RETHINKING GREEK TRAGEDY IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS: A STUDY OF OLA ROTIMI AND WOLE SOYINKA

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study is a critical analysis of two Yoruba (Nigerian) dramatic texts which have been re-worked from fifth-century Greek tragedies: Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* from Euripides' *Bacchae*. Although there are similarities between the ancient Greek and Yoruba myths and rituals, the purpose of this study is to establish that the essential link between Greek tragedy and modern Nigerian drama is the influence of western education imposed by the British during colonization and to demonstrate that the Nigerian adaptations of canonized western texts are significant within the context of postcolonial discourse and modern African drama.

Following the preface, there is a brief discussion of aspects of postcolonialism, the British slave trade and colonization as reflected in the ideological structure of imperial expansion and the eurocentric assumptions written in history and literature. The next two chapters examine the plays individually with references to their Greek originals and the ancient African myths that provide the cultural environment for the plays. Appropriate biographical information on Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka help establish ways in which western education influenced their writing and provide the socio-political context within which the plays were written.

The study concludes that the re-writing and re-interpreting of fifth-century Greek tragedies, which formed the models for western dramatic art forms, contribute

to distinctive discursive practices aimed at challenging and interrogating eurocentric ideologies while authenticating and valorizing pre-colonial Nigerian history and culture. The transformation of ancient Greek originals by modern Nigerian playwrights show how the colonial language and cultural heritage which were used as tools of oppression could be used paradoxically as instruments to undermine and resist that oppression. Postcolonial discourse is marked by this irony.

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PREFACE

Dissimilar in most respects, William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* share one thing in common; all can be defined as representative of what has been categorized as colonialist literature. All reflect a certain way of thinking and writing about indigenous blacks, specifically Africans. The fictional presentation of blacks in European literature, which coincided with the European slave trade and colonization of Africa, helped create the myth of the Dark Continent and the inferiority of the negroid in contrast to the caucasian race. For example, Prospero and Caliban in *The Tempest* have become the archetypes of the master and slave dialectics of the west; Crusoe's attempt to tame the wild land, and Man Friday's status as cannibal within it, further intensifies the differences between the civilized white master and the black savage; and Conrad's readers are taken into the very heart of darkness in the African continent where darkness is synonymous with evil and Africans are reduced to the subhuman standard of beasts. The scientific and philosophical speculations of such men as Darwin, Hume and Kant reinforced the eurocentric assumptions prevalent at the time. The distinct dichotomy between white and black, good and evil, master and slave, civilized and savage, cultured and primitive was established and its subsequent dialectics continued to permeate literary texts and academic institutions. Europe became the imperial centre, the continent of the superior master race with all its patriarchal, hierarchical values; non-Europeans, particularly those of African, Indian,

and Caribbean descent, remained at the periphery as the anti-thesis of Europe, the inferior "other," with all its connotations of savagery.

Of equal significance is the response to eurocentric ideologies written in history and the fictional representation of blacks in eighteenth and nineteenth century western texts; it is a phenomenon now defined as postcolonial literature. Undergirding such literary discourse are the constructs of postcolonial theory which challenges and interrogates colonialist assumptions about the history and culture of the colonized. Colonization, like slavery, involved the destruction and deliberate undervaluing of a people's dignity and culture while consciously elevating and propagating those of the colonizer. In seeking to undo eurocentricism, postcolonial writers emphasize that the colonized had a rich culture and history prior to European domination. The purpose of postcolonial discourse is to abolish all distinctions between the imperial centre and the periphery as well as other binaries which still remain as the legacy of colonialism.

Postcolonial literature is evidenced by the revising, rewriting and reformulating of western texts in ways that challenge, interrogate and re-evaluate the assumptions written into European literature. For example, J. M. Coetzee in *Foe* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* subverts Crusoe's concept of empire building and the violence against the innocent associated with taming the native. Chinua Achebe tells a different story of imperialism and the missionary enterprise from the African's perspective in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In portraying a pre-colonial African worldview, postcolonial fictional writers re-present Africans as intelligent and rational and

operating within complex organized social and religious systems.

The imposition of the European's language and the naming of the slaves and the colonized were integral to the mental colonization of the Africans. By replacing the indigenous languages, the Europeans redefined the languages of the colonized as meaningless and uncivilized. Since language has been used as a tool to oppress and denigrate the colonized, in the same way, it is being utilized as an instrument of resistance and liberation as part of the decolonization process. Like Prospero's Caliban who uses the language he was forced to learn from his master to curse, postcolonial writers who are unable to write in their mother-tongue because they were indoctrinated at an early age are manipulating the European languages in such a way as to serve their own purposes. Many writers satirize the stereotypical white imperialist and missionary; utilize Pidgin English, an adulterated form of the Queen's English; and incorporate indigenous words, proverbs and idioms that valorize the pre-colonial history and culture of the colonized. Western education in the colonies coupled with the knowledge of the colonizer's language, which accompanied the imperial enterprise, have been employed by postcolonial writers as a source of empowerment in their fight against eurocentricism.

A critical study of *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, Ola Rotimi's transformation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*, Wole Soyinka's transformation of Euripides' *Bacchae* reveals that they contribute to distinctive discursive practices aimed at subverting colonialism. Just as the Greek

originals were charged with ideological meanings in the ways they were taught to the Africans, so these adaptations, when re-interpreted within the African culture, are re-vitalized and given new meaning. The study is constructed on the proposition that language and power are inseparable and that literature provides an open site for an examination of this relationship. The dramatic texts of Rotimi and Soyinka are based on the reality that ideology is produced through language and by changing language ideology can in turn be forced into new directions. Although both plays are written and performed in English, the playwrights have deliberately transformed and re-interpreted the plot to lend authenticity and legitimacy to their African history and culture. By incorporating pre-colonial African myths and rituals, the dramatists provide an ethnocentric framework for their plays. A discourse on the existence of an indigenous African culture prior to colonization is vital to an understanding and appreciation of significant aspects of modern African drama. Such a study is relevant to the ever-increasing scholarly attempts to define African literature within the context of current transformations in colonialist literary forms.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial Theory and the Rewriting of Canonized Western Texts

Apollodorus records an ancient Greek myth about Philomela and her sister, Procne, daughters of Pandion, king of Athens. In return for assisting him during the war against Thebes, Pandion gives Procne in marriage to the Thracian king, Tereus. After a few years, Tereus goes to Athens to bring Philomela to Thrace on the pretence that Procne was dead. On their arrival, Tereus rapes Philomela and cuts off her tongue to prevent her from revealing what happened. However, Philomela finds out that Procne is alive and communicates with her by weaving a tapestry depicting her violation (III.xiv.8).[1] Centuries later, in 1986, J. M. Coetzee rewrites Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in a novel entitled *Foe*, in which the character, Friday, is a slave who has been castrated, and his tongue cut off. Friday's owners attempt to teach him to write English words, but instead of imitating the letters, he writes rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together like a stone wall (152).[2]

Although in different ways, the characters of Philomela and Friday symbolize the resistance to violence and liberation from a dominating power. While Philomela exposes Tereus' violence which frees her from her condemnation to silence, Friday, by refusing to write like his masters, resists being formed into their image or being drawn into their mode of representation. Instead, he uses the ability to write that he has acquired as a means of creating his own images. Coetzee reverses one of the dominant motifs of the topos - Philomela "speaks" despite her "silencing" - Friday

refuses to, because to do so is to accept the domination of his oppressors. The issue of attempting to silence the oppressed or victimized and their resistance to oppression, which runs throughout legends, myths and folk-tales, also permeate the history of slavery, colonization and apartheid. Since it is not only through violent military conquest that people are subjugated, but also through language, postcolonial theory demonstrates how language can be used as a means of resisting that oppression. This chapter explores how postcolonial theory interrogates a certain western way of thinking and writing that perpetuates colonial ideologies about the history and culture of the colonized, and how a rewriting of canonized texts subverts such ideologies. Beginning with the sixteenth-century British slave trade, I shall present a brief overview of eurocentric ideologies, which were well ingrained in the European's mind long before colonization, and I shall discuss resistance as an emancipatory project of postcolonialism.

The term postcolonial and its variant forms (postcolonialism, postcoloniality) have recently gained currency in academic institutions and have become the subject of conferences and seminars. Postcolonial theory and criticism have featured as special topics in such literary journals and periodicals as *Critical Inquiry, Diacritics, Kunapipi, Modern Drama, PMLA, Social Text, Theatre Journal*, and *Yale French Studies*. Postcolonial as an adjective has been attached to a number of nouns: 'aura' (Arif Dirlik), 'condition' (Linda Hutcheon), 'critic' (Gayatri Spivak), 'intellectual' (Edward Said), in addition to the frequently used, 'discourse,' 'studies,' and 'theory.'

Postcolonial theory comprises the discourse of the margin/periphery with reference to the centre, but what exactly is postcolonialism? Kwame Anthony Appiah asks, "Is the Post- in Postmodern the Post- in the Postcolonial?" And an equally provocative question is that of Annamaria Carusi, "Post, Post and Post. Or, Where is South African Literature in All This?" Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge in their essay "What is Post (-) colonialism?" remind us that the 1989 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* does not give post-colonialism (hyphenated) an independent entry. Instead, it "exists alongside other compounds [with the prefix 'post-'] such as post-adolescent, post-cognitive, post-coital and so on" (276). In 1994, Columbia University Press published a compilation of essays in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. Other texts include: *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, edited by Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (1993), Michael Harris' *Outsiders and Insiders: Perspectives of Third World Culture in British and Post-Colonial Fiction* (1992) and *Post-Colonial English Drama: Commonwealth Drama Since 1960*, edited by Bruce King (1992). What then is postcolonial theory and why is it significant to the adaptation and rewriting of western texts?

Although there are geo-political, historical and theoretical ambiguities inherent in the term postcolonial, it is used to identify a type of theoretical discourse that interrogates and challenges eurocentric assumptions written in history and literature. In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Bill

Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin use the term postcolonial to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). This raises the question about whether one single term can represent *all* the culture affected by the imperial process. Such a universalizing and totalizing definition seems to render the term inadequate. Ella Shohat in her "Notes on the Postcolonial" suggests:

> Positioning Australia and India, for example, in relation to an imperial center, simply because they were both colonies, equates the relations of the colonized white-settlers to the Europeans at the "centre" with that of the colonized indigenous populations to the Europeans. It also assumes that white settler countries and emerging Third World nations broke away from the "centre" in the same way. Similarly, white Australians and Aboriginal Australians are placed in the "periphery," as though they were co-habitatants (*sic*) vis-a-vis the "centre" (102).

There are obvious political, historical and cultural differences between white-settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and colonies in Africa and India. Colonization in countries such as Kenya and South Africa where European settlers took possession of the land is different from countries like Nigeria and Ghana. Furthermore, the colonizer/colonized relationship of the francophone colonies is unlike that of the anglophone colonies. The French colony of Algeria is not "postcolonial" in the same way as Hong Kong, which will be independent of Britain in 1997. The various colonized countries differ in race, nationality, language and the way that they were colonized and governed. However, despite the differences, there are some similarities between the literature produced by those whose lives were affected by the

colonial process.[3]

The use of the term, postcolonialism, as a "singular, ahistorical abstraction" has been questioned by Anne McClintock in "Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism:'"

> I am not convinced that one of the most important emerging areas of intellectual and political enquiry is best served by inscribing history as a single issue. Just as the singular category "Woman" has been discredited as a bogus universal for feminism, incapable of distinguishing between the varied histories and imbalances in power among women, so the singular category "post-colonial" may license too readily a panoptic tendency to view the globe within generic abstractions voided of political nuance (86).

If postcolonial is employed to define a single, universal category, "*the* postcolonial," the term has failed to take into consideration the multiplicity of locations and cultures that have been affected by the imperial process. Even within the category of postcolonial intellectuals, there are the resident and diasporic intellectuals; and within the diasporic, there are those who migrated, those forced into exile, and those with or without First World citizenship. If their resistance to European domination is reflected in their literature, can their counter-discursive practices be considered postcolonial, in spite of their differences? For example, the metaphors of "house," "homelessness," and "hybridity," which symbolize the effects of colonization, are evident in the Trinidadian Sam Selvon's *Moses Ascending*, Asian-born Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*, and white South African J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*.[4]

McClintock is also concerned that the term postcolonialism marks history as a "series of stages along an epochal road from 'the pre-colonial,' to 'the colonial,' to

'the post-colonial' ..." (85), signalling a commitment to linear time and the idea of "development" which it sets out to dismantle. Since it directly affected over eighty percent of the world, colonization as a historical marker is of great importance in political global relations. As Gayatri Spivak emphasizes in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies and Dialogues*, one cannot ignore the last few centuries of the historical impact of colonization and other forms of European domination which continue to exist (69, 70, 150). Moreover, far from being just a commitment to linear time, postcolonial theory, in joining the anti-colonial and feminist struggle, goes back to interrogate hierarchical and patriarchal values embedded in eurocentricism, and explore the continuities and ruptures between the discursive formations in relation to teaching English literature in current institutions of learning.[5]

The prefix 'post' in the term postcolonial has created a reason for contention among those who understand it to be synonymous with post-independence. The fact that some colonies have been officially declared independent of imperial rule does not mean the end of colonization. The political and economic wheels of the colonial masters are still turning. Old colonial structures are replicated in forms of neo-colonialism. For example, Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 but there was extensive colonial involvement leading up to the civil war in 1967 and Nigeria is still economically, and in other ways, dependent on Britain. After providing military aid that fuelled the seven-year civil war in Zimbabwe, in 1979, Britain presided over the Lancaster House Agreement which gave the white minority in Zimbabwe the right

to own one-third of the land.

While using the prefix "post," the term postcolonial must not be understood as exclusively denoting the period after colonization. In the Introduction to the January 1995 special topic issue of *PMLA* on "Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition," Linda Hutcheon asserts:

> Of the many meanings attributed to *post*, two have emerged as emblematic of the dynamics of cultural resistance and retention. On the one hand, *post* is taken to mean "after," "because of, " and even unavoidably "inclusive of" the colonial; on the other, it signifies more explicit resistance and opposition, the anti-colonial (10).

How effective is postcolonial theory as a form of resistance and opposition? Postcolonial theory, through a re-reading and revising of colonialist texts, challenges and subverts colonial ideologies written in history and literature. The *Empire Writes Back* suggests that "[t]he concern of postmodernist writers and post-structuralist critics to dismantle assumptions about language and textuality and to stress the importance of ideological construction in social-textual relations finds echoes in postcolonial texts" (165). Gyan Prakash, in "Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography," argues:

> One of the distinct effects of the recent emergence of postcolonial criticism has been to force a radical re-thinking and re-formulation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and western domination. For this reason, it has also created a ferment in the field of knowledge. This is not to say that colonialism and its legacies remained unquestioned until recently: nationalism and marxism come immediately to mind as powerful challenges to colonialism. But both of these operated with master-narratives that put Europe at the centre .... Recent postcolonial criticism, on the other hand, seeks to undo the Eurocentricism produced by the institution of the west's trajectory, its appropriation of the other as History (8).

Even though postcolonial theory interrogates colonialist assumptions, it is evident that eurocentric ideologies were formulated and disseminated long before colonization.

The domination of other nations by the western world did not begin with the 1884 Berlin Conference which stipulated that Europeans could own whatever territory in Africa they occupied;[6] the period of European slave trade had already seen the domination of one nation over another. Different forms of slavery had existed long before the full-scale transatlantic slave trade. Enslaving the enemy that had been defeated in battle was practiced by the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Europeans were enslaved by the Byzantines and Moslems. Domestic slavery was an acceptable way of life for many people around the world, including some African tribes. It was a common practice for slavery to be used as a form of punishment for crimes involving death; and for the creditor to enslave the debtor and/or his relatives as collateral until the debt was paid. Eric R. Wolf, in *Europe and the People Without History*, suggests that during the time prior to the European slave trade "slavery was clearly color-blind" (195). Emphasis was not placed on racial origin *per se*; however, the European slave trade was definitely different in scope and had far reaching effects on the Africans that were enslaved and their culture. Britain's lucrative enterprise in trading humans began in 1562 when, according to Claude George in *The Rise of British West Africa*, Captain John Hawkins' first shipment of three-hundred slaves left Sierra Leone in West Africa for the West Indies.[7] The majority of African slaves were shipped under deplorable conditions to the West Indian islands and the Americas to work in the sugar and cotton

plantations and the coffee plantations in Brazil; others were used as domestic slaves in England.[8] Slave labour sustained the industry and increased Britain's wealth.

In *Three Black Writers in Eighteenth Century England*, Francis Adams and Barry Sanders record the biography and writings of three slaves and their resistance to slavery. One of these slaves, Ottabah Cugoano, who was born in 1757, was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery.[9] He was given the English name, John Stewart, taken to the West Indies and eventually brought to England. Having learned English, he writes a book condemning slavery entitled *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787). He constructs his political and philosophical arguments in the writing style of the eighteenth century. Since he had heard slave traders justify their business by making references to the bible, he also referred to God's love and other appropriate biblical passages that denounced slavery. In other words, he uses his master's tool in his attempt to dismantle his master's house.

Cugoano writes about the degrading and sub-human fashion in which Europeans treated and spoke about blacks. He demonstrates that the behaviour of the English slave traders was worse than that of the slaves whom they regard as beasts:

> None but men of the most brutish and depraved nature, led on by the invidious influence of infernal wickedness, could have made their settlements in the different parts of the world discovered by them, and have treated the various Indian nations, in the manner that the barbarous inhuman Europeans have done; and their establishing and carrying on that most dishonest, unjust and diabolical traffic of buying and selling, and of enslaving men, is such a monstrous, audacious and unparalleled

> wickedness, that the very idea of it is shocking, and the whole nature of it is horrible and infernal (81).

Cugoano made his appeal on humanitarian, theological and economic grounds. If Africans were allowed to live freely, they could still produce the raw materials; they could also buy manufactured goods which would boost Britain's economy. Although it is not known what impact Cugoano had on the abolition of slavery, it is important to note how he articulated his resistance to slavery. In 1807, twenty years after his book was published, slave trade was abolished but the practice of slavery carried on well into the following decades. The freed blacks in England, who were referred to as the "white man's burden,"[10] were transported in overcrowded ships under terrible conditions to populate the colonies in West Africa. By this time, the British had already extended their empire to include their trading posts in the Gambia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria and Sierra Leone; the Berlin Conference just made their occupation official.

The oppressed, like Cugoano, reversed the political and philosophical arguments that the British used to validate slavery, as resistance against slavery. Such arguments had a powerful impact on the British authorities. Contrary to the philosophy of the Europeans, these slaves proved that they were capable of learning and reasoning, just like intelligent human beings. However, although the slaves were emancipated, it was evident from colonization that the Europeans still considered them morally, mentally and physically inferior.

The period of formal colonization began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the British setting up schools, churches and government administrations. Each British colony was divided up arbitrarily into smaller sections ruled by British district officers. Since the colonizers' aims were to "civilize" the natives, the administrators hired local men whom they taught to help enforce the British rules of conduct. These local men, called district interpreters, were placed in a position of power and used as sycophants which alienated them from their community. Thus, the hierarchical system, patterned after the great chain of being that placed non-whites on the lower rung next to the beasts, was established and maintained.

Not only were children removed physically from their homes and cultural environment to attend British-run schools, but they were indoctrinated in the European language and culture. They were taught British history, geography, and most importantly, they were taught that the whites were superior. The children were given English names which alienated them further from their history since the naming of a child in the African culture has great significance to ancestral connections and the ownership of land. Identifying with the traditions of the master and speaking the master's language were an integral part of the colonizing process. For the British colonies, English became the official language for conducting business and government transactions. Ngugi wa Thiong'o asserts in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*:

Colonialism ... involved two aspects of the same process: the

> destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. The domination of a people's language by the language of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized (16).

Language as a means of communication is also a carrier of culture. If a people's language is replaced by a more dominant one, then, the tendency is for the dominant culture to take precedence in that society. As part of the colonizing process, the British enforced their language and literature which perpetuated the inferiority of the colonized. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* suggest:

> It can be argued that the study of English and the growth of empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other, both at the level of simple utility (as propaganda for instance) and at the unconscious level where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values (eg. civilization, humanity, etc.) which, conversely, established 'savagery', 'native', 'primitive', as their antithesis and as the object of a reforming zeal (3).

Gauri Viswanathan echoes a similar relationship between the teaching of English and the colonization of India in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. She demonstrates how the British colonial control depended on western knowledge which fostered "cultural hegemony, ethical absolutism, [and] centralized authority," (74) to which all Indians were subjected. While the study of English was a means of imposing foreign power, its widespread usage provided a means of communication among the diverse tribal groups. For example, according to *Language Survey in Nigeria*, the results of a 1979 study by Bede Osaji, Nigeria has about 368

linguistic groups. The people who occupied the land prior to European intrusion must, however, have communicated because they interacted and traded with each other.

Whether in blatant or subtle ways, ideas that elevated the European's worldview at the expense of the non-European permeated colonialist texts. The colonized were mis- or re-presented as the antithesis of civilized Europe, the inferior 'other' with all its connotations of savagery. In his essay, "Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," Abdul JanMohamed asserts that the English texts were used to justify imperial control and the exploitation of the colony's resources:

> If such literature can demonstrate that the barbarism of the native is irrevocable, or at least very deeply ingrained, then the European's attempt to civilize him can continue indefinitely, the exploitation of his resources can proceed without hinderance, and the European can persist in enjoying a position of moral superiority (62).

This was the process of colonizing the mental universe of the natives while reinforcing the supremacy of the European.

In his essay on "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent," Patrick Brantlinger analyzes several texts to delineate the development and establishment of the myth that Africa is the dark continent. He bases his discussion on the theory of discourse "as strategies of power and subjection, inclusion and exclusion, the voiced and silenced" (166). Brantlinger argues that the imperialist ideology produced the Dark Continent myth which was developed and maintained during the slave trade and the partitioning of Africa:

> As part of a larger discourse about empire, it [the myth] was shaped by political and economic pressures and also by a psychology of blaming the victim through which Europeans projected many of their own darkest impulses onto Africans. The product of the transition - or transvaluation - from abolitionism to imperialism, the myth of the Dark Continent defined slavery as the offspring of tribal savagery and portrayed white explorers and missionaries as the leaders of a christian crusade that would vanquish the forces of darkness .... When the taint of slavery fused with sensational reports about cannibalism, witchcraft, and apparently shameless sexual customs, Victorian Africa emerged draped in that pall of darkness that the Victorians themselves accepted as reality (198).

The association of Africa with darkness is evident in numerous colonialist texts which were widely circulated in Europe and in the colonies. Postcolonial theory challenges this white mythology that has been accepted as a universal reality.

Like Cugoano, a number of the African intellectuals in the twentieth century resisted the eurocentric discourse of domination. The West Indian poet, Aimé Césaire, coined the word *Négritude* but Africans, like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Amilcar Cabral, played major roles in the *Négritude* movement by writing essays and poetry emphasizing their identity. The philosophy of *Négritude*, developed by colonized francophone Africans, emphasized the recognition of the culture and dignity of the African in an effort to gain social and political liberation from colonization. In *An Introduction to West African Literature*, Oladele Taiwo cites Leopold Senghor's speech at the founding of the *Négritude* movement:

> They [the colonizers] esteemed that we [the colonized] had neither invented, nor created, nor written, nor sculptured, nor painted nor sung anything. To set our own and effective revolution, we had first to put off our borrowed dresses, those of assimilation and affirm our being,

> that is our *négritude* ..... For our *négritude* to be an effective instrument of liberation, instead of a section of a museum, we had to shake off the dust and assert it in the international movement of the contemporary world (45).

Colonization, more so for the francophone than the anglophone Africans, meant a total assimilation of western culture, physically and mentally dominating their language, lifestyle and values. Senghor and his pioneers tried to validate the worth of the Negro, but by doing so, placed the African in an inferior position to the European. Frantz Fanon, influenced by Marxist ideology, attacked the philosophy of *Négritude* as a concept to create black self-consciousness. He advocated a more aggressive means of decolonization and national liberation.[11]

Négritude did not of itself make a radical break from the ideology of French, and by extension European, colonization; however, it prepared the way for anglophone African intellectuals' increasing awareness of nationalism and the appreciation for their own indigenous culture, one which was intensified during the fight for independence from European rule. *Négritude* was a product of French theorizing and ideology and some anglophone African intellectuals criticized its reliance on the essential binary nature of the western philosophical tradition. Wole Soyinka's argument against the racist philosophy of *Négritude*, particularly his comment on 'tigritude,' has been misinterpreted as an attack against African Nationalism. Soyinka put the record straight at the Berlin Conference for African writers in 1964; in *Neo-African Literature*, Janheinz Jahn records Soyinka's taped response:

> The point is this that, to quote what I said fully, I said: "A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces." In other words: a tiger does not stand in the forest and say: "I am a tiger." When you pass where the tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker, you know that some tigritude has been emanated there. In other words: the distinction which I was making at this conference (in Kampala, Uganda, 1962) was a purely literary one: I was trying to distinguish between propaganda and true poetic creativity (265-266).[12]

Despite its deficiencies, *Négritude*, like Nationalism and Marxism, was a step in the right direction in the fight against European colonization.[13]

Postcolonial literature has been regarded as a replacement or substitute for Third World, Commonwealth, or (New) Literatures in English. The term, Third World, was coined in the fifties in France by analogy to the third estate, the commoners who were neither nobility nor clergy. The term is widely used in academic institutions, and in social and political contexts, particularly in reference to anti-colonial national liberation movements. Third World carries with it the connotation of inferiority as it is usually associated with the state of being underdeveloped and/or underprivileged. It also supports the European hierarchical system with its binaries of First World/Third World and developed/underdeveloped which places such concepts in fixed positions. The notion of First World/Third World does not take into account the changing global relations in which, for example, the Third World Arab countries have First World economic power nor the Third World national who has First World citizenship.

"Commonwealth Literature" emerged in the sixties to describe Britain's both

white and non-white colonies. The term, Commonwealth, was already ideologically nuanced because Britain as the head of the Commonwealth was assuming a cultural domination of politically independent ex-colonies. Furthermore, what came to be named Commonwealth Literature or (New) Literatures in English, did not include British literature (nor those from other European countries), thereby continuing the distinction between the periphery and the centre. In "Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," Helen Tiffin recommends the advantages of the term postcolonial:

> [I]f the impulse behind all post-colonial literatures is seen to be counter-discursive, and it recognised that such strategies may take many forms in different cultures, I think we have a more satisfactory model than any loose national grouping based on felt marginality can offer, and one which perhaps avoids some of the pitfalls of earlier collective models or paradigms. Moreover, such a model can account for the ambiguous position of say, white Australians, who, though still colonised by Europe and European ideas, are themselves the colonisers of the Aboriginal inhabitants. In this model all post-invasion Aboriginal writing and orature might be regarded as counter-discursive to a dominant 'Australian discourse' and beyond that again to its European progenitor (20).

The use of postcolonial theory does not limit the writer to any specific country, race, gender, class, or language. Consequently, Dutch Afrikaners and Anglo-South Africans, such as J. M. Coetzee, André Brink, Athol Fugard and Guy Butler can be engaged in anti or postcolonial discursive practices. According to Albert Memmi, in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, such a writer can be classified as a "colonizer who refuses" (19) because s/he does not assume the role of the colonizer. Under the rubric

of postcolonial theory, Memmi's classification is unnecessary.

The colonizer who chooses to identify with the colonized and the struggle for freedom from European domination stands at a very precarious position. S/he may be treated with suspicion by the colonized and with disgust by other colonizers. In his "Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech (1987)," J. M. Coetzee asserts that "[i]n a society of masters and slaves, no one is free. The slave is not free, because he is not his own master; the master is not free, because he cannot do without the slave" (96). Coetzee makes reference to the psychological dilemma that any colonizer who refuses faces because there is no way of escaping one's skin colour or genetic composition which immediately resigns that person to a specific racial caste.[14] Coetzee argues that South African literature is a literature in bondage:

> It is a less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them. It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from a prison (98).

Although belonging to the race of colonizers, Coetzee and others can choose to engage in postcolonial discourse by challenging eurocentricism.

On the other hand, it is not all those who were previously colonized or living in post-independent countries whose texts adhere to postcolonial theory. There has been a controversy surrounding V. S. Naipaul's status as a postcolonial writer. His novel, *The Middle Passage: The Caribbean Revisited*, and his autobiography, *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* which includes references to the primitive lifestyle of the

Africans in Ivory Coast have been questioned.[15] Many East and West Indian critics accuse the Trinidadian-born writer of Indian descent, who now resides in Europe, of "self hatred" and of being a "colonialist writer" because of the way he represents the colonized in his writings,[16] for example, in *An Area of Darkness*:

> To me as a child the India that had produced so many of the persons and things around me was featureless, and I thought of the time when the transference was made as a period of darkness, darkness which also extended to the land, as darkness surrounds a hut at evening ... I have travelled lucidly over that area which was to me the area of darkness, something of darkness remains, in those attitudes, those ways of thinking and seeing, which are no longer mine (32).

Naipaul's negative description of India, and blacks in general, has earned him the reputation of assimilating eurocentric ideologies and using them against his own people. The particular reference to darkness and its connotations fall into the category of themes found in colonialist literature; however, that does not necessarily make Naipaul a colonialist writer. In *Miguel Street* (1959) and *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), Naipaul engages in postcolonial discourse in his exposure of the effects of colonization and the impact it has had, and continues to have, on the lives of the colonized. Himself a victim of colonization, Naipaul is caught in the predicament of hybridity, of belonging to both worlds and at the same time belonging to neither.[17]

Postcolonial theory is worked out through the practice of postcolonial discourse, in other words, the re-constructions of knowledge and power through language. The discursive practices of slavery, imperialism and colonialism demonstrate that ideology is produced through language, and particularly in literature. This is

evident not only in the language of fictional texts but in what was considered "true" scientific and philosophical observations. Conceptual frameworks of men like Darwin and Freud were based on patriarchal hegemonic structures of race, gender and class. In "Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes" Henry Louis Gates Jr. says, "Hegel, echoing Hume and Kant, claimed that Africans had no history, because they had developed no systems of writing and had not mastered the art of writing in European languages" (11). Chinua Achebe, one of the foremost postcolonial writers, resists such assumptions by suggesting in his novels and essays that Africans had a rich culture and an organized system of religion and government prior to European domination. In *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, he reiterates that the African's "past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (72). Ironically, colonialist writers, who assume that the blacks had no written history or culture, conveniently ignore the fact that the Egyptians not only invented hieroglyphs but also made the writing material from papyrus, which other civilizations copied and an African mask sculptured by the Fang people, which came into Picasso's possession, revolutionized twentieth-century European art. The music of the Africans in America has greatly influenced American popular music, like gospel, rhythm-and-blues, rock and jazz. Paul Simon has relied on African musicians and musical instruments to enhance his songs, although he has been accused of artistic exploitation and colonialism.

Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, applies the notion of discourse to his analysis of

how the West dealt with the Orient by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it ..." as a way of dominating and having authority over it (3). Said claims that various texts authorized the Orient, and through the citing of previous texts by succeeding authors, the Orient came into being (20).[18] The connotations of authority that Said applies to Orientalism also define imperialism and colonialism:

> It [authority] is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgements it forms, transmits, reproduces (19-20).

Although *Orientalism* does not provide a counter-discourse to eurocentricism, it does demonstrate that knowledge/language and power are inseparable. Within the colonizer's language, there are sign systems that pass themselves off as 'universal' or 'natural,' that give the speaking subject the power to represent and inscribe its object.

Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge suggest that there is a danger that "the post-colonial is reduced to a purely textual phenomenon, as if power is *simply* a matter of discourse and it is only through discourse that counter claims can be made" (278, italics mine). Although the postcolonial project should not be reduced to a single phenomenon, however, language is power and it played a major role in the imperial and colonial conquest of subduing the colonized. Moreover, a great percentage of the human race has been, and continues to be, described and represented as inferior. Terry Eagleton, in his chapter on "The Rise of English Literature" in *Literary Theory*,

contends that: "'Literature,' in the meaning of the word we have inherited, *is* an ideology. It is the most intimate relations to questions of social power" (22). Postcolonial theory, through language, can be a powerful tool in combatting colonialist ideologies.

In her essay on "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," Spivak discusses the term, *catachreses*, which she describes by saying: "You take positions in terms not of the discovery on historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" (228).[19] Postcolonial theory seizes the apparatus of value-coding of imperialism and displaces it by positing alternative meanings in the language. Considering that ideology is produced through language, by reversing the value placed on language, ideology is forced into different directions. For example, by re-presenting Africans functioning in complex socio-political and religious systems, postcolonial African writers seek to reverse eurocentric assumptions about the image and mental capability of the African.

Some of the western literary master narratives that have been interrogated and/or rewritten include: Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Othello*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*,[20] Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*. In his essay, entitled "An African Image: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Hopes and Impediments*, Chinua Achebe challenges the obvious racial and colonial assumptions presented in Conrad's text. He considers Conrad's writing a product of its

time when the British enterprise of slavery, imperialism and colonization denigrated and dehumanized the non-European. Conrad's descriptions of blacks in his novel and autobiography reduce them to mere animals; Achebe quotes the following passages:

> And between whiles I had to look after a savage who was a fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing *a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs* (6, italics mine).
> A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the *human animal* to the end of my days (13, italics mine).

Achebe asserts that "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as the 'other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (3). Achebe has come under attack for his observations of racism, on the basis that Conrad's is an imaginative novel and the darkness is used as a metaphor for the character's soul. Conrad does portray the darkness as inherent in all men and the Africans on a whole are described favourably.

"Can a writer be condemned for writing within the confines of his own time?" is the question asked by David Denby in "Jungle Fever," published in the November 1995 issue of *The New Yorker*. Denby argues that Edward Said's suggestion that *Heart of Darkness* was "an organic part of the 'Scramble for Africa'" (127) is misleading[21] and that Achebe's essay is "an act of rhetorical violence" (125). Denby, who interprets Marlow's voyage from Europe to Africa and upriver to Kurtz's

inner station as a "revelation of the squalors and disasters of the colonial 'mission,'" argues that it is a figurative trip down "through the levels of self to repressed and unlawful desires" (120); he concludes:

> [T]o maintain that this book is not embedded in the world - to treat it innocently, as earlier critics did, as a garden of symbols, or as a quest for the Grail or the Father, or whatnot - is itself to diminish Conrad's achievement. And to pretend that literature has no political component whatsoever is an equal folly (129).

Language is power and literature provides an open site for an examination of this relationship. It is significant that while Conrad is a product of his time, his fictional work exposes the atrocities of imperialism without endorsing or passing judgement on Europe's imperialistic ventures. His portrayal of the blacks in the chain-gang and in the groves of death scenes reveals his sensitivity to their humanity and suffering. At the Central Station, there is a suggestion of the Africans' resistance to their enslavement by the burning down of the store house. However, Conrad's work contributes to a certain body of texts that reinforce the otherness of non-Europeans. The binary opposition between Europe and its other is submerged in a highly encoded system of language which allows the European to maintain distinctions of power and domination. Conrad, and other so-called colonialist writers, are caught in a web of cultural and political dialectics. Can one culture describe and define another culture without relegating it to an inferior status, without hostility or the desire to dominate?

Lewis Nkosi, a black South African living in exile, discusses the ideology underlying European domination in "Robinson Crusoe: Call Me Master," in *Home and*

Exile. Nkosi suggests that the myth of civilization written in fictional texts convinced the European readers that such things as savages and cannibals exist in Africa and need to be enlightened and civilized. Just as the violence is inseparable from the enterprise, so in *Robinson Crusoe* the element of myth "regarding the painstaking industry of building a civilization from nothing, *ex nihilo*, is inseparable from the story of colonisation, of subjugation, exploitation, and finally christianisation ..." (154). In his discussion, Nkosi asserts that a vital part of the enterprise of empire building was subjugating the natives; and of equal importance to the idea of civilization based on law and order was the naming and classification of objects:

> Defoe makes Crusoe confess: 'I began to speak to him, and teach him to speak to me; and first, I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life; I called him so for the memory of the time; I likewise taught him to say Master, and then let him know, that was to be my name' .... Crusoe does not teach Friday to call him by his name. He does not teach him to call him Robinson or Bob or even Crusoe (156).

Permeating the language of imperial domination is the naming and categorizing of the 'other.' Since language and power are inseparable, the ability to name and place in fixed categories gives the one who dominates that power of authority. The binaries between 'self' and 'other' are established. According to Robert Young in *White Mythologies*: "What is called 'other' is an alterity that does settle down and falls into the dialectical circle. It is the other in the hierarchically organized relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns 'its' other' (2). Prakash claims that if these binary oppositions, "as Derrida's analysis of the metaphysics of

presence shows, aim relentlessly to suppress the other as an inferior, as a supplement, their structures of signification can also be rearticulated differently" (10).

In his novel *Foe*, J. M. Coetzee not only interrogates the discursive field of eurocentric ideology by rearticulating and revising Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, but he also seizes the apparatus of value-coding and reverses the dialectic of imperialism surrounding empire/civilization building. Unlike Defoe's character, Coetzee's Cruso (without the *e*)[22] does not keep a diary, tabulate the days, clear the wilderness, build a boat or cultivate anything. Coetzee's Friday has been castrated and his tongue cut off to represent the violence inflicted on those whose voices are silenced by oppression.

The patriarchal hierarchy, propagated by colonization and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, is subverted by Coetzee in the character of Susan Barton who takes ownership of most of the novel's narrative, and custody of Friday after Cruso's death. The two meanings of "foe," Defoe's patronymic name, and the denotation for "enemy," are used to undermine the authority of Defoe's story. Coetzee has often said that: "History is nothing but a certain kind of story that people agree to tell each other."[23] He echoes Vico's observation that men make their own history, and that what they can know is what they have made. Coetzee captures the idea of history making in *Foe* by re-interpreting Defoe's story. Like Cugoano, Coetzee writes in the style of the early nineteenth-century travel/autobiographical novel. Coetzee demonstrates the intersection between feminist and postcolonial theories by having the character of Susan keep a

diary and write letters. While she is given the dominant role of the creative enterprise, she still identifies with the colonizers in her efforts to dominate Friday. She could not free Friday because he would be enslaved by whoever finds him; yet she could not treat him as an equal. Coetzee puts Susan's narrative in quotation marks to lend authority and authenticity to it:

> 'Then there is the matter of Friday's tongue. On the island I accepted that I should never learn how Friday lost his tongue, as I accepted that I should never learn how apes crossed the sea. But what we can accept in life we cannot accept in history. To tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost!' (67).

Coetzee's Friday has his tongue cut off, and while it is a violent act, it means that Friday does not have to speak his master's language. The literal and metaphorical silencing of postcolonial writers in South Africa is significant to their role in the liberation struggle and anti-imperialist resistance. Just as Friday resists domination by refusing to write as his owners, and by inscribing his own writing (rows and rows of the letter *o* tightly packed together), postcolonial writers resist colonialist inscriptions by either replacing or rearticulating them.

In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, O. Mannoni treats the Crusoe/Friday and the Prospero/Caliban relationships, in *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest* psychoanalytically, as paradigmatic examples of the master/slave, colonizer/colonized dialectics of colonial domination. Caliban attempts to violate one of the most basic taboos underpinning imperial rule - that of the violation of white

women by the natives. In "Caliban Answers Prospero: The Dialogue Between West and African Literature," Kofi Awoonor suggests:

> A significant sub theme that also reflects some of the deep seated psychological dimensions of the play [*The Tempest*] is the relationship between Caliban and Miranda, the beast and the beauty, the aboriginal focus of the sex-based war between the races. She is the pure white woman over whom the native savage salivates. Between her and Caliban the racial rape syndrome is born (78).

Mannoni explains the "Prospero Complex" of the paternalist colonial and white racialist, who desires to dominate and fears the rape of a white woman by a black man, as his own repressed tendencies towards sadism, rape or incest, the image of which frightens and fascinates him, being projected on to others (110-111). The owners of Coetzee's Friday eliminate the possibility of him ever raping their women by having Friday castrated.

It is apparent that associated with the project of colonization is the process of taming the savage by teaching him language. However, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare presents the character of Caliban as having a better understanding of the English syntax, semantics, and poetic diction than Defoe's Friday. Caliban's understanding of the English language empowers him to respond: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse: the red-plague ride you / For learning me your language" (I.ii.363-365). Caliban uses his acquisition of western language and power to subvert it.

The issue of language has caused contention among some African postcolonial

writers. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and others such as David Diop and Obi Wali have insisted that in an effort to decolonize the mind and break free from dependence on the colonial masters, previously colonized writers should not write in their adopted European languages. Writing in the language of the colonizers is seen as a subtle form of colonization. The debate on what constitutes African literature has been focused on the language by those who insist that the authentic African literature must be written in an indigenous African language. In an interview with Phanuel Egejuru in *Black Writers: White Audience*, Chinua Achebe asserts:

> It's not just the language that determines what the literature is; it's important, but it's not the main issue. If you have a place called Nigeria in which education is in English, then there is a certain way in which English becomes part of that reality. Literature is just one way in which this reality demonstrates itself (102).

Part of that reality is also the fact that in Nigeria alone, there are seven main tribal languages and over three-hundred ethnic dialects; one language could be like a foreign language to someone who does not speak the same language. If you multiply that with an equal number of diverse languages spoken in the other forty or so African countries, what are the chances that an authentic African writer could communicate with the rest of Africa? At the 1977 Second World and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) and at a UNESCO conference in Tanzania, Wole Soyinka proposed that Swahili or Kiswahili become the official language of Africa.[24] Since no tribe in Nigeria speaks the East African language, it would have been a level playing field, whereas the acquisition of English had formed a social hierarchy that

privileged the élite above those without formal English training. Ironically, Kiswahili and Gikuyu, spoken predominantly in East Africa, are Ngugi's indigenous languages which he has chosen as the medium for his writing after gaining his reputation as a writer in English. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngugi states his decision to abandon the use of English but he declares: "I hope that through the age old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all" (*xiv*). While Ngugi condemns writing in the colonizer's language, he does not condemn its translation into that same language.

In addition to communicating in the colonizer's language is the reality that many postcolonial intellectuals cannot write in their indigenous languages. Removed from their cultural environment at an early age without any formal teaching in their tribal languages, they became fluent and excelled in their adopted languages. Unlike Ngugi, such writers cannot reverse the process overnight; years of western domination have made that impossible. Gayatri Spivak puts a similar issue in perspective in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* when she responds to the question of privileging First World theories:

> I cannot understand what indigenous theory there might be that can ignore the reality of nineteenth-century history .... To construct indigenous theories one must ignore the last few centuries of historical involvement. I would rather use what history has written for me (69).

Crucial to the debate on writing in African languages is that while ex-colonized writers cannot pretend that colonization did not happen, they can use what history has written for them to recover what was lost thereby creating their own unique cultural space.

Some postcolonial writers consider returning to indigenous languages as forms of fetishization and syncretism. Others use the English language as a tool, as a means of empowerment to subvert colonialist ideologies and present an African worldview. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Achebe responds to the use of indigenous languages:

> The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will not be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry out his peculiar experience (100).

Achebe achieves these aims in his novels (*Things Fall Apart* and *Man of the People*) by using Pidgin English or Igbo idioms, proverbs and parables, as well as standard English. Other postcolonial writers use indigenous words, phrases and traditional songs with or without a translation or glossary. Writing in indigenous African languages is nothing new, there are texts written in Zulu and Yoruba; but by making that the only criterion for African literature discriminates against other postcolonial writers. If a foreigner, or an African for that matter, were to write in an African language and present a eurocentric view would the work qualify as African literature?

Phanuel Egejuru, in *Black Writers: White Audience*, suggests another reason why writing in the colonizer's language is effective in challenging European ideas:

> Being able to use the language of the colonizer was one of the ways of proving to him that the colonized people were educable. In this way, knowledge of the foreign language became a powerful means of contradicting the colonizer's idea of the mental inferiority of the colonized (57).

Not only are postcolonial writers able to match their intellectual ability with the

colonizers', but they can also manipulate the language to convey the message even of a counter-culture. As Bakhtin suggests in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, they can "populate the word with their own intentions, their own accents, appropriating and adapting the word," by placing their own value on the meanings (293-294).

Abrogation and appropriation of language is quite evident in modern West African drama which combines the classical heritage of western theatre with African dramatic art forms. Since drama is an ideal medium for political and cultural expression, through the revising of Greek tragedies and the use of Greek myths legends and motifs, African playwrights project their image of Africa. For example, J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi incorporate African myths, rituals and languages into the plays they inherited from the colonial influence on their education.

By using the English language and making it their own, the postcolonial writers can resist the colonialist labelling and re-presentations. Unfortunately, the use of the English language in postcolonialist literature has been described as non-standard and referred to, at least in *The Empire Writes Back*, with a lower case "e." This practice, which categorizes their literature under "englishes," implies inferiority and continues the marginalization of their texts. Can the term, postcolonial literature, eliminate such binaries as centre/margin? In *The Post-Colonial Critic*, Spivak suggests a re-inventing of the term margin as "not opposed to the centre, but as an accomplice of the centre:"

> [I]n the old days, marginalia were, in fact, rather important. Textual criticism in the pre-modern period is much interested in marginalia. In the early print culture in the West it was in the margins that the so-

> called argument of the paragraph or set of paragraphs was written. I would like to take away the current notion of marginality, which implicitly valorizes the centre (156).

Postcolonial theory, through an interrogation and rearticulation of colonialist assumptions, resists and liberates those enslaved by such ideologies. Postcolonial discourse, whether written in French or Bengali, by a Dutch or an Aboriginal can resist the mis- or non representation in history and literature because the emancipatory project of postcolonialism is not limited to any country, race, gender or class. However, is it possible to theorize postcoloniality without falling into the trap of universalizing? Can the writer avoid stepping out of the aesthetic realm of art into politically-charged hegemonic discourses? Or should we consider Homi Bhabha's "unmanned sites," the "*in-between* spaces," between cultures and nations and peoples, that will give us an *inter*national dimension?[25]

Notes

1. A more elaborate version of this myth is recorded in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983) VI.430-678.

2. In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare refers to the myth recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In his sensational version of the Greek myth, Lavinia is raped and her tongue and hands are cut off; however, she reveals her offenders by writing their names on sand using a staff held with her mouth and guided by her stumps.

3. Edward Said, "Yeats and Decolonization," ed. Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990) 69-95. Said suggests that Yeats belongs to a tradition of the "colonial world ruled by European imperialism" (69), and compares Yeats' Irish poetry to African poetry as a form of resistance to oppression (85). While there are similarities in the tone and themes of Irish and African poetry, Said's over-generalization does not take into consideration the devastating effect of the specific project of imperialism as it applies to the African continent.

4. See also Homi K. Bhaba, "The World and the Home," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 141-153.

5. Gayatri Spivak, "The Burden of English," eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993) 134-157. Spivak discusses the teaching of English literature in the postcolonial context as "transforming the way in which objects of knowledge are constructed" (139).

6. Frank Maloy Anderson and Amos Shartle Hershey, Handbook for the Diplomatic History of Europe, Asia, and Africa 1870-1914 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918) 164.

7. It must be noted that prior to the British shipment, the Spanish and Portuguese had already shipped slaves out of West Africa, according to Richard Olaniyan, ed. *African History and Culture* (Ikeja: Longman, 1982) 62.

8. See Elizabeth Isichei, *History of West Africa Since 1800* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1977) for a discussion on trade with the Europeans and the slave trade in West Africa.

9. In the introduction, Francis Adams and Barry Sanders, *Three Black Writers in Eighteenth Century England* (Belmont: Publishing Company, 1971) suggest that the "Europeans undermined African culture, not only with the promise of material wealth but also by providing modern instruments of battle that enabled the Africans to wage more destructive wars" (5). This became a vicious cycle; the more sophisticated the weapons, the greater the number of Africans captured and the need for more weapons which fostered distrust and hatred among the Africans.

10. Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The White Man's Burden" (1899), *Rudyard Kipling's Verse* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1940) epitomizes the project of imperialism: to civilize and christianize the "natives" whom he describes in the first stanza as "half-devil and half-child" (321-323).

11. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), argues that "colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength. The exploited man sees that his liberation implies the use of all means, and that of force first and foremost .... The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of national destiny and of a collective history" (47-48; 73).

12. For a discussion on *Négritude*, including the original remark by Wole Soyinka, see W. H. Stevenson, "*The Horn*: What it Was and What it Did," *Research in African Literatures* 6:1 (1975): 5-31. Soyinka discusses the ideological nature of *Négritude* and gives examples of the poetry that came out of the movement in *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: UP, 1976) 63-66, 126-139. During an interview with university students in Paris, "Conversations with Wole Soyinka," *Commonwealth* 15.3 (Spring 1993): 1-42, Soyinka responds to the question on *Négritude* as "something about which most Anglophone writers and intellectuals were very impatient; they reacted with suspicion" (27). Soyinka sympathizes with the Francophone African students who, unlike the Anglophone students, were completely alienated from their culture and as a result of a "self-conscious need to retrieve their original identity," started the movement.

13. The projects of Nationalism and Subaltern Studies are also forms of resistance to imperialist ideologies which demand a detailed consideration outside the scope of this essay.

14. Coetzee explores the difficulties that the 'colonizer who refuses' experiences within himself and from his peers and the colonized in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).

15. See "The Crocodiles of Yamoussoukro," *Finding the Centre: Two Narratives* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984) 89-187.

16. See Fawzia Afzal-Khan, *Cultural Imperialism and the Indo-English Novel* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993). Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (Autumn 1985): 59-87.

17. In "Without a Place," an interview recorded in *Critical Perspectives on V. S. Naipaul*, ed. Robert D. Hamner (Washington D.C: Three Continents Press, 1977), Ian Hamilton asks Naipaul about his article in the *Times Literary Supplement* in which he expressed a sense of alienation from things English to the point where he had achieved the "Buddhist ideal of non-attachment" (39). Naipaul asserts that although London is his 'metropolitan centre,' it is a kind of limbo and he is a refugee in the sense that he is 'alway [*sic*] peripheral'" (41).

18. Dennis Porter challenges Edward Said's assumptions, particularly on travel literature and its modes of representation in "Orientalism and its Problems," *The Politics of Theory* (Colchester: U of Essex, 1982) 179-193.

19. Spivak describes "catachresis" as a "concept-metaphor without an adequate referent" (225). The word is used as an extension of the classical rhetorical term meaning "a wrenching of words," presumably out of their original contexts.

20. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys takes the character, Bertha Mason, in *Jane Eyre* and writes a story of what led to the West Indian character's mental deterioration, the story that Rhys says, Charlotte Brontë does not tell. Gayatri Spivak discusses Bertha Mason as a figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 243-261.

21. In *Orientalism* (1979), Edward Said includes Conrad on his list of nineteenth-century authors who projected the superiority of the imperialists. Said discusses *Heart of Darkness* in his chapter, "Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

22. Sheila Roberts, "Post-Colonialism, or The House of Friday," *Us/Them: Translation, Transcription and Identity in Post-Colonial Cultures*, ed. Gordon Collier (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1992): 335-340. Roberts suggests that Coetzee removes the "e" from Crusoe, "thus de-Englishing him ..." (336).

23. In *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1988), Coetzee talks about the Afrikaner myth, which attempts to erase the native Africans from their land and history, by saying that South Africa was essentially uninhabited except for a few a Bushmen and Hottentots who were more like beasts than human beings.

24. Stephan Larsen, *A Writer and His Gods: A Study of the Importance of Yoruba Myths and Religious Ideas to the Writing of Wole Soyinka* (Minab/Gotab: U of Stockholm, 1983) 19. "Conversations with Wole Soyinka," *Commonwealth*, 31.

25. Homi K Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration* (London & New York: Routledge, 1990) 3, 4.

CHAPTER 2

The Gods Are Not To Blame: Ola Rotimi's Transformation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*

> I think every writer - whether a dramatist, novelist or poet - should have some commitment to his society. It's not enough to entertain; the writer must try to excite people into thinking or reacting to the situations he is striving to hold up to them in his drama or narrative. I think there must always be some social relevance in what one presents. Ola Rotimi[1]

Ola Rotimi wrote *The Gods Are Not To Blame* in 1967, a year after civil war broke out in Nigeria. The devastating conflict, which came to be known as the Biafran war, was primarily between the Igbos in the East and the Hausas in the North, but there were also casualties among the Yorubas in the West and other ethnic groups. Michael Crowder, the director of African Studies at the University of Ife, had suggested that Rotimi produce a drama that will be "the star turn of the Ife Festival" held annually in Nigeria (68).[2] Rotimi duly took on the challenge and chose what could be considered the master dramatic text in the western literary canon, *Oedipus Rex*. Sophocles' masterpiece, which was performed about a year after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (431 BC.), won second prize in the Athenian festival, the Great Dionysia. *Oedipus Rex* was Aristotle's prime example of a perfect tragedy, the focus of Sigmund Freud's Oedipal Complex, and one of the plays most translated, adapted and alluded to by various playwrights throughout the history of dramatic literature. Rotimi was not only aware of the cultural and religious similarities between the Greek and Yoruba world view, but he was also cognizant of his role as a

postcolonial writer and the significance of dramatic art in contemporary Nigerian society. Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, which won first prize at the Ife Festival in 1968, is more a re-interpretation or a transformation than a translation or an adaptation of its original; it goes beyond just a philosophical or psychoanalytic treatise. This chapter is a critical analysis of *The Gods Are Not To Blame* with a view to establishing the influence of colonization and western education on modern Yoruba drama, demonstrating how a rewriting of a canonized western text contributes to postcolonial theory, and examining how drama is an ideal medium for social and political expression.

Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi, who prefers to be known as Ola Rotimi, was born in April 1938 in Sapele, a town in the Bendel State in Nigeria, then a British colony in West Africa. During the transatlantic slave trade which began in the sixteenth century, the Europeans, who bought Africans to work on the sugar, cotton and coffee plantations, branded their slaves with a hot iron to indicate which company bought them.[3] Those slaves were treated as beasts of burden; the domesticated slaves were given European names, usually ones that would identify their owner. The use of names as a means of establishing dominance and authority could hardly be clearer than in such a context. The abolition of the slave trade was followed by the formal period of colonization during which those who were colonized and christianized still received European names. It was incumbent on the colonized to follow this practice of giving their children foreign names, but now it became a mark of their status as the

(involuntary) recipients of so-called western civilization. The children who were not already subjected to this practice before attending the mission schools had their African names replaced at registration. The changing of the children's names and forbidding them to speak their tribal or vernacular languages were an integral part of the colonization process which attempted to alienate the Africans from their culture.

Rotimi's preference for the use of his African name, Ola, instead of Emmanuel or Gladstone, suggests the breaking away from the colonial practice of adopting the master's names. A number of African writers rejected their Christian names, to revert to their African ones. For example, Chinua Achebe dropped his first name, Albert,[4] and the anti-colonialist East African writer, James Ngugi, changed his name to the more comprehensive Ngugi wa Thiong'o.[5]

Nigeria was under British rule when Rotimi was born and he lived the first twenty-two years of his life under such rule before the country gained independence in 1960. His father was Yoruba and his mother was an Ijo from Bendel State. His father was educated under the British system; so he spoke both English and his mother-tongue Yoruba, but did not speak his wife's language Ijo. Not having an opportunity for extensive formal education, Rotimi's mother spoke the common lingua franca, Nigerian Pidgin English. Growing up in an ethnically heterogeneous family, Rotimi had the option of speaking Yoruba or English with his father, and responding to his mother in Ijo or Pidgin. His ethnically diverse family background clearly sharpened his sensitivity towards the problems of tribalism and the language barriers that

hindered communication with the different ethnic groups. Rotimi's father, who was an engineer, spent his leisure time directing and organizing neighbourhood concerts which fostered communality among the various tribes. From this environment, Rotimi was equipped to explore a variety of themes in his plays that are pertinent to the postcolonial situation.

As a child, Rotimi had the influence of his father's knowledge of English, but as he got older he received years of formal western education. From 1952-1957, he had his post-primary education at the prestigious Methodist Boy's High School which was established by British missionaries in Lagos. There Rotimi was exposed to various texts in the western canon including classical Greek, Roman and Shakespearean drama, as well as the works of Plato and Aristotle. Being in a missionary-run school, he would have been also exposed to Christian Medieval drama, the cycle and Morality plays that were taught and performed as part of the Christmas and Easter celebrations.

In 1959, Rotimi won a scholarship from the Nigerian Federal Government to continue his education at Boston University in the United States of America. He pursued a four-year undergraduate degree in drama with a major in directing and a minor in playwriting. After graduating in 1963, he received a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship and completed a Masters degree in playwriting (minor in directing) at Yale university. With the opportunity for post-secondary education overseas, Rotimi became further steeped in the western dramatic art forms and conventions. In his interview with Bernth Lindfors in *Dem Say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers*, Rotimi

admits his admiration for Shakespeare's characterization through dialogue (58). After obtaining his degree, Rotimi returned to Nigeria to take up the position of research fellow at the institute of African studies at the University of Ife, and later, as dean of Faculty of Arts at the University of Port Harcourt.[6]

Rotimi's plays reflect his dual heritage of both African and western drama. This combination characterizes much of modern African drama. Like most of the literature of the colonized, his plays are written and performed in English. However, he incorporates Nigerian Pidgin English, African idioms and proverbs, with Yoruba religious rituals and traditional ceremonies. His plays explore mythical and historical themes with emphasis on political and social problems that have resulted from Nigeria's encounter with colonial domination. For example, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad*, a satirical comedy, was first performed at Yale in 1966 and was published in 1977. It depicts an army veteran, Major Rahman Taslim Lejoka-Brown, who attempts to advance his political aspirations by exploiting women who eventually outwit him. The character's bigotry and deception is exposed and he is rejected by the voting public. Rotimi's portrayal of a Nigerian army officer/politician who prefers to live with a western-educated woman instead of his "bush" wife, a village woman without formal British education and proficiency in English, shows that the colonial mentality of superiority still prevails in the attitudes of the colonized.

Another comedy, *Holding Talks*, published in 1979, parodies contemporary Nigerian society's preference for talking in situations that demand immediate action. A

barber collapses from hunger and while he lies helpless, a variety of characters discuss, debate, question and argue without meeting his immediate physical needs. Chinyere Okafor in "Ola Rotimi: The Man, the Playwright, and the Producer on the Nigerian Theater Scene" refers to a section in the play's production notes:

> France flagrantly exploding bombs in the Pacific, the United Nations "discussing" the situation! The Republic of Guinea under invasion by Portuguese mercenaries, the O.A.U. arranging "Talks" on the incident to take place some two weeks after the deed. Africans in Mozambique being massacred, the world press "sending in observers" and "debating the issue" etc, etc (27).

Rotimi satirizes the absurdity of this western trait, inherited by the colonized Nigerians, which demonstrates the lack of sensitivity to human suffering.

Oppression and exploitation are portrayed in the next two socio-political plays, *If* (1983) and *Hopes for the Living Dead* (1985). *If* dramatizes the exploitation of poor, low income apartment tenants by the rich and powerful men in contemporary Nigerian society. The tragedy lies in the inability of the oppressed people to join together and fight their oppressors, the landlords. What these characters fail to achieve, another repressed group in society accomplishes in *Hopes for the Living Dead*. This play is based on an incident which occurred in the Port Harcourt General hospital in 1924. Rotimi weaves into the plot the circumstances surrounding the event. A Scottish doctor had initiated an experimental treatment programme for lepers at the hospital but when he left Nigeria, the colonial authorities attempted to discontinue the treatment and send the lepers away. In the play, the character, Ikoli Harcourt Whyte, organizes the other

forty lepers to resist removal from the hospital and win the war against oppression. In these two plays, Rotimi experiments with the use of Nigerian languages which he translates in the first play. In the second play, he uses up to fifteen different tribal languages, untranslated. According to Martin Banham, in "Ola Rotimi: 'Humanity as my Tribesmen,'" having characters express their disgust and resignation in different tribal languages works well as a dramatic device (75).[7] The plays also demonstrate that the colonized do not have to depend solely on the use of the English language to strengthen their solidarity. The different tribes can break the language barrier and work together against colonial and neo-colonial domination, just as the characters do in *Hopes for the Living Dead.*

Rotimi has labelled *Kunrunmi* (1971) and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974) as historical plays. *Kunrunmi* is set in the late nineteenth century during the Yoruba (Ijaiye) wars in which the leader, after whom the play is titled, fights for what he believes is right. The presence of the Christian missionaries in the play subtly points both to the imposition of Western ideologies, and of the missionaries' function as agents of colonial domination. In *Post-Colonial English Drama: Commonwealth Drama Since 1960*, Elaine Saint-Andre Utudjian suggests that the character, Kunrunmi, "welcomed the Christian missionaries, thus paving the way for the white invaders" (194). *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* explores the events surrounding the historical figure, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, who became the king of the Benin Empire in 1888. The British destroyed the king and his people in a punitive expedition in 1897. Martin

Banham cites the production notes and comments on the play:

> Ovonramwen Nogbaisi was a man "long portrayed by the biases of colonial History in the mien of the most abominable sadist" (p.*xi*), and the play is concerned to challenge that viewpoint and to show how the ignorance and blundering prejudice of the colonial authorities caused the horrific bloodshed of the sacking of Benin (69).

The British troops responsible for this attack discovered what they called bronze but were actually brass statues, plaques and masks, which came to be known as the Benin bronzes. These were ingeniously crafted with such intricate design that art experts in London compared them to the classical Greek sculpture in style, though superior in quality. They remain to this day in the British Museum, though Nigerian authorities continue to press for their return.[8]

Setting the records straight about the colonial encounter with the colonized has been one aspect of the postcolonial agenda. These plays contribute to the dual focus of postcolonial theory by challenging and interrogating colonialist ideologies about the colonized, and by presenting Africa's rich culture and history. This is further exemplified in the revising of a canonized western text that portrays the aftermath of colonization. *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, Rotimi's only play rewritten from an extant Greek tragedy, was first performed in 1968 at the Ife Festival of the Arts in Nigeria. It was a time of profound social, political and economic upheaval, exacerbated by the ravages of war, one itself partly fuelled by some of the first world countries. There was blatant corruption in every level of government, coupled with distrust and animosity among the various tribes.

