

PORTRAYAL OF THE YORUBA METAPHYSICAL WORLD IN WOLE
SOYINKA'S DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN AND, THE STRONG
BREED

BY

ANNA KULA MITI

C50/11265/04

A Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the
degree of Master of Arts.

Kenyatta University

Literature Department.

JULY 2006.

Miti, Anna Kula
*Portrayal of the
Yoruba metaphysical*



08/322057

KENYATTA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

Candidate Miti

Anna Kula Miti

Date: 10/07/2006

This research project has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

Supervisors:

Prof. O. Obura [Signature]
Date: 11/7/06

Prof. E. Mbogo [Signature]
Date: 22/9/06

DEDICATION

To Kula, my father, another of the strong breeds.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work acknowledges my supervisors, Prof. Oluoch Obura and Prof. E. Mbogo for their advice and direction. Its completion depended so much on their cooperation, availability and readiness to read my work in time.

I further acknowledge the support of my colleagues Wahome, Mac, Barasa *and Flora* with whom I shared in an academic venture. This work is one of the products of our journey together. I am equally grateful to Kenyatta University for according me the opportunity to carry out my studies.

I am further indebted to my family and friends especially Ngungu, Tiku, Frida and Chris, for their encouragement and moral support. God bless them.

ABSTRACT

This study is an investigation of how the Yoruba metaphysical world has been portrayed in Wole Soyinka's **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Strong Breed**. It involves an examination of which of the Yoruba myths, how and why they have been incorporated in the two texts. The central position given to the Yoruba myths and rituals issues from the view that these myths and rituals are media through which a people's conception of the universe (metaphysics) is revealed.

The study set out to achieve its objectives through utilisation of three theoretical approaches: Sociological Theory, Myth Criticism and Stylistics. The sociological theory looks at the two plays and their author as products of a society. The same theoretical position also view literature as a means through which society can learn from its past and present, and get direction into the future. Myth criticism aids the study by analysing the myths and rituals while stylistics handles the dramatic techniques employed in the plays.

The study makes use of library and Internet research. It employs extensive reading of secondary texts to aid in the understanding and analysis of the primary texts. The content analysis of the plays involves close textual analysis which links details of style and characterisation to the metaphysical theme.

The conclusion of the study is that Soyinka uses myths and rituals as raw material for his creative work. Soyinka however does not bow fully to the prescriptions of his people's myths and rituals. He introduces a new dimension to the people's social order. At the end of the plays, he has replaced the old order of subjection of the individual's will to societal prescriptions, with individual choice and freedom. This act indicates a clear reading of the times; the modern era whose hallmarks include insistence on freedom for the individual.

1.1 Background of the Study	
1.1.1 Yoruba Mythology and Rituals	
1.1.2 Yoruba Culture	
1.2 Statement of the Problem	2
1.3 Research Objectives	10
1.4 Research Questions	
1.5 Justification of the Study	
1.6 Assumptions	
1.7 Theoretical Framework	13
1.8 Literature Review	18
1.9 Scope of the Study	25
1.10 Research Methodology	26
1.11 Outline of the Study	27

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Item	Page
Declaration.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgement.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Table of contents.....	vii
1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background to the study.....	1
Yoruba Metaphysical World.....	3
Yoruba Drama.....	7
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	9
1.3 Research objectives.....	10
1.4 Research questions.....	10
1.5 Justification of the Study	11
1.6 Assumptions.....	11
1.7 Theoretical framework.....	12
1.8 Literature review.....	18
1.9 Scope and limitation.....	25
1.10 Research Design and Methodology.....	25
1.11 Outline of the Study.....	26

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: MYTHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF <u>DEATH</u> <u>AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN AND THE STRONG BREED</u>	28
Ogun and the Tragic Characters.....	32
The Archetype and its Faces.....	44
3.0 CHAPTER THREE: THE SCAPEGOAT THEME.....	45
Self-sacrifice.....	45
Ritual Cleansing.....	56
The Role of the Scapegoat.....	68
4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: A NEW SOCIAL ORDER	71
Eman Versus Ifada.....	71
Olunde Versus Elesin.....	76
The New Versus the Old Order.....	85
5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.....	90
Bibliography.....	94

PORTRAYAL OF THE YORUBA METAPHYSICAL WORLD IN WOLE
SOYINKA'S DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN AND, THE STRONG
BREED

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Drama is an artistic expression in which the participants – actor and audience – relive their experiences. Such experiences could be personal or communal or both. The human experiences are relived in drama directly by the actor and vicariously by the audience through the actor. Joe de Graft (1979) establishes that the roots of African drama lie in a community's religion - the body of beliefs and ritual practices which in the view of the members of the community ensured their moral sanity and communal survival. Human life is charged with such threats associated with elemental phenomena as lightning, darkness, floods, cold, holocausts, drought, earthquakes, storms etc., as well as interior forces of hunger, thirst, and suffocation. There are threats too from one's fellow creatures - beasts as well as people of ill will, hatred and envy. Moreover, there are threats that are deep within our own souls - forces like pride, anger, greed, lust, jealousy, fear etc. It is the awareness of these threats which led ancient people 'to those rituals of apprehension, propiation, purification, and exorcism of which impersonation was often a cardinal feature' (p.4) The same awareness dominated the drama in such widely different cultures as those of fifth-century

Greece (B.C) and medieval Europe. In both cases (ritual and medieval European drama) the aim was to restore the society to health and sanity as de Graft states:

Drama... is - a reaching out by the whole man toward sanity through vicarious experience, whether as an impersonator who himself assumes the identity of the inimical forces or their more powerful opposites, or as a celebrant who seeks identification with an impersonator acting as a mediator between him and the forces concerned (p.5).

A historical review of West African drama, shows that this drama developed on, and from, myth and ritual. Soyinka (1976) notes that myth arises from a people's attempt to externalise and communicate their inner intuitions. These attempts themselves issue from a consciousness that the human person exists in a cosmic totality. Myth undoubtedly, has a crucial role in African metaphysics. Goldschmidt (1960) observes that a ritual (ceremony) is a meaningful formal act that signals an occasion of special importance. It is a little drama to underlie the significance of a person or a moment which is out of the ordinary and that the society wishes to recognize. Rituals are representations of beliefs which people hold; they are ways in which people together show that they care for about something. Myths are stories which correspond to rituals. They are ways in which the institutions and expectations of the society are emphasized and made dramatic and persuasive in narrative form. Myths show that what a people has to enjoy or endure is right and true - true to the sentiments the people hold. The religious myths are true to the moral and sacred ideas that inspire them; they

need not be true as legal evidence must be. Myths and rituals, like much of art, are collective and traditional forms in which people of a society remind themselves of what matters to them and why it matters. In other words, myths and rituals carry a people's values.

To understand African drama, which develops from myth and ritual, the knowledge of African people's philosophy must be brought to the fore. Such philosophy embodies the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African people think, act, or speak in different situations of life, in short, the African metaphysics. Since the two texts under study, **Death and the King's Horseman** and, **The Strong Breed**, have been greatly influenced by Soyinka's conception of Yoruba metaphysical world, it is important to summarise the aspects of the world.

Yoruba Metaphysical World

The key aspects of Yoruba metaphysics are summarised here under three (3) headings: areas of existence, concept of the pantheon, and the concept of moral order. Each of these is briefly explained below.

The Yoruba metaphysics recognises four areas of human existence: the worlds of the ancestor, the living, and the unborn, and the abyss of transition (gulf). In most African metaphysics the first three worlds are clearly defined. The relationship between the three worlds can only be understood if viewed in a

cyclic reality so that neither the child nor father is a closed or chronological concept. In some circumstances the child issues from the father while still in others, the child is older than the father. This is the principle behind instances in which a child in African society greets an elder person as though s/he were herself / himself the adult. Consequently the world of the unborn is older than the world of living as the world of living is older than the ancestor-world. Similarly, the world of the unborn precedes the ancestor-world in this cyclic reality. (Soyinka, 1976) Soyinka further notes that the fourth area of existence is less explored in African metaphysics. He refers to this fourth space as 'the dark continuum of transition' which 'houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will' (p.26). This is better clarified, as is evident below, by examining the essence of Ogun.

The basic cornerstone of Yoruba thinking, Roscoe (1971) observes, stems directly from their conception of the pantheon (in itself a divine, though 'human' representation of cosmic order) as a grouping and balancing of forces in which all subsists by elemental strife. The three significant deities here are Obatala, Sango and Ogun. According to Yoruba belief, Obatala is the god of creation, the father of peace and laughter, who was sent by Oludumare, the Supreme God to come down and create the earth. However, under the influence of too much palm-wine, his work was bungled up and he created the blind, albinos and hunchbacks. As punishment for this error, Obatala was imprisoned in the city of Ife and when creation began to suffer, he was released from prison and his sufferings enable him to emerge morally triumphant and purged of guilt. He is therefore in Wole

Soyinka's words, associated with virtues of social and individual accommodation: patience, suffering, peace, and all imperatives of harmony in the universe, the essence of quietitude and forbearance; in short, the aesthetics of the saint. (Soyinka, 1976)

Sango is the Yoruba god of lightning and thunder, who, like all Yoruba gods, led an earthly life among people before his death and deification. He was the king and founder of modern city of Oyo. (Roscoe, 1971) It is in Sango's hands that Obatala faced torture and imprisonment. Sango places himself beyond reciprocation and beyond caring. According to the myth thus, Sango is associated with destruction; the awesome essence of justice.

The Ogun myth encompasses the totality of Yoruba metaphysical world. When the original godhead and primogenitor of both god and human beings was by his slave's rebellion fragmented into multiple godhead; there was unrest among the gods. None of them felt complete in himself and therefore a journey to seek human beings began. But the way was impassable owing to long isolation from the world of human beings. So the gods tried and failed to break this primordial barrier. It is Ogun, who at last 'armed with the first technical instrument forged from the ore of mountain-wombs clears the primordial jungle', plunges through the abyss and the other gods follow. Later he was crowned the king of Ire and led his people to war and like Obatala, he took too much palm-wine and slew his own men. Ogun, Soyinka (1976) observes, is the symbol of challenge, the

principle instinct in man constantly at the service of the society for its full self-realization. He is also the master craftsman and artist, farmer, warrior or essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a reluctant leader of people and deities.

Significantly, Ogun becomes a key figure in understanding the Yoruba metaphysical world because of the reality of the gulf, the fourth area of existence. As Soyinka notes, 'The gulf is what must constantly be diminished (or rendered less threateningly remote) by sacrifices, rituals, ceremonies of appeasement to the cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf' (1976:31). Ogun makes the first fundamental bridge across this gulf and therefore he is the 'father' of those who seek the way.

The information on the four areas of existence and the vital roles played by the three important deities lead to another important aspect of the Yoruba metaphysics: the moral order. Wole Soyinka constantly asserts that since society co-exists with nature, regulating its existence by natural phenomena with evident process of continuity - sea tide, waxing and waning of moon, rain and drought, planting and harvesting - the highest moral order is seen as that which guarantees a parallel continuity of the species; that which makes the entire society survive. (Soyinka, 1971:52; Louis Gates, 1975) Moral order in this sense should not be reduced to a society's code of ethics dictating its people's conduct. It should rather be understood within the framework of what Wole Soyinka terms

as metaphysics of the irreducible: knowledge of birth and death as the human cycle; the wind as a moving, felling, cleansing, destroying, winnowing force; the duality of the knife as blood-letter and creative implement; earth and sun as life-sustaining verities, etc. These provide the matrices within which customs and conventions, personal relationships and even communal economics are formulated and reviewed. Moral disorder in Yoruba world-view, like in all African world-view, threatens not only the shared reality but also the existence itself since the individual is intertwined in the fate of the entire community.

It is within the metaphysics of the irreducible that cosmos balance is maintained. Obatala, Roscoe (1971) observes, balances Ogun (creator versus slayer) as Ogun balances Sango (in competing degrees of the sense of justice) just like birth balances death. There is balancing of cosmic forces and this way, harmony is maintained.

Yoruba Drama

The Yoruba metaphysical world as summarised above has found expression in the hands of artists (writers, dramatists) as the following discourse shows. What should be noted as essential at this stage is that Yoruba drama has evolved from myth and ritual. Three significant steps in the development of Yoruba theatre and drama are recognizable: ritual drama, Yoruba Folk Opera, and English-language drama (written).

In relation to the first stage, Adedeji says that drama is evident during the observance of most of the principal divinities of Yoruba especially during the annual festivals when everybody in the community is involved either as a participant or as a spectator. (Quoted in Roscoe, 1971:180) Adedeji further illustrates this point by analysing the annual festival of Obatala as having three acts: initial conflict, his capture, and his release. The ritual performance creates a religious experience but not without an artistic form which is created by the presence of a procession of the ritual participants and the utilisation of music and song, chants and drumming. It is important to clarify the point at which ritual becomes drama. Michael Etherton (1982) argues that whether ritual or festival (or both) is historically and in essence 'African drama', the answer lies primarily with the aesthetics of the particular performances being studied. Ruth Finnegan (1970) too opts to stylistic expression evident in song, dance and mime to establish that African indigenous artistic forms are, in some way, drama. De Graft (1979) draws the distinction between ritual and drama by looking at the function of the performance. He observes that the Egungun and Gelede masquerade drama of the Yoruba had originally, religious functions - for example, the Gelede cult is aimed at placation of witches. But there has been dramatic evolution with the movement from the original religious function of the Egungun and Gelede masquerader to that of entertainer. This has come about with the involvement of a spectator-audience of uninitiated in what formerly used to be secret rituals. This is a movement towards secularisation (as opposed to religion), which leads naturally to the theatre of entertainment.

The second stage in the development of Yoruba theatre, Yoruba Folk Opera, is characterised by performance (and in later stage, scripting) in vernacular. An example here is Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso* ('*The King Does Not Hang*') which is an eight-scene dramatisation of the death of Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder. Roscoe (1971) notes that this play is 'theatre' as opposed to 'ritual' and it would often be acted for, and perhaps by, Sango worshippers themselves, for whom it must partake a religious experience. Plays in this second stage could be available in English language but only as translations.

Lastly, the third stage in the development of Yoruba drama is modern African drama written in English language. The development of African drama shows a transition from embryonic drama (ritual) through vernacular performance and writing to drama in English language. Common to the three stages is the use of ritual based on Yoruba myths. The written stage builds on a cultural inheritance: ritual, drumming, singing, dances, etc. while at the same time incorporating elements of Western drama.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The task in this study is to investigate how the Yoruba metaphysical world has been portrayed in *Death and the King's Horseman* and, *The Strong Breed*. It involves an examination of how and why the Yoruba myths and rituals have been incorporated in the two texts. Such examination is important since myths and

rituals embody a people's values as well as their conception of the universe (metaphysics). Myths and rituals represent a consensus on social behaviour. Moreover, these myths and rituals are key to understanding Wole Soyinka's works. A writer does not always remain faithful to his people's myths. S/he may express ingenuity in utilising myths in a novel way to explore problems of his society and suggest some solutions. The analysis of the works in the light of particular myths and rituals therefore aims at discovering meanings (of these myths and rituals) which relate to the community's metaphysical realities.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study has the following objectives:

- a) To establish the mythological foundation of the two plays.
- b) To examine how Soyinka uses the structural framework of rituals to further the metaphysical theme.
- c) To evaluate Soyinka's treatment of change in societal morality and identify its signification to Yoruba metaphysics.

