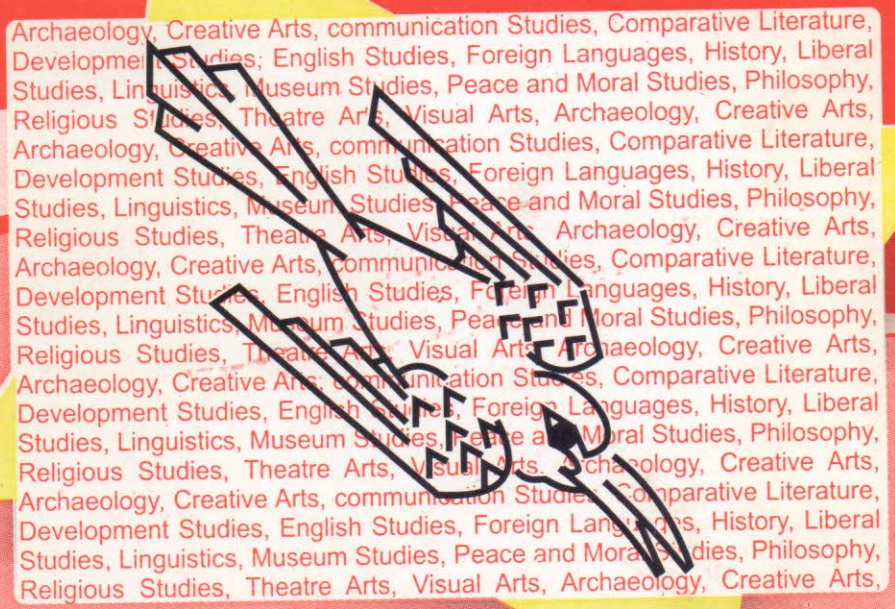
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The fifth Stage (Beyond the Dirge of Ògún & Soyinka's Romance with the Left)

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Wole Soyinka's fourth stage is the supposed stage of ritual theatre and to the African cultural revivalists and the dramatists of the left, it is the abode of 'metaphysical mourning'. The fifth stage, quite generously and as we have observed is, however, Soyinka's living stage and the palpable house of reality. While the fourth stage stupendously mourns the gods, the fifth stage is the stage for social drama. It refuses to sing the dirge of the gods and paradoxically, it demystifies and deconstructs the 'mythopoeic lamentations' of the gods to facilitate the attractions and distractions in the contemporary age. Through the analytical methodology and the dialectical premise of revolution in Soyinka's social drama, this paper examines the fifth stage in the plays of Soyinka. After examining the fourth stage as a journey into the tragic drama of the gods, we also make a panoramic review of the unfilled poetic lacuna in the fourth stage. We conclude on the pedagogy that, there is indeed the fifth stage in the plays of Soyinka which goes beyond 'metaphysical mourning' to the celebration of the complexities and contradictions in the contemporary age, the age of reality. Directors and performers are therefore warned to take some cautionary note: Soyinka is neither a ritual merchant nor a cultural Eurocentric but an African revolutionary of the left, as the plays in his fifth stage project.

KEY WORDS: Soyinka, Fourth stage, Theatre, Ògún, Fifth stage.

The Prologue

The metaphor of the fifth stage in the plays of Wole Soyinka represents Soyinka's dialectical romance with revolution, a robust compendium for the saturated left and a critical reconstitution of the progressive ideology of popular struggle, of Marxism, in spite of the ceaseless disagreement from the critics of the left who are hyper-critical of Soyinka's eclectic and didactic theatre.

Most of Wole Soyinka's celebrated tragedies can, therefore, be rightly placed in the fourth stage. Soyinka's fourth stage, to the African cultural revivalists and the dramatists of the left is, the abode of 'metaphysical mourning' and the supposed stage of ritual theatre. The fifth stage (distinctively and creatively compiled in Soyinka's comedies and satires), quite generously and as we have observed is, however, Soyinka's living stage and the palpable house of reality. While the fourth stage stupendously mourns the gods through tragic canons, the fifth stage is, however, the stage for social drama. It refuses to sing the dirge of the gods and paradoxically, it demystifies and deconstructs the 'mythopoeic lamentations' of the gods to facilitate the attractions and distractions in the contemporary age.

From the resolute yet radical rebellion of the Nigerian literary traducers; Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike in their antagonistic's Toward the Decolonization of African Literature (1980) and their latest but critical comments against James Gibbs, (a Soyinkaerian), humbly titled; "Gibbs's Gibberish" (1993), a crumbling reply

to James Gibbs' "Larsony with a Difference..." (1993), to the highly diplomatic inventive and critical salvo from Femi Osofisan in his Insidious Treason; Drama in a Postcolonial State (2001) and The Nostalgic Drum: Essay on Literature (2001) and many more against Soyinka and his works, only help to reinforce the contestable notion that most of Soyinka's plays are flamboyantly and blatantly, the expressions of ritual theatre and the aesthetic trajectory of tragic sensibilities. This generalization, although axiomatic of a massive Bacchanalian orgy, is but a paradox and a trivialization of the inherent transition and Soyinka's dialectical transformation into fifth stage through his comedies and satires.

For example, Femi Osofisan (the radical pen of African theatre) in The Nostalgic Drum... correspondingly reduces Soyinka to a ritual idol by echoing that:

> For Soyinka, in his works and statements, has done virtually nothing else than call our attention repeatedly to the latency of space, the "area of transition", the "Fourth stage". Examined closely, all his major plays are translations of this second approach of the spatial problem, and are designed along the paradigm of traditional ritual, even if variously located in differing social and political contexts (Osofisan, 2001a:63).

When departing from Soyinka and after examining major heroes of Soyinka's plays, Osofisan re-echoes Soyinka's ritual aesthetics more lucidly and concludes in the Insidious Treasons... that Soyinka's characters "are the metaphoric incantations of this tragic generation" (Osofisan: 2001b:6-7).

In his radical Marxist manifesto which he scholarly titled, "Beyond Jargons and Cliches: A Re-appraisal of Nigerian Committed Drama", Nasiru (1989:39) also says that Soyinka "creates his own gods and fashions his own myths and thus satisfies his own intellectual (or academic?) pre-occupations without seeming to care that he sings his own song all alone" and concludes by propounding "a new philosophy of aesthetic" which he says must be "dictated by the needs of the moment and the realities of present-day Nigeria".

The failure of Soyinka's heroes and his constant romance with ritual theatre as Osofisan and Nasiru strongly suggest is, a temporary relief, a lingering and a one-way interpretation of Soyinka's plays. Soyinka , the crowned king of letter, the literary genius from Ijegba and other international playwrights such as Shakespeare, Moliere, Chekov, Brecht, Pinter and many more, have many parts to themselves. The seeds of Soyinka's plays have many fruits and have taken off through different roots: the social and the political, being the vehicles that make the fifth stage thick.

