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CP **CRITICAL
PERSPECTIVES**
**ON WOLE
SOYINKA**

Edited by **James Gibbs**

Lecturer in English at Ibadan University



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Wole Soyinka has spoken for himself in an autobiographical statement which appears in *World Authors 1950 - 1970*, edited by John Wakeman and published by H.W. Wilson Company. I recommend it as a preface to this volume of critical essays, since it provides a clear self-portrait of the writer. The statement also provides a useful preface to this Introduction, a row of pegs on which comments on Soyinka's life and work can be hung.

I shall concentrate on the pegs in the first paragraph of the statement and introduce Soyinka from five points of view: as a Yoruba; as an academic; as a man-of-the-theatre; as a political activist, and as a writer. These five categories do not aspire to cover even cursorily the whole man—since his patron god is Ogun I would expect Soyinka to have seven parts. Nor do I presume to fragment the individual. Soyinka reacted to the tendency to categorize and compartmentalize in an exchange at Washington, Seattle, an exchange which catches the easy humor of the man:

Participant: You seem to wear three caps: the poet, playwright, and novelist. Is there any conflict between the three? And which do you prefer?

Soyinka: Yes, well there were more than three caps. One which you omitted to mention is that first and foremost I wear the cap of a human being. And, therefore, the other three caps are really very minor: you know, rain covers, sun shields, and things like that.¹

My categories do not seek to eliminate the human being, or control the "fluid operation of the creative mind,"² but rather to provide a context in which the man can be seen at work, to describe briefly his "rain covers, sun shields, and things like that." I hope that at the end the reader will feel the current of a life which is not pursuing different courses separated by islands and delta flats, but a strong river, full of eddies and subtle flows. But all one stream, one river, one flow.

Soyinka as a Yoruba:

Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka was, born on July 13th, 1934 in Ijebu Isara. His parents, Ayo and Eniola, came from adjoining kingdoms, Ijebu and Egba,³ and his father was a school supervisor. One aspect of his mother is glimpsed briefly in a discussion about Amope:

... My own mother, for instance, was a terror. Not by nature, but she was a trader, and I know that even she, who was a rather gentle person, when she got fed up and wanted to collect her debts from her customers - it is no joke - suddenly she was transformed.⁴

Soyinka was brought up, educated and worked - until the age of twenty - in what was then called the Western Region of Nigeria and in Lagos. He is a Yoruba and, although he has travelled widely, he has returned to Yorubaland to work. His present post at Ife, a spiritual center of the Yoruba, is conveniently symbolic. It is his actual and spiritual home.

Much of his work is linked to Yoruba culture and Yoruba concepts. Some of the most obvious examples of the use of Yoruba material and the presence of Yoruba

POETICS AND THE MYTHIC IMAGINATION

Stanley Macebuh

It would be no exaggeration to observe that Wole Soyinka is probably the most widely-known African intellectual of the contemporary period. Yet the observation would seem to require considerable explanation: for to inquire into the nature of his reputation is to begin to understand the quite specific manner in which the profession of 'art' can appropriately serve as the formal demonstration of that sensibility whose truest aspect is to be discovered more in social activity than in a merely aesthetic posture. When one thinks, for instance, of Achebe, one thinks of the self-effacing author of that inimitable work of creative genius, *Things Fall Apart*. But one does not usually think of Soyinka as the author of any specific work; it is not impossible that many of those who know him, particularly outside Africa, recognise him not simply as the author of *Idanre* or *The Road*, or even of that endlessly anthologised piece, 'Telephone Conversation', but more as a man whose 'renaissance' posture deeply impresses the twentieth century mind. In Soyinka's own mythic terms, the difference between his reputation and Achebe's is the difference between the mythic impulse of Ogun and of Obatala, between the heroic posture of 'tragic dare' and of 'harmonious resolution.' We shall return to the crucial significance of this distinction later. Here it is sufficient to suggest that it would probably be too limiting to see Soyinka merely in terms of a talented playwright of the theatre. He has, of course, experimented with just about every major literary form—with drama, with poetry and fiction, with the essay and the diary, and, we might as well add, with radio. One can hardly deny that his preference has been for drama and for the dramatic in poetry, yet it is a preference that would seem to be significant less for his interest in theatre (some of his plays are simply unstageable) than for his belief that it is through drama that he can most adequately convey his thematic preoccupations. And Soyinka's abiding concern has been with myth, with its significance for contemporary

life in Africa. For him, 'history' has been not so much a record of human action as a demonstration of the manner in which social behaviour so often symbolises a sometimes voluntary, sometimes unwilling obedience to the subliminal impulse of the ancestral memory. If it is true, as Eliot once suggested, that there can be no culture without religion, we may be equally certain that there can be no history without myth. And to the extent that myth and history are complementary, it may be suggested that Soyinka's persistent meditation on myth is an attempt to reveal the primal foundations of African culture, and therefore of history. To say, then, that Soyinka is a dramatist is to say that he has chosen as his medium that literary form most appropriate for the communication of the hardly tangible anatomy of the ancestral memory. Soyinka is, first and foremost, a mythopoiest; his imagination is, in a quite fundamental sense, a mythic imagination.

To recognise this basic interest in myth is to begin to discover the source of Soyinka's creative strengths, and of his weaknesses. Apart from his quite astringent social criticism, he has been particularly impressive on those occasions when he has sought to reveal the primeval psychic dilemmas of African man. What has sometimes seemed the cynical pessimism of his circular vision of history, in *A Dance of the Forests*, for instance, is, in fact, an index of his belief that it is impossible to divorce culture from its mythic origins. Yet what redeems this vision from total pessimism would seem to be the consideration that though Soyinka is not exactly enthusiastic over the possibility that human history is the history of 'progress' and perfection, he appears nevertheless certain that ineluctable though mythic compulsions are, man yet still does have a measure of choice, and therefore of responsibility for the state of things in his world. Unlike the Christian world, Soyinka's world is one in which one can hardly speak meaningfully of any doctrine of grace; it is a world in which absolution is never even remotely *a priori*, never dependent on any power outside the realm of a broad concept of culture. It is this fundamental relation between myth and social behaviour that those who object to the quaintness of Soyinka's ritual dramas have failed to recognise, and it is this, too, that often elevates his works beyond the limits of merely temporary ideological agitation.

