CHAPTER III
Among the significant motivations that unite writers all over the world are perhaps the social and political conditions they are part of, particularly if those conditions happen to be harsh, and unstable and fraught with danger and violence to the individual and the community. In such conditions they find the tensions that arouse their deepest springs of creativity - they transcend the need for self-expression and see in their role a need to commit themselves to certain objectives. Such was the case which produced the satiric vision of eighteenth century England, the protest literature of anti-colonialism in third world countries, the Negritude movement of self-assertion in the 1930's and post-colonial literatures in the newly independent countries of the Commonwealth. "It is the relationship between the artist and his milieu, his response to the problems confronting his society that makes a writer like Mulk Raj Anand himself socially and politically alert, discover the coincidence of the world-wide thirties movement sponsored by the liberals, radicals and communists against fascism which brought pioneers like Gorky, Cide, Malraux, John Strachey, C. Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, Ernest Toller, Hemingway, Dos Passos and many other intellectuals on the same platform of life against death..."¹

The same rationale of social and political commitment underlying the modern writer's preoccupations elicits from Louis James the remark that "In situations as explosive as that of Africa today

¹ C.D. Narasimhaiah, Awakened Conscience, p.442.
there can be no creative literature that is not in some way political, in some way protest. Even the writer who opts out of the social struggles of his country and tries to create a private world of art, is saying something controversial about the responsibility of the artist to society."  

While it is true that every artist creates or recreates a private world from the sources of his collective or personal consciousness, it is equally true to say that living as he does in a particular society he takes much of his inspiration ideas and images from that society and transforms them into his works of art. In short he cannot be insulated from the happenings around him. As Peter Nazareth quite emphatically writes, "I would say that no African who writes about society in present-day Africa can avoid being committed and political... ."  

Tracing the involvement of writers in politics during the Nigerian crisis of 1967, the editor of the Journal of the New African Literature and Arts, J.O. Okpaku finds it particularly relevant to comment that the African intellectual found it necessary to reject everything associated with the colonizer and adds "This freedom through rejection becomes a necessary prelude to developing an independent mind and thought. It is in this disposition that this younger generation of Africans turns to re-evaluate the entire objectives, goals, and actions of the ruling


3 R.N. Egudu, p.3.
class at home." It is as though Okpaku, is analysing precisely the situations presented in such works as Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and Kongi's *Harvest* and other politically relevant works such as *Jagua Nana* by Cyprian Ekwensi and Achebe's *A Man of the People* Aluko's *Chief, the Honourable Minister*. "The Nigerian Novelists were the earliest to realise their responsibility in the process of political, economic and cultural emancipation." This direction was hastened by the first six years of Independence which saw a deterioration in the existing federal system which had taken over from the colonial administration. It is also worthwhile to remember that these same intellectuals, educated in English at home and abroad were full of expectations, enthusiasm and optimism. The conflict or tension between this faith and the reality of conditions provided the necessary grist for the African writer's mill. The stage of preoccupation with sociological interpretations of the pre-colonial and colonial phase was over. The writer had to confront the present and address the present. So novels like Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) present more often a registration of social facts than their artistic transformation which is perhaps a criterion distinguishing ... narrative realism from social or critical realism ... ." 


6 Ibid., p.106.
While writers like Soyinka, Ngugi, Armah, Ezekiel Mphahlele and even Noema Sousa of Mozambique show a consistent regard for the present, another aspect of the writer's commitment is seen in the form of actual and active participation in their country's affairs. Achebe, it is said attempted to create a parliamentary democracy in areas where British troops had crushed the tribal powers. Christopher Okigbo (1932-1967) was killed fighting for Biafra in the civil war and Soyinka as this chapter will later discuss was imprisoned twice by the Federal government. In South Africa Dennis Brutus wrote of his arrests, exile and harassment with such power that Paul Theroux says of him "Brutus is whipped and he lashes back furiously. It is true that sometimes his punches are wild but sometimes he swings enough times for us to see what he is aiming at."8

Alex La Guma is a South African writer living in exile, but writing continuously against apartheid. "The South African artist finds himself with no other choice but to dedicate himself to that movement which must involve not only himself but ordinary people as well ... all human activity which does not serve humanity must be a waste of time and effort."9, he says in Tolstoyan defence of functional art. When we regard the situation of the artist in many African countries we must conclude that Okpaku's voice is indeed crying in the wilderness when it pleads

7 Ibid., p.107.
8 Quoted in R.N. Egudu, p. 64.
9 Lewis Nkosi, Quoted in Black Africa, p.270.
to the authorities for an understanding of the artist's social and political vision. "... it is the creative artist who as a committed citizen, will take the chance of saying things or doing things that many would feel less willing to risk. This kind of a challenge, this kind of commitment, this kind of involvement, is one which the government must encourage."\(^{10}\) Later he adds "It is this group that must be encouraged to freely express its views on the best approaches to the cooperative search for solutions to problems and pressing issues that confront all of us in Africa as individuals, as nations ... ."(p.13)

The social and political concerns of the African writer are myriad - he has to live down intellectually and emotionally the images of imperialism - exploitation, cultural denigration, psychological annihilation, apartheid, civil wars, post-colonial politics and keep pace with social changes in the face of a technologically fast-moving world. How is a writer like Soyinka concerned with these issues and how does he deal with them as an artist? In what way do his works written over the last two and a half decades of significant national history reflect these realities and in turn how are these works shaped by them? What is the range of his concerns? How did his active involvement in the affairs of his nation affect the quality of his writing? These are the questions that are of concern here while discussing the writer's understanding and communication of self-apprehension in the area of social and political concern.

The clue to the political aspect of Soyinka's creativity can be traced to his earliest creations - two serious plays - The Invention and another which he destroyed 'in a sober moment' because he was experiencing the situation vicariously. The Invention (1959) itself was not very satisfactory for the same reasons but although the play has never been published, it was produced at the Royal Court Theatre in 1959. "It merits discussion" as Charles Larson observes "because of the concise picture it gives of Soyinka's concern with Pan-African problems, of Soyinka's early work as a satirist of contemporary African Life."11 As far as Soyinka was concerned at this stage, colonialism was dead and he admits that his interest was centred on South Africa as the arena of political confrontation in the whole of the African continent. The Invention is not available in printed form and therefore it is necessary to depend on upon reviews and critical articles for an understanding of what the play is about. In this instance, the paraphrase is from Charles Larson's discussion. The play in one act and largely satirical seems to be inspired by the kind of racial experiences Soyinka encountered in 'Telephone Conversation'. It concerns the experiments of seven South African scientists working to discover "a foolproof method for establishing racial identity" (p. 80) because people have become indistinguishable as a result of an American Nuclear bomb. Every nation, in particular England and America are waiting for the results anxiously as their "entire policy of racial superiority has, of course been jolted to its

very foundations." (p.80) Larson compares the situation to the one in George Schuyler's *Black No More*, "in which a doctor invents a bleaching process that turns blacks into whites". (p.80) South Africa itself is in a state of chaos as its attempt to enforce apartheid has to be stalled until an answer is found by the scientists who use violent methods to test their hunches. In the process, an accident occurs, in which presumably, the envoys of the world have learnt the secret. The scientists still deny they have found the answer. However, as the play ends one of them "claiming that you can fool most of the people all of the time finally brings in the new invention for the envoys nothing! It is invisible but the American and English envoys fall into the trap and refuse to admit that they cannot see what the South African scientist pretends he has invented. They fall for the Emperor's new clothes." (p.83) Clearly the play's objective was aimed satirically at the so called politically conscious Europeans. It is an indication of the fearlesslessness of the dramatist in communicating to an unsympathetic audience his deep sense of anger and commitment to the African cause. As he says in an interview twenty-five years later, "... whenever one has to speak to a specific issue, and to a specific situation and people, anytime, anybody who is as socially and politically committed as I think I am, one will always find the means for it. ... I consider literature all writing all creative work a joint social operation."12 In spite of the lack of the distancing Soyinka himself felt about the play, a reviewer of *The Times*

admired "his gift for words" and a critic of *The Stage* wrote of his "true feeling for words and imagery" and his remarkably deep penetration of humanity."¹³

Eleven Men Dead at Hola was also a similar play to which Soyinka contributed by way of scripting, music and acting. It was presented at the Royal Court Theatre and addressed itself to a pertinent political situation in South Africa. Its significance for Soyinka may be gauged from the fact that he devotes the early part of his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, dedicated to Nelson Mandela, to recreating what the play meant to him. Improvised as a parody of the official report on the death of eleven Mau-Mau suspects at Hola camp in Kenya by the British; the author refused to participate in the actual performance because "he found the mode of presentation at war with the ugliness it tried to convey, creating an intense disquiet about his very presence on that stage, in that place, before an audience whom he considered collectively responsible for that dehumanising actuality."¹⁴ With this speech delivered on December 8, 1986, Soyinka has once again come full circle as though, while he was preoccupied with issues at home, and his own personal suffering for his beliefs, his concern for South Africa had never really left him.

The beginning of the decade when Soyinka returned to Nigeria - the sixties was an important one in the lives of the Nigerians.


¹⁴ Wole Soyinka "This Past Must Address its Present" in *Mainstream*, Delhi, January 3, 1987, p.15.
It was a period of unceasing turbulence, civil war, political change, and uncertainty and these qualities of life did not fail to impress themselves on a mind sharpened and attuned to the fate of his people and nation. Independence and cessation of colonial rule in Nigeria in 1960 was only the beginning of political hardships for Nigeria and in order to understand this fully, we need to recapitulate some of the historical and political events in the country.

Between Independence and the present time, Nigeria has been through a civil war that resulted in the secession of Biafra, and at least three military coups replacing corrupt civilian rule that was more dictatorial than professed military rule. This was a problem not unique to Nigeria among African countries. Similar events were happening in Ghana and Uganda and in Rhodesia, white rule and apartheid were practically killing off any hope the Africans might have had for self-government. With the numerous and often overnight changes in government came downright corrupt and insensitive power-mongering politicians. In October 1965 Soyinka himself was arrested for attempting to replace an the tape of election broadcast by Chief Akintola in an attempt to point out the futility of democracy in the wake of rigged elections and the amassing of wealth by the politicians.

War and corruption have depleted the resources of the common man and forced him into artificial conditions of poverty. Mismanagement of resources led to unemployment and discontent on a vast scale, so much so that people actually welcomed the post-Shagari military government as a God-sent saviour when the only
answer to the needs of the country might have seemed a bloody political revolution. As Margaret Laurence says "Although Nigeria was originally formed by almost arbitrary boundaries devised in the colonial era, these boundaries represent the country which was being written about by novelists and dramatists in the past fifteen years. There is now no Nigeria in that form, but, the writing survives and may even provide some clues to the present tragic situation."\textsuperscript{15}

The process of decolonisation and political emancipation had drawn its response from Nigerian writers. Although it is generally recognised that the degree of dissent depends upon the writer's standing in relation to the government, it appears that social position notwithstanding, Soyinka expressed his disapproval in a gesture expressing extreme radicalism - he resigned from his teaching job at the University of Ife in 1972 and became intensive in his attack upon the establishment. Many of his works written and published during this period are pointedly and increasingly furious, disillusioned and satiric in tone: \textit{The Interpreters}(1965), \textit{Kongi's Harvest}(1967), \textit{Madmen and Specialists}(1971), \textit{The Man Died}(1972), \textit{The Bacchae of Euripides} (1971), \textit{Season of Anomy}(1973) \textit{Ogun Abibiman}(1976), and \textit{Opera Wonyosi}(1981).

To those who had gained power in elections or in military regimes, including the intelligentsia, political power was a maddening success, having far reaching advantages for a whole

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Long Drums and Cannons}, p.10.
clan sometimes. As a result, a veneer of hypocrisy and false standards was used to mask ill-gotten wealth and status.

Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is a satiric expose of Nigerian social and cultural snobbery through the characters of Prof. Oguazor, his wife, Chief Winsala, Sir Derinola and Faseyi. Eldred Jones points out that the interpreters stand out as a group of individuals and are placed diametrically opposite to the establishment represented by Oguazor and his like. This important aspect of the novel has not been given the attention it deserves - after all a sizable portion of the novel is given to a painstaking delineation of these "establishment" characters and their ways and for Soyinka it is his very first expression of a mature understanding of a society he has returned to - he is now able to see them as Africans who are quick to deny their own natures and in adopting poses and gestures are exemplary of the faulty structure of modern, intellectual Nigeria - a society which is as chaotic as the novel's technique is a reflection of it.

