CHAPTER - 3
PROTEST AS RESISTANCE

The Nigerian Civil War began with Biafra’s declaration of secession from the Nigerian Federation on May 30, 1967 and continued with fierce fighting until the surrender of Biafra on January 15, 1970. In August 1967, Soyinka was detained without trial for opposition to that war, and released only in October 1969. He made notes during this period of incarceration secretly, and was able to publish them on his release under the title *The Man Died* (1972) – ‘The man dies’, he wrote, ‘in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny’. Therefore, a resistance is what Soyinka’s protest turns into from this point onwards. The work forms a quartet: with his next major play *Madmen and Specialists* (Premiered in Connecticut, USA, 1970); with another collection of poems, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1971); and with the novel, *Season of Anomy* (1973). Soyinka’s protest and political ideology became a major irritant and a source of constant vexation for the military rulers of his country. In an interview, Soyinka says:

It isn’t so much that I became more of an activist after my imprisonment, it’s rather that the situation in Nigeria deteriorated to such an extent that the degree, the intensity, of my activism had to be elevated correspondingly … there was a military dictatorship at the time when I came out, it was still under Gowan, General Gowan … The war was over, the nation had stayed together. Unity become a virtue. The ills, the anomalies, the contradictions which led to the war in the first place, the civil war, no longer existed. And then there was an oil boom. People expected the country to be impoverished as a result of the war. But the opposite happened. There was money. And I saw society all around me and felt, it wasn’t a question of being a voice crying in the wilderness, it was just a sense of isolation. I didn’t even bother to cry out in the wilderness. I just knew that something was very profoundly wrong, that the platform on which the nation was sitting was worm-eaten and was going to collapse very soon … Things had gone from bad to worse in Nigeria. And so I become involved as a matter of course. (Kriesler, *Conversations*)
Madmen and Specialists purged the rancour and despair, which had accumulated during the months in detention and confronted the evil which Soyinka had encountered with fierce, acerbic humour. In this play, he highlights that the acceptance of the human condition without an accompanying desire for its transformation would lead to misanthropy and cannibalism.

Madmen continues the examination of themes present in earlier works such as The Strong Breed and Kongi’s Harvest, bringing corrupt power into collision with humane interests but Soyinka’s voice becomes more acerbic. Soyinka has artistically objectified brutish aspects of the war ethos in post-war Nigeria. Although the play is a philosophical repudiation of all accepted norms, the weight of Soyinka’s moral indictment descends most heavily on a human being who has become so debased due to his lust for power that he does not hesitate to be a cannibalistic beast. Despair and cynicism gave rise to self-awareness, and were tempered by a resolve to live in the very eye of contradiction. Soyinka contended that war could have been avoided if there had been a fundamental re-evaluation of the ethical and ideological basis of the Nigerian state:

What is clear, miserably and humiliating clear, is that a war is being fought without a simultaneous programme of reform and redefinition of social purpose. A war of solidity, for solidity is a far more accurate word than the unity to employ in describing a war which can only consolidate the very value that gave rise to the war in the first place. (Kriesler, Conversations)

Written after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70), the play shows the erosion of humanity and civilization to blatant, contaminative, militaristic inhumanity. There are two main issues concerning war that the play devotes much attention to: war as cannibalism and those involved in it as cannibals, and the physical and intellectual maiming that war brings on men. Soyinka had experienced emotions beyond despair, and had constituted these objectively as a profound self-awareness, and a cynicism, which is tempered by a resistance to live in the very eye of contradiction. He then attempted to create characters and situations in which these emotions could be bodied forth.
During a Civil War, reminiscent of the 1966-70 Nigerian Civil War, Dr. Bero, an ambitious young medical doctor, joins the army as a member of the medical corps; but then, in his relentless pursuit of power, he enlists for the army intelligence services, in the course of which he turns his medical knowledge into the state’s instrument of torture and death. Bero keeps his sister and his father in the dark about his real job, mostly dwelling on the horrors of war in his letters home. Hearing of the atrocities being committed at the war front, Old Man, the father, decides that if human beings are going to kill one another in such large numbers, they might as well be encouraged to practise cannibalism so that the produce of their murderous labour is not wasted. He joins the army with the immediate aim of helping the wounded, but also with the long term objective of demonstrating that cannibalism is the only logical and civilized outcome of purposeless warfare. Indeed, the opportunity for Old Man to inculcate his philosophy of ‘As’ arises when he is put in charge of the rehabilitation of the wounded, whom he puts beyond all fear: the fear of cannibalism, the fear of death and, subversively, the fear of state violence. It is this secret that Bero and the state want desperately, and when Old Man refuses to disclose it Bero shoots him dead.

_Madmen and Specialists_ is set in and around the home surgery of ‘Dr. Bero, lately returned from the wars’. Four Mendicants, Cripple, Blindman, Aafaa and Goyi, have established themselves in front of the ‘home’ to guard, spy, beg, entertain and comment. The Mendicants establish the opening mood of the play with a grotesque game of chance in which the stakes are parts of their bodies. As they bicker, they convey an impression of a dehumanised, brutalised community. They escape the reality of their disability by poking excessive fun at themselves in a game of dice in which they wager their remaining body parts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAFAA</td>
<td>Three and two, born loser. What did you stake?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOYI</td>
<td>The stump of the left arm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIPPLE</td>
<td>Your last?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOYI</td>
<td>No, I have got one left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLINDMAN</td>
<td>Your last. You lost the right stump to me yesterday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOYI</td>
<td>Do you want it now or later?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLINDMAN</td>
<td>Keep it for now. (CP-2 217)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Mendicants' sense of humour is macabre, indicative of an extreme situation in which the dismemberment of the body or playing at it has become a suitable subject for and a device of the comic. Perhaps it affords the Mendicants a bit of comic relief from the incessant brutality of war of which they are victims. Nevertheless, its normalization of the abnormally cruel through the obliteration of the distinction between pain and laughter illustrates how, taken to the extreme, the idea of ethical relativity, a sound counter weight to dogmatism and fundamentalism, can itself be used to legitimize the wanton inversion of established ethical values on which the humane ideals of justice and social responsibility are predicated. Soyinka seems to be asking a very profound question here about the limits of moral relativity by demonstrating the malleability of the concept of the normal. Nevertheless, the Mendicants' witty verbal escapism occasionally allows a whiff of sadness to escape, indicating that there is a whole world of tortured feelings hidden behind their language games.

