The Theatre of Promiscuity

A Comparative Study of the Dramatic Writings of Wole Soyinka and Howard Barker

Amanda Price

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy University of Leeds, School of English (Workshop Theatre), April 1995

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Abstract

The word 'artist' serves as a pivot to the major concerns of this study. Consideration of its application and meaning in relation to contemporary society facilitates a detailed exploration and analysis of selected dramatic writings by Wole Soyinka and Howard Barker. The comparative nature of this work begins by charting the parallel journeys of these writers - within widely differing cultural contexts - from a critique of social determinations which serve to define and bound authorial intent to a process of "promiscuous" self-definition whereby the artistic imagination is used to name and designate a specific relationship to the cultural and social structures within which their work will be received.

Working from a theoretical base which, in the case of Soyinka, finds its foundations in critique and commentary upon nationalist discourse, and in the case of Barker, rests upon contemporary critiques of Enlightenment reason, the study debates their development of theatrical form within both social and cultural contexts. Emphasis is placed upon the relationship of the author to the dramatic text, the creation of character and the defined channels of communication through which dramatic performance is to be received by the spectator. The concept of 'transgression' is explored as a key principle by which to define the 'theatrical' as opposed to the 'social' text.

Chapters Four and Five link the work of Howard Barker and Wole Soyinka through the application of Nietzschean philosophy, with especial emphasis being placed upon the concept of genealogical history, the creation of the aesthetic, and the consideration of 'tragedy' as a means by which to offer resistant critique to the social imperative of national citizenship as a badge and boundary to identity. The formation of the 'tragic' or 'catastrophic' individual is explored through key dramatic texts, thus allowing dramatic form the status of a discourse in its own right.

Throughout the study an attempt is made to develop an argument which allows the artist to be distinguished as one who speaks *to* his nation, rather than *for* his nation. With regard to the work of Barker and Soyinka this has involved both the exposure and exploration of a theatrical space unmapped by social cartography, and a peopling of the stage with creations who could be described as 'ethical' rather than 'political' individuals.

Contents

Acknowledgements

Woven into the fabric of this study is material from numerous conversations, debates, and discussions which have progressed, clarified, confounded, and inspired my research. I would like particularly to acknowledge the informal contribution of Linda Taylor, Liz Heywood, Dr Niké Imoru and Dr Steve Nicholson.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Howard Barker for his continued generosity in contributing to my work through friendship, conversation and correspondance. I would also like to thank him for giving me permission to stage the first production of ***Minna*** which allowed me an invaluable period of practical research into his work.

I would like to extend my especial thanks to the cast and production crew of *Minna*: Ian Connaughton, Nick Quirke, Linda Taylor, Janet Gordon, Chris Jowett, Liz Heywood, Phill Dalziel, Antje Diedrich, Niké Imoru, Bill Handley, Richard Talbot, Deborah Wilson and Kitty Burrows.

Many thanks to both my supervisors, Professor Martin Banham and Dr Richard Boon for their advice and support, both formal and informal. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr Rowland Cotterill who offered help and encouragement in the shaping and application of the theoretical aspects of my research. His comments on early drafts were invaluable in the writing of this study.

Finally, I would like to thank my father, Gordon Price, who insisted that I asked the questions in the first place.

Amanda Price

Leeds, April 1995

Introduction

It is the aim of this study to link, through the process of extended argument, selected dramatic writings by the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka and the British playwright Howard Barker. There is an emphasis placed on *argument* throughout the following pages, reflecting both the means by which Barker and Soyinka have forged the appearance of unique theatrical manifestations in their respective cultures, and the critical pathway I have forged through the two widely divergent imaginations which serve as source to their dramatic texts.

To argue is to offer proof - in language - for a manifestation, or phenomenon, which, by virtue of its status as a source of argument, is not yet a fact. It would seem, therefore, that argument proves an admirable starting-point for any discussion of the theatrical event, but particularly with regard to these specific playwrights for whom language-based theatre is, in its very form, the constitution of an argument with its reader or spectator. Theatre, for Soyinka and Barker, argues at the level of representation with that which it unceasingly attempts to represent; the imaginative life of individuals in its relationship to the 'reality' of their society.

The pleasure inherent in argument is dependent upon the evasion of a 'solution' and its attendant discursive compromises. It is perhaps for this reason that the yoking of two playwrights so occupied in the discrete theatrical exploration of their widely diverse cultures should have proved such a fertile source for the form of the study which follows.

The dramatic texts of Howard Barker and Wole Soyinka first became linked in my own mind by an experience for which I have never found a better description than that offered by Sigmund Freud in his attempts to define "The Uncanny".[1] As a basis for his essay on the subject, Freud introduces the 'uncanny' to the reader as "material for the study of aesthetics" [2] and offers the following as a foundation upon which to build his own observations:

> ...an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on.[3]

This basic effect Freud likens to the apprehension of "magical practices" and the ease of its production he attributes to the continued cultural traces of an archaic belief in the "omnipotence of thought".[4] More complex, however, is his

etymological tracing of the 'uncanny' to both a sense of "home-sickness" - a realization that what was once familiar and loved now forms the object of the exile's desire - and a fear born of "intellectual uncertainty" whereby confidence in the notions of 'progress' and 'enlightenment' is undermined by an imaginative intrusion which appears to be closer to reality than the intellect which has supposedly surmounted its premiss as a possibility. Thus, the appearance, or experience, of the 'uncanny' as an aesthetic phenomenon may be described, after Freud, as the recognition, or familiarity, of that which bears no relation to contemporary intellectual perceptions of reality.

It is, perhaps, unfair to cite Freud at this stage, as his psychological enquiry into the sources of the 'uncanny' as a phenomenon are not a focus for what follows. His description of the experiencing of the 'uncanny' does, however, lend articulation to the distinct affect which was afforded by my - initially - unrelated readings of Barker's and Soyinka's plays. The excitement which this early engagement aroused - which centred upon Howard Barker's ***Victory: Choices in Reaction***,[5] and Wole Soyinka's ***Death and the King's Horseman*** [6] - emerged from an awareness that in both cases a sense of recognition, or familiarity, had occurred in the absence of intellectual comprehension. I was not able, therefore, to rationalize the sense of 'rediscovery' or 'remembering' that was occurring in my relationship to these texts, and certainly with regard to Soyinka's work the foundation of my aesthetic response had either to recognize its wholly irrational base, or be content to answer its paradox with the solution that a process of cultural translation was the source of my spurious engagement.

My fascination was fed by practical incursions into the work of these two playwrights, and a growing conviction that their particular contribution to contemporary theatrical discourse was unique in its exploration of 'lives' or 'realities' which defied both ideological explanation and assimilation. It also seemed to me that their work 'proved' the elusive power of theatrical performance in that their printed texts, for the most part, remained frustratingly incomprehensible until realized in performance, at which point 'meaning' danced and proliferated as if liberated by the resonances of the actor's body. Here was a drama which *only* worked in the process of theatrical performance and appeared to insistently evade explanation as a stem to the complex emotional responses and intellectual confusions it engendered.