*The Interpreters* is a complex imaginative urban-oriented response to the chaos and confusion that is post independent Nigeria. It is a multi-pronged response at that, encompassing the entwined lives of the five friends who are the interpreters not only of their own condition but the condition of Nigerian society itself. Egbo, Sekoni, Kola, Bandele, Sagoe, Dehinwa and the university


17 *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, p.160.
student are representative of the young, educated and aware elite, the children of tradition, putting up a struggle with an emergent awareness of modernity. The formal complexity of the novel with its sudden shifts in time perspectives (from the present to the past and back again to ongoing events) demands from the reader an alertness to his technique, which reflects the multiplicity of themes. Critical attention of the novel has usually centred on making this complex novel yield the meaning of what the interpreters reveal of themselves, individually and as a group. These efforts have been eminently rewarding. However, it is important to recognise that The Interpreters is really perhaps the first serious, critical and artistic evaluation of a modern African Society, ironically free from the shackles of colonialism but not so free from the decadence that has started to corrode the fabric of society. The characters of the five friends are important, not so much that we see their sensibilities, individually and while interacting with each other but more so because their society and times are seen through their eyes. If we take this approach, it is obvious that the focus of Soyinka's attention is equally on a so-called progressive civilisation, stripped of its facade of respectability, knowledge, honour and material status to reveal an essentially corrupt, hypocritical and insensitive middle class. The lives and consciousness of the five friends are determined to a large extent by the sympathy or lack of it from an unfeeling society made up of bureaucrats, university intelligentsia, and the governing class of the state. In the estimation of Arthur Ravenscroft, The Interpreters is one
among the many African 'novels of disillusion'. In the end it leaves the interpreters shattered in their attempts to come to grips with its demands. Bandele curses the representatives of that society: "May you all live to bury your daughters". (p.251)

Sekoni's death is an occasion for grieving; but its pathos is heightened by the fact that his dreams and ambitions were thwarted by corruption and condescension on the part of his superiors. Sagoe has already felt the embarrassment of being subjected to the demand of a bribe in return for a job and that by two pillars of society - Chief Winsala and Sir Derinola, Kola has observed with disgust the aping of Western values and modes of living by the new black elite and Egbo must face the consequences of his action as the choice of a man drowning. The summing up of the novel leaves a sense of fragmentation and a feeling of being disbanded in the consciousness of the readers as well as the interpreters, following their experiences in this harsh landscape. There is much merriment and escape into scenes of comedy in the novel, but the overriding concluding tone is one of seriousness—not the levity with which it begins. The 'strong undercurrent' of seriousness places Soyinka "among the chroniclers of the areas of darkness within us all."19

As a matter of formality, perhaps it is necessary to delve into the background and occupation of the different characters in the novel. They are highly individualistic and do not in the least

19 Margaret Laurence, Long Drums and Cannons, p.76.
represent any 'types'. Neither is it easy to agree with the singular viewpoint of Lolo Houbien that the five characters represent five aspects of Soyinka himself.\textsuperscript{20} Each character is strongly individuated and it seems hardly likely that the authors personality would be so fragmented as to comprise so many characters, so contradictory and different as for instance the mature and wise Bandele on the one hand and the flippant Sagoe on the other. Houbien wisely modifies the earlier opinion: "Of course, it would be an oversimplification to see the five male protagonists as aspects of Wole Soyinka alone, as a way for one complex man to empty out all the compartments of his mind from the unspeakable to the profane, to avoid being labelled a five-fold schizophrenic. Neither can it be the Whole Soyinka truth man can be objective about himself."(p.108) Other critics have seen the interpreters for what they are - a group of school friends who go abroad for their education, return to Nigeria and renew their ties with one another. They are bound up with one another through this deep and common friendship.

It is essential to recreate the chronology of events which occur in the lives of the characters, if we are to understand the relationship between the two and draw our conclusions of the author's intentions in the novel. This will additionally help to clarify the shifts in time - the past and present - through the consciousness of which Soyinka develops his characters.

\textsuperscript{20} "The Interpreters: The Whole Soyinka?" ACLALS Fifth Series, No.3, pp. 98-110.
The novel recreates the present as a time when the interpreters have returned after their education abroad to take up positions in society, from where they view their own lives and the processes at work in an emerging post-colonial society.

Egbo, on his return is "torn between his will to reject his vitiated heritage and his feeling of bondage to that past."21 He opts for a job at the foreign office. Sekoni returns, filled with dreams, eager to translate his new found knowledge into the reality of bridges, dams and power stations. Like Egbo, he is motivated strongly to contribute to his new nation but his vision is crudely shattered by manipulating politicians and ignorant villagers. His power station was never given a chance to work and Sekoni breaks down exhausted mentally and emotionally from having to knock against the structures of corrupted power. Soyinka resolves this tension of Sekoni's life by a powerfully executed artistic stroke. As Margaret Laurence says "Only one thing can happen to Sekoni ...."22 In the chapter which begins part II of the novel, we read "The Dome cracked above Sekoni's short sighted head one messy night. Too late he saw the insanity of a lorry parked right in his path, a swerve turned into a skid and crucial arabesques of tyres. A futile heap of metal, and Sekoni's body lay surprised across the open door, showers of laminated glass around him, his beard one fastness of blood and wet earth."(p.155) His friends mourn his death deeply and in their mourning, Soyinka

22 Long Drums and Cannons, p.69.
indicts the waste that an unseeing society imposed on the Sheikh's life. Kola and Bandele meanwhile have taken up positions at the university as teachers and Sagoe has become a journalist.

In a novel which rejects the conventionality of a plot, the individual and joint experiences of the interpreters forms the content of the novel. Sagoe's professional experience as a journalist and his involvement with Dehinwa is one of these experiences. Sagoe is an irrepresible character whose moods swing from spontaneous elation to acute depression when he takes refuge in bouts of drinking. His acquaintance with Chief Winsala and Sir Derinola introduces him to their facade of dignity and status which cloaks their rampant corruption and degenerate lifestyles. He is expected to bribe the selection board in return for his job as a newspaper reporter. He is considerably enlightened during the scene at the bar where Chief Winsala meets him to discuss the amount of the bribe on behalf of Sir Derinola. The two are exposed brutally through Sagoe's reactions. Chief Winsala is too drunk even to pay his bill and Sir Derinola is exposed hiding behind a palm, taking in the scene of Chief Winsala's drunkenness "And Sagoe was never to forget the look upon his face. Beside the fright and his affronted dignity was marked the anguish of indecision. He had come up to see what caused the long delay and had entered at the start of the bating. It was at first a strange kind of fascination, as if in Chief Winsala he saw his own fate, recognised the downward logic of the loss of self respect .... But above all, Sir Derinola was truly paralysed at the confrontation of a future image... (p.92)
They are both depicted as betrayers, who have stepped into the shoes of the colonizer. But the method Soyinka uses is to reduce them to comic proportions as the objects of satire. The satire is more biting when later at Sir Derin's funeral Sagoe hears "the orator read his panegyric to a thousand heavy mourners. Sagoe fled, pursued by silences that left the world only such noises as ... his life our inspiration, his idealism our hopes, the survival of his spirit in our midst the hope for a future Nigeria, for moral irredentism and national rejuvenescence.

Sagoe's efforts at getting a job are not half as frustrating as the fight he has to put up afterwards to have his revelations of political and social malignancies printed in the newspapers. Sir Derinola uses Sagoe's scoop on Sekoni's thwarted power station to 'Swap silences':

'Well that is it. Now you know'.
'Now I know what?'
'Shit your mouth, I shut mine ... . It goes on all the time. You see, it is part of the mutual protection. Before we publish any revelation like that, it must go to our lawyers. And he in turn consults with the chairman. It is out of our hands... . 'Well I have a pretty good idea what Sir Derin had got himself into, but anyway, your copy came in the nick of time. They have done a swap of silences'.(p.95)

In a way Sekoni and Sagoe are caught up in a fate imposed on them by a society whose practices clash with their youthful idealism. Sekoni finds refuge in the artistic creation of 'The Wrestler' a work of art, so powerful that it served to inspire the other interpreters, after his death. Sagoe takes consolation in the numbing sensation of drink, his promise of giving up drinking as well as his treatise on voidancy is the moment of pragmatic...
acceptance and realisation of the harsh reality that surrounds him.

Soyinka realises his characters as channels of social satire and ironic observation. Bandele, gives the impression of being the oldest and wisest of the group ('old and immutable', 'old and cruel') but he too becomes impatient over a period of observation, so that his last outburst against a hypocritic intelligentsia comes as a surprise. Bandele broods over the affairs of the group. His role of friend, philosopher and guide is brought into relief when he is chosen to console Alhaji Sekoni after Sekoni's death.

Bandele reacts to the ills in society like Sagoe but his fury is unsullied, aggravated by a long patient wait. Bandele is the most withdrawn of the interpreters, unyielding, rigid' like a tireless image brooding over lesser beings."(p.244) Bandele is searching for a 'new law for living.' As he interacts with his friends on the many social occasions they celebrate together, Bandele absorbs their ways without comment, as though Soyinka is consciously preparing him for the final assault of indiction which he launches at the Oguazors' party. Bandele's sensitivity is touched to the quick as he takes in the hypocrisy, double standards, of morality and the self-assurance and arrogance of the privileged in society. In Bandele we see how the inner life of a character is affected by outward incidents as for instance when he watches with livid rage the pronouncements of Dr. Lumoye and Prof. Oguazor on the girl who is to become the unwed mother
of Egbo's child.

Angrily, feeling somehow challenged and his challenger impertinent, Oguazor was near shouting. "The college cannot afford to have its name dragged by the moral turpitude of irresponsible young men. The younger generation is too morally corrupt".

Lumoye jerked up his head, recovered, and bolder for being well away from Egbo. 'Yes, I agree. They dishonour their family name for nothing, that is the saddest part of it'.

'As a doctor of course, Bandele said, you would prescribe death before dishonour'.

'Look here ...' Oguazor began 'I hope Bandele doesn't think that a university is a social welfare centre'. Bandele looked at him then thoughtful, and he looked round the circle, his body lax again. He was looking at them with pity, only his pity was more terrible than his hardness, inexorable. (p.250)

Of all the interpreters, it is Egbo who is filled with self-torturing doubts and conflicts. His restless energy for creative and destructive deeds identifies him with Ogun. Egbo, identified as the most authorial of characters is intense in his relationship with others - his friends, his mistress Simi and the young girl at the university whose qualities of mind he admires. Paradoxically again, he also finds the need to isolate himself for moments of introspection. It is through Egbo that we sense the destructive tendency that is in the heart of man. Kola describes him as ruthless and Bandele holds him indirectly responsible for young Noah's death. He is also uncertain regarding the girl whom he has made pregnant and Soyinka leaves us with this uncertainty even at the end of the novel, confirming that it is consistent with Egbo's character. Egbo is first confronted in the novel while he is making a choice between
having to succeed to the kingship of Osa after his blind grandfather or taking up employment at the foreign office. He rejects the vision of being an enlightened and progressive ruler. His character is fleshed out through the many flashbacks in the novel - memories of his parents drowning, his visit to his grandfather, his childhood spent with his aunt, his sexual encounters with Simi, and his fortnightly outings with the rest of the interpreters. The immediate present holds for him yet another decision-making dilemma - the obligation of choosing between Simi and the young university girl about whom he shows almost a wild concern. The latter is the 'new woman' of his generation, articulate, sensitive and independent whereas Simi's effect on him is more sensual. The events on Egbo's life are associated with the imagery of water - streams, rockpools and tears. Although he tries to deny his past, its memory always haunts him. "The spectre of generations rose now above him and Egbo found he would always shrink, although incessantly drawn to the pattern of the dead."(p.11)

Kola's role in the novel is to unite the disparities. His 'Pantheon' as a work of art is symbolic of this - from concept to realisation its progress is wound up closely with the development and progress of the novel itself. Kola restless in his search for models is certainly dissatisfied with the final product. As he tells Monica, Faseyi's wife, whom he has decided to rescue from a disastrous marriage "You must know by now that I am not really an artist. I never set out to be one. But I understand the nature of art and so I make an excellent teacher of art."(p.227)
Kola does not fully realise the fact that through his 'Pantheon', he has recorded a unified impression of all the 'presences' in the novel. If his 'Pantheon' is no match for Sekoni's 'Wrestler', it is in a way a realisation of Sekoni's 'Dome' - a symbol of wholeness and integration. So although Kola feels (sadly and with a sense of fragmentation) on the right of Joe Golder's concert and Sekoni's art exhibition that".... it is a night of severance, every man is going his way"(p.245) his 'Pantheon' retains intimations of the former linking of their lives together.

The completeness, conveyed in the 'Pantheon' in effect contrasts with the unwholesomeness of society which is an important concern in the novel. This is conveyed in at least four situations in the novel. The demand of a bribe from Sagoe by Sir Derinola and Chief Winsala, the manipulated rejection of Sekoni's power station, the party at the Oguazor's and the relationship between Ayo Faseyi, and his English wife Monica. Soyinka conveys through these scenes of social comedy an accompanying sense of anger and cynicism for what youthful pragmatism and idealism have suffered.

As Sagoe waits to be interviewed for a reporter's job we are told that "Independent View Point owned a large building in the slum, the paper itself was a party organ, its location meant easy patronage of local thugs and Isale-Eko was a rich spawning ground."(p.72) The office itself with its plush carpets, air-conditioners, imported furniture and radiogram was a different world from the slums just outside it and Sagoe realised that "we only despise the small criminal."(p.75) This realisation is evoked again when he encounters a mob attacking Noah the small-
time thief. "Run you little thief, or the bigger thieves will pass a law against your existence as a menace to the society... run Barabbas from the same crowd which will reform tomorrow and cheer the larger thief returning from his twentieth Economic Mission... ."(p.114) He finds occasion here to spew his philosophy of Voidancy, disgusted by the vulgar opulence. He feels revolted that men of seeming eminence exposed their greed for petty bribes - more so that "he should have witnessed this cruel exposure of men whose age demanded his respect... . He was the guilty one who has trespassed on secrets that should never be exposed."(p.86)

Soyinka recreates in the events overtaking the lives of the interpreters the eternal demolition of youthful and idealistic values by powerful and greedy men in society. This is not the only instance of bribery and corruption Sagoe encounters. His report about Sekoni's successfully erected power-station is shelved for similar reasons. Sekoni too is the victim of the same ruthless power game. Soyinka presents him to us first, in a most extraordinarily compact frame. "Sekoni, qualified engineer, had looked over the railing every day of his sea voyage home. And the sea-sprays built him bridges and hospitals, and the large trailing furrow became a deafening waterfall defying human will until he gathered it between his fingers, made the water run in the lower channels of his palm, directing it against the primeval giants on the forest banks."(p.26) All Sekoni however does on his return is sign letters and applications and vouchers. When he protests, he is transferred to Ijioha where he builds a small
experimental power station. Sekoni's project is written off by the expatriate expert at the instance of the Chairman. "And the chairman - for his subsidiary company registered in the name of his two-month-old niece had been the sole contractor for project Ijioha - cleaned out a few thousands in immediate compensation and filed claims for a few thousands more. "I always say it, the Write-Offs pay better than fulfilled contracts". And to Sekoni, "the expert says that was junk, Engineer, junk". And Sekoni, bewildered, repeating "J-j-j-junk? J-j-j-junk... ?" Sekoni is reduced in the public eye to a pathetic figure as the papers report on 'the escapade of the mad engineer'. After several meetings and enquiries, Sekoni is abandoned to his fate in a mental hospital from which he returns only to meet death in an accident - a death which marks the starting point for the disbanding of the interpreters and the disillusionment of their individual visions. Sekoni's rejection by his society is offset by the realisation of new powers within him "Sekoni was an artist, who had waited long to find himself but had done so finally and left no room for doubt."(p.100) It is this awareness that intensifies the grief of his friends over his death - Egbo fled to his retreat where 'he shed his bitter angry tears', Sagoe was 'locked in beer and vomit',(p.155) 'Kola's brush raised itself again and again, faltered and worked blindly in spasms of grief and unbelieving and 'To Bandele fell the agony of consoling Alhaji Sekoni ... .'(p.156)

