A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN* AND *THE ROAD*

BY

MUSA UMARU GARGATI
MA/ARTS/3777/2009-2010

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES,
FACULTY OF ARTS, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA.

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POST-GRADUATE SCHOOL, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA. IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE MASTERS OF ARTS DEGREE IN LITERATURE.

JANUARY, 2015.

DECLARATION

This is to certify that I Musa, Umaru Gargati MA/ARTS/3777/2009-2010 have solely undertaken this research, which is the outcome of my original work and has not been presented to any tertiary institution in fulfilling the partial requirements for the award of any degree.

CERTIFICATION

We certify that this thesis entitled, A Deconstructive Reading of Wole Soyinka's ***Death and the King's Horseman*** and ***The Road*** has been duly presented by Musa Umaru Gargati MA/ARTS/3777/2009-2010 of the Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and has been approved by the Examiners.

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Dr. Abubakar Ali Liman Date
Chairman, Supervisory Committee

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Prof. AbubakarTanimu Date
Member, Supervisory Committee

--------------------------------- ----------

Dr. Abubakar Ali Liman
Head of Department Date

--------------------------------- ----------

Prof. A. Z Hassan
Dean, Post Graduate School Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work first to God Almighty and my mother, Mrs. Esther Umaru Gargati.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am fortunate to have had help from many quarters in writing this research. Chief among my helpers are my amiable supervisors, Dr. Abu Ali Liman and Prof. Abubakar Tanimu whose pieces of advice and suggestions are wholly interpolated into this research. Permit my plagiarism! In particular, I thank Martha Kato Nyam for her understanding in making sure that this work sees the light of day before tying the nuptial knot. Also, my mother has been with me all the way. For this, I am grateful.

Lastly, the guidance, directives and encouragements of Professor Nasidi Yakubu of blessed memory ring continually in the course of this research. I am eternally indebted to him academically. May Allah grant him Aljanahtu Firdausi.

ABSTRACT

African literary elites have responded to the call by Africans to free the continent from all forms of colonial and slave mentality. While others have responded overtly, Soyinka does so covertly. As a result, over time, critical commentaries on his works have been on the mythical presentation of the Yoruba world as a microcosm of the entire African continent and the post-colonial experience. While these commentaries cannot be totally erased, this research exposes the pitfalls, the blindspots and the aporias that characterize most African writings. Consequently, this research discusses Soyinka's two plays; ***Death and the King's Horseman*** and ***The Road*** as Soyinka's unconscious hatred for the West. Clearly, African writers in an attempt to counter Western perception of Africa as being uncultured unwittingly enter the same conceptual web. To foreground such instances this research deploys deconstructive method of reading to bring to the fore some of the biased presentation of the Western world in all its fauna and flora. Although, deconstructive approach is "esoteric", it is distinct in pointing out binary oppositions and how such binaries work to undo any artistic creation. Consequently, this research is premised on the following assumptions; that there is a biased portraiture of the Western world; that Africa's position as the Other in Western metaphysics has been reversed to take the privileged position while the West becomes a negation. What Derrida calls *supplementation*. This research stresses the creative freedom of the reader as well as the attempt to participate in and observe the ***play*** of possible meanings to which the texts give access.

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CHAPTER ONE*:*

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

This thesis espouses and identifies gaps in critical comments made about the subject matter of *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road.* Consequently, the study analyses the various positions taken by critics concerning Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road.* Most importantly, the study sought out the binaries that operate throughout the plays so as to unequivocally bring to the fore some of the prejudices that informed these plays. While the world view that Soyinka presents in these plays gives us a better understanding of the trilogic 'essence' of Yoruba culture (the world of the living, the death and the unborn) - what most critics believe to be his underlying thesis, this tripartite relationship works as a form of higher truth (transcendental signified); the philosophy that unsettles the Western view of Africa as the other.

Therefore, in order to achieve the set objective this research evaluates Wole Soyinka's two plays; *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and *The Road* (1965) from a deconstructive standpoint. Precisely, the research pits these plays against Soyinka's submissions in his polemics i.e *Myth, Literature and the African World.* The polemics presents Africa as a fount-head of all its culture. Besides, the study looks out for instances where Soyinka's language occasionally *spills* or *slips* from his control. To this end therefore, this study evaluates the typologies enunciated in these works. It therefore follows that the main trajectory of the discourse in this study is not simply what Soyinka says but how he uses the same tool of the *"adversary*" as Professor Yakubu Nasidi (2002:7) would say, to create a supposedly African world where African plays reflect an ontologically African reality different from the West**.** Deconstructive criticism interrogates philosophical empiricism, and

unmasks claims of totalizing metaphysics such as inscribed in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road.* In Derrida's phrase:

> *The Nietzschean **affirmation**, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and one of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of the world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation.(Writing and Difference 1978 p.292).*

The term, *play* in the above excerpt implies the Derridean notion of undecidability. Binary oppositions are reversed in order to elevate the "inferior" term of the opposition so that the constative becomes the performative and vice-versa. This "explodes" the initial arrangement as Derrida puts it in ***Positions*** (ibid: 45). This "explosion" or reversal of hierarchy is not intended to invert the value systems implied in the initial opposition but to confront one interpretation with another interpretation. By so doing, the construction of a new hierarchy is refused or, avoided. At this juncture, interpretation affirms free-play. The aim is to oscillate between critical comments on Soyinka as a romanticist on one side and, the other view which sees his work as about clash of culture.

Deconstructive approach to the study of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road* opens up an important argument hitherto in vogue especially by critics like Nasidi (2002) in his book *Beyond the Experience of Limits* which serves as the mainstay of this study, because it combines insights from philosophy, literature, culture and anthropology. Nasidi (ibid) through a kind of rhetorical critique undermines Soyinka's text ***Myth, Literature and the African World*** as having coherence, unity and meaning and shows that it does not represent the truth it so claims. It does so by playing with language in a way that teases and delights. Example of other works used in analysing these same texts are, Idegu's (2007) "*Beyond the Yoruba Cosmology: a Contestation of the Africanness of Wole Soyinka's Submission in Myth, Literature and the African World";* Kwame A. Appiah (1992) *In My*

Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. The above named writers could be found guilty of their use of theoretical tools; that is, if we understand Eagleton's (1983:18) definition of theory as "a form of discourse which is extremely sensitive to its basic assumptions". This study foregrounds the binaries of these plays and how such binaries undo the coherence the plays have so far enjoyed. What Norris (1997: viii) describes as "old, truth-fixated, epistemological ***position for a pretty long time***" (emphases mine). The aim is to challenge fixed meta-position, or a stable position beyond critique. Though, interpretation should not hope to decipher a hidden meaning, truth or origin, it must play without security and thus be a "sure substitution of given and existing present", argues Derrida (ibid: 292). Similarly, Ibrahim Bello Kano posits that deconstrucive "*method*" has deep roots in the Post-Kantian critique of reason. The term, Post-structuralism expresses a unique style of thought influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, but now popularized by philosophers and literary theorists like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and their American counterparts, namely Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom, Barbara Johnson and Shoshana Felmann. Post-structuralist philosophy is oriented towards the *"destructive*" analysis of all stable conception of meaning, subjectivity and identity. In the Post-Structuralist tradition, there are no self-evident first principles, an origin, or centre, but the very interrogation of philosophical reason itself, the unmasking of the claims of totalizing metaphysics. On the whole, deconstruction is a method of reading that foregrounds the silences, the absences and the blind spots of any work of art. It works by circumspectively entering into each labyrinth in order to find elements in the work which is alogical, threads in the work which will annihilate the ground upon which the work stands. In order to achieve this, this work applies the Derridean model of Double-Reading.

Therefore, this work challenges all hitherto critical interpretations which often border on the ontological nature of African societies and the effect of westernization on African continent. It resists such interpretations by looking at binaries and how such binaries work to undo the coherence the works so claim. It displaces the bias that informed the binaries, it overturns hierarchies thereby offering another set of possible meaning that arises from the new relations of meaning, which, in itself is also not absolute.

Barbara (1987:87) explains that deconstruction teaches us to look out for what the construction of the bottom line leaves out, what it represses, what it disregards, what it considers unimportant, what it puts in the margin. That is, one has to have the conception of what the bottom line is, in order to organize the "noise" that is being disregarded. By 'noise' we mean what the writer is never aware of, those things the writer does not say but which are there in the work- that which our usual cultural and cognitive schemas disregard or marginalize. Seldom (1989:15) explains that deconstruction begins when we locate the point at which "a text transgresses the laws it appears to set up for itself". Therefore, the philosophical concern of deconstruction is to undo the coherence a work of art enjoys in order to foreground the blind spots that annihilate the ground upon which a work rests.

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

Most African literatures are written against the historical context of a burning desire by subjected people to counter their subjugation, whether Soyinka succeeds and how he does succeed is what this study intents to foreground. Soyinka has written a '*Poetics of Culture' (i.e Myth, Literature and the African World)* and also created a mythic world in his plays, where his cultural poetics can find ontological and epistemological justification. The main thesis of *Myth, Literature and the African World* and is here quoted at some length:

> *we black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonization- this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of their world and their history, their social neuroses and their value systems. It is time, clearly to respond to this new threat…* ***hence, the brain behind the plays (Emphasis mine)***

The above extract is a call by Soyinka to all African elites to rise against all forms of denigration with the attainment of independence. This is important because of the vestiges of colonialism that still rare it's ugly head despite independence. Being at the vanguard of this decolonizing enterprise, Soyinka fired the first strike through his plays by presenting to us an untainted African society before its contact with the West. The plays to be considered therefore present Africa in a 'new' light. Hence this study is posed to uncover how Soyinka undertakes this enterprise by looking at the margins, the unimportant aspects in order to create the noise. Therefore, this study assumes that:

1Deconstruction is a viable means of exploring the binary opposition between Africa and the West in Soyinka's two plays.

2 in Soyinka's selected plays, African position as the other in Western metaphysics has been reversed to take the privileged position while the West becomes the negation.

3African culture becomes a higher form of culture (transcendental signified).

4 Soyinka is an ambivalent writer that cannot be easily classified.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study sought to explicate the nature of Africa's counterfactualization especially by literary scholars which often times take the same degree of denigration as the West's. Therefore, Africans are as guilty of stereotypical outlooks on Western culture as the West is guilty of prejudices against Africa. Instead of this 'acrimony', these cultures are supposed to

see themselves as different but equal partners in progress thereby expanding the frontiers ***differance***, as that which is different not as a negation, an inferior other. The specific objectives of the study are to illustrate that:

- Although Wole Soyinka's texts attack the West they use the same method with which the West denigrated Africa therefore, they are also guilty of what they criticize.
- The prejudices which propelled Soyinka to write the texts in-question and by so doing show that Soyinka has a deep seated hatred for the West.
- Illustrate instances where Soyinka's language occasionally slips from his control thereby giving us a glimpse of his sub-conscious biases.

