Adriano Moraes Migliavacca

DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

—Analysis and Translation into Portuguese—

Porto Alegre

2018

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Instituto de Letras

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras

Estudos de Literatura

Literaturas Estrangeiras Modernas

DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

—Analysis and Translation into Portuguese—

Adriano Moraes Migliavacca

Orientadora:

Prof. Dr. Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia

Tese apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras do Instituto de Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para a obtenção de título de Doutor em Letras – Literaturas Estrangeiras Modernas

Porto Alegre

2018

CIP - Catalogação na Publicação

Migliavacca, Adriano Moraes
Death and the King's Horseman - Analysis and Translation into Portuguese / Adriano Moraes Migliavacca. -- 2018.
316 f.
Orientadora: Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia.

Tese (Doutorado) -- Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Letras, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, Porto Alegre, BR-RS, 2018.

1. Literatura Africana. 2. Tradução Literária. 3. Literatura Moderna. 4. Teatro Africano. 5. Wole Soyinka. I. Garcia, Rosalia Angelita Neumann, orient. II. Título.

Elaborada pelo Sistema de Geração Automática de Ficha Catalográfica da UFRGS com os dados fornecidos pelo(a) autor(a).

Agradecimentos

À minha orientadora Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia por me acompanhar já há tanto tempo em minha formação e aos membros da banca professora Eliana Lourenço da Lima Reis, Elizamari Rodrigues Becker e Lawrence Flores Pereira por gentilmente terem aceitado avaliar esta tese, ponto crucial de meu amadurecimento intelectual.

À Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, por todos estes anos de aprendizado.

Ao amigo José Ricardo Costa por trocas intelectuais e espirituais.

Ao Bàbálawo Ifálọlá Ojétundé Awosanmi Fájobí Agboọlá, por me guiar na minha Ìrìn-àjò, e a todos os membros da Ẹgbẹ́ Agboọlá, pelas experiências que tivemos juntos.

À mana Ifáṣike Ọ̀ṣunbunmi Irewole – Carol – pelas trocas e aprendizados espirituais-pessoais, de perto e à distância.

Ao grande amigo Rodrigo de Lemos, pelas trajetórias paralelas ao longo de quase vinte anos entre poemas e ideias.

Ao brother Jerônimo Cassol Soro, na fragilidade fora da sina.

À minha Eliane Fernandes Marques, Olùfẹ́ mi, por um ano de amor, companheirismo, muito auxílio, aprendizado e mais amor. Que outros venham!!!

Enfim para a minha Ẹgbẹ́ Ọ̀run àti Ẹgbẹ́ Àiyé:

Umberto, Bàbá mi

Gisela, Ìyá mi

Carolina, Arábìnrin mi

Por terem gerado e moldado a pessoa que sou e que chegou até aqui, estando do meu lado mesmo quando as coisas pareciam perdidas, mas, acima de tudo, nos momentos de felicidade.

e

A todos os membros da Ẹgbẹ́ Migliavacca e da Ẹgbẹ́ Moraes – os que estão, os que estiveram e os que estarão.

RESUMO

Na moderna literatura africana, poucos autores se destacam tanto quanto o dramaturgo, poeta, ensaísta, memorialista e ficcionista nigeriano, de origem iorubá, Wole Soyinka, internacionalmente célebre e ganhador do Prêmio Nobel de Literatura em 1986. Soyinka é conhecido sobretudo como dramaturgo, e seu teatro se caracteriza pelo uso de uma variedade de gêneros literários, formas, linguagens extraliterárias, como a dança e a música, e outros recursos relacionados à cultura iorubá. A obra de Soyinka, escrita em inglês, incorpora tanto elementos das literaturas ocidentais quanto das africanas, e seu inglês é marcado pela constante visitação da oralidade iorubá em provérbios, metáforas e fragmentos de poemas tradicionais assim como sua dramaturgia incorpora elementos do teatro tradicional de seu povo. Acima de tudo, seus enredos, que incluem temas atuais como corrupção, lutas por poder e conflitos entre o indivíduo e seu grupo, estão alicerçados na visão de mundo e cosmogonia iorubá, contendo ainda diversas referências mitológicas e rituais. Em outras palavras, Wole Soyinka se caracteriza, antes de tudo, como um escritor iorubá, cuja obra, cosmopolita em seus temas e conflitos, encontra suas raízes e enquadramento filosófico na visão de mundo de seu povo. É nessa forte presença de elementos iorubás que se encontra um dos maiores interesses das obras de Wole Soyinka para o Brasil. Sabemos que, nos últimos tempos, está havendo uma considerável valorização de elementos de origem africana presentes na cultura nacional, dentre eles, os encontrados nas religiões de matriz africana, que se mostram verdadeiros repositórios de mitos e símbolos de grande riqueza semântica. Tais mitos e símbolos presentes nessas religiões são majoritariamente de origem iorubá. Ler a obra de Soyinka no Brasil, portanto, é buscar uma nova forma de se relacionar com esses elementos e de valorizá-los em sua dimensão literária. Entre as peças de Wole Soyinka, a mais conhecida é provavelmente *Death and the King's Horseman*, publicada em 1975 e com diversas realizações teatrais na Nigéria, Estados Unidos e Reino Unido. Baseada em uma situação real na Nigéria colonial, em que um costume do povo iorubá entrou em conflito com a ordem britânica, tal peça é aquela em que visão de mundo e mitologia iorubá estão mais bem articuladas com uma linguagem rica em gêneros e fragmentos da literatura oral iorubá, sendo particularmente proveitosa para uma aproximação cultural. Esta tese oferece uma análise da peça baseada em noções da cultura, da mitologia e da visão de mundo iorubá e nas teorias estéticas e metafísicas do próprio Wole Soyinka. Destacam-se nesta análise os aspectos simbólicos, míticos e metafísicos, assim como os estéticos. Essa análise é precedida de um estudo sobre dimensões da cultura iorubá importantes para o entendimento da peça, tais como história, religião, mitologia, filosofia e artes. Em seguida, as teorias estéticas de Wole Soyinka são estudadas sobre o pano de fundo das discussões literárias vigentes na África no período em que Soyinka engendrava tais teorias. É a partir desses elementos que a peça é analisada. Acima de tudo, esta tese oferece uma tradução de *Death and the King's Horseman* que busca valorizar seu conteúdo lírico, suas várias linguagens e suas perspectivas filosóficas, com base nos estudos que foram feitos nos capítulos precedentes, concluindo a tese com observações sobre o processo de tradução.

Palavras-chave: Wole Soyinka. Tradução Literária. Literatura Africana.

ABSTRACT

In modern African literature, few authors stand out as much as the Nigerian playwright, poet, essayist, memorialist, and novelist, of Yoruba origin, Wole Soyinka, internationally acknowledged as the winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature. Soyinka is known above all as a playwright, and his theatre is characterized by the use of a variety of literary genres, forms, extra-literary languages, such as dance and music, and other resources related to Yoruba culture. Soyinka's work, written in English, includes elements from both Western and African literatures, and his English is marked by the constant presence of Yoruba orality in proverbs, metaphors and fragments of traditional poems as much as his dramaturgy embodies elements of the traditional theatre of his people. Above all, his plots, in such current themes as corruption, struggle for power and conflicts between individual and the community, are stippled on Yoruba worldview and cosmogony, containing as well many mythological and ritual references. In other words, Wole Soyinka characterizes himself, above all, as a Yoruba writer, whose work finds its roots and philosophical framework in the worldview of his people. It is in the strong presence of Yoruba elements in virtually all the ambits that we find one of the greatest interests of Soyinka's works for Brazil. It is well-known that, in later years, there has been an increasing valuation and interest for elements of African origin in national culture, including those found in African-Brazilian religions, which are actually pools of myths and symbols of great semantic wealth. These myths and symbols found in those religions are, in their majority, of Yoruba origin. Reading Soyinka's works in Brazil, therefore, is a way of relating to these elements and valuing them in their literary dimension. Among Soyinka's works, the best-known is probably *Death and the King's Horseman*, published in 1975 and with many productions in Nigeria, the United States and the United Kingdom. Based on an actual event that took place in colonial Nigeria, in which a Yoruba native habit conflicted with the British rule, this play is the one in which Yoruba mythology and worldview are best articulated with language that is rich in genres and fragments of Yoruba oral literature, being particularly fruitful for a cultural encounter. This dissertation offers an analysis of the play base on notions of Yoruba culture, mythology, and worldview and on Soyinka's own aesthetic and metaphysical theories. This analysis highlights the symbolical, mythical and metaphysical, as well as aesthetic aspects. It is preceded by a study on important dimensions of Yoruba culture for the understanding of the play, such as history, religion, mythology, philosophy and arts. After that, Wole Soyinka's aesthetic theories are studied against the background of the current literary discussions in Africa at the time. It is from these elements that the play is studied. Above all, this dissertation offers a translation of *Death and the King's Horseman* that values its lyrical content, its many artistic languages and its philosophical perspectives based on the studies conducted in previous chapters and concluding with observations about the translation process.

Keywords: Wole Soyinka. Literary Translation. African Literature

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 9

CHAPTER 1 *ORISUN*

(SPRINGHEAD)

The Land of Spreading 23

Oyo: Kingdom among Kingdoms 30

Yoruba Religion—The Early Views 40

A Worldview and its Deities 46

Yoruba Worldview in Art and Spectacle 55

CHAPTER 2 *ORITA META*

(CROSSROADS)

The Position of African Literature 68

The Negritude Movement and Soyinka 73

The Burden and the Muse 84

A Yoruba Writer 89

Soyinka and the African World 93

Literature as Mythopoiesis 111

CHAPTER 3 *OJA ATI ILE*

(MARKETPLACE AND HOME)

The Horseman Staged and Read 118

Act 1 122

Act 2 136

Act 3 139

Act 4 145

Act 5 147

Discussion 154

CHAPTER 4 *IKU ATI ELESIN OBA*

(DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN)

Ato 1 180

Ato 2 200

Ato 3 213

Ato 4 226

Ato 5 244

CHAPTER 5 *IRIN AJO*

(JOURNEY)

Language Worlds 261

Act 1 264

Act 2 273

Act 3 279

Act 4 288

Act 5 292

CONCLUSION 302

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES 307

INTRODUCTION

In 1986, the world saw the first Black author to win the Nobel Prize in Liter in the figure of the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka. An author of plays, poems, essays, memoir books and novels, Wole Soyinka was paramount in the formation of modern African Literature, which cannot be conceived of without him. His works, written in English, mingle Modern, Elizabethan and Greek elements in structure, themes and language, but there is no doubt that their trademark is what he brings of African oral literature and traditional theatre. Primarily a playwright, with elements of these different theatrical traditions, he developed a very original art to give to the reader more than a picture, actually an experience of Africa. From this source also he has drawn an equally original theory of the African theatre.

In addition to his reputation as a writer, he became well-known throughout the years as one of the most prominent spokespersons of Africa to the world as he has been a present figure in many countries discussing assorted issues such as poverty, corruption and religious intolerance. His acknowledgment in this field does not mean that, in the places he visits, his works tend to become well-known and well-read. Our case in Brazil can be used as an example: Wole Soyinka has been here a number of times, including in 2017 in Porto Alegre as the main invitee of the Book Fair. When he comes, he usually arouses interest and is received with warmth. Nevertheless, there is, among us, only one of his books translated: the play *The Lion and the Jewel*, and one book-length critical study about his work: *Pós-Colonialismo, Identidade e Mestiçagem Cultural: A Literatura de Wole Soyinka*, by Professor Eliana Lourenço da Lima Reis, the result of a doctoral dissertation.

It is not difficult to understand why such a situation occurs if we think about the general features of the works of Wole Soyinka. They tend to be difficult to read in their thematic and structural complexity. Such obstacles often prevent us from getting to know works that are of great importance and that include details and nuances of the historical, social, political and religious landscape of Africa. Indeed, Soyinka addresses all these dimensions in his works with a wealth of meanings and symbols that provides us with a picture of African society and culture that gets ever deeper as we keep on discovering it.

Soyinka is a Nigerian writer, of Yoruba origin. His works draw heavily on the reality of Nigeria—including many of his lyrical poems. Even the writings that provide no nominal indication of country or city—such as *A Dance of the Forests*—show evidence of being placed in Nigeria in details such as the names of the characters. Nevertheless its firm location in Nigeria, the works of Wole Soyinka aim to be meaningful to Africa as a whole and, more widely, to the world as a whole. Indeed, the critic Eldred Durosimi Jones, in his essay in the book *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, edited by Bruce King, writes about Soyinka that "[n]o African writer has been more successful in making the rest of the world see humanity through African eyes" (JONES, 1972, p. 113).

However, more than the historical and political, it is in the mythical reality that Soyinka's works have their roots. Myth is the source from which politics, social relations and even history spring. And this recourse to myth may help to explain the universality that is spotted by Eldred Jones. Drawing upon resources from mythologies and cultures as different as Hindu, Greek and Christian, the framework for the worldview that animates Soyinka's writings is unquestionably found in Yoruba mythology. As Ken Goodwin affirms in *Understanding African Poetry*, what Soyinka does with these assorted mythologies "is integrate any such imagery into the pervading imagery of Yoruba belief" (GOODWIN, 1982, p. 109). The same Goodwin defines Soyinka as "a myth-maker" who "begins from existing myths, which he develops and rejuvenates by introducing 'foreign' material" (id.). Such an observation finds an echo in an article by the already cited Eliana Lourenço da Lima Reis, according to whom, for Soyinka, "African culture should claim for itself not only its singularity, but also its right and possibility of communication with the other cultures" (REIS, 2010, p. 56, my translation). Soyinka's cosmopolitan approach to Yoruba culture has taken his work to be read and studied in different parts of the world, not only in different African countries, but in the United States, many countries in Europe and even in East-Asia, as we can see in the volume of essays *The Writer as Myth-Maker: East-Asian Perspectives on Wole Soyinka,* edited by Bernth Lindfors and Bala Kothandaranam, published by Africa World Press in 2004. In all of these places where Soyinka's works have come to be studied, Yoruba culture and mythology has become known and made to intersect with other cultures and worldviews, as said by Professor Reis.

Soyinka's lack of acknowledgement in Brazil is particularly puzzling. Not only has Brazil the presence of important African elements in its culture, but these elements are, in their majority, Yoruba. This same anomaly was spotted by Professor Reis in the article mentioned above. The matrix of most Afro-Brazilian religions is Yoruba; therefore, Yoruba is the origin of many symbols, narratives, myths, divinities, practices, and metaphors that are crucial to the symbolic experiences of many Brazilians who follow these religions, and these religions have been more and more the object of study of anthropologists, theologians, sociologists and other scholars. It can be said that Yoruba culture and mythology have laid its roots in Brazilian soil. Curiously, in literature the presence of Yoruba myths, symbols and ideas is relatively scarce. And, above all, if some writers have explored Yoruba myths and symbols in their works, none seems to have gone so far as to write within the Yoruba worldview, and this leads us into a seeming paradox: in Brazil, Yoruba gods are worshipped, Yoruba symbols are used, but little is known about the very worldview of the Yoruba—their views on life, death, time, society, the individual, social organization and others.

In the works of Wole Soyinka, these same issues are deeply investigated. Indeed, it can be said that Soyinka's own literary project focuses on producing a work that is built within the African, and more specifically, Yoruba worldview. As Soyinka himself posits in the preface to his book *Myth, Literature and the African World*, his project "embraces the apprehension of a culture whose reference points are taken from within the culture itself' (SOYINKA, 2005, p. viii). Soyinka has always worked toward a greater intellectual independence of Africa and, consequently, has always favored the research and deep study of African art, poetry, drama and systems of thought. As we can see in the essay "Theatre in African Traditional Cultures: *Survival Patterns*" (SOYINKA, 1993, p. 134-146), he possesses a wide knowledge of African theatrical traditions from assorted countries. Likewise, we see, in the poem *Ogun Abibimañ*, Soyinka drawing upon the resources of Zulu myth and history to bring together their emperor Shaka and the Yoruba god of iron Ogun. Soyinka always looked forward to a greater cultural integration of Africa—as we can see in his proposal of adopting Kiswahili as a *lingua franca* for Black Africa (SOYINKA, 2001, p. 141)—and has developed this idea in his *Myth, Literature and the African World*. It is the Yoruba mythology and system of thought that he delves into as a system to represent the "African Worldview." But is there such a worldview? Some—among them, Kwame

Appiah—would say there is not. Some say that African cultures are too diverse to be collected into one overarching "African culture" or "African worldview."

As controversial as they are, Soyinka's ideas about an "African worldview" are of great importance for a discussion about Africa and its cultures and are prone to have a strong impact on the way we discuss Afro-Brazilian culture and identity. The analysis of Soyinka's ideas constitutes an important part of this dissertation, since they are fundamental for a deeper reading of the play analyzed and translated, *Death and the King's Horseman*.

The play *Death and the King's Horseman* is probably the most well-known work by Soyinka. It was written in 1973 and published in 1975, based on a true event that happened in Oyo, an ancient Yoruba city, in 1946, when a ritual suicide, of great importance to the community, was prevented by an English colonial authority. The situation gets out of control and the suicide that the British aimed to prevent ends up taking place without the ritual setting that would give it meaning. What is worst, to substitute for the ritual suicide that should have taken place, the community elects another ritual victim, and, in the end, two deaths occur instead of one. These events inspired the Yoruba-spoken folk-opera *Oba Waja*, written in 1964 by the Yoruba dramatist Duro Ladipo, which counted on a highly proverbialized verse language and a very direct approach to the theme. Wole Soyinka's play in English also draws heavily on the Yoruba sources of oral treasury in proverbs, poetry and song. Likewise, Soyinka uses elements from Yoruba traditional theatre—an important source for Ladipo's aesthetics. However, Soyinka lends to his dramatic work a philosophical dimension which is broader than that of *Oba Waja*. Indeed, Wole Soyinka draws upon these events to conduct deep investigations about the relationship between life and death, the different experiences of time and the notions of the individual and the community. Elesin Oba, the Horseman of the King in Soyinka's play, becomes a sort of vehicle for Yoruba metaphysics.

This is probably the reason why Soyinka, in an Author's note that accompanies the published text of *Death and the King's Horseman*, repudiates readings of the play that interpret it as a "clash of cultures," an idea Soyinka finds to be prejudiced and biased, proposing, instead, a metaphysical approach. This metaphysical approach aims exactly at leading to the heart of Yoruba culture and worldview. Perhaps rather than

discussing the ills of colonialism or the conflict between a European and an African culture, the play searches to enable the reader to experience a story as perceived from the point-of-view of the Yoruba ideas about the organization of the cosmos and the destiny of humans both during life and after it.

The complexity of Yoruba thought receives a special aesthetic treatment in the play, since it deploys a host of resources covering many areas of Yoruba art. In the case of the written text—which is what will be analyzed—there is the frequent usage of proverbs and genres of Yoruba oral poetry, some of this material directly translated from the Yoruba. In the live staging of the play, many of the parts of the text are sung at the sound of traditional Yoruba percussive music accompanied by Yoruba dance. And, in pictures and videos of different productions of the play, it is possible to see Yoruba carvings decorating the places and Yoruba fabrics and clothes being worn. Therefore, the play is actually set in the Yoruba world, with its artefacts, principles, arts and crafts. The reader or watcher is dragged toward this world and is immersed in it.

Those are reasons why it is my conviction that *Death and the King's Horseman* is particularly interesting, among Soyinka's works, to be translated and known in Brazil. It can help us to perceive Yoruba, or for that matter African culture from a different perspective than the one we are used to. Soyinka's deployment of notions of Yoruba spirituality and their framework of thought can help us understand the Yoruba worldview in greater depth and detail. In addition, this play can put us in touch with a literary style that is loaded with features of African oral literary genres, which allows us to have a clearer vision of the reality of oral literature in Africa. All of these elements can be helpful for building a less prejudiced view about Africa and its cultural products.

The words above may have given the impression that Wole Soyinka faithfully reproduces themes of Yoruba religion and mythology in his works, giving them an anthropological, almost descriptive character. In fact, it is the opposite. A clear, neat, detailed and considerably objective account of an African community and its culture are found in Chinua Achebe's famous novel *Things Fall Apart*, which has received the tag of "anthropological novel." This objectivity is largely due to Achebe's sober, concise, direct and descriptive language. Soyinka's approach to language is far more disruptive, tense and non-linear. Likewise, his approach to his culture and mythology does not seek to be a faithful description of what he finds in his society. To understand the way he

processes this culture to render it into works of art, we have to understand something of his upbringing and training.

Wole Soyinka was born in 1934 in the city of Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. He attended Abeokuta Grammar School, where his father was headmaster, then Government College and Ibadan University College—all of them prestigious educational institutions. The latter, in colonial times, was an extension of the University of London and had a very thorough syllabus in English literature. Soyinka studied this subject, along with Greek and Western history. At the University of Leeds, under the supervision of Wilson Knight, he focused his energies on the history of tragedy, encompassing the Greek, the Elizabethan and the Modern. This very solid training in Western literature, mainly drama, meets with Soyinka's next step after Leeds: a two-year Rockefeller research grant which he used to roam, at the wheel of a Land Rover, remote regions of Nigeria studying African traditional theatre forms—the episode receives a poetic, almost mystical account in Soyinka's most recent memoir volume *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (SOYINKA, 2006, p. 46-47).

The results of these researches can be seen throughout Soyinka's career, both in his theatrical and critical productions. They can be seen already in his first play to be staged in Nigeria—*A Dance of the Forests*, which presents a host of traditional theatrical and religious resources such as ritual, dance, oracles and a distinctive poetic language that includes proverbs, repeated lines and odd images, along with a stock of myths, tales, gods and fantastic figures direct from the Yoruba tradition. They can be seen also in a play like *The Road* in which very ancient esoteric rites and mystic festivals share a room with road accidents, stolen car parts, bribery and corruption. In *The Strong Breed*, notions of traditional morality are intertwined with the seasonal rites that sustain these notions and in *Kongi's Harvest*, which does not have the same relationship with the supernatural as these other plays cited, we see luxuriant scenes of dance and song with long parts in Yoruba. In these sixties plays, it becomes evident how Soyinka had developed in his mind and in his artistic work the information he had collected during his two-year Rockefeller grant.

This baggage has accompanied Soyinka during his life, and from the seventies on his perspective on the knowledge he builds based on this material seems to take another path. Published in 1976, the book *Myth, Literature and the African World*,

composed of four lectures Soyinka gave at Cambridge University plus an appendix, marks maturation in Soyinka's thinking of Africa and African culture, which would flow right into the writing of *Death and the King's Horseman*. In this book, without losing anything of the wry humor that marks his earlier essayistic production, one can sense a certain distancing from the iconoclasm of his youth in his theoretical and critical texts. It is here that he starts moving toward a more unified vision of Africa, taking as his departure point the mythology and worldview of his people. From this very specific culture, from this very specific mythology and worldview, Soyinka's remarks can extend to other African cultures, mainly when he examines literary productions from other parts of Africa, enabling him to project a view that is no longer circumscribed to the Yoruba only and, with this broadening of scope, Soyinka proposes a worldview for Africa.

It can actually be said that this book presents an outline for a literary project, something which encompasses seeds of Soyinka's ideas in the 1960's and would have great impact on the future development of his thought. It is here that Soyinka states his commitment to myth as the matrix of literature and the source to which it can return, establishing himself, as he himself said at the Sixth Annual Arthur Miller Freedom to Write Lecture at May 11 2011, as "a compulsive mythologist" (retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo4l1M3VNNY). This compulsive mythologizing can be traced to an earlier essay called "The Fourth Stage," in which Soyinka examines the deep syncretism of languages (myth, poetry, music, dance, verbal language) found in Yoruba arts to arrive at an inchoate and dark matrix from which they spring. This matrix is the source of the metaphysics Soyinka develops in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, which is prefigured in his earlier plays, essays and poems and explodes with its full force in *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Death and the King's Horseman finds its roots in the Yoruba tripartite view of existence as the world of the ancestors, the world of the living and the world of the unborn, and the dark and elusive abyss of transition that pervades them all. These four instances are frequently in the characters' minds as they undergo the situations that make up the play. The notion of an afterlife is central to its understanding, as much as the idea of the organization of the cosmos and its correlations with human living. The dialogs, the poetry, the actions and the artistic performances in the play can be

understood under the aegis of the motions between these three worlds and the fourth stage, the abyss. It is in this sense that we can understand Soyinka's proposition of *Death and the King's Horseman* as a metaphysical play. It is, as well, the play in which Soyinka most elaborates the arts and characteristics of the Yoruba.

The observations above may lead to the conclusion that reading *Death and the King's Horseman* as a metaphysical play implies denying the importance of historical and political factors, especially when Soyinka, in the same Author's note, deems the colonial factor incidental, something that has given rise to much controversy. However, instead of excluding the historical and the political factors altogether, the metaphysical interpretation actually enhances them by putting them in a wider context of both space and time—that is, within the metaphysical framework of the Yoruba, the event which the play is about is thrown into a bigger picture and understood in terms of the perturbation it provokes in the life of a community that transcends both the very land on which they are and the very present they are living in. The world that is affected by the event in Oyo far exceeds colonization, but it can no longer be understood without it. The metaphysical structure that sustains the world of the Yoruba is permanent and cannot be affected by worldly events, but the Yoruba world, as the very words say, can be and is affected.

And here, one is inclined to bring forth the theme of death. There are various deaths in the play, and they constantly compete. There is the ritual death of Elesin, which was supposed to follow the death of his King—these are regenerative deaths whereas the death the Colonial District Officer wants to prevent is a merely biological event with no effects but material decomposition. The death that follows the prevention of Elesin's death is a catastrophic death since it involves the whole Yoruba community. The clash between Elesin's wide metaphysical view of death and the District Officer's death from a Western perspective is a determinant aspect to grasp the main conflict in the play and equally to insert a certain element of a clash of cultures, even if it is not the mainstay of the play.

All these themes have been discussed, discarded and accepted by many critics from different perspectives. From the markedly sociologic views of Biodun Jeiyfo and Olakunle George to the more esoteric and language-focused approaches of David Richardson and Joan Hepburn, never excluding the deconstructionist analysis of Henry

Louis Gates, Jr., and the symbolical reading of Dan S. Izevbaye. Ketu Katrak examines the tragic roots of *Death and the King's Horseman* and Abiola Irele instructs us about the central importance of language in the understanding of the development of the plot. Even the philosopher Kwame Appiah has his contribution in a chapter of his most famous work, *In my Father's House*, in which he examines and questions Soyinka's metaphysical approach as well as his theories about the unification of an African world and worldview.

These critics will be read and discussed in order to achieve a broad view of the work being analyzed and enrich the analysis, which will have its own focus. This focus, as it can be grasped from what was read up to here, is on the metaphysical dimension and elements of the play. This choice was not made purely because it is the approach suggested by Soyinka, but because what I think is its immense relevance to a rich and fruitful reading of the play. As I have said earlier, valuing the metaphysical interpretation of the play means valuing the Yoruba view, since this very view is rooted in a metaphysical, spiritual conception of the world in which natural and supernatural are in continual exchange and can hardly be separated. The previous and the future generations already exist as a concrete reality for the presently living generation. It is this conception that will be investigated within the analysis of the play and, for such, Yoruba concepts, symbols and myths will be examined. In addition to the play, this conception is frequently materialized in art objects, religious paraphernalia, songs, music, dance and rituals. Accordingly, some of these elements will be analyzed as well in the dissertation.

The dissertation will be divided into five chapters that, connected as they are in their themes, bear some independence. They will focus on different aspects that are important to understand the play that will be analyzed and translated and its context. Aspects of Yoruba culture and the formation of modern African literature will be addressed as well as issues concerning the process of translation.

Chapter 1 will be an overall study of Yoruba history and culture in order to familiarize the reader with some concepts, theories, historical events, thoughts, myths, gods and symbols that will be of importance to a thorough reading of the play. It begins discussing the diffusion of Yoruba culture in continents other than Africa, which is largely due to the presence of enslaved Yoruba persons in the Americas (mainly Latin

America) who took their systems of belief to their new and hostile home, although we should say that this does not account for the totality of the presence of this culture in the world, since more and more Yoruba priests and priestesses are traveling to America and Europe to teach their religion to new believers in these continents. We discover that this diffusion cannot be satisfactorily understood if not based on notions of Yoruba history; therefore, there is a section about Yoruba history from the beginnings in the forming of Ile-Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba people, to the independence of Nigeria, having its center in the Oyo Empire, which, in addition to its historical importance, is the site where the action of the play occurs. The religion of the Yoruba is also a point examined, its conception of the living world and the afterworld, its myths and some divinities; in the beginning of this section, a brief review of the first works about Yoruba religion, by European and African authors, is provided in order to trace the first views about the Yoruba people, culture and religion that were accessible to the Western reader; in the part dedicated to the divinities, three will be more lengthily discussed: Esu, Ogun and Sango, due to their importance for the analysis of the play. Finally, the last section of this chapter focuses on an analysis of Yoruba worldview as it can be seen in the visual arts and spectacles, since these instances are privileged sources for understanding the Yoruba worldview.

The purpose of the second chapter is to introduce the reader into some of the discussions, developments and controversies surrounding the idea and the creation of modern African literature. The very notion of African literature and its existence are questioned, and this questioning will be discussed with authors such as Valentin Mudimbe, Abiola Irele and Wole Soyinka himself. An analysis of some classifications and theorizations of the idea of African literature follows, focusing on the works of Janheinz Jahn and Abiola Irele. Possibly the first literary theory focusing on African and Black literature was Negritude, whose importance is proportional to its level of controversy; negritude was strongly countered by Soyinka, and this countering was fundamental for him to found the beginning of his thought; moreover, as many critics say, Negritude was partly refurbished in the second phase of his essayistic work (that of *Myth, Literature and the African World*), which is of special interest for us; therefore, the theory of Negritude will be summarized as it was theorized by the Senegalese poet and thinker Léopold Sédar Senghor. This discussion flows directly to issues such as the language of African literature and the influence of ethnic elements in Soyinka's

literature. Then, we will finally follow to Soyinka's thinking and its relations to Yoruba traditional thinking, myths and gods. This thinking is tightly intertwined to his dramatic works, which will be briefly examined in order to deduce some categories and elements for the next phase of the dissertation: the analysis of the play.

Death and the King's Horseman is a very complex play, both in the thematic and the formal levels. In terms of form and style, it encompasses a variety of language styles that follow each other in the different acts of the play, from the solemn and poetic to the colloquial. The poetic and solemn is concentrated in the Yoruba characters while the colloquial is found among the European characters. Among the former, prose frequently yields to verse and we see a festival of poetic rhythms and meters and exquisite metaphors—it is a point in which words cross with music since we know that many of these recitals are sung and danced. On the thematic dimension, the themes of death, life, the relationship between both, life after death, the relationship between humans and the gods cross with colonialism, cultural intervention, invasion, relationship between cultures. It is important to remember that, historically, *Death and the King's Horseman* is linked to two intersecting histories, both touched upon in the first chapter: the long history of the Oyo empire and the history of Nigeria as a modern country then run by the British colonizers. This shows how rich is the play in both historical and metaphysical dimensions, although the emphasis of this analysis, as we said, will be on the metaphysical. The third chapter provides first commentaries on the play divided by acts and, then, an overall analysis of both social and metaphysical aspects. Yoruba myths and symbols will be analyzed as they appear or are pertinent to the play. And the three divinities marked above will appear again as hidden agents.

The fourth chapter consists of the translation of the play. In it, the characteristics already observed in terms of type of language (solemn, colloquial), genre (poetry, prose) will be respected. The closest possible correspondents to the metaphors and images will be sought. The metrics of the verse parts will receive attention and corresponding rhythms and metrics will be used in order to search for a similar sonority to the original. To aid in the process of translation, two other translations will be used for comparison, in order to observe possible alternatives or to resolve possible doubts; the fact that both translations are in Latinate language being of extreme help in translating the text into Portuguese. These translations are *La mort et l'écuyer du roi*, a

French translation by Thierry Dubost and *La morte e il cavaliere del re*, an Italian translation by Graziella Bellini.

The fifth and last chapter will be a brief discussion on the process of translating the play. Comments will be divided per act and will cover aspects such as metrics, syntax, forms of expression, figures of speech, the fluctuation between colloquialism and ritual language, denotative and connotative language, emotional tone and many others. It is important to say that the commentaries will not be systematic, that is, there will not be a list of aspects that will be analyzed in every act; the aspects will be analyzed according to their pertinence to each act. In some occasions, there will be comparisons between the original English text and the translations (often, both translations will be compared to the original). Likewise, some of the critical remarks made during the previous chapters will be resumed in order to understand how the practical process of translation is intrinsically linked to the critical discussion of the play and its meanings, since both the translation and the critical analysis are ultimately intertwined and should be understood together. In addition, the chapter will include some critical remarks on the language issue in African theatre and about some features of Yoruba oral poetry.

This dissertation is basically focused on a play and unfortunately other works of extreme importance will not be analyzed, even if I discuss some elements of *A Dance of the Forests, The Road* and *The Strong Breed*. These are very important plays that include some elements of Soyinka's thought about the significance of ritual, myth and tradition and their complexities. The first two are also important in the building of a Yoruba poetics within Soyinka's drama, since they encompass Yoruba mythical figures, Yoruba ancient rites and religious artifacts, in addition to the Yoruba notion of cyclical time and the relationship between the living, the dead and the unborn. It will be seen that some of these elements are found in *Death and the King's Horseman*, mainly those relating directly to the Yoruba worldview and ritual since the divinities and other supernatural beings are not as present in this play as they are in the former two. The Yoruba gods and supernatural creatures appear in person in *A Dance of the Forests*, making it a play that draws upon the supernatural; in *The Road*, the god Ogun and the ancestral figure of the Egungun, the latter even appearing in the end; in *Death and the King's Horseman*, some gods and imps are cited, though none has an overarching and

determining role, but their unnamed presence can be deduced from the happenings and the plot.

Myth is a resource that will be frequently used. There are some founding myths that Soyinka draws upon to build his own theory of drama, especially those linked to the iron god Ogun, which is the patron of Soyinka's art. Once again, *Death and the King's Horseman* is not based on nor makes any clear reference to any particular myth, but there are some Yoruba myths that can be related to it and others that can be understood as a basis for the reality that brought the situation of the play about. Therefore, the analysis of the play will include the recourse to myths as an important procedure.

As it can be seen, this dissertation will be, in addition to a discussion and a translation of Soyinka's play, a research on Yoruba culture, thought and spirituality, as well as an investigation of the development of African literature and the critical thinking about it. The authors used will vary in terms of field of study and nationality. There will be art critics such as the Americans John Henry and Margaret Drewal, Steve Doris and the Yoruba Babatunde Lawal; in literary criticism, the names will range from African scholars such as Abiola Irele, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Biodun Jeiyfo to American scholars such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr.; the research will also count on the works of scholars of other fields such as the historians Adebanji Akintoye and Toyin Falola, the philosopher Kwame Appiah and the anthropologists Karin Barber and Antonio Riserio, who provide valuable material on Yoruba oral poetry. In chapter 3, some works of theology will also be drawn upon in order to grasp the play's distinctive view of spirituality. As will be pointed out in the dissertation, more recently, the works on Yoruba culture and spirituality have gained in quality and variety of fields, which is a reflection of a greater respect that newer scholars have for Yoruba culture, and African cultures in general; if yesterday we had to agree on seeing the Yoruba world through the lenses of theology and anthropology (mostly by European scholars, with some exceptions, like John Olumide Lucas, a Yoruba who, notwithstanding his origin, shared the views of his Western colleagues), today we have the views of art historians, theatre and performance scholars and literary critics who deal both with Yoruba oral heritage and with modern written literature. This development will be analyzed in the dissertation.

A note must be made on Yoruba words and names. On writing in English about Yoruba culture, with Yoruba terms, one can take one of two paths: one either uses the English version of the Yoruba words and names or the original Yoruba version. For instance, one can write orisha or Orisa, Eshu or Esu; Shango or Sango. I have to admit that I prefer the first solution; as much as we vernacularize the names of Greek or Nordic gods and concepts, there seems to be no reason for not doing so with Yoruba names. However, both Soyinka and his critics use the Yoruba versions, so I decided to follow their lead in order not to cause confusion. It must also be added that, even though this form of writing maintains the original letters, it leaves aside the stresses, which indicate the tones of the syllables, and diacritics, which indicate alterations in the sounds of the letters *e, o* and *s.* For instance, the word "Ọ̀run" (loosely translatable as "heaven") becomes "Orun."

The complexity of the play is evident. Both the analysis and the translation must be very detailed, but the result must come out as a whole. In this analysis, the philosophical, aesthetic and social aspects must come together as if there was no division among them (because ultimately there is not), as if they were a complete calabash, or an Ifa divination tray with its multiple figures and representations, crafted from one piece of wood.

CHAPTER 1

ORISUN

(SPRINGHEAD)

THE LAND OF SPREADING

Once talking to a friend, a Yoruba-Nigerian linguist, professor at the Obafemi Awolowo University, I heard his enthusiastic remark that when one thinks or talks about "African culture" or "African religion," it is often Yoruba culture or religion that one is referring to. This conversation occurred soon before the commencement of the 50th Anniversary Conference of the Faculty of Arts on the theme "Afro-Identity on the Crossroads: African and African Diaspora Creative Genius beyond Globalization and the 21st Century." The conference was taking place at the city of Ile Ife, in the university where my interlocutor taught. The city of Ile Ife is considered by the Yoruba people to be their place of origin and that of the whole of humanity. The program of the conference included visits to important historical places associated to Yoruba history.

When one starts to have contact with the scholarly literature about African history, cultures, societies and other aspects, the remark made by my interlocutor and mirrored in the program of the conference is confirmed and strengthened: many monographs, books, and articles have been dedicated to Yoruba culture, society and religion. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, when European colonization was in vigor in Africa, many anthropologists and theologians, often linked to colonial and missionary enterprises, wrote extensive and detailed studies about Yoruba religion, whose intricacies and ideas they could not prevent themselves from admiring even if they ultimately deemed it "savage," "fetishistic" or "inferior." The same admiration was dedicated to other aspects of their culture. It did not take long until the Yoruba native theologians themselves started using their insider knowledge to produce works about their culture as result of academic studies in theology. Throughout the 20th century, two other, interlinked, developments were visible in this sense: firstly, the views on Yoruba culture and thought became increasingly positive—from an interesting and complex savage and idolatrous religious manifestation to a religious-cultural complex of great importance and contribution to mankind; secondly, there is an obvious broadening of the fields in which Yoruba culture came to be studied—from the

traditional anthropological or ethno-theological studies frequently dedicated to African or other oral cultures to studies on philosophy, art history, theatre and literary criticism. Not surprisingly, this tendency is associated to growing numbers of African scholars working alongside European and American ones and, what is most interesting, the sentiment of identification with this African culture is often very similar in writers from these different origins.

The cultural prominence of the Yoruba as an African ethnic group cannot be separated from the strong presence of Yoruba culture across the Atlantic. In the Americas, the descendants of once enslaved Yoruba men and women have structured their religious beliefs into new religions that have been followed by many practitioners of varied origins, many of them taking travels to Africa to have their initiation rituals in the heartland of their creed, some even establishing new homes in the African continent. The voluminous work by Henry John Drewal, John Pemberton III and Rowland Abiodun, *Yoruba—Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought* (1995) brings an introductory text by the art historian Susan Vogel that gives a good idea of this prominence:

> The creative vitality and enduring culture of the Yoruba have provided a foundation for the lives of millions of people not only in Africa, but in Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States. Through their beliefs and the ritual and artistic expressions of them, they have enriched the heritage of the world (VOGEL, 1995, p. 10).

These data leaves little doubt about the place of Yoruba culture in the establishment of a pan-African identity. However, when investigating the culture and worldview associated to this group, the existence of a Yoruba identity, although it cannot be put into doubt, should also not be taken for granted, since it is a historically-bound existence and development. There is a tendency by some authors to posit that the Yoruba identity did not exist but until the 19th century. The historian Toyin Falola presents us with a more nuanced view; according to him, it is actually right to say that the intellectualization of a Yoruba identity appeared only in the 19th century, but it would be a mistake to say that nothing of the sort existed until then (FALOLA, 2006, p. 29). Words such as *Anago, Lukumi* and *Aku* have been alternatively used to designate an identity that most likely pre-dates them all. Recent historians (Falola among them) have been providing us with investigations about the possible formation of a historical Yoruba identity. The safest ground to start, the one that has provided these historians with their solid basis, seems to be the Yoruba myth of origin.

The number of writers who have reported the all-too-known Yoruba myth of origin in its different versions is so large that a survey of all (or even most) of them would take many pages; here let us use the works of two important and related Yoruba theologians: Bolaji Idowu—author of the classic *Olódùmarè—God in Yoruba Belief* (1994) and his student Joseph Omosade Awolalu with his *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (2001). These writers tell us that, before the world as inhabited by humans was created, all that existed was water and marshy lands under the sky where the Supreme Being Olodumare and the other divinities dwelt. Every once in a while the divinities descended through iron chains or spider webs to hunt and play. Olodumare eventually decided that solid inhabitable earth should be created out of this marshy waste and trusted his eldest son Obatala, the deity of creation, with this mission, providing him with a snail shell filled with sand, a pigeon and a five-toed chicken to accomplish the task: the sand should be thrown over the water to be spread by the chicken's feet and the pigeon; every watery space to be touched by a grain of sand would become solid earth. Afterwards, Agemo, the chameleon, would be sent to inspect the work and certify that the earth was indeed inhabitable. Here the mythic traditions start to diverge. One tradition says that Obatala accomplished his task and became the creator of the earth. Another tradition, however, posits that, before going on his errand, the arch-divinity was asked to perform a sacrifice, which he did not; as a result, he got thirsty on his way and, finding a palm-tree, inebriated himself with its wine, slept heavily and left his mission unfulfilled. The one who ended up creating the earth was his younger brother Oduduwa. Regardless of the version, the place where earth was created became known as "Ile-Ife" (which could be loosely translated as "the land of spreading"), a city that is known until today as the epicenter of the Yoruba world.

This myth and its alternative versions came to provide the material for many historical investigations. Obatala and Oduduwa are seen as deifications of two ancient kings who have been important in the founding of the Yoruba nation. The two versions arise from two distinct sects. Indeed, the historical study *A History of the Yoruba People*, by S. Adebanji Akintoye (2010) begins with the report of this myth, out of which much of Yoruba history has been deduced. Akintoye's data evidence the potency of the myth of Ife as the epicenter of creation. According to this historian, the Yoruba people believe that all human beings, races, cultures and religions came from Ife and their existence is sustained from what occurs in this sacred city. Curiously enough,

Akintoye reports the history of the Yoruba people—as beginning in Ife—from the contrary perspective: that of a meeting point where different groups and different peoples have assembled. According to Akintoye, the wealth and influence of the Yoruba people came forth as a result from this people's ability to both influence and absorb elements from such important neighboring peoples as the Edo, the Nupe, the Aja and the Bariba in terms of commerce, economy, familial and political organization and religious traditions (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 3). The sacred city of Ife—which eventually came to grow as a kingdom—arose from a series of settlements, which were known as *elu*, comprising families and their leaders in a movement of growing centralization. The economic and professional developments in agriculture and in the use of iron had strong impact on the development of Yoruba religion and mythology. In agriculture, the great importance of the palm tree and the many products (palm oil, palm wine, food) that are extracted from it was reflected in the importance of this tree as a symbol for the divination god Orunmila and the divination system of Ifa. Likewise, the importance of iron in the development of many different trades came to mark the outstanding role of the god Ogun—whose central role in Soyinka's work will give him special prominence in this dissertation—in Yoruba mythology. The two pivotal mythological figures in the foundation of the Yoruba nation, however, are those already cited: Obatala and Oduduwa.

Oduduwa is probably the central figure in the construction of Yoruba political, religious and cultural organization. The creation of the world is attributed to him (except for some versions, as noted before) and most, if not all, kings in Yorubaland claim to be his biological descendants. Not surprisingly, his importance is followed by a great degree of controversy in relation to his origin and, in terms of his divine identity, to his sex.

The first extensive historical account about the Yoruba people was the classic book *The History of the Yorubas*, by the Anglican priest and historian of Yoruba origin Samuel Johnson. According to a prefatory note to the 2010 Cambridge printing, the book was finished by Johnson in 1897, but, due to a misplacing, only came to light in 1921, becoming the standard history book of the Yoruba people and a milestone in the constitution of what is now known as "Yoruba identity." Samuel Johnson is positive in giving Oduduwa a central role in the constitution of a Yoruba nation; however, his hypothesis about this mythical-historical figure lends his origins to a further people.

According to Johnson, Oduduwa was actually an important Muslim prince from the East who, at a certain time in his life, changed his religion to a kind of pagan idol worship (which Johnson later identifies as a primitive form of Christianity) and changed the main mosque of the city over which he ruled (not specified by Johnson) into an "idol temple." After being opposed by his own son, a Muslim convert, he was persecuted and had to escape to found another kingdom. The place where he settled was what would become known as Ile-Ife, where he met the religious leader Agboniregun, who would be the founder of the worship of Ifa, the Yoruba god of divination and wisdom and a central figure in Yoruba mythology and culture.

During years, the Muslim origin of Oduduwa (and, therefore, of Yoruba culture) had not been questioned. However, the already cited historian Adebanji Akintoye attributes this hypothesis to an overall tendency (in Johnson's time and also a little later) of African scholars to search for the origins of their civilizations in some of the cultures of the Middle East—Muslim, Christian and Egyptian. This tendency, tells us Akintoye, is explained not only by the obvious reason that referring the cultures of Africa South of the Sahara to the much more prestigious cultures of the Middle East would lend the former a higher degree of prestige, but also by the fact that much of what was known about so called black Africa came from historical and mythical reports from Barbary, North-African origin, mixing the histories of the black Africans and the North-African peoples. Akintoye tells us that, nowadays, more scientific methods in the study of African history have pointed out to purely indigenous origins of many of these cultures—including the Yoruba.

According to Akintoye, Ile Ife as a political and historical organization emerged from the encounter of many cultures, and Oduduwa acted as a centralizer. Before Oduduwa, around the 9th Century, Ife was a series of settlements run by priestly kings with religion holding the system together. Some attempts to centralization were made, and two of the main leaders in this tendency were Oranfe and Obatala—both of them later incorporated into the pantheon of Yoruba deities, Obatala as the greatest, primordial deity. Nevertheless, Ife came to expand, becoming a religious, political, and cultural center, after Oduduwa, which accounted for the glorious aura that was bestowed upon him as a king and god. Indeed, the role of Oduduwa in the emergence of Yoruba culture was probably that of a successful political and religious centralizer. Myths of origin with supernatural beings descending from the sky to found the inhabited land

were certainly of great antiquity; these myths came to be unified with Oduduwa appearing as the very deity who created the earth. Likewise, the sea and wealth were probably associated in many a deity before Olokun became a pan-Yoruba deity of wealth and the sea, and the god of iron and work in general only came to have the strength and significance of Ogun from the times of Oduduwa on.

Religion, obviously, was not the only aspect that flourished in Ile-Ife. The city became a pole of economic activities and excellence in farming, art, jewelry, medicine, oral literature and others. Perhaps the most famous examples of the legacy of Ile-Ife are the terracotta and bronze sculptures found in the Olokun sacred grove in 1910 by the German anthropologist and archaeologist Leo Frobenius. These are naturalistic sculptures representing human heads with a high degree of anatomic perfection and technical sophistication. The presence of crowns and diadems point to a probable royal character of the figures represented, and the striking facial similarity to the modern Ife inhabitants, as remarked by Robert Smith (1988, p. 23), seems to attest that they were indeed the ancestors of the Yoruba of today. This economic and cultural prominence was responsible for Ife becoming a cosmopolitan center of influence. According to legend and oral history, many kingdoms have originated from Ife. Once again, Akintoye tells us that the actual origin of many of these kingdoms in Ife is discussable. What deserves to be remarked is the perception, existing for centuries until now, of the legitimacy ensured by pertaining to the great family of Ife.

As powerful and prominent as many of these kingdoms came to be (Ijebu, Ekiti, Owo and others), it is probable that none of them achieved the degree of influence and wealth that the Oyo Empire achieved. According to John Pemberton III, by the beginning of the 18th Century, the Oyo Empire encompassed as many as a million people and 18,000 square miles, representing areas in all parts of Yorubaland (PEMBERTON III, 1995, p. 149). Both Pemberton III and Akintoye point out that Oyo is frequently characterized as the youngest of the Yoruba kingdoms. As in the case of Ile-Ife, Oyo's history is intertwined with its myth and, mainly, with its mythical founders, the kingdom's features mirroring those of the founders. Ile-Ife became known for its perennial religious importance and the serene beauty of its visual art, which is in line with the competence and diplomacy of the nation-builder Oduduwa and the tranquil perfectionism of Obatala, the life deity who creates human forms. On its turn, Oyo's history of imperial power and military expertise is founded upon the braveness of

Oranmyan, supposedly Oduduwa's son who headed north to found a new land, and the fierceness and sagacity of Sango, responsible for the taming of many territories and the expansion of Yoruba culture. All of these kings have been deified, and their mythology and symbolism will be delved upon later.

Despite Oyo's fame as a bellicose and successful military state, which counted on a legendarily powerful cavalry and came to be prominent in slave trade, Akintoye posits that it stood out throughout the centuries for its competent and benevolent ruling and its cultural development. The Alafin—as the king of Oyo was known—had immense power over his people and the vassal states; yet, a strong council of chiefs existed that could depose the king if his administration was unsatisfactory, constituting a complex political structure. Likewise, the kingdom of Oyo was known for the development of sculptural arts, music and drama, mainly the *alarinjo* touring theatre groups. The constant contact of Oyo with other important and highly developed African nations such as Dahomey, Nupe, and Bariba helped it to build a cosmopolitan identity that, as will be seen, had a fundamental impact on the global importance that Yoruba culture has today around the world.

Finally, the relation between Oyo and Ile-Ife is a subject of great importance. Akintoye claims that, more than once, Oyo challenged the primacy of Ife, and the Alafin came to be known as "the king of kings." However, for the most part, the rulers of Oyo, as of most Yoruba kingdoms, claimed to have descended from Oduduwa and their kingdom to be an offspring of the famous sacred original city. Robert Smith, in *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (1988, p. 13), reminds us that for years the connection between the Alafin and the Oni (King of Ife) was largely compared to that between the Emperor and the Pope, placing Oyo and Ife in a polar relationship of political and religious authority, which is in part contested by Smith himself based on the fact that both Ife and Oyo had their own political and religious activities separately. For the sake of this work, what is important is that, mythically, Ife came to represent the origin and the perennial spiritual center of mankind whereas Oyo came to represent the pole of political expansion and economic progress.

For the building of a pan-Yoruba identity, however, the importance of the descendants of once enslaved Yoruba persons in the Americas and the traditions that developed therein cannot be overlooked. In fact, Stephan Palmié (2006) refers the

creation of this pan-Yoruba identity to actually two important cultural actors of the 19th century: one is the already cited Sierra Leone-born pastor and historian Samuel Johnson; the other is the Cuban entrepreneur and Africanist priest Remigio Herrera, known by the Yoruba traditional name of Adechina. Adechina was a freed slave who prospered as a businessman in Cuba and came to introduce and establish the religious cult of Ifa, the divine oracle of the Yoruba people around which the whole of their religion is centered. According to Palmié, these two men, who lived at the same time and were separated by the Atlantic Ocean, could not possibly have grown under the knowledge of anything that could be termed as a "Yoruba identity." Johnson was paramount in structuring it, but it is of little probability that his parents had heard the name or that it meant anything to him in his formation. As for Adechina, Palmié states that if he ever heard the name "Yoruba," it was probably very late in his life when he was already an established and respected religious authority of the Ifa cult in Cuba. Johnson, says Palmié, laid the Christian historical and hermeneutical foundations of the Yoruba "nation," whereas Adechina has established a set of ritual practices that enabled a religious belonging to substitute for an often impossible to attest biological one. In both cases, the name "Yoruba" has a retrospective value, as it came to have both to the African people that came to be known as Yoruba and to those in the rest of the world, particularly in the Americas, who identify themselves as so due to religious and cultural belonging—a belonging that came to extend throughout time to many individuals of non-African ethnic backgrounds and various countries not only in Africa and the Americas, but also in Europe. Therefore, it is first and foremost their religion and mythology that came to condition what Palmié has termed the "Yoruba globalization."

OYO: KINGDOM AMONG KINGDOMS

Although Ile Ife's place as the center and origin of the Yoruba kingdoms is undisputed, the kingdom of Oyo came to have special prominence due to its military power and territorial expansion. The importance of Oyo in forming a pan-Yoruba identity and culture extends to the point that, when, in the 19th century, the Yoruba language came to be written and dictionaries of the Yoruba language started to be produced, it was the variation spoken at Oyo that was used as the "official Yoruba," which is still the case today.

As already mentioned, the Yoruba kingdoms are believed to have developed from Ife, many of them claiming to be founded by a son of Oduduwa. In the places where these primordial founders settled, they brought many of the characteristics and structures of their original home in Ife, amalgamating the population that was already living there before the settlement and attracting, through the benefits brought by urbanization and larger numbers of people, and founding considerably large cities. Akintoye situates the beginning of this process of the building of Yoruba kingdoms around the eleventh century and extending throughout six or seven centuries thereafter (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 119). In line with this belief in a common origin, Akintoye posits that, as diverse as the different Yoruba kingdoms may have come to develop throughout the centuries, the model of government sprung also from Ife—that is, the system that had developed in the large settlements, or *elu*, in pre-Oduduwa times, in which the senior member of each settlement would concentrate the functions of ruler, setting the standard for further governments. A group of secondary inhabitants of the settlement would constitute what would become the King's council, who had the power to sanction or reject any of the King's decisions, even though these decisions were presented to the people as being made exclusively by the king. The power of this council was so great that they had the function of selecting a new king once the old one had died, since, if the principle of hereditariness was widely observed, that of primogeniture was not, all the male sons of the king being qualified to ascend to the throne.

The status of the king in face of his people was that of a being next to the gods (*Ekeji-Orisa*): he could not be addressed directly or called by his personal name by his subjects, he used special regalia and beaded crowns to cover his face—which was considered too awesome and sacred for an ordinary person to stare at. Accordingly, the rise to power of a new king was followed by due initiatory rites. In spite of this power, the king was not invulnerable to the dissatisfaction and criticism of his subjects. If the case was that the king was judged as inefficient or too tyrannical, the council had the duty to privately advise him in the matters of his decisions concerning his subjects. In more dramatic cases, the same council could suggest that, burdened by his duties, the king should "go to sleep," which euphemistically meant that he should commit suicide, since, once selected as a king, a person could never resume his civilian identity. This

request was presented with the symbols (depending on the kingdom) of an empty calabash or a parrot's egg (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 124).

These instances in which a king could be deposed were often taken to another, more powerful and mysterious council known as the Ogboni society. Different from the specific councils, the Ogboni were an organization that was probably established in Ife in the times of Oduduwa (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 64) and, as an institution, spread throughout all Yorubaland. The Ogboni was a council of elders who possessed special political and religious knowledge and exerted crucial functions in both areas. They had the power to depose a prince or a king, since their authority was based on their worship of the Earth, which was viewed as older than the gods and royalty and, therefore, seen with more awe. The activities of this group occurred under an aura of extreme secrecy, their knowledge was highly esoteric and their power, unquestionable. Up to our times, ethnographic and scholarly material on the Ogboni is extremely rare and elusive, since the oaths of secrecy taken by its members are apparently unbreakable.

Akintoye informs that, during much of Yoruba history, as numerous and varied as the kingdoms that sprung from Ife were, they maintained Ife as a cultural, economic and commercial center. Communication and commerce between the different kingdoms and cities favored Ife's centrality up to the fifteenth century. By this time, however, the same development ended up diminishing Ife's central position, since communication, commerce and trade between the other kingdoms started to become stronger, accounting for greater independence of these kingdoms in relation to Ife and a consequent downfall of the latter's influence. Despite its dwindling political and economic power, Ife maintained its aura and position as the springhead of Yoruba culture throughout the centuries, and rulers from more powerful kingdoms paid their honors to the holy city (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 143-145).

From the seventeenth century on, Oyo, a then very young kingdom, came to be the most influential and successful of Yoruba kingdoms. According to Akintoye, the fact that it was surrounded by enemies, the defense of large rocky hills that surrounded it and the adequacy of its land for agriculture were the three main factors that boosted Oyo's power. Its geographic position allowed it to control commerce and communications through large areas of land, especially through the use of horses. Oyo

came to be at the center of the Yoruba world, its ruler, the Alafin, being regarded as the greatest king among Yoruba kings (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 230-231).

Myth and history claim that Oyo was founded by Oranmiyan, a warrior prince who was the youngest son or grandson (according to the source) of Oduduwa. On this point, Samuel Johnson (2010, p. 143-144), Robert S. Smith (1988, p. 29) and Akintoye (2010, p. 232) agree; the three historians are, however, not in agreement when it comes to the reason for Oranmiyan leaving Ile-Ife to found a new kingdom. In line with his theory that the Yoruba have their origin in the Middle East, Johnson posits that Oranmiyan left his homeland to the Middle East to avenge the old quarrel between his father and his original people. Smith and Akintoye, who are at odds with the theory of the Middle Eastern origin of the Yoruba people, lay this idea aside. Akintoye even presents a possible version according to which Oyo was actually founded by Nupe and Bariba (two neighboring ethnic groups) chiefs and not by a warrior-prince from Ile-Ife, although Akintoye himself seems to prefer the older version. Nevertheless, this alternative version points to the importance of the either peaceful or violent exchanges with the Nupe and Bariba in the history of the kingdom of Oyo.

Indeed, after a brief period of peaceful exchange, the wars between Oyo and these two neighboring peoples resulted in a difficult period for the kingdom that led Oranmiyan to move it to a different place, where, in addition to some Bariba raids that had persisted, Oyo had to pay tribute to the Yoruba kingdom of Owu. All this was aggravated by Oranmiyan returning to Ile-Ife. It was Oramniyan's son, Sango, who was able to successfully fight Owu and reestablish the kingdom in its original place (AKINTOYE, 2010; SMITH, 1988). This victory resulted in Sango being deified and becoming one of the most important gods in the Yoruba pantheon.

According to Robert Smith, this history established Oyo as a militarily successful and warrior kingdom with a famously effective cavalry (SMITH, 1988, p. 31). In the 14th century, Oyo started to establish its power, but it was from 1600 on, under the Alafin Obalokun, that Oyo extended its area of influence over other Yoruba kingdoms and also over the territories of their old enemies, the Nupe and Bariba (SMITH, 1988, p. 34-35). The power of the empire continued to rise until it saw its first disturbances during what Smith (1988, p. 38) calls the "age of Gaha."

First of all, it is important to notice that, as occurs with many Yoruba states, the king's decisions were not absolute, but subjected to the approval or rejection of a council of seven advisers, known as the Oyo Mesi. Although it could not depose a king, it could strongly recommend that the king give up his throne by committing suicide. The principal officer of this council was called the Basorun, who possessed immense powers over the kingdom. Gaha served as the Basorun of four kings. When he was selected, in 1754, during the reign of Alafin Alabisi, he was known as a prominent and popular warrior. However, as soon as he was selected, he started to draw on a number of strategies to diminish Labisi's power until the king was convinced to take his own life. Of the next three kings, all selected by Gaha, two had the same fate; Alafin Abiodun, the fourth king under Gaha, was finally able to form an army to battle and defeat Gaha, but, at that time, much harm had already been done to the empire (AKINTOYE, 2010). Akintoye observes that, at the root of the fall of the empire was a conflict between a lineage of war-chiefs and the Alafins. The first kings of Oyo were warrior kings, Sango being the epitome of them. As the empire evolved, the duties of warfare passed on to the Basorun, who had enormous power and opinions of their own regarding the future of the kingdom—opinions that were not always aligned with those of the Alaafin. The "age of Gaha" ended with the kingdom of Abiodun, a kingdom, according to Akintoye (2010, p. 269-270) of great popularity, but whose economic glory was based largely on slave trade and which, at the expense of toppling an infamously corrupt and destructive Basorun, bestowed excessive power in the king's hands and destroyed the balance between the different instances of the previous kingdom.

The fall of the great Oyo Empire had tremendous consequences in the 19th century in Yorubaland. The empire, says Akintoye (2010, p. 292), had the strong role of maintaining peace throughout Yorubaland both through its military and administrative action and through the spreading of its traditions; without its role, Yorubaland started a process of dissolution with myriad wars erupting between its numerous states. The many refugees from Oyo entering other kingdoms also brought forth inquietude and turmoil. The first great war of this period was that between the coalitions of Oyo-Owu and Ife-Ijebu-Ode with the victory of the latter. Apart from what was seen as the sacrilegious act of a reign launching war against the sacred city of Ife, this war had the effect of scattering the kingdoms of Owu and Oyo even more.

During the war, the Owu armies were helped by the populations of the cities of the Egba country. After Oyo-Owu's defeat, these peoples were punished as well and many of their cities were destroyed. From this, two important new cities arose. One was Abeokuta, which was raised by Egba refugees around the epicenter of a large rock called Olumo Rock, regarded as a landmark up to these days. The other was Ibadan, which was a small Egba village settled by Ife and Ijebu troops and developed to become a powerful kingdom. The growth of Ibadan represented more than the emergence of a new powerful kingdom. The system of government was based on one civil and one military authority as occurred with other Yoruba kingdoms; the great novelty was the fact that neither positions obeyed the criterion of lineage, but both would be attained by merit and influence. The same criterion held for other minor, although also important, positions of leadership, which allowed people from other kingdoms to become leaders in Ibadan. This condition attracted many subjects from other kingdoms and cities who would travel to Ibadan in search of prestige and power, even if those more attached to tradition would deride Ibadan as "a people without a king" (AKINTOYE, 2010, P. 298). This rejection toward the new system of Ibadan can be seen in a traditional poem translated and published by the Austrian phonologist and literary historian Ulli Beier, where Ibadan is deemed "the town where the owner of the land does not prosper like the stranger" (BEIER, 1970, P. 41).

Moreover, the 19th century saw the kingdom of Ilorin becoming an Islamic emirate and growing to great power until it was defeated by the army of Ibadan at the town of Osogbo in 1840. Many towns that had helped Ibadan against Ilorin would come to accept its protection, Ibadan becoming an empire that would include, in 1850, the kingdom of Ife. Throughout the 19th century, Ibadan would achieve immense power and a series of enmities and wars would revolve around it. The end of the century saw the outbreak of many conflicts that would weaken Ibadan and cause intense upheavals and reconfigurations in Yorubaland until in 1892 the British colonial powers intervened, making a treaty with Ibadan and ending these long wars.

According to Akintoye, the 19th century was a time of great changes. The wars resulted in numerous cities and towns being utterly destroyed and their populations disbanded, creating new centers of culture and social life and mixing the Yoruba subgroups as never before. The once great city of Oyo was totally damaged, becoming unrecognizable as the great center of power that it once was. Another element that

cannot be overlooked was slavery—until 1867, the trans-Atlantic slavery took place; in Yorubaland, its peak was in 1826. After 1867, only domestic slavery remained, contributing to the rearrangements of families and groups. Finally, due to the convulsions caused by these factors, the 19th century was a period of great changes and experimentations in the political systems drawn upon in Yorubaland. Ibadan's rejection of the kingdom and the lineage system was probably the major example, but other towns and cities also abandoned monarchy to embrace alternative systems. Due to all these changes, Akintoye refers to this period as a time of revolution (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 328).

But the changes in Yorubaland in the 19th century were not only of political character, but also economic and cultural. In economic terms, the end of slavery propelled the development of the production and marketing of agricultural goods such as palm oil—which was in great demand in Europe due to the industrial revolution. In cultural terms, there were profound changes in the ambits of religion and cultural patterns adopted. First of all, the intensification of European intervention conditioned an intensification of Christian missionary activity and a spread of Christianity and Western culture. Nevertheless, the spread of Christianity was not only due to European Christian missionaries, but also to formerly enslaved Americans (mainly from Brazil) who found their way to the homeland of their ancestors and helped propagate Western culture and Christianity, making the Yoruba people one of the most literate of Africa (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 348). An analogous part was played by the spread of Islam, in which Islamic evangelizers not only preached their religion, but taught Arabic, Arabic writing and reading and the Koran. In general, the Yoruba welcomed different religions and showed no intolerance or suspicion. Violent reactions only followed when these religions sought to impair their native beliefs and culture. Finally, some European missionaries and explorers started to show interest in Yoruba culture, resulting in many studies and monographs on Yoruba religion and society—some of which will be discussed in this chapter. Towards the beginning of the 20th century, due to the influx of extraneous economic and cultural elements and the efflux of Yoruba economic and cultural elements, the Yoruba started to build an ever-more cosmopolitan identity.

Indeed, the 19th century also saw a strengthening of Yoruba identity. Throughout his book, Akintoye stresses the similarities in culture, religion and government systems that maintained the Yoruba as a group during its long history, despite the different

kingdoms to which they belonged. However, in the 19th century, a community of former Yoruba captives in Sierra Leone started to use the name "Yoruba," previously used by Sudanese peoples, to predicate themselves. A strong Yoruba consciousness arose and, with it, a Yoruba cultural nationalism, based on the common heritage of Oduduwa, the language, the religion and many other factors that were sketched herein.

The Yoruba entered the 20th century under European rule—some under French rule in the country then known as Dahomey (today, the Republic of Benin), a few under German rule in Togo and the majority under British rule in Nigeria. According to Adebanji Akintoye (2010, p. 389-396), whereas French rule considerably diminished the power of native authorities, under British rule they were able to maintain it. In considering the colonization of Nigeria by the British, it is important to note that the country of Nigeria came to encompass, in its area, a northern region in which the majority was formed by the Fulani and Hausa, who had Islam as their religion, and a southern region whose majority was formed by Yoruba and Igbo subjects who had their own native religions and came gradually to accept Christianity (apart from Ilorin, which was a Yoruba Islamic state). According to Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton in *A History of Nigeria* (2010, p. 116), although a system of indirect rule—in which the British officials would rule through native authorities—was established by the Governor-General of Nigeria Frederick Lugard, the actual functioning of this system had marked differences in the north and in the south. First of all, in the south the indirect rule would be established through a network of traditional chiefs whereas a single emir would rule in the north; moreover, there was a far stronger preoccupation with cultural preservation in the north (probably due to a higher esteem in which Islamic culture was held), whereas the indirect system was more direct in the south. As a result, a Western-educated elite developed in the south more than it did in the north. However, Lugard's plans were to extend the power of southern native authorities as it occurred in the north.

Toyin Falola, in his essay "Power, Statues and Influence of Yorùbá Chiefs in Historical Perspective," informs that, whereas the revenue of traditional chiefs traditionally came from war booty, tolls, and tributes, under indirect rule they received salaries from the British Government—these salaries were greater according to the taxes the same chiefs could extract from their people, which incurred in the anger of the people against their chiefs (FALOLA, 2006, p.168-169). Lugard's new system gave the

chiefs powers and duties greater than they held in the past, which increased their distance to their subjects (FALOLA, HEATON, 2010, p. 117). Moreover, Akintoye points out that, right at the beginning of colonization, before Lugard's government, the war chiefs represented the greatest danger to colonial rules and their power had to be eliminated. The result was that the system that held sway since the beginning of the nineteenth century in Yorubaland, in which the power was divided between a military and a civil chieftaincy, disappeared and the Yoruba kings enjoyed an authority they had only had before this period, becoming the undisputed rulers of Yoruba communities (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 391). Paradoxically, this great power they now had existed because they were subordinated to a greater authority—the British colonial rulers.

It was in 1914 that the Lugardian system of indirect rule developed in Yorubaland. Akintoye (2010, p. 392) offers the following description of this system: the Yoruba Oba (king) was officially acknowledged as the native authority, having at his service a native treasury, a native court and a native police force. The British official was the District Officer, and the districts were divided into provinces, whose authorities were the Residents. Despite the attempt to preserve the power and prestige of Yoruba native authorities, Akintoye tells us, the British still ruled the land, since they were the final instance to be heard in the selection of a king and the court of the District Officer was superior to the native court (2010, p. 393). This allowed the District Officer to intervene in situations which should be handled by native authorities or, to use Akintoye's words, he should be an advisor to the king, but often acted as a supervisor (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 392). Moreover, the different districts had different forms of rule. In Oyo, for instance, the Alafin was the supreme ruler, but there were districts, as Ekiti, where the authority was divided into equal kings. In the latter situation, it was more difficult for the colonial forces to rule through these kings and, to correct the problem, the British tried to artificially centralize the native power into one king, creating illegitimate authority.

Throughout the 20th century, the colonial society of Nigeria followed its course and brought industrialization and the intensification of Western education and, along with it, a Western-educated elite. The members of this elite, many of whom went to Europe to pursue a university degree, came to develop a more critical view on Nigerian society, the problems of colonization, and culture; from these elites, nationalist movements started to appear and gain strength. According to Falola and Heaton (2010,

p. 137), it was not until the 1930's that a Nigerian identity and consciousness was formed—until then, Nigerians identified with their specific ethnic groups. The formation of this Nigerian identity and consciousness accompanied the development of other pan-African forms of consciousness. The authors also remark on the emergence of a race consciousness aimed at fighting for the rights of native Africans and against problems such as the relegation of qualified native Africans to less qualified jobs in favor of workers of European origin. These developments intensified with the newer generations. First of all, the number of Western-educated graduates significantly increased. Second, there were more and more students who preferred to pursue their University degrees not in the United Kingdom, as occurred with almost the totality of students in the previous generations, but in the United States, in African-American colleges, which certainly helped in the development of the race consciousness that was previously pointed out. The establishment of trade unions and other organizations also helped in advancing the causes of native Nigerians. Moreover, pan-Nigerian nationalist groups such as the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) started to emerge.

In the Yoruba area, one of the first significant political movements was the Abeokuta Ladies' Club, founded in 1944 (it would become the Abeokuta Women's Union in 1946) by the political activist Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, mother of the musician Fela Kuti and aunt of the author whose work is the subject of this dissertation (the foundation of the club found its way to the pages of Soyinka's childhood memoirs *Aké*). This group successfully fought for the rights of the women of the region. The 1940's saw Nigeria struggling against economic problems, but also deepening the awareness of both problems and possible solutions. Along with economic problems, the two World Wars brought training centers aimed at Nigerians who were sent to war. Another very important event was the foundation, in 1948, of the University of Ibadan—an extension of the University of London. This university would have immense importance in Nigeria's intellectual life and the formation of a Nigerian literature, since many important authors studied there, including Wole Soyinka himself, the poets Christopher Okigbo and John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, the literary critic Abiola Irele, the novelist Chinua Achebe and many others. Moreover, from 1945 on, the political scenery in London began to favor a future independence in Nigeria as more and

more senior positions in Nigerian politics and civil society were occupied by Nigerians, most of them nationalists.

In the 1940's emerges a very highlighted and important figure in the story of Yoruba culture and nationalism: the political and cultural activist Obafemi Awolowo, who started as the leader of the NYM before going to study in London. Upon his coming back, Awolowo founded the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Society of Sons of Oduduwa), an organization aimed at, according to Falola and Heaton (2010, p. 151), "foster unity among the Yoruba, promote the spread of Yoruba language and culture, and work with other nationalist groups in Nigeria" towards Yoruba progress. Awolowo became the main figure in Yoruba nationalism.

The independence of Nigeria was finally possible in October 1st 1960. It was welcomed with great enthusiasm by nationalist leaders and celebrated with a speech by the Prime Minister Alhaji Tafawa Balewa. Of course many problems and conflicts followed, but they will not be addressed in this work.

YORUBA RELIGION—THE EARLY VIEWS

"In all things… religious"—this is the phrase with which the Yoruba Methodist theologian Bolaji Idowu names the first chapter of his classic monography on Yoruba religion *Olódùmarè—God in Yorùbá Belief*. We will go back to it later. For now, let us remark that, in naming his first chapter in such a fashion, Idowu is making a point, stressing that religion is the main element to define all the areas of Yoruba life: "The keynote of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life for them" (IDOWU, 1994, p. 5). It is not surprising, then, that what has been called the "pan-Yoruba identity" or "global Yoruba identity" is established and defined by this same religion—a religion that, as already remarked—came to spread to many other parts of the world and be practiced by individuals with no ethnic affiliation with the Yoruba people. Places outside Africa where Yoruba religion enjoys great popularity and number of followers are found mainly in Latin America, in particular Cuba and Brazil, to where slaves of Yoruba origin have taken part of their traditions. However, with the growing globalization and accessibility of information, Yoruba religion has reached the United States and many

countries in Europe. It is important to say that the way the religion is practiced in Latin America is, due to the geographical and temporal distance and the trying social conditions in which the rites were implemented in these places, considerably different from the one practiced today in Nigeria and other African countries to the point of the religious variations that developed in these countries receiving different names (Candomblé, Batuque and others in Brazil, Santeria in Cuba). With the growing access to information and communication, a greater dialog between African practitioners of Yoruba religion and their peers in other countries has become possible, which often leads to greater homogeneity in ritual practice and theological thought. In European countries and the United States, Yoruba religion has been, to a great extent, taken and established directly by African religious authorities, which leads to its practice in these places having an outstanding degree of similarity to the way it is done in Africa.

