

LANGUAGE USE AND STYLE, AS A DEPICTION OF AFRICAN LITERATURE: AN EXAMPLE OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*.

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07/15CD076

AN ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONS) IN ENGLISH

TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FACULTY OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN,

NIGERIA.

MAY, 2011.

CERTIFICATION

This essay has been read and approved as meeting part of the requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in the Department English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God for His guidance and protection and to my Parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tony Boyejo for their support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I sincerely appreciate my Supervisor Dr. Mrs. B.F. Ibrahim for her motherly advice and counseling throughout the process of this research. I say a very big and hearty thank you Ma; you have made this work a reality. I also appreciate the support of Anthony Obute in the process of this research, thanks for being a friend indeed. I equally acknowledge the moral support of Hameedah Kehinde and other friends too numerous to mention. Wish you all the very best in the next phase of your pursuits.

ABSTRACT

*The continued domination of English language in the African world especially in the literary field has caused various doubts on what could be termed the African literature. Therefore, purpose of this research is to identify, how African writers have used language and style of writing to depict their continental identity in works of art. Researches have established that the some parts of Africa had their literatures (either oral and or written) long before some parts of Europe. Therefore, the advent of English language is not the genesis of literature in Africa. The research, having examined this paramount discourse from Wole Soyinka' s **Death and the King's Horseman**, has concluded that language use and style are still significant beacons of African Literature.*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The invasions of the African continent by Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries on the grounds of religious, political and economic interests have not only left the continent in the rubbles of political and economic chaos but have equally altered the original languages of the continent. Before the advent of these “superior forces” (Great Britain and France), Africa had flourished in her literature, religion, politics and other spheres of human endeavors with the plurality of its language. The African perception of life, religious believes, political ideologies, literary insights and thought patterns were best represented in these African languages as initiated by the African ancestors. This fact makes the use of language imperatively pragmatic for language user’s better understanding.

The historical antecedents of slave trade, religious evangelisms and the colonization of various African countries by Europe, exposed the continent (Africa) to the contemporary spread of English and French languages across the continent and the world in general. This was triggered by the basic necessity for communication among human beings irrespective of their cultural origins. As this need arose between Africans and the European missionaries and political “big guns”, Africans gradually and unconsciously started adopting the use of these foreign languages at the expense of their mother tongue.

Over time, the use of these foreign languages penetrated virtually all the sectors of the African world with an exceptional dominance in the fields of literature and world politics. No

wonder, English language has gained global acceptance and recognition today and has become the world's second most spoken language.

The implication of relegation of African languages by these foreign languages on the African continent is an unfortunate loss of one of the paramount ingredients of the African cultural and racial identity. In precise terms, African languages have been significantly lost to English and French languages among others.

After about five decades of political independence, social integration and cultural renaissance of various African states, the continent as a whole is yet to be liberated from the linguistic influence of these foreign languages on the indigenous African languages. At this juncture, it may be safe for us to mention that the present day African continent is still under the archetypal colonialism of foreign languages. In other words, these foreign languages have bestridden the African literary world like a colossus, forcing the African writers to compress their thought patterns and ideologies within the available expressive modes of these foreign languages. Therefore, the contemporary African writer is faced with the challenge of expressing his thought patterns which are better represented in his indigenous language than in a foreign language. More so, there is the challenge of how the African writer will advocate the cultural, literary and racial identity of his immediate environment in a foreign language?

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A persisting struggle in African literature in the face of the influence of foreign languages, over the past decades, has remained the deliberate use of both foreign and indigenous languages as well as styles of writing to create a significant difference between the African literature and those of other continents.

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (6th edition) defines language as “a system of communication in speech and writing that is peculiar to a particular group of people”. Style, on the other hand, means “a particular way of writing or doing things”. The importance of language to a people cannot be over-emphasized because it is a crucial element in the making of a nation. Without a common language, a nation cannot evolve; a common culture and history are dependent on language. Therefore, without the use of African languages in works of art, African literature may attract numerous critical evaluations, as there would be doubts on what is actually African. Besides, it may lose its communication with its actual audience.

In the opinions of B.F. Ibrahim and Akande F.F. (2000, 2) literature is “the private and public awareness given to both the individual and the society through the exposure of the hidden or open truth that the people seem to be ignorant of”. With these definitions in mind, we may then ask the question, what is African literature and by what yardstick is this determined? Chinweizu et al (1980, 56) responds to this, thus, “African literatures are works done for the African audience, by Africans and in African languages whether written or oral”

Having established these basic frameworks, our major task in this research, is to examine how African writers have used language and style of writing to sustain the ethos of African literature written in foreign language. For the purpose of this study, our analysis are drawn from Wole Soyinka's *Death and the king's Horseman* which is an African drama text that investigates the age-long struggle of cultural conflict between the African world view and the European 'civilized' way of cultural thinking.

BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

Professor Akinwale Oluwole Soyinka, better known as Wole Soyinka, is an accomplished literary scholar, a social crusader, an ardent foe of military regimes, a foremost advocate of the African culture and perhaps, the most celebrated African writer of this age.