But if the advantage of Soyinka's mythic imagination is this transcendent quality, it may yet be suggested that his particular nemesis has been the problem of language. Soyinka is, without doubt, a difficult, sometimes infuriating writer. The particular ambience of myth, we may be reasonably certain, is dignified sim-

plicity; it tends to appeal to immediate recognition, to be clear, untortured, serene. In a writer so persistently concerned with the mythic, one might therefore expect to find a certain measure of melodious ease. Because of its appeal to a 'universal' consciousness in man, myth, we are told, is eminently translatable from one language to the other; and Soyinka's own interest in Greek mythology, his recognition of certain analogies between Greek and Yoruba legend would seem to confirm this. If, then, we find in spite of this a condition of linguistic stress in Soyinka's attempts to communicate the mythic heritage of African man, the question must be asked why this is the case; and it is at this point that we begin to realise that the problem of language in Soyinka is a two-fold problem, the one deriving from Soyinka's sense of his relation to his colonial burden, the other, more internal, relating to the very nature of the body of myth with which he is preoccupied.

The fundamental intention behind Soyinka's interest in Yoruba myth has little to do with popularising the archaic; his concern would appear rather to be that of discovering in mythic history certain principles upon which contemporary behaviour might be based and by which it might legitimately be judged. Indeed, there is a profound sense in which it might be said that the chaotic nature of social behaviour in our time is the single most important justification for Soyinka's meditations on myth. His preoccupation with the tragic exactions of the god Ogun is by now well-known enough—in *A Dance of the Forests*, in *The Road*, in *Idanre*; but it needs to be reiterated that his is not a merely antiquarian interest, that the legend of the gods provides for him a means for illuminating the complexities of contemporary life in Africa. According to him, the Yoruba, for instance, are a people perpetually bound to the parallel (and sometimes complementary) impulses of two gods, Ogun and Obatala, and to understand the personality attributed to these gods by the Yoruba is to understand the origins of what might otherwise be deemed a merely neurotic condition in their contemporary behaviour. Obatala is the god of 'spiritual complacency', Ogun the god of 'tragic' dare. "The overt optimistic nature of the total culture," Soyinka observes in his examination of this problem, evident "in the quality attributed to the Yoruba himself . . . has in fact begun to affect his accommodativeness towards the modern world, a spiritual complacency with which he encounters threats to his humane and unique validation" (1). It is a condition of mind traceable to the mythic influence of Obatala, but it is equally part of Soyinka's point here that this spiritual complacency is not entirely inevitable, that the impulse of Ogun is

always there, imperiously demanding that his radical will be done(2).

In a situation, then, in which social commentary is embodied in mythic interpretation, language, if it is alien, might be expected to be problematical. And in the case of the African writer, this is so because, thanks to his colonial inheritance, to seek to understand the essence of African myth is to do so at a time when the African mind is burdened with the encumbrances of Western culture. That is to say that in a quite fundamental sense, one of the consequences of colonial history is that the once-colonised are so often obliged to view the world from a *comparative* point of view. When Keats meditates on Apollo, he never evinces any obligation to bear Gilgamesh in mind, and one does not really expect him to. Writing though he is in the English language, it is possible for him to assume a direct link between the conceptual assumptions of his language and the conceptual framework from which he derives his myths. The once-colonised, on the other hand, when they write in English or French, are almost inevitably driven to comparison, in the case of Soyinka between Ogun and Dionysos-Apollo-Prometheus, and certainly not out of a mere desire for ostentation. Indeed, that Soyinka should appear to feel obliged to suggest an analogy between Ogun and *three* Greek deities is an indication of the seriousness of the problem. For to explain the African world, when one is writing in a European language, is to assume the responsibility not merely of articulating African concepts but of making them intelligible also to those whose world view has been conditioned by the vision implicit in European languages; and, it need hardly be remarked, there are many Africans in this latter group. We shall suggest in a moment why this responsibility becomes even more uniquely vexatious in the case of Soyinka; here we may suggest that those who object to the difficulty of his language might do well to bear this general problem in mind. Part, at least, of our impression of the harsh inscrutableness of Soyinka's language may be seen as an exact equivalent in words of that unease of the mind that is the lot of all those who have suffered a modification of vision through colonialism. When they seek to penetrate this barrier and to reach towards the primal sources of their being, they are not unlikely to be as tortured in their languages as Soyinka sometimes is (3). For the contemporary African concerned to delve deeply enough into his ancestral past, to articulate the past is to expose oneself to the obtrusiveness of Western culture. And language, more often than not, is the vehicle of this obtrusion.

Language in Soyinka is difficult, harsh, sometimes tortured; his syntax is often archaic, his verbal structures

sometimes impenetrable. It would be pointless to seek to overlook this condition in his works. And bearing in mind his basic preoccupation with myth, it might on the face of it appear an insupportable contradiction that he should thus seem to overlook the consideration that the language of myth is usually 'simple.' There is, nevertheless, the possibility that a good many of Soyinka's critics have, in identifying this difficulty, yet failed to pay sufficient attention to the internal, that is, ethnocentric compulsions in his poetic dramas that render this condition nearly inevitable. We will in a moment suggest reasons why the criticism of Soyinka's works appears to us so often to exist in a vacuum. Here it is necessary first to summarise the objections against him.

In the Fall of 1972 a group of three young Nigerian poets resident in the United States prepared an essay in which they attempted to identify the failures of Nigerian poetry of the contemporary period (4). We draw attention to this essay because it embodies an almost exhaustive list of the usual objections against Soyinka in particular, and against the poetry of the Ibadan-Nsukka School in general. The essay was prepared as an angry response to the suspicion shared by many that Nigerian poetry was by way of being taken over by jaded European mannerisms. It came at a time also when, particularly in the United States, the burgeoning black consciousness had begun to lead to a feverish search for sources and origins, for ancestral justifications. To the extent that it sought to re-establish the need for an authentically African vision in art, it was a welcome venture, yet it may nevertheless be argued that, its general indictment apart, its ethnocentric rigour was deeply tainted both by youthful rashness and by insufficient or perhaps too elliptical an understanding of that very tradition upon which its indictment was based.