1.4 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- a) What Yoruba myths are incorporated in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*?
- b) What and how does the ritual framework reveal (about) the Yoruba metaphysical world?

c) How does Soyinka treat changes in societal morality?

1.5 Justification of the Study

This study sheds light to the crucial role played by myths and rituals in Wole Soyinka's works. It highlights cases of societal dysfunction. It is thus important in its attempt to shed light on cosmos relations - how people relate to both material and spiritual environment and the consequences of disrupting these relationships. In this way, the study contributes to an understanding of the Yoruba society in particular and African societies in general. The research is also important as it shows how a modern writer turns to his culture and tradition for material to achieve his goal of educating as well as entertaining his audience. This way it contributes to the knowledge concerning the relationship between oral and written literature. The study further contributes to our understanding of how literature, as a discipline, responds to society's cultural, social, political and historical matters. It is hoped that this study will cover areas not reviewed before by previous research. The study intends to examine the metaphysical theme at a greater depth than the one evident in the reviewed literature

1.6 Assumptions

The study makes the following assumptions:

- a) Soyinka's works have their basis in Yoruba mythology.
- b) Rituals communicate the prescribed societal morality.
- c) Soyinka artistically introduces a new order to the existing morality.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study utilises three theories: Sociological Approach, Myth Criticism and Stylistics. Proponents of sociological approach to literature maintain that literature occurs only in a social context, as a part of culture, in a milieu. According to James Barnett (1959), the intellectual roots of sociology of art are to be found in the writings of a number of 19th century Europeans. Accounts of the beginnings of the social interpretation of art cite the writing of Madam de Stael, who in 1800 discussed the relation of race and climate to literary styles, as well as the effects of women and religion on art. She asserted that the literature of a society should be brought to harmony with its prevailing political beliefs. Literature should portray important changes in social order especially those, which indicate movement toward the goals of liberty and justice.

Further contribution to sociological approach to art is found in the writings of Karl Marx who as early as 1845 provide a more specific thesis concerning the relation of art and society. Marx held that the system of production in existence at a given time determines both the content and style of the arts of a society. For Marx, art preferences differ according to class, position and outlook. Influenced by Marx, Ernest Grosse wrote *The Beginnings of Art* (1893) in which he offered the thesis that art reflects the stage of economic organisation of a society.

A more influential precursor of contemporary sociology of arts was Hippolyte Tain, whose *History of English Literature* (1871) advanced the thesis that 'a

work of art is determined by an aggregate which is the general state of mind and surrounding circumstances'. Taine attached special importance to the social 'medium' or milieu which produces the 'state of mind' necessary for artistic creation. For Taine, this state of mind is accounted by three aspects: race, environment and time.

Another French scholar of 19th century, Jean-Marie Guyau, espoused the thesis in his *Art from the Point of View of Sociology* (1887), that social integration is embodied in works of arts. Great art was necessarily social and the isolated artist who created for his private pleasure was decanted. According to Kallen, in Harry Levin, *'Literature as an Institution'* Guyau's theory of art 'the artist's images, the sensations they stir, the recollections they call up, the emotions and judgments they awaken, are but symbols and communications of the collective life.'

During the 20th century, sociological interest in the relations of art and society has persisted, and scholars in Eastern Europe as well as in the rest of Europe and in the US have undertaken both theoretical discussions and specific research in this field. This is evident in Marx Webber's essay *'The Rationale and Social Foundations of Music'*, Charles Lalo's *L'Art et la vie sociale*, Ernst Kohn-Bramstedt's *Aristocracy and the Middle Classes in Germany*, and, Levin Schucking's *The Sociology of Literary Taste*.

The above 19th and 20th century influential figures have struggled with the question of how art and society are related. Their answers were varied, but none denied that art, society and culture were inextricably tied together, although the nature of the connections was obscure. As Walter Goldschmidt (1960), laughing, joking, improvising with language, story-telling, praying, arranging flowers, painting pictures, dancing are all expressive forms which give each society its own special character. Different societies may have the same tools and the same work habits, but if their art and story telling are different, the societies are then different. Ruth Finnegan (1970) agrees with Goldschmidt in her assertion that a society cannot be fully understood without its songs and for assessment of the society, its oral art is important.

Under the Sociological theoretical framework, literature is interpreted from the point of view of its societal importance, its social function of storing and transmitting the values of a given society. The theoretical framework holds that a writer writes with a purpose and that his/her works reflect the social and related experiences s/he has undergone.

Abiola Irele advancing sociological approach in the criticism of African literature summarises this approach as

... attempts to correlate the work to the social background to see how the author's intention and attitude issue out of the wider social context of his art in the first place and, more important still, to get to an understanding of

the way the writer or each group of writers captures a moment of historical consciousness of society. The intimate progression of the collective mind, its working, its shapes, its temper, these - and more - are determinants to which a writer's mind and sensibilities are subject, to which they are responding all the time and which, at a superficial or profound level, his work will reflect in its moods and structures. (Quoted in Christopher Heywood, ed., 1971)

In sociological criticism one studies the text as well as the social situation which determines the creation of the text. Omafume Onoge asserts that 'the very sociality of literature requires that criticism go beyond the literary text to include the very structures of its manufacture' (quoted in Gugelberger, 1985:62)

The researcher in this case justifies the use of this theoretical framework because the study essentially raises a social issue: how the Yoruba world-view is portrayed in Wole Soyinka's works. Wallek and Warren (1949) indicate that literature has a sociological function bordering on the social issues affecting humankind:

...a large majority of the questions raised by literary study are, at least ultimately or by implication social questions: questions of tradition and convention, or norms and genres, symbols and myths (1949:95)

It is expected that within this framework the content of Soyinka's plays (*Death and King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*) can be examined in the light of

Yoruba mythology. In mythology, as Goldschmidt (1960) observes, the expressive side of life appears in forms related to the persistence of society.

It has often been admitted that mythologies, Greek, Roman or otherwise, have greatly influenced our literature. This means that for such literature to be appreciated, knowledge of the myths is mandatory. (Guerber, 1995) The critic however works with the knowledge that a writer displays his originality by exercising creativity while writing about old myths. (Ruthven, 1976) Soyinka shows a deep scholarly interest in Yoruba culture and indeed 'some knowledge of Yoruba culture is necessary for any serious study of this author's work' (Eldred Jones, 1988:4). It is within sociological theory of literature that such examination of culture in relation to literature can be examined.

Myth Criticism is employed in this study in terms of the tenets stated by Ruthven (1976), David Bidney (1966), Clyde Kluckholm (1966) and William Righter (1975). Myth critics make an assumption that writers are in some way possessed by the myths they recount (or invent) by virtue of some unique ability to think 'mythically' in an age which has aspired since Socratic times, to think 'rationally' (Ruthven, 1976:74). The central task in myth criticism is to establish a system of **reductive monism** for the reintegration of many into one. This means that there is only one hero or villain with many faces (or manifestations), the one being the archetype. Upon increasing fascination with the archetypal images, some critics have intensified their reductive approach by seeking to locate the archetype

behind the archetype, what Joseph Campbell calls the **monomyth**. This information is important to the current study in which Soyinka's patron deity is viewed as the archetype behind the tragic heroes. Also, very important in myth criticism is the awareness of the historical context in which archetypal images occur. Thus in the study at hand, the historical context of Ogun needs to be established.

Bidney (1966) notes that myth like rituals have a social function which 'is essentially practical and social, namely, to promote a feeling of unity or harmony with the whole nature or life.' Kluckholm's view too, point to the social function of rituals. He observes that both myth and rituals 'provide cultural solutions to problems which all human beings face' (1966:41). Myth criticism is important to this study because as Righter (1975) explains, rituals and their supporting myths are 'at varying levels of consciousness and degrees of articulation, a way of describing the foundations of social behaviour' (p.11). The study examines the use of myth and ritual with the view of understanding the Yoruba (and hence, African) worldview.

In a work of art, content and form are inseparable. The two theoretical approaches explained above – sociological and myth criticism – put a lot of emphasis on the content of the texts. Stylistics considers the form. As Stephen (1991) observes that Stylistics concentrates on the style of a work and how an author chooses to express himself. Stylistics also considers a work of art as a

reflection of the author's appreciation of his own cultural environment. Stephen further argues that a Stylistic interpretation of a work of art can be related to author, or sociological, historical and biographical features, the stylistic approach is adopted in this study for its relevance in describing aspects of the two literary texts such as Symbolism, foreshadowing, flashback etc, and their effects in the works.

1.8 Literature Review

Many studies related to the use of myths and rituals in literature have been done. An example is Machayo Olilo's PhD thesis on eight (8) of Francis Imbuga's texts. The researchers conclusion is that myths are indeed vital trope for a modern African writer in an endeavour to explain current issues in the society. The study informs the one at hand in its concretisation of the central position occupied by myths and rituals in literature. The current study however, relates the events in Soyinka's two plays to Yoruba metaphysics whose media of manifestation are the myths and rituals.

Another relevant study is Milton Obote's M.A Dissertation, *The Vision of Heroic Self in Soyinka's Tragic Drama* (1989). The study evaluates the heroic self alongside Soyinka's view that the hero is fashioned closely along the line of Ogun's primal act of going through the transition. This is a point to which the current study returns at some stage.

In relation to Soyinka's two texts: *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and *The Strong Breed* (1975) significant contribution has been made by several critics. Eldred Jones Durosimi lists a number of influences on Soyinka: Yoruba culture, his education, work on theatre and Christianity. He comments on Soyinka's reliance on Yoruba mythology and religion in relation to *A Dance of the Forest* in which is evident the Yoruba concept of the pantheon; the poem '*Idanre*' in which Soyinka celebrates the fragmentation of the unified essence of God to many essences; and, Soyinka's adaptation of *The Bacchae* of Euripides in which Soyinka sees similarities between Dionysus and the Yoruba god Ogun making him 'to look at the functioning of a god in another mythological tradition who also had more than a hint of waywardness in his nature.' (Jones, 1988: 125)

Jones' analysis of *The Strong Breed*, centres on the value of sacrifice in the salvation of the society from its 'evil'. For him 'Eman's sacrifice is modelled on the sacrifice of Christ' (1988:72). He draws parallels between Eman and Jesus Christ (a teacher and healer) and their manner of death on a tree, between the sick girl and Judas, the reaction / response of the people present at the death of the two men (Eman and Jesus). This way, Jones hints at the ritual sacrifice without contextualising it, as this study intends to do, within the Yoruba cultural practices and looking at its signification in the wider Yoruba society.

Elsewhere, Eldred Jones observes that Soyinka in *The Strong Breed* utilises the 'African idea of ritual cleansing through a victim' so as to create a vision of the

kind of sacrifice through which society is saved. Jones' reference to 'the African idea of ritual cleansing' ties the practice to African society therefore overlooking one important fact: that the idea of ritual cleansing is not unique to Africa. What would Jones say about the Jews and their various cleansing rituals one being the scapegoat practice which is similar to the case in *The Strong Breed*? However, what is important to this study is Jones' recognition that a customary ritual is used as a framework within which the play progresses.

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi sees parallels between Eman and Jesus as saviours. He refers to Eman as 'Christ-like figure'. He says that Soyinka 'superimposes African religion on Christian mythology, each vying for supremacy in a rather disconcerting manner.' (Jones, (ed., 1981:31-31) But it also seems probable that Ogunyemi's analysis imposes Christianity on Yoruba mythology contrary to the claim in the above quotation. Why for example, would he (Ogunyemi) see Eman as Christ-like and not Jesus Christ as Eman-like? In other words, just like Jones, Ogunyemi fails to realize and treat Yoruba Traditional religion and Christianity as different and independent. Such view recognizes, as this study does, that the concept of salvation is a universal one – one community need not be influenced by another to seek its own salvation through an individual who is charged with the saving task through suffering.

In the same way Kolawole Ogungbesan recognises the Christ-like figure in Eman as he (Eman) is hunted down like 'an animal' by an 'evil community' which is

hostile to strangers. The phrases in quotes show how Ogungbesan's analysis is judgemental - the ritual sacrifice is portrayed as negative, contrary to the intended argument of the current study that the ritual sacrifice is necessary community's continued survival. Ogunyemi's analysis informs the current study in its assertion that the text reflects the mood of crisis in Nigeria and the entire Africa and that it presses forth for selfless sacrifice which counters 'other general cannibalism of human beings. (King and Ogungbesan (eds., 1975)

Esslin Martin's short analysis of *The Strong Breed* emphasizes the grim side of Eman's sacrifice. The hostile community 'beat, hurray to distraction' and cruelly sacrifice Eman. The spark of hope lies perhaps in the majority of villagers' realization of the brutality of the old tradition. A similar view is held by Obi Maduakor who refers to Eman only as 'a burnt offering at the altar of custom'. (Beier, (ed., 1970) These studies, like the current one recognize the case of sacrifice but depart from it in their negative attitude towards the practice.

While Adrian A. Roscoe acknowledges the ideas of scapegoat, and like the above two, Esslin and Maduakor, emphasizes not the noble idea of self-sacrifice for the society, but rather on the hostility of the society. For him, Eman 'nobly substitutes' Ifada and 'dies in a manhunt that ensues,...an appalling affair... [in which he suffers] the same humiliation [as his father]' (Roscoe, 1971:246).The words 'appalling', 'manhunt', 'humiliation' express an idea contrary to Jones' concept of saving mission being noble.

Gareth Griffiths points at the King's Horseman's role in maintaining the cosmos balance. He observes that the Yoruba cosmology involves a close relationship between the world of the past (ancestors and gods), the present (the world of human beings), and the future (the unborn) and that the passage between the worlds is crucial. Life's own task is to maintain the links between these worlds through the proper maintenance of ritual. Thus unlike Pilkings, for the Elesin and his people (the Yoruba people) the ritual death is an act of great honour, essential to maintain the links which permit the present world to continue from it. (Griffiths, 2000)

Sharing Griffiths's opinion is Gerald Moore for whom in terms of the play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, the future is not separable from the past and must suffer whatever contamination the present events may spill upon it. It is thus to safeguard the cosmos relations that the Elesin is called to offer his life as the 'King's Horseman'. The Elesin's response has cosmic significance and he (the Elesin) faces two polarised choices – his personal extinction or the community's destruction. (Moore, 1980) The analysis further focuses on the question of social expectation on an individual to save the society but, regrettably, without any particular reference to existing moral order. The concern further dwells on the preservation of African culture in general as a task for an individual and not collective will. David Kerr's analysis of the play reinforces this latter interpretation,

by Moore, with particular reference to the young generation led by Olunde as 'saviours of the African Civilisation'. (Kerr, 1995)

Jones shares Griffiths's and Moore's concept of cosmos balance. He observes that by failing in his task, the Elesin not only endangers the lives of the living, but he has threatened the unborn by fathering a child in these circumstances. This is important because the current study examines the close relationship between the four worlds of existence. In his analysis, Jones (1988) further lists the external features of a Yoruba festival such as songs, dances, and drumming. This study explores these features as well as others to a greater depth to bring out the artistic creativity through which the rituals in the two plays are explained.