He was born on the 14th of July, 1934 in Ake, Abeokuta in the present day Ogun State, Nigeria. Soyinka had his primary education in St. Peter's Primary School, Ake. He then proceeded to Government College Ibadan. In 1952, he was admitted into the then University College Ibadan now University of Ibadan where he studied English, History and Greek. He left Ibadan for Leeds University, United Kingdom in 1954 where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English.

Soyinka's literary activities date back to his days in the then University College, Ibadan. However, in 1958, he began his heroic pilgrimage in the literary world when he published his two plays *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and The Jewel*. His artistic insight reached its

climax in 1975, when he published another play titled *Death and the King's Horseman*, this play is widely believed among other scholars and Soyinka's contemporaries to be his best known play and it earned him the Noble Prize for Literature in 1986. His other works include, *The Trial of Brother Jero*, *The Road*, *A dance of the Forest*, *A Play of the Giants*, *The Strong Breed*, *Kongi's Harvest*, *The Interpreters*, *Idanre and other Poems* among others.

Soyinka is a vast personality who mystifies himself and his message in his works, leaving his readers with the questions of his true personality. Outside the literary field, Soyinka occupies a pride of place in the political history of Nigeria, informed by his activities as the mediator between the Nigerian Government and the then seceding Biafran Republic in 1967. As part of his humanist activities, Soyinka once forcefully seized a radio station in Western Nigeria and made a public broadcast titled "*The Voice of the People*". In this broadcast, he verbally mobilized the masses against the irresponsible government of the then Premier of the Western region.

Soyinka has equally taken the front stage among other African writers in the advocacy of the African culture to the outside world. This, he does, through the deliberate infusion of his native language (Yoruba) and a general manipulation of English language in his works in order to accommodate his African thought patterns.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Wole Soyinka's works have often been characterized by mythic and ritualistic phenomena in his residual attempt to peruse and expose the aesthetic visions of the African culture to the outside world. This is one of the scholar's deliberate attempts at advocating the

vibrancy of “Africanity”, thereby putting a trademark on African literature from those literatures of other continents. However, this research is not intended at seconding the mythic and ritualistic impulses of Soyinka, but a deliberate shift to examine how the use of language and style of writing in *Death and the King’s Horseman* have been used to advocate the racial identity of the African continent in literature.

As earlier mentioned, language is one of the most important features in an objective definition of a set of people. Considering the continent’s contact with the outside world in the years before, which led to the linguistic genocide of the African world with the introduction of foreign languages as the official languages of the continent, how then would Africa advocate her racial identity in works of art using a foreign language? Therefore, the ultimate focus of this research is to unravel how Soyinka has been able to expand the frontiers of English language, probably with the infusion of his mother tongue, proverbs, riddles, music, dance and other African traditional literary aesthetics in this his selected work; *Death and the King’s Horseman*.

JUSTIFICATION

Fundamentally, this research presents as additional information to the already existing research reports on the concept of the use of language for the depiction of African literature. However, these findings will be in particular reference to the use of language and style in African literature. The findings that will be provided at the end of this research will be of great benefit to future researchers in this field of art and the humanities in general.

Over the years, many arguments have arisen on the existence of African literature. Scholars like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Chinweizu among others have taken the lead in the crusade for the decolonization and domestication of African literature from the apron strings of Europe. This has been examined from diverse perspectives, ranging from geographical to thematic exploration of African works. Therefore, our examination of this crucial concept from the linguistic and stylistic point of views is justifiable, because it will help reaffirm the place of African literature in the world's literature.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

The concept of African literature is such a wide field of research that no researcher may ever exhaust in his life time, because of the multiplicity of subjects that can be discussed under this topic and more so, a researcher may not be able to draw analysis from all the generic forms of African literature both written and oral.

Therefore, we have limited the study of this research to the use of language and style as used by Soyinka in his deliberate attempt to depict his African racial identity. Secondly, the list of Soyinka's publication can be said to be endless and time may not permit us a careful examination of all his works, so, our primary data of analysis shall be *Death and the King's Horseman*. In this play, we shall take a careful look into the use of proverbs, riddles, Yoruba languages, music, dance and other features of African orature.

This essay is divided into four chapters, chapter one serves as a general introduction into the research, stating the background of study and the author, purpose of study, justification,

scope and delimitation as well as the methodology for the research. Chapter two is the review of relevant literatures that are related to this important study. At this juncture, a review is done on the archetypal theory which we are adopting for our data analysis, the concept of African literature and scholarly discussion on Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. Data for analysis at this chapter is drawn from articles and journals. Chapter three shall focus on how language and style have been used in the play to depict African literature. Our analysis is based on proverbs, riddles.... Chapter four comprises the summary, findings and conclusion of this research as well as the right acknowledgements of all cited authorities in this research.

METHODOLOGY

This research is mainly empirical, using the archetypal approach as the framework for our data analysis. The archetype of language is given an apt attention in our analysis. Our analysis is solely drawn from Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. No interviews or questionnaires are used in this research, all analysis are restricted the mentioned text by Wole Soyinka.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Dialectal Discourses as Literary Archetypes

It can be safely suggested that ‘archetypes’ are the umbilical cords that connect the past; history with the present and also recommend standards for the future, by implication, the contemporary African literature with her mother literature of African orature. This is justifiable because the present day African literature is nothing but an upshot of the African oral tradition and ‘archetypes’ have been the main vehicle for this transition from the oral to the written form. Therefore, in the evaluation of African literature, it may be most appropriate to approach a dialectical discourse such as this from the archetypal point of view.