1.3 Justification of the Study

Wole Soyinka's critical prejudices against the West were, no doubt, formed quite early in his life. These prejudices have transformed into an epistemology (system of knowledge about an inquiry into African belief). Therefore, his plays have been seen, so far, as polemics attacking the West and presenting Africa and its people in a more positive light. His plays transform language into discourse of identity, of history and the African predicament in general. While these positions cannot be totally erased, this research is aimed at opening up new horizons by exploring the lacuna in comments already made about these plays which border on clash of culture(Soyinka (1997:67) would not want his works to be judged as such) thereby expanding the frontiers of existing knowledge. Or as Macherey Pierre (1978:6) observes, "the act of knowing is not like listening to a discourse already constituted, a mere fiction which we have simply to translate. It is rather the elaboration of a new discourse, the articulation of silence." To this end therefore, this research differs remarkably from previous research in that it sees *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and *The Road* (1965) in a refreshingly new perspective; as Soyinka attempts to *supplement* the

binary thinking of the West. Africa therefore is giving a new identity, existence and essence; concepts that Derrida fought strongly to foreclose. This work therefore expands the frontiers of existing knowledge by viewing these texts as attempts by Soyinka to decolonize Africa. Perhaps, Soyinka is not even aware of this position but since interpretation is an unending venture of ***differance,*** this work enjoys the priviledge of deconstructive interpretation. By Western binary it means that the Western world has already defined humanity and unfortunately, the black person finds himself at the base of this race ladder. Consequently, this research aims at foregrounding the binary oppositions in these plays, and also to show the instability of such binaries. If, as we are made aware even in his literary essay, ***Myth, Literature and the African World*** (1975) that:

> *When ideological relations begin to deny, both theoretically and in action, the reality of a cultural entity which we define as the African world while asserting theirs even to the extent of inviting the African world to sublimate its existence in theirs, we must begin to look seriously into their political motivations. (pp:xi)*

This Western political motivation results in another kind of political motivation-African; which Soyinka inextricably finds himself. These two positions results in ***logocentric*** thinking. Logocentrism is a term coined by the German philosopher, Ludwig Klages in the 1920s. it refers to the tradition of Western science and philosophy that stipulates the logos, "the word" or the "act of speech" as epistemologically superior in a system or structure in which we may only know, or be present in the world by way of a logocentric metaphysics. For this structure to hold true it must be assumed that there is an original, irreducible object to which the logos is representative, and therefore, that our presence in the world is necessarily mediated. If there is a Platonic Ideal Form then there must be an ideal representation of such a form. This ideal representation is, according to logocentrist thought, the logos; a kind of bias, in which an aspect of an argument is de-valued. The de-valued aspect becomes a

negation, an inferior other whereas; the privileged position becomes a generator of essences, a fount-head of knowledge. Therefore, this research undermines the logic of oppositions within these texts. Interpretation cannot ever be closed, as Machery once posit; there are as many interpretations as there are human beings. The beauty of it is that there is no single and ultimate interpretation

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is the questioning of the empirical claims to reality by Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road*. However this will be done bearing in mind his (Soyinka's) submissions in *Myth, Literature and the African World* ***(1976).*** This scope becomes inevitable if an in-depth analysis of the texts in question is what this study seeks to do. Despite the scope, there is strong indication that the findings will help expand the frontiers of knowledge.

1.5 Methodology

In order to achieve the set objectives, Soyinka's ***Death and the King's Horseman*** and ***The Road*** are the primary source materials which constitute the basis of discussion through content analysis. As such the study is research oriented and adopts a library –based approach by which materials from a wide academic field have been used in the study, thus, providing a work that explicates the nature of African decolonization using the dramatic genre. Consequently, sources such as books, web-based materials, published and unpublished dissertations, journals, magazines, articles, newspapers have been incorporated into this research. The internet, with its wide spectrum has been of tremendous assistance. While the real texts for this research are Soyinka's *Death And The King's Horseman* and *The Road* and to a larger extent, *Myth, Literature and the African World,* this study shall be approached

from a multidisciplinary angle that combines insights from anthropology, philosophy, history, and literature.

1.6 Chapter Structure

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One, the introduction deals with the nature of some African writings as attempts to correct certain stereotypes about the continent and in so doing, it introduces the major concern of this study which is to foreground the *blindspot*, the *absences* and the *aporias* of *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road*. Chapter Two on the other presents and analyses the various approaches to Soyinka's texts as well as the theoritical framework while Chapter Three foregrounds the binary opposition in *Death and the King's Horseman* and how such binary works to present another perspective of viewing the text through an in-depth analysis of the writer's language. Similarly, Chapter Four presents *The Road* as an attack on the West noting areas where Soyinka's language occasional slip from his control thereby is being susceptible to deconstructive reading. Lastly, Chapter Five concludes by summarizing the entire study and stating unequivocally the importance of *play* in deconstructive reading.

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CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Many literary scholars have written extensively about Wole Soyinka and his works and as such it is cumbersome to review critical works on his writing individually. Consequently, this study delineates these critical responses into two viz Critics who see Soyinka as an enigmatic humanist artist and those that see his plays as axiomatic of the traditions of cultural assertion and dissolutioment. This division does not downplay other notable voices, as a cursory look into them will help shade more light about the personality of Soyinka. Crow (1987:147) for instance believes that Soyinka has had many influences that culminated to inform his works chief amongst which is G. Wilson Knight, a renowned romanticist. These influences resulted in the writing of *The Bacchae* adapted from *Euripides* which attests to Soyinka's retaining, "like Murano, one leg, or at least a big toe, in that other world". A more than cursory reading of romanticism as a literary movement shows that the era is defined by revolution and revolt against existing order. In this light, Crow (ibid: 153) sees romanticism as a reaction "against an encroaching industrialism and commercialism, and their ideological accompaniments, by a self conscious adaptation of traditional modes of wisdom, by seeking to restore to their community an imaginative union with the natural world that was fast being utterly transformed". With this definition, it is not difficult to see the affinity between Soyinka and romantic metaphysics. They share a remarkably similar structure; an original unity of being is shattered into atomized alienation, which brings the yearning for completion and fulfillment; and a quest has to be undertaken, at grave risk to the quester. This position has has taken both critical and imaginative enterprise in soyinka's works as evident in *Myth, Literature and the African World* and *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road* respectively. We see in *Myth, Literature and the African World* for

instance, the central romantic enterprise: the imaginative reinterpretation of the traditional mode of wisdom to deal with the realities of a changing contemporary world. While on the creative or imaginative sphere, *The Road* elaborates Soyinka's concern with the nature of the individual quest. Professor, clearly enough, takes his eccentric place in the line of rebels and would-be redeemers, having been ejected by the church for what it regards as the blasphemy of his teaching. Though, Abrams (1971:46) posits that the high romantic period, beginning in the 1970s, represented:

> *A return to a mode of hereditary wisdom which is redefined, expanded, and applied to the emerging world of continuous political, industrial and social revolution and disorder which is the world we live in today.*

This mode of wisdom, in the West, was the Judeo-Christian world view, with its history of man's Fall and subsequent alienation from God. At the social and political level, the romantic myth describes a world which has fallen into alienation and tyranny but which could at least potentially be redeemed through a qualitative change in human consciousness.

Therefore, it is along these lines that one may legitimately describe a romantic, an artist whose deepest social and cultural influences have not been European, and who is not concerned to place himself within any European 'movement' or artistic tendency. "Soyinka is a romantic in that he fulfills the twin requirements of an artist in the romantic tradition: he seeks "truths" through a highly individual imaginative quest, in which personal experience is necessarily the touch stone of value, and in doing so he stands in a complex relationship to the hereditary mode of wisdom of his culture, since he both returns to it and consistently redefines, expands and applies it to the "emerging world of continuous political, industrial, and social revolution and disorder" which is Africa and the world today.

In an interview with Nkosi (1962), Soyinka confirmed the gloomy message he had sought to carry across at the Nigerian independence celebrations two years earlier: "the main

thing is my personal conviction or observation that human beings are simply cannibals all over the world so that their main preoccupation seems to be eating up one another". This has become the hallmark of Soyinka's plays since independence. His earlier plays could be seen as an exploration of this theme.

Ogungbesan (1975: 177) believes that *The Road* (1965) unequivocally explores this theme. The Nigerian road here serves as a pervasive symbol of death. Ogun, the patron god of the drivers, preyed on his devotees and they all perished on the road. These heroes of the road: Akanni the lizard, Zorro, Saidu-Say, Sigidi Ope, Sapele Joe, Indian Charlie, Sergent Burma e.t.c ended up being consumed by the road. Similarly, Srinivas (2004:84) describes how the play is structured around the cult of Ogun, the god of the road and the fierce protector of taxi and lorry drivers. Srinivas believes that nature has always awed man and the road traverses through various landscapes like the mountains, the rivers, the jungle, the valley, the bridges and the rocks. Therefore, the traveler on the road has to face the power of these natural structures and possibly pay the supreme price, death.

Maduakor (1986:316) documents the attacks that Soyinka encountered consequent upon the preponderance of myth and animism in his works. The two radical voices in this direction are the Marxist school, who believe in the historical cum materialist basis of works of art led by Biodun Jeyifo, Femi Osofisan e.t.c and the neo-Neogritudist apologetics. These critics are unrepentant in their evaluation of Soyinka's works despite the latter's attempt to exonerate himself and by extension his works. It is common knowledge that the Marxist school of criticism approaches a work of art from the materialist-historical perspective; to look out for the social conditions that necessitate a work of art as well as the place such works occupy in the historic development of society and of a class (see Leon Trosky 1977:368 and Ernst Fischer 1970: 80-93). Consequently, these Marxists scholars indict

Soyinka for his supreme indifference to the impulses of Marxism. To the Nigerian Marxist, any work of imagination that dares an independent existence outside the framework of historical materialism is open to the charge of deliberate falsification of experience and reality. These methods of falsification according to these Marxists scholars are 'distortions', 'romanticizing', 'mythifying', 'mystifying', and 'prettifying'. Therefore, Soyinka's predilection for myth exposes him to the Marxist notion of falsification. In reading Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman (1975),* Jeyifo (1977:27) criticizes Soyinka for his "mythopoeic attitude to history, his constant penchant for transforming experience into metaphysical, trans-historical, mythic dimension." Somewhere, these Marxists define mythopoeia as "… the pre-eminence of the supernatural in the artistic representation of the past." In an essay "*Drama and the New Exotic*" Osofisan (1978: 7) ridicules the 'new exotic' stage of playwrights like Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, peopled by animist gods and utterly indifferent to the logic of "historical contradictions in the dialectical flux." Similarly, Omafume Onoge and G.G Darah (1977 p55) presented the same point in their paper ***"****The Retrospective Stage: Some Reflections on the Mythopeoeic Tradition at Ibadan"*

Applying the materialist theory to *Death and the King's Horseman*, Jeyifo (ibid) finds the play guilty of misrepresenting and misinterpreting the real identity of the indigenous society. The play, according to Jeyifo, did not attempt to highlight the real objective difference between the conflicting groups and classes in the indigenous society. On a more positive note and in an early essay on Soyinka's *The Road*, Jeyifo gave kudos to Soyinka for the presentation of some dialectical awareness of history, but, that awareness, he feels, is subverted by Soyinka's mythopoiec imagination which leads to mystification and reification of the road.

