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1994-07-13T13:28:33Z
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Outrage and Political Choice in Nigeria: A Consideration of Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists*, *The Man Died*, and *Season of Anomy*.

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The late 1960's were transforming years for Nigeria. The events are well-known. The chaotic 'democratic' practice of the early post-independence years had culminated in corruption, abuse of power and an alarming rise in political violence. The rigged elections of 1965 and the disturbances in the Western Region as Akintola manoeuvred to hang on to power have come to seem a lasting image of the time. The military could not resist the authoritarian colonial ethos which had brought them into being and intervened with sudden and devastating brutality to expel the unruly civilians. Since the government was Northern-led, and the senior hierarchy of the military was mostly Eastern, there were conclusions which were hard to resist. The coup was followed by an equally brutal counter-coup, by organised massacres of Ibos in the North, by the secession of Biafra, and the catastrophic Civil War. Wole Soyinka was arrested by officials of the government of Yakubu Gowon in August 1967 and imprisoned until October 1969, and for most of that time was held in solitary confinement. His offence was to have undertaken an unavailing and, with hindsight, quixotic campaign in the Nigerian press and among sympathetic outsiders in Europe to have an arms embargo declared against the Federal as well as Biafran sides. He also admitted some sympathy for 'the Third Force', a group among the military who were 'socialists' and wanted to transform

the polarised political culture through an ethos of public service.

Four texts came directly out of Soyinka's experience of these years: *Madmen and Specialists* (1970) was first performed about a year after his release; *The Man Died: prison notes* (1972) is a detailed account of the endless months of his incarceration; *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972) is a collection of poems written in prison - in *The Man Died* he calls his 'solitary' quarters 'the crypt'; and a novel *Season of Anomy* (1973).[1] This writing describes a pessimistic vision of Nigeria, though traces of the critique of Nigerian political culture which is at its centre were already present in earlier work. In *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), for example, the head of state brutalised by power, is challenged both by a 'community' leader, Chief Danlola, and a younger generation of activists who constitute something like a secular 'Third Force'. The leader of the activists is called Daodu. He is Danlola's son, but he really acquires his authority through the Co-operative he heads, rather than through custom, as Danlola, or through violence, as Kongi. In other words he champions a desire for authority which is consensual and accountable, and against a state machinery which is increasingly unscrupulous. He acts heroically because his activism is principled rather than pragmatic, placing himself at risk rather than accepting the compromises that are made available to him. Even though Kongi triumphs against the wide-spread resistance, he does so in a way which discredits the legitimacy of his hold on power. In the post-prison writing, such illegitimate exercise of power becomes naked and unashamed.

In *Madmen and Specialists*, the first and most pessimistic of the post-prison texts, 'the people' are reduced to mutilated beggars who pervert what they have learned about human potential and adhere to the obscene and crazy cult of As, whose central liturgy is a satirical celebration of decline and stagnation, and whose sacred act is the consumption of human flesh. The 'mendicants' are in every sense brutalised by the war and by their submission to

the triumph of the totalitarian state. *The Man Died* gives an account of 'the strange sinister byways of the mind in solitary confinement' (p 12), but also places this one oppression in a larger social context. On one hand it is 'prison notes', an account of the survival of an oppressed consciousness. The victimised narrator emerges heroic from his unique experience, able to claim an appropriate recognition for his sustained resistance to disorder and disregard. The writing is testimony of both survival and an entitlement to speak with authority on the risks and consequences of resistance. On the other hand, the title phrase refers to a journalist who was beaten by soldiers under orders from 'the Military Governor of the West', who felt himself slighted in some way. The condition of the journalist was so bad afterwards that he was flown to England for treatment. Gangrene had set in, and despite several amputations it was clear that he could not be saved, and so what was left of him was returned to his family in Nigeria. When Soyinka enquired of the man from a friend, he received a telegram with the words of the title - 'The man died'. The proposition at the heart of Soyinka's text is that the first duty under terror is to speak: 'The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny' (p 13). As we shall see, this proposition hardens into action in *Season of Anomy*, where the story of Orpheus's descent into the Underworld is a metaphor for a journey which reveals Nigeria as hell. The novel urgently poses the question which is present in the other texts of this period: in a state ruled by terror, what is a responsible political act?

