

*A Song for the Road*  
*Wole Soyinka's Imagery and Tradition*



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## Preface

As a student I enjoyed reading modern plays. Among the modern plays, the plays of Soyinka were my favorites. Soyinka deals with tradition and exploits traditional language, songs, dances, and themes and myths to help us see the good and bad effects of the world around us and creates in us a desire to move forward to create a new world, which would cherish the past but will not be bound by its evil elements.

There is more to study and enjoy in Soyinka's plays. This book deals with Soyinka's imagery and tradition.

My grateful thanks are due to my teachers, especially Dr. Mangaiarkkarsi, PSGR Krishnammal College.

My husband and life-partner ... has been my strength and great support in all my studies. To him and to all the members of my family I owe a special sense of debt and gratitude.

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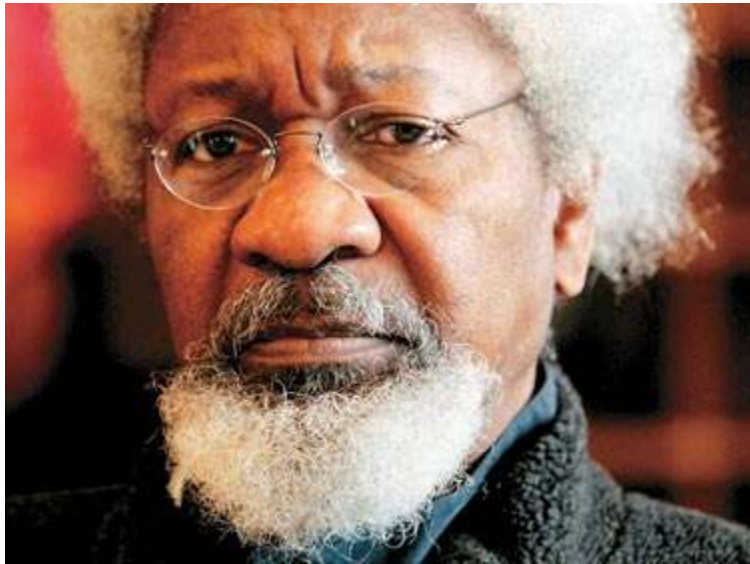
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## Chapter 1

### Modern African Literature and Wole Soyinka

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**Wole Soyinka**

#### **Scope of Commonwealth Literature**

Modern African Literature is part of Commonwealth Literature which is a collection of writing outside the tradition of Britain and United States. Commonwealth writers are native to the regions they write about: the Caribbean, India, China, and parts of Africa.

One of the most predominant themes of commonwealth Literature is the interaction between the forces of tradition and modernity. It is a normal off shoot of the intermingling of culture due to the effect of colonization. The meeting of East and West is one of the prominent themes of the Commonwealth Literature.

The diversity of the commonwealth literature is further enhanced by the contemporary African literature.

#### **The Versatility of Modern African Writers**

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African literatures in English and other European languages have added a new dimension to the commonwealth literature. Commonwealth Literature has reached a greater height in its search for universality and truth.

The African writers have deep acquaintance with the European and American literature and they are in touch with the literary movements all over the world. In the words of Shiv.K.Kumar, Soyinka “Spoke in a deep bass voice, lunging his hands into the air as though he were tearing apart everything around him social injustice, hypocrisy and above all tyranny.” African poets and playwrights have produced some of the most endearing literary works by any standards in the world. Particular emphasis is placed on Nigerian Gender Poetry, Yoruba theatre Eastern African traditionalism, African American movement and African Canadian writing.

Venkata Reddy opines “Wole Soyinka, whose work alone seems to be enough to establish Nigeria as the Commonwealth Literature is a veritable store-house of different cultures and perspectives.

### **Specialized Drama in Africa**



According to Finnegan, African people like specialized drama. They lay greater stress on certain dramatic characteristics of their literatures than do cultures which rely primarily on written forms. The earlier forms if these dramas are said to be as puppet shows from Bruno, mimicry imitations, particularly dramatization of hunting from Bantu Africa. More elaborate forms of these dramas from puppet shows to the masquerades are from West Africa, mainly from forest regions. These dramas include most of the dramatic elements: the enactment of characters and

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events, several actors-in puppets rather in human forms –plot, a little linguistic content with specialized costumes, a limited amount of singing, dancing and music.

The important aspect of the civilisation of Africa is concerned with the geographical or racial origin of the people called “Bantu”. They have an adequate language and the traditions of the tribes are preserved by oral narratives and folklore.

There are two broad groups of Nigerian drama, namely, the traditional, which includes the sacred and secular drama and the modern, in which one finds the folk theater and the literary drama. However, music, dance and poetry have been associated with Nigerian drama from the earliest birth, marriage and death cycle ceremonies and rituals to the present trails by error of today (118).

### **The Masquerades**

The masquerades are specially developed in forest areas where the carving of wooden masks has reached a high degree of artistic development. The masquerades probably vary throughout the region in content, purpose and pattern, but they all seem to include certain elements of drama and are often referred to as ‘plays’. This is in fact a kind of representation by the masked figure with great emphasis on costumes and on music and dancing.

Finnegan adds that with a few possible exceptions, there is no tradition in African of artistic performances which include all the elements which might be demanded in a strict definition of drama. Traditional drama was being performed before the colonial era, and its many forms, still performed. Side by side with this there are two other types of drama-‘popular’ and ‘literary’. Popular drama aims at mass audience or at an unsophisticated audience with little formal education. The ‘literary’ drama is that which is inspired by European models.

### **Impact of Modern European Drama on Modern African Drama**

Modern drama and stagecraft in Africa owes much to the introduction of European dramatic technique. Many of the contemporary writers, writing in English and French have also been involved in experimental works in the African universities. Traditional drama embodying all these chances gave way to the literary theatre which was written with a particular audience in mind. This was away from ‘popular’ theatre. ‘Literary’ drama was another name for ‘art-theatre’. But broadly speaking as a category, literary theatre approaches theatre from the side of the artistic product and focuses on the process of creativity whereas popular theatre approaches theatre from the side of the audience and focuses on the process of consumption. In the end they are not exclusive categories and can merge depending upon the audience.

Drama is not merely the printed word. It is much more than that. Some critics believe that removed from its performance drama becomes elitist. But it is a fact that drama as ‘literature’ or ‘text’ outlasts any performance and history.

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## **Development of Modern Drama in Africa**

Michael Etherton, in his book *The Development of African Drama*, analyses the causes that led to the development of drama as play-texts in Africa. According to him there are three main reasons:

1. The development of the study of drama in African Universities.
2. The extensive influence of classical (Greek and Roman) and European form of drama on African playwrights.
3. The establishment of play-texts as the dominant mode of drama.

## **Giving Life to Performance**

Live performances, whether of drama or story are the most ephemeral of all arts. They vanish within moments of being brought into existence, and only remain as memory. It is very difficult for someone from outside the specific culture to know what he or she is looking at and listening to, during a particular performance. The very style of a performance is a short form of actual meaning which has been established jointly by artists and their audience over a period of time.

To give life to a performance, and make it permanent, a performance is recorded, generally as a written text. In that way drama as text or literature comes into existence. Here a transitory moment is eternalized and made accessible for a larger number of audience. The meaning of drama as performance and as text differs. As performance it has a subjective meaning for the audience collectively assembled there. As a text it has an objective meaning- to the extent that there is no influence from outside the text-and as well as a subjective meaning-in the sense of the personal experiences of the reader of the text. In a way we are now beginning to set the objective experience of a play-text in opposition to the subjective experience of it as a performance.

## **Heterogeneous Mixture in Africa and Soyinka's Plays**

Africa is a heterogeneous mixture of colours, races, religions, languages and civilizations-past and present political influences, cultural concepts, negritude, colour bar, colonialism, Africanness and racial inheritance confiding to geographical areas. A committed writer, Soyinka feels that Africans should become one and a united force. Basically a satiric writer, Soyinka exposes the society in breadth. He is dissatisfied with men of power-as is evident from his plays. As Klima Vladimir says, Soyinka exposes snobbery, corruption, bureaucracy and hypocrisy in modern urban life.

Soyinka's theatrical effects are both visual, dance and mime and auditory bells, drums, and songs. These are most commonly used during festivals among his people-the Yoruba, who are

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very conscious of their cultural heritage which they celebrate publicly and lavishly. As an expression of cultural continuity, the dead and the gods are understood to be present and rejoice with the living.

African literature occupies a special place among the new literatures of the commonwealth for its vigour, vitality and freshness. Like the literatures of Asia and of the islands of the Pacific it enjoys an enviable antiquity, for though in English its oral literature in the numerous languages of Africa. African literature manifests a very serious intellectual, cultural, literary activity. It has served African home as a tool for the acculturation and socialization of the young. It has been used always as a medium of instilling social awareness, creating national consciousness. Modern African literature is part of the collective struggle of the African intellectual of the second half of the twentieth century to restore the dignity of the Africa and provide a new orientation for African and all people of African descent, the world over.

### **Wole Soyinka and His Place among African Writers**

Wole Soyinka occupies a prominent place among the African writers. Soyinka, who has tried his hand at almost all genres of literature, has written two novels, a valuable contribution to African fiction. He is probably the most prolific of modern African writers and the most varied in his achievements. His achievement has placed drama of Africa and the Africans on the world stage. He will be most admired for his established contribution not only to the art of drama, but also to fiction, poetry and criticism.

Soyinka's priority as a commonwealth writer has been to articulate what he describes as "the self – apprehension of the African world" Self-apprehension involves "the apprehension of a culture whose reference points are taken from within the culture itself" (p.ix).

According to Reddy,

He is a poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, critic, editor and translator, all rolled into one. He is undoubtedly the greatest of contemporary African playwrights. He has been hailed as one of the finest poetic playwrights who have ever written in English. Soyinka has to his credit fifteen plays in which he has made extensive use of Yoruba Mythology. His plays helped to develop a Nigerian theatre in which he presents the imposition of European civilization on Africa as a threat to the African villager's individuality (186).

Kola Wole Ogundimu describes

Soyinka as a novelist and dramatist deserves to be taken seriously because of his high intellectual position among African writers. A speculative thinker, his persistent call to African writers to demonstrate that they have a vision shows that he sees the literary artist as a redeemer. He believes that the writer possesses an inner light unavailable to the mass of his people, and that it is his duty to guide his society towards a beautiful future. (7-8).

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Soyinka in his work enriches and gives dramatic importance to modern themes by introducing religion, mythology and the poetry of the African past. Yoruba Gods inhabit his plays as they have been used for centuries to heighten and define rituals. The plays of Soyinka reflect more than any other another's work the intense complexities of form and African drama. Commenting upon Soyinka's attitude towards life, generally Oyin ogunba asserts that "Soyinka has the reputation in certain circles in Nigeria..... of being the artist par excellence in an ultra-modern, twentieth century sense, a man against the Establishment, a firm believer in the absolute freedom of the individual" (6)

As a leading contemporary dramatist, he is also an outstanding dramatic theorist, whose contribution is ritual theory of drama as asserting its relevance to world drama. He enhances the understanding of contemporary dramatic experience. He suggests that drama effects change through the use of universal ritual and of recognizable rites. This group of techniques can be further expanded by the examination of Soyinka's own dramatic works with the aim of identifying ritual aspects or those elements which would function in performance to establish and then break habits of through or acceptance. Such identification assumes of course, Soyinka's use of the term "ritual" to denote aesthetic and communicative aspects of culturally patterned behavior.

### **Poetry and Songs of Soyinka**

The poetry and dance creates a renewed mythic awareness in the plays of Wole Soyinka. The Nobel Prize awarded to him speaks volumes of his dramatic skills. Nigeria with its social and communal pattern has provided the rich background to his plays. The atmosphere is steeped in traditionalism. The plays unfold, one after another, the high drama of life. Traditional ideas mingle with new ideas. The traditional ideas are given a fresh lease of life, with the fusion of the old and the new. A variegated background such as this forms the backbone of Soyinka's plays. He is a writer who has just caught the public eye and a casual reading of his plays and poems is edifying. His plays have fascinated people with their wisdom and practical knowledge.

Life for man is a series of adjustments, struggle and conflicts. Soyinka portrays this brilliantly with use of songs, dances and drumbeats against varying backgrounds. Myth and rituals songs and dances, political overtones, Western influences and many other factors shape the works of Soyinka. He translates ideas into actions

The African nation has a distinctive personality. In Africa man is considered a spiritual being endowed with a certain dignity. He has a will of his own with which he can do marvelous things. It has been a form of belief that an ideal situation is a new integration which accommodates the past and the traditional culture, with a moral perspective. He is a writer endowed with a social vision.

### **Plays of Soyinka**

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Soyinka's plays cover a wide range of topics and characters. The domination of will and the will to power and knowledge, power mongers as predators, the opportunists, are some of his characters who are astride his wide canvas. He dramatizes the conflict and correspondences between city and village, tradition and modernism, conflicts of ideas and visions, of illusion and reality.

### **Soyinka's Life**

Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka was born on July 13<sup>th</sup> 1934. In Ijebu Isara. His parents Ayo and Eniola, came from adjoining kingdoms, Ijebu and Egba. His father was a school supervisor. He was brought up educated and worked until the age of twenty-in what was called the Western Region of Nigeria and in Lagos. He went to primary school in Abeokuta and to secondary school in Ibadan. After some months working in Lagos, he went to the University College, Ibadan, an institution affiliated to the University of London. He then did an English Honours degree at Leeds, a well-staffed and exciting British University.

Soyinka was awarded an Honorary Ph.D. by the University of Leeds in May 1973. His intellectual concerns are many. He has written articles about novels, poetry, films, plays and travel. His quotations are drawn from philosophers, political scientists, historians, as well as literary and dramatic sources. He is familiar with black traditions in The United States, South America and the Caribbean as well as with European and African culture. His interest in the theatre began at school, where he wrote sketches for "concerts" After he left school and before he went to the university college, Ibadan he began writing "pun-demented radio Comedies" At Leeds he concentrated on drama, perhaps because "plays took less time to read than novels" and began writing "seriously".

Returning to Nigeria in 1960, he organized and promoted, wrote and directed with great enthusiasm and to considerable effect. His plays gained more recognition than his novels and poems. Some of his well-known plays are *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), *A dance of the forests*, (1959) *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), *The strong Breed* (1976), *Opera Wonyosi* (1977) and *A play of Giants* (1984). His poems are *Idanre and other poems* (1967) and *Ogun Abibiman* (1977). His prison diary, *The man died* (1972) and his poetry collection. *A shuttle in the crypt* (1972) chronicles his traumatic experience as a political activist. *Myth, Literature and the African world* (1976) a collection of essays based on the literatures Soyinka derived at Cambridge, provides great insight into Soyinka's Literary Philosophy.

Acknowledged by many critics as Nigeria's finest contemporary dramatist, and one of its most distinguished men of letters Soyinka is also the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. He has rapidly emerged as West Africa's most distinguished dramatist, and indeed he is beginning to claim attention as one of the foremost English – speaking play wrights. He is a versatile writer and he achieves in his work an almost unbelievable amount of vitality.

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Commenting on the works of Soyinka, Margaret Laurence, “In his work Soyinka enriches and gives dramatic emphasis to modern themes by drawing upon the religion, the mythology and the poetry of the African past” (63)

Soyinka is an honest observer of his land and people. He also makes use of the dance and the mask idiom which is an integral part of traditional Yoruba dance. He combines these elements with contemporary settings and with themes which are universal and the results are very effective. Soyinka’s plays are the first on the Nigerian stage to deal with themes more profound than the sociological disorders. He is able to handle many themes simultaneously without ever endangering the reality of his characters.

### **Psychological and Spiritual Themes**

Psychological or spiritual themes are as important to Soyinka as social ones. He explores the question of human sacrifice. In nearly everything that Soyinka has written there is a blending of the social and psychological themes and the theme of sacrifice leads into the theme of martyrdom, which for Soyinka means the chosen death. Surrounding this central desire to control death, there are important characteristics exhibited by Soyinka’s characters in their dramatic encounters with death. They wish not only to conquer death by somehow anticipating it and learning it.

“Soyinka’s writing is life – filled over flowing with energy, capable of realizing human personalities and catching the sound of one particular voice, at times intensely comic coloured with rhythm and dance” (74) remarks Margaret Laurence.

### **Intellectual and Critical Attitude**

The plays of Soyinka are characterized by a predominantly intellectual and critical attitude to life. His imagination is directed towards understanding and formulating the principles of life. A peculiar inconclusiveness underlies much of Soyinka’s philosophy and may have its origin in the tradition to which he belongs. His response to life is more natural and instinctive rather than intellectual. What he attempts to capture is the totality of an emotion in its most concentrated form, the authentic experience of the single moment in the fullness of its emotional intensity, its existential totality.

Association with the European playwrights as well as the work of traditional dramatics through the Royal court, and world-wide travel has made his work” a truly original manifestation of his whole vast range of experiences. Certainly this range of experiences has given him a world-wide view of mankind, even though he naturally chooses to treat man mainly through the African environment. (Eldred Durosimi Jones, 9)

### **Finding Meaning in Ever Changing World**

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Soyinka's plays are concerned with expressing the difficulty of finding meaning in a world, subject to incessant change, and as a vehicle for the expression of the valid statements, an instrument of thought. His language is evocative; he calls upon the experiences, beliefs, fantasies and emotions of his audience.

Soyinka calls this as a "people's theatre" appropriately. He has always been a supporter of the Yoruba folk opera playwrights in their attitude towards language. As a Yoruba, even writing in English, he is conscious of the rich possibilities of allusion and is constantly referring back to details of Yoruba folklore and custom. His use of language is evocative and the playwright calls upon the experiences, beliefs, fantasies and emotions of his audience. In the folk opera, the language is paralleled by the music and dance, often using traditional dance steps or particular musical statements that are vivid in themselves, perhaps steps used for a certain ceremony or by the worshippers of a particular god. The basic elements of the traditional Nigerian theatre, music and dance have been incorporated by Soyinka into the European theatrical forms. Soyinka as a satirical writer comments upon the universal themes such as the frailty of power seekers in his plays like *The Lion and the Jewel*, *A Dance of the Forests*, *Kongi 's Harvest* and *The Road* where dance and music have been used fully. The enlivened language, the clarity of movement and the comment of the music find new powers in the theatre.

### **Achieving a Balanced Whole**

Through the "shaping power of imagination" Soyinka achieves a configuration in which all the elements of his work are combined into a balanced whole. It is in this interplay of image, paradox, irony and symbol that gives to the overall meaning a certain irreducible dimension – a dimension that cannot be simplified into paraphrase. In this way Soyinka's language is inseparable from the subject, just as his language is its meaning. One can recognize Soyinka's gift for natural dialogue, his power of irony and humour and admire fluent cadences of his finely modulated prose and poetry. His plots reveal considerable mastery of the technique. He resembles the Absurdist in his exquisite literary craftsmanship.

"Character is life of drama; as Pirandello expressed it . . . . . Every action, and every idea it contains needs a free human personality if it is to appear alive and breathing before us. It needs something that will function as its motor pathos, to use "Hegel's phrase characters in other words". (S.W.Dawson, 68)

### **Characters in Soyinka's Plays**

Characters in Soyinka's plays are more factual and rational unlike the conventional plays where the emotional and imaginative visions form its lore. Each play is a new beginning with new characters to be meditated on in a new world. The motives and the actions of the characters remain largely incomprehensible. The more mysterious their action and their nature, the less human the characters become and the more difficult it is to be carried away into seeing the world from their point of view.

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Soyinka's play is not concerned with conveying information or presenting the problems or destinies of character that exist the author's inner world, nor is it concerned with the representation of events, the narration of the adventures of the characters, but instead with the presentation of one individual's basic situation. So his imagination is seized by a situation and not an argument.

“Soyinka lets us enter into each character's private self awareness; he succeeds at the same time in keeping us conscious of how they appear to the outside. Observer, to the society at large; we share twin view points; subjective and objective . . . . . A man 'matters to us in this context not simply because he does this or that or amuses us, but in himself, because he is himself'. (David cook, 116)

Soyinka begins his plays from a philosophical or moral point of view and then proceeds to translate them into concrete terms of plot and character. He is clearly in pursuit of that mysterious essence of life that seems to disappear in the process of becoming. He transfers the drama of life from the outer sphere of action to the mind, where everything has its beginning. The various types of conflict which he depicts are sometimes physical, intellectual or spiritual between antagonistic forces, between man and man, man and society, man and the universe.

Bernth Lindfers seems to have foreseen the distinction Soyinka had in store when he complimented Soyinka, “His imagination, vision and craft distinguish him as a creative artist of the very first rank, as a writer of the very first rank, as a writer of the world stature” (90)

### **A Blend of the past, Present and the Future**

The plays are a blend of the past, present and the future. Whenever he writes he keeps the social purpose in mind. What emerges, consequently, is a portrayal of African experience in its totality. His works make a successful attempt to apprehend the African world in its full complexity its traditional beliefs and structures, conventions and superstitions, contemporary progression as well as distortion. His greatest achievement lies in his ability to make the world to look at life through African eyes. The theme not only suits to Africa alone but to the whole world. His worldview emerges clearly from the vast corpus of his writing. It is essentially home based that he inherited from his Yoruba origin. In his works, he tries to define African Ontology through an interpretation of Yoruba myths and rituals by the use of songs, mime, dance and drumbeats. Soyinka is greatly concerned about the wellbeing of his community.

The plays are a keen dissection of his society and a ritual carrier of the sins, maladies and political injustices that he explores and exposes. He wants his country to get rid of the racial discrimination, social and political changes and for this he uses drama as a medium of exposition. He is essentially a critic and his weapon is satire. He endeavours to correct the follies implicit in the changes through ridicule. His satire is incisive and witty. He also incorporates a

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traditional myth or ritual to heighten the effects. This is because he is an individualistic and solitary iconoclastic playwright.

### **Vision of Soyinka**

The vision of Soyinka is nowhere better presented than in his plays. Through the usage of songs and dances he explores in his plays, the adventure of Man's metaphysical self. They reflect through symbolic means man's struggle to comprehend reality. To him, human life is an act of sacrifice and an individual is engaged in an incessant struggle to be absorbed into the cosmic oneness, but there exists a vast abyss in which the human endeavours for transition often ends.

For his subject matter he mainly depends on the spiritual drama, traditional drama and the folklore. He also makes his works relevant to the times and uses the past only to clarify the present. It is his poetic imagination that lends peculiar charm, complexity, richness and strength to his works.

The profuse employment of music and dance suggestively and symbolically represent the intrinsic value of the components and it adds new dimensions to the ideas that the dramatist wishes to tell through his plays when staged.

### ***The Lion and the Jewel***



The play '*The Lion and the Jewel*' is a joyous comedy with a touch of serious social comment. It speaks of progress and the bride price, the conflict between western concepts of progress and traditional African custom. The play is produced in 1963 and is set in a village called Ilujinle the play presents the clash between the seventy two years old Bale Baroka and the young school master, Lakunle, for the village belle, Sidi. Intrigue and fine speeches are combined with elaborate passages of mime and dance. The vile Baroka completely outmanouvers his opponent, and by so he challenges preconceptions, not least preconceptions about elderly people. Sidi, The heroine is ready to accept some of the new fangled ways of the

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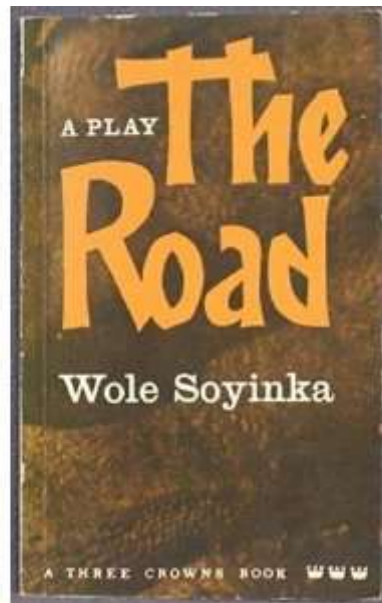


comic village school – teacher Lakunle. Her acceptance opposes him; but both Sadiku and the Bale remark Lakunle’s influence on her thoughts. Thus in spite of the apparent disagreement between Sidi and Lakunle, over kisses and the bride – price, they both represent youth against the cunning old Baroka. At the end of the contest however it is the cunning of old age which wins against youth.

“The play *The Lion and the Jewel*, brought him to the attention of the Royal court. There he saw drama as a social force in action and came into contact with a generation of stimulating British playwrights and producers’ (Terry Browne). The dances have the scope of expressing the most realistic imitation of action such as the pantomime of the felling of the trees in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Sidi “Stages” a pantomime to re-enact the arrival of the photographer from Lagos who has fallen in love with her, takes photographs of the village and gives her an image in the front page in a popular magazine. The magazine, bearing a beautiful image of Sidi, has just been received back in the village and the pantomime is meant to celebrate Sidi’s joy and pride in her youthful beauty. Lind fords praises the Lucidity of the play ‘*The Lion and the Jewel*’ (Annemarie Heywood, 131)

According to M. Pushpa, A very mild clash between the African values and the modern ideas is depicted in “*The Lion and the Jewel*” (150). *The Lion and the Jewel* is a play of exceptional charm and dexterity. The obvious merits of the play as a stage comedy have led to its becoming one of the most popular of all Soyinka’s plays. His play “*The Road*” was written in 1965. The play is a prolonged sustained metaphor about the nature of life.

### ***The Road***



*The Road* is profoundly influenced by a Yoruba sense of the continuity between life and death and of the limits on human knowledge of the universe. Songs and rituals constantly

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break through the surface of the drama and draw attention to this Yoruba dimension. *The Road* is the product of Nigerian experiences during the middle of the twentieth century and it reflects the roles played by drugs, criminals, corrupt policemen and unscrupulous politicians.

*The Road* is “a play which satisfies our sense of dramatic rightness” (53) It is simply a play about a day in the strange life of a group of drivers in Nigerian road. Their aimless existence, waiting for jobs, drinking, sleeping, dreaming of an exciting future is dominated by the obscure but powerful presence of the professor. He runs an establishment providing spare parts for vehicle, which is looted from road accident. This occupation promotes personal quest for the meaning of death, which encounters him at the end of the play.

The play is set on a road-side shack, which is the single one for the whole play. Professor, one of the main characters of the play is the proprietor of ‘The Aksident Store’ where he sells the spare parts of the vehicles, which he causes to crash by removing the road-signs. Thus he makes money out of death on the road. Kotonu is an ex-driver who has recently witnessed an accident, and refuses to drive again. He thus becomes a psychological victim of the road. Samson and Salubi are two other characters who are touts. Murano is a mysterious dumb servant of the Professor. Joe the police inspector, Say Tokyo Kid the gangster are the important other characters present in the play.

All these characters are the users of the road and are constantly explored to death. In addition to this they also interact with policemen, forgers of licenses, looters and spare parts salesmen. The play begins when Samson and Salubi are talking about several things including the parody of the police force, the church and the absurd morality of the wars. The play picks up action slowly and towards the climax it is heightened to a pitch. Professor, the protagonist is always in search of the ‘Word’. Ultimately he finds the clue for mysterious word in death when he confronts death itself in the shape of Murano who is in agemo phase. Professor is accidentally killed in the course of a scuffle over a knife with Say Tokyo Kid. He falls dying as the play ends.

“*The Road* is rather static, constituting philosophy rather than drama in the proper sense. The basic idea is a metaphor: a road connects the spiritual world with the material one”. (Klima 124). The play is a kind of fantasy in which the inner questionings and obsessions of the playwright are exteriorized and interwoven with elements of reality in a dramatic condensation’ of multiple levels of action and symbols”.

*The Road* is important among Soyinka’s works, not merely because of the themes and attitudes on it, but because in this play Soyinka achieves an unequivocal success in the union of theme and dramatic technique, an experiment which he first attempted in *A Dance of the Forests* (1960). The play is itself a dramatization of the limits of language.

### ***Kongi’s Harvest***

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*Kongi's Harvest* was performed in 1965 and published in the year 1967. It draws on the contemporary political developments; it combines particular and topical allusions with comments applicable to various countries. The play is built, in a manner characteristic of Soyinka around an interrupted ritual, in this case the ritual associated with the harvest of yams, and casts Kongi as a barren, hate-filled tyrant determined to usurp the right of traditional ruler Oba Danlola to receive. “the first fruit” of the new crop. Danlola resists the political pressure from the new head of the state and supports the vital challenge to Kongi launched by the characters Daodu and segi. Daodu, an educated farmer and Danlola’s heir, and segi, the mysterious female owner of a nightclub and the organizer of a women’s group, arrange for Kongi to be shot during the New Yam Festival, but their plan goes awry when the assassin is killed. Segi then improvises a ceremonial dance in which Kongi is presented with the assassin’s head, a gesture showing that Kongi is a harvester of death.

“*Kongi's Harvest* presents the confrontation of old and new. There is not much drama, but theatrical devices and techniques brighten the performance. The meaning of the play comes in many ways: characters, conversations, songs, etc.

*Kongi's Harvest* has a very coherent and simple basic articulation. The play is a microcosm of the contemporary political situation. The play presents the conflict between the traditional and the modern. *Kongi's Harvest* was inspired by the dictatorial traits present in the African system of Government Soyinka has eschewed and pronounced political overtones in the play – the play seeks to reach the eternal essence by penetrating the ephemeral surface”.

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“The political scene in contemporary Africa was a very complex and disturbing one and *Kongi’s Harvest* is a comment on it. (M. Pushpa 95) In *Kongi’s Harvest* Soyinka was obsessed with the corruption that prevails in politics and society.

In the words of Eldred Durosimi ones “This is a symbolic dramatization of the opposed values of Kongi and his people death against life. Kongi obviously takes the meaning this symbolic curse on his regime.... He sees the eventual futility of his terror staring back at him through the dead man’s eyes” (87)

### ***A Dance of the Forests***

*A Dance of the Forests* was published in the year 1959. It was a play of an occasion, the celebration of Nigerian independence. Hence Soyinka brings together in the conception of the play the idea of an important event among the living, which he calls ‘The Gathering of the Tribes’ and the idea of a divinely ordered confrontation between certain mortals and their historical prototypes of a distant age.

*A Dance of the Forests* completely reverses the customary relationship between the living and the dead; here the ancestors return not to be judged and instead of being honoured with the customary salute to the lineage, they are chased away. It is an intricate play, which contains some extremely vivid comments on corrupt politicians and a number of pointed warnings about the dancers which face a newly independent country. The play, with its multiple, recurrent in fact Aristotelian in shape but ha indeed the fluid, free – ranging form of the festival in which there is always the feelings of events taking place within the context of a larger, cosmic time scale.

A major theme in the play concerns the difficulties involved in making “new beginning”, but there is much more. The characters include human beings and supernatural entities; the action incorporates rites, masques, a flash back and a series of dances. It is a brilliant play lively and pertinent satire on moral values. It is a criticism of life itself. It is a unique vision of life so rich and so subjectively true and coherent that one finds it deeply moving, permanently interesting and analytically inexhaustible. The play is an entirely new form of literary art in which words are fused into a language rich in suggestive power which provides the means of revitalizing dramatic art once again in its long history.

*A Dance of the Forest* draws heavily from Yoruba mythology in its exploration of the role of the artist in the society. As said in the Encyclopedia Britannica “the play satirizes the fledging nation by stripping it of romantic legend and by showing that the present is no more a golden age than is the past” (391).

In *A Dance of the Forests* Soyinka subtly proves that man never changes and hence history repeats itself. Man’s mind, his temperament and his attitude – all remain unchanged. No change can take place overnight. Any change can be effected rather in slow degrees. Still, the

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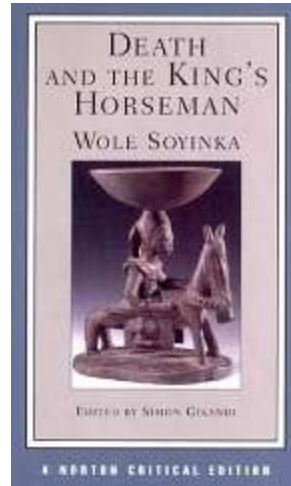
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change would be only in external environment, his mind and manners would never accept any change whatsoever. That would demand rather a radical mind which most of the people may not have. That is why there is an inherent love in man for the past and what is his own asserts it.

### ***Death and the King's Horseman***



*Death and the King's Horseman* combines powerful dramatic verse and some impressive characterization with a structure that incorporates contrast and juxtaposition. It explores the complexities of situations, ambiguities and uncertainties in human relations and refuses to opt for the easy rhetoric of the anti-colonial struggle. Some have praised the play as a penetrating examination of responsibilities and as a worthwhile examination of the notion of honor. The play *Death and King's Horseman* is based on an incident in Oyo history which illustrates, in the words of Biodun Jeyifo,

The play enshrines many of the seminal features of the Yoruba world – view. For instance the Yoruba belief that death is not cessation of existence but a mere transition into a continued existence, and that the unborn, the living and the dead form a continuum underpins the play's metaphysical scheme.

The strong capacity of the African tradition to stand erect whatever be the force that tries to knock it off is emphasized in the plays. The western influence, on the natives and their tradition has been the primary subject for the writers. Soyinka's plays deal with the same problem but in different angle. The main difference lies not as much in plot as in its treatment. It is but the narrative technique alone that is different. Soyinka is one among the playwrights who has made use of songs, music and dance in his plays, which are considered indispensable in African culture. The songs are simple, clear, energetic and full of delight, which reveal the custom and tradition of Yoruba people.

### **Soyinka's Techniques**

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Soyinka's creative writing characteristically uses point of image, mood and tone. This is related to the development Soyinka has observed in narrative development. His range as a writer for the stage is very broad. He is a satirist, a comic playwright and a tragic author. He has influenced a number of African playwrights. Ola Rotimi, for example, has acknowledged the effect of Soyinka's use of cultural elements on his own writing.

Soyinka gives importance to the fact that society in tradition-bound. Soyinka is a proper representative of Nigeria, a country rich in its heritage and with varied social and communal pattern that provided that right background for his plays. The atmosphere is steeped in traditionalism. Religion, politics, economics, social taboos and other aspects of life come under microscope of Soyinka's vision. The problems, the characters and the basic social structure have a universal appeal.

Soyinka's plays developed a Nigerian theatre in which he presented imposition of European civilization of Africa as a threat to African villager's individuality. Soyinka presents an authentic picture of the crumbling past' of its ancestry, in heritage, its warriors and men of titles. It also captures the spirit of the age, which is known for its ethics and egalitarian values.

The complexity of the plot structure becomes almost immediately apparent since, in detailing the background of the play *Aroni* indicates that the double lives of the characters are implicated. He remarks that the Dead Woman is the wife of the Dead Man, a captain in Mata Kharibu's army of some eight centuries ago. Rola the prostitute, Adenebi the Court Orator, Demoke the carver and Agboreko the Elder of Sealed Lips all have links with the dead pair. They are respectively Madam Tortoise, who was Kharibu's queen, Court Historian, Court Poet and Soothsayer. Although the function and importance of the four currently living human beings are not identical with those they have had in their previous existence, their similar characteristics and actions will serve to illustrate Soyinka's theme of repetition. Against their will, the four human beings have been lured into the forest by Forest Head, disguised as Obaneji in order to achieve a full accounting of the deeds of past and present. The dance of welcome is thus in itself an irony for the indictment of the human community as a corrective to the extravagant celebration of the past that is under way in the town.

### ***The Swamp Dwellers***

*The Swamp Dwellers* is concerned primarily with the social changes brought about by an easy access to sudden wealth. It demonstrates how easy money whatever may be its source, destroys. The play comes to us essentially as an evocative study in disappointment and frustration. Although its tone is graver than that of *The Lion and The Jewel*, it is an examination of a society in a state of change.

### **Various Settings**

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“*The Road*” moves from the intensely comic and satiric to the purely tragic and symbolic. Like Tagore’s *The Post-Office*, Soyinka’s *The Road* is a powerful symbolic piece, insinuating the subtle clash and sinister affiliations between primitive belief and African Christianity. With its distinct echoes of the theatre of the absurd, the play seeks to expose a world of phantasmagoria of masked dance and muffled action, involving the clash obscure powers and personalities.

The setting is a transport depot in a Nigerian town. In a garage where the salvaged parts of crashed cars are sold, the owner named Professor, an unorthodox Christian, is engaged in trying to understand the meaning of death. He is presented as a piece of motley, half-genuine and half-boss, a fantastic mix of business man, charlatan and prophet. In his role as prophet, Professor begins the maddening enactment of Resurrection. He seeks the Word, and is half-afraid. It might turn out to be Death followed by the resurrection. He is driven at last to use the pagan God, Ogun, to enact the Christian drama of resurrection which explodes into melodrama. All the same, Professor somehow manages, in his own blundering and exasperated way, to convey the eternal cyclic truth of birth and change and death and renewal. The play is stormed with symbols. The Road is a passage from somewhere to somewhere, and life too is a passage from somewhere to somewhere. The road is uncannily deceptive, and mankind can be deceptive too. This road’s seductive bends and coils can be an invitation to destruction just as life’s baits and temptations could be.

*A Dance of the Forests* is one of the most recognised of Wole Soyinka’s plays. At the time of its release in 1960, it was an iconoclastic work that angered many of the elites in Soyinka’s native Nigeria. Politicians were particularly incensed at Soyinka’s prescient portrayal of post-colonial Nigerian politics as aimless and corrupt. Despite the deluge of criticism the play remains an influential work. In it he espouses a unique vision for a new Africa, one that is able to forge a new identity free from the influence of European imperialism.

*A Dance of the Forests* is regarded as Soyinka’s theatrical debut. In it he unveils the rotten aspects of the society and demonstrates that the past is no better than the society and wants people as they are on the brink of a new stage in their history; independence. The Chaimaka April Javonne Erica is also a Nigerian play involved with accompanying footwork.

*Death and the King’s Horseman*, which many consider Wole Soyinka’s greatest play, is based on a real incident that took place in Nigeria during British intervention, Soyinka calls the horseman’s own Chief must be followed by the ritual conviction towards suicide into question, posing another problem that throws off the community’s balance.

## Chapter 2

### Songs and Mimes in Aid of Ridicule, Satire and Change in Society *Lion and the Jewell*

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#### **Traditional Forms for Modern Themes and Audience**

In India and elsewhere, singing songs as a mode of celebration is commonly found. We have songs for every occasion, for every milestone or stage of life. We find this in every community in India. As urbanization spreads along with western type of education and job skills, it is no more incumbent on all members of any community to participate in communal singing and dancing. Yet understanding and appreciation of singing and dancing, and use of these media to tell stories of great values have become well established. These narratives and performances have become an integral part of our cultures and living.

Folk arts are being restored and given new themes and motifs by modern writers and playwrights around the world. Soyinka's part in this sort of modernization and exploitation of traditional forms for a modern audience to express socially relevant themes is great and valuable, indeed.

#### **A Combination of Singing, Dancing and Acting: Archetypal Elements**

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*The Lion and the Jewel* is Soyinka's earliest and perhaps most popular play. *The Lion and the Jewel* combines acting, dancing and singing. The vitality of the play depends as much on verbal drama, on wit, on the ridiculous or theoretical proliferation of language, and on grotesque behavior, as it depends on those emotive moments which can only be adequately expressed through music and dance.

Wole Soyinka's play has a firm story-line; it has solidly drawn characters; it has a verbal wit; above all, it draws upon mythic and archetypal elements which lie behind human life throughout the world, while it gives these elements a twist and makes them immediately relevant to life in West Africa. It employs the basic drives of sex, youthful vanity and pride likewise - old cunning, and braggart cuckoldry, it touches these levels of human "action" most appropriately dramatized by music and dance. Soyinka seems to be at ease in any form of writing, but drama is his favorite medium.

### **Central Situation of the Play**

'*The Lion and the Jewel*' has been produced many times since 1959. Soyinka himself produced it in 1960. It was presented in the Royal Court in 1996, it has been broadcast by the BBC, and it has been produced frequently by schools, colleges and university groups in the United States and English speaking Africa.

The central situation in this play is similar to that of many Restoration comedies. Soyinka has used various techniques like music, songs, dance, drumbeating and ceremonies as part of the structure carried out till now in African Yoruba community. The characters in the play are basically familiar types but they are marked with individuality. Soyinka's debt to Yoruba tradition is obvious in his earliest play *The Lion and Jewel*.

This play is a comedy which raises serious questions about society, traditional and modern. Its ending suggests that wily conservatism can triumph over modernism. It treats serious issues in a generally light-hearted manner.

### **The Story**

It is a triangular conflict between Lakunle, a school teacher, Sidi, the village girl and Baroka, the village Bale. Baroka wins not because he is better than Lakunle, but because he is more cunning than Lakunle.

The scene takes place in the village centre of Ilujinle. The bush school is close by with one of the walls overlooking the centre. Children are reciting the table. Sidi enters carrying a pail of water on her head. Lakunle, the schoolmaster, is seen at the window of the school. He disappears to reappear and goes near Sidi. He is a young man of twenty-three. He is dressed in an old-style English suit. Lakunle, obviously in love with Sidi, offers to carry her pail. He speaks like a

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typical schoolmaster in high-flown language, a bookish style marked with quotations and comparisons. He does not realize that his speech evokes derisive laughter. He seizes the pail from her. He recalls that he has advised her not to carry the pail on her head as it would affect her spine and shorten her neck. Sidi is quick to retort that her looks would not affect his love as he has declared his love on his knees. But it does not mean that she should carry loads on her head, he argues. It is unwomanly and only spiders carry loads as she does.