Rotimi's commitment to the advancement of modern African drama and its social and political relevance in contemporary Nigerian society is shown in his critical essay on "The Drama in African Ritual Display" published in the 1968 edition of *Nigeria Magazine*. In his essay, "Traditional Nigerian Drama," in the *Introduction to Nigerian Literature* edited by Bruce King (1971), Rotimi traces the development of Nigerian drama in English from 'ritual drama' and 'traditional drama.' Rotimi has expressed his commitment to socio-political issues in Nigeria and given valuable insights into his plays in interviews with Onuora Ossie Enekwe published in *Okike* in 1984, with Dapo Adelugba in 1975, cited by Martin Banham, and in 1973 with Bernth Lindfors, recorded in *Dem Say*. Rotimi is known for his public statements against any form of discrimination and oppression. It is in this context that Okafor refers to Rotimi's public lecture, "The Trials of African Literature," delivered at the opening of the English and Literature Students' Association Week at the University of Benin in 1987 (25).[9] Rotimi himself, a professor of English Literature, has had to wrestle with the historical irony that while the colonized strive to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism, African Literature as a discipline is still very much attached to the study of English Literature, a fact which demonstrates the continued cultural dependence on the colonial masters. Rotimi's involvement in drama might be considered an attempt to establish independence culturally as well as politically.

The theatres and theatre groups that Rotimi established or co-founded also demonstrate his commitment to African drama. While at the University of Ife in 1968,

he founded the Ori Olokun theatre group which offered a dramatic experience for both the townsfolk and the university students. The group's physical stage was an open-air courtyard structure similar to the traditional palace courtyard in which local dramatization of rituals and festivals would have been held. Rotimi established another playhouse, the Crab, at the University of Port Harcourt. Okafor asserts that the Crab Theatre, an amphitheatre, had "the advantage of promoting a physical and psychological rapport between audience and performers" like those of the traditional performances (29).[10] Rotimi's dedication to reviving indigenous drama, training actors, and exposing the political and social problems related to postcolonialism is significant to drama not only in Nigerian society, but also, in those countries affected by colonization. The fact that his plays are written and performed mainly in English and he incorporates western dramatic art forms are ironic indications that such dedication is itself a reflection of his dependence on western education and culture.

In *The Gods Are Not To Blame*,[11] Rotimi makes several changes to the Sophoclean tragedy while keeping the main idea that in ignorance a man killed his father and married his mother. These changes are significant to an analysis of the play because they reveal Rotimi's commitment to the African world view while using the European knowledge he has acquired. Being educated in the western literary canon, Rotimi was exposed to the larger body of classical Greek texts behind Sophocles' play; that is, like Sophocles, Rotimi would have been privy to the Theban legend and Oedipus myth, and Odysseus' description in Homer's *The Odyssey*:

> Then I saw Oedipus' mother, the lovely Epicaste [also known as Jocasta]. She in her ignorance did a terrible thing; she married her son. For Oedipus killed his father and took his mother to wife. But the gods soon let the truth come out. They devised a cruel plan: Oedipus remained to suffer the tortures of remorse as king of the Cadmeians in the lovely city Thebes; but Epicaste, tormented by anguish, hanged herself with a long rope she made fast to the roof-beam overhead ... (XI.271-280).

Homer's was just one of the versions that circulated in Ancient Greece; and Sophocles' reputation for originality and ingenuity depended on his use of the familiar myth to create dramatic tension, irony and recognition. For the fifth-century Athenian audience, the success of *Oedipus Rex* relied not on revealing the incestuous murderer to the audience but on the dramatic technique used to reveal Oedipus to himself. As Rush Rehm suggests, in *Greek Tragic Theatre*, "[t]he audience in the theatre resemble the gods who foresee Oedipus' destination but [unlike the gods] are ignorant of its precise course" (110).

Like the ancient Greeks, the history of Africans is filled with numerous myths and legends, handed down through the oral traditions and re-enacted in regular rituals and festivals. A number of the aetiological myths and the gods associated with them, which find their correspondence in ancient Greek society, would have been familiar to Rotimi because they are used to initiate and educate the young into the moral code of the society. For example, John Pepper Clark's essay, "Aspects of Nigerian Drama," relates the story of Obatala, the creation God of the Yoruba, which is re-enacted in the annual ritual at Oshogbo and other Yoruba towns:

> In the legend, against the advice of the Oracle Ifa, Obatala, on his way to Shango, the God of Thunder, relieves Eshu, the God of Mischief, here disguised as an old woman, of a pot of oil. The pot breaks in the process with an effect like a sacred vessel breaking .... Thus Obatala, his white dress all dripping with oil, arrives at the court of the King Shango at Oyo, and since nobody recognizes the God, he is thrown into jail when he protests at the ill-treatment of a horse. As a result, drought and famine befall the earth. And it is not until King Sango consults the oracle and is told he must make reparation to an innocent man wrongly punished in his kingdom that the general curse is lifted (78-79).

These common elements, such as plagues, oracles and divine anthropomorphic disguises make for easy transformation from Greek to African drama. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka describes the re-enacted drama, the ritual of Obatala, as a "moving celebration whose nearest equivalent in the European idiom is the Passion play." Obatala is "captured, confined and ransomed" (152).

While African ritual drama is a phenomenon of pre-colonial Africa, western dramatic forms and metaphors provide an idiom for making the work accessible to a European audience. Ironically, the development of modern sub-Saharan African drama has been greatly influenced by the western tradition. In "The Drama in African Ritual Display," Rotimi defines drama in Aristotelian terms as "an imitation of an action ... or of a person or persons in action" (77) which has a "PLOT, with its implied vitals of SUSPENSE and CONFLICT" (79). He suggests that while the series of "abebe" dance processions of the Edi festival of Ile-Ife cannot be called drama, the mock-duel scenes staged on the second day of the Obatala festival are certainly dramatic in form and content:

> The characters are: the Ajagemo, as protagonist, the Olunwi, his opponent. They engage each other in a duel, the Olunwi wielding a whip and attacking, the Ajagemo mainly parrying off the strokes in self-defence. Eventually, the Ajagemo is defeated, taken prisoner, and hustled off into the interior of the palace .... [a ransom is paid] and the Ajagemo is set free (79-80).

Modern Nigerian drama developed from ancient pre-colonial rituals, such as the re-enactment of the Obatala myth, performed in an open-air courtyard and involved the whole community. The emphasis on ancient African drama was performance and had religious and social relevance. During the period of colonization many of these rituals and festivals, which were labelled pagan, were banned by the colonial administrators and replaced by Passion plays held in the church. There is a tendency to consider pre-colonial drama as non-existent because it was part of the oral tradition and did not meet the restrictive criteria for drama in European literary terms.

Vital to the development of African drama is the work of Chief Hubert Ogunde who combined Nigerian folklore with social and political satire. Ebun Clark has credited Ogunde, who started his dramatic career performing church plays, for the emergence of contemporary Yoruba theatre in Nigeria between 1946 and 1972.[12] According to Michael Etherton, in *The Development of African Drama*, Ogunde attacked colonialism and political corruption in the new independent Nigerian state and some of his plays and his entire theatrical company were banned for a period of time by both the pre- and post-independence governments (45-47).

Modern professional Nigerian drama and theatre with a strong influence from

western culture evolved from the drama disciplines of the universities like Ibadan and Ile-Ife. Nigerian postcolonial dramatists, while incorporating western dramatic art forms, have returned to the pre-colonial ritual and myths of oral traditional drama. Whenever possible, Soyinka and Rotimi have abandoned the European style proscenium arch in an enclosed space for the open-air arena style theatre in an effort to restore the indigenous participatory relationship between the actors and their audience.[13] Of particular significance in modern Nigerian drama is Rotimi's rewriting of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.[14]

The main plot of *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is quite similar to that of *Oedipus Rex*.[15] Sophocles' play, which begins *in medias res*, reveals how the tragic character, Oedipus, finds out that he killed his father, Laius, and married his mother, Jocasta. Before the staged time of the play, Oedipus had saved the city of Thebes by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, and received as a reward the throne of Laius and marriage to Jocasta. After years of prosperity and four children, a devastating plague brings Theban citizens to their King for help. The Delphic oracle declares that the murderer of King Laius, who is the cause of the plague, is in the city; Oedipus does all in his power to find him. The aged seer, Teiresias, accuses Oedipus of the murder which leads to Oedipus' suspicion of his wife's brother, Creon. An ensuing quarrel between Oedipus and Creon leads to Jocasta's disclosure of the oracle given at the birth of her child and the place of Laius' death. Thinking he may have been guilty of regicide, Oedipus summons the return of the survivor of Laius' travelling party, who

also happens to be the household servant who saved Oedipus from exposure as a child. The arrival of the Corinthian messenger with news of Oedipus' father's death and the good news of his position as king of Corinth reveals that Oedipus was adopted as a child and that the messenger was the one who received him and took him to Corinth. The ironic dramatic reversal, discovery and recognition take place as Oedipus' insatiable desire to know his identity leads him to discover the truth that he fulfilled the oracle's prophecy.

In Rotimi's version, Odewale, the African Oedipus, who believes he is the son of Ogundele and Mobike of Ijekun Yemoja, kills his father, King Adutesa of Kutuje, and marries his mother, Queen Ojuola. Odewale does not solve the riddle of the Sphinx to gain the kingdom of Kutuje and the hand of Queen Ojuola in marriage; instead, he saves the Kutuje people from the attacks and enslavement to the neighbouring Ikolu tribe. Rescuing an enslaved group of people from the domination of another mirrors the social and political role of the postcolonial African playwright in an attempt to free his people from the slavery to western ideologies about the colonized. Of equal importance to the period to European slavery is the universal problem of ethnic wars. Both the history of African tribal wars, particularly the Yoruba (Ijaiye) wars of the late nineteenth century, and the Biafran war that was raging at the time Rotimi wrote the play, make his replacement of the Sphinx more effective. Moreover, making the character of Odewale, who thinks he is from the tribe of Ijekun Yemoja, come in defense of one tribe against another warring tribe is

appropriate to Rotimi's theme of tribalism in the play. In *The Development of African Drama*, Michael Etherton conjectures that "[t]he time in which the action takes place ... is not made specific; but it is clearly neither contemporary nor colonial, and predates white intrusion into Yorubaland" (123-124). However, although the play is set in a mythological past, it clearly has relevance to contemporary postcolonial Nigerian society.

In "*The God's Are Not To Blame*: Ola Rotimi's Version of the Oedipus Myth," J. P. Conradie suggests that "Odewale does not outwit the Sphinx, for it would have been difficult to transport her to Africa" (28). Contrary to Conradie's suggestion, it would have posed no difficulty because popular legend has it that the Sphinx hailed from "the uttermost parts of Ethiopia," in East Africa or "originated in Egypt" in North Africa.[16] However, Rotimi chooses a more suitable feat to raise Odewale to a high social position because prowess in war gives him a better cultural status than solving a riddle; even though Odewale does say that he is "good at solving riddles" (21).

Rotimi's change of places and characters into recognizable Yoruba names and the addition of characters and scenes are not arbitrary but essential to the transformation of the Greek original to *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. For example, Odewale's name in the Yoruba language means "the hunter has returned home." Just as the name Oedipus has thematic significance to Sophocles' play, so does the name Odewale to Rotimi's version. Oedipus in Greek, can suggest "swollen feet" from the

verb *oideo* meaning "swell" or "become swollen;" but it also resembles *oida*, the verb meaning "know." Oedipus is called swollen feet because of the effects of having his feet pinned together as a baby but his desire to know who he is, is an integral part of the tragic plot. The same tragic connotations are apparent in Odewale, the hunter, who without knowing it, pursues himself. As a skilled hunter who tracks down his prey, in accordance with the oracle, Odewale kills his father, returns home to take the hunter's prize and later finds out that he fulfils both parts of the prophecy. Learning that King Adetusa's murderer is the cause of the plague in Kutuje, Odewale takes an oath to find the murderer. Odewale as the hunter, becomes the hunted; the predator becomes the prey; the saviour because the sacrificial scapegoat for the purification of the people and village of Kutuje.

Oedipus is a well-known figure in ancient Greek mythology and so is Odewale in ancient Nigerian folklore. Ebun Clark narrates the popular folk tale about Odewale, head hunter in the a town called Ijaye:

> While hunting in the forest one day, he [Odewale] saw a deer which miraculously took off her skin and became a beautiful woman. She then changed the nearby leaves into costly female dresses which she wore and went to market. Odewale quickly came out from his hideout took the skin, returned to his hideout and waited for the arrival of the beautiful creature. On her return she found that Odewale had taken her skin, and followed him home to become his wife. Odewale already had two wives ...[who] were suspicious of Adesina the new wife and did not rest until they had tricked Odewale into revealing that Adesina was half animal and half human (9).

Female creatures, such as the sphinx, from the animal or spirit world, who take on

human features and interact with men, is a common motif in African mythology and folklore. J. P. Clark records the same tale as a beautiful drama observed in the annual *Igogo*, a vegetation festival, at Owo in Western Nigeria. The hybrid woman/creature, here called Orosen, is the central figure and the story is about how "her rival spouses eventually encompass her downfall by tricking their man [Odewale] into revealing the true identity of his favourite wife" (83-84).

Rotimi's addition of a prologue to the original Sophoclean play is crucial to the transformation of the fifth-century B.C. Greek play into an African ritual performance, one rooted in Yoruba drama. Edmondson Asgill, in "African Adaptations of Greek Tragedies," suggests that the prologue is necessary because "Rotimi's presumed audience does not have the advantage of a prior knowledge of the background details on which an appreciation of the play so much depends" (180). However, he contradicts his own previous statement in which he asserts that the preoccupation with adapting Greek tragedies by African playwrights "may reflect to some extent the depth of classical learning that featured in the syllabuses of colonial education ..." (175).[17] *Oedipus Rex*, as a written text, either in Greek or in the English translation, was and is still used by institutions in Nigeria which teach in English to citizens of a country whose official language is English. In other words, the people who were and continue to be subjected to the colonial education are the same people who make up the majority of the English speaking theatre audience.

The prologue must be considered an integral part of the play, not because it

educates an audience that is already familiar with the story, but for several reasons which I shall now discuss. If *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is to portray the African world view, then it is imperative that the opening of the play presents a vital aspect of pre-colonial Africa - the importance of the gods in the lives of the people. Rotimi reinforces the role of the gods by erecting in a prominent position on stage the shrine of Ogun, which according to the stage directions should be "in its stark simplicity: two upright palm-tree fronds supporting, horizontally, a third; a lone matchet ... stuck in the ground within this frame" (1). Ogun, whose shrine is veiled with palm fronds, is the Yoruba God of Iron and War accredited for making the first technical instrument of iron; he is particularly revered by all who use iron weapons and implements. Consequently, he is also associated with hunting. Rotimi makes his audience aware of Ogun's presence throughout the drama. The rhythmic clinking of metallic objects combined with the rhythm of Ogun in the background help to create the atmosphere of awe associated with one of the most powerful gods in the African cosmology.

In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka discusses the Yoruba history of Ogun and presents a few lines from the praise chants sung in his honour:

> Rich-laden is his home, yet, decked in palm fronds
> He ventures forth, refuge of the down-trodden.
> To rescue slaves he unleashed the judgement of war
> Because of the blind, plunged into the forest
> Of curative herbs, Bountiful One
> Who stands bulwark to offsprings of the dead in heaven
> Salutations O lone being, who bathes in rivers of blood (26, 27).

Ogun is associated with palm fronds and the wine produced from the palm. Ogun is

the master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity. He is known as the protector of orphans, roof over the homeless, terrible guardian of the sacred oath (26). The Yorubas' belief in Ogun's dual nature as the one who rescues slaves and pronounces the judgement of war is of thematic significance in *The Gods Are Not To blame*. For example, although Odewale saves the people of Kutuje from slavery to the Ikolu tribe, his shedding of his father's blood is the cause of the plague that destroys Kutuje.

Of equal importance to the presence of the gods is the birth of a child and Rotimi uses the prologue to demonstrate this vital connection in the Yoruba society. In *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance*, Isidore Okpewho explains that in ancient Indo-European heroic narrative, the poet occasionally explores the birth of the heroic figure. He gives as an example of The Homeric Hymn to Athene which sets forth the fantastic birth and meteorological turmoil of the type seen in some African epics, and adds that "in Africa, the heroic career starts right from infancy" (89). In Rotimi's play, these are the narrator's first words to the audience after he pays obeisance to the shrine of Ogun: "The struggles of man begin at birth. / It is meet then that our play begin with / birth of a child" (1). One of the most significant themes in the drama of *Oedipus Rex* is the struggle of man against supernatural forces. Rotimi emphasizes that this struggle, which is well dramatized throughout the play, begins at birth because the idea of some relationship between the gods and humans corresponds to the beliefs of West Africans. When Odewale arrives

in Kutuje, he tells the people not to be passive but to struggle because "'the world is struggle'" (6). "Life is a struggle," Odewale repeats as the people go out into the bush to collect curative herbs (15). Alaka reminds Odewale that he told him he (Odewale) was "going to face the struggle of life alone ..." (44). In "Adaptations of Greek Tragedy," Asgill suggests:

> Odewale's tragedy is self-imposed and from the outset the need to struggle is a recurrent thematic refrain. Odewale's insistence on struggle seems to call attention to an authorial warning against the possibility of overreaching himself, or attempting to exceed his human limitations and consequently creating a situation for his tragic fall .... The blame on Odewale can be traced specifically to his compulsive drive to struggle beyond his capabilities" (182,183).

While I disagree with Asgill that Odewale's tragedy is self-imposed because, as with the original Oedipus, Odewale has been destined to destruction as confirmed by the oracle, Rotimi's emphasis on Odewale's temper and bigotry does suggest such an interpretation. There is a struggle between the god's oracular proclamation and Odewale's eventual recognition that he fulfils, albeit in ignorance, the god's oracle.

The need to struggle has specific resonance in the context of colonization. The struggle against supernatural forces is nothing compared to the struggle against slavery and oppression which the colonized have had to endure. While Africans see this struggle against the larger context of life, they are aware that the struggle against humankind on the basis of racial or tribal difference is far more devastating. As a postcolonial dramatist, Rotimi seeks to change the eurocentric ideologies that divide along racial lines and ethnocentric ideologies that segregate on tribal orientation.

From the moment a child is conceived the struggle for survival begins and it is central to the rituals and customs observed by Africans. The cycle of birth and rebirth, whether of the seeds of plant or animal life, is seen as governed by the supernatural. Odewale refers to his wife, Ojuola by saying: "She now is bearer / of all my four seeds" (8). The metaphor of sowing seeds and reaping a harvest is used to represent the significance of birth and regeneration in the African culture, which is closely connected to the benevolence of the gods. There is a vital relationship between Odewale's birth and the welfare of the people of Kutuje within the plot of the play. Just as in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the main plot hinges on Oedipus' ignorance of the fact surrounding his birth (he thinks he is the son of Polybus and Merope), so Rotimi draws attention to Odewale's birth, by presenting him as a baby to Ogun, according to the Yoruba custom. It is a West African belief that the newborn baby does not belong to the family, and therefore is not even given a name until after the seventh or eighth day. If the child dies, it is believed that he/she has returned to the gods and the land of the ancestors; if the child lives, it is assumed that he/she has come to stay.[18] The child is then presented in a ceremony to the gods that involves the ancestors and the whole community, as the narrator explains in the prologue:

NARRATOR: Then they call
a priest of Ifa,
as is the custom,
to divine
the future that this boy
has brought
with him.

> .....
> what is it that the child has brought
> as duty to this earth
> from the gods? (2)

This dedication of a child to the gods is usually conducted with the naming ceremony in which the child's name is given and announced to all present. However, since the priest declares that the child will kill his father and marry his mother, the naming ceremony is withheld. Not naming the child acknowledges the sovereignty of the gods to whom the child must be returned, and veils the identity of the child, thereby delaying the moment of recognition till the appropriate time in the plot. It is obvious from the rest of the play that Odewale was named after he was found, as in the biblical narrative of Moses found floating on the Nile and named by the daughter of Pharaoh (Exodus 2:10). Other versions of the Oedipus myth tell of Laius putting Oedipus in a chest and lowering him into the sea. However, the chest drifted ashore at Sicyon where Polybus' queen found him, and being childless, she adopted him.[19]

In *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*, Margaret Thompson Drewal asserts that the first rituals performed for a newborn infant among the Yoruba peoples of southwestern Nigerian focus on the metaphysical journey between two realms because the newborn is "still betwixt and between the other world and earth" (51). Drewal describes the divination process:

> Through interpreting texts, the diviner obtains a sense of the baby's impact on its family. He constructs for the parents what the immediate future holds in store. The texts provide clues to the baby's nature, including its name. If, for example, the baby has come to the world

> through the intercession of a deity, it will be named in that deity's honour .... Ogunbiyii, 'Ogun gave birth to this one ...'" (52).

Drewal witnessed several such rituals during her research and on one occasion, the diviner was led to the negative side of *Oyeku meji*, a powerful set of texts full of death and destruction, which determined a child was "born to die" (*abiku*); she explains:

> An *abiku* is a child whose soul is considered "irresponsible" because it never completes a full life cycle. The child dies young and its spirit lingers nearby, continually plaguing the mother with rebirths and sudden deaths (59).

An understanding of the Yoruba belief in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, as well as the god's involvement in each stage, is relevant for an appreciation of Rotimi's inclusion of the birth ritual in the prologue.

Rotimi dramatizes the Yoruba ritual ceremonies for a newborn entirely in mime with choral singing, drumming and dancing. In his essay on "Traditional Nigerian Drama," he considers "the most salient characteristics of traditional drama [to be] dance, mime, music, masquerade, procession, worship, and the lesson or moral theme" (40). In "Wale Ogunyemi, 'Zulu Sofola & Ola Rotimi: Three Dramatists in Search of a Language," Dapo Adelugba comments on Rotimi's use of the traditional Yoruba music in *The Gods Are Not To Blame*:

> Music is also an integral part of the theatrical creation, and Rotimi has used his association with the sophisticated Nigerian musician and ethnomusicologist, Akin Euba, to advantage. Indeed, the choral chant of the Townspeople of this drama has a socio-philosophical content comparable to the role of the Chorus in ancient Greek drama (214-215).

Various types of music, both vocal and instrumental, together with mime and dance were intrinsic to the earliest forms of African ritual. These elements continue to play a vital role in modern Nigerian drama in combination with western dramatic art forms.

The prologue is also significant because it introduces the audience to Aderopo, the character who replaces Sophocles' Creon. The purpose of this introduction is two-fold: it shows the benevolence of Obatala, the god of creation, who consoles the bereaved parents by granting them another son, Aderopo; and secondly, it presents Aderopo as the rightful heir and next in succession to the throne of Kutuje. Obatala and Ogun are two of the important gods in the Yoruba pantheon; however, Rotimi chooses to have Odewale associate with Ogun. Just before killing his father, Odewale narrates the myth surrounding Ogun's anthropomorphic visit on earth during which he mistakenly killed his own people:

> ODEWALE: When Ogun, the god of iron,
> was returning from Ire
> his loincloth was
> a hoop of
> fire.
> Blood ... the deep red stain
> of victim's blood
> his cloak. (48,49)

Rotimi intensifies the irony by Odewale relating Ogun's erroneous slaughter of his own people as he is about to make a similar mistake of killing his own father. Obatala is associated with creation and the creative process among all living things; Ogun is the god who is associated with war and the use of weapons. Odewale reinforces the

power and potency of the oath he takes to find King Adetusa's murderer by calling on the gods, Obatala, Orunmila, Sango, Esu-Elegbara, Agemo, and Ogun to stand by him (24). Like the Greek pantheon, these gods have their individual responsibilities but they can be called upon to work corporatively towards a special task.

The birth of Aderopo, Odewale's younger brother, establishes a contrast between the child who is to be sacrificed to the gods and the child who is permitted by the gods to stay on earth. The prologue, which announces the birth of the sons, portrays that destiny is determined from birth. Instead of waiting to reveal the oracle concerning the child, as Sophocles did by having Jocasta narrate it half way through the drama (711-722), Rotimi presents it directly from the "oldest and most knowing of all Ifa priests in this world ..." (2). The gods have decreed Odewale's destiny; nothing he does can deliver him from it. Like Oedipus, when Odewale finds out about the oracle, he leaves what he thinks is his hometown, Ijekun-Yemoja, and Ogundele and Mobike whom he thinks are his biological parents, for Ede. It is at Ede that he kills his own father without recognizing it, in fulfilment of the prophecy. His defeat of the Ikolu warriors, which earned him the marriage of his mother, made him the scapegoat and sacrifice for the pollution of the people and the land of Kutuje.

During the prologue, Odewale takes over the storytelling from the narrator and explains how he earned the right to be king of Kutuje, at the same time the event is demonstrated in mime. He says that the people of Ikolu took advantage of King Adetusa's death by waging war, plundering and enslaving the people of Kutuje.

Having heard about their predicament, upon arrival in the town, he was responsible for organizing fighters and defeating the people of Ikolu and seizing their lands. As a result, Odewale says, "they [the people of Kutuje] broke tradition and made me, / unasked, / King of Kutuje" (7). They broke the tradition of giving the throne to Aderopo, the only known son of the king, and gave it to the supposed stranger. Ironically, far from being a stranger, Odewale is the most eligible man for the throne; choosing the older of the two sons, the people of Kutuje did not break their tradition at all. In an interview with Onuora Ossie Enekwe, Rotimi answers the question of whether the people of Kutuje caused their tragedy by making Odewale king contrary to tradition:

> No. As a matter of fact, I do not think the people are guilty in that respect. They needed someone to give them succour in the face of persistent aggression and devastation from a neighbouring tribe. They needed some leader to help mobilize them, to help galvanize their morale, and, by extension, to help forge them into a solid group against those invaders. Odewale arrived at the right moment to give them the needed boost in spirit against the people of Ikolu whom they eventually defeated (38).

Although Rotimi's drama is the tragedy of Odewale, because of the cultural and socio-economic situation in Africa, which is rooted in the extended family system, one man's tragedy is usually seen to affect the whole community. Rotimi demonstrates this in the final stage directions as Odewale and his children make their journey through the Kutuje Townspeople who "kneel or crouch in final deference to the man whose tragedy is also their tragedy" (72).

In "The Theater in the Search for Authenticity," 'Zulu Sofola strongly criticizes Rotimi for his attempt to "clothe the Greek cosmic view in a Nigerian garb ..." (134). She suggests that it would be "virtually unthinkable" that the people of Kutuje would make a total stranger their king without first consulting the gods (135).[20] However, it is obvious that if the people were desperate at the time they were being ravaged by the Ikolu warriors, here fully dramatized, they would have been willing to give anything to the person who saves them from such destruction and protects them from any future attack. Asgill suggests that "[s]aving a people from the ravages of war and from the loss of patrimony are reasons enough to exalt such a saviour as Odewale to the highest position in the land" (181). Furthermore, the Ikolu warriors took advantage of Kutuje because of the empty throne; and Odewale proved himself to be deserving of the kingship by his qualities of leadership, courage and success in war. The people would have had no doubt that the gods were with him to give him such victory, and that the gods had sent him to deliver them from their enemies, a common theme in folk mythology.[21] In *Dem Say*, Rotimi responds to the criticism of Odewale, a total stranger, occupying the throne:

> I'm sure those same Nigerian critics know all about the battle of Hastings in 1066 which saw the ascension to the throne of England by William the Conqueror - a total stranger from Normandy .... But they'll be ignorant of the fact that assumption of kingship by a stranger of greater military or physical prowess was also quite a common experience in our own African mythology and African history. For instance, how did Oduduwa, "father of the Yoruba race itself," become Lord of Ile-Ife? Didn't he migrate to Ile-Ife? Wasn't he a stranger? Didn't he subjugate the aborigines of Ife, become their lord

and assume power over the land? (64).

Rotimi refers to both English history and African mythology to provide precedents in support of his making Odewale, the supposed stranger, king of Kutuje.

The Nigerian audience and critics are familiar with British and European history because it has been part of their educational curriculum since colonization. Rotimi is able to draw from his own educational background to substantiate the plot of his drama. Of equal importance is the parallel in African mythology and history. Rotimi makes use of his dual heritage to his advantage in presenting a postcolonial ideology rooted in the fact that, although the colonized were and are influenced by European domination, the Africans can still portray their rich ancestry prior to colonization. Like all societies, those of Africa are organized and have their own fully developed culture, history, mythologies, rituals and religious ceremonies. In the prologue and throughout the play this intersection of cultures is exhibited and presented within the social and political context of contemporary Nigerian society.

Rotimi's replacement of Sophocles' Creon, Jocasta's brother, with Queen Ojuola's and King Adetusa's son, Aderopo, reflects the African patrilineal tradition. In such a system, a wife's brother cannot be eligible for the throne because royal succession is passed down from the male members of the family. The oldest son is usually considered the first in line of inheriting the throne and if there are no sons, the oldest of the king's brothers is considered. Rotimi intensifies the dramatic irony by adding the character of Aderopo, the younger brother, because Odewale being the

older brother rightfully occupies the throne at the death of his father. Although Odewale is ignorant of his birth right, and thus his tribal affiliations, the audience watch him unravel the mystery surrounding his birth.

By replacing Creon with Aderopo, who, in the absence of an older brother, would have been the rightful heir to the throne after King Adetusa's death, Rotimi strengthens Odewale's suspicion that Aderopo is guilty of treason. One wonders why Aderopo was not crowned king after his father's death; was it because he feared for his life or the elders questioned his competence? Whatever the reasons, it is obvious that Aderopo is in a difficult situation as the rightful heir to the throne. This makes Odewale's suspicion of him even more plausible because Odewale sees himself as a stranger in Kutuje. Odewale expresses his anger against Aderopo after the scene in which Baba Fakunle calls him a murderer and bedsharer:

ODEWALE: First, that boy, Aderopo or whatever he calls himself. He wants to be King, so what did he do? He bribed the Seer to come and insult me, to call me murderer of his father.

.....

That blind bat who calls himself Seer says I am a 'bedsharer'. What does that mean? Sharing a bed with whom? Ojuola, Aderopo's mother. In other words, I don't belong in that bed. In other words, I have no right to be King.

.....

Is Aderopo jealous that I am sharing a bed with his mother? Very well then, let him come and sleep with his mother.

1st CHIEF: The gods forbid that such thoughts should enter the heads of the living.

ODEWALE: Oh, you wait, I have sent for him to come. Bedsharer. So, let him come and marry his own mother. And not stopping there, let

him bear children by her (31).

Rotimi's creation of Aderopo intensifies the dramatic irony more directly than in the corresponding scene in *Oedipus Rex* because Odewale actually verbalizes the incestuous relationship that Aderopo would have been guilty of had he married his mother, not knowing that he, Odewale, has already committed the act. The dialogue portrays incest as no less an offence to the gods in African culture than in Greek.

Another scene that has dialogue riddled with similar irony is the one in which Odewale asks his wife, Ojuola, if she would side with her son against him:

> OJUOLA: [*kneeling*]. It is you I married, your highness, *not* my son.
>
> ODEWALE: [*moved*]. Hm! Great woman. Indeed. Who says women have no heads? She is a foolish wife who sides with her son against her own husband. [*Gestures her to sit on the stool next to the throne.*]
> A son is a son: a husband is a husband. A woman cannot love both equally. Everything has its own place (38).

Ironically, everything in not in place; the son is also the husband and the woman in ignorance loves both equally. Although the Greek original is filled with irony, Rotimi, by replacing Sophocles' Creon, the queen's brother, with Queen Ojuola's son greatly intensifies it.

Rotimi establishes Odewale as a man of high social status in the prologue. His coronation is well attended by chiefs, body guards, royal retainers, musicians and several of the townspeople, who replace the formal Sophoclean chorus. These characters portray the mood and atmosphere of the play in mime and dance while

reflecting their social relevance in African culture. Rotimi introduces a royal bard, not in the Greek original, whose function it is to exalt and entertain the king. In reference to the African context, Okpewho asserts that like Hesiod, "every bard considers himself, and none other, the chosen one in his craft, commissioned by the supernatural powers to deliver the *truth* in song" (48). It is in this attitude that Odewale's royal bard pushes the King gently aside, faces Queen Ojuola and declares:

> ROYAL BARD: You and your husband -
> two parts of the same
> calabash split equal
> by the gods. Indeed,
> what is the difference between the right ear
> Of a horse
> And the left ear of that same
> horse?
> Nothing (38).

