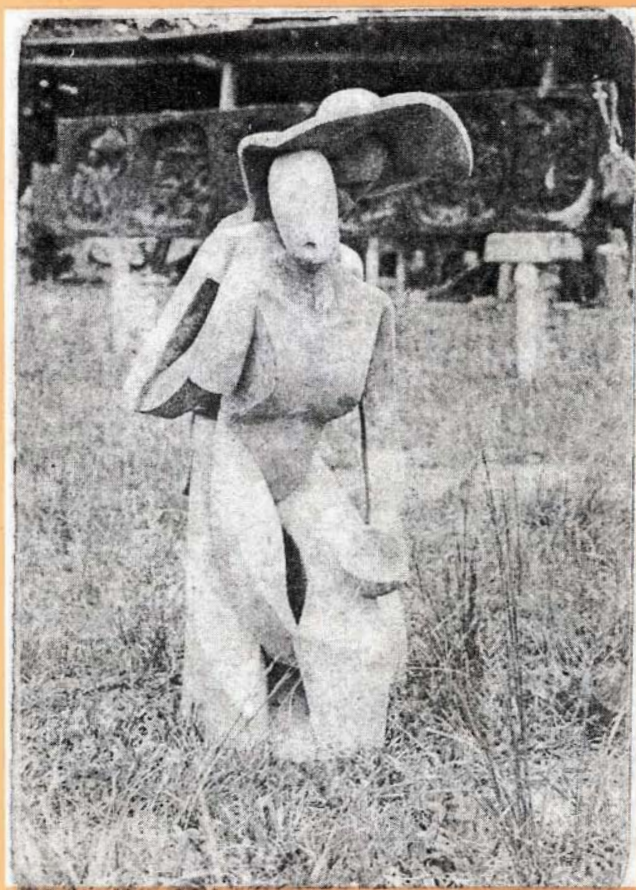




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IJE UDE

Dear Daddy

It is a full moon.
And from the other side of the world,
I hear your loneliness.

Each absence is a whip
across our bare back.
Each lie stings like salt
on fresh wounds.

I would have liked you
to gather me into your arms and comfort me
like wind flowing over sand

I would have liked you
to carry me along
gently, and watch me
settle into my
SELF

I wish you peace:
the sudden eruption of truth.

I'll wait patiently
until you are covered in its lava
and flow back into our lives.
You are my soul's mate.
Without you
my heart will always be lonely.

Aisha

Dear Aisha,
Spread your fragile wings
and step into the dark

Our parents
wrapped us in courage,
then let us fall from their arms
into the sky.

Now you're dropping, drifting,
drowning, dizzy, dreary and
depressed.

You're a clay of strength
sculpted with love
and fear is fighting to mold you.

Remember my big head
in your little lap,
you playing with my hair?
Mommy saying I was too heavy
but you just pulling me near?

The sun is within you.
Your doubt is a passing cloud.
You are perfect and have
all that you can't do without.

Your heart is your soul's mouth.
Feed it everyday.

Dream and write, pray and sing.
Dance your fears away.

Your mind is your heart's eye.
Sharpen it with silence.
Listen to the love inside you.
It'll protect you from violence.

Your will is your strength's voice.
Speak it through your goals.
Achieve, reflect, accept.
Celebration revives our souls.

Start to fly
through life's maze of tests.
Only your wings can create your happiness.

Aisha
my perfect butterfly,
spread your wings gently.
Let your soul be free.

N F INYAMA**From the Comical to the Sinister: Charlatanry as Theme in
Wole Soyinka's Writing**

INTRODUCTION

I start this essay with an assertion. It seems to me that after a writer has produced a number of works, or has practised his craft for a reasonable length of time, certain patterns or elements begin to reappear from one text to another. These may be in the form of character, theme, symbol, setting, and so on. Just as most writers develop individual or peculiar styles over time, a particular theme, symbol, or character may continue to resurface in a writer's successive productions, even if with varying degrees of emphasis, elaboration, or disguise.

Thus, for Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the nationalist struggle in Kenya, with the betrayals which accompanied it, remains a constant theme in his works, even in those that deal with the post-independence era. The theme of power and its manipulation at the domestic, clan and national levels runs through most of the works of Achebe. Apartheid, of course, forms the core of Dennis Brutus's writing. Ayi Kwei Armah's preoccupation with impotent men in a morally and physically dessicated and oppressive society does not begin to resolve itself until we are taken back to a mythical past in *2000 seasons* where a band of young patriots begins a revolutionary struggle against the monsters in their society. In other words, the worlds of *The Beautiful Ones* and *Fragments* reappear in a different guise in *2000 Seasons*, but the impotence of the characters in the two earlier novels is overcome in the latter novel.