Briefly stated, the essay began with the thesis, unarguable enough, that all contemporary poetry in Africa must derive its legitimate inspiration from the oral tradition; the exigences of our colonial inheritance are such, however, that a good many of our poets have allowed themselves to suffer "a divorce from African oral tradition, tempered only by lifeless attempts at revivalism." Incapable of accommodating a dynamic sense of the African past in their psyche, they become the unconvincing and inept vectors of European impulses. Their works consequently display "glaring faults", "old-fashioned, craggy, unmusical language; obscure and inaccessible diction; a plethora of imported imagery." Not only is the form of their works objectionable; they suffer also from a failure of sensibility; their thoughts are either confused, or their "simple" ideas are "clothed in esoteric idiom." Latinisms and Shakespeareanisms abound; they do not even know how to

course properly enough in their own tongue. Okigbo and Echeruo come in for the most vitriolic contempt; J. P. Clark is dismissed out of hand as suffering from "blameless blandness"; Wole Soyinka is indicted for betraying his fertile, Yoruba inheritance.

It is not, of course, that these young poets do not have a clear standard upon which they base their evaluations. It may reasonably be said that implicit in their objections is the assumption that tradition in Africa is not dead; that all authenticity must be founded in history; that all borrowings from elsewhere must be rigorously judicious. As their example of authentic Africanness in poetry, they cite Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation', Okigbo's 'Path of Thunder', Okot p'Bitek's *Songs*. If we insist, as we do, that their criticism yet exists in a vacuum, it is therefore not because they fail to propose a standard both of creative action and critical response, but because their standards are ultimately externally derived, because 'tradition' appears in their opinion to be good only in so far as it is old, and because we do not see in their essay that level of immersion in the complex impulses of African culture that might have rendered their indictments less capricious. To put it differently, there is in this essay a 'positivist' bias, a tediously McLuhanese interest in demotic culture. There is, to be sure, nothing particularly wrong in supposing that there was a fundamentally democratic aspect to culture in Africa; what is disturbing rather is the suspicion we have in reading this essay that in adhering so faithfully to the 'principles' of 'practical criticism' it becomes so preoccupied with *means* that it hardly concerns itself with legitimate ends. In identifying, for instance, the qualities of the oral tradition that should be emulated in good contemporary African poetry, it limits itself to recommendations of *technique*. "One of the most telling qualities of African oral tradition," it blandly insists, "is its economy of means." Other qualities are "lucidity", "normal syntax," "precise and apt imagery", "efficient structure and logistics." All this may indeed be true enough if one were thinking specifically of a *type* of poetry in the oral tradition; what this essay is curiously silent about is, what were the ends proposed? What intrinsic value may legitimately be attached to 'simplicity'? Or, to put the question more broadly, what is the meaning of tradition, and what essential justifications may we find for recommending that it be emulated?

It is in this failure to grapple seriously with the fundamental question of values and ends that we begin to suspect that this essay suffers, in its fundamental inspiration, precisely from that same involuntary tutelage to an alien vision for which it bitterly indicts the objects of its anger. If 'simplicity' and 'lucidity'

are good in themselves, they must be supposed to be so as much for African as for European poets, particularly if it is possible to suppose that these qualities derive from the oral traditions of Africa and Europe. And if that is the case, it would seem then that what is being demanded is that African poets be *good poets*, not *good African poets*—and in such a case it would be irrational to insist on an African oral tradition as the basis of judgment, unless this is seen as being universally identical. In any event, T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards become, curiously, our most reliable mentors, *not* those examples of African oral poetry that are so copiously cited in the essay. In a word, what is being recommended here is not an aesthetics in which essentially *African* values are implicated in the means employed, but one in which a quite constricted notion of the principle of 'aesthetic pleasure' is regarded as being of foremost significance. Consider, for instance, the attitude taken to the question of the writer's responsibility in society: "If a writer wants to write poetry that says, 'destroy the status quo, let him do so but do it well'; and if, on the other hand, he chooses to advocate a radical convulsion, 'let him do so but do it well.'" We need not go too deeply into the question of the writer's responsibility in order to discover that this essay is altogether un-African in its essential callousness, particularly as it appears so willing to recommend a concept of art so painfully devoid of ultimate value.

On a much deeper level, it may be said that while the authors of this essay might be legitimately congratulated for their suspicion that something is terribly wrong with poetry in Africa—and something *is* wrong—they must nevertheless be charged with a response to tradition that is altogether cavalier. One may sympathise with the thrust of their indictment, and yet feel that they themselves have not meditated deeply enough on the nature and essential values of traditional African culture. They would have us believe that it is a virtue to be true to one's tradition, but they fail to show us precisely wherein lies the virtue, or what the essential, not merely formal qualities of this tradition are. At the risk of mounting the commonplace, it may be surmised that any theory of art that insists on form at the expense of content, on means to the exclusion of ends, can hardly be judged African. It is not enough merely to argue, as our authors do, that the value of simplicity lies in its capacity to enhance communication. Communication is important, not as an end, but as a means of transmitting and sharing ideas and ideals that have some authentic appeal. The language of a specific type of traditional oral poetry may have been a 'public language', but it would be obviously facetious to suppose that the publicness of language was invested with any-

thing close to a final cause. If Okot p'Bitek's poetry appeals to us in so fundamental a way, it is not merely because its language is 'simple', certainly not because he transliterates the name Melchisedec into the more vernacular 'Melikisedeki', but ultimately because the sensibility that informs his poetry rigorously divests itself of its colonial encumbrance and attests to a vision of the world that may be judged authentically African. By the same token, if one regrets the somewhat pretentious Latinisms in Echeruo and the classicisms in the early Okigbo, it is finally not merely because they might just as well have invoked the gods of Africa, but because the borrowings of allusion and imagery are so extreme as to suggest the possibility that they are an exact equivalent in language of a tragic corruption of vision. We object to some of their poetry not merely on account of style, but because style is often in their poems the vehicle for a modified sensibility. But it would be purely sophistical to insist on such objections unless we were certain that that which has been corrupted is not merely language, not merely the means of expression, but a more authentic African vision. And this objection immediately places upon the critic the terrible responsibility of articulating an authentically African vision in art, an articulation that must necessarily go quite beyond the matter of 'simplicity', 'lucidity' and 'economy of means.' It is this that the authors of this essay have failed to do, partly out of a preoccupation, dangerously veering on dilettantism, with an aesthetics of value-starved form, and partly also out of the apparent fear that to articulate a traditional African vision is to delve into those intangible realms of metaphysical reality that constitute the positivist philosopher's nightmare.

