

**A Tiger Does Not Shout its Tigritude, it Acts: An Analysis of  
The Works of Wole Soyinka**

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## Preface

Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka, known as Wole Soyinka, is a Nigerian playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist. He is a towering figure in world literature. He has won international acclaim for his poetry as well as for his novels. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986 for "a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones that fashioned the drama of existence."

The dissertation, titled "A Tiger Does Not Shout its Tigritude, it Acts: An Analysis of the Works of Wole Soyinka" focuses on his writing skills and mastery of language, with special emphasis on the themes used by him in the majority of his works. The introductory chapter presents a brief note on the background of how the Nobel Prize was institutionalised. It also gives a glimpse into the various aspects that shaped the life of Wole Soyinka and led to his becoming a widely acclaimed writer. Chapter two discusses the literary style of Wole Soyinka and the major themes used by him in his works. Chapter three specifically delineates how Soyinka's works made an impact on a wide range of audiences and how it sheds light on Nigerian traditions. The concluding chapter sums up the argument.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

The "Merchant of Death," inventor of dynamite and other powerful explosives, Alfred Bernhard Nobel, born on October 21, 1833, in Stockholm, Sweden, had various interests, so he was not only an inventor but also an entrepreneur, businessman, scientist, chemist, poet, and dramatist. His interests are reflected in the prize he established and laid the foundation for in 1895 when he wrote his last will, leaving much of his wealth to the establishment of the prize.

Since 1901, the Nobel Prize has been honouring men and women from around the world for outstanding achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology, medicine, literature, or work in fostering world peace. It has been presented to new laureates at ceremonies on 10 December, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death. At the Nobel Prize award ceremony in Stockholm, speeches present the laureates and their discovery or work, after which His Majesty, the King of Sweden, hands each laureate a diploma and a medal.

Each Nobel medal is individually inscribed and made of 24 karat gold. It weighs up to 175 grams and has a portrait of Alfred Nobel on one side. The design on the reverse differs by prize. It also has the laureate's name. The Nobel Prize medal in literature was designed by Erik Lindberg, a Swedish sculptor and engraver.

The first laureate to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature was Sully Prudhomme in 1901, as his works showed a "rare combination of the qualities of both heart and intellect."

Wole Soyinka became the first sub-Saharan African to be honoured with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986 for "a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones that fashioned the drama of existence."

Akinwande Oluwole Babatunde Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934, in Abeokuta, near Ibadan, in western Nigeria, into a Yoruba family of village school teachers. He is a Nigerian playwright and political activist. He is the second child of Samuel Ayodele and Grace Eniola Soyinka. Soyinka's father was an "Ijebu" and his mother was an "Egba," both sub-divisions of the Yoruba ethnic group that were not traditionally allowed to marry each other.

Soyinka's father was a scholar and the headmaster of Abeokuta, so it was quite natural for Soyinka to receive early education in the school of his father. Afterwards, he pursued his secondary education in Ibadan, which was during the colonial period. In 1946, he went to the Elite Government College at Ibadan, the capital city of western Nigeria. This is the place where he began his literary activities by joining drama groups and writing poetry.

He also started reading short stories on the national radio, which led him to pioneer Nigerian radio drama. A further landmark in his educational career came when he entered the newly established University College of Ibadan. It was here that Soyinka got exposed to multiple disciplinary educations and activities. He also mastered Greek, English and History. Furthermore, he played lead roles in a number of theatre productions. After editing the student publication, known as *The Eagle*, he found an opportunity for creative writing.

An urge to do something of greater magnitude made him go to the British University of Leeds in 1954, where he finished his graduation with an upper second in

English honours. His encounter with some literary personalities was instrumental in the making of his literary career. One such person, G. Wilson Knight, the great Shakespearean scholar, made Soyinka keenly interested in theorising the link between ritual and tragedy. Also, Knight's metaphysical interpretation of literature impressed him a lot. Another influence came from Arnold Kettle, a leading Marxist critic, who exposed him to the various roles of class relations in political and economic fields, which became a recurrent theme in Soyinka's works. He has periodically been a visiting professor at the universities of Cambridge, Sheffield, and Yale.

