

Artistry and Post-Colonial Issues in Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

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ABSTRACT:

This paper sets out to examine how Wole Soyinka uses art in his first novel, *The Interpreters* to reflect the post-colonial issues that affect individuals in the newly independent state of Nigeria. It begins by illuminating Wole Soyinka as a unique artist who experiments with all genres of literature. The paper then discusses Artistry in *The Interpreters* but limiting the study to plot, characterisation and his style of narration. This paper draws interest in the society as portrayed in the text. We see a society which is experiencing a gradual drifting from the traditional ways of life to the modern, though in a confused manner because their world view of the contemporary world is suppressed by the systems put by the post-colonial government. The interpreters are an epitome of the broader community, which is experiencing changes in their country. The paper brings out an argument that with the creation of post-colonial society come different personalities with different responses to the situation.

Key Terms: artistry, post-colonialism, society, worldview.

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Introduction to Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

The Interpreters has no central plot; it is instead a sequence of dramatic scenes and descriptions that follow a chronological line, interrupted by periodic flashbacks within flashbacks, 'flash-forwards' and recollections, during the rainy season in Nigeria from May through July. The action shifts from Lagos and the university city of Ibadan to the backcountry and lagoons outside populated areas. The main characters are five university graduates who studied abroad and have just come back to Nigeria because the country has just obtained its independence. These intellectuals, who happen to be interpreters of the new Nigeria, are trying to find their way within the new political structure, within a society dominated by confusion, insensitivity, social climbing, and corruption. One thing that holds the novel together is the gradual movement of the interpreters Bandele, Egbo, Biodun Sagoe, Kola and Sekoni toward an awareness of their situation.

The theme of the novel involves the awareness and clear perception of each of the young men to struggle to realise their redemptive potential despite the stifling influence of a corrupt and spiritual arid. The interpreters are brilliant individual, but with different psychological, emotional and spiritual makeups as well as social predicament. Each of them is interesting, full of creative potential, so well realised that we can imagine him living his separate life outside the novel. In the book, each is given some of the favourite themes or ideas of his creator to embody.

The Span of Wole Soyinka's Artistry

This section borrows partly from the works compiled by Salsabeel Kassem in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* at *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* and lays a foundation of the study of Wole Soyinka's work as an exceptional artist. He is known for his novels, autobiographical works, poetry and criticism and in 1986, he became the first African writer ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Soyinka

is often regarded as a universal man: poet, playwright, novelist, critic, lecturer, teacher, actor, translator, politician and publisher. "His achievements as one of the most original and multifarious of African writers were recognised long before the award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986, since when his astonishing output – plays, novels, poems, autobiography, essays, social commentary – has continued unabated" (Adewale, 1994: p. Vii).

According to Bernth Lindfors:

No one would deny that Soyinka is a thoroughly African playwright with a theatrical identity of his own, but his genius is so multifaceted, his eloquence so dazzling, his concerns so universal, that he transcends parochial cultural boundaries and takes his place alongside the masters of the world literature. One could say without too much exaggeration that he is Africa's Shakespeare (Lindfors, 1994, p.21).

Wole Soyinka's full name is Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka. Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria on July 13, 1934, among the Yoruba people. Soyinka attended Government College in Ibadan before he graduated from the University of Leeds in England with a degree in English in 1958. When he returned to Nigeria, he established an acting company and wrote his first important play, *A Dance of the Forest* (1963) for the Nigerian independence celebrations. The play satirises the fledgeling nation by dismantling its romantic legend and showing that the present is no more glorious than was the past.

Soyinka wrote multiple plays in a lighter vein that made fun of pompous, westernised school teachers in *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) and mocking the clever preachers of upstart prayer- churches who grow fat at the expense of

their parishioners in *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1963) and *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973). But his more serious plays, like *Kongi's Harvest* (Opened the first Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, 1966; published 1967), *The Strong Breed* (1963), *The Road* (1965) *From Zia, With Love* (1992), and even the parody *King Baabu* (2002), reveal his disregard for African authoritarian leadership and his disillusionment with Nigerian society as a whole.