If Sekoni has been the derisive victim of a corrupt system, the other friends find themselves face to face with hypocrisy in
moral standards and superficiality in social interaction. The party at the Oguazors, described in chapter 10, serves the purpose for Soyinka's critical assessment of the upper educated class. The aloofness and lack of warmth in the lives of these people, typified by the University Professor and his wife Mrs. Oguazor is captured in the description of the decor in Oguazor's house: "From the ceiling hung citrous clusters on invisible wires. A glaze for the warmth of life and succulence told the story, they were the same as the artificial apples. There were fancy beach-hat flowerpots on the wall, ivy clung from these along a picture rail, all plastic and the ceiling was covered in plastic lichen". Sagoe responds to it with sarcasm and sensitivity "I feel let loose in the Petrified Forest. What's the matter with those who live in it? (p.140) The answer to his question "Have they petrified brains to match?" comes from the conversation that takes place in different corners of the drawing room. At one end is a European who talks of his cat Nephritites ('who simply cannot stand Africans') to the Professor in a tuxedo suit, who unashamedly listens sympathetically. Sagoe takes in the scene of women whose tastes in clothes are unrefined while they mouth the most genteel social talk laced with gossip. The Professor himself is the most affected in his speech and mannerisms. The highpoint of the evening is Mrs. Oguazor's futile attempts at getting Monica Faseyi 'to visit the ladies'. The incident ends as a war of wits with Monica Faseyi stubbornly refusing to leave the room while Mrs. Oguazor employs all her tactics of persuasion, firmness and matronly condescension. The scene causes much confusion and embarrassment, most of all to
Faseyi, who confides to Kola the reasons for his uneasiness. "Do you know a Minister was present. Yes, and one or two other VIPs. Oguazor knows people, you know, I saw four Corporation Chairmen there, and some permanent Secretaries. A thing like that, Kola, one is simply socially finished... the University is just a stepping stone. Politics, Corporations - There is always something. Not to talk of these foreign firms, always looking for Nigerian Directors".(pp.202 - 203) Needless to say, Soyinka's satire here, is born out of a scorn that he had developed when in England, he encountered 'our first set of legislators' and his comrades who had until Independence been concerned only with that event but once the country was free "They could not wait to return home and get a slice of 'independence cake' because that was all independence meant to them': step fast into the shoes of the departing whites before other people got there."23

The Oguazor's party is also the occasion for discussing the latest scandals in and around the campus. So while we learn that Prof. Oguazor himself had a daughter whom' "he could not publicly acknowledge, since he had her by the housemaid", he is quick to censure the "merals" of the young university girl who comes to Dr. Lumoye for advice on termination of her pregnancy. Many righteous and indignant indictments are pronounced on the 'standard of morals' by Prof. Oguazor, which culminates in Sagoe drunkenly throwing out of the window all the plastic objects in the Oguazor home. While Sagoe exhibits his rejection of the so

23 Wole Soyinka, Six Plays, p.xiii.
called intelligentsia in this way, Bandele for the first time in
the novel, reveals that he too cannot tolerate any more all the
sham and hypocrisy and in one of the final outbursts in the novel
curses the society he has stepped into, rejecting his role in it,
once and for all. Soyinka seems to berate, through Bandele, the
unfeeling callousness for the individual human predicament. As
Eldred Jones observes in his introduction to the novel "the
frank, sometimes even crude honesty of the interpreters shows up
the thinness of the veneer of the old guard."24 The one
exceptional character who redeems this sordid society is Mrs.
Faseyi, Ayo's mother who reveals an enlightened attitude. She
understands the plight of her English daughter-in-law, Monica,
even advising her to leave her son, who is preoccupied with
'status' and material advancement. Kola who sympathises with
Monica's situation, listens impatiently to the virtuous Ayo
wanting to punish his wife for letting him down at the various
social functions instead of being an asset to him. Kola is filled
with regret for not having made a decision earlier with regard to
Monica: "What he wanted at the least, as some form of
compensation was for the man to be made to lower himself
altogether, to cheapen his rights to Monica."(p.205)

The Interpreters, therefore reveals Soyinka as a writer acutely
aware of those issues in his country which need remedying. Like
many artists, he expresses this through the anger frustration
cynicism and powerlessness of his chief characters. He achieves

24 The Interpreters, p.6.
this in the particular cast of the novel's technique and brilliant and facile prose. However, there is truth in the opinion expressed by many critics that the novel could have gained from not mixing up too many issues. It seems as though Soyinka had so much to say and he wanted to say it all at once. Nevertheless, The Interpreters is unique among African Novels and is perhaps a trendsetter. It is a response to a very articulate and urgent question that Soyinka himself poses: "But what Nigerian today, what thinking, or feeling Nigerian this very moment that in talking looks at his country and does not experience absolute despondency?" (Six Plays, p. xvii)

Whether Soyinka is writing realistically of the present as in The Interpreters or he masks that reality by subsuming it in myth as in Season of Anomy, his second novel published in 1980 he is deeply aware of his sense of history - especially Nigerian history which is a story of tribal disunity and aggression with constant friction between the North on the one hand, dominated by the Hausas; and the West and the East on the other accommodating the Yorubas and Ibos respectively. Northern domination in politics became a permanent feature and was seen as a threat to the survival of the nation itself. In spite of this, on 1 October 1960, Nigeria stumbled into independence "loudly hailed from within and without as a model to Africa, but regrettably as stable behind the gloss as a house of cards." 25 It is no wonder then that, within the decade there was total political chaos in

the country. Nigeria was not alone in presenting this picture of utter confusion; there were other African countries undergoing similar historical experiences and writers like Ngugi in Kenya and Athol Fugard in South Africa were writing from a deep sense of concern for the future. Indeed, this was a response shared by writers in all the countries emerging into national consciousness after having slumbered through centuries of imperialism. They were finding their authenticity by invigorating their own cultures and values and responding to present social changes in the light of those cultures and values. Soyinka is a typical example of this new class of writers. While presenting historical and political narrations of specificity, rooted in African and to be precise in Yoruba tradition, Soyinka is also reacting to events all the time as a creative, imaginative artist, responding on a level where universal problems and solutions have to be tackled and remedies suggested.

A Dance of the Forests handles this dichotomy in a more elaborate way than Season of Anomy (1973), in which Soyinka is looking at the present political struggles and the situation of war but also creating a 'Universal Wasteland' as a forewarning to the future of mankind itself - for universals are not affected by 'history and time'. This is integral to his literary theory. As Ofeyi, the hero of Season of Anomy thinks "perhaps deep down I realise that the search would immerse me in the meaning of the event, lead me to a new understanding of history."

26 Wole Soyinka, Season of Anomy, (Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1980).
Aiyero, the place which is presented as a universal ideal is bound up with the world through economic ties and is both a traditional African community as well as a social and economic ideal of a modern state. In this way, it is different from the spiritually isolated ideal that James Hilton creates in *The Lost Horizon*, a novel with which many useful comparisons may be made. Aiyero poses a sharp contrast to the materialistic world outside but Soyinka presents it as a desirable goal. As an artist with a vision for the future, Soyinka is here projecting a universal ideal through archetypal images of regeneration and change and a search for a symbolic ideal—much as the Holy Grail in the mediaeval legend.

*Season of Anomy* is a satirical title, understating as it does the vast scale of genocide and destruction. It is not only indicative of the specific events of the civil war in Nigeria but it also historically captures the conditions that were similar in other African countries. In fact, Joyce Johnson goes so far as to say that *Season of Anomy* may be regarded as having "a general relevance to the problems of twentieth century societies."27 The novel itself describes and indicts repression and violence that has become the order of the day all over the continent of Africa and in many other parts of the world. "Dirty deals, the old bargaining in human flesh, a slave market among the middlemen of the black continent, perpetuating their historic role in a

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lucrative betrayal of their own skin and flesh". (p. 103)

Ofeyi's search for Iriyise through Cross River State is an obvious African interpretation of Orpheus' search for Eurydice in Hades. The atrocities committed on the helpless people of Cross River evokes the barbarism of the Biafran civil war. A comparison of two passages - one from Fredrick Forsyth and the other from Season of Anomy would show how authentically Soyinka describes the events that overshadowed Nigeria in the late sixties, consequently claiming for itself the position of an important historical novel.

While the Hausas in each town and village in the North know what happened in their own localities, only the Ibos know the whole terrible story from the 600,000 or so refugees who have fled to the safety of the Eastern Region - hacked, slashed, mangled, stripped naked and robbed of all their possessions; the orphans, the widows, the traumatized. A woman, mute and dazed arrived back in her village after travelling for five days with only a bowl in her lap. She held her child's head, which was severed before her eyes.

Men, women and children arrived with arms and legs broken, hands hacked off, mouths split open. Pregnant women were cut open and the unborn children killed. The total casualties are unknown. The number of injured who have arrived in the East runs into thousands. After a fortnight the scene in the Eastern Region continues to be reminiscent of the ingathering of exiles into Israel after the end of the last war. The parallel is not fanciful. (Frederick Forsyth). 28

The wires seemed to emit nothing but aeons of destruction. He felt his skin crackle under their bombardment. Among a welter of images one that constantly monopolised evocation was the mystery of a woman dead of machine-gun bullets, whose hand still clutched an infant's legs. The infant's head was a pulp of brain and bone. Did madness enter her with that same bullet which first passed through the child that was feeding at her breast? .... A tourist, a total stranger had recorded this scene long after the departure of the death-dealers. (Season of Anomy, p.137)

Season of Anomy is a quest myth adapted, a regeneration myth freshly created a historical document and a novel of imaginative complexity. The action of the novel spans the activities of Aiyero, the inroads made into it by a commercial cocoa corporation represented by Ofeyi, his initiation into the mysteries of Aiyero, his rejection of materialism, the reign of terror the Cartel lets loose on the people of Cross River state and in the midst of it, Ofeyi's search for Iriyise.

Aiyero the village-commune seeks to be an alternative to the establishment - "To the governments that came and went it posed neither threat nor liability" (p.2), that is, until Ofeyi came there, first to promote the idea of cocoa plantations but later to use Aiyero and its men to supply an idealistic alternative to the unsparing regime of the cartel. He is requested by the custodian of Aiyero to be his successor, as a regenerative agent of change because the new generation, the custodian rightly points out seems to be "born into one long crisis", (p.6) Ofeyi appears during this crisis, messiah-like. Ofeyi was a natural inheritor - he did not have to be taught the philosophy of Aiyero - he brought them their own views of life - compounded of an
idealistic socialism and a beneficial anarchy if need be. Aiyero is not primitive - it is a happy blend of drums and power stations, a "communal, labouring sharing entity" (p. 19) Ofeyi returns many times to Aiyero before he becomes seriously involved in using its men to fight his war through insurrection. His objective was to take hold of "undirected youth and fill the vacuum of their transitional heritage with the virile shoot." (p. 19) The corporation which sent Ofeyi was oppressive in its ideas, and when it finds that Ofeyi is substituting its ideas with subvertive anarchism, it sends him abroad, hoping he will return with more sense than to oppose the establishment. Not accidentally, (as Ofeyi realises later in the novel) he meets the Dentist, (a man who advocates violence against the Cartel) and Tailla, (who wants to 'embrace the infinite' through the beauty of healing). Ofeyi seeks to maintain a balance between these two extremes, but no matter what the means, the end of their mission is all the same. Their common intention is to turn the whirlwind against the "storm sown by the Cartel." (p. 27) Ofeyi goes from revelation to revelation in his wish to undermine "the Cartel's superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder" (p. 27) and to realise the objective of Aiyero which was created as "a resting place between the battles of the world." (p. 28)

In its new regenerative role, Aiyero is more than this - it becomes "a moral thorn in the complacent skin of the national body." (p. 82) The Cartel comprising of four people, however was far from complacent:

Protected by an army of minions, Zaki Amuri remained equally immune in Cross - river.
Chief Biga paraded boldly where he pleased, surrounded by motorcades of his private army. The Commandant-in-Chief carried out orders, made speeches as they were drafted by the Civilian trio; but the genius of their language was Batoki himself. And Batoki sowed a forest of bayonets in the sun, laughed through the curses of the people and mocked their tears of frustration. He was endowed with the patience of a lizard and he bridged time with mounds of the dead and the mutilated. (p. 135)

Ofeyi does not at first believe in repaying violence with violence but when he sees it in all its rawness, he must confront it by organising, not by insulating himself against it. He wants to take control of that violence and direct it with a constructive economy. Although unable to accompany Iriyise and Zaccheus into Cross-River state, when he learns that they have driven straight into the violence, he sets out on their trail. When Iriyise disappears, he begins to feel a 'fear which lay deeper than past recollection', 'So tangible that he could touch it all around him'. The trail leads him through a wasteland of horror and insanity and human degradation to the Tabernacle of Hope, a church ironically now used to house the physically mutilated and the mentally sick. Ofeyi almost abdicates his will and his search, but ultimately he triumphs, even at the cost to his own life and sanity. As the novel ends, "In the forests, life began to stir." (p. 313) It concludes by focusing not on the Wasteland of moral depravity and the stench of death, but on the life-giving forest and new life.

