).

To cite an example, Knight maintains that the image "A spring-haired elbow" remains "disembodied" and that "the elbow" is not after attached to anything. Wilson again does not ask why Soyinka images the palm-tree as a phallus, "piercing/ High hairs of wind" bearing "the pollen highest" and "tearing wind/The chaste hide of the sky" (Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol VIII, No.1 p.70).

The tree is a source of creative energy that stands erect and is aflame with kernels. These kernels, and the shafts of early morning sunlight, combine to suggest the presence of blood drops in the air. The image of the phallus described by the poet however requires an understanding of the traditional myths of the Nigerian people.

E.B. Idowu, in his book entitled Olodumare, says that Olorun, the Yoruba God, handed a palm-tree to Orisanla, when he sent this divinity to equip and

embellish the earth'. Idowu also says that Olorun ordered this so that 'its juice would give drink, its seed would give oil as well as kernels for food' (20-21). The palm-tree's fertility ensured the survival of the Yoruba divinities and people, and this seems to stand here as, amongst other things, an emblem of the creative essence inherent in Olorun's universe. The God bestows life, and Soyinka uses a sexual metaphor to convey this idea. The use of the phallus is a practical way for the poet and the dramatist to convey to his readers the importance of the palm fronds in their social, economic and creative life.

Soyinka's use of language in his poems brings up an important perspective: his shift from one level of reality to another, often frequently to illustrate a unique idea. The feature is present in the verse of the Nigerian, as much as it is present in his plays. In the use of such figurative language, Soyinka, does not embellish, but also ensure a unique mode of perception.

In his anti-colonial stance, this apparent slipperiness he divulges, becomes a strategy, a foil to the oppressive control of the means of communications which colonialism precisely strengthened. To cull an instance from colonial literary markers, Cortez's successful campaign against the Aztecs of Central America is explained by the Spaniard's seizure and domination from the beginning of the means of communication. The problem, says Bill Ashcroft in his essay 'Replacing the Text' included in his book The Empire Writes back, "for Aztec oral culture, based it was on the ritual and cyclic interpretation of reality, was that there was simply no place in its scheme of things for the unpredictable arrival of Cortez" (79-80).

Soyinka however says that his plays lacks no historical perceptiveness and they in fact prepare his readers for the challenges ahead. The reason why he claims so is

because the Yoruba myths upon which he builds up his concept of man and society is opposed to stasis. Art, Dialogue and Outrage' runs thus:

The African world-view is not however, as though by implication, static...an attitude of philosophical accommodativeness is constantly demonstrated in the attributes accorded to most African deities, attributes which –deny the existence of impurities or 'foreign matter' in the gods digestive system. Experiences, which, until the event, lie outside the tribe's recognition, are absorbed through the god's agency and converted into yet another piece in the social armoury of society in its struggle for existence or enter the lore of the tribe. (105)

Death and King's Horseman is beyond doubt one of the most celebrated works by Soyinka. It honors death as the highest form of achievement. Though centering on an actual series of events that took place in the ancient Nigerian city of Oyo in 1946, with the ritual suicide of the Chief Elesin, it generates its interest in diverting the centrality of the play's motif from the act of death to the process involved in it. Besides, the inclusion of a confrontational aesthetic between Olunde the colored man, and the white colonizers Mr. and Mrs. Pilkings has led many critics of Soyinka to propose the play's attractiveness as due to a tag of cultures. Soyinka himself however cautions against such reductions warning of the dangers this involves:

The bane of themes of this genres is that they are no sooner employed creatively then they acquire the facile tag of the clash of cultures, a prejudicial label which, quite apart from its frequent misapplication, presupposes a potential quality in every given situation of the alien culture and the indigenous, on the actual soil of the latter. The Colonial Factor is an incident, a

catalytic incident merely [...]. (Author's note to Death and the King's Horseman 6)

Death and the King's Horseman remain for Niyi Osundare "both the watershed and ultimate in African tragic dramaturgy... a drama which juxtaposes the beauty of form with the disturbing controversy of content." (Quoted by Cheeka, Soyinka and the Crisis of Nigerian Petit-bourgeois Radicalism)

For Ejinkeonye the book compels a second reading for the sublime language and the dignifying and overwhelming characters of Eleshin-Oba and Iyalaja³¹ (quoted by Cheeka, Soyinka and the Crisis of Nigerian Petit-bourgeois Radicalism). But, Ejinkeonye raised questions, too, concerning "the rationale in celebrating suicide and thinking that the mockery of Mr. Pilkings who tries to halt it, will justify it. One wonders why young Olunde would want to waste his youth and usefulness just to make the shallow, uninspiring point that Pilkings is fighting against what he does not understand" (Quoted by Cheeka, Soyinka and the Crisis of Nigerian Petit-bourgeois Radicalism).

Didi Cheeka, finds no point of difference with Soyinka's claim that the play does not present a clash of cultures. But, the critic, nevertheless questions the writer's rationale in celebrating suicide.

But the question remains; why celebrate suicide? (Quoted by Cheeka, Soyinka and the Crisis of Nigerian Petit-bourgeois Radicalism)

Soyinka answers this query in his essay 'Who is afraid of Elesin Oba?' included in his Art, Dialogue and Outrage:

My circumscription of the possible areas of 'argument', my rejection, for

instance, of the option to make Olunde reject suicide because of 'overseas' enlightenment is a creative prerogative logically exercised, since I have no wish to demonstrate that the colonial factor is ethically superior to the indigenous. (ADO 128)

The critic further considers why Soyinka's work finds such wide acceptance abroad where social development is considerably more advanced. In a more serious note, he argues that, Soyinka is a poet and ideologue of class rule. His individualism accords with their belief in rule by the minority.

The struggles of Soyinka's heroes are purely individualistic. A more general liberation for the toiling masses is left out of the question. Present in them is the triumph of the strong over the weak, and the inevitability and effectiveness of brute force. In the *Lion and the Jewel*, Side, the village belle, who had consistently rejected the amorous advances of Baroka, the wily village head, to make her the latest wife in his already congested harem was finally 'conquered' by Baroka, thus, presenting women as something to be conquered and put in their place – a congested harem. This is a point worth looking into. (Quoted by Cheeka, Soyinka and the Crisis of Nigerian Petit-bourgeois Radicalism).