In the complex opening of Soyinka's first novel *The Interpreters* (1965), a dynamic mode of enquiry is employed in the journey to Egbo's ancestral creek-town.[2] Egbo returns to the creek-town to test his response to the invitation from the elders that he should succeed his grandfather as their leader. The evocative language of Egbo's immersion in his past endorses his attachment to it. Yet Egbo sees the creek-town as stagnant and dangerous, and this points to his view of the paradoxical relationship between the past and his age. It is a

relationship Soyinka has persistently explored, more often than not contrasting 'the mutilations' of the present with the abiding nature of the unified cultural self. As a number of commentators have noted, it is a Romantic argument in its privileging of culture as visceral and intuitive.[3] The quest of the Soyinka hero is to re-new this connection with the ancestral self, or to be measured against the inability or unwillingness to do so. While this position recalls the Romantic conception of the individual constituted through unique attachment to environment, it is not crudely nostalgic. Throughout his writing, almost without exception, Soyinka figures 'tradition' with a dynamic dimension. In *Madmen and Specialists*, his most gloomy text, the two old women Iya Mate and Iya Agba, have knowledge of herbs and medicines and other mysteries which together represent a cultural memory stretching back to the unremembered past. They jealously guard this secret knowledge from the mendicants, who are the degraded victims of the terrorist state, and from Bero, the doctor who has turned into 'a specialist' in assasination and torture and is the prime agent of the state's terror. Because they cannot find anyone worthy of their secret, the old women burn the hut where they store the herbs, symbolically destroying the knowledge rather than allowing it to fall into dangerous hands. The profound decline of the 'community' is figured in the old women's inability to recognise someone who can be trusted not to misuse the power of the knowledge they hold in a kind of trust. In this respect, the unified self is figured as knowledge deeply buried in the cultural psyche, and the custodians of that knowledge are intuitively self-recognising.

It is by this process of intuitive recognition that the Egbo figure in *The Interpreters* is invited to kingship, as is Ofeyi in *Season of Anomy*. In the first case, Egbo valorizes the past as archetypal but also fears its demands. In the end, he feels the pull of the past as the pull of death:

> He acknowledged it finally, this was a place of death. And admitted too that he was drawn to it, drawn to it as a dream of isolation, smelling its archaic menace and the violent undertows, unable to deny its dark vitality (p 12).

Soyinka uses a metaphor of depth to suggest both danger and a mysterious or a hidden dimension which appears treacherous to the Egbo figure precisely because he cannot trust his heroic stature. Soyinka's fetish for the myth of Ogun derives from the heroic manner in which the god cut a path through chaos to reunite gods and humans. In this respect, Ogun is the paradigmatic hero, complex and contradictory, but able to trust in his ambition - the hero is always a 'he'. Ogun is also a paradigm for the artist, who has to release himself in an act of trust before he can do anything meaningful. More often than not, the artist-figure creates in 'frenzy' in Soyinka's texts, in a state of ecstatic liberation - and the lesser artist is often unable to achieve this state of release. A notable example is Demoke in *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), where at first the artist is afraid of heights and cannot carve, but his murder of Oremole releases him into a 'frenzy' of creativity:

> and I
>
> Demoke, sat in the shoulders of the tree,
>
> My spirit set free and singing, my hands,
>
> My father's hands possessed by demons of blood
>
> And I carved three days and nights till tools
>
> Were blunted, and these hands, my father's hands
>
> Swelled big as the tree-trunk
>
> *Collected Plays 1*, London: Oxford University Press, 1973, p 27.