At another level of critical applause to Soyinka's work, Kolawole (ibid: 175) argues that festivals seems to take center stage in Soyinka's most literary drama. For instance, *A Dance of the Forests,* his first major play, was especially written for the Nigerian independence celebration of 1960. The action of *The Strong Breed* centres on the festival of the New Year. The crux of *The Road* is an event which happened at the last Driver's festival. Similarly, the festival of the New Yam brought *Kongi's Harvest* to its pessimistic denouement. Booth (1992:14) suggests that Wole Soyinka is unique among African writers in the historical imaginative commitment which he gives to the motif of human sacrifice in his works. He argues that;

> *In the Strong Breed (1964), The Bacchae of Euripides (1973) and Death and the King's Horseman (1975), he challenges European images of barbarism, and averts through the ritual of human sacrifice a communal relationship between the individual and society different from that of the individualistic West.*

Similarly, Adeniran (1994:5) observes that Soyinka's plays have attempted a direct and meaningful imitation of reality. One is therefore quickly struck by the recurrence of features like myth and religion in his plays. What endeared most of his plays to the public are the vibrancy and attempts to explore the dark recesses of the human psyche through satire. Beneath this humour is the political element of rebellion and change or, the need for them in societies. Speaking about *Death and the King's Horseman* Adeniran (ibid:69) believes that the play has so much to do with clash of will or the subversion of culture, treachery and worldly desires. Of symbolic importance in the play are Iyaloja, the bride, and the ritual sacrifice. Iyaloja is the symbol of authority, an assertive woman ready to dare and deal while focusing on a principled goal. The bride symbol points out how material things, attachment to the pleasures of the flesh, e.t.c block the realisation of social and political goals. Essentially, however, these 'vices' as well as the insensitive roles played by the whites- Simon and Jane Pilkings- are not as instructive as the base and banal traditional custom

partially romanticized in the play. There seems to be no hope or aspiration except as decreed by the king's life or death, no justice beyond the realism of myths veiled in the bowel of traditional enslavement. "With this, who would not long for a play that challenges and calls for a revolt against that exiguous part of an unedifying Yoruba ethos", asked Adeniran (ibid). For those who remember Soyinka's assertion as quoted by Eldred Durosimi Jones (1973:73) that "the despair and anguish which is spreading a miasma over the continent must sooner or later engage the attention of the writer in his own society or else be boldly ignored" Adeniran (ibid: 70) is quick to conclude that ***Death and the King's Horseman*** attests to the artistic writer in Soyinka more than anything else.

Speaking on Soyinka's ***Opera Wonyosi***, one of Soyinka's faithfuls, Yemi Ogunbiyi opines that the play is "specifically his caustic account of decadent post-civil war 'petro-naira' Nigeria". In a more general term it is Soyinka's partial summation of the contemporary African situation. According to a critical essay on Soyinka published in E-notes that, Soyinka's, art and morality are inseparable. This does not however mean that sensitivity to beauty is a good indicator of moral awareness, though that is strongly suggested in ***A Dance of the Forests***. What is more to the point is that the primary obligation of art is to tell the 'truth'. That obligation implies exposure and denunciation of falsehood. Even in Soyinka's broad farces- for example, the two plays that feature the prophet Jero- the object is not entertainment for its own sake but satire against any religious, social, or political leader who makes mockery of human freedom. Soyinka also insists- with an eye on the romantic notion of negritude- that human beings have a dual nature whether they be African or Western; that is, they have destructive as well as creative urges. Part of this purpose as an artist is to expose the self-serving idealization of primitive African virtue; the problems in contemporary Africa may exist in a context of Western colonial oppression, but moral responsibility lies within the

individual person as much as in the cultural milieu. ***The Road*** therefore is Soyinka's first drama that centers on the danger of human sanity posed by contact with the chthonic realm. ***The Road*** combines the psychic themes of tragedy and myth with the grim reality of death, symbolized by the spider's web. Murano prods the web several times to draw attention to the parallel between the spider and the road as sources of death. Professor's quest for the Word is rendered ambiguous by the incongruous juxtaposition of his constant rhetoric about revelations through the mystical Word and his collection of spare parts for the Aksident store. So far, as we have seen, critical comments on both *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Road* have been on the supernatural or spiritual undertones of the works. While these positions cannot be totally erased, this work looks at the political motivations behind these works as well as the lacunas in comments about these plays. Therefore, deconstructive technique of reading is used in order to achieve this objective.

2.1 Theoritcal Framework

The term, "*Deconstruction*" has generated a lot of controversies even among literary scholars as well as scholars from the humanities in general. The controversy appears irresolvable when even an Encyclopedia (see *Encyclopedia of Quantitative Research* vol. 1 and 2 by Lisa M. Given 2008) designed to enclose, encapsulate, reduce and simplify its subject matters (deconstruction being one of such matters) could not arrive at any convincing, clear-cut definition. This is because; the term is oriented towards opening, expanding, amplifying and ***"complexifying***" matters. Therefore, it becomes obvious that deconstruction cannot be discussed in a nutshell. But, in an ironically titled paper by John Coputo (1997:32) "*Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida"* posits that "whenever deconstruction finds a nutshell-a secure axiom or a pithy maxim- the very idea is to crack it

open and disturb this tranquility." Similarly, Tony Bennett (2005:70) corroborated the fact that:

> *In the hands of its defenders… deconstruction is frequently understood as a critical method or procedure, involving the reversal and then annulment of hierarchical opposed terms. In the hands of its enemies…it is frequently accused of being a form of skeptical relativism.*

Both positions show the complicity of either position one chooses to take. Hence, deconstruction can either be a technique for making trouble or a technique for critical assessment of close systems. Given (2008:203) concludes that even Jacques Derrida, the acclaimed initiator of the term and its defining concepts was at pains defining the concept when confronted by The New York Times reporter, Dinitia Smith (2008:203). The worst that Derrida said was, "it is impossible to respond…I can only do something that will leave me unsatisfied." This is a pointer to the kind of problem we are about to face. However, this work tries as much as it can to generate the term's historiography and its adoption into present literary theory.

The German term, "Destruktion" was initially used by the German, Martin Heidegger in a 1927 lecture later published as *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Heidegger is of the opinion that phenomenology is a method of doing philosophy that has three steps: reduction, construction and destruction. In 1985, when Derrida wrote a letter to Tsutsu of Japan who was then finding difficulty translating deconstruction into Japanese, he explained that in Heidegger's *Basic Problem of Phenomenology* (1927), both Destruktion and ***Abbau*** (another German term which literally means "unbuild") means "an operation bearing on the structure or traditional architecture of the fundamental concepts of ontology or Western metaphysics" (see Given 2008:204). Therefore, it becomes obvious to stress that deconstruction is anti-structure (then, structuralism was at its peak), and anti Western ontology and metaphysics.

Throughout the 19th century and early 20th century philology not linguistics was the science of language. Philologists' *diachronic* approach to language was to discover the similarities and relationship between languages of the world; how, let's say, a sound in a particular language had changed etymologically or phonologically over centuries. Philologists moreover, believed that words mirrored the structure of the world it mimics. That is, language had no structure of its own. Known as the ***Mimetic Theory of language***, this hypothesis asserted that words (either spoken or written) are symbols for things in the phenomenal world, each word having its own referent. According to this theory posits Bressler (2003:77), the symbol (a word) equals a thing:

Symbol=thing

It was a Swiss philologist and teacher, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) who revolutionises language studies from philology to linguistics. His paper, *"Course in General Linguistics*", published post-humously, is one of the seminal works of modern linguistics and forms the basis for Structuralism literary theory. Saussure does not reject completely the diachronic approach to language by Grimm brothers and Karl Verner because such an approach helped in discovering changes that occurred in consonantal pronunciation in Indo-European languages. But, he introduces the ***synchronic*** approach; an approach that focuses on language at one point in time. Here, the attention is on how the language and its parts function not the historical evolution.

Therefore, Saussure is of the opinion that all languages are governed by their own internal rules that do not mirror the structure of the world. Hence, the basic building block of language is the phoneme- the smallest (meaningful, significant) sound in language. This phoneme is made up of identical speech sounds called allophones (how a particular sound let's say /t/ is realized in 'tip' and 'star' varies). How these combine to produce meaning is

not arbitrary, but is "governed by a prescribed set of rules developed through time by the speakers of a language" (see Bressler p.78-79). Besides this, another major building block of language is the morpheme. This is the smallest unit of a word that has lexical or grammatical significance. The study of this is what linguist call morphology. Syntax on the other hand is the arrangement of words to form a sentence. Just as the arrangement of phonemes and morphemes are rule governed, so also is the arrangement of words to form sentences. Besides syntax, there is also semantics. This studies the meaning of utterances in order to eliminate potential ambiguities.

Saussure is of the opinion that between the ages of five and six speakers of any language have consciously mastered their language's complex systems of rules or its grammar- their language's phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics; which enables them to participate in language communication. They do not however, master such advanced prescriptive grammar of English invented by the 19th century English purist. These aspects of language that the child internalises, Saussure call it ***Langue*** and its evidence in speech he calls ***Parole***. Jonathan Culler (2002:9) puts the point more succinctly thus:

> *The basic distinction on which modern linguistics rests, and which is equally crucial to the structuralist enterprise in other fields is Saussure's isolation of langue from parole. The former is a system, an institution, a set of interpersonal rules and norms, while the latter comprises the actual manifestation of the system in speech and writing.*

Rejecting philologists' belief that word equals a thing, Saussure proposed that words are signs made up of two parts; the signifier and the signified: the former a written or spoken mark and the latter, a concept. Hence, the conclusion that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, and a matter of convention: for Saussure, meaning is therefore relational and a matter of *difference.* This therefore, leads us to the often

misunderstood statement by Saussure and which forms the basis of all post-discourses: “in language there are only differences without positive terms” (see Course in General Linguistics :5). Since signs are arbitrary, conventional and differential, Saussure concludes that the proper study of language is an examination of its langue. Borrowing the vocabulary from Saussure, Structuralists - variously called structuralism, semiotics, stylistics, and narratology according to Bressler (p.82) believe that rules, codes and signs govern all human life and communication. The proper study of meaning and reality is an investigation of the system behind these practices, not the individual practices themselves.

