Like many African cultures, the Yoruba have a fundamental belief that life is a continuum. The dead are not forgotten; the ancestors are honored and cherished as guides and companions. The not-yet-borns are also cherished, and new babies may in fact be ancestors returning to physical life. The most highly charged moments in the life cycle are the moments of transition from one type of existence to the next that is, the passage into the physical world during birth and the passage into death. In African context, it is mediation between the living and the unborn. A paean is a song of praise and triumph. In ancient Greece, it used to be sung generally in praise and honour of Apollo. Thus Elesin of Death and the king’s horseman, Eman of The strong breed, Pentheus of The Baccchae of Euripides and many others in The Road enter into the world of sacrificial death thus forming a connection between the living and the unborn. The themes show a continuation into the future thus making the life, as well as death-optimistic. The idea of death is found throughout the plays Death and the king’s horseman and in The road.

As in his version of the Bachhae, Soyinka exploited the cultural overlap between Europe and Africa; he had also emphasized characteristic qualities of the African tradition. In the tableau which closes Horseman, the living surround the two dead bodies, but the dead are not simply be mourned, as they might be in
parts of the western tradition and as they are in the last acts of some European plays. The play *Death and the king's horseman* is set in post World War II Nigeria and of the customs of burying a king. The play is based on a ritual that was practiced by the Yoruba tribe. If a king died, his horseman, horse and the dog had to follow the king into the after life; these customs and rituals are analyzed for their symbolism throughout the play. Here, Soyinka describes the circumstances surrounding and leading up to the ritual suicides of Elesin Oba, the King's chief horseman. On the day of the burial of the king, the day of Elesin's suicide, the horseman is celebrated and praised; the praise-singer celebrates the life of Elesin; the village women glorify his exploits and the supreme sacrifice he is about to make. There is singing and dancing as part of the celebration; Elesin is arrayed in the richest and the most colorful finery. Prominent women Iyaloja acquiesces to Elesin's request to marry and consummate relationships, if only for one night, with a young beautiful woman who is betrothed to her own son. Such is the willingness of the village to glorify Elesin. After the marriage the procession winds to the village and the place to the suicide ritual. Soyinka vividly and lyrically describes how the praise singer plays devils advocating asking whether Elesin is ready to go through with it. Elesin is ready; he enters a trance that transcends the boundaries of physical feeling.

Ralph-Bowman argues that the play entitled *Death and the King's Horseman* was "Soyinka's judgment on the decade or so of Nigerian history up to the time of its composition [it was
published in 1975]. Ralph-Bowman’s view is debatable, but it is justified insofar as Soyinka’s play (like Rotimi’s) downplays the role of foreign colonial powers in Nigerian life. in his note to Death and the King’s Horseman, Soyinka maintains that "The Colonial Factor is an accident, a catalytic incident merely" and that "the confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind—the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition" (Six Plays 145).

The action of the play is essentially Elesin’s prolonged, indeed, almost Hamlet like hesitation before killing himself as tradition demands. He is the designated scapegoat for the king’s recent death, and everyone expects him to purge the collective guilt that seems to linger in the people’s mind (even though the king died naturally) by accompanying the king into the afterlife. Elesin is treated as a living inhabitant of death’s kingdom, a bridge between gods and mortals, and he is allowed to sleep with a young woman to create a new sacred life. His own wife tells Elesin "It is good that your loins be drained into the earth we know, that your last strength be ploughed back into the womb that gave you being" (Six Plays 161). This last incestuous image recalls Girard’s contention that every African king (or in this case, every ceremonial victim who must accompany a dead king on his journey to the afterlife) is another Oedipus, who must repeat his crimes in a ritual fashion to justify his death. Elesin allows himself to be arrested by the English police chief, Pilkings, before he can go
through with his action, and his continued and ineffectual survival quickly becomes a public disgrace as well as a cause of social because it threatens to dissolve the very idea that dead and living can be united in a single person.

At first, Elesin blames Pilkings for interrupting the death-ceremony, citing the foreigner's "plan to push our world from its course and sever the cord that links us to the great origin", yet, as many critics have noted, Elesin's own will to die is very much in doubt even before Pilkings intervenes. Moreover, a sign of Soyinka's belief that the colonial side of Nigerian life is merely "incidental" to the action of the play is given when Elesin finally takes responsibility for his own failure: as he says, "First I blamed the white man, then I blamed my gods for deserting me", but in the end, he has only himself to blame for "the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in this alien rupture" in his world, a "blasphemy" which he sees had "turned me into an infant in the hands of unnamable strangers" Elesin's delay earns him the scorn of his peers, and his son Olunde is especially grieved by his father's temporizations. Olunde, like Obi in No Longer at Ease, has just returned from England, where he has been going to school, to be faced with a dilemma. Olunde feels that his father has corrupted the tradition of the Elesins by failing to die and accompany the dead king into the afterlife, just as Obi finds that Nigerian life has been corrupted by bribery and patronage. Olunde decides to take a stand against his father's weakness, and kills himself before any further disgrace befalls his family. In committing suicide before
his father is able to kill him as precedent demands, Olunde seems to be importing a gratuitous altruism where it doesn’t belong. As Ibitokun notes, Olunde is "alienated from his roots; his character smacks of chic traditionalism", and his death is an uncomfortable echo of the selfless suicide of an English captain who has recently blown himself up with his ship in the local harbor, a gesture Olunde admires.