‘Archetypes’ are the historical remains of a people that have continued to re-occur in the events and activities of the people. These historical residues are usually in their conscious and unconscious patterns, with an indisputable influence on individuals and the community in general. Archetypes are the apron strings that sustain a people’s cultural identity and traditions in a hostile environment of globalization, like we have today. For example, archetypal influence makes it possible for a Yoruba man to speak the Yoruba language without any possible explanation for his choice of language against the Igbo and Hausa languages.

Fundamentally, ‘archetypes’ originated from the Greek word- *Arche* which translates for “beginning, and *Typos* meaning imprint”, and as a literary theory, deals with the interpretation of texts by focusing on the recurring myths, images, symbols and character types in narratives. This theory is strongly rooted in two sub-disciplines, namely the ‘social anthropology’ and ‘psychoanalysis’. The former was spear-headed by the Scottish anthropologist- James Gorge

Frazer and the latter by the Danish psychologist- Dr. Carl Jung. However, other scholars like Northrop Frey, Maud Bodkin, Bates Roland, Knapp Betina and Segal Robert have contributed greatly to the general development of the Archetypal literary theory.

In the undeveloped ages of archetype, Frazer, in his book titled *The Golden Bough* written between 1890 and 1915, described archetypes as the ‘continual’ recurrence of same or similar incidents told in a similar manner. Frazer further identified shared practices and mythological beliefs between the primitive religions and modern religions as the matrix of his archetypal approach. No doubt, the ‘recurrence’ in incidents as described by Frazer validates our earlier standpoint on archetype as a pre-existing phenomenon in the life of a people. However, Frazer’s choice of religion as a foundation upon which he developed his archetypal impulse may not be universally appealing because religion is only an aspect of human endeavor, therefore, a means to an end and not an end to itself. Frazer, as a social anthropologist, we may have expected him to extend the frontiers of this theoretical framework to appeal and suit the diverse aspects of the human society. It is imperative to mention at this point that our discussion so far on archetypes has been on the historical or anthropological dimension. Therefore, we shall now turn our focus to the psychological aspect of it because it is our major concern in this study.

The psychological school of archetype was propounded by Carl Jung, a renowned Danish scholar, psychiatrist and protégé of Sigmund Freud. Jung, in his definition alluded to the Aristotelian insight on archetypes “as an idea supraordinate and pre-existent to all phenomena, represented in images”. Jung explains these images as the

...psychic residue of numberless experiences of the same type, experiences which have happened not only to the individual but to his ancestors and of which the results are inherited in the structure of the brain, a priori determinants of individual experience.

Jide Balogun (2003, 146) historically unraveling the origins of archetypes argued that the term- archetype is traceable to the Classical ideas of Plato in *Corpus Hermeticum*, where God was described as the prototype of all light. Plato described God as the source of all light, and pre-existed before and supraordinate to light. This is what Jung interprets as priori factor in all human endeavors. The concept of archetype is not a modern initiative but dates back to the pre-historic age of man. The term ‘archetype’ was first used by Carl Jung in 1919 in his attempt to explain the similarity of themes, myths and motifs as he proved the there are two dynamic realisms in an individual- the conscious and the unconscious realms. Balogun (2003, 147) explains that:

The preconscious psyche is the aspect that contains all hereditary behaviors in all human creatures. These are morbid dispositions in parents transferable or transmittable to their offspring. The preconscious psyche finds expression in instinctive behavior of both human and animal beings. A child behaves in both a human manner and an animal manner because each of them share and operate in the preconscious psyche.

The implication of the Jungian standpoint on this discourse, clearly explains why human beings are subjected to some character traits that they may not possibly explain why they have chosen to adapt such behavioral patterns? These patterns can be described as images which are inherent in us. By inference to the subject of our study, the contemporary African literature has also taken after some features of the pre-historic African orature majorly dealing with the use of language as we are concerned with this aspect in our study.

However, Jung further argued that archetypes are not only based on traditions, language and other salient social phenomena but could occur spontaneously without respect to time and space. Jung further narrowed his archetypal insight to four basic structures, namely: The Mother Archetype, The Rebirth Archetype, The Spirit Archetype and the Trickster Archetype. The Jungian archetypes expanded the earlier religious archetype propounded by Gorge Frazer. Each of these archetypes as propounded by Jung has its intended purpose and specifics; however, all of these genres may not be fully explained in this study as we shall focus on the mother archetype which is our major concern in this research.

The mother archetype can be interpreted in various ways namely personal mother, grandmother, stepmother, mother-in-law, ancestress or governess. The central focus of the mother archetype is built around the female phenomenon of motherhood with the ability to sustain the grace of fertility, fruitfulness and replenishment. However, this universal phenomenon of motherhood is also subject to some modifications based on the individual psyche. The mother archetype deals with the mother/offspring relationship.