Claude Levi-Strauss is the first anthropologist to apply Saussure’s theory of linguistics to narrative discourse in the 1950’s. He was attracted by the rich symbols in myths which he believed, possessed structures like language. Each individual myth was therefore an example of parole. What he wanted to discover was myth’s langue; its overall structure that allows individual examples (parole) to function and have meanings. Roland Barthes’ contribution to structuralism theory is best summed up in the title of his most famous text, ***S/Z*** (1974). In this text, Barthes posits that in Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, the first‘s’ is produced without any vibration of the vocal cords hence, voiceless. Whereas, the second‘s’ in the title is produced with vibration of the vocal cords hence, voiced. This allophonic realization of the grapheme (s) into /s/ and /z/ Barthes term them minimal pair. Most consonant sounds are divided into this minimal pairing. That is, they are produced with the same organ of speech, the same manner and point of articulation but the differences being that one is voiced and the other, voiceless. For example, /t/ and /d/, /k/ and /g/ e.t.c. Barthes declares that all language is its own self-enclosed system based upon binary opposition.

When applied to literature, an individual text is simply a message- a parole that most be interpreted by using the appropriate codes or signs or binary operations that form the basis

of the entire system: the langue. Only through recognizing the codes or binary oppositions within the text, says Barthes, can the message encoded within the text be explained. Structuralists believe that a text's meaning can be discovered through an examination of its structural codes. Therefore, structuralism believes that an author conveys something to a reader by mixing, re-mixing and fabricating some "tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture and it is the reader's duty to decode what has been encoded in the text". Barthes was alive to the problems of structuralist theory. He remains open to the pleasure of system and method, the old fascination with structure as a totalizing order of thought but he views such as fantastic. His later texts maintain a dialogue not only with structuralism but with Derrida, Jacques Lacan and other post-structuralist thinkers whose influence Barthes both acknowledges and keeps at protective distance.

Saussure, has discovered the arbitrary relationship between language and the phenomenal world i.e. language as a system of naming things based on agreement by a particular speech community. However, post-structuralism has now driven structuralism into critical limbo or historical museum by establishing the instability of such signification. Little wonder, other scholars see deconstruction as a radical reading of Saussure's structuralism (see *Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methodology*); hence post-structuralism.

The debate about the emergence of post-structuralism can be traced to 1966/7 at an International Symposium when the languages of criticism and the sciences of man emerged. Derrida published three books in 1967, among them *of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*. However, it is Derrida's paper '*Structure, Sign and Play'* that is taken as the beginning of post-structuralism. Though, Derrida (1967:287) acknowledged other scholars as precursors to deconstruction thus:

> *It would be somewhat naive to refer to an event, a doctrine, or an author in order to designate this occurrence. It is no doubt part of the totality of an era, our own, but still it has already begun to proclaim itself and begun to work. Nevertheless, if I wished to give some sort of indication by choosing one or two "names," and by recalling those authors in whose discourses this occurrence has most nearly maintained its most radical formulation, I would probably cite the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without truth present); the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of being as presence*

That is, these scholars have started deconstructive enterprise long before Derrida. Though, it is as a result of "an era" that has dedicated itself to critical thinking; and Derrida is happy to be part of such an era. In fact, when Derrida's work emerged Barthe's work was undergoing a transition from the structuralism of elements of *Semiology* **(***1964*) to a post-structuralist position that can be traced in essays written between then and the publication of ***S/Z*** in 1972. According to Philip and Patricia (2001:178), a more radical reading of Barthe's S/Z will reveal that the five codes were actually not meant to reveal the structural grid of the text but as processing the textual web in an act of structuration. Similarly, Lisa (ibid:666) is of the opinion that post-structuralist perspectives tend to concentrate on language, the production of meaning, and the ways in which knowledge and power combine to create accepted or taken-for-granted forms of knowledge and social practices. The post-structuralist dimension to power was given by Foucault.

"Literature", posits Blamires (1991:36) "is susceptible of infinite reinterpretations because it conveys no message but system of signs". Moreover, Barthes in the *Times Literary Magazine* (1967) as quoted by Blamires (ibid: 36) declares that, "we blind ourselves to the fundamental problems of utterances if we postulate a truth of content and reasoning in language such as science claims." Hence, this position led critics to see Barthes more as a

post-structuralist than a structuralist. Little wonder in an essay, *"The Death of the Author*" (1968), Barthes posits that "writing is the destruction of every point of origin". That is, what a writer thinks he says and what is actually said might be different because of the fluidity of language. The structural theory of language has therefore obtrusively entered literary criticism coupled with much wider movements expressing dissatisfaction with traditional philosophical assumptions. The question might be repeated here as it was asked somewhere in the introductory notes to Norris (1982:xi):

> *In what conceivable way can man 'transform' himself through a process of naming somehow made possible by this rigorous unreliability,* ***language****? These are not problems that either resolve themselves on a more careful reading or simply settle down (like religious belief) into a system of self supporting paradox. Rather they operate, as more than one disgruntled critic has remarked of de Man, as a positive technique for making trouble; an affront to every normal and comfortable habit of thought (emphasis mine).*

Language and its unreliability has now become a tool with which deconstructionists employ to make "trouble" because signifiers cannot make permanent any signified. For signifieds in this instance could become signifiers in another instance. Philosophy, right from the time of Plato has carved a place for itself as "the sovereign dispenser of reason" whereas; literature was seen as a kind of poor relation to philosophy, contending itself with mere imaginary themes. Little wonder, Plato in his all time referential book *Republic,* expelled poets from his 'ideal' republic, then, set philosophy as a guide against the beguilements of emotions (plays). This privileged position enjoyed by philosophy has been ingrained in Western metaphysics right from the time of Socrates. In fact, the Socratic method of eliciting "truth" from the youths by feigning ignorance was aimed at suppressing what he considered inconsequential. The unprivileged position in which literature was reduced to led eventually to so many defenses written in support of literature among which, Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* numbered itself. Derrida counters this position of power by attacking philosophy using its

very language and method. As Derrida says, it is incumbent on whosoever claims the truth to reveal it in the full glory of its presence. But the truth, argues Derrida, is always conveyed in some medium- speech, writing, for example- and never directly. Philosophy has enjoyed this privilege position for a long time by ignoring, or suppressing, the disruptive effects of language.

Above all, deconstruction works to undo- according to Derrida, the ruling illusion of Western metaphysics. Or, as Miller (1986) would say, "deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself…." Derrida's writings seem closer to literary criticism than philosophy. Their main concern is that, methods of rhetorical analysis, initially an exclusive reserve of literary texts are in fact, essential for reading any kind of discourse. Derrida's work provides a new set of powerful strategies which places the literary critic, not simply on a same footing with the philosopher, but in a complex relationship (or rivalry) with him, whereby philosophic claims are open to rhetorical questioning or deconstruction. Paul de Man (1979:113) posits that "literature turns out to be the main topic of philosophy and the model of the kind of truth to which it aspires".

The French philosopher, Jacques Derrida attacked the *logocentrism* which, by giving primacy to speech (which means, value of presence, presence of the object, presence of meaning to consciousness, truth e.t.c) over writing, presupposes a fusion between the signifier and the signified. Derrida gives primacy to writing, where the realization of the meaning is always postponed by the very fact that it will always be read and re-interpreted in the future. If, as Saussure says that language is a system based on difference, Derrida coined the word, *differance* to also mean that writing has the tendency of difference and deferral in its relationship to consciousness, presence and science. That is, meaning can be postponed

and deferred. This coinage becomes necessary because no signifier can orient or make permanent any signified. Signifiers lead us to so many signifieds. Hence, there are many interpretations not a single interpretation. Derrida (1981:8) defines *differance* more succinctly thus:

> *First, differance refers to the (active or passive) movements that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving….Second, the movement of difference, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates…*

This word therefore, expresses a dual spatial 'difference' and temporal 'deferment', detaching any sign from full presence of its meaning. Language as a system of naming things is subject to slippages or spillages. Where Rousseaus regarded writing as a *supplement* to speech, Derrida sees it as both taking the place of speech and adding to it. His position as a philosopher is to discard 'hierarchical' formulations of relationship by firstly, reversing them (e.g speech/ writing to writing/speech) and then discarding of the reversal. Derrida used the term *supplementation* to refer to the unstable relationship between binary.

Derrida believes that the whole history of Western Philosophy from Plato to Aristotle is founded on a fundamental error. That error is what Derrida calls *transcendental signified* posit Bressler (2003:104). This transcendental signified, once found, it will be an external form of reference upon which one can build a concept or philosophy. This western proclivity for desiring a centre Saussure terms *logocentrism.* Since, any logocentric outlook presupposes that another is de-valued; Derrida concludes that Western Metaphysics is based on a system of *binary oppositions*. Therefore in any binary, one concept is superior and defines itself in terms of the other. For instance, I know woman because I know man. Deconstruction according to Tony (2005:70) "is a strategy of critical analysis associated with the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida***… and it is used in the*** disassembling of

philosophical preconceptions (emphasis mine).” Post- structuralism therefore has the tendency of undermining closed systems and fixed limits. Its technique of reading has to do with close reading of heterogeneous logic of a text and the conditions that allows such systems to operate.

The traditional method of reading tries to establish the true meaning of a text, a deconstructive reading on the other hand challenges such position. It involves an effort to show that what we claim to be saying is different from what the text is actually saying. It tries to undermine a text’s meta-position as having coherence, unity, and meaning and to show that it does not represent the truth it so claims. Deconstructive reading rejects fixed positions and considers any interpretation as being provisional, just one in a series of interpretations that decenter each other in an ongoing play of difference. In the absence of an ultimate interpretation, a text cannot be said to be tied to some center that existed before and outside it, and meaning can have no place to conclude, nothing in which to be subsumed.

A number of people have tried to summarize the process of deconstructing a text. Derrida himself explained it saying that “reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he/she commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language he uses”. As Sharon Crowley describes the process in *Teacher’s Introduction to Deconstruction (1989),* it tries to “tease larger systemic motif out of gaps, aberrations, or inconsistencies in a given text”. It tries to find blind spots that the writer might not have known. She adds that “deconstruction amounts to reading a text in order to rewrite them”. Similarly, Derrida in his seminar paper (1967:278-294) tries “to re read Western history to give voice to that which has been systematically silenced”. On *blind spots*, Paul de Man probably has more to say. He posits in *Blindness and Insight (1971:80)* that critics achieve insight through their “peculiar blindness”.

