Drama in Nigeria: A Pedagogical Perspective with Focus on Wole Soyinka.

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty Board of Education for acceptance of a research project entitled "Drama in Nigeria: A Pedagogical Perspective with Focus on Wole Soyinka" submitted by Omotola W. Awobode in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in The Teaching of English as a Second Language.

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ABSTRACT

There is a lot of negative attitude to Wole Soyinka especially among students and teachers. The general belief is that Soyinka is unnecessarily and deliberately being difficult in his writings. This project attempts to see if Soyinka is really as difficult as claimed and even if he is, whether what he has to offer is not good enough to justify the extra effort needed for the understanding of his works. A look is taken at the way drama is taught in Nigerian schools and an alternative drama teaching method suggested, using Soyinka's works as a base of reference.

Table of Contents

		Page
Title Page	... ...	i
Approval Sheet	... ...	ii
Acknowledgement	... ...	iii
Abstract	... ...	iv
CHAPTER I:	DRAMA AND SOCIETY ...	1
CHAPTER II:	DRAMA TEACHING IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS	7
CHAPTER III:	SOYINKA: LIFE AND WORKS ...	16
CHAPTER IV:	SOYINKA: CRITICS AND HIS REPLIES	70
CHAPTER V:	WHAT IS REALLY DIFFICULT IN SOYINKA	89
CHAPTER VI:	SUGGESTED APPROACH TO SOYINKA - PEDAGOGICAL SUGGESTIONS ...	105
References	... ...	118

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

DRAMA AND SOCIETY

No one really knows how Drama began: it probably evolved from religious rituals, story telling and other activities of primitive man. But formal drama seems to have emerged first from ancient Greece, where Greek drama was presented exclusively at festivals honoring Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility. The myths that arose about Dionysus were closely related to the life cycle and to seasonal changes: birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth; spring, summer, fall, winter. The worship of the god was designed in part to insure the return of spring and fertility but as the god of wine he also represented many of the world's irrational forces, and its worship was a recognition of man's elemental passions.

So in the beginning, Greek drama centred around religious and philosophical issues but as time went on it became more concerned with human relationships. The Greeks defined art and drama as an imitation of nature. Since nature is forever changing, drama then should change in imitating nature.

They also believed that men are what they are by a divine scheme. Class difference, therefore, is divinely justifiable and the higher one is up the class hierarchy the nobler and more virtuous one is. Drama must therefore imitate the most highly placed in society because they are the noblest and most virtuous. Aristotle's scheme for Tragedy involves the downfall of a highly placed man in the society through an essential flaw in his character which fate plays upon. He is the tragic hero

and his fall is that of all the people, who must sympathise and empathise with him all along. At the end there is purgation and the cosmic order is restored.

This view of drama endured through the Middle Ages. William Shakespeare used Aristotle's ideas. His tragic heroes were either kings, princes or at least people very highly placed in the societal hierarchy. The heroes spoke lofty and poetic language while the peasants spoke ordinary prose. The peasants were there to serve and amuse the nobility. They were mere instruments in the hands of the noble, while the nobility were likewise mere pawns in the hand of fate.

So the world is seen in a mechanistic and hierarchical way: the gods are at the top, followed by the kings or rulers, next are the rich property owners - all these constitute only about ten percent of the population of any given society. The remaining 90% are the rest of humanity - the masses.

There is also the belief that if man uses his own initiative to choose his own path he will violate the divine order and will suffer accordingly. Everyman is living according to the will of God and no one can change what has been destined. This belief is the basis of Sophocles' play called King Oedipus.

All the above beliefs are reflected in drama which the noble and the rich use to sell the values, cultures and beliefs of their class. Drama in this era is used

mainly to strengthen the position of the ruling class through the ideas contained in the plots.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a number of forces combined to break the hold of neoclassicism and created what is now called romanticism. Melodrama also emerged as the most popular dramatic form and spectacle became more realistic. Gradually faith in reason was replaced by trust in natural instinct. In addition, the rise of the middle class prompted a reconsideration of the class structure under which the majority was cannibalised by the nobility. Concepts of equality and fraternity arose. People believed that truth can only be discovered in the infinite variety of creation and to know truth one must include as much of creation as possible because everything in existence has the same common origin. Here the emphasis is more on nature and drama was about unspoiled man living in primitive times or in rebellion against the restraints imposed by society. There is also the belief in a few rare beings - the geniuses - or 'superman' who can perceive far more of the truth than the ordinary man. Genius was said to involve an innate capacity to grasp intuitively the complexity of the universe. But this capacity that sets the genius off from other men frequently makes him appear strange (even dangerous) and thus he is often treated as an outcast. Genius, then, is both a gift and a curse.

There was also great emphasis on the supernatural and the mysterious as essential parts of existence. All these were used in drama to show man's attempts to achieve freedom, to find peace of mind or the secret of all being. All these differences in outlook created a drama that was very different from the neoclassical age.

By mid-nineteenth century the belief in man's idealistic nature had received many setbacks. After the war, there was a lot of misery and suffering, the romantic's emphasis on the ideal seemed too vague and impractical so many came to demand solutions based on systematic inquiry into facts. Realistic drama demands a truthful depicting of the real world. Drama should reflect the society around one and be as objective as possible. And if the audiences do not like what they see then they should change the society since drama is only reflecting society.

It was also imperative that the writer remains aloof and not allow his prejudices to show when he is treating his subject. And that a play should be 'a slice of life'. So drama now became predominantly concerned with contemporary moral and social values.

Modern revolutionary drama, which Bertolt Brecht evolved, is now used not only for entertainment but also to instruct, educate, expose and incite. This is done through choice of subjects, themes and dramatic

techniques. Roles are no longer assigned to rulers and the 'common man' features as a hero through some commendable aspect of their character. When rulers feature at all and are fake they are exposed for what they are through the use of ironies and satire.

The trends in drama have left their impact on most African dramatists. In Ola Rotimi's The Gods are not to Blame one can see an obvious influence of the Greek's view of life which preaches the inevitability of man's fate; as portrayed in Sophocles' King Oedipus.

Wole Soyinka, the great Nigerian dramatist, has gone through the classics, so there are some reflections of this in his work, evidence of this is his adaptations - The Bachae of Euripedes.

Despite this, he is more of a modern revolutionary dramatist.

He comes down heavily against institutionalized cannibalism of the helpless masses. Soyinka's plays are informed by a clear philosophy of man and his place in a complex universe, and of society as a whole. He is concerned with both the complex relationships of man with his fellow men, and of man with his spiritual being, the struggle for survival, the cost of survival; the real meaning of progress; the role of death - even the necessity for death in a man's life, are some of Soyinka's major dramatic pre-occupations.

Rather than help students understand Soyinka's thematic pre-occupations teachers usually begin by emphasising the negative - that Soyinka is an impossible author. It is true that Soyinka's language is difficult and his symbols, complex. It is also true that a careful study of his works is usually a very rich literary excursion into the dilemma of the modern man, an excursion which teachers and students could find very enriching depending on the approaches used. These approaches will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2

DRAMA TEACHING IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

It is generally agreed that drama is different from the novel, short story or poetry because it is written primarily for the stage. It is an extension of both our emotional and imaginative world, hence it demands an immediate response and direct involvement. The playwright brings his dramatic experience vividly and immediately before our eyes. This unique characteristic of drama calls for a more systematic approach; in its teaching, than in the teaching of other literary genres. Unfortunately, drama teaching in Nigerian schools does not have a systematic approach.

Ideally, before coming into the college, the child is supposed to have passed through the various stages of the sequence of dramatic activities at the elementary level. For example, (a) The stimulation of the child's imaginative observation in order to further understand himself and the world around him. (b) Exposure to an atmosphere conducive for the free expression of his ideas and reactions to the impressions he receives. (c) An opportunity to act out his own life experiences without being tied down to or by any printed text.

But this is not the case in our Nigerian situation where primary schools are very poorly staffed, both in quality and quantity to the extent that the basic needs of a primary school child are not met by

the time he goes into any post-primary institution.

Added to this is the fact that most primary school graduates are near illiterate in the use of the English language. As English is the medium of instruction in the colleges, the students find the first two years in school very heavy going. The college teacher, as a consequence finds that he has no other alternative than to dedicate the first two years to the teaching of the English language and filling the very wide gap created by the elementary school system.

Another important problem is that literature in English is an optional subject in the college curriculum, and drama as just an arm of this subject. In addition, literature as a subject does not have more than three periods or hours a week on the school timetable and does not feature as a subject until the third year. The time allotted to drama is therefore too insignificant to be of any use to both teachers and students.

During these drama hours most teachers who see themselves as talented actors see these periods as their only chance to parade their talents before an audience - the students. They seize this opportunity to introduce the students into the world of the theatre. They assign parts to the students and the play is read word for word in class. During the reading these teachers interrupt with the action and

gestures that they think should accompany the lines, and impatiently try to correct students whose reading is not dramatically effective. Poor readers are not given any opportunity in this class. They are totally ignored, passive listeners, who might occasionally be appointed to do one or two minor lines. The teacher here does not reach the majority of his students, let alone, all of them.

Some other teachers have no confidence in the reading abilities of any student and so take on the herculean task of reading the entire play themselves while the students all listen. Pausing occasionally to comment on the lines being read, this type of teacher reaches all the students only so far as his voice is heard. This approach is definitely not creative because the students are not engaged in doing anything. So most students get bored, some lazy ones just sit back and try to memorize the teacher's comments. This approach is detrimental to good students because they will be afraid to contribute their original thinking during the course of the lesson and even after.

Other drama teachers are fascinated by the traditional approach to teaching drama. They handle individual plays by breaking down the actions of each into four stages: exposition, rising action, climax and falling action. They spend most of the lesson

trying to establish the 'action' of the play and how it can be broken into four stages. In the end, students are usually at a loss as to where exactly to place the climax, the end of the exposition and the beginning of the rising action. This approach is a rigid preoccupation with mere structure.

On the other side are teachers who are committed to the question of human value and behaviour in drama. They concentrate on characters and why they behave the ways they do and try to make the students identify with these characters. When this method is employed, students can escape thorough reading of the play and still participate actively in the lesson. They know the characters very well but are unable to relate the parts of the individual characters to the main plot and so the meaning of the plot is lost.

In addition to the above, there are some teachers who approach the plays through the syntax and imagery used, thereby losing the overall meaning of the play and leaving the students at sea.

There is also the study-to-pass-exam approach. Here the teacher's sole aim is to help the students pass their examination. Although this is commendable, drama lessons should involve the teaching of other aspects of life because drama is life. This approach reduces the lessons to dull hours and instills fear of examinations in the students.

Although each of these groups of teachers has something to offer his students, they can all be faulted on two very crucial points. First is that they fail to reach all or a majority of their students, and secondly, they teach about the plays and not the plays. A combination of all the methods would have benefited the students more but this is not the case in Nigerian schools.

Another crucial problem in drama teaching in Nigerian schools is the prominence given to foreign authors in the syllabus, especially Shakespeare. Most Nigerian students get exposed to Shakespeare right from childhood through Lamb's tales. Tseja (1975) claims that more than is usually realised, it appears that quite a number of students make their first contact with Shakespeare in the primary school. In addition he says that even at this early stage the pupils are already being influenced into memorizing famous quotations from Shakespeare.

Although Shakespeare's genius cannot be denied, he is definitely irrelevant to the modern Nigerian mind. In subject matter and theme, he is very reactionary. And his language is archaic, the poetry notwithstanding.

Most Nigerian school children must have read some Shakespearean texts by the end of their fifth year

in secondary school, and all literature students must have read at least two texts in preparation for their West African School Certificate Examinations. The authorities that recommend the reading of Shakespeare in Nigerian schools claim that there is a relevance of theme in some Shakespearean plays to Nigeria (Tseja, 1975). For the reading of Julius Ceasar, for example, the paper claims that Julius Ceasar could be related to a situation here in Africa. "There is a coup d'etat and a man named Julius Ceasar is overthrown. In the process he loses his life. This kind of thing happens here, everyday in Africa", (op. cit.)

One cannot help but feel that the above statement is rather an oversimplification of Julius Ceasar. Moreover one does not need to go all the way to Rome or England to find examples of coup d'etats, our indigenous writers have dwelt at length on this theme. It is definitely a universal theme.

In Nigerian schools, there is also the belief that Shakespeare's use of language is straight-forward as far as it is possible for a sixteenth century language to be straightforward in a second language situation (op. cit, 1975). Obviously, this will mean a total breakdown in communication because modern English is already a problem for the students.

After W.A.E.C. assumed full control of examinations from Cambridge in 1966, many popular writers before then

were on their way out i.e. Chaucer, Webster, Johnson et cetera. But this is not the case with Shakespeare. He seems to enjoy a special regard amongst Nigerian teachers and students. As Tseja (op. cit.) said:

> "Shakespeare's growing popularity in Africa is seen in the increasing number of translations of his works into other languages. Some of his plays have been translated into at least ten African languages", (1975).

One tends to ask oneself why this should be so when indigenous writers in English have not been translated in order that non-speakers of, or readers in English can be exposed to their work. It seems that teachers, syllabus planners and students in Nigeria are mesmerized by the aura of Shakespeare. There doesn't seem to be any particular enjoyment of the play beyond the fact that the 'great' Shakespeare is being studied. But this is not enough reason for students to be exposed further to the poor judgement of instiling their heads with foreign and archaic ideas which Shakespeare represents.

On the other hand, one can argue that if the students are to have a broad education and a knowledge of great works in the English language, why not read Shakespeare who has been acclaimed the greatest writer in the language by Europeans? But this should not be done at the expense of indigenous writers. As Oyin Ogunba says:

> "no community in the world can live on an alien literature and achieve full spiritual fulfilment", (page 101).

Given the present deplorable state of drama in Nigerian schools and the benefits and values of drama to the student and to the society, it follows that the teaching of drama will have to be taken far more seriously than is the case at the moment. Obviously a modern and more effective method of drama teaching will have to be adopted in Nigerian schools, including a thorough review of the contents of the literature syllabus.

For instance the 1983/84 WAEC WASC/GCE Ordinary Level 'Literature in English' syllabus has the following five plays on the reading list:

1. Julius Ceasar by William Shakespeare
2. The Taming of the Shrew by William Shakespeare
3. The Merchant of Venice by William Shakespeare
4. The Dilemma of a Ghost by Ama Ata Aidoo
5. The Trials of Brother Jero by Wole Soyinka.

The syllabus prescribes that candidates must answer:

(i) One context question on a Shakespeare text;

(ii) One essay question on a Shakespeare text; and

(iii) One essay question on a prescribed African play.

The question is, why all the obsession with Shakespeare? Do Europeans give such prominence to our writers in

their literature syllabus? Why should Shakespeare be given more prominence than Soyinka in our literature programmes! Is Soyinka not great enough to be given a prime place in our literature scheme? A peep into the man's life and a brief survey of his major works will provide some answers.