The plays of Soyinka celebrate daring. They have heroes who can oppose or go against the political and social bounds of the times and in doing so help their communities as a whole to march forward. Apparently, such acts, looked from the perspective of an alien would suggest a detachment between the leader and his men or more fundamentally, a salute to the courage and will to being of an individual. But, the Nigerian social and communal life, being what it is, is closely knit. The inter-relationships between the community and its representative are undisclosed

one-yet, commonly known and practiced. It is the community, which is behind the individual in his march forward. Without the community, he is blank.

It may be said at this point that Oluinde's confrontation of death and indeed the white man even after his return to his ancestral land is between a concept of hubris that finds its solace in annihilation and another that despises death as a mere material and physical act.

For the audience the chance is to understand and hone the individual psyche under the stress of knowledge that attends this dialectics of combat. It sublimates in him the "social particulars that go into the engagement, the conflict that lead to self-liberation." (ADO 45)

Soyinka however does not only present men face to face with unfamiliar experiences as a matter of fact accruing from the white man's advent into Africa. But, he also shows that for any individual venturing into unknown territories of existence, the journey is never easy and he presents the emotional and mental conflict of his heroes through his dramaturgy. In this place, it is relevant to quote what Etherton speaks of Soyinka's view of his spectators and the way the Nigerian dramatist has used his stage space:

The members of the audience are part of the space of the performance and therefore metaphysically part of the conflict taking place. This conflict is itself symbolic of a primal conflict in the origin of the race. The audience participate in this much deeper metaphysical sense throughout the 'ritual'- which is the word Soyinka uses for drama in performance-because they are an integral part of the space in which performance of the conflict takes place [...]. Soyinka

therefore sees the use of space as *affective*, not merely effective, because it affects the audience in certain emotional and physical ways (244).

Soyinka's dramaturgy is evident in such works of his as the Madman, where the writer places his character against unknown odds that they must comprehend.

The Old Man who is an important character in the Madman, knows how to cure the sick. He is an herbalist. But, his traditional perspective is not unqualified. He despises organized religion and offers war victims human flesh. In doing so he irritates those who are in positions of strength, i.e. the authorities.

His son Bero is similarly equipped like his father to treat the sick. Before the war he had been with his father and sister in curing the patients of his village. But the war makes him cruel. He takes to eating human flesh not out of necessity as the lower ranks in the army would due to want of food but out of relish. But, it is his father ironically who had first offered him man's flesh and he vomited it up. Finally, he disowns the fact that human meat is worse than other flesh and consumes what comes his way because it is his way of ending inhibitions. He ultimately kills his father as proof that he recognizes no human order. But here again his father instigates his son to kill him. In doing so, the Old Man sacrifices himself to curtail Bero's capacity for evil.

Bero too is not without his own dilemmas. At a time when the earth mothers come to destroy his house so as to destroy all cures, herbs and medicines that the earth has yielded, the Old Man parodies operating on the Cripples so as to distract his own son from saving his medicines. Soyinka's stage direction at this point are precise and to the point:

(She [Iya Agba] raises the pot [of glowing charcols] suddenly to throw the embers into the store. Bero steps out at that moment, gun in hand, bearing down on Iya Agba.

OLD MAN. *(His voice has risen to frenzy)* Practice, Practice, Practice on the cyst in the system [...].

(Bero is checked in stride by the voice. He now hesitates between the two distractions) (Madman 76)

The Old Man definitely wants his son to be at peace with himself and to be happy as any father would. But, he apparently torments his son to ignite his most blasphemous passions so that they may finally be rendered inconsequential. The tragic dilemma of the Old Man then veers upon a love for his son and that of tradition, cut across by his rational estimate of a world that needs extremes to generate their opposite. Soyinka's characterization of the Old Man or even Bero may appear to be influenced by his Yoruba outlook. But, it is also definitely modern. Psychological inhibitions and emotional suppression of feelings and desires in individuals do lead to evil being committed by them. On the other hand, a conduit for their release offers humanity a hope for peace.

Rituals offers man a scope to address his most inward wants. As Soyinka had said in his book Art, Dialogue and Outrage, the ritual space offers humanity a better means of expressing their anger, frustration and the like, by breaking a gourd than by taking the life of their brethren.

Again if ritual is mediated upon to unhinge new understandings of social parameters, simultaneity of neglecting the uncomfortable modes of realities or wishing them out of existence cannot be attributed to Soyinka and infact becomes a gloss over. Soyinka's literary excursions have this effect that it produces change by

unsettling the certainties of life. There is destabilizing reference point in his plays and mostly in *Death and the King's Horseman* one cannot be sure to the end if normative expectations might be fulfilled. Olunde is confronted with a sense of loss that is unmotivated, unexplained, and yet paradoxically over determined. He suffers a fractured self. His desire for learning medicine takes him to England. But his home remains a much-honoured presence and to this effort he mitigates between a senses of nostalgia for the past with a present demand to carry out this search. Why then one might say, does Olunde do what he finally does? One account of it has been rendered visible through the application of the 'father child concept' as given out by C. Kerenyi:

The expression 'the child is the father of the man', becomes within the context of this time-structure, not merely a metaphor for development, one that is rooted in a system of representative individuation, but a proverb of human continuity that is not uni-directional. Neither 'child', nor 'father' is a closed or chronological concept. The world of the unborn, in the Yoruba world-view, is as evidently older than the ancestor world. (ADO 10)

But Olunde's decision to go for his cultural affirmations is situated in a comparative analysis of Euro centric jargons, faith, commitment to duty and nationality with those of his own country where the metaphysical contains an inbuilt mechanism of accommodativeness, the divine and the mundane, material science and spiritual resonance. The process of his arriving at a truth is dialogic-through comparable analysis and studied discursions into colonial space and the colonized one and is best exemplified in the conversations he has with Mrs. Pilkings.

