



**A Thematic and Technical Study of Wole Soyinka's  
Poetry**

**دراسة تقنية وموضوعية في شعر  
وول سوينيكا**

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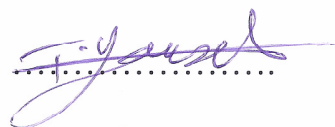
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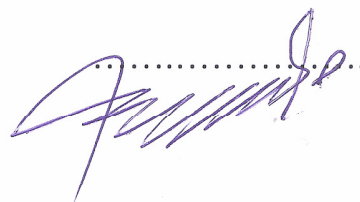
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## **Dedication**

I would like dedicate my humble work to all my family members and my husband for their support, especially my parents for raising me to be the person I am today. I would like to dedicate my modest work to my father for encouraging me to pursue my dream of reaching the highest academic position, and for supporting me financially through my life. I also want to dedicate my work to my mother for her emotional support since she is always pushing me to be distinguished among my peers. I would like to dedicate my work to all my sisters and brothers for helping me through my life and supporting me emotionally.

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To all of them I dedicate my simple work.

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## **A Thematic and Technical Study of Wole Soyinka's Poetry**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims at showing the typical and the local aspects of Wole Soyinka's poetry, as well as, identifying the most important features of Wole Soyinka as a poet and the outstanding elements that influenced his poetry.

In order to achieve the goals of the study the research used the analytical and descriptive approach in which the researcher traced some of the main topics in the poetry of Wole Soyinka. Also, the study seeks the interpretation and criticism of some of the poems through checking these poems addressing love, myth, prison, satire, and linguistic strategies of the poet.

The study reached out the following results:

- 1- The most important characteristic of the writer Wole Soyinka is that he is not an elitist, addressing merely artistic matters. On the contrary, he is the writer of people whose role in cultural enlightenment and struggling against political injustice is unmistakable. As such, he suffered imprisonment.
  
- 2- Wole Soyinka's poetry is distinguished from that of his contemporaries that the language of his poetry is simple and easy to understand because he does not want to create a distance between him as a writer and the common readers. According to that, his poetry covers many topics and fields; some are local and others universal. This is

perhaps one reason for his great reputation as a public figure in contemporary poetry and thought.

- 3- There are many elements that influenced Wole Soyinka's poetry such as; Yoruba mythology, rituals, traditions, politics, customs and prison.

Key Words : Wole Soyinka Yoruba

mythology, rituals, traditions, politics, customs and prison.

## A Thematic and Technical Study of Wole Soyinka's Poetry

دراسة تقنية و موضوعية في شعر

وول سوينكا

اسم الباحث : رؤية حافظ عباس

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### ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى عرض الجوانب النموذجية والمحلية في شعر وول سوينكا، وكذلك، تحديد أهم ملامح وول سوينكا كشاعر، والعناصر البارزة التي أثرت على شعره.

من أجل تحقيق أهداف الدراسة استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي من خلال تتبع بعض المواضيع الرئيسية التي وردت في شعر وول سوينكا. كذلك سعت الدراسة إلى تفسير ونقد بعض القصائد من خلال تطرق تلك القصائد إلى مواضيع الحب، والأسطورة، والسجن، والهجاء، والاستراتيجيات اللغوية للشاعر. توصلت الدراسة إلى النتائج التالية:

- 1- إن أهم ما تميزت به كتابات وول سوينكا أنها ليست نخبوية. على العكس من ذلك، فقد كانت كتاباته عن الناس، وكان له دورا بارزا في التنوير الثقافي والنضال ضد الظلم السياسي، والتي عانى بسببها السجن.
- 2- من أهم ما تميز به شعر وول سوينكا عن شعر معاصريه أن لغة شعره اتسمت بالبساطة وسهولة الفهم، وذلك يعود ذلك إلى رغبته في عدم خلق مسافة بينه وبين القراء، بحيث يستطيع الجميع فهم كتاباته. ووفقا لذلك، فإن شعره تناول العديد من المواضيع والمجالات المحلية والدولية. ولعل هذا هو أحد أسباب شهرته الكبيرة كشخصية عامة في الشعر والفكر المعاصر.
- 3- توصلت الدراسة إلى أن هناك العديد من العناصر التي أثرت على شعر وول سوينكا مثل: اليوروبا والأساطير، والعادات والتقاليد، والسياسة والفترة التي قضاها بالسجن.
- 4- الكلمات المفتاحية للرسالة: وول سوينكا اليوروبا والأساطير، والعادات والتقاليد، والسياسة والفترة التي قضاها بالسجن.

## **Chapter One**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the study**

African literature can be defined as writings or poems or articles that come from the writers of the African continent, whether in the north or in the south region. African poetry is dominated by myths and rituals that include gods, humans, animals, plants and places. There are chants dealing with the tribal and war leaders, such as those that glorify the great Zulu leader, “Shaka” and the “Yoruba” tribes. The poetry and literature in Nigeria is mainly affected by the surrounding environments, such as poverty, ignorance, tribal and religious conflicts and cultural diversity, which created a fertile soil for the African writers in general and for the Nigerian poet in particular. In Nigeria, Wole Soyinka has been known as a playwright and novelist rather than a poet.

The fact is that the entire literary output of Africa shows that the majority of African contemporary writers are under the influence of two strong currents; the first is represented in an attempt to deepen the link to their roots, and the second is embodied in the creation of a special language that is characterized by comprehensive and global nature at the same time as

reflected in the work of Jean Pliya and Felix Kochorau and Francie Baby and Roné Falombe. (Aljalad, 2013, p.5)

### **Wole Soyinka: The Writer and Man:**

Soyinka is one of the most famous writers of the world; the diversity of his literary world between the theater, the novel and poetry in addition to translation has formed of a true combination to his vision for two civilizations: the African civilization to which he belongs by blood and flesh, and the Western civilization that he has deeply experienced by tongue and culture. He has received many awards at local, regional and global levels, including Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.

He has grown up in the arms of the Yoruba culture and has become a natural part of that culture, as well as, his great interest in studying the culture of his people. The manifestation of his keen interest in vocabularies and its critical differences is represented in his translation of one of the great literary works: the novel of (*A Forest of a Thousand Daemons*). He wrote its introduction explaining his cautious and sagacious in way addressing the language (Soyinka, 1982, P.5).

## 1.2 Introductory Remarks

Wole Soyinka, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, has produced two novels, six collections of poetry and fifteen works of drama (George, 2003, p.146). He is far less concerned with the literary world than with the political one, especially in his native Nigeria. His memoirs run to around 600 pages. His style of writing is elaborate, laboured and somewhat hard. Take, for instance this passage:

I looked round, listened to the conversation around me - a pretentious note perhaps, some posturing, a preposterous proposition, an artificial ardour, a comfortable liberalism or the intrusion of a vicarious revolutionary warrior - and the wine would turn flat on my tongue, my mind go blank, leaving only the rebuke, what are you still doing in this place. (Thomas, 1984, p.506)

One can easily notice that all these lines are one sentence. It is full of parenthetical sentences and phrases which are really hard.

Soyinka's self-definition as an artist and intellectual in the modern time is always there in his writings. In one of his essays, "The Writer in a Modern African State", Wole Soyinka wrote that "the artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time" (Soyinka, 1967, p. 31). As a historian of the culture of the last of

his people, he was able to highlight his voice to the needs and aspirations of the present through the voice of the African literature today. As a playwright, he is simultaneously a traditionalist and a path-finder, the leading exponent of drama in English (George, 2003, p.146). Soyinka's achievement is to have placed drama about Africa and Africans on the world stage; to have inspired other contemporary African dramatists.

There is a second level of seeming contradiction to be found in Soyinka's work. Drawing on Yoruba mythology and the rituals that are derived from it. A range of critical work has shown this vision to be based on a socio-cultural passion, even as the writer's out put constitutes an attempt to work through the passion by means of language and symbol. This understanding of Soyinka gives a sociological accent to his mythopoeic vision and aesthetic. His specific refashioning of traditional Yoruba myths and archetypes emerges, on the one hand, as a theory of historical being and the often brutal adventure of the social, and on the other, of literature as witness of both. "However his use of Yoruba mythology as a way of working out an "African" perspective on tragedy comes close to nativism, and a number of critics have thought this out" (George, 2003, p.146).

### **1.3 Wole Soyinka's Variety of Topics in His Work, Politics, Imprisonment, and Freedom**

In 1967, soon after Nigeria's civil war and six years after independence, Wole Soyinka famously declared that a "Phase of Disillusionment" had started in which the attention of most African writers is paid to the problems they face at home. So there is a need for a new vision, Soyinka said: "if writers were to have any influence in postcolonial African societies, in which the state seemed to provide no recourse against corruption and rising violence" (Attwell, 2003, p32), they have to deal with these, because it is a way to define the program, so Soyinka has announced the problems faced by colonialism in South Africa so that it is temporary, especially, the fact that was "simply out of this world" (Attwell, 2003, p32).

However, Soyinka's imagery also implies a vision of counter-modernity: this past [Europe] must address its present [South Africa]. Europe will restore itself to health by separating South Africa from its diseased body. The calendar is not time itself, for time has its universal "imperatives" which include the destruction of irrational apartheid, and so on. This last concept is similar to Homi Bhabha's notion that certain postcolonial projects operate within a "time-lag" which is imposed by colonialism but which is used to remind European modality of what it has failed to achieve (Bhabha, 1983, p.



245). In other words, postcolonial reason holds Europe, as reason's guardian, to its promises. Similarly, a certain obstacle in Soyinka over South Africa is overcome, by means of an appeal to a properly universal view of history in the development of Soyinka's writing on South Africa.

When Soyinka was asked about the challenges facing the country today, he replied, that the problems facing the country will not be solved by the prayers, but can be solved efficiently, where he said: (www.thisdaylive.com.15 April 2014) "the basic necessities of existence, faith and secularism", a seminar organized by the Cultural Center Black and International Understanding (CBCIU) in Osogbo, Soyinka was the keynote speaker at the symposium, where he called for a frank talk among stakeholders in order to end the bombings crisis to hit the country.

Soyinka calls to teach comparative religious studies and that in primary and secondary education. Board of Directors and Chairman of Osogbo Center for Black Culture and International Understanding, warned against preaching religious intolerance to the younger generation.