It would appear that many a writer starts his career with a thematic blueprint, which controls his craft from one work to another. From this creative blueprint several narrative and thematic configurations may emerge, but somehow there will be one of them—symbol, character, et cetera—which will always be present, like a fingerprint, with varying levels of emphasis or prominence. To a large extent, the author's perception of his society is embedded in this blueprint, as well as any transformations, which may occur in this initial perception.

But what I have said so far about thematic or symbolic recurrence is not peculiar to African writers. It occurs in the works of European writers, and writers from other parts of the world. Charles Dickens, for instance, returns to the theme of threatened and oppressed children again and again. D.H. Lawrence's works consistently delve into private myths of fecund forces in nature, the problem of wife—husband tensions, especially in matters of sex, and the problem of wife and mother possessiveness. Hemingway's heroes are almost always lonely men at the core, facing Herculean challenges.

There seems also to exist in a writer's creative progress a certain evolutionary process in his perception of society. The initial creative germ seems to undergo a mutation that ultimately colours his perception of characters and events in his world. I think that in Wole Soyinka's case, the theme that appears to be permanent or prevalent in his works is charlatanism or charlatany, and this element of his writing has gone through mutations of perception and reconfigurations, producing different brands of the charlatan: the comic and the sinister.

DEFINITION AND POSSIBLE SOURCE OF SOYINKA'S PERCEPTION OF CHARLATANISM:

'Charlatany' or "Charlatanism" is defined as a pretension to ability, knowledge, or power which a person does not possess. This means that the charlatan is a mountebank, a quack, a masker of his real intentions in a given situation, one who hides or

disguises his real personality, usually with negative goals or aims. Charlatans not only exist in Soyinka's works, but their individual personalities have coloured the thrust of the thematic development of these works. Ultimately, they reflect Soyinka's progressively darkening perception of the human being, or the human society.

If, as psychologists have said, our behaviours in later life are often coloured or even determined by early childhood experiences, or even a single significant experience, then it might be possible to locate the root of Soyinka's ability to see beyond the facade to the essential core of an individual's real make-up. I admit the tenuousness of this speculation, but in *Ake*, the first part of his autobiography, Soyinka recounts this almost surrealistic experience:

Bishops Court, of Upper Parsonage is no more. Bishop Ajayi Crowther would sometimes emerge from the cluster of hydrangea and bougainvillea, a gnomish face with popping eyes whose formal photograph had first stared at us from the frontispiece of his life history. He had lived, the teacher said, in Bishops Court and from that moment he peered out from among the creeping plants whenever I passed by the house on an errand to our Great Aunt, Mrs Lijadu.... the Bishop sat, silently, on the bench beneath the wooden porch over the entrance, his robes twined through and through with the lengthening tendrils of the bougainvillea. I moved closer when his eyes turned to sockets. My mind wondered then to another photograph in which he wore a clerical suit with waistcoat and I wondered what he really kept at the end of the silver chain that vanished into the pocket. He grinned and said, come nearer, I'll show you. As I moved towards the porch he drew on the watch chain until he had lifted out a

wholly round pocket-watch that gleamed of solid silver. He pressed a button and the lid opened, revealing, not the glass and the face-dial but a deep cloud-filled space. Then he winked one and it fell from his face into the bowl on the watch. He winked the other and this joined its partner in the watch. He snapped back the lid, nodded again and his head went backward till the whitened cheekbones were exposed. Then he stood up and, tucking the watch back into the waistcoat pocket, moved a step towards me. I fled homewards. (4-5)

It seems to me that this half-comical and surrealistic transformation would have left the child with an indelible impression regarding what is real and what is visible on the surface. Is it not possible that from this half-imagine experience Soyinka might have come to see the human person as having a dual quality, the real and the mask which covers it? In other words, someone might choose to put on a different face to hide his real nature—that is, become a charlatan in a negative context.

Brands of Charlatantry:

In creating his charlatans Soyinka's craft seems to have undergone an evolution, starting off with the comical charlatan whom he presents with an amused tolerance, and transiting to the sinister charlatan whose criminal traits and actions he presents from a darkening perspective.

Comical Charlatantry:

This is the first stage in Soyinka's formulation and presentation of his gallery of charlatan characters. By comical charlatantry I am referring to the comical image of a character like Lakunle in *The Lion and the Jewel*. He is the out-of-place teacher in Ilujinle. In a narrow sense, he is not the "pure" charlatan, since he cannot be

accused of having an ulterior *harmful* motive. But he is ill-suited to the environment in which he operates.

However, that is as much as could be said in his favour. Otherwise, he has all the essential markings of a charlatan, especially in his efforts to hide or camouflage his handicaps, to cover up. His dreams are beyond his means, but he pretends to have the social and material wherewithal to attain them. He fantasizes about a glamorous city life with Sidi, and makes claims to a modernity he has not experienced, let alone understood. All his claims and strategies are a subterfuge, designed to dodge Sidi's demand or insistence that he pay the bride price if he must have her. The bride price is beyond Lakunle's means, but he hides this pecuniary inadequacy in a fake outrage at the idea of paying money for a wife. It is a custom he considers "Savage... barbaric, out-dated/Rejected, denounced, accused/Excommunicated, archaic, degrading/Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant/Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable" (7).