Regardless of its motives, Olunde’s death has an immediate effect. Pointing to the apparently unnatural sight of a son dead before his father, Iyaloja asks Elesin "Whose trunk withers to give sap to the other? The parent shoot or the younger?" and accuses him of being among those who "choose to reverse the cycle of our being" (Six Plays 212). To be a father is, by definition, to be willing to die, in Iyaloja’s mind; as she asks Elesin: "Who are you to open a new life when you dared not open the door to a new existence?". When Olunde’s dead body is brought in, Iyaloja tells Elesin "The son has proved the father Elesin, and there is nothing left in your mouth to gnash but infant gums". As this insulting image suggests, even adulthood is denied those who cannot face the reality of their death (Pilkings, who is called a "child" by Iyaloja, is also put into this category). Overcome by guilt at the sight of his dead son, Elesin swiftly strangles himself with his own chains. This double death seems to herald a new birth, however, and Iyaloja asks Elesin’s bride to think only of the "unborn" child within her. This impending birth recalls the one which is prophesied in Yeats’s The Second Coming, a coming of some sort.
of messiah who will end the Christian era (and, in Yeats's theory, reinstate the age of Oedipus, Christ's counterpart). This hopeful note has prompted some readers to see hope in Elesin's refusal to carry out his family's traditional self-sacrificial role. Ibitokun has praised Elesin for being "bold enough to challenge the age-old ethic of the (Messianic) carrier in the society in which he is born and bred" and thus "the tragic revolutionary hero of our times". Both Death and the King's Horseman and Soyinka's adaptation of The Bacchae of Euripides enact "the end of him who embodies the Promethean and rationalist energies of man"; thus "In Elesin's forced suicide, the dawn of a new historical reality for the community is overwhelmingly set". This picture of Elesin seems flawed, not because he cannot be a positive figure, but because it is unlikely that Soyinka would have made his redemptive hero a rationalist of the sort imagined by Ibitokun (indeed, the evil Bero of Madmen and Specialists is possibly the closest thing to a rationalist in Soyinka's work).

To understand the ways in which Elesin's peculiar heroism and somewhat ambiguous crimes may be understood, it is helpful to recall Girard's remark that some African peoples insisted that their king "commit an act of incest, either real or symbolic, on certain solemn occasions— notably, at his enthronement or in the course of the periodic rites of renewal". This desire that a king (who is to be blamed for bad harvests or other disasters) should "show himself 'worthy' of his punishment" is part of what Girard sees at work in the crimes attributed to Oedipus, and it is also
behind the rites of the Incwala, in Swaziland, for instance, which demand that a king drink "various noxious potions" and commit "incest with a tribal sister". As Girard points out, these actions "are intended to augment the king’s Silwane, a term whose literal translation is ‘to be like a savage beast’", and suggest that the king must, by virtue of being a ruler, exceed human boundaries both on the side of divinity and on the side of bestiality (as defined by the traditions in which he rules). Elesin fulfils this condition by committing a sexual crime against his community; he takes a bride just before he is supposed to die, when, as Ibitokun notes, "it is a taboo in Yoruba ethics for the celebrant to go close to the second sex". An incestuous subtext to this crime is suggested by Elesin’s address to his young bride: he calls her "little mother" as well as "daughter" and plainly views her as the portal to another existence, a kind of anti-womb through which he must pass into death: "I needed you as the abyss across which my body must be drawn... You were the final gift of the living to their emissary to the land of the ancestors". His violation of the taboo earns Elesin some violent condemnation and scatological abuse, but this verbal attack may well have a redemptive undercurrent much like the one in an investiture hymn sung by the Ouagadogous and cited by Girard as a "a dynamic formula for salvation":

You are a turd,
You are a heap of refuse,
You have come to kill us,
You have come to save us.
Such a view of *Death and the King’s Horseman* gains a greater measure of credibility if we compare it with Soyinka’s play *The Strong Breed*, in which another sacrificial "carrier" refuses to fulfill his role and ends up dying anyway. The representative and tragically heroic self is a signature of Soyinka’s artistic prowess and *Death and the King’s Horseman* serves well as our point of comparison. Perhaps one of the most discussed of the plays, and widely acclaimed for artistic merit, *Death and the King’s Horseman* depicts a struggle between indigenous tradition and an uncomprehending and bureaucratic colonial rule. According to tradition, Elesin, the King’s Horseman, must accompany his liege to heaven when the latter dies. This entails that Elesin must take his own life before the king is buried. But as soon as the District Officer, Simon Pilkings, gets word of this news, he orders that the already reluctant Elesin be imprisoned to keep him from taking his life. In prison, however, Elesin hears that Olunde, his son, has taken the place of his father, and has killed himself in keeping with tradition. The body of the son is brought to Elesin, rolled up in a mat; upon seeing the body of his dead son, Elesin strangles himself with the very chains that are to keep him from doing so. The play ends, though in a bloodbath, with a sense of continuity of tradition: Elesin’s young bride who had accompanied him to prison is pregnant with the Horseman’s child, and is led away by Iyaloja, who had brought Olunde’s corpse to Elesin, in order to awaken Elesin’s sense of honor. She leads the young bride away with the words, “Now forget the dead, and forget even the living. Turn your
mind to the unborn.” Although the play closes with this sense of continuity and hope, this is only a representational continuity: the “dirge rises in volume, and the women continue their sway,” but the “[l]ights fade to a black-out,” leaving the characters in a blacked-out box, away from the realm of the audience for whom the play is being performed.

In this sense, representational continuity bespeaks a strict honouring of boundaries between the world and the text. The integrity of the work of art is kept intact; it does not leak out into the world of the real. This containment issues from an implicit acknowledgment on the part of the play of the primacy of its collective nature, since what is embedded in the performance of the play is direct interaction with the audience. The play, having started out as a primarily collective form, turns by the end into its dialectical other; that is, it requires and posits formal constraints to maintain its boundaries from the world. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., commenting on *Death and the King’s Horseman*, sees the play as representative of Soyinka’s ability to create a “self-contained, hermetic world, an effected reality” and calls this ability Soyinka’s “greatest achievement,” for it also bespeaks his ability to “create a reality, and not merely to reflect reality. For our purposes, here, it is important to note that the creation of an alternate reality, a “self-contained, hermetic world,” is possible for the play precisely because the play is always already, structurally, an interactive form. The play must strive not to overspill the boundaries between the text and the world. In this struggle lies the play’s success.⁷

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The dynamics of Soyinka’s novel, *Season of Anomy*, are qualitatively different from those of his plays. As opposed to the play, the novel, having arisen from the creation of a leisured class under bourgeois society, has historically evolved as a particularly private form. The novel must labor under the burden of its structural hermeticism, and it is this labor — this failed attempt — that certainly makes this novel different from Soyinka’s oeuvre. For here what we find is not the creation of an alternate “hermetic” reality, but, rather, a heroic and tragic struggle, on the part of the text, to bridge that gap between the world and the text. More specifically, here, if the play’s heroic Olunde, acting on behalf of his erstwhile father, has been able to maintain traditional integrity and defy imminent cultural collapse resulting from the colonial encounter, it is not so much the novel’s male protagonist, Ofeyi, but rather narrative itself that undertakes this tragic heroic traversing of the void between representation and reality.