Muyiwa Awodiya, Osofisan's unrelenting disciple also classified Soyinka and other writers into the group of Nigerian dramatists who promote the ethics and ethos of traditional African gods. To Awodiya, Soyinka did not belong to the social group because:

> The emphasis of the drama shifts from examining the relationship between man and god (like his other compatriots, Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark and Ola Rotimi) to man in society, in conflict with community, government, politic or morals, a pre-occupation with society as a whole (Awodiya, 1993:13).

Although Adedeji (1971), Ogunba (1975), Gibbs (1980 and 1993), Etherton (1982), Jeyifo (1985 and 2004), Ebewo (1988), Okome (2004), Dunmade (2006) and variously, by Wole Soyinka himself have debunked as surface interpretation and analysis, the continued affection with which Soyinka's plays have been tragically generalized and interpreted as ritual theatre in tragic blood. Unfortunately, this intellectual instigation and misinterpretations continue unabatedly. All for Soyinka: the tongues are literarily fighting.

Quite frankly, literature, we hope should have double, if not multiple face. What jolts this researcher, therefore, is some of our dreaded critics (Jeyifo, Onoge, Osofisan, Nasiru, Gurr and so on) and scholars' reduction of Soyinka to a myth seller and a fetish ritual hawker. Thus, creating a wide gulf and a loophole which this researcher just like others (Larson, Sekoni, Gibbs, Ebewo, Okome and so on) in the Soyinkaerian pragmatic literary school have attempted to fill.

Condemning the literary critics of the left and expounding more on the various intellectual dimensions through which literature can be interpreted, the following conversation between Biodun Jeyifo (radically progressive and radically inventive) and Wole Soyinka (the unmovingg rock of Gilbatrar) dwell on the various considerable interests and ideological perspectives that literature can generate:

Jeyifo: It is generally thought that you are rather ambivalent about the left in the country, especially in relation to the leftist critique of your work. What really is the essence of your reaction to the leftist criticism of your writing?

Soyinka: Well, much of it, I find, is the result of a very vulgar concept of Marxist theory and I have written extensively about this. Some of it is due to mis-understanding of the intent, the purposes of literature, i.e. total purpose of literature. You see, literature is supposed to serve, it is a product of intellectual labour, and any such product is directed towards more than one end. Literature does not have to serve, all the time, a particular ideological theory (Jeyifo, 1985:29).

This general conspiracy of wanting to universalize or generalize literature to suite Marxism as frequently sloganeered by Marxists, is what Soyinka called the "surrogate power complex". But, we must be careful of such self-indulgence on the part of those who think that all literature must necessarily promote their ideological tenet. To us, no literary ideology is supreme and no interpreter's interpretation or critic's criticism can be totally faultless. For criticism itself is a big hunting ground where hunters can embark on ceaseless interpretative adventure.

They say (and in continuation of their contradictions) that, Soyinka is a rebel and his followers, anarchists for following Ògún. As it were, they also echo, after gyrating with Òrúnmìlà (the Yoruba god of wisdom) that Soyinka is an uncommitted artist of the ritual mode in his works and conclude that:

> The major plays of Wole Soyinka, if we examine them closely, are structured along the paradigmatic mould of ritual drama. In all of them a number of "acolytes" assemble round a quasi-priestly figure, and undergo a dramatic process which turns out to be a parody of some traditional ritual ceremony,

> performed here not really for the religious need, but in a secular, almost blasphemous context, and for ends which are mainly intellectual and philosophical. Generous libations of wine, ribald song and dancing till the moments of this ritual, recalling some of the more opulent telluric cults of ancient Greece (for example, the cult of Dionysus) and of Yorubaland (especially the Ogun cult)... (Osofisan, 2001b:72).

They also see Òrúnmìlà as a scientist with his sixteen Ifá corpus forgetting that every unique step taken by Òrúnmìlà is made possible by Ògún (the conqueror) who fought the war and clear the path for Òrúnmìlà to majestically step in.

To avoid being contradicted, this article is not a rejoinder but a fruitful search for the proper location, identification and interpretation of Soyinka's plays. In this era of failure in literature and imagination, this researcher strongly believes that the charges of obscurantism, of disease, of Euromodernism and the promotion of anti-African outlook in Nigerian literary culture (Chinweizu et al, 1980:208) variously and sensationally levelled against the 'Cowboy Sheriff' – Wole Soyinka, should not be allowed to go unchallenged even in the last twenty years when the 'Asíwájú' and the 'Ogbuefi' of African literature has worn different masks – as it were, re-writing himself where necessary. For Soyinka has undergone serious transformation in his creative writing through the 'fighting phase' which Fanon (1963:179), says, is being actualized through, "a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature".

Importantly as well, this article intends to draw out some of the contradictions in Soyinka's seminar article: "The Fourth Stage (Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy)". Structurally, this work is divided into eight sub-headings which include: the prologue which has inevitably set the agenda of this article; the fourth stage: a journey into the tragic drama of the gods; the unfilled poetic lacuna in the fourth stage; the fifth stage: the stage of reality; the fifth stage in the plays of Soyinka; directors and performers in the fifth stage will also be considered while the epilogue serves as the conclusion to this study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theoretical framework of the interpretation of Soyinka's comedies through the class structure in the society. The analytical methodology which Gbilekaa (1997) in the "Introduction" to his resourceful book; Radical Theatre in Nigeria (1997) says "identifies a dialectical relationship between literature and social struggle and to relate artistic concepts to the realization of an egalitarian society void of acrimonious class brouhaha" and the dialectical premise of revolution in Soyinka's social drama is adopted for this study. Although Gbilekaa sees Ola Rotimi as a dramatist who has romance the left he, however, cleverly omitted Soyinka from the list of his radical dramatists in the Nigerian theatre. We, however, believe that Wole Soyinka, as will be proven here, is eminently qualified and in fact, leads the radical school of drama in Nigeria irrespective of Geoffrey Hunt's reductionist confrontation that Soyinka's works project "radical conservatism which he associates with romanticism" (Hunt in Gugelberger, 1985:x). We also accept the notion that,

Soyinka's radical passion and tactic has "out-Marx... the Marxists" in his projection of radical vision especially in drama.