Lakunle's attempts to hoodwink Sidi by overwhelming her with words is not helped by his inconsistency of character—one moment the amorous wooer, the next the frustrated abuser of the object of his love. Furthermore, if we understand that the word "charlatan" is influenced by the word "ciarlare", Italian for "to prate" or chatter, then we can further appreciate the charlatan-like verbosity of Lakunle, the "fast talk" of the confidence trickster or con man.

Lakunle's "learned" prating is pitched against the dignified idioms of the Bale's speech which so mesmerize Sidi that she does not know when she yields to his amorous advances, and in the end becomes his latest bride. Lakunle is indeed a charlatan of a type, in the sense that he falsely claims to have experiences and knowledge of far-away customs, places and habits, and tries to use this pretence to bluff his way through the town. His efforts yield him nothing in the end; they only make him the laughing stock of the surrounding district, where he is known as "the madman of Ilujinle", according to Sidi, who also says that all he

has are his "fine airs and little sense" (3). Furthermore, Lakunle's "modernity" is undercut by his ill-matched "modern" European mode of dressing—"Old style English suit, thread-bare but not ragged ... a size too small ... twenty-three-inch-bottom trousers, and blanco-white tennis shoes".(1).

However, Soyinka deliberately presents Lakunle in this comical light because, in the end, he is a harmless caricature, and even has potentials for reformation and redemption from his ill-imagined modernity. In the end, Soyinka symbolically reintegrates him into the real world of Ilujinle when Lakunle joins the bridal dance that leads Sidi to the Bale. Lakunle forgets his waltzes and foxtrots and succumbs to the exuberant rhythms of the "gan-gan", behind another bottom-flaunting village belle.

What I have said in the preceding paragraph in terms of authorial attitude could apply to Brother Jero in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. The play is not an indictment of prophecy or religion but an amused look at religious credulity and hypocrisy. Like Moliere's *Tartuffe* which it has frequently been compared to, *The Trials* is a study of the ways of a religious hypocrite and charlatan. But there does exist a subtle distinction between *Tartuffe* and *Jero*, and that is in the underlying humour in the presentation of the one (*Jero*), and the almost total absence of it in the presentation of the other (*Tartuffe*).

Tartuffe is a thoroughly sinister character, with a well-designed criminal goal, not to talk of his notorious criminal past which he cloaks in fake piety. *Jero*, on the other hand, and in spite of his self-confessed skill at manipulative "prophecy" is essentially a somewhat clever but amiable practitioner on the gullibility of his followers, whom he calls "customers". Religion is a tool for making his daily bread, but his real genius lies not in actual schemes to inflict harm (like *Tartuffe*), but in his ability to scheme himself out of sticky situations. So, he says in *Jero's Metamorphosis*, he has "but little gifts" but knows ... how to "make the most of them"(48).

Soyinka's projection of *Jero* as a genial rogue—as a

"showman" as Enekwe calls him—rather than as an evil plotter ameliorates the reader's anger or disgust with the prophet's manipulating propensities. Jero is not the comical figure we see in *Lakunle*, but the pervading humour of the play—in spite of the doom-laden curses of Jero's mentor, the Old Prophet—underscores the author's attitude to an perception of the trickeries of Jero, and the pretensions of an ill-nurtured modernist in the shape of *Lakunle*. Essentially, this authorial attitude is one of good humoured accommodation or toleration, not only because these characters lack genuine qualities of evil, but also because society will always have them; and furthermore, because their brand of charlatany is not the type that could harm the larger community at its core.

It does not appear to me that authorial intention favours the extermination of Jero-type charlatans, even though they are not to be encouraged. They will always be a feature of the social environment, especially as long as there exist characters like Chume and others whose credulity will remain common fodder for the skilled trickster. It is here that Enekwe's insightful article "Soyinka's Brother Jero As Narrator, Character and Showman" seems to judge Jero too harshly when he concludes that "... we can now see him as someone who is not only evil, but glories in his viciousness". I would rather see Brother Jero as someone who see's life as a game of wits where an occasional hard tackle will yield a dividend, without hurting the opponent too severely or permanently.

I shall briefly point out one more example of this kind of comical/religious charlatan, and that is the albino who calls himself Lazarus in *The Interpreters*. Again, this is someone who has a certain charisma, like Jero; and again like Jero, he deploys it for holding people in religious thrall. His claims to a resurrection, like the biblical Lazarus, are palpably false and the Interpreters who visit his church are not deceived, in spite of his valiant efforts to convince them, and in spite of his tedious sermon. His spiritual claims over the young thief whom he rescued at some point in the story do not stand up to scrutiny.

