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Myth in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Bacchae of Euripides*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of

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by

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Certificate

Certified that the dissertation entitled **Myth in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Bacchae of Euripides*** submitted by **Ms Junaid Shabir** for the award of **MPhil Degree in English**, is an original research work carried out by her under my supervision. This dissertation has not been submitted in part or in full, to any University/Institution for any degree or diploma. The candidate has fulfilled all the statutory requirements for the submission of the dissertation.

Professor Mohammad Aslam

Supervisor

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Ms Junaid Shabir

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Introduction

Essentially a playwright, Soyinka is also recognized as a prolific essayist, poet, novelist and theatre director. He is also one of the continent's most imaginative advocates of native culture and of the humane social order it embodies. He writes mainly in English. His works are distinguished by their exploration of the African world view, and are steeped in Yoruba mythology, imagery and dramatic idioms. His satiric pen, directed at the leadership iniquities on his continent and inhuman conduct among people, has also produced powerful works.

As a human rights activist who declares that human liberty is his abiding religion, Soyinka has endured incarceration at the hands of repressive regimes. He has been placed on trial on trumped-up charges of treason and has undergone spells of political exile. In the midst of several violent and repressive African regimes, Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986 to become the first African Laureate.

Nigeria gained independence in 1960 and Soyinka has always been critical of its dictators ever since. In 1967, in what became one of his most contentious essays, "The Writer in a Modern African State", he questioned the Negritude movement. Soyinka sees that negritude affirms one of the central Eurocentric prejudices against Africans, namely the dichotomy between European rationalism and African emotionalism. In his essay "Reparations, Truth and Reconciliation" (1999), Soyinka defended the idea that the West should pay reparations for crimes committed against African people.

Soyinka's representation of Postcolonial African identity will be examined in the light of his two plays, *The Bacchae of Euripides* and *A Dance of the Forests* to show how this writer's idiom of cultural authenticity both embraces hybridity and defines itself as specific and particular. His works conceptualize identity in ways that modify colonial perception of 'Africaness'. Soyinka has been one of the most outspoken critics of the concept of *negritude*,

which has been associated with Leopold Senghor, the writer and former President of Senegal. Soyinka sees that *negritude* encourages into self-absorption and affirms one of the central Eurocentric prejudices against Africans. Soyinka negates the inferiority of Africans by saying“ A Tiger does not show his tigritude but acts”.

Soyinka’s works have frequently been described as demanding but rewarding to read. While many critics have focused on Soyinka’s strengths as a playwright, others have acknowledged his skill as a poet, novelist and essayist. Henry Louis Gates Jr. in *Wole Soyinka: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Resources* (1986) *has* written that Soyinka “is a master of the verbal arts. His English is among the finest and most resonant in any literary tradition, fused seamlessly as it is with the resonances and music of the great lyrical, myth-dense Yoruba tradition”. Mpalive Hnagson Msiska in *Postcolonial Identity in Wole Soyinka* (2007) approaches Soyinka’s works through a generic classification of his texts. James Gibbs Lindfors in Research *on Wole Soyinka* (1993) defines Soyinka as a poet, novelist, journalist, critic, academic man of the theatre, political activist and writer. Uzor Maxim Uzoatu in *The Essential Soyinka* (1993) hails Soyinka as “a father figure and mentor to multitudes. Nobody comes into Soyinka’s presence without being moved.” Nkengasong in *Samuel Beckett, Wole Soyinka and the Theatre of Desolate Reality* (1980) reads plays of Beckett and Soyinka against the background of the presumptions of myth criticism. He delineates the human condition of desolate reality and quest for salvation in both playwrights. All these texts by and large focus on the thematic context of Soyinka’s works.

Soyinka’s works carry political import to a large extent. Nigeria is a federal republic in Western Africa that was formerly a British dependency. Nigeria became an independent member of the Commonwealth of Nations in 1960. The following year it was joined by the northern

part of the British Cameroons, a United Nations trust territory. In 1963, Nigeria adopted a republican constitution but retained its Commonwealth membership. It might be appropriate to keep in mind what Wole Soyinka observes in a 1993 interview:

> When did Nigeria as a nation come into being? And how did it come into being? Nigeria was an artificial creation, and it was a creation, which did not take into consideration either the wishes or the will or the interests of the people who were enclosed within that boundary. They were lumped together. So, the genesis of Nigeria, as with many African countries, is very flawed.
>
> (Maja-Pearce 1999:153)

Western Nigeria is a complex of powerful city states and the first of these is Ife. In the 1830s the new city states of Ibadan and Abeokuta were found as civil war became endemic. Soyinka has been closely associated with these states. In the 1890s, the British declared a protectorate over Western Nigeria. Wars and slave trade continued. Since, it was formed by the decisions of the European powers. Nigeria was an unnatural creation. It has more than 300 languages although English is the official language. The various linguistic groups naturally have different political, economic, social and religious traditions, much as in the various states and union territories of India. The nations and polities within Nigeria range from the small to the large. The largest of Nigeria's so-called nations are Hausa, Fulami, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Ijaw, Ibibio, Ibo and Yoruba.

The Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic groups of Nigeria. There are approximately fifteen million Yoruba people in south-west Nigeria and the neighboring Benin and Togo. They are loosely linked by geography, language, history and religion. Most of them live within the borders of the tropical forest belt, but remnants of the powerful Oyo kingdom include groups that live at the fringes of the northern Savanna grasslands. Archaeological evidence suggests that the ancestors of the Yoruba may have lived in the same general area of Africa since

prehistoric times. In the mid eighteenth century the slave traders sent slaves of Yoruba descent to America . Some of them resettled in Cuba and Brazil where elements of Yoruba culture and language can still be found.

For centuries the Yoruba lived in large, densely populated cities which were able to practice special trades. Most of the people commuted to the countryside for part of the year to raise the staple crops—yams, corn, cassava, cocoa. The economy is structured around agriculture, trade and handicrafts. Women do not normally work outside the home. They attain social status through their role in the market system rather than through their husbands economic status. Each city state maintains its own interpretation of history and religious traditions and their unique art style, yet all acknowledge the ritual sovereign of Ife, all consult Yoruba herbalists and divination priests, and all honour the pantheon of Yoruba gods.

Soyinka, like other Yorubas, has three names: Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka. A Yoruba child is born with one name, christened with a second and has an attributive name. In Soyinka's case, "Olu", used as a compound in Oluwole, originally belonged to a child of high or princely birth. "Akin", in Akinwande means strength or the strong one. Soyinka's parents adherence to the traditional naming procedure suggests the traditional base of their family. He was born into a Yoruba family in Abeokuta, specifically, a Remo family from Isara-Remo on July 13, 1934.

Soyinka's first important play, *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), was written for Nigeria's independence celebration. Soyinka has played an active role in Nigeria's political history. In 1965, he made a broadcast demanding the cancellation of the rigged Western Nigeria Regional Elections following his seizure of the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service studio. He was arrested, arraigned but freed on a technicality by Justice Esho. In 1967, during the Nigerian

Civil War he was arrested by the Federal Government of General Yakubu Gowon and put in solitary confinement for his attempts at brokering a peace between the warring Nigerian and Biafran parties. While in prison he wrote poetry on tissue paper which was published in a collection titled *Poems from Prison*. He was released 22 months later after international attention was drawn to his unwarranted imprisonment. His experiences in prison are recounted in his book *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972). He worked as a lecturer, held a fellowship at Churchill College, Cambridge, and wrote three important plays: *Jero's Metamorphosis*, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*, and *Death and The King's Horseman*. In 1988 Soyinka became a professor of African studies and theatre at Cornell University. Despite government pressure, Soyinka was active in the Nigerian theater. Soyinka's best-known essays *Myth, Literature and the African World* were published in 1976.

Soyinka's artistic commitment merits an elaborate treatment. The complexity of Soyinka's styles merits from his use of language, myth, symbolism and allegory have been closely and profitable interwoven into the texture of his works. Much of Soyinka's celebrated obscurity is a direct result of the handling of the English tongue. He is fond of archaic words and loves to coin new phrases. Something of the dramatist and something of the poet, both of which Soyinka is, always find their way into his works.

Another quality peculiar to Soyinka's style is the structural use of the myth. Myths run in close parallel with the narrative in his works. And the characters also have mythological dimensions. Soyinka's complex style has more value to the discerning reader than that of those writers who simplify their language in order to reach a larger readership. Emphasizing the importance of the complex style, Soyinka himself says, "the energy and passion of social revolution appears. . .to quarry into the metaphorical resources of language in order to

brand its message deeper in the heart of humanity" (Soyinka 1976:63). The radical originality of his approach is to liberate black Africa from its crippling legacy of European imperialism. He envisioned a 'New Africa' that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present onto the stock of its own ancient traditions. For this purpose, Soyinka employed native myth which reformulated to accommodate contemporary reality and that served as the foundation of future. It opened the way to self-retrieval, cultural recollection and cultural security.

In the light of the above discussion, the obscurity of Soyinka becomes part of a greater purpose and just not an effort on his part to ignore the ordinary reader. The ideological and mythical dimensions of Soyinka's works, the minute analysis of society and deep insights into the African psyche and his exploitation of the English language lend his works variety and depth besides earning them universal acceptability and acclaim. In the process, Soyinka emerges an African writer of unique distinction.

The aim of this study is to explore how Soyinka postulates the necessity of traditional African myths and legends in *The Dance of the Forests* and *The Bacchae of Euriphides: A Communion Rite*. The aim of this study is also to show that the traditional narratives belong not so much to the heritage of nature as to the heritage of the culture. The idea is to show how by reaching the realm of imagination and revealing the archetypal patterns, myths and legends , he enters in the sphere of primordial energies and everlasting truths so often suppressed by the rational mechanization of Western civilization. The aim is therefore two-fold: First, to identify African myth and rituals in the two plays and second, to probe the overall significance of myth in Wole Soyinka's plays as a postcolonial strategy.

The study is divided into three chapters and conclusion. In Chapter I titled, "Myth: An Overview", an attempt has been made to define myth and its literary significance. The various approaches towards myth by eminent anthropologists and psychologists is discussed.

In Chapter II titled, "*A Dance of the Forests:* The Role of Yoruba Mythology", an attempt has been made to show how Soyinka replays in African costume the West's own indigenous myths of liberalism, Marxism and repressive racism. Also, Soyinka's Yoruba belief which is transmitted through ritual drama is delineated. How he questions the past, present and future obscenities of Africa through the interaction between Yoruba archetypal mythic figures such as Ogun, the revolutionary and creative deity and the community's living people is depicted.

In Chapter III titled "*The Bacchae of Euripides:* A Postcolonial Revision of An Ancient Myth", it is shown why Soyinka found a soul mate in Euripides and then used the adaptation as a way to elucidate the political, social, and economic climate of Nigeria. Soyinka's revision of this drama and his contemporaneous theory of ritual theatre not only connect a modern Nigerian in exile to his European hosts and audiences but marks the potential return of ritual spirits and communal identities in both the Euro-American and African theatre traditions.

In 'Conclusion', an attempt has been made to sum up the mythical approach of Soyinka from the Postcolonial view. Besides, Wole Soyinka is evaluated as a postcolonial writer which is related to the evaluation drawn about him from previous chapters. The converging point of postcolonialism and mythical dimension is located. Also, Soyinka's aim in projecting postcolonialism through the medium of myth is mentioned.

Chapter 1

Myth: An Overview

The term “myth” is often used colloquially to refer to a false story, but the academic use of the term, generally, does not pass judgment on truth or falsity. In the study of folklore, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and humankind came to be in their present form. In a very broad sense, the word can refer to any traditional story. The main characters in myths are usually gods or supernatural heroes. As sacred stories, myths are often endorsed by rulers and priests and are closely linked to religion. In the society in which it is told, a myth is usually regarded as a true account of the remote past. In fact, many societies have two categories of traditional narrative, “true stories” or myths, and “false stories” or fables. Myths, generally, take place in a primordial age and explain how the world gained its current form and how customs, institutions and taboos were established.

The critical interpretation of “myth” goes back as far as the pre-Socratics. Euhemerus was one of the most important pre-modern mythologists. He interpreted myths as accounts of actual historical events, distorted over many retellings. This view of myth and their origin is criticized by Plato in the *Phaedrus* (229d), in which he says that this approach is the province of one who is vehemently curious and laborious, and not entirely happy. The Platonists, generally, had a more profound and comprehensive view of the subject. Sallustius, for example, divides myths into five categories: theological, physical (or concerning natural laws), animistic (or concerning soul), material and mixed. The theological are those myths which use no bodily form but contemplate the very essence of the gods—for example, Kronos swallowing his children. Since God is intellectual, and all intellect returns into itself, this myth expresses in allegory the essence of God. Myths may be regarded physically when they express the activities of the gods in the world —for example; people before now have regarded Kronos as time, and calling the divisions of time as his sons. The material myths are those myths which the Egyptians have

mostly used, believing material objects actually to be gods, and so assigning names of gods to them. For example, they call the earth Isis, moisture Osiris, heat Typhon, or again, water Kronos, the fruits of the earth Adonis, and wine Dionysus. The mixed kinds of myths are those which show interaction between two or more myths of the previous categories. The mythology of the classical world provided themes for some of the world's greatest drama and similar themes can be traced in Renaissance literature to modern poetry. Hamlet, for example, is often seen as the reluctant hero who must sacrifice himself to purify Denmark made diseased by the foul and unnatural murder of its king. The remoteness, heroism and mystery of myth have always fascinated writers like Yeats, Pound and Eliot. They employ myths of history, rebirth and fulfillment through sacrifice, as do other poets. Myth is used in "Leda and the Swan" (1924), by Yeats to express his view of history. The legend of the girl Leda being ravished by the Greek God Zeus in the guise of a swan is interpreted by Yeats to illustrate his view of history. In "The Cantos" (1964), Ezra Pound gives myth an independent status and in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910), myth articulates a fantasy of immanence and identity. In "The Wasteland" (1922), Eliot uses the myth of Holy Grail as a possibility for the salvation of mankind. The ancient myth of Fisher king is also used to express the need of sacrifice, rebirth and redemption.

Although Plato condemned the poetic myth when discussing the education of the young in the *Republic*, primarily on the grounds that there was a danger that the young and uneducated might take the stories of gods and heroes literally; nevertheless, he constantly refers to myths of all kinds throughout his writings. As Platonism developed in the phases commonly called Middle Platonism and Neo-Platonism, such writers as Plutarch, Porphyry, Proclus, Olympiodorus and Damascius wrote explicitly about the symbolic interpretation of traditional and Orphic myths.

Interest in polytheistic mythology revived in the Renaissance, with early works on mythography appearing in the 16th century, such as the *Theologia Mythologica* (1532).

If ancient commentators were concerned with whether or not the stories of gods were real, those of the Renaissance, working within a Christian frame of reference, knew that they could not be literally true. The question for them was what do the tales of the ancient gods represent? So, myth became the subject of allegorical interpretation which in turn was rationalized with more and more complexity. Northrop Frye (1957:43) comments, "Myths of gods merge into legends of heroes; legends of heroes merge into plots of tragedies and comedies; plots of tragedies and comedies merge into plots of more or less realistic fiction". Seznec describes the academic development of myth studies in the sixteenth century as "the increasingly erudite and diminishingly alive, less and less felt but more and more intellectualized— such, from now on it seems, is to be the inescapable evolution of mythology" (quoted in Righter 1975:8).

When the study of myths and religions intensified through the 19th century, patterns of them were extracted and compared, and theories on what they revealed about common human conditions emerged. Myths were increasingly seen as expressions of needs in the human psyche. They were, therefore, rewarding fields of study of human nature, especially since there was a quickly growing mass of documentation of myths from around the world, as well as a quickly increasing knowledge of religions and traditions among distant and obscure cultures. By the end of the 19th century, the literature on the subject was already immense and mostly pointing to psychological explanations for the structure and content of myths as well as for the birth of religions. To name a few, English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture:*

Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom was published in 1871, though he had written *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* on the same theme in 1865. In this book, Tylor studied languages, art, rituals, customs, myths, and beliefs of people belonging to different cultures and concluded that the human mind functions quite similarly everywhere. He saw a universal pattern of development in every culture. Based on that he believed in the unity of humankind, as societies progressed in their evolutionary development from primitive to civilized. He finds a common reservoir of all myths by exploring that all of them are rooted firmly in primitive times.,

The German philologist and orientalist, Max Muller, regarded as the initiator of comparative religion and becoming Oxford's first professor of comparative theology in 1868, edited the 50 volume Sacred *Books of the East*, published between 1879 and 1910. Scottish writer Andrew Lang's two volumes of *Myth, Ritual and Religion* were published in 1887. Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, presenting a vast material on myth, lore and ritual around the world, was originally published in 1890, as a two volume work, to expand considerably in the following decades. It explained myth as a reflection of seasonal rituals including the springtime renewal of gods such as Osiris. The evocation of the myth takes us into the imaginative country where the notions of sacrifice, loss and redemption take on a richer meaning through the depth of human past. John Vickery (1973) has shown that the Modernist generation responded more warmly to the mythic world of seasonal ritual which George Frazer (1890) showed to be still residually present in European rural life, at least before the 1914-18 war. There were also journals of anthropology published since the mid-1800's, often containing documentation of myths and rituals in cultures without their own writing. Lucien

Levy-Bruhl (1922) presented a view of archaic man as enjoying a pre-rational state of sympathetic continuity with the world.

Myth is of immense importance in the domains of anthropology, psychology and literature. During the second half of the 20th century, various writers started documenting myth using a psychoanalytical perspective. Anthropologists used psychological concepts to analyze and explain beliefs and religious practices of societies they studied, and psychologists searched anthropological material in order to support their theories about the mental state of man. Myth has attracted the attention of critics from times immemorial because of its invaluable utility. The definition and literary significance of myth in a wide spectrum is given below:

1. **As a Narrative Device:**

   Richard Chase (1969) states that myth is an aesthetic device for bringing the imaginary but powerful world of preternatural focus into a manageable collaboration with the objective i.e., experienced facts of life in such a way as to excite a sense of reality amenable to both the unconscious passions and the conscious mind.

2. Has to with the Gods and "other" world:

Stith Thompson (2005) states that in myth, the gods and their actions play an important role. It also deals with creation and the general nature of the universe and of the earth. In European literature, myth is sometimes applied also to the hero tales, whether those hero tales deal with demigods or not.

Similarly, Rudolf Bultmann (1953) asserts that mythology is the use of imagery to express the other-worldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side. Myth is the report of an event or occurrence in which supernatural and super-human powers or persons are at work.

3. Related to religion:

Robert A. Georges (1968) states that myth retained its basic meaning as a narrative, well known among members of a particular society or a group or groups within that society, which explains the origins of natural and social phenomena and the interrelationships among man, his deities and his universe.