What we have already seen, however, during our discussion of Iriyise’s dance, is that the novel also sees itself, and art, as a failed political act, as unable to affect reality, because of its confinement in representational form. But this realization on the part of the novel — of its arrest in art form — is not its final statement on itself. Indeed, this realization engenders an act of will, as it were, to refuse the status of arrest to which it sees itself doomed. This is the kind of failure, then, that turns into its very obverse — success. For the point here is not that *Anomy* is a failed attempt to represent an alternative. It is that the novel itself
recognizes its structural failure and attempts to will away the boundaries between the text and the world. In other words, Soyinka’s novel recognizes, and responds to, precisely this limitation on the work of art — a limit that the novel views with a sense of frustration. Because the novel recognizes its own structural limitations, that is, its essentially individual character — not only in that its primary reader is the individual reader, but also in that the narrative necessarily unfolds through the exploits of individual protagonists — it nevertheless seeks to overcome this limit. This response is what makes *Anomy* uncharacteristic of Soyinka’s oeuvre. If, on one hand, the play, *Death and the King’s Horseman*, may be said to belong to the realm of wish fulfillment, wherein the contradictions of an indigenous culture besieged by invading colonial regulations and mores are resolved on the representational plane, the novel, on the other hand, recognizes this as wish fulfillment, and seeks to resolve what it sees as contradictions of reality on the real plane. The novel undertakes this endeavor via an attempt to demolish the boundaries between the world and the text, between reality and its representation, in order that the represented resolutions may intervene as real resolutions.

In this sense, Iriyise’s double-bind, as we had argued earlier, is also the novel’s double-bind. This arrest of the spectacle and of the spectator, the object of transformation and the would-be agent, into discrete compartments, becomes horrifically clear during a scene of perversely slow and methodical mutilation and
killing by a hunting group of an unnamed human figure transformed into a monkey wearing clothes. The narrative voice shows us Ofeyi and Zaccheus, hiding and watching helpless as the hunters stalk the already maimed human:

“A movement from the stunned creature, a stirring in the matted rags, a twig, a tubercular arm scrabbled on the tar ... again all was still. Only for an instant. The eyes of the watching group were suddenly alerted to the evidence that life still existed in him. Again the claw moved on as if it sought to smooth down the protruding pebbles .... And only then was there animation in the eyes of his hunters who had waited ... just for this moment. As if this flicker of life was a sign, a sanction and a command that must be fulfilled before it again petered out they swept him up, bore him onto the grass verge and held him by his wasted limbs to earth”.

This sacrifice is completed first with the slitting of the throat, and then the cutting of his genitals, which are stuffed into the victim’s mouth. Afterwards, aggressors “stepped back and looked on the transformation they had wrought.” If Ofeyi and Zaccheus watch helpless, the narrative voice has also curiously distanced itself from the “stunned creature” on the ground. It has already described the human victim of this sacrificial ritual as a “monkey wearing clothes.” It, too, waits and watches the movements, transfixed, not only like our protagonist, but also like the victimizers.
With these passages, the novel swings from a search for workers’ solidarity challenging the power of the Cartel to an exploration of the self-destructive violence of the Cartel’s victims — the torture and ritual mutilation of one of their own. Paradoxically, the novel’s retreat from social agency emphasizes such agency, by contrasting workers’ collective struggle with a passive relationship between the spectacle and the viewers, which form concentric circles. If the hunters watch, they are, also, actors in this scene of inhumane depravity; Ofeyi and Zaccheus watch the hunters and the hunted, helpless but entranced, actors in their inaction, while the narrative voice watches and relates the narrative, as if in the outermost of concentric circles of viewers, transcribing the events. If workers’ self-activity has failed to emerge to resolve the contradictions, African “traditions” do not provide an alternative either. Rather, the continued penetration of imperialism in postcolonial Africa leads to social decay and violence. The novel seems to have reached an impasse.

In this apparent impasse lies the novel’s comment about the social function of narrative, and of art — that art necessitates the establishment of a contemplative distance between the viewer and the object of art. The realization is that the object of art is bound to inertia, an arrest, crystallization into a discrete moment. But also in this very realization that engenders the impasse lies the seed of a further consciousness, and action, on the part of the novel, whereby the novel seeks to bridge that contemplative distance, the void. The impasse is thus dissolved: if it is the case that the narrative voice
occupies the outermost of the concentric circles within the narrative, and is most distanced from the narrated event, itself not the participant, the actor in the event, it is also the case that this apparently distanced narrative voice is, simultaneously, the actor of the narration itself. It thus turns out that this construction of concentric circles of narration/viewing is not limited, that this series of circles itself lies within a larger circle in which the real-world reader is interpolated into the actions of the narrative voice. And the implication is that this moment of discrete isolation is continuous with totality as a process; in this further circle, the reader occupies the position that the narrative voice had occupied in the previous, inner circle. In the act of reading — and in this sense, reading itself becomes an act of narration — the reader becomes the actor, the agent that makes history.

Chinua Acebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* and Wole Soyinka's drama *Death and the King's Horsemen* both deal with the thorny issue of suicide within African culture. Each work defies a simplistic or clichéd view of suicide by placing it within the context of how it is viewed by differing African cultures and the way in which colonialism both complicates how social, moral, ethical, and political beliefs and rituals are practiced by those cultures as well as impedes their autonomous and homogeneous conventions.