Barbara Johnson's (1980:72) often quoted definition of deconstruction says that it occurs by "the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself". Whereas, Jonathan Culler (1882:45) says that "to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies". An elaborate comment comes from J. Hillis Miller (1976:6-13):

> *Deconstruction as a mode of interpretation works by a careful and circumspect entering of each labyrinth… The deconstructive critic seeks to find, by this process of retracing, the element in the system studied which is alogical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building…deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text has already annihilates the ground, knowingly or unknowingly. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that is has already dismantled itself.*

Such definitions are helpful, but how does the deconstructive critic goes about 'dismantling' the text or finding a writer's blind spots or a text's "gaps, aberrations, or inconsistencies"? The reader has to engage in a close reading of a text, noting the presence and operation of all its elements. Unlike formalism, deconstruction seeks to show that a text has no organic unity or basis for presenting meanings, only a series of conflicting significations.

A simple way to start is to follow Derrida's own process, which he called "double reading." That is, you first go through a text in a traditional manner, pointing out where it seems to have determinate meanings. The first step in deconstructive reading is to recognize the operations of binary opposition in our thinking. According to Derrida one of the most "violent hierarchies" derived from Platonic and Aristotelian thought is speech/writing, with speech privileged. Consequently, speech is awarded presence, and writing becomes simply the symbol of speech, a second hand representation of ideas. When incompatible meanings are brought to light, the text deconstructs itself. These incompatible meanings undermine the

grounds on which the text is based, and meaning becomes indeterminate. The text is not unitary and unified in the manner that logocentrism promises. Recognizing that a text has multiple interpretations, the reader expects to interpret it over and over again. No single reading is irrevocable; it can always be displaced by a subsequent one. Thus interpretation becomes a creative act as important as the text undergoing interpretation. The joy lies in the evolvement of new ways of seeing the work. Because the reader must express new discoveries in logocentric language, the interpretation will deconstruct itself as well.

The question might appear speculatively simple, how can we find alternative interpretation now that we are used to believing that there is an inherent meaning in all texts, to be brought to light by the enterprise of criticism? More so, the interpretation there from reflects the real world and can be so acknowledged by other readers? How can one find contradictory meanings? The first step in deconstructive criticism is to look out for binary oppositions in a work, picking out members in the work that are privileged and the ones that are not. All terms and characters are defined by their opposites, so the deconstructive analyst will show that the pairs are intricately dependent but most importantly, unstable.

2.2 Critique of Deconstruction

This technique of reading did not escape criticism from pundits who are at pains coming to terms with its basic tenets and its meta-tools. Some critics reject what they consider as negativism in the philosophical speculations of deconstruction. More so, others react less to its tendencies to "destroy", than to its ability to reduce literature and the art of reading to a play ground of people, who call themselves critics. They accuse deconstruction of trivializing the capacity to appreciate literature and interpret literature. Besides, virtually everyone complains of obscurantism and confusing terminologies. Some notable voices in this direction are, Hirsch's *The Deconstruction of Literature;* Ellis's *Against Deconstruction,*

and Lehman's *Signs of the Times: Deconstruction and the fall of Paul de Man*. All these literary critics question the credibility of this approach. The most fervent criticism of deconstruction comes from Jane Tomkins (1990:19-37) who argues against applying poststructuralist principles to a text because it involves using methods that are basically positivist and empirical:

> *The point I want to make here is that you can't apply post-structuralism to literary texts. Why not? Because to talk about applying post-structuralism to literary texts assumes the following things: (1) that we have freestanding subjects, (2) that we have freestanding objects of investigation, (3) that there are freestanding methods, and (4) that what results when we apply reader to method and method to text is a freestanding interpretation. This series of assumptions revokes everything that Derrida is getting at in "Difference," and that is implicit in Saussure's theory of language… As we read literary texts, then, "we" are not applying a "method"; we are acting as an extension of the interpretive code, of those systems of difference that constitute us and the objects of our perception simultaneously.*

Despite the aforementioned points, the joy of deconstruction is that it gives multiple ways of viewing a text by providing an unending journey through interpretation, with each one revealing a refreshing insight that itself is not ultimate.

2.3 Derridean Model of Double Reading

According to Derrida, a deconstructor begins textual analysis by assuming that a text has multiple interpretations and that it allows itself to be re-read and thus reinterpreted countless times. Denying the New Critical stance that a text possesses a special ontological status and that it has only one correct interpretation, deconstructors assert that the great joy of textual analysis resides in discovering new interpretations each time a text is read and reread. Ultimately, a text's meaning is undecidable, for each reading or rereading can elicit different interpretations.

When beginning an interpretative process, deconstructors seek to override their own logocentric and inherited ways of viewing a text. Such revolutionary thinking decrees that they find the binary opposition at work in the text itself. These binary oppositions, they believe, represent established and accepted ideologies that more frequently than not posit the existence of *transcendental signifieds.* These binary oppositions, then, restrict meaning, for they already assume a fixed interpretation of reality. They assume, for instance, the existence of truth and falsehood, reason and insanity, good and bad. Realising that these hierarchies presuppose a fixed and a biased way of viewing the world, deconstructors search for binary oppositions operating in a text and reverse them. By reviewing these hierarchies, deconstructors wish to challenge the fixed views assumed by such hierarchies and the values associated with such rigid beliefs.

The technique of identifying the binary operations that exist in a text allows deconstructors to expose the preconceived assumptions upon which most of us base our interpretations. We all, for example, declare some activity, being, or object to be good or bad, valuable or worthless, significant or insignificant. These kinds of values or ideas automatically operate when we write or read any text. In the reversal of hierarchies that form the basis of our interpretations, deconstructors wish to free us from the constraints of our prejudiced beliefs. Such freedom, they hope, will allow us to see a text from exciting new perspectives that we have never before recognized.

Deconstructors say that we cannot simultaneously see both of these perspectives in whatever we are trying to deconstruct. To discover where the new hierarchy will lead us in our interpretation, we must suspend our first interpretation. We do not, however, forget it, for it is locked in our minds. We simply shift our allegiance to another perspective. The process of oscillating between interpretations, levels, or perspectives allows us to see the

impossibility of ever choosing a correct interpretation, for meaning is an ongoing activity that is always in progress, always based on difference. By asking what will happen if we reverse the hierarchies that frame our preconceived ways of thinking, we open ourselves to a never-ending process of interpretation, one that decrees that no hierarchy or binary operation is right and no other is wrong.

Since meaning, deconstructionists believe, emerges through interpretation, even the author does not control a text's interpretations. Although writers may have clearly stated intentions concerning their texts, such statements should and must be given little credence. Just like language, texts have no outside referents or transcendental signifieds. What an author thinks he or she says or means in a text may be quite different from what is actually written. Deconstructors therefore look for places in the text where the author *misspeaks* or loses control of language and says what was supposedly not meant to be said. These *slips* of language often occur in questions, figurative language, and strong declarations. By examining such slips and the binary oppositions that govern them, deconstructors are able to demonstrate the *undecidability* of a text's meaning. Therefore, deconstructive reading may do the following:

A -discover the binary operation at work in a text

B -comment on the values, concepts, and ideas beyond these operations

C -reverse these binary oppositions

D -dismantle previously held worldviews

E -accept the possibility of various perspective or levels of meanings in a text based on the new binary inversions

F -allow meaning of the text to be undecidable.

2.4 Poetics of Deconstruction

Deconstructive criticism emphasizes great importance on ***dissemination***. ***Dissemination*** "… affirms …endless substitution, it neither arrests nor controls play…Dissemination "is" this *angle* of the play of castration which does not signify, which permits itself to be constituted neither as a signified nor a signifier…"Derrida (1983:87). This means that dissemination is the specific way(s) in which texts violate their self-constitution and searches for those points where texts annihilate the ground upon which they stand. That is, the point where the logic of a text is questioned. Deconstruction playfully searches out the ***aporias*** (deep and inescapable conflicts, disjunctions, discontinuities, fault lines, slippages and absences) of a text, its impasse of meaning, as Ibrahim Bello Kano observes in ***An Introduction to Deconstruction.*** Or, to quote the famous Eagleton (1983:134) who opines that deconstruction searches for areas where texts "get into trouble, come unstruck, offer to contradict themselves". ***Aporia*** according to Norris (ibid:49) is derived from the Greek word which means "unpassable path".

In this enterprise of deconstruction which involves the ***de-centering*** of any centre if found, all self-evident concepts which hitherto serve as ***transcendental signifieds*** are made to appear suspicious. Hence, the text (in literary theory, a text is any object that can be "read" including literature and other objects) is seen as a free-play of signifiers, signifieds and readings. It is this instability of signifiers (that is, without corresponding truth intrinsic in them) that Derrida coined the term ***differance*** from Saussure's ***difference***. According to an interview with Ronse in ***Position*** (ibid:8) Derrida defines ***differance*** as "…(active or passive) movement that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving…as that which produces different things, that which differentiates…" this is the sense in which the concept of ***free-play*** has its potency; the ability

to oscillate between different levels of interpretation none of which is final less we fall into the temptation of *logocentrism*. *Logocentrism* or ***metaphysics of presenc***e in its classical sense enounces the logos (written or spoken word) as a higher form of truth. Better put, logocentrism privildges one interpretation as truth while others as effacements. All these priviledges accorded to some interpretations are to be undone, decomposed, and desedimented. For deconstruction therefore, the concept/rhetoric of ***differance*** implies the rejection of a center, a fixed origin: hence, the view of the text as an endless play of ***differance*** and as about what it appears not to be.

At the initial stage of deconstructive reading, the generally accepted hierarchical oppositions are reversed in order to elevate the "inferior" term of the opposition. In the second phase, deconstruction "explodes", as Derrida puts it in ***Positions*** (ibid:45) the original opposition.

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CHAPTER THREE

3.0 The Binaries of ***Death and the King's Horseman***

The subject matter of many of Soyinka's texts is the spiritual interdependence between the past, the present and the future. Soyinka (1976: 146) corroborates this fact when he states that the "past, present and future are so pertinently conceived and woven together". While this has been his preoccupation, we are here concerned with the binary opposition in ***Death and the King's Horseman*** which Soyinka (ibid) articulates in these words:

> *When ideological relations begin to deny, both theoretically and in action the reality of a cultural entity which we define as the African world while asserting theirs even to the extent of inviting the African world to sublimate its existence in theirs, we must begin to look seriously into their political motivations.*

This 'Western motivation' which this study understands to be Western cultural superiority or Western proclivity for desiring recognition, is taken to mean that Africa is culturally inferior before its contact and even after its contact with the West. It is this motivation that results in Soyinka's counter-motivation which is African. Consequently, Soyinka presents an untainted, Yoruba society before its contact with the West, in the process therefore signifying his concerns within two binaries; African and European.

Although *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) was written a year before the publication of his theoretical master piece, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), it does not negate the fact that as at the publication of *Death and the King's Horseman* Soyinka's perceptions of the predicament of Africa were formed. It was formed but not expressed. This is true if one considers the circumstances that brought *The Fourth Stage* as part of his theory. So, Soyinka's views only found coherent expression in *Myth, Literature and the African World,* after, a long period of introspective scrutiny.

