

**UNIVERSITY OF ALGIERS 2  
FACULTY OF ARTS AND LANGUAGES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**HEROISM, REPRESENTATION AND COMMUNAL SALVATION IN WOLE  
SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*, *A DANCE OF THE  
FORESTS* AND *THE STRONG BREED***

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree  
of Magister in literature and civilization in the Department of English at the  
University of Bouzareah –Algiers-

**Submitted by:** Ms. Khadija Chergui

**Supervised by:** Prof. Mr. M'hamed Bensemmane

**Academic year: 2013/2014**

**Defended:** 13/03/2016

**BOARD OF EXAMINERS:**

**Chair:** Dr. Louiza Ait Hamou, University of Algiers

**Supervisor:** Prof. M'hamed Bensemmane, University of Algiers

**External examiner:** Dr. Sabrina Zerar, University of Tizi Ouzou

## **DISCLAIMER**

I hereby declare that the substance of this dissertation is entirely the result of my investigation and that due reference or acknowledgement is made, whenever necessary, to the work of other researchers. I am duly informed that any person practicing plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary sanctions issued by university authorities under the rules and regulations in force.

Ms. K. Chergui

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

*\* My greatest debt of gratitude goes to my supervisor, Prof. M'hamed Bensemmane whose supreme patience, wisdom and generosity made this work possible. He will ever remain a source of inspiration for me.*

*\*\* Sincere thanks go to all my family members, on their head my father and mother who provided inspiration and support beyond the call of duty, and to my friend Prof. Latri Souad for being a voice of reason and passion in hard times. My profound gratitude goes to my brother Prof. Chergui Abd Elghani whose various discussions gave a new impetus to my work.*

*\*\*\* My gratitude also goes to some Yoruba friends on Facebook and Twitter, namely Adebayo Biodun Temitayo and Samuel Dero, whose numerous discussions helped me to enrich my topic.*

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how Soyinka's vision of the relationship between the individual and society, mainly the idea of the "visceral intertwining of an individual with the fate of the community", is developed in some of his tragic plays. Soyinka's presentation of the vision of the tragic heroic self in *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Strong Breed*, and *Death and the king's Horseman*, is part of his project to bring about change in society. This attempt at change manifests in him trying to raise people's consciousness and awareness to issues that might be detrimental to their future well-being. Understanding Soyinka's philosophy of change requires getting an insight to the obstacles and difficulties the heroic characters, Demoke, Eman, and Elesin encounter as they try to intervene to direct the future of their societies. Soyinka introduces these characters along with the ancient gods' tragedies; mainly Ogun's one which is considered a motivating factor for the tragic hero, into the service of a cultural debate that any society, for the purpose of achieving salvation, requires of its members to transmit moral teaching to its collective social consciousness for the sake of ensuring harmony and future regeneration. Soyinka's characters, who are the appointed nation-builders and saviors, become the chosen agents in raising that consciousness.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, we will look into Soyinka's philosophy of art and life with a view to understanding and appreciating the way he invokes Yoruba traditional mythology to present his vision of potential salvation and change in society. In Soyinka's dramas, myths and rituals are incorporated with a modernist consciousness reflecting their importance in a modern changing world.

In the second chapter, I will examine what constitutes a tragic experience in Soyinka's drama. We see how Soyinka presents his vision of tragic heroism within a cosmic mythological framework. The chapter attempts also to examine how the issues of destiny

and individual choice versus collective will do overlap in the human agent who is deemed as the vehicle for achieving the salvation wanted by his community.

The last chapter examines, on the basis of a close analysis of the tragic heroes, the fact that Soyinka, despite him being deeply rooted in his Yoruba, Nigerian and African land and traditions, relates his writing experience to that of world literature as he probes into an entire human condition through considering tragedy's role to understand the human paradox or human nature in general.

Apparent from all this, is the fact that Soyinka believes that in order to release the society from what he termed in his play *A Dance of the Forests* "the soul-deadening habits", the chosen heroic agent that Soyinka outlines in his plays, would act as " the force of fusion between the various contradictions"; the individual's ability to lead and direct the community's future. Significantly, we demonstrate the effectiveness and optimism inherent in the vision of the tragic heroic self to be a catalyst for communal salvation.

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
-------------------	---

### **CHAPTER ONE: SOYINKA'S DRAMA AND TRADITIONAL AFRICAN LORE**

1.1. Mythical and ritual epistemologies in Soyinka's drama.....	15
1.2. Notions of being and human agency in Yoruba worldview.....	25
1.3. The meaning of self-sacrifice in Soyinka's drama.....	30

### **CHAPTER TWO: SOYINKA'S DRAMA AND THE YORUBA CONCEPTION OF TRAGIC HEROISM**

2.1. Soyinka's concept of tragedy.....	39
2.1.1. The questioning hero and the notion of being a savior.....	43
2.1.2. Moral choice and the Ogunian ethic .....	48
2.2. Heroes as agents of morality and communal salvation in <i>Death and The King's Horseman, A Dance of The Forests</i> and <i>The Strong Breed</i> .....	52

### **CHAPTER THREE: IN THE BACKDROP OF AFRICAN CULTURE, A UNIVERSAL WORLD: SOYINKA'S "DRAMA OF ESSENCE"**

3.1. "Piercing the encrustations of soul-deadening habits".....	77
3.2. Universal knowledge in <i>Death and The King's Horseman, A Dance of The Forests</i> and <i>The Strong Breed</i> :.....	79
3.2.1. Patterns of self-knowledge in Soyinka, Shakespeare and Euripides... ..	80
3.2.2. "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it": The paradoxical dimension of human nature.....	96

CONCLUSION.....	105
-----------------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	118
-------------------	-----

## INTRODUCTION:

The vision of salvation as a privileged gift which can only be connected to an exceptional figure in the human community runs through Soyinka's works in different ways. In his plays, Soyinka creates exceptional figures out of several characters. In *The Strong Breed* (thereafter *TSB*), *Death and the King's Horseman* (thereafter *DKH*), and *A Dance of the Forests* (thereafter *ADF*), Eman, Olunde and Demoke willingly accept to sacrifice their lives for the continuity of their race. These individuals are appointed, because of their inherent dispositions, to address the challenges of the situations that are experienced by them and their respective communities. Soyinka insists that only the creative will of some individuals could define and determine ideals and values that would be meaningful and rewarding for them and their societies. It is this effort at the innovation of ideals and ethics which qualifies the hero and the leader as a visionary, a myth maker and path finder or what I would term in my study a 'nation builder'.

This is what motivates us to claim that the playwright projects, in different settings, the correlation between the desperate human condition and the possibilities of salvation and regeneration which in the twentieth century was an issue of crucial importance. Writers have all the time tried to evoke in their works conditions of despair which the individual cannot be expected to control easily. At the same time, they try, through choosing the individual psyches as sites of exploration, to diagnose these conditions of despair and suggest possible ways to attain the salvation needed to recover from these undesirable conditions. Soyinka points to the fact that the despondent and agonizing human condition is a universal reality and that such a condition expresses humanity's pressing need for salvation, and this certainly is the dominant concern in many of his plays. Soyinka on his part endeavors, through the incorporation of the African mythical and ritual epistemologies

and frames of thought, to explore the absurdity of the human condition against the background of African belief systems. In the plays under study, Soyinka imagines a model nation-builder who can grasp conditions around him and make use of his vision and the knowledge he is endowed with to open his community's eyes towards circumstances that might be detrimental to societal welfare. Thus, this nation-builder would stand as an archetype of behavior to be emulated, and becomes a source of fusion between the various contradictions that inhibit modern societies from enjoying a healthy living. This can be achieved, according to Soyinka, through the dedication of individuals like Demoke (the artist) in *A Dance of the Forests*, Eman (the teacher) in *The Strong Breed*, Olunde (the doctor) in *Death and the King's Horseman* and Igwezu in *The Swamp Dwellers*, among others. Soyinka terms this as the Ogunian hero who would act according to an Ogunian ethic that necessitates taking hard decisions, making difficult choices, with recognizing the presence of both the creative and destructive inclinations in humanity. He employs the personality of the Yoruba god Ogun as a motivating factor for this tragic hero for Soyinka believes that he has always faced the challenges of wrong choices and turnings.

Soyinka is one of those modern dramatists who project modern realities in their works for the purpose of satirizing and deriding inadequate attitudes. In so doing, this writer seeks to elicit the readers' and audiences' sympathy with modern society's plight in its inability to lead a harmonious existence. Soyinka's writings display a profound distaste for immoral postures and his dramas constitute a cry of anguish over an impotent post-colonial Nigeria and its impotent leading individuals. In most of his plays, he inveighs against human silence in the face of transgressions, against the individual's lack of reflection and insight to affect the course of events, against the terrifying emptiness that turns functional

individuals into empty and unmoving dummies possessing nothing of value to contribute to the world's progress. In his "The Credo of Being and Nothingness", Soyinka contends that:

*The Will of man is placed beyond surrender. Without the knowing of Divinity by man, can Deity survive? Oh hesitant one, Man's conceiving is fathomless; his community will rise beyond the present reaches of the mind. Orisa reveals destiny as SELF-DESTINATION.*<sup>1</sup>

By the word self –destination, Soyinka means that beyond the general conception that destiny intervenes to shape peoples' lives, the individual can intervene by using his will for action, to change the course of events because his capacity for action, as Soyinka maintains, should be "*placed beyond surrender*". Accordingly, in some of his plays, Soyinka dramatizes those vices that prevent people from emerging into better humans and better societies. For him, the human project demands daring attempts in the form of sacrifices to combat the forces that motivate and promote these contradictions. For instance, in his strongly satirical play, *Kongi's Harvest*, Kongi, having tasted all the irresistible attractions of power and domination, calls himself the Spirit of Harvest. He is a kind of a leader of the nation-state who desires to be the ultimate creator, founder and originator of all, the most complete source of authority. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, the Kadiye, in the name of god and in order to appease the divine serpent of the swamps, acts as a threat to people's stability as he encroaches on the villagers' rights and properties. In this scenario of confused and corrupt values enters the nation-builder, the Ogunian heroic character that Soyinka outlines in the dramas under study, the one who is prepared to sacrifice himself so as to raise his society's consciousness to the previously mentioned vices leading to both the salvation that the society needs as well as to a way of redeeming himself.

---

<sup>1</sup>. Cited in Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 276

The theme of communal salvation that comes about through the self-sacrifices of dedicated individuals in society is not a new one. This has been a prevalent concern in literary art as can be seen in various phases of literary history such as in the works of Homer, Euripides, John Milton, William Shakespeare, and Emile Zola to the modernists T.S. Eliot and James Joyce among others. Following the dense production on that theme, taken over to African literature, I will focus on some plays by Wole Soyinka in view of his interest in relating African drama to the universal experience. Soyinka's interest in the theme of communal salvation springs from his desire to initiate a change in the thinking of a community's social, political and moral life and to cultivate for his people a safe path towards the future that ensures both individual as well as social progress.

This theme of salvation that aims at initiating regeneration in society has always preoccupied Soyinka in many of his works. Being thought of by many critics as "*a man against the establishment, a firm believer in the absolute freedom of the individual*"<sup>2</sup>, Soyinka is a kind of modern writer who has used the power of his art to criticize social misconduct and even shock his audience for the sake of opening their eyes to issues they have always blindly believed in and adopted without any attempt at change. He wanted to transform life into something more ordered and meaningful than the alienating and morally misleading postures he sees around him and that are created by people who lack the illuminating spirit that characterizes the writer. In a personal mode of thought that tries to reach the horizons of the universal, Soyinka detaches himself from any specific ideology, making of the universal human condition his sole playground to bring to the fore his enlightened revelation to a deluded and benighted African as well as world audience. From this vantage point, it emerges that the act of salvation that Soyinka stresses in most of his

---

<sup>2</sup>. Ogunba Oyin, *The Movement of Transition* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975) p. 6

works takes the form of raising the "collective consciousness" of the community. For regeneration to be a lived reality, Soyinka believes that society has to be saved from what he termed in his play *ADF* "the soul-deadening habits"<sup>3</sup>; that society has to come to a meeting point with its reality where it can apprehend what went wrong and what is needed so that the regeneration of the whole community can be brought about. In retrieving the traditional Yoruba festivals and rites, Soyinka employs the theme of death not as the end stage to life but as its redemptive and strengthening force. Ketu Katrak points out:

*The goal of Yoruba tragedy is to energize the community at the conclusion; therefore, the need for coming towards endings is eminent. The resolution lies not in the protagonist's death but in his bringing new strength into the communal life-blood.*<sup>4</sup>

Tejumola Olaniyan thinks that Soyinka, in his dramas, shows his favor of individual will rather than collective will to achieve the salvation needed by the society: "*For Soyinka, the motive cause of history is not class or group but the lone individual hero who acts for and catalyzes the community: the Ogun, the Atunda...*"<sup>5</sup> This act of salvation, Soyinka believes, should not be entrusted to everyone in the community but to only those who exhibit certain capacities that make them eligible for the task. Eldred Jones writes:

*This act of salvation is not a mass act; it comes about through the vision and the dedication of individuals who doggedly pursue their vision in spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save. They frequently end up as the victims of the society which benefits from their vision*<sup>6</sup>

In *TSB*, *DKH* and *ADF*, there is the death of someone for the sake of newness, renewal, catharsis and communal salvation. Elesin's, Eman's and Demoke's deaths (hypothetically

---

<sup>3</sup>. Soyinka wole, *A Dance of the Forests in Collected Plays I* ((Oxford: OUP, 1973) p. 71

<sup>4</sup>. Katrak Ketu, H. *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) p. 19

<sup>5</sup>. Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) p. 61

<sup>6</sup>. Jones, Eldred Durosimi, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973) p. 11

speaking) are not for the sake of the dead but for bringing harmony to the rest of the universe because in the Yoruba cultural setup there is an interconnection between one and another and between the living, the dead and the unborn. In pursuit of their ideals, these chosen characters embark on their redemptive roles in various forms of representation and ritual enactments. This act of representation means to create an image in minds of people, to function as a pattern to be finally measured to be worthy or not of emulation. It also means to bring to presence a behavior or a situation that stands for an ethic or an attitude in people's lives. The present study is to explore the images of individuals representing the fate of their communities.

So, there is a suggestion here, through an examination of the way Soyinka appropriates ritual and mythical epistemologies and the way he subjects them to what he calls "cosmic inspection", that Soyinka's tragic dramas, particularly those under study, appropriate ritual and mythical epistemologies. Soyinka indeed aims at projecting the image of individuals representing the fate of their community. There is a suggestion also that Wole Soyinka, in his tragic dramas, outlines a model nation builder who can be a catalyst for change and a force of fusion between the different forces that would stand in the face of any society's evolution. This research work also points to the fact that those individuals representing the fate of their community, as they go through sacrifices, death and other ritual enactments, get insights into their psyches as well as into the meaning of life, therefore reflecting the playwright's quest for truth and spirituality behind the manifold experiences of life. This research work also points to the fact that Soyinka attempts a questioning of the ambivalences that inform the ontology, epistemology and cosmology of the African world. A conclusion is also to be reached, on the basis of a close examination and analysis of tragic heroes in some of his tragic plays, concerning the fact that Soyinka,

despite his being deeply rooted in his Yoruba, Nigerian and African land and traditions, relates his writing experience to that of world literature as he attempts a questioning of an entire human condition by highlighting the role of tragedy in understanding human nature and its often paradoxical dimension. Soyinka appropriately and successfully employed his intellectual sagacity to make these points unequivocal.

To do so, I will base this study on myth criticism with a focus on its archetypal aspect. Archetypes usually offer examples of human behavior and involve a gnosis that includes tales, beliefs and rituals. The following scholars are known to have greatly contributed to the development of archetypal criticism: James Frazer in the late 19th century revealed the recurring mythical patterns across cultures; Carl Jung in the 1930's, with his psychoanalytic approach to myth, developed a theory of archetypes out of his conception of the mythic patterns advocated by Frazer; and Northrop Frye proposed, based on the previous scholars' contributions, a whole theory of literary archetypal criticism in the 1950's<sup>7</sup>. This approach focuses on universal archetypal images and patterns and according to which myths and rituals are interpreted as structuring the human world and explicating the phenomenon of being. In the light of this approach, certain issues are investigated, such as: what universal experiences and human concerns are depicted and revealed in the work; how myths attempt to explain the purpose and destiny of human life; what kinds of transformations the protagonists undergo and what archetypal events do occur in the work (quest, initiation, scapegoating, sacrifice, descent into the underworld, ascent to heaven...etc.). Carl Jung avers that:

*...The archetypes, which are pre-existent to consciousness (...) appear in the part they actually play in reality: as a priori structural forms of the stuff of*

---

<sup>7</sup>. Wilfred Guerin, Earle G. Labor, Lee Morgan, John R. Willingham, *A Handbook of Critical Approaches*. (Harper Row, 1966) pp. 123-135

*consciousness. They do not in any sense represent things as they are in themselves, but rather the forms in which things can be perceived and conceived.*<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the issues and phenomena that the present study negotiates and that the three plays under study reveal can be possibly approached by adopting the myth archetype criticism. The study is in a question of heroism; of images of individuals representing the fate of their communities, fate and destiny of a people, death as a universal human concern and experience, and archetypal events such as sacrifice, scapegoating, ascent to the unseen world accompanied with various transformations undergone by the characters. Such events do occur in the three plays under study. When approached, then, from Carl Gustav Jung's "collective unconscious myths", as well as Northrop Frye's, Joseph Campbell's, James Fraser's and Clyde Kluckhohn's elaborations, one understands myths to represent patterns of beliefs and spiritual concepts in literature and society, dealing with themes, experiences and situations universally acknowledged and experienced. Clyde Kluckhohn, in his article "Recurrent Themes in Myths and Mythmaking" stresses the fact that

*certain features of mythology that are apparently universal or that have such wide distribution in space and time that result from recurrent reactions of the human psyche to situations and stimuli of the same general order*<sup>9</sup>.

In relating the myth archetypal approach to literature to his works, Soyinka, in his dramas, makes use of gods as well as human agents as archetypes of behavior and as representatives of certain depths of human nature with which he dramatized in most of his works. He says:

*...gods of the pantheon are artistic tools and are commended particularly by Soyinka for: their self-sacrifice on the alter of literature "... and possibly because*

---

<sup>8</sup>. Jung, Carl Gustav. "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious." 1936. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1968) P. 347

<sup>9</sup>. Kluckhohn, Clyde. "Recurrent Themes in Mythmaking." *Myth and Mythmaking*. Ed. Henry A. Murray. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) ( 46- 60.) p. 46

of ... " further service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being<sup>10</sup>

It is also important to situate and read the dramatist's works in a way that is in line with the writer's 'world'. In this respect, critical essays of Soyinka scholarship, such as those of Eldred Jones, Gerald Moore, Ketu Katrak, Jeyifo Biodun and James Gibbs will illuminate my study. In the last chapter, I will attempt a comparison of Wole Soyinka's philosophy of social change with some works representative of world literature to get an insight into the way he relates his writing experience to that of world literature.

Soyinka's contribution to our understanding of myths and rituals, as elaborated in his dramatic theories, is revealing. Soyinka's use of myth reflects his engagement with the present moment and explains his interest at finding meaning behind the manifold experiences of life. Ato Quayson suggests that Soyinka:

*Transfer[s] the myths from its [sic] ritual contexts of performance, but by the extensive interpretation to which he submits them, their original terms are re-written so as to embrace new aesthetic, cultural, and even political realities that were not within their purview in other cultural uses.*<sup>11</sup>

In Soyinka's mythical and ritual tragic theory, Yoruba metaphysical concepts are integrated in the form of mythical narratives and performed in ritual enactments. In his tragic dramas, Soyinka appropriates mythical and ritual epistemologies as artistic tools to approach the nature of man, his desires and aspirations. For him, myth is

*The essentialisation of a rational worldview, one which is elicited from the reality of social and natural experience and from the integrated reality of racial myth, into a living reality*<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup>. Soyinka Wole, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 9

<sup>11</sup>. Quayson, Ato. *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and history in the work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka & Ben Okri*, (Oxford, James Currey & Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997) p. 75

<sup>12</sup>. Soyinka, *Myth*, p. 4

Myth, therefore, is a term used to project the complex African reality. The plays under study illustrate Soyinka's views on drama, the African worldview and the nature of Yoruba tragedy. His theories are first articulated in the essay, "The Fourth Stage" (1969) subtitled, "Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy". His seminal work *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976) is a key text that contains essays that testify to his awareness of the importance of tradition in shaping African writings. This project manifests itself in Soyinka's plays through a treatment of past mythology and tradition by considering them as paradigms to outline his philosophy of change as well as sources of a creative insight. On the whole, Soyinka's dramatic theory, which is largely centered on the myth of Ogun and the Yoruba philosophical thought, proves Soyinka's rootedness in Yoruba culture, cosmology and worldview and which this dissertation takes as a point of departure in approaching the complex issues examined in the three plays. His art lies in the way he combines the myths of the past with the realities of the present and that he uses such a skillful embedding as a revolutionary medium to outline his salvation project for his people and for the world in its entirety. Soyinka always stresses that, "*Transition is now,*" he said,

*and is born of every experience, not buried in the stillness of antiquity. This freedom is the true legacy of the modern African, the freedom to reshape, to select and to reject, to build new forms around the image of the past, to reinterpret the ancient idioms through the uniqueness of a personal, contemporary experience. For the new African, form is a movement that constantly supersedes itself*<sup>13</sup>

In the first chapter of this dissertation, therefore, we will look into Soyinka's philosophy of art and life with a view to understanding and appreciating the way he invokes Yoruba traditional mythology to present his vision of potential salvation and change in society. In

---

<sup>13</sup>. Rand Bishop, *African Literature, African Critics: The Forming of Critical Standards, 1947-1966*, (Greenwood Press, New York, 1988) p. 104

Soyinka's dramas, myths and rituals are incorporated with a modernist consciousness reflecting their importance in a modern changing world.

In the second chapter, I will examine what constitutes a tragic experience in Soyinka's drama. We see how Soyinka presents his vision of tragic heroism within a cosmic mythological framework. The chapter attempts also to examine how the issues of destiny and individual choice versus collective will do overlap in the human agent who is deemed as the vehicle for achieving the salvation wanted by his community.

The last chapter examines, on the basis of a close analysis of the tragic heroes, the fact that Soyinka, despite his being deeply rooted in his Yoruba, Nigerian and African land and traditions, relates his writing experience to that of world literature as he probes into an entire human condition through considering tragedy's role to understand human nature and its often paradoxical/dual dimension.

## **Chapter One:**

---

### **SOYINKA'S DRAMA AND TRADITIONAL AFRICAN LORE**

*" I abandoned my work—it was middle of night—and walked. Idanre is the record of that walk through wet woods on the outskirts of Molete, a pilgrimage to Idanre in the company of presences such as dilate the head and erase known worlds. We returned at dawn, the sun was rising just below the hut where we had sheltered on the outward journey..."*

(Wole Soyinka, *Idanre*: 58)

Chapter one of this study sets out to explore the way Wole Soyinka uses his Yoruba African lore in the service of a social creative vision for his community and the way he values the old gnosis, the old forms of knowledge, for their relevance in a modern changing world.

Writers, throughout various historical epochs and across different geographical spheres, have used their art with the aim of initiating a change in the thinking of people in their respective communities, raising their consciousness to issues of great importance to them. In crafting their literary works, they can possibly use existing social conditions as ingredients to diagnose and reflect on as they might create their own conditions to maintain or reinforce certain beliefs and attitudes. Past as well as present historical and political events have always shaped the background of many literary works in Africa and elsewhere. Such works serve as premonitory glimpses to the change of a certain order, as projections of images of social decay, or as reflections of some of the agonizing experiences that most societies go through in the stages of their historical development. This reflects these writers'

growing sense of responsibility to save what can still be saved to be used as an enriching ground for the future.

Wole Soyinka is one example of those writers/artists who have all the time grappled with conditions that characterize contemporary life aiming directly or indirectly to influence societal attitudes and behaviors. The title of Soyinka's Nobel acceptance speech was, "This past must address its present". One can understand that Soyinka thinks that bringing to center stage the past experiences and the events that shaped them is a vital tool to assist people to come to terms with their present realities and even more to prepare them for possible future challenges. The title of the speech reminds me of T.S. Eliot's remark that the past "*should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past*"<sup>14</sup>. Chinua Achebe upholds the same view when he contends that the role of the writer is to assist his society to better understand its past and present realities:

*Our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose. Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society, and created their works for the good of that society*<sup>15</sup>.