The Fourth Stage: A Journey into the Tragic Drama of the Gods

Soyinka's corrected version of "The Fourth Stage (Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy") which appears as "Appendix" in one of Soyinka's celebrated literary classics, Myth, Literature and the African World (1976) stands tall as one of the best works of literary criticism that has ever been written by any scholar in the humanities. "The Fourth Stage" unambiguously advanced the frontier of studies in literary discourse. This twenty-one-page critical evolutionary note is the:

> Persistent search for the meaning of tragedy, for a re-definition in terms of cultural or private experience is, at the least, man's recognition of certain areas of depth-experience which are not satisfactorily explained by general aesthetic theories; and, of all the subjective unease that is aroused by man's creative insights... (Soyinka, 1976:140).

"The Fourth Stage" telegraphically captures the essence of African tragedy through the cultural heritage of the myth of Ògún, the Yoruba god of wine, which gives birth to "the Ogunnian concept of tragedy".

In the fourth stage, there is a ceaseless celebration in the grooves through the dance of the gods and the musical fanfare of the metaphysical. The fourth stage is the house of the hero-gods and important deities in the Yoruba mytho-historical recollections. These gods are however repositioned for a bountiful harvest of theatrical activities because Soyinka, the African living lord of letters brings the gods back to life by making them potent and active through his tragedies.

The piety and the often-demure appearance of Obàtálá – the Yoruba professor of holiness, the rascality – the unending destruction, the constant dredging up of anger and the paradox of positive creativity of Ògún (the great field marshal), set the stage in the fourth stage. The power of Sàngó was a near tragedy: his ascendance to Òyó throne is a study in culture of courage and his final transition has recorded series of dissertations in failure in political leadership. This is because the man with fire in his mouth finally burned himself: Obá so – the king hanged himself. This is the true picture of Sàngó against the much deconstructed myth of 'Oba kò so' (the king did not hang) from Sàngó's worshippers.

Soyinka's "The Fourth Stage" is a genealogical dossier on three important gods in Yoruba mythology. However, Soyinka swells the already popular coat of Ògún as "the first actor". Interestingly, Soyinka's fourth stage (his tragedies) is rooted and can be located through:

i. Yoruba myths and metaphysics
ii. The dramatization of ritual aesthetics
iii. And the radical spirit of instance transformation into African tragedy.

Myth connotes believable and unbelievable stories and histories of the glorious and inglorious past. These stories and histories conveniently find themselves in various

theatrical enactments. The study of myth has, therefore, found root in the humanities. Myth, according to The World Book Encyclopedia (1990:973), is being studied because it shows:

i. How different societies have answered their basic questions about the world and the individual's place in it.
ii. How people developed a particular social system with its many customs and ways of life.
iii. How people will be able to understand the feelings and values that bind members of society into one group.
iv. And to know cultural difference through mythological analyses.

We also have "mythical beings" (heroes, heroines, gods, goddesses and deities), "mythical place" (revered and celebrated place of worship) and "mythical symbols" (special objects and instruments of worship). The metaphor of myth includes, "a traditional narrative usually involving supernatural or imaginary persons and often embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena" (Metacalf, 1998: 541).

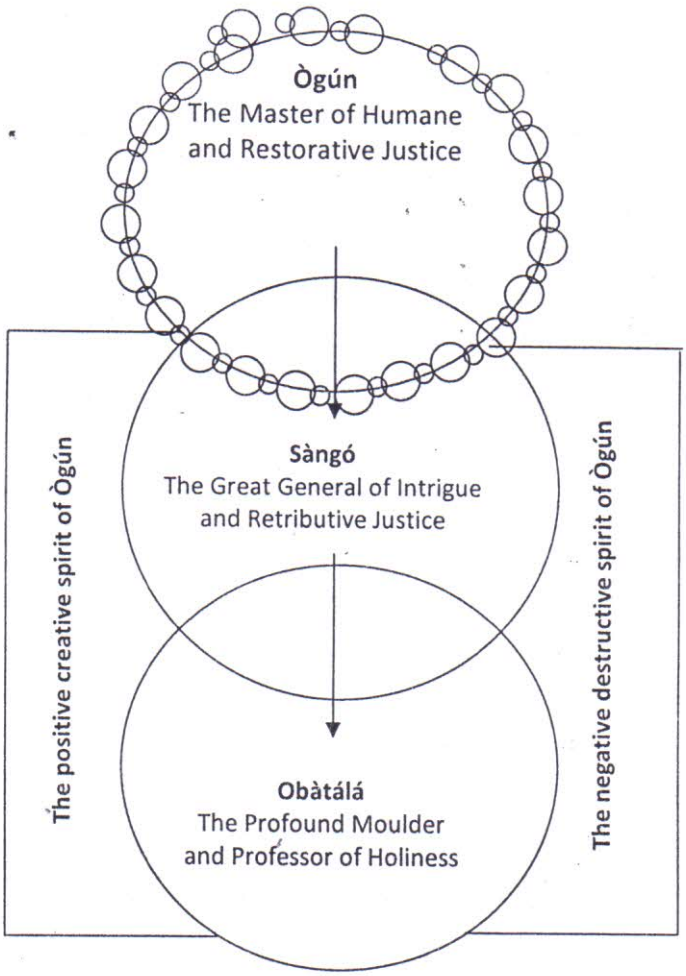
For example, there are many myths surrounding the creation of the Yoruba nation. In fact, Samuel Johnson identified one of such mythological assumptions and concludes that the Yorubas:

> Sprang from Egypt, or Nubia. That they were subjects of the Egyptian conqueror Nimrod... that from Arabia they were driven, on account of their practicing there their own form of worship, which was either paganism or more likely a corrupt form of Eastern Christianity (Johnson, 1921:6-7).

Wole Soyinka, just like other musicians, hunters and praise-singers before him too, sees the myth of Ògún as part of the myth of the creation or origin of the Yoruba, nay, the entire world. "The myth of gods' descent to earth and the battle with immense chaotic growth which has sealed off reunion with man", is used by Soyinka to build his theatre thesis in "The Fourth Stage".

Among the Yoruba, Ògún's name is politically and ritualistically symbolic with power and courage. He has many songs and some are often sang in madrigal. His praise-chants are endlessly multitudinous. Ògún (the owner of two cutlasses), among his numerous chants, has been described as the god of "creativity", "metallic lore" "artistry", "war" and so on, to reinforce the resounding victory of the person and power of Ògún.

