

**AN EXAMINATION OF SATIRE IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE
KING'S HORSEMAN AND THE BEATIFICATION OF AREA BOY***

BY

**Esther Chizoba NSOBUNDU (Miss)
ART1700478**

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

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AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A. HONS.) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by **Esther Chizoba NSOBUNDU (Miss)** with Matriculation Number **ART1700478** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

Dr. E. I. Jamgbadi
(Project Supervisor)

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God Almighty for His protection and guidance during my undergraduate programme and also to my family.

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I wish to first and foremost, acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude and immense appreciation to God of victory whose invaluable matchless and boundless patience upon my life, sustained me throughout the period of writing this project, may him alone be praised.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

This essay explores Soyinka's cultural and political satire in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Beatification of Area Boy* respectively. The goal is to unveil the ills in politics and governance in Nigeria as well as the errors in the socio-cultural set up of the Nigerian society, towards the goal of awakening readers to the need to solve the problem of corruption and underdevelopment, which is a product of political and socio-cultural decadence.

1.2 Scope of Study

Wole Soyinka has many works of literature cutting across the genres of drama, poetry and prose. This essay is however limited to these two works because they explore the ills in politics and culture in the African society paying particular attention to Nigeria.

1.3 Methodology

The method of research employed in this paper is the qualitative method of research with close reference to *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Beatification of Area boy* by Wole Soyinka. The essay extracts data and materials from different articles online that

engage in political and socio-cultural satire. It also makes use of journals and other relevant materials.

1.4 Theoretical Background

This essay uses the post-colonial theory for the analysis of this work.

According to Homi Bhabha, postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and universal forces of cultural representation that are involved in a constant competition for political and economic control in the contemporary world. (171). Here Bhabha addresses the issue of control and how colonies are part of the plan of the colonial states to exact power and control in the global economy. The post colonial theory emerged in the 18th century as the concerns about the economic, political social and aesthetic impact of European intrusion of African states grew.

Aschcroft et al opine that:

the term ‘post-colonial’ is resonant with all the ambiguity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates, and how it addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact. (Ashcroft, et al 2).

Flowing from this understanding, they present a recommendation that post-colonial critics and theorists should consider the full implications of restricting the meaning of the term to ‘after-colonialism’ or after-Independence because all post-colonial societies are

still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem.

The colonial adventure also left with its colonised victims and societies issues that have become so pervading and rampant. Issues such as corruption, fund mismanagement, violence, abduction, oppression and so on cannot but be frowned at in contemporary society of today. It is in the light of this that the social media has become a watchdog and whistle blower in modern day society interrogating the ills and inappropriateness that pervade the society on daily basis. The effectiveness and upgrade of technology too in the modern day society is also a wheel that helps to roll out these factors, hence making it easier for the social media to play contributive roles.

Typically, the proponents of the theory examine the ways in which writers from colonised countries attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonisers. Through inventions of problem solving objects and presentations of write-ups and narratives that projected them as not being intellectually ignorant, they projected the ideology of full emancipation and freedom. They also examine ways in which the literature of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of images of the colonised as inferior. However, attempts at coming up with a single definition of postcolonial theory have also proved controversial, and some writers have strongly critiqued the whole concept. Postcolonial theory is built in large part around the concept of **otherness**. There are however problems with or complexities

to the concept of otherness, for instance: otherness includes doubleness, both identity and difference, so that every other, every different than and excluded by is dialectically created and includes the values and meaning of the colonizing culture even as it rejects its power to define; the western concept of the oriental is based, as Abdul Jan Mohamed argues, on the Manichean allegory (seeing the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites): if the west is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the orient is chaotic, irrational, feminine, evil.

Ato Quayson in his definition of post colonialism postulates that:

post colonialism often centers on the discussion of experiences of various kinds such as those of slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender, place and the responses to the discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. (Quayson, 2).

Lufti Hamadi gave his view on post colonialism as a literary theory. For him:

Postcolonialism, a literary theory, which traces European colonialism of many regions all over the world, its effects on various aspects of the lives of the colonized people in general, and its manifestations in Western literary and philosophical heritage in particular throughout the

nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, in addition to the emergence of the literature of opposition and resistance in the ex-colonies (39).

Ashcroft et al talks about the fact that the theory also primarily talks of the effects of colonialism itself and its aftermath. They opine that "the term 'post-colonial' is resonant with all the ambiguity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates, and how it addresses all aspects of the colonial process from the beginning of colonial contact" (2).

John Hawley is of the view that post colonialism centers on diverse concepts. For him:

The theorization of post-colonial studies has centered on a number of concepts that do not, on the face of it, necessarily have much to do with each other, but have proven to be synergistic. Among these are alterity, dealt with notably in Edward Said's (2003[1935]) discussion of orientalism; hybridity, associated with Homi Bhabha (1949-), and subalternity and strategic essentialism, associated with Gayatri Spivak (1942-). (1).

This essay uses the post colonial theory because the examples from the text, show how the characters, plot and events are allegorical representations of the Nigerian society after independence and the challenges of corruption and bad governance.

1.5 Review of Related Scholarship/Justification of Study

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. 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 Williams 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. grandeur in the work(91).

Davis Gover examine *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. (89). 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.”(101).

Omolaya Owoeye reviews *The Beatification of Area Boy* thus:

Soyinka still tackles the recurrent plague of the Nigerian nation - military dictatorship - in *The Beatification*, written at the peak of an oppressive military administration in Nigeria. The thematic thrust of the play is thus consistent with those of his earlier satirical

plays particularly the political ones though in the initial part of this latter satire, he only refers to the military either directly or through reminiscing characters such as Mama Put and Sanda.(127).

According to Ahmed Yerima's comment on the play in an interview, he reveals:

Soyinka always has an alternative society presented in his works...Beatification of the Area Boy is almost a contrast to that, the characters are not rich people, which does not make him Marxist though, but the characters are common people. I always see the play in the light of leadership, and that leaders are not only in high places, but they exist within. And if good leaders are not chosen, the society will be destroyed. (Oladele, 54).