The Mendicants' self mockery is shown to mask an extremely amoral and ruthlessly calculating attitude to life. They are persuaded by Bero, for the promise of a fee, to spy on their teacher, Old Man, and we are given to understand that there is nothing in their concept of morality that would make them think twice about betraying someone who has been helpful to them. In fact, the Mendicants are not an exception to this regard, as such the attitude is not only dominant in the society depicted in the play but is also part and parcel of the state ideology.

The Mendicants, therefore, convey the dramatist's view of the society which is receding away from traditional values and is making the people physically and mentally handicapped. As Jones comments:

...in *Madmen*, the central enveloping theme is the erosion of humanity in a well organized, tightly controlled authoritarian society... This opening tableau can thus be taken as a miniature representation of man in his world, or in the cryptic words of the play. The creatures in the timeless parade; man in a pantomime of perpetual self-destructive folly. Man is both sufferer and activator of his own suffering. ('Progress and Civilization in the works of Wole Soyinka' 132)
Dr. Bero, it emerges has come back from the war transformed: he has exchanged his practice as a medical doctor for the sinister role of intelligence officer. His surgery has been transformed too, for in it he has secretly imprisoned his father, referred to as the Old Man. He is the one who is most deeply aware of the scale and magnitude of the crisis which humanity in general and his society in particular has entered, in the aftermath of the war, which forms the play's background. The Old Man had, we learn, opposed the war; he had challenged the war-mongers, in a manner similar to that employed by Michael Flanders and Donald Swann in 'The Reluctant Cannibal', with the argument that if you can justify war you can also justify cannibalism. It is the demythologization of the relationship between oppression and civilization to which the Old Man is committed. Soyinka's Swiftian *reducto ad absurdum* is most explicit in Old Man’s choice of cannibalism as part of his philosophy of As. As he recalls in a conversation with Bero:

Oh, your faces gentlemen, your faces. You should see your faces. And your mouths hanging open. You are drooling, but I am not exactly sure why. Is there really much difference? All intelligent animals kill only for food, you know, and you are intelligent animals. Eat – eat – eat – eat – eat! (CP-2 254)

The Old Man had translated this argument into a ghoulish coup-de-theatre by arranging for members of the upper echelons of the army to consume a meal of human flesh. He had anticipated that when told what they had eaten, the officers would be filled with self-disgust and compelled to reconsider their attitude to war. This did not happen, indeed the plan back-fired completely: the unscrupulous and 'power-hungry' commanders, Dr. Bero among them, delighted in what they fed on and quickly developed an appetite for human flesh. In the dialogue between Priest and Bero, we are invited into the horrors of cannibalism:

PRIEST: Strange man, your father, very strange ... I’m really anxious to know if he still intends to legalize cannibalism.

BERO: He does.

PRIEST: I knew it. A stubborn man, once he gets hold of an idea. You won’t believe it but he actually said to me, I’m going to try and persuade those fools not to waste all that meat. Mind you he never could stand wastage, could he? I
remember, he used to wade into you both if he caught you wasting anything. But human flesh, why, that’s another matter altogether.

BERO: But why Pastor. It’s quite delicious you know.

PRIEST: Just what I say. It’s … what did you say?

BERO: (reaches out and pulls out the Priest’s cheek): This. Delicious.

PRIEST (struggles free): You’re joking, of course.

BERO: No. Your friend will confirm it when he comes.

PRIEST (increasingly horrified): You mean he…

BERO: No, not him. He never meant anything. At least, not that way. But we found it delicious just the same.

PRIEST: You?

BERO: I give you the personal word of a scientist. Human flesh is delicious. Of course, not all parts of the body. I prefer the balls myself.

PRIEST (vehemently): I don’t believe you. (CP-2 239-40)

Shortly before the play begins Bero has brought his father home under a guard made up of four of the wounded and battle-scarred, the Mendicants. These men had at one stage been on a rehabilitation programme run by the Old Man, but rather than teach them the skills usually associated with schemes for the disabled, such as mat-making and basket-weaving, the ‘subversive’ teacher had introduced them to his ‘Cult of As’, and more important, had taught them to think. The Old Man had taught them about their exploitation. In particular, he had disabused their minds of the healing powers of religion or belief. The central target of his attack is organized religion, which is cynically used by those in authority to maintain and consolidate their power. ‘Good’ (faith, hope and charity) is used for ‘evil’ (controlling lives, mutilating bodies and abusing minds). To the Old Man it has now gone beyond the ‘ends justifying the means’; control has become an end in itself and justifies the ‘meanness’. This to the war leaders is plainly subversive; and it is the last straw when he leads them into breaking the taboo on eating human flesh. Though the Mendicants’ relationship with the Old Man has altered, it still includes a degree of respect; they act out the sketches he produced with them, sing the songs he taught them and view the world with the independent, cynical attitude which he encouraged – an almost nihilistic view in which humour preserves sanity and edges aside despair.
The Mendicants also spy on the Earth Mothers whose store of herbs stands to one side of the stage. They seek to learn about the herbs which the old women, with help from Dr. Bero’s gentle sister, Si Bero, have gathered. As the drama unfolds it becomes clear that the Earth Mothers have great knowledge and that their collection includes both curative and poisonous herbs of considerable power. The power can be used for good or evil and the women who represent an earthed, age-old wisdom are anxious that this should remain in responsible and humane hands. Their persons and roles have a greater significance than simply as herbalists or cultists who teach the younger Si Bero their knowledge of the physical world. In fact, their approach to their work is metaphysical, in that their knowledge of the earth’s secrets is related to the primal causes of existence. Their powers of observation and deduction are such that they seem to peer into the depths of human behaviour. They do not prophesy, and they are not witches; but they do have great insight.

When the Old Women finally come to Si Bero with the pot of glowing embers to burn her store down, Iya Agba sums up their position:

> What is used for evil is also put to use. Have I not sat with the knowledge of abuse these many days and kept the eyes of my mind open? .... Rain falls and seasons turn. Night comes and goes – do you think they wait for the likes of you? (CP-2 274)

These earth mothers are profoundly aware of the ‘metaphysics of the irreducible’ – a phrase which Soyinka used later in *Myth Literature and the African World*, and means by it ‘knowledge of birth and death as the human cycle; the wind as a moving, felling, cleansing, destroying winnowing force; the duality of the knife as blood-letter and creative implement; earth and sun as life sustaining verities, and so on’. Morality fits into this basic framework; and the highest moral order is that which guarantees a parallel continuity of the species (Quoted in Msiska, 46).