Based on the above revelation, our discourse will be hinged on African orature as the mother and ancestress of the contemporary African literature. Hence, the African mother literature (orature) has rubbed off on her offspring, the contemporary African literature (written), in her language, finding ample expression in the extensive use of proverbs, riddles, folklores, tongue twisters, elegy, dirge, rituals, music, dance, etc. However, these archetypal features have been modified through the use of English language. This is the archetype of language and style in African literature, which we have made the subject of our discourse in this study.

It is important to mention at this juncture that within the ages of Sigmund Freud, Gorge Frazer and Carl Jung, archetype existed as a form of social-psychological concept rather than a literary theory. However, in 1934, Maud Bodkin expanded the frontiers of archetypes, bringing it into the literary field as he published a book titled *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, hence archetype became a literary concept. Afolayan (2008, 3) explaining Maud Bodkin's archetypal perception, opines that:

Maud Bodkin extended the Jungian cognitive premise by bringing in the literary dimension; Bodkin compliments the Jungian ex post facto definition as he describes archetype as narrative designs, character types or images which are said to be identified in a wide variety of literature, myths, dreams and even ritualized modes of behavior.

A careful examination of Maud Bodkin's archetypal position reveals to us that Bodkin was the first to systematically move archetypes from the social-psychological realm to the literary frame work within which we function today as archetypal critics.

However, archetypal criticism reached its crescendo in the 1950's and 1960's, largely due to the work of Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye. In 1954, Northrop Frye published a masterpiece titled *Archetypes of Literature*. In this work Frye categorized literary works into generic forms of comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, etc. Going by Frye's categorization, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was regarded as a tragicomedy because of the tragic and satirical elements in it; hence all works of arts with the elements of tragedy and satire were regarded as tragicomedy.

Having examined the pristine opinions of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, George Frazer and Northrop Frye, Ibrahim, B.F. (2003, 132) concludes that "archetypes are properties of socio-cultural credentials used for communal and collective mobilization, solidarity and progress". The position and logical conclusion of Ibrahim, B.F. on this discourse also validates and seconds our earliest standpoint on this matter as we have suggested that archetypes are the historical sediments of a people used both consciously and unconsciously for the day to day existence of the people and the major instrument for the transformation of the African literature from the oral form to the written form.

African Literature and its Peculiar Language

Hackman and Mitchell (1990, 1) have argued that the earliest and supposedly ‘broadest’ definition of literature as “anything written” does not utterly give an objective and explicit definition of literature because “a shopping list” can not be termed a literary work. Therefore, literature is more intrinsic than any other written piece. Bayo Ogunjimi (2003, 1) opines that:

Literature is a discipline that attempts to depict man and his environment within a creative mode. The creative imagination and the use of specialized form of communication medium-language and style make literature different from all other disciplines.

Going by Ogunjimi’s definition, it can be inferred that the use of words and styles of writing to a large extent are the major distinguishing factors between literature and other written works, like a “shopping list”. Furthermore, literature deliberately aims at re-creating the human society via the exposition of human experiences, religious beliefs and socio-cultural motifs of that society within the imaginative framework of arts. Literature is also a liberating force that frees us from the inherent shackles placed upon us by society and it is categorized into three generic forms of drama prose and poetry Ibrahim B.F. and Akande F.F (2000, 3).

The African experience of literature dates back to the pristine age of man and equally precedes the literature of some European countries. P.O. Dada (2003, 36) maintains that “African literature refers to works done for the African audience, by Africans and in African languages

whether these works are oral or written”. The definition of Dada seconds and re-affirms the earlier definition posited by Chinweizu et al (1980, 56). G.A. Ajadi (2003, 119) supporting the definition of Dada, maintains that “African literature presupposes the existence of the ancient African literary tradition”.

Over the years, some European cynics have subjectively argued that there was nothing like African literature, prior the advent of the colonial masters. That means that colonialism exposed the Africa continent to literature. This Eurocentric insinuation on African literature is erroneous in all ramifications and an insult on the traditional African literature. Some African cultural and literary scholars have also responded to this slander on African literature by utterly negating the standpoints of these European cynics. Jide Balogun (2007) (lecture notes) quoting Chinua Achebe (1976) opined that Achebe wrote *Things fall Apart* to re-educate and correct Europeans on the aesthetics of traditional Africa literature that was invoke before European invasion of Africa. Chinweizu, et al (1980, 26) in quick reaction to the cynical position of these Europeans on African literature, maintains that

...some parts of Africa had written literatures long before many parts of Western Europe. Long before Caesar led his Roman legions to bring civilization to barbarian Gaul, to Celtic Britain, and to the Druidic German tribes of Vercingtorix in the 1st century B/C., the African Nile valley civilization of Pharaohnic Egypt, Nubia, Meroe and Ethiopia had literate cultures –in territories where Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt are today located

G.A. Ajadi (2003, 119) supporting Chinweizu's above position, advocates that "history has revealed to us that the first sustained literary work ever to be discovered was found in Egypt, and that the piece dated back to 2, 500 B.C. and it was authored by Ethiopia". Ajadi (2003, 119) concludes that "any authentic anthology of world literature will anthologize such works".