From a deconstructive viewpoint, the privileging of presence, of logocentricism, is achieved by the suppression of differance. Mrs. Pilkings stands for a state of

European knowledge as supreme, which is why Olunde says, "You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you" (1: Scene 4, 194). Mrs. Pilkings is also not willing to accede to other wisdoms and for her the native who in this case is the black colonized, is a barbaric race, feudally oriented. Her response to quirky and almost incomprehensible British snobbery- her wearing of the egungun dress lamentably offshoring the respect with which it is seen by the natives, to please a British prince who is on tour, is only an ingenious attempt to come to terms with the horrors of war, a fact recognized by Olunde who defines it "decadence" (195). Indeed the war which the British was fighting out at the hour was illogical:

OLUNDE: By all logical and natural laws this war should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilization for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us (Death 195).

By apportioning logic in the British sense, Olunde the black man proves that he too can be capable of reason and conversely the colonizers are not despite all their protestations to the contrary. Olunde's response is to dismantle the rationalistic framework of imperialism itself, voice its silences and therefore reverse the text and involve itself in a continuously receding play of meanings. He moreover takes pain to prove that the hierarchy of colonialism is only a mental construct, best shattered, the possibility of which he himself executes by nominating death over life. But even when Olunde goes to accept death outsmarting his father in the job, he defamiliarizes the socially recognized role of the father as the lead taker and the first one to take the move. It was however his father who was believed by all and sundry to actually go for the ritual suicide and to this purpose the praise singers constantly remind the

King's horseman of the latter's duty and the reason why he should commit himself to his social and communal aspirations. That ritual suicide is a not a paucity in the traditionally bound society of Nigeria and remained a part of its cultural ethos even in the 1975's need not be referred to again. This is also because the Yoruba's believed in the cult of 'Agemo' one of the rituals dealing with the process of transition from one stage to another.

Critics like Jonathan Culler (1975) defines such defamiliarization on three levels 1) the text's relationship with the real world, the socially given text 2) a cultural text, recognized by participants of a given culture as naturally belonging 3) genre conventions that is specifically literary vraisemblance 4) the natural attitude to the artificial in which a text makes explicit its use of genre conventions, implying a natural presence on the metatextual level, and thus reinforcing its own authority and 5) another specific work which becomes a basis and point of departure and which must be assimilated in relation to the work (Structuralist Poetics 35).

It is another paradox that Soyinka who has always spoken against Negritude, is himself blamed for promoting a screeching African value system that contradicts with his talk of liberalism and an acceptance of other cultural milieus. Critics such as Rachael Teich in the Postcolonial Literature Web, in his essay 'Colonialism in Conrad and Soyinka' gives the following point to argue why he thinks Soyinka is after all such a good prop of Negritude:

Although Soyinka criticizes Negritude, his drawing on African myths, including those of his own Yoruba culture, does in fact define Negritude in the best sense; thus, there appears to exist a contradiction in his sentiments against Negritude, for, on the other hand, he accedes to dominant African culture in his

Négritude, for, on the other hand, he accedes to dominant African culture in his works. In Myth, Literature, and the African World, Soyinka discusses the creation of the universe by Yoruba deities as well as Ogun, thus yielding to the dominant ideology of Négritude-- pride in African history. However, Soyinka does base his play *Death and the King's Horseman* on the events in Yorubaland in the 1940's when European ideology dominated Nigeria: he depicts European versus Yoruba notions of personal honor and self-sacrifice, which he renders irreconcilable. In this aspect of Soyinka's writing, his use of African "mythology is part of an active, dynamic, liberating African culture and political assertion." Furthermore, "there is a double focus in the play, almost as if the world of British skepticism and power only superficially impinged on the real world of the Yoruba community [...]. Whereas Soyinka disagrees with the ideas prevalent in Négritude he ironically embraces it in the subject matter of many of his works, and as an artist he commits himself to social awareness, seeing his African heritage as a background in which to express the Africans' struggle with the environment of colonialism (Teich, Colonialism in Conrad and Soyinka, Post-Colonial Literature Web).

Soyinka need not give up his African beliefs purely because alternate philosophies explain the world. If African traditions have any iota of truth in them, they need not be disowned simply because Soyinka had been trained in the universities of the West and therefore could have examined the Yoruba world view from the perspective of an European-with detachment and irony.

That Soyinka's dramas are set in Africa is a truth beyond much debate. It is also factual that he does not dispense with the myths of his own people to interrogate the

present. Nonetheless, tradition is made complimentary to the newest social and technological viewpoints. The cross-cultural tendencies of his age and the world over find an expression in his plays, in the equally robust articulation of a vision of truth by the Europeans and other racial identities.

If, Mrs. Pilkings is not wholly wrong in sending him to England to study medicine, Olunde is not incorrect in promoting himself to the privileges of his father. In Olunde, Europe and Africa meet—the technology of Europe with the assimilative wisdom of Africa. Similarly in the mythical figures in Soyinka's plays, one finds an extremely individualistic reading of communal history, in accordance with the spirits and culture of the Yoruba people themselves. Soyinka does not acknowledge Negritude as such. But, he accepts to a certain extent the contributions made by it. Negritude glorified the intuitive man, proclaimed war on black bourgeoisification. It let loose 'the unrestrained poly-symphonic man, which like its forbear, tried to replace the empirical drift with communalistic faith, intensity of emotions and ethical intuitions' (ADO 230).

But, Negritude had its own drawbacks. It was reductionist in its tendencies and as such became 'the apogee of the critical phase of European xenophobia- racial chauvinism, honed to the last limits' (ADO 230).

Negritude insisted on African mythologies unsullied by foreign and alien interferences. It disowned the material evidence of a culture that supported a cohesive totality of human experience, and an integrated world-view. In a way, it was the frustrated expression of minds unable to absorb and dissect present conceptions of life. The African writers of Negritude were in fact shaped by centuries of European historicism and intellectual cannons for which the African reality provided only the occasional, marginal, race –motivated fodder. Soyinka also calls

them the “neo-Tarzanists- lazy, undialectical interpreters of their own society, choosing the line of least resistance” (ADO 235).