The earth mothers represent this highest moral order in the play, but it only seems, as a point of reference. They stand aside from the terrible conflicts generated by man as predator and exploiter of his fellow human beings. These conflicts can, as in the case of Bero himself, carry man ‘farther than the truth’ and therefore out of the sphere of the earth mothers’ moral order. It is, therefore, left to the Old Man, ironically Bero’s
own father, to take it upon himself to challenge his son: and he chooses to mouth his protest through those who have been most abused by Bero’s society: the war wounded, racked by poverty, maimed and reduced to beggary. It is as Bero’s challengers that Soyinka creates the characters of the four mendicants.

It seems that before the war Bero effectively combined modem medicine and traditional cures, and had used his sister and his father in the curing of patients in the village. He was regarded as a very good man. It is the war that has turned Bero from one who cured people to one who abuses them. Ironically it was his father who gave that transformation the coup de grace. He was shocked, Bero tells his sister, when his father first tricked him into eating human flesh, and he vomited it up.

   Afterwards I said why not? What is one flesh from another? So I tried again, just to be sure of myself. It was the first step to power you understand. Power in its purest sense. The end of inhibitions. The conquest of the weakness of your too human flesh with all its sentiment ...(CP-2 241)

Bero in the play is the embodiment of the aberrant exercise of the will, and the one whose passion for control and social order can eventually lead to cosmic disorder. In the end Bero shoots his father dead. The play exhibits Soyinka’s trained eye for the comic potential of even the most tragic situation, but the laughter it induces is not of the lightness evoked by The Lion and the Jewel or The Trials of Brother Jero, for example, but the heavier kind associated with Soyinka’s favourite character, Shakespeare’s King Lear, when in his royal madness he outperforms his own fool. Lear commands our pity, and is thus a tragic hero, but Dr, Bero, the specialist, evokes horror, for he lacks the redeeming grace of human frailty of a Lear. He suffers from an acute form of hubris, which like that of Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus, insatiably drives him to seek the acquisition of all available knowledge for the sake of power it promises rather than for its social value. During the course of Bero’s interrogation of his father, the latter asks Bero why he hesitates to kill him. He is deliberately tempting him to further excesses in the perverse exercise of his power. The Old Man tells him: “Once you begin there is no stopping. You say, ah, this is the last step, the highest step, but there is always one more step. For those who want to step beyond, there is always one further step” (CP-2 253).
Bero comments: ‘Nothing more is needed’; to which the Old Man replies: “Oh yes there is. I am the last proof of the human in you. The last shadow. Shadows are tough things to be rid of ... How does one prove he was never born of man? Of course you could kill me…” (CP-2 253).

At the end of the play Bero does kill him, though again he is tricked into the breaking of this taboo by the Old Man: he appears to Bero to have gone mad and to be about to kill the Cripple.

The act of Bero killing his father, at the end of the play, is the one event which the whole play has led up to. It involves not only the death of the Old Man but also, simultaneously, the burning down of Si Bero’s store, filled with nature’s remedies and cures, by the earth mothers who helped her collect it together. Both the death of the Old Man and the burning of the store are generated by the same impulse: a willing sacrifice, to curtail, or resist Bero’s capacity for evil.

The surgery, where some important sequences are played, is significantly down in a cellar; immediately in front of this, herbs and pieces of bark are laid out to dry, To one side, in a semi-open hut which is the higher structure, sit the Earth Mothers, Iya Agba and Iya Mate, one smoking while the other tends a small fire. From the beginning these two are linked with fire, with its multiple symbolic associations, its value for cooking, its ability to given warmth and comfort, its fearsome power to destroy and its benign gift of fumigation and cleansing. The appearance and the afflictions of the Mendicants who sit by the road which runs past the surgery provide an image of the sacrifice and mutilation which war demands and leaves in its wake.

When the drama gets underway, Soyinka repeatedly makes use of the four men to comment on events, draw diverse experiences into consideration, help the plot unfold and represent the legacy of war. Almost any passage of the Mendicants’ chorus-like commentary reveals their skill in creating mocking, revealing, macabre characters, At one point they take off from the word ‘dutiful’. Goyi claims Dr. Bero is ‘dutiful’.

CRIPPLE: Him a dutiful son? You’re crazy.
BLINDMAN: I Know he means. (He points an imaginary gun).
Bang! All in the line of duty!
(Goyi clutches his chest, slumps over). (CP-2 220)
When the legality of this execution is challenged on the grounds the Goyi has not been tried, the victim is ‘resurrected’. Aafaa (in a ringing voice) says ‘You are accused’ and, the requirements of the law now satisfied, Goyi is summarily dispatched once more. When, from the dead, he says he has ‘no complaints’, they even allow him to be buried. This grizzly sequence, with its unmistakable comment on the kind of rough and rapid ‘justice’ meted out by military rulers leads, through the mention of vultures, into a series of jibes at those, such as Goon’s companions in uniforms, who claimed to be ‘cleaning up the mess’ left by others. Addressing an imaginary audience and with his hand on a imaginary gun, Aafaa asks: ‘Is there anyone here who does not approve of us, just say so and we quit’. Predictably, and as a ‘model’ of military rulers in Nigeria, he is able to assure his companions that ‘They insist we stay’.

The Old Man also uses language extensively and effectively. In a particularly intense speech near the end of the play the Old Man’s voice rises to a frenzy as he tears apart words in order to show his scorn for religious and organized systems of thought which challenge his notion of ‘As’.

...You cyst, you cyst, you splint in the arrow of arrogance, the dog in dogma, tick of a heretic, the tick in politics, the mock of democracy, the mar of Marxism, a tic of the fanatic, the boo in Buddhism, the ham in Mohammed, the dash in the criss-cross of Christ. A dot on the i of ego, an ass in the mass, the ash in ashram, a boot in kibbutz, the pee of priesthood, the peepee of perfect priesthood, oh how dare you raise your hind-quarters, you dog of dogma and cast the scent of your existence on the lamp-post of Destiny you HOLE IN THE ZERO OF NOTHING!