The argument on the African literature notwithstanding, the basic truth of the matter remains that the traditional African literature majorly existed in its oral form. However, there were pocket of texts of written literature traceable to the activities of the ancient Egyptian archeologist, but these texts could not stand for the multi-cultural nations of Africa. Na'Allah (2003, 101) explains that:

Traditional Africa was a basically oral society. Our history, science, medicine, technology, philosophy and literary forms were passed through the words of mouth in myths, folktales, legends, proverbs, praise poetry and ritual performances. (The Egyptian hieroglyphics which was pointed to as a pioneer of written culture in the world was a minority in Africa and could not be cited to represent the dense culture of orature in all other parts of the continent).

However, the ancient existence of the African society as an oral one which affected her literature in a predominantly oral form did not in any way negate the existence of all the generic forms of literature, even if we judge by the European standards of drama, prose and poetry.

Na'Allah (2003, 102) further categorized the generic forms of traditional African orature into the three basic generic forms of literature.

Oral Prose Forms:

Oral Poetry Forms:

Oral Drama Forms:

Myths	Praise Poetry	Religious Rituals
Legends	Religious Poetry	Traditional Festivals
Folktales	Occupational Poetry	Children Games
Proverbs	Topical poetry	
Riddles and Jokes	Heroic Poetry and the Epic	

The language of African literature is another area of interest that has raised a lot of dust among scholars and critics. Going by the earlier definition of African literature as proposed by Chinweizu et al and supported by P.O. Dada and G.A Ajadi in this study, as “works done by Africans for the African audience and in African languages whether oral or written”, we are then left with the task of reconciling the racial conflict of a supposed African literature in English language as exemplified in African works? This conflict is an offspring of the historical antecedent of colonialism as mentioned in our introduction.

Dasylya A.O. (2003, 204) quoting Frantz Fanon (1977, 154) posits that “colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grips and emptying the native brains of all form and content by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it”. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1993, 42) commenting on the vicious effect of colonialism on Africa, states that “the economic and political conquest of Africa was

accompanied by cultural subjugation and the imposition of an imperialist cultural tradition whose dire effects are still being felt today....’ One of these dire effects intended by Ngugi is the issue of English language in the contemporary African literature. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1993, 31) explained further by asserting that “the languages of the captive nations were suppressed... the culture and the history carried by these languages were thereby thrown onto the rubbish heap... to perish”.

Ayi Kwei Armah (2005), delivering a Public Lecture on African literature at the University of Nairobi on the February 16th 2005, argued that the idea of African independence from Europe is false and a joke in all other ways. The novelist further asserted that the African political independence is meaningless without cultural independence, for it is only cultural values that can inspire a people with national pride, give them separate identity and something to live and die for. Commenting on the language of African literature, Armah posited that “we are presently suspended in linguistic neocolonialism while awaiting a decisive breakthrough, if an African language is adopted, it will be a big solution. Africa is vast and requires a vast language to put through all our ideals, and that language is not yet born”. He concludes that he will continue to write in a language that reaches the majority of Africans, which is English and French.

This intriguing discuss may not be objectively concluded without the opinion of Chinua Achebe, one of the leading voices of the evolutionary and revolutionary African literature. Achebe in his vast knowledge on both African and European cultures holds the view that:

For an African writing in English language is not without its serious setbacks. He often finds himself describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in English way of life. Caught in that situation, he can do two things. He can try and contain what he wants to say within the limits of the conventional English or he can try to push back those limits to accommodate his ideas... I submit that those who can do the work of extending the frontiers of English so as to accommodate African thought-patterns must do it through the mastery of English and not out of innocence.

Achebe, defending his choice of English language over his indigenous Igbo language in his works advocates that “Britain did not push English language into our faces. I chose to learn English and eventually write in English as a means of infiltrating the ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within.” The decisive position of Achebe notwithstanding, Ngugi wa Thiong’o upholds the opinion that “language carries culture and culture carries (particularly through orature and literature) the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our places in the world. Therefore, how can the African experiences be expressed properly in another language?”

Luster Palmer (1982, 21) cited by Ogunkayode O. (2008, 19) concludes that “the West African writer, forced to write in a language which is not his own, is often inadequate to give room to his purpose”. He comments that Amos Tutola’s derby appearance in the literary world

with *Palmwine Drinkard* breaks the rules of the language without necessarily denigrating the value of his art....”

The ultimate thrust of the debate on the language of African literature is aimed at enthroning the use of African languages in writing rather than the European languages. This linguistic evangelism is a deliberate effort by some African scholars to totally wipe-off the traces of European colonialism and influence on the African race. However, that African language that may be chosen to reach the entire African race is not yet born, so the African writer may continue to extend and push the frontiers of English and French languages as recommended by Chinua Achebe to accommodate the African thought pattern.

Review on Wole Soyinka and *Death and the King's Horseman*

Wole Soyinka is a renowned scholar of African literature and culture; his literary insight is legendary, being unusually versatile in the three generic forms of literature namely drama, prose and poetry. For this purpose, he has drawn a wide range attention and criticism from seasoned scholars and critics around the globe on his personality and works. Soyinka's literary concerns have remained the reoccurring cultural conflict between the African world view and that of Europe, religious concerns as well as the salient socio-political issues and challenges of the African race and communities. The effects of African traditional religion are also obvious in Soyinka's personality and works. For this purpose, his personality is often mistaken by some religious extremists as an “Ogun incarnate”.