Adeoti states that:

Soyinka takes cognizance of the age-long trajectory of the people's socio-political development which finds enduring records not only in history and political treaties, but quite importantly, in the gamut of literary and performing arts. (Adeoti 12)

Oluwole Akinwande Soyinka better known as Wole Soyinka was born on the 14th of July 1934 in his hometown Isara, Abeokuta of Ogun State Nigeria. He often describes himself as "Ijegba" a combination of Egba and Ijebu. He attended Saint Peter's Primary School

in his home town and spent a year at Abeokuta Grammar School before he 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 English. Today, Soyinka is an icon of African literature. His literary accomplishment is legendary being unusually versatile in all the three genres of literature namely drama, prose and poetry. His scholarship in literature was well rewarded in 1986 with the prestigious award of Noble Prize for Literature, making him the first African to win that prize. (Oladele, 49).

Satire

Satire is a creative genre in which a heavy emphasis on irony and sarcasm is used to critique specific cultural or other practices. Although humour and comedy are not always the primary aims of this sort of critique, humour is sometimes employed to offset the harshness of the criticism itself. Satire is most efficient in a culture that is aware of acceptable moral and behavioral norms. To do this, the satirist must adopt some ideals against which a dramatic decline in the example of behaviour or aberration might be depicted.

Satire has been defined as a literary manner that blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to the end so that human institutions or humanity may be improved. There are specific features through which satire may be identified. Satire is critical, employs

wit and humor, ridicules the target, aims at individuals or institutions, and most importantly, may be used to provoke or prevent a change.

For Ngugi Wa Thiongo, a satirist must set specific standards for society and evaluate the community based on these standards. A satirist then lampoons the organisation when the expected standards are not upheld (54). He stresses that:

the satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to pour scorn and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious, laughter. (Wa Thiong'o, 55).

Tejumola Olaniyan also provides his definition of Satire. For him:

The whole society is its constituency. Satire focuses its lens on our failings as a community of people. It magnifies one or several of our sores for critical inspection, using such sharp weapons as scorn, derision, ridicule, bitter Irony, and Laughter as its surgical tools. But the appropriate set of standards – against which our failings can be determined – to form Satire's baseline has often

been the point of departure between satirists and between the satirist and his critic (Olaniyan, 48).

Kimani Njogu, in his analysis of Northrop Frye's view of Satire, considers Satire as militant irony with two fundamental aspects. First, he acknowledges that aggression constitutes satire's indispensable component. Second, Frye sees Irony as Satire's recurrent weapon (Njogu, 3).

This work examines satire in two plays of Wole Soyinka and specifically focuses on the political and sociocultural satire in both texts. This justifies this study because not much has been said of the political implication of *Death and the Kings Horsemen* which is mainly analysed from the perspective of culture.

1.6 Thesis Statement.

Wole Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* and *Death and the King's Horseman* is a political, societal and cultural satire that unveils Soyinka's distaste for the state of the nation and the loopholes in the Nigerian socio-cultural milieu in order to stir further conversations on the aforementioned subjects.

CHAPTER TWO

POLITICAL SATIRE

2.1 Introduction

As the Nigeria political structure degenerates into deeper levels of ineptitude and inefficiency, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Beautification of Area Boy* becomes instrumental in orchestrating a satiric view of the core Nigerian political situation. Both texts lament bad governance as a loss of the sacrificial and selfless bent of leadership that once characterised precolonial political structures. The plays are also a commentary on the proliferation of neocolonialism and the negative effects of colonial intrusion on the politics of African nation's. In all, It reveals the gradual and steady increase in corruption. Through the texts used for analysis, Soyinka laments the far reaching effects of colonialism in the political structure of Nigeria.

2.2 Bad Governance and Corruption in *Death and the King's Horsemen*

The playwright, Wole Soyinka is known for his outright criticism of bad governance and poor leadership in his plays. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, sacrifice is as a metaphoric symbol of the loss of selfless leaders in precolonial times. Soyinka uses the motif of ritual and sacrifice as a metaphoric response to the intrusion of colonial masters with a desire to force another system of political leadership on the continent where sacrifice is non existent and leaders only wallow in their power and need to be

served and not to serve. He uses the Yoruba sociopolitical structure as an example to depict his concerns for the colonial powers that ravaged the African political climate.

In the play, Soyinka reveals how the growing influence of Simon Pilkings and his British political envoys were an indication of the impending doom that the growth of Western ideas and belief systems would have on the Nigerian political system. First Soyinka reveals the reality that African political cultures and organisation was one where a leader's actions should have meaning and a sense of purpose. This meaning was expressed in sacrifice. Soyinka satirically juxtaposes the core traditional political structure of the African society and in its monarchical system and the intruding Western system of politics to reveal the failures and weaknesses of the later. This is expressed in the speech of the protagonist, Elesin Oba who was the political leaders of the Yoruba people in the play:

Our acts should have meaning. The sap of the plantain never dries.
You have seen the young shoot swelling. Even as the parent stalk
begins to wither. Women, let my going be likened to the twilight
hour of the plantain. (Soyinka 1975, p. 20)

However, as the play progresses, it becomes glaring to readers that Soyinka's political satire is a double edged sword that does not also spare the shortcomings and failings of the African traditional political practices. Why he presents the act of ritual and sacrifice as epitomized in the Oba's death as a system of political reproduction and

selflessness, he presents in the character of Elesin Oba, someone who is driven by a strange desire to amass pleasures before he takes on his very demanding responsibility to sustain the political structure of traditional Yoruba societies that has existed in precolonial times. Elesin uses his position as a leader and the ritual he is about to perform as a yardstick to demand that he is allowed to take another bride even as his journey beyond the Earth has begun. His conversation with Iyaloja when he is challenged for taking a bride in the middle of a very significant political and cultural ritual that defines the trajectory of the political structure and health of the kingdom for the next few years reveals his sense of entitlement and emotion:

Elesin: What! Where do you all say I am?