Though each work has a different attitude toward suicide, both deal with it within the context of the communal beliefs in African cultures. Self-murder is the ultimate individualist act, and
given this, suicide would be considered an aberration. Achebe's novel conforms to this reading, but Soyinka's play takes an opposing view in its given context. Both works place suicide within the context of those communal beliefs. Okonkwo, the lead character in Achebe's novel, commits suicide after he has lost political autonomy to colonialism. This is occasioned by the fact that his clansman does not follow him into battle against the colonialists. Okonkwo's identity as a great warrior is tested throughout the novel, particularly by his own clansman. Indeed, the conflicts that arise between Okonkwo and Umofia, his village, occur when Okonkwo's own need for self-identification contradicts the interests of the community. His fear of being seen weak by his clansman, a fear born out of his father's failures as a man, becomes the basis for most of Okonkwo's actions—his abusive behavior toward his family, his denials of affection toward his sons (adopted and biological), and the cutting down of his adopted son Ikemefuna, whose execution is ordered by the Oracle, after the boy runs to his father for help. When Okonkwo accidentally kills a young boy during a ceremony, he is exiled to his motherland, thus further alienating him from his people. These acts and circumstances reveal Okonkwo's individualist nature. This is further revealed after Okonkwo returns to Umofia and realizes that his village has come under sway of the new religion, government, and economic trade that has been established by the colonialists. Okonkwo fantasizes about going to war against the white men. He reacts with "childlike excitement" as he brings down his war dress,
and reflects on the way he was treated in the white man's court, "[swearing] vengeance. If Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they chose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself". Okonkwo's response to colonialist injustices and insults is placed squarely within an individualist context. Though Okonkwo is troubled over how Umuofia has changed under colonialism, his greatest concern is his own identity within the context of his community. War against the whites satisfies his vanity about being a great, fearless warrior. Therefore, when his own clansman refuses to join him in that battle, Okonkwo's identity is destroyed. Despite his earlier assertion of battling the whites on his own, Okonkwo commits suicide instead. This becomes one of many individualist acts which alienate him from his people.

Okonkwo's suicide is considered an aberration in his community, one that merits a cleansing ritual. Since suicide is considered a sin, the men themselves will not take down his body from the tree on which he has hung himself, delegating this responsibility to the colonialists. As one of the clansman explains: "[Suicide] is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansman. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it". The clansmen's response to Okonkwo's suicide arrives out of a moral and ethical response which places itself within the same context as Okonkwo's exile and the executions of Ikemefuna's and the Twins. While each act might bring into question the efficacy of these cultural practices, they do reveal the significance the Ibos place on communal survivalism.
over individual self-definition. Any threat to the community demands a ritual to appease the gods or the sacrifice of individuals. Okonkwo's suicide is not viewed as a sacrifice to the community in the same way Ikemefuna's death was a sacrifice. It is an individualist act of self-destruction, occasioned not only by the destruction of what Okonkwo sees as his people's political and cultural autonomy but his own identity as a leader and warrior of that separatesociety.

Soyinka provides a different context in which suicide plays itself out. In *Death and the King's Horsemen*, the Yoruba tradition of the king's horseman to ritualistically kill himself upon the burial of the king to rejoin him in death sets the stage for the play. The drama comes about when the colonialists, who view this tradition as barbaric, arrest the King's horseman, Elesin Oba, to prevent him from performing the ritual. In this context, suicide takes on a more metaphysical definition. Olakunle George in his essay *Tragedy, Mimicry, and The African World* describes this as:

a very important mechanism of communal regeneration. The Elesin, at the moment of self-sacrifice, embodies the collective social and psychic aspiration of the Oyo community; he is a ritual scapegoat who mediates the world of the living, the dead, and the unborn. His death thus ensures renewed harmony between the three levels of existence constitutive of traditional Yoruba cosmic order. Indeed, on Soyinka's terms, "suicide" is a misnomer. That is, Elesin's death does not turn on a brutalization of the corporeal body; rather, it operates via an "act of will" through which his total
being submits to a monitored dissolution almost anaesthetic in essence.

The Elesin's self-sacrifice is therefore an acceptable cultural practice because it honors the perpetuation of the community rather than the perpetuation of individual desires. Elesin's definition as an individual, in this sense, unlike Okonkwo's, is not in conflict with his community. His duty as an individual is in service to the king and his community. Early on in the play, Elesin is praised by members of the community. When Pilkings, the white District Officer, tries to put a stop to the ritual killing, the community, particularly the market women, band together to defend and protect him. Elesin's own son, Olunde, whom Elesin disowned when the Pilkings and his wife sent him off to Europe to be educated as a doctor, defends his people's practice with his return to bury his father. When Elesin is arrested, Olunde kills himself to repair the interruption from his father's duties caused by colonial interference. Elesin's duties, while considered foreign and barbaric to the colonialists, are a part of the ritual of life that forms the Yoruba beliefs in reconnecting life, the afterlife, and the unborn. Therefore, Elesin's own death is considered an affirmative act, one that is firmly based within communal beliefs.

Yet, both suicidal acts are nonetheless compromised by colonial interference. While Okonkwo's suicide is symptomatic of his own individualist traits, it is a direct response to the destruction colonialism has on Ibo cultural practices and beliefs. And while Elesin does commit the ritual killing, it is done within a context the
colonialists have forced upon him. As the praise-singer says to Elesin after his son's body has been brought to his jail cell: "Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers, Elesin". Olunde's death, caused by colonial interference, compromises these practices, as well. As Iyajola, the Mother of the market, remarks: "The gods demanded only the old expired plantain but you cut down the sap-laden shoot to feed your pride" (ibid.). Colonialism does more than simply complicate the issue of suicide in African societies, but jeopardizes the cultural responses to them. In *Things Fall Apart*, it is a part of the ritual to have strangers arrange the burial of the suicide. As Obierika explains, men from another village have been called for to handle these arrangements, but the delay in their arrival forces the clansmen to turn on the colonialists to handle this duty. Yet, this will only prompt disrespect toward the Ibo's cultural rituals and toward Okonkwo. This duty, which the Commissioner shirks because he "must never attend to such undignified details," is left with the chief messenger. The cultural rites and customs of the Ibo and Yoruba peoples will no longer be whole. Colonialism has not only usurped African political autonomy, but it has tainted their cultural practices and beliefs. As the title suggests, things fall apart because the beliefs that were so homogeneous among the people now sever the spiritual (the cultural practices are to honor the gods) from the material (the land and the people themselves). For the treatments toward it in both Achebe's and Soyinka's works given precedent for that. The manner and beliefs held toward it are contextually defined by the needs and interests of the community.
Yet, what is compromised by colonialism is not the introduction of suicide as an act in response to it but the cultural rituals, customs, and belief that are homogeneous to those societies.

The Englishman who fails to understand the situation is addressed as ‘child’ by the Mother Figure, just as she called Elesin who failed to live up to his understanding. Neither of them has the maturity of mind demanded by the complex developments. But she would not allow the white man to close Elesin’s eye. She screams:

‘However sunk he was in debt he is no pauper’s carrion abandoned on the road.’ (P. 76).