In "The Fourth Stage", Soyinka examines the tragic mien of three great gods of the Yorubas. We have decided, however, to capture Soyinka's sagacious descriptions of the three gods through a model:



For simple explication, there is a balance of force in the character of Ògún: fifty percent for destruction and fifty percent for creativity. Ògún often restores what he has destroyed and he sees destruction as a necessary ingredient for reconstruction. The myth of the Yoruba gods is no longer new, but the news is that; in the night of disillusionment, of long knives among the gods, Ògún makes a statement by taking a short cut, but swift walk to stardom – he clears the path to the earth through 'the destructive – creative unity'. In the international scene, the present President of America, George Bush Jnr is the archetype of Ògún. Bush often restores what he destroys. Osama Bin Laden could have been a good example of Ògún, but he has not restored what he destroyed. So also is Saddam Hussein who destroys and restores, but lost the war of continuity. Ògún had never lost any war in Yorùbá history. Sàngó, of the overwhelming ambition, and through the glamour of monarchical splendor, cultivates and becomes the great general of intrigue and retributive justice, a confirmed double-dealer of yore. Obàtálá ends up as the profound moulder and the tireless professor of holiness.

Interestingly, the positive and negative power of Ògún can be located in the behavioural nuances of Sàngó and Obàtálá. While Sàngó wins many wars and expands Oyo Kingdom during his life time, showing clearly an aspect of creativity, Obàtálá also, and in spite of his essence of holiness, moulds misfits to religiously complete but unconsciously oils the wheel of destruction. The 'creative-destructive' unity in the attribute of the gods, is captured in a grand metaphor by Olu Obafemi in

his glamorous yet critical book, Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision (1996) when he notes:

> ... the co-existence of good and evil in most Yoruba divinities: Ogun is god of war and creativity, Sango is god of justice but he is rash, intemperate and tyrannical, even Obatala who is the essence of purity and creation when having taken palm-wine moulds cripples and blind men... (Obafemi, 1996:120).

The greatness of these gods can be located in the mysteries of rituals which cumulatively makes "the fourth stage, the vortex of archetypes and home of tragic spirit". Blood, wine, red, black and white clothes, iron, other mythical objects and other traditional ritual instruments are, therefore, part of the props and costumes that are often used to power rituals. For rituals, as explained by Chinua Achebe "are created by man to explain the mysteries of life and death – his attempt to make sense of the bewildering complexities of existence" (cited in Killam, 1969:21).

There is science in ritual and there is ritual in science. Ògún's knowledge of science and of ritual finally gave him the crown at Irè. Every act of the "conqueror of transition", the "revolutionary grandeur", the "embodiment of will" – Ògún, is therefore, the personification of tragedy and of Yoruba tragic drama. This has hitherto conformed to major aspects of Western tragedies and that which is used to define the concept of African tragedy through metaphysics and the leading collectivism of "heremeticism". Whether it is ritual drama or ritual theatre, Soyinka (1976:42) has warned and insisted that "ritual understanding is essential to a profound participation in the cathartic processes of the great tragedies". Ritual thus becomes the instrument of revolution in Soyinka's tragedies.

Soyinka to us, has four solemn but resonate, radical but unique voices in "The Fourth Stage" which further expand his interdisciplinary perceptions of Ògún and ritual drama, tragedy, literature, sociology and history:

i. That of Ògún, the irredentist revolutionary and the iconoclast genius of transition and ritual permutation, the grand master of progressive radicalism.
ii. That of a historian and a sociologist, attempting to capture the myth of Yoruba creation through the defined, yet, heroic deeds of some Yoruba gods by comparing same with European and Greek gods and cultures.
iii. That of an artist, a dramatist, singing the dirge of tragedy and echoing its tragic flaw.
iv. And that of a literary theorist and critic, defending, replying and envisioning a broader perspective for the ideological struggle in the African literature, art and theatre.

The crux of the matter is that, all Soyinka's tragedies find their firm root in the fourth stage. Whether in A Dance of the Forests (1963), where "Soyinkan vision of celebration as an occasion for renewal of communal life through a courageous encounter with the great challenges of the past, the present and the future" (Jeyifo, 2004:25) or in The Strong Breed (1964), a script that romanticises the concept of the

carrier and scapegoatism as inspiration for societal renewal. The Road (1965), is seen as an unimistaken dramatization of the "precise spiritual world" of the Yoruba and The Bacchae of Euripides (1973), a communal ritual which Bishop (1993:115), paraphrasing Soyinka, says, is "finally as prodigious, barbaric banquet, an insightful manifestation of the universal need of man to match himself against nature". Interestingly, heroism and anti-heroism are used to further explain Yoruba metaphysics as they profoundly concern the 'tragic rites of passage' in Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman (1975). All these tragic plays at first reading may serve as the tragedies of the gods through the recurrent appearance of rituals. They are, however, deep beyond ritual dramatization by wearing the mask of revolution.

The Unfilled Poetic Lacuna in the Fourth Stage

In spite of Soyinka's eloquent testimonies in "The Fourth Stage" which he captured through some of his tragedies and ritual theatre, in the terrain of the fourth stage, there appears a serious unfilled poetic lacuna in Soyinka's fourth stage. The unfilled poetic lacuna that will be made in this research work conforms with Iji's (1991:21) assertion that "Soyinka, like Nietzsche in many ways, makes it rather easy for his critics, both detractive and favourable, to misinterpret his message". Or while lamenting in the same way, Yakubu Nasidi concludes that:

> Soyinka himself... fails to escape the West, and remains tied, in his most passionate formulations, to the very thing he attempts to negate. Thus, far from transcending the cultural limits of the West, Soyinka and the Negritudinists help to confirm those limit. Ogun may be a convenient indigenization of Dionysius, but romantics have convincingly demonstrated that Africa does not necessary have a monopoly of the myth-making faculty (Nasidi, 2001: xiii).

In the often retold myth of Yoruba gods (especially those of them) that fought to make the earth habitable for humanity – Ògún, Sàngó, Obàtálá, Èsù, Òrànmíyàn, Òsanyìn and Yemoja, only the first three finds place in Soyinka's "Fourth Stage", while the last four important Yoruba gods lost their ritual power and rhythm in this masterpiece.

Even if faintly and in passing, Soyinka should have mentioned these gods and narrate their roles in "the dark continuum of transition" which serves as "home of tragedies". The surreptitious way by which Soyinka surveys Sàngó and smartly obliterates Obàtálá in "The Fourth Stage" can also be called to question. The roles of the duo loomed larger than Soyinka's suspicious interpretation. Ahmed Yerima in his play titled, Yemoja (2002), has recently deconstructed the roles of these gods although with special focus on Yemoja, the beautiful and adorable river goddess.

The fourth stage is a dinner theatre, it is potent during the meal. Discussion on the first, the second and the third stage is incomprehensibly treated in Soyinka's "The Fourth Stage". Perhaps a return to Soyinka's epistolary construction in Myth..., and precisely, "The Fourth Stage" will serve as defense to our charges of non-clarity of issues in the first, second and third stage. Soyinka summarily fumes that:

> The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the

> ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies and uncertainties, employing the same masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf to transition (Soyinka, 1976:148).