Iyaloja: Still among the living

Elesin: and that radiance which so suddenly lit up this market I could boast I knew so well?

Iyaloja: Has one step already in her husband's home. She is betrothed

Elesin: [irritated]: Why do you tell me that?

Iyaloja: Not because we dare give you offence Elesin. (Soyinka 1975,p.20)

According to the practice, the Elesin has the power to enjoy the world before he departs one final time. However, his action of taking a betrothed woman is wrong and do

not represent a smooth passage from the land of the living to the land of the dead. But rather than listen and do the right thing, Elesin again becomes a symbolic representation of the fact that leaders take advantage of their positions to amass material things for themselves at the expense of the cohesion and progress of the society and the people they are called to serve.

As the play progresses with the influence of Pilkings, the colonial officer from Britain, Elesin is convinced to not follow through with the ritual by Pilkings, who considered it a barbaric act. This is a depiction of how the West have found ways to demonise African political systems and reality, an act that has distorted the steady indigenous growth of African society. The irony of Pilkings contribution to derailing Elesin from the ritual that represents political reproduction and passage to the new order is seen in their discussion. While Pilkings suggests that he has saved the life of Elesin, Elesin retorts:

Elesin: You did not save my life District Officer. You destroyed it.

Pilkings: Now come on.

Elesin: And not merely my life but the lives of many.

Elesin is aware of the communal effect of his derailing from his political duties on the community and understands its far reaching effects. Soyinka here satirized contemporary political leaders who now without the supervision of a colonial official,

chooses to sacrifice the lives and proper existence of their citizens for their own selfish interests. Soyinka in this play uses death as a metaphor for selflessness, what can be referred to as death on oneself for the good and service of others. Using a biblical allusion, one that Ngugi Wa Thiongo, another renowned political satirist uses in his novel *A Grain of Wheat*, Wole Soyinka presupposes that except a politician or leader in Nigeria has chosen to die like a grain of Wheat, he will not serve selflessly and bear fruits of growth, development and prosperity. Avoiding the ritual passage of death, Elesin is like the contemporary Nigerian politician who has abandoned his duties and the need for selflessness, living a life as a sacrificial offering to serve the citizens of a nation.

This act of sacrifice has been in the African society for long as a political, socio-cultural and religious ritual. Through this play, Soyinka reveals the political activities of the British in pre-independence times and the response of Nigerians in the face of the challenges posed by the British. The power struggle that is reflected in different points in the play is however a representation of the Yoruba's people effort to resist the British intrusion and sustain the Yoruba cultural ideology. From the struggle at the market place, the district officer's bungalow, the prison cell residency, etcetera, Soyinka reveals the power struggles and the tragedy that finally befalls the Yoruba people, the play reveals the Nigerians tragedy, when the British colonial representatives were able to stop that ritual. That is a symbol of the successful uprooting of the African political heritage that is embedded in and interwoven with the socio-cultural and religious way of life of the people.

2.3 Bad Governance and Corruption in *The Beautification of Area Boy*

The play is a socio-political satire that focuses on the poverty, corruption and political thuggery in Nigeria. Soyinka uses the symbol of rogues and area boys to represent the military era in Nigeria characterised by crime, oppression and force. The play specifically highlights the military regime of 1994 and uses the area boys who are the characters in the play to satirized the events of military dictatorship and extortion. It further talks about the far reaching effects of bad military governance in Nigeria exemplified in the prevalence of poverty and crime. Soyinka sums up the events that led to the writing of this play in unequivocal terms:

The post civil-war years, J harvel witnessed Nigeria's self-engorgement at the banquet of highway robberies, public executions, public floggings and other institutionalised sadisms, arsons, individual and mass megalomania, racketeering, hoarding , epidemic, road abuse and reckless slaughter. (Ogunbiyi 6).

The writing of the play is very fast and fluid as the entire action takes place in a what Soyinka describes as *the broad fronting of an opulent plaza* (5). The names of the characters therefore are instruments to which Soyinka lampoon's his different areas of the nation that has become laughable and pitiable as a result of poor governance and corruption. The area boys includes TRADER, JUDGE, BARBER, BIG MAN SHOPPER, and other names like SANDA, BOKYO, etcetera. The play first depicts the challenge

degenerates level of things in Nigeria where a common bicycle is seen as a luxury as a result of widespread poverty. The area boys, a gang of criminals mock a man who own a bicycle and believe he is not a citizen of Nigeria as even bicycle is a luxury. It shows how much poverty ravaged the country. The first to be enthralled by the bicycle is TRADER, in front of whose shop the Cyclist has stopped:

TRADER gets up slowly, as if in a trance. He circles the bicycle, warily.

TRADER: Oga Sanda, make you look this thing wey I dey look so o. Mama Put, Mr. Barber, all of una, make you come look o. Because I no believe this thing at all at all, even though my eye tell me say no to dream I dey dream am (p.24).

Next to be affected is NEWSVENDOR, who comes in on his daily round and is transfixed by the bicycle. BARBER attributes the appearance of the bicycle to a probable circus in town. Another character in the play, Mama Put reacts with a sense of nostalgia:

MAMA PUT: It makes me homesick. Oh the sight of this thing, it makes me feel homesick....It makes me homesick, that's all I can say. It just makes me feel so homesick I want to pack up and go home. Today (p.25).

Mama Put's homesickness is representative of the depression and frustration experienced by the average urban migrant in Nigeria, who leaves his local community to the big cities for greener pastures only to realize that the change of environment does not hold the key to happiness and wealth after all, because the hardship in Nigeria does not respect rural or

urban settlements. As a Lagosian, Mama Put has, no doubt, come across many exotic cars but the sight of the bicycle recalls the image of home and all its native attractions. The bad government hits the village the same way it hits the cities.

However, CYCLIST is irritated by what he considers an unnecessary fuss about the bicycle. But SANDA and TRADER explain the reason for the general excitement to him:

CYCLIST: (drops the tie). All of una, I tink you dey take me play. I go take my business go somewhere else.