Ayo Banjo (1994, ix) in his criticism of Soyinka maintains that “he has rightly become a national institution, his name not being simply associated with his writings, and even less with any particular genre, but also with social and political activism in its best sense”. Oyin Ogunba (1994, 2) holds the view that “Soyinka is a hybrid of two worlds, that is, the world of conventional modern Christian living (Ake) and that of the traditional African ethos (Isara)”. The observation of Oyin Ogunba (1994, 2) on the personality of Soyinka explains the writer’s affinity to the Ogun deity according to the Yoruba mythology and his ridicule of the Christian faith as exemplified in *Jero’s Play*.

Olu Obafemi (2007, 33) concludes that Soyinka is a “social revolutionist who has dedicated himself to the humanist salvation of humanity rather than an ideological approach... he has broadened his rebellion to encompass what Albet Camus describes as “resistance to forces which threaten the lives of all men”, and not merely oneself (by helping) the humiliated to become men once more”.

The Soyinka/Ogun relationship is predominantly built around the matrix of social revolution. The writer draws inspirations from the heroism in the personality of this divinity to confront the issues of his society. He also replicates the personality of this divinity in his characters like Eman in *The Strong Breed*, Olunde in *Death and the King’s Horseman* and Old Man in *Madman and the Specialists* for the transformation of the society.

Death and the King’s Horseman is generally regarded by Soyinka’s contemporaries and protégés as his classic, because of the artistic maturity displayed by the dramatist and the lyrical

grandeur in the work. The play is set in the Yoruba society of Nigerian under the colonial oppression and cultural subjugation of the African race by Europe.

In his criticism of *Death and the King's Horseman*, Adebayo, W. (1994, 91) hold the view that

It is however, in *Death and the King's Horseman* that we find Soyinka's most explicit deployment of ritual both as an organizing principle and as a surgical instrument for prising open a people's collective consciousness at a crucial moment of their historical development.

The above submission of Adebayo could be related to the conventional attempt of Soyinka at associating ritual with the African society as part of their main ingredient of cultural and racial identity. However, in another realm of thought, Adebayo, W. (1994, 94) argues:

In this play, Soyinka manages to capture the power and glory of the ancient Yoruba state in its dying moment and at the same time to pose a serious intellectual challenge to those who would deny a conquered people its unique mode of apprehending and making sense of reality. *Death and the King's Horseman* represents an attempt to confront on a creative level the arrogance and cultural chauvinism of the Western imperialism.

The above criticism of Adebayo captures the real essence of Soyinka's archetypal negation of the cultural imposition of the West on the African continent. The eventual abortion of the Pilkings attempt at stopping this important ritual of the people validates soyinka's preference of the African culture against that of Europe.

Gover, D (2004, 89) examined *Death and the King's Horseman* from the perspective of Wole Soyinka's appetite for sacrifice which reflects in most of the author's works. In his opinion, this sacrificial instinct runs through works like *Strong Breed and Kongi's Harvest*. He points out that "Olunde considers his father's as self-sacrifice, essential to the continuity of the culture." (P. 101)

CHAPTER THREE

Language Use and Style: A Depiction of African Literature

An Example of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

In the previous chapters, we have been able to establish the basic framework for our research while identifying what we aim at achieving at the end of this research. We have also been able to do a coherent criticism on our theoretical framework – archetype, the concept of literature and the African experience, the language of African literature as well as the person and work of Soyinka under review. At this chapter, we shall do an objective criticism of our primary data which is Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Our analysis of this text shall be based on linguistic parameters of Standard English, Pidgin English, African English, Yoruba language, Names of characters, Proverbs, Riddles as well as stylistic effects of Songs, Dance, Rituals and Folktales.

Standard English and its Satiric Use in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

A Standard English can be defined as a variation of English language predominantly spoken by the original owners of the language. This variation maintains all the rules of the language and can be said to be error free. The speakers of this variation have in-depth knowledge of all the grammatical rules guiding the language.

In the text under review, there is the use of Standard English as can be seen in the speeches of Pilkings (a European character in the play). While explaining the situation of the abortion of Elesin's suicide, he says:

It's unlikely but I don't want to take a chance. I made them believe I was going to lock the man up in my house, which was what I had planned to do in the first place. They are probably assailing it by now. I took a roundabout route here so I don't think there is any danger at all....
(P.59)

Pilking's choice of diction is impeccable and it properly suits his status as a British; this confirms his affinity with England who is the original owner of the language. His sentences through out the play maintain all the laws of the grammatical constructions with no phonological, morphological or graphological defects. The use of Standard English is also found in the speeches of Jane, Aide-De-Camp, Resident and Olunde all of whom are European characters except Olunde. Olunde's use of Standard English is hinged on his contact with England where he schooled.

Pidgin English and its African Relativity as in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

Pidgin English can be defined as a variation of English language, characterized by multiple syntactic errors. This variation of English language is spoken by some Africans and predominantly by the uneducated in the African society. This variation of English language suffers syntactic, phonological, morphological and graphological errors because of the speaker's

little or no exposure to the rudiments of the language. This can be exemplified in the speeches of Amusa. For example, in one of his speeches he says:

Madam, I arrest the ring-leader who make trouble but me
I no touch *egungun*. That *egungun* inself, I no touch am.
And I no abuse 'am. I arrest ring-leader but I treat
egungun with respect. (P.25)

In the above speech of Amusa (an African character), his statements are characterized by multiple deviation from the original rudiments of English language as postulated by the British. The use of this language was deliberately employed by Soyinka to show the nationality and racial identity of Amusa. Having attributed Pidgin English to the African society, its usage in this text under review authenticates it as an African literature.