The spiritual transformation he says he has effected in the boy does not exist because the youth's problem does not lie in a lack of spirituality but in a lack of proper identification with the surrounding environment. He is only a step away from acute schizophrenia, and society for him is not to be felt in spiritual terms but in terms of its exploitable potentials via thievery. Lazarus is, of course, aware of this; he is equally aware of the falseness of his claim to resurrection, but he has a mission to mesmerize his congregation and his most powerful tool is to lay claim to a non-existent mystical religious power.

From *the Interpreters* again, we will extract another shade of charlatan—the academic type. He is Professor Oguazor. He and his wife labour so hard at being genteel that they are an embarrassment to some of the people in the university where they function. Professor Oguazor is remarkably fatuous. Although we are not told that Oguazor is an intellectual fraud, he is a moral masquerader. Professor Oguazor pontificates on the moral ('meral') lapses of the young students, casting himself as a moral censor and an upholder of moral propriety—all of which is a mask over his own moral failings, for he has an illegitimate daughter by his maid whom he has hidden in a far-away school in England—"the plastic apple of his eye", as Soyinka describes the child.

Professor Oguazor's false public image finds symbolic expression in the plastic flora with which his house is festooned, and in his strange accent—"herve" (have), "meral terpitude" (moral turpitude) 'bet' (but) 'fend' (fond), 'chandeliers' (chandeliers), 'prectical'; and his darling wife is 'Ceroline' (Caroline).

The Interpreters is actually replete with different sorts of charlatans presented with different degrees of elaboration: Chief Winsala, Sir Derinola, Ayo Faseyi, Dr Lumoye, etc. all wearing different masks over their real selves.

In spite of its generally moody tone, the charlatans of the novel are not yet evil enough to be guillotined. They are still closer to Jero and Lakunle in their comic configurations. But at

the same time the darkening of Soyinka's perception of the essence of charlatantry has begun.

Sinister Charlatantry:

Sinister charlatanism is different from comical charlatanism. As I have already stated, comical charlatantry is embedded in easily discernible humour. It provokes ready laughter, or merely provokes mild contempt from the reader. But there is no conviction of absolute evil. Sinister charlatanism, on the other hand, is deliberately scheming, negatively motivated, and ultimately evil.

My first example of the sinister charlatan is Professor in *The Road*. Petty forger, apostate, and petty thief, he has found accommodation among the denizens of the motor park whom he manipulates and confuses with his false mystique. He makes pretence to secret quest—the quest for what he calls “the word,” a nebulous concept whose meaning eludes his companions and to an extent, even the reader of the play. Wrapped in his cunning mystique, Professor is able to live off these characters in various ways, but principally by parasiting on the proceeds of the “Aksident Store” which they run at the motor park.

But in spite of his outdated outfit and his somewhat comical appearance, one can still feel the sinister essence of the character as soon as he appears. His opening speech immediately points to what the readers shall witness later on: the ability to mask the ordinary or the commonplace in mysterious verbiage, the true mark of the charlatan.

Professor is truly sinister, both in words and action. The driving licences which he forges put unqualified drivers on the road; and this in turn increases the rate of accidents and fatalities on the roads. The crashed vehicles are then cannibalised by his companions to stock their “Aksident” store which nourishes Professor and his crowd. Professor is a necrophilist, a lover and creator of death; in fact, one of the characters complains of his habit of pulling up road signs. Indeed, when he first appears he

is carrying a road sign with the word BEND on it. Had he pulled it off to generate an accident? Isn't the ambiguity of the store's name deliberate? Is it a store where fake parts are sold in order to create accidents, or one from which parts could be bought for vehicles that have had accidents? Or further still, is it a store that stays open through the cannibalisation of parts of vehicles involved in planned accidents?

The Road is generally a dark play, and coming after *The Lion and the Jewel* ('63) and *Jero* ('64) and in the same year as *The Interpreters* ('65), we can see the shift from the tolerant humour of the earlier plays to the now darkening perception of charlatanry by the author. In *The Road*, the consciousness of death and near-death incidents is all-pervading, and its "lighter moments" are mostly recollections of deaths from the past.

The most memorable character in the play is also the most dangerous and sinister. The comic limit in this play is professor's physical appearance which, in fact, is a disguise for the evil quest he pursues. Apart from that, he knows that he is a manipulator and that his mystique is a deliberately nurtured cover for his pretence to the possession of a non-existent deep and mysterious knowledge and power. One is therefore not surprised that death should come his way.

The death of Professor is for me the first concrete indicator of Soyinka's new perception and re-evaluation of charlatanism. The toleration which he grants Jero, Lakunle, and even Oguazor and his type in *The Interpreter*, would be inappropriate for Professor who has an essentially evil core. Mere comicality would be inadequate a label for his sinister nature. If Jero makes a living through laughable tricks on his "customers", Professor is a ghoul who schemes deaths in order to live.