Other notable plays include *Madmen and Specialists* (1971) *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), and *Beatification of Area Boy* (1995). Within these and other dramas, Soyinka skilfully fused western elements with the subject matter as well as dramatic techniques that are deeply rooted in Yoruba religion and folklore. Symbolism, ingenious plotting and flashback contribute to a dramatic, rich structure. His most outstanding works demonstrate humour and an elegant poetic style. They also exhibit a gift for satire and irony that accurately matches the language of numerous of his complex characters with their moral qualities and social standing.

From 1960 to 1964, Soyinka was co-editor of *Black Orpheus*, a literary journal of significance. From 1960 forward, he taught drama and literature and also was in charge of theatre groups in a number of Nigerian Universities, including Ife, Ibadan and Lagos. Soyinka became the first African to receive the Nobel Prize in 1986 for Literature. Winning the Nobel Prize, resulted in fame, with Soyinka becoming a sought-after lecturer, and many of his lectures were published- notably the Reith lectures of 2004, *Climate of Fear* (2004).

Although Soyinka regarded himself primarily as a playwright, he wrote novels as well – *The Interpreters* (1965) and *Season of Anomy* (1973) – and several volumes of poetry. The poetry includes *Idanre*, *Poems from Prison* (1969) and *Other Poems* (1967) that were republished under

the title *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972). These were published together as *Early Poems* (1998); *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988); and *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* (2002).

His verse is characterised by a precise grasp of language and a mastery of dramatic, lyric and meditative poetic forms. He wrote a significant portion of *Poems from Prison* while in jail in 1967-69 because of speaking out against the war caused by the Biafran attempt to secede from Nigeria. *His narrative account in The Man Died* (1972) details his arrest and the subsequent imprisonment for 22-months. *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (1976) is Soyinka's first critical work. It is a collection of essays that analyses the role played by the artist in the light of Yoruba symbolism and mythology. *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage* (1988) is his work with similar themes of culture, art and society. He also addressed Africa's problems and western responsibility in *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness* (1999) and *The Open Sore of a Continent* (1996).

An autobiography, *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, was published in 1981 and followed by the companion pieces *Isara: A Voyage around Essay* (1989) and *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years: A Memoir, 1946- 1965* (1994). *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. In 2005-06, Soyinka served on the Encyclopaedia Britannica Editorial Board of Advisors.

Artistry in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

Wole Soyinka being a creative artist, uses different artistic modes to relay the message to his readers. Soyinka's use of unfamiliar language sometimes dismissed as needless obscurantism is well supported by Longinus who posits that:

These expressions are on the very edge of vulgarity; but their expressiveness saves them from actually being vulgar. (140)

Longinus statement is thought-provoking and removes the indignation directed towards the artist of 'strong' style. In one of the very first reviews, Gerald Moore terms *The Interpreters* "The first African novel that has a texture of real complexity and depth" (New African, 2). These views are shared by Eldred Jones in the introduction he wrote to the first edition of the novel, in which he stated:

The style of narration gives the novel compactness of structure and a feeling of the wholeness of conception (Soyinka, 1965, p.02).

At this stage, the paper has deliberately looked at how other critics have referenced the text itself instead of the artist, Soyinka or any of the underlying implications to ideology. This evokes a feeling for the structural composition of the text and thus gains it an epic status. Ian Watt echoed this in his discussion of the fielding and the epic, 'Theory of the Novel':

This view is certainly widely held, albeit in a rather general and unformulated way, to deserve consideration. It is evident that since the epic was the first example of narrative form on a large scale and of a serious kind, it is reasonable that it should give its name to the general category which contains all such works, and in this sense, the term the novel may be said to be the epic kind (Watt, 1957, p.272).