James Booth similarly recognises the idea of ritual death (human sacrifice) and places it in its proper religious context among the Yoruba. 'The Yoruba religion prescribes sacrificial death'. He follows to suggest a forgetting of the whole western tradition of individual tragedy if the central issues of *Death and the King's Horseman* are to be understood. Gibbs and Lindfors (eds., 1993:127) He further observes that the religious motive of Olunde's self-sacrifice is not intended to command the audience's approval on literal level. For Booth, very few will be inclined to accept that the gods or 'cosmic totality' really requires self-immolation of the kind prescribed by Yoruba tradition. (p.136) Of great significance to this study is the fact that Booth establishes from a Yoruba historian, Rev. Samuel Johnson, that this form of human sacrifice did exist in

large numbers until 19th century when it was abolished (even then it continued but at reduced levels). This information aids the current study in placing the ritual sacrifice within its historical context. Booth's analysis further embraces a stylistic approach, engaging the exploration of the dramatic techniques through which the play's metaphysical theme is realised.

Lastly, the contribution by D.S. Isevbaye notes the gravity of the King's Horseman's death in the Yoruba religious history. He demonstrates that the Yoruba community demands the Elesin's death failure to which his close relatives could strangle him to death. The analysis also takes a stylistic approach majoring on the dramatic style of the play. (Gibbs, (ed., 1987)

The review has established gaps existing between what has been done in relation to the metaphysical theme and what this study intends to achieve. The current study sets out to treat the two texts, *The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, with the intensity of centring their content within the Yoruba metaphysical world to examine the signification of such content in the Yoruba community. It aims at dealing with the metaphysical theme at depth, a task which will involve drawing from Yoruba cultural practices so as to unveil the meaning of the events in the two plays. Soyinka himself has been quoted as saying; 'metaphysical quest is not of itself a static theme, not when it is integrated by real proportions, into individual or social patterns of life' (Soyinka, 1966:55). As the study shows in later discussion, the metaphysical theme does not just rely

on unchanging prescriptions of tradition. It allows for dynamics in thought and accepts changes in perspectives.

1.9 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study covers Wole Soyinka's two texts: *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*. The study is limited to examination of the two texts in relation to the metaphysical theme and its implication in the society. Whereas other works of Soyinka such as *A Dance of the Forest* also treat the same theme, the two texts in this study have been selected particularly for their use of the significant rituals of self-sacrifice and ritual cleansing. These rituals are viewed as having important implication in Yoruba metaphysics. Other aspects of the texts such as style and characterisation are examined in relation to their contribution in furthering the central theme. The study is further limited to library-based research and the Internet.

1.10 Research Design and Methodology

The research engages a qualitative research design. It involves a textual study in which data presented for analysis is collected from primary texts (selected works of Wole Soyinka). Data from secondary sources would help in the comprehension and qualitative analysis of the primary texts. Information from primary texts is to be collected by reading the selected works of Wole Soyinka. For secondary data, the research has access to materials from Kenyatta University Library and other libraries within the Nairobi City. The materials are to

be read, reviewed and selected in respect to their relevant and significant contribution to the research study. Such relevant material includes Soyinka's essay, *'The Fourth Stage'* and other texts which expound on Yoruba metaphysical world.

The study engages the content analysis approach to study the two texts. In this approach detailed information about the phenomenon being studied is obtained and then attempts to establish patterns, trends and relationships from the information gathered are made. Thus the researcher intends to show how Yoruba myths, rituals and festivals relate to the content of Soyinka's two texts. The conclusion ensuing from the analysis must of necessity link the writer's use and manipulation of these myths and rituals to the society's metaphysics.

1.11 Outline of the Study

The work is organised into four main chapters and a conclusion. This introduction forms the first chapter. The second chapter establishes the mythological foundation of the plays putting emphasis on the similarities between Ogun and the tragic characters. The third chapter focuses on the artistic measures which add up to the scheme of scapegoat within which the rituals in the two plays are designed. The chapter further explores the overall signification of the scapegoat model in the Yoruba cosmology. In chapter four the argument concentrates on a new order, which Soyinka introduces to societal morality. Finally a review of the main discussions carried out in the preceding chapters is provided in the last

CHAPTER TWO: MYTHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN AND THE STRONG BREED

This chapter explores the mythical framework of **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Strong Breed**. It examines elements of Yoruba mythology evident in these two texts. Particular emphasis is laid on the Ogun myth and its significance in communicating societal realities. The character of Ogun is compared to that of the tragic characters in the two texts.

The Yoruba are reputed to have the biggest number of divinities (god). No one knows the actual number but ranges from 200 to 1700 and even more, have been suggested. (Mugambi, 1990) Since, according to Yoruba tradition, the Orishas (gods) were initially unhappily separated from human beings, Yoruba myths are stories about the efforts made to cross the gulf, which brought about the separation. (Soyinka, 1976) In mythological terms, the orishas eventually descended from the sky and spent their lives in relationship with human beings – as kings, chiefs, leaders at war etc. Soyinka transfers this mythic world into his literary texts. This is evident in the many references he makes to various gods in **Death and the King's Horseman**. These gods dictate and direct every human affair so that the Praise Singer says to the Elesin: 'In their [ancestors'] time the world was never tilted from its groove, it shall not be in yours', the Elesin twice replies, 'The gods have said No' (Soyinka, 1964:10). At a later stage in the play, the Elesin says to the white man (Mr. Pilkings), 'You advise all our lives although on the authority of what gods, I do not know' (p.64). The gods thus wield power

over human dealing so that all leadership is in their name. As Wande Abimbola observes, such authority is not the case just in Soyinka's literary texts but also in Yoruba life. He writes: 'In indigenous Yoruba culture, Ifa has governed almost every aspect of Yoruba life from the birth of a child through his or her childhood days to marriage and old age and finally death' (Blakely, 1994:6). Ifa is both the name of the god of knowledge and wisdom as well as his divination system (the oracle). This orisha also known as Urunmila, gives divine guidance and counsel, through his oracle, to those who consult him – and many consult him on important matters. Hence Soyinka's reference to the deity in **Death and the King's Horseman**:

'And Ifa spoke no more that day....

But for Osanyin, courier-bird of Ifa's heart of Wisdom' (p.13)

Other mentions of orishas are evident in the following citations:

'That Esu-harassed day slipped into the stew-pot' (p.9).

'I saw the ivory pebbles of Oya's river bed' (p.19).

'Not even Ogun-of-the-farm toiling dawn till dusk on his tuber patch...

Not even Ogun with finest hoe he ever

Forged at the anvil could have shaped the buttocks...'

(p.19).

'When the river begins to taste salt of the ocean, we no longer know what deity to call on, the river-god or Olokun' (p.44).

It is observable in the above citations that Soyinka's work is so steeped into Yoruba mythology that it takes a matter-of-fact approach in the deployment of the orishas. The names of the gods are not given typographical highlight to show that they are foreign to the language of the play (they are not English). Even the glossary bears no such information. Soyinka's reader would therefore, need to dig deep into Yoruba mythology for the knowledge that the names stand for gods and to understand the function of each deity. Thus Esu is the orisha of chance, accident and unpredictability. Because he is Olorun's (Sky God's) linguist, and master of languages, *Esu* is responsible for carrying sacrifices from humans to the Sky God. He is also known for his phallic powers and exploits. He is said to lurk at the gateways, on the highways and the crossroads, where he introduces chance and accident into the lives of humans. (Coulander, 1973) This being Esu's character, the Elesin appropriately refers to 'Esu-harassed day to mean a day plagued by misfortunes.

Oya is both the name of a river as well as the deity who plays patron to it. Oya was one of Sango's wives and she is the orisha of the Niger River. **Ogun**, whose myth is explored shortly after this, is the orisha of iron, and consequently the patron orisha of all humans for who iron has particular significance, such as

smiths, hunters, and warriors. The quotation above makes reference to Ogun as the patron of farmers who use iron hoes to accomplish their tasks.

In the last quotation, Soyinka just refers to the river-god without mentioning the name and refers to **Olokun** by name. This is because each river in Yoruba land has a patron deity. For instance, the wives of Sango, Osun and Oba, are orishas of rivers bearing those names. (Abimbola, 1994) Since in the quotation the river is not specified, the orisha name is not specified either. However, the orisha of the ocean, Olokun is singled out for she is the only deity that presides over seas and oceans.

Unlike **Death and the King's Horseman**, **The Strong Breed** displays a paucity of references to particular orishas. Even then the relationship between gods and people is still portrayed as crucial. When the Old Man fears what might become of the ritual cleansing, his Attendant replies, 'The gods will not desert us on that account' (Soyinka, 1979: 103). Consider yet another citation: when the 'chasers' do not seem to be able to control Eman, the carrier, the latter gets thirsty and as he heads to the stream for water, the following is the dialogue:

Jaguna: And it works so well. This surely is the help of gods themselves Oroge.

Ogun: Don't you know at once what is on the path to the stream?

Oroge: The sacred trees.

Jaguna: I tell you it is the very hand of gods. (p.115)

A short while later, Jaguna explains, 'When the carrier steps on the fallen twigs, it is up in the sacred trees with him' (p.117). What is evident in the extract is not just the strong claim on the help of gods, but also another element of Yoruba mythology – people's relationship with the environment. Abimbola (1994) observes that in traditional Yoruba thought, there is a deep respect for nature as an important part of the universe. Two reasons are responsible for this place of nature in the thought system: There is a belief that when the orishas finished their assignment on earth, most of them turned themselves into objects of nature such as trees, rocks, hills, mountains, rivers, lagoons, and the ocean. Moreover, the Yoruba believe in the ancient covenant between human beings and nature. This covenant compels mutual respect. They believe that every object of nature has an ancient name, which is used to communicate with it and command it to do their will. Abimbola's explanation lays the basis for Jaguna's optimism and faith in the sacred trees in helping to trap the carrier. It is as though nature would fully cooperate with the human community to ensure the well being of the other. Besides, the sacred trees might also be deified to aid humans from their position as gods.

Ogun and the Tragic Characters

Soyinka argues that Yoruba tragedy acts out the suffering caused by the gulfs in existence and by the painful acts of will or assertion performed to bridge them. His assertion presupposes an essential relationship between the Yoruba tragic

drama and the Ogun myth. Soyinka in '*The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy*' asserts:

The first actor ... for he led others... was Ogun, first suffering deity, first creative energy, the first challenger, and conqueror of transition. And his, the first art, was tragic art...(p.34)

Soyinka's strong assertion is that modern African tragic drama 're-creates through the medium of physical contemporary action' the first experience of Ogun through the transition abyss. Thus in the discourse that follows below, we attempt to relate the tragic characters in Soyinka's two texts with the character of Ogun. We seek to establish ways in which Eman (in *The Strong Breed*) and the Elesin (in *Death and the King's Horseman*) are modelled on the character of Ogun. Before this, it is necessary to supply some more information on the Ogun figure to understand his character.

Oba Ofeimun (2003) establishes that there is a relationship, or better, a synchrony between *Ogun Ewuare*, King of the Edo Kingdom in the 15th Century (1440 – 1485) and Ogun, the god of iron who, in spite of Christianity and Islam, is still worshipped across much of Southern Nigeria, the West Coast of Africa, and the African Diaspora – the West Indies and the Americas. Ogun the King was described by his subjects as powerful, cruel, wicked, autocratic and surrounded by mystery. He conquered and re-built the city of Benin constructing well-paved streets, which were greatly admired by the Portuguese adventurer who first

visited Benin in 1472. He was partial to ironworkers so that even when captured in the war, they were never to be killed. Ogun Ewuare was also a musician inventing a fife-like wind instrument. His artistic venture also led to the introduction of royal beads and the scarlet clothes that he stole from the Portuguese ships with help of the Ifa priest. Later, the historical figure was deified and worshipped in Benin as well as in the surrounding lands of Nigeria and the present day Ghana. These activities synchronise the two Ogun figures so that one may see the mythical figure as a product of the historical one. Soyinka's Ogun is purely mythical – existing at the beginning of time but the relationship with history is unmissable. He (Soyinka) frees the deity from local politics and geography so that he (Ogun) affects not only Yoruba land but also a far wide terrestrial space.

The operations of Ogun can be pieced together to form a salvation story. The Orisha plays a redemptive role when he sets out to better the lives of the other orishas – from the lonely, isolated and incomplete selves to communion with humans with whom they share their origin. Eman, Soyinka's protagonist in **The Strong Breed**, is a saviour too. When we encounter him at the beginning of the text, he is at a 'modest clinic'. He runs a medical clinic, which ensures a kind of redemption in its endeavour to restore people's health, therefore bettering the physical lives of the members of the society. He offers his medical services even when he is rejected: Sunma observes, 'you are wasting your life on people who really want you out of their way' (Soyinka 1979:83). When the girl who goes

round with a carrier comes to him and claims to be 'unwell', Eman responds, 'But I have never seen you here. Why do you come to the Clinic?' (p.85) The girl who is isolated because of her disease stands at a distance from Eman as lepers in the gospels do when they meet Jesus. The kindness and fearlessness of Jesus to the leper's parallels Eman's when he says, 'I am not afraid of catching your disease' (Soyinka, 1976:86; *Luke*. 17:11ff). The association of Eman with the Christ makes him fit in with not only great healers but also saviours. The clinic therefore is hope and help for the 'unwell' who too, like the orishas, are incomplete seeking wholeness.

It is Eman too who clears the bush for the handicapped Ifada for a farm, just as Ogun clears the first bush with his iron knife when the god and human population wishes to expand their dwelling. (Coulander, 1973) records this part of Ogun myth thus:

...orishas and humans alike ...hunted, cleared the land so that they could plant, and they cultivated the earth. But the tools they had were of wood, stone, or soft metal, and the heavy work that had to be done was a great burden. Because there were more people living at Ife than in the beginning, it was necessary to clear away trees from the edge of the forest to make more room for planting. (p.33)

The rest of the account has every orisha trying unsuccessfully to clear the bush with his poor tool and it is a voice of despair and disappointment when they

(orishas) say to each other, 'what kind of a world are living in? How can we survive in this place? Their survival is ensured by Ogun who emerges with tools of new technology (the Iron Age) to save them from modern problems – of overpopulation –, which old means (technology of the past) cannot solve. Eman who is modelled on Ogun is equally progressive-minded. He takes the initiative to think and act for Ifada whom despite his incapacitated self must have a means of livelihood hence the need for a farm. He encourages Ifada to like farming. Eman is unlike Sunma who thinks Ifada should be very thankful for merely 'being allowed to live' (p.83).