CHAPTER 3

SOYINKA: BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS

Wole Soyinka was born in Abeokuta of Ijegba parentage in 1934. He attended St. Peter's Primary School, Ake, in Abeokuta between 1938 - 1945. Government College, Ibadan, 1946 - 1950.

1952 to 1954 he was a student at University College, Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan). From 1954 to 1957, he was a student at the University of Leeds, and obtained a B.A. (Honours in English). He published two short stories while in Leeds: 'Madame Etienne's Establishment' and 'A Tale of Two Cities'.

From 1957 to 1959, he was attached to the Royal Court Theatre, London, as Play Reader where he gained practical experience. His play, 'The Invention' (which was never published) was peformed at the Theatre on November 1, 1959.

In 1959, The Swamp Dwellers was produced in London. In this year also this same play and The Lion and the Jewel were produced in Ibadan, Nigeria. In 1960, Langston Hughes' African Treasury was published and it contained Soyinka's poems. Soyinka had by now formed 'The 1960 Masks', a drama company in Lagos. In this particular year A Dance of the Forests was produced in Lagos and won Encounter independence play award. From 1961 to 1962 Soyinka was a Rockefeller Research Fellow, at the University of Ibadan. In 1963 a satirical

sketch, The Republican was performed by 'The 1960 Masks'. Later in the same year The New Republican was performed. In 1963 The Lion and the Jewel and A Dance of the Forests were published. In this same year Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier's 'Modern Poetry from Africa' (Penguin) was published containing Soyinka's poems. 1964 saw the formation of the 'Orisun Theatre' drama group; later in the year The Strong Breed and The Trials of Brother Jero were produced at Greenwich News Theatre (USA). Five Plays was published this year. In 1965 Before the Blackout, another satirical sketch, was also produced. The later part of this year saw the production of The Road in London. In October of the same year Soyinka was arrested in connection with a 'pirate' broadcast made from the Western region elections. He was acquitted in December. The Road and The Interpreters were published this same year and Camwood on Leaves plus The Detainee, both radio plays, were broadcast on B.B.C. overseas service. Kongi's Harvest, directed by the author, was produced this same year in Lagos.

From 1965 to 1967, Soyinka was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Lagos as well as Acting Head of the Department of English. In 1966, not less than four of Soyinka's plays were produced in various countries: Kongi's Harvest - Dakar Festival of Negro Arts,

Rites of the Harmattan Solstice - University of Lagos, The Trials of Brother Jero - Hampstead Theatre, London, and The Lion and the Jewel - Royal Court Theatre, London.

Kongi's Harvest was published in 1967 as well as Idanre and other Poems. He was detained by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria in August of the same year. In 1968, The Forest of a thousand Daemons, Soyinka's translation of D.O. Fagunwa's Yoruba novel 'Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irummole', was published. In 1969, Three Short Plays and Poems from Prison were published. He was appointed as Head of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan and was also released from detention. In 1970, Madmen and Specialists was produced at Eugene O'Neil theatre centre, Waterford, Connecticut, U.S.A. and was performed in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1971. It was this year that Before the Blackout was published. W. Soyinka has been awarded a number of prizes for his literary contributions. His play A Dance of the Forests won "Encounter", the prize offered by the British monthly review to mark Nigerian independence celebrations in 1960. His novel The Interpreters won the Jock Campbell/ Newstatesman Award. The Road won the Best Published Drama Award at the Dakar Festival of Negro Arts, 1966. He has also won the John Whiting Drama prize.

Soyinka has also lectured in about seventy-five of the world's famous Universities. He was a tireless controversialist and had twice been jailed.

Professor Wole Soyinka, apart from being a poet, playwright, novelist, a professional actor, a literary critic and theatre director, he is first and foremost committed to the theatre as evidenced in his study and works. He is widely recognized as Africa's foremost playwright. His works, especially his plays, are of immediate relevance because he is relentless in his aim to expose the inadequacies of present-day African society.

Satire, therefore, is one of Soyinka's chief artistic weapons and he uses it constantly to expose the crudities and sufferings of a society in a state of change. According to Oyin Ogunba (1975), "His voice is often that of an angry non-conformist who seeks to be the conscience of his community." So in general, his plays are usually about representatives of the established order on the one hand and one or two people with messianic propensities or pretensions on the other. The community Soyinka keeps depicting is caught in both a conflict of two or more cultures and a conflict of generations, and one of his preoccupations is to show how the community responds to its dilemma.

Soyinka's plays can be seen to fall into two main categories, his pre-1960 writings and the ones starting with A Dance of the Forests (Post-1960 writings). In those of the first category, Soyinka is, in effect, still searching for a theme; although these plays already show the potential of a great artist in terms

of a mastery of dramatic technique, a sense of humour and an urge to experiment with new materials. There is no concrete, virile, central idea to unify the experience and give it direction i.e. The Swamp Dwellers, The Trials of Brother Jero, et cetera.

In the plays of the second category, Soyinka is now in great earnest and he deals with matters of great consequence for the life and health of his community. The tone of these plays change from conventional social criticism to acute anxiety about the shape of the present and the fortunes of the future. Whereas the messianic figure in the early plays is often either a ridiculous, self-opinionated prig, or a disillusioned morbid character, in the latter plays, he becomes a man wide awake to the realities of modern Africa and is often ready to stake everything for the regeneration of his community. In a nutshell, Soyinka's concern for the health, both spiritual and political, of his community is a near obsession. In play after play he presents situations in which people, high and low alike, act under the influence of some blindness or delusion which is an indication of a lack of self-knowledge. They are motivated primarily by self-interest and even deliberately shut their eyes against the light. Thus they lose a sense of direction and this is extremely dangerous in a life full of bends and bumps.

The theme of self-interest is central to virtually all of Soyinka's plays. They suggest that if a community

eventually suffers death it will be because each person has been so recklessly self-centered that no-one has had the time to think of the over-all interest of the community itself.

According to Ogunba (1975), "Soyinka is a playwright who takes himself seriously as a man with an important message which must be delivered in a most forthright manner. He sees his community as moribund and he raises an alarm". Soyinka also believes that he must keep hammering his point until it is driven home in the popular conscience. This makes his plays dark, perhaps too dark because he is dealing with the less glamorous side of society.

Soyinka is a non-conformist. A man against the Establishment, a firm believer in the absolute freedom of the individual who would go to any length to ensure that this freedom is not intruded on. He is not just an arm-chair critic of society, but one who is prepared to show the example, at whatever cost, to defend his conviction - as is exemplified by several incidents in Soyinka's life. To Soyinka, his society needs a saviour and, if need be, he would play that role and fight for liberty at whatever sacrifice.

Soyinka's real significance however is that he is the father of modern African drama of English expression. In his hands this genre of art takes a great leap from mere infant beginnings to the great complex machine that

is now emerging. Ogunba (1975) thinks this is so "because he has been able to combine successfully his rich Yoruba cultural heritage with the excellent technical (dramatic) skills learnt primarily from the West." He is also the main inspiration of modern African playwrights. "Indeed, Soyinka's influence in giving direction to drama in Africa can be compared with that of Achebe in shaping the African Novel" (Ogunba, 1975).

Despite this, there is a general complaint that Soyinka's writings are very complex. This gives an impression that he is writing for a certain class which is about thirty percent of the world's audience. (Aloysius Ibeabuchi, 1982). Asked about this in an interview by Ibeabuchi (1982) Soyinka replies:

> "I have heard that claim but I have looked at the kind of audiences who come to watch my plays and these cut across all the so-called educational barriers. In other words it is one thing, reading a play in cold breath, it's yet another thing watching it on stage".

He feels that if this accusation is correct then he is depriving himself of royalties or financial rewards by not writing for a large audience. He goes on to say:

> "But one thing is that I communicate in many forms. I communicate through poetry, through the stage, through the novel, through newspaper articles, through interviews, through historical sessions, television and through the radio. So I can only say that whatever I want to say which I want to reach the people I always find a correct medium for it".

The use of mime, symbolism and dance is notewrothy in Soyinka's art.

In Soyinka's poems he emerges as a serious poet concerned with the grave issues which face him. These poems are expressions of intense personal feelings arising out of actual experiences. He usually objectifies the particular stimuli which give rise to the poems by using representative images, giving the poems an independent existence from those stimuli, and making them stand as art irrespective of them.

Soyinka is essentially neither a descriptive nor a narrative poet but he is particularly sensitive to landscape, as an informing environment which supplies the essential images which ultimately are the poems. He is also fond of fusing different objects or ideas through a single image, resulting in compactness. So an appreciation of Soyinka's poems depends primarily on a realization of the significance of a well-organized system of images.

Soyinka has written just three novels and his unique style cannot be mistaken in them.

HIS WORKS: DRAMA

The Swamp-Dwellers: This is one of Soyinka's early plays and is an examination of a society in a state of change. The action in the play is set at nightfall in a simple hut that stands among the swamps of a riverine district,

suggesting the Niger Delta. A quarrelsome old couple, Makuri and his wife Alu, are awaiting the return of their son Igwezu, who has gone out to visit his flooded farm nearby. Three arrivals came to them in succession, each serving to illuminate their situation and discuss the themes of drought and flood, dearth and plenty, impatience and humility.

The first to arrive is a Blind Beggar who has walked all the way from the North, following the long river from a land of perpetual drought and locusts until he finds one where the soil is always moist. But he finds Makuri's household staggering under the weight of an opposite misfortune, for here the river has flooded and destroyed many farms. There is also much good land unused in these parts for it is sacred to "The Serpent of the Swamps" and no one may cultivate it. Their next visitor is the Kadiye, Chief Priest to the Serpent of the Swamps and the villagers' only safeguard against the vagaries of the river. It is to the Kadiye that they must make an annual offering from their produce so that the holy Serpent may spare their crops. The Kadiye is consoling, plausible and fat. Finally comes Igwezu himself, raging with bitterness: against the Kadiye who has deceived him, against the city where his elder brother has robbed him of money and wife, against the land which has despoiled his final hopes as a returning prodigal son. The beggar discerns a kind of strength in this angry youth who blames

everyone but himself for his misfortunes. He offers to serve Igwezu and to fructify his fields with those dry toes and fingers which so long for the embrace of mud. Igwezu accepts his service offhandedly, but remains intent upon his vendetta against the Kadiye, whom he now sets down as an over-fed rascal and an obstacle to all the advancement in the area. Makuri and Igwezu being the local barbers, Kadiye has come for a shave, for he predicts an imminent break in the long rains which will release him from his onerous vow to remain unshaven as long as they last. While he sits helpless in the chair, Igwezu menaces him with the open razor.

The play ends with Igwezu rushing angrily off to the city again, though as the land is dark and flooded there is more likelihood of his finding death than fulfilment in the journey, leading to another sacrifice for the unresponding land. Only the blind beggar remains on stage as the light is put off to "give account". The end suggests that the only light in the expansive spiritual darkness has been snuffed out and that total darkness will prevail for some time to come.

Soyinka shows us a pagan rural community which is disintegrating because the young, unable to accept poverty and hazard, no longer gave faith in its life and its gods. For them the attraction of the city is strong and is a way of getting off the land. If the city destroys every obligation of kinship and friendship, as Igwezu has already learnt, it also destroys the kind of sanctified

exploitation represented by the Kadiye. On the land, even the old have become quarrelsome and sad, grieving for their lost children and turning their resentment against each other. Only the Beggar has quiet dignity and faith because his demands are minimal. While Igwezu flees from the land because it does not produce (for someone who has abandoned it) the Beggar is confident that his love and need for it will make it yield. He does not need the Kadiye to stand between him and misfortune. Having known blindness, destitution and drought all his life, he senses the promise of a harvest where the others see only bitterness and failure.

The main theme of this play is the conflicting values of the old and the young in Nigeria. The old order in the village is presented as being sick unto death, with the message that an immediate radical change is imperative. But the task of effecting this change is not an easy one and a young man in this community is faced with the dilemma of either escaping into the city, forgetting the village and thereby allowing the Serpent to rule forever, or staying back to challenge the Serpent at great personal peril.

Symbolically and in physical terms Soyinka is saying that Nigeria still has a long way to go before it can be truly developed and a civilized community fostered.

Spiritually, he is saying that the soul and mind of Nigerians still have to be emancipated, the individual

person totally liberated from the clutches of the gods, his head drained of filthy things implanted by a tradition that is now moribund. Only then can his dry brain be successfully irrigated and cultivated. These are the pre-requisites of the spiritual welfare of Nigeria and the blossoming of its great potentialities.

In such a situation, Igwezu's impatience with the Serpent and ridicule of the Kadiye on the one hand and the Beggar's rejection of his native land and escape from it on the other are complementary radical actions which Soyinka seems to endorse. Since the very soul of the community is that of the Serpent, Soyinka may have thought that his country was in great danger of being destroyed by the complacency and conservatism of its system.

The Swamp-Dwellers is a simple, well-laid out play. Technically it is a very good play. But one possible weakness of the play is its highly derivative language, e.g. Since Igwezu is an unfortunate and desperate man, one may well ask if the 'messianic tone and phrase' of his speeches are appropriate to his circumstances et cetera.

Certain parts of the play also show the immaturity of Soyinka's writing at this stage i.e. the scene where Igwezu attacks Kadiye. The confrontation or conflict is not well developed. The play becomes one-dimensional as we only see Kadiye through Igwezu's eyes. Igwuezu gets so carried away by emotions that he seems pathetic instead of calling for our admiration.

Nevertheless, this play shows that Soyinka has, so early in his career, put his hands on the essentials of his trade: an engaging idea and technical virtuosty.

The Lion and the Jewel is a comedy. The main point of the play is the dilemma of choice between the rival worlds of tradition and modernism; and Sidi, a young village beauty who is just ripe for marriage, is caught in it. She has a suitor in the person of twenty-three year old Lakunle, a school teacher in the village. But Lakunle is a dreamer, who is more interested in showing his 'great learning' and firing his mind with the imagination of the total overhaul of the village community to bring it in line with the sophisticated cities of Lagos and Ibadan. Although Sidi has a warm, romantic nature and is relatively open-minded, she is too simplistic for Lakunle's revolutionary ideas. She would feel honoured to be married to Lakunle, but expects him to perform the proper traditional rites, especially pay the 'bride-price' - a thing which is anathema to the forward looking Lakunle. Lakunle's rejection of this 'out-dated custom' is complete. His yardstick for evaluating the custom is foreign (European) and to that extent inadequate, although there is sincerity in his attitude.

Above all, Lakunle rejects Chief Baroka, the Bale of Ilujile and all he represents, that is, traditional royalty, masquerades, music and dances. For him Baroka is lascivious, self-centred and incompetent, utterly

ineffective as an administrator in modern times and a clog in the wheel of progress which must be removed with all speed. But as Baroka is more and more revealed to us we find that he does not conform to Lakunle's picture of him, thus Soyinka's satire is as much poised against Lakunle as it is against Baroka. One, a self-opinionated, impatient young man bound to fail because of his temerity, the other an elder who is already spent but desperately, cunningly, clinging to life!