The other brand of sinister charlatanism is in the political sphere, and this is preeminently demonstrated in *Kongi's Harvest*. Kongi is not just a dictator and egomaniac but an image faker. He attempts to hide his real nature through the creation of a contrary image. The typical heavy-handed ways of the

megalomaniac need not concern us here. What is of interest is the fact of Kongi's efforts to project a fraudulent image of himself to the world. Kongi has brought disharmony and disaffection into Isma, but he has instructed his Reformed Aweri Fraternity to project him as the source of harmony. Harmony will be the theme of the next five year [non] development plan.

An international photographer has "managed" to make his way to Kongi's mountain retreat in spite of 'strict orders" to allow no one up there where the leader is "meditating". He will take photographs of Kongi in various poses and these will be appropriately labeled and published worldwide:

— A Leader's Temptation. — Agony on the Mountains — The Loneliness of the Pure — A Saint at Twilight — The Spirit of the Harvest.... The Face of Benevolence The Giver of Life. (39).

Of course, the years are to be dated after him from henceforth. Kongi wants to be seen as a leader of the people, but he is only a leader in the dictatorial sense, leading a band of self-serving sycophants and time-servers in the oppression of the citizenry. His distance—spiritual or otherwise—is symbolised by his retreat to the mountains from where he determines the cruel fate of those who stand in his way, and schemes the consolidation of all power.

Again, fake mystification is a tool in sustaining this brand of charlatantry. By withdrawing from the people, Kongi's real nature and intentions can only be speculated about. No one must know the "Leader's" real intentions. That is the mystique of power, and no one should be allowed to see behind this sinister, and negative mask. Kongi's transformation into what he is at present was deliberate, not accidental. The choice between being "a benevolent father of the nation" and being the megalomaniac he is at present was his, and he chose the later. As Segi says, "Kongi was a great man, and I loved him" (45). In

In the USA.
Where entrance to Negroes,
No matter how sanctified,
Is denied,
Where race, not religion,
Is glorified.
But say it—
You may be
Crucified.

A similar point is made in "Ku Klux" which closes:

A Klansman said, "Nigger,
Look me in the face—
And tell me you believe in
The great white race."

While humour is often the cachet of Hughes' work there is no humour in "Christ in Alabama", where he associates the lynchings of black men with the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ. The tone is cutting and accusing both the unknown power and the racist society:

Christ is a nigger
Beaten and black
Oh, bare your back!
Mary is His mother:
Mammy of the South
Silence your mouth.
God is His Father
White Master above
Grant Him your love.
Most holy bastard
Of the bleeding mouth,
Nigger Christ
On the cross

other words, what Kongi is now is a negative copy of what he probably was before; from being a great man he has become a perverse dictator and oppressor by his own choice.

It is in this perversion that we find the link between *Kongi's Harvest* and *Madmen and Specialists*. Again, someone has chosen to abjure what is good in order to wear a different mask and serve an empty but ruinous ideology. Dr Bero was a doctor before he joined the military mafia. But within a short time, he mutates into a perverse worshiper and advocate of "AS". "As" is the same thing as the 'Ism' of *Kongi's Harvest* and 'Kongism'; Dr. Bero's transformation is totally antithetical to what he ought to be—a healer. But he has allowed himself to turn from benevolence to malevolence, like Kongi. He has put on the ugly mask of the negative ideologue, which suppresses his humanity and gives him a perverted and sadistic sense of power.

In *Madmen and Kongi*, Soyinka stretches the meaning of dictatorship and ideological fanaticism to the limit, and the ultimate consequence of this addiction to ideology without—humanity is the spawning of monsters like Bero and Kongi.

Obi Maduakor has observed that Soyinka's "works are one long protest against AS in its various manifestations" (229). Between *Kongi's Harvest* and *Madmen*, we also see the deepening of Soyinka's awareness of the dangers of charlatanry when intelligent men resort to it for whatever purpose. What Maduakor says of *Madmen* could equally apply to *Kongi's Harvest*, or even started in this particular play: "pessimism and cynicism have been nurtured to a point in both Soyinka himself and the characters...." he creates (229).

The Tools of Charlatany: Language and Ideology

One prominent feature of charlatany in Soyinka's works is the manner language functions and is manipulated by the charlatans. Simply put, language is deployed as a tool of deceit, and is a complementary element of fake ideology. Lakunle's

"adolescent exuberances and... artificial rhetoric" (Maduakor: 192), in *The Lion and the Jewel*, is aimed at confusing Sidi. It is comical and amusing to the reader, but it is still the language of deceit, for Lakunle imagines that by overwhelming Sidi with words, by "Chirruping like a Cuckatoo" (7), he will win her hand without paying the bride price. His "fast talk" is a known trade mark of all confidence tricksters— "con men" as they are conventionally called.