While describing the marital union, the metaphorical imagery of "two parts of the same" can also be applied to the union between mother and child. A calabash grows like an enclosed womb - a gourd when full grown is cut open, the pulp removed, and the outer shell is dried and used as a container. References to two parts of a calabash coming together as one also has sexual connotations.

Since in certain African traditions a king would have many children and more than one wife, Rotimi argues in *Dem Say*, that he adds Abero, the maiden in Odewale's palace who, according to custom, is "being groomed by the Oloori, Queen Ojuola, to be a potential wife of the king" (63-64). Unlike the Sophoclean drama in which Oedipus' children are on stage only for the final scene, Odewale's two sons and

two daughters are introduced on stage in the prologue and seen interacting with both parents throughout the drama. By having his children around, Rotimi establishes the cultural milieu, Odewale's social status and the benevolence of the gods in prospering him with wealth and children. Rotimi also uses the parents' interaction with the children to portray Ojuola's ambivalence towards her husband and children. In Act two, after Odewale's quarrel with Aderopo, Ojuola reads the four children a story of Olurombi and sings the corresponding song in Yoruba, to which the children join in the chorus (36). Akanji Nasiru, in "Ola Rotimi's Search for a Technique," suggests:

> [T]he context of the song makes is clear that the playwright intends more than [the] depiction of a commonplace event. It comes from the story of a woman who swears to give anything as reward to the iroko spirit if she has a successful venture in the market. The request is granted, but she realizes her folly when the spirit demands her only child. Rotimi skilfully brings in the song to forebode disaster ... (26).

Rotimi uses the corresponding African folk tale of King Midas whose wish that anything he touched turned to gold proved to be disastrous when he touched his only daughter. He appropriately integrates the theme of this common folklore into the drama, which foreshadows the tragedy, after Odewale predicts his own destruction by biting the sword of Ogun and saying: "May my eyes not see Aderopo again till I die!" (35). The use of the story also lends credibility to the African oral tradition that existed prior to European colonization.

Another important addition to the play is Alaka, who not only corresponds to Sophocles' Corinthian messenger and the one who received Oedipus from the Theban

shepherd, but is also Odewale's boyhood friend and mentor (44). Martin Banham and Clive Wake, in *African Theatre Today*, suggest that he is one of the "most successful creations" of the play:

> Alaka is half clown, half philosopher, a man of rural wisdom, who reveals the true nature of the King's parenthood through a performance that is tantalizingly slow, warm with his goodness and innocence, enlivened by his country wit and manners, and finally exploded by his words .... Dramatically his presence is extraordinary, and his creation a triumph of theatrical craftsmanship and instinct (44).

Alaka is a combination of a character out of Aristophanes' comedy, an Elizabethan court jester and definitely a versatile African storyteller. On his arrival at the palace, he interacts on the level of the common man. In the scenes that follow, which quickly bring the play to its dénouement, Alaka plays a major part in the revelation that Odewale was picked from the bush, the reversal of the news of Ogundele's death and Odewale's recognition of who he is.

In *The God's Are Not To Blame*, the combination of both western and African cultures is seen in the portrayal of the tragic plot and of Odewale as a tragic character. While adhering to western theories of tragedy, Rotimi creates a tragic character who not only fits into the traditional West African setting, but also, reflects the socio-political environment of contemporary Nigeria. One of the texts in the western dramatic canon that was prominent in Rotimi's education is Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle asserts that the tragic character be "that of a man not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune, however, is brought about not by vice and depravity, but

by some error or frailty" (X111.1453a3).[22]

Aristotle, who writes over a hundred years after the original production of classical Greek tragedies, bases his description of tragedy on the plays of that time period, and mentions particularly the tragic character of Oedipus. However by Aristotle's time, there was a greater emphasis on the morality of drama as described in *The Republic*, to the extent that Plato would ban the tragedians because they corrupted the youth.[23] It is evident in *Oedipus Rex* that the tragic character's misfortune is not brought about by some error or frailty for which he is responsible. According to the Theban legend and the Sophoclean plot, Oedipus' misfortune was decided long before his was even born. The gods decreed that he would kill his father and marry his mother, regardless of what Oedipus did or did not do. Between the fifth and fourth centuries, the emphasis shifted from the decree of the gods to the responsibility of Oedipus. The fifth-century Athenian tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* is not that Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother, but that he discovered the truth of who he is and what he had done in ignorance. Oedipus attributes his deeds to Apollo in his reply to the chorus after Jocasta's suicide and his self blinding: "It was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, who accomplished these cruel, cruel sufferings of mine" (1329-1330).[24] However Oedipus does take responsibility for his own blinding by saying that his own miserable hand struck his eyes (1331-1332).

The Greek word, *hamartia*, which is translated "error" in Aristotle's text, has since taken on a moral or religious meaning. The original meaning of the Greek verb

from which the noun is derived is "to miss the mark," as for example, if someone throws a spear and it fails to hit its target, or if an archer's arrow does not hit the intended mark. According to Liddell and Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon*, the verb also means the following: "to fail one's purpose" or "to go wrong" as in the case of Penelope's suitors who were unable to string Odysseus' bow (*Odyssey* XXI.155ff); "fail of having," or "be deprived of;" and rarely means, "fail to do," "neglect," "do wrong," "err," or "sin" (77). The meaning, "to miss the mark," in the ancient Greek context has no moral or religious connotations; it is just a commentary on an action. While Stephen Halliwell in his interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* suggests that the common premise underlying reversal, recognition and *hamartia* is human ignorance, he says that *hamartia* ought to be located "somewhere in the space between guilt and vulnerability to arbitrary misfortune" (220).[25]

Within the context of the plot of *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is doomed from birth and he is subjected to the will of the gods; whether or not the Greek gods are irrational is besides the point. When the account of Oedipus and his mother is mentioned in the *Odyssey*, it is related as a matter of fact, "but in time the gods made the deeds known to men. He [Oedipus] ruled the Cadmean people in lovely Thebe[s] in suffering woes, through the dreadful *plan of the gods* ..." (XI.274-276, italics mine,). Similarly, Sophocles includes in his plot the Delphic oracle concerning Oedipus and simply presents him as a character who commits acts that are abominable to the gods, without passing any moral or religious judgement on Oedipus. Although

there are numerous references to the gods, Apollo and the Delphic oracle, Oedipus is not portrayed as a guilty sinner in the Christian sense of the word. Oedipus committed the acts in ignorance and fulfilled the oracle of the gods. Oedipus, who knows how to calculate the time and distance, and answer correctly the riddle of the Sphinx, does not know who he is; he misses the mark by thinking he could outwit the gods. Even in the epilogue the Chorus remember Oedipus who knew the answer to the famous riddle (1525). Ironically the English word, enigma, which is derived from the Greek noun translated "riddle" aptly describes Oedipus himself and his circumstances.

During the Elizabethan period, *hamartia* acquired the meaning of "tragic flaw." Some Shakespearean tragedies had characters who were not pre-eminently virtuous because they possessed by nature, demonstrated through their behaviour, a tragic flaw. For example, Macbeth is told by the three witches that he will become king; but with the aid of his wife, he commits a premeditated act of regicide. Macbeth, like Othello, exhibits an inherent tragic flaw. Sometimes this flaw is associated with the Greek word, *hubris*, which is translated as pride. The original Greek noun means "wanton violence, arising from the pride of strength or from passion," frequently used in reference to the extravagance of Penelope's suitors in the *Odyssey*. It carries the idea of a violent act, and in extreme cases, violation on a person, such as rape. As a legal term, it covers all the more serious injuries done to a person (Liddell and Scott). The meaning of a tragic flaw as an innate personality trait, has been superimposed on fifth-century Greek tragic characters. Consequently, it has been interpreted that Oedipus'

tragic flaw, his sin of *hubris*, brought about his tragedy and caused his change in fortune. Michael Grant, in *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, suggests that "in an age of fighting and killing [Oedipus] killed hot-headedly at the crossroads when provoked, and he shows fits of *hubris* in his over-confident, rash handling of the present situation. Yet these things are not the main, or at least the sole cause of his disaster" (198). Here, Grant implies that while not being the main or sole cause, Oedipus' fits of *hubris* contributed to his disaster. In other words, Oedipus must have done something to cause his tragic fall; certainly, the gods should not take all the blame. Such an interpretation fails to take into consideration the fact that Oedipus committed the deeds before the beginning of the play; *Oedipus Rex* seems concerned not so much with the deeds themselves but with the degree to which they point to the limited possibility of human freedom. From his report of what happened at the place where three roads meet, Oedipus himself was only acting in self defense.

In *The God's Are Not To Blame*, Rotimi's transformation of *Oedipus Rex* links the Sophoclean tragic character with the Aristotelian and Shakespearean models while at the same time reflecting the African worldview. In *Dem Say*, Rotimi explains:

> The idea of absolute subservience to the gods, and acceptance of the immutability of fate which is a recurrent motif in early Greek drama, to a large measure dictated the direction and outcome of the original Oedipus tragedy. Quite interestingly, traditional Nigerian religions also do acknowledge the power of predestination. Furthermore, our religions appreciate the wisdom in personal submission - submission not only to the gods of the land but also to the memory of departed ancestors. (62-63).

Rotimi draws from his knowledge of the mythological, religious and socio-political aspects of the ancient Greeks and combines it with his African experience and culture. During the ceremony to divine the future of the boy, subsequently known as Odewale, the Sophoclean concept of the tragic character is well defined in terms of the will of the gods, spoken directly through the most reliable source, who predicts that Odewale "*will* kill his own father and marry his own mother" (3, italics mine). There is no doubt about it; Odewale's doom is sealed as the narrator continues:

> NARRATOR: The bad future must not happen
> The only way to stop it
> is to kill,
> kill the unlucky messenger
> of the gods,
> kill the boy (3).

According to the custom of the Kutuje people, such a child must die and be returned to the land of the gods. 'Zulu Sofola disagrees with Rotimi's representation of the Yoruba gods who would decree such abominable acts on society:

> In Greek cosmology destiny is forced on individuals who are thus helplessly burdened with what they can neither influence nor alter. They may try to run away but they cannot escape. Their natural impulse is to fight these natural and supernatural forces in order to survive. Africans, on the other hand, as we have seen, actively participate in their own destinies, and irrational and intolerable arrangements of their lives rarely occur. Hence it would be inconceivable that an African would ever be destined to kill his own father and marry his own mother. Nor would an African god have ordained that a child should commit a murder in order to right a wrong which was still unrighted, but which had been committed earlier in his life (134).

Sofola's argument that irrational and intolerable arrangements of Africans' lives rarely

occur does leave room for the possibility of it occurring, however rare. She also says that the "complex nature of this situation is compounded by the fact that the destiny is often forgotten by a person after birth, though the oracular art can be consulted for recollection and redirection" (129). If the Supreme Being is the only one who remembers the destiny, as the need for consultation of the oracle suggests, then whatever is proclaimed during the divination ceremony cannot be refuted. Rotimi explains the premise on which he developed the drama's divine/human relationship in the interview with Enekwe:

> When one says, 'the gods are not to blame', one must contemplate the worldview of the African people; particularly the Yoruba concept of destiny. This is that, a person chooses his own destiny from a sort of *tabula rasa* mind, before he descends to the world to practicalize the choice. You might say that this determinist tenet has a fatalistic ring which could, in human affairs, encourage social stasis. It is like foreclosing individual effort against all odds to achieve success. I don't think that is the way we should look at it. Rather we should conceive the idea from the angle that every action of man, or every destiny, has a role in the entire purpose of human interaction (38, 39).

Although Rotimi would rather emphasize the role of human action in the large arena of life instead of the determinist or fatalistic aspect, yet Odewale's efforts against all odds do not avoid the fulfilment of the oracle; on the contrary, his attempt at avoidance itself leads to the oracle's fulfilment.

It is clear that Sophocles' Oedipus does not choose his own destiny, rather the gods chose it for him; he makes choices but they lead him right back to the god's prophecy. In the case of Odewale, Rotimi's flash-back scene captures the presence of

the god speaking through the Ifa priest as the oracle is relayed through a loud speaker:

> VOICE: 'You cannot run away from it [the curse], the gods have willed that you kill your father, and then marry your mother!'
> .....
>
> ODEWALE: 'What must I do then not to carry out this will of the gods?'
>
> VOICE: 'Nothing. To run away would be foolish. The snail may try, but it cannot cast off its shell. Just stay where you are. Stay where you are...stay where you are...' (60).

Odewale is given definite instructions to stay where he is.

In the Sophoclean original, Jocasta responds to the oracle given to Oedipus by saying: "Many [mortals] have lain [slept] with their mothers in [their] dreams too" (981-982). In his commentary on *Oedipus Rex*, R. D. Dawe asserts that the only meaning that can be extracted from the Greek that is faintly plausible for the context is "in dreams too <as you have been warned you will do by this oracle>, plenty of men have slept with their mothers" (196).[26] In this recognition scene, it would seem that Jocasta tries to alleviate Oedipus' fears and discredits oracular utterances.

The Oedipus-complex in psychoanalytic theory has thrived on Jocasta's remark which is interpreted as a universal statement that in their dreams men have incestuous relationships with their mothers. Modern critics, like Freud, find it difficult to accept that the Greek gods decreed societal taboos, and so attempt to explain away divine intervention by placing the responsibility on Oedipus. Even though Freud had a problem with the god's curse on Oedipus, the ancient Greeks had no problem

accepting it; the gods themselves committed incest and broke taboos. Certainly in terms of the power and potency of the Delphic oracle as portrayed by Sophocles, it is clear that what the oracle says shall be so. Similarly, Abimbola asserts that in "traditional Yoruba society, the life of every man, from birth until death, is dominated and regulated by Ifa" (66). Yet a problem remains for most; if the gods dominate human life, how do humans take responsibility for their actions? How can they evade the will and decree of the gods? Did the gods predestinate or simply predict Oedipus' and Odewale's actions?

The infallibility of the divine oracle is juxtaposed against human skepticism in both plays by Sophocles and Rotimi. During the fifth century there was a move away from the Athenian gods and oracles to man's technological wisdom and sophism as satirized in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Thucidydes gives an account of the plague which broke out during the Pelopponesian War and suggests that "the temples in which they pitched their tents were full of corpses which had died on the spot. As it prevailed over them people turned to negligence of both holy and sacred things alike" (II.52.3-5). Similarly, with the exposure to western civilization, money and power, many Africans turned away from the tribal gods to embrace the "gods" of the foreigners; and during the civil war, there was no fear of god in the midst of moral and political corruption.

Sophocles dramatizes such moral decay when just after hearing that Polybus is dead, Jocasta says mockingly, "O oracles of the gods where are you?" (946-947) and

Oedipus says that the oracles are worth nothing. Prior to this scene, the Chorus laments the attitude towards the oracles and how their significance is waning, even Apollo's glory (883-910). Rotimi captures the humanistic reasoning when Ojuola insists that the all-knowing Ifa priest lied (53) and Odewale concludes "these soothsayers, oracles, gods - they are not to be trusted. Not one!" (58-59). Both playwrights in subtle ways give commentary on the trend towards humanism and materialism prevalent during their time of writing.

Sofola's argument that, unlike the Greek gods, the African gods are not irrational can be disputed. In his essay on "Ogun Festival in Ire Ekiti," R. I. Ibigbami narrates an incident in the history of Ogun, who visited the people of Ire at the time of their festival which they celebrated in utter silence. They had finished their wine and the empty kegs were standing around:

> Hungry, thirsty and tired, he [Ogun] suddenly walked into the midst of a silent group of people. The smell of wine that filled the air aggravated his thirst while the sight of standing kegs made him anxious to drink. Since the people offered him neither wine nor salutations he bent down to serve himself; to his frustration he discovered that all the kegs were empty. He gave vent to his pent up indignation by drawing his sword and killing many of the people around (45).

This is just one of the many instances in the Yoruba mythological corpus in which Ogun displays irrationality. A majority of Africans emphasize the benevolence of the gods, and rightly so; however, the dual nature of the gods reveal their capriciousness. Michael Etherton, in *The Development of African Drama*, also argues against Rotimi's concept of fate and says that Yorubas traditionally believe that "your fate is your own

doing: you kneel down and receive it as a gift from Olodumare before being born" (124). But how can it be your own doing if you receive it as a gift? To strengthen his argument, Etherton goes on to assert that "unlike the Greek Olympian pantheon (Zeus, Apollo and the rest) whose divinities pursue vendettas against each other and against mortals, the Yoruba gods are not capricious, least of all Ogun ..." (125).

The custom of sacrificing a scapegoat, ordained by the gods, for the purification of a community is considered in terms of morality as a necessity for the good of the whole community. The fate of the sacrificial victim is a recurring theme in African mythologies and has been used by several African dramatists. Soyinka, in *The Strong Breed*, dramatizes the ritual cleansing of a village through the death of the sacrificial victim, Eman. In this play, he follows the tradition that the scapegoat must be a stranger. In *A Writer and His Gods: A Study of the Importance of Yoruba Myths and Religious Ideas to the Writing of Wole Soyinka*, Stephan Larsen compares Eman to Ogun who "sacrifices himself in order that the group .... may have a chance of progressing" (91). The fact that Odewale was thought to be a stranger is a double irony because as a baby, according to the Yoruba custom, he would have been called a stranger until the Ifa priest finds out whether or not he has come to stay on earth and gives him a name. Since the priest revealed that he was supposed to be returned to the gods, Odewale remained a stranger and became the most eligible person for the carrier ritual expiation ceremony.

In the prologue, Rotimi clearly identifies the child, Odewale, as a sacrificial

victim. The Priest performs the customary rites and prepares the child for sacrifice:

> NARRATOR: Priest of Ogun ties boy's feet
> with a string of cowries
> meaning sacrifice
> to the gods who have sent
> boy down to this Earth (3).

The audience would easily identify with the performance because animal sacrifices are a part of the religious observance of many tribes, including the Yoruba, in an effort to appease the gods, appeal for a good harvest or to purify the evil from the land.[27] The Nigerian J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* portrays the custom of the Ijo people of the Niger Delta which requires the offender of the gods to sacrifice a goat as an act of propitiation. The refusal of the tragic character, Zifa, to offer the sacrifice at the appropriate time brings death to his wife, his younger brother and himself.

Rotimi infuses both Aristotelian and Shakespearean concepts of tragedy into the tragic character of Odewale while emphasizing his African roots. Odewale is presented as one "not pre-eminently virtuous or just." The opening of Act one reveals a cross-section of the Yoruba townspeople gathered together as a pitiful illustration of the effects of the plague that has ravaged the once prosperous village of Kutuje. The atmosphere parallels the attack of the Ikolu warriors which was narrated and mimed in the prologue. It was Odewale who had gathered the men of Kutuje then and conquered the Ikolu people. Now, the townspeople have gathered to seek Odewale's help. Just as he organized them to fight against the Ikolu; so he organizes them to fight against the plague. In the stage directions, Rotimi stipulates the physical and emotional condition

of the Townspeople:

> [The] old, and young, men, women, some with babies strapped to their backs - all sprawling or crouching on the bare ground in varying forms of agonized semi-consciousness; moaning, keening. Voices become more inarticulate, more impatient; then give way to moaning and keening again (9).

The group of people coming to the king represents the communal nature of a West African village. Their wailing and moaning suggest the extreme pain and suffering that they have been going through. This scene is reminiscent of Thucydides' account of the plague that ravaged the Athenians after the Peloponnesian War broke out. The country dwellers were forced to abandon their homes to the enemy and take refuge within the city walls; the over-population and lack of supplies may have caused the outbreak of the plague. Thucydides describes the symptoms of the plague which he himself caught but from which he recovered; however, Pericles and about a quarter of the people died:

> An ineffectual retching producing violent convulsions fell upon most of the sufferers; some as soon as the previous symptoms had abated, others not long afterwards ... the burning within them was intense ... the disease descended into the bowels and there produced violent ulceration; severe diarrhoea at the same time set in, and at a latter stage caused exhaustion, which finally with few exceptions carried them off (II.49.4-6).[28]

H. D. F. Kitto, in *The Greeks*, discusses the Peleoponnesian War and suggests that in the drama produced for the Athenians, and in their name, "Sophocles without a word about the war, continued to brood on the ultimate problems of human life and character" (137). Contrary to Kitto's suggestion, in *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles does

dramatize the effects of the war in the presence of the Theban elders and townspeople who came to Oedipus for help. In the prologue, the Priest says:

> For the city [Thebes], as you see yourself, is grievously tossed by storms, and still cannot lift its head from beneath the depths of the killing angry [blood-stained] sea, a blight is on the buds that enclose the fruit, a blight is on the flocks of grazing cattle and on the women giving birth, killing their offspring (22-27).[29]

Like Sophocles, exposed to the ravages of war and the destruction caused by the plague, Rotimi vividly dramatizes the plight of the innocent people who were caught in the brutal Nigerian Biafran war. Rotimi's depiction of the sick villagers mirrors Thucydides' account of the Athenians and Sophocles' representation of the Thebans.

Rotimi uses the scene with the sick and helpless citizens to present Odewale as a good, caring, efficient king and leader of the people. Odewale takes time to listen to each individual's complains, even when his chiefs want them to be quiet; he is sensitive and understanding towards their problems. When the first woman mentions her sick child, Odewale comes down to her level, physically by descending the steps, and emotionally by touching her sick child (9). Noticing Iya Aburo, a mentally disturbed mother mishandling her child, Odewale gives the child to Ojuola's care and orders his men to take Iya to the curer of sick- heads and he (Odewale) will pay the charges (16). Odewale fits perfectly into the model of the Good Samaritan. Iya Aburo's mental distress due to the plague and the loss of her husband parallels the effects of the plague mentioned by Thucydides, that "those who got up [recovered] were seized with a forgetfulness of all things and knew neither themselves nor their

friends" (II.49.8).

Whereas Oedipus only tells the people that the sickness is also in his home, Odewale actually asks his wife to bring out his sick children and even to wake up the one who was asleep in order to demonstrate to the people that he and his household are suffering too (11). Odewale shows the people the healing herbs he himself collected from the bush and encourages them to go in groups and get similar herbs to boil as medicine for their sick families (14-15). The scene ends with the Towncrier summoning everyone together for the journey to the bush. The stage directions read:

> TOWNSWOMEN appear, carrying earthen pots on their heads. They pick up the TOWNCRIER's tune, and dance, heading for the bush. The women haven't completely danced past when a contrasting chorus of male voices approaches from another direction .... Drumbeats accentuate their dance song (17).

Rotimi incorporates the song and dance as part of the communal activity of going out to the bush. Odewale and his Chiefs come out and happily join in the dance. Africans are known for using songs and dance as a means of coping with the struggles of life; this is how they survived during the period of slavery and colonization. Ironically, the Townspeople go out into the bush, albeit a different part of the forest in which Odewale as a child would have been sacrificed, to collect healing herbs. The earth that receives the dead also provides nourishment that sustains life.

This opening scene does not reveal any vice in Odewale's character at all. Not only is he able to motivate the people for the common good of the community, but also, he has offered all the necessary sacrifices to the gods and has sent Aderopo to

Ile-Ife to inquire of the gods the reason for the plague and how it can be eliminated (11, 12). Furthermore, Odewale admits: "I cannot help. Why? Because I, Odewale, son of Ogundele, I am only a person, human: like you, and you, and ... you" (13). Although Odewale has done remarkable deeds in the past by sacking Ikolu and reigning as the victorious king of Kutuje, he humbly accepts that he is only human, just like any of his subjects. Rotimi adheres to Aristotle's criterion that the tragic character be "one like ourselves." By stating that he is only human, demonstrating how he is affected by the plague and interacting with the local people, Odewale does not exhibit any form of *hubris*.

As the drama continues however, Odewale increasingly displays what seems to be a tragic flaw after the Shakespearean model, one that worsens as the play progresses. The first sign of this flaw is demonstrated by Odewale on Aderopo's reluctance to repeat the oracle in public, "My people, I beg of you, plead with him, or I shall loose my temper soon!" (20). During the misunderstanding with Odewale, Baba Fakunle says: "Go on, touch me. Call up your raw anger ..."(27); later he refers to Odewale's anger as "your hot temper, like a disease from birth, is the curse that has brought you trouble" (29). While Baba Fakunle attests to the curse on Odewale that has caused the plague using the metaphor of disease, he also implies that this disease is somehow related to the curse. Rotimi juxtaposes, though ironically, the curse of the gods with Odewale's disease of anger. In *Dem Say*, Rotimi claims that "the human element of Oedipus' tragic flaw in the Greek original is irascibility - a congenital,

inborn and therefore, perhaps, incurable affliction" (63). The interpretation leans towards two forces at work, the supernatural, that is the Greek oracle, and the human, Oedipus' congenital affliction. Rotimi injects this interpretation into his transformation of the tragic character to make Odewale more human and acceptable in the contemporary Nigerian context, more fitting to the theme of tribalism.

Before the end of the drama, it is obvious that Odewale has a serious problem with anger, which is called hot temper in Nigerian parlance. Odewale's boyhood friend, Alaka, reveals that he used to call the King scorpion because of his temper (42). Beginning with the second scene in Act two, Odewale exhibits this terrible human trait which culminates in the recognition scene. From the time Odewale is aware that the previous king was killed by his own people and that he being a stranger (as he believes) is a target for assassination, his outbursts of anger occur frequently. His suspicions intensify because he is paranoid that Aderopo desires the throne, is jealous of him, and therefore in alliance with the chiefs and priests to kill him. He provokes a duel with Aderopo and, when the latter does not give in to his provocation, he banishes him from the land, saying "may my eyes not see Aderopo again till I die" (35). He foreshadows his own blinding. Queen Ojuola, who previously asks Odewale to cool his anger, tells the children that they should not make their father angry (35, 36). Odewale, who himself is aware of his anger, prays to Ogun in his household shrine. In the Greek original, it is Jocasta who prays for Oedipus; but in the patrilineal society in Africa, it is the man who approaches the gods on behalf of

his household. Rotimi has a dual purpose in this action: to portray Odewale's submission to the gods and emphasize his awareness of his debilitating temper:

> Give me some of her patience, I pray you. Some ... some of her cool heart ... let her cool spirit enter my body, and cool the hot, hot, hotness in my blood - the hot blood of a gorilla! [*Cleansing himself in the sacred water.*] Cool me, Ogun, cool me. The touch of palmoil is cool to the body. Cool me. The blood is hot. The blood is hot because fear now grips the heart of Odewale, son of Ogundele, a stranger in this land (39).

Odewale's persistence in his prayer to Ogun implies this anger that runs through his veins can only be alleviated supernaturally. He likens his blood to that of a gorilla, noting that these bestial qualities are detrimental in human experiences. He expresses his fear and puts himself at the mercy of the gods. This scene justifies Rotimi's juxtaposition between the gods' oracular prediction and the character's tragic flaw.

In *Make man Talk True: Nigerian Drama in English Since 1970*, Chris Dunton insists that Odewale's hasty temper is introduced too abruptly in the drama. He says: "No more than twenty minutes of stage time later, and Odewale has changed almost out of recognition from his early model of self-control and initiative [and] by the end of Act two he appears pathological" (16). In the opening scene of the Greek original, Sophocles' Oedipus is presented as a calm and self-controlled leader, who 325 lines into the play becomes extremely angry at Teiresias, and later requires death for Creon's plotting against him (513-679). Conradie argues, in response to Dunton, that a "dramatist does not have the time for an extended character analysis and frequently has to juxtapose two different states of mind" (34). The latent anger in Odewale,

which is not apparent in the opening scenes, is referred to by Alaka as a boyhood trait. Teiresias declares Odewale's hot temper has plagued him since birth. In the drama, Rotimi clearly demonstrates that Odewale did not acquire the trait on the spur of the moment, although it seems triggered by an insurmountable sense of fear for his life. The dramatization in the flashback scene of a situation in which Odewale loses his temper, prior to the time of the play, confirms that Odewale had the problem during the twenty-minute stage time Dunton mentions.

Rotimi deliberately focuses on the double irony that Odewale thinks he is from the tribe of Ijejun Yemoja when he is in reality from Kutuje. The Sophoclean scene in which Oedipus kills his father Laius is replaced by a highly theatrical flash-back scene in which Odewale narrates how he killed an older man, not knowing it was his father:

> Flash-back: as lights fade in the bedroom ODEWALE's voice is carried over loudspeaker, as from a distance. Lights brighten on forestage, where men with hoes are grouting out imaginary mounds of yam ... The climax of the fight scene should be mimed in slow motion, suggesting the nightmarish languor of bizarre recall (45).

In this scene, Rotimi depicts the use of the weapons that are associated with Ogun the god of war and iron and the power of the supernatural. Rotimi dramatizes the creative/destructive principle of Ogun (visualized by the lone matchet at Ogun's shrine on stage); the men use the hoe to cultivate and harvest the life-sustaining yams but Odewale also uses the hoe as a weapon to take life.

Rotimi demonstrates how tribal hostility can lead to fights that result in death, as in the civil war occurring at the time. Odewale buys a piece of farm land in Ede,

the place where three footpaths meet, and plants yams; but at harvest time he finds an old man supervising his labourers in harvesting the yams. The old man tells Odewale that he is from a bush tribe and makes fun of his mother tongue (45-46). Odewale fights with the old man's workers and mesmerizes them with his charms. The old man takes out his charms and a battle of the supernatural forces ensues until Odewale strikes the old man with a single blow of his hoe (49). The encounter between Odewale and the old man mirrors the act of war that is re-enacted during the Ogun festival in which people attack each other with matchets. Ibigbami asserts that only those who are sure of immunity to the effect of matchets take part in the remembrance of the battling spirits of Ogun: "It was then a common occurrence to see matchets breaking into two instead of cutting human flesh" (47). By using supernatural forces, Rotimi justifies Odewale striking someone old enough to be his father.

Since in the Nigerian cultural setting there can be no justification for a young man to strike an elder in a dispute over right-of-way as happened in the Greek original, Rotimi replaces the cause with a more a plausible scenario. Rotimi explains in *Dem Say* that he chose "landed property as the instrument to galvanize [his] hero's temper. In addition to this, [he] introduced, as a kind of catalyst, another touchy issue - tribalism - the bane of contemporary African social life" (63). Two issues emerge from Rotimi's argument, landed property and tribalism. Concerning the first, it is acknowledged that the ownership of land is an integral part of any African society because of its ties with the ancestors. It is also a very valuable asset in an agrarian

society that depends on the benevolence of the gods for survival. In the case of Odewale, the farm land is not handed down to him by his father, according to the African custom; he buys the land for five bags of cowries from Kakalu, son of Atiki, who lives in Ede (45, 46). Ironically, Odewale's father owns the land which Kakalu sold to him; but at the time of the encounter, Odewale is ignorant of that fact. The irony is further heightened by the fact that since the ownership of land is passed from father to son, Odewale being the elder would have had the land after his father's death. During colonization, some of the tribal chiefs had sold sections of land to foreigners, breaking the traditional norm of family ownership. Some of the problems of contemporary Nigeria today relate to the contracting of land to foreign oil companies which results in pollution in the environment from oil spills and the destruction of valuable local farm land.