Sidi gains prominence in the village because of her photograph on the cover of a Lagos magazine and Baroka begins to desire her. This new move would be a way of thwarting his enemy, the 'all-knowing' young man Lakunle, whom he had treated thus far with tolerant amusement, but occasionally also with genuine fear. Baroka wins Sidi and Lakunle is deprived of his dream - wife.

Thus a situation is created in which a girl of seventeen rejects a man of twenty-three, a bachelor and modern progressive, the most forward-looking person in the village, to marry an old man of sixty-two who has a great many wives and sons and daughters much older than herself. Chief Baroka pretends to Sidi that he is philanthropic, concerned with the welfare of the people and capable of providing the warmth, the reliability and confidence which the dreamy Lakunle seems incapable

of manifesting. Thus Sidi becomes yet another victim of Baroka's amorous plunder.

Lakunle fails because his ideas show mere adolescent revolt without the substance to back them up. Soyinka's attitude to him is partly ridicule, partly sympathy, for his sincere patriotism counterbalances his obtuseness. Lakunle's failure is that of a pioneer and the impression is created that, chastened by defeat, he will recover composure and be better prepared to do great things for the community he loves so much.

This play contrasts progress and reaction as represented by Lakunle and Baroka respectively. Conservatism wins because, though not being held up as an ideal, it has a clearer view of life, and in the prevailing state of contest is more likely to succeed. The main theme of the play is the exploration of the cultural inferiority complex of Nigerians. This is embodied in Lakunle, Soyinka examines a situation in which a people have not fully recovered from a systematic indoctrination against their own culture and are still striving slavishly to copy the ways of their (former) colonial masters in order to be highly esteemed. The village of Ilujile can do without Lakunle's description of progress; fame/international conspicousty, ballroom dancing/a modern park for lovers, et cetera.

Baroka, the conservative under whom nothing is likely to change wins because he is certainly the

lesser of two evils. No doubt change is inevitable, the village school is an index of this. The Bale would, in spite of himself, have to yield to change. He would not however start the slide himself and knows what he wants or does not want. The Bale lives while Lakunle frustrates his own vitality. They represent opposing values which in more sombre works are equated with the opposed principles of life and death. In a nutshell, this play is the dramatization of the beginnings of change in modern Africa.

The play is a harmonious blend of words, song, dance and mime. Mime and dance are used structurally to recall past events. This use of flashback technique gives the play historical depth.

The Lion and the Jewel has an overall gaiety. No one in the play feels desperate yet and one is encouraged to take the goings-on in the play lightly. In fact Lakunle, in contrast to Soyinka's angry young men in subsequent plays, is full of life and can even sometimes step out of his consuming 'messianic' role to partake of a simple, comic exercise.

It is in this play that Soyinka begins to use his language as an index of character, an experiment he further develops in subsequent plays. Thus it is in the writing of The Lion and the Jewel that Soyinka's dramatic style begins to mature, for here are virtually all the features of language and form which are to blossom in

his later writings. In addition, it is Soyinka's happiest play to date.

The Road: In this play Soyinka sets up a main character called Professor who is searching for the meaning of life in the now familiar manner of twentieth century existentialists.

The quest is for the word, a name used in the play to cover a number of codes for apprehending the universe in Professor's society. When the play opens the search has been going on for a long time and Professor, who is about sixty years old, has probably been at it for over thirty years.

The quest for the word is, therefore, a search for the Metaphysical power with which Professor wishes to control his universe. It is based on the mystical idea that the universe is more than just physical substance and that one can attain supernatural power by communing with the invisible spirits who sustain the world. Since Professor is desperate to achieve this power he soon finds himself trying several avenues for it. The first is the Christian Church.

In his younger days Professor, like many of his educated contemporaries, had sought the word in the Christian Church. The bible, after all, does claim to be the sole repository of the word and the church its sole guardian. Knowledge of the word brings truth and this truth is available to anyone who would take the

pains to search for it. Professor took the promises to heart and became a lay-reader and practised his faith assiduously. But soon, emphasis was concentrated on the mere outward observances of christian practice at the expense of the tenets of his religion. He used his great powers for his own benefit and perfected his false piety and garrulity. Professor was so eloquent in church that the people came to worship him rather than God. He was later expelled from the church for blasphemy. Now worse off he finds that the church cannot be the true repository of the Word, for the Word cannot live with so much hypocrisy, arrogance and ignorance. Professor's expulsion from the church carried also the penalty of the forfeiture of all his pension rights. So he was determined to look for a profession which would ensure not only a decent living, but also an opportunity to continue his soul-consuming search for the Word. Thus Professor established a spare-parts store cum drinking bar adjacent to the very church from which he had been expelled and effectively put himself in a situation in which he could go on performing the roles of keeping an eye on his past - the church, dealing with the present mechanical age - spare-parts, and engaging the body and soul of his customers through drink - the bar.

As the play opens we see a new Professor, who goes into the graveyard at night to commune with the spirit of the dead, who seem to have already given him a strange

supernatural 'power' over human beings. He is now insane and fancies that the supernatural 'power' is real. The Word which Professor now seeks to understand or unravel is a far more complex one than the one he rejected in the Church. His present conviction is that the meaning of human existence is to be found in man's daily encounter with oro, the dark, inexorable spirit of the road, the spirit of sudden death. If he is to have this meaning, he must get familiar with the instruments which the spirit uses to vanquish human beings as well as the victims of the spirits' plunder. To this end, Professor makes himself the patron of the road mania of his community. He would secretly remove road signs in extremely dangerous bends so as to cause more and more fatal accidents, then rush to the accident spots when it is still fresh to steal parts of the vehicles to replenish his 'Aksident Store' and, more important to him, collect more data for his 'research' into the human soul from the groans of dying men and the warm bodies of the freshly dead. Professor's method may be bizarre but at least it is sincere - the sincerity of a demented man. He is devoted to his macabre 'research', the ultimate goal being the solution of man's existential problems.

To aid him, Professor incorporated Kotonu, a retired driver who is disenchanted with the road, as his partner. Kotonu feels the spirit of the road is

inexorable as ever and had defeated many of his friends and associates. Through him we have a feeling of colossal waste, a picture of so many fallen 'warriors', all of them victims of the blood-mongering spirit of the road. Kotonu is really in lament and disconsolate in his despair as he has seen the hopelessness of struggling with the invicible spirit of the road. It is this perception of Kotonu which impresses Professor, for it must be that Kotonu has gleamed something of the essence of life or death which Professor is so anxious to discover.

Professor then transfers Kotonu's driving licence to Salubi, an incompetent driver, to ensure an increase in the number of road deaths and, in consequence, the 'research' material for himself. Salubi is a dirty, stinking, young man, who has already accepted the corruption of his society as the only way of life and is determined to be successful by the easiest method. His type is well-known in contemporary Africa, whether he is a man looking for bare subsistence, a business-man anxious to accumulate wealth, or a politician thirsty for power.

At one of the accident scenes Professor found Murano, an accident victim and brought him home ostensibly as a Good Samaritan gesture. But, in fact, he planned to use him as an invaluable object of his search for the meaning of death and his whole

existentialist quest. To this end he has arrested Murano's soul at the stage of transition between life and death in which he found him with the great hope that if he is able to understand that transitional stage all other things about life and death will become clear. This is the missing link and only a thorough study of Murano can supply it.

Samson, (Kotonu's tout) has a traditional, and rather simplistic, interpretation of the road and the Word. As far as he is concerned, there is no need to search for the Word, for it has always been known - the Word is Ogun, and all he requires of any man using the road or any of his implements is a simple sacrifice - a kind of ritual insurance against this capricious, unrelenting god. Thus Samson believes in the efficacy of ritual sacrifice in solving human problems in the community, but this seems to be obsolete and it is even doubtful if it had ever worked, as many of the fallen drivers et cetera have paid Ogun his due regularly and are still vanquished by the spirit of the road.

Another example of the more direct search for the Word on the road is Say Tokyo kid's talisman. Say Tokyo is a Timber lorry driver as well as a captain of thugs. He is also a hemp addict. For him the Word is 'juju' an amulet which fortifies him against mysterious enemies and diabolical spirits and gods. He goes through life in a turbulent manner, absolutely certain that ancient sanctions are still efficacious

Professor's drinking bar is the centre of life in the community. Law and order has broken down in the community and the bar is an obvious indication of this state of affairs. The policeman, Particulars Joe, whose duty it is to keep the law, breaks it with relish and impunity, connives at Professor's forgeries and jokes about arresting him. A local politician, Chief-in-Town, goes to the bar to recruit his thugs for a 'tough' political meeting. All the degenerates in the community find refuge in the bar or the 'Aksident Store'.

Professor's search for the Word therefore came to a head in his bar. He was killed by the irresponsible Say Tokyo kid. As Professor dies he comes to realise too late that all quest after the meaning of life or the essence of death is futile, its apparent partial success a mere dream.

In this play Soyinka tries to represent the mind of a confused man who is also a jack-of-all trades. He is also trying to mirror a situation of rapid social and political disintegration. Soyinka conceives The Road as a kind of spiritual transition in which a whole community is moving towards a new consciousness. The road on which they move is full of dangerous bends which cause serious and sometimes fatal accidents and it is not too certain that many of them will get to their destination alive. Thus Murano is used as an image of the society Soyinka represents in this play,

that is, a society which is simply drifting on, uncertain of its future and in a tense state between survival and extinction. The play is a satire on a corrupt society where bribery, forgery et cetera are the order of the day. The cycle of corruption and the products of corruption reinforcing corruption is a never ending one. Organized religion also comes in for its share of satire. Through its satirical thrusts, the play extends its moral range over a wide area far beyond the immediate world of the road. The Road treats an essentially tragic theme without solemnity; it is also an extraordinary theatrical achievement.

The Road marks a new level of achievement in several ways. Soyinka has here discovered the dramatic means for presenting his vision with swift economy and concentrated effect. His language has also undergone a comparable development. He now abandons the rather loose bland verse, which was favoured in The Lion and the Jewel; for example. The Road enjoys the poetic qualities of intensity and suggestion more than any earlier play. Kotonu and Samson range from pidgin English and fragments of Yoruba to a speech almost as formal as Professor's, the choice of language depending entirely upon the nature of the scene they are playing. Say Tokyo Kid and his gang speak in the Americanized cinema-influenced slang of the lorry parks, whilst Particulars Joe sticks closely to his stilted policeman's

English. For instance, in an apparent self-praise before his gang of thugs, Say Tokyo Kid, when referred to as 'timber', gives this reply:

> "That me Kid. A guy is gorra has his principles. I'm a right guy. I mean you just look arrit this way. If you gonna be killed by a car you don't wana be killed by a Volkswagen. You wanra Limonsine, a Pontiac or something like that, ..." (page 27).

This complexity of linguistic texture is an important source of the play's strength and points the way towards a much greater use of different types and levels of language in African drama. The Road, with its Yoruba choruses and integrated action, is a logical development from Soyinka's previous works.

Kongi's Harvest: This play is a comment on political life in a modern African state and the career of an African dictator.

There is a conflict between President Kongi of Isma, a dictator, and Oba Danlola, a paramount king in the land and the representative of the old order. Kongi, the new leader, wants to destroy traditional authority and transform his country into a modern state. His idea of a modern state is, however, one organized into an efficient machine along Nazi lines. Oba Danlola, on the other hand, with a natural instinct for self-preservation, resists this development,

especially as he sees in Kongi not patriotism but a sheer lust for power. The consequent power tussle has already broken Isma citizens into two camps. Kongi is in the ascendant and has put Oba Danlola and his men, now branded reactionaries, in a detention camp. He is condemned to remain there until he agrees that the honour of eating the first of the New Yam, traditionally belonging to the king, must now be transferred to the new-style political boss. The king in eating the first of the new yam neutralises the 'poison' in the vast quantities that remain and makes them palatable to the rank and file of the population. But Kongi is only interested in eating the first yam (symbol of power) to demonstrate his ascendency to absolute power.

In return for the reprieve of five conspirators sentenced to death for bomb-plot against the dictator, Oba Danlola agreed to go to the New Yam Festival to surrender his functions to Kongi.

The central section of the play, an alternation of rapid scenes in Kongi's mountain retreat and in Segi's nightclub centres around the inept machinations of the Organizing Secretary. This character exhibits all the slightly menacing and false 'good-man' of the political toadie. Prolific in threats and bribes, he represents the system of intimidation, corruption, and sycophancy on which Kongi's power now rests. Carefully insulated

from reality by his professional flatterers, the Reformed Aweri Society, the leader lives more and more in a cloud-cuckoo-land of self-worship and magical sloganizing. The real opposition, however, does not come from Oba Danlola and his brother - Oba Sarumi, but from the younger group represented by Sarumi's son Daodu and his mistress Segi. Daodu has started an infuriatingly successful co-operative farm in competition with the somewhat militaristic state farms of the regime, while Segi, whose father is one of the condemned men, has organized her night club as a centre of resistance, employing beer and sex as two of its weapons against the pomposities of power. Segi has even tried her methods successfully upon Kongi in the past. And it is Daodu who persuades Danlola to swallow his pride, so permitting Kongi to eat of the first yam and reprieve the conspirators.

When the day of the festival arrives it transforms the intentions of all the principal characters. The secret bargain between Daodu and the Secretary is in disarray. Of the five condemned men due to be reprieved, one has hanged himself in prison and another, Segi's father, has already escaped. Kongi promptly calls off the reprieve and orders that all the condemned be hanged upon the very Day of Harvest. Oba Danlola, hearing as he returns to his palace to dress for the festival that the escaped man is wanted 'dead or alive',

resolves that he will not go to swell the pageant of a faithless murderer. Daodu, who has his own ideas about what will really happen at the festival, desperately porsuades the king to attend after all.

At the critical moment of the ceremony, Segi's father, returning to attempt the assassination of the dictator, is shot down off stage and killed. But Segi transforms the meaning of his death by presenting his head to Kongi in a covered platter, in the guise of the New Yam. All breaks up in confusion and flight. Danlola and the Secretary are left at the frontier, their last words suggest that they are bidding farewell to more than each other. Kongi too, one feels, is probably finished as a political force. The play allows one to hope that the future belongs to Daodu and Segi.

Danlola, as the paramount chief of the land, is the grand exemplary of the traditional system and, necessarily the obvious target for destruction by Kongi. Danlola and his retinue are given sufficient complexity to reflect both the greatness and weakness of the traditional system. Soyinka does not extol this traditional system unduly; indeed he recognizes that there is something sickeningly aristocratic and obsolete about it and that it cannot in its present form survive the rigors of the modern age. But he seems to emphasize the point that there is value in the essential humanism of the tradition, in its preference

for the man who has a soul to the man who is used as a mere tool to realize a totalitarian or mechanistic ideology. The Reformed Aweris recognize some of the values of tradition, and this is close to the centre of the satirical effort of the playwright, namely, to show that what the Aweri philosophers and Kongi and the so-called modern times are doing, in most cases, is merely renaming old institutions, white-washing ancient structures and pretending they are new.