Perhaps Eman's ability to provide remedy or wholeness to incompleteness is more evident in Sunma's plea. In the initial pages of the text, she pleads with Eman to take her away from the village as she 'demand[s] some wholesomeness' which can only be granted by or through Eman. She tells him, 'I swear to you, I do not mind what happens afterwards. But you must help me tear myself away from here. I can no longer do it by myself...' (p.88). Her inability to save herself in the situation is the inability of the conquered self, which authenticates Eman's role as saviour. She desperately clings to him, 'you see, I bore myself to you. For days, I had thought it over; this was to be a new beginning for us. And I placed my fate wholly into your hands...' (p.91). Evidently, Sunma's redemption lies with Eman. However, give the Yoruba communal aspect of life, Sunma's individual plea is rejected for Eman must stay in the village to contribute his share to the well being of all people.

For Soyinka, the society is always in need of salvation from itself. The required act of salvation is not a mass act but it comes through individual vision and dedication. The individual undertakes the saving mission in spite of the opposition of the very society s/he seeks to save. (Jones, 1988) Like Eman, such individuals end up as victims of the society, which benefits from their vision. The society thus depends on the exercise of the individual will. Soyinka celebrates this individual will power in the poem 'Idanre' which he refers to a 'passion poem of Ogun elder brother to Dionysus'. Atunda, in Yoruba mythology, is the slave of the first deity, who carried out the first revolutionary act by rolling a bolder on his master and hence fragmenting the first unified essence to many individual essences or gods as well as human beings. Soyinka praises him: 'All hail Saint Atunda, first revolutionary / Grand Iconoclast at genesis' (King, ed. 1975). By exalting Atunda, Soyinka exalts 'the individual who sets out to redeem his society whether or not the process involves an act of rebellion. The poem further associates Atunda with Ogun and the Greek god Dionysus. To their class, by extension, belongs Eman who seemingly joins the drama of gods. As Jones (1988) observes, the Yoruba figure is paralleled by figures from all universal religions. Atunda is a symbol for a universal idea which Yoruba mythology and religion conveniently supplies. That is why Eman relates not only to Ogun (another Yoruba figure) but also to Jesus Christ (a Christian figure who is a healer and a saviour).

Eman by birth belongs to a family of carriers, to a 'strong breed' that can 'take this boat to the river year after year and wax stronger on it. I [Eman's father] have taken down each year's evils for over twenty years' (p.103). The imagery of the boat and the carrier denotes a purification and for people who depend on Eman for the washing away of the evil of the old year and therefore assurance of wholeness (as opposed to incompleteness caused by their sins) in the New Year. As Sunma puts it, the New Year 'is the time for making changes in ones life' (p.89) but the individual change requires communal cleansing, which must be ensured by one person – Eman.

Elesin Oba, the tragic character in **Death and the King's Horseman** is also comparable to Ogun in several ways. Iyaloja describes him as he 'who now bestrides the hidden gulf and pause to draw the right foot across end into the resting-home of the great forebears' (Soyinka, 1975:22). The archetype on whom Elesin is modelled (Ogun) is always described, in Soyinka's interpretation of Yoruba mythology, as breaching the 'gulf' between the gods or/and ancestors and human beings. Therefore, Elesin's is a great task as Iyaloja further describes him as 'stand[ing] at the gateway of the great change' (p.23). As Ofemun (2003) notes, Ogun and in deed all orishas, function within what Nietzsche describes as the chthonic realm, the fourth stage in Soyinka's terms. This is a zone in mythic space which is distinct from but which encompasses the world of living, the dead, and the unborn. It is an in-between world, in which all the suffering of gods and humankind are experienced, transformed and re-incribed for the fortification of

human will. Soyinka clearly observes that this chthonic realm is periodically in need of a challenger, a human representative, to breach it on behalf of the well being of the community. In terms of drama, as it developed from ritual, the stage came to represent the symbolic chthonic space and the presence of the challenger (the protagonist, the tragic hero) within it is the earliest physical expression of people's fearful awareness of the cosmic context of their existent.

Given a secular interpretation, the 'gateway' / the gulf of transition / the chthonic realm, within which Elesin operates (stands), is a zone of difficult choices and hard decisions. In the making of these difficulty decisions, uncertainties are breached, an act, which thereafter affects the present and re-shapes how the community relates to the past and the future. Thus for the intended change to be attained, Elesin's cooperation and self-sacrifice like Eman's, is mandatory. As already observed, Ogun is at the heart of changes in the society. The society in the world of the text (**Death and the King's Horseman**) is in the throes of political colonisation and cultural imperialism. We encounter the Pilkings desecrating the ancestral masks, which are central to traditional Yoruba culture. The DC (Mr. Pilkings), who represents the colonial government displays his authority over the natives by disrupting the ceremony / ritual in which Elesin is meant to die to ensure the society's continued well being. Both acts seek to kill the past and sever cords which like it to the present. The changes, which have occurred in the society (foreign interference), call for Elesin who impersonates Ogun, to provide vision and direction. In his lecture, *'In Search of Ogun:*

Soyinka, Nietzsche and the Edo Century' (2003), Oba Ofemun resonates this role of Ogun in the following words:

...Ogun, as a theme, is particularly fortuitous in [that] it brings together core issues that have plagued African societies since the first European landed on our shores: issues concerning the displacement of nature gnosis by alien epistemologies, the role of leaders not just politicians but also writers and artists and other professionals, in re-mobilising or failing to mobilise a defeated people. (p.9)

Oba Ofemun's outlook on Ogun finds parallels in both the mythical as well as the historical Ogun who bears the following praise names 'Master of the world; the one who shows the way for others; the deity who brought fire; the first hunter, the opener of roads; the clearer of the first fields; the warrior; the founder of dynasties, kingdoms' (Oba Ofemun, 2003:33). All the praise names suggest a case of a leader who leads others into building a new civilisation than the one in existence.

Elesin Oba should be judged against the standard set above. Does he measure up to the praise names given above? Does he even measure up to the title of 'a man of honour', which the women have given him in the text? Does he mobilise or fail to mobilise the 'defeated people' to respond adequately to the changes of their time? This however, is the subject of discussion in chapter four.

The language used in relation to Elesin also hints at the intention to model him on the mythic Ogun. Consider the following:

The gourd you bear is not for shirking

The gourd is not for setting down ... (Soyinka, 1975:15)

The symbol of a *gourd* is picked from the myth about Ogun. The deity (mythical character) as well as the historical Ogun, ruler of the Edo kingdom, is described as going to war with three gourds; one for palm wine (victory and celebration), another for sperms (creativity) and the third for gun powder (war and destruction). (Ofeimun, 2003) The gourd which Elesin should not 'shirk' may be viewed in all the three senses: His creativity is necessary in the battle that lies ahead, as Iyaloja indicates that the 'hand of foreigners threaten to tear the world apart'. After the cosmic balance has been assured, the third gourd of palm wine, for celebration would be in use.

Consider yet another extract which links Elesin to Ogun: 'They have slain the favourite horse of the king and slain his dog. They have borne them from pulse to pulse centre of the land receiving prayers for the king' (Soyinka, 1975:74). Of the two animals mentioned here, the horse provides Elesin's full title, 'Elesin Oba' (the King's Horseman) as such was his traditional role, but it is of interest why the other animal is a dog. Ofeimun (2003) has the answer: the historical Ogun (Ogun Ewaure) was once, as a crown prince, exiled from his homeland, Benin. As he escaped, he ran into other dangers, he killed a leopard and a snake and planted an evergreen on the spot to commemorate it. This act of bravery is celebrated in

mythology save for the fact that the tradition of killing of a leopard every year, although continued by his successors, has been replaced by the sacrifice of dogs more readily available. The dog is the so-called meat of Ogun. The reference to a dog having been killed in the play therefore evokes the sacrifice to Ogun and by symbolism, represents appeasement for Elesin. Since the role of a sacrifice is to honour as well as reconcile the parties involved, the sacrifice of a dog is meant to exhort Elesin to undertake the dangerous task of self-sacrifice for his community's well being – now that the favourite animal has been sacrificed.

Another similarity is still evident in the creative use of language. Soyinka says of his own patron deity, Ogun:

...the shard of original oneness which contained the creative flint appears to have passed into being of Ogun who manifests a temperament for artistic creativity matched by technological proficiency. His world is the world of craft, song and poetry' (1976:36).

This, being Soyinka's conception of Ogun, forms the grounds upon which he has matched the god with Elesin Oba. The language that Elesin Oba is given is largely poetic. He not only uses rich imagery, proverbs, but also speaks in verse as opposed to prosaic language of other characters such as, the women, Amusa, Joseph, and the Pilkings among others. The only other character that matches Elesin Oba is the Praise Singer, another artist whose function is to prepare Elesin Oba sufficiently for his task, by use of song. But even the praise singer

marvels at Elesin's use of proverbs: 'The elesin's riddles are not merely the nut in the kernel that breaks human teeth; he also buries the kernel in hot embers and dares a man's fingers to draw it out' (Soyinka, 1975:11). The Singer proudly says that 'a man is either born to his art or he isn't' (p.10) Elesin Oba however, uses poetic language only when he relates closely to his redemptive role (of self-sacrifice). Otherwise he uses the commonplace conversational language. Just to demonstrate the case in point, consider the following:

Who does not seek to be remembered?
 Memory is master of Death, the chink
 In his armour of conceit. I shall leave
 That which Makes my going the sheerest
 Dream of an afternoon. Should voyagers
 Not travel light? Let the considerate travel
 Shed, of his excessive load, all
 That may benefit the living. (p.20)

The elevated language in the above extract is unmissable. Soyinka succeeds in making his protagonist artistic to measure up to the world of 'craft, song and poetry' to which his patron deity belongs. The language raises Elesin to the level of kings; for it is to royalty that the refined levels of language historically belong. If Elesin Oba is raised to such kingly status, it is still to make him fit with the mythological Ogun on whom Elesin is fashioned.

The Archetype and its Faces

The discussion in this chapter has allied the tragic characters – Eman and Elesin – to Ogun. This means that Soyinka chooses the deity as the archetype and all the protagonists in this tragic drama are faces or manifestations or actualisations of this archetype. The role that these characters play in the drama of the two texts is paralleled to the role played by Ogun in the Yoruba mythology. The role in both cases is redemptive. The archetype and the tragic heroes are saviours who seek to better the lives of their respective societies.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SCAPEGOAT THEME

This chapter explores the events in **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Strong Breed** in relation to the concept of the scapegoat. It involves a close examination of the rituals employed in the two texts; paying particular attention to stylistic and dramatic techniques which contribute to a successful portrayal of these rituals. Finally the discussion shows the overall implication of these rituals in the entire Yoruba cosmos.

The Yoruba cosmology involves a close but disrupted relationship between the past (the world of the ancestors and gods), the present (the world of the living) and the future (the world of the unborn). The passage between these worlds is crucial. In fulfilling the obligation of a ritual, the balance of forces is maintained so that the actions of people do not bring about their own (people's) destruction. (Griffiths, 2000) According to Soyinka, the function of a ritual is to diminish the gulf that lies between one area of existence and another. In this chapter, two rituals utilised in Soyinka's two texts are examined: ritual sacrifice (self-sacrifice) in **Death and the King's Horseman** and ritual cleansing in **The Strong Breed**. As the discussion shows, both rituals fit into the framework of a scapegoat.

Self-sacrifice

In an interview with Louis S. Gates, Soyinka has the following to observe about self-sacrifice in relation to the African society:

In our society, this kind of event [self sacrifice] is inbuilt into the very mechanism, which operates the entire totality of society. The individual acts as a carrier... who knows very well what is going to become of him is really no different, is doing nothing special, from the other members of the society who build society and who guarantee survival of society in their own way...there is one principle, one essential morality of African society which we must always bear in mind, and that is, the greatest morality is what makes the entire community survive. (August 1975)

Therefore, self-sacrifice is aimed at ensuring the well being of the community. In most cases, rituals and sacrifice involve death or transition with the latter aspect involving death at a symbolic level. Elesin in **Death and the King's Horseman** is supposed to undergo the experience of ritual sacrifice lest the actions of people 'wrench the world adrift' (Soyinka, 1975:17). Before we examine the elements of ritual and its implication, we need to trace the historical origin of ritual sacrifice among the Yoruba.

Human sacrifice was a practice among the Yoruba people just as it was common in many pre-technological societies. The *Ijebu* sub-tribe of Yoruba (Soyinka belongs to this ethnic group) is further divided into two branches – *Ijebu ode* and *Ijebu Remon*. The Ode branch used to be ruled by a chief whose title was Awujale while the Remon branch used to be governed by a chief who ranked below the Awajale. Before Nigeria came under British protection, this subordinate

chief used to be killed with a ceremony after a rule of three years. (George Frazer, 1959) The chief's death was ritualistic and it must have had a great signification in the Yoruba cosmology. In relation to the alafin's (king's) funeral, the Yoruba historian, the Rev. Samuel Johnson, establishes that such funeral, as it was conducted at Oyo until late 19th century, involved a large number of sacrifices, which included 'honourable suicide' of the King's Horseman, Or *Ona-Oluku-esin*, whose title implied that he must die with the king. Other than this suicide, the rest of the elaborate ritual includes sacrifices which are described thus:

At certain stations, on route between the palace and the Bara, eleven in all, they halt and immolate a man and a ram, and also at the Bara itself, four women each at the head and at the feet, two boys on the right and the left, were usually buried in the same grave with the dead monarch to be his attendants in the other world, and the last of all, the lamp-bearer in whose presence all the ceremonies are performed. (Gibbs, 1993:55)

Johnson's further observation is that the death of Elesin Oba (chief) had such grave moral implication that reluctance (to die) necessitated an intervention. There are cases in which members of the offending chief's family strangled him to save themselves the disgrace. The case described above is not particular to the Yoruba community. Other societies like the Egyptians buried their monarch together with his household. The practice was based on a belief in continuation of life after death (though in another form) so that the monarch required his

servants and subordinates in the next life. Evidently, Soyinka picks an aspect of the ritual described above to form the framework of **Death and the King's Horseman**. Joseph explains to his employer: 'It is native custom. The king die last month. Tonight is his burial. But before they can bury him, the Elesin must die so as to accompany him to heaven' (Soyinka, 1975: 36).

It is characteristic of Soyinka to use a festival framework as a form to carry the intended content. Jones (ed., 1972) says that perhaps the most significant traditional element in Soyinka's plays is the use of the overall design of a festival. For example, in **Kongi's Harvest**, Soyinka uses the festival of the New Yam as framework to develop the plot. In **Death and the King's Horseman**, he uses the traditional ceremony of a king's burial and the consequent passing away of a chief. It has been established from Soyinka himself (in his introduction to the text, **Death and the King's Horseman**) that he (Soyinka) is using historical material to build the play. The play is based on well documented historical events which took place in Oyo, the ancient Yoruba city of Nigeria, in 1946 – in which a son died on behalf of his father (Olori Elesin). The presence of the colonial district officer is the same. The royal visit by the Prince of Wales and the war are historical facts too. Soyinka has however, rearranged these historical materials and added other details to bring the intended dramatic effects. He is therefore not just reproducing history. He mythicises history and weaves a dramatic piece which possesses the appearance of fiction.