Equally, in *The Interpreters* Kola speaks of himself applying the brakes to his talent when he should let go: 'At his elbow was the invisible brake which drew him back from final

transportation in the act' (p 218). Both men only begin to acquire self-respect as artists when they have abandoned caution. Egbo's ambivalence about the past is therefore also an expression of his incapacity for daring.

In *Season of Anomy*, Ofeyi echoes Egbo's response in his view of Aiyéró, the rural community which both tempts and at first repels him. He says to Pa Ahime, one of the Aiyéró elders:

> even the state of content can become malignant. Like indifference. Or complacency. Already you are near stagnant.... I don't know how to convey to you the smell of mould, stagnation which clings to places like this' (p 6).

Ofeyi's ambivalence is a stage in his journey to resolve the dilemma of appropriate action in a political state ruled by terror. The resolution is arrived at, in part, by exploring the meaning of the rootedness represented by Aiyéró. Its other part is the expulsion of the 'power profiteers' by whatever means available. *The Man Died* quotes George Mangakis's comments on the 'humiliation' of tyranny:

> This feeling [of humiliation] grows day by day, as a result of the oppressors' unceasing effort to force your mind to accept all the vulgarity which makes up the abortive mental world of dictators (p 14).

The totalitarian state Soyinka figures in *The Man Died* frowns on all witness to its oppression: 'It was sufficient to look disapproving on methods of terror' (p 41). Even the look has to be silenced. In this text Soyinka echoes Mangakis, and offers his testimony as a deliberate and precisely directed refusal to remain silent. This is how he ends the opening section of *The Man Died*: 'the first step towards the dethronement of terror is the deflation of its hypocritical self-righteousness' (p 16), and so his testimony here does not represent only self-vindication but is also an act of rebellion.

Before looking in detail at how *Season of Anomy* advances its argument for the privileging of violent resistance to tyranny, from testimony to action, it is worth noting in

these three texts the recuperation of optimism with the increase of distance from the events they describe. Soyinka was in voluntary 'exile' in Europe when *Season of Anomy* appeared. In it, the profoundly hedonist submission of the 'mendicants' of *Madmen and Specialists* has been replaced by witty and sustained resistance. The texts are set in slightly different times, of course, and this may account for some of these differences. The events of the play take place after the Civil War and the massacre of Southerners living in the Cross River Region in the novel clearly refer to the killings in 1966. The former, therefore, can be expected to reflect the depression and decline after barbarities of war, whereas the latter is full of outrage at the massacre of innocents. None the less, a kind of aggresssive optimism informs this outrage, both in the agenda set up in the narrative, and, as we shall see, in the consequences proposed in the closure.

But first, the novel establishes some familiar tropes. The rural landscape of Aiyéró is figured as authentic and ideal, symbolised by the silted pool at its heart. Though Ofeyi goes there by chance, as a publicist for the Cocoa Board promotion campaign, the elders recognise in him the qualities they require in their new leader. Opposed to Aiyéró's humane creed is the merciless cynicism of the Cartel, for whom power and its practice require no further justification. The novel debates the adequacy of humane politics in the face of such oppression. This debate is figured in altogether starker terms in *Madmen and Specialists*, where the pursuit of power has become a pathology. There the old women who guard the knowledge of 'the Earth' in all its contradictory complexity are forced to burn its symbolic representation because they have understood the totalitarian ambition of Bero. The old women's conception of the world takes account of contradictions. '[Y]ou don't learn good things unless you learn evil' (p 225), Iya Mate says as a rebuke to Si Bero, the doctor's sister, whom the two old women at first take to be someone whom they can trust. Even the

mendicants, whose defeated cynicism is shameless, recognise something 'good' in her. She says to her brother: 'I like to keep close to earth' (p 234), affirming her nearness to a notion of abiding and incorruptible values. The old women's approval of her endorse this. Here Si Bero has brought poison berries by mistake, and Iya Mate's correction reminds her that the co-existence of evil and good is a central idea in Yoruba cosmology. But the doctor's obsession with 'control' is limitless. It takes the form of an eradication of all taboos so that no action is inconceivable if its consequence is a firmer grip on power. The Old Man, his father as well as critic of this life-denying ethos, satirically makes the point by feeding Bero and his military colleagues the flesh of a dead soldier, at once a victim of military barbarity whose consumption demonstrates the degradation of the oppressor. It is this act in the play which represents the dehumanisation of the agents of the state, for Bero relishes the knowledge of his transgression:

> It was the first step to power.... Power in its purest sense. The end of inhibitions. The conquest of the weakness of your too too human flesh with all its sentiments (p 241).