Soyinka's artistic vision for his people is shaped and inspired by the cultural structure which defines his very essence, as Abiola Irele asserts:

*The myth of the artist as it develops in Soyinka's writings rests on his role as the mediator of the inner truths that sustain collective life, and on his function in renewing the fundamental values that govern it*<sup>16</sup>.

In his article, "Tradition and the Yoruba writers", Irele thinks that some Yoruba writers, in his examples are Amos Tutuola, D.O. Fagunwa and Wole Soyinka, reflect in their works the vision and talent of writers whose "*symbolic schemes and resonance derive from the culture*

---

<sup>14</sup>. Eliot, T.S, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in David Lodge ed., *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: Reader*. (London: Longman, 1998) p. 39

<sup>15</sup>. Achebe Chinua, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*. (London: Heinemann, 1975) p. 19

<sup>16</sup>. Irele, Abiola. "Tradition and the Yoruba Writers: D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka." *Yoruba Language and Literature*. (Ed.). Ife: University Press, 1982. pp. (95-117) p. 100

that provides the foundation of their individual imaginative worlds."<sup>17</sup>—These writers share a common ground that testifies to the role of their traditional belief systems in informing their works that are suffused with mythical and/or metaphysical landscapes inhabited by ancient deities, supernatural beings and the spirits of the ancestors. In this regard, the function of these writers is to help improve the African situation through the appropriation of myths, rituals and other aesthetics and also to envision a better social order through this consciousness raising. In his essay, "The Writer in a Modern African State", Soyinka writes, "*The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experiences of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time.*"<sup>18</sup> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, on his account, supports Soyinka's view on the African writer as a moving spirit in the modern era:

*The product of a writer's imaginative involvement – what Shakespeare called mirror unto nature - becomes a reflection of society: its economic structure, its class formation, its conflicts and contradictions; its class power political and cultural struggles; its structure of values - the conflict and tensions arising from the antagonism between those which are dying and those which are pointing to the future*<sup>19</sup>.

In the case of Wole Soyinka, employing traditional African lore " registers his quest for fundamental human and spiritual values as they are expressed in the traditional worldview."<sup>20</sup>

This possibly motivated Soyinka, along with many other writers of his age, to delve into the repository of his society's past knowledge to seek answers for his quest and to awaken in his readers the desire to participate in the task of unraveling the frailties and

---

<sup>17</sup>. "Tradition and the Yoruba Writers: D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka.", *opcit.*, p. 95

<sup>18</sup>. "The Writer in A Modern African State". (1967) *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*. p. 20

<sup>19</sup>. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. *Writers in Politics: Essays*, (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1981) p. 72

<sup>20</sup>. Abiola Irele, *Ibid.*

fatuities that are inhibiting modern societies from evolving into better societies. We need to understand that Soyinka does not retrieve aspects of his culture's mythology and tradition out of a glorification of the past neglecting the present, instead, he criticizes the African social past and uses it as a means to work out a philosophy adequate for modern life. In this chapter, we shall look at the mythical and ritual epistemologies that do inform Soyinka's writing along with the notion of the person/individual as outlined in the Yoruba worldview. This leads us to speak about the notion of sacrifice that shapes the core of the plays under study; the notion that ontologically relates man, society and the cosmos.

### **1.1. Mythical and ritual epistemologies in Soyinka's drama:**

Myths and rituals are often interpreted in the light of the close relation they have with human nature and human psychology. Where myth is presented as a narrative underlying a certain worldview, ritual is presented as its enactment, as its manifestation on a human practical sphere.

Myth is usually thought of as a narrative aiming at projecting the image of the world making it possible for people to unravel some truths about their past events. In *Myth and Reality*, Mircea Eliade tells us that myths are "*the most general and effective means of awakening and maintaining consciousness of another world, a world beyond, whether.. it be the divine world or the world of the ancestors*"<sup>21</sup> . Myth, relating its use to modern times, offers a new ground for understanding man and his place in the world. In "Ulysses, order and myth", T.S. Eliot asserts that: "*myth is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is*

---

<sup>21</sup>. Eliade Mircea. *Myth and Reality*, translated by: Willard R. Trask (Harper & Row publishers: New York and Evanston, 1968 ) p. 139

*contemporary history*"<sup>22</sup>. With his psychological insight into the study of myths and rituals and through his concept of the archetype, Carl Jung interpreted myths as the projection of what he termed "the collective unconscious"; that is the expression of the inherited psychic realities of a society and these myths, according to him, contain images and archetypes which are shared by the society as a whole. These archetypes, according to Jung, turn out to be tools to reflect on a certain universal reality and which serve as examples and images. The patterns of behavior that many heroes and characters share and exhibit act as archetypes of transformation and salvation, individual as well as social<sup>23</sup>.

While Eliot considers myth as a means to give shape to experience and Jung speaks of it as a means to reveal some shared psychic realities, Wole Soyinka thinks that myth serves as a tool to achieve "self-apprehension", the full awareness of being. Soyinka elucidates in the preface to his *Myth, Literature and the African World* that his use of traditional myths consists in:

*...eliciting from history, mythology and literature, for the benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its non-existence or its irrelevance...in contemporary world reality*<sup>24</sup>

In using myth, Soyinka aims at projecting the way the African world perceives itself and its place in the world, as a framework that would enable people to come to terms with reality, reflect on past events and seek answers for their shortcomings and pressures of living. He further maintains that: "*man exists in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores and, in such a total context, the African world, like any other world is unique.*"<sup>25</sup> In his

---

<sup>22</sup>. Eliot, Thomas Stearns, "Ulysses, order and myth", [www.rci.rutgers.edu/~marinos/MythicalMethod.html](http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~marinos/MythicalMethod.html)

<sup>23</sup>. Carl. G. Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious," in. *Man and His Symbols*, ed. C.G. Jung and Marie Louise von Franz. (New York: Dell, 1964) pp. 17-18

<sup>24</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., p. xi

<sup>25</sup>. *Ibid.*

mythical and ritual theory, Soyinka incorporates mythical and ritual epistemologies central to Yoruba worldview within the context of a "cosmic inspection" because he thinks that people in Africa are closely tied to a cosmic reality that allows them the apprehension of the self and the purpose of their existence in the world. Hence, one might assume that Soyinka uses myth to project the complex African reality and that he makes use of the ancient paradigms central to Yoruba worldview to address his concern with the modern day wavering conditions in his continent. He is recognized by many critics to be a modern mythmaker likening him to the modernists James Joyce and T.S Eliot.

As for rituals, Soyinka shares many of Carl Jung's views that rituals are usually performed because they express man's desire to enjoy a spiritual understanding of his life. Ritual theater for Soyinka *"parallels the experience and intuitions in man ...are an integral part of man's efforts to master the immensity of the cosmos with his miniscule self."*<sup>26</sup> Some other theorists like James Frazer, Emile Durkheim, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss attest to the emotional cathartic function of ritual, at both the social as well as the individual levels. According to them, ritual has always functioned as a vehicle for emotional communal satisfaction, *"the agency by which men are brought into contact with divine, inspirational and often aesthetic experience in a controlled and regulated way"*<sup>27</sup>.

To illustrate Soyinka's view of tradition as it develops in his writings, we opted for god Ogun's myth and the vision of rituals as "rites-of-passage" as they are two insights into comprehending his mechanism of initiating change in the three plays under study.

Wole Soyinka has written several essays dealing with the mythic sources of Yoruba ritual, the origins of the Yoruba tragic conception and the interpretation of Yoruba

---

<sup>26</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., p. 141

<sup>27</sup>. Frazer, James, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*. (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993) p. 80

cosmology in relation to human experience. In his well-known essay, "The Fourth Stage", he points to the cyclic nature of reality for the Yoruba and how the realm of the gods is tied to that of the mortals in a relation of mutual obligation and service where, for the purpose of securing communal continuity and harmony, the divide between the two realms has to be diminished by either side of the divide. Therefore, the gods intervened in the ways of the mortals to provide insight and guidance. On the other hand, to create order and balance in the universe, individuals remain the central initiative within that framework through personal daring acts. Soyinka writes:

*If we may put the same thing in fleshed-out cognitions, life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn. All are vitally within the intimations and the affectiveness of life, beyond mere abstract conceptualization<sup>28</sup>.*

In that context, and according to Yoruba mythology, this heroic task of establishing a link between the two realms was overtaken by many gods over the centuries but all was in vain until the arrival of the Promethean\* god Ogun who could triumphantly demolish the impassable barrier between the two worlds. For this, he gained the designations of: "*the first warrior*", "*the master of the world*", the one who "*showed the way*"<sup>29</sup> to others, the one who always sought for knowledge, the one who opened the roads and cleared the fields:

*And Ogun is also the master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a gregarious imbibor, a reluctant leader of men and deities. He is 'Lord of the road' of Ifa; that is, he opens the way to the heart of Ifa's wisdom, thus representing the knowledge-seeking instinct, an attribute which sets him apart as the only deity who 'sought the*

---

<sup>28</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., p. 144

\*1. In considering the process of individuation as a universal shared reality, Soyinka stresses the continuities between Greek mythology and contemporary Yoruba mythology. Ogun is, according to Soyinka, the Yoruba counterpart and older brother of Prometheus and Dionysus. He mentioned this in a note at the beginning of his version of (*The Bacchae*, 1973) xiv.

<sup>29</sup>. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p. 7

*way', and harnessed the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man<sup>30</sup>.*

Ogun's heroic acts, however, included the seeds of violence and bloodshed. To highlight this destructive aspect that characterizes the nature and character of Ogun, Soyinka opines that:

*Ogun is the antithesis of cowardice and philistinism, yet within him is contained also the complement of the creative essence, a bloodthirsty destructiveness. Contradictory as they are, it is necessary to experience those aspects of the god as a single comprehended essence<sup>31</sup>*

According to Soyinka's conception, then, the counterbalancing side of creativity is destructiveness, two traits that have to complement each other in one single being and the absence of each would make the wholeness of the being incomplete. And, to locate Ogun within the pale of everyday reality and to relate the opposing passions of his nature to the human character analogously, Soyinka tells us that not all individuals can be expected to follow in the tracks of Ogun but only the individual

*Whose spirit has been tested and whose psychic resources laid under stress by the forces most inimical to individual assertion.....who can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions<sup>32</sup>.*

Using the gods as active agents and characters in literary tradition is not something restricted to Soyinka's works. Some other African writers used their gods as central characters in their plays and poems to reflect on some spiritual, social and political matters in their societies. Most Indian dramatists inserted the gods Shiva, Parvati and Krishna to express their vision of truth beyond the abode of the real. Nietzsche used the old Persian god Zarathustra to express his modern philosophy, and the Greek tragedians used the pantheon of their gods with their conflicting passions to reflect on issues of great importance in

---

<sup>30</sup>. Soyinka, *Myth.*, pp. 145-146

<sup>31</sup>. In, "And After the Narcissist?", (*African Forum* vol. 1 no. 460, 1966) pp. 53-54

<sup>32</sup>. *Myth*, p. 145

ancient Greece. All these writers invoked these gods with the intention to initiate a change and present a vision of life.

Being the central trope in most of Soyinka's works, therefore, Ogun sometimes acts with a creative impulse emerging as one who acts on behalf of his community; in other instances he acts with a destructive impulse, eking out a path of communal salvation, however, using violence in the process. In his novel, *The Interpreters* (1965), which launches a sustained critique of Nigerian society at the threshold of its independence, led by a self-contradictory and corrupt elite that fails to be at the reach of its society's expectations to be an active agent of transformation, we come across an Ogun image that is interpreted differently by different interpreters (the four protagonists). While Kola proudly reveals his epic painting at the end of the novel, Egbo describes Kola's Ogun as a looming figure who kills his own people in a bloodthirsty craziness, one who deserves no recognition of any effort at being heroic. In his play *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), there emerges another picture of Ogun where Demoke is said to share many of the creative features of his patron Ogun, regardless of the crime he committed against his apprentice. Both Gerald Moore and Eldred Jones think that his artistic creativity overshadows his crime when he tries to save the Half-Child, and the future of humanity accordingly. In this play, Demoke displays both the creative and destructive attributes of his god.

Biodun Jeyifo's commentary on the Ogun phenomenon in Soyinka's writings would further extrapolate the contradictory aspects of the god. In his essay, "Forget the Muse, think only of the (Decentered) Subject?" (2011), Jeyifo questions the way some African and Caribbean writers, with Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott as the subject of his discussion, incorporate some traditional 'muses' as a part of their struggle to bring about change in society besides being artistic tools in crafting out a literary aesthetic. In some instances, he

thinks that in his incorporation of the Ogun myth, Soyinka aims at criticizing Ogun as a muse and his workings over his human protégés claiming that Soyinka wants to "*alert us to those dimensions of the appropriation of cultural traditions which are often of dubious, even contradictory value to the community*"<sup>33</sup>. In other instances, Jeyifo alludes to Ogun as an inspirer of creativity and moral progress. He concludes that:

*The Nigerian author's recognition that when muses are constructed around the powerful or central deities and avatars of a culture, they are subject to both creative, beneficial appropriation and quite troubling and baleful uses*<sup>34</sup>.

In the light of the above observations, I think it would be accurate to say that in incorporating the Ogun phenomenon with its contradictory and conflicting inclinations in his writings, Soyinka aims at demonstrating the fact that the traditional elements that most modern dramatists tend to insert in their writings have to be approached from a critical angle to reveal both their positive and misleading dimensions and this constitutes part of a larger vision that makes of tradition and the past as two grounds on the basis of which present and future realities might be measured.

In his dramatic theories, Soyinka deploys a "rite-of-passage" narrative in which the welfare of the triumphant protagonist is inseparable from that of his community. This means that any benefit generated at the individual level would cover the rest of the community. Soyinka speaks of a passage, a gap that has to be bridged by the human endeavor, T.S. Eliot and the modernists speak of a certain hollowness and superficiality that characterize modern psyches and societies and which have to be filled with a conscious sensibility on the part of individuals. Thus, Soyinka is usually named "the philosopher of the gap" because he has always tried to demonstrate modern man's negotiation of his desperate condition because he

---

<sup>33</sup>. Jeyifo Biodun, "Forget the Muse, think only of the (Decentered) Subject?", (Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde • 48 (1) • 2011) p. 60

<sup>34</sup>. Ibid. p. 62

is faced with a void within him that has to be filled with an inward awareness to get rid of the feelings of nothingness that afflict not just individuals but entire societies in trying to initiate a balanced link between their past experiences and the ones currently at play. For Soyinka thinks that the restless climate that characterized most African nations after independence was due to a failure, on their part, to fill the gap that separates their past historical events with the realities they faced after independence. They failed to understand that the past has to function as a firm platform on which new realities might be built, to make it possible to deal with and respond to the new life discourses dictated by post-independence circumstances; a passageway that has to be bridged with a historical consciousness that relates past, present and future. Accomplishing that successfully would give a chance to these societies to rightly control and transform all the disturbing and retarding vibrations, social, political and moral, enslaving both individuals and communities in Africa and elsewhere.

Soyinka calls this phase of transition or transformation the "*chthonic realm*", "*primordial march*", "*transitional gulf*" and "*the Fourth stage*" and he regards it as "*the storehouse of creative and destructive essence*"<sup>35</sup>. Ritual theater, then, remains an arena in which man attempted to come to terms with his role in maintaining order and stability in the world:

*Because of the visceral intertwining of each individual with the fate of the entire community, a rupture in his functioning not only endangers this sacred reality but threatens existence itself*<sup>36</sup>.

Derek Wright propounds that in Soyinka's dramatic production:

---

<sup>35</sup>. "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy"(1973) In., Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays in Literature and Culture. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993) (pp.21–34.) p. 32

<sup>36</sup>. *Myth*, p. 53

*Its aim (of ritual) is to constantly recharge and keep in motion a vital flux which prevents stagnation and ensures the continued healthy functioning of society and the continuity of the species*<sup>37</sup>

In his "rites-of-passage" view of ritual, Soyinka shares some views with other theorists like the social theorist Arnold Van Gennep, who coined the phrase the "rites-of-passage" and the anthropologist Victor Turner that are worth mentioning to see in which way(s) the African Yoruba view and Soyinka's interpretation of it, stands out of them.

For Van Gennep, the rites of passage are those rites performed at specific stages in the life of the individual to prepare him to step into a new social status, ready to assume new responsibilities. During his development and to secure his passage to the next social station, the individual is confronted with challenges that he has to manage<sup>38</sup>. These periods, according to Van Gannep include birth, social puberty, and marriage....etc. This phase/period is termed by the anthropologist Victor Turner as the "liminal realm" or frame where it becomes possible for a society to asses, remodel and rearrange images and symbols. In his essay, "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality", Turner asserted that: *"to look at itself, a society must cut a piece of itself for inspection"*, for this to come about, *"it must set up a frame "*, a realm that allows images and symbols to *"be scrutinized, assessed, and, if need be, remodeled and rearranged."*<sup>39</sup> The piece that the society has to cut for inspection and assessment is the individual since he is

---

<sup>37</sup>. Derek Wright, "Ritual and Revolution: Soyinka's Dramatic Theory", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 23:1, (Online e-article. Synergies Prairie Node, January 1992) p. 47

<sup>38</sup>. Van Gennep, Arnold, *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1966) pp. 140-145

<sup>39</sup>. Turner Victor. "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 6/4 December, 1979) p. 468

\* This article appeared originally in Turner's *Performance in postmodern culture* (Madison, Wisconsin: Coda Press, Inc., 1977) and was reproduced in this journal by permission of the author and of the publisher.

the nexus of society and what is fathomed out of this individual inspection can then be generalized to suit the society as a whole.

Being more in line with Turner's theorization and despite the fact that some of Van Gannep's features are to be found in Soyinka, this passage, according to Soyinka, assumes metaphysical transcendental overtones. As Soyinka explains, the passage in the abyss of transition is a transcendental aspect of existence where a shift in the prior knowledge and understanding in the communal psyche is to be experienced. This shift can be from life to death, death to life, from mortality to immortality or from profane to sacred. With this view, death is not perceived to be an end stage of life but as a threshold to a new life. Mircea Eliade puts it as follows:

*The passage is a center of being ...attaining the center is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation; yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new life that is real, enduring and affective*<sup>40</sup>.

In his essay, "the Space of Transformations: Theory, Myth and Ritual in the Work of Wole Soyinka"(1997), Ato Quayson reflects on Soyinka's idea of the "Fourth Stage" linking it to his dramas *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Bacchae of Euripides*, referring to them as "bridging rituals" and "spaces of transformations" where individuals come into contact with "the infinite and the limitless" (using Turner's words). In entering these 'spaces of transformations', Quayson thinks, individuals experience a state of introspection where they become compelled to question their life, realities around them emerging as transformed individuals able to transfer their newly acquired knowledge to others in their society<sup>41</sup>.

---

<sup>40</sup>. Eliade Mircea, *The Myth of Eternal Return or Cosmos and History*. Trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen series XLVI (Princeton: UP, 1974) p. 96

<sup>41</sup>. Quayson Ato. "The Space of Transformations: Theory, Myth and Ritual in the Work of Wole Soyinka" (1997) in *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo, (Univ. of Mississippi Press, Jackson, 2001) pp. 201-236

From what was previously discussed, it becomes possible to argue that according to the worldview that Soyinka interprets in his writings, and most succinctly in the plays under study, human experience is a cycle that involves life in a constant development from one state to another; from past to present, from ignorance to introspection, from absurdity to awareness and consciousness, and most importantly from the recurrence of the "soul-deadening habits" to salvation and regeneration. Amidst these incessant transitions, the individual's initiative, knowledge and dare remain the sole moving mechanism.

### **1.2. Notions of being and human agency in Yoruba worldview:**

Wole Soyinka insists mainly on the role of the individual who sacrifices himself to save the community. The individual is in a perpetual attempt to identify himself within a society that constantly faces him with new challenges, the overcoming of which turns to be the measure of his social standing. In his various works, the individual, that who is endowed with knowledge and certain capacities, is expected to play the role of a mediator between the various realms of existence that his community recognizes, as a carrier of the community's sins and a vehicle for its regeneration. Not only in Africa but elsewhere in the world, certain assumptions about the way the world is constructed, about the nature of reality and about the purpose behind human existence and the role of the individual in it underlie the behavior and beliefs of human beings as lived out in their cultures. This provides people with a way of looking at the world and make sense out of it. This section, therefore, looks at the notion of person/individual or human agency as outlined in the Yoruba worldview, in relation to both the community and the entire cosmic phenomenon.

The transcendental nature characterizing the African perception of reality ties the individual to others in the community and compels him to see himself as an inseparable

segment from his community and from the entire cosmic phenomenon in a cycle of obligations and mutual service. Soyinka asserts:

*Where society lives in a close inter-relation with Nature, regulates its existence by natural phenomena within the observable processes of continuity -- ebb and tide, waxing and waning of the moon, rain and drought, planting and harvest – the highest moral order is seen as that which guarantees a parallel continuity of the species<sup>42</sup>.*

In addition to recognizing the individual as having a transcendental nature, the ontological structure of reality in African thought shows the person as the central figure in the maintenance of order in the universe. Since the individual is born with a human purpose, a mission, this elevates him to occupy a center position in the scheme of things assuming certain responsibilities. This further leads him to develop a sense of dynamic consciousness towards his surroundings and to understand that his sense of good would only be recognized and justified if it stretches out to embrace the collective good. John Mbiti, sharing views with Kwame Appiah and Kwasi Wiredu, opines that:

*Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man<sup>43</sup>.*

In this regard, the person in African philosophical conception is defined by reference to the environing community. This conception sometimes extends to justify even the individual's failure and triumph in certain areas of his personal life as exerting consequences far and wide embodying his society in general. Since the individual lives under the sway of a particular social structure, this same societal structure acts as the agent that can judge and

---

<sup>42</sup>. Soyinka, *Myth*, p. 52

<sup>43</sup>. Quoted in Bernard Matolino, *The concept of person in African political philosophy: an analytical and evaluative study*, (a PhD thesis in the School of Philosophy and Ethics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2008) p. 69

assess the individual's actions and behaviors. In his article, "On the normative conception of a person", Ifeanyi A. Menkiti puts forward the point that:

*Since triumph and failure have their consequences, and the consequences cut beyond the life cycle of the assignable individual, affecting others in the community as well, it follows that societies, both large and small, are in need of recognizing that they are caught up in an inextricable dance with their component individuals. And one of the ways to act on that recognition is to join the task of transforming the individual into a true person, in other words, a moral being or bearer of norms<sup>44</sup>.*

With this view of the individual in Yoruba worldview, the community then turns out to be the locus of duty and the individual as the moving mechanism in its workings. One can get the impression that there is some sort of interplay of individual and community in terms of norm prescribing and benefit reference. What I mean here is that, in trying to participate in the common good of the community, the individual performs certain tasks the norms of which are dictated by his community and this same community would later reap the benefits generated by the individual acts of its members. This additionally explains the fact that even though the individual enjoys a free social standing of his own to some degree, his actions have yet a communitarian dimension and they are of no sense unless they are performed with the intention to preserve order in the community. In commenting upon the fact that any imbalance in this chain that ties the individual to his community and to a certain cosmic reality would generate chaos and disorder at the human level, Wole Soyinka states that:

*Thus the death of an individual is not seen as an isolated incident in the life of one man. Nor is individual fertility separable from the regenerative promise of earth and sea. The sickness of the individual is a sign of, or may portend the sickness of, the world around him. Something has occurred to disrupt the natural rhythms and the cosmic balances of the total community<sup>45</sup>.*

---

<sup>44</sup>. Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, "On the normative conception of a person", In. *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Edited by Kwasi Wiredu, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004) pp. (324-332) p. 326

<sup>45</sup>. Soyinka, *Myth*, p. 51

Ostensibly, Soyinka wants to tell us that societal health and well-being are very dependent on the individual's well-being. As long as the individual works to maintain his personal progress, this would benefit the entire community in terms of ensuring a healthy and balanced life. Therefore, it becomes a communal necessity to maintain a balance and social order by seeking salvation and taking for models dedicated individuals to play different roles to that effect. Sometimes they are called upon to play the roles of mediators and connectors between various groups of influence as well as between the past, the present and the future of the community, as carriers of the community's sins and maladies and as saviors of the communal destiny in the face of dissolution and disintegration. The individual's perception of the common good, then, has to meet the expectations of the community and has to be flexible enough, in the case of deviance or of a society going astray, to give the individual a chance to intervene and impose order as necessary.