If the parable of Soyinka's 'three worlds', that of 'the ancestor, the living and the unborn' is to be considered, then, they represent the first, the second and the third stage, while the fourth stage serves as the tragic area of 'immeasurable gulf of transition" between the living and the unborn.

In spite of man's endless search to deconstruct God and beyond Soyinka's thesis in the cycle of life above, and without singing a church hymn or calling Muslim faithful to prayer, there is but one God. His, is therefore, wonderfully and abundantly the first stage. He stands in the Olympian height unrivalled. Even within the African traditional religions, God has been majestically described as: "High god", "Supreme Being" and with numerous and uncountable names from various religious adherents.

Whether in the numerous myths of creation in all cultures of the world, or, the special roles of ancestral spirits, apostles and messengers of God, God is the first stage. As the Supreme Being, He has also been described as the "creator; eternal, self-subsisting and omniscient... in the traditional religion the Supreme Being is also regarded as Judge... the ultimate judge to whom all creation is accountable" (Imasogie, 1985:29-30).

If Soyinka accepts that "Obatala moulds the forms while the breath of life is administered by Edumare the Supreme deity", and also concluding that, "the art of Obatala is thus essentially plastic and formal", then the first, second and third stage, as they are in Soyinka's supposed ritual theatre, stand alterable altogether. The first stage as Soyinka consciously accepts should therefore be altered to give room to, or to accommodate Edumare, the Yoruba Supreme deity because Edumare cannot, and must never be equated with the ancestors or the gods that He created in the first place.

The unrivalled creative power of God can never be faulted. In fact, Sofola (1994:2) says that God is "the Supreme Deity... A Creator, the Supreme Artist". It is also important to recall the last stanza of the theme song titled: "Let's Work on this Mountain" from Ayo Akinwale's production of "Mountains of Wealth" for the playwright/director's poetic ingenuity and rhythmic harmony in capturing the unrivalled, indescribable power and majestic grace of God:

> Art predates science
> Religion also
> Art is the father of Science
> God is an Artist
> The very first one
> God is the master creator[1]

Through the cyclical plot structure which Akinwale creatively and prodigiously romanticized into the African festival theatre in the popular traveling theatre tradition, "Mountains of Wealth" explores the superiority war between religion and science by preaching tolerance, unity and love. This is a performance where Akinwale also

demonstrates his profound understanding of the African total theatre idiom and stage icons.

While warning Africans and African intellectuals, Soyinka (1991:32) in the Credo of Being and Nothingness says, that "the world must not be set on fire through cheap recourse to the most primitive of all human instincts – that of religion", we equally beckon on Soyinka to also accept some interrelated myths in Islamic and Christian religions since they have undeniable attractions" as Soyinka one observed, his rejection of them notwithstanding. The Bible and the Quran, just like Soyinka's "seven precepts from the teachings of Orisa", collectively and harmoniously teach us about justice, virtue, faith, truth and most importantly, about His majesty, God – the Supreme Being.

Soyinka's ritual theatre is also loaded with revolutionary aesthetics. Ògún, Soyinka's idol is clearly a positive rebel irrespective of his supposed terrorist reputation. There is, therefore, a conscious and a deliberate romance with ritual and revolution even in almost all of Soyinka's tragedies which he has invented in the fourth stage. Whether Pentheus in The Bacchae of Euripides, Eman in The Strong Breed, Olunde (Soyinka's voice) in Death and the King's Horseman or, Demoke in A Dance of the Forests, there is a conscious effort on the part of Soyinka's antagonists or protagonists to move beyond the epistemology of ritual to the radical vision of revolution which Olu Obafemi says, is the "revolutionary acts for social redemption" and that Soyinka

> ... evolves a revolutionary vision for contemporary African society based on traditional African mythology..., it is thus in the attempt to project a revolutionary vision of social liberation through a revolutionary art form that Soyinka resorts to myth and ritual in his plays (Obafemi, 1996:118-123).

Even if uncountable literary critics see the fourth stage as a tragic stage for metaphysical theatre, the fourth stage goes beyond that abstraction to include a strong composition of revolutionary aesthetics.

The Fifth Stage: The Stage of Reality

The fifth stage is the stage for social drama. It is a living avenue for the dramatization of political happenings. In the fifth stage, theatre must necessarily derobes itself of 'mythopoeic lamentations' to facilitate the attractions and distractions in human existence through the re-creation of true life stories in coded and elegant theatrical mechanics. No empty space is anticipated in the fifth stage because all the empty lacunas must be filled with fresh and current socio-political dialectics.

The fifth stage is not the house of the gods, for it must poed the gods and refuse to serve them their wine. No ritual is envisaged in the fifth stage or the burning of incense to appease an angry Ògún – neither will dog blood be given to "the pathfinder" and all semi-demi-gods must be derobed, demystified and deconstructed within man's social reality and vision.

In the fifth stage, historical truth and some basic assumptions about human beings, must be investigated and crafted in a platinum blonde and there must be a fierce resistance to the majestic celebration of the gods for the celebration of reality,

which must be the central metaphor of the work of any playwright. In the fifth stage, drama – a strong physical voice in the family of literature should not be viewed "as a secondary reflection of something else, but as a real social force, existing in its own right, with its own determinations and effects" (Bennett, 1979:41).

In literary discourse, controversial postulations are endless. While scholars are busy battling with the "Platonic dilemma" in the Republic, "Aristotelian solution" in the Poetics only serves as a stop gap and this too is overtaken by Arthur Miller's "Tragedy of the common man" – a contrast to heroism and nobility in tragedy through his Death of a Salesman (1949).

In African literature, however, Marxist debate still continues unabatedly. This is because the central motif of Marxism in the society is change. Incontrovertibly, "Marx looked at the consequences of our need to labour in terms of the social relations, social classes and forms of politics which it entailed" (Eagleton, 1996:152).

In his detailed examination and classification of the "main tendencies of post-independence African criticism", Gugelberger, G.M. also observes that we have five types of critics in African literature: "Larsonist critics, African Euro-centric critics, Bolekaja critics, Ogunist critics and Marxist critics (radical chic-ists)". He, however, concludes by saying that Marxist aesthetics'

> ... basic methodology was historical, materialist, dialectical: a methodology which certainly can be applied to literature once we learn to refrain from merely citing their statements out of context to back up a particular point of view that we want to make. Marxist is clearly teleological, its goal must be the amelioration of a given society. It is a class conscious and anti-metaphysical (Gugelberger, 1985:5)

African writers of the left whether in poetry, novel or drama are often classified as promoters of Marxist dialectics. In the Nigerian theatre and drama, playwrights such as Osofisan, Obafemi, Nasiru, Sowande, Oyekunle and many pro-Osofisan playwrights are natural promoters of the ideal of Marxism, contradicting very radically, "animist metaphysics" for "social reformations" and "collective struggle" and substituting rather politically – capitalism for socialism.