The interest that Yoruba religion arouses can be seen already in the time of the colonization and evangelization of Africa by Europeans—when a host of anthropological works centered on Yoruba culture started to appear. Many of those works were written by missionaries with the aim of understanding the beliefs of the people they aimed to evangelize and, in them, religion is the main focus, such as the works by Noel Baudin (originally published in 1979, with an English translation published in 1885 and reprinted in 2012), Stephen Farrow (originally published in 1926, reprinted in 1996) and the Yoruba preacher John Olumide Lucas (published in 1948); however, in those that had a more general scope on Yoruba culture and society, such as the works of the Colonel Alfred Burton Ellis (originally published in 1894, reprinted in 1970) and Richard Edward Dennett (originally published in 1910, reprinted in 2012), the attention dedicated to religion and mythology shows how this aspect of Yoruba culture has always stood out among others. The same interest can be perceived in the very idiosyncratic book by the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius *Die atlantische Götterlehre* (originally published in 1926, published in French in 1949). In addition to their observations, the authors usually had access to the works of their predecessors, which were frequently drawn upon, reassessed, criticized, agreed or disagreed with. From this recurrent interest in Yoruba religion and culture and frequent evaluation by the authors of the works of their peers, a field of Yoruba studies started to emerge and a general idea of Yoruba religion was formed, which would be revised and reassessed by younger authors, but served as their groundwork, notwithstanding.

The French Catholic missionary Noel Baudin was one of the first authors to provide reports and an evaluation of Yoruba religion in his book tellingly called *Fétichisme et féticheurs*, translated into English as *Fetichism and Fetich-Worshippers* (1885/2012). The first thing to be remarked about this work is that it postulates the existence of a uniform religion called Fetichism which is seen as "the religion of the innumerable black tribes which inhabit Guinea, the Gold Coast, Ashanti, Slave Coast, Dahomey, Yoruba, Benin, and the shores of the Niger and the Benue" (BAUDIN, 1885, p. 6). Baudin seems astonished to find out that "fetichism is only the material covering" and that "under this coarse and repellent exterior" lies "a chain of doctrines and a complete religious system, of which spiritualism forms the greater part," adding that the beliefs and doctrines of these "tribes" are strikingly similar to "the paganism of the civilized nations of antiquity" (BAUDIN, 1885, p. 6), by which he refers to the religions of Greece and Rome, initiating a comparison that would become very common in the study of African religions. Baudin characterizes the doctrine of this religion called "Fetichism" as "an odd mixture of monotheism, polytheism and idolatry" (BAUDIN, 1885, p. 9), founded on the idea of a Supreme God, named Olorun, which is revered but not worshipped (since he is seen as too high to take an interest in human affairs) and is thus represented by numerous "inferior gods," which are called "orichas" by Baudin, associated to the elements of nature, followed by good and evil genii, heroes and the dead ancestors. The "religion of the blacks," as he calls it, is then characterized by Baudin as "practically only a vast pantheism" (BAUDIN, 1885, p. 9) and their idea of the Supreme God is "very confused and obscure" and "most unworthy of His Divine Majesty" (BAUDIN, 1885, p. 10).

Even under the intention of providing a scientific enquiry of the religion he calls Fetichism, Baudin is unable to conceal the contempt he has for this supposed religion and its practitioners. This contempt is not seen in the book authored by the Colonel Alfred Burton Ellis, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa* (1970). Differently from his predecessor, who speaks of the "religion of the blacks" in general (although the deities and customs he registers are clearly Yoruba), Ellis focused his work, as the title informs, on the Yoruba-speaking peoples, in which he sees "sentiments of nationality and patriotism," which make them "socially higher" than other African ethnic groups studied by Ellis (ELLIS, 1970, p. 33). However, this more sympathetic look toward the people studied did not prevent Ellis from falling into a

pitfall that had been avoided by Baudin: Olorun is seen by Ellis as "the sky-god of the Yorubas, that is, he is the deified firmament, or personal sky," which, according to him, "is considered too distant, or too indifferent, to interfere in the affairs of the world" (ELLIS, 1970, p. 36). Ellis attributes to Olorun the features and attributes of a nature god, which, as was seen in all the previous and posterior works, is a mistake. Ellis then presents the other worshipped nature-gods, now spelled "Orishas," in a similar fashion to Baudin, excepting, as noted first, the contempt.

A more thorough study is provided by Richard Edward Dennett in his *Nigerian Studies* (1910). In the all-too-important issue of the existence of a supreme godhead and his relationship with the minor gods, Dennett provides an interesting theory. Although he deems Olorun the creator and supreme godhead, he believes that he is actually a later development in the religion of the Yorubas influenced by the spread of Islam. Islam would have provided the Yorubas with the idea of a supreme god, whose figure and attributes would have developed from the thunder deity Jakuta. This theory puts Dennett together with other early scholars who believed the Yorubas were derived from Eastern peoples. Dennett believes that the "marked superiority" of the Yoruba in relation to their neighbors indicates that origin from "a superior race" (DENNETT, 1910, p. 11). Despite the language of superiority and inferiority of races, Dennett's book is marked by expressions of admiration for the ingenuity of the people he is studying.

On his turn, the missionary Stephen S. Farrow, in his *Faith, Fancies and Fetich or Yoruba Paganism* (1996, originally published in 1926) harshly criticizes both Ellis and Dennett, whom he deems "superficial observers" (FARROW, 1996, p. 25) on the subject of the nature of Olorun and, drawing upon a series of Yoruba Bishops and writers who, in addition to the advantage point of being native Africans, are regarded by Farrow as "thoughtful men of culture" to ascertain that "the Yoruba have a clear conception of the one Supreme Deity, whom they call *Olorun*" (FARROW, 1996, p. 25). Moreover, Farrow explicitly denies any Christian or Muslim influence on this conception, which is seen as entirely African. It is interesting to notice how Farrow seems to eschew every notion of race inferiority; in fact, race plays no part in his observations: the African missions are seen as comparatively more functional than European ones in their job of evangelizing; the Yoruba high priests—called babalawos—, seen as morally questionable or even straightforwardly evil, are, from the intellectual point-of-view, "profound thinkers and of great subtlety and knowledge"

(FARROW, 1996, p. 148); and two babalawos converted to Christianity, provided by Farrow as examples, become incredibly fervent and generous preachers of the gospel. Nevertheless, in one of the concluding chapters, Farrow remarks that, if he were to accept the idea that each religion is a manifestation of one true religion, then Yoruba paganism would be "a terribly degenerate and corrupt representation of the true" (FARROW, 1996, p. 144).

Therefore, Farrow's view of the Yoruba people is that of a very gifted people with a degenerate religion that leads them toward decadence. This is exactly the view that is assumed by the Yoruba Christian theologian John Olumide Lucas. In the preface to his *The Religion of the Yorubas* (1948), he presents two possible views adopted by scholars of the state of what was then called "primitive peoples"—one was that these people were, as the very word "primitive" suggests, peoples in early stages of human development who would in due time achieve the evolutionary state attained by European society; the other view, already sketched here, was that these were not primitive, but actually degenerate peoples: in other words, they were residues of earlier more developed societies who had experienced a downfall to an inferior state. Lucas adopts the latter view and dedicates his work to discover what was the civilization from which the Yoruba derived and what were the elements of its religion that had degenerated (LUCAS, 1948, p. 10). His thesis is that the Yoruba derived from the civilization of Ancient Egypt, and he presents a series of similarities in language, religious beliefs, religious ideas and practices and customs, names of persons, places and objects (LUCAS, 1948, p. 18). However painstakingly researched and well written his book is, Lucas's theories would not be developed further by other researchers and would be rejected by his younger compatriot Bolaji Idowu, as we will see later.

In the theories of Yoruba degeneration, none has gone so far in terms of imagination as the German anthropologist and archaeologist Leo Frobenius. In 1910, he discovered in the Yoruba sacred city of Ife a series of sculptures portraying human heads of Negroid features that were marked by a realism and technical perfection that reminded Frobenius of Greek art. Since these sculptures were not similar to any instances of African art then known in Europe, Frobenius believed that the Yoruba could only have learned the craft to make them from a higher civilization. From a series of evidences he concluded that this was the lost civilization of Atlantis. In his *Mythologie de l'Atlantide* (1949, originnally published in German as *Die atlantische*

Götterlehre in 1926), he draws upon a series of symbols and their relations with points in space that reminded him of Roman, Greek and Etruscan symbolisms and which, he believed, were of Atlantic origin. Moreover, one of the best-crafted sculptures that Frobenius found was said by native priests to be a depiction of the sea-god Olokun—which Frobenius believed to be an African version of Poseidon; due to the beauty of the sculpture, he was led to believe that the sea-god was the greatest god of the Yoruba, and this preeminence would point to an origin in a maritime civilization, which would strengthen the idea that they were the offspring of Atlantis, which would have, in time, assumed the characteristics of an African civilization and degenerated in contact with modern European nations (FROBENIUS, 1948, p. 38). Many of the data and theories proposed by Frobenius concerning the mythology and institutions of the Yoruba people are not corroborated by any other works and seem to be utterly inaccurate, and his Atlantis-origin theory has been evidently discarded. Nevertheless, his book brings interesting myths and details, in addition to being particularly well-written.

Apart from the differences among them, sketched above, these early works present strong similarities in the way they portray Yoruba religion. The general picture that comes from these works is that of a religion that blends monotheism and polytheism, in which one supreme and creator god, who is not directly worshiped even if acknowledged and revered, is represented by a series of minor gods known collectively as Orisa. Most of these works were written by Christian scholars and they had the tendency to associate Olorun, the supreme god, to the supreme God of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. They had also the tendency to associate the messenger Orisa Esu with the Christian devil due to Esu's unpredictable and mischievous character. The main Orisa listed by them were Obatala, the highest god responsible for the creation of the human body; Oduduwa, the creator of the earth and founder of the Yoruba nation; Yemoja, goddess of a great river and mother of all other Orisa; Ogun, the god of iron and war; Sango, the god of justice and thunder; Osun, the goddess of fertility and love; Oya, goddess of the winds, closely associated to Sango; Orisa Oko, the god of agriculture and vegetation. There were some exceptions—Ellis and Frobenius stand out as not associating Esu with the devil, and Frobenius believed the highest Orisa was Olokun, the god of the sea. The image and postulates about Yoruba religion coming from these works are extremely important to be understood, since they formed the early figure of Yoruba religion that appeared in the West and provided the

groundwork for newer studies, which will be the main sources of our discussion on Yoruba religion in this dissertation.

A WORLDVIEW AND ITS DEITIES

From the mid-20th century on, studies in Yoruba religion and culture suffer an intensification. In addition, it is possible to see that the works that started to appear then tend to be more respectful and detailed than the ones already sketched; it could be said, for short, that the works on Yoruba religion appearing from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century approached Yoruba religion as an ethnologic object to be analyzed; from the middle of the 20th century on, there are more and more works in which Yoruba beliefs and ideas are seen as a source of knowledge from which other peoples could learn. In this transition, a turning point lies in the work of Bolaji Idowu, a Yoruba Methodist theologian born in 1913 and deceased in 1993, whose doctorate in theology was concluded in 1955 at the University of London with a thesis on the theological ideas of the Yoruba people concerning the existence of a supreme and creator god, in which he uses both his extensive knowledge of theology and the oral traditions of his people to understand their metaphysical conceptions. This thesis was published for the first time in 1962 under the title *Olódùmarè: God in Yorùbá Belief*. It is already telling that, instead of Olorun—which is the name of the supreme god usually used in Christian and Muslim liturgy—, Idowu preferred the one more used by the Yoruba people themselves: Olodumare. In the very first chapter, Idowu discards the theories that attribute a foreign origin to Yoruba religion—especially those of Lucas and Frobenius, which he sees as resulting from excessive enthusiasm and little scientificity. Idowu informs us that his investigations were based on five sources from oral tradition: the myths, the corpus of the Ifa oracle, the liturgies, the songs and the proverbs, accounting for a very wide range of Yoruba knowledge to draw upon.

The place to start seems to be the myth of origin, which has already been touched upon previously. It is important to say, however, that there are two myths of origin. One was explored by many of the older authors previously discussed, according to which the world was constituted by a great calabash on whose upper half resided Obatala and lower half resided Oduduwa, in this myth a woman and wife of Obatala. Once they started a violent fight that ended in the calabash of the world being divided

into two with Obatala inhabiting the portion corresponding to the sky and Oduduwa inhabiting the portion corresponding to the earth. Nevertheless, the version offered by Idowu is the one, already told here, according to which Obatala was commissioned to create solid earth from the marshy waste that existed and came with solid earth inside a shell and a five-toe chicken. The earth was thrown over the water and the chicken spread it with its feet, creating solid earth. There is also a variation of this myth according to which the earth was created by Oduduwa after Obatala got drunk in his errand to the earth.

From these two myths important metaphysical conceptions can be drawn. The calabash version could be seen, in a metaphorical level, as the Yoruba conception of existence. According to Drewal, Pemberton III and Abiodun, the Yoruba conception of the cosmos can be successfully metaphorized in the figure of a calabash, the upper part symbolizing the metaphysical world, known as Orun, inhabited by Olodumare and other spiritual beings, and the lower part, the physical world, known as Aiye, inhabited by all humans and all material beings (DREWAL, PEMBERTON III, ABIODUN, 1995, p. 14). The calabash, then, stands for the twofold nature of the world—the spiritual and the material. The other myth, of the foundation from marshy waste, functions, in a metaphorical level, with the idea that the world was created from an epicenter and spread to all directions, this epicenter being the city of Ile-Ife, as already commented upon.

It should be remarked that, if we take into consideration the version of the second myth according to which it was Oduduwa, and not Obatala, who created the world, then in both myths Obatala has a heavenly nature whereas Oduduwa has an earthly nature. If the world is divided into two realms (and if, as the first myth suggests, these two realms were once severed), how do they communicate and interchange? It was already seen that Olodumare seems a somewhat distant figure in his abode in the Orun. The Orisa are the spirits that intermediate between the two realms, constituting the main objects of worship by the Yoruba. But if they intermediate between the two realms, how do they do that? What does this function tell us about their natures? And what are the main Orisa and their specific attributions?

Idowu gives us the following definition of the Orisa:

> Thus, they are the ministers of Olódùmarè, looking after the affairs of His universe and acting as intermediaries between Him and the world of men. To each of them is assigned a department over which he is ruler and governor (IDOWU, 1994, p. 62).

It is due to this sectioning of existence into Orisa that Idowu ascertains that Yoruba religion is not properly polytheistic. It is true that Wole Soyinka more than once criticized Idowu (not without admitting the excellency of his research) for stressing too much the monotheistic aspect of Yoruba religion, which Soyinka attributes to a wish of making Yoruba religion more acceptable to a Christian-centered European readership (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 108; 2012, p. 131)—a preference that can also be explained by the fact that Idowu was a Christian himself. However, this emphasis on the belief in a single supreme deity coexisting with the numerous Orisa point to a very important aspect of Yoruba religion: the idea of the relationship between unity and plurality.

Here, it is relevant to draw upon the resource of myth—a myth of great importance told by Idowu and that will be resumed in chapter two when discussing Soyinka's theory. The myth involves the primordial deity Obatala (also called Orisa-Nla—the Great Orisa) and a slave called Atowoda or, alternatively, Atunda (the significance of the name of the deity will be explored in the second chapter). In the beginning of human settling in Ile-Ife, the only divinity existing on earth was Obatala. The lands to be cultivated were divided among him and the humans, and he took the least fertile portion. However, being the divinity of life, his lands came to be the most productive, which aroused the envy of many. Burdened with work, he bought a slave with whom he had a friendly and fair relationship. But the slave was also envious and planned to kill the arch-divinity. One day he climbed up a hill and, seeing Obatala walking in the field, rolled down a huge rock that smashed the divinity into numerous pieces. This was reported to Olodumare by Esu, the divine messenger. Orunmila, the Orisa of divination and wisdom living in heaven, was commissioned to go down and gather the pieces of Obatala, who could be recreated from some of the pieces, while the others were spread throughout the world and gave origin to the other existing Orisa. Idowu even informs that one of the etymological hypotheses for the word "*Orisa*" (in Yoruba) comes from this myth: it would be a contraction of the phrase "*ohun ti a ri sa*," which means "what was found and gathered" (IDOWU, 1994, p. 59-60). Therefore, in the very idea of Orisa is present the notions of both unity and multiplicity, of unity that

was fractioned. Another idea present in this myth, which should be remarked upon, was that Obatala was the only divinity *existing on earth*. As the very myth indicates, other divinities existed in the Orun. The myth points to the existence of two other deities beside Obatala: Orunmila and Esu, while the other divinities would have sprung from the fractioning of Obatala. It is with these three that a characterization of the Yoruba deities should begin.

Above, we saw how Idowu stresses that each Orisa is associated to a compartment of life and existence. Much has already been said about Obatala in this dissertation. As the arch divinity, he also receives the title of Orisa-Nla—the great Orisa. If in one version of the myth of origin he is denied the attribution of having created the world, his role as the creator of human beings is uncontested. Obatala is the sculptor deity who molds the human body from the soul created by Olodumare. Idowu presents as a translation to his name "King in white clothing" due to the fact that he is always dressed in white robes and is connected with the color white in general, which stands as a symbol of the purity and elevation linked to him. According to Idowu (and the myth sketched above strengthens this idea), he is not only the greatest and most powerful divinity, but also the primordial one, from whom all have sprung. Therefore, the very appellation Orisa is applied primarily to him and inherited from him by the other deities. As the sculptor of human bodies, he has the prerogative of creating them as he wishes and, as a mark of his craft, he often creates hunchbacks and albinos, which are regarded as sacred and named *Eni Orisa* (Orisa people), the albinos being particularly linked to the white deity. Purity of spirit and high moral standards are associated to him and expected from his disciples, who must lead an exemplary life. As the life-giving deity whose human sculptures receive the breath of Olodumare, Obatala is the closest deity to the Supreme Being (IDOWU, 1994, p. 71-75).

Another deity that is very near Olodumare is Orunmila, whom Idowu deems his deputy in matters of wisdom (IDOWU, 1994, p. 75). It is in this function that Orunmila came to be the Orisa who presides over the art of divination—an extremely important art in Yoruba traditional society. Orunmila was a witness to the creation of the world and has accompanied Obatala in his functions. Since then, he is supposed to be in possession of incommensurable knowledge about the life and destiny of divinities, humans, animals and even inanimate beings. Many of the stories known by him are systematized in the oracle of Ifa—the Yoruba traditional divination system which is

practiced by the priests of Orunmila, known as babalawos. Under a cyclical notion of time (more will be said about this notion), the babalawos have methods that allow them to discover what story pertaining to the mythical past is being repeated in his client's life. If Obatala is the source and creative principle of all other divinities, Orunmila is the one who has the knowledge of all their stories and secrets.

The third deity present in the myth before the time of the fragmentation of Obatala in the other Orisa is a mysterious and ambiguous character—Esu—, whom, as we saw, the first commentators on Yoruba religion insisted in identifying with the Christian devil. Among our first three deities, Esu will be one in which we will focus more due to the importance he has in the play analyzed in this dissertation. The ambiguity of his character can be accounted on his liminal position as the messenger between the Orisa and the humans, since he is constantly in transit between the Orun and the Aiye. Concerning his identification with the Christian devil, Idowu points out that Esu certainly has no relationship with the devil of the New Testament, the enemy of God, but could be related to Satan in the book of Job as a minister of Olodumare who is in charge of tempting, testing and watching the behaviors of humans (IDOWU, 1994, p. 80). Indeed, Esu is in charge of ensuring that every sacrifice or religious duty be duly fulfilled. If such is not the case, it is his duty to effect the due punishment for the offender. Given this role of Esu, two questions arise: how is he able to keep such a close watch on humans and divinities alike to make sure they fulfill their duties and what are his methods for punishing those who do not?

Ubiquity and multiplicity are two essential features of this Orisa, who stands apart from the others. Indeed, Juana Elbein dos Santos and Deoscoredes Maximiliano dos Santos inform us that there are actually many Esus and "[a]lthough they are numerous, their nature and origin are one" (SANTOS and SANTOS, 2014, p. 26). Also according to these researchers, the most typical representation of Esu is the laterite—a reddish rock; a myth collected by them (SANTOS and SANTOS, 2014, p. 51) shows how Esu, in the shape of a huge laterite rock, was one of the first forms to exist in the world. After being breathed on by Olodumare, the rock came to life and split into uncountable small pieces, showering over the whole world and populating it with the multiple presence of Esu. It is impossible not to form a link between this myth and the one about the splitting of Obatala into many Orisa. Indeed, the multiplicity of Esu is due to his association not only with each Orisa, but with each living being and inanimate

object existing on earth. Everything—Santos and Santos posit—has its own Esu, which becomes its living and dynamic principle.

Sellers and Tishken, in discussing Esu's place in the Yoruba pantheon (2013), emphasize both his multiplicity and his dynamicity, pointing out that he "is most readily identified as the personification of paradox" (SELLERS and TISHKEN, 2013, p. 42), which, according to these authors, is seen in some representations that depict him as having two mouths or legs of different sizes, one placed in each dimension of existence (the human and the divine realms). His dynamicity leads him to be associated with the market, which is illustrated, according to these authors, by his association with the first day of the Yoruba five-day week—a market day. The ambiguity and tension of his position between worlds and places of dynamicity, such as the market and the crossroads, gives him an unpredictable and even mischievous character, which explains his early association with the Christian devil. And this character is the key to understanding his methods to perform his tasks.

As Sellers and Tishken point out, Esu is also seen as the trickster god, associated with chaos and disharmony. However, this chaos and disharmony are far from being gratuitous. Chaos, mischief and disharmony are the instruments Esu has not only for punishing those who do not perform the prescribed sacrifices or offend religious taboos, but also to lead people into other pathways and to bring about necessary changes. Therefore, his character and his methods lead him to be strongly linked to the ideas of chance and luck. Surprisingly or not, he is narrowly linked to Orunmila, the Orisa who informs people of their destiny through divination: if Orunmila is the one who produces the patterns that reveal destiny, it is Esu that communicates them to the babalawo, accounting for an element of luck in the forming of destiny.

Esu's methods can be illustrated by one of his most popular myths, reported by Sellers and Tishken (2013, p. 48-49) among others: two neighbors had a very friendly relationship. Esu decided to test their friendship and one day as they were working opposite to each other, Esu passed between them with a two-color cap (the colors vary according to the source, but they are usually red and black, Esu's colors) and hailed both. The two friends commented on the beauty of the cap, but they could not agree on its color, since each of them had seen only one side of the cap—a disagreement that led

them to a bitter fight. This simple myth has received the following insightful interpretation by the writer Oluwatoyin Vincent Adepoju:

> This demonstration of a cognitive limitation in perceiving phenomena only from the perspective to which the individual is exposed, to the exclusion of other possibilities which are equally pertinent, but to which they are not privy, is correlative with Èshù's role in his position at the nexus of traffic between various forms of being, particularly human beings and the Orisha. His location implies that he mediates between entities as well as between ways of understanding phenomena. He embodies the contrastive ontological and epistemological possibilities that make up the variety of existence. He is also the unknown factor in every possibility and experience who must be taken into account if that endeavor is to succeed (ADEPOJU, 2010, p. 195).

Adepoju's interpretation points toward a very important aspect of Esu's behavior and acting, one that will be central to our discussion of Soyinka's play: his dealing with a person's perception and emotional and intellectual orientation toward his or her environment and situation. Esu brings about confusion and disorientation through the presentation of particular elements to perception and this brings about change—either positive or negative. As also pointed out by Adepoju, Esu is frequently visualized at the crossroads, which reinforces his "integration of contraries" (ADEPOJU, 2010, p. 195).

Esu, then, has a special place among the Orisa as their messenger. The total number of Orisa cannot be calculated, but it is often said to be 401—a number that symbolizes "limitlessness" (FALOLA, 2014, p. 3). In addition to those already discussed, we will focus on other two that are among the most worshipped in Yorubaland and abroad: Ogun and Sango. The choice of these specific deities is due to their relevance to the literary analyses intended in the next chapters.

Ogun somehow shares with Esu a liminal position. Idowu characterizes him as a path-making divinity who opens the way to other deities. Ogun presides over iron and the instruments made of it—their uses in hunting, rituals, agriculture, cooking and other cultural and social occupations make him a very widespread divinity. Adebanji Akintoye posits that Ogun existed even before the technology of iron smelting was known in Yorubaland and was previously a general deity presiding over all workers and professions (AKINTOYE, 2010, p. 18-19). Sandra Barnes (1997), based on the etymological researches of Armstrong (1997), also proposes an existence of Ogun that was previous to the iron revolution in Africa; however, she posits that what existed prior to the deity was probably a concept or a set of ideas connected to the themes of hunting

and killing—the iron sacred complex coming to participate in this later in history and giving shape to the deity Ogun (BARNES, 1997, p. 5).

In emphasizing Ogun's character as path maker, Idowu reports a myth wherein the Orisa were attempting to open way to reunite with humans and this was possible only through the agency of Ogun, who was able to fashion an iron instrument that could destroy the obstacles hindering them. Such ingenuity led him to be chosen among the deities to be their king, which he refused. Living among humans, he taught them the secret of iron; however, his fearsome appearance led him to live a solitary life until he decked himself in palm-fronds and became the king of the city of Ire. His tutelage over iron also connects him to warfare, and this accounts for his being often seen as a violent divinity who bathes in blood, emphasizing, as well, his character as a protecting divinity that watches over orphans and ensures the prosperity of his followers (IDOWU, 1994, p. 87-89). These traits point to an ambiguous character similar to that of Esu. Nevertheless, their types of ambiguity are different. Esu seems to preside over the very notion and existence of ambiguity, that is, his dynamic nature springs from his position as encompassing any form of ambiguity, the confrontation and integration of opposites and that is why he is so associated to riddles, language slips and double meanings. Ogun's ambiguity is actually a product of his tutelage over iron and iron tools: the specific ambiguity of creation and destruction, the idea that the same impulse that leads to creation leads also to destruction or, as Sandra Barnes puts it, "[o]n a more abstract level, it can be said that Ogun is a metaphoric representation of the realization that people create the means to destroy themselves" (BARNES, 1997, P. 17). As the patron deity of Wole Soyinka's work, Ogun will be more broadly discussed in the second chapter.

Finally, Sango has a special position in the pantheon insofar as he is the Orisa whose existence as a historical person is uncontested. We have already seen how Oduduwa and Obatala are often interpreted as having been kings in olden times. These are cases in which history is so intertwined with myth that it is difficult to ascertain their boundaries. In the case of Sango, the process of turning a historical figure into a mythical one is more evident and the two are often separated by scholars. Tishken, Falola and Akinyemi, in their introduction to the volume of essays *Sango: In Africa and the African Diaspora* clearly distinguish between the Sango Irunmole (i.e., the divinity) and the Oba Alaafin (the king of Oyo). As a divinity, Sango is very ancient and

primordial as "the embodiment of thunder, lightning and the fierceness of atmospheric power" (TISHKEN, FALOLA, AKINYEMI, 2009, p. 8). In this quality, as happened with several Yoruba deities, he was probably the mingling of many other similar divinities and came even to be worshipped with different names, such as "Jakuta," an older name by which he is still known in some contexts. The historical Sango, on the other hand, was one of the first kings of Oyo and the embodiment and symbol of the power of this kingdom, becoming its tutelary deity.

The story of Sango, the king, has been told by many authors. In his essay "The Place of Sango in the Yoruba Pantheon," Akintunde Akinyemi suggests that the great popularity of Sango among the Yoruba and the followers of Yoruba religion elsewhere in the world finds its historical roots in the strength, spread and dominance of the old Oyo Empire (AKINYEMI, 2009, p. 29). Wherever the Oyo Empire spread its dominion—and we have seen above that it was a large area—, the cult of Sango was established with great popularity. Sango as a historical figure is consistently described as having a fiery and violent temper, being a severe and sometimes tyrannical ruler and a merciless and extremely competent military leader. Akinyemi posits that he was responsible for consolidating the Kingdom of Oyo when, after occupying the place of his brother Ajaka (who was known as peaceful and conciliatory), he ended the domination of the kingdom of Owu over Oyo by refusing to pay tributes and routing the Owu army. From this point on, a series of military victories ensued with territorial expansion and the correspondent growth in power and prestige of the warlike king. However, his burdensome impositions over the people led him to lose popularity. Moreover, he felt his power menaced by the popularity of two of his servants, the warriors Timi and Gbonka, and, to prevent them from ascending too much in the eyes of the people, he turned one against the other in a fight that ended with Timi's death. Gbonka, perceiving Sango's strategy, challenged the king, who was obliged to abdicate. The story has it that, after that, Sango hanged himself from a tree (TISHKEN, FALOLA, AKINYEMI, 2009, p. 10).

The story of Sango's suicide also receives another version, in which, after learning a spell to produce lightning, he accidentally destroyed his own palace and killed many of his wives and servants. Burdened by grief, he killed himself by hanging (TISHKEN, FALOLA, AKINYEMI, 2009, p. 9). This version highlights another feature attributed to Sango: his great knowledge of magical arts. However, there is

another version, told by his devotees, that he did not hang himself, but actually ascended the heavens to rule the people from above. Many authors claim that, on the night of the day in which Sango hanged himself or ascended the heavens—depending on the version—the rooftops of the houses of those who had spread the version that he had hanged himself were destroyed by fire. The devotees said that they were experiencing the wrath of Sango for having lied about the divine king; the other theory is that the rooftops were set on fire by the devotees to establish the power of their deity. From this time on, Sango became a divinity of lightning and justice in Yorubaland, punishing those who lie, steal, kill and transgress the laws of the land. About Sango's status as an enforcer of justice, Idowu has an important theory. He reminds us that, considering the character that is attributed to Sango as a king, his association with justice and high moral standards is unlikely. He believes that there was an older thunder divinity called Jakuta—a name which is still used to refer to Sango—who embodied the wrath of Olodumare. Wrath was not a logical feature to be attributed to Olodumare and, therefore, it was transferred to Jakuta, who became the divine punisher. After Sango's deification, due to his character as a king, he attracted the features and tasks of Jakuta and became himself the divine punisher (IDOWU, 1994, p. 93-94).

Apart from these, there are myriad Orisa that would deserve discussion. However, here we will focus on these, who are of special importance to our further work in this dissertation. We will now move on to other important aspects of Yoruba religion and worldview.

YORUBA WORLDVIEW IN ART AND SPECTACLE

As we have seen earlier, the mid-20th century saw a broadening in the fields of the works produced about Yoruba culture. In particular, we see a focus on works dealing with arts and spectacles. African, European and American scholars, such as Rowland Abiodun, Babatunde Lawal, Henry John and Margaret Drewal and David Doris, among others, have discovered and revealed the wealth of Yoruba visual and performative arts. What is interesting about their works is that their scope goes far beyond the technicalities of their specific areas and end up reaching elements of the very worldview and philosophy of the Yoruba people, often by means of accurate linguistic analyses. This development comes with the perception that, for the Yoruba

people, arts and spectacles are favored ways of communicating the concepts and insights that form the structure of their worldview, as much as their myths and oral literature. It is even difficult—or totally inappropriate—to sever religion from arts and spectacles, given the point to which they commingle.

The fact is that art objects, dances and festivals acquire a metaphysical and philosophical dimension insofar as they embody in concrete terms the very worldview inherent to the culture. Not surprisingly, it is a tool, which can also be conceived of as an art object, that is often used by the Yoruba to explain their conception of life and the world and its dynamics. As we have seen before, Drewal, Pemberton III and Abiodun present the Yoruba conception of the cosmos as metaphorized in the figure of a spherical gourd, the upper part symbolizing the metaphysical world and the lower part, the physical world (DREWAL, PEMBERTON III, ABIODUN, 1995, p. 14)—the upper part inhabited by Olodumare, the Orisa and ancestor spirits and the lower part inhabited by human beings. If these two parts are divided, there is a fine relationship between them established by the Orisa—and particularly by Esu—who, counting on the agency of human beings, perform an exchange of forces between the two realms. The very presence of the Orisa on the Aiye is to be found in their close identification with myriad aspects of the living, concrete world such as natural phenomena, social habits and traditions, occupations, and social institutions. In other words, more than nature gods, the Orisa are tutelary spirits who guide, enhance and maintain human life in its many aspects. Natural phenomena are considered meaningful signs of their presence and action. The essence of Yoruba religion consists, therefore, in promoting a continuous and healthy exchange between these two realms of existence. The existence in the Aiye is conditioned by that in the Orun.

The circular form of the calabash is paramount in characterizing the also circular dynamics of existence in this constant exchange between the two spheres. Drewal and cols. (1995, p. 16-18) go further, using another very important utensil and art object (let us always remember that, in speaking about Yoruba culture—and many other African cultures—it is idle to separate between the two)—the opon Ifa, or divination tray. As seen earlier, Ifa is the divinatory system widely used by the Yoruba and many practitioners of Yoruba religion. It is believed that this system is presided over—and has been presented to humans—by the Orisa Orunmila, tutelary divinity of divination. The Ifa system comprises an immense collection of poems, traditionally passed on

orally (although there are written versions available today), which include myths and narratives that account for the happenings and events taking place in the life of all creatures, as well as advice about how to cope with the situations that are warned about in oracular practice and prescriptions of rituals and medicines. The poems are divided into large chapters known collectively as odu, which are the units consulted by the babalawo. The odu revealed will bring out the collection of myths that respect the supplicant's situation being consulted. The opon Ifa referred to above is the place where the odu will be registered during consultation and its form of composition bears special symbolic significance.

The opon Ifa is a tray made of wood usually in circular form (although some rectangular ones are also occasionally found). The center of the tray is empty—it is where the priest will mark, on a yellowish powder called *iyerosun*, the odu patterns. The edge of the tray is carved with figures depicting scenes of everyday life that involve from animals to deities and persons of the most varied walks of life—from kings and rulers to simple merchants. Topping the tray is a human head which, Drewal and cols. point out, is consistently said to represent Esu, messenger, inspector general and executive functionary in the Yoruba religious system. The interpretation provided by the authors is that the Ifa system encompasses the many situations comprising the life of humans, deities, animals and even inanimate objects, which are relentlessly observed by Esu, who is ready to report what he sees to Orunmila and, accordingly, transmit to humans the messages of the divination deity. It is Orunmila's work to interpret the life situations of the client according to esoteric wisdom and help the client understand his or her situation in a wider view.

Drewal and cols. also affirm that, in addition to the odu patterns, the diviner also impresses intersecting lines describing the four cardinal points and determining four quadrants. The resulting image is that of a complex cosmos composed of competing and interactive forces. Another feature found in Yoruba art, mainly the carvings, remarked by Drewal is the pattern of numerous segmented figures whereof no center or hierarchy can be established. In the case of the divination tray, that is what is seen on the edges. There are two elements in the tray that have a markedly divine character: the all-seeing Esu head on the top and the empty center where the odus and quadrants are inscribed; in the words of Oluwatoyin Adepoju, the center of the tray "assumes the character of a generative space" (ADEPOJU, 2010, p. 195). As much as the head symbolizes Esu in

his inspecting role, the center of the tray can be said to be dedicated to Orunmila, whereon he presents his information and teachings to the Ifa priest. Therefore, these two spaces of the tray symbolize the principles that can lend order and organization to the seeming chaos of the living world. Both Esu and Orunmila act connecting humans to the other gods—Esu as the mouth that speaks, the messenger and functionary; Orunmila as the interpreter of the oracular poems that guide humans in their relationship to other gods and spirits.

The oracular practice is, therefore, paramount to the establishment of a healthy cyclical relationship between the two spheres of existence, but it is not the sole action to ensure that. In addition to the communication provided by the Ifa oracle, effective action has to be taken in the form of long-standing social institutions and their correlative actions—rituals and spectacles. First of all, it is important to grapple with the difficulties of discussing institutions and structures pertaining to a culture in a language that is associated to another culture. A "spectacle," according to the single-volume edition of the Oxford Dictionary of English, is "a visually striking performance or display" (OXFORD, 2003, p. 1699). Funk and Wagnalls (1968, p. 1205) defines it as "that which is exhibited to public view; a grand display; pageant; parade show"—, both definitions focusing on the visual aspect, as is evidenced by the very word "spectacle." The Yoruba examples of spectacle studied in the literature also emphasize—as expected—this undeniably defining trait of the spectacle; however—as we will see—of equal, or even greater importance for the definition of the Yoruba spectacle is the other dimension—the *invisible* aspect.

First of all, it should be said that the many instances of Yoruba spectacles are promoted and organized by what is called in Yoruba the *egbe*—which could be loosely translated as "societies." The societies are institutions usually encompassing a large quantity of members containing not only rules and postulates, but also the roles, beliefs, habits and traditions that they are supposed to inforce and promote in the community at large and the methods used to it. Some important examples of these societies (*egbe*) are the Egungun society, concerned with the worship of the dead ancestors; the Ogboni society, which has already been characterized in this dissertation; the Oro society, concerned with the punishment of socially disruptive behavior; and the Gelede society, focused on the celebration of female power and the defense of women.

Among these societies, perhaps the one with the lowest level of secrecy is Gelede. The Egungun, Oro and Ogboni societies have a highly esoteric character and their rituals and spectacles—unless in some special cases—can only be followed by very select groups of initiates. The Gelede, on the other hand, has a more public character and the spectacles promoted by it are massively watched, very popular public performances. Henry John and Margaret Drewal, in their study about Gelede, collected a common Yoruba saying: "*Oju to ba ri Gelede ti de opin iron"*—translated by them as "eyes that have seen Gelede have seen the ultimate spectacle" (DREWAL, DREWAL, 1990, p. 1)

The phrasing of this dictum in its original Yoruba has the word that can help us begin our understanding of the nature and significance of the Yoruba spectacle. Drewal and Drewal tell us that "iron," the Yoruba word that was translated by them as "spectacle," includes in it the ideas of transitory phenomenon—as a performance—, an image or a mystical vision and a remembrance; inherent to this word, however, is the notion of something permanent and mysterious that is revealed to humanity in the form of an instantaneous happening. The term can also mean a "generation," that is, the group of living individuals who belong to a lineage. From these observations, the Drewals draw an interpretation that is highly important for the purpose of understanding the significance of Yoruba spectacle:

> A generation is the worldly manifestation of a lineage, just as a spectacle is the worldly manifestation of a permanent otherworldly reality. Like spectacle, a generation is temporary, transitory and cyclical (DREWAL, DREWAL, 1990, p. 2).

So important is the otherworldly dimension of the festival that, in order for a festival to open and close, special spirits have to be summoned from the other world. This notion is reinforced by spatial and temporal elements. Festivals occur in places considered to be liminal, to be points of interaction between the two spheres of existence. For example, the Egungun festival, the Drewals tell us, takes place at the center of the town, where "the material and the spiritual realms intersect" (DREWAL, DREWAL, 1990, p. 4). On its turn, the Gelede festival, which is the Drewals' main object of study, occurs in the central marketplace. About the marketplace the authors say:

> The marketplace is a metaphor for the world. Existence on earth is like coming to the marketplace to do business before returning to the realm of the ancestors (Lindfors and Owomoyela 1973:23). The marketplace itself symbolizes Gelede's transitory, worldly manifestation, while at the same time it represents its otherworldly dimension, for the market is a liminal place, where spirits intermingle with human beings. It is often situated at the center of the town, at a crossroads where one finds the shrine for the deity in charge of the crossroads, Esu/Elegba (DREWAL and DREWAL, 1990, p.10).

The marketplace as a metaphor for existence is discussed by these authors in the same work and by Drewal, Abiodun and Pemberton III in the work mentioned above with relation to a well-known and widely cited Yoruba proverb "*Aiye l'oja, orun n'ile*," which can be translated as "The world is a marketplace, heaven is home." This saying is cited by the authors to reinforce the idea of earthly existence as transitory in nature; as a marketplace, it is a place, or situation, which is temporarily visited, marked by a diversity of persons and elements (the sellers and clients, who are sometimes the same individuals, and the many and varied goods being sold and bought) and by intense and constant movement, whereas heaven (Orun), as home, is seen as a place of stability of being, the place where one is one's own essence.

An alternative rendering of the sentence is also registered by Drewal, Pemberton III and Abiodun: "*Aiye l'ajo, orun n'ile*"—translated as "The world is a journey while heaven is home"—which reinforces the idea of movement. The reference to a journey brings forth another metaphor that was referred to—the crossroads, in Yoruba, the *orita meta*, which can be translated as "the springhead of three roads," in other words, it is a road that splits into three other, emphasizing their point of intersection and, as was stated by Drewal and Drewal, it is identified with Esu Elegba, the god of chance, luck and transiency. The crossroads, the center of the town, and the market, which, as informed by the Drewals, often coincide in the disposition of Yoruba towns, all become central and liminal places, where the physical and the spiritual comingle. The setting of spectacles there reinforces their character as transitory events designed to actualize and reinforce the link between this transitory, marketplace-like existence and the otherworldly, permanent dimension.

Likewise, in temporal terms, the Gelede, Egungun and other important Yoruba spectacles have their peaks at night, when spirits are vigilant and the presence of the spirit world can be more intensely felt. Yoruba funeral rites, the Drewals tell us, include

a sleepless night (*aisun*) in which the family of the deceased has to aid him or her in the journey to the other world. In the Gelede spectacle, the night is devoted to songs and dances and its most dramatic moment is when the main performer, known as Oro Efe, enters. The Oro Efe is a man who comes into the festival in full regalia, wearing elaborate costumes of colorful fabrics and a headdress including a veil and a heavy, intricately carved wooden mask that portrays the figure of a human head topped by a scene involving humans and animals that is said to represent a proverb. The Oro Efe, as the main figure of the spectacle, is authorized by divine power and is, therefore, allowed to voice his opinion on any given topic without any danger of harmful consequences or punishment for himself. The Oro Efe is the voice of the community as much as the representative of transcendental power, effecting in his image and performance this link between the two realms of existence exemplified by the two sections of the calabash.

The reflections offered by Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal in their work on the Gelede spectacle are in line with many of the definitions arrived at by Margaret Thompson Drewal in her individual book *Yoruba Ritual* (1992). According to her, "Yoruba peoples of southwestern Nigeria conceive of rituals as journeys—sometimes actual, sometimes virtual" (DREWAL, 1992, p. xiii)—a journey, says Drewal, "with a synecdochic relationship to the ontology of the human spirit journeying through birth, death, and reincarnation" (DREWAL, 1992, p. xvii). The idea of ritual necessarily includes the notion of repetition, be it the repetition of an event in a fixed period of time that recurs cyclically or the repetition of a series of actions within one ritual. Drewal reminds us that, as much as repetition has the effect of producing a sense of stability and predictability, it is also the common denominator for differentiation (p. 2). According to her, Yoruba rituals are filled with instances of change, improvisation, and incorporation of previously alien elements in order to ensure their effect. These changes are in line with the transformative effect of ritual itself. Moreover, Drewal emphasizes the importance of the individual actor (whether an artist or a religious authority) into shaping ritual and introducing in it new elements.

Margaret Drewal clarifies that she uses the word *iron* for spectacle (as was the case in her work on Gelede with H. J. Drewal), *etutu* for ritual, *odun* for festival and *ere* for play. However, she admits that, in Yoruba culture, these fields are not always so clearly delimited. First of all, *iron*, as a spectacle, is seen as a "permanent, otherworldly dimension of reality which, until *revealed* by knowledgeable actors, is inaccessible to

human experience" (DREWAL, 1992, p. 13), a definition that is perfectly in line with those presented above. *Ere*, or play, on the other hand, has a broader sense. In defining this notion as present in the Yoruba worldview, Drewal points out that, in Western thought, it includes both an element of trickery and mischief and an element of "make believe," of something that is not serious, true or effective, which, using grammatical terminology, she associates with the subjunctive rather than the indicative. Among the Yoruba, Drewal has noticed, *ere* clearly involves the first element, which is often associated to the character of the god Esu Elegbara and the myths involving him. The second, subjunctive dimension, however, is not actually found.

Ere—Yoruba play, according to Margaret Drewal—may involve tricks and ruses, but it can also include verbal competition of wits and other activities that are practiced for their own sake and for pleasure, usually involving more than one person. The important difference from the Western view of playing is that the Yoruba *ere* is actually a quite serious activity in the sense that it is effective—it has important results that will impact on the frame of the reality whereof the play is a part. For instance, it is expected that a verbal competition of wits will eventually come down to a new definition or a new idea that will determine the path of a wider conversation. Or, as Margaret Drewal herself puts it:

> The object is to turn one condition into another through a series of exchanges that bring revelations, altered perceptions, or even a reorientation of the participants. It is the process itself that is critical, whereby each spontaneous response turns on the previous one and to some degree directs the one that follows. This process is also at times autotelic. When it involves competition between people, the activity itself organizes their relationships (DREWAL, 1992, p. 18).

In this kind of play, then, the limits between everyday reality and play are fainter—the play becomes efficacious in shaping the situations of everyday life. To play, or enact, a situation is to intervene in it—to transform it. Playing, then, is an integral part of everyday life and becomes something extremely serious. This definition of playing is not far from that offered by Huizinga in his *Homo Ludens* (2007), wherein playing is defined as an event apart from everyday reality, limited in time and space, with its own rules that, once performed, becomes a tradition and has the effect of changing reality. Another characteristic of play, according to Huizinga, is that it has a sacred character. Huizinga also points out that, in the rituals of what was once known as

"primitive religions" there is an important element of "make believe," although the threshold between this "make believe" and the practical, concrete reality is not always clear, since the ritual is performed, but the effects are seen as real and effective. Here, in the framework of Yoruba thought and culture, play, with its liminal nature between fact and "make-believe," is an important practice to shape a reality that is, in itself, unpredictable and ambiguous, since it is the province of the unpredictable god Esu Elegbara.

On its turn, "ritual" is the name Drewal uses to translate the Yoruba term *etutu*, a noun stemming from the verb *tu*, which means "to cool." A ritual, therefore, is an action intended to "cool" or to "placate" the gods and powerful spirits. As its elements, it includes the *ebo*, or sacrifice, and the already mentioned *ere*, play, which Margaret Drewal identifies in the presence of improvisation in these rituals. Improvisation, she clarifies, is seen, above all, in the use of new items, some of them of Western origin, mass-produced items, in ancient rituals. These items are incorporated in the rituals to give them a different strength, but they do not actually modify the structure; as Drewal herself puts it, "the performance is a restoration of an earlier performance and, at the same time, a new actualization" (DREWAL, 1992, p. 20). She characterizes Yoruba ritual as "unfixed and unstable," reinforces the claim that the Yoruba perform rituals in the same way done by their ancestors in the past, improvisation being an implicit element in this remaking.

The primary metaphor for the Yoruba ritual, it should be emphasized, is that of the journey. "Are all rituals like journeys?" was the question asked by Margaret Drewal to Kolawole Ositola, the babalawo who acted as her main consultant and source in her work *Yoruba Ritual.* Surprisingly or not, the answer did not come directly. Instead, Ositola—who was from a traditional family of babalawos, having exercised the function since early in youth, in addition to being a member of the important society of Osugbo (another name for the Ogboni society) elders—engaged in a philosophical discussion about human life, beginning with the sentence "The whole life span is wonderful," which, as Drewal had explained, in Ositola's use of English, has the meaning of something that "makes one wonder" (DREWAL, 1992, p. 31).

As a trained babalawo, Ositola, in his participation in Drewal's study, draws extensively on the oral poems of the Ifa oracle to explicate his conception of human life

as a journey, citing mainly one particular myth about the day in which the elders (or, we could understand, the ancestors) came from heaven to found life on earth. Drewal points out that "journey (*irin ajo*, or simply *ajo*) is an important organizing metaphor in Yoruba thought," since "[m]ore than simply a movement forward, the act of traveling implies a transformation in the process, a progression" (DREWAL, 1992, p. 33). According to Ositola's report on his own development as a babalawo, he perceived his life as an ongoing journey ultimately in search of knowledge. Ositola's individual search is cyclically articulated within the journey of his own family, wherein he began to learn his trade. However, as an Osugbo member, this individual-yet-familial journey is inserted within an even more ancient journey, which is that of the elders belonging to this society, or in Ositola's words, "[i]t relates to the research of the elders and why the elders are still searching" (cited by DREWAL, 1992, p. 35). And, of course, this ever-widening journey could not but include the journey between the realm of life and that of the after-life:

> You know Ogboni means elderly people. You think that you still start, you feel that you still begin. And even at your dying point, you will feel that you will decide you will still continue. You will not be sure whether you have searched enough. And even on your death, after you have found yourself at the resting place, at the cooler place, then you will feel you are leaving the search to be continued with those who will take it from you. They will bid you bye, and say you are expected to continue. (OSITOLA, cited by DREWAL. 1992, p. 35)

This journey within the cyclical notion of time presented by Drewal and Ositola actually include not one, but many intersecting cycles that intersect each other. As we have seen, this notion of journey also includes the primordial journey made by the Orisa from heaven to create this world. And if we focus on the mythical-historical notion that all Yoruba peoples (and, in a broader sense, all humanity) came from Ile Ife, the very journey made by the creators from Ife to the kingdoms and cities they had created is included within this notion of journey. Ritual, then, to cite Margaret Drewal again, is a journey "with a synecdochic relationship to the ontology of the human spirit journeying through birth, death, and reincarnation" (DREWAL, 1992, p. xvii); this synecdoche, however, seems to get ever more inclusive. It should be remembered that a ritual is not only a journey forward, but also, back to the original place, as another author, David Doris, has discovered in a ritual experience provided by the same Kolawole Ositola interviewed by Drewal.

A researcher on visual arts, especially Yoruba arts, then living in Ile-Ife, Doris was surprised and somewhat annoyed when, after traveling for two hours to Ibadan to interview the well-known babalawo Kolawole Ositola, he heard him say that "Today, we are going to Ife" (DORIS, 2011, p. 100). After the researcher's protest that he had just came from there, the Yoruba priest smilingly answered: "Not that Ife. That Ife is where you live now, Ile-Ife, it is just a place. We are going to go to the source, the cradle, the beginning. That is Ife" (id.). David Doris was then working in his PhD dissertation about a phenomenon called *aale*—a set of objects made from waste and used materials which are employed to prevent theft. If duly prepared, an *aale* placed over an object has the power to effect damage to somebody who steals that object. Doris went to interview Ositola on his technique of preparing *aale*. Ositola informed him that, if they were to study the preparation of aale, they should go to the time/place where aale began to be made—they should go to Ife.

Their travel to Ife, the cradle, occurred in a tiny room filled with liturgical elements such as a bronze staff, kola nuts, alligator peppers, vodka and the palm fronds known as *mariwo*. With these elements and the right invocations, Ositola performed a ritual that ensured their entry into "the cradle," Ife, where the ancient and hidden knowledge of how it was originally made was accessible to them. Doris's observations about the experience are telling:

> Such a world was constituted by the *babalawo* as time rather than space—a conflation of present with plural pasts both historical and protohistorical. Within such a temporal framework, the fleeting reality of the present is bracketed and set aside: "Notwithstanding the choking place where we are, we still do not forget to send ourself back to the holy cradle." As he sat on the mat in the center of a cramped little room, each of Ositola's ritual actions became for him a repetition of actions performed by countless generations of ancestors. This was not a passive, unthinking repetition, but an active acknowledgement of the efficacy and authority of the actions of those who came before (DORIS, 2011, p. 104).

The name given by Ositola to the ceremony was *asufe*, a compressed word that was translated by Doris as "We perform as they performed in the most ancient past" (DORIS, 2011, p. 105). It should be remarked that, as much as the world in which they entered was constituted, "as time rather than space," it was designated by the babalawo as "Ife," which, being primarily the name of a city, has a spatial rather than temporal character. "Notwithstanding the choking place where we are, we still do not forget to

send ourself back to the holy cradle," said the babalawo to Doris—with the right actions and the due disposition of those present in the ritual, a tiny room in a city two hours from the place today known as Ife becomes Ife, the old Ife, which, according to the babalawo, "cannot be destroyed" or "tampered with" (cited by DORIS, 2011, p. 114). Here again, the authority and power of the Osugbo society is of extreme importance, since, as Doris says, the ritual had its validity testified by the presence of the Earth, which is the ultimate source of the power of Osugbo: "The power of Osugbo [...] is *spatialized* as the Earth, an area of incomprehensible scale and absolute presence" (DORIS, 2011, p. 114). This "incomprehensible scale and absolute presence" is what enables the understanding that, whether one is in a small room in Ibadan or in the contemporary city of Ile Ife, or anywhere else in the world, one can always come back to that Ife that is the cradle and foundation of existence according to Yoruba thought since the same Earth that is witnessing the ritual being performed is the one that witnessed these rituals being performed in ancient times in Ife, or, as Doris says, "the ritual moment thus unfolds in a time that is regarded as preceding and standing outside history" (id.).

The ideas of repetition of time have been painstakingly investigated by Mircea Eliade in his classic *Le Mythe de l'Éternel Retour* (1969). This repetition of time is a central characteristic of archaic cultures and societies and it has some defining conditions. According to Eliade, among archaic cultures the role assigned in Western and other cultures to philosophical concepts elaborated in doctrinal texts is played by sacred objects. These objects exist insofar as they are endowed with a mystical force, insofar as they are endowed with *being*. Within ritual context, the value of objects is not found in their physical presence, but actually in their ability to reproduce a primordial act, of repetition of a mythical example. Their identity and the reality is ensured by their participation in a transcendent reality—a reality whose very foundation is what is known as the "center" of the world, the *axis mundi*—a place to which all existence is referred. This center can be a temple, a natural phenomenon, such as a tree or a mountain, or a city. This center is the "place of the sacred" (ELIADE, 1969, p. 30, my translation) and the foundation of every act of creation. Since the world was created there, all subsequent creation has to occur there. In the example provided by Doris, the object being created was a simple, practical object. Nevertheless, the babalawo insisted that, to really understand how aale was created, they had to go back to the center, or

their work would not be effective and the researcher's learning would be faulty. In their ritual action, all the material elements used—the bronze staff, the kola nuts, the alligator peppers, the *mariwo* and even the very modern vodka Doris had purchased in a grocery store as his contribution to the ritual—become endowed with the quality of being that can be granted only by the Isese (the assembly of gods and ancient spirits) and the participation in Ife. In repeating the act of creation, concrete time is referred to mythic time; in other words, both profane space is transformed into sacred space and concrete time is transformed into mythic time.

Construing time and space in such a fashion allows the present to encompass all moments past and to reestablish them as much as wanted. The agencies of ritual, such as the one performed by Ositola, and festival, as those sketched above, allow this conflation of different times into the present and the presence of older generations into the generation now living. This cyclical time is in the core of Yoruba worldview and it is also one of the tokens of greatest importance in the establishment of Soyinka's theoretical views, which directly impact on his theatrical practice. The forming of this worldview is the focus of our second chapter.

CHAPTER 2

ORITA META

(CROSSROADS)

THE POSITION OF AFRICAN LITERATURE

The Congolese critic and philosopher Valentin Mudimbe once said that "African literature as a commodity is a recent invention" (MUDIMBE, 2007, p. 61). For a Western literary audience and scholarly public not used to discussing this body of literary products, the very existence of an African literature may sound like a novelty and, taking into consideration how recent the contact of African peoples with Western culture is, Mudimbe's assertion may at first sound obvious. Wole Soyinka himself begins the preface of his book *Myth, Literature and the African World* by letting us know that the lectures that compose the book, occurred at Cambridge University, were entirely given in the Department of Social Anthropology—"the Department of English," ironizes Soyinka, "did not believe in any such mythical beast as 'African Literature'" and he adds, even more ironically, that the "traditionalists" at the Department of English "at least have not gone so far as to deny the existence of an African world – only its literature and, perhaps, its civilization" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. vii-viii).

Indeed, the topic of the existence and nature of an African literature can hardly be addressed without controversy. In Brazil, for instance, controversy was aroused when the late poet Ferreira Gullar, in an article in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* in its issue of December 4th 2011 rejected the idea of a "Black literature" on the basis that the literary references of the Black writers in Brazil were entirely European since, according to Gullar, the enslaved populations that were brought to Brazil "had no literature, since this manifestation was not part of their culture" (GULLAR, 2011 in: http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/ilustrada/12790-preconceito-cultural.shtml, my translation). As important as it is, the adequacy or not of the notion of a "Black literature" will not be discussed in this dissertation. What interests us here is his assertion that the enslaved Black persons brought to Brazil had no literature, since it did not belong to their culture. Apparently it is perfectly in line with Mudimbe's affirmation about the recent invention of African literature as a commodity. Only apparently, since

the reality of African literature that arises from Mudimbe's article is considerably more complex.

The supposition of the inexistence of an African literature, as encountered by Soyinka in the Department of English in an English university and posited by the Brazilian poet Ferreira Gullar, can be easily attributed to the notion that African peoples never possessed a written language until the European colonization brought the Roman alphabet to African shores. It could be supposed as well that the emergence of literary productions in English, French and Portuguese in Africa by writers of African descent is to be ascribed to the same class of phenomena as the one perceived by Gullar in Brazil: would the modern African writers producing in English, French and Portuguese be no more than English, French and Portuguese writers with black skin and writing in other geographical realities? Are their literary references and traditions entirely Western since they are writing in Western languages?

First of all, a correction should be made. Written language did not appear in Sub-Saharan Africa only with the arrival of European colonization. In his article "Sub-Saharan Africa's Literary History in a Nutshell" (2007), Albert Gérard remarks us that peoples of Islamized Africa have developed bodies of written literature in the Arabic script, both in Arabic and in native languages, mainly Swahili and Hausa, in addition to the written literature that was produced in Christian Ethiopia in its original script. This is not, however, the literature being dealt with here, which presents other features and problems.

Mudimbe's article should be resumed, which has the very telling title of "African Literature: Myth or Reality?," which somewhat echoes Soyinka's commentary about the "mythical beast" called "African literature" in which the English Department of Cambridge University apparently did not believe. In the beginning of his essay, Mudimbe informs us that probing the articles and textbooks about the existence and nature of African literature evidences a reality composed of two bodies of texts: one, the written texts of known authors in European and (less common) African languages; two, the oral texts of anonymous authorship scattered throughout the sundry traditions of the peoples of Africa (MUDIMBE, 2007, p. 60). In face of this reality, Mudimbe asks what kind of literary criticism could be adequate for such a varied body of texts—an explicative framework that would allow conceiving of African literature in relation to

other literatures not as a secondary version of another literary tradition or, as Mudimbe himself puts it, “an indigenized imitation of something else” (MUDIMBE, 2007, p. 60), once the notion of an African authorship was forged primarily on the grounds of the Western myth of Africa in its exoticism and basic dichotomy between primitiveness and civilization, between the anonymity of oral cultures and the modern authorship of written culture. The supposedly mythical character of African literature perceived by both Soyinka and Mudimbe may lie in the indecisiveness as to whether a form of continuity between the traditional oral experience and the modern written experience actually exists.

It is a difficult and crucial question. If, on the one hand, this continuity cannot be posited, there may be hardly any criterion that can characterize African literature written in Western languages as African and not as an extension of Western literatures. On the other hand, the position of such continuity launches us into a whole universe of questions and difficulties. In the European tradition, there is linguistic and etymological continuity between ancient Greek and Latin and the modern languages of English and French. No such continuity can be found between Soyinka’s Yoruba or Mazisi Kunene’s Zulu and the English of both authors, between Senghor’s Serer and his French. This lack of continuity can be found as well in the field of literary genres, since the genres practiced in modern European literatures have evolved from those of classic Greek and Latin literature and, once again, there is hardly any relationship between the genres of Zulu and Yoruba oral literature and those of English literature. To complicate the question even further, if both Soyinka and Kunene write in English and could read each other’s works in this language, Soyinka could have no access to Kunene’s Zulu tradition as much as Kunene cannot have access to Yoruba oral productions. In other words, the multiplicity of African oral traditions and their seeming general lack of relationship to one another make us ask about the very possibility of an African literature.

This complex reality has originated the following observation by the Nigerian literary critic Abiola Irele:

> The African situation is marked by a radical anomaly, in which the intimate collaboration between the imaginative impulse, expressing itself either as individual creation or as collective representation, and the linguistic resources through which the imagination works itself to complete realization, this

> collaboration seems at the moment not only to be affected by complications of various kinds but indeed on the way to losing its meaning (IRELE, 1990, p. 44).

We have listed some of the effects of this dissimilitude between the literary language practiced by the modern African author and the language in which his or her traditional culture is presented. Irele launches this situation to an even broader dimension, namely that of the relationship between the individual author and the collective reality from which he or she springs. In other words, the language of the literary works does not coincide with the language of the collective experience of his or her people, which is correlative with a devaluation of the oral literatures of Africa, which Irele presents as "the true literatures of Africa" (IRELE, 1990, p. 44), in face of the modern literatures in European languages.

Therefore, what place does this new literature being produced in Africa occupy in the scenery of world literary studies? Maybe one of the first acclaimed attempts of systematization came from the German literary theorist Janheinz Jahn, who in 1965 published the study *Die neoafrikanische Literatur* (Spanish translation: *Las Literaturas Neoafricanas*, 1971), discussing the modern literary manifestations found in Africa under the Sahara. In order to reject classifications based on geographical criteria (sub-Saharan African literature, South-Saharan African literature or even the broader African literature) or race (Black literature), which he considers insufficient, he refers to the area usually called Sub-Saharan Africa or Black Africa as "Agisymbia," the name used by Ptolemy to designate this area (JAHN, 1973, p. 22) and calls its modern literary manifestations "Neo-African literatures," which would result, according to Jahn, from the "mutual fertilization of Agisymbian and Western cultures" (JAHN, 1973, p. 24, my translation).

Jahn begins from the principle that literary works can only be classified according to their stylistic traits. The literature being examined, according to Jahn, is a literature written in European languages, and possessing stylistic traits of European traditions, but possessing as well stylistic traits pertaining to one of the oral traditional literatures of Agisymbia. Jahn proceeds then to trace a very wide panorama including not only written works of Africa, but also manifestations found in the New World such as forms of popular music that have their roots in African music (Blues, Negro Spirituals, Calypso) and others. In a previous and celebrated book, *Muntu* (originally

published in 1958, French translation of 1961), Jahn had posited that poetry was the fundamental art in Africa insofar as it is the rhythmed word. Rhythm and sense, says the German author, is what determines and grounds the whole culture in Africa, it is the core of the oral literatures of Africa. In studying the Neo-African literatures, he admits that this preeminence given to rhythm was based on the consideration of the Negritude movement—a movement that was paramount in establishing a direction to a Negro-African aesthetics—mainly in literature—and, therefore, deserves to be discussed more thoroughly.

It is not possible to assess the degree to which Jahn's classification is or is not still influent today, but it has probably exerted considerable influence on Abiola Irele's theory about African literature, to the point of the Nigerian author adding an "In Memorian" note to the German author in his *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (1990). The book in which he sketches his systematization of African literature, however, is *The African Imagination*. In this work, Irele is interested exactly in finding a definition of African literature that could encompass the modern writings of African authors in Western languages, the traditional oral literatures, the written literatures in African languages and the manifestations of authors of African descent in the New World. In his enquiry, he arrives at the concept of "African imagination," which is broader than that of the geographically limited "African literature." This African imagination is defined as "a conjunction of impulses that have been given a unified expression in a body of literary texts" (IRELE, 2001, p. 4). Irele finds in this body of literary texts "a convergence of themes and a common preoccupation with the modes of address of a new formulation" (id.). The basis of this mode of imagination would lie in the experience of orality—a literature that, despite the increasing marginalization perceived by Irele (IRELE, 2001, p. 8), continues to be produced and to provide a source of inspiration for the modern written literatures of Africa. Irele identifies three dimensions of orality: 1) the everyday spoken language with purely denotative function; 2) the "formulaic" and rhetorical use of language such as in proverbs and aphorisms, which provides a structure of thought; and 3) the strictly literary level consisting of canonic oral texts.

The concept of African imagination and the levels of orality theorized by Irele should be borne in mind since they will be paramount to understand a work such as *Death and the King's Horseman*. For now, it is important to focus on the first highly

influential theory of African identity, culture and literature: the Negritude movement, which had a strong impact on the writers of Soyinka's generation.

THE NEGRITUDE MOVEMENT AND SOYINKA

In the previous chapter we have seen that in 1948 the University of Ibadan was founded by the English—a university that was wholly based on the University of London. Wole Soyinka, born in 1934 to a family of Yoruba Christians of intellectual prominence—his father was the headmaster of a local school and his mother a Christian political activist who was part of the Abeokuta Women's Union, founded by her sister, Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Wole Soyinka grew up in this environment of education, books, political activism, but also surrounded by the indigenous traditions of the Yoruba people, as he characterizes in his autobiography *Aké – the Years of Childhood* (SOYINKA, 1989). As a student at the University of Ibadan, he was there at the same time as writers such as Abiola Irele, Christopher Okigbo, Chinua Achebe and John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo—names that would be paramount in the development of Nigerian literature. There needs to be no doubt that Soyinka—a student of English and Greek—was surrounded by the questionings about African cultural identity and its relationship with the West. By that time he could not but be affected by the postulates of the Negritude movement—which was one of the first organized movements to systematically discuss such issues of African culture and identity. However, the relationship between Wole Soyinka and this movement was not free from ambiguity. Indeed, the intellectuals that surrounded Soyinka had profound differences with Negritude in terms of point of view, literary style and even language.

The Negritude movement emerged within the context of the search not only for an identity for Africans, but for their liberation from a situation of colonialism and racism. Abiola Irele affirms that Negritude was "the only really significant expression of cultural nationalism associated with Africa" (IRELE, 2011, p. 2) in the face of a reality of domination. Some points need to be stressed. First of all, the Negritude movement appeared within the reality of French-speaking Black intellectuals of both Africa and the Americas, having its two main axes in the Senegalese poet Lépold Sédar Senghor and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, who were both students in Paris. Second, it should be pointed out that these intellectuals from distinct parts of Africa and

from the Caribbean and the West Indies, speaking and writing in a Western language and studying in Western institutions, in their search for an affirmation of African values, frequently had to rely on works authored by Western anthropologists and critics—whose thought did not differ much from that of many of the authors examined in Chapter One—to be able to establish their unified idea of Africa. Therefore, it has to be borne in mind that the Negritude authors were writing Africa—and about Africa—from within the very idea of Africa associated with the reality from which they wanted to liberate it. This ambivalence of the position occupied by the African was remarked upon by Abiola Irele:

> While he [the African] was refused acceptance as an equal by the colonizers, his life and values had come to be ruled by the norms imposed or sanctioned by the latter. He thus lived with the European in a state of symbiosis, but marked ambiguity (IRELE, 2011, p. 4).

It was from this state of ambiguous symbiosis that sprung the first movements of cultural and political liberation in Africa, which Irele characterizes as of messianic nature. These movements would ultimately result in Negritude. The African Black suffered with a situation of colonial domination; the American Black suffered with racial discrimination, social exclusion and erasing of a cultural past. In both cases, the result is that place of symbiosis and ambiguity under which the Black populations had to draw upon an identity and a place that were not chosen or made by themselves, but by those dominating them. In such a situation, Negritude could not but have a rebellious and revolutionary character—it was a movement turned against a reality of domination and exclusion.

As Abiola Irele points out in his *The Negritude Moment*, this rebellious and revolutionary nature of Negritude could be seen as well in the European intellectual and artistic movements and developments adopted as references by the Negritude exponents. Irele stresses a vein of anti-intellectualism and irrationalism within European thought and art in the beginning of the 20th century. This irrationalism could be seen in the philosophy of Henri Bergson and the aesthetic postulates and practices of Surrealism. Bergson's works were of great influence to Senghor's formulation of the philosophy of Negritude whereas the impact of Surrealism could be found in the lyrical texts of many a Negritude poet, most notably Aimé Césaire. On a social level, Marxism

had also had an importance as a revolutionary movement to form a political basis for Negritude.

However, Irele also emphasizes the importance of the discipline of anthropology in the forming of a worldview for Negritude. Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire have found great inspiration in the works of the German archaeologist and anthropologist Leo Frobenius, who had discovered and disclosed to the West many cultural items of African civilizations, allowing Western scholars to know the wealth of these cultures. Frobenius also posited a philosophical theory about the origins of culture—from his observations of African societies—according to which culture arose from intense emotional responses of humans to their environments, which acquired a godly character—a theory postulated mainly in his works *Paideuma* (originally published in 1921, translated into Spanish as *La cultura como ser viviente* and published in 1934) and *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* (originally published in 1933, translated into French as *Histoire de la Civilization africaine* and published in 1936). On the other hand, the works of the French ethnologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl had attempted to sketch what was seen as the distinctive mindset of "primitive man"—a mindset that would be characterized by the dominance of invisible events as explaining factors and the absence of causal logical links (LÉVY-BRUHL, 1928, 1947).

These works—as prejudiced as they appear now—had great importance in opening the West to extraneous modes of thought and culture and would greatly impact Negritude's theorizations about what constitutes the features that characterize the African mindset. The postulation of a philosophy of Negritude owes its main pages to Léopold Sédar Senghor. To evaluate his ideas, it is important to bear in mind that he was not only looking for a revolt and a response to Western domination, but also aiming to establish a distinctive contribution of Black African civilization to the world—a contribution that had been consistently denied by racial and colonial prejudice, as posited by Abiola Irele (2011). Such an enterprise demanded that Senghor found a correlative distinctive character of Black African civilization. Senghor found this character in the works of the Western anthropologists mentioned above, among others, about the characteristics and frame of mind of the so called Black race. The building of his theoretical project drew upon, therefore, the idea of a distinctive Black mentality or a distinctive Black soul.

When studying the pages of the volumes of his collected essays—the *Libertés*—, one cannot but notice the attention given by Senghor to the elucidation of the nature of a Black soul: numerous essays scattered throughout the whole span of his career written in a most elegant and supple French show that this subject has occupied and fascinated him as much as the art of poetry. The insight into the nature of Black personality could illuminate an understanding of Black art and civilization and help to disclose the Black contribution to the world. It is important to remark that the attribution of the characters that enable a Black contribution to the world being articulated primarily on the racial—not social or national—level allows Senghor to broaden this contribution to the Black individuals and Black communities on the other side of the Atlantic—if the distinctive Black contribution lies in the distinctive Black soul, this contribution will be realized anywhere Black communities are formed—within or without Africa.

As early as 1939, an essay called "Ce que l'homme noir apporte" (The Black man's contribution) is published, containing the key elements of Senghor's theory about the Black soul. Drawing upon the authority of Leo Frobenius, Senghor rejects the scientific idea that there is not a pure Black race, since undeniable traces of this race were found by the German ethnologist to compose a once vibrant civilization and culture—the civilization had disappeared, but the culture lingered on in Africa and the Americas (SENGHOR, 1964, p. 22-23). This culture—which is present in the music, literature and the social organization of Black communities—bears witness to the Negro-African soul, style and sensibility, which was characterized by the absence of "literature between subject and object" (SENGHOR, 1964, p. 23, my translation), in other words, for the Black man, subject and object are not separated, he himself is undistinguished from the object, conditioning a more direct form of apprehending the world. The Black soul—says Senghor—is permeable to all sensorial data that the world provides—even ideas, theories, words and sentences seduce for their spiritual and even sensual aspects as much as for their rational content. Reason, after all, is Hellenic whereas emotion is Black ("L'émotion est nègre, comme la raison hellène"), says the poet (SENGHOR, 1965, p. 24). This primarily emotional form of experiencing the world overflows the individual and passes on to his or her relationship with the environment and, thence, to the forms of familial and social organization. And the Black society, according to Senghor, can be compared to the organic image of concentric cycles, having the family as center and fundamental unit and growing to the

outer instances. Being in constant animistic exchange with the environment, the Black man raises an organic society whose rhythms and institutions are in line with the rhythms of nature—the organization of work is in itself rhythmic; and rhythm, confesses the poet, is the one aspect of Black contribution that has not been contested (SENGHOR, 1964, p. 36). This rhythmic contribution is found in African music and the music of North-American Blacks. Senghor offers in his philosophy a very subtle and complex rendition of the idea of rhythm and its importance as well as participation in the character of Black art and civilization.