Soyinka has said that he is writing about Kongism. Kongism, as seen from the play, is the modern African brand of totalitarianism. It takes the form of oppression, mass fear, sudden arrests and inhuman treatment of detainees. Soyinka interprets Kongism as an attempt to turn people into automators to flatter the ego of one indefatigable mad-man. Kongi is a monster who is trying to impose on his community a world-view which sees only pain and suffering as the lot of man. Kongi's regime is one of repression. The Reformed Aweri are the instruments of intellectual and spiritual repression, while the mallet-swinging carpenters are the instrument of physical repression.

Kongi's Harvest is not only the representation of a modern dictatorship and the traditional system which it has effectively replaced. It is ultimately a representation of the clash between the life-giving

forces and death producing forces. Daodu, Segi, Oba Danlola and his retinue on the one hand and Kongi and his men on the other. Oba Danlola has deep spiritual links; his authority crosses the borders of life. He not only gives life to the already born; by drawing poison from the new yams thereby making eating and living safe for the governed, but is linked with the bringing of new life into the world. It is because the Oba's regime is based on this basic assumption that his regime emerges as being morally superior to the physically more successful regime of Kongi which is based on death, not on life. Far from drawing out the poison to give life to the people, Kongi is a dealer out of death.

Segi is a symbol of sex and life while Daodu speaks for the forces of life against those of death. Daodu's silencing of the Oba's song is a significant symbol of the end of effective chieftaincy of the Oba's sort in the face of the competition offered by modern political regimes. There is no suggestion, however, that the particular manifestation of modern political power in Kongi's regime will survive either. Some form of government which combines the moral authority and humanity of the Oba's regime with the efficiency of modern regimes (the Daodu-Segi combination) seems to be indicated as the hope of stability.

At the peak of the crises all flee but Daodu seems determined to stay and face the consequences of his action or continue his opposition within the country. The odds are against him whatever his intentions, but the odds are always loaded against the true saviour of his society in Soyinka's work. So whether Daodu falls into Kongi's hands and is killed or whether he is able to hold out in his farm settlement his role would be fulfilled. He has released a spirit in the land, a potential force, which is the spirit of revolution. At the end of the play, the struggle merely continues. It is this, however feeble, which holds out any hope for particular situations and societies, and, eventually for mankind. One takes the consolation in the fact that both Kongi and Kongism have no real future because man in any community cannot for long tolerate a tyrannical megalomaniac.

This play is Soyinka's most popular in Nigeria and certainly his most theatrically successful. This success is due partly to its public theme and the sheer topicality of the events dealt with e.g. the Awujale of Ijebuland. Soyinka has achieved a just equilibrium of material and form resulting in a solidity which his other plays lack. This play is high in Soyinka's dramatic achievement.

Poems: Soyinka's published poetry ranged from the light satirical Telephone Conversation to the sombre probings of life after death in Requiem.

The first separate collection of the poems of Soyinka was published in 1967 by Methuen under the title Idanre and Other Poems. Although, his poems had previously appeared in small clusters or singly in journals and anthologies.

Idanre and Other Poems: Soyinka emerges from this collection as a serious poet concerned with the grave issues which face him as a man in first his own country Nigeria but eventually as a man living in the twentieth century. Often Soyinka announces the historical or other background of the poem in the title e.g. "Massacre, October 1966", 'To my First White Hairs' et cetera. His titles not only place many poems in this way, but often supply important keys to their meaning. An appreciation of Soyinka's poetry depends primarily on a sensitive realization of the significance of a well-organized system of images within each poem, and a willingness to follow wherever the images lead. The poems in Idanre and Other Poems are grouped under general thematic headings viz: Of The Road, LONE Figure, Of Birth and Death, FOR Women, GREY Seasons, October '66 and Idanre.

Of The Road: This group of poems reverts to the theme of the road, an image both of sudden death and of the terrible cost exacted by technical progress in Africa. These poems are vaguely connected by the fact that they are based on experiences obtained while travelling

(by road or air) or events which took place on the road - like the death of Segun Awolowo (a very close friend of Soyinka's). The poems attribute death on the road to the whims of Ogun the god of iron and the road. The figure of Ogun, the embodiment of both the creative and the destructive essence, occupies a prominent place in Soyinka's artistic and critical writing.

The poems are not all of the same mood. The opening poem Dawn celebrates dawn as it is seen by someone who has been driving through the night. The poem seems to attempt to capture the essence, the spirit of Dawn - a time of day which often in Soyinka's poetry represents hope. But in Death in the Dawn this hope becomes ironical in that dawn provides the setting for death.

'Around us, dawning' is connected to the other poems by the theme of travelling, though this time the travelling is not by road but by plane. Soyinka manages to convey the ambiguous nature of the plane itself; it is a creation - it was 'fashioned' - but once created it takes on a being of its own; it becomes a proud, majestic, beast of prey. The irony goes further, for even the creator, man himself, becomes the victim of his own creation. Thus man in his machine is poised between triumph and disaster. Other poems in this group are 'Luo Plains' and 'In Memory of Segun Awolowo'. In this last poem, the untimely death of the victim,

Segun, is imaged as an untimely harvest. The familiar figure of the anthromorphic road bent on plunder reappears but this time the road is already glutted with plunder and so did not need this particular victim so he 'retched' on his latest victim. The point is that there can be no explaining the waste involved in such a tragedy - it is the whim of Ogun.

LONE Figure: The poems under this theme introduce a figure which frequently appears in Soyinka's work, namely the lonely inspired man in society who sees what others cannot see, and who, because he does not fit comfortably into the society's pattern is martyred. Eman in The Strong Breed resembles this figure, so do the soldier Mulieu in A Dance of the Forests and Sekoni, the engineer in The Interpreters. In the poem Idanre, while all men await the promise of the harvest and the blessing of the god in passive hope, only the poet dares to make the perilous pilgrimage to watch the god in his agony. Thus the poet earns death and later glory by walking the lonely path by which society, in spite of itself, could possibly be saved.

The first poem under this group 'The Dreamer' deliberately evokes memories of Christ's crucifixion. The influence of the martyred is pictured in the images of growth; the seed falls to the earth and dies but germinates and grows, spreading its influence over

the seas. This happens to the martyr here in the last stanza, which also economically defines the nature of his influence with words. The second poem, 'The Hunchback of Dugbe' is about a hunchback, one of the unfortunate madmen who, detached from their surrounding countrymen, walk their lonely demented way all over tropical Africa. The poem also describes the gruesome death of the man. In spite of his death, however, the hunchback walks on, visiting his old haunts in Dugbe in his ghostly nudity.

'The Last Lamp' is a poem in which the original object has been totally transformed into new images. All the associations here are of an old and frail woman bent with great age as she goes in and out and as she patiently waits out her time in spite of her troubles. At the end, she comes to the end of her long day, but she was the valediction which suggests that not only she, but an era died with her.

'Easter' produces yet another lone figure; the man who distils the wisdom of the surrounding world, but who has to do this in isolation. The martyr of his society - the man who is spurned but who nevertheless has the perfume with which to halt the decay of the society which rejects him.

Of Birth and Death: The poems in this section start with the theme of the birth and death of children, to one of the first reminders of old age and ends with pictures of the dead man on a slab unknowingly yielding the secrets

of life to the investigating fingers of the pathologist. So even in death the body has some use. Some of the poems rest on the idea of the continuum of life from pre-existence through life on earth to a continuing existence after death. There is also the idea of a purer form of being - called knowledge - which is dissipated by life and growth on earth. Thus a child who dies young has decided to preserve this knowledge rather than grow old and lose it.

'Dedication' invokes a blessing on the newly born infant in language which is based on that used by elders in ceremonies when the child is formally recognized as having been born and introduced to the world.

The light heady atmosphere of buoyant hope in 'Dedication' is chilled by the hopeless grief and lamentation of the mother of a still-born child in 'A Cry in the Night' - another ironical sequence.

'A First Deathday' has a similar inspiration - the death of a child, this time on her first birthday - but it is of a different tone altogether. Here the grief has been got over and there is an attempt to distil some meaning from the event. It is suggested that at birth we bring with us a certain knowledge which 'thins' as we remain in this world. Thus, this child by willingly assuming her shroud almost as soon as she sheds her swaddlings, preserves this knowledge undissipated.

This idea recurs in 'For the Piper's Daughter' where, in contrast to the purity, innocence, and openness of childhood, age is characterized by a false appearance, deceit and lies. The children are enjoined therefore not to grow old in this way, but to retain the qualities of their childhood.

In 'Abiku' Soyinka emphasises the callous wilfulness of an Abiku child who haughtily scorns the pleas, the sacrifices, the ritual scarrings and all other efforts calculated to make her stay. The Abiku continues its cycle of life and death, thereby plaguing the mother time after time.

'To my first White hairs' is a fairly light-hearted greeting of the first signs of age, leading to decreptitude and death and possible wisdom that comes with it. 'Nightcap' takes the idea further into debility and death and looks hopefully beyond life towards higher things. This easily leads on to 'Post Mortem' which also has a half-mocking approach to a grim subject - death.

For Women: The poems under this group are linked by the fact that a woman is part of the stimulation for each one. It is a series of variations on a theme. There are also the themes of sex and its fulfilment or the absence of it, the suffering of the negro people in

'Black Singer' and the gentle and calming effect of a tactful woman on man's hurt or rage.

The first two poems 'Song: Deserted Market' and 'Psalm' are opposites. The image of seed or grain as the source of growth is the dominating image in both poems. In the first, the seed is to be frustrated; it is not to be allowed to grow, it is deprived of moisture and tender care, therefore there is no harvest. The fate of the seed in 'Psalm' is more fortunate, it has been tended, and has reached a happy harvest. The harvest is triumphantly celebrated at the end of the poem as a manifestation of the mystery of the continuing cycle of life. These three poems, including 'Song' form a three-part variation of the theme of sex and its fulfilment or the absence of it.

'Black Singer' conveys the reaction of the poet to the song of a black female singer. The darkness of the song expresses the background of suffering of the souls for whom the singer speaks. It evokes the whole history of the suffering of the Negro people.

'Bringer of Peace' presents the qualities of a woman whose tactful influence has a steadying influence on the persona who speaks in the poem.

'To One, In Labour' yokes the process of gestation to the social organization of ants. The poem moves full circle from the 'regurgitations' of ants to the secretions of the one in labour.

The seed which comes to fruition is 'In Paths of Rains' is sown during one highly charged explosive moment in a compulsive instinctive act. These are the seeds of life. The end suggests a marriage required by society because of a pregnancy, resulting in a 'Freak Communion' in contrast to the more natural communion portrayed earlier.

'By little loving' represents the persona's attempt to isolate himself from love, love being equated with life-giving forces. The imagery suggests a retreat into a dead unproductive state in order to avoid the agony which total commitment can bring. But mercifully the instincts he had tried to suppress asserted themselves, and he was spiritually redeemed.

Grey Seasons: also contains poems with varying but related themes; it is a picture of a state in which the rain, instead of bringing its usual release, restricts and releases latent energies in him, for example in the poem 'I think it rains'. The first stanza describes what rain ought to do and the second describes what it did on a particular occasion. Contrary to expectations, instead of liberating, the ashes reacting abnormally to the rain have imprisoned the human spirit which circles helpless within the restraining circle, but has a different effect on the poet.

The image of a restricting circle - 'a ring of grey' - within which the spirit is enclosed, central to the

first poem, is more explicit in 'Prisoner' where the subject is also in mental prison. By the end of the poem, the 'walls' are set and the prisoner is 'closed' in sadness. The accumulations of grey which set into the prison walls are not sudden formulations but form and harden imperceptibly from the grey wisps and the 'threads' and catch the subject unawares.

The theme of 'Season' is summarized by its epigrammatic opening: 'Rust is ripeness'. By juxtaposing 'rust', a symbol of age and decay, with 'ripeness' - maturity and full growth - Soyinka suggests the cycle by which growth leads to death and a new beginning of cycle. Thus even rust can be promising for it points to the decay of the germ, which brings new life. There is always the rhythm of birth, growth and decay.

'Night' is an evocation of the effect of night on the poet, with a call at the end for deliverance from 'night children' which haunt the earth.

'Fado Singer' is a tribute to a performer in the genre. Fado is a popular Portuguese song and dance with guitar accompaniment. The poem is a record of the poet's reaction to the sadness of the song.

October '66: The poems here are about the waste and negation of life that war - not just the Nigerian civil war - brings. All the poems spring from experiences during the troubled period from about October 1966 to

the months leading to the civil war. These poems gaze with horror at man, the victim of his own power, substituting death for life.

Idanre: This is Soyinka's longest poem (written in 1965 and published 1967). In it he has used the Yoruba mythological background as the vehicles for ideas. There is the usual figure of the poet on a lonely pilgrimage. While the generality of men do nothing about their fate, it is the poet who dares to save them. It is to those only who dare to gaze alone on the naked truth that the hills 'yield their secrets'. 'Idanre' is a record both of the poet's metaphysical pilgrimage and of the secrets which it yields.

Many of Soyinka's favourite themes are introduced within this framework - the waste of war, the consequences of free will, death on the roads, man's potential for as well as his proneness to self-destruction, the nature of the god - Ogun - are given a new form and unity. Idanre is a major poetic expression of some of the pervading themes in Soyinka's work.

Poems From Prison: Wole Soyinka was detained in Prison from August 1967 until 1970. In 1969, Rex Collings published two of Soyinka's poems written in Prison. The usual ideas were all there - the assertion of the individual will; the lonely figure separate, yet a

part of the society; the concern for society even as one groans under it. In these poems the prisoner is not killed, only entombed and watched by guards who are portrayed with a strong hint of sadism.

These two poems represent a triumph of the universal mind over the limitations and frustrations of a purely local situation, even prison. Soyinka's main concern and preoccupation is truth as it is painfully discovered by the individual; the struggle to remain faithful to this truth; the need for self-sacrifice to enhance the truth; the consciousness that even when the mind is resolute, the body sometimes falters when the ultimate price is demanded. All these abound and are adequately illustrated in these poems.

Requiem: First appeared in the first edition of Moore and Beier's 'Modern Poetry from Africa' 1963. It opens with a fittingly delicate representation of barely perceptible intimations of life after death and of a continuing relationship with the dead.

Ogun Abibiman: This long poem was written after Soyinka's return to Nigeria in 1976. It was inspired by Samora Machel's virtual declaration of war against Rhodesia on March 3rd of that year. Here the concern is not with the ancient deed of violence which obsessed Ogun

on Idanre Hill. The necessities of a modern liberation war in Southern Africa demand a different deity, and he sets about creating one. Soyinka matches the attributes of Ogun and Chaka, thereby indicating a continental will to action; and the war-cries of Yoruba and Zulu mingle in the rush to battle. Soyinka's Ogun-Chaka hybrid remains a symbol for collective revolutionary struggle.