The argument which forms the thrust of this study is based, therefore, upon an aesthetic response to texts which appeared to converge in their interrogation of, and challenge to, contemporary intellectual and ideological perceptions of identity and its relationship to reality. The aim of the work as a comparative study is to test my

own observations concerning the similarities demonstrated - at an aesthetic level - in selected theatrical texts produced by these two playwrights.

Wole Soyinka's theatrical career began roughly a decade before that of Howard Barker with the drafting, whilst still at the University of Leeds, of two plays which have proved the mainstay of Soyinka's reputation as an 'accessible' playwright; these were ***The Swamp Dwellers*** [7] and ***The Lion and the Jewel***,[8] written around 1957, and first performed respectively in 1958 (with the Nigerian Drama Group in London) and 1959 (at the Arts Theatre, Ibadan). He, like Howard Barker in the early seventies, found nurturance at the Royal Court theatre where he worked as a Play Reader and participated in the Court's Sunday 'Evening' events which were designed to offer a platform for new writing.[9] Howard Barker's first stage play, ***Cheek***,[10] was premiered at the Theatre Upstairs, with William Gaskill as director, in 1970; an event which proved the beginning of a long and not untroubled relationship with the Artistic Directors of Royal Court, and in particular with the direction their artistic policy was to take throughout the late seventies and early eighties.[11]

This would be a very different study had I decided to concentrate upon the theatrical sources and influences which have shaped the work of these two playwrights. Wole Soyinka has worked in film and radio, as well as for the theatre, and his theatrical activity includes satirical revue, "hit and run" street theatre,[12] as well as a large output of language-based drama, much of which he has directed himself in Africa, Europe and America. Barker has been most widely acclaimed by critics for the 'accessibility' of his radio drama; he has also worked in film and television as well as writing prolifically for the theatre throughout the last three decades. In 1988, The Wrestling School theatre company was created by a group of actors and directors, with the sole intent of performing Barker's work. As Robert Shaughnessy has noted, it is a rare thing indeed that a dramatist should be so honoured by his accomplices in the theatre profession, and it stands as a mark of the excitement and challenge his work has engendered *within* the profession that such a bold testimony to his status as an actors' dramatist should have emerged.[13]

In considering the very broad span of work offered by each of the two playwrights in relation to the aesthetic response from which this study emerged, it seemed to me that a relatively small cluster of plays would prove particularly fruitful as a source for comparative criticism. These are plays which emerged, in both instances, at moments of social and cultural revolution. Thus, the two periods cited by my choice of plays written by Wole Soyinka are the moment of Nigerian Independence and the years 1965-75 which encapsulate the Nigerian civil war, and with regard to Barker, the focus is upon the proliferating political authoritarianism

of the Thatcher years. In neither case does the content of their plays reflect an overt commitment to temporally specific political debate, rather it is their response at the level of the formal structuring of their dramatic material which serves as the focus of my comparative analysis.

The plays I have chosen are: ***A Dance of the Forests***,[14] ***Death and the King's Horseman***, and ***The Road*** [15] by Wole Soyinka, and ***Victory: Choices in Reaction***, ***The Last Supper***,[16] ***Uncle Vanya***,[17] ***The Bite of the Night***,[18] and (to a lesser extent) ***The Europeans*** [19] by Howard Barker. In each of these texts, the mediation of the dramatic material selected by the playwright questions - at the level of narrative, characterization, authorial intervention and demands made upon the actor - the means by which individuals are able to articulate their appearance and affectivity within the parameters of the stage-world represented. The repeated iteration of this dramatic enquiry into the validity of 'human' representation upon the stage engenders a theatrical form which is itself in a state of fluid transition, leading both the actor and the spectator back again and again to questions concerning the nature of their response to actions and individuals that refuse the stable accommodation of the psychologized 'I' as an organizing principle for explanation and understanding.

The comparison made between these two playwrights relies therefore, not upon their status as political commentators but rather upon their formation of an aesthetic *in response* to the conditions of valid discursive articulation operating within their given cultural and social conditions.

The charges of inaccessibility which have circumscribed many of the texts selected for this study have necessarily drawn both Barker and Soyinka into debates concerning the 'proper' relationship for theatre as an artform to the society in which it is produced. The 'arguments' which have emerged from this encounter with detractors form both the raw material for their drama and the basis of a continuing contemporary debate concerning the responsibility of the playwright to the moral tenets of his time. For both writers the theatrical or artistic tradition from which they emerge has proved essential as an element of the social and cultural critique out of which their dramatic form is hewn; central consideration is thus given to the historical formation of theatrical structures and conventions, in particular the development of the actor, in his relationship to the playwright, as a non-ideological body through which conflicting concepts of identity and represention may be played out.

The difficulty of writing about Barker's or Soyinka's work emerges at the level of articulating dramatic structures which are in themselves the crystalline formations

of complex, individual critique. It is impossible, therefore, to describe their plays, without re-constituting both the structural development of social and cultural debate, and the forged perspective upon that debate proffered by the text's creator. Descriptions of the plays tend to flatten their effect, involving the reader in a convoluted progression which aids little in either the understanding of, or engagement with the *real* text which has, even within literary production, to flicker between the printed word and its theatrical articulation. My approach is therefore one which attempts to place the texts within their structural contexts, and thus to compare at the level of illumined moments the theatrical affectivity of the playwrights' aesthetic.

In trying to articulate that which began as a non-rationalized aesthetic response, I have trusted in the two subjects of my study as guides to the formation of an argument by which to define the nature of their dramatic texts. This guidance occurs at the level of prioritized discourses which re-occur throughout their texts, and through particular attention paid to that which speaks as articulated absence in their work. The commitment indicated by both Soyinka and Barker to a theatrical discourse premised upon philosophical enquiry has invited research into the contemporary constitution of philosophical debate. Throughout the following chapters a philosophical grouping emerges, to which I have given the name "Philosophers of the Gap, or Abyss", their concentration upon man's contemporary negotiation of his condition of nihilism, or non-belief, being particularly pertinent to my discussion of the playwrights' work.

Finally, in formulating the argument which would lend articulation to my initial sense of the 'uncanny' in response to both Barker's and Soyinka's work, I also found a question with which to underpin the method of my enquiry. This question rests upon a comment offered by Simon During on Michel Foucault's use of genealogical excavation as a resistance to historical investigation:

> ...society is, for Foucault...constituted precisely by resistances (ultimately grounded on the *body's* resistance - pain). Genealogy attempts to keep memories of such resistance alive *against* historicism and the human sciences; in doing so it uncovers an event - the emergence of modern power - that had previously been ignored...The emergence of modern power has been concealed by those traditional and 'evolutive' histories which concentrated on topics like religion, nationality, and the law.[20]

In response to During's exposition, I began to wonder whether the odd sense of 'remembering', allied to Freud's notion of exiled memory, in response to the texts of Soyinka and Barker, was not a symptom of the re-emergence of the Foucauldian 'event' whereby the invisibility of modern power - upon which its efficacy rests

and to which end it discursively 'naturalizes' its own effects - is made visible by the eruption, at the level of resistance, of a body of experience which had hitherto lain dormant under the pressure of more organized configurations of experience. It was this possibility, linked to the awareness that both Barker's and Soyinka's theatrical form emerges at the level of social and cultural critique, that allowed me to articulate the nature of the enquiry from which this study proceeds: 'In what manner and to what degree is the illusory nature of theatre equipped to make visible that which 'reality' renders invisible?'