Rotimi also uses the flash-back scene to dramatize a dispute provoked by tribal animosity. Odewale is angered by the old man, his father, calling his tribe bush and mocking his mother tongue. Referring to Odewale, the old man orders his men to "bundle the goat up" and Odewale uses his tortoiseshell talisman pendant to mesmerize his assailants. With the men fast asleep, the war of charms, a battle in the supernatural realm, ensues as the old man produces his talisman and demands death in the act of conjuration. Okpewho explains the use of complex magical devices in the African heroic myth and says that "the most significant of these devices is that by which the hero reaches into the very source of his enemy's personality and being and completely

overwhelms him (113). Odewale, reciting in mythopoeic language Ogun's slaughter of the Ire people, wields the hoe high above his head:

> ODEWALE: This is ... Ogun
> and Ogun says: flow!
> flow ... let your blood flow
> flow ... flow ... f-l-o-w ... [*Lurches forward and strikes OLD MAN down with a single blow of his hoe; suddenly realizing the fatal result he backs away overcome with fright*] (49).

Odewale takes on the character of Ogun in his re-enactment of Ogun's massacre as he strikes the old man with one fatal blow. This phenomenon in which the actor is possessed by the spirit of the god is a vital part of African ritual sacrifices. In "Aspects of Nigerian Drama," Clark explains:

> This ['possession'] is the attainment by actors in the heat of performance of 'actual freedom of spirit from this material world', a state of transformation .... when as the Ijaw put it, 'things unseen enter the man', the actor may become a medium, a votary of some ancestor spirits or divine powers filling him with the gift of prophecy (87).

Although the regularity of such occurrences has been limited since the intrusion of western civilization, by including this ritual as part of the performance, Rotimi consolidates the ancient African rituals. While he features the metaphysical aspects of ancient African history, he also explores political and social aspects of contemporary postcolonial Nigerian Society. Biodun Jeyifo, in *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama*, refers to theatrical performances that combine ancient African history with problems of contemporary socio-political significance:

> Very consciously, very deliberately, active historical contents are played

> off against the old myths, the supernatural and magical explanations of man's existence within society and nature. And no wonder, for quite often these plays deal with the more basic, more concrete problems that confront Africa and Africans: foreign domination ... the degradations and oppression of the "little people", that is of Africa's vast urban and rural masses. The sights are focused more sharply on all the means of liberation, as much from foreign and domestic oppression, as from the systems of thought and the mystifications of reality inherited from previous ages unencumbered by the problems of the present epoch (62).

Rotimi participates in the liberating project of postcolonial writers; here he is not only revising a western canonical text, but is addressing the issues surrounding the aftermath of colonization, such as ethnic marginalization.

Tribalism is the second issue that arises from Rotimi's argument about the theme of *The Gods Are Not To Blame*; Odewale reveals his motive for murder:

> They [the gods] knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defence of his tribe against others. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him. But he spat on my tribe. He spat on the tribe I thought was my own tribe. The man laughed, and laughing, he called me a 'man from the bush tribe of Ijekun'. And I lost my reason (71).

Rotimi brings together the god's prediction and human destiny in such a way that Odewale realizes that he had played a part; he allowed the gods to use him, to use his quick temper or loss of reason. Rotimi in his interview with Enekwe articulates the didactic locus of the drama:

> Rather than blame the gods for letting Odewale perpetrate such heinous crimes, people should look at Odewale's experience and learn the lessons from unbridled tribal bigotry. In other words, Odewale is used, in the idiom of the play, to dramatize the shocks which ethnic jingoism is capable of paralleling in the relationships of African people. In this sense, Odewale's tribulations can be seen as drawing attention to that

most obtrusive of African national evils: ethnicism (39, 40).

Critics, like Etherton question the validity of Odewale's final monologue:

> Rotimi finds himself trapped both within the story and within the Greek moral order: if the gods, or 'fate', are to blame and not Odewale, then the Yoruba milieu of the play disintegrates. If, on the other hand, Odewale's hot temper and, as he says, tribalism, is (*sic*) to blame and not the Gods, then the story of the prophecy has no rationale" (127).

V. U. Ola, in "The Concept of Tragedy in Ola Rotimi's '*The Gods Are Not To Blame*,'" suggests that "the idea of ethnic distrust simply hangs on the play and is not fully woven into the fabric of the work." He argues that Odewale's first mention of his tribe is on a happy occasion while meditating on his achievement and subsequent references come from Odewale himself most of which appear as figments of his imagination (27-29). Although Ola concludes that only Odewale emphasizes his tribal connections, it seems to me that that is the point that Rotimi is making - that is, Odewale's obsession with tribalism and ethnic distrust causes him to commit murder, albeit against his own father. The senselessness of tribalism leads to equally senseless wars in myths and the real world. Ogun, the god of war, and the other gods themselves have acted irrationally and arbitrarily against mortals. Rotimi draws a contrast between war for a good cause, to deliver the Kutuje people from slavery to the Ikolu, and the war waged on the grounds of tribalism.

Even though Ola does not think that the theme of tribalism is integrated effectively into the play, he does acknowledge:

> Rotimi seems to have married both ideas successfully. The initial curse

> on Odewale that he should kill his father and marry his mother is given enough emphasis to convince us that this is truly a drama of the gods. In addition Odewale's quick temper is given enough dramatic expression to make it a strong enough propeller of the decision of fate. The result is that we can say at the end of the play, "The Gods are not to blame," even when, like the playwright, we know that they are to blame in the context of the play (24).

Ola also finds Rotimi's use of the word "bush" disturbing because most ethnic groups in Nigeria, "especially Ibos and Yorubas have fixed words or expressions for those areas and people within their groups whom they consider a bit less 'civilized' than themselves" (29). Ola fails to realize the implications of the word in its colonial context and the memories it brings back for the audience. The word "bush" took on a demeaning connotation during the period of colonization. In other words, it was bad enough for the European to call the African "bush" but an anathema between the colonized. Just as Friday, in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, resists domination by refusing to write exactly as his owners dictated, and by inscribing his own writing, so Rotimi resists colonialist inscriptions by portraying how despicable they are, particularly when used among Africans. By blatantly exposing such words that imply inferiority, the writer moves towards influencing the mental universe of the colonized and re-evaluating what was encoded in the language of dominance.

The imposition of the English language on the colonized Nigerians established a hierarchy of social classes with the overseas university-trained postcolonial intellectuals at the top and those without formal training in English, whom the white man referred to as "bush," at the bottom. Chinua Achebe satirizes the social hierarchy

created by the English language in *A Man of the People*, which is set in a post-independent African country. Mrs. Nanga, who characterizes a typical African motherly figure without any lengthy formal English education, says about her children who attend English-run schools: "Don't you see they hardly speak our language? Ask them something in it and they reply in English. The little one, Micah, called my mother 'a dirty, bush woman'" (38).[30]

The problems of tribalism in post-independent Nigeria has been an impediment to the unity and progress of the people as a nation. Neo-colonialism is comparable to colonization in its destruction of national unity; this is evident in the Biafran civil war and the several preceding and succeeding military coups. Rotimi insists that European intervention in African affairs is the cause but lays equal blame on the nationals who allow themselves to be influenced. In *Dem Say*, Rotimi alleges that the civil war that motivated his play broke out because of "tribal animosities, which had been fostered by the politics of the day, and compounded by insatiable corruption in high quarters" (62). Odewale suspects bribery and corruption and financial influence surrounding the death of King Adetusa (23). In *Dem Say*, Rotimi asserts that the title of the play does not refer to the mythological gods or mystic deities of the African pantheon but symbolizes the national, political powers such as America, Russia, France and England who dictate the pace of world peace:

> So I asked: why hold outside powers responsible for the resultant bloodshed? Why place the guilt for our disintegration on foreign intervention? Why not blame ourselves? If we hadn't created the climate

> in the first place,...[foreign powers] wouldn't have taken liberties at meddling so brazenly in the affairs of our nation, and consequently dictating the scope of our national tragedy (62).

The problems that continue to exist under neo-colonialism are intrinsically tied to the colonial powers. Although the Europeans officially handed over to the colonized during independence, they still exert tremendous influence, particularly in a country like Nigeria that is rich in natural resources. For example, the conflict between Shell Oil company and the Ogoni people in southeastern Nigeria led to the 1995 execution of many Ogoni leaders by the ruling military leader.

Postcolonial countries continue to face the divide-and-rule policy, tainted with greed and hatred. During slavery, the Africans captured and sold each other; during colonization, the colonial masters had African district interpreters who were paid to betray other Africans; and after independence Africans sell each other for power. Reliance on foreign control creates complex social, political and economic problems in ex-colonized countries; dramatists utilize such themes as forms of resistance.

Rotimi envisions that his role as a dramatist in his commitment to his society is not only to entertain but to teach, to present something of social relevance. Chidi Amuta, in *The Theory of African Literature*, suggests that "*the rise of revolutionary drama in a given society requires the existence of social, economic and political situations requiring revolutionary intervention*" (156); and asserts:

> [D]rama is very amenable to revolutionary expression and can become very instrumental to revolutionary situations for reasons that are intrinsic to the nature of both drama and revolution. Drama is addressed

> to a group mind, is a collaborative art, relies on action for its actualization and appeals to a combination of senses, thus exploding the barrier of literacy which shackles the other forms in their written expression (156).

Rotimi's awareness that drama is an ideal medium for social and political expression is stringently articulated in *Dem Say*: "Nigerians like action. When we boil it down, really, the essence of drama is ACTION which, by Aristotelian definition, means plot, which in turn presumes a story line" (60). The African culture attaches a lot of importance to storytelling as a means of educating the young in the society. Rotimi is able to draw from the rich resources of African myths and folk tales in his drama. Martin Banham affirms that the strength of Rotimi's work lies "not in the propagation of any simple ideological dogma, but in its powerful theatrical advocacy of political and social action, based on thoughtful and concerned analysis" (80).

Rotimi's use of language in his plays, particularly in *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, reflects his commitment to reaching a wide audience in his performances. Although he writes mostly in standard English, the official medium of communication in Nigeria, he integrates Nigerian Pidgin, Yoruba poems and songs, and idioms, proverbs and parables. He combines poetry and prose and uses customary gestures, such as, prostrating before the king or elder, and biting on the sword of Ogun in taking an oath. Asgill suggests that: "In the localization of his play, the very choice of names in a language which is very tonal reflects a certain histrionic quality ... Like the images and idioms, proverbs evoke an authentic African milieu and lend poetic

embellishments to the language" (181, 182). For example, when the citizens come to Odewale, one of them says: "When rain falls on the leopard, does it wash off it (*sic*) spots?" (10). In some instances, Rotimi explains the proverb to make its meaning understandable to a non-African audience by allowing the character to give a translation in a close approximation to the English language, as in this instance when the character goes on to say: "Has the richness of kingly life washed off the love of our king for his people?" (10). Sometimes, the proverb is more explicit and no translation is needed; for example, Odewale suspects the people of treason: "When crocodiles eat their own eggs, what will they not do to the flesh of a frog?" (23).

The Yoruba song that Ojuola sings with her children and the song that Odewale sings for Alaka to dance are not translated into English, thereby lending authority and authenticity to the indigenous language as a legitimate social register. On one occasion, Odewale says to Aderopo: "Aren't you a Yoruba man? Must proverbs be explained to you after they are said?" (32). The audience would relate to the question because the African English-trained intellectuals are ridiculed for not being conversant with their own local proverbs and idioms and for their insistence on speaking English to maintain a high social status.

One of the difficulties anglophone postcolonial dramatists, who have to publish in English, face is expressing in a language what the character in his cultural setting would express in an indigenous language. With the transposition into English, the accents, inflexions and intonations are lost in the written words. In handling the

English language in his plays, Rotimi asserts in *Dem Say* that he strives to temper its "phraseology to the ear of both the dominant semiliterate as well as the literate classes," ensuring that his dialogue reaches out to both groups with ease in assimilation and clarity in identification" (60). In "Ola Rotimi's Search for a Technique," Akanji Nasiru comments on Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*:

> [T]he actual weakness of the play is that language sounds a discordant note in a play that attempts to arouse tragic feelings and emotions in its audience. It is curious that a playwright who subscribes so much to Aristotelian tenets, as is evident both from his adaptation of the quintessence of Greek tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, ... can ignore the Greek philosopher's insistence on elevated language as the appropriate register for the tragic genre (23).

How many people in the theatre audience does Nasiru think would be able to understand a Greek translation of elevated language? Rotimi's play employs poetic mythopoeic language which is elevated language in the Yoruba cultural context. The aim of a dramatic performance is to communicate, not to display elevated language. Rotimi makes use of Aristotelian elements wherever they are appropriate; neither he, nor any other writer, is bound by all the criteria in Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is ironic that in challenging eurocentric, hegemonic ideologies, postcolonial writers are still expected to adhere strictly to western literary forms even by their ex-colonized peers.

In "Aspects of Nigerian Drama," J. P. Clark argues that the task of any Nigerian or African artist writing in a European language is two-fold: that "of finding the verbal equivalent for his characters created in their original and native context ... [and] the conscious exploitation of language for the purpose of persuasion and

pleasure" (92). In "Imitation, Abrogation and Appropriation: the Production of the Post-colonial text," Gareth Griffiths suggests that the need to make the language over is a task faced by all writers in post-colonial societies:

> When they are faced with the need to record an experience which within the available discourse is marginalised, is outside the received norm, they can only do so by abrogating that discourse, that is by recognising that their reality is oppressed by the discourse and that any true language for them must involve the rejection of the hierarchy within which they are not privileged (15).[31]

Many previously colonized writers, including Rotimi, have chosen to re-evaluate the European language and to lend credibility to the indigenous languages by placing them on the same social level as Standard English both in dramatic performances and in the literary text. Dramatic performances, however, provide the opportunity to use indigenous languages and accentuate the English words so that the ideas are communicated effectively.

Rotimi admits to making a conscious effort to eliminate the alienating effect which a foreign language poses between writer and reader or audience. Immersed in the English language from an early age and removed from the indigenous African setting for most of his early adult life, Rotimi realizes his need to be immersed in his culture to be able to reach the local audience and he explains how to Enekwe:

> I started out apprenticing under traditional Yorubal artistes and spiritualists, spiritualists in the sense of people like the Ifa Priest; Ogun priest; traditional poetry chanters, etcetera. I would frequent Ifa festivals, Ijala, Ogun ceremonies, and watch as many plays by Yoruba performing groups as possible. In the process of all this, I guess, I got myself really absorbed in conditions where the manipulation of our

> language was richest .... I started perceiving the possibilities of using the English language to approximate the impact which our traditional language has on people (41,42).

The Gods Are Not To Blame is Rotimi's first play in which he makes the conscious effort to eliminate the alienating factor in the English language while portraying the richness of the Yoruba language, history and culture. In the development of modern African drama, Nigerian playwrights are returning to the oral performances in traditional ritual drama to make them speak to their contemporary society.

Although Rotimi does not write solely in the vernacular, he has succeeded in incorporating it to empower his writings in English. Martin Banham cites a lecture given by Rotimi at the University of Benin in 1987 entitled, "The Trials of African Literature," in which Rotimi responds to the controversy over writing in the colonizer's language:

> The real issue should not be *why* an African writer resorts to perpetuating a colonial tongue. Rather, for the debate to be worthwhile, it should bear on *how* the writer uses that tongue to express the conditions and yearnings of his linguistically *diverse* peoples. To ignore the fact of linguistic heterogeneity, is to be hypocritical, because it is the very multi-linguality of the peoples - or to put it more bluntly - it is the very ethnic promiscuity in the land that, in the first place, necessitated the adoption of that foreign tongue to serve as a neutral base for communication among a reasonable cross-section of the people (75-76).

Rotimi hits at the crux of the postcolonial debate about whether Africans should use their vernacular or European language. While all the ex-colonized cannot simply revert to writing in their indigenous language for the simple reason that their

communication is limited to only those who can understand; yet they can strive to bring together the various other Africans through the medium of English. Within the defining characteristics of African literature, there must be room for diversity without one group imposing on others. Through the medium of drama, Rotimi contributes to the postcolonial agenda of rearticulating and revising colonialist texts in ways that challenge, resist and subvert eurocentric ideologies about the colonized.

Notes

1. Interview with Ola Rotimi recorded at the University of Ife on March 8, 1973. *Dem Say: Interviews With Eight Nigerian Writers*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Austin: U of Texas, 1974) 66.

2. Ola Rotimi, in an interview with Dapo Adelugba in 1975, cited by Martin Banham, "Ola Rotimi: 'Humanity as my Tribesman,'" *Modern Drama* 33.1 (March 1990): 67-81.

3. Francis D. Adams and Barry Sanders, *Three Black Writers in Eighteenth Century England* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971) 5.

4. Chinua Achebe records the influence of colonization and missionary activity in his Nigerian village and home in "Named for Victoria, Queen of England," *Hopes and Impediments* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 30-39.

5. Ngugi's choice of his African names can be linked to his decision to write in Gikuyu and Kiswahili as part of the anti-imperialist struggle he discusses in *Decolonising the Mind* (London: James Currey, 1986).

6. Biographical information on Ola Rotimi was taken from *Dem Say: Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers*, edited by Bernth Lindfors (Austin: U of Texas at Austin, 1974) and "Ola Rotimi: The Man, the Playwright, and the Producer on the Nigerian Theater Scene," *World Literature Today* 64.1 (Winter 1990): 24-29.

7. This device was also effective in The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of David Edgar's *Pentecost* (August 1995) in which a group of refugees and their hostages communicate in different European and Middle Eastern languages.

8. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (Washington D. C: Howard UP, 1983). The British refused to loan the Benin bronze mask for the month of FESTAC because Nigeria did not have the facilities for preventing its deterioration (203).

9. Chinyere G. Okafor, "Ola Rotimi: The Man, the Playwright, and the Producer on the Nigerian Theater Scene," *World Literature Today* 64.1 (Winter 1990): 24-29.

10. The original Greek performances of dithyrambs and tragedies took place in an open space of the Agora and in the fifth century, the theatre of Dionysus was an open area in the south slope of the Acropolis. For a detailed description with illustrations, see A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1907).

11. Ola Rotimi, *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (London: Oxford UP, 1971). All further references will be to this text. There have been various critical approaches to Rotimi's plays. Peter Ukpokodu provides a biography and brief comments on the plays in general in *Socio-Political Theatre in Nigeria* (San Francisco: Mellen Research UP, 1992); Elaine Saint-Andre Utudjian discusses Rotimi's plays

alongside those of other Nigerian dramatists in *Post-Colonial English Drama: Commonwealth Drama Since 1960*, edited by Bruce King (New York: St. Martin's P, 1992); Martin Banham, in "Ola Rotimi: 'Humanity as my Tribesman'" *Modern Drama* 33.1 (March 1990): 67-81, and Chinyere Okafor, in "Ola Rotimi: The Man, the Playwright, and the Producer on the Nigerian Theater Scene," *World Literature Today* 64.1 (Winter 1990): 24-29, give an overview of Rotimi's plays and how they relate to his concern for social justice and equality; and Alex Johnson focuses on Rotimi's use of language in "Ola Rotimi: How Significant?" *African Literature Today* 12 (1982): 137-153.

Kunrunmi and *The Gods Are Not To Blame* are given critical attention in *African Theatre Today* (London: Pitman, 1976) edited by Martin Banham and Clive Wake. Both plays are used to exemplify historical drama and Aristotelian tragedy, respectively, in *Studying Drama* (Harlow: Longman, 1983), a student's guide book by Brian Crow. In *The Development of African Drama* (New York: Africana, 1982), Michael Etherton includes a discussion of *The God's Are Not To Blame* in his chapter on "Transpositions and Adaptations in African Drama" and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* in "Plays about Colonialism and the Struggle for Independence." Akanji Nasiru discusses Rotimi's dramaturgical experimentation in *The Gods Are Not to Blame, Kunrunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* in "Ola Rotimi's Search for a Technique," in *New West African Literature* edited by Kolawole Ogungbesan (London and Ibadan: Heinemann, 1979). Dapo Adelugba's essay, "Wale Ogunyemi, 'Zulu Sofola & Ola Rotimi: Three Dramatists in Search of a Language," in *Theatre in Africa*, edited by Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (Ibadan: Ibadan UP, 1978), takes a more detailed look at language in the two plays, *The Gods Are Not To Blame* and *Kunrunmi*. In a paper entitled, "The Theater in the Search for African Authenticity," given at the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theology, December 1977, 'Zulu Sofola discusses African theology and gives examples of their manifestations in Nigerian theatre. She considers *The Gods Are Not To Blame* as exemplifying the European cosmic view forced upon Africans.

The Gods Are Not To Blame is the main focus of the work of the following critics: P. J. Conradie in "*The God's Are Not To Blame*: Ola Rotimi's Version of the Oedipus Myth" in *Akroterion* XXXIX.1 (April 1994): 27-36; Teresa Njoku in the "Influence of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* on Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*" in *Nigerian Magazine* 51 (1984): 88-92; and V. U. Ola in "The Concept of Tragedy in Ola Rotimi's '*The Gods Are Not To Blame*'" in *Okike* 22 (September 1982): 23-31. *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is one of the three plays Edmondson Asgill explores briefly in "African Adaptations of Greek Tragedies" in *African Literature Today* 11 (1980): 175-189.

12. Ebun Clark, "Ogunde Theatre: The Rise of Contemporary Professional Theatre in Nigeria 1946-72," *Nigeria Magazine* 115-116 (1974): 9-24. See also her detailed work in *Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre* (London: Oxford UP, 1979).

13. In *Dem Say*, Rotimi asserts that "the proscenium in Africa is a dispensable bequest of western imperial culture...In traditional presentation where communal involvement is part of the entertainment spirit, spectators sit round the performers...we deliberately set out to affront the conventions of the proscenium style of production which interfere with our desire to feel the audience as being one with us" (60).

14. Akanji Nasiru attests to the success and popularity that Rotimi's plays have gained in Nigeria in "Ola Rotimi's Search for a Technique," *New West African Literature*, ed. Kolawole Ogungbesan (London: Heinemann, 1979).

15. Sophocles, *Ajax, Electra, Oedipus Tyrannus*, Ed. and Trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1994). Unless otherwise stated, all further references will be to this text. Consultation on the Greek original from Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, ed. R. D. Dawe (Cambridge: UP, 1988).

16. See James L. Sanderson and Everett Zimmerman, eds, *Oedipus: Myth and Dramatic Form* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968) 4, and Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (New York: New American Library, 1962) 195.

17. Michael Etherton, in *The Development of African Drama*, also suggests that members of the West African audience will be ignorant of the Greek model (123), even though he had previously discussed the influence of classical and European drama in the educational syllabuses of West Africans during and after the period of colonization (63-66).

18. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, "Indigenous African Christian Churches: Signs of Authenticity," *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979) 123.

19. Robert Graves, "The Myth of Oedipus," *Oedipus: Myth and Dramatic Form*, James L. Sanderson and Everett Zimmerman, eds. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968) 3.

20. 'Zulu Sofola, "The Theater in the Search for African Authenticity," *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians*, December 17-23, 1977, Accra Ghana, Kofi Appia-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979) 126-136.

21. Isidore Okpewho, in *The Epic in Africa: Towards a Poetics of the Oral Performance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1979), examines the supernatural elements in the heroic actions and personalities, such as Sunjata, in traditional African epics (105-119) and suggests that it is unlikely that there are many traditions in which the hero achieves amazing feats by sheer force of his own human strength (105). The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* recount several instances in which the gods aided the heroes, like Agamemnon, Hector and Odysseus.

22. Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Dover Publications, 1951).

23. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928) X.605-607.

24. The original Greek word translated "accomplish" can also mean "ordain," in the context of the oracle of Apollo.

25. Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Duckworth, 1986). Halliwell's argument (212-230) is based on Aristotle's usage of *hamartia* and does not acknowledge the shift in meaning from the ancient Greek writers.

26. R.D. Dawe, in his commentary suggests that "it is not easy to make the necessary mental supplement, for at first sight the words mean 'in dreams too' <as in real life> - as if Jocasta was casually assuring Oedipus that incest was quite an ordinary occurrence" (196).

27. For example, sacrifices offered to Ogun, R. I. Ibigbami, "Ogun Festival in Ire Ekiti" *Nigeria Magazine* 126-127 (1978): 44-59.

28. *Thucydides*, Trans. Benjamin Jowett, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1900).

29. Sophocles uses the metaphor of a ship tossed at sea for the city and vividly describes the death and decay caused by the plague; the buds of the fruits die before they are full grown, like the women who give birth to stillborn children (childless bearing of the women).

30. The problem of social hierarchy caused by the acquisition of the English language is demonstrated in Ogali A. Ogali's *Veronica My Daughter*, edited by Reinhard W. Sander and Peter K. Ayers (Washington D.C.: Three Continents P, 1980).

31. Gareth Griffiths, "Imitation, Abrogation and Appropriation: The Production of the Post-colonial Text," *Kunapipi* IX.1 (1987): 13-20.

CHAPTER 3

The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite - Wole Soyinka's Transformation of Euripides' *Bacchae*

> Colonialism I do not separate, even in its more horrendous form, from the experience of slavery .... After all, we [Africans] did have a history. We had civilizations, the process of evolution of these civilizations into the contemporary world, the pattern of evolution towards egalitarian relationships with the outside world were interrupted suddenly. Our entire history was denied. I am more interested in recovering that history, utilizing that sense of history for moving forward. Wole Soyinka[1]

The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite,[2] which was commissioned by the National Theatre in London, was written in 1973 by Wole Soyinka during his self-imposed exile from Nigeria. The civil war in Nigeria, which resulted partly from Biafra's attempted secession, had worsened since Rotimi's production of *The God's Are Not To Blame* in 1968. The tribal hostility and political mistrust between the Hausas in the north, the Yorubas in the south-west and the Ibos in the south-east (Biafra), which had been suppressed during British colonial rule, was unleashed in the devastating war. During the pre-colonial period, what came to be known as Nigeria were separate kingdoms or empires, such as the Hausa, Oyo, Ife and Benin, with their individual kings or rulers. In 1897, after the Berlin Conference, the British sent Sir Frederick Lugard to command the forces that pushed out the French and established the borders of what Lady Lugard called Nigeria. Frederick Forsyth, in *The Biafra Story*, affirms: "Nigeria had never been more than an amalgam of peoples welded together in the interests and for the benefit of a European power" (11). The British forced these people of diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds into one

entity under the colonial system. In an interview with John A. Stotesbury, Soyinka comments on the effects of colonialism on the problem of unity in Nigeria:

> We [Nigerians] are victims of a peculiar, of an unnatural process which interrupted what could have been a process of evolution into a larger political entity. This was interrupted and we were dragooned into these very artificial boundaries. I think we also have a duty to ensure that any means of communication between these artificially separated peoples should in some way at least be preserved (61).[3]

Soyinka is convinced that colonization interfered with the natural, amicable progression towards unity that would have taken place between the different pre-colonial kingdoms that existed. As a result, this premature fusion of the kingdoms has created numerous political, tribal and social problems. Soyinka uses his talents as a writer, dramatist, poet, novelist, political activist, and critic to expose the problems and offer possible solutions through recovering and validating his people's history.

Since Nigeria's official independence from Britain in 1960, the country has continued to experience political and social problems inherited during colonization. Nigeria has gone from one political crisis to another with the main tribes and colonial elite classes vying for supremacy and control of power. During the last three decades Nigeria has had several unsuccessful military regimes and civilian administrations, rigged elections, mass murders, imprisonments and executions with or without bogus trials as, most recently and notoriously in the case of nine civilians including the talented poet/writer, Ken Saro-wiwa, in November 1995. A month after these executions, while Soyinka was in Paris receiving an award for the imprisoned

Nigerian journalist, Chris Anyanwu, armed men ransacked and removed items from Soyinka's Abeokuta residence. The March 1996 cover story of *Tell*, a Nigerian weekly magazine, read: "Wanted Dead or Alive: The Junta Guns for Soyinka." Soyinka has been in exile since he left Nigeria for Paris in December 1995.[4]

In 1973, when Soyinka was commissioned to write a play for the London theatre, he chose to adapt the only extant classical Greek tragedy[5] in which the major theme is the worship and acknowledgement of the deity of Dionysos, whom the fifth-century Athenians honoured with their dramatic performances. Soyinka, who says "the play has always fascinated [him]," considers it the "first of the classics."[6] In the *Bacchae*, Euripides explores the earliest form of the Dionysian ritual performance with the dithyrambic chorus out of which Athenian theatre and Western theatrical forms have evolved.[7] Many writers have since incorporated various aspects of the Dionysian impulse into their work.

Euripides wrote the *Bacchae* when he himself was in exile from Athens, living at the court of Archelaus of Macedon between 408-406 B.C. The play, which was produced posthumously by one of his three sons in 405 B.C, won the first prize at the yearly dramatic performances held during the Dionysian Festival. Born in c.485 B.C., Euripides was quite involved in the political, social and religious life of his Greek community. According to James T. Luce in *Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome*, Euripides was commissioned by the Athenians to write a funeral epigram for the soldiers who died in the disastrous expedition of 414-412 (233). Geoffrey S. Kirk in

his introduction to the *Bacchae* asserts that Euripides served on an embassy to Syracuse and held a lay priesthood in the cult of Zeus at his birthplace in Attica (*ix*). During Euripides' lifetime the Greek city-states experienced a series of military, political and social crises which threatened their stability. While the Peloponnesian War was raging, he abandoned his homeland for safety and security in a foreign land.

Similarly, while Nigeria was in a political turmoil following the devastating civil war, involving a majority of its thirty city-states, Soyinka left his homeland and took the opportunity to re-write Euripides' original. Although the Greeks and Yorubas share a mythological, religious and cultural affinity, Soyinka's transformation of Euripides' *Bacchae* reflects certain relevant aspects of the postcolonial agenda in its restoration of the cultural and historical image of the Yorubas distorted by British imperialism, and its resistance to political and social oppression, nationally and internationally. This chapter demonstrates how Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* authenticates the pre-colonial history and metaphysics of the Yorubas; exposes the tyranny of slavery and British colonization; denounces the colonial mentality inherited by contemporary Nigerian leaders; encourages resistance to political oppression; proposes liberation and renewal through communal celebration; and explores drama's portrayal as a revolutionary art form.

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka, commonly known as Wole Soyinka, was born on July 13, 1934 in Aké, Abeokuta, a city in the Western Region of Nigeria. In a 1990 conversation with the students at the Institut du Monde anglophone in Paris, Soyinka

said that his last name, which begins with an 'sh' sound, means "I am surrounded by sorcerers."[8] Soyinka's father, a teacher, moved to Aké from the Ijebu town of Isara and became headmaster of St. Peter's Primary, a British Mission school. His mother, who acquired the name, "Wild Christian," in Aké, because of her fervent evangelistic endeavours, was born into an Egba family. She was also a teacher, a political activist and a business woman. Both parents descended from the Yorubas of the south-west region of Nigeria, one of the first areas to be affected by British imperial expansion. In his book entitled *Wole Soyinka*, James Gibbs asserts that Soyinka's maternal ancestors "played a pioneering role in spreading christianity through Western Nigeria and had composed music which fused Yoruba and European traditions" (2).

In his autobiography, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), Soyinka vividly describes the first eleven-and-a-half years of his life in Aké and his father's home town, Isara, where he was influenced by both the Yoruba and Western cultures. He started school earlier than the usual age when he followed his older sister to the nearby St. Peter's Primary school and was allowed to stay because he was well-behaved and smart enough to comprehend the lessons. After completing his primary education, he spent a year at Abeokuta Grammar school and four years at Government College at Ibadan. In 1952, he started his undergraduate studies at University College, which later became the University of Ibadan, where he studied English, Greek and history. At the age of twenty, he left Nigeria for the School of English at Leeds University. In 1957 he was awarded an Upper Second Class Honours degree and he

began work on his Masters programme. His plays, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel* sparked interest at the Royal Court Theatre in London; his involvement in the theatre as playwright and play-reader hindered the completion his graduate work. He has since received honourary Doctor of Laws degrees from the University of Leeds (1973); Yale University (1981); Paul Valéry University, Montpellier, France (1984); University of Lagos, Nigeria (1988); Moorehouse College, Atlanta (1988); and University of Bayreuth, Germany, (1989).