There have been several bomb attacks around the country since December 1997, including some army bus bombings that killed three soldiers and wounding dozens; police accused Soyinka and the National Democratic for the bombings; both he and the group have denied involvement. There were

political activities in which he was involved; first he was an editor at the University College Ibadan. Bernth Lindfors concludes that as “an enthusiastic member of the progressive party, a student political organization set up in opposition to the more powerful student Dynamic Party, then he took over the editorship of *The Eagle*, a sporadic cyclostyled newssheet of campus commentary and humour” (Musa, 2006, p.216). He was arrested in 1965 to prove courage through his speech, which condemned the electoral fraud in the Western Region in 1964 Western region elections.

#### **1.4 Variety of Topics and Genres:**

Soyinka, is a playwright and novelist, a major Nigerian military commander, who escaped to Europe and the United States. He has lived there for more than two years. In his book *The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis*. Soyinka depicted the real suffering and political crisis of the Nigerian Society.

Although his most famous dramatic works are metaphysical in theme, his outlook is strongly present in others such as poetry and short stories. Or perhaps this is a product of what his admirers and questioners most want him to talk about: how do we solve the ‘problem(s)’ of Nigeria?. This excessive interest in politics is expected if one takes into account the religions, ethical, political and cultural problems of modern Nigeria. As its representative voice,

Soyinka concentrates heavily on the political problems of his country and its wide ranging effects. Gibbs wrote that:

Wole Soyinka is a poet , playwright, director, novelist, critic, political, activist, and many other thing. Wole Soyinka is Africa's best-known dramatist and one of the most illustrious personalities. (Gibbs, 1980, p.21).

Another critic of Soyinka finds him the great representative name in his country. "Wole Soyinka is considered sometimes the most versatile genius among the Ibadan Poets . (Maduakor, 1977, p. 12)

In the book mentioned earlier, the open sore, Soyinka talks about both the personal and impersonal sides, especially his own moment of triumph such as the reception of the Nobel Prize and his successes as a dramatist speaking to people directly.

After this brief presentation about the features of Wole Soyinka and what the foreign newspapers about him, and what his friends said about him, this chapter will highlight the historical background, social and professional in detail through the three topics. Wole Soyinka, who went on hunger strike when he was imprisoned in Nigeria, reveals that he rejected 'food' in order to protest against the death of 'words' that he suffered in his solitary confinement:

Why do I first?' he writes, "I ask for books, writing material.. and ask for an end to my inhuman isolation. His hunger symbolizes the starvation of his intellect, while has already exhausted its resources to feed my body and deny my mind is deliberate dehumanization. (Moud, 1993, p.106)

By "regurgitating" the ideas that he has consumed, Soyinka makes himself into a "mental prison", "I count circle indefinitely in the regurgitate "the ideas of my mind to me", he persists. (Moud, 1993, p.106)

The evidence of Soyinka's appeal lies in that his plays which form the most substantial part of his output, are read and performed all over the world. On these terms, the ability to effect changes in society, to make decisions or take actions that contribute to the collective good, is for Soyinka as much the providence of the poet as it is the scientist's. " We recall here Fagunwa's invention of the singer Olohun-iyo and the intellectual Imodoye as indispensable members of the questing subjects of his world" (George, 2003, p.150) .

What Soyinka does is to locate in Ogun a happy coincidence of the principles of artistic and scientific instrumental creativity. In the opening chapter of *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, he writes: "Ogun, by incorporating within himself so many seemingly contradictory attributes,

represents the closest conception to the original oneness of Orisanla”. (George, 2003, p.150). And in “The Fourth Stage” he states that “Ogun not only dared to look into transitional essence but triumphantly bridged it with knowledge, with art, with vision and the mystic creativity of science a total and profound hubristic assertiveness that is beyond any parallel in Yoruba experience” (Soyinka, 1976, p. 31).

However, the self-creation of Ogun makes sure self with the price. Because the human warrior enemy is under war conditions, Ogun is prone to excesses. So much is this the case that he could turn on his own people in the heat of battle without realizing his mistake (Soyinka, 1976, p. 28-30). In his long poem, ‘Idanre’, Soyinka captures this duality in the section entitled “The Beginning.” There he elaborates imagery that connotes his contradictory significance as an emblem of creativity and destructiveness: (Barnes, 1997, p. 308 )

Ogun is the lascivious god who takes  
 Seven gourdlets to war. One for gunpowder  
 One for charms, two for palm wine and three  
 Storage for his sperms. (Idanre, 72)

On his way to war, one notices that words “gunpowder” and “charms,” emblems of destruction, are accompanied by regenerative vessels of “palm

wine” and “sperms”. It is no wonder, then, that the hero’s shield could just as well be inward spiked, that the agency of humane philanthropy could at the same time be one of aggression: “Ogun path-maker, he who goes for where other gods/Have turned, Shield of Orphans, was your shield/In-spiked that day on sheltering lives?” (Idanre, 72).

On Soyinka’s terms, change in all societies involves recurrent negotiations of this tense dualism, the archetypal passion and process represented in the myth of Ogun.

The warrior tradition of Ogun is symbolized by the sword, being the primary instance of the use of iron implements for purposes of violence and destruction. As Carroll’s studies into representational art in Nigeria reveal, the members of the warrior tradition identify with Ogun’s military exploiting him symbolically in their rituals as the god of war (Adu-Gyamfi, 1997, p.78).

Yoruba military discourse is regarding the relationship between the warrior and Ogun. Any dictionary of the Yoruba language would indicate that the word "Ogun" is both the linguistic sign for war and the god, though the two words are distinguished by tone differences.

The members of veterans such as hunter group, do not taste the blood of animals, but a taste for human blood describing Ogun’s ferocity in war (Adu-Gyamfi, 1997, p.79): (oral praise poem)

Where does one meet him?

One meets him in the place of battle:

One meets him in the place of wrangling;

One meets him in the place where torrents of blood

Fill with longing, as a cup of water does the thirsty. (Idowu 89)

### **1.5 Wole Soyinka and his Native Heritage**

Wole Soyinka is a member of the Yoruba people, who form one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The language, myths and customs of the Yoruba feature prominently in most of Soyinka's works, and in some it is an essential element. Soyinka is deeply conscious of his heritage as a Yoruba and deeply concerned, too, with his role as a Nigerian. The quality of Nigerian life and the errors and weaknesses which, Soyinka believes, infect Nigerian society are constantly examined in his poems (Dunton, 1982, p.6). His work offers conclusive proof of the assertion that for an author to be truly international in appeal it is necessary for him in the first place to be truly regional.

Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934 in the city of Abeokuta southwest Nigeria, and belongs to the Yoruba tribe, and graduated from the University of Ibadan in 1952. He travelled to Britain for higher studies in English literature, and he earned his Master's degree with honors in 1954. During his studies in

London he worked as a reader and reviewer of theatrical texts at the royal theater.

Soyinka received his primary education at St Peter's school, Ake, Abeokuta, and then spent one year at Abeokuta Grammar School. In 1946 he transferred to Government College, Ibadan, an institution with particularly high academic standards. During his school-days he cultivated his talents as a musician, a guitarist and a singer. He says of this interest: "I was musically inclined, but I was too lazy to study music. Somehow I just began writing and took an interest in drama " (Lindfors, 1975, pp.64-65). During Soyinka's childhood in the Isara-Remo town under the British dominance, his father was the headmaster of St. Peter school in Abeokuta, his mother owned a shop and was a member of political movement in the local society. The colonization of his country and its impact will be reflected in his literary works and images.

Since his early childhood Wole Soyinka grew up in a climate marked by religiosity, which helped form his character later. The Second World War erupted when he was only five years old; he used to listen and pay attention to the war's news from the radio that was dominated almost completely by the Nazi Germany through its leader Hitler. After he finished his studies at St. Peter School, Soyinka joined the grammar school in Abeokuta, in which has



won numerous awards, and in 1946 he left for Lagos to work as a writer (Fraser, 2008, p.2). During this period he was able to write some radio plays and short stories broadcasted through the Nigerian radio station. Soyinka began his study at the University College in Ibadan in 1952, he studied English literature, Western history and the Greek language. Then he moved to Leeds-England to study at the University of Leads (Fraser, 2008, p.2).

Wilson Knight was the supervisor and mentor of Soyinka in his studies in English literature to become the means of having relationships with some of the talented British writers. Needless to say, Wilson Knight is a famous Shakespearian scholar whose effects will be felt in the perspective and judgments of the young Soyinka.

Before receiving his Bachelor degree, he participated actively and successfully in literary fiction, when he wrote many comic pieces such as *The Lion and the Jewel*. Also, Soyinka was engaged in writing commentaries often directing his criticism to his fellows at the University (Fraser, 2008). He was known as having a very uncompromising stance, often directed his criticism to the females he worked with at the university. After finishing his study in Leeds, he did not leave the city because he planned to receive his Master degree. He was greatly influenced by his former mentors, and made up his mind to try merging the European traditions with his home land traditions.

His first main play was published in the year 1958, and it called *Swamp Dwellers*, then he wrote his second play entitled *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959). Those plays encouraged Soyinka because of the popularity they had received that made him leave his ambition to continue his study to attain the doctorate degree, and made him leave to London.

In December 1962, Soyinka's essay "Towards a True Theater" was published. He began teaching with the Department of English Language at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife. He discussed current affairs with "négrophiles", and condemned the government of Nigeria in more than one occasion. This whole period was eventful life and various experience will be felt in his literary works both in poetry and prose.

It remains unclear how far Soyinka is prepared to argue the basic contradiction he established between the so-called Yoruba mind and the so-called Western mind. One does not have to go far to identify the problem in such binary characterization. What is clear, however, is that Soyinka's work maintains a balance between the local setting (Arica) and the Western View of life. Soyinka, using Nigerian settings has portrayed universal problem. This is what makes both his novel (*The Interpreters*) and the whole corpus of Soyinka's work universally valid (Achebe, 1989, p.95).