Lakunle next finds fault with her dress which leaves her shoulders bare. It attracts all idle, shameless men who cast their lustful eyes on her breasts. But she justifies the dress which is held high and tight as it leaves her arms free. Her dress, he remarks, as that of other girls, invites only lewd jokes from others. Sidi is angry with him for saying that she makes herself a butt of common talk.. People call Lakunle, the mad man of Ilujinle, she retorts. His big meaningless words and old books bring forth only curses from people and even the children call him a fool. He calls her and her people savages and he considers himself above them all.

Sidi is furious and threatens to hit his brain. Lakunle accuses her of jealousy. He shows off his bookish knowledge, when he says her envy is due to her having a smaller brain. She attributes his insulting remarks to his manly conceit. But Lakunle does not want to be drawn into an argument on a topic which is above her head. She demands for her pail and asks him never to stop her in the streets. He explains that his observation about the women's brain is not directed at her for it is the finding of scientists of women in general. That is why they are called the weaker sex. His western education is not a match to the bush woman's rustic wisdom. She asks him whether the woman who pounds the yam or plants the millet with a child strapped to her back is weak. Lakunle promises that soon machines will do all the work and she will be spared this pain. Sidi does not believe a word of what he says. But he will change the village, if not the world, starting from the village chief Baroka. Sidi wonders whether all his thoughts of future wonders are the result of his madness or they are dreams.

Lakunle says whatever he proposes are now in Lagos, in Balgry and even in smaller towns. Sidi asks him to leave the village for the cities. Lakunle now becomes passionate and wags eloquent to declare his love and to ask her to be his wife. If he does not like the ignorant villages, why does he not leaves the place, she asks. "If the snail forks splinters in his shell he changes his house,"( *????* ). She advises him in the village wisdom. She asks him to pay the bride-price first. She will not make herself a cheap bowl for the village to spit", she declares. He denounces this savage custom. He protests that he wants to marry her out of love. He wants to have a life companion, not a cook or someone to bring forth children.

Sidi loses her patience and insists that he pays her the bride-price. But he persists in making her his equal and outlines his plan of offering her a western home with table and chair, knives and forks. He imagines that she will beside him like the couples in Lagos. He hopes to change her into a lady wearing lipstick and high-heeled shoes. He gives her a kiss on her lips and she detests it and calls it unhealthy. He protests that it is how educated men and Christians kiss their wives. He elaborates his notion of western romance, which only irritates Sidi. She calls him mad. The

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village young men and girls enter. They tell Sidi about the return of the stranger with his motorbike, his horse, and the one-eyed box which is his camera. He has brought the album with the pictures. The cover of the magazine has her picture as well as the centre-spread.

The Bale is jealous of her because he has been given a little corner. But he pretends to be proud of her because she is famous in the city. Sidi is ecstatic as she is more esteemed than Baroka, the Lion of Ilujinle, the fox of the undergrowth, the living God among men.

When Lakunle calls him a devil among women, she silences him. It is evident she both admires and hates Baroka. Sidi becomes more self-important as her picture has found a place in the magazine and she is not willing to accept Lakunle as her husband. She praises the stranger and starts dancing. Other girls join her. Lakunle is also drawn in, to play the part of the stranger and the dancers mime a motor-car, accompanied by the rhythmic beat of drums in other words *gangan*.

### **Baroka and His Role**

In the middle of the play appears Baroka, the sixty-two-year-old Bale. All the dancers except Lakunle prostrate before him. He calls Lakunle who bows deeply from the waist and greets him with a good morning. Baroka says he knows the story and the chief Bale in the play is himself. So he asks them to resume the play. He accuses Lakunle of stealing their village maiden-head. At a signal from him, the villagers throw Lakunle down. He pacifies the villagers, sets dry clothes for him and orders a feast. Lakunle as the stranger in the mime takes photographs. Sidi is brought and the stranger takes photographs of her too. He drinks the local brew and leaves the party sick. Thus ends the mime.

Sidi congratulates Lakunle on his performance. She invites him to go with her to find the stranger whose speech Lakunle can interpret. Baroka is left alone. He stares at Sidi's picture in the magazine and recollects that it is five months since he took a wife. In the play-within-the-play Lakunle acts the part of the Stranger who has brought all the symbols of the west to the little village of Nigeria. Further, it shows Baroka in his full colours, always in command of any situation. He is ready to take on his lovely antagonist Sidi and plots to take her as his wife.

### **The Shocking and Demanding Message from Baroka and Consequences**

Sidi is happily engrossed in the pictures of the magazine. Lakunle follows her carrying a bundle of firewood for Sidi. Sadiku, the senior wife of Baroka, meets her. She is an old woman, wearing a shawl over her head. She informs Sidi that Baroka has sent her. Sidi does not care for what she says and shows her the magazine. Sadiku has already seen them and she wants to convey Baroka's message in private. But Sidi asks her to ignore Lakunle. Then Sadiku blurts out that the Lion wants Sidi for his wife. Lakunle pleads with her not to listen to her. But she chides him for calling her with names from his books. She is Sidi, and she is beautiful and even the stranger had called her "Loveliness beyond the jewels of the throne".

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Taking the cue, Sadiku asks her again to be Baroka's own jewel, his sweetest princess. But Sidi is aware of Sadiku's wooing tongue. Sadiku tries to entice her saying as the last wife of the Bale, she will become the senior wife of the next Bale on Baroka's death. She will be Baroka's favourite and she will always live in the palace. But Sidi has a ready answer. Baroka has not turned his attention on her till now. The reason for his sudden interest is that she has become famous. He wants to have fame by possessing her, the jewel of Ilujinle. Sadiku is shocked and finds fault with Lakunle for having poisoned the poor girl's mind. Sidi tells her that it is her own decision and that Baroka is old and the picture in this magazine betrays his age while it flatters her own youth and beauty. She is 'the twinkle of a jewel but he is the hind quarters of a lion'.

Sadiku is amazed but helpless and informs Sidi that Baroka invites her to supper that night, if she declines his offer of marriage. Sidi is aware of Baroka's trick and asks her to tell him that Sidi does not stay with married men. Sadiku protests that the tales about Baroka's suppers are lies. Sidi knows that every woman who has supper with him one night becomes his wife or concubine the next.

Lakunle adds that Baroka is a fox who is cunning by nature. He points out that Baroka has foiled the attempt of the Public Works to build the railway line through Ilujinle. Lakunle then starts narrating the trick played by Baroka. The event is shown in a flash back, punctuated by the narrative by Lakunle.

### **Construction of Rail Tracks**

To lay rail tracks prisoners were brought to work guarded by warders. A white surveyor directs the marking of the route and starts the work. Trade, success and civilization are all within the reach of Ilujinle. The wrestler watches the sight and comes back with the Bale. Soon a bull-roarer is heard and the workers run away. Baroka enters with a girl and attendants and offers the surveyor a gift of pound notes and kola. The surveyor pretends to study his map, admits an error and decides to have the track elsewhere. All this is shown on the stage and Lakunle offers an explanation for Baroka's behaviour. The Bale had done this to prevent civilization from entering the village so that he could securely have his haven of wives and concubines. Lakunle envies Baroka for having his pick of luscious women. But he soon corrects himself. He needs only one and that is Sidi. Sidi goes off and he rushes to follow her.

### **Baroka's Confession: Loss of His Manhood**





Sadiku enters his rich bedroom and tells him that Sidi has spurned his offer because she considers him too old for her. Baroka recalls his past feats of bravery and strength and his acts of sex in bed. He opens the magazine and studies the pictures. He throws it away and confesses that his manhood has ended a week ago. He has asked for Sidi because he thought a young virgin like Sidi might bring back his failing strength. Now that Sidi has rejected him, he realizes that his impotency is irreversible. He asks Sadiku to keep his impotency a secret. He is full of remorse that when his father could bring forth twins at sixty-seven, he has been deprived of his manhood at sixty-two.

The scene reveals the cunning nature of Baroka. He is responsible for shutting out civilization for his village by blocking the railroad. When he is told that Sidi refuses to marry an old man, he makes an elaborate plan to trap Sidi. He pretends to have become impotent and confesses it to his senior wife, fully knowing that she cannot keep a secret.

### **Women Can Kill Even Lions**

The scene shifts to the village centre. Sidi stands by the school room, admiring her photos. Sadiku enters with the carved figure of the Bale. She sets the naked figure in front of the tree. She bursts into laughter. Sidi is amazed at the sight. Sadiku is ecstatic that the high and mighty lion is at last brought to the shameful state. She boasts with pride how she, as the youngest wife of his father Odiki, killed him with her strength.

Women are capable of consuming the race of mighty lions and spinning them at their whim and pleasure. She warns her masters that they will scotch them in the end. Noticing Sidi, she asks her to join her victory dance. She whispers in Sidi's ears the fall of Baroka. Sidi joins her in the dance in great merriment. Lakunle enters and the dancing stops. Sadiku wants him to leave as they are in the midst of performing a ritual. Lakunle threatens to prove his manliness. Sadiku laughs at him asking whether he is any better than Baroka who is no longer a man. Lakunle understands what she means and stands shocked.

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### **Plans to Mock at Baroka: Reforms for Personal Benefit?**

Sidi has an idea. She wants to attend the supper so that she can mock him. She will ask his forgiveness, and ask for a month's time. Sadiku is apprehensive that Baroka might see through the trick. Sidi longs to see the old man thwarted. Sadiku warns her that she may not be a match for the Fox's cunning. Lakunle, who has listened to the conversation with horror asks her not to torment the man and if he discovers the truth, he will be brutal. But she does not listen and runs away. Lakunle chides Sadiku for not keeping a secret. She assures him that Sidi can take better care of herself. She asks him whether he has paid the bride price. She advises him to take to farming as other men do so that he can earn the bride, price. She asks him whether he wants to convert the whole village against paying bride price so that he need not pay it .But Lakunle is convinced that the village will undergo a change in a year or two. There will be no bride price and women will be equal to men. Monogamy will replace polygamy. There will be roads and kitchens will have saucepans. The transport system will change. The village will have newspapers, parties, ballrooms and other modern amenities. He wants Sadiku to attend school.

### **Wrestling in Baroko's Bedroom**

The scene changes to Baroka's bedroom. Baroka is engaged in a wrestling match with another strong man. Sidi enters admiring the room and gasps at the sight of the wrestlers. Baroka is rough with her, asking whether there is no one to bar an unwanted stranger from his privacy. There is neither Sadiku nor Ailatu his favourite, available. He realizes that today is the day off for the palace workers as demanded by the Palace Workers' Union. Baroka's wives have not joined them. Ailatu has gone out but as her shawl is left behind, she will be back tonight. She has not taken offence at his words. Sidi watches the match with fascination. She tells Baroka that the answer she sent through Sadiku was given in a thoughtless moment and she is repentant. But Baroka pretends that he has not sent any message to her. Then she recalls his invitation to her for supper but he says Sadiku has not brought any reply so far. Sidi protests that she is there at his invitation and she cannot be an unwanted stranger. Again, he insults her saying that his bedroom cannot be made naked to any flea. This hurts her and she turns away.

Sidi remembers why she is at Baroka's bedroom. She wonders whether his favourite is dissatisfied with him so as to give offence to him. Baroka ignores this remark and tells her he has no leisure to ask reasons for such behaviour from a woman. He asks her to stay on though he does not allow anyone to watch his daily exercise. Sidi tries another trick to taunt him. She says his adversary will win. She speaks in proverbs saying if the tortoise cannot tumble it does not mean - that he can stand. She implies that if he loses in bed he will lose in the wrestling match also. But Baroka too replies in riddles and wishes that his opponent should win, for he does not want to wrestle with a weakling. He changes his wrestlers when he has learnt to throw them just as he changes his wives when he has learnt to tire them.

The wrestler makes an effort to conquer Baroka. Sidi is genuinely worried and asks him whether it hurts. She once again refers to the message brought by Sadiku. She asks him whether he will pay the dowry to the man who has sent the message. He indirectly asks her to give her opinion about him. He asks her whether the man is rich, repulsive, mean and miserly. She replies that he is rumoured to be rich, but he is old and too mean to buy snuff. Her reply must have angered him and he throws his opponent over his shoulder. In his anger, he blurts out that he is not mean, forgetting that they are pretending to talk about someone else.

Baroka now locks himself with the wrestler to overturn his hand. He defends himself saying that he is not mean and he has taken a liking for pepper and corn. He does not want others to discover it. So he keeps them in a snuff box. Women scandalize him out of malice. He continues his questioning. To a question whether he is fierce in hunting, she sarcastically remarks that his council room is full of heads and skins of leopards but they might have been bought in the market. He asks her whether he is not wise. She admits that he is wise and cunning like a fox which eats newly hatched chickens. As for his capacity to bring forth children, she says he was once endowed with sexual prowess but he had not brought forth any child the last two years. He has a clever answer for this too. Perhaps he is carefully preserving strength, planning for a final outburst of life.

Baroka blames Sadiku for tutoring Sidi like this which she denies. He brings down his opponent's arm and asks him to bring fresh wine. He asks her whether she knows the reason for inviting her to supper and whether Sadiku has not told her anything. She replies that she has not said anything except that the Bale begged her presence. The use of the word 'begged' provokes an outburst of anger from him. But he carefully hides it and blames everything on Sadiku the matchmaker. When he expresses his concern for some maid with his thoughtfulness for village health, she starts match-making. She brings a new girl to his bed. Sidi ironically remarks that his life is full of great unhappiness. Baroka cleverly praises her beauty, her modesty and her wisdom beyond her age. She is not vain as he has thought her to be. He then takes out the magazines and an envelope with a stamp. He shows her a strange machine which, he says, will print stamps. Soon she will have her own picture on it and it will reach the whole world. But first he will print stamps for the village.

### **Baroka's Political Posturing**

Baroka proclaims that he holds the welfare of the people deep at heart. It hurts him when town-dwellers make tales of him. He dismisses the wrestler. He is not against progress. But he does not like the sameness of things. His arguments only bewilder Sidi. He is happy at the sensitive nature of himself and Sidi, though one generation separates them. The first sign of their union is the stamp. She confesses that she does not understand him as he almost speaks like the schoolteacher. Perhaps he is simple-minded, she says. Baroka continues his flattery calling her straight and truthful. He wants to learn from her. The old must flow into the new and she must inherit the miracles which age alone reveals. Modifying the Biblical words, "old wine in a new

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bottle', he says that old wine thrives best within a new bottle. Thus by his wife words, Baroka seduces her.

### **The Final Scene: A Dance of Virility**

The final scene is at the market clearing. Lakunle and Sadiku are waiting for Sidi's return. Lakunle is afraid that Baroka has killed Sidi. There is no sign of her even after half a day. He suspects that she has vanished like other women into the dungeons or secret holes in the Bale's palace. The mummers arrive, obviously to demonstrate to the world that Baroka is no more sexually active. Sadiku must have informed them. She takes coins from Lakunle and gives them to the drummers. They enact the Baroka story in a dance of virility. He is made a comic figure. They taunt the old man at his decline and downfall. Sadiku also joins them.

Lakunle has enjoyed the spectacle in spite of himself. He finds fault with Sadiku for betraying her master. Sidi rushes in and throws herself on the ground, sobbing violently. Lakunle thinks that Baroka has beaten her and vows to kill him or to send him to prison. Sidi confesses that what he has told Sadiku about his manhood is a lie. The cunning frog told her it was a trick. Knowing that Sadiku could not keep a secret, he made her believe the lie. He expected Sidi or other maids to go to mock his plight. His trick has worked and he has called her a little fool after seducing her.

Lakunle curses himself for what has befallen Sidi. He declares that he is still ready to take her as his wife. They can take an oath to keep it a secret between them. Sidi stares at him without believing him. On seeing Sidi leave, he says he can find a virgin for his wife but still he can take the fallen woman. It solves the problem of bride-price. He will thus stand by his principles. Sadiku informs him that Sidi is packing her things. He thinks that she is getting ready to marry her. But when Sadiku has made this observation, Sidi has called her a barbarian. Lakunle wants to send back the musicians. Sidi comes in, offering the album to Lakunle and invites him to join her if he wants. This surprises Lakunle since as a groom, he has to go with her. But Sidi laughs at the very idea of marrying him, after she has experienced the strength of Baroka.. She adores him for giving her the strength as she dances and sings on her way to the Bale.

### **The Setting: The Morning, Noon and Night**

Setting provides a good prop to the play. It is neatly divided into three sections-Morning, Noon and Night.

Morning symbolizes primitive innocence and Night adult experience. The entire first section sparkles with youthful exuberance-Lakunle's sentimental love, which romanticizes the concept of pure love. The section 'Night' is full of intrigues. The freshness of the morning air has vanished and in its place the readers have deceptive lights with Sadiku spreading the rumour of Baroka's final impotence. The audience can see a mock duel between Baroka and the wrestler, and the plot to entice Sidi. Noon is a kind between the two states. The action here is innocent,

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and there are indications of some untoward events taking place. An important message is dispatched by Baroka to Sidi which she hastily refuses. The audience is shown Baroka's past in mime when he bribes the white surveyor and halts the construction work and ensures his domination over Ilujinle, and plans a stratagem to cheat Sidi. Hence, the play dramatizes the conflict which characterizes the period of transition in modern Africa.

### **The Role of Songs in the Play**

Songs play a very significant role in Soyinka's plays. In this play he has also used folk music along with the songs. In an elaborate dance and music the villagers re-enact the stranger's first visit to the village some time earlier, during which he took numerous photographs of Sidi. Through this, he has brought out the culture and tradition of African country, which is the part and parcel of their life. Sidi sings the first song in order to tease Lakunle, she chants

You are dressed like him  
You look like him  
You speak his tongue  
You think like him  
You're just as clerisy  
In your Lagos ways –  
You'll do for him! (14)

The anaphoric repetition of the word 'You' in the first song of Sidi makes it lively. One can visualize the teasing intensified in the word 'You' which is repeated six times since it is addressed to Lakunle directly. This song hence motivates the group to dance and beat the drums encouraging Lakunle to join them. The words 'like him' are repeated thrice at the end of the line. This epistrophic repetition of the words 'like him' excites Lakunle to join the dance. To quote the words of Soyinka,

This chant is taken up by all and they begin to dance round Lakunle, in a fast rhythm. The drummers join in after the first time, keeping up a steady beat as the others whirl round their victim. They go faster and faster and chant faster and faster with each round. By the sixth or seventh, Lakunle has obviously had enough.(pp 14).

### **Accompanying Music and Musical Instruments**

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A clap of drums and a terrific shout follows when Lakunle expresses his acceptance. The chant of the song, dance and the beating of drums incite Lakunle into a spirit of dance with great enthusiasm. The visitor's entry into Ilujinle is depicted in a mime. Four girls who are dancing the 'motor-car' crouch on the floor as four wheels of a car. Lakunle gradually takes place in the middle and 'sits on air' directing their spacing. Though he 'does not dance, he does a realistic miming'. The following words of the playwright highlight the excitement, giving a realistic picture of the variations in the rhythmic drum beating which sets a mood of great excitement.

Soft throbbing drums, gradually swelling in volume, and the four 'wheels' begin to rotate the upper halves of their bodies in perpendicular circles. Lakunle clowning the driving motions, obviously enjoying this fully. The drums gain tempo, faster' faster, faster. A sudden crash of drums and the girls quiver and dance the stall. Another effort at rhythm fails, and the stalling wheels give a corresponding shudder, finally, and let their faces fall on to their laps. Lakunle tampers with a number of controls, climbs out of the car and looks underneath it. His lips indicate that he is swearing violently. (LJ 14,15).

### **Actions**

Before beginning the trek, Lakunle imitates the English visitor, picks up his camera, his helmet, 'pockets a flash of whisky from which he takes a swigs'. The mime which is accompanied by drumbeats, dance and songs is an effective stylistic device of Soyinka. The succeeding lines effectively reiterate the point:

The drums resume beating, a different, darker tone and rhythm, varying with the journey. Full use of "gangan' and 'iya ilu'.  
the 'trees' perform a subdued and unobtrusive dance on the same spot. Details as a snake slithering out of the branches and poisoning over Lakunle's head when he leans against a tree

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for a rest. He flees, restoring his nerves shortly after by a swig. A monkey drops suddenly in his path and gibbers at him before scampering off. A roar comes from somewhere, etc. His nerves go rapidly and he recuperates himself by copious draughts. He is soon tipsy, battles violently with the undergrowth and curses silently as he swats the flies off his tortured body. Suddenly from somewhere in the bush comes the sound of a girl singing.(pp 15).

### **The Role and Function of the Mime**

Soyinka has used song in this context in order to bring comic relief to the audience. The atmosphere is filled with happiness and Sidi's intention about Lakunle is expressed through her song. It is filled with energy, and the structure seems to be loose. Through this song, Soyinka has thrown light on the culture and tradition of Africa. This song signifies the conflict between tradition and modernity, which is the central theme of the play.

In the course of the mime, Lakunle as traveller, now and then drinks and tosses the bottle, drinking the remaining dregs. There is a scream and a torrent of abuse, followed by a silence.

He tip-toes, clears away the obstructing growth, blinks hard, and rubs his eyes. Whatever he has seen still remains. He whistles softly, unhitches his camera, and begins to jockey himself into a good position for a take backwards and forwards a careless foot and disappears completely. There is a loud splash and the invisible singer alters her next tone to a sustained scream. Quickened rhythm and shortly afterwards, amidst sounds of splashes, Sidi appears on the stage, with a piece of cloth partially covering her.(pp 16).

The mime still continues with Lakunle losing all his appendages except the camera. Sidi who runs across the stage after a short while, returns with the villagers, who are in an ugly mood and, in spite of Lakunle's protest, 'Haul him of to the town centre in front of the Odon tree. In the midst of the mime, there is also a conversation between Lakunle and Baroka, who incidentally appears on the stage.

With the stranger appearing who 'springs up every second to take photographs of the party and specifically focusing on Sidi, who is dancing. The stranger arranges Sidi in all sorts of magazine's postures and takes innumerable photographs of her. Though he refuses the drinks, that are offered to him but later on he accepts and drinks profusely. As he leaves, the people tap him on the back and the two drummers, insist on dancing round him, after which he leaves. Lakunle's exit seems to signify the end of the mime. He returns almost at once and others discard their roles.

The scene in 'Morning' where Sidi and her friends force Lakunle to mime the role of the visiting photographer is an economic and effective device, for it not only recreates the original comedy of a white man's arrival in the village, but it presents Lakunle with his best opportunity in the play for gaining some of the audience's sympathy.. It is also a splendid miming, dancing and drumming opportunity for the entire cast, and a notable 'warmer-up' for the play at an important point in its development. The arrival of the Bale in the middle of this scene is given a naturalistic explanation; although he arrives 'right on cue', the readers can assume that he has been hovering in the vicinity in order to do so. (pp22) - refer diary no:7 ,Wole Soyinka- Early Work in the Theatre

In the mime which is performed to enact the arrival of the photographer and the subsequent events Lakunle plays the main role with initial reluctance but thoroughly enjoying himself later.

The use of mime with the songs, dance and drumbeating along with enacting enables Soyinka to represent many vital issues of the play in a nut shell. The time duration of the play is only for a day as indicated by the sub-titles morning, noon and night. It is not without purpose, that he has given such significant sub-titles. The use of songs, dance, mime accompanied by drum-beating enables the dramatist to compress many ideas precisely and effectively.

Another mime that appears in the second section of the play entitled 'Noon' is a powerful medium of highlighting the character of Baroka, the village Bale , who has been a hindrance for the improvement of the village. The story is enacted as a flashback of the past and is vividly told in song and mime and acted out before the villagers. To quote

Enter the prisoners, guarded by two warders. A white surveyor examines his map (khaki helmet, spats, etc). The fore man runs up with his camp stool, table etc ..erects the umbrella over him and unpacks the usual box of bush comforts –soda siphon, whisky bottle and geometric sandwiches. His map consulted, he directs the sweat team to where to work. They begin felling, matchet swinging, log dragging , all to the rhythm of the work gang's metal percussion (rod on gong or rude triangle etc).

### **The Lewd Pub-Songs**

The Song is as follows:

'N' ijo itoro  
'Amuda el'ebe  
I' aiya;  
'G be je on' ipa' ( LJ 23)

The translation is as follows:

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Whenever I have three pence  
Whenever I have sixpence  
It is always palm – wine  
I would have been married by now  
But for the palm – wine gourel. ( LJ 28)

The above song by the prisoners working on the railway track is a wellknown ‘lewd pub-song’. According to Ogunba “It was very popular in 1940s and later became a favourite percussion song among prisoners”(pp 45).It expresses the spirit of regret and anger which provokes Lakunle to accuse Baroka of extreme conservatism. Ilujinle would, in his thinking, have become a modern community but for Baroka’s selfish lasciviousness.

The prisoners with two warders enter Ilunjinle. A white surveyor examines the map. The foreman directs the team to the work place. They begin felling, matchet swinging, log dragging according to the rhythm. The two performers are the song leaders. Following them, the others follow the chorus.

The scene is made rich by different characters enacting many roles. It is significant that two among the performers enacting the role of the prisoners are also song leaders and others fill the chorus. The use of songs makes the play lively and interesting since many on the stage are involved in the scene. A special feature of the mime is dialogues or speeches between the shift of scenes.

To cite an example, Lakunle remarks:

They marked the route with stakes, ate  
Through the jungle and began the tracks. Trade,  
Progress, adventure, success, civilization,  
Fame, international conspicuousity...it was  
All within the grasp of Ilujinle...( LJ 24).

This is followed by the wrestler entering and who stands horrified at the sight and flees. He returns with the Bale, who soon assess the situation of the prisoners guarded by the two guarders, the white surveyor examining the map and the foreman assisting him. After they disappear, the surveyor occupies himself with the whisky. The work continues after a bull-roarer is heard. ‘The prisoners falter a little’ and ‘pick up again’. With the intruding of the bull-roarer, the work results in chaos and the sole surveyor of the route is the surveyor himself.

The following words of Soyinka graphically portrays the succeeding events,

Baroka enters a few minutes later accompanied by some attendants  
and preceded by a young girl bearing a calabash bowl.. The surveyor,

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angry and threatening, is prevailed upon to open his gift. From it he reveals a wad of pound notes and cola nuts. Mutual understanding is established. The surveyor frowns heavily, rubs his chin, and consults his map. Re-examines the contents of the bowl, shakes his head.

Baroka adds more money, and a coop of hens. A goat follows, and more money. This time 'truth' dawns on him at last, he has made a mistake. The track really should go the other way. What an unfortunate error, discovered just in time! No, no, no possibility of a mistake this time, the track should be much farther away. In fact the earth is most unsuitable, couldn't possibly support the weight of a railway engine.

A gourd of palm wine is brought to seal the agreement and a cola-nut is broken. Baroka's men help the surveyor pack and they leave with their arms round each other followed by the surveyor's booty.( LJ 25).

### A Different Mime



In 'NOON' there is another mime re-enacted in which Soyinka departs much farther from the conventions of naturalistic comedy. Lakunle begins reminiscing about the Bale's cunning in staving off the injurious effects of 'progress', as instanced in his deflection of the railway away from his village in the old days. Immediately the stage actually becomes that scene of ancient villainy.

The contemporary players, Lakunle, Sidi and Sadiku, withdraw from the action and are replaced by actors miming the encounter between the Bale and the advancing railway-workers long ago. The technique here has something in common with the stage musical, where similar suspensions of natural action are accepted as part of the convention.

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It is another example of Soyinka's freedom, right from the start of his career, in the choice of theatrical means that he employs. This second passage of mime as many functions as the first, but it does not increase the general fluidity of the action and extend it momentarily beyond the normal limits of one-dimensional comedy. It also dramatizes Baroka's ability to come to terms with encroaching modernity and exploit it for his own ends, as he does later in his handling of Sidi. (pp22) - refer diary no:7, Wole Soyinka- Early Work in the Theatre

### **The Pseudo-Traditional Nature of Songs and Chants**

The songs and chants in the plays of Wole Soyinka are only pseudo – traditional. They merely wear a traditional appearance. They fall into two groups, namely those which are taken from the popular disc rewards of modern commercial musicians who work in the traditional mode and those which, starting off in a traditional mode are, half – way through, deliberately given a satirical twist by the author. The example of the first group is the songs and chants found in *The Lion and the Jewel*.

The prisoner's song is an example for this group.(Oyin Ogumba, pp 6). To quote:

'N' ijo itoro  
'Amuda el' ebe  
I' aiya;  
'G be je on' ipa' (LJ 23).

### **Use of Anaphora**

I have already referred to the use of anaphora in the beginning of this chapter. The use of anaphora which is a repetition of the initial words 'whenever I have, whenever I have', is seen.

The words, though they are simple become effective because of the repetition. So, whenever the person has three pence or six pence, it is always spent on palm wine. There is a tragic vein suggesting poverty and regret, when the song emphasizes that the person would have been married, but for the palm wine. All his money has been wasted and squandered in drinking. Such apparently comic or humorous expressions appear and sound simple, but it clearly felt that these are filled with energy and throw light on culture and tradition of Africa.

Baroka hears from Sadiku that Sidi thinks he is too old to marry her and he breaks out in a great song of self-praise:

Did I not, at the festival of Rain,  
Defeat the men in the long-tossing match?  
Do I not still with the most fearless ones,  
Hunt the leopard and the boa at night  
And save the farmers' goats from further harm?

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And does she say I'm old?  
Did I not, to announce the Harmattan,  
Climb to the top of the silk-cotton tree,  
Break the first pod, and scatter tasseled seeds  
To the four winds-and this but yesterday?  
Do any of my wives report  
A failing in my manliness?  
The strongest of them all  
Still wearies long before the lion does!  
And so would she, had I briefest chance  
To teach this unfledged bridling  
That lacks the wisdom to embrace  
The rich mustiness of age.( LJ 27).

### **Dramatic Speech in the Night**

In the 'Night', the third section, Sadiku seems to playfully entice Sidi to come out. Her speech which is highly dramatic is quoted below

So we did for you too did we ? We did for you in the end.  
Oh high and mighty lion, have we really scotched you?  
A-ya-ya-ya... we women undid you in the end. I was there  
When it happened to your father, the great Okiki. I did for him,  
I, the youngest and freshest of the wives. I killed him with my  
Strength. I called him and he came at me, but no, for him, this  
Was not like other times. I, Sadiku, was I not flame itself and he  
The flax on old women's spindles? I ate him up! Race of mighty  
Lions, we always consume you, at our pleasure we spin you, at  
Our whim we make you dance; like the foolish you think  
The world revolves around you...fools! fools!... it is you who  
Run giddy while we stand still and watch, and draw your stick.  
I scotched Okiki, Sadiku's unopened treasure-house demanded  
Sacrifice, and Okiki came with his rusted key. Like a snake he  
Came at me, like a rag he went back, a limp rag smeared in shame...  
Ah, take warning my masters, we'll scotch you in the end...( LJ 30)

### **Celebration through Dancing – A Victory Dance**

Sadiku is unable to keep Baroka's confession to herself. She celebrates with a dance, on behalf of all women in the village. She leaps up with a yell and begins to dance round the tree chanting 'Take warning, my masters we'll scotch you in the end' which is a repetition of the last line mentioned earlier. As Sidi comes out, shutting the windows gently, Sadiku gasps and is checked in the middle of the song. In the course of her talk, Sadiku convey her ideas with the dance,

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repeating the line 'Take warning my masters' three more times. The dancing continues. Sidi and Sadiku, exchange their views even while dancing. Unable to comprehend, Sadiku's states 'To see him fizzle with the drabbest puff of a mis-primed 'sakabula'.

Sidi wants clarification since she cannot understand. Sadiku asks her to join her victory dance, not asking questions and finally whispers something to which Sidi most excitedly reacts and leaps in the air, repeating Sadiku's words 'Take warning my master'. The dance stops with the entry of Lakunle. The 'energetic leaps' and 'gleeful and cackling laughter' during the course of dance, song and dialogue is a unique technique of Soyinka. This in fact, adds colour to the show and simultaneously brings out the African lifestyle.

### **Impressive Shoulder Dance**

Reacting to the words of Baroka, Sidi excitedly breaks into a kind of shoulder dance and sings. To quote:

“Yokolu Yokolu. Ko ha tan bi  
Iyawo gb' oko san'le  
Oko yo 'ke...( LJ 40)  
The translation is as follows,  
“Yokolu, Yokolu, what say you now?  
The wife knocked down the husband  
And he now sprouts a hunchback....” ( LJ 40)

Sidi repeats this song and dance throughout Baroka's protest. Soyinka, once again effectively uses the word 'Yokolu' repetitively.

Sadiku ridiculing Lakunle, as 'A man of learning', 'A young sprig of foreign wisdom,' demands money for a dance performance. The mummers straight through dance in the centre as before. It is significant to note that Soyinka has introduced difference in the dancing introduced in the play throughout. Male dancers enter first in this dance, pursued by a number of young women and other choral idlers. In this picture is seen:

The man dances in tortured movements. He and about half of his pursuers have already danced offstage on the opposite side when Sadiku dips her hand briskly in Lakunle's pocket, this time with greater success.( LJ 51).

Sadiku darts quickly to the drummers and presses 'a coin a piece on their foreheads, waving them to possession of the floor. Tilting their heads backwards, they drum her praises.'( LJ 51). The dance is interrupted when Sadiku points to Lakunle as the 'generous benefactor'. Few other dancers enter when the drummers resume the beat of the dance.

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Now begins the dance of virility which is of course none other than Baroka story.very athletic movements.even in his prime, 'Baroka' is made a comic figure, held in a kind of tolerant respect by his women. At his decline and final downfall, they are most unsparing in their taunts and tantalizing motions. Sadiku has never stopped bouncing on her toes through the dance, now she is done the honour of being invited to join at the kill. ( LJ 52)

### **Dumb Show**

A dumb show that follows, reveal Sadiku's agility and the wild enthusiasm of the rest of the people. The words of Soyinka most dramatically capsulize the further development of the play along with the details of the drumming, the dancing and the shouting. It prepares the mind of the audience for the most awaited moment of the play. It is significant to note the special reference to distant music, light, drums, flutes, box-guitars and sekere after Lakunle's disappointment as expressed in the following lines:

And now I know I am the biggest fool  
That never walked this earth.  
There are women to be found  
In every town or village in these parts,  
And every one a virgin.  
But I obey my books. ( LJ 55)

The distant music, the light drums and other instruments are played just before Lakunle's moment of realization, when he remarks :

Man takes the fallen woman by the hand'  
And ever after they live happily.  
Moreover, I will admit,  
It solves the problem of her bride-price too.  
A man must live or fall by his true  
Principles. That, I had sworn,  
Never to pay. ( LJ 55)

The singing group again commences singing when Lakunle shares with Sadiku his views on marriage. Lakunle is mistaken when he tells the musicians that no one is getting married and they should return. It is at this strategic point that Sidi enters:

In one hand she holds a bundle, done up in a richly embroidered cloth; in the other magazine. She is radiant, jewelled, lightly clothed and light leather-thong sandals. They all go suddenly silent except for the long drawn O-Ohs of admiration. She goes up to Lakunle

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and hands him the book.( LJ 56)

### **Change of Moment and Music**

Whenever there is a significant and dramatic change or an exciting moment arrives, when there is a turn of events, there is music, singing of songs, dances, beating of drums and mimes. Sidi rushes of leaving him posturing that everyone would have thought that she would marry Lakunle, but Soyinka allows this misunderstanding to prevail for a time. Sidi gets blessing from Sadiku, and now Sidi is in a happy mood. She starts to sing and dance. The musicians accompany her and starts resuming their tune.

The final scene makes it perfectly clear that the Bale triumphs, for, despite an offer Sidi from Lakunle, respects “beardless Youth” in favour of experience and maturity. The play ends with the song and dance of Sidi. Turning to the musicians, she exclaims,

Come, sing to me for seeds  
Of children, sired of the lion stock.’( LJ 57)  
‘Mo te’ ni’ as the song begins, is a bridal song. To quote

Mo te’ni. Mo te’ni.  
Mo te’ni. Mo te’ni.  
Sun mo mi, we mo mi  
Sun mo mi, fa mo mi  
Yarabi lo m’yei t’o le d’omo.....( LJ 57)

The translation is as follows:

My net is spread, my net is spread  
Come close to me, wrap yourself around me.  
Only God knows which moment makes the child...

### **The Second Song**

‘Mo te’ni’ is the second song by Sidi, which is called as the Bridal Song. Her romantic sensibility and her dream of a matrimonial life are revealed. In this song, she highlights her emotions especially, the happiness. She does not feel sorry for her seduction, but on the other hand, she prepares herself for her marriage. To her it is a better proposition to marry Baroka. The Epizeuxis repetition of the words, ‘My net is spread’, brings out Sidi’s romantic happiness. The use of Epanalepsis which is a repetition of the words in a verse, underline her romantic sensibility and dream of her matrimonial life.

A festive air prevails and the traders leave their stalls to join the celebration. A young dancing girl appears and Lakunle clears the space in the ground for the girl. The crowd repeats the song

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after Sidi. She sings enthusiastically and reveals her happiness towards all and also she wants everyone to join with her in the celebration. To quote

To lani tolani  
T'emi Nit' emi N;  
Sun momi, we momi;  
Sun momi, ta momi  
Yarabi io m'eyi to 'led' omo ( LJ 58).

The meaning is as follows:

'Tolani Tolani  
She belongs to me, wrap yourself around me  
Come close to me, wrap yourself around me  
Only god knows which moment makes the child.'

This is the sequel of the previous one, and along with Sidi, the crowd also sings and dances. This song is for celebrating marriages. Thus, songs are an essential part of the village.

The above two songs are sung at end of the play. There are many Yoruba songs for celebrating marriages. They are part of a village repertoire, familiar to all, including children and part of ever-changing body of popular music.

### **Yoruba Language and Song**

The language is generally a symbol of culture of the speakers. The culture of Yoruba is enshrined in their language. It is highly tonal and musical language, which gives the impression of being chanted rather than spoken. The rhythmic and tonal qualities do not come in English and that is why Soyinka has introduced Yoruba Songs in English plays.

In the words of Grahame Smith:

*The Lion and the Jewel* can be seen in the brilliance of its ideas as much as in its language and stagecraft, but this is a matter of exploration rather than statement. (pp. 214, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Hans Zell Publishers. New York)

### **African Dance in the Writings of Soyinka**

Soyinka brings out significance of African dance. He has synthesized the different dance forms having religious significance. For him, dance symbolizes the different aspects of religious beliefs and archetypal themes of birth and death. The transition from the human to the divine is brought out in the dance forms and movements. Soyinka who had an interest in music, brings out the Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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significance of African dance and the folk music in his plays. He has synthesized the different dance forms having religious significance in his works. The way he uses prose and verse in his plays to bring out the indigenous spirit of African culture is remarkable.

### **Festival and Culture**

Culturally and religiously speaking, festival is the prime institution of traditional Africa, for the festival is the only institution, which has the frame work to virtually co-ordinate all the art forms of a community. Each important traditional festival lasts for a considerable time which may be three, seven, nine and sixteen days, a month or even three months. Each tends to have a story or myth to perform and each make use of its own peculiar style in the dramatic realization of the story. In the process, the arts of costuming, masking, drumming, chanting and dancing and several others are utilized in a manner, not totally dissimilar to their usage in other dramatic traditions. The activities of the man from the “outer world” of Lagos is communicated through the wonderful mime and dance.

### **Dance Dramas – Characteristic of African Festival Theatre**

Dance dramas and mimes have rhythmical accompaniment. The playwright has taken pains to incorporate into this play a number of dances. The following ‘dances’ occur in this play. The dance of the lost traveler, A dance drama with episodes of mime and a final communal dance, The mime of the white surveyor, largely a mime in the course of which the prisoners sing and move rhythmically. The dance of Baroka’s story in two parts tells the story of Baroka’s sex life as understood by Sadiku, who has arranged the performance. The final, a bridal and communal dance, takes Sidi off to her husband and draws the play to a close.

The dances in *The lion and the jewel* are relevant in that through them, significant events which happened in Ilunjile, or about the personalities of the characters are revealed. The dramatic functions of the dances differ, but Soyinka is actually aware of the need for contrast of style in which these dances provide. He is also aware of the accepted practice of the musical stage, that the performance should open with a ‘big number’ and that each act should close with a strong and spectacular set – piece. He amends this slightly and makes the readers wait for the end of the opening dialogue before the readers move into ‘the dance of the lost traveller’. At the end, however he brings the play into a satisfying conclusion with ‘the final’.

Dances are characteristics of African Festival Theatre. The way in which the dances are introduced and the idioms they employ might be expected to reveal the tradition which dominates in *The Lion and the Jewel*. All but one of the dances are introduced in ways that are familiar to the tradition of musical the one exception, ‘the mime of the white surveyor,’ appears to be introduced in accordance with Soyinka’s concept of dramatic time rather than in a manner familiar from the festival theatre.