SANDA: You don't understand, my friend. Even I, I don't recall when I last I saw one of those in the streets of Lagos. It is quite a sight I promise.

TRADER: I tell you this na wonderful. Wonderful! A real bicycle inside Lagos. Which place you find am?.... The last time I see bicycle for this Lagos na before the oil boom. Enh? You mean to say somebody still dey, we no troway in bicycle inside lagoon?

This is the first time anyone has explained the background to the entire hullabaloo about the bicycle. TRADER's reference to the oil boom is very revealing. The oil boom period in Nigeria occurred during the 1970s. According to Brian Pinto, "The oil price shocks of 1973/1974 and 1979 resulted in a large transfer of wealth to Nigeria. Public expenditure increased greatly, as did the country's access to international capital markets" (419). This resulted in an unprecedented spending spree by government

and ordinary Nigerians who struggled to outdo each other in acquiring the best of exotic luxury items. The gross political misconduct was the catalyst that plunged Nigeria to the status of poverty capital of the world in the midst of plenty to this present day. People abandoned what they considered as out-dated products and scrambled for more modern and expensive ones without thinking of saving for rainy days. Massive allowances and sundry increments were senselessly added to the salaries of workers and daily millionaires emerged to swell the ranks of those jostling for increasingly available foreign goods. TRADER and CYCLIST succinctly capture the reality of that period of national economic insanity as they continue talking about the oil boom:

TRADER: Na waya for me today. (Jumps on it and rides, barely able to balance.)

Common bicycle. Inside this very Lagos of oil-boom and daily millionaire.

I tink say

everyone done smash in bicycle or sell am for scrap iron.

CYCLIST: (trying on the ties).You wait small. As our people say, na cudgel go reach

crazeman sense; na hunger go reform labourer pikin wey dream say in papa be

millionaire. When the time come, na omalanke, common push-cart, na in even senior service go take go work. Na omolanke go full express inself.

TRADER: (Chuckling as he wobbles from side to side). True word, my brother. Before before, for early morning, na bicycle dey jam-pack Carter Bridge as people dey ride go begin work or return go home. Den, oil boom come. Government dash everybody salary increase, salary advance, salary arrears, motor car advance, motor car incentive, motorcycle advance, all kind vehicle allowance, any kind incentive.

CYCLIST: My friend, make we forget better time. Not to that time the Minister of Finance inself boast for budget speech say any increment wey no dey, we go increment am? no be money, but how to spend 'am. Abi na my memory dey lie? (pp.27-28).

TRADER's memory captures the turn of events perfectly. Nigeria's Head of State at that time, General Yakubu Gowon, actually boasted that the problem of Nigeria was how to spend her surplus money. In addition, Ndubisi (2015, p. 133) notes that the Jerome Oputa Udoji panel on Public Service Organisation, Management and Remuneration recommended a jumbo pay rise for Nigerian workers. Furthermore, Lloyd Amaghionyeodiwe and Elias Udejaja describe the recklessness of that era:

Most of the regimes engaged in lavish spending and not much thought were given to frugal spending. Funds were embezzled; reckless spending became the order of the day both during the military and civilian regimes. Elephant projects were embarked upon; some were completed at unimaginable costs while others were abandoned after the contractors absconded only to emerge later as overnight millionaires (62).

The oil boom period was short-lived. The oil price shocks of the late 1970s and early 1980s brought about dwindling fortunes from oil, massive inflation and severe economic adjustment programmes supervised by the Bretton Wood institutions. These led to so much suffering and depression in the land. Suddenly, a nation that was practically swimming in money was inflicted with a back-breaking debt burden and an ever-fluctuating currency exchange rate.

Before the discovery of oil, the main stay of the Nigerian economy was agriculture. The sector was under the control of the country but the over-reliance on oil, exposed Nigeria to international price regimes outside her economic control and weakened her currency and access to international capital markets. Amaghionyeodiwe and Udejaja call attention to the implication of the above:

Nigeria as an oil producing country depends on oil for national survival. Over 90% of the foreign exchange earnings as well as total government revenue are derived from oil. Similarly, the industrialized countries want

to retain control of a commodity that has been so instrumental to their wellbeing and would want to exert political influence and/or pressure if necessary to achieve their desired objective. Overriding political interests with significant impacts on the market are often brought to bear on what otherwise could have (sic) been pure economic decisions (67).

It is, therefore clear that any attempt by a nation to be frivolous with resources outside its control is attempted economic suicide. We should not be too quick to change from our old ways without examining the consequences of new ways, no matter the temptation to do so. Many national assets in Nigeria will soon become moribund and only memories in our national psyche, like the bicycle in the focus play, if we keep neglecting them. Examples are the Nigerian Postal service, which is being gradually pushed out of place by the internet, and fixed-line telephony being discarded in favour of mobile phones. Interestingly the developed nations we copied these communication platforms from are still maintaining their old ways alongside the new ones, boosting their national economies and sustaining national development from multiple angles.

Soyinka addresses another issue of poverty caused by political ineptitude in Nigeria. It has to do with the fact that citizens now perpetuate any kind of evil to make money. In this scene, a mob enters on the heels of a man accused of having “stolen” the penis of another man. This scene is very important because it presents a familiar scenario that became part of the narrative of Nigeria’s harsh economic reality in the early 1990s.

As a result of the severe hardship faced by the ordinary Nigerian, the anxieties of speculations about currency change, and the uncertainty of daily existence, there were many phantom tales about supernatural ways of making money, using other people's body parts. One of such tales was that people could steal other people's genitals to make money.

However, Wole Soyinka attempts to reveal that this issue of ritual killing and using human parts for money is a myth that tries to hide the real problem of embezzlement of public funds by the few rich individuals. He explains this through the character of SANDA who tries in vain to educate BARBER and TRADER on the real problem.