According to Soyinka, to understand the Yoruba mode of seeing, one is required to delve into its complexities as embedded in myths and dramatized in festivals and rituals. In his interpretation of Yoruba myth of origins, Soyinka focuses on what he calls a “primordial rupture” in the human psyche and cosmic order. One way in which the Yoruba apprehended and represented this rupture is in the myth of the fragmentation of godhead occasioned by a primal act of rebellion. According to this myth, all of what now constitutes humanity’s faculties were once concentrated in the figure of the deity Obatala, also known as Orisha-nla (Arch divinity). An essence of creation, Obatala is not itself a principle of dynamic creativity: he superintends creation only of and after an external agency provides the all-important creative spark. In this sense, the god Obatala is the embodiment of hegemonic social order, of preconstituted totality. Obatala reigns over this cosmic/social totality and destiny. To serve him in this dispensation is a slave, another mythic figure named Atunda or Atooda. It was this slave who initiated the primal rupture by rolling a huge boulder over Obatala, shattering the godhead into a thousand and one fragments (George, 2003, pp.148-149).

When Wole Soyinka writes like this, his audience is not a local one; it is a universal one. Indeed, to this point he widens his immediate range of

reference by making the court historian invoke the precedent of the Trojan War (Jones, 1971, p.97).

## **1.6 Social and Historical Background**

As already mentioned, Syoinka's parents came from neighboring Yoruba kingdoms: he is a Yoruba and he speaks the Yoruba language. In one of the several studies of Yoruba history and culture, S.A. Babalola makes the following observations about the Yoruba:

Numbering over ten million, they occupy the south-west segment of Nigeria as well as the rain – forest areas of Dahomey (now the People's Republic of Benin) and Togo. They have a rich and ancient cultural heritage dating as far back as the sixth century AD.(1966, pp.5-6.)

Babalola goes on to explore some of the most striking features of Yoruba culture. He draws attention to the 'large number of towns with democratic systems of local government' led by an oba, or , for smaller units, a bale or 'head chief', the 'extended family' system of relationships, the 'tonal, metaphor-saturated language', the religion, and the 'drum music of different modes with dancing to match'.(Babalola, 1966, pp.5-6.) Often, he says, a religious occasion is celebrated with music and dancing and this produces a performance tradition, which may be called African Festival Theatre. This tradition and kindred forms of Yoruba theatre require further comment

because they provide particularly useful background to *the Lion and the Jewel* (Jeffares & Suheil, 1982, p.7) .

Written more extensively on African Festival Theatre, and drawing largely on his research in Yorubaland, Ogunba says:

The festival is the prime artistic institution of traditional Africa, for the festival is the only institution which has the framework which can co-ordinate virtually all the art forms of a community. Each important traditional festival lasts for a considerable time which may be three, seven, nine or sixteen days, a month or even three months. Each tends to have a story or myth to perform and each makes use of its own peculiar style in the dramatic realization of the story. In the process the arts of costuming, masking, drumming, chanting, dancing and several others are utilized in a manner not totally dissimilar to their usage in other dramatic traditions (Abiola & Ogunba, 1978, p.5)

Another performance tradition that is reflected in Soyinka's dramatic work is the presence of companies of professionals or semi-professionals: the Yoruba Masque Theatre. This has been clearly described by Joel Adodeji who identifies one of the distinct genres as the 'revue-masque'. It has some affinities with *the Lion and the Jewel* as the following description makes clear: the revue – masques are sketched out as comments on the state of society. They tend to create the illusion of reality; but this is selectively done. In spite

of the naturalness brought into the acting, both the stylized make and the realistic costume are fixed, expressing only the prevailing characteristics of stereotypes rather than specific individuals. The revues are usually based on subjects of topical interest and easily display the comic spirit of the Yoruba; but there is more emphasis on dramatic action than on the working out of the plot.(Adediji, 1972, p.261).

Looking back on this period from the early 1990s, in an interview with Biodun Jeyifo, Soyinka had this to say about it:

Twenty five years ago I was almost exclusively concerned with the problem of black liberation from the settler-colonial and apartheid obscenities. As a student just beginning to write seriously, I saw the political battleground in Africa as being situated in Southern Africa, nowhere else. ... My first two 'serious' plays were on Southern Africa. One of them was a melodramatic piece which, after about six versions, I realized was just 'wrong' and I destroyed it in a sober moment. I realized that the first enemy was within. ... And I suppose since then I've been doing nothing but the dance macabre in this jungle of ours.

(Attwell , 2003, p.31)

Obviously, Soyinka tries to find his way as a writer, checking his choices and judging them as objectively as possible. In fact, one notice that there is a shift from choosing external conditions of post-colonial literature to

a writing that tries to enter in the psyche of the battle African and his/her real problems.

Over the years the apartheid period, Soyinka returned to the question of South Africa's troubled situation. In this period Soyinka could not ignore these circumstances, and show its relationship with South Africa in this period to certain unforgettable moments: the first is what is stated in Jeyifo interview, the second play is one of destruction, and the second is the invention and creativity, he has published. Soyinka then produced "Ogun Abibiman", an epic poem caused by Samora Machel Declaration of March 3 of that year, and the development of Mozambique on a war footing with Rhodesia declares that ZANU forces Robert Mugabe to put itself on the soil of Mozambique., "Ogun Abibiman" was published in Johannesburg in 1980, with a new dedication to "the dead and maimed of Soweto." (Atwell 2003, P.32)

The third high point in the story is the Nobel Prize acceptance speech Soyinka in 1986 and published under the title: "This must be the last address of the present." it was allocated address to Mandela, the liberation struggle icon for freedom. Finally, there was the land Mandela, a collection of poems, published two years later, in 1988. In spite of the attention Soyinka, the company generally focus on problems closer to home, it is also clear that he

could not resist the desire to address other issues such as heritage, politics and history. (Atwell 2003, P.32)

### **1.7 Wole Soyinka's Literary Career:**

He began his career as a playwright by preparing sketches for Saturday Evening school entertainments. On leaving school, he worked for a short while in the medical stores in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. He began to write for the Nigerian broadcasting service, and one of his plays was the first by a Nigerian to be broadcast.(Jeffares & Suheil, 1982, p.5)

Soyinka's accounts of the tragic and harrowing episode in prison were published in *The Man Died* (1972), and in his second volume of poems, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972). Soyinka has also edited a collection of African verse (including some of his own poems, and others translated from Swahili, Yoruba, Portuguese and French), called *Poems of Black Africa* (1975). The same year saw the publication of his most recent play to date, *Death and the King's Horseman*. In 1976 some of his essays appeared in the volume *Myth, literature and the African World* .(Soyinka, 1981, p.7)

In October 1952, at the age of eighteen, he entered University College, Ibadan. University College had been opened four years earlier and offered General Degree under a special relationship with the University of London. Soyinka entered fully into undergraduate life: he wrote poetry; he edited a



student newspaper, and he distinguished himself academically. After two years, he was selected to go to the University of Leeds to take an Honors Degree in English.

Soyinka has said that it was during his undergraduate days at Leeds that he started taking writing 'seriously'.(Duerden& Peterse, 1972, p.172.) After his return he worked as a lecturer in the departments of drama at the Nigerian different universities such as, the Ife, Lagos and Ibadan universities. He also served as a teacher of literature at Emory University in Atlanta, USA. He returned to Nigeria in 1960, and his efforts at that time focused on the development of the Nigerian theater by the discovering of ancient African shapes, he established his group which was called "Masks". He has worked as a director, actor and producer for that troupe he works in teaching the comparative literature and chairman of the Department of Drama at the University of Ife, and he is heading the International Theatre Institute of UNESCO in Nigeria, and Chairman of the World Book Council, he works as an ambassador of goodwill and good offices for UNESCO.

The year 1960 was very important, not only for Soyinka, but for his country, since in October Nigeria gained its independence from the United Kingdom. Soon invitations were issued for plays to be written in celebration of the event and Soyinka participated by producing a *Dance of the Forests*.

From Nigeria's independence Soyinka took the opportunity to insist that the country took a long, hard look at its past history, at its current pretensions and at the prospect for the future, and the fierce pessimism of the play he produced probably contributed to its being rejected as an entry for the official programme of celebration (Jeffares & Suheil, 1982, p.7).

Soyinka's intensely active, controversial, and productive career is remarkable by any standards. There is a commitment to his art and to his political and moral views which has earned him the title *Tiger on Stage*, (Jeffares & Suheil, 1982, p.9) a recognition of his fierce, self – assertive intellectual toughness and independence. He bridges separate cultures in his criticism and has a dazzling power over the resources of language which some have linked with James Joyce. However, his Yoruba background represents the roots that feed his extraordinary energy and also the inspiration of his plays and poems.

His first collection of poems, *Idanre and other poems*, appeared in 1967, and included the long title poem written for the Commonwealth Arts Festival (1965). It concerns the creation myth of Ogun, the God of Iron, Soyinka's own personal god and a recurrent source of inspiration in much of his work. Other poems focus on the massacre of Igbos in Northern Nigeria, a prelude to the Civil War (1966-70). The first section of this volume, 'of the

read', underlines several major themes in the Road (death on the roads, the dual nature of the creative destructive Ogun, and man's own dual nature), and other poems deal with the waste of war and the idea of the artist as a pathfinder misunderstood by his society .(Jeffares & Suheil, 1982, p.9)

### **1.8 Concluding Remarks:**

This chapter dealt with the life of the poet Wole Soyinka and the most important positions and tasks that he has been in charge of, and aspects of his political, professional and social career. It is proper to conclude by presenting and emphasizing the basic lines of Soyinka's life and works, in addition to a brief background about his social and political life. The most important factors which will be published in his literary works are those related to World War II, politics and domestic methods such as the absence of democracy and arbitrary authority of rulers.

It is also obvious that Wole Soyinka occupied the prominent position and status among the contemporary African writers because of his different literary achievements during a period less than twenty years. He was the first African who won the Noble Prize in literature in the year 1987, as already mentioned. Also, he was able to establish himself as one of the most important writers in the African continent in the present age. He was one of the supporters who called to address the identity issue and the African culture,

especially the Nigerian culture, and protecting the African social system from the colonizer's culture. The conclusion of this chapter is that Soyinka is a great writer who has covered many fields in literature such as drama, poetry, fiction, criticism, teaching and translating. In all these he distinguished himself as a very important literary figure who talks about both the past and present, local and universal, mythological and scientific.