The young bride-widow understands the message and closes the dead man’s eyes with a pinch of earth. She is calm, and never loses composure. Iyaloja sounds the final benediction, addressing the bride.

Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn. (p.76)

Olunde thus becomes the father, taking upon himself the role of his father relegating Elesin to the background. He is the horseman who follows the king willingly. Modern, yet traditional, he represents the deepest Yoruba wisdom and the strength of will to carry it out. As Soyinka himself points out, the conflict is metaphysical and therefore should not be interpreted in terms of cultural conflict. The officer’s ignorance of the deep commitment
of the African to his ancestral wisdom, and his desire to ‘save’ the victims are responsible for the double tragedy.

The play is said to be is an elegy against the background of the dirge, but it is, with all emphasis, an assertion of the triumph of death. It is this knowledge that Olunde had carried in his young heart to a world which had other lessons to teach him. As a praise death, the tone is festive throughout, even the young bride not excepted. Iyaloja chants the hymn of life which Death has left behind in the form of the unborn, just conceived by the young bride. Her widowhood is to be ignored. It is motherhood that is to be celebrated. The play is

Dedicated

In Affectionate Greeting

To

My Father, Ayodele

Who lately danced, and joined the Ancestors.(P 56)

The dedication is clearly suggestive of the basic theme of the play, bearing out the Yoruba faith treating life as a continuum. The passage from one phase to another should be a joyous transition, to the eternal rhythm of music and dance, signifying recognition and acceptance of the process. It is a happy ‘Greeting’ and not a mournful ‘Farewell’ to the departed father. The core of the concept
lies in the conviction that ‘death’ is nothing but dancing one’s way through the successive stages of existence. It is in this sense that *Death and the King’s Horseman* becomes a paean of death.\(^8\)

Life, an eternal continuum, forming the cycle of births and deaths, has been explained by Soyinka with the diagram of the tail-devouring snake, in the pattern called the ‘Mobius Strip’. Individuals are committed to the totality of the life-cycle, and not to earthly life which forms just a part of it. This faith is illustrated in Soyinka’s play *A Dance of the Forests*, where characters from different births are brought together, connecting the past and the present with the half-born future in the form of the strange character, the Half Child.

The gods do not play any direct role in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, as they do in several other works of his. But the ritual drama has its very theme based on the significance of the roles of the immortals, especially those of Ogun, Obatala, and Sango in the present context. Soyinka explains the Yoruba concept behind the reversal of the father child roles here. In one of his essays he points out that in traditional Yoruba thought it is not a linear concept of time, but a cyclic reality that operates. Soyinka refers to certain parallel verities from Greek mythology as pointed out by C. Kerenyi, and states:

The expression ‘the child is father of the man’ becomes, within the context of this time-structure, not merely a metaphor of development, one that is rooted in
a system of representative individuation, but a proverb of human continuity which is not unidirectional. Neither ‘child’, nor ‘father’ is a closed or chronological concept. The world of the unborn, in the Yoruba world-livings as the world of the living is older than the ancestor-world.9

Soyinka points out how the Yoruba faith had equal concern for each realm of existence. Having come into contact with novel thought processes, the modern man’s vision was getting restricted to “the hierarchical circuits immediately above earth”. He assesses the changes that have come over ritual drama:

Ritual drama, that is drama as a cleansing, binding, communal, recreative force, disappears or is vitiated during such periods or within such cultures which survive only by the narrowing of the cosmic whole.10

He observes that in contemporary Christian-influenced societies of the African world, this process has already commenced. Olunde impresses as the symbol of the wisdom which resisted this influence.

Music weaves these stages into a celestial symphony of joy. Even a note of discord in the eternal rhythm throws the cosmic system out of equilibrium Michael Etherton highlights the role of music in Death and the King's Horseman:
In this metaphysical sense, music is most apparent and effective in a much later play, *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), both within the play and between the play itself in performance and its audiences. Within the play it is the means by which Elesin Oba, The King's Horseman, is supposed to commit his ritual suicide in honour of the dead Oba and so restore harmony to the community which the death of Oba has set at risk. Between the play and its audiences, music shows the far greater disharmony caused by his failure to commit suicide, and carries the audience through a far more profound crisis.11

*The Road*, one of the most popular among Soyinka's plays is an exposition of his basic qualities of his favourite deity, Ogun. Soyinka identifies Ogun with the essence of tragedy which revolves round the dual principles of creation and destruction, of dissolution and recreation. He explains:

Ogun is embodiment of Will and the Will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man. Only one who has himself undergone the experience of disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and psychic resources laid dual assertion, only he can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions. The resulting sensibility is also the sensibility of the artist, and he is a profound artist only to the degree to which he comprehends and expresses the principle of destruction and recreation.12
Disintegration is an aspect of the cyclic process that maintains the harmony and integration of the cosmos. It is therefore as significant and indispensable as creation itself. Ogun is the patron of the road. But there is an inherent paradox in his character. The protector makes heavy demands on his devotees. The god must be propitiated. His share of 'meat' should never be denied or even delayed. His favorite delicacy appears to be the rotting flesh of the victims of road accidents. To avert this, a dog could deliberately be run over in the beginning itself so that Ogun, the 'dog-eater', will be appeased. Otherwise he is bound to precipitate accidents which will provide him with decomposing human bodies.

The theme of *The Road* is Death. In the words of William Walsh, Everyone in the play is the servant, or agent, or priest, or student of death... Road accidents, which Professor, the missionary of death, helps to arrange by removing road signs from dangerous points of the road, are Ogun's High Masses. The theme of the work is life conceived of as a movement towards dissolution, the action of the play is an arrest of time at the point where man is dissolving into the underworld.¹³

The narrative interest of *The road* is provided by two converging lives, those of Professor and Kotonu, which are finally brought together by a being, who seems to be only half alive, another 'half-child', Murano In the course of the play and by diverse techniques, we learn that Professor was, in his youth, a crusader who waged a holy war against palm - wine bars. Later he became a prominent lay - reader with a penchant for controversy

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and a tendency to self-advertising behaviour. Then, having stolen some of the church’s money, he left the fold. At the time the play is set, he earns his living by forging licenses and by selling the pickings from motor accidents, some of which he causes by uprooting the road-signs. Professor is a scavenger and a wrecker; he is corrupt and wicked, confused and bewildered, part wise man and part fool.