Lessa & Vogt (1979) state that myths are sacred stories handed down through the generations, either by word of mouth or through books. Such stories are usually of crucial importance in providing explanations of how human life came to be as it is and in providing justifications for the efficacy of ceremonials and rituals. On the other hand, there are always prescribed ways of carrying on religious acts and procedures, ways of worshipping, praying, changing, sacrificing, making offerings and so on, that are called rituals. In brief, the beliefs are found in myths; the practices are prescribed in rituals.

4. Enforces Social Order:

Bronislaw Malinowski (1979) states that through the operation of what might be called the elementary law of sociology, myth possesses the normative power of fixing custom, of sanctioning modes of behavior, of giving dignity and importance to an institution.

H.Buck (1966) states that history functions as social control only when it functions as myth. It need not be truly a myth, but it must function as one.

5. As Primitive science:

David Bidney (1967) asserts that myth originates wherever thought and imagination are employed uncritically or deliberately used to promote social delusion. Myth must be taken seriously as a cultural force but it must be taken seriously precisely in order that it may be gradually superseded in the interests of the advancement of truth and the growth of human intelligence.

6. As universal concept:

Theodor A. Gaster (1962) states that myth is the supreme vehicle in all religions. Myth acts as the element which gives religion life and pertinence. Events of the past, in general, are religiously significant and relevant in the present only insofar as they are lifted out of the specific contexts of their occurrence and taken as symbols of continuing, universal situations. And, to effect such a translation from the punctual to the ideal is precisely the function of myth.

Andrew Lang (1884) states that the real intention of myth is not to provide an objective world view. Rather, in it is expressed the way man understands himself in his world. Myth is not intended to be interpreted cosmologically, but rather anthropologically, or better still, existentialistically. Myth speaks of the power or powers that man thinks he experiences as ground and limit of his world, of his own action, and of what happens to him. It speaks of the unworldly in a worldly way, of the gods in a human way.

7. Explicate beliefs or collective experience; convey values:

Marshall McLuhan (1960) questions: "Are we inclined to insist that myth be a reduction of collective experience to a visual and classifiable form?" The answer to this question as per McLuhan is that myth is certainly the sum total of the collective experience which conveys

collective values and beliefs to us in a visual form. As myth is today seen as a photograph of still-shot of a macro myth (language) in action—a means of static abstraction from live process. Myth has been means of access to collective postures of mind/which now replaced by new electronic means of communication.

Alan W. Watts (1954) says that myth is to be defined as a complex of stories—some no doubt fact, and some fantasy—which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life.

Erich Dinkler (1967) says that modern historians of religion use the word as a technical term for that literary form which tells about otherworldly things in these worldly concepts. Thus, myth expresses truth in a hidden or indirect language, not in an open and direct way. Therefore, it cannot be objectified; all mythology expresses a truth, though in an absolute way.

8. Spiritual Expression:

Ernest Cassirer (1946) states that myth creates a world of its own in accordance with a spiritual principle, a world which discloses an immanent rule, a characteristic necessity. The objectivity of myth consists in its being a concrete and necessary mode of spiritual formation, a typical mode of formation in which consciousness disengages itself from and confronts the mere receptivity of the sensory impression. Myth is not a reflection of an objective reality independent of it, but is rather the product of true creative and spiritual actions, an independent image world of the spirit as well as an active force of expression.

Whalley (1953) states that myth is a direct metaphysical statement beyond science—Myth has as its purpose, its source and end, revelation.Berdyaev (2009) states that myth is a reality which is immeasurably greater than concept. It is high time that we stopped identifying myth with invention, with the illusions of primitive mentality. Behind

the myths are concealed the greatest realities, the original phenomena of the spiritual life. Myth is always concrete and expresses life better than abstract thought can do. Myth presents to us the supernatural in the natural—it brings two worlds together symbolically.

These definitions bring out clearly the importance of myth in almost every domain of life. Myth is not an obsolete concept but is significant even today. It is to be taken seriously as it is a part of culture. It is not only limited to the domain of culture but has universal significance as well. In the above definitions, the concept by Lessa and Vogt (Page no.6) will prove helpful in the study. They delineate the important role played by rituals like sacrifice, making offerings, praying and so on. All these rituals are abundant in *The Dance of the Forests*. And, the significance of myth and ritual as an essential literary element will be discussed in the next Chapter (Chapter I). In the same chapter, Berdyaev's point (Page no.8) how myth connects the two worlds symbolically (The world of Living and the world of Dead) will be discussed. Equally helpful will prove in Chapter III the view of Andrew Lang (Page no.7), in which he labels myth as a vehicle of transmuting divine language of gods in a human language. For instance, in *The Bacchae of Euripides,* another play under study, godly figures use myth to put their message across.

Considering the psychological aspect of myth which is the most important dimension of myth, the two persons who have so far been most influential in the psychological treatment of myth are Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, the latter to a much wider extent than the former. Both were connected to the psychoanalytical movement and their perspectives on man and myth search deeper into the psyche than mere emotions or instinctive stimuli and their thoughts on myth are psychoanalytical in nature. Whereas Freud was mainly interested in the origin of religion and importance of

ritual, Jung focused on myth and legend, the stories told within religions. To him, these stories were the essence of any religion and therefore he was keener to explore the origin of myths, apparently intrinsic to modernity. Also, contrary to Freud, Jung saw myth and its meaning within the individual psyche. In spite of myths and their components being shared by all members of a society and essentially by all mankind their workings are strictly personal. Wittgenstein who was the disciple of Freud says, "Freudian psychoanalysis is based in myth, its application to actual psychological problems does not, indeed cannot, resolve them. Instead, all it can do is to clarify them or present them in a different light..." (quoted in Bouveresse 1995:41). The necessity of a fundamentally mythological approach to psychological problems lies in the relation of desire to language. The problem is one of expression. The human being, Vincent Descombes says in the foreword to *Wittgenstein Reads Freud: The Myth of Unconscious* (1995) that myth is "a divided subject". The subject does not emerge until he speaks, but when he speaks, he loses himself in language and is condemned to desire without being able to signify the object of his desire in an articulate message. Descombes continues that the subject is therefore divided, due to his condition as a speaking being, between what he can ask in the language he shares with others, and what he continues to desire—which is always something else. The problem, then, is one of expression. The solution lies in inventing a manner of speaking— a mythology. For Freud, that manner of speaking was grounded in the postulation of the unconscious. Giving expression to unconscious desires and their conflicts became the centerpiece of psychoanalysis.

According to Jung, man is on a quest towards self-realization, and myths serve as clues to this process. Therefore, to him, myths contain messages to the individuals, not

the group, no matter how many people are involved in retelling and listening to them. Myths speak to each individual in the same way but have to be dealt with individually. Jung himself pointed out other differences to Freud, in *Psychoanalysis of Myth* (1912), mainly those in how to interpret dreams and fantasies:

> I did not reduce them to personal factors, as Freud does, but – and this seemed indicated by the very nature – I compared them with the symbols from mythology and history of religion, in order to discover the meaning they were trying to express.

Freud and Jung differed in their respective treatment of myths. Freud relegated them to personal factors whereas for Jung they had a firm and logical foundation to it. He explained myths in an extraordinary way by gluing archetype to them. Even some of the writers like Nelson Vieira (1995:93) find myths and archetype as almost synonymous and state:

> The myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance…Hence the myth is the archetype, though it might be convenient to say myth only when referring to narrative…and archetype when speaking of significance.

Myth and Archetype

The word archetype is from the Greek *arkhetupon*, first mould or model, in the meaning of being the initial version of something later multiplied. It is made up of *arkhos*, meaning chief or ruler (used also in e.g., archbishop and monarch), and *tupos*, meaning mould, model or type. It has been used to describe original or ideal model phenomena and characters, such as easily recognizable type-roles in drama – like the evil stepmother, the miser, the brave hero. In the case of drama and literature, such

archetypes are usually traceable back to myth and fable. Jung's first mention of the term 'archetype' was in the *Instinct and the Unconscious* (1919). According to Stephen Stanaurd:

> Jung's use of the term is similar at first glance. He repeatedly refers to such fictional type-roles as archetypes, the hero being the one most frequently used. But to Jung they are far more than recognizable characters—in fact, they are not at all characters, essentially, but symbolic keys to truths about human condition and to the path of personal enlightenment. They can reveal the workings of the world, as to how it affects the human psyche, and what man should do to accomplish something or for that matter ward something off. They are learning tools, lessons from primordial time, answers included. And they do more than that: Archetypes create myths, religions, and philosophical ideas that influence and set their stamp on whole nations and epochs.
>
> (Online)

Archetypes carry meanings for the human mind to decipher and utilize. For Jung, the archetype is a symbolic formula which always begins to function when there are no conscious ideas present, or when conscious ideas are inhibited for internal or external reasons. He also compares the archetypes to the axial system of a crystal, which, as it were, forms the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of its own. Archetypes can also reveal the workings of the world, as to how it affects the human psyche, and what man should do to accomplish something or for that matter ward something off. They are learning tools, lessons from primordial time, answers included. And, they do more than that, as in Jungian perspective, archetypes create myths, religions, and philosophical ideas that influence and set their stamp on whole nations and epochs.

The source of archetypes is a difficult question to answer. How do they appear and remain? Jung does not discuss it much, but his explanation is quite identical to that of Freud about how memories get incorporated into the archaic heritage by repetitious experience. Jung (quoted in Stephen: 2006) imagines the same for archetypes by asserting that the origin of archetypes can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity. It is not possible to make a complete list of archetypes, since many of them are yet to be discovered, nor is there room for a substantial list of archetypes recognized so far in Jungian theory. Jung himself never even suggested a listing. In addition, some archetypes can be seen as examples of more fundamental ones, or sorts of mixes of other archetypes. It is not a very orderly universe. However, some of the archetypes mentioned by Jung (1981) and by Robertson (1995) are as under:

The Hero, who pursues a great quest to realize his destiny.

The Self, the personality striving towards its own complete realization.

The Shadow, the amoral remnant of our instinctual animal past.

The Persona, the mask and pretense we show others.

The Anima and Animus, our female and male roles and urges.

The Mother, primarily in the sense of our need of her.

The Father, primarily an authority figure often inducing fear.

The Child, our innocent beginning with all our potential in front of us.

The Sage, or wise old man, one who has the profound knowledge.

The God, the perfect image of the Self.

The Goddess, the great mother, or Mother Earth.

The Trickster, a rascal agent pushing us towards change.

The Hermaphrodite, the joiner of opposites.

The Beast, a representation of the primitive past of man.

The Scapegoat, suffering the shortcomings of others.

The Fool, wandering off in confusion and faulty directions.

The Artist, the visionary and inspired way of approaching truth.

Mana , represents spiritual energy.

The Journey, a representation of the quest towards self-realization.

Life, death and rebirth, the cyclic nature of existence.

Light and dark, images of the conscious and the unconscious.

The Tree, the growth towards self-fulfillment.

Water, the unconscious and the emotions.

The Wizard, knowledgeable of the hidden and of transformation needed.

The foremost of these archetypes is the hero, a person who bravely overcomes great difficulties in order to realize his destiny. He could be described as a role-model, urging each of us to go ahead and pursue our own quest. Freud, too, put significant emphasis on the hero of myth and lore. Jung's hero meets with certain characters, events and obstacles in his quest. Those are often recognizable from one myth to another and archetypes as well. The hero myth is the ultimate

formula of self-realization, wherefore it is central in Jung's treatments on myth. Hence, archetype is a typical or recurring image, character, narrative design, theme, or other literary phenomenon that has been in literature from the beginning and regularly reappears. Though Frye (1973) sees archetypes as recurring patterns in literature; in contrast, Jung views archetypes as primal, ancient images/ experience that we have inherited.

Jung was unwilling to apply his religious concepts to literature as he placed religious levels on a level above than literature. But T.S Eliot, James Joyce and Mark Rithko place a high value on art and literature. It is really astonishing that they have made extensive use of the Jungian ideas. Not only this, they have also used ideas of Frazer to show how literature is rooted in myth. In *Archetypal Pattern in Poetry* (1934), Bodkin interpreted Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner" and T.S Eliot's "The Wasteland" as poems about the myth of rebirth. Many of the myths known to modern world are a misconstruction of earlier myths; this view is debated by Robert Grove in *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948). J. Campbell held that numerous myths from disparate times and regions share fundamental structures and stages, which he summarized in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Blake's poetic prophecies are interpreted as myths by Frye in *Fearful Symmetry* (1946). In Quest for Myth, Chase asserted that myth is literature and must be considered as the creation of human imagination.

In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Frye disengaged myth from anthropological and psychological beginnings. He considers Frazer's work as a study of the ritual basis of naive drama. And for him, Jung's work makes possible an understanding of the dream basis of naive romance. According to Frye, the critics need not be concerned with primordial unconscious, nor

with questions of his transmission. Archetypes undoubtedly form an integral part of literature. Literary criticism accepts this as a fact as Archetypal/Mythical criticism forms an important component of literary criticism.

Frye's focus, unlike Jung, is upon the study of the direct development of myth in or by literature. All the theories in *Anatomy of Criticism* (like Theory of Symbols, Theory of myths and Theory of Modes), he says, "rested on the continuity and identity of myth and literature" (Frye 1957:63). It is quintessential to give Frye's literary view of an archetype. He says, "I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and there by helps to unify and integrate our literary experience". He continues:

> If we do not accept the archetypal or conventional element in the imagery that links one poem with another, it is impossible to get any systematic mental training out of reading literature alone…A symbol like the sea or the heath cannot remain within Conrad or Hardy: it is bound to expand over many works into an archetypal symbol of literature as a whole.

The archetypes will be listed towards the end in the sub-section of this chapter with a special reference to African context.

Frye labels the recurrence of the image as archetype and very artistically, he clubs the recurrence and desire together in its archetypal phase. He says that recurrence and desire interpenetrate and are equally important in both ritual and dream. In its archetypal phase, the pull of ritual is towards cyclical narrative, which, if there could be such a thing, would be automatic and unconscious repetition. (In the next chapter, "*A Dance of the Forests*: The Role of Yoruba Mythology", the ritual will be analyzed meticulously with respect to the cultural context and will be placed in the broad panorama of myth). Frye relates myth and ritual in a lucid and concise manner. He (1957:106-107) states:

> The union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication is myth…The myth accounts for, and makes communicable, the ritual and the dream. Ritual, by itself, cannot account for itself : it is pre-logical, pre-verbal, and in a sense pre-human…Myth, therefore, not only gives meaning to ritual and dream, in which the former is seen to be the latter in movement….All that we need to say here is that ritual is the archetypal aspect of *mythos*.

Murray says, "The Verbal imitation of ritual is myth, and the typical action of poetry is the plot, or what Aristotle calls *mythos*, so that for the literary critic and Aristotelian term *mythos* and the English word myth are much the same thing"(quoted in Shinn:1986). This brings us to the interesting aspect of myth i.e., *mythos* which is integral to the present study. Frye (1973:162) says in this regard:

> We thus have four narrative pregeneric elements of literature, which I shall call mythoi or generic plots. If we think of our experience of these mythoi, we shall realize that they form two opposite pairs. Tragedy and comedy contrast rather than blend, and so do romance and irony, the champions respectively of the ideal and the actual. On the other hand, comedy blends insensibly into satire at one extreme and into romance at the other; romance may be comic or tragic; tragic extends from high romance to bitter and ironic realism.

Frye preferred the terms *myth* and *mythoi* to the terms *genre* and *genres* because he thought clarity would be better served by reserving the latter terms to the usages already in place when he directed attention to the more basic generic plots the genres of narration and drama exploited. He may have been right. But his discussion has been so influential as to shape the general critical usage of the term "genre" itself. Nowadays, when we encounter the term "literary genre", we have to ask ourselves whether we have to do with the older classification (narration, drama, lyric, essay) or with Frye's own classification (tragedy, comedy, romance, satire), a classification of what Frye called *mythoi.* Regarding the classification, he (1973:192) states:

> The four mythoi we are dealing with, comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony, may now be seen as four aspects of a central unifying myth. *Agon* or conflict is the basis or archetypal theme of romance…*Pathos* or catastrophe, whether in triumph or in defeat, is the archetypal theme of tragedy. *Sparagmos*, or the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world, is the archetypal theme of irony and satire… *Anagnorisis* or recognition….is the archetypal theme of comedy.

The archetypal theme integral to our analysis is *Sparagmos* (satire and irony) i.e. the confusion and chaos going to doom Nigerian society in its post-independent phase according to Soyinka.

Frye's application of seasons to generic plots has always attracted the attention of critics. Ford Russell, a critic of Frye, says, in *Northrop Frye on Myth* (2000) that Frye's individual pattern of thought is as expansive as Spengler's. Frazer can help us see why Frye names his story types after the four seasons, so that comedy is the "mythos of spring", romance is the, "mythos of summer" and so on. So, the spectacle of the great changes which annually pass over the earth has powerfully impressed the minds of men in all changes. The most striking event is what Frye calls," the world that nature presents to us". Therefore, the cycle of nature is constant to which humans have continually sought to relate, reconcile or accommodate themselves and we get its reflection in literature in the form of *mythoi.*

The study will be carried in terms of myth and structure being an inescapable part of myth. *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) complements the close reading of texts as things in themselves and provides enough scope for the varied interpretation of texts which is certainly commendable. In a major sense, archetypal criticism, especially as articulated and practiced by Frye, anticipates or prepares the way for Structuralism. Mythology and literature inhabit and function within the same imaginative world; both are governed by conventions, symbols, myths and genres. Integrity for criticism requires that it too operates within the sphere of the

imagination and does not seek an organizing principle in ideology. To do so, claims Frye along with Dolzani:

> …[Myth provides] the principles that give literature its communicating power across the centuries through all ideological changes. Such structural principles are certainly conditioned by social and historical factors and do not transcend them, but they retain a continuity of form that points to an identity of the literary organism distinct from all its adaptations to its social environment.
>
> (1990: xiii)

Myth therefore provides structure to literature simply because literature as a whole is "displaced mythology" (Gillespie 2010).

Structure is an essential component of myth and Levi-Strauss (1963) insists that myth is language because myth has to be told in order to exist. It is also a language with the same structures that Saussure (2004) described as belonging to any language. A myth, according to Levi-Strauss, is both historically specific and ahistorical, meaning that its story is timeless. As history, myth is parole; as timeless, it is langue. Levi-Strauss says that myth can be translated, paraphrased, reduced, expanded and otherwise manipulated without losing its basic shape or structure. The significance of myth, according to Levi-Strauss, is that it presents certain structural relations in the form of binary oppositions that remain universal concerns of all cultures. Strauss (1963:216) says:

> Turning back to the Oedipus myth, we may now see what it means. The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous…to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman. Although the problem obviously cannot be solved, the Oedipus myth provides a kind of logical tool which relates the original problem--born from one or born from two?— to the derivative problem: born from different or born from

> same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true.

Levi Strauss has said that myth is still felt as a myth by a reader anywhere in the world. For him, myth is kind of universal language. While the events of myths vary, the basic structures, like grammar, are similar in myths worldwide because people are similar.