Apart from being a writer, he was also a strong political activist who served for Nigerian democracy. His decades of political activism included periods of imprisonment and exile, and he founded, headed, or participated in several political groups, including the National Democratic Organization, the National Liberation Council of Nigeria, and Pro-National Conference Organizations (PRONACO). In 2010, Soyinka founded the Democratic Front for a People's Federation and served as chairman of the party.

Wole Soyinka's life has been full of ups and downs, it can also be considered adventurous. It is his own experiences that are reflected in his works. He writes in English and his literary language is marked by great scope and richness of words. He founded the theatre group, "The 1960 Masks" and in 1964, the "Orisun Theatre Company", in which he has produced his own plays and taken part as actor.

He wrote his first plays during his time in London, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel* (a light comedy), which were performed at Ibadan in 1958 and 1959 and were published in 1963. Some of his satirical comedies include *The Trial of Brother Jero* with its sequel, *Jero's Metamorphosis*, *A Dance of the Forests*, *Kongi's*

*Harvest* and *Madmen and Specialists*. His serious philosophic plays are *The Strong Breed*, *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Soyinka's autobiographies *Ake* (1981) and *Isara* (1989) reveal tensions between tradition and modernity – the tension which can be seen in almost all his writings. *The Man Died* (1972) is his prose account of his arrest and 22-month imprisonment. He has written two novels, *The Interpreters* (1965), narratively, a complicated work and *Season of Anomy* (1973) which is based on the writer's thoughts during his imprisonment.

He wrote a good deal of *Poems from Prison* (1969) while he was jailed in 1967–69 for speaking out against the war brought on by the attempted secession of Biafra from Nigeria. Soyinka's poems show a close connection to his plays, they are collected in *Idanre, and Other Poems* (1967), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), the long poem *Ogun Abibiman* (1976) and *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988).

As a dramatist, Wole Soyinka was influenced by J M Synge, Osborne, Wesker, John Arden and Harold Pinter. All were his icons in one way or the other. Family played no less important role in shaping Soyinka's genius. The colonial period prompted him to actively engage in political activities. It was at this time that he evolved into a playwright who employs the idiom of African art to write plays in English.

After winning the Nobel Prize, he was sought after as a lecturer, and many of his lectures were published—notably the Reith Lectures of 2004, as *Climate of Fear* (2004). Symbolism, flashback, and ingenious plotting contribute to a rich dramatic structure. His best works exhibit humour and fine poetic style as well as a gift for irony and satire and for accurately matching the language of his complex characters to their social position and moral qualities.



## Chapter Two

### Recurring Themes in the Works of Wole Soyinka

Historically African continent has always been looked down upon in the field of any creative activity. The British colonizers even branded it as a 'dark continent'. No human race, however primitive and ancient, can be called summarily as uncivilized, not having any language or means of expression.

The basic origin of literature, in Africa, as elsewhere, may be traced from the expressions of sorrow or joy- the cries of victory and groans of sorrow. African literature, by common consent, is said to be deeply rooted in its varied customs and traditions and their languages in different dialects. So it is not an exaggeration to say that the Africans had a rich cultural heritage. Irele Abiola has rightly observed, "Traditional African literature is something which exists in our indigenous languages and which is related to our traditional societies and cultures." (Khandelwal 67)

Nigeria is situated in the West African region and is the most populous nation and biggest economy. Nigerian culture is as multi-ethnic as the people in Nigeria. The people of Nigeria still cherish their traditional languages, music, dance and literature. Nigeria comprises of three large ethnic groups, which are Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo.

Wole Soyinka belonged to the Yoruba ethnic group. He exhibits both the modern and traditional customs of Nigeria. His works include themes of his own surroundings and the confusions that he had to face as he grew up. His works reveal him as a humanist, a courageous man and a lover of justice. His works have such impact

that some of them are used in schools in Nigeria and some other anglophone countries in West Africa.

Soyinka's plays cut across diverse socio-economic, political, cultural and religious preoccupations. He had the ability to give new life to old ways. Young people who attended his shows would see relevance in the traditions they considered primitive. Also similar to neoclassicism, the function of his plays was nearly always to teach and to please. His drama was not devoid of light hearted moments, but it pushed audiences to think about important issues.