His playful reference to *Hamlet* indicates both the degree to which he is in control of this conversation about the taboo of cannibalism, and also demonstrates his repudiation of the anguish Hamlet goes through as he contemplates the murder of his uncle Claudius, who had murdered Hamlet's own father to acquire the throne of Denmark.[4] To Bero such squeamishness is only sentiment.

Like Egbo, Ofeyi's first reaction to the invitation from the elders of Aiyéró is ambivalence and denial. In *The Interpreters*, Egbo's ambivalence about the past and its relation to the present is part of an exploration of the meaning of tradition in post-colonial Nigeria, a less urgent though more profound enquiry than that in *Season of Anomy*. Both attack the greed of corrupt authority, but *The Interpreters* also figures the intellectuals and

the 'bourgeoisie' critically. The Oguazor party incident, for example, mocks the hollow men of the new elite with their farcical affectations. On the other hand, the chairman's party in *Season of Anomy* (p 36), while it recalls the excess and vulgarity of the Oguazors, has quite a different outcome. In the party at the chairman's house it is the collusion of the military and business which is the point of attack, rather than the laughable hypocrisies of 'bourgeois' intellectuals and corrupt businessmen. The depiction of Professor Oguazor and his wife, the tone of voice they are given to speak with, their absurd mimicry of European 'etiquette', identifies them as among 'the dead,' whose brains are as 'petrified' as the fake fruit they generously distribute around their home. A similarly bizarre image in *Season of Anomy* is the dedication of the fountain at the chairman's house: 'a Florentine moment in the heart of the festering continent' with a statue of St George as the hypocritical message against corruption (p 44). St George in this context, in other words, is as fake as the plastic fruit. That scene, though, reflecting the altogether darker vision of the text, plays out the oppressions that the novel investigates. There are references to the hubris of the military and the Security, the ugly excess of the Cartel, the futility of the kind of rebellion that Ofeyi is engaged in at this stage in his political engagement. Most notably, the scene ends with the cloud-host depicting the slaughter of the innocents, a pre-figurement of the massacres to come later (p 48). In *The Interpreters*, by contrast, the ends of the Oguazor scene are entirely satirical.

Season of Anomy, though constructed to a more compact mythic metaphor than *The Interpreters*, is both a less effective and a more problematic text. The central metaphor is based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, re-named closely enough as Ofeyi and Iriyise. The most basic version of the Orpheus story - there are many variations and an ancient religious cult arose out of the myth - has the hero descending into the Underworld to ask for

the return of his lover Eurydice, who had been bitten by a snake and died. Orpheus, who is a poet and singer, wins over the guardians of the Underworld with his songs and poems, and Eurydice is released, on condition that *he* does not look back until they are both in the upper world. He does, and therefore *she* dies again and is returned to the Underworld. Soyinka analogises this myth more or less precisely, except for one major change. Iriyise is rescued from the Underworld, without any conditions. Soyinka's text re-writes the tragic end of the Orpheus story, and in due course we shall see why it does this.

The real concern of the novel is to debate the choice of political action, and this choice is dramatised in Ofeyi's increasing radicalisation in the face of the Cartel's pitiless logic. The Cartel is the combination of three stalwarts of the pre-war Nigerian Federation (though Nigeria is not mentioned), in alliance with the military and other agents of coercion, who come together to eliminate competition with cut-throat cynicism. Ofeyi works for the Cocoa Board, which markets the cocoa to the nation as a substitute for all the other things the people are denied. He writes advertising songs and produces fantastic promotions in which Iriyise stars as the luscious meat of the cocoa-pod. Unknown to the company, these songs and promotions are deliberately ambiguous and subversive. This is the extent of Ofeyi's political action at the opening of the novel. A number of events take place which make it impossible to continue this low-key (and probably not uncomfortable) rebellion.