By contrast with any plays *The Road* has rarely been performed, is regarded as obscure and had a long gestation. Soyinka 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’. He emphasized the certainty and inevitable frustration of professor’s search in rather different terms. The old man is, he wrote, seeking a categorical certainty which is alien to a Yoruba world view, a world view rooted in the very indeterminacy of truth’. Professor discovers, and it is a discovery which costs him his life, that, in the words of Soyinka’s rather convoluted prose, ‘the community which he, in effect appropriates and opposes to the one which casts him out proves, in the end, just as controlled and restricted by orthodox acceptances as the former’.14

While going to Isara, Soyinka visited an area which regarded Agemo as a major deity. Agemo, like Ogun is concerned with roads. During his ceremonial processions he has right of way and may on no account be hindered as he moves from shrine to shrine. The annual Agemo festival, for which the deity wears a mask topped with a carving of a chameleon, involves acrobatic
dances, the performance of rituals at specific places, processions and spectacular transformations wrought by means of cunningly designed costume. Thus Agemo provided a background to the play.

While in the other plays a sense of duty and responsibility prevail throughout the plays, in *The Road*, it is a result of accident, an unforeseen event, even to the Professor. The characters in this play are to be seen as mirroring a cruel and corrupt society which makes no room for creation or development. Through biting satire Soyinka registers his distaste for such ugly aspects of modern African societies. Though the play does not reflect the cyclic nature comma among African societies, yet with the technical advancement the play shows it as African. The theme, as it suggests is universal, a mystery to the mankind and needs search which the Professor does.

Kotonu, the son of a truck-pusher is driver by profession. He used to be an excellent driver according to his effervescent ‘tout’ or conductor, Samson, but he was always slightly unusual. He would not, for example deliberately run over dogs, as other drivers did in the belief that Ogun would accept the dogs as ‘sacrifices’ and ‘protect his own’. Kotonu’s experiences shortly before the play opens include his ‘narrow escape at the rotten bridge’ which is presented as a flashback and his ‘Accident at the Driver’s festival’. It seems that having been saved from death at the rotten bridge by ‘a miracle’, he had knocked down an ‘egungun’ figure, Murano, who was taking part in a driver’s festival. Kotonu had managed to hide the injured dancer in his truck and had put on
Murano's masquerader costume to mislead the celebrants. When the festival was over, he made his escape, tossed the costume into his truck and drove to Professor's Aksident store. There he withdrew into himself, bewildered unable to make any sense of the extraordinary series of events that had happened to him. The injured Murano was nursed back to health by Professor, and returned to a previous occupation as a palm-wine topper. He has not, however, regained his power of speech, perhaps because, having been knocked down while impersonating an ancestor or god, he knows secrets he must not reveal. This is what Professor thinks and he uses Murano in his search into the meaning of death in the hope of cheating fear by knowledge.

The dramatic convention employed in *The Road* is extremely flexible and original. The style is one which combines naturalism with symbolism, popular comedy with ritual, political satire with choral interludes, and Shakespearean echoes with absurdist modernisms. As is inevitable with such a mixture, there is no consensus as to what the play means, indeed as with *A dance...* it is not a play to be understood but to be experienced. It does not reach any conclusions, it is content to take us through ordeal, to take us to a little bit further along 'the road of life'- the original title of the play and to leave us at the end emotionally exhausted. The setting appears naturalistic enough, yet there are strange and symbolic dimensions to it, particularly to the church, clock and spider's web, which are made clear in the course of the play. The social significance of the church is revealed, 'na high
society......politics na get dramatic passam'. So too its importance for an earlier phase of Professor's quest: he recalls that 'on the broad span of the eagle's outstretched wings rested word'. The services, organ music and lights of the church add a religions dimension to the play and provide emotional coloring at various points in the drama.

While the church stands symbolically and actually in the background to the religious concerns of the play, the mummy truck is a shrine for a different religion: it is a store house of relics from the road. These include not only the 'spare plugs, fuses, petrol cover/wind screen wiper, twin carburetor./Tyre chassis hub or tie rod.....'and the other items which customers come looking for, but also an Ogun mask and a complete masquerade figure. The truck is the tiring-house for the dancer who performs at the drivers' festival; a performer who in a sense, becomes Ogun, lord of the road; and who dances to the rhythm of another deity of the way, Agemo. The spider's web comes to represent the roads, the horrifying danger roads of Nigeria, which are traps to ensure unwary travelers. In the course of the play, Samson draws attention to the misfortune of those who have 'crashed'.

The layabouts, under the 'cap' n', Say Tokyo kid, 'earn' money and marijuana by 'thugging ' for politicians, and so the arrival at the 'Aksident store' of chief-in-Town on a recruiting drive is perfectly natural. The Aksident store' is an obvious place for a policeman, Particulars Joe, who includes it in his rounds. He is also drawn there by the prospect of smoking marijuana and of
making enquiries into the whereabouts of an ‘egungun’ masquerader missing after a drivers festival. It is also Professor’s place of business, the office in which he consults, carries out his research and forges the licenses which confuse the police.

It is clear that the setting quintessentially is of Nigerian, a meeting point for different groups and for the mingling experiences. It is furthermore, a place for ritual celebrations. Each evening Professor serves palm wine in a version of the communion rite which complements the service held in the church. In the closing moments of The Road, he stages an unusual experiment as Murano puts on his ‘egungun’ costume and dances to the music, supplied by the ‘layabouts’ of ‘Agemo emerging from the bowels of earth’ from professors background it is clear that he is a man who has moved between ‘worlds’, between social environments and cosmological systems. When he enters, dressed in Victorian outfit-tails, top-hat, etc, it is clear that he belongs to a separate ‘world’ from the ‘habitues’ who surround him. As an emblem of his religion, he carries a road-sign with the word ‘Bend’ on it. The adopted title indicates that he is an expert, lives in a world in which the mundane and the metaphysical are inextricably entwined. He moves between these two levels of reality without effort, unaware that for most people the planes are separated.