Soyinka not only writes for the stage but is also active in directing and producing theatre. Soyinka believes that the role of performative art is very important in shaping and regenerating the culture and political identity of a people and a nation. Art connects the culture of a people with the cosmic and the archetypal primal sources of beginnings.

Soyinka's belief in the interrelation between a culture's art and its cosmic history is manifested in his depiction of Yoruban cosmology in his writings. Due to the infusion of Yoruban deities and folklore some of Soyinka's writing may be very distant from the average knowledge and expectations of western readership. The cultural intricacies and weight of Yoruban myth will not be explicated here, but the relation between Soyinka's use of Yoruban myth and his ideas about the western mind is examined.

The themes used by him in most of his works are :

## Colonialism

At the turn of the century, colonialism had reached its peak in the African states. With colonialism came a realization of its dark future and ultimate futility. When the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought increased exploitation to Africa due to the European demand for large quantities of raw materials, with the entrepreneurs came missionaries and teachers with the intent of smothering native African culture. One cannot ignore the fact that with the arrival of Europeans, the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria united to oppose them. Soyinka's works reflect the pain and suffering of colonialism. He reacted against Negritude, a movement which reflected a reaction to colonialism and rejected the political, social, and moral domination of the West. Whereas Negritude assumes the total consciousness of belonging to the black race, and thus becomes a rationale against western imperialism, Soyinka saw Negritude as belonging to colonial ideology and 'otherizing', or giving the African group an identity that so radically differs from that of Europeans that it comes to represent savagery and irrationality. Although he criticizes Negritude, his drawing on African myths, including those of his own Yoruba culture, does in fact define negritude in the best sense; thus, there appears to exist a contradiction in his sentiments against negritude, for, on the other hand, he accedes to dominant African culture in his works.

*Death and the King's Horseman* is a play that tells historically accurate events of the tragic demise of Elesin, a Yoruban king's horseman, and the moment of cosmic crisis that this brings upon his culture as a whole. As the king's horseman it is Elesin's role to follow his king into death through self-sacrifice. The play opens after the death of the king and thus Elesin's death is imminent. Contrary to most western readers' expectations, Elesin is not wracked with self-pity and rage against his fate. Elesin

knows that he holds the highest honour due to his active role in continuing the Yoruban cosmos by easing the transition of their fallen leader to the realm of the dead. The moment of outward crisis comes for the Yoruba when Elesin's self-sacrifice is stopped by the British District Officer who sees the act as a suicide that breaks civilized, legal, religious, and moral codes. What Soyinka alerts us to in the 'Author's Note' is to search for deeper human conflicts through a closer reading of the text. It was actually Elesin's own pride and lust for the material goods of this life that caused his hesitation to commit the self-sacrifice. This moment of hesitation granted the District Officer enough time to disrupt the ritual. This story is extremely relevant to both postcolonial concepts of art and political or cultural self-projections by nations in a postcolonial situation. It contextualizes colonialism as a matter of modern history and allows art and culture to go beyond and deeper into the innate human soul to find its sources of creation. Art produced in a postcolonial situation, even within the framework of colonial difference and oppression, is not confined to finding its roots in imperial opposition. Colonialism remains a framework of a story where the "threnodic essence" inherent to humanity can be created. The colonized must not be seen as only existing in opposition to a colonial force. The self-definition of a culture can also arise out of its own cosmic history.

### **Yoruban Religious Images**

Yoruba is one of the dominant ethnic group in Nigeria. There is a strong influence of Yoruban culture and religion on world religions among African diaspora. Soyinka's poem, *Last Turning* illustrates death with imagery that refers to Yoruban traditional beliefs. Death is portrayed as a physical, mental and religious act, the culmination of a journey to wisdom. The mention of hills, earth, rainfall and paths all have special significance in Yoruban culture, and Soyinka's metaphoric references to them serve to emphasize the poem's depiction of death as perhaps more valuable than

life. The poem addresses the last survivor of a group of five men who are being executed in Soyinka's prison. It is a more specific development of the introductory prose piece "Chains of Silence," which describes the five men as they walk to their deaths:

"Five men are walking the other way,  
 five men walking even more slowly, wearily,  
 with the weight of the world on each foot,  
 on each step towards eternity.  
 I hear them pause at every scrap of life,  
 at every beat of the silence,  
 at every mote in the sun,  
 those five for whom the world is about to die."