In any event, to object to Soyinka's poetry on much the same grounds that they object to Echeruo and Okigbo is to evince a near-abysmal misconception of the relationship between language and vision in Soyinka's *Ilanre*, for instance. If there is anyone who has been persistently exercised, and painfully so, by the problem of language in contemporary African writing, it surely must be Wole Soyinka. But he has not been preoccupied with language merely as the index of style, but rather with language as a vehicle of mythic meaning. No one could reasonably charge him with being unduly Latinate in his poetry; and the fact that his English sources appear to be located in the Anglo-Saxon rigour of Donne rather than in the Romantic surfeit of a Keats, Byron or Yeats should suggest a certain antecedent positioning of the poetic self with regard to the English language. Language in Donne is, of course, more visceral, less 'musical', rather closer to the roots of the English language than it is in Keats or Yeats. The African

writer who recognises the burden of having to express himself in the English language must therefore decide for himself the *type* of English he must use—whether the harsh dissonances of a Donne or the tender mellifluousness of a Keats or Yeats. But such a decision would presumably depend on an earlier choice, whether the African poet discovers an appeal in the ‘democratic’ or the ‘cultic’, masonic impulse in the oral tradition. For it is clearly wrong-headed to suppose that the democratic impulse is the only impulse evident in the oral tradition of Africa. In any case, if the poet believes, as Soyinka clearly does, that the way to reconciling the contemporary poetic self to traditional impulses is through myth, through a recapturing of the ancestral memory as recorded in cultic ritual, the type of English he chooses is likely to reflect this concern, to reflect the search for roots. There is a sense, then, in which it might be said that archaisms are the linguistic equivalent of Soyinka’s preoccupation with cultic myth.

*“In cult funerals, the circle of initiate mourners, an ageless swaying grove of dark pines, raise a chant around a mortar of fire, and words are taken back to their roots, to their original poetic sources when fusion was total and the movement of words is the very passage of music and dance of images . . . Language still is the embryo of thought and music where myth is daily companion”.*⁵

The roots of Soyinka’s English are uncompromisingly Anglo-Saxon rather than Hellenic or Latinate because they represent for him the closest proximation to the primal roots of Yoruba cultic diction. But the virtue of ‘originality’ lies not merely in its freshness or quaintness but indeed in its vitality, in its ability to evoke in the mind a memory of the dynamism of the original Yoruba. For Soyinka, particularly in those poems in which legend, tradition and ancestral custom constitute the internal structure of his poetry, is in fact a *translator*. That is to say, that to anyone who even vaguely understands the tonalities of the Yoruba language (and curious as it may sound, none of the three young poets we have mentioned here speaks or understands the language), the structure and fertile ambience of Soyinka’s English derives, in fact, more from the Yoruba than from the English. And if it is true, as we have suggested, that Soyinka is a ‘translator’, we may then raise the question whether effective translation is a matter of equating that which is to be translated as closely as possible to the verbose sensibility of contemporary times, or of seeking to convey the vast ambience of meaning implicit in the original. To compare Pope’s Homer with recent translations is to discover the problematic nature of the issue we raise here, Pope’s Homer

is summative, its syntax relatively complex, but it has the redeeming virtue at least of eschewing, in Soyinka’s own words, “the sterile limits of particularisation.” It seeks to convey total meaning, whereas recent translations of Homer are tediously prosaic, more impressive for their clinical, literal veracity than for the sublimity or totality of the impression created. Soyinka’s approach to Yoruba myth and language is comparable to Pope’s approach to Homer. For him, myth is not to be understood merely in its literal particularisations; its power is not to be captured through analysis. Rather, when the senses are exposed to the language of myth, they

“do not at such moments interpret myth in their particular concretions, rather are we left only with the emotional and spiritual values and experience of those truths (which are symbolically not rationally triggered off in memory and shared as a communal experience).”⁶

To capture the fundamental dynamic of Soyinka’s poetic language then, one does not look, as our essayists have done, for surface lucidity and simplicity; one does not look for that kind of ‘music’ that is “all clear tone and winnowed lyric, of order and harmony, stately and saintly.”⁷ One looks rather, for that music in language which has “undergone transformation through myth into a secret masonic correspondence with the symbolism of tragedy, a symbolic language . . . whence springs the weird disruptive melodies.”⁸ And the melody of Soyinka’s poetry is preternaturally ‘disruptive.’

The language of Soyinka’s poetry is archaic, cacophonous, disruptive, precisely because it is a contemporary equivalent of Yoruba mythic language; but the ancestral myths that he works with are not those deriving from the god Obatala, whose motif is white “for transparency of heart and mind”, in whose drama there is a rejection of “mystery and terror”, an affirmation of calm, of “harmony.” Soyinka’s titular god is not Obatala but Ogun, and the particular abode of this terrible, contradictory god is in the language of disjunction, stress, rupture and “demonic energy.” If one were obliged to be charitable to the authors of the essay in review, we would presumably have to concede that in their insistence on lucidity, simplicity, clarity and harmony, they are devotees, if unconscious ones, of the god Obatala, and may therefore be allowed their preference. What is more disturbing, however, is the suspicion we have that their god is neither Obatala nor Ogun, indeed not an African god at all, that their awareness of the power and nature of myth is painfully minimal, that the justification for their position is ultimately not founded in African myth or ethos, but in fact in a vague universalist axiom which insists that

simplicity is all. Certainly, their understanding of Soyinka's "Dawn" veers awfully close to the pathetic. For them,

"not only does it not make immediate sense (you have to puzzle it out), but it is not even easy or pleasurable to read. On the contrary it is heavy, tongue-twisting, difficult to articulate, and it cannot keep the reader's attention. *And poetry is an auditory medium*"⁹ (emphasis theirs).