Wilfred F. Feuser's article on 'The problem of Authenticity' quotes Soyinka at one point as having the stylistic quality as one of his primary concerns;

... I was saying in other words that one expected from poetry was an intrinsic poetic quality, not mere name-dropping (Lindberg-Wada, 2006, p.556)

Though this was the elaboration of his turpitude statement, it augers well a Yoruban proverb, which states that 'The proverb is the horse carrying the topic under discussion; if the topic loses its way under discussion; if the topic loses its way we use a proverb to recapture it.' It is clear that the artistic vision of Soyinka has, as one of its major pillars, technique, if the proverb is to be accepted as the withiest compression of art in literature.

According to Mary T. David, *The Interpreters* is a "multi-focal novel" (1988, p.02), and within it, one will encounter images and allusions long before they're fully explained, which underlies Soyinka's literary sensibilities in the book, whereby genuine concern for literariness is contained within the title that is no less literary. It is worth noting that *The Interpreters* was written by a poet and a Thespian. This echoes an explanation as to why Soyinka brings poetic technique into his writing of the interpreter. Sekoni's death in a car crash is a product of the same imagination which in 'Death at Dawn' produced the lines;

Brother
Silenced in the startled hug of
Your-invention- is this mocked grimace
This closed contortion – I (Soyinka, 1965, p.01)

Eldred Jones, in his introduction to *The Interpreters*, reminds us that:

The Interpreters is Wole Soyinka's first novel although by 1965 when this novel was first published, Soyinka had become established as one of Africa's foremost playwrights. He had written a small but a distinguished corpus of poems, and several literary and critical essays. He brings to *The Interpreters* from his poetry a cryptic, image-laden style, from his drama a sense of setting and character, and from his articles a fluency of exposition and critical observation (Soyinka, 1965, p.01)

These qualities have earned the novel attributes of being obscure, complex and challenging.

Technique of Narration

Technique is the device that brings one closer to the actual meaning of the text. In a broader sense, it is technique alone, as pointed out by Mark Schorer, which objectifies the art materials of as symbolism in fiction is the real source of the theme (Schorer, 1988, p.68). Soyinka's mode of narration has been viewed by many as complicated and indecipherable to an average reader. Emmanuel Ngara observes that Soyinka's dramatic language in the novel is deliberately used and is aimed at evoking "a sense of horror... of pity in the reader, pity for suffering humanity" (Ngara, 1985, p.110).

Mary T. David, in her book "*Wole Soyinka: A Quest for Renewal*", observes that *The Interpreters*... is among the most complex pieces of fiction written in Africa. *The Interpreters* follows a narrative technique that is the despair of reader's uninitiated into modern fiction, particularly the innovations made by Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner. The disjunction of time and the technique of the flashbacks and plots unfolding within the consciousness of characters...

M. Rajeshwar, in his critical monograph on Wole Soyinka's novels, observes that they make a difficult reading for an average reader on account of broken chronology and multiple flashbacks that Soyinka uses in them. Rajeshwar's monograph entitled "The intellectual and society on the Novels of Wole Soyinka" observes that Soyinka has chosen to examine the predicament of the intellectuals in a corrupt society and their contributions to social change" (Rajeshwar, 1990).

Soyinka does not narrate the events of the story chronologically; that is, he does not start from the beginning, leading us through consecutive episodes to the end. The novel starts in the middle of the affairs of the main characters, their frustrations and their success by stepping back in time and filling in pictures of the past and sometimes darting from the present into the future to complete a particular image of an individual or a situation. He uses sardonic satire that runs as an undercurrent throughout the novel. Satire in any of its forms signifies that the writer's vision of things is different from and far better than the situations that prevail at the time; he disagrees with the present pseudo- order of things universally taken for granted as the right way that things should be. Soyinka uses satire to bring home the truth, not realised by them.

Wole Soyinka uses a kind of a plot that does not give space to plunge into the narrative with a reminiscential anecdote, the withheld information, or the hidden card. It provides a structure that is unidirectional and can only be experienced by a reader who retrospectively looks back on the narrative and tries to create a graspable chronology in mind (Kitata, 2000, p.29).