Mukotani Ruyendo, from the University of Tanzania puts an opposite point of view than suggested beforehand. He makes the following remark about Soyinka’s play Kongi’s Harvest:

Wole Soyinka in Kongi’s Harvest failed to come down completely to wallowing in true African theatrical tradition [...] what we would otherwise expect is a drama whose total form is based on the traditional forms and with all the incidents in the drama existing within the confines of that form (ADO 235).

Soyinka’s play, according to Ruyendo, does not stick to any particular form. It is also unsuccessful due to this lack. What the critic fails to comprehend is at times the limiting parameters of tradition in fully enriching consciousness. Tradition kept to itself is a cloistered virtue and lacks the power to define newer modes of apprehensions through an acceptance of the changing socio-economic dimensions of history.

Ruyendo should have considered that Kongi’s Harvest plays with a contrast between a wily and mischievous old *rogue of a king* and a modern dictator who to legitimize his authoritative prowess intends to lay claim to the Oba’s spiritual authority through his ritual consecration of the crops of the annual New Yam festival. But the real issue is far from resolved in the oppositions between two power seekers. As has been discussed earlier, the real challenge to Kongi’s despotism appears to come not¹ from Danlola, however but from his nephew and heir, Daodu, the head of a successful farming commune, and from Segi, the strange

nightclub dancer and ex-mistress of Kongi with whom Daodu is both sexually involved and is in vague political league.

Thus the play leaves the vanguard of pure political arena and risks an assessment of the human psyche. It justifies the wants of man. The way personal choice dictates political opposition is another way of saying that appearances are deceptive.

Annemarie Heywood says that it is the club and in Daodu and Segi's world "whence originates the moves which activate both Kongi and Danlola towards the climax". Even the production set, says the critic demands a static set with three distinct acting areas, separately and characteristically lit and furnished (Critical Perspectives 130).

Moreover, the characterization has to have its own nuances and a naturalistic acting style seems inappropriate in the play. Soyinka has made efforts to this end. Danlola in his play is not an attribute of great personal charm as much as any psychologically form of megalomania in Kongi is discounted. Danlola and Kongi are further representatives of their class and have been represented in the epic style of Brecht's drama, rhetorically projected in the third person. Similarly the love scene between Daodu and Segi cannot have the illusion of reality. For this to happen, the audience will be ill at ease and might not fathom the true motif in the opposition set by the lovers to the sterility of a Kongi/Danlola confrontation.

Soyinka suffices it to say, upholds neither the modern dictator who is a killer, nor the traditional ruler whose inertia is the reason for his subject's misfortunes. He supports Daodu instead and to this end moves away from what would otherwise have been a rather hackneyed end to a play of contradictory impulses to look out for an alternative. Through a different refractory index, the incorporation of music

distraughts through contrasts the inbuilt motifs of the play-insinuating grave nostalgia and lyrical mockery to say the least, made complex in the incorporation of a synthetic gathering of sounds and instruments for Segi's club.

Pointed references to the characters mental makeup and their denotative social hierarchy are made visible through the incorporation of dance and costume. Danlola's dance for example is slow and has swirling movements. His attire too is heavily ornamental and stiff the play's mention for the same term is 'gbarye' suggestive of a old world with its entrenched laws. Kongi on the other hand has mechanical movements. He is also a military man and his bedfellows are in the army. Hence, they drill out their exercises in a puerile machine like manner, wear military costumes and suggest a robotic world where stringency of laws comes uppermost even to the discredit of human impulses.

What is eluded in and through the presentation of the play's imaginative chiaroscuro is a heightened social awareness and temperament, which far from being a subjective term incorporates a complementary objective analysis (ADO 120). The hiatus given to credit Soyinka's ritualisation of experience at the cost of other social dimensions in the plays, involves a hysterical exaggeration. Outside the cocooned boundaries of the academic quarters it has little or no recognition. Soyinka never intends ritual to mean reconciliation with history.

And so when Femi Osofisan writes what follows one knows that he is besides the mark:

The humanist asserts that a subliminal mythological intuition identifies all humanity, that in every society at whatever stage of growth or decadence, the progressive human impulse –that is, the human urge to come to terms with

history or even transcend mundane imbecilities, resolves itself ultimately and dynamically into a continual drive to invoke the ancient communal psyche, through a dance –even transient –backwards into the womb of primeval chaos, into what Soyinka calls the ‘chthonic realm’. Then the archetypal myths are again resuscitated, the symbols renewed, the community is again reconciled with history (ADO 121).

Soyinka lambastes such decrepit assumptions with the retort “ Which society is this? Mine?”(ADO 121).

Indeed so. Even his most unmediated work *Death and the King’s Horseman* never represents a society reconciled with history. Myth must be understood as a forceful benedictory presence, and invites the recreative intelligence to accommodate the most alien jargons to the culture and society of a nation. But it favors critical reconnaissance too and to this end the writer has to initiate his own discourse patterns to the already established repository of tradition. While Soyinka favors a cyclic version of history, there is no suggestion that the society returns to its “original phase”(ADO 122).

If we turn to investigate such works as the Road, Soyinka’s technique of defamiliarization becomes apparent .One of the primary reasons why the play has elicited confusing responses from critics has been its process of mediating normally accepted notions of truth, celebrating a madman of a Professor who fizzles out in incoherencies and at his death leave for those who lives a strange cocktail of deceit and treachery as an ideal to be followed and realized in life.

D.S Izevbaye in his discussions of Soyinka’s dramas especially with reference to The Road included in his essay ‘Language and Meaning in Soyinka’s The Road’

comments, that although The Road is one of the most exciting of Soyinka's plays, it is also a problem play because not only it raises the question of linguistic communication and apprehension in the theatre-it is itself about the problem of communication (Critical Perspectives).

However, the critic referring to 'Times Literary Supplement', says that the critical journal, "despite its favorable and proficient view[...] seems to hold an unintentional scare for the reader of Soyinka's works in its ironic title, 'Keep off the Road' " (Critical Perspectives).