Living within the bounds of a certain social order and abiding by a particular socially defined framework makes it possible for the individual to exercise his capacities and judgments, although to a lesser degree, to alter what is usually held static and unalterable in society. We said earlier that some persons, according to the Yoruba cultural makeup, are born with a sacred mission and purpose. It is worth mentioning, nevertheless, that sometimes the individual meets sharp criticism when he works against the scheme of things, when he tries to use his own ideals to further the community's well-being and correct some unavailing practices. In most of Soyinka's works, we come across some characters being criticized for trying to influence societal attitudes towards certain issues. In his play *Kongi's Harvest*, Daodu is considered a rebel when he tried to challenge Kongi's tyranny in a coup d'état so as to put a limit to Kongi's lust for ,and abuse, of power and their nefarious effects on the rest of the community. In *The Strong Breed*, Eman is often warned by Sunma not to

interfere in the sacrificial rites of the village in which he is a stranger. He tried to illuminate the villagers' conception of a proper sacrifice while the villagers think that Ifada is a godsent man and the god's will has to be fulfilled even at the cost of the life of a powerless idiot. In *The Swamp Dwellers*, Igwezu, who is the protagonist of the play, is the one considered by all as the 'real son of the land'. He challenges the excessive lust and greed of the priest Kadiye, who in the name of god and in order to appease the divine serpent of the swamps, encroaches on the villagers' rights and properties. Because of this attitude, he is constantly warned by his father and the villagers that he is pulling himself into an unbreakable antagonism with the Kadiye, and this might cost his life at the end. But adamant and resolute, Igwezu ends up an outcast and a defiler as he strove to free himself from the shackles of falsified religious practices that the group blindly and uncritically follows.

Soyinka, therefore, makes of the traditional Yoruba worldview that he projects in his works a frame of thought to outline and reflect his vision of change which involves the individual and gives him a central role in amending reality and changing the course of events. The underlying assumption is that the individual has the capacity to manage his personal life with its various impulses in consideration of what is generally agreed upon to be the good of the community. According to Soyinka, it is the history of this adjustment that ultimately defines an authentic individuality in the Yoruba cultural make-up. Most of Soyinka's works, mainly his dramas, do project all the aspects attributed to the centrality of the individual who acts within the communal, ontological and cosmological framework of the Yoruba worldview and culture, in more general terms.

### 1.3. The meaning of self-sacrifice in Soyinka's drama:

In the first section of this chapter, we argued that most ritual theories turn on the principles of societal renewal and rejuvenation that are realized through the life of the "victim" whose fate is conditioned upon the good of his people. And this usually requires his "blood" in the process. In most cultures, hence, the individual who perceives himself as a "carrier" of cultural potential among his folks would see it as a necessity to sacrifice his life and lay down his personal interests in defending a cause relevant to the society as a whole. Apart from its general meaning as a rite performed for the sake of engendering a proper relationship with the sacred world and placed in such a position as to gain physical or material reward, to propitiate the gods or for health concerns, the present study looks at the notion of sacrifice through a cultural lens, as a concept reflecting a specific worldview. And as literature grows out to be a projection of a certain worldview, literary traditions over the centuries have given self-sacrifice various treatments but all agree on the fact that it is a means to explain the individual's commitment to secure his society's regeneration in the course of its historical evolution. Saving the community, then, becomes an imperative that justifies the significance attached to some sacrificial customs in the community. In his *Culture and Sacrifice* (2007), Derek Hughes forwards the idea that sacrifice renders the victimization experienced by the individual into a moment of joyful gain experienced by the entire community. He asserts that:

*Sacrifice is not matter of relinquishing what you find worthless, but of freely surrendering what you esteem for the benefit of others. It is this which marks the difference between the suicide and the martyrdom<sup>46</sup>.*

---

<sup>46</sup>. Hughes, Derek. *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 3

The word sacrifice conceptually means the act of offering something to a god or a higher sacred power in return for a benefit or a reward. In ancient times, human sacrifice served several functions. It was meant to rectify a certain social order, to enhance the feelings of communal togetherness and belonging to a common ancestry and to provide moments of communion between the folks and their gods. The sacrificial body, then acts as a mediator between the different realms of existence his community abides by. In this sense, people's lives might be sustained.

Although most theorists looked at the notion of sacrifice as a positive and fruitful custom, others downplayed its positive function for a more rigid treatment thinking of it as a violent practice and making a scapegoat of its performer. To illustrate the discussion, I have opted for Hubert and Mauss's, and René Girard's views about sacrifice. In their famous essay: "Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice"(1899), Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, sharing views with James Frazer and Emile Durkheim, consider that sacrifice, whatever its motivations, remains a vital means through which the individual can show his allegiance to societal laws, desires and aspirations even if that requires abandoning things very dear to him. They further point out that sacrifice should be looked at on the basis of the consecration or sense of responsibility, what would later be considered as a sense of loss by René Girard; it creates in the individual, who, in being sanctified by the act of sacrifice, would later transfer this sanctity or blessing to his fellow men. They write in their essay:

*Sacrifice is an act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the state of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned<sup>47</sup>.*

---

<sup>47</sup>. See Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice", *L'Année sociologique*, vol. 2 (1899), pp. 29-138; collected in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1909), pp. 1-130; and translated by W. D. Halls, with a foreword by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, as *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (London: Cohen and West, 1964), p. 13

In this approach, sacrifice is presented to have a utilitarian character; anything the individual gives in sacrifice would receive something in return which would later be reaped by those he leaves behind. Contrary to Hubert and Mauss's theorization, René Girard regards sacrifice as a truly communal violence and villainy at the expense of the individual's life. He questions: why should a person be sacrificed for others to get blessed and satisfied? In his understanding, self-sacrifice assumes a punitive character. In his *violence and the Sacred* (1988), Girard posits that if we are to believe that sacrifice would yield in a communal continuity, still nothing guarantees that the agent sacrificing himself might not lose his life with no sign of purification being arrived at. The individual then becomes a scapegoat to his society's unappeased desires<sup>48</sup>.

In the Yoruba African context, though sacrifice might seem to assume a transcendental dimension, it has rather practical manifestations in social reality too. For the Yoruba, self-sacrifice is deemed as a regenerative and purifying principle. The idea that one has to die so that others can live and be blessed lies at the heart of the Yoruba theorization about the individual group relationship that requires a loss of life in the process, however violent it might be. These sacrificial rites are also performed to release social tensions after periods of upheaval. Regarding this, Tanure Ojaide says,

*Order to Africans is perceived as natural and ritualistic to ensure harmony, the absence of which will bring calamity to the whole group. For this reason, an individual could be sacrificed to avoid a war, a plague, or any anticipated communal disaster. In other words, the individual can be sacrificed for the well-being of the community*<sup>49</sup>.

---

<sup>48</sup>. René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1972); translated by Patrick Gregory as *Violence and the Sacred* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), pp. 45-50

<sup>49</sup>. Ojaide, Tanure. "Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity". *African Studies Review* 35.3 (Dec. 1992), 43-57. (JSTOR. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.) p. 48

After having shown the disparity between the previous theoretical treatments of sacrifice, we turn to see Soyinka's view of sacrifice and how it manifests in his body of works. In the case of Wole Soyinka, many arguments were brought to the fore concerning his theoretical interest in the individual's self-sacrifice and its socially regenerative orientation. In his article, "Human sacrifice in literature: the case of Wole Soyinka", James Booth postulates on the importance of the concept of sacrifice for the Yoruba worldview that Soyinka projects in his writings, saying that:

*The gods, the deified king, the sun or the ancestors, require the sacrifice of human life in return for power or survival. The victims' deaths are a matter neither of tragedy nor punishment...their function is to act as a bridge to the supernatural world, and their individual entities are lost in their role*<sup>50</sup>.

Many tropes of the concept of sacrifice have also been employed by other leading Nigerian playwrights such as Femi Osofisan, Ola Rotimi and J. P Clark. Being more in line with Soyinka's point on sacrifice, Ola Rotimi's play *Kurunmi* employs ritual sacrifice as a regenerative force in which Kurunmi insists that the tradition of sacrifice should be upheld whatever outcomes it might have. Kurunmi sacrifices the stability and even the lives of his men in his attempt to keep the tradition of human sacrifice alive in his society. Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*, on the other hand, considers sacrifice as an unprofitable venture and the play was written as a reaction to Soyinka's play *The Strong Breed*. Osofisan makes the point that the task of saving the community has to be a collective initiative instead of lone individuals being held responsible for wiping out societal ills. Still, Soyinka's treatment of sacrifice remains unique in its dimension. Booth thinks that, in the case of Wole Soyinka, human sacrifice functions within the abode of everyday reality,

---

<sup>50</sup>. Booth, James. "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka". *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 23, no. 1 (Jan 1992), (pp. 7-24). Online e-article. Synergies Prairie Node. <http://ariel.synergiesprairies.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/view/2609/2559> [accessed 15/06/2012] p. 10

within the bounds of the individual's relationship to his society; a relation that ties individual and community in the form of a reciprocal beneficial obligation<sup>51</sup>. And this view of sacrifice manifests itself very clearly in Soyinka's drama and mainly in the plays under study in which case Eman, the descendant of the strong breed, Elesin Oba, the king's chief horseman and Demoke, the artist lay down their lives in acts of sacrifice that would greatly redirect the future of their respective communities.

Both Ann B. Davis and Ketu Katak, in their approach to Soyinka's sacrificial view of tragedy, align themselves with Booth's argument that sacrificial death is not a final step in the life of the tragic character. Instead, he continues to confer his benefits on his community because his death, as Katak notes, brings "*a new life to the communal life blood*"<sup>52</sup>. Dionysus in Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: a communion rite* thinks that "*Pentheus' scapegoat role is necessary for the renewal of the seasons*"<sup>53</sup>. He says addressing Pentheus:

**Dionysus:** Yes, you alone  
Make sacrifices for your people, you alone  
Like those gods who  
Must be rent to spring anew.<sup>54</sup>

And the praise singer in *DKH* views Elesin's sacrifice as necessary to maintain the cord that already relates the living with their forebears and Forest Head in *ADF* describes Demoke sacrificial act as "*the kind of action that redeems mankind*"<sup>55</sup>. In Soyinka's dramas, then, these characters in pursuit of their ideals embark on their redemptive roles in various forms of representation and ritual enactments. And since our study is to focus on the images of

---

<sup>51</sup>. "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka", *opcit.*, pp. 10-11

<sup>52</sup>. Katak, Ketu H. *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) p. 19

<sup>53</sup>. James Booth, *Ibid.*, p.15

<sup>54</sup>. James Booth, *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup>. Wole Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests in Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973) p. 10

individuals representing the fate of their communities to bring about salvation and regeneration, we see these individuals engaging in acts of sacrifice. Such acts are considered the most powerful assertion of the individual's attachment to the culture of the community the laws of which he represents and upholds through the choices he makes and the roles he assumes. Booth further asserts that, in inserting the motif of sacrifice in his works, Soyinka "asserts...a communal interrelationship between the individual and society."<sup>56</sup>

This aspect of sacrifice that brings together individual and society in a relation of mutual service and obligation, which is in most cases enacted so as to make something apparent, has deep roots in literary tradition. The Greek tradition offers us some living examples like that of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Unbound* which dramatizes the highest type of sacrifice in Greek tragedy; the one leading to mankind's salvation. It takes place when Prometheus sacrificed himself and gave men fire as he learned that Zeus was trying to destroy the human race, so he saved his people from destruction<sup>57</sup>. In the Middle Ages, the stage was rich with religious scenes set inside churches and cathedrals, as most medieval dramatists dealt with the serious problem of morality, mainly the issue of the salvation of human beings, represented by an individual's sacrifice in his struggle to avoid sin and damnation and attain salvation in the world after. The modern stage, dramatizing more the type of sacrifice that promotes personal elevation and redemption than the one that aims at others' salvation, offers us the examples of the plays of Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Miller, Henrik Ibsen, T.S. Eliot and the Indian Girish Karnad along with Wole Soyinka as the most representative of the modern African stage.

---

<sup>56</sup>. "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka", opcit., p. 8

<sup>57</sup>. Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005) pp. 250-251

Selecting the human subject for the ritual sacrifice is of paramount importance. In all literary works in which self-sacrifice functions as a moving motif, certain characters and not others are appointed for the ritual. In the Greek stage, with the exception of most of Euripides' tragedies that dramatize the plight of women, slaves and other low-positioned people seeking recognition in society as the chief characters and targets of sacrifice, characters of a high social status, usually princes, kings and gods themselves, tend to be the only ones who are apt for such a heroic task. In Shakespeare's tragedies, we find the same rhythm of Greek tragedy going on where the selectee for the task is often a prince like Hamlet or a king like Lear where self-sacrifice takes the shape of losing something precious to achieve self-knowledge at the end more than communal salvation as it is the case with Soyinka's tragedies. In Arthur Miller's tragedies, for example, simple people who are voices of common sense and everyday life issues are those who turn out to be targets of a sacrificial custom. T.S. Eliot, who is often considered as a critic of modernity through the skeptical spirit with which he invests the characters of his poems and dramas and through which he attempts a perfection of the individual, believes that the challenging act of sacrifice should come out from an enlightened individual who possesses the ability to look at his surroundings with a critical eye and who can produce new ideas for the sake not just for self-elevation but also for his meaningful contribution to the advancement of human thought and knowledge. Eliot's candidate for sacrifice would be one who is far from being 'hollow', and who can face up to 'the kingdom of god' achieving his redemption and salvation for others. Wole Soyinka shares most of the previous views but he spices the individual's sacrifice with a communal taste of joy and catharsis and creates a kind of a 'visceral intertwining' between the individual's fate and that of his people.

All the aforementioned views approached the issue of sacrifice of the individual from various angles depending on the final outcomes desired out of it. Besides being a means to achieve personal gratification and satisfaction, self-sacrifice can be an option to escape the pressure exerted by society, as in most of Miller's plays, as it can be a means of asserting one's responsibility and sense of imperative towards societal issues. When misdeeds and violations prevail in a certain community, self-sacrifice sometimes acts as the sole course of action for the responsible and aware individual to show his concern with his surroundings and gives him a chance to correct what can be corrected before time goes by. Most of Soyinka's plays and primarily those under study project such a vision.

The present chapter has attempted to introduce the philosophy of art and life that informs most of Soyinka's writings. He inserts the rich traditional African lore: past events, past original myths and frames of thought, and the Yoruba pantheon of gods are central tropes in his plays in the service of the vision of change that he outlines for his people and his continent. Soyinka constantly tries to keep in motion those vital elements that need to be recorded and asserted over and over again to remind his society that a prosperous future won't be a reality unless the chain that relates past and present is well preserved.

## Chapter two:

---

### SOYINKA'S DRAMA AND THE YORUBA CONCEPTION OF TRAGIC HEROISM

*"For lineage of modern thinkers from Hegel and Baudelaire to Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Yeats, Claudel, Mauriac, and T.S. Eliot, tragedy represents a Privileged mode of cognition, a spiritual experience reserved for the metaphysically minded few. It is, in effect, an ersatz form of religion for a secular age, countering its vulgarity with a higher wisdom"*

(Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*: 46)

Soyinka strongly believes that society is in continual need of salvation from itself whereby change, renewal, and catharsis in society are tied up to the fate of the heroic characters. This salvation can come about only through the vision and action of dedicated individuals who pursue their vision even when they meet antagonism on the part of the very society they strive to save. Apparent from all this, is the fact that Soyinka perceives the nation-builder or leader as such a person who will *"be the force of fusion between the two contradictions"*; whom Soyinka calls "the human challenger" and "the Ogunian hero". Even though Soyinka puts under stress the fact that there are conditions of despair from which the human beings and entire societies could not be expected to recover, he believes in the flexibility and endurance of the human mind to cope with difficulties as he perceives that there are no limitations to the human initiative to create and reform the human condition. The three tragedies, *TSB*, *ADF* and *DKH* constitute three of Soyinka's great dramatic creations for the examination of these complex and overlapping issues.

Therefore, this chapter sets out to explore what constitutes a tragic experience in Soyinka's drama. We see how the vision of the tragic heroic self manifests itself in the

plays. We also see how Soyinka presents his vision of tragic heroism within a cosmic mythological framework. The discussion focuses also on the tensions and struggles the tragic characters experience as carriers of the potential of their communities, amidst a complex cycle of communal as well as cosmic obligations. We also attempt a deeper analysis of the forms of the vision of the tragic heroic self as brought out by the tragic heroic characters to see whether or not it would promise any future salvation for their communities and redemption for themselves.

### **2.1. Soyinka's concept of tragedy:**

The classical definition of tragedy comes from Aristotle who thinks that tragedy functions as a means to bring people's emotions into some sort of a proper balance, into what he termed a 'catharsis'. His *The Poetics* provides us with the following definition:

*Tragedy is the representation [mimesis] of a serious and complete set of events [praxis], having a certain size, with embellished language used distinctly in the various parts of the play, the representation being accomplished by people performing and not by narration, and through pity and fear achieving the katharsis of such emotions<sup>58</sup>.*

In reflecting on the issues dramatized in the Greek stage centuries ago, F. Nietzsche drew a theory of tragedy exemplified in the confrontation between the conflicting propensities of the two Greek deities, Apollo and Dionysus; for they are the two gods who controlled the general scheme of things in Greek times. Nietzsche contends that the Greeks regarded life as a conflict between wavering passions and that some sort of a regulation has to be issued if their existence is to have meaning and significance. For Apollo represents art, music and oratory, and Dionysus, his counterpart represents action and chivalry, Nietzsche postulates

---

<sup>58</sup>. *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*, opcit., p. 77

that tragedy's resolution is seen in the balance that ought to be initiated between the qualities of both deities. He says in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

*In the light of this insight, we must see Greek tragedy as the Dionysiac chorus, continuously discharging itself in an Apolline world of images. In several successive discharges, this primal ground of tragedy radiates that vision of the drama of which is entirely as an objectification of a Dionysiac state, it is not Apolline redemption through illusion but rather a representation of the fragmentation of the individual and his unification with primal being. Thus, the drama is the Apolline symbol of Dionysiac knowledge and Dionysiac events*<sup>59</sup>.

Being under the sway of both gods, then, the Greeks, so as to secure future happiness and continuity for themselves, decided to stay in a safe middle ground that exploits the features of both gods for they had seen vitality and outlet in both deities. In this light, if a society wants to move in a right direction, it has to accept contradiction as a normal fact of life and works at creating a balance between the thought and artistry of Apollo and the action of Dionysus. Hence, in recalling the workings of tragedy in Greek times and how it was manifested in the great plays of Euripides, Aristophanes and Aeschylus, Nietzsche tried to mold it for a modern audience to show that there are among us some who simply fall prey to desire at the expense of order and reason and those who conform to rationality, rejecting their internal impulses by keeping control over themselves.

In like fashion, Arthur Miller asserts in his famous essay, "Tragedy and the common man", that tragedy is the classical definition of man's attempt to understand the self and his unwillingness to remain passive in front of those powers that are inimical to his assertion of self:

*...but there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrade them, and in the process of action,*

---

<sup>59</sup>. Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. Ed. Michael Tanner. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. (London: Penguin Books, 1993) p. 44

*everything we have accepted out of fear or insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us--from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment-- comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy*<sup>60</sup>.

Soyinka's view of tragedy is quite akin to that of Shakespeare's, Nietzsche's and all the aforementioned views. Soyinka is considered worldwide as the fountainhead of the African tragic thought for he fashioned a modern theory of a Yoruba African tragedy in retrieving the old forms of knowledge that the gods and the traditional African mythopoesis represented and inserting them as he sees apt to dramatize about a modern changing age. And to summarize his view, or theory, of tragedy, the following statement by him is enlightening:

*The persistent search for the meaning of tragedy, for a redefinition in terms of cultural or private experience is, at the least, man's recognition of certain areas of depth-experience which are not satisfactorily explained by general aesthetic theories; and of all the subjective unease that is aroused by man's creative insights, that wrench within the human psyche which we vaguely define as 'tragedy' is the most insistent voice that bids us return to our own sources. There, illusively, hovers the key to the human paradox, to man's experience of being and non-being, his dubiousness as essence and matter, intimations of transience and eternity, and the harrowing drives between uniqueness and oneness*<sup>61</sup>.

In Soyinka's tragic paradigm, hence, tragedy motivates change through converting pain into pleasure, creating an intense emotional state that puts the character's psyche in a condition of unease that allows for introspection and self-apprehension. And this aids the individual to learn profound truths about his and the human condition because pleasure, for Soyinka, manifests itself in tasting a new level of understanding, acquiring a new insight into the meaning of life. Within that mode of thinking, salvation and regeneration are to be aspired

---

<sup>60</sup>. Miller Arthur. "Tragedy and the common man". Source: Guth, Hans P. and Gabriele L Rico, in., *Discovering Literature*. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993) p. 282

<sup>61</sup>. Soyinka, Wole. *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*. (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988) p. 27

to only after passing through the disintegrating and destabilizing experience of suffering aroused by tragedy.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. (2001) thinks that Soyinka's concept of tragedy is "*dialectic between retributive and restorative justice and order*". Then, Gates tried to draw a contrast between "*the tragedy of the individual as first defined by Aristotle and, in essence, reiterated by Hegel, Nietzsche and even Brecht*", with Soyinka's "*tragedy of the community*", because he thinks that Soyinka's protagonists function as "*embodiments of the communal will*"<sup>62</sup>. Here it seems that an important implication of Gates' claim is that even though tragedy in Soyinka's drama operates within the boundaries of pure individual context to achieve personal elevation and glorification, it extends to embrace the fate of the entire community. A good example illustrating this is that in adopting Euripides' *Bacchae*, Soyinka modified it with a subtitle *The Bacchae of Euripides: a communion rite*, meaning that the plight of Pentheus the protagonist turns out to be the plight of his community and that his blood was sacrificed to save the people of ancient Thebes. What is perceived as a private tragic experience in Aristotle's and Nietzsche's theorizations grows to be a shared reality reflected in the individual as well as communal psyches in Soyinka's.

In most tragic works, therefore, the difficulty or impossibility to find answers to certain questions creates man's tragedy. Any tragic experience covers the exposition of human psyches in an incessant struggle to identify themselves within a hostile nature or enviroing antagonisms. Tragic writers, across the ages, have always tried to broach the unresolved questions about human existence because if man has existed with a mission to fulfill, the questions worth asking, then, revolve around what choices he has to make, which

---

<sup>62</sup>. Gates Jr., H.L (2001). "Being, the Will and the Semantics of Death". In, Jeyifo Biodun(ed) (2001). *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*. Jakson: University Press of Messissippi.) (pp. 62-76)

risks he has to surmount, how he can consider phenomena external to him in acting out his tasks, how the individualized side of his nature can act in compliance with the demands of the collective around him in a well-defined and balanced pattern that no side should be sacrificed for the sake of the other. How he can understand that his personal aspirations and propensities can be possibly enjoyed but with recognizing that limitations, either from his nature or from forces external to him, are ever present to render the task of understanding the self a hard and frustrating initiative.

### 2.1.1. The questioning hero and the notion of being a savior:

In the context of everyday use, the designation of a hero is often given to the one who shows great readiness to lay down his life for the sake of others, the one who faces daunting and challenging antagonisms in the name of values he strongly believes worth fighting for. Heroes usually enjoy a vivid conscience towards issues surrounding them and often pursue their goals ending up changing themselves, their communities and nations.

In mythic tradition, the conception of a hero is often related to his role as the savior of his people. Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) speaks of the archetypal hero who exhibits a great will for self-sacrifice for the sake of a greater benefit:

*Ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man*<sup>63</sup>.

According to Campbell's elaboration, the hero is expected to enlighten his fellow men, and his success lies in him approaching the secret of truth that the others are unable to approach as decisively as he does.