It is not necessary to offer a synopsis of the poem¹⁰ here in order to discover that our authors are limited by their desire that poetry be unmysterious. It is nonsensical to seek to derive from this poem a literal, line-by-line meaning. Soyinka's poetry does not work that way. The "meaning" of the poem is, in fact, not "concrete", but a cluster of emotions and impulses culminating in an incantatory celebration of dawn, of life, of the creative impulse in the world. That it comes at the very beginning of Soyinka's book of poems should alert the reader to the possibility that it is the equivalent, but the intensely African equivalent, of those invocations of the epic Muse in Virgil, Homer, Milton and others that are, curiously enough, so much more readily recognisable to the 'educated' African reader. For Ogun is Soyinka's Muse and patron god, and his thyrsus is the staff made from the palm-wine tree. It symbolises both the heroic labours of Ogun and the ecstatic, wine-inspired headiness of his exactions in the world. He is Soyinka's Muse because he is the creative impulse, yet a creative impulse that, according to Yoruba myth, was somewhat compromised by indiscriminate blood-letting. The palm-fronds in the poem, the "blood-drops" in the air, the "lone" intrusion into "the chaste hide of the sky", the god, "night-spread in tatters . . . aflame with kernels", all these would seem to point to an attempt on Soyinka's part to summarize Ogun's mythic history, to evoke and appropriate his "willful, ecstatic being." To those who are ignorant of Soyinka's poetic saturation in African myth, "Dawn" would be inevitably difficult and 'meaningless'; yet to recognise such a spurious difficulty is not to identify a problem inherent in the poem itself, but indeed to confess to ignorance of the dynamic relevance of that very 'oral tradition' that is touted as the adequate foundation for all contemporary African poetry.

Take, again, the translation by the authors of the essay under review of Soyinka's "Malediction."¹¹ Nothing could be more profane than their supposition that to convey the force and impatient tartness of the traditional curse all one need do is translate it into readable English prose. And particularly since they are poets, the three of them, one might have thought they

would be the first to be outraged by so crudely lifeless a transliteration as this:

<p>Soyinka Giggles fill the water hole Offsprings by you aban- doned, And afterbirth, at cross- roads.</p>	<p>Their Version May you give birth to monstrosities in the streets.</p>
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Their transliteration robs Soyinka's poem of its air of metaphysical, not merely secular or physiological monstrosity; they divest the curse of its terror, of its mystery, of its evocation, of a vision of eternal, apocalyptic damnation. It argues not simply an ineptitude of translation but a failure, indeed, of sensitivity. And, it would appear, their limitation is not simply that they do not understand the Yoruba language; their rendering even of Igbo curses is equally effeminate, equally ludicrous. They convert the terrible into the merely ironic: "May you go mad at the height of your prosperity." They would presumably also translate the fearsome Igbo curse—"Chineke kpo gi oku"—merely in the manner of the elliptical pidgin—"God punish you" (actually, a literal translation of the latter would probably read—"May God burn you with fire"—though one would expect poets to do much better than this).

To conclude. The authors of "Toward the Decolonization of African Literature" have allowed themselves to be carried away by a 'positivist' impulse that stands altogether in contradiction to some of the fundamental impulses of tradition in Africa. They have sought to convert an instinctive suspicion that contemporary African poetry is often wrong-headed and externally derivative into a rigid theory of art based upon a questionable understanding of the nature of the oral tradition in Africa. More specifically, when they object to the alien imagery in Echeruo and Okigbo, they identify a problem that requires much more rigorous examination than they have been willing to or are capable of providing. There is a difference, and a fundamental one, between the sensibility implicit in Okigbo's Christian imagery and in Soyinka's masonic diction. The imagination that spawns such superfluous allusions as 'lumen mundi', 'nobis quoque peccatoribus' and 'lacrimae Christi' is hardly the same as the intelligence that works through such ancestral symbols as Ogun's staff, or the white cockerel that is impaled on the windscreen of a car as a sacrifice to the famished god who might otherwise demand human blood. At best, the former achieves an implausible wedding of the ancestral and the borrowed, and at worst, it attests to a tragic separation of the contemporary African psyche from its primal roots.

Soyinka's imagery, on the other hand, is persistently African, and often uncompromisingly so. He achieves in poetry much the same result that Achebe achieves in prose, though through a different route. Both of them amaze us with their near-miraculous ability to evoke a vision of our past, to recapture in these distracting times a view of the world that we recognise, through reflection, to be so authentically African. Achebe's language is just as uncompromising as Soyinka's. Poet and novelist rely so heavily on the Anglo-Saxon roots of the English language because they are determined to get to the roots of the African psyche. Soyinka's language is, however, more difficult; it creates a greater impression of tension and disjunction because his poetic model is the poetry of the cultic worshippers of Ogun, not the 'transparent', 'simple', and 'lucid' poetry of Obatala. The authors of "Toward the Decolonization of African Literature" succeed in so far as they give voice to a general summons to African writers and critics to begin to look a little deeper into themselves. It is a call that, though hardly unprecedented, comes not too soon indeed. Yet it must nevertheless be observed that their understanding of 'tradition' appears to be a painfully limited one; and it is, finally, a limited understanding that traps them into postulating a theory of poetry that, in its exclusive insistence on the surface attributes of poetry, negates what must be judged a crucial principle of traditional art, that style and form possess value only in so far as they are a means of conveying appropriate vision.

Notes

Editor's Note: This article was originally published without a key to the footnotes and I have attempted to reconstruct it.

¹ Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage," in *The Morality of Art*, ed. D. W. Jefferson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 130.

² *ibid.*, pp. 126-27.

³ The complexity of some of Soyinka's prose and verse has been repeatedly noted. In *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Soyinka observes with relation to "The Fourth Stage": "I have tried now to reduce what a student of mine complained of as 'elliptical' obstacles to its comprehension." (p. ix)

⁴ Chinweizu, Onwuchewka Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, "Towards the Decolonization of African Literature," *Transition*, 48 (1975), 29-37, 54, 56-57. The article originally appeared in *Okike*, 6 (1974), 11-28.

⁵ Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage," p. 124.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 125.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 128.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 124-25.

⁹ Chinweizu *et al.*, p. 30.

¹⁰ "Dawn" appears in *Idanre and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 9.

¹¹ Chinweizu *et al.*, pp. 31-32.