Soyinka' has used the commonplace language of his listeners. But, at the same time he has infused in such a language new significance in terms of words and proverbs from the Yoruba term. He even uses words, which are unheard of in the language of his colonizers. But this is only a strategy. The attempt is to usher forth in a dialectics across multiple semantic horizons.

Even when Soyinka uses myth it is not with the tendency of the modern writer, merely to camouflage the difference between a writer who is inspired by myth and a writer who takes an ironic attitude towards myth but does not believe the modern world. Many recent writers of myths look try actually to reconcile the anachronisms of the Manichean/Cartesian dualism, and are afraid of a world, which is beyond their control. At this point one is reminded of Joseph Conrad's illuminating dictum: "The habit of profound reflection is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man" (Victory 58).

The metaphysics of the Yoruba world recognizes the many sided nature of human experience. At the same time, it prepares its believers to constantly look out for new answers to meet the ordeals of life. Soyinka's world-view accrues from his Yoruba

mentality. He is always prepared for the unexpected in experience.

To return one more to The Road and trying to understand what it means we are brought to the most insidious use of language use, complicated through visuals and the array of images that also form a part of the intricate network of values which it holds. The word miracle, which the Professor for example uses is one such for coming from a man whom we have taken to be of no sense its use complicates the issue of laughter with which we are ready to greet the possibly lunatic man.

PROF. Almost a miracle ...dawn provides the greatest miracles but this...in this dawn has exceeded its promise (The Road 6).

And again when the same Professor uses the word 'wonder' the general expectancy is of audacity. But its power to arrest captures the imagination simultaneously.

PROF. Come then, I have a new wonder to show you ...a madness where a motor-car throws itself against a tree-Gbram ! And showers of crystal flying on broken souls.

SAMSON. (Suddenly alarmed): Wait! What was that about an accident? (The Road 51)

He finally ejects his final adieu, calling upon his listeners to be like the road:

Flatten your bellies with the hunger of an unpropitious day, power your hands with the knowledge of death. In the heat of the afternoon when the sheen raises false forests and a watered heaven. ...Coil your self in dreams, lay flat in treachery and deceit at the moment of a trusting step , rear your head and strike the traveler in his confidence , swallow him whole or break him on the earth[...] (The Road 96).

The Professor is actually using words for the dual purpose of combating stereotypes and also to heighten the benchmarks for illumination. Destruction creates. Hunger, treachery, deceit and strike- are mere words of moral conduct and legislations. Without their apprehensions in application they do not ignite the opposite. Virtue remains comatose in the bargain since not arrived at through a tested social conduct. This is also the possible 'Fourth Stage' that Soyinka speaks about, the field of transition, which must be evoked and transcended and evoked again to reach incrementally newer domains of wisdom. What is conventional is also deadening. The requirement is for an unprecedented and calamitous proposition of effort. Such is illustrated in the character of Murano whose dance is the key to a symbolic encounter with truth. Soyinka explains this:

The dance is the movement of transition; it is used in the play as a visual suspension of death-in much the same way as Murano, the mute, is a dramatic embodiment of this suspension. He functions as an arrest of time, or death, since it was his 'agemo ' phase that the lorry knocked him down (The Road 149).

What Soyinka is proposing here is a sublimation of mere walk and infact the impossibility of the same under the gravity of an overburdened consciousness, a cyclic and even at times disruptive concept of time which detouring the linear can be a buzzword of true liberation.

Derek Wright concedes this when he says:

The violence of transition in the play is perhaps most acutely felt in its treatment of time. The road covers a single day, with time lapses curtailed even to the extent of performing without an interval, but this outward

adherence to the classical unities is disruptive. The second part of the play, though its duration is only a single twilight hour, takes longer to perform because so much time is spent reproducing the accidents of the past week. These are piled up thick and fast- the Driver's Festival, the rotten bridge, Sergeant Burma's the morning crash at the uprooted sign-that it is difficult to tell them apart or to say what happened when (Soyinka Revisited 93).

The first part of the play is again continuous and has no breaks. The audience is unsettled at this juncture and their temporal bearings are consequently put out of depths. When the clock strikes thrice with the simultaneous disappearance of Murano into the dawn it again indicates that what is put forward is not mechanical time or its linear concept, but rather a liminal space and time element in which a dumb god exists. It is to establish this concept of concatenation, the parallel existence of past and the present that the play does not offer any flashbacks from 'then' into the 'now'. And out of this blurring of dimensions, arrives the foreknowledge that the play is after all grounded in the Yoruba worldview of accountability.

When Samson and Kotonu put on the mask of Sergeant Burma and others, they literally put themselves in other time zones, seeps, as out of life into the horrors of death. The Professor, however must in fact die, physically and mentally i.e. dissolve in the body and the mind to release himself from the entrapment of his quest- defined in his belief in the "Word" (The Road). And when he does that he will know that true knowledge is not derivable in scraps of paper or signs of road. It is a state of the mind and death is only an act of affirmation towards the same process. Death and silence becomes impregnated by contrast with the callous verbiage of the scraps of paper which the Professor accumulates, almost reminding of Keats's famous dictum in the 'Grecian Urn' "Heard melodies are sweet/ but those unheard are

sweeter /Therefore ye pipes play on /To the spirit ditties of no tone.” (Complete Poems)

This is why the Professor says at the play’s finale: “death’s revelation must be total or nothing at all” (The Road 226).

Examined from an anti-colonial combativeness, the final say of the play is disconcerting and extremely riddle-like not only because it leaves the possibility of any structural assumptions indefinite, but also says nothing at all to conform to straitjacket expectancies. There are no resolutions in terms of an affirmative good and bad, which is also why, like Shakespeare’s Hamlet, it leaves the ground of civilization extremely scorched and uncertain. The result is an ironic, radical, savage and amoral turning of tables upside down. This does not make Soyinka historically invalid or inaccurate. But it says that his dramatic artifacts are consciously self-aware, mixed genre performances in the present and it is not possible to decode their semantic contours without arriving at the text devoid any presuppositions or set valuations of the normal. To do so is to defeat the end of effort itself, and foreground the hierarchies upon which so much of modern anomalies and frustrations are built.