(CP-2 275)

The Mendicants have learned from the Old Man to scrutinize and analyse language; they take words and phrases to pieces, play with them and use the broken bits as windows through with they can see the corrupt, exploitative, evil forces at work in the world. If the mendicants use language as a form of escapism, in order to avoid facing up to the reality of their physical disability, Bero exemplifies how it can serve not only to disguise violence, but to embellish it and present it in the acceptable social
tedium of a privileged linguistic register. As far as Soyinka is concerned, dictators are the same regardless of the language in which they choose to disguise their practise.

The creation of the characters of the mendicants reflects Soyinka’s sensibility at its most complex. First, he creates the mendicants as the people who are most abused by the system which Bero upholds and develops. They are, as we have said, war victims: young men mutilated by armed conflict. The system, or the state, making a gesture in the general direction of humanitarianism, has felt obliged to ‘rehabilitate’ the war disabled: and has intended to teach them to use what is left of their mangled bodies and disturbed minds, and to convince them of the state’s good intentions. It is, as we have seen, the Old Man who was given this task. Instead of teaching them passivity and acceptance, however, he has taught them to use their minds and has unmasked the system of authority in ways which they can understand. This has made him a heretic. Bero tells his sister: ‘Can you picture a more treacherous deed than to place a working mind in a mangled body?’ To pay the Old Man back for his ‘impertinence’, his son makes four of his former patients act as his gaolers.

The four are Aafaa, who suffers from chorea or St. Vitus’s Dance; the Blindman; the Cripple (neither of whom has any other name); and Goyi, who has an iron rod contraption in place of a spine. Each of the mendicants has a distinct character. Aafaa’s nervous disease, which we gather came on during the war, is linked with his wider education than the others, and greater aspirations and neuroticism. He is the most voluble of the four, though not always their spokesman. Cripple is the dreamer; the one who has not yet given up hope. He says he collaborates with the Old Man’s son, the specialist, in the faint hope that Bero will be able to make him walk again. The Blindman is the most aesthetic of the four, and the most aware. He knows before any of the others what the Old Man is driving at. Goyi is the least intelligent member of the quartet and the one whose body is most mutilated.

It is Aafaa who expresses the first of a number of crucial contradictions which they are obliged to live through and eventually articulate: they owe their new awareness to the Old Man, but are obliged to do Bero’s bidding against him. When Aafaa rebels and says he at least is not ‘under orders’ from Bero, Bero strikes him across the face with his swagger-stick. Aafaa says to Bero: ‘You think we spent all that time with
your old man without learning a thing or two? ’ And during the course of the plays all
the mendicants refer, quite sincerely, to the ‘sweet times’ with the Old man, and to
‘the best song’ he ever wrote for them. They recall his words and what he taught
them. As they embark on their final parody, with its tragic ending, they all say that it
is just like ‘old times’. However, they appear to have no loyalty to the Old Man,
whether or not out of fear of Bero, we cannot say; nor does the Old Man demand any
loyalty from them. When Bero instructs them to tell his sister who made them
‘insane’, Aafaa readily obliges on behalf of the others and says it was the Old Man.
But it is a parody of a confession. It sounds like a recitation of what they have been
made to say, and so it rebounds upon Bero himself were he more sensitive to their
mocking tone.

The mendicants avidly watch Bero trying to break his father’s spirit by distorting,
misinterpreting and finally denying the latter’s simple requests: for his watch and his
spectacles, a pencil and paper, and his pipe. Aafaa has his watch and glasses and, led
by Aafaa, the mendicants eat the Old Man’s food themselves – while justifying their
actions in the cynical terms the Old Man has taught them. Goyi accuses Aafaa of
being a ‘parrot’, which Aafaa denies: ‘I am a good pupil. The Old Man himself admits
it. The quickest of the underdogs, he always said.’ And he stuffs his mouth with the
Old Man’s food. Goyi’s reply actually sums up this basis contradiction in their lives:
‘First the Old Man tells us we are the underdogs, then his blasted son makes us his
watchdogs!’

Another contradiction is expressed through the new religion which the Old Man has
taught his patients: the doctrine of As. It is not a new religion at all, however, but an
attack on organized religion as such. Soyinka subsequently writes about religion in
general terms in the essay ‘The Ritual Archetype’:

Economics and power have always played a large part in championing the new
deities throughout human history. The struggle for authority in early human
society with the prize of material advantages, social prestige and the
establishment of an elite has been nowhere so intensely marked as in the
function of religion, perpetuating itself in repressive orthodoxies, countered by
equally determined schisms. (Myth, Literature and the African World 12)
This is almost exactly the realization Aafaa arrives at, at the end of the play. His attack is on the priesthood; and is expressed in the form of a parody of the Gospel according to St. John:

In the beginning was the Priesthood, and the Priesthood was one. Then came schism after schism by a parcel of schismatic ticks in the One Body of the Priesthood, the political priesthood went right, the spiritual priesthood went left, or vice versa … (CP-2 272)

This speech by Aafaa clearly sheds light on the universal fact of the selfishness of human beings, who have been using religion to suit their own ends. Aafaa has now come to realize that the schisms were all part and parcel of the same system of domination. Indeed, the very divisions served to bring man into a more complete subjugation. Man retreats further and further into himself. However, at this juncture, he starts tackling his problems without the help of the priesthood. This is the moment for the priesthood, the system, to reassert itself as something else. In the re-emergence of belief as something ‘new’, there is paradoxically the unending and unchanging domination of man by man.

The mendicants’ repeated chant – ‘As – Was – Is – Now – As Ever Shall Be’ – parodies part of the Christian church liturgy:

Glory be to the Father,
And to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning,
Is now,
And ever shall be,
World without end. Amen.

At one point they also include the last line ‘World without …’, but they deliberately omit ‘end’, suggesting that in Christian theology at least the world is outside of, or irrelevant to, this religious system.
‘As’ – the word representing God – has further resonance. In Norse mythology, ‘As’ was the name for any of the Norse gods, such as Thor or Odin, who inhabited Asgard, the home of the gods. It comes from the Icelandic word ‘ass’ meaning a god, but it was obviously the interchangeability of specific gods under the title As that particularly appealed to Soyinka. For the main emphasis in Soyinka’s use of the word As in this play is the insight gained from switching the conjunction ‘as’ (‘like’) into a noun (the process of transformation into a parallel existence). Let us stop worshipping God as Jehovah, as Christ (in his various schismatic transformations!), as Allah, as Siva, and so on; and let us start acknowledging the transformation process itself: As. ‘As’ is older than any of the religions and their priesthoods, and is each one’s inner dynamic.