The promotions team visits Aiyéró, a commune which is self-sufficient, worldly-wise, tolerant and contemptuous of money - different in every respect to the Nigeria of the Cartel and therefore in opposition to its greedy ethos. It is isolated and is figured as more continuous with its earth than the city. The elders of Aiyéró ask Ofeyi to become 'the Guardian of the Grain' a kind of first-among-equals in the hierarchy of the community. As we have seen, Ofeyi refuses but the more he learns about Aiyéró, its rejection of Christianity

in preference for an older and more rooted tradition, and its egalitarian and life-sustaining ethos, the more persuasive he finds the offer. After the failure of his subversive 'promotions,' and a spell of 'study tour' abroad, he sees Aiyéró's offer as a means of another kind of political activism:

> The goals were clear enough, the dream a new concept of labouring hands across artificial frontiers, the concrete, affective presence of Aiyéró throughout the land, undermining the Cartel's superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder, ending the new phase of slavery (27).

Aiyéró's humane philosophy and its willing adherents are to be both example and cadre of the new transformations. The project is later re-stated more prosaically as 'to create working-class kinships as opposed to the tribal' (p 170). Aiyéró's rootedness in the land is symbolised by the pool at the heart of the settlement and by the rituals for the funeral of the Guardian of the Grain. The pool has an appearance of being a deep 'subterranean lake' silted with 'history' (p 88), the atmosphere around it 'a dense-textured drape...sealing them within the dark preserve of spirits, placid and protective'. It is a place mysteriously sanctified against petty intrusion. In the past it had been a sanctuary from slave raiders who had the 'Cross-river whiff of violence, rape and death' (p 89). In this pool-sanctuary Ofeyi receives the recognition of the spirits of the place, confirming his non-alienation, his rootedness:

> He felt borne on a vintage fluid and potency of the past, as if invisible denizens of that space had lain their hands on him' (p 90).

The image of history as the real transformed into the mythical is connected to Alonzo's change into a figure of fantasy after his death in Ariel's Song in *The Tempest*. Soyinka's text makes this connection concrete by quoting three fragments from the Song: 'full fathom five his father lies...of his bones are coral made...those are pearls....' (p 90). So the 'undertows' of history, so dangerous in *The Interpreters*, are seen here as a force to be released, a coiled dynamism camouflaged by surface calm: 'This pond denied even its undertows, presenting

a clean slate of perpetual calm' (p 92). At the heart of Aiyéró, then, past human suffering and endeavour is transformed into a silt out of which new life forms.

The funeral rites for the Guardian equally celebrate new life. The dirge brings the dead back among the living by locating their origin and their return to the earth:

> A low moan rose, thrilled in the slumbersome air, the earth gave answer in trembling accents, a lead voice prompted the sleep-washed dirge of earth and a sudden motion of feet would thud in velvety union (p 12).

Then the dirge turns into a quasi-Dionysian dance with the women stilt-dancers opening their legs to the humps of the bulls, celebrating procreation and death in the same ritual. The sacrifice of the bulls, so dramatically evoked in the writing, is also figured as renewal - willing beasts giving willingly to appease the spirits which guard the ancestral world.[5] The lavish drama of its evocation and its valorisation of blood ritual expresses (somewhat indulgently) the visceral connectedness of gods and men. The sacrifice anticipates and is contrasted to the unwilling sacrifices that are about to take place. For when Ofeyi's attempt at converting others to the humane ethos of Aiyéró are engulfed in the larger terror of the Cartel's Cross-river massacres, it becomes impossible to resist the position put forward by another activist, the Dentist, that the only way to fight terror is by terror. (He is the Dentist because he removes diseased parts from the body.) This is the climax of the novel's argument, the acceptance that violence is appropriate political action in circumstances such as those which prevailed in Nigeria just before the Civil War. Ofeyi's position hardens from acknowledging 'the claims of violence' to acting as if no other action but violence is possible.