Beyond the theme of clash of culture and its devastating effects which most critics believe to be his underlying thesis in *Death and the King's Horseman* (a kind of reductionist outlook), the triumph of *Death and the King's Horseman* is in evoking the mystery and ritual of Yoruba life; a world of the living, the death and the unborn and in giving it breath-taking theatrical form, in contrast to the life style of the Western world which is sterile as represented by the colonials. While Soyinka's efforts are worthy of commendation, we are here critical about his submissions and the workings of the binaries identified in the undoing of the logic the text has so far enjoyed.

It should be noted that in this text, first, a coherent African world is presented with its code-of-conduct, hierarchy of power distribution and the spiritual interdependence of this world to the ethereal. At the helm of affairs is the dead King, Elesin Oba, Iyaloja, Praise Singer, e.t.c whose duties are independent yet interrelated or complementary. By this structural arrangement, we have an African society that presents itself as self-generating and a fount-head of all its code-of-conduct. At least, based on the structural setting of the text it is the African people we encounter before any European, represented by characters like Pilkings (pp24). This arrangement is deliberate; to present Africa before the West. At this juncture, two binaries are discernable; Africa and then the West, a clear case of *supplementation*; changing the hitherto notion of Europe/Africa to Africa/Europe. Soyinka is supposed to discard 'hierarchical' formulations by firstly, reversing them, as he has done, and then discarding of the reversal which he has not done. Supplementation is used to show that neither pole can exist; each is unstable in its own right. Consequently, we are left in this text with a bias or, what Derrida calls *transcendental signified*. This transcendental signified has all along become a reference point upon which philosophies rest. This issue presupposes that another important philosophy is de-valued (the philosophy upon which the Pilkings and of

course the Western world views the "barbarism" of Africa). This invariably brings us to the issue of *logocentrism* which runs as a motif in the play.

In this politics of logocentrism which has found expression in the ontological world of this play, African world is superior and defines itself in terms of the "foolishness" of Western world; other. The Pilkings could not understand the futility of the Elesin (horseman) accompanying the death king to the world of his ancestors through suicide; the bizarre nature of certain rights of passage (the dying Elesin's wish which has to be honoured);

Elesin: … tell me who was that goddess through whose lips
I saw the ivory pebbles of Oya's river-bed,
Iyaloja, who is she? I saw her enter your stall;
all your daughters I know well… her wrapper
was no disguise for thighs whose ripples
shamed the river's coils around the hills of Ilabi

Iyaloja: she has one step already in her husband's home. She is
betrothed

Elesin: Then honour me. I deserve a bed of honour to lie upon (pp20)

Elesin: My wish transcends
the blotting out of thought in one moment's
tremor of the senses. Do me credit. And do me
honour. I am girded to the route beyond… let
seed that will not serve the stomach on the way
remain behind (pp21)

Iyaloja: (turns to women) The voice I hear is already touched
by the waiting fingers of our departed. I dare
not refuse… my sons wish is mine. I did
the asking for him, the loss can be remedied.
But who will remedy the blight of closed hands
on the day… (pp21)

To Iyaloja, the horseman's wish has to be honoured because his death is for the general good of the society. The fact that he will be leaving behind many pleasures of this world in order to salvage the society from the brink of collapse, Iyaloja sees his dying wish as an obligation that every other member of the society must be willing to honour. Besides, this sentiment of dying in the name of honour is definitely an attribute needed for transition to the fourth area of existence. The concept of honour is bigger than an individual's will. Olunde (pp53) tells Jane that "*what can you offer him **(i.e Elesin**) in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration of his own people**…**"* (Emphasis mine). Most importantly, Olunde, whose father is to pay the ultimate price sees his father's intending mission as a duty to honour his people. This question immediately comes to mind, is it right to die in the name of honour, even when life seems more worthwhile? Is this old African custom of the horseman accompanying his king in death not slavery? This play, contrary to all initial critical comments seems to bring forth the injustice in African society. The sacrificial death of Elesin seems like suicide to English eye. Mr and Mrs Pilkings could not understand the purpose of Elesin's death because the society they found themselves is beyond their cognitive grabs; it belongs to the supernatural. Soyinka makes known to the West, significant rituals like the horseman accompanying his king in death, and at the same time unwittingly questioning its logic and relevance in modern times.

At another level, The Praise Singer tells Elesin before his aborted "suicide" attempt that, "our world is tumbling in the void of strangers", (pp75) therefore, there is no guarantee of what the end will be. The word, "stranger" used in this context has the connotation of denigration. It obviously denigrated the West as being infectious and corruptible. According to Ipshita Chanda, (2004:134) "thus the encounter with the other ***(i.e West***) and the other's attempt to belittle all that does not conform to his standards seems to be the true instrument of the colonized subject's self-actualization" (emphasis mine). This is obviously a fact that is too closely wrapped in the logic of binary opposition. Brain Crow and Chris Banfield (1996:82) states that:

> *The colonialists… while being horrified at what they can only understand as native barbarism, fail to recognize that they are ritualists too (the Prince's visit) and are themselves embroiled in actions that others might find senseless and barbaric*

The West refers to as the colonialists in the above excerpt could not understand the nitty-gritty behind accompanying a dead person to his ancestors thereby referring to the whole ritual exercise as barbaric and senseless. Besides, why won't they question the logic behind such an act of barbarism? But by so doing, Soyinka achieves his teleological intention-presenting Africa and imbuing it with complexities that the Western world could not understand. It becomes pertinent to stress that Soyinka uses the terms of the "adversary" in attacking the West. Hence, he is guilty of biased supplementation.

The death of Olunde, Elesin's son, having returned from Britain on completion of his medical studies is not accidental. It is deliberately tailored to smear Western hallowed profession, which is medicine. That, despite encomiums that would have been showered on Olunde because of his achievement, it is considered worthless in the face of African culture and tradition. A deconstructive eye sees how the West is drawn into disrepute. Medical

science represents one of the most respected Western professions while the ritual death of Olunde for the continued existence of his community represents Africa and its belief system.

The concept of ***differance*** has found its way into the world of this play. Derrida (1982:8) defines differance more succinctly thus:

> *First, differance refers to the (active or passive) movement that consists in differing by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving… second, the movement of difference, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates*

Therefore, in this play, ***differance*** means the ontological and opposing views of the Pilking's, and secondly, it means the political and military wherewithal which the Pilkings have to stop the death of Elesin. This becomes necessary to the Pilkings since every "barbaric" culture is senseless:

Jane:… you have leant to argue I can tell that, but
i never said you make sense. However cleverly you try to put it, it
is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse it's feudal! The king dies
and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you
get! (pp 53)

Perpetuating the logic of opposition and presenting Africa as culturally superior, Soyinka continues his dominance of Western culture through Jane's naïve understanding of African culture. In that scene, Jane on the other hand describes the British way as "therapy" (pp53), Olunde could not comprehend the senselessness with which the British crown (i.e the Prince) conducts himself in the midst of war. Olunde calls the British way "decadence" (pp53) thereby having the capacity to drift to "primitivism"

The dialogue between Olunde and Jane is a sure testimony of two worlds battling for superiority. And on either side, each one of them de-rationalizes the other based on his/her

knowledge of the other. While Olunde's England scholarship affords him the opportunity to know British ways which he does not wholesomely accept; "***I don't say that I found your people quite admirable in many ways" (pp50***). Jane equally does not understand the senselessness of Elesin's intending suicide which she refers to as "*nonsense"* (pp51). In fact, she describes Olunde as a "***savage"*** like his people.

Soyinka erroneously regarded African "essence" as a ***supplement*** to European ways, by taking the place of European culture and adding to it through a higher level of consciousness which has to do with the spiritual dimension of the play. Derrida used the term ***supplementation*** to refer to the unstable relationship between binaries. Invariably, Soyinka enters the same kind of conceptual binaries he is trying to undermine. This he does by undermining anything European. For instance, anybody who consents to the white man's ways is seen as being a cultural bastard. Notable examples in this regard are Joseph and Sergent Amusa. Because of their fraternity with the whites, they are considered as way-wards. In Act iii, Sergent Amusa is ridiculed to a public spectacle by the Girls, who consider his advances as an affront on their mothers (pp37). Not only is Sergent Amusa assaulted but the whole of the white race that he represents:

> ***Girl: Haven't you learnt that yet, you jester in khaki and starch.***
> ***Girl: Then tell him to leave this market. This is the home of our mothers. We don't want the eater of white left-overs at the feast their hands have prepared. (pp39***)

Because Sergent Amusa is a British messenger, he also could not escape ridicule from even little girls that he might be old enough to father. For aligning with the Britons, Sergent Amusa has become an outcast being treated with all the indignities that befits an outcast.

Even at this, Soyinka could not hide his fascination with the way the girls have learnt the white man's ways in school:

Woman: Do they teach you all that at school?

Woman: And to think I nearly kept Apinke away from the place.

The last excerpt is a clear case of what Sigmund Freud would have called parapraxis or slippage. That is, occasional subliminal eruption. Soyinka could not hide his fascination with the European "superior" ways of argument. In fact, he is well cultured in the use of the Roman alphabet. Hence their mothers are baffled at the way their daughters have learnt to use the white man's language to the extent that one of the women regrets the thought of wanting to stop her daughter from attending a school.

Taken overall, while critics have worked so hard to actually portray Soyinka's intention in this play, most of which border on the trilogic essence or the tripartite relationship that exists between the world of the living, the death and the unborn, this study presents the binary opposition in the play and how it works to undo the coherence the work so claims. The point here is to open new ways of viewing this text as subliminal eruption of the writer's unconscious hatred for anything Western. Perhaps, the writer is not even aware of the binaries so far foregrounded but which all the same work to portray his bias. As we have seen from the above analysis, anything Western is dragged into serious disrepute immediately we are able to locate two binaries.

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CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 The Road and the Search for a 'True African Essence'

> *Self-identity is effectively what the episteme of the classical age imposes on us. This is because what appears as a figure of alterity- something which the same cannot recognize as belonging to it- is nevertheless defined as a variation, a deviation, a spacing in relation to it. Every identity is therefore prisoner of an identification that relates it to what it is not (as a species of the negative, the inverted double, or of exteriority); such a dialectical stratagem of capitation of what should on the contrary be seen as different, non-identical and non-identitary (non-identitaire) is an explicit move of power, that is, an act of violence. This use of an 'inclusive exclusion' in conceptualizing identification is precisely one of the essential instruments in the functioning of modern Reason.*
>
> (Revel Judith 2009:46)

The above excerpt is instrumental in conceptualizing what this work entails because everything that Soyinka does in this play has linkage with the issue of identity of exclusion. Since the Western way of life is perceived as a "figure of alterity" (i.e. something different from Africa, which the African culture perceives as utterly different from the core of its 'essence'- becomes a negation, a deviation from it). Therefore, anything Western is placed in inverted commas, and treated with suspicion if not contempt and disdain. This dialectical strategy is an explicit move of power; to give Africa a pride of place in the community of nations.