In and through this instance Soyinka parallels Foucault who wanted to turn history against itself, “to sever its connections with memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and construct a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time” (Language, Counter Memory and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, 205-217). Foucault’s attitude to knowledge and the epistemologies of human faith was counter productive in so far it was evolving, complex and ambivalent, a trait which Soyinka adheres to. Soyinka stands apart from conventional markers of civilizations and spins a whole configuration of systematic

apparatus so as to do what knowledge does to its material. As a humanist he is opposed to the confinements of didacticisms, to what society thinks as acceptable and the norm. He stimulates the dialogic struggle between competing voices and foregrounds in some sense the formalistic strategy of the contrastive principle of construction. The projection of experience is also deconstructive in so as the hierarchies between an inside and an outside are turned over to make what is incidental or marginal central by virtue of its very marginality. This is also the logic of the parergon, which according to deconstructive critics is the manner of turning outside into the inside. Thus it may be said that interpretative statements constructed as self-referential within the African literary text are meta literary and literary at the same time.

The subjective space of a Lakunle, for example, in Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel fits into this category. In an important centripetal movement, he comes to his village with a European value for civilization, advocates progress, opposes the idea of bride price, and invites Sidi to civilized romance and to a life of knives and forks and breakable plates with him. Also, his proposals include his desire to walk side by side with his wife in the street;

Just like the Lagos couples I have seen
 High heeled shoes for the lady, red paint
 On her lips. And her hair is stretched
 Like a magazine photo. (Lion and the Jewel 9)

The "stranger with the one-eyed box" (Lion and the Jewel), a foreign journalist who went about taking photographs of several rural scenes to be published in a magazine is like Lakunle, a source of immense delight and curiosity for the woman in the play. Both Lakunle and the photographer nevertheless lack true personal

charm. Lakunle loses out to Bale for having received the proposal of marriage from he dithers.

But I must prepare myself

I cannot be

A single man one day and a married one the next (Lion and the Jewel 55).

The hypocrite and the weakling that he is, he emphatically condemns Baroka when the latter wins Sidi

Voluptuous beast! He loves his life too well

To bear to part from it

Baroka has such a selective eye, none, suits him

But the best

[...]Yes one must grant him that

Ah, sometimes I wish I led his kind of life

No! I do not envy him! Just, the one woman for me. Alone I stand

For progress (Lion and the Jewel 24-25).

Referring to this passage, Eldred. D. Jones points out the conflict between the dual aspects of Lakunle's nature that is reflected in the variations in his diction:

Once he recovers and the prudish sentinel in him takes over, he returns to a rhetorical style studded with clichés from his book of learning. The inverted syntax signals the return of the respectable veneer: 'Alone I stand for progress...' This is an example of Soyinka's subtle use of linguistic register to highlight Lakunle's total unfitness for the role of the reformer with which he flatter himself (Moore, Wole Soyinka 23).

Lakunle, the emaciated man is the real outsider. The rise of Bale is explicable in what Derrida concludes in his book Of Grammatology:

An external frame may function as the most intrinsic element of a work, folding itself in; conversely, what seems the most inner or central aspect of a work will acquire this role through qualities that fold it back outside of and against the work. The secret center that appears to explain everything folds back on the work, incorporating an external position from which to elucidate the whole in which it also figures (Of Grammatology 198).

Had Lakunle married Sedi or taken the trouble of opposing the wily Bale, he could have been the forerunner of change and evolution. But his precise incapacities of the role that is expected of him shroud his dignity and honor. He cannot be the man she wants who says one thing and does another and so negates his former self. Lakunle, the man who might have been takes the mantle of the old Bale, and fizzles out his rational claiming. So when Gerald Moore finds a touch of paradox in the character of Lakunle, the frustrated lover and reformer, one cannot possibly disagree that the critic's opinion might have been sounder.

We should feel for him (Lakunle) even if we are to endorse Sidi's final preference for the old lion of Ilunjinle (Wole Soyinka 23).

But one cannot really feel for Lakunle. This is because he is a man who does not understand his own social responsibilities. At the same time, he is weak, ignorant and cannot force himself to stand against the old Baroka in guile. He has no moral courage. He despises his own grounds, the culture of his own people, which is why he is reluctant to join the revelers and partake the spontaneity and ease with which they participate in the celebrations.

The African's feisty celebration of life through the profuse use of dance and mime, reflects his commitment to his own country, its sounds, gyrations and moods that are at the same time an opportunity to regroup and reorganize himself and his brethren. But in the play, it has another important role cut for it: it enacts the important events in retrospect. This is similar to the flashback techniques referred to by E.D. Jones who believes that their introduction in theatre is for emphasis, clarification and to break the monotony of the narrative structure, which the drama uses.

At this point one is reminded of what K.E. Senanu says:

In the script, Sidi stages a pantomime to re-enact the arrival of the photographer from Lagos who had fallen in love with her, taken photographs of the village and given her image a front-page printing in a popular magazine [...]. But the problem that the production faced at this point and never quite managed to solve, was to make the traditional dances chosen as a substitute for the pantomime, a celebration of Sidi's youth. This would have prepared the way for the finale and contrasted capitulation of youth to old-age cunning at the end of the play. (Critical Perspectives 74-78)

Whatever might have been the success or failure of the dances which K.E. Senanu observed, it is undoubtedly true that they act as a vehicle of social commentary, enlarge the narrative modes of the play and focus attention on the other mediums of semantic exchanges available to the exploratory artist who stands at the crossroads of culture, i.e. use both traditional story telling with the measured notes of the colonial tongue. As a form and pattern of expression they are recognizably the most direct and yet the most complex form of theatrical communication, which is both prior to, and transcends, verbal drama. But their relevance in societies such as that of Nigeria

is in their ability to speak to audiences who lack the specialist knowledge to appreciate the technical jargons of modern drama.