The crisis and its resolution between choices of action is brought to a dramatic climax through the Orpheus metaphor. Iriyise is captured and spirited away by the henchmen of Zaki Amuru, the Cartel's strong-man in Cross-river. Ofeyi descends into this Underworld to rescue her, and in the process he is driven to the unavoidable conclusion that only terror can

succeed against a terrorist authority. Before following this descent, we need to look at Iriyise. Iriyise is figured as receptive to experience, so she takes to Aiyéró 'as a new organism long in search of its true element' (p 3). If this appears a positive quality, a generous openness, it also suggests emptiness. Iriyise does not know herself and 'seemed to change under his [Ofeyi's] touch' (p 3). Later we find her just as receptive to 'the gin-and-tonic siren from the godless lights of the capital' (p 7). This emptiness is also attested by the way she feels 'filled' by her initiation into Aiyéró, made complete (p 7).

She was a prostitute when Ofeyi found her and re-constructed her. As The Dentist remarks with grudging admiration, Ofeyi 'plucks symbols out of brothels' which when the moment arrives turn into 'super-mistress of universal insurgence' (219). Iriyise was a prostitute whose ferocity and sensuality expressed her undirected rage until Ofeyi rescued her, and made her perform as the fecund earth itself:

> With Iriyise unbound, unearthed, salvaged, transformed and fresh-created, a grand design for the Cocoa campaign had crystallized in the flash of their first encounter, leapt from his hot brain entire. Goddess, Princess, Chrysalis of the Cocoa Grain, around her burgeoned a thousand schemes and devices, a panoply of adulation and Svengalian transformations, ending her immaturity and self-prostitution (p 94).

It is clear who runs this show. The image of fecundity is expressed clearly in the planting in Aiyéró - fecund earth and fecund Iriyise celebrated in prose of high optimism - and the meaning of her name as Dawn seems completely appropriate.

But Iriyise is also 'the bitch,' and there are explicit references to her as the powerful female figure with potent sexuality who is also to be found in other Soyinka texts: Segi in *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), Madame Tortoise in *A Dance of the Forest* (1960), Simi in *The Interpreters*. The Indian woman Taiila in *Season of Anomy* is also given a powerful, controlling stillness and her eyes are 'ocean-bedded' offering as Simi's did 'a choice of drowning' (p 93)). Iriyise is also 'Queen Bee,' involuntarily at the heart of processes that she

does not actively control: 'Iriyise occupied a cell in a deep hive.... And Iriyise was Queen Bee of the hive' (p 58). Finally, her 'moods' are unpredictable and therefore apparently out of her control (p 81). It is clear that Iriyise is, in a profound sense, 'natural', an instinctual creature. And because her instincts are sound, (they have their source in a regenerative impulse imaged as fecund earth and Dawn), she puts her trust in Ofeyi and is pliant in his hands. This relationship describes the hierarchical disposition in Soyinka's texts of the male artist figure and the potent women who are attracted to him. We find an explicit statement of this in *Season of Anomy* when Ofeyi reflects:

> Vision is eternally of man's own creating. The woman's acceptance, her collaboration in man's vision of life results time and time again in just such periodic embodiments of earth and ideal' (82).

Ofeyi identifies 'woman' as instinctual and fecund and reserves 'vision' and 'ideal' for himself.