The structure of *Season of Anomy* corresponds to the cycle of nature and vegetation on one level (suggested by the section
headings - Seminal, Buds, Tentacles, Harvest and Spores) and to a questing on another level - suggesting a transition and transformation from one level of being to another. Here again, as in *A Dance of the Forests*, an individual quest takes on dimensions and questions of a historical political nature. The events of a specific time and place in history have been transformed artistically to include an ever-present question in the mind of Soyinka - the question of the errors of history and redemption from these errors. Ofeyi projects into the future in one of his many introspective moments, to see how historians and archaeologists would view this moment in history. The passage is reminiscent of the sense of history projected in *A Dance of the Forests*. "The pool stank of history. Slaves, gold, oil. The old wars. ... this spent energy, this spent error, this violent, untimely cycle of waste renewed a demand for transformation."(p.86)

Throughout the novel, a sense of grimness and foreboding is communicated. One of Iryise's acts during a party at the Chairman's house is the Pandora's Box. This act literally overturns events and lets loose a horde of evil which leaves its creator, Ofeyi with a sense of superfluity. The grimness is relieved only by two scenes of social satire - the scene of the party at the Chairman's house and the subversively suggestive songs composed by Ofeyi at the cost of the Cocoa Corporation's image. The first scene is immediately reminiscent of the party at the Oguazor's in *The Interpreters*. The Chairman is, inspite of having an I.Q. (Intellectual Quota) to give him information,
constantly on his toes to detect hidden doses of anarchy in Ofeyi's songs. He is pictured as struck dumb with surprise when his I.Q. brings him the surreptitious poster, depicting the "picture of an opulent glutton with a mouth wide open to cram into it a mammoth sized slice of the Cocoa-pod. Beneath it the legend read "The Golden Slice." With irritation he discovers that this is an innuendo, poking fun at a leader who boasted that he would have a slice of the national cake. The songs have a powerful dig at the despoliation of the environment by the Corporation, implying the side effects of capitalism and technological advancement.

They milked the cocoa-tree in a mass operation
They drained the nectar, peeled the gold
The trees were bled prematurely old
Nor green nor gold remained for the next generation (p.33)

The party suggests in a swift economical scene the assumed social niceties and the imitation of western manners by an upstart elite.

The novel is deeply symbolic in its evocation of characters. Nowhere is this symbolism more clear than in the character of Iriyise. Although she is individualistic, and very much human, there is no doubt that her creator meant her to be a symbol of regeneration and hope, a lost ideal to be regained. "When the moment arrives a woman like Iriyise becomes for them a Chantal, a Deborah, torch and standard torch bearer, super-mistress of universal insurgence. To abandon such a potential weapon in any struggle is to admit a lack of foresight."(p.214) She is like
Taiila, and Segi in Kongi's Harvest a presence, whose meaning goes beyond the descriptive and temporal: "The woman's acceptance, her collaboration in man's vision of life results time and time again in just such periodic embodiments of earth and ideal ... Iriyise would reveal within her person a harrowing vision of the unattainable. Similarly Taiila is a symbol of a choice confronting Ofeyi, very much as the girl of the new generation represented a choice to Egbo in The Interpreters. Taiila represents the state of detached consciousness and spiritual harmony. She thinks of everything in terms of predestined fate. Her vocation is "to spend a whole life in self preparation for that moment of perception of the infinite."(p.96)

She forms a part of Ofeyi's aspirations, and comes into his life at the same time - when he meets the Dentist who advocates the use of violence. She tempers his reactions and helps him maintain his emotional balance. Ofeyi himself is identified in a syncretistic manner with Ogun and Orpheus. He shares the passion of their will and risk-taking. In creating Ofeyi, Soyinka has created an allegorical figure - on the one level he is human, passionate and given to miscalculation and doubt and on another he represents the unique individual's and in the context of Aiyero, even everyman's desire to conquer the ideal by bridging the abyss of transition. Joyce Johnson has identified a personal element in the attempt of the hero to reconcile all the disparities facing him.29 Ofeyi (like Soyinka during the Biafran war) attempts to undermine the influence of the political

29 Joyce Johnson, op.cit., p.293.
elite, visits Aiyero and becomes committed to creating a balanced association between Aiyero and her neighbours. Phyllis Pollard sees in Ofeyis confrontation of choices, Soyinka's artistic predicament: "He takes on ... the role of the traditional Shaman, performing his art as a ritual of transition, helping to lead his society into a desired future." She sees Soyinka's art as an enactment of Ogun's primal act of will in bridging the gulf of transition between gods and men.

While this aspect of Ogun is invested in Ofeyi, she argues understandably, Ofeyi is like Orpheus, a private quester too. In this private quest she quotes Elizabeth Sewell on the Orpheus story as "poetry thinking about itself." However, her conclusion that Season of Anomy is a novel about the writer's dilemma rather than a work of ideological commitment is rather difficult to accept - rooted as the novel is in a political and historical consciousness. It would be more appropriate to state that Soyinka identifies his own condition with that of his nation and that of all suffering nations. It is the same motive that drives Ofeyi as the act of self-sacrifice by Christopher Okigbo, another Nigerian poet, who died fighting for Biafra.

The Biafran war has been an ironic and tragic inspiration for many writers of the newly emerged nation. In the creative imagination of these writers it is depicted as a physical


struggle as well as a warning for the future. The futility, the inhumanity and the suffering of its victims are the repetition of history's folly and thus is how it is perceived, reminding us of the responses to war in the literature of the two world wars. As A. Ravenscroft observes, the writers saw this period "as the acrid experience of eating the fruit of the tree of very bitter knowledge. ... it is the belief in life, in the indestructability of moral principles which characterise the civil war literature... ." \(^{32}\)

The literature of the Biafran war naturally continues the literature of protest written in earlier decades in that it revolves round the themes of freedom and justice and inhumanity. The war literature not only takes stock of the dehumanising effects of war but looks forward by providing a warning against the repetition that history is wont to be. Dieter Riemenschneider sees Okigbo's poems as a prophetic stimulation to other fellow writers urging them to identify their "personal fate with the historic experience of a whole generation of Nigerians." \(^{33}\)

1966 for Nigeria was a year fraught with infighting in the army among the Northerners and the Easterners, massacres and large scale anarchy, leading eventually to the secession of Biafra in Eastern Nigeria on 30 May 1967. Many writers besides Okigbo -


Achebe, Soyinka and J.P. Clark - made several attempts to defuse the tension through direct involvement, diplomatic missions and personal pleas. Soyinka anticipated the horror much before it actually came and he made a desperate attempt through letters in the newspapers and direct discussions with leaders to avert the movement towards the fragmentation of the country. When everything failed, he crossed over the lines in an attempt to appeal personally to the leaders of Biafra. This intervention was misinterpreted as treason by the Nigerian Government and he paid for his commitment by being arrested and imprisoned in August 1967.

A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972)\textsuperscript{34} is the poetic counterpart of The Man Died (1972),\textsuperscript{35} Soyinka's prison journal. Soyinka writes of the former that "It is a map of the course trodden by the mind, not a record of the actual struggle against a vegetable existence... ."\textsuperscript{36} It is irrelevant to question why Soyinka felt impelled to duplicate artistically the same experience - once in poetry and again in prose. The incidents and characters in 'Shuttle' are certainly to be found in the prison diary - but the outpourings of emotion and imagery invest 'Shuttle' with an artistic experience that is not to be found in the prose memoir. The latter moreover, provides guidance to an understanding of the poems and supports and extends the scope of the poems.

\textsuperscript{34} Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt, (London: Rex Collings/Eyre Methuen, 1977). Sometimes abbreviated as Shuttle.


\textsuperscript{36} A Shuttle in the Crypt, p.vii.
G. Moore and C. Tighe have pointed out that Soyinka could not have intended the prison diary to be a work of pure literature though both of them cite different reasons for this.

In the context of this chapter, that is Soyinka's political and social vision it would be worthwhile to evaluate the merit of both works in as much as they contribute for Soyinka himself and for his readers a sense of the concept of self-apprehension.

The poems in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* are essentially the outpourings of a mind which disregards or tries to disregard its physical situation of deprecation. Thereby we get a clue to the artist's preoccupation and values. The poems are to do with the nature of oppression, its various forms and the individual's capacity to stay these. Soyinka has the rare achievement of chronicling these as perhaps no other writer has done. His mind flees the physical confinement, transcends it or goes beyond the terrible reality to find succour in the widening expanse of self-expression and self-communication through the use of that universal power - the word. Soyinka does not soften the anger, the terror, the pity. Rather his poems and more so, the prison diary spout an intensely angry and ironic attack against the 'scavengers' and 'mutilators' of humanity. Here is an example from the prose: "Tragedy is possible solely because of the limitations of the human spirit. There are levels of despair from

37 Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka, p.104.


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which it rightly seems, the human spirit should not recover. To plunge to such a level is to be overwhelmed by the debris of all those anti-human barriers which are erected by jealous gods."(p.89) Soyinka sees his imprisonment as a quest and summons up 'kindred knowledge'(p.90) of philosophers and historians to protect his sanity from disintegrating - a process which his victimisers are bent upon. As he writes in *Shuttle*:

A round table, board
Of the new abiding-man, ghoul, Cockroach,
Jackal and brood of vile cross-breeding
Broke bread to a loud veneration
Of awe-filled creatures of the wild,
Sat to a feast of love - our pulsing hearts.(p.10)

This range of emotions raises questions of language. C. Tighe 39 analyses the language of Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and questions if there is a language appropriate to deal with the 'experience of atrocities'. By this it is supposed the critic does not imply that the writer's choice of words is wrong - only that the 'experience of atrocities' itself is something so personally felt it can hardly be translated into language that can be communicated to convey the same feeling or experience. After testifying from the experiences of Eichmann's trial, Auschwitz and Koestler and Tadeusz Borowski, "a Pole who lived through Auschwitz and Dachau only to gas himself at the age of twenty-seven".40 Tighe quotes Alvarez as having written that "police terror and concentration camps have proved to be more or

39 Ibid., pp.9-10.
40 Ibid., p.10.
less impossible subjects for the artist". He contends therefore that "The main problem in Soyinka's *The Man Died* and *A Shuttle in the Crypt* is that of creating a language for describing twenty-five months of solitary confinement and all its attendant horrors and dangers". Soyinka is only too aware of this problem raised by critics for he says "Such critics, of course, had no suggestions to offer for an apt language for a truthful representation of the obscenities that provokes certain experiences." He proceeds to answer this charge by forcefully stating "Such language does not pretend to dismantle that structure of power, which can only be a collective endeavour in any case; it does, however, contribute to the psychological reconstitution of public attitudes to forms of oppression."

*A Shuttle in the Crypt* contains six groups of poems, some of them prefaced with helpful observations that explain and help to demystify the poems. The complexity and obscurity of source of the poems trend to divest them of the authenticity of the African experience and therefore seem verbose or derivative of European models. For instance Soyinka and T.C. Nwosu his countryman, both have written elegies to courageous friends who have died in the war. The difference is in the communication and the imagery which makes Nwosu's poem immediately evoke an authentically African

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41 Ibid., p.10.
42 Ibid., p.10.
43 *The Man Died*, p.xii.
44 Ibid., p.xiv.
poem whereas Soyinka's does not appear so obvious.

"Harvest is no blessing
When death is the crop
He was both the crop and the harvest
The ploughman and the ploughshare... .45

Soyinka's poem of couplets on Okigbo ends thus: "Eternal provender for Time/ Whose wings his boundless thoughts would climb." (Shuttle, p.89)

Chimes of Silence according to Soyinka is central to the entire experience contained in A Shuttle in the Crypt. The brilliant image of the shuttle, 'a restless bolt of energy' trapped in a solitary cell is sustained throughout. Death is a horror as well as a consolation for it is a 'complete in-gathereing of being' (p.vii - viii). Again, it is a recollection or setting down of the unchanging nature of humanity which is a consistent idea in Soyinka's works. The experience is comparable to J.P. Clark's poem 'The Casualties', for its paradoxical situation: "The cell is a cruel place, sometimes a haven/Nowhere as absolute as the grave." 46

In Chimes of Silence the poems are all of suffering and ordeal—the lonely death of prisoners of their wailing sounds, of shrill cries of agony, of the thundercrack that silences them all. The house of death is described by various bearings - Wailing Wall.


46 Ibid., p.136.
Wall of Mists, Amber Wall, Purgatory and Vault Centre. In all of these places "... the mad commingle with the damned."(p.38)

Regardless of what is implied in Tighe's statement that the poems and the prison writings were not conceived as literature, there would be an element of frivolity if these works were to be dismissed thus. The purpose behind the works is serious enough for he considers them as contributive to "the liberation therapy" (The Man Died, p. xvi) In that phrase is contained a consciousness of nationhood, race and humanity appropriately evoked in the poem 'Roots' which begins the poetry selection. There are reminders throughout the poem of all those familiar images and resources that the poet now summons up as it were to enable him to face the terrifying experiences before him.

'Roots' covers a wide range of the poets' associations - Ogun, his own ancestral spirits, the path of the underworld which is now his prison cell or the psyche through which the prisoner must now hew a path - all these are circumscribed images in the poem.

Pathfinder to the underworld, lead
My feet to core, to kernel seed
Draw me still to crucibles of earth's Alchemy, to rock and metal births.
To vibrations of your tuning-fork.(p.3)

Similarly sustained and recurring are the portraits of the torturers responsible for his 'phases of peril'. They are seen as 'night-scavengers', 'grave-robbers' and 'vultures' who wrought havoc upon innocent people:

Not human faces, hands, were these That fell upon us, nor was death withheld
Even from children, from the unborn
And wombs were torn from living women
And eyes of children taken out
On the points of knives and bayonets
The sky was blotted out in funeral pyres. (p. 10)

Of the victims who have cost their reason, the poet wrings out
this desperate cry from his soul:

I fear
Your minds have dared the infinite
And journeyed back
To speak in foreign tongues.
(To the Madmen over the wall, p. 18)

In 'Four Archetypes', the poet sees himself in the role of the
Biblical Joseph, Hamlet, Gulliver, (in which role, he confesses
"I schooled me/In their ways, picked a wary course/Through egg-
shell structures ... "). (p. 23), and Ulysses:

... We embrace,
The world and I in great infinitudes
I grow into that portion of the world. (p. 27)

Poems like 'Apres La Guerre' and 'Journey', 'Flowers for my land'
and 'Live Burial' are compact in form and lucid in meaning. The
mental figurations are all of a piece:

Do not cover up the scars
In the quick distillery of blood
I have smelt
Seepage from familiar opiates
Do not cover up the scars. (Apres La Guerre, p. 84)

Many of these ideas, events and characters are more fully fleshed
out as is to be expected in The Man Died. Knowing this, it is not
difficult to understand the compulsions that made Soyinka write
it. Through it, he searches for the meaning of suffering and its
relation to history and power. As he says, "Frequently one is compelled to ask. What sort of society is one a part of? What community of the intelligentsia is it that accepts, without a squawk the disappearance of a trade-union leader without a trace (p.viii). The Man Died is Soyinka's opportunity to examine the power structures that sustain oppression on a large scale. The title gains meaning from Soyinka's self-exploration which followed the news of a young man's death. "The man dies in all who keeps silent in the face of tyranny".(p.13) Soyinka narrates his agony and deliverance as that of a being who emerges from the pit of anguish - "Reality for him is ever tinged in the flames of a terrible passage."(p.90) True to that archetype Ogun, he has survived the ordeal without compromise 'deflating' all the pretensions of 'the structures of power'.