---

<sup>63</sup>. Quoted in Cristina Pividori, *The Death and Birth of a Hero: The Search for Heroism in British World War One Literature* (PhD thesis submitted to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, University of Barcelona, 2012) p. 17

Since the concept of heroism is culturally specific and historically contextualized, it has been open to debate as to what can be considered heroic. This controversy is due to the fact that the heroes' actions are often informed by the social contexts that give meaning to them. These tragic heroes are usually called to their heroic actions when a threatened cultural cause relevant to their respective societies needs to be defended, or when an issue that promotes certain moral values of the society is being jeopardized by certain external forces trying to intimidate the cultural fabric or stability of the society. In intervening then, the hero would strive to restore the luminous line of morality and justice handed down over the historical evolution of his society despite all pressures to do otherwise. In his preface to his novel *Lord Jim*, and in stating his view of Jim, Joseph Conrad thinks that the tragic hero is "*one of us*". And he adds that:

*He is not necessarily virtuous, not necessarily free from profound guilt. What he is, is a man who reminds us of our own humanity, who can be accepted as standing for us*<sup>64</sup>

From an African perspective, Isidore Okpewho depicts the dual dimension that features the character of the tragic hero: "*the hero is frequently formidable, self-centered and disruptive; but he also...feels love and concern for his fellows.*"<sup>65</sup>

The previously mentioned views can all be said to culminate in the fact that the figure of the hero is often associated with the idea of salvation. These views seem to converge on some shared qualities of the hero wherever he exists: he enjoys a great reediness for action, he might sin and fall into an unexpected mistake as he might end up deprived of any sense of peace with the self for he divested this self for the sake of others. This tragic hero may possibly find himself indulged in a set of confusing alternatives, so

---

<sup>64</sup>. Quoted by Leech, Clifford, *Tragedy*. (Rutledge, London and New York, 1969) p. 46

<sup>65</sup>. Isidore Okpewho, *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972) p.235

that he must thread his way out with only one right and useful alternative to enlighten others with his example. Thus, the hero is a representative, is an image. In his book *The Theater of Revolt*, in connecting the figure of the hero with revolutionary change, Robert Brustein remarks:

*As a malefactor, the messianic hero desires to kill god and destroy the old order; as a benefactor, he desires to build an order of his own. Like Prometheus, he defies the heavens for the sake of man- but like Moses, Christ, Buddha, Brahma, and Confucius, he tries to form new laws, representing himself as a savior with the means of salvation in his grasp. Like most saviors, he suffers the fate of the scapegoat at the hands of the multitude<sup>66</sup>.*

According to this view, the hero is a builder; a path finder who might destroy in order to create an order as he can fall down as a scapegoat. But, it is not always the case that heroes are used for the purpose of protecting their societies from external threats or for espousing the society's belief in certain values. Writers, over the ages, have inserted images of heroes who are used to criticize that society for behaving in this or that way where they become vital instruments for the disenchantment of reality in the eyes of ignorant people. Through his upright behavior, the hero can criticize certain misheld notions or irrelevant practices accepted as truthful by others as he can mock or ridicule absurd situations and unjust policies. Frederick Nietzsche termed this person who would act in the name of others as the 'superman' who is daring enough to give voice to the issues that the feeble and disabled behind him cannot even pronounce. He is one who has no fears to face up to and surmount the challenges that have become an inseparable part of man's struggle to maintain a stable existence. For Nietzsche valorizes the 'will for action', he thinks that this will should not be quelled if man's struggle is to lead to a new level of regeneration and catharsis. An obvious

---

<sup>66</sup>. Robert Brustein, *The Theater of Revolt: Studies in Modern Drama From Ibsen to Genet*, (Elephant Paperback, Chicago, USA, 1964) p. 21

corollary of this strong will for action is an inner inventiveness to encounter the destructive and the unknown:

*Nietzsche is committed to the enhancement of man and this enhancement does not consist in Nietzsche's critique of morality improving the conditions of existence for the majority of human beings, but in the generation of a few, striking and superlatively vital 'highest exemplars' of the species. Nietzsche looks forward to new philosophers who will be strong and original enough to revalue and reverse so-called 'eternal values' and, in teaching human beings that the future depends on their will, 'will prepare the way for great risk-taking and joint experiments in discipline and breeding'<sup>67</sup>*

In his elucidation of the Yoruba conception of tragic heroism, Soyinka gives primacy to the role of the tragic hero as a savior of his people, whatever interpretations the word salvation might imply. Although he adopts many of the other tragic writers' contentions concerning the distinguishing features and missions of the tragic hero, he always weaves into the life and fate of the tragic character, an issue that is often of a profound concern to the community and the example of Ogun (being the first one to undertake a heroic task in the void separating the two sides of the divide for the sake of communal good), serves as a primary motivating factor for this tragic hero:

*The actor in ritual drama operates in the same way (as Ogun did on the first day). He prepares mentally and physically for his disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin, experiences the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and being. Such an actor in the role of the protagonist becomes the unresisting mouthpiece of the god, uttering sounds which he barely comprehends but which are reflections of the awesome glimpse of that transitional gulf, the seething cauldron of the dark world – will and psyche. Tragic feeling in Yoruba drama stems from sympathetic knowledge of the protagonist's foray into this psychic abyss of re-creative energies<sup>68</sup>.*

---

<sup>67</sup>. "Introduction: on Nietzsche's critique of morality: Introduction to Nietzsche's text". In. Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed), translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006) pp. xxvii/ xxviii

<sup>68</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., pp. 30-31

According to the above passage that sums up Soyinka's remarks of the tragic hero's task, for the tragic hero to develop and fortify himself in passing through the void, he has to keep his 'will for action' firm and alive and to remain intense to shield himself against all those forces that may threaten to obliterate his assertion of will. Ogun's drama turns out to manifest itself in the task of the tragic hero in Yoruba tragic drama:

*Soyinka's fetish for the myth of Ogun derives from the heroic manner in which the god cut a path through chaos to reunite gods and humans. In this respect, Ogun is the paradigmatic hero, complex and contradictory, but able to trust in his ambition – the hero is always a 'he'. Ogun is also a paradigm for the artist, who has to release himself in an act of trust before he can do anything meaningful<sup>69</sup>.*

In this regard, this hero or tragic character is named, in Soyinka's tragic theory, the 'Ogunian hero' or 'the human challenger'. For the sake of the communal good and for achieving the salvation required of him, he would follow in the tracks of Ogun; initiating a change but at the cost of something very dear to him. In his article, "Exorcising Faustus from Africa: Wole Soyinka's *The Road*", K.J. Phillips maintains that: "*Soyinka insists that every tragic hero reenacts Ogun's individualized ordeal only for the sake of communal renewal in the audience*"<sup>70</sup>, and he further adds that, "*Soyinka considers Ogun and, potentially, humans who might imitate him as active (if not always successful) shapers of destiny.*"<sup>71</sup> According to this opinion, Soyinka's tragic characters become shapers of destiny, exponents of a certain reality and archetypes of behavior to be emulated by the rest of humanity. In the light of Soyinka's theorization, then, the task of the tragic Ogunian hero

---

<sup>69</sup>. Abdulrazak Gurnah, "Outrage and Political Choice in Nigeria: A Consideration of Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Man Died*, and *Season of Anomy*", University of Kent, (URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7818>) (13/07/1994) p. 5

<sup>70</sup>. Phillips, K. J. "Exorcising Faustus from Africa: Wole Soyinka's *The Road*". *Comparative Literature Studies*, 27, no. 2 (1990): 140-157. e-article. JSTOR (database). <http://ariel.synergiesprairies.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/view/2408/2362> [accessed 5 Jul 2013] p. 141

<sup>71</sup>. Ibid.

hinges upon the following: to follow in the tracks of the heroic Ogun, to preserve the 'will for action' from losing its momentum if redemption is to keep its promise, to pass through a testing moment that would make his inner features bloom, to be ready to ward off death's terrors, and last to return triumphant to his society with a moral code that ensures its salvation and gives it a possibility to step into the future; this would mean a successfully transformed society. In this regard, Soyinka remarks that those men who are destined for this heroic compelling task would bear some hardships in their way:

*The bearers, who can only be men, are compelled to move about among the revelers as the effort to keep the ore-head from toppling over keeps them perpetually on the move<sup>72</sup>.*

This study is to pose the question of how far the characters Elesin Oba, Eman and Demoke can qualify to become Ogunian heroes, as agents of transformation who can triumph over their inner inadequacies for the sake of their society's wellbeing and whether or not they would succeed to make the choices that are likely to redirect the future of their societies.

### **2.1.2. Moral choice and the Ogunian ethic:**

The most important element that brings the character to a real tragedy is the moment he is faced with a choice that he has to make in an attempt to change the course of action. This tragic moment would be more painful especially when the character encounters two alternatives, choosing one of them at the risk of abandoning the better proposition. Most moral philosophers agree on the fact that moral choice is the most important and difficult task faced by those selected by their societies to be the leaders and nation builders.

People's lives are shaped by the kinds of choices they make. Life constantly faces people with situations where they need to find a middle way to reconcile competing values

---

<sup>72</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., pp. 158-159

and where compromise proves to be inaccessible. They then become obliged to choose one of them at the expense of the other. Moral philosophers think that choice, in most cases, is tragic because whatever choice we make and think right, we feel that we have lost something valuable and that circumstances grow to be more suffocating as our personal desires and aspirations tend to seem pointless or be in opposition to the repressive nature of social life. Therefore, tragic choice is a multidimensional experience in the sense that the need to direct our lives adequately suggests to us certain pathways, even if some of them hold a certain affinity in terms of results; we have to use our knowledge and insight to choose the easier and less extreme. Being knowledgeable and possessing a certain moral vision, then, play a vital role in distinguishing people's capacities for making the right choices. In commenting upon the difficult task of making a right choice especially a choice against which is measured an entire people's ability to achieve a right transition, Soyinka says in "The Fourth Stage" that:

*[W]hen man is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts (the material of drama) have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of this gulf, he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses upon his spiritual or psychic perception. It is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of will<sup>73</sup>.*

This passage asserts how painful it is to make a choice amidst all the parallel alternatives presented by experience as it endeavors to tell us that when man is denied all means to aptly make a choice or a decision, he has to resort to 'the agency of will', to his inner consciousness, that singles him out from all others, to seek better and more productive ways to envisage life and its limitations. From this vantage point, the individual had better not let

---

<sup>73</sup>. Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage", p. 148

his incipient lack of initiative influence his efficacy of making a right choice or his ability to maintain a stable course of action.

In his book, *Existentialism and Humanism* (1948), J. Paul Sartre tells us, in order to illustrate his view of the difficulty of the tragic moment that faces the individual with a tragic choice, a story of one of his students who was faced with a state of conflict undecided which road he would take. The student was put in a position where he had to choose between either joining the Free French Forces to avenge his brother who was killed in a German attack in 1940 or staying at home to look after his very old mother, who has no other in the world to depend on except him. The student is faced with two powerfully appealing imperatives: he felt strongly obliged to avenge his dead brother and kill his Nazi enemies (an issue which is of great importance to the French nation), whereas his sense of responsibility does not allow him to desert his very old mother since he is the only source of mental and financial support to her (an issue of personal duty and integrity). The student, however, cannot do both at once<sup>74</sup>. This leads us to assume that even though we try to think critically and make use of our knowledge and vision to choose the easier and more comforting path, choices sometimes seem to be both extreme with no possibility for compromise left open.

This dilemma of tragic choice manifests itself in Soyinka's writings in what he termed as the 'Ogunian ethic'. The 'Ogunian ethic', according to Soyinka's elaboration in the Fourth Stage', is exemplified in the fact of choosing between various alternatives with the absolute recognition of the creative/destructive essence inherent in the social being<sup>75</sup>. Soyinka relates this ethic to Ogun because it takes Ogun to be the first deity to try to bridge the gap

---

<sup>74</sup>. Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translated by Philip Mairet. (London: Methuen, 1948) p. 35

<sup>75</sup>. Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage", pp. 142-144

that separates the divine and human worlds. In the "Fourth Stage", we are informed that Ogun has always lived amidst the risks and challenges of wrong choices that necessitated of him to make use of both his creative and destructive impulses in the process to assure that his task will be successful. In the light of this understanding, the tragic character who acts according to the Ogunian principle, in making his choices, might use violence and destroy a certain order for the sake of personal glory, as he might achieve sanity and salvation through losing and disturbing something in him. That is to say that the seeds of creativity and destructiveness are always there to shape as well as limit the tragic character's decision making. The tragic moment described by "The Fourth Stage" is the result of a choice made by the individual to take possession of the prize of salvation/redemption.

In the context of the plays under study, some hard choices are to be made by the protagonists in ways that would affect the present and future. In *DKH*, Elesin's decision making oscillates between a desire for life preservation and a desire for death. The latter would mean a communion with the ancestors that would elevate him to a higher level of spirituality; his sacrifice would also be necessary for the community's well-being and continuity. In *ADF*, Demoke's decision hinges upon the Half-Child's future (the entire community's future); whether he lets Eshuoro, Ogun's enemy, get the Half-Child to be an Abiku curse on mankind or he intervenes to save him, causing damage to himself because he will be at the mercy of Eshuoro suffering the malevolence of the forest under Eshuoro's patronage. In *TSB*, Eman's decision to perform the role of a carrier in a village in which he is a stranger puts him in a dilemma of questionings: Eman feels compelled to replace the chosen but disinclined Ifada in performing the sacrificial task, being convinced that the role has to be embraced willingly on the part of the carrier. We know that he fled his home village neglecting his task and mission in being a descendent of the strong breed. Eman's

desire to preserve his life is apparently to teach the villagers something about the character of a true and proper sacrifice. What complicates matters further in the aforementioned choices is the fact that these protagonists have to consider not just the community's needs, they have also to consider how this choice would affect the entire cosmic phenomenon for, according to the worldview projected in the three plays, the individual's fate is dictated and shaped by an interplay between a communal necessity and what Soyinka calls 'cosmic necessity'. The failure to make the right choice would destabilize and disturb this 'visceral intertwining' of individual, community and cosmos.

Up to this point, I have been exploring certain issues central to our understanding of a tragic experience. The foregoing discussion of the concept of heroism and what is meant by the Ogunian hero in Soyinka's theory of tragedy and the difficulty of moral choice is useful for understanding and analyzing the plays at hand.

## **2.2. Heroes as agents of morality and communal salvation in *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*, *A DANCE OF THE FORESTS* and *THE STRONG BREED***

The plays under study foreground issues of individual choice and destiny versus collective will; these issues are being tested within a cycle of cosmic obligations and imperatives with the tragic heroes being called upon to be the catalysts for change and communal salvation.

We start with a preview of each play. *TSB* dramatizes the tale of Eman, a teacher and at the same time a descendant of the "strong breed" of persons who have always inherited the responsibility of 'carrying' the community's sins on their shoulders in acts of self-sacrifice. Reluctant to perform the duty in his home village, Eman escapes but naively volunteers for the role in a strange village unaware of the differences between the custom for which he has been trained and the one for which he has volunteered. The play opens with an annual end of year, when a purification ritual has to be enacted to banish the evil of

the previous year and to approach the New Year with a sense of purging. In the village in which Eman is a stranger, and as custom demands, strangers are used for this purging task. There are two strangers in the village: Eman, the school teacher, and Ifada, the idiot who is the apparent choice. Soyinka said in an interview regarding the play and the ritual:

*This is another play (The Strong Breed) in which I have used these African ceremonies where the town is cleansed in the new year where you have sort of a carrier....these people go through the town and the real meaning. The significance of it is that they sort of take away a lot of evils from the town<sup>76</sup>.*

Eman's father in the play insists on the greatness that lies at the heart of Eman's duty that distinguishes the strong breed from the rest of humanity. Unprepared, however, to take the responsibility bestowed on him by his inheritance, Eman flees his home village to find himself stepping forward as the year's scapegoat in a strange village and, overtaken by his blood, lays down his life on behalf of a community that is not his.

Much like *TSB*, the plot of *DKH* involves the death of someone on behalf of the entire community that requires Elesin's blood to secure its transition to the next world. Holding a noble position as the king's chief horseman, Elesin Oba is expected to perform a ritual self-sacrifice/suicide on the night of the final ceremonies to accompany his king to the spiritual after-world that the Yoruba recognize as essential for communal regeneration. On his comment on the crucial role of Elesin in maintaining order in the universe according to the Yoruba conception, Gareth Griffiths holds that:

*In fulfilling the obligations of the ritual, Elesin is literally holding the world in his hands. He is the link between past, present and future, a link analogous to the cord which joins mother to child, and through which life flows from one to the other<sup>77</sup>.*

---

<sup>76</sup>. Mphahlele, Ezekiel (1975) "Interview with Wole Soyinka", *African Writers Talking*. (Eds) Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse. (London: Heinemann Educational Books) p. 28

<sup>77</sup>. Gareth Griffiths, *African Literature in English: East and West*. Longman literature in English series, (Pearson Education Limited, England, 2000) p. 151

The play opens as the chief character engages in a final ritual dance round the market. All throughout the play, Elesin is held in a privileged position among his people to the point that he cannot be denied anything he desires. Iyaloja, mother of the market, says:

*It does not bear thinking. If we offend you now, we have mortified the gods. We offend heaven itself. Father of us all; tell us where we went astray. (She kneels, the other women follow)*<sup>78</sup>.

Elesin is constantly reminded of the task that lies before him and the dire implications that the failing of performing it would exacerbate. Here is an exchange pointing to this:

**Praise-singer:** There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter?

**Elesin:** It did not in the time of my forebears, it shall not in mine<sup>79</sup>.

To everybody's surprise, however, Elesin falls prey to his earthly desires and decides to take a new bride in the most important night in his life. During this disruption, Simon Pilkings, the district officer, intervenes and arrests him. Olunde, Elesin's first son and a medical student in England, feels the dishonor that the failure of his father would entail on the family. He shows a great determination to preserve his family's integrity, and commits suicide in the place of his father. Elesin kills himself in shame, too late to fulfill his destiny.

*ADF* is the play of an occasion, the celebration of Nigerian independence. The play turns around an important event among the living which Soyinka calls "the gathering of the tribes":

---

<sup>78</sup>. Soyinka Wole, *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Methuen, 1975) p. 16

<sup>79</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. p. 11

*The mortals have in fact brought this confrontation upon themselves by asking the spirits to send them certain forefathers of the glorious past to take part in their celebration*<sup>80</sup>.

Scenes alternate between the court of the traditional, pre-colonial ruler, Mata Kharibu, and the modern state which is being celebrated. The play opens with a scene where the living characters are shown their past crimes and foibles, then a dead couple step into the scene to be questioned by the living, and last, the dance of the welcome that does not take place due to the living's refusal to perform it. Forest Head, Obaneji, aware of the past misdeeds and crimes of individuals in the community, brings to judgment the three chosen mortals; Rola, Demoke and Adenebi and brings them deeper into the forest to become witnesses at the dance. When forest Father announces the moment of the welcoming of the dead, the dead woman enters, no longer pregnant but leading the Half-child by the hand. Leaving his mother's hand, the Half-child is attacked by an unseen figure while he is playing his game. He asks for help but in vain until Demoke intervenes and makes the choice of handing it to its mother, the dead woman.

In the three plays under study, Soyinka, through inserting the issue of self-sacrifice that demands heroic tragic endeavors on the part of individuals, emphasizes a communal interrelationship between the individual and society. To begin with, one might want to know what makes of Elesin Oba, Eman and Demoke the persons eligible to perform the sacrificial roles that would measure their relationship and allegiance to their communities. In the three plays, the selected carriers of social potential and harmony are part of the elite in their societies, Elesin Oba as the King's horseman, Eman as a teacher and Demoke as a carver and artist. In *DKH*, the first lines of the play introduce Elesin as "*a man of enormous vitality, speaks, sings and dances with that infectious enjoyment of life which accompanies*

---

<sup>80</sup>. Wole Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests in Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973)

*all his actions*"<sup>81</sup>. In his 'Not-I-Bird' chant, Elesin praises himself as the only human among his fellows who can explain the mysteries of death and the unknown; he compares himself to the rest of humanity who, in his opinion, lack the will to dare the unknown and he scolds those people who preach courage but flinch when called upon to confront death:

I, when the Not-I bird perched  
Upon my roof, bade him seek his nest again,  
Safe, without care or fear. I unrolled  
My welcome mat for him to see. Not-I  
Flew happily away, you will hear his voice  
No more in this life time. You all know  
What I am<sup>82</sup>.

Here, Elesin claims he can withstand the terror of death and then deserves to be elevated to spiritually join his forebears. In stressing his role to keep the cord that has always maintained the continuity of his people, he says:

No man beholds his mother's womb  
Yet who denies it's there? Coiled  
To the navel of the world is that  
Endless cord that links us all  
To the great origin. If I lose my way  
The trailing cord will bring me to the roots<sup>83</sup>.

In *TSB*, The role expected of Eman is that of the carrier of the harmony in the community because it is the role expected of any individual descending from 'the strong breed'. We are told that Eman is born of the strong breed who, in their blood, have the capacity and readiness to confront evil and carry others' sins and never escape like other men. Eman's father draws a contrast between the strong breed and the rest of humanity: "*Other men*

---

<sup>81</sup>. *DKH.*, opcit., p. 9

<sup>82</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 14

<sup>83</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 27

would not die doing this task. Our blood is strong like no other. Anything you do in life must be less than this."<sup>84</sup> He further tells him:

*Ours is a strong breed, my son. It is only a strong breed that can take this boat to the river year after year and wax stronger on it. I have taken each year's evils for over twenty years. I hoped you would follow me*<sup>85</sup>.

*No woman survives the bearing of the strong ones. Son, it is not the mouth of the boaster that says he belongs to the strong breed. It is the tongue that is red with pain and black with sorrow.*<sup>86</sup>

Eman is shown to be greatly concerned about issues in his community; he questions the uselessness of the ritual of sacrifice if it is not based on a proper selection of a willing devotee. Having the insight of a teacher and in contrast to other people in the village who are embracing the tradition of a carrier blindly without any attempt at change, Eman fled his home village to search for truth, working to oppose the injustices committed against powerless people like Efada. This really signals Eman out as an exceptional and dedicated individual possessing the spirit to question and criticize situations that the others have not. In *ADF*, Demoke's relation to his community is asserted through his role as the artist, carver, poet and Ogun's protégé and servant among the living. His sacrificial dance, at the end of the play, greatly changes the course of events, however painful; it leads to the raising of the awareness of people who are in need of such a sacrifice to amend their present condition. Demoke proudly avers:

The world knew of Demoke, son and son to carvers;  
Master of wood, shaper of iron, servant of Ogun<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup>. Soyinka, Wole, *The Strong Breed in Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973) p. 134

<sup>85</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 133

<sup>86</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>. *ADF.*, *opcit.*, p. 26

Being aware of the vital role an individual can play in the progress of his society, Demoke crafts a totem for the celebration of the new state and which symbolizes his active participation in initiating the cycle that links the past, the present and future of his nation.

Because a creative/destructive dynamic forms the tragic experience in Soyinka's dramatic aesthetic, the tragic character can function as an agent of regeneration and continuity. His action nevertheless bears the seeds of suffering and destruction within it. The tragic character, according to Soyinka, can lead at the end to salvation but his initiatives cannot be exempt from mistakes and revisions, hesitations, wavering passions, and tragic flaws in the person of the character. Gerald Moore points to this attribute in Soyinka's tragic sense, saying that:

*Soyinka restores to the word 'tragic' its proper weight of meaning, for the tragic death is not that which is casual, incidental or out of season, but that which is invested with significance for the community who witness it<sup>88</sup>.*

This means that the salvation desired out of the tragic character's sacrifice is not a lone incident in the life of the character but it would greatly affect the community that testifies to it even when a destabilization of a certain order takes place.

In *DKH*, Elesin's moment of indecision is considered a crucial moment in the cycle that relates this world and the one after: Is his hesitation, his unwillingness to die, caused by a lack of will in his character or is it a part of the destiny primordially issued for his community? Is his attachment to life's pleasures just before his passage to be justified? When the decisive moment comes, Elesin Oba is seen as immersed in overpraising life's joys in a highly poetic language, ornamented with words and phrases referring to the extreme bliss one can get from earthly pleasures. Despite the fact that he wavers, to the

---

<sup>88</sup>. Moore, Gerald, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1978) p. 47

surprise of his people, Elesin goes on in an attempt to convince Iyaloja and the other women of the purity of his intentions:

**Elesin:** Who speaks of pleasure? O women, listen!  
Pleasure palls. Our acts should have meaning.  
The sap of the plantain never dries.  
You have seen the young shoot swelling.  
Even as the parent stalk begins to wither.  
Women, let my going be likened to  
The twilight hour of the plantain<sup>89</sup>.