Cocaine, 419 swindlers, godfathering or mothering armed robbers, or after a career with the police or the army if you are lucky to grab a political post, then retire at 40 as a general who have never fought a war, or you start your own church or mosque. That is getting more and more popular (14).

The above reveals Soyinka's view that corruption at the top and high positions in Nigeria is the cause of the widespread poverty as people use their high positions for self aggrandizement and embezzlement of public funds.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored Wole Soyinka's criticism of bad governance and corruption as the root cause of poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIO-CULTURAL SATIRE

3.1 Introduction

Wole Soyinka is known for his discontent with the socio cultural effects of colonialism in Nigeria. Usually, his works lament the loss of a unique cultural identity that is originally African. Moreso, he bemoans the gradual disappearance of the unique Yoruba cultural heritage and the annihilation of a people's African identity to accommodate Western values which from his observation are largely destructive. The plays, *Death and the King's Horseman* and the *Beatification of Area boy* are plays that also satirized the socio-cultural milieu of the people. This chapter analysis both texts as a satire on culture and society.

3.2 Cultural Satire in *Death and the King's Horseman*

One of the recurrent issue that Soyinka addresses in the play is the clash of culture. In *Death and the king's horseman*, the tradition of the Yorùbá as practiced from time immemorial, is unprecedentedly plunged into chaos by the interception of Simon Pilkings which disrupts the ritual suicide of Elesin. When Simon Pilkings learns from

Amusa through his report that a prominent chief was going to commit suicide, he sets to investigate the reasons for such an act. In Amusa's report, states:

I have to report that it came to my information that one prominent chief, namely the Elesin Oba, is to commit death tonight as a result of native custom. Because this is a criminal offence, I await further instruction at charge office. Sergeant Amusa.' (S, óyinká, 1975, p.26).

There is the clash of tradition and modernity in the play. In one of the scenes for example, Olunde is hard-pressed to explain to Jane the moral or metaphysical validity of the custom that requires his father's self-immolation. Despite Olunde's explanation, Jane sees no meaning in such a tradition. Soyinka here reveals the disrespect and outright rejection of the African condi and way of life to adds already mentioned earlier, she proceeds to call the traditional custom of Olunde, who represents African tradition, 'barbaric' and 'feudal'. The extreme rejection by Jane in such insulting terms, of the customs of the people irritates Olunde who accuses her of hypocrisy (of not recognizing the value and efficacy of self-sacrifice in her own culture). As he says:

Olunde: You white races know how to survive: I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws, this war [World War Two] should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilisation for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of

which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us. I thought all that at the beginning. Then I slowly realized that your greatest art is the art of survival. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way.

Jane: Through ritual suicide? Olunde: Is that worse than mass suicide? Mrs. Pilkings, what do you call what those young men are sent to do by their generals in this war? Of course, you have also mastered the art of calling things by names which don't remotely describe them. Jane: You talk! You people with your long-winded, roundabout way of making conversation.

Olunde: Mrs. Pilkings, whatever we do, we never suggest that a thing is the opposite of what it really is. In your newsreels I heard defeats described as strategic victories. No wait, it wasn't just on your newsreels. Don't forget I was attached to hospitals all the time. Hordes of your wounded passed through those wards. I spoke to them. I spent long evenings by their bedside while they spoke terrible truths of the realities of that war. I know now how history is made. Jane: But surely, in a war of this nature, for the morale of the nation you must expect... Olunde: That a disaster beyond human reckoning be spoken of as a triumph? No. I mean,

is there no mourning in the home of the bereaved that such blasphemy is permitted? (Sóyinká, 1975, p. 28).

On the one hand, the explanation of the conflict in terms of ‘the universe of the Yoruba mind – the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition’ exceeds the scope of this paper. Considered from a metaphysical standpoint, the local human participants may well be ‘vehicles’, but at the level of describable human social practice, the individuals, including the Colonial District Officer, are not only personages, but also embodiments of social ideologies; and their actions manifest aspects of the ideology that forms the basis of their moral attitudes and rational responses. As a consequence, the actions of the characters may ultimately be referred to the governing norms in their different ideologies.

On the other hand, reducing ‘the Colonial Factor’ to ‘an incident, a catalytic incident merely’ seems not to give full weight to the arrest and removal of Elesin from the cultural environment where the pressure to comply with the traditional norms would probably have been overwhelming. According to Ikyoive, ‘Irrespective of this [authorial] cautioning, the textual evidence and interpretation of the play speaks quite loudly to the obvious presence of a clash of tradition and modernity in the play’ (25).

In the cultural space, there would have been no chance to avoid doing his duty by the dead king; and Olunde would have been alive. Iyaloja and the chiefs, who at the first sign of trouble had in fact turned to Olunde (Olori Elesin), would have seen to it. Her last

speech to Mr Pilkings also assures as much: No child, it is what you brought to be, you who play with strangers' lives, who even usurp the vestments of our dead, yet believe that the stain of death will not cling to you. The gods demanded only the old expired plantain but you cut down the sapladen shoot to feed your pride. There is your board, filled to overflowing. Feast on it. (Scene Five) Iyaloja clearly believes that Mr Plikings by his actions has 'cut down the sap-laden shoot to feed [his] pride'. Nor does she forgive him for the belated suicide of Elesin – 'belated', because it comes after the cultural function it would have served had been supplied by another. It is in fact in its having come after it was required that it gets to be called a suicide. Now it has no significance. In a very important sense, significance is what is at stake in this play, first of all, in the limited perspectives of the individual characters, but also, and more importantly, at the wider social level. To Mr Pilkings, for example, the laws he has to enforce and the values he is there to foster come first; and then, afterwards, there might be room, as in a similar moment of crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, to become 'a student of primitive customs' (68).

It will be argued that the play's action has built up towards a cultural revolution; for what would have been a normal transition from one reign to another becomes a crisis of huge proportions because of the Colonial authorities, who by their actions introduce 'an alternative that is of direct consequence for the subsequent development of the story' (Barthes 94). With this intervention, the age-old practice of ritual suicide by Elesin as

part of the funeral ceremonies of his king is admitted into the domain of thought and deliberation, and crucially by the individual who has the burden.