Frantz Fanon in his writings on anti-colonialism devotes a chapter to 'Colonial War and mental disorders' - What he says of the soldier forced to fight for liberation might very well form the core of Soyinka's main stream of thought in his prison writings. Fanon observes that "the man of action has sometimes the exhausting impression that he must restore the whole of his people, that he must bring everyone of them out of the pit and out of the shadows. He very often sees that his task is not only to hunt down the enemy forces but also to overcome the kernel of despair which has hardened in the native's being. The period of oppression is painful, but the conflict ... sets on foot a process of reintegration which is fertile and decisive in the
The Man Died is a testimony to the kind of man described by Fanon. The central character is a man of pragmatic action and will who believes in the "indestructible continuum of ordeal - survival - affirmation. ... which sustains a prisoner in his darkest moments and which ... urges on him a pledge and a duty to all victims of power sadism in and outside his own country." (p.11)

While A Shuttle in the Crypt and The Man Died are the recording of Soyinka's experiences in prison, his attitude and emotional response to the war itself are recorded in individual poems and in Idanre and Ogun Abibiman.

The poems sectioned 'October 1966' record the grief of witnessing the bloodshed and aftermath of the impulse to war. On July 29, 1966, Soyinka was present at Ikeja when northern soldiers started killing Ibo troops and civilians. Soyinka records his impressions in the brief poem 'Ikeja, Friday, Four o'clock'. He sees the sacrificial victims as "gourds for earth to drink from", as "unbidden offering". Although these are images of ritual for a festival, he observes ironically that it is "No feast but the eternal retch of human surfeit". (p.49) His distilled grief is reflected in the intensity of the poem's last lines: "Let nought be wasted, gather up for the recurrent session/Loaves of lead, lusting in the Sun's recession." (p.49)

The poem is prophetic in its awareness that human sacrifice and wanton destruction will soon be repeated in a "recurrent session" implying a warning that may only be too futile.

The images of sacrifice - as natural ritual offering as well as tragic, unbidden and unnatural killing occur as contrasts in the evocation of memory in 'Harvest of Hate', a poem written when Soyinka left the country for a brief period. The memory of destruction of human life appears to him now not as a harvest of life and fulfillment, to be gathered but a harvest of death. Images of life - the sun, wine, fronds of palm and kernels are objects of despoliation. "The air is heavy" with the "incense" of gunpowder. Fledglings, "womb-moist", fall to the tribute of fire. Soyinka looks upon this harvest in retrospect as a forfeit paid for mistakes not rectified at the proper time. Where forefathers should have prepared a future for renewal and growth, they have left a legacy inopportune and unwisely turned to "blighted futures" by succeeding generations. The harvest which should have been filled with" sighs/Alone of petals" and "wine-buds/in August rains",(p.50) has been blighted by lack of foresight, wisdom and restraint. There is a tone of regret, muted anger and blame accompanying the very successful suggestive ability of the image of the aborted harvest, a consistent symbol for Soyinka, of the negation of life forces.

'Massacre, October 1966' is again placed spatially and temporally, but like 'Ikeja' and 'Harvest of Hate', moves towards universal considerations of "arithmetics of death" from a starting point which is particular and personal. Written in Tegel
in Germany where Soyinka had "briefly fled" as he admits in the poem, the location and time evoke a fusion of ideas and feelings that cut across ideologies and historical events. The season is autumn appropriately seen here as "the removal man". It is a grim reminder of the event the title speaks of. Soyinka repeatedly relies on imagery and its associative powers to evoke a total experience to his poems. 'Massacre, October '66' is a good example of this use of imagery. The poem speaks of "his mind at silt-bed" that he is trying to reach, while the stained glass of church windows is reflected on the lake and autumn leaves swirl about him, and acorns drop from oak trees in hundreds. The scene taps the resources of a "sharp reckoning" in the poet and he is shocked into awareness by the association his mind makes between the detonation of acorn shells and the harvest of skulls during the massacres at home. His dispirited mind borrows "seasons of an alien land/In brotherhood of ill, pride of race ... ". He is reminded of the massacre of Jews in Germany and this thought strengthens him to endure the memories of contemporary events, it helps him to "stay the season of a mind".

Jones accurately points out that one image leads swiftly to another and this accumulative process unifies the main concern of the poet. For instance, the acorns cracking underfoot is linked to the idea of heads cropped by the whirlwind of war. The image of acorns is sustained again as the food of hogs, considered unholy in northern Nigeria, predominantly muslim. Yet, human life there was afforded the same value as hogs'food. Strangers to the land where peaceful greetings were exchanged became victims of
wrath and anger. Alien lands are yoked in Soyinka's memory by common practices of inhumanity. On Soyinka's effective use of imagery, it would be relevant here to further quote Jones who writes "... Soyinka's use of images provides him with the means of distancing the primary object, event or experience which gives rise to the poem, and enables him to produce a work of art instead of a chronicle of events."48

A poem that is strongly reminiscent of Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting' is Soyinka's 'Civilian and Soldier'. His obsession is still with the "lead festival" in which the partakers are the soldier destroyers and there is a strange meeting between a soldier and a civilian and both are presented as pawns in the game of war. The poet as civilian confronts the soldier with the lone question -"do you, friend, even now know/what it is all about?"(p.53) Earlier in the poem, the poet has resolved that the soldier's quarrel is not of this world, reminding us of the familiar lines in Yeats' 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death'.

The poet-civilian understands the plight of the soldier whose business it "is to deal death" as the civilian's business is the "trade of living". The sense of sympathy and understanding of the soldier's plight is conveyed by the poet in his resolve to return the soldier's deed with gifts of life, if ever he encountered him - "But I shall shoot you clean and fair/With meat and bread, a gourd of wine."(p.53)

Though the poem is simple in its narration, it is dramatic in the scene of confrontation between the civilian and soldier, in its statement of the soldier's plight and the resolve of the civilian to forgive the soldier who is after all only conditioned by his training. The thematic tension is relieved by an anticlimactic sense of impish humour in the concluding lines:

I hope some day
Intent upon my trade of living, to be checked
In stride by your apparition in a trench,
Signalling, I am a soldier. No hesitation then
But I shall shoot you clean and fair
With meat and bread, a gourd of wine.

Soyinka greatly admired one of the leading figures of those crucial days of coups and counter-coups during the Nigerian crisis of the late sixties - Lt. Col. Fajuyi, the Western military governor. Fajuyi was committed to set right the political balance in his country, to weed out corruption and bring about a sense of unity among the rival groups and a sense of security among the threatened Ibos. Soyinka offered his services to Fajuyi in the capacity of a peace-maker, but even before he could set out on his mission there was a wave of violence, following which on July 29, 1966, Fajuyi was killed in a counter-coup which put "the final seal of refusal upon the January hopes of unification and political cleansing, and touched off the first mass flight of easterners back across the Niger, to the temporary security of what later became Biafra."49 'For Fajuyi' is a thredonic tribute to Fajuyi against this background.

49 Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka, p.103.
Fajuyi is the "flare too rare", "chivalric steel", "mystery kernel," "miracle of boughs" referred to in the poem. And yet the poem is not a string of epitaphs. Fajuyi's role in the history of the nation is seen as a "lonely feat" of honour and redemption, a triumph of the will in the sense that Ogun symbolises in all of Soyinka's canon.

Fajuyi's death is like the bridge that must be crossed before a journey ends. The image of the bridge recurs again when Soyinka exhorts the people to "Tread the span of bridges, look not down to gravestones."(p.54)

There is no grief here, no sentimentality nor hero-worship. Gerald Moore's remarks about this group of poems is relevant in this particular instance. He says Soyinka has the "imaginative equipment to convey his anguish and compassion without loss of control."\(^\text{50}\)

The group of poems titled 'October '66' concludes with 'Malediction' which underscores yet another aspect of Soyinka's feelings for the fate of his countrymen. The poem sub-titled 'For her who rejoiced' rebukes and curses a woman who rejoiced when "all the human world/shared in grief's humility."(p.55) In the poet's opinion, she is "unsexed" linking her with the inhumanity of Lady Macbeth. The poet rains maledictions on her procreative ability, as a punishment for her alliance with the forces of death. The poem finds identification with the psalms of the

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p.93.
Israelites who called down curses on their enemies who oppressed them and rejoiced at their defencelessness.

When *Idanre* was published in 1967, Soyinka wrote in a preface: "*Idanre* lost its mystification early enough. As events gathered pace and unreason around me, I recognised it as part of a pattern of awareness which began when I wrote *A Dance of the Forests*. In details, in the human context of my own society, *Idanre* has made abundant sense. (The town of *Idanre* itself was the first to cut its bridge, its only link with the rest of the region, during the uprising of October '65). And since then, the bloody origin of Ogun's pilgrimage has been, in a true cyclic manner, most bloodily re-enacted." (p. 58) It is obvious that although *Idanre* was originally written as an enactment of the poet's visit to Ogun's abode, the hills of *Idanre*, incidentally recreating the role of Ogun in the history of the Yorubas, later Soyinka sees in the Ogun myth, seeds of future historic events, significantly the lines "... and men are one/when knowledge comes, of death" (p. 78) seem to reiterate the repetitiveness of man's folly and lack of foresight. *Idanre* recounts the deeds - creative and destructive, of Ogun but it is that other epic poem *Ogun Abibiman* that continues the 'dance macabre' foretold in *A Dance of the Forests*.

*Ogun Abibiman*\(^{51}\) was Soyinka's immediate reaction to a particular political condition in South Africa. As he says, it was inspired by Samora Machel's declaration in Mozambique on March 3rd, 1976, announcing to the world "a symbolic decision which primed the

\(^{51}\) *Ogun Abibiman*, (London: Rex Collings, 1980).
black fuse on Southern Africa: the Mozambique Nation had placed itself in a state of war against while ruled Rhodesia. Soyinka sees in this history-making decision a negation of passivity and an affirmation of the collective will of the people. Although Soyinka once admitted in an interview in 1983 that writers from different African countries had of necessity to be narrowly concerned with forces threatening their own existence, he added that "the Nigerian writer can actually afford to be positive in his concern with the movement of worldwide forces ... even as he attempts to utilise his craft in the immediate context of desired changes within his society." He goes on to discuss his own concern with the problem of black liberation from the "settler colonial and apartheid obscenities. As a student just beginning to write seriously, I saw the political background in Africa as being situated in Southern Africa, nowhere else."

The development of Soyinka's writing over twenty years has revealed that although his attention turned to the state of political and societal changes at home, his concern for Pan-African issues has not changed and this is amply borne out by the writing of Ogun Abibiman in 1976. Ogun Abibiman is an affirmation of the human spirit to overcome and the poem is a tribute to that spirit. If Idanre was a "tragic prelude", Ogun Abibiman is the "joie de vivre" - different dimensions of the same

52 Soyinka, Ogun Abibiman, Introduction.
53 Soyinka, Six Plays, p.xii.
54 Ibid., p.xii.
experience, as the writer explains:

I was able to write Abibiman, which I called a revolutionary 'joie de vivre'. For me that moment when Samora Machel accepted the challenge of South Africa - and remember what I said at the beginning: that this sore, this festering toe of the continent of Africa, has always been my petty obsession, even though since my early days I've re-defined my immediate constituency - was not a tragic moment at all, even though I know it predicates loss. Suddenly there's a statement to the people of a continent, to myself personally, that somebody thousands of miles away has finally rejected further dialogue or compromise with an uncompromisable situation: for me it's the same kind of joie de vivre that I experience when I drink a good heady glass of wine .... the history of betrayals is constantly at the back of one's mind, the knowledge of the constant possibility of betrayals in the whole history of political movements in the world, yet the knowledge that one must go on, which you might describe as fatalism, but which I consider the very essence of life of existence, of change, of progress within society."55

Abibiman is an epic poem in three parts fusing together, likeSeason of Anomy, contemporary history and ancient myth. A Dance of the Forests similarly fuses the past and present in a mood of reckoning and cynicism. Now that mood changes to one of action and expression of will. The forests, abode of the gods and ancestors, repository of wisdom and strength become in the first section (Induction), the arena for confrontation: "A crop of arms dethrones the ancient / Reign of lush... ."(p.1) The forests must be awakened to the sound of Ogun's anvil. The neglected farmstead must be brought to yield, the rusting instruments must be once

55 Ibid., p.xviii.
again be sharpened and the slumbering ore "new stressed/to a keen emergence." (p.3) The poet is strengthened by the knowledge of ancestral presences: "A horde of martyrs burst upon our/present - They march, beside the living." (p.2)

The poem speaks in images of a new birth, a cyclical renewal. "Huge with Time, a wombfruit lanced,/ A cycle resumed..." (p.4) This awareness is accompanied by a spirit of festivity: "The singer's tongue is loosened / The drummer's armpits/Flex for a lyrical contention" and the enriched atmosphere is celebration of "A Cause that moves at last to resolution". (p.4)

The presence of the historic past is an idea not easily forgotten throughout the poem. "Time and space are negated" suggesting continuity and universality. Abibiman is not just Southern Africa but all the black nations, at all times. Again, the metaphysical nature of the "cause" and its universal implications are contained in the reference to Abibiman as a "planet".