Fiction - His Novels

The Interpreters: Most of Soyinka's work, especially by 1965, betray a fear of the consequences of the violence which the politicians had so casually invoked for the intimidation of their opponents. All show an awareness of the crass materialism which is eroding traditional values, and the easy-going indulgence with which corruption and inhumanity are commonly regarded. In addition, all except Kongi's Harvest show a profound concern for the way in which the gods manifest their will, both through human acts and through the contingent moulding of human personality. It is this last concern which lies at the centre of The Interpreters.

The novel starts with Egbo who sits pondering on his choice of going 'with the tide' and continuing with his routine and comfortable job in the Foreign Office instead of opting for the traditional pattern of life by which he could succeed (or even displace) his

maternal grandfather from the throne of Osa. Egbo broods over his choice continually because he more than suspects it is cowardly. His choice involves a struggle and the decision has been his alone because he is on his own. Similar choices face all the young 'interpreters'. Egbo has further choices; he has to give up Simi as it is clearly impossible for him to go on satisfying his body with her and his mind with "the new woman" of his generation. There is stress and tension in the lives of the friends who make up the group of interpreters, but in none is this more clearly shown than in Sekoni's life. Sekoni is the most intense of the interpreters and has arrived from abroad full of dreams of what he could do with his knowledge and ability - build a power station. But when Sekoni finally takes up his post he was assigned to puny, trivial tasks which led to his mental breakdown and later his death. He is brought to mental collapse while the cynical chairman of the Electricity Board actually makes money out of his Condemned Power Station. Because Sekoni is the most intense, his frustrations are of greater dimensions.

Kola looks to art for his fulfilment, and comes to the painful realization that, unlike Sekoni, he is no artist; this in itself is a valuable if painful piece of self-knowledge. He only finds fulfilment in his relationship with Monica.

Sagoe eventually finds a similar anchor in Dehinwa whom he will marry.

Bandele functions among his friends as a prod for their conscience. He is generally reticent but springs into action when this is necessary. He is a consoler; at the death of Sekoni, Egbo escaped to his shrine, Sagoe into drink and it was left to Bandele to console Sekoni's father. His ability to tolerate the company of people he really finds unbearable surprises even his friends. As the various relationships move uncomfortably to some sort of resolution towards the end of the book, one sees Bandele as a sort of timeless arbiter and a divine judge. He solemnly courses the establishment against which the young interpreters continually bruise themselves in their individualistic adventures in the society. Ayo Faseyi is almost pathologically anxious to establish himself as a member of this power group and preoccupied with outward presentation of things instead of essentials. It is this substitution of an appearance of honour and morality for the thing itself, that the novel continually satirizes. Professor Oguazor of the Ibadan establishment, is symbolically placed in a house decorated with plastic fruits and flowers, in which these objects take the place of real ones. The falsity of the facade is imaged as an unnatural substitution of death for life. This unnaturalness suggested by

the image of the plastic fruit is exemplified by Professor Oguazor's act of unnaturally hiding away his illegitimate daughter in a private school in Islinton so he now presents to the respectable world a nicely laundered facade of virtue. He is unfit to make moral judgement and his power to do so because of his position in the society is at the heart of the satire in the novel.

This is also the basis of the satire implied in the treatment of Sir Derinola, the judge. On the bench he is a pillar of rectitude but he is not above taking petty bribes, hiding behind the more obviously corrupt front of the crooked politician Chief Winsala. This facade of Sir Derinola's was finally shattered in the novel by both fantasy and fact.

The satire, particularized in this novel through Sir Derinola, is more general. It is the whole society - the whole 'civilized world'- which is characterized by this hypocrisy and moral confusion. The business of justice has become a game in which the sword is in the hands of theives.

The novel covers a list of topics; in the realm of human relations, racialism, tribalism, religious intolerance, homosexuality, different kinds of sexual relations, various kinds of monogamy, polygamy and love are all explored. The satire encompasses corruption, political thuggery, bribery, universities - undergraduates

as well as their teachers - religion, war, and a host of other topics.

All the young interpreters are individuals trying to make sense out of their world. They are hammering out values and codes of conduct in a world which seems to have none ready made. The novel portrays the essential isolation of the new generation. It is the necessity to make choices, to carve paths - even wrong and uncomfortable ones - which distinguishes the young interpreters from other members of the society who float along without any real values, or whose choices have been made for them. The total meaning of life for the interpreters is to be painfully pieced together out of the trivial and the routines of existence. Whether through art or through meaningful relationships each of the young people is to work out some sort of resolution - even in death - of their experiences. As against the lack of concern for essentials by the others in society.

The values of the whole society have become inverted; to protect the phony facade of society, those who do not conform are crushed - 'expelled', sentenced, driven to insanity. The satire is indeed serious and The Interpreters is a most serious novel in spite of its cloak of comedy.

The novel is primarily concerned with contemporary Nigeria in which, although the ancient traditional life

still makes its appearance, the predominant impression is of a society in the grip of a turbulent modernity. It is in this uncertain atmosphere of a society which has not completely come to terms with itself that corruption, tribalism, window-dressing hypocricy and moral uncertainty flourish. It is through all these that the interpreters seek a path.

The novel makes few assertions but probes and exposes themes for judgement. It is an artistic realization of the opportunities as well as the awful responsibilities of being an individual on his own in a maze of a world.

Season of Anomy: The whole of this novel is built upon the imagery of the aborted harvest. Crucial to the positive aspects of this book is the opening section, 'seminal' in which Soyinka depicts a just balance and harmony between continuity and renewal, earth and blood and between man and the fruits of his labour. For this purpose he juxtaposes the meaningless greed and haste of Ilosa, the capital city dominated by the giant cocoa corporation, and the quiet but purposeful rhythms of life in an ideal community which has survived unscathed amid the creeks of the delta. Soyinka depicts the Aiyero as a commune which has in turn broken away from a healthy but misguided parent, called Aiyetoro due to religious differences. What both communities have in common,

however, is an equal sharing of labour and the fruits of labour, a total participation in the rituals of the group, and a pervasive loyalty to their own values so that even the sons who have been sent away to learn new skills always return to share them with their own people.

Having watched how this human seed, scattered by Aiyero in the cities of the world, always returns the harvest to its home soil, Ofeyi, the hero of the novel, conceives the idea of making the seeds of Aiyero bear fruit elsewhere in the land, wherever her sons are found - gradually inducing men elsewhere to take a different view of the meaning of their labour and the quality of their expectations.

This enterprise fials disastrously, unleashing a hurricane of violence and massacre from the corporation and its military allies in which thousands are slain. This is the 'season of anomy' (lawlessness) of which the title speaks. But one is not meant to see this failure as ultimate, or as invalidating the original idea of trying to match the corporation's strategy of enslavement-through-materialism by a counter campaign of liberation-through-Enlightenment. Ofeyi is urged to redeem the whole nation from the spreading tentacles of the corporation by countering them with his new ideology. The novel ends on a positive tone for Ofeyi, despite the predominance of scenes of frightful cruelty and massacre in the middle sections.

This novel is conceived as a sequel to The Interpreters. Their common theme can be stated as 'the intellectual in a new nation'. The characters in Season of Anomy are socio-activists who occupy themselves with schemes through which they hope to counter the offensive of the establishment in the interest of the populace as opposed to the passive role of the characters in The Interpreters.

Here, also, Soyinka suggests the necessary steps which the intellectual must take towards the achievement of his prescribed goal. Soyinka feels that the intelligentsia cannot save society. But the role of the genuine ones in this group should be to educate the masses politically - about their own potentials in the society.

His most current published work is his autobiography. AKE Wole Soyinka is at present directing his latest play "Requiem for a Futurologist", a play whose radio version won a B.B.C. award in December of 1982, under the title "Die Still Reverend Godspeak".

This latest play is a satirical play which portrays and ridicules a social syndrome which is fast gaining ground in Nigeria. It concerns spiritual charlatans who come over the Mass Media at the end of every year to make vague and inaccurate predictions as to what would happen in the country within the new year. Equally under the butt of the play's ridicule are palmists, occultists, soothsayers, religious prophets, phoney salvationists,

and all those who believe in these charlatans, including those who read horoscope daily and live by them. His play is about the general "religious sickness" of the country. Whenever there is a problem or the country is in big economic-social trouble, it invariably turns more and more towards mumble-jumble aspects of existence which becomes a very big commercial proposition for the opportunists. To explain the reality of this phenomenon, Soyinka employs satire, creating the character of a professional futurologist who goes by the name of Reverend Doctor Godspeak, who predicts events yearly. In the play, Godspeak's own death is predicted by another futurologist who trained under him, but Godspeak refused to die as predicted and it became a problem to try and convince people that he was not dead.

Soyinka's "Requiem ..." is designed to bring the University of Ife Theatre Company back on the road after what appeared to be a lull, due partly to the movement of Ola Rotimi, the playwright, to the University of Port Harcourt from Ife in 1977, and partly because a department of Dramatic Arts was formed in Unife, as a result of which the staff who could have continued with production were busy putting the new department on a solid foundation. It is now that the department is able to bring to life the University's theatre. Soyinka has introduced into the Unife Theatre short plays consisting of social criticisms, like he did before with the

Orisun Theatre. He has also resigned his appointment as the Head of the Dramatic Arts Department in Unife in order to be able to devote more time to production of plays. Apart from the production of his plays, Professor Soyinka also writes the music and prepares the posters for most of them.

In view of the seriousness of Soyinka's work and his wide range of themes, it is necessary for his work to be read by those in power as well as by those who put them in power, but most especially by the young - in schools. For Soyinka's work has all the civilizing influence of a combination of vibrant ideas with art.

One cannot claim the ability to exhaust all of Soyinka's work, most especially in a research of this nature. The following are some of his works which have not been discussed:

(A) Plays: A Dance of the Forests, The Trials of Brother Jero, The Strong Breed, Madmen and Specialists, Camwood on Leaves, Jero's Metamorphosis, The Bachae of Euripides, Death and the King's Horseman, The Detainee - (unpublished B.B.C. playscript).

OPERA WONYOSI

Revues: Before the Blackout

The Republican (unpublished)

The New Republican (unpublished)

(B) Poetry: Three Poems ('The Immigrant', 'And The Other Immigrant', 'My Next door Neighbour'.)

A Shuttle in the Crypt

Poems from Prison

(C) Novels: The Man Died

Translation: The Forest of a Thousand Daemons (from D.O. Fagwuna's Yoruba novel 'Ogboju Ode minu Igbo Irunmale'.)

(D) Essays and Critical Articles:

'Salutations to the Gut' Reflections ed. Frances Ademola, African Universities Press, Lagos, 1962.

Toward a True African Theatre', Transition 8, Kampala, March, 1983.

'Nigeria's International Film Festival, 1962', Nigeria Magazine 79, December 1963.

'Amos Tutuola on Stage', Ibadan 16, Ibadan, June 1963.

'From a Common Backcloth: Reassessment of the African Literary Image', American Scholar, New York, Vol. 32, No. 3, June 1963.

'And After the Narcissist?' African Forum, New York Vol. 1, No. 4, Spring, 1966.

'The Writer in an African State', Transition 31, Kampala, June 1967.

'The Fourth Stage', in The Morality of Art, essays presented in London, 1969.

'Myth, Literature and the African World', Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Chapter 4

Some Critics on Soyinka and his replies

According to Professor Eldred D. Jones (1973), "Misinterpretation of a writer's intentions in any work of art is a risk every reader has to take, and a danger every writer runs".

So it is not surprising that there are many adverse criticisms of Wole Soyinka. These range from being the white-man's stooge to being deliberately difficult in his writings. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa and Madubuike (1979) accused Soyinka of cultivating England's poetic tradition, especially the Anglo-Modernist sensibility and style. They accused him also of carrying out a determined fight to wean the poets away from any stirrings of African nationalist consciousness in order to indoctrinate them with a universalist individualist outlook.

The above accusations arose as a result of Soyinka's position on Senghor's over romanticisations of the negro when he (Senghor) is so obviously artistically expatriate. According to Soyinka,

> "The duiker will not paint 'duiker' on his beautiful back to proclaim his duikeritude; you'll know him by his elegant leap. The less self-conscious the African is, and more innately his individual qualities appear in his writing, the more seriously he will be taken as an artist of exciting dignity..."

Soyinka's critics Chinweizu and company then decided, that Soyinka wants the African writer to be taken seriously by British manipulators and promoters whose opinion should not matter in Africa.

Chinweizu and company did not stop at the above, they further accused Soyinka of serving the British as 'pointman' and 'demolition expert' in their "campaign to slow down and guide astray any active nationalist consciousness in the literature of their African colonies and neo-colonies". Their opinion is that Soyinka's success has wasted for them a generation of opportunities for their cultural liberation. In their opinion, Soyinka takes a delight in masquerading as the authentic and quintessential African literary force.

In another article in "Transition" (1975) Chinweizu and company has this to say about language and surface meaning in Soyinka's poetry:

> "Wole Soyinka's syntax and verbal structure is Shakespearean: he speaks of 'unsexed', 'such webs as these we build our dreams upon' and 'propitiatious Speed/Grimly on, before' (Idanre, pages 7, 10).
>
> Partly as a result of this addiction to archaisms, the poetry of the Ibadan/ Nsukka poets tends to be craggy, lumpy, full of obstructions, unnecessarily and artificially difficult. Simple ideas are often deliberately clothed in esoteric idiom".

They illustrated this accusation with Soyinka's Dawn which, according to them, does not make immediate sense and is not even easy or pleasurable to read.

> "It is heavy tongue twisting, and it cannot keep the listener's attention. And poetry is an articulatory medium".

On imagery and attitudes the critics accused the Ibadan/Nsukka poets of dragging everything: foreign images, attitudes, forms and assorted mannerisms into their obscurautist cesspool. Soyinka's Malediction was used as an example. They said, Soyinka in this poem, curses a woman who rejoiced at the massacre of her fellow country-men in a language that is a blend of Shakespeare and the Victorian English poets. "Soyinka does not curse the way his forefathers cursed, or the way his contemporaries curse". Not to do the above is voluntary cultural servitude - and worse, servitude to somebody else's dead past. It is a denial of the validity of one's own culture. Furthermore, it blocks the channel of cultural transmission.

Chinweizu and company feel that the Ibadan/Nsukka poets are for the most part ineffectual imitators. When they imitate the European tradition, they too often botch it; and when they consciously attempt to write in the African manner, they also botch it.

They claim that a more immediate issue is how to write well in a language one uses. And to write well in English today it is necessary to write clearly using contemporary 20th century diction and idiom, so that anyone literate in the language can make literal sense out of every sentence or line that is written. It should be left to the educated elite to worry about the many layers of rich meaning that may be buried beneath that

surface clarity. They quickly go on to state that this is not to suggest that what is needed is a poetry of nursery rhymes; although some of the great poetry of the world has the linguistic clarity and simplicity of nursery rhymes - for example "Humpty-Dumpty". They go on to include Onitsha Market literature as a yardstick for judging the intelligibility of works written by poets and other writers.

In a nutshell, they claim that the foundation elements of a modern African poetics must be extracted from Oral Tradition. That Oral Tradition, being auditory, places high value on lucidity, normal syntax, and precise and apt imagery. Language or imagery that is not vivid, precise or apt compels the listener to puzzle it out, interrupts his attention, and makes him lose parts of the telling. They see no reason why these virtues including logistics and efficient structure, which are valued in the Oral Tradition should be abandoned just because literature becomes written and visual.