Through his depiction of the story Soyinka stresses that self-sacrifice is important for both Europeans and Africans, but in a different way. In doing that, he foregrounds the importance of the Yoruba culture. The Yoruba tradition focuses on the gulf between the deities, between man and his ancestors, between the unborn and his reality, and the essential gulf that lies between one area of existence and another. This gulf is what must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices, rituals, ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which act as guardian to the gulf. The Yoruba tragedy reflects the anguish of this separation from the essential self. Music in Yoruba tragedy helps reflect the mood of this severance. Mrs. Pilkings doesn't fully understand what going to Europe meant for Olunde. She assumes that he would have internalized European ways whereas Olunde's experience abroad makes him appreciate his own roots better and comprehend what he had left behind. Jane is blind to the conventions of others; she thinks that the only thing that can be important for Olunde is his profession. Olunde's decision to sacrifice himself in place of his father, shows his deep attachment to his cultural roots. He chooses to die "because he rejects his European education and the colonial restraint of the Pilkings, thus gaining the audience's anti-imperialist sympathy" (539). Olunde's sacrifice is seen as more significant than his father's. In a reversal of roles, the son Olunde becomes the responsible father. According to Msiska, "Pilkings' intervention is not simply a castor of colonial meddling in the indigenous culture, rather it is an external factor that

unintentionally strengthens the institution of the carrier instead of undermining it.” (70)

Death is one of the most important concepts examined in the book. It takes on different connotations including natural death, murder, suicide and ritual sacrifice. When Pilkings learns that Elesin intends to kill himself, he cannot decide what to do; he is torn by conflicting emotions. While he feels compelled to interfere as a colonizer, he also doesn't wish to do so. When Elesin's expected death is announced Pilkings observes that: “obviously he means murder.” Jane: “you mean a ritual murder?” Pilkings: “Must be. You think you've stamped it all out. But it is always lurking under the surface somewhere”(26). Mr. Pilkings is more sensitive to Yoruba customs compared to his wife and knows in his heart that he should leave them alone observing thus:

“If they want to throw themselves off the top of a cliff or poison themselves for the sake of some barbaric custom what is that to me? If it were ritual murder or something like that, I'd be duty bound to do something. I can't keep an eye on all the potential suicides in this province” (31).

At least Pilkington is aware of the seriousness of the problem. Soyinka also examines the reasons for Elesin Oba's failure to do what is required of him by the Yoruba traditions. The reader must be made aware of the reasons for this failure. One can surmise that if there is no respect for death, there can be no respect for life. In the words of Ralph Bowman: “Soyinka has made Elesin's failure both individual and representative since as

well as being a finely delineated individual character, Elesin Oba is also, as suggested earlier, the embodiment of the culture of his people, and as such, he has an awful responsibility” (89). “Elesin Oba is both the mediator between the dead and the living as well as mediation itself” (84). In order to fully comprehend Elesin Oba’s failure to kill himself one should take into consideration his sensual character. He is a man deeply devoted to life and the fulfillment of sexual desires. His identity is defined by his relations with other people. His vitality is noteworthy: “through dance, music, songs and chants, a repeated sexual act, two deaths” (42). Elesin had spent all his life as a sensualist, now he has to change and prepare himself for death. He should be more concerned with the other world. The following song reflects his mood: “Death came calling./Who does not know his grasp of reeds?/A twilight whisper in the leaves before”(149). Although Elesin prepares himself for death, he still feels sad to leave the world. He observes: “Life is honour, It ends when honour ends”. Women: “We know you for a man of honour.” (154) When he hears these words from the women, he gets angry: “Stop! Enough of that” he says (154). He doesn’t want to be reminded of his approaching death. A young girl enters the market place, she is betrothed to his own son and yet Elesin wants to spend one night with her before going to the world of his ancestors. Iyaloja, mother of the market, is at first surprised and sad and yet she acquiesces saying: “Now we must go prepare your bridal chamber. Then these same hands will lay your shroud” (162). Iyoloja serves as the leader of the Greek chorus. Already, Elesin is considered as belonging to the world of his

ancestors. He died when his king died. So his son also considers his father already dead. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka draws attention to different

3.3 Satire on the African Society in *The Beatification of Area Boy*

The physical setting of this play, opulent shopping complex alongside made shift stalls, informs readers senses of the issue of class stratification. The characters of Barber, Trader, Mama Put, Boyko and Judge constitute the lower classes that are restricted to such degrading human environments, while Big Man Shopper and the Military Agents who are enjoying the pleasure of the shopping complex constitute the upper class. This physical separation of the setting, introduces the human concept of class and struggle. Obute (2011:36). This is the reality of the world we live in, people working in hospitals can't afford to fall sick into. Guiding a super mart they can't afford to shop in. Live and survive day to day in a place called slums, ghetto and degradation of civilization by others. It is a world where the rich apparently get richer and teaches the poor to be cunning enough like the poor main characters in the text to squeeze the little they can out of them. They weren't going to release it anyways. They would rather impress and splash it at a wedding ceremony or buy a lot of stuffs they need not at the supermarket. The military agents and the types of the Big Man Shopper belong to the class who are known for their affluence and illegal acquisition of wealth.

The lower class society is relegated to the background because they are “no forces to reckon with” both politically and socially. I totally agree with Obute when he added that: “the narrow separation between the make shift stalls and the shopping complex implies that this oppressive gap can be bridged to allow a fair cohabitation of these groups of people but the upper class would not let go of their intimidations of the lower class.(2011:36). The lower class will never be given a chance...it is either he stays out or be wasted away. This is pointed out by the colonel in page 85 of the text. Nobody cares about what becomes of the lower class anyways. They have no relatives. They are literarily useless and will not be missed...at least that’s the belief of the upper class. This was coined by Soyinka according to Shittu (2011:36), to show the extent of dictatorship and brutality being Practice by the military government. The baby who was trampled to death in the stampede of the Maroko market pilgrims could not be identified in terms of its gender, hence the baby is regarded to as “it”, and it made up the classless that belong nowhere and cannot find a place in the class driven society of our world. The struggle to keep up the class stratification by the upper class is also identified in the intended marriage between the two wealthy families. Miseyi’s betrothal to the Bridegroom was not out of love but a sacrifice.