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The dance of the lost traveller is familiar enough from the English language tradition of the musical community, swept into creative life of one of its members, re-acts a recent event. This kind of activity does not reflect ordinary behavior as we observe it, but in the theatre it is easy to accept the Ilujinle might be a community where such important dances are possible. In most of the other dances there are similar explanations: Sadiku who was once known as 'Sadiku of the duiker feet,' express her satisfaction with 'a dance of triumph,' and this seems well within the bounds of possibility; the mummies perform 'the dance of the Baroka's story' after being encouraged by Sadiku. At the end of the play bridal dance is performed, once again this is not at all surprising. It is easy to believe that the news of the marriage would quickly spread and that the community would gather to celebrate and dance. There is nothing particularly unusual about the way these dances are introduced: similar conventions can be seen at work in musicals about Spanish peasants or Londoners.

### **Interludes between Actions**

Dances in this play become interludes between the main span of action. Lakunle enters into the spirit of the dance with enthusiasms. In the second part of 'the dance of the lost traveller' the sequence at the least, the readers are able to see that he protects and encourages the photographer. But he fails to anticipate the use that will be made of the photographs, and the publication of them causes him distress and a temporary set – back.

Soyinka has incorporated into this play a number of dances, dance dramas and mimes which have rhythmical accompaniment. They are all included under this heading since Soyinka uses the word 'dance' vaguely. The following 'dances' occur in the play, 'The dance of the lost traveller', a dance drama with episodes of mime and a final communal dance, 'The mime of the white surveyor', largely a mime in the course of which the prisoners sing and move rhythmically, 'Sadiku's dance of triumph', a solo performed around a carving of the Bale, 'The dance of Baroka's story'; in two parts, this tells the story of Baroka's sex life as understood by Sadiku, who has arranged for the performance, 'The finale', a bridal and communal dance which takes Sidi off to her husband and draws the play to a close.

The dances in *The Lion and the Jewel* are relevant in that through them the readers are able to learn about significant events which have happened in Ilujinle, or about the personalities of the characters. The dramatic functions of the dances differ, but Soyinka is acutely aware of the need for variation in tempo and the need for contrasts of style, and these the dances provide. He is also aware of the accepted practice of the musical stage, that the performance should open with a 'big number' and that each act should close with a strong and spectacular set-piece. He amends this slightly and we wait for the end of 'the opening dialogue' before we move into 'the dance of the lost traveller'. At the end, however, he brings the play to a satisfying conclusion with 'the finale'. This is in a tradition which European and American practice shares with the Yoruba 'Alarinjo' theatre, which usually concludes its performances with a dance. The similarity is striking since the 'Alarinjo' finale is often a bridal masque.

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## **Use of Authoritative Instruments**

Yoruba drums are used for music in this play. There are specific requests for the *gangan*, a notable 'talking drum', which can initiate some of the tonal patterns of the Yoruba language; and the *iluiya*, which is played by hitting the membrane at the other end with a leather strap. This is an authoritative instrument, difficult to control and regarded as the senior talking drum. The *Lion and the Jewel* is unique, or even very unusual, in combining acting, dancing and singing.

## **Mime and Other Traditional Devices**

The use of traditional devices such as mime at the right moment makes an impact. Morning shows the magazine man from the outside world whose presence has generated a lot of excitement. Sidi's friends force Lakunle to perform the dance of the Lost Traveller. The dance takes place at a time when Sidi is yearning for a strong love which Lakunle is unable to satisfy. He has only deified Sidi; he has not even touched her. A romantic adventurer, he is exploring his own psychology.

The second mime which reveals Baroka's corruption is also well conceived. The white surveyor is bribed and then sent away. The wrestler acts as a spy for Baroka. He wants to safeguard his position as the chief.

Then there is the dance of virility, which depicts his sexual prowess. The contrast of virility and impotence in the same man binds itself to a rich dramatic representation. Besides, this mime has ironic function-Baroka is not impotent after all. This changes the course of the play - Sidi is transformed from a maiden to a woman, and Sadiku is surprised and Lakunle is frustrated.

These mimes help in creating the poetic atmosphere. This goes to prove that tradition is ingrained in the social essence and Soyinka, as an artist, depicts the protagonist as a part of this tradition. Nevertheless, he has a will of his own and he asserts it in order to bring about certain changes (p. 118 *The Plays of Wole Soyinka A Socio-psychological study* by M.Pushpa.1999, Prestige Books, New Delhi).

The mime of the white surveyors, however, introduces a new principle. The encounter makes much greater impact and assures the audience that Lakunle is telling the truth. Musicals thrive on discovering relatively unknown or under exposed musical and dance idioms.

In 'The Dance of the Lost Traveller', there is full use of 'gangan' and 'iya ilu'-talking drums. In Sadiku's 'Dance of Triumph' they follow Yoruba steps and gestures. In 'The Dance of Baroka's Story' however, a fundamentally different convention, the masquerade convention, is used and this presents the audience with a distinctive element from the sophisticated and stylized idiom of African drama. The dancer's mask has become a cliché as an emblem of Africa, but not without reason since African masks draw together some of the most striking features of African culture.

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The mask can be seen to make a statement about the nature of African gods and the way they interact with men in the dance. The mask in “The Dance of Baroka’s Story’ is not that of a god, though Baroka is ‘the living god among men’, but it still indicates cultural values and attitudes. The mask shows most clearly what Soyinka meant by saying that African drama uses stylized forms as basic accepted disciplines.

### **Speech and Inner Feelings**

The words of Senanu may be recalled in this context. Speech sometimes cannot adequately express what the characters undergo, the dance, the bodily movement to music objectifies the life of the play. There are four such moments in the course of the play: the first is at the end of the morning scene when Sidi celebrates her renowned beauty; the second, at the beginning of the night scene, when Sadiku performs the spell, followed by a dance expressing her supposed emasculation of the Bale; the third moment is the wrestling-match, between the Bale and his court wrestler in which the Bale effectively demonstrates his prowess and anticipates his seduction of Sidi. The final moment is the dance which celebrates the cuckolding of Lakunle and the marriage of Sidi and the Bale. These are all ritual moments, moments of celebration with dances. (pp. 77. THOUGHTS ON CREATING THE POPULAR THEATRE BY K.E.SENANU) REFER DIARY NO. 6.)

### **The Originality of Soyinka**

The originality of Soyinka’s rural comedy lies in two things; firstly, the great scope which he allows for mime and for dramatically expressive dance and movement; secondly, the deliberately provocative moral of the ending, that the heroine must always opt for ‘progress, and ‘enlightenment’.

The conflict between tradition and modernity is the central thematic concern of Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*. A deft comedy which provides excellent theatre to the audience, it draws heavily on the theme of colonial conflict. The main characters of this comedy can be classified into two groups: Baroka, Sadiku and Sidi represent the traditional African values of life. The conflict between the two value-systems is triggered off by the germination of amorous love between Sidi, a beautiful young girl of about sixteen years and Lakunle, a young school teacher in Ilujinle.

It was a period of transition in Nigeria, when western education had strengthened its hold on the people. A new breed of men, with different social and cultural orientation had sprung up. As a result, there was a clash between accepted ideas and new ideas, as each one of them showed a tendency towards a system of indoctrination. Soyinka combines imaginative inventiveness with reflection and shows a clear grasp of psychology. His usual concern with liberating his action from the limits of a single ‘line’ in space and time here finds only muted expression, for Soyinka is rightly intent upon keeping his comic plot moving along a single plane of reality. He even

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obeys the classical 'unities' since, as in most of his plays, he confines his action to a single place and a single day (p.22) - Refer diary no:7, Wole Soyinka- Early Work in the Theatre.

In *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) Soyinka seems to reassert the value of a traditional and communally – based society. The play could be described as a condemnation of self – seeking individualism. There is a mockery of 'modern' ways in general and the play exposes the self – seeking element in all the characters. It is not out of loyalty that people make use of the traditional ideas or the motivations of pride and power or out of moral or religious conviction.

*The Lion and the Jewel* works through caricature and simplification to make a provocative contribution to the debate about the direction in which African society should move.

Thus in the play '*The lion and the jewel*' as in other plays, Soyinka proves that the use of songs as accompanied by music, dance, drum beating and mimes can be an effective and a stylistic dramatic device. The obvious merits of *The Lion and the Jewel* as a stage comedy have led to its becoming one of the most popular of all Soyinka's plays. In Nigeria itself, its first production has been followed by many others, and it has also been presented in many other parts of Africa, in London, in the United States and as far as New Guinea

### **Spontaneity of Songs and Celebrations**

Soyinka adopts Yoruba tradition of storytelling with great ease and uses it to express himself effectively and to entertain his audiences. Whether we know Yoruba tradition or not, we still continue to enjoy his plays and get an in-depth understanding of the mind of Soyinka. Although, at first, it may look like that his purpose is to follow and present Yoruba traditional forms of storytelling and Yoruba stories, we soon realize that his agenda is not the glorification of traditions, but to use the traditions to bring light upon the existing complex conditions of human society and to offer some glimpse of possible solutions to the problems that we face. And again, Soyinka brings this about with great mastery of the medium.

One of the impressive achievements of Soyinka in his plays is to relate songs to celebration. The celebration does not wait for anything big and grand to occur, celebration begins in a natural manner for everything that needs to be celebrated, even day to day occurrences and statements. Celebration is not a ritual, it is spontaneous and it springs up with songs. The mere tune of a song softly uttered becomes the dominant voice soon in the form of spontaneous songs. The characters are not necessarily talented singers or song composers, but in there is a fountain that brings forth words and tunes and the celebration becomes an inclusive participation of all.

This spontaneity is obvious in Soyinka's earliest play *The Lion and Jewel*. It is the earliest and perhaps most popular play. *The Lion and the Jewel* is unique, or even very unusual, in combining acting, dancing and singing. The vitality of the play depends as much on verbal drama, on wit, on the ridiculous or theoretical proliferation of language, and on grotesque

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behavior, as it depends on those emotive moments which can only be adequately expressed through music and dance.

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## Chapter 3

### Songs as Contemplation



#### What Is Contemplation?

The term *contemplation* is defined as the act of thoughtful observation. It includes full or deep consideration and reflection. Such acts should be deliberate, purposeful and intentional. In addition, contemplation also has the feature of prospect or expectation. Wole Soyinka's plays are certainly works of contemplation since he uses his plays to bring home certain truths and ideals before his audiences.

Of all the forms of contemplation, songs seem to be most preferred in all cultures and religions. Often contemplative thoughts and singing focus on the pessimistic side of life, even as the contemplative process leads one to accept what lies ahead with trust and hope.



## Soyinka's Contemplative Road and Journey



Poetry with melody of various types marks the songs of contemplation in Soyinka's works.

“The main landmarks of Soyinka's career have been *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road*, *Kongi's Harvest* – all of them brilliant exposition of a profoundly pessimistic view of the human condition”, remarks William Walsh.(p. 163). ‘The play *The Road* focuses on ‘the alienation and strangeness of man in this world, the contradictoriness, feebleness, and contingency of human existence; and the central and overwhelming reality of time for man who has lost his anchorage in the eternal’.(pp503). It won the first prize in commonwealth art festival and in fact has proved to be a superb accomplishment of Soyinka as a dramatist.

*The Road* is important among Soyinka's works because in this play Soyinka achieves an unequivocal success in the union of theme and dramatic technique. It is this balance of message and method which makes the play a successful communication.

According to Pushpa,

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“The play *The Road* is an eloquent comment on Nigerian society. It is in fact a bitter attack. The whole society reeks with the stench of disintegration and death. There is no character in the play who is not diseased- there is an ambience of vice and greed. The play presents a great grim picture of gloom and decadence, where a dog – eat – dog morality rules supreme”. (132).

In the words of Ogunba Oyin, “*The Road*, when it is observed is that Soyinka has in fact inverted the pattern, so that the interrupted rite which constitutes his play runs not from the dusk of one day to the dawn of another, but between two twilights of the same day, ending with an abrupt finality in the gathering dark and with no hint of renewal, no glimmer of returning light.” (20).

### **Quest for the Word in Metaphor**

The subject of this play, Professor’s quest for the Word, is treated partly humorously and partly grimly through well-managed dialogue, splendidly realized role playing and the interactions of individually realized characters, many of whom are the object of Soyinka’s satire. The scene of action takes place in a road somewhere in Nigeria. Professor, who is the protagonist of his play, owns a shop where he sells the parts of wrecked cars to drivers who are in need of them. There are other persons around Professor who depend on the road for their livelihood. There is Kotonu, an erstwhile lorry driver who now assists Professor in his business. Samson, Kotonu’s companion and tout, is distressed with Kotonu’s in difference to his profession. There is Salubi, a private chauffeur, who has managed to obtain a driver’s uniform, but has no driving license.

“*The Road* is rather static, constituting philosophy rather than drama, in the proper sense. The basic idea is a metaphor: a road connects the spiritual world with the material one” (Klima 124). *The Road* can be interpreted thus a path that leads to a particular destination. *The Road* can symbolize the death trap. Man’s place on the road is inevitable and he is held by the clutches of the road. He can be easily devoured at any time. But the road in Soyinka’s play signifies the eternal salvation. Man longs for the eternal salvation so that he can be purged of all wrongs and gained the bliss ordained for him.

## The Setting



The setting of the play takes place during an interrupted festival of Ogun, and it is therefore an episode influenced by what has gone before and by what will surely follow. During the Driver's Festival, a masker who has been impersonating the god Ogun has been knocked down by Kotonu's lorry and almost killed, at the same moment when he possessed the spirit of God in him.

Samson one of his colleague returns to the immediate problem of rehabilitating kotanu to reenact the fatal accident at the broken bridge and prepare their eye-witness statement for the police investigation. Samson's account is factual. Excitement runs through the scene.

Professor, reacting to the narration on a different level altogether from Kotonu and Samson, interpolates a range of images of death and waste. From Kotonu, it seems, his near fatal approach to the broken bridge signifies a personal boundary, between the known and the unknown. For Samson, it was a merely a narrow escape, although a narrow escape, although he recounts the episode with great energy and excitement.

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He warns Kotonu that it is necessary to make a propitiatory sacrifice to the god of the road, Ogun, by killing a dog if he wishes to preserve his own life. Professor's remark about Murano being a god startles the usually inert Kotonu, but the latter's frantic demand for an explanation is ignored.

Professor has been taken to the accident store by Kotonu. In fact Kotonu has been concealed by Professor, who believes that Murano holds within him the secret knowledge for which he so desperately searches: the knowledge of the essence of death, and the secret of the transitional experience from life to death. Professor's jealousy guards Murano who, even though he is mute, is expected to supply the answer to Professor's questions: "I am so confused, but I have sight and vision only for the word and it may chance, sometimes that I miss the way among wordy human beings"(Soyinka 10).

But the Egungun masqueraders are searching for their lost mask-bearer, and their frenzied violence increases as they sense the presence of Murano at the end of the play. Their violence infects the drivers, and Professor is killed, either as an intruder into the Ogun rite, or as a religious violator, or a punishment for his dangerous pride, or by sheer accident after a clumsy scuffle.

After a few minutes, Joe, a corrupt policeman suddenly rounds on Kotonu, an easier victim to ask him about his activities on the day of the Driver's festival, the feast of Ogun, the dog-eater; the day on which god was abducted. Now, say Tokyo kid, a lorry driver and caption of toughs, intervenes and persuades him that Ogun's appearance and disappearance were perfectly normal.

Particulars Joe is baffled, and any further attempt to investigate the mystery by orthodox police methods is discouraged by the gang threatening to invoke the murderous Ogun. Kotonu gives an account of his part in the events of the Driver's festival.

Samson is struck with horror. He realizes that he has been impersonating a dead man, a victim of Ogun's demand for sacrifice. Thus a taboo is broken. Samson is increasingly distressed. By seeing the prevailing conditions, Professor vehemently asserts that there is no difference between the lawlessness of war and the battlefield of the present time. He gives a lecture which is as absurd as ever. In need of self-confidence, he allows the group to sing his favorite praise-song about communion with the spirit world. In the song he is depicted as their protective patron and the link between the worlds of men and gods. Far from being pleased by this song, Professor is enraged. He rejects any responsibility for the drivers, expressing a superhuman contempt for them, and points out that he is merely using them as means to an end.

Finally, Professor makes clear that Murano is merely a man, but with the spirit of God in him, and that he has been held captive by the Professor as a means of cheating death by foreknowledge. In other words, Professor hopes to experience death and learn its secret mysteries through Murano, without dying himself.

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When Say Tokyo Kid criticizes Professor, he is frenzied by their incomprehension and opposition. The Egungnu is building up to a state of possession Kotonu is upbraided by Samson for his business partnership with the Professor. Unlike Sergeant, Burma he has had no prior experience of morally regarding the effect of war to prepare him for the gruesome business of the accident store. Kotonu remarks that a man gets tired of feeling too much, the second driver's dirge is sexually lewd, but contains a reference to ancestral spirits, a link with the past.

Kotonu recites a litany of famous drivers killed on the roads, as though they were heroes Fallen in battle. The road is thus linked with the war time battlefield, the enemy being Ogun, and traveling the road becomes a metaphor for destiny itself. Professor instructs his followers to imitate the road, in all its treachery and destruction. He has intervened with his own personal search for a revelation of the word and set up his own parallel ritual, and therefore directly challenging the procedure and climax of Ogun masquerade. This becomes clear when he says, "my task is to keep company with the fallen... only the fallen have need of restitution"(p.51).

Professor is expecting the spirit of the God to be made flesh, but he does not need or want a public manifestation of death's meaning." And should I not hope, with him, to cheat, to anticipate the final confrontation; earning its nature baring its skulking face, why may I not understand?" (p. 52).

### **Hidden Knowledge**

There is no suggestion that hidden knowledge will be thereby revealed and there is no revelation of the essence of death. Professor pauses on to them no discovery, only on injunction to collaborate with the road as an agent of carnage and pointless doom. The mask becomes the sound of the driver's dirge as Professor's head falls forward. The design of Professor's quest is revealed when he speaks to Samson that he should no more cheat. Thus the Professor's use of mute Murano is revealed.

The knowledge of death concealed from all men is his motivation for using Murano. He manipulates all those around him for an intensely personal revelation and is clearly prepared to engineer road deaths by uprooting road signs and forging driving licenses for inexperienced and unqualified drivers in pursuit of the experience of death.

He wishes to experience death vicariously, that is by directing others to the boundary of life and death whilst he himself remains uninvolved and ready to learn from their direct contact. Soyinka's ability to combine description with symbolic suggestiveness provides a rich texture of magnificent but cruel beauty. It is the mingling of prosaic facts with allusive meanings which gives the play its haunting element of threatening disaster, half glimpsed explanations, shadow presences and elusive meanings.

### **Soyinka's Focus**

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For Soyinka, death is a rite of passage from one world to the next, the focus of his artistic imagination and the point at which Yoruba mythology and contemporary experience meet.

Ogun's dual nature implies that, the destruction in one form of being will lead to a new creation; that fire will consume and also give birth to purer forms. But Soyinka's tragic imagination concentrates on the fact of destruction and waste; he sees no sign yet of what Professor in *The Road* calls a resurrection of rebirth. The world depicted in *The Road* is in itself a state of transition between the fading certainties of established religion and a confused and violent present of uncertainty in which savage gods take a heavy toll of human life.

The central image of the road is a symbol: of progress of an actual road marked by reckless driving and violent deaths; of the road of life from birth to death, and from this world to the next; and of the passage between life and death in the sense that its travelers move along a boundary which at any moment can be crossed and which leads to the certainty of sacrificial death demanded by Ogun. Thus Professor's individual quest for the meaning of life through the essence of death is the pattern of every man's quest for knowledge in a world of confused values, false prophets, and wrong turnings in the figure of Professor we can also see the symbol of man as restless intellect, never willing or able to cease questioning the world he lives in, always ready to grasp the power of a god and use it for his own ambition, but eventually destroyed by his pride and lust for domination.

### **In Masque Tradition**



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The entire play is set in the masque tradition. Masque is a form of aristocratic entertainment in England in the 16th and 17th centuries, originally consisting of pantomime and dancing but later including dialogue and song, presented in elaborate productions given by amateur and professional actors. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Masque>

Soyinka provides two kinds of preface to *The Road*. He draws attention to the unfamiliar use of the masque idiom, to the significance of death and to the main characters' search for the essence of death. Reference is also made to Ogun. In the prefatory poem *Alagemo*, the connected themes of transition from life to death and dissolution of the flesh are presented in a series of vivid images. The key theme of the play is the states of life in death and death in life to movement as a theme; and to a certain kind of stylization in treating these themes.

### **The Incomprehensible Lord of Life**

The traditional Yoruba significance of Agemo, the incomprehensible Lord of life, is mystery and death. The spirit contains the essence of death, and he hints at an unknown but certainly violent future. The play begins and ends with this ominous note. The masque tradition in which *The Road* is set and the fact that it takes place within an interrupted Ogun masquerade is a constant reminder that Professor is tempering with dangerous and impenetrable spiritual mysteries.

The use of dirges and the recurrent mention of Murano, the god apparent, provide a chorus from the spiritual world which Professor is attempting to penetrate, but they also indicate the impassable boundary along which all the events of the play are arranged. Thus the form of *The Road* is an integral expression of its meaning.

### **Portraying the Derelict Conditions**

In *The Road* Soyinka clearly pictures the derelict condition of the able-bodied young men who are reduced to useless beings due to illiteracy, ignorance and poverty. There is a whole gang of zombies and the Professor is the chief. The underhand dealing of the Professor puzzles and baffles the natives. His sole mission is creating accidents on the road with wrong sign-posts, creating an illusion of reality which ends up in the death of many people. The selling of spare-parts is rather a side business. The Professor holds the reins and deftly manipulates the accidents. He maneuvers the death of many lives in such an off-hand manner. It seems the most natural thing to him.

### **A Character for the Universal Political Scene**

Say Tokyo kid is a typical character, very relevant to the universal political scene. He is a lorry driver, but is more interested in leading a gang of hooligans. This gang helps politicians in disrupting meetings of the opponents. Particulars Joe is another typical character—a corrupt policeman, who fits into the scene smoothly. Professor himself is a Sunday-school teacher and a

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lay preacher in a church close to his shop. He loses his position in the church after charges of embezzlement of funds and drunken misbehavior. He loses his faith in the validity of Christian teaching, but retains his interest in spiritual matters. He is obsessed with one idea to find the key to the mysterious truth which he calls “the Word”, and which he believes is closely related to death. He firmly believes that one cannot understand the meaning of life, unless one understands the meaning of death. This notion prompts him to settle close to the road, as number of accidents occurs there. He even manipulates certain accidents especially when he runs short of spare parts in his shop. He has a lucrative business.

### **The Opening Scene: The Aksident Store**

The opening 'scene' displays some of the terms on which the play asks to be understood and communicates the mood wholly through setting and mime. The road, the corner of a church, and an old mammy wagon now used as the 'Aksident Store' are not merely the physical setting but communicate, through their usual everyday associations, the religious and social dimensions of the play. Their constant presence on stage sustains this function: the road links the spiritual and the satirical aspects of the play by being the agent of death as well as the path along which the dead passengers are carried to their church funeral. After this a mime rapidly suggests some patters of the play: Murano the tapster disappears into the dawn, Samson the idler probes into uncertainly after him, poking a spider's web in frustration after failing in a lonely, desperate attempt to wake his companions

The Aksident store is a money-spinning proposition. Professor sells parts of wrecked cars. He sells his advice at exorbitant prices. Manipulation is an art he has perfected, and does not mind practicing it on his disciples, if it brings him close to truth. To cheat is his motto, and he has no qualms about it. His goal is absolute knowledge, but he is not prepared to make personal sacrifices. He believes that he can make use of Ogun, whose spirit dwells in Murano's body. “I must hope, even now, I cannot yet believe that death's revelation must be total or not at all” ( TR 226). He has failed to realize that absolute knowledge cannot be achieved if one is firmly anchored in the world of living. Whoever wants to gain insight into the mysteries of being, of existence, must die-either ritually, like Murano, or physically like Professor. He realizes the truth, while on the threshold of death. “Breathe like the road, be even like the road itself” (228).

The Aksident Store is furnished with spare parts garnered from road accidents. In his shack of Nigerian subculture, the atmosphere, idiom, hopes and aspirations, of the “motor park” is dramatized. People of all sorts haunt this place, drivers and their touts, unemployed men, thugs, political opportunists who supplement their incomes by taking part in profitable conflicts. These ‘layabouts’ occupy a ‘sort of island of lost souls’ presided over by Professor. The characters assembled in the shack belong to the lower classes. One of them is Kotonu, a competent driver, who has given up the road after two near escape from death. He is Professor's new business partner keeping shop for the mortuary as Samson puts it disgustingly. He is

mentally shaken and despite warnings from his friends, he goes to the scene of accident. Professor describes the accident as “showers of crystals flying on broken souls” (TR159).

### **Death by Road: Emotional and Personal Overtones**

The subject of death by road appeared earlier in his poem "Death in the Dawn," and the Segun Awolowo poem. In "Death in the Dawn," dawn is a time of hope, tinted with fear. The people make their way to the market in the early morning mist. The men have not found the meaning of life; they are groping in the dark. The road waits for them and devours them. Soyinka captures the sudden transformation from life to death which takes place when the car crashes. Man is trapped in his own invention. Progress has only exposed man to more frightening forms of death. In the poem "In Memory of Segun Awolowo" the grief is personal. Death is not mere abstraction for him, but a concrete foe. His triumph is certain, but what makes it revolting is that our fellow-men are in league with Death.

Professor is keen on finding out the meaning of Death, though it is very elusive. His quest is not merely intellectual; it has emotional as well as personal overtones. He is groping his way through the evening of life towards death, and also the achievement of that divine status, which he loses by his fall from ecclesiastical grace. He is nagged by the feeling of guilt over the embezzlement of church funds. He appears to be a mad man to some people because of his verbal virtuosity. He cannot define the Word, but he uses it in changing and bewildering context. The Word becomes an elusive landmark which Professor fails to lay his hands on. He insists on saying that the Word is growing, and its growth is determined by the context in which it is placed.

### **A Lonely Pathfinder**

Professor, once a Christian, is a lonely pathfinder. Underneath this frenzied search, there is a process at work, symbolized by Ogun. This is the law which says that man will destroy man by his relentless search for progress. He is an individual who is dominated by his pride and arrogance and by massive self-centredness which is a denial of the common interest. His mysterious words cast a spell on everyone. His quest is awe-inspiring, as he is keen on finding out the crook, an expert in forgery and a thief. He engineers road deaths, by manipulating the road signs. He sends others to the boundary between life and death in his search for knowledge. Through the strange vision he possesses, the deeply embedded need in man for possession of ultimate knowledge and power is emphasized. How he plans to fulfill his ambitions forms the crux of the play

### **The Theology of Flesh Dissolution**

It is this acceptance of the Yoruba view of flesh dissolution in place of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation which brings Professor into association with drivers whose trade involves death, and with Agemo, described by Soyinka as 'a religious cult of flesh dissolution'.

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The rejection of his Christian background is the point of departure for the evolution of Professor's philosophy. In some sense, it also signified the changes in the worldview and theology of Soyinka.

The religious background becomes the language through which we understand the dramatic unfolding of Professor's experience. He is feeling his way through the evening of his life towards not just death but also the achievement of that divine status which he apparently lost by his fall from ecclesiastical grace. This fall is represented in the play as guilt over embezzled Church funds and as blasphemy against Church dogma, especially on the interpretation of the Word. Professor's rejection of Christian theology appears to be final but is really equivocal. Although he builds his shack in competition with the church after his apparent excommunication, he insists that the Church cannot cast him out. However the contradiction in his position does not affect his single-minded Quest.

### **The Word – A Notion Re-interpreted by Soyinka**

Word is the moving force in the play. Professor is looking out for the Word – he is partly mad, partly inspired. He is enigmatic as the word. He ceaselessly attempts to define the elusive word. He seeks the help of Christian imagery. “There are dangers in the quest I know, but the Word may be found companion not to life, but death. “Three souls you know, fled up that tree ... they died, all three of them crucified on rigid branches” (p. 159). His quest leads him into a state of frenzied activity. He can see nothing else but the word. “I am so confused, but I have sight and vision only for the word, and it may chance, sometimes that I miss my way in the proximity of death. ( pp158 ).

### **Desire to See and Hear at the Moment of One's Passage**

Professor is not been able to get close to a dying person in order to find out what one sees and hears at the moment of one's passage. He is happy to find Murano in a semi-dying state. He hopes to get the revelation of the word, and pass it on to his disciples. He has the ability to penetrate sensitively into another world. Professor is a type of westernized Yoruba, who is caught between two worlds. The traditionalist, perhaps, has found a way of ritually containing the fearful reality of death, whereas Professor has not been able to do so. Professor is a typical Westernised Yoruba caught between two worlds. Christianity has not given him the strength he needed, and he is alienated from his traditional religion. He is an individualist, and worse than that, he is eccentric.

### **The Quest for the Word**

The Professor's obsession in the play is the quest for the 'Word'. The quest for the word goes beyond the desire for knowledge to a longing for self-deification. The word is elusive, trapped in the” slumbering chrysalis of the word” Professor's search for it among the rejects,

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abandoned scraps of paper, newspaper and the like, indicates a topsy-turvydom in which the hierarchical values are reversed. This reversal of values is seen in Professor's association of the word with Death. Such association is in contrast with the fundamental Christian belief, according to which Christ is seen as the savior, who shows the way, to the truth and the Life throughout Eternity. It is also in conflict with the Yoruba teaching which recognizes the duality of life and death forces.

Professor's assumptions are at odds with established religious beliefs, whether Christian or Yoruba "he flutters mid-way between the practices of the church, and the belief of Yoruba religion and culture" (peters 191). His search for the Word is an ambivalent quest. It may be viewed as simply a quest for meaning or, since it is a quest for the essence of death, it may be considered as an attempt to seek immortality through the conquest of death itself. In his search for meaning Professor examines the only certainty in mortal existence, the certainty of death in a bid to find the key to its mystery. In one of his pronouncements, for instance, he declares that 'the Word may be found companion not to life but Death' (p. 159). thus if death is meaningless and without any essential purpose, life itself becomes trivial and worthless unless some rationalization suggests a future existence for which life and death are merely a prelude.

### **Quest – A Perennial Instinct**

In his quest for meaning Professor represents the perennial instinct in man which longs to justify and explain the complex world he lives in and his place in it. Characteristically, man tries to probe the foundation of his existence and to project meaning and relevance onto life. The discovery of death's secret would be a key not only to knowledge but also could lead to an extension of life's meaning through an extension of mortality into immortality. Such an undertaking, however, is a perilous course fraught with dangers, since it is an attempt to bridge the gulf of transition and become united with godly essence. The all-creating Word which expresses the indestructible energy of God is the Word which the Professor seeks. His concern is vital, not a morbid one although he seeks this Word in the presence and process of death. The Professor seems to be learning to master the fear of death which often inhibits the fullness of life. 'One must cheat fear, he says, by foreknowledge'.

### **Disillusion with the Professor**

People are disillusioned by the Professor. He is obsessed with the 'Word'. The 'Word' is not to be found in denial. In denying, he cannot follow the path of God and understand his message. Denial does not mean denying oneself of worldly pleasures alone. The Professor saying, "Life is difficult for the faithless. But do not despair"(pp 180) shoes that basic faith and trust in man is important to keep life going. He is a representative of the modern, civilized man groping in wilderness with nothing to cling on to.

Although the Professor is well-versed in The Bible and Christianity and is one who will definitely bow whenever the name of Jesus is mentioned, he is not able to identify himself with

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charity. Being a Sunday school teacher he preaches the most effective sermons. Yet he bargains for money. He even refers to his age thus: "I am not yet sixty. Fifty-nine pounds, seven shillings and twenty-one pence-that is my real age" ( ). The actions of the Professor are inexplicable. He is an elusive character.

### **Platonic View of People and Events – Clever Use of Language**

Professor's use of language shows, not his love for the sound of words only, but his platonic view of people and events. To Samson the accident victims on three branches would have been just three dead people. For Professor they become three figures each hanging from a tree, just as the back of the doomed lorry is filled, not with people, but with stillborn.

For him, language does not merely describe the immediate, particular event, it reveals the archetypal figures and primary ideas behind it. The dramatization of this exploratory function of language emphasizes the difference between *The Road*, which deals satirically and tragically with the use of language. A kindred fullness in Professor's language suggests that perhaps he is one of those characters created out of the artist's need to purge his passion for words, and held at a distance satirically. Since language is theme and medium in the play, Professor's Quest begins as an adventure in language. Because he has not found the Word when the play begins he cannot give us a precise definition, and he uses it in shifting and frequently bewildering contexts. He predetermines its character, however, by fixing it with a familiar label although he allows himself a certain range of ambiguity to allow for interpretation and to enable him to correct his errors by adjusting his meanings.

### **Professor's Interpretation and Manipulation of the Word**

Professor begins by treating the Word in the ordinary sense of words in a language, especially printed words. This leads him to collect all printed matter within reach - newspapers, fallen road signs, and even pools coupons. He does not, however, pretend that everyday words are identical with the Word. Apparently it is the equivalence of sound and the rough correspondence of meaning which assure him that ordinary words are a means of achieving the Word. When he erroneously pulls up an erect road sign with 'BEND' on it, he admits that this is not the Word. But he hangs on to his spar of error in the absence of a usable alternative because 'every discovery is a signpost . . . eventually the subterfuge will be over, my cause vindicated' (p. 160). This insistence on the value of error gives 'BEND' an ironic relevance for his reasoning throughout the play, just as his quest for broken words in order to find the unbroken Word points to his adoption of unorthodox means for the end he seeks. The duplicity in this method is further dramatized in the uprooting of the sign: 'this word was growing, it was growing from earth until I plucked it. . .' (p. 157). Word has been associated with the Professor which leads to what is obviously the object of Professor's Quest - the Word as a divine power manifesting itself in potent utterance. This recalls what has been described as the Ogboni use of the earth cult as a means not only of preparing for death but also of gaining power,<sup>5</sup> and transmitting it verbally.

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## **Pettiness and Corruption**

The tragic grandeur of the play is balanced by a pettiness and a low level corruption in the means whereby he tries to achieve his ends. The play is about a search for hidden knowledge in a world of broken traditions and cultural chaos. It is represented in the form of a quest by a man for the essence of death. The scenario is very bleak, and is marked with despondency. Established religion has become a distant memory unable to maintain its hold over people's mind. There is a spiritual vacuum and the individual quester is left alone to seek his salvation.

## **Death, Redefined**

Death is described as a harvest, and the meanings gained at the scene of an accident are the offerings of the hungry god. Soyinka seems skeptical of the cost of progress and brings out the paradoxical nature of progress.. The theme is tragedy of human waste and loss of life. The playwright described it "as based on ... a personal intimacy with a certain aspect of the road. ... It concerns, he said, a search into the essence of death" (Gibbs 78). Professor is desirous of penetrating the very heart of phenomena. He seeks a categorical certainty, which is alien to a Yoruba world view a world-view rooted in "the very indeterminacy of Truth" (Gibbs 78).

The theme of death is well analyzed in *The Road* – death as ‘gruesome’ reality as well as a trade. One is aware of proximity to death. The spider’s web in a corner, and the alert spider is itself an eloquent symbol of the theme In “*Death in the Dawn*”, man hears the voice inviting him to his compulsory pilgrimage to Hades “traveler, you must set out, At dawn”. Technological progress has put at Man’s disposal new and effective means of getting to his destination. The sacrifice of “dawn’s lone trumpeter” is a futile rite. Progress will settle for nothing less than the startled hug of a man and motor- car. The idea is expressed in “*Around us the dawning*”. There “the wrathful wings of man’s progression ...”as he gets to “*The hidden ache... when / Death makes a swift descent*” is expressed.

Thus Progress has only exposed Man to even more frightening forms of death but Soyinka has not always contemplate Death only in the abstract. Sometimes it is a personal tragedy. In “*In Memory of Segun Awolowo*” he laments the death of an intimate friend ,

The road, the aged road  
Retched on this fresh pilnder  
Of my youth”. (p.14).

## **Viewing Death with Distant Indifference**

The sting of personal loss prevents the possibility of looking with distant indifference on the strange arithmetics of Death . Death is not an abstraction, but a concrete foe. Death is the arch- enemy. His triumph is certain . No human being can escape as he plods or jets along his road of life. The road is fraught with dangers, as it is infected with reckless drivers. There is an

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air of uncertainty about one reaching the destination. It is very similar to the lack of direction which characterized Nigerian society in 1965.

The road is used as a symbol to capture the transitional stage of his country and its very precarious socio-political state on the verge of civil war. He was appalled by the large number of road fatalities on Nigerian highways. Kotonu remarks, "the road and the spider is gloating. Then the fly buzzes along like a happy fool" (178). In one of his poems, "In Memory of Segun Awolowo," Soyinka characterizes the road as "the aged road/retched on this fresh plunder/of my youth" (Idanre and Other Poems 14). The road is a hungry, man-devouring monster. Professor urges the travellers to be aggressors. They can achieve this by imbibing the very qualities of the road a snake like deceit and treachery. In essence, his quest fails since, according to Soyinka, both religious structures – the church and the traditional Yoruba religion – turn out to be "restricted by orthodox acceptances."

### **Adam Replanting Life!**

Professor is ruthless and indifferent to human loss. Kotonu makes this remark about Professor, "He was moving around those corpses as if they didn't exist. All he cared about was replanting that sign-post. To see him you would think he was Adam replanting the Tree of Life" (167). Advocates of peace and non-violence would be appalled at the alarming conditions of the Nigerian society, where the common people are preying on one another like hyenas. Corruption pervades every aspect of life—law, religion, human relations, play is like Soyinka's writing on the nation's wall. He depicts a society which has lost its grip over the essentials of life, and is on the road to dissolution and death. . The network of roads is symbolic of the bureaucratic system of regulations, licenses and taxes. This set-up has encouraged corruption.

### **Road as a Predator**

The road is not a fixed symbol- it is path as well as a predator. As a path it is the physical road that we tread. It is also trajectory of Professor's quest and medium of benefits and scourges of civilization. The road's rapacious nature matches the spider's function as a similarly Professor is not a representative quester charting out a path for every man to decide to achieve the positive through the negative; to find life through death, value through rejection. He exploits the castaways and wants their lives to end in meaningless death. He does not hide his regret that no one has died in the motor accident. He rushes to the site of the accident to arrest the flight of the souls of the newly dead in order to pluck from them the secret of death and life. He plucks the cautionary road sign and plants the sign 'bend'. All this is part of the intellectual striving after the word, as essence of death. It is self-pride which propels Professor to know what only the Gods know. Man's egoism has led him to believe that he cannot be confined to earthly life like other creatures. Professor's egoism displays his extraordinary insolence, the insolence of a man with a will to power and knowledge. The road is a symbol in Soyinka's work of aggression, threat and man's quest for meaning that brings death. Man is ignorant of the threat, yet Soyinka himself realizes the futility of man's actions in his attempts to master the road.

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Soyinka focuses on the violent and the predatory in his use of the road as symbol and setting. On the realistic level, the world of drivers, touts and thugs is so well realized that the drama of their lives, as portrayed in the play, becomes satisfying entertainment in its own right. The only anomaly in this road setting is Professor, in his dress and in his concern with the “word business” as Samson puts it. Yet, on this realistic level, even he enjoys a measure of justification because of his spare parts enterprise and his forgeries of drivers’ licenses. The violence of the roadsters’ way of life is also well documented through direct reporting and role playing. The reactions of these men to the impact of the road on their lives varies from Say Tokyo’s fatalism to Samson’s plea, “May we never walk when the road waits, famished.” This prayer which is echoed in “Death in the Dawn,” a poem in the section “Of the Road” in *Idanre and Other Poems*, identifies the role of the road as symbol in the play.

Samson’s personification of the road is echoed by Particulars Joe when, in reply to the Professor’s question about the God he pretends to worship, he answers “Same as the other sir, the road.” But, despite the emphasis on its character as predator, the road is not a fixed symbol. It is changeable as Professor observes in his expatiation on the relationship between his road and the Word.

### **Death of the Professor**

Professor’s death has given rise to very different interpretations. Ketu Katrak sees it as Ogun’s intervention for the purpose of annihilating a social menace.’ She sees the death as ‘the kind of destructiveness of Ogun (that) opens the road to a spiritually healthy life for the community.(pp 74). its title. In many cultures the road is the religious reality symbolizing mans aspirations to reach the gods. Symbolically it also refers to the passage from this world to the holy world which the Professor resembles the shaman who receives supernatural instructions which enable him to guide the tribe in its prodigious wanderings.

The game of death is played by Ogun, who reveals in unseasonal harvests, such as the death of the playwright’s friend, Segun Awolowo who reveals in un-seasonal harvests, such as the death of the playwright’s friend, Segun Awolowo. It was "plunder of my youth," he says, Death has been the "scrap-iron dealer." The paradox in Soyinka's concept of tragedy is the contradiction between Ogun's caprice and man's Free Will. This imparts a touch of irony. The road could be the proverbial road of life, along which men must travel It could also be a symbol of progress, a notion ridiculed by Soyinka in many of his works, who would question the

Wrathful wings of Man's Progression . . .  
But such another Wraith! Brother,  
Silenced in the startled hug of  
Your invention—is the mocked grimace  
This closed contortion—I?