This is another way of saying that literary texts pass the test of authenticity and value only if they are “universal”. For the Universalist arguments often derive from European assumptions, whereby “Western” or European things become the normative “universal” standard of judgment. But Soyinka, is also quick to criticize or satirize those he considers Eurocentric (George, 2003, p.146). Thus he frees himself from those influences that might keep him away from his native culture background.

Without claiming that this is the most appropriate way Soyinka should be read, the combination of Universal rhetoric in Soyinka, as well as his combination of a civic life of political engagement with an insistence on the autonomy of art, is an index of the mission he sets for himself as writer and intellectual. It is a mission he shares with other writers of his post independence generation. In 1971, his poetry collection *A Shuttle in the Crypt* was published. *Madmen and Specialists* was produced in Ibadan that year.

Soyinka travelled to Paris to take the lead role as Patrice Lumumba, the murdered first Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo, in the production of his *Murderous Angels*. His powerful autobiographical work *The Man Died* (1971), a collection of notes from prison, was also published.

In April 1971, concerned about the political situation in Nigeria, Soyinka resigned from his duties at the University in Ibadan, and began years of voluntary exile. In July in Paris, excerpts from his well-known play *The Dance of The Forests* were performed. In 1972, he was awarded an Honoris Causa doctorate by the University of Leeds. Soon thereafter, his novel *Season of Anomy* (1972) and his *Collected Plays* (1972) were both published by Oxford University Press. In 1973 the National Theatre, London, commissioned and premiered the play *The Bacchae of Euripides* (Killam & Rowe, 2000, p.275 ). In 1973 his plays *Camwood on the Leaves* and *Jero's Metamorphosis* were first published. From 1973 to 1975, Soyinka spent time on scientific studies. He spent a year as a visiting fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge University 1973-74 and wrote *Death and the King's Horseman*, which had its first reading at Churchill College, and gave a series of lectures at a number of European universities.

In 1974 his *Collected Plays, Volume II* was issued by Oxford University Press. In 1975 Soyinka was promoted to the position of editor for *Transition*, a

magazine based in the Ghanaian capital of Accra, where he moved for some time. He used his columns in *Transition* to criticize the "negrophiles" (for instance, his article "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Transition") and military regimes. He protested against the military junta of Idi Amin in Uganda. After the political turnover in Nigeria and the subversion of Gowon's military regime in 1975, Soyinka returned to his homeland and resumed his position at the Cathedral of Comparative Literature at the University of Ife.

In 1976 he published his poetry collection *Ogun Abibiman*, as well as a collection of essays entitled *Myth, Literature and the African World*. In these, Soyinka explores the genesis of mysticism in African theatre and, using examples from both European and African literature, compares and contrasts the cultures. He delivered a series of guest lectures at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana in Legon. In October, the French version of *The Dance of The Forests* was performed in Dakar, while in Ife, his *Death and The King's Horseman* had its first performance.

In 1988, his collection of poems *Mandela's Earth, and Other Poems* was published, while in Nigeria another collection of essays entitled *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* appeared. In the same year, Soyinka accepted the position of Professor of African Studies and Theatre at Cornell University. (<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/soyinka.htm> ).

Although, based on a true historical event, Soyinka's play changes some of the precise historical details. As his prefatory note informs us: "The changes I have made are in matters of detail, sequence and of course characterization. The action has also been set back two or three years to while the war (World War II) was still on, for minor reasons of dramaturgy" (Soyinka, 1975. p.1). Not only does he locate the play in the middle of the Second World War, but he also changes the social location of the son who commits suicide. In the true story, the son is a trader in Ghana who returns home, whereas Soyinka's character is educated, based in England, and a medical attendant to World War II casualties. In the true story also, the Elesin figure did not commit suicide after his son's death; according to D. S. Izevbaye, he lived on, although, there is no way of knowing whether or not his reputation in Oyo suffered irreparable damage as a result of the incident(Izevbaye, 1997, p. 70).

In seeking to understand the play, the playwright's won interpretation will show itself to be part of the cultural drama being played out. According to Soyinka's account of Yoruba metaphysics as outlined in the preceding section, what Simon Pilkington sees as feudalistic barbarism is an important mechanism of communal regeneration. The Elesin, at the moment of self-sacrifice, embodies the collective social and psychic aspirations of the Oyo community. He is a ritual scapegoat who mediates the world of the living, the dead, and

the unborn. By his willful death at the summons of the community, he accedes the world of the dead on behalf of the living and the unborn. His death thus ensures renewed harmony between the three levels of existence constitutive of traditional Yoruba cosmic order, namely, the dead, the living, and the unborn. Indeed, on Soyinka's terms, "*suicide*" is a misnomer. That is, Elesin's death does not turn on a brutalization of the corporeal body; rather, it operates via an "act of will" through which his whole being submits to dissolution almost an aesthetic inspiring the social position he currently occupies, "and all things being equal, his heir will do likewise, thereby ensuring the continuity of Oyo tradition and social-spiritual harmony" (George, 2003, p.153).

### **1.9 Statement of the Problem:**

The present study concentrates on Wole Soyinka as representing a special case in contemporary African and World literatures. His name is known in poetry, drama, fiction and journalism. Because his poetry has not received great attention as in the case of his fiction and drama, this study will shed light on his poetry, thematically and technically as well as its broad cultural context. It chooses Soyinka's poetry to concentrate on technically. The wide context of this poetry will be discussed as it is central for appreciating his work.



### **1.10 Questions of the Study:**

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most important characteristics of the writer Wole Soyinka as a poet?
2. What distinguishes Wole Soyinka's poetry from that of his contemporaries?
3. What are the elements that influenced his poetry?

### **1.11 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims at the following:

1. Showing the typical and the local aspects of Wole Soyinka's poetry.
2. Identifying the most important features of Wole Soyinka as a poet.
3. Identifying the outstanding elements that influenced his poetry.

### **1.12 Significance of the Study:**

The importance of the present study springs from the fact that it represents an early attempt to choose a poet not only of African origin, but Nigerian as well.

As such, it is hoped that it may fill a gap in the studies in this field.

### **1.13 Methodology :**

The method that will be used throughout the study is both descriptive and analytic. It studies in detail the poems, emphasizing these aspects of his poetry.

### **1.14 Limitations of the study**

The study is limited to analyzing his poetic works; therefore, his plays, novels, and short stories will be excluded from its attention. The study is also limited by the difficulty of getting enough sources and relevant references due to their scarcity.

### **1.15 Definition of Terms**

**Poetry:** Poetry is any kind of verbal or written language that is structured rhythmically and is meant to tell a story, or express any kind of emotion, idea, or state of being. Poetry is used to achieve this artistic expression in several ways. There are certain forms and patterns that poets follow in the composition process of their work. These different forms were born out of separate artistic and cultural movements. Most of these forms coincide with the previously mentioned definition of poetry; and, the most popular of these forms are elegy, narrative, ode, ballad, sonnet, villanelle, sestina, free verse, and epic. (Ollila & Jantas, 2006, P. 1).

**Yoruba people :** The Yoruba established a federation of city-states under the political ascendancy of the city state of Oyo, located on the Northern fringes of Yoruba land in the Savanna plains between the forests of present Southwest Nigeria and the Niger River. Following a Jihad led by Uthman Dan Fodio and a rapid consolidation of the Hausa city states of contemporary northern

Nigeria, the Fulani Sokoto Caliphate invaded and annexed the buffer Nupe Kingdom. It then began to advance southwards into Oyo lands. Shortly afterwards, its armies overran the Yoruba military capital of Ilorin, and then sacked and destroyed Oyo-Ile, the royal seat of the Oyo Empire. Following this, Oyo-Ile was abandoned, and the Oyo retreated south to the present city of Oyo (formerly known as "Ago d'Oyo", or "Oyo Atiba") in a forested region where the cavalry of the Sokoto Caliphate was less effective. Further attempts by the Sokoto Caliphate to expand southwards were checked by the Yoruba who had rallied in defense under the military leadership of the ascendant Ibadan clan, which rose from the old Oyo Empire, and of the Ijebu city-states. However, the Oyo superiority got a terrible blow. The other Yoruba city-states broke free of Oyo dominance and civil war. These events weakened the southern Yorubas in their resistance to British colonial and military invasions. In 1960, greater Yorubaland was incorporated into the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (Azar, 2006, p.275).

**Empirical Study:** Empirical research methods are a class of research methods in which empirical observations or data are collected in order to answer particular research questions. While primarily used in academic research, they can also be useful in answering practical questions (Moody, 2002, p.1)

**Theoretical Study:** Study which refers to the scientific activity which is the main purpose of it and direct access to the facts and scientific laws and theories Inquirer. It thus contributes to the growth of scientific knowledge and to achieve a broader and deeper understanding of it's apart from the interest of scientific applications of this knowledge. (Almatore, 2007)

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

Many studies dealt with Wole Soyinka as a writer and novelist, and few studies have focused upon him as a dramatist, novelist and poet. The reviews that will be shown in the present study concentrate on his achievement as a poet.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Studies:**

Purisch's (1972) intent is to analyze the poetry of Wole Soyinka and to encourage other students to read the works of one of Africa's finest intellectuals. African literature is a relatively new field of critical inquiry and most universities and colleges cannot afford the luxury of hiring someone to teach it. Just as world history is so often taught as if Africa did not exist, comparative world literature courses often ignore the African writer.

Purisch adds in his thesis that if one man stands out defiantly in the African literary dilemma, he must be Nigerian poet, Wole Soyinka, and he is a man of integrity, and great virtue.

This study is in line with the current study that focuses on the analysis of Wole Soyinka's poems, especially the emphasis laid on the culture, social and political issues.

Thomas's (1984) emphasizes that Wole Soyinka, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, has produced two novels, six collections of poetry and fifteen works of drama. Yet in this book he is far less concerned with the literary world than with the political one, especially in his native Nigeria. His memoirs run to around 600 pages.

The chaotic state of Nigeria since it achieved independence from Britain in October 1961 further complicates matters for non-specialist readers. The country suffered its first constitutional crisis a year after Britain left when, in May 1962, a state of emergency was declared in its Western Region.