Satire on the Society in *Death and the King's Horseman*

Colonial intervention in Nigeria is described as an obviously devastating cataclysmic event. It is observed repeatedly that African society, through a long period of

historical change have not experienced a moment of dislocation as that of European imperial rule. The losses that the African sustained during the period of slavery (according to the Praise-singer in the opening scene) were not as traumatic as what they encountered in the hand of European rule. The Praisesinger says that, “the world was never wrenched from its groove” and “our world was never wrenched from its true course” (Sóyinká, 1975, p.34). The Praise-singer again meant that throughout the long history of Africans, African society maintained a basic degree of cultural integrity and homogeneity, which the British colonial masters threatened. In his words he says, “There is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter?” towards the end of the play, Elesin admits to Pilkings that European colonialism was actually a “plan to push our world from its course and sever the cord that links us to the great origin” (Sóyinká, 1975, p.40).

Therefore, the British rule, which Elesin perceives to be the cause of his irreverent default, becomes a quintessential threat to the series of inter-relationships or that endless cord which provides the framework that regulates the moral values of the Yorùbá universe. As an act of resistance, Olunde’s affirmation of self-sacrifice that propels his own ritual suicide should be seen as a patriotic and a vital heroic attempt aimed at salvaging self-respect and dignity for his people. Though the question of a clash of cultures may form a contravening essence of interpretation for S, óyinká, the very act is central in the complex world of the play. The question of tradition versus modernity is

one that tampers with the theme of self-sacrifice by opposing and truncating the ritual suicide of Elesin. This has been clearly reflected in Elesin's statement that has seen the intervention of the British colonialist as central in stopping his suicide. On the other hand, the decision of Elesin to take another wife before the ritual goes a long way to delay the ritual and to create other complexes. Despite the warnings from the Praise-singer and Iyaloja, Elesin is determined and goes ahead to take a new bride. It was also at this moment of dramatic delay that Mr. Pilkings interrupts making it impossible for Elesin to continue with the ritual suicide.

3.4 Conclusion

The theme of suicide as well as its motivations reflects the prevailing value system in different ages and cultures. The inner feelings, sense of suffering and the expression of a character as he confronts the inevitability of suicide reflects the customs, religious traditions, and the cosmology of the people. The perception and reception of suicide in traditional African culture and Yorùbá culture in particular contrasts itself with the western perceptions of suicide. The western worldview is largely individualistic. S. óyinká, in his *Myth, literature and the African world* (1976, p.37) observes that western culture employs "a compartmentalizing habit of thought which periodically selects aspects of human emotion, phenomenal observations, metaphysical intuitions and even scientific deductions and turns them into separatist myths (or 'truths') sustained by a proliferating superstructure of presentation idioms, analogies and analytical modes." The

perceptive notion therefore of western reception of suicide is that of an illegal act, immoral, inhuman, biological vulnerability as well as a psychological problem of an individual. This is the African (Yorùbá in particular) worldview is however defined within its communal existence where what confronts the individual is what confronts the society and what affects an individual affects the entire community. This chapter has explored Soyónlá's satire of culture and society using the texts of study.

CHAPTER FOUR

LITERARY DEVICES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the different Literary devices employed by Wole Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Beatification of Area Boy* to achieve its themes.

4.2 Literary Devices in *Death and the King's Horsemen*

The play is written in the third person narrative point of view. There is no explicit narrator (it is a play). Additionally, the tone is ironic. The mood varies. In the first and third acts, it is ritualistic, celebratory, and vibrant. In acts two and four it is tense and ironic. In act five it is mournful, ironic, and bittersweet.. Foreshadowing is also used in the play. The sacrifice of the European captain during war foreshadows Olunde's own self-sacrifice. There is also the use of understatement. Olunde comments, "All this can't be just because he failed to stop my father from killing himself" (59). While also ironic, there is understatement here because the huge issue, which Olunde is barely aware of the half of, is not a result of the simple reason Olunde supposes.

There is also the use of allusions. Pilkings alludes several times to Catholicism, speaking of holy water and the Virgin Mary (30-31). The play also makes use of metaphors. The marketplace is a metaphor for life and death. It contains life and death within it. Other metaphors include *The Not-I Bird*. The story of the *Not-I bird* is a

metaphor for humanity's fear of death and the unknown. The Play itself is also a metaphor. The entire play is a metaphor for the clash between European and African cultures, religions, and societies, as seen in the clash between Elesin and Pilkings.

Simile can also be found in the play. The praise-singer says, "Your name will be like the sweet berry a child places under his tongue to sweeten the passage of food" (10). The play also makes extensive use of symbols: The captain and the ship symbolize the sacrifice the king's horseman will make for his people. There is also the dancing motif. Dancing permeates the text. It is part of the ritual, and is directly connected to Elesin's suicide. Elesin, the women, and the praise-singer dance to enact the ritual. However, Pilkings and Jane also dance, but their dance is awkward and representative of their outsider status.

There is a rich use of symbols in the play. This include The *egungun* costumes. These costumes symbolise traditional Nigerian culture, and are improperly worn by Pilkings and Jane. Elesin is a symbol for Nigeria in all of its vibrant culture, vitality, and humbling at the hand of Europeans. Joseph symbolizes a Westernized Nigerian, one who has assumed elements of Christianity and Western values but retains some of his own culture. This gives him a sort of 'double consciousness

4.3 Language in *The Beatification of Area Boy*

The most striking device use in the *Beatification* by Wole Soyinka is the unique language. It inculcates the use of Nigerian Pidgin English through one of the low class

characters and this development signifies the author's conscious effort to be realistic and down to earth in this particular play. The use of Nigerian Pidgin English is commonplace in *The Beatification*. Indeed, the various dialogues are replete with characters communicating in Pidgin to reflect the typical market scene in cosmopolitan Lagos. Trader's discourse with Cyclist as quoted below replicates this: CYCLIST: Ajegunle new settlement. And na tie I wan buy, that's all. But e be say dat one done become commotion. Who get this stall? E wan' sell tie abi 'e no dey sell?