A vow of silence (which does not imply inaction or passivity) consecrates the will to act and dethrones all attempted overtures which have now proved futile, meaningless dialogues of statesmen and diplomatic missions, political sanctions, political manoeuvres, protests, pleas that have fallen on deaf ears have all run around on southern reefs - "Pleas are ended in the Court of Rights, Hope/Has fled the Cape miscalled - Good Hope." (p.6)

The poet concludes this section of stock taking with an invocation to Ogun: "None vies with him/Of Seven paths, Ogun, who to right a wrong/Emptied reservoirs of blood in heaven." (p.7) The
first section presents an end-of-the-tether situation, a situation which calls for the awesome energy contained in none but Ogun and it portends a silent threat: Ogun/In a vow of silence till the task is done/Kindles the forge."(p.2)

In the second section entitled 'Retrospect for Marchers: Shaka,' Soyinka transfers power from Ogun to Shaka through a process of fusion. Soyinka explains that Shaka was 'King of the amaZulu, easily Africa's most renowned nation builder. A military and socio-organisational genius, he suffered towards the end of his life from what, from this distance, we can only surmise as manic depression. It resulted in the decimation of his own people, a history which reminds one of a similar lapse in Ogun's own leadership of men."(p.23) Ogun and Shaka both share a paradoxical nature, being creative as well as destructive. However, the poem affords an occasion for acceptance of former misdeeds and the need for reparation for those deeds - "The gods that show remorse lay claim to man's Forgiveness - a founder-king shall dare no less."(p.14) In this section of the poem, the invaders are seen as thieves who, not content with the despoliation and ransacking of the country's resources, impose themselves on the will of others.

The poet calls for a reversal of this position - "This will to desecration now be ours"; emboldened by the fusion of the powers of Ogun and Shaka, "as Shaka, roused / Defines his being anew in Ogun's embrace."(p.9) The fusion is perceived in terms of a powerful image of 'taproots' joining and intertwining across time and space.
The white race is seen in the image of termites gnawing at the houseposts of the very dwellings where they receive hospitality, as flies swarming to death and as locusts filling the night. Their pestilence is like a nightmare from which Shaka can awaken only by redeeming himself and his nation so that future generations can be promised a rich harvest. Shaka's plea to Ogun to unite with him is an agonised cry: "Restore my seeds. Reclaim/The manhood of a founder king."(p.13) Soyinka's sense of historic perspective is revealed in his reliance upon the idea of wholeness - the nation's past, present and future are seen as one entirety. Contemporary self styled leaders are looked upon as 'vipers' whom the people must beware of. Obviously this is a reference to politicians of the ilk of Idi Amin and contemporary political events. In a bid to differentiate Shaka from such 'scorpions', and 'hyenas', Soyinka deliberately focuses upon Shaka's deeds of glory. He may have been "beset by demons of blood" in a moment of weakness but he is saved by his remorse and will to repair the damage - unlike the Idi Amins. Besides, Shaka

Fought battles, invented rare techniques, created
Order from chaos, coloured the sights of men
In self-transcending visions, sought
Man's renewal in the fount of knowledge. (p.15)

To Shaka is attributed the unification of tribes, 'the building of nations' and the forging of 'a new sense of being'. Now he seeks in sorrow to achieve redemption by laying waste the 'usurper's fortress'.

The third and final section 'Sigidi' (Shaka's war cry) forges a synthesis of the first two sections. The war cry is translated
into a song of celebration. The purpose of war is to "press the purity of claims" whose end can be achieved neither by love nor contempt nor vengeance. "Vengeance/Is not the god we celebrate, nor hate ... ."(p.20) Vengeance, hate and loss are necessary evils, not the primary aim which is spelt out as reclamation or repossession of the will. In this most rhetorical section of the poem, the poet remembers other dreams "that will go sour". As the analogy between the Nazi treatment of the Jews and the massacre of the Ibos is yoked in the poet's memory in 'Massacre, October 66,' a similar universality of historical events is recalled here in the evocative remembrance of Guernica, Lidice and Sharpeville, which references are explained by James Goodwin:"As the poem comes to an end, there are reminders of outrages against humanity, white as well as black. Guernica during the Spanish Civil War: Lidice in Czechoslovakia, the mining village completely destroyed by the Germans in 1942 and above all the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. They are to be remembered, lest dreams go sour. The action of Ogun to redress these wrongs will result not in vengeance, hate or unawareness of accompanying human loss. It will result in the 'cessation of a long despair'."56 As in all his other works, Soyinka is at pains to remind the world that the lessons of history are soon forgotten and recalls modern poet-prophets: "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world et cetera / Remember too, the awesome beauty at the door of birth."(p.21)

For all its revolutionary inclination, the attitude to the future is constructive. The war cry of Shaka is synthesised into a song which must pause "While hands are raised/To heal, and to rebuild."(p.21)

Ogun Abibiman occupies that status in Soyinka's poetry that Death and the King's Horseman occupies in his canon of plays - simple and complex at the same time; a personal statement and yet not unconcerned with a comprehensive vision of historical and metaphysical dimensions. Both are completely satisfying artistic experiences.

As Thomas R. Knipp observes "Some critics have rejoiced in the appearance of Ogun Abibiman and the change it seems to indicate in the direction of Soyinka's work." Omolana Ogundipe-Leslie calls it 'accessible Soyinka poetry' and adds "Soyinka's writing has become doubly interesting since the writing became ideological", although Goodwin is of the opinion that this may contribute to a failure in the poetry("Nothing has failed in the patterning, any failure as poetry lies in the extremity with which passionately held political beliefs are announced").

As an author of protest and political writing, Soyinka's writing may be identifiable equated with political activity, both sharing common objectives. It is evident from the way he attacks the

58 Quoted in Knipp, p.24.
establishment and the abuse of power in *Kongi's Harvest*, *The Bacchae* and *Season of Anomy*. In all these works, he seems to strike at the very base of authoritarianism and political tyranny, suggesting alongside alternatives for action - this may include as wide a range of political action as revolution, violence and even anarchy of a beneficial kind. As Etherton has occasion to remark "Anarchists seek to abolish the state and to replace it with free association and voluntary co-operation of individuals and groups." Daodu, in *Kongi's Harvest*, the slaves helped by Dicnysos in *The Bacchae* and Ofeyi and *Season of Anomy* are agents of political change in varying degrees and kinds. Soyinka is aware of the tension between nationalism and independence on the one hand and the rhetorics of power on the other. It is this tension and conflict of opposites that provides the grist to his creative mill. He has been eminently successful in conveying this conflict to the extent of having influenced his fellow writers to feel the need for being politically committed and to play a significant role in the life of their nation. He has had to exile himself from Nigeria for five years and suffer political imprisonment for a period totalling three years and more on account of his political activities and yet surprisingly he has not been aligned towards any party politics. His brand of commitment stems from a concern for the oppressed, no matter whether it is the common man in Nigeria suffering from exploitation or the South African being denied his rights by an unsympathetic and cruel apartheid policy. As he himself remarks:

60 Michael Etherton, *The Development of African Drama*, p.281
Twentyfive years ago, to use me as an example, I was almost exclusively concerned with the problem of black liberation from the settler-colonial and apartheid obscenities. As a student first beginning to write seriously, I saw the political background in S. Africa as being situated in S. Africa, nowhere else. ...there were other things I did in preparation for the day of celebration (Nigerian). Now the change when it came was an abrupt change, a total change... I took one look at our first set of legislators, you know, partial self-government at the time... I realised the first enemy was within."

Soyinka's attention turned from a Pan-African concern to the problems of strife and social problems within his own country. It was at this stage that he began to write A Dance of the Forests which, in his own words "takes a jaundiced view of the much-vaunted glorious past of Africa". He goes on to say "since then I've been doing nothing but the dance - macabre in this political jungle of ours."62

A dance - macabre is what A Dance of the Forests, Madmen and Specialists and Opera Wonyosi are about. They are distinctive links in the chain formed by his political ideas and social concerns while Kongi's Harvest, The Bacchae and Season of Anomy have amply revealed Soyinka's perception of the dangers into which the country was led during the sixties.

Madmen and Specialists(1971)63 was written at the end of the Nigerian Civil War and purports to be a fulfilment of the prophecy made in A Dance of the Forests. It is the most 'macabre'

61 Soyinka, Six Plays, p.xii.
62 Ibid., p.xiii.
recreation of some of the horrors 'in minutae' dealt with in _Season of Anomy_. The experience of the play, as many critics have pointed out has been sharpened by the fact that Soyinka is writing with the recent memory of his own experiences of solitary confinement. (August, 1967 - October, 1969) This fact makes the play cynical and pessimistic in mood giving rise to the need for using allegory and parody. The play is Swiftian in its merciless reflection of the political aspect of a modern society. Written as it is following a period of despair and near mental breakdown, it is starkly grim, alleviated only by ironical parody that serves to underscore the grimness. "Soyinka has experienced emotions beyond despair, and has constituted these objectively as a profound self-awareness and a cynicism which is tempered by the resolve to live in the very eye of contradiction. He has then attempted, in the play, to create characters and situations in which these emotions can be bodied forth."64

Such a fatalistic play could have been formulated only by a mind whose sensibility had reacted strongly and emotionally to a personal mental crises. The play does not let us forget this as well as the fact that it is constructed against a background of the destruction that accompanies the horror of uncontrolled and large scale war. The play is not limited in any sense by geographical or time dimensions, indeed its concerns are cosmic

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64 Etherton, op.cit., pp. 245-246.
in the questioning of the future of humanity itself. Thus although the background and immediate occasion for the play can be accounted for, once again it is Soyinka's concern for universals that marks the play. The reason for the lack of specificity Eldred Jones points out, is perhaps owing to the fact that Soyinka was writing in a sensitive society. This contributes to a feeling of vagueness about it. However, it must be said for the play that this is a technique that has close affinities with the Theatre of the Absurd. This is identifiable in the play's abstractions, in its strange atmosphere, in the seemingly illogical quality and use of apparently meaningless and repetitive phrases.

The action of Madmen and Specialists centres around contraries. The play is a conflict between Bero, totally evil, and his sister Si Bero, identified with the goodness of the earth, between death and life giving forces; between destruction and humaneness. Gerald Moore points out that the play, inspite of its tough initial surface, reveals essentially a conflict between the old man who 'dares to expand human consciousness' and his son who "opposes this essentially Socratean heretical endeavour." Eldred Jones and Gerald Moore have further identified the play as a protest and indictment of the totalitarian nature of military regimes. Although their analyses of the play provides helpful insights, there is an element of ambiguity in their discussion of

66. Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka, p.118
the final crucial scene. From this point of view, Michael Etherton's analysis of the play is important inasmuch as it resolves this ambiguity and suitably answers the doubts raised by the last scene of the play. He explains the thematic relevance of the play in terms of the significance of this final scene. In this respect, it may be mentioned here that there is a similar predicament which has faced critics in regard to the last scenes in *A Dance of the Forests* as well as in *The Road*.

The action in Part One of the play is set in and around Dr. Bero's home and surgery. There are three levels of stage structure to correspond to three levels of existence. Moore refers to the allegorical significance of the stage setting:

"the play is an allegory of the human, not just specifically the Nigerian condition. The highest level, that of the old Women's hut, is not Heaven, but rather a representation of traditional humanistic wisdom, balance and control - that knowledge of both good and evil which is necessary to the control of either. Si Bero has access to that level - as to that knowledge - but dwells generally upon the middle level which is the starting point of man and which is occupied part of the time by the Beggars and by Dr. Bero." The lowest level of the stage is seen as a kind of purgatory: for the author, a reminder of his own prison cell.

The play opens on a scene of humanity utterly degraded

represented by a blind man, a cripple, and two physically mutilated men, Aafaa and Goya, collectively referred to as the Mendicants. Theirs is the condition of men after they have been through a war which has not only left them deformed but spiritually empty. They have been rehabilitated in a sense, by the old man, Dr. Bero's father, who has committed the heinous crime of teaching them to THINK.

Their sense of self-worth is minimal and they look on themselves with self-disgust. They provide telling comments on the situations they have been put into by the war:

GOYA: ... I have a personal aversion to vultures.
BLINDMAN: Oh, come come, Nice birds they are, they clean up after the mess.
CRIPPLE: Not like some bastards we know. (He spits).
AAFAA: (posing) In a way you may call us vultures, we clean up the mess made by others ... .

They also provide the first clue to Bero's inhumanity. Bero, a doctor, has become willingly transformed for the worse during the war. He has abandoned his healing skills and become the Chief of Military Intelligence. He returns from the war, having acquired new skills - of torture, imprisonment and dehumanizing all of which he effectively practises on his father who has begun to question the system. The system 'AS' is, as mystifying as the Professor's 'WORD' in The Road or Okolo's search for 'IT' in Okara's The Voice, and similarly lends itself to a variety of interpretations. In the old Man's words: "As is and the system is its mainstay though it wear a hundred masks and a thousand
outward forms. And because you are within the system ... and are part of the material for deformulating 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, You - cannot - es - cape!" (p. 271)

The mendicants, the underdogs, have been hired by Bero to keep a watch on his imprisoned father - a fact not realised by Si Bero who goes about her duties, waiting patiently for the return of the men after the war. She maintains the responsibilities of the Surgery, collecting health - giving herbs and enlists the help of the earth mothers Iya Mate and Iya Agba, and through sacrifice, wills the lives of her dear ones.