Roland Barthes (1998) presents an interesting dimension of myth in structural terms. His discussion of the relationship between signs that constitute a myth is indebted to the Swiss linguist Saussure. In *Mythologies* (2004), he asserts that "the myth does not, as we saw it, operate directly on the real, but on signs: its language is a metalanguage". But if this is so, then the mythologist, producing language out of an existing metalanguage, is one stage further removed from reality. However, this is not my contention. What is important is Barthes's celebrating a direct relationship between language and reality. He reduces, with the help of myth, the world to a set of essences, social interaction to so many individual transactions. For him, "myth is just not a message, but a message that is political by depoliticizing" (2004: 229). It turns history into essence, culture into Nature and obscures the role of human beings in producing the structures they inhabit and thus their capacity to change them. Hence, the constructive purpose of myth is discussed with reference to Soyinka's plays in the next chapters to prove that myth contains message and is not a fabrication of lies at all. Barthes accredits the constructive purpose of myth by assigning an economic dimension to it. He says, "Myth has an economic dimension: by simplifying reality, it saves on intellectual effort, and, moreover, what it simplifies reality to is the most basic commercial relationship" (2004: 242). Therefore, for Barthes, reality or say essential reality is mystified, which is an inevitable component of the human condition. It is seen

as the product of history, an alienated present that spurs us on to attempt a Utopian reconciliation between the human activity of interpretation and the world it is applied to. So, myth is contained with the historical import which is the pivotal point of my study in the next chapters.

Myth in the African Context

There has been an increasing tendency, on the part of modern African writers, to identify with the literary traditions of their people in terms of both content and technique. The reason is not far to seek. For a long time before African nations won political independence from their European colonizers, African culture was misunderstood and misrepresented. Words such as savage and primitive were used to describe them by foreign scholars who had little or no feeling for the languages and the attitudes in which that literature was expressed. It was only inevitable that, when these African nations won their independence, they undertook to reexamine and overhaul not only the institutions by which they had been governed but also the image of their culture that had long been advertised by outsiders. The aim was to demonstrate that Africa has had, since time immemorial, traditions that should be respected and a culture to be proud of. In this regard, V.Y.Mudimbe (2007:61) states:

> African literature as a commodity is a recent invention, and authors as well as critics tend to resist this fact. They seem more interested in this literature, not for what it is as discourse and what in the variety of its events it could mean in a larger context of other local and regional discourses, but rather for its significance as a mirror of something else, say or instance, Africa's political struggle, process of cultural disalienation or human rights objectives…Thus one would add, the literary world could be a mythical space, yet it unveils the concrete experience of human communities.

Hence, African literature is commented upon and celebrated as it is creative in nature. The functional rule of creativity is played by myth which is certainly commendable.

African mythology covers a large area. There are so many countries, regions, languages, tribes, cultures and imperialist crossovers that the sheer diversity of prevailing gods would seem overwhelming if there weren't a few handy shortcuts. Traditional African belief is overwhelmingly monotheistic. There may be spirits and ancestors floating around, but there is only one God. Early missionaries made a complete pig's ear of their research in this respect and seem to have delighted in cataloging as many heathen gods as they could possibly get away with. African creator gods seem to follow a distinctive pattern— they are all extremely dissatisfied with their creations. There is much shaking of heads, turning away in sorrow and avoidance of contact. The humans are left to fend for themselves. Attempts to regain contact with their God by building a heavenly ladder are the subject of many an unhappy legend. On the whole, African gods don't like to be pestered and humans have to learn to be content with their lot. But while God sits in Heaven wringing his hands in despair, the ancestral spirits are very willing to take an active part in Earthly life. These are mostly into hunting and other practical subjects— with food, sex and booze as popular as always. There is a remarkable innocence about the gods of Africa. They seem naive and unworldly, believing the best of everyone and optimistically giving the benefit of the doubt to all and sundry. No wonder they are rudely disappointed when it turns out their badly-chosen favorites are up to no good.

Like myths from other parts of the world, those of the African people reflect beliefs and values. But, while the mythologies of many cultures are carefully preserved relics of ancient times, African myths and legends are still a meaningful part of everyday life. Some African myths deal with universal themes, such as the origin of the world and the fate of the individual after death. All traditional African people agree that the soul of an individual lives on after death. Some people distinguish more than one spiritual essence living within one person, the life-soul or

biospirit which disappears at the moment of definitive death, and the thought-soul which keeps his individual identity even after it is separated from the body. The life-soul can, according to some people in Africa, be separated during a person's life, in times of danger, and be kept hidden in a safe place, so that its owner can be harmed, mortally wounded even, but not killed, as long as his life-soul is safe. When the danger is past, the life-soul can be restored to the body and the person is hale and hearty again. The thought-soul lives on after death, but not for ever, it may gradually die and be forgotten. Souls of little children who died young, those of weak minds and insignificant persons will fade away after some years lingering. If, however, an individual had a strong personality, a rich and famous man, a mother of many children, a chief, someone who was loved or admired, that soul will live on for many generations. Evil souls, too, may have a long afterlife: witches, sorcerers, the souls with a grudge, who have a score to settle, will wait for their revenge and haunt the living for years. The oldest concept of the place where the dead continue their existence is the forest. The impenetrable depth of the great forests of Africa is the heartland of the spirits and of all magical beings. In the next chapter, the importance of the forests from the mythical perspective will be analyzed.

The African have a firm belief that where there are steep rocks, the dead reside in deep, dark caves, where their souls flutter about disguised as bats. Below the surface of rivers and lakes is the habitat of many souls. Many others linger on near the graveyards where they were buried. The good souls of the loved ones who have died, the wise parent's souls still accompany their living children and grandchildren. The Yoruba (Nigerians) believe that each person has at least three spiritual beings. Firstly there is the spirit, *emi*, literally breath, which resides in the lungs and heart and is fed by the wind through the nostrils, just as the fire is fed through the twin openings in the blacksmith's bellows. This *emi* is the vital force which makes a man live, that is,

breathe, rise up, walk, be aware, be active, work, speak, see, hear and make love. There is also the shadow or shade, *ojiji*, which follows its owner like a dog. When he dies, it awaits his return in heaven. The third is the *eleda* (spirit) or *ori* (head), also translated as 'guardian soul'; from time to time it has to be fed by sacrifices. At death these spiritual aspects of a person leave the body and wait for him or her in heaven. An individual is expected to return to his clan as a newborn baby. *Babatunde*, 'Father returns' is a name which is given to a child when it resembles his father's father; *Yetunde* 'Mother returns' for a girl. Physical resemblances determine the identity of the baby. Before death, the emi-spirit may visit relatives, clan-members who will thus learn in a dream that their kinsman or woman is going to die soon. Even in daytime, the cold presence of a dying relative may be felt from far away, as if he were close by. The ghosts of those who died in mid-life may go and live in distant towns and assume a quasi-physical existence there. A man who died early in life might even marry, his wife would not even know that her husband was dead already, a mere ghost. When the final hour arrives, the man dies a second time. After death the guardian soul arrives in heaven and confesses to the Supreme God *Olorun* what it has done on earth. The good souls will then be sent to the Good Heaven, *Orun Rere*. The souls of the wicked, those who are guilty of theft, murder or cruelty, poisoning, witchcraft or slander, will be sent to *Orun Buburu*, the Bad Heaven, as punishment.

There are many other myths which spring from the continent's own settings, conditions and history. The people of Africa did not use written language until modern times. Instead, they possessed rich and complex oral traditions, passing myths, legends and history from generation to generation in the spoken form. Parrinder's illustrated volume, *African Mythology* (1967), describes the mythology of the indigenous people of Africa. In his introduction to the book, he discusses African's ancient oral tradition, noting that myths and stories have only begun to be

collected and written down in recent times. He argues that religion is an essential part of African myth, it forms—topics which include myths, beliefs and rituals associated with the creator; God; the first human beings; the mystery of birth and origins of death; gods and spirits; divinations; ancestors and witches and monsters.

In some cultures, professional storytellers—called *griots*—preserved the oral tradition. The written accounts of African mythology began to appear in the early 1800s, and present-day scholars labour to record the continent's myths and legends before they are lost to time and cultural change. African mythologies include supernatural beings that influence human life. Some of these beings are powerful deities. Others are lesser spirits, such as the spirits of ancestors as listed below.

African Deities:

Deity	**People and Region**	**Role**
Ala	Ibo, Nigeria	Mother Goddess, Ruler of the Underworld, Goddess of Fertility
Amma	Dogon, Mali Bushmen	Supreme God
Cagn	South-Western Africa	Creator God
Eshu	Yoruba, Nigeria	Trickster and Messenger God
Katonda	Buganda, East Africa	Creator God, Father of the Gods, King and Judge of the Universe
Leza	Bantu, Central and South Africa	Creator and Sky God
Mujaji	Lovedu, South Africa	Rain Goddess
Nyame	Ashanti and Akan, Ghana	Ogun

African myths sketch a conceptual world presided over by a divinity that is responsible for the emergence of humanity and the development of a community. Myths provide the legitimacy of local authority, settlement, and social organization, and describe the moral universe of the people. Mythic narratives, which Paul Ricoeur (1976) describes as primary language, offer religious perspectives on the past and the present and provide an ethos upon which to construct the future. Wole Soyinka (1999: xii) asserts:

> Man exists, however, in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context, the African world, like any other 'world' is unique. It possesses, however, in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarities. To ignore this simple route to a common humanity and pursue the alternative route of negation is, for whatever motives, an attempt to perpetuate the external subjugation of the Black continent.

Zulu, Swazi, Xhosa, Tsonga, and some Sotho myths state that people came out of a bed of reeds. Yoruba myths state that the Orishas Obatala and Oduduwa, representing Olodumare, the Supreme God, created the world and humanity. The Batammaliba people believe that Kuiye created the world and gave its people all they needed. Ogun, an important deity, is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian Apollonian and Promethean virtues. Transcending, even today, the distorted myths of his terrorist reputation, traditional poetry records him as 'protector of orphans', 'roof over the homeless', 'terrible guardian of the sacred oath; Ogun stands for a transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative justice. However, the role of the deity "Ogun" in the archetypal context will be discussed in the next chapter.

The function of myth in the postcolonial context is quite amazing as it argues that particular contexts of class configuration and state hegemony define the way myths are developed in literary genres. The paradigmatic, resonant and symbolic quality of myths means

that they cannot be easily contained and condensed. Hence, they encode resistance to the hegemonic drives found in the narratives of the state. Myth is seen to function in a normative and regulative fashion; subjects are positioned within society through the narratives that society tells itself. According to Peter Calvocoressi, “All societies rest on myths. To justify a particular view of a particular society one needs to identify its basic myths and to reflect upon their impact on the current generations.” (Quoted in Righter 1975:9). The mythological literary text is the rewriting of historical experience and seeing if it carries with it some truth-value, of a political group or culture and the cosmic narratives of deities. Historical context makes myth an appropriate form at specific times. Myth acts out dissent in ways that go beyond gesturing to and providing evidence of pre-colonial cultures and methods of organizing. It engages with dominant discourses through hollowing out potential alternatives. Such acts of postcolonial literary resistance function counter-discursively because they read the dominant colonialist discursive system as a whole in its possibilities and operations and force that discourse’s synchronic or unitary account of the cultural situation towards the movement of the diachronic. In short, myth necessarily performs an act of dissent by displaying an alternative method of societal organization and narrative construction. This organization involves the paradigmatic dissenting nature of myth; myth as paradigm cuts across the syntagmatic narrative of the state. In order to prove this, archetypes in Soyinka’s two plays, *A Dance of the Forests* (1964) and *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973) will be discussed as symbols in the form of patterns or themes which are drawn from mythology capable of evoking ultimate values of a cultural tradition. An investigation of Soyinka’s use and narration of archetypes as understood in the sense as outlined in this chapter will contribute to our understanding of the style and meaning of Soyinka’s art. Literary and mythic references will be analyzed and evaluated in Soyinka’s two plays, the meaning of which may be suggestive of total

archetypal situations. This will serve as devices for achieving many leveled meanings: irony, satire as well as pathos and emotional depth in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

A Dance of the Forests: The Role Yoruba Mythology

With the award of the Nobel Prize for literature to Wole Soyinka in 1986, the seal of international recognition was eventually laid on African Literature. The award jolted the European and American critics from their surprisingly long condescension towards the “new literatures” including the African writing in English. For once, they shed their patronizing airs and began to pay serious attention to the Anglophone African writers, in general, and to Soyinka, in particular.

Soyinka is one of the influential men of the African world of letters, among whom we may include fellow Nigerian giant Chinua Achebe, the Senegalese poet President Leopold Senghor and Kenyean activist Ngugi Wa Thong’o. Soyinka occupies a unique position particularly among the duo Nigerian writers-Chinua Achebe and John Pepper Clark. Unlike the latter, Achebe and Clark who have excelled in particular genres-Achebe in fiction and Clark in drama, respectively-Soyinka has demonstrated a consummate mastery over almost every literary genre proving his amazing versatility. Few writers would be able to match Soyinka in the volume and range of his literary output, leave alone the power of his writings. The intertextuality noted among the various genres that Soyinka has experimented with may be ascribed to the writer’s personality, which moves from one genre to another to articulate his concerns. As Jeyifo (2004:19) argues, “It is impossible to compartmentalize his different writings because of their strong overlap.” The incorporation of unfamiliar anthropological material, fictionalization of nationalist and political aspirations and the recent trend of treating social and existential problems in artistic terms have lent a complex character to African writing and Soyinka’s works being very representative share many of the concerns of the African writers.

Before Africa’s interaction with Europe, its numerous races and ethnic groups lived a simple life—in close affinity with nature. They had their rituals and observances which gave

meaning to their existence. Every small community had its own world view which was characterized by intellectual and moral-independence. In their narratives, the European adventurer and mariners, who explored Africa in the nineteenth century, had registered a great admiration for the age-old African institutions and its self-sufficient societies. In his Nobel address, Soyinka eloquently acknowledges this fact. He (1987:18) says:

> They [the adventurers] spoke of living communities which regulated their own lives, which had evolved a working relationship with Nature, which ministered to their own wants and secured their future with their future with their own genius.

Accounts of these European travelers of Africa deeply disturbed the European savants and philosophers-Hegel, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume and Voltaire, to name a few-who had held for ages a poor opinion of Africa and its people. They unabashedly believed Africa to be a "dark continent", its people barbarians and its institutions primitive. In spite of ample evidence to the contrary, they doggedly clung to this view of Africa. European scientists and theorists of human evolution have contributed enough in this regard. To meet the Africans on a reasonably equal footing and to accord them the recognition as fellow human beings was not acceptable to them. Caught in this irksome situation, the European philosophers were necessitated to denigrate Africa and its way of life. To maintain their racial superiority they took to mystification of the plain truth about Africa and consequently it remained a "dark continent", at least for the outsiders, for many more years.

The European colonizers of Africa were undoubtedly guided by the views of their philosophers. The colonists were quick to realize that economic plundering of Africa would not last long unless the exploited people were made to feel inferior to them. With this aim, they

evolved ingenious strategies to instill inferiority complex among the African natives. The independent African societies were strategically dismantled by them. The values these societies cherished since time immemorial were openly and flagrantly denigrated. Soon the cultural and religious institutions of Africa had either totally collapsed or were distorted beyond recognition. African history and culture had been misinterpreted to serve the selfish ends of the colonists:

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.
>
> (Frantz Fanon 1982:169)

The ceaseless efforts of the colonialists ultimately destroyed the very African character of these societies. As a part of effecting this miraculous historical change, the colonialists employed many passive methods like conversion of Africans to the Christian Faith and the imposition of the European methods of educating the young.

Even though the edifice of colonialism was formally dismantled in the early sixties, its evil legacy continues to characterize the social and religious institutions and tenor of life in Africa, more so in Nigeria to which Soyinka belongs. Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934, was educated in Ibadan, Nigeria, Leeds and England, where he obtained an Honors Degree in literature. Like the other reputed men of postcolonial nationalism—Nehru, Nasser and Nkrumah—Wole Soyinka is bold, brilliant and exceptionally gifted. And, like them, he has been instrumental in the construction of the patriarchal tradition of the national masculine in the postcolony; his brand of well-intentioned but youthful idealism has come to be increasingly interrogated in the wake of the failure of the nation. The brilliance of Soyinka's writings, groundbreaking in every sense of the term, remains undiminished as does his personal charisma

and near legendary status. Soyinka continues to espouse causes and struggle against injustice with a passion and conviction that strikes the practitioners of instrumental rationality in an inexplicable way.

"Justice is the first condition of humanity" is the motto that Osundare defined as Soyinka's "abiding philosophy", and stated that "the crusade for its restoration" has been one of "the defining goals of Soyinka's career as a writer and social being" (Osundare 2000:14). Even his worst enemies concede that Soyinka has displayed enormous courage and daredevilry in his denunciation of a succession of Nigerian dictators at a great cost to his life. He embodies, along with several others of the Renaissance generation, "the ideal of the aesthetic and social accountability of art" (Osundare 2000:14) that Africa demands of its writers. "I cannot conceive of my existence without political involvement", he had once confided to Henry Louis Gates Jr. in an interview (1975). In fact, he painfully realizes that, while resisting to colonialism new elites start where the departing white colonialists had left off— the process of cultural assimilation and political exploitation. Hence, he urges the African writers to become the conscience of their nations. In order to affirm his cultural self alienation and political commitment, he writes literary works such as the ritual dramatic work *A Dance of the Forests* published in 1960. In fact, Soyinka's literary output, generally, try to show the essential function of orature through the exploration of Yoruba mythology and its ritual drama. There are different traditional artworks such as visual, poetic and performed which are used by Soyinka in *A Dance of the Forests* conforming to the mythology of Yoruba.

A Dance of the Forests is, perhaps, the most difficult and complex among all the plays of Wole Soyinka on account of its archetypal characters, multiplicity of themes, complicated symbolism and multidimensional technique. Since the play was occasioned by the political event

of the Independence Day of Nigeria in 1960, Soyinka had to select a theme to suit the occasion. But, being a richly endowed mind, he was not satisfied with the topical theme. He tried to extend its scope to wider and deeper levels by enriching it with the Yoruba mythology contained in symbols and various theatrical devices. Because of its complexity of theme and technique, the play is likely to baffle the uninitiated reader. It is rather difficult for any critic to decide its meaning equally successfully in all its ramifications. In an interview with Ezekiel Mphahlele (1972:169), Soyinka remarks that he has made the abundant use of Yoruba mythology in the play. In this chapter, the Yoruba mythology in *A Dance of the Forests* will be analyzed with reference to the cultural implications and postcolonial context. An attempt will be made to find an answer to the question whether mythology is a means or mask of resistance in Soyinka.