(“Death in the Dawn,” *Idanre and Other Poems*)

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## **A Traveller to the Destination of Death**

Man is a traveller along the road that leads to one destination: Death . In “Death in the Dawn” a mother pleads : “ ... Child – May you walk- When the road waits, famished.” (p.11). In the road Samson repeats this plea: “May we never walk when the road waits , famished. ” (p.60). The exhortation not to travel when the road waits, famished, is futile because Man is a pilgrim who must travel. In a general and impersonal manner ‘Idanre’ tells of the horror on the life-eating road:

We walked through broken braids of steel  
And fallen acrobats. The endless safety nets  
Of forests prove a green deception  
Fated lives ride on the wheels of death when,  
The road waits, famished .(p.64).

The key to human life is beyond the reader’s grasp. “In the course of the play, the pace of transition is quickened and the community is driven to an important, crucial road junction . As Professor, the shepherd of that inglorious flock dies, the readers are at the end of an era. Soyinka describes Professor as a “Charlatan, outcast, communal teacher and quester innocent and cunning, a stray among strays, priest and profaner, moulder and iconoclast the community (traditional Yoruba believers) which he, in effect appropriates and opposes to the one which cast him out, proves in the end,just as controlled and restricted by orthodox acceptances as the former” (Katrak 74). The road symbolizes Ogun.

The overall impression of Professor’s last words are obscure. The monologue ends abruptly, as death intervenes. The reader wonders if he is exhorting him to prey upon one another: an exhortation to the seeker of truth to accept death as something natural. Professor’s “intellectual grope” ends with his death.*The Road* is skillfully handled play with the fine use of irony. Soyinka has exhibited his penetrating insight into the trends of modern life. It expresses man’s frustration because he has no faith, no enthusiasm and no convictions.It is a picture of the modern man suffering from a deep moral malady, unable to free himself from dishonesty and fraud.

## **Ogun is Ever Present**

Ogun dominates the play with his presence. He is the road and is in possession of the truth. Anyone who wants to get at the truth must surrender himself to Ogun, even at the risk of his life. Ogun wants to accept death as a prelude to life; from the decay of the dead past comes new life. Ogun is not in favour of death as a result of political violence, or of sheer carelessness. Ritual death results in temporary effacement of individual personality, and is attainable in the ecstasy of ritual dancing. A meaningful life is one in one realizes the absolute oneness of everything that exists. Professor gets this realization through the agency of Ogun, for he is

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stabbed with a knife, an instrument made of steel, which is sacred to Ogun. It is Ogun, in the guise of the possessed Murano, who says the champion of meaningless killing Say Tokyo kid.

The wall in the church comes down. This symbolizes the collapse of the false edifice they had setup. The community had pursued the shadow of Christian practice. The collapse of the wall symbolizes the triumph of external forces over the church. One significant observation is that there is no difference in the standard of mortality between the church community and the one outside it. Professor has been in the forefront of the Christian onslaught, and is involved in the embezzlement of church funds. He and others interrupted the Christian injunction in a narrow way. After leaving the church where there is so much hypocrisy. His search the word develops into necromantic practice.

### **Appearances are Deceptive!**

Appearances are deceptive, and so it is with the Professor. He appears to be a bundle of contradictions, but he is not. He is a perfect deceiver as a seeker and as a forger of driver's licenses. As a seeker he is deceiving others, as well as himself. The Word is enshrouded in a haze which cannot be penetrated. Murano is the only crutch on which Professor leans for his spiritual aid, but Murano has been deprived of the power of speech. Professor claims that Murano is the sole guardian of the Word. People like him in a state of suspension of death. He has slept beyond the portals of secret. They have pierced the guard of eternity and unearthed the word, a golden nugget on the tongue. And so their tongue hangs heavy and they are forever silenced" (186). Two focal points are provided in the play, Professor and Kotonu. Professor has a colonial background. As a young man he had waged holy war against palm-wine bars; later, he became lay-reader and then left the church. A complex character like Professor can never be defined, part wise man and part fool.

### **Contradictory Traits – Professor and His Personality**

Professor is complex and full of contradictory traits. Instead of seeing such a character as a villain worthy to be annihilated, he is a kind of satanic hero. Certainly something of that romantic legacy has gone into the figure of this multiplex character. His breaking away from the church and searching for the word on his own becomes paradigmatic. It is difficult therefore to think that his death is a punishment when the metaphysical thrust of the play points to very different conclusions. He is a character who defies analysis. A charismatic character, he defeats our efforts at identifying him as a specific type. He is verbose, though uneducated, eccentric, and is intoxicated with the 'learning.' His quest is the vicarious experience of the passage from life to death in the belief that "the Word may be found companion not to life but to Death" (159). He is doubtful whether the Word exists in the church. "I stood often behind the bronze wings of the eagle; on the broad span of the eagle's outstretched wings rested the Word—oh what a blasphemy it all was but I did not know it" (205).

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Professor's haunts are next to the shadows of death. The quest leads him from the respectable brass lectern to the driver's shack, but it can only be found in death. He uses all his intellectual resources in order to make money. He charges the illiterate exorbitant "consultation fees" even when they want to discuss a simple problem. Forging drivers' license is an artistic endeavor for him. He feels that his powers are on the wane and that life is receding from him. This needs a little adjustment. He justifies his illegal activity as "a solution, a compensation, a redress, a balance of inequalities" (187) and ignores its fatal ramifications. The word is the guiding force of Professor's life and the motive for his quest. It summons up the tradition divine power of God's word, which was the medium of his communion with men. It is related to the divine pattern of which our world is a copy. Christ becomes the word. Professor assimilates all these meanings and strives to add on the secret knowledge of the transition between life and death. The accidents are signposts on the road of his quest for word, which is the essence of death itself.

Professor is a composite of earlier protagonists .Brother Jero and Eman. Jero's longing for sainthood is surpassed by Professor's yearning for knowledge and godhead in *The Road*. Eman's death like Professor's inordinate desire for the power of knowledge is not as devastating as the savage propensities of Kongi and Dr.Bero, who have modern weapons of war at their disposal. Professor feels that he has the capacity to combat the consequences of sacrilege as he has superior understanding Professor is a cross between of sacrilege as he has superior – he is a maverick Professor is presented as a syncretist but the vision that propels him is verbalized in Christian terminology. 'Revelation', 'crucifixion', 'miracle', 'resurrection', 'communion' are terms that recur in the play. Professor's speech is strongly coloured by Biblical echoes and images.

### **Paradoxical Nature of Truth**

Men who follow in the footsteps of the successful Ogun may suffer disintegration of their individual selfhoods. Ogun is "the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man" (Myth 150). He is the artistic spirit and the first tragic actor. The protagonist of the Yoruba 'ritual of archetypes' is a surrogate for Ogun and his experience of ritual possession is actually reliving of the god's dissolution and reintegration. "The actor in the ritual drama...prepares mentally and physically for his disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin, experiences the transitional, inchoate matrix of death and being"(Myth 30). There is a mingling of experiences in this typical Nigerian setting. A specific ethnic situation calls for ritual celebration. In *The Road*, such a situation is delineated. Each evening the Professor serves palm-wine in a version of the communion rite which compliments the service held in the church. (pp122). **[EUNUCHS of will power and power mongers: Wole Soyinka's *The Road and Death and the King's Horseman*-M.PUSHPA]**

Professor's search for the Word in the play *The Road* is an ambivalent quest. It may be viewed as simply a quest for meaning or since, it is a quest for the essence of death, it may be considered as an attempt to seek immortality through the conquest of death itself.

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In his search for meaning Professor examines the only certainty in mortal existence, the certainty of death, in a bid to find the key to its mystery. In one of his pronouncements, for instance, he declares that “the Word may be found companion not to life but death”. Thus, if death is meaningless and without any essential purpose, life itself becomes trivial and worthless unless some rationalization suggests a future existence for which life and death are merely a prelude. In his quest for meaning Professor represents the perennial instinct in man which longs to justify and explain the complex world he lives in and his place in it. Characteristically, man tries to probe the foundation of his existence and to project meaning and relevance onto life. In the process, he has reached out to the supernatural world which gods and spirits are thought to inhabit because physical forces alone do not sufficiently explain the ultimate value of his existence. Professor may seem at first to strike a discordant note. But the greatest barrier to a contemplation of earthly life as a totally rewarding and meaningful experience is the purposeless waste of countless human lives through war, disaster or some other circumstances.

In *The Road Kotonu*, the driver-turned salesman who manages Professor’s “Aksident Store” with its boast “All Part Available” reflects on his and Samson’s narrow escape from death. He is at a loss to understand why the people in the lorry that overtook them after an accident at the bridge were killed while they were spared. In his search Professor goes beyond circumstances of life such as this to investigate the nature of death. If he can understand its secret he will be able to fulfill an intellectual yearning for knowledge.

### **Discovering the Secret of Death**

The discovery of death’s secret would be a key not only to knowledge but also could lead to an extension of life’s meaning through an extension of mortality in to immortality. Such an undertaking, however, is a perilous course fraught with dangers, since it is an attempt to bridge the gulf of transition and become united with godly essence. The *Road* is in fact prefaced by a poem, “Alagemo” which alludes to the dissolution of the flesh that occurs when a person passes from physical to spiritual essence. The poem prefigures Professor’s sacrilegious attempt to recreate out of turn the dance of “Agemo” which had been suspended when Murano the mask-wearer was struck down by Kotonu’s lorry in another road accident. As Soyinka explains in his prefatory note, “For the Producer, “ this final dance of the play “is the movement of transistion .... used in the play as a visual suspension of death in much the same way as Murano, the mute, is a dramatic embodiment of that suspension” (RO vi). Soyinka elaborates thus on the role of Murano in the rite of transistion:

He functions as an arrest of time, or, death, since it was in his “agemo” phase that the lorry knocked him down. Agemo, the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from human to the divine essence (as in the festival of Ogun in this play) as much as the part psychic, part intellectual grope of Professor towards the essence of death.



## Yearning for Self-Deification



Professor's quest for the Word seems to go beyond the desire for knowledge to a yearning for self-deification. His exertions in this direction are the subject of study in the play. They are framed within a frozen moment of time and history. Consequently, his stopped watch "still tells the time". The events of the past, present and the future merge within this limbo to the extent that the episodes appear to be unco-ordinated events in an elaborate Absurdist vein. The enigmatic Word itself which Professor describes as elusive is trapped. "Fast is demonic bondage" until its kernel, "the slumbering chrysalis of the Word", can be forced to crack. But Professor's search for it only among rejects, abandoned scraps of paper, newsprint, and the like, indicates a topsyturvydom in which hierarchical values are reversed.

The reversal of values is inherent not only in his quasi-religious search for the Word among abandoned words but also in Professor's association of the Word with death. Such an association contrasts with the fundamental Christian belief according to which Christ is seen as the Saviour who represents the Way, the Truth and the Life throughout the eternity. It is also in conflict with Yoruba teaching which recognizes the duality of life-and-death forces. Thus in terms of his philosophical pursuit Professor's assumptions are at odds with established religious belief whether Christian or Yoruba. He has been ousted from the church and has set himself up just outside its stained windows. He flutters midway between the practices of the church and the beliefs of the Yoruba religion and culture.

The characters in *The Road* are either predators of victims or both. Professor is the arch predator exploiting all his dependants. But the men of the road are often predators in their own right. Kotonu, for instance, is afraid of becoming a sacrificial victim to the road. In his function as the manager of Professor's store he accepts, however half-heartedly, the role of predator

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himself. Perhaps even more explicitly Say-Tokyo Kid, who is something of an antagonist to Professor, assumes the role of predator as leader of the gang. He feels that he is protected from the ravages of the road as a son of timber but nonetheless resigned, unlike Kotonu, to the possibility of violent death on the road- as long as he is crushed by solid timber instead of by some third-rate wood. Each in his own way, Chief-in-town and Particulars Joe represents the corrupt and violent world of politics and government that lies beyond the shack. Professor has however no control over chief-in –town who, as the type of the vicious politician, is an exploiter himself.

### **Discovering the Incommunicable Essence of Death**

Professor Eldred Jones begins a discussion of *The Road* with the observation that “There will probably always be some question as to the ultimate value of whatever it is Professor finds at the end of his research for the Word in *The Road*. After a sensitive reading of the play Jones concludes that Professor has found the incommunicable essence of death for himself. But Soyinka does not believe that all men have this discerning quality. Nor is Professor a representative quester charting a path that every man has to follow. He has rejected orthodox values calling them an illusion of the Word. He seems to think that the beaten path has, apart from many theories and controversies, brought forth no startling revelations about the meaning and extension of life into eternity. His aim, therefore, is to achieve the positive by pursuing the negative: to find life through death, meaning through unmeaning, value through rejection. In the face of the love of such contraries in established religion, there appears to be a depth of reason in the height of Professor’s madness.

In her book, *Long Drums and Cannons*, Margaret Laurence has made this pointed observation about Professor’s vainglory: “Professor, at the end, is mad in a way that is universally comprehensible and for which no better term has ever been found than hubris, the self-pride of the man compelled to try to know what only the gods may know, to be in fact a god.” Laurence’s remark, in the same context, that the Word may not even exist is an avowal of the paradox inherent in the quest.

(191-196) *A DANCE OF MASKS*-Senghor, Achebe, Soyinka by Jonathan Peters)

### **Pretending to be Christ and God-apparent**

Professor assumes the tone of Christ in words like ‘only the fallen have need of restitution’ (pp 220) or again in his exhortation of his disciple: ‘Life is difficult for the faithless, but do not despair’ (pp 180). The quest of Professor is bound up with Murano is a dramatic embodiment of the suspension of death. ‘He functions as an arrest of time or death, since it was in his agemo phase thale trughe lorry knocks him down. Agemo, the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence..’ (pp 149). Since Murano is in this liminal phase and Professor knows it, he hopes to find the word through him. He explains: ‘when a man has one leg in each world, his legs are never the same. ‘ The big toe of Murano’s foot – the left one of course - rests on the slumbering chrysalis of the Word. When that crust cracks my

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friends – you and I, that is the moment we await. That is the moment of our rehabilitation.’(pp187).

Murano is also ‘god-apparent’ since the accident that knocked him down happened when he was the masquerade at Ogun festival, the medium possessed by the god, and he has not returned to his mortal form but exists in the Agemo state. Professor, who has deeper mystic knowledge than the others says, ‘you brought a god to my door step’ (pp 199 ). This is why the daily sharing of the palm-wine brought by Murano becomes the ‘hour of the sacrament’, ‘the communion hour’. So the Quest of Professor for the word, which he believes to be a secret enshrined in the mute god –apparent, assumes the nature of the quest of all mystery religions, which is mystical union with the god. In his enigmatic language Professor tells Samson where the word can be found: ‘where ascent is broken and a winged secret plummets back to earth’ (pp 187). The explanatory note on Agemo helps us to understand the phrase or the description as applied to Murano. So the quest of Professor is for the kind of experience granted to the very boldest and most persistent of the devotees of mystery religions, the secret of the god, which is really a dangerous quest. Hence the climax of the play is one intense spiritual dread. The moment Murano sees the Ogun mask is a moment of deep significance. And the death of Professor occurs at a moment of revelation of the mystery. As soon as Murano sees the mask, the arrested process is set in motion once again.

Murano’s peculiar reaction to the mask is first noticed by Say Tokyo kid who exclaims, “Say whas wrong wir that kid?”(p. 223). And the stage direction tells us: It cuts across the noise, they mostly turn to look at Murano who has seen the mask and lifted it out, to the table, his eyes fixed on the mute, the silence reaches the Professor and he looks at them. “(CPI 223). Though at first the significance of it is played down by Professor, “You must remember he is a child and bright things attract him”(pp223). He later explains the meaning of what they see: “So, surely Murano, crawling out of the darkness, from the last suck of the throat of death, and Murano that I held a god captive, that his hands held out the day’s communion! And should I not hope, with him, to cheat, to anticipate the final confrontation, learning its nature baring its skulking face, why may I not understand...’(p. 223).

### **The Ever Present Quest Motif**

The quest motif is unmistakably there. But by making the protagonist a highly complex character – mystic, eccentric and charlatan-Soyinka introduces a great deal of subtle variation to the basic pattern. Professor’s quest, however eccentric it may appear to the lay bouts whom he has gathered around him, is certainly taken seriously by his creator himself. In his note to the director Soyinka calls this search ‘part psychic, part intellectual grope towards the essence of death’ (p. 149). To this mystic object of this search Professor gives the convenient name ‘the word ‘and as a reversal of the Christian concept of the word of life, the word here is associated with Death. The word then may be looked upon the secret that lies beyond the grave or the object of the Faustian search. The Word is the Mystery, the quest for which is fraught with danger,

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‘such dangers beset us who seek after the Word’, says Professor, and again. ‘There are dangers in the quest I know but the word...’ (CPI 158).

Kotonu is a driver by profession. He would not run over dogs as other drivers did as a ritual of sacrifice for Ogun, in the belief that Ogun accepts the dogs as sacrifices and protects the interests of the drivers. Kotonu is haunted by a guilty conscience as he knocked down an Egungun figure, Murano, who is taking part in a drivers' festival. Kotonu, stunned by this tragic event, withdrew himself, bewildered, unable to understand anything that had happened to him.

Murano is trapped in the moment when he is experiencing the transition. He represents the unadulterated old order. He is a palm-wine tapper, the representative of a traditional rural occupation. He has no ability to talk or to hear. He is dead and is sinking towards dissolution. When Samson puts the first question to Professor, Professor admits that Murano could not reveal much, as we may well expect. For Murano, the agemo masquerader knocked down by Kotonu's lorry and nursed back to partial life by Professor, has been entrusted with the secret of the Word, but is therefore 'forever silenced', like many such figures in literature who, on their return from limbo, are forbid to tell the secrets of their prison-house. Professor has been seeking to know the unknowable through language even from the idiom of the drivers and layabouts that there are areas of experience best communicated in terms which are primarily nonverbal. For example, Kotonu's problem is explicated mainly through the rituals and emblems which contribute to the language of the drivers.

### **The Irony of the Play and the Satirical Attack**

The main irony of the play is that Murano, knocked down by Kotonu, represents the drivers' god confronting the driver who would not sacrifice, and frightening him off the road. From the beginning of the play up to the point when, by turning from language to ritual, Professor admits that this foreknowledge cannot be acquired merely by waiting for a verbal revelation of Murano's secret, he is shown to be out of touch with the true idiom of the drivers. He ironically occupies an extreme position of the drivers' belief in the value of ritual when he treats every object as the mask of an archetype, and every action as a mime of an experience which can be entered into only by mimetic evocation. Thus when he comes upon Samson on an elevated chair playing at being rich, he takes the physical elevation as a sign of superior enlightenment. The darker tones which now mark Samson's speech do not, however, show that he has come to accept death as an important fact. He talks of the late Sergeant Burma as if he was alive still, and thus causes Salubi to point out that 'Sergeant Burma is dead'. The words and the whole incident look forward to that scene in which Samson manoeuvres himself into crossing the gulf to dead Sergeant Burma while innocently playing at his game of life.

The Road is a satirical attack on the official order. Soyinka ridicules the whole official order that mindlessly repeats the errors of established authority. The countryside of western Nigeria is cut by creeks and streams, some of them with deep channels and the highways include

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curves and bridges which are likely to damage due to rains. The major accident in the Play takes place on a “rotten bridge”. It is the result of apparently in same officiousness.

The Professor by his volition brings about the crisis knowing fully well that the dance of Murano as Egungun can lead to a confrontation with death./ His words at this point, addressed more to himself than to the layouts reveal this: ‘So Murano, crawling out of the darkness, from the last suck of the throat of death.... And should I not hope with him to anticipate the final confrontation, learning its nature baring its skulking face, why may I not understand...’(pp223). Then turning to Kotonu he asks, ‘Why don’t you ask him you runaway driver, why don’t you ask him to try it on, see if it fits....’(pp224). This defiant provocation brings about the only resolution possible. Death in such a situation is not a punishment, certainly not to one whom the dramatist describes and shows as searching into the essence of death’.

### **Yoruba Lore and the Play**

*The Road* is more thoroughly grounded in Yoruba lore. The road climaxes in the dance of possession, Soyinka uses Yoruba language especially for the songs : the tonal rhythms of Yoruba are in tune with the drums and the dancing, and all three – language, music and action – are inseparable from the performance of ritual. Soyinka thus owes a great debt to traditional wisdom and culture which he fashions into a literary credo .The play, enacts a ritual of possession during which a god becomes apparent. In this play Soyinka borrows from basic Yoruba beliefs to produce an atmosphere in which at one and the same time the contact with the living and the dead, the unearthly and the earthly, with the present, the past and the future is focused.

The play conveys the author’s sense of mystery, bewilderment and anxiety when confronted with the human condition and his despair at being unable to find a meaning in existence. In other words he deals with man’s predicament in the universe. He is obsessed with the thoughts of death reducing life to inanity and also concerned with the plight of man who longs for escape and freedom from the confinement within the universe .*The Road* presents life’s movement towards death that reduces everything into nothing, to be followed by a renewed movement towards the emptiness of life.

The commentary on the play by William Walsh is worth mentioning here:

‘The play is set along the road, the road from life to death; the cast is a superbly seedy gang, including the driver of a passenger truck. No Danger and No Delay; his passenger-tout driver’s mate; Samson, a mixture of Enobarbus and Mosca; a captain of thugs called Say Tokyo Kid, and a splendidly pliable policeman Particulars Joe; and brooding over all with menacing benevolence is Professor, the proprietor of the driver’s haven, a dismissed lay leader but also the oppressively strange death-in-life figure. Everyone in the play is the servant or priest, or agent of death. The road itself is ruled by Ogun, the god of war and death and roads. Road accidents which the Professor, the missionary of death helps to arrange by removing road signs from

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dangerous points of the road are Ogun's high masses. The theme of the work is life concerned as a movement towards dissolution, the action of the play is an arrest of time at the point where man is dissolving into the under world'.(pp35).

### **Dependence on Movement, Song, Music and Rituals**

The play *The Road* is a genuine work of Soyinka's creative imagination with an unusual dependence on movement, song, music of various types and ritual design. Songs are one of the major elements, which have made the play very interesting. The songs express life's movement towards death that reduces everything into nothing. Each and every song discloses different aspects of actions, which takes place in the life of a human being. The role played by rituals is significant. The play is built around the Yourba cult of 'Agemo.' Soyinka himself explains:"Agemo is simply a religious cult of flesh dissolution ... Agemo, the mere phrase includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence" (149). Murano functions as an arrest of time, or death since he was knocked down by a lorry in his "Agemo" state. Soyinka uses 'Agemo' the sense of illusion in the egungun masquerade but there is no attempt at illusion.

### **The Songs – Various Types of Repetitions**

The first song is a prefatory poem Alagemo, the connected themes of transition from life to death and dissolution of the flesh are presented in a series of vivid images. Agemo ,the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence, as much as the part psychic, part intellectual grope of Professor towards the essence of death .To quote,

I heard! I felt their reach  
And heard my naming named.  
The pit it there, the digger fell right through  
My roots have come out in the other world.  
Make away. Agemo's loops  
Are pathways of the sun?  
Rain-reeds, unbend to me, quench  
The burn of cartwheels at my waist!  
Pennant in the stream of time – Now,  
Gone, and Here the Future  
Make way. Let the river woo  
The thinning, thinning Here and  
Vanished Leap that was the Night  
And the split that snatched the heavy-lidded  
She - twin into the Dawn.  
No sweat – beads droop beneath  
The plough – wings of the hawk.  
No bettle finds a hole between Agemo's toes.

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When the whirl wind claps his feet  
It is the sundering of the.... Name of no ills....  
Of...the Not-to-be  
Of the moistening moment of a breadth ...  
Approach. Approach and feel  
Did I not speak? Is there not flesh  
Between the dead man's thumbs? (150).

It acts as a prologue, and brings out the theme and concept of the play. The metaphysical concepts have been used in the song. It is filled with unrevealable myth of death. This song signifies the search for hidden knowledge in the world of broken tradition and cultural confusion. It brings out the quest of man for the essence of death, which alone will explain the meaning of life. The whole song signifies the state of transition between the fading facts of established religion and a confused and violent present of uncertainty in which savage gods take a heavy toll of human life. The line "my roots have come out in the other world"(150) depicts the life after death either in heaven or in hades. The second half of the song is about that it the dissolution of flesh.

Soyinka captures the sudden transformation from life to death which takes place after the accident. Death is not a mere abstraction for them but a concrete foe. There is an air of uncertainty about one reaching the destination and lack of direction and lack of direction which characterized in the lives of the characters. The spiritual vacuum is highlighted when the quester is trying to seek his own salvation.

The meaning of the central symbol used in the The play *The Road* is built around the Yoruba cult of 'Agemo'. Soyinka himself explains: "Agemo is simply a religious cult of flesh dissolution... Agemo, the mere phase includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence" (149). Soyinka uses 'Agemo' as the sense of illusion in the Egunun masquerade. The metaphysical aspect of 'Agemo' is what impresses the dramatist- "flesh dissolution".

The use of epizeuxis (a fastening together, filing upon, repetition) with an immediate repetition of adjacent words is to noteworthy. The words 'Thinning , Thinning' can be cited as a example in this poem. The anaphoric, repetition of 'No and of 'cannot be missed Anadiplosis is another significant repetition of the final word of one phrase and the initial word of the next as found in 'Approach , Approach and feel'.

The next song is the dirge of the driver. The song is sung by one of the layabouts, strumming his guitar and it is sung in Yoruba language. Kotonu enters with an armful of motor parts, an old shoe, a cap and otherthings. He goes in to the mammy wagon stall, through hidden entrance upstage. Now and then people are able to here him. He tries to move quietly.He takes necessary measures to remain unobserved by Samson .One of the layabouts begins to sing and plays his guitar while Samson is moaning. The song is as follows.

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Ona orun jin o eeeee  
Ona orun jin dereba roar  
E e dereba rora  
E e dereba rora  
Ona orun jin o eeeee  
Eleda mi ma buru  
Esin baba Bandele je l' odan  
Won o gbefun o  
Eleda mi ma ma buru  
Esin baba Bandele je l' odan  
Won o gbefun o (p.165).

The translation is as follows,

It's a long long road to heaven  
It's a long road to heaven, Driver  
Go easy a-ah go easy driver  
It's a long long road to heaven  
My creator, be not harsh on me  
Bandeles horse galloped home a winner  
But the race eluded him.

The song is about the long road that leads to Heaven. The driver can take it easy since it is a long, long road to heaven. There is plea to the Creator that He should not be harsh on him. The road to heaven is indeed long. In other words, they are going to face death in the distant future. Most ironically he ends the song with the point that

“Bandeles horse gallop home a winner  
But the race eluded him.”

“Bandeles horse” can mean a hard working man who successfully makes his way to heaven but in spite of his hard work on earth he faces failures and defeat. In spite of working hard man may face failures in the race of life but he may be successful in reaching heaven.

The repetition of the same line twice it's a long ,long road to heaven' brings out the tediousness of life's journey and at the same time 'driver go easy , go easy driver', the use of epiphora which is repetition of words 'go easy' twice. An epiphora use of the final words 'drive' also bring out the reckless and the irresponsible attitudes of the singer. The last two lines:

“Bandeles horse galloped home a winner  
But the race eluded him”, is an antithetic parallelism which focuses on the man reaching heaven successfully and as reflected in the second line ' his earthly life has been a

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defeat'. The man's home coming has been successful while his earthly life has been a defeat. This is beautifully brought out in the, metaphoric use of horse and race.

Pushpa writes:

Ogun dominates the play with his presence. He is the road and is in possession of the truth .Any one who wants to get at the truth must surrender himself to Ogun, even at the risk of his life, Ogun wants to accept death as a prelude to life, from the decay of the dead past comes new life (127-28).

Kotonu's horror of death is counter pointed by the first driver's drige, which refers to the sacrifice to Ogun and the theme of life as a journey to heaven. This song unfolds the secret of the transitional experience from life to death. And it reveals the feelings of existence, their life is disrupted, and the question of their existence, highlighted through this song. After heated conversation between Kotonu and Samson, the gang, resume their singing, making their theme lewd. The following song of the gang is in 'lewd' verse,

Bebe yi ga e-e-e  
Bebe yi ga sisi je nda mi'ra  
Ee sisi je nda mi'ra  
Ee sisi je nda mi'ra  
Bebe yi ga, o po o  
Omi tide pe mi l'okobo Mo yo  
Sibesibe me le f'asape laya o  
Won ndi bebe leko o won ndi bebe  
Eko mo roye o, ah mama  
Eko lawo ya o egungun d'enia(166).

The translation is as follows

This waist-ruff is piled high, high  
This waist-ruff is piled high, the lady  
Has made me wet my pants  
Oh she is cause of my sticky pants  
Some high ruff she's piled on her waist.  
A harlot called me a eunuch, I rejoiced  
In spite of that I will not take  
A prostitute to wife  
Oh they pile it high in lagos  
They really pile it high  
In Lagos it was my eyes were opened,  
It took Lagos to break the secret, where  
An ancestral spirit turned mortal (p.231).

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The song is about a harlot, which unfolds the life of a wanton. This signifies the passion of human beings. Soyinka has made use of words which give multiple meanings and the meaning of the words vary according to the context in which it is being used. The life of African people is defined here, and they live a life dictated by their own desires. The way, in which they live by dancing, drinking, eating and enjoying in their own way, this shows morality normally accepted by society. The play is an eloquent comment on Nigerian society. It is, in fact, a bitter attack. The whole society reeks with the stench of disintegration and death. There is no character in the play who is not diseased—there is an ambience of vice and greed. The play presents a grim picture of gloom and decadence, where a dog-eat-dog morality rules supreme.

Repetition of many kinds, of lines, of initial words, of the final words is an effective technique of Soyinka. The anaphoric repetition of 'oh' is once again an interesting feature of the poem, which brings out the emotion of the speaker. As in other songs, epiphora, which is repetition of the same words, is used in this song. The words 'plied it high and In Lagos' twice.

The third driver's dirge is an incantation, a warning about denying the power of the God and functions as an omen for the future transgression of Samson and Professor. The dirge is accompanied by a violent war dance, song and shouting.

Ogun is another important God, the God of iron and steel originally, he was a hunted deity. When Gods descended to the earth, Ogun at first preferred to live on high mountains. Later, he returned to social life. He is the one who prepared the road for the other deities. He is the God of war, hunting, blacksmith, engineers, machines, lorry drivers, barbers, butchers and carvers. He is by nature hard and fierce, but is not evil. He demands justice, tree play and rectitude (Pushpa, S., p. 123).

Say Tokyo Kid narrates an accident that takes place on the road. According to him, the lady's head was smeared with yam porridge by a passenger. After which the thugs' war chant follows. The third song is accompanied by the drummer and he beats louder. His voice is heavy and drowsy the thugs chant the following war song.

Eni r'oro ke juba  
 Ohun oju ri  
 K'o ba de'le a mo'ra  
 Ohun oju ri  
 Eni r'oro ke juba  
 Ohun oju ri  
 Ko ba de'le aru'bo  
 Ohun oju ri  
 B'e de dele d'ojumo  
 Ohun oju ri

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Oruwo re a pitan  
Ohun oju ri  
Eni r'esu ke yago  
Ohun oju ri  
Eni s'agberef'elegun  
Ohun oju ri (173).

The translation is as follows,

Who meets Oro and makes no obeisance  
What he shall experience!  
When he's home he'll need a hot message  
What he shall experience!  
When he's home he'll make thanksgivings  
What he shall experience!  
And if he fails to make home before dawn.  
What he shall experience!  
His skull shall tell the tales thereof-oh  
What he shall experience!  
Who meets Esu and fails to give way  
What he shall experience!  
Who struts arrogant before ancestral spirits  
What he shall experience! (p.231.)

In this song, the thugs make seven statements after each line a refrain 'What he shall experience!' follows. What shall be the experience of the man who meets Oru and makes no obeisance. What kind of an experience will a man who reaches home will have, may be he needs a hot massage. What will a man undergo, if he is back home and makes Thanksgiving. What will he go through, if he fails to go home before dawn. In that case, his skull shall narrate the concern tales. What will he experience, when he meets Esu and fails to give way and finally before he struts arrogant before ancestral spirits. The words of Soyinka are here with cited. The slow song and drugged movements pickup tempo with war-whoops. They stamp out a violent beat and somersaulting war-dance is performed. The song declares the God Oruesu and the ancestral spirits. Though they are not moral to their deeds, they fear for Gods. The song signifies the respects and the honor given by the people to their psyche. The line "ohun ojuri"(173) meaning 'what he shall experience' describes the arrogance of their Gods. They seem to be savageous Gods who play on the life of their people.

The anaphoric repetition of 'who' before the conclusion of the poem raises thought provoking questions.

It is significant to note that the dirge is being sung even as Kotonu explains about the life and death of Kokol'ori. Before he became a driver, Kokol'ori, had died in an accident. But he

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died before that of a lorry in his back. It beat his spine against a load of stockfish. It was what he carried mostly – stockfish. That day the truck was piled high with it. The group begins to dirge softly. The dirge wells up gradually, when Kotonu further comments on the torn bodies on the road with the smell of stockfish. The dirge continues as follows,

Iri se l’oganzo orun ni ki lo ti je  
Iri se l’oganzo orun ni ki lo S’orun  
Iri erun ta si mi j’ese iku gb’omitan  
Iri erun ta si mi l’aiya otutu eru mu mi  
Iku se ni o’ okoni l’aiye lo  
Eba mi kedum, kokolori o...(191).

The translation is as follows,

It fogged suddenly at noonday  
The sun asked, what is this wonder?  
The sun asked, what is this wonder?  
The dew of drought settled on my feet  
Death deprives us of rain  
The dew of drought settled on my breast  
And the chill of fear took me  
Death has sinned against us  
A man among men is gone ... Kokol’ori.(p.231).

In the dirge there is a reference to the sun which is surprised when fog suddenly appears in the noon-day. They are not affected when the dew of drought is settled on their feet, but the chill of fear overtakes when the dew of drought settles on their breast. Death seems to have deprived them of all their blessing. Death has sinned against them and Kokol’ori, a man among men is dead. The Professor shouts above the dirge, which still continues. The singing comes to an end when the Professor commands ‘the rejects of the roads’ to stop the wail.

‘The dew of drought settled on my’ appearing as the initial words of line third and fifth keeps the audience with expectation. In the third line ‘the dew of drought settles at the feet’ and gains momentum. In the fifth line it is again repeated but settles on the breast. ‘A man among men’ is an example of polyptotoas where there is a repetition of words with the same root.

The song signifies the life of a man in this sinful world and the mystery of death, which has been hidden in the song. And their sin seems to be the hindrance to enjoy the life which is presented by the god to the mankind. The last line brings out the truth that no man can live in this world forever. He must step in to either of the world. The theme of death is well analyzed in The Road, death as gruesome reality as well as trade. The Professor recapitulates his experiences. At his request, the group sings his favourite praise-song. He tells them “Call out the hymn. Any

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song will do but to restore my self-confidence make it a song of praise. But mind you don't disturb me. I feel like working".(p.220). The last song is about Professor.

Professor anjonnu t'awa  
Professor anjonnu t'awa  
Baba wa l'oke baba  
Baba wa l'oke baba  
Eni ba magbe mi san'le, ko da'wo duro  
Mo leni lehin,ejo ragbada l'ori awo  
Ay' awo pada,ejo ragbada l'ori awo  
Ota o lef'ori oma baba gun'yan jc  
A b'oro soro ab'elerigbo b'okele  
Baba wa l'oke baba  
Baba wa l'do baba...(220).

The translation is as follows,

Professor, our being like demon  
Professor, our being like demon  
The elder above us  
The elder below  
The hand that thinks to smash me, let it  
Pause awhile  
I have one behind me, coiled snake on Mysteries  
He moults in season, coiled snake on Mysteries  
The foe cannot pound the head of a Father's  
Son like yam  
Who holds discourse with spirits, who dines with  
The Ruler of Forests  
He is elder above us  
He is our elder below... (p.231,232).

The Professor is their elder above them and below. They request the hand that plans to destroy them to stop a while since there is a "coiled snake on mysteries".(p232) . The enemy cannot destroy anyone who holds discourse with spirits and who dines with the ruler of the forest. The above song is sung in order to boost up Professor's confidence. So he allows the group to sing favorite praise song about communication with the spirit world. Here he is depicted as their protective patron and the link between the world of men and gods. Through these songs Soyinka has effectively brought out the anguish and despair, giving a clear picture of man's insecurity, aggressiveness and evasiveness. They contrast the greed, the violence in the world of politics and the quest for spiritual peace. Above all this the songs deal with the theme of death.

The song begins with 'yet another repetition of line,

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‘Professour, our being like demon.

This is followed by an athitetic parallelism in the next two lines.

‘The elder above us

The elder below’

There is yet another in the last two lines

‘ He is our elder above us

He is our elder below’

The ephistrophic use of repetition of the final words

‘Coiled shake on mysteries’.

The use of masks along with songs and music, the vivacious presentation of the characters’ bitter and disappointing experiences and serious issues of life as death are expressed through the songs. The songs tell the tale with great effect on the audience and the readers.

### **Songs – Contemplation of the Struggles of Life: Private Vision of Truth behind Reality**

Soyinka’s pre-occupation with the use of songs and masks is, indeed, a reflection of the serious question of life. It is in fact a contemplation of the struggles of life and life after death.

In 1962, Soyinka has published an article in Daily Express (Lagos): ‘Bad roads, Bad users, Bad deaths’ in the series entitled “what infuriates about Nigeria”. The readers see that this idea of the horrors of the road is in Soyinka’s mind. It is also evident from his other writings that he is very much dissatisfied with the corruption of the men of power. Taken together one can see the combination of satirical energy and the outrage that underlies this fascinating play. The Road mainly deals with death. Soyinka has taken image of the road and explored it, through those who live in constant touch with death upon it.

*The Road* is important among Soyinka’s works, not merely because of the themes and attitudes in it, but because in this play Soyinka achieves an unequivocal success in the union of theme and dramatic technique, an experiment which he first attempted in *A Dance of the forest* (1960). It is this balance of message and method which makes the play a successful communication, not in the sense of something immediately and wholly understood, but in the sense of a play which satisfies the reader’s sense of dramatic rightness. The Road is itself a dramatization of the limits of language. In the play, the dance is used as the movement of transition. The language of the play is logical because its metaphors are functional rather than convenient or decorative. In the road the readers are prepared for the ambivalence of the last speech by Soyinka’s use of the mediating device of the spider, which is more easily understood.

In *The Road* Soyinka has explored in depth the shrouded middle passage between death, fleshly dissolution and arrival in the other world. “He has not felt obliged to cast off traditional thinking and dress himself in the tattered remnants of alien philosophies” (Roscoe 50).

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Man actually struggles to transcend his psychic alienation. An artist achieves this with the help of his imagination. For the common man, it is a formidable task. The primal severance of men and Gods is of significance. Soyinka believes like Wordsworth that the need of the hour is to marry our minds to the restorative power of the mystical communion of the contemporary psyche with its cosmic environment. The ritual is a cleansing and recreative ceremony and an attempt at diminishing the gulf of transition, and thereby strengthening the communal psyche. In the play *The Road*, the basic conflict between the two protagonists: Man and destiny or will and tradition. The only certainty in man's life is reduction to nothingness-Death is inescapable. Man's mortality cannot be denied. He flouts the traditional Yoruba's struggle to preserve life. Man's anguish at the thought of death is deepened, as he is conscious of his losing battle with destiny. The road is one avenue which leads to death. The road is a monstrous man-eater, and man is a pilgrim who must travel.

*The Road* is the first sustained presentation of what has become Soyinka's private vision of the truth behind reality. The dramatis personae of the play consist of a group of drivers and lorry – park layabouts whose lives are dominated by Professor, the central character who is involved in a quest for the Word. Now the Word which Professor seeks, according to Gerald Moore, "is surely the all – creating Word which expresses the indestructible energy of God". (pp 53.). This orthodox religion, in conjunction with the Yoruba Agemo, a religious cult of flesh dissolution, provides the background against which the syntax is foregrounded. Professor's quest in itself should in several stages: when the play opens the Professor equate the Word with ordinary words in a language. He thus collects all printed matters he can find – journals, and even pools coupons-but he does not delude himself into accepting all such manifestations as truth and soon rejects this approach.

The second stage of his quest is his realization that "the word may be found companion not to life, but Death." At this point Professor has rejected his Christian background and has accepted the Yoruba view of flesh dissolution. His fall from ecclesiastical grace is complete. He then associates with drivers, purveyors of death on road, and finally, he accepts ritual as the only means through which the word may be revealed. Throughout the quest the Professor's action – his obsession with potent utterances, collection of journals and pools coupons, removal of road signs, involvement in ritual and the game of death – help to build the play's semantic system, exemplified by the syntactic organization. On the road of life some are contemplating on Ogun and is conscious of his actions. On the other hand Professor is talking about the Word. To quote "You think I did? Indeed anything is possible when I pursue the Word. But...and mind you tell the truth..you are not here to take the Word from me?(p157).

### **Tragedy or Comedy?**

It is very difficult to classify *The Road* into strictly tragedy or comedy or tragic-comedy. Its theme deals with a serious subject Death often it is flooded with grim humour. At the same

time it is hilariously comic and at some places even becomes farcial. The role played by rituals is significant.

Soyinka himself explains 'It is believed that the spirit of the deceased may be evoked to enter into the masquerader during the dance. At the height of the dance every true Egunun will enter into a state of possession, when he will speak with a new voice' remarks (Vlli Beier p.57).