After a short time, Iyaloja convincingly responds:

*Elesin, even at the narrow end of the passage I know you will look back and sigh at last regret for the flesh that flashed past your spirit in flight. You always had a restless eye<sup>90</sup>.*

Iyaloja clearly means that Elesin's sense of desire would hinder the completion of his ritual task. Many other interpretations are given to the failure of Elesin to accomplish his task. Some critics like Abiola Irele, Elderred Jones and Gerald Moore argue that the roots of Elesin's tragedy lie in him giving in to his appetites. Jeyifo, for instance assumes that:

*The tragic flaw of the protagonist of this play is thus Elesin's willful misrecognition of his divided volition, willful because it is only by acting out and vibrantly playing the elaborate conceits of his mastery of death and his self-projection as an avatar of earth's regenerative powers that he is able to live the lie of being an absolutely willing ritual scapegoat. The lie of course catches up with him – and the ritual is aborted<sup>91</sup>.*

Here, Jeyifo attributes Elesin's failure to perform his task to a flaw in his character, thinking that his volition was divided between desiring a spiritual communion with the gods and an inclination that drives him back to earthly delights. This means that he was defeated because he was living under a lie that overshadows his real intentions. Hence, in "one mere

---

<sup>89</sup>. DKH., opcit., p. 20

<sup>90</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 22

<sup>91</sup>. Jeyifo Biodun, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Post-colonialism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 156

*moment's tremor of the senses"*, Elesin succumbs to his desire and unbridles his appetite for life pleasures. Sharing Jeyifo's view of the reason behind Elesin's tragic flaw, many critics think that from his actions, Elesin made it clear in the eyes of every one that he is not prepared for the heroic task bestowed on him.

Ketu Katrak and Ann B. Davies, among other critics, argue that the play's ending is too enigmatic to indicate a clear outcome. They think that whereas the ritual takes place at last under the eyes of the community, there is an impression that the peaceful world of the Yoruba described earlier in the play has been finally shaken from its course. The words of the praise singer clearly exhibit the community's prognostications that a fatal imbalance would afflict the Yoruba world because of Elesin failing to keep his will for action firm:

*Elesin Oba, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness – you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future. Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell<sup>92</sup>.*

In *ADF*, scenes alternate between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and between the ancient state of Mata Kharibu and the present state which is being celebrated in a form of 'gathering of tribes'. In responding to the call of the living community to bring to the ceremony some of the ancestors of the glorious past as witnesses to the joys of celebration, Forest forces answered with sending two dead people to share in the occasion. Many critics agree on the fact that the way with which the forest forces responded to the call of the living community shows that the living community is valorizing the past to be glorious and they are ignorant of the misdeeds committed over the ages but of which Forest Head is well aware. Here is an exchange between The Old Man, fully knowing that the

---

<sup>92</sup>. *DKH.*, *opcit.*, p. 75

living are unaware of the spirits they are calling for, and Adenebi (the court councilor) who, with joyful overtones, describes the past of the community:

**Adenebi:** We must bring home the descendants of our great forebears. Find them. Find the scattered sons of our proud ancestors. The builders of empires. The descendants of our great nobility. Find them. Bring them here. If they are half-way across the world, trace them. If they are in hell, ransom them. Let them symbolize all that is noble in our nation. Let them be our historical link for the season of rejoicing. Warriors, sages, conquerors, builders, philosophers, mystics. Let us assemble them around the totem of the nation and we will drink from their resurrected glory.

**Old Man:** Yes, it was a fine speech. But control, at some point was lost to 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<sup>93</sup>.

This exchange makes it clear that the past the living are proud of recalling is not that glorious to rejoice over after all. Bringing to judgment the three living characters has been viewed as an intention by Forest Head, representing the writer's intention, to bring past and present realities into a meeting point of revelation. Past misdeeds, crimes, and fooleries, committed by people throughout history, have to be disclosed to the living community. In the mouth of the Forest Crier, Forest Head declares:

When spells are cast  
And the dead invoked by the living, only such  
May resume their body corporeal as are summoned  
*When the understreams that whirl them endlessly*  
*Complete a circle.* Only such may regain  
Voice auditorial as are summoned *when their link*  
*With the living has fully repeated in nature,* has  
Re-impressed fully on the tapestry of Igbehinadun  
In approximate duplicate of actions, be they  
Of good, or of evil, of violence or carelessness;  
In approximate duplicate of motives, be they  
Illusory, tangible, commendable or damnable.

---

<sup>93</sup>. *ADF.*, *opcit.*, p. 31

Take note, this selection, is by the living.  
We hold these rites, at human insistence.  
By proclamation, *let the mists of generations*  
*Be now dispersed.*<sup>94</sup> (*italics my emphasis*)

Here the link that relates past and present realities is reinforced in the Forest Crier's words. Soyinka seems to tell us to have a full understanding of the present state of events, the cord that links past and present has to be preserved, not out of a valorizing blindness, but with a critical eye that can apprehend what went wrong and work towards its improvement. Accordingly, critical approaches to the play often disagree on the interpretation they give to the half-child and Demoke's choice in handing it to its mother, the Dead Woman. With his choice to take the Half-child from the hands of Eshuoro, Demoke puts himself and the living community at the risk of facing the abomination of the forest under Eshuoro. The question that is often asked when it comes to Demoke's choice in intervening and blocking the plans of Eshuoro is that: how could a simple being take an action that faces him, and his community in the process, to greater forces in the forest encompassing the ancestors, the gods and other supernatural elements? Forest Head, declining to intervene in this deadly game, distances himself from the matter, only asking, "*Aroni, does Demoke know the meaning of this act?*" Aroni then says to Demoke:

*Demoke, you held a doomed thing in your hand. It is no light matter to reverse the deed that was begun many lives ago. The forest will not let you pass.*<sup>95</sup>

Aroni perceives of the deed which started ages ago as unchangeable. The deed has characterized the community in its entirety till the present state. Another critical issue that pushes matters further and complicates the dynamism of the play is the contradiction that lies in referencing the crime committed by Demoke against his apprentice where both Demoke and his patron god hold responsibility for the action. In fact, Demoke overtly

---

<sup>94</sup>. *ADF.*, opcit., p. 45

<sup>95</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 71

confesses his crime and claims that he pulled down his apprentice out of a weakness and jealousy and that it is a matter of "*lack of fulfillment*"<sup>96</sup> on his part:

Demoke's head is no woman's cloth, spread  
To receive wood shavings from a carpenter.  
Down, down I plucked him, screaming on Oro.  
Before he made hard obeisance to his death,  
My axe was executioner at Oro's neck. Alone,  
Alone I cut the strands that mocked me, till head  
And boastful slave lay side by side, and i  
Demoke sat in the soulders of the tree,  
My spirit set free and singing...<sup>97</sup>

Ogun, Demoke's patron god, claims that he is the one who motivated and helped Demoke to commit his crime:

The crime, if crime it was, lies on my head.  
My instrument he was, pucking out Oremole  
Worshipper of Oro, slayer of my disciples.  
I set his hand to the act. I killed  
The proud one, who would not bow araba's head

I will not desert my servant,  
And if my voice is not heard, my hand must  
Be felt<sup>98</sup>

This duality in deciding upon the real motive behind the crime reflects the generally static character of the play; the people and the gods themselves are wavering about their intentions, actions and their implications. Jeyifo, along with Katrak and Moore, thinks that the opposite types and images that Soyinka creates in this play, between past and present, between the living and the dead, between Ogun and Eshuoro, along with their protégés reflect a criticism of the restless and desperate condition characterizing a nation at the threshold of transition from a state of being to the state of becoming:

---

<sup>96</sup>. *ADF.*, opcit., p. 20

<sup>97</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>98</sup>. *Ibid.*, p.28

*Most critics, following the suggestion of Eldred Jones in the first, full length study of Soyinka's writings, have read the struggle of Eshuoro and Ogun for the Half-Child as a struggle for the life, the soul of the then newly independent nation of Nigeria*<sup>99</sup>.

In *TSB*, the confrontation that rises between the form of sacrifice practiced in Eman's home village and the one the new village believes in provides the dynamic of the play and its ambiguity. In Eman's home village, the role of a carrier is embraced willingly on the part of the carrier. For this reason, he sees that the carrier is a victim and scapegoat to the demands of tradition. This leads him to confront the elders of the new village, wanting them to be reasonable in enacting such a custom:

**Eman:** Yes. But why did you pick on a helpless boy? Obviously he is not willing.

**Jaguna:** What is the man talking about? Ifada is a godsend. Does he have to be willing?

**Eman:** A village which cannot produce its own carrier contains no men.... Does it really have meaning to use one as unwillingly as that?<sup>100</sup>

Eman perceives the custom in the new village as a death penalty as it lacks the willingness and sense of duty on the part of the carrier. Oroge explains: *"no carrier may return to the village. If he does, the people will stone him to death"*<sup>101</sup>. James Booth comments, *"The possibility that the inheritor of the scapegoat role might use his freedom of choice to evade death is not considered"*<sup>102</sup>.

Matters get complicated in the play, however, after the scene, in a flashback revealing Eman's past life, that shows Eman's reluctance to perform the sacrificial duty required of him as a member of the strong breed, who have all the time devoted their lives to such a task as emphasized by Eman's father, and foretells the first signs of him failing in his task:

---

<sup>99</sup>. Wole Soyinka: *Politics, Poetics and Post-colonialism*, opcit., p. 156

<sup>100</sup>. *TSB.*, opcit., p. 28

<sup>101</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup>. "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka". Opcit., p.16

**Eman:** Go and see him for me. Tell him I have gone away for some time. I think he will know.

**Omae:** But Eman...

**Eman:** I haven't finished. You will go and live with him till I get back. I have spoken to him about you. Look after him!

**Omae:** But what is this journey? When will you come back?

**Eman:** I don't know. But this is a good moment to go. Nothing ties me down<sup>103</sup>.

The father's skepticism of Eman's willingness and readiness to assume his responsibilities is further reinforced:

**Old Man:** I meant to wait until after my journey to the river, but my mind is so burdened with my own grief and yours I could not delay it. Come nearer... we will never meet again son. Not on this side of the flesh. What I do not know is whether you will return to take my place<sup>104</sup>.

The old man is grieved because he is convinced that Eman has returned not to be a carrier and that his view towards the carrier tradition has entirely changed, at least in that very specific moment of his life.

After this brief exposition of the complex issues that form the core of the three plays, the question to ask now is: where lies salvation? Or, are there any signs in the plays that give glimpses of hope or promise any future regeneration? After all, can we end up saying that the three tragic protagonists, Elesin Oba, Eman and Demoke successfully represent the fate of their communities leading to communal salvation and regeneration? Can they be considered agents of transformation or heroes for their dedication and preparedness to sacrifice themselves for the welfare of their societies, or are they to be considered victims to the demands of tradition and custom? Might we assume that the hesitation the three persons experience is not necessarily an inherent flaw in their character and that societal pressures

---

<sup>103</sup>. *TSB.*, opcit., p. 141

<sup>104</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 133

also have led to their indecisiveness? And, in all this, is the community's clinging to such rituals and sacrifices to be justified? Such are the questions implied by Soyinka.

The answer to such questions is shown as not an easy one: the complexity of the issues examined makes any attempt at treating them extend over multiple fronts. Indeed, the author, through the exposition of the characters' states of mind, declines to induce any kind of bias in our interpretations, attempting to openly expose the three stories from different viewpoints leaving us room to have our own judgment. Towards the end of the play *ADF*, Forest Head, reflecting the anguished state of the writer himself, remarks: "*My secret is my eternal burden – to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habits, and bare the mirror of original nakedness – knowing full well it is all futility*"<sup>105</sup>. This reflects in a way the burden of the artist to eke out a safe path that leads to future salvation and sanity for his people.

In *TSB*, Eman's constant questioning of the uselessness of the carrier tradition is seen by many critics as a way of critiquing society. This questioning is seen as the factor that leads the villagers, at the end of the play, to appreciate how much they clung to a custom without making any effort at amending it. Eman's character is charged with an insightful spirit of criticism and reflection that the villagers, throughout the play, see as heavy to stand. Martin Esslin comments: "*In the Strong Breed, the hero is clearly on the side of new ideas*"<sup>106</sup>. The following exchange at the end of *TSB* between the elders of the village, Oroge and Jaguna, overtly expresses the villagers' feelings of regret and self-remorse for having wasted the life of such an enlightened man before trying to understand the potential he holds for them:

---

<sup>105</sup>. *ADF.*, opcit., p. 71

<sup>106</sup>. Esslin Martin, " Two Nigerian Playwrights", In. *Introduction to African Literature: Anthology of critical writing from 'Black Orpheus'* , Ulli Beier (ed.), (Longman Group Limited, London, 1967) p. 262

**Oroge:** Let's go home.

**Jaguna:** I am sick to the heart of the cowardice I have seen tonight.

**Oroge:** That is the nature of men.

**Jaguna:** Then it is a sorry world to live in. We did it for them. It was all for their common good. What did it benefit me whether the man lived or died. But did you see them? One and all they looked up at the man and words died in their throats.

**Oroge:** it was no common sight.

**Jaguna:** Women could not have behaved so shamefully. One by one they crept like sick dogs. Not one could raise a curse.

**Oroge:** It was not only they fled. Do you see how unattended we are?

**Jaguna:** There are those who will pay for this night's work!<sup>107</sup>

Some critics think that the tormented spirit of the villagers finally gives a sign of hope in the sense that it foresees the possibility that their attitude towards the carrier custom, or at least to the proper way through which it has to be accomplished, might evolve with time:

*The only gleam of hope lies in the fact that the majority of the villagers is horrified when it becomes clear how brutally the upholders of the old tradition have acted. In this, 'the tortured awareness' in men's souls that might perhaps, in the Forest Head's in the other play, result in a new beginning? Perhaps, only perhaps<sup>108</sup>*

In *DKH*, Iyaloja confesses to the women of the market that those who dare the darkness and the mysteries of the unknown should be glorified. The sudden change which Elesin experiences when he recognizes the true meaning and weight of his sacrifice is very often emphasized. Daniel Gover says:

*En route to the afterlife, Elesin suddenly envisions a different and more sensuous kind of heaven and an extremely earthbound, sexual goddess. His keen appetite has led him back from the entrance to the ancestral world to this heaving, panting earth where he becomes once again a privileged sensualist<sup>109</sup>.*

---

<sup>107</sup>. *TSB.*, opcit., p. 146

<sup>108</sup>. "Two Nigerian Playwrights", opcit., p. 268

<sup>109</sup>. Gover Daniel, "Soyinka's Appetite for Sacrifice", *Lagos Review of English Studies*. (Kean College of New Jersey, 27 August 2010)(Accessed: 21/07/2012) [http://www.aciafrica.org/journal/Lares10%20fullpaper\\_Daniel%20Gover\\_.pdf](http://www.aciafrica.org/journal/Lares10%20fullpaper_Daniel%20Gover_.pdf) p. 149

The manner in which the play *DKH* is constructed is ambivalent. One might tend to ask: Are the deaths of Olunde and the Elesin Oba tragically heroic and promising or wasteful and to no avail? Does Olunde's sacrifice come on time to save the Yoruba world from being lost to the forces of imbalance and destruction? Iyaloja glorifies Olunde's intervention to save the honor of the community, but she seems to value the action just with the intention to scold Elesin:

*There lies the honour of your household and of our race. Because he could not bear to let the honour fly out of doors, stopped it with his life. The son -has proved the father Elesin, and there is nothing left in your mouth to gnash but infant gums<sup>110</sup>.*

As an attempt to redeem himself, Elesin tries hard to express his inner torture:

*You saw it, Iyaloja. You saw me struggle to retrieve my will from the power of the stranger whose shadow fell across the doorway and left me floundering and blundering in the maze I had never before encountered ...I could do nothing to save myself<sup>111</sup>.*

His passage to the afterworld was blocked by his desire to keep his light, his language. Nevertheless, he is never bereft of promises of future regeneration and his tongue never ceases to evoke elaborate metaphors that speak of the fertility and the continuity of the society he eagerly anticipates.

In *ADF*, this role of salvaging society and giving it a possibility to reform itself is attributed to Demoke, who boldly interferes to save the Half-Child, which represents the future of the community, from keeping incarnated in repeated forms of disastrous cyclic rebirths. Demoke, the artist, is described by Forest Head as taking "*the kind of action that redeems mankind*"<sup>112</sup>. Thus, despite his crime, Demoke is seen by many critics as the

---

<sup>110</sup>. *DKH.*, opcit., p. 75

<sup>111</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 68

<sup>112</sup>. *ADF.*, opcit., p.10

sensitive soul of the community, as the artist who can play a vital role in bringing back to society its hope of enjoying a better life. In intervening to save the future of the Half-Child, Demoke could successfully intercept the deadly and malevolent games of Eshuoro who intends to use the Half-Child as a means to curse and destroy mankind. In his "Demoke's Choice in A Dance of the Forests", James Gibbs comments:

*The half-child then acts as the agent by which Demoke is faced by a moral choice: between letting things be, or interfering and causing damage to himself. The half-child's death was caused by the 'moral' act of his father, the warrior dead man, while his salvation rests on the 'moral' act of Demoke. The balance of the two cases is vital in interpreting Demoke's act <sup>113</sup>.*

Gibbs is making the point that Demoke's choice to intervene in this dreadful game measures his capacity to hold the potential of his people between his hands and makes him stand out as the most sensitive spirit, the spirit of an individual who is aware of the dramatic changes his community is undergoing. The role that Soyinka gives to him among the living is that of an artist/carver and even when incarnated in a flashback to the court of ancient Mata Kharibu, he assumed the role of the court poet. Both the artist and the poet have a power to see what is beyond a mere work of art. Using his power of reflection, therefore, Demoke could sense coming events anticipating their future implications. In the light of this, Eldred Jones claims that:

*while there are people able of undergoing the spiritual experience of total introspection of piercing the 'encrustations of self-deadening habits' which is represented by the participation in the welcome ceremony, there is presumably some hope for man's regeneration"<sup>114</sup>*

What is more, Biodun Jeyifo comments on the fact that Demoke's dance to death and his heroic task, and the revelation of the past to the present consciousness purge people's

---

<sup>113</sup>. James Gibbs (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* (Washington DC: Three Continents, 1980) p. 169

<sup>114</sup>. Jones, Eldred Durosimi, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973) p. 15

emotions and bring them to the point where they have become "less blind" to recognize the truth revealed in front of them:

*In A Dance, the destructive energies that must be ritually cleansed or purged are concentrated in Eshuoro and Ogun on the side of the deities, and in Demoke, Rola and Adenebi, on the side of the humans. The two deities are entirely unmoved by the catharsis of the trial scene, but the three human protagonists, especially Demoke, become less blind to the terrible destruction caused by the past and present acting out of their egotistical drives, desires or appetites. These are the dialogical faces of ritual negation and affirmation in Soyinka's dramatization of the "ritual problematic" in this play<sup>115</sup>.*

In the world of the plays, Elesin's, Eman's and Demoke's sacrifices are meant to salvage their communities that are in a crucial period of transition from a state of being to a state of becoming; from present to future realities. Through the tragic exposition of these tragic characters in the plays and inserting the question of sacrifice, Soyinka aims at theorizing and arguing about the role of sacrifice in assessing the individual's readiness to respond to the call of his society to play the role of a heroic savior. In so doing, Soyinka intends to examine and at the same time enlarge the gap between the desired communal salvation and its reality.

The question Soyinka is posing is a fundamental question of choice between attraction to earthly pleasures and responding favorably to the call of duty. In the light of this, one might inquire whether: the denunciatory reactions towards Elesin's indecision and confession of being blinded by earthly pleasures in *DKH*, the wavering attitudes in the closing scenes of *ADF* with Demoke's confession of his crime, and the regretful mood of the villagers at the end of *TSB*, are indicative of a society seeking new ways to mend its present realities and balance the forces of the past and the forces currently experienced.

---

<sup>115</sup>. Wole Soyinka: *Politics, Poetics and Post-colonialism*, opcit., p. 141

Where does communal salvation lie between these two extremes of personal aspirations and the demands of the collective communal will?

Amidst these wavering and seemingly contradictory attitudes, Soyinka seems to tell us that in order to achieve the communal salvation it expects from its dedicated individuals, society has to be aware that the individual's choice and destiny, and the desires of the collective must be reconciled and considered even handedly. This springs from the fact that Soyinka is well convinced that for any world civilization to prosper and progress, contradiction is a necessary ingredient in existence, the balancing of which requires the use and cultivation of its members' energies and capacities to meet life's unexpected and sudden challenges. Additionally, out of the list of complex issues examined in the plays and the moral confrontations originating from them, Soyinka wants to forward the idea that for salvation to be achieved, failure, suffering and pain are necessary states in the process. True awareness comes about only when a troubled and destabilized state of events takes place. As long as redemptive action is performed to be a force of change and is meant to rectify a certain unstable order, salvation can come after a failure. And as long as we believe in the individual's role to bring about catharsis to the communal psyche, failure has to be perceived as a positive and necessary step to measure the tragic character's effect in initiating a change. This Ogunian pattern of initiating change while experiencing contradiction and failure for Soyinka, as Awam Amkpa states, turns around "*crisis and chaos*" that are vital "*ingredients for social transformation*"<sup>116</sup>. In *DKH*, the reaction of Olunde, Elesin's son, to the death of his father, however shameful, and the way he answered the Pilkings' questioning, show that the son is aware enough of the mistake of his father and

---

<sup>116</sup>. Awam Amkpa, *Theatre and Post-colonial Desires* (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 21

this injects him with a further sense of duty towards his people and that, in a way, started to throw some glimpses of hope in the eyes of people:

*My father has been dead in my mind for nearly a month ever since I learnt of the king's death. I've lived with my bereavement so long now that I cannot think of him alive on that journey on the boat; I kept my mind on my duties as the one who must perform the rites over his body. I didn't want to do anything wrong, something which might jeopardize the welfare of my people<sup>117</sup>.*

Derek Wright, sharing the views of Ketu Katrak, Eldred Jones and Gerald Moore, comments on the fruitful outcome expected from the ritual 'deaths' of the characters in the plays examined:

*The ritual action does not end with the life of the hero but entails a beneficial follow-on effect for the community more pervasive than in the Western individualist tragic tradition<sup>118</sup>.*

Ato Quayson thinks that redemption and salvation in Soyinka's tragic dramas resides in the fact that the hero continues to act as a model, as a subject and image of appraisal for his attempt to renew in his fellows the capacity for action and struggle:

*Soyinka's meditations on heroism.... hint at the redemptive quality of the hero's death. ....it is important to hold out the possibility of redemption as residing in a continual reappraisal of the life and death of the hero as a means of renewing the resolve to struggle on in the process of challenging the dominant structural and discursive relations begun by the tragic hero<sup>119</sup>.*

The point is that one positive step towards awareness and salvation for a society is taken when the chain which binds a people to a certain past and to a specific history is seen as an inescapable reality. In *ADF*, the Dead Woman keeps repeating to Demoke that she came to the world of the living in order to be saved. She says to Demoke:

---

<sup>117</sup>. *DKH.*, opcit., p. 57

<sup>118</sup>. Derek Wright, "Ritual and Revolution: Soyinka's Dramatic Theory", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 23:1, Online e-article. Synergies Prairie Node. (January 1992) p.42

<sup>119</sup>. Quayso Ato, *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*, Chap. 3, "African Postcolonial Relations through a Prism of Tragedy" (The Regents of the University of Minnesota, Minnesota, 2003) p. 74

**Dead Woman:** I said the living would save me. What fingers those whom I begged to lay down my child gently?<sup>120</sup>

This clearly indicates that the Dead Woman trusts that Demoke can play a great role in saving her and securing the future of her child.

From what is previously discussed, it becomes clear that the path finder/the hero and savior of his people is the one who, in recognizing the greatness of the responsibilities bestowed on him, would go searching in his inner nature, to control the disturbing and selfish thoughts within him, and to be no more a slave to changing moods and desires that will finally subject him to the pettiness of outward conditions. Just now, he can be said to be able to sense coming events and judge them, therefore being fit for directing his energies and mental forces, which are conditioned upon the good of his people, to aid his society achieve its future salvation and welfare. The tragic ends of Elesin, Eman and Demoke induce one to believe that the playwright is firmly convinced that, when appointed for a certain task to perform, the individual has to recognize that he is an integral part of and 'viscerally intertwined' with a larger reality and, as such he is obliged to face up to the responsibilities that this necessarily implies. Soyinka's plays delicately project such a vision.

---

<sup>120</sup>. *ADF.*, opcit., pp. 25-26

## CHAPTER THREE:

---

### IN THE BACKDROP OF AFRICAN CULTURE, A UNIVERSAL WORLD: SOYINKA'S "DRAMA OF ESSENCE"

*I looked for universal things . . .  
And turning the mind in upon itself,  
Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts,  
And spread them with a wider creeping ...*

(William Wordsworth, The Prelude: 1805)

In an interview with Karen L. Morell (1974), Soyinka said:

*First of all, I believe implicitly that any work of art which opens up the horizons of the human mind, the human intellect is by its very nature a force of change, a medium for change...<sup>121</sup>.*

This was the answer of Wole Soyinka when he was asked about the ethics of his theater. It is the answer of a writer with a sensibility towards not just the Nigerian African condition but also the entire human condition as one of his primary concerns. Although he sets his works in Africa, with the African character lending them a local color, Soyinka gives his works a modern universal twist in trying to keep up with the cycle of universal human values.