Indeed, in another essay, "L'Esthétique Négro-Africaine," in which his principles are further discussed, Senghor lists as the "two fundamental traces of the Negro-African style" (SENGHOR, 1964, p. 209, my translation) the *image* and the *rhythm*. The image has a close resemblance to the word insofar as thought and emotion are based on verbal images, and in the African languages, says Senghor, *concrete* words dominate—words are therefore, "always pregnant with images," under whose "value as sign the value as *sense* appears through" (SENGHOR, 1964, p. 210, my translation). It is not an "image-equation," but an "image-analogy" able to reveal the "surreality" of things, more than their physical reality; but even the surreality of the African is different from that of the European insofar as the latter is empirical whereas the former is metaphysical and mystical. The word becomes image in sculpture and dance. Music, on its turn, is not an autonomous art, but the very basis of poetry and dance. Therefore, it can be seen that, in Senghor's rendition of Negro-African culture, the arts are tightly interlinked and these links are not of the same nature as those found between the arts in Western culture. But the arts are not only linked among themselves, they are strictly linked as well with the society they are a part of. The poet who sings the great deeds of a hero is providing the society with its sense of history. This accounts for an essentially functional character of art in Negro-African society.

Underlying all those links between the arts and between the arts and society, there is rhythm as a fundamental principle. Senghor defines rhythm poetically:

> *What is rhythm?* It is the architecture of being, the dynamicity that shapes it, the system of waves that it moves toward the *Others*, the expression of the pure vital force. The rhythm, is the vibrating shock, the strength that, through sense, takes us to the root of *being* (SENGHOR, 1964, p. 211-212, my translation).

It should be regarded that, in rendering rhythm in this general and metaphysical fashion, Senghor extrapolates the concept way beyond the field of music and sound, or even time. In yet another essay, "De la négritude"—first published in 1969—in which Senghor defends his philosophy from the criticism of many English-speaking African authors (Wole Soyinka among them) by reexamining these principles, Senghor exemplifies the difference between European and African modes of thought by comparing two sculptures—one from each culture: the Greek Venus de Milo and the African Venus of Lespugue. The Greek work is characterized by a photographic approach in which the perfect figure of a Greek woman is rendered in marble. The African work, on the other hand, offers the impression of a concept—the concept of fertility, which is concretized in the round and sometimes exaggerated shapes of the sculpture. According to Senghor, whereas the European sculpture is guided by visual reasoning in providing a perfect resemblance of a woman, the African one offers a series of spherical and oval shapes that communicate the notion of fertility through the *rhythm* which links and coordinates them. Therefore, the rhythmic principle accounts as well for the organization of all the African arts, not only those that involve time and movement.

The comparison between the two Venuses highlights what Senghor posits as the main difference between European and Negro-African thought. The photographic Venus of the Greek is redolent of a linear, discursive and analytic reason whereas the Lespugue counterpart shows the predominance of an intuitive and synthetic reasoning, in which the object is taken as a whole to the point of the inexistence of a barrier between it and the subject. Such a view could not but receive strong criticism, having in mind its controversial character. The differences postulated by Senghor were essential and had a racial-physiological basis, to which a mystical-metaphysical substrate was added. It is not, therefore, a very distant idea of the Negro as that traditionally held in the West. Indeed, Abiola Irele remarks that Senghor's program largely consists of "setting a positive value on what the West derided in the African" (IRELE, 2011, p. 59). The Nigerian critic also stresses the impact of the theses of the French anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl about the primitive mind on Senghor's theorizations. On his turn, the Beninese philosopher Stanislas Spero Adotevi dedicated a whole book to criticizing the conception of Negritude, which he deems fixist and fantasist. For him, rather than

being poetic, Negritude's tenets are political; they are rather practical than lyrical (ADOTEVI, 1998, p. 31).

Senghor's theories, as outdated as they can be today in their biological and spiritual fixity and determinism, cannot be understood without having in mind his search for a very broad and open dialog between the cultures of the world, a "Civilization of the Universal, which will be the joint work of all the races, all the different civilizations—or it will be not" (SENGHOR, 1964, p. 9, my translation). What may strike as a paradox is the fact that the "differentialism" with which Senghor addresses the issue of the character of the Black race comes exactly from a markedly universalist outlook. Léopold Sédar Senghor, the humanist poet and thinker, wanted to see humanity progress in the direction of a universal debate and understanding between the races; he found a way to insert his own race in it through what he (and many Western scholars) perceived as their unique characteristics—strong emotionalism and the ability to blend with nature and directly apprehend reality through the senses. His Negritude was a search for a unique mission of the Black race in the world. Such a controversial search was not without criticism, as we have seen. And perhaps the main criticism would come from Senghor's peers from Anglophone Africa.

The most famous attack on Negritude came perhaps from Wole Soyinka in the form of a comment in which the Nigerian playwright jokingly said that a tiger "has no need to proclaim its tigritude" (cited by IRELE, 2011, p. 110). The commentary has received many formulations and, as one could expect, an answer from Senghor himself. In the end of his essay "Qu'est-ce que la négritude? ("What is Negritude"), the poet ascertains:

> "The tiger does not speak about its tigritude," as our Nigerian friend Wole Soyinka addresses us. I respond thus. The tiger does not speak about its tigritude because it is a beast. But man, himself, talks about his *humanity* because he's a man and he *thinks*. The English talk well about the "Anglo-Saxon civilization," even in Nigeria, and they are right. The French talk about the "French civilization" or even the "Latin" or "Greek-Roman" civilization, and we praise them. And we, Negritude militants, we speak, then, about *Negritude*, since we are Negros and, therefore, thinking men (SENGHOR, 1977, p. 101, my translation).

However, as Irele explains, criticism coming from Anglophone Africa actually went further. According again to Irele, the South-African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele

deemed the ideology of Negritude as irrelevant. The essentialist postulates about the nature of the Negro race were not as welcome among the English-speaking African intellectuals as among the French-speaking ones. Irele tells us that in the 19th century some theories about an African personality had been advanced by English-speaking African intellectuals such as Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummell, but these were not as elaborated as the concept of Negritude (IRELE, 2011, p. 110). It is important to remark that, in addition to the African references, Negritude counted on a number of developments in French literature, arts and thought, particularly Surrealism, which offered not only an ideology of revolution, but a method of composition that allowed expressing the images and symbols that distinguished the African imagination from the European, even if, as already discussed, Senghor laid a sharp distinction between European surrealism and African surreality as philosophically separated. It should also be mentioned that artists like Picasso and Matisse drew upon the aesthetics of African masks, characterizing a somewhat circular influence. In Anglophone Africa, however, not only were the literary references distinct, they also found no movement that articulated an aesthetic philosophy, an artistic methodology and a political-revolutionary ideology from the English-speaking world that could help shape a specific movement.

Indeed, the whole relationship between England and its colonies in Africa, on the one hand, and French and its colonies in Africa, on the other, was quite different. In the previous chapter, we have seen that, within the ambit of colonial administration, French rule acted in a much more direct way in its colonies whereas the British, through the system of indirect rule, lent considerable power to the traditional kings and systems, controlling them indirectly. This administrative difference could not but leave its cultural marks. According to Wole Soyinka in the essay "Negritude and the gods of equity," the French colonies where the exponents of the Negritude movement were raised and educated (both in Africa and in the Caribbean) were considered as "departments" of France and its subjects were French citizens overseas (SOYINKA, 1999, p. 149). The objective of French colonial education was, accordingly, to make French citizens out of the Africans and Caribbean who were under their rule, completely weaned on French culture and assimilated to the point of sharing a French ancestry. This preoccupation of lending their African subjects with a European ancestry did not hold in the British colonies. Moreover, the French were actively engaged in

approximating Black students of the Caribbean with those of Africa. Indeed, Caribbean black students were frequently chosen as administrators in African colonies and some Caribbean and African had political positions in France. Although this happened between British colonies in the Caribbean (such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago) and in Africa, it was far less common than in the French case. In other words, in Anglophone Africa, English colonialism and education exerted less power on the identity and culture of the African subjects. Correlatively, the African students who went to pursue their studies in England usually aimed "to obtain their degree and return home" (SOYINKA, 1996, p. 161).

This difference in colonial cultural administration could not but have decisive bearings on the African intellectuals coming from these different colonial realities. The very idea of liberation from a dominant alien culture would in itself be strange to the British colonial since, according to Soyinka, no experience of loss of culture was found in this case (SOYINKA, 1996, p. 162). There was a stronger vein of rebellion in Surrealist-fueled Negritude, Soyinka says, perceived in the poems of such authors as Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas, but also the case of a marked identification with France and French culture in Senghor, whose African-ness did not, in any way, precluded a deep sense of French-ness; on the contrary, the two identities were narrowly weaved in the spirit of the Senegalese man of letters. Indeed, the universalism that pervaded Senghor's Negritudinist philosophy was greatly (even if not totally) due to the universalistic ideals of the French culture he had been weaned on. Wole Soyinka points yet to a third decisive factor in the building of Senghor's universalism: his catholicity. In Soyinka's essay "L. S. Senghor and Negritude," it can be seen how Senghor's Catholic convictions had deep results that enabled his universalism in at least two ways: firstly, the Catholic creed of forgiveness allowed Senghor to forgive the atrocities committed by French colonialists against his own people mainly in face of the humanistic values and cultural treasures France had to offer the world; secondly, the universality and catholicity Senghor proposed as the grounds for uniting the civilizations of the world were French in essence: Soyinka compares Martin Luther King's "love," a "universal redemption of humanity" (SOYINKA, 1996, p. 100) to Senghor's, which is "selectively nationalistic (and by adoption!), a poet's special advocacy that seeks to universalize a specific civilization and culture" (SOYINKA, 1996, p. 101). French culture and Catholicism were paramount, therefore, in enabling

Senghor to endow his Negritude with its universalism, since, as Wole Soyinka once again posits, "Negritude came to mean for Senghor more than race vindication; it was to serve as a bridge into other cultures and racial propositions" (SOYINKA, 1996, p. 140).

The universalism found by Senghor in French culture and thought could not but reside as well—and mainly so—in the French language. In his essay, "Le Français, langue de culture" (French, language of culture), Senghor, without denying the merits of the African languages, posits a series of considerable advantages of the French language for the Black writer or politician, such as the wealth of abstract words in French vocabulary, the French syntax of subordination that renders it a concise language, French stylistics that enables the building through language of the world of *Man*, and, finally, as a consequence, French Humanism, residing in the French language that, expressing a moral, renders it *universal*. The *Francophonie*—the politics of spreading the teaching of the French language throughout Africa as a common language—was an *integral Humanism* that encompassed all the civilizations, races and cultures (SENGHOR, 1966, p. 363). Thus, the universalism Senghor saw in French culture was due first and foremost to a universal character Senghor encountered in the French language. Curiously enough, it was to a linguistic-cultural difference that Senghor attributed the rejection of Negritude ideology by Anglophone African writers:

> The truth is that our Anglophone fellows act as the instruments of an Imperialism they silence: an old Anglo-French rivalry that today should be surpassed in this 20th century, which is that of the Universal (SENGHOR, 1993, p. 16, my translation).

The truth of this reasoning, suggests Senghor, can be found in the very curious fact that Negritude had its forerunners in the Negro-American movement of the Harlem Renaissance: that is, in Black writers of English expression that were often translated by the Negritude poets and with whom they shared some ideological convictions. Wole Soyinka brings forth this same affinity between Black American and Negritude writers to do away with the simplistic idea that the rejection of Negritude by Anglophone African writers was solely due to differences in literary education. The Anglophone African writer, says Soyinka, was not unfamiliar with the Black American tradition of literature; what actually united these two groups of writers—Black Americans and Francophone Africans—was a sense of belonging in a society as second-class citizens: the Black Americans for belonging in a segregationist society where they were in the

lower level; the Francophone Africans (or, for that matter, Caribbean, since their condition was the same) for being incorporated as citizens of the colonizing nation to which they were subject, but as second-class citizens. This condition logically strengthened the need to ascertain a sense of distinctive personality in these two groups of writers. The Anglophone Africans, on the other hand, lived in a totally different situation where, even if they were subjugated, their colonizers were not a frequently seen presence among them; therefore, their African personality could be something taken for granted and that did not need to be posited and predicated (SOYINKA, 1996, p. 124-128).

Soyinka's rejection of Negritude is more thoroughly schematized in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, in the essay "Ideology and the Social Vision (2): The secular ideal." There, the Nigerian author analyzes what he sees as the basic weakness of Negritude in a series of syllogisms beginning from the thesis of white superiority. The primary syllogism posits that the ability to use analytical thought characterizes the European white as highly developed; from this, it is argued that Africans, who are supposedly incapable of analytical thought, are not highly developed—that is the basic reasoning of racism. Negritude's mistake is that, in its attempt of "race-retrieval" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 126), it does not reject this racist idea, but actually introduces a third syllogism—one that posits that intuition—the characteristic operation of the African mind—is also a sign of high development and, therefore, since Africans are able to intuit, they are also highly developed. In other words, Soyinka perceives in Negritude the same problem as Abiola Irele: the fact that Negritude, in its search for the dignity of the African and African civilization, does not, in any way, reject the conception that forms the background for the negation of this dignity; it is, therefore, an attempt to fight racism within the very conceptual battleground of racism, which evidently hinders any effective attempt to fight it. In Soyinka's own emphatic words,

> Negritude trapped itself in what was primarily a defensive role, even though its accents were strident, its syntax hyperbolic and its strategy aggressive. It accepted one of the most commonplace blasphemies of racism, that the black man has nothing between his ears, and proceeded to subvert the power of poetry to glorify this fabricated justification of European cultural domination. Suddenly, we were exhorted to give a cheer for those who never explored the oceans. The truth, however, is that there isn't any such creature (SOYINKA, 2005, P. 129).

Moreover, Soyinka affirms that these "watertight categories of the creative spirit" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 130) suggested by Negritude's philosophy, are strange to the African world-view, which is more dynamic and less limited by clear-cut divisions, according to Soyinka in his investigations in this book. In the beginning of his session on Negritude, Soyinka admits the weight of the movement, which "should never be underestimated or belittled" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 126); the objective of reestablishing a racial psyche and its dignity were laudable, admits Soyinka. However, Negritude's research of an African experience and personality was constricted by the parameters of the European world-view on which it was undeniably based. The African personality and identity posited by Negritude was the one already sketched by European racism—therein lies the basis for Soyinka's rejection of this philosophy. This very rejection was of the utmost importance to the development of Soyinka's own thought, especially concerning the position of an African identity. This influence will be discussed further.

THE BURDEN AND THE MUSE

Even in face of its clear rejection by many African intellectuals (Soyinka in particular)—and even if the idea of a fixed, non-rational, non-analytical, intuitive and emotive personality to the "African race" has been laid aside—, Negritude is of importance not only for providing a point of departure from whose rejection a new African worldview could be systematized, but also for clearly indicating strong issues that cannot be left aside by African intellectuals. We have seen how, in his critique of Negritude, Soyinka points out to the impingements of European theories on the search for a race-retrieval by Senghor and other Francophone African intellectuals. Indeed, the relationship between African and European intellectual references within the African intellectual is an issue that stands out in the discussion of Negritudinist philosophy and cultural movement, having been explicitly discussed by Senghor in more than one essay. Moreover, we have also seen that the rejection of Negritude by Anglophone Africans was frequently attributed to a difference in literary upbringing and a difference in language—an attribution made by Senghor himself. Indeed, the issue of language is another that is greatly stressed and brought to light by the Negritude debate, more specifically, the issue of the relationship between the African writer or intellectual and the language in which he or she writes.

Senghor had no problems in suggesting French as a pan-African language, given the communicative and linguistic advantages he saw in the European language. Kwame Appiah, in the beginning of his book *In my Father's House*, brings forth the figure of Alexander Crummel, the African-American author who adopted Liberia as his country, dedicating himself to the advancement of African nationalism and who, as Appiah says, was very enthusiastic about the possibility of English becoming a pan-African language that would eventually replace African native idioms. Appiah remarks that only part of Crummel's prophecy had become true, since, if on the one hand English is the official language of half of Africa, on the other, even in the countries where it is the official language, English is spoken by a minority, the native languages being those of the majority; in Francophone Africa, the situation is the same (APPIAH, 1993, p. 3). In other words, in most of Africa, the situation is very much the one described by Irele in the essay mentioned above: a division between the literary language, used by writers and intellectuals, and the everyday languages, spoken by most Africans—something Irele has described as an anomaly, the existence of a rift between the language of literature and the language of oral communication (IRELE, 1990). This anomaly was obviously perceived and discussed by many African writers with much controversy.

In 1962, Makerere College in Kampala, Uganda, held a Conference of African Writers of English Expression, having the presences of, among others, Soyinka, Okigbo and Ulli Beier. This conference elicited a response in the form of an essay by the Nigerian literary scholar and politician Obiajunwa Wali called "The Dead End of African Literature?," wherein he harshly criticizes the posirtion of the African writers who choose to write in a European instead of an African language. With strong arguments, Wali argues that "any true African literature must be written in African languages" (WALI, 2007, p. 282) and writers who do not follow this lead would be "pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration" (idem). Wali advocates the use of African languages in literature as a way of building a truly African sensibility and preserving African languages, since a language needs a literature to survive. In Wali's own words:

> Literature, after all, is the exploitation of language. It is the African languages that are in crying need of this kind of development, not the overworked French and English (WALI, 2007, p. 283).

> There is little doubt that African languages would face inevitable extinction, if they do not embody some kind of intelligent literature, and the only way to hasten this, is by continuing in our present illusion that we can produce African literature in English and French (WALI, 2007, p. 284).

It is noticeable how Wali's arguments are basically directed toward the idea of cultural development and preservation of the African linguistic heritage in literature; in other words, there is a need of African literature in African languages because it is important to advance African languages in creative and critical writing as much as occurs in any language: "I believe that every language has a right to be developed as literature" (WALI, 2007, p. 283). After all, African literature produced in European languages "is merely an appendage to the main stream of European language" (WALI, 2007, p. 282) and the very phrase "African literature" can only be justified if it has a literature in its own languages. The Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o followed similar lines in his argument, although with more politically open overtones. After seventeen years as a prestigious English-language writer, he substituted the Anglo-Saxon idiom with his native Gikuyu in 1977, becoming a firm defender of writing in African native languages. In a 1986 essay called "The Language of African Literature," he not only advocates the use of African languages in literature but also analyzes the establishment and the effects of European languages as literary languages in Africa.

Discussing the colonization and partition of Africa, Ngugi remarks us that, along with political colonization, achieved by means of violent coercion, there is the subtler mind domination which is achieved most effectively through education and the imposition of the dominant group's language along with the debasement of the native one: "the physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom," language being "the most important vehicle" for imprisoning the souls of the dominated (THIONG'O, 2007, p. 289). Language, Ngugi points out, is a carrier of culture either on the level of daily communication or on the level of communicating complex thinking and societal values in the form of proverbs, poems, fables and other items that compose the cultural canon of an oral culture—the articulation of one language into these dimensions forms a unified cultural existence. More and more, Ngugi argues, African societies are structuring themselves in a way in which the level of literate culture and that of daily communication are set within completely different languages. For children under colonial education—as Ngugi himself once was—the different levels of communication had their relationships broken.

Thiong'o clearly associates this development with a colonial project, which, in his view, is maintained and enlarged by those who advocate African literatures in European languages and the writers in this tendency, regardless of their talent as artists; for Ngugi, what these writers do "is not African literature" (THIONG'O, 2007, p. 301), but "a hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature" (THIONG'O, 2007, p. 301). This literature, says the Gikuyu author, can last only while Africa remains under the colonial control—even if a cultural, indirect control—of Europe.

On the other hand, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, a contemporary of Wole Soyinka and his colleague at the University of Ibadan, brought forth a quite different perspective. In an essay pertaining to his book *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, Achebe draws on his own experience as a child educated under colonial rule to counter some of Ngugi's claims based on his experience. Thiong'o, let it be remembered, argued that the imposition of European languages was a form of imperial domination. According to Achebe, the truth was exactly the opposite: the colonial powers' primary plan was to educate African children in their own languages; the teaching of English was something demanded by Africans, and what is more, those of the peasant communities—exactly the ones who Thiong'o suggested would be the focus of resistance of African native languages (ACHEBE, 2009, P. 104). Some high chiefs in Nigeria even paid private teachers of English, not satisfied with the English being taught in missionary schools. The teaching of English as a general language (or French or Portuguese, in other areas) was seen as a way of countering the disruptive effects of the linguistic plurality found in African communities. Indeed, Achebe bases his own consistent use of English as literary language on the importance it has in uniting the more than two hundred different linguistic groups in Nigeria:

> As long as Nigeria wishes to exist as a nation, it has no choice in the foreseeable future but to hold its more than two hundred component nationalities together through an alien language, English (ACHEBE, 2009, P. 100).

The language question is undeniably one of importance and controversy for the modern African writer, and Wole Soyinka is not excluded from this controversy. Once reviewing two collections of plays—one by J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, the other by Wole Soyinka—, the English drama critic Martin Esslin wondered about the reason why

African writers preferred English for their works than their own African languages. "Is it that they themselves are more at home in English?" (ESSLIN, 1980, p. 283) Perhaps, but the issue seems more complicated than that. In more than one occasion, Wole Soyinka was asked about the language issue. In face of such questions, the Nigerian poet frequently reminds his interlocutor that he has for a long time proposed Kiswahili as a *lingua franca* to be taught in all African schools (SOYINKA, 2001, p. 77, 141) as a form of strengthening Black Africa as a community. In relation to the language in which African literatures should be written, he has a broad view:

> The promotion of literature in those [African] languages is absolutely important. There is no question, no dispute at all about it. But in addition, I believe the *solution* to this language question is to have a common language, like Kiswahili for Africa. […] When someone like Ngugi wa Thiong'o says he's going back to writing in his own native language (Gikuyu), I believe he is really depriving me of something (SOYINKA, 2001, p. 141-142).

Finally, in relation to his own writing in English, Soyinka is equally assertive:

> I will not go back to writing in Yoruba. No way. Because within the boundaries of Nigeria, we have at least 200 different languages. Why should I speak to the Yoruba alone? I will not accept that. I will be willing and ready to use a language that not only reaches all those people within the continent, but actually expands outside the continent. For me, [Ngugi's] is a gesture which is grand, which is magnificent, but which for me does not relate to realities of the African continent (SOYINKA, 2001, p. 141-142).

Soyinka's views are, therefore, more attuned to those of Achebe than to, on the one hand, Senghor, who sounds perfectly convinced of the communicational and artistic advantages of French for Africa and her writers, and, on the other, of Ngugi, who totally rejects the idea of African literature in a non-African language. Senghor was noted for declaring of French in relation to African languages: "With us (Africans), words are surrounded by a halo of sap and blood; words in French glitter with a thousand fires like diamonds" (SENGHOR, 1990, p. 172, my translation). The case made by Soyinka and Achebe for writing in English is far less romanticized or poeticized; it is, indeed, a practical one. The poetic, linguistic and semantic complexity of the texts of both Nigerian writers makes us wonder whether their relationship with the Anglo-Saxon language does not go deeper than the practical considerations of the audience reached. This practicality may be, at least in part, a way for them to balancing the muse of the language in which they write with its burden.

A YORUBA WRITER

Above, it was seen how Ngugi wa Thiong'o believed that there could be no legitimate African literature in a non-African language. Obi Wali was of the same opinion, stating that the African literature produced in European languages was merely an appendage to the European literatures to which they are related. Wole Soyinka surely does not agree with this. Indeed, when asked by Jane Wilkinson in an interview whether he saw himself as a Yoruba writer, he answered:

> Well, it's obvious I'm not an Igbo writer! The "Nigerian" writer is a creature in formation. Obviously we're bound to end up as a hybridization. Well I'm not a Hausa writer. There is the Hausa culture, the Tiv culture—we have several cultures in Nigeria—so that makes me primarily a Yoruba writer. There's no question at all about it in my mind, I'm primarily a Yoruba writer, just as you have Occitan writers in France, Welsh writers, Scottish literature, within the same political entity. There is Gaelic literature, literature in Welsh, even when it is written in English, like the works of Powys, for instance (SOYINKA, 2001, p. 149)

It should be clear that the criterion according to which Soyinka considers himself primarily a Yoruba writer is not that of language, as we have seen earlier. A cue to understanding in which sense Soyinka is a Yoruba writer can be found in the very question made by Jane Wilkinson, in which, after asking whether he saw himself as a Yoruba writer, she adds that Abiola Irele has suggested the existence of a lineage of Yoruba writers that includes Wole Soyinka. She is referring there to Irele's essay "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer," which is crucial to understanding the issue at hand.

The title of the essay proposes a starting point in T. S. Eliot's famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (ELIOT, 1975), due to what Irele sees as "its immediate relevance to the consideration of the literary situation in Africa in our times" (IRELE, 1991, p. 174). Irele interprets Eliot's view of tradition as "a constant refinement and extension" of beliefs and symbols "in a way which relates to an experience that is felt as being at once continuous and significantly new" (IRELE, 1991, p. 174). Irele sees an effort in Africa towards the establishment of this sense of tradition among the writers within a moment of transition between the older traditions and the modern experience and he believes that among Yoruba writers this development is more visible than in those of other traditions. In the encounter between traditional Africa and

the West, Yoruba culture has been particularly successful, Irele believes, in not only surviving but actually widening itself to the point of becoming a cultural frame of reference to individuals in modern times; in other words, Yoruba culture is being particularly successful in becoming modern while maintaining its own essence and nature. This is strongly visible in the trajectory of Yoruba literature in the 20th century.

As happens with most traditional cultures in Africa, Yoruba culture had not known the written language until European colonization. Until then, its literature was wholly oral. It is important to point out, however, that with the arrival of writing and written literature, Yoruba oral tradition has not been weakened, but has actually maintained its strength throughout the myriad genres in which it is practiced and the modern, written literature has developed in a particularly healthy relationship with its oral counterpart in an organic progression. Irele substantiates his claims by examining the works of three Yoruba writers pertaining to three different generations: D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka. Among themselves, these writers show significant differences, particularly in terms of language—Fagunwa, a Yoruba chieftain of refined education, was the first to write novels in the Yoruba language, achieving national acclaim in Nigeria. Amos Tutuola, on the other hand, was a novelist who had little instruction in English but decided to write in it, creating his works based on the works of Fagunwa in an English that was often considered faulty but did not fail to win him international recognition. Finally, Wole Soyinka differed from the two other writers in the genres practiced (although he has published two novels, his main genres are drama and poetry) and in writing in English with mastery and artistry.

Despite the important differences in language, Irele is able to trace a line of development uniting the three writers from the point of view of their appropriation of the Yoruba worldview, myths and symbols—in other words, Irele examines the way each of these individual Yoruba writers relates literarily with the Yoruba tradition, since the oral tradition, Irele ascertains, is present in the three of them as an important stock of symbols and inspiration. In the case of Fagunwa, the Yoruba oral tradition is the direct source of his work; Tutuola was acquainted with it directly, but also through the works of Fagunwa and had to grapple with the difficulty of writing it in a language he did not fully mastered; Soyinka had a broad Western education and could relate Yoruba oral tradition with the Western tradition.

The influence of Fagunwa's novels on the works of Tutuola are more readily apprehended; the influence of the two novelists on Soyinka is not so easily seen, even if we know that Soyinka has produced an English translation of Fagunwa's first and most celebrated novel *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmole* (in English, translated as "The Forest of a Thousand Daemons"). However, the line connecting these distinct writers can be seen in the way myth and fable are incorporated in their works. Irele tells us that Fagunwa was particularly successful in finding a novelistic form to encapsulate an oral tradition, since his work is far from a mere juxtaposition of myths and fables—these are integrated in a very cohesive way. This feature is easily perceived in his most famous novel *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (FAGUNWA, 1982), in which we have a strong sense of the evolution the character *Akara Ogun* goes through since his first adventures to the last. One feature that is frequently associated with the Yoruba worldview and singled out by Irele is the intermingling of the natural and the supernatural, which appear as undistinguishable. Fagunwa is particularly gifted in giving this feature a metaphysical breadth, since Irele remarks that the ambience of the forest, in his novels, acquire the symbolical meaning of the universe itself—the very stage whereon seen and unseen forces come together to propose the challenges and difficulties for the protagonist hunters. The hunters' quarrels with the mythic beasts and beings become more than fantastic tales—they become vivid metaphors for the human quarrel with their environment and the strange forces coming from them—a theme, as we will see, dear to Soyinka.

In the case of Tutuola, Irele admits that his relative unfamiliarity with the language in which he wrote constituted a considerable hindrance to the composition of his works. Tutuola did not have the means to completely effect the passage from Fagunwa's Yoruba to English, but Irele stresses that, even through this linguistic barrier, Tutuola's imagination was able to present a very vivid rendering of the Yoruba fable tradition, possessing, Irele points out, a more personal tone than Fagunwa's. Indeed, the Nigerian critic perceives in Tutuola an individuality that is more implicated in the events being narrated than in Fagunwa. Curiously enough, Irele says that, among those who were influenced by or who imitated the style of Fagunwa in the Yoruba language, none had the imaginative genius of Amos Tutuola; therefore, Fagunwa's main inheritance in the history of Yoruba literature was not realized in the language he wrote, but in English, and it was his imaginative qualities that were more profitable for his

disciple Amos Tutuola. Moreover, Irele finds a relationship of complementariness between the works of the two writers:

> Thus, despite the varying degrees and different manners in which they express this communal spirit, the works of Fagunwa and Tutuola belong very much together and complement each other admirably in their reference to a common stock of symbols and their foundation in a world view that is culturally bound (IRELE, 1990, p. 188).

In this triadic lineage of Yoruba writers proposed by Irele, Soyinka stands aside not only in terms of genre, but also, as Irele points out, because his relationship to Yoruba tradition and mythology is not as direct as that of the two other writers. Irele stresses that, through a highly conscious art, the symbols and themes pertaining to a communal consciousness are sifted in Soyinka by a strong sense of individuality—we can understand that this individuality Irele finds in Soyinka is allowed by his mastery not only of the English language but of the technical resources pertaining to his craft as well. It seems clear that, between the two older writers, it is Fagunwa who exerts more influence on Soyinka and, as paradoxical as it may seem, this influence can be seen not only in the use of themes, symbols and the worldview, but also in language: Fagunwa's Yoruba appears to have had more impact on Soyinka's English than Tutuola's own idiosyncratic English. Fagunwa's Yoruba—as described by Soyinka in his preface to his own translation to Fagunwa's novel (SOYINKA, 1982, p. *v*) and also by Irele (IRELE, 1990, p. 178, 189)—is elaborate and highly charged with poetic tones and connotations as is Soyinka's English. In addition to the use of language, Irele finds Fagunwa's influence in Soyinka mainly in his play *A Dance of the Forests*, where the natural and the supernatural worlds are deeply intertwined, offering a view of history as repeating itself within one same environment—a forest, echoing Fagunwa's forest as the metaphor for the universe where human drama takes place.

As varied and cosmopolitan as Soyinka's field of reference may be, it is a fact that these two classics of Yoruba literature have been incorporated by him in his oeuvre in both stylistic and thematic elements. Soyinka himself has once in an interview (SOYINKA, 2001, p. 154) admitted the influence on his work of the poetic prose of Fagunwa and many genres of Yoruba oral poetry. What one finds in a play like *A Dance of the Forests* and other works to be examined here—mainly the one in which this dissertation is centered, *Death and the King's Horseman*—is that the Yoruba world in

Soyinka is far from a reduced, tribal, community, but it is very expanded to include the whole of humanity. Or as the critic Robert Fraser says of Soyinka:

> For Soyinka, to be truly Yoruba is by the same token to assert one's solidarity with all men; to pay homage at a village shrine to recognize one's membership of a wider religious community (FRASER, 2001, p. 296).

According to the examination of these views, it seems correct to propose that Soyinka's construction of a Yoruba identity as a writer comprehends a humanistic universalism that bears some resemblance with Senghor's Negritude as a standpoint for the African in face of the building of a communal, universal identity. It is important now to examine Soyinka's own views.

SOYNKA AND THE AFRICAN WORLD

Since very early in his career, Soyinka stood out as an opponent of Negritude, not only in his much reproduced and cited dictum about the tiger and its tigritude, but also in a poetic parody to Léopold Sédar Senghor that Chinua Achebe heard him recite at the Makerere conference in 1962 (ACHEBE, 2010, p. 98). Nevertheless, some authors are positive in ascertaining a strong influence of Negritude in Soyinka's thought. Eldred Durosimi Jones posits that, while Soyinka became known as the quintessential antinegritudinist, "his work exhibits all that Negritude was essentially about, bar the shouting" (JONES, 1972, p. 113). On his turn, Biodun Jeyifo sees Soyinka's mature writings as "neo-Negritudinist in their evaluation of the African past and precolonial African traditions" (JEYIFO, 2009, p. 43). We have seen earlier Soyinka's reactions to the negritudinist philosophy. It is important now to focus on his own thinking to understand its actual relations—in terms of differences and similarities—with Negritude.

Biodun Jeyifo, in his critical work *Wole Soyinka*, divides Soyinka's thought in three phases: the early antinegritudinist stances, the neo-negritudinist views of the 70s and the 80s and the neo-cosmopolitan ideas of his later writings (JEYIFO, 2009). Jeyifo sees these divisions as appearing both in his imaginative and his critical writings. *Death and the King's Horseman*, the play that will be examined here, belongs to the second phase and is in line with the critical writings of this time, mainly those collected in the

book *Myth, Literature and the African World*. It is to this phase and ideas that most of the discussion here will be dedicated. Jeyifo sets the beginning of this phase of Soyinka's thought in the introduction that the Nigerian poet wrote to the collection *Poems of Black Africa*, prepared by himself. In this text, Soyinka binds together the poems selected as belonging to "a conceptual tradition which embodies essentials of the metaphysics of the African world" (SOYINKA, 1975, p. 13). In order to characterize this metaphysics as it appears in the poems of the book, Soyinka uses the category "animistic," which is described as "an interfusion of object, thought and spirit" (SOYINKA, 1975, p. 14) and is differentiated from surrealism in the sense that African poetic animism eschews surrealist autotelism. It is plain to see that this definition is not so distant from Senghor's own distinction between African surreality and European surrealism.

It is necessary, therefore, to trace the movement made by Soyinka from his first anti-Negritude stances to what Jeyifo sees as a neo-Negritudinist position. In the first phase of his thought, Jeyifo informs us that, in order to counter the stances of Negritude about the particularity of the Black race as innocently emotional and pristine in world perception, Soyinka tended toward "an abstract universalism" (JEYIFO, 2009, p. 52). In his theatrical work, this anti-negritudinism can be seen in a rejection of the romanticization of the African past, often resulting in pessimism, in plays such as *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Strong Breed*. In these plays, the African traditional world is depicted as every bit as corrupt and prone to degeneration as the modern, colonial times. Likewise, we find in an early essay as "From a Common Backcloth" an effort to understand the movements of numerous African writers to distance themselves more and more "from the common backcloth of an imposed identity—primitivism" (SOYINKA, 1994, p. 7, originally published in 1963). More than this, in this essay we see Soyinka evaluating the development of a stock of African symbols and motifs that can preserve, in an African literature in formation, something of an African identity, as in his evaluation of the works of Amos Tutuola, which is seen as a setting of the storytelling tradition in modernity. In an earlier essay, "The Writer in a Modern African State," Soyinka grapples with the difficulties afflicting the African writer in post-independence African nations in relation to his role in these new societies, which are no longer colonized, but already start to show problems of their own, even as the colonizers have left. In face of collapse and societies in the dire situation of

projecting themselves into a future that is particularly insecure in face of the presence—and commitment with—the traditional past, Soyinka sees the writer as in a condition of isolation. It is in this situation that Soyinka summons the African writer to search for a new position:

> The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past. Of course, the past exists, the real African consciousness establishes this—the past exists now, this moment, it is co-existent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future, but it is not a fleshpot for escapist indulgence, and it is vitally dependent on the sensibility that recalls it (SOYINKA, 1994, p. 18-19, originally published in 1960).

This summon is made in face of the fact that "[t]he myth of irrational nobility, of a racial essence that must come to the rescue of the white depravity has run its full course" (SOYINKA, 1994, p. 19, originally published in 1960). With this blatant rejection of Negritude as a romanticizing of the African past and racial essence, Soyinka sets forth in pursuit of a greater commitment with the present—one that does not exclude the past. The question that comes to mind is how this past-including present could be systematized and characterized by Soyinka. It was mentioned that in these early essays, as well as in his early plays, a marked vein of pessimism is visible in which we see African past and present overwhelmed by the doings of corrupt characters that are prone to pervert traditions to their own benefits. The already cited Eldred Durosimi Jones finds in the Negritude writers "a kind of worship of Mother Africa which is absent in Soyinka's work" (JONES, 1972, p. 114)—the same author that posited Soyinka's proximity to Negritude. Under this light, Soyinka's attitudes toward Africa resemble that of Kofi Awoonor as expressed in the excerpt of an interview cited by Ken Goodwin in his essay on the Ghanaian poet:

> the setting up of a false myth in response to another false myth [colonialism]…. Our ancestors were as barbarous and cruel and as devious as anybody else's ancestors. And there was no Golden Age in Africa any more than there was one anywhere else. The corruption of Africa is an aspect of its humanity. To deny that corruption—that we sold people into slavery and did all the usual horrible human things—is to suggest in a way that we were not human (AWOONOR, cited by GOODWIN, 1982, p.96-97).

"Glories? Who said they are glories?," once asked Awoonor in one of his poems (AWOONOR, 1987, p. 5). As literary artists of a post-Negritude generation, both Soyinka and Awoonor had to come to terms with the Negritudinist inheritance, finding

a new path for African literature—a way to revitalize African cultural identity and heritage without collapsing into the romantic myths that so marked their predecessors' musings.

Biodun Jeyifo sees as an important transition between his early universalist and iconoclastic views and his Neo-Negritudinist phase the essay "The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy," originally published in 1973 as a part of the book *The Morality of Art: Essays Presented to G. Wilson Knight*, as the very name says, a collection of essays in honor of the critic Wilson Knight, Soyinka's advisor at Leeds. It is no wonder, then, that this piece was published as an appendix to the four lectures that compose *Myth, Literature and the African World*. This essay will be more thoroughly discussed afterwards. At this moment, it should be remarked that it presents an attempt to sketch a theory of African drama based on archetypes of Yoruba gods in the very vein of finding a distinctively African view and contribution in the ambiance of modern culture. The search for a place for the African traditional ethos within modernity dominates *Myth, Literature and the African World* and it is a considerably difficult task given the differences of media between an oral and a written culture. As we have seen in the beginning of this chapter, Soyinka had to grapple with this difficulty already in the setting of the lectures: instead of taking place in the Department of English, his lectures on African Literature had to be delivered in the Department of Social Anthropology. It was probably in reaction to this that Soyinka ironically begins his first lecture "commemorating the gods for their self-sacrifice on the altar of literature" and "pressing them into further service on behalf of human society" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 5). We are in the same realm as we were in Abiola Irele's reflections about the evolution of Yoruba written literature in the 20th century: that of the passage from an oral culture to a written one. It should be remembered, however, that the oral culture being written is still alive and vigorous and its gods, even if they have sacrificed themselves on the altar of literature, are still worshipped on both sides of the Atlantic. In the end of his essay, Abiola Irele comments on the different fortunes of the European modern poets, from Baudelaire to the symbolists, and the African writer, remarking that

> The great fortune of African writers is that the world views which shape the experience of the individual in traditional society are still very much alive and continue to provide a comprehensive frame of reference for communal life. The African gods continue to function within the realm of the inner consciousness of

> the majority of our societies, and the symbols attached to them continue to inform in an active way the communal sensibility. It has thus been possible for our poets in particular to evoke them as a proper, and indeed integral element of their individual imaginings (IRELE, 1990, p. 196).

It is in this realm that we find ourselves in Soyinka's essay, and the Nigerian poet is positive in distinguishing between the environment inhabited by the European modern consciousness and that inhabited by the African consciousness today, remembering that, in olden days, both European and Asian people inhabited the same realm of consciousness as the African:

> In Asian and European antiquity, therefore, man did, like the African, exist within a cosmic totality, did possess a consciousness in which his own earth being, his gravity-bound apprehension of self, was inseparable from the entire cosmic phenomenon. (For let it always be recalled that myths arise from man's attempt to externalize and communicate his inner intuitions.) A profound transformation has therefore taken place within the human psyche if, to hypothesise, the same homo sapiens, mythologises at one period that an adventurous deity has penetrated earth, rocks and underground streams with his phallus, going right through the outer atmosphere, and, at another period, that a new god walks on water without getting his feet wet (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 5).

It is within this form of consciousness that Soyinka's investigations in the essay "The Ritual Archetype in Morality and Aesthetics" are set, taking us back to the very origins of literature and the arts in which there was hardly a separation between poetry, drama, music and dance—artistic practices that were comprehended within the all-embracing agency of ritual, which is firmly attached to myth itself. The drama, the deeds of gods and heroes were enacted and staged, Soyinka tells us, in "the cosmic entirety" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 2), that is, the environment in which the gods become present and fulfill their role as paradigms and standards for society is the very physical environment in which man lives. This surrounding, this chthonic space, as Soyinka calls it, overwhelms men with uncertainties and poses them face to face with the question of infinity; it is in this place that the life cycles that compose the existence of society take place. The physical environment and the metaphysical reality are inextricable under this mode of thought. The ritual actor becomes the one who transposes this space to reaffirm the intuitions and values that are the basis of their community and that became evidenced through the agency of the gods. The transition from the open-space arenas of ritual to the closed stages of institutionalized drama somewhat represents a break in this

ritualistic character and an ultimate separation of ritual and drama—a separation which cannot be rigidly posited in Africa, where these two worlds are intertwined, turning any attempt to distinguish between the two an otiose enterprise.

Soyinka is, therefore, dealing with the difference in world-view and orientation of consciousness between African traditional societies and European and American modern societies. He investigates this difference in the depiction of three Yoruba deities as they appear in an African and a Brazilian play, remembering that, in Brazil, the Orisa have been frequently merged with Catholic saints, receiving a part of their ethereal character, which is shown not only in the acts that are attributed to the deities in the two different plays, but also in the stock of metaphors used in each instance. African literary productions have a tendency to use more "down-to-earth" metaphors, such as yam, peat and earth, whereas the Catholic-influenced Brazilian play displays in its language metaphors of flowers, heavenly phenomena and precious metals.

It is through these plays that Soyinka sketches the symbolic and metaphysical significance of the deities Sango, Obatala and Ogun, of which we have already heard in the first chapter. Sango presents, according to Soyinka, a curious paradox, since, being probably the most assuredly anthropomorphic Orisa (his human existence as a king is an accepted fact), he is also the agent of a perennial natural phenomenon—lightning. His deification is set within a certain time in the history of Oyo. From that time on—which occurs after his suicide resulting from his having been rejected by his people—, he assumes the agency of lightning. In chapter one, we have seen that Bolaji Idowu proposes the theory that lightning and justice were the provinces of another, older deity—Jakuta—which came to be syncretized with Sango. Even if Sango comes to assume the tutelage of a timeless phenomenon, there is no doubt that his existence is the most time-bound at least among the three Orisa studied in the essay: "Sango's history is not the history of primal becoming, but of racial origin, which is historically dated" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 9). In the first chapter we have seen the prominence and importance of Oyo in the consolidation of a Yoruba identity; we remember that Oyo became the largest empire in Yorubaland and its cultural and economic center, enabling an articulation and relationship of the different Yoruba kingdoms that, when Oyo decayed, myriad problems arose afflicting its unity. The role of Oyo in providing a frame of reference for Yoruba identity accounts for Soyinka's attribution of the history of racial origin to Sango. Sango is not the father of the Yoruba race, for that is

Oduduwa, but Sango became the unifying symbol or paradigm of the Yoruba race as something that transcended even the *axis mundi* of Ile-Ife, as something more widespread and concretized in a historical, cultural and political identity.

Soyinka characterizes Obatala as "a gentler sector of the arc of human psyche" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 13). The ideas of purity, peace, and tranquility are associated to this deity, as well as those of self-sacrifice and suffering. However, we should not forget that he is also the paradigm of creation and of human origin in general, not of specific racial origin as Sango. Indeed, the relationship between what Sango and Obatala represent is depicted in a myth that gives origin to the two plays analyzed by Soyinka in the essay. In this myth, which is fully reported by Pierre Verger (VERGER, 2000, p. 428-429), Obatala decides to visit Sango, his friend, in Oyo and goes on a journey, although the oracle had warned him not to do so. After being harassed by Esu on his way, he arrives at Oyo in rags and is taken as a prisoner by Sango's guards. During the time that Obatala lingers in jail, sterility reigns in Oyo: the crops do not grow, the rain does not fall, women become barren. It is only when Sango discovers that Obatala is locked in his dungeons that he is able to free the older deity and reestablish order in Oyo. In considering the status attributed to each of the deities involved in the myth, and in considering the relationship between Oyo and Ile-Ife (to which Obatala is associated as Sango to Oyo), it is evident that the myth presents us with a picture of reversal of seniority and the disruptive consequences it has in the normal cycle of life.

In addition to his role as the molder of the human body, Obatala is also linked to the origin of life through the already told myth of Atunda, where the first deity is shredded into pieces, giving origin to the other deities. In relation to this myth, the poet Niyi Osundare makes an interesting remark about the slave's name: "Atunda" could be translated as "Recreator" whereas the alternative name "Atooda" could be translated as "Created from the hand" (OSUNDARE, 2001, p. 188-189). The first name presents the slave as somebody who creates beginning from an original source that is already there; this original source, of course, is Obatala, the actual creator. The second name, Osundare tells us, may be interpreted as stressing the slave's character as himself a creation of the very deity he was to destroy; under this rendition, Obatala comes as the maker of his own destruction—a destruction that would bring diversity of deities to human community. This could be interpreted as Obatala's fate of self-sacrifice to fill the world with numerous deities, which could not be fulfilled without his own slave's

action. According to Osundare, the Atunda ideal is of great importance in Soyinka's work and outlook as a purveyor of diversity and freedom and a challenger of hegemony and established orders. The act of Atunda is essentially a revolutionary one since the tranquil and unshakeable unity of Obatala was disrupted, giving origin to an uncertain yet dynamic multiplicity of paradigms.

It is in this sense that Atunda approaches the third god studied by Soyinka in the essay, the one to which he pays tributes and to which his work is dedicated: Ogun, the god of iron ore and war. In his own theorization about Ogun, Soyinka extends his tutelage to the lyrical arts and the creative activities in general. He draws upon the myth, already told in the first chapter, in which Ogun fashions an iron tool to destroy the obstacles (in Soyinka's version, a rock, maybe as large as the one manipulated by Atunda) that were set between the Orisa and the humans. After giving the secret of iron to humans, he is crowned the king of the city of Ire, even if he had refused the honor at first. He became a great king and an effective warlord until one day he went to war to defend his people inebriated with palm-wine. His senses blurred, his bloodthirstiness aroused, he kills both the enemies and his men. Grieving, he draws his sword on the ground, which opens to receive him.

This sequence of myths reinforces the view of Sandra Barnes according to which Ogun "is a metaphoric representation of the realization that people create the means to destroy themselves" (BARNES, 1997, P. 17). Soyinka's rendering of the symbolism of Ogun goes in the same direction, since he also stresses the ambivalence of a god who stands for both creativity and destructiveness. Ogun, we understand if we follow Soyinka's lead, is the deity of ingenuity, the ability of humans to fashion devices and utensils in order to intervene in reality in search of adaptation. When one thinks of this role of Ogun—and crosses it with his fame for being the god of iron—, one is tempted to believe that the reality in which he intervenes is exclusively the physical reality. However, Soyinka's ideas, particularly those discussed in "The Fourth Stage," show us that Ogun's action extends beyond mere physical and stretches toward metaphysical reality, or else, the threshold between physical and metaphysical realities.

Soyinka offers an extremely elaborate theory to explain Ogun's mediating role between the different realities. First of all, it is important to characterize these realities. We are no longer reduced to the two aspects of reality discussed in the first chapter and

represented by the two parts of the calabash—the spiritual and the material world. We are now talking about three realms which do not exclude the two previously mentioned, but actually set the relationship between them into motion: these are the realms of the living, the unborn, and the ancestors. The notion of these three realms is not an easy one to understand since, as Soyinka says, it "denies periodicities to the existences of the dead, the living and the unborn" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 10). Those who are living now have once been dead and will live again not without going through the realm of the unborn; likewise those who are dead also inhabit the world of the unborn waiting to live again. The three realms are not chronologically separated but actually tightly imbricated: the newly born child can be his or her own father or grandfather. Human society, according to the Yoruba view as sketched by Soyinka, is this never-ending cycle of souls constantly departing and being reborn to live again.

Inasmuch as there are these three intertwined realms, there is a fourth, less-known and perceived realm: the void that pervades all of them and that Soyinka calls the abyss of transition: "This gulf is what must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 144). This is the fourth stage to which the title of the essay refers. In the essay "Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype," discussed above, Soyinka already refers to this fourth stage in the following terms:

> Commonly recognized in most African metaphysics are the three worlds we have already discussed: the world of the ancestor, the living and the unborn. Less understood or explored is the fourth space, the dark continuum of transition where occurs the inter-transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality. It houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 26).

That abyss is associated by Soyinka to the rock that was set between the Orisa and the humans and that was destroyed by Ogun, who was able to fashion an iron tool to destroy this rock and allow the gods to meet with humans. For Soyinka, Ogun's action is equivalent to plunging into the abyss of transition: "Into this universal womb once plunged and emerged Ogun, the first actor, disintegrating within the abyss" (SOYNKA, 2005, p. 142). This disintegration was followed by the god's re-assemblage, his successful bridging of two worlds—those of the gods and of the humans. Ogun becomes, then, an archetype of those individuals whose function is to bridge different worlds and the metallic ore he used to fashion the knife with which he opened the way

to the gods becomes the archetype of all forms of devices or crafts that are used to effect this bridging of worlds. This process receives a vivid description in the third poem of Soyinka's first volume of poems, *Idanre and Other Poems*. The piece, called "Around us, dawning," describes a jet-flight in which the jet's wings are seen as

> *Scouring grey recesses of the void*
> *To a linear flare of dawns* (SOYINKA, 1987, p. 12).

The plane, a product of human craft, is able to extract grey recesses from the dark and cyclical void and transform them into luminous linear dawns. The linear notion of time, understandable and quantifiable by humans, is extracted through craft from this non-linear, seemingly chaotic matrix. The void, the transitional abyss which faces humans in their contact with the world is as chaotic and challenging as the chthonic realm the Orisa found in their journey to reunite with men. As much as Ogun needed an iron-ore device to enable him and his companions to traverse this world, so humans need craft as well to enable the life of their society within this seemingly chaotic world between births and deaths. Birth and death are transitional situations, and therefore pertain to this world of transition, as Soyinka himself says: "It must be remembered that within this abyss are the activities of birth, death and resorption in phenomena (for the abyss is the transition between the various stages of existence)" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 154). Within these two transitional states lies the world of the living, beyond them are the world of the ancestors and the world of the unborn. The soundness and continuity of society is guaranteed by transposing the transitional abyss that shows itself in situations such as birth and death; if this transposition is not done correctly, the whole of society is in peril of losing itself within the transitional void. What, then, are the devices needed to effect this transposition? As stated above, the devices are the ceremonies, the sacrifices, the rituals—rituals of birth to ensure a sound passage for the unborn into the world of the living and rituals of death to enable those who died to follow their path to the ancestors' world and the many forms of rituals to ensure the continuity of the world of the living.

The actors of a ritual play assume, then, the role of Ogun, and the god is the archetype for each of them. The devices of poetry, music, dance and the other crafts that compose ritual action are in line with the iron implement Ogun used to destroy the rock.

These different dimensions of ritual become intertwined: Music and language are not separated and they both find their matrix in the world of myth. Yoruba is known to be a tonal language and, according to Beier (1970), the Yoruba use a drum, called the *dundun* drum, which is known as "the talking drum" due to its capacity of reproducing the tones of speech; the skilled drummers are able to reproduce whole sentences in their instruments that can be understood by their audiences. This is a technical example of the convertibility of speech and music in Yoruba culture, but Soyinka says that the congeniality of one with the other, and of both with myth, goes deeper:

> it is 'unmusical' to separate Yoruba musical form from myth and poetry. The nature of Yoruba music is intensively the nature of its language and poetry, highly charged, symbolic, myth-embryonic [….] Language therefore is not a barrier to the profound universality of music but a cohesive dimension and clarification of that willfully independent art-form which we label music. Language reverts in religious rites to its pristine existence, eschewing the sterile limits of particularization. In cult funerals, the circle of initiate mourners, an ageless swaying grove of dark pines, raises a chant around a mortar of fire, and words are taken back to their roots, to their original poetic sources when fusion was total and the movement of words was the very passage of music and the dance of images. Language is still the embryo of thought and music where myth is daily companion, for there language is constantly mythopoeic (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 147).

Music has a special importance in ritual and its function is allowing the crossing of the abyss of transition, since, as Soyinka says, music is the expression of the will, and will only be able to rescue the actor from disintegration in this abyss as it was what enabled Ogun to re-assemble himself after plunging into it. "Ogun is the embodiment of will, and the will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 150).

The tragic actor, then, as singer, poet, dancer, armed with craft and will, is challenged to cross the gulf of transition, facing disintegration on behalf of community. Or, as Ketu Katrak says in *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*:

> in Soyinka's tragic universe, the resolutions lie in the human hands of the tragic protagonists who must undergo severe trials and tests of their human will for survival, and who must try to emerge out of the tragic suffering through the strength of the same human will (KATRAK, 1986, p. 34).

The significance of ritual drama goes beyond aesthetic and technical considerations and reaches societal and metaphysical dimensions. This comes to change

the very relationship the tragic actor has with the space of dramatic action. We have seen earlier how Soyinka remarks that the drama of the gods takes place and is reproduced in the cosmic entirety—the same place where the life of the society occurs. This cosmic entirety, the very immensities of open space, are where the ancestor, the unborn and the living exist and is also the stage where ritual drama is set. In another essay of *Myth, Literature and the African World*, "Drama and the African World View," Soyinka elaborates further on this space and its significance. Ritual drama occurs in the wilderness, the very immensities that gave men their first apprehension of the mysteries of infinity; thereon, the presence of the ancestors and the unborn along with the living in the ritual drama broaden the space of acting to metaphysical dimensions, contrarily to what occurs in modern theatre, where the confinement of plays to closed arenas provide a strictly physical space:

> Ritual theatre, let it be recalled, establishes the spatial medium not merely as a physical area for simulated events but as a manageable contraction of the cosmic envelope within which man—no matter how deeply buried such a consciousness has latterly become—fearfully exists. And this attempt to manage the immensity of his spatial awareness makes every manifestation in ritual theatre a paradigm for the cosmic human condition (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 41).

The difference in conception between the two forms of theatre has consequences that go as far as the relationship between the actor and the audience. According to Soyinka, the sympathetic tension felt by the audience in relation to the actor, in European theatre, is related to technical aspects such as remembering the text or being able to cope with vocal registers, whereas in the African ritual theatre, the main tension felt by the audience is related to whether the ritual actor will be able to avoid disintegration in the void of archetypes. The position of the ritual actor, therefore, is one of ontological peril since in his acting he straddles the borders between the worlds of the ancestor, the unborn and the living.

The difference between the European and African theatre settings is a result, therefore, of different worldviews. This difference in worldview as reflected in theatre is exemplified by Soyinka in the reception by European audiences of the play *Song of a Goat* by the Ijaw-Nigerian poet and playwright J. P. Clark, which tells a story set in a traditional riverine community in Nigeria; a married man suffers from impotence which leads his wife to search for a traditional healer, who suggests her to have intercourse

with her husband's brother. When she does so, a fatal quarrel is set between the two brothers, ending in tragedy within the community. The European audiences were not convinced of the tragic character of the conflict, which was seen as essentially an individual one. However, Soyinka remarks, the drama of impotence cannot be separated "from the regenerative promise of earth and sea" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 51). Within this view, "[s]omething has occurred to disrupt the natural rhythms and the cosmic balances of the total community" (id.)—a view that is characterized by "an unselfconscious conjunction of the circumcentric worlds of man, social community and Nature in the minds of each character, irrespective of role" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 52). Soyinka rounds the discussion by saying:

> Where society lives in a close inter-relation with Nature, regulates its existence by natural phenomena within the observable processes of continuity – ebb and tide, waxing and waning of the moon, rain and drought, planting and harvest – the highest moral order is seen as that which guarantees a parallel continuity of the species (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 52).

Similarly, the Yoruba opera *Oba Koso*, written in Yoruba by the playwright Duro Ladipo about the drama of power of the king Sango (the same narrated in Chapter One of this dissertation), provides him with the groundwork for discussing the interplay between individual and communal drama and its bearings in the "spiritual consolidation of the race through immersion in the poetry of origin" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 56). Sango's hubristic act, which leads him to be rejected by his people, can only be remedied by his self-sacrifice, which is paramount in restoring a disrupted order. His resulting deification and tutelage of such a morally and socially symbolic natural phenomenon as lightning poses Sango as the symbol of a natural-social cycle in which he becomes a paradigm of racial origin for the people of Oyo and, consequentially, the Yoruba people at large:

> Sango dares the symbolic abyss of transition on behalf of his people, the resources which he calls upon for his passage of terror must be both good and evil. His tragic excess and weakness fulfil the cyclic demand on, and provoke the replenishment of, choric (communal) energies and resilience. It is an eternal tension which is sustained by challenge and response, so thorough and if necessary so 'amoral' that the protagonist is seen as a reflection of that communal strength in all its mottled nature (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 58).

Through his analyses of these plays, Soyinka sketches what is, according to him, an African worldview. In the investigation of the features of this worldview as sketched by Soyinka, the characterization of the second phase of his critical thought by Biodun Jeyifo as neo-Negritudinist—as well as Eldred Jones's assertion about the similarity of Soyinka's works with Negritude thinking—comes under a clearer light. There are undisguisable similarities between the African identity as viewed by Soyinka and by Senghor. As it was already remarked, Soyinka's distinction between what he calls "animism," which he deems an essential characteristic of African poetics, and surrealism is very much in line with Senghor's distinction between African surreality and European surrealism. Likewise, the convertibility between language, poetry, myth and music—and their reflections in the visual arts—resemble Senghor's postulation that, in the African arts, the word of poetry is intrinsically articulated with music and dance and projected into sculpture. Finally, we have seen that Soyinka also posits a concentricity of African society in which the organic circles that form its structure are directly projected from the structuration and the functioning of the surrounding natural phenomena—a much similar view to Senghor's Negro-African society.

The point that allows the distinction between their views seems to lie in their articulation of an idea of race. We have already seen how Soyinka uses the term especially to define an important aspect of the tutelage of the Orisa Sango. However, it should be remarked that the idea of race as used by Soyinka is not the same as that articulated by Senghor. As we have seen earlier, Senghor's "race" is based on a biological substrate, present in every individual of African descent, which would condition a certain attitude toward the world and a way of experiencing it. On an abstract or metaphysical level, Senghor speaks of a Black *soul*, which would be the springhead of the Black race. The idea of a Black "soul" is, nevertheless, as fixed as that of a Black biology, since both are constructs that would be inherent in every Black individual. On its turn, Soyinka's idea of race seems not to draw upon biology or psychology at all, being actually a cultural substrate and a collective identity which are able to bring together a group of individuals that identify with it.

In using Sango as the paradigm of racial origin, Soyinka is obviously referring to the Yoruba race (in Soyinka's sense). However, as it was remarked before, the Yoruba identity is enlarged by Soyinka to universal levels, insofar as it can comprehend all of Africa and ultimately all of humanity. According to Tanure Ojaide, "[t]o Soyinka, 'the

African world' is synonymous with the Yoruba world" (OJAIDE, 1994, p.6). We have seen Robert Fraser's citation in which he associates the Yoruba identity to a sympathy with all humanity. There is another citation, belonging to the same passage—Fraser's study of Soyinka's narrative poem *Ogun Abibimañ*—which gives this idea a theological basis. In *Ogun Abibiman*, the Yoruba god of iron is ranked to fight alongside Shaka, the mythic Zulu emperor and warlord. This association, says Fraser,

> (….) is made feasible by the elemental aspect of Yoruba religion itself; its identification of Ogun's hammer with all metal, whether cable, bell, sword or machine gun; its further association of the spark at the naked forge with all fire and hence with the conflagration which, in the wake of a conclusive call to liberation, might well engulf the whole land of Abibiman (FRASER, 2001, p. 296-297).

It should be remarked that the word *Abibiman*, according to Soyinka's explanatory note to the poem, is "From the Akan, the Black Nation; the land of the Black Peoples; the Black World; that which pertains to, the matter, the affair of, Black peoples" (SOYINKA, 1976, p. 23). Therefore, Ogun passes from the benefactor of the Yoruba race to that of all Black peoples, and the notion of a Black race is no longer a fixed identity fatalistically inscribed in a genetic code or in an unchangeable soul, but a spiritual affinity with a paradigm of origin. It should be remarked, also, that, as we have seen in the first chapter, the notion of the Yoruba being the original people from which all other peoples sprung is something found in Yoruba mythology itself, which postulates that Ile Ife is the origin of all human races and cultures.

Even with this undeniably greater flexibility in Soyinka's notion of a Black race or collectivity, Soyinka's views are not exempted from criticism. Kwame Anthony Appiah in his *In my Father's House*, questions and problematizes the search for an African identity and its parallel search for an African literature in general and particularly in the case of Wole Soyinka. First of all, Appiah observes that the inceptive constitution of an African culture is in part a projection of identities engendered not in Africa, but in Europe. According to the Ghanaian philosopher, "the course of cultural nationalism in Africa has been to make real the imaginary identities to which Europe has subjected us" (APPIAH, 1992, p. 62). The case of Wole Soyinka demands such special attention that Appiah dedicates a whole chapter to it.

The cohering of an African world as postulated by early African-American authors who directed their attention to Africa in the early 20th century, such as Edward Wylmot Blyden and Alexander Crummel, used the notion of a single African race as the criterion uniting Africans and their descendants around the world. The same, as we saw, could be said about Senghor, even though the Senegalese poet could go beyond the mere idea of race and draw upon the notion of a common Black culture based on the spiritual features of the Black race. In case of the Anglophone writers of the generation of Wole Soyinka, the idea of an African culture became more and more what could articulate an African identity. Appiah points out that, to reach this articulation, Wole Soyinka takes for granted an African world—especially in *Myth, Literature and the African World*—and this African world, Appiah remarks as did Tanure Ojaide, is synonymous with the Yoruba world. The fact that Soyinka's readership is largely European and American is only part of the problem—these readers, Appiah argues, would hardly be familiar with the references to Yoruba culture. However, the problem becomes deeper when we remember that most of an African readership would not be familiar with these references as well:

> The reason that Africa cannot take an African cultural or political or intellectual life for granted is that there is no such thing: there are only so many traditions with their complex relationships and, as often, their lack of any relationship—to each other (APPIAH, 1992, p. 80).

Appiah does not discard a notion such as "African literature," which he considers useful since there are factors that unite these different cultures that are considered African. However, he denies that this bringing together of these cultures could be effected by metaphysical consensus or by a common mythology; what brings African cultures together is a set of problems that are common to recently decolonized nations—problems that could be addressed by an African literature—problems such as transition from traditional to modern, racial prejudice and discrimination, the experience of colonialism and others. What leads Soyinka into positing the existence of a common metaphysical and mythical African world, Appiah theorizes, is that the Nigerian writer revolts against seeing such problems that were brought upon the African communities by European colonialism as the cohering factor for Africa and accordingly looks for an endogenous common denominator for the conception of an African identity.

This essentialism of Soyinka's theory of an African world is also pointed out by Abiola Irele in relation to, on one end, the theories of Léopold Sédar Senghor and, on the other, Cheikh Anta Diop's ideas about a cultural unity of African nations that could be historically found in ancient Egypt:

> Against the massive postulate of an African essence implied by Senghor's formulations, Cheikh Anta Diop has propounded a more dynamic theory of Africanism, a distinctive disposition of the African personality whose determinations go back to the civilization of ancient Egypt. Yet his thesis involves no more, ultimately, than a projection of this abstract personality from a metaphysical onto a historical plane. Soyinka's response is even less differentiated than that of Cheikh Anta Diop. For despite his well-publicized stand against Senghor's Negritude, it becomes clear from a consideration of his work that he only burrows deeper into the essentialism that underlies the concept as he endeavors to give a more vivid realization to the "magnitude of unfelt abstractions" that Negritude represents for him. Soyinka thus opposes Senghor's concept with an organicism that amounts in reality to a more thoroughgoing traditionalism (IRELE, 2001, p. 62).

Nevertheless, Soyinka's articulation of an African world can be read in a different light if we take into consideration the very figure of the Orisa that becomes, for Soyinka, the archetype of the African in fight for the affirmation of an African identity. In discussing the figure of Ogun as proposed by Soyinka in "The Fourth Stage," Professor Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis observes how the dynamicity and multiplicity of the god of iron and craft endows Soyinka's postulation of an African identity with a fluidity that challenges the deep essentialism perceived by Appiah and Irele in Soyinka's theory:

> In considering Ogun a paradigmatic figure of African identity, Soyinka somehow relativizes the essentialism contained in his defense of an African world. After all, it is multiplicity that characterizes this world as well as its potential for metamorphosis. Thus, instead of the "essence" of the Black race, there is an ever-changing identity; instead of a root, what is found is the rhizome, as affirmed by Edouard Glissant in *La Poéthique de la Relation* (A poética da relação) (REIS, 1999, p. 182-183, my translation).

Indeed, if we take into consideration the characterization offered by Soyinka of the Orisa Ogun, Sango and Obatala, it is very significant that Soyinka chooses Ogun and not the other two as an archetype for the African identity. Sango, as we remember, stands for the establishment of a racial being, Obatala for the serene stability of essence whereas Ogun represents primal becoming and, most of all, the will to overcome

limiting situations. This reading is in accordance with the ideas of Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis, for whom the theory proposed in "The Fourth Stage" goes beyond the association between theatre and ritual in Africa, "becoming a theorization about cultural contacts and an attempt to, at the same time, define an African identity and relate it to other cultural identities" (REIS, 1999 p. 153). In this vein, the African identity as proposed by Soyinka extrapolates the actual territories of Africa. In the essay "The Credo of Being and Nothingness" (SOYINKA, 1994), which appeared first as a lecture at the University of Ibadan in 1991 to a largely Christian audience, Soyinka addresses the issue of religious intolerance through an understanding of the polarity between existence and non-existence, being and nothingness, which are characteristics attributed by most of the major religions to themselves (being) and the competing religions (nothingness). In face of the violence with which many religions tend to react to the forms of spirituality (and non-spirituality) that occupy that undistinguished blank area deemed "nothingness," Soyinka responds not with a modern iconoclastic atheism, but with what Biodun Jeyifo calls "a deliberate celebration of radical agnosticism and 'pagan' animistic spirituality," whose literary inspiring model would be the Persian poet Omar Khayam (JEYIFO, 2009, p. 76). As a corollary of his lecture, Soyinka suggest that his Christian audience "study the spirituality of this continent [….] go to the *orisa*, learn from them and be wise" (SOYINKA, 1994, p. 246), offering seven ethical precepts elicited from his reflections on the Orisa ontology, presenting the African gods as models of a far more tolerant spirituality, which could eschew condemning other faiths to the reign of nothingness—a belief echoed many times in Soyinka's career, such as in "The Tolerant Gods," the opening essay to the collection of essays *Òrìsà Devotion as World Religion*, edited by Jacob Olupona and Terry Rey, where Soyinka presents the Orisa as "the very embodiment of Tolerance" (SOYINKA, 2008, p. 40).

Therefore, Soyinka's African Orisa world extends far beyond the soil of Africa. Indeed, it could be said that he draws upon the strong presence of the Yoruba deities in Black communities of the Americas to reinforce his belief in the possibility of the Orisa as a unification force for Africans and their descendants elsewhere in the world and as a message of traditional Africa to the world.

LITERATURE AS MYTHOPOIESIS

In perceiving the depth to which Soyinka delves into Yoruba myth in his theory, it is difficult not to raise the question of whether Soyinka is a religious writer or not. Indeed, this question is asked by Mary T. David in her article "Yoruba Heritage and a Christian Home"—her contribution to the collection of critical essays about the works of Wole Soyinka *The Writer as Myth Maker—South-Asian Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*. She arrives at the following answer:

> One cannot label Soyinka as a "religious writer" if that description applies to a writer who resorts to dogma or institutional terms or conventional religious symbols. However, one can surely say that Soyinka's work has a strong orientation to the sacred, which, as historians of religion tell us, is the irreducible element of all religious experience. It is suffused with a sense of the numinous and reflects a worldview that involves a co-ordination of the physical and the spiritual (DAVID, 2004, p. 3).

Even in face of the observations made by Professor Eliana Reis about a relativization of the essentialism of Soyinka's position enabled by the very deity who is the groundwork to his thinking, it is difficult not to posit a numinous dimension to his views. The fact is that, since Soyinka is a writer who is deeply concerned with social, political and racial issues, he does not place them in a down-to-earth dimension while enclosing his mythical and numinous considerations in an ethereal reign of archetypes, but articulates them. Actually, if we remember how the intermingling of the natural and the supernatural is a characteristic of the worldview in Yoruba mythology—something that is reflected in the works of Daniel Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola as examined before—, Soyinka is being perfectly consistent with the claim that he is primarily a Yoruba writer. Myth and social reality are not separated, but articulated in his thought, as we have seen; this intermingling seems to be even stronger in his imaginative works, where history encounters myth in a continuous "loop of time" (SOYINKA, 1987, p. 68) as he himself says in his narrative poem "Idanre"—a link also perceived by the critic Stanley Macebuh:

> If it is true, as Eliot once suggested that there can be no culture without religion, we may be equally certain that there can be no history without myth. And to the extent that myth and history are complementary, it may be suggested that Soyinka's persistent meditation on myth is an attempt to reveal the primal foundations of African culture, and therefore of history. To say, then, that Soyinka is a dramatist is to say that he has chosen as his medium that literary form most appropriate for the communication of the hardly tangible anatomy of

> the ancestral memory. Soyinka is, first and foremost, a mythopoiest; his imagination is, in quite a fundamental sense, a mythic imagination (MACEBUH, 2001 p. 29).

This mythic imagination can be associated to the mythic mindset as studied by Mircea Eliade in works such as *Aspects du Mythe* (1963) and *Le Mythe de l'Éternel Retour* (1969). According to these works, the so called mythic mindset that is found in many distinct cultures (the Yoruba included) is best characterized by the cyclical notion of time: The world was once created by a divine force. In its trajectory, time flows circularly in a continuous return to the origins in a movement that parallels the cycles of birth, growth, destruction and regeneration of nature. The rituals of passage, such as those associated to the new year, are a form of guaranteeing man's due participation within these cycles of rebirth whereas rituals of cure search for a regeneration via a return to the origins. That is why, Eliade tells us, many of these rituals include a recitation of the myth of origin—time has to be recreated in such situations.

This doctrine is in line with Soyinka's observations on the Yoruba cyclic existence as occurring within the realms of the living, the ancestors and the unborn, and the importance of rituals and sacrifices in ensuring the continuity of this cycle. It is in line, as well, with the already touched upon essay by Davis, "Yoruba Heritage and a Christian Home," where the forces of the numinous and the sacred in Soyinka's work are associated first and foremost with the notion of healing and regeneration, as commented by the author herself: "In the world of Soyinka's creativity, these forces are often seen as agents of renewal" (DAVIS, 2004, p. 3).