Dramatic performances are usually given during a festival. A festival contains rituals and 'drama'. Performers share the esteem in which the society is held. They are the guardians of community values: sometimes satirizing those who go against them; sometimes acting out historical events, often identifying with the ancestors or with the spirits and always full of proverbial sayings. Costumes seem to be at their most magnificent where the setting is bare. Masks are used in the traditional African drama. The word 'mask' implies that the wearer's identity is hidden. Yoruba Masquerades are simple caricatures of social types. They cannot be touched and the identity of the wearer should not be revealed. In the play '*The Road*', 'masks' play a significant role in the end.

Professor and his parishioners conduct a kind of communion, different from that being administered in the church. They drink palm-wine served by Murano. Murano is taking part in a religious feast in honour of Ogun. He is possessed by God, and runs across the road. He is run over by Kotonu, who is driving the lorry, and is unable to apply the brakes on time. Professor is happy to keep Murano with him, as he feels that Murano is close to death. He is keen on his doing the ritual dance, so that he could get a revelation of the Word. Say Tokyo Kid, driver and captain of thugs makes an attempt to stop the ritual dance, and in the flight that ensures both Professor and Say Tokyo Kid are killed

The ritual is a cleansing—a kind of recreative ceremony aimed at diminishing the gulf of transition, and, thus strengthening the psyche of the community. Yoruba culture retains the collective experience as a living reality. Soyinka has used his own folk tradition in *The Road* as the basis of very sophisticated theatre. As he himself explains in his note to the producer, *The Road* is set in the masque idiom. One of the underlying beliefs of this tradition is that of possession. 'It is believed that the spirit of the deceased may be evoked to enter into the masquerader during the dance. At the height of the dance every true Egungun will enter into a state of possession, when he will speak with a you voice' says Ulli Beier..Soyinka enlarges this basic belief to produce an indefinite suspension between life and death in the character Murano. He writes " Murano the mute, time, or death, since it was in his Agemo phase that the lorry knocked him down(pp149)..

Murano is possessed by a god. As Soyinka' remarks in his prefatory note, he functions as "an arrest of time or death" (149). In a ritual dance, the actor is in constant fear of his personality merging with the character he is impersonating. It is this aspect which terrifies Kotonu. The mask of Agemo hovers in the background throughout the play.

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Professor tries every channel to find out the meaning of death, but fails. As a last resort, he tries to investigate death through Ogun mask, and forces Murano to wear the mask. Face to face with the Egungun, the spirit of death, Professor hopes to understand this ultimate event. The people gathered around are struck with terror at Professor's trivializing the ritual. "Do you want to go blind from the things you shouldn't see?" remarks Say Tokyo kid (227). He prevails on him to stop it, but Professor is adamant on his refusal to abandon this ritual. Professor approaches a spiritual issue like death analytically. He has a sense of contempt for the lower classes.

The lorry drivers are Ogun's devotees. Their masquerade is performed in his honour. Most of the characters in *The Road* are groping in the twilight zone. Soyinka chooses a sort of no-man's land, belonging neither to the world of flesh nor the spirit. Hence, the significance of 'Agemo' is a visual suspension of death. Soyinka is concerned with the spiritual quest. An artist is the voice of vision in his own time. His mythmaking revolves around the imperative need for a spiritual life and art which has links with past and is a transformation of it. He reformulates with the help of heroically personal experience of self-discover and self-renewal, and the path of visionary quest. The whole play assumes the form of a myth or a symbol Professor represents the perennial instinct in man, which yearns to explain the complex world he lives in.

Man tries to probe the foundation of his existence, and to discover a meaning for life. This effort leads him beyond the physical forces, to gods and spirits. Physical forces alone do not explain the value of human existence. Kotonu reflects on his and Samson's narrow escape from death. The people in the lorry which overtook them on the bridge are killed while they are spared. Hence Professor is determined to investigate the nature of death and understand its secret. This understanding could lead to an extension of life's meaning through an extension of mortality into immortality.

Professor deliberately precipitates the crisis by forcing Murano to wear the mask causing the resumption and completion of that which was arrested. Through this he hopes to understand the mystery of death that he always been on a quest for: "I cannot yet believe that death's revelation must be total or not at all." (pp 226). He feels that now he is reaching the final gate to the word. The last and most important stage in initiation, when the quester after spiritual revelation comes within grasp of that reality Death seems to be the price one has to pay for the sort of knowledge that Professor is aspiring to have. In this final stage of following the God apparent or surrogate God, death comes to Professor.

The readers have to pay attention also to something that the playwright tells us in the final stage direction- The mask still spinning, has continued to sink slowly until it appears to be nothing beyond a heap of cloth and raffia. Still upright in his chair, Professor's head falls forward. "this synchronization of Professor's death and the release of Murano from his Agemo stage strikes is significant. For Professor it would be a privileged crossing over through the realm of transition, accompanied by or accompanying his' God- apparent Professor's dying peroration to his ' followers is also not without meaning. Through the cryptic phrases do not all yield their

sense easily, the general meaning is what Professor had earlier expresses in plain speech- one must cheat fear by foreknowledge.' His point seems to be that part of the power of death is in its unexpectedness and surprise and that by lying in wait for death and taking death by surprise one can take away some of its victory.

Professor's speech is different from that of his companions. It is marked heavily by biblical phrases and images. Words of deep spiritual significance like miracle, communion, resurrection, the word are repeated. The readers get many echoes of the psalms and of verses from the New Testament. 'A shadow in the valley of the shadow of (TR 205), Only the fallen have need of restitution, (TR 220), Life is difficult for the faithless. But do not despair (TR180) are some of the examples. We meet such overtones also in the cadence of when the shadow covers me in the grace of darkness he will come' (TR 186). Such language used in marked contrast to the pidgin of the touts and the drivers is the device of the characterization too.

Kotonu, for instance, well-set on the path of spiritual insight and regeneration is not made to speak the lingo of the touts. He is reticent and his silence is often the result of his turning inwards to absorb his experience. His insight that Murano is the god apparent sets him above the runaway driver that he is. His very first words in the play are 'If you like Professor I will come home, with you (TR 158). Though spoken to lure Professor out of the scene of Samson's impersonation of the African millionaire, the words are significant at a deeper level for the readers to see that Kotonu is sharing the lure of the road which has symbolic significance in the play. His language sometimes touches the lyricism as in the words of the Professor ' as in the road and the spider lie gloating, then the fly buzzes along like a happy fool'.(TR178). 'Picking up the mask which he intends to keep he reflects on what it means to him: It has to stay with me humble quota to the harvest of the road'. (pp 181).

The play's link with the Mystery Religions as well as African rituals can be traced also to Kotonu's strange experiences. What happened on the day of the Drivers festival is shown as a flash back. Kotonu with the masked figure who is actually possessed by Ogun and who thus becomes the god surrogate. When Kotonu is forced by Samson to wear the mask for fear of the mob, what happens to him is nothing short of a baptism of blood, the full significance of which is not grasped by Kotonu but can be discerned by the readers.

KOTONU: (tearing at the clothes, demented) It's all wet inside. I've got his blood all over me. It's getting dark Samson I can't see. His blood has got in my eyes. I can't see Samson. (His struggles becomes truly frantic, full of violent contortions. Gradually he grows weaker, collapsing slowly on the ground until he is completely inert.( TR 209 ).

### **Finally, the Dance of Possession**

The dance of possession is the climax of the action in *The Road*. The Dance represents the blending of the religious elements in traditional culture and Christian doctrine. The dance is

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desperate bid to unearth the belief that God becomes manifest. In its exposition of Professor's quest and its underlying implications *The Road* is the most mask-bound play that Soyinka has written. It is a play that is more thoroughly grounded in Yoruba lore and especially in the mysteries of Ogun than most of the other plays in the corpus. In blending the many themes and scenes of *The Road* artistically together, Soyinka has succeeded in creating a remarkable piece of theatre. The play is satisfying in itself even if little or no attention is given to the profoundly serious insights that underlie this superficially humorous and dramatically intense play. Moreover, a recognition of the atheistic tone of this play can lead to an appreciation of the much subtler skepticism of *The Road* which is a genuine inquiry into the substance and shadow of belief. Soyinka uses Yoruba language especially for the songs: the tonal rhythms of Yoruba are in tune with the drums and the dancing, and all three-language, music and action- are inseparable from the performance of ritual. Soyinka thus owes a great debt to traditional wisdom and culture which he fashions into a literary credo (p. 165, A DANCE OF MASKS - Senghor, Achebe, Soyinka by Jonathan Peters).

Soyinka's work covers a great variety of themes but it can be reduced to a fundamental conflict between two protagonists: Man and Destiny. Through the use of dance, mime, songs and music he remarks that Death is inescapable. In the play *The Road* Samson pleads: 'May we never walk when the road waits, famished'. (pp199).

On the road of life some are contemplating on Ogun and is conscious of its actions. On the other hand Professor is talking about the quest for Word. Soyinka makes the scenes natural by the uses of songs. They seem to comment on life and its serious issues in a lively way. The songs reflect the characters' sorrow, disappointment, frustration and longing which form the backdrop of the play. The play *The Road* is a successful piece of imaginative writing. In words of D.S.Izebaye in his penetrating critical study of language and meaning, *The Road* is "a play which satisfies our sense of dramatic rightness" (53).

*The Road*, however, presents a tragic and mystical vision of mankind in a universe in which the physical and spiritual interpenetrate. The play underlines the greatness and the futility of a mind that quests for the ultimate knowledge of its spiritual essence while it is firmly yoked to the corporeal and the mundane. In blending the many themes and scenes of *The Road* artistically together, Soyinka has succeeded in creating a remarkable piece of theatre. The play is satisfying in itself even if little or no attention is given to the profoundly serious insights that underlie this superficially humorous and dramatically intense play. *The Road* is the first sustained presentation of what has become Soyinka's vision of the truth behind reality. Thus songs of Soyinka are a mode of man's experiences, sufferings, quest, failure, disappointment, frustration, discouragement, hopelessness, ignorance, sense of insecurity, alienation, and disgressiveness on the road of life and death. "The Road is a superb accomplishment of Soyinka as a dramatist Soyinka endeavours to clarify the relationship between the contemporary Nigerian life and Yoruba Myth in this Play". (pp27). Soyinka, particularly in *The Road*, has used his own folk tradition as the basis of very sophisticated theatre" says( Eldred Jones, pp 57).

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*The Road* is a superb accomplishment of Soyinka as a dramatist. Soyinka endeavors to clarify the relationship between the contemporary Nigerian life and Yoruba Myths through the use of songs which heighten the effect of the play. There is a rather sing – song quality and poetic structuring in the play. With the chorus supplying a soft dirge for the dead, Professor’s speech stands out throughout. His language reaches a poetic height when he collects information about the accidents. At end, we are not sure whether we miss the Professor, fell sorry for him, or for the entire community of humans.

## Chapter 4

### Songs as Expression of Conflict



#### Politics and Songs

Songs and singing play a crucial part in any movement: religious, social and political. There is emotion in all these intense activities. Songs generate emotions, empathy and actual obedience. Songs move the hearts of all humans, lift their souls high and enable them to look up to high ideals. At the same time songs and singing can also be used for the promotion of wrong ideals in an intense manner.

Conflict is resolved even as conflict is raised by songs and singing. So, songs and singing generously express existing conflicts. Soyinka exploits this universal features of songs and singing through the use of Yoruba songs and singing in his plays. Conflicts are indirectly and symbolically referred to in the songs adopted in his plays. Singing adds to the intensity of the conflicts in the scenes of the plays. Episodes are filled with songs and singing.

“Power corrupts man. Opportunists wait for the right moment to snatch a chance, and make the most of it. This ailment is contagious, and affects the marrow of the society. It is like quick sands—it engulfs the victims. The road to power has many diversions and by-ways—

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through politics, academic skill, magic, traditional status, religion, affectation” (pp. 91), remarks M. Pushpa.

### **Songs as an expression of conflicts**

*Kongi's Harvest* was published before the elongated imprisonment of Soyinka can be considered as a direct comment upon the contemporary political scene in Africa. It is a satire on the emergent style elegance of African dictatorship. It can be taken as a depiction of the clash between modern dictatorships and tradition system. Ultimately it a representation of the duel between the life giving forces and death producing forces.

The play's two protagonists, the old king Oba Danlola and Kongi. Oba Danlola is in prison along with some of his chiefs and followers. He is condemned to remain there till he agrees to transfer the honour of eating the first of the 'New Yam' to the new-style political boss. The prison superintendent, the first manifestation of the new race in the play, tries to tyrannize over Danlola. Oba has spiritual resources, which Kongi does not have and so the superintendent is out smarted by Danlola and he is reduced to self – abasement and abject pleading before the physically powerless Oba Atlast he decides to surrender the honour to Kongi in return for the release of the five conspirators who have been sentenced to death in relation with a bomb – plot against the dictator.

Daodu is an important character. He is not only a prince but also a successful farmer. He convinces his uncle Danlola to allow kongi to eat the first of the 'New Yam'. Meanwhile the secret bargain between Daodu and the secretary is revealed one of the five condemned men due to be reprieved commits suicide in the prison, while another, Segi's father escapes. Kongi in his anger cancels the reprieve and orders that on the day of the harvest all the condemned should be hanged. For this reason Danlola decides not to attend the festival. Daodu who is aware of what is going to happen, asks the kings to attend the festival.

While attempting to kill the king during the critical moment of the ceremony, Segi's father is assassinated. Segi presents the head to kongi in a covered platter in the guise of 'New Yam' transforms the meaning of his death. Thus in the middle of the 'feast of life', which is celebrated by his subjects kongi is presented with a harvest dish. The play ends with anticlimax. Through Daodu's revolution fails, the points has been made Daodu embodies the kind of force which can save a society. At the end of the play there is no mention of the precise fate of Daodu and Segi.

### **A Microcosm of the Contemporary Political Situation**

*Kongi's Harvest* is a microcosm of the contemporary political situation, a situation relevant to Nigeria. The modern replacement for the traditional authority is also a kind of dictator. In *Kongi's Harvest* though Oba's power is curbed, his spiritual and moral grip is retained. Soyinka detested dictators and the brutality associated with them. The individuals have

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the power to find an escape route from this claustrophobic tyrannical rule. Kongi's *Harvest* delves deep into the problem of the ruler of Isma. It is not only the traditional ruler Oba Danlola or the usurper Kongi, who is well-endowed with modern equipment and methods of coercion but also another contender is Daodu, the modern idealist whose recipe for good administration is a mixture of traditionalism and modernism. Soyinka's political vision attains clarity, for him the individual is important. His traumatic experiences as a victim of his country's military regime have left indelible scars on his psyche. Suppression of the rights of individuals is unpardonable for Soyinka. He respects a regime which recognizes an individual's right to sovereignty.

### **Many Strands of the Political Web**

The political web in Kongi's *Harvest* comprises many strands. The main strands are Kongi and Oba Danlola. Kongi, a champion of new values, wants to destroy the substratum of tradition. The Oba resists the onslaught of these modern forces. Autocrats like Kongi drunk with power, destroy all those who cross their path. Daodu, the Oba's nephew, wants a rule which is a cross-fertilization of the traditional forces and the modernist forces. Daodu's coup ends in a failure. Kongi is a typical example of a dictator, a brutal egoist, a man who has animalism of a man climbing the ladder to power. As a blood-thirsty tyrant, he loves to prey on his people and his craving for popularity makes him fast before people as he has genuine concern for the welfare of the people. Kongi and his men are trapped in a situation where to preserve their sanity, they use words and slogans as mere jargon. Kongi stands for denial of life, while Daodu stands for life. Daodu wants to overthrow Kongi. It is not an easy task to overthrow a well-entrenched autocrat. Daodu is a revolutionary, who has no patience for rituals.

### **The Power Syndrome**

Each of these characters is afflicted with the power syndrome. Intimations of immortality are a direct result of the mania for power. True power rests on humility and generosity. Egoism leads the protagonist nowhere. The pursuit of power leads them to an abysmal darkness, where there is nothing but destruction and self-annihilation. Kongi's lust for power becomes a devouring passion. Daodu, on the other hand, is enhancing the quality of life through diligent cultivation of the land. *Kongi's Harvest* is Soyinka's last published play before his prolonged imprisonment was his closest to a direct comment upon the contemporary political scene in Africa. At one level, this play is a satirical comedy upon the emergent style and rhetoric of African dictatorship.

### **The Story**

The play opens with Oba Danlola in prison, together with certain of his chiefs and followers. 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 Kongi's the new political boss. During the scene, when the prison Superintendent is outsmarted by Danlola he is forced to abase himself to the king again and again while the royal drums break forth into a song

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of mourning and farewell. For the words of the song demonstrate that, however proud his spirit, the mere fact that their master is in prison is enough to convince them that the old days can never truly return again: To quote:

DANLOLA : This dance is the last  
Our feet shall dance together  
The royal python may be good  
At hissing, but it seems  
The scorpion's tail is fire.  
DRUMMER : The king's umbrella  
Gives us no more shade  
But we summon no dirge-master.  
The tunnel passes through  
The hill's belly-But we cry no defilement  
A new-dug path may lead  
To the secret heart of being.  
Ogun is still a god  
Even without his navel.

“Although these lines express a confidence that the divine power of the gods cannot be annulled by presidential decree, yet the tone of the whole song from which they are quoted, with its reiterated refrain 'This is the last/That we shall dance together', is one of dignified withdrawal into the shades of history. As such, it prepares us for Oba Danlola's decision soon afterwards to go to the New Yam Festival and surrender his functions to Kongi, in return for the reprieve of five conspirators sentenced to death for a plot against the dictator”.( DIARY NO 7 ).

### **Alteration of Scenes – Rapid Changes**





The central section of the play, an alteration of rapid scenes in Kongi's mountain retreat and in an urban night club, centres around the rather inept machinations of the Organizing Secretary. This character exhibits all the slightly menacing and false bonhomie of the political situation.. 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 the right lines and gestures to strike a contemporary chord.

The real opposition to Kongi does not come from Danlola and his brother-king Sarumi, but from the younger group represented by Sarumi's son Daodu and Daodu's mistress Segi. Daodu has started an infuriatingly successful cooperative 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 sex and beer 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 the first of the New Yam and reprieve the conspirators.

### **The Great Day and Transformation of Intentions**

The great day arrives and 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

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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 persuades the king to attend.

At the critical moment of the ceremony, Segi's father, returning to attempt the assassination of the dictator, is shot down offstage 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. Everything breaks up in confusion and flight. Danlola and the Secretary are at the frontier and their last words suggesting that they are bidding farewell to more than each other. Kongi too, we feel, is probably finished as a political force. The play implies that the future belongs to Daodu and Segi. Daodu's black prayer certainly carries all the impetus of the play's urgency:

Imprecations then, curses on all inventors of agonies, on all  
Messiahs of pain and false burdens . . .

### **The Harvest**

The Harvest in the play is, true to form, a dismal affair, since Kongi, the despotic president of Isma is bent on stifling the people's cultural life and on replacing it with cant and repression.

Soyinka has labelled Kongi's state the republic of Isma on account of the regime's fondness for isms and its exaction of blind allegiance from the people.-st

The play is rooted in African tradition, especially in the elaboration of concepts concerning the feast of the New Yam, in the extensive employment of proverbs and in the ritual of the king's dance (-song).

In an invaluable essay Oyin Ogunba makes the following comment on the structure of the play:

In Kongi's Harvest, the design is that of a king's festival, especially a Yoruba king's festival. The king in Africa is still God's deputy on earth and so he combines both spiritual and political functions.

Hence this festival is not a private celebration but one that has meaning for the whole community and in which everyone is expected to participate with interest. As the first citizen, the ideal figure around whom the whole tradition is woven, the king's dance is the dance of the community by its divine leader, a re-enactment of the whole living tradition of the people. It is thus a life-giving ritual which has to be done in epic style to demonstrate the higher aspirations of the community.

### **SONG**

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The dance that Oba Danlola and his retinue perform in the introductory "Hemlock" section of the play seems to have this royal quality. These words from the praise-song, sung by Oba Sarumi, pay tribute to the might and majesty of the king:

Oba ni i fepo inu ebo ra'ri  
Orisa l'oba  
Oba ni fepo inu ebo r'awuje  
Orisa l'oba  
None but the king  
Takes the oil from the cross roads  
And rubs it his awuje  
The king is god.

These lines stress the spiritual authority of the Oba when he anoints the head's pulse centre with the oil of sacrifice, as well as his power as a God. But the Oba now has only the trappings of royalty, since he is in detention after being stripped of his political power by Kongi. The regal dance is therefore sheer make-believe, as we discover when the Superintendent stops the dance by grabbing the wrist of the lead drummer. Danlola exhibits his resignation to his loss of power when he says:

My friend, you merely stopped  
My drums, but they were silenced  
On the day when Kongi cast aside  
My props of wisdom, the day he  
Drove the old Aweri from their seats.

(KH4).

The drums which sound now have a hollow ring since the real drums which symbolize power have been snatched from the Oba by President Kongi. In the play, the dance of the king, with all its pomp and majesty, is a reminder of the departed graces of traditional authority to which the Oba's hark back nostalgically. The abrupt ending of the dance brings a jolting return to reality.

Oba Danlola is a realist whose first rule of combat, according to his servant, Deride, is "always outnumber the enemy". Since he is hopelessly outnumbered and outclassed by the forces of Kongi he has accepted defeat on the political level. But Danlola refuses to relinquish his spiritual and symbolic authority over the people which is what Kongi wants. He is in detention for declining to serve Kongi the New Yam instead of presiding over the ceremony and eating the Yam himself.

## **The Feast**

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The Feast of the New Yam is an indispensable ritual of celebration in traditional black Africa. It is the feast of the New Year and therefore celebrates the renewing cycle of nature. In those areas where yam is grown as the prime crop, this king of crops, as it is called in *Things Fall Apart*, symbolizes the supremacy and power of the clan. As symbol of harvest, the yam embodies the fertility of the tribe and guarantees its continued procreation through harmonious interaction with the people. In addition, as an occasion of cleansing, the harvest festival symbolizes the purgation of the clan's sins and the restoration of its commonwealth through the medium of its spiritual head. The New Yam festival is consequently no light matter. It lies at the heart and soul of the community and imposes an onerous burden of responsibility on its divine ruler. Whoever presides over such a feast therefore has the life of the community in his hands.

### **Traditional Conflict**

The dispute between the factions of Kongi and Danlola reminds one of a similar conflict in Achebe's *Arrow of God* over the announcement of the Feast of the New Yam..

### **SONG**

Oba Danlola's sense of the doom of traditional culture is reiterated from the very beginning, although the forces of Kongi prevail in the end, the death of tradition will be a disaster for the new nation since the complete abandonment of traditional culture. As Oba Sarumi points out at the start of a dirge which is sung traditionally when a king dies:

They complained because  
The first of the new yams  
Melted first in an Oba's mouth

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But the dead will witness  
We drew the poison from the root.

(KH)

In his despotic rule Kongi will not be prepared to risk danger and encounter suffering on behalf of his people in either word or deed. In fact he personifies the poison in the body of politics. In contrast with the life-giving qualities that a spiritual ruler incorporates, he heads a reign of terror and unnatural developments that totally are at odds with the spirit of harmony which he professes to invoke. The disharmony is already suggested in the sentiments expressed in Oba Danlola's final chant of the dirge of *ege*, sentiments that predict the impending blighting of tradition:

This is the last  
Our feet shall touch together  
We thought the tune  
Obeyed us to the soul  
But the drums are newly shaped  
And stiff arms strain  
On stubborn crooks, so  
Delve with the left foot  
For ill luck; with the left  
Again for ill-luck; once more  
With the left alone, for disaster  
Is the only certainty we know.

(KH10).

Kongi's newly shaped drums do not beat a harmonious rhythm since the leader is preoccupied with power and divinity as ends in themselves.

### **Story of Messianism**

The barren hypocrisy of Kongi's Messianism is open to view as he operates from his cell in a mountain retreat on the eve of the festival. He is supposed to be fasting and meditating as Isma stands on the threshold of its second Five Year Development Plan. But the image of total harmony which he is busy setting up for the state has been disputed by the recent bomb throwing attempt on his life. Kongi's pretentious posing for "Last Supper" portraits instead of engaging in earnest meditation betrays the fictional foundation of his mission which the Secretary helps him fabricate:

SECRETARY: It's all part of one and same harmonious idea my Leader. A Leader's  
Temptation. . . . Agony on the Mountains. . . . The loneliness of the Pure. .  
. . The Uneasy Head. . . . A Saint at Twilight. . . . The Spirit of the Harvest.

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. . . The Face of Benevolence. . . The Giver of Life . . . who knows how many other titles will accompany such pictures round the world. And then my Leader, this is the Year of Kongi's Harvest! The Presiding Spirit as a life-giving spirit-we could project that image into every heart and head, no matter how stubborn.

(KH

39).

The fabrication of images that are to be forcibly projected into the minds of the people reveals the regime's lack of creative ideas and its reliance on brute force.

### **The Mantle of Divinity**

In Kongi's Harvest, Kongi assumes the mantle of divinity without the ritual of investiture and proclaims himself the Spirit of Harvest. Unlike him, Danlola, the lecherous old realist, never forgets that he is yoked to the corporeal, a yoking that he symbolizes in an excremental image. Kongi, however, is so far gone in self-conceit and in delusion of immortality that he is ready to change the course of the world. In his pitiless satire of the man Soyinka exposes Kongi's approval of a new calendar that will date from the current harvest. Kongi's rejection of his Secretary's nomenclatures which omit Kongi's name in favour of the unambiguous "Kongi's Harvest" (KH) and "Before Kongi's Harvest" No need why we should conform to the habit of two initials only", is typical of a self-love that seeks self-proliferation.

In the words of Jonathan A. Peters,

Entering into a true spirit of harvest, Kongi endorses those principles and practices that proclaim life and abundance. But he merely disguises his treacherous, unforgiving and murderous spirit by assuming the posture of a Messiah and of a benevolent life-giver. His hypocritical proclamation of a reprieve for the men condemned to die for the attempt on his life, when he fully intends to have them hanged, goes beyond his reputed "flair for gestures".(pp 203). It characterizes the bloodthirsty tyrant who preys on his own people. His convulsions, like those of a God possessed, actually bring him down from his pedestal to his true level of impotent humanity. Oba Danlola is right in picturing Kongi as the son of the crow which feeds on carrion. Because Kongi is so rapacious, the only way he can regain his composure is through the exercise of "scientific exorcism" as Fourth Aweri calls the slaying of the condemned men.

### **Plans to Oust the Dictatorial King – Anti-thesis of Kongi**

While Oba Danlola falls under the weight of Kongi's repression Daodu, his nephew and heir, is quietly involved in a scheme to oust the dictatorial Kongi. Even Danlola, fooled by Daodu's calm exterior,. describes him as "Lately returned from everywhere and still / Trying to find his feet" (KH 54). In fact, Daodu has his feet planted in the soil and his yam will easily win the competition for the prize yam at the New Yam Feast. Ironically, however, his prize yam is a monster, "a most abnormal specimen" (KH 72) for, while the fertilizers and the labour are his the soil is still Kongi's.

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In Kongi's Harvest Soyinka presents Daodu as the antithesis of Kongi. The contrast between the two men is dramatized in the stage set by the juxtaposition of scenes. In the First Part, Kongi's ascetic mountain retreat is worlds removed from the gay atmosphere in the night club scene where Daodu consolidates his opposition to Kongi by joining forces with Segi. Segi calls Daodu her Spirit of Harvest but, in a reference to Kongi Daodu tells her resignedly "I hate to be a mere antithesis to your Messiah of Pain." (KH 46). Instead he would like to fight Kongi with his own weapons of hate and destruction. The litany in which Daodu and Segi take part lays bare the dangerous effects of the will to power:

DAODU : Let me preach hatred Segi. If I preached hatred I could match his barren marathon, hour for hour, torrent for torrent. . . . SEGI: Preach life Daodu, only life. . . .

DAODU : Imprecations then, curses on all inventors of agonies, on all Messiahs of pain and false burdens... .

SEGI : Only life is worth preaching my prince.

DAODU : [with mounting passion. ]: On all who fashion chains, on farmers of terror, on builders of walls, on all who guard against the night but breed darkness by day, on  
on  
all whose feet are heavy and yet stand upon the world. . . .

SEGI : Life... life. . . .

DAODU : On all who see, not with the eyes of the dead, but with eyes of Death

SEGI : Life then. It needs a sermon on life . . . love., .

DAODU : [with violent anger]: Love? Love? You who gave love, how were you requited?

SEGI : [rises]: My eyes were open to what I did. Kongi was a great man, and I loved him.

Daodu's speech at the festival is made with the assurance and the vigour of a Conquering Hero. Fully confident that Kongi will be overthrown by the time the Oba presents the sacred yam and before Kongi makes his marathon speech, Daodu speaks as a Saviour at the Second Coming. In contrast with the asceticism of the First Coming he declares "This trip I have elected to sample the joys of life, not its sorrows, to feast on the pounded yam, not on the rind of yam, to drink the wine myself, not leave it to my ministers for frugal sacraments, to love the women, not merely wash their feet at the well." Daodu will not subscribe to the false asceticism of Kongi. As Redeemer he unequivocally preaches libertinism instead, as he contemplates the Ismites' liberation from the barren hold of the autocratic Kongi.

### **Cruelty: A Normal Historic Pattern**

One issue on which the New Aweri seems to reach a consensus is that Kongi's rule is "part of a normal historic pattern". Nations and empires rise and fall, cultures reach their height and decline, the strong overpower the weak. The foiling of the plot against Kongi, demonstrates

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that, Daodu's assurance to the contrary, it is not such an easy matter to depose an established ruler, especially one, like Kongi, who runs a police state.

For the present, Kongi is entrenched in power but the promise of greater repression after the aborted Bacchanal will not wipe out opposition to his oppressive regime. The doctrine of Inevitable History dictates that Oba Danlola cannot hold on to power indefinitely. No more can Kongi, as long as there are those who have the will and courage to oppose him and eventually to expose him to the people for what he really is. His discomfiture when Segi serves up the head of her father in a platter as the harvest feast becomes nightmare brings home to him the stark reality of his diabolical regime.

Kongi, the autocrat, has inverted the old order of communal sharing and responsibility in which the individual's actions for good or evil have repercussions on the body politic. Under his coercive and unimaginative rule the people have the support of their traditional beliefs taken from them. Instead they are subjected to propaganda and brute force which win their allegiance through fear rather than through trust.

According to Jonathan Peters,

Daodu, the quiet revolutionary, is impatient with the ritual and slow dignity of traditional authority and abhors the image-making and the unproductive terrorism of the present government. Although he adopts the productive tools of the modern world he fails to recognize that he must also respect the soil of tradition in order to produce a normal harvest. Success in the future will depend on the just matching of tradition and modernism, not on the elimination of one by the other (206).

Although the three characterize differing and conflicting interests, Danlola, Kongi and Daodu are afflicted, in varying degrees, by much the same syndrome of power. Soyinka considers true humility and generosity as the indispensable counterparts of power and greatness.

### **Soyinka's fascination with manifestations of self-deification**

Soyinka's fascination with manifestations of self-deification goes beyond the personages involved. In the dancing that accompanies Kongi's Bacchanal, the first half of the accompanying song describes a lack-lustre First Coming in which "The foolhardy hedgehog, Was spreadeagled on nails". Kongi projects on himself the ascetic image of a Messiah at his First Coming which contrasts with the merriment and abandon of the Second Coming. Daodu espouses this Second Coming.

The head of the Yoruba government is the Oba. He is a King, who rules both as a religious and political head, and is surrounded by ceremony. In Kongi's Harvest (1967), though Oba's political authority is curbed, his spiritual and moral grip is retained. Soyinka always dwelt on the tyrannical brutality associated with military regime. In his the man died, the man, a victim

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of such a brutality died and thus became a metaphor for the death of justice and of any other claim to legitimacy of the regime. It is all in the hands of the individuals and organised opposition to find an escape route from an intolerable rule. A political holocaust always brings about drastic changes in the lives of the people caught in it. The study of these changes with its political, social and psychological undertones is interesting.

### **Ideal Hero**

Ogun provides the ideal for a Soyinka hero. He is the god of iron and of war, destruction, and carnage, and the god of creativity. So Ogun heroes are a kind of paradox, they destroy and create life. Daodu who disrupts the traditional order by bursting the drum, is also the leading farmer, working hard to save the state. Here the hero fights for justice, a transcendental and human justice. In *Kongi's Harvest*, the issue under discussion is, who controls the power in the State of Isma? Is it the traditional ruler Oba Danlola; or the usurper Kongi, who is well-endowed with modern equipment and methods of coercion; or Daodu, the modern idealist, who intends combining traditionalism with modernism? In the struggle, it is Daodu who takes the initiative. With this dialectics as the background, Soyinka's political vision becomes clear. The dramatist's pressing problem is the suppression of the individual's natural rights in Nigeria. He sought the establishment of a new political order that protects the individual's fundamental human rights. He respects all administration which respects an individual's right to personal sovereignty. Soyinka makes no political commitment in his plays. He does not use his literary works as a platform for political propaganda. He did not much care for the concept of Negritude, as he felt that it was a cultural concept created for political purposes. Nevertheless, Soyinka blamed the African writer for a lack of political understanding.

### **Scapecoat Syndrome**

The political situation in Nigeria was an off-shoot of the Civil War. Soyinka attributes it to what is called "scapegoat syndrome." that is, a section robs the society, and then persuades the robbed that the real causes of their dissatisfaction can be traced to a particular section of the community. *Kongi's Harvest* is a comment on the political life in a modern African State. It traces the career of an African dictator. The first decade of political independence in Africa produced many petty dictators, and Soyinka had no problem, getting a model for his protagonist, the conflict is between President Kongi of Isma, a dictator, and Oba Danlola, a paramount King in the land, and one who represents the old order. Kongi is a champion of new values and wants to destroy the older order. The situation is a typical one with Oba Danlola resisting the onslaught of modernist forces and the natural instinct for self-preservation. He is shrewd enough to see in Kongi not sentiments of patriotism, but a sheer lust for power. With the trend pointing towards modernism, Kongi's power is in the ascendant, and has detained Oba Danlola and his aides in special camps. Isma is a fictive African State. Kongi has imprisoned Oba Danlola, and persuades him to demonstrate his submission publicly by handing over a portion of chosen yams to Kongi at a national festival, the Festival of the New Yam.

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An interesting twist is given to the intrigue when Kongi approaches young Daodu, Oba Danlola's nephew, for help. Daodu is the manager of a collective farm, which has produced the finest yams of the year. Daodu, with the help of his mistress Segi, is planning a coup himself, and is scheduled to take off at the moment of the handing over of the New Yam, but the scheme of things is disturbed. Segi's father, who opposed Kongi's rule is killed in a shooting incident. Segi, however, manages to send a copper salver to the dais, where the dictator is standing. The salver is supposed to contain the yam, but it actually contains Segi's father's head. This macabre spectacle marks the abrupt end of the festival. Daodu is rational in his approach. He wants progress without abolishing the ancient traditional values. He wants to strike a balance between the traditional forces and the forces of modernism. He wants to fight the superficialities of some modern ideas. Daodu's intention is not just to introduce new ideas but to pave the way for destroying those forces which block the road to progress. Daodu acts as the mouthpiece for a saviour god, who was on earth only to suffer, and, later returns to earth to enjoy. This unnamed God first visited earth in the guise of Ogun. Ogun's name is not mentioned, but his presence is felt. Harvest season is the season of Ogun, and palm-wine is of great importance in the worship of Ogun. Yams are considered to be one of Ogun's favourite foods. Daodu is the representative of Ogun; while Segi is the representative of Oya, the river goddess who was first married to Ogun and then to Shango. It is not remarkable that the human agents, Daodu and Segi are united by mutual love. Segi, like Oya, is both terrifying and attractive, one who can bring death and destruction, but can also be pleasant and charming. Segi is irresistibly attractive, and both ruthless and tender, and like Oya, is brave and not impressed by brutal violence. Daodu and Segi show that resistance is possible by clearing a path which the people can follow, if they have the courage.

### **Strifling the People's Cultural Life**

Kongi's state is labelled as Isma as the regime is fond of 'isms'. His rule is typical of the rule that exists in many countries—Kongi stifles the people's cultural life, and replaces it with repression. There is no interaction between the ruler and the people. Communication is in one direction since the "government rediffusion sets . . . talk and talk, and never/Take a lone word in reply". "Thus Kongi's rule is marked by barren words and vicious police action rather than by consultation with the people and by concerted action" (Jonathan A. Peters 199). The trend towards dictatorship in the newly independent states of Africa has provided the inspiration for Kongi's rule. Autocrats, like Kongi, intoxicated with power, destroy all those who cross their path. The play is deeply rooted in tradition, especially in the concepts concerning the feast of the new Yam and in the use of proverbs, and in the ritual of the King's dance.

Oyin Ogunba makes a useful observation,

The king in Africa is still God's deputy on earth and so he combines both spiritual and political functions. Hence this festival is not a private celebration but one that has meaning for the whole community and in which everyone is expected to participate with interest. (1972: 8)

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The play presents the conflict between the traditional and the modern. Kongi with his passion for dictatorship in the modern style ousts the traditional politics which gave the powers of ruling to the local chieftains. It is a familiar pattern of the traditional in conflict with the forces of change.

### **Power and Repression**

The thirst for power is an inherent quality of mankind. Excessive repressiveness leads to revolt by people, and kindles in them a desire for change. The ruler is a combination of mental and spiritual forces, and is a representative of the community; when he strikes a discordant note with the community, he is sure to be ousted. Change every few years, is inevitable. The modern democracy adopts the method of election to effect changes which will prevent crystallization of power and dictatorship. Kongi's Harvest was inspired by the dictatorial traits present in the African system of government. Kongi is a paranoid leader and his chief, Oba Danlola is an earthy individual. Daodu is the heir apparent, and a gentleman-farmer, whose farming community has set up a kind of doctrinal opposition to the creed of the Carpenter Brigade, which is Kongi's public relations squad. The play deals with the ideals of Kongi, with Kongism. Soyinka has eschewed any pronounced political overtones in the play—the play seeks to reach the eternal essence by penetrating the ephemeral surface. Kongi is an individual with the trappings of a powerful, modern leader. He is a representative of modern leaders.

#### (INTRO)

The pessimistic note in the play is struck by Soyinka, who believes -that dictatorship can never die. Danlola or Kongi or any other ruler, for that matter, takes delight in exploiting people—one form of tyranny is exchanged for another. Traditional society is closer to the natural world. Kongi is mildly paranoid.

They say we took too much silk  
For the royal canopy  
But the dead will witness  
We never ate the silkworm.

#### (SONG)

The traditional ruler might have been autocratic, but the modern ruler has more bloodthirsty tendencies. Daodu's farming community is able to flourish, using modern techniques, such as fertilizers, in a traditional context, as the farm belongs to Oba's heir. The carpenters are trained to sing Kongi's praises, but they are cowardly, and flee from the man they have pledged to die for, at the very first sign of danger. An attempt is made to kill Kongi, but it proves to be abortive. He is too well-protected, or it may also mean that one dead Kongi will be

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replaced by another equally ruthless dictator. The different designs perceived in the political kaleidoscope reveal the different facets of reality of the human condition.

### **Almost a God, in Detention**

Oba Danlola is almost a God, but at present he is in a detention camp. Suddenly the beating of the drums is stopped in the opening section of the play called "Hemlock." This signifies the death of the royal authority. Another symbolic gesture is Oba Danlola's dressing up in the national flag. It is meaningful only insofar as it serves as a covering for him. It is an open challenge to Kongi, and the Oba prepares for the final encounter. The Superintendent tears off the flag, and is scared of his own action. Here, he is not afraid of Danlola's political powers, but he is afraid of his spiritual power. He has no intention of returning the national flag to Oba Danlola—there is no compromise on that point. This brave action of the Superintendent is a pointer to the triumph of the new times, and of the approaching death of traditional authority. A few elders insist on wearing the 'rags' but the others can see the writing on the wall.

#### (INTRO)

The Yam festival is a part of the traditional Yoruba society, and has deep meaning, and philosophy embedded in it. Yams are harvested from about June each year in a Yoruba community, but the people can eat them only after the King has accepted the Yam at the festival. As the first citizen he has to eat the first yam. It is a cleansing ceremony after which the ordinary men eat without any fear of adverse results. With the new times, the significance is slightly altered. Kongi may eat the first yam but the spiritual side of the ceremony is neglected by Kongi. He is only interested in eating the first yam to demonstrate his ascendancy to absolute power. The King is an embodiment of the society's spiritual personality. There are undertones of lament, as the infrastructure of tradition is slowly crumbling. Tradition may not be perfect, but it is humanistic, as it is in harmony with nature and derives its strength from it.

Oba Danlola's suffering acquires the dimensions of martyrdom: "The King's umbrella/Gives no more shade". An air of despondency marks the life in the royal camp, but the situation is not so hopeless, as it appears. The supernatural guardians of the community will not permit Kongi to have a clean walk-over, remarks M. Pushpa (pp. 91).