*Last Turning* moves forward in time to address the moment when four of the men have already been executed, and only one remains, "the last among the five". It attempts to comfort this last man's fears, to quiet his terror as he awaits his turn to be killed. Soyinka portrays death in "Last Turning" as a mental and physical journey. It is a time for contemplation, when "self/ Encounters self", but also a moment when all is made clear, when men can "read the earth in tremor [and]/ Pierce the day's elusive blindfold". Death thereby becomes an action, rather than a reaction as it is in Western cultures.

Soyinka exalts death by connecting it to particularly important phenomena in Yoruban belief: hills, the earth, rain and paths. Each pack special power as they are, with the exception of the path, particularly potent factors in the ethnic group's theology.

Hills were traditionally honoured as the homes of gods, for several reasons: they offered superb protection during wartime, they were of an awe-inspiring size and covered with dense, mysterious vegetation thought to be the home of wild animals and spirits, and thirdly they maintained 'an eternal presence' as they were known to outlast generations of humans. Soyinka's mention of "where the peaks fine needles have embossed/ Missals on the heart" is thereby a religious image connecting death to the holy hills and to Catholicism, which had been an influence in Yoruba land since the late nineteenth century.

### **Tradition vs Modernity**

Tradition vs modernity is one of the most recurring theme in Wole Soyinka's works. Through his works he has always given truthful pictures of the lives, hopes and frustrations of his own people. The tension and conflict that arises due to the collision of traditional and modern ideologies are very evident in his works.

*The Lion and the Jewel* was written and first performed the year before Nigeria was granted its independence from Great Britain, and the script was published two years after independence. As such, one of the primary conflicts of the play is its traditional Yoruba customs against a western conception of progress and modernity. The conflict subtly shows cultural hegemony running through the play as Baroka and Lakunle fight for Sidi's hand in marriage.

Lakunle represents the modern Nigerian man. He wears western clothing, has been educated in a presumably British school, and wants to turn his village into a modern paradise like the city of Lagos. Lakunle doesn't just admire and idolize western society; he actively and loudly despises the traditional customs of his village and the people who support them. This is best illustrated by Lakunle's refusal to pay Sidi's bride

price. Sidi indicates that she'd marry Lakunle any time if he'd only pay the price and observe local custom. Lakunle's refusal shows that it's more important to him to convert Sidi to his way of thinking and turn her into a "modern wife" than it is for him to marry her in the first place.

For much of the play, other characters describe Baroka as being directly opposed to modernity and extremely concerned with preserving his village's traditional way of life. Lakunle, in particular, finds Baroka's lifestyle abhorrent. He describes how Baroka paid off a surveyor to not route train tracks through the outskirts of Ilujinle, thereby robbing the village of a link to the modern world that would modernize the village.

However, when Baroka himself speaks, it becomes apparent that he doesn't actually hate modernity or progress. While he obviously delights in the joys and customs of village life, when it comes to modernity he simply hates having it forced upon him. He sees more value in bringing modern customs to the village on his own terms. For example, he argues that creating a postal system for the village will begin to bring it into the modern world without entirely upending the village's way of life. Further, when he does talk about modern ideas that were forced upon him, such as his servants forming a union and taking Sundays off, his tone is resigned rather than angry—he sees it as inevitable and annoying, but not bad.

Baroka wishes to add Sidi to his harem of wives, while Lakunle dreams of having one wife who, in theory at least, is his equal. Both men promise Sidi a different version of power and fulfillment. When Baroka dies, Sidi will become the head wife of the new Bale, a position that would make her one of the most powerful women in the village. Lakunle, on the other hand, offers Sidi the possibility of an equal partnership

in which she's not required to serve her husband as in traditional way. As Sidi recognizes that Lakunle's idea of modernity might not improve her life; in fact, it might mean that she would have less power and fewer rights than she would have in a traditional marriage.

Baroka's actions (and the fact that he triumphs in the fight for Sidi's hand) suggest that while Lakunle may be right that Ilujinle will indeed need to join the modern world, modernization and the outright rejection of local custom simply for the sake of doing so are foolish goals that benefit nobody. Instead, Baroka's triumph suggests that progress must be made when and where it truly benefits the village and its inhabitants.