In many circumstances, a story would follow a chronological causal sequence in which the reader retrospectively reassembles motifs. This is a progressive

process in the traditional tale. It answers the question: *And then?* But instead, Soyinka deforms and re-contextualises this raw material in what is evidently an act of temporal displacements. Consequently, what the reader actually encounters in *The Interpreters* is the real motifs presented in a final product rather than the 'objective' order of occurrence. This is referred to as "Flashbacks" and "Flash forwards" by critics (Gikandi, 1987, p.92).

Soyinka begins chapter one with interspersed talk about a drink. It is also a reminiscence of their past of which they have failed to create a complete unity from, and are merely going with the flow. Soyinka appears to be choosing from a long history and discarding whatever is not relevant to his chief concerns.

In *The Interpreters*, a curious combination of Soyinka's prior artistic concerns is given. In his narrative, he manages to present elements emerging from his poetry, drama and philosophy of life from his previous works. One encounters *The Road plus Death at Dawn* in the death of Sekoni, *The Tribulations of Brother Jero* in Lazarus. The deaths and artistic obsessions found in 'Telephone Conversation' and 'Death at Dawn' are created (Kitata, 2000, p.03).

Soyinka's 'heroes' are 'born' into a complex of pre-existing circumstances that intimately determines their future living career. Why is Sagoe a drunkard? Why is Egbo involved in disturbing reminiscents? Why is Bandele a fully evolved cat-like figure? Why is Sekoni a cranial stammerer? And why is Dehinwa so flippant and condescending? The reader has to reconcile this with their expectations. Soyinka decides either to surprise or if the outcome is predictable sustains a climate of belief and lifelikeness. He equips the reader with the tools for curiosity, which is an effective substitute for suspense.

Round and dynamic characters

Soyinka uses characters as a vehicle of transmitting and relaying pertinent information on the state of Nigeria after independence. The main characters in *The Interpreters* Sagoe the journalist, Egbo, the foreign officer; Bandele and Kola the University lecturer, Sekoni the engineer and sculptor and Lasunwon, the lawyer. Rather than a single protagonist, Soyinka presents the image of the whole society in diverse settings, not just the professional class that receives primary attention but also a few people on the fringes of polite society an evangelical preacher, a courtesan, and a thief. In a sense, Soyinka divides the characters into two groups, the observed and the observer, though the observers themselves, the interpreters, must submit to the closest scrutiny. This paper looks at the observers as the round and dynamic characters.

Wole Soyinka's first story is that of a round character known as Egbo, who is the grandson and heir to a tribal warlord and chief. He's faced with a dilemma on whether he should go back to his old village and take his powers and privileges (which include polygamy) or just abandon them and strive to adapt to the new Nigeria. Because he delayed his return (he makes one unsuccessful attempt to travel toward his home country), he effectively chooses to remain in the present, though the alternatives plague him throughout the novel. The dilemma is compounded by another: Should he stay with his mistress, Simi, a nationally famous courtesan with whom he forms an intimate relationship early in the novel, or abandon her to commit himself to a university student, a feminist, who is pregnant with his child and who challenges the moral prudishness of the university elite? The old African society, which Egbo has forfeited, has a social structure permitting him to keep both. Egbo is torn between traditional and modern lifestyle. For instance, he is being tossed between being a

bureaucrat at present and his wish to have become the chieftain of the creaky kingdom. It is idle now to think of the lordship of the creaky kingdom, and this reveals that Egbo is not dedicated to his present profession. In a sense, it is a concealed act of apostasy on his part.

Egbo advances the conflict between traditional and modern issues. This is brought about by Soyinka by acting as an omniscient narrator who is able to read through Egbo's mind. Egbo has to make a choice between two alternatives: either to become the chieftain of the creaky kingdom of which he is the legitimate inheritor or to become the lord of his domain, to follow the traditional line in which the son succeeds the father; the other alternative is to become a bureaucrat in a foreign office. Egbo's temporary conflict between his wish to be the inheritor of the creaky kingdom and to be the civil official, nags and teases his mind from time to time; his legitimate right to rule over his community and lead a life of princely luxury and fleshpots of Egypt and a dull, drab and dreary routine existence in the midst of "dull, grey file cabinet faces."