Although in his teenage years Soyinka had written plays for his school drama group, read his short stories on the local radio, won prizes for poems he wrote and recited at art festivals, he became more widely known as a multi-talented artist when, in 1959, he directed an evening of his work at the Royal Court Theatre which included, poetry, songs and dramatic pieces. It was a sensational performance, particularly *The Invention*, a play about the absurdity of racism and apartheid in South Africa. He returned to Nigeria on a two-year Rockefeller scholarship to research African drama and theatre at the University of Ibadan in 1960, the year of Nigeria's official independence from British colonial rule. Soyinka formed the 1960 Masks drama group and staged *A Dance of the Forests*, a revision of an earlier anti-apartheid piece, *A Dance of the African Forest*, which he entered in a competition of plays to celebrate Nigeria's Independence. Soyinka had always been suspicious about the myth of Nigerian unity propagated by the British and suspected that it would lead to further disintegration of the country's social and political fabric. His outspoken criticism of

the illusion that all would be well after independence and his opposition to political corruption which he depicts in his plays placed him in a precarious position in Nigeria.

Prior to his period of exile in England in 1973, Soyinka had been imprisoned twice in Nigeria on politically-related charges. In protest against the results of the 1965 elections that declared Chief S. L. Akintola the winner in the Western Region of Nigeria, Soyinka replaced the victory tape of Akintola's national radio broadcast. Soyinka's tape, which began with "This is the voice of Free Nigeria" requested that Akintola and his "crew of renegades" quit the country.[9] Soyinka was arrested and imprisoned and had to go on a hunger strike in order to have his case brought to trial during which he pleaded not guilty to the charge of subversion and was acquitted because of insufficient evidence. Twenty months later, in August 1967, Soyinka was re-arrested and detained without trial in solitary confinement in Kaduna prison for his visit to the Biafran leader, Colonel Ojukwu, and for writing letters to the press opposing the war.[10] In an interview with Louis S. Gates, Soyinka disclosed that his visit was to present viable and concrete solutions and "a definite political alternative to the secession which had been worked out by a number of influential people" (33). Soyinka, who was released in October 1969, insists that the war was not merely tribal but a result of class segmentation and the lack of egalitarianism.

Soyinka was devastated by his experience in prison which he records in *The Man Died: Prison Notes* and in his *Poems from Prison*; however he has continued his

fight against political, social and economic corruption in Nigeria and other parts of the world. For example, he transformed Euripides' the *Bacchae* into a drama against forms of oppression in 1973, and in 1979, he directed and acted in *The Biko Inquest*, a play about the South African court proceedings following the death in police custody of Steve Biko, a black anti-apartheid leader. In *Wole Soyinka*, James Gibbs comments on the play:

> The production was a clinical exposé of the inhumanity and deceit in far-off South Africa, but the play was not allowed to become in any sense escapist. All the parts were taken by black actors, and the piece was obviously relevant to the Nigeria in which police brutality and lack of integrity in the judicial system were common-place (12).

Soyinka has used whatever means he could to communicate his opposition against tribalism, racism, corruption and oppression in Nigeria and abroad. He says, in an interview with Stotesbury, that when he was unable to raise sufficient funds to make an agitprop film, he recorded the songs in an album, entitled *Unlimited Liability Company* (1983), which effectively and economically expressed his views about the socio-political situation in Nigeria and was widely distributed among the masses.

In 1986, Wole Soyinka became the first and only West African to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. He has also had many national and international awards and honours including, the John Whiting Drama Award (1967); Jock Campbell-New Statesman Literary Award (1968); Commander, Federal Republic of Nigeria (1986); the Order of La Légion d'Honneur from France (1989); the Akogun of Isara (1989); Akinlatun of Egbaland (1990); the Order of the Republic of Italy (1990); and Premio

Letterario Internazionale Mondello (1990).

Soyinka, who has over fifty published and unpublished works, is a prolific writer, fluent in Yoruba, Pidgin and English; he is well-known and respected nationally and internationally. His plays have been performed locally, in continental Europe and the Americas. He has produced and directed numerous radio, television and stage plays written either by himself or others. A film version has been made of a few of his plays and his movie *Blues for a Prodigal* was released in 1984. He played the role of Patrice Lumumba in Joan Littlewood's Paris production of Conor Cruise O'Brien's play, *Murderous Angels* in 1971 and the following year he had the lead role in the movie, *African Themes and Perspectives* directed by Ossie Davies.

In addition to the drama group, 1960 Masks, Soyinka also formed the Orisun Theatre drama group (1963) and the Unife Guerilla Theatre at the University of Ife (1978). Other non-established drama groups were created to meet the immediate needs for agitprop plays, for example, as Soyinka explains in an interview with Stotesbury:

> When I direct my plays in Nigeria, and especially the kind of plays which I call 'shot-gun theatre', my group goes to the market square, to outside the offices, outside the Houses of Assembly, and enacts these very hard-hitting plays on specific political and economic issues and then they vanish before they're rounded up by police. In this way, we are communicating with market-women, with peasants, with office-workers, with the unemployed ... (62).

Soyinka's dramatic productions are not limited to an enclosed space within a theatre building; he takes his message to the masses and the leaders wherever they are. Art, whether in the form of drama or music, has been utilized by Soyinka to expose and

resist political, social and cultural oppression.

Soyinka's versatility and his commitment to raising the awareness of the value of Yoruba theatre was also evident in his introduction of a Nigerian theatrical season, the Orisun Repertory, in 1964. During and after the period of official colonization, indigenous Yoruba plays were not given the same value as the plays performed in English. For the first time in the history of Nigerian theater, Soyinka arranged for individual plays in both Yoruba and English to be performed as part of the same repertoire. On twelve successive evenings three separate theatrical companies performed five different plays in both languages. In 1961, he was actively involved in the foundation of the Mbari Writers and Artists Club in Ibadan. He was the co-editor of *Black Orpheus* from 1961-1964; literary editor for *Orisun Acting Editions* in 1970; and editor of the journal *Transition* which he renamed *Ch'Indaba* between 1974 and 1976. He held the position of secretary-general of the Union of Writers of African Peoples in 1975 and in 1977, he was the administrator of the second International Festival of Negro Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held for the first time in Nigeria.

Between his return to Nigeria in 1960 and until his retirement from academia in 1985, Soyinka held various full time positions. He was lecturer in English at the University of Ife for one year in 1962; senior lecturer in English, University of Lagos (1965-67); chair of the Drama Department and appointed head of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan in 1967 (spent 1967-72 in prison); and professor of Comparative Literature and head of the Department of Dramatic Arts, University of

Ife (1975-85). While in exile at various times, he was visiting professor at several prestigious universities, including Churchill College, Cambridge University (1973-74); University of Sheffield (1973); Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana (1976); Yale University (1979-80); Cornell University (1986); and Goldwin Smith Professor of Africana Studies and Theatre, Cornell University (1988).[11]

It is evident that from early childhood and during his education in Nigeria and England, and throughout his professional career, Soyinka has been tremendously influenced by Western culture. In his Preface to *The Golden Labyrinth*, G. Wilson Knight acknowledges Soyinka's contribution to the writing of his essay on Shakespeare (*x*). Those Soyinka considers the "quintessence of the literary art" are: John Synge, Umberto Eco and Toni Morrison. He admires such dramatists as, Bertolt Brecht, Derek Walcott, Sean O'casey, Mayakovsky and Shakespeare.[12]

Several of Soyinka's written works had been previously performed and some published individually; however the Oxford University Press published *Collected Plays* vol. 1 (1973) containing *A Dance of the Forests, The Swamp Dwellers, The Strong Breed, The Road, and The Bacchae of Euripides*. *Collected Plays* vol. 2 (1974), comprised *The Lion and the Jewel, Kongi's Harvest, The Trials of Brother Jero, Jero's Metamorphosis, and Madmen and Specialists*. Plays from both collections had been previously published as *Five Plays* (1964). Other published plays, which had been written and performed earlier either on radio or stage, include: *Camwood on the Leaves* (1974); *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975); *Opera Wonyosi* (1981); *A*

Play of Giants (1984); *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985); and *Childe Internationale*, originally part of a revue, *Before the Blackout* (1987).

Soyinka's published collection of poems are: *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), *Poems from Prison* (1969) *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972); he edited *Poems of Black Africa* (1975); *Ogun Abibiman* (1976); *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988). He has several uncollected poems and others that are part of anthologies, for example, in *An African Treasury* (1960) edited by Langston Hughes, and in *Modern Poetry from Africa* (1963) edited by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier. Soyinka has two original novels *The Interpreters* (1965) and *Season of Anomy* (1989). He translated D. O. Fagunwa's Yoruba novel, *Ogbuju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale*, into English called *The Forest of a Thousand Deamons* (1968). He has three autobiographies: *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (1972); *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981); *Isara: A Voyage around "Essay"* (1989). Soyinka has recently published a sequel to *Aké* and *Isasa, The Penkelemes Years, a Memoir 1946-1965* (1994). He has written a poetics on Yoruba drama, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976); he has a collection of essays on literature and culture entitled *Art, Dialogue & Outrage* (1988); and numerous critical essays and letters to the press.

Soyinka has interviews recorded in "Conversations with Wole Soyinka" in Paris, transcribed by Michel Fabre, *Commonwealth* 15.2 (Spring 1993); With 'Biyi Bandele-Thomas in July 1993 recorded in *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal* edited by Adewale Maja-Pearce (1994); "Interview by John A. Stotesbury at the Second

Stockholm Conference for African Writers," *Kunapipi* IX.1 (1987):59-64; "Interview with Laura Jones," editor of *The New Theatre Review* (March 1978); "An Interview with Wole Soyinka" by Louis S. Gates in *Black World* (August 1975); Televised class discussion recorded in Karen L. Morrell's *In Person Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka* (1975); and interviews with Ezekiel Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi and Dennis Duerden in *African Writers Talking* (1972) edited by Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duerden.

In Soyinka's transformation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, which he subtitles "A Communion Rite," he makes significant changes to the original by juxtaposing slavery, colonization and oppression with resistance, liberation and communal equality.[13] Soyinka adds a slave leader, an old slave, an additional chorus of slaves, creates relevant scenes and replaces Euripides' epilogue of vengeance and retribution with restitution and celebration. Unlike Rotimi, who gives the Greek characters and places Yoruba names in *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, Soyinka maintains the English translation of the Greek characters and setting, using standard English language and images of contemporary European scenes. Like Rotimi, but to a greater degree, Soyinka projects his African culture in such a way as to assert its authority over imported western traditions. Although Soyinka acknowledges his dependence on the English translations by Gilbert Murray and William Arrowsmith, he uses lines from his African poem, *Idanre*, and traditional praise-chants that exalt African deities. Just as Euripides relies on the myths surrounding Dionysos and the founding of Thebes, so does Soyinka on the myths of Ogun and other Yoruba gods; but each playwright

imaginatively recreates the plot and dramatization into his own individual production.

Euripides reverts to earlier forms and structures of Greek drama in his construction of the *Bacchae*, for example, the Chorus is given a prominent position in the drama. The Chorus has long choral odes that mark distinct divisions in the action of the play. As the true worshippers of Dionysos, the all-female Chorus honour their god, reinforce the myths and respond to the various actions in the drama. They are the focal point of reference, permanently on stage, drawing attention to the wisdom of the gods and particularly the divinity of Dionysos. Although it is not clear to what extent Euripides mirrors the activities of the Dionysian cult, he makes use of several ancient and contemporary myths and stories regarding Dionysos' existence and position in the Greek cosmology.[14]

In Greek mythology, Dionysos is the only Olympian god who has a divine father, Zeus, and mortal mother, Semele. Although Dionysos has attributes that associate him with early chthonic deities, his addition to the Olympian pantheon as one of the twelve came later when Pisistratos added him in Hestia's place and introduced the Dionysian Festival as a state celebration.[15] Explanations of the gods' origins and histories play an important part in the development of Greek mythology. Homer's *Iliad* has the origin of the gods as Oceanus and Tethys (XIV.201) and Hesiod's (c.700 B.C.) *Theogony* gives the earliest surviving account of a systematic genealogy of the gods, the creation of the universe and mankind. The *Theogony* explains that in the beginning there was Chaos. Chaos brought Gaea (Gaia) or Ge, Mother Earth, into

being and she produced Uranus. Together with Uranus she had the Titans of which Cronus was the youngest of seven sons (123-138). Cronus cut off his father's genitals using a long sickle with jagged teeth given to him by his mother because Uranus was the first to devise shameful actions. Uranus' blood drops produced the Erinyes and the white foam from his immortal genitals produced Aphrodite (168-182; cf. *Apollodorus* I.i.4). Cronus married his sister Rhea and ruled in his father's place. Fearing his father's prophecy that one of his sons would dethrone him, Cronus swallowed all five of his children. When Rhea gave birth to her sixth child, Zeus, she presented Cronus with a stone wrapped as a baby while Mother Earth carried Zeus away to safety in Crete where he was nursed by nymphs. Zeus grew up into manhood, attacked his father and defeated him after Cronus had vomited the children he had swallowed (453-491). Zeus reigned supreme, married his sister, Hera, and made their home on Mount Olympus.

Zeus, who had a reputation for amorous affairs with women, was in a relationship with Semele, one of the four daughters of Cadmus, the legendary founder of Thebes. Hera, who was always jealous of such relationships, disguised herself as an old neighbour and convinced Semele to ask her lover to reveal himself in all his glory to her. Semele made the request to Zeus after making him promise to grant her whatever she asked. Zeus' great power and mighty manifestation of lightning blew Semele and her home into pieces; her child, later called Dionysos, was torn from her womb in the sixth month of her pregnancy. Zeus saved Dionysos, carved out a place

in his thigh and sewed it up so that he could be protected till the appropriate time of his birth. The name Dionysos etymologically could be a combination of the genitive form of the noun Zeus, "Dios," and "Nysa" the lofty mountain overgrown with trees where he was hidden as an infant.[16] Dionysos' double birth characterizes his dual nature of mortal and immortal, good and evil, and his origins in Asia Minor and Thebes.

Dionysos' association with Thebes comes through his maternal relations. Cadmus, the legendary founder of the city, was the son of Agenor, king of Tyre and brother of Europa. Agenor demanded that his sons find Europa, whom Zeus, disguised as a bull, had carried away. Cadmus consulted the Delphic Oracle and was told to follow a cow and found a new city wherever the cow laid down in weariness. Cadmus obeyed and founded Cadmeia which was later called Thebes. In his attempt to get water to sacrifice the cow, he killed the serpent guarding the nearby spring of Ares and a voice prophesied that before the end of his life Cadmus would become a serpent. Athena told Cadmus to sow the serpent's teeth from which sprung, the Spartoi (Sown Men), the presumed initial inhabitants of Thebes. Euripides retells this story in *The Phoenician Women* written in 410-409 BC. (638-675) and ends the *Bacchae* with Dionysos' pronouncement that Cadmus and his wife will become serpents (1330-1331).[17] According to the myth, Cadmus appeased Ares for the death of the serpent by becoming his slave. Cadmus married Harmonia, daughter of Ares and Aphrodite. They had a son and four daughters: Polydorus, father of

Labdacus and grandfather of Oedipus; Semele married Zeus and conceived Dionysos; Ino married Athamas and both were struck with madness by Hera as a revenge on Ino for her care of the infant Dionysos; Autonoe married Aristeus and had a son Acteon who was torn to pieces by his carnivorous hounds on Mount Cithaeron; Agave married Echion, a descendant of Cadmus, and she dismembered her son, Pentheus.

Euripides incorporates into the *Bacchae* several aspects of the aetiological myths of the ancient Greeks and gives prominence to their historical significance. By having the Chorus call Dionysos, Zagreus, Euripides identifies him with yet another myth that is crucial to the theme of the play. Legend has it that Zeus impregnated his sister, Demeter, who gave birth to Persephone; both are regarded as fertility goddesses. The union between Zeus and Persephone resulted in his son, Zagreus. Hera, as usual, jealous of the affair aroused the Titans who attacked the child Zagreus, cut him to pieces with knives and ate his dismembered parts.[18] Athena saved the child's heart and brought it to Zeus who swallowed the heart and implanted it through sexual union with Semele. Zeus in anger destroyed the Titans with his thunder and lightning but out of their ashes the human race was created. The aetiological significance of this myth lies in the idea that being created out of the ashes of the monstrous, evil Titans, humans have the dual nature of evil and good, as well as the capacity for divine attributes. Dionysos' relationship to Demeter and Persephone qualify him as a fertility deity and accounts for similarities between the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries. [19]

In the prologue of Euripides' *Bacchae*, Dionysos emphasizes his divine and mortal parentage and his reasons for being in Thebes. His mother's sisters deny his biological connection with Zeus and claim that his mother was consumed because she lied about her relationship with Zeus. Therefore, he has disguised himself as a mortal in order to exact revenge on the perpetrators (1-4; 26-31). Part of Dionysos' mission is to defend his mother's reputation by the revelation of his divinity as proof that his mother's story is true; he is the product of the union between Semele and Zeus, the father of gods and men. He also intends to introduce the Bacchic rites and Dionysian ritual to the Thebans because they, through the arrogance of Pentheus, have neglected to worship him as god. Dionysos makes this clear in the prologue that he stung the Theban women with madness, driving them from their homes. Dressed in Bacchic costume, they have gone to Mount Cithaeron to participate in Dionysian rites (32-36). The irony is that Dionysos takes on mortal form but uses his supernatural powers to entice and excite the Theban women into Bacchic worship and perform numerous miracles. While the Theban women, compelled to perform in Dionysian rites, are out on Mount Cithaeron, the group of Lydian women, who willingly followed Dionysos from Asia Minor, form the Chorus on stage.

As the title suggests, the *Bacchae* is also a play about women. The Greek word transliterated as *bacchae*, is the nominative, feminine, plural of the masculine singular noun, *bacchus*, meaning women possessed/inspired by the god, Bacchus. Euripides makes reference to several mythological women. Dionysos comes to honour the

memory of his mother whose tomb is a permanently on stage; and Pentheus, stripped of his masculinity and disguised in a female Bacchic costume, is sacrificed by his mother. Through his worship, Dionysos liberates the Theban women and the female slaves from their burdensome tasks of home-making, weaving and labouring in the fields. The Chorus confirms that stung to madness by Dionysos, the women are away from their looms and shuttles and are gone into the mountains (116-119). The Chorus of foreign women have the important role as bearers of the wisdom and knowledge of the myths and Bacchic rites. Euripides contrasts the peaceful, willing worshippers with the Theban women whose mad, violent behaviour is a result of rejecting the god.[20]

In the absence of a male heir, Cadmus, in his old age, handed over the throne and the rulership of Thebes to his daughter's son, Pentheus. Pentheus has ruled Thebes as a tyrant, not only in the Greek sense of the word, meaning a usurper, but as a dictator and a despot. In his first appearance on stage, he is enraged that the women have left their work and gone away to participate in Bacchic revels. He refers to Dionysos as a stranger, a new-made god, an effeminate impostor, one who corrupts the women, and the one who was blown up with his mother by Zeus. He admits that he has had some of the women chained and imprisoned and intends to do the same with Dionysos. Pentheus passes judgement and punishment on Dionysos:

> PENTHEUS: ...these women you have brought with you
> As collaborators in evil we shall either sell off,
> Or I shall stop their hands from the drum-beating din
> And own them as household slaves at the looms
> (511-514).

Euripides gives enough information about Pentheus' attitudes towards Dionysos, woman and those in a lower class for his characterization as a tragic hero to be understood. At the end of the play, when rebuked by the Messenger for rejoicing in his master's death, the Chorus is able to say, "I a cry in ecstasy, a foreigner, in my alien strains, for no longer do I cringe under fear of imprisonment" (1034-1035).[21]

The Greek myths and legends make reference to slaves; for example, Cadmus served as a slave of the god, Ares, for a period of time. According to *The World of Athens*, during Euripides' lifetime, the Greek population was made up of social classes which included the citizens, the *metoikoi* and slaves (153-162). Thucydides reports that after 413 B.C. 20,000 slaves, mostly skilled workers, escaped to the Spartans during the latter phase of the Peloponnesian War. Slaves were used extensively in agriculture as manual labour for tilling the ground, planting and harvesting; in the clay pits and mines; in the manufacture of implements; and in domestic services. The slaves, whether domestic or otherwise, had no rights to own property, buy land or sit at the assemblies. In *The Greek World*, Philip de Souza asserts:

> Slavery was widespread in the Greek World, but the slave trade received little attention from the writers of ancient Greek literature, partly, it seems, because they were embarrassed and offended by it, although they were aware of its importance (188).

Slavery could also have been accepted as a way of life and just taken for granted. It is not clear what Euripides' own personal opinions were about slavery or Greece's imperialistic ventures; however in the *Bacchae*, Dionysos makes it clear that everyone,

whether bond or free, rich or poor, male or female, young or old can worship Dionysos and participate in the Bacchic rites. Dionysos and Pentheus reveal their attitudes:

> DIONYSOS: Every foreigner dances in these rites.
>
> PENTHEUS: Yes, because they are less sensible than Hellenes.
>
> DIONYSOS: In this case, rather, they are fully sensible; but their customs differ [are different] (482-484).

Pentheus describes the foreigners as mentally inferior, as having ideas much worse than the Hellenes. Having lived in exile, first in Thessaly and then in Macedon, as a foreigner from Athens and his birth place, Attica, Euripides seems to view foreigners not in terms of their inferiority of intelligence, morality or society, but in terms of social, political and religious differences. Euripides has dramatized this observation in his earlier tragedy, *Medea* (431 B.C.), in which the heroine, Medea, who is from Colchis, faces rejection because she is a foreigner.[22] In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus upholds Zeus as the source of the state religion but rejects Zeus' son, Dionysos. In the punishment meted out to the Cadmeian family at the end of the play, Cadmus and Harmonia will be turned into snakes, exiled into slavery to drive an ox-cart and lead foreigners before they will be rescued by Ares and transplanted to the land of the blessed (1330-1339). Agave is to be separated from her sisters and all of them exiled from Thebes.

Euripides, in having Pentheus disguised as a woman and a bacchante, gives

him not only the bi-sexual nature attributed to Dionysos but also the role of a scapegoat as Dionysos declares: "You alone take on the burden for this city, you alone; / Therefore the necessary contests await you" (964-965). The Second Messenger's description of what happens to Pentheus and Agave's expressions when she returns with his head confirm his death as a sacrificial victim. Pentheus is seen as a mountain beast, a lion, by the bacchantes and his mother, the priestess, possessed by the Bacchic god starts the process of dismembering him. According to the ritual, in the dismembering of a sacrificial victim, known as *sparagmos*, the priest or priestess initiates the rite as dramatized by Agave. Unaware that she tore up her son, she calls to Cadmus and Pentheus to share her victory in the hunt of the beast. She comes to her senses and recognizes that she has killed her own son (1169-1300).

Euripides presents the tragedy that befalls the house of Cadmus through Pentheus's death by his mother as justified. Despite all the reports of Dionysos' miraculous manifestation of power, and the Chorus' pleading that Dionysos is "the equal of any of the gods!" (777)[23], Pentheus remains adamant that the god does not exist because he was blown to pieces with his mother. In the end, Cadmus admits that Pentheus was a terror to the city (1310), and if there is any man who thinks he is above the gods; "Let him look on Pentheus's death, and judge that gods exist" (1326). When Cadmus pleads that the punishment is too harsh, Dionysos' response is that "long ago Zeus my father approved these things" (1349). Euripides dramatizes what is very evident from Greek mythology and ancient Greek literature that mortals who

think themselves to be above the gods do not get away unpunished; the fact that Zeus himself "gave his nod," in the literal sense of the word, demonstrates that Dionysos acted in accordance with the will of Zeus.

Aware of the parallels between Greek and Yoruba mythology and rituals, Soyinka underscores the significance of the elder god, Ogun, who is synonymous with Dionysos. Like the Greeks, the Yorubas have a multiplicity of gods and several aetiological myths. In *Yoruba Myths*, Ulli Beier records:

> In the beginning there was Orisha. Orisha lived alone in a little hut which was at the foot of a huge rock. He had a faithful slave, who cooked his food and looked after him in every way ... One day the slave waylaid Orisha. He waited for him at the top of the rock, and when he saw Orisha return home from his farm, he rolled a huge boulder onto the hut. Orisha was crushed into hundreds of pieces and they were scattered throughout the world...Orunmila [Yoruba creation god] put all the pieces he had collected into a large calabash which he called Orisha Nla, or Orishanla, and deposited them in a shrine at Ife. But hundreds of fragments are still scattered throughout the world today (6-7).

Orisha's household slave, reminiscent of Cadmus, is one of the earliest examples of resistance to servitude in the Yoruba mythology. Beier suggests that the Yorubas say they have 401 *orisha*, or divinities, meaning that no one knows the exact number.

Ogun, like the Dionysos depicted by Euripides in the *Bacchae*, symbolizes the creative/destructive principle in humans and nature. In *Myth*, Soyinka records the myth about the gods' journey through an impenetrable void and Ogun's importance:

> A long isolation from the world of men had created an impassable barrier which they [the gods] tried, but failed, to demolish. Ogun finally took over. Armed with the first technical instrument which he had

> forged from the ore of mountain-wombs, he cleared the primordial jungle, plunged through the abyss and called on the others to follow. For this feat the gods offered him a crown, inviting him to be king over them (28-29).

Yoruba mythology elevates Ogun because he is the first to restore communication between gods and men. It is to Ogun that Soyinka attributes the creation of the first technical implement and thereby implies Ogun's superiority to Cronus and Uranus, the former of whom has only a flint sickle to castrate the latter. The rest of the Yoruba creation myth presents Ogun's dual nature and similarity to the Greek gods Zeus and Dionysos. Ogun, who is well-received at Ire, comes to the aid of the townsfolk by ridding them of their enemy, similar to Odewale's accomplishment for the Kutuje people in Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. However, Ogun refuses several requests from the people for him to be their king but since they persist he eventually accepts and comes down from his mountain abode decked in palm fronds to be crowned king. One day, Ogun drinks a gourd of palm wine left by Esu, the trickster god and in his state of confusion kills his own people (29). Soyinka insists that "Ogun, by incorporating within himself so many seemingly contradictory attributes, represents the closest conception to the original oneness of Orisa-nla" (31).

Another version of this myth which helps to crystallize Soyinka's *Bacchae* is recorded in "The Ifa Divination System" by Wande Abimbola. Ifa, also known as Orunmila, was one of the 401 divinities who came to earth and settled at Ife. Olodumare, the Yoruba high god, gave each divinity a function to perform on earth

and Ogun was put in charge of all things related to war and hunting and the use of iron implements. The divinities married among themselves and gave birth to those who became the divine rulers of the Yoruba. Out of the descendants of the divinities, the children of Oduduwa became the most important politically and formed the ruling dynasty of the Yoruba kingdoms which later culminated into the imperial organization of the Oyo Empire. Olodumare created human beings from clay and they became the subjects over whom the divinities and their descendants ruled (35-36). Other sources declare Ogun the first son of Oduduwa and the direct ancestor of the Yorubas.[24]

Since Ogun is the only one who forged through primordial chaos, which he conquered through the use of a scientific invention, according to Soyinka, Ogun becomes a key figure in the understanding of Yoruba metaphysics, and consequently ritual drama. Ogun is Soyinka's patron god, because being the god of creativity, he is also the god of artists. In the Introduction to his version of the *Bacchae*, Soyinka narrates the parallels between Ogun and Dionysos:

> The Phrygian god and his twinhood with Ogun exercise irresistible fascination. His thyrsus is physically and functionally parallelled (*sic*) by the *opa Ogun* borne by the male devotees of Ogun. But the thyrsus of Dionysos is brighter, it is all light and running wine, Ogun's stave is more symbolic of his labours of Ogun through the night of transition. A long willowy pole, it is topped by a frond-bound lump of ore which strains the pole in wilful curves and keeps it vibrant .... Through town and village, up the mountain to the grove of Ogun, this dance of the straining phallus-heads pocks the air above men and women revellers who are decked in palm fronds and bear palm branches in their hands (*v*).

Associated with the Dionysian rituals are the fertility rites which include the harvesting

of grapes, pressing out of the wine, the procession of girls carrying baskets filled with the fruits and flowers of the earth, culminating in music, dancing and the drinking of wine. An animal is sacrificed and its limbs torn apart in the act of *sparagmos*.[25]

During the annual Ogun Festival at Ire Ekiti described by R. L. Ibigbami, Ogun's shrine and images are cleansed and veiled with palm fronds, sacrifices are offered by individual households and by the whole community. On Ogun day, the Eyemola leads the female procession of followers while masked mortals in the image of Ogun and his wife with their male attendants make a symbolic journey amidst drumming and dancing to and from Umeru. Ibigbami asserts that "groups of hundreds parade the street dancing vigorously, chanting war songs in memory of Ogun ..." (53). In his Introduction to the *Bacchae*, Soyinka identifies the Dionysian practices with those of Ogun's festival, which significantly is climaxed by the symbolic sacrifice of Ogun's favourite animal:

> A dog [a surrogate for the god] is slaughtered [cut clean through the neck] in sacrifice, and the [symbolic] mock-struggle of the head priest and his acolytes for the carcass, during which it is literally torn limb from limb, inevitably brings to mind the dismemberment of Zagreus, son of Zeus. Most significant of all is the brotherhood of the palm and the ivy. The mystery of the wine of palm, bled straight from the tree and potent without further ministration, is a miracle of nature acquiring symbolic significance in the Mysteries of Ogun (*v*).

The Mysteries of Ogun symbolize the return to nature, which is intrinsic to African religious beliefs, and which possess the power to recreate and stimulate growth for all.

Soyinka's transformation of Euripides' *Bacchae* is relevant to postcolonial

discourse because he draws parallels from the mythological and religious history of the ancient Greeks to authenticate the pre-colonial history of the Yorubas, and by extension, the African countries affected by European imperialism. In *Myth*, Soyinka ridicules those who have the "strong scholarly nerve" to present 'conclusive evidence' that the Yoruba religion is derived from the Greek (14). Ironically, Martin Bernal documents the contrary in his two-volume treatise, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987). Cheikh Anta Diop confirms the direct influence of African civilization on Greece in his anthropological research, *Civilization or Barbarism* (1981), which was translated into English in 1991. Some of Soyinka's arguments are similar to those of Bernal's and Diop's, as revealed in his discussion on Greek mythology in "Conversations":

> [H]istorically, nobody has been in the slightest doubt about the links between the past African civilizations and the Grecian world. What are called the Hellenic religions are proven to have come from Africa by way of Egypt. Those aspects of African history I quite opportunistically inserted there [in my plays] to see that people would try to remember what was often denied, to remember that the world was not originally quite as dichotomized as happened later in the last millennium. I deliberately referred to that also to counter the habit of insularity which in fact has often been imposed on African self-awareness by the contemporary encounter with the European world by severing those links (22).