Ofeyi is forced to descend into the Underworld when he receives news of Iriyise's capture. The events fall into historical shape now. The coup has taken place and the killings in Cross-river are the massacres in the North in October '66 (pp 87-88). Ofeyi and his friend Zaccheus travel to Cross-river, and in a series of encounters, the horrors that are taking place there are dramatised: the killing on the road evoked with remarkable power; the lake filled with the dead; the train full of corpses which stops over a bridge to dump the dead; the burning of the church described with chilling detail.[6] It is quickly established that the Dentist has undertaken a campaign of counter-terror, of selective assassination, and that his killings precipitate rebellion among oppressed people. The Dentist gloats about the assassinations 'which in turn appalled and uplifted him' (p 113). His action releases the retribution of rural people, whose 'visceral bond' is still intact, in contrast to townspeople (pp 116-7) who have lost touch with their earth. Once again this valorises and idealises the rooted rural

community, even if here in its capacity for righteous violence. Ofeyi's attempt to organise reform had only resulted in the carnage at the lake, the Dentist's campaign releases directed retribution. The argument is already turning towards violence as the inevitable response in these circumstances. In *The Man Died*, the same debate about the need for violence had been resolved with the same result but with much less conviction.[9]

The inevitability of violence is also confirmed by the nature of the adversary. Cross-river is a grotesque dystopia. The landscape establishes this. Nature is perverted in the parched, diseased land which is 'infected' with violence. Ultimately Cross-river is described simply as 'the territory of hell' (p 192). Zaki Amuri, the Cross-river strong-man, is a monster surrounded by languid, sprawled shapes among whom is 'a young boy' - to signify that Amuri is a sodomiser. It is an 'oriental' court: the petulant boy represents decadent sensualities, the cruel but grovelling clerk spread-eagled in contrition describes the slavishness of the people, and the Zaki is 'hooded' and evil. Whereas the rural people are valorised as 'rooted', in Cross-river the archetype is of the cringing cowardly peasant who turns to beggary. These are predictable tropes of the North of Nigeria, and African Islam in general, and were generated by 'orientalist' narratives of colonialism. It is made clear in this scene that the killings are to do with the expulsion of new ideas from Cross-river, ideas which challenge the corrupt feudal order. The killing of the man on the road figures the killers as sadistic and brutalised. As they perform horrific mutilations on their victim, their 'faces betrayed neither thought nor feeling' (p 164). Both here and in the description of the massacre at the lake, the killings are figured as perverted sacrifice, an image raised again in the description of the 'Anubis-headed multitudes.' These killings are contrasted with 'Ahime's scalpel of light' which symbolised the regenerative nature of sacrifice in Aiyéró.

Event after event intensify the horror as Ofeyi and Zaccheus search for Iriyise. They

descend into the morgue where the human body lies 'piece-meal', they visit the underground sanctuary in the church which is littered with bodies, and eventually Ofeyi enters the prison, in the innermost circle of which, beyond the quarters of the insane prisoners, he finds Iriyise . It is there too that Ofeyi himself is imprisoned. Soyinka's 'crypt' in *The Man Died* was next to the insane prisoners' quarters, but there he had found their presence reassuringly human. In *Season of Anomy*, the prisoners and their treatment signifies the profound degradation practised in Zaki's Underworld, and of course signifies the extent of the danger facing both Iriyise and Ofeyi in the proximity of such insanity.

It is significant that Ofeyi, like Orpheus, converts his adversary, the guard, with words, but it is ultimately the intervention of the Dentist which releases Ofeyi and Iriyise from prison, the triumph of violence over violence. At the novel's end, the tragedy of Orpheus's glance back is replaced by the column of prisoners setting off on a long march as dawn rises.

The novel then, debates and resolves the issue of appropriate political action in an oppressive state: 'the claims of violence' are irresistible. The debate is effectively dramatised in the way we have discussed, but the analysis of the issue in the conversations between Ofeyi and the Dentist, and Ofeyi and the Indian doctor, lacks conviction. This is partly because the language in which it is offered is melodramatic and partly because the dilemma is posed in such a simple and unproblematised way. The portrayal of Cross-river as evil contagion - the massacres are 'bloodlust' which is 'a legacy of the climate' - simplifies the issue to an incredible extent. If the terrorist state is like Cross-river, the argument appears to go, then violence is justified.