But then dance is also the sub-text of the written form and puts to the reportire of the dramatist all the resources he needs to reach to his people, his audience. Its gestures, motions, and colors help the story to move along without any hiccups.

Leslie Paik, in his essay entitled 'Wordsworth, Shelley, and Soyinka's Pessimism in Procession,' in *Postcolonial Literature Web*, refers to the Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook, where some serious charges have been leveled against Soyinka. He points to that section of the 'Yearbook', which contains the attack.

Although satire and social and political commentary have always been a staple of Soyinka's work, even in such lighthearted examples as his early drama *The Lion and the Jewel*, critics discern an increased anger, pessimism, and devotion to political themes in his work after 1967 (Contemporary Literary Criticism, Yearbook 1986, 277).

In 1966, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a distinguished professor of literature and East Africa's foremost writer gave a brilliant lecture at Africa Centre, London, entitled, 'Satire In Nigeria' in which he discussed the works of Wole Soyinka and T. M. Aluko, identifying the satirical thrusts they make in Nigerian society through their work. But Ngugi had reservations about the pictures Soyinka presents, especially in his play, The Lion And The Jewels (produced in Ibadan in 1959).

Confronted with the impotence of the elite, the corruption of those steering the ship of State and those looking after its organs of justice, Wole Soyinka does not know where to turn. Often the characters held up for our admiration is ... cynics, or sheer tribal reactionaries like Baroka [...]. Although Soyinka

exposes his society in breadth, the picture he draws is static, for he fails to see the present in the historical perspective of conflict and struggle. It is not enough for the African artist, standing aloof, to view society and highlight its weaknesses. He must go beyond [...] (Thiong'o, Satire in Nigeria 1966).

Soyinka could see the disastrous effect of colonialism in Nigeria. The political, social and economic mess and above all the climate of fear under which people all around lived, made Soyinka weary, but not really exhausted. His faith in the resources of his people, and in fact those around the world, similarly oppressed, stemmed from his incisive assessment that societies can regroup through interaction.

Soyinka's dramaturgy never suggests a society in inertia. If traditions are culled in his work, they also explain and contain the dichotomies of present aberrations. But, Soyinka's dramaturgy is also a latent exercise in building up the consciousness of readers. It makes them aware of the many different ways of looking at things- through exchanges- with events, histories, nationalities and cultures, alien to each other apparently. It provokes humanity to take up the positions of the 'other'.

Thus it is within human relationships that the essence of a human attribute, that such a dignity, is most meaningfully sought, not within the self as some mystic endowment, but as a product of social interaction.

Africa should not bother to ape the West. If Lakunle is admonishable, it is because the teacher has no notions of progress except through the vague façade of fashion. Bale may not be likeable too. But in some ways he is better than the foolish master. At least, he recognizes progress and knows how it is to be attained.

In choosing between two evils, Soyinka, goes for one, his people are best acclimatized to control and define. Traditional incompetence of its rulers was the

result of Nigeria's domination by the West. If Nigeria must accept the West at all, it must be on its own terms and one that suits its human enterprise.

Mikhail Bakhtin in his work The Dialogic Imagination (1983) asserts that a discourse "orchestrates" voices on many levels: "authorial speech, the speech of narrators, inserted genres, and the speech of characters". Each voice he mentions "permits a multiplicity of social voices" whose diffuse movement, whose dispersion into rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia", whose "dialogization" defines the novel in its richest aspect (263) endowing it with the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the written work. But in focusing on this social component, the linguistic basis is apparently suppressed, and in Africa this basis is what is most heavily overlaid with palimpsests and echoes, voices that remain silent and not spoken at all.

But while Bakhtin admits the fertility of written forms in allowing for the intermixing of disparate linguistic genres, he is not supportive of the oral forms and believes that orature signifies a closed world which affirms a stable order, with characters who are either epic heroes or mystical beings or folk types.

The epic past is called the "absolute past" for good reason: it is both monochronic and valorized; it lacks any relativity. (The Dialogic Imagination 15-16)

This attitude of Bakhtin must be looked into and examined.

Soyinka uses ritual to organize and define in communal terms the apparatus of opposition to stasis and provoke meaningful new changes. But, he is not the only writer to have incorporated rituals in his aesthetic framework. Aristotle was the first to do so and Friedrich Nietzsche and G. Wilson Knight both of whom were deeply alive

to the functions of drama have anticipated his position in the modern age in sublimating audience emotions though differently than what the Greek believed in an achievement of a catharsis of pity and fear.

Like Aristotle, Nietzsche believes that tragedy developed from the Dionysian dithyramb (Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy 26). He also argues that in tragedy, ritual dithyramb is only a symbol of the universal and individual conflicts raging in all societies of the world (Hinden, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 359).

Nietzsche's concept of audience effect was also that in the experience of drama the individual achieves a subliminal perception of a communal consciousness. In and through the dramatic dialectics, an audience member realizes that the dramatic conflict parallels his internal psychological conflict both as an individual and as the member of the society. At the same time a conflict is paralleled within the world will between the principles of fusion and those of individuation (Hinden, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 8)

While G. Wilson Knight accepts Nietzsche's model of the link between rituals and tragic drama which in the latter's case was restricted purely to the Greek plays, in Knight's case an examination of the dramatic process also takes into account the plays of Shakespeare, Wagnerian and modern drama. Knight discusses in his arguments the psychological and the psychoanalytic conflict which drama engenders in the audience.

While Soyinka accepts that drama has a ritual component to it, he departs from any monotheistic concern with the ritual to include references to contemporary history and even gears the same to a revolutionary or liberating consciousness. He also postulates that in the experience of the theatre, revolution and the ritual, the

individual loses a sense of himself and when he fights to have it back he carries along a new sense of individuation based on a renewal awareness of communal values and beliefs. Ultimately, the individual does not remain ensconced to his earlier self and when he realizes his true potential for wisdom, it is generally with an understanding that his community must benefit from it. For Soyinka the easiest way of achieving transference of meanings catapulted by the culture hero is through an incorporation of ritual, which encourages the inclusion of the audience to have its complete say and evolution. Masks, dance, songs and the like and those that the common man understands have been consequently brought in by the artist, purposefully, to allow the audience participate in the dramatic processes.