Since, according to Saussure a word does not represent a referent in the phenomenal world but a sign, without truth intrinsic in it, it therefore follows that "deconstructively", we can assign a meaning to the Word that Professor searches for in ***The Road*** (1973). Hence, contrary to all critical predilections; the 'Word' is here used as a metaphor for an authentic African essence and the Professor's search for the Word (an African essence) ends in futility when he meets his death in the hands of Say Tokyo Kid without locating the Word. But we are told that nothing is essential, for essence, especially with philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida drawing from Friedrich Nietzsche argued that the idea of

essence is always linked to definite strategies of exclusion. In their account, a critical function of the concept, (i.e essence) was charged with being another form of power whose aim was to legitimize itself by delegitimizing other forms of understanding. Perhaps, there could be no essence, whether historical or not, lying behind appearances because everything, including what counts as appearance and what counts as essence, must be stated in language. (see Nietzsche, Friedrich (1965). *"Truth and falsity in an Ultramoral Sense"*. In Nietzsche(ed). *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*.

Nowhere is the mystery of the English word better exemplified than in *The Road*. Therefore, the fluidity of the Roman word according to synchronics is the presence of signifier and signified. Rejecting the myth of correspondence between word and its referent in the phenomenal world, Saussure proposed that words are only signs made up of two parts; the signifier (a written or spoken mark) and a signified (a concept). A word does not carry any intrinsic value to relate it to a concept in the phenomenal world; therefore, we attach meaning to words by a kind of social contract. Giving that privilege, we can now safely conclude that the Word which Professor searches for throughout the length and breadth of the text is that African essence which the Western world refuses to acknowledge but which Soyinka strives to foreground; "when ideological relations begin to deny, both theoretically and in action the reality of a cultural entity which we define as the African world while asserting theirs…" *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1975). At the center of the search for an authentic African essence is the parallel presentation of anything Western – its road (from which the text has its title), the Professor and the church in a denigrated form.

Soyinka takes the role of Ogun in the search for a 'true' and 'authentic' African essence. Ogun we are told is:

> *…the master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a gregarious imbiber, a reluctant leader of men and deities. He is 'lord' of the road of Ifa… thus representing the knowledge seeking instinct, an attribute which sets him apart as the only deity who 'sought the way', and harnessed the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man.*
>
> *(Myth, Literature and the African World 1976:27)*

Trying as he does to present African culture as essentially self-generating. This search for an essential African identity or, to remake the African image is, contrary to all critical predilections about the subject matter of ***The Road***. This therefore is an attempt to show the 'geocentric' bias of Soyinka, anguished by the continuing sense of prejudices heaped on Africa unabated, which needs to be recovered; 'the long lost essence'.

By a kind of violent yoking, similarities are seen between Soyinka and the character of Professor. These similarities are not only found in their choice of high sounding words, which, incontrovertibly is Soyinka's stock-in-trade, but also in their quest. Professor searches for the Word in the fictive world of the play; a metaphor for the true African essence and Soyinka searches for a true essential African drama through the microcosm of the Yoruba world view (he has always been a vanguard of African belief system). Therefore, it will only be right to say that Professor in the play represents Soyinka himself in search of an essential African culture.

Acting as Ogun in ***The Road***, the Professor (Soyinka) undertakes a journey in search of an African "essence" metaphorically represented by the Word which ends in futility because even at the end of the play the Word is still at large. This he does by delegitimizing anything that has European colouration. For example, imagine the way the Professor's store is presented. Most of the spellings are wrongly done: "AKSIDENT STORE-ALL PARTS AVAILEBUL". The enigmatic Professor runs a "bolekaja" (mammy wagon), selling spare-parts for all locomotives, especially trucks and lorries running on the road. In order to smear

the Professor, whose title is the height of academic achievement in Western civilization, he, the Professor is presented as a complicit to thieves and criminals like Say Tokyo Kid, Kotonou and other thugs. He removes road signs in order to cause accidents and profits from the wreck by stocking his shop. Don't forget that the Professor represents not just Western civilization; he also searches for the Word, a metaphor for African essence. Invariably, Westernization brings about "soul-deadening habits". In this play, Soyinka, unwittingly criticizes what he stands for. Soyinka is a Professor, well learned in the Roman alphabet, yet a bulwark of African identity. His dislike for Western ways is punching in virtually all his plays.

Murano, it appears, is the custodian of the Word; he is an embodiment of mystery that the Professor stoops to uncover. Murano's transmutability portrays him as somebody who has pass through The Fourth Stage; the Territory of essence ideal. Murano is presented as being in the Agemo phase. In Part One, Soyinka explains that the "Agemo, the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence…" in this phase that the interest in life wanes. The Professor, like Ogun has both the creative and destructive qualities in him but it is his destructive tendencies that are emphasized throughout the length and breadth of the play. He explains that too many people come to him for help. Yet, he causes accidents and deaths by pulling down road signs. Soyinka unwittingly presents the West as being destructive and capable of causing deaths. This theme of death on the road is also acknowledged by Eldred (1983:21) thus: "this theme of death is further symbolized by the spider's web with its ever-watchful spider; Murano prods the web several times during the play to call attention to this parallel to the road as a source of sudden death". This is true because the Professor is a symbol of Western education, and having acquired this status one would expect that he will use his wealth of knowledge to better his society but reverse is the

case. Meanwhile, Ogun is reconciliatory in nature, initiating the move to reunite the other gods with human beings-taking the risk of the primodial chaos. But because the Professor has a tinsel of westernization it is his destructive energies that are emphasized in the play.

Professor's obsessive search for the 'Word' is the principal intellectual feature of this play. His base for this search has shifted eventually from the church which has now disowned him, to the drivers' shack which, in his more radical days as a christian he had persecuted. Although the various worlds of the play are blended and interact with each other, it would be convenient to look at them separately. The broad background is the world of the drivers, their touts, their passengers and the general hangers-on. Professor's previous credentials are thus highly dubious. His present search for the 'Word' is similarly deprived of purity by the conflicting elements in his character. It is possible, because of the corrupt nature of the surrounding society, to forgive him for making part of his living by forging licenses and other official documents. Professor, however, is a parasite on the users of the road, charging them exorbitantly for his services to the very limits of their resources. Not only that, but when their backs are turned he even dips into their money-bags. Samson catches him red-handed doing just that, but once caught, he brazenly legitimizes his act:

> (Samson goes. As he turns his back, Professor tries to extract a coin from the bag but Samson looks back just then. Professor is left with no choice but to carry out his action after a natural hesitation, explaining quite calmly;) for initial expenses you know.

Samson's brave attempt to nail Professor's act for what it is merely produces one of the master's verbal feats, which has the desired effect of reducing Samson to confusion:

> Samson: with all due respect professor sir, I don't quite see how that will come under initial expenses.
>
> Prof: we had to get rid of him. Or you can have him spying on us if you like
>
> Samson: but Professor he was already outside.

> Prof: that is why it was necessary to call him in (Samson scratches his head, puzzles it a bit, gives up) (pp: 62)

If Salubi is to be believed, Professor is not above causing the accidents himself to ginger up the flow of spare parts into the AKSIDENT STORE:

> Tell him the day the police catch him I will come and testify against him. The man is a menace. Pulling up road signs and talking all that mumbo- jumbo.

Soyinka quite deliberately gives Professor these unprepossessing aspects to his character, and yet gives him also the role of a seeker of the 'Word', a role in which he fitfully achieves a measure of profundity. He certainly gives the impression of someone who has in his sights something that others cannot see. It is this search that brings in the mystic element of the play, and links the Christian religion with the *egungun* mask through Professor's exploration of both.

In keeping with his elevated role of seeker of the 'Word' Soyinka gives the Professor a very impressive speech register redolent with suggestions of Bible and church liturgy. This register is potentially ironic for it gives Professor's speech an impressive ring which, however, when put beside other things-his clothes and his conflicting roles-is capable of bathos. There are occasions when the bathos is not so obviously suggested, and Professor's voice momentarily becomes less equivocal, but as this is never sustained, he seems constantly teetering between profundity and bathos. The mystic and the proprietor of the AKSIDENT STORE are never far from each other. If the proximity of the two roles makes it difficult to accept him as a true mystic-it also makes it difficult to dismiss him altogether as a charlatan. More so, his compulsive search for the 'Word' among useless bits of papers is so unpromising as to be a symptom of madness. It is tempting to see Professor-in a play which makes so much use of parody-as a parody of the Western world and the learned professional.

Through the drivers and their festival, the psychic theme is introduced. These users of the road (a European invention), as the words of the play underline, are constantly exposed to death; "the road and the spider lie gloating, then the fly buzzes along like a happy fool" (p. 34). In addition to this constant dicing with death, they interact with policemen, forgers of licences, looters, and spare parts salesmen. All of them are linked by the phenomenon of death which is never absent from the scene for long. Kotonu dramatizes this precariousness of the drivers' existence and their rapid turnover by his rhetorical catalogue of departed heroes of the road:

> Where is Zorro who never returned from the North without a basket of Guinea-fowl egg? Where is Akanni the lizard? I have not seen any other tout who would stand on the lorry's roof and play the samba at sixty miles an hour. Where is Sigidi Ope? Where is Sapele Joe who took on six policemen at the crossing and knocked them all into the river? (pp21)

Kotonou's chronicle links the excitement of the road with the fact of death. The heroes have gained immortality and passed into legendary status through death. As Kotonu recites the chronicle there is a combination of glory and tragedy. Soyinka enlarges the drivers' world by giving them a mythology of their own, a mythology arising from the road, and linked with death on the road.

One of the triumphs of the play is its portrayal of the many-faceted nature of death. Side by side with the tragedy and the myth we have grim physical pictures of death at speed and its consequences. This transformation is fascinating to Professor (who always benefit from the wreck) who describes the scene of an accident to Kotonu: "come then, I have a new wonder to show you… a madness where a motorcar throws itself against a tree- Gbram! and showers of crystal flying on broken souls" (pp10-11). Professor goes on to paint an even grimmer picture of the scene. Soyinka here presents the messiness of death on the asphalted

road (a European innovation) and the incongruities it produces, in several passages. Say Tokyo Kid recalls in his racy language the scene of an accident that he had come upon:

> You know, just last week I passed an accident on the road. There was a dead dame and you know what her pretty head was spread with? Yam porrage. See what I mean? A swell adame is gonna die on the road just so the next paseenger kin smear her head in yam porrage.(pp27-28).