This study focuses on the impact of the chaos and poverty, conflict and corruption on Nigeria after independence from Britain and how that politics has been reflected in the poetical poems works of Wole Soyinka.

Dasenbrock (1987) is an article that discusses the significance of the winning of Nigerian dramatist Wole Soyinka of the 1986 Nobel Prize in Literature to English literature. It discusses the development of new literature in English among nations that have been colonized by the West. Also, it refers to the challenge posed by this development on the received image of English literature and the English-speaking peoples, issues surrounding the proper medium for African literature; criticisms on Soyinka for using English as his medium for his works.

David's (2000) is one of the critical studies in recent times published on Wole Soyinka's work. Mary David starts by defending Soyinka against Marxist critics of the late 1970s and early 1980s who accused him of lacking "social commitment and class perspective" (p. 237). She cites Soyinka's own responses and other facts that exhibit his social criticism and political activism such as his holding up a radio station, solitary confinement, indictment of the establishment, and his Road Safety Corps as pointers to a writer who is very much committed to underlying processes of a spiritual recovery in individuals and community. This vision of life, David argues, informs the African writer's aesthetics, subject-matter, setting, protagonists, plots, and imagery.

Much of the comprehensiveness of David's book comes from the introduction and background knowledge of both Yoruba, Western, and other influences on Soyinka's creative work. She reminds the reader of the author's Yoruba heritage and Christian home. The Yoruba heritage informs Soyinka's use, despite criticisms from Biodun Jeyifo and Femi Osofisan, of the "mythology of his people for his most significant archetypes which encode the message of renewal" (p.13).

David uses a mixture of historical progression and generic distinction in her study of Soyinka's preoccupation with spiritual renewal of the individual

and the community. As they become common with Soyinka studies, David starts with Soyinka's plays; those before the civil war and the post-detention ones. She omits the satirical plays, saying they "do not admit ritual cleansing and purification or characters enriched with archetypal coloring.

After discussing the creative works, David establishes in "An Aesthetic of Renewal" the effect of a commitment to renewal as a theme that is easily traced to Soyinka's setting, characterization, plot, imagery and language and style.

Below are quotes from Wole Soyinka's speech at the Nobel Banquet, (7 Dec 2014. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes)). certainly they reveal the author's understanding of literature and culture and the role of the writer:

It was inevitable that the Nordic world and the African, especially that part of it which constitutes the Yoruba world - should meet at the crossroads of Sweden. That I am the agent of such a symbolic encounter is due very simply to that my creative Muse is Ogun, the god of creativity and destruction, of the lyric and metallurgy. This deity anticipated your scientist Alfred Nobel at the very beginning of time by clearing a path through primordial chaos, dynamiting his way through the core of earth to open a route for his fellow deities who sought to be reunited with us, mortals.



Johae's (2007) Wole Soyinka's sonnet "Hamlet" is first situated in the historical and biographical circumstances under which it was written. A close reading of the text follows interpretations carried out on two levels: what Shakespeare's Hamlet presents and his situation as a prisoner in his own country just like prince Hamlet. A theoretical framework for the reading is also presented based on a schema of vertical and horizontal compositional tracks. With the close reading played out, consideration is given to the appropriateness of Shakespeare's tragedy as archetypal incentive for Soyinka's sonnet.

Msiska' (2007) argument identity is a topic of central concern to a wide range of writers and activists involved with cultural production and reception in former European colonies. Mpalive-Hangson Msiska takes up several aspects of this topic. In his introduction, he sets out some of the main issues and defends Soyinka against critics such as Chinweizu. The first chapter considers the interrelations between myth and history. Chapter two turns to the opposition between tradition and modernity. In this chapter, Msiska presents the main discussion of the book, summarized already on the opening pages of his introduction, that Soyinka's "particular mode of cognition is animated by a commitment to the historicisation of the postcolonial contemporary and a relocation of its problematic within a symbolic order" (xv). As this suggests,

Msiska believes Soyinka's work goes in line with the ideas of post-structuralist theorists, prominently Homi Bhabha. The third and fourth chapters turn to Soyinka's representation of power in postcolonial societies. The final chapter considers what positive possibilities there are for such societies. In the course of this study, Msiska discusses thirteen plays, three works of poetry, and a novel in some detail, taking up other works more briefly.

Msiska's book is an exemplary case of what is referred to as "theoretically informed criticism," (p.204) the mainstream of postcolonial literary interpretation today.

Jeyifo's (2009) examines the connections between the innovative and influential writings of Wole Soyinka and his radical political activism. Jeyifo carries out detailed analyses of Soyinka's most ambitious works, relating them to the controversies generated by Soyinka's use of literature and theatre for radical political purposes. He gives a fascinating account of the profound but paradoxical affinities Soyinka has felt about the significance of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century. No existing study of Soyinka's works and career has attempted such a systematic investigation of their complex relationship to politics.

There is undisguised national belonging in Soyinka's memoir:  
'Instinctively, I turn towards the window when the captain  
announces that we have entered the Nigerian air-space  
(Soyinka 2007: 22).

Mosobalaje's (2011) is concerned with the readers of Wole Soyinka's political drama and theatre with a view to establishing the relationship between the author and his readers in terms of communication. To accomplish this, the paper employs the reader-oriented theory, using the critical perspectives of scholars in the field. It begins by examining the identity of Soyinka's readers in particular and readers of literature in general. Thereafter, the breakdown of communication between Soyinka and his readers, and his subsequent courtship of the popular readers.

This paper highlights how Wole Soyinka began his career writing through the popular medium, where his work covered a wide range of folk art has generated wide reactions among the readers. In other words, this study has shown that Wole Soyinka's popular language used in his satirical works.

Abisola's (2011) attempt focuses on the social and political evils prevalent in the African societies with the view of correcting them thus, making the contemporary society a better place to live. Using two texts from the Nigeria writer, we see the economic, social and political evils which morally degrade our society and the community at last. These evils are being

satirized to bring about transformation. This study brings out the evil inherent in African socio-political system and calls for a change especially in society.

Soyinka sees society as being in continual need of salvation for itself. This act of salvation is not a mass act. It come about through the vision and dedication of individuals who continuously pursue their vision. In spite of the opposition of the very society they seek to save, they frequently end up as the victims of the society which benefits from their vision. The salvation of the society then depends on exercise of the individual will. (p.36)

saw the mustering of men, gather in the name of  
 peace through strength  
 And at a desk, in a large gilt room, great men of  
 the land awaited your  
 Word, and on the door leading into your office, I  
 read the words ministered for war.

The importance of this study lies focuses on community issues. More so, this study intends to re-emphasise and expose the use of satire by African playwright to lash political leaders and religious leaders and highly esteemed people in the society. The works of Wole Soyinka are appraised as a corrective instrument for socio-political problems of Nigeria contemporary society.

The essay is also meant to add useful literacy contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this field and to serve as useful literary contribution to the existing body of knowledge and to serve as useful consultation in this field for future researchers.

Mosobalaje's (2012) attempts to analyze names of round characters in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* from the ethnography of communication's perspective. It was discovered that the characters in the text bear different names which reflect diverse ethnolinguistic values. This, therefore, necessitated occasional translation from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) i.e. English. The names were further analyzed contextually based on their discursive illocutionary acts.

Akinbode (2013) confirmed the importance of linguistics to literature, as presented by the theories of language. The application of such theories in any linguistic interpretation of a literary text has been proved to be a more objective critical response to the text. It has also revealed subjective nature of impressionistic and expressionistic criticism. This follows from Prague's Linguistic Criticism, which views literature as a special class of language, which rests on the assumption that there is a fundamental opposition between literary (or poetic) language and ordinary day-to-day language. This study gives the semantic appreciation of Soyinka's poem 'Dawn'. Thus, it reveals the

formal basis which leads the readers of the poem to the meaning embedded in the poem. Examples of this:

The pun is spring-haired elbow' conveys both new growth and a coiled energy. There is a tense expectancy, but the elbow is not after all attached to anything and the image remains disembodied

Anyokwu's (2012) analyzed the chaos and loss of memory and the refraction of the post-colonial narrative. Also the writer focused on the collapse of some social groups and the intellectual ones in modern literature because of the moral and spiritual chaos in the history of experience and the loss of perfection due to contact of African society with the imperialist West. Also Anyokwu added that there is a part of the fall-out and after the effects of this historic merger was a regular and systematic degeneration regularly and systematically to subvert the life of African origin and the adoption of Western view of life. The writer added that there are many Nigerian writers who had been educated in the schools through the adoption of foreign languages, especially English language. These languages have influenced the work of these writers.

Anyokwu attempted in his study to address the question of the centrality of fracturing in postcolonial and diasporic narrativity. So he analyzed in this poem "Dance Forest" "Ideas Yoruba: English words", Soyinka's ritualistic conception

of history as an infernal cycle of repeated follies, cruelties, and ignorance which has already been noticed (p. 35).

## **2.2 Empirical Studies:**

Jeyifo's (2006) is a chapter on poetry which offers Jeyifo a convenient point for steering the debate on Soyinka's alleged 'obscurity' and 'complexity' away from the routine approach. He rejects the thesis as a criterion for evaluating Soyinka's achievement as a poet because, according to him, Soyinka's works take us beyond complexity to the 'complex evanescent experience of considerable lyrical forces' (p.73). Instead, he suggests that one should take as a point of departure the distinction between poetry and versification in the assessment of the nature of the poet's output. According to Jeyifo, Soyinka is both a poet and versifier but his critics are preoccupied with versification much more than poetry. While Jeyifo commends the first two volumes for their expression of personal and public pain with consistently polished expression, he marks in the third volume Soyinka's returns to the African discourse along with the notion of 'race men'. While agreeing that Soyinka creates the Promethean hero with great power, Jeyifo questions the strains of the totemic poet speaking for or on behalf of his people.

George's (2008) is interested in two of his prose writings: the novel *The Interpreters* (1965) and his memoir, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981). He

added that he began by briefly considering an example of the invention of Africa in language by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a figure who is not only a direct predecessor of Soyinka but also an iconic representative of nineteenth-century missionary work and discursive colonization in Africa; Then he turns to Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and *Aké: The Years of Childhood*.