This cyclical notion of time is represented already in one of his first plays to achieve celebrity: *A Dance of the Forests*, which was staged in Nigeria in 1960 to clebrate the nation's independence—an uncommon choice for such a celebration due to the cynicism of the work. The play presents the story of a recently-independent African nation which decides to summon the ancestors to participate in the celebration. In the place of the ancestors, an unknown dead couple arises in conditions that attract only fear and contempt of those who cross their path. Meanwhile, the preparations for the celebration are involved in myriad corruptions and bribes, anticipating a not very optimistic future for the nation. A group of supernatural creatures inhabiting the forest, including the Orisa Ogun, participate in the action as the conflicts involving them

mirror the conflicts involving the humans. In the middle of this complex play, two of the main supernatural forest creatures—the godly figure of Forest Head and Aroni, his assistant—turn back time some centuries. We are faced then with an ancestral and powerful African kingdom reigned by the monarch called Mata Kharibu. In this golden age kingdom we see characters that parallel those in the present performing the same corrupt actions as their present correspondents. There, we discover that the dead man and woman were actually part of the court of Mata Kharibu: he was a captain who once refused to lead his men in a perilous battle against the orders of the king. In addition, when seduced by the queen, he refused her. He ends up being castrated and sold as a slave and dies on the slave ship that would take him to his destination. The dead woman was his then-pregnant wife who was killed with the baby still in her womb. This baby appears in a scene in the end of the play where myriad spirits and forces reveal their dangerous and harmful side to humanity. However, the baby appears not as a complete newborn, but as a half-child, an image Soyinka probably got from a chapter in Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. The half-child changes hands until it is handed to the woman who would have been his mother. During the scene, the half-child pronounces the following lines:

> I who yet await a mother
>
> Feel this dread
>
> Feel this dread
>
> I who flee from womb to branded womb, cry it now
>
> I'll be born dead, I'll be born dead
>
> (SOYINKA, 1973, p. 64)

The presence of the half-child in the end of the play allows us to complete the whole cycle of life and death in the Yoruba worldview as presented in Soyinka's essays; however, the cycle in this situation is being disrupted by the corrupt acts of humans which are present in both the world of the living (the recently-independent nation) and of the ancestors (the court of Mata Kharibu). Here, the evil acts of humans work in the opposite way that work the rituals, sacrifices and ceremonies in a healthy traditional societies: while the latter renew and strengthen the bonds between the three worlds, the former accelerate a loosing of the same bonds and the derailment of the axes of the Yoruba world. The half-child represents the world of the unborn, but in a very dark

manner: it is an unborn that will never be born or will be born dead, remaining a lost spirit through the times. It is clear that, in the case of *A Dance of the Forests*, the cycle is not of regeneration, but degeneration and it is so because of the actions of humans. As the English critic Martin Esslin once pointed out, the very philosophy of the play is “strangely conservative and resigned” (ESSLIN, 1980 p. 286) for a writer of a new nation celebrating its independence.

A Dance of the Forests puts us in touch with the agency of humans in the cyclic movement of time—human actions can bring the cycle to disruption. The same cyclic notion of time is apparent in another play called *The Strong Breed*, published in 1964. The action of this play takes place in a small Nigerian village during the celebration of the New Year. Eman, a schoolteacher from another village, is frequently summoned by Sunma, the daughter of a chief, who is evidently fond of Eman, to leave the village in a lorry before the celebration starts. During this time, a New Year habit is revealed: a scapegoat must be chosen to atone for the villagers’ sins of the last year in order for the New Year to start afresh. The scapegoat of choice in the situation is Ifada, a young boy with cognitive problems. It does not take long for Eman to perceive what is happening and to offer himself as the scapegoat in Ifada’s place. During the time Eman is chased by the villagers, we are referred, through flashbacks, to Eman’s past in his original village, and we have the opportunity to witness conversations between Eman and his father, who was frequently assigned the role of “carrier”—the one who carries the sins in the New Year’s ceremony. However, we get to discover as well that there were some differences between the convention in one village and the other. In Eman’s village, a person to be a carrier had to be willing and the ceremony involved an activity that required great physical strength—crossing a river with heavy loads—, but to which a man could survive. In the new village, no permission was asked, and the ritual would inevitably end with the death of the carrier. During the flashback conversation between Eman and his father, we also discover that Eman had a wife who died giving birth to his child. Eman was supposed to take the place of his father as regular carrier, but decided to leave to another town:

> EMAN: I will never come back.
>
> OLD MAN: Do you know what you are saying? Ours is a strong breed my son. It is only a strong breed that can take this boat to the river year after year and wax stronger on it. I have taken down each year's evils for over twenty years. I hoped you would follow me.
>
> (SOYINKA, 1973, p. 133)

It is no coincidence that, in deserting his original destiny as a carrier in his hometown, he would live it in a new town, but under worse circumstances. In Eman's spatial dislocation between one town and the other, we see also a kind of temporal dislocation that, as happens with *A Dance of the Forests*, describes a circular movement of degradation. The New Year ritual in Eman's town demanded physical strength, but, above all, the force of will for the carrier to survive the travel. In the new town, the carrier, before being replaced by Eman, was a boy who had no conditions to as much as know what was happening; in other words, no force of will, strength or dexterity were necessary, the carrier no longer being a subject, but a simple object. Eman's trajectory, is one of descent: he ended up living unwillingly what he was destined to live willfully had he followed the steps of his ancestors. The death of Eman's child marks the presence of the world of the unborn also in this degeneration cycle.

In *The Strong Breed*, we see, as a minor but relevant element, a metaphor that is of the utmost importance in many of Soyinka's plays: the road; the road as a place of passage and transition as we see in his play titled exactly "The Road," whose action takes place in a roadside store of car parts stolen from accidents; the store is sided by a Church. In this store, drivers, sellers, corrupt law agents and thugs working for running politicians move and act. Among these characters, the one named "Professor" stands out: he is the owner of the store and a former teacher at the nearby Church. An eccentric character, he displays features of both a scholar and a madman since he claims to be frequently searching for "the Word" as he indulges in unlawful activities such as selling stolen car parts and forging driving licenses for drivers who cannot afford to have legal licenses. The action of the play is marked by the figures of the dead drivers who are frequently referred to by those living. In addition to its structural complexity, the play also shows complexity in language since it is written not only in English, but also in Yoruba (the songs) and Pidgin English.

These are plays marked by myriad forms of transition and intermediation. In an interview with Ulli Beier, Soyinka once rejected the idea that he was a "man in-between" (SOYINKA, 2001, P. 167). It may well be so, but it is nevertheless undeniable that the notion of transition and passage between states of being and uncertain states is a very frequent element in his works, particularly those of the early years. Let it always be recalled that he was living and writing in a country found in an uncertain situation—not only was Nigeria passing from a colonized to an independent country, its people was also found in a cultural situation in which strains of traditional cultures related with features of modern culture. The transitional spaces found in his works include not only physical transition, but also that between the physical and the metaphysical, between the world of the living and that of the ancestors and the unborn, the transitional abyss as a constant mediator. However, there are aspects of these forms of transition that should be remarked. First, it is difficult to separate between political, physical and metaphysical transition. Second, the lines between the spaces are never neatly drawn, which is a trait already seen as definitional of what was understood to be a Yoruba mindset as exemplified in the works of Fagunwa and Tutuola. The same token is adopted by Soyinka. As Abiola Irele once said in the aforementioned article "Tradition and the Yoruba Writer," the cosmic setting of *A Dance of the Forests* is very similar to that of Fagunwa: the forest as a place where the natural and the supernatural commingle as humans, Orisa and other supernatural beings relate. In the other plays by Soyinka, the commingling of planes is not as evident as in *A Dance of the Forests* or in the works of Fagunwa and Tutuola, since there is not the direct intervention of supernatural creatures, but the very mindset of the plays ensures this supernatural element as will be seen in Chapter 3.

In *The Road*, on the other hand, the transition goes beyond the physical and metaphysical. As Professor Christiane Fioupou has stressed in her book *La Route*, the mobility is social and linguistic (FIOUPOU, 1994, p. 35). In this play, there are elements of transition in many of its planes: pidgin English mediates between English and Yoruba as a fluctuating language (FIOUPOU, 1994, p. 37), the road mediates between different destinations, and the frequent deaths on the road mediate between the world of the living and that of the dead. As well, the mode of ritual or festival often emerges in the play; there, the characters frequently impersonate other (including dead) characters and invent different identities for themselves.

It is important to notice that, despite the fact that the plays sketched above have been written before *Myth, Literature and the African World*, many of the themes and ideas discussed in this book already appear therein. There is strong affinity between the investigations regarding Yoruba thought and worldview discussed in Chapter One and Soyinka's own rendition of a Yoruba mindset in his essays. And the features of this mindset are present in the very structure of many of his plays. Once these features are sketched and discussed in general, it is important to proceed to the discussion of our main object of study in this dissertation—the play *Death and the King's Horseman*.

CHAPTER 3

OJA ATI ILE

(MARKETPLACE AND HOME)

THE HORSEMAN READ AND STAGED

The play *Death and the King's Horseman* is one of Soyinka's most celebrated works. Written in 1973, it was first published in 1975 and premiered in 1976 at the University of Ife. Afterwards, the play came to be presented in many places in Africa, Europe and the United States. One of the first reviews of the play, by the critic Gerald Moore, stresses the use Soyinka makes of stage resources to mirror the structure of the play, highlighting the isolation of the main character in relation to the other characters who constitute the chorus (MOORE, 1980, p. 126-127). From then on, much has been written and discussed about this play. Simon Gikandi, in his Introduction to the Norton's Critical Edition of the play, points out that, when Soyinka was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1986, the Swedish Academy highlighted this work as "the synthesis of Soyinka's primary concerns as a writer" (GIKANDI, 2003, p. vii).

Since very early in its appearance on stage, some important difficulties have been pointed out. Martin Rohmer, in reviewing a production at the Royal Exchange Theatre in November 1990, has focused on the difficulties the play poses to a Western director and audience (ROHMER, 2003, p. 121). These difficulties do not lie exclusively in Westerners' lack of knowledge about the references linked to Yoruba culture, but also—and perhaps mainly so—in the metaphysical aspects of Soyinka's plays as they are set on a stage. As we have seen in the previous chapter in Soyinka's rendition of what he calls "ritual drama," there are strong and important metaphysical issues regarding the space on which the play is set—in this case, open-spaces arenas in which the drama of the gods and heroes has originally taken place and are mythically reenacted in every presentation. The physical environment is filled with the presences of the ancestors and the unborn who come to join the living in the celebration. Martin Rohmer, in his review, has identified this metaphysical energy in Soyinka's plays even as they are staged in modern closed arenas. It is important to point out that this

metaphysical dimension does not appear only in the thematic aspects, but also in the expressive means that are used, and this brings us to yet another major difficulty presented by the staging of Soyinka's plays for Western audiences: verbal dialog is only one mean of expression and communication, music and dance being as important. The fact is that music and dance are also used as means of communication in many African societies—the Yoruba included—and Soyinka takes this aspect of his culture to his theatre works. Therefore, in a culture where music and dance have very little direct communicative value and, in the theatre, usually function as mere appendages to the text being delivered, this cannot but represent a challenge. Therefore an analysis of a play such as *Death and the King's Horseman* demands us to cope with both the role of extra-verbal resources in theatre and the metaphysical dimension of theatre.

Biodun Jeyifo points to the fact that ritual has largely become the main paradigm through which most readings of Soyinka's theatre are made. Indeed, the plays in which ritual is more broadly used are considered by the Nigerian critic to be the most ambitious in Soyinka's corpus, including *Death and the King's Horseman*. However, Jeyifo highlights two aspects of Soyinka's use of ritual that are frequently left aside and that indicate a seeming contradiction: first, that Soyinka draws upon very ancient and autochthonous rituals in his plays, those rituals that see their existence endangered by modern culture; and second, that Soyinka often uses the "ritual matrix" as a paradigm to analyze the works of other artists, including modern playwrights and painters (JEYIFO, 2009, p. 123-125). Therefore, the fact that Soyinka is interested in the most pristine and ancient rituals does not prevent him from seeing ritual as intrinsically modern and even revolutionary. Moreover, it is also Biodun Jeyifo who sees the agency of "anti-ritual" in Soyinka's play as a way of relativizing the importance of ritual in his works. This is what leads Jeyifo to see ritual as one, even if extremely important, among other performative modes deployed by Soyinka in his work, which would be better characterized by the "festival complex," which encompasses a myriad of resources, as do Soyinka's most ambitious plays.

In relation to the metaphysical dimension present in *Death and the King's Horseman* (and in other plays), there should be an investigation of the very theme and other elements. In the previous chapter we have seen how Soyinka, despite not being intrinsically linked to one institutionalized religion and its dogma, is deeply attached to the numinous and supernatural aspect of life in his works and how this aspect appears in

some of his plays. We have seen how the notion of life beyond death and reincarnation and the intermediary stages between life and death were prominent in *A Dance of the Forests* as much as how the roads uniting different physical places and those uniting the planes of existence intersected in *The Road*. And how about *Death and the King's Horseman*? To start delving into the play's metaphysical significance, we first need to be acquainted with its plot.

Death and the King's Horseman is based on a true event that happened in the city of Oyo in 1946, than under British rule. After the King had died, his Chief Horseman—Elesin Oba—was supposed to commit suicide to lead the King in the journey to the abode of the ancestors. In case it did not happen, the King would lose his path to the abode and the whole world as understood by the Yoruba would be completely set adrift. In this time, however, the British Colonial District Officer heard about what would happen and prevented the ritual suicide from taking place by arresting the Horseman, causing distress to the society. To counter the disruptive effects, the Horseman's son died in his place, leading Elesin Oba to commit suicide in prison. This is basically the plot of the play by Soyinka. The Norton Critical Edition comes with a prefatory note by Soyinka himself which, due to its importance, I shall quote in full:

> This play is based on events which took place in Oyo, ancient Yoruba city of Nigeria, in 1946. That year, the lives of Elesin (Olori Elesin), his son, and the Colonial District Officer intertwined with the disastrous results set out in the play. The changes I have made are in matters of detail, sequence and of course characterisation. The action has also been set back two or three years to while the war was still on, for minor reasons of dramaturgy.
>
> The factual account still exists in the archives of the British Colonial Administration. It has already inspired a fine play in Yoruba (Oba Wàjà) by Duro Ladipo. It has also misbegotten a film by some German television company.
>
> The bane of themes of this genre is that they are no sooner employed creatively than they acquire the facile tag of 'clash of cultures', a prejudicial label which, quite apart from its frequent misapplication, presupposes a potential equality *in every given situation* of the alien culture and the indigenous, on the actual soil of the latter. (In the area of misapplication, the overseas prize for illiteracy and mental conditioning undoubtedly goes to the blurb-writer for the American edition of my novel *Season of Anomy* who unblushingly declares that this work portrays the 'clash between old values and new ways, between western methods and African traditions'!) It is thanks to this kind of perverse mentality that I find it necessary to caution the would-be producer of this play against a sadly familiar reductionist tendency, and to direct his vision instead to the far more difficult and risky task of eliciting the play's threnodic essence.

> One of the more obvious alternative structures of the play would be to make the District Officer the victim of a cruel dilemma. This is not to my taste and it is not by chance that I have avoided dialogue or situation which would encourage this. No attempt should be made in production to suggest it. The Colonial Factor is an incident, a catalytic incident merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind—the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition. *Death and the King's Horseman* can be fully realised only through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition.

The directions given by Soyinka cannot but be controversial, especially when, in a play taking place in the colonial situation in Africa, and focusing on a conflict between a native and a colonial order, he demands a metaphysical perspective. Such a perspective has been the subject of criticism or questioning. Kwame Anthony Appiah comments about Soyinka's claim: "I find the tone of this passage strained, the claim disingenuous" (APPIAH, 1992, P. 78), since, for him, the "Colonial Factor" is actually "a profound assault on the consciousness of the African intellectual, on the consciousness that guides this play" (id.). Appiah concludes his commentary on Soyinka's note hinting on the reason why Soyinka drives the discussion this way:

> It is perhaps because he has not resolved the tension between the desire that arises from his *enracinement* in the European tradition of authorship to see his literary work as, so to speak, authentic, "metaphysical," and the desire he must feel as an African in a once-colonized and merely notionally decolonized culture to face up to and reflect the problem at the level of ideology? Is it, to put it briskly, because Soyinka is torn between the demands of a private authenticity and a public commitment? Between individual self-discovery and what he elsewhere calls the "social vision"? (APPIAH, 1992, p. 78)

In other words, the push toward a metaphysical perspective seen in Soyinka is due partly to his position as an African writer educated within European culture, to a commitment hesitating between the self and the culture.

The same metaphysical stance is criticized by Biodun Jeyifo on the grounds that it—and the notions of honor and dignity that arise from it—is a product of a social form of class organization that is neither uncovered nor criticized by Soyinka in the play. Jeyifo criticizes Soyinka for naturalizing a worldview—the Yoruba worldview—that is actually the result of a complex social order. As Jeyifo himself has put it:

> In the process of polarizing the conflict of *Death and the King's Horseman* between an alien, and an indigenous African world view, Soyinka has suppressed the real, objective differences between conflicting groups and classes within the indigenous system (JEYIFO, 2003, p. 171).

On the other hand, Abiola Irele raises the very important question of language and how it works in the play:

> The work is a play centered on a precise, crucial moment of rupture in the African consciousness. In formal terms, the play progresses from an immediate realization of orality as the expressive mode of a total way of life to what can only be described, within its specific context, as the tragic loss of the empowering function of the word in the universe of the African. The circumstantial interest of the play rests upon its theme of the encounter between the traditional ethos and Western values, between a metaphysical and a historical imperative. But it is the presentation of this encounter that gives force to the theme and significance to the work itself, for it enacts in language the form of the existential predicament it presents, the dilemma involved in the progressive decentering of the African psyche and imagination in a new dispensation that is imposing itself upon the African world. Part of the significance of *Death and the King's Horseman* is its demonstration that this process begins with language (IRELE, 2001, p. 19).

What can be ascertained initially about these different critical views is that the metaphysical question raised by Soyinka is attributed to different instances—the result of a particular worldview, the result of a social system and the result of a linguistic fact. It is an important question whether these dimensions are irreconcilable. In order to answer this, a close analysis of the play is needed.

ACT 1

The scene is set in Oyo central marketplace in its closing stage. The women are packing to go when Elesin Oba arrives followed by his praise singers and drummers. There is a spatial and a temporal aspect to be considered. Spatially, the marketplace is the center of the social life in Yoruba society; it is also a powerful metaphor for the earthly world as much as it is a place where the visible meets the invisible (LAWAL, 1996, p. 91). In temporal terms, it is the beginning of the night of the day when Elesin is to leave this world, and night, as Drewal and Drewal inform us, is a time more cogent to intermingling with spirits (DREWAL and DREWAL, 1990, p.10-11). In addition, these authors also remind us that the marketplace is controlled by women, being indeed the realm of women (DREWAL and DREWAL, 1990, p.10). In other words, Elesin Oba

goes to say goodbye to the world exactly at the place where the world is most conspicuously represented.

The first line, by the Praise-Singer, already points to a strange dilemma: the cockerel should not be seen without its feathers. Obviously he is referring to the unsolemn costume Elesin is wearing on the day that is supposed to be the most solemn of all for him. Elesin answers about it that, in this tryst, "the cockerel needs no adornment" (p. 5). This answer already gives us a hint of his attitude. He goes to visit the market in everyday clothes, which is in conflict with the character of that date.

However, it is not only the inadequacy of Elesin's clothes his Praise-Singer points to: it is a general attitude as when he says that when the man approaches "a brand-new bride he forgets the long-faithful mother of his children" (p. 5). Elesin, on his turn, seems very confident about the role he will fulfill, this confidence will reappear in his lines.

Esu, the god of unpredictability, appears in a very early line by Elesin Oba:

> ELESIN OBA The market is the long-suffering home of my spirit and the women are packing up to go. That Esu-harassed day slipped into the stewpot while we feasted. We ate it up with the rest of the meat. I have neglected my women. (p. 5)

We have discussed Esu's personality and attributes in the first chapter. We have seen that the marketplace is his homeland. Here, Elesin refers to him not in spatial, but temporal terms: this is his day, probably referring to the Yoruba tradition of assigning days of the week to the different Orisa.

The Praise-Singer receives here the appellation of Olohun-Iyo, which, Lawal explains to us, is a nickname frequently given to the *Elefe*, a highly-regarded traditional singer in the Yoruba community who can voice controversial opinions about kings and chiefs—a name which could be translated as "one who has salt in his voice" (LAWAL, 1996, p. 84). In addition, Olohun-Iyo is the name of a character in D. O. Fagunwa's novel *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale*, translated by Soyinka as *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*—a character whose main attributes were his stunningly good appearance, his sweet voice, excellent singing and drumming. We do see the Praise-Singer voicing his opinion in relation to Elesin Oba when he warns him continuously

that the cock should not be seen without its feathers. Likewise, the Praise-Singer draws Elesin's attention to stories from the past of the city of Oyo: the long and tough wars that forced the Oyo population to change the site of the city, the slave trade that took away many inhabitants; however, "our world has never wrenched from its axis" (p. 6), says the singer. Even with these catastrophic events, the world was maintained in its axes. What axes are these? One citation from Olohun-Iyo may help us:

> There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course and smashes on boulders of the great void, whose world will give us shelter? (p. 6).

Here we are evidently in face of the void theorized by Soyinka that we saw in Chapter 2. As we can remember, this void is found in the metaphysical dimension and is characterized by moving in a cyclic time and being the very origin of linear time. Here, the linear events of the history of Oyo meets the cyclic time of the void in the Praise-Singer's words, the physically real people of Oyo meet their metaphysical origin, history meets meta-history. As much as linear time depends on the cyclic time of the void, it is evident that the Praise-Singer conceives of the maintenance of the world in its axis as a task that involves primarily the metaphysical dimension. History, according to this conception, moves in a certain rhythm that exceeds it—a movement that is dictated by the movements of the great void—the axis or course to which the Praise-Singer refers is the one described by this movement; and if the world should leave this course, it would smash "on boulders of the great void," it would lose itself in the void, losing its history and its very culture. In Chapter 2 we have seen the sacrifices and rituals that were made by the ritual actor in order not to lose himself in the same void.

Elesin's answer to this question is filled with confidence: "It did not in the times of my forebears, it shall not in mine" (p. 6). The Praise-Singer once again reminds him that "the cockerel must not be seen without his feathers" (p. 6) in face of which Elesin begins a song about the "Not-I bird," a bird whose chirping, a footnote explains to us, reminds the words "Not I" in Yoruba.

> Death came calling.
>
> Who does not know his rasp of reeds?
>
> A twilight whisper in the leaves before

The great araba falls? Did you hear it?
Not I! swears the farmer. He snaps
His fingers round his head, abandons
A hard-worn harvest and begins
A rapid dialog with his legs. (p. 11)

Death, the character who had been surrounding the first scenes, makes a full appearance in the song, which mostly seems to answer how and to whom Death appears. Death is rendered here in the form of sounds: it is a whisper in the leaves or the chirp of a bird. The equation of death with a whisper in the leaves is not without precedent, as we can see in Ulli Beier's collection *Yoruba Poetry*. A riddle collected by Beier says the following: "We call the dead—they answer/We call the living—they don't answer"—the answer to this riddle is [*leaves*] (Beier, 1970. p. 113). The affinity between the leaves and the dead is strongly marked here. In a poem by Soyinka called "A cobweb's touch in the dark," form the book *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, we find an echo of this association:

Hearing
Voices of our dead in leaves their presences
Have nourished, more than in foliage essences
(SOYINKA, 1972, p. 14)

Here, Death appears in the sound of the leaves and scares the farmer, who then "begins a rapid dialog with his legs" in an expression frequently used in Soyinka's translation of Fagunwa's novel referred to before. But the farmer is not the only one to be scared and to answers with "Not-I" to the whisper in the leaves. The hunter also responds in the same manner: "Not I!" and trembles because of a sentence he himself uttered about a leaking lamp; the lamp being extinguished reminds of life being drained. From then on, the song presents a string of characters from various walks of life: the courtesan, the Muslim teacher, the babalawo, the tapper. The courtesan invokes the famous relation between menstruation and death with two time-related metaphors: "My period has come suddenly/But not—I hope—my time" whereas the Muslim teacher,

after reprehending the pupil for believing in the death-whisper in the leaves, surrounds himself with amulets to avoid the undesired guest.

The babalawo, on his turn, has the tremendous reaction of his divination instruments stopping to speak in front of his client referring to the whisper in the leaves. Ifa would not speak to him—or he would refuse to listen to his oracle should it bring a bad omen. He goes on to shut off any opening he could find in his house—Death should not come through any passage. However, the traditional priest has ways of interpreting the signs of the gods. Fawomi, the name of the priest, tells us Soyinka's note, means "Ifa watches over me"; A kite hovering in the sky, David Doris argues, is the eyes of God watching the behavior of those on the ground. Indeed, Doris records the following proverb "Àwòdì òkè kò mọ̀ pẹ́ ará ilẹ̀ nwò ó," which he translates as "The eagle flying high in the sky does not know that those on the ground are looking at him"; although he informs that the "Àwòdì" is actually the African Black Kite (DORIS, 2011, p. 185). Here, Fawomi seems to be reassured by the presence of the kite, ensuring that God is watching over him. The reference to Osanyin can be understood in the light of the fact that Osanyin is the Yoruba god of medicinal herbs—the leaves belong to him; leaves whispering are a message to him, not to the dedicated priest, who is being watched by God as the kite hovering in the sky reveals. In face of the meaning given to the signs surrounding the priest, his divinatory instruments start talking again like a "twittering chicken" in the hands of the diviner.

The stanza about the tapper brings out another reference to Esu, here with his epithet Elegbara (the mighty one). The irreverent trickster god leads Elesin's evening courier to defecate against a sacred grove. This scene echoes an anecdote registered by Drewal and Drewal as part of a Gelede spectacle in which Esu "frightens a defecating man by excreting intestines rather than feces" (1990, p. 41). The anecdote described by Drewal and Drewal is suggestive of Esu's way of behaving, in which things are turned upside down and end up functioning in the opposite way that they should. Esu likes things to be their opposite. In Soyinka's lines, the supposed action of the god makes the courier defecate in a place of reverence and awe. As a result, he immediately answers with a "Not I" to the death whispers through the leaves. Elesin Oba, however, affirms he could return to his master's home, where he would be safe from Death. As powerful as Death is, it cannot take arms against Elesin Oba. Let us remember that Samuel Johnson (2010, p.55-56) says that one of the privileges of the royal servants who die

with the king, among them the Horseman of the King, is that they can protect any person condemned to death in their house, who become free under their protection. This law is in touch with this passage, where the Elesin assures his tapper that, under Elesin's protection, he would be safe from death.

As a response to the Praise-Singer, when he suggests that one would not doubt the peace of the forest, Elesin reminds us that even the animals were frightened about the whispers in the leaves and the ominous bird. In one same stanza of his song, he passes from animals to gods and he sings:

Not I
Has long abandoned home. This same dawn
I heard him twitter in the gods' abode.
Ah, companions of this living world
What a thing this is, that even those
We call immortal
Should fear to die. (p. 9)

"But you, husband of multitudes?," asks Iyaloja. Elesin answers:

I, when that Not-I bird perched
Upon my roof, bade him seek his nest again,
Safe, without care or fear. I unrolled
My welcome mat for him to see. Not-I
Flew happily away, you'll hear his voice
No more in this lifetime—You all know
What I am. (p. 9)

As we have seen from the lines above, Elesin Oba presents himself as someone able to face death. This same thought will appear later. There are a number of ideas and facts to which the figure of Elesin Oba is associated, and these same ideas are related among themselves in a particular way within the character of Elesin Oba. These ideas make their appearances in the song sung mainly by Elesin Oba, but also by the Praise-Singer, Iyaloja and the women of the market. In this passage, for example:

My master's hand and mine have always

Dipped together and, home or sacred feast,

The bowl was beaten bronze, the meats

So succulent our teeth accused us of neglect.

We shared the choicest of the season's

Harvest of yams. How my friend would read

Desire in my eyes before I knew the cause—

However rare, however precious, it was mine. (p. 10)

We can see two other dimensions of Elesin's life intertwined: the privileges he had and his link with royalty. His privileged status is equally the theme of one of the Praise-Singer's contributions to the song

PRAISE-SINGER Elesin Oba! Are you not that man who

Looked out of doors that stormy day

The god of luck limped by, drenched

To the very lice that held

His rags together? You took pity upon

His sores and wished him fortune.

Fortune was footloose that dawn, he replied,

Till you trapped him in a heartfelt wish

That now returns to you. Elesin Oba!

I say you are the man who

Chanced upon the calabash of honour

You thought it was palm wine and

Drained its content to the final drop. (p. 11)

"Life is honour. It ends when honour ends.," Elesin Oba responds. "We know you for a man of honour.," (p. 11) say the women from the market, to which the horseman of the king reacts with a violent reprimand to the women. In the following scene, we see the women, including Iyaloja, trying to understand in what sense they had

disrespected Elesin Oba. Elesin delays the answer as much as he wants and ends up with:

> Words are cheap. 'We know you for
> A man of honour.' Well tell me, is this how
> A man of honour should be seen?
> Are these not the same clothes in which
> I came among you a full half-hour ago? (p.11-12)

Following his answer with roaring laughter, which is followed by the sighs of relief of the women with his forgiveness. All he wanted was for the women to prepare clothes for him. Here, Elesin Oba makes use of what, in the first chapter, was conceptualized by Margaret Drewal as "Yoruba play"—it is an activity practiced for pleasure, apparently for its own sake, but that has to be effective, has to impart some kind of change in the state of things whereof the play is a part. Here, Elesin simulated anger due to something the women did not know what was. It was a pathway to arrive at an objective: getting the women to fetch some clothes to him; in the play, Elesin creates a tension that ends up resulting in relief, joy and dances while the women dress him. As they dance and dress Elesin Oba, they sing:

> For a while we truly feared
> Our hands had wrenched the world
> In emptiness. (p. 12)

Offending the Elesin Oba, especially on the day when he must join the ancestors, means posing a great threat to the order of the world and the community, in which, it should be remembered, the other world is included. We remember how the Yoruba represent the world as a closed calabash, the upper part standing for the metaphysical world, and the lower part for the physical world. As much as these two parts are severed, and there is therefore a separation between upper and lower, there is also the notion of circularity in which intersecting lines unite the two planes and make travelling through them possible. The already discussed messenger god Esu is a constant traveler between these two worlds; it is not, therefore, a coincidence that he has been mentioned more than once until now in the play. As we have seen before, the metaphysical and the

physical worlds are in a constant and dynamic exchange not only through the gods—especially Esu—, but also through the ancestors and the unborn. The two modes of existence are very near each other. Therefore, assuring the continuity of the community is an act that involves spiritual action. The special place of the Elesin Oba is again stressed by the Praise-Singer in the lines:

> The gourd you take is not for shirking.
>
> The gourd is not for setting down
>
> At the first crossroad or wayside grove.
>
> Only one river may know its content. (p. 12)

To which the women respond:

> We shall all meet at the great market
>
> We shall all meet at the great market
>
> He who goes first takes the best bargains
>
> But we shall all meet, and resume our banter. (p. 12)

Here we come back to the idea contained in the Yoruba proverb: "The world is a marketplace; heaven is home" with the difference that here it is heaven that is metaphorized as a marketplace.

Elesin, now richly dressed in fine clothes, a cap and sandals, appears and has his attention caught by something that is not visible to the audience of the play. Whatever it is, it elicits from him the sentence "The world I know is good" with the response from the women "And we know you'll leave it so." Elesin then resumes the metaphysical considerations:

> I was born to keep it so. A hive
>
> Is never known to wander. An anthill
>
> Does not desert its roots. We cannot see
>
> The still great womb of the world—
>
> No man beholds his mother's womb—
>
> Yet who denies it's there? Coiled

To the great navel of the world is that
Endless cord that links us all
To the great origin. If I lose my way
The trailing cord will bring me to the roots. (p. 13)

The womb can be read as another reference to the void, the abyss of transition, the idea that the world originates in one enormous abyss that cannot be fully understood by men and constitutes the origin of all becoming. This void-womb moves constantly among the individuals and within themselves.

"The world I know is good"—what, after all, did bring about such a sentence from Elesin's mouth? The answer starts to take form as Elesin, addressing the Praise-Singer and the women, questions his position among the living:

I embrace it. And let me tell you, women—
I like this farewell that the world designed,
Unless my eyes deceive me, unless
We are already departed, the world and I,
And all that breeds desire is lodged
Among our tireless ancestors. Tell me friends,
Am I still earthed in that beloved market
Of my youth? Or could it be my will
Has outleapt the conscious act and I have come
Among the great departed? (p. 13)

The reason for these curious questions becomes evident later on: a young girl who came through a passage of the market directly to Iyaloja's stall and whose beauty overwhealmed the horseman of the king. His desire for her is immediate. He admits not knowing her, even if he knows many of the market women. He is astonished by her beauty and decides to discover who she is. We learn, however, that she is betrothed, which enrages the Elesin Oba.

ELESIN [*irritated*] Why do you tell me that?

[IYALOJA *falls silent. The* WOMEN *shuffle uneasily.*]

IYALOJA Not because we dare give you offence Elesin. Today is your day and the whole world is yours. Still, even those who leave town to make a new dwelling elsewhere like to be remembered by what they leave behind.

ELESIN Who does not seek to be remembered?

Memory is Master of Death, the chink

In his armour of conceit. I shall leave

That which makes my going the sheerest

Dream of an afternoon. Should voyagers

Not travel light? Let the considerate traveler

Shed, of his excessive load, all

That may benefit the living. (p. 15)

In Elesin's language, his desire for the young girl rapidly acquires a metaphysical dimension. The load of his sexual desire, which could also be metaphorized in his sperm, should be discharged in the earth, in the Aiye, which is the place that harbors all desires, and not follow with him to the other world. This same load, the sperm, Elesin Oba believes, is something that can benefit the living and, therefore, should stay on the earth. This sense attributed to the desired sexual act with the girl is reinforced when Iyaloja says that she believes Elesin Oba to be "not one who blights the happiness of others for a moment's pleasure" (p. 16). Elesin Oba replies:

Who speaks of pleasure? O women, listen!

Pleasure palls. Our acts should have meaning.

The sap of the plaintain never dries.

You have seen the young shoot swelling

Even as the parent stalk begins to wither.

Women, let my going be likened to

The twilight hour of the plaintain. (p. 16)

Her betrothal, we discover, is to Iyaloja's son, but she dares not refuse the wish of the horseman of the king, mainly on the day when he is to take the path of the

ancestors in order to lead the king to their abode and ensure the continuity of life among the Yoruba community, within the Yoruba world. "Not many men," says one of the women, "will brave the curse of a dispossessed husband" (p. 16); Iyaloja reminds her that "[o]nly the curses of the departed are to be feared," since "[t]he claims of one whose foot is on the threshold of their abode surpasses even the claims of blood" (p. 16-17). This claim by Iyaloja helps us understand the continuity of the current, living community into a wider metaphysical community, of current time into a time beyond; the claims of blood are essential and they speak of the history of one family, of one lineage, they speak of the maintenance of this lineage within the living world. These families exist, although, within a certain frame and a certain dynamic, the frame and dynamic of this same living world. There are those responsible for maintaining this world in its frame and dynamic. Above all, the king, who is the father of all, who, dead, follows to join the other kings, the great ancestors, in the Orun. Along with him is the Elesin Oba, who will guide him to the Orun. In the play, Elesin says "The world I know is good," to which the women reply "We know you'll leave it so." Elesin's answer is "I was born to keep it so" (p. 13). Elesin stands for the maintenance of the larger community and that is why his claims surpass the claims of blood: without him, the claims of blood will collapse with the world that gives them meaning. They are the way eternity concretizes itself in worldly reality. The articulation of these ideas is important to grasp the precedence Iyaloja gives to Elesin Oba over her son as the husband of the young girl. The decision is made. Iyaloja has to announce it to the Elesin, who asks "Shall I step burdened into the unknown?" (p. 17). She answers:

> Not we, but the very earth says No. The sap of the plaintain does not dry. Let grain that will not feed the voyager at his passage drop here and take root as he steps beyond this earth and us. Oh you who fill the home from hearth to threshold with the voices of children, you who now bestride the hidden gulf and pause to draw the right foot across and into the resting-home of the great forebears, it is good that your loins be drained into the earth we know, that your last strength be ploughed back into the womb that gave you being. (p. 17)

Elesin is bound to leave the earth behind to his journey beyond. Paradoxically, it is this leaving behind that will ensure the very existence of this earth. Before, he wants to give his last seed to the earth, one last issue by the Elesin Oba—one that has been accepted. This acceptance, says Iyaloja, comes not from her, but from the earth, from the cycle of the plaintain's sap. Iyaloja projects her answer to a wider, a cosmic reality

and she intuits nature in all its elements and rhythms combining to testify the union of the two. One is inclined to remember Douglas Bush's commentary about Spenser's *Epithalamion* as metaphysical poetry:

> In the total impression marriage is a supreme example of the beauty of order. The *Epithalamion* is indeed a metaphysical poem, however remote from *The Ecstasy* or *To his Coy Mistress*. The love of two ordinary persons is felt as a part, a splendid part of the creative process of a divine world, and all nature shares in the glorious nuptial (BUSH, 1968, p. 40).

The Yoruba doctrine of god does not do away with the idea of a supreme creator god, but turns its attention to those mystical forces that surround us and act in our lives according to the beautiful order of the universe: the Orisa. Indeed, the many natural metaphors that appear in the text (the bees, the anthill, the animals in the forest, the very bird) could be read not as simple objects of comparison to the human world, but actually as instances from other, natural, aspects of the world, that are in resonance with the myriad aspects of human life. In this moment, Iyaloja draws upon the greatest authority: that of the earth. We should remember the first chapter when the researcher David Doris participated in a ritual with babalawo Kolawole Ositola, which had its mystical validity ensured by the witnessing of the earth, whose authority is greater than that of the divinities, since it is older than the divinities. Here, Iyaloja strongly legitimizes Elesin's marriage to the young girl by projecting it to the tutelage of the earth.

A marriage must receive the blessing of the cosmic forces. However, if Elesin's marriage has apparently been blessed, it is not, in any manner, an ordinary marriage. More than a marriage between an adult high servant of the King and a young girl, it is a marriage between two states of being. Iyaloja says:

> And then, think of it—it makes the mind tremble. The fruit of such a union is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor world and the unborn have joined spirits to wring an issue of the elusive being of passage… Elesin! (p. 17)

We are again face to face with the three realms: that of the living, that of the ancestors and that of the unborn. The future issue of Elesin's marriage is located in the elusive abyss of transition. Iyaloja points to the uncommon nature of Elesin's wedding.

As we have seen, the Elesin Oba, the king being dead, is already on his way to the realm of the ancestors, not totally in the realm of the living.

Iyaloja, having given her blessings, is perfectly aware that the Elesin's task is to protect the living and ensure the continuity of their existence. Such a delicate situation invites precaution. In the words of Iyaloja,

> The living must eat and drink. When the moment comes don't turn the food to rodents' droppings in their mouth. Don't let them taste the ashes of the world when they step out at dawn to breathe the morning dew. (p. 17)

In the face of Elesin Oba's indignation, Iyaloja continues her recommendation with a cluster of proverbs:

> No one knows when the ants desert their home; they leave the mound intact. The swallow is never seen to peck holes in its nest when it is time to move on with the season. There are always throngs of humanity behind the leave-taker. The rain should not come through the roof for them, the wind must not blow through the walls at night. (p. 16-17)

In other words, Elesin must make sure that he leaves a world that is fully in order, fully protected. The world is in his hands, it was said before, in which he confirmed that he embraced it, accepting, self-confidently, full responsibility for it. That is why Elesin is offended at Iyaloja's advice:

> ELESIN I refuse to take offence.
>
> IYALOJA You wish to travel light. Well, the earth is yours. But be sure the seed you leave in it attracts no curse. (p. 17)

Previously we have seen Iyaloja attributing to the earth the blessing of Elesin's wedding with the utmost certainty. What we see now is not a change of opinion, but the perception of a possibility, which does not seem likely, but exists. At this point, the Praise-Singer's warnings about Elesin's choice of clothing in that day come back to mind. This is the day Elesin will make the journey beyond, he must make sure he leaves this earth free from its stains. It is interesting to notice that, as pointed out by Drewal, Pemberton III and Abiodun, the evil people (including wizards and witches) are collectively called *araye* (DREWAL, PEMBERTON III, ABIODUN,1989, p. 15), which can be translated as "people of the world." Therefore, in the very language of the

Yoruba there is the idea that this world (Aiye) is tainted and filled with impurities. To make the journey beyond and be worthy of leading the king to the sacred abode of the ancestors, Elesin Oba must be rid of all these impurities, his mind must be ready to attain a higher state of existence, there must be no weight holding him back. His marriage had been a controversial enough request: he would produce life in the day when he is committed to death. The request was accepted, but a warning was made: the seed he leaves in this earth must be clean of all the impurities of this world.

Act 1 finishes with Elesin's bridal chamber being prepared.

ACT 2

The setting of this act is quite different from that of the first: instead of a teeming Yoruba market, we are in a bungalow. Inside the bungalow, the District-Officer Simon Pilkings and his wife Jane dance a tango wearing what will later be defined as Egungun costumes—a long costume covering the entire body and consisting of myriad colored pieces of cloth. We saw briefly in the first chapter that the Egungun society is concerned with the worship of important ancestors. The ancestors dance dressed in these clothes and, strengthening the bond between their world and the world of the living. Here, these self-same costumes and masks will provide the District-Officer and his wife with fancy-dresses for a costume party.

An African police-officer arrives at the place and is horrified by the scene: the clothes Simon and Jane are wearing are meant for the dead, not the living. Here a curious parallelism should be noted between the beginning of the first and the second acts: in both of them there is a reproach about the way some character is dressed. In the first, the Elesin Oba, destined to embrace death this very day, is reproached by his Praise-Singer for wearing tooregular, too worldly clothes and not being ready for the ritual death; in the second, the British District-Officer and his wife are reproached by Sergeant Amusa for, being alive, wearing clothes that could be destined to dead people. Simon Pilkings, on return reproaches the Muslim Amusa for still believing in what he deems as superstitions of his people's native religion.

The fact is that Amusa has a message to Simon Pilkings—a message he refuses to deliver when he sees an Egungun mask, since the message deals with death and it

cannot be verbalized in someone wearing a “death uniform.” Annoyed, Simon consents that Amusa writes the message in a pad. The result is the following:

> I have to report that it come to my information that one prominent chief, namely, the Elesin Oba, is to commit death tonight as a result of native custom. Because this is criminal offence I await further instruction at charge office. Sergeant Amusa. (p. 20)

An ambiguous enough report that is interpreted by Simon and Jane as if the chief is going to kill somebody. Immediate measures are to be taken: Elesin must be arrested and they must go to the ball. Pilkings calls his house-boy Joseph, a native Yoruba like Amusa, but a Christian. They are surrounded by the incessant sound of drums. Unlike Amusa, Joseph is not startled by the Egungun dress. Simon asks him about the “death” referred to by Amusa and discovers it consists of ritual suicide linked to the death of the king. The Elesin Oba, we find out, is an old enemy of Simon Pilkings, since the District-Officer helped Elesin’s eldest son Olunde to go to England study medicine instead of following his mission as the next Elesin Oba. In passages, Simon’s distance to the natives is evidenced. In talking about the natives, Jane asks Simon

> JANE Aren’t they all rather close, Simon?
>
> PILKINGS These natives here? Good gracious. They’ll open their mouths and yap with you about their family secrets before you can stop them. Only the other day…
>
> JANE But Simon, do they really give anything away? I mean, anything that really counts. This affair for instance, we didn’t know they still practiced that custom did we?
>
> PILKINGS Ye-e-es, I suppose you’re right there. Sly, devious bastards.
>
> JOSEPH [*stiffly*] Can I go now master? I have to clean the kitchen.
>
> PILKINGS What? Oh, you can go. Forgot you were still there.
>
> [JOSEPH *goes*].
>
> JANE Simon, you really must watch your language. Bastard isn’t just a simple swear-word in these parts, you know.
>
> PILKINGS Look, just when did you become a social anthropologist, that’s what I’d like to know.
>
> JANE I’m not claiming to know anything. I just happen to have overheard quarrels among the servants. That’s how I know they consider it a smear.
>
> PILKINGS I thought the extended family system took care of all that. Elastic family, no bastards. (p. 23-24)

Here there is an evident distance between Simon's supposed knowledge about the natives' customs and values and their reality. He seems quite alienated from the people he is supposed to administer. This is visible once more in the language he uses when he asks Joseph about the meaning of the drums:

> PILKINGS Let's ask our native guide. Joseph! Just a minute Joseph. [JOSEPH *re-enters*]. What's the drumming about?
>
> JOSEPH I don't know master.
>
> PILKINGS What do you mean you don't know? It's only two years since your conversion. Don't tell me that holy water nonsense also wiped out your tribal memory.
>
> JOSEPH [*visibly shocked*] Master!
>
> JANE Now you've done it.
>
> PILKINGS What have I done now? (p. 24)

Pilkings's contempt for religion is not reduced to the religion of the natives, but extends itself to Christianity (and probably Islam). Here we see Pilkings as essentially a secular and selfish character. This selfishness will be reinforced later in the play. If we go back to Soyinka's *Author's note* to the play, which was reproduced in the beginning of this chapter we will see Soyinka stating that

> One of the more obvious alternative structures of the play would be to make the District Officer the victim of a cruel dilemma. This is not to my taste and it is not by chance that I have avoided dialogue or situation which would encourage this. No attempt should be made in production to suggest it.

Indeed, such a dilemma hardly seems likely in the case of Pilkings who, not being actually an evil man, is nevertheless detached and little inclined to consider the humanity of the natives and the significance of their customs and cultural institutions. Moreover, Pilkings seems disrespectful regarding worldviews and habits other than his own, even if they are closer to him than those of the natives when he treats Christianity, the official system of beliefs of the culture to which he belongs and which he represents, as nonsense; he does not really profess it (maybe he is officially a Christian), therefore, it is nonsense.

But even then, Joseph tries to help them decipher the meaning of the drums: to the bewildered Yoruba Christian, the drums seem to be announcing, at the same time, the wedding and the death of a great chief.

Pilkings's unholy behavior deserves Jane's criticism: if such information got to the ecclesiastical authority in the colonies, this could be disadvantageous for them.

Pilkings finally decides to send Joseph with a note to Amusa, instructing the sergeant to arrest Elesin Oba. The idea was to lock him up secretly in Pilkings's study to avoid the possibility of other natives helping Elesin to escape.

With all this set, the English couple can rest assured that the ritual suicide will be prevented and can go to the ball with their extravagant costumes. One last piece of information comes from Pilkings, a surprise to his wife: The Prince, who is currently on a tour of the colonies, is in Oyo and will honor the ball with his presence.

ACT 3

We are back in the market, a cloth stall has been converted into a sanctuary, with velvet and woven cloths leading to its entrance. Amusa and two constables try to get to this improvised sanctuary, where, we discover, Elesin Oba is consummating his marriage. Their mission is exactly to arrest the chief. They are not being able, however, to fulfill this task, because the women in the market prevent them, blocking their way and taunting them, ridiculing their uniforms and their batons, offending their masculinity. His mission, he repeats, is to get to the hut and arrest Elesin Oba:

> AMUSA [*shouting above the laughter*] For the last time I warn you women to clear the road
>
> WOMAN To where?
>
> AMUSA To that hut. I know he dey dere.
>
> WOMAN Who?
>
> AMUSA The chief who call himself Elesin Oba.
>
> WOMAN You ignorant man. It is not he who calls himself Elesin Oba, it is his blood that says it. As it called out to his father before him and will to his son after him. And that is in spite of everything your white man can do.

> WOMAN Is it not the same ocean that washes this land and the white man's land? Tell your white man he can hide our son away as long as he likes. When the time comes for him, the same ocean will bring him back.
>
> AMUSA The government say dat kin' ting must stop.
>
> WOMAN Who will stop it? Tonight our husband and father will prove himself greater than the laws of strangers. (p. 28)

The words of these women take us to the center of the conflict between two different laws, two different idioms of power and regulation. On the one hand, there is Amusa serving an abstract written law that is alien to that land. On the other hand, there is the very concrete law of the blood, of the lineage, which is contained in ideas concerning ancestry, life, death and continuity. Amusa points to the attempt of an interruption of a tradition through government action, whereas the woman points to a force capable of overpowering all these governmental laws, the force of an individual who brings with himself the weight of his tradition and his community. Amusa himself is somewhat lost between these two worlds, since he is a born Yoruba who converted to Islamism and went to work for the colonial powers, even though he was not able to fully abandon his beliefs and the only sentiment he shows toward this culture is fear; his uncomfortable and limited language stresses this uncertain position he occupies—as if, having abandoned his original culture without really absorbing the new one, his language has broken down.

Iyaloja intervenes with a more conciliating attitude, but becomes firmer when she understands Amusa's intentions. Elesin Oba, says Iyaloja, was performing his duty as a husband and should not be interrupted. Amusa insists, but is interrupted by two girls, who promise to show Amusa and the constables what it is "to tamper with the mothers of the market" (p. 29). In the same vein, one of the girls says of Amusa: "He no longer knows his mother, we'll teach them" (p. 29). Soon, they snatch the batons of the constables before snatching their hats also. They then start to impersonate a caricature of two English men chatting. In face of this attack, Amusa and the constables flee the market with the promise of coming back.

There is euphoria in the air both for Elesin's marriage and the expelling of the constables from the market. A woman sings and dances to a song that says "*Tani l'awa o l'ogbeja? Kayi! A l'ogbeja. Omo Kekere l'ogbeja*," in Soyinka's translation, "Who

says we haven't a defender? Silence! We have our defenders. Little children are our champions," exploding in general dances. The children are here celebrated in their protecting role whereas the seed of a new child is being placed inside Elesin's young bride.

Elesin finally appears with a white velvet cloth in his hand, his marriage consummated. He delivers the white cloth to Iyaloja with the words: "It is no mere virgin stain, but the union of life and the seeds of passage" (p. 32) and starts a long monolog announcing his death that is coming. In it he enumerates some of the symbolic elements surrounding the ritual of his passage. The King is waiting.

The king's horse and dog have been killed and entered the spirit world. As Elesin told them to, they will meet Elesin in the market, which is the place he has chosen to enter the passage between the two worlds. The market is the center of life and the place where Elesin has "known love and laughter away from the palace" (p. 32). The drums are heard, indicating the progress of the ritual. Elesin knows his time is coming. The horse and the dog should come soon:

> If they arrive before the drums beat for me, I shall tell them to let the Alafin know I follow swiftly. If they come after the drums have sounded, why then, all is well for I have gone ahead. Our spirits shall fall in step along the great passage. (p. 33)

Elesin gazes at the sky in search for something. "The moon has fed," he says, "but I cannot tell where is that gateway through which I must pass" (p. 33). He starts bidding goodbye to his friends as the Praise-Singer exhorts the women to sing a dirge that says Alẹ lẹ lẹ, awo mi lọ (Soyinka's translation: "Night has fallen, the seasoned initiate is leaving"). All of a sudden, the Praise-Singer starts communicating with Elesin. It is the king, however, that is speaking through his voice:

> PRAISE-SINGER Elesin Alafin, can you hear my voice?
>
> ELESIN Faintly, my friend, faintly.
>
> PRAISE-SINGER Elesin Alafin, can you hear my call?
>
> Shall my voice be a blade of grass and
>
> Tickle the armpit of the past?
>
> ELESIN My memory needs no prodding but

What do you wish to say to me?

PRAISE-SINGER Only what has been spoken. Only what concerns

The dying wish of the father of all.

ELESIN It is buried like seed-yam in my mind.

This is the season of quick rains, the harvest

Is this moment due for gathering.

PRAISE-SINGER If you cannot come, I said swear

You'll tell my favourite horse. I shall

Ride on through the gates alone.

ELESIN Elesin's message will be read

Only when his loyal heart no longer beats.

PRAISE-SINGER If you cannot come Elesin, tell my dog.

I cannot stay the keeper too long

At the gate.

ELESIN A dog does not outrun the hand

That feeds it meat. A horse that throws its rider

Slows down to a stop. Elesin Alafin

Trusts no beasts with messages between

A king and his companion.

PRAISE-SINGER If you get lost my dog will track

The hidden path to me.

ELESIN The seven-way crossroads confuses

Only the stranger. The Horseman of the King

Was born in the recesses of the house. (p. 33-34)

Once again, the Praise-Singer, this time as the mouthpiece of the king, warns Elesin Oba about the dangers that may come in his way, although Elesin maintains a self-assured attitude. The insecurity projected by the Praise-Singer seems to have no bearing on Elesin.

PRAISE-SINGER I know the wickedness of men. If there is

Weight on the loose end of your sash, such weight

As no mere man can shift; If your sash is earthed

By evil minds who mean to part us at the last…

ELESIN My sash is of the deep purple *alari*;

It is no tethering-rope; the king

Is not yet crowned who will peg an elephant—

Not even you my friend and King.

PRAISE-SINGER And yet this fear will not depart from me

The darkness of this new abode is deep—

Will your human eyes suffice?

ELESIN In a night which falls before our eyes

However deep, we do not miss our way. (p. 34)

Elesin's trance becomes deeper as the king abandons the body of the Praise-Singer. "Strange voices guide my feet" (p. 35), says the Elesin Oba.

PRAISE-SINGER The river is never so high that the eyes

Of a fish are covered. The night is not so dark

That the albino fails to find his way. A child

Returning homewards craves no leading by the hand.

Gracefully does the mask regain his grove at the end of the day…

Gracefully. Gracefully does the mask dance

Homeward at the end of the day, gracefully… (p. 35)

The secret of Elesin's death is sung by Iyaloja

It is the death of war that kills the valiant,

Death of water is how the swimmer goes

It is the death of markets that kills the trader

And death of indecision takes the idle away

The trade of the cutlass blunts its edge

And the beautiful die the death of beauty.

It takes an Elesin to die the death of death…

> Only Elesin… dies the unknowable death of death…
>
> Gracefully, gracefully does the horseman regain
>
> The stables by the end of day, gracefully… (p. 35)

A poetic symphony celebrating a death that is not like other deaths, celebrating Elesin's entry in the abode of the ancestors. As we see in Iyaloja's refrain, for each being there is one specific death, death is not the same for all, but takes different shapes for each type of existence. Elesin Oba dies the death of death, since his death allows his community to keep on living, it is his death that ends the death of his community.

The Praise-Singer comes back dazzled by what he saw and heard:

> How shall I tell what my eyes have seen? The Horseman gallops on before the courier, how shall I tell what my eyes have seen? He says a dog may be confused by new scents of being he never dreamt of, so he must precede the dog to heaven. He says a horse may stumble on strange boulders and be lamed, so he races on before the horse to heaven. It is best, he says, to trust no messenger who may falter at the gate; oh how shall I tell what my ears have heard? But do you hear me still Elesin, do you hear your faithful one? (p. 35)

There is a whole sense of amazement in face of Elesin's impeding passage to the other side. The drums guide his feet; he goes into a trance. All is mystery at this moment, and this mystery actualizes itself in poetry, in the immediate realization of orality. ThePraise-Singer, as he switches from the mouthpiece of the king to himself again, switches from verse to prose and it is a torrential prose he produces in a long cluster of metaphors where he wonders whether his master is already too far from the world. The metaphors he uses include the sacred role of drums in their culture ("Those drums that brook no rivals, have they blocked the passage to your ears that my voice passes into wind, a mere leaf floating in the night?") to the fading away of sweet waters in the sea ("When the river begins to taste the salt of the ocean, we no longer know what deity to call on, the river-god or Olokun"—Olokun being the Yoruba god of the ocean). All of these metaphors reveal the Praise-Singer's desperation in face of the passage of his master and friend, which ends up in his breaking down as the dirge becomes louder. It is nearly time for Elesin's passage.

ACT 4

"Are the drums on the other side now turning skin to skin with ours in *oshugbo*?," asks the Praise-Singer in the already mentioned cluster of metaphors that ends the last act. What is he referring to by the name of *oshugbo*? *Oshugbo* is actually another name for the Ogboni Society, which we have encountered in the first chapter. We remember that the Ogboni/Osugbo society commands tremendous authority—to the point where its members decide who will be the next king; it is no wonder they are involved as well in the passage of the old. The drums that coordinate the progression of the ritual, including its climactic moment—Elesin's death—spring from the esoteric authority of Osugbo. We remember also that the Ogboni's jurisdiction included religious and political affairs—which are, of course, closely interlinked in Yoruba society; the whole ritual of passage of a king from the abode of the living to the abode of the dead guided by his chief horseman—and the leaving of this life by his chief horseman—demands a particular rhythm, it cannot be performed randomly in time; the Osugbo drums are used to dictate this rhythm. The drums are widely used in Yoruba music in many situations, but the knowledge of the specific rhythm that informs the time of passage from one mode of life to another belongs to the Osugbo only. In act V we discover what is the source of this rhythm.

As the sacred celebration occurs in the marketplace, at the European Club, the guests are received in the Masque, they dance until a poor rendition of "Rule Britannia" announces the arrival of the Prince, who is saluted by all the couples in a line. Simon and Jane Pilkings stand out due to their custom, which fascinates the Prince. They show the details of the Egungun, imitate the guttural voice made by the actual Egunguns and play with the other dancers. After that, the resident comes and hands a note to Pilkings warning about the women's riot in the market. The resident interrogates Pilkings, who briefly explains the situation of the king's death, his thirty-day mourning period and his eventual burial followed by Elesin Oba's ritual suicide. Soon Amusa and the constables arrive and the resident cannot help but notice the items missing in their uniforms. The resident instructs Pilkings to send him a report in the morning and he leaves. However, as before, Amusa refuses to talk against death in face of somebody using a uniform of death, that is, the Egungun.

The sound of the clock announcing midnight makes Pilkings and the two constables run, leaving Jane with Amusa, who soon leaves as well. In a few minutes, a young black man dressed in a suit arrives to speak with Jane Pilkings and we are introduced to Olunde, the son of Elesin Oba who, against his father's will, went to England to study medicine, with the aid of Simon Pilkings. The greetings are warm, until the moment when the Egungun costume is touched upon: "And that is the good cause for which you desecrate an ancestral mask?" (p. 41), asks Olunde when Jane explains to him the "good cause" for which she was wearing such a strange and somewhat uncomfortable costume: the presence of the Prince in the ball. Jane is disappointed with what she believes to be Olunde's reaction to the situation:

> OLUNDE No I am not shocked Mrs. Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand. (p. 41)

A tension is set between the two, but no argument ensues. Olunde admits to Jane that he admired the conduct and courage of the English in the Second World War—which he could witness very nearly since he worked as a doctor during the war. Mrs. Pilkings occasionally tells the story of the captain of a ship who had to blow up the ship with him inside to save thousands of coasters, which Olunde finds inspiring and Jane does not. But Olunde had come for another reason: he was in Oyo to bury his father, who, according to his calculations would be dying to accompany the king that night. He needed to find Simon Pilkings to prevent him from doing the madness of interrupting Elesin's ritual suicide, which would result in chaos among his people. Jane is visibly shocked with Olunde's attitude toward his father's impending death:

> JANE But don't you think your father is also entitled to whatever protection is available to him?
>
> OLUNDE How can I make you understand? He *has* protection. No one can undertake what he does tonight without the deepest protection the mind can conceive. What can you offer him in place of his peace of mind, in place of the honour and veneration or his own people? What would you think of your Prince if he refused to accept the risk of losing his life on this voyage? This… showing-the-flag tour of colonial possessions. (p. 43)

The discussion than focuses on the negative perceptions each one has of another's culture. Jane considers the ritual suicide a barbaric habit. Olunde reminds her

of the barbarity of the Second World War, whose carnage has achieved such a dimension that, by all means, should have whipped all white races of the face of the earth or sent them back to a primitivism that "has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us" (p. 43)—all of which led him to believe that the great art of the white races was the art of survival. Olunde, after all, saw "nothing, that gave you the right to pass judgement on other peoples and their ways" (p. 44). Olunde also informs Mrs. Pilkings that England had helped him to understand what he had as a Yoruba and that he would never give it up. Soon after that, Olunde hears the drums announcing his father's death. Mrs. Pilkings once again is shocked with what she sees as Olunde's cold attitude toward his father's death. Olunde explains to her that his father's "will-power has always been enormous" (p. 45). He was dead. An aide-de-camp arrives after he hears Mrs. Pilkings's screaming, but she asks him to leave them alone.

A calmer conversation succeeds in which Jane tries to understand better Olunde's calm acceptance. He explains to her, citing factors as his medical training and the fact that he got used to death and also the fact that he had received a telegram a month before informing him of the king's death and considered his father dead since then. Pilkings arrives and finds out about the situation. Uneasy, he reveals that Olunde had to stay there due to a crisis linked to his father's affair. Olunde cannot understand what could have happened until he hears his father's voice screaming from outside the club. Finally Elesin Oba appears with guards holding him—he had been caught. Released, he collapses to his son's feet and asks:

> ELESIN Oh son, don't let the sight of your father turn you blind!

And Olunde answers:

> OLUNDE I have no father, eater of leftovers. (p. 50)

ACT 5

In act V we have Elesin Oba arrested in an old cellar that served as a storage for slaves in old times (Pilkings had changed his mind about locking the chief up in his own studio). Elesin is behind bars, gazing at the moon, two guards inside the cell and

Pilkings outside in a police officer's uniform. Pilkings starts a conversation, commenting on Elesin's seeming fascination with the moon.

> ELESIN Yes, ghostly one. Your twin-brother up there engages my thoughts. (p. 50)

Their dialog is telling, despite, or exactly because, the disparity of thought between the two. After the District Officer tries to engage in a conversation with Elesin Oba by pointing out how peaceful the night is, Elesin corrects him:

> ELESIN The night is not at peace, ghostly one. The world is not at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world for ever. There is no sleep in the world tonight.
>
> PILKINGS It is still a good bargain if the world should lose one night's sleep as the price of saving a man's life.
>
> ELESIN You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it. (p. 50)

The misunderstanding of thought between them is total, they are truly speaking from different places that cannot communicate. The very notion of death they work with is different. Their conversation follows on to Elesin Oba's son, Olunde:

> PILKINGS Your son does not take so gloomy a view.
>
> ELESIN Are you dreaming now, white man? Were you not present at the reunion of shame? Did you not see when the world reversed itself and the father fell before his son, asking forgiveness? (p. 51)

Elesin establishes Olunde in the middle of a battleground—the District Officer took his son and sent him to his own land to turn him into someone more attuned to him (the District Officer) than to his father, Elesin Oba. However, Olunde's return had reassured Elesin that he had a son, since Olunde had proven faithful to his people and tradition. Elesin interprets his going to study in England as a way of discovering the secrets of the enemy. Elesin is sure that his son will avenge him. Pilkings informs him that Olunde honors the father and is coming to bid goodbye to his father.

The general misunderstanding continues as we read the following dialog:

> PILKINGS I wish to ask you to search the quiet of your heart and tell me—do you not find great contradictions in the wisdom of your own race?

> ELESIN Make yourself clear, white one.
>
> PILKINGS I have lived among you long enough to learn a saying or two. One came to my mind tonight when I stepped into the market and saw what was going on. You were surrounded by those who egged you on with song and praises. I thought, are these not the same people who say: the elder grimly approaches heaven and you ask him to bear your greetings yonder; do you really think he makes the journey willingly? After that, I did not hesitate. (p. 53)

A sigh by Elesin Oba is interrupted by Mrs. Pilkings's voice calling on Simon. Elesin is left with his silent young bride in the cell. Elesin uses their solitude in the cell to make a confession:

> ELESIN My young bride, did you hear the ghostly one? You sit and sob in your silent heart but say nothing to all this. First I blamed the white man, then I blamed my gods for deserting me. Now I feel I want to blame you for the mystery of the sapping of my will. But blame is a strange peace offering for a man to bring a world he has deeply wronged, and to its innocent dwellers. Oh little mother, I have taken countless women in my life but you were more than a desire of the flesh. I needed you as the abyss across which my body must be drawn, I filled it with earth and dropped my seed in it at the moment of preparedness for my crossing. You were the final gift of the living to their emissary to the land of the ancestors, and perhaps your warmth and youth brought new insights of this world to me and turned my feet leaden on this side of the abyss. For I confess to you, daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man who came violently into my fading presence, there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. I would have shaken it off, already my foot had begun to lift but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled. (p. 53)

Simon Pilkings comes back with Jane talking about a certain note and a person to be let in. Soon, it is Iyaloja who enters. Her approach to Elesin Oba could not be more striking:

> IYALOJA How boldly the lizard struts before the pigeon when it was the eagle itself he promised us he would confront.
>
> ELESIN I don't ask you to take pity on me Iyaloja. You have a message for me or you would not have come. Even if it is the curses of the world, I shall listen.
>
> IYALOJA You made so bold with the servant of the white king who took your side against death. I must tell your brother chiefs when I return how bravely you waged war against him. Especially with words.
>
> ELESIN I more than deserve your scorn.
>
> IYALOJA [*with sudden anger*] I warned you, if you must leave a seed behind, be sure it is not tainted with the curses of the world. Who are you to open a new life when you dared not open the door to a new existence? I say who are you to

> make so bold? [*The* BRIDE *sobs and* IYALOJA *notices her. Her contempt noticeably increases as she turns back to* ELESIN.] Oh you self-vaunted stem of the plaintain, how hollow it all proves. The pith is gone in the parent stem, so how will it prove with the new shoot? How will it go with that earth that bears it? Who are you to bring this abomination to us! (p. 55)

Elesin is subjected to thorough humiliation by Iyaloja. She attacks him mostly with metaphors which are appropriate to the moment and for Elesin's condition. It is noticeable that she resumes the metaphor of the plaintain, once used by Elesin to refer to his situation in relation to the ritual suicide and what he saw as the need for him to leave another child, who would be his young shoot. This metaphor will be crucial to represent Elesin's plight. It is then with many metaphors pertaining to the ambits of food, drinking and hunting that she addresses him:

> IYALOJA You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's left-overs. You said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter's dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter. We said you were the hunter returning home in triumph, a slain buffalo pressing down on his neck; you said wait, I first must turn up this cricket hole with my toes. We said yours was the doorway at which we first spy the tapper when he comes down from the tree, yours was the blessing of the twilight wine, the purl that brings night spirits out of doors to steal their portion before the light of day. We said yours was the body of wine whose burden shakes the tapper like a sudden gust on his perch. You said, No, I am content to lick the dregs from each calabash when the drinkers are done. We said the dew on earth's surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honour. You said No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the droppings of mice; I shall fight them for the left-overs of the world. (p. 56)

The progression of the situation, the intensification of the accusations and his incarceration have over Elesin Oba the effect, in addition of eliciting his shame, of pushing him toward deep self-analysis. He probes within himself for an understanding of the reason why he came to be stopped by the English police and finds a root in his attitude toward the gods:

> […] It is when the alien hand pollutes the source of will, when a stranger force of violence shatters the mind's calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in his alien rupture of his world. I know it was this thought that killed me, sapped my powers and turned me into an infant in the hands of unnamable strangers. I made to utter my spells anew

but my tongue merely rattled in my mouth. I fingered hidden charms and the contact was damp; there was no spark left to sever the life-strings that should stretch from every finger-tip. My will was squelched in the spittle of an alien race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought—that there might be the hand of the gods in a stranger's intervention. (p. 57)

Iyaloja had announced that she had come with a burden, but before it can be delivered, she asks Elesin the question:

> IYALOJA […] you who know so well the cycle of the plaintain: is it the parent shoot which withers to give sap to the younger or, does your wisdom see it running the other way? (p. 57)

Once again she brings in the metaphor of the plaintain's sap. Let us remember the passage where Elesin uses it to symbolize his own lifecycle:

> The sap of the plaintain never dries.
>
> You have seen the young shoot swelling
>
> Even as the parent stalk begins to wither.
>
> Women, let my going be likened to
>
> The twilight hour of the plaintain. (p. 16)

It is a metaphor for a healthy unbroken lifecycle: as the parent stalk withers, the sap passes on to the young shoot. Iyaloja seems to be pointing to a possible situation in which the cycle is inverted, something which brings to mind Elesin's talk with Pilkings in the beginning of act V in which he refers to the reversion of the world in which the father falls before the son asking for forgiveness.

Elesin answers Iyaloja, as expected, that it is the parent shoot that withers to give sap to the younger one, to which Iyaloja replies that "there are sights in the world which say different Elesin," reminding that "[t]here are some who choose to reverse the cycle of our being" (p. 57)

We are in the presence of the idea of reversion. Once again, Iyaloja announces the coming of a burden, which "drags behind me on the slow, weary feet of women," but "slow as it is Elesin, it has long overtaken you. It rides ahead of your laggard will"

(p.58). Controversy is set between Pilkings and Iyaloja concerning the object that is to arrive at any moment. Pilkings is not sure whether he will let it in. Soon, the aide-de-camp announces that a group of chanting women moves up the hill. Jane reminds him that maybe that was what Olunde had referred to before in a letter, which makes Pilkings give orders to the aide-de-camp to prepare a car to take Olunde out of town. Iyaloja makes the following, very curious observation:

> IYALOJA Save your labor white one. If it is the father of your prisoner you want, Olunde, he who until this night we knew as Elesin's son, he comes soon himself to take his leave. He has sent the women ahead, so let them in. (p. 59)

Very strangely, Olunde is treated here as the father of Elesin Oba and not the contrary, confirming the reversion of the world that was referred to some times before.

Pilkings, after hearing the aide de camp's description of the group that approached (peaceful women and two or three men at most), decides to give permission for them to come in; he asks the aide-de-camp to hurry Olunde to the place carrying his baggage and warns Iyaloja that if something goes wrong, she will be responsible, his men have orders to shoot at the first sign of trouble, which elicits the following observation from her:

> To prevent one death you will actually make other deaths? Ah, great is the wisdom of the white race. But have no fear. Your Prince will sleep peacefully. So at long last will ours. We will disturb you no further, servant of the white King. Just let Elesin fulfil his oath and we will retire home and pay homage to our King. (p. 59-60)

The burden finally arrives with the women singing the dirge "Alẹ lẹ lẹ" and bringing an object that looks like a cylindrical bolt. They make a semi-circle around the object, the Praise-Singer and the Drummer inside the circle.

Elesin requires Pilkings to let him out to speak a secret in the ears of the body that lied inside the bolt, which he utterly refuses. Elesin insists, reminding him that Christians bow down to a candle in order to speak their words secretly to their god, so he, Elesin, should be granted the same right, he needed to speak in secret. Even when Iyaloja asks, Pilkings remains consistent. Elesin would have to speak it through the bars.

Afterwards, it is the Praise-Singer's turn to speak to Elesin Oba and he does so reminding Elesin of what he told him when possessed by the king: that Elesin should speak in the horse's and the dog's ear so they could lead the King in case Elesin was delayed, which was denied by Elesin. The Praise-Singer speaks in accusatory terms.

There comes the time to remove the cloth of the object. What is revealed when it happens is the dead body of Olunde. He had taken his father's place in order to save his people. Iyaloja announces:

> There lies the honour of your household and of our race. Because he could not bear to let honour fly out of doors, he stopped it with his life. The son has proved the father, Elesin, and there is nothing left in your mouth to gnash but infant gums. (p. 61-62)

The Praise-Singer approaches him in a similar fashion:

> PRAISE-SINGER Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You set with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness—you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future. Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers, Elesin. (p. 62)

In the Praise-Singer's voice, the tumbling of the world into the void is linked not to the absence of a messenger, but to the reversion of the cycle of life, which becomes the great concern to the Yoruba characters, from Elesin's first comment about his falling to the knees of his son to that comment by the Praise-Singer.

In face of these happenings, Elesin Oba, who had been perfectly still, strangles himself with the handcuffs. The Yoruba characters remain still as the guards and Pilkings rush to Elesin's body trying to resurrect him. Iyaloja's comment is unmerciful:

> IYALOJA Why do you strain yourself? Why do you labour at tasks for which no one, not even the man lying there, would give you thanks? He is gone at last into the passage but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on the meat and throw him bones. The passage is clogged with droppings from the King's stallion; he will arrive all stained in dung.
>
> PILKINGS [*in a tired voice*] Was this what you wanted?
>
> IYALOJA No, child, it is what you brought to be, you who play with strangers' lives, who even usurp the vestments of our dead, yet believe that the stain of

death will not cling to you. The gods demanded only the old expired plaintain but you cut down the sap-laden shoot to feed your pride. There is your board, filled to overflowing. Feast on it. [*She screams at him suddenly, seeing that* PILKINGS *is about to close* ELESIN'*s staring eyes.*] Let him alone! However sunk he was in debt he is no pauper's carrion abandoned on the road. Since when have strangers donned clothes of indigo before the bereaved cries out his loss? (p. 62)

Finally, Elesin's young bride pours earth over his eyes. Iyaloja turns to her and says:

> Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn (p. 63).

The play is finished.

DISCUSSION

As we have seen earlier, Soyinka rejects a reading of the play based on the idea of a "clash of cultures," which he deems a sign of prejudice. In its place, he recommends a metaphysical reading. How can the play just described be analyzed in a metaphysical vein? In other words, is *Death and the King's Horseman* actually a metaphysical play? If it is, in what sense is it metaphysical?

Soyinka gives us a hint when he locates this metaphysical view as centered in the Yoruba worldview, which includes the living, the dead, the unborn and the spaces between them. We are referred to the very worldview postulated by Soyinka in his own critical works and by the notions, artifacts and institutions that compose Yoruba metaphysics, some of which were seen in the first chapter.