A Dance of the Forests focuses on Yoruba tradition as an important source. The role of Yoruba mythology is an emergent tradition and art in Africa. Yoruba is one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. The majority of Yoruba speak the Yoruba language. The Yoruba constitute between 30 and 50 million individuals in West Africa and are predominantly in Nigeria with around 21 per cent of its total population. While the majority of the Yoruba live in Western Nigeria, there are also substantial indigenous Yoruba communities in the Republic of Benin, the USA, the United Kingdom and Togo. It is well-known that Yoruba culture and tradition forms the background of several contemporary written dramas. But, the importance of the Yoruba sources has not been explored in detail. One must understand that the Yoruba origins of the plays in order to appreciate their literary evolution. As in other parts of Africa, Nigerian literary genres have been inspired by traditional religious performance genres. Bakery Traore traces the journey of secular performance from festive rituals and autonomous rites and

concludes that the “process of dramatic development begins in religion and ends in aesthetics” (Traore 1972:15).

A Dance of the Forests presents a complex interplay between gods, mortals and the dead in which the ideal goal is the experience of self-discovery within the context of West African spiritualism. The living have invited two glorious forefathers to take part in a feast and celebration—the Gathering of the Tribes. The god Aroni, however, explains in the prologue that he received the permission of the Forest Head to select instead two obscure spirits of the restless dead: the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, a captain and his wife, from the army of the ancient Emperor, Mata Kharibu. These two were selected because in a previous life they had been violently abused by four of the living. The four mortals are Rola, an incorrigible whore nicknamed Madame Tortoise, who was then a queen; Demoke, now a carver and then a poet; Adenebi, now council Orator and then Court Historian; and Agboreko, Elder of Sealed Lips, a soothsayer in both existences. They have been selected because of past debauchery, which Aroni hopes can be expiated through revelation. Aroni further explains in the prologue that the Forest Head, disguised as a human, Obaneji, invites the four mortals into the forest to participate in a welcome dance for the Dead Man and the Dead Woman. Aroni takes them under his wing after the living group like Rola and others refuse to help them. The dance is interrupted by the wayward spirit Eshuoro. Eshuoro seeks vengeance for the death of Oremole, a devotee of Oro and apprentice to the carver Demoke, who killed Oremole by pulling him off the top of the araba tree that they were carving together. Ogun, the patron god of carvers, defends Demoke. Ogun (the god of iron, war and craftsmanship of the Yoruba) and Oro (the Yoruba god of punishment and death) represent the antithetical forces that continuously interact until their hypothetical synthesis, through which the mortals would attain self-understanding.

The characters of the play represent three worlds, i.e., human, natural and divine- a feature so common to Greek Tragedy and epics of the world. The human world is again divided into the ancient and contemporary ones. Firstly, the characters like Adenbi, Agboreko, Demoke and Rola represent the contemporary civilians of Nigeria, whereas the Dead Man (captain of army), the Dead Woman (the captain's wife), the Child, Mata Kharibu, the Court Historian and the Poet represent the ancient life of Nigeria. Secondly, the character like Agboreko, Araba, Obaneji the Forest Head, Murete, the tree spirits, the river spirits, the spirits of pachyderms and ants signify the natural world. Thirdly, the character like Eshuoro, Oro, Ogun etc represent the divine world. Thus, Soyinka offers a complex picture of the Nigerian life where the human, the natural and the divine worlds are interrelated symbiotically. Almost all the characters carry the archetypal import as discussed below.

Forest Father or Forest Head, the chief god, who controls the universe of this play, is called Osanyin in the pantheon of Yoruba gods. He is the supreme arbiter who rules both humans and lesser gods. Because he represents the divine qualities of justice and mercy, he despairs the continuous evil of humanity's history but believes that humankind may be improved if mortals can be made to admit the consequences of their acts as part of history. He designs the dance to expose past and present wickedness. In his mortal guise, he masquerades as Obaneji who leads the party into the forest.

> FOREST HEAD [more to himself]: Trouble me no further. The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden- to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness- knowing full

well, it is all futility. Yet I must do this alone, and no more, since to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction…

(76)

Aroni who opens the play is the messenger of the great Forest Head, and it is he who selects the dead man and woman who reflect the violent past that lives on in the grim practices of the present-day characters.

ARONI: [Enter Aroni, the one-legged. He looks as if he is going to hope right past the tree when he stops suddenly gives it a stout wallop. The tree demon yelps].

ARONI: So you are not afraid…Today when Forest Head needed you all. You meant to desert him.

(12)

Eshuro, one of the aspects of Oro, is God of the dead. He has the qualities of the Yoruba God of mischief, Eshu. He is spiteful and antagonistic to humankind and demands from Forest Head vengeance against Demoke. It is his final chance to destroy the human race, as he so bitterly desires.

ESHURO: Demoke, son and son to carvers, who taught you how you impale me,abuse me! Scratching my shame to the dwellers of hell, where the womb-snake shudders and the world is set on fire…Demoke, son and son again to pious carvers, have you lost fear? Demoke, renegade, beware the slanted eye of night. Beware the anger of the silent wind that rustles not a leaf. I'll be revenged. Eshuro, I, I'll be revenged, I'll be revenged…

(44)

Agboreko, an Elder of the Sealed Lips, exists as a soothsayer between the two existences. He is an intermediary between the living people on Earth and the spirits in the Forest.

He is the most stuffy and serious character. He completely lacks the sense of humour and often full of the sense of his own importance. He is the embodiment of sterility, emptiness and parsimony.

> AGBOREKO: If they are dead and we are the living, then we are their children. They shan't curse us.
>
> (37)

Rola, the eternal whore, queen in the ancient court of Mata Kharibu, also called Madame Tortoise because of the image that once was on her back, she will not turn herself over. She is projected as a tormentor and sexual sadist. She demands the attention and subjugation of all men. In one evidence of her cruel nature, she orders the passivist army captain (the Dead Man) to be castrated for rejecting her sexual overtures. Now reduced to an actual prostitute, she continues her sexual scandals in modern times when two of her lovers die, one by murder and one by suicide. She is the female black widow spider in human form.

> ROLA: Go. It is people like you…..Pshn Since when did I ever begin to waste a glance on fools. You know that, I hope you are a fool. A foolish man. The word has meaning when I look at you. I wouldn't be sorry to see you under the ground, except that it would not be because you were me lover.
>
> (23)

> MADAME TORTOISE: Call me by my name. Madame Tortoise. I am the one who outlasts you all. Madame Tortoise. You are a man; I swear I must respect you.
>
> (56-57)

Adenebi, a corrupt official, indifferent to decency and principle, is concerned only with being paid for his patronage. He now has the position of a council orator and uses pompous

rhetoric while as in early times, he was the court historian and cruelly sent innocent men to their deaths. He exemplifies political immorality.

> ADENEBI: I suppose you didn't really run merely because you were beset by your relations. They simply did not leave you room to entertain your lovers… (24)

> HISTORIAN: It is unheard of. War is the only consistency that past ages afford us. It is the legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. (51)

The Dead Man is revived from his earlier existence as a captain in the army of the dead emperor Mata Kharibu. He has refused to serve in the emperor's unjust wars. As a punishment, he is sold into slavery and castrated on the instructions of the jealous empress.

> DEAD MAN: It was a mistake from the beginning. It is a long way to travel the under streams to be present where the living make merry. What is it to me? I want nothing more. Nothing at all...
>
> (8)

> WARRIOR: Mata Kharibo is a leader, not merely of soldiers but of men. Let him turn the unnatural pattern of men always eating up one another. (50)

The Dead Woman is Dead Man's wife. She is equally dirty, ragged and squalid, a far cry from the visions of lovely opulence from the other world that were anticipated to arrive. She was killed while pregnant. If her child can now be brought to birth, it will establish the future of the human race. In her crude way, she supplies the continuity of life that derives from motherhood and offers life even under degraded conditions.

> DEAD WOMAN: Better not to know the bearing
> Better not to know the weaning

I who know the branded navel
Shudder at the visitation
Shall my breast again be severed
Again and yet again be severed.
From its right of sanctity?
Child, your hand is pure as sorrow
Free me of the endless burden,
Let this gourd, let this gourd
Break beyond my hearth…

(70)

All the characters are layered in and out with Yoruba mythic colour and hence have been projected with utmost dexterity by Soyinka. Characters like Eshuro and Ogun are based on the gods inspired from mythology. The Yoruba mythological issue finds a place in the play through the belief of a transition from the human to the divine essence. In other words, the primal essence of human beings is inspired from the Yoruba mythology. In fact, Soyinka uses Yoruba mythic figures through his archetypal characterization which is applied as a narrative device in the play. The play's characters are one of the human community representatives in Soyinka's literary output. Demoke, whose power is endowed by the creative god Ogun, is aware of his destructive power and is propelled toward redemption. Therefore, Demoke stands for the hope that Nigerians had in finding solution to the Nigerian sociopolitical hardships. Hence, the first Yoruba elements that stand out in the play are the names of the characters, both human and divine, and the forest setting. As gods are believed to inhabit trees in the Yoruba mythology, so do they in the play. The Yoruba names and setting locate the play unmistakably in a physical Yoruba world.

Apart from the mortal characters in the play, the deity characters have an important role to play in terms of the Yoruba mythology. Soyinka (1976:1) says that gods though, unquestionable, have a significant role to play in the drama and their symbolic roles are identified by man as the role of an intermediary quester, an explorer into the territories of essence-ideal around whose edges man fearfully skirts. When in the play Eshuro wants to seek vengeance from Demoke and is at his wits end, Ogun makes his entry as a rescue ranger just to help out Demoke:

> OGUN: Face to face at last Eshuro. Do you come here with your loud words and empty boasts? Souless one, Demoke is no empty nut that fell, motherless from the sky. In all that he did, he followed my bidding. I will speak for him.
>
> (158)

Of Yoruba deities, especially that of Ogun, Soyinka refers as the protagonists to the Prometheus spirit god Ogun: "Ogun is the embodiment of challenge the Promethean instinct in man, constantly at the service of society for its full realization" (1976:30). In order to save poor Demoke from the vicious Eshuro, Ogun blurts out categorically to Aroni, "Aroni let my servant go. He has suffered enough" (1973:59). In the essay "The Fourth Stage: Ogun/Origin of Yoruba Tragedy" (2007:369), Soyinka assigns role to Ogun according to the Yoruba mythology:

> Ogun is the embodiment of will, and the will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man. Only one who has himself undergone the experience of disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and whose psychic resources laid under stress by the forces most inimical to individual assertion, only he can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions.

Though Ogun makes his appearance in the play for a short period of time as compared to other characters, even then he acts as the most important character in the play almost pivotal in the machinery of the Yoruba mythology. In *Myth, Literature And The African World* (1976), Soyinka lays further stress on the importance of Ogun by saying, “Ogun becomes a key figure in understanding the Yoruba metaphysical world. The gulf is what must constantly be diminished (or rendered less threateningly remote) by sacrifices, rituals, ceremonies of appeasement to the cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf.” Osundare (1983) draws parallel between some of the deities and his characters which are employed as archetypal narrative devices. Besides, Osundare deals with issue about the religious link between the Yoruba divine figures and the human community. Hence, Soyinka posits that the reference to Yoruba gods is very essential in Yoruba religion which is one of the prominent aspects of African Negro Aesthetics. For the playwright, it is through this ritual enactment of self discovery that a human being can be aware of his condition in order to better face socio-political problems. Soyinka, as a postmodernist writer, uses his literary trend as narrative structure in the play to examine the binary opposite forces- Ogun’s destructive and creative forces.

Supernatural beings and human community are, therefore, very meaningful as an oral tradition in *A Dance of the Forests.* Soyinka comments in this regard:

> And yet the Yoruba does not for that reason fail to distinguish between himself and the deities, between himself and the ancestors, between the unborn and his reality….Spiritually, the primordial disquiet of the Yoruba psyche may be expressed as the existence in collective memory of a primal severance in transitional ether, whose first effective defiance is symbolized in the myth of the gods descend to the earth and the battle with immense chaotic growth which had sealed off reunion with man.
>
> (1973:366)

The gulf which separates the deities and the living people represented through Soyinka's abyss of transition is expressed through elements of African Negro aesthetics, especially the use of Yoruba ritual artworks as narrative devices. The play presents the symbiosis of the world of the living and the supernatural through the techniques of characterization which is suggestive of the political and social upheavals in post-independent Nigeria. It is also expressive of hope for a better future, as towards the end of the play we get to hear from Agboreko,

> "Does that mean something wise, child?
> Of the future did you learn anything?"

The central event in the play happens to be the ritualistic ceremony called the gathering of the tribes and welcoming of the dead. The Gathering of the Tribe possesses some semblance of the many festivals in Yoruba sacred society, as do the rituals of sacrifice and appeasements. The festival tradition was and continues to be a popular form of communal art among the Yoruba:

> Life, for the Yoruba, has endless resources of joy and can provide pleasure…No major achievement in the life of an individual, a group or a community is considered possible without the active support of the supernatural.
>
> (Ogunba 1973:87)

Rituals and other forms of interaction between the human and the spirit world, ranging from rites of passage to annual festivals, are plentiful. These, as Akinwumi Isola (1981:399) writes, were probably not enough to satisfy the Yoruba's insatiable appetite for "merry-making and for spectacular shows". Thus, the tradition of the masquerades began.

The masquerades as part of poetic arts are considered by Soyinka as the core of African-Negro aesthetics. In fact, Soyinka also uses poetic arts to portray Yoruba ritual drama. There are many cases of performed masquerades, in *A Dance of the Forests*, with basic artistic materials such as masks, music and dance. In this context, the performer is no longer considered as a simple living person but a spirit. Hence, Soyinka adopts Yoruba masquerade called "elgungun" as a narrative device through mask –motif of the three mortals such as Demoke, Rola, and Adenebie's passive state of mind while they are reliving their past crimes (*A Dance of the Forests* 1973:63). In the play, the Forest Father wants to conduct the gathering of the tribes in order to chorus the Future through the lips of earth beings. Therefore, the gathering of the tribes is contained with the confessions of earth-creatures like the Spirit of the Palm, the Spirit of Darkness, the Spirit of Precious Stones, the Spirit of Pachyderms, the Spirit of the Rivers, the Chorus of the Waters, the Spirit of the Sun, the Spirit of Volcanoes and the three protagonists are masked and reduced to a state of resigned passivity. The Forest Father is there supervising the programme of listening to the, Ants and Ant Leaders who narrate their dilemmas. After the confessions from these creatures are over, the three protagonists are unmasked so that they can see the rest of the function with their natural eyes. Now the unmasked triplets begin to express their newly-earned wisdom through formulas. The first of the triplet says that he is the End that will justify the Means. The second confesses that he is the Greater Cause. And the third triplet declares that he is the posterity:

FIRST TRIPLET: [speaking as he comes in]: Has anyone found the Means? I am the End that will justify it. [The interpreter turns and does a round of 'ampe' with him. Enter Second Triplet. An over-blown head, drooling.]

SECOND TRIPLET: I am the Greater Cause, standing ever ready, excusing crimes of today for tomorrow's mirage. Hungry come, hearing there was a feast for the

dead…Am I expected? [The interpreter and the Second Triplet 'ampe', then interpreter with the First, and then the two Triplets together.]

SECOND TRIPLET: [stops suddenly. Goes to where Demoke, etc., stand huddled together. Sniffs them, turns them to the Interpreter.]:
But who are these?

FOREST HEAD: They are the lesser criminals, pursuing the destructive path of survival. Weak, pitiable, criminals, hiding their cowardice in sudden acts of bluster. And you obscenities …

THIRD TRIPLET: I find I am posterity. Can no one see on what milk I have been nourished?
(1973:69)

Soyinka says in "The Fourth Stage" that, "the mask, however, also functions from the same source as its music—from the archetypal essences whose language derives not from the plane of physical reality or ancestral memory but from the numerous territory of transition into which the artist obtains fleeting glimpses by ritual, sacrifice and a patient submission of rational awareness to the moment when fingers and voice relate the symbolic language of cosmos" (2007:371). The dance and music used in the play certainly embody Yoruba mythic beliefs. In fact, music is an echo from the void and the celebrant speaks, sings, and dances in an authentic archetypal images from the abyss. The celebrant refers to the Dirge man who sings and dances for the welcoming of the Dead couple with the accompaniment of the music represented through the drum and flute's rhythm in the second part of the play:

DIRGE-MAN: Move on eyah! Move apart
I felt the wind breathe—no more
Keep away now. Leave the dead
Some room to dance.
If you see the banana leaf
Freshly fibrous like a woman's breasts

If you see the banana leaf
Shred itself, thread on thread
Hang wet as the crepe of grief
Don't say it's the wind. Leave the dead
Some room to dance.

AGBOREKO: The loft is not out of reach when the dust means to settle. Oracle to the living and silence.

[The Old Man turns away, disappointed. The dancer does not, of course, ever stop, although the drumming is lowered for Agboreko and for the dirge-man]

DIRGE-MAN: [goes to the drummer and gives him the two-fisted greeting. The acolyte, who has finished her sprinkling, Begins to dance softly, growing rapidly more intense]: Ah Your hands are vanished and if it thunders. We know where the hands are gone. But we name no names. Leave the dead. Some room to dance.

(36-37)

The motif of dance as contained in the title is to illustrate the rhythm of a life that is not necessarily physical. There are some dance segments in the Play such as dance of exorcism, the dance of welcome, the dance of half-child and the dance of the unwilling sacrifice; all directs the importance of dance towards the dramatic technique:

> The word "dance" operates at various levels of meaning in the play, and is not always associated with agitated body movement. In most of the Yoruba ritual dances, a step or two might be sufficient. We have dance as drama, dance as ritual, dance as the movement of transition, and dance as festival. The entire dramatic enactment itself, as the title the play implies, is conceived as dance.
>
> (Maduakar 1991:178)

The usage of dance as ritual is more significant in the play. According to Thompson ritual is an essential element in the traditional African theatre. He (1941:64) continues:

> In the song and dance of the mimetic rite, each performer withdrew, under the hypnotic effect of rhythm, from the consciousness of reality, which was peculiar to himself, individual, into the subconscious world of fantasy, which was common to all, collective, and from that inner world they return charged with new strength for action. Poetry and dancing which grew out of the mimetic rite, are speech and gesture raised to a magical level of intensity. For a long time, in virtue of their common origin and function, they were inseparable.

Music, mask and dance form an important component of the ritual. They are of prime importance as they carry the mythic import in an outstanding manner. The void between past and present is filled with the help of the trio (music, dance and masks) by the playwright. Soyinka moves to retrieve and chant Yoruba culture in *A Dance of the Forests.* In the aesthetic perspective, characters such as Yoruba supernatural beings and the living people share the same universe with the mediation of traditional aesthetics which play essential role because it ensures social harmony.

CHORUS OF THE WATERS: Let no man then lave his feet
In any stream, in any lake
In rapids or in cataracts
Let no man think to bake
Her cornmeal wrapped in leaves
With water gathered of the rain
He'll think his eye deceives
Who treads the ripples where I run
As kernels, his the presser's feet
Standing in the rich, and red, and cloying Stream

SPIRIT OF THE RIVERS: Then shall men say that I the Mother
Have joined veins with the Palm my Brothers.