Elesin's job is that of a saviour. The women clearly define it: 'The world is in your hands' (p.18). Iyaloja clearly warns him not to 'set this world adrift in [his] own time' (p.21). If Elesin Oba is to achieve this, certain elements of the ritual must be respected. All his requests are granted because the community fears that offending him is to mortify the gods. "We offend heaven itself" says Iyaloja. That is why the women grant his wish for new clothes and a girl already betrothed to Iyaloja's son. It is clear that the success of the ritual depends on the contribution of all members of the society even if such contribution is only at the level of support. Such communion binds the community together so that they share their achievements as well as their failures and disappointments. Only then can they face life threats together.

Aesthetically, Soyinka employs strategies, which are aimed at aiding Elesin to perform his duty well. Language is used artistically to bring out the position and response of various characters in relation to the ritual of self-sacrifice at hand. There are three categories of language use. The first category is characterised by Yoruba traditional expressions namely, proverbs or wise sayings. Three characters comfortably use proverbs in their speech: Elesin, Praise Singer and Iyaloja. When the Praise Singer asks Elesin why he has ignored his wife on the morning of his death, the latter answers with a proverb: 'When the horse sniffs the stable, does he not strain at the bridle?' (p.9). The proverb brings out Elesin's personal feelings over the ritual; he is already afraid of his impending death. He has 'sniffed' death and therefore he feels 'strain' – anxiety, over the whole ordeal.

A while later, when Iyaloja doubts Elesin's commitment to the cause, she uses a proverb to reason with him: 'Eating the awusa nut is not so difficult as drinking water afterwards' (p.22). Elesin has just demanded (and in fact has been given) a girl for his bride before his death. Iyaloja fears that when the moment of death ('drinking water afterwards') comes, Elesin will waver having indulged in pleasure of flesh with the girl ('eating the awusa nut'). The proverb therefore seems to be development on the saying that 'things are easier said than done'. Elesin consequently responds with another proverb: 'The waters of bitter stream are honey to a man / Whose tongue has savoured all' (p.22). This is an assertion that he does not fear death ('waters of bitter stream' given his wealth of experience ('savourd all')). He has therefore re-affirmed his commitment to his traditional calling.

The second category of language use involves Nigerian Pidgin English. Sergeant Amusa in most part speaks in pidgin. For example, when Iyaloja tells him not to stop the chief from performing his duty, Amusa responds: 'what kin' of duty be dat one Iyaloja?' (p.36) There is similar language in the rest of his dialogue with the women and the girls.

The third and last major category in language use is the 'perfect' or refined English employed by the girls in the play within a play semi-scene to ridicule Amusa as well as the Western mannerisms. The girls speak in "an 'English' accent" (p.37). The speech together with the dramatic technique (play acting of

the girls) which supplements it, emerge successfully in drawing contrasting views to the ritual at hand. The West is trivialised in speech; and when Sergeant Amusa is embarrassed at the end of this scene, the class he represents is embarrassed too.

Each of the above categories of language use is representative and symbolic of part of the society in **Death and the King's Horseman**. The three characters who speak in proverbs represent the custodians of the Yoruba culture. The wisdom coded in, and the linguistic difficulty posed by the proverbs, symbolise the richness of culture which the Yoruba tradition intends to preserve in the intended ritual sacrifice. This is opposed by the second category in which Nigerian pidgin, even though a modern characteristic of their language is a deviation from the original version (of language). The development of pidgin implies an interaction of the Yoruba with Westerners. The birth of a 'confused' language mid-way English and native forms is a characteristic of a conquered people. Amusa represents this class of a confused people who are gradually losing touch with their culture. It is no wonder he takes instructions from his conqueror, Mr. Pilkings, to interrupt the ritual. He is unlike the third part of the society represented by the girls (and perhaps, Olunde), which has mastered the foreigner's language so well that they can subvert the Western prescribed etiquette as the girls do. The first and the third categories propel the ritual sacrifice forward, though each in a different way.

Jones (1988) lists the external features of Yoruba festivals: drumming, singing, dancing, feasting and sacrifice. Poetic praise songs (oriki) and prayers are recited, and mimetic dances re-enact events whose originals are lost in mythological gloom. Sacrifices are also offered and pent-up spirits are released in general dancing. All these elements are evident in the ritual re-enactment in **Death and the King's Horseman**. Soyinka employs several songs, chants and dances. For example, Elesin breaks into a chant and a dance about the Not-I bird and the drummer attempts to draw 'a rhythm out of his steps' (p. 11). The women sing and dance around Elesin as they dress him with rich new clothes (p.16); they also sing and dance in praise of the girls (p.40) and Elesin, as well, dances to the Praise Singer's dirge (p.41).

Soyinka utilises the expertise of a Praise Singer whose function is to praise, caution, as well as exhort and encourage Elesin to undertake the difficult task of delivering the audience (participants of the ritual) through the transitional gulf. His (the Praise Singer's) role is so crucial that he begins the drama of **Death and the King's Horseman** and his presence is required up to the very end of the play. Significantly, he appears with Elesin and strictly addresses only him. In other words, he is fashioned specifically for his service in the ritual, which involves Elesin's death. Evidently, his role, like Elesin's, is inherited. He says to Elesin: 'I don't know for certain that you'll meet my father, so who is going to sing these deeds in accents that will pierce the deafness of the ancient ones?' (p.10). These

two characters (who represent the present) inherit their roles from their ancestors (who represent the past) and the need for continuity is unmissable.

To highlight the Praise Singer's role, the following may be considered:

'They love to spoil you but beware. The hand of women also weaken the unwary'
(p.10)

'Your name will be like the sweet berry a child places under his tongue to sweeten the passage of food. The world will never spit it out' p.10)

'Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of bitter precipice' (p.75)

The first quotation bears a warning that the women who pamper him could also be his downfall. Apparently, Elesin fails to heed to this warning and the Praise Singer's anticipation comes to pass. In the second citation, the Singer paints a very good future for Elesin after a successful completion of his task hence encouraging him to go ahead with it. The third quotation bears a voice of reproach for the failed Elesin. These roles show that the Praise Singer is an indispensable element of the ritual. Further more, the very use of the character 'Praise Singer' suggests that the whole dramatic piece can be largely sung hence a conclusion that the plays owes much to the Yoruba opera, an earlier stage in the development of Yoruba theatre.

Similarly, the role and effects of the drums is moving. The drums 'talk' to Elesin directing him as well as to the whole Yoruba community. When the foreigner (the

Pilkings) think that 'all bush drumming sounded the same', (p.27), the Christian convert, Joseph, is capable of identifying the two-fold implication of the drumming on the night of Elesin's death. He says, 'It sounds like the death of a great chief and then, it sounds like the wedding of a great chief' (p.31)

The aesthetic effect of the drums on Elesin requires some exemplification. After the consummation of his marriage, there is a 'steady drum-beat from the distance' and Elesin's response is 'Yes. It is nearly time' (p.40) From this point onward, the progression of the ritual relies almost solely on the drums as summarised below:

The Elesin listens to the drums again and observes, 'They have begun to seek out the heart of the king's favourite horse... They know it is here I shall await them.' As he continues to listen to the drumming 'his eyes appear to cloud'. This marks an initial step into a trance, which is meant to unite his spirit and that of his king's in the 'great passage'. 'He listens to the drums. He seems...to be falling into a state of semi-hypnosis; His voice a little breathless'. He begins to dance to the drumming: 'let me dance into the passage,' he says. 'He comes down progressively among them...the drummers playing. His dance is one of the solemn, regal motions'. At this stage, the degree of trance has intensified for when the Praise Singer calls him, he only hears 'faintly'.

The drumming, the singing and the dancing combine and gradually weave into a climax, which only the stage directions can communicate well:

Elesin is now sunk fully deep in his trance; there is no longer any sign of awareness of his surrounding. ... He dances on, completely in a trance. The dirge wells up louder and stronger. Elesin's dance does not lose elasticity, but his gestures become... even more weighty. (p.45)

Olunde, still with his Western education, listens to the drums at this stage and realises 'there is a change in of rhythm, it rises to a crescendo and then, suddenly, it is cut off' (p.55). He must understand the implication of the climax of ritual for he says: 'There. It's all over' (meaning' the father has died). Unfortunately, this is the same time that Mr. Pilkings interrupts the ritual and the intended does not happen.

This description of ritual adheres to Soyinka's recognition of the integral nature of poetry (song) and dancing in the mimetic rite and the individual's withdrawal to an inner world, the primal reality or the hinterland of transition. The inner world is a collective experience in which all the participants experience through the tragic hero, the agonies of their cosmos existence; and release from these agonies, so that as Jonathan Swift puts it, 'the community emerges from the ritual experience charged with new strength'. The strength issues from the hero's (like Ogun's) raid on the durable resources of the transitional realm. (Soyinka, 1976:55) Elesin therefore, is charged with the responsibility of taking the community through the ritual and obtain for them new insights, strengths for living their present time.

The examination of the ritual sacrifice and its signification in Yoruba metaphysics cannot be complete without drawing the contrast with the Western case. Jane Pilkington's unquestionably Euro-centric view of the captain who blows himself up to save hundreds of people who would have died, other ships and a city, dismisses the act as 'nonsense. [For] life should never be thrown away deliberately. For Olunde, the same case amounts to self-sacrifice – and so is his father's (Elesin's) case. On the contrary, Elesin's death to Jane (therefore to the West) is nothing but 'ritual suicide'. While the West tends toward self-preservation, Africa moves in the opposite direction toward self-giving – spending oneself for the community. This is Soyinka's strong advocacy to counter what he refers as a 'cannibalistic society that is evident in his home in Nigeria as well as elsewhere in the world. (Duerden and Pieterse, ed.s, 1972) The main ingredient for this cannibalism is selfishness, which exists at the opposite axis with self-sacrifice. The understanding of the ritual forms the basis for Yoruba (African) tragedy in which the death of a tragic hero is not a sorry sight, evoking pity and sympathy. It is rather a celebratory act, which brings happiness to the participants of the ritual (drama) because they understand the great significance of the death.

Ritual Cleansing

The Strong Breed develops within the framework of the idea of scapegoat which Adrian Roscoe (1971) describes as 'one of the most ancient conventions devised by social man for easing of his collective conscience' (p.246). Contrary to Eldred Jones' assertion that Soyinka uses the African idea of ritual cleansing, the

scapegoat practice is a universal one. Many religions and societies of the world had a kind of purification ceremony, which would fit into the scapegoat scheme.

Judaism is one of these religions and the ritual is thus described:

When Aaron has finished performing the ritual to purify the Most Holy Place, the rest of the tent of the Lord's presence, and the altar, he shall present to the Lord the live goat, chosen for Azazel. He shall put both his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the evils, sins and rebellions of the people of Israel and so transfer them to the goat's head. Then the goat is to be driven off into the desert by a man appointed to do it. The goat will carry away with him into some uninhabited land. (Leviticus 16:20-22)

Elsewhere the Jews carried out purification for people with skin diseases (leprosy) with birds in which one bird was let to fly away with the evil / sin of the sick person. (Leviticus 14:4-7) Jews associated sickness closely with sin. In the New Testament, Jesus the founder of Christianity purifies a man possessed with demons by sending the evil spirit into pigs. (Mark 5:6-13) The ritual cleansing employed in **The Strong Breed** clearly fits into this scapegoat scheme. The pattern in the cited examples has the following elements: presence of evil, an animal to carry away the evil, the carrier animal moves away from the purified community. The ritual in **The Strong Breed** has the same pattern. It is appropriately developed in a festival design in which the community must start a New Year clean with the evil gone with the carrier. The only difference is that, the carrier is not a goat, or a bird or a pig but a man.

Aesthetically, Soyinka employs techniques which add up to the message he intends to communicate in relation to a comprehensive view of the ritual cleansing in **The Strong Breed**. Of these techniques is flashback. The first flashback puts Eman together with his old father and in this we are treated to the knowledge of the task he (Eman) is charged with by birth. In the flashback, Eman's character growth is evident from the idiotic child who at first argues that he is 'totally unfitted for [the old man's] call' to adherence of his fathers warning: 'Stay longer and you will answer the urge of your blood' (p.104). Before the flashback Eman is already a carrier and therefore the father's prophecy has come true with his character growth to accept community responsibility.

Even though Eman plays scapegoat in an environment different from his father's, his participation in the ritual can be described as Old Man's:

He [the old man, Eman's father] sits perfectly for several moments.

Drumming begins somewhere in the distance and the old man sways his head almost imperceptibly. Two men come in bearing a miniature boat, containing an **indefinite mound**. ... The old man gets up slowly. ... He motions to the men to **lift the boat quickly onto the old man's head**. As soon as it touches his head, he holds it down with both hands and **runs off; the man gives him a start, then follow at a trot**. ((emphasis mine) Soyinka, 1979: 105).

The highlighted words describe the purification rite in which Eman is the central figure. The indefinable mound is the evil, which must be carried away. It is not defined hence leaving room for multiple interpretation of the many faces of evil, shortcomings and incompleteness which society must be rid of. There is conscious and deliberate act by representatives of the society to load their problems on the designated saviour after which he runs and the men give a chase. Unlike other cases where drumming is an important aspect of the Yoruba festival, this element is played down and a lot of emphasis is put on chasing the carrier. The description of the ritual above is compounded by a dramatic technique of freezing on stage by Eman as he stares at the distance scene of himself and his father in the past. The freezing effect has particular effect on the ritual. It offers Eman a kind of introspection in which he can evaluate his performance of the ritual in relation to his father's. This way, he is strengthened to go on. Also the freezing catches Oroge's attention and from this moment onward in the play, he contemplates the possible meaning of Eman's behaviour. He (Oroge), unlike Jaguna, does not treat Eman just as a mere carrier. As he says at the end, Eman 'was no common sight' (p. 119).

The second flashback takes the play to a time in the past with Eman, a teenager and her equally young bride, Omae. This flashback develops the plot by filling in the gaps with details of Eman's life's story. More significantly, the flashback scene serves to inform on the origin of Eman's character strength. He leaves the initiation camp to protect his and Omae's moral principles against the pretentious

and immoral tutor. His behaviour displays bravery, courage, strong will and above all, maturity. This is evident not only in the abrupt decision to leave the training centre but also in the unemotional resolute break from his village, his father as well as his love, Omae. His character thus portrayed, the society, through the reader or the audience, can rely on Eman to take them through the ritual cleansing without wavering.

Lastly, the play makes use of a flashback in which information about Omae's death at child delivery is provided. This scene is done with such artistic care that we not only have character merge (Eman in the past as well as a carrier) but also a merge of settings. Thus even though Eman is a carrier in a different land from his homeland, he walks to his dead wife's grave in his current state (as carrier).