Wole Soyinka: Obscurity, Romanticism and Dylan Thomas

Robin Graham

Scholars of Wole Soyinka are indebted to Stanley Macebuh for his suggestive definition of the poet's "Mythic Imagination."¹ Used in partial defence of Soyinka's "obscurity," the concepts myth and imagination ought to define the unique way his poetry reaches its significance. Myth expresses man's obscure, yet defiant, attempt to create order out of chaos, belief out of despair: for myths are, in a narrative form, accounts of the creation of life, the inevitability of death, and the wish for a sacrificial redemption. Creating from such darkness, how could the poet be anything but arcane, if not obscure? As for the Imagination; that faculty of "High" Romanticism expresses the mystery of the world and the vagaries of the human heart. The highest claims of art have always relied on the sanctity of the imagination as if to discount the paltriness of mere simplicity or understanding. Are we, then, to judge Soyinka's verse by the same terms as we understand, if that is the word, "The Ancient Mariner," The Lucy Poems of Wordsworth, "Prometheus Unbound," and especially, as I want to suggest, the Arch-Romantic, surviving from a previous age, Dylan Thomas? Yet Macebuh gives the hint without following through the argument, for reasons which are crucial both for the study of Soyinka, and for the study of African literature in general.

Macebuh misses the implications of his term "Imagination" and fails to place Soyinka in the right tradition through a misconception about the nature of Romantic verse. He too readily defines the language of the Romantics as "tender melliflousness;" the language of the Lucy poems, the first lines of "Lamia," ought to discount such a generalization. As a result of this confusion he rather places Soyinka in the tradition of intellectual and metaphysical poets like Donne and Eliot. According to Macebuh, just as Donne and Eliot went back to the purity of Anglo-Saxon from the decadence of Keatsian Latinisms, so Soyinka goes to the Yoruba language: for sound effects, syntax and other potentialities of expression. Language being what someone once called, "a universal whore," it is inevitably less than virginal and pure. So immediately when a critic begins to talk about purity of diction, or the virtues of Anglo-Saxon, we should be aware that his motives are less or more than literary. The English language is the language of Donne and Keats, Eliot and Soyinka. If we want to exclude Latinisms, or Keatsianisms, then it is for ethical not aesthetic reasons. And such is the case of Macebuh.

The essential point about Soyinka's obscurity, according to the critic, is a sociological one: "Soyinka's harsh inscrutableness . . . may be seen as an exact equivalent in words of that unease of mind that is the lot of those who have suffered a modification of vision through colonialism." This is the essence of the ethical defense of the "African-ness" of African literature in revealing to us the poet's responsibility to his indigenous culture, rather than the medium of his colonizing oppressor. As one critic puts it: "Taking the white man's language, dislocating his syntax, recharging his words with new strength and sometimes with new meaning before hurling them back in his teeth, while upsetting his self-righteous complacency and clichés, our poets rehabilitate such terms as Africa and blackness, beauty and peace."² Statements unobjectionable enough in this case, but when has it been the case that poets have *not* thrown language back in the

teeth of his audience? Certainly not since what is called the Romantic Revolution. The sentiments could have come straight from Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*.³ The poet is unique among artists in having to use the commonplace medium of their audience, and to make it new; to make it what Dylan Thomas called "young English" in reference to Tutuola, he has to dislocate and recharge language to his own individual purposes. To make poetry or language serve a sociological purpose is to appoint a mediate end which subverts the ultimate, aesthetic end which cannot be prescribed to. Romantic art has always been anarchic. Macebuh's judgement that Soyinka possesses a "sensibility whose truest aspect is to be discovered more in social activity than in a merely aesthetic posture," is, so far as our concern with art is for it as art, a mediate view. True, the political, social pressures on Soyinka the man, are immense as *The Man Died* insists, but how much are they the concern of the poet? The poet is motivated by a Mythic Imagination which is not, as Macebuh, the critic of ethics, would like it to be, dependent upon "social activity." Only a sociological imagination (if there is such a thing - one might think of Camus or Sartre) can express man's relationship with man. The Mythic Imagination searches out man's relationship with God.

In purely literary terms, the obscurity of Soyinka reveals different motives and allegiances. Macebuh would place him in the tradition of intellectual and obscurantist poets like Donne or Eliot. At first glance this seems to some degree appropriate. But Soyinka does not truly belong to the tradition of dissident intellectualism. In his recent *Myth, Literature and the African World*, he disengaged himself from the "universal-humanoid abstraction" of the West.⁴ Soyinka would exorcise the ghost of Western abstraction with a concrete, mythological expression "You are one-who-thinks, white-creature-in-pith-helmet-in-African-jungle-who-thinks and, finally, white-man-who-has-problems-believing-in-his-own-existence."⁵ Back to the problem of language. The poet can only avoid insidious abstraction through the darker unity of myth: man's expression of fear and wonder at a universe which defies his hubristic intellectual attempt to explain or explain away the mystery.

The modernist writer's use of mythology (that is, the work of Eliot, Yeats or Joyce), merely serves to camouflage the difference between a writer who is inspired by myth and a writer who takes an ironic attitude towards myth, and the absence of belief in the modern world. If these writers search for a unity of being it is because they are hag-ridden by Manichean/Cartesian dualism, and intimidated by a world from which it cannot simulate order. *The Waste Land* is essentially anti-mythological: the regenerative ritual is lacking, there exists merely an Ixion-like wheel of torture and debased repetition. "I want to die," says the Sybil who is blessed with eternal life and cosmic prescience. Yeats's mythological poems are no more than the expression of a sentimental nostalgia for a lost golden-age: for Greece, or quattrocento Italy, or a utopian Irish Renaissance. And the obscurity of such poetry is the result of mythology refracted through a conceptualizing mind. The ironic attitude towards the mythological experience reveals an enervating self-consciousness. Joseph Conrad's dictum is relevant: "The habit of profound reflection is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man."⁶ This is not the way of Soyinka: if he is ambiguous it is not the refraction of the mind which makes him so, but the peculiarity of myth in its ordering of experience.