Osa Descendants Union sent their spokesmen to plague him daily, all bitten by the bug of an 'enlightened ruler', and gradually Egbo had begun to wonder and to set the warlord of the creeks against dull grey file cabinet faces of the Foreign Office. And slow anger built in him, panic and retraction from the elaborate pit. What did they demand of him? How dare they suggest obligation? And this stranger whose halting breath he could hear in their every plea... (Soyinka, 1965).

After a temporary spell of indecision, he chooses to be a bureaucrat. This confirms the post-colonial issue of graduates and elites of rejection of traditional systems and

values and embracing modernity. Although his people prevail upon him that he should take over the reins of rulership and ameliorate the conditions in his kingdom, Egbo declines the appeal made by Osa Descendants' Union' and prefers to be a bureaucrat. Egbo has a feeling that he must compromise with the present.

He externalises his choice between the chieftainship of the creeks and a position in the bureaucracy in an alien office. He compares the choice between these two alternatives: with choosing a beautiful old lady or a young lady who is pregnant; in either case, the choice is unpleasant and, therefore, undesirable. Despite some of these foibles in Egbo's characters, Soyinka prefers him to be the leading character and endows him with certain exceptional traits... traits that Ogun, one of the chief deities in the Yoruba pantheon, possesses. He is also endowed with the responsibility of reflecting on time, that is, past, present and the future. We are moved from the days of our ancestors through the colonial to post-colonial periods. Through this period Soyinka intends to bring about the disruption brought about by the imperialists and the resultant conflict that emerges between the traditional and modern view of time as the 'interpreters' try to conform to the changes.

Egbo's view of time is that it is unbroken continuity, but later on, he questions himself that if the past is one uninterrupted continuity, why the dead should not be forgotten if they are not strong enough to be ever-present in our being. We learn this from his conversation with Sekoni.

Bandeled was frowning, and Egbo noticed.

"Why do you frown?"

Bandeled merely shook his head.

'You don't agree? Sekoni, what do you say? If the dead

Are not strong enough to be ever-present in our being,

should they not be as they are, dead?'
T-t-to make such d-d-distinctions disrupts the d-d-dome of
c-c-continuity, which is what life is.'
'But are we then,' Egbo continued, 'to continue making advances
to the dead? Why should the dead on their part fear to speak to light? (Soyinka, 1965, p.09)

Responding to Egbo's question why the dead are not strong enough to be ever-present in our being and why they should not be as dead as they are, Sekoni stammers that:

T-t-to make such d-d-distinctions disrupts the d-d-dome of
c-c-continuity, which is what life is (Soyinka, 1965, p.09).

Upon Egbo's persistence that the dead should fear the light, he responds by a philosophical response to bridges which he calls the dome of religion as they are static and most significantly, they face backwards. Later we see him stammer out his sense of social responsibility when he asks his friends to stop the drinking and see whether they can help the residents of a shanty that had been struck by lightning.

Of the five characters in *The Interpreters*, no two of them are alike. Each follows an occupation that is different from others. Sekoni, one of the five interpreters is an engineer who has studied abroad and has come back to Nigeria with a view to change the state of his country that is 'waking up' from colonialism after independence. Sekoni is an archetype of modern generation that would like to use their brain in order to bring development to the society and take it above traditional lifestyle which is viewed as retrogressive.

Soyinka gives us a vivid description of Sekoni, the newly qualified engineer, as he leans on the deck of the ship that is bringing him home. He is dreaming of how he is going to transform his country with his engineering skill.