The stage directions read thus:

*Eman, as carrier walking towards the graveside, the other Eman having gone. His feet sink into the mound and he breaks slowly on to his knees, **scooping the sand in his hands and pouring it on to his head.** (Bold mine, p. 117).*

The action implied by the bolded words signifies that Eman anoints himself to go his wife's way, to die. Such should be the case for when we meet him again, in what seems to be a continuation of this flashback, he is pleading with his father to wait for him. Since his father is already dead, their union leave very little room for speculation. As observed in the stage directions, 'he [Eman] makes to hold him [his father]. Instantly, the old man breaks into a rapid trot. Eman hesitates,

then follows, his strength nearly gone' (p.118). It is after this that he pleads 'wait father. I am coming with you... wait... wait for me father' (p.188) and those being his last words, he dies. Thus a flashback propels the play forward to the death of Eman, which is the intended climax of the ritual that Soyinka designs.

Another technique employed in **The Strong Breed**, is foreshadowing in which a symbolic miniature cleansing ritual parallels and anticipates the major one. A girl who describes herself as unwell drags behind her an 'effigy by a rope attached to one of its legs' (p.84). She is isolated from the rest of the community: 'I play alone,' she says. 'The children won't come near me. Their mothers would beat them' (p.88). Her sickness like the evil of the society is undefined throughout the play. Sunma's description of her creates the impression that her case is an offshoot of the community's: 'She is not a child. She is as evil as the rest of them' (p.86). After all, the whole community 'from the oldest to the smallest child [is] nourished in evil and unwholesomeness' (p.88). Of the effigy she carries, she observes: 'My mother says it will take away my sickness of the old year' (p.85). A while later she warns Ifada that the effigy which she now refers to a 'carrier' is meant for her personal salvation even though Ifada may help with the ritual: 'I am the one who will get well at midnight, do you understand? It is my carrier – and it is for me alone' (p.87)

The treatment given to the effigy parallels that which Eman receives later, as a carrier. The effigy is beaten violently after which the intention is to hang and burn

it. Actually at the moment of Eman's death, the play presents a glaring image of 'the effigy hanging from the sheaves in front of Eman's house' p.118). The miniature ritual gives a reflection of the other (the main ritual) in all aspects. Later Eman ends up in the sacred trees after stepping on the fallen twigs (of a tree), which suggests hanging. The hanging and the tree create an image of Jesus hanging on the cross and therefore defining Eman's role like Jesus Christ's as a scapegoat. The desperation of the girl to get well, echoes that of the society. It is through her that the para-ritual merges with the ritual. Both Ifada and Eman meet their destiny in her presence, seemingly with her help. She appears at the scene as a 'betrayor' leading the community to its source of redemption. Her enthusiasm to get healed at midnight parallels the community's. So well designed is the anticipatory rite that it lays the basis for comprehending the main ritual upon which the progression of the largest part of the play develops. The transition from one to the other is clear. Consider the following:

*The girl is now seen coming back, still dragging her 'carrier'. Ifada brings up the rear as before. As she comes round the corner of the house two men emerge from the shadows. A sack is thrown over Ifada's head, the rope pulled tight rendering him instantly helpless. The girl ... turns round at the sound of the scuffle. She is in time to see Ifada thrown over the shoulders and borne away... **the girl backs slowly away**, turns and flees, leaving the carrier behind. (Bold mine, p. 92).*

The heroine of the para-ritual 'backs away' so that from now on, the focus shifts from the dummy to the real human carrier - first Ifada, then Eman. She leaves her carrier behind because she does not need it anymore – the entire community together with her, will be sanctified by the human saviour.

The play also makes use of symbolic objects to further the scapegoat theme which has metaphysical significance. Sunma has particular preoccupation with the lamp. She lights two kerosene lamps and when Eman says 'one is enough', she replies that she wants to leave one outside and proceeds to do that (p.92-93). She who is so preoccupied and threatened by the evil of the night wishes to not only light up the house where she dwells but also the outside whose darkness is nearly overwhelming her. Her fear, of the outside (community's evil) is evident in the resolute bolting of the door, under the pretext that it is getting cold. The gesture underscores Sunma's intention to keep herself and Eman isolated 'safe' in their cocoon and shut the community with its troubles outside. Eman counters this action by not only being suspicious of Sunma's action but also unbolting the door to let Ifada in and to mingle with the ritual cleansing mood. By juxtaposing Eman and Sunma in their views and feelings toward the events of the night and letting Eman triumph, Soyinka seems to suggest that the individual is part of the community and ought to partake in its life. Eman implies this when he says, 'we must not remain shut up here. Let us go and be part of the living' (p.92). The festival is for the living and it means life to the society members when they share in the celebration. One at this point is likely to justify

Okot p'Bitek's condemnation of Christians who feeling too holy to live with sinners, embrace the ascetic tradition and live away from the rest of the community. He observes:

...the attempted fleeing from life, from full participation in the tremendous and deepest challenges of the life-process with its risks and dangers; with its joys and success and brief sorrows of failure and loss; [that] world view... the ascetic tradition of the so called 'great' but foreign religions is wholly meaningless in African thought. (1986:21).

Soyinka does seem to agree with P'Bitek that Sunma's perspective does not serve African metaphysics. Like Eman, she ought to go out and get involved with life and in p'Bitek's words, sing and dance the people's philosophy to celebrate and perpetuate the African worldview. Soyinka therefore, uses his character to communicate the communal aspect African philosophy of life.

Other symbols include the effigy, boat and lorry. The objects suggest the crucial vehicle of salvation – the carrier. Sunma wishes to get away from the community and her only means of salvation is the lorry, which supposedly should 'carry' her away. This is why, when it takes off, leaving her behind, she desperately says to herself, 'what happens now?' (p.90). It is as though this action blocks all her avenues for happiness and wholeness, which she seeks. Also the unnamed girl (who therefore represents every member of the society) with unnamed sickness (which can thus refer to every of the society's ills) has an effigy, which is the

vehicle which must cleanse her by carrying her problems, physical or otherwise, away. Likewise, the old man has a boat (not an effigy). The boat too is the carrier of evil. Other than the effigy which takes the form of a person, the other two symbols (lorry and boat) have container-like body thus creating a very strong image through which the requirements of the ritual can be understood.

The symbolic objects combine with the movement motif to culminate in a successful portrayal of the cleansing ritual. The play, *The Strong Breed*, is full of movements; in fact, the characters are hardly in the same place, just talking while seated. There is a lot of action. Even the girl, who introduces the first action of the ritual, keeps moving (walking or running) around with the carrier. The old man upon holding the content of the boat, runs and the men who lay the burden in him follow him at a trot. The words suggesting movement are highlighted. The following extracts trace the activities from the beginning of the ritual to its end. He (the old man) refers to the event he is now undertaking as his 'last journey' (to the river):

*It is a narrow passage-way between two mud houses. At the far end one man after another is seen **running** across the entry, the noise dying off gradually. As the noise dies off, he seems to relax, but the alert-hunted look is still in his eyes which are ringed in reddish colour... (Bold mine, p.107)*

As the two elders, Jaguna and Oroge discuss Eman a while later, Jaguna asks, 'what made him run like a coward?' (p.102) Then at the scene where Eman freezes and reflects on his father's role as a carrier, the following takes place:

Oroge ... looks behind him to see what has engaged Eman's attention... Jaguna **enters** sees him and shouts, 'Here he is', **rushes** at Eman who is whipped back to the immediate and **flees**, Jaguna **in pursuit**. Three or four others **enter and follow** them. (p.106, Bold mine)

Towards the end of the ritual, when Eman is thirsty and the girl betrays him, the truth dawns on him suddenly and he 'moves off, sadly' (p.115). At the very end as Eman makes his way to the stream, he says, 'wait, I am coming with you...' after which he steps on the twigs and he dies.

The above are just some of the extracts that capture the chronological progress of the ritual. The highlighted words make the movement motif in the play undeniable. The movements work up to a climax in which the victim or rather the volunteer of community sacrifice dies. Of what implication then are the movements? Movement creates the impression of transition, a tearing apart of oneself from something or from one place to one another. At its depth, it symbolises growth. This is why at some stage mid-the ritual, we are treated with Eman's violent break up from his village, his father and his spouse, Omae. Eman justifies this movement thus: 'A man must go on his own, go where no one can help him, and test his strength'. It is this conviction that makes Eman act in the

following way: 'His face set, Eman slides off and Omae loses balance as he increases his pace. Falling, she quickly wraps her arms around his ankle, but Eman continues unchecked, dragging her along' (p.114). We can rightly conclude that without this initial movement, the society in question would lack the services of the 'strong breed' which Eman has to offer.

For the rest of the society, the movement has the same implication. It is a leaving behind of their unpleasant past to embrace a new self after exorcising (purging) themselves of their guilt by sacrificing the carrier and driving it away. Soyinka thus uses movement as part of the cleansing ritual to communicate the importance of accepting change. There is no static rite of passage, for such would mean a static community, which maintains the status quo by getting stuck up in their incompleteness. The transition, which Eman initiates, is a collective call for society members to experience. This way, it is evident that Soyinka thus does fashion his drama alongside his idea that '[r]itual equates the divine (superhuman) cleansing with the communal will fusing the social with spiritual... the ritual sublimated or expressive, is both social therapy and reaffirmation of group solidarity' (1988:71). The ritual cleansing in **The Strong Breed** is aimed at social therapy and group solidarity.

The three elaborate flashback scenes also bring out another aspect of the ritual in **The Strong Breed** which cannot be overlooked, that is, the relationship between the present, the past and the future. Through this technique Eman

meets with his father (who is already dead). In the ensuing dialogue, Eman's role is explained. Shortly after this dialogue, Eman has a vision in which he witnesses the cleansing ritual as performed by his father. He now has had both the theory and demonstration of the practice. It is left to him to play his part. The second flashback bears some complications so that there is character-merge when Eman, still as a carrier, has a conversation with his already dead wife, Omae. It is as though Eman is a formation of both his past and his presenting the third flashback; we are treated to information that Eman has a son (by Omae) who too is a 'strong breed' (women die as they give birth to these carriers). Then Eman dies soon after a conversation with his father a case which creates the impression of a dramatic union of the present and the past. It is as though the dead (Eman's father) stretches their hand to receive the living (Eman) who must pass on into the next world. Thus with a calculated economy of words, the present (represented by Eman) merges into the past (the old man's world) and the future (Omae's son's world). This is a central idea in the Yoruba cosmology – the present learning from the past, and the future having its foundation on the present.

The Role of the Scapegoat

Even though the two rituals – self-sacrifice and ritual cleansing – have been treated in isolation, they are not unrelated; nor are the tragic characters involved different. The activities of both Elesin and Eman fit both characters very well in the scapegoat scheme – in the sense that they are supposed to lose their lives

for the society to survive into the future. They are set apart to be 'the grain of wheat' that falls to the ground to guarantee new growth. The success of the ritual in each case depends on their performance.

The combined role played by Eman and Elesin has significance in the wider Yoruba cosmology. Just like in the world of the plays, the role is that of the saviour; it is the role of the victim for sacrifice. The two tasks of the two characters form the function of a community scapegoat. As has been observed at the beginning of this chapter, such role is meant to bridge the gulf and make transition in the area / stages of existence smooth. Only after Eman and Elesin have performed their duties can the living coexist in harmony with the dead.

Also the events in rituals call to mind de Graft's views on the function of drama. The human community threatened by their own inadequacies as well as the hostile environment design 'those rituals of apprehension, propitiation, purification and exorcism' (de Graft, 1979:4). The Yoruba society therefore opts for a ritual of propitiation through Elesin to placate their dead king and for the continued well-being. Through Eman, the Yoruba society begs for purification and exorcism rituals to rid themselves of their human failings and guilt and look forward to a better future. Both rituals are clearly community rituals. The anxiety, aspiration and participation of the community in the plays are the same as that of the Yoruba community in the traditional rituals. Both communities reach out for

CHAPTER FOUR: A NEW SOCIAL ORDER

This chapter recognises changes in society, which Wole Soyinka explores in his two texts. At its core, it evaluates the shifts from societal options for Ifada to Eman (in **The Strong Breed**) and from Elesin Oba to his son, Olunde (in **Death and the King's Horseman**). The process of analysis has its point of departure rooted in Soyinka's critical observation of relationships in Yoruba cosmology – that the purpose of life is to maintain balance within and across the four areas of existence. This goes hand in hand with the concept of salvation in which the survival of the society is assured. Thus the principle which or the individual who leads the society successfully into a good future (informed by the present and rooted in the past) provides the greatest morality of African society. The task in this chapter involves the examination of the performance of the tragic characters in the ritual (in the texts) as well as the prescriptions in supporting myths.

Eman Versus Ifada

The purification ritual in **The Strong Breed** gives a central position to the services of an outsider. For this society then, Ifada, a dumb boy, whom Eman describes as helpless and unwilling for the task is a 'godsend' in Jaguna's words. He does not have to be willing to provide the required services. Oroge explains the reason behind the community's hospitality to the mentally retarded:

This is not a cheap task for anybody. No one in his normal senses would do such a job. Why do you think we give refuge to idiots like him? We don't know where he came from. One morning, he is

simply there, just like that. From nowhere at all you see, there is a purpose in that. (Soyinka, 1979:98)

Eman, another outsider to this society has different perspectives from Oroge's and Jaguna's: The salvation of the society must lie within itself and the saviour must be willing. He says, 'A village which cannot produce its own carrier contains no men' (p.98) and 'in my home we believe that a man should be willing' (p.97). It is this new perspective – Eman's view of the ritual of community cleansing – which brings about a very significant change in the events of the ritual. Soon after this exchange Ifada is released and encounter Eman as the people's new carrier. Though not explicitly stated, we have been led to conclude that he (Eman) has volunteered for the task. After all, Jaguna's last word to Eman had been a challenge to step in Ifada's shoes: 'There is only one other stranger in the village [Eman], but I have not heard him offer himself' (p.99).

In terms of the ritual prescription, the process is breached at various points and in various ways. Ifada, the first carrier bolts with fear into Eman's house against the prescriptions of the ritual which Jaguna summarises thus: 'A carrier should end up in the bush, not in a house. Anyone who doesn't guard his door when the carrier goes by has himself to blame. A contaminated house should be burnt down' (p. 97). Oroge, also explains, 'a carrier should never return to the village and if he does, the people ought to stone him to death' (p.97). Ifada's is the first of the many cases of contamination in the ritual. Soon after Eman takes up the task, he escapes his pursuers and their fear strike once again. Jaguna

expresses the community's concern, 'we must find him. It is a poor beginning for a year when our own curses remain hovering over our homes because the carrier refused to take them' (p.102). Like the Biblical scapegoat, the carrier must end away from the already purified community. From this moment in the play until the end when the carrier dies, there is mounting fear, that the ritual may not be a success. As Jaguna explains:

...things have taken a bad turn. It is not enough to drive him [Eman, the carrier] past every house. There is too much contamination about already... there is too much harm done already. The year will demand more from this carrier than we thought. (p.100)

For Oroge, 'this is an unhappy night for us. I fear what is to come of it' (p.107).