Out of the phantasmagoria of fleeting impressions, the mythical poet creates a

cosmology of inherent significance. He believes in the instinctive importance of every event. Nothing goes by without being placed, through comparison and conjunction, into a cosmic pattern. He does not exist as a separate creature as "one-who-thinks," floating upon silence like Yeats's "long-legged fly." He believes in what the history of Romanticism has variously called "Pantheism," the "Pathetic Fallacy" or a variety of "Animism": the expression of a sympathy between the perceiving mind and the external world. Hence the poet can celebrate, through metaphor, all kinds of identity:

Roots, be an anchor at my keel
Shore my limbs against the wayward gale
Reach in earth for deep sustaining draughts
Potencies against my endless thirsts
Your surface runnels end in blinds, your courses
Choke on silt, stagnate in human curses
Feet of pilgrims pause by chartered pools
Balm seeking.⁷

The ambiguity here, of Soyinka's poem, is one of metaphor attempting to invoke a symbolic identity which resists the commonplace. The metaphors though various transmutations are progressively linked by the poet's emotional needs: "anchor" - "keel" - "shore" - "wayward gale". Later the poet calls for a cosmic energy to keep him inviolate:

Thread
My hands to spring-rites, to green hands of the dead.⁸

The "green hands of the dead" is not ironically obscure, but an expression of cosmic inevitability. We live to die, and we die to be reborn. Dylan Thomas reiterates the same image obsessively: "Time held me green and dying." The linguistic potentialities which allow such effects are authorized by mythology's own repetitive sympathies which equate life and death as in this famous poem by Thomas:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.⁹

The same progression through imaginative metaphors is present here as in Soyinka: "force" - "fuse" - "drives" - "blasts". An experience is held up, felt, shaped and twisted to reveal its significance. Far from being ambiguous, these effects are a direct expression of the cosmic behaviorism which the Romantic imagination continuously reveals.

This process may be explained in reference to Soyinka's "Dawn," a poem the author uses as a kind of dedication to his first volume of poems, and one which is celebrated for its ambiguity.¹⁰

Breaking earth upon
 A spring-haired elbow, lone
 A palm beyond head-grains, spikes
 A guard of prim fronds, piercing
 High hairs of the wind
 As one who bore the pollen highest
 Blood-drops in the air, above
 The even belt of tassels, above
 Coarse leaf teasing on the waist, steals
 The lone intruder, tearing wide
 The chaste hide of the sky
 O celebration of the rites of dawn
 Night-spread in tatters and a god
 Received, aflame with kernels.¹¹

If instead of attempting to translate the poem word by word to find some prose meaning or Yoruba folklore source, we apprehend it whole, as we do a Romantic poem, then instead of obscurity we get intimations and revelations. The essential emotions are generated by metaphors which identify "Dawn" with sexual congress: "the prim fronds", a "belt of tassels", "teasing on the waist", are all suggestive of coy, feminine sexuality, even virginity; while the great palm "piercing high hairs of the wind", "tearing wide/The chaste hide of the sky" are patently phallic. Along with this scenario goes the rising of the sun: "Blood-drops in the air", "Night-spread in tatters", which suggest another sexual confrontation, this time not with a palm "Breaking earth", but with the sun, universally a masculine deity, ravaging the feminine symbol of night. The poem ends with a final apotheosis which links the sun with the palm in an almost homosexual union:

a god

Received, aflame with kernels.

"Pollen" and "kernels" are both suggestive of regeneration, and therefore pick up the sexual motif and link it with a god who is also a sacrifice, and an action which is also a rite. So the poet ends: "O celebration of the rites of dawn."

There is nothing in the poem which would be impenetrable to Keats, Blake, Dylan Thomas, or to any poet in the tradition of Romanticism. There is no linguistic deviation in the conflicting and consorting of images not sanctioned by the potentialities of English. And above all, there is nothing in the mythology alien to Western thought.

Thomas's own poem, "On the Marriage Of A Virgin," celebrates the same mysterious fascination of dawn in sexual terms, only he switches vehicle and tenor, making sex the literal level of significance and dawn the figurative:

Waking alone in the multitude of loves when morning's light
 Surprised in the opening of her nightlong eyes
 His golden yesterday asleep upon the iris
 And this day's sun leapt up the sky out of her thighs
 Was miraculous virginity old as loaves and fishes,
 Though the moment of a miracle is unending lightening
 And the shipyards of Galilee's footprints hid a navy of doves.

No longer will the vibrations of the sun desire on
 Her deepsea pillow where once she married alone,
 Her heart all ears and eyes, lips catching the avalanche
 Of the golden ghost who ringed with his streams her mercury bone
 Who under the lids of her windows hoisted his golden luggage,
 For a man sleeps where fire leapt down and she learns through his arm
 That other sun, the jealous coursing of the unrivalled blood.

A poem no less "obscure" than "Dawn," yet potentially illuminated by the same compulsive need to ascertain a mythical view of life, and using two related experiences: virginity lost, and dawn, as identities of this. "Man," "golden ghost," and "sun" are all connected as the spouse; the "virgin" seems connected with darkness, "nightlong eyes;" and the sea "deepsea pillow," but also with the Virgin Mary: "Was miraculous virginity old as loaves and fishes." And is there not a reference to Eve, Adam, and the Incarnation in the final lines? We seem to imagine the sleeping Adam, and Eve now bereft of her virginity learning of "That other sun," perhaps God's other archetypal Creation, The Son. "Fire" suggests, as always in Thomas, the fire of creation which formed the stars. His imagination is moved profoundly by the Book of Genesis: the original dawn of the poem, a local and descriptive one, searches out its own inevitable archetype, God's creation of light upon the waters. It follows through a series of dawns: "the shipyards of Galilee's footprints hide a navy of doves," seems to be a reference to the building of Noah's ark, and the dove which left in search of land at dawn. Mythology relies on periodicity and repetition and each beginning summons up every other. In turn this is associated with the beginning symbolized by marriage, whose archetype seems to be the "marriage" of Mary: the miracle which brought "unending lightening." The light of dawn is also the light of knowledge. Along with repetition goes the identity between macrocosm and microcosm: "her thighs" and "his arm" are the bride and the groom as well as the world and the light. Which still leaves difficulties: are "her windows" the "windows of heaven"; the "mercury bone," is it "bone of my bones"? But these are not ambiguous in the sense that we do not know to what they relate. The total implication of the poem is clearly an identity between dawn and marriage using the archetypes of Genesis, the Garden of Eden, the Flood, The Incarnation and the cosmic marriage of darkness and light, the sea and the sun. Our difficulty is in how much we want to bring into the poem; how much is it Thomas's poem and how much each individual reader's. But so far as the Mythic Imagination goes, this is a pseudo-problem. Life is simultaneous and eternal.