Also, the researcher added that he didn't mean to suggest that his reading of two novels by this Nigerian writer is somehow the most outstanding way to engage Soyinka's works in particular, or, in general, the institutional category he calls "African literature"—or, indeed, "the African novel." What he wished to do, rather, is to read these two novels with two aims in mind. The first is to suggest that the complex ideological centre and intellectual history that links many African novelists to the history and discourse of Christian missionary work in Africa offers grounds for refining those aspects in contemporary postcolonial criticism. The second is to elaborate one sense in which the interplay of race, nation, and ethnicity in Soyinka derives from a dual impulse that can be characterized as, at once, "nationalist" and "internationalist." (p. 280). That is to say, Soyinka's rhetoric reveals that his work is divided between the national and the transnational. In this way, Soyinka not only allows us a glimpse of the particular inflections of categories



like nation and identity in an African context; he also makes available a vision of social-political transition and transformation.

I went back to bed, fatigued, suffering a mild relapse of the fever.... The days regained definition and pattern. A sense of liberation, a deep psychic relief, a sense of lasting reprieve took over. Beyond a few times when I caught myself watching Essay with a baffled intensity, beyond the evidence of the photographs which had been framed and now hung on the walls, I accepted ...a sense of gratitude to an unseen Force for a deliverance from the suspected but unnamed Menace.

Abou-bakr's (2009) argues that survival is "a major theme of prison writing as a literary genre," proposing that in both its physical and psychological manifestations, survival is of central significance, particularly for the political prisoner. His view highlights the inseparability of the two attempts of striving for survival and seeking to establish communication, while it also highlights the centrality of both to prison writing. To live so as to tell the "large prison story, which is, to a certain degree, the story of the society it belongs to," (p. 94) is a motivator for political prisoners. He said that he goes one step further to link this complex of survival and communication "through dogged determination and mental discipline" ,," (p. 94) to the figure of the antihero. Representing both defeat and endurance through various

strategies, the antiheroic stance is perhaps the last line of defense for the imprisoned writer. Within an ongoing effort by various scholars to closely examine the poetic strategies of prison writing, the figure of the antihero could be one way of approaching the diverse body of writing by imprisoned political activists, and of providing one common ground on which writings coming out of a wide range of cultural contexts and literary traditions could be examined.

Weary? Rest, and to distant echoes of  
 Their evensong I'll lull you with a sweet  
 Lament of victims. Oh I've crept among them

Omigbule's (2013) is one means through which conflict is resolved in Soyinka's works. It also accounts for the difficulty in interpreting his works. Proverbs play a significant role as a creative tool in the playwright's construction of paradox for the representation of the reality of his society and envisioning a better one. The article focuses on how proverbs have been strategically infused into the plays to lend a paradoxical edge to characterization and the ironic resolution of conflict in the plays.

A critical study of the proverbial idioms employed in the plays (these idioms are critically related to some Yoruba proverbs outside the texts) shows that the charge of obscurity that is often raised against Soyinka is due to his continuous uses of the tool of paradox to achieve aesthetic and philosophical

significance. The study use an approach of literary criticism, which makes possible the establishment of connections between authorial intention and the agency of the text.

The proof of wisdom is the wish to learn  
Even from children. And the haste of youth  
Must learn its temper from the gloss  
Of ancient leather, from a strength  
Knit close along the grain.

Reddy's (2013) affirms that Wole Soyinka is Africa's most distinguished playwright, winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. Nigerian literature was born in earnest with the award of Nobel Prize in literature to Wole Soyinka. Soyinka, often referred to as the Bringer of Light to African Literatures (p. 404), has put Nigerian literature on the world map, and since 1986, hundreds of Nigerians have proudly taken to studying Nigerian literature, as departments of Nigerian literature are being created in all the universities across the country. Writers of different genres have been published. Some have won prizes, while some are finalists in national and international contests, adding their voices to the identity, authenticity, aesthetics and glory of Nigerian literature. Written by Wole Soyinka the play *The Lion and The Jewel* has its setting in the village of Ilunjunle in Yoruba West Africa. It was published in 1963 by Oxford University Press.

This article is a modest attempt to bring out how his play *The Lion And The Jewel* is characterized by cultural conflict, comedy and love. In contrast the old culture represented by the uneducated people in Ilunjunle, led by Baroka, Sidi and the rest, clashes with the new one led by Lakunle, who is an educated, school teacher by profession and is influenced by the Western ways.

### **2.3 What Distinguishes the Current Study from Previous Studies?**

Out of the list of studies already given, is clear that the Siska & Jeyifo's studies are consistent with the present study. It differs from previous studies in that it concentrates on Wole Soyinka exclusively as a poet, while the other studies discuss him as a poet and activist, dramatis, novelist and public figure. As such, the following pages will center heavily on his poetry, its themes, interests and imagery and other linguistic devices.

## **Chapter Three**

### **3.1 Methods and Procedures:**

The method to be used in this study is the analytical and descriptive approach in which the researcher will trace some of the main topics in the poetry of Wole Soyinka.. The exploration will be carried out by analyzing the themes of the poems through the view of some writers who write in time or with or at variance with Wole Soyinka's poems. In addition to interpretation and criticism of some of the poems through checking these poems addressing love, myth, prison, satire, and linguistic strategies of the poet.

### **3.2 Sample of the Study**

The sample of the study will be some of his poems, which are (Dedication, In The Small Hours, Death in Dawn's Idanre, Roots, and Hamlet) written by Soyinka. The poems will be explored thematically and technically in order to verify the main postulates of this research.

### **3.3 Method of the study:**

The researcher will analyze the selected poems focusing on the multiplicity and diversity of topics and interests.

**3.4 Procedures of the study:**

1. Reading the biography of Soyinka.
2. Tracing the origin and development of the poems.
3. Reading previous studies related to the main topics of the selected poems.
4. Reading Wole Soyinka's views concerning poetry and its role in society.
5. Analyzing the themes and the technical aspects of the selected poems.
6. Discussing the findings.
7. Concluding and judgments.
8. Writing references according to APA style.

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Main Argument**

#### **4. 1 Introduction**

After independence, each African country distinguished itself from others and concentrated on race. The writers of the African continent were preoccupied with the preservation of culture which had been identity destroyed by the occupation fully.

Because of the importance enjoyed by African literature and Nigerian poetry current study current study will focus on the Wole Soyinka's poetry, where this part of the fourth chapter shows the main features of his poems.

Soyinka has written a number of poems that speak of love, myth, and prison, in addition to the sharp satire in his poems. Apart from poetry, Soyinka wrote novels, short stories, literary criticism and aesthetic theory, theater, cultural history, and above all political issues. However, this chapter sheds light on the poems of black Africa, through what was written by Nigerian poet Wole Soyinka and how critics Soyinka see in his poems.

## 4.2 Poetry of Love:

African poetry has expressed many concerns, which make them unique to the understanding of African spirit and traditions. Commenting on these various voices in African poetry, Soyinka asserts that these poems:

Embrace most of the experience of the African world- modern and historic though naturally no claim is made here for an unattainable comprehensiveness of themes; or for their mutual exclusiveness. The overlapping is obvious and frequent. What gives, for instance, the love poems of Denis Brutus their raw, passionate desperation is the fact that they are just as much poems about love as they are poems of indictment . (Soyinka, 1999, p.27)

The biography of Wole Soyinka is completely devoid of any emotional signal, even though the slightest hint. The reason is due to shyness in Soyinka's psychological state. Even so, Soyinka wrote many poems about love, the research will focus on two of them. 'Dedication', and 'In The Small Hours' (Soyinka, 1963). In 'Dedication' he states:

Earth will not share the rafter's envy; dung floors  
Break, not the gecko's slight skin, but its fall  
Taste this soil for death and plumb her deep for life  
As this yam, wholly earthed, yet a living tuber  
To the warmth of waters, earthed as springs  
As roots of baobab, as the hearth.



The air will not deny you. Like a top  
 Spin you on the navel of the storm, for the hoe  
 That roots the forests plows a path for squirrels.

‘Dedication’ talks about love in its broad sense. It shows the great relationship between human beings and nature (earth). It is a relation based on love and warmth, an endless giving that does not expect a return. From the first lines, one realize this completely disinterested passion:

Earth will not share the rafter’s envy; dung floors/Break, not  
 the gecko’s slight skin, but it fall / Take this soil for death  
 and plumb her deep for life...

Other natural element share this generosity and kindness:

The air will not deny you. Like a top skin on the navel of  
 the storm, for the hoe/That roots the forests plows a path for  
 squirrels.

The poem sows the secrets of nature and its miracles, especially conception and birth of a child. Indeed the whole poem is a celebration of the mystery of creation, both in plants and human beings. The concluding lines show this meaning clearly, when they address the newly born babe and the mysteries surrounding its coming to this world:

Peppers green and red-child-your tongue arch/ To scorpion  
 tail, spit straight return to danger’s threats/ yet coo with the  
 brow pigeon, tendril dew between your lips.....

..... child , palm oil on your tongue / is suppleness to life,  
 and wine of this gourd/ From self-same timeless run of  
 runnels as refill/ Your puddings, child, weaned from yours  
 we embrace.

It ends with words about the offerings of nature when Soyinka states. It  
 is the noble type of love:

Earth's honeyed mild, wine of the only rib.

The organisms to which this poem refers are more fully shown in the  
 invocation the poet addresses to his newborn daughter in the poem  
 "Dedication," which sixteen Africana philosophers develop in terms of the  
 symbolic order that authenticates the ritual performed during the Yoruba  
 naming ceremony: (Irele, 2008, p.15)

Camwood round the heart, chalk for flight  
 Of blemish—see? It dawns—antimony beneath  
 Armpits like a goddess, and leave this taste.  
 Long on your lips, of salt, that you may seek  
 None from tears. This, rain-water, is the gift  
 Of gods—drink of its purity, bear fruits in season.

In the 'Small Hours'; he has the following to say:

Blue diaphane, tobacco smoke  
 Serpentine on wet film and wood glaze,  
 Mutes chrome, wreathes velvet drapes,

Dims the cave of mirrors. Ghost fingers  
 Comb seaweed hair, stroke aquamarine veins  
 Of marooned mariners, captives  
 Of Circe's sultry notes. The barman  
 Dispenses igneous potions?  
 Somnabulist, the band plays on.