7
Notes

1. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919) in *The Standard Edition* Vol XVII (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp.217-255
2. Freud, *Ibid.*, p.219
3. Freud, *Ibid.*, p.244
4. Freud, *Ibid.*, p.244
5. Howard Barker, *Victory: Choices in Reaction* in *Collected Plays Vol One* (London: Calder, 1990)
6. Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Methuen, 1975)
7. Wole Soyinka, *The Swamp Dwellers* in *Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1974)
8. Wole Soyinka, *The Lion and the Jewel* in *Collected Plays Two* (Oxford: OUP, 1974)
9. "During November (1959) Soyinka directed an 'Evening' of his own work at the theatre; the programme included poetry and songs which revealed his interest in Black American styles, and dramatic pieces, particularly *The Invention*, which showed his loathing of racism, and, in particular, of Apartheid." James Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.4
10. Howard Barker, *Cheek* in *New Short Plays 3* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972)
11. "At one time Howard would have unquestionably been a Court writer, championed over a number of years. But even if I'd stayed at the Court I don't know that I would have taken him on. It would have involved me in the same kind of difficult relationship with a sombre and individual imagination that I'd had with Bond. You need a lot of commitment for that." William Gaskill, *A Sense of Direction: Life at the Royal Court* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp.128-129
12. Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka*, p.12
13. Robert Shaughnessy, "Howard Barker, The Wrestling School, and the Cult of the Author" in *New Theatre Quarterly* V/19 (1989). pp.264-271
14. Wole Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests* in *Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973)
15. Wole Soyinka, *The Road* (Oxford: OUP, 1965)
16. Howard Barker, *The Last Supper* (London: Calder, 1988)
17. Howard Barker, *Uncle Vanya* in *Collected Plays Vol Two* (London: Calder, 1993)
18. Howard Barker, *The Bite of the Night* (London: Calder, 1988)
19. Howard Barker, *The Europeans* (London: Calder, 1990)
20. Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.136

Chapter One

What is a Playwright?

The paradox of the artist's relationship to his society, and the nature of his commitment to that society, is one which has constantly proved the shadowy penumbra to even the most incandescent moments of literary endeavour. To pose the question 'What is a Playwright?' is to require of this historical paradox a specificity consistently blurred by its wholesale inclusion within the edifice which we have come to know as 'literature'. The Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka, uses as a paradigmatic example of this paradox the Mbari-house sculptor who

> ...shuts himself away from the day-to-day contact [and] undertakes this period of purgation and reflection on behalf of his society. The resulting mud figures are never given the same interpretation by any two individuals yet the presence of this isolated sculpting - placed usually away from the frequented parts of the village and left to crumble and decay with time - is experienced by the community as contributing to the spiritual well-being of the village in its homage to earth.[1]

This passage, written in response to critics who perceive all literary endeavour to be a catalogue of cultural aims and political development, reminds us that the playwright, despite the published text which stands as a 'monument' to his work, is the producer of perishable goods.[2] His medium, the perishable clay of the actor, allied to the malleable substance of language, stands as a testimony to the transience of man's experience of the world; its very ephemerality pays homage to the finite nature of that experience. The playwright is a builder of edifices whose mutability is the condition of their existence; he therefore makes his image of man out of man himself and not of the printed word.

The British playwright, Howard Barker, writes of his texts as a relationship primarily with actors. The language employed within his work is not a literary one therefore, but rather a pre-verbal promise which is utterly dependent upon the actors' art for its realization:

> It has been often remarked that my theatre is predominantly an actors' theatre, and it is certainly true that actors have been my greatest allies and collaborators. This reflects the supreme responsibility that is placed in them, in their powers of articulation to conduct what is in effect a symphony of speech. It is this displacement of attention from meaning to texture that characterizes the first moments of the play.[3]

Barker considers his work a gift offered, not to the director, but to the actors, and in articulating the nature of the responsibility of the actor to language, exposes the

fact that the playwright 'loses' his text to a second system of signification as an innate element of the theatrical process. The control an author may have over the form of his literary work is, therefore, refused the playwright as a fundamental condition of his chosen sphere of communication. The theatrical text must pass through living bodies in order to achieve its stage life; those bodies, as conductors of historical and cultural experience are only, themselves, partially in control of the significations they transmit. The playwright's art is, therefore, built upon a promiscuous relationship to language and meaning, for its very structure is dependent upon the interpretative facility of the actor's body as a vessel of transitory expressiveness.

Consideration of the playwright as a scion of literary pursuit thus requires a framework of enquiry which distinguishes the profession as unique in relation to the generic aims of authorship. The pursuit of this framework, always conditional upon the culture by which it is contextualized, forms the meeting point for the two playwrights upon which this study focuses. Although one could consider the confluence of their particular engagement with the figure of the playwright to stem from a shared educational immersion in the English literary canon, I believe that a comparison of this nature would prove limited and ultimately return one to a determinist view of their subsequent careers which would not, in the end, prove fruitful. Instead, I shall consider their theatrical output as the development of a specific relationship to the diverse cultures of which they are a part, and as one which is unique to the role of the playwright. The temporal, cultural and political specificity afforded by a comparative study of this kind thus allows examination of the playwright as an historical entity; the carrier and cultivator of particular questions inscribed and pursued through and by his chosen medium. His relationship to his society will, therefore, be considered as a fundamental and historical symptom of social and cultural questioning, rather than as a phenomenon solely determined by and subject to the economic framework of the forces of production.

Concentration upon the dramatic writings of Wole Soyinka and Howard Barker has necessitated the exclusion of a large body of poetic works published by both men, and of two novels and three autobiographical studies produced by Wole Soyinka over the past three decades. The fact that this study focuses upon their work as playwrights reflects their prioritizing of the theatrical medium throughout the roughly parallel span of their careers, and the diverse nature of their contribution to dramatic form throughout those years spawns a fluid relationship to central considerations of what it means to be a playwright.

The theatrical careers of both playwrights are distinguished by a prolific output of dramatic material, accompanied by volumes of essays which, whilst not offering specific commentaries or explanations of their theatrical texts, serve to demonstrate a highly personal engagement with key cultural and critical debates which adumbrate the nature of their dramatic endeavour. The sheer breadth and development of argument and debate contained both within the essays and the theatre texts stands as a testimony to the writers' commitment to theatre as a unique area for examination of contemporary cultural experience. It has also engendered, for my purposes, a further process of selection whereby particular texts, or clusters of texts, will be given priority as a means of defining the boundaries of this study.