Soyinka took on the above critics in an article titled "Neo-Tarsanism: The poetics of Pseudo-Tradition" in Transition 48, April/June 1975.

He started off by explaining in detail what Oral Tradition means. That oral traditional poetry is extra dimensional and not one dimensional as claimed by Chinweizu and company. Their stand according to Soyinka is too simplistic. The African world is more

intricate; embracing modern technology as well as the 'flora and fauna' of its poetic landscape e.g. "pumpkin leaves, towncriers, drums, calabashes" et cetera. Soyinka continued "This may result in a subtle complication, in the 'narration, reflection and resolution' of these phenomena but emphatically denies the deliberate complicating of them".

Soyinka feels that complex poems make his "receptivity more rewardingly engaged, stimulated - even aggravated, yes - but ultimately more enriched by the analytical exercise of sharing my discoveries with my readers".

One should not opt for simple poems just because some extra intellectual effort is required in order to appreciate the more intricate ones. He also thinks it rediculous to raise "Humpty-Dumpty" to the level of "great poetry" and to equate it not only with William Blake's "Tiger" but with Langston Hughes' "Harlem" which is what Chinweizu and company have done.

Also replying to Chinweizu and company's accusations that he "borrows seasons of alien lands to mourn our dead", Soyinka states that if one is in another part of the world and observing a unique experience which reminds one of home; in recording the experience the poet does not have to limit himself to thatched huts and bonga fish. This is the delimitation of poetic provinces that is being decreed by Chinweizu

and company especially through the pronouncements on religion and its metaphors, symbolisms and imagery. Chinweizu and company claim that the very existence and practice of non-traditional religions be declared retrogressive and colonialist. Soyinka thinks that they do not know what they are talking about since Incendiaries, however inspired or inspiring, can by no stretch of the imagination be conservers of tradition.

They are willing to accommodate the use of English in African poetry but fail to understand that language is shaped by a number of factors including the religious one. Soyinka feels that with this attitude they lend credence to the frequent accusation that critics are failed writers. That they should bear in mind that all poets will not write alike. "And also that poetry is not like the day which comes to life only on the death of the last".

Soyinka agrees that their contention of "wilful obscurity and private esoterism" is one which does plague a good proportion of modern poetry of Africans and that some of their examples are justified. But he feels that Chinweizu and company whom he referred to as "Simple Simons of Criticisms" subvert the principle of imaginative challenge which is one of the functions of poetry.

He also feels that the denigration and misunderstanding of traditional forms of African art should stop.

Our society is full of rich and various activities and poetry is a totality of it all and not the work of one man.

Yemi Ogunbiyi (1979) in his study of Wole Soyinka's Opera Wonyosi wrote that the play has a loosely episodic structure with no compelling sequence. He added in agreement with some critics, i.e. Biodun Jeyifo and Gerald Moore, that far too many issues are taken on in the play to the detriment of the play's depth.

> "From the cement scandal, through the Igbeti scandal, the secret society decree, army-civilian riots, the obnoxious foreign exchange decree, to religious hypocrisy, public execution and all forms of corruption in government ...", (page 7).

Ogunbiyi wrote further that close to the above mentioned problems is the ambiguous nature of the play: that on the one hand Soyinka appears to have written a work demanding social revolution while on the other it attacks the revolution. He then went on to state his critical position as opposed to whether 'Opera Wonyosi' merely reflects the society of its time, or whether it criticises "the surrounding social reality". His position is with the assessment of artistic vision in terms of its practical relevance to the struggle for

a more democratic form of existence. He continued:

> "This leads us to start from the premises that a work of art must depict reality correctly and unambiguously, must give real insight into the objective relationships between classes and individuals in a given society", (page 12).

He stated that a work such as 'Opera Wonyosi' must therefore lay bare the system of objective laws on which social life is based, must lay bare the tangled relationships of several interest groups and the chaos of the year 'Wonyosi' seeks to capture. Only then, according to him, can one say that reality has been accurately depicted.

Finally, Ogunbiyi stated that 'Wonyosi' is "a document of real value to the extent that it attempts to capture the tempo, the mood, the contradictions, in fact, the meaning of a period in Nigerian and African history that will be long remembered".

Soyinka, in his Foreword to the text 'Opera Wonyosi' responded to the above criticism of the play. After some discussion on how dictators come to stay in power for long terms and what a writer's role is in a society, Soyinka goes on to say:

> "A quite favourable review in the University of Ife based journal 'Positive Review' nevertheless laments the lack of a 'solid class perspective' in Opera Wonyosi. Translated in practical dramaturgical

> terms, the reviewer desired an adaptation which would latch a class exegesis on to my parade of clowns, fools, villains, mass-murderers et cetera in their arbitrary setting of a Nigerian expatriate colony in the (then) Central African Empire. Let us make it wearisomely clear that the province of the artist, while it does not exclude a direct interest in the class, socio-economic, psychological, and other possible promoters of his characters being, on stage or on paper, is not such as cannot validly manifest itself in any given work without taking into its immediate provenance all or more of these various contributors to the history of that character, or his fate at curtain time", (page II).

According to Soyinka, 'A play, a novel, a poem, a painting or any other creative composition is not a thesis on the ultimate condition of man. "Opera Wonyosi" is an exposition of levels of power in practice - by a satirist's pen. To ask for a 'solid class perspective' in such a work curtails creative and critical options and tries to dodge labour which properly belongs to the socio-political analyst".

Soyinka continued that the Nigerian society is an oil-boom society, with crimes committed by a power-drunk soldiery against a cowed and defenceless people, resulting in further mutual, brutalization down the scale of power. These are the hard realities that hit every man, woman and child irrespective of class.

> "Indeed, I am definitely in agreement: 'Art can and should reflect, with the "dominant" temper of the age, those vital, positive points which, even in

> the darkest times, are never totally absent'. Equally is it necessary that art should expose, reflect, indeed magnify the decadent, rotted underbelly of a society that has lost its direction, jesttisoned down a precipice as fast as the latest artificial boom can take it ... What the writer will not accept is the irrational claim that a work of social criticism must submerge its expression of moral disgust for the anodyne of 'correct' class analysis", (page III).

Soyinka ended by saying that "To suggest that the turning up of the maggot-infested underside of the compost heap is not a prerequisite of the land's transformation is the ultimate in dogmatic mind-closure. All evidence in the material world of theatre and society asserts the opposite".

As mentioned earlier, a lot has been said about Soyinka's work and the man himself. One of his books which has generated the most controversial response from the Nigerian public is The Man Died. Some comments e.g. that of Abiola Irele's (1975), claim the book has no "concreteness", is "too negative" and "too narrow" to be either here or there.

Others, e.g. Adamu Ciroma, accuse Soyinka of being very firmly established on foreign thinkers i.e. Kant, Karl Marx, Jaspers, Mangakis, et cetera. He calls Soyinka a "narrow Yoruba jingoist" who hates the north.

According to Dan Izerubaye (page 14) "I consider it a flawed work because its quality is uneven. Its basic weakness stems from Soyinka's determined and

calculated attempt to hit back at those who dared to imprison him ..."

Another comment on the book is that of Chief S. Sowemimo who thinks "The Man Died" is a vulgar book written by a chatty and garrulous author who has no iota of respect for truth. In short is reads like the ramblings of a demented playwright", (page 23).

On The Man Died Soyinka himself has said that "it is very pointedly political and is geared towards re-educating the minds of Nigerians by relating things which they thought they knew about and shaping their ways of looking at so called public leaders and figures", (page 34).

Soyinka's reaction to the controversy over the literary value of The Man Died is to say that he thinks "a book if necessary should be a hammer, hand grenade which you detonate under a stagnant way of looking at the world", (page 37).

He feels that these critics are not used to this particular form of writing since they have received ideas about what constitutes the correct literary style for any particular experience. Soyinka said that he uses a deliberate style in The Man Died in order to avoid creating a mono-stylistic narrative which, according to him, writers should not feel obliged to use.

From Soyinka's point of view, writers must do their best to use words and style when given the opportunity

in order to "arrest the ears of the normally complacent people." They must make sure they explode something inside them which is a parallel of the sordidness which they ignore outside.

He said he very much appreciates the shock reaction to his book because it was actually his intention to create feelings of revolution, disappointment, and bewilderment leading to a therapeutic effect which will completely revolutionize the ways of the people's thinking, perceiving and therefore participating in whatever sort of programme is envisaged for society.

The only bit of criticism which distressed Soyinka most was being called a Yoruba jingoist and a hater of Northerners by Adamu Ciroma because according to him this is not true.

On the duality or complexity of Soyinka's work he states that he is fascinated with the symbol figure of his society - Ogun. It represents the duality of man; the creative, destructive aspect. And he thinks that this is the reality of society. He says that those who are expecting one-dimensional statements from him as a writer are looking for "a cheap injection of optimism in their nervous system." His main aim is to lure society into implementing serious progressive changes.

G. Tseja, who has been actively involved in the production of one of Soyinka's plays and has also

taught some of Soyinka's plays and poems to students, delivered a lecture at Bayero University Kano titled "Is Soyinka an Introvert?". He started by defining what being an introvert means. He is "one who is so involved in his own private or individual world that he is often accused of shutting himself up, and making himself inaccessible to the outer world".

Although Tseja claims not to be an expert on Soyinka and does not know him personally, he goes on to apply this definition to Soyinka as a writer. He poses the question "Is Soyinka too remote, too inaccessible, to be enjoyed by the average reader?"

He defines the average reader as those whose aim in reading a work of literature is the worthwhile pursuit of enjoyment, which all true art should elicit. And then went on to answer his question in the affirmative, that Soyinka is a difficult writer - most times too difficult for the comfort of his average reader.

He ascribes this difficulty to the complexity which arises out of the totality of his work: the experience(s) from which the work is conceived, the theme(s) with which Soyinka is preoccupied, the intricacy of his plot, the sophistication of his characterization and the appropriateness or accessibility of his style. For the purpose of the lecture Tseja decided to focus on Soyinka's style and the relationship

between his language and his characters; and how it isolates him from his audience.

Tseja thinks the first difficulty a reader encounters is Soyinka's choice of words and syntax. He thinks Soyinka was playing to the European gallery and obsessed with telling them that he, an African whose mother-tongue is not English can also speak sophisticated English. According to Tseja, Soyinka is an unnecessarily difficult writer. He feels Soyinka is running from a psychological fear induced by the unflattering class of degree he received as a graduate of the University of Ibadan. This, of course is a dubious assertion.

But on the other hand he grudgingly praised Soyinka for sometimes achieving a lucidity of style and presentation which he thinks must surprise Soyinka himself.

Tseja uses Soyinka's poem 'Telephone Conversation' to illustrate the difficulty in understanding his work.

He feels that Soyinka's poems, unlike J.P. Clark's, leave one bewildered as words and phrases glare at one unblinkingly from the page, distracting one rather frustratingly from the essence of the poem. He then picked out some words and phrases out of context to prove his point.

One should not condemn a piece of work just because some extra intellectual effort is required in

order to understand it. It is necessary to point out here what Soyinka said of his writing in "When the Man Died - Views, Reviews and Interviews on Soyinka's controversial Book". He says he is not conscious of the dimension of the audience for whom he is writing except his political sketches and his book The Man Died. In these, he continues, there was a very conscious orientation as they were written for specific events directed at specific abuses. Otherwise he writes under the conviction that there must be a number of people on the same intellectual "wavelength" for whom whatever he writes must have a meaning. In response to the question as to whether there is any conscious effort on his part to blur meaning, Soyinka replies that although he tends towards what is called the elliptic style of writing, this is not deliberate but a quirk about which he cannot do much. He does not deliberately attempt to mystify or to create obscurities. Soyinka feels that the problem arises when educational institutions do not sufficiently examine the works which they set for their students. He feels any single writer has works which are a little bit more difficult, more obscure than others and that "complex subjects sometimes elicit from the writer complex treatment". For example, when the relative simplicity of The Lion and the Jewel or The Jero plays, is juxtaposed with complex works like Madmen and Specialists or

A Dance of the Forests, it becomes clear how the complexity of Soyinka's style is ultimately dictated by the subject, the theme(s).

Soyinka feels that it is very important for a writer not to condescend to one's audience. He says one must not say "I want to write something at the lowest possible common denominator to make sure that a child in kindergatern will have to understand it".

This is what people like Tseja want Soyinka to do before they stop claiming that he is deliberately and unnecessarily difficult in his work.

According to Tseja, Soyinka's problem is not in his choice of words and phrases alone but in his characters and the language they use. He illustrates by stating that a Nigerian character that is supposed to be speaking in Pidgin is caught with idioms, cliches and expressions which sound more like the well rehearsed speech of a professor at Oxford than that of an uneducated Nigerian speaking the only version of English he knows. A writer could conceivably decide to jumble up a character's speech in order to depict emotional stress - which the character Tseja used as an example was undergoing. In addition, Pidgin or Nigerian uneducated English has not quite been standardized. It is not clear whose standard Tseja wants Soyinka to approximate.

Tseja also thinks that the quality of Soyinka's language vis-a-vis the characters is not convincing. According to him, language should reflect culture, but the feel of Soyinka's language does not reflect Nigerian culture. "Even when amply supplied with proper names and lexical items which are obviously Nigerian, the overall flavour is not Nigerian". Using Achebe as an example, Tseja feels that the skilful use of proverbs in a piece of work are good examples of the special quality of style an African writer in English must possess, if he is to make his mark. He continues, "It is in this ability to manipulate the language imaginatively so as to convey not only the substance of the information, but also the extra-linguistic characteristics, that is the weakest point in Soyinka's literature.

Tseja, in his enthusiasm, has over-looked one crucial fact: Arrow of God by Achebe and The Trials of Brother Jero by Soyinka are set in different backgrounds. The former has a typical village background while the latter is set in the city. Nothing will be more incongruous than a city dweller, even if uneducated, mouthing proverbs like the village dweller who lives closer to nature. It might be possible but is not the norm.

Moreover, using Soyinka's words "The actual form, the medium, the metaphor, which one uses is ultimately

unimportant because this is merely the framework upon which one poses certain themes. "... as long as the actual metaphor itself does not become an obstacle to the appreciation of the entire message, I don't think a poet (writer) should worry unduly about the electic appearance or structure of his work. We must not think that traditionalism means raffia skirts", (Agetua 1975).

Tseja also accuses Soyinka of fusing realism and symbolism so that a reader (or audience) is required to respond at two levels simultaneously. Lastly, Tseja feels that Soyinka's cinematic technique of flash-backs can constitute an impediment to the average reader or audience, and the problem is compounded that within the overall framework of these flash-backs, there are variations e.g. in The Lion and The Jewel he uses mimes in The Road characters in the play re-enact events realistically et cetera.