Danlola is out of the detention camp and makes for the final surrender of his power to Kongi. He desires to personally hand over the best yam to Kongi. Hence, it appears as if Kongi's tactics have paid off, and Oba Danlola finally broken. In reality the plan is different. Oba Danlola does not intend to be present at the ceremony. As he is spied on, he contrives a plot to give the impression of activity. He will then break down, as a result of the exertion of the preparations, and so once again postpone his final humiliation. The fact that he has to resort to this unkingly trick is a pointer to Kongi's success as a leader. Daodu, however, persuades him to attend the ceremony. The Secretary visits Danlola, and he is impatient at the inordinate delay

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caused by the King. The Secretary assures him that the dress he has worn, is good enough to which Oba Danlola replies:

What! these trimmings may serve  
A wayside lunatic, but my friend,  
We must meet the Leader as  
A conquering hero, not welcome him  
Like some comer-corner son-in-law.

Oba Danlola is sensitive to every little event that is taking place there. He decides not to attend the ceremony, while the Secretary thinks he would meet him there. The king is tired of play-acting. The dominant tone is of despair and unspoken grief. He is confused and worried about the future, which seems to grow more and more uncertain. It is imperative that the King should not be provoked to anger, for his wrath will have disastrous consequences for man in Isma community.

Daodu seeks to rejuvenate the Oba's traditional royalty, which is moribund. He persuades Oba Danlola to attend the ceremony and present the yam. Daodu sees through Oba's weakness for Oba Danlola is only waiting for someone to help him to make up his mind. He exploits the situation and we get a glimpse of the accomplished plotter that he is. Oba Danlola is a symbol of the traditional system, and obviously the target for destruction by Kongi.

(CON)

### **Extolling the Virtues of Traditional System**

Soyinka does not extol the virtues of the traditional system unduly; he recognises that there is something autocratic and absolute about it, and this has to be eschewed if it has to survive. At the same time he does emphasize that there is value in the essential humanism of the tradition, its preference for the man who has a soul to the man who is used as a mere tool to realize a totalitarian ideology.

(story)

### **Resistance to Image Building**

Kongi is a typical politician, more keen on image building than constructive administration. The Fourth Aweri declares: "We need an image. Tomorrow being our first appearance in public, it is essential that we find an image". Kongi and his advisors contribute to what is called Kongism. The function of the Aweri philosophers is to foster and establish the image of Kongi. Their aim is to generate an aura of mystery round their leader's head. The first Aweri has an inclination towards the traditional. He recognises some of the values of tradition. He wants to form "a conclave of patriarchs". It is clearly understood that what the Aweri

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philosophers and Kongi and the so-called modern rulers are doing, is merely re-naming old institutions.

The other Aweris are averse to this idea of image-building. They want elements of science to be introduced into the system, but are not able to define 'positive scientificism.' The Fourth Aweri makes a different suggestion altogether: "We might Consider a scientific image. This would be a positive stamp and one very much in tune with our contemporary situation. Our pronouncements should be dominated by a positive scientificism". None of them is able to define what 'positive scientificism' is.

The Aweris are an inharmonious, disreputable group. They lack moral courage, and they are actually in a detention camp as their initiative is killed by Kongi. He uses them as he would use a computer. He is like a lord, and they are like his slaves, rather than his advisors. It is ridiculous that these same people in their happier moments fancy themselves to be the powerful ones of the land. Kongi is a typical autocrat, who makes decisions irrespective of their disputations. All his decisions are based on preconceived, and sometimes irrelevant, theories. Kongi treats his aides as mere children, ordering them around. The political deliberations have a comic touch. Hunger is gnawing at them and they find themselves, spending much of the time talking about food or using food metaphor. Soyinka's target is the Five-Year Development Plan of Isma, which requires one to starve today to get overfed tomorrow. What he bemoans is the spiritual starvation in this community. Like any other dictator, Kongi and his men deal with human beings as if they were blocks of wood.(pp 93 ). M.Pushpa

### **Rule of Enlightened Ritualism**

The aim of the new regime seems to be the establishment of a government based on Enlightened Ritualism. They want to formulate a philosophy which is understood by one and all, and is practical. Oba Danlola and all other institutions will be treated as "glamourised fossilism." The Aweris are guilty of corruption, but are indignant with the accusation aimed at them by the Secretary. The Fourth Aweri is a crazy believer of the present, "one who is sunk in intellectual reverie" (Ogunba, 1975: 180). He just plays around with concepts—'Enlightened ritualism,' 'comprehensive philosophies,' 'glamourised fossilism.' These strike a learned note, but produce no results, as his head is in the clouds, far removed from the world of reality and pragmatism. He is carried away by one idea—the idea of modernisation. He does not have contact with the people for whom he wants to introduce reforms.

The Secretary lashes out at the Aweri. This verbal attack has a paralysing impact on the Fourth Aweri—his dream world collapses. The Fifth Aweri strikes a deal with the Secretary—he charges him fees for his suggestion, and the solution is that Kongi should grant a reprieve to the condemned men as an inducement to Oba Danlola to surrender. The fee that he demands is food. He then makes a devastating statement: "But tell him he can kill them later in detention. Have them shot trying to escape or something. But first demonstrate his power over life and death by granting them a last minute reprieve". This bizarre suggestion must have been

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introduced by Soyinka to demonstrate how widespread Kongism is in the contemporary African World. In February 1961 Patrick Lumumba, the Prime Minister of Congo was killed, but it was announced that he was accidentally shot while trying to escape from prison.

### **Kongi – a Real Dictator**

Kongi is a typical example of dictatorship. He expects the Aweri to write books with his name affixed as the author. The Secretary flatters him by feeding his love for image-building. Since Kongi is the spirit of 'Harvest' everything will date from 'Kongi's Harvest.' Kongi is a brutal egoist, a man who has animalism of a man climbing to power.

The Secretary is nonplussed as Oba Danlola refuses to give up New Yam. Though in detention, he refuses to give up the last vestiges of his royal power. Daodu remains unnerved even when the Secretary shoots questions at him. The subtle moves of Daodu, such as the indication to Segi to disappear from the scene, or the ordering of beer, leave the Secretary in a daze. "Arc you trying to make a fool of me?" he screams .He warns Daodu of serious consequences as he is a dangerous man. Daodu and Segi represent the offended elements in Isma. The Secretary comes out with a slogan, "Every Ismite must do his Mite" . Segi is a mysterious character. She is compared to a black, glistening snake, for she is a woman with extremes of temper, who turns violent when she is angry. She has a tender side to her nature, when she makes amorous advances to Daodu. He has deeper thoughts which disengage him from his amorous pursuits. The attempt to assassinate Kongi fails, and Segi's father is hanged. Kongi makes a triumphant speech: "The spirit of Harvest has smitten the enemies of Kongi. . . . The spirit of resurgence is cleansed in the blood of the nation's enemies, my enemies" (129). The identity of each and every citizen is wiped out as Kongi becomes Ismite, and Ismite means might.

Oba Danlola has surrendered the monster yam, and Kongi has blessed it. Kongi's victory seems assured, but his problems are not over, as peace and salvation are still remote propositions. He makes a marathon speech, and Segi performs a symbolic action. She puts her father's head in a copper salver which is passed from hand to hand, until it reaches Kongi, and then Segi throws open the lid. Kongi is shocked and is rendered speechless. What it symbolises is that Kongi has succeeded in producing the destructive forces of life, and that he is the new spirit of Death, not the spirit of Harvest or resurgence. Kongi recovers from this temporary shock, and a new Kongi is born more tyrannical than ever before. This forces people like the Secretary, Oba Danlola, Sarumi and others to go into exile to form the nucleus of a resistance movement to liquidate him and his absolutism. His totalitarianism uses all horrifying tactics, and we realise that Kongism cannot remain endemic to Africa. Soyinka seems to take courage from the fact that Kongi and Kongism have no future, and no community can tolerate a tyrannical megalomaniac for long. Kongi is dehumanised, and Isma will reject him one day. Power has drained even-drop of life in him. A concerted action by the members of the community will result in his downfall.

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## **The Feast of the New Yam**

The Feast of the New Yam is an indispensable ritual of celebration in the tradition-bound Africa. This prime crop symbolises the supremacy and power of the clan. It embodies the fertility of the tribe and guarantees its continued procreation through harmonious interaction with nature. The harvest festival symbolises the cleansing of the clan's sins, and the restoration of its health, through the medium of the spiritual head. This New Yam festival imposes a burden of responsibility on its divine ruler. Kongi's Harvest deals with the conflict between religion and politics that was an important part of the political scenario in Europe, some centuries back. Oba Danlola is preoccupied with the doom of traditional culture, which gradually dies. The death of traditional values may prove disastrous for the new nation. Total abandoning of the traditional bulwark, does not augur well for a nation on the threshold of a sea-change. (pp 95) M. Pushpa

Kongi's new regime does not succeed in establishing a well-ordered reign. He and his followers are a pack of hollowmen who consider themselves as the Magi. Kongi proclaims himself to be a god in his own right. He operates from his cell in a mountain retreat on the eve of the festival. Isma sands on the threshold of its Second Five Year Development Plan, and he is fasting for its well-being. He is far too gone with the delusions of immortality. He is ready to change the course of the world.

There has been a plot against the dictator, and the five conspirators are to be hanged. Oba Danlola reluctantly agrees to attend the New Yam festival and surrender his rights to Kongi in return for the reprieve of the five plotters. Then, the focus shifts to the organising Secretary who represents the system of intimidation, corruption and sycophancy on which Kongi's power rests. Kongi is well protected by the Reformed Awcri society, and he "lives more and more in a cloud-cuckoo-land of self-worship and magical sloganizing" (Moore 62). The real opposition to Kongi comes from the younger generation comprising Sarumi's son Daodu, and Daodu's mistress Segi. He has started a successful co-operative farm in competition with the somewhat militaristic state farms of the regime. Segi has organised a night club as a centre of resistance. On the great day, the intentions of the principal actors are transformed. The secret bargain between Daodu and the Secretary is ruptured, as of the five plotters, one hangs himself and another escapes. Kongi takes back his reprieve, and orders that all the condemned men should be hanged on the Day of Harvest. As we have observed earlier the function ends in chaos, as Segi serves her father's head on a salver. Kongi we feel is a spent force; perhaps, the future rests with Daodu and Segi.

### **Kongi, a Psychopath**

Kongi, the dictator, is almost a psychopath; yet Segi tells us that once upon a time Kongi was a great man. Daodu, Danlola's nephew, opposes Kongi, but not openly. A modernist by temperament, he runs a cooperative farm successfully. Oba Danlola is a sad man—his power being snatched away by Kongi. His band of old advisors has been dismissed. We feel sorry for the traditional ruler when he says, "What is a King without a clan of elders". Oba's Aweri

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otherwise called as the wise men have been replaced by Reformed Aweri Fraternity, consisting of the men. They are concerned with image building. Kongi wants to make a clean break from the past. He and his followers use words like "progressive" and "reactionary," which are apparently meaningless when used by these people. Kongi, in reality is a corrupt, soulless dictator. He suggests that the old superstitious festival has been replaced by the principle of Enlightened Ritualism, and that his take over has had the sanction of the old order. Kongi is obsessed with the desire for fame and praise, as an intellectual; he has a craving to be hero-worshipped. In short, his desire is to be installed as god on earth. Like all dictators, he crumbles when he comes face to face with an act of actual cruelty. The sight of Segi's father's head unsettles his mental equilibrium. He becomes a symbol of the typical paranoid black dictatorship that was a new experience for Africa, which had just come out of the Western 'stranglehold.'

Kongi's transformation from a great man to a dictator is a baffling one. Now, he appears to be a man, who has crossed boundaries of sanity. The new system is like a devalued coin—the people are ruled by the tyranny of words. The Reformed Aweri Fraternity produces the words in a factory and drops them into talking boxes. The repetition of words and slogans devalues their worth.. He tyrannises over the Oba, whose royal drum has been silenced. The Oba still retains his spiritual power. When he threatens to prostrate before him, the Superintendent is reduced to abject pleading before the powerless Oba. Kongi does not have the father-child relationship with his subjects. His power has no roots, as it is not rooted in tradition.

According to M.Pushpa,"Hemlock" suggests that a heavy responsibility rests with the Oba Danlola. He has to work for the welfare of the people. He eats the new Yam in order to absorb the poison, so as to make eating and living safe for the people. This is the ultimate responsibility of the ruler. It is this which makes the Oba's rule superior to that of Kongi's, which is based on physical power. It is a rule built around personality cult and a vicious selfishness. It is a self-centred regime, as Kcngi is not one who cares for the welfare of the people. It is not a facile opposition of old and the new—it is not an opposition between the humane and the monstrous, between the giver of life and the bringer of death. The title 'Hemlock' indicates tragedy with its implication of poison and the death of Socrates.(pp 97).

Kongi fasts, but has no concern for the welfare of the people. His asceticism is assumed for the benefit of image building. The Reformed Aweri complain of starvation as they are compulsorily imprisoned with Kongi on a near starvation diet. The total effect of the scenes is one of barrenness, a denial of life and truth. On the other hand, Segi's nightclub is a scene of life. Daodu, too suggests life. He is close to the source of life, as he works on land. Kongi's regime is a regime of repression. The Reformed Aweri are instruments of intellectual and spiritual repression, while the Carpenter's Brigade are the instruments of physical repression. As Kongi remarks: "They, the Carpenter's Brigade complement my sleepy Aweris here. These ones look after my intellectual needs, the Brigade take care of the occasional physical requirements". His regime is marked by brutality and a play on words—it is an exercise in scientific exorcism.

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Kongi and his men are trapped in a situation where to preserve their sanity, they use words and slogans as mere jargon.

### **Turn-around in the Life of Segi**

Segi is a very interesting character. An erstwhile admirer of Kongi, Segi has now recognised the evil in him. She clings to the life-principle symbolised by Daodu. She has one element without which no human being can live—devotion to life. Daodu is a prince, an heir to Danlola's throne, being the son of the junior Oba Sarumi. The throne now is an empty symbol, perhaps, possessing only spiritual power. A successful farmer, he is linked to the earth. He has been abroad, and now he is trying to find his feet. Kongi represents a denial of life. Daodu on the other hand, stands for life. He can suppress Kongi only by being his antithesis. Kongi, the Messiah of pain is seen in a fit of uncontrollable anger, and it culminates in an epileptic fit, as he pronounces the decree of death against the prisoners. He withdraws his amnesty and he is left writhing in pain, fighting for breath and life, hence, a living symbol of his regime of death.

(SONG)

The latter part of the play becomes interesting with some excellent play-acting by Oba Danlola and Daodu. Oba Danlola deceives even the organising Secretary into believing that he is abdicating his throne by the final presentation of the New Yam to Kongi. Daodu actually bursts the royal drum thus symbolising the end of the effective leadership of the Oba, in the face of the competition offered, by modern political regimes. Daodu's act is an acknowledgement of the fact that a different road lies ahead—Oba Danlola's regime has come to an end. Segi's presence acquires a new meaning. Oba Danlola exclaims:

There was always something more, I knew,  
To that strange woman beyond  
Her power to turn grown men to infants.(pp ). (114)

### **Contrast in Music – a Symbol of Conflicts**

The preliminaries to the arrival of Kongi confirm the earlier suggestions of the nature of the regime—the music of the penny whistles in contrast to the royal drums, bespeaks the hollowness of the rulers. It is very clear that the administrators are preoccupied with the surface of things rather than the essentials. Repressive methods are to be used to defend Kongism. As we have seen earlier, Kongi and his aides are always concerned with the trivialities of life. The values of Kongi's Government of death are further stressed with the gift which Segi makes to him, her father's head. Kongi stares in wonder and he sees the eventual futility of his terror staring at him.

Daodu is disappointed as his plan has failed; but it has led to the assertion of life against the death principle. Daodu represents the kind of force which rejuvenates the society. He has to

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face odds if he wants to be its saviour. The Organising Secretary is unable to understand the spirit of sacrifice inherent in a saviour. Daodu and Segi appear to him as 'roadside lunatics.' They have succeeded in releasing certain potential forces which point to a better future. The struggle does not seem to end—it continues, and it is in this continuity that the hope for the future of mankind lies.

(STORY)

### **Ever-present Satire**

The play rests firmly on the infrastructure of biting satire. The Oba Danlola is a traditional ruler fond of ceremony, and Kongi, President of the new regime, is devoted to "isms." Both are celebrating a national day. Kongi is a poseur—a man who thinks that the world is watching him at all times. He sits on the heath, in the midst of barrenness and makes a speech, which is devoid of sound. The gestures are of a man who has lost control over himself. Oba Danlola, the fiery traditional leader is obstinate. One of the major actions of the play is to persuade Oba Danlola to present the new Yam to Kongi. There are two interesting characters, Right and Left Ears of state, who are henchmen of Kongi's Organising Secretary. They disappear never to re-appear. Later, we learn that they have been killed. Kongi desires to maintain power by bulldozing the people into submission. The threat to his power comes from the least expected source, Daodu and Segi combination which symbolizes the younger generation and future hope of Ismaland. They combine to form a formidable plank for spiritual traditionalism against the pragmatism of the modern. Their aim is to control Kongism.

### **Clash between Traditionalism and Modernism**

There is always a clash between traditionalism and modernism. The play dramatizes this conflict. Though its immediate concern is with the African context, it acquires a universal tone. It is an accepted dictum that the old order has to change, yielding place to new, but the transition is not so smooth always. Most of the countries with unstable elected governments face a situation where the old order collapses, and the new one is not able to adjust to growth. "Hemlock," the opening part, seems to hint at the cup of humiliation which the Oba is forced to drink at the hands of Kongi, and the Superintendent. "Hangover," the last part, shows the unpleasant effects of totalitarianism.

Daodu is confident that Kongi will be overthrown. He wants to bring life into the barren world of the autocratic King. One thing becomes clear to us, that it is not easy to overthrow an autocrat like Kongi, especially as he is well-entrenched in his seat of power. A ruler may assume power through tradition like Oba Danlola, but he cannot hope to hold on to it for long. A dictator like Kongi has to be prepared for his downfall. The harvest festival becomes a nightmare, when he faces the stark reality of his autocratic rule. Oba Danlola is a typical traditional ruler, who holds his sway, with the paraphernalia of custom and taboo. His love for pomp and majesty is not diminished even when he loses his political and spiritual power.

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## **Monstrous Wave of Propaganda**

The people, deprived of their traditional plank, are carried adrift by the monstrous wave of propaganda. Brute force is used to make the people give their allegiance to the ruler. The bond of trust does not exist between Kongi and the people; it is fear that forces them to acknowledge his power. Daodu is a quiet revolutionary, who has no patience for the rituals, and the slow dignity of traditional authority. He hates image building and terrorism, which do not yield fruits. Modernism can flourish only in the soil of tradition. Success of any government depends on the just matching of tradition and modernism, and not on the elimination of one by the other. Each of these three characters is afflicted by the power syndrome. These power-mongers develop an over-blown divinity. Intimations of immortality are a direct result of the mania for power.

## **Soyinka's View of Omnipotence and Divinity**

Soyinka denounces such tendencies and demonstrates that ideas of omnipotence and divinity can reduce a man to impotence. If one wants to retain his grip over power and greatness, he has to have true humility and generosity. It is a matter of regret that people in power do not realize that their foothold on the climb to power is not secure without the help of these softening influences. What we see in Soyinka's plays is a demonstration of this. Egoism leads the protagonist nowhere, and he ends up in a chaotic state of mind or dies. The valuable lessons offered by history have not made any impact on the rulers. The pursuit of power leads them to an abysmal darkness, where there is nothing but destruction and self-annihilation.

Daodu in his speech makes it clear that there is an alternative to Kongism as a way of life.

So let him, the Jesus of Isma, let him, who has assumed the mantle of a Messiah, accept from my farming settlement this gift of soil and remember that a human life once buried cannot, like this yam, sprout anew. Let him take from the palm only its wine and not crucify lives upon it. (p. 128).

## **Peace and Salvation**

He becomes the voice of the people, a messiah who rejects an ascetic and sadistic way of life. Daodu believes in enjoying life to its last dregs, for life without basic comforts and joys is a beastly one. He is against Kongi as he has inflicted pain and suffering on the people. He believes in removing pain from life or at least reducing it. His intention is to enhance the quality of life through diligent cultivation of land. Kongi has committed a crime—he has starved people physically and spiritually, he has an organised spy system and has subverted the very foundations of the society. He almost becomes a maniac with murderous instincts. He breaks out into epileptic fits when he hears that one of his prisoners has escaped. Kongi's lust for power has

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become a devouring passion. He is like a beast waiting to pounce upon his prey. He screams: "I want him back—alive if possible. If not, ANY OTHER WAY!" (100). Unfortunately, the image of immortality built by Kongi is strengthened by the failure of the coup d'etat', Kongi is intoxicated with the pride of his success. "The justice of earth has prevailed over traitors and conspirators. There is divine blessing on the Second Five Year Development Plan" (129). Daodu and Segi confess they have failed again and the Secretary will soon escape through the border.

Peace and salvation are still distant goals for Kongi. At an important juncture in his speech, Kongi is presented with Segi's father's head. This horrifying sight unnerves Kongi. The Yam would have been a symbol of life, of the spirit of harvest; instead the head symbolizes the spirit of death. Kongi is completely dehumanised, and the way is clear for a megalomaniac to bid good-bye. ( pp 101).M.Pushpa

The Secretary is a very complex character. His relation with Kongi is shrouded in mystery. Sometimes he is performing his duty because he is forced to do so. Sometimes, he seems to be truly enjoying the work for it gives him a great sensation of power over the Oba Danlola and the Awed, including Daodu and Segi. He has studied Kongi well and is aware of his propensity to flattery. He is an excellent combination of the politician .and a civil servant, especially the type found in post-independent Africa. He belongs to the type who work for a cause vigorously without believing in it, enjoy all the privileges of office and flee at the first sign of trouble.

### **The Strife will Continue**

In the end of the play Kongi's secretary is seen going towards the border. This indicates all is not well in Kongi's camp. There seems to be a problem in Daodu's camp. The indications are that the strife will continue. The Secretary bemoans his plight:

But  
Contented? That is one uneasy crown  
Which still eludes my willing head. (136)

The play ends as Umukoro saying that "Soyinka's political vision in this play is suspended, awaiting the end of the strife" (179).

### **A World that has Lost its Unifying Principle**

The play Kongi's Harvest presents the picture of a distinguishing world which has lost its unifying principle. Kongi's Harvest is a satirical exposure of the absurdity of human conditions in the world, where life is faced with its ultimate world, stark reality when man is confronted with the basic choices and the basic situations of his existence.

Kongi's Harvest is a total theatre, brilliantly structured to articulate a dialectical confrontation of old and new not so much through dramatic action as by the theatrical means. The meaning is communicated by design music, songs, costume style of gesture and delivery over and above the dialogue within the plot. There are traditional drumming and singing and the songs acts as chorus for the Reformed Aweri. In Segi's club the voice rhythm are natural, even in the lyrical passages; movement relaxed, poised and cool.

### **Focus on African Way of Administration**

The first section entitled "Hemlock" suggests that a heavy responsibility rests with Oba Danlola. He has to work for the welfare of the people. He eats the New Yam in order to absorb the poison, so as to make eating and living safe for the people. This is the ultimate responsibility of the ruler. It is this which makes the Oba's rule superior to that of Kongi's which is based on physical power. It is a rule built around personality cult and a vicious selfishness. It is a self centered regime, as Kongi is not one who cares for the welfare of the people. It is not a facile opposition of old and the new it is not an opposition between the human and the monstrous, between the giver of life and the bringer of death. The title 'Hemlock' indicates tragedy with its implication of poison and the death of Socrates.

The play opens with an anthem  
The pot that will eat fat  
Its bottom must be scorched  
The squirrel that will long crack nuts  
Its footpad must be sore  
The sweetest wine has flowed down  
The tapper's shattered shins  
And there is more isn't more  
Who says there isn't more?  
Who says there isn't more plenty a word.  
In a penny newspaper

This is a long song, which is their national song. It depicts the African way of administration. The song is being sung inside the prison after a meeting of the present king Oba Danlola with some of chiefs and followers is over. In the first paragraph the first four lines describe about the 'New Yam' which is taken at the time of ordination by the king and it implies that the king should be the representative of all good virtues.

Ism to ism for ism is ism  
Of ism and isms and absolute – ism  
To demonstrate the tree of life  
Is sprung from the broken peat  
And we the rotted bark, spurned  
When the tree swells its pot

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The mucus that is shorted out.  
When Kongi's new race blows  
And more, oh there's a harvest of words  
In a Penny newspaper (61)

### **Emergin New State**

The second paragraph recites about Kongi's new race. His state is labelled as Isma as the regime is fond of 'ism'. The cine "We the rotten bark" refers to the followers of Kongi. They are ready to welcome the life giving tree as their new king. Here the conflict arises between the traditional figure and the political figure. "Kongi's rule is marked by barren words and vicious police action rather than by consultation with the people and by concerted action" (Peters 199)

They say, Oh how  
They say it all on silent skulls  
But who cares? Who but a lunatic  
Will bandy words with boxes  
With government re diffusion sets  
Which talk and talk and never  
Take a lone word in reply.  
I cannot counter words, Oh  
I cannot counter words of  
A rediffusion set  
My ears are sore,  
But my mouth is 'agbayun'  
For I do not bandy words  
With a government loudspeaker. (61, 62)

### **Confusion in the Government**

The last two paragraphs deal with the confusion, which is prevailing in the government and also satirically comments that there are no words to comment on the government diffusion and the confusion. The last line depicts the situation of the government, and it is compared to the loud speaker, which characterizes sound but lacks clarity of expression.

### **Hemlock**

Most dramatically the play *Kongi's Harvest* begins with an anthem. 'A roll of drums' accompanies the anthem. Along with the curtain, the audience also rise, when Oba Danlola, Wuraola, his favourite wife, Oba Aweri, head of Oba's defunct Concliaive of Elders, Dende and danlola's retinue of drummers and buglers appear on the scene and break into a song. The song is significantly entitled 'Hemlock'.

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In this context, it is to be recalled that the feast of the New Yam is an indispensable ritual.

The following lines

The pot that will eat fat  
Its bottom must be scorched  
The squirrel that will long crack nuts  
Its footpad must be sore

If the pot has to give forth substance with fat, its lowest portion, the bottom has to dry out and wither as a result of extreme heat.

The cracking of nuts for a long time will cause the footpad of the squirrel sore. The words 'pot' and 'squirrel' have been used metaphorically to refer to the pain and agony that the king has to face for cleansing of the clan's sins and for its restoration of its health acting as its spiritual head. All along Oba Danola as kin, has been the sweetest wine that has flown down the tappers shattered sins.'

### Poetic Devices in the Play

The usage of the words oh!oh is an effective use of epizeuxis, which is a repetition of adjacent words. It brings out the agony and the intense feeling of the singer for the imprisoned king.

The anaphoric repetition of the questions

Who says there isn't more  
Who says there isn't plenty a word

implies the controversy that prevails and the conflict that exists between Oba Danlola and the king. The refrain of in a penny newspaper is used twice after the end of the first two paragraphs. Even in an ordinary newspaper which is worth just a prey that remarks that there isn't plenty a word' for the king while there is a harvest of words for Kongi.

The first stanza thus focusing on the ultimate responsibility lies on the king, who is now imprisoned and powerless.

The second stanza begins with the following lines

'Ism' to 'ism' for 'ism' is 'ism'  
Of 'isms' and 'isms' on  
Absolute-'ism'

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Where there is a general repetition of the word 'ism'. The repetition of 'ism' becomes effective when it finally ends with absolute-'ism' portrays in which Kongi's power as a ruler remains unchecked.

The springing of the tree of life from the broken peat is the demonstration of absolute-'ism'.

And we the rotted bark spurned  
When the tree swells its pot

The mucus that is snorted out when Kongi's new race blows and contempt of people or the helpless king are underlined by the striking use of the words 'spurned and snorted out and blows.' The scornful reaction and rejection to Kongi's injustice has a harvest of words in a penny newspaper.

Even the lowest and poorest of the social rung are sensitive to the serious change of the political issues.

The anaphoric repetition of 'they say, they say' becomes powerful, when they say it as they say it on silent skulls, they are helpless and thereby cannot be expressive. The general repetition of words such as 'who, bandy, talk, diffusion sets' highlight the views of the people.

But who cares? Who but a lunatic  
Will bandy words with boxes  
With government rediffusion sets  
Which talk and talk and never  
Take a lone word in reply.(pp 61).

When sung these words sound very impressive and meaningful.

The repetition of 'I cannot counter the words of,' and "I do not bandy words" twice acts like a refrain and emphasizes what the singer wants to say. The addition of 'Oh,' in between 'I cannot counter words' underlines the tragic vein of thought. The use of the word 'bandy' is striking because the singer implies tossing of words back and forth casually, whether they are true or not or what ever the effect they might have. It further brings out the helplessness on the part of the king and his people, who cannot voice forth their opinion, but passively watch and witness the ensuing events of the play.

The tone of the opening songs, however, together with the brutal climax of the action, combine to give it a more sombre and disturbing quality. The play's two protagonists, the old king Oba Danlola and the megalomaniac dictator Kongi, are both left in some disarray at the end of the play. Hence the farewell to past greatness and formal splendour which is sung to Danlola by his faithful courtiers in 'Hemlock', the opening movement of the play, is a farewell occasioned

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not only by Kongi's campaign against the king but also by Africa's search for a future which equally excludes both types of discredited leadership.

The first song is quite significant because it introduces the setting and brings out the helplessness of King Danola and the fierce usurping of the kingdom by Kongi. The people, therefore are helpless and positive witnesses. The first song reiterating the above mentioned points and sets the mood of the play, anticipates the tragic end of the play.

The second song is as follows

E ma gun' Yan Oba kere O  
E ma gun' Yan Oba kere  
Kaun elepini ko see gbe mi  
Eweyo noin in if yo' nu  
E ma gun' Yan Oba kere (62).

The above song is sung by Dantola's followers in the prison. In spite of being the king, he remains in his own world. In response to the beating of the drums he steps into slow royal dance. His followers sing in fury in order to rebel against Kongi's administration in the King's absence. They compare the king to a spice, which is suppressed by a shilling vegetable. The atmosphere is filled with melancholy notes and the followers are cheerless, they dislike the entrance of the new government. This song signifies the unwillingness of the followers and the king to accept the new 'Yam' which is going to be tasted by Kongi.

The translation is as follows:

Don't pound the king's yam  
In a small mortar  
Don't pound the king's yam  
In a small mortar  
Small as the spice is  
It cannot be swallowed whole  
A shilling's vegetable must appease  
A halfpenny spice.(pp 62 ).

The king responding to the words of the superintendent, slowly steps into the royal dance, to the beat of 'gbedu' drum. The lines are repeated twice:

Don't pound the king's yam  
In a small mortar

The song says that the king's yam should not be pound in a small mortar. The spice, though it may, small in quality cannot be swallowed as a main meal. A shilling worth vegetable

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should to spice, which is worth only half a penny. He implies that Kongi usurping his place is compared to a spice which is the shilling worth vegetable, who can make the spice valuable. To quote

Small as the spice is  
It cannot be swallowed whole  
A shilling's vegetable must appease  
A halfpenny spice.(pp 62 ).

Sarumi, a junior Oba breaks forth into a song.

Oba ni if' epo inu ebo ra'ri  
Orisa I'oba  
Oba ni if' epo inu ebo r'awuje  
Orisa I' Oba. (62)

The translation is as follows:

None but the king  
Takes the oil from the crossroads  
And rubs it in his 'awuje'  
The king is a god.(pp 62)

Just as the formal praise of Danlola in the 'Hemlock' scene is lent an ironical quality by the visible fact that both king and courtiers are in prison, the praises here do not conceal the weakened state of Sango, who has become the 'prisoner' of his generals. Both scenes are highly economical ways of rendering a political situation. 'Hemlock' expresses completely the dignity and richness of cultural association which surround the Oba, and which cannot conceivably be transferred to Kongi along with the New Yam; but it expresses also the mournful recognition that his courtiers are dancing 'a long farewell' to this particular type of greatness. The courtiers are as defunct as the king, the sole object of their praise.(song 3)

### **The Impact of Drums**

In this song he sings about the ability of the king. He opines that the king is the descendant of God, Who has the divine right with him. Sarumi proves to be a strong supporter of the king. Infact when he says 'None but the king Takes the oil from the crossroads' stoutly asserts that at the cross roads it is the king, who has to take the decisions. He goes to the extent of making the king, a god. The superintendent feels that they are desecrating the national anthem and commands them to stop that unholy noise. When he seizes the lead drummer by the wrist, the song, the dance and the beating of the drums stop.

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Danlola becomes angry. To soothe him Sarumi co-joined by the drummers sings the following song. Danlola is accused by the superintendent. In order to claim Danlola, Sarumi sings,

Sarumi: Ah, Danlola, my father,  
Even so did I  
Wish your frown of thunder away  
When the Aweri were driven from  
Their ancient conclave. Then you said . . . . . (66).

Drummer: This is the last  
That we shall dance together  
They say we too much silk  
For the royal canopy  
But the dead will witness  
We never ate the silkworm. (66)

Sarumi: They complained because  
The first of the new yams  
Melted first in an Oba's mouth  
But the dead will witness  
We drew the poison from the root. (66)

The royal drums break forth in a song of mourning and farewell, and the words demonstrate that since their master is in prison, they cannot enjoy the days with him. He desires to console all the followers including Danlola. The words seem to support the King, who has got the first chance to taste the 'Yam'.

Danlola's begins to feel at ease as the King's men begin a dirge of 'ege'

Drummer: I saw a strange sight  
In the marker this day  
The day of the feast of Agemo  
The sun was high  
And the king's umbrella  
Beneath it . . . . .

Sarumi: We lift the king's umbrella  
Higher than men  
But it never pushes  
The sun in the face.

Drummer: I saw a strange sight

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In the market this day  
The sun was high  
But I saw no shade  
From the king's umbrella

This is once again about the king. It focuses on the king's reputation and his present decline. Since the king is the representative of God, he is regarded as a descendant of God. The reference to his umbrella symbolizes the present powerless condition of the king. Ogbo Aweri joins with them in the course of dance

Sarumi: This is the last our feet  
Shall speak to feet of the dead  
And the unborn cling  
To the hem of our robes  
Oh yes, we know they say  
We wore out looms  
With weaving robes for kings  
But I ask, is popoki  
The stuff to let down  
To unformed fingers clutching up  
At life?

Oba Aweri: 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 Enjoin  
Whose hands of chalk  
Have formed the cripple  
And the human bat of day.  
In the end sings

Danlola: This is the last  
Our feet shall touch together  
We thought the tune  
Obeyed us to the soul  
But the drums are newly shaped  
And stiff arms strain  
On stubborn crooks, so  
Delve with the left foot  
For ill – luck; with the left

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Again for ill – luck; once more  
With the left alone, for disaster  
Is the only certainty we know. (69).

### **Alternate Singing**

Hemlock ends with long, alternative singing, focusing on the leading and conflicting issues. It is sung by Sarumi, drummer, Ogba Aweri and Danlola respectively. When Sarumi addresses the king as ‘Ah, Danlola, my father’ shows his awe and reverence, love and faithfulness. The drummer seems to have a premonition of the future when he sings that ‘This is the last, That we shall dance together’. The false allegations set against the king are metaphorically and most beautifully brought out in the song of the drummer.

They say we too much silk  
For the royal canopy  
But the dead will witness  
We never ate the silkworm. (66)

Sarumi acknowledges that earlier it has been the king, who tasted the new yam first as reflected in the lines, ‘The first of the new yams, Melted first in Oba’s mouth’. He states only the dead of the past will be able to testify that the existing evil, the poison has been removed from the root. The reference to ‘the poison from the root’ is so relevant to the title ‘Hemlock’. The song proves to be an effective device of the structure which precisely relates the play to the title ‘hemlock’. Tasting of the hemlock is a definite duty of the king which in turn proves to be detrimental for his life.

### **The Dirge**

The king’s men begin a dirge of ‘ege’. Danlola withdraws ‘more and more into himself’ as the drummer continues singing. The drummer exclaims that he saw a strange sight in the market on the day of the feast of Agemo—the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence. It is pertinent when he stops with the point ‘The sun was high, And the king’s umbrella, Beneath it .....’. The drummer’s song is intruded by Sarumi, who remarks that they lift the king’s umbrella above men but the umbrella does not protect the face from the sun as seen in the following lines,

But it never pushes  
The sun in the face (p. 67).

The drummer resumes his previous song and completes the idea to quote

I saw a strange sight  
In the market this day

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The sun was high  
But I saw no shade  
From the king's umbrella (p. 67)

Danlola's pathetic state is heightened in these lines. With the coming of Kongi, Danlola has failed to be a source of comfort consolation and protection for his people since he himself is in a helpless situation in the prison. The singing of the song oncemore at the end of the chapter entitled 'Hemlock' prepares the wind of the audience for the action of the play. Hence this case of song is a powerful structural device of Soyinka. In reply to the drummer Ogbo Aweri prophetically says

This is the last  
That we shall dance together (p. 67)

### **The Last Dance?**

A point of emphasis all through the singing is that 'This is the last dance'. Sarumi remarks

This is the last our feet  
Shall speak to feet of the dead  
And the unborn cling  
To the hem of our robes(pp 67).

Danlola reiterates the same point when he says that

This is the last  
Our feet shall dance together(pp 68).

### **Royal Python and Other Symbols**

The metaphorical comparison of himself to the 'royal python' which may be good at hissing is ineffective as a contrast to Kongi. The drummers for the third time repeats his view that 'the king's umbrella gives no more shade'. The strange comparison of the mother and Kongi to the child in the course of the song is very efficacious. To quote

Too big for pillow  
And it swelled too big  
For the mother's back  
And soon the mother's head  
Was nowhere to be seen  
And the child's slight belly  
Was strangely distended.(pp69)

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There use of epanalapsis of the word 'ill-luck' is an effective device to bring about the Danlola's pathetic state. The final stanza of the song as sung by Danlola highlights that they only imagined that they sang and danced to the tune as inspired in the soul but on the contrary the drums are newly shaped and the drummers seem to strain their stiff arms 'on stubborn crooks'. He repeatedly anticipates ill luck and disaster which he thinks are a certainty. During the course of the song, asking questions and answering the gives variety. It avoids monotony.

To quote the words of Soyinka:

The bugles join in royal cadences, the two kings dance slow, mournful steps. Accompanied by the retinue. Coming down on the scene, a cage of prison bars separating Danlola from Sarumi and the other visitors who go out backwards herded off by the superintendent (p. 69).

### **Dance and Songs**

Danlola also joins with them in the royal dance. The king dance slowly and later on Danlola is separated from Sarumi. In the Yoruba tribe songs are popular not only at times of public ceremony and rituals, but in most of the occasions. Here the song is sung in conversational mode. Songs have complex emphasis and repetitions. The faint ironic humour and the realism define the personality of the character.

The songs in the plays of Soyinka gain significance with the accompaniment of music, dance and drum-beating. He introduces variety of dances, instruments of different kinds and lively drum-beating. He normally prepares the minds of the audience with music in the background and sometimes dances before a song is introduced. In the first-part The stage directions given by Soyinka is note-worthy. To quote:

Coloured lights, and the sustained chord of a juju band guitar gone typically mad brings on the night club scene. A few dancers on , the band itself offstage. Daodu is dancing with Segi. Enter Secretary flanked by the right and Left ear of state. Reactions are immediate to their entry. A few night-lifers pickup their drinks and go in, there are one or two aggressive departures, some stay on defiantly, others obsequiously try to attract attention and say a humble greeting. Daodu and Segi dance on . The music continues in the background (pp72).

### **Change of Scenes**

Music preceding the change of the scene are leading into the next scene or into the significant moment is a striking feature of Soyinka's plays. There is a loud chord on guitar after the scene with Kongi, the Aweris and the secretary with the shift of scene to Segi,s club. The

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secretary who comes to announce a message is once again struck by the beauty of segi. The song is sung in praise of Segi's beauty.

In the above mentioned song Daodu compares Segi's skin to a black glistening snake which passes in the sun into cool shadows. He compares Segi to a coiled snake which is beautifully sleeping in a velvet bolster laid on flowers. If this python of a woman welcomes him, he prefers her breast to a softer pillow. Daodu ends the song with a point that with a python coiled, whose bosom ripples waiting for its prey, one should not be fooled with.

The use of Epistrophe is one of the devices of Soyinka which the audience cannot miss. The words 'the sea' is repeated thrice in the song of the secretary. Epinalapsis is one of the significant techniques of the songs. In Daodu's songs the words 'still' and 'tender' are repeated twice.

In addition to the use of striking anaphoric repetition, the vigorous use of similes in the songs makes them more lively.

### **The Reality of Confusion**

The play ends on a note of confusion. The fate of the protagonists is left unclear. Kongi's secretary is seen going towards the border. This indicates cell is not well in Kongi's camp. There seems to be a problem in Daodu's camp. The indications are that the strife will continue. The secretary bemoans his plight. No solution has been evolved in the end. "Hangover" the last part, shows the unpleasant effects of the totalitarianism.

*Kongi's Harvest* is a satirical exposure of the absurdity of human conditions in the world, where life is faced with its ultimate world, stark reality when man is confronted with the basic choices and the basic situations of his existence. *Kongi's Harvest* is a total theatre, brilliantly structured to articulate a dialectical confrontation of old and new not so much through dramatic action as by the theatrical means. The meaning is communicated by design music, songs, costume style of gesture and delivery over and above the dialogue within the plot. There are traditional drumming and singing and the songs acts as chorus for the Reformed Aweri. In Segi's club the voice rhythm are natural, even in the lyrical passages; movement relaxed, poised and cool.