TRADER: (rushing back behind his stall). Ah, sorry, sorry. I sorry too much. No vex, my friend. Na de ting wey bring you come cause the all the wonderment. Wetin you wan' buy? Take your time, I beg. Everyting na reduced price, specially for you. You see, I go give you special reduction. (His attention still partially on the bicycle). You say you like the tie? How much you wan' pay? Ah, but this is wonderful. The last time I see bicycle for this Lagos na before the oil boom. Enh?.... (Looks wistfully at CYCLIST.) You no mind, my friend? I just wan' see if I still fit balance. CYCLIST: (gives up). Do anything wey you want. Make you no wreck am, thas all. Because na borrow I borrow am. (26-27).

The discussion in this Pidginised English continues unpunctuated for pages in the play. In fact whenever any of the area boys like Trader, Boyko, Barber, Area Two-Four and others in the same circle like Mama Put and Minstrel want to talk, they use Pidgin. It

is like the Lingua Franca of the low class characters throughout the play. The Nigerian Pidgin English is a daily reality of communication among certain segments of Nigerian people. Even the average Nigerian's rendition of the sound /e/ as /t/ is revealed. The average Nigerian audience is quite familiar with these Pidginised expressions and so will most likely make sense of *The Beatification*. Soyinka's incorporation of lexical choices that reflect elements of everyday communication in the latter, which are almost absent in the former, attests to this.

The often controversial elevated or poetic use of language is restricted to only instantial usage in *The Beatification* as against its widespread usage in *Madmen*. Indeed, only the songs in *The Beatification* are poetic. Even then, rhythm and end rhymes are the major poetic devices noticeable in the songs and some of them are written in Pidgin English like 'I love this Lagos' by Minstrel. The importation of indigenous words into characters' utterances also echoes the playwright's intention of grounding the dialogue in its cultural and linguistic contexts. Words like "bobo" for boyfriend (12), "Omolanke for "cart" (26), "Oga for "boss" (62), "konkere" for "beans pottage" and "alawada" for "comedian" (62) are some examples which showcase the typical lexical borrowing that dots the vocabulary of the average Nigerian.

In a similar practice, we find expressions that are transliterated from Yoruba into English language such as; "male yams" (92), which is from the Yoruba expression "ako isu". Expressions otherwise known as Nigerian English are also a part of this play as can

be seen below; “The wise one always throws the water forwards” (94) “Someone old enough to be your father is talking and you keep putting your mouth in his” (42) “”Na good quality evidence should in case the police follow the case” (46) This deliberate act of identifying with the masses in their mode of communication is in harmony with the general attitude of the play where the author perceptibly takes sides with the masses right from the title to all the scenic performances and character attributes. It is thus only apposite and natural that he makes them speak in their language. There are also other noticeable changes in *The Beatification* which we can attribute to ‘style shift’. The playwright’s design of making Miseyi abandon her potential ostentatious life to join the ideologue, Sanda in his revolutionary bid is one of such. Here in *The Beatification*, Miseyi is the essence of the revolution as it is her initiative that leads to the realization and perfection of Sanda’s dream.

Characters names are designed to be representative rather than pinned down to particular individuals hence they often come in form of common nouns such as Boy, Trader, Mama Put, Old Man, Iya Agba, Cyclist, Blindman, Cripple, Barber, Iyaloja, Praise Singer, Minstrel and Foreigner and a lot of others.

This technique has the an implication for the author’s intention in the work because they reveal that the playwright is deliberately depicting the condition of humanity at large in the play and not just relaying an interest in peculiar individuals. A name such as Boy therefore reveals that the fate suffered by Boy in that play is the lot of

many boys like him all over the country. By refusing to particularise these names, Soyinka has successfully generalised the problem and turned away attention from individuals to issues of common concern.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the literary devices and the language used in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This research has examined the use of satire in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*. The first chapter engages in the purpose of study, scope of study, and the theoretical background used for this essay. It talks about the research methodology used, paying attention to the review of related literature and ending with a thesis statement to direct the essay.

The second chapter examined political satire in both plays. It explored the sociopolitical implication of British intrusion of Nigeria and the gradual decay in moral values and the selfishness that set in in place of the usually sacrificial monarchical system of leadership in Nigeria. The satire of this political structure is used to represent the broader political scenario of Nigeria and the corruption that is partly a product of contact with Western ideas of self-preservation as against the common good. It also explored the satire against the military regime of Nigeria as exemplified in *The Beatification of Area Boy*.

The third chapter satirizes culture and society in both plays. It reveals the clash of cultures that led to the inability to follow through with the ritual rites in the Yoruba community. It symbolizes the death of the Yoruba and African culture which was suicidal, as it was a product of embracing foreign ideas. The Beautification of area boy also

satirizes the society using Lagos as a case study. It laments the poor socio-economic state of the nation that leads to all sort of criminal activities. It adds that underdevelopment and gross illiteracy are all products of a very irresponsible government. The fourth chapter examines the Literary devices and language used in both plays. This chapter concludes the essay.

From this research, it is glaring that the African (Yorùbá in particular) worldview is however defined within its communal existence where what confronts the individual is what confronts the society and what affects an individual affects the entire community. It also reveals that Africa must return to its roots and assert its true identity in the sociopolitical strata of the nation. There should be a return to systems of leadership and government that is unique to Africa and steeped in morals and selflessness only when this is done that the nation can come out of the shackles of poverty and underdevelopment.

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