Most of the works of these playwrights belong to the fifth stage – the stage of reality, of comedies and satires. Importantly also, "the purpose of comedy is social concession" because "comic dramatist offers us an opportunity to make amends" as once reasoned by Moliere, the great French playwright. The fifth stage substitutes the unreal with reality and emotion with reason. We are of the strong opinion, therefore, that most of Wole Soyinka's comedies and satires belong to the fifth stage, the stage of Marxist aesthetics, the abode of the leftists with their slogan of mass movement, mass action, political and economic liberation and social emancipation. Soyinka, the supposed man with ritual theatre also flirts and romance with revolutionary theatre.

The Fifth Stage in the Plays of Soyinka

Beyond the 'Mungo Parkian Fallacy', the Conrandian sentiment and the Finegann somersault, the fifth stage in the plays of Soyinka is not hidden. Its vision is laid open and it is within the canvass of Soyinka's comedies. In the fifth stage, there is no place for the language of algebra, concocted neologies, the fertile but hidden

semiotics, the deep and overtly obscure rhetorics or complex metaphors. However, exclusionist and individualistic language and praxis are heavily broken down into the essence of comic vision, of social drama.

For Example, The Lion and Jewel (1963) is a play which Kofoworola (2004:80), a relentless scholar in the Soyinkaerian school who had directed Soyinka's The Baccahae of Euripides in the United States of America crisply observes, presents a "conflict between the forces of conservation and progression". Using Sidi, as a central figure of competition in The Lion and the Jewel, with Lakunle serving as the progressive radical and Baroka, the experienced conservative, Soyinka has consciously created a conflict of ideology between the progressive leftist and the traditional rightist in which the latter won.

There is also a political war between socialism (Lakunle) and capitalism (Baroka). Lakunle, just like African progressives, especially Nigerian politicians of the left, speaks violently and radically, bubbling with ideas and condemning existing traditions in the play: "A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated/rejected, denounced, accursed/Excommunicated, archaic, degrading/Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant/ Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable" (Soyinka, 1963:7).

The traditional capitalist (Baroka) on his own is a soft speaker, a defender of the people's heritage, a master planner and a confirmed strategist. In fact, Baroka is a crude fellow who does everything possible to achieve his aim. These attributes are that of African conservative politicians who plan and win elections at all cost to the detriment of the politicians of the left who talk and talk without achieving results.

The socio-political and economic implications of rural to urban migration, the theory of change as envisaged differently by the old generation and the new generation through the "doctrine of serpentism" make Soyinka's The Swamp Dwellers (1964) a social drama of reality. And for almost half a decade that The Swamp Dwellers was published, the above problems persisted in the Nigerian nation. Ogunba (1975:14) also observes that,

> ... the main theme of The Swamp Dwellers is the conflicting values of the old and the young in Soyinka's Nigeria... the village is shown to be sick unto death, with the message that an immediate, radical change is imperative. But the task of effecting this change is a herculean one and a young man in this community is faced with the dilemma of either escaping into the city, forgetting the village and thereby allowing the Serpent to rule it forever, or staying back to challenge the Serpent at great personal peril and risk of utter failure.

The conflict between Danlola (traditionalism) and Kongi (materialism) has produced a conflict and failure in leadership which graduated into "hedonism" and "masochism" in Soyinka's Kongi's Harvest (1967). The appearance of Daodu, an afternoon messiah, with Segi, a firebrand feminist, planning to control the political system of Isma (a fictitious microcosm of Nigeria), only help to confirm the failure of the African political system. Interpreting further to mean the failure of democratic/traditional institution (Danlola), the disaster of, and the murderous mess of the military class (Kongi) and the ability of the radicals (Segi and Daodu) to lead and

rule well. As Soyinka observes in the play, "The pot that will eat fat/Its bottom must be scorched/The squirrel that will long crack nut/Its footpad must be sore" (Soyinka, 1967:1). Till date, the Nigerian nation is still searching for an enduring, progressive and people oriented political system and leadership. A playwright cannot be more committed than what Soyinka has done in Kongi's Harvest, bringing forth, the socio-political problems confronting the African nations.

Soyinka, just like Moliére also hit hard at the Nigerian fake prophets and hypocrites who call themselves men of God. Soyinka's vituperations against pentecostalism through Prophet Jeroboam and his monumental transition from a poor church rat in The Trials of Brother Jero (1973) to an affluence church Prophet in Jero's Metamorphosis (1973), is the stark reality of the ungodly behaviour of the majority of Nigerian prophets.

Opera Wonyosi (1981) and The Beatification of Area Boy (1995) in particular are two social satires that preach and promote the ideological tenet of Marxism in profundity. In The Beatification of Area Boy, Soyinka celebrates the struggle of the masses for socio-political and economic liberation. The survival of the common men against the rotten bourgeoisie as Marxists often preach is abundantly dramatized in this postmodern play. For example, the agony and the 'survival' strategies of the down-trodden masses (bus conductors, barber, food vendor, cyclists, minstrels, newsvendors, parking attendants, prisoners, warders and so on) in a capitalist economy are highlighted through the use of Pidgin-English (this obviously, is a response to and a defense of the charges of complexity and obscurantism in Soyinka's use of language).

In the 1999 edition of The Beatification of Area Boy, the following conversation between Trader and Cyclist in the play castigates the outright rejection of 'made in Nigeria' products for the acceptance of foreign goods which almost all Nigerian traders capitalise on to make more money:

> Cyclist: Hn – hn. How much?
> Trader: Ninety naira, my brother, and only because you be my first customer.
> Cyclist: Ninety nai...! Haba, my friend, oil boom done finish now.
> Trader: But devaluation never stop. Remember say ninety naira today na only one dollar. So make you tell me, you fit buy that kin tie for America for one dollar? Na dat kind eye make you take look am. Look the label... look am, look am... Made in Florida, USA. You tink na one dollar'e cost for USA?
> Cyclist: Even so...
> Trader: Na first – class tie (Soyinka, 1999:29).