But one point needs to be pointed out here. This is that while Nietzsche indicated a body of living man as his community, Soyinka's definition of the same proceed from an ontological summation of Yoruba metaphysics which posits three major areas of experience—the living, the dead, the unborn. To these time frames, Soyinka adds another—the area of transition, which he defines in the 'Fourth Stage,' which is also a mediatory world, the "area of transition". (ADO 26)

All action Soyinka further must involve a stage of transition with its precedent in the will of Ogun who is also Soyinka's favored deity in being the first amongst the gods to cross the abyss that separated man from the gods and thus reuniting them with the humans. Human actions must parallel the gods who led by Ogun defied their inherent fears, to forge ahead a new world.

But in A Dance of the Forests, Soyinka's patterning of contemporary Nigerian history through the weaving of past, present and the future-is to point out to an incomplete ritual, the rites of passage being blocked and fissured in the devious manipulations of leadership. The inconsistencies which this triggers off, between the

expectations of the common man and what he finally achieves is a commentary on the lackadaisical and equivocal commitment of the powers that be in addressing the political and social crisis that strangled Nigeria after the independence of 1962. Obviously tragedy in such a society is far from being an individual event and a spectacle for the society. It is rather the contiguity of the whole social body in the malignant and hazardous dynamics surrounding its being that gives to the Dance an exponential social argument. It is the social manifestations that dictate individual suffering and to that extent, recognition of hamartia is both an individual and social necessity.

The play's opening with the "Welcoming of the Dead" and "Gathering of the Tribes", turns out to be no solace in the past for the emergence of the "Dead Man" and the "Dead Woman", subverts all expectations of a fruitful beginning in the nation's march and celebrations towards prosperity. The implications are intended to be expansive and far from a simplistic idealization of the past. The need is to critically examine the totality of paradigms which gives the past its distinction. Mata Kharibus for example appear in every generation under different names. Rola or Madame Tortoise is the coquette, the flirt or the prostitute endangering the security of individuals and nations when she is in position of power. The Court Historian's interpretation of history is the same in all eras-it is the tyrant's version. It is the common man who is the victim of state's oppression. A release from this morass is however not possible in the way of life the common man chooses.

This has to be through an alternative, such as Demoke suggests- through his human suffering and expiation, promoting the liberty of those who continue to suffer the consequences of destabilizing intrusions in their lives by the mighty and the powerful. That the commentary of the play is expansive has already been suggested

earlier. Soyinka's dramatic apparatus at this point needs recognition of its functioning momentum. It may be reemphasized that while he speaks of the simultaneity of the divine and human order, Soyinka is essentially making a point to relate the repercussions of individual anomalies on the larger social scene and of society as such on the latter. His plays, especially the serious ones, are not linear. Each scene reflects on the others, except that the episode of the Half-Child is completely kept in isolation. Una MacLean views the Half-Child as symbolic of the perilous existence of Nigeria on the attainment of independence. (Black Orpheus. Vol 15, 1964) Eldred Jones 'regards it as a symbol for man's future (The Writing of Wole Soyinka 44-46). But Margaret Laurence in her essay complied with Ulli Beier sees the arrival of the Half-Child as a mere scene only and does not take cognizance of its relatedness with other parts of the play. (Laurence & Brier, Black Orpheus. No 8, 1960)

But Laurence's view cannot be taken for granted. Though the Half-Child, is negligible on the surface it is the victim of an inhuman political regime and thus its presence in the play is illustrative at a concrete level the repercussions of misrule. The Half-Child again bears resemblance to the Yoruba concept of 'abiku' though it is really not for it is not even born. His subsequent game of *sesan* with the 'Figure in Red', his loss to the latter who intends to take him as his own agent of death reveals at a deeper emotional level the hostilities and insecurities suffered by the weak and the despondent as mere devices in the larger game of ego and self-aggrandizement. Its movement towards its mother may be taken at a connotative level- Nigeria's search for its own roots when it was being rumpiled upon by the neo-colonial regimes. In fact, it is also upon the Half Child reaching its mother that she can be unburdened of dented sense of completeness and nourish to life and activity as only a mother can.

Shall my breast again be severed

Again and yet again be severed

From its right of sanctity? (Dance 80-81).

Ogun who supports human beings throughout, especially Demoke, tries to help the “Dead Woman” by drawing the child towards her. (Margaret Laurence sees in this act of Ogun an affirmation of the Half-Child being an abiku, and in Ogun’s acting a malevolent aspect in this case.) But, the “Interpreter”, and the “Third Triplet”, who, dance the dance of “ampe” and throw the child between them, intercept Ogun. Demoke intervenes to save the child for having already taken the life of his apprentice Oremole, he is under a deep mental duress and recognizes that a component of creativity is preservation. The question thrown by the ‘Forest Head’ at Demoke assumes relevance at this point.

Aroni, does Demoke know the meaning of his act? (Soyinka, Dance of the Forests 82)

And Aroni goes on to add:

Demoke, you hold a doomed thing in your hand .It is no light matter to reverse the deed that was begun many lives ago. The Forest will not let you pass (Dance 82).

Demoke however makes the human choice. In his hubristic daring, he allows the future generations of mankind to live with the conjugal possibility of being attached to its past and also being responsive to the future. Demoke’s act may then be seen as a genuine, but difficult act of freedom. But it is nonetheless necessary to forge ahead and “pierce the encrustations of soul deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness” as the Forest Head says (Dance 82).

Demoke's catharsis is arrived through a recognition of his personal delinquencies, his negation of ego, and his commitment towards those who suffer.

Soyinka's dramaturgy, the building up of opposites through the dance of the "Interpreter" and the "Third Triplet, " involving the child, symbol again of the country's future, transmutes "ampe," the traditional Nigerian dance pattern into a short and snappy expression of the nation's ills. Tradition has been aesthetically changed in this act of the dramatist. Soyinka applies the form and pressure of a past jargon and gives it a modern interpretation.