Resorting to pompous and obfuscatory language is not exclusive to Lakunle. Chief Winsala falls back on that subterfuge when he is nearly disgraced by a hotel steward when he goes to extract a bride from Sogoe. Finding himself in a quandary, he lets fall a rapid string of irrelevant saws until he is mercifully rescued by his intended victim. I have already mentioned Professor Oguazor's own comical linguistic facade, which doesn't need further elaboration. But between Lakunle, Oguazor and Winsala, the comic element in the charlatan's use of language ends.

The tone becomes more sinister in *The Road*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *Madmen*. What Maduakor says of language in *The Road* might, with minor modifications be applicable to the other plays:

Language... has mystifying potential, which Professor can exploit in order to cheat. Dialogue between him and his followers operates on different wavelengths, and Professor relishes the confusion he inflicts through his mastery of words. Rhetoric or fluency of speech seems to be more important to Professor than communication (213).

Professor uses his language for mystification and deceit, but not all his followers are totally deceived. Samson claims that Professor can't scare him with his "mumbo-jumbo" and "that nonsense about the word". But Professor is a sinister and cynical

character and maintains his manipulative linguistic acrobatics till the end.

Briefly, we will mention language in *Kongi's Harvest* which is based on ideology. Just as the 'Ism' of the play is as nebulous and harmful as the 'As' of *Madmen*, the language of the ideology is aimed at mystifying and confusing the citizenry. Kongi's Reformed Aweri Fraternity members are trying to fashion out a new way of speaking, different from the familiar and normal cadences of speech, a kind of Orwellian "newspeak":

Fifth Aweri: Ah yes, Nor proverbs nor verse, only ideograms in algebraic quantum. If the square root of XQY ($2bc$) equals QA into square root of X , then the progressive forces must prevail over the reactionary in the span of .32 of a single generation (13).

Not even the parroters of the formular understand what it means! But as a means of baffling the masses, it is perfect. Mystification, manipulation, ideological heavy wind—these are tools that a practised charlatan employs for success in his trade.

Conclusion

I started off with the assertion that one theme often creeps into an author's different works, with different degrees of intensity or elaboration. That theme in Soyinka's works considered here is, in my view, charlatanry. Its progression is from the light comicality of *The Lion and the Jewel*, through the genial roguery of Jero to the sinister hues of *The Road*, and finally, to the grand perversion of the good in *Kongi's Harvest* and *Madmen and Specialists*. The transition from one level to the other is a reflection of the author's changing perception of society, and perhaps, it is in this phenomenon that society's ills are in fact anchored.

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MCPHILIPS NWACHUKWU**To my kinsman, the Delta...**

From here, the dung hill of war,
I stretch my hands to feel flaming rays:

The five horsemen saw the danger early.
They read the prophecy in the sky.

From this dunghill of war,
I feel the flames of Jesse:

I saw that gory sight: charred human beings;
Bloated yam tuber
In a bonfire of shame.

The five horsemen saw the danger early.
They read the prophecy of the sky.

From this dung hill
Where I nurse my bruised ego,
I smell the death of Odi...

I see the randy victory of
Errant ants,
Sniffing the backyards of Odi mothers and daughters.
He goats on rampage.

I can read your pulse, the anger in your face

As you watch theatre of destruction and ego
In the land of your birth.

The five horsemen saw the danger early.
They read the prophecy of the sky.

From this dunghill
I witnessed death of a clime's man...
Echo of the horsemen
Who challenged the horsemen:
And he died, killed like an animal,
Strangled by the hangman

Ken Saro Wiwa, the son of Ogoni.
Ken Saro Wiwa, the myth maker.

The five horsemen saw the danger early:
They foresaw annihilations in our camps

They rolled out their spirit and dared the monster.

But, we sabotaged them.

Ken Saro Wiwa, the son of Ogoni.
Ken Saro Wiwa, the myth maker.

Now, the inconclusive question:
The polity hunting us like an aggressive lion,
Incarnating quota system, resource control
And revenue allocation as siblings.

Ken Saro Wiwa, the son of Ogoni.
Ken Saro Wiwa, the myth maker.

Members of my clime are still nursing their bruised ego;
Their un-fair representation...

They pay the supreme price of neglect.

Ken Saro Wiwa, the son of Ogoni.
Ken Saro Wiwa, the myth maker.

But the Delta is among the chosen:
Providing their men and the launch pad...
The beautiful bride of the hour.

The bridal love lost a place of pride;
The chief bride got hanged.

From this dunghill,
I read of the terrific death toll on Delta kinsmen:
I feel the death of Iteskiri, Ijaw and Ogoni youths;
I feel the death by pipe explosion.

The bridal love lost a place of pride;
The chief bride got hanged.

I feel orchestrated death,
Of wild life and aquatic...
Of acid rain and gas flaring;
Of depletion of the ozone layer.

The bridal love lost a place of pride;
The chief bride got hanged.

From this dung hill of war, I take stock
Of Delta death, our death.