If we were to attempt to define the "obscurities" of the Mythic Imagination we would have to pay attention to its proliferation of associative metaphor: how the palm gathers the insistence of sexual energy about it; or how Thomas can equate genesis with the marriage of a virgin. These "obscurities" belong to the processes of mythology rather than to the arbitrary potentialities of language. Myth is a faculty which flourishes on sudden and unexpected analogies and recurrences. This in itself makes the products of the Mythic Imagination impenetrable to the anatomizing, analytical mind. But Macebuh, for one, would not recognize this: "The particular ambience of myth, we may be reasonably certain, is dignified simplicity; it tends to appeal to immediate recognition, to be clear, untortured, serene."¹³ One wonders of whom he is thinking: not Homer, Shelley, Jung,

Frazer, Okigbo, and certainly not the Soyinka of *Idanre*. Serenity and dignity express only part of the mythologist's emotion. Nature is also alien and forboding; myth expresses a quality of attraction and repulsion, threat and promise:

The element of participation and sympathy, of kinship between society and nature, is not the whole story. It is complemented by a lurking sense of nature's otherness, strangeness, and lurking hostility. The typically primitive attitude toward nature is largely a tension between familiarity and watchfulness.¹⁴

Myth almost always determines a paradoxical and circular response to experience with its observance of a cosmic behaviorism which continually undermines itself.

For the poet, this authorizes a particular density of metaphor and counter-metaphor which matches the pulse of the Mythic Imagination. Nobody has expressed the creative act under this dispensation better than Dylan Thomas when he denied that he could "make a poem out of a single motivating experience," rather insisting: "That the *life* in any poem of mine cannot move concentrically round a central image; the life must come out of the centre; an image must be born and die in another; and any sequence of my images must be a sequence of creations, recreations, destructions, contradictions."¹⁵ This method of creation I suggest explains the poetry of Soyinka; and in its turn explains the creative methods of the Mythic Imagination. Inevitably African Literature will have to lose its epithet; and will have to seriously question any anterior sociological claims for its function; and will have to accept that it is written in the language of Shakespeare, Keats, The Romantic Poets, and Dylan Thomas. As Echeruo once said, Soyinka "operates completely within the English tradition."¹⁶ It is one task of the critic to establish which tradition.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Poetics and the Mythic Imagination," *Transition Ch'indaba*, 50/1 (December, 1975), 79-84.
2. Mercer Cook, quoted in "Cultural Norms and Modes of Perception in Achebe's Fiction," Lloyd W. Brown, *Research in African Literatures*, 3 (1972), 22.
3. "They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phrasology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title." *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802).
4. *Myth, Literature and the African World* (London, 1976), p. 14.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
6. *Victory* (London, 1923), p. 58.
7. *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London, 1972), p. 1.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
9. *Collected Poems 1934-1952* (London, 1971), p. 8.
10. See *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 8, 1 (1973), 69-80.
11. *Idanre and Other Poems*, (London, 1967), p. 9.
12. Thomas, 1971, p.119.
13. Macebuh, p.80.
14. Philip Wheelwright, "Notes on Mythopoeia," in *Myth and Literature*, ed. John B. Vickery (Lincoln, 1966), p. 63.
15. *Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, ed. Constantine Fitzgibbon (London, 1966), p. 191.
16. M.J.C. Echeruo, "Traditional and Borrowed Elements in Nigerian Poetry," *Nigeria Magazine*, 89 142-55.

THE INTERPRETERS - A FORM OF CRITICISM

Mark Kinkead-Weekes

Soyinka's first novel has turned out to be one of those books that are widely admired, and yet have never received the kind of attention they deserve - or so it seems to me. It is labelled "difficult", and certainly on a first reading it does present problems of structure and style. The manipulation of chronology, the seeming absence of plot, the variation of style, the co-presence of very different kinds of imagination, the unequal development of characters, and the sudden concentration on new characters in Part Two, have led commentators, in the act of praising the book's power, to voice imperfectly concealed doubts about its coherence. It is true that Soyinka has never been afraid to take risks and make demands of his audience; that he has never been satisfied with "unrelieved competence,"¹ and that he has a tendency to overload his vehicles and drive with a certain extravagance. What is disturbing, however, is that so few questions have been asked about the nature and purpose of his novel's form. If we have had to learn one lesson from twentieth century fiction, it is surely that there can be no valid judgment of structure and style whatsoever, until we know what they are *for*, what kind of in-forming vision they serve. Indeed, we cannot even be sure what a novel is "about" until we discover the peculiar nature of its "shaping spirit of imagination" and its particular "maker's rage to order words."² So many novels turn out to be about something quite different from what one had thought, as soon as one allows one's focus to be aligned by their form. A failure to realize form becomes, only too easily, a mistaking of subject. This in turn produces difficulties with the techniques, that may come from no more than looking in the wrong direction, or adhering obstinately to assumptions and conventions the author is trying to subvert.

There is another impression that Soyinka's book is essentially socio-political satire, mediated by the interpreters on behalf of the author. To this one might retort that the novel begins in a language, Sagoe's, in which nothing serious can be said; and ends with another, Egbo's, in which nothing can be resolved. I do not think we can make sense of the book until we see that the challenge of the form involves challenging the characters as well as the reader, and results in an interpretation of life and consciousness in a "language" the interpreters cannot command. The socio-political satire, as in all Soyinka's best work, is a station one passes through in order to arrive at more significant destinations.

One needs to start then, by asking questions about the form, and about the kind of imagination it serves. At the very beginning there is a difficulty (or a challenge) in an arresting switch of chronology. After a page of edgy conversation in the nightclub, we are plunged without warning into Egbo's past. A critic writes: "His relative inexperience in the art of fiction is revealed in the manner of Soyinka's opening, which requires the reader to assess and relate a number of widely differing personalities who are all introduced, without history, in the first few pages."³ Yet no character in a novel can have a history until he is given one, and the difficulty would seem to lie precisely in Soyinka's extreme haste to do so for Egbo. More significant however is what looks like a concealed assumption: that in "the" art of fiction, it is the clear function of "history" to explain and relate "personalities." The emphasis is on character, understood in terms of the cause-and-effect development of the present out of the past. One might illustrate this by