In another reflection, Newsvendor's pedlar performance in the same play which "is prosecuted as an alloy of adroit oratorical skills and luxuriant narrative techniques" (Akwang 2002:56), can only be recalled here to show the extent with which the theatrical tradition of pedlarism finds its way into a play-text and not 'shunned academically' as Richard Schechner once queried:

Newsvendor: Business Times, Sir? Or City Gent? I get latest Expose and Newsurvite Comrade Ugo Bassa done explode for Update? Sensational interview, sir, sensational; Look am sah, make you just look de cover. Den say Minister of Commerce may resign because of drug scandal. Only twenty-five naira; copies nearly finish... Hot, hot, hot... Adult magazines sir... Hot, hot, hot... sexy video ... Hot, hot, hot... Secret Nights in the Bishop's Vestry... Hot, hot, hot... Madonna Meets the Prince of Darkness-sai!- Sizzling hot, hot, hot-the very latest, not yet officially released... sex slaves in Saudi Arabia-Hot, hot, hot-na we own pilgrims just smuggle am commot for Jeddah. You no fit get copy anywhere else... (Soyinka, 1999:84).

The search in The Beatification of Area Boy, 'a Lagosian Kaleidoscope' is for equity and the war therein, is against oppression and domination which Military Officer (a character in the play) promotes. This same character, like many of them in the Nigerian nation, are enemies of the press, always planning and wanting to suppress the media. After all, and to them, "the media is prejudiced. Simply prejudiced and irresponsible".

Through the satiric parade of African 'giants' in A Play of Giants (1984), the tragedy of injustice (fake trials) that produced many prisoners of war during the Buhari/Idiagbon regime in From Zia, With Love (1992) and the comedic dramatization of the life and times of Late General Sanni Abacha in King Baabu (2002), Soyinka has consistently shown that there is no place to hide for African dictators whether they are "President – for – life" (Idi Amin), "Emperor-for-Life" (Bokassa), or "President – for – Keeps" (Nguema).

The reality in Soyinka's fifth stage does not make Soyinka to conceal the identities of African dictators that he dramatized. Writing "On the Heroes of our Time: Some Personal Notes", Soyinka echoes and reveals very candidly that "No serious effort is made... to hide the identities of the real-life actors who have served as model for A Play of Giants" (Soyinka: 1984:v). Soyinka's use of dense metaphor and obscure characters are deliberately substituted for 'satiric jibes' and true to life stories of the decimation and destruction of African heritage by African dictators as clearly demonstrated in A Play of Giants and King Baabu which is Soyinka's Play of the twenty first century where General Basha Bash later transforms to King Baabu (Late General Sanni Abacha who transformed from Secretary of Defence to the Military Head of State). And between Basha Bash and King Baabu, power is brazenly raped with impunity:

Basha: There always mutineers, my brothers. We are brothers-in-arms, so we must stick together. Those who disagree with authority are mutineers and only one answer to mutineer. Go on Brigadier, I think you will like the speech. It get signature of General Potipoo himself at bottom, so everything is as saying goes, very legitimate. We have promise that there will be no more coups in the nation, and there is no coup, only a change of command...

Kpoki: Ah, a change of command.
Basha: So, just to avoid any misunderstanding my humble self is the new Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces. And looking after Ministry of Petroleum... (Soyinka, 2002:34-5).

As King Baabu (The Head of State), human beings (albinos and hunchbacks) are used as sacrificial instruments by his Marabout in the play, so that King Baabu will rule forever by "overcoming all foes", and by having "the bountifulness of Baabu's dynasty".

From the foregoing and whether as 'Europhile critics', 'throwback activists', 'Neo-Tarzanists' or 'Bolekaja critics' it is glaring that Wole Soyinka is ideologically committed. Soyinka's rejection of the label of being called a Marxist, who must ride in Marxism does not take ideological commitment away from him, at least, as he has demonstrated in his plays, poems and novels. While not denying the relevance of Karl Marx thesis to human growth, social change and development, the whole literary discourse should therefore not centre on Marxism, a relevant but dying political philosophy of communism and socialism.

Without creating unnecessary attraction to the person of Ògún, scholars of revolution and change should include the study of Ògún within the polemics of drama and theatre and should "worried less about Karl Marx than about Ògún, the re-discovered deity of revolution" (Soyinka, 1976:54). Much as Marxism represents a communist/socialist manifesto, Soyinkaerian revolutionary manifesto is partly located in Ògún (supporter of orphan) and totally loaded in the comical and satirical ambience of the fifth stage. Other larger-than-life heroes forgotten and scattered all over the five continents of the world should also studied by scholars in the humanities. Most of the histories and myths can be used to re-invent contemporary issues.

Directors and Performers in the Fifth Stage

Soyinka's fifth stage is not laced with ritual aesthetics as such, instant transformation of performers and the stage is not expected. Instead, performers in Soyinka's fifth stage should purge themselves of everything ritual and mythical to play the characters rather than transforming into the characters.

Performers and directors especially in Soyinka's fifth stage should treat Soyinka's comedies and satires as historical realities in dramatic constructions. These comedies and satires represent the past and the living African leaders, heroes and characters. They must thus be treated, acted and deconstructed within our immediate socio-historical reality because "comedy also expresses a world-view" while satire is a "drama whose concern is the degradation of vice, error or folly through the thrust of ridicule or laughter" (Johnson, 2003:231).

Directors should stick religiously to the staging convention expected of comedy and satire, at least, in the core area of the director's functions such as; composition, movement, picturization, rhythm and pantomimic dramatization which (Dean and Carra, 1965:26) called "the five fundamentals of directing". Movements and tempo should be fast without sacrificing clarity and audibility. The colour of costumes should be bright without loosing the artistic touch of excellence. The set should not

affect movement yet its construction must take into cognizance the law of balance, harmony and rhythm in comic aesthetics. Major actions must be exaggerated to build up the dramatic conflicts and performers in the fifth stage should also be profound humour merchants, joke sellers and wit peddlers.

There is comic vision in comedies and satires. It is a vision which Barranger (1995: 106) describes as a "call for sanity, reason, and moderation in human behaviour so that the society can function for the well-being and happiness of its members. In comedy, society survives the threat posed by inflexible or antisocial behaviour". Soyinka's comic vision in the fifth stage is, therefore, a vision where freedom is sought against oppression and intimidation; democracy against dictatorship; cultural liberation and defence of cultural institution against cultural dislocation, bastrardization and colonization; social order against social disorder; moral order against moral disorder and ineptitude. As such, play directors should ensure that performers "don't play the text" or recite the lines – performers must be professionals or at least, the willing-to-learn thespians.

Soyinka's fifth stage is an experimental stage. Directors should therefore create new stage icons and theatrical cum directorial styles that will project the vision of the playwright and that which will satisfy the yearning of the audience. 'Theatrical conservatism' should be rejected and replaced with a synthesis of African festival and Western theatre aesthetics by directors wishing to direct any of Soyinka's comedies and satires. The sub-texts, in Soyinka's comedies and satires, must also be located and domesticated to spice up the total theatre idiom.

Directors, performers and other designers of Soyinka's comedies and satires must 'build theatre into Soyinka's plays' because Soyinka's fifth stage cannot be produced by the texts alone. We will deal with this sub-heading more handsomely and elaborately in future academic engagements.