CHORUS OF THE WATERS: Let the Camel mend his leaking hump
Let the squirrel guard the hollows in the stump.
[The distant noise grows more insistent. What appears to be a cloud of dust begins to rise steadily, darkening the scene. Aroni moves with sudden determination towards the Figure in Red, but the interpreter

begins a sudden dance which comes between them, and Aroni is forced retreat.]

INTERPRETER: Spirit of the sun! Spirit of the sun!

SPIRIT OF THE SUN: Red is the pit of the sun's entrails, and I
Who light the crannies of the bole
Would speak, but shadows veil the eye
That pierces with the thorn. I know the stole
That warms the shoulders of the moon.
But this is not its shadow. And I trace
No course that leaves a cloud. The sun cries Noon
Whose hand is it that covers up his face!

(66-67)

Such a social idealism shows the effectiveness of Black aesthetics which is materialized through Yoruba tradition. For Yoruba social hierarchy, the carver such as Demoke occupy us a considerable place since he incarnates the spirits power. They are viewed as historical and religious conservators. In fact, their sculptural artworks are considered as spiritual in Yoruba traditional beliefs. Concerning the alleged European individualistic art such as painting, Soyinka depicts it as capable to convey the collective consciousness and the religious beliefs of one ethnic group. As underlined in *The Columbia Encyclopedia,* dialectical Marxism, known also as dialectical materialism, is:

> a theory in which basic tenets are that every material and change takes places through the "struggle of opposition"… Central to historical materialism is the belief that change takes place through the meeting of the two opposite forces–thesis and antithesis.

However, Soyinka has a particular adoption of dialectical Marxism in *A Dance of the Forests.* In fact, in Soyinka's work dialectical Marxism is less dialectical, more destructive in its contempt for those elites and institutions to which the committed artist finds himself naturally opposed. Actually, instead of trying to trigger new projects of socio-economic development for African

nation, the new elites take benefit from the country's welfare. Consequently, there is a division of the social pattern in the ruling class and the victims who are mainly composed of the working class. Nevertheless, Black intellectual from the middle class is, more or less, the suitable individual who finds solutions by making the masses aware of their precarious social situation. In *A Dance of the Forests*, Soyinka adopts dialectical materialism in a historical perspective. In the play, dialectical Marxism is symbolized through the confrontation between the monarchy symbolized by King Mata Kharibo and Queen Madame Tortoise and their subjects characterized through the Warrior. The corrupted Court Physician tries to reason the Captain who confronts King Mata Kharibu:

> PHYSICIAN: Was ever a man so bent on his own destruction…
>
> WARRIOR: Mata Kharibu is leader, not merely of soldiers but of men.
> Let him turn the unnatural pattern of men always eating up one another.
>
> (49-50)

The need to change conscious self urges Soyinka to question inglorious historical events. It is illustrated by S. Haney (1990) in these words:

> By reliving their previous incidents of their present crimes, the mortals (Demoke, Rola, and Adenebi) reveal the functioning of no changing pure consciousness that is the basis for historical change. For Soyinka, the artists, represented through Demoke, have to take part in the struggle for historical change. By and large, Soyinka's dialectical Marxism is more bent to the role of the artist regarding to Nigerian postcolonial Morality and the Yoruba Aesthetics.

The artist, according to Soyinka, has got a prime role to play the role of revolutionary and he, as an artist, heralds the people of the upcoming change in the socio-political conditions of Nigeria.

In the dumb-show at the end of the play, “Dance of the Unwilling Sacrifice”, Demoke’s totem is silhouetted as the towns people dance around it. A totem, as an archetype, is symbolic of the regeneration of the tribes, recollection and solidarity. So it was ordered to be carved by Demoke. Demoke took three days and three nights to carve it. But, the paradox is that Demoke who carves the totem is himself subjected to deep envy and causes the death of Oremole. Soyinka seems to satirize the blatant gap between the ugly reality and the high ideal of regeneration. As Eldred Jones (1971:135) points out, “Demoke’s totem in *A Dance of the Forests* towers above both the vandalism of the councilors and his own petty human jealousy. There seems to be a persistent hint that the world could be saved only through the artistic, the creative, but spiritual progress is slow.” The significance of the totem is very great for the nation. It is explained by Adenbi:

> An occasion such as the gathering of the tribes. It would happen only once in several lifetimes…It is a whole historical approach in itself. We resolved to carve a totem that would reach to the sky.
>
> (1973: 20)

Although *A Dance of the Forests* offered to a nation to celebrate its independence, the irony is that the victim of its satire is Nigeria itself. Completely devoid of nostalgia, Soyinka boldly deromanticises his characters by focusing on delusion, death and betrayal. The great gathering of the tribes corresponds to the birth of a nation, but the heady excitement of the present, bolstered by a glorious heritage, is satirically complemented by a glimpse of the disquieting truths of the human condition accumulated throughout the ages. The gathering of the tribes is motivated by a desire of collecting the great people of the past like warriors, sages, conquerors, builders and mystics in order to resurrect the past glory of the nation. But, the irony is that Soyinka seems to suggest and satirize that something has gone wrong somewhere and

consequently the very purpose of the grand programme has been reversed. The Old Man, father of Demoke, points out to Adenbi:

> Yes, it was a fine speech. But control, at some points was lost of our enemies. The guests we were sent were slaves and lackeys. They have only come to undermine our strength. To preach to us how ignoble we are. They are disgruntled creatures who have come to accuse their tormentors as if this were a court of law.
>
> (1973: 21)

The disappointingly wide gap between the dream and harsh reality is satirized by the playwright through the character of Adenbi who says:

> I see. I had thought how splendid it would all be. Purple robes. White horses dressed in gold. Processions through the town with communion and service around our symbol…By the way I really ought to tell you how disappointed I was with your son's handiwork. Don't you think it was rather pagan? I should have thought that something more in keeping with our progress would be more appropriate.
>
> (1973: 22)

The Gathering of the Tribes happens to be rather a disappointing one. All the dreams and ideals of the people seem to be frustrated by the inimical forces. Soyinka seems to suggest that although the Africans have a rich religion, mythology and pantheon of gods, they have to rely upon themselves for their actions.

> FOREST HEAD: Trouble me no further. The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden-to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness-knowing full well, it is all futility
>
> (1973:71)

Similarly, he seems to suggest that the ancients have become dysfunctional and even disrespectable in the present although they happened to be ideal and integrated people in the past. For Soyinka, then, Africa has an inglorious past; his technique is to expose this reality through the metaphysical elements of Yoruba cosmology. Expecting to worship their historic magnificence, the African audience instead looks back across time to a whore as queen, a barbaric king and a subjugated people.

Soyinka is very dubious about the future of the country because of the corruption in bureaucracy, exploitation of the countless anonymous citizens, selfishness and so on. In an interview with Lewis Nkosi, Soyinka reveals his purpose about the use of myth in the play:

> In *A Dance of the Forests*, I was very much conscious of all the potentialities of existing theatrical idioms in Nigeria and there was only one thing which motivated, may be, guided the form and the shape of the play or the eventual fate of the characters…I consciously tried to preach or bring out, you know, a series of symbolism at all, but the main thing was the realization that human beings are destructive all over the world.
>
> (1972:173)

In the play the warrior acts as the mouth-piece of Soyinka when he says that "unborn generations will be cannibals most worshipful physicians. Unborn generations will, as we have done, eat up one another" (*A Dance of the Forests* 1973:49). So Yoruba mythology has served the main purpose of bringing home the message of the utmost devastation that is waiting for Africa. The materialism is creeping slowly in the guise of the technocratic icons and virtually handicapping our lives when we are bound to give up every single precious virtue for the devil of luxury. Hence, the post of postcolonial is to be seen in the context of colonial era in which one mimics the colonizer just to live up to his cannibalism.

The contemporary African world also seems to be one of conflict and corruption. Agboreko, Adenbi, Demoke, Obaneji and Rola are five major characters who represent the modern African World. They are all aware of the great function i.e., gathering of the tribe and welcome of the dead that is going to be celebrated shortly. A part of the forest has been cleared for the programme and a totem has been ordered to be cleared by Demoke. But, their conversation reveals the picture of the present life, which is not a happy one. It is marked by corruption, selfishness and inhumanity. Obaneji, for example, knows too much about the corruption of his countrymen to be happy about it. He asks Rola:

> Don't misunderstand me. It is just that I work as a filing clerk for the Courts. Senior clerk, mind you. I know about people even before I've met them. Know their whole history sometimes.
>
> (1973:15)

Further, he illustrates his knowledge of official secrets with some important case histories. For example, he narrates the history of a motar lorry nicknamed as Chimney of Ereko as it smoked like a perpetual volcano and had survived eight crashes. Then, he narrates the history of another lorry called the Incinerator, which had a capacity of forty, but the clerk took a substantial bribe and changed its capacity from forty to seventy. He further tells how the lorry caught fire and burnt sixty five passengers to ashes.

> OBANEJI: Before I tell you, I must let you know the history of the lorry. When it was built, someone looked at it, and decided that it would only take forty men. But the owner took it to the council……now, my friend, this is something for you to investigate. One of your office workers took a real substantial bribe. And he changed the capacity to seventy.
>
> (1973:18)

Here Soyinka seems to convey that bureaucratic corruption is rampant even today in Africa and there seems to be no remedy against it. Through the play, Soyinka wants to reform his

countrymen as he anticipates a safe and happy future for them which will be free from the dross of corruption.

Africa is grounded in cultural values which may be viewed either as the standard of conduct that Africans have constructed for themselves or as the body of obligation or duties which they need to follow strictly. But in the postcolonial context, the new elites became more and more immoral by corrupting the whole Nigerian social system. That is why Africa represents the lost cultural heritage for West. Therefore, Soyinka analyses Yoruba mythology and ritual drama as capable of conveying and preserving Yoruba cultural values in *A Dance of the Forests*. However, myth is defined as related to a particular civilization, group of people, or to a religion and particularly Greek and Latin myth is closer to nature and the sacred. It also encompasses moral values. That is why, Soyinka posits out that Yoruba tragedies, mainly related to Ogun, emerge as the principal features of the drama of the gods. It is within their framework that the traditional society poses its social questions or formulates its moralities.

Soyinka offers solution to the problems of Nigerian society but in an ambivalent way. The past is presented as sinister and even the present is painted all in gray. The reader is left in a vacuum to answer the question that if atonement of the sins is the solution then that is too far from being practical? Nigeria which was recently set free from the shackles of colonialism is on the way to a new and glorious independent journey. But, Soyinka turns low the morale of Nigerians by accusing them of inglorious past and a corrupt present. The climax of *A Dance of the Forests* contains the “Dance of the Half-Child” and the “Dance of the Unwilling Sacrifice” in which Demoke ascends towards an experience of the self. At this point Demoke comes to himself and in the “Dance of the Half-child”, tries to rescue the Half-Child from the fate of being continually “born dead”. The significance of Demoke’s intervention is not that it liberates the

Half-Child—this is beyond him—but that he has taken the first tangible step towards his own redemption. The Half-child is the representative of future and even there we can sense pessimism of Soyinka as when the Half-child is born, he is more morbid than being lively and says:

> HALF-CHILD: I who flee from womb
> To branded womb, cry it now
> I'll be born dead
> I'll be born dead.
>
> (64)

Soyinka (1990) says that the expression "The child is father of the man" becomes not merely a metaphor of development, one that is rooted in a system of representative individuation, but a proverb of human continuity which is not uni-directional. For Soyinka, in the Yoruba world-view, the world of unborn is older than the world of the living as the world of living is older than the world of ancestors. Hence, the Half-Child in the play stands for the next post-colonial breed of Nigerians and Soyinka declares them spiritually and morally dead. The chain of the dead breed is a continuous one and he offers no tangible solution to break it. Mary T. David (1995) says that the criticism of Soyinka for the past and present of his country is harsh and unsparing but Soyinka also gives a remedy or at least points out the path the nation should follow in order to avoid a catastrophic course. This path is the path of regeneration through atonement. But Mary T. David fails to get hold of the loop-hole. The carver (Demoke) of the symbol of regeneration (totem) is himself a murderer and hence the redemption is like a far-fetched dream. We see towards the end of the play, Eshuoro sets fire to Demoke's tree of transition, from which he falls into the arms of Ogun, the patron god of carvers. Thus, Demoke's rebirth is symbolized not with words, but with dance and music. The impulse toward transcendence originates not

from the Forest Dwellers, but from within each mortal, from their inner gods that the Forest personifies. Therefore, in midst of the blotted past and murky present Soyinka draws road map to future but the foggy route is lost in its own twists.

The characters belonging to the past, like Rola (Madam Tortoise), Mata Kharibo, Obaneji and so on, who present a microcosm of the traditional heritage, have been given a lethal projection. The playwright seems more ashamed of his past and therefore exhibits little pride in the projection of the Yoruba mythology. Nigeria was in dire need of establishing a link with the past but scanty effort has been taken by Soyinka at this front. Moreover, the trauma of colonialism has not been touched in the play though a Slave-dealer does make his appearance in the play but the subject of colonialism has been ignored.

The Gathering of the Tribes referred to in the play is, therefore, the new Nigerian polity. The Tribes celebration is, however, dented by the fact that (i) the commissioned totem which was supposed to represent the spirit of the gathering turns out to be a sacrilegious epitome of evil and (ii) the representatives of the proud ancestral past turn out to be victims of past despotism and violence crying for justice. Their presence causes a play-within-a-play, depicting past evil, to be enacted. The work ends in a spate of negative prophetic utterances and a climactic failure to lead a half-child (abiku) to safety. The play, therefore, aimed at countering the (now) unfounded euphoria of the independence days. Why celebrate the birth of an abiku? But, like the officials in the play, the Nigerian officials in charge of the independence celebrations rejected the play.

The play is infused with a sense of the futility of human actions. It dramatizes the mankind's cycle of failure in the bid for moral evolution. Not only does it suggest the existence

of a supernatural conspiracy against mankind, it portrays man himself as being, as it were, genetically prone to evil. The efforts of the protagonist avail little in influencing the final outcome of events. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the chief protagonist, Demoke, is a thoughtful and reticent artist who is made to recognize, through the revelation of a past epoch in which he had been active, the continual re-enactment of man's evil nature generation after generation. Towards the end, Aroni says to Demoke:

> ARONI: Demoke, you hold a doomed thing in your hand.
> It is no light matter to reverse the deed that
> was begun many lives ago.
>
> (76)

What he is called upon to do to free mankind from this cycle of failure is revealed only at a symbolic level (he should lead the half-child, itself a symbol of a threatened posterity, through the Forest, to the light of day). But, by the end of the play, it becomes evident that apart from attaining an indeterminate kind of quietist wisdom he fails to accomplish this mission or any other thing significant enough to liberate mankind from the destructive path of survival. His totem would seem to be the most significant of all his actions in the play. But even this is ultimately ineffectual. Man's perennial attempt to redefine his existence and participate in the formulation of his destiny appears to be consistently frustrated by a cast-iron determinism. The determinism is two-faceted. On the one hand, tragedy is imposed by motiveless malignant existential or supernatural agencies, on the other hand, man's nature is partly responsible for the misfortunes. It is this blend of hubris and dike that makes attempts by man to challenge his fate tragically heroic.

Soyinka hints at the possibility of a new beginning that would be properly seen as running counter to the internal logic of the dramatic events. It is true that the Ants talk of “the good to come” and of a time when the “ring of scourges” would be complete and the hair would rise on tails like scorpions (1973:79). A good time would, hopefully, come when the persecuted would violently free themselves from the bondage of tyranny. But what we witness is the drama of human failure in the bid to bring about this good-time. What is dramatized in his rebellion is therefore the impotence of this outcry. As the Historian rightly tells him, “This thing cannot last. It is unheard of. In a thousand years it will be unheard of…You only throw your life away uselessly” (1973:57). Forest Head, referring to him later, describes him as part of the waste of history (1973:70), and this is a man who refuses to fight a frivolous and unjust war. It is significant that he is emasculated and thus becomes a symbol of helpless rage and perpetual impotence. His wife too, by dying pregnant and being perpetually in that state (as Dead Woman) is another form of impotence (this is despite her bold affront in storming into the courts of Mata Kharibu pleading for the release of her husband). The couple’s actions are portrayed as unconstructive and foolish, lacking any fruit or significance. The Questioner therefore puts it aptly when he says of Dead Man:

> Three lives he boasted of and each. A complete waste foolishly cast aside. What did he prove, from the first when, power at his grasp, he easily surrendered his manhood. It was surely the act of fool.
>
> (71)

Towards the end of the play, the reader is left questioning himself whether any hope for a better future is left or not. To the utter dismay of the reader, the play ends at in a pessimistic note. Annemarie Heywood (2004:131) says that at the end, “the reader is left with an

intolerable open paradox—the choice of a man to drown and a disequilibrium calling for commitment and action". She goes on to say that, "*A Dance of the Forests* ends this way too." If this is true of *A Dance of the Forests*, it ought to be true also of Demoke's ugly totem; a symbol or picture of mankind's fulfilled evil, a kind of artistic representation of the tragic nature of man as crystallized in the person of Madam Tortoise. Like tragic drama, the totem should unfold to man the bestial depth of his depraved soul and create in him tragic recognition. Thus, the totem ought to have the same kind of effect that the presence of the accusing ancestors has on the community. Meanwhile, the community refuses to be accused on that glorious day of their celebration. Even the play-within-the-play, revealed to what might be described as a representative selection from the community, fails to reveal any change more tangible than an indeterminate 'quietist wisdom' in its audience. The Forest Head half-soliloquizes in disillusionment at the end of the play within-the play:

> Trouble me no further. The foolishness of beings whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden-to pierce the encrustation of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness…knowing full well, it is all futility.
>
> (81)

His disillusion is in consonance with what we see dramatized. The spirits of the Palm, the Dark, Precious Stones, Pachyderms, Rivers and the chorus of waters, all without exception, prophesy future doom and high-light the evil nature of man. Man's future as we see symbolized by the first-triplet is headless end.

It is possible that since the Gathering of the Tribes finally makes sacrifice and seeks the path of expiation (instead of the earlier offensive stance when it had refused to look at the

images of its ignominious past) it probably shares in the tuition which Demoke likens to searing lightening. But even if this is so, there is no evidence that this tuition is affected through any human action. Had the desire for expiation been linked with Demoke's totem, it would have become evident that Soyinka has faith in the ability of tragic art to awaken the slumbering Nigerian masses, in particular, and mankind in general. However, the way the play ends, the value of the tragic recognition becomes even questionable. Soyinka fails to dramatize the barely implied sense of hope for the future. When Demoke ends the play with the pessimistic "And the lightning made his bid—in vain", he re-unites the movement of the play with its tragic highlights and creates the impression that the paradoxical verbally-asserted hope is little more than a poetic fancy.