For instance, the professor can ask, without any sense that it is an extraordinary question: ‘Do (the dead) give overdrafts…?’ His elision of the two planes is apparent in almost all of his speeches: its particular quality of transforming the ordinary into the
transcendental is presented with the utmost clarity in his preparation of Kotonu’s account of how the mammy truck overtook his vehicle just before the accident at the rotten bridge. Kotonu says: ‘It was a full load and it took some moments overtaking us. Heavy it was’. ‘Professor’, writing furiously’, imparts a metaphysical dimension to his account. He writes: ‘It dragged alongside and after an eternity it pulled to the front swaying from side to side, pregnant will stillborns’.

The other character which moves easily from one plane to another is Samson. He has a histrionic talent and takes a delight in dressing-up, giving impersonations, telling stories with sound effects or, in the idiom of the play, ‘making cinema show’. Samson gets ‘carried away’ trapped by his impersonation or even, perhaps, possessed, but most of the time he is fully aware of what he is doing and just enjoys performing. Soon after the play opens, he pretends to be an African millionaire in a charade which contains social comment, a cynical assessment of the situation (man wey get money get power’) and hyperbolic statements which fuse the sacred and mundane.

As in the earlier plays, Soyinka brings past onto the stage in this play. There are sequences when actors present episodes which happened before the play began. The two sequences which can be described as flash-backs are’ the narrow escape at the wooden bridge’ and ‘the drivers’ Festival’. Kotonu and Samson are drawn into the first while Professor is writing out the report of the accident. With a shout from Samson and a violent
screech of brakes’, the two men are suddenly back at the ‘Broken bridge’, with great intensity ‘they skirt an area carefully and peer down a hole in the ground’. Professors occasional comments do not impinge upon them as they re-live the past. The second sequence from the past begins with the explosive fall of the tailboard’ and a lighting change. It brings before the audience the full crisis of the drivers’ festival and shows us how, to save himself from being attacked fear knocking down ‘a god’, Kotonu put on the Ogun mask and blinded by the wet blood, danced until he collapsed.

PROF.: If you think I do this from the kindness of my heart you are fools. But you are no fools, so you must be liars. It is true I demand little from you, just your presence at evening communion, and the knowledge you afford me that your deaths will have no meaning. Well look at you, battered in pieces and I ask no explanation. I let you serve two masters, three, four, five, and a hundred if you wish. But understand that I would live as hopefully among cattle, among hogs, among rams if it were Ramadan, I would live as hopefully if you were ant-heaps destined to be crushed underfoot. But I suppose you my friend, would dare to call this also, accident?

KOTONU: Professor, I haven’t said anything.

PROF: Not you. Your friend. But I thank you all who hasten the redeeming of the Word. You are important I promise you. Everyone here is important. Your lives whittle down the last obstacle to the hidden Word.

PARTIC. JOE [turning back sheets in his notebook.]:
In that case sir, perhaps we will be of mutual assistance to each other. Our investigations indicate that the man who was possessed at the Festival of Driver was a palm wine tapper by trade. The coincidence involved will be of great interest to my bosses, but I am, as you know sir, a humble man and very approachable.

SAY T.: Hey, wairaminute wairaminute....(P.221)

The lesson to draw from this is that, it is necessary to stand back from Soyinka’s words in order to appreciate the stage images he creates and the patterns into which his plays fall. In this case it is important to see professor’s death in the context provided by a series of scenes about his past and by gathering strength of ritual forces. Sensitivity to these qualities means that preoccupations with narrative, class analysis and the meaning of the ‘word’ are replaced by an experience of Soyinka’s play in performance. Despite similarities with that of others, his theatre is distinctive both in its conventions and its intentions. Its distinctiveness is partly to be found in the specifically Yoruba attitudes and conventions which it employs and for this reason it may be described as ‘African’.

The important feature corruption is portrayed in this play, embodied in the person of the policeman particulars Joe which is a contemporary feature in African societies. Ironically he who should be at the helm of maintaining law and order initiates violation by sharing hemp with the political thugs whilst in uniform. The corruption is pervasive, seeping through all areas,
even through the so-called crème de I am crème whose deprived moral Samson satirizes here:

Now I want you to take the car the long one and Drive along the Marina at ten O’clock. All the fine girls Just coming from offices, the young and tender faces fresh from school-them lift to my house. Old Bones like we must put fresh tonic in his blood.(P218)

There is the case of the messenger who became a senator after winning “Thirteen thousand” with which he bought half the houses in Apapa.

The road is presented as a cunning and timely monster patently and quietly waiting to pounce. On an unwary victim and gobble it up ravenously. The happy fool who buzzes along oblivious of the fact that it is running happily into a gruesome and represents aptly the gruesome fate awaiting the hapless road-users. The precariousness of their existence is further amplified through kotonu’s rhetorical but grin catalogue of departed heroes whose passing heroism is ironic for their death has no noble cause.

“Where is Zorro who never returned from the north without a basket of guinea-fowl eggs? Where is Akanni the lizard? I have not see any other toint who would stand on the lorry’s roof and play the samba at sixty miles an. Where is sigidi ope? Where is saple joe who took on six policemen at the crossing and knocked them all into the river?

Samson: Overshoot the pontoon, went down with his
Lorry (p 157)

Professor also exploits the hazards of the road for his own personal gratification regardless of the resulting suffering. He cares less as to whether those he issues licenses to are qualified to drive or not thus being another contributing factor to the increasing dangers on the road.

The driver's destructiveness-devouring human lives in large numbers – is indeed a reflection of the destruction and dog-eat-dog acquisitiveness we see in all the characters. And again they could be seen as mirroring a cruel and corrupt society which makes no room for creation or development. Through biting satin Soyinka registers his distaste for such ugly aspects of modern African societies. The ending of the play leaves no hope in as for the purging of such societies. The professors perennial searching for a perverted version of the 'word' is a clear indication of the reversed values of the modern African society. In the end he attains the way-death. This suggests that the road of modern society, just like the physical road, can only lead to destruction. Thus before dying the professor passes on his insight.