An audience watching this play does not have to speculate about what may be demanded of the carrier. So much in the play suggests that he must die for all evil heaped on him to cease and this ultimately is his fate.

The implication of the contamination in the process of the ritual in the text poses a threat to human existence in the society. Failure or deficiencies in the ritual imply that these problems of the society would be carried into the New Year, into the future. When Eman dies, at the end of the play, the reader, the audience, the critic, is still left with a puzzle to solve: has the ritual been a success? Does Eman's self-sacrifice fit in Soyinka's definition of the greatest / essential morality? Extracts from the last page of the play paint a clear picture of things at the end of the ritual: 'almost at once, the villagers begin to return, subdued and guilty. They

walk across the front, skirting the house as widely as they can. No word is exchanged' (p.119). Jaguna and Oroge discussing the people's reaction of cowardice, guilty and shame observe the following:

Jaguna: Then it is a sorry world to live in. We did it for them. It was all for their own common good. What did it benefit me whether the man lived or died? But did you see them? One and all they looked 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 off like sick dogs. Not one could raise a curse.

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

A moment of guilty and shame mark the end of the ritual. There is lack of happiness and excitement, which should mark the New Year, a new beginning of life. The extract provides another of the several parallels between Jesus and Eman. Soyinka, perhaps under the influence of Christianity, makes people react to Eman's death in a similar way the Jews do to Jesus: 'when the people who had gathered there to watch the spectacle saw what had happened, they all went back, beating their breast in sorrow' (Luke 23:48). They (the people who partake in this ritual of cleansing) too feel guilt and shame for the deed in which they willingly participated.

Perhaps the guilt and shame is the beginning of the desired change. The silence that augments the overall grim and solemn mood is characteristic of a reflective

self, which deliberates on consequential matters. Eman's sacrificial death has definitely planted something new in the village, which may grow – the community should choose to nurture or kill it. But growth, if it must take place. Will have to handle the obstacles of the voices of reaction which are already at work. Like all change Eman's is resisted. Jaguna, one of the elders sees Eman's new vision arising out of willing sacrifice as threatening the old regime. He observes: 'There are those who will pay for this night's work!' Thus what the end of the ritual (and indeed the end of the play) brings about is a conflict. Soyinka uses an old ritual in a new way to challenge an existing order of things. He does not provide an easily acceptable situation at the end of the play. At first sight, the scene at the end suggests pessimism, that Eman's death is a waste. But Soyinka defends himself by asserting that such pessimism is realism. In an interview with John Aguta (1975), Soyinka describes such pessimism as 'nothing but a very square, sharp look'. He continues:

I have depicted scenes of devastation, I have depicted the depression in the minds even of those who are committed to these changes and who are actively engaged in these changes simply because it would be starry-eyed to do otherwise. One should not peruse what is not there. Only one thing can be guaranteed and that is the principle of accepting the challenges of life, of society in the same way as nature does.

With this in mind, it is no wonder that Soyinka designs his protagonist (Eman) as both committed to change but disillusioned at the same time. He starts off

enthusiastically but mid-way, he breaks down tired: 'I will simply stay here till dawn. I have done enough' (Soyinka, 1979:101). In fact towards the end of the play, Eman is characterised by weakness of the will and lack of clear vision in his mission.

Olunde Versus Elesin

In **Death and the King's Horseman**, Elesin like Eman is charged with the responsibility of providing survival for the society 'to overtake the world' and maintain a balance of forces in the area of existence. As Moore (1980) says, Soyinka presents his hero with a crucial test. He must face personal extinction in order that the continuity of the community and its values may be assured. The choice is his own voluntary death or the death of those traditional values which preserve the community. Elesin, like Ifada is a community's choice for the ritual sacrifice by the virtue of being born to his family. Like Eman's case or even more, the ritual in **Death and the King's Horseman** is breached. Elesin Oba's intentions and actions fail to harmonise, therefore creating an onset of the play's conflict. The intentions are expressed in the following words:

My rein is loosened.

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

Watch me dance along the narrowing path

Glanced by soles of my great precursors

My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside. (Soyinka, 1975:14)

However, when 'the hour comes', he fails to 'raise his will to cut the thread of life at the summons of the drums' (p.75). In the process of the ritual, his will weakens to such a level that he cannot successfully perform his task.

From the beginning of the play, one can easily doubt Elesin Oba's commitment to the course of upholding and preserving his people's culture. His indulgence is opposed to the spiritual abstinence associated with people preparing to undertake spiritual rituals such as his. Even though in all his life as the king's horseman, the best has always been his – he has had the juiciest fruits and wooed (women) and 'rarely was the answer no' (p.18) – he still makes two demands on the important day when the world should now receive from him. The first is for rich clothes and the request is nothing compared to the saving mission which Elesin is to carry out. So Iyaloja and other women grant it with a reminder that 'the world is in [his] hands' (p.18).

Secondly, Elesin's lecherous self craves for a girl who is already promised in marriage to Iyaloja's son. Elesin's sexual desires are evident in Iyaloja's description of him. She says: 'even at the narrow end of the passage I know you will look back and sigh a last regret for the flesh that flashed past your spirit in flight. You always had a restless eye' (p.22). Elesin's request cannot be denied him as Iyaloja observes, 'the best is [his]. We know you [Elesin] for a man of honour' (p.20) and later she convinces the women that Elesin Oba is 'already touched by the wailing figures of our departed' (p.21). However, alongside the

granting of his request is a constant reminder to Elesin not to 'blight the happiness of others for a moment's pleasure' (p.20). Iyaloja on behalf of the community expresses fear over the complications of fathering a child in the circumstances. She tells Elesin:

Think of this – it makes the mind tremble. The fruit of such union is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next, nor of the one behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor world and the unborn have joint spirits to wring an issue of the elusive being of passage. (p.22)

Elesin listens to all these warnings but still accedes to the temptation to give in to lust. But now even at his worst, Elesin is still true to type. He is closely modelled on Soyinka's archetype, Ogun.

When Ogun had accepted to be King of Ire, he was beguiled by the trickster god, Esu, to gorge himself in palm wine. Drunkenness empowered the deity to conquer his enemies. However, under the influence of alcohol, friend and foe became confused and he turned on his men and slaughtered them. His indulgence like Elesin's led to his destructive nature. Even at the sight of such destruction, Ogun unlike Obatala, makes palm wine mandatory in his worship. He is in Ofeimun's words; a 'hot' god confronting life's challenges head long. Then there is Ogun's association with sex, which Ofeimun (2003) opts to explain in relation to Ogun's nature as a warrior and hunter. He observes:

A naturalistic explanation inheres is the timeless truth that warriors and hunters – and where do you find an army that is not involved with wine and women – are wine-swilling tribe. It may tell us a lot about the pragmatic nature of the Yoruba but it tell us more about the general nature of the warrior ethic which Ogun personified.

So Elesin through his indulgence to dress and sex is just a representative of Ogun in Soyinka's drama. May be he too has been tricked by Esu, the spirit of disorder. The result is a threat to the community's life since from the moment Elesin desires are gratified; the ritual is headed for ruins. One may note, as Moore (1980) does, that ironically, Elesin's desires hold him to life instead of freeing him to execute his duty.

Upon interference with the ritual, Elesin knows as everyone else in the society, that their values are threatened: 'The world is not at peace. You [Pilkings] have shattered the peace of the world forever. There is no sleep in the world tonight' (Soyinka, 1975:62). Even though there is an outside force to blame for the failure of the ritual, Elesin's weakness of will springs from his relationship with the girl. He admits:

First I blamed the white man, then I blamed you [my young bride] for the mystery of the sapping of my will. ... I have taken countless women in my life but you are more than a desire of flesh. ... Perhaps your warmth brought new insight of this world

to me and turned my feet leaden on this side of the abyss. ... I confess ... my weakness came not merely from the abomination of white man who came violently into my fading presence; there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. (p.65)

Elesin's failure to have successful transition between the world of the living and that of the ancestors, threatens not only those two stages of existence but the future too (represented by the child he has fathered). He threatens existence by beginning new life while at the same time failing to open the door to a new existence. His weakened will is likely to be passed on to the new generation as Iyaloja observes, 'the pith is gone in the parent stem, so how will it prove with the new shoot?' (p.68) The threat is evident in the last line of the play in which the young mother is advised to forget about the living and the dead and to focus her attention solely on the future (the unborn child she is carrying in her). She must safeguard the interests of this future generation.

As already noted, the failure of the ritual cannot wholly be blamed on Elesin's personal weakness. Elesin says that his will deserted him when Mr. Pilkings bound his wrists in iron shackles. The Pilkings (husband and wife) represent colonisation and indeed colonization does sweep away people's culture. The play documents an incidence where the Pilkings play with *egungun* (ancestral masquerade) confiscated from a Yoruba sacred ceremony. This is desecration and it amounts to undermining the Yoruba culture as well as attempting to wipe it out. Even the learned Olunde understanding the implication of the Pilkings' action

gives a mild admonition. He asks Jane, 'And that [the prince's party] is a good cause for which you desecrate an ancestral mask?' (p.50) Mr. Pilkings' interruption at the opportune moment in which Elesin is supposed to die, becomes a critical stage in the chain of threats to the continuity of the Yoruba traditions.

Furthermore, there is another minute yet significant detail. When Elesin is arrested, he is held in 'that annex where slaves were stored before being taken down to the court' (p. 58). This reference to slavery has important implication. It is a reminder of a historical fact in which African culture (as well as politics and economy) suffered at the hands of the Whites in the Americas and the Caribbean. To imprison Elesin in this room is not just to enslave him as a person but also to imprison the traditions of his entire community which he wishes to preserve in the ritual sacrifice. Thus in this single action, the West attempts to arrest and enslave Yoruba culture. Significantly, Elesin dies in the same cellar and with his death the keen reader nearly feels the death of Yoruba traditions through total subjugation by the West. The threat is enormous and therefore a remedy must be designed to reverse the process. This is how and why Olunde, the centre of the following discussion comes to the scene.

Elesin like Ifada (in **The Strong Breed**) fails to fit in Soyinka's scheme of heroic individuals whose act is meant for the salvation of the society. This is evident in the Praise Singer's blame for Elesin:

Elesin, 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 blind future. (p.75)

It is just like Soyinka to strongly assert that there is something that 'one man' can do for the society. He chastises, through Elesin, those who fail to realise that individuals are charged with social responsibilities.

Both Ifada and Elesin share the same weakness – lack of willingness and the strength of their will power. The outsider, Mr. Pilkings knows Elesin's weakness and capitalises on it. He thinks of an old Yoruba proverb, 'the elder grimly approaches heaven and you ask him to bear your greetings yonder; do you think he makes the journey willingly?' (p.64) After this, he does not hesitate to 'rescue' Elesin from what he considers a dreadful situation. Both characters (Ifada in **The Strong Breed** and Elesin in **Death and the King's Horseman**) must therefore be dropped for Soyinka to advance his theory of salvation. It is within Soyinka's style that Olunde should bear his father's burden and kill himself to ensure survival for his community. To counter the threat to African culture (whether such threat is an outside force like colonisation or individual weakness like Elesin's), 'the intellectual adherence to indigenous culture, associated with a young generation of the educated is required' (Kerr, 1995:121). Olunde represents this

generation. He arrives at the scene decisive and enthusiastic. He understands exactly why his father should die and that is why he travels from England to take his rightful position in the order of things. When his father fails in his duty, Olunde renounces him, 'I have no father, eater of left-overs' (p.61).

However, like Eman's death in **The Strong Breed**, Soyinka does not explicitly state the role of Olunde's sacrificial death to the Yoruba cosmology. It is open for speculation. There is a feeling of uncertainty among the member of the society over the reversal of roles between Elesin and his son, Olunde. The Praise Singer's last speech summarises the community's position: 'What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured in sap into the parent stalk and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers' (p.75). So is Olunde's death necessary or wasteful? Griffiths (2000) thinks that it is both. Quoting Achebe, that each one must dance the dance of his time, he says that Olunde like the girls, could have functioned to resist the destructive impact of the coloniser in ways Elesin cannot. Olunde must sacrifice his own dance to complete the unfinished dance of his father a dance not intended for him. Moore (1980) agrees with the last statement when he suggests that Soyinka wishes that someone of Olunde's background renounces his education in reverence to the ways of his people. This study has a different position. Olunde does not sacrifice his own dance (his education) to save his society from the impending destruction. He displays knowledge of the West as well as rootedness in his own African culture. As such, he is in a better position

(than Elesin's) to lead his society into the salvation they seek. His father, Elesin, says of Olunde:

Once I mistrusted him for seeking the companionship of those my spirit knew as enemies of our race, now I understand. One should seek to obtain the secrets of his enemies. He will avenge my shame white one. His spirit will destroy yours. (Soyinka, 1975:63)

Soyinka's view is very much similar to Achebe's. In *The Arrow of God*, Ezeulu the traditional priest gives one of his sons to the church to learn the secrets of the white man. The strategy of sending a spy into the enemy camp is a wise step in the plot to conquer the enemy.

The question is thus not so much as to whether Olunde's death is necessary or wasteful. In fact, the emphasis is not on death at all. Of greatest significance, Soyinka seems to imply, is the spirit behind the (self) sacrifice. The spirit, which is intended at destroying the white man's, is a spirit of willingness and a strong will power that pervades Olunde's heroic act. The spirit is evident in his discussion of self-sacrifice with Jane Pilkings. Even at the sight of his father spared from death, Olunde is not tempted to embrace a meaningless life by embracing his father. Such act would be tantamount to acceptance of failure and weakness which his father represents. 'He [Olunde] stares above his [Elesin's] head into the distance and his father pleads, 'Son, don't let the sight of your father turn you blind!' (p.60). These lines could be taken literally to mean that Olunde stares at a distance to avoid getting blind (for otherwise would be a

taboo), but also at a deeper level, the lines imply something else. Olunde by fixing his eyes away from the present moment transcends his father's failures for only then can he offer a successful remedy. As his father says, he (Olunde) has a choice not to be disillusioned ('blinded') by his father's conduct. He definitely demonstrates his ability for choice and remains focused and unclouded. It is such a clear vision, rather than guilt or embarrassment, which leads to Olunde's self sacrifice.

The New Versus the Old Order

The foregoing discussion has presented Soyinka's fascination with a new order of things. In both texts, it cannot be dismissed as a minor detail that Soyinka lets an apparently old order fail and replaces it with a new one. The transition however is very quick but smooth. Ifada and Elesin represent the old order. They are meant to carry out the old rituals in an apparently old way. They do not choose themselves but are rather forced into their roles by the society. Interestingly, Ifada is dropped at an early stage in the play unlike Elesin who is the centre of focus in **Death and the King's Horseman** for most of the play. The reason for Soyinka's treatment of the two characters lies in their understanding of the task presented to them. Ifada completely lacks knowledge as well as willingness to partake in the ritual and for this he cannot serve Soyinka's interests in creating a saviour. Elesin Oba starts off with full knowledge of his task as well as a feeling that he does not have an option but to undergo the tragic experience. He is thus willing to honour the prescription of his society. However, his is only

blind obedience of the law for when another law is presented to him by Mr. Pilkings, he complies with an excuse that 'there might be the hand of gods in a strangers intervention' (69). He too cannot fit into Soyinka's description of a saviour for he lack the self-drive to sustain him throughout his mission.