In this play, modern Lakunle also plays the role of 'the occidental force'. He tries to civilize the outdated life style, beliefs, creeds, etc. of the native Nigerian. Through the running conflict between him and the villagers, represented especially by Baroka and Sidi, the taste of 'the Other' emerges. 'The Other' is, as usual, considered to be of lower slandered and moral values—they still believe in "bride-price" and many gods. Lakunle vehement attempt to modernize 'the Other' focuses on the beginning of the colonial process and on the "cultural hegemony". Lakunle tries to convince that "bride-price" is an outdated idea by telling her of the equalizing effect of marriage.

## **Racism**

Racism generally includes negative emotional reactions to members of the group, acceptance of negative stereotypes, and racial discrimination against individuals; in some cases, it leads to violence. Racism and racial discrimination have caused people of African descent to be held back in many aspects of public life. They have suffered exclusion and poverty and are often 'invisible' in official statistics. There



has been progress, but the situation persists, to varying degrees, in many parts of the world.

Racial discrimination are among the most important themes presented in books especially, by the writers who have confronted this in real life. Wole Soyinka is one among them. Being a citizen of a country that was under the control of European government that propagated racist behaviour toward natives, it is quite natural for Soyinka to bring the theme of racism into his works.

The best example of racist behaviour that also includes satire, is his poem, *Telephone Conversation*, written in first person narration, it depicts a telephone conversation between a West-African man and a British land-lady who shockingly changes her attitude towards the man soon after he reveals his racial identity. It makes the readers feel that how brutal and devastating it can be for a man who is subjected to racial discrimination.

Thoughts of racism and preconceived notions come blended with an element of irony. Soyinka very well weaves the ignorance of whites using satire in a such a way that it blends in the poem smoothly.

He has mainly used two literary devices to deliver the message of anger and frustration towards racial discrimination at the micro-level of society. One is imagery; “lipstick coated, gold rolled cigarette holder piped” is the mental image of the lady made by the African speaker by just listening to her voice on the phone.

The other important poetic device is irony, which the poet uses in the poem. The irony lies in the fact that the lady has given an ad about the flat statement that the price is reasonable and indifferent. Indifferent in the case of the colour of the skin of any people, but when the African room seeker confesses about his identity, she holds silence

and does not respond to him. Her words and action do not match. *Telephone conversation* is excellent in its use of rich language and the timeless message it conveys, that is to avoid silent resignations to such policies of the racist society and also that intellectual superiority is not determined by racial colour.

Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others. It is a disease of the ignorant, is a horrific part of society, and has reared its ugly head throughout history, and is continuing to do the same today.

Racism adapts and changes over time, and can impact different communities in different ways, with racism towards different groups intensifying in different historical moments. It is important to spread the pain of the people being subjugated due to racial discrimination. This is best done when writers like Wole Soyinka, Maya Angelou etc. write about this and get global attention on this issue.

It is very important if we want to stop talking about these themes that all people begin to create individual action to achieve a society that can live in harmony, without prejudices and falsehoods. Otherwise, racial discrimination will always float in our society as the largest black hole.

### **Gender inequality**

Soyinka has several things to say about gender. Gender inequality is something that is deeply rooted in each society. Males are considered superior and are given full power to control others.

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is a work in which the women and girls of the marketplace, particularly Iyaloja, seem to have a great deal of power: their voices are loud and forceful. However, the Bride is completely mute and is more or less an object that is given to Elesin to appease him. She is a cipher who demonstrates how little power Nigerian women can possess. Jane, on the other hand, who represents European women, may seem to have a bit more power than her Nigerian counterparts. Wole Soyinka shows that women had important and recognized roles in traditional Yoruba society. Women fulfil their social, moral and spiritual roles as mothers, enforces of the discipline, show guidance to the community. On the other hand, men and women of white colour have no such obligations that suppresses them.

The characters of *The Trials of Brother Jero* are bound to their gender roles, with many personality traits explicitly attributed to a character's sex. Men constantly struggle to steer clear of the temptation of sin posed by women. The women of the play, on the other hand, feel tied to the will of men and therefore similarly limited. Amope complains that "it is a tough life for a woman" as she must depend on Chume and what he provides, which she deems insufficient for her needs. This barrier between men and women causes lapses in understanding and strained relationships. In this way, the theme of gender drives much of the plot in the play.