The Epilogue

Is this researcher anti-Marxism? No (if Marxist protagonists and their neophytes) can, however, stop over-protecting and imposing and ideology which has not root in Africa into African art, culture, literature and theatre. But, the above question can be answered in the affirmative if Marxist's prejudice is imposed into the culture and art of the black race: the sky is big enough for birds to fly unfettered – no literary ideology or theory is supreme.

To recall once again, the near radicalism and intellectual imposition of (sorry, an attempt at smuggling) Marxism into Wale Ogunyemi's Langbodo during FESTAC 77 where two firebrand Marxists – Femi Osofisan and Biodun Jeyifo "actually wrote an alternative 'Langbodo' in the Marxian mode, being somewhat dissatisfied with Wale Ogunyemi script" (Adelugba, 1986:6) which "The Directorate" led by Dapo Adelugba 'abandoned for diplomatic reasons' can only show, the desperation with which Marxists can impose or promote Marxism.

In their unrelenting and unapologetic promotion of the theory of complex surrogatism however, Femi Osofisan while delivering the first J.P. Clark Annual Lecture inside the Arts Theatre at the University of Lagos in November 2005, with the title; "Answering the Communal Call: J.P. Clark and the Allotropes of the Self" submits and condemns J.P. Clark that:

> Women. Nothing done on women – the cruelty of widowhood, female genital mutilation, early childhood marriage, rape of women, wife battering, discrimination against women in place of works. Women have been relegated to the back role apart from mention of the matriarch in the family. Most of his works had been largely patriarchal (Osofisan in Edukugho, 2005:30).

Then, like a big bang that led to the creation of the universe, J.P. Clark, the Delta State renowned literary scholar obeys the canonical law of Moses: an eye for an eye. He replies Osofisan more aggressively that: "as a writer, he cannot prescribe to any writer. You take what he gives you... I want to claim that no Nigerian writer of my time had been fascinated by women around him than J.P. Clark" (Clark in Edukugho, 2005:30). We are in total support of Adelugba and Clark; a work of arts, like human intestine has many layers.

If Marxist school of critics approaches a work of art from the materialist-historical perspective as clearly outlined in the materialist – historical theory of art by Leon Trotsky (Maduakor, 1993:290), then, Soyinka's fifth stage is a theatre of mass appeal irrespective of the mask of contradictions frequently worn by 'Biodun Jeyifo and Femi Osofisan who led the Ibadan-Ife Marxist School' and others like Omafume Onoge, G.G. Darah, Andrew Gurr, including the sheer fanatism of the 'neo-negritudist school led by Chinweizu' and his co-travelers. They should note the 'autonomy of creative imagination', avoid reducing 'art to an economic commodity' and accept the abundant presence of 'social vision' in Soyinka's fifth stage.

Through his article entitled, "Towards a Theory and Criticism of Theatre Arts", a 1991 Ibadan Postgraduate School Inter-disciplinary Discourse, Adelugba also calls for homegrown ideological leaning and perceptions after a critical review of Marxist theory in the Nigerian theatre. This position, he re-echoes by calling for a serious "talk on Oni-ism... Onimode-ism or Onoge-ism or Jeyifo-ism". He submits again in 2003 that:

> If anything perhaps, we provide another platform for dialogues across ideological fronts – the socialist or the capitalist dialogue could take place within the framework of theatre arts projects. We need not make all theatre arts projects either capitalist-oriented or socialist-oriented. We can now start to have zero ideology in which there are perspectives representing the different ideologies, working together on the same project (Adelugba in Dasylva, 2003:229).

Whether in 1977, 1991 or 2003, Adelugba believes that Marxist theatre is not the theatre of the people. We also believe that the theatre of the people, by the people and for the people goes beyond the zero sum game of Marxism to include other abstractions eminently present and endlessly loaded within various theatre traditions and critically articulated by willing theatre scholars.

To us, no Nigerian dramatist has shown to be politically correct and ideologically committed in the Nigerian theatre than Wole Soyinka. In spite of the ceaseless controversies trailing his personality, Soyinka is unapologetic about any cause that he believes in. Examples of his controversies are endless: the formation of

pyrates confraternity, the pirated speech that embarrassed Late Ladoke Akintola, the formation of the 'Third Force' in 1967 during the Nigerian civil war, his movement from University of Ibadan to University of Ife, the Road Safety connection, the Guerrilla Theatre political statements at Ife, the Radio Kudirat fame and at present, he is still sparring with the present regime of Obasanjo/Atiku owing to injustice, corruption and the roles of the state in political killings. Either as a person, on the stage or tube, Soyinka's words are loaded with actions. He, most often, removes the log in our eyes by fighting injustice, political domination and oppression. He seeks for justice and decries tribal domination in the Nigerian project. He shows this by calling our attention to the Arewa symbol cleverly embossed in the Nigerian twenty naira notes (where the symbols of other major tribes are deliberately omitted).

Soyinka, one of the world's most 'fertile and original writers' as we have shown in this paper, is but a writer of many parts and most certainly, a revolutionary whose works go beyond 'metaphysical mourning' to celebrate the complexities and contradictions in the contemporary age, the age of reality. Soyinka is not a ritual merchant or a cultural Eurocentric but an African revolutionary of the left as his plays in the fifth stage (comedies and satires) project. This is a scholar whose drama "gave him the Nobel Prize for Literature... according to the Swedish Academy, he fashioned the drama of existence" (Otiono, 2005:18).

To the new radicals in the garb of Marxism, literary critics of the left, theatre practitioners of the conservative schools, there is indeed the fifth stage in the plays of Soyinka which goes beyond the dirge of Ògún to romanticising the left and as the Yoruba will say: Ègàn ò pé kóyin mádùn (envy does not stop honey from having its unrivalled taste). The more Soyinka's literary detractors and unconscious critics attempt at fumigating Soyinka out of literary existence and reckoning the more their follies will be blown out in the fullness of time. We must insist "on the freedom of expressive form and a general recasting of aesthetic expectations" (Adelugba, 2006:215) to give new directions to our vibrant literary and theatre traditions. Wole Soyinka is a crucial matter in the world of literary discourse and he stands tall as the undisputed lord of the African theatre.

Note

1. Ayo Akinwale's "Mountains of Wealth" though unpublished, has been performed at three different occasions. First at the University of Ilorin's Africa Hall for the Committee on African Conference on Science and Religion in 2001, second at the same venue for the Unilorin's 'postponed' Convocation Play and also at the Alliance Française Cultural Centre, Ilorin, all in year 2004. The researcher played active roles in the productions, ending as the Assistant Director of the play.

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