Furthermore, ‘As today is all the other parts of the system as well: political and economic orthodoxy, science, the law, the judiciary, the arts. As is, in fact, hegemony – the development of the institutions of the state specifically to keep the elite in power, to perpetuate the power-base of the ruling class. ‘As’ was, ‘As’ is, ‘As’ will always be. The Old Man tells the mendicants that they are the cysts in the system:

… and are part of the material for re-formulating the mind of a man into the necessity of the moment’s political As, the moment’s scientific As, metaphysic As, Sociologic As, economic recreative ethical As…. (CP-2 271)

They are going to be used by Bero and his colleagues to experiment on, to practise upon, in order to gain absolute control of their minds. The Old Man tells them that there is no point in saying to Bero and his manipulators, look we are all human beings, all prey to the same human weaknesses and limitations, and you are a man like me; because they will reply that they are ‘chosen, restored, re-designated and re­destined’, and they are going to practise on all those who undermine the system.

The paradox lies in the doctrine of As seeming to be the new religion of the Old Man and his patients, when it is in fact the religion of Bero himself and the revelation of his continuing exploitation of them. The mendicants and the Old Man live out this contradiction through the role play and constant recourse to parody. They assume the roles of those in command right from the start of the play. In the name of ‘As’ they ‘torture’ each other ‘appeal’ against the ‘torture’, are ‘tried’ then ‘executed’, and so
on. They parody even their own poverty and servility; they parody confession. They parody politicians, whites and neo-colonialists (as in Blindman’s superb rendering of a ‘refined’ public speaker preying on the racial prejudices of his audience – ‘I hope I didn’t do too badly.’ ‘No,’ replies the Old Man, ‘it was quite good really.’ ‘it was just like old times,’ Blindman adds).

The events move towards a crisis, and understanding grows. The Old Man, and then Aafaa, parody the priests; and then, finally, they parody Bero himself, the specialist: ‘Practise, Practise, Practise,’ they all chant, tempting Bero, gun in hand, to kill his father, as the father parodies his son killing the questioning and hopeful Cripple.

Ironically, throughout the play Bero persists in thinking that ‘As’ is a new religion of the poor, and therefore a threat to him and his order in society, rather than the true face of his own credo, the awareness of which by the exploited is ultimately much more of threat.

What has happened in the end? The Old Man has forced his son to kill him – Bero’s final impious act for which there is no redress. The Old Man has finally put himself beyond the reach of his son’s meanness. However, the Old Man did not do it for that reason, but to distract Bero from shooting the earth mothers. His action ensures that they destroy the herbs that Bero was planning to use himself. The Old Man’s action is in effect a sacrifice on behalf of the mendicants: a following-through of self-awareness, and an assertion of the principle of common humanity. He makes the understanding which he has given them substantial. Bero is defiled; and he is cheated of that earth-bound goodness which he sought to bend to his will. The mendicants mockingly chant at him and his ineffectual sister the Old Man’s credo which is really his own:

Bi o ti wa

...  
As-Was-Is-Now ...

And the final stage direction: ‘The song stops in mid-word and the lights snap out simultaneously’. (CP-2 276)
In constructing *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka achieved a great degree of flexibility and fluidity without recourse to flashbacks (as in *The Road*) or shifts of location (as in *Kongi's Harvest*). The various ‘slabs’ of experience incorporated into the play, including the ritual chants of the Earth Mothers and the long speech in which the Priest recalls his debates with the old Man, are set off against the swaggering of Bero and the grim cabaret of the Mendicants. The Mendicants and the Old Man provide a satirical drama. Their bitterness and the speed of their attack provide a cutting edge to the play which challenges audiences and keeps them alert. They constitute a new element in Soyinka’s drama and help him to achieve a high degree of intensity in this work.

There is no doubt that the play conveys a vision which Soyinka was very anxious to communicate. Part of the vision emerges through the Mendicants, the Old Man and use of language, part from the image of corrupted power which is presented by Bero, and part from the integrity of the uncorrupted Earth Mothers. One of the central images in the play is of cannibalism, the image of man’s tendency to feed off and draw power from his fellow man. It stands at the center of Soyinka’s apprehension of man’s relationship with man in this play from the tense post-Civil War Period.

In reviewing the American world premiere of *Madmen*, Alan Bunce wrote that the drama was given ‘real lift and impact (by) lively outbursts of tribal chanting, acidic humor, ritual form (and) forcefully worded flights of bitter speculation’ (*Soyinka’s Nigerian Play*). Abiola Irele, commented as follows on the Nigerian production:

> The play itself is a kind of fantasy that takes off from reality and whose action seems to run parallel to it by developing the implications of real life situations to their weird, absurd and, finally, inhuman limits. The prevailing atmosphere of the play is one of acute moral and spiritual discomfort. (*Tradition and the Yoruba Writer*’ 80)

When Bero shoots his father, he sheds the last vestiges of his humanity, breaks the ultimate taboo, and joins Oedipus and Isola and all those who are condemned to go through life with their father’s blood on their hands. The Earth Mothers seize the opportunity offered to them, and, as the parricide stands with smoking pistol over the body of his victim, they set fire to their store of herbs in an irreversible act which will prevent their power and knowledge falling into unworthy hands.
Though the play is a bitter and violent attack on a sick society, the ending is not entirely without the prospect of improvement. The Old Man is dead, but the distraction caused by his death allows the Earth Mothers to destroy the herbs which the evil Bero had sought to possess. As the smoke billows onto the stage, it is time for a new game to start: the players are different, for the Old Man has been killed by his son and Bero stands exposed as a violator to the final taboo. The Mendicants are cut off in the line ‘Even as it was’ which they sang early in the play, but, despite the apparent implications of the chant, there has been change. And while there is change there is, even in the nearly despairing world of this play, hope.