The texts to be included are those which demonstrate most clearly the processes of the playwrights' own exploration of theatre as a mode of communication and means of expression. These tend to be the texts which have given critics and commentators the most acute problems in finding the means whereby they may be approached, apprehended or accessed to a broad reader/spectatorship. The title of 'Difficult Playwright' is one to which both Soyinka and Barker have been subject at various points in their careers. This designation, which carries in its wake charges of elitism and wilful obscurantism, raises fundamental questions concerning the social function of the playwright as perceived by the critical establishment and will form a central focus for this study.

The quality which links these texts could be most economically described as the wilful abrogation of a uni-plane line of communication between the theatrical product and its audience. Critical response tends to treat these texts indignantly, charging the playwright who dares to deny his audience coherent meaning with arrogance and lack of craft. In 1992, by chance, Howard Barker's ***A Hard Heart*** [4] coincided, in its premiere at the Almeida Theatre, Islington, with a production of Wole Soyinka's ***The Road***,[5] which marked the launch of the Talawa Theatre Company at The Cochrane Theatre, Holborn. This resulted in reviews appearing simultaneously in the Sunday papers, and allowed comparison of the critics' response to the very particular theatrical experience attempted in these two instances. Irving Wardle, in the ***Independent on Sunday***, wrote of them thus:

> What, finally, does Barker's fable mean? It appears to be saying that the seige-mentality makes a stone of the heart; and that culture does not survive by intelligence alone. But the function of Riddler's son is to credit her with one human weakness; but for him, intelligence would have conquered...The story does not add up.
>
> ***The Road*** [is] a rarely performed Wole Soyinka piece of the 1960s. Set in an abandoned motor park and drawing on Soyinka's Christian and Yoruba background, this is a work of white-hot imagination, fusing past and present, metaphysics and underworld comedy in a

> single seamless action periodically lifting off into tribal ritual...I could make no sense of the work in performance.[6]

For Irving Wardle - and the majority of his colleagues who reviewed the two plays - the criteria by which the work is to be judged focuses upon the ability to "make sense of" or 'understand' the material placed before the spectator. The perspective is - we presume - offered on behalf of a theatre-going public who are likely to experience the same problems in watching the play that the critics did. The critic's inability to comprehend or unravel the paradoxical material is *prima facie* presumed to be the fault of either the playwright or the production, suggesting that the role of the theatre is first and foremost the presentation of clear and coherent meanings to its audience. The understanding of the play in performance is thus demanded as a right each member of the audience may expect in return for the price of a ticket purchased. The naturalization of these critical requirements, upheld to a large extent by the brevity and insubstantiality of the journalistic form through which they are mediated, allows consensual opinion - offered as informed opinion - to masquerade as critical debate.

Throughout the course of his career as a writer and dramatist, Wole Soyinka has tirelessly repeated a challenge to his critics, which he insists must be acknowledged if a given culture wishes to claim as one of its goals the foundation and encouragement of artistic commitment and development of creative expression:

> ...attention must also be paid to the sociological conditioning of critics and criticism as a means of providing safeguards against an alien orientation of judgement or evaluation - a factor of which the critic may remain blissfully unaware...[critics] recognize the importance of the sociology of the writer: we must now emphasize the even greater importance - as the self-appointed moulder of tastes - of the sociology of the critic.[7]

The essay from which this passage is taken was written in 1976 and belongs, of course, to the particular context of a developing literary canon specific to Nigerian identity and experience. Soyinka's main cause for concern is the choice of material offered as 'canon fodder' by those critics whose crudely functionalist criteria are served by polemical attacks upon any artwork which refuses to meet the demands of their own ideological perception of African culture. Whilst Soyinka applauds the underlying ambition to formulate an African poetics, he singularly abhors the usurpation of the collective voice as a means by which to achieve this aim. His demand is therefore simple in its requirement that the critic be relieved of the self-assumed mantle of the peoples' voice. For Soyinka, critical debate may only achieve its real purpose as a creative genre in its own right, once the politics of social engineering and its attendant ideologies are themselves offered as the subject of rigorous critique.

Soyinka's strident hostility towards the more extreme Marxist ideologues of the African continent, who have - over the past three decades - found their way into print via literary criticism, is well known. His ire at what he calls the "theological" application of Marxist dogma is repeatedly asserted throughout his critical essays, always carrying in its wake a plea for the recognition of an individual - often tragic - experience of the world which refuses the determinist categories of ideological optimism.

> Is literary criticism presumptuous enough to deny that moment of total disintegration which may or may not be a prelude to social resurgence? Those who seek easy (optimistic) answers from literature are trapping themselves within the same cul-de-sac where extremist schools of European criticism of 'commitment' have stubbornly confronted opaque walls for over a century.[8]

The 'Literary Critic' is rounded upon as an example of ideological agencies which, in the name of social progress and truth, offer interpretation as a means of censoring, curtailing or appropriating areas of human experience shrouded in uncertainty or doubt. Soyinka's central concern in exposing the perspective of the critic is to demonstrate the reified consciousness to which their ideological doctrines serve as vehicles. His writings insist that no ideology is innocent, nor may it be grafted to an alien stem without consideration of the hybrid it may engender:

> The danger which a literary ideology poses is the act of consecration - and of course extermination. Thanks to the tendency of the consumer-mind to facilitate digestion by putting in strict categories what are essentially fluid operations of the creative mind upon social and natural phenomena, the formulation of a literary ideology tends to congeal sooner or later into instant capsules which, administered also to the writer, may end up by asphyxiating the creative process.[9]

The cultural context within which Howard Barker places his work is obviously one built upon the founding literary tradition described by Soyinka as the symptom of "a compartmentalising habit of thought"[10] which stands as anathema to "the fluid operations of the creative mind". Because his writing will inevitably be judged through and against this tradition, Barker's concern is to distinguish the theatrical event from literary form. Thus he asserts that the playwright's text belongs truly to the actor - the vessel through whom the language will pass as a life-force - and thence to the spectator for whom it becomes the source of imaginative speculation. His texts he describes as an invitation to "reach down beyond the known for once",[11] asserting that only by taking this leap may the creative imagination come into play. To the critic therefore who insists that appreciation and satisfaction are achieved only by secure understanding, he would counter:

Those who are threatened by the dictat of accessibility, 'Be understood or Perish', need to keep their nerve, since in a populist culture the abuse from certain quarters is bound to become increasingly violent. The writer of 'inaccessible' theatre will be repudiated as a poseur, or, most favoured of all English calumnies, identified as 'pretentious'. His collaborators will be seen as dupes, the actors vilified as brainless exhibitionists, and the institution which mounts the production attacked as corrupt, elitist and overdue for demolition.[12]

The inference is, as with Soyinka, that the exposure of the critic as the carrier of an historically specific ideology is essential to theatrical enterprise, if the communication it engenders is to be safeguarded against what amounts to covert censorship perpetuated in the name of an audience perceived as a mass.