We have also seen that Soyinka's metaphysical views were not free from criticism. They were particularly questioned by Marxist critics such as Biodun Jeyifo and the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah. Soyinka's comment cannot but be controversial as he assigns Colonialism to a second place—deeming it only an incident—in a play that deals with events taking place in a British colony in Africa and in which a colonial officer suppresses a native tradition by means of violence. Considering such facts, we may get the impression that Soyinka is evading the real subjects through a metaphysical rationalization that sends his work to greater heights.

Would it be really true? Are Soyinka's metaphysical stances only an ivory-tower rationalization?

Biodun Jeyifo, as we have already seen, criticizes Soyinka's play and his own rendition of it based on the notion that the metaphysics apparent in the play and the many abstract notions that it entails—such as honor—are but the material cover of a political and economic order that is not touched upon or questioned by the playwright (JEYIFO, 2003, p. 164-171). Kwame Appiah, on his turn, hints that Soyinka's metaphysical viewpoint arises from a split between an individual call for authenticity and a public commitment. Indeed, this position seems to result in a notion of the African world that is based on this metaphysics. Of Soyinka's assertion that the Colonial Factor is merely an incident and that the conflict in the play is largely metaphysical, the Ghanaian philosopher writes:

> The "Colonial Factor" is not a "catalytic incident merely"; it is a profound assault on the consciousness of the African intellectual, on the consciousness that guides this play. And it would be irresponsible, which Soyinka is not, to assert that novel (*Season of Anomy*) and play do not imply a complex (and nonreductionist) set of attitudes to the problem. It is one thing to say (as I think correctly) that the drama in Oyo is driven ultimately by the logic of Yoruba cosmology, another to deny the existence of a dimension of power in which it is the colonial state that forms the action (APPIAH, 1992, p. 78).

It should be noticed that, in calling for a metaphysical reading over one focused on the "clash of cultures" and the Colonial Factor, Soyinka is putting the emphasis on the "Yoruba character" of the play, since it is Yoruba metaphysics that guides it. This turns to be a political position, one that is in line with the project that we see in *Myth, Literature and the African World*—that of establishing the characteristics of an *African World* and, above all, an *African Worldview*. It is this project that is criticized by Appiah, who does not accept the idea of a metaphysical community uniting the distinct cultures in Africa that often bear no resemblance to one another. Indeed, Soyinka attributes the existence of the three worlds—living, dead, unborn—to "most African metaphysics" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 26). It is clear that this metaphysical dimension is what unites the cultures of Africa and organizes them into what Soyinka calls the *African World*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this project bears a good deal of resemblance to Léopold Sédar Senghor's Negritude, although the cohering identity of an African world lies in different instances in each case: Senghor bases it on a

somewhat unified soul or personality present in each Black individual; Soyinka finds a cultural and metaphysical rationale for it.

On the other hand, a reading focused on the Colonial Factor and the clash of cultures would consequentially emphasize the role of the colonizers. In the previous chapter we saw Abiola Irele talking about the colonization of culture and mind, which goes beyond political and economic colonization. More than an adaptation, in *Death and the King's Horseman* we see a culture actually struggling for survival, and the very play largely fights a colonization of the mind. The play occurs within the Yoruba mind, and it is there that it will be read.

First of all, the Yoruba and the English colonialists do not inhabit the same world, even if they share the same geography. The Brazilian philosopher Vicente Ferreira da Silva, in discussing Heidegger's idea of 'world', defines it as "an opening through which things may manifest" (SILVA, 2010 p. 123) as well as "the victory of a principle with the exclusion of all others, the domination of an interiority" (SILVA, 2010, p. 124). It is in this sense that the Yoruba and the English inhabit different worlds. The sets of symbols, relationships, structures and paradigms that populate their worlds and according to which they live are different. Valentin Mudimbe sees two phases of colonization as the domination of physical space and reformation of natives' minds (MUDIMBE, 1988, p. 2). There is, if we can think, a point in which these two operations intersect, for the physical space is also inhabited by the mind of the people living there, and the colonial enterprise includes controlling the way the natives relate with their own living space, the way they symbolize it.

The symbolical (or metaphysical) value of physical space in *Death and the King's Horseman* and its importance are perceived already in the beginning of the play, when Elesin Oba, on the day he was supposed to die, arrives at the market in its closing stage, in the beginning of the night. As we have seen in the summary of the play, the market is a highly symbolic place, a place of meeting between the visible and the invisible. Esu, the patron of the marketplace, is referred to right in the beginning and will be cited more than once, perhaps pointing to his possible participation in the events that will follow. Through the historical musings of the Praise-Singer, the place becomes imbibed with the history of Oyo. As we have seen in the first chapter, Oyo was once the center of the Yoruba world, becoming its main reference in terms of economy, political

and military structures, culture and spirituality; even if the pole of spirituality lied in Ile-Ife, there is hardly any doubt that Oyo's religious influence over the rest of Yorubaland was considerable, which can be seen in the fact that Sango, an Orisa whose origin is in Oyo, has been, since a long time, a popular Orisa in many parts of Yorubaland. Therefore, we are standing on a milestone of Yoruba history and tradition, and Elesin Oba is a server to "the king of kings," as the Alaafin of Oyo is considered to be due to being the heir to Sango and Oramnyan, warrior kings who became great Orisa. It seems difficult to me to approach *Death and the King's Horseman* without this notion.

In other words, the physical space which is inhabited by the Praise-Singer and Elesin Oba and the other Yoruba characters is filled with the mystique and the history of Oyo, even though the Praise-Singer himself reminds us that the city has had to move to different places due to the continuous wars that ravaged it in the past. This is the same physical space that is inhabited by the British, for whom Oyo's mystique and history mean nothing at all.

This mythical significance is present when the Praise-Singer talks of Oyo in the time of the ancestors:

> In their time the great wars came and went, the little wars came and went; the white slavers came and went, they took away the heart of our race, they bore away the mind and muscle of our race. The city fell and was rebuilt; the city fell and our people trudged through mountain and forest to found a new home but—Elesin Oba do you hear me? (p. 6)

As the critic Dan Izevbaye argues, "[t]he opening scene presents the Yoruba as a people who have had a vision of the void and whose values are an attempt to overcome it" (IZEVBAYE, D., 2003, p. 145). Here, the metaphysical and the historical dimensions cross. Throughout so many defeats, wars, enslavements, changes of site, this people saw its very identity as a people being shattered as the very castles and houses that were destroyed. It is through these experiences that they had this vision of the void, it is through seeing the cycle of living, ancestor and unborn being almost broken that the vision of the abyss of transition came to them, the abyss almost swallowing their culture and identity as a people, as a race (in Soyinka's sense, as we saw in Chapter Two). We remember how this abyss of transition was set within a whole community and within the individual as well. Therefore, the void would be faced by both the community of Oyo and each person living there.

Elesin Oba, as we saw, has a special position within his community—whereas the task of bridging this gap, this abyss of transition is for each and every citizen to perform in their daily relations with tradition, Elesin Oba has a special place as the one who will lead the King, after his death, to the abode of the ancestors. The ritual in which this is supposed to come about is crucial to the community. With it, he is directly bridging the gaps between the world of the living and the world of the ancestors and ensuring continuity for the unborn. We have seen earlier how the abyss of transition is pointed out by the Praise-Singer as a danger to be avoided by Elesin Oba. Clothes, in this situation, are not simple visual adornments or means to cover the body; they have an important symbolism. Therefore, the fact that the fowl appears in the market without its feathers is a relevant, if relatively small, sign toward a kind of unwillingness on Elesin's part to make the ultimate sacrifice.

The task of bridging the abyss of transition brings some considerations. Elesin's being assigned this task since his birth makes him an extraordinary being and poses him at the brim of the abyss of transition from early in his life, that is, this place of transition is constantly experienced by him. Elesin Oba is, prior to his ultimate sacrifice, a being of passage, or a mediator, as Dan Izevbaye says (2003). This critic brings forth "mediation" as a crucial theme in the works of Wole Soyinka, which can be tracked to his investigations of Yoruba tragedy and the place of Ogun as the tragic actor. Ogun, as we saw earlier, is the god who bridged the gap between gods and humans by eliminating a rock that stood between the two. This gave Ogun the title of king of the deities, which he refused, and the role of mediator god, which he is unable to decline. The tragic actor, as seen before, has a mediating role as he dances and acts in the liminal space between the reigns of the living, the ancestor and the unborn. Soyinka sees Ogun as the quintessence of the tragic actor. This role, however, as Izevbaye reminds us, can be filled by myriad creatures including cripples and albinos: "These beings are either in constant motion between the different realms or they permanently inhabit the area of transition and are in constant state of passage" (IZEVBAYE, 2003, p. 142). Elesin no doubt qualifies for this mediator role.

Moreover, it is not only characters that Izevbaye sees in the place of mediation, but actions, too, especially those involving artistic activities. Above all, we see dance as a mediator in many of Soyinka's plays such as *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, making it a privileged mean of moving between levels

of existence. In the latter play, another important artistic mean appears: drum music. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, right in the beginning, soon after the first dialog between Elesin Oba and the Praise-Singer, we are presented with what David Richards calls "a kind of *Alarinjo* masquerade" (RICHARDS, 2003, p. 197). Once again we remember that Biodun Jeyifo, despite accepting the crucial role of ritual in Soyinka's work, considers the "festival complex" as "the fundamental underlying paradigm for dramatic form in both Soyinka's dramatic works and his theories of drama and theatre" (JEIYFO, 2009, p. 126). To substantiate his ideas, he relies upon an essay by Soyinka that he deems as important as "The Fourth Stage": "Theatre in African Traditional Cultures," citing a part of this essay that I, too, will reproduce here:

> Festivals, comprising as they do such a variety of forms, from the most spectacular to the most secretive and emotionally charged, offer the most familiar hunting-ground. What is more, they constitute in themselves *pure theatre* at its most prodigal and resourceful. In short, the persistent habit of dismissing festivals as belonging to a 'spontaneous' inartistic expression of communities demands re-examination. The level of organization involved, the integration of the sublime with the mundane, the endowment of the familiar with properties of the unique (and this, spread over days) all indicate that it is into the heart of many African festivals that we should look for the most stirring expressions of man's instinct and need for drama at its most comprehensive and community-involving (SOYINKA, 2003, p. 93-94).

These features listed by Soyinka as pertaining to a festival, if we apply them to Elesin's performance in the song of the Not-I bird, are perfectly in line with Richards when he says that this performance consists of "a kind of Alarinjo." Elesin's narrative of the Not-I bird is rendered with the myriad resources of song, dance, drum music, sung dialogs and choral intervention—more than a recital, a festival. The level of expressiveness and the richness of the ideas conveyed is remarkable. As Soyinka says that the festival unites the sublime with the mundane, in Elesin's song, the common people of Oyo, from different walks of life, meet with the awesomeness of death, the sublimity of royalty and its link with the ancestor world and the mysteries of the origin of life, of earth and men. Elesin's dance unites the Orun and the Aiye, since he is already posed in the area of passage. In other words, the visible and the invisible realities meet in the marketplace. As we remember, in the first Chapter, we have seen John and Margaret Drewal's explorations of the concept of *iron*, a word that was translated as "spectacle" as well as "generation," comprising in these two meanings a parallel semantic structure: both a spectacle and a generation are visible and time-bound

manifestations of an invisible and timeless reality. Here Elesin's dance and poetry unite these two dimensions halfway through his journey to the abode of the ancestors.

In his investigations about the perception of time in Bantu cultures, Alexis Kagame notices an inextricable relationship between time and location (KAGAME, 1975). In studying the categories of Bantu thinking, the Rwandan philosopher perceives that the ideas of time and location are actually placed within one category only—Hantu—since a fact cannot be individualized neither by its place only—because many facts happen in one place—or by the instant in which it happens—since many events happen in one instant. Bantu thinking then locates happenings in a complex of time and space, which are inseparable. Kagame informs us that the conclusions arrived at in his investigations about Bantu thinking can be applied as well to Sudanese cultures (in which we find the Yoruba). The drama that starts to unfold in the market could be understood with these ideas. Elesin's day of death and the location in the market seem to be perfectly unified in a whole that resolves itself in an event. Upon his arrival at the market, Elesin Oba refers to the day as an "Esu-harassed day"; we remember how the Yoruba assign days of the week to different Orisa. In this case, the day and the place (the market) belong to Esu—a deity that becomes all too powerful in the scene and which will appear more than once in Elesin's song of the Not-I bird.

It is interesting to remember also that, in the aforementioned article, Izevbaye assigns the principle of mediation to "Esu Elegba, the principle of uncertainty, fertility and change, and the one god who makes possible the reconciliation of opposites which we associate with mediation" (IZEVBAYE, 2003, p. 141). What, then, is the difference between the mediation of Ogun and that of Esu Elegba? Ogun dares the area of transition between the three realms mentioned before, breaking the obstacles between them and allowing the passage of humans from one to another. Esu's place, on the other hand, is at the crossroads, mixing and negotiating different perspectives, watching and supervising the events of the day, intervening whenever necessary. Izevbaye also says that Esu has a social role as an explanation for disruption, nonconformity and change—a role that is attributed to him in the Yoruba play *Oba Waja*, by Duro Ladipo, based on the same event that gave origin to Death and the King's Horseman (IZEVBAYE, 2003, p. 148).

In Elesin's song Esu appears nominally as a trickster who leads a man to defecate against a sacred grove and as the god of luck, but his presence there is ubiquitous. The composition of the song could be compared to that of an *opon Ifa*, which was discussed in the first chapter—the people and animals on the edges of the tray in a seriate composition representing the numerous events that occur in a day—as the people and the animals in the forest in Elesin's song who are interrupted in their tasks by the deadly whisper in the leaves. Esu is watching, as he is represented, in the upper part of the tray.

As we have seen before, the song of the Not-I bird introduces the subject of death, which Elesin dares to address even if he is in his last moments. He dares so because death, for him, is conquered, poses no threat. His death means the continuity of life for the whole of his community and what awaits him on the other side of the passage are splendorous scenaries with luxuries that exceed those that were always available to him throughout his life. The song shows us that the fear of death unites all people, regardless of their economic status and occupation. There are, however, different kinds of death, the one died by Elesin is a regenerative death, which brings happiness to all, on both sides of the passage; the one of ordinary people can be horrifying should the spirit have nowhere to go and roam in the wilderness. The death of those who have children is accompanied by the hope of resurrection. The destruction of their culture, tradition, and civilization would be the most frightening death and it should be avoided at any cost. We remember Iyaloja when she says:

> It is the death of war that kills the valiant,
>
> Death of water is how the swimmer goes
>
> It is the death of markets that kills the trader
>
> And death of indecision takes the idle away
>
> The trade of the cutlass blunts its edge
>
> And the beautiful die the death of beauty.
>
> It takes an Elesin to die the death of death…
>
> Only Elesin… dies the unknowable death of death… (p. 35)

Elesin Oba's death belongs to, therefore, a special category, since it is more than individual, and that is where he and Pilkings diverge when they discuss in the last act.

In face of Elesin's claim that "[t]here is no sleep in the world tonight," Pilkings answers that "[i]t is still a good bargain if the world should lose one night's sleep as the price of saving a man's life," and Elesin answers that "[y]ou did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it" (p. 50). The irony of this dialog is that the duty of both is to prevent death, although they do not seem to agree on what death should be prevented. There is a crucial difference in what each of them refer to as "death"—for Pilkings, death is the biological end of an individual life; for Elesin, it is the decomposition of a culture or tradition through the severance of the cord that links the living community to its origin in the abode of the ancestors. The prevention of death by any of them will unavoidably result in the occurrence of the death that the other wants to prevent; therefore only one death can be prevented. A reflection found in a book by an unnamed Catholic theologian may help us. The book is a theological discussion about the symbolism of Tarot cards. In the essay about the "Death" card, wherein the author discusses the Biblical dialog between the Serpent and Eve, we find the following lines:

> Did the Serpent simply lie or is it a fundamental error of its part? Or is its affirmation true in the order of *truths within the domain of the Serpent*, which are lies in the domain of truths of God? In other terms: are there *two* immortalities and *two* different deaths, one from the point of view of God, the other from the point of view of the Serpent? So that the Serpent understands as "death" what God understands as "life," and understands as "life" what God understands as "death"? (ANONYMOUS AUTHOR, 2014 p. 343, my translation).

The nameless theologian is, then, talking of conflicting deaths and immortalities. Each is bound to destroy the other should they meet. Therefore, if we resume the question of the clash of cultures, we could say that the actual clash is not between two cultures, but between two deaths.

If for Pilkings and other Westerners life and death are two excluding opposites, the death philosophy of the Yoruba includes more complex states with multiple possible destinies since the symbolism of death is not reduced to the reign of thought and imagination, it is contained in its experience; therefore, the many cares of Iyaloja when Elesin decides to marry on the day of his death. More than having her son deprived of his bride, she, who is a figure of wisdom in the play, feels there may be some problem if this marriage is carried on, something that could interfere with Elesin's passage to the

other world, something that could diminish his will—which is the foremost element in Elesin's passage.

The Ugandan theologian Y. K. Bamunoba, in his investigations about the meanings of death in several Ugandan cultures, points to some interesting data:

> Marriage turns a man into a creator and reproductive being, at the same time relating him with the ancestors and with future generations. Death, on the contrary, is situated between the world of humans and that of the spirits, between the visible and the invisible, which means that death does not end existence, since the latter continues beyond (BAMUNOBA, 1984, p. 9, my translation).

We see how the two happenings (marriage and death) stand in opposite places. Bamunoba's description of the effects of marriage are in line with the doctrine of the three worlds. In other words, marriage has the role of reaffirming life and of placing man within the great cycle of existence, which is beyond himself as an active being, since he will contribute to the continuous and healthy movement of the cycle with his offspring. To use one of the important concepts here, man's *will* is turned toward the bringing forth of new life when marriage is contracted; Elesin Oba's will should be turned toward his journey to the reign of the ancestors, or, simply put, death, not life, at least not material life. Iyaloja's concern seems to be exactly that as she says:

> The living must eat and drink. When the moment comes, don't turn the food to rodents' droppings in their mouth. Don't let them taste the ashes of the world when they step at dawn to breathe the morning dew. (p. 17)

And what does elicit this thought in her mind? Should we agree with Elesin Oba when he answers, with unease, "This doubt is unworthy of you Iyaloja"? Elesin's responsibility is to the living, his death will allow the living to keep on living. We are not talking here about the mere biological existence, but life within a tradition that is effective in ensuring the spiritual well-being of the community, the continuity of the cycle between living, the ancestors and the unborn. As much as any person will contribute to the healthy continuity of the cycle with his or her offspring, Elesin's contribution is broader, since it guarantees that the cycle continues to exist to receive new souls. Elesin's role can be understood in the light of what Soyinka says of Sango in his own community as he is portrayed in the play *Oba Koso*, by Duro Ladipo: "Sango dares the symbolic abyss of transition on behalf of his people[...]" (SOYINKA, 2005,

p. 58). The same can be said, in a certain sense, about Ogun, but there is an important difference. Indeed, we remember how in Chapter 2, we discussed the essential difference between Sango and Ogun—whereas Ogun stands for the primal becoming of men, Sango symbolizes the consolidation of a race, of a community. Elesin Oba is, without doubt, the benefactor of his race and his community and he is expected to dare this abyss of transition on behalf of his own people—an important action to maintain its organization, its traditions, all that ensure the cohesion and continuity of this community.

Sango, then, appears as an archetypal Orisa for Elesin Oba, since he is the paradigm of origin for the royalty of Oyo, to which Elesin Oba is intrinsically linked. Moreover, the personal character of Elesin Oba—sensuous, extroverted, charismatic, womanizer, lover of life, impulsive—are very similar to those frequently attributed to Sango. And even his death—suicide by the interruption of breathing—is similar to that of Sango.

However, Iyaloja's question points to a doubt that arises. As Soyinka says in "The Fourth Stage," "nothing rescues man (ancestral, living or unborn) from loss of self within this abyss but a titanic resolution of the will," or even simpler "nothing but the will (for that alone is left untouched) rescues being from annihilation within the abyss" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 149-150). Will, then, is the instrument Elesin Oba must rely on to cross the abyss of transition between the reign of the living and that of the dead, preparing the way for the King. Iyaloja perceives the shadow of a loss of will in Elesin Oba when he chooses to marry on the day of his ritual death. Elesin is adamant in claiming that his intention in marrying the young girl goes beyond the pleasure of sex, but actually aims at leaving his last seed in the earth of the living, leaving a last issue. Iyaloja, however, senses in Elesin Oba a deeper attachment to things of this world that may jeopardize the will that he needs to face the abyss of transition. David Richards points out that "Elesin artificially embroils sexual desire in the wider metaphysical and social processes of transition from the world of the living to the world of the ancestors" (RICHARDS, 2003, p. 200), whereas Eldred Durosimi Jones says that

> By the end of the first section of the play the Elesin's involvement with things of this world and his evident irritation at being remembered of his coming death have sown doubts about the firmness of his will (JONES, 2003, p. 152).

Iyaloja's doubt appears, in part, because Elesin already stands at the passage. When Elesin asks Iyaloja and the other women to "dare to rid my going of regrets" (p. 16), to let him dispose of his last seed in this soil before he starts his journey, Iyaloja is impressed: "The voice I hear is already touched by the waiting fingers of our departed. I dare not refuse" (p. 16). Elesin's foot is at the passage; this situation has implications not only for his position, but also for the nature of his being; he is not wholly in the reign of the living. So much so that Iyaloja says about the child that will be begotten by the union of Elesin Oba and the girl he will marry:

> The fruit of such a union is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next. Nor of the one behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor world and the unborn have joined spirits to wring an issue of the elusive being of passage… Elesin! (p. 17)

The liminal condition in which Elesin Oba is found will be inherited by his child, who will most likely integrate that group of mediating creatures pointed out by Izevbaye. David Richards compares this child to an abiku or a half-child (RICHARDS, 2003, p. 200). The abiku is a common figure in Yoruba mythology: when a mother loses many children consecutively, it is believed that she is being the victim of an abiku—a parasitic spirit child who drains all the resources of the host child, killing it; when the mother has another child, the abiku comes back to plague her new child in the same manner. The half-child we have encountered in Chapter 2 in our brief discussion of *A dance of the forests*. The two are not without relationship. Nick Wilkinson, in a brief essay about *A dance of the forests*, puts forth the idea that the half-child will become an abiku (WILKINSON, 1980, p. 70), he then cites Gerald Moore, who says that "Abiku, though he appears a child, is truly ageless and forever apart" (MOORE, 1978, p. 90). The two figures—abiku and half-child—are liminal phenomena, both eternally inhabiting the abyss of transition, never placing their roots in any of the other worlds, lost between the world of the unborn and the world of the living. That seems to be the case of Elesin's future child, whom David Richards calls "a child of transition" (RICHARDS, 2003, p. 200).

In act II, we are faced with yet another figure of transition, although it is here in state of paralysis: the Egungun. The Egungun garments here are being used by two Europeans who wear them for the sake of leisure and have absolutely no idea what their

meaning is—the Egungun garment, in them, is deprived of its mythological origin, ritual significance and mystical power. As Eldred Durosimi Jones puts it:

> The first section also introduces us to the heart of a culture. Its privilege and its responsibilities are understood by all, so that they are accepted, faced or shirked knowingly. What the portrait of the District Officer and his wife, Simon and Jane Pilkings, dancing the tango dressed in the captured regalia of an *egungun* masque presents to us is a trifling travesty of the same culture, which shocks even the converted Christian (sic) Sergeant Amusa (JONES, 2003, p. 153).

There are symbolical aspects of the Egungun garment being worn by the two Pilkingses which, as far as I know, have not been touched upon by the critics. The first aspect relates to the Egungun as a symbol of death; as we saw above, the garments mean nothing to the European but highly refined costumes, not only do they not believe in any possible mystical power the garment may have, they also ignore its symbolism; as soon as the Muslim-convert Yoruba sergeant sees them, he shies away in fear, since he recognizes in the garment the symbol and the power of death. Therefore, we have the Europeans dressed in something that means death to the Yoruba, foreshadowing what Elesin says in the last act, that the white skin prevented him to see the death the enemies had sent upon them; here they are dressed in the regalia of death, meaning death to the Yoruba and their culture, although this meaning is grasped by the Yoruba only. The other aspect is related to the Egungun as earthly representatives of the ancestors. In this vein, it is profitable to cite a myth collected by Babatunde Lawal in his book *The Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture*:

> Legend has it that when the first *òrìṣà* were coming from heaven to earth, they did not bring the Egúngún mask along. As a result, all children born on earth had no eyes, nose or mouth and could not talk. Olúayé Olókun (the divinity of the sea) consulted a diviner, who revealed that the "facelessness" of the newborn babies was due to the absence of Egúngún on earth. In short, only after Olúayé Olókun brought Egúngún to earth did women become fertile and bear normal children (LAWAL, 1996, p. 63).

There is a direct relationship between the absence of Egungun on earth and the facelessness of the children, how one leads to the other is to be investigated. If we take the figures in this myth to our cycle of existence, the Egungun would inhabit the world of the ancestor whereas the faceless children (as all children) would have just crossed the passage from the world of the unborn to that of the living; in other words, they have just come from the spirit world to this one. What Olúayé Olókun discovered in her

consultation with the oracle was that the relationship with the ancestors could not be reduced to the other world, they had to be worshipped on earth as well so that they could ensure the children their identity and means of perception and expression, they needed a token of the ancestor world to receive the children from the world of the unborn. The faceless children could be linked to the aforementioned abiku children and the half-child: all of them were not wholly successful in making the passage from the spirit world to the living world. The presence of Egungun on earth is fundamental to the healthy continuity of the cycle of existence. In the play, the Egungun costumes are captured, alienated from their natural world and made powerless by being worn by those who see them as purely material things with no spiritual function. In a way, the Pilkingses are drawing the Egungun away from their place in the cycle of existence, which is in line with the disruptive effect Pilkings will have on this cycle in stopping Elesin's ritual death.

When Elesin decides to marry, deflower and impregnate a young girl on the day of his ritual death, he creates a situation that is drowned in ambiguity. This ambiguity is visible in Iyaloja's predication of the future child. Moreover, this ambiguity is audible by Joseph, the Yoruba Christian servant of the Pilkingses, when he is bewildered by the drums he listens to, which he identifies as the death of a great chief and the marriage of a great chief. Indeed, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., sees ambiguity as the very essence of the play, as something that pervades the very task of Elesin Oba and his actions; moreover, ambiguity is seen not only in the plot, according to this critic, but also in the language of the play (GATES, 2003, p. 160).

The ambiguity, as we have seen, lies in Elesin's own attitude toward his mission. If, on the one hand, he claims to embrace this mission with honor and promises that nothing will hold him back, on the other hand, he gives too many hints of attachment to the world and its pleasures. We have already talked about the doubt that arises about whether Elesin decides to marry in a wish to leave yet another child before his passage to the other world or he does it out of sheer lust. We have seen David Richards's hypothesis that Elesin is embroiling lust with metaphysics to dignify it. I believe that it may be both.

The earth has been a constant image in the characters' language. More than a provider, it functions as a witness to what the characters say, as we have seen in the

relationship of the symbolism of the earth with the Ogboni in Chapter One. The earth also lies on the opposite side of where Elesin Oba is heading. To reach his objective, Elesin has to sever the cord that attaches him to the earth and transcend to the spiritual world and, for this, he needs to rely on a very strong will, that cannot be tainted by any form of yearning or attachment to the earth. Yeleazar Meletinsky narrates a psychological process which has an analogous process in heroic legends: the process of individuation. According to Meletinsky, the process of the son cutting the psychological ties with the parents is analogous to the process of heroic achievement. The maternal principle is chthonic and sexual while the masculine principle is a spiritual one (MELETINSKI, 2015, p. 26). Transcendence occurs when the hero ascends from the chthonic to the spiritual or when the child draws away from the mother toward individuation.

Much of these reflections can be satisfactorily applied to the case of Elesin Oba. He decides to spend his last hours in the market—the center of life—surrounded by women—the principle of life and birth—and decides finally to marry a young girl. He is clearly very attached to earth—both as a symbol and as a material presence of sustenance. His spirit is evidently not turned toward the spiritual journey he is supposed to make. This has been noticed by Joan Hepburn in her essay "Ritual closure in *Death and the King's Horseman*":

> Though it is appropriate that Elesin be ceremonially and richly attired for his burial later that night, the fact that he spends his last hours in the company of women—usually symbolic of the principle of life in Soyinka's plays—, in the liveliest center of the community and in the richest garb, suggests his materialistic nature (HEPBURN, 2003, p. 184).

This mainly symbolic role of women should not go without some criticism. Indeed, Biodun Jeiyfo discusses what he sees as the male-centeredness of Soyinka's works, remembering how even the strongest women in Soyinka's works appear as "over-symbolized essences representing the nurturing and healing power of nature" (JEIYFO, 2009, p. 99). Jeiyfo continues, citing a fragment of an interview with a female scholar, who questions Soyinka about what she sees as the unrealistic nature of his female characters. Soyinka responds that, in his mind, women are intimately fused with Nature, mainly due to their reproductive capacity—the figure and the biology of women link them with nature in a way it does not to man and make them occupy a specific

position in his writings. Since I am here adopting this line of interpretation, it is important that this be discussed. Soyinka's attitudes toward women are partly explained by his mythic imagination, as Stanley Macebuh has characterized (MACEBUH, 2001, p. 29). In myth, all acquire symbolic value, including men and women.

The best place to look for an understanding of Soyinka's characterization of women in this play is, of course, Yoruba mythology, the archetypical source. The metaphysics of femininity in Yoruba culture is associated to a series of female deities who refer to a more ancient, more primeval source. Babatunde Lawal discusses a mythological figure who is the source of all human beings as well as the source of female power called Iya Nla (Great Mother) (LAWAL, 1996, p. 71). Lawal identifies her with Mother Nature and epitomizes the maternal principle in the Yoruba cosmos and to her pertains attributes of the main female deities—among them, Yemoja, Olokun (who is sometimes seen as a male deity), Osun and others. According yet to Lawal, "Ìyá Nlá was the primeval sea out of which habitable land emerged at Ilé-Ifẹ̀, the cradle of Yoruba civilization" (LAWAL, 1996, p. 71-73)—the primeval waters, the undifferentiated matter from which all forms may come. This is also perceivable in Iya Nla's relationship with the arts. Lawal posits that the coastal populations of Yorubaland associate the movements of the sea with the drums beating in Iya Nla's underwater palace. There where she dwells, drum music and dancing constantly take place. Her music lends its rhythm to the ocean, a source of rhythm for human activities in traditional societies. Iya Nla loves the arts, which are excellent ways of honoring her and her earthly disciples. Gelede spectacle, occurring in the market, is one of the most propitious moments to do so.

According yet to Lawal, Iya Nla is also linked to the divinity called Iyami Osoronga, the first female deity to come from heaven to earth with a supreme power given to her by Olodumare in the form of a calabash containing a bird (LAWAL, 1996, p. 73). The same author links this female figure with the aje—women endowed with tremendous magical powers capable of both good and evil—somewhat similar to the Western figure of the witch. "Iyami," as can be guessed, means "my mother." Although this divinity and her followers on earth can do both good and evil, they are known mainly by their evil facet and numerous crimes are attributed to them, such as poisoning, damning through magical powers, mutilations, homicides and infanticides—indeed, some aje are known to kill their own children (VERGER, 2003, p. 18, 24). The

aje, therefore, represent the primitive feminine, an archetypal idea of women as having enormous occult powers and an unpredictable, vindictive and wild character. This archetype is not far from the one Meletinski attributes to the Great Mother: the wild nature, incantation, blood, death (MELETINSKI, 2002, p. 25).

The godly figure of Iya Nla, as a primeval feminine figure, effects this link pointed out by Soyinka between Nature, and the earth, and women—the processes of reproduction, containment and nourishment that we see in both. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the figure of Iya Nla is implicit in the figures and activities of the women. In act 3, when the girls expel Amusa and his guards from the marketplace, one of them keeps on referring reverentially to "the mothers of the market" or "our mother" and she even accuses him of no longer knowing his own mother. The "mothers" referred to here can be read as a reference to such figures of primeval femininity such as Iya Nla and the Iyami Osoronga in their mysteries and powers, which is reinforced by the fact that the marketplace is seen as a space of women.

Therefore, in this context, the market and the women are intertwined in a symbolic whole that means life, physical life, which is antithetical to the path that should be taken by Elesin Oba. It is with this disposition that Elesin prepares to begin his journey, his *irin ajo*. A conflict between the spiritual and the corporeal within Elesin—this conflict is as internal as the journey that he is supposed to make. His spirit becomes the battleground for two opposing impulses—one that drags him toward the earth and another that drags him toward the spirit world. Ketu Katrak summarizes this conflict:

> Soyinka sympathetically explores the predicament of a human being like Elesin facing the metaphysical abyss and fearing that final plunge into the unknown. His drive to live is so strong that it drags him back to earth. Although, on the surface, Elesin welcomes this role he must perform for his people, the deeper springs of life within him, the force of his blood tying him to other human beings and to the earth, win over his attempt to relinquish the body. Although he is prepared for his death and he knows how close he is to death, his resolve to die fails on the brink of the transitional gulf (KATRAK, 1986, p. 89).

Here lies the ambiguity of Elesin's position—his drive to live and his duty to perform. As we have once noticed in the words of Iyaloja ("It takes an Elesin to die the death of death"), the death that is prepared to him is not a common death, it will occur willfully under specific circumstances and in a very specific place and time. Elesin was

free to choose the place—the market—; the time, however, is predetermined by the authority of the Osugbo society. His death will involve ritual actions and a gradual change of state of consciousness—such as we see in act 3—, which will bring Elesin nearer the state he has to achieve to prepare him for his journey. His death will mean a change of being, a form of transformation of essence. In this sense, his death has a strong character of initiation. Mircea Eliade defines initiation from the philosophical point of view as an "ontological mutation" (ELIADE, 2015, p. 12). Eliade also points out that, in societies where initiations are made, they engage the whole human being and are responsible for a deep change in his or her life as a totality. It is through initiation that man becomes what he is and what he ought to be (ELIADE, 2015, p. 26). Elesin Oba's initiation will open the door for him to a new, broader and happier life, which comes with the fulfilment of his duties. Arnold Van Gennep, in his study about the rites of passage, writes about a class of rites that he calls rites of "territorial passage," which involves the passing from one territory to another. Among them, there is what he calls the threshold rites, in which the physical passage from one place to another corresponds to a spiritual passage from one state of being to another, "to cross the threshold," says van Gennep, "is to unite oneself with another world" (VAN GENNEP, 1961, p. 20). These rites are considered by van Gennep transition rites, which presuppose rites of separation from a previous world (called by Van Gennep preliminal rites), rites executed during the transitional stage (liminal or threshold rites) and ceremonies of incorporation into the new world (post-liminal rites). Henry Louis Gates, Jr., seems to be in accordance with the character of Elesin's death as a rite of passage:

> Death for the Elesin is not a final contract: it is rather the rite of passage to the larger world of the ancestors, a world linked in the continuous bond of Yoruba metaphysics to that of the living and the unborn (GATES, JR., 2003, p. 156).

Elesin lavishly welcomes the approaching of his rite of passage, but in his interior there is division—a paradox that is lived in having his marriage and death on the same day, actually with a few hours of difference. Perhaps the most curious moment of *Death and the King's Horseman* is the hours between the consummation of Elesin's marriage and his prospective ritual death. The two poles of the life of a man, as Bamunoba says above, will be lived by Elesin in a few hours. Two rituals—one inviting new life and one leading toward death—are experienced in a very short period of time.

One wonders whether the spirit state of Elesin Oba could actually switch so quickly from one reality to the other. It appears it cannot. The state in which his spirit remains seems actually to be conflict. As Biodun Jeyifo says:

> The tragic flaw of the protagonist of this play is thus Elesin's willful misrecognition of his divided volition, willful because it is only by acting out and vibrantly playing the elaborate conceits of his mastery of death and his self-projection as an avatar of earth's regenerative powers that he is able to live the lie of being an absolutely willing ritual scapegoat. The lie of course catches up with him – and the ritual is aborted (JEYIFO, 2009, p. 156).

His *marriage* consummated, Elesin Oba's poetry starts to assume a more solemn tone as he moves toward the final rites:

> Our marriage is not yet wholly fulfilled. When earth and passage wed, the consummation is complete only when there are grains of earth on the eyelids of passage. Stay by me till then. My faithful drummers, do me your last service (p. 32).

Drums come by; they come from the Osugbo lodge. Elesin Oba identifies the moment of the *death* of the king's dog and the king's favorite horse. The language of the play suddenly takes on a poetic tone. A sentence uttered by Elesin— "The moon has fed, a glow from its full stomach fills the sky and air, but I cannot tell where is that gateway through which I must pass"—marks his progressive falling into a trance. The moon appears as a messenger, and Elesin's trance hones him to a greater receptivity for its message; although he cannot understand it completely, he can perceive its existence and its connection to the sacred drums whose phrasings propitiate the strange voices that guide Elesin's feet. The state of Elesin's trance is one in which the surroundings acquire a different, deeper logic in a sequence that was considered by Olakunle George "one of the most powerfully realized moments in all of Soyinka" (GEORGE, 2003, p. 214). The ambiance is then suffused with what Soyinka calls, in "Drama and the African World View," "the poetry of origin" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 56) especially when the women chanting a dirge. That is when the Praise-Singer's body is inhabited by the spirit of the dead King, when he approaches the mysterious zone of passage which will be crossed by Elesin Oba. Both Praise-Singer and Elesin Oba are here in a state "that is no longer of this earth" (SOYINKA, 2003, p. 6), a step closer to the world of the ancestors. Their voices start to assume other tonalities. As David Richards says,

> The dialogue of spirits detaches the voice from the characters; in the rituals of the dead the word escapes from human identities as language becomes the possession of the ancestors (RICHARDS, 2003, p. 198).

Elesin already feels his entranced being becoming permanently different, as if this trance was the harbinger of a change of substance. The Praise-Singer's trance, however, is *temporary* as he is acting as the mouthpiece of the King. As David Richards observes, as soon as the Praise-Singer reassumes his body, he abandons poetry and returns to prose, even if a remarkably poetic prose. The last poetic fragment of the Praise-Singer contains a phrase ("gracefully") that is echoed in Iyaloja's fragment, which signals to his return to the realm of the living.

Elesin Oba is *here* nearer than ever to his Ogun-role. He is about to step into the unknown on behalf of his community as Ogun did in mythical times. David Richards says that "true to the narrative of the myth of Ogun, his creative role as a figure of transition also involves acts of destruction" (RICHARDS, 2003, p, 200). The destruction was being sown since the first act with Elesin's attachment to the things of the earth. More than ever, Elesin seems to be in a paradoxical position in which he is prepared to make the journey that will maintain the soundness of his community, heading straight to the failure that will signify the destruction of this same community.

The arrival of Olunde, Elesin's son, in the fourth act, presents us with another figure between cultures, as Joseph and Amusa. The great difference is that Olunde seems to comfortably inhabit the two worlds whereas Joseph and Amusa, uncomfortably. In Amusa's clumsy English we perceive his discomfort with the culture he decided to serve; in his fear of the Egungun costume we perceive a superstitious, therefore unhealthy, attachment to his old culture, which is in conflict with his recently adopted Islamism. Joseph seems somewhat more at home in his new creed and can recall features of his culture. In Olunde we see the opposite situation. His revolt in seeing Jane Pilkings in an Egungun costume has nothing to do with a fantastic fear that it may attract death, but with what he sees as disrespect for his people's heritage. As we can see, Olunde's English is as articulated as that of the English characters (maybe more) and he is perfectly informed about the recent history of Europe. Likewise, he is convinced of the value of his Yoruba heritage and has decided never to give it up—something that is not in contradiction with his pursuit of a medical career in England.

Olakunle George describes in crystalline terms the difference between Amusa's reaction to the Egungun mask and Olunde's:

> Where Amusa is locked into the total transparency of the mask as signifier of the world of the dead, Olunde pays attention to who is wearing the mask. For Olunde, intentionality mediates his reaction to Jane dressed as *egungun*, and since a white colonial functionary cannot wear the mask for the same reason that a native wears it, he is able to see Jane as Jane (GEORGE, 2003, p. 221).

Olunde has the necessary degree of secularization not to be alarmed by the clothes' magical powers, but not to the point of seeing it as an ordinary, even if very exquisite, garment; he sees it as suffused with his culture, the culture from which he sprang. His reaction to his father's ritual suicide, which shocks Jane, is perfectly in tune with the beliefs of the Yoruba people—he deems it totally necessary for the sake of his people and is totally bent toward behaving exactly as he is expected to as Elesin's son and heir. Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that he reacts with such hostility in face of his father's failure to die.

It is in this scene that occurs the reversal Elesin comments about in act 5: "Did you not see when the world reversed itself and the father fell before his son; asking forgiveness?" (p. 51). This was no mere exaggeration or sentimentality, Elesin was referring to a process that actually took place. This point marks out another moment in the play, where Elesin acquires another nature, but not the glorious nature of a revered ancestor he was supposed to acquire had he died in the appointed moment. Elesin achieves a state which is not unusual in the African metaphysics of death. Let us return to the Ugandan theologian Y. K. Bamunoba: "Sometimes the notion of 'death' is drawn upon in describing a person or thing that has not accomplished what was expected of him or her in life" (BAMUNOBA, 1984, p. 9). Bamunoba informs us that such a person, even if apparently materially alive, is dead in spirit. It is a strange state of spiritual death in a body that is materially alive, which is the opposite state that Elesin would achieve with a timely death—that of perfect life in spirit due to a peaceful materially dead body. When Pilkings suggests he had saved Elesin's life, Elesin answered: "You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it" (p. 50). Once again, Elesin sounds sentimental and exaggerated, but he is merely telling the truth, and it is just ironic that Pilkings, attempting to save Elesin, threw him in the most frightful death.

Elesin's reversed state is accompanied by a reversal in the whole of society and the cosmos, as the very Elesin suggests in his talk with Pilkings—"If I wished you well I would pray that you do not stay long enough to see the disaster you have brought upon us" (p. 50). The theme of the disorganization of nature from the act of an individual was interestingly explored by Jean-Pierre Vernant in his analysis of the myth of Oedipus in his book *L'Univers, Les Dieus, Les Hommes*. Vernant tells us that Oedipus, in killing his father, marrying his mother and having children with her, identified with his father, became son and husband at the same time and father and brother, causing chaos in the natural order of life within family succession (VERNANT, 1999, p. 209). This chaos is reflected in disorder in nature and society. Likewise, the myth narrated in the second chapter of this dissertation, in which Obatala is arrested in his visit to Sango in Oyo, presents a similar situation, in which Obatala, the principle of life and the elder, is arrested and degraded in jail, following a period of poor crops, chaos and degeneration in nature, sterility in women, in other words, the cycles of nature are disrupted. Here in *Death and the King's Horseman*, the events follow the same logic. Elesin, the elder who is bound to his journey to the ancestor world, puts himself in the place of a young man and decides to become the groom of a young bride and conceive of her; if we go back to his metaphor of the sap of the plaintain, he was actually the parent stalk putting himself in the place of the young shoot. His attachment to earth and life—when he was bound to death—caused an imbalance and effected a reversal in the order of life. Elesin's position resulted in his personal reversion of life being reflected in his whole society. The metaphor of the plaintain, as we have seen in the description, comes back in Iyaloja's voice when she asks him "is it the parent shoot which withers to give sap to the younger or, does your wisdom see it running the other way?" (p. 57). The metaphor of the hollow stem and the subverted cycle of the plaintain reinforces the idea of reversion of nature.

In this reversion of life, another agent is the moon with its symbolic aspects. In his talk with Pilkings, Elesin Oba decides to give him a thorough explanation on the functioning of the works of the night:

> You are waiting for dawn white man. I hear you saying to yourself: only so many hours until dawn and then the danger is over. All I must do is to keep him alive tonight. You don't quite understand it all but you know that tonight is when what ought to be must be brought about. I shall ease your mind even more, ghostly one. It is not an entire night but a moment of the night, and that

moment is past. The moon was my messenger and guide. When it reached a certain gateway in the sky, it touched that moment for which my whole life has been spent in blessings. Even I do not know the gateway. I have stood here and scanned the sky for a glimpse of that door but, I cannot see it. Human eyes are useless for a search of this nature. But in the house of *osugbo*, those who keep watch through the spirit recognised the moment, they sent word to me through the voice of our sacred drums to prepare myself. I heard them and I shed all thoughts of earth. I began to follow the moon to the abode of the gods… servant of the white king, that was when you entered my chosen place of departure on feet of desecration. (p. 51)

The drums that guided Elesin's actions in act III, coming from the house of Osugbo, were actually paying heed to one unhuman, impersonal master—the moon. The commanding movements of this aster in the skies are accessible but to the party of sages called Ogboni—or Osugbo—society. The Osugbo society, in presiding over the death rites of a dead king and the rites of enthronement of a new king, actually presides over a cycle of death and rebirth. Samuel Johnson informed us that the coronation of a new king took place at the end of three months, that is, at the third appearance of the new moon after the last king's death (JOHNSON, 2010 p. 43); here we see the master of all cycles presiding as well over the passage of a horseman of the king. It is a cycle of which Elesin's death is a part. Stephen Farrow found no worship of celestial bodies among the Yoruba (FARROW, 1996, p. 13), but festivities in the new moon. The moon here has the importance of a guide, possibly an Orisa, who links the cosmic rhythms to the state rhythms.

It is interesting to draw upon the ideas of Brazilian philosopher Vicente Ferreira da Silva, when he discusses ethnographic data presented by Leo Frobenius:

> Frobenius speaks of an African tribe in which the sovereign followed, in his relations with the people, the evolution of the lunar cycle: as the moon grew in the sky, he would show himself more frequently in front of all, until in the full moon he would appear with his court and in all luxury and pomp imaginable, beginning days of great festivities. However, as the celestial body started to decline, the sovereign would draw away from the community until he would retreat to a reclusive place when the celestial body disappeared from the sky. This lunar-sovereign symbolized and represented, on earth, that order. If, for us, who observe the facts from the outside and from another perspective, this identification of the sovereign and the moon seems an unexplainable and purely fortuitous relation, from the internal core of this social-vital system, the lunar drama and the pulsation of life in the State are translated in one same will of expression. Evidently, to this tribe, the moon is not our moon, nor the king is this entity that is ourselves in our anthropological knowledge. Their lunar gnosis and their personal self-gnosis should be fundamentally distinguished from the

> one prevalent among us, making such an identification possible (SILVA, 2010, p. 128, my translation).

More than the State rhythms, the moon establishes the very rhythms of life and death, the cycles of degeneration and regeneration, as Jasbir Jain says: "Elesin watches the moon, for it is to its movement that life and death are connected" (JAIN, 2004, p. 108). On his turn, Mircea Eliade emphasizes the idea of measurement and periodicity (ELIADE, 2010, p. 127-128). The moon, in its inconstancy and periodical death and rebirth, is the paradigm for human life. It is no wonder that it should serve as a regulator for Elesin's abandonment of life, which should occur exactly at a certain moment with a certain position of the moon. After that, the moon marks only the spiritual death of Elesin and his loss. In the abovementioned theological treatise on Tarot cards, the symbolism of the moon card is associated to the movement of life reversion, contrary to nature, the movement of recession (ANONYMOUS AUTHOR, 2014 p. 485-486, my translation), such as we see in the case of Elesin Oba.

The complete confirmation of this reversal occurs when the dead body of Olunde is revealed: "This young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life," says the Praise-Singer (p. 62). The son has become the father. Elesin's suicide puts an end to his bodily life as the spiritual had already been cut short. Jasbir Jain observes that Elesin Oba suffers two deaths: one in the end of act 3 and one in the end of act 5—"The second and the final death is a weak duplicate of the first" (JAIN, 2004, p. 109).

The state of spiritual death is perceived through Elesin's language, the quality of which suffers a clear decrease. Although it is still marked by sophisticated metaphors, it no longer includes neither the wealth of the proverbial forms nor the poetical rhythms expressed in musical sentences in verses. Particularly the want of proverbs is very telling of his rupture with the spirit of his culture, since the proverb is an extremely important organizer in Yoruba—and African in general—thought. David Richards points out to this loss when he posits:

> Elesin no longer controls his world through proverbial language, since he has lost the capacity to give a voice to 'the Yoruba mind' which proverbs express. Instead he grapples desperately with a devalued language where there was once a profound and confident image of a world held in equilibrium by the creative ego of Elesin. The play replicates the binary structure of the myth of Ogun;

> having made the world by his creative ritual acts, Elesin, like Ogun at Ire, unmakes it in an act of destructive failure (RICHARDS, 2003, p. 206).

In Chapter Two, we have seen Abiola Irele discussing the levels of articulation of language and the importance of proverbs in Yoruba culture: it provides a structure of thought as is apparent in the metaproverb *Owe l'esin oro; ti oro ba sonu, owe l'a fi nwa* (Proverbs are the horses of thought; when thoughts get lost, we send the proverbs to find them) (IRELE, 2001, p. 9, p. 32). Elesin loses much of his language power in face of the disruption caused by his failure to die. Here we are faced with the language rupture pointed out by Abiola Irele in the beginning of this chapter. It is interesting to return to these ideas:

> The work is a play centered on a precise, crucial moment of rupture in the African consciousness. In formal terms, the play progresses from an immediate realization of orality as the expressive mode of a total way of life to what can only be described, within its specific context, as the tragic loss of the empowering function of the word in the universe of the African. The circumstantial interest of the play rests upon its theme of the encounter between the traditional ethos and Western values, between a metaphysical and a historical imperative. But it is the presentation of this encounter that gives force to the theme and significance to the work itself, for it enacts in language the form of the existential predicament it presents, the dilemma involved in the progressive decentering of the African psyche and imagination in a new dispensation that is imposing itself upon the African world. Part of the significance of *Death and the King's Horseman* is its demonstration that this process begins with language (IRELE, 2001, p. 19).

The disruption occurred with Elesin Oba and his society can be viewed from different perspectives: in this analysis, we have viewed it from a metaphysical and mythical perspective; here, we add a linguistic perspective, according to which this disruption is established firstly with language. In Irele's words, we see, in *Death and the King's Horseman*, a new dispensation that encroaches on the African world with a disrupting effect. From this point of view, we could say that the very metaphysical perspective suggested in the *Author's note* comes to be harmed or even destroyed: the metaphysical perspective lied on the Yoruba side, as Soyinka himself says in the note: "the universe of the Yoruba mind—the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition." More than intervening in a native custom, Pilkings is disrupting a worldview and its logics, reorganizing the natives' lives according to his own secular logics and morality. It was said before that there was a

conflict between death as experienced by Pilkings and death as experienced by Elesin Oba. Death is a most important organizer of human social life, providing it with a structure. When Pilkings slips his secular concept of death into Yoruba social and cultural organization, he provokes—even if unknowingly—this disruption that has been talked about in the beginning of this paragraph. The result is confusion and chaos, which are mirrored in the impoverishment of language such as we see in Elesin.

The final sentence uttered by Iyaloja to Elesin's unfortunate widow can be understood along those lines: "Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn." (p. 63). Tradition has been upset, and the worlds that turn on its hinges are in chaos: the world of the living and that of the ancestor; now the only world that can provide them with some hope is the world of those yet to come, the world of the unborn.

CHAPTER 4

IKU ATI ELESIN OBA

(DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN)

A MORTE E O CAVALEIRO DO REI

ATO 1

Uma passagem pelo mercado no local quase fechando. As barracas estão sendo esvaziadas, colchonetes sendo dobrados. Algumas MULHERES *passam indo para casa, cheias de cestas. Em uma barraca de tecidos, rolos de tecido são retirados, peças de exibição dobradas e empilhadas em uma bandeja.* ELESIN OBA *entra por uma passagem diante do mercado seguido por seus* TAMBOREIROS *e* AEDOS. *É um homem de enorme vitalidade, fala, dança e canta com a alegria de viver infecciosa que acompanha todas as suas ações.*

AEDO Elesin o! Elesin Oba! Howu! Que compromisso é esse a que o galo atende com tal pressa que deve abandonar sua cauda?

ELESIN [*desacelera um pouco, rindo*] Um compromisso em que o galo não precisa de ornamentos.

AEDO O-oh, ouviram isso, meus amigos? É assim que anda o mundo. Porque se aproxima de uma noiva novinha em folha, o homem esquece a fiel mãe de seus filhos.

ELESIN Quando o cavalo fareja o estábulo, não força as rédeas? O mercado é o paciente lar de meu espírito e as mulheres se preparam para ir embora. Este dia assolado por Exu deslizou para dentro da panela enquanto ceávamos. Nós o comemos com o resto da carne. Negligenciei minhas mulheres.

AEDO Sabemos disso tudo. Ainda assim, não é razão para deixar de lado sua cauda neste dia de todos os dias. Sei que as mulheres o cobrirão de damasco e *alari*, mas é quando o vento sopra frio pelas costas que o frango conhece seus verdadeiros amigos.

ELESIN Olohun-iyo!

AEDO Tem certeza de que haverá alguém como eu do outro lado?

ELESIN Olohun-iyo!

AEDO Longe de mim menosprezar os habitantes daquele lugar, mas um homem ou nasce para seu ofício ou não. E eu não tenho certeza se você encontrará meu pai, então quem vai cantar esses feitos em acentos que perfurem a surdez dos antigos? Preparei minha partida – só me diga: Olohun-iyo, preciso de você nesta jornada e eu seguirei logo atrás.

ELESIN Você é como uma esposa ciumenta. Fique perto de mim, mas só neste lado. Minha fama, minha honra, são legados para os vivos; fique atrás de mim e deixe o mundo tragar seu mel de seus lábios.

AEDO Seu nome será como o frutinho que a criança coloca sob a língua para adoçar a passagem da comida. O mundo nunca o cuspirá.

ELESIN Venha, então. Este mercado é meu poleiro. Quando chego entre as mulheres, sou um pinto com cem mães. Eu me torno um monarca cujo palácio se constrói com ternura e beleza.

AEDO Elas adoram mimá-lo, mas cuidado. Mãos de mulheres também enfraquecem o incauto.

ELESIN Esta noite vou deitar minha cabeça em seu colo e dormir. Esta noite vou tocar pés com seus pés em uma dança que já não é mais desta terra. Mas o cheiro de sua carne, seu suor, o cheiro do índigo em seus tecidos, este é o último ar que quero inspirar antes de ir me encontrar com meus grandes ancestrais.

AEDO No tempo deles, o mundo nunca se desviou de seu eixo.

ELESIN Os deuses disseram Não.

AEDO No tempo deles, as grandes guerras iam e vinham, as pequenas guerras iam e vinham; os escravistas brancos iam e vinham, eles levaram embora o coração de nossa raça, eles carregaram a mente e o músculo de nossa raça. A cidade caiu e foi reconstruída; a cidade caiu e nosso povo percorreu com dificuldade montanha e floresta para fundar um novo lar, mas – Elesin Oba, você me ouve?

ELESIN Ouço sua voz, Olohun-iyo.

AEDO Nosso mundo nunca se extraviou de seu verdadeiro curso.

ELESIN Os deuses disseram Não.

AEDO Há apenas um lar para a vida de um mexilhão do rio; há a penas um lar para a vida de um cágado; há apenas uma concha para a alma do homem; há apenas um mundo para o espírito de nossa raça. Se esse mundo abandonar seu curso e se chocar contra os rochedos do grande vácuo, o mundo de quem nos abrigará?

ELESIN Isso não ocorreu no tempo de meus ancestrais, não ocorrerá no meu.

AEDO O galo não deve ser visto sem suas penas.

ELESIN Nem ficará o pássaro do Eu-não muito tempo sem seu ninho.

AEDO [*interrompido em seu passeio lírico*] O pássaro do Eu-não, Elesin?

ELESIN Eu disse o pássaro do Eu-não.

AEDO Com todo respeito aos nossos anciãos, mas tal pássaro de fato existe?

ELESIN Como assim?! Será possível que ele tenha se esquecido de bater em sua porta?

AEDO [*sorrindo*] As charadas de Elesin não são só a noz sob a casca que rompe dentes humanos; ele também esconde a amêndoa em brasas quentes e desafia os dedos de um homem a retirá-la.

ELESIN Tenho certeza de que ele o chamou, Olohun-iyo. Você se escondeu no sótão e mandou o criado dizer a ele que você não estava em casa?

> [ELESIN *executa uma dança curta, em parte zombeteira. O* TAMBOREIRO *entra em cena e acompanha o ritmo de seus passos.* ELESIN *dança em direção ao mercado ao mesmo tempo em que canta a estória do pássaro do Eu-não, sua voz se modificando com destreza para imitar seus personagens. Ele atua como um contador de histórias nato, contagiando seus acompanhantes com seu humor e energia. Mais* MULHERES *chegam durante seu recital, incluindo* IYALOJA.]

A morte vinha chamando.

Quem não conhece seu rascar de juncos?

Suspiro de crepúsculo entre as folhas

Antes que caia o grande arabá? Você ouviu?

Eu não! Jura o fazendeiro. Ele estrala

Os dedos ao redor de sua cabeça, abandona

Uma safra já gasta e inicia

Um diálogo veloz com suas pernas.

"Eu não", berra o destemido caçador, "mas –

Está escurecendo, e essa lâmpada

Já vazou todo seu óleo. Acho

Melhor ir para casa e retomar minha caçada

Outro dia". Mas então ele pára, de repente

Solta um gemido: "Oh boca tola, atraindo

Uma maldição sobre sua própria cabeça! Sua lâmpada

Vazou todo seu óleo, é?"

Pra frente ou para trás não ousa se mover.

Buscar folhas ou fazer *etutu*

Neste ponto? Ou correr para casa para a segurança

De sua lareira? Dez dias de mercado se passaram,

Amigos, e ele segue lá plantado

Tão rijo quanto a haste de Orayan.

A boca da cortesã mal

Abriu para engolir um *robo* de meia pataca

Quando ela gemeu: “Eu não.” Estava toda vestida

Pra chamar meu amigo o fiscal-chefe.

Mas em vez disso manda o mensageiro:

“Diz que estou doente: a menstruação chegou do nada

Mas não a minha hora – espero.”

Por que chora o pupilo?

Sua pobre cabeça teve de degustar

Os croques do Mallam, meu bom amigo:

“Se estivesses recitando o Corão

Darias ouvidos a ruídos sem sentido

Escurecendo as folhas, criança de má cepa?”

Ele fecha sua escola antes do tempo

Corre para casa e se cobre de amuletos.

E que tal meu camarada Ifawomi?

Tinha as mãos de um entalhador, firmes

E fortes. Eu as vi tremerem

Qual asas úmidas de um frango

Um dia joga o *opele* alisado pelo tempo

Sobre a tábua oracular. Tudo porque

O consulente o olhou nos olhos e indagou,

“Ouviu aquele sussurro nas folhas?”

“Eu não”, foi sua réplica; “acho que estou ficando surdo –

Bom dia.” E Ifá não falou mais aquele dia

Trancou sua porta o sacerdote

Vedou a goteira em seu telhado – mas espere!

Esse aviso não foi pra Fawomi

Mas para Ossaim, pombo correio do coração

Da sabedoria de Ifá. Não sabia que uma águia

Voejava pelo céu

E Ifá agora um pintinho na ninhada

De Fawomi Galinha Mãe, piando.

Ah, mas não devo esquecer meu mensageiro

Noturno da palmeira abundante, cujo grunhido

Se tornou Eu-não, enquanto se aliviava

Perto de um arbusto. Ele se pergunta se Elegbara

Fez suas nádegas descarregarem

Contra um bosque sagrado. Ouça-o

Murmurando feitiços para evitar penalidades

Pois não intencionava nenhuma abominação

Se alguém por aqui

Tropeçar em uma cabaça de vinho, fermentando

Próxima à estrada, e por perto ouvir uma torrente

De encantamentos saindo de uma forma acocorada,

Irmão de um *sigidi*, traga meu vinho para casa,

Digam ao meu vinhateiro que expulsei

Medo de casa e da fazenda. Assegure-o

De que tudo está bem.

AEDO No seu tempo, não duvidamos da paz na fazenda e no lar, a paz na estrada e na lareira, não duvidamos da paz na floresta.

ELESIN Havia medo na floresta também.

Eu-não ultimamente foi ouvido até na toca

Das feras. A hiena alardeou alto Eu não,

O almiscareiro agitou sua fogosa cauda e faiscou:

Eu-não. Eu não tornou-se o nome

Da indômita ave, a pequenina

Que a Morte encontrou aninhada entre as folhas

Quando um sussurro de sua vinda correu

À sua frente pelo vento. Eu-não

Há tempos deixou o lar. Nesta madrugada

O ouvi piar na abóbada dos deuses.

Ah, meus companheiros deste mundo dos vivos

Que coisa é essa, que mesmo aqueles

A quem chamamos imortais

Temam morrer.

IYALOJA Mas e você, marido de multidões?

ELESIN Eu, quando esse pássaro do Eu-não se empoleirou

Em meu telhado, o mandei de volta ao seu ninho,

Seguro, sem medo ou inquietude. Desenrolei

Meu tapete de boas-vindas para ele ver. Eu-não

Saiu voando alegre – não vão ouvir sua voz

De novo nesta vida – vocês sabem

O que sou.

AEDO A rocha que gira seus filões abertos

Para o caminho do relâmpago. Um alegre

Sangue-puro cujos passos se recusam

A vacilar em frente à víbora

Repentina em seu caminho.

ELESIN Minhas rédeas se soltaram.

Sou o senhor do meu Destino. Chegada a hora

Me observem dançar pela via estreita

Lustrada pelos pés de meus grandes precursores.

Minha alma é ávida. Nem penso em recuar.

MULHERES Você não vai adiar?

ELESIN Onde e quando a tormenta quer por bem

Dirige os gigantes da floresta. Quando a amizade

Convoca é que o camarada de verdade se vai.

MULHERES Nada vai retê-lo?

ELESIN Nada. O quê? Ninguém as avisou?

Vou fazer companhia ao meu senhor e amigo.

Quem diz que a boca não crê em

“Não, mastiguei tudo isso antes”? Pois eu sim.

Nem sempre o mundo é um alguidar de mel.

Onde achei pouco me virei com pouco.

Onde houve muito me refestelei.

Sempre minhas mãos e as de meu senhor

Mergulharam juntas e, lar ou sacra ceia,

Era de bronze a baixela, as carnes

Tão suculentas – os dentes nos diziam negligentes.

Compartilhamos o melhor de cada safra

De inhames. Meu amigo costumava ler

Desejo nos meus olhos antes que eu soubesse a causa –

Quão raro fosse ou precioso, era meu.

MULHERES Era sua a cidadela, a própria terra.

ELESIN O mundo era meu. Nossas mãos juntas

Erguiam vigas de confiança que aguentavam

O cerco da inveja e os cupins do tempo

Mas o crepúsculo traz morcegos e roedores –

Devo ceder a eles razão para sujar os caibros?

AEDO Elesin Oba! Não foi você o homem que

Olhou para fora aquele dia de tempestade

Em que o deus da sorte mancou por perto, encharcado

Até os piolhos que sustentavam seus trapos? Você teve pena

De seu infortúnio e desejou-lhe sorte.

A sorte está à solta nesta madrugada, ele respondeu.

Até que você a encarcerou em um desejo de coração

Que agora retorna a você. Elesin Oba!

Eu digo que você é o homem que

Topou com a cabaça da honra

Pensou que era vinho de palma e

Entornou o líquido até a última gota.

ELESIN A vida tem um fim. Se uma vida vive mais

Que fama e amizade, requer um outro nome.

Que ancião leva sua língua até o prato,

Lambe até o último farelo? Ele encontrará

Silêncio quando pedir a seus filhos que cumpram

Mesmo a menor das missões! A vida é honra.

Termina quando termina a honra.

MULHERES Nós o conhecemos como um homem de honra.

ELESIN Parem! Chega disso!

MULHERES [*confusas, cochicham entre si, voltando-se especialmente para* IYALOJA] O que houve? Dissemos algo que ofendesse? Nós fizemos pouco dele de alguma forma?

ELESIN Chega desse barulho, eu já disse. Não quero ouvir mais nada disto. Já ouvi o que baste.

IYALOJA Devemos ter dito algo errado. [*Vem para diante um pouco.*] Elesin Oba, pedimos perdão antes que você fale.

ELESIN Estou amargamente ofendido.

IYALOJA Nosso demérito nos traiu a todas. Só podemos pedir seu perdão. Corrija-nos como um pai bondoso.

ELESIN Neste dia de todos os dias…

IYALOJA É algo impensável. Se o ofendemos agora, mortificamos os deuses. Ofendemos mesmo os céus. Pai de todos nós, nos diga onde nos transviamos. [*Ela se ajoelha, as outras mulheres seguem.*]

ELESIN Não estão envergonhadas? Mesmo velado por uma lágrima

O olho preserva a faculdade da visão.

Porque minha mente se elevou a horizontes

Que mesmo o mais bravo dos homens baixa a fronte

De cogitar, deve meu corpo aqui

Ser tomado pelo de um vagabundo?

IYALOJA Cavaleiro do Rei, estou mais desconcertada que nunca.

AEDO O pai mais severo desfranze o cenho quando o filho é penitente, Elesin. Quando o tempo é curto, não o desperdiçamos prolongando a charada. Os ombros delas curvam-se com o peso do medo de terem arruinado seu dia para além do reparo. Fale agora em palavras claras e deixe-nos levar a enfermidade à casa dos remédios.

ELESIN Palavras são baratas. "Nós o conhecemos

como um homem de honra." Bom, me digam, é assim que

deve ser visto um homem de honra?

Não são estas as vestes nas quais

Cheguei entre vocês há meia hora?

[*Ele ri estrondosamente e as* MULHERES, *aliviadas*, *se erguem e correm até as barracas para buscar roupas elegantes.*]

MULHERES Os deuses são bondosos. Uma falta logo remediada é logo perdoada. Elesin Oba, no mesmo momento em que pareamos palavras com feitos, que seu coração nos perdoe por completo.

ELESIN Vocês que são o hálito e a fonte de meu ser

Como recusaria a vocês o perdão

Mesmo se fosse real a ofensa?

IYALOJA [*Dançando ao redor dele. Canta*]

Ele nos perdoa. Ele nos perdoa.

É algo tão temível quando

O viajante se despede

Mas fica uma maldição para trás.

MULHERES Por um tempo de fato tememos

Que nossas mãos extraviassem o mundo

No vazio.

IYALOJA Com luxo, com luxo, vistam-no com luxo

O tecido da honra é o *alari*

Sanyan é a faixa da amizade

A pele da jiboia faz sandálias refinadas.

MULHERES Por um tempo de fato tememos

Que nossas mãos extraviassem o mundo

No vazio.

AEDO Aquele que deve, que viaje em frente

O mundo não vai rolar para trás

É ele que deve, com um

Grande gesto abarcar o mundo.

MULHERES Por um tempo de fato tememos

Que nossas mãos extraviassem o mundo

No vazio.

AEDO A cabaça que levas não se evita.

Não se larga tal cabaça no chão

Na encruzilhada ou num bosque ao lado.

Apenas um rio pode conhecer seu conteúdo.

MULHERES Vamos todos nos ver no grande mercado

Vamos todos nos ver no grande mercado

Quem vai mais cedo faz os melhores negócios

Mas todos vamos nos ver, e retomar nossa conversa.

[ELESIN *surge resplandecente em roupas luxuosas, gorro, manta etc. Sua faixa é feita de um tecido* alari *vermelho claro. As* MULHERES *dançam ao redor dele. De repente, sua atenção se volta para um objeto fora do palco.*]

ELESIN O mundo que conheço é bom.

MULHERES Assim vai deixá-lo, nós sabemos.

ELESIN O mundo que conheço é a dádiva

Das colmeias quando se enxamearam as abelhas.

Nenhuma bondade profunde de mãos assim abertas

Mesmo nos sonhos das deidades.

MULHERES E assim vai deixá-lo, nós sabemos.

ELESIN Nasci pra assim mantê-lo. Não se sabe

De colmeia que vagueie. Um formigueiro

Não deserta suas raízes. Não vemos

O grande e silente útero do mundo –

Não há homem que contemple o útero de sua mãe –

Mas quem nega que ele existe? Enroscado

Ao umbigo do mundo está o cordel

Sem fim que liga todos

À grande origem. Se perder a trilha

O cordel-guia me levará às raízes.

MULHERES O mundo está em suas mãos.

[*A distração anterior, um bela* JOVEM, *vem pela passagem pela qual* ELESIN *fez sua primeira entrada.*]

ELESIN Eu o acolho. E lhes digo, mulheres –

Agrada-me este adeus que o mundo designou,

Se meus olhos não me enganam, se não

Tivermos, eu o mundo, já partido,

E tudo que gera desejo se conserve

Entre nossos incansáveis ancestrais. Me digam, amigos,

A terra me mantém no mercado amado

De minha juventude? Ou pode ser que minha vontade

Tenha saltado o ato consciente e eu tenha vindo

Parar entre os grandes que se foram?

AEDO Elesin-Oba, por que seus olhos se reviram como um rato do mato que vê seu destino qual o espírito de seu pai, espelhado no olho de uma cobra? E todas essas perguntas! Você se encontra sobre a mesma terra sobre a qual sempre se encontrou. Esta voz que escuta é minha, Olohun-iyo, não a de um acólito no céu.

ELESIN Como pode? Em toda minha vida

Como Cavaleiro do Rei, a mais suculenta

Fruta em cada árvore era minha. Eu via,

Eu tocava, eu desejava, raramente ouvia um Não.

A honra de meu posto, a veneração que

Recebia em olhos de homem ou mulher

Favoreciam minha demanda e

Arruinavam minhas horas de sono.

E meus olhos, dizem, eram um gavião

Em fome perpétua. Corte um pé de iroco

Em dois, oculte em seu durame a beleza de uma mulher

E feche-o novamente – Elesin, em sua viagem,

Acamparia ao lado desta

Entre outras sombras da floresta.

AEDO Quem negaria sua reputação, cobra à solta em passagens escuras do mercado! Percevejo que declara guerra ao colchão e recebe as graças do vencido! Quando pego com a própria irmã de sua noiva, protestou – eu estava só me prostrando diante dela como faz um cunhado agradecido. Caçador que carrega o chifre de pólvora na cintura e atira de cócoras ou de pé! Guerreiro que nunca usa a desculpa do covarde choramingas – mas como posso ir à batalha sem minhas calças? – sem calça ou sem camisa, para ele dá na mesma. Oka saindo de uma camuflagem de folhas, antes de dar o bote, a vítima já

está pronta! Uma vez o disseram, Howu, um garanhão não se alimenta da grama embaixo dele: ele respondeu, verdade, mas é claro que pode rolar sobre ela!

MULHERES Ba-a-a-ba O!

AEDO Ah, mas ouçam essa também. Vocês sabem que há a larva que mordisca a folha e o besouro que mastiga a noz de cola; a larva que mordisca a folha vive na folha, o besouro que mastiga a noz de cola vive na noz de cola. Não sabemos de que se alimenta um homem quando o encontramos encasulado no robe de uma mulher?

ELESIN Certo, certo, vocês todos têm razões

Para me conhecerem bem. Mas, se dizem que esta terra

É ainda aquela a dar nascença a estas canções,

Que deusa era aquela por cujos lábios

Vi as contas de marfim do leito do rio de Oiá?

Quem é, Iyaloja? A vi entrar

Em sua barraca; conheço bem todas suas filhas.

Não, nem mesmo Ogum da fazenda mourejando

Da alvorada ao crepúsculo entre seus tubérculos

Nem mesmo Ogum com a mais perfeita enxada

Que forjou em sua bigorna moldaria

O curvar daqueles glúteos, mesmo se tivesse

Entre seus dedos a mais rica terra.

Suas vestes não proviam esconderijo

A coxas cujas curvas vexariam

O serepentear do rio pelas colinas de Ilesi. Seus olhos

Ovos recém-postos rutilando em meio ao escuro.

Sua pele...

IYALOJA Elesin Oba…

ELESIN O quê?! Onde disseram que estou?

IYALOJA Ainda entre os vivos.

ELESIN E aquela fulgurância que do nada

Iluminou este mercado que me gabava

De conhecer tão bem?

IYALOJA Já tem um pé no lar de seu marido. É comprometida.

ELESIN [*irritado*] Por que você me diz isso?

[IYALOJA *fica silenciosa. As* MULHERES *se remexem inquietas.*]

IYALOJA Não porque ousemos ofendê-lo, Elesin. Hoje é o seu dia e o mundo inteiro é seu. Ainda assim, mesmo os que se vão da cidade para ter sua morada em outro lugar gostam de ser lembrados pelo que deixam para trás.