## Chapter 5

### Songs as Medium of Convention



#### Divinely Ordered Confrontation

*A Dance of the Forests* is the play of an occasion, the celebration of Nigerian independence. Hence Soyinka brings together in the conception of the play the idea of an important event among the living, which he calls 'The Gathering of the Tribes', and the idea of a divinely ordered confrontation between certain mortals and their historical prototypes of a distant age. "The mortals have in fact brought this confrontation upon themselves by asking the spirits to send them certain forefathers of the glorious past to take part in their celebration". (DF 31).

Soyinka presents the play in a more or less tragic vein. *A Dance of the forests* deals with the contemporary society. Its original title has been *A Dance of the African Forests* and indeed the context of the play as well as its rituals and characters are unmistakably African. Before

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completion, Soyinka has enlarged its scope to include all men everywhere and modified the title. The play is regarded as Soyinka's theatrical debut.

### **Troubled Awareness**

This development begins to unfold in an explicit way in *A Dance of the Forests*. It is the first work in which the troubled awareness of the human scene, as exemplified by the African situation, which has emerged as the dominant theme of Soyinka's work, is given expression at a serious meditative level. The immediate reference of the play, the celebration of Nigerian independence, is presented as a paradigm of not only the African society, marked explicitly by the fact that it is poised at a turning point in time, but also of human society generally, whose moral progress is inscribed within a historical perspective.

The first performance of *A Dance of the Forests* was also the first announcement of Soyinka's tragic imagination, his severely circumscribed hopes for what African independence might achieve, and the demands which he was now prepared to make upon the comprehension of his audience. Those who had genuine hopes for the African theatre could not fail to be stimulated by the appearance of a work of such scale and ambition. Soyinka's potentialities as a writer were clearly extended far beyond anything that his earlier plays and poetry might suggest.

### **Fulfilling the Promise**

The play is a consideration of the chances of Africa, in which this historical perspective has taken on an acutely felt dimension, of fulfilling the promise of the moment by a universal renewal of moral and spiritual values. In the words of A. P. Dani, "The play ""denigrate the glorious African past and warned Nigerians and all Africans that their energies henceforth should be spent trying to avoid repeating the mistakes that have already been made."(pp117).

*A Dance of the Forests* is a very important work in the development of Soyinka's art, for what he initiates in this play begins henceforth to achieve a refinement both in the expression and in the greater coherence of the experience. The personal elaboration of elements drawn from tradition into a new pattern of meanings attests not simply to a desire on the writer's part to give originality to his work but to a more important artistic preoccupation; it registers Soyinka's quest for fundamental human and spiritual values as they are expressed in the traditional world view. There is thus an immediate connection between the use of traditional material in his expression, and the development of his individual artistic experience.

### **Primarily a Satirical Play**

The play is primarily satirical and Soyinka does not attempt to present a balanced portrait of past empires or present national interests. The festivities and spectacles of the new nation's celebrations are reduced to oral reports by the characters and to the sound of rejoicing in the

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background of this independence play. In place of revellers, the foreground' is held by criminal members of society while the dead representatives who linger in the background are reminders of an ignoble past.



Jonathan A Peters remarks:

The obvious patterning after Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is perhaps the first most striking feature of Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. Apart from the forest setting and the other-worldly atmosphere of the play, elements such as disguise, a prologue, a play-within-a-play, magical happenings involving gods, spirits and demons are other striking features. Soyinka presents the play in a more or less tragic vein. *A Dance of the Forests* deals with contemporary society. Its original title was *A Dance of the African Forests* and indeed the context of the play as well as its rituals and characters are unmistakably African. But before completion, Soyinka had enlarged its scope to include all men everywhere and modified the title (p. 168).

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "*A Dance of the Forests* satirizes the fledging nation by stripping it of romantic legend and by showing that the present is no more a golden age than is the past".(pp391). In the manner of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Soyinka now alternates

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scenes involving mortals and immortals, as Obaneji, the forest Father leads his three chosen victims deeper and deeper into the forest, bringing them to judgement.

### **The Forest Father, The Dead Man and the Dead Woman**

The principle divine actor in the play is Forest Father. He masquerades to the mortals as Obaneji. He is to some extent identified with Osanyin. The messenger and agent of Osanyin is traditionally Aroni. It is Aroni 'the Lame One' who appears in the prologue. He warns that the two obscure and accusing ancestors he has selected in answer to the mortals' request have been chosen because 'In previous life they were linked in violence and blood with four of the living'. (DF5). He names these four as Rola now, as then a whore by nature and hence eternally nicknamed Madame Tortoise, Demoke now, a carver and then a poet, Adenebi now, Council Orator and then Court Historian; and Agboreko, Elder of the Sealed Lips, who is a type of cryptic soothsayer in both existences, an intermediary between the living and the spirits of the forest He briefly explains the concept of Ogun and Eshuoro and the way they are presented in the play.

The Dead Man and Woman come in response to their appeal are a former captain and his wife from the army of the ancient emperor Mata Kharibu. Aroni now tells that Demoke has been guilty of killing his apprentice Oremole, by plucking him down from a tree top which they were carving together in honour of the occasion. The Dance reveals the pattern of the interaction of the past and present. But, quite apart from its ancient echoes, it has placed two of the gods in bitter enmity over Demoke. For Ogun, patron of all carvers with metal upon wood, Demoke can do no wrong. But Demoke has chosen to carve *araba*, the silk-cotton tree sacred to Oro, god of punishment and the dead.

Furthermore, Oremole, whom Demoke has killed due to envy, has been a devotee of Oro. Hence Oro seeks to revenge himself upon Demoke through one of his own aspects, Eshuoro, 'the wayward flesh of Oro'. Eshuoro appears in fact to be a composite of Eshu, Yoruba god of fate, mischief and the unpredictable, and Oro. Although Ogun is presented as friendly to the creative aspirations of mankind, this divine rivalry between Ogun and Eshuoro has nothing to do with Forest Father's desire to lead the four mortal principals to a deeper knowledge of themselves, and may to some extent run counter to it. It constantly threatens to disrupt the Dance, which is the focus of all Forest Father's intentions. Etherton remarks "Demoke has agreed to be the sacrifice and he also compels his spirit through the darkness".(pp268).

Aroni hops away and leaves the stage empty. Soon the surface begins to break up and the Dead Man and Woman emerge slowly from the ground. He is filthy and mouldy looking, while she is bloated with pregnancy. Obaneji watches from a distance while they are successively rejected by Demoke, Rola and Adenebi, all of whom refuse brusquely to 'hear their case'. The dead pair wanders off.

Obaneji begins to lead these three mortals Rola, Demoke and Adenebi deeper and deeper into the forest, to become witnesses at the Dance of their former selves and brings them to judgement. They, on the other hand, believe that they are fleeing the celebrations in spontaneous disgust. Rola is appalled by the arrival of so many obscure relatives demanding hospitality for the event. Demoke is vaguely troubled by his unadmitted crime and Adenebi claims to be overexcited by his own sense of history.

### **Gathering of the Tribes**



The next section is an exchange between Aroni, the lame and Murete, a treeimp about the festivities and rituals that are brought about to begin to celebrate the gathering of the tribes, among them the welcoming of the dead. Aroni wants to extract information from the mischievous and unwilling witness, Merete who is hidden in the tree home, has seen passing by him. The dead pair has been sent by Aroni as a result of the request of the living for some representatives of their illustrious ancestors. Aroni informs Murete that one of the four living characters who has passed by Murete's tree is a servant of Ogun. Once Aroni exits and Murete disappears inside the tree to continue spying, Agboreko, the Elder of the Sealed Lips, enters and tries to coax Murete out of the tree and extract information, only to be told that he has to return later. Then Ogun enters and enquires from Murete by forcing millete wine down murete's throat. Ogun informs that it is Demoke, the carver who is Ogun's servant among the living characters.

### **Characters and Their Duties**

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After Ogun's leaves the four living characters Demoke, Obaneji, Rola and Adenebi re-enter and begin their conversation by conjecturing about the identity of the two dead people. Rola begins to taunt Adenebi but he interrupts and says there should be no unpleasantness since they have to spend time in each other's company. Obaneji explains some of the interesting parts of his job such as the records for motor lorries, for which he owns a passion. There has been one such lorry, the Incinerator, for which the concerned official took a substantial bribe and changed the capacity from forty to seventy. Once it caught fire and five of the seventy on board managed to escape. All the passengers have been on their way to the gathering of the tribes.

Obaneji asks Adenebi to find out some information for him. They argue as to how the bribe-taking official ought to be punished. Rola tries to kiss Obaneji while answering. As Obaneji refuses, she taunts him saying that he is not a man. As the result of this conversation Demoke guesses that Rola is none other than infamous Madame Tortoise. Rola attacks Obaneji for revealing her identity. Adenebi is disgusted to be in her company and shocked at her behaviour. But she is proud to have used physical asserts to acquire wealth. Demoke asks Rola if she was aware of the legendary Madame Tortoise. The dead pair enters and the dead man speaks of how he had always wanted to return here to his home. Soyinka's love to tears his country is deeply observed through the dead man's character.

Demoke, wants to know if the carver who fell to his death from the totem blames Demoke. The dead pair leaves in despair of being saved by the living saying, "May you be cursed again". After they leave Demoke confesses that he pushed his apprentice Oremole, of the totem pole. A man's voice is heard calling Demoke, and Obeneji leads them awwy in the wrong direction .Ogun enters and admits that he imitated Demoke's father's voice. Ogun takes Demoke's crime on his shoulders because Oro is his enemy and Ormole was Oro's follower.

It was Ogun who made Demoke raise his hand because Oremole Would not allows Demoke to bow the Araba trees head and master wood with Iron. Ogun tells Forest Father, masquerading as a human being (Obaneji) that he will not desert his son at the moment of trail and Punishment. As Ogun leaves, the old man enters with two councilors and lots of beaters. The music and drums are almost always an accompaniment for any manner of ceremony such as births, deaths, marriages together with ritual dance in Africa.

### **The Dirge Man**

Beaters play an important role along with the Dirge-Man in the play. The people dance to the beats of the drum. They have their traditional dance While little in the play it is noted that the whole village is dancing around the silhouette of Demoke's totem. The Dirge-man is also the representative of African tradition. He laments for the dead man and women asking for permission the dead to dance. Soyinka has used his extensive use of language through the songs of the Dirge-man. Africans are widely known not only for their drums and music but also for their songs.

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The Dirge-Man sings

Move on eyah! Move apart  
I felt the wind breathe-no more  
Keep away now. Leave the dead  
Some room to dance.

If you see the banana leaf  
Freshly fibrous like a woman's breasts  
If you see the banana leaf  
Shred itself, thread on thread  
Hang wet as the crape of grief  
Don't say it's the wind. Leave the dead  
Some room to dance. (36)

The Dirge-man sings by asking the wind to keep away and leave the dead some space to dance. He compares the banana leaf which is fresh and fibrous to a woman's breast. He again wants the dead people to come and participate the dance. The Dirge-man again continues by singing.

Ah, your hands are vanished and if it thunders  
We know where the hands are gone,  
But we name no names, let no god think  
We say his envy. ; Eave the dead  
Some room to dance. (37)

The Dirge-Man also joins one or two others in a casual dance. There is also a reference to the sound of a gong which the Forest crier makes with a scroll. Any announcement is made in the forest with the help of such instruments by the forest Crier in Africa.

### **Escape Artists**

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After the councillor and the beater's arrival, the old man says that they have to drive away their guests because the wrong people have come, statesmen were asked for and executioners came instead. The Old Man orders petrol to be poured all over his forest because the dead cannot stand the smell. Then he changes his mind, realizing that his whole forest would be burnt down. Instead, he orders than an old wagon, the chimney of Ereko, is driven through the forest, polluting it with smoke. The old man is sure no ghost can survive the chimney's smoke.

Ademebi is confused by the old man wanting to drive away the very guests he has invited. He recalls the ambitious plans for the gathering of the tribes, the building of the totem pole, the brining home of the "scattered sons" of their "proud ancestors", be their sages, conquerors, philosophers, mystics, warriors, even from hell if need be. The old man says that their plans have misfired and instead of great people," slaves "have

Come to accuse their hosts in the land of the living and undermine the whole celebration.

Adenebi goes on and on about now he had expected the great heroes of old to appear while the old man restlessly waits for Agboreko to come and report the information he had got from Murete. Agboreko is also another character who passing on stories and riddles, songs and legends play a vital role in the culture of the people of Nigeria.

Agboreko enters and reports that the dead pair, so full of their own woes, has been taken, under Aroni's wing so they won't trouble the living. The old man asks Agboreko if Ore Mole, Demoke's apprentice, is among the dead. Agboreko says that he does not know. The old man then asks if Forest Father works along with Aroni and Adenebi asks Forest Father and others are amazed that he does not know of him. Agboreko leaves get information from Murete.

Later it is known that Adenebi saw Demoke in the forest and that there were two others, besides himself, with Demoke. He says that the two were too unpleasant looking who followed him and made him stick. He also discovered a woman with then was Mademe Tortoise. The old man becomes very agitated to know that his son is in the company of Madam Tortoise and his

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identities the fourth person as Obanjeji must be Eshuoro, thirsting for the blood of the slayer of his servant, Oremole. He then feels free after finding that it could be even the Forest Father himself. Agboreko tries to calm him down.

The beaters enter along with the flogger who clears a space. The Dancers and the Dirge-Man begin their work. The danced and song of the Dirge-man plays a vital role here. The Dirge-Man sings,

Daughter, your feet were shod  
In eeled shuttles of Yemoja's loom  
But twice your smock went up  
And I swear your feet were pounding  
Dust at the time. Girl, I know  
The game of my ancestors. Leave the dead  
Some room to dance.

A touch, at that rounded moment of the night  
And the dead return to life  
Bum-belly woman, plantain-breasted  
Mother, what human husband folds  
His arms, and blesses randy ghosts?  
Keep away now, leave the dead  
Some room to dance.

The Dirge Man asks for room for the dead to dance. Here it is noted that the Dirge Man and Agboreko take turns in making a number of statements referring to figures in Yoruba myth. The Dirge-Man repeats his request for leaving the dead enough room to dance.

The old man makes fun of Agboreko for uttering meaningless Proverbs and Agboreko in turn laughs at old man for believing that he can rid of the dead by the chimney of Ereko. Obanej, Rola and Demoke, all go to the welcoming of the dead. After hesitating, Adenebi runs after them. With this the first part of the play ends.

### **The Milk of the Palm Tree**

The second part of the play begins with Murete grumbling to himself because he can't drink the milk of the palm tree in which he lives. Palm trees are large in number in Africa. Soyinka has also mentioned not only about the palm wine but also the millet wine in the play. When he is about to leave for the human celebrations Eshuoro graphs his throat from behind. Eshuoro asks him to swear that Murett hasn't seen him. He also tells that the ceremony will be a lesson for humans.

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Eshuoro acts the preserver of the forest by fighting against the carving of the tree. He is particularly angry with Demoke who carves and defaces trees. He threatens that he and Oro will have their revenge. Murete runs off as Eshuoro threatens him with a branch.

In another part of the forest crier comes in with a scroll and strikes his gong. The crier walks with a kind of mechanical to and fro movement. This is a kind of traditional dance movement followed by all the cries. He calls all the forest spirits by inviting,

Too all such as dwell in these forests; Rock devils,  
Earth imps, Tree demons, ghommids, deurlds, genie  
Incubi, Succubi, windhorls, bits and halves and such  
Sons and subjects of Forest Father, and all  
Those dwell in his domain, take note this night  
Is the welcome of the dead? (45).

### **The Spirits of the Dead and the Poet**

The Forest crier also clearly explains that those spirits of the dead are specifically summoned can be seen or heard that night. Then the Forest Father and Aroni enter and exchange a few words about how tame the human witnesses become and how they do not suspect Forest Father's identity. As the play –within-a play begins, Aroni reminds Forest Father that they have eight centuries, perhaps even more.

The scene that is gradually lit up is the court of Mata Kharibu. There are two thrones. One contains Mata Kharibu, and the other, his queen, Madam Tortoise, both surrounded by splendors. There is also a mention about the African guitar; this is one of the African musical instruments that are used to render the traditional music of Africans. A page plucks an African guitar. Matakharibu is angry; his eyes roll terribly; the court cowers. His queen on the other hand, is very gay and cruel in her coquetry.

The poet tries not to respond to her coquetry. She says that she is sad because she's lost her canary which had flown off to the roof. She orders the poet to fetch it. The poet's novice immediately offers to go. The court poet doesn't want him to go because a soldier fell to his death from the same roof two days ago, but Madame Tortoise overrules him.

A chained warrior is pushed inside the court. It is the Dead man. Matakharibu slaps him and accuses him of being a traitor. The warrior has persuaded his soldiers not to fight on unjust war on the kin's behalf-this is his treason. The physician (the old man) tries to persuade the warriors to agree to Mata Kharibu's war, calling it not a war to gather a women's trousseau but an affair of honor.

The warrior refuses to believe that is honorable to steal another chieftain's wife, as Mata Kharibu has done, and then to declare war on that chieftain in order to recover the abducted woman's goods. He refuses by saying that his first loyalty is to his men. The Historian (Adenebi)

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then enters with a scroll and tries to persuade the warrior by citing the examples of the ancient Greeks and Trojans where the Trojan War was the one thing that immortalized that period in history. The Historian is convinced that only a man with slave's blood in him would refuse to fight.

As Mata Kharibu vows to be rid of all such men as the warrior, the Soothsayer enters. He predicts a lot of bloodshed in the coming battle. Mata Kharibu is pleased because it signifies a great battle and orders that the warrior and his followers be drowned. A slave Dealer offers not only his boat but also to take the men off Mata Kharibu's hands. Just before leaving. He admits to the soothsayer that he knows that the anyway because the indications of democracy and independence among his subjects have frightened him.

The Soothsayer falsely reassures him. As the king leaves the soothsayer says men will by their nature seek power over each other, and the king cannot control this. After the soothsayer exists, the physician and the slave Dealer continue their quarrel. The latter slips the Historian a bribe so that the Historian will support his claim that he had a new boat in which the slaves can travel in comfort. The historian does the needful. After the slave Dealer leaves happily, the Historian invites the physician to his house to have a glass of sherbet.

After their exit, the court poet enters with a canary in a gold cage. As soon as Madame Tortoise sees the bard she no longer wants it. Then she clears the entire court except for the warrior and his guard and tries to trap him in her net. He begs her to keep her distance otherwise he might be tempted to punish her for the evil she has brought on his men. This only encourages her further she tries to console him by saying that he may become king since Mata Kharibu is a fool.

The warrior merely shouts for the guard who enters following a disheveled pregnant woman the Dead woman. Even before the pregnant woman can beg Madam Tortoise for mercy. She tells the warrior that he has the choice of being made a enrich or being sold as a slave, when the warrior does not answer, Madam Tortoise orders the guard to carry out her sentence, and the pregnant woman faints. The lights go out and the scene now returns to Aroni and the Forest Father staring at the scene.

Exhuoro strides into the stage that the warrior was a fool and coward. Ogun enters and tries to silence. Eshuoro he goes beyond endurance tries to attack Ogun, but the Forest Father prevents him. The Forest Father wants the humans to 'discover their own regeneration'-either to change their destructive ways or to follow the same path. He asks for the questioner to be called and orders not to interrupt the proceedings. Then a questioner asks the Dead Woman about who sent her and why she came before her time. She replies that a woman without a womb sent her. The questioner asks her to rest to rear the child in her womb. She says that she is weak. The forest father is more gentle with her and asks her to rest and quieten her spirit, disordered by suddenness of her death.

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The dead man then enters, saying that he has led three lives but his first life still obsesses him. He also says that he has been researching for the Forest Father ever since they cut off his manhood. The Forest Father calls him by his name, Muierce, and recalls his journey by ship till he was sold as a slave for the questioner discusses the man of surrendering his manhood too easily. Aroni enters and slips off the questioner's mask-it is Eshuoro. He immediately runs away.

The interpreter enters, leading in Demoke, Rold and Adenebi. Forest Father looks closely at the interpreter, wondering if he has been sending by Eshuoro. Aroni enters leads off the Dead woman on Forest Father's orders and the interpreter masks the tree humans the masks wear the same expression. The playwright of the masks is also an important aspect of African culture. The playwright has also used masks in the ceremony of the welcoming of the dead to call the spirits. Even Eshuoro wears a mask pretending to be the questioner.

When the Forest Father announces the moment the welcoming of the dead, the dead woman enters, no longer pregnant, but leading the half child by the hand. For each spirit that is called, one of the three speaks, saying how his color has changed from white to red, and how those guilty will be punished, the Half-child turns around, trying to guess which of the masked figures has spoken. Then the child leaves his mother's hand and plays a game of "Sesan" while a figure in Red, longs his footsteps. The child asks for help but no one helps. Half-child:

I who yet await a mother  
Feel this dread  
Feel this dread  
I who flee from womb  
To branded womb, cry it now  
I'll be born dead  
I'll be born dead. (04)

The child chants that he fears he will be born dead. Then the spirits of the darkness precious stones, pachy, river, sun, volcanoes enter one by one declaring the destruction of the forest critical perspectives.

### **The Half-Child**

The scene with the Half-child is dramatically entirely different from the earlier part of the play, with the voices of symbolic spirits speaking the earlier part of the play, with the voices of symbolic spirits speaking through the masked human beings, the grotesque Triplets and the fierce dancing setting it apart from the more familiar conversations of men and gods. The perilous situation of the Half-child with all the hostile forces swirling around him also has an immediate emotional appeal and involvement which has been rather lacking so far in the play.

Chorus

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let no man lave his feet  
In any streams, in any lake  
In rapids or in cataracts  
Let no woman think to bake  
Her cornmeal wrapped in leaves  
He'll think his eye deceives  
Who treads the ripples where I run?  
In shallows. The stones shall seem  
As kernels, his the presser's feet  
Standing in the rich, and red, and cloying stream... (66)

The ant leader and all the ants follows complaining of the destruction that follows in the wake of "progress"=the good "to come".

As the humans are unmasked the Triplets enter and the interpreter dances with all the three triplets. Then it is revealed that the figure in red is Eshuoro. He tries to catch the half child but Ogun prevents him. Telling Eshuoro to be beware of the mask "lined with scorpions", gun exists then Eshuoro again plays trick masked as the interpreter.

### **Punishment for the Humans**

As he tries to make the child dead, Ogun saves the child. The forest Father then says that he is going to teach humans the wickedness of their ways and to show them a picture of their lost innocence. Once again there is the dumb show where Demoke gives the half-child to the Dead-woman who also leaves with them.

A silhouette of Demoke's totem is seen, with the villagers dancing around it. The jester enters with a leap, puts the sacrificial basket on Demoke's head and performs a wild dance. As Eshuoro fights with Demoke, he hits the totem. Eshuoro sets fire to the tree with a band. But Ogun saved him as Demoke was falling. Dawn is breaking. Eshuoro flees after his jester. It is now full dawn. The old man asks Demoke what he has seen. Demoke then reveals that the fourth companion with was Forest Father.

The old man speaks of the sacrifices that have been made and the explanation asked for, but Demoke feels that the three have suffered enough in this one night as they relived their past lives. Then Demoke asks Agboreko not to call Rola by the same name as they have been changed by their rigours of that night. Agboreko eagerly asks him if he has learned anything wise, anything of the future, but the play ends with Agboreko's old and tires cliché "proverb to bones and silence".

### **The Need for Periodic Cleansing**

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According to Mary T. David an important belief in traditional African communities is the need for periodic cleansing. The numerous cleansing rituals and festivals serve to get rid of the accumulating capurities and sins. The Ijebu people alone, according to Oyin Ogunba, have festivals known as the Ebi, Ekine, Epa, Liwe, Magbo, Obiren, Ojowu and Oro, the declared aim of all which is to rid the community of the evil accumulated by citizens during the past years. An integral part of these festivals is the dance. (17).

“Demoke has agreed to be the sacrifice and he also Compels his spirit through the darkness.”(Ethern 268).

### **Many Motifs**

*A Dance of the Forests* is an extremely important play, for it contains a number of motifs that Soyinka will draw on in subsequent works. These motifs include physical sacrifice for both goods and evil ends; the innate depravity of human nature which manifests itself as corruption and vice, violence in nature that, at its best, follows a destructive-creative pattern, and that, at its worst, reveals itself as cruel savagery; dance, song and mime as traditional culture. All these elements are fused together by a creative imagination that draws upon topical issues and problems in contemporary society to produce works of intensity and complexity.

In this play, Soyinka attempts to plunge the main personages-and us-into the ‘rationally incomprehensible’ area of experience. To achieve this he draws on the primal simultaneity of art forms in a culture of total awareness and phenomenal involvements.

Obaneji and his companions are followed at a distance by another group of townsfolk, whose concern is to drive off by noise and smoke, the unwholesome guests whom they unwittingly invited from the 'understreams' of death. Demoke's father, who guesses and fears his son's crime on the *araba* tree, makes one of this group. Agboreko, knowing far more than he cares to reveal, bustles to and fro between the Forest Spirits and both groups of mortals, muttering proverbs to himself. The flogger, drummers and dancers enter to clear a space for a dance. Agboreko settles down to throw palm kernels for the Ifa oracle, supposedly to find out what has happened to Rola and Demoke. But the occasion is arranged by the living, to welcome the dead which Obaneji has planned.

The occasion is in any event shattered by the clamorous arrival of an ancient lorry named the Chimney of Ereko, summoned by the Council for its exceptional smoking and stinking properties so that it may help to drive off the forest creatures, and the unwelcome dead along with them. Adenebi, who had temporarily fled from the probings of Obaneji, is making half-hearted attempts to join this group of townsfolk, but the others panic and leave him facing the lorry alone. In mortal terror at last, he resigns himself to follow Obaneji and his little party wherever they may lead. Only the flimsiest barrier now separates him from open confession of his guilt as he hurries after them into the forest.

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## Honour in Slavery

So, despite the ominous warnings of the Soothsayer Agboreko, Mata Kharibu plunges on with his war and the warrior is sold into slavery. But first the queen, attracted by his courage and maddened by his indifference, tries to seduce him and make him her weapon against the king. Even before, she has systematically debauched his followers. The warrior, however, remains constant to his curious concept of honour. Madame Tortoise orders that he-be gelded as well as enslaved, and his pregnant wife the Dead Woman collapses in a final agony of grief.

After the scene which prefigures of life and court of the emperor Mata Karibu's the imperial stage darkens once more and the lights return to Forest Father. Immediately Eshuoro bursts in upon him, demanding vengeance against Demoke. He has no patience with this pantomime. But Forest Father refuses him the simple vengeance. He insists that the Questioning of the Dead Pair be proceeded with. They are asked to give an account of themselves and of their coming here. The Dead Woman insists that she is a delegate for every mother cheated by death of her fulfillment:

Wet runnels  
Of the earth brought me hither.  
Call Forest Head, Say someone comes  
For all the rest. Say someone asks —  
Was it for this, for this, Children plagued their mothers?(DF 60).

But the masked Questioner mocks the Dead Pair with such hostility that he arouses the suspicions of Aroni, who unmask him to expose the furious countenance of Eshuoro.

The Interpreter carefully orchestrates all these cries of unremitting disaster until the exasperated Aroni intervene, sensing that this vision of darkness has been conjured up to show the futility of any appeal for justice against fate.

Mean while, the Half-Child pleads to be released from his endless cycle of frustrated birth, and the Dead Woman, that her womb may rest at last. Their plight draws from Soyinka two of his most beautiful dramatic songs, cast like antiphons against the mounting frenzy of the Spirits:

HALF – CHILD : I who yet await a mother  
Feel this dread,  
Feel this dread,  
I who flee from womb  
To branded womb, cry it now  
I'll be born dead.(DF 64).  
I'll be born dead ..."  
DEAD WOMAN : Better not to know the bearing

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Better not to bear the weaning  
 I who grow the branded navel  
 Shudder at the visitation  
 Shall my breast again be severed  
 Again and yet again be severed  
 From its right of sanctity?  
 Child, your hand is pure as sorrow  
 Free me of the endless burden,  
 Let this gourd, let this gourd  
 Break beyond my hearth . . .(DF 70).

But the final words of Forest Father, as he closes the Dance, suggest that Demoke may at best have opened the pathway towards his own redemption. No simple action of the living can now redeem the child from the grim verdict of history,

FOREST FATHER : Yet I must do this alone, and no more,  
 since to intervene is to be guilty of  
 contradiction, and yet to remain altogether  
 unfelt is to make my long-rumoured  
 ineffectuality complete; hoping that  
 when I have tortured awareness from their  
 souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, in new  
 beginnings . . . Aroni, does Demoke know  
 the meaning of his act?(DF 71)

ARONI : Demoke, you hold a doomed thing in your  
 hand.It is no light matter to reverse the deed  
 that was begun many lives ago.  
 The Forest will not let you pass.(DF 71).

“I who await a mother,Feel this dread I'll be born dead”(DF 64) cries the half child in *A Dance of the Forest*. The half-child symbolically refers to Nigeria. Soyinka's fears for Nigeria's stability and political sanity are precisely brought out.. The horror of being stillborn is experienced by many of his characters, for if the nations's fate is fractured and chaotic, so will be the lives of its people. How an individual can negotiate a path of decency and principle in a modern African state is one of his major concerns. The past will not help him to solve his problems. Adenebi, the Council Orator's high hopes are ruined at the court of Mala Kharibu where he was Court Historian. The Warrior or the Captain who is the Dead Man tells the Physician: "I look up soldiering to defend my country, but those to whom I gave the power to command my life abuse my trust in them."(Df 49). The Historian Adenebi tells Mata Kharibu: "War is the only consistency the past ages afford us. It is the legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. Soldiers have never questioned bloodshed. The cause is always the accident your Majesty, and war is the Destiny."" He further argues: "history has always revealed that the soldier who will not fight has the blood of slaves in him".(DF 51).

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## **Futile to Bear the Mirror of Original Nakedness**

The Forest Head desires to lay out the rites of the dead but he realizes that it is futile "to bear the mirror of original nakedness." But he must persist knowing that nothing is altered. The only hope he has is that when he has "tortured awareness from their souls" that is the new beginning. From the testimony of Aroni, the Lame One, the readers can see that the Dead ones desired to have their illustrious ancestors present at the Feast, the Gathering of the Tribes, where the Forests would dance for them. The Forest Head Obaneji, Demoke, the Carver, the Poet in the Court of Mata Kharibu and Rola, a whore known as Madame Tortoise for centuries, would also participate in the dance. It was not a dignified dance. Eshuoro, a wayward cult-spirit, cried for vengeance and stratagems. Ogun, the patron god of carvers, protects carvers, smiths and all workers in iron though he is often associated with the battlefield.

Obaneji refers to the history of the lorry which involves a lot of corruption. The lorry meets with an accident and out of seventy people on board only five escaped. He wants Adenebi to give him the name of the persons who took the bribe for record's sake. When Adenebi accuses him with insensitivity, Obaneji retorts: "I didn't kill them. And anyway we have our different views. The world must go on. After all what are a mere sixty-five souls burnt to death? Nothing, your bribe taker was only a small-time murderer, he wasn't even cold-blooded. He doesn't really interest me very much".(DF 19). The expression vividly brings out the unfeeling and callous manifestation of human corruption. Aroni, as Ageborko maintains, is Wisdom itself. When Aroni means to expose the weakness of human lives there is nothing that can stop him. And he knows how to choose his time. It has been demonstrated that "both in conception and practice the visionary qualities of Soyinka's art have striking affinities with the tradition of European Romanticism.

## **Myth and Its Relvance to Current World**

In the words of A.P.Dani, " Soyinka adapts mythic patterns, persons and values drawn from the traditional wisdom, infusing them as he does so with the urgency of his conviction of their relevance to a world which, like that of the early nineteenth century, is marked by continuous political, industrial and social revolution and disorder." He believes that "this inherited wisdom reveals truths which his contemporaries ignore only at their greatest peril." He thinks that "this myth of Ogun's quest across the gulf of transition as a revelation of the necessity for the contemporary psyche to enter into restorative mystical communion with its cosmic environment" is profoundly significant. Soyinka's romantic idealism is revealed in the three plays *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Strong Breed (1964)* and *The Road*. These plays assert "the Romantic belief in the need for individual self-discovery in the face of conventional values" of tradition".(pp 120).(AFRICAN POETRY AND DRAMA ,Prestige books,New Delhi)

## **Voice of Vision through Exile**

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Soyinka seems to suggest that the artist's voice of vision is found through exile and arduous re-discovery and re-formulation of the ancient values of tradition, but not through the unquestioning acceptance of inherited truths. "This idea is embodied in the artist Demoke in *A Dance of the Forests*. The "redemptive sacrifice" of Demoke has the "symbolic reference to the history of the peoples of Nigeria and indeed of the African continent over many centuries. Demoke succeeds in his revolt against the perennial cycle of human stupidity and brutality where Eshuoro and the dead Warrior have failed." In the play "the living want the Gathering of the Tribes to be a glorification of past history, and they are angry when their guests from the ancestor world turn out to be reminders of the inheritance of brutality and evil." A truly modern human state, Soyinka seems to suggest, will emerge from the unity of past, present and future in the moment of vision. The tradition is revitalized "through visionary self-discovery and regeneration." In other words, "the inheritance of traditional wisdom," Soyinka believes, should be directed to "a humanistic re-formulation" which is facilitated by the "visionary quest" of "a heroically personal experience of self-discovery and self-renewal."

Demoke's act is seen as a genuine, but difficult, act of freedom, made against a background of dire prophecies and revelations of the human condition. They have been shown to the dead and have presumably affected their living human channels, 'to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness', in the words of Forest Head (p. 82). Demoke's act is a positive one, but it exacerbates the division among the gods, Eshuoro and Ogun and sets himself, and perhaps mankind, against the Forest.

### **The Prologue**

Aroni's Prologue is virtually indispensable to an understanding of the involved plot of *A Dance of the Forests*. In his Prologue Aroni reveals that he has answered the request of the "Human Community" for illustrious ancestors to attend their "Gathering of the Tribes" by sending them "two spirits of the restless dead."

### **Complicated Plot**

The plot is further complicated by a dispute between two gods-Ogun, the god of War and Eshuoro, a composite of Chance also known as Esu and the bestial in humanity, Oro. Their dispute is linked to Demoke, Ogun's protege who has used araba, the silk cotton tree which is sacred to Oro for a carving to commemorate the feast. It is Demoke who supplies the final link in the chain of circumstances by violently pulling down to his death his apprentice, Oremole, who is a servant of Oro. Aroni concedes that the dance recreational process.

Apart from the ultimate barrenness that this aberration suggests, violence is linked with the predatory Madame Tortoise's exploitation of men. Thus, one of the soldiers that the ancient Madame Tortoise seduces jumps to his death when she is no longer accommodating. Rola, the contemporary Madame Tortoise, has similarly been responsible, for the premature death of two of her lovers. Paradoxically, also, she has been an inspiration behind the creation of a work of art

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which Forest Head himself, as Obaneji, has praised: "Unfortunately I have seen so much and I am rarely impressed by anything. But the totem was the work of ten generations. I think your hands are very old. You have the fingers of the dead". Madame Tortoise is in fact typical of the female fatale who fascinates Soyinka. Simi of *The Interpreters*, Segi of *Kongi's Harvest* and Iriyise of *Season of Anomy* are also members of this breed. Adenebi is, in essence, a vacillating individual whom Soyinka caricatures for the deadly sins of hypocrisy, corruption, inauthenticity and misplaced values, all of which are among the sins that incur this playwright's indignation.

### **The Most Contemptible Protagonist**

Adenebi is the most contemptible of the three human protagonists not because he has perpetrated the most heinous crime—it is Demoke who is directly responsible for what is the treachery which involves Oremole—but because he affects an air of probity that masks his utterly bestial corruptness. Because he has so much to hide, he is the wariest of the three characters when he answers Obaneji's unobtrusive questions. Asked about the identity of the councillor who took the bribe for increasing the official passenger capacity of a lorry from forty to seventy people "for the sake of records", he reverts to his usual paltering.

Adenebi is reluctant to disclose the name of the guilty councillor because he is that councillor. It is in fact the crime that justifies his presence in the group and his preoccupation with his self-image prevents him, as Aroni tells us in his Preface, from recognizing the presence of the dead among them. His lack of rectitude which leads him to take bribes as a councillor is kept well hidden from the public gaze. Instead, it is the image of the moralist and the image of the proud defender of the tribe's cultural heritage that he puts forward. The arch moralist in him is apparent in his outrage when he learns of Rola's true identity. His image as preserver of custom comes out in his exchange with Demoke's father about their attempt to celebrate the Gathering of the Tribes in classic style of welcome for the dead is "not as dignified a Dance as it should be" owing to the machinations of Eshuoro. But Eshuoro's intrigue is only one more facet in a complex and at times obscure mask-presentation that takes up the second half of the play.

If there is a discernible main plot in *A Dance of the Forests*, it is the dance of welcome for the dead couple who are the first to appear in the play. The attempts by the living in Part I and by Eshuoro in Part II to abort the welcome can then be seen as sub-plots. But Dead Man and Dead Woman are themselves passive spectators in the unfolding drama which is stage-managed by Forest Head and Aroni. Motive and action are, however, relegated to the human beings on one level and to the vying deities on another.

In reality, the plot development of *A Dance of the Forests* does not centre on any one character or group of characters. The grim forest setting with its sombre rituals is, first of all, an inverted parallel of the city atmosphere where joyous feasting and dancing are taking place. Secondly, Soyinka uses myth and allegory less to develop character or analyze motives than to propound the thesis of the ubiquity of what he has called, in a key phrase, "the black portion of a common human equation."<sup>20</sup>

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Although the principal human characters, Demoke, Adenebi and Rola are not the prime focus of the action in *A Dance of the forests*, their motives and actions are important directional guides into the heartland of Soyinka's metaphysic. Initially they are unaware of each other's identity and each seeks to supply an ostensible reason for coming into the forest. As they are led deeper into the forest, the prodding of Obenji, Forest Father and, in the case of Demoke, the intermittent encounters with the two dead ancestors bring out something of their true character. While Demoke is the first professional to be identified, then Adenebi, it is Rola the prostitute who is first shown to have violent links with the past. Rola's coquetry is established when she openly tries to seduce Demoke as soon as she learns that he is the famous carver. But it requires Obaneji's comment that the graveyard is full of her lovers and Rola's continued taunting after this to bring recognition of her true identity to Demoke.

The series of exchanges reveals the details of the attitudes of the characters. Forest Head, whose disguise as Obaneji remains intact throughout, is preparing the human protagonists for the ritual by exposing them to one another and to themselves. At the same time, by placating the trio he avoids open hostility. Rola, feeling that her mask of respectability will not be removed, decides to take the offensive. But when Demoke stumbles on the truth and calls her by her legendary name, Madame Tortoise, she breaks down only to assume a defiant posture when she mistakes Demoke's wonderment for pity. Adenebi's sense of outrage at her brazen defiance is a cover for his own culpability.

Demoke's amazement stems from the fact that inspiration for the carving of the totem came in part from the image of Madam Tortoise he had before him as he worked. That image however has an innate rather than a facial resemblance to the present Madame Tortoise:

DEMOKE: You don't look one bit similar to your other face-you know, the one that rises from legends. That was the one I thought of. I thought of you together,

but . . . you are not the same. Anyway, you can have a look at my totem and tell . I needed some continuity and you provided it.(DF 24).

The continuity that he needs, although he himself may not be fully aware of its implications, is that which underlies the universal cycle of human violence. Soyinka emphasizes the ingrained similarity rather than the superficial resemblance of past, present and future not only in the totem but also in the double lives of the characters, in the acts of violence they commit and in the complex symbolism involving the Abiku child during the rites of welcome. That a whore should be one of the informing impulses behind the totem of the new nation is one of the play's ironies. The playwright believes that in real life this assemblage of illustrious personages is always equalled, if not surpassed, by a corresponding gallery of infamous rogues and villains.

### **The Indictment of the Past**

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The indictment of the past is confined neither to ancestral delegates nor to the human representatives involved in the welcome for the dead which is the forest's answer to the town's exclusivist celebration. The very totem that the council appointed Demoke to carve is a reminder of the ignominy of the past. Ironically, it is Adenebi, a proponent of the carving of the totem, who unwittingly stumbles on the truth about the work, who seems to have approved of before. .

Demoke is the only one of the three human protagonists to acknowledge his latent violence. As the artist, he is the sensitive point of his community. He represents the creative spark in man which produces works of insight that characterize society. As an artist, Demoke has created a work of art that has stood up to the test of public scrutiny, Adenebi's disparagement notwithstanding. He has however sacrificed the life of his apprentice, Oremole, in order to summon the demiurge necessary for the creation of the imposing work of genius. The totem emerges as a multi-faceted symbol. Although Demoke has a directive from the council to carve the totem, he was given no idea what it was intended for. The appropriateness of Demoke's theme derives from his psychic grasp of the spirit of the times.