Through out the play, gods and mortals strive for the unity which is latent but only stabilized in the conscious mind when self-knowledge enlivens the whole person across the boundaries of time and space. The folkloric relation between the gods and the play's aesthetic dimension reveals Soyinka's belief in the need for modern Africa to revive the culture of transcendence. The quest for moral regeneration and reinforcement is served through Yoruba mythology, when Soyinka's theme expresses the Yoruba belief in harmony with the cosmic realm. His awareness of the relevance of Yoruba myths and worldview to contemporary society was vindicated when Nigeria's seven year independence erupted into a three-year civil war.

In short, the mythic inner world of *A Dance of the Forests* combines both inner and outer reality, the psychic as well as the temporal in which it subsists and thus teaches that in the struggle for moral evolution, man is recurrently defeated by his own nature. Those who rebel against this inexorably tragic fate succeed only in making futile gestures of defiance. The main stream of society moves on towards a grim future unperturbed Soyinka's notion of transition—of

transcending to a deeper experience of the transitional gulf—cannot be separated from the African context of being and historical continuity. Besides, Soyinka uses myth to awaken black consciousness regarding their changing society under Western culture's influence and to help Africans renew with their cultural values. He has relentlessly struggled against assimilation which goes with a disdain of tradition conveyed through cultural values. Some of his characters face a dilemma, having to choose between their ancestor's heritage and the material values from Western countries. However, Soyinka suggests responses to cultural dilemma through the Yoruba theological principles, which can be considered as a means to struggle against cultural domination and the new leader's greediness. Concisely, African literature, including oral literature, has been a means for African writers to examine and affirm African cultural values and to resist to Eurocentric thread on African society. In fact, while European views of literature often stress on separation of art and content, African one considers art as conscious-writing. Black aesthetics is conveyed through oral literature by means of mythic or historical texts, narrative epic, ritual verse and plastic arts such as sculpture and painting in *A Dance of the Forests*. Though Soyinka does not grant radical responses to postcolonial threads as the Nigerian and South African writers Chinua Achebe and Alex La Guma have done in their literary works, he posits African Negro aesthetics, essentially Yoruba mythology as a means of mild resistance to Western indoctrination.

Chapter 3

The Bacchae of Euripides: A Postcolonial Revision of an Ancient Myth

Soyinka's harrowing experiences with the oppressive forces after the Nigerian Independence made him a kind of a revolutionary. In October 1969, when the civil war came to an end, amnesty was proclaimed, and Soyinka was released from prison. For the first few months after his release, Soyinka stayed at a friend's farm in southern France where he sought solitude after the period of mental stagnation. From this experience emerged *The Bacchae of Euripides*, a reworking of the Pentheus myth. K.E.Senanu appreciates the play by asserting:

> *The Bacchae* which Euripides (480-406 BC) wrote towards the end of his life, while he was in self-exile in Macdon, has always been recognized for his astonishing power, for classical simplicity and rigor of its structure and for the remarkable nature of its homage to traditional beliefs from a man who has spent the greater part of his writing career expressing his scepticism.
>
> (1990:108)

Along with Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan and Athol Fugard are the African playwrights who have adapted the classical texts which culminated in the expansion and interrogation of the postcolonial theatre. To regard postcolonial African performance as part of a wider literary performance, history exposes playwrights, performers and directors, and the texts to new forms of inquiry. Postcolonial adaptations and re-readings of Greek classics reveal signifying performance practices, and raise political and ideological questions. A study of these adaptations not only raises questions of literary and performance aesthetics and cultural signification but also "opens up new ways of seeing, and understanding" (Mercer 1994: 2) for the critic and the performer.

The Bacchae adapted by Soyinka is an ancient Greek tragedy by the Athenian playwright, Euripides, during his final years in Macedon, at the court of Archelaus I of

Macedon. Euripides's *Bacchae* premiered posthumously at the Theatre of Dionysus in 405 BC as part of a tetralogy that also included *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, and which Euripides's son or nephew probably directed. It won first prize in the City of Dionysia's festival competition. The tragedy is based on the mythological story of King Pentheus of Thebes and his mother Agave , and their punishment by the god Dionysus (who is Pentheus's cousin) for refusing to worship him.

Wole Soyinka adapted the play as *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* with the British Royal National Theatre in London in 1972, incorporating a second chorus of slaves to mirror the civil unrest in his native Nigeria. Soyinka's title, *The Bacchae of Euripides*, suggests the influence of ancient Greek desire in his playwriting. Robert Detweiler and David Jasper also suggest the paramount influence of Greek playwright Euripides in Soyinka's *The Bacchae* by saying, "In the early 1970s, he adapted Euripides's play, *The Bacchae* while using Euriphides's version as a guide, Soyinka essentially rewrites the Greek play…" (2000:63). The other dramatists view this play as a bridge between the African and European traditions. But Soyinka also subverts the dominance of the European tradition in postcolonial Africa with the note of mimicry in this title: his play is obviously not *The Bacchae* of Euripides. Lorna Hardwick and Carol Gillespie in *Classics in Post-colonial Worlds* (2007) delineate how Soyinka, while retaining aspects of Euripides's play embed, verse that decorates cross-cultural elements whose ingredients are essentially African. Soyinka cites two English translations of the Greek play, Arrowsmith and Murray, from which he has admittedly borrowed phrases and even lines in creating his own version. Soyinka prefaces *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973) with notes on the racial identity of Slaves and the Bacchantes and in addition, he

acknowledges the intertextual element of the text by stating that he has borrowed from his own poem , "Idanre", "a Passion poem of Ogun, elder brother to Dionysus" (1973: 234).

The Bacchae of Euripides was almost a politically savvy move as it was commisioned by National Theatre. Since Soyinka had proven his prowess as an anglophone African playwright whose theatre met Eurocentric standards but relied on Afrocentric aesthetics and sensibility and, therefore, his adaptation would enhance the theatre's experimental agenda. Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* is a literary appropriation of Euripides's play that reflects the playwright's Nigerian roots. It is a series of physical as well as verbal responses to its source text where Soyinka's choice of setting and stage directions, inserted bits of stage business, alteration of the make-up and role of the chorus are as dependent upon contemporary performance modes and uses of space as upon his desire to create a play that is as relevant to its current audience as it was for a Greek audience in the fifth century BC.

Soyinka's The *Bacchae* is a testimony to the high regard in which he holds the original text and its author. Okpewho asserts: "While Soyinka may be a broad-based humanist who explores the common ties that bind the human race, he is primarily a nativist in the sense of seeing his indigenous culture as the starting point of any such universalist gestures" (1999: 51). He convincingly shows why Soyinka found a soul mate in Euripides and then used the adaptation as a way to elucidate the political, social and economic climate of the fifth-century imperialistic Athens that Euripides himself may have had to underplay. He also points out intercultural penetrations where Ogun and Dionysos merge and at the same time are differentiated. Robert Detweiler and David Jasper say, "Soyinka's *Bacchae*, however, approaches Dionysos through another syncretic move by conflating Dionysos with the Yoruba god of iron and war, Ogun, who Soyinka shows to be Dionysos's twin brother" (2000:63).

Soyinka merges Dionysos and Ogun in such an extraordinary way that the blend of the two is not only appropraite but also acts as a helpful dramatic device.

Okpewho makes a very powerful argument about Soyinka's "parochializing strategies" or "counter-hegemonic moves" that centre his adaptation in Yoruba culture and politics (1999:38). These are readily seen in the charnel house image of skeletal remains reminiscent of the gladiatorial spectacle of mass executions that took place on Bar Beach in the aftermath of the Biafran civil war. They are also prevalent in the attitudes of both rulers, Pentheus and Kadmos, who could be echoing the sentiments of Nigeria's military leaders from whom Soyinka had fled:

> PENTHEUS: I shall have order! Let the city know at once Pentheus is here to give back order and sanity. To think those reports which came to us abroad are true! Not padded or stained. Disgustingly true in detail. If anything reality beggars the report. It's disgusting!...Let everyone know I've returned to impose order. Order!
>
> (1973:256)

Pentheus, as a dictator, is revealed further in the following dialogue:

> PENTHEUS: Go, this instant!
> Find the place where this prophet sits. Faking revelations out of birdsong. Go. Pry it up with crowbars, heave it over. Upside down. Demolish everything you see. Throw his fillets out to wind and weather.That will teach you! The rest of you, Go Scour the city, bring me this foreigner… He 'll find Thebes a harder bed than he had Bargained for with his bacchic jigs.
>
> (1973:263)

The hegemonic element in Kadmos is delineated in the following dialogue:

> KADMOS: I am still Kadmos, I sowed the dragon's teeth. And brought forth a race of supermen.
>
> (1973:258)

Soyinka's syncretism is grounded in a challenge to the dictatorial excesses of the government in his homeland as well as to the hegemonic position of the British Academy of Nigeria. Certainly the playwright's substitution of Ogun for Dionysos is more than a personal choice; it serves as a corrective for "what he sees as an error in Euripides's portrait of chthonic essence" (Okpewho 1999:52), and thus becomes a way to resist the colonial insistence upon cultural superiority that was reified in the university education offered to Soyinka and his contemporaries at Ibadan and Ife before independence.

The nostalgia of the past communal self always haunts the Postcolonial cultures and they loathe its unnatural return in a more specific way. The postcolonial identity is often found wriggling between the postmodern temptations of global capitalism, the modernist thrust of national identities, and the premodern heritage of obsolete tribal communities. This postcolonial "betweenness" (Fortier 1977:132) has been explored by Wole Soyinka through his revision of violence in ancient Greek drama. In The *Bacchae* , Soyinka returns to the roots of both European and African (Yoruba) theatre, combining Dionysian and Ogunian rites of communal passage, to involve a postmodern and postcolonial audience in the ancient sacrificial offering. Isidore Okpewho's argues, "Soyinka's adaptation of Euripides's play is a translation of culture, and that he devotes as much of his energy to reconstruct the ethnos of the play as to manipulating the language of it" (1999: 32). Therefore, Okpewho seems to offer an important way of reading postcolonial adaptations of classics. Soyinka's *The Bacchae* is an exemplary postcolonial adaptation of classic and the elements of Yoruba ritual theatre in it are noteworthy.

In order to give his play the premodern communal space of Yoruba ritual theatre, Soyinka altered the parameters of modern theatre. This can be understood in a new light through the postcolonial views of Wole Soyinka. In his Cambridge lectures of 1973, Soyinka developed

his theory of African folk theatre's ritual space. According to Soyinka, Greek deities were lost in ancient European theatre through the Judeo-Christian transference of the underworld to a new locale up in the sky, a purgatorial suburb under the direct supervision of the sky deities. Soyinka adds that a similar loss of Greek theatre can be seen in modern Africa in the drama of the gods in contemporary Christian-influenced societies of the African world. Soyinka relates this historical loss of the earth gods grounding ritual drama, in premodern Europe and modern Africa, not only to theological colonialism, but also to a profound transformation that has therefore taken place within the human psyche. Soyinka suggests unearthing the lost psychic horizon of ritual theatre and a prime concern with the political dominance of thought, self, and audience by an imperial and mimetic ideology. In fact, in the 1970s when these theories were articulated, Soyinka adapted *The Bacchae.*

Soyinka's play contains diversified views which are not only debatable but commendable as well. He seems to drop the hint through his writing that Greeks failed to pay reverence to other cultures. But the other cultures or say foreign subjects were the elements responsible for harnessing the revolution and outwit people like Pentheus. The challenging job for Soyinka was to decolonize the European stage through his postcolonial adaptation of a classic. It included listening to the multivocality within the text and foregrounding the antiaesthetics without which the classical African concept of theatre would remain muted in performance. He also examined notions of subjectivity, race, ethnicity, language and space. With all this, Soyinka created his own *Bacchae* which is different in form and style from Euripide's *Bacchae*. Soyinka's play reflects the notion of Africanness specifically through the performative styles that he employs. Therefore, Soyinka was quite successful in retaining the notion of Africanness in his adapted play.

The play portrays an integral dimension of Africa and, this is, its iconography and myth. Not only is this but the existence of Africa as a migratory concept brought to the forefront through the multiple performances in the play. When Soyinka's African performance is displayed and disrupted by new cultures, the meeting of different cultures culminates into the production of a new space where questions of originality, myth and meaning of Africanness arise. Since, the text is embedded with the elements of postcolonial performance through its relationship to slavery and empire which makes us to reflect on our position in postimperial world. Homi .K. Bhabha comments in this regard:

> The Third space, in Bhabha's usage, is a third location, outside, or in-between, traditional binary structures of cultural analysis. The Third space is an attempt to assign spatial characteristics to the margins…
>
> (Hernandes 2010: 11)

In order to claim the 'Third space', the stage becomes the space that allows the user/performer to subvert the authorized images and create his counter discourse. In the analysis of postcolonial world, Soyinka identifies the multiple spaces that he engages in his writing as: the world of living, the world of the dead and so on:

LEADER: Justice! Restitution! O Spirit of Equity
Be manifest! Bright clear sword, a gleam
Of blood on its edge—drive!
Destroy the earth-spurning evil spawn of Ichion.
IST BACCHANTE: Reveal yourself Dionysos! Be manifest!
O Bacchus come! Come with your killing smile!
Come a dragon with swarming heads, vomiting flames!..
OFFICER: What is this? Has this god not done enough
That you still call here on Bromius?...
CHORUS: What is it?
Have you news? Were you in the hills.

> OFFICER: I am only a soldier, nothing more, yet
> I mourn the fortunes of this fallen house.
> King Pentheus, son of Ichion is dead.
>
> (296-297)

Therefore, Soyinka fills in the 'Third space' with the notion of Africanness which is represented by the Old Slave:

> OLD SLAVE: What does it mean life? Dare one
> Hope for better than merely warring, seeking
> Change, seeking the better life? Can we
> Control what threatens before the eruption?
> Defeat what oppresses by anticipation? Can we?
> Dare we surrender to what comes after, embrace
> The ambiguous face of the future? It is enough
> To concede awareness of the inexplicable, to wait
> And watch the unfolding. . . .
>
> (292)

These interpretations of multiple spaces are important to our understanding of how Soyinka identifies the notion of space of transition represented by the characters. The space is filled in with the notion of Africanness—culture and history. The stage provides a kind of platform to Soyinka where he subverts the authorized images and turns them against themselves to reveal a different history.

Soyinka is quite meticulous in the play about the varied performance techniques. He blends the European performance techniques with indigenous African styles and made it relevant to the audience in an outstanding manner. The context and performance codes are contemporary African, the narrative ancient Greek and African, but using relevant performance codes, the production addresses its target English audience. Soyinka in his note to the director underlines

the importance of a multicultural cast stating he recommends that while the Slave Leader should "be fully negroid" and "The Slaves, and the Bacchantes should be as mixed a cast as is possible, testifying to their varied origins" (1973: 233). This note not only highlights the colonial role of Ancient Greece but also the African cultural performance traditions, specifically the call and response style evident in the performance. The interpenetration of the black gospel tradition and contemporary European pop in a European classic not only highlights the historical encounter between European and African societies but also enables the director to blend performance style from both traditions. Hence, it acknowledges the connections between past and present, and Africa and Europe. Soyinka writes back Africa into European classics, he pairs the theatrical significance (Wetmore, Jr. 2002: 87) of the ritual enactment of tragedy with its political importance particularly uprisings among the slave population. In the Workshop Theatre performance, the silent chorus of dead slaves lining the stage helped to redefine the performance space and may be the answer to the question: Where is Europe (Greece) in Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*? Its juxtaposition with the live Slave Chorus on stage underlined how through performance Soyinka had turned to Greece for its classical drama without being involved with its colonial politics. The consequence of the contrast between the Slave Leader and Pentheus's speeches is to foreground the African aspects of the play and project Slave culture.

LEADER [alone]: Said Bromius,

I am the gentle comb of breezes on the slopes of vines
The autumn flush on clustered joy of grapes
I am the autumn sacrament, the bond, word, pledge
The blood rejuvenated from a dying world
I am the life that's trodden by the dance of joy
My flesh, my death, my re-birth is the song

That rises from men's lips, they know not how
But also,
The wild blood of the predator that's held in leash
The fearful flames that prowl the thicket of the night
I melt as wax the wilful barriers of the human mind
Gently even in this, except to the tyrant mind
That thinks to dam the flood-tide from the hills.
I am Dionysos.
[A pause of an instant, then, powerfully.]
Lead us Bromius!

SLAVES: Lead us!

PENTHEUS [He has snatched out his sword]: Shut up!
[dead silence.]
I will cut out the tongue of the next man that utters Bromius. Or Dionysos!

(1973:265)

The Slave Leader's speech is an interpenetration of African and Greek worlds/ discourses (Goff and Simpson 2008: 229) while the gospel tradition operates as a metaphor for the prolonged encounter between black and white that defines so much of American history.

LEADER: Then listen Thebes, nurse of Semele,
Crown your hair with ivy
Turn your fingers green with bryony
Redden your walls with berries,
Decked with boughs of oak and fir
Come dance the dance of god.
Fringe your skin of drappled fawn
With wool from the shuttle and loom
For the looms are abandoned by throngs of women
They run to the mountains and Bromius before
They follow the violent wand of the bringer of life

The violent wand,
Of the gentle, jealous, joy!

(1973:249)

Hence, whereas the play is an intersection of Greek and African elements within a largely English medium, the discourse of the Slave Leader intersects African and English elements framed within the larger play and its Greek component. In performance this contrast has a significant impact helping to foreground the African "medium of the play" (Goff and Simpson 2008: 229) enabling the audience to distinguish between European (read Greek) characters and the slave other.

The main aim of the dramatist to revise the drama was to correct the balance, change the plot and establish the dialogical links between Ogun and Dionysos. The Slave leader and the Chorus of Slaves represent the Greek community in the play.

SLAVE: Break interminable shackles
Break bonds of oppressors
Break the beast of blood
Break bars that sprout
In travesty of growth

The Bacchantes alert the audience to the cultural, imperial and postcolonial issues:

IST BANCCHANTE: Wounding the farmlands
Bruising the grapes
Lashing the late buds…

(275)

Therefore, the play stages beautifully the postcolonial conflict, colonization and slave trade between Europe and Africa. The conflict staged through the medium of characters makes an indelible impact on the audience.

After prologue, Dionysus stays onstage (unlike Euripides who exits). Standing "still, statuesque," (1973:236) he then becomes invisible to other characters who enter in Soyinka's added scenes of ritual procession and revolutionary desire. First, a herdsman enters and talks with the slave leader (from the group at labor), remarking on the distant, approaching sounds of Eleusian priests and vestal virgins, chanting in procession. But as the leader and other slaves drink from a jug of wine brought by the herdsman, they also talk about overthrowing that ritual order, which uses slaves as scapegoats, as whipping boys. The herdsman explains that the scapegoat's blood must be shed:

> HERDSMAN: Someone must cleanse the new year of the rot of the old or,
> the world will die. Have you ever known famine?
> Real famine?
>
> (237)

But the slave leader complains that this is class abuse: "the rites bring us nothing!. Let those to whom the profits go bear the burden of the old year dying" (1973:237). The herdsman replies by pointing to the crucified skeletons as signifying the fate of rebellious slaves.