Sekoni, a qualified engineer, had looked over the railings every day of his sea voyage home. And the sea sprays built him bridges and hospitals and the large trailing furrows became a deafening waterfall defying human will until he gathered it between his fingers, made the water run in the lower channels of his palm directing it against the primaeval giants on the forest banks... (Soyinka, 1965, p.26)

Sekoni is not aware of what lies ahead of him. The major conflict here lies between the old way of looking at things and the new way of looking at them. Eldred D Jones in *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* (1976) makes a pertinent observation that the viewpoint of the old society comes in conflict with the modern view. Sekoni exemplifies the opinions of the post-colonial, contemporary and the elite generation. With his vision, Sekoni can quickly transform society. He actually moves in the direction of this dream when he builds the first power station. Despite all this effort, he ends up in a mental hospital.

Soyinka has withheld these facts of Sekoni's development and has portrayed him as a character who is merely loitering in Kola's art classes and the night club. The loitering of Sekoni marries with the 'facts' of his life that Soyinka has left vague. After chapter one, Sekoni is frozen up to chapter six where curiosity is quenched by the news that he is now a sculptor deftly working on his 'wrestler'. Sekoni then becomes 'the most non-existent person in the world'. We are told 'Sekoni never talked, he only burst with

sudden efforts and was obsessed with the theme of life and death. He still maintained the company he had before going to the hospital. The redemptive promise of Sekoni's act is destroyed by the corrupt establishment, which ruthlessly crushes the young man and his dream. The madness of Sekoni, his curse, and the burgeoning and quick flowering of his creativity in a totally different realm follow the pattern of symbolic death and rebirth of a nation, while his actual death on the road provides the strong sacrificial motif in the novel.

Soyinka portrays Nigeria as a country that has just attained independence, a post-colonial state and the ghost of the immediate past starts haunting free-born Nigeria. Politically, socially and economically, things are out of joint and out of shape. Soyinka castigates the new rulers of Nigeria. They are unruly and dictatorial. They have their own way – the way of the tyrants. The whole of the state is weltering in a sea of corruption. Corruption in the government is what destroys Sekoni's dream. Corruption is the mother of all evils. As much as the leaders have acquired new status under independence, they have drifted from the old values. The ancient society was free from corruption and Soyinka seems to insinuate that freedom, in its real sense, must be free from all stain: first of all, it must be free from corruption. To create a new one out of the ashes of the old, the corrupt regime, out of political and social chaos, Nigeria now needs administrators with hands clean and with a great sense of commitment to public welfare.

Sekoni's untimely death is symbolic of Nigeria's moral death. His premature departure also symbolises that the electrifying genius, capable of performing miracles of the scientific invention that is too early for the newly emancipated Nigeria; has to wait. Nigeria has to see and experience her own growth and all-round development, passing through the travails of suffering. The country can

hopefully anticipate a genius like Sekoni in her future. Sekoni may be seen as the alluring vision that Nigeria unfolds for the generations of men to come. His genius, albeit as brief as lightning, is his own tribute:

Sekoni, qualified engineer; had looked over the railings every day of his sea voyage home. And the sea sprays built him bridges and hospitals and large trailing furrow become ... (Soyinka, 1965, p.26)

It is worth noting that the five 'interpreters' work independently but they harmoniously combine to produce a total integrated image that helps them understand the post-colonial Nigeria as one entity and interpret it as an object of their joint study.

One of the interpreters named Kola is depicted as a painter. And as an artist, he constructs a bridge between the world of man and the world of traditional Gods. Kola paints the pantheon of Yoruba gods, and it represents all the mythological deities there. In book one, we see Soyinka representing the ideologies of the traditional god, and in book two, we see a representation of the modern God through Lazarus. The real significance of the pantheon has often been questioned by the critics, but Soyinka's intention in making Kola thoroughly preoccupied with this pantheon is to revive their traditional deities and thereby to mark or achieve cultural identity. Soyinka himself is grounded with both the Knowledge of the traditional god as well as the Christian God. He is so much attached to the Yoruba mythological gods, and in most of his writings, he alludes to them, especially Ogun; god of war and iron. The pantheon represents the community of gods in Yoruba mythology. Through Kola, we see the pantheon as a symbol of 'the dome of continuity of time.' He believes that the past continues into the present, and the present passes into the future; thus, time is represented as an unbroken

chain. The Yoruba myth represents the link between men and god; therefore, it stresses that they are inseparable from one another:

Kola said, 'It requires only the bridge or the ladder between heaven and earth. A rope or a chain. The link that is all. After fifteen months all that is left is the link... (Soyinka, 1965, p.225)

In this pantheon, we continue seeing the representation of traditional values of the Yoruba that kept them together and brought about unity and oneness. The opening of Kola's painting the pantheon with the sacrifice of a ram and the ritual sprinkling of blood implies the cleansing and the reformation of society. On the bigger picture, the 'interpreters' are equipped with 'modern' knowledge acquired from civilised foreign countries, and they would like to renew society and make it a new. They would like to reform Nigeria that is wallowing in the quagmire of corruption, and therefore this pantheon serves as a larger metaphor for a reformative undertaking of these interpreters. According to Kola, the theme of the pantheon is oneness or unity of time and space of the past, present and future. Soyinka seems to state that the present disintegration of Nigeria, politically, socially and morally is due to the people of the state of Nigeria, gradually drifting away from their traditions which, in the past, kept them in perfect unity and harmony. One can easily deduce that Soyinka seems to be suggesting that the then chaotic disorder in the lives of Nigerians is that they come under the influence of the European way of living, being thoughtlessly attracted the Western civilisation since their simplicity of life was rooted in the rural mode of living which is incompatible with the materialistic way of life of Europe. The 'interpreters' too having acquired the white man's education, advance the idea of Western civilisation, but Soyinka uses them to transmit his vision of a good and

healthy society. A society that is free from corruption and a community that is being transformed from traditional, to post-independence and to neo-colonialism. Soyinka's conviction is that every committed writer in the society must create social and political awareness to his community.

Flat, static characters and the parody of resurrection

Most of the static characters are created by alluding to the Bible. Soyinka creates Biblical characters: Noah and Lazarus. These are flat and static characters, and their literary career in the text is as predictable as the scriptural ancestors from which they emerge. Soyinka's Noah is set in a cataclysmic deluge, and his Lazarus claims to have arisen from the dead. The setting and careers of these two characters echo their biblical antecedents as closely as possible.

Chapter eleven and twelve introduce and close these flat characters and the motivation for their entrance is the death of Sekoni. A fortnight after his funeral and after his remaining friends and interpreters (Kola, Sagoe, Bandele, Dehinwa and Lasunwon) has returned. The motivation here is that, consistent with Soyinka's vision of the continuity of life after death a reincarnation of the departed Sekoni has to be presented. Egbo announces that; The night-club salesman of Sagoe has defected to more watery deities (Soyinka 1965, p.158). Who has defected? Apparently, this question does not sound outrageous and in no place do the interpreters agree that Sekoni is dead and absent. The story of the resurrection of Lazarus is derived from the New Testament from the book of John in chapter eleven.

The biblical Lazarus died and resurrected from the dead after four days. The bible states that when Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been buried four days before (John 11:17) ... he called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out! He came out, his hands and feet wrapped in grave

clothes..." (John 11:44). This makes other characters in the text believe in the resurrection. Dehinwa fearing the intensity of Sekoni's 'resurrection' upon the now drained friends warns them that their habits should change since their routine meetings at the Cambana and Mayoni in Ibadan every fortnight were making memory unbearable. Just as she is about to bring this reflection to a proper discussion, the albino, Lazarus joins them and immediately establishes himself as one of them. The transition from reminiscing over Sekoni to this Lazarus who terrifies them all is far too clean and stark to be mistaken for anything else (Kitata, 2000, p.45).

Artistically, he fills in a character gap that is wanting:

These were the accidents that grew into set habits, reminders among several more of Sekoni who was more oppressively with them now than the strain of stuttering intensity ever was. 'He's coming' Dehinwa hissed between her teeth (Soyinka, 1965, p.155).

The entry of Lazarus has a spellbinding power on Sekoni's friends. Kola is in effect fantasising on what to make of the stranger's timing, "So soon after Sekoni's death...