Soyinka makes a conscious effort to validate the pre-colonial history of the Yorubas and associate the beginnings of civilization with Africa through the reworking of Euripides' play. He emphasizes the Yoruba myths and local religious practices to demonstrate that organized religion and forms of social and political interaction and

communication existed long before European domination. In Dionysos' opening speech, Soyinka identifies him with dark Ethiopia and insinuates Dionysos' African origin, which implies that Ogun and the Yoruba gods existed before the ancient Greeks and the subsequent western religions came into being. The Slave Leader exalts Dionysos by saying that he has seen him in "the mountains of Eritrea, in the deserts of Libya ..." (19). Contrary to the myth of imperialism, the Europeans did not have to come and deliver the "natives" from "darkness;" the Africans already possessed the light.

It is obvious from his interviews and lectures that Soyinka sees his role as a writer largely in terms of restoring the history of the Africans that has been denied or distorted by European imperialists. In his preface to *Myth*, which he wrote in 1973 the same year he produced the *Bacchae*, Soyinka narrates the incident that precipitated the contents of his book. While a visiting professor at Sheffield University he found out that the "English Department (or perhaps some key individual) did not believe in any such mythical beast as 'African Literature.'" He acknowledges with mock relief that such individuals "at least have not gone so far as to deny the existence of an African world - only its literature and, perhaps, its civilization" (*vii, viii*).[26]

Soyinka acknowledges the postcolonial theoretical position that eurocentric assumptions about the foundation and development of human civilization and the whole theory of social origins which have been postulated by European thinkers and scholars must be re-evaluated. In an interview with Louis L. Gates in 1975, he argues:

> I find myself very much preoccupied - if you like, naturally prejudiced - in favor of a wholesale re-examination, re-evaluation of European ideas. In fact, I question very much the intellectual value of a number of the preoccupations of European scholars. And taking as the foundation of my thinking the ideas, the world-view, the philosophical concepts of my society, I find that Europe has for too long brow-beaten the rest of the world, and especially the African world, into an acceptance of the very fundamental system [of evaluation] which is, I suppose, natural to Europe (35).

Soyinka engages in postcolonial discourse when he says that his only justification for being preoccupied with European systems and the reason for us to recognize what they are is "in order to undo, as far as we can, the immense damage which has been done to our [African] society, and also to retrieve our centers of learning - our schools even, and our universities - from the wrong emphasis ..." (35-36). He is convinced that "nothing short of a *cultural revolution*," similar to that of China, is needed to rid Africa and the world of eurocentricism (44).

Soyinka's commitment to ridding the world of eurocentricism includes re-articulating and interrogating hegemonic ideologies and positing new meanings on certain eurocentric ways of thinking and writing about Africans. Words like "pagan," "primitive" and "barbaric" are semantically purged of anything derogatory and utilized in their older senses, namely as integral parts of various complex African mythological and religious systems. In "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka," James Booth argues that Soyinka "challenges European images of barbarism, and asserts through the ritual of human sacrifice a communal interrelationship between the individual and society, different from that of the individualistic 'West'" (14).[27]

Soyinka's notion of tragedy is crucial to an understanding and interpretation of his drama. An attempt to explain Soyinka's play outside of its framework leads only to distortion as in the case of the 1973 National Theatre production directed by Roland Joffé. Soyinka has since added the following in the Production Notes of the 1974 Norton edition:

> This version of *The Bacchae* has been conceived as a communal feast, a tumultuous celebration of life. It must be staged as such. Any cuts in the text, dictated by production necessities must NOT be permitted to affect the essential dimension of a Nature feast.

In the context of a Nature feast, Soyinka considers the sacrificial death of Pentheus necessary for the renewal of Thebes, as redefined in terms of the contemporary Nigerian situation. In his essay "Between Self and System: The Artist in Search of Liberation" written in June 1974, Soyinka delineates his problems with the director's interpretation of his adaptation and includes copies of his notes to the director. Soyinka's outline of what was wrong with the production's interpretation of his play and a misunderstanding of his transformation explain some of the poor reviews and disappointment of the critics.[28] Commenting on Joffé's production, apart from the misuse or abuse of the Yoruba talking-drum, Dionysos' introduction on stage with a sign of the *namaste* and the lotus posture, and viscous paint in place of wine, Soyinka asserts:

> (1) all the principal actors among the slaves and the followers of Dionysos were black ... a reduction along racial lines which neither Euripedes (*sic*) nor I his adapter ever indicated; (2) the sense of visceral liberation implicit in the poetry was made literal and agitprop .... a

> ponderously metallic stage set, the clanking of chains which drowned all speeches ... (77).[29]

In an interview with W. Stephen Gilbert in *Plays and Players* (September 1973), Joffé mentions the plays similarity with Indian mythology (23) and must have preferred that interpretation instead of the African Ogun. Soyinka insists in his Introduction, that he conceives his adaptation of the *Bacchae* as a "prodigious banquet, an insightful manifestation of the universal need for man to match himself against Nature" (*x-xi*).

In his transformation and re-interpretation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, Soyinka not only authenticates the pre-colonial history of the Yorubas but he also exposes the tyranny of European slavery and colonization. He emphasizes oppression by the visual representation of slavery, the addition to the original Euripidean cast of a Chorus of Slaves, an Old Slave and a Slave Leader who plays a major dramatic and symbolic role in the play. The nature of Pentheus' reign is characterized by terror, reminiscent of both a slave master and a contemporary Nigerian military officer or political leader. Soyinka specifies in the Production Notes that the Slaves and Bacchantes should be as "mixed a cast as is possible testifying to their varied origins." Joffé obviously ignores this important aspect to the understanding of Soyinka's play. In "Translation: Changing the Code: Soyinka's Ironic Aetiology," André Lefevere suggests that by requesting a mixed cast, "Soyinka's dispossessed are emphatically made to include Africa and the third world in general, without excluding the dispossessed in the developed nations ..." (134). In other words, Soyinka includes all those who are

oppressed, politically or otherwise, regardless of their colour, class, country or creed.

So relevant is slavery to the production of Soyinka's drama that he subjects his audience to the stark reality of its humiliating and destructive power on human life. In addition to Euripides' smoldering tomb of Semele with green vines clinging to its ruins, Soyinka sets up "a road [which] dips steeply into lower background, lined by the bodies of crucified slaves mostly in the skeletal stage" (1). Having a road dip steeply into the lower background conveys the impression that there are multitudes of such bodies of slaves exposed for miles along the road. Far more devastating than Zeus' lightning and fire that destroyed Semele and her home are the slaves that have been crucified and their bodies left to rot in the open air. Just as these slaves were kept and then murdered to satisfy Pentheus' whims so were the slaves in the nineteenth century used to satisfy the economic greed of the Europeans. Many slaves were inhumanely treated and died under the burden of work or the beatings of their cruel slave masters. Unfortunately, another form of inhumanity still exists; the murders such as occurred in the Biafran war during which Soyinka not only witnessed merciless killings of others but was also the victim of man's inhumanity to man.[30]

Soyinka portrays a complementary scene on the set as another constant reminder of slavery. His stage directions read: "Farther down and into the wings, a lean-to built against the wall, a threshing-floor. A cloud of chaff, and through it, dim figures of slaves flailing and treading" (1). Slavery, colonization, apartheid, deeply ingrained into the history and the lives of Africans, is dramatized physically by the

sweating labour of slaves on the threshing floor and symbolically by the dead bodies of the other sacrificed slaves. The cries of the slaves permeate the drama.

According to Albert Hunt's review of the production, "Amateurs in Horror," the image of the Chorus of male slaves at the beginning of the play is effective because "they shamble through the audience, linked to each other by chains that clang as they walk; and on the stage they form themselves into a shuffling circle that evokes images from the concentration camps" (343). Even though this scene is visually impressive, Soyinka mentions the technical difficulties created because the clanking drowned the actors' speeches. Portraying the men chained to each other brings back memories of those who were chained in like manner on their journey to the slave markets during the British transatlantic slave trade. Amidst such representation of brutality on stage is the main gate of Pentheus' palace, a symbol of terror and oppression. Pentheus maintains the old, established state religion which requires that a slave be ritually flogged to death to symbolize the demise of the old year and prospects for the new. This ritual perpetuates the oppression of slaves by the imperialistic and aristocratic leadership, in which many suffer and die to sustain a few. Such a process is a reversal of true leadership and ritual sacrifice where one dies to save many.

Soyinka includes a re-enactment of the King's yearly ritual procession of the Mysteries of Eleusis in the opening scene. Tiresias, the old blind seer, whose position as priest of the state religion associates him with Pentheus' reign, has taken the place

of the old household slave who is to be flogged to death in the ritual. Tiresias makes the transference partly because he fears the possibility of insurrection and rebellion among the slaves and because he sees it as an opportunity to participate in the slave's role instead of his usual role as administrator of the ritual (12). Tiresias has arranged that the floggers do not whip him mercilessly to death as they do the slaves but only perform the symbolic flogging; nonetheless they almost flog the last breath out of his body. When asked by Dionysos why he volunteered to play flagellant, Tiresias replies: "The city must be cleansed. Filth, pollution, cruelties, secret abominations - a whole year's accumulation .... If one more slave had been killed at the cleansing rites, or sacrificed to that insatiable altar of nation-building ..." (10, 11). Tiresias wants to sacrifice himself but not completely; he identifies with the scapegoat but not to the extent of being flogged to death. Through Dionysos, Soyinka demonstrates that Pentheus, not Tiresias, is eligible as a scapegoat, to take away the filth, pollution and cruelties of the whole year, since he is directly responsible for them, and more importantly as Dionysos declares: "There are risks / A king must take for his own people" (70). Soyinka also hints at the thousands of Nigerians whose lives were cut short under the guise of "nation-building" during the past several decades.

In his Introduction, Soyinka explains the philosophy behind the ritual flogging and how it benefits the oppressor at the expense of the slaves and lower classes:

> The impact of the Dionysiac revival on the slave-sustained economy of Greek society becomes understandable within this context. Punishment for 'economic sabotage' - malingering, rebelliousness, quota failure etc.

> etc. - was, in a sense, a disciplinary perversion of the nature-propitiation principle. (*ix*).

The theme of sacrifice, both in mythology and as a social practice, is foregrounded more in Soyinka's transformation than the Euripidean original, although Euripides employs the theme of sacrifice in most of his plays.[31] The sacrifice of Pentheus for the good of the whole community is developed through dialogue, mime and symbolic enactment by the Slave Leader.

Significant to the understanding of Soyinka's *Bacchae* in its social, political and religious contexts is the role of the Slave Leader. He is the leader of the Chorus of slaves who are threshing and flailing, indicating the season of harvest, the time when the ritual of sacrifice to welcome the new year is performed. The Slave Leader is the first to protest the killing of slaves, the first to honour and identify with the god, Dionysos. Having been told that the old man who looks after the King's dogs is to be sacrificed, the Slave Leader is agitated about his death:

> SLAVE LEADER: Flogged to death? In the name of some unspeakable rites?
>
> HERDSMAN: Someone must cleanse the new year of the rot of the old or the world will die. Have you ever known famine? Real famine?
>
> SLAVE LEADER: Why us? Why always us?
>
> HERDSMAN: Why not?
>
> SLAVE LEADER: Because the rites bring us nothing! Let those to whom the profits go bear the burden of the old year dying (4).

Soyinka's creation of this scene early in the drama sets the stage for the tension and

conflict between the oppressed and the oppressor, juxtaposed between the saviour and the sacrifice. The Slave Leader proclaims that the worst form of brutality is to sacrifice an unwilling slave from the already underprivileged class for the sake of maintaining the wealth of the aristocracy. After Pentheus' sacrificial death, the Slave Leader responds to the Old Slave who accuses the god of such heartless revenge:

> SLAVE LEADER: Who pities us? When the mine-prop falls and pulps
> Our bones with mud, who pities us? When harvest
> Fails, who goes without? And you, if you had
> Died at the feast of Eleusis, would Thebes
> Have remembered you with pity? (87).

His words invoke the memory of those who die in the South African mines, or in peaceful demonstrations, and of those who died in slave ships or on the plantations, sacrificed for the advancement and profit of the master race.[32] Similarly, British colonization of the African colonies introduced western education and culture at the painful sacrifice of West African's culture and language.

The Slave Leader refers to Pentheus' brutal rituals as "unspeakable rites" because they are no longer efficacious; they have become corrupt and polluted. In "The Exigencies of Adaptation: The Case of Soyinka's *Bacchae*," K. E. Senanu suggests: "Pentheus has established a tyranny which involves a perversion of religious rites into a cruel and meaningless sacrifice of slaves as scapegoats" (109).

Soyinka's description of the yearly ritual procession: "a liturgical drone - lead and refrain, a dull, thin, monotone .... black-robed priests intoning a liturgy, punctuated by hand-bells" (2, 5), offers a thinly veiled satire of Western religion more

generally reduced to mechanical and meaningless ritual. He contrasts this dull, useless ritual with the vibrant, meaningful dance of anticipated freedom initiated by the Slave Leader in cooperation with the Bacchantes and Slaves. The stage directions read:

> Music. It has the strange quality - the nearest familiar example is the theme-song of 'Zorba the Greek' - with its strange mixture of nostalgia, violence and death. The scene which follows needs the following quality: extracting the emotional colour and temperature of a European pop scene without degenerating into that tawdry commercial manipulation of teenage mindlessness. The lines are chanted not sung, to the musical accompaniment .... His [the SLAVE LEADER's] style is based on the lilt and energy of the black hot gospellers who themselves are often the first to become physically possessed (18).

The theme-song of 'Zorba the Greek' starts off with slow single beats which gradually increase in both intensity and speed.[33] The fully negroid Slave Leader who has experienced prolonged restraint and oppression knows how to freely express his emotions physically and spiritually.

The Slave Leader, breaks loose from the restraints of the other slaves and shouts "Welcome the new god! Thrice welcome the new order!" and with his hands cupped to his mouth, yodels "Evohe-e-e-e, Evoh-e-e-e!" (7). Soyinka duplicates the sound in the Greek word for the Bacchic cry mentioned in Euripides' original (1034).[34] Soyinka specifically recommends that the Slave Leader be fully negroid because of the 'hollering' style of his solo in the play. His vocal resonance will be extremely effective on stage, particularly as it intermingles with the sound/music of Dionysos. According to the stage directions, the Slave Leader's sound is "taken up by echoes from the hills. It roves round and round and envelops the scene .... the sound

continues, transformed beyond the plain echo to an eerie response from vast distances" (7). These are the sounds that build up and swell, culminating in the music of the black hot gospellers, the African-Americans whose music became a source of comfort and hope during their years of slavery and oppression. The Slave Leader sees that same hope for freedom and liberation as revealed in his words to the other slaves who are frightened because they danced with Dionysos and the Vestals:

> SLAVE LEADER: You hesitant fools! Don't you understand?
> Don't you *know*? We are no longer alone -
> Slaves, helots, the near and distant dispossessed!
> This master race, this much vaunted dragon spawn
> Have met their match. Nature has joined forces with us.
> Let them reckon now, not with mere men, not with
> The scapegoat bogey of a slave uprising
> But with a new remorseless order, forces
> Unpredictable as molten fire in mountain wombs.
> To doubt, to hesitate is to prove undeserving (7-8).

The Slave Leader assures all the slaves and helots both near and far that their redemption is at hand. It is the dawning of a new day when the suppressed will be freed. By saying that the master race have met their match because nature has joined forces with the servile race, Soyinka would seem by extension to be alluding to all the European colonialists who considered themselves to be the master race. The Slave Leader's words are like a call to arms for the ex-colonized to join forces and attack eurocentred ideologies and discrimination of every kind. Furthermore, Soyinka, by being commissioned to write a play, takes the opportunity to expose the tyranny of slavery and colonization and authenticate Africa's pre-colonial history to a

predominantly British audience.

In his transformation of the *Bacchae*, Soyinka considers Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war, to be the older brother of Dionysos. Therefore, the Slave Leader can identify with Dionysos because his counter-part, Ogun, is a native of his land. Soyinka traces Dionysian worship back to Ogun, as he asserts in his Introduction: "The dionysiac impulse was not new. Dionysianism, essentially agrarian in origin, was the peasant's natural evocation of, and self-immersion in, the mysterious and forceful in Nature" (*vi*). If the Dionysiac was already present in Ogun, suggesting that Ogun is older chronologically than Dionysos, then the African religions, myths and history are older than those of the Greeks and the western world. The negroid Slave Leader, who speaks like one of Ogun's priests, has "long been a spokesman for the god" (15); he once knew the freedom to worship Ogun (3). Just like Soyinka, the Slave Leader emphasizes that there was a time when he and his ancestors were not enslaved, physically and mentally, a time before European slavery, colonization and the white master race brought their new state religion. In the Greek myth, Cadmus, at the command of the Delphic oracle, is said to have founded Thebes and taken over the land; likewise, at the command of Her Majesty and the whole European imperialistic system, the British took up residence in Nigeria and other colonies, defiled their culture and distorted their history.

Soyinka adds another dimension to Euripides' theme of liberation; by freeing the Slaves to worship in the ritual dance with the Bacchantes, he demonstrates the

intersection between postcolonialism and feminism. Both theories denounce the patriarchal, imperialistic and hierarchical systems that marginalize along gender and racial lines. Hélène Cixous, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," discusses phallocentric and eurocentric ideologies in the context of slavery and European domination of Africa.[35] Soyinka capitalizes on the strengths of both female and male impulses as he brings them together in a highly ritualized dance.

Many women, like Soyinka's mother and aunt, play significant roles in the religious and socio-economic life of Nigeria. In "Mother's Day: A Note on Euripides' *Bacchae*," J. Gould makes reference to the Efe/Gelede festival of the Yorubas of Western Nigeria held in the spring to honour mothers as an indication of the authority and power of Nigerian women (32).[36] Dionysos' opening speech offers a specific invitation to both men and women to accept him (1). Soyinka denounces any form of discrimination in the play which is a reflection of his own personal attitude, expressed in "*World Authors*: "I have one abiding religion - human liberty. It works in me as a raging, insurgent force against the inexplicable propensity of human beings towards the enslavement of others" (1356). Soyinka is fighting the liberation battle on both fronts: against the European imperialists and against the Africans who continue to make war with each other.

Soyinka makes another significant change to Euripides' *Bacchae*, which is evident in the addition of a subtitle, "A Communion Rite." The Euripidean drama, which exposes the tyranny of a mortal who dares to deny and reject a god, is moved

into the realm of communal ritual. In his Introduction, Soyinka states why he changes Euripides' ending and supports his reasons for the change throughout the drama. He expresses dissatisfaction at the "petering off of ecstasy into a suggestion of a prelude to another play" (*x*). He is convinced that the *Bacchae* is not an episode in a historical series, and this is not merely because Euripides did not live to write the next instalment; it is because the drama is "too powerful a play of forces in the human condition and too rounded a rite for the communal psyche:"

> I have therefore sought a new resolution in the symbolic extension of ritual powers, but only such as we have already encountered with the Bacchantes on the mountain-side. The disruptive challenges to Nature that have been let loose in the action demand no less ... I see *The Bacchae*, finally, as a prodigious, barbaric banquet, an insightful manifestation of the universal need of man to match himself against nature (*x*).

By transforming Euripides' play into a Nature feast, a barbaric banquet and a communion rite of liberation, Soyinka equates the tragedy with the Yoruba rituals on which the social and cultural stability depended before the intrusion of European slavery and colonization. He explains his idea of ritual in his interview with Gates:

> The principle of it [ritual] is that a person takes on himself the entire burdens of society; very often it takes the symbolic form of a canoe-shaped object which is then taken to the river or to the sea and floated away .... In certain Yoruba areas the carrier takes the object and dives into the water and disappears for quite a while; he goes down there to bury the object right in the sea bed...He [Eyo Adimu, a masquerade] carries the evils of the year in his person: all the diseases, the unhappiness, the evil, all the curses which have hung around society. He takes this away, disappears into a grove or bushes somewhere and all the collective evils of society are taken in his own person and are thrown away (40).

Notice that the carrier takes all the collective evils of the whole society symbolically and psychologically in his person. The carrier or scapegoat always operates on behalf of the whole community. In "Tiger on Stage: Wole Soyinka and Nigerian Theatre," Femi Osofisan argues that Soyinka's thematic concern in his plays rests in his belief that society seasonally accumulates a burden of guilt that can only be purged through the shedding of blood:

> For Soyinka this process equates to nothing less than a tragic cycle - firstly, in the notion of prerequisite destruction and violence before the advent of rain and harvest, and secondly, because this harvest, in order to be at its most fecund, must first feed on a ritual victim, taken from the society's strongest stock. That scapegoat, especially in societies where the burden is hereditary, continuously fascinates Soyinka, becoming for him the most palpable incarnation of our tragic fate ... (163).

Soyinka superimposes his own theory of tragic fate, different from that of Aristotle's, on to the action. The tragedy here is not merely an "imitation of actions arousing fear and pity" nor is it the change in the tragic hero's misfortune from happiness to misery caused by "some error on his part" (X111). On the contrary, the cathartic experience in Soyinka's dramatic theory is worked out through the re-enactment of Ogun's rite of passage as he makes the transition through the primordial jungle where the tragic transformation takes place, resulting in purgation and purification, rejuvenation and renewal for the individual and the community; *hamartia* and/or the tragic flaw are not essential. Agave sacrifices her son and in the recognition scene when Cadmus asks "Why us?" she responds "Why not?" Agave accepts her role as priestess of the hunt

and drinks from the wine that spurts out of Pentheus' severed head (97).

Ogun and his rites of passage form the framework of Soyinka's adaptation. In *Myth*, Soyinka asserts that "Ogun, for his part, is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues" (141). Soyinka immediately acknowledges the superiority of Ogun as one who embodies the virtues of a combination of all the Greek gods, including Prometheus the bringer of light. He reinterprets Friedrich Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) by adding a third dimension to Nietzsche's Apollinian/Dionysian concept of the origin of Greek tragedy.[37] Soyinka, in referring to Ogun's battle through the primordial gulf, in *Myth*, declares that Ogun is the first actor for he led others, "the first suffering deity, first creative energy, the first challenger, and conqueror of transition ... the first actor in that battle, and Yoruba tragic drama is the re-enactment of the cosmic conflict" (145, 150).

In *Myth*, Soyinka insists on the differences between the traditional African and the European approach to drama:

> It is representative of the essential differences between two world-views, a difference between one culture whose very artifacts are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed by period dialectics. So, to begin with, we must jettison that fashionable distinction which tends to encapsulate Western drama as a form of esoteric enterprise spied upon by fee-paying strangers, as contrasted with a communal evolution of the dramatic mode of expression, this latter being the African (38).

African drama has evolved from the traditional rituals of masks and masquerades,

which involved the whole community, to the modern drama, influenced by colonization, that incorporates western dramatic techniques. Soyinka is interested in returning to the roots of African drama which emphasizes "a symbolic struggle with chthonic presences, the goal of the conflict being a harmonious resolution for plentitude and the well-being of the community" (38).

Throughout his version of the *Bacchae*, Soyinka emphasizes the theme of commonality. In the beginning of the drama, the male slaves are separated both from Agave and the women in the mountains on the one hand and on the other hand from the female Bacchantes on stage. Gradually at first, the Bacchantes and the slaves intermingle in the ritual dance and at the end all three groups participate in the new wine festival as it pours from Pentheus' head. This innovative ritual, as Soyinka describes it in the Introduction is "both social therapy and reaffirmation of group solidarity ..." (*xi*). Soyinka dramatizes the idea of communion and liberation in the opening scene when a Herdsman carrying a jar filled with new wine runs across the stage to the threshers. The slaves come together and listen as the jug is passed around for each one to drink (2,3); the Slave Leader gets a first taste of freedom (3). He sees some possibility for total freedom in Dionysos and he identifies with the Bacchantes who are crying out for Bromius. The "deep audible breaths" accompanied by "spasmodic, scenting movements" are punctuated by sudden "passionate screams" by both the Bacchantes and the Slave Leader which culminates in a dance of release. The stage directions read:

> From orgasmic moans the surrogate climax is achieved. A scream finds its electric response in others and a rush begins for the person of the preacher. Handfuls of his clothes are torn, his person is endangered but he never 'loses his cool'. As his chant approaches climax a sudden human wave engulfs him and he is completely submerged under screaming, 'possessed' lungs and bodies. As with such scenes there is always something of an overall ugliness about the manifested emotion. But the radiant isolated votive or two or even the few faces of intensely energised spiritual rapture that stands out in the melée indicate something of the awesome depths of this self-release (18-19).

Soyinka suggests that the Slave Leader "never loses his cool" implying that he is in control and participating in a rite natural to his existence. The Slave Leader goes through this symbolic ritual of tearing apart the willing scapegoat in order to sacrifice for the good of the whole community as exemplified in the dance which does not discriminate against females or slaves. The dance enacts the ritual of death and rebirth which is so relevant to the Nature cults and deities and which is physically carried out by the tearing of Pentheus' flesh; the replacement of blood with wine during the final celebration scene brings the drama full circle from the communion of the wine in the Herdsman's jug at the beginning.

It is important to note that while the Slave Leader and the Bacchantes come together to symbolically perform a stylized mime of the hunt, their counterpart on the mountains, possessed by the god, perform the actual violent tearing apart of Pentheus' flesh, indicating the dual nature of Dionysos and the creative/destructive nature of Ogun. In *Myth*, Soyinka discusses the similarities between theatre and ritual and suggests that the actor in ritual drama

> prepares mentally and physically for his disintegration and re-assembly within the universal womb of origin, experiences the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and being. Such an actor in the role of the protagonist becomes the unresisting mouthpiece of the god, uttering sounds which he barely comprehends but which are reflections of the awesome glimpse of that transitional gulf ... (30).

During the symbolic *sparagmos*, the Slave Leader, possessed by the god, takes on the qualities and attributes of the god and grants freedom and release to his worshippers.

Soyinka superimposes the tragic character in African ritual drama on the western concept of the tragic hero. The ancient Greek actor masked himself to portray the god and in ancient Yoruba drama, according to Soyinka, the actor is possessed by Ogun in order to re-enact the god's tragic disintegration and re-assembly of his night of transition through the gulf to reunite the gods with men. In his essay, *The Development of African Drama*, Michael Etherton suggests that Soyinka's reference to the connection between the mock struggle of the head priest and his acolytes for Ogun's sacrificial dog which is literally torn limb from limb and the dismemberment of Zagreus is unclear because it was Pentheus, not Dionysos, who was dismembered in the play (134). Etherton is obviously unaware of the forms of ritual drama in which Ogun possesses the sacrificial animal and so goes through the process of disintegration and re-assembly during which the earth is renewed and the community cleansed and restored. This transformation, which occurs gradually during the scene that Dionysos holds up his hand as a mirror for Pentheus to see his beast-like reflection, culminates in the scene during which Dionysos leads him out to the mountains reminding him of

"those gods, who yearly must be rent to spring anew" (78). While preparing Pentheus for sacrifice, Dionysos/Ogun possesses Pentheus, transforming him into the sacrificial beast, unrecognized even by his own mother.[38] To reiterate the significance of the sacrificial animal, Soyinka has both the Officer and Agave describe the tearing apart of Pentheus.

Elizabeth Hale Winkler, in "Three Recent Versions of The *Bacchae*," suggests that Soyinka makes the theme of revolt against authoritarianism and colonial oppression more central than the two feminist adaptations, *Rites* (1969) by Maureen Duffy and *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986) by Caryl Churchill and David Lan. Winkler compares Dionysiac possession with political rebellion:

> Group ritual leads people into a phase of altered consciousness where they feel the power of a supernatural force and are encouraged in their behaviour through the participation of others. Choral dance, music, traditional religious rites, or mass political rallies can all bring on states of mind in which the individual is beside him/herself, and malleable in ways he or she would not normally be. Mass possession may lead to mass psychosis or even to acts of collective violence which no one individual would have perpetrated alone (218).[39]

Winkler links mass psychosis with rituals and political rallies as they relate to the effects of communal actions. By transforming Euripides' original into a communal ritual, Soyinka combines elements of the religious and political. Soyinka is clear in his Introduction about the subversive nature of Euripides' message - Dionysos' followers "could become truly *entheos*; his worship released the pent-up frustrated energy of all the downtrodden" (*vii*); he sees the *Bacchae* in its totality as "a celebration of life,

bloody and tumultuous, an extravagant rite of the human and social psyche .... a manic religious inspiration suddenly let loose" (x).[40] The Theban women are possessed by the god and perform the actual physical tearing apart of Pentheus in the manner of Ogun's priests and acolytes; the Slave Leader, Slaves and Bacchantes in the city perform the symbolic ritual act but are brought together to seek release from the god instead of marshalling a slave uprising that would only lead to death for the slaves. As one of the Slaves reminds the Slave Leader when he tries to protest and rebel, "you'll get us killed. We'll be wiped out to a man" (6).

In *The New York Review of Books* (February 1976) it is suggested that "Soyinka's *Bacchae* is ... a third-world revolutionary communion rite, in which Dionysos speaks with the voice of Frantz Fanon" (12). The Slave Leader seems to possess more aggressive anti-colonial characteristics than Dionysos; however, the theme of social and political liberation through ritual has been questioned by critics such as Derek Wright who, in *Wole Soyinka Revisited*, argues:

> Psychic liberation from a repressive rationality through religious ecstasy is not the same as revolution, and whatever the historical justification for Soyinka's concept of Dionysos as a liberative force for the oppressed masses, it is as priest of hallucinated, anarchic excitement, not as political insurrectionary, that he impresses in this adaptation (64).

There is a potential for revolutionary action in religious and political activities. Soyinka discusses his own definition of the revolutionary qualities of drama in *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka*:

> By making the audience or a member of the audience go through this process, a reawakening has begun in the individual which in turn affects his attitude to the external social realities ... I believe the creative process is the most energizing. And that is why it is so intimately related to the process of revolution within society (126).

Soyinka dramatizes how the revolutionary spirit can be initiated mentally and then reinforced through the development of a communal spirit. In *Myth*, he says:

> Ogun for his part becomes not merely the god of war but the god of revolution in the most contemporary context - and this is not merely in Africa, but in the Americas to where his worship has spread. As the Roman Catholic props of the Batista regime in Cuba discovered when it was too late, they should have worried less about Karl Marx than about Ogun, the re-discovered deity of revolution (54n).

Chidi Amuta suggests that "drama is addressed to a group mind; [it] is a collaborative art" (156) and for this reason it can stir up a revolutionary spirit within religious and political groups. Soyinka adequately dramatizes the oppression and subsequent communal revolt against Pentheus. There is a tendency that this can have negative implications and be abused by bigoted or corrupted political/religious leaders; Soyinka more than hints at this possibility in the drama which he redirects into the more positive goal of renewal for the individual and community.[41]

Soyinka justifies the slaves' revolt and Pentheus as a suitable sacrifice by emphasizing Pentheus' tyrannical reign. Even before he appears on stage, the audience is aware of his brutality. The skeletal figures of crucified slaves, the agitation, tension and possible insurrection suggest the slaves have been oppressed and dehumanized for a long time, having at least one of them killed as a yearly sacrifice, and whenever

there is a slave uprising Pentheus seizes the opportunity for mass murder. When his aged priest, Tiresias, pleads with him to accept Dionysos, Pentheus orders his attendants to demolish his home and temple (35). Knowing it is an abomination, the Old Slave hesitantly asks Pentheus if he really wants to destroy the holy man's hut and Pentheus replies with "a slap that knocks him flat" (36). As in the similar situation where Rotimi could not allow Oedipus to hit an elder, old enough to be his father, here Soyinka deliberately has Pentheus violate the ethical codes and mores of African culture by creating a character who does not respect anyone, not even his own grandfather. The Slaves and others (Various) express their disgust:

> VARIOUS: We are strangers but we know the meaning of madness
> To hit an old servant
> With frost on his head
> .....
> Age is holy
> To hit an old man
> Or demolish the roof of a sage? (37).