The theme of male chauvinism is clearly portrayed in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. A glimpse of this can be seen in the dialogue between Lakunle and Sidi in which the former attributes the latter's inability to comprehend what he is saying to the generic inferiority of women. He backs his claim with the fact that it has been scientifically proven that "women have a smaller brain than men"; hence, "they are called the weaker sex". But Sidi questions this claim:

“The weaker sex, is it?

Is it a weaker breed who pounds yam

Or bends all day to plant the millet

With a child strapped to her back?”

This dialogue is a reference to the male dominant African society and the role of second-fiddle women play in traditional African society. The prevailing ideology in *Ilujinley* is such that it makes the women next to servants in their male dominated society, though they are hardly aware of it. Sidi, as the product of that ideology, does not even know that she is actually serving the male chauvinism in *Ilujinley*. Marginalization of women as mere property becomes even more transparent when, in the final scene of the play, Sadiku comes out from Baroka’s palace on triumphant mood claiming,

“I was there when it happened to your father, the great Okiki. / I did for him, I, the youngest and the freshest of the wives. I / killed him with my claiming.”

Ironically enough, she does not know that her speech does carry more than she has intended it to carry. It is, as if, she is a piece of property handed down from a generation to the next one — she is a thing of inheritance that Baroka inherits from his father. More ironically, she does not even know until later that she has been deceived even in her thought that Baroka has simply used her as a tool to gain his own end— Sidi, the titular jewel.

Women are deceived, manipulated, and used as a tool by men whenever they feel like in their tradition. The language that Baroka uses to address Sidi upholds the idea that a woman is just like a ‘child’ supposed to be docile in the patriarchal society.

This play upholds certain ideas about masculinity and raises a number of questions about gender issues: why men or women should be considered as more powerful; what makes them more powerful in the first place, and how they either maintain or lose their power.

### **Society, Politics and Economy**

As Soyinka's writing inspiration was his own surrounding, he wrote creatively what he saw before his eyes.

In his work, *The Interpreters*, along with African cultural traditions, social and political changes are also mentioned. Rather than focusing directly on the political dimensions of Nigerian society after independence, Soyinka primarily situates politics within the cultural and intellectual areas.

The characters represent different aspects of the best and the brightest of the new national society, as the author attends to the vast challenges that they must overcome. The university at Ibadan offers a microcosm of the whole society, including the commitment to expanding access to higher education and the incorporation of African material in the curriculum. Corruption not only impedes technological progress by derailing the rural dam project on which Sekoni was working but also costs him his engineering career. Finally, it is technology that results in Sekoni's death when he is killed in a car accident, symbolizing the destruction of the Nigerian intelligentsia by the political technocracy.

In *The Road*, the socioeconomic urgency of transportation is highlighted within the social world that Soyinka depicts. Because the process of becoming a legally licensed driver is out of the reach of most people, drivers often obtain their credentials illegally. Passengers and the clients who contract with trucking services to move goods

participate in the underground economy. In doing so, they support a variety of illegal businesses, such as forging documents that is the Professor's specialty.

The economic difficulties also mean that many potential workers find no employment; the unemployed drivers that Say Tokyo Kid organizes take on paid odd jobs that include supporting political bosses who might steer patronage jobs their way.

In *The Dance of the Forest*, corrupted power or abuse of power is another major theme in the play. A simple definition of the abuse of power is the misuse of a position of power to take unjust advantage of individuals, organizations, or governments. Soyinka not only highlighted the misuse of power by colonialists but also wrote about abuse of power by the head of ethnic groups.

In this work it is represented in the characters of Mata Kharibu and Madame Tortoise. As we are taken back to the palace of the king, we see that Madame Tortoise exploits her beauty and her power over men in order to stir up discord. Mata Kharibu is also corrupted by his immense power, as demonstrated by the fact that he is demanding that his soldiers fight against their better judgment, and the fact that he mercilessly punishes free thinking. Wole Soyinka tells a story that reveals to the reader that all power is corruptible, and that just because people are given authority does not mean that they are good or ethical people.