We find that there are definitely significant elements which Soyinka shares with the Old Man he drew in Madmen and Specialists. Both are activists with a perception of the failing of their societies. Both use songs, sketches and their influences over performers to proclaim their vision and expose evil by offering it resistance. The Old Man arranged a grim banquet; Soyinka a harrowing production. In the seventies and eighties, Soyinka found occasions to provide his groups of actors, his Mendicants, with material which challenged the assumptions of Nigerian audiences.

In the course of the play, power is defined in terms of the ability to establish absolute control, as Bero puts it bluntly to the Old Man: ‘I do not read illusions. I control lives’ (CP II 264). Yet the moral of the play is precisely that Bero’s quest for absolute control is illusive, since the Old Man has gone a step further than he and his colleagues could dare and proved to them that they are evil, and that their cruelty to others, ironically, does not depend on their transcendence of pain, but on their intense fear of it. Old Man is able not only to rehabilitate the victims of war physically, but to make them think differently about their world; and it is this that particularly worries Bero and the whole establishment, for, as he says: ‘Father’s assignment was to help the wounded readjust to the pieces and remnants of their bodies …Instead he began to teach them to think’ (CP-2 242). Old Man has not only taught them to think, but has also emancipated them from fear and as Bero and the regime depend for their effectiveness on inspiring fear in the citizens, his philosophy has proved the limitations of their power and knowledge. It is the awareness of this that motivates Bero to have Old Man’s secret at any cost.
Another form of resistance offered to the destruction and brutality of Bero is by the Earth Mothers, the traditional herbalists. Displeased, that contrary to the tradition, they have been unwittingly co-opted into Bero’s murderous schemes, they set fire to their house, thereby challenging the sinister forces he represents.

Soyinka’s protest as resistance receives further examination in his play *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Soyinka develops faith in self-sacrifice throughout his career. In *The Strong Breed* and *The Road*, the coherence of the playwright’s thinking is temporarily disfigured by encroaching pessimism. But by the time of *Madman and Specialists*, and more so at the time of writing *Death And The King’s Horseman*, sacrifice is seen as asserting “cosmic totality.” E.M Birbalsingh approvingly concludes that in this play Soyinka at last presents “a story in which the efficacy of self sacrifice is convincingly demonstrated” (210 – 11). Olunde’s death by ritual suicide is interpreted as a powerful metaphor for all sacrifice of self – though the word “efficacy” strikes a strangely practical note in this metaphysical context. Eldred Jones follows a similar line of interpretation, citing without reservation the Praise-Singer’s view that Elesin’s sacrifice is necessary “to maintain the integrity of a civilization at a crucial point in history” (*The Writing of Wole Soyinka* 115). His explication goes on to characterize Olunde’s decision to die in his father’s place as an indication of “the society’s hope of regeneration and of continuity” (118). It is here that Soyinka’s protest as resistance takes another form represented by Olunde’s sacrifice.

*Death And The King’s Horseman*, written while Soyinka was at Churchill College, Cambridge, was a play which he had been mulling over since 1960. In that year, Ulli Beier, a teacher and writer working in Nigeria, had suggested that certain events which took place at Oyo some fifteen years before would be suitable for an Independence play. In the early seventies, Soyinka used the episode in a play. He recognized that the story commented on the qualities required of leaders and on the way the British tended to regard other peoples and other cultures.

The episode which Ulli Beier had suggested was that of the interrupted ritual suicide of the King’s Horseman at Oyo in 1945. In this instance, the interruption not only focused on the specific historical event, but also provided a general image for colonial
intervention. Some details about what happened at Oyo provide a relevant background to the study of the play.

On Tuesday, December 19, 1944, the Alafin of Oyo, Oba Siyenbola Oladigbolu I died after a reign of thirty-three years. The Master of his Horse, his ‘Horseman’ – Olukun Esin Jinadu had enjoyed a privileged position during the Alafin’s reign and it seems to have been assumed by the people of Oya that he would follow his master by committing suicide. On December 19, Jinadu was delivering a message at the village of Ikoyi near Oyo. About three weeks later, on January 4, 1945, he returned to Oya, dressed himself in white and began dancing through the streets towards the house of the Bashorun Ladukun, a customary prelude to committing suicide. It was apparently anticipated that he would end his life by the established means of taking poison or allowing a relative to strangle him. However, at this point the British colonial officer in authority at Oyo intervened: he sent an order to Bashorun’s house that Jinadu should be apprehended and taken to the Residency. The order was carried out and Jinadu was taken into custody. When word of the arrest spread, Jinadu’s youngest son, Murana, killed himself in his father’s place.

Soyinka’s play opens in the market-place where the King’s Horseman, ‘Elesin Oba’, ‘a man of enormous vitality, speaks, dances and sings with ... infectious enjoyment’. Accompanied by his drummers and Praise Singer, Elesin Oba is following his dead lord, he is on his way to commit suicide. The protagonist’s entry involves drummers and praise-singers. When the play opens his dance is “no longer of this earth” (Six Plays 146). The opening scene presents the Yoruba as a people who have had a vision of the void and whose values are an attempt to overcome it. The harmony of their world is imposed on their fear of chaos:

If [our] world leaves its course and smashes on the boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter?...In your time we do not doubt the peace of farmland and home, the peace of road and hearth, we do not doubt the peace of the forest. (Six Plays 146)

Part of this hope is expressed in the election and initiation of an “intercessor to the other world” whom they address as “you who now bestride the hidden gulf and pause to draw the right foot across”. They thus seek a balance between the material world and the spiritual.
When the stage lights come up on the opening scene of the play, they would fall, significantly, on “a passage through the market in its closing stages ... stalls are emptied, mats folded ... bolts of cloth taken down ... and piled on a tray” (Six Plays 146).

It transpires that Elesin has not cast off the delight he has long taken in worldly pleasures: he checks his progress between the market stalls and encourages the market women to deck him in rich cloth. Then he sees and desires a beautiful young woman, the Bride, and dallies for a second time. The leader of the market-women, Iyaloja, whose son is betrothed to the Bride, briefly tries to dissuade him, but Elesin Oba is determined to ‘let/Seed that will not severe the stomach/On the way remain behind.’ Iyaloja, unwilling to ‘blight the day when all should be openness and light’, bids the women prepare the young woman. The first act closes as the bedecked Bride is presented to the glowing Elesin, and Iyaloja’s words of warning ring in the ears of the audience. Iyaloja says of the proposed union between Elesin, who stands at the threshold of death, and the mystery market girl, that “the fruit of such a union will be neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind us ... [but an] elusive being of passage”. Mark Ralph-Bowman asserts that in order to appreciate the “religious mystery” (82) which lies at the heart of the play, we must understand the communal Yoruba values by which Elesin is found wanting and condemned. “Through a creation of such stature,” Ralph-Bowman argues, “he has to be totally and unequivocally renounced” (94). Elesin is rejected by the world of the play because he allows himself to be diverted by selfish individualism from the sacrificial death that his Yoruba religion prescribes.