I remember
The five horsemen,
Revolutionary voices at the advent of time.
I remember infant lives snuffed out in their prime ...

The bridal love lost a place of pride;
The chief bride got hanged.

Mcphilips
April 15 2004



EBELE OSEYE (Ellesee Southerland)**In a Sacred Tone: A Comment on Religion and Langston Hughes**

"I have always accepted as my religion the liberation of my people," Charles Langston said. And his grand nephew, Langston Hughes, who also did not embrace an organized religion, shared that view. In his literary works Langston Hughes was conspicuously "more Christian", more charitable than the cross toting lynchers, the slavers before them and other civilized racists who quote or misquote the scriptures to support their unsupportable views. Langston's works, in sharp contrast, come from a generous spirit which regards and records the full spectrum of African-American life in ways which make sacred a people so frequently denigrated and disregarded. If to be "religious" is to show moral responsibility, then his writings are sacred. If religion is designed to help the dispirited return to emotional and spiritual harmony, Langston's writings in expressing hope for harmony, qualify as religious. In tone and in word Langston speaks of brotherhood as natural for all members of the human family. The lore and language of religion enriches many of his works. He does not go out of his way to exclude religion, but he will not, out of "structural necessity" use religion to mask historical reality.

Elaine Pagels observes that what is "heretical changes with time; and this point is made dramatically by William Tyndale (1492-1536), the scholar who translated the Bible into English, and who was subsequently hunted, finally caught and burned at the stake by "good Christians" who considered the translation blasphemous. That same translation would later be accepted as the King James version of the Bible. And the "good Christians"

would make him a martyr. Also accepted were the decisions of the Nicene Council (325 AD), presided over by Constantine who was not a Christian; he gathered religionists from many regions, forced them to create a uniform doctrine, ironed out contradictions that could lead to political unrest; this council bullied by Constantine (a man who had his wife boiled to death in her bath), decided which religious beliefs were "true" and these beliefs are still held as true today.

The Europeans who came to North America to flee religious persecution, themselves practised religious intolerance. In 1620, the Separatists (those not of the established order) did not believe in religious freedom in their own colony. No non-Catholics could vote in their colonies which were French or Spanish. In Massachusetts, all non-Puritans were driven out. A Baptist minister was arrested for preaching without a permit from the Anglican church. In 1760, when the Baptists arrived, the forms of toleration were barely better than outright persecution. Religious hostilities certainly have their precedents in this country. Directed against people of colour (the indigenous people of North America), these hostilities took a more vicious turn. What ever happened to "Love your neighbour as you love yourself?"

It was from ancient Egypt that the above expression originated. From the Grand Lodge at Luxor came the advice to love yourself, love your family, love mother and father. Hughes would not have to quarrel with organized religion if it did not go out of its way to nurture self-hatred in African people. Bartolomew de las Casas, who later became Pope, added religious sanction to enslavement indicating that Africans were not fully human. And this continues to be the thinking of many who want to believe that American slavery is justifiable. That African people have dark skin proves their sin, according to religious bigots. Don't eat licorice, one of Langston's teachers advised a white classmate. "Do you want to be black like Langston?" The lessons in self-hatred were so effective that African Americans today are willing to risk great pain and

possible injury not necessarily to look more beautiful, but to look less black. As though to be less black is to be more Christian. How can you possibly love your neighbour if you do not love yourself?

In Langston's novel, Tempy demonstrates this self-hatred. She is the oldest daughter of three. Early in the novel, her mother, Hagar Williams and a neighbour Mrs. Whiteside, discuss Tempy's church-going habits as follows: "I hears from Reverend Berry that Tempy done withdrawn from our church and joined the Episcopalians," the neighbour observes. And Hagar Williams confirms the rumour adding, "The last time I seed Tempy, she told me she couldn't stand the Baptist no mo' too many low Niggers belonging she say, so she's gonna joint Father Hill's church, where de best people go." Tempy not only avoids the black church, she also avoids her black family. Through Tempy, Langston comments on many that see African heritage as a religious handicap.

What a paradox that the European Christian religion has African, Kemetic (Egyptian) origins. And in Ancient Kemet, the colour black was the colour of reverence. In a country where the land is 96% desert, a red, dry desert representing death, the Nile overflows to deposit rich black soil along its banks to give the people life. On the walls of tombs and temples, the most venerated figures are painted blue black. Blackness represents life. Ancient Egypt is called Kemet, which translates the black land. When the Pharaoh died, it was no ordinary scarab placed on his heart, but a black scarab to symbolize that he will live again (the scarab represents creativity). How then did blackness come to represent divine disfavour, to be the visible sign of a curse which could validate slavery (the children of Ham are cursed!)?

Race replaced religion. "It would be too bad if Jesus were to come back black." Hughes writes in "Bible Belt":

There are so many churches
Where he couldn't pray

Of the South.