Thus we see the conflict of antinomies and in Blake's metaphysical terms, progression through contraries. The Earth Mothers are metaphysical natures, repositories of ancient wisdom and truth, helping to maintain and restore balance and control between good and evil. They have an omniscient knowledge of both and are quick to recognise and reward good and punish evil. This tension of opposites, a consistent feature that informs Soyinka's art is outlined in the words of Iya Mate "you don't learn good things unless you learn evil." (p. 225)

In this context, an interviewer once questioned, whether as an artist Soyinka was able to integrate or resolve antinomic tensions in his works. Soyinka, accepting the statement replied "But are these not a reflection of the human condition?" and added, "so this antinomic tension is not something to be
contained; in fact it is the very heart of my creative existence, the acceptance of the tragic face of life, the tragic face inherent even in the joyous acceptance of responsibility.69

The mendicants recognise the goodness of Si Bero. Ironically it is the Blindman who informs his friends:

I can only tell you what I felt -
In that room where I stood with her.
There is more love in there than you'll find in the arms of a hundred women.(p.231)

He shares the insight of another blindman, the Northerner in The Swamp Dwellers who is responsible for initiating change in Igwezu's attitude. Si Bero is the symbol of goodness and she expresses her affinities to the Earth Mothers: "I like to keep close to Earth"(p.234), so it is her 'naturalness' in its essential sense of the word that is pitted against the 'unnaturalness' of Dr. Bero, her brother. She welcomes the return of Dr. Bero with an oblation of a gourd of palm wine, but to her dismay, he informs her that he has wetted her "good earth with something more potent than that."(234) Thus, all her sacrifices and good deeds, performed for his safe return have been negated. The two lives poured into her hands by the Earth Mothers, was not only their own but inherited from ancestors: "What she took from us began with others we no longer call by name."(p.235) They know that hers is a fruitless endeavour but they are overcome by her persistence and selflessness. While she bends her will to nature, Dr. Bero believes in the opposite dictum that "power comes from

69 Wole Soyinka, Six Plays, p.xix.
bending nature to your will."(p.237) His belief in As, the system that teaches you to consume your fellow-human beings is antithetical to her belief in God - the source of Life and Nature. His advocacy of power results in his father's attempt to legalise cannibalism in an effort to persuade the system to accept its own horrendous nature.

Amidst these warring opposites, what does the conclusion of the play mean? As it stands, the play seems to imply, superficially seen, the triumph of evil over good, concretely realised in killing of the old man by Dr. Bero. In reality, the conclusion is very much in line with Soyinka's theory of the follies of history and redemption from them by a unique act of risk - taking and self sacrifice. The play is about the 'creatures of AS in a timeless parade' and implies in its own universality the history of "man in a pantomime of perpetual self-destructive folly."70

Bero destroys the Old Man, fulfilling the Old Man's words, "I am the last proof of the human in you."(p.253) In killing him, he annihilates forever, the last bit of humanity in himself and this seemingly is a grim and foreboding end to the play - but it is not so when we view it in the light of Soyinka's canon and literary theory. The Old Man may be killed but he "recreates his tentacles". His spirit cannot be silenced - this is the silent triumph of this macabre play. To understand the real meaning of the play we must transcend the apparent chaos of this last tragic scene. The old Man is seen with a scalpel ready to operate

70 Eldred Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka, p.91.
on the cripple and Bero arrives to take in this scene. He nurses a secret desire to kill his father and now the opportunity presents itself. In an apparent bid to save the cripple, Bero shoots his father. The question raised here is why does the old man became so demented as to want to kill one of the mendicants? The scene fulfills the wants of the theatre of the absurd in depicting man in this seemingly irrational world. This disorder is constituted by men like Bero who wish to subject and control through an exercise of power the social and political order of mankind. The tragic death of the Old Man provides the transformation or transition required in Soyinka's moral world. As Etherton perceptively argues, "... in fact the act of Bero killing his father 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 at least set a limit to, Bero's capacity for evil."71 Again, he points outs, the Old Man's action of operating upon the cripple is to distract Bero's attention from the Earth Mothers who have come to burn down the store in order to prevent further misuse of the herbs by Bero. The Old Man therefore is a paradigm of Ogun, the embodiment of will. Once again the truth of the statement has been evaluated:

"Only one who has himself undergone the experience of

disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and whose psychic resources laid under stress by forces most inimical to individual assertion, only can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions." (MLAW, p.150)

Other forces acting against individual assertion, is also the theme of Kongi's Harvest and The Bacchae, the former a direct attack on identifiable fascist autocracies in Africa and the second a marvellous adaptation of the well known Euripedean play on the theme of freedom. Both plays have this in common that they parallel structurally, ritual and festival drama. While in Kongi's Harvest, the ritual model is the festival of the New Yam, in The Bacchae, myth and the festivities of the god Dionysos are usefully adapted. The plays, while implicitly celebrating new life are an explicit comment on the harvest of death and the oppressiveness of tyranny.

Kongi's Harvest (1967), a political satire takes its shape and form from being built upon a ritual relating to the harvest festival "In traditional Africa, the New Yam signifies the life-giving spirit, the fruit of the fertility and the diligent cultivators of the land. It can also be a sexual symbol, the manifestations of the virility and fertility of the citizens of the community". The central issue in the play is that Kongi, the autocratic ruler of Kongi's land demands from Oba Danlola, the traditional ruler (whom he has overthrown and confirmed) the

offer in public view, of the New Yam at the festival, as a symbol of the latter's renunciation of political and spiritual authority. The action of the play is spread over the last two days of the festivities. It is obvious that here, Soyinka is attacking reactionary political upstarts and their death-dealing and oppressive regimes. Many critics, including James Gibbs, Peter Nazareth and Gerald Moore see Kongi as representing Kwameh but Soyinka in a rare mood of breaking a rule of never commenting on his critics' views, has actually clarified his position and put all doubts at rest, regarding the identity of Kongi. He has quoted from the text of his letter published in The Nigerian Statesman in June 1966, a few months after the deposition of Nkrumah:

"There has been one exception, Nkrumah, and this is why exceptions must be made on his behalf, which will never apply to say, Banda, and other fascist freaks whenever the same permissive soil as sprouted them elects to break their back. ... the problem now is the utilization of the talents, experience and idealism of a unique man ... . Nkrumah's international presence has become crucial ... ."

Gerald Moore is of the opinion that Banda is one of the original models for Kongi, although he too seems to agree that Soyinka was anxious "to play down Kongi's dependence on the original model of the late Kwameh Nkrumah, and to develop the play's qualities as a

73 Quoted in Gibbs, A Study Aid to Kongi's Harvest, p.61.
more general attack on African dictatorship."\textsuperscript{74} It is not easy to agree with him however that the topical references make \textit{Kongi's Harvest} somewhat "flawed as a permanent contribution to the African repertory".\textsuperscript{75} It may be argued here that \textit{Gulliver's Travels} is none the less interesting to readers of English literature because once upon a time it happened to be a satire on the fortunes or misfortunes of the Whigs and Tories.

Kongi has also been identified with Chief Akintola who was responsible for the Western Nigerian crisis following which, there was untold political chaos leading to a coup-d'état and a civil war in quick succession. Therefore it is an exercise in futility to say that Kongi represents an individual and that the play has outlasted its significance. In reflecting Soyinka's concern for his country's situation, \textit{Kongi's Harvest} is an important statement of Soyinka's belief and disillusionment. Kongi is a Hitlerian figure - a megalomaniac, obsessed with power dialectics. His slogans - 'power reversionism' and 'systematic formulation of comprehensive philosophies' and his disputations and planning are sterile and meaningless. "\textit{Kongi's Harvest} is about power, pomp and ecstasy. It was inspired by a sentence I once heard an African leader pronounce. 'I want him alive if possible."\textsuperscript{76} Soyinka's satire, however is pointed not only at the death-dealing Kongi but also at the decadent and self-indulgent

\textsuperscript{74} Gerald Moore, \textit{Wole Soyinka}, p.61.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p.65.
\textsuperscript{76} Soyinka, quoted in Gibbs, \textit{A Study Aid to Kongi's Harvest}, p.1.
life style of the ex-ruler, Oba Danlola. In varying degrees of opposition to these characters are Segi (Kongi's ex-mistress) and Daodu, the foreign-educated heir-apparent to the throne. Daodu undertakes in the play what in ritual drama would be interpreted as a mythic journey through chaos to creativity. In ritual theatre, Soyinka suggests the chief character undertakes a journey on behalf of the community. Such a journey aims to "reflect through physical and symbolic means the archetypal struggle of the mortal being against exterior forces."77 Segi and Daodu undertake the task of securing a higher good through willing sacrifice and thus by a tragic process affirm an implicit faith in the forces of life, which is what the harvest festival celebrates. Their plot to assassinate Kongi fails, and in the final scene instead of the new Yam, Kongi is offered the head of an executed man. Daodu silences the Oba's dreams and fiercely opposes the new set-up in order to establish a new political order. His apparent failure is only a necessary step in the process. Daodu's risk-taking is an action imitative of Ogun's rite of passage. Like Eman in The Strong Breed, Daodu is "redeemed by undergoing a potentially destructive experience... . His behaviour represents the will and risk-taking necessary if the Karma of man's destiny is to be broken and the hope of a new age brought about."78

Ostensibly change and a desire for a "new law of living" is the

78 Bruce King, The New English literatures, p.91.
thematic base in "Kongi's Harvest". It is interesting to observe that Soyinka sees a desire for political change in modern times as a continuation of the myth of the dying king regenerated. Modern depositions, or even the casting of ballots only continue a way of life existing in ancient societies. Depositions in ancient days took the form of a ritual - "the priesthood recognises that it is time for the unspoken farewell, dawn comes and the king is the pattern of divinity or apotheosization is preserved, the monarch has preferred a last service for his people."79 The necessity of such a ritual was a recognised fact and is no different, Soyinka says from "The four or five-yearly ritual of the ballot in modern democracy" which is "merely a diffusion of the basic cognizance of the assertiveness of change, the event of subversion - and this is the case as it happens in Kongi's Harvest and The Bacchae.

Kongi's Harvest is an important landmark in Soyinka's creativity, prefiguring his satirical attitude towards Nigerian and African political conditions. This interest was to be sustained through all his writings. The satire is elevated by an accompanying concept of power in modern times and a vision of being rescued from its misuse by a metaphysics gleaned from the Yoruba world view. This vision is rooted in a tangible and understood perspective - whether it involves the wanderings of Ofeyi in Season of Anomy or the seemingly foolish risk-taking of Daodu in

79 Soyinka's letter to Gibbs, op.cit.
80 Ibid.
Kongi's *Harvest*. As Etherton observes: His satire and parody are directed against society and its power structures. His criticism is bound up with his metaphysics ... it reaches towards an understanding of the fundamental basis of man's existence.  

The stage becomes an area of transformation - both for the actors and the audience as in a ritual. In this way social protest takes on an added dimension.

The *Bacchae* of Euripides (1973) picks up where Kongis' *Harvest* ends. In the latter play, the revolutionaries wanting a new political order are unable to carry out the assassination of Kongi, but here in *The Bacchae* the slaves unite in common purpose with the Bacchae and through the agency of Dionysos are successful in bringing about the downfall of the autocrat, Pentheus. In *The Bacchae* therefore an element that marks a new departure from the The Euripedian play is a consistent political overtone taking shape as a class struggle. The overriding theme of *The Bacchae* seen on this level is the idea of political freedom. The chorus in the play by Euripides consists of female bacchantes from Asia Minor but Soyinka, significantly delegates this function to the slaves. During the revels which opens the play an old man becomes victim like Eman in *The Strong Breed*. He is flogged to cleanse the city of "filth, pollution, secret abominations - a whole year's accumulation". (p.237) It is a matter for speculation whether the sacrifice is intended for ritual cleansing or whether it is a political act, until the

leader of the slaves ominously warns "If another of us dies under the lash ...(p.236) That 'deliverance' is the major preoccupation of this political drama is seen clearly in this conversation which follows:

Leader : A scent of freedom is not easily forgotten ...
Herdsman : ... It gets oppressive sometimes, to tell the truth. You know rather cloying.
Leader : Surrounded by walls, one can only dream. But one day ... one day ...(p. 240)

The slaves who are flailing and treading at the harvest scene are full of fear for the man who is being flogged but a moment later Dionysos comes into their midst and infuses the spirit of defiance in them. The leader berates them for doubting their own power:

Leader : You hesitant fools! Don't you understand? Don't you know? We are no longer alone Slaves, helots, the near and distant dispossessed! This master race, this much vaunted dragon spawn Have met their match. Nature has joined forces with us Let them reckon now, not with mere men, not with The scapegoat bogey of a slave uprising But with a new remorseless order, forces Unpredictable as molten fire in mountain wombs To doubt, to hesitate is to prove undeserving.(p.240)

When Pentheus is away safeguarding the "territorial integrity of Thebes", a state of anarchy prevails in the state - a consequence of the women deserting their children and homes to 'follow the new fashion' - the religion of Dionysos. It is possible that here, as in Kongi's Harvest Soyinka is depicting a contemporaneous political situation - of a clash between an autocratic tyrant "faced with anarchy and/indecency."(p.258) As
Tiresias remarks to Pentheus while he coaxes him to 'accept' Dionysos: "If only you would lose this notion that power/Is all that matters in the life of man."(p.261)

When Pentheus attempts to impose discipline and restraint on his people, Tiresias observes that discipline - political or social cannot be forced - for it is 'the greatest/Guarantee of human will and freedom' (p. 261) - that only through self-discipline can one exercise human will, which ultimately decides the outcome of conflict - in philosophical as well as in physical terms within the play itself. Pentheus is clearly the imperialist, attempting to tame the barbaric races and the measure of his ultimate resourcefulness is to clap them in chains or flog them to death. Dionysos implies that Pentheus is a prisoner of his own ideas: "You Pentheus, because you are a man of chains You love chains. Have you uttered one phrase today that was not hyphenated by chains? You breathe chains, talk chains, eat chains, dream chains, think chains. Your world is bound in manacles."(p. 284)

The slaves are aware of Pentheus' 'inhuman indifference' to them and of the chasm between him and them:

Yet we are the barbarians
And Greece the boast of civilization
We are slaves and have no souls. (p.264)

This is an ironic endorsement of the self-exalting opinion of Pentheus: "We have more sense than barbarians/ Greece has a culture."(p.269) However their fears are like the darkness that fills a mountain cave and in his lack of self knowledge Pentheus is no better. Dionysos' function in the play is to open the eyes
of the slaves to their condition and to make Pentheus try, by overcoming his conceit, to be enlightened. Pentheus looks on Dionysos as a "spy, an agent/of subversion for some foreign power", whereas the slaves invoke him as the 'soul of liberty, seed of the new order'.(p.271) When he is imprisoned, he is hailed as the liberator - an idea which is not to be found in Euripedes:

Break interminable shackles
Break bonds of oppressions
Break the beast of blood
Break bars that sprout
In travesty of growth.(p.273)

Once again in securing Dionysos' freedom (even to the amazement of the slaves themselves), Soyinka illustrates his belief in the collective will of the people. When retribution is swift, in the impending moment of Pentheus' death, the Leader of the Slaves call out "Justice! Restitution! O Spirit of Equity!" The political situation evoked is not only the downfall of self-styled autocrats but the destruction of even royal lineages such as that of the house of Kadmos. This is another link with Kongi's Harvest. The slaves join hands with the Bacchae in celebration of Pentheus' death. Agave may mourn her son but oppression has killed even compassion in the slaves: "Who pities us, When harvest/Fails, who goes without?"(p.300)

The leaves of Kithairon have turned red and a powerful red glow fills the stage at the end of the play. The sustained imagery of blood points strongly to political revolution. Whether the play actually advocates political violence is not clear, for
ultimately the play is to be judged by Kadmos' appraisal of Dionysos: "Though he had right on his side, he lacks/Compassion, the deeper justice." (p.304)

Ofeyi in *Season of Anomy* gives expression to Soyinka's feelings on the subject of violence when he tells Taiila, "I also do not believe in violence, But I see it, I recognise it, I must confront it." (p.96)

The works written in the early seventies—*Madmen and Specialists* The *Bacchae of Euripides* and *The Man Died* are no doubt a prelude to the plays published a decade later—*Opera Wonyosi* (1981) and *A Play of Giants*, (1984) foreshadowing as they do Soyinka's antagonism against all degrading political systems and their perpetrators, and revealing the dramatist as a consummate satirist of his society. *Opera Wonyosi* is so markedly localised that Etherton accounts for its lack of the expected metaphysical dimension that is a characteristic of Soyinka's drama. "It is a critique that is specific to time and place: Nigeria at the end of the 1970's", he notes. There are topical references to the civil war, the trade scandals, the oil-boom, the public repressions and executions, and the role of the army and the so-called intelligentsia in all these events. The play is set in Bangui, the Nigerian quarter in Bokassa's Central African Republic. This affords the dramatist an opportunity to launch an

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82 Soyinka, "Opera Wonyosi" in *Six Plays*, (London: Methuen, 1984). Subsequent references to the play in this edition are incorporated in the text.

83 Etherton, op.cit., p.272.
attack on one of the most corrupt and vicious leaders in Africa at the time - a theme repeatedly handled in *A Play of Giants* as well. Soyinka is practically obsessed with these 'inhuman malformations' "whose impact on society is always of a far more critical, and profound effect than the writers." 84 He has captured their eccentricities and caprices, right through history, as memory recalls Mata Kharibu in *A Dance of the Forests*, Kongi in *Kongi's Harvest*, Bero in *Madmen and Specialists* and Emperor Boky in *Opera Wonyosi*.

*Opera Wonyosi* is an adaptation of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (which in turn is an adaptation of Gay's *The Beggars' Opera*). With its scenes of parody, song, dance and mime, it is surely cast in the tradition of the folk-opera of Nigeria which Soyinka himself feels is the medium best suited for the subject. He states without apology in his foreword to the play that he does not wish to propound any ideology of power. Rather, "*Opera Wonyosi* is an exposition of levels of power in practice - by a satirist's pen." 85

Obviously then, Soyinka is not interested in the ideology (that some of his critics feel he must include in the plays). His interest lies only in expressing a humanistic concern bordering on rage and justifiable indignance about a society in transition. *Opera Wonyosi* presents all levels of society. In it, Chief Anikura, the 'King of the Beggars' exerts sway over all the

84 Soyinka, *Six Plays*, p.xxi.
85 Ibid., p.298.
other beggars, who in this instance parody the intelligentsia and the politicians who beg for a slice of the national cake. In the power conflict in the play, he is thrown in opposition to Mac Heath, (Mackie) leader of the underworld criminals. The action of the play stems from the runaway marriage of Anikura's daughter, Polly, to Mackie, who now covets power over all the petty criminals. MacHeath and Polly hope to achieve their ambition with the help of the Police Commissioner, Brown. Anikura on learning of MacHeath's plans, deploys to have him arrested and put out of the way permanently by having him, publicly executed, also with Brown's assistance, leading to a spy vs spy situation. Amidst this confusion, preparations are on for Bokassa's coronation. Polly's wedding as well as Bokassa's coronation are events which allow the dramatist's sense of irony and satire to be fully exploited. Mack is arrested but manages to have his execution stayed by the Deputy Chief Justice. Bokassa's military advisor Colonel Moses is also drawn into the power game, affording the dramatist scope for satirising the army which Moses represents here, by detailing its crimes against the civilians. As Alatako, the law officer during his cross-examination of Moses questions "Now Colonel Moses, kindly tell me what the organisation which you represent had to report about the identity of the culprits in the military-civilian riots which we have had the displeasure of enumerating before this court. Of the criminal gang involved in the burning down of villages, assault, rape, murder etc. etc. your organisation blamed in 1970... "(pp391-392.)
In a repeat scene from Kongi's Harvest Mack is to be executed during Bokassa's coronation, so that the public may be entertained in the fashion of the ancient Romans. Religion too, becomes a target of attack as the following extract from the play reveals.

[ PROPHET JERU, a ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIEST, an ANGLICAN, an IMAM, and a SANGO PRIEST detach themselves from the crowd and move towards MACHEATH ]

CATHOLIC He's mine. He's taken Mass with us.
ANGLICAN He's mine. I baptized him.
JERU He's mine. I officiated at his wedding.
IMAM He's mine. We celebrated Ileya together.
SANGO PRIEST: Lightning is about to strike him. He's mine. Plus his property.
OFFICER: Which of them do you acknowledge prisoner?
MACK: (points to the SANGO PRIEST) I like his style. (The others protest). After all property is what it's all about, not so? (The SANGO PRIEST grins.) Also, as it happens, I have none left. Nothing. (All the PRIESTS retire, disgusted.) (pp. 400-401)

Mack is forgiven in a general amnesty for criminals, while the last of Anikura's speeches is delivered to the audience, summing up what really led to his conflict with Mackie.

... - who gains?
Who really accumulates and exercises Power over others. The currency of that power Though it forms the bone of contention Soon proves secondary. I tell you - Power is delicious. (p. 404)

The concept of power as a corruptive influence has engaged Soyinka's attention in play after play. As a dramatist he employs his skills to convey social criticism of its destructive aspect. He finds his success in the reactions of "a truly wide spectrum
of audience - across all class divisions."\(^{86}\)

He therefore finds it unnecessary to indulge in theoretical speculations of even genuinely committed ideologies.\(^ {87}\) and he works from the conviction that "theatre is rooted in the responses of such audiences."\(^ {88}\)

A Play of Giants,\(^ {89}\) Soyinka admits has one too many heroes and though he absolves Genet for its shortcomings confesses to having modelled the form of his play on The Balcony. Once again, the dramatist is at no loss to devise a play on the "grotesqueries" of nature and attribute their staying power to vested interests of Western Nations, sometimes even of opposing ideologies. The giants, the Supermen, parodied in the play are Nguema of Guinea, Bokassa of the Central African Republic, Mobutu of Congo and Idi Amin of Uganda - each one outstripping the other in self-deluding aggrandizement. Soyinka's contention in this play is that the reason why power calls to power is that power impresses with its successes and cuts across all human occupations. Indirectly but very much consciously, Soyinka hits out at the intelligentsia once again - "politically impotent", but savouring the ability to enjoy power vicariously. It is to such people that Soyinka portrays the giants in actuality as blubbing idiots whose

\(^{86}\) Ibid., p.300.

\(^{87}\) Ibid., p.300.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., p.300.

\(^{89}\) Wole Soyinka, A Play of Giants, (London: Methuen, 1984). Subsequent references to the play in this edition are incorporated in the text.
idiosyncracies and caprices lead to loss of human life and productivity.

In this respect, Soyinka places this loss on the same footing as losses suffered in war.

If Opera Wonyosi ends with the phrase "Power is delicious", A Play of Giants written seven years later has, in its opening scene, one of the giants proclaiming about subvertives:
"... mostly they seek power. Simply power." (p.1) Kamini (Idi Amin). President of Bugara, Kasco (Bokassa) and Gunema (Nguema), the three African dictators have met at the Bugaran Embassy in Hyacombe, (also the location of the United Nations), where all the action of the play unfolds and dissolves. Kamini awaits a loan from the World Bank which the chairman of the Bugara Central Bank is negotiating. While they wait, they have their statues sculpted, intending to have them placed in the foyer of the U.N. building and while the terrified sculptor works, the giants discourse the political situation of the present day world. The play in its entirety is a revelation of their obsession with power and its consequent attendants - paranoia, insecurity, self-delusion, fear psychosis and a megalomanic threat that hangs over the set as though it were a time-bomb primed to fuse before curtain drop. The giants boast of their leadership, discuss the games the super-powers play in third world countries and their own attempts to foil them. Interest in the play is sustained through irony manifested in the parody of character and situation. For instance, Gunema, it is revealed has acquired power through voodoo and the others seem to be in awe of him on
account of this. Kamini desperately needs an enormous loan from the World Bank but appears in his role as a pompous egoistic, mentally unstable character who threatens to shake up the world economy if he does not get it. "So they can come and send their stinking spies into Bugara saying they come to supervise loan project? No deal. Kamini wise to their game of infiltrating Third World country with their syphilitic spies. Go back and tell them either they loan ready cash direct, or I take over all remaining foreign business in Bugara. Any member country of World Bank with business in Bugara, we nationalise." (p.5) He is even prepared to mint his own money, without comprehending that "there is nothing to back the new currency with." (p.6) When the Chairman brings this necessity to his notice he promptly orders his head to be flushed in the toilet bowl - a punishment that endures till the play ends. Similarly the sculptor is manhandled severely for daring to joke with the ambassador that the rightful place for the statues would be the Chamber of Horrors in Madame Tussaud's Waxworks. Such reprisals and the possibility of an impending coup in Bugara cause all his aides, including the lady ambassador and his ministers to desert him one by one - but the realisation dawns too late on Kamini who is then forced to destroy himself and those of his dictator friends left with him in the embassy. The 'Giants' make a pretension of understanding the politics of power but through the deft strokes of the ironist in Soyinka, they are reduced to objects of laughter as for instance when they arrogantly dispute their knowledge, when they wish to espouse a name for the secretary General of the U.N.

Kasco: Oui Oui. There are persons, individuals who are born
with the imperial sign here (He taps his forehead). on head. Me, I think - de Gaulle. Robespierre. But the prime, the leader of them all in history, in all the world history - the sans pareil of all time is Napoleon Bonaparte!

Gunema: No, is Franco.

Kasco: Franco is like midget in history when you compare with Bonaparte. Franco! Franco! was - he did not even have a presence. No command in personality.


Kasco: My friend to know French is to understand history ....

Kamini: My brothers, what are we fighting about? What about our own brother, Chaka? For me Chaka is greatest. Only Hitler can compare to Chaka .... I know because I am descended from the great Chaka.(pp.11-12)

Gunema distinguishes between the 'ordinario' and themselves."Why you think we rule our people? Some people are born to power. Others are - cattle. They need ring in their nose for us to lead."(p.11) Kamini rants and raves against his deserters and attributes their disloyalty to "imperialism and neo-colonialism and the culture they teach our people. Syphilitic culture"(p.15) Even among themselves, Kasco intimidates the others by implying that all dictators may be equal but some are more equal than others. "Now I inhabit only the pure realm of power. I fear mes amis, all three of you have chosen to remain in the territory of politics"(p.21), an idea beyond Kamini's understanding as he shakes his head in bewilderment. The Russian delegation aware of his ignorance of diplomatic protocol only serve to reduce him further to the status of a pathetic clown.

Kamini: International law! I know my international law as well as anybody .... Even if President of United States come here and abuse Bugaran hospitality, he is subject to Bugaran law"(p.50)
Kaminis' 'hospitality' of course is a euphemism for insult, derision and torture.

The worst is yet to come. As Kamini realises that there has been an uprising in Bugara, he holds everybody - the Russians, the Americans and his brother dictators as hostages in the embassy which he has carefully armed. In the end he does not hesitate to blow up the embassy choosing to die with the others rather than let them escape. The situation of creating and destabilising dictators by vested political and economic interests is appropriately summed up by Prof. Batey, whose justification of Kamini's character and deeds is fraught, with irony, implying an intellectual's view of a common butcher. "He is product of the economic and historical conditions of our people on the continent. There is no such thing as a monster - you, if nobody else, should be the first to acknowledge that. You know it is colonial history which must bear full responsibility for all seeming aberrations in African leadership." (pp. 55-56)

Prof. Batey's sophistry represents the false rationalisation and deadening of the moral fibre of the intelligentsia. Soyinka fervently hopes by portraying such representations "that sooner or later, society will recognise itself in the projections and ... be moved to act in its own overall self-interest." 90

Essentially then, Soyinka sees himself as creative artists in all disturbed societies do. He visualises Utopias but he is only too

90 Soyinka, Six Plays, p. 300.
aware of the political, social and moral chaos in his society. In taking a moral stand by writing satirically about that society he willingly places at risk, his own life. Being considered a threat to the establishment by his outspokenness is innate to Soyinka's literary character. It is in the context of this temperament of the writer that during his second imprisonment, the editor of an African journal pleads to the government for an understanding of the motivations and eccentricities of artists who say and write the things they do because they are struggling to find a solution to the nation's problems."91

Soyinka's major thrust as a satirist has been the translation of the political and social reality of his times into an art with a consistency that makes him worthy of comparison with committed writers whose vision was matched by action. In terms of literature and art this means that he has contributed to the social meaning of literature and emphasised the dimension of its humanizing effect. At the same time he distinguishes his role as distinctly different from and complementary to that of other roles in society - "the politician, sociologist, technocrat, worker, ideologue, priest, student, teacher, etc" and adds that if he were to assume any of these mantles, his own work would "forfeit its claim to a distinctive vocation."92

92 Soyinka, Six Plays, Foreword, p. 297.