In the play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka is not only poking fun at religion but also criticizing politics; often, as the play reveals, there is a large overlap between the two. Politics appears at an official level, such as the supposed low salary granted to Chume as the local government's messenger and the Member of the House's desire for a position of more power, between the local village and the central government. But it

also exists at a more informal level, between each character attempting to figure out her/his role in a country still negotiating its new independence from Britain.

Jero's very rise to power was a result of what he called a successful "campaign" against other prophets and their followings, and as the self-elected leader, or tyrant, of the Brotherhood of Jero, his every action is political, serving to consolidate his own power.

In the same play, Jero uses his Brotherhood as a tool to achieve power. Rather than valuing his followers as people and ends in themselves, Jero assigns value as if they were goods to be traded and swapped. This is demonstrated when, following his loss of Chume's faith, Jero attempts to convert the Member, as if balancing his books. In doing so, Jero commodifies religion, turning toward a system that understands only financial gains.

Through his actions, Soyinka seems to be asking his audience how we should properly value each other and our lives, in a world where people focus increasingly on making financial gains.

## Chapter Three

### Conclusion

Soyinka, therefore, presents an honest picture of the Nigerian culture in his works. As Zargar puts it:

“Soyinka can likewise be considered as an ethno-moderate, since his works concern a Yoruba focused esteem framework and clarify its perspective through the Yoruba culture, and in addition; he has raised in a Yoruba people group and subsequently follows his recollections of custom and convention from the Yoruba, in spite of the fact that he was additionally instructed in the Western world which included learning Western structures and abstract structures, which he endeavoured to use to present his African and Yoruba root to the world.” (Zargar 89)

He became the first sub-Saharan African to be honoured with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986 solely due to the way he used words to weave plots for plays and stories that contained richness along with entertainment. Soyinka never failed in addressing the conflicts and tensions that prevailed among the ethnic groups of Nigeria. He never openly supported British colonial rule nor did he dismiss it. He maintained a balance between colonial progress and traditional values in his works. He is a natural playwright with a taste of frankness and clarity about his views on African culture. His plays reflect various evils of Yoruba people, their lack of education, superstitious beliefs, age-old outdated customs, etc. But he shows his innate love for his people, he does not despise them, but only their ignorance and backwardness. He wants to reform his society. All this has gone to make him the most popular writer in Africa.



He not only wrote for pleasure, rather his works gave some sort of message to the readers. The worldwide acceptance of his works not only bought Wole Soyinka into the limelight but also bought the rituals and customs and the pain endured during the colonial period to mainstream media.

This is reflected in his works through themes like colonialism, which appears in the play *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) which is based on a real incident that took place in Nigeria during the colonial Era. In the play British District Officer disrupts native customs considering it suicidal. Yoruba religious images are also reflected in the poem, *Last Turning*. The poem shows the religious beliefs and how the people of Yoruba consider nature sacred. Another important theme in Soyinka's works is the continuous battle between tradition and modernity. It is clearly presented in the play, *The Lion and the Jewel* (1962), a play that chronicles how Baroka, the lion, fights with the modern Lakunle over the right to marry Sidi, the titular Jewel. The play ends with Baroka winning Sidi's hand for marriage that is, traditions overtook modernity through the characters, Lakunle and Baroka. Racism is the theme that is very common and most recurring theme in the works of those writers who have experienced it. Soyinka too represents this theme in his poem *Telephone Conversation* (1963) which appeared in *Modern Poetry from Africa*. As the title indicates, the poem is a conversation between a West African man and a white landlady. Through the dialogues exchanged between them, the writer ironically comments on the ignorance of the Europeans and the way they consider dark skin colour as an offence or as a sign of impurity. Gender inequality is another theme. It occurs in *Death and the King's Horseman* in which Iyaloja is shown as powerful and on the contrary the Bride is mute, she is someone who has no opinion of her own. Even another character, a European woman, Jane, she has comparatively more freedom than the native women. In *The*