The words of Eldred Jones will suffice here -

> "Soyinka's plays have the complexity of organization, and of language that distinguishes literature from mere writing. The seriousness of their content makes him a vital voice to his generation, but it is his art that sets him apart from a large number of well-meaning writers with a message".

Not all comments about Soyinka have been negative however. Some critics on The Man Died e.g. Peter Enahoro said that one feels occasionally that Soyinka is

determined to show that "the pen is mightier than the sword" and succeeds mercilessly but calculatedly. According to Enahoro the book is a welcome departure from the "cold statistics, the sick 'objective' political analyses, and the dull economic ramblings around which the two sides of the Nigerian civil war have been argued".

Another critic, Donatus Nwoga, feels that Soyinka's recording of his experiences in The Man Died gives some significant insight into how sensitive human beings, as people, react to oppressive and difficult situations.

All these are possible because of Soyinka's talents as a writer.

It would be dishonest however to argue that Soyinka is an easy writer. The accusation of obscurantism levelled against him has some justification. But those who dismiss Soyinka in his totality are those who are either too mentally lazy to carefully study his work or are too intellectually dishonest or sacred to cope with the giant creative image of Soyinka.

For each of his works Soyinka decides on his audience and his theme. These two dictate the style. The lucidity and simplicity of the Jero plays matched against the impenetrable medium of The Swamp Dwellers or The Strong Breed or even A Dance of the Forests shows that Soyinka is a very conscious and deliberate

artist who knows when to match language with theme.

Soyinka has a firm root in the Yoruba cosmic and mythological world. Those who, for instance, read The Road without an understanding of the 'Agemo' tradition, definitely have something to lose from a rich understanding and enjoyment of the work. Or those not conversant with the pop and pageantry that attend the lives of traditional rulers in Yoruba land could easily dismiss Oba Danlola in Kongi's Harvest as a lunatic, when he starts to speak his poetry and perform his royal antics. When Oba Danlola threatens the Superintendent with a curse everybody sprawls on the ground pleading with the Oba not to place a curse on the head of 'his son'. Those not conversant with the Yoruba culture can easily miss the serious import of such an action and its symbolic meaning.

His images and symbols may be private and personal, but are all great poets not slaves to their "private" emotions even when treating the so-called universal themes?

Until our syllabus designers become reasonable and rational in their selection of texts, there will be no end to the injuries the image of Soyinka is receiving. Soyinka should be left for the pleasure of those who understand and enjoy him.

Chapter 5

What is really difficult in Soyinka
(with Reference to Kongi's HARVEST)

Wole Soyinka's work has been misinterpreted and misunderstood countless times. His works have a special notoreity for being deliberately difficult to understand. It is true that some of his plays are very complex and outside the comprehension of an average reader or theatre goer because of the complex images and symbols he employs, but is also not true that all his works are difficult to understand. Soyinka selects his images, symbols and language to suit his intended audience. The Jero plays are simple, both thematically and structurally, just as Madmen and Specialists or A Dance of the Forests are complex.

Complaint about areas of difficulty cover his language,use of images, symbols, cultural elements and characterization. Before discussing the above with reference to Kongi's Harvest, a brief introductory comment on the cultural element of Soyinka's work is imperative.

Wole Soyinka has his roots in Yoruba culture but his experiences extend far wider; his formal education and working experience have brought him into contact with ideas from the whole modern world. In his works, his imagery ranges from tropical yam roots to the falling acorns of Tegel. But he starts as a Yoruba. The effect of his deep scholarly interest in Yoruba culture endows Soyinka with a base from which his work flows.

So some knowledge of Yoruba culture is necessary for any serious study of Soyinka's work.

Traditional Yoruba culture is dominated by religion. The Yorubas are surrounded by gods and spirits with whom mortals interact. (These gods are depicted in A Dance of the Forests and The Interpreters).

Soyinka's favourite god is Ogun. The duality of his nature - he is both creative and destructive - makes him an inigmatic symbol both in Soyinka's own creative work and his criticism. Man in his capacity both for creation and destruction is a re-incarnation of this contradictory god of the forge. Soyinka feels that Ogun stands for a transcendental humane but rigidly restorative justice. Ogun appears repeatedly in Soyinka's work and some of his themes are centred around the duality of his nature.

In Yoruba culture human life itself is regarded as part of a continuum stretching from spirits of unborn children through bodily existence to the spirits of departed ancestors. Thus the abiku child appears as a symbol at the end of A Dance of the Forests and is also the subject of a poem by Soyinka. It is constantly shuttling back and forth between the land of the unborn spirit and this life, causing itself to be born over and over again by the same mother only to plague her by its death.

These ancestors are worshipped through the egungun, masked figures who after duly observed ceremonies become possessed by the spirits they represent and are able to talk with unearthly wisdom. Soyinka uses this idea of possession in some of his plays, for example, The Road. And as the carver of the masks is central to Yoruba life and worship, Soyinka uses the symbolic role of Demoke the carver in A Dance of the Forests to reflect this central position.

Farming is also central to the Yoruba pattern of living. In Soyinka's dramatic world a failure of the harvest is a symbol of destruction and the very negation of life, while the image of a successful and plenteous harvest is a symbol of the positive forces of life. Harvest thus has associations of both piety and joy as is reflected in Soyinka's poem Idanre. Some trees also have symbolic stature i.e. yam, kola, oil-palm and maleguetta pepper. These appear in their symbolic role in Soyinka's works. Particularly the palm-wine which assumes almost a mystical role in Soyinka's work e.g. The Road and The Interpreters.

The Yoruba festival has greatly influenced Soyinka's plays, especially in the overall design. In such plays like Kongi's Harvest, The Strong Breed and A Dance of the Forests, the prevailing mood is that of the preparation for or celebration of a great event which produces so much excitement or tension in the

whole populace that everybody thinks of nothing but the great event. And Soyinka in his plays very often catches the essence of the festival mood with the drumming, bustle and other manifestations of a holiday.

The head of the Yoruba government is the Oba who combines both political and priestly functions. These are depicted in some of Soyinka's plays e.g. Kongi's Harvest and The Lion and the Jewel.

The wealth of imagery and proverbial formula from the Yoruba language flows into Soyinka's work. Soyinka thinks in images and the full meaning of these can only be revealed when the image safe is cracked.

Although Soyinka is no longer a practising Christian, the influence of Christianity on his work is apparent especially in The Interpreters, The Strong Breed, and The Trial of Brother Jero.

Soyinka's concern for his society is apparent in his poetry, drama and novels. According to him, he believes in freedom and is against dictatorship of any form - benevolent or malevolent as in Kongi's Harvest. It is from such deeply held convictions that his literary and social works flow.

Soyinka is basically concerned with MAN on earth. The duality of man's personality, his simultaneous capacity for creation and destruction which makes him almost at every moment a potential victim of his own ingenuity, is a universal trait of homo sapiens who has

been given by his creator the gift of free will. In A Dance of the Forests, the Yoruba deity Forest Father represents the creator and Demoke, the Yoruba carver, represents man. Any universal god or any abstraction for the source of life could take Forest Father's place just as any man of sensibility could take the place of the Yoruba artist.

Soyinka sees society as being in continual need of salvation from itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act; it comes about through the vision and dedication of individuals who end up becoming victims of the society they wish to save and the society in turn benefits from their vision. The clash between the individual and the society which Soyinka so often portrays in African terms is a universal phenomenon; the martyr who is the positive product of the clash is also universal.

Soyinka's works celebrate life and deprecate its opposite. This opposite includes minor internal repressions but most importantly it embraces the general wastefulness of war. Yoruba mythology comes in handy here with its enveloping images - Ogun temporarily madened by drink and indiscriminately killing friend and foe, is a personalization of the idea of the senseless waste that war brings.

A minor variation on the destruction of human potential is man's destruction of the environment.

Soyinka is against this and it comes out in his plays. Soyinka believes that man should go through the hazards and challenges of life and move towards true wisdom, battered and bruised by his experiences. These sort of ideas are what gives Soyinka his universal appeal.

In the light of the above one cannot accuse Soyinka of being unintelligible in terms of cultural content because of his reliance on Yoruba language and mythology. Fundamentally, his messages and themes are universal and should be easily grasped.

As mentioned earlier, Soyinka is a Yoruba and draws particularly on Yoruba poetry, mythology, ritual, dance and folk theatre in Kongi's Harvest. His use of images, symbols, cultural elements, characterization and language will now be discussed with close reference to Kongi's Harvest.

Yoruba poetry is a difficult and advanced art in which image, symbol, complex form, rhythm and tonality all play their parts. The style of the opening verse of Kongi's Harvest is related to 'Ijala' - the Traditional Poetry of Yoruba Hunters which merely express one odd thought after another about almost anything in the life of the Yoruba. The opening verse in Kongi's Harvest starts:

> The pot that will eat fat
> Its bottom must be scorched
> The Squirrel that will long crack nuts
> Its footpad must be sore, (Kongi's
> Harvest 1).

This verse uses instances from domestic and animal life to introduce the theme, that those who wish to be satisfied and comfortable must expect to experience some suffering.

In Kongi's Harvest there are also verses for which Soyinka provides a Yoruba equivalent. These are the *Praise Songs, the commonest form of Yoruba poetry, and* they are often allusive and symbolic. These verses occasionally contain references to gods and the actions of gods which require elucidation. For example, Danlola's Praise Singer has the following lines:

> Ogun did not seek the throne
> Ogun did not seek the throne
> Quietly retired minding his own business
> The nobles brought the crown of Ire
> To the ancestors of all hunters
> Ogun did not seek the throne
>
> (Kongi's Harvest, 58).

Ogun is one of the traditional gods of Yorubaland. His mention in the play, like that of Sango, Obatala and Esu, indicates the religious background of the Oba and his followers. Ogun is a versatile god, and Sonyika has elevated him to a place of particular importance in his private pantheon. Traditionally, he is the god of iron, a hunter who led the gods through the place of 'no-road' to the community of men. For this he was given the only crown the gods had brought with them, and he became known as 'Chief among the Divinities'. However, he was so ferocious that he did

not find it easy to settle down among men and so withdrew to 'The Top of the Hill', whence he descended to hunt and make war. After a while he was tired of his seclusion, but his appearance so terrified men that he could not live with them. He went and borrowed clothes from the palm-tree, and 'attired now in fresh palm fronds he entered Ire and was immediately proclaimed king'. Among other attributes Ogun is regarded as the 'pioneer divinity', the bringer of gods and the bringer of riches; he is the god of all who use iron, of carvers and warriors, artisans and drivers, and, since he is ubiquitous, he is also the god of oaths.

Sango (Kongi's Harvest, 59) is unique among the Yoruba gods in that he was an historical figure, the fourth Alafin of Oyo. During his life he was strong, self-willed, cruel, tyrannical and passionately devoted to carnage. When his authority was challenged by two courtiers, he set them against each other. One was killed and other pursued Sango. In order to escape the Alafin hung himself on a ayan tree, which caused his opponents to taunt his body and his followers. His followers respond by using magic to invoke lightening, with great loss of property and life. They then claim that Sango did not hang himself; he only ascended into heaven; the lightening and the resulting calamities were vengeance which Sango sent upon them who slandered him by saying that he had hanged himself.

Everyone was to confess that Sango did not hang himself and from then on worship him; the article of faith to be repeated should be Oba-ko-so: "The King did not hang himself".

The reference to Obatala comes earlier in the play and is more cryptic. The Ogbo Aweri asks:

> Did you not see us
> Lead twins by the hand?
> Did you not see us
> Shade the albino's eyes
> From the hard sun, with a fan
> Of parrot feathers?
> Even so did the god eiyoin
> Whose hands of chalk
> Have formed the cripple
> And the human bat of the day.
>
> (Kongi's Harvest, 9).

Obatala is the sculptor-divinity who has been given the prerogative to create as he chooses, so that he makes man of shapely or deformed features. The hunchback, the cripple and the albino, are regarded as special marks of his prerogative, either signifying his displeasure at the breach of some taboo, or to show that he could do as he likes. Obatala's followers have particular responsibilities for those with 'disabilities', such as the albino, 'the human bat of day'.

Esu is the Yoruba trickster god. He is versatile and mobile, the errand boy of the Oracular god, but capable of causing mischief, confusion and disaster.

Danlola says:

> . .
> ... I have myself
> Wandered round some dens of Esu, once
> And clambered over sweet hillocks
> In the dark, and not lost my way.
>
> (Kongi's Harvest, 51).

He is talking of Daodu's connection with Segi, whom he regards as a dangerous woman, and 'dens of Esu' are night clubs or brothels.

Soyinka employs Yoruba ritual in a number of his plays. In Kongi's Harvest, he refers to several rituals, for example, the Drummer sings:

> I saw a strange sight
> In the market this day
> The day of the feast of Agemo
> The sun was high
> And the king's umbrella
> Beneath it ...
>
> (Kongi's Harvest, 8).

According to Soyinka 'Agemo is simply a religious cult of flesh dissolution. This ritual is not of particular importance in Kongi's Harvest, but the basic shape of the play is partly created by another ritual, the New Yam Festival.

Oyin Ogunba (1970), says of the symbolism of the New Yam:

> "... in traditional Africa, the New Yam signifies the life-giving spirit, the fruit of fertility and the diligent cultivators of the land. It can also be a sexual symbol, the manifestations of the virility of the citizens of the community".

In Kongi's Harvest we are carefully given to understand the significance of the New Yam Festival, and it is clear that it is part of Danlola's divine function to receive and eat the first and finest fruit of the harvest of yams. In attempting to replace Danlola, Kongi is usurping this spiritual function in the hope of attracting the Oba's awe and power, and becoming the focal point of the community's religious life.

Dance has punctuated the drama all through. The startling interruption of the harvest dance is anticipated by the superintendent's interruption of the opening song and by Daodu's interruption of the Oba's dance near the beginning of the second part. The climax of the festival and of the play is conceived in terms of a dance.

Language is used in Kongi's Harvest to draw strong contrasts between the factions. Danlola and his retinue speak in the style of the Yoruba, in verses, images and proverbs. The result is an expressive supple and energetic form of speech. Most of Danlola's retinue express themselves through images for example Sarumi's plea to the Oba:

> Ah don't be angry with him
> Oba Danlola, don't be angry
> With your son,
> If the baobab shakes
> Her head in anger, what chance
> Has the rodent when

An ear-ring falls
And hits the earth with thunder?
(Kongi's Harvest, 6-7).

This is a way of saying that the king's words carry a divine efficacy and that Oba Danlola should be restrained in his anger.

The image here is of an angry baobab shaking its head in anger, and losing an earing which strikes the ground with the sound of thunder, while a squirrel, cowed into submission by these manifestations of power, clings desperately to the branches of the tree. Danlola's anger does find resonant and also imaginative expression. At the beginning of the Second Part he roars at Dende:

Do you dare call this a sceptre?
This dung-stained goat prod, this
Makeshift sign at crossroads, this
Thighbone of the crow that died
Of rickets? or did you merely
Steal the warped backscratcher
Of your hunchback uncle?
(Kongi's Harvest, 48).