Demoke's conscience pricks him because he knows that he is the cause of his bondsman's death. On account of this awareness, he recognizes the dead pair instinctively and, when plagued by their continued reappearance, he is forced to ask them whether the spirit of Oremole accuses him. Unprovoked, he later confesses his guilt in the longest speech of the play, Aroni's Prologue excepted.

The speech is more an expression of pride and joy at his feat, however, than a confession. Demoke is proud of his famed skill in wood and is at the same time condescending towards Oremole whom he brands as more of a carpenter than a carver. The conflict between acrophobic master and nimble apprentice is deepened by their different allegiances. Oremole is a worshipper of Oro who, as the combined deity Eshuoro, seeks to exact vengeance both for Demoke's sacrilege in carving araba and for his slaying of the god's disciple. Demoke is a follower of Ogun, god of War and Creativity. In the latter half of his speech the artist recounts the violent origin of his work with the silk cotton tree,

Thrice I said I would behead it  
Where my feet would go no further. Thrice  
Oremole, slave, fawner on Eshuoro laughed.  
"No one reduces Oro's height, while I serve  
The wind. Watch Oremole ride on Aja's head,  
And when I sift the dust, master, gather it  
Below." The water-pot, swept up suddenly  
Boasted, Aja is my horse. Has it got wings  
Or is it not made of clay? I plucked him down!  
Demoke's head is no woman's cloth, spread  
To receive wood shavings from a carpenter.  
Down, down I plucked him, screaming on Oro.

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Before he made hard obeisance to his earth,  
My axe was executioner at Oro's neck. Alone,  
Alone I cut the strands that mocked me, till head  
And boastful slave lay side by side, and I  
Demoke, sat on the shoulders of the tree,  
My spirit set free and singing, my hands,  
My father's hands possessed by demons of blood  
And I carved three days and nights till tools  
Were blunted, and these hands, my father's hands  
Swelled big as the tree-trunk. Down I came  
But Ogun touched me at the forge, and I slept  
Weary at his feet.(DF 26-7).

### **Catharsis**

The confession brings catharsis to Demoke even though he shows no contrition. Soyinka uses Adenebi, whose hedging is in marked contrast with Demoke's openness as a spokesman, but it is Demoke who acts as the rarely stricken conscience of society. A guilty man himself, however venial his crime, the artist can assist his people, by precept and example, to open a pathway towards sanity and salvation. If the meaning of Demoke's totem is comprehended, the finished work should worry as well as divert the collective mind of society.

### **Collective Ignorance of Administrators**

A statement by the council shows that for all the eloquent speeches of its members, are planning to erect a monument to the nation without attaching any importance to the carving's motif. Not only do they show ignorance about their culture and its significance, but they are also insensitive to the artist's conception of his work. Concerned only with image-building and publicity, they lay bare the area around the totem and build a motor road right up to it. The motor road and the cleared forest are symptoms, no doubt, of modern technological progress and civilization; but this secularization strips the totem of whatever sanctity it might have had and makes it a popular spectacle which its creator can no longer recognize as his work. The insensitivity of the councillors to the totem's intrinsic meaning and purpose consequently exposes their desire to return to the glory of past empires for cosmetic rather than metaphysical reasons, a hollow wishfulness rather than a serious commitment to tradition and culture.

The council's obsession with the trappings and not the essence of grandeur and tradition is illustrated in the puny and ludicrous attempts by Old Man and his attendants to ward off their guests at the welcome. Not content with expelling them from the town, the council seeks to oust them from the forest as well, to prevent their indictment of the present generation. Old Man is desperately anxious to circumvent the forest's welcome because his son, Demoke, whom he wanders all over the forest to find, is implicated. Agboreko, the Elder of Sealed Lips who performs the rites imploring the representation of the ancestors at their feast, is with the group to

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divine whether or not the forest will receive the guests. Agboreko consults Murete the tree-demon. Murete is the link between the spirits of the forest and the human community and therefore gives information to mortals and spirits alike about the happenings in either domain. After his second inquiry with the imp, Agboreko begins his divination accompanied by a dirge-man and his acolyte. The refrain which ends each strophe of the dirge indicates, even before Agboreko interprets the message of his oracle, that the dance of welcome will go on. The last strophe is particularly apposite:

A touch, at the rounded moment of the night  
And the dead return to life  
Dum-belly woman, plantain-breasted  
Mother! What human husband folds  
His arms, and blesses randy ghosts?  
Keep away now, leave, leave the dead  
Some room to dance. (DF 36).

### **The Play within a Play**

Soyinka delays the dance of welcome by presenting a longish pantomime set in one of the great African empires—Aroni sarcastically forgets which, for the purpose of establishing the link between the dead pair and the three human actors on the one hand, and their parallel existences in the earlier period on the other.

The play-within-a-play with its evocation of Mata Kharibu's courtly splendour serves many objectives. It dramatizes Soyinka's postulate about an ignoble past in a fictitious kingdom at the height of African empire. It provides "evidence" for the subsequent "trial" scene. Like Bottom's "sweet comedy" of Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it has the appearance of a comic relief from the nightmarish forest atmosphere which is pervaded by hundreds of spirits. And it visualizes a human situation that parallels contemporary events which Soyinka probably thought wise to veil. Beyond these four functions, the court scene adds another dimension to the human characters and to the themes Soyinka propounds.

The important developments contained in the play-within-a-play are highlighted in a number of revealing speeches made principally by the captain a Dead Man and Historian Adenebi, although a few speeches by other characters are also significant. Madame Tortoise, Rola and the Court Poet, Demoke make hardly any profound observations, since their importance lies more in the fact that they provide the necessary continuity than in the development of valuable insights. Demoke, in his asides, is primarily a foil to Madame Tortoise for it is quite apparent that he holds her in contempt. His parallel act of violence in Kharibu's court is not a duplicate but a caricature of his killing of Oremole in his subsequent life: the poet's novice goes to the roof of the palace to recover the queen's canary and falling breaks an arm. But Madame Tortoise is much more powerful in the court of Mata Kharibu than in her contemporary role. She not only plays the whore with the soldiers under Warrior, a Dead Man but she tries also

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to seduce him and have him overthrow his master. It is his refusal and Madame Tortoise's jealousy of his pregnant wife a Dead Woman that leads to his gelding and debasement to the status of slave.

The plight of Warrior a Dead Man at the court of Mata Kharibu gives prominence to the petty wrangles of men of power, wrangles that often occasion senseless wars. If his stubborn idealism and atypical insubordination prevent him from being a credible character, they at least serve very well to hammer home the key points of the issue. He "pleads guilty," before Kharibu, "to the possession of thought" which he began to exercise only after receiving his sovereign's unacceptably "inhuman commands." He declares to the Physician of the court that the war Kharibu orders him to fight is an unjust war "merely to recover the trousseau" of a stolen wife whose husband does not consider her worthy of a battle. But his most powerful statement comes when Physician tries to project the consequences of his rebellious action into the future and predicts that he will be labelled traitor by future generations.

Kharibu seeks to justify his action as a powerful warmonger and to discredit the soldier's stand against the war. Historian endorses both. As a matter of fact, he ironically suggests that war is virtually a boon to patriots and a healthy legacy that new nations like Nigeria wish to keep. He also suggests that war, as an end in itself marks as it is by unreason, needs no rational causes. On account of this implication, the captain is proved right. Mata Kharibu is merely looking for an excuse to wage war. Kharibu's own concern with historical precedent is matched only by his obsession about the way posterity will judge him. After initiating plans for the war out of whims and fancy, he is trapped by his own decision and, for fear of losing face, he cannot reverse himself, even when Soothsayer Agboreko informs him that there will be much bloodshed "on both sides of the plough" (DF 58). He is in fact the earliest model for the title-hero/dictator of Kongi's Harvest who is completely absorbed in the task of self-deification.

### **Shades of Darkness in African Heritage**

Soyinka seeks to demonstrate the inglorious side of the African heritage through the agency of Mata Kharibu's court. Lurking below all its surface pomp and majesty are disturbing traits, bestial and violent, of human nature: the whoring of Mata Kharibu's queen, the corruption of his Historian, the selling of the soldier and his sixty men as slaves, the machinations of Madame Tortoise against her new lord, and the total lack of feeling and compassion by men of power who engulf their subjects and lesser compatriots in meaningless wars. Because the latent violence of Adenebi, Rola and Demoke affects only a small segment of society, they are the lesser criminals.

In comparison, Mata Kharibu and powerful men like him, ancient and modern, are the scourge of humanity because of their absolute and destructive control over countless human lives. Kharibu's indulgence in a futile war lays bare another ignoble aspect of the African past and calls in question the exclusive glorification of the traditional African heritage and culture. Soyinka expresses a tendency towards violence and a glorification of the past as universal. As an

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illustration he selects the famous Trojan War which was waged by the Greeks against Troy after Trojan Paris had seized Helen the wife of the Greek Menelaus. It is Historian who draws the parallel for the benefit of the mutinous Warrior,

WARRIOR : I am no traitor!

HISTORIAN : Be quiet Soldier! I have here the whole history of Troy. If you were not the swillage of pigs and could read the writings of wiser men, I would show you the magnificence of the destruction of a beautiful city. I would reveal to you the attainments of men which lifted mankind to the ranks of gods and demi-gods. And who was the inspiration of this divine carnage? Helen of Troy, a woman whose honour became as rare a conception as her beauty. Would Troy, if it were standing today lay claim to preservation in the annals of history if a thousand valiant Greeks had not been slaughtered before its gates, and a hundred thousand Trojans within her walls?(DF 51).

Historian avers that the Trojan war is an example of a grand and heroic event that brought out the best in man. The quality of this speaker's "excess of zeal" in the service of Mata Kharibu is clearly indicated soon after this testimony. In return for a handsome bribe surreptitiously passed to him, he supports the slave-dealer's fable that he has a "new vessel . . . capable of transporting the whole of Kharibu's court to hell, when that time does come" .He simply cannot be trusted to speak honestly since he is a confounded rogue and an ingratiating servant. A close examination of the speech reveals how sophisticated his reasoning is. Briefly summed up the argument is the following: The destruction of Troy is a good and glorious event because its "divine carnage" elevates mankind to godhead and because Troy itself has become immortalized in historical records whereas it would have been obscure if it had survived. Carried to its ultimate conclusion this specious reasoning results in the farcical assertion that the way to achieve fame and immortality is through death and destruction.

Kharibu insists on fighting even though the dishonoured chieftain does not find Madame Tortoise worth fighting for. His excuses are that he must get a dowry for his wife in spite of the fact that she is a ravaged queen and that he must not set a precedent by condoning his captain's mutiny. His absurd and indefensible position accentuates his Historian's ironic statement, which Kharibu does not comprehend, that the cause of wars is always irrelevant. If the satire against war and the glorification of the past is still lost to some, Historian's lament to Physician, that Kharibu's reign will go unsung because the war is not fought, drives the point home unmistakably. The dreary portent of inevitable human warfare is attested to because the war is eventually fought and the tribe scattered. Thus, instead of bringing relief from the tense atmosphere surrounding the play the court scene increases its intensity.

### **The Dead Man and Dead Woman**

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Dead Woman is a dazed and lost character, as she was on her first appearance, because she does not comprehend her reception. She has known nothing but suffering since the events in Mata Kharibu's court and can hardly find rest in what seems a strange, unfriendly land. She has apparently committed suicide when Madame Tortoise sold her husband as a slave and so the child she carried in her womb had been lost. She and Dead Man importune the three human protagonists in turn to "take their case" and are shocked later to discover intuitively that Demoke, the most sympathetic of the three, is also tainted. Dead Woman asks: "The one who was to take my case-has he sent another down? Into the pit?" .In such circumstances her return, like her passage since the traumatic events of Kharibu's court, has been one long draught of pain. She tells the Questioner

My knowledge is  
The hate alone. The little ball of hate  
Alone consumed me. Wet runnels  
Of the earth brought me hither.  
all Forest Head. Say someone comes  
For all the rest. Say someone asks-  
Was it for this, for this,  
Children plagued their mothers?(DF 60).

Like Dead Woman, Dead Man is disillusioned by his reception. The Questioner, Eshuoro who is in disguise viciously accuses him of wasting the three consecutive lives he has lived since his first existence in the court of Kharibu "when, Power at his grasp, he easily ,Surrendered his manhood". Eshuoro cannot appreciate the idealistic instinct of Dead Man which shies away from the corrupting influence of power. In three successive life experiences spread over three hundred years the captain has suffered acutely for his consistent honesty and sense of justice, in the New World where he was sent as a slave as well as in Africa. By vitiating his aims and ideals human society shows itself quite unready for the egalitarian world of justice, truth and goodness to which it consistently pays lip service. "The womb-snake of the world", the Yoruba icon of eternal repetition symbolized by a snake for ever eating its tail, is not yet ready to develop the link that would enable man to escape the evil cycle of repetition. Dead Man is condemned to spend another hundred years of wandering in order to complete his present cycle. But his stubborn hankering after truth is an assurance that there are men, admittedly few, who appear intermittently on earth and who are poised ready to help lift man out of the pit of unreason and evil if there is wholehearted commitment from those who hold sway.

### **Cyclical Destruction and Creation**

The ants recite the story of the human paradox in which progress is seen as self-defeating if not retrogressive. The sepulchral foundation of human progress and civilization dooms the fabric of society to destruction because new nation states are built on the sites and with the same fragile pillars, physical and ethical, of old ones. The ants emphasize the ultimate fragility and

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futility of human endeavour since man never learns from the lessons of the past. The utilitarian principles that are so often quoted when masses of people are sacrificed for "progress," "civilization," "democracy" and "the good to come" are yet another indication of the proneness to self-deception or a make-believe sense of permanence and justice in a cruel and bellicose world.

Another variation on the theme of cyclical destruction and creation involves a set of Triplets-End, Greater Cause and Posterity. These reflect man's specious justification of his acts of cruelty and savagery. The use of rationalistic terms to defend and legitimize selfish and irrational decisions is one more piece of evidence of self-deception and hypocrisy. And because the high moral tone is only a varnish that covers the base intentions underneath, the future is simply an outline of a violent past and present.

Aroni was right when he said in his Prologue that the dance of welcome "was not as dignified a Dance as it should be." In order to thwart the ceremony, Eshuoro disguises himself as the Questioner and later as the Figure in Red to involve the Half-Child in a game whose stake is the child's future. His acolyte, meanwhile, masks himself as the Interpreter. The two appear successful in sabotaging the inquest over which Forest Head presides as coroner. But Forest Head's equanimity throughout indicates that the basic aim of the proceeding is fulfilled, that is, the attempt to make the humans aware of their pursuit of "the destructive path of survival". This awareness is the object of the welcome. And since there is little inherent dignity or praiseworthiness in the core of the past or of the present, and little hope of improvement in the future, the reception cannot emulate the wild festivities of the town, the sounds of which penetrate the heart of the forest.

### **The Final Speech**

Forest Head's final speech is an exercise in godly frustration and despair. He sees his role as a passive one. He is full of knowledge, wisdom and weariness because of the folly of man, a creature dear to him. The painful knowledge of man's persistent course is also his secret burden of responsibility:

My secret is my eternal burden-to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare (lie mirror of original nakedness knowing full well, it is all futility. Yet I must do this alone, and no more, since to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumoured ineffectually complete; hoping that when I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, in new beginnings. . . .( DF 71).

The last words of this speech hold the tiniest glimmer of hope for the future, a vain hope that will be dashed five short years after the "new beginnings" of the Nigerian nation. But Forest Head also strikes at a nerve center, God's efficacy in the face of "long-rumoured ineffectuality."

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## A Thesis Play

*A Dance of the Forests* is in fact a thesis play designed to elaborate several of Soyinka's ideas rather than explore psychological motives. The play is Soyinka's Half-Child auguring the future development of this artist. The massive structure and proliferation of themes are never again repeated since Soyinka achieves a mastery over dialogue and psychological motivation that enables him to develop complexity and cohesion with much simpler and more artistically integrated plots and with themes and symbols.

It will be seen that much of Part Two reads more like the synopsis of a symbolic ballet than a self-sufficient dramatic text. In his laudable desire to develop a 'total theatre' for West Africa, a theatre which will make the fullest use of music, masquerade, dance and mime. The final scenes, are a text which is too thin and inexplicit to guide the readers through a complex maze of stage action performed to music alone.

The chorus of the future is best described as a pageant whose underlying theme, the pursuit of what Forest Head calls "the destructive path of survival," is repeated in a number of variations. The three leading human participants Rola, Demoke and Adenebi are masked and made to speak as spirits of Palm, Precious Stones, Darkness and River. These tell the story of man's eternal greed, dissoluteness, destruction of his environment, of animal and plant life, and of his treachery towards his own kind. It is a story that will be relived in the future. The living tableau of ants symbolizes the waste of human resources, since four hundred million lives have been sacrificed during man's one million years of life on the planet to satisfy the whim and the lust of men of power. The antiphonal recitative of the ants, following Forest Head's question, exposes the barren reasoning that promotes such sacrifice,

FOREST HEAD: Have you a Cause, or shall Ieserve you like a riddle?

ANT LEADER: We arc the ones remembered then nations build ...

ANOTHER: ... with tombstones.

ANOTHER: We are the dried leaves, impaled

On one-eyed brooms. ANOTHER: We are the headless bodies when

The spade of progress delves. ANOTHER: The ones that never looked up when

The wind turned suddenly, erupting

In our heads.

ANOTHER: Down the axis of the world, from

The whirlwind to the frozen drifts,

We are the ever legion of the world,

Smitten, for-"the good to come."(DF 68).

The real meaning of that moment when the celebrant is possessed by his god, so central to all African religious observance, and this moment can be realized only in music, the true language of tragedy, with its concomitants of dance, mime and masquerade. In his essay, 'The

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Fourth Stage', Soyinka has elaborated his ideas about the relationship between human and divine action. Both gods and men, he argues, are conscious of a 'primeval severance' lying between them and both constantly strive to bridge it by means of ritual. The gods to whom appeal is made in sacrifice and ceremonies of appeasement are not indifferent and aloof, but are themselves filled with the anguish of that severance and continually yearning towards reunification with men.

Mask is a special feature of this part of the play. A flashback is played of the life of Mata Karibhu some eight centuries ago is presented as a pantomime accompanied by music. Eshuoro is seeking out Demoke, intent upon revenge. But Forest Father has his own design for the regeneration of the living and does not intend that either Eshuoro or Ogun shall disturb it. His preparations are now complete and he empowers Aroni, his Master of Ceremonies, to begin. While the townsfolk, far away, are intent upon their 'gathering of the tribes', the design of Forest Father for the self-discovery of the living and the dead unfolds itself.

The ceremony is in three parts: first, the re-enacting of the ancient scene which prefigured the crimes of the living characters, second, the questioning of the dead pair, and last, the dance of welcome for them, which the living have refused to perform. Suddenly, like a masque, the court of the African emperor Mata Kharibu, some eight centuries ago appears as a pantomime. His queen is recognizably Madame Tortoise and the Court Poet is, equally clearly, Demoke. The queen is bored and entertains herself by sending him to catch her canary on the steep, dangerous roof of the palace. But the poet cravenly sends his pupil instead and the pupil, falling, breaks his arm. Meanwhile, the furious Emperor has summoned a Captain who has refused to serve him in an unjust and frivolous war. This warrior is the Dead Man. Their dialogue prefigures Soyinka's own encounter, seven years later, with an authority equally bent on war. When Mata Kharibu is about to strike him dead, the Physician steps forward to reason with 'the traitor'. The anxious courtiers consult the Historian, an old friend Adenebi as to whether the annals show any precedent for this dangerous disease of independent thought.

### **The Form and Function of Mask**

Masque is one of the significant of the play which is mostly accompanied by music. The play in fact is an entertainment with music. Forest Father now orders that the Dance of Welcome be performed. The three mortals are masked and led into the arena. They are in a tranced state beyond themselves and have become momentarily one with the Forest. Through their masks speak the spirits of the unborn, while the Dead Man, Woman and Half-Child, now taken from his mother's womb wait to hear whether future, ages will offer that gleam of light refused by the past and the present. But the vision of the future unfolded by the Spirits of the Palm, the Darkness and the Waters, who speak respectively through Rola, Demoke, and Adenebi, is one of unremitting suffering and hopelessness.

.....

The ultimate meaning of the mask motif in the "Dance of the Half-Child" is as obscure as the future itself. As the custodian who has to decide the child's fate Demoke, the conscious artist, Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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is once again involved in the action. Since Demoke's role is unclear and the symbolism is ambivalent, there have been a number of admittedly speculative interpretations of the ritual. There has, however, been general agreement about the main purpose of the dance, whether the original directions for the "Dance of the Half-Child" are followed or the less elaborate substitution dance for staging purposes: the future will be as bloody and as evil as the past. On the basis of the foregoing reading of the play, Demoke may be seen as the sensitive soul of the community, as the artist who can play a vital role in restoring society to itself through his art and his criticism of society. Since the past is finished and the present has arrived, the domain in which the artist can have the most impact is the future and it is up to him, as Soyinka says of the African writer, to "have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity."

## **To Conclude**

In the words of Nick Wilkinson, Soyinka has shown the difficulties of moral choice, and the dire implications of even a seemingly 'good' moral choice. The parallels drawn between *A Dance of the Forests* and Nigeria's position at Independence can then be related to this general idea, rather than individual symbols or figures within the play: all human history is gory, and all human decisions have fearful implications. Thus this approach fits in with the general sombre warning tone seen by all critics to be the essence of the play (p. 26).

The play is a detailed study of the theme of frustration- the malady of modern life. The conflict between passion and reason results in frustration. The total effect is one of the bitter disillusionment with society which finds itself in the grip of a new savagery, racial persecution and a lust for blood. The characters are tragic in the modern sense of being caught in situations from which there is no way of escape. The play covers different aspects of life and its moral emptiness, and it also reveals the frightening spiritual emptiness of humanity. The focus is on the struggle of man against society and man, and the inevitable devaluation of ideals. Man's growing disillusionment with the world and society is reflected. Its theme is the continuity of human life and in particular of human evil, suffering and injustice. But this moral theme is set in a larger context of the continuity of life itself, of trees and ants, of men and Gods, of the living and the dead. The play moves in two great swoops, each of which turns cyclically back on itself of me again and again (p.33).

Of all Soyinka's plays *A Dance of the Forests* is theatrically the most demanding. The characters are drawn from four distinct levels of abstraction or 'reality', a number of them appearing as themselves, but in different forms, at two levels. Within the mundane forest there are three orders of being: present day humans; two revenants who must be instantly recognizable as such; and, in certain scenes, Murete the tree-imp who belongs to the spirit world. In the numinous forest there are three humans; the same human in a host of spirits, some of whom assume temporary disguises. The terrible Triplets, grotesque symbolic masks, are perhaps yet another category. The forest-dwellers are masked and the humans such as Demoke, Rola, Adenebi and Agboreko are splendidly dressed.

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Periodically from the beginning of the play, the beating of drums and ringing of bells are heard which build to a crescendo and die off in a distance.

Dance is an integral part of all Soyinka's plays. As in other plays, Soyinka's stage directions focus on the details and they are unparalleled stylistic devices. Soyinka focuses on details of dance, drums and music which are a part and parcel of his stylistic devices. In fact, such features make the songs and the play lively, dramatic and colourful.

It is widely recognized that Africa has a rich variety of instruments and in the case of drums there is goblet, conical barrel, cylindrical and frame. Soyinka has extensively used drums and songs throughout the play in order to maintain their custom of using drums and music in all their ceremonies.

The play's real importance seems at first to lie in its character of an over-stored treasure house, full of themes, concepts and images of divine intervention which Soyinka was to return to and refine in much of his later writing.

In *A Dance of the Forests* Soyinka subtly proves that man never changes and hence history repeats itself. Man's temperament, his attitude and his mind never changes. No change can take place immediately. Any change can only be taken place only in a very slow degree. Even that would demand a radical mind to accept the changes. That is why there is an inherent love in man for the past.

Thus Soyinka emphasizes the ingrained similarity rather than the superficial resemblance of the past, present and future in the lives of the characters, in the acts of violence they commit and in the complex symbolism.

## Chapter 6

### Soyinka's World



#### Society and Playwright

Society comprises individuals of different temperaments and different motives. Interaction of these individuals causes friction at times. Coalition, too, comes as a result of this interaction. The individual with a strong will forms a crux of society. He wages a relentless battle against the established norms of society in order to give it a face lift. The battle, in many cases, proves to be futile, but, the effort does succeed in awakening the people from a somnambulistic state.

A writer wants to communicate something, and it is always something outside oneself. Any upheaval in the society elicits response from a writer. His or her plays have as their background that sensitive period which is called as transitional period. Africa was ravaged by colonialism, and it was now passing through a socio-economic stage in which the protagonists are placed Soyinka's plays. All of his characters are involved in some crusade or the other against the powers that be.

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## A Complex Style of Songs, Dances, Mimes, and so on



The dramatist enhances the artistic values of his or her words by adopting a complex style using songs, dances, mime, drums and music. Language is not the only thing relied upon for effective theatre. The drama of Soyinka is a creative mixing of Yoruba rituals, dramatic techniques, music and dance with the foreign language, English. The rites, rituals, gestures, music and dance are some of the non-verbal techniques Soyinka employs in order to achieve his dramatic effect.

A perspective reading of Soyinka's plays proves that his artistic sensibility is suitably shaped by African history and present. In his plays, Soyinka not only fictionally relieves the African reality but also envisions, a better social order expecting the progressive minded among his countrymen to strive for its realization. He occupies a prominent place among the African writers. He is one of those artists who do not subordinate artistic values to political consideration

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even when he is committed to a political cause. He is very conscious of the important role he can play as an artist in shaping the destiny of the society.

### **Tallest Among His Peers**

Soyinka as a dramatist deserves to be taken seriously because of his high intellectual position among African writers. A speculative thinker, his persistent call to African writers to demonstrate that the writer possesses an inner light of unavailability to the mass of his people, and that his duty to guide his society towards a beautiful future. Soyinka, as a literary artist, is preoccupied with social justice and a hatred of oppressive institutions. He displays an obsession with myth and rituals. Soyinka is “a man against the establishment, a firm believer in the absolute freedom of the individual” (Ogunba, 1975:6).

### **Diagnosing the Malady**

Soyinka had the uncanny knack of reading the symptoms and diagnosing the malady. He believed in liberty. In an interview in 1973, he said “I have a special responsibility because I can smell the reactionary sperm before the rape of the nation takes place” (qtd in Gibbs, 1981:11). As observed, Soyinka is an artist interested in twilight zones-between the night and the day, or life and death. It is clear that he has a fascination for the areas of transition, for they are those areas in which he can most fully explore certain basic facts about life and death”(Roscoe 164).

### **In the Backdrop of African Culture, a Universal World**

Dances are not only reference to Soyinka’s African culture but also to represent the concepts about time, about the dead, about the communal imperatives and about modernism. Sometimes it also speaks about the characters, the mood of the play, the setting and focuses about the future too. His traditional Africa has many roles to play. He is often a poet, musician, performer, sculptor, critic and society’s transmitter of history rolled into one. His social commitment was transformed from the role of artist – moralist to that of artist-activist by his experiences and sufferings during the years of turmoil in Nigeria. The combined sense of humiliation, loneliness and isolation he felt during this period has made him not only a more subjective writer but also a more optimistic prognosticator. He has influenced a number of African playwrights. Old Rotimi, for example has acknowledged the affect of Soyinka’s use of cultural elements in his own writing. “Ha disturbs, he disquietens, he delights, he demands attention and now African letters, indeed Africa herself, cannot be without him.”

Soyinka’s impressive literary and dramatic accomplishments in London and Ibadan won him a measure of recognition in Nigeria. In March 1961, the twenty-six-year-old author was made the subject of an illustrated feature article in *Drum*, probably the leading African popular magazine in Africa those days. The headline read “Young dramatist is yearning the Title of Bernard shaw”. The comparison was apt, probably more apt and more prophetic than the journalist who made it could have realized, for Soyinka hadn’t yet displayed some of his most

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Shavian qualities. He was known primarily as a humorist, a public entertainer, a campus wit, a high-spirited man. And he was known almost exclusively in his homeland, where he addressed his own people through the most popular media-theatre, radio, television and print. In 1963, when his first three books were published that he became –instantly and forever-one of the most important writers in the English-speaking world.

### **Dramatist Gifts**

Soyinka has the true dramatist's gift of making actions seem significant. His use of action and language effectively commands the readers "Look here, this is important and you should read carefully". He must not only be considered a leading contemporary dramatist, but also an outstanding dramatic theorist, whose contribution to the ritual drama and the understanding of contemporary dramatic experiences.

Every young man has his dreams of rebuilding the society. He also has a desire of carving a niche for himself in the social set-up. He is interested in the welfare of the society. *The Road* is Soyinka's most nature work. He displays in this play his usual ability to create living characters, which unlike the rest are more diverse and more deeply explored. Songs are used in the play to present life's progress towards death that reduces everything into nothing. It is a skillfully handed play with fine use of songs. The very first song reveals the form of a quest by one man for the essence of death, which alone will explain the meaning of life. It brings out the truth that loss of belief and conviction has produced a society in a state of transition.

### **The Journey on the Road**

*The Road* begins, ends on several occasions is punctuated by the rhythmic presence of masque for the dead. The driver's dirges is sung on the occasion of or about death provide a thematic chorus, closely commenting on and elaborating the central idea of death, disobedience to God and sacrifice. All the songs are sung in Yoruba, which underlines their traditional validity and customary strength, as well as isolating the theme of modern, straining away from the traditional values. The song talks about the life in earth and shows the way to heaven. The first concerns the road to heaven; the second parody of the idea of ancestral spirits becoming flesh, the third is an ominous elaboration of death on the road, qualifying the confidence by involving Ogun. A dirge is heard from the drivers at Kotonu and Samson telling the story of 'Konok Oris' death and professor attempts to restore his damaged self-confidence by listening to his favourite praise-song. At every point, the songs focus on precise moments and themes.

### **Songs to Touch Hearts and Provide Vivid Descriptions**

The songs show the picture of the man suffering from deep moral maladies, which is unable to free himself from dishonesty and fraud. Through he has effectively brought out the anguish and despair, giving a clear picture of man's security, aggressiveness and evasiveness. In other words songs are dealt with man's predicament in the universe. The songs contrast the

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greed, the violence in the world of politics and the quest for spiritual peace. Above all, the songs deal with the theme of death. The play is more complex and open to a multitude of additional interpretations.

### **A Modern Master of English Plays**

*The Road* alone is enough to suggest that no other poet or dramatist in the English language has explored so extensively, and with such rapt fascination, that shrouded middle passage between death, fleshly dissolution and arrival in the other world. "Soyinka chooses a middle ground, a sort of no man's land belonging neither to the world of the flesh nor the spirit." This dark middle area effortlessly grows suggestive of ideas other than those of death and dissolution. It suggest for example, the overall position of Africa, caught hanging in the middle way.

### **A Hideous Mingling of Cultures**

Soyinka in his play portrays a hideous mingling of cultures that he finds in this middle state. He does so with a complexity, a subtlety and a revulsion that is unparalleled. The professor himself is the best illustration of this. With his Victorian outfit of top hat and tails, all thread bare, with his academic title earned through his prowess in forgery, with his past connection with the Christian church, he is a sort of amphibious creature. He is neither a right African nor a right European, neither spiritually oriented nor wholly materialistic.

*The Road* is Soyinka's writing on the nation's wall. He draws a society that is on the road to death and dissolution, a society for which there seems no hope. Perhaps, like Professor, who speaks of death as the moment of rehabilitation, this society will have to die before it learns the truth". Soyinka's figures have a degree of psychological depth and complexity which modern drama has never achieved. The Professor, in *The Road*, to take but one illustration, is a distinctly African personality in a distinctly African play. The bewildering complexity of his character, the shadows of the past that enshroud it, its aura of insanity, its weird admixture of the criminal and spiritual—all this is made possible by his knowledge. It serves to indicate how deeply the roots of his art are sunk in African traditional practice.

### **A Recorder of Social Mores and Experience**

Wole Soyinka in his essay 'The writer in a modern African State' wrote: 'The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time'. His belief is manifested in his writings. As a historian of his people's culture past and as a mold of that past for present needs and aspirations, Soyinka is the most original and challenging literary voice in African Literature society.

The playwright enhances the artistic value of his works by adopting dramatic techniques like songs, dances, music and masks. In the play *The Lion and the Jewel* songs and dances play

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a significant role. His use of songs is very effective. The songs not only show poetic and romantic sensibility but the dream of matrimonial life. The employment of songs has the play much interesting. The play implies that songs are an integral part of the African society. It is essentially a play of mood and atmosphere, providing the readers with ample opportunity to make comparisons and reach their own judgements. Soyinka has used a kind of technique that he generally employs in his plays for artistic purposes.

*The Road* is Soyinka's most mature work. He displays in this play his usual ability to create living characters, which unlike the rest are more diverse and more deeply explored. In this play songs present life's progress towards death that reduces everything into nothing. It is a skillfully handled play with fine use of songs. The very first song reveals the quest of man for the essence of death, which alone will explain the meaning of life. It also brings out the truth that loss of belief and conviction has produced a society in a state of transition.

*The Road* begins and ends on several occasions is punctuated by the rhythmic presence of masque for the dead. The driver's dirge is sung on the occasion of death, provide a thematic chorus. It comments on the central idea of death and disobedience towards God. All these songs are sung in Yoruba, which underlines their traditional value and customary strength and the theme of modern straining away from the traditional values. The song also speaks about the life of man in earth and shows way to heaven. Another dirge song is about the story of Kokolori's death. Professor's attempt to restore his self-confidence by listening to his favourite praise-song is another feature which highlights the play.

The songs in this play show the suffering from deep moral maladies, which is unable to free him from dishonesty and fraud. Through songs he has effectively brings out the anguish and despair, giving a clear picture of man's insecurity, aggressiveness and evasiveness. In other words songs deal with man's predicament in the universe. The songs contrast the greed, the violence in the world and the quest for spiritual peace. Above all, the songs deal with the theme of death.

### **Reality of Characters**

Soyinka is able to handle many themes simultaneously without endangering the reality of his characters with the use of music songs and dance in the background. Psychological or spiritual themes are important to him as social themes. He explores the question of human sacrifice in much of his writings. In nearly everything he has written there appears songs, music, dance and drum beating which forms the essence of the play. Through the use of songs, dance music and drum beating he has portrayed the characters' conflict and fear, the complexities and the problems of the human heart.

### **More Social than Metaphysical**

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Soyinka's passionate and concern for society makes him inseparable from his destination. This heed for society is obvious, not only in his plays but also in his poetry and essays. He strongly believes that society is in continual need of salvation from itself. This salvation can come about only through the vision and action of dedicated individuals, who pursue their vision even when they meet competition from the very society they strive to save. His concern is more social than metaphysical and his art is more of an exercise of the intellect than of the imagination. He tries to imprison reality in words of infinite perception. He sets the search for truth against the dreamy world and seeks spirituality behind the manifold experience of life.

### **Abundant Harvest**

The play *Kongi's Harvest* is about the conflict between two protagonists, the old king Danlola and the dictator Kongi. Danlola is in prison along with some of his chief. He is condemned to remain there until he agrees to transfer the honour of eating the first of the 'New Yam' to dictator Kongi. At last he decides to transfer the honour in return for the release of the five conspirators. It is a brilliant satire on moral values. In this play human conflict in social terms because human problems are thought to be the result of violation of the natural order, by individuals and groups.

*Kongi's Harvest* begins with the National Anthem, which highlights the patriotism of the characters. The next five songs are of mourning about the king Danlola, who is in prison. It emphatically shows the pathetic state of the king and his disableness.

Songs on Segi's beauty moves the play in a light hearted vein. The last song describes the great feast. The songs present the readers with the picture of a disintegrating world, which lost its unifying principle.

### **Dance and Forests – Vision Beyond the Present**

*A Dance of the Forests* is the most complex and satirical play that Soyinka has so far written. It is a stroke of bold imagination that brought to light the depth and sincerity of Soyinka's vision. The play is offered to a nation on the happy occasion of its independence, but being a satirical play, the nation itself is the victim of the satire. His vision ranges far beyond the present. His theme is a large one, his frame of reference nothing less than the past, present and ongoing stream of human existence. There is to be a great gathering of the tribes at a momentous time in their history. Those come with the excitement of the present must confess their guilt of the past and are allowed to glimpse the abiding truths of human condition. Those who are in the present with former glories must face the grim reality behind their dreams. The play attempts to recognize the history and to reconcile the past with the present and knit the two together, rather than deny the past. In the play *A Dance of the Forests* the setting along with the characters with drumming, dance, songs and music forms the part and parcel of Africa.

### **Language and Drama**

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Language is not the only thing Soyinka relies on for effective theatre. The drama of Wole Soyinka is the creative mixing of Yoruba rituals, dramatic techniques, music and dance with the foreign language, English. The rites, rituals, gestures, music and dance are some of the non-verbal techniques Soyinka employs in order to achieve his dramatic effect. The language is full of wit and graphic insult. The language at the end of the play *A Dance of the Forest* is dignified and poetical. As for non-verbal techniques, rites, like the invitation to the dead, rituals like climbing of the totem pole, music and dance are used. His plays are to be staged rather than be read.

Beier remarks about Soyinka's message for the happy occasion of Nigeria's independence celebration is as follows, "a sobering reminder of some basic, and abiding truths about mankind in general and about Africans and their history in particular" (p254, Beier, Vili. *Introduction to African Literature*, London: Longman, 1967).

### **A Poet and Dramatist of Twilight Zones**

Soyinka's writing is life-filled, overflowing with energy, capable of realizing human personalities and catching the sound of one particular voice, at times intensely comic, coloured with rhythm and dance, with drums and masquerade. (174)-**Buwaneswari thesis**

"Soyinka is a poet of twilight zones, be they between night and day or day and night, life and death, or death and life", (Roscoe 277). They are areas of transition for which he has an abiding fascination; for they are those areas in which he can most fully explore certain basic facts about life and death".

### **Preoccupation with Personal Responsibility**

Soyinka's writings are preoccupied with the question of personal responsibility in a world where individual power must be limited. His characters are admirable examples of realism and the creation of types as a means of revealing the connection between man as a private individual and man as a social being and as a member of a community. Soyinka recognizes that he must participate in the task of re-education and regeneration of the society.

*The Road* is Soyinka's writing on the nation's wall. He draws a society that is on the road to death and dissolution, a society for which there seems no hope. Perhaps, like Professor, who speaks of death as the moment of our rehabilitation, this society will have to die before it learns the truth (Roscoe 281).

### **Humanistic Portrayal of Characters**

Soyinka's portrayal of characters is of very high order. His humanism leads him to admire an individual's creative struggle of the masses. His use of language is evocative and the playwright calls upon the experiences, beliefs fantasies and emotions of his readers. His play

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along with the language is paralleled by music and dance. As a dramatist, his intention is neither to preach nor to entertain. He believes in portraying the society as it is, so that the evil ranging the society would be easily identified and rooted out. He does not merely satirize the society to expose its follies. His commitment as a social reformer and an ardent one at that raises him above all the other writers. He admits that it was not any literary ideal that served as the compulsive urge helping him in the pursuit of his mission.

### **Ingenueous Literary Output**

Soyinka as the twentieth century African writer has achieved worldwide fame because of his ingenious literary output. As a Nigerian dramatist director, poet and novelist, has proved as one of the most important contemporary African dramatists writing in English. Though he has tried his hands in all the three forms, his plays are the sure manifestation of his mastermind. His writing are often modeled with the heightened poetic quality.

Emerging as the West Africa's most distinguished dramatist, he has claimed attention as one of the foremost English-speaking playwrights. He is a versatile writer, and he achieves in his work an almost unbelievable amount of vitality. Songs in his plays deal with the basic human emotions and predicaments in a social context through social conventions. Through his songs he has drawn the readers very closely into the Nigerian world.

Soyinka as a dramatist deserves to be taken seriously because of his high intellectual position among African writers. A speculative thinker, his persistent call to African writers to demonstrate that they have a vision shows that he sees the literary artist as a redeemed. He believes that the writer posses an inner light of unavailable to the mass of his people, and that it is his duty to guide his society towards a beautiful future. As a part of this strenuous task of guiding his society, Soyinka has made a thorough analysis of the Nigerian society and suggested ways to overcome the evils plaguing it.

Soyinka is widely regarded as the leading African playwright and as one of the finest verse playwrights using English. He has also distinguished himself as a poet and a novelist and he believes passionately in human rights. He has written forcefully and fearlessly on National and International issues. His mastery of English is at a height where expertise breaks the semantic barrier to poetic efflorescence and linguistic newness.

Soyinka the artist, the man, who is unified personality, believes strongly in freedom. He also makes use of the dance and mask idiom, which are an integral part of traditional Yoruba dance. He combines these elements with contemporary settings and with things, which are universal and with themes that are most relevant to modern times.

To conclude, Soyinka is exciting and has such vitality something which is really beautiful and distinctive. He is black but beautiful as a writer What does his colour matter as long as "he writes like an angel" about the "African Heaven". The plays of Wole Soyinka are of universal

value and most relevant to modern times. It is an undeniable fact that they would challenge consideration is the best of audience and claims memorable place in the realm of literature.

Thus rituals, rites ceremonies, dance, drums, music, masks and songs which are the structural devices highlights the dramatic techniques in plays *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Road*, *Kongi's harvest* and *A Dance of the Forests*.

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