ELESIN Quem não busca ser lembrado?

A Memória é a Senhora da Morte, a fissura

Em sua armadura de arrogância. Deixarei

Aquilo que faz de minha partida o mais puro

Sonho vespertino. Não devem os viajantes

Viajar com uma bagagem leve? Pois que o viajante solícito

Desprenda, de sua carga, tudo

Que possa beneficiar os vivos.

MULHERES [*aliviadas*] Ah, Elesin Oba, nós o conhecíamos como um homem de honra.

ELESIN Então, me honrem. Mereço um leito de honra para meu repouso.

IYALOJA É seu o que há de melhor. O conhecemos como um homem de honra. Não alguém que come e não deixa nada em seu prato às crianças. Não o disse você mesmo? Não alguém que põe em risco a felicidade de outros pelo prazer de um momento.

ELESIN Mas quem está falando em prazer? Mulheres, ouçam!

O prazer empalidece. Nossos atos devem ter sentido.

A seiva da bananeira nunca seca.

Vemos inchar o jovem broto

Quando já o talo-pai fenece.

Mulheres, que minha partida se assemelhe

Ao crepúsculo da bananeira.

MULHERES O que ele quer dizer, Iyaloja? Essa linguagem é a linguagem de nossos anciãos, não a compreendemos de todo.

IYALOJA Ainda não me arrisco a compreendê-lo, Elesin.

ELESIN Todas vocês diante do espírito que se aventura

A abrir a última porta de passagem,

Aventurem-se a despir minha partida de remorsos! Meu desejo

Transcende a turvação do pensamento

No tremor dos sentidos de um mero momento.

Me deem crédito, me honrem.

Estou pronto para a viagem que atravessa

Fardos do deserto e do desejo.

Então, que eu viaje com leveza. Que a

Semente que não servirá ao estômago

No caminho fique para trás. Que ela lance raízes

Na terra de minha escolha, nesta terra

Que abandono.

IYALOJA [*se volta para as* MULHERES] A voz que ouço é já tocada pelos dedos expectantes dos que já se foram. Não ouso recusar.

MULHERES Mas, Iyaloja…

IYALOJA A questão não está mais em nossas mãos.

MULHERES Mas ela é noiva de seu próprio filho. Diga a ele.

IYALOJA É meu o desejo de meu filho. Eu mesma fiz o pedido por ele, a perda pode ser remediada. Mas quem remediará o dano de mãos fechadas no dia em que tudo deve ser abertura e luz? Diga a ele, vocês dizem! Querem que eu o onere com um saber que amargará seu desejo e deitará remorsos nos últimos momentos de sua mente?! Rezem a ele que é seu intercessor no mundo – não extravie este mundo em seu próprio tempo; prefeririam que fosse de minha mão o sacrilégio a desviá-lo?

MULHER Não são muitos os homens que enfrentam a maldição de um marido despossuído.

IYALOJA Só se devem temer as maldições dos que se foram. O que reclama aquele cujo pé margina a própria morada excede o que reclama o sangue. É ímpio mesmo impor obstáculos à suas vias.

ELESIN Que dizem minhas mães? Devo pisar

Sobrecarregado no desconhecido?

IYALOJA Não nós, mas a própria terra diz Não. A seiva da bananeira não seca. Que o grão que não alimenta o viajante em sua passagem caia aqui e deite raízes no que pisa para além desta terra e de nós mesmos. Oh, vocês que preenchem do lar à lareira à soleira com vozes de crianças, vocês que se arqueiam sobre o golfo oculto e param para atravessar com o pé direito para o lar dos grandes ancestrais, é bom que seus quadris se aliviem na terra que conhecemos, que seu último vigor seja arado de volta no útero que proveu seu ser.

AEDO Iyaloja, mãe de multidões no mercado profuso do mundo, como a transfigura sua sabedoria!

IYALOJA [*com um amplo sorriso, completamente reconciliada*] Elesin, mesmo à via estreita da passagem, sei que olhará para trás a suspirar um último remorso pela carne que lampejou em seu espírito em seu voo. Você sempre teve um olho incansável. Sua escolha tem minha bênção. [*Às* MULHERES] Deem a boa notícia à nossa filha e a aprontem. [*Algumas* MULHERES *saem.*]

ELESIN Seus olhos se turvaram antes.

IYALOJA Por pouco tempo. É às súplicas daqueles que se encontram ao portal da grande mudança que devemos dar ouvidos. E, então, pense nisto – faz a mente tremular. O fruto de tal união é raro. Não será nem deste mundo nem do próximo. Nem daquele às nossas costas. É como se se unissem a atemporalidade do mundo dos ancestrais e dos não nascidos para extrair um produto do elusivo ser da passagem… Elesin!

ELESIN Estou aqui. O que é?

IYALOJA Você ouviu o que eu acabei de dizer?

ELESIN Sim.

IYALOJA Os vivos devem comer e beber. Quando chegar a hora, não transforme a comida em excrementos de roedores em suas bocas. Não os deixe provar as cinzas do mundo quando eles saírem à madrugada para tragar o orvalho da manhã.

ELESIN Essa dúvida não é digna de você, Iyaloja.

IYALOJA Comer a noz de awusa não é tão difícil quanto beber água depois.

ELESIN As águas da corrente amarga são mel para um homem cuja língua saboreou de tudo.

IYALOJA Ninguém sabe quando as formigas desertam o lar; elas deixam intacto o montículo. Nunca se viu a andorinha abrir buracos em seu ninho quando deve seguir viagem com a estação. Há sempre multidões de humanidade atrás daquele que se despede. A chuva não deve atravessar o telhado para eles, o vento não deve soprar pelas paredes à noite.

ELESIN Recuso-me a aceitar uma ofensa.

IYALOJA Você quer viajar com leveza. Bem, a terra é sua. Mas se certifique de que a semente que deixa nela não atraia maldição.

ELESIN Você realmente me toma pela pessoa errada, Iyaloja.

IYALOJA Não disse nada. Agora devemos ir preparar seu quarto de núpcias. E estas mesmas mãos vão preparar sua mortalha.

ELESIN [*exasperado*] Você precisa ser tão direta? [*Ele se recupera*] Bem, teça suas mortalhas, mas que os dedos de minha noiva cerrem meus olhos com terra e lavem meu corpo.

IYALOJA Prepare-se, Elesin.

[*Ela se levanta para partir. Nesse momento, as* MULHERES *retornam, conduzindo a* NOIVA. *O rosto de* ELESIN *se acende de prazer. Ele arregaça as mangas de seu agbada com confiança renovada e caminha adiante para se encontrar com o grupo. Quando a garota se ajoelha diante de* IYALOJA, *a luz se apaga.*]

ATO 2

> *A varanda do bangalô do Oficial Distrital. Um tango toca em um velho gramofone de manivela e, vislumbrados pelas amplas janelas e portas que se abrem para a varanda diante da cortina, estão as formas de* SIMON PILKINGS *e sua esposa* JANE, *dançando tango para dentro e para fora de sombras na sala-de-estar. Eles vestem o que à primeira vista parece ser uma espécie de fantasia. A dança segue por alguns momentos e então a figura de um* POLICIAL 'DA ADMINISTRAÇÃO NATIVA' *surge e sobe os degraus da escada até a varanda. Ele espia e observa o casal dançando, reagindo com uma óbvia perplexidade antiga. Ele subitamente se enrijece, sua expressão muda para descrença e horror. Em sua perturbação, ele desequilibra um vaso de flores e atrai a atenção do casal. Eles param de dançar.*

PILKINGS Tem alguém aí?

JANE Vou desligar o gramofone.

PILKINGS [aproximando-se da varanda] Tenho certeza de que ouvi algo cair. [*O* OFICIAL *lentamente recua, boquiaberto, à medida que* PILKINGS *se aproxima da varanda*] Oh, é você, Amusa. Por que não bateu simplesmente em vez de bater e derrubar essas coisas?

AMUSA [*gagueja muito e aponta um dedo trêmulo para sua roupa*] Sinhô Pirinkin... Sinhô Pirinkin...

PILKINGS O que há com você?

JANE [*aparecendo*] Quem é, querido? Oh, Amusa…

PILKINGS Sim, é Amusa, e agindo de forma bem estranha.

AMUSA [*sua atenção agora se volta para a* SRA. PILKINGS] Sissinhá… a sinhá também!

PILKINGS Mas o que diabos há com você, homem!

JANE Sua roupa, querido. Nossa fantasia.

PILKINGS Ah, diabo, esqueci completamente. [*Levanta a máscara facial sobre sua cabeça e mostra seu rosto. Sua esposa faz o mesmo.*]

JANE Acho que você chocou seu grande coração pagão... que Deus o abençoe.

PILKINGS… Bogabem, ele é muçulmano. Venha, Amusa, você não acredita nessa bobagem toda, acredita? Pensei que você era um bom muçulmano.

AMUSA Sinhô Pirinkin, eu imploro, sinhô, o que o sinhô acha que tá fazendo com essa roupa? Ela é do culto aos mortos, não para seres humanos.

PILKINGS Oh, Amusa, que decepção é você. Eu juro por você no clube, sabe – Graças a Deus, temos Amusa, ele não acredita nessa bobajada. E olha só o que temos!

AMUSA Sinhô Pirinkin, eu imploro, tire essa roupa. Não é bom que gente como o sinhô toque nesse tecido.

PILKINGS Bom, eu estou vestindo. E tem mais: Jane e eu apostamos que vamos levar o primeiro prêmio no baile. Agora, recomponha-se, por favor e me diga qual era o assunto que vinha trazer…

AMUSA Sinhô, eu não posso falar sobre esse assunto com o sinhô nessa roupa. Não é certo.

PILKINGS Que besteira é essa agora?

JANE Ele também está falando bem sério, Simon. Acho que você vai ter que resolver isso com delicadeza.

PILKINGS Delicadeza uma…! Olhe aqui, Amusa, eu acho que essa brincadeira já foi longe demais, hm? Vamos ter bom-senso. Parece que você se esquece de que é um policial a serviço do Governo de Sua Majestade. Ordeno que relate o assunto de uma vez ou seja submetido a ação disciplinar.

AMUSA Sinhô, é um assunto de morte. Como se pode falar contra a morte a uma pessoa com o uniforme da morte? É como falar contra o governo para uma pessoa com uniforme da polícia. Por favor, sinhô, eu vou e volto.

PILKINGS [*aos berros*] Agora! [AMUSA *volta seu olhar para o teto de repente, segue mudo.*]

JANE Oh, Amusa, o que tem de assustador nesta roupa? Você a viu ser confiscada no mês passado daqueles homens *egungun* que estavam causando perturbação na cidade. Você mesmo ajudou a prender os líderes do culto—se a macumba não fez mal para você naquela época, como poderia fazer agora? E só de olhar?

AMUSA [sem olhar para baixo] Sinhá, eu prendo os baderneiros que causam desordem, mas não ponho a mão em *egungun*. Nesse egungun eu não pego. E não desrespeito. Prendo baderneiros, mas trato *egungun* com respeito.

PILKINGS É inútil. Vamos acabar perdendo a melhor parte do baile. Quando a coisa fica assim, não tem o que fazer. É como dar murro em ponta de faca. Escreva seu relatório ou o que quer que seja neste bloco, Amusa, e vá embora daqui. Venha, Jane, só vamos perturbar os sentimentos delicados dele se ficarmos aqui.

[AMUSA *espera que eles saiam e, depois, escreve no bloco de notas com certo esforço. Avoluma-se o som de tambores vindo da direção da cidade.* AMUSA *escuta, faz um movimento como se quisesse chamar* PILKINGS *de volta, mas muda de ideia. Ele conclui suas anotações e vai embora. Alguns instantes mais tarde,* PILKINGS *aparece*, apanha o bloco e lê.]

PILKINGS Jane!

JANE [*do quarto de dormir*] Estou indo, querido. Quase pronta.

PILKINGS Esqueça isso agora, só escute.

JANE O que é?

PILKINGS O relatório de Amusa. Escute. "Devo relatar que vêm a mim a informação de que um chefe proeminente, a saber, o Elesin Oba, vai cometer morte hoje à noite como resultado de costume nativo. Sendo isso ato criminoso, aguardo instruções. Sargento Amusa."

[JANE *sai até a varanda enquanto ele lê.*]

JANE Eu ouvi "cometer morte"?

PILKINGS Obviamente, ele quer dizer "assassinato".

JANE Quer dizer, assassinato ritual?

PILKINGS Deve ser. Você acha que varreu tudo para debaixo do tapete, mas sempre sobra algo espreitando sob a superfície em algum lugar.

JANE Oh. Isso significa que não vamos mais ao baile?

PILKINGS Nã-ão. Vou mandar prender o homem. E todo mundo que tiver algum envolvimento remoto. De qualquer modo, não deve ser nada. Só boatos.

JANE Mesmo? Pensei que você achasse os boatos de Amusa confiáveis em geral.

PILKINGS Isso é bem verdade. Mas quem sabe o que o tem assustado ultimamente. Olhe a conduta dele esta noite.

JANE [*rindo*] É preciso admitir que ele tem lá sua própria lógica peculiar. [*Em uma voz mais grossa.*] Como pode um homem falar contra a morte a uma pessoa com o uniforme de morte? [*Ri.*] De qualquer modo, você não pode ir até a delegacia vestido assim.

PILKINGS Vou enviar Joseph com instruções. Raios, que confusão danada essa!

JANE Mas você não acha que deveria antes falar com o homem, Simon?

PILKINGS Você quer ir ao baile ou não?

JANE Querido, por que está incomodado? Só estou tentando tomar uma decisão inteligente. Não parece muito justo simplesmente prender um homem – ainda mais um chefe – baseado só na er… qual é o termo legal, mesmo – palavra não corroborada de um sargento.

PILKINGS Bom, isso é fácil de decidir. Joseph!

JOSEPH [de dentro] Sim, senhor.

PILKINGS Você tem razão, é claro, eu estou ficando incomodado. Provavelmente é o efeito desses malditos tambores. Você percebe como eles tocam sem parar?

JANE Eu estava me perguntando quando você iria perceber. Você acha que tem algo a ver com esse negócio?

PILKINGS Quem vai saber? Eles sempre encontram uma desculpa para fazer barulho… [*Pensativo.*] Apesar de que…

JANE Pois não, Simon?

PILKINGS É diferente, Jane. Eu acho que nunca ouvi esse – som – específico antes. Tem algo de inquietante nele.

JANE Pensei que todos os tambores selvagens tivessem o mesmo som.

PILKINGS Não me provoque agora, Jane. Isso pode ser sério.

JANE Perdão. [*Levanta-se e envolve o pescoço dele com os braços. Beija-o. O* CRIADO *entra, recua e bate.*]

PILKINGS [*impaciente*] Oh, entre, Joseph! Não sei onde você arranjou todas essas noções exageradas de tato. Venha até aqui.

JOSEPH Senhor?

PILKINGS Joseph, você é cristão ou não?

JOSEPH Sim, senhor.

PILKINGS Você se incomoda de me ver com este traje?

JOSEPH Não, senhor, ele não tem poder nenhum.

PILKINGS Graças a Deus, finalmente um pouco de sanidade. Agora, Joseph, me responda com a honra de um cristão – o que supostamente está acontecendo hoje à noite?

JOSEPH Hoje à noite, senhor? O senhor quer dizer, o chefe que vai se matar?

PILKINGS O quê?

JANE O que você quer dizer com "se matar"?

PILKINGS Você quer dizer que ele vai matar alguém, certo?

JOSEPH Não, senhor. Ele não vai matar ninguém e ninguém vai matá-lo. Ele simplesmente vai morrer.

JANE Mas por quê, Joseph?

JOSEPH É lei e costume nativo. O rei morreu no mês passado. Hoje é o enterro dele. Mas antes que eles o enterrem, o Elesin precisa morrer para acompanhá-lo até o céu.

PILKINGS Parece que estou destinado a entrar em atrito com esse homem mais vezes que com qualquer outro dos chefes.

JOSEPH Ele é o Chefe da Cavalaria do Rei.

PILKINGS [*de maneira resignada*] Eu sei.

JANE Simon, qual é o problema?

PILKINGS Tinha que ser ele!

JANE Quem é?

PILKINGS Não lembra? Ele é aquele chefe com quem eu tive uma briga uns três ou quatro anos atrás. Eu ajudei o filho dele a entrar em uma escola de medicina na Inglaterra, lembra? Ele lutou com unhas e dentes para evitar.

JANE Oh, eu me lembro. Ele era aquele jovem tão sensível. Qual era o nome dele mesmo?

PILKINGS Olunde. Nem respondi a última carta dele, só agora me lembrei. O velho pagão queria que ele ficasse e seguisse com alguma tradição familiar ou outra qualquer. Sinceramente, não consegui entender o espalhafato que ele fez. Eu literalmente tive que ajudar o garoto a escapar do confinamento rigoroso e colocá-lo no próximo navio. Um garoto muito inteligente, brilhante na verdade.

JANE Eu sempre o achei muito sensível, sabe? O tipo de pessoa que deveria ser um poeta mastigando pétalas de rosa em Bloomsbury.

PILKINGS Bom, vai ser um médico de primeira. Ele está decidido a ser. E sempre que quiser minha ajuda, será bem-vindo.

JANE [*após uma pausa*] Simon.

PILKINGS Sim?

JANE Esse rapaz. Ele era o filho mais velho, não era?

PILKINGS Não tenho certeza. Como se vai saber com aquele bode velho?

JANE Você sabe, Joseph?

JOSEPH Oh, sim, senhora. Ele era o filho mais velho. É por isso que o Elesin amaldiçoou o senhor Pilkings pra valer. O filho mais velho não poderia viajar para longe da terra.

JANE [*dando risadinhas*] É verdade, Simon? Ele realmente o amaldiçoou pra valer?

PILKINGS A princípio, eu deveria estar morto agora.

JOSEPH Oh, não. O senhor é homem branco. E bom cristão. Macumba de homem negro não pode pegar no senhor.

JANE Se ele era o filho mais velho, isso quer dizer que ele seria o Elesin do próximo rei. É uma coisa de família, não é, Joseph?

JOSEPH Sim, senhora. E se esse Elesin morresse antes do Rei, seu filho mais velho teria que ficar no seu lugar.

JANE Isso explica por que o velho chefe ficou tão bravo quando você levou o garoto embora.

PILKINGS Bom, isso só me deixa mais feliz por ter feito isso.

JANE Será que ele sabia?

PILKINGS Quem? Olunde, você quer dizer?

JANE Sim. Era por isso que ele estava tão determinado a ir embora? Eu não ficaria se soubesse que estava presa em um costume tão horrendo.

PILKINGS [*pensativo*] Não, acho que não sabia. Pelo menos, não deu nenhuma indicação. Mas não dava para dizer direito com ele. Ele era bastante fechado, sabe? Diferente da maioria deles. Ele não revelava muita coisa, nem mesmo para mim.

JANE Eles não são todos um tanto fechados, Simon?

PILKINGS Esses nativos aqui? Pelo amor de Deus, eles abrem a boca e tagarelam com você sobre seus segredos de família antes que você possa impedi-los. Outro dia mesmo…

JANE Mas, Simon, srá que eles revelam alguma coisa de verdade? Quero dizer, coisas que realmente têm importância. Esse caso, por exemplo, nós não sabíamos que eles ainda praticavam esse costume, sabíamos?

PILKINGS É-é-é, acho que você tem razão nisso. Bastardos escorregadios e sorrateiros.

JOSEPH [*formal*] Posso ir, senhor? Preciso limpar a cozinha.

PILKINGS O quê? Oh, pode ir. Esqueci que ainda estava aí.

[JOSEPH *sai*]

JANE Simon, você tem que cuidar com o linguajar. "Bastardo" não é só um simples xingamento nestas bandas, você sabe.

PILKINGS Olhe aqui, desde quando você virou uma antropóloga social, é isso o que eu gostaria de saber.

JANE Não estou dizendo que sei alguma coisa. Só que já ouvi brigas entre os serviçais. É assim que sei que eles consideram isso uma difamação.

PILKINGS Eu pensei que o sistema de família estendido desse conta de tudo isso. Família elástica, não há bastardos.

JANE [*dá de ombros*] Faça como quiser.

> [*Um silêncio desconfortável. Os tambores aumentam de volume.* JANE *se levanta de súbito, inquieta.*]
>
> Esses tambores, Simon, você acha que podem estar ligados com esse ritual? Estão durando a noite inteira.

PILKINGS Vamos perguntar ao nosso guia nativo. Joseph! Venha cá um minuto, Joseph. [JOSEPH *retorna.*] Qual é o sentido desses tambores?

JOSEPH Não sei, senhor.

PILKINGS Como assim não sabe? Não tem nem dois anos que você se converteu. Não me diga que essa besteira de água benta já apagou sua memória tribal.

JOSEPH [*visivelmente chocado*] Senhor!

JANE Agora sim, você conseguiu.

PILKINGS Consegui o quê?

JANE Esqueça. Escute, Joseph, só me diga isso. Esses tambores estão ligados com a morte ou algo dessa natureza?

JOSEPH Senhora, isso é o que estou tentando dizer: não tenho certeza. Parece a morte de um grande chefe e, então, parece o casamento de um grande chefe. Isso me confunde de verdade.

PILKINGS Oh, volte para a cozinha. Grande ajuda é você.

JOSEPH Sim, senhor. [*Sai.*]

JANE Simon…

PILKINGS Certo, certo. Não estou no clima para um sermão agora.

JANE Não é com o meu sermão que você tem que se preocupar, mas o dos missionários que o precederam aqui. Quando eles convertem, convertem de verdade. Chamar água benta de bobagem na frente do nosso Joseph é como insultar a Virgem Maria diante de um católico romano. Amanhã mesmo, ele vai pedir as contas, preste atenção no que estou falando.

PILKINGS Agora você está sendo ridícula.

JANE Estou? Quanto você quer apostar que amanhã não teremos um doméstico? Você viu o rosto dele?

PILKINGS Estou mais preocupado se estaremos com um chefe nativo a menos amanhã. Cristo! Escute só esses tambores. [*Ele caminha de um lado para outro, indeciso*.]

JANE [*levantando-se*] Eu vou me trocar e fazer algo para jantar.

PILKINGS O que é isso?

JANE Simon, é óbvio que teremos que perder o baile.

PILKINGS Bobagem. É a primeira vez que o clube europeu organizou algo divertido em mais de um ano. Nem pensar que vou perder. E é uma ocasião bem especial. Não acontece todo dia.

JANE Você sabe que esse negócio precisa ser interrompido, Simon. E só você pode fazer isso.

PILKINGS Eu não tenho que interromper nada. Se eles querem se jogar de cima de um penhasco ou se envenenar por causa de um costume bárbaro, o que eu tenho a ver com isso? Se fosse assassinato ritual ou algo desse tipo, eu teria o dever de fazer alguma coisa. Eu não posso ficar de olho em todos os suicidas potenciais nesta província. E quanto a esse homem – é bom que desapareça, acredite.

JANE [*ri*] Eu o conheço bem, Simon. Você vai ter que fazer alguma coisa para impedir isso – após você parar de esbravejar.

PILKINGS [*grita para ela*] E suponha, afinal, que seja só um casamento. Eu ia parecer um verdadeiro idiota se interrompesse a lua de mel de um chefe, não? [*Retorna ao seu caminhar raivoso, desacelera*.] Ah, bom, vai saber o que esses chefes fazem na lua-de-mel deles? [*Ele pega o bloco e anota rapidamente nele*.] Joseph! Joseph! [*Alguns momentos depois, JOSEPH surge com uma expressão contrariada*.] Você me ouviu chamar? Por que diabos você não respondeu?

JOSEPH Eu não ouvi, senhor.

PILKINGS Você não me ouviu! Então, como você está aqui?

JOSEPH [*teimosamente*] Eu não ouvi, senhor.

PILKINGS [*controla-se com esforço*] Vamos falar sobre isso de manhã. Quero que leve esta nota direto para o Sargento Amusa. Você vai encontrá-lo na delegacia. Suba em sua bicicleta e corra até lá com a nota. Eu o espero de volta em exatamente vinte minutos. Vinte minutos, isso está claro?

JOSEPH Sim, senhor. [*Saindo.*]

PILKINGS Oh er… Joseph.

JOSEPH Sim, senhor?

PILKINGS [*rangendo os dentes*] Er… Esqueça o que eu disse há pouco. A água benta não é bobagem. *Eu* estava falando bobagem.

JOSEPH Sim, senhor. [*Sai.*]

JANE [*esgueira a cabeça pela porta*] Você o achou?

PILKINGS Achei quem?

JANE Joseph. Você não estava gritando atrás dele?

PILKINGS. Oh, sim, ele apareceu afinal.

JANE Você parecia desesperado. Qual era a questão, afinal?

PILKINGS Oh, nada. Eu só queria me desculpar com ele. Assegurá-lo de que a água benta não é bobagem.

JANE Oh? E como ele reagiu?

PILKINGS Quem diabos se importa?! Tive uma súbita visão de nosso Reverendo Macfarlane rabiscando outra carta de reclamação ao Residente sobre meu linguajar nada cristão sobre seus párocos.

JANE Oh, acho que a esta altura ele já deve ter desistido de você.

PILKINGS Não tenha tanta certeza. E, de qualquer modo, eu queria ter certeza de que Joseph não vá "perder" minha nota no caminho. Ele parecia suficientemente cheio da santa cruzada para fazer algo desse tipo.

JANE Se você já parou de exagerar, venha comer alguma coisa.

PILKINGS Não, esqueça tudo. Ainda podemos ir ao baile.

JANE Simon…

PILKINGS Coloque a fantasia de novo. Não temos nada com que nos preocupar. Instruí Amusa a prender o homem e trancafiá-lo.

JANE Mas a delegacia sequer é um lugar seguro. Logo ele consegue que os amigos o ajudem a escapar.

PILKINGS A-ah, é aí que eu já me antecipei a você. Eu não vou colocá-lo na delegacia. Amusa vai trazê-lo aqui e trancafiá-lo em meu estúdio. E vai ficar com ele até voltarmos. Ninguém vai ousar chegar aqui para incitá-lo a fazer o que seja.

JANE Querido, que inteligente você é. Vou me aprontar.

PILKINGS Hey.

JANE Sim, querido?

PILKINGS Tenho uma surpresa para você. Eu ia esperar até chegarmos ao baile.

JANE O que é?

PILKINGS Você sabe que o Príncipe está fazendo uma viagem pelas colônias, não sabe? Bom, ele aportou na capital nesta manhã mesmo, mas já está na Residência. Ele vai agraciar o baile com sua presença mais tarde hoje à noite.

JANE Simon! Não me diga.

PILKINGS Sim, ele vem. Foi convidado a entregar os prêmios e aceitou. É preciso admitir que o velho Engleton é o melhor secretário que o clube já teve. Rápido e rasteiro esse rapaz.

JANE Mas que emoção!

PILKINGS Os outros oficiais provinciais vão morrer de inveja.

JANE Eu me pergunto de que ele vai vir fantasiado.

PILKINGS Oh, eu não sei. De brasão, talvez. De qualquer modo, não vai chegar nem perto disto aqui.

JANE Bom, que sorte. Se vamos ser apresentados, não vou precisar procurar um par de luvas. Isto aqui é todo costurado.

PILKINGS [*rindo*] Você tem razão. Pode confiar que só uma mulher vai pensar nisso. Venha, vamos indo.

JANE [*apressando-se*] Em um segundo. [*Para.*] Agora entendo por que você estava tão irritado a noite inteira. Eu bem que pensei que você não estava resolvendo essa questão com o brilhantismo que geralmente tem – no começo.

PILKINGS [*seu humor melhorou muito*] Cale a boca, mulher, e prepare suas coisas.

JANE, Certo, chefe, indo.

> [PILKINGS *subitamente começa a cantarolar o tango que estavam dançando antes. Começa a ensaiar alguns passos. As luzes se apagam.*]

ATO 3

> *Um rumor agitado e crescente de vozes de mulheres se ergue imediatamente no fundo. As luzes se acendem e vemos a fachada de uma barraca de tecidos no mercado. O piso que leva à entrada está coberto por veludos refinados e tecido feitos em tear. As* MULHERES *entram no palco, empurradas para trás pelo progresso determinado do Sargento* AMUSA *e seus dois* OFICIAIS, *que já sacaram seus cassetetes e os usam como forma de pressão contra as* MULHERES. *Ao se aproximarem do chão coberto de tecido, no entanto, as MULHERES tomam uma posição com firmeza e bloqueiam qualquer progresso dos homens. Elas começam a provocá-los sem piedade.*

AMUSA Eu tô dizendo pra vocês mulheres pela última vez pra saí da minha estrada. Estou aqui em negócios oficiais.

MULHER Negócios oficiais, seu eunuco do homem branco? Negócios oficiais estão ocorrendo onde você quer ir e é um negócio que você não entenderia.

MULHER [*dá um rápido puxão no cassetete de um* OFICIAL] Isso não engana ninguém, você sabe. É o que você carrega sob suas calcinhas governamentais que conta. [*Ela se abaixa como se estivesse espiando sob os shorts largos. O* OFICIAL *constrangido rapidamente fecha os joelhos. As* MULHERES *gargalham*.]

MULHER Quer dizer que não tem nada mesmo lá?

MULHER Ah, tinha alguma coisa. Sabe a sineta que o homem branco usa para chamar seus serviçais…?

AMUSA [*ele tenta preservar alguma dignidade durante a situação*] Mulheres, espero que vocês saibam que interferir com um oficial durante a execução de seu dever é ofensa criminal.

MULHER Interferir? Ele diz que estamos interferindo nele. Seu homem babaca, estamos dizendo que não há nada para interferir.

AMUSA Eu estou ordenando agora para saírem da estrada.

MULHER Que estrada? A que o seu pai construiu?

MULHER Você é um policial, não é? Então, você sabe como eles chamam a transgressão no tribunal. Ou – [*Apontando para os degraus cobertos de tecido*] – você acha que esse tipo de estrada é construído para qualquer tipo de pés?

MULHER Volte e diga para o branco que o mandou para vir ele mesmo.

AMUSA Se eu vou, volto com reforço. E vamos voltar carregando armas.

MULHER Oh, agora eu entendo. Antes de eles poderem vestir essas calcinhas, o homem branco primeiro corta fora as armas deles.

MULHER Que audácia! Quer dizer que você vem aqui mostrar poder para mulheres e sequer tem uma arma.

AMUSA [*berrando por cima das risadas*] Pela última vez, mulheres, eu aviso para saírem da estrada.

MULHER Para onde?

AMUSA Para esta cabana. Eu sei que ele tá aí.

MULHER Quem?

AMUSA O chefe que chama a si mesmo de Elesin Oba.

MULHER Homem ignorante. Não é ele que se chama de Elesin Oba, é seu sangue que o diz. Assim como chamou seu pai antes dele e vai chamar o filho dele depois. E isso apesar de tudo o que o seu branco pode fazer.

MULHER Não é o mesmo oceano que banha esta terra e a do homem branco? Diga ao homem branco que ele pode esconder nosso filho pelo tempo que quiser. Quando chegar a hora, o mesmo oceano vai trazê-lo de volta.

AMUSA O governo disse que essas coisa têm que parar.

MULHER Quem virá parar? Você? Esta noite, nosso marido e pai vai provar que é maior que as leis dos estranhos.

AMUSA Eu digo ninguém vai provar nada hoje de noite nem nunca. É ignorância e criminal provar esse tipo de prova.

IYALOJA [*entrando, da cabana. Está acompanhada por um grupo de* JOVENS GAROTAS *que estavam ajudando a* NOIVA] O que houve, Amusa? Por que você veio aqui perturbar a felicidade dos outros?

AMUSA Madame Iyaloja, fico feliz que a senhora está aí. A senhora me conhece, eu não gosto de problema, mas dever é dever. Estou aqui para prender Elesin por intenção criminosa. Diga a essas mulheres para pararem de me obstruir no desempenho de minha função.

IYALOJA E você? O que lhe dá o direito de obstruir nosso chefe de homens no desempenho de sua função?

AMUSA Que tipo de função é esse, Iyaloja?

IYALOJA Que tipo de função? Que tipo de função um homem tem para com sua nova esposa?

AMUSA [*confuso, olha para as* MULHERES *e para a entrada da cabana*] Você chama esse tipo de coisa casamento, Iyaloja?

IYALOJA Você tem esposas, não tem? O que quer que o homem branco tenha feito com você, ele não o impediu de ter esposas. E se impediu, pelo menos ele é casado. Se você não sabe o que é um casamento, vá e peça que ele o diga.

AMUSA Isso não é casamento não.

IYALOJA E pergunte também o que ele teria feito se alguém viesse perturbá-lo na sua noite de núpcias.

AMUSA Iyaloja, eu disse que isso não é casamento.

IYALOJA Você quer olhar dentro do quarto nupcial? Você quer ver por si próprio como um homem corta o nó virgem?

AMUSA Madame…

MULHER Talvez as esposas dele ainda estejam esperando que ele aprenda.

AMUSA Iyaloja, pode falar pra essas mulheres pra elas parar de me insultar de novo. Se ouvir esse tipo de insulto de novo…

GAROTA [*abrindo caminho*] Vai fazer o quê?

GAROTA Ele está fora de si. Você está falando com as nossas mães, você sabe? Não com qualquer analfabeto da vila que você pode oprimir e aterrorizar. E como você ousa se intrometer aqui?

GAROTA Que audácia, que impertinência!

GAROTA Você os tratou com delicadeza demais. Agora vamos mostrar o que é se meter com as mães deste mercado.

GAROTA É melhor você não entrar no mercado quando as mulheres dizem não!

GAROTA Você ainda não aprendeu isso, seu bufão de cáqui engomado?

IYALOJA Filhas…

GAROTA Não, não, Iyaloja, deixe que nós cuidamos dele. Ele não conhece mais a mãe dele, vamos ensinar.

> [*Com um movimento repentino, elas arrancam os cassetetes dos dois* OFICIAIS. *Elas começam a cercá-los.*]

GAROTA E agora? Estamos com seus cassetetes? E agora? O que vocês vão fazer?

> [*Com movimentos igualmente rápidos, elas derrubam seus chapéus.*]

GAROTA Se movam se têm coragem. Estamos com seus chapéus, o que vão fazer a respeito disso? O homem branco não os ensinou a tirar o chapéu diante das mulheres?

IYALOJA É noite de casamento. É uma noite de alegria para nós. Paz…

GAROTA Não para ele. Quem o convidou aqui?

GAROTA Ele ousa ir até a Residência sem convite?

GAROTA Nem mesmo onde os serviçais comem os restos.

GAROTA [*em resposta. Em um sotaque "inglês"*] Bem, bem, trata-se do Senhor Amusa. Você foi convidado? [*Interpretando o papel uma para a outra. As* MULHERES *mais velhas as encorajam com seus risinhos.*]

– O seu convite, por favor?

– Quem é você? Chegamos a ser apresentados?

– E quem você disse que era mesmo?

– Perdão, eu não entendi bem seu nome.

– Posso pegar o seu chapéu?

– Se você insiste. Posse pegar o seu? [trocando os chapéus dos POLICIAIS.]

– Como você é gentil.

– De maneira alguma. Você quer se sentar?

– Depois de você.

– Oh, não.

– Eu insisto.

– Você é muito educado.

– E o que está achando do lugar?

– Os nativos são ok.

– Amigáveis?

– Tratáveis.

– Nem um pouquinhozinho agitados?

– Bom, um pouquinhozinho agitados.

– Pode-se dizer talvez até, difíceis?

– De fato, sente-se tentado a dizer, difíceis.

– Mas você consegue lidar com eles?

– Sim, na verdade, sim. Eu tenho um bobão bem fiel chamado Amusa.

– Ele é leal?

– Totalmente.

– Daria a vida por você?

– Sem pensar por um momento.

– Eu tive um desses uma vez. Confiava minha vida nele.

– Na maioria, é claro, são mentirosos.

– Nunca conheci um nativo que falasse a verdade.

– Fica um pouco abafado aqui?

– Para esta época do ano, está até ameno.

– Mas ainda podem vir as chuvas.

– Estão atrasadas este ano, não estão?

– Estão funcionando segundo a noção de tempo africana.

– Ha ha ha ha

– Ha ha ha ha

– A umidade é que é o problema.

– Costumava ser o uísque.

– Ha ha ha ha

– Ha ha ha ha

– Qual é o seu fraco, meu chapa?

– Tem corrida aqui, pelos céus?

– Um campo de golfe fabuloso, você vai gostar.

– Já estou começando a gostar.

– E um clube europeu, exclusivo.

– Você fez umótimo trabalho.

– Fazemos o melhor para a velha pátria.

– É um prazer poder servir.

– Um outro uísque, meu velho?

– Você é de fato muito, muito gentil.

– Nada disso, senhor. Onde está aquele garoto? [*Com um berro repentino.*] Sargento!

AMUSA [em atenção instantânea] Sinsenhor!

[*As* MULHERES *caem de rir.*]

GAROTA Tire seus homens daqui.

AMUSA [*percebendo a brincadeira, fica furioso por ter perdido o respeito*] E dou a você aviso…

GAROTA Está certo, então. Tirem as calcinhas deles! [*Elas se movimentam lentamente para frente.*]

IYALOJA Filhas, por favor.

AMUSA [*preparando-se para se defender*] A primeira mulher que me tocar…

IYALOJA Minhas crianças, eu as peço…

GAROTA Então, diga para ele sair deste mercado. Este é o lar de nossas mães. Não queremos o comedor de restos brancos no banquete que as mãos delas prepararam.

IYALOJA Você as ouviu, Amusa. É melhor você ir.

GAROTA Agora!

AMUSA [*iniciando seu recuo*] A gente pode ir agora, mas não vão dizer que não avisei.

GAROTA Agora!

GAROTA Antes de lermos a lei sobre tumultos – vocês devem saber tudo sobre isso.

AMUSA Então, vamos. [*Eles vão embora, mais precipitadamente.*]

[*As* MULHERES *batem as palmas da mão em gesto de admiração.*]

MULHERES Eles ensinam tudo isso na escola?

MULHER E pensar que quase que mantenho Apinke longe daquele lugar.

MULHER Você as ouviu? Viu como imitaram o homem branco?

MULHER As vozes exatas. Ei, há coisas incríveis neste mundo!

IYALOJA Bem, nossos anciãos disseram: Dada pode ser fraco, mas tem um irmão mais novo que é verdadeiramente destemido.

MULHER A próxima vez que o homem branco mostrar sua cara neste mercado, vou colocar Wuraola em seu encalço.

[*Uma* MULHER *irrompe em canção e dança de euforia – "Tani l'awa o l'ogbeja? Kayi! A l'ogbeja. Omo Kekere l'ogbeja". O resto das* MULHERES *se junta a ela, algumas colocando as garotas em suas costas como crianças pequenas, outras dançando em volta delas. A dança se generaliza, aumentando em animação.* ELESIN *surge, vestindo apenas um pano. Em suas mãos, um tecido aveludado branco dobrado frouxamente como se contivesse algo delicado. Ele grita.]*

ELESIN Oh, mães de belas noivas! [*A dança para. Elas se viram e o veem, assim como o objeto nas mãos dele.* IYALOJA *se aproxima e com delicadeza retira o tecido de suas mãos.*] Tome. Não é uma simples mancha de virgindade, mas a união da vida e das sementes da passagem. Meu fluxo vital, o último desta carne, está misturado com a promessa de vida futura. Tudo está pronto. Escutem! [*Uma batida de tambor constante à distância.*] Sim, está quase na hora. O cão do rei foi morto. O cavalo favorito do rei está prestes a seguir seu mestre. Meus irmãos, os chefes, conhecem sua tarefa e a desempenham bem. [*Ele escuta novamente.*]

[*A* ESPOSA *surge, de pé timidamente junto à porta. Ele se volta para ela.*]

Nosso casamento ainda não se cumpriu totalmente. Quando se casam terra e passagem, a consumação só se completa quando há grãos de terra sobre as pálpebras da passagem.

Até lá, fique perto de mim. Meus fiéis tamboreiros, prestem-me seu último serviço. Foi aqui que escolhi para fazer minha despedida, neste coração de vida, essa colmeia que contém o enxame do mundo em seu pequeno compasso. Foi aqui que conheci o amor e o riso longe do palácio. Mesmo o mais saboroso alimento perde o gosto se é comido por muitos dias; no mercado, nada perde o gosto. Escutem. [*Eles escutam os tambores.*] Começaram a buscar o coração do cavalo favorito do Rei. Logo cavalgará em seus arreios de ráfia com o cão aos seus pés. Juntos correrão sobre os ombros dos cavalariços do Rei por entre os centros da vida da cidade. Eles sabem que é aqui que devo esperá-los. Eu lhes disse. [*Seus olhos parecem se nublar. Ele passa a mão sobre eles como se para clarear a vista. Dá um leve sorriso.*] Há promessa nisso; acabei de sentir a avidez de meu espírito. O papagaio busca espaços amplos, e o vento rasteja atrás de sua cauda; pode o papagaio dizer menos que – obrigado, quanto mais rápido, melhor? Mas, espere um pouco, espírito meu. Espere. Espere a vinda do mensageiro do Rei. Vocês sabem, amigos, o cavalo nasce com esse destino, carregar o fardo que é o homem sobre suas costas. A não ser nesta noite, nesta noite só quando o garanhão imaculado cavalgará triunfante sobre as costas do homem. No tempo de meu pai, testemunhei a estranha visão. Talvez esta noite a verei pela última vez. Se eles chegarem antes que os tambores batam por mim, lhes direi para informar o Alafin que sigo com ligeireza. Se vierem após soarem os tambores, bem, tudo estará bem, pois já terei ido em frente. Nossos espíritos acertarão o passo pela grande passagem. [*Ele escuta os tambores. Parece novamente cair em um estado de semi-hipnose; seus olhos perscrutam os céus, mas em uma espécie de estupor. Sua voz um pouco ofegante.*] A lua se alimentou, um brilho de seu estômago cheio preenche o céu e o ar, mas não consigo dizer onde está o portal pelo qual devo passar. Meus amigos fiéis, que nossos pés toquem juntos por esta última vez, me levem até o outro mercado com sons que cubram minha pele com penugens, mas que façam meus membros golpearem a terra como um sangue-puro. Queridas mães, que eu dance na passagem mesmo tendo vivido sob seus tetos. [*Ele desce progressivamente entre elas. Elas abrem caminho para ele, os* TAMBOREIROS *tocam. Sua dança é feita de movimentos solenes e régios, cada gesto do corpo é feito com uma finalidade solene. As* MULHERES *se juntam a ele, seus passos, uma versão algo mais fluida dos dele. Mais baixo que as exortações do* AEDO*, as mulheres cantam a elegia "Ale le le, awo mi lo".*]

AEDO Elesin Alafin, você consegue ouvir minha voz?

ELESIN Fracamente, meu amigo, fracamente.

AEDO Elesin Alafin, você consegue ouvir meu chamado?

ELESIN Fracamente, meu rei, fracamente.

AEDO Sua memória está sã, Elesin?

Será minha voz uma lâmina de grama para

Atiçar a axila do passado?

ELESIN Não é necessário atiçar minha memória, mas

O que você deseja me dizer?

AEDO Só o que foi dito. Só o que diz respeito

Ao desejo final do pai de todos.

ELESIN Está enterrado como inhame em minha mente.

Esta é a estação das chuvas ligeiras

Este é o momento propício à colheita.

AEDO Se você não puder vir, eu disse, jure,

Dirá ao meu cavalo favorito. Irei

Cavalgar pelos portais sozinho.

ELESIN A mensagem de Elesin será lida

Apenas quando seu coração leal não mais bater.

AEDO Se não puder vir, Elesin, diga ao meu cão.

Não posso me manter em guarda muito tempo

Ao portão.

ELESIN Um cão não ultrapassa a mão

Que lhe dá a carne. Um cavalo que arremessa o cavaleiro

Desacelera até parar. Elesin Alafin

Não confia a animais mensagens entre

Um rei e seu companheiro.

AEDO Se você se perder, meu cão farejará

O caminho oculto para mim.

ELESIN A encruzilhada de sete sendas confunde

Somente o estranho. O Cavaleiro do Rei

Nasceu nos recessos da casa.

AEDO Conheço a maldade dos homens. Se houver

Peso na ponta solta de sua faixa, um peso que

Não possa ser movido por um mero homem; se em sua faixa for presa à terra

Por mentes más que buscam separar-nos no último…

ELESIN Minha faixa é do *alari* mais profundamente púrpura;

Não é corda que me prenda. O elefante

Não segue corda nenhuma; não está

Coroado o rei que prenda um elefante –

Nem mesmo você, meu amigo e Rei.

AEDO Ainda assim, este medo não me deixará

A treva desta nova morada é profunda –

Bastarão seus olhos humanos?

ELESIN Numa noite que cai em frente aos nossos olhos

Por mais profunda que seja, não perdemos o caminho.

AEDO Devo agora não reconhecer que estive

Onde maravilhas seu fim encontraram? O elefante merece

Mais do que se diga "Apanhei

Um vislumbre de algo". Se virmos o domador

Da floresta que digamos claramente, vimos

Um elefante.

ELESIN [*Sua voz está entorpecida*]

Libertei-me da terra e agora

Escurece. Vozes estranhas guiam meus pés.

AEDO O rio nunca é tão alto que os olhos

De um peixe estejam cobertos. A noite nunca é tão escura

Que um albino ache seu caminho. Uma criança

Voltando para casa não deseja que a levem pela mão

Com graça retoma a máscara seu bosque ao fim do dia…

Com graça, com graça dança a máscara

Em direção à casa no fim do dia, com graça…

[*O transe de* ELESIN *parece se profundar, seus passos mais pesados.*]

IYALOJA É a morte da guerra que mata o bravo,

Morte da água é como se vai o nadador

É a morte dos mercados que mata o comerciante

E a morte da indecisão leva o indolente

O ofício do alfanje cega seu fio

E o belo morre a morte da beleza.

É preciso um Elesin para morrer a morte da morte...

Só Elesin... morre a incognoscível morte da morte...

Com graça, com graça retoma o cavaleiro

Os estábulos no fim do dia, com graça…

AEDO Como direi o que viram os meus olhos? O Cavaleiro galopa adiante do mensageiro, como direi o que viram os meus olhos? Ele diz que um cão pode se confundir com novos aromas de seres com que nunca sonhou, logo, ele deve ir à frente do cão para o céu. Ele diz que um cavalo pode tropeçar em rochedos estranhos e se aleijar, então ele corre para o céu adiante do cavalo. É melhor, diz ele, não confiar em mensageiros que possam hesitar ao portão externo; oh, como posso dizer o que ouviram meus ouvidos? Mas você ainda me ouve, Elesin, você ouve seu fiel?

[ELESIN *em seus movimentos parece procurar ouvir a direção do som, sutilmente, mas ele só mergulha mais fundo em sua dança de transe.*]

Elesin Alafin, não mais percebo sua carne. Os tambores estão mudando agora, mas você foi para muito longe do mundo. Ainda não é meio-dia no céu; que aqueles que dizem ser iniciem sua jornada para casa. Então, por que você se apressa como uma noiva impaciente: por que você corre para desertar seu Olohun-iyo?

[ELESIN *agora está totalmente imerso no transe, não há mais nenhum sinal de consciência de seus entornos.*]

A profunda voz do *gbedu* o cobre então, como a passagem de elefantes reais? Estes tambores que não toleram rivais, eles bloquearam a passagem aos seus ouvidos ao ponto de minha voz passar por vento, uma mera folha flutuando na noite? Sua carne está mais leve, Elesin? O torrão de terra que deslizei entre suas sandálias para mantê-lo por mais tempo lentamente escapa de seus pés? Os tambores do outro lado agora se tornam couro a couro com os nossos em *osugbo*? Há sons ali que não consigo ouvir, te cercam passos que percutem a terra como o *gbedu*, retumbam como o trovão em volta da abóbada do mundo? A treva se ajunta em sua cabeça, Elesin? Há agora uma réstia de luz no fim da passagem, uma luz que não ouso mirar? Ela revela de quem eram as vozes que com frequência ouvimos, de quem eram os toques que com frequência sentimos, de quem eram as sabedorias que vêm repentinamente à mente após os mais sábios balançarem as cabeças e murmurarem "Não pode ser feito"? Elesin Alafin, não pense que eu não sei

por que seus lábios estão pesados, por que seus membros estão entorpecidos como azeite de dendê no frio do harmatã. Eu o chamaria de volta, mas quando o elefante segue para a floresta, a cauda é uma alça pequena demais para o caçador que o traria de volta. O sol que segue para o mar não mais escuta as orações do fazendeiro. Quando o rio começa a degustar o sal do oceano, não mais sabemos qual divindade chamar, se o deus do rio ou Olokun. Não há flecha que voe de volta à corda, a criança não retorna pela mesma passagem que a deu à luz. Elesin Oba, você consegue me ouvir? Suas pálpebras estão vítreas como as de uma cortesã, eis que você vê o escuro cavalariço e mestre da vida? E você verá meu pai? Você o dirá que fiquei com você até o final? Minha voz soará em seus ouvidos por um tempo, você se recordará de Olohun-iyo mesmo se a música do outro lado sobrepujar sua arte de mortal? Mas eles o conhecerão do outro lado? Eles têm olhos que apreciem seu valor, coração que o ame, saberão eles que sangue-puro que empina na direção deles em jaezes de honra? Se não o fizerem, Elesin, se lá cortarem seu inhame com faca pequena, ou servirem seu vinho em cabaça pequena, vire as costas e retorne a mãos acolhedoras. Se o mundo não fosse maior que os desejos de Olohun-iyo, eu não o deixaria ir…

[*Ele parece entrar em colapso.* ELESIN *segue dançando, completamente em transe. A elegia se torna cada vez mais alta e forte. A dança de* ELESIN *não perde em elasticidade, mas seus gestos se tornam, se possível, ainda mais pesados. As luzes lentamente se apagam.*]

ATO 4

Um Baile de Máscaras. A frente do palco é parte de um amplo corredor em volta do salão da Residência, que se estende para além da vista para os fundos e as alas. Há sinais da decadência cafona de uma fronteira imperial distante mas importante. Os casais, com uma variedade de fantasias, estão arranjados em volta dos muros, olhando todos para a mesma direção. O convidado de honra está prestes a aparecer. Uma parte da banda de metais da polícia local com seu condutor branco está ligeiramente visível. Por fim, a entrada da Realeza. A banda toca "Rule Britannia", mal, começando muito antes de ele estar visível. Os casais se curvam e fazem reverência à medida que ele passa diante deles. Ele e seus acompanhantes usam vestes europeias do século XVII. Logo atrás, segue

o Residente e sua parceira, vestidos de forma semelhante. À medida que se aproximam do fim do salão, onde começa o palco da orquestra, a música vai finalizando. O PRÍNCIPE *se curva diante dos convidados. A banda inicia uma valsa vienense e o* PRÍNCIPE *inicia a dança formalmente. Muitos compassos depois, o* RESIDENTE *e sua companheira começam a dançar. Outros seguem na ordem hierárquica adequada. A execução que a orquestra faz da valsa não é da mais alta qualidade musical.*

Algum tempo depois, o PRÍNCIPE *aparece novamente em cena dançando e é instalado em um canto pelo* RESIDENTE, *que então passa a selecionar casais para serem apresentados enquanto estes dançam e se apresentam, por vezes passando por entre os dançarinos para tocar o casal afortunado nos ombros. Há esforços desesperados de alguns para serem reconhecidos a despeito, talvez, de suas fantasias. O ritual de apresentações logo chega a* PILKINGS *e sua esposa. O* PRÍNCIPE *está bastante fascinado pela fantasia deles, e eles demonstram as adaptações que fizeram, abaixando a máscara para demonstrar a aparência que o* egungun *geralmente tem, mostrando então os vários botões de controle que eles inventaram para as abas do rosto, as mangas etc. Eles demonstram os passos de dança e os sons guturais feitos pelo* egungun, *acossam outros dançarinos no salão, a* SRA. PILKINGS *fazendo o papel de "reguladora" dos movimentos frenéticos de* PILKINGS. *Todos se divertem muito, especialmente o grupo da Realeza, que comanda os aplausos.*

Nesse ponto, um empregado uniformizado chega com uma nota em uma bandeja e é interceptado quase distraidamente pelo RESIDENTE, *que apanha a nota e a lê. Após tossidas educadas, ele pede licença ao* PRÍNCIPE *para ter a atenção dos* PILKINGS *e os leva para o lado. O* PRÍNCIPE *oferece com educação a mão à esposa do* RESIDENTE *e a dança recomeça.*

Ao sair, o RESIDENTE *dá uma ordem ao seu* AJUDANTE. *Eles vão até o corredor lateral onde o* RESIDENTE *entrega a nota a* PILKINGS.

RESIDENTE Como o senhor vê, diz "emergência" no lado de fora. Tomei a liberdade de abrir porque Sua Alteza estava claramente apreciando o entretenimento. Eu não gostaria de interromper a não ser que fosse realmente necessário.

PILKINGS Sim, sim, claro, senhor.

RESIDENTE É algo tão preocupante quanto diz? Afinal, qual é o assunto?

PILKINGS Algum costume estranho deles, senhor. Parece que, porque o Rei morreu, um chefe importante precisa cometer suicídio.

RESIDENTE O Rei? Não é o mesmo que morreu há mais ou menos um mês?

PILKINGS Sim, senhor.

RESIDENTE Ainda não o enterraram?

PILKINGS Eles têm seu próprio tempo para essas coisas, senhor. A cerimônia pré-enterro dura quase trinta dias. Parece que hoje é a noite final.

RESIDENTE Mas o que isso tem a ver com as mulheres do mercado? Por que elas estão se rebelando? Nós eliminamos os impostos que estavam causando os problemas, não eliminamos?

PILKINGS Ainda não sabemos com certeza se elas estão de fato se rebelando, senhor. O Sargento Amusa às vezes tende a exagerar.

RESIDENTE Ele parece bastante desesperado. Isso transparece mesmo em sua gramática um tanto singular. Por sinal, onde está o homem? Pedi ao meu ajudante que o trouxesse aqui.

PILKINGS Provavelmente estão procurando na varanda errada. Vou buscá-lo eu mesmo.

RESIDENTE Não, não, o senhor fique aqui. Deixe sua esposa ir buscá-los. Você se importa, minha cara…?

JANE Com certeza, não, Excelência. [*Sai.*]

RESIDENTE Você deveria ter me mantido informado, Pilkings. Você percebe o desastre que seria se isso tivesse estourado enquanto Sua Alteza estivesse aqui?

PILKINGS Eu não estava a par de tudo até esta noite, senhor.

RESIDENTE Olhos abertos, Pilkings, olhos abertos. Se deixássemos essas coisinhas passarem por nós, onde estaria o império, ahn? Me diga. Onde nós todos estaríamos?

PILKINGS [*voz baixa*] Dormindo em paz em casa, aposto.

RESIDENTE O que você disse, Pilkings?

PILKINGS Não vai acontecer de novo, senhor.

RESIDENTE Não deve acontecer, Pilkings, não deve. Onde está aquele maldito sargento? Preciso retornar a Sua Alteza o mais rápido possível e oferecer alguma explicação plausível para minha conduta um tanto abrupta. Você consegue pensar em alguma, Pilkings?

PILKINGS Você poderia dizer a verdade, senhor.

RESIDENTE Poderia? Não, não, não, Pilkings, de jeito nenhum. Ora essa! Dizer a ele que houve uma rebelião a apenas duas milhas dele? Supostamente esta é uma colônia segura de Sua majestade, Pilkings.

PILKINGS Sim, senhor.

RESIDENTE Ah, lá estão eles. Não, eles não são da nossa polícia nativa. Eles são os líderes da revolta?

PILKINGS Senhor, esses são os meus policiais.

RESIDENTE. Oh, peço perdão, soldados. Vocês parecem um pouco… Digo, não há algo faltando no uniforme? Eu acho que eles costumavam ter cinturões um tanto coloridos. Se me lembro bem, eu mesmo os recomendei no início dos meus dias no serviço. Um pouco de cor sempre tem um certo apelo aos nativos; sim, eu me lembro de colocar isso em meu relatório. Pois bem, o que temos aqui? Faça seu relato, homem.

PILKINGS [*aproxima-se de* AMUSA *e fala entre dentes*] E que não haja mais bobagens supersticiosas vindas de você, Amusa, ou vou deixá-lo na cela por um mês e dar carne de porco para você comer!

RESIDENTE. O que houve? O que a carne de porco tem a ver com isso?

PILKINGS Senhor, eu só o estava avisando para ser breve. Tenho certeza de que está bastante ansioso para ouvir o relato dele.

RESIDENTE Sim, sim, com certeza. Vamos, homem, fale de uma vez. Ei, nós também não demos a eles barretes coloridos com aquelas coisas onduladas todas, sim, franjas rosas…

PILKINGS Senhor, eu acho que se o permitíssemos fazer seu relato, descobriríamos que ele perdeu seu chapéu no tumulto.

RESIDENTE Ah, sim, de fato. É melhor eu falar isso a Sua Alteza. Perdeu o chapéu no tumulto, ha ha. Ele provavelmente dirá "bem, desde que não tenha perdido a cabeça". [*Ri para si mesmo.*] Não se esqueça de me enviar um relatório amanhã bem cedo, jovem Pilkings.

PILKINGS Não, senhor.

RESIDENTE E o que quer que você faça, não deixe as coisas saírem do controle. Mantenha a cabeça fria e – olhos abertos, Pilkings. [*Vai caminhando em direção ao salão.*]

PILKINGS Sim, senhor.

AJUDANTE Minha ajuda será necessária, senhor?

PILKINGS Não, obrigado, Bob. Creio que a necessidade que Sua Excelência tem de você é maior que a nossa.

AJUDANTE Temos um destacamento de soldados da capital, senhor. Eles acompanharam Sua Alteza até aqui.

PILKINGS Duvido que chegue a esse ponto, mas obrigado, vou me lembrar disso. Oh, pode enviar uma ordenança com minha capa?

AJUDANTE Com certeza, senhor. [*Sai.*]

PILKINGS Agora, sargento.

AMUSA Senhor… [*Faz um esforço, fica parado. Olhos para o teto.*]

PILKINGS Oh, de novo, não.

AMUSA Não posso ir contra a morte ao culto dos mortos. Esse traje pega poder dos mortos.

PILKINGS Está certo, vamos lá. Você está liberado de todo e qualquer dever, Amusa. Faça um relato para mim logo cedo de manhã.

JANE Devo ir, Simon?

PILKINGS Não, não tem necessidade. Se eu puder, volto mais tarde. Se não, Bob vai levar você para casa.

JANE Seja cuidadoso, Simon… Ou melhor, seja esperto.

PILKINGS Claro, claro. Vocês dois, venham comigo. [*Assim que se volta para ir embora, o relógio na Residência começa a soar.* PILKINGS *olha para seu relógio de pulso e se volta, apavorado, para olhar para sua mulher. O mesmo pensamento claramente ocorre a ela. Ele engole com dificuldade. Uma ordenança traz sua capa.*] É meia-noite. Não tinha ideia que era tão tarde.

JANE Mas, bem… eles não contam as horas do mesmo jeito que nós. A lua, ou algo assim...

PILKINGS Eu… não tenho tanta certeza.

> [*Ele se vira e começa de repente a correr. Os dois* OFICIAIS *seguem, também correndo.* AMUSA*, que mantivera seus olhos no teto o tempo todo, espera até que o último passo pare de soar. Ele saúda, repentinamente, mas sem olhar uma única vez na direção da mulher.*]

AMUSA Boa noite, senhora.

JANE Oh. [*Ela hesita.*] Amusa… [*Ele sai sem parecer ter ouvido.*] Pobre Simon… [*Uma figura emerge das sombras, um jovem homem negro vestido com um terno ocidental sóbrio. Ele espia para dentro do salão, tentando reconhecer as figuras dos dançarinos.*] Quem é?

OLUNDE [*surgindo na luz*] Não queria sobressaltá-la, senhora. Estou procurando o Oficial Distrital.

JANE Espere um pouco… Eu não conheço você? Sim, você é Olunde, o jovem que…

OLUNDE Sra. Pilkings! Que sorte. Vim aqui procurar seu marido.

JANE Olunde! Olhe só para você. Que belo jovem você se tornou. Imponente, mas discreto. Meu Deus, quando você voltou? Simon não disse palavra. Mas você parece bem, Olunde. Realmente!

OLUNDE A senhora está… bem, você também parece bem, sra. Pilkings. Pelo pouco que posso vê-la.

JANE Oh, isso. Causou um rebuliço, posso dizer, e nem sempre muito agradável. Você não está chocado, espero.

OLUNDE Por que estaria? Mas não está um tanto quente aí dentro? Deve ser difícil para sua pele respirar.

JANE Bem, é um tanto quente, devo admitir, mas é por uma boa causa.

OLUNDE Qual causa, sra. Pilkings?

JANE Tudo isto. O baile. E Sua Alteza estando aqui em pessoa e tudo isso.

OLUNDE [*com discrição*] E essa é a boa causa para profanar uma máscara ancestral?

JANE Oh, então você está chocado, afinal. Que decepção.

OLUNDE Não, não estou chocado, sra. Pilkings. A senhora se esquece de que passei quatro anos entre a sua gente. Eu descobri que vocês não têm respeito nenhum pelo que não entendem.

JANE Oh. Então, você voltou com um ressentimento. Que pena, Olunde. Lamento.

[*Um silêncio constrangedor se segue.*]

Imagino, então, que você não achou sua estadia na Inglaterra tão edificante assim.

OLUNDE Não diria isso. Acho sua gente bastante admirável em muitos sentidos, a conduta e coragem deles nesta guerra, por exemplo.

JANE Ah, sim, a guerra. Aqui, isso tudo é um tanto remoto. Por vezes, temos treinamentos para blecaute só para nos lembrar de que há uma guerra acontecendo. E de

vez em quando passa um raro comboio indo para algum lugar ou em manobras. Lembre-se de que há um pouco de comoção como aquele navio que explodiu no porto.

OLUNDE Aqui? Quer dizer, ação adversária?

JANE Oh, não, a guerra não chegou tão perto. O próprio capitão fez isso. Eu não entendo bem, na verdade. Simon tentou explicar. O navio teve que ser explodido porque tinha se tornado perigoso para outros navios, até mesmo para a cidade. Centenas de pessoas que viviam na costa morreram.

OLUNDE Talvez estivesse carregado de munição e tenha pegado fogo. Ou algum desses gases letais que têm sido experimentados.

JANE Algo do tipo. O capitão se explodiu com o navio. Deliberadamente. Simon disse que alguém tinha que ficar a bordo para acionar o detonador.

OLUNDE Devia ser um detonador bem curto.

JANE [*dá de ombros*] Eu não sei muito sobre isso. Só sei que não tinha outro jeito de salvar vidas. Não havia tempo para planejar outra coisa. O capitão tomou a decisão e a colocou em prática.

OLUNDE Sim… acredito nisso, de fato. Conheci homens assim na Inglaterra.

JANE Oh, olhe só para mim! Dando boas-vindas a você com notícias tão mórbidas. E bem desatualizadas, também. Foi há pelo menos seis meses.

OLUNDE Não acho mórbido, de jeito nenhum. Na verdade, acho bem inspirador. É um comentário afirmativo sobre a vida.

JANE O quê?

OLUNDE O autossacrifício do capitão.

JANE Bobagem. Não se deve jogar a vida fora deliberadamente.

OLUNDE E as pessoas inocentes perto do porto?

JANE Oh, como se pode saber? Provavelmente foi tudo um exagero, afinal.

OLUNDE Era um risco que o capitão não podia correr. Mas, por favor, sra. Pilkings, a senhora acha que poderia encontrar seu marido para mim? Preciso falar com ele.

JANE Simon? Oh. [*Assim que reconhece pela primeira vez a significância total da presença de* OLUNDE.] Simon está… há um probleminha na cidade. Ele foi resolver. Mas… quando você chegou? Simon sabe que você está aqui?

OLUNDE [*sério de repente*] Preciso de sua ajuda, sra. Pilkings. Sempre achei a senhora um pouco mais compreensiva que seu marido. Por favor, encontre-o para mim e, quando achar, precisa me ajudar a falar com ele.

JANE Receio que eu não… o esteja entendendo bem. Você já viu meu marido?

OLUNDE Eu fui até sua casa. Seu criado disse que a senhora estaria aqui. [*Sorri.*] Ele até me disse como eu reconheceria você e o sr. Pilkings.

JANE Então, você deve saber o que meu marido está tentando fazer por você.

OLUNDE Por mim?

JANE Por você. Pela sua gente. E pensar que ele nem sabia que você estava voltando! Mas o que o traz aqui? Esta noite mesmo estávamos falando sobre você. Achamos que você ainda estava a 4 mil milhas.

OLUNDE Recebi um telegrama.

JANE Um telegrama? Quem enviou? Simon? O negócio com seu pai só começou hoje à noite.

OLUNDE Uma pessoa que conheço me enviou semanas atrás e não dizia nada sobre meu pai. Só dizia que "Nosso Rei morreu". Mas eu sabia que devia voltar logo para casa para enterrar meu pai. Eu entendi isso.

JANE Bem, graças a Deus você não precisa passar por essa agonia. Simon vai impedir que isso aconteça.

OLUNDE. É por isso que gostaria de vê-lo. Ele está perdendo tempo. E já que ele me ajudou tanto, eu não gostaria de permitir que atraia a inimizade de nosso povo. Especialmente por pouca coisa.

JANE [*senta-se boquiaberta*] Você… você… Olunde!

OLUNDE Sra. Pilkings, eu vim para casa enterrar meu pai. Assim que soube das notícias, reservei uma passagem para casa. Na verdade, tivemos sorte. Viajamos no mesmo comboio que o seu Príncipe, então, tivemos excelente proteção.

JANE Mas você não acha que seu pai não tem direito a toda proteção que esteja disponível a ele?

OLUNDE Como eu posso fazê-la entender? Ele *tem* proteção. Ninguém pode empreender o que ele vai fazer hoje à noite sem a mais profunda proteção concebível pela mente. O que você pode dar a ele no lugar de sua paz de espírito, no lugar da honra e veneração de seu próprio povo? O que você pensaria do seu Príncipe se ele se recusasse a aceitar o risco de perder sua vida nesta viagem? Essa… bandeirosa tournée de posses coloniais.

JANE Entendo. Então, não é só medicina que você estudou na Inglaterra.

OLUNDE Mais um erro em que o seu povo recai. Vocês acham que tudo o que parece fazer sentido foi aprendido com vocês.

JANE Espere um pouco, Olunde. Você aprendeu a argumentar, isso eu percebi, mas nunca disse que o que você diz faz sentido. Por mais claro que você o coloque, ainda assim é um costume bárbaro. É ainda pior… é feudal! O rei morre e um chefe precisa ser enterrado com ele. Veja o grau de feudalismo!

OLUNDE [*aponta para o fundo do palco. O* PRÍNCIPE *está dançando por perto novamente – a uma música diferente – e todos os convidados se curvam e fazem reverência quando ele passa*] E isto? Mesmo em meio a uma guerra devastadora, olhe para isto. Que nome a senhora daria a isto?

JANE Terapia, ao estilo britânico. A preservação da sanidade em meio ao caos.

OLUNDE Outros chamariam de decadência. No entanto, isso não me interessa na verdade. Vocês, raças brancas, sabem sobreviver; disso tive prova. Pela lógica e pelas leis naturais, esta guerra deveria acabar com todas as raças brancas varrendo umas às outras do mapa, varrendo do mapa sua assim chamada civilização pelo resto dos tempos e retornando a um estado de primitivismo semelhante ao que só existia até então em sua

imaginação quando pensavam em nós. Eu pensei tudo isso no início. Então, percebi que a grande arte de vocês é a arte da sobrevivência. Mas pelo menos tenham a humildade de deixarem os outros sobreviverem do jeito deles.

JANE Com suicídio ritual?

OLUNDE É pior que suicídio em massa? Sra. Pilkings, como a senhora chama o que esses jovens são mandados a fazer nesta guerra por seus generais? É claro que vocês também dominam a arte de chamar as coisas por nomes que não as descrevem nem remotamente.

JANE Vocês falam! Vocês com seu jeito verboso e enrolado de conversar.

OLUNDE Sra. Pilkings, o que quer que façamos, nunca sugerimos que uma coisa seja o oposto do que ela é na verdade. Nos jornais que passam antes dos filmes, ouvi derrotas – derrotas totais e assassinas – descritas como vitórias estratégicas. Não, espere um pouco, não foi só nesses jornais. Não se esqueça de que eu trabalhava em hospitais durante esse tempo. Hordas de seus feridos passaram por aquelas alas. Eu falava com eles. Eu passava longas noites ao lado da cama deles enquanto eles falavam verdades terríveis das realidades da guerra. Agora sei como se faz história.

JANE Mas é óbvio que, numa guerra dessa natureza, pela moral de uma nação, deve-se esperar…

OLUNDE Que se fale de um desastre para além do entendimento humano como um triunfo? Não. Quero dizer, não há luto na casa do enlutado para que se permita uma blasfêmia dessas?

JANE [*após um momento de pausa*] Talvez agora eu consiga entendê-lo. O momento que escolhemos para você não era um dos nossos melhores para você nos ver.

OLUNDE Não pense que foi só a guerra. Antes mesmo de ela começar, tive bastante tempo para estudar o seu povo. Eu não vi nada, afinal, que desse a vocês o direito de julgar outros povos e seus costumes. Nada mesmo.

JANE [*hesitante*] Foi… a questão da cor? Eu sei que existe um pouco de discriminação.

OLUNDE Não torne isso tão simples, sra. Pilkings. A senhora faz parecer que, quando fui embora, não levei nada comigo.

JANE Sim… e, para falar a verdade, esta noite mesmo Simon e eu comentamos que nós nunca soubemos de fato o que você levou com você.

OLUNDE Nem eu sabia. Mas descobri lá. Sou grato ao seu país por isso. E nunca vou abandonar.

JANE Olunde, por favor… prometa-me uma coisa. O que quer que você faça, não jogue fora o que você começou a fazer. Você quer ser um médico. Meu marido e eu acreditamos que você será um médico excelente, compreensivo e competente. Não deixe que algo o leve a jogar fora sua formação.

OLUNDE [*genuinamente surpreso*] Claro que não. Que ideia estranha. Eu pretendo retornar e concluir minha formação. Assim que o enterro do meu pai tiver terminado.

JANE Oh, por favor…!

OLUNDE Ouça! Venha para fora. Não se ouve nada com esta música.

JANE O que é?

OLUNDE Os tambores. A senhora ouve a mudança? Ouça.

> [*Ouvem-se os tambores, ainda distantes, mas mais distintos. Há uma mudança de ritmo, ele cresce e, então, repentinamente, é cortado. Após um silêncio, uma nova batida começa, lenta e ressonante.*]
>
> Pronto, está tudo acabado.

JANE Você quer dizer que ele está…

OLUNDE Sim, sra. Pilkings, meu pai morreu. Sua força de vontade sempre foi enorme; eu sei que ele morreu.

JANE [*grita*] Como você pode ser tão insensível! Tão sem sentimentos! Você anuncia a morte de seu próprio pai como um cirurgião examinando alguém estranho… um corpo estranho! Você é apenas um selvagem como todo o resto!

AJUDANTE [*correndo para atender*] Sra. Pilkings. Sra. Pilkings. [*Ela cai em prantos, em soluços.*] A senhora está bem, sra. Pilkings?

OLUNDE Ela ficará bem. [*Volta-se para ir embora.*]

AJUDANTE Quem é você? E quem diabos perguntou sua opinião?

OLUNDE Você está certo, ninguém. [*Indo embora*].

AJUDANTE Que diabos! Você me ouviu perguntar quem é você?

OLUNDE Tenho afazeres me esperando.

AJUDANTE Vou lhe dar afazeres em um instante, seu negro insolente! Responda minha pergunta!

OLUNDE Tenho um funeral para organizar. Com licença. [*Indo embora.*]

AJUDANTE Eu disse pare! Ordenança!

JANE Não, não, não faça isso. Eu estou bem. E, pelo amor de Deus, não aja desse modo tolo. Ele é amigo da família.

AJUDANTE Bem, é melhor ele aprender a responder perguntas educadas quando lhe são feitas. Esses nativos colocam um terno e passam a se achar importantes.

OLUNDE Posso ir agora?

JANE Não, não vá. Preciso falar com você. Sinto muito pelo que disse.