In the 'Small Hours' carries on what is present in 'Dedication', especially in the changes taking place in nature. The earth is once again the center of interest in this poem.

The title is very expressive in showing the actual time described by the poem. It is the small hours between night and day and how this change takes place. Although this is a philosophical question, the implicit meaning is that in this world there is a great extent of love in that the 'Darkness' never remains forever and is certainly replaced by its opposite. The poem suggests hope and faith in the future, even though one's part is dark. Although the speaker in the poem is sad as seen in the words 'The broken silence of the heart', the music appears in the poem to be bringing comfort:

The hovering notes caress the night  
 Mellowed deep indigo? Still they play.  
 Departures linger. Absences do not

Deplete the tavern. They hang over the haze as exhalations  
 from receded shores. Soon, night repossesses the silence,  
 but till dawn.

The notes hold sway, smoky.

Epiphanies, possessive of the hours.

This music's plaint forgives, redeems

The deafness of this world.

### **4.3 Poetry of Myth**

Wole Soyinka's makes use of myths, which were prevalent before colonization, where Soyinka's rich heritage combines superstitions of his country, and old habits and traditions, especially the old African literary traditions, ended *A Dance Forest* mixes of European folklore with African traditions. It also describes the presence of ghosts and spirits and the gods. ” (Davis, 2012, p. 344).

Yoruba religion centers upon the Orisha, which may be any or all of three things: a god (Sango, for example); a force in nature (Sango as lightning or electricity); a figure in history, a king, or a founder of a dynasty (Sango is thought to have been the fourth king of the Yoruba town of Oyo). The possibility always exists, therefore, of one image or idea being transformed and adapted into another: this is the key to Ogun's nature and to his complex manifestations in Soyinka's work.( Soyinka, 1965, p.13)

Ogun has a couple nature: he is both a destructive and a creative force, a frightening god known for his recklessness, a symbol and an embodiment of the idea of waste (in warfare and on the roads). In Soyinka's own words, he has 'a terrorist reputation', yet is also known as 'a protector of orphans', 'roof over the homeless', 'terrible guardian of the sacred oath', who stands for 'a transcendental humane but rigidly restorative justice'. His worshippers include all those who work with iron (factory workers, smiths, farmers, engineers, hunters, drivers, writers and students – since the later use the pen in their work. He has been called the national god of the Yoruba people. But he is a dangerous patron. In Soyinka's poem (Idanre) the men who worship him are followers and also his victims: (Soyinka, 1965, p.13)

And we  
 Have honeycombed beneath his hills, worked red earth  
 Of energies, quarrying rare and urgent ores and paid.  
 With wrecks of last year's suppers, paved his roads  
 With shells, intestines of breathless bones-  
 Ogun is a demanding god

In fact, Soyinka was affected by superstitious customs and traditions that appear through his poems showing the old gods and myths where he showed ghosts and spirits like gods.

Many of his poems were a combination of Folklore African literary traditions Alavraiqih. Beier has indicated elsewhere in this poem he called 'Lust-blind god, gore – drunk Hunter' because when Ogun usurped the town of Ire he became drunk on palm-wine and indiscriminately slaughtered his own army ('Monster deity, you destroy you men'). Yet Ogun's strength depends on his worshippers: his existence becomes manifest through their spiritual efforts. A translation of a traditional Yoruba poem describes him as the killer of 'the thief and the owner of stolen goods', as: (Beier, 1970, p.34)

Master of iron, chief of robbers,

You have no water, but you bath in blood

The light shining in your face is not easy to behold:

Ogun with bloody cap

Let me see the red of your eye

This is the terrifying goddess whose presence hovers over every line of Soyinka's 'The Road', threatening continuously, and providing the possibility of what Soyinka calls 'rigidly restorative justice' through sacrifice of man and animals. Ojaide noticed that the first part of Ogun Abibiaman sets the tone of the poet's heroic celebration: (Ojaide, 1982, p.155)

Acolyte to Craft master of them all

Medium of tremors from his taut membrane

The poet here is committed to race because it is a follower of the god Ogun, that he describes the paradox of metaphors taken from "green forests" and "hard". The very old people in the black continent, "green," touted the compatibility between the fertile plains. (Agemo, 2011)

Through a sample of hair Soyinka celebrated rituals and myths in the African community, since all hair types and gods exist and give it a certain flavor (Agemo, 2011)

#### **4.4 Poetry of Loneliness**

In to Christopher Drummond's article (2005) about the African post-colonial literature, Wole Soyinka was introduced in 1972 in "shuttle in the basement," seven sets of poems by during his time in prison to protest against the Nigerian government policy. One of these groups is entitled "Four examples," four poems - "Joseph," "Hamlet," "Gulliver", and "*Ulysses*" - each one of which shows the similarity between Soyinka and these poems. Especially the poem "*Ulysses*" employs references to the *Odyssey* of Homer and *James Joyce's Ulysses* (1922). These poems indicate that all of the works in this context, talk about separation from their home and their past. Through the similarities between his life and the stories and the stories of Odysseus and Leopold Bloom, Soyinka represents his imprisonment dramatically, in addition to his isolation. It seems that this issue of isolation constitute two

different first two ways through his dealings with the theme of the prison and the second through his dealings with The Nigerian government. (Ogunyemi & Babalola, 2011 p.230)

This is evident through his quotation:

A boulder solitude amidst wine-centered waves

Portrays a lonely man who lives on the fringe of society, yet his apartness points out the weakness of a modernizing world (Soyinka, 1999, p. 29).

Soyinka describes himself here like *Odysseus*, who was separated from his life, and toured for ten years after the fall of Troy, , wandering lost for a period of ten years after the fall of Troy, has been imprisoned for several years struggling in the swell of the sea dancing fountains when compared with *Odysseus* seems that the isolation experienced by Soyinka in prison is somewhat limited (Agemo, 2011)

However, Soyinka shows that is impressment for several years raises a great similarity between him and *Odysseus*:

It turns on quest cycles, to track a skein

Of self through eyeless veils, stumble on warps

Endure the blinds of spidery distortions, till

Swine-scented folds and caressing tunnels

Come to crossroads at the straits.



So, Soyinka has compared himself with Odysseus because of his sense of loneliness and isolation in prison for years, where the similarities between him and Odysseus become clear through the presentation of the suffering in his personal experience. However the following section elaborates further the terrifying sides of imprisonment.

#### **4.5 Poetry of Imprisonment:**

At the University of Leeds, Soyinka studied English literature, and when he was sent to prison, he was studying English literature at the University of Ibadan-Nigeria. At that time, “his position in the literary field in Nigeria and Africa was ascertained, with secured international reputation” (Ogunyemi& Babalola, 2011 p.241) . Soyinka’s imprisonment has brought him to international attention, and that was the result of his release, because of the great international support that he has gained, especially the support by many American and British writers, such as Robert Lowell and Lillian Hellman.

Wole Soyinka’s “purgatory” is a poem that explores this issue successfully. Reflecting on “cold” of Denis Brutus, one can see the dehumanizing expressions in the poem when the poet shows how he was brutally hurt by the prison conditions. The poem asserts:

The clammy cement

Sucks our naked feet  
A rheumy yellow bulb  
Lights a damp grey wall  
The stubbled grass  
Wet with three o'clock dew  
Is black with our fingers  
The sugarless pap  
Into our mouths  
Then labour erect;

The poet has resigned to fate. He was arrested and badly treated by the authorities and he was criticizing. In prison, and the conditions in the prison room were too bad. It was the bulb lighting of the kind that can make a blind person in addition to the wall which is dirty.

Through the above, it is clear that Wole Soyinka was affected by the prison. This is evident through his poems, which attack the walls and bars as well as the suffering of loneliness and isolation of the difficult conditions that prevailed in prison. The colors in the poem express his sadness, such as gray, yellow, and blacks. All these suggest illness and grief.

Such conditions in prisons lead individuals to disease and the image of "waste", "nothingness" is a sign of the bad image suffered by the people from the government in Nigeria. Wole Soyinka has been arrested several times, "the

theme of households” shows through the poem "cleanser", which says:  
(Ogunyemi& Babalola, 2011 p.242)

Wall of flagellation to the south  
Strokes of justice slice a festive airIt  
is the day of reckoning  
.....the circus comes to circus town  
A freak show comes to freaks  
And ancient pageant to divert  
Archetypes of Purgatorio

Soyinka's poem highlights the bad prison conditions. This is a view which does not affect anything. The terms of these conditions emerged in the poem. "Strokes of justice," talks about the Nigerian military system that sends the critics of the government to jail, the poem highlights describes the "Justice forest" where Soyinka appears to be a victim of the circumstances and conditions of this type of justice of the jungle was a reason to send Nelson Mandela to prison for seven years without trial (Priebe, 2005, p. 47).

In the poem A ‘shuttle’ in the basement, Soyinka presents an important part of his role as a writer and social and political activist. This is shown by Irving Howe, who notes that:

Literature provides a particularly severe test for the writer in confronting institutionalized social vices. It arouses human passions as nothing else does and whatever we may consent to

overlook in reading a novel, we react to, in the physical socio-political circumstances (Priebe, 2005, p 47).

Although Soyinka describes in his imprisonment poem his personal suffering and humiliation, the final tone of the poem carries universal implications. It is this interesting mixture between the private and public that gives his poetry its great universal appeal.

#### **4.6 Poetry in Politics:**

During the civil war in Nigeria in 1967, Gen. Yakubu Gowon from the federal government was arrested and put in solitary confinement. He was accused that he tried to arrange a peace settlement between the warring process. In prison books of poetry have been published in a collection of poems entitled "Prison". After he was released after 22 months and has written about his experience in jail in his book, the man died. He was considered a critic of the Nigerian administrations, and dictatorships, not in Nigeria alone, but in the whole world. There has been a great deal of his writings concerned with "the oppressive boot and the irrelevance of the color of the foot that wears it" (Alu, 2008, p.62).