African English: The Language of African Literature

What we have decided to categorize in this chapter as African English is the type of English spoken by characters like Elesin, Iyaloja, the Women and Praise-Singer. Ibrahim B.F. (2005, 7) gave the assertion that “the African English is full of idioms and are mostly used by the aged in the African society”. The African English, in context of this study can be defined as the direct transliteration of the African ideologies and ethos into the English language. This variation

of English language does not break the grammatical rules of English language but the meanings are usually inferred. In the speech of Iyaloja (an African character) she says:

Not for long. It is those who stand at the gateway of the great change to whose cry we must pay heed. And then think of this – it makes the mind tremble. The fruit of such a union is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind you....

(P.22)

The above statement by Iyaloja means that she will heed the request of Elesin by giving him the virgin because he tarries in the golf of transition between the worlds of the unborn, the living and the dead. The interpretation of this idiomatic expression cannot be unraveled at a glance by Pilkings because he lacks the rudimentary knowledge of the African world view. The above statement of Iyaloja did not defile any of the rules of English language.

Yoruba Language in Translation

The Yoruba language is a language spoken by the South-Western people of Nigeria in West Africa. In precise terms, the language is spoken by the following states in Nigeria – Ogun, Lagos, Osun, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti and a faction of Kwara state. Prior the advent of the colonial masters, missionaries, slave merchants and the introduction of English language, this was the official language of the people and serves today as their traditional language.

In the text under review, the use of this language finds ample expression in the speeches of the characters like Elesin, Iyaloja, the Women, Praise-Singer among others. Historical evidences have revealed to us that the events of this play were a real life experience in the ancient Oyo Empire. Therefore all the speeches of the above listed characters had existed in the Yoruba language before it was scripted into English by Wole Soyinka. However, the writer has sustained the racial identity of this memorable event by deliberately bringing in some Yoruba expressions. For example, Elesin uses the expression *olohu-iyo* (sweet talks) to punctuate the musical activities of Praise-Singer. Other words like *alari*, *etutu*, *robo*, *ifawomi*, *opele*, *elegbara*, are used in the play text to sustain their original meanings of such words that have no direct equivalence in English language. This also helps validate this text as an African literature.

Use of Proverbs

Proverbial expressions and wise sayings are one of the integral strong-holds of the traditional African poetry and they are still of great significance in the present day African society. These expressions are used to instruct, teach and correct the younger generations. They are the language of the aged in the African society, however, a handful of the younger generations also use these expressions.

Proverbs are well-known phrases or sentences that give advice or say something that is generally true. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, proverbs are used predominantly by Iyaloja to scold Elesin in his cowardice of defiling the rituals of his suicide. She says:

How boldly the lizard struts before the pigeon when it was
the eagle itself he promised us he would confront. (P.67)

In the above proverb, Iyaloja indicts Elesin for stooping so low before the white man (Pilkings) when he had promised the people to perform the ritual of his suicide. In the above proverb, Iyaloja mocks and scolds Elesin for his cowardice, remaining at the prison yard of Pilkings rather than perform the ritual to ensure the continuity of his community. Elesin's cowardice triggered the brevity and daring nature of Ogun in Olunde, who performed the ritual to save his people. Hence Iyaloja addresses Elesin in proverb again:

I gave you a warning. The river which fills up before our
eyes does not sweep us away in its floods. (P.69)

The above proverb interprets that Elesin, who grew up before the people cannot ruin the destiny of the entire community. Elesin also used proverbs in his earlier conversation with Iyaloja, thus he says:

Who does not seek to be remembered? Memory is the
Master of Death.... (P.20)

Elesin, in the above proverb stressed his desire to be remembered after he would have committed the ritual of suicide.

Soyinka's use of proverbs in this play is very profound, intelligent and serves as a trademark on *Death and King's Horseman* as an African literature. The proverbs in the play

achieved different purposes of scolding and advising. The language of proverb is an African language without respect to time and space.

Riddles

Riddles are mysterious situations that a person cannot explain. This device is employed in African to code meanings and address the aged in the society, leaving the novice in the doubt of what has been said. In the text under review, Iyaloja speaks in riddles to mystify Pilkings while communicating with Elesin. In one of her speeches, she says:

Not yet. It drags me on the slow, weary feet of women.
Slow as it is Elesin, it has long overtaken you. It rides
ahead of your laggard will. (P.71)

In the above statement, Iyaloja, was talking about the corpse of Olunde that was been brought forward by the women for Elesin to utter the final words before he was laid to rest. The choice of riddle by Iyaloja to communicate this to Elesin was well understood by Elesin but left Pilkings in total confusion of what has been said. Hence, Pilkings exclaims:

What is she saying now? Christ! Must you people forever
speak in riddles? (P.71)

At the introductory section of the play, the dialogue between Elesin and Praise-singer was in riddles. The use of riddles in this play was aimed at painting a picture of a true African society in the work.