Once a crash has taken place it also becomes a source of business. Professor may talk about the psychic aspect of death, but he has always been the brains behind the AKSIDENT STORE. It was he who had invited Sergeant Burma, now dead- his brakes failed going down a hill- to open the store, and he is disappointed at the 'tardiness' of Kotonu (whom he has now appointed to succeed Sergeant Burma) in replenishing the stock by looting crashed vehicles. He reprimands Kotonu and his friend, Samson when they return empty-handed from the scene of an accident.

Organized religion (especially the church) comes in for its share of criticism. The church, another symbol of Westernization is portrayed as a hub for corruption, rotten to its roots. This exposé of how the church is being reduced to a high society is foregrounded by Samson in his characteristically racy language:

> *Samson:…ah, when Professor was Professor, he would go up after service and correct the organist where he went wrong. And even during singing if he heard a wrong note he would shake his head and look round the church making tch-tch-tch-tch-tch. Every time the organist saw that, he knew he was in serious trouble.*
>
> *Samson:… that bow, it means that the preacher has just mentioned the name of Jesus Christ. And let me tell you ehn, the preacher directed his sermons to Professor for approval.(he sits listening attentively. Suddenly he frowns, takes a notebook from his books and writes in it) that means a point of controversy to be hotly debated after church. PART ONE PP162-163)*

This attack on the church and by extension the Western culture could be likened to what Derrida calls ***supplementation***. That is, reversing the stereotypes and negativities heaped on

African continent by white anthropologists in order to show the instability of such stereotypes. If these anthropologists are accused of falsification then, Soyinka should also suffer the same fate. The negativities heaped on the West in the above excerpt are not only empiricist but racist. Anything that has Western colouration could not escape the attack of this veteran writer.

Worst of all, is the feud between the bishop (B.D i.e Bachelor of Divinity) and Professor where, the Wall of Jericho fell down (pp163-164). In the Christendom, the Wall of Jericho (see the book of Joshua chapter 6) was a wall that fell for the children of Israel to assault Jericho; a wall that barricaded the Israelites from fulfilling God's promise. But in this play, the wall of Jericho is brought down by thugs and thieves who come to watch the feud between the bishop and professor. In fact, it falls because of the weight of these onlookers not by any spiritual magic as enunciated in the Bible:

Samson: we were riding the wall like a victory
horse- everybody. Grown-up customers and
Suddenly___
Gbram!
Salubi: with you on top?
Samson: you no fit tell me from rubble I tell you

(pp164)

It is not even the presentation that matter most, though it matters in a way but it is the sarcastic tone with which the analogy is presented. Here, obviously, the Western religion (Christianity) is ridiculed and made to appear as if it lacks the capacity to make an individual overcome his/her soul deadening habit. Little wonder Salubi refers to the church as "… high society", where people go to show up and corrupt their souls instead of lifting it.

Professor refers to the African essence as "inviolate word" (pp 187). That is, something that has been, or must be, respected and should not be attacked or destroyed. Simply put, the primacy of the inviolate word (Africa's identity, uniqueness, culture, essence) should remain shrouded in mystery; not to be questioned as the Western world does. It is sacrosanct and infallible. Yet, Soyinka could not present the sacrosanctity of this African culture without delegitimizing anything Western.

Another character that needs review perhaps because of his elusiveness is Murano. Murano has been knocked down by Kotonu's lorry while in a state of possession- in the state of 'transition from the human to the divine essence'-and Professor happens to discover him abandoned by Kotonu and Samson in the back of a lorry. Discovered and rehabilitated by the enigmatic Professor:

> *Neglected in the back of a hearse. And dying. Moaned like a dog whose legs have been broken by a motor car. I took him- somewhere- looked after him till he was well again.*
> *(pp 186)*

Professor believes that because of Murano's unusual physical attributes, "one leg longer than the other" (pp186), and barely talks he, therefore, is the repository of the "elusive Word". Hmmm, the Word is indeed elusive! Of course the elusiveness of the Word is not far-fetched because even at the death of Professor and Murano at the end of the play the Word could not be found. Murano, the acclaimed keeper of the Word is, if not half-demented then, he is dump:

> *PROF:…oh my friend, beware the pity of those that have no tongue for they have been proclaimed sole guardian of the Word.*
> *They have slept beyond the portals of the Word, a golden nugget on the tongue. And so their tongue hangs heavy and they are forever Silenced… (pp186).*

The mute Murano, the personality that houses the elusive Word, "has one leg in each world, his legs are never the same". Little wonder he leaves at down (to attend to the business of the ethereal world) and comes back at dusk when the church does have communion. PROF *(looks at the church window): He will come at the communion/hour. When the shadow covers me with grace of darkness he will/come. KOTONU: Yes, he always seems to time it wel**l**.* There is obviously a line of symmetry from the above quoted lines between the ritualistic return of Murano at dusk and the church communion at the same time. The communion whom the Professor refers to in the above excerpt is not the church communion obviously, but the ritual communion between him (the PROF) and his devotees which takes place at the same time with the church communion. The salient point being made here is this: the church, which symbolizes the West has ritual practices also that are synonymous with the African tradition. The question that will naturally come to mind is therefore this: why delegitimizing the West in both the presentation of its fauna and flora when the culture you so defend is guilty of same?

Soyinka's criticism of the West comes to the limelight when he (Soyinka) openly describes the West as racist by passing an unwholesome comment through the character of Samson:

> *Samson:… but you know how things be for blackman. My Major recommend me for the decoration but dey begin ask how den go give black man dat kind honour?(pp216-217)*

But Soyinka's racist inclination comes to the forefront somewhere in ***Myth, Literature and the African World (1976:141).*** He succinctly puts it thus: *"Yoruba traditional art is not ideational however* ***like the European****, but essential*" (emphasis mine). That is Yoruba traditional art is sacrosanct.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

Conclusion

This study is premised on the following propositions. One, there is an ambivalent portrayal of the West. Two, that Africa's position as the Other in Western metaphysics has been reversed to take the privileged position while the West becomes the negation. And three, African culture becomes essential (logos, transcendental signified). Finally, Soyinka is an ambivalent writer that cannot easily be classified.

Consequently, this study examines instances where Soyinka's language occasional slips or spills from his control thereby exposing his biased presentation of the West. It therefore seeks to demonstrate the prejudices that inform Soyinka's work. It also illustrates the instances where anything Western is placed in inverted commas or treated as a negation thereby being pushed to the margins.

The focus of this research has been on the use of the dramatic genre as explicated by the works of Soyinka. It provides therefore, a broader base for the critical assessment of African writers using the tool of deconstruction as theoretical base. Hitherto, the predilections on Soyinka's works have been on the preponderance of myth and animism in his works. This research however, places importance on the deconstructive technique as the most potent tool to espousing the prejudices Soyinka has against the West. This is because the deconstructive technique focuses on the silences or absences inherent in a work that even the writer may not have known which nonetheless is inherent in the work. Apart from its ability to foreground some silences, deconstruction also portrays the binaries that work to undo the coherence a work so claims. In essence therefore, this research signifies and highlights the prejudices inherent in Soyinka's works.

The study attempts a deconstructive reading of Soyinka's texts: ***Death and the King's Horseman*** and ***The Road*** in view of the fact that Soyinka has, for long, been as ardent critic

of the Western world in his varied attempts to decolonize Africa from Western hegemony. Having made a clarion call to all African elites to dissipate their energies in this enterprise of decolonizing Africa, he, Soyinka took the first step through his creative works.

Over time, critics have made comments concerning these two plays ranging from Soyinka's attempt to explore the "essence" of African culture which is different and at times, antithetical to the West and also, an exposé of the tripartite relationship that exists between the world of the living, the death and the unborn. While others, particularly those that have taken a leftist posture, notably, the Marxists, criticize the preponderance of myth and animism in these plays. To them, any work of art that fails to reflect the social conditions that necessitate a work of art to exist as well as the place such works occupy in the historic development of society and of a class lacks credence. Therefore, as far as the Marxists are concerned these plays fall short of the impulse of Marxism. Others yet, see him as a romanticist whose aim is a revolt against stereotypes

Within the corpus of this existing knowledge, is the political motivation that this work has unraveled. These political motivations as well as Soyinka's prejudices against the West which were formed quite early in his life have unconsciously found expression in these plays, perhaps, unknowingly to Soyinka himself. This work establishes the two binary oppositions in these works: Africa and Europe. This binary arrangement is an anomaly if we are familiar with the Western metaphysics of Europe/Africa. This reversal (Africa/Europe) that this study is able to unravel becomes the pivot around which our analyses of the two plays are based. For deconstructive criticism, no pole is allowed to exist; if found, transcendental signifieds are supposed to be reversed and then annulled. So that, interpretation will only be a matter of difference and play in which none is absolute.

This study adopts a library based approach by which sources such as books, web-based material, published and unpublished dissertations from wide field of human endeavour

is incorporated into this research. The internet provided a wider spectrum of materials with which this work is enriched. The findings of this research are made possible through the framework of deconstruction. Deconstruction offers us the opportunity to see even through a writer's sub-consciousness elicited by his writings. Prior to this moment critics have made critical comments about the subject matter of these texts few, however, has subjected these texts to the "mystique" of deconstruction by which some hidden meanings that have perhaps escaped the grasp of even the author are foregrounded. This is made possible by the infinite possibilities of interpretation that deconstruction permits.

In ***Death and the King's Horseman*** we saw that the structural patterning is first and foremost biased: an African world preceded the presentation of European world-what deconstructors refer to as binary opposition. More so, anything European lacks the capacity to edify but destroys while, everything African is edifying and invigorating. In fact, Olunde's medical profession is sacrificed on the altar of tradition. Perhaps, even Soyinka himself does not seem to know that he has passed such comments.

Similarly, ***The Road*** presents itself as an attack on the Western world. The asphalted road is an European invention that has claimed so many lives. PROF., having achieved Western education condescends low to associate with thieves and criminals.

From the above discussion, this study is able to establish the two binaries that have worked themselves throughout the play either consciously or otherwise. These binaries have become the basis upon which our discussion is based. Consequently, the study highlights areas of slippages or spillages that the writer might not have known which all the same work to undo the coherence of the work. The aim is not to ridicule the writer but to present another possible way of viewing the text which in itself is not ultimate but subject also to another

deconstructive reading. The aim is that reading and interpretation is never closed; it is an ungoing process of play.

Therefore, the findings are not meant to mean but to proffer another possibility of reading these texts. The claim is that the kind of poetics which produces the intelligibility of this work, of the logic by which this work stands stresses the creative freedom of the reader. This is to emphasize the active, productive nature of reading and to eliminate notions of literary work as having truth of content. Interpretation or re-reading is not a matter of recovering some meaning which lies behind the work and serves as a centre governing its structure; it is rather an attempt to participate in and observe the play of possible meanings to which the texts give access. In other words, the critique of language has the function of freeing one from any nostalgic longing for an original or transcendental meaning and preparing one to accept free play of interpretation.

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