The critique offered by Barker of the literary mediations of the critic signals his endeavour to return to the geography of the theatre a relationship between the spectator and actor which would articulate the unique qualities of communication made possible by the dramatic event. The sham democracy he perceives to be operating in the majority of contemporary civic theatres is one which offers the spectator an illusory relationship of power and autonomous judgement over that which occurs on the stage, in return for his passive incorporation into the body of the audience which is identified by its singular and unified pursuit of consensual meaning:

> By collectively situating the audience in blocks who peer into the pit of the stage, or even gaze down a raked landscape of seats, this is a theatre which implies a unanimity of response.[13]

Barker's observation serves not only as an indictment of contemporary theatrical conventions - commonly attributed in their development to the predominance of a middle-class audience - but also serves as a critique of what he has called elsewhere "the sickening and secret compact between the author and his audience that distinguishes liberal art".[14]

The relationship between the artwork and its audience, and the implications this has with regard to the political structures by which it is framed, lies not only within the province of the playwright's concerns. The "liberal" pact has been widely debated throughout the twentieth century by Critical Theorists - most notably by members of the Frankfurt School of philosophy - and may be generally defined as the illusory assumption of individual autonomy via the private ownership of property, in return for a monogamous relationship to State beliefs and ideologies, so long as those ideologies continue to reflect the primacy of the property base. The key element of this pact is what Herbert Marcuse calls "the privatisation of reason",

whereby the understanding and rationality of the individual constitutes a knowledge of the society as a whole:

> Liberalism believes that through adaptation to...'natural laws' the conflict between different wants, the strife between the general interest and private interests, as well as social inequality are ultimately overcome in the all-encompassing harmony of the whole, and that the whole thus becomes a blessing for the individual. Here, in the center of the liberalist system, society is interpreted through its reduction to 'nature' in its harmonizing function: as the evasive justification of a contradictory social order.[15]

Liberalism asserts itself within theatrical practice, therefore, via the re-iteration of ideological positions which - although they may give voice to dissent and diverse opinion - basically return to the spectator the illusion of autonomous individuality premised upon shared knowledge and belief in the ameliorating principles of society as a whole, the whole being visibly represented in this particular instance by the configuration of the audience in relationship to the stage. A liberal artform is therefore, one which perpetuates the illusion - for the spectator - of autonomous individuality whilst concurrently maintaining the 'whole' of a society which in its political and economic practices is actually opposed to the principles of 'liberty' and 'autonomy' which its harmonizing 'nature' purports to uphold.

Barker's refusal of this 'sham-democracy' is therefore a refusal of theatre as a public event which replicates the 'democratic' procedures operating outside the theatre walls. His naming of the invisible pact between audience and playwright serves as critique in that it problematizes that which would appear to be natural and therefore 'self-evident'. In exposing this relationship as an articulation of innate assumptions concerning the function of theatrical practice he not only opens to question the alternative possibilities inherent to theatrical communication, but also posits an enquiry into the relationship of the public arena to the practices of State democracy.

For Wole Soyinka, writing on his return to the newly-independent State of Nigeria in the early 1960s, the imposition of civic structures upon a nascent theatrical creativity awoke in him the awareness that the articulacy of architectural frameworks extend beyond their functional capacity of containment:

> The building itself is an embodiment of the general misconception of the word 'theatre'. Theatre, and especially, a 'National Theatre', is never the lump of wood and mortar which architects splash on the landscape. We heard of the existence of a National Theatre and ran to it full of joy and anticipation. We discovered that there was no theatre, there was nothing beyond a precious, attractive building in the town centre.[16]

The playwright's fear is that the striving towards an articulation of theatrical possibility, offered as a thread to the weave of cultural potential, will be replaced by the easy definition offered to theatre by its civic costumiers in the name of cultural excellence. That which contains the imagination - Soyinka states - may also repress the imagination, or serve to define the nature of the theatre it houses rather than aid its expression. Soyinka's attack on the civic theatres which sprang up in the African States in the 1960s is another form of his attack upon the consumer-led categorization of thought which he perceives to be peculiar to the Western approach to artistic form. The very idea that a ready-made category or shape should be used to define the work of art as it struggles into existence is anathema to Soyinka's concept of "fluid creativity", for, like the mediation of the critic at the vital moment of theatrical process meeting the spectator, the pre-packaged categorization of work threatens to stunt, or give premature delivery to that which is not yet ready to define its artistic parameters.

Soyinka's theatre, like that of Barker, insists upon the right to initiate structures of theatrical response which would appear to be at odds with the demands of both the critics and the buildings within which their work is housed. The Frankfurt philosopher, Theodor Adorno, describes the contemporary requirement - that a committed artist should offer clarity and coherence to his public - as one which essentially undermines the communicative process inherent in artistic endeavour:

> This theory wants art to speak to human beings directly, as though the immediate could be realized directly in a world of universal mediation. But it thereby degrades word and form to a mere means, to an element in the context of the work's effect, to psychological manipulation; and it erodes the work's coherence and logic, which are no longer to develop in accordance with the law of their own truth but are to follow the line of least resistance in the consumer.[17]

Adorno's description of the spectator, or receiver, of the artwork as a consumer is helpful in considering the refusal implicit in critiques offered by both Barker and Soyinka of the frameworks - whether abstract or material - which circumscribe the audience's relationship to the stage. The concept of theatre as unilinear 'call and response' suggests a reification of the cultural potential offered by the specific meeting of live actors and spectators. Their refusal, therefore, amounts to a denial of the spectator's assumed right to instant gratification which makes the point of purchase the moment of consumer satisfaction. Rather, the experiential pleasure of the theatre offered by these two playwrights lies in the witnessing of acts which, owing to their refusal of commodity status, seek responses other than those which satisfy the utility value of consumer durables. The theatre which replaces free market commodification, they would seem to say, offers the spectator the experience of being a consumer in a foreign land, where the laws of exchange have

to be intuited or interpreted and neither the innate value of goods nor their purpose is immediately obvious.

In attempting to communicate the nature of theatrical experience in its opposition to what Adorno calls "the line of least resistance", both Barker and Soyinka make clear their abhorrence of audience participation as a means of proving the physical reality of the encounter. Soyinka in particular, goes to great lengths to debunk the myth that African theatre may be distinguished from its Western counterpart by virtue of the uninhibited participation of its audience members. He berates what he perceives to be the Western romanticization of this form of 'experience' and hotly denies its claims to revolutionary effect:

> When I go to the theatre it is not to suffer drooling morons translate audience participation into a license to maul me with their bodies simply because they are incapable of reaching me with their minds. This is the debasement of the principle of ritualistic communion at its most nauseating, the triteness which comes sooner or later to any culture whose rationale is based not on irreducible truths of universal experiences but on a cultural emptiness which can only feed on novelties, extremisms and personal fantasies.[18]

For Soyinka, the revolutionary possibility, which he believes to be inherent in the social event of theatrical performance, has little to do with the prioritizing of the body and the physical breaking of barriers which separate audience from performers. Rather, he opines, the problem - which returns once again to the concept of categorization - lies with the *perception* of separation, owing to the existence of different spheres of activity occurring within the unified space of the theatrical arena. To force an audience, therefore, to participate physically, is to deny the very real and active experience which has the potential to occur within what *appears* to be the inert body of unified audience perception.