Eman and Olunde represent the new order which must thrive. Eman starts off like Elesin with knowledge of what the society demands of a carrier. But he goes beyond mere societal prescription to a willing acceptance of a task that is not initially cut out for him in the community in which he undertakes (but meant for him in his homeland). In fact, he is persuaded by the custom of his homeland to accept the position of a carrier. He observes: 'in my home we believe that a man should be willing' (Soyinka, 1979:97). By using a person who is not willing, Eman sees it as deceit and attempt to fool the spirit of the New Year. The outcome of such a ritual can hardly be fruitful. In the old order of the ritual, no one in his senses would do such a job, but Eman and Olunde are in their normal senses. They set their mind resolutely to take up the necessary task. The new order demands that one be in the right frame of mind so as to be fully responsible for his and to his society. Soyinka, by letting a man travel and introduce change in a different society seems to imply, that no society is complete on its own. The theory and practice of culture needs to be enriched by an authentic mingling of cultures.

Olunde too, like Eman has travelled. He has knowledge which his father lacks. He knows the difference between self-sacrifice and mass suicide, the latter being a characteristic of wars in the West. Olunde too, like Eman starts off as a mere prescription of the society – called by his own ‘blood’ to be a victim of sacrifice. A woman admonishing Sergeant Amusa for attempting to disrupt Elesin’s ritual says: ‘Is it not the same ocean that washes this land and the white man’s land? Tell your white man he can hide our son away as long as he likes. When the time comes for him, the same ocean will bring him back’ (Soyinka, 1975:35). He however moves to a higher level of making a deliberate choice to offer his services prematurely.

Basically, the difference between the old and the new order is willingness and will power. The latter has these qualities while the former lacks them. For example, the difference between Olunde and his father lies principally in Olunde’s will power to take away his life. This is clearly in Soyinka’s view. He writes:

The stage of transition is however the metaphysical abyss both of god and man. ... [N]othing rescues man (ancestral, living or unborn) from loss of self within this abyss but a titanic resolution of the will. (1976:36)

He advocates for ‘titanic resolution’ and empowers his two characters (Olunde and Eman) with it while juxtaposing them with Elesin Oba and Ifada. Elesin’s ultimate death thus becomes useless because the wrong spirit – not will power but shame and guilt feeling, fires it. Soyinka, through his treatment of change

embraces the concept of *Ese*, which is an important principle in the Yoruba culture. *Ese* refers to the principle of struggle and self-help as opposed to *Ori*, the principle of predestination. *Ese* requires that a person struggles and works hard to bring the potentialities of her or his *Ori* to fruition. It is the symbol of activity that must accompany any successful human endeavour. *Ese* is what Elesin lacks – he depends very much on *Ori* and therefore fails. The new order of things must make use of *Ese* to have a fruitful present and future.

To conclude this chapter, we realise that we are led by preceding discussion to judge that Soyinka advocates for a new dimension in relation to the concept of a society's salvation. He portrays a transition from a mere sufferer, scapegoat who is manhandled to accept the role, to a saviour who is willing. Soyinka's knowledge of Christianity might have influenced him to design his characters (Olunde and Eman) along the concept of *kenosis*. This is a Greek word, which refers to the self-emptying of Jesus. The Christ is described as humbling and emptying himself of his own free will: 'He always had the nature of God but He did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had and took the nature of a servant' (**Philippians 2:6-7**). The saviour therefore has a choice. He can reject or accept the call put to him. This however, is not a new concept. Soyinka's patron deity, Ogun, on whom he fashions Olunde and Eman, is described as willing in his task. He freely chooses to initiate a movement to bring the other orishas and human beings to communion. He chooses without coercion to clear the bush for

the community's expanding population. This being his character, he is the informing principle on which Soyinka must create a saviour for his Yoruba, and indeed, African society, against the threat of modern civilisation.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study set out to investigate the metaphysical theme as it is treated in Soyinka's **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Strong Breed**. It aimed at identifying the myths or details of Yoruba mythology on which the two plays are founded. The task also involved inquiring into rituals employed in the plays while relating the same to Yoruba traditional practices. But the study did not merely seek to identify these myths and rituals. It also aimed at revealing the significance that the playwright attaches to these myths and rituals in artistic terms. This means that the myths and rituals have both aesthetic value in the literary sense as well as cosmological signification in relation to the Yoruba metaphysics.

The study has argued in chapter two that the two texts are steeped into Yoruba mythology. This points to the author's comprehensive knowledge of his people's mythology, which finds expression in his creative work. Alongside reference to gods, is a treatment of the physical environment in the plays, especially **The Strong Breed**, as though it has divine characteristics. These two aspects – the reference to Yoruba orishas and the deification of environment – function as revealing lenses to prepare the reader of Soyinka for what to expect and what to is required to understand the plays.

The playwright does not explicitly state all other aspects of Yoruba mythology inherent in the plays. The case of the Ogun myth is a subtle one. However, the

study does in chapter two piece details provided in the plays together. The tragic characters are thus tailored alongside the characteristics of Ogun, Soyinka's patron deity. Both cases of Ogun (historical and mythical) and the protagonists in **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Strong Breed**, have the same qualities and function in the same way – as leaders who conscious of the social problems of their communities, set out to save the situation.

In chapter three, the study explores the theme of the scapegoat. **Death and the King's Horseman** utilises the ritual of self-sacrifice which demands Elesin's and ultimately Olunde's sacrificial death. **The Strong Breed** uses a purification rite which too demands Eman's death for its success. In both cases, Elesin, Olunde and Eman are fashioned as scapegoats. They are meant to carry the community's faults and social and psychological burdens and rid the community of its guilt, so as to ensure peaceful and productive future. The discussion has concretised the scapegoat theme of the plays by linking the events of the rituals to those of the biblical scapegoat rite. The rituals are further linked to the Yoruba metaphysical world. The events in the literary text bear significance in the wide cosmology. They are ways of restoring society members to periods of grace and glory.

The third chapter also established Soyinka as a literary writer as opposed to an anthropologist or a sociologist. The playwright does not merely give a plain description of the proceedings of the rituals. He instead presents the same in a

creative and artistic way so that it is left to reader to scale out the various stages of the rituals. Thus as the discussion in chapter three has demonstrated, the plays make use of dramatic techniques carefully selected to successfully develop the rituals and move their (rituals') participants to desired response. These techniques include Yoruba traditional theatre forms such as drumming, song and dance. In short, chapter three designates **Death and the King's Horseman** and **The Strong Breed** as literary texts whose part of construction has sociological materials.

The study in chapter four focuses on a changing trend evident in both of Soyinka's texts. The basis of argument is Soyinka's critical remark that the highest morality is that which guarantees survival / continuity to the entire society. The discussion has demonstrated how such survival is threatened by the breach of the rituals by Ifada in **The Strong Breed** and Elesin in **Death and the King's Horseman**. The failure in the prescribed performance by the two characters necessitates a choice for more competent personalities who would successfully deliver the required services. The community's preferred option fails and with it, it appears that, an old order fails and must of necessity be substituted with a new and more efficient one. The older is characterised by service to the community being viewed as a compulsory affair. In the new order, individuals are presented with a duty, the requirements of which are well understood, and then a call is extended to the individuals for acceptance or rejection. Thus unlike Ifada

and Elesin, Eman's and Olunde's deaths are matters of choice by the two characters.

In the light of its objectives thus, the study establishes that Soyinka uses Yoruba myths and rituals as raw material for his creative work. He is however critical of these myths and rituals. This is why he gives an artistic rather than a mere sociological documentation of the rituals and myths. He refuses to be directed fully by their prescriptions. Consequently, he introduces a new perspective to the existing social order. Aware of changes in the modern world, he creates a transition from the traditional subjection of one to duty, to an element of freedom of choice characteristic of modern life in the world, whether Europe or Yoruba land in Nigeria.

An area for further research could invite a focus on how the changing trends in the modern world influences Soyinka's later writing. Does he still lean on mythology to make his case? The interest then would be on how he perceives and treats the social and political environment of his people in the light of modernity. This may involve an evaluation of a cross-section of his texts written in 1980s through 1990s to his 2006 publication, **You Must Set Forth at Dawn**.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbrecht, M., J. barenett, Griff, J. (ed.s, 1999). The Sociology of Art and Literature. N.Y.: Praeger Publishers.
- Abimbola, W. (1994). 'Ifa: A West African Cosmological System?' in Religion in African Experience and Expression by Blakely, T.D., 1914. London: James Currey.
- Abimbola, W. (1976). Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus. Ibadan: OUP.
- Achebe, C. (1964). Arrow of God. London: HEB.
- Achebe, C. (1975). Morning Yet on Creation Day. London: HEB.
- Agetua, J. (1975). When the Man Die: View, Reviews and Interview on Wole Soyinka's controversial Book. Benin, Nigeria: HV 9865.5 A 15. August, 1975. Interview by Louis S. Gates. Blackworld, V 24, #10
- Bascom, R. (1965). A Survey of Social Research. London: Heinman.
- Beier, U. (ed.,1970). Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Bernett, J. (1959). 'The Sociology of Art' in Sociology Today. N.Y.: Harper Torchbook.
- Bidney, D. (1966). 'Myth, Symbolism and Truth' in Myth and Literature by Vickery, J. B. (ed), Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Blakely, T.D. (1994). Religion in African Expression and Expression. London: James Currey.
- Conversations with Wole Soyinka. [Online] Regents of the University of California, 1998.

- Courlander, H. (1973). Tales of Yoruba Gods and Heroes. N.Y.: Crown Publishers Inc.
- Eco, U. (1985). Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language. London: Macmillan.
- Ellis, J.M. (1974). The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Critical Analysis. N.Y.:University of California.
- Eshwani, G. S. (1989). A Guide to the Writing of a Research Proposal. Naorobi: Unpublished.
- Etherton, M. (1982). The Development of African Drama. London: Hutchinson.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). Oral Literature in Africa. Oxford: OUP.
- Fraser, J. G. (1963).The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (Abridged Ed.). London: OUP.
- Fraser, J.G. (1957). The New Golden Bough. N.Y.: Criterion Books.
- Gibbs, J. (ed.,1987). Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka. Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Gibbs, J., Lindfors, B (ed.s, 1993). Research on Wole Soyinka. Trenton: African World Press, Inc.
- Goldschmidt, W. (1960). Exploring the Ways of mankind. N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Graft, J. C. de. (1979). 'Roots of African Drama and Theatre' in African Literature Today, Vol 10 by Jones E.D. (ed.). Nrb: Heinemann.
- Griffiths ,G. (2000). African Literature in English. London: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Guerber, H. (1988). Great Mythology Series: Greece and Rome. London:

Chancellor Press.

Gugelberger G. M. (ed., 1985). Marxism and African Literature. London: James

Currey Ltd.

Hayness, J. (1995). Style. London: Routledge.

Jones, E.D. (ed., 1979). African Literature Today. Vol. 10. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Jones E.D. (ed., 1981). African Literature Today, Vol. 8. London: Heinemann.

Jones, E. D. (ed., 1981). African Literature Today, Vol. 9. London: Heinemann.

Jones, E. D. (ed., 1988). The Writing of Wole Soyinka. London: James Currey.

Jones, E.D., Palmer, E., Jones, M. (ed.s, 1991). The Question of Language in

African in Literature Today. London: James Currey.

Kerr, D. (1995). African Popular Theatre. Oxford: OUP.

King, B., Ogunbesan K. (ed.s, 1975). A Celebration of Black and African

Writing. Oxford: OUP.

Kluckholm, C. (1966). 'Myths and Rituals' in Myth and Literature by Vickery, J. B.

(ed). Lincoln: University of Nebraska.

Knappert, J. (1977). Bantu Myths and Other Tales. The Netherlands: E.J. Brill,

Leiden.

Lubbock, P. (1957). The Craft of Fiction. London: The Viking Press.

Mbiti, J.S. (1969). African Religions and Philosophy. Nairobi: EAEP.

Mbiti, J.S. (1971). New Testament Eschatology in an African background: A Study

of Encounter Between New Testament Theology and African

Traditional Concepts. Oxford: OUP.

- Merriam, A.P. (1964). The Anthropology of Music. Evaston: North-Western University Press.
- Moore, G. (1980). Wole Soyinka. Oxford: OUP.
- Mugambi, J.K. (1990). A Comparative Study of Religions. Nrb: Nairobi University Press.
- Mugenda, O., A. Mugenda. (1999). Research Methods. NRB: African Centre for Technology Studies.
- Murray, H.A. (ed; 1960). Myth and Myth-making. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Nowotny, W. (1991). The Language Poets Use. Ondon: The Athlone Press.
- Obote, M. (1989). The Vision of Heroic Self in Soyinka's Tragic Drama. Nairobi: Unpublished.
- Ofeimun, O. (2003). In Search of Ogun: Soyinka, Nietzsche and the Edo Century. [Online] The 2003 Egharevba Memorial Lecture.
- Ogungbesan, K. (ed., 1979). New West African Literature. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Olilo, M. (2002). Myths and Rituals in the Works of Francis D. Imbuga. Nairobi: Unpublished.
- P'Bitek, O. (1986). Artist the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture and Values. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya.
- Pears, D.F. (1966). The Nature of Metaphysics. N.Y.: St. Martins Press.
- Righter, W. (1975). Myth and Literature. London: Routledge & Degan Paul.
- Roscoe, A. (1971). Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature. Cambridge: CUP.

Ruthven, K. (1976). Myth. London: Methuen & CO. Ltd.

Sociological Theory. [Online] <http://uchicago.edu/PRELIMS/theory/weber.html>

Soyinka, W. (1960). A Dance of the Forest. Cambridge: CUP.

Soyinka, W. (1975). Death and the King's Horseman. Cambridge: CUP.

Soyinka, W. (1976). Myth, Literature and African World. Cambridge: CUP.

Soyinka, W. (1979). Three Short Plays. Oxford: OUP.

Soyinka, W. (1981). Ake: The Years of Childhood. Cambridge: CUP.

Soyinka, W. (1988). 'Between Self and System' in Art, Dialogue and Outrage.
Cambridge: CUP.

Stephen, D (1991). English Literature: A Student Guide. London: Longman
Group UK Ltd.

The African Bible. (1999). Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

Thiong'o, N. Wa. (1972). Homecoming. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Thiong'o, N. Wa. (1981). Writers in Politics. Nairobi: Heinemann.

Turner, G. W. (1984). Stylistics. London: Penguin Books.

Wales, K. (1994). A Dictionary of Stylistics. London: Longman.

Wallek, R., Warren, A. (1949). The Theory of Literature. London: Penguin Books.

Wilkinson, J. (1990). Talking with African Writers. London: Villiers Publication Ltd.

Wright, E. (ed., 1973). The Critical Evaluation of African Literature. London:
Heinemann.