Kola, his mind was full of fantasies – what should one make of this stranger's timing, so soon after Sekoni's death?... and yes, now doctors even talk of 'apparent' death, what does it mean then, death or no-death, for instance, Sekoni, as he was lowered into the grave, suppose a sudden knock was heard and Sekoni stammering, Illet me out, Illet me out... (Soyinka, 1965, p160).

He found himself boring into the man's face as if he could see Sekoni's face demetamorphose from the albino's. The albino himself claims that before he was put into the coffin, he looked just like Sagoe and all his fellow black friends. On Lasunwon's insinuation that Lazarus, had gone through the horrible fate of being mistakenly buried alive, the latter promptly corrects him that he was actually dead.

Kola can imagine Sekoni actually banging on the coffin and asking to be let out and Lazarus, timely, promises to tell them of his ordeal but at a different place and time, not in the Cambana where life looked cheap. Apparently, this seems to be what a fluent Sekoni would have wished for: a change of setting from club to church for he was a sheikh. This phase in characterisation comes full circle then when the interpreters agree to change haunt and visit the religious. Soyinka consciously sidesteps the reality of miracles through substituting it with a mystical emergence. As the novel advances, Lazarus once again appears as a flat character when he gives a direct statement about himself:

My name is Lazarus', said the man in lace-fringed robes, all white. 'My name is Lazarus, not Christ, son of God'... 'My name is Lazarus, not Christ, son of God'. They took off their shoes, covered in confusion at the distraction they caused and the attention to themselves (Soyinka, 1965, p.164)

Soyinka uses this static character to prove to the readers how little knowledge the interpreters had on the new religion. He sharpens our perception of Lazarus just in case the reader may be sceptical about false prophets.

The fantastical revelation of Lazarus' calling to the flock is infused with readings from the Bible taken directly from

the gospels in which the death and raising of Lazarus by Jesus is re-echoed:

I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me shall not perish but shall have everlasting life.

I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever believeth in me shall never die (Soyinka, 1965, p.167).

At the end of this spiritual locution, it is apparent that Soyinka's intent on creating a parallel between Lazarus and his biblical counterpart but the parody is too intense even to raise some scepticism about the validity of the biblical narrative of the raising of Lazarus by Jesus from the grave. This is given latitude by the mention of Barabbas, the cynical thief who taunted Jesus on the cross and died challenging Christ to save them both. One wonders why Jesus failed to forgive, bless and invite the radical to heavenly bliss if he indeed was a God for sinners. It takes an interpreter to make this connection.

Barabbas is mentioned by Sagoe in reference to Noah, a former shoplifter whom Lazarus has brought to the church and baptised. This typifies the movement of Soyinka's characterisation of Noah and his apostles in the biblical strain but, significantly, the Bible is re-created in a humorous, cynical way if these characters are to be taken seriously. This demeaning character parody is called by Egbo as knowledge of the new generation of interpreters (178), but the substitution of the saints with lower depth characters is the real characterisation mechanics. Noah takes a minimal position in the novel. His image which Kola paints as Esumale (the rainbow) is the final stroke in the

canvas. Rainbow coincidentally was the first sign of a new beginning of life after the deluge, and significantly it is a last illusion in the yet wet pantheon. Noah represents the renewal of a generation and the beginning of a new life.

Conclusion

Through artistry, Soyinka tries to unearth and discover the causes of Nigeria's moral death 'Death at Dawn' in the post-colonial state. He insinuates that freedom, in its real sense, must be free from corruption and other social injustices. Corruption in Nigeria must be brought to an end and that there is no panacea to cure corruption; it is by necessity a slow process, but it must be a steady process, requiring the patience of Prometheus and the Christ of the primitive world. To create a new one out of the ashes of the old, corrupt regime, out of political and social chaos, Nigeria now must have administrators with hands clean and with a great sense of commitment to public welfare. Soyinka expresses his sense of disillusionment in *The Interpreters* and through satire portrays Nigeria as a 'primitive world' of which even Christ cannot bring to salvation.

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