> Both audience and effect are contained within a very malleable matrix which is the sum of the physical energy and intellect, the sensual and moral interaction, of the audience and the protagonist forces on stage.
>
> ...this is the operative technique, this technique of interaction, a technique whose end can only be change, not consolidation (change, however fragmentary, illusory, however transient, however lacking in concrete, ultimate significances, but nevertheless change) - it suggests that theatre is perhaps the most revolutionising art form known to man.[19]

Soyinka does not require *proof* of audience participation or activity. Nor does he perceive his audience to be a mass which requires a standardized form of communication. Rather, his work is an act of faith which attributes to individual

spectators the desire, hunger and curiosity for participation in a realm of experience particular to theatrical expression.

Despite the very different material upon which their work focuses, Barker and Soyinka find a solid meeting point in their location of theatrical experience within the mind of the spectator. For both playwrights, theatre is the witnessing of embodied language, or languages; it is the witnessing of language which has achieved the status of an action via the sensitized body of the actor. In order that the mind may achieve a focus equal to the exigencies of this specific activity, Barker is insistent that certain conditions are necessary to the nurturance of the spectator's willing involvement, a process he calls "seduction",[20] which is entrusted to the actor as a primary task:

> ...all theatre that affronts or offends the audience by direct engagement wrecks that sacred compact between actor and witness that is older than history. To insult the audience for the paltry gratification of the actors destroys theatre, erodes its authority as an art, just as all invitations to debate what has been witnessed diminish its beauty. The great play is immune to discussion, the play eliminates debate, it is not about arguments, it replaces arguments.[21]

The faith which these two playwrights would seem to place in the spectator's ability to apprehend the demands made upon them by the artwork is not, finally an act of altruism. Rather, their faith is a by-product of need; the stringent requirement of texts which refuse to take as their starting point the easy pleasure born of a desire to gratify the spectator's social self-image. What is offered in its stead is theatre which defines itself as a process of creation to which the spectator is invited as participant. The invitation carries with it certain pre-conditions which are re-iterated by the text, namely that the "*saying*" of the "*idea*" will be subordinated to an "*experiencing*" of complex thought as action and, therefore, that the play will eschew the concept of the "solution" in order to pursue the fluid continuance of this process beyond the boundaries of the theatrical event. The altered status of the spectator from customer to creative participant is one which refuses the deferral of moral responsibility to the playwright. Thus, the equation which allows the playwright privileged knowledge by virtue of his ordering of the material to a state of coherence, is replaced - once that coherence is removed - by an equality born of shared struggle towards meaning. In an interview given early in his career Soyinka stated his position with regard to the spectator unambiguously:

> Quite frankly, I do not think of any audience when I write. I write in the firm belief that there must be at least a hall full of people who are sort of on the same wave-length as mine from every stratum of society and there must be at least a thousand people who are able to

> feel the same way as I do about something. So when I write, I write in the absolute confidence that it must have an audience.[22]

Likewise, Howard Barker has described his writing as daring to dream "life as it might be lived",[23] an intensely private process which is made public by the actors' mediation of a language to which his struggle gives birth:

> The dramatist explores the terrain, half-knowing, half-ignorant. His journey is mapped by the actors. The audience participate in the struggle to make sense of the journey, which becomes their journey also. Consequently, what is achieved by them is achieved individually and not collectively. There is no official interpretation.[24]

The process of exposing the mind's creative relationship to the socio-historic 'reality' within which their work achieves meaning, appears to be central to both Barker and Soyinka's relationship to theatrical communication. Their recognition of the privileged perspective of the playwright, as one who is 'paid to imagine' carries in its wake a refusal of the social and cultural creation of the author within ideological discourse, described by Michel Foucault as "the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning".[25]

In a paper addressed to the *Collège de France* in 1971, entitled "What is an Author?", Foucault suggests that the contemporary discourse which holds our notion of the author in place is a symptom of the historic development of a rationalized worldview which is specific to the creation of European culture and is most commonly identified as the Age of Enlightenment. Foucault pinpoints the eruption of authorial discourse as the moment at which texts became the property of the individual; that is to say, the moment at which the author and not the language which formed his raw material became the source of meaning for the reader of his texts. Foucault is precise in his location of this moment, in which the author is created, by a process of ideological reversal, from 'pure being' *in* a discourse - as a product of that discourse which has no meaning outside its own production - to the owner *of* a discourse for which he must take responsibility and prove the boundary marker to its significations:

> The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say 'this was written by so-and-so' or 'so-and-so is its author' shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status.[26]

Thus, the moment which, for Foucault, furnishes our contemporary understanding of the author-function, is that moment at which texts become the property of the

named individual. This yoking at once served a classificatory function and also initiated the formulation of an ethics of authorship whereby the producer/owner of the text became a householder accountable for its functioning in society.

"What is an Author?" both challenges and upholds the deconstructionist stance that would negate the author in order to facilitate a proliferation of texts and textual meaning. This is achieved by the fact that Foucault rehearses the means by which the contemporary author-figure was created. In removing him from a discourse which defined his being as pure immanence and locating him outside that discourse as owner and producer, the illusion of wholeness replaced ambiguity and absence in an attempt to ward off chaos and return meaning to an attributable source. The proper name, which assumed vital importance as an indicator of property ownership, also invited the creation of an identity which would function to support the text's meanings. It is Foucault's assertion that the death of the author - as being in discourse - occurs at the moment in which his being is dispersed across the text's absences. Thus the death of the author, for Foucault, heralds the birth of the psychologized identity of the named owner of the text. The imperative working to produce this moment is fear; a fear born of the need 'to understand', which countenances the construction of a fixed identity in order to veil the transgressive possibilities of language as a chaos of free-floating signifiers - as a structure of meaning wholly divorced from the world it would seek to describe.

Whilst Foucault would agree, therefore, that the named author must disappear in order to reveal the multiple texts masked by his psychologized persona, he would challenge the supposition that this action is an end in itself. For the named author is also a text; a metatext which serves a classificatory function. To call for the death of this figure is to fall prey to the ideology which objectified his function and placed him outside a discourse in order to name that discourse. Rather, Foucault suggests, we should interrogate the construct which parades as individual authorship in order to discover the repressed texts written into the history of his engendering:

> ...[those] aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize or the exclusions that we practice.[27]

Thus, to remove the named author is to attempt to ignore a catalogue of fear and repression which is, in itself, a commentary upon the formation of a discourse which cannot free or transform itself without recognition of the power structures which have called it into being. These power structures operate ideologically,

attributing to the author the question which - in truth - should be posed by the reader in order to expose that which the author functions to disguise: 'What are the social and cultural requirements which underpin the formulation of meanings represented by a text?'. For Foucault, to answer this question is to demonstrate the means by which discourse functions, and further, to lever open the doorway through which one may glimpse the possibility of texts awaiting the structures which may call them into being. To follow this proposition through to its natural conclusion, one might state that the contemporary, named author is created in the image of his society's fear of its own destruction, defined in this instance as the inability of language to place man in a stable and understandable relationship to the world of his perceptions.