Here is commentary on the sexual abuses during and after slavery; a black man could be lynched for whistling at a white woman, but a white man, the paternal figure, could rape a black woman with impunity.

The matter of race and religion is examined in a different tone through the character Simple who in "Temptation" opens with the question "When the Lord said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light, what I want to know, is where was us coloured people?" "We must not of been there said Simple, "because I am still dark. Either he did not include me or else I were not there." Again as sense of exclusion, "I never did see anybody look like me on a Sunday school card," Simple says later in the same essay.

In 'Cracker Prayer', another simple tale, the racist prays:

"Oh, Lord help me to get right, do right, be right, die right before I ascends to Thy sight. Help me to make my peace with Nigras, Lord, because I have hated them all my life. If I do not got to heaven, Lord, I certainly do not want to to go to hell with all them Nigras down there waiting to meet me. I hear the Devil is in League with the Nigras, and if the Devil associates with Nigras, he must be a yankee who would not give me protection. Lord take me to Thy Kingdom where I will not associate with a hell full of Nigras. Do you hear me Lord?"

What contradictions! The next request in this prayer is for a mammy in heaven, since the prayer does not have a mammy on earth. This southerner has already decided that hell is the proper place for black people, but for his personal convenience he would like a mammy, a black woman, in heaven. He has already acknowledged his hatred for blacks as wrong, yet continues as though the hatred is somehow justified.

Hughes celebrates blackness in a literature that joins blackness and beauty. He does this in "Dream Variation", where he speaks of "Night coming tenderly, /Black like me." And again in "My People" where he says "The night is beautiful/ So the faces of my people." Twice in "Dream Variations", Hughes associates peace with the image of a tall tree, and again in "Daybreak in Alabama", he refers to "tall tall trees"; and it is no simple reference. This is poetry which heals, which restores the world as beautiful. The tree is the channel between heaven and earth, the path to heaven. It had been denatured through lynching and had been twisted into a death symbol. The rivers had become a death bed, especially the infamous Mississippi. The south had become hell, at night a time of terror when the KKK covered in sheets rode with flaming cross, sometimes to terrorize, sometimes to kill. With this in mind, "Daybreak in Alabama" becomes something of a miracle, with its dream of racial harmony, putting the human family together, in touch again, again connected to the earth.

When we consider the magnificent array of animals in this world, we observe that they are suited to their habitats; the polar bear with white fur and black skin; white fur to blend in with the arctic snow, black skin to absorb heat; male birds have bright colours, the female who sit on the nests, dull colours to provide camouflage, with the exception of the female parrot whose tropical surroundings are brilliant. Humans too, are suited to their habitats. Africans are dark by design; those born near the equator, darkest; those born in places of high altitude, lighter. A full nostril dissipates heat; crinkled hair provides protection from the sun. The pull of gravity is greater at the equator, and those born near the equator have a denser body structure, and a broader foot to support that structure. It's no wonder that heavy weight champions and track and field athletes are often African. It is purely malicious to suggest that physical appearance is proof of divine curse.

Before 1509 when Michael Angelo painted his cousin and his uncle's wife as models for the divine Mother and Child, there

was Kemet's (Egypt's) Isis and Horus. (There are many such statues at the Cairo Museum). The idea of divine kinship is a conspicuous part of the Egyptian religion where Pharaoh's not only claimed to be the son of God, but added emphatically, the *son of his own body*. The full name of Rameses II, Pharaoh of the XIXth dynasty, Ra Meses Mery Amon, Useret Re, Setep N Ra, translates, born of Re, beloved of Amon, power of Re, select of Re; where Re, the sun, the centre of the solar system, represents the revealed aspects of God, and Amon, the unseen, the hidden aspects of God; recognizing that there is more to God than that which the eye perceives. The word "Amen", sung at the end of Christian hymns has Egyptian origins. The judgement scenes decorated the walls of Egypt's tombs long before they reached the Bible. The tomb of Ramesis VI depicts a snake turned into a rod becoming a snake again. The temple of Seti I, father of Ramesis II, records the Tale of Two Brothers, which becomes the biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar. When a black choir sing "The Lord is My Light and My Salvation", they sing a song four thousand years old. What irony that this religion should become a tool used to disinherit the descendants of that religion.

Hughes life is an integral part of his poetry. Travel in Russia provided freedom to attack religion's failings in "Good Bye Christ". In Russia, the great stretch of frigid landscape, his close call with death, and the scarcity of food all deepened his introspective mood. He carried with him Black American music, which many Russians listened to, but when advised that jazz had no place in the revolution, Hughes simply rejected that notion. This music was his religion. He was respectful of people and their places of worship, visiting the synagogue of his classmates and the cathedral in Mexico. He seems to have bathed in the rhythms and energy of the Black church in poems such as "Feet o' Jesus":

At the feet o' Jesus
Sorrow like a sea.
Lordy, let yo' mercy