In his characterization, Soyinka portrays figures that fit our understanding and interpretation of the ambiguities of human nature. Therefore, characters, who through their ultimate lust for power and domination, exploit the positions they are entrusted with to serve

---

<sup>121</sup>. Interview with Karen L. Morell, in Karen L. Morell (ed) *In Person - Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka at the University of Washington*. Seattle: African studies Program (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975) pp. (78-83) p. 78

their personal purposes, usually at the cost of the communal good, (*Kongi's Harvest*), others experiencing internal tensions in pursuing their noble goals when those around them welcome their ideas with reluctance and ridicule (*The Strong Breed*). We also come across characters facing serious hostility in trying to undertake actions relevant to the wellbeing of their societies; societies that, in most cases, turn out to be a hindering factor instead of supporting and upholding new ideas (*The Swamp Dwellers*). As odd as it might seem, we meet some other exceptional characters who have chosen for themselves a different path; whereas some might estrange themselves to escape societal pressures to search for truth and live life as they see appropriate, others may definitely reject any future conformity to societal norms creating for themselves codes of conduct that allow them the possibility to act for themselves (*The Road*). In this regard, and in relation to Soyinka's plays, Oyin Ogunba maintains that:

*Today's African may be a little more bizarre than his contemporaries, but he still has the same essence. Thus, it is universal human nature that is explored in these plays, only the setting is particularized in time and space. We are confronted with the same problems, the same intensity of feelings and the same conventional solutions or lack of solutions<sup>122</sup>.*

Whatever our backgrounds, we find in these characters some aspects that we can identify with, qualities that we do sympathize with and inadequacies and flaws that we justify as being mere reflections of the complexities of human nature. Ogunba, in commenting on the universal character of Soyinka's works, further asserts:

*This is why he is able to recognize a sameness of disposition in characters as apparently different as the ancient Helen of Troy, the medieval Madame Tortoise and the modern Rola. This is also why he regards Oba Danlola and Kongi as kindred spirits and finds the same cunning tendency in the Biblical Serpent and the serpent of the Swamps. Human crimes or foibles are outside*

---

<sup>122</sup>. Ogunba Oyin, "The Traditional Content of the Plays of Wole Soyinka", In. *African Literature Today*, (ed), Eldered Durosimi Jones, (Heinemann Educational Books LTD, London, 1971) (106-115) p. 115

*time and place and so there is no need to upbraid some while extolling others*<sup>123</sup>.

It is always thought that the corresponding side of Soyinka's "*rootedness is his cosmopolitanism*" <sup>\*124</sup> in the sense that the Yoruba and African roots that form the skeleton of Soyinka's writings should be held with the same weight as his human universal roots. In the light of this, I might say that reading Soyinka's plays often calls to mind the settings and themes of the plays of Euripides, Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht and Jean-Paul Sartre. This motivates us to say that the task of projecting the human experience in its entirety, of bringing to center stage the paralyzed condition of man and his constant search for a convenient source of salvation cuts across cultural boundaries. Wherever in the world, we hear of individuals and societies striving under the grip of the same situations of desolation and hopelessness inciting their artists and writers to respond with fine literary productions. In the following passage, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o comments on the fact that whatever tropes a work of art would assume, the ideas it furnishes would basically cling to one shared universal essence:

*The universal is contained in the particular just as the particular is contained in the universal. We are all human beings but the fact of our being human does not manifest itself in its abstraction but in the particularity of real living human beings of different climes and races*<sup>125</sup>.

Soyinka's plays, therefore, embrace the bonds of universal human thought in terms of human suffering, and the human quest to attain salvation and regeneration. In this chapter, we will see how Soyinka relates his writing experience to that of world literature as he probes into an entire human condition through valuing the role of tragedy to understand

---

<sup>123</sup>. Ibid., p. 114

<sup>124</sup>. Phrase borrowed from a lecture delivered by the American Professor Robert Elliot Fox in Lagos entitled "From Tigrity to Transcendence: The Conscience and Conscientiousness of Wole Soyinka", (Sunday Magazine, 15 July 2012)

<sup>125</sup>. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, section '3', "The Universality of Local Knowledge", pp. (25-30) (James Currey Ltd., London, 1993) p. 26

human nature and its often paradoxical inclinations. To do so, I shall compare Soyinka's characters, the ideas and thoughts they cherish with some other characters representative of world literature to point out how they enact the human predicament and man's need for salvation and change.

### 3.1. " Piercing the encrustations of soul-deadening habits":

Towards the end of the play *ADF*, Forest Head remarks:

*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 habits, 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, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumored ineffectuality complete; hoping that when I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, is new beginnings<sup>126</sup>.*

In this passage, Forest Head is well aware of people's past crimes and deeds or what he termed 'fooleries'. Even though he is convinced that he ought to persist and go on in his task of trying to understand what made life so degenerate and people so blind to truth, still he is distressed, worried and pained for he feels the heaviness of the burden over his head of "piercing the encrustations" of these fooleries and bad habits that keep repeating over the ages curbing any society's task to improve its existence. This delicately reflects the image of the writer and the artist who feels the burden over his head and pen to think, plan, write down, execute and concretize and "bare the mirror of original nakedness" to his readers and audience. In so doing, the artist might assure to initiate a new beginning in his society, as Soyinka says, at least "*hoping that when I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, is new beginnings*" The final end then which is desired is to "torture

---

<sup>126</sup>. *ADF.*, opcit., p. 71

the awareness" from people's souls and to raise their consciousness to issues they can barely recognize as vital for their wellbeing.

Bursting with such a dynamic consciousness towards their environment, writers over the ages felt the urgent need to engage with the changing realities around them, being aware that it will be difficult for their societies to lead an authentic life, or pursue those things which are worthwhile unless they understand what went wrong and what remained to be still corrected and salvaged. This incited these writers to use their literary works mainly the stage, which has always proved revolutionary, to bring to the eyes of the ignorant what he cannot make sense of or respond to on his own.

In many instances, Soyinka made it clear that the ethics of his theater aim at the perfection of the individual and his condition because he regards him as the nexus of revolutionary change and that for societies to evolve, individuals have to evolve. He says in in a 1975 interview:

*We haven't begun actually using words to punch holes inside people. But let's do our best to use words and style when we have the opportunity – to arrest the ears of normally complacent people, we must make sure we explode something inside them which is a parallel of the sordidness which they ignore outside<sup>127</sup>.*

In so saying, Soyinka thinks that the writer has to account for the means by which human beings can amend their past mistakes and work towards a more stable future. Because of the growing sense of futility and despair in the hearts and minds of people, Soyinka's task of "piercing the incrustations of soul-deadening habits" is like that of "punching holes inside people" to reveal their weaknesses and inadequacies and to evoke a tragic sense of life in them hoping to purge their souls and revive in them the desire and capacity for action again.

---

<sup>127</sup>. Cited in Adekunle Olowonmi, "The Writer and the Quest for Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Transcending Post-Independence Disillusionment", (*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, no.3, March 2008) p. 63

This is what may be meant by T.S. Eliot who speaks of the modern writer's task to summarize in him bringing together the "*heap of broken images*"<sup>128</sup> again; images of decay and ineffectuality, and, which according to him, is the only possible option open to writers to restore shape and significance to experience.

Because Soyinka has a deep faith in human progress, he contends that every human being if willing enough can overcome the undesirable aspects of his character and evolve into a better human being. Soyinka's main concern, hence, is to salvage society from the recurrent cycle of human follies, so that human beings can progress and evolve. Soyinka thinks that the artist can contribute to a better future for his society. For the African writer and the modern writer in general, the commitment at hand is to "*have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity.*"<sup>129</sup>

### **3.2. Universal knowledge in *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*, *A DANCE OF THE FORESTS* and *THE STRONG BREED*:**

This section attempts a close examination of Soyinka's characters in relation to other characters from world literature, mainly those of Euripides and Shakespeare, to demonstrate how they do present universal patterns of behavior, patterns that help us comprehend our own nature and human nature in general. Therefore, in the first part, we attempt a kind of a comparison of Soyinka's Elesin Oba, Demoke and Eman with Euripides's Orestes and Shakespeare's Hamlet in terms of the shared tendencies they exhibit. In the second part, we try to get an insight into the paradoxical dimensions of human nature that Soyinka dramatizes with in the three plays and that reflect the existential dimension of his works and his engagement with the universal spirit of understanding the ambiguities of human nature.

---

<sup>128</sup>. Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *The Waste Land*. Ed. Michael North. (New York: Norton, 2001) p. 22

<sup>129</sup>. Soyinka, "The Writer in A Modern African State". (1967) In. *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*. (15–20) p. 15

### 3.2.1. Patterns of self-knowledge in Soyinka, Shakespeare and Euripides:

Reflecting on whether he would be strong enough "to force the moment to its crisis"<sup>130</sup> , Prufrock in T.S. Eliot's *The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, says:

I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker  
And I have seen the eternal footman hold my coat and snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid<sup>131</sup>

This is a verbal expression of internal anxieties and conflicts of a powerless man striving to come to terms with a reality that denies him all means to control the circumstances around him, let alone to make a decision whether or not to act. He is frustrated, feels paralyzed like an 'etherized patient' who perceives his surroundings just in faint images and actions.

Being a crucial element in the development of a tragic character into a stable individual able to make wise decisions and to have peace of mind, anagnorisis (translated as self-revelation or self-knowledge) has to be experienced by the character to understand what went wrong and why. As defined by Aristotle in *The Poetics*, *anagnorisis* refers to

*A discovery, a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortunes*<sup>132</sup>.

The fully aware character is the one who, after experiencing pain and falling prey to wrong choices and turnings, becomes able to determine the proper course of action that would allow him to maintain his social standing, and apprehend the intricacies that made him restless or undecided towards an action that is vital for the wellbeing of others. In this context, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer says:

---

<sup>130</sup>. Eliot, Thomas Stearns. *Prufrock and Other Observations*. (published by: Poems. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1920) (Online: Bartleby.com. [www.bartleby.com/198/](http://www.bartleby.com/198/)) (7 January 2012). (Line: 80 )

<sup>131</sup>. *Ibid.* (Lines: 84-86)

<sup>132</sup>. Quoted in Leech, Clifford, *Tragedy*. (Routledge, London and New York, 1969) p. 64

*...Although a man is always the same, he does not always understand himself, but often fails to recognize himself until he has acquired some degree of real self-knowledge. In this way, an insight into that which alone of all he wills and is able to do by dint of his individuality, is made difficult for him. He finds in himself the tendencies to all the various human aspirations and abilities, but the different degrees of these in his individuality do not become clear to him without experience<sup>133</sup>.*

So, according to Schopenhauer, acquiring some degree of self-knowledge aids the individual to assume a new stance that will give meaning to his experience; this moment of his individuality that manifests itself to him shows him his aspirations and their limitations. Soyinka holds a similar view, in making his characters' attempts at self-knowledge extend to reflect the whole society's desire to achieve understanding and recognition. To improve itself, society then has to get an insight into its flaws and defects through a process of self-apprehension. In the dramatist's words:

*I have been preoccupied with the process of apprehending my own world in its full complexity, also through its contemporary progression and distortions ... For after (or simultaneously with) an externally directed and conclusive confrontation on the continent must come a reinstatement of the values authentic to that society modified only by the demands of a contemporary world.<sup>134</sup>*

For the purpose of the present study, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Euripides' Orestes are compared to Soyinka's Elesin, Eman and Demoke with the intention to show how they present patterns of self-knowledge of man in general knowing that Soyinka is greatly influenced by both dramatists. Regardless of the roles they occupy or the kinds of duties required of them, all these characters share moments of indecision, churning thoughts and conflicting passions in carrying out the tasks bestowed on them, inhibiting them from

---

<sup>133</sup>. Quoted in Norman Stinchcombe, *Understanding Ourselves: Character and Self-knowledge in Conrad and Schopenhauer*, (A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham for the degree of doctor of philosophy, Department of Philosophy, College of Arts and Law, The University of Birmingham, September 2010) p. 43

<sup>134</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. ix

managing the scheme of things and fulfill their duties. These moments, however, turn out to be the obstacles these characters need so as to achieve self-knowledge and recognition. And this reflects the three dramatists' concern with exploring the complexities of human nature and those human follies that are still precluding entire societies from leading a serene existence, whether in ancient Greece, Medieval/Renaissance Britain or modern Nigeria.

In Soyinka's plays, the characters' struggles for self-knowledge have several frontiers. I have earlier suggested that the tragedy of a certain character comes about when he tries to strike a balance between personal desires and the desires of the collective especially because the figure of the hero is often associated with the idea of salvation that limits his freedom of choice. In the three plays, the characters are given opportunities by Wole Soyinka to experience moments of introspection so as to explore their drives and their limitations. That is why the plays are rife with feelings of guilt, escapism, confession and remorse that shape the process by which the three protagonists end up identifying themselves and realizing their inadequacies and flaws. In *DKH*, Elesin's attempt at self-knowledge manifests itself in the way he wavers amidst his thoughts of responsibility to take action and the justifications he forwards so as to make others understand that he is apt for the task accorded to him and that his sense of desire has not failed him. From the outset, Elesin speaks of himself as one who is greatly trusted to hold the potential of his people in his hands. Over and above, he muses with others' incapacities for such a great task judging their merits and defects, and this gives him more self-assurance and conviction of distinctness:

**Elesin:** My rein is loosened.

I am master of my fate. When the hour comes,

Watch me dance along the narrowing path

Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.

My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside

**Women:** You will not delay?

**Elesin:** Where the storm pleases, and when, it directs  
The giants of the forests. When friendship summons  
Is when the true comrade goes.

**Women:** Nothing will hold you back?

**Elesin:** Nothing. What! Has no one told you yet?  
I go to keep my friend and master company.  
Who says the mouth does not believe in  
"No, I have chewed all that before?" I say  
I have<sup>135</sup>.

Soon after this assuring self-praise, Elesin starts to give space to the possibility that his task might be distracted. As if he wants others to understand that he might fall prey to outward influence and that it is not a matter of imperfection in his character. He tells the market women:

**Elesin:** I embrace it. And let me tell you, women  
I like this farewell that the world designed,  
*Unless my eyes deceive me, unless*  
We are already parted, the world and I,  
*And all that breeds desire is lodged*  
*Among our tireless ancestors.* Tell me friends,  
Am I still earthed in that beloved market  
Of my youth? Or could it be my will  
Has outleapt the conscious act and I have come  
Among the great departed?<sup>136</sup> (*italics my emphasis*)

The two above exchanges project Elesin in a mood of self-assessment: conflicting passions between assuring feelings of eagerness and readiness to fulfill his task on the one hand, and the evasive possibilities he creates that he might be beguiled by one reason or another, on the other. Elesin, hence, emerges as an individual who knows his path, one who is aware of his duty and of the retributive implications the failing of which might finally entail. He strives to find a middle way between the promise he made to his people and the beauty of life he can no longer resist.

---

<sup>135</sup>. *DKH.*, opcit., p. 14

<sup>136</sup>. *Ibid.*, p. 18

While Elesin is hindered by the constraints of his desires and propensities, he always uses his inner positivism and resourcefulness to draw a positive and strong image of himself in the eyes of those around him. Even though he finds earthly pleasures irresistible, he strives to remain firm so as to prove worthy of the glorification heaped upon him and that he is not the kind of those who fear to enter the unknown. About this state of mind, Carl Jung comments:

*In the realm of consciousness we are our own masters; we seem to be the 'factors' themselves. But if we step through the door of the shadow we discover with terror that we are the objects of unseen factors. To know this is decidedly unpleasant, for nothing is more disillusioning than the discovery of our own inadequacy<sup>137</sup>.*

This is the difficult task of questioning one's own inadequacies in the face of external communal as well as cosmic demands. Elesin wants to satisfy his inner call for life pleasures; at the same time, he wants to show his allegiance to his society's need for continuity and rejuvenation. In the eyes of those around him, however, Elesin's hesitation puts him in a guilty position by his people. Iyaloja attests to his desperation and says:

*You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's left-overs. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter's dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and faeces of the hunter<sup>138</sup>.*

Sharing much of Elesin's hesitations and distractions, Hamlet's tragedy is caused by his complex and constantly restless state of mind. Hamlet's character here is approached according to his role as a prince and reformer of Denmark. The picture of Hamlet that we, all readers, perceive from the overall character of the play is that he is a prince of great

---

<sup>137</sup>. Jung, Carl Gustav, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", (1934). *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. Ed. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, and William McGuire. Bollinger Series XX. 2nd ed. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1968) (3-41) P. 23

<sup>138</sup>. *DKH.*, opcit., p. 68

insight, one who enjoys great power for reflection, and a character who constantly meditates on the secrets of human destiny and the mysteries of the unknown. In each of his soliloquies, Hamlet moves from one state of mind to another, never ceasing to conjure up man's fate in the face of outward conditions and demands. This ambitious and knowledgeable man who values the beauty and serenity of life is called upon to avenge a dead father that compels him to measure life again with a different and despising lens. Nevertheless, before Hamlet meets his final destination with death being finally killed, he passes through hard moments in trying to inflict death on those he wants to take revenge from. He experiences the task of inflicting death on others before he himself receives it at the end. Seeking a balance between these conflicting emotions lies at the heart of Hamlet's tragedy. Hamlet's agitated state of mind is emphasized by many critics. In the words of Dr. Samuel Johnson:

*...A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away. All duties are holy for him; the present is too hard. Impossibilities have been required of him; not in themselves impossibilities, but such for him. He winds, and turns, and torments himself; he advances and recoils; is ever put in mind, ever puts himself in mind; at last does all but lose his purpose from his thoughts; yet still without recovering his peace of mind<sup>139</sup>.*

Hamlet's monologues are very relevant to inform his complex and tormented state of mind:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?  
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
That youth and observation copied there;  
And thy commandment all alone shall live  
Within the book and volume of my brain,

---

<sup>139</sup>. Quoted in, *Hamlet: a study guide*. (Published by the Guthrie Theater and directed by Joe Dowling, 2006) p. 73

Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!<sup>140</sup>

The above soliloquy rightly reveals Hamlet's state of mind when he was addressed by his father's ghost that reminds him of the duty that lies ahead. Hamlet's words show his readiness to embrace his responsibility, he seems to have a firm belief in his task and that no force in the world would stand in his way. And as a prince of Denmark, to preserve the throne from being usurped, he assures his father that he would "*wipe away all trivial fond records.*"

Soon after these self-affirming and assertive words, Hamlet's wavering mind starts to manifest itself. He starts to speak of himself as unfit for the avenging task and that he is no more different from those from whom he is seeking revenge. He scorns and rebukes himself and he seems that he lost trust both in his capacity to accomplish the task and in the outward circumstances that, according to him, grow just to be more disturbing and paralyzing. He contemplates:

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,  
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,  
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab....<sup>141</sup>

This feeling of hesitation, of passivity and inability to take a step forward keeps him in a state of constant questioning. Whereas things seemed clear and worth sacrificing himself for, now he blames the circumstances for turning against him; he says: "*How all occasions do inform against me, / And spur my dull revenge!*"<sup>142</sup> This calls to the mind the way Elsin starts to accuse his surroundings for delaying his dance to death except of himself. But, the

---

<sup>140</sup>. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: Prince of Denmark* ([http://www.bookrix.com/\\_ebook-william-shakespeare-hamlet/](http://www.bookrix.com/_ebook-william-shakespeare-hamlet/), 2008) p. 55

<sup>141</sup>. *Ibid.* (Act ii, ii) (Lines: 556-560) p. 114

<sup>142</sup>. *Ibid.* (Act iv, iv) (Lines: 32-33) p. 196

more we get across instances of Hamlet delaying his action, the more we can understand how much he really values his task and how much he is preoccupied with his role.

Life, for Hamlet, seems a mystery and that any attempt at understanding its enigmatic nature would lead just to further confusion and self-remorse. Resolving the secret of life, Hamlet seems to tell us, would make a skeptic of every one of us. Therefore, the form of self-knowledge that Hamlet experiences at the end of the play reveals itself in the fact that he becomes able to draw some conclusions about human nature and destiny, the most insightful of all is that the quest for the meaning of life is trivial if we are not able to understand our role and purpose in it. After a long time of indecisiveness, Hamlet, at last, approaches his task but only after a true conviction of its importance in changing the scheme of things. While Elesin Oba looks at death as a step into a new life, a crucial beginning into a spiritual communion with the forebears and a point of honor for the living, Hamlet considers it as having little dignity, as the great equalizer that makes all men equal. In Hamlet, as in *DKH*, *ADF* and *TSB*, the issues of individual responsibility and destiny do overlap to lead Hamlet to his tragic end in a graveyard setting and Elesin Oba in a prison cell chained and disgraced.

In *TSB*, Eman's questioning stance of his people's values and customs leads him to a transformation, yet this does not keep him from experiencing emotional conflict and pain. From the outset of the play, we are made to understand that Eman finds solace in being strange, he likes to be strange. The following exchange between Eman and Sunma overtly refers to this:

**Sunma:** I am not trying to share your life. I know you too well by now. But at least we worked together since you came. Is there nothing at all I deserve to know?

**Eman:** Let me continue a stranger- especially to you. Those who have much to give fulfill themselves only in total loneliness.

**Sunma:** Then there is no love in what you do.

**Eman:** There is. Love comes to me more easily with strangers.

**Sunma:** that is unnatural.

**Eman:** Not for me. I know I find consummation only when I have spent myself for a total stranger<sup>143</sup>.

Eman knows very well why he prefers living as a stranger. This estrangement gives him a space for contemplation and reflection where he becomes able to learn a lot about the petty feelings of those around him. It helps him to see in others what they are unable to understand about themselves but, at the same time it tortures him as it deepens his fears of others who are blind to truth and who are unable to understand him or welcome his ideas.

He says to Omae:

*A man must go on his own, go where no one can help him, and test his strength. Because he may find himself one day sitting alone in a wall as round as that. In there, my mind could hold no other thought. I may never have such moments again to myself. Don't dare to come and steal any more of it<sup>144</sup>.*

What torments him further, however, is the fact that he is being seen for one who has failed his people as a descendent of the strong breed.

By constantly evading the task of the carrier in both his home village and the new one, Eman wants others to understand how much hollow and useless is the custom they are valuing and for which disabled ones like Efada, or enlightening individuals like Eman are wastefully given. In the play, Eman seems to hold the view that this carrier custom has been performed in the village for ages but people seem not to be purged and that their spiritual state seems stagnant about the task being approached unwillingly by the carrier. Thus, he wants to stress the point that for the purging task to have the transforming results desired out of it, the carrier has to feel the burden of the duty and he ought to perform it with a sense of

---

<sup>143</sup>. *TSB.*, opcit., p. 125

<sup>144</sup>. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139

responsibility. Only in that way can this custom be said to hold a potential for the community's rejuvenation. This motivates us to ask, are there any signs that do inform the villagers' transformed state of mind or make us assume that they are undergoing a process of self-apprehension and recognition? At the end of the play, Jaguna says that "*women could not have behaved so shamefully. One by one they crept off like sick dogs.*"<sup>145</sup> The villagers, mainly the leaders, are now seen going back to the village with hearts full of pity and remorse of what happened. Hence, we might argue that Eman's clashing views with the villagers helped produce a sense of awareness on both sides. As in Soyinka's line of thought, Eliot similarly thinks that the most important recognition and self-knowledge that we constantly experience are most of the time constructed by our interactions with the outward world that do reveal to us things we cannot easily perceive on our own:

*The self, we find, seems to depend upon a world, which in turn depends upon it; and nowhere, I repeat, can we find anything original or ultimate. And the self depends upon other selves; it is not given as a direct experience, but is an interpretation of experience by interaction with other selves*<sup>146</sup>

Eliot therefore gives a crucial role to the enviroing circumstances to have a hand in our process to get knowledge about our strengths and weaknesses. This is what we clearly notice in Eman's character in that it could develop through time due to the pressures of duty he lives under and which both his home village and the new village exercise upon him; as a descendent of the strong breed in his home village and a stranger in the new one. Having such an enlightened spirit, Eman tries to set himself as an example to be emulated, being dissatisfied with the role of a preacher.