For Foucault, authorship is not a profession but a mode of 'being' in the world; it represents the immanence of subjectivity. By this I mean that subjectivity is an aim, or an object of critique, rather than the *prima facie* attribute or condition of the author's function. To return to the author the questions a text raises is therefore to refuse to take responsibility for those questions; it is also to refuse the possibility of new varieties of the self which lie beyond the safety-net of ideological thought. The entry of the author into a system of ownership which designates his work as labelled property - all enquiries being referred to source - is the negation of the potential of the author to proliferate and make promiscuous 'meaning' as understood by a rational worldview. The discourse which seeks to define the author, once exposed as boundary or marker to that worldview, opens up the possibility of uncharted territory; what Foucault calls the "limitless reign of the limit".[28]

The relationship which Barker and Soyinka have attempted to articulate with their audiences would appear to be the consequence of a refusal of the discourse of authorship, as an ideological linkage to the text defined as private property. This linkage may also be defined as an element of the liberal pact which sustains autonomous individuality based upon the private ownership of property in return for fidelity to the 'natural' functioning of the State. We may surmise, after Foucault, that what they wish to put in its place may be described as an authorship premised upon promiscuity, this being a non-ideological, non-monogomous attachment to rationality which offers critique in place of certainty and speculation in place of State-driven interpretation.

Theodor Adorno's pursuit, as a literary critic and philosophical thinker, of a literary form which has not - in the name of mass consumption - allowed reified consciousness to be both the driving-force and the *raison d'être* of its coming into being, causes him to focus upon a bastard child of literary endeavour:

> The essay allows for the consciousness of nonidentity (*sic*), without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character.[29]

Adorno premises his paean to the essay form upon its promiscuous relationship to knowledge, realised in its refusal to offer thought as explanation. The intimacy it attempts with its reader, is born of a denial of the self as a source of 'absolute' or 'theological' meaning. The version of authorship which holds authorial identity to be the source of 'truth' has been described by Roland Barthes as the construction of the "Author/God";[30] a variety of selfhood which places subjective perception as both the source and horizon of truth and meaning. Individual interpretation, within this model, depends upon a practical application of thought to subjective experience, the goal being a secure understanding of one's relationship to the world of perception. What is not recognized, or named, within this matrix of meaning, is the system of thought, or the ordering of concepts and classifications which underpin its existence. Knowledge is, therefore, perceived to be a 'natural' process of deduction which returns to the individual the 'logical' processes of reasoning as absolute truths. Alternative modes of structuring perception are thus considered inferior, wrong-headed or dangerous in their designated 'otherness' to what indubitably 'is'.

Adorno describes the essay form as the willed return of the foreign 'other' to the processes of knowledge. The speculative method of interpretation invited by the essayist is described as comparable to a foreigner who, rather than learning the grammatical construction of his hosts' language, becomes fluent via experimentation with the possible meanings contained within its vocabulary:

> Such a person will read without a dictionary. If he sees the same word thirty times in continually changing contexts, he will have ascertained its meaning better than if he had looked up all the meanings listed, which are usually too narrow in relation to the changes that occur with changing contexts and too vague in relation to the unmistakable nuances that the context gives rise to in every individual case. This kind of learning remains vulnerable to error, as does the essay as form; it has to pay for its affinity with open intellectual experience with a lack of security that the norm of established thought fears like death.[31]

The equation of the foreigner with the concept of non-identity within the bounded landscape of Western Enlightenment rationality is helpful in a consideration of the purposes to which Soyinka and Barker have subordinated their published papers and essays written throughout the course of their development as playwrights. The central focus of any study of the playwright will inevitably be that of the theatrical texts they have produced, but before entering into this form of analysis it may be

helpful to consider the framework their volumes of essays provide for the reader seeking a contextualized understanding of their theatrical work.

Fidelity to the essay as form, if we are to accept Adorno's definition, requires the dissolution of the psychologized author in order that he may be replaced by the textual processes of mind in its ordering and re-ordering of concepts. The meaning of this text, which draws on no authority beyond its own form, is produced only via the reader's interpretation of the juxtaposed concepts offered as content. The removal of an organizing principle behind the 'I' which writes, allied to the wilful withdrawal of explicatory method, produces the appearance of thought as montage, described by Adorno thus:

> Thought does not progress in a single direction; instead, the moments are interwoven as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of the texture. The thinker does not actually think but rather makes himself into an arena for intellectual experience, without unraveling it.[32]

It would be misleading to suggest that Barker and Soyinka's use of the essay form is a pre-meditated attempt on their part to define their function as playwrights. Nor would this type of 'cause and effect' reasoning do justice to Adorno's purposes in focusing upon the essay as a form of "non-radical radicalism". His purpose, as a literary critic, is not to suggest models for future utility, but rather to seek the means by which literary texts function to produce meaning and the significance they achieve culturally via this process. Thus, Adorno singles out the essay as a text which was willed into existence by the demands of individual processes of thought reflected in its form. Contemporary attitudes towards this form, and consideration of the conditions which gave birth to it form, therefore, the basis of a social critique founded upon the status of the social subject as the self-determined organizer of experience.

What Soyinka and Barker do *not* choose to offer their readership is authoritative discourse based upon the psychologized experience of the author. Soyinka favours a mode of 'fictional' autobiography and autobiographical details are virtually absent in the writings of Barker. The capacity to create an identikit picture of the author in relation to his personalised milieu is therefore denied the reader who must instead consider the proper name attached to these essays to be, in the words of Gilles Deleuze:"...neither signifier, nor signified, rather they are designations of intensity inscribed upon a body".[33] Thus, the authoritative style assumed by both writers etches out an arena of intensity which remains unexplained by reference to psychological discourse. Their essays are, I would like to suggest, a form of intellectual biography which posits the self as an attribute of language and linguistic

form. The manner of its appearance becomes therefore, of central significance to debates concerning the nature of identity.