The second act is set on the verandah of the house of the town’s District Officer, Simon Pilkings in Soyinka’s drama – an appropriate name for the brisk subordinate of limited intellectual capacity that Soyinka has created. Pilkings and his wife, Jane, are dressed up in the clothes they intend to wear to a fancy-dress ball at the Residency – egungun masquerade costumes – and are dancing a tango. The image is grotesque, and immediately reveals the attitude of the couple towards the community in which they live and over which Pilkings has, thanks to the soldiers at his command, considerable power. Serjeant Amusa clumsily interrupts the dance with important news, which he is reluctant to reveal while Pilkings is dressed as a cult figure.
Although a Muslim, Amusa has enough respect for the masquerade costume to refuse to 'talk against death to person in uniform of death.' Eventually he writes out his report and we learn that 'Elesin Oba is to commit death tonight as a result of native custom.' Simon and Jane Pilkings construe this to mean that a ritual murder is about to take place and call on their servant Joseph for confirmation. Joseph, a Christian convert, explains that Elesin Oba "will not kill anybody and no one will kill him. He will simply die". From the ensuing conversation Simon Pilkings' lack of respect for Christianity becomes apparent and the audience learns of his previous intervention in the life of the Elesin's family: four years earlier he had helped Olunde, Elesin's son, to get to medical school in England. The District Officer sends a note to Amusa ordering him to arrest Elesin Oba and the act closes with more Latin American rhythms and with Jane's excitement at the news that the Prince of Wales will attend the ball.

For the third act, the scene shifts back to the market where the women are protecting Elesin's marriage bower from Amusa's forces. The women halt the policemen's progress by teasing them and questioning their virility. The humour provides a ribald background to the consummation of the marriage and further explores the theme of manhood. The success of the market-women, and then Iyaloja, in halting the police is followed by the triumph of their daughters in a charade which ridicules the white community's affected and trivial pre-occupations. Amusa is made to look foolish and forced to retreat, but he leaves, threatening to return. Elesin then enters bearing the cloth which testifies that his Bride was a virgin. As a dirge wells up and the lights fade, he moves into a deep trance, resuming his interrupted movement toward the transitional gulf, which, in the cosmology of the play, separates the living from the dead.

The setting for act four is the Great Hall of the Residency, redolent, the stage-direction reads, of 'the tawdry decadence of a far-flung but key imperial frontier'. Couples are dancing in fancy-dress and the Prince of Wales enters to the strains of 'Rule Britannia' execrably played by the police band. Each of the four acts opens and closes with the action of dancing thereby creating a basis for comparing and contrasting the world of the white men and the world of the Africans. A waltz follows and then, as the 'ritual' of introductions begins, Simon and Jane Pilkings delight the
assembled company by showing off their costumers and imitating the mock-threatening behaviour of egungun masqueraders. A sinister note is sounded during the sequence since it becomes apparent that the ‘tawdry decadence’ of the décor extends to the imperial officers who trivialize all they do not understand and are united by an utter contempt for the community in which they work. Pilkings is called apart – *his* dance interrupted for a second time – when Amusa arrives. Since it is clear that trouble is brewing in the town, the DO goes off to change out of one ‘uniform of death’ into another, and to take action. Left behind, Jane is approached by a young Nigerian in a sober suit; he turns out to be Olunde, who has returned ‘on the mailboat’ after hearing of the Alafin’s death and in anticipation of the consequences for his father. The conversation which follows covers British attitudes, war, deeds of honour, Olunde’s experiences and the events which are taking place in the town. By becoming the agent of renewal of his people’s spirituality, Olunde confounds both tradition and modernity. Like Eman in *The Strong Breed*, he had revolted against being a carrier by duty rather than choice. His training as a doctor in England has given Olunde a greater appreciation of the culture. This is conveyed with considerable authority as he explains to Pilkings the significance of the ritual suicide to his father, Elesin, and the community:

> No one can understand what he does tonight without the deepest protection the mind can conceive. What can you offer him in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration of his own people? What would you think of your prince if he refuses to accept the risk of losing his life on this voyage? (Six Plays 194)

The young man assumes that his father has committed suicide, and, by way of explanation, says: ‘His will power has always been enormous.’ The pace of events quickens as Olunde is first abused by a bigoted colonial officer and then reveals his moral and intellectual superiority. A bellow of rage from off-stage anticipates the entrance of Elesin in hand cuffs. Surprised and dismayed Olunde rejects his father with the words ‘I have no father, eater of left-overs’, and walks slowly away leaving the light fading on the sobbing horseman who has failed his master, his son, his people and himself.
That Elesin has arrived at the state of transition is suggested in the confusion of the mind of Joseph who cannot tell whether the chief is living or dead: the drumming “sounds like the death of the great chief and then, it sounds like the wedding of a great chief.” The white man’s intervention in the rites of passage is the historical stopping of drums. It is presented off-stage to heighten its dramatic impact on both Olunde and the audience.

OLUNDE: The drums. Can you hear the change? Listen. (The drums come over, still distinct. There is a change of rhythm, it rises to a crescendo and then, suddenly, it is cut off. After a silence, a new beat begins, slow and resonant.) There. It’s all over ... my father is dead. His will power has always been enormous. (Six Plays 178)

This is the main dramatic irony of the play, for at this point Elesin is neither dead nor has his will-power been proved to be enormous.

When the final act opens, relationships are clarified by a highly symbolic setting: a prison in which slaves were once held prior to being sent to the coast. Elesin is a prisoner; Pilkings is in his policeman’s uniform. They talk about the events of the day, honour, duty, and society, speaking to each other ‘a wide iron-barred gate’, which imprisons Elesin and symbolizes the barriers to understanding between the two men. In this conversation, Elesin reveals a depth of understanding which repeatedly exposes the shallowness of the Englishman.