Folktales

Folktales are old traditional stories from a particular place that was originally passed on to the people in a spoken form. The use of folktale is evident in the text under review in the narration of Elesin:

Death came calling.
Who does not know his rasp of reeds?
A twilight whisper in the leaves before
The great araba falls? Did you hear it?
Not I! swears the farmer. He snaps
His fingers round his head, abandons
A hard-worn harvest and begins....

This ancient narration recited by Elesin is one of the folktales of the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

This narration equally paints the picture of an African society in this text.

Characterization

This is the names and actions of characters in a work of art. In the text under review, the names of the characters are represented in Yoruba language which depicts the African nature of the play text. In the text, such names like Elesin, Olunde, Amusa and Iyaloja are derived from the Yoruba language.

Styles of African Literature: The Implantation of Cultural Icons and Tradition

Drums and Music

Music and drums are paramount aspects of the African oral tradition. It can almost be said that the African society is a musical society because they find ample expressions in major events of the African society be it festivals, rituals, initiations and other ceremonies. African orature is musical in nature and music is embedded in drums. In the text under review, these instruments are used to portray the racial identity of the events. Olunde explains the importance of music and drum to the Pilkings in this dialogue:

Olunde: Listen! Come outside. You can't hear anything against that music.

Jane: What is it?

Olunde: The drums. Can you hear the change? Listen.

(The drums come over, still distant but more distinct. There is a change of rhythm, it rises to a crescendo and then suddenly, it is cut off. After a silence, a new beat begins, slow and resonant.)

There. It's all over.

Jane: You mean he's...

Olunde: Yes Mrs. Pilkings, my father is dead. His will-power has always been enormous; I know he is dead. (P.55)

In the above dialogue, it is evident that music and drums are used as a medium of public announcement of the death of an important personality among the ancient Yoruba people of Nigeria as exemplified above.

Ritual

Ritual is a vital element of the traditional African society and the world in general. Virtually all human societies perform certain rituals at certain times in connection of man with the unseen world. Rituals are the basic matrix of every religious concern including the contemporary religions.

The central focus of Wole Soyinka in this text is an attempt at capturing the ritual phenomenon of an African society in the late hours of its transition to history by virtue of the European invasion of Africa. Therefore, the ritual indices in this text validate it as an African literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary

This research has been able to establish how the use of language and style of writing have been deployed by African writers in their attempt to create a racial identity of African literature. This study has also been able to establish the primordial nature of African literature which was embedded in orature prior to the advent of the colonial masters.

Chapter one introduced us to the general background for this study, giving us the purpose, justification, scope and delimitation of the study. It also covered the author's biography. Chapter two dwelt extensively on the review of literature related to this study. At this juncture, a critical evaluation was done on the archetype theory, literature and the African experience as well as Wole Soyinka and *Death and the King's Horseman*. Chapter three dwelt on the analysis of our primary data, *Death and the King's Horseman*. This text was analyzed from the standpoints of Standard English, Pidgin English, African English, Yoruba language, Proverbs Riddles etc. Findings revealed to us that African writers have continued to push the frontiers of English language through the infusion of proverbs, riddles, local dialects etc., in order to accommodate their African thought patterns, thereby, answering our earliest question of how the African writer will represent his thought patterns in a foreign language.

Conclusions

It can be safely advocated at this juncture that the subjective debates on the existence of African literature by some European scholars is futile and baseless. More so, the argument on the non-existence of African literature before the Western arrival on the African shores is equally baseless and subjective because this research has made it evident that some parts of Africa (Egypt) had written literature long before Europe came in contact with graphics and the African territory.

African literature is equally very distinct in all ramifications and can always be separated from the literatures of other continents judging by its language aesthetics and styles of writing. The language of African literature is decorated with the use of proverbs, riddles, tongue twisters, folktales and folklores. These language aesthetics are not found in the literatures of other continents because they are peculiar to the African race. These use of proverbs riddles etc., are the primordial language pattern of African orature, hence they are transferred to the contemporary African written literature. Furthermore, it is also evident that African literature has taken the recommendations of Chinua Achebe for the extension of the frontiers of English language in order to accommodate the African thought patterns. For this purpose are the use African languages, transliteration of African ideas into English language evident in most African works especially the text examined in this study.

Furthermore, it is evident from this research that certain instruments are used by African writers in their quest to create a racial identity of the African environment. For example, the use of drums and style of music in African literature differ from that of Europe. In African literature,

drums are used as certain kinds of symbols and auditory images in the attempt to describe to certain African phenomenon. The use of African kind of drums is significantly absent in the literatures of other continents.

Conclusively, the contemporary African literature is an upshot of the African orature. However, it can be said the English language has helped modified it to a great extent for wider readership and acceptance of the African literature.

This research has extensively exposed how African writers have used language and style of writing in their attempt to depict the racial identity of Africa in literature. In addition, it has also been able to ascertain the African kind of English from those of other continent. Therefore, the linguistic subjugation of the African languages by Europe in the eras of colonialism has not hindered the African writer from finding suitable medium to expose and express his African thought patterns.

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