---

<sup>145</sup>. TSB., opcit., p. 146

<sup>146</sup>. Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *The Sacred Wood*, (London: Methuen, 1969) p. 146

Orestes, sharing most of the previous characters' restless intellect, has often been approached for the mutability and lack of constancy that characterize his character. Euripides is thought of as a tragedian who

*Exhibits a more sympathetic concern for the currents of intellectual challenge in the fifth century B.C.E., currents of skepticism, impiety, and secular humanism...*<sup>147</sup>

The Euripidean character then tends to be conscious and skeptical of everything surrounding him looking at the world with a critical eye. Of all the tragic characters that Euripides creates on stage, Orestes is said to be the most representative. This is due to the 'air of skepticism' that he creates in his tragedies with the intention to reflect on the issues prevailing in ancient Greece.

In the traditional tale that Euripides adopts in his play *Orestes*, Orestes is presented as faced with a moral dilemma unable to make the right choice about a seemingly impossible action; that is the killing of his mother<sup>148</sup>. Orestes faces here an impossible choice: in order to avenge his father, he has to kill his own mother, Clytemnestra. While Orestes knew the dreadful implications of the blood crime he committed; he feels obliged to fulfill a religious duty required of him by his patron god Apollo, because of a messenger sent by the god in Delphi ordering him to accomplish the murder and to which Orestes took an oath. Orestes decides then to follow his patron's wish and to kill Clytemnestra: "*As the slayer of his mother, Orestes may be open to condemnation, but he is praiseworthy as the avenger of his father*"<sup>149</sup>. Owing to the matricide he commits and the difficult and agonizing state of mind he is put in, between an avenger and a killer, Orestes is presented,

---

<sup>147</sup>. David Damrosch and David L. Pike (eds.), *The Longman Anthology of World Literature* (Second edition) (Longman: Pearson Education, Inc., 2009) p. 61

<sup>148</sup>. Euripides, *Orestes* (Translated from Greek by Ian Johnston Vancouver, Island University Nanaimo, BC Canada) , (Richer Resources Publications Arlington, USA, 2010)

<sup>149</sup>. A. W. Verrall, Litt.D. *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides: Andromache, Helen, Heracles and Orestes*, Chap 4: "Orestes: A fire from hell" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905) p. 204

from the outset of the play, as a maniac, suffering from mental disorder and being taken care of by his sister Electra. His sister Electra describes his state of mind as follows:

**Electra:** After that poor Orestes grew so ill.  
Infected with a savage wasting sickness,  
he's collapsed in bed and lies there, driven  
into fits of madness by his mother's blood<sup>150</sup>.

Although diseased and unconscious, in his lonely monologues, Orestes seems to be well aware of the gravity of his act and its future implications:

**Menelaus:** What's wrong with you?  
What's the sickness that's destroying you?  
**Orestes:** It's here—in my mind—because I'm aware  
I've done something horrific<sup>151</sup>.

In adopting the same story of Orestes that Euripides adopted in his play, J.P. Sartre, in his novel *Les Mouches* (*Flies*, 1943), speaks of Orestes as an existential man describing him to be the 'guilt stealer' in Argos as he thinks that through trying to fill the void within himself, because of feeling rootless and strange, Orestes is driven to 'steal' the guilt of the people of Argos making it his own<sup>152</sup>. In Euripides' play, though Orestes sees the task of avenging a slayed father a decisive one, Euripides projects him in an incessant attempt to atone and purge his soul of his crime. He says to Electra:

If we could get  
just one thing, we could get lucky—*some way*  
*to save ourselves despite all expectations*  
*might fall our way from somewhere*, so we'd kill  
and not get killed ourselves. I pray for that.  
It's sweet to talk about what I desire  
in words with wings which cheer my spirit

---

<sup>150</sup>. *Orestes*, opcit., (Lines: 30-50), pp. 6-7

<sup>151</sup>. *Ibid.* (Lines: 453-457), p. 22

<sup>152</sup>. Cited in Leech Clifford, *Tragedy*, opcit., p. 51

and don't cost anything<sup>153</sup>. (*italics my emphasis*)

As it is clear from his words, he finds a joy in revealing his inner feelings and talking about his desires of having a purged soul because as he says this would "cheer my spirit":

**Orestes:** Menelaus, I am Orestes—the man  
you asked about. I'm willing to reveal  
all the suffering I've been through<sup>154</sup>.

Much like Eman who finds peace in estrangement, Orestes, being under a heavy torment, found solace in the penalty imposed on him by the people of Argos even though he feels rootless belonging nowhere. Before being reintegrated into the city of Argos according to the solution proposed by Apollo at the end of the story, Orestes feels alienated with a strong sense of depravity. He says to Menelaus: "*Wherever I go, doors are shut to me.*"<sup>155</sup>

Besides, and in like fashion with Hamlet, Orestes takes on the duty of avenging a murdered father from a slaying mother. On the basis of this, Orestes has been often compared to Hamlet and which reflects Euripides' direct influence on Shakespeare. In many respects, they share scenes of indecision, self-doubt, both being deeply pained and concerned about a father who has to be avenged:

*Orestes is very much like Hamlet in other ways as well: he doubts himself and hesitates to take action; he fears that the god who commands him to take revenge may be an evil spirit in disguise; and he is given to expressing himself with soliloquies*<sup>156</sup>.

He, like Hamlet, restores his energy for action, however infected by feelings of helplessness and exhaustion, by the end of the play to carry his plan against Helen and her daughter. He experiences a sudden act of awakening and awareness towards responsibility:

---

<sup>153</sup>. *Orestes*, opcit. (Lines: 453-457), p. 22

<sup>154</sup>. *Ibid.* (Lines: 1433-1440) p. 60

<sup>155</sup>. *Ibid.* (Line: 430) p. 25

<sup>156</sup>. Earl Showerman, "Orestes and Hamlet: From Myth to Masterpiece: Part I", (*The Oxfordian*, Volume VII, 2004), p. 105

*His feebleness, still visible at his approach is reinvigorated by the fatal forces of fever and madness; exhaustion is replaced by activity, energy, violence, and finally by strength more than natural, while the organ of thought proportionally fails, and at last is utterly overthrown<sup>157</sup>.*

After a series of pains and torments for committing an abominable act, after experiencing estrangement, after his wavering feelings of despondency and delusion, Orestes eventually and abruptly wakes up from his long sleep with a new sense of positivism towards crisis. He no longer harbors fears of the furies, the Argives or even the gods themselves, and emerges with a clear and assuring state of mind, recognizing the duty bestowed upon him and firmly says:

You fool!  
Do you think I could stand to stain your neck,  
make it bloody? You weren't born a woman  
and don't belong with men. I left the house  
to stop you making such a noise. Argos  
is quick to move once it hears the alarm.  
But still I'm not afraid of matching swords  
with Menelaus<sup>158</sup>.

The best kind of self-knowledge or recognition, according to Aristotle, is when a kind of situation reversal takes place leading the character to realize his transition and gives him a capacity to compare his past and present states<sup>159</sup>. This takes place when the character faces the opposite of what he expected, and this would either uplift the way he looks at himself or destroys his image in the eyes of those around him. In *ADF*, when past and present realities come into a meeting point in parallel scenes between the court of the ancient Mata Kharibu and the modern state that the living are celebrating, Demoke recognizes the brutality of past patterns and crimes and this pushes him into the transitional space of change; the ritual

---

<sup>157</sup>. *Four Essays*, opcit., p. 245

<sup>158</sup>. *Orestes*, opcit. (Lines: 1830- 1837) p. 76

<sup>159</sup>. *Tragedy*, opcit. pp. 63-64

dance of sacrifice. His talk with the Dead Man shows his awareness of the burden put on the living characters as there is no more an occasion for joy or celebration:

**Old Man:** Demoke, we made sacrifice and demanded the path of expiation...

**Demoke:** Expiation? We three who lived many lives in this one night, have we not done enough? Have we not felt enough for the memory of our remaining lives?

**Old Man:** What manner of a night was it? Can you tell us that? In this wilderness, was there a kernel of light?

**Demoke:** Not any more. It was the same lightening that seared us through the head<sup>160</sup>.

In this exchange, Demoke seems to be greatly pained about the truth that is being revealed to him to the point that he doubts the effectuality of light to enlighten people's life; that according to him, nothing is left to promise any future joy. Similarly, in recognizing the failure of his task and its apparent effects on people, Elesin Oba kills himself in shame, realizing that he has destroyed the honor of his family for failing his duty on the most important night in the life of a king's horseman. Having all the time praised his present world and the world he is about to visit, Elesin abruptly changes his view claiming that the world is not at peace: *"The world is not at peace ghostly one. The world is not at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world forever. There is no sleep in the world tonight"*<sup>161</sup>.

Opinion reversal is a clear symptom of situation reversal and self-knowledge.

Even though he shows no clear contrition, Demoke's confession of his crime and its implications bring him to a state of awareness and to a meeting point with his true nature. One might wonder why does Demoke suddenly make the choice of intercepting the tricky maneuver of Eshuoro to hold the Half-Child in his arms? One possible answer is that Demoke, the carver and artist, who knows very well that he is unable to take upon himself the responsibility of assuring the Half-Child's growth and potential and recognizes Eshuoro's deadly intentions to use the Half-Child for the destruction of mankind, evades

---

<sup>160</sup>. *ADF.*, opcit., pp. 73-74

<sup>161</sup>. *DKH.*, opcit., p. 62

forcing the child into this challenge because he knows that he is incapable of defending him and even himself. Here we can say that this is a sign of a great awareness on the part of Demoke, his realization that he must first recognize and understand his inadequacies and weaknesses before one takes upon oneself the responsibility of a people's future. Thus, the emergence of the aware and transformed individual who, through recognizing that it is a burden upon himself to redeem himself and restore to himself the capacity for action on moral and noble principles through an introspectional journey, gives his society a new impetus and a possibility to attempt its own journey, in acquiring a new level of awareness, towards rationality and salvation.

Whether for Euripides, Shakespeare or Wole Soyinka, the process of self-knowledge or self-discovery finally makes one realize that all human beings, despite their varied personalities and intentions, bear similar universal features. The human spirit is the same, and it is this spirit with its desire for self-apprehension which has to be tapped for societies to progress in a positive direction. From a personal view point, I would say that in passing through all these moments of introspection, of self-examination, these characters, and all those they represent in the world, would appear in another light, as persons capable of taking and effecting decisions; they would be put in a position to start afresh as transformed individuals ready to act upon their own circumstances, to transmute all feelings of hesitation and restlessness into a firm assertion of the self. They will end up thinking out new, healthy ideas for themselves and those in need of their insight and newly- acquired knowledge.

### 3.2.2. "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it": The paradoxical dimension of human nature

In his interviews and essays, Chinua Achebe employs the Igbo proverb "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it"<sup>162</sup> to stress the idea that difference and contradiction lie at the very heart of the African's conception of life. He said this to uphold the fact that our world is a world of dualities, of conflicting passions and opposed viewpoints that do intermingle and coexist in one worldview or one single being<sup>163</sup>. This proverb apparently infers that the presence of both sides is vital to give shape and meaning to our experiences.

Many other writers and thinkers share Achebe's view. In his essay, "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions", Emile Durkheim forwards the idea that inner contradiction is a feature that is inherent in any social being. He stresses the fact that human beings have the tendency to desire one thing and desire its opposite even though one side often tends to be hidden to the outward world and which the others cannot easily perceive. He opines that:

*We cannot pursue moral ends without causing a split within ourselves, without offending the instincts and the penchants that are deeply rooted in our bodies. There is no moral act that does not imply sacrifice, for, as Kant has shown, the law of duty cannot be obeyed without humiliating our individual....how can we belong entirely to ourselves, and entirely to others at one and the same time<sup>164</sup>.*

Within the same line of thought, the modernists also speak of achieving salvation through experiencing damnation in the sense that the one who is destined to experience the final joy

---

<sup>162</sup>. Taken from Achebe's Interview with Bill Moyers in 1989. In. Moyers, Bill. *A World of Ideas* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) P. 333

<sup>163</sup>. Achebe Chinua, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*. (London: Heinemann, 1975) p. 9

<sup>164</sup>. Emile Durkheim, "Le dualisme de la Nature Humaine et ses conditions sociales", *Scientia XV* (1914) pp. (206-21), "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions", Emile Durkheim et al: *Essays on Sociology and Philosophy*, (ed), Kurt H. Wolff, translated by Charles Blend, (Harvard college Library, 1960) pp. (325-340) p. 328

of salvation is the one whose spirit suffers the pains and mysteries of damnation. The existentialists, on their part, theorize about the paradoxical dimension of human nature through bringing the idea of understanding in confrontation; only after a confrontation between our inner desires on the one hand, and a confrontation with the outward environment that in most cases refuses to accommodate our ideas on the other, that one can end up understanding his purpose in life and his stance in it. This is what is often termed in psychoanalysis as 'ambivalence'; a kind of shuttling of emotions or a fluctuation between desiring one thing and desiring its opposite<sup>165</sup>. In many literary works, we get across characters exhibiting contrasting views and conflicting passions in their stands towards themselves or towards others and this often results in a kind of a friction between various factions in society, for every faction thinks its desires have to be favored whatever outcomes this might entail on society. In his philosophy, Soyinka ponders about this phenomenon as the creative/destructive essence in human nature. He wants to make it clear that every category in the African ontology and cosmology is invested with a dual nature, with the human being as its first embodiment.

Soyinka's philosophy of change is said to incorporate many of the basic tenets of existentialist thought, and that the ideas of finding stability in contradiction, and achieving creativity through the experience of destructiveness are the most illustrative of all. In an interview conducted by John Agetua, Soyinka maintains:

*You must of course know my fascination with the symbol figure of my society-Ogun. He represents the duality of Man; the creative destructive aspect. And I think it is the reality of society, the reality of man<sup>166</sup>.*

---

<sup>165</sup>. "Ambivalence", *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. (23 March. 2015). <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ambivalence>>.

<sup>166</sup>. Interview conducted by John Agetua . Excerpted from: *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*, Literary conversations series, Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (ed), (University Press of Mississippi, 2001) p. 39

In Soyinka's understanding, thus, for the individual to renew his insights to life, to achieve a higher level of spirituality and to reach a true state of self-awareness, 'suffering' is a necessary element to accomplish this process. In developing what he calls "African Tragedy", Soyinka proposes an aesthetic principle where the experience of 'suffering' assumes a positive tone to help in the act of sensitizing the community to conditions they are ignorant of and propels an intentional inventiveness that seeks to destabilize societal attitudes but for the sake of achieving stability, dis-alienation and salvation at the end. Soyinka claims that final purgation can only be arrived at through suffering:

*Suffering cancels the opaque pleasure of human existence: suffering, the truly overwhelming suffering of Sango, of Lear, of Oedipus, this suffering hones the Psyche to a finely self- annihilating perceptiveness and renders further action futile and above all, lacking in dignity. And what has the struggle of the tragic hero been, after all, but an effort to maintain that innate concept of dignity which impels to action only to that degree in which the hero possesses a true nobility of spirit? At such moments he is close to the acceptance and wisdom of Obatala in which faith is rested, not on the self, but on a universal selfhood to which individual contributions are fundamentally meaningless<sup>167</sup>.*

In his plays, Soyinka creates an air of opposition between one part of human nature and another allowing his characters to try to reflect on challenges facing them and emerge with a new sense of resilience towards difficulties. In his article, "Soyinka's Appetite for Sacrifice", Daniel Gover says:

*Of all the dualities that run through Wole Soyinka's dramatic writing and reflect his shifting balance between the creative and destructive sides of life, one of the most instructive sets of contraries is the alternation of appetite and sacrifice<sup>168</sup>.*

He further asserts that:

---

<sup>167</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., p. 134

<sup>168</sup>. Gover Daniel, "Soyinka's Appetite for Sacrifice", *Lagos Review of English Studies*. (Kean College of New Jersey, 27 August 2010)(Accessed: 21/07/2012) [http://www.aciafrica.org/journal/Lares10%20fullpaper\\_Daniel%20Gover\\_.pdf](http://www.aciafrica.org/journal/Lares10%20fullpaper_Daniel%20Gover_.pdf)

*Human nature seems to be at war with its own conflicting needs both to fulfill and transcend the individual self, to dominate the community and to serve it through sacrifice*<sup>169</sup>.

This view is trying to forward the idea that in his works, Soyinka inserts side by side the issues of sacrifice and appetite for life to theorize about the contradictory drives inherent in individuals and of which the characters under examination are the most representative of Soyinka's characters.

Some parts of *DKH*, for instance, speak of Elesin Oba in contrasting tones. While he blames everyone but himself for the failure in performing his dance to death, he confesses to his young bride that her beauty and youth were irresistible attractions, and that they were the reason for delaying his ritual dance. As much he joyfully desires to die to achieve a high level of spirituality and retain the cord that links that world with the one after and preserve the glory that the family of the horseman accomplishes over the ages, he describes life and its pleasures with great eagerness. He says addressing his young bride: " *First I blamed the white man, then I blamed my gods for deserting me. Now I feel I want to blame you for the mystery of the sapping of my will*"<sup>170</sup>, then he overtly confesses:

*Perhaps your warmth and youth brought new insights of this world to me and turned my feet leaden on this side of the abyss. For I confess to you, daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man who came violently into my fading presence, there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. I would have shaken it off, already my foot had begun to lift but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled*<sup>171</sup>.

The contradictory sides of sacrifice and appetite are clearly manifested in this confession and apparently self-blaming passage. Gover, in summarizing some of the critics' views about the duality in Elesin's character, says:

---

<sup>169</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>. *DKH.*, opcit., p. 65

<sup>171</sup>. Ibid.

*He is something of a culminating character for Soyinka: a man whose appetites for transcendence through death and earthly fulfilment are both strong, though at odds with each other. And it is the collision of these powerful human drives that produces Elesin's great tragedy*<sup>172</sup>.

Because Soyinka believes that existence could only be defined by remaining open to human possibilities, he fills his characters with wavering feelings of uncertainty between two extremely desired sides and of which the personality of Ogun is the most representative. I have earlier suggested that Ogun's unpredicted and dual character is employed by Soyinka to theorize about the dualism with which human nature is invested. In his "Fourth Stage", he says that Ogun is *"a combination of Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean principles"*<sup>173</sup>, to suggest that the dual nature that characterizes human beings and their characters in particular originates from Ogun who, in one single being, combines the contradictory aspects of life. Eman in *TSB* is thought to be, by many critics, as the most representative embodiment of Ogun's personality in terms of a similarity of life giving and causing death like that of Ogun. We know that Eman belongs to the 'strong breed'; people who have been brought into the world just to sacrifice themselves at the end as carriers of the spiritual burdens of others, thus making it possible for them to lead a better life. Eman's father's words stress this paradox inherited in the strong breed's mission in life when he tells his son Eman: *"Omae is giving birth to your child ...Don't you know it was the same with you? And me? No woman survives the bearing of the strong one"*<sup>174</sup>. The strong breed are born just to die at the end saving other people's souls. While his inner nature calls him to intervene and spare a powerless individual like Efada an end the boy is not even able to understand its meaning or the intention behind it, Eman seems reluctant to waste his life to perpetuate a useless and mistakenly practiced custom for he sees the willingness on the part of the carrier

---

<sup>172</sup>. "Soyinka's Appetite for Sacrifice", *opcit.*, p. 145

<sup>173</sup>. "The Fourth Stage", *opcit.*, p. 158

<sup>174</sup>. *TSB.*, *opcit.*, p. 133

as a crucial step in carrying out the ritual. Eman, thus wavers between the pressures of rigid social demands and an inner positivism that informs his character and with which he measures life. In the light of this, Durkheim stresses further the difficulty inherent in the fact of living within the bounds of a social group that overburdens us to revise and revalue our commitment to people while keeping faithful to our desires and goals:

*Our joys can never be pure; there is always some pain mixed with them; for we cannot simultaneously satisfy the two beings that are within us. It is this disagreement, this perpetual division against ourselves that produces both our grandeur and our misery: our misery because we are thus condemned to live in suffering; and our grandeur because it is this division that distinguishes us from all other beings<sup>175</sup>.*

In his seminal work, *The Death of Tragedy*, George Steiner speaks of the paradox that lies in the idea of a hero or a character who gives his life to death so that others might be saved, and the pain and suffering he goes through which are thought by many critics to be a vital step for the character's redemption<sup>176</sup>. Besides, he stresses the fact that the hero's death is not always a way to his redemption or the salvation of others as it might subject him to self-destruction and self-loss. Nevertheless, Steiner believes that so long as the tragic hero becomes a partner to death which he no more fears, he would see all else frivolous because in experiencing the terrors of death and sacrifice, he becomes able to perceive the joy afforded by death that he considers a release from life's pressures and restrictions. In *ADF*, Demoke, in spite of being a skillful carver and artist and while at first he is afraid of heights and unable to carve, his murder of his apprentice Oremole charges him with a new strength and gives rein to his will for creativity again. He joyfully says then after:

And I  
Demoke, sat in the shoulders of the tree.  
My spirit set free and singing, my hands,

---

<sup>175</sup>. "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions", *opcit.*, p. 329

<sup>176</sup>. *Tragedy*, *opcit.*, p. 80

My father's hands possessed by demons of blood  
And I carved three days and nights till tools  
Were blunted, and these hands, my father's hands  
Swelled big as the tree-trunk<sup>177</sup>.

Here, we can assume that even though Demoke commits the crime of murdering his apprentice, he was in need of this incident as a step to set his will for creativity free again. This clearly explains what Soyinka meant by achieving creativity through destructiveness; suffering as a threshold to joy and redemption. This reminds me of the old woman's remark in *Madmen and Specialists* (1970). In this play and in understanding the totalitarian intentions of Dr. Bero, the old woman's opinion of experience and the way she perceives the world around her attest to this contradictory principle of life. She says: "[Y]ou don't learn good things unless you learn evil"<sup>178</sup>. Despite the fact that he keeps asking the Dead Woman whether his apprentice Oremole accuses him for his crime, he seems to be consistent with his crime and that he is prepared to do it again if he is given chance:

**Demoke:** Now, now, and from his nest, I will again pluck him, Oremole servant of Oro and fling him screaming downwards into hell<sup>179</sup>.

We might assume that this opinion reflects any writer's tendency when he tries and works hard to reach his readers' minds whatever this might require of him in the process; to offend, criticize or destabilize others. Jung stresses this idea that when our desires and views are conflicting in our psyches, as long as this reminds us of our helplessness and fears, this gives us a chance to apprehend what was previously difficult to understand if our two sides were not at opposite ends. He says:

---

<sup>177</sup>. ADF., opcit., p. 27

<sup>178</sup>. Soyinka, Wole. *Madmen and Specialists in Collected Plays II*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) P. 225

<sup>179</sup>. ADF., opcit., p. 26

*This confrontation is the first test of courage on the inner way, a test sufficient to frighten off most people, for the meeting with ourselves belongs to the more unpleasant things that can be avoided so long as we can project everything negative into the environment. But if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious. .... This problem is exceedingly difficult because it not only challenges the whole man, but reminds him at the same time of his helplessness and ineffectuality<sup>180</sup>.*

Wole Soyinka was very often criticized by his fellow critic Chinweizu that, in his works, he tries to impel his characters as well as readers to a kind of pure individualism, and that he divorces his works from any mass character of action. As a response to this, Soyinka asserts that, as we have clearly demonstrated, that the African experience cannot just be thought of within the bounds of mere events particular to specific people, he instead insists that a work of art would have no appeal if it tries not to reach the mysteries of human nature. This can come about, according to Soyinka, through universalizing the particular and enriching the particular from what can be delicately reaped from the universal human experience. This attitude springs from Soyinka's belief that cultures, however different, in the process of their evolution, cross-fertilize each other for the sake of generating one lived universal reality. In his respect, Soyinka maintains that *"in order to transmit the self-apprehension of a race, a culture, it is sometimes necessary to liberate from and relate this collective awareness to, the values of others."*<sup>181</sup>

Therefore, in absorbing the western literary idiom into his drama, Soyinka is well aware that, for his project of change to achieve the desired improvement he aims at and to inspire the masses to whom it is destined, it has to work towards the elevation of the individual through creating dramatic spaces to measure the desires and aspirations of his heroes/characters within the insurmountable restrictions and obstacles of the real world. Out

---

<sup>180</sup>. "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", opcit., pp. 20-21

<sup>181</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., p. viii

of this conflict, emerges the individual with a new way to sense the events and to pass it over to the others in his society. Soyinka's plays search deep into the human psyche to reveal its mysteries, its inclinations and conflicts. Soyinka indeed aims at establishing a universal character of tragedy having its roots, however in the old forms of knowledge, the old gnosis that the gods represented.