"Be even like the road itself Flatten your bellies with the hunger of an unpropitious day; power your hands with the knowledge of death....Breath like the road. Be the road coil yourself in dreams, lay flat in treachery and deceit and at the moment of a trusting step, rear your head and strike the traveler in his confidence, swallow him whole, or break him on the earth. Spread a broad sheet for death with the length and
the time of the sun between you until the one face multiplies and the one shadow is cast by all the doomed (F P 228, 229)

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 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 transition...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 transition:

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 the 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.
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” (RO 38). The events of past, present and future time merge within this limbo (which reflects the gulf of transition) to the extent that the episodes appear to be uncoordinated events in an elaborate Absurdist vein. The enigmatic Word itself which professor describes as elusive is “[t] rapped. Fast in demonic bondage” until its kernel, “the slumbering chrysalis of the Word” (RO 45), can be forced to crack. But professor’s search for it only among rejects, abandoned scraps of paper, newsprint, and the like, indicates a topsy-turvy Dom in which hierarchical values are reversed.

This 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 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 Yoruba religion and culture.

In its exposition of Professor's quest and in 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. It is true that Ogun never appears as a character in the way that he does in A Dance of the Forests, but his impact is even greater in The Road because the dramatic invocation of the god through the agency of Murano is more in keeping with Yoruba belief, in spite of its steeping in tradition, one of the most remarkable qualities of this play is the unobtrusiveness of the complex philosophical ideas that are contained in it because even the most baffling episodes and statements are resolvable within the play's framework and development. Alternatively, these perplexing features of the play can be put down to the enigmatic nature of professor's character and quest. 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.

Although the ambitious plunging of Professor towards knowledge and immortality is of paramount interest in The Road, it is effectively obscured by a plethora of mundane events and episodes ranging from the predicament of Kotonu and Samson to
the identity of Murano of, on another level, from the actions of external characters like Say-Tokyo Kid, Chief-in-Town, the customers of the "Aksident Store" and the corrupt policeman particulars Joe to the exploitation by Professor of his minions. Talk of his quest dominates the action but little meaningful progress in the tracking down of the Word, or, for that matter, in developing his avocation of forgery seems to take place. His first appearance in the play with the signpost "BEND" under his arm, his subsequent preoccupation with the "cabalistic signs" of a discarded football coupon that he treasures above the food it is used to wrap and finally his offer of his bundle of faded scraps of paper as assets that he will contribute to form a syndicate with Kotonu and Samson do not convince us that he is pursuing a creditable objective. Instead as in this brief speech at the beginning of Part Two, the religious sounding quest is mixed with concern about goods for the store: "You neglect my needs and you neglect the Quest, Even total strangers have begun to notice. Three men sought me out on the road. They complained of your tardiness in re-opening the shop." (RO 55). In his dealings with the men of the road under his charge Professor is a vicious and selfish character. When he is not actually stealing their money he is busy exploiting their plight by reducing them to servitude. In this connection, he effectively robs Kotonu of the will or the ability to take up driving again by exposing him to scenes of violent death which only deepen his abhorrence of driving and by attempting to convert his license to a forged license for the driver-trainee, Salubi. But even more, Professor has sinister
designs to exploit the "rejects of the road" as he calls his men, since he plans to use them as pawns in his play for possession of the enigmatic Word. They can provide clues to the Word by becoming the victims of violent and meaningless death on the road.

Samson's personification of the road is echoed by Particulars Joe when, in reply to professor's question about the god he pretends to worship, he answers "Same as the other sir, the road." (RO 85). 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 World:

It is true I am a gleaner; I dare not be swayed by marvels. Stick to the air and to open earth, wet my feet in morning dew, gleaning loose words from the road. Remain with the open eye of earth until the shadow of the usurping word touches my place of exile. But I broke my habit. I succumbed to the flaunting of a single word, forgot that exercise of spirit which demands that I make daily pilgrimage in search of leavings. I deserted my course and rightly -I lost my way. That was the vengeance of the word. But don't we all change from minute to minute? If we didn't we wouldn't hope to die. Well, same as the road. My favorite paths are those trickles among green fastnesses, on which forests are broken up-between the falling dew and the evening mists the nature of those paths changes right beneath my feet.(P 191)
In this speech there is a blend of the realistic and symbolic attributes of the road as pathway and as predator. As pathway the road is the physical road that we tread, specifically the motor road that transports goods and people, but it is also the trajectory of professor's quest and (if we take into account the ideas expressed elsewhere in Soyinka's work) a medium of the benefits and scourges of civilization. Evidence of its changing character is inherent in its role as predator claiming victims from the spoil. This dominant function is linked with the typology of the road as the preserve of Ogun, god of War and Guardian of the Road. The Road's symbolically tenacious nature is reinforced by reference to the spider's function as a similarly vicious predator trapping victims in its artistic web of destruction. Professor's speech confirms that, conceptually, the road is inextricably linked to the quest for the Word in the world of the play.

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 search 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 in death and that everyone must similarly find it for himself. But Soyinka does not believe that all men have this discerning quality. Nor is Professor a representative quester charting a path that everyman must 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. While in the other plays, a sense of duty and responsibility prevail throughout the plays, in "The Road" it is a result of accident, an unforeseen event, even to the Professor. The characters in this play are to be seen as mirroring a cruel and corrupt society which makes no room for creation or development through biting satire Soyinka registers his distaste for such ugly aspects of modern African Societies. Though the play does not reflect the cyclic nature common among African societies yet with the technical advancement the play shows it as African. The theme as it suggests his universal, a mystery to the mankind and needs search which the professor does.

Thus both the plays Death and the king's horseman and the road exhibit the theme of death establishing a close, interlinking pattern, connecting the phenomena of life and death. Death and the king's horseman is poetical in concept. It has the tone of lyrical incantation throughout, especially during Elesin's anticipation of death. Symbols such as those of the 'not-I' bird, the horse and the plantain sapling enrich the play with delicate touches, bringing the two worlds closer to each other. In The Road, the worlds of St Peter's church and Abeokuta lorry-park come together
and are given extra dimensions by egungun masquerader, a driver’s festival, celebrations and the Yoruba comic theatre tradition of slap-stick and satire. The European influences include the traditions of Aristophanes, the theatre of the absurd and the cinematic conventions of the flash-back and dissolve. In introducing Agemo, Soyinka’s experience provides a background in constructing the play *The Road*.

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9. *ibid*.

10. *ibid* p.4.


14. **Gibbs James**, Wole Soyinka, P. 34