Further simplification occurs in the opposition of the idealised campaign to transform the country through the humane philosophy of Aiyéró, and the violence of the Dentist. Such

an opposition may make dramatic sense, but in a fictional text which insists on placing its mythic metaphors within a realist context, it is both unsubtle and manipulative. It makes the triumph of the Dentist's retributive righteousness all but inevitable. In contrast to *The Interpreters*, where a superb concert is achieved between method and substance, *Season of Anomy* valorises myth over the demands of language and voice. Political dispositions are presented without irony and are often overtaken by a tough-talking 'radical' voice which deteriorates, at worst, to the cartoon language of student politics. Despite the power of the set-piece scenes, *Season of Anomy* is undercut by the melodrama of its argument, and in this respect, the text as testimony argument in *The Man Died* carries far greater conviction. Soyinka's post-prison texts mark the transformation of the political culture of Nigeria only a few years after independence. The dilemmas they express are still evident now - the corrupt state endlessly manouvering to retain power - yet a resolution through violence seems as unlikely to lead to democracy now as it did in 1966.

Notes

1. The first version of *Madmen and Specialists* was performed at the 1970 Playwrights' Workshop Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Waterford, Connecticut, U.S.A. It is published in *Collected Plays II*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974; *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, London: Rex Collings and Methuen, 1972; *The Man Died*, London: Rex Collings, 1972; *Season of Anomy*, London: Collings, 1973. This paper will be concerned mostly with the prose texts.

2. Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, London: Deustch, 1965. Page references will be to the Heinemann edition 1970; reprinted 1976.

3. See for example: Brian Crow, 'Soyinka and the Romantic Tradition,' *Before Our Eyes: Tribute to Wole Soyinka*, ed Dapo Adelugba , Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1987, pp 147-169; and Geoffrey Hunt, 'Two African Aesthetics: Soyinka vs Cabral,' *Marxism and African Literature*, ed Georg Gugelberger, London: James Currey, 1985, pp 64-93

4. The reference suggested by Bero's words is to Hamlet's speech:

> O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> His canon against self-slaughter. (*Hamlet* Act I Sc II L 129-30).

At this stage in the play Hamlet does not know of Claudius's treachery to his father, and is more shamed by his mother's swift marriage to his uncle. But one reading of the play, of course, is that it constitutes a debate between self-destruction rather than acting in cruelty, however justified the latter might seem to be by circumstasnces. This reading of Hamlet as 'a prince of doubts' is apparent in Soyinka's sonnet 'Hamlet', which is included in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972):

> He stilled his doubts, they rose to halt and lame
> A resolution on the rack. Passion's flame
> Was doused in fear of error, his mind's unease
> Bred indulgence to the state's disease ('Hamlet' *A Shuttle* p 22).

Soyinka's Hamlet is 'salted' into action before the end of the sonnet, bringing to an end his 'lame' irresolution.

5. This is how Soyinka puts it in *Myth Literature and the African World*, p 31: 'It is because of the reality of this [transitional] gulf, this abyss, so crucial to Yoruba cosmic ordering, that Ogun becomes a key figure in understanding the Yoruba metaphysical world. The gulf is what must constantly be diminished...by sacrifices, rituals, ceremonies of appeasement to the cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf.' (Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.)

6. The journey North derives from Soyinka's own journey at about the same period of the events of the novel. This is described in *The Man Died*, for example: 'Birkin Ladi, about thirty miles from Jos, was where we encountered the riots' p 164.

7. In discussing the events which led to the January 15, 1966 coup, Soyinka's text says this:

> Violence and death are personal things, and finally there is left only this code by which responsibility is shed or assumed: knowing in advance what the results would be, given the choice of a role in advancing or participating in the course of action taken by those young officers would I have accepted such a role? There was no qualification to my affirmative answer (p 161).

The answer may have still been 'affirmative', but what is missing here is the swaggering celebration given to the Dentist in *Season of Anomy*.