## CONCLUSION:

Most of Soyinka's works, both fictional and non-fictional, project his dissatisfaction with the status quo against which he launches a scathing reaction. This led him to dramatize with the issue of the society's need for an expedient source of salvation to get rid of those "soul-deadening habits" that are precluding modern societies, mainly those which are in a state of transition from a colonial to a post-colonial state of events, from stepping into the realm of the saved and transformed. This task of leading society to this state of salvation and transformation cannot be easily accomplished through the passivity of ordinary men who are just mere watchers of events on the road of change, but it requires a heroic initiative coming from a knowledgeable, thinking and daring agent who is eagerly prepared to step into the crucible of challenges and confront all that is conceived of as unchallengeable by others. This clearly explains the way Soyinka values the individual's role in effecting the fate of his society and in changing the course of events:

*Because of the visceral intertwining of each individual with the fate of the entire community, a rupture in his [the individual's] normal functioning not only endangers this shared reality but threatens existence itself<sup>182</sup>.*

The tragic ends of *Elesin Oba*, *Eman* and *Demoke*, and the desperate and seemingly unpromising ends of the plays induce one to doubt the regenerative force of sacrifice that Soyinka claims to be the act by which the individual's representation of his society can be measured. Besides, the closing scenes of the three plays lead us to assume that the worlds the protagonists have left behind are rather sterile, hopeless and waver in an uncertainty of what is to come. Accordingly, views do diverge about what Soyinka really has in mind when he puts forward the issue of sacrifice as a manifestation of the heroic self and its role in bringing about salvation and catharsis. While very few views, represented by Femi

---

<sup>182</sup>. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, opcit., p. 53

Osofisan and Biodun Jeyifo, emphasized the final impressions of the plays to have little to do with Soyinka's theorization about the renewing effects of tragedy constructed around the Ogun archetype and the Ogunian hero, many other critics have appealed to the hope-promising dimension of the protagonists' sacrificial acts pointing to the fact that Soyinka's protagonists achieve new levels of awareness in the community, in raising the consciousness of people by means of their suffering and devoted "deaths". Derek Wright, in summarizing the views of many critics towards Soyinka's tragic sacrificial impulse, asserts:

*In the Yoruba model, it matters less whether the protagonist's disintegration is followed by a self-willed reassemblage or by death, or whether he does or does not achieve self-knowledge..., than that his ordeal injects a new strength into the communal life-blood, either by engendering new levels of awareness in sudden acts of collective self-apprehension or by his continuing service as an exemplary or cautionary model<sup>183</sup>.*

And to make it clear to everyone, Soyinka himself opines that:

*all socio-political systems believe in the 'final resolution of things' and that many facets of experience in the process of catalyzing the status quo into a new level of society are understandable and explicable through a recourse to myth,<sup>184</sup>.*

Soyinka, here, speaks of a "new level of society" and this motivates us to say that the protagonists, through their sacrifices, achieve new levels of understanding and initiate new ways of looking at reality. Soyinka seems to tell us that even though it has no tangible manifestations in the worlds left at the ends of the plays, salvation lies in Elesin's, Eman's and Demoke's giving glimpses of hope, and that the "final resolution of things" implies a change in the people's consciousness of reality, not a change of reality itself. We can easily believe in this attitude if we aptly apprehend the general aura at the ends of the three plays: feelings of regret over the sacrifice of an ambitious individual like Eman overwhelm his

---

<sup>183</sup>. "Ritual and Revolution: Soyinka's Dramatic Theory", *opcit.*, p. 42

<sup>184</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 44

village, people's questionings and doubts rise around Elesin's eligibility for the sacrificial task as they grew undecided whether his downfall would be solely attributed to his character. Past and present realities coexist in Demoke's society in *ADF* bringing the living characters and their incarnated past images into a meeting point; into an ambiguous forest realm where each of them starts to recall his past mistakes and their implications. All these feelings can be said to translate into the entire society's sensitivity towards issues when moving from the state of being to the state of becoming. One might assume that the regretful sentiments of the villagers at the end of *TSB* give a glimpse of hope that the villagers' attitude towards the absurdity of the ritual of human sacrifice would change as time goes by in the same manner that Eman's view has changed over the years.

In the plays under study, Soyinka has recalled and made use of the repository of knowledge and tradition of his society with the aim of creating parallels between past experiences and those currently at play. This helps his society to see what went wrong and what can properly be salvaged to use it to cope with the exigencies of the modern age. Visiting his community's traditional past and employing the gods of the Yoruba pantheon as active agents and characters in his plays explain Soyinka's desire to seek alternative ways in which to regard the troublesome condition on the continent. African societies are in a period of transition, of reordering themselves, and for this reason, Soyinka puts his characters, Elesin, Eman and Demoke into question and scrutiny to see whether they can be apt for the task of aiding such societies in this process of alteration.

Throughout this study, I have argued that Soyinka indeed aims at projecting the image of individuals representing the fate of their community. In his tragic dramas, he outlines a modern nation builder who can, following the steps of Ogun before him, be a catalyst for change and a force of fusion between the different forces that would stand in the face of his

society's evolution. The plays' characters, I would say, being simply human beings who tend to err and sin, in acting out their sacrificial roles, have their own defects and conflicting passions but at least they take the initiative to open the path towards their society's future. For Soyinka believes that if any world society desires to secure a safe path towards the future, this society has to consider how a proper balance can be reasonably established between these contraries and passions.

I have also argued that the tensions that often take place between the heroes and their societies motivate them to question, criticize and even offend them, therefore, giving chance to their inner inventiveness to manifest itself to the outside world. The moments of suffering experienced by Elesin, Eman and Demoke seem to bring people to a point of recognition and insight, to a new truth that was previously lurking behind the shadows of unawareness and ignorance. Soyinka suggests that: "*...any faith that places the conscious quest for the inner self as goal, for which the context of forces are mere battle aids is ultimately destructive of the social potential of that self*"<sup>185</sup>. In the light of this, for a society to achieve self-realization, a connection between the daring self and the other selves is mandatory. Soyinka values the social potential of this daring self, as it would ever remain a source of insight and vision for others.

There has also been a suggestion that Soyinka sees an affinity between the types of experiences his characters project and those projected in world literature in the sense that they present patterns of behavior that can be universal. This is due to the fact that Soyinka prioritizes the role of tragedy in broaching the question of human nature and essentially its paradoxical propensities, and this justifies the way he relates his writing experience to that of world literature. His mechanism of initiating change in society reflects the modernist

---

<sup>185</sup>. Soyinka, W. *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*. (London, Rex Collings, 1972), p. 87

impulse that works towards the perfection of the individual as it also operates within the bounds of the existentialist frame of thought. Equally evident in Soyinka's plays is the notion that evoking the urgent needs of the modern Nigerian predicament means giving a possibility to approach the universal; a universal reality that makes any effort at reforming the human condition a shared experience in world literature.

Furthermore, I would say that at the basis of the rich philosophical background with which the plays under study are composed, Soyinka aims at initiating a project of emancipation that would direct the future of modern African societies and the future of the continent at the socio-cultural, political and economic levels.

I think that the plays under study are implicitly posing the question about the kind of leadership modern African societies should have, with a view to suggesting adequate political systems. Leaders include policymakers and the elite who are constantly making erroneous and sometimes tragic choices that decide upon the future of the continent. It takes competent and courageous leaders to conduct Africa. Indeed, the modern African state requires a nation builder who, in acting on behalf of the masses behind him, would behave with a well-established and distinguishing self-assertiveness, the one who does not waver and churn in the midst of uncertainties and challenging situations. If they act otherwise, should they be trusted to decide upon the country's destiny? The nation builder who twitches back and forth and hesitates to make a right choice becomes the subject of severe scrutiny, like Elesin Oba who, despite his great initial eagerness for action, fails to represent his folks and refuses the role assigned to him. The leader that any world nation needs, starting from Africa, is required to maintain a balance between keeping faithful to his aspirations on one hand, and reacting responsibly to the issues concerning his society on the other. In most cases, this requires him to exclude personal priorities. It is in this modern

context, Soyinka seems to tell us, that the nation builder can form and develop his character and elaborate his capacity for judgment.

In the character of Elesin Oba, for example, we might say that Soyinka attempts an assessment of the role of the elite in directing the country's destiny. As said, the leaders are not exempt from flaws and foibles. Through the image of Elesin, we can imagine the frivolous and ineffective role of the petit bourgeois parties that are just concerned about personal interests. And in the character of Eman, we can see that idealist leader who is wastefully sacrificed to appease the desires of the few, who think themselves as representatives of the communal will, to keep a useless tradition alive. In *TSB*, Jaguna and Oroge seem to be the ones who are more concerned about the issue of sacrifice than the rest of the village.

In bringing to the fore the idea of the dual, ambivalent dimension of human nature, Soyinka wants probably to stress the need for a the multiplicity of standpoints where even contradictory ideas can be brought together in tackling issues that hold great potential for the society. It seems that Soyinka infers that for any political system to prosper, in Africa or elsewhere, exclusivity in decision making has to be avoided; opposing views should be reconciled and that the failure to see the validity of this insight has greatly contributed to Africa's problems. The idea, for instance, of the one-party state is behind the prevalence of destructive dictatorships that do mutilate most modern African societies nowadays and are hindering them from enjoying a prosperous existence.

The idea of the "rites-of-passage" can be widely interpreted to include the whole African process of passage from one stage in its historical development to another. This passage requires, philosophically speaking, the 'assertion of the self' against any force attempting at its disintegration. Therefore, the "will" for action has to be preserved if the task is to be

successful in the post-colonial context of Africa. The assertion of the self might be seen as the duty of preserving the identity of the African character against the background of foreign cultural features. This interpretation, however, does not exclude the possibility of absorbing the foreign element during this passage; this means that the African character has to assert itself firmly so as not to fall prey to the foreign element that, if not well-understood or rightly incorporated, can destabilize the local element in the accomplishment of this transition.

Finally, I would say that whether the results aimed at are achieved or not, people should at least be prepared to take the necessary actions when called upon to play roles which are of crucial importance to the well-being of their societies. *DKH*, *ADF* and *TSB* operate within that abode of thinking in which the issue of achieving salvation in society through heroic acts coming from its own members is greatly and beautifully examined.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I/- PRIMARY SOURCES:

- Wole Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests in Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973)
- *The Strong Breed in Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973)
- *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Methuen, 1975)

### II/- SECONDARY SOURCES:

#### A- Works by Wole Soyinka

- "And After the Narcissist?" *African Forum*, vol. 1 no. 460. (1966) (e-article)
- *Idanre and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967)
- *Madmen and Specialists in Collected Plays II*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974)
- *Myth, Literature and the African World*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1976)
- *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (London: Arrow, 1985) (e-book)
- *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*. (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988) (e-book)

#### B- Critical works on Wole Soyinka

- Amkpa Awam, *Theatre and Post-colonial Desires* (London: Routledge, 2004) (e-book)
- Biodun Jeyifo, *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001) (e-book)
- ....., *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- ....." Forget the Muse, think only of the (Decentered) Subject?" (*Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde* • 48 (1) • (2011) (e-article)
- Booth, James. "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka". *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 23, no. 1 (Jan 1992), (pp. 7-24) (e-article)
- Derek Wright, "Ritual and Revolution: Soyinka's Dramatic Theory", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 23:1, Online e-article. Synergies Prairie Node. (January 1992)
- Eldred Durosimi, Jones, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973) (e-book)

- Esslin Martin, "Two Nigerian Playwrights", In. *Introduction to African Literature: Anthology of critical writing from 'Black Orpheus'*, Ulli Beier (ed.), (Longman Group Limited, London, 1967)
- Gareth Griffiths, *African Literature in English: East and West*. Longman literature in English series, (Pearson Education Limited, England, 2000)
- Gates Jr., H.L (2001). "Being, the Will and the Semantics of Death". In, Jeyifo Biodun(ed) (2001). *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*. (Jakson: University Press of Mississippi.) (e-article)
- Gibbs James (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* (Washington DC: Three Continents, 1980) (e-book)
- Gover Daniel, "Soyinka's Appetite for Sacrifice", *Lagos Review of English Studies*. (Kean College of New Jersey, 27 August 2010)(Accessed: 21/07/2012) [http://www.aciafrica.org/journal/Lares10%20fullpaper\\_Daniel%20Gover\\_.pdf](http://www.aciafrica.org/journal/Lares10%20fullpaper_Daniel%20Gover_.pdf)
- Gurnah Abdulrazak, "Outrage and Political Choice in Nigeria: A Consideration of Soyinka's Madmen and Specialists, The Man Died, and Season of Anomy", University of Kent , (URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7818>) (13/07/1994)
- Irele Abiola, "Tradition and the Yoruba writers", in. Biodun Jeyifo, *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*. (Jakson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001) (e-article)
- Katrak, Ketu H. *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) (e-book)
- Mathuray Mark, ed., *On the Sacred in African Literature: Old Gods and New Worlds*. (Palgrave Macmillan, UK. 2009) (e-book)
- Moore, Gerald, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1978) (e-book)
- Ogunba, Oyin, *The Movement of Transition* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975) (e-book)
- ..... "The Traditional Content of the Plays of Wole Soyinka", In. *African Literature Today*, (ed), Eldered Durosimi Jones, (Heinemann Educational Books LTD, London, 1971)
- Phillips, K. J. "Exorcising Faustus from Africa: Wole Soyinka's The Road". *Comparative Literature Studies*, 27, no. 2 (1990): 140-157. e-article. JSTOR (database). <http://ariel.synergiesprairies.ca/ariel/index.php/ariel/article/view/2408/2362> [accessed 5 Jul 2013]

- Quayson, Ato. *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and history in the work of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka & Ben Okri* (Oxford, James Currey & Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997) (e-book)
- ..... "The Space of Transformations: Theory, Myth and Ritual in the Work of Wole Soyinka" (1997) In. *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*, ed. Biodun Jeyifo, (Univ. of Mississippi Press, Jackson, 2001) (e-article)
- ..... *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*, Chap. 3, "African Postcolonial Relations through a Prism of Tragedy" (The Regents of the University of Minnesota, Minnesota, 2003) (e-book)
- Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995)

### **C- Works on theory and criticism**

- Achebe Chinua, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*. (London: Heinemann, 1975) (e-book)
- Bishop Rand, *African Literature, African Critics: The Forming of Critical Standards, 1947-1966*, (Greenwood Press, New York, 1988) (e-book)
- Brustein Robert, *The Theater of Revolt: Studies in Modern Drama From Ibsen to Genet*, (Elephant Paperback, Chicago, USA, 1964) (e-book)
- Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *The Sacred Wood*, (London: Methuen, 1969)
- Durkheim Emile et al. "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions", *Essays on Sociology and Philosophy*, (ed), Kurt H. Wolff, translated by Charles Blend, (Harvard college Library, 1960) (e-article)
- Frazer, James, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*. (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993) (e-book)
- Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1957) (e-book)
- G. Jung Carl., "Approaching the Unconscious," In. *Man and His Symbols*, ed. C.G. Jung and Marie Louise von Franz. (New York: Dell, 1964) (e-article)
- ..... "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious." 1936. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1968) (e-article)
- Hubert, Henri and Marcel Mauss. *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. Trans. W. D. Halls. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) (e-book)

- Hughes, Derek. *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) (e-book)
- Kwasi Wiredu, (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*, (USA: Blackwell, 2004) (e-book)
- Leech, Clifford, *Tragedy*. (Routledge, London and New York, 1969)
- Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, translated by: Willard R. Trask (Harper & Row publishers: New York and Evanston, 1968) (e-book)
- ..... *The Myth of Eternal Return or Cosmos and History*. Trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen series XLVI (Princeton: UP, 1974) (e-book)
- Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics: Essays*, (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1981) (e-book)
- .....*Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, (James Currey Ltd., London, 1993) (e-book)
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. Ed. Michael Tanner. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. (London: Penguin Books, 1993)
- .....*On the Genealogy of Morals*. Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed), translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006)
- Okpewho Isidore, *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972) (e-book)
- René Girard, *La Violence et le Sacré* (Paris: Éditions Bernard Grasset, 1972); translated by Patrick Gregory as *Violence and the Sacred* (London: The Athlone Press, 1988) (e-book)
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translated by Philip Mairet. (London: Methuen, 1948) (e-book)
- Van Gennep, Arnold, *The Rites of Passage*. (Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1966) (e-book)
- Wilfred Guerin, Earle G. Labor, Lee Morgan, John R. Willingham, *A Handbook of Critical Approaches*. (Harper Row, 1966) (e-book)

#### **D- Miscellaneous:**

- A. W. Verrall, Litt.D. *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides: Andromache, Helen, Heracles and Orestes*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905) (e-book)
- Damrosch David and L. Pike David (eds.), *The Longman Anthology of World Literature* (Second edition) (Longman: Pearson Education, Inc., 2009) (e-book)

- Euripides, *Orestes* (Translated from Greek by Ian Johnston Vancouver, Island University Nanaimo, BC Canada, Richer Resources Publications Arlington, USA 2010) (e-book)
- Ian C. Storey and Arlene Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005) (e-book)
- Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, "On the normative conception of a person", In. *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Edited by Kwasi Wiredu, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004)
- Kluckhohn, Clyde. "Recurrent Themes in Mythmaking." *Myth and Mythmaking*. Ed. Henry A. Murray. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) ( 46- 60.) (e-article)
- Miller Arthur. "Tragedy and the common man". Source: Guth, Hans P. and Gabriele L Rico, in., *Discovering Literature*. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993)(e-article)
- Ojaide, Tanure. "Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity". *African Studies Review* 35.3 (Dec. 1992), 43-57. (JSTOR. Web. 5 Jan. 2012.)
- Showerman Earl, "Orestes and Hamlet: From Myth to Masterpiece: Part I", *The Oxfordian*, Volume VII, 2004) (e-article)
- Thomas Stearns,Eliot, "Ulysses, order and myth", [www.rci.rutgers.edu/~marinos/MythicalMethod.html](http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~marinos/MythicalMethod.html) (e-article)
- .....*The Waste Land*. Ed. Michael North. (New York: Norton, 2001)
- ..... *Prufrock and Other Observations*. (Bartleby.com) (Web. 7 January 2012)
- Turner Victor. "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 6/4 December, 1979) (e-article)
- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: a study guide*. (Published by the Guthrie Theater and directed by Joe Dowling, 2006) e-book

#### **E- Theses:**

- Matolino Bernard, *The concept of person in African political philosophy: an analytical and evaluative study*, (a PhD thesis submitted to the School of Philosophy and Ethics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2008) (e-thesis)
- Pivideri Cristina, *The Death and Birth of a Hero: The Search for Heroism in British World War One Literature* (a PhD thesis submitted to the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, University of Barcelona, 2012) (e-thesis)
- Stinchcombe Norman, *Understanding Ourselves: Character and Self-knowledge in Conrad and Schopenhauer*, (a PhD thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham, Department of Philosophy, College of Arts and Law, the University of Birmingham, September, 2010) (e-thesis)

## **F- Interviews/conversations:**

- Achebe's Interview with Bill Moyers in 1989. In. Moyers, Bill. *A World of Ideas* (New York: Doubleday, 1989)
- John Agetua . Excerpted from: *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*, Literary conversations series, Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (ed), (University press of Mississippi, 2001) (e-book)
- Karen L. Morell (ed.), (April 1974). Excerpted from: *In Person - Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka at the University of Washington*. Seattle: African studies Program (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975) (e-book)
- Mphahlele, Ezekiel (1975) "Interview with Wole Soyinka." *African Writers Talking*. (Eds.) Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse. (London: Heinemann Educational Books)

يرمي هذا البحث الى دراسة كيفية رؤية وولي شوينكا للعلاقة بين الفرد والمجتمع ، وعلى رأسها فكرة " التداخل العميق للفرد مع مصير المجتمع " ، وكيف تم تطويرها في بعض مسرحياته المأساوية . عرض شوينكا للذات المأساوية البطولية في

(A Dance of the Forests)، (The Strong Breed) و (Death and the King's Horseman)

هو طريقته الفريدة في إحداث التغيير في المجتمع. الكاتب يعلق أهمية كبيرة على مآثر الشخصيات البطولية:

. Eman ، Demoke ، Elesin و Olunde .

والتي يمكن فهمها في إطار أسطوري الذي يستدل به الكاتب في المسرحيات الثلاث. أسسها تكمن في تصور اليوروبا للمأساة وتصورهم للمصير العام.

في الفصل الأول ، نتطلع إلى فلسفة شوينكا في الفن و الحياة وذلك بهدف فهم وتقدير قوة و تفرد

رؤيته في ضوء العديد من الجدل حول نوع الرؤية التي ينبغي على الكتاب الأفارقة تجسيدها . أيضا نرى كيف يقوم شوينكا بتجسيد الأساطير التقليدية لليوروبا من اجل ايصال رؤيته حول الخلاص و التغيير في المجتمع. هذا التحليل يهدف الى عكس الاهمية الكبيرة التي يعلقها شوينكا على الارث الفلكلوري اليوروبي لخدمة اهدافه التغييرية.

الفصل الثاني يستكشف ما يشكل التجربة المأساوية في الدراما بالنسبة لشوينكا . نرى أيضا كيف يعرض

شوينكا رؤيته للبطولة المأساوية في إطار أسطوري كوني . وتركز المناقشة أيضا على طبيعة الشخصيات البطولية في نظرتهم الخاصة للعالم . فمن الأهمية اظهار هذه العلاقة لان النظرة للعالم تحدد كل خطوة تقوم بها الشخصية كما اننا نحاول أيضا تحليلًا أعمق للذات المأساوية كلما كانت تقوم بأدوار تتناسب مع ادراكهم لمصير المجتمع والكون.

لقد بينا ان الشخصيات البطولية التي تناولناها في دراستنا هاته Eman ، Demoke ، Elesin و Olunde

تدرك تمام الادراك ضرورة التضحيات و القرارات التي هم بصدد اتخاذها لتوعية مجتمعاتهم بأهميتها، رغم ما تشكله من خطورة على حياة الشخصيات البطولية، لضمان استمرارية تواصلهم مع الاسلاف و الاجداد ومن اجل رفاهيتهم و تقدمهم

يتناول الفصل الأخير، انطلاقا من تحليل للشخصيات البطولية ، حقيقة أن شوينكا ، على الرغم من كونه له جذور عميقة في الأرض و التقاليد النيجيرية والإفريقية ، يربط تجربته الادبية إلى الأدب العالمي بما انه يهدف إلى دراسة وفهم حالة الإنسان أيا كان من خلال اعتباره لدور المأساة لفهم الجانب التناقضي في الطبيعة الإنسانية. فهو يرى انه على الرغم من ارتباط كتاباته الوثيق بمصير بلده نيجيريا و بأفريقيا على مستوى عام، الا انه يرى انها انعكاس لحالة الانسان الاجتماعية و السيكولوجية لان مصير الانسان مشترك اينما وجد.

من كل هذا ، يمكن القول بأن محتويات المسرحيات المأساوية التي تناولها هذه الدراسة على حد سواء ملموسة و رمزية. ملموسة لأنها تتعلق بواقع شعب معين ورمزية لأنه لفهم معناها، علينا أولا أن نفهم الإطار الأسطوري الذي في سياقه عولجت هذه المسرحيات. انه في استحضار مثل هذا الإطار الأسطوري و استرجاع الأشكال القديمة للمعرفة ، والمعارف الروحية القديمة التي تمثل الآلهة، بان شوينكا قادر على عرض تصوره بحيث ان التغيير والتجديد ، والخلاص في المجتمع متعلق و موصول بمصير الشخصيات البطولية. نلاحظ أن الصفات التي تشكل الروح البطولية تنبع من أوجون ، الآلهة اليوروبا المعروف على اتخاذه مخاطر هائلة من محاولة لتوحيد العالم البشري مع الروحي. هذه الشخصيات تحمل نفس الشجاعة القصوى في أدوارهم لإحداث تغيير في حالة الإنسان؛ لتحقيق ما يسميه شوينكا "مبادئ أخلاقية للمجتمع" . بالنسبة لشوينكا، لا يتم جلب التغيير المراد في المجتمع من خلال الجهود المتضافرة لأعضاء المجتمع ، ولكن من قبل الشخصيات البطولية الذين ، من خلال الشجاعة و التفاني، يخضعون لتجارب اثارها تستهدف المجتمع ككل.

ليس سوى مثل هذا الشخص هو الذي سوف "يكون قوة الانصهار بين التناقضات " ؛ قدرة الفرد على قيادة وتوجيه مستقبل المجتمع . إلى حد كبير، امكن اظهار الفعالية والتفاؤل الكامنين في رؤية النفس البطولية المأساوية لتكون حافزا للخلاص والتقدم الاجتماعي .