OLUNDE Não foi nada, sra. Pilkings. E realmente estou ansioso para ir. Não pude ver meu pai antes, é proibido para mim, seu herdeiro e sucessor, pôr os olhos nele a partir do momento da morte do rei. Mas agora... Gostaria de tocar seu corpo enquanto ainda está quente.

JANE Você vai. Prometo não segurá-lo por muito tempo. Só não poderia deixá-lo partir assim. Bob, por favor, nos dê licença.

AJUDANTE Se a senhora tem certeza...

JANE É claro que tenho certeza. Algo aconteceu e me incomodou naquele momento, mas estou bem agora. De verdade.

[*O* AJUDANTE *sai, um tanto relutante.*]

OLUNDE Não posso ficar muito tempo.

JANE Por favor, prometo não segurá-lo. É só que… oh você viu o que acontece conosco neste lugar. O homem do Residente achou que estava ajudando, é assim que todos reagimos. Mas eu não posso entrar no meio da multidão agora e, se eu ficar sozinha, alguém virá me procurar. Por favor, só diga algo por alguns instantes e, depois, você pode ir. Só para eu me recuperar.

OLUNDE O que a senhora quer que eu diga?

JANE Sua aceitação tranquila, por exemplo, você pode explicá-la? Foi tão antinatural. Eu não entendo de jeito nenhum. Eu sinto a necessidade de entender tudo o que puder.

OLUNDE Mas a senhora mesma explicou. Talvez seja minha formação médica. Vi a morte muito frequentemente. E os soldados que retornavam do front, morriam em nossas mãos o tempo inteiro.

JANE Não. Tem que ser mais que isso. Eu sinto que tem a ver com as muitas coisas que nós não entendemos sobre o seu povo. Pelo menos você pode explicar.

OLUNDE Todas essas coisas são parte disso. E, de qualquer forma, meu pai já estava morto em minha mente por quase um mês. A partir do momento em que soube da morte do rei. Vivi com meu luto por tanto tempo que não consigo pensar nele vivo agora. Na viagem de navio, mantive a mente em minhas obrigações como aquele que deve executar os ritos sobre corpo de meu pai. Eu passei e repassei tudo isso na minha mente do jeito que ele me ensinou. Eu não queria fazer nada errado, algo que pudesse pôr em risco o bem-estar do meu povo.

JANE Mas ele o deserdou. Quando você foi embora, ele jurou publicamente que você não era mais filho dele.

OLUNDE Eu lhe disse, ele era um homem de grande vontade. Às vezes essa é outra maneira de se dizer teimoso. Mas, entre nosso povo, você não deserda um filho assim tão simples. Mesmo se eu tivesse morrido antes dele, eu ainda seria enterrado como seu filho mais velho. Mas é hora de ir.

JANE Obrigada. Eu me sinto mais calma. Não deixe que eu atrapalhe suas obrigações.

OLUNDE Boa noite, sra. Pilkings.

JANE Bem-vindo ao lar. [*Ela estende a mão. Assim que ele a segura, ouvem-se passos se aproximando da entrada. Um pouco mais tarde, os soluços de uma mulher também se ouvem.*]

PILKINGS (*fora de cena*) Mantenha-os aqui até eu retornar. [*Ele caminha em cena, reage quando vê* OLUNDE, *mas se volta para a esposa.*] Que bom que você ainda está aqui.

JANE Simon, o que aconteceu?

PILKINGS Mais tarde, Jane, por favor. Bob ainda está aqui?

JANE Sim, acho que está. Tenho certeza de que deve estar.

PILKINGS Tente trazê-lo para cá o mais rápido possível. Diga a ele que é urgente.

JANE É claro. Oh, Simon, você se lembra…

PILKINGS Sim, sim. Posso ver quem é. Traga Bob aqui. [*Ela sai.*] No primeiro instante, achei que estava vendo um fantasma.

OLUNDE Sr. Pilkings, aprecio o que tentou fazer. Quero que o senhor acredite nisso. Posso dizer que teria sido uma terrível calamidade se tivesse tido sucesso.

PILKINGS [*abre a boca várias vezes, fecha*] O que você… disse?

OLUNDE Uma calamidade para nós, todo o povo.

PILKINGS [*suspira*] Vejo. Hm.

OLUNDE E agora devo ir. Devo vê-lo antes que fique frio.

PILKINGS Oh ah… em… mas é um choque vê-lo. Quero dizer… er… pensando o tempo todo que você estava na Inglaterra e agradecendo a Deus por isso.

OLUNDE Vim no navio do correio. Viajamos no comboio do Príncipe.

PILKINGS Ah, sim, a-ah, hm… er, bem…

OLUNDE Boa noite. Vejo que está chocado com tudo o que aconteceu. Mas deve saber agora que há coisas que o senhor não pode entender – ou evitar.

PILKINGS Sim. Só um instante. Há policiais armados por aqui e foram instruídos a não deixar ninguém passar. Sugiro que espere um pouco. Eu vou… er… encontrar alguém para escoltá-lo.

OLUNDE Muita gentileza sua. Mas o senhor acha que pode arranjar isso rápido?

PILKINGS É claro. Na verdade, sim, vou é mandar Bob com alguns homens para o… er… lugar. Você pode ir com eles. Aqui vem ele. Com licença um minuto.

AJUDANTE Algo errado, senhor?

PILKINGS [*leva-o para um canto*] Ouça, Bob, aquele porão no anexo da Residência que não está em uso, sabe, onde se guardavam os escravos antes de serem levados à costa…

AJUDANTE Oh, sim, usamos como depósito de móveis quebrados.

PILKINGS Mas ainda tem as barras de ferro?

AJUDANTE Oh, sim, estão bem intactas.

PILKINGS Pegue as chaves, por favor. Explico mais tarde. Quero umvigilância forte na Residência hoje à noite.

AJUDANTE Já está lá. O destacamento da costa…

PILKINGS Não, não os quero nos portões da Residência. Quero que os leve ao sopé da colina, bem distante do salão principal para que possam lidar com qualquer situação muito antes que o som chegue à casa.

AJUDANTE Sim, é claro.

PILKINGS Não quero Sua Alteza alarmado.

AJUDANTE O senhor acha que o tumulto chegará até aqui?

PILKINGS Não é provável, mas não quero arriscar. Eu os fiz acreditar que iria trancafiar o homem na minha casa, que foi o que tinha planejado primeiro. Provavelmente estão investindo contra ela agora. Tomei um desvio para cá, então creio que não haja perigo nenhum. Pelo menos não antes da madrugada. Ninguém deve

deixar o local, é claro – quero dizer, os empregados nativos. Logo vão sentir o cheiro de algo acontecendo e eles não conseguem manter suas bocas fechadas.

AJUDANTE Vou dar instruções imediatamente.

PILKINGS Eu mesmo vou levar o prisioneiro. Dois policiais ficarão com ele durante a noite toda. Dentro da cela.

AJUDANTE Certo, senhor. [*Saúda e sai rapidamente.*]

PILKINGS Jane, Bob está vindo em um instante com um destacamento. Até ele voltar, por favor fique com Olunde. [*Ele faz um gesto de aviso extra com seus olhos.*]

OLUNDE Por favor, sr. Pilkings…

PILKINGS Detesto ser enfadonho, velho filho, mas temos uma crise em nossas mãos. Tem a ver com a questão de seu pai, já que precisa saber. E está acontecendo também em um momento em que temos Sua Alteza aqui. Sou responsável pela segurança, então, você simplesmente deve fazer o que eu digo. Espero que esteja entendido. [*Sai marchando com rapidez na direção de onde fez sua primeira aparição.*]

OLUNDE O que está acontecendo? Isso tudo não pode ser só porque ele não conseguiu impedir meu pai de se matar.

JANE Honestamente não sei. Isso poderia ter iniciado uma rebelião?

OLUNDE Não. Se ele tivesse tido sucesso, aí sim haveria a probabilidade de se iniciar a rebelião. Talvez houvesse outros fatores envolvidos. Houve disputa entre chefes?

JANE Não que eu saiba.

ELESIN [*um urro animal de fora da cena*] Me deixem em paz! Já não basta vocês terem me coberto de vergonha?! Homem branco, tire sua mão de meu corpo!

[OLUNDE *congela no local.* JANE, *finalmente entendendo, tenta movê-lo.*]

JANE Vamos entrar. Está ficando frio aqui.

PILKINGS [*fora de cena*] Levem ele.

ELESIN Me devolva o nome que tirou de mim, fantasma da terra dos sem-nome!

PILKINGS Levem ele! Não pode haver perturbação aqui. Rápido! Fechem sua boca.

JANE Oh, Deus! Vamos entrar. Por favor, Olunde. [OLUNDE *não se move*.]

ELESIN Tire sua mão albina de cima de mim, seu…

[*Som de luta. Sua voz engasga e ele é amordaçado.*]

OLUNDE [*quieto*] Era a voz de meu pai.

JANE Oh, pobre órfão, para o que você retornou ao lar?

[*Há uma súbita explosão de raiva fora do palco e passos poderosos vêm correndo sobre o passeio*.]

PILKINGS Malditos idiotas, atrás dele!

[*Imediatamente* ELESIN, *algemado, vem se batendo na direção de* JANE *e* OLUNDE, *seguido alguns momentos atrás por* PILKINGS *e os* OFICIAIS. ELESIN, *confrontado pela aparente estátua de seu filho, para morto.* OLUNDE *olha por sobre sua cabeça à distância. Os* OFICIAIS *tentam segurá-lo.* JANE *grita com eles*.]

JANE Deixem-no em paz! Simon, diga a eles para deixá-lo em paz.

PILKINGS Certo, recuem. [*Encolhe os ombros*.] Talvez seja melhor assim. Pode ajudar a acalmá-lo.

[*Por muitos instantes eles ficam na mesma posição.* ELESIN *dá um passo à frente, quase como se ainda estivesse em dúvida.*]

ELESIN Olunde? [*Move a cabeça, inspecionando-o de lado a lado*.] Olunde! [*Cai lentamente aos pés de* OLUNDE.] Oh, filho, não deixe a visão de seu pai cegá-lo!

OLUNDE [*ele se move pela primeira vez desde que ouviu a voz do pai, baixa a cabeça lentamente e olha o pai*] Eu não tenho pai, comedor de restos.

[*Ele sai caminhando lentamente pelo caminho que seu pai correra. As luzes se apagam sobre* ELESIN, *soluçando sobre o chão*.]

ATO 5

Um amplo portão com barras de ferro se estende por quase toda a extensão da cela em que ELESIN *está aprisionado. Seus pulsos estão presos por grossos braceletes de ferro, acorrentados juntos; ele está de pé contra as barras, olhando para fora. Sentada sobre o chão a um lado do lado de fora está sua noiva recente, seus olhos sempre voltados ao chão. As figuras dos dois* GUARDAS *podem ser vistas mais no fundo, dentro da cela, alertas a cada movimento que* ELESIN *faz.* PILKINGS*, agora em um uniforme policial, entra sem fazer barulhos, o observa por um tempo. Então, tosse de forma ostentosa e se aproxima. Ele se inclina contra as barras perto de um canto, de costas para* ELESIN*. Ele está obviamente tentando se conectar com* ELESIN*. Silêncio por alguns momentos.*

PILKINGS Você parece fascinado pela lua.

ELESIN [*após uma pausa*] Sim, ser fantasmático. Seu irmão gêmeo ali em cima ocupa meus pensamentos.

PILKINGS É uma noite bonita.

ELESIN É mesmo?

PILKINGS A luz sobre as folhas, a paz da noite…

ELESIN A noite não está em paz, Oficial Distrital.

PILKINGS Não? Eu diria que está. Sabe, tranquila…

ELESIN E tranquilo significa pacífico para você?

PILKINGS Bem, quase a mesma coisa. Naturalmente existe uma diferença sutil...

ELESIN A noite não está em paz, ser fantasmático. O mundo não está em paz. Você destroçou a paz do mundo para sempre. Não há sono no mundo hoje à noite.

PILKINGS Ainda assim, é um bom negócio que o mundo perca uma noite de sono se esse for o preço de salvar a vida de um homem.

ELESIN Você não salvou minha vida, Oficial Distrital. Você a destruiu.

PILKINGS Ah, por favor…

ELESIN E não só a minha vida, mas as vidas de muitos. O fim do trabalho noturno ainda não acabou. Nem este ano nem o próximo o verão. Se eu desejasse seu bem, eu rezaria para que você não ficasse tempo suficiente em nossa terra para ver o desastre que trouxe para nós.

PILKINGS Bem, cumpri meu dever do modo como o via. Não tenho arrependimentos.

ELESIN Não, os arrependimentos da vida sempre vêm mais tarde

[*Pausa de alguns instantes*]

Você está esperando pela madrugada, homem branco. Eu o ouço dizendo para si mesmo: só tantas horas até a madrugada e o perigo terá acabado. Tudo que preciso fazer é mantê-lo vivo esta noite. Você não entende bem a coisa toda, mas sabe que é hoje à noite que o que deveria ser deve ocorrer. Vou aliviar sua mente ainda mais, ser fantasmático. Não é a noite inteira, mas um momento da noite, e esse momento passou. A lua era minha mensageira e guia. Quando ela atingiu um certo portal no céu, tocou aquele momento pelo qual minha vida inteira se passou em bênçãos. Mesmo eu não sei que portal é esse. Fiquei aqui perscrutando o céu por um vislumbre dessa porta, mas, não posso vê-la. Olhos humanos são inúteis para uma busca dessa natureza. Mas na casa de *osugbo*, aqueles que vigiam por meio do espírito reconheceram o momento, eles enviaram a mensagem até mim pela voz de nossos tambores sagrados para me preparar. Eu os ouvi e me despi de todos os pensamentos da terra. Eu comecei a seguir a lua até a morada dos deuses… servo do rei branco, foi aí que você adentrou meu local escolhido para a partida em pés de dessacralização.

PILKINGS Sinto muito, mas vemos nossos deveres de forma diferente.

ELESIN Eu não mais o culpo. Você roubou meu primogênito de mim, o enviou para o seu país de forma a torná-lo algo à sua própria imagem. Você planejou com antecedência? Há momentos em que tudo parece parte de um plano maior. Aquele que deve seguir meus passos é tirado de mim, enviado através oceano. Então, na minha vez, sou impedido de cumprir meu destino. Você pensou em tudo isso antes, esse plano de empurrar nosso mundo de seu curso e partir o cordel que nos liga à grande origem?

PILKINGS Você não acredita mesmo nisso. De qualquer forma, se essa era a minha intenção com seu filho, parece que falhei.

ELESIN Você não falhou no principal, ser fantasmático. Sabemos que o telhado cobre os caibros, o tecido cobre as manchas; quem diria que a pele branca cobria nosso futuro, impedindo-nos de ver a morte que nossos inimigos haviam preparado para nós? O mundo se transviou e seus habitantes se perderam. Em volta deles, não há nada senão vazio.

PILKINGS Seu filho não tem uma visão tão sombria.

ELESIN Você está sonhando agora, homem branco? Você não estava presente na reunião de vergonha? Você não viu quando o mundo rodou em reverso e o pai caiu diante de seu filho, pedindo perdão?

PILKINGS Isso foi no calor do momento. Eu falei com ele e… se você quer saber, ele gostaria de cortar a própria língua pelas palavras que falou.

ELESIN Não. O que ele disse não deve nunca ser desdito. O desprezo de meu próprio filho resgatou algo de minha vergonha em suas mãos. Você me impediu em meu dever, mas sei agora que dei à luz um filho. Outrora desconfiei dele por buscar a companhia daqueles que meu espírito sabia serem inimigos de nossa raça. Agora, eu entendo. Deve-se buscar obter os segredos dos inimigos. Ele vai vingar minha vergonha, branco. Seu espírito vai destruir a você e aos seus.

PILKINGS Esse tipo de conversa é desnecessário. Se você não quer minha consolação…

ELESIN Não, homem branco, eu não quero sua consolação.

PILKINGS Como quiser. De qualquer forma, seu filho manda sua consolação. Ele pede seu perdão. Quando pedi a ele que não o desprezasse, sua resposta foi: não posso julgá-lo, e se não posso julgá-lo, não posso desprezá-lo. Ele quer vir até você, se despedir e receber sua bênção.

ELESIN Se despedir? Ele vai voltar à sua terra?

PILKINGS Você não acha que é a coisa mais sensata a se fazer no caso dele? Eu o aconselhei a partir imediatamente, antes da madrugada, e ele concorda que é a atitude correta.

ELESIN Sim, é o melhor. E mesmo que não pensasse assim, perdi o local de honra do pai. Minha voz se rompeu.

PILKINGS Seu filho o honra. Se não honrasse, não pediria sua bênção.

ELESIN Não, mesmo um sangue-puro não deixa de sentir pena pelo gramado que golpeia com o casco. Quando ele vem?

PILKINGS Assim que a cidade estiver mais tranquila. Foi o que aconselhei.

ELESIN Sim, homem branco, tenho certeza de que aconselhou. Você aconselha todas as nossas vidas, embora eu não saiba sob a autoridade de quais deuses.

PILKINGS [*abre sua boca para responder, então, parece mudar de ideia. Volta-se para ir. Hesita e para novamente*] Antes de deixá-lo, posso perguntar apenas uma coisa?

ELESIN Estou ouvindo.

PILKINGS Quero pedir que busque na tranquilidade de seu coração e me diga – você não vê grandes contradições na sabedoria de sua própria raça?

PILKINGS Faça-se claro, branco.

PILKINGS Eu vivi entre vocês tempo suficiente para aprender um dito ou dois. Um deles me veio à mente hoje à noite quando cheguei ao mercado e vi o que estava acontecendo. Você estava cercado por aqueles que o incitavam com canções e louvores. Eu pensei, são essas as mesmas pessoas que dizem: com desgosto o ancião se aproxima do céu e você o pede para carregar suas saudações para além; você realmente acha que ele faz a jornada de boa vontade? Após isso, não hesitei.

> [*Uma pausa*. ELESIN *suspira. Antes que ele possa falar, ouve-se um som de pés correndo.*]

JANE [*fora de cena*] Simon! Simon!

PILKINGS O que raios…! [*Corre para fora.*]

[ELESIN *se volta para sua nova esposa, a observa por alguns instantes*.]

ELESIN Minha jovem noiva, você ouviu o ser fantasmático? Você se senta e soluça em seu coração silencioso, mas não diz nada sobre isso tudo. Primeiro, eu culpei o homem branco, depois culpei meus deuses por me desertarem. Agora sinto que quero culpar a você pelo mistério da dissipação de minha vontade. Mas a culpa é uma estranha oferta de paz para um homem trazer a um mundo que ele ofendeu profundamente e a seus habitantes inocentes. Oh, mãe pequena, tive inúmeras mulheres na minha vida, mas você foi mais que um desejo da carne. Precisava de você como o abismo através do qual meu corpo seria levado, eu o enchi com terra e deixei cair minha semente nele no momento de me preparar para cruzá-lo. Você foi o dom final dos vivos a seu emissário para a terra dos ancestrais, e talvez seu calor e juventude tenham trazido novas visões deste mundo para mim e tornaram chumbo meus pés neste lado do abismo. Pois eu confesso a você, filha, minha fraqueza não veio apenas da abominação do homem branco que veio com violência à minha presença evanescente, havia também um peso de desejo em meus membros segurados pela terra. Eu o teria jogado longe, meu pé já começava a se levantar, mas, então, o fantasma branco entrou e tudo se desfez.

[*Aproximam-se as vozes de* PILKINGS *e sua mulher.*]

JANE Oh, Simon, você vai deixá-la entrar, não vai?

PILKINGS Eu gostaria muito que você parasse de interferir.

[*Eles aparecem em cena.* JANE *usa um roupão.* PILKINGS *segura uma nota, a qual ele consulta de tempo em tempo.*]

JANE Deus meu, eu não comecei isso. Eu estava dormindo tranquila, ou pelo menos tentando, quando o serviçal trouxe isso. Não é culpa minha se não se pode dormir sem ser perturbado mesmo na Residência.

PILKINGS Ele teria feito a mesma coisa se estivéssemos dormindo em casa, então, não mude o assunto. Ele sabe que pode convencê-la ou não teria enviado a petição, para início de conversa.

JANE Seja justo, Simon. No final, ele estava pensando nos teus próprios interesses. Ele é grato, sabe, e você parece se esquecer disso. Ele sente que deve algo a você.

PILKINGS Eu só gostaria que deixassem esse homem em paz hoje à noite, só isso.

JANE Confie nele, Simon. Ele deu sua palavra de que tudo vai ocorrer de forma pacífica.

PILKINGS. Sim, e aí está a outra questão. Eu não gosto de ser ameaçado.

JANE Ameaçado? [*pega a nota.*] Não percebi ameaça nenhuma.

PILKINGS Está lá. Velada, mas está lá. A única forma de evitar uma rebelião séria amanhã – que ousadia!

JANE Eu não acho que ele esteja ameaçando você, Simon.

PILKINGS Ele pegou a linguagem, é fato. Não me surpreenderia se ele estivesse se misturando com comunistas ou anarquistas lá. A construção da linguagem soa boa demais para ser verdade. Raios! Se pelo menos o Príncipe não tivesse escolhido este momento para vir visitar.

JANE Bem, ainda assim, Simon, o que você tem a perder? Você não quer uma rebelião em suas mãos, não com o Príncipe aqui.

PILKINGS [*indo até* ELESIN] Vamos ver o que ele tem a dizer. Chefe Elesin, tem ainda outra pessoa que quer vê-lo. Já que ela não é sua parente, não me sinto obrigado a deixá-la entrar. Mas seu filho enviou uma nota com ela, então, é você quem decide.

ELESIN Sei quem deve ser. Então, ela descobriu seu esconderijo. Bem, não foi difícil. Meu fedor de vergonha é tão forte que não é preciso um cão de caça para segui-lo.

PILKINGS Se você não quer vê-la, só diga e eu a mando embora agora mesmo.

ELESIN Por que eu não quereria vê-la? Deixe-a vir. Não tenho mais buracos nos meus trapos de vergonha. Está tudo a nu.

PILKINGS Vou trazê-la. [*Sai.*]

JANE [*hesita, então vai até* ELESIN] Por favor, tente entender, tudo que meu marido fez foi com as melhores intenções.

ELESIN [*ele a olha de modo estranho por um longo tempo, como se tentasse entender quem ela é*] Você é a esposa do Oficial Distrital?

JANE Sim. Meu nome é Jane.

ELESIN Aquela é minha mulher sentada ali. Você percebe como ela está quieta e silenciosa? Meu negócio é com seu marido.

[PILKINGS retorna com IYALOJA.]

PILKINGS Aqui está ela. Mas antes quero sua palavra de honra de que você não vai tentar nenhuma tolice.

ELESIN Honra? Homem branco, você disse que quer minha palavra de honra?

PILKINGS Eu sei que você é um homem honrado. Me dê sua palavra de honra de que você não vai receber nada dela.

ELESIN Mas eu tenho certeza de que você vasculhou suas roupas de uma forma como jamais ousaria tocar em sua própria mãe. E tem esses seus dois lagartos que viram os olhos até quando eu me coço.

PILKINGS E eu vou ficar sentado naquele tronco de árvore observando até como você pisca. Ainda assim, quero sua palavra de que você não vai deixá-la passar nada para você.

ELESIN Você já tem minha honra. Está trancada naquela escrivaninha em que você vai guardar seu relatório dos eventos desta noite. Mesmo a honra do meu povo você já levou; está atada junto com aqueles papéis de traição que os fazem senhores nesta terra.

PILKINGS Certo. Estou tentando tornar as coisas fáceis, mas se você precisa falar de política, vou ter que fazer do jeito mais duro. Senhora, quero que você permaneça atrás desta linha e não se aproxime da porta da cela. Guardas! [*Eles pulam atentos*.] Se ela passar deste ponto, soem o apito. Venha, Jane. [*Eles saem*.]

IYALOJA Com que garra se alça o lagarto diante do pombo quando era a própria águia que ele nos prometera confrontar.

ELESIN Eu não lhe peço que tenha pena de mim, Iyaloja. Você tem uma mensagem para mim ou não teria vindo. Mesmo se forem as maldições do mundo, vou ouvir.

IYALOJA Você se mostrou tão bravo com o servo do rei branco que ficou ao seu lado contra a morte. Devo dizer aos seus irmãos chefes quando retornar com que bravura travou guerra contra ele. Especialmente com palavras.

ELESIN Eu mais que mereço seu escárnio.

IYALOJA [*com súbita fúria*] Eu o avisei, se você deve deixar uma semente para trás, tenha certeza de que não esteja maculada com as maldições do mundo. Quem é você para abrir uma nova vida quando não teve coragem de abrir a porta para uma nova existência? Digo, quem é você que se mostra tão bravo? [*A* NOIVA *soluça e* IYALOJA *a percebe. Seu desprezo aumenta perceptivelmente enquanto ela se volta para* ELESIN.] Oh, seu autoproclamado caule da bananeira, como tudo isso se mostra vazio. A seiva se foi no tronco pai, então como se mostrará no novo broto? Como irá com a terra que o carrega? Quem é você que traz essa abominação para nós?!

ELESIN Minhas forças me desertaram. Meus encantos, meus feitiços, mesmo minha voz não teve força quando invoquei as forças que me guiariam por sobre a última medida de terra dentro do país dos descarnados. Você viu, Iyaloja. Você me viu lutar para retomar minha vontade do poder do estrangeiro cuja sombra caiu pela porta de entrada e me deixou me debatendo e vacilando em um labirinto que nunca havia encontrado. Meus sentidos se entorpeceram quando o toque do ferro frio chegou aos meus pulsos. Não pude fazer nada para me salvar.

IYALOJA Você nos traiu. Nós o alimentamos com guloseimas como aquelas que esperávamos que o aguardassem do outro lado. Mas você disse Não, devo comer as sobras do mundo. Nós dissemos que você era o caçador que derrubou a caça; era a você que cabiam as porções vitais do animal. Não, você disse, eu sou o cão do caçador e vou comer as entranhas do animal e as fezes do caçador. Dissemos que você era o caçador retornando ao lar triunfante, um búfalo morto pressionando seu pescoço; você disse espere, primeiro devo escavar esse buraco de grilo com os dedos do pé. Nós dissemos que era sua a porta pela qual enxergamos, pela primeira vez, o sangrador quando ele desce da árvore, era sua a bênção do vinho crepuscular, o borbulhar que traz espíritos noturnos para fora das portas para roubar sua porção antes da luz do dia. Dissemos que era seu o corpo do vinho cujo fardo faz balançar o sangrador como uma súbita lufada em seu galho. Você disse, Não, me contento em lamber os sedimentos de cada cabaça quando se foram os bebedores. Nós dissemos, o orvalho sobre a superfície da terra era

para você lavar seus pés ao longo dos declives da honra. Você disse Não, vou pisar no vômito de gatos e nos excrementos de ratos; vou brigar com eles pelos restos do mundo.

ELESIN É o bastante, Iyaloja, é o bastante.

IYALOJA Nós o chamamos de líder e, oh, como você nos liderou. O que não temos a intenção de comer não deveria ser posto diante do nariz.

ELESIN É o bastante, é o bastante. Minha vergonha está pesada o bastante.

IYALOJA Espere. Vim com um fardo.

ELESIN Já está mais que descarregado.

IYALOJA Eu gostaria de conseguir ter pena de você.

ELESIN Não preciso nem de sua piedade nem da piedade do mundo. Preciso de entendimento. Eu mesmo preciso entender. Você estava presente na minha derrota. Você foi parte do começo. Você provocou a renovação de meu laço com a terra, você ajudou a enodar o cordel.

IYALOJA Eu lhe dei o aviso. O rio que se enche diante de nossos olhos não nos carrega para longe em sua enchente.

ELESIN O que eram os avisos senão o úmido contato da terra viva entre meus dedos? O que eram avisos além da renovação de brasas famintas alojadas eternamente no coração do homem? Mas mesmo isso, mesmo se esmagado com milhares de tentações para ficar um pouco mais, um homem poderia sobrepor-se. É quando a mão estrangeira polui a fonte da vontade, quando uma força estrangeira de violência destroça a calma resolução da mente, é aí que o homem é levado a cometer a terrível traição do alívio, cometer em seu pensamento a indizível blasfêmia de ver a mão dos deuses nessa ruptura estrangeira do mundo. Eu sei que foi esse pensamento que me matou, dissipou meus poderes e me transformou em um recém-nascido nas mãos de estrangeiros inomináveis. Busquei recitar meus encantamentos novamente, mas minha língua só se debateu em minha boca. Dedilhei feitiços ocultos e o contato foi umedecido; não sobrou fagulha para cortar as cordas de vida que se estendiam a partir da ponta de cada dedo. Minha vontade se amainou no cuspe de uma raça estrangeira, e tudo porque cometi essa blasfêmia de pensamento – de que poderia haver a mão dos deuses na intervenção de um estrangeiro.

IYALOJA Explique como quiser, espero que isso lhe traga paz de espírito. O rato do mato abandonou sua justa causa, chegou ao mercado e emitiu um lamento: "Por favor, me salve!" – essas palavras são adequadas de se ouvir de uma máscara ancestral? "Há uma fera selvagem em meus calcanhares" não é algo que se deva ouvir de um caçador.

ELESIN Que o mundo possa me perdoar.

IYALOJA Eu vim com um fardo, eu disse. Ele se aproxima dos portões que estão tão bem guardados por aqueles chacais cuja saliva estará, desde este dia, em tua comida e bebida. Mas primeiro, me diga, você que uma vez foi Elesin Oba, me diga, você que conhece tão bem o ciclo da bananeira: é o talo pai que fenece para dar seiva ao mais jovem ou a sua sabedoria vê ocorrer de modo contrário?

ELESIN Não entendo o sentido disso, Iyaloja.

IYALOJA Eu pedi algum sentido? Eu fiz uma pergunta. O caule de quem fenece para dar seiva ao outro? O talo pai ou o mais novo?

ELESIN O pai.

IYALOJA Ah. Então, você sabe disso. Há visões neste mundo que dizem algo diferente, Elesin. Há os que preferem inverter o ciclo de nosso ser. Oh, sua casca vazia que o mundo um dia saudou como um ser carregado de seiva, devo dizê-lo o que os deuses declararam de você?

> [*Em sua agitação ela ultrapassa a linha indicada por* PILKINGS *e o ar é rompido por apitos agudos. Os dois* GUARDAS *também saltam adiante e põem suas mãos sobre* ELESIN *para protegê-lo.* IYALOJA *para, surpresa.* PILKINGS *chega correndo, seguido por* JANE.]

PILKINGS O que houve? Eles tentaram algo?

GUARDA Ela ultrapassou a linha.

ELESIN [*em uma voz quebrada*] Deixem ela em paz. Ela não quis fazer mal nenhum.

IYALOJA Oh, Elesin, veja o que você se tornou. Outrora você não precisava abrir sua boca para explicar por que cabras malcheirosas, sarnentas nas mãos e nos pés, perderam os sentidos. E só mesmo um homem bravo ousaria pôr as mãos em você porque Iyaloja

pisou de um lado da terra para o outro. Agora olhe o espetáculo de sua vida. Aflijo-me por você.

PILKINGS Acho melhor você sair. Duvido que tenha lhe feito algum bem você vir aqui. Vou me certificar de que você não tenha permissão de vê-lo novamente. De qualquer maneira, vamos levá-lo a outro lugar antes da madrugada, então, não se dê ao trabalho de voltar.

IYALOJA Nós o previmos. Daí, o fardo que me arrastei até aqui para depositar ao lado de seus portões.

PILKINGS O que foi que você disse?

IYALOJA Nosso filho não explicou? Pergunte a esse aí. Ele sabe o que é. Pelo menos esperamos que o homem que um dia conhecemos como Elesin se lembre dos juramentos menores que ele não precisa quebrar.

PILKINGS Você sabe do que ela está falando?

ELESIN Vá aos portões, ser fantasmático. O que quer que você encontre lá, traga para mim.

IYALOJA Ainda não. Ele se arrasta atrás de mim nos lentos e cansados pés das mulheres. Lento da forma que é, Elesin, ainda assim o superou. Cavalga à frente de sua lerda vontade.

PILKINGS O que ela está dizendo agora? Cristo! O seu povo tem que sempre falar por enigmas?

ELESIN Virá, homem branco, virá. Diga aos seus homens nos portões para deixar passar.

PILKINGS [*hesitante*] Vou ter que ver o que é.

IYALOJA Você verá. [*Apaixonadamente.*] Mas este é um juramento do qual ele não pode se furtar. Homem branco, você tem um rei aqui, um visitante de sua terra. Sabemos de sua presença aqui. Diga-me, se ele morresse, você deixaria seu espírito vagando inquieto sobre a superfície da terra? Você o enterraria aqui entre os que você considera menos que humanos? Na sua terra não há cerimônias dos mortos?

PILKINGS Sim. Mas nós não fazemos nossos chefes cometerem suicídio para acompanhá-lo.

IYALOJA Criança, eu não vim ajudá-lo a entender. [*Aponta para* ELESIN.] Este é o homem cujo entendimento enfraquecido nos mantém cativos a você. Mas pergunte a ele se quiser. Ele conhece o sentido da passagem de um rei; ele não nasceu ontem. Ele conhece o perigo à raça quando nosso pai morto, que vai como intermediário, aguarda e aguarda e sabe que foi traído. Ele sabe quando o portão estreito foi aberto e sabe que não permanecerá assim para retardatários que arrastam seus pés em esterco e vômito, cujos lábios fedem a restos de homens inferiores. Ele sabe que condenou nosso rei a perambular no vácuo do mal com seres que são inimigos da vida.

PILKINGS Sim… er… mas olhe aqui…

IYALOJA Pedimos pouca coisa. Deixe que ele libere nosso Rei para que ele possa cavalgar em direção ao lar sozinho. O mensageiro está a caminho sob os dorsos de mulheres. Que ele traga sua mensagem pelo coração que está embrulhado sob o tecido. É o menor de seus juramentos, o mais fácil de cumprir.

[*O* AJUDANTE DE CAMPO *corre para dentro*.]

PILKINGS Bob?

AJUDANTE DE CAMPO Senhor, há um grupo de mulheres cantando nas colinas.

PILKINGS [*em volta de* IYALOJA] Se vocês querem problemas…

JANE Simon, eu acho que é a isso que Olunde se referiu em sua carta.

PILKINGS Ele sabe muito bem que não podemos deixar uma multidão entrar aqui! Diabos, eu expliquei como era delicada a minha posição para ele. Acho que é hora de tirar ele da cidade. Bob, mande um carro e dois ou três soldados para trazê-lo aqui. Eu acho que quanto mais rápido ele se despedir de seu pai e sair, melhor.

IYALOJA Poupe seu trabalho, homem branco. Se é o pai de seu prisioneiro que você quer, Olunde, aquele que até esta noite nós conhecíamos como o filho de Elesin, ele mesmo virá em breve para se despedir. Ele enviou as mulheres à frente, então deixe-as entrar.

[PILKINGS *segue indeciso*.]

AJUDANTE DE CAMPO O que fazemos a respeito da invasão? Ainda podemos impedi-las longe daqui.

PILKINGS Qual a aparência delas?

AJUDANTE DE CAMPO Não são muitas. E parecem bem pacíficas.

PILKINGS Não há homens?

AJUDANTE DE CAMPO Mm, dois ou três, no máximo.

JANE Honestamente, Simon, eu confiaria em Olunde. Eu não acho que ele o enganaria sobre suas intenções.

PILKINGS É melhor que não engane. Está certo, então, deixe-as entrar, Bob. Avise-as para se controlarem. Depois, apresse Olunde para vir para cá. Certifique-se de que ele trará sua bagagem porque eu não vou levar ele de volta para a cidade.

AJUDANTE DE CAMPO Certo, senhor. [*Sai*.]

PIKINGS [*para* IYALOJA] Espero que entenda que, se algo der errado, cairá sobre a sua cabeça. Meus homens têm ordem de atirar ao primeiro sinal de problema.

IYALOJA Para evitar uma morte, você de fato fará outras mortes? Ah, é grande a sabedoria da raça branca. Mas não tenha medo. Seu Príncipe vai dormir em paz. E o nosso, depois de muito tempo, também. Não vamos mais perturbá-lo, servo do Rei branco. Apenas deixe Elesin cumprir seu juramento e vamos embora para casa homenagear nosso Rei.

JANE Eu acredito nela, Simon, você não?

PILKINGS Talvez.

ELESIN Não tenha medo, ser fantasmático. Eu tenho uma mensagem para enviar ao meu Rei e, então, você não terá nada mais a temer.

IYALOJA Olunde teria feito. Os chefes pediram para ele pronunciar as palavras, mas ele disse que não, não enquanto você estivesse vivo.

ELESIN Mesmo das profundezas em que meu espírito afundou, encontro certa alegria em que esse pouco restou para mim.

[*As* MULHERES *entram, entoando a nênia "Ale lẹ lẹ" e balançando de um lado para o outro. Sobre seus ombros jaz um objeto longo que se parece uma caixa cilíndrica, coberta por tecido. Elas o colocam sobre o ponto onde* IYALOJA *permanecera antes e formam um semicírculo em volta dele. O* AEDO *e o* TAMBOREIRO *ficam no interior do semicírculo, mas o tambor não é usado em momento algum. O* TAMBOREIRO *entoa sob as invocações do* AEDO.]

PILKINGS [*enquanto entram*] O que é *isso?*

IYALOJA O fardo que você criou, homem branco, mas o trazemos em paz.

PILKINGS Eu disse *o que* é isso?

ELESIN Homem branco, você deve me deixar sair. Tenho um dever a cumprir.

PILKINGS Com certeza, não deixarei.

ELESIN Ali está o mensageiro de meu Rei. Deixe-me sair para que eu possa desempenhar o que me é exigido.

PILKINGS Você fará o que precisa fazer aí dentro ou não fará. Não quero me envolver mais com essa situação.

ELESIN O devoto que acende uma vela em sua igreja para enviar uma mensagem ao seu deus baixa sua cabeça e fala em um sussurro para a chama. Será que não o vi, ser fantasmático? Sua voz não soa pelo mundo. Minhas palavras não são para quaisquer ouvidos. Não são nem para as que carregam este fardo. São palavras que devo falar em segredo, assim como meu pai as sussurrou em meus ouvidos e eu nos ouvidos do meu primogênito. Não posso gritá-las para o vento e o céu da noite aberto.

JANE Simon…

PILKINGS Não interfira, por favor!

IYALOJA Mataram o cavalo favorito do Rei e seu cão. Eles os levaram aos centros vitais da terra recebendo orações para o Rei. Mas o cavaleiro preferiu ficar para trás. É pedir demais que ele fale de coração a coração com o mensageiro que aguarda?

[PILKINGS *vira as costas a ela*.] Que assim seja, Elesin Oba, você vê que mesmo meros restos lhe são negados. [*Ela gesticula para o* AEDO.]

AEDO Elesin Oba! Eu o chamo por esse nome por esta última vez. Lembre-se quando eu disse que, se não pode vir, diga ao meu cavalo. [*Pausa*.] O quê? Não consigo ouvi-lo. Eu disse, se você não puder vir, sussurre nos ouvidos de meu cavalo. Sua língua foi cortada das raízes, Elesin? Não ouço resposta. Eu disse, se houver rochedos que você não pode escalar, suba na garupa de meu cavalo, esse garanhão preto sem manchas, ele o trará por cima deles. [*Pausa*.] Elesin Oba, uma vez você teve uma língua tão rápida quanto a baqueta de um tamboreiro. Eu disse, se você se perder, meu cão rastreará um caminho para mim. Minha memória falha, mas eu penso que você respondeu: Meus pés encontraram o caminho, Alafin.

[*A nênia aumenta e diminui*.]

Eu disse afinal, se mãos maldosas o segurarem, apenas diga ao meu cavalo que há peso na bainha de seu avental. Não ouso aguardar muito tempo.

[*A nênia aumenta e diminui*.]

Lá se encontra o mais ligeiro mensageiro de um rei, então liberte-me com a missão de seu coração. Lá se encontram a cabeça e o coração do favorito dos deuses, sussurre em seus ouvidos. Oh, meu companheiro, se tivesse seguido quando devia, não diríamos que o cavalo precedeu seu cavaleiro. Se você tivesse seguido quando havia tempo, não diríamos que o cão correu mais e deixou seu mestre para trás. Se tivesse erguido sua vontade para cortar o fio de vida à invocação dos tambores, não diríamos que sua mera sombra caiu pelo portal e tomou o lugar de seu dono no banquete. Mas o caçador, sob o fardo do búfalo morto, ficou para deitar raízes no buraco da galinha com seus dedos do pé. O que sobra agora? Se há falta de morcegos, deve o pombo servir como oferenda. Fale as palavras sobre sua sombra, que agora deve servir no seu lugar.

ELESIN Não posso chegar perto. Tirem o tecido. Vou falar minha mensagem de coração a coração em silêncio.

IYALOJA [*se adianta e remove a cobertura*] Seu mensageiro, Elesin, ponha seus olhos sobre a companhia de escolha do Rei.

[*Enrolado no colchão, cabeça e pés aparecendo em cada ponta, está o corpo de* OLUNDE.]

Aqui está a honra de sua casa e de nossa raça. Porque não suportou deixar a honra sair voando pela porta, ele a segurou com sua vida. O filho se mostrou o pai, Elesin, e nada resta em sua boca para mascar se não gomas de crianças.

AEDO Elesin, colocamos as rédeas do mundo em suas mãos e você as viu mergulharem pela beira do amargo precipício. Você se sentou com os braços cruzados enquanto estranhos maldosos extraviavam o mundo de seu curso e o destruíram para além da beirada do vazio – você murmurou, há pouco que um homem possa fazer, você nos deixou debatendo-nos em um futuro cego. Seu herdeiro pegou o fardo para si. Qual será o fim, não somos deuses para dizê-lo. Mas esse jovem broto derramou sua seiva no talo pai, e sabemos que este não é o caminho da vida. Nosso mundo cambaleia no vácuo dos estranhos, Elesin.

[ELESIN *permanecera quieto como uma rocha, seus dedos firmes nas barras, seus olhos colados no corpo de seu filho. A quietude toma e paralisa a todos, incluindo* PILKINGS, *que se voltou para ver. Subitamente,* ELESIN *joga um braço em volta de seu pescoço, uma vez, e com laço da corrente, estrangula a si mesmo em um gesto ligeiro e decidido. Os* GUARDAS *correm para diante para impedi-lo, mas só chegam a tempo de deixar seu corpo cair.* PILKINGS *correu para a porta no mesmo tempo e briga com a tranca. Ele corre para dentro, remexe nas algemas e as destranca, ergue o corpo para uma posição sentada enquanto tenta ressuscitá-lo. As* MULHERES *seguem com a nênia sem se abalarem com o evento súbito.*]

IYALOJA Por que você se desgasta? Por que se esforça em tarefas pelas quais ninguém, nem mesmo o homem ali deitado, lhe agradeceria? Ele se foi, afinal, pela passagem, mas, oh, como é tarde. Seu filho se banqueteará com a carne e jogará os ossos para ele. A passagem está entupida pelos excrementos do garanhão do Rei, ele chegará todo manchado pelo esterco.

PILKINGS [*em uma voz cansada*] Era isso que você queria?

IYALOJA Não, criança, isso é o que você fez ser, você que brinca com a vida de estranhos, que chega a usurpar as vestes de nossos mortos e ainda assim acredita que a

mancha da morte não grudará em você. Os deuses exigiram apenas a velha bananeira gasta, mas você cortou o broto carregado de seiva para alimentar seu orgulho. Eis sua mesa, cheia até transbordar. Banqueteie-se. [*Ela grita com ele de repente, vendo que* PILKINGS *está prestes a fechar os olhos fixos de* ELESIN.] Deixe ele em paz! Por mais afundado em dívida que estivesse, não é a carcaça de um pobretão abandonada na estrada. Desde quando os estranhos usam vestes de índigo antes que o enlutado lamente sua perda?

[*Ela se volta à* NOIVA *que permaneceu o tempo inteiro sem se mover.*]

Criança.

[*A garota toma um pouco de terra, caminha calmamente para dentro da cela e fecha os olhos de ELESIN. Ela então derrama um pouco de terra sobre cada pálpebra e sai novamente.*]

IYALOJA Agora, esqueça os mortos, esqueça mesmo os vivos. Volte sua mente apenas para os não nascidos.

[*Ela vai embora, acompanhada pela* NOIVA. *A nênia aumenta em volume e as* MULHERES *mantêm o balanço. As luzes se apagam até escurecer totalmente.*]

FIM

CHAPTER 5

IRIN AJO

(JOURNEY)

LANGUAGE WORLDS

As we have seen in the last chapter, *Death and the King's Horseman* is a play in which language is far more than a conveyor of meaning. We have seen Abiola Irele arguing that language plays a central role in the conformation of one of the main motifs of the play—that of the process of decentering of a culture and the establishment of a new dispensation. The Nigerian critic reminds us that the play progresses from a total realization of orality to a complete breakdown of orality. Indeed, a progressive change in language occurs throughout the play, the orality of the beginning being marked by poetic lines in verse forms teeming with proverbs and metaphors in rhythms often dictated by drums and, in the end, an Elesin Oba that has lost all his proverbial power, a Praise-Singer who does not sing, and a drummer who does not play. Indeed, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., seems to be in line with Abiola Irele when he posits:

> Soyinka's greatest achievement is just this: the creation of a compelling world through language, in language, and of language. He has mastered the power of language to create a reality, and not merely to reflect reality. But his mastery of spoken language is necessarily reinforced by mastery of a second language of music, and a third of the dance (GATES, JR., 2003, p.161).

Indeed, even in the silence of a printed text, there is a marked, often percussive musicality in language that Soyinka finds in his mother tongue. This musicality lies in the fact that music, in Yoruba culture, is inseparable from language as we remember in Soyinka saying, in his essay "The Fourth Stage," that "[t]he nature of Yoruba music is intensively the nature of its language and poetry, highly charged, symbolic, myth-embryonic" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 147). The influence of Yoruba language in Soyinka's English is the theme of many a commentator. Once again it is Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who says that "Soyinka allows the metaphorical and tonal Yoruba language to inform his use of English" (GATES, JR., 2003, p. 160), saying as well that the aspect of Yoruba language upon which Soyinka draws is "a transfer or carriage of meaning, through intension and extension" (*id.*). Gates is not the only one to perceive this

approximation between Soyinka's English and Yoruba and discuss it. However, he focuses more on the features and origin of Soyinka's English and how it relates to Yoruba:

> The roots of Soyinka's English are uncompromisingly Anglo-Saxon rather than Hellenic or Latinate because they represent for him the closest approximation to the primal roots of Yoruba cultic diction (MACEBUH, 2001, p. 35).

Perhaps Macebuh is referring to some features shared by Yoruba with the Anglo-Saxon dimension of English, such as the great quantity of monosyllables, which may account for a somewhat percussive character. But Macebuh goes further and states that "Soyinka's English derives, in fact, more from the Yoruba than English" (MACEBUH, 2001, p. 36).

If there is a seemingly cooperative relationship between English and Yoruba in Soyinka, it is always good to remember that, for many critics and writers, it is hard to accept that type of cooperation. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the question of the language in which an African writer writes is a bone of contention. Soyinka was not spared for choosing English instead of his native Yoruba. The question of fidelity to a culture is not the only one involved in the process of choosing a language. There is, as well, the very literary problem of making native Africans in their own communities to speak English instead of their own languages. This point was perceived by Martin Esslin, already cited in Chapter 2, in analyzing plays by Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark-Bekederemo:

> These plays are by Africans about Africans in an African social context. And they are, largely, about Africans who, in reality, speak their own African languages. It is here that the problem lies. We are here presented with African peasants, African fishermen, African labourers expressing themselves in impeccable English. Of course in reality they speak in their own languages equally impeccably and the playwrights have merely translated what they would have said in those languages into the equivalent English. Precisely! Which is to say that these original plays labour under the universal handicap of all translated drama (ESSLIN, 1980 , p. 282).

This problem described by Esslin acquires a higher degree of complexity in *Death and the King's Horseman*. As much as the play involves a variety of social ambiances, it also involves different forms of language and, actually, different languages. There is a marked distinction between the language of the Yoruba characters

and that of the English characters. The Yorubas display a formalized, solemn language marked by proverbs, metaphors and other figures of speech and by the frequentation of the mystical and metaphysical; in addition, their language is often presented in verse form, in which moment it is often accompanied by drum music and dance, fitting perfectly the passage of "The Fourth Stage" where Soyinka speaks about the relationship between music, language, poetry and myth. On the other hand, the English have a colloquial, linear language that reveals their reasoning in a straightforward manner without the lyrical sophistication of the Yorubas. Between these two groups are Joseph and Amusa, inhabiting a middle place between cultures and displaying a very poor language, mainly in the case of Amusa, whose English is sometimes clearly incorrect.

This plurality of languages is far from being the only linguistic complication of the play. The problem commented upon by Martin Esslin is present as well: here, the Yoruba of the natives is heard through English, which the reader has to imagine as Yoruba. However, there is still another issue to complicate it even further. The idea of "Yoruba translated into English" is perfectly functional until the natives speak to the English. This happens, obviously, in act five, where we have a long dialog between Simon Pilkings and Elesin Oba, which is joined afterwards by Iyaloja and Jane Pilkings. The dialogs are written in English, but which language are all of them speaking? Supposedly, the Yoruba characters know as much English as the English know Yoruba. These two groups are worlds apart, their cultures do not touch in any point and their languages belong to assorted universes. There is no common point between their ways of signifying. In act five, this question has to be suspended for the reader to continue with the text.

All these facts, particularly in what accords with Esslin's views, makes the translation of *Death and the King's Horseman* a curious work since we are, in taking Esslin's comment, translating a translation, even though the translator has access to only one language. In the case of *Death and the King's Horseman*, this first process of translation exists literally in some cases: David Richards encounters many proverbs in the play that were translated from Yoruba into English by Soyinka (RICHARDS, p. 201-203), which reminds us of all the genres of oral literature present in the text. Indeed, oral literature informs a great deal of Soyinka's text in a culture where there is no written language to provide such a clear separation between common speech and

literature. However, we remember from Chapter Two that Abiola Irele theorized about orality, perceiving in it different realizations in different levels of orality. These levels were 1) common everyday speech, 2) rhetorical use of language (proverbs and aphorisms), and 3) literary use of language (canonical texts).

These three levels are visible in the play. The first level—which is visible in the prose sections—is still highly poetic; the second level figures in the sections of both other levels, providing a structure of thought for the first and poetic content for the third levels; the third level could be seen in the song of the Not-I bird: although it does not actually seem a canonical text, it is very well structured in verses, it is sung and danced to the rhythm of the drums, that is, it can fit into a rhythmic pattern, it has different sections, dealing with different scenes. One of the genres deployed is the oriki—a kind of predicative poetry said to encompass the essence of the person, god or thing being predicated; an oriki is actually an epithet that says something of what or who is predicated and is formally characterized by a paratactic structure in which different epithets are disposed in a cluster without a cohering principle (BARBER, 1991). The oriki is frequently used to praise Orisa or highly regarded individuals, but can also be used to animals or simple objects.

Death and the King's Horseman is, therefore, linguistically a very rich text, encompassing many levels of language and the influence of one language—Yoruba—on another—English. Along with the influence of Yoruba language on English, we have the influence of Yoruba literature—with its poetic genres—on English literature and its genres. Therefore, in translating the text of the play, one has to pay attention to the way these different modes of language are translated and which criteria and features will be important in each. Translating *Death and the King's Horseman* is, therefore, working within a space of transition between three linguistic worlds: Yoruba, English and Portuguese, adding another triadic cycle to our already well-known and discussed one.

ACT 1

Act One is the richest in poetic forms. If we take into consideration Abiola Irele's observation that

> the play progresses from an immediate realization of orality as the expressive mode of a total way of life to what can only be described, within its specific context, as the tragic loss of the empowering function of the word in the universe of the African (IRELE, 2001, p. 19).

then it is to notice that Act One is the one in which orality is in its fullest realization, possessing its full empowering function and expressing a total way of life. The life of the Yoruba community is not yet contaminated by the English influence, so they live a total life with their ways of expressing their own concepts and beliefs in tandem with language's rhythmic and literary features. Elesin's passage from prosaic language to the song of the Not-I bird depicts the slip from the first to the third level of language as conceptualized by Abiola Irele. This demands the translator to use the full arsenal linked to prose and verse. Once again, it is to be reminded that the prose here is formal and solemn, as in this talk by the Praise-Singer:

> There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only one shell to the soul of man; there is only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world leaves its course, whose world will give us shelter? (p. 6)

In Portuguese, I translated:

> Há apenas um lar para a vida de um mexilhão do rio; há apenas um lar para a vida de um cágado; há apenas uma concha para a alma do homem; há apenas um mundo para o espírito de nossa raça. Se esse mundo abandonar seu curso e se chocar contra os rochedos do grande vácuo, o mundo de quem nos abrigará?

It should be noticed that both the French translation by Thierry Dubost (1986) and the Italian one by Graziella Bellini (1995) replace the possessive "whose" ("whose world will give us shelter?") by the relative "what"—"*quel* monde nous donera asile?" and "*quale* mondo ci darà rifugio?" I am not sure about their reason for doing so; I decided to maintain the possessive, since the presence of the possessor is, in my opinion, extremely important, because it reminds us that it would necessarily be in a stranger's world that they would have to search for sanctuary, which is tacitly understood as the colonizer's world, providing the question with bitterness.

The poetic prose of Wole Soyinka demands the translator to give special attention to the rhythm of this prose, such as in the fragment cited. The juxtaposition of

semantically and syntactically parallel proverbs produces a repetitive rhythm, which is broken by the conditional question that ends it, in line with the paratactic nature of Yoruba poetic form, as it was said before. With the verse sections, such as the Not-I bird song, the translator's concern starts to involve metrics, since Soyinka's verse is not totally free. Although there is no regular metrics, there is the frequent use of the iambic pentameter and tetrameter along with less common but also used verse forms such as the dodecasyllable or iambic hexameter, a verse form that is very common in Latinate languages—mainly French, in which it is the official verse—and, in English, it is often used as the last line of a long composition formed mainly by iambic pentameters, such as we see in Spenser and Donne. Thus, we have in the first stanza of the song:

> Death came calling
>
> Who does not know his rasp of reeds?
>
> A twilight whisper in the leaves before
>
> The great araba falls? Did you hear it?
>
> Not I! swears the farmer. He snaps
>
> His fingers round his head, abandons
>
> A hard-worn crop and begins
>
> A rapid dialogue with his legs. (p. 7)

As we can see, this stanza is not characterized by a metric pattern, but, even in its irregularity, there is rhythmic regularity within some of the verses themselves, some of them using canonical forms. The first verse is a percussive three-syllable line with three stresses, as sudden as death that came calling. It is followed by a gorgeous regular iambic tetrameter and then an iambic pentameter, rhythmically regular, but semantically broken, since it ends in the enjambment "before" that will connect with the following line, leaving the meaning of the verse suspended. The next verse is a rhythmically broken pentameter: it is regular up to the sixth syllable and then it breaks in the next four. The fifth verse, a tetrameter, in spite of being composed of three separated fragments (two sentences and the beginning of a third), it obeys a regular rhythmic pattern (one iambus and two anapests). The sixth is a broken tetrameter: it follows the iambic regularity up to the sixth syllable and changes the rhythm in "abandons." The seventh verse is a seven-line verse and the stanza closes with the sonorous tetrameter "A

rapid dialogue with his legs," a phrase Soyinka took from his own translation of D. O. Fagunuwa's novel *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale*, which Soyinka called *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (Soyinka, 1982).

The two translations I have consulted vary in terms of obedience to the original pattern. For example, the first verse was expectedly lengthened in Italian ("La morte viene chiamando") and French (La mort est venue l'appeler) to 7 and 8 syllables, respectively. The same goes to the second verse ("Chi no conosce lo stridore de suoi dardi"—12 syllables—and "Qui ne connaît son bruissement de Roseaux"—11 syllables). And finally in the third something curious happened. As we have seen, the third verse is a regular iambic pentameter ending in a part of an enjambment ("before"); if we take the Italian version ("Un mormorio crepuscolare nelle foglie prima"), we see that the translator stressed the verse considerably—up to 14 syllables—in order to maintain the idea and the same exact structure, so much so that the verse ends in "prima" exactly in the same place as its English correspondent "before." On its turn, the French translation decided to maintain some rhythmic correspondence and modified the structure: as we know there are "official verses" to most of the languages, a metric form that is seen in its traditional poems, its epics and in a great quantity of other poems—the English one is the iambic pentameter, a decasyllable; the French is the alexandrine, the dodecasyllable. It is actually a common procedure to translate a canonical verse in one language to a correspondent canonical verse in the other language. That is exactly what the French translator does: he translates the iambic pentameter "A twilight whisper in the leaves before" to the alexandrine "Murmure qui parcourt les feuilles au crepuscule," dropping the "avant" (before) to the next line.

In my version I followed the strategy of the French translator, translating the iambic pentameter for a "heroic decasyllable," the Portuguese canonical verse, leaving the temporal conjunction (in this case, "antes") in the following line. Moreover, I translated the earlier iambic tetrameter to a decasyllable as well, due to an approximation in rhythm between these two verse forms. The result was the following:

> A morte vinha chamando.
>
> Quem não conhece seu rascar de juncos?
>
> Suspiro de crepúsculo entre as folhas
>
> Antes que caia o grande arabá? Você ouviu?

Eu não! Jura o fazendeiro. Ele estrala

Os dedos ao redor de sua cabeça, abandona

Uma safra já gasta e inicia

Um diálogo veloz com suas pernas.

I discarded the article “a” (um) for the verse to fit into the rhythm desired. In the rest of the stanza, I attempted to make the structure of the sentences as similar as possible in order to preserve the rhythmic breaks, which are important.

There is also another important aspect of my translation of this part: it respects the unusual sentence “He snaps his fingers round his head”… Before discussing my own translation, let us see what solutions the other translators found to this apparent enigma. The French version offers “Il se prendre la tête entre les mains” (p. 17), that is, “he takes his head between his hands” and “Lui si stringe le dita intorno al capo” (p. 462), that is, “he presses his fingers around his head.” As we see, Bellini, the Italian translator, opted for a literal translation whereas Dubost, the French translator, decided to change the gesture of the farmer for one which would be more readily recognizable by the French readership as a gesture of appalment. On my turn, I opted for the literal translation for a reason that has to do with what seems to me a form of respect for the Afro-Brazilian culture. As though it may seem strange for many people in Brazil, in Afro-religious communities snapping one’s fingers around one’s head to ward off the possibility of death is something common. I decided to maintain the exact image to value a liaison—even if a small one—between the Afro-Brazilian habit and its probable origin in the Yoruba community.

Four stanzas down, we have a text teeming with metaphors redolent of the esoteric language of Ifa:

And take my good kinsman Ifawomi.

His hands were like a carver’s, strong

And true. I saw them

Tremble like wet wings of a fowl

One day he cast his time-smoothed *opele*

Across the divination board and all because

The suppliant looked him in the eye and asked,

'Did you hear that whisper in the leaves?'

'Not I,' was his reply; 'perhaps I'm growing deaf—

Good day.' And Ifa spoke no more that day

The priest locked fast his doors,

Sealed up his leaking roof—but wait!

This sudden care was not for Fawomi

But for Osanyin, courier-bird of Ifa's

Heart of wisdom. I did not know a kite

Was hovering in the sky

And Ifa now a twittering chicken in

The brood of Fawomi the Mother Hen. (p. 8)

I decided not to "portuguesize" the Yoruba word "opele" by giving it a circumflex (the word actually features in the Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language with the odd spelling of "*opelé-ifá*" and the even odder alternative spelling of "*opelifá*" – INSTITUTO ANTONIO HOUAISS, 2001, p. 2069). I rather followed Soyinka's decision and italicized it, indicating a word of foreign origin. My translation was thus rendered:

E que tal meu camarada Ifawomi?

Tinha as mãos de um entalhador, firmes

E fortes. Eu as vi tremerem

Qual asas úmidas de um frango

Um dia joga o *opele* alisado pelo tempo

Pela tábua oracular. Tudo porque

O consulente o olhou nos olhos e indagou,

"Ouviu aquele suspiro nas folhas?"

"Eu não", foi sua réplica; "acho que estou ficando surdo –

Bom dia." E Ifá não falou mais aquele dia

Trancou sua porta o sacerdote

Vedou a goteira em seu telhado – mas espere!

Esse aviso não foi pra Fawomi

Mas para Ossaim, pombo correio do coração

Da sabedoria de Ifá. Não sabia que uma águia

Voejava pelo céu

E Ifá agora um pintinho na ninhada

De Fawomi Galinha Mãe, piando.

In the sixteenth verse, "kite" was translated into "águia" (eagle) due to David Doris's observation. In Chapter Three, we have seen that Doris cites the proverb "Àwòdì òkè kò mọ̀ pẹ́ ará ilẹ̀ nwò ó," translated as "The eagle flying high in the sky does not know that those on the ground are looking at him." "Àwòdì," as Doris says, is actually the African black kite (DORIS, 2011, p. 185). Here, it was translated as "eagle." I decided to follow the same alternative and translate "kite" as "águia," whose sound fits in the overall pattern of the sentence. The correspondent bird in Portuguese, "milhafre," was chosen in the Italian version, "nibbio," while the French translation used "cerf-volant," the flying toy.

Vocabulary doubts like these were very frequent in the process of translation, since Soyinka is a writer of rare and very specific words. I often relied on other works of African literature and their translations. For instance, one stanza after the one I just analyzed (that which begins with "Ah, but I must not forget my evening…"), one finds the word "tapper," that is, the one who taps the wine—a figure often seen in works of the African imagination. I researched in two novels that include this figure and that were translated into Portuguese: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard.* In the first case, in the Brazilian edition translated by Vera Queiroz da Costa e Silva, the word "tapper" is translated as "sangrador" (ACHEBE, 2009); in Tutola's case, the slightly different word "tapster"—which figures in the subtitle of the book, "and his dead Palm-Wine Tapster in Deads' Town"—is translated by Eliane Fontenelle as "vinhateiro" (TUTOLA, undated). Between the two, I opted for "vinhateiro," for being more readily associable to wine.

There were also situations in which, trying to render the meaning of the word as accurate as possible, I ended up with a not very usual word in Portuguese. This was the case of the lines

The world I know is the bounty

Of hives after bees have swarmed.

No goodness teems with such open hands

Even in the dreams of deities. (p. 13)

The word "teem" was the great question here. How to render it in Portuguese? It is not an easy word to translate. If we take the French translation by Thierry Dubost, we have:

Le monde que je connais a la munificence

Des ruches après que les abeilles ont butiné.

Aucune richesse ne s'offre avec tant d'abondance

Même dans les rêves des divinités. (p. 25)

In the Italian one, by Graziella Bellini, on its turn, we have:

Il mondo che io conosco è il dono

Degli alveari dopo che le api hanno sciamato.

Nessuna virtù abbonda a mani così aperte

Neppure nei sogni degli dei. (p. 471)

Dubost, as we see, has significantly changed the image maintaining the sense: the catachresis of the open hands of goodness is eliminated and the idea of abundance contained in the verb "teem" is split into two fragments of language—the verb "s'offre" and the prepositional syntagma "avec tant d'abondance"—and its core is contained in a noun (abondance). For my part, the thought of having the idea of abundance in a verb was extremely desirable due to the dynamicity it provides to that idea. In terms of "abundance," the most interesting word I know is "profusão" (profusion), but I was not sure whether there was a verb deriving from it. After researching, I found the verb "Profundir," which, according to Caldas Aulete dictionary, means "espalhar, difundir" (to spread, to difuse) (CALDAS AULETE, 1970, p. 2955)—a rare verb, but perfect to be used in this context and, to my ear, more beautiful than "abunda" or "abunde," in

addition to the fact that it would eliminate the unpleasant alliteration of "bondade abunda" or "bondade que abunde." The result was as follows:

> O mundo que conheço é a dádiva
>
> Das colmeias quando enxamearam-se as abelhas.
>
> Nenhuma bondade profunde de mãos assim abertas
>
> Mesmo nos sonhos das deidades.

The choice to use the verb "enxamear" to translate the verb "swarm" was due to the fact that it covered the same semantic area as "swarm." Bellini chose "sciamare," which can be translated as "swarm" and Dubost chose "butiner," which refers to the act of gathering pollen. The bees are here the givers of the bounty of the hive; in a swarm they replenish it with honey.

It is soon after this that we have what is probably the best example of oriki-performance in the play. After Elesin's self-definition as one who was the natural recipient of all the goods of the world, the Praise-Singer engages in a long torrent of orikis:

> Who would deny your reputation, snake-on-the-loose in dark passages of the market! Bed-bug that wages war on the mat and receives the thanks of the vanquished! When caught with his bride's own sister he protested—but I was only prostrating myself to her as becomes a grateful in-law. Hunter who carries his powder-horn on the hips and fires crouching or standing! Warrior who never makes that excuse of the whining coward—but how can I go to battle without my trousers?—trouserless or shirtless it's all one to him. Oka-rearing-from-a-camouflage-of-leaves, before he strikes the victim is already prone! Once they told him, Howu, a stallion does not feed on the grass beneath him: he replied, true, but surely he can roll on it! (14)

That is, we have a cluster of assorted sentences of myriad natures. The Brazilian anthropologist and poet Antonio Riserio, in his work about the translation of orikis, reminds us that the word "oriki" has more than one meaning. In addition to meaning a kind of poetry, it also designates one of the three names a child is given as of his or her birth. Citing the historian Bólánlé Awé, he hypothesizes that the oriki-poem is an unfolding of the oriki-name in its predicative form (RISERIO, 1996, p. 35). Riserio is in line with Karin Barber, who observes oriki's basic dissimilitude with what in the Western world is considered to be a literary text due to its lack of linearity and center.

Such features are observable in the fragment exposed above. Another feature lies in the nature of the imagery: according to Riserio, images tend to be hyperbolic and grandiose (RISERIO, 1996, p. 45). In addition, the images, as we see in the fragment commented, are not always sublime, but there are predications in terms of bed-bugs and adultery, as we saw. Wole Soyinka, in discussing some oriki of Sango, draws our attention to this fact when he observes that the expression "praise-song" (as the oriki is often called) is "applied to such wanton savagery" (SOYINKA, 2005, p. 57). The literary disposition of the oriki mirrors the one observed by Drewal in Yoruba visual arts—a series of different parts joined together but without the principle of hierarchy or a center—as we saw in Chapter One. The cluster of orikis presented above was thus translated:

> Quem negaria sua reputação, cobra à solta em passagens escuras do mercado! Percevejo que declara guerra ao colchão e recebe as graças do vencido! Quando pego com a própria irmã de sua noiva, protestou – eu estava só me prostrando diante dela como faz um cunhado agradecido. Caçador que carrega o chifre de pólvora na cintura e atira de cócoras ou de pé! Guerreiro que nunca usa a desculpa do covarde choramingas – mas como posso ir à batalha sem minhas calças? – sem calça ou sem camisa, para ele dá na mesma. Oka saindo de uma camuflagem de folhas, antes de dar o bote, a vítima já está pronta! Uma vez o disseram, Howu, um garanhão não se alimenta da grama embaixo dele: ele respondeu, verdade, mas é claro que pode rolar sobre ela!

The decision to use the expression. "dá na mesma" to translate "it's all one to him" is due to a necessity of maintaining the element of colloquialism. This is not among the most meaningful parts of the play in terms of content and relevance for the plot, but it is surely one of the most meaningful in terms of style and craft—it is where the language of the play approaches an all-too-important genre of Yoruba oral literature: the oriki.

The first act, then, is thus characterized: rich in poetic forms and metaphors. The second act, as we know, follows a more prosaic path, demanding other kinds of skills from the translator.

ACT 2

In Act Two we are settled in a totally different linguistic universe. The European colonial environment has not their language crossed by poetic fragments. On the contrary. In analyzing Act One, I commented that, in addition to the long parts in verse,

the very prose counted with a poetic rhythm and imagery. In Act Two, on its turn, the language is characteristically prosaic, in all its dimensions. The prose of the District Officer's and his wife's speech follows the most colloquial rhythm of question and answer and commentaries. The broken language of Amusa also reveals a type of orality as well as Joseph's meagre language.

The place to start seems to be Amusa's idiosyncratic language. Amusa, it is good to remember, is a Yoruba Muslim convert working for the colonial administration as a sergeant. He has changed his cultural and spiritual universe from the Yoruba to, respectively, the Western and Eastern, but this passage was not satisfactorily effected, the previous culture leaving marks in his worldview and his language. His English is, then, broken, with numerous mistakes. Wole Soyinka used for him an English that reminds one of the English of North-American Southern blacks with its comicality; for instance, he uses "mistah" instead of "mister." I, on my turn, used an equivalent kind of Portuguese, often attributed to low-class blacks in Northeastern Brazil. To pick up the same case, the term "senhor" (mister) was translated to "sinhô," a form associated with a negative image of enslaved blacks.

> Mista Pirinkin, I beg you sir, what you think you do with that dress? It belong to dead cult, not for human being (p. 19).

This line was thus translated:

> AMUSA Sinhô Pirinkin, eu imploro, sinhô, o que o sinhô acha que tá fazendo com essa roupa? Ela é do culto aos mortos, não para seres humanos.

The comicality is apparent both in the situation that is illustrated and in the language used by Amusa. It is interesting to notice that the idiosyncrasies of Amusa's language appear as well in his writing. After he refuses to report his information to Pilkings wearing the Egungun dress, Pilkings authorizes him to write what he had to say on a notepad. The result is what follows:

> I have to report that it come to my information that one prominent chief, namely, the Elesin Oba, is to commit death tonight as a result of native custom. Because this is criminal offence I await further instruction at charge office. Sergeant Amusa (p. 20).

The carefully chosen words such as "prominent," the correct use of such expressions as "namely" and "rather" do not erase a grammatical error in the beginning (it *come* to my information) and the semantic imprecision in the second line (commit death). Amusa struggles with his own language. In my translation, I tried to place the errors in the same places, although a change had to be effected in the nature of the error, in the first case:

> Devo relatar que vêm a mim a informação de que um chefe proeminente, a saber, o Elesin Oba, vai cometer morte hoje à noite como resultado de hábito nativo. Sendo isso ato criminal, aguardo instruções. Sargento Amusa.

The first error in the original English is an error of conjugation—"come" instead of "comes" in the third person singular. In my case I placed the error in the correspondent word—the verb "vir"—putting a circumflex on the form "vem," indicating the third person plural instead of singular; the opposite error is more common, but this happens too. As for the second error, I literally translated "commit death" to "cometer morte."

On the other hand, Simon Pilkings's language is that of a learned British man, articulate in the way he associates ideas, with rightly used adverbs and comfortable with expressions and similes. His ideas, as I said, are articulately presented, but they are considerably shallow, lacking the metaphysical depths of the Yorubas' poetic musings. This shallowness is much more evident in the last act. The following passage shows some of these characteristics:

> It's hopeless. We'll merely end up missing the best part of the ball. When they get this way there is nothing you can do. It's simply hammering against a brick wall. Write your report or whatever it is on that pad Amusa and take yourself out of here. Come on Jane. We only upset his delicate sensibilities by remaining in here (p. 20).

There is evident precision in this talk. My translation tried to value that precision:

> É inútil. Vamos acabar perdendo a melhor parte do baile. Quando a coisa fica assim, não tem o que fazer. É dar murro em ponta de faca. Escreva seu relatório ou o que quer que seja neste bloco, Amusa, e vá embora daqui. Venha, Jane, só vamos perturbar os sentimentos delicados dele se ficarmos aqui.

Likewise, the unimaginativeness of an obvious expression like "hammering against a brick wall" is rendered in the cliché expression in Brazilian Portuguese of "dar murro em ponta de faca." I also tried to value elements of colloquialism in Pilkings's speech. This colloquialism appears more than once. One example appears when, after referring to the natives as "bastards," Pilkings is made to hear the following piece of advice by his wife:

> Simon, you really must watch your language. Bastard isn't just a simple swear-word in these parts, you know. (p. 23)

To which he replies:

> Look, just when did you become a social anthropologist, that's what I'd like to know. (p. 23)

The sentence is successful in transmitting his irritation toward a critical comment associated with the hurry to solve a problem. The joking metaphor of the social anthropologist gives the idea of Pilkings's angry and ironic sense of humor. My translation for this dialog was:

> JANE Simon, você tem que cuidar com o linguajar. "Bastardo" não é só um simples xingamento nestas bandas, você sabe.
>
> PILKINGS Olhe aqui, desde quando você virou uma antropóloga social, é isso o que eu gostaria de saber.

It must be observed that "bastardo," in Portuguese is not as common a swear-word as "bastard" in English. However, the double meaning is absolutely necessary in this passage, and the word "bastardo" had to be chosen.