The statuesque figure of Dionysus onstage, watching invisibly like the theatre audience, becomes an imaginary/symbolic lens to reflect and refocus the abject suffering of living and dead slaves, their ritual submission as scapegoats, and their rebellious energies. When the Eleusian procession arrives, another catalytic figure appears in the role of scapegoat. The priests and vestals are followed by an Old Man being whipped by others in procession. He turns

out to be the blind seer, Tiresias, and he collapses to his knees as the procession approaches the slave group. Dionysus saves Tiresias from further lashes, by revealing himself then in a lightning flash. After the priests flee and the vestals and slaves convert to Dionysian enthusiasm, Tiresias reprimands the ritual floggers for their overly enthusiastic participation in the onstage violence:

> TIRESIAS: Blind, stupid, bloody brutes! Can you see how you've covered me in weals? Can't you bastards ever tell the difference between ritual and reality…Symbolic flogging that is what I keep trying to drum into your thick heads.
>
> (1973:241)

By adding this ritual and its violent, yet comic twists (plus a subsequent dialogue between Tiresias and Dionysus), Soyinka draws out the symbolic, imaginary, and strands of sacrifice connecting dead and living slaves. Even the main characters in the drama are involved in their subsequent sacrificial drive. The slave leader uses Ogun's iron core symbolism to express his will to join the Dionysian revolt, even if it means the shattering of familiar ritual orders:

> LEADER: 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.
>
> (240)

Tiresias then shows the symbolic and imaginary conceits of his role as scapegoat in the ritual procession. Not only does he insist on "symbolic flogging," (1973:241) but he also confesses to Dionysus that he wears a fawn-skin under his clothes to protect his own skin from the lashes.

And yet, when pressed by Dionysus as to why he chose the scapegoat role, Tiresias gives two reasons that reveal the Real, social and personal dimensions beyond such theatrical tricks. The terms he uses also echo today's postcolonial conflicts in Africa and the perverse turns of postmodern culture. First, Tiresias says he wanted to save Kadmos and Thebes from a real revolution by taking the slave's place as scapegoat:

> TIRESIAS: A mere favor to Kadmos whom I love like a brother. Kadmos is Thebes. He has yielded all power to Pentheus but I know he still rejoices or weeps with Thebes. And Thebes —-well, let's just say the situation is touch and go. If one more slave had been killed at the cleansing rites, or sacrificed to that insatiable altar of nation-building…
>
> (242)

But next, Tiresias admits that he wanted the real experience of pain:

> I have longed to know what flesh is made of. What suffering is? Feel the taste of blood instead of merely foreseeing it. Taste the ecstasy of rejuvenation after long organising its ritual.
>
> (243)

Dionysus promises Tiresias that "Thebes will have its full sacrifice," (1973:244) hinting at the Ogunian plunge of Pentheus by the end of the play. But the old priest already begins to sense the symbolic, imaginary, and real convergence—through "a small crack in the dead crust of the soul" (1973:245). At the distant sound of the bacchic *chora*, his "veins race," and at the prompting of Dionysus, the old blind man joins in the dance.

After Dionysus leaves, the Bacchae arrive, enthusiastically seeking him. But in Soyinka's version the slave chorus also returns and the two choruses converse, through their leaders, sharing their Theban abjection and Dionysian ecstasy. The slave leader says to the foreign women:

LEADER: let me ask you—do you know Bromius?

(246)

This question, from the local slave chorus to the Bacchae who have arrived in Thebes with Dionysus (Bromius), suggests that "knowledge" of the god has an internal source: the alienation is experienced by each of these subcultures, whether in diasporic wandering or colonial enslavement. Soyinka's double chorus then chants an "old hymn to godhead" (1973:247) that involves an explicit tie to African culture and cosmology.

LEADER: Tribute to the holy hills of Ethiopia /
Caves of unborn and the dark ancestral spirits.
Home of primal drums round which the dead and living Dance.

(248)

Not only are the worlds of living, dead, and unborn evoked here, but a reference is also made to Ethiopia (as in Dionysus's prologue) where ancient Yoruba culture may have begun, according to legend, before migrating to West Africa.

Soyinka's perspective from the postcolonial world enables a critical interrogation of colonization and slave trade beyond Africa to Asia. The Slave Leader is an interesting character who, obsessed by memories of his homeland, the landscape, believes in Dionysus as a Messiah, and dreams of a life after slavery.

LEADER: [progressively radiant]: He…is…
Sweet upon the mountains, such sweetness
As afterbirth, such sweetness as death.
His hand strap wildness, and breed it gentle
He infuses tameness with savagery.
I have seen him on the mountains in vibrant fawn-

Skin
I have seen his smile in the red flash of blood
I have seen the raw heart of a mountain-lion
Yet pulsing in his throat.
In the mountains of Eritrea, in the deserts of Libya
In phrygia whose copper hills ring with cries of
Bromius, Zagreus, Dionysos,
I know he is the awaited, the covenant, promise,
Restorer of fullness to Nature's lean hours.
As milk he flows in the earth as wine
In the hills. He runs in the nectar of bees, and
In the duct of of their sting lurks—Bromius.
Oh let his flames burn gently in you, gently,
Or else—consume you it must—consume you…

(1973:249-250)

The imperial master's desire to control and conquer the other is embedded in Pentheus whose name in Greek signifies sorrow. His appearance, costumes and props capture his obsession with power; before Dionysos dresses him in a toga he is in military regalia complete with a sword. The sword and his militaristic vocal projections echo his desire to order, control and oppress others. His imagination is to control the immortal world but, Tiresias warns him about his journey towards death (1973: 259). The violent assault of the Old Slave, who beseeches him not to destroy Dionysos's hut, is a visible extension of his violent streak that gives the Slave Leader the opportunity to confront the colonial regime. Pentheus is an imperial master whose character is constructed to mirror contemporary dictators like the deceased Mobutu Ssesseko (Zaire), Idi Amin Dada (Uganda) and Emperor Bokassa (Central African Republic) whom Soyinka refers to in the play. In addition, through the Old Slave, Soyinka is able to comment on the ritual of regeneration, as a universal concept for, he argues, it covered the entire spectrum of socio-

economic consciousness as well as the religious experience of the people and is as relevant to Africa today as it was to Euripides's Greece.

Soyinka's analysis of tyranny and interrogation of the Greek imperial codes may read as anti-classical to some people, while to others it is an exercise in re-presenting the classical Greek text. Soyinka uses the classical form as a foundation to explore critical issues where by he focuses on filling in the gaps. He engages with its structure, style and conventions, interpreting and redeveloping/ redefining the classical to enable it to migrate to new spaces. By creating this dialogical relationship between African and Greek dramatic forms, rooted through an African slave narrative, he redefines it for an African postcolonial perspective. Hence, this allows us to ask ideological questions about how it has been read and performed. For example, the slave community, comprising of African and oriental slave women, form into a formidable oppositional force led by the Slave Leader. What Soyinka achieves in the scene where the Old Slave is slapped is emblematic of the play's central theme specifically because the Slave Leader sees the possibility of liberation:

PENTHEUS [his hand on his sword]:
Do you slaves defy me?
VARIOUS: We are strangers but we know the meaning of madness
To hit an Old servant
With frost on his head
Such as one as has stood
At the gateway of Mysteries.
LEADER: You know it. This
Was the body of the Old Year Dying
The choice of the priests of Eleusis

Till good Tieresias stepped in his place.

SlAVE: And now you'll pull down the Old Seer's hut.

LEADER: You said to the Master of Revels
Take him—, or perhaps he'll live, or the gods
Will claim him—he's old enough.
Is such a one to be violated by you?

VARIOUS: Oh the scorn on his lips. Such
Inhuman indifference. Corrosive
As his hate for Dionysos.
Age is holy
To hit an old man
Or demolish the roof of a sage?
Yet we are the barbarians
And Greece the boast of civilization.
We are slaves and have no souls.

LEADER: No one will touch him where he lies
The world must see it.
Dionysos must avenge his profanity.
I live to share
The feast of the vengeance of joy. O-oh

(1973:264)

In *Bacchae,* Soyinka articulates the spirits of various Yoruba gods behind the mask of Euripides and Dionysus. He manifests the shifting desires of a trickster figure, of the Yoruba god Esu, as Dionysus manipulates his human worshipers and his nemesis Pentheus toward a sacrificial rite of revenge.

DIONYSOS: Trust me. I shall be your, guide. There is a force that binds all men to diadems, swords and scepters. You feel the beginnings of it.

PENTHEUS: [as Dionysos fastens a jewelled brooch]:
You are a dark horse, ful of hidden talents
To look at you,one would hardly think you knew those

Intracacies of an armour's chains and buckles
Yet you handle them like a practised armourer.
Is there anything you don't know?

DIONYSOS: Dionysos taught me all I know.

PENTHEUS [chuckles in a very good humo
It is very instructive to meet a fanatic. I could use
Such loyalty. Whatever I say is turned
And exploited to you to glorify Dionysos.
[He tilts the cup.]
Is there more of this nectar? I feel
A great thirst within me.

DIONYSOS [stretching his hand]: Your cup is full.

PENTHEUS [looks]: Ah. [Takes a prolonged drought.]

IST BACCHANTE: Look! He stands at the gate of the trap
He'll find the Bacchae and with his life
He'll answer. He thrashes in the net of
Dionysos, his wits are distracted.
Though he fought with the will of a Titan
Yet, for all that, he's a man.

(1973:289-290)

Soyinka also shows the Nietzschean characteristics of Apollonian serenity and Dionysian violence, of both Obatala and Ogun, in his Dionysus— who first appears "relaxed, as becomes divine self-assurance but equally tensed as if for action, an arrow drawn in readiness for flight" (1973:235). Most significantly, in relation to ritual theory, Soyinka alters Euripides revenge plot to show the erotic/death drive of Ogun crossing the fourth stage abyss between living, dead and unborn worlds—driving through the human characters tragic actions, which benefit the entire, choral community in the play's new, tragicomic ending.

Building the extended sense of community from the beginning of the play, Soyinka adds a second chorus of slaves to the Bacchae of the Euripides drama. This community of slaves

is first seen at work in the play's opening images and eventually becomes a chorus of Dionysus' worshipers. It is also reflected in a related community of the dead, according to Soyinka's initial stage directions. The background is lined by the bodies of crucified slaves mostly in the skeletal stage. In the foreground "dim figures of slaves" (the eventual chorus) labour upon a threshing-floor against the palace wall, in a "cloud of chaff… flailing and treading … [with the] smell and sweat of harvest," (1973:275) as Dionysus emerges from the tomb of his mother, Semele, to speak of revenge. Dionysus thus arises out of the womb of earth and death. The threshing-floor with its chaff cloud reflects the historical origin of Greek theatre's Dionysian orchestra in the threshing-floor of the *agora* (market place). But Soyinka shows the original ritual space of his added chorus in the working area of slaves, juxtaposed against the Apollonian palace of Pentheus and the abject bodies of dead slaves, left as semiotic warnings against rebellion.

Soyinka includes Euripides's mythic setting for the start of *The Bacchae*: the choral space of Semele's tomb, representing her cosmic abjection:

> DIONYSOS: It is time to state my patrimony—even here in Thebes. I am the gentle, jealous joy. Vengeful and Kind. An essence that will not exclude, nor be excluded. If you are Man or Woman, I am Dionysos. Accept.
> A seed of Zeus was sown in Semele my mother
> earth, here on this spot…
> It beats on the walls of Thebes, bringing vengeance
> On all who deny my holy origin and call my—Slut.
>
> (1973:236)

It is out of this maternal *chora* that Dionysus first appears, returning to Thebes as the spirit of revolution and familial revenge. But Soyinka's additional layers of death and abjection—through the scenic *chora* of crucified and laboring slaves, as well as Semele's tomb—reframes the high drama of gods and mythic heroes to remind the audience of the mundane suffering of the lower

classes . The opening scene of *The Bacchae* thus shows a specific African sense of flexible ritual space and the gestic performance of colonial slave labour. Both of these dramatic choices serve to set up the cosmic, yet political theatre of Ogun's drive to cross the abyss between the dead and the living—as that orisa comes in the figure of Dionysus to possess both his followers and his enemies, especially Pentheus and his mother. Agave in the state of insanity tears her son into shreds:

> AGAVE: I, Agave. I struck first, tore off.
> A limb that launched its unsheathed claws
> Against my face. Thus—my foot was planted
> Crushing its rib-case! I heard sweet sounds of sinews
> Yielded at the socket as I tugged. The beast's snarl
> Tugged to agony. I swung its lifeless limb
> Up in the air, the first taste of hunt
> To Dionysos the mynaeds call me
> Agave the Blest.
>
> (1973:301)

Pentheus, in a state of trance, experiences hallucinations:

> PENTHEUS [with just a touch of tipsiness]:
> Yes, but listen.I seem to see two suns
> Blazing in the heavens. And now two Thebes
> Two cities, each with seven gates.And you—
> Are you a bull? There are horns newly
> Sprouted from your head. Have you always been
> A bull/ Were you . . .
> [He searches foggily in his brain.]
> . . .Yes, that bull, in there?
> Was it you?
>
> (1973:292)

The bout of madness because of Dionysos's inescapable strong influence is rendered quite artistically by Soyinka in Pentheus and Agave.

Through further changes in Euripides's drama, Soyinka expresses the revolutionary power of the abject *chora* within certain characters and their Orisa (Yoruba deity) aspects, as well as in the scenery and stage space. He shows the potential evocation of a choral space—or in his terms, of a "fourth stage," as transitional abyss between the living, dead, and unborn. Thus, the "Communion Rite," Soyinka's subtitle for his *Bacchae*, takes place not only in the altered tragicomic ending of the drama, but ideally between actors onstage, spectators offstage, and their lost ancestors and future progeny in the psychic community of performance. This may happen even in a secular context, although the play's premiere by London's National Theatre received very negative reviews. The animist sense of theatrical ritual (articulated in Soyinka's essays) involves an intermixing of temporal worlds and spiritual identities that recast the drama in a distinctive African light, especially as the ancient Greek characters appear to embody certain aspects of Yoruba orisas. Yet, here again the insights of Soyinka's intercultural ritual theory, through his retelling of Yoruba myth, can shed light not only upon his stage drama, but also on the social drama of lacking being between postmodern subjects. In his "Fourth Stage", Soyinka draws on Yoruba mythology, as well as Nietzsche's view of the Greeks, to craft a theory of ritual theatre concerning the purpose of sacrificial violence onstage. Soyinka finds the origin of Yoruba tragedy in the mysteries of the gods (Orisas) Ogun and Obatala; but he also uses the Yoruba genesis myth of Orisanla (Yoruba God).

Not only does Soyinka add to Euripides's drama the slave chorus, their leader's identification with the god, Pentheus's verbal threat and Dionysus's own violation but also puts a complex twist to this rebellious scene. The stage direction reads: "As Dionysos is chained, his

Bacchantes begin a noise, a kind of ululating which is found among some African and Oriental peoples and signifies great distress, warning, or agitation. Sometimes all combined. It increases in volume. As Dionysos is led away it spreads towards the Chorus of Slaves, swelling into deafening proportions"(1973:271). Pentheus is seen inspecting his prisoner, as his officer reports the "miracle" of how the offstage, imprisoned Bacchae have "shed their chains" (1973:277). As in Euripides's version, Pentheus continues to misrecognize Dionysus as merely a priest or sorcerer of the cult but in Soyinka's version, Dionysus with an Esu-like trickster god (similar to Euripides's character), plays along with many double entendres, such as: "the god himself / Initiated me" (1973:267). This also begins his Obatala-effect on Pentheus, luring the ruler into Apollonian dreams, through Dionysian drunkenness, which will ultimately lead to his own malformation in deadly, choral rebirth. Even now, Dionysus initiates Pentheus by invoking the king's curiosity about the cult, then reacting critically:

> DIONYSOS: Will you reduce it all to a court
> Of inquiry? A fact-finding commission such as
> One might set up to decide the cause
> Of a revolt in your salt-mines, or a slave uprising?
>
> (1973:267)

Soyinka thus connects the ancient Greek ruler, in his voyeuristic desire for judicial control, to the postmodern spectator—through this implicit reference to the governmental commissions and juridical news media of today's Europe, Africa, and United States. But Soyinka will also show his theatre audience more of the ancient ritual sacrifice, to answer Pentheus's question:

> PENTHEUS: You say you saw the god?
> What form
> Did he assume?
>
> (1973:268)

Therefore, the universal significance of ritual sacrifice is proved by Soyinka. He intends to say that rituals exist in different forms in all cultures, irrespective of its dependence on time and space.

Instead of Euripides's single chorus of female maenads, calling for the mythic Dionysus to descend from Olympus and take vengeance on Pentheus, Soyinka creates a choral dialogue between bacchantes and slaves, beginning with their infectious, pre-verbal, ululating cries. Although Euripides's chorus describes the male womb of Zeus through which Dionysus was born, Soyinka's double chorus of males and females becomes the dithyrambic (twofold) *chora*, as their abject ululations shift into chthonic birth pains. First, their semiotic breathing resonates with the thunderous earthquake that precedes the god's reappearance. Then they give birth, as collective womb, through the choral chant that Soyinka adds between the lead bacchante, repeating the word "earth," and the group's one-word responses:

> IST BACCHANTE: Earth—
> CHORUS: —Shake!
> IST BACCHANTE: Earth—
> CHORUS: —Retch
> IST BACCHANTE: Earth—
> CHORUS: —Melt
> IST BACCHANTE: Earth—
> CHORUS: —Swarm…
> IST BACCHANTE: Earth—
> CHORUS: —TAKE!
>
> (1973:275)

Dionysus returns through this choral thunder and earthquake—appearing, as at the beginning of the play, in the *chora* of his dead mother's tomb (but this time with flames around

his feet). Euripides's Dionysus returns with a violent, raging voice: "Let the earthquake come! Shatter the floor of the world!" (1973:274). However, Soyinka's Dionysus resurrects calmly, in contrast to the terror of his chorus:

> DIONYSOS: Why do you tremble?
> Look up. Look up at me. The mortal ribs of Pentheus
> Crumble, sundered by the presence
> Of the eternal. Look up. All is well.
>
> (1973:275)

Rather than a vengeful Dionysus, in fierce command of the lightning "consume with flame the palace of Pentheus!"(1973:276) this Dionysus presents an Apollonian, Obatala-like serenity, explaining to his chorus how he escaped imprisonment and fooled Pentheus: "With ease. No effort was required" (1973:276). And yet, Dionysus also reveals his Esu aspect to the chorus, telling how he tricked Pentheus, by evoking the king's rage and destructiveness.