#### **4.7 Justice and Rights of People in Soyinka's Poetry**

In Soyinka's poetry, one comes across many forces of oppression in the varying operative arenas. Most importantly, the outstanding feature of his

poetry is his defense of the speechless and oppressed citizens of the land. He appears involved and sympathetic to their unfortunate condition, whether in the rural or urban areas. The theme runs through all his collections, cutting across various fields of human endeavor. Thus he affirms that he is essentially a politician, ‘since a genuine poet has always been interested in politics which is a means of eradicating poverty as he believes’ (Alu, 2008, p.62) :

And so when you have a country and a continent and a world where instead of that happening, politics is being used to entrench poverty and enrich a few, then problems are bound to rise.

Poetry has become a tool for setting things right, for praising virtue... Genuine poetry raises political songs; political songs directly and indirectly. It tells kings about the corpses which line their way to the throne. It tells the rich ones the skulls in their cupboards.

*Moonsongs* is a collection of songs which Odugbemi observes “... is riveting lunacy of song... (where) verses lap gently at the base of your soul...” in a down –to- earth comment Odugbemi was quoted as saying:

The poet belts out his songs as though in a joy trance. He sweeps you from moonrise to moonset. Imagine yourself by the magic seas of a moonlit night lying on a carpet of songs, floating whimsically in the “soft windiness” of this night of the gods. Muyide .

The song / poem, starts, which was broken by a chorus of Yoruba drums of war began as these habits deeply rooted in the traditions of the Yoruba, says Saleh Abdo, where it formed the backbone of the aesthetic poetry of the poet.:( Abdu, 2003)

Let the cricket slit night's silence  
 with the scapel of its throat  
 Let nightbirds coo and cuddle  
 In the swinging Eden of their nests; 74  
 Alu, Nesther Nachafiya  
 But when down finally climbs down  
 Through the leering rafters,

Another poem “Shows” affected Wole Soyinka of justice and persecuted and oppressed by the following poems: (Bhushan, 2012, p.9)

Roof over the homeless  
 terrible guardian of the sacred oath  
 Far above all this,  
 Ogun stands for a transcendental,  
 human but rigidly restorative justice (Soyinka, 1976).

#### **4.8 Poetry about Freedom:**

Soyinka often wrote about the need for individual freedom. As a playwright, actor, producer, poet, novelist and author of satirical reviews, Soyinka has been a champion of the responsibility of art and the artist to

society. This has made him a bitter critic of society and the establishment and has involved him in some activist episodes, which cost him his freedom. This section develops further the previous one in that it carries an emphasis on people rights and the injustice they receive under certain political circumstances.

Soyinka's commitment to freedom has always been absolute. He truly opposed Soviet repression in Eastern Europe. So he presents his poem "Live Burial" because of his suffering in prison by the restrictions imposed by the limits enforced by the walls and the government which do not let him read and write.

Sixteen paces

By twenty-three. They hold

Siege against humanity

And Truth

Employing time to drill through to his sanity

Schismatic

Lover of Antigone !

You will? You will unearth

Corpses of yester-

Expose manure of present birth? (Ogunyemi, 1982 , p. 80)

The poem "Live Burial" explains Soyinka's painful torture carried out by the Nigerian government against Soyinka when he was in prison for two years. It emphasizes the restrictions imposed by prison walls to freedom, especially that the poet does not abate; However, he gets a possible outlet for him, this is what has emerged through the beginning of the poem, which says "going sixteen and twenty-three before," where he emerged as the space available for the poet to live in for 24 months.

The government did not allow him to read or write, and banned him from writing and materials needed for it. However, he had to use toilet paper to write it, the poet has taken this experience in the poem "Burial Live," which reflects the conditions of his imprisonment, and his opinion as if buried alive.

#### **4.9 Poetry about Traditions and Culture:**

Modernity made many changes in Africa. Poets in African poetry viewed it as a voice of change and challenges, social, political, private. It attacked anything which works as an obstacle to its growth and development: For example, the poet in "Bastard," satirized girls who have turned to life in the city and have given birth to bastard children where this is against the customs and traditions of the people of Yoruba.

An unlucky creation

His mother, a street walker;

His lying father,



A champion at producing bastards

It's not his fault,

Poor innocent bastard,

That in slums he's brought up (Ogunyme, 2011, p.246)

Among other topics, the African poems discuss are, morality, mortality indictment, and poor conditions. African literature, have used their poems either protest or warning, caution on the need to solve the problems militating sweeping human society. "(Kumar, 2011, p.90)

One of these issues is the situation of the bride who does not get a good price; such girls are not virgins and therefore do not deserve to be married; it is an honor for the bride who gets a good price. If a girl marries without a price, it is assumed that it is not a virgin or she does not deserve to marry. Sidi here is the girl traditional African, which are far from foreign ideas and culture, and insists on the bride price and honor to Lakunle:

I have told you, and I say it again

I shall marry you today, next week

Or any day you name.

But my bride-price must first be paid....

But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have

The full bride-price. Will you make me

A laughing-stock? Well, do as you please.

But Sidi will not make herself

A cheap bowl for the village spit....  
 They will say I was no virgin  
 That I was forced to sell my shame  
 And marry you without a price. ("The Lion and the Jewel", 8)

#### **4.10 Poetry about Life and Death: Philosophical Meditations:**

In one of his latest poems, "Visiting Trees," one notices an immediate connection before plant and renewal.

To step within a tree is not so arduous, indeed  
 No harder than thought, involuntary as  
 Walking, placing left foot after right, except  
 There are no limbs. Not even a floating sensation—  
 there is no body.

This relation between man and plant reveals the unity of the universe and community carries mystic implications about man and his position in the universe. Moreover, his work carries imperatives and judgments as seen in his poem of "Dawn" which says the following:

Breaking Earth upon  
 A spring-haired elbow, lone.  
 O celebration of rites of dawn  
 Night spread in tallers and a god  
 Received, aflame with kernels

There is a close relationship between the form and meaning of a text. The meaning conveyed by a text places the text in a particular locale as well as situates it in particular literary form (Akinbode, 2013, p.289). The nature and artistic function of linguistic organization in Soyinka's poem are of a great interest. Normally, the African critics hold opposite views regarding the meaning of the poem. In fact, there are two divided groups. A group rests its interpretation on "mythology". James Booth and D. I. Nwoga are prominent members of this group. Another group, consisting mostly of non-Africans, attempt an explication of the poem through its metaphors and syntax. Obviously, the poem is very controversial and has different ritual references deeply rooted in the African soil and tradition.

Psychological or spiritual themes are equally important to Soyinka as social ones. Soyinka shows in most of his writings human sacrifice, there is a blending of the social and psychological themes and the theme of sacrifice leads into the theme of martyrdom, Soyinka's vision of death reveals his desire to control death. In meeting death, the poems of Soyinka show his desire to conquer death (Manjula, 2012, p.11). This is evident in the poem 'Death in the Dawn':

Traveller, you must set out  
At dawn. And wipe your feet upon  
The dog-nose wetness of earth.

Let sunrise quench your lamps, and watch  
Faint brush prickling's in the sky light  
Cottoned feet to break the early earthworm  
On the hoe. Now shadows stretch with sap  
Not twilight's death and sad prostration

“Death in the Dawn” is a poem that presents itself in a monologue, and addresses the reader as a “traveller,”. He gives an account of life as a journey, or a form of passage. Although it sounds like a form of lyric, the title "death" might be expected to take place in the evening. Therefore, the announcement of the discrepancy in the poem is to explore the antithesis of the concept of revelation, and in fact there are two deaths did not occur during that dawn.

Seen as a whole Soyinka's poetry covers many topics and fields, some local and others universal. This is perhaps one reason for his great reputation as a public figure in contemporary poetry and thought.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion**

The research was devoted to addressing Wole Soyinka as a poet through the presentation of a variety of topics in his work, such as politics, imprisonment, freedom, tradition and culture or philosophical questions. It has become clear that Soyinka is a writer who has used all types of genres such as drama, novel, essays, and poetry. Also in his poetry he tackled all types of themes and questions, some of them are local and traditional and others are universal.

The research has shown that Soyinka is not an elitist, addressing merely artistic matters. On the contrary, he is the writer of people whose role in cultural enlightenment and struggling against political injustice is unmistakable. As such, he suffered imprisonment, exile and very terrible circumstances. It is because of these social and universal sides of his literary achievement that Soyinka was granted the Noble Prize in literature in year 1986.

In general, the language of his poetry is simple and easy to understand. One reason for this simplicity is the desire to make every reader understand his poetry easily. Also it shows that he does not want to create a distance between him as a writer and the common readers.

If all his poems are read as a whole, they will give a detailed picture about life in Nigeria whether in mythology, rituals, traditions, politics, customs.. etc. Accordingly, one can say that his poetry records all the daily and major events and situations of Nigerian Life. Drawing on Yoruba mythology and the rituals that derive from it, he has developed from ritual a drama of archetypes, developing in the process a vision of history. Yoruba people, customs and traditions influence the poems of Wole Soyinka. Also his poems are motivated by prison and the loneliness that he suffered, where he poetized many situations while he was in prison.

Accordingly, the study has answered its questions:

**Question 1: What are the most important characteristics of the writer Wole Soyinka as a poet?**

The most important characteristic of the writer Wole Soyinka is that he is not an elitist, addressing merely artistic matters. He considers himself the voice of his people, their hopes and sufferings. On the contrary, he is the writer of people whose role in cultural enlightenment and struggling against political injustice is unmistakable. As such, he suffered imprisonment. His works talk about the urgent matters of his people such as poverty, violence and search for justice.

**Question 2: What distinguishes Wole Soyinka's poetry from that of his contemporaries?**

The most significant things, which distinguished Wole Soyinka's poetry from those of his contemporaries are that the language of his poetry is simple and easy to understand. One reason for this simplicity is the desire to make every reader understand his poetry easily. In addition, it shows that he does not want to create a distance between him as a writer and the common readers. According to that, his poetry covers many topics and fields, some local and others universal. This is perhaps one reason for his great reputation as a public figure in contemporary poetry and thought.

**Question 3: What are the elements that influenced his poetry?**

There are many elements that influenced Wole Soyinka's poetry such as; Yoruba mythology, rituals, traditions, politics, customs and prison. Thus his poetry reflects all these issues in different forms and shapes and literary genres like drama, novel, short story, essay and of course poetry. In other words, Soyinka's interests in poetry are various and multiple. His personal experiences and public issues stem from the essence of his poetry.

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