The two men are joined by Jane and then by Iyaloja, who upbraids Elesin for the way he has betrayed his community. Her eloquent denunciation includes the following summary: “We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world’s left-overs” (Six Plays 210).

Elesin tries to justify himself with a speech which puts the blame on outsiders:

It is when the alien hand pollutes the source of will, when a stranger force of violence shatters the mind’s calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in the alien rupture of his world. (Six Plays 211-12)
Iyaloja brushes aside this explanation, and the fact that the play has presented Elesin's wilful dallying in the market but not his arrest by Amusa's men reinforces the impression that he is thrashing around for some way of justifying himself rather than genuinely searching his soul.

Iyaloja then announces the approach of 'a burden'. When it is carried in, to the accompaniment of a dirge, the Praise Singer confronts Elesin, exploring still further his failure of will, asking why Elesin had not enlisted assistance in committing suicide, and retracing, in expressive and reverberating imagery, the course which Elesin had taken. When the covering of the burden is removed, Olunde's body is revealed and, with the chains which secure his wrists, Elesin strangles himself. In one final, clumsy intervention, the last of a series, Pilkings moves forward to close Elesin's eyes, but Iyaloja, here as so often a figure of true authority, cries 'Let him alone'. She summons the Bride to perform this last service and to scatter a little earth on Elesin's eye lids. A dirge rises as the lights fade on the tableau of corpses and swaying women.

Brian W. Last argues that Olunde's climactic sacrifice can only be understood in metaphysical terms:

The problem arises as to whether an educated intellectual at the time would behave like this, but the argument fades into the background on consideration of the play: it has a metaphysical design, not a realistic one. It may be that this did not happen in fact, but it happened psychologically, subconsciously, spiritually. (41-42).

By imaginative handling of historical material and subtle stage craft, Soyinka created a compelling and substantial drama. The introduction of the Prince and the setting of the drama in war-time made it possible for him to contrast two codes of honour, both embodied in the summons to fulfill responsibilities and obey patterns of inheritance: codes apparent in the privileges and obligations imposed on Elesin, and in the courage which carried the Prince of Wales across the 'nazi-infested seas'. By making Olunde a medical student with first-hand experience of the carnage of the Second World War, Soyinka was able to contrast the savage blood-letting of Europe with the strictly controlled sacrifices of Yorubaland.
The characterization contributes to a moving and coherent examination of the colonial encounter in which the arrogant, supercilious and well-armed British confronted a social structure and a metaphysical system they did not begin to understand, did not even try to appreciate. However, Soyinka is only partly concerned to make the British appear insensitive and ridiculous; a major concern is to present the Yoruba world and world-view on stage – and in this he is successful. Christians and Muslims are there, as well as Simon Pilkings, who has no respect for any religion, and orisha worshippers. In the course of the play Elesin approaches ‘the gulf of transition’ and, though he stumbles, he suggests something of the passage in image and dance. In fact, he has certain qualities in common with Ogun, the first to cross the abyss and Soyinka’s idea of a protagonist, but it is, of course, Olunde who proves himself the true devotee of the God of Iron.

To highlight the Yoruba worldview, Soyinka again adopts the ritual form: both the trivial rituals of the Prince’s progress, such as the playing of ‘Rule Britannica’ and the presentation of selected couples, and also the far more intense and meaningful ritual of the procession of the Horsemen.

Olunde has triumphed in death; through embracing death he has salvaged some honour for his family and his death is a cause for rejoicing. His achievement is all the greater because he died despite the opportunity of escape provided by Pilkings: he was, in a sense, responding to the call of ‘his blood’; he was also, like protagonists in earlier plays by Soyinka, making a voluntary sacrifice. It is in this context that the name Soyinka selected for the Horseman’s son becomes significant, for, according to Dan Izevbaye, ‘Olunde’ may be a contracted form of ‘Olundande’ (One who liberates) or of ‘Olundanide’ (He who rises by himself), the second alternative would then mean ‘honour restored’ or ‘honour arisen’. The mixture of emotions which should be felt as the lights fade on the tableau is distinctive, a mingling of sadness and joy (151). In this rich masterpiece of expressive poetry, strong characterization, subtle theatrical techniques and sinuous argument, Soyinka has, once again, extended the range of drama and challenged audiences to respond to a new experience. He has created a different sort of tragedy that is intellectually arousing and gives direction to the modern Nigerian youth.
Soyinka in his own explicit admonitions in the Author’s Note, warns the would-be producer against a “sadly familiar reductionist tendency” that might lead him or her to present its action as a facile “clash of cultures”. He exhorts the producer to attempt “the far more difficult and risky task of eliciting the plays threnodic essence,” going on to insist that “the Colonial Factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human nature which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind – the world of the living, the dead and the unborn” (Six Plays 142). It is essentially about the metaphysical theme of the Yoruba “abyss of transition” (142) and Elesin’s failure to enter it. It is the inner, metaphysical quality of the central conflict in Elesin’s mind that Soyinka stresses, as much as the Yoruba identity of that mind.

Before the publication of this play, Soyinka had attempted an explication of what remains implicit in Yoruba ritual and philosophy, that there is a “fourth area – the area of transition … the area of the really dark forces … the area of stress of the human will” (Myth, Literature and the African World 117-18). As a result of this view his key characters are usually intermediaries: Lazarus, Murano, Aroni, the Kadiye, Eman, the Organising Secretary, Si Bero and Elesin. Thus, Soyinka has always been fond of generating imaginative dynamism by pushing his metaphors to the provocative limits of literalness.

Soyinka’s protest as resistance in Death and The King’s Horseman is at a metaphysical level rather than sociological or historical level. It is embodied in the central sacrificial-ritual placed in a unique African context of myths and mores. There is practical value in Soyinka’s advice that the play’s dramatic potential is best realised through concentration on the inner drama of Elesin’s mind, expressed often in the most gorgeous rhetoric. Olunde’s sacrifice is a metaphorical vehicle for a more universal tenor. It symbolizes the determination to be true to one’s roots and to assert the value of higher duty against both the internal threat of materialistic self-interest (Elesin’s tragic flaw) and the external threat of imposed alien culture. Viewed as the freely willed sacrifice of individual self on behalf of a religious principle, Olunde’s decision achieves a metaphorical universality.