> DIONYSOS: I made the sick desires
> Of his mind his goal, and he pursued them.
> He fed on the vapors of his own malignant
> Hate, pursued and roped mirages in the stable . . .
>
> (1973:276)

Then Dionysus describes his own actions as a separate persona (like Ogun and Sango), destroying Pentheus's palace through earthquake and lightning:

> DIONYSOS: That moment came Dionysos.
> He shook the roof of the palace of Pentheus.
> Razed the palace to the ground, reduced it
> To utter ruins.
>
> (1973:276)

This exposition by Dionysus is very similar to Euripides's version. But Soyinka's *Bacchae* will show more onstage of the Esu-like trickery of his Dionysus, bringing out further Obatalan

delusions through a drunken Pentheus, which will focus the Ogun-like death drive of the king toward his ultimate offstage sacrifice.

In a chaotic African postcolonial world, a grassroots guerrilla war had just ended years of conflict in Uganda and the South African apartheid regime was tottering towards collapse. But, Nigeria was still in the grips of military dictators and in this situation, the staging of The *Bacchae*, had particular resonance for both the cast and the audience. It was staged during the distinguished leadership of Martin Banham at the Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds. But Soyinka grumbles as in his view, the National Theatre production of the play had not worked particularly because the director(s) misread the codes, theatrical idioms and rhythms of the script, making the African aspects of the adaptation seat uncomfortably with the cast and the audience. In his article "Between Self and System" (1988: 53), he is scathing about the presentation of the final scene:

> Paint, viscous paint flowed from Pentheus's head on Tuesday!.... Is this a school production? We get realistic, grisly innards and a mangled head but not a convincing wine fluid. Aren't the actors supposed to drink the stuff? Why invite the audience to burst into titters when that mixture flows out after the line, It's wine?

In his version of *The Bacchae*, Soyinka changes Dionysus's opening monologue to reveal an Ogunian spirit, there by twisting Euripides's melodramatic revenge plot to stress the initial, tragic abjection of the protagonist:

> DIONYSOS: Thebes taints me with bastardy.
> I am turned into an alien, some foreigng
> growth of her habitual tyranny.
> Thebes blasphemes against me, makes a

Scapegoat of a god.

(1973:235)

Here Soyinka may be expressing, through his Dionysus, an exile's bitterness against Nigeria's tyrannous military leaders, who had jailed him for two years, shortly before his writing of *The Bacchae*. Euripides also wrote his *Bacchae* in exile. Soyinka may also be showing, with the added slave scenery and chorus, a postcolonial rage against Europe's habitual tyranny and slave trading in Africa. Yet, Soyinka reveals an Ogunian will to transcend the melodramatic rage of the vengeful Dionysus, by embracing divine alienation and fragmentation.

The tearing apart of Pentheus is rendered artistically by Soyinka. The offstage dismemberment of Pentheus by Agave is heart rending but a literary feast as well.

AGAVE: We hunt. We kill. Now, look!
A royal masterhead! Look Father. Turn around!
Glory in my kill, my new found prowess, invite
All Thebes to a great celebration. You are blessed
Father
By this great deed of mine.

(1973:304)

The portrayal of Dionysos is awful as he emerges from his mother's tomb introducing his tragic self unlike the vengeful thoughts of Euripides's Dionysos:

> A seed of Zeus was sown in Semele my mother earth, here on this spot. It has burgeoned through the cragged rocks of far Afghanistan, burst the banks of fertile Tmolus, sprung oasis through the red-eyed sands of Arabia, flowered in hill an and gorge of dark Ethiopia. It pounds in the blood and breasts of my wild-haired women . . . through Phrygia and the isles of crete. It beats on the walls of Thebes, bringing vengeance on all who deny my holy origin and call my mother—slut.

(235)

Soyinka certainly adapted Euripides's play but the characterization of Dionysos is entirely different from Euripides's Dionysos. Soyinka's Dionysos is quiet and sober and says:

> DIONYSOS: I am the gentle, jealous joy. Vengeful and kind.
> An essence that will not exclude nor be excluded.
> If you are a man or woman, I am Dionysos. Accept.
> (235)

But this makes one to question what is the aim of Dionysos, if not revenge? Soyinka's Dionysos is not swayed by a melodramatic family feud but is harbouring a complex tragic drive, like Ogun. Dionysos's aim is to reconnect the psychic worlds of living, dead and unborn. He will turn the tables on Pentheus in a smart manner by cajoling and flattering. Pentheus is outwitted by Dionysos and in this way the silenced postcolonial victim finds a voice in the performance.

The main element that gives entirely a different form to Soyinka's performance of an ancient drama is his new perception of tragedy. Being a postcolonial victim he completely negates the Eurocentric definition of tragedy. Instead, Soyinka finds the Greek myth of Dionysus to be a significant parallel, rather than the canonical origin (Goff and Simpson 2008: 74). He comes up with his innovative views regarding Eurocentric definition of tragedy in an interview with Anthony Kwame Appiah. He expresses the different ways in which different communities relate to the concept of tragedy. Soyinka asserts that it is not easy to stage a tragedy for an American audience because the real concept of tragedy is distant to many people. He states:

> I remember my shock as a student of literature and drama when I read that drama originated in Greece. What is this? I couldn't quite deal with it. What are they talking about? I never heard my grandfather talk about Greeks invading Yoruba land. I couldn't understand. I've lived from childhood with drama. I read at the time that tragedy evolved as a result of the

> rites of Dionysus. Now we all went through this damn thing, so I think the presence [sic] of eradication had better begin. It doesn't matter what form it takes.
>
> (1988: 777-785)

There can be possibly two reasons for Soyinka's negation of Euro-centric definition of tragedy; one is to show that literature is not the monopoly of colonizer and other is to give a voice to the oppression by twisting the tragic tale to suit his end. Therefore, Soyinka dismisses out of hand the notion that tragedy is in some way necessarily connected to European identity.

Soyinka explains that all communities have experiences of tragedy but it is only in the details the differences arise. In "The Fourth Stage" Soyinka relates Yoruba tradition and European antiquity. He states:

> In Asian and European antiquity, therefore, man did, like, the African, exist within a cosmic totality, did possess a consciousness in which his own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon.
>
> (1976:3)

Soyinka states that ancient Europeans lost the chthonic connection in ancient European theatre and by extension a sense of the cosmic totality as a result of the expansion of the Platonic-Christian tradition. But Yoruba (African) tragedy is still able to move into the "chthonic realm" (1976: 142). He equates Dionysos to Ogun arguing that although Ogun is "a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues" (1976: 141), he is the elder brother to Dionysos. The presence of both Ogun and Dionysos in Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides*, is testimony to the fact that Soyinka forms a marvelous tragedy by foregrounding Ancient Greek drama with African rituals and gods.

In short, Soyinka's adaptation of *Bacchae* aimed to set the theatre free from the clutches of colonization. The breaking of shackles is carried by innovative dramatic techniques.

At the same time the locale of the play is changed apparently only because when observed minutely Ancient or say colonial Greece is still there. But he does change the classic as he does not narrate the story in the same old way as he uses myth, dialogue and iconography drawn from Africa and Europe. Just as Euripides's play examined ancient Greece, Soyinka's revision excavates Africa, Europe, America and Asia in post imperial age. Also, one cannot deny that the indirect presence of Europe is felt strongly in the play, in the guise of Greece. Soyinka is criticized by the critics who sought to present African literary works without the impression of Europe. But it is worth appreciation that Soyinka has retained European influence in the play. By doing this he has proved his mettle as an artist by setting all literary artists free to use the myriad techniques and styles that are consistent with the culture and heritage and convey contemporary reality well. Soyinka's revision of this drama connects beautifully a modern Nigerian in exile to his European audiences. The link between Greek theatre and older African gods in the play stress on the importance of ritual spirits in both the Euro-American and African theatre in the postcolonial age.

Conclusion

The innovative and influential writings of Wole Soyinka always give a vent to his radical political activism. Soyinka uses literature and theatre for radical political purposes. Soyinka writes with regard to the impact on his artistic sensibilities of the pervasiveness of representational ambiguity and linguistic exuberance in Yoruba culture. Soyinka's sustained engagement with the violence of collective experience in post-independence, postcolonial Africa and the developing world leave an indelible impression on his works.

The political vision in Soyinka's writing can be appreciated by understanding the in-depth message of his works. He brings the message home that African culture is rich and his native men should feel proud of it. In the postcolonial era, they need to glue to it and at the same time they should work together for the prosperity of the nation. For the propagation of his message, he makes a tremendous use of Yoruba myths and tradition as an appropriation of African culture within a Western framework. The plays under study, *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Bacchae of Euripides,* are contained with myth which act as a medium for him to project the impact of imperialism. Africa's colonial past is the important factor in both plays. What Crow and Banfield (1981) term, "the disruption of African history" by the European imperialists is a crucial cause of the current chaos. As in the formation of Nigeria , the African countries were artificial creations by the imperialist powers which often cared little about the range of languages, cultures and religions they were grouping together as a result of the artificially imposed national boundaries. Disruptive ethnic rivalry, economies crippled by imperialist demands and large scale foreign debt are crutches which few countries can outgrow in order to develop in a healthy manner. These are conditions in which few would expect the art to flourish, but paradoxically it is these African countries like Kenya, Ososa, Ghana and Nigeria

that have produced the works of writers as diverse as Ngugi wa Thiong'o , Hubert Ogunde, Ama Ata Aidoo, and, of course, Wole Soyinka.

One crucial way in which colonialism did not affect Africa was that it did not succeed in completely erasing indigenous culture from the continent. The celebration of seasonal rituals, of the New Year, of Ogun mysteries, of folk, the wealth of the oral tradition, the reinterpretation and recuperation of past history and tradition—all of these are alive and kicking for the African writers to reject or accept or blend into existing western artistic traditions. And it is to Soyinka's credit that he has been the most innovative writer to blend existing Yoruba myth, ritual, festivities and celebrations along with the elements of popular theatre in his plays, especially *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Bacchae of Euriphides.*

For all its merits, *A Dance of the Forests,* is a flawed creation. The postcolonial theme is not handled properly by the playwright. It is difficult to sort out, especially towards the end of part II, what Soyinka is driving at. The passages in which the different spirits speak of the way in which they have been exploited sound too long-drawn out. Part I and those sections of part II which deal with court of Mata Kharibu are well worked out and gripping theatre. However, the intensity seems to diminish somewhat the extended chorus of the spirits, the chorus of the ants and the masque of the triplets. The end, from the spirits, the chorus of the ants and the masque of the triplets. The end, from the moment of the characters start playing ampe ,is, once again, very gripping and intense. And the postcolonial theme is not handled properly by the playwright.

Soyinka is often accused of elitism by critics but he had defended by saying that he did not mean for his creation to be completely comprehensible. He challenged the notion that

any play could or should be completely understood. He wanted to produce exciting theatre; he was content to set a riddle which would excite the audience to think for itself. The audience ought to dispense with their tutored responses and expectations; instead they ought to respond to the rhythms and the moods of the play. This is all very well, but one cannot help feeling that the effectiveness of the play as well as the playwright's intention of making a difference to society cannot be best served by obscurity. This is, of course, not to diminish the enormous courage of conviction that Soyinka has shown in his work and his unremitting efforts to make art a vehicle of social change, of the removal or, at least, the lessening of human obtuseness, of the hope he expresses time and again that life can change without being blind to its many searing anomalies and injustices. And, the fact that he does this without making his art to sink to the level of propaganda or becoming sickeningly sentimental is evidence of his consummate artistry.

The other play, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite,* is the intersection of the ancient Greek drama/ theatre with African ritual, gods and theatre. Soyinka uses the classical form as a foundation to explore critical issue of Slave Trade and rather redefines it in an African postcolonial perspective. It enables a critical interrogation of colonization and Slave Trade beyond Africa to Asia. The Slave Leader is an interesting character who, obsessed by memories of his homeland, the landscape, believes in Dionysus as a Messiah, and dreams of a life after slavery. The imperial master's desire to control and conquer the "other" is embedded in Pentheus who represents the colonizer and mirrors the dictators.

Soyinka's revision of ancient violence in *The Bacchae* offers valuable sacrificial connections, not only between vastly different cultures, or to the past worlds of the dead within them, but also to the other of the living in the present theatre of the communal psyche—

and to the unborn in the global village of the future. The facets of postcolonial aspects are presented in a marvelous manner by violating the various dramatical techniques. Therefore, the decolonization tactic of theatre is served well by the myriad innovative dramatic techniques employed by Soyinka in an exceptional way.

Soyinka's African view, thus, offers a postcolonial vision of ancient European theatre. Instead of placing the orchestra as a circle for the Bacchic chorus between heroic characters and audience, Soyinka recenters the postcolonial stage in the classical times. He shows its semiotic motility between the background line of slave skeletons on crosses, the foreground threshing-floor of slave labor, and the tomb of Semele out of which the dithyrambic (twice-born) Dionysos emerges to begin the play. The animist sense of theatrical ritual (articulated in Soyinka's essays) involves an intermixing of temporal worlds and spiritual identities that recast the drama in a distinctive African light, especially as the ancient Greek characters appear to embody certain aspects of Yoruba mythology. Yet, here again the insights of Soyinka's intercultural ritual theory, through his retelling of Yoruba myth, shed light upon his stage drama in a beautiful manner.

In both the plays Soyinka makes tremendous use of Yoruba art which contain music, ritual masks and dance. The masks are simple facial carvings that represent different types of Yoruba society—the trader, the servant or the seducer. In *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976:141), Soyinka states that Yoruba traditional art is not ideational but essential. About Yoruba music Soyinka says it tries to return to the roots of language and expression. Words are not seen alien to music: the nature of Yoruba music is intensively the nature of its language and poetry, highly charged, symbolic and myth embryonic" (1976:147). Both religious ritual and music play a large part in both the plays.

While Soyinka lets us enter into each character's private self-awareness, he succeeds at the same time in keeping us conscious of how they appear to the outside observer and to their society at large. We share twin view-points: subjective and objective. In such a situation, we feel a spark of love towards humanity which any man worthy of god's awe must feel infinitely. A man matters to us in this context not simply because he is good like Demoke and Dionysos , or because he amuses us like Rola and Tieresias, but because he is an individual. A dramatist like Soyinka who works outwards from this intimacy of response to human beings does not need a 'plot' to keep us absorbed: he can simply unfold one of the patterns of the way people behave.

Soyinka uses *collective unconscious* in both the plays as Jung (1972) used to describe humankind's inborn predisposition to certain feelings, perceptions and behaviors. It is not dependent on the experiences of the individual, but is instead something that we inherit, and perhaps share, as a kind of genetic memory. He reacts to certain instances in the same way that the human and even pre-human ancestors did because we carry the same potentialities for reaction that they did. He also uses archetypes that come forth as forms to be filled in with the contents of conscious life and the conscious life that brought forth myth. So instead of using the myths literally, he uses them metaphorically. As the myth of the birth of Dionysos, "A seed of Zeus was sown in Semele my mother earth, here on this spot" (1973:235) is altered to convey the avengeful thoughts of the colonized Nigerians. More than that, there emerge twin values of the myth. First, there is the unbidden psychological effect of having the archetypal forms pulled from the unconscious world into the conscious world through myth and ritual. It allows us to gain insight into the sources of our fears, reactions, behaviors, and perceptions. The second value is as blueprint for handling specific situations that we see in the cycle of our lifetimes. The myth

(and the archetypal element at its core), our lives could open up (and inward) to reveal a rich symphony of experiences.

Soyinka emerges as an outstanding social reformist in the plays. Demoke emerges as redeemer of mankind in *A Dance of the Forests* and Dionysos plays the part of avenger and reformer in an outstanding manner in *The Bacchae of Euriphides: A Communion Rite*. It won't be wrong to say that both emerge as the mouthpiece of Soyinka. For Soyinka, the social reformation and literary art go hand in hand and he thinks it is his prime reponsibility to bring change in his society in a positive sense through his works. For Soyinka, escape from responsibility is an impossible course of action. Again, the view presented here allows a new space for understanding beyond ideological dualisms.

If Western critics and commentators have overlooked African literary works, Western activists have also failed to engage with African political expressions. An anarchist philosopher Paul Feyerabend has noted, it is now necessary "to re-examine our attitude towards myth, religion, magic, witchcraft and towards all those ideas which rationalists would like to see forever removed from the surface of the earth (without so much as having looked at them − a typical taboo reaction)". Of course, while these intentions and concerns are well-taken, one must avoid replicating Eurocentric dualisms in contrasting western rationality with supposed African emotionalism. This is a mistake that Wole Soyinka identifies and attempts to overcome. Both plays belong simultaneously to the history of Western and the worlds of colonial and postcolonial African writing.

The present study stresses that myth and archetypes are an integral part of Soyinka's narrative. It is also stressed that myth is capable of evoking ultimate values of cultural tradition.

The role of Yoruba mythology is discussed with the help of archetypal characterization (see, Chapter II). How Soyinka uses myth in order to make his countrymen aware of the changing society under Western influence is discussed. The importance of switching to ancestral values is stressed through the Yoruba theological principles.

In Chapter III, Soyinka's adaptation of a Greek play as a tactic to decolonize the theatre is discussed. Soyinka's choice of history is given perfect expression. How he alters the events and characters that fashions it into a personal intellectual weapon is discussed. The play reconstructs the bond between modern Nigerian in exile to his European audience in an outstanding manner. The chapter ends on a positive note that there is need of stressing the importance of rituals in the modern theatre.

Soyinka is patently in the stream of international movements in twenthieth century, and has been influenced consciously or consciously by the contemporary scene. Soyinka employed the effective tool of myth he found in his dramatic environment and which he adapted to his own ends. Soyinka is never bothered by the need self doubtingly to demonstrate his affinities. Both the plays provide an ample evidence in this regard as they are profoundly conscious of the earth, of place, of solidity; and so it follows from this at a second level that it possesses a spontaneous human solidarity and oneness.

Clearly, Soyinka is blessed with the praiseworthy quality of offering serious social and political commentary through the use of myth. As examined in the two plays, Soyinka excels the new possibilities of voicing the concern of postcolonial victims. Nevertheless, he also emerges as a social reformist when he is on the pursuit of justice, dignity and access to basic social amenities for those to whom these necessities were denied. Not only this, he has physically intervened and

literally taking up arms against repressive regimes in Nigeria. Both the plays studied offer testimony to the fact that they were written in response to pressing issues of his society where he simultaneously addresses the problems of Nigeria and those of other African countries as well.

The study contests the view that Soyinka projects postcolonial reality in an outstanding manner using the medium of myth. He undeniably emerges as one of the major producers of textual fodder for the postcolonial literary undertaking as well as critical perspectives on postcolonialism. His battle against colonial repression even after the demise of direct formal colonization is noteworthy. He seems to present a unique postcolonial resistance in the plays by not only challenging colonial presence in the colonies but by also dismantling all forms of colonial knowledge which is still haunting the ex-colonies. He completely eradicates the postcolonial hegemony through his radical postcolonial resistance by contesting the everyday trauma, repression, injustice and brutality which a common man is bound to suffer in a postcolonial set up.

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