This is a finely controlled use of rhetorical questions. Every metaphor finally led to the creation of a grotesque and vivid image, that of back scratcher, specifically designed for a hunchback and warped at that.

The expressiveness of Danlola's speech is matched by that of the songs which sing Segi's praises. Segi's

dramatic function seems to be to represent the feminine principle, or earth goddess although she is not given enough humanity to be real.

The expressive language of Danlola and his retinue and of the songs in Segi's praise are contrasted with the 'foreign ideological rhetoric' of the Reformed Aweri Fraternity and their master. With the exception of the fifth Aweri, and occasionally of the sixth, the intellectuals talk in an almost meaningless jargon. An example is Kongi's latest publications:

> 'Nor proverbs, nor verse, only
> ideograms in algebraic quantums'.

The Aweris' language is riddled with cliches and ugly coinages, such as 'positive stamp' 'contemporary situation' and barely pronounceable 'scientificism'. Kongi speaks to the people in pseudo-biblical rhetoric, beginning:

> 'The Spirit of Harvest has
> Smitten the enemies of Kongi.
> The justice of the earth has
> prevailed over traitors and
> conspirators. There is divine
> blessing ...'
>
> (Kongi's Harvest, 81).

The difference between the era which Danlola represents and Kongi's new dispensation is seen as largely one of language. Having dismissed Danlola and his retinue as

'a backward, superstitious lot', Kongi is firmly committed to building a political machine that is recognizably western and modern. Hence, the linguistic style which Soyinka gives to the tyrant and his minions is fraught, not with the metaphor and proverbial wisdom of Old Africa, but with the 'washer words' and politico-scientific jargon of the modern world. In all of Soyinka's work, he uses language as an instrument of characterisation. In Kongi's Harvest there is a rich, poetic and idiomatic freshness that characterises the speeches of the Oba and his retinue, as against the empty 'isms' of the intellectuals of Isma.

As earlier stated Soyinka goes back to Yoruba theatre for his materials. The traditional Yoruba theatre has the following structure:

(1) The Opening glee or Ijuba
(2) The Drama
(3) The Closing, usually a moralistic summary of the events of the drama.

Kongi's Harvest conforms to this structure. The Hemlock serves as an opening and it started off with songs and praise singing - a kind of prologue. Then comes the drama in two parts, followed by the Hangover, a kind of epilogue.

The three parts have a unity of action, of time and of space. In Hemlock the whole tragic theme is

introduced. Besides the two protagonists are introduced.

The events insinuated, mentioned or shown in Hemlock are fully dramatised in the first and second parts of the text.

The final section, Hangover, shows the aftermath of the festival - a kind of summary of the vicious circle of Kongism. Kongi's Harvest moves forward through a series of contrasts, rather than through the development of a narrative. Soyinka is less interested in character and plot than in symbol and pattern. The mood and style of his characters, the contrasts between factions and the overall shape of his work are of greater importance than a bald summary of the actions. It is the themes that are most important in Soyinka's work, since most of his themes are recurrent, an understanding of Soyinka's work should not be too difficult once one is familiar with these themes.

Soyinka's work benefits from being studied in the context of Yoruba culture because he is a poet who invests traditional ideas with new meanings. Soyinka seizes on ideas and themes and his characters tend to become symbols conveying these ideas.

There is, for instance, no better way of presenting a society that is past redemption than in presenting filthy cripples and other perverse human beings like

Soyinka did in Madmen and Specialists or A Dance of the Forests.

CHAPTER 6

PEDAGOGICAL SUGGESTIONS - WITH REFERENCE TO SOYINKA'S KONGI'S HARVEST

There are many methods of teaching drama, as discussed in Chapter Two. These methods are also applicable to other literary texts. There have been lots of suggestions on the best approaches to the teaching of literature. J.H. Welsh (1965) made a recommendation which involves an approach to the literary work by seven stages:

1. A preliminary discussion - chiefly of the story and plot.
2. A brief consideration of each scene or chapter in turn.
3. A closer examination of the text act by act or chapter by chapter.
4. A special study of some of the long speeches.
5. Some consideration of the linguistic detail.
6. A discussion of the characters in relation to the text.
7. A consideration of the text as a whole.

Suggestions like these are useful, although dogmatic adherence to teaching methods is unsavoury. The disadvantage in the drama teaching methods used in Nigerian classrooms, discussed in Chapter Two, lie in their lack of motivation for a generality of the students in the class as only few students are actively involved at any one time. A modern teacher therefore insists on mass involvement in the lessons i.e. that every student must be actively involved in the

learning process. Although it would be ridiculous to suggest a rigid approach for teaching literature, the teaching of any of Soyinka's work should be based on the modern total participation approach, for the benefit of the students. This modern approach is eclectic; a combination of all methods so that a student not reached by one can be reached by the other. To illustrate this method, Soyinka's Kongi's Harvest will be used.

The main thing to teach in any piece of literature work is meaning (theme). This is where the kernel is and where the emphasis should go. The study of language, imagery, symbols, historical background et cetera in a text are useful only in so far as they help the students to unravel the meaning (theme(s) of the literary piece. Background information like the age of the author, when and why he wrote the text become more relevant, meaningful and interesting after the student must have grasped the meaning of text. Once this is done, it is easier for the student to unravel the symbols, images et cetera himself with a little prompting from the teacher.

Stage One:

The first step then is to ensure that all the students are familiar with the text. The play should be assigned to students to read as home work. No line

by line reading in the class should be encouraged. Students should be able to read the entire text through and get the overall meaning before coming to the classroom. At most, a week should be allowed them, depending on the complexity of the text. The students may not be able to critically analyse the text at this stage. What is needed is just some idea of the subject-matter of the play, i.e. ability to tell the story. Some guidelines, in the form of questions, will help them in points to look for while reading, for example:

a. Who wrote Kongi's Harvest?
b. Who is Oba Danlola?
c. What happened at the beginning of the play, in Hemlock?
d. Who is Kongi?
e. Who are Daodu and Segi?
f. What did Kongi want from Oba Danlola?
g. How did the play end? et cetera.

Stage Two:

After this introductory, fact finding exercise, the students should be in fair possession of the subject of the play, at least in broad outlines. To make sure that all the students in the class work, a short quiz of about ten to fifteen minutes should be given to them at the beginning of the next class.

An example, with reference to Kongi's Harvest is:

(a) The play Kongi's Harvest has (a) one (b) Two (c) Three (d) Four sections altogether (circle one).

(b) The major characters in Kongi's Harvest are:

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

(e)

(c) Kongi's government is a representation of most government in Africa. True or false.

(d) Daodu is the heir apparent to Kongi's throne. True or false.

(e) In one sentence say why Wole Soyinka in Kongi's Harvest presents the Aweri's as suffering?

(f) What does Kongi reap at the end of the play?

(g) With reference to Kongi's Harvest Wole Soyinka is (circle one):

(a) a prose writer;

(b) a poet;

(c) a dramatist and a poet;

(d) none of the above.

As a guide, if more than one-third of the class gets less than half of the questions right, the treatment of the text in class should be postponed until they are familiar with the text. Quiz scores could be

recorded and added to the overall performance scores of students.

This will be an incentive for them to read the text when told to do so.

It is recommended that no line by line reading of the text in class should be encouraged. After the short quiz, each scene or portion of the text to be read next should be prepared from home. A five minute written or oral quiz before each lesson can be used to check laziness. Class reading should be restricted to the dramatic moments of the play. By dramatic moment is meant the point of conflict, the climax of the action within each scene or Act.

Stage Three:

The next step is to make as many students as possible tell the story. As much debate as possible should be encouraged during this process. This is to ensure that the students are very familiar with the story line.

As a summary, the students should give the plot summary in a logical and sequential order with help from the teacher. At this point the distinction between the subject-matter and the theme of a text should be discussed. The subject-matter is the story as it is told, without any attempts to read between the

lines, whereas the theme involves reading between the lines. And although themes are a question of interpretation, depending on the reader, they should not be too far-fetched. Every theme suggested or identified should be backed up with a close reference to the text. To illustrate a thematic analysis of Kongi's Harvest, for example, the following statements can be made: Kongi's Harvest satirises the emergent style and empty rhetorics of African dictatorship as well as the African traditional institutions who turn all available instruments to the maintenance of the status quo. To the traditional African mind, the King rules by divine mandate and so he speaks with the voice of the god e.g. the superintendent panics at the threat of a curse from Oba Danlola. This is one extreme in the leadership of the African people. On the other extreme are the self-seeking, self-opinionated and megalomaniac dictors in intellectual garments as epitomised by Kongi of Isma. So, neither the Oba nor Kongi is spared the devastating irony of Soyinka. No African leader willingly gives up power or leaves the stage when the ovation is loudest. Most of them, except those relieved of power by death or assassination, do not leave the throne honourably. There is a crushing anxiety to hold on to power for as long as possible. In Kongi's Harvest neither Danlola nor Kongi is willing

to surrender. In spite of all the odds against him Danlola does not want to believe that he has become politically irrelevant. He continues in shame to plan intrigues and rule imaginary empires. Also for the glorification only of his own ego, Kongi insists on a public humiliation of Danlola, with very tragic consequences.

The themes of misrule, over-ambition, corruption, political rascality and cannibalism of the masses, should be discussed and the students asked to re-read the text as a home assignment.

Stage Four:

Next class should be spent with more searching questions aiding critical interpretation. For example:

(a) the meaning and implications of some important lines in the text.

(b) the interdependence of certain words and actions.

(c) the attitude of one character to another.

Discussions can be based on fundamental questions, an example with reference to Kongi's Harvest:

(1) What do the two protagonists in Kongi's Harvest symbolise?

(2) What is the most significant traditional element in Kongi's Harvest?

(3) What are the roles of Segi and Daodu in Kongi's Harvest?

(4) Why does Kongi want an image?

(5) What is the significance of Hemlock?

(6) What message does the Hangover put across and how correct is this message?

The students should be encouraged to form and put forward questions for further class discussions.

Stage Five:

The next aspect should be the dramatic qualities of the play with close reference to the text. This will include:

(a) the plot and structure of the play.

(b) the characters and characterisation,

(c) conflicts, ironies and symbols,

(d) the language,

(e) images.

Each of these should be related to the subject matter, theme and over all development of the play. For example, structurally, Kongi's Harvest is divided into four sections, the Hemlock, Part 1, Part 2, and Hangover.

The Hemlock serves as an opening, a kind of epilogue. The First Part and the Second Part; focus on the main actions of the play, and the last part - The Hangover is a kind of epilogue. As for the plot, the setting is the Yoruba society. Soyinka presents the play's two protagonists - Oba Danlola and Kongi:

Both of them are concerned with image building especially during the New Yam Festival. Kongi who wants his image to outshine others has Oba Danlola under preventive detention as a kind of check lest his image be outshone. The Oba and some of his men are forced to remain in prison. This is also aimed at forcing the Oba to agree that the honour of eating the first of the New Yam, traditionally belonging to the Oba, must now be transferred to the New-style political boss. This act is sacrilegious, hence the royal drums break forth into a song of mourning and farewell to the old order seen dying. As a usurper of the throne and a killer, Kongi harvests Segi's father's head which was presented to him in a dish.

To further illustrate Soyinka's use of language as a symbol of characterization, the Oba and his royal retinue use a language that is rich, poetic and idiomatic. Their language is full of poetic devices e.g. images and symbols. It is also proverbial and full of depth of reasoning and thought. On the other hand, Kongi's language is shallow and lacks depth, the tone is sharp, short, brief and commanding. It is full of empty 'isms'.

Verbal, situational and dramatic ironies abound in the play e.g. the language is satirical, ironical and mocking. It says one thing and means the other, purposely ridiculing the so-called new regime - the

progressive lot. Kongi is also fully satirised. In addition, Danlola making trousers with the national flag is ironical because to him, National will is meaningful only in so far as it serves the will of the individuals that inhabit the nation. And by that singular action, Danlola has demonstrated his open defiance of everything that Kongi stands for.

(1) There are five essential conflicts in the play: evil in the minds of individuals and between individuals.

(2) The conflict between the forces of dogma and tradition and the uneducated and selfish modernists on the other.

(3) The conflict between personal survival and desire for power.

(4) The conflict between radical revolutionary minds as represented by Segi and Daodu and reactionary minds like Danlola and Kongi.

(5) The conflict between duty and individual needs and ambitions as represented by the Aweri's, the organizing secretary and the superintendent.

Stage Six:

After all the above, any necessary historical, social and cultural background information about the text can now be given to the students, with close reference to the text. For example, in Kongi's Harvest

it is necessary to point out that, traditionally, before the first eating of the new yam, it is very important that a ceremony is performed to cleanse the yam and make it fit for consumption. This ceremony is usually performed by the Oba or a Chief Priest. In the text, on the surface, eating a piece of a new yam is a very trivial event but Soyinka uses this traditional ceremony as a symbol of power. The act of eating the yam therefore moves away from the spiritual function it traditionally performs into a very serious political event.

Stage Seven:

Finally, to reinforce the text in the minds of the students, recorded versions of the text or films (where available) can be shown to the students. If films are not available, pictures from actual production can be shown to the students. This might prove difficult but teachers should try as much as possible to get these audio-visual aids as they help the students a lot in retaining what they have read.

Recommendations

(1) In addition to the above, in order to make the teaching and learning of Soyinka easier for both teachers and students, the students should be

exposed to Soyinka's work right from their early years of development (i.e. as from the age of ten). This could be achieved through abridged versions (or simplified versions) of his work - like those on Shakespeare's work. This way, children will already be familiar with the story line, general themes and characters in Soyinka's work, before they get into secondary schools and other institutions of higher learning. These simplified versions could include easily comprehended syntax. Dialogues could be reduced without removing momentuous expressions. These versions can also be used as introduction to the study of Soyinka but not as a substitute for his work. It should be a means of launching people into the fascinating world of Soyinka's work. It can act as a prelude to the real work.

The disadvantage in abridged versions is that the beauty and poetry of the language in the original work might be lost. But the gain by the students, later when they come into contact with the original works, far surpasses this loss.

(2) Apart from abridged versions of Soyinka's plays, there should be stories re-told in which Soyinka's plays are reduced to stories for the consumption of primary school children.

(3) Being the most important African playwright to date, Soyinka should replace Shakespeare in our literature syllabuses. The primary emphasis now accorded Shakespeare should legitimately move to Soyinka. He is African and his plays are theatrically dense.

(4) More elaborate extracts, but still far shorter than the full text, could also be fed to the students. Each extract can tell the essentials of the story but also manage to leave out quite a lot of from the full text. But lengthy explanations will be necessary to provide links in the extracts. The extracts can be studied or acted and it should give students some knowledge of Soyinka's work, some pleasurable interest in them and some determination to continue reading them in later years.

(5) A glossary of words (both Yoruba and English) and their meanings should be contained at the end of the texts. These should also include explanations of the imageries and symbols used in the texts.

(6) The use of audio-visual aids is very important, in the teaching and learning of literature. Films, tapes and records should be made available to the teachers.

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