The words spoken by the Slaves and others in response to Pentheus' brutality suggest Soyinka's awareness that some African leaders have become like Pentheus in their rejection of African traditions and in the way they treat their own people.

Pentheus' initial entrance on stage, according to the stage directions, is "straight, militaristic in bearing and speech. His attendants have to run to keep up with him. Once on stage he strides angrily up and down" (26). Like the modern day dictators, Pentheus speaks in militaristic terms and says: "I shall have order! Let the city know at once / Pentheus is here to give back order and sanity" (27). The first

minute of his speech, he utters the word "order" five times. He wants Dionysos and the women "hunted down. Chained and caged behind bars of iron" (27). He uses political terms such as "campaigning to secure our national frontiers;" "state policies;" "stamp of approval from the head of state;" "break the last barriers of restraint." He wants to call in "heavy-armoured infantry;" troops of the cavalry" and order "a state of emergency." In his interrogation of Dionysos, the latter says:

> DIONYSOS: Will you reduce it all to a court
> Of enquiry? A fact-finding commission such as
> One might set up to decide the cause
> Of a revolt in your salt-mines, or a slave uprising?
> These matters are beyond the routine machinery of state (41).

Although Soyinka makes Dionysos' words relevant to the context of the play, he also mirrors the contemporary Nigerian situation, one to which he himself was subject between 1965 and 1969; he was tried in a court of enquiry, released, and later, hunted, chained and locked up behind bars.[42]

Soyinka transforms the typical blood-thirsty politician into a ready and prepared sacrifice. Unlike Euripides, who takes Pentheus off stage to dress him up as a Bacchante, Soyinka makes the transition from King to scapegoat in the presence of the community on stage and the audience. Dionysos, like a stage director, takes Pentheus through the rehearsal for the ritual performance. Having agreed to act the part, Dionysos dresses him in what he thinks is his royal armour but in reality it is a female Bacchic costume. Although the dramatization of this scene is comical, it is also pathetic and has relevance to ritual performances. The transformed, dressed-up

Pentheus resembles the *Egungun*, who appears at the beginning of the new yam season, completely covered in variegated-coloured cloths, concealing his identity, to honour the ancestors. The *Egungun* embodies the ancestral spirits during the masked ritual performances in Nigeria. In *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, J. Omosade Awolalu asserts: "[W]henever there are terrible calamities in a town or village, and there is the need to offer a propitiatory sacrifice, it is the usual practice for an *Egungun* to convey such prescribed sacrifice to the appropriate place in the middle of the night" (66).[43]

To demonstrate the symbolic extension of those ritual powers, Soyinka draws upon Yoruba metaphysics and incorporates into it aspects of Greek and western cultures. For example, in the procession scene, Soyinka dramatizes a combination of ritual forms from various cultures: the western liturgical procession of priests in black robes, the white-robed Roman vestal virgins and Tiresias carrying a bunch of twigs, symbolizing the Old Year in the African carrier rites. Pentheus is to be not just a carrier, but a scapegoat; the resolution is to be immediate and potent. Dionysos reminds him as he goes to be sacrificed:

> DIONYSOS: Yes, you alone
> Make sacrifices for your people, you alone.
> The role belongs to a king. Like those gods, who yearly
> Must be rent to spring anew, that also
> Is the fate of heroes (78).

In the both ancient Greek and Yoruba creation myths, killing was necessary for the rejuvenation of the earth.

Soyinka's dramatization of two wedding scenes in masks and mime makes a vital connection between ancient Greek and western rites in preparation for the display of a more significant African ritual, Pentheus' vicarious sacrifice. As Uranus and Ge and Cronus and Rhea form a sacred union in Greek mythology, so are marriages among the gods and Ogun and his wife relevant in Yoruba mythology. While marriage and the children that ensue from it establish the continuity of the population, sacrificial rites ensure the survival of the community as a whole. According to Soyinka's Introduction, through such rituals, "man re-affirms his indebtedness to earth, dedicates himself to the demands of continuity and invokes the energies of productivity" (*xi*).

The first wedding scene portrays the ceremony of Hippoclides, who under the influence of wine, demonstrates the freedom and liberty of Dionysiac worship.[44] The bridegroom, Hippoclides transforms himself by ripping apart his mask and formal wedding attire to reveal his Dionysian costume, the fawn-skin. He dances vigorously and ends up on the bridal table up side down to the horror and fury of the bride's father. Earlier, the beautifully veiled bride had removed her veil to reveal a "picture of horrendous, irredeemable ugliness" (67). There is a reversal in the horror; first the groom and bestman express their horror at the bride's revealed ugliness and later the bridal party demonstrate their horror at the groom's association with the Dionysian ecstatic cult. Soyinka displays both the horror and beauty inherent in nature in the bust of Aphrodite whose face peels off to expose the mocking face of Dionysos who assumes pre-existence and association with the fertility goddess.[45]

Soyinka utilizes his knowledge of western religion and undermines it to lend authority to the pre-colonial African religions in the second wedding scene. This scene is a sharp contrast to the conservative, aristocratic, sedate (except for the grooms's dance) ceremony of the previous scene; here there is music, revellers and snatches of drunken singing. Visually, the western traditional Christ-figure is seated and his halo is replaced by "an ambiguous thorn-ivy-crown of Dionysos" (68). It depicts a wedding celebration in true African style but it is a combination of two episodes in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ which are symbolically relevant to Soyinka's re-interpretation of the *Bacchae*. The first is Mary's anointing of Christ's feet with expensive perfume during the Jewish feast of the Passover, which was held in commemoration of, according to the Old Testament, the offering of the sacrificial lamb prior to the exodus of the Jews into freedom from slavery in Egypt (Genesis 12; cf. Leviticus 22). In St. Mark's account of Christ's anointing, when the guests complained about Mary's waste of money, Christ replies that she has anointed his body "before hand for burial" (14:8).[46] Soyinka combines the aspects of slavery and freedom with a ritual practice anticipating the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross for the salvation of all mankind. The dramatization of this scene is symbolic as Mary prepares Christ to be a sacrifice through his death and in anticipation of his resurrection to bring newness of life. However for Soyinka, it is not Christ but the past and future of Dionysos/Ogun.

To make his imagery more effective Soyinka combines the demonstration of the preparation of the sacrificial lamb with the first recorded miracle of Christ in

which he turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana (St. John 2:2-11).[47] Soyinka has the Christ figure drink first from the cup with the water turned into wine and passes it to the character representing his mother who had alerted him to the lack of wine; she then passes it to Mary in the manner of the communion rite instituted after the celebrated last supper with Jesus and his disciples. As this scene fades slowly, Dionysos is holding the cup of wine and passing it on to Pentheus (69). Soyinka succeeds in transferring the western rite, which symbolizes Christ's broken body and shed blood as a sacrifice, back to the earlier god, Dionysos, and earlier still to the African god, Ogun. Emerging from the tableaux, Dionysos warns Pentheus not to take shadows too seriously and to "continue to reject illusion" (69). It is as shadows, illusions and distortions that Soyinka is defining eurocentric ideologies as he continues to insist that the Dionysian cult, like Christianity, has non-European roots:

> I see Christianity merely as another expression of nature religion. I cannot accept, I do not regard the principle of sacrifice as belonging to the European world. I completely reject the idea that the notion of the scapegoat is a Christian idea. This scapegoat idea is very much rooted in African religion (Gates, 36).

In interrogating eurocentric views of the primacy of western religion, Soyinka rejects Christianity's doctrine of the pre-existence of the incarnate Christ and compares him in his humanity with Dionysos or Ogun who took on mortal forms.[48]

Opposing the hierarchical, linear nature of western philosophical tradition and culture, Soyinka explains in *Myth* that "the world of the unborn, in the Yoruba worldview, is evidently older than the world of the living as the world of the living is

older than the ancestor-world" (10); the present life contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn" (144). There is a connecting passage linking these three areas of existence and Soyinka describes birth and death as acts of *hubris*. The western definition of *hubris* in tragic drama is here re-defined by Soyinka in Yoruba terms. It takes on more of a double meaning from the original Greek word signifying violence - *hubris* becomes a violent tearing apart from the womb at birth and at death a violent breaking into the realm of the dead - both a re-enactment of Ogun's passage through the primordial gulf and his tearing apart to effect renewal.[49] The contemporary usage of *hubris* as pride or an overreaching attitude can also apply to Pentheus' character but Soyinka focuses on Pentheus as a ritual sacrifice.

In his transformation of Euripides' *Bacchae*, Soyinka turns the western rite into an African communal ritual, a celebration of renewal and liberation in its religious, social and political contexts. In "Between Self and System," Soyinka asserts:

> [A] celebration of Dionysos becomes, truthfully, a celebration of theatre: theatre as community, as idiom of liberation and renewal .... Ritual equates the divine (superhuman) dimension with the communal will, fusing the social with the spiritual. The social liberation strands in the play are not therefore arbitrary but intrinsic (68-69; 71).

From the opening scene, Soyinka's *Bacchae* is a demonstration of liberation and the anticipation of it. Soyinka transforms Pentheus' "unspeakable rites" into a new "communion rite" for the prosperity and benefit of all. The transformation from slavery and bondage to freedom and release is celebrated by all in the communal

ritual. As Tiresias says, Dionysos "has broken the barrier of age, the barrier of sex or slave and master" (26). Tiresias discovers that his old traditional carrier rite is inefficacious and that "life-sustaining earth / Demands ... a little more ... / Than token offering for her own needful renewal" (96). In "Melting the Barriers of the Mind: *The Bacchae of Euripides* as a Liberation Rite," Jane Wilkinson suggests:

> No longer separated from his people, Pentheus has become the centre of their communion, the symbol of their victory over the old regime and of their power to transform what remains into a new, more human order, building a future of plenitude, well-being and renewal in which all can share (81).

The communal rite takes on spiritual, social and political dimensions as it also releases the community from the political tyranny of Pentheus. Like the Slaves, Soyinka, a representative of the colonized, sees the dawning of a new day when the African's history will be validated and when the old political regime will be replaced by a new and more human order.

Soyinka's use of language is relevant to his postcolonial discourse. In "Conversations," he takes up the issue of Nigeria's multiplicity of languages and explains that he writes in English in order to make his work accessible to Nigerians (27). He also discusses the response to his proposition for the utilization of Kiswahili at the UNESCO Conference on the Use of Culture in the Decolonization Process:

> I remember the shadow foreign minister who was there from FRELIMO said: "I agree with you in principle ... We have taken the Portuguese language, we turned it inside out, we made it an instrument against the very colonial masters, the original owners, in such a way that they won't even feel that it belongs to them." So there is language as

> metalanguage, there is a political use of language, there is the creative interior of languages which can be made to bear the burden even of a strenuous counter-culture (31).

It is hard to take Soyinka's proposition of having Kiswahili as a common African language seriously, even though he says it would strengthen the bond between Africans and provide a united front against eurocentricism. Even if Africans could and did all learn Kishwahili, itself an unlikely proposition; they would not be able to communicate with the outside world. As the minister rightly says, the colonial language itself as an instrument against the colonizers is far more effective. Soyinka is well educated in the English language and the culture that produced it so he is able to manipulate it to suit his own purpose. For example, in *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka extracts parts of the morphological units to convey meanings different from the original words by having the Old Man say:

> You splint in the arrow of ignorance, the dog in dogma, tick of a heretic, the tick of politics, the mock of democracy, the mar of marxism, a tic of the fanatic, the boo in buddhism, the ham in Mohammed, the dash in the criss-cross of Christ, a dot on the i of ego, an ass in the Mass, the ash in ashram, a boot in kibbutz, the pee in priesthood...you HOLE IN THE ZERO OF NOTHING! (76).

By changing the meanings in the words, Soyinka takes the liberty to reconstruct, exploit and do violence to the language of the colonizer.

In his version of the *Bacchae*, Soyinka integrates the ancient art of story telling which is a vital part of the African community because it brings the people together. The stories function as a tool for educating the young and reminding the old of their

history. The story teller is an actor in his own right as he uses his voice and actions to dramatize the events as he narrates them. Soyinka uses this technique for the Officer's report of Pentheus' death. In the form of the oral traditions, half-way through his report, the Officer incorporates an appropriate African proverb:

> OFFICER: You know that saying - a man the people seek
> To roast, rubs himself in oil, crouches beside an open fire
> Moaning, I have a chill: the rest is soon told (85).

Soyinka has him say, "you know that saying," knowing full well that a majority of his immediate audience would not know the saying; however in his translation of the proverb from its original, Soyinka presents it in such a way that the meaning can be understood.

In *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*, Soyinka not only transforms but re-interprets the mythological, religious, political, cultural and linguistic contexts of the original. Imposing Yoruba myths, rituals and customs on the hither to inviolate context of western cultural history, Soyinka celebrates the pre-colonial history and metaphysics of Africans. He insists on depicting highly organized and complex African concepts of life that existed prior to European domination in order to authenticate them. Soyinka considers his commitment to recovering and restoring Africa's history that has been distorted and denied by Europeans through drama as a means of moving forward in the decolonization process. He exposes the reality of slavery and British colonization and the enslavement of others in their varying forms to convey their dehumanizing and destructive consequences.

By changing the epilogue of Euripides' original from Dionysos' pronouncement of retribution and vengeance to communion and celebration, Soyinka demonstrates the possibility of breaking the continuing cycle of violence caused by revenge among the Nigerian tribes, partly fuelled by European intervention. Soyinka's version proposes resistance to oppression and liberation for all those enslaved, through a united communal action without discriminating against gender, race or language. In keeping with Soyinka's suggestion that drama/theatre is the most revolutionary art form, Soyinka has transformed Euripides' *Bacchae* into a powerful attack against oppression and a manifesto for communal liberation. Soyinka operates within the postcolonial agenda by radically changing western dramatic techniques and implementing his own concept of tragedy, predominantly based on certain Yoruba aesthetics.

Notes

1. In an interview recorded at Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris on March 19, 1990. "Conversations with Wole Soyinka," trans. Michael Fabre, eds. Michael Fabre and Jean-Pierre Durix, *Commonwealth* 15.2 (Spring 1993): 11.

2. With the exception of Dionysos, I have used the Latinized forms of the Greek names and places in this study in order to be consistent with Soyinka's text.

3. In an interview with John A. Stotesbury at the Second Stockholm Conference for African Writers, April 1986, *Kunapipi* IX.1 (1987): 59-64.

4. Reported by Adewale Maja-Pearce in "Unleashing the Furies," *Index on Censorship* (15 March 1996): 2, Online, Internet, 3 May 1996.

5. The only other extant Greek play is Aristophanes' *Frogs*, a satiric comedy, in which Dionysos is a major character and Euripides is characterized as a tragedian.

6. Wole Soyinka, *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka*, ed. Karen Morell (Seattle: U of Washington, 1975) 102.

7. Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1968).

8. Soyinka, "Conversations." The meaning of his name may explain Soyinka's great interest in Yoruba metaphysics, especially with Ogun, who is also the god of creativity and artists.

9. Cited in James Gibbs, "Tear the Painted Masks. Join the Poison Stains: A Preliminary Study of Wole Soyinka's Writings for the Nigerian Press," *Research in African Literatures* 14.1 (February 1983) 20.

10. Recorded in the chronology by Derek Wright, *Wole Soyinka Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1993) *xiv*.

11. Biographical information taken from Mark Hawkins-Dady, ed. *Playwrights: International Dictionary of Theatre*, 2 vols. (Detroit, London, Washington DC: St James P, 1994) 910-913, and Stephan Larsen, *A Writer and His Gods: A Study of the Importance of Yoruba Myths and Religious Ideas to the Writing of Wole Soyinka* (Minab/Gotab: U of Stockholm, 1983) 15-20.

12. Soyinka, "Conversations" 33-34. Soyinka wrote an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*, a political satire, entitled *Opera Wonyosi* (performed in 1977).

13. Wole Soyinka, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974). All subsequent references will be to this text. An enormous variety of critical essays on Wole Soyinka and his writings exist, and to refer to such an exhaustive list is beyond the scope of this work; however, the following are either devoted or related to the text under consideration: Donald E. Herdeck, ed. *Three Dynamite Authors* (Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, 1995); Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean Drama* (New York & Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995); Adewale Maja-Pearce, ed. *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994); Robert Baker-White, "The Politics of Ritual in Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides*," *Comparative Drama* 27.3 (Fall 1993); Derek Wright, *Wole Soyinka Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1993); James Booth, "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka," *Ariel* 23.1 (January 1992); Thomas R. Whitaker, "Wole Soyinka" in *Post-Colonial English Drama*, ed. Bruce King (New York: St. Martins, 1992); Derek Wright, "Ritual and Revolution: Soyinka's Dramatic Theory," *Ariel* 23.1 (January 1992); Jane Wilkinson, "Melting the Barriers of Mind: *The Bacchae of Euripides* as a Liberation Rite," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 13.2 (Spring 1991); P. J. Conradie, "Syncretism in Wole Soyinka's Play '*The Bacchae of Euripides*,'" *South African Theatre Journal* 4.1 (May 1990); Eldred Durosimi Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, 3rd ed. (London: James Currey, 1988); Obi Maduakor, *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to his Writing* (New York & London: Garland, 1987); Danielle Bonneau, "Africa and Ancient Greece: Euripides, Soyinka and Their Bacchants," *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, ed. Albert S. Gérard (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986); James Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* (New York: Grove, 1986); Ketu H. Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice* (New York: Greenwood, 1986); Wiveca Sotto, *The Rounded Rite: A Study of Wole Soyinka's Play The Bacchae of Euripides* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1985); Norma Bishop, "A Nigerian Version of a Greek Classic: Soyinka's Transformation of *The Bacchae*," *Research in African Literatures* 14.1 (February 1983); Stephen Larson, *A Writer and His Gods: A Study of the Importance of Yoruba Myths and Religious Ideas to the Writing of Wole Soyinka* (Minab/Gotab: U of Stockholm, 1983); 'Ropo Sekoni, "Metaphor as Basis of Form in Soyinka's Drama," *Research in African Literatures* 14.1 (February 1983); Femi Osofisan, "Ritual and the Revolutionary Ethos," *Okike* 22 (September 1982); Michael Etherton, "The Art Theatre: Soyinka's Protest Plays" in *The Development of African Drama* (New York: Africana, 1982); Adebayo Williams, "The Mythic Imagination and Social Theories: Soyinka and Euripides as Political Thinkers," *Okike* 18 (June 1981); E. J. Asgill, "African Adaptation of Greek Tragedies," *African Literature Today* 11 (1980); André Lefevere, "Translation: Changing the Code: Soyinka's Ironic Aetiology," *The Languages of Theatre*, ed. Ortrun Zuber (Oxford: Pergamon, 1980); Gerald Moore, *Twelve African Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980); K. E. Senanu, "The Exigencies of Adaptation: The Case of Soyinka's *Bacchae*," *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, ed. James Gibbs (Washington DC: Three Continents, 1980); Derek Wright, "The Ritual Context of Two Plays by Wole Soyinka," *Theatre Research International* 12.1 (Spring 1987); Femi Osofisan, "Tiger on Stage: Wole Soyinka and Nigerian Theatre" in *Theatre in Africa*. ed. Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (Ibadan: UP, 1978); Robert Plant Armstrong, "Tragedy - Greek and Yoruba: A Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Research in African Literatures* 7.1 (1976); Karen L. Morell, ed. *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka* (Austin: U of Texas, 1975); Martin Esslin, "Two Nigerian Playwrights: Wole Soyinka; J. P. Clark," *Introduction to African Literature*, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longmans, 1967). Reviews of the London National Theatre

production of *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* - Irving Wardle, "Mangled Re-write of The *Bacchae*," *The Times* (London), 3 August 1973; Harold Hobson, "Agony and Ecstasy," *The Sunday Times* (London) 5 August 1973; Albert Hunt, "Amateurs in Horror," *New Society* (London) 9 August 1973; W. Stephen Gilbert, "Directors Bearing Gifts," *Play and Players* (London) September 1973; John Lahr, *Plays and Players* (London) October 1973.

14. Some critics have suggested that the women's violent attack on the villages was not associated with the Dionysiac cult. Euripides may have included such an incident to reinforce the destructive nature of Dionysus and portray the difference between the behaviour of the true worshippers and that of the Theban women who are forced to acknowledge the god.

15. See Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (New York & London: Longman, 1985) 68.

16. *The Homeric Hymns*, trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1976) 1, 72.

17. Euripides, *Bacchae*, Trans. Geoffrey S. Kirk (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970). Unless otherwise stated, all references will be to this text. The Greek text consulted, Euripides, *Bacchae*, ed. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1953).

18. Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 217-218.

19. According to Greek myth, Persephone was carried to the underworld but is release every spring to rejuvenate the earth (Morford and Lenardon).

20. A majority of Euripides' extant tragedies involve women who are given major roles, for example, *Alcestis, Medea, Hecuba, Electra, Helen, The Trojan Women, The Phoenician Women, Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

21. The Greek word translated "ecstasy" is to utter a cry in honour of Bacchus. The utterance could be out of ecstatic pleasure.

22. Guy Butler has re-written *Medea* to speak out against the South African system of apartheid. Although Butler wrote *Demea* in 1960 for a multiracial cast, it could not be performed until the laws against which it is a protest were repealed in 1990.

23. The literal Greek translation is more comprehensive in its description that Dionysus is "lesser than none of the gods could be greater" (777).

24. R. L. Ibigbami, "Ogun Festival in Ire Ekiti," *Nigeria Magazine* 126-127 (1978): 44-59. As with the ancient Greeks, different versions of the same myth exist in various ethnic groups.

25. W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (London: Methuen, 1977) 145-182.

26. Although Soyinka responds to his unfortunate experience at Sheffield, it must be acknowledged that a misunderstanding about the lack of history of the Africans may rely on the theory that Africans had no written history before European colonization. However, it has since been proven that forms of writing existed in pre-colonial African states.

27. In *The Complete Poems of Cavafy*, trans. Rae Dalven (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948), one of the poems by Constantin P. Cavafy (1863-1933), "Awaiting the Barbarians," satirizes imperialism. The last two lines in the poem are: "And what are we to do without any barbarians? / They could have served as a solution of some sort" (19). The literal translation of the last line is, "These men could have been some sort of a solution." The Greeks regarded non-Greek speakers as *barbaroi* because they spoke sounds that were unintelligible to the Greeks; later the Romans used it to describe all other nations as foreigners. J. M. Coetzee explores the theme of imperialism in his postcolonial novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

28. John Lahr, in *Plays and Players* (October 1973), asserts that there is no discussion on justice between Cadmus and Dionysus" and accuses Soyinka of "turning the tragedy into a tract" (59). Irving Wardle, in his review in *The Times* (August 1973), calls the performance a "mangled rewrite" 11.

29. Albert Hunt concurs with Soyinka's observation of the production in "Amateurs in Horror," *New Society* [London], 9 August 1973: 342-343. He says: "The company that presents Soyinka's play contains a drummer who can't drum, dancers who can't dance .... Where the play calls for ecstasy, the girls in the chorus offer a well-bred imitation of a hop at the local disco .... Faced with a text that calls for precise and strictly meaningful gesture, for narrative clarity, and for a theatre language built on ritual, the director has opted for imitation orgies, fake horror, and whooped up excitement" (343).

30. Hunt, in "Amateurs in Horror," asserts that the two "complacent regimes" during the Biafran war "presided over an orgy of genocide, which was connived at by a distant god in the shape of a benign white man with a pipe. And when the orgy was over, the vacuum was filled by weekend entertainments on the Bar Beach, the Sunday playground of Lagos, in the form of public executions .... It's against this slice of contemporary reality that Soyinka's version of Euripides must be seen" (342).

31. James T. Luce, ed. *Ancient Writers Greece and Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), suggests that sacrifice and revenge are the "two commonest plot elements in Euripides' surviving plays" (249), for example, *Alcestis, Medea, Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. (Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to obtain favourable winds to continue the expedition that ended in the sacking of Troy).

32. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). Fanon discusses the violence associated with colonization.

33. Soyinka, in *Myth*, argues that the "European concept of music does not fully illuminate the relationship of music to ritual and drama among the Yoruba." He explains the

transformation that language in Yoruba music undergoes to "unearth the cosmic uncertainties which pervade human existence..." (147-150).

34. Geoffrey S. Kirk in *The Bacchae* by Euripides asserts that in these lines the Chorus responds in excited "dochmiacs" (1031-1042); "[d]ochmiacs" were used "to express excitement and strong emotion, either joy or sorrow ..." (977-1023n).

35. Western feminism cannot really be compared to the destructive consequences of slavery and colonization. See also Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

36. *In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka*, ed. Karen L. Morell (Austin: U of Texas, 1975), Soyinka responds to the question of the role of women in his plays and he gives the example of how his mother, gentle in disposition, was transformed when she had to collect her debts (93).

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967). For a detailed discussion, Wiveca Sotto, "'The Fourth Stage' and The Birth of Tragedy: Soyinka and Nietzsche," *The Rounded Rite: A Study of Wole Soyink'a Play The Bacchae of Euripides* (59-101).

38. Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, suggests that "if Pentheus can appear as the bestial surrogate for the god, the god is also Pentheus' other self, his double, the repressed *alter ego* of the young king" (29).

39. William Golding, in *Lord of the Flies*, dramatizes how group ritual can lead to collective violence even among young "innocent" school boys. The boys' actions mirror those of the soldiers who were at war.

40. The Greek word *entheos* from which the word, "enthusiasm," is derived means "full of, inspired or possessed by a god."

41. Soyinka has referred to his time in prison and the death of innocent victims as a sacrifice and as a result he has been accused of condoning senseless killings to support his theory. See Renato Berger, "Ogun: God of War and Iron" (*Nigeria Magazine* 99, December 1968). Soyinka does tend to universalize his concepts, even though myths and legends differ from one tribal group to another.

42. Wole Soyinka, in *The Man Died*, records his prison experiences where, among other inhumane treatment, he was put in chains, literally and kept *in communicado* in Maximum Security (79-83).

43. Margaret Thompson Drewal in *Yoruba Ritual* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992) has documented the *Egungun* ritual with photographs of modern masked performers and performances.

44. Herodotus, *History of the Greek and Persian War*, trans. George Rawlinson (New York: Twayne, 1963) records the story of Hippoclides who danced away his opportunity to marry Agariste, the daughter of Clisthenes, king of Sicyon (VI.126-130).

45. Just as it was out of Cronus' violent castration of Uranus' genitals that Aphrodite the beautiful goddess of love was born, so it is out of the violence of Agave's deed that the community will be reborn.

46. All biblical references are take from the 1975 edition of the *New American Standard Version*.

47. The apostle, John, in his Gospel refers to Jesus Christ as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (1:29). God replaced Abraham's son whom he attempted to sacrifice with a lamb, foreshadowing the sacrificial death of God's son, the perfect lamb, on the cross. (Genesis 22; cf. Romans 8:32).

48. Obi Maduakor, *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to His Writing* (New York & London: Garland, 1986) suggests that Soyinka's "insertion of the wedding scenes is superfluous at the critical moment when Pentheus is beginning to submit to Dionysus and to acknowledge the hopelessness of his position as an apostle of reason" (256). On the contrary, the scenes advance the plot, inverse the western rituals, and prepare Pentheus and the audience for Pentheus' sacrificial death.

49. An example of *hubris* in ancient Greek tragedy is in the scene in Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* in which Agamemnon returns from Troy and commits *hubris* by walking on the purple tapestry. The scene evokes connotations of Agamemnon's transformation as a sacrificial victim as he walks right into Clytaemnestra's net and his death.

CHAPTER 4 - CONCLUSION

Changing the Game

Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* and Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* contribute to a body of texts whose dialectical framework can best be described by J. M. Coetzee's analogy which he gave at a Writers' Workshop on March 1984, recorded in Dick Penner's *Countries of the Mind*: "Whereas in the kind of game that I am talking about, you can change the rules if you are good enough. You can change the rules for everybody if you are good enough. You can change the game." Postcolonial theory is about change; it is about changing the ideological assumptions written in colonialist history and literature. Through a rewriting and re-interpreting of the western originals, Rotimi and Soyinka challenge colonial ideologies while privileging African culture and history. Although Marxism, Nationalism and *Négritude* challenged colonialism, they did so from the premise that placed Europe at the centre. The purpose of the postcolonial project itself denies eurocentred theoretical models which Soyinka, in *Myth*, rejects:

> We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation - this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems. It is time clearly to respond to this new threat, each in his own field (x).

In response to this second epoch, Soyinka aims not only at changing the rules and the game, but also the very arena on which the game is played.

The French noun for game is derived from the verb to play, and the interplay

of both words can be applied to the discursive and counter-discursive practices in various relationships of power. Encoded in the language of the imperial centre is the power to describe and inscribe its other; postcolonial writers have seized the apparatus of value-coding in order to authorize their own forms of knowledge and social identities. More effectively than the novel, drama as performance provides the opportunity to authenticate pre-colonial African culture through the incorporation of traditional rituals, mime, dance, music and idioms. *The Gods Are Not To Blame* and *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*, though in different ways, effect changes that dispel the white mythology about the superiority of the colonizer. However, neither Rotimi nor Soyinka ignores the issues that plague contemporary Nigerian society. Their commitment to exposing the destructive forces of neo-colonialism and tribalism demonstrates a move towards socio-political change as part of the decolonization process.

Rotimi transplants the Greek original into pre-colonial African soil, utilizing Yoruba place names with historical significance. By replacing the characters' names with those of mythological and folkloric significance, Rotimi further valorizes the traditional ritual elements in the Yoruba culture. He integrates Yoruba metaphysics, customs, idioms, proverbs, songs and linguistic codes, easily recognized by the audience, to create an appreciation for their cultural heritage.

While Soyinka retains much of the fifth-century Greek characters and setting, he makes significant changes in the interpretation of the drama. By superimposing the

African mythological worldview on the traditional western rituals, Soyinka undermines the primacy of the western belief system. Soyinka replays the history of slavery and colonization in an attempt to convey the idea that civilization and drama originated from Africa. The whole tragedy becomes a communal ritual performed to bring renewal and liberation to those who are oppressed and subjugated. Through this revolutionary process, he attacks the very foundation of western traditional drama to beat the colonizers at their own game. Misunderstood by predominately western-oriented audiences, Soyinka's drama is characterized by a radical postcolonial phenomenon, one that abandons western traditional criteria for tragedy and replaces them with that of pre-colonial rituals.

In seeking to abolish all distinctions between the imperial centre and the periphery, there is a tendency for postcolonial discourse to become absorbed into First world dialectics and become subjected to the west's ideology. Spivak has more than hinted at the danger of using marginality to the extent that it valorizes the centre. A majority of postcolonial writers depend on European publishers and they are again drawn into the capitalist mode of production that renders their project counter-productive.

The plays of Rotimi and Soyinka, although characterized by hybridity because of the encounter with Europe, contribute to the on-going dialogue aimed at re-defining and re-interpreting eurocentric assumptions. Although the concepts of resistance and liberation are more intense and dominant in Soyinka's transformation than in Rotimi's,

both plays explore alter/native modes of re-presentation of the previously colonized. There can be no closure on such a varied and rapidly evolving area of critical inquiry. A postcolonial text need not be defined by the language in which it is written, nor the genetic orientation of its writer, nor should it be analyzed by existing First world theories; it needs, however, to break up/out/down/through the western stranglehold on literary study and critical theory that perpetuates European domination.

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