*Trials of Brother Jero* (1963), a satirical play about a fake prophet, the men are bound with the roles that has to be performed by them and women are tied due to which they both are similarly controlled in their freedom. *The Lion and the Jewel* portrays male chauvinism through the characters of Lakunle and Baroka. One describes women as weaker sex and the other considers women as child, someone who has to be taken care of along with spoon-feeding. Even the woman are unaware of the fact that they are being treated like a mere object through which the males satisfy their requirements. Society, politics and economy of Nigeria is shown in Soyinka's novel, *The Interpreters* (1965), it is the first and one of the only three novels written by him. This novel depicts the social and political changes through the representation of the university at Ibadan and the death of Sekoni due to technological reasons. It shows the exposure of Nigeria to western aspects and the post-independence moral decadence that plagues the Nigerian society which is being solved by the Nigerians who had just returned from studies abroad. *The Road* (1965) is a play about a day in the strange life of a group of drivers on a Nigerian road. It deals with the aspect of unemployment and how the drivers illegally get driving license. In *The Dancer of the Future* abuse of power is shown through reputed characters, Mata Kharibu and Madame Tortoise. Overlapping of politics and religion by criticizing the former and making fun of the latter is shown in the play *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

“Well, the first thing is that truth and power for me form an antithesis, an antagonism, which will hardly ever be resolved. I can define in fact, can simplify the history of human society, the evolution of human society, as a contest between power and freedom.”

Therefore, Soyinka is a writer and activist who drastically changed the way of writing fiction. The themes used by him take the readers back to their societies where such

causative histories are far fresher in the memory, where the ruins of formerly thriving communities still speak eloquent accusations and the fumes still rise from the scorched earth strategies of colonial and racist myopia. Yet the streets bear the names of former oppressors, and their statues and other symbols of subjugation are left to decorate their squares, the consciousness of a fully confident people has relegated them to mere decorations and roosting places for bats and pigeons. And the libraries remain unpurged so that new generations freely browse through the works of Frobenius, Hume, Hegel, Montesquieu and others without first encountering, freshly stamped on the fly-leaf: *Warning! This work is dangerous for your racial self – esteem.*

To spread the knowledge of past it is important that writers like Wole Soyinka get worldwide acknowledgment amongst ‘white supremacy’. Soyinka also played a prominent role in Nigerian civil society. As a faculty member at the University of Ife, he led a campaign for road safety, organizing a civilian traffic authority to reduce the shocking rate of traffic fatalities on the public highways. His program became a model of traffic safety for other states in Nigeria.

‘The Wole Soyinka Annual Lecture Series’ was founded in 1994 and “is dedicated to honouring one of Nigeria and Africa’s most outstanding and enduring literary icons: Professor Wole Soyinka. In 2011, the African Heritage Research Library and Cultural Centre built a writers' enclave in his honour. It is located in Adeyipo Village, Lagelu Local Government Area, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The enclave includes a Writer-in-Residence Programme that enables writers to stay for a period of two, three or six months, engaging in serious creative writing. ‘Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature’ in Africa is a pan-African writing prize awarded biennially to the best literary work produced by an African. It was established by the Lumina Foundation in 2005 in honour of Africa's first Nobel Laureate in Literature, Wole Soyinka, who

presents the prize, which is chosen by an international jury of literary figures. Administered by the Lumina Foundation, the prize has been described as the African equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

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## Appendix

### Honours bestowed on Wole Soyinka:

- 1973: Honorary D.Litt. University of Leeds.
- 1973–74: Overseas Fellow, Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 1983: Elected an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.
- 1983: Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, United States.
- 1986: Nobel Prize for Literature.
- 1986: Agip Prize for Literature.
- 1986: Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic (CFR).
- 1990: Benson Medal from Royal Society of Literature.
- 1993: Honorary doctorate, Harvard University.
- 2002: Honorary fellowship, SOAS.
- 2005: Honorary doctorate degree, Princeton University.
- 2005: Enstooled as the Akinlatun of Egbaland, a Nigerian chief, by the Oba Alake of the Egba clan of Yoruba land. Soyinka became a tribal aristocrat by way of this, one vested with the right to use the Yoruba title Oloye as a pre-nominal honorific.
- 2009: Golden Plate Award of the American Academy of Achievement presented by Awards Council member Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
- 2013: Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, Lifetime Achievement, United States.
- 2014: International Humanist Award.

- 2017: Joins the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, as a Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Humanities.
- 2017: "Special Prize" of the Europe Theatre Prize.
- 2018: University of Ibadan renamed its arts theater to Wole Soyinka Theatre.
- 2018: Honorary Doctorate Degree of Letters, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB).
- 2022: Honorary Degree from Cambridge University.