Just a few lines down we have another example of Pilkings's angry and ironic sense of humor, here in a much more caustic fashion. The drums are deafening, Pilkings decides to ask Joseph, their houseboy, what is the meaning of the drum patterns, to which Joseph answers he does not know. Pilkings's reaction is not only explosive, it is blasphemous:

> What do you mean you don't know? It's only two years since your conversion. Don't tell me all that holy water nonsense also wiped out your tribal memory. (p. 24)

And leaves Joseph scandalized. Through these talks we see Pilkings essentially as a comic character, even if his role in the play is directly connected to its tragic ending. This last line shows him as hot-tempered and socially inept, unable to perceive the most obvious reactions of his interlocutors. Once again, Simon Pilkings is reproached by his wife. This hilarious line was translated thus:

> Como assim não sabe? Não tem nem dois anos que você se converteu. Não me diga que essa besteira de água benta já apagou sua memória tribal.

I decided for the term "besteira," rather than its similar "bobagem," to translate "nonsense" because "besteira" has a more offensive tone than "bobagem," which is more in line with the character of the word "nonsense" in this context.

Jane's language, on its turn, displays the same refinement linked to colloquialism as Simon's, but her way of addressing issues is subtler and she deals with the native functionaries with far more tact then her husband. In the beginning of the act, when Simon is losing his temper with Amusa's reluctance in face of the Egungun garment, she turns to Amusa and says:

> Oh Amusa, what is there to be scared of in the costume? You saw it confiscated last month from those egungun men who were creating trouble in town. You helped arrest the cult leaders yourself—if the juju didn't harm you at the time how could it possibly harm you now? And merely by looking at it? (p. 20)

A much more reasonable and rational approach than Simon's. The translation is as follows:

> Oh, Amusa, que tem de assustador nesta roupa? Você a viu ser confiscada no mês passado daqueles homens egungun que estavam causando perturbação na cidade. Você mesmo ajudou a prender os líderes do culto—se a macumba não fez mal para você naquela época, como poderia fazer agora? E só olhando?

The translation of one particular term here deserves a lengthier explanation. The term "juju," used by Jane to refer to the supposed magical powers of the Egungun garment, has, according to the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language, the meaning of "a charm or fetish, especially as used by some West African peoples" (OXFORD, 2003, p. 939) and has a pejorative character, associated with so called "primitive" beliefs, religions and magical practices, particularly African ones. The pejorative

character is controversial since the word is sometimes used by Africans themselves to refer to their own religions and religious practices; an example is Amos Tutuola in his *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*: the main character of the book is a master of spells, which he calls, exactly, jujus. In having recourse to its Portuguese translation, I discovered that the translator did not translate the word "juju," but left it there. I thought that the word in Brazil is not sufficiently popular to provoke the effect it has in the English language. I found a suitable translation in "macumba," which in the Houaiss Dictionary of the English Language has, among others, the meanings of "black magic, spell, witchcraft" and "lay designation of Afro-Brazilian cults" (HOUAISS, 2001, p. 2069) and, as "juju," is mostly used in a pejorative sense to refer to African-Brazilian religions and its practices, but is also sometimes used by the practitioners of these religions themselves. Moreover, the term "macumba" is extremely popular in Brazil and I believe will elicit the same tone of despise and ridiculous with which the African or African-Brazilian religions are seen by many who do not know them.

Jane also comes with very tactful and appreciative comments such as this one about Olunde, Elesin Oba's son whom was sent by Pilkings to England to study medicine:

> I rather thought he was much too sensitive you know. The kind of person you think should be a poet munching rose petals in Blumsbury. (p. 22)

The translation:

> Eu sempre o achei muito sensível, sabe? O tipo de pessoa que deveria ser um poeta mastigando pétalas de rosa em Bloomsbury.

Finally, Joseph has a very limited role in the act. His language appears very sparsely and is essentially a matter-of-fact way of talking—without the comic idiosyncrasies of Amusa, the violent ironies of Simon Pilkings or the subtleties of Jane. One example of his language will be offered that shows his exact logic. It appears after Pilkings asks him whether the Elesin Oba was supposed to kill somebody in the night ritual. His answer is:

> No master. He will not kill anybody and no one will kill him. He will simply die. (p. 22)

An extremely logical and organized thought that was used by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., as an interpretive key for the role of Elesin Oba (GATES, JR., 2003, p. 158). The translation is as follows:

> Não, senhor. Ele não vai matar ninguém e ninguém vai matá-lo. Ele simplesmente vai morrer.

Thus we follow to Act Three.

ACT 3

A chaos! A swarming chaos! That is perhaps a suitable description for the beginning of Act Three. The beginnings of each act in *Death and the King's Horseman* are strikingly original—the first begins with the peaceful yet decided stride of Elesin Oba and his musicians to the market for his last night there. Act Two begins as comically as unusual with Europeans dancing in Egungun garments. And now Act Three begins in… chaos—a chaos of women and constables in the market right in front of the cloth stall where the Elesin Oba and his new wife consummate their marriage. So much so that Amusa's language is in itself more chaotic than ever:

> I am tell you women for last time to commot my road. I am here on official business. (27)

No language other than Nigerian Pidgin English can offer such a hilarious expression as "commot my road." The French and Italian translations display common expressions: "laissez-moi passer" (let me pass) and "lasciarmi passare" (idem). I tried to stylize the sentence a little so as to have some oral and popular feature:

> Eu digo mulheres pela última vez pra saí da minha estrada. Estou aqui em negócios oficiais.

The expression "saí" instead of "sair" is an attempt to recover something of the popular tone of the original. Indeed, the number of taunts and angry screams present in this first part of Act Three is so great that it offers us a myriad different idioms and phrases. In a second part, from when Elesin Oba emerges from his bridal chamber, the

language of the play acquires a solemn and highly poetic tone similar to the one we heard in Act One. In the first part, however, the tone is other, as we have seen.

The taunting tone of the first part of Act Three, however, should not lead us into thinking its dialogs wholly futile or purely humoristic. Undoubtedly one of the most important dialogs occurs in the beginning of this act:

> AMUSA [*shouting above the laughter*] For the last time I warn you women to clear the road.
>
> WOMAN To where?
>
> AMUSA To that hut. I know he dey dere.
>
> WOMAN Who?
>
> AMUSA The chief who calls himself Elesin Oba.
>
> WOMAN You ignorant man. It is not he who calls himself Elesin Oba, it is his blood that says it. As it called out to his father before him and will to his son after him. And that is in spite of everything your white man can do.
>
> WOMAN Is it not the same ocean that washes this land and the white man's land? Tell your white man he can hide our son away as long as he likes. When the time comes for him, the same ocean will bring him back. (p. 28)

The notion of predestination as part of a person's character, as part of a person's *body* (as the idea of blood attests) is evidenced here in harrowing terms. Moreover, the comment by the second woman about the ocean bringing back Olunde allies to the idea of blood predestination one of geographic predestination—the body, the spirit, and the land all belong to one same experience—and this experience is apparent in the women's talk. As Ketu Katrak says in her study about the tragic character of Soyinka's theatre, in the Yoruba concept of destiny, a person is born with a predetermined destiny which can be fulfilled—which is the road to full happiness—or not (KATRAK, 1986, p. 110). But here the women evoke destiny as something unchangeable, probably to the force attributed to the role of Elesin Oba, which cannot but realize itself in its bearer's life. I translated these strong lines as follows:

> AMUSA [berrando por cima das risadas] Pela última vez, mulheres, eu aviso para saírem da estrada.
>
> MULHER Para onde?
>
> AMUSA Para esta cabana. Eu sei que ele tá aí.
>
> MULHER Quem?

AMUSA O chefe que chama a si mesmo de Elesin Oba.

MULHER Homem ignorante. Não é ele que se chama de Elesin Oba, é seu sangue que o diz. Assim como chamou seu pai antes dele e vai chamar o filho dele depois. E isso apesar de tudo o que o seu branco pode fazer.

MULHER Não é o mesmo oceano que banha esta terra e a do homem branco? Diga ao homem branco que ele pode esconder nosso filho pelo tempo que quiser. Quando chegar a hora, o mesmo oceano vai trazê-lo de volta.

The comic dimension appears in the part wherein the young girls imitate British people and their ways of speaking. The reader can almost hear the British accents through the shrill voices of the girls:

—Your invitation card please?

—Who are you? Have we been introduced?

—And who did you say you were?

—Sorry, I didn't quite catch your name.

—May I take your hat? [*Exchanging the* POLICEMAN's *hats.*]

—How very kind of you.

The formalities and polite sentences are perfectly in place. The use of dashes for the dialogs instead of indications of the names of the character (or their definition) helps to give the idea of quickness. The dialog was rendered thus in Portuguese:

– O seu convite, por favor?

– Quem é você? Chegamos a ser apresentados?

– E quem você disse que era mesmo?

– Perdão, eu não entendi bem seu nome.

– Posso pegar o seu chapéu?

– Se você insiste. Posse pegar o seu? [*trocando os chapéus dos* POLICIAIS.]

– Como você é gentil.

Equally ludicrous is the two "Englishmen" speaking about the natives of Nigeria:

—And how do you find the place?

—The natives are alright.

—Friendly?

—Tractable.

—Not a teeny-weeny bit restless?

—Well, a teeny-weeny bit restless.

—One might even say, difficult.

—But you do manage to cope?

—Yes indeed I do. I have a rather faithful ox called Amusa. (p. 30)

The politeness of the sentence cannot hide the deep contempt they feel for the natives. The two girls were able to grasp it and deliver it in their imitation. My translation:

– E o que está achando do lugar?

– Os nativos são o.k.

– Amigáveis?

– Tratáveis.

– Nem um pouquinhozinho agitados?

– Bom, um pouquinhozinho agitados.

– Pode-se dizer talvez até, difíceis?

– De fato, sente-se tentado a dizer, difíceis.

– Mas você consegue lidar?

– Sim, na verdade, sim. Eu tenho um boi bem fiel chamado Amusa.

The best word I found to translate “teeny-weeny” was the double diminutive “pouquinhozinho.” With this massive humiliation, Amusa and his constables flee the place, leaving the market free for women and girls to dance and sing. It does not take long for Elesin Oba to emerge from his improvised bridal chamber with a piece of cloth in his hand containing the “virgin stain.” As soon as he does so, he starts listening to the drum beats of Osugbo. Elesin Oba recognizes his call.

This is the moment in which a decisive shift occurs in language in this act. In Elesin's monolog, language becomes increasingly solemn and formal as he approaches the gateway between this world and the next until it finally breaks into verse in which form the king—through the voice of the Praise-Singer—and Elesin talk about Elesin's imminent passage. Metaphors also start to abound such as that, contained in Elesin's answer after the king wants to reiterate his wish. Elesin talks about the situation of this wish:

> It is buried like seed-yam in my mind.
>
> This is the season of quick rains, the harvest
>
> Is this moment due for gathering. (p. 34)

At first, I understood "seed-yam" as "yam seed," that is, the seed of the yam. From this understanding, I coined the verse, very satisfactory for me, "Está enterrado qual semente de inhame em minha mente"—a very long verse that surpasses the original decasyllable in five syllables and displays some sound recurrences, like the progression of nasals sounds of "m" and "n" and the internal rhyme between "semente" and "mente." Dubost and Bellini decided to maintain the idea of seed in their translations. Dubost, in his somewhat freer translation method, arrived at "Cela est enfin comme une graine d'igname dans mon esprit," leaving the idea of "buried" outside and exchanging "grain" for "seed" and "spirit" for "mind." Bellini was more literal: "È sepolto nella mia mente come un seme di igname." However, I discovered that "seed-yam" is not the seed of yam, but a kind of yam. As it has no specific translation in Portuguese, I left the "semente" aside and got to a far more compacted 12-syllable verse, preserving the series of nasals, but disposing of the rhyme:

> Está enterrado como inhame em minha mente.

The rest of the verses posed a challenge to me, to which I initially chose a very unsatisfactory solution. The first solution was like this:

> Esta é a estação das chuvas ligeiras, a colheita
>
> É este momento adequado para se colher.

The problem here is obvious: the redundancy between "a colheita" and "colher," something like "The harvest is the moment due for harvesting"—repetitive. I looked in the two translations and here is what I encountered:

French:

> C'est la saison de las pluies passagères,
>
> C'est le moment de récolter la moisson. (p. 66)

Italian:

> Questa è stagione di piogge veloci,
>
> Questo è il momento reservato al raccolto. (p. 502)

These beautiful verses came to my aid in their organization of the semantic material of the verses. The French one places the word for "harvest" (moisson) as the direct object of the verb "gathering" (récolter). The Italian eliminates the verb "gathering" and maintains only the noun "harvest" (raccolto). The one that I mostly drew upon was the Italian one. My translation was like this:

> Esta é a estação das chuvas ligeiras,
>
> Este é o momento propício à colheita.

Resulting into two far more euphonic verses than the first, in addition to guaranteeing an assonance in the end of the verse—that between "ligeiras" and "colheitas."

The next moment in this incredibly poetic passage that demanded me to research longer into the possibilities of translation was

> Shall I not acknowledge I have stood
>
> Where wonders met their end? The elephant deserves
>
> Better than that we say 'I have caught
>
> A glimpse of something'. If we see the tamer
>
> Of the forest let us say plainly, we have seen

An elephant (p. 34).

The stanza engages in somewhat confusing enjambments from "the elephant deserves," which gave me a hard time. But the point I want to discuss first lies in the beginning of the second verse. It is important to notice that the first verse and the first part of the second (up till "end?") show a perfectly melodic pattern, the first verse a nine-syllable whose rhythm reminds us of the iambic pentameter; the second verse a gorgeous six-syllable verse. In the second verse, one of these strange perceptive errors leading to curious results took place (Soyinka would probably say that Esu was in action here) and I seem to have seen an extra 's' after "end" (ends). This language slip led me, in my translation, to what I see as a fabulous verse: "Onde pontas de espanto se encontraram." Unfortunately, as I said, this translation was based on a wrong reading and had to be abandoned. The verse, of course, is buried like seed-yam in my mind. The French translation offers:

> Ne reconnaîtrait-je pas maintenant que je suis allé là où les merveilles ont une fin? (p. 66)

For some unfathomable reason, Thierry Dubost decided to render his translation into prose instead of verse. His translation for the "wonders met their end" was clear and objective: "merveilles ont un fin." Let us look for the Italian translation by Graziella Bellini.

> Non devo ora riconoscere di essere stato
>
> Dove tutte le meraviglie si compiono? (p. 503)

The Italian version tends toward hyperbole in rendering it "all" (tutte) wonders instead of simply "wonders." I have tried to follow the French one and give it a translation as straight as I could:

> Devo agora não reconhecer que estive
>
> Onde maravilhas seu fim encontraram?

Two eleven-syllable verses.

As we saw, there is a shift in the verse pattern: from the hemistich “The elephant deserves” on, what we see is an enjambment-driven irregular verse pattern that approaches prose. This difference is so strong that Graziella Bellini has cut the verse in two and transformed the second hemistich in a verse on its own:

> Non devo ora riconoscere di essere stato
>
> Dove tutte le meraviglie si compiono?
>
> L’elefante merita
>
> Più di um símplice “Ho visto
>
> Qualcosa di sfuggita”. Se vediamo il domatore
>
> Della foresta, diciamolo chiaramente, abbiamo visto
>
> Um elefante. (p. 503)

Thierry Dubost, on his turn, made the mysterious choice of rendering this stanza into prose. I have not, like Belinni, isolated “The elephant deserves” in a different verse. Instead I put together with the rest of the verse, rendering it a gigantic 18-syllable verse. The rest was organized as in Soyinka’s original:

> Mais do que digamos “Apanhei
>
> Um vislumbre de algo”. Se vemos o domador
>
> Da floresta que digamos claramente, vimos
>
> Um elefante.

I tried to render it close to the original in its rhythm and metrics, even if I could not find a suitable decasyllable to represent the gorgeous iambic pentameter “A glimpse of something’. If we see the tamer.”

The verse section of the act ends with a beautiful heavily proverbialized stanza by Iyaloja:

> It is the death of war that kills the valiant,
>
> Death of water is how the swimmer goes
>
> It is the death of markets that kills the trader
>
> And death of indecision takes the idle away

The trade of the cutlass blunts its edge

And the beautiful die the death of beauty.

It takes an Elesin to die the death of death…

Only Elesin… dies the unknowable death of death…

Gracefully, gracefully, does the horseman regain

The stable at the end of day, gracefully… (p. 35)

As expectable, the verses tend to be longer in Latinate languages than in English. This was what happened to the French and Italian versions and to mine:

É a morte da guerra que mata o bravo,

Morte da água é como se vai o nadador

É a morte dos mercados que mata o comerciante

E a morte da indecisão leva o indolente

O ofício do alfanje cega seu fio

E o belo morre a morte da beleza.

É preciso um Elesin para morrer a morte da morte...

Só Elesin... morre a incognoscível morte da morte...

Com graça, com graça retoma o cavaleiro

Os estábulos no fim do dia, com graça…

It is from this point on that the language returns to prose with Olohun-Iyo reporting the visions he had access to during the time he was serving as mouthpiece of the King. However, if verse is abandoned, the metaphorically-charged language is not. From this moment on, the Praise-Singer dominates the scene, ending the act in a long and impressive poetic monolog with a shower of metaphors; a last appeal to Elesin as he walks to the gates. The whole text is too long to expose here. I will provide only the beginning and its translation:

> Does the deep voice of *gbedu* cover you then, like the passage of royal elephants? Those drums that brook no rivals, have they blocked the passage to your ears that my voice passes into wind, a mere leaf floating in the night? Is your flesh lightened Elesin, is that lump of earth I slid between your slippers to keep you longer slowly sifting from your feet? Are the drums on the other side now turning skin to skin with ours in *osugbo*? Are there sounds there I cannot hear, do footsteps surround you which pound the earth like *gbedu*, roll like thunder round the dome of the world? (p. 36)

In Chapter One, in discussing some features of Yoruba art, we have seen that segmentation is a frequent principle: many Yoruba art objects are composed of segmented figures with no center or hierarchy coordinating them. Above, we have seen that this is the compositional logics of the oriki poetry. Here, in the Praise-Singer's appeal we find the same logic of seriate composition without a center, in this case building an increase in intensity. After a moment, Olohun-Iyo changes from questions to affirmations in terms of proverbs:

> The sun that heads for the sea no longer heeds the prayers of the farmer. When the river begins to taste the salt of the ocean, we no longer know what deity to call on, the river-god or Olokun. No arrow flies back to the string, the child does not return through the same passage that gave it birth. (p. 36)

The following are the translations I provided for each fragment:

> A profunda voz do gbedu o cobre então, como a passagem de elefantes reais? Estes tambores que não toleram rivais, eles bloquearam a passagem aos seus ouvidos ao ponto de minha voz passar por vento, uma mera folha flutuando na noite? Sua carne está mais leve, Elesin? O montículo de terra que deslizei entre suas sandálias para mantê-lo por mais tempo lentamente escapa de seus pés? Os tambores do outro lado agora se tornam couro a couro com os nossos em osugbo? Há sons ali que não consigo ouvir, te cercam passos que percutem a terra como o gbedu, se precipitam como o trovão em volta da abóbada do mundo?

____

> O sol que segue para o mar não mais escuta as orações do fazendeiro. Quando o rio começa a degustar o sal do oceano, não mais sabemos qual divindade chamar, se o deus do rio ou Olokun. Não há flecha que voe de volta à corda, a criança não retorna pela mesma passagem que a deu à luz.

This is the summit of the play in terms of poetic intensity and dexterity. Soon Pilkings is to arrive and upset the ritual, breaking the tradition. And this is the precise moment pointed out by Irele when orality is broken and its empowering function lost.

ACT 4

We are back to the company of the Pilkingses, but now in the party they longed so much to go to. Similarly to Act Two, the language of this act is colloquial and mostly

denotative and straightforward, often comic. It is in this act also that a crucial character appears: Olunde, Elesin's son who went to study in England. From the linguistic point of view, we are met with a new reality: the native who speaks English similarly to the born English; his long dialog with Jane Pilkings is among the most important sequences in the play, since it vents ideas that are against what the British presence represents in Nigeria. It is not that the other natives themselves had not already protested, because they did, as we saw in Act Three. The difference is that here we see a native discussing with a European in the same language, with the same register and with a similar set of references. Olunde knows well the English and European reality, he came to obtain "the secrets of the enemy," as Elesin says. Indeed, Olunde's mastery of the English language is remarked upon by Simon Pilkings in Act Five and there is hardly any similitude between Olunde's language and that spoken by his Yoruba compatriots.

Olunde's polite yet quasi inimical talk with Mrs. Pilkings includes tense moments in which Olunde shows his bright logic and language ability. Right in the beginning, in face of Mrs. Pilkings's "good reason" to be wearing an Egungun mask, Olunde shows no mercy:

> JANE Oh, so you are shocked after all. How disappointing.
>
> OLUNDE No I am not shocked Mrs. Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand. (p. 41)

The objective of my translation was to preserve that formal, yet impacting tone characteristic of Olunde's speech.

> JANE Oh, então você está chocado, afinal. Que decepção.
>
> OLUNDE Não, não estou chocado, sra. Pilkings. Você se esquece de que agora são quatro anos que passei entre a sua gente. Eu descobri que vocês não têm respeito nenhum pelo que não entendem.

As their conversation moves toward more complex themes, Olunde's reasoning becomes more refined and his syntax follows suit. When the subject of Elesin's death is touched upon, Jane judges his culture "barbaric," even "feudal." Olunde points to the dance they were seeing in the ballroom as an example of feudalism. He asks her "What name would you give to that?"

> JANE Therapy, British style. The preservation of sanity in the midst of chaos.

> OLUNDE Others would call it decadence. However, it doesn't really interest me. You white races know how to survive; I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws this war should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping their so-called civilization for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us. I thought all that at the beginning. Then I slowly realized that your greatest art is the art of survival. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way. (p. 43)

This is one of Olunde's most sophisticated moments. His reasoning includes complex associations among diverse pathways of ideas. My translation tried to value this:

> JANE Terapia, no estilo britânico. A preservação da sanidade em meio ao caos.
>
> OLUNDE Outros chamariam de decadência. No entanto, isso não me interessa, na verdade. Vocês, raças brancas, sabem sobreviver; disso tive prova. Por todas as leis da lógica e da natureza, esta guerra deveria acabar com todas as raças brancas varrendo umas às outras do mapa, varrendo do mapa sua assim chamada civilização pelo resto dos tempos e retornando a um estado de primitivismo semelhante ao que só existia até então em sua imaginação quando pensavam em nós. Eu pensei tudo isso no início. Então, percebi que a grande arte de vocês é a arte da sobrevivência. Mas pelo menos tenham a humildade de deixarem os outros sobreviverem do jeito deles.

Jane Pilkings is consistently appalled by Olunde's demeanor in face of his father impending suicide. And Olunde deepens his thought to help her understand:

> OLUNDE What do you want me to say?
>
> JANE Your calm acceptance for instance, can you explain that? It was so unnatural. I don't understand that at all. I feel a need to understand all I can.
>
> OLUNDE But you explained it yourself. My medical training perhaps. I have seen death too often. And the soldiers who returned from the front, they died on our hands all the time.
>
> JANE No. It has to be more than that. I feel it has to do with the many things we don't really grasp about your people. At least you can explain.
>
> OLUNDE All these things are part of it. And anyway, my father has been dead in my mind for nearly a month. Ever since I learnt of the King's death. I've lived with my bereavement so long now that I cannot think of him alive. On that journey on the boat, I kept my mind on my duties as the one who must perform the rites over his body. I went through it all again and again in my mind over his body. I went through it all again and again in my mind as he himself had taught me. I didn't want to do anything wrong, something which might jeopardize the welfare of my people.

> JANE But he had disowned you. When you left he swore publicly you were no longer his son.
>
> OLUNDE I told you, he was a man of tremendous will. Sometimes that's another way of saying stubborn. But among our people, you don't disown a child just like that. Even if I had died before him I would still be buried like his eldest son. But it's time for me to go.
>
> JANE Thank you. I feel calmer. Don't let me keep you from your duties. (p. 46)

This is the point in which there is a loosening of the tension in their discussion, a point in which they seem to become closer in understanding. Olunde's ability to verbally disentangle the threads of his tradition in a way that it becomes comprehensible to Jane Pilkings is highlighted here. My translation is the following:

> OLUNDE O que você quer que eu diga?
>
> JANE Sua aceitação tranquila, por exemplo, você pode explicá-la? Foi tão antinatural. Eu não entendo de jeito nenhum. Eu sinto a necessidade de entender tudo o que puder.
>
> OLUNDE Mas você mesma explicou. Talvez seja minha formação médica. Vi a morte muito frequentemente. E os soldados que retornavam do front, morriam em nossas mãos o tempo inteiro.
>
> JANE Não. Tem que ser mais que isso. Eu sinto que tem a ver com as muitas coisas que nós não entendemos sobre o seu povo. Pelo menos você pode explicar.
>
> OLUNDE Todas essas coisas são parte disso. E, de qualquer forma, meu pai já estava morto em minha mente por quase um mês. A partir do momento em que ouvi sobre a morte do rei. Vivi com meu luto por tanto tempo que não consigo pensar nele vivo agora. Na viagem de barco, mantive minha mente em minhas obrigações como aquele que deve executar os ritos sobre seu corpo. Eu passei e repassei tudo isso na minha mente do jeito que ele me ensinou. Eu não queria fazer nada errado, algo que pudesse pôr em risco o bem-estar do meu povo.
>
> JANE Mas ele o deserdou. Quando você foi embora, ele jurou publicamente que você não era mais filho dele.
>
> OLUNDE Eu disse a você, ele era um homem de grande vontade. Às vezes essa é outra maneira de se dizer teimoso. Mas, entre nosso povo, você não deserda um filho assim tão simples. Mesmo se eu tivesse morrido antes dele, eu ainda seria enterrado como seu filho mais velho. Mas é hora de ir.
>
> JANE Obrigada. Eu me sinto mais calma. Não deixe que eu atrapalhe suas obrigações.

The colloquialism of this act does not mean simplicity or banality. Olunde and Jane Pilkings stand out in this part of the play. We have seen how there is a sort of

oscillation between colloquialism and solemnity in language, which is sometimes followed by an oscillation between prose and verse, having a middle term in the poetic prose spoken by the native characters. Something different happens in the fifth act.

ACT 5

As was said in the beginning of this chapter, the language problem pointed out by Martin Esslin deepens itself in Act Five. Here Yoruba and English characters finally face and confront each other. The language problem here lies in the fact that both Yoruba and English characters conduct their verbal confrontations in English, perfectly understanding each other and none of them having any difficulty in conveying their ideas. However, it is important to remember that, taking Esslin's cue, the English spoken by the Yoruba should actually be imagined by the reader to be Yoruba translated into English. Therefore, within the reality of the play, there would be no possible way for these two groups to understand each other. This is a problem that remains unsolved, but, for the play, it is extremely important that the Yoruba and English characters should dialog, and so they do.

This is also in act 5 that we notice the result of the language break pointed out by Irele. Here, behind bars, rid of his freedom, subdued by the white stranger who comes talk to him, Elesin's language loses many of the resources it had at other moments. The resources lost are mainly those relating to literary form: before, his language was full of proverbs, metaphors, oriki, similes and, moreover, was frequently delivered in verse rather than prose. Indeed, both in Act One and Act Three, which are the acts before Act Five which feature extensive texts delivered by Elesin, he speaks partly in verse, maybe even more than he does in prose. Here in Act Five, the verse is gone, since there is no musical background to accompany Elesin's performance. Likewise, proverbs become scarce in his language, which is now realized through long periods of an elaborate and complex prose, and it should be remembered that, if the lyrical arsenal has been elided from Elesin's language, the philosophical tone remains there, as sharp as ever. It is interesting to mark the contrast between Elesin's reflections and Pilkings's almost casual comments

PILKINGS You seem fascinated by the moon.

> ELESIN [*after a pause*] Yes, ghostly one, your twin-brother up there engages my thoughts.
>
> PILKINGS It is a beautiful night.
>
> ELESIN Is that so?
>
> PILKINGS The light on the leaves, the peace of the night…
>
> ELESIN The night is not at peace, District Officer.
>
> PILKINGS No? I would have said it was. You know, quiet…
>
> ELESIN And does quiet mean peaceful to you?
>
> PILKINGS Well, nearly the same thing. Naturally there is a subtle difference…
>
> ELESIN The night is not at peace, ghostly one. The world is not at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world for ever. There is no sleep in the world tonight.
>
> PILKINGS It is still a good bargain if the world should lose one night's sleep as the price of saving a man's life.
>
> ELESIN You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it.
>
> PILKINGS Now come on…
>
> ELESIN And not merely my life but the lives of many. The end of the night's work is not over. Neither this year nor the next will see it. If I wished you well, I would pray that you do not stay long enough in our land to see the disaster you have brought upon us. (p. 50)

There is complete misunderstanding between the two, who are talking from different points of view—points of view that seem to overshadow each other in each other's words. It is also clear that Pilkings is hardly conscious of the philosophical groundings of his decision and attitudes whereas Elesin is perfectly aware of his. The translation follows:

> PILKINGS Você parece fascinado pela lua.
>
> ELESIN [após uma pausa] Sim, ser fantasmático. Seu irmão gêmeo ali em cima ocupa meus pensamentos.
>
> PILKINGS É uma noite bonita.
>
> ELESIN É mesmo?
>
> PILKINGS A luz sobre as folhas, a paz da noite…
>
> ELESIN A noite não está em paz, Oficial Distrital.
>
> PILKINGS Não? Eu diria que está. Sabe, tranquila…

ELESIN E tranquilo significa pacífico para você?

PILKINGS Bem, quase a mesma coisa. Naturalmente existe uma diferença sutil...

ELESIN A noite não está em paz, ser fantasmático. O mundo não está em paz. Você destroçou a paz do mundo para sempre. Não há sono no mundo hoje à noite.

PILKINGS Ainda assim, é um bom negócio que o mundo perca uma noite de sono se esse for o preço de salvar a vida de um homem.

ELESIN Você não salvou minha vida, Oficial Distrital. Você a destruiu.

PILKINGS Ah, por favor…

ELESIN E não só a minha vida, mas as vidas de muitos. O fim do trabalho noturno ainda não acabou. Nem este ano nem o próximo o verão. Se eu desejasse seu bem, eu rezaria para que você não ficasse tempo suficiente em nossa terra para ver o desastre que trouxe para nós.

The expression "ghostly one" is quite difficult to translate into Portuguese, since this use of the word "one" has no correspondent in our language. I quickly thought about the expression "ser fantasmático" (ghostly being), but I was unsure as to use it in the beginning due to its length. The second option was to use simply the word "fantasma" (ghost), which I preferred in the first moment. I then decided to see how did the French and the Italian translators solved this problem, and it was not without surprise that I found out that each of them had opted for each of my two solutions.

French:

> Oui, *être fantomatique*. Ton frère jumeau, là-haut ocupe mes pensées. (p. 101)

Italian:

> Sì, *fantasma*. Lassù il tuo fratello gemello occupa i miei pensieri. (p. 526)

Finally, I decided that the expression "ser fantasmático" was more exact in giving the idea conveyed by "ghostly one"—the "ghostly" feature is here in adjectival position, and I thought it should remain so in my Portuguese translation. Moreover, later

on Elesin will refer to Pilkings as "the white ghost" in page 53, so it was important to differentiate one from the other.

The first long monolog by Elesin Oba is also important to be observed in the logical maneuvers Elesin engages into in order to make Pilkings understand what was happening and what crisis he had given rise to. Once again let us see this remarkable passage:

> You are waiting for dawn white man. I hear you saying to yourself: only so many hours until dawn and then the danger is over. All I must do is to keep him alive tonight. You don't quite understand it all but you know that tonight is when what ought to be must be brought about. I shall ease your mind even more, ghostly one. It is not an entire night but a moment of the night, and that moment is past. The moon was my messenger and guide. When it reached a certain gateway in the sky, it touched that moment for which my whole life has been spent in blessings. Even I do not know the gateway. I have stood here and scanned the sky for a glimpse of that door but, I cannot see it. Human eyes are useless for a search of this nature. But in the house of *osugbo*, those who keep watch through the spirit recognised the moment, they sent word to me through the voice of our sacred drums to prepare myself. I heard them and I shed all thoughts of earth. I began to follow the moon to the abode of the gods… servant of the white king, that was when you entered my chosen place of departure on feet of desecration. (p. 51)

My Portuguese version was this:

> Você está esperando pela madrugada, homem branco. Eu o ouço dizendo para si mesmo: só tantas horas até a madrugada e o perigo terá acabado. Tudo que preciso fazer é mantê-lo vivo esta noite. Você não entende bem a coisa toda, mas sabe que é hoje à noite que o que deveria ser deve ocorrer. Vou aliviar sua mente ainda mais, ser fantasmático. Não é a noite inteira, mas um momento da noite, e esse momento passou. A lua era minha mensageira e guia. Quando ela atingiu um certo portal no céu, tocou aquele momento pelo qual minha vida inteira se passou em bênçãos. Mesmo eu não sei que portal é esse. Fiquei aqui perscrutando o céu por um vislumbre dessa porta, mas, não posso vê-la. Olhos humanos são inúteis para uma busca dessa natureza. Mas na casa de osugbo, aqueles que vigiam por meio do espírito reconheceram o momento, eles enviaram a mensagem até mim pela voz de nossos tambores sagrados para me preparar. Eu os ouvi e me despi de todos os pensamentos da terra. Eu comecei a seguir a lua até a morada dos deuses… servo do rei branco, foi aí que você adentrou meu local escolhido para a partida em pés de dessacralização.

There is one difficulty that should be noticed here. Earlier on, Elesin Oba referred to the moon as Pilkings's "twin brother," attributing the male sex to the aster. There was no problem in translating it as "o teu irmão gêmeo." The problem arrived in this paragraph, in which the moon is cited again and referred to with the neutral

pronoun “it.” In Latinate languages, the moon is consistently of the female sex. Therefore, the right translation of this passage would incur in a certain contradiction: the moon would be male at one moment, in which it is referred to as “twin brother,” and female at another moment, in which it would be referred to with female pronoun (*ela*), the female article (*a*) and with the female termination (mensageir*a*). Changing the sex of the moon (O lua era meu mensageiro e guia”) would be painfully artificial. Researching the solutions found by the French and the Italian translators, I saw that they opted exactly for the first solution listed: maintaining the “twin brother” predication and referring to it in the female sex in the second occurrence. I decided to follow their lead.

Great emotional intensity marks this last act in face of Elesin’s failure to cross the abyss of transition. The effect of this on Elesin’s language has already been discussed. The European characters seem to have their language intact. However, Iyaloja shows some of the effects that occurred to Elesin. In her mouth we no longer encounter the beautiful verses we saw before, the light even if decisive prose and the luminous metaphors that, just like Elesin Oba’s, were probably the most accurate instruments for fathoming the transcendence of the play. Her speech is enraged, hard and her metaphors contrast the sublime that was reserved to Elesin Oba and the degradation he brought upon himself.

> You have betrayed us. We fed you sweetmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world’s left-overs. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter’s dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter. We said you were the hunter returning home in triumph, a slain buffalo pressing down on his neck; you said wait, I first must turn up this cricket hole with my toes. We said yours was the doorway at which we first spy the tapper when he comes down from the tree, yours was the blessing of the twilight wine, the purl that brings night spirits out of doors to steal their portion before the light of day. We said yours was the body of wine whose burden shakes the tapper like a sudden gust on his perch. You said, No, I am content to lick the dregs from each calabash when the drinkers are done. We said, the dew on earth’s surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honour. You said No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the droppings of mice; I shall fight them for the left-overs of the world. (p. 56)

The strength of these words, especially if compared to the way Iyaloja addressed Elesin Oba before, makes this one of the most compelling passages of the play. There is in it a principle of seriality similar to the one we saw functioned as the structural

organizer of the oriki: the repetition of syntactic structures, with the repetition of some words and a kind of semantic parallelism. Let us see how it was in Portuguese:

> Você nos traiu. Nós o alimentamos com guloseimas como aquelas que esperávamos que o aguardassem do outro lado. Mas você disse Não, devo comer as sobras do mundo. Nós dissemos que você era o caçador que derrubou a caça; era a você que cabiam as porções vitais do animal. Não, você disse, eu sou o cão do caçador e vou comer as entranhas do animal e as fezes do caçador. Dissemos que você era o caçador retornando ao lar triunfante, um búfalo morto pressionando seu pescoço; você disse espere, primeiro devo escavar esse buraco de grilo com os dedos do pé. Nós dissemos que era sua a porta pela qual enxergamos, pela primeira vez, o sangrador quando ele desce da árvore, era sua a bênção do vinho crepuscular, o borbulhar que traz espíritos noturnos para fora das portas para roubar sua porção antes da luz do dia. Dissemos que era seu o corpo do vinho cujo fardo faz balançar o sangrador como uma súbita lufada em seu galho. Você disse, Não, me contento em lamber os sedimentos de cada cabaça quando se foram os bebedores. Nós dissemos, o orvalho sobre a superfície da terra era para você lavar seus pés ao longo dos declives da honra. Você disse Não, vou pisar no vômito de gatos e nos excrementos de ratos; vou brigar com eles pelos restos do mundo.

These long speeches are performed exclusively by the Yoruba characters, namely Elesin, Iyaloja and the Praise-Singer, Simon Pilkings's lines are essentially operational, containing orders, permissions and prohibitions and the rare lines by Jane Pilkings involve requests of understanding to Elesin Oba, once, and often to her husband—all very short lines. Even after what Abiola Irele has called the breakdown of orality has taken place, the language of the Yoruba remains abundant—perhaps even more so. The breakup of orality seems to be linked not to the quantity of the language produced, but to its quality. We often find in Elesin Oba a language that overflows with excessive and dramatic metaphors and an excess of adjectives as we see in the following speech:

> What were warnings beside the moist contact of living earth between my fingers? What were warnings beside the renewal of famished embers lodged eternally in the heart of man. But even that, even if it overwhelmed one with a thousandfold temptations to linger a little while, a man could overcome it. It is when the alien hand pollutes the source of will, when a stranger force of violence shatters the mind's calm resolution, this is when a man is made to commit the awful treachery of relief, commit in his thought the unspeakable blasphemy of seeing the hand of the gods in this alien rupture of his world. I know it was this thought that killed me, sapped my powers and turned me into an infant in the hands of unnamable strangers. I made to utter my spells anew but my tongue merely rattled in my mouth. I fingered hidden charms and the contact was damp; there was no spark left to sever the life-strings that should stretch from every finger-tip. My will was squelched in the spittle of an alien

> race, and all because I had committed this blasphemy of thought—that there might be the hand of the gods in a stranger's intervention. (p. 56-57)

The meter of poetry surely summons the singer to be economic in his or her words. Here, Elesin's prose extends itself in endless metaphors in his lament. The translation searched to preserve this excess:

> O que eram os avisos senão o úmido contato da terra viva entre meus dedos? O que eram avisos além da renovação de brasas famintas alojadas eternamente no coração do homem? Mas mesmo isso, mesmo se esmagado com milhares de tentações para ficar um pouco mais, um homem poderia sobrepor-se. É quando a mão estrangeira polui a fonte da vontade, quando uma força estrangeira de violência destroça a calma resolução da mente, é aí que o homem é levado a cometer a terrível traição do alívio, cometer em seu pensamento a indizível blasfêmia de ver a mão dos deuses nessa ruptura estrangeira do mundo. Eu sei que foi esse pensamento que me matou, dissipou meus poderes e me transformou em um recém-nascido nas mãos de estrangeiros inomináveis. Busquei recitar meus encantamentos novamente, mas minha língua só se debateu em minha boca. Dedilhei feitiços ocultos e o contato foi umedecido; não sobrou fagulha para cortar as cordas de vida que se estendiam a partir da ponta de cada dedo. Minha vontade se amainou no cuspe de uma raça estrangeira, e tudo porque cometi essa blasfêmia do pensamento – de que poderia haver a mão dos deuses na intervenção de um estrangeiro.

Iyaloja's prose, on the other hand, as desperate as she is, seems to maintain a certain economy of style. We saw her in a solid imaginative discourse with parallel, juxtaposed metaphors. She also has moments of sheer logicality and reasoning, such as the following passage:

> Child, I have not come to help your understanding. [*points to* ELESIN.] This is the man whose weakened understanding holds us in bondage to you. But ask him if you wish. He knows the meaning of a king's passage; he was not born yesterday. He knows the peril to the race when our dead father, who goes as intermediary, waits and waits and knows he is betrayed. He knows when the narrow gate was opened and he knows it will not stay for laggards who drag their feet in dung and vomit, whose lips are reeking of the left-overs of lesser men. He knows he has condemned our King to wander in the void of evil with beings who are enemies to life. (p. 58-59)

The parallel structure is visible here coordinated by the phrase "He knows," but the sentences are composed more of reasoning than of metaphors—and the metaphors which appear are there to help conveying the reasoning. In the passage cited before, figurative language dominated.

> Criança, eu não vim ajudá-lo a entender. [Aponta para ELESIN.] Este é o homem cujo entendimento enfraquecido nos mantém cativos a você. Mas pergunte a ele se quiser. Ele conhece o sentido da passagem de um rei; ele não nasceu ontem. Ele conhece o perigo à raça quando nosso pai morto, que vai como intermediário, aguarda e aguarda e sabe que foi traído. Ele sabe quando o portão estreito foi aberto e sabe que não permanecerá assim para retardatários que arrastam seus pés em esterco e vômito, cujos lábios fedem a restos de homens inferiores. Ele sabe que condenou nosso rei a perambular no vácuo do mal com seres que são inimigos da vida.

The parallel structure suffered a minor alteration since, due to the semantic structure of the sentences, I had to use both possible translations to the word "know"— "conhecer" and "saber" without changing too much the meaning of these expressions in the context of the text.

Another eloquent character that returns to see Elesin Oba is the Praise-Singer. We see him once again as the mouthpiece of the dead king. He speaks in an accusatory tone to Elesin Oba, reminding him of the advice that was given him and to which he did not pay heed.

> Elesin Oba! I call you by that name only this last time. Remember when I said, if you cannot come, tell my horse. [*Pause*.] What? I cannot hear you? I said, if you cannot come, whisper in the ears of my horse. Is your tongue severed from the roots Elesin? I can hear no response. I said, if there are boulders you cannot climb, mount my horse's back, this spotless black stallion, he'll bring you over them. [*Pauses*.] Elesin Oba, once you had a tongue that darted like a drummer's stick. I said, if you get lost my dog will track a path to me. My memory fails me but I think you replied: My feet have found the path, Alafin. (p. 61)

In this discourse marked by questions addressed to Elesin ("What? I cannot hear you?," "Is your tongue severed from the roots Elesin?"), the Alafin, through his mouthpiece the Praise-Singer, brings back many of the demands he had made in Elesin's trance just before his abortive death. There is a strong sense of betrayal in this passage, which I translated as follow:

> Elesin Oba! Eu o chamo por esse nome por esta última vez. Lembre-se de quando eu disse que, se não pode vir, diga ao meu cavalo. [Pausa.] O quê? Não consigo ouvi-lo. Eu disse, se você não puder vir, sussurre nos ouvidos de meu cavalo. Sua língua foi cortada das raízes, Elesin? Não ouço resposta. Eu disse, se houver rochedos que você não pode escalar, suba na garupa de meu cavalo, esse garanhão preto sem manchas, ele o trará por cima deles. [Pausa.] Elesin Oba, uma vez você teve uma língua tão rápida quanto a baqueta de um tamboreiro. Eu disse, se você se perder, meu cão rastreará um caminho para mim. Minha memória falha, mas eu penso que você respondeu: Meus pés encontraram o caminho, Alafin.

It is the Praise-Singer's the last words Elesin hears before he commits suicide, as accusatory as those just read. This time, however, he focuses on the disastrous metaphysical results of Elesin's failure to die:

> Elesin, we placed the reins of the world in your hands yet you watched it plunge over the edge of the bitter precipice. You sat with folded arms while evil strangers tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond edge of emptiness—you muttered, there is little that one man can do, you left us floundering in a blind future. Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. But this young shoot has poured its sap into the parent stalk, and we know this is not the way of life. Our world is stumbling in the void of strangers, Elesin. (p. 63)

Using both metaphysical (the void, the bitter precipice) and physical (the stalks) metaphors, the Praise-Singer constructs an impacting discourse, especially by evoking the notion of the cycle of life. As we saw in Chapter Three, Elesin's failure to die inverted the cycle of life and his people would suffer the consequences. It is in this void that Elesin is lost when he dies. There was no redemption for him.

> Elesin, colocamos as rédeas do mundo em suas mãos e você as viu mergulharem pela beira do amargo precipício. Você se sentou com os braços cruzados enquanto estranhos maldosos extraviavam o mundo de seu curso e o destruíram para além da beirada do vazio – você murmurou, há pouco que um homem possa fazer, você nos deixou debatendo-nos em um futuro cego. Seu herdeiro pegou o fardo para si. Qual será o fim, não somos deuses para dizê-lo. Mas esse jovem broto derramou sua seiva no talo pai, e sabemos que este não é o caminho da vida. Nosso mundo cambaleia no vácuo dos estranhos, Elesin.

This painful language we find in the ending of the play, more than anything, accounts for and bears witness to what Soyinka, in the author's note, called the "play's threnodic essence"—the lament in front of a tragically ruined and unfulfilled destiny. In this fifth act, the very language suffers a shift: from the deft quickness of the beginning to the rueing slowness of the end, as slow as the Yorubas' world's bitter sliding into the abyss of transition. Just as Ogun, Olunde had to plunge into the abyss to save his drifting world—a tragic act that chaotically reversed the cycle of existence in order to annul the reversion that had already taken place with Elesin's failure to die. In *Death and the King's Horseman* this unhappy trajectory is enacted in the English language. The Italian and French translations used both brought this journey to their respective languages and hopefully my translation into Portuguese will do the same. The linguistic

springhead for all of these language is, however, undoubtedly the Yoruba language—an ancestry we all should admit and pay homage to.

CONCLUSION

The process of translation is always a process of moving within cultures, more than a process of decoding. A language brings distinctive notions, emotions and ideas within its words. And rendering these into the words of another language, another system of signs, is an act of transition not too different from the one theorized by Soyinka. A translator may not plunge into the abyss of transition, the vortex of archetypes, and straddle it as does the ritual actor, but he or she surely strides at its borders and frequently gazes at its depths.

It is a common say that a translator does not translate only languages, but actually cultures. As we have seen, in the case of *Death and the King's Horseman* this fact reaches high complexities, since there is a strange dissimilitude between language and culture. The play is written in one language, but the culture that gives it its worldview is linked to another language. The Yoruba worldview with its ideas, concepts and metaphysical notions—with its great sophistication and depth—appears through English words. The situation is even more complex because, in addition to the worldview that grounds the play, there are myriad literary genres and forms from Yoruba culture that are used in the text. This accounts, at least in part, for the liminality found in Soyinka's work.

Professor Eliana Lourenço da Lima Reis reminds us that the place wherein the language of Soyinka functions is an in-between place (entre-lugar) (REIS, 1999). Indeed, the African author working with a European language builds a different relationship with this language than does his or her European counterpart. As Professor Reis posits, "Soyinka's English—as well as that of other writers of the old colonies—*is* and at the same time *is not* the language of the metropolis" (REIS, 1999, p. 101, my translation). It is a language recomposed by the cultural experiences of a new people speaking it, and these cultural experiences are already attached to another—native—language.

On a personal note, I have to admit that this language problem—the fact of African writers writing in a language other than the one of their native group—puzzled me more than any other in studying African literature. How could the work of a writer whose imaginative and stylistic roots lie in two very different traditions—one African and one European—be addressed? And, what is more, the language in which these

writers write is the one associated with the tradition to which they tend to feel less attached.

The links between a language and a tradition are not firm to the point they cannot be separated, and a tradition may be expressed in more than one language. As I studied the works of Wole Soyinka—mainly *Death and the King's Horseman*—and those of other African writers and critics, this dynamicity of tradition became more and more evident and, although the relationship between these writers and the languages they adopted in their works remained a mysterious point to me, it became clear that they could "write Africa" in English and French. They managed to use these languages to express the picture and the elements of a world new to those languages.

We can remember, in this dissertation, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., saying that "Soyinka's greatest achievement is just this: the creation of a compelling world through language, in language, and of language" (GATES, Jr., 2003, p. 161). That language could be English or Yoruba, the world that Gates found in his words is, at least in the case of *Death and the King's Horseman*, the Yoruba world, and it comes to life with greater strength on stage since "his mastery of spoken language is necessarily reinforced by the mastery of a second language of music, and a third of the dance" (id.). The coordination of different modes of expression beyond verbal language increases the complexity of African literature and distinguishes it even further from European and American literatures. Although I did not have direct access to the music and the dances of the play, these elements were somehow included in my writing; the analyses that encompassed elements of dance and music had to rely not only on the text of the play and the author's instructions, but also on Soyinka's theorizing, in his essay "The Fourth Stage," about the articulation and the profound identity of the different artistic languages in Yoruba arts. The deployment of these different languages in the play is as important as the reflection Soyinka makes about their relationship, and they are helpful in better understanding the world that Soyinka creates through language. It is clear, in the play and in essays such as "The Fourth Stage" and "Drama and the African World-view," that the classification of the arts and their relationship to each other is not the same in Yoruba culture as in Western culture, and the reflections produced in these essays help us to understand these relationships and the thought that underlies and animates them. Soyinka's theoretical investigations about the roots of African theatre are paramount to a critical appreciation of *Death and the King's Horseman*, not only in

its technical level, but also in its philosophical level, since they offer both a theory of the theatre and a reflection on human existence itself. As Professor Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis affirms in her book, reading "The Fourth Stage" solely as a dramatic theory is improper, because it reduces its significance. "The Fourth Stage," says Professor Reis, should be viewed also as a theory of cultural contacts and an attempt to define an African identity (REIS, 1999, p. 153, my translation).

Professor Reis's view of "The Fourth Stage" is twofold, two seemingly paradoxical paths that actually galvanize each other, mutually, as the Mobius strip, the infinity symbol that Soyinka uses in his poem "Idanre"—a use that is theorized by Professor Reis in her book—to propose a more dynamic view of the circular time that we find in Yoruba metaphysics. Nothing to be confused about this seeming paradox as we have already seen it in Chapter Two in talking about Léopold Sédar Senghor's intellectual project. Self-definition—one of Soyinka's concerns—needs not and actually cannot exclude external contacts. An African identity is defined largely in—healthy—cultural contacts with other realities. Soyinka, as we have seen in some passages of this dissertation, is successful in merging his Yoruba heritage with Greek, Christian and Hindu elements. A holistic view of cultures and religions is sketched in the already mentioned essay "The Credo of Being and Nothingness" in search for greater understanding among the spiritual heritages of the world. The essay "The Fourth Stage," in its interpretation by Professor Reis, is a large step in this direction. Let us remember that, in the Introduction, Eldred Durosimi Jones is cited as saying "[n]o African writer has been more successful in making the rest of the world see humanity through African eyes" (JONES, 1972, p. 113). Soyinka's work is this highway paved by Yoruba myths and symbols where myriad traditions—religious or not—can intersect and transform each other—that highway-Mobius strip.

This dialog with other cultures and traditions in the world seems to be an aim of African culture at least since Léopold Sédar Senghor, who sought not only to unify and strengthen the identity of Black people around the world, but also to establish what could be a distinctive contribution of Black culture to a universal dialog of civilizations, encompassing each and every civilization, each and every race and their cultures in a broad, global and encompassing view of human beings and their worldviews. We have already seen that Soyinka, even in his disagreement with Senghor's main postulates, inherited his conviction that a dialog between Africa and other continents was possible

and his determination to foster such dialog. In this movement of widening the reach of African culture, they had to reinvent their relationship with their *other*: European (or Euroamerican, as Senghor would say) culture and decide on what terms it could debate with African traditional cultures—since both would be part of this new dispensation. Africa would not throw away what it had learnt from Western culture, but it would not be shackled by it.

Soyinka has found in Yoruba culture and tradition an assimilative worldview that could absorb elements from outer cultures and at the same time provide a fresh interpretive matrix with which to grasp the issues and ideas of different peoples and cultures and we would not be reduced to thinking *about* Yoruba, one could also think *Yoruba*—to address the issues posed by other cultures with a Yoruba view. And, as we have seen, he offered this Yoruba view to speak for Africa as actually the African worldview. It is with this purpose in mind that Soyinka launches himself into a literary project in search for a Yoruba—and African—worldview. This process, as we have seen, takes the shape of the four lectures and the appendix (the essay "The Fourth Stage") of the book *Myth, Literature and the African World*. The key to a unified African identity, as suggested in this book, is a metaphysical affinity for the different cultures of Africa. As Professor Reis says, "Soyinka's objective in describing the African universe through the Yoruba perspective was certainly to advocate the existence of a metaphysical system typical of Black Africa in contrast with the Western system" (REIS, 1999, p. 88).

As we have seen, this metaphysical thinking was paramount to the coming to light of *Death and the King's Horseman*. The particular situation happening in the play unfolds a complex of history and metaphysics. The more we are able to see these two dimensions as united, the more successful our reading of *Death and the King's Horseman* will be. After all, Soyinka does not sever them, but brings them together as they appear in Yoruba thought. It is not possible to say whether Soyinka has achieved his objective of providing a metaphysical system for the whole of Africa from Yoruba metaphysics or his theory will become, like Senghor's Negritude, an important landmark in Africa theory, but something apparently ossified, not living and fruitful. But it is clear that his ideas have not been exhausted and, as I said in the Introduction, it is my conviction that they can provide elements for a wider discussion about African identity and culture—something that is being sorely needed among us, Brazilians. There

is, I believe, an increasing awareness that studying Africa and its cultures is more and more leaving that room of the completely optional to inhabit that of the mandatory subjects as the evidence of its necessity comes through. This awareness is still timid, but hopefully it will continue increasing. The ideas of Wole Soyinka will be greatly welcome to a construction of an idea of African culture and identity.

And this can be said about his imaginative works—in theatre, poetry, and fictional and autobiographical prose. After all, much of his works—particularly his theatre—is suffused with the musings of his theory of the African worldview. His idea of Africa can have an experiential correlative in these works, where he brings forth his Yoruba background—which he has acquired both in his childhood and in his research—to render his African worldview solid, something we can touch, see, read, hear, perceive as movement. The Yoruba heritage in philosophy, music, oral literature, visual arts, philosophy and mysticism finds its way in Soyinka's works. It is about time we explore it.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

ACHEBE, C. *O mundo se despedaça*. Translated by Vera Queiroz da Costa e Silva. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras. 2009.

___. *The Education of a British-Protected Child.* New York: Anchor Books. 2009.

___. Things Fall Apart. In: ACHEBE, C. *The African Trilogy*. New York, London, Toronto: Everyman's Library.2010. p. 1-148.

ADEPOJU, O. V. Orisha. In: IRELE, F. A. & BIODUN, J. (ed.). *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*. V.2. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010. P. 1194-198.

ADOTEVI, S. P. *Négritude et Négrologues*. Bègles : Le Castor Astral. 1998.

AKINTOYE, S. A. *A History of the Yoruba People*. Dakar: Amalion Publishing. 2010.

AKINYEMI, A. The Place of Ṣàngó in the Yorùbá Pantheon. In: TISHKEN, J. E.; FALOLA, T.; AKINYEMI, A. (ed.) *Ṣàngó*: in Africa and the African Diaspora. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2009. p. 23-43

ANONYMOUS. *Meditação sobre os 22 arcanos maiores do Tarô*. Translated by Benôni Lemos. São Paulo: Paulus. 2014.

APPIAH, K. A. *In my Father's House:* Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1992.

AWOLALU, J. O. *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*. New York: Athelia Henrietta Press. 2001.

AWOONOR, K. *Until the Morning After:* Collected Poems 1963-1985. New York: Greenfield Review Press. 1987.

BAMUNOBA, Y. K. La idea de la vida Africana. In: ADOUKONOU, B.; BAMUNOBA, Y. K. *La muerte en la vida africana.* Translated by C. A. Caranci. Barcelona: Serbal/Unesco. 1984. p. 7-108.

BARBER, K. *I Could Speak until Tomorrow:* Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian University Press. 1991

BARNES, S. T. The Many Faces of Ogun. In: BARNES, S. T. (ed.). *Africa's Ogun:* Old World and New. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1997. p. 1-26.

BAUDIN, P. *Fetichism and Fetich Worshippers*. Translated by Miss M. Mahon. New York, Cincinnati and St. Louis: Benziger Brothers, Printers to the Holy Apostolic See. 1885.

BEIER, U. *Yoruba Poetry*. London: Cambridge University Press. London. 1970.

BUSH, D. *English Poetry*. London: Methuen & CO LTD. 1968.

CALDAS AULETE. *Dicionário contemporâneo da língua portuguesa.* V. IV. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Delta S. A. 1970. p. 2955.

DAVID, M. T. Yoruba Heritage and a Christian Home. In: LINDFORS, B.; KOTHANDARAMAN, B (eds.). *The Writer as Myth-Maker:* South-Asian Perspectives on Wole Soyinka. Trenton and Asmara: African World Press. 2004. p. 3-26.

DENNETT, R. E. *Nigerian Studies.* MacMillan and Co. Limited. London. 1910.

DORIS, D. T. *Vigilant Things:* On Thieves, Yoruba Anti-Aesthetics, and the Strange Fate of Ordinary Objects in Nigeria. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. 2011.

DREWAL, J. H.; DREWAL, M. *Gẹlẹdẹ:* Art and Female Power among the Yoruba. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1990.

DREWAL, H. J.; PEMBERTON III, J.; ABIODUN, R. The Yoruba World. In: DREWAL, H. J.; PEMBERTON III, J.; ABIODUN, R. *Yoruba*: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought. New York: The Center for African Art. 1995. p. 13-44.

DREWAL, M. T. *Yoruba Ritual:* Performers, Play, Agency. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1992.

ELIADE, M. *Aspects du Mythe*. Editions Gallimard. Paris. 1963.

___. *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes :* Naissances mystiques. Paris : Éditions Gallimard. 2015.

___. *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*. Paris : Éditions Gallimard. 1969.

___. *Tratado de história das religiões*. (Translated by Fernando Tomaz and Natália Nunes). São Paulo: Editora WMF Martins Fontes Ltda. 2010.

ELIOT, T. S. Tradition and the Individual Talent. In: KERMODE, F. (Ed.). *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux. 1975

ELLIS, A. B. *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa*. Oosterhout: Anthropological Publications. 1970.

ESSLIN, M. Two Nigerian Playwrights: Wole Soyinka; J. P. Clark. In: BEIER, U. (ed.) *Introduction to African Literature.* London: Longman Group Limited. 1980. p. 281-288.

FAGUNWA, D. O. *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*. Translated by Wole Soyinka. San Francisco: City Lights. 1982.

FALOLA, T. Èṣù: The God withouth Boundaries. In: In: FALOLA, T (Ed.). *Èṣù*: Yoruba God, Power and the Imaginative Frontiers. Durham: Carolina Academic Press. 2013. p. 3-37.

___. Power, Status and Influence of Yorùbá Chiefs in Historical Perspective. In: FALOLA, T. & GENOVA, A. *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press. 2006. p. 161-176.

___. The Yorùbá Nation. In: FALOLA, T. & GENOVA, A. *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press. 2006. p. 29-48.

FALOLA, T. & HEATON, M. A History of Nigeria. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010.

FARROW, S. S. Faith, Fancies and Fetish or Yoruba Paganism. Athelia Henrietta Press. New York. 1996

FIOUPOU, C. *La route*: réalité et représentation dans l'oeuvre de Wole Soyinka. Amsterdan and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B. V. 1994

FRASER, R. *West African Poetry*: A Critical History. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2001.

FROBENIUS, L. *Histoire de la Civilisation Africaine*. Translated by D. H. Back and D. Ermont. Paris: Gallimard. 1936.

___. *La cultura como ser viviente*. Translated by Máximo José Kahn. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A. 1934

___. *Mythologie de l'Atlantide*. Translated by F. Gidon. Paris: Payot. 1949.

FUNK & WAGNALLS. *Standard Dictionary of the English Language*: International Edition. New York: Funk & Wagnalls. 1969. V. 1. p. 1205.

GATES, JR., H. L. Being, Will and the Semantics of Death. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman* – A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. 155-164.

GEORGE, O. Tragedy, Mimicry, and "The African World". In: OLANIYAN, T., QUAYSON, A. (ed.). *African Literature:* – An Anthology of Criticism and Theory. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. p. 207-222.

GÉRARD, A.S. Sub-Saharan Africa's Literary History in a Nutshell. In: OLANIYAN, T., QUAYSON, A. (ed.). *African Literature:* – An Anthology of Criticism and Theory. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. p.16-21.

GIKANDI, S. Introduction. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. vii-xxiv.

GOODWIN, K. *Understanding African Poetry:* A Study of Ten Poets. London, Ibadan and Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1982.

GULLAR, F. *Preconceito Cultural.* Retrieved from: http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/ilustrada/12790-preconceito-cultural.shtml. Access in June 25 2018.

HEPBURN, J. Ritual Closure in *Death and the King's Horseman*. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. 177-187.

HUIZINGA, J. *Homo ludens*. Translated by João Paulo Monteiro. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva. 2007.

IDOWU, E. B. *Olódùmarè* – God in Yoruba Belief. New York: African Tree Press. 1994.

INSTITUTO ANTÔNIO HOUAISS. *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa*. Editora Objetiva. Rio de Janeiro. 2001. p. 2069.

IRELE, F. A. African Literature and the Language Question. In: IRELE, F. A. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1990. p. 43-65.

___. *The African Imagination*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 2001.

___. *The Negritude Moment*. Trenton: Africa World Press. 2011.

___. Tradition and the Yoruba Writer. In: IRELE, F. A. *The African Experience in Literature and Ideolog*y. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1990. p. 174-197.

IZEVBAYE, D.S. Mediation in Soyinka: The Case of the King's Horseman. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. 141-151.

JAHN, J. *Las Literaturas Neoafricanas.* Translated by Daniel Romero. Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama. 1971.

___. *Muntu :* l΄homme africain et la cuolture néo-africain. Translated by Brian de Martinoir. Paris: Éditions du Seuil. 1961.

JAIN, J. The Unfolding of a Text : *Death and the King's Horseman*. In: LINDFORS, B.; KOTHANDARAMAN, B (eds.). *The Writer as Myth-Maker:* South-Asian

Perspectives on Wole Soyinka. Trenton and Asmara: African World Press. 2004. p. 103-112.

JEYIFO, B. Ideology and Tragedy. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p.164-171.

___. *Wole Soyinka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2009.

JOHNSON, S. *The History of the Yorubas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010.

JONES, E.D. Death and the King's Horseman. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman*: A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. 151-154.

___. The Essential Soyinka. In: KING. B. *Introduction to Nigerian Literature.* New York: Africana Publishing Corporation. 1972. p.113-134.

KAGAME, A. Aperception empirique du temps et conception de l'histoire dans la pensé bantu. In: RICOUER, P. et al. *Les cultures et les temps*. Paris: Payot/Unesco. 1975. p. 103-133.

KATRAK, H. K. *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy:* A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice. New York, Westport and London: Greenwood Press. 1986.

LAWAL, B. *The Gẹ̀lẹ̀dé Spectacle* – Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture. Washington: University of Washington Press. 1996.

LÉVY-BRUHL, L. *La mentalité primitive*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. 1947.

___. *Les Fonctions mentales dans les Societés inferieures*. Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan. 1928.

LUCAS, J. O. *The Religion of the Yorubas*. Lagos: C. M. S. Bookshop. 1948.

MACEBUH, S. Poetics and the Mythic Imagination. In: JEYIFO, B. (Ed.*) Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*: Freedom and Complexity. 2001. p. 27-40.

MELETINSKI, E. M. *Os Arquétipos Literários*. Translated by Aurora, Fornoni, Bernardini, Homero Freitas de Andrade, Arlete Cavaliere. Cotia: Ateliê Editorial. 2015.

MOORE, G. Soyinka's New Play. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. 113-114.

___. *Wole Soyinka.* Ibadan: Evans Brothers Limited. 1978.

MUDIMBE, V. Y. African Literature: Myth or Reality? In: OLANIYAN, T.; QUAYSON, A. (ed.). *African Literature:* An Anthology of Criticism and Theory. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2011. p.60-64.

___. T*he Invention of Africa*: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1988.

OJAIDE, T. *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited. 1994.

OSITOLA, K. Extract from an Interview. In: DREWAL, M. T. *Yoruba Ritual*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1992. p. 31-32.

OSUNDARE, N. Wole Soyinka and the Atunda Ideal: A Reading of Soyinka's Poetry. In: JEYIFO, B. (Ed.) *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*: Freedom and Complexity. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 2001. p. 187-200.

OXFORD DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003. P. 1699.

PALMIÉ, S. *O trabalho cultural da globalização iorubá*. Retrieved from: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0100-85872007000100005 Access in: June 6 2018.

PEMBERTON III, J. The Oyo Empire. In: DREWAL, H. J.; PEMBERTON III, J.; ABIODUN, R. *Yoruba:* Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought. New York: The Center for African Art. 1995. p. 147-187.

REIS, E. L. L. *Pós-colonialismo, identidade e mestiçagem cultural*: a literatura de Wole Soyinka. Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará.1999.

___. O humor além do riso fácil: as sátiras políticas de Wole Soyinka. In: *Ipotesi*, Juiz de Fora, v. 14, n. 2, p. 53-71, jul./dez. 2010.

RICHARDS, D. The Masks of Language. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. 196-207.

RISÉRIO, A. *Oriki Orixá*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva. 1996.

ROHMER, M. Wole Soyinka's 'Death and the King's Horseman,' Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p. 121-138.

SANTOS, J. E. & SANTOS, D. M. *Èṣù*. Salvador: Editora Corrúpio. 2014.

SELLERS, A.; TISHKEN, J. E. The Place of Èṣù in the Yorùbá Pantheon. In: FALOLA, T (Ed.). *Èṣù*: Yoruba God, Power and the Imaginative Frontiers. Durham: Carolina Academic Press. 2013. p. 41-55.

SENGHOR, L. S. Ce que l'homme noir apporte. In : *Liberté 1 : Negritude et Humanisme*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. 1964. p. 22-38.

___. Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source. In : SENGHOR, L. S. *Oeuvre Poétique*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. 1990. p. 160-172.

___. De la Négritude. In : *Liberté 5 :* Dialogue des cultures. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. 1993. p. 14-26.

___. Introduction. In : *Liberté 1 : Negritude et Humanisme*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. 1964. p. 7-9.

___. Le français, langue de culture. In : *Liberté 1 : Negritude et Humanisme*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. 1964. p. 358-363.

___. L'esthétique Négro-Africaine. In : *Liberté 1 : Négritude et civilisation de l'universel*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. 1964. p. 90-101.

___. Qu'est-ce que la Négritude ? In : *Liberté 3 : Negritude et Humanisme*. Paris : Éditions du Seuil. 1977.

SILVA, V. F. O ser "in-fusivo". In: SILVA, V. F. *Obras completas.* São Paulo: É Realizações. 2010. p. 121-128.

SMITH, R. Kingdoms of the Yoruba. Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press. 1988.

SOYINKA, W. A Dance of the Forests. In: SOYINKA, W. *Collected Plays 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1973. p. 1-77.

___. *A Shuttle in the Crypt*. London: Rex Collins / Eyre Methuen. 1972.

___. *Aké*: The Years of Childhood. New York: Vintage International Edition. 1989.

___. Conversation with Jane Wilkinson. In: JEYIFO, B (Ed.). *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*. 2001. Jackson: Mississippi University Press. p. 143-166.

___. Death and the King's Horseman. In: GIKANDI, S. (ed.) *Death and the King's Horseman:* A Norton Critical Edition. New York & London: W. W. Norton and Company. 2003. p.3-63.

___. Drama and the African World-View. In: SOYINKA, W. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. p. 37-60.

___. From a Common Back Cloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image. In: SOYINKA, W. *Art, Dialogue and Outrage.* Edited by Biodun Jeyifo. New York: Pantheon Books. 1993. p. 7-14.

___. *Idanre and Other Poems*. New York: Hill and Wang. 1987.

___. Ideology and the Social Vision (2): The Secular Factor. In: SOYINKA, W. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. p. 97-139.

___. Introduction. In: SOYINKA, W. *Poems of Black Africa*. New York: Hill and Wang. 1975.

___. Kongi's Harvest. In: SOYINKA, W. *Collected Plays 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1974. p. 59-142.

___. L. S. Senghor and Negritude : *J'accuse, mais, je pardonne*. In: SOYINKA, W. *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. p. 93-144.

___. *La Mort et l'écuyer du roi.* Translated by Thierry Dubost. Hatier. Paris. 1986.

___. La morte e il cavaliere del re. In: SOYINKA, W. *Le Opere*. (Translated by Graziella Bellini). Firenze: Utet. 1995. p.453-546.

___. Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype. In: SOYINKA, W. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. p. 1-36.

___. Negritude and the Gods of Equity. In: SOYINKA, W. *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999. p. 145-194.

___. *Ogun Abibimañ*. London: Rex Collins. 1980.

___. Preface. In: SOYINKA, W. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. p. vii-xii.

___. The Credo of Being and Nothingness. In: SOYINKA, W. *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*. Edited by Biodun Jeyifo. New York: Pantheon Books. 1993. p. 231-247.

___. The Fourth Stage. In: SOYINKA, W. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2005. p. 140-160.

___. The Road. In: SOYINKA, W. *Collected Plays 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1973. p. 147-232.

___. The Strong Breed. In: SOYINKA, W. *Collected Plays 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1973. p. 113-146.

___. The Tolerant Gods. In: OLUPONA, J. K.; REY, T. *Òrìsà Devotion as World Religion.* Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press. 2008. p. 31-50.

___. The Writer in a Modern African State. In: SOYINKA, W. *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*. Edited by Biodun Jeyifo. New York: Pantheon Books. 1993. p. 15-26.

___. Theatre in African Traditional Cultures: Survival Patterns. In: SOYINKA, W. *Art, Dialogue and Outrage.* Edited by Biodun Jeyifo. New York: Pantheon Books. 1993. p.134-146.

___. Wole Soyinka in Stockholm. In: JEYIFO, B (ed.). *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*. 2001. Jackson: Mississippi University Press. p. 138-142.

___. Wole Soyinka on "Identity." In: JEYIFO, B (ed.). *Conversations with Wole Soyinka*. 2001. Jackson: Mississippi University Press. p. 167-181.

___. *You Must Set Forth at Dawn.* New York: Random House. 2006.

THIONG'O, N. W. The Language of African Literature. In: OLANIYAN, T.; QUAYSON, A. (ed.). *African Literature* – An Anthology of Criticism and Theory. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2011. p. 285-306.

TISHKEN, J. E.; FALOLA, T.; AKINYEMI, A. Introduction. In: TISHKEN, J. E.; FALOLA, T.; AKINYEMI, A. (ed.) *Ṣàngó*: in Africa and the African Diaspora. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 2009.

TUTUOLA, A. *O bebedor de vinho de palmeira*. Translated by Eliane Fontenelle. São Paulo: Círculo do Livro S. A. undated.

___. The Palm-Wine Drinkard. In: TUTUOLA, A. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. New York: Grove Press. 1994.

VAN GENNEP, A. *The Rites of Passage:* A Study of Cultural Celebrations. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle l. Caffee. Illinois: The University of Chicago Press. 1960.

VERGER, P. *Notas sobre o Culto aos Orixás e Voduns*. Translated by Carlos Eugênio Marcondes Moura. São Paulo: Edusp. 2000.

___. Grandeza e Decadência do Culto das *Ìyàmi Ọ̀ṣòrọ̀nga*. In: MOURA, C. E. M. (Org.) *As senhoras do pássaro da noite*. São Paulo: Axis Mundi Editora and Edusp. 2003. p. 13-71.

VERNANT, J. P. *L'univers, les dieux, les hommes* : Vernant reconte les mythes. Paris: Éditions du Seuil. 1999.

VOGEL, S. Foreword. In: DREWAL, H. J.; PEMBERTON III, J.; ABIODUN, R. *Yoruba:* Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought. New York: The Center for African Art. 1995. p. 10.

WALI, O. The Dead End of African Literature? In: OLANIYAN, T.; QUAYSON, A. (ed.). *African Literature:* An Anthology of Criticism and Theory. Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2011. p. 281-284.

WILKINSON, N. Demoke's Choice in *A Dance of the Forests*. In: GIBBS, J. *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka.* Washington D. C.: Three Continents Press, Inc. 1980. p. 69-73.