Wole Soyinka as Essayist

Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his study of African self-identification ***In my Father's House***,[34] encounters Soyinka's work as a problematic, but absolutely necessary development in contemporary Nigerian culture;

> In taking up so passionately the heritage of the printed word, he has entered inevitably into the new kind of literary self that comes with print, a self that is the product surely, of changes in social life as well as the technology of the word. This novel self is more individualist and atomic than the self of pre-capitalist societies; it is a creature of modern economic relations. I do not know that this new conception of the self was inevitable, but it is no longer something that we in Africa could escape even if we wanted to.[35]

What Appiah recognizes in Soyinka's developing oeuvre - and his reference is particularly to the essays collected under the title ***Myth, Literature and the African World*** - is not the product of an elitist system of education, nor an assimilation of colonial values imbibed through the British University system, but rather an awareness on the part of the writer that the written word throws into disarray the stable and accommodating knowledge born of a traditional, oral culture. Appiah makes the point that an oral culture is, by definition, devoid of written records; it is therefore, absolved of the need to overcome or explain inconsistency in its beliefs. The words of the ancestors survive only through a living tradition which is perpetuated by the repetition of originary words and actions representing a form of truth. Knowledge, within this framework, is accumulative and eclectic, but the basic principles upon which it is founded must remain constant if its inherited authority is to retain its sacred character. It is Appiah's argument that culture's 'image of knowledge' changes with the introduction of the written word, and that the growth of literacy will inevitably herald a refusal of knowledge defined by its self-evident 'body of truths'. Communal interpretation of knowledge, which prioritizes the interests of the community as a whole and invests little or no social effort in individual research or enquiry - which is not to say that these modes are nonexistent - is challenged by literacy which takes as an *a priori* assumption the individual interpretation of the written word.

Appiah places Soyinka's essays, and Soyinka's role as writer, at the crux of this perceived disjuncture between written and oral culture; a disjuncture which challenges at root the very concept of knowledge as communal pursuit;

> The growth both of literacy and of the availability of printing...gives

> rise to that peculiar privacy associated with a new kind of property in texts, a new kind of authorial authority, a new kind of creative *persona*.[36]

Thus, in the Nigerian context, the organization implicit in Western literary pursuits, which expects and rewards change, development and progress in both artistic and scientific theory, enters into a dialectical relationship with a knowledge born of and carried by the spoken word. Thus, abstract theory confronts as 'other' language, which in its relationship to the body of its carrier has become text and inviolable origin of historic truths. For Appiah, the dilemma now facing the contemporary African States is not whether or not to accept a worldview permeated through and through with the rational mode of enquiry - the very fact of literacy, in whatever language, introduces abstractions and elaborations into an oral culture which have been hitherto unperceived - but rather, whether traditional beliefs can emerge unscathed from their contact with individualistic cognitive styles if indeed this is perceived to be a desirable state of affairs.

The complexities of Africa's current cultural matrix, where widespread literacy is a progressive aim, married to a desire for a purity of expression cleansed of the contamination of colonial history, are, for Appiah, demonstrated by the struggles of the writer, Soyinka, to determine his role within transitional culture:

> Soyinka, the individual, a Nigerian outside the traditional, more certain world of his Yoruba ancestors, struggles with the Soyinka who experiences the loss of that world, of those gods of whom he speaks with such love and longing...Once again the 'I' seeks to escape the persistent and engulfing 'We'.[37]

The uneasy relationship of the writer to a non-unified people is, suggests Appiah, highlighted in the case of Soyinka whose chosen medium is the English language. This choice demonstrates the impossibility of identifying his reading public, beyond a localised linguistic community, via any language other than that of the erstwhile colonial power. Thus language as a boundary marker both reinforces colonial boundaries imposed upon a disparate collection of peoples and signifies the 'failure' of the Nigerian State to move beyond the homogeneity forced into being by the organizational principles of imperialist power.

The contemporary historical moment of the African States is one which, asserts Appiah, makes impossible a systematic response to the question: "What does it mean to be African today?". The necessitated use of the word 'African' signifying no more than a concept imposed by the colonial power in opposition to which it now tries to define itself. By the same token, the use of the word 'black' as a fundamental component of self-description can only highlight the fragmented nature of the identity which thus appears in print, for 'black' retains its stable

signification in the English language, only via its polar relationship to 'white'. Thus, Appiah dismisses the idea of an 'African' purity which pre-dates colonialism and therefore rejects the notion that the 'authentic' African may emerge in print:

> Nativist nostalgia, in short, is largely fuelled by that Western sentimentalism so familiar after Rousseau; few things, then, are less native than nativism in its current forms.[38]

The relationship a writer such as Soyinka forges with the English language is therefore the dramatization of an historical relationship, rather than the 'natural' ordering of linguistic categories. No longer the tool of 'truth' language becomes a collision of possible perspectives; a theatricalisation of power.[39] For the African writer attempting artistic expression via this medium the engagement is one of tensile creativity and combat. The possible 'identities' which may emerge from such an engagement also, within the cultural matrix of which they are a part, suggests a wider potential for subjective consideration of what it means to be an African today.

What Appiah describes, through his chosen example of Soyinka's writing, is not a transition from a 'simple' culture to a 'complex' one which will leave in its wake a floundering, illiterate sub-class, locked into essential beliefs which have no place in the modern world. Rather, the transition is one which involves a questioning of social priorities in the face of widespread industrialization and technological innovation. Communities that have 'chosen' in the past to prioritize a form of knowledge which is accommodative and communitarian are challenged - at the moment of their introduction to widespread literacy - to reconsider the organization of their conceptual base. The historical choices which have previously defined their systems of knowledge stand - at this moment - in danger of being pejoratively described as an earlier, or more primitive stage of development, in relation to the complexities of mature selfhood made possible by the technological development of the printed word. This model of the human evolution of knowledge is based on a Western system of rationality which perceives the development of society to be linear and progressive, history becoming thus the charting of an unbroken line which follows the life cycle of biological development from child to mature adult. What Appiah exposes in Soyinka's writing is rather the transition from one system of thought to another with its attendant problems and possibilities in the re-formation of identity.

Soyinka's relationship to the English language must therefore be considered as a fundamental component of his identity as a writer. His awareness of it as a monument hewn out of the supremacist sensibility is one which frees him from an intimate and unifying linkage with the system of values it upholds. He is therefore

liberated from the 'truth-telling' functions of its discourses, for he stands in relation to its meanings as the 'other' of its significations. Viewed within the broader sphere of contemporary Nigerian culture, his work appears as a distillation of the individual in struggle with the means by which he may appear in cultural discourse; a struggle which involves choices concerning fundamental beliefs and structures of cognition. The complexity of his vision, and the form in which it finds its means of expression, become therefore articulations of a highly individualized quest for 'identity', defined in this instance as the relationship of the writer to an 'image of knowledge' negotiated with his society via literary form. Understood in these terms the modes of reception made possible by his work reflect the prismatic constellations of meaning available to a culture at a given moment.

In an essay entitled "Aesthetic Illusions", Soyinka makes a plea for the complex experiencing of language in opposition to the "neo-Tarzanist" approach to African aesthetics:

> Is it really intelligent to demand that *all* poetry be simple? Not *all* experience is simple. More pertinently, not all *experiencing* is limited to a simple uni-linear activity of mind. And does any work which results from man's creative intelligence not become in itself a source of experiencing? That a poem should *communicate*, no one in his right mind would deny. But what should it communicate? The dictionary value of each word? Phrase? Stanza? Story-line? Or could it be that the mind does not *always* demand a literal value out of every image?[40]

In this essay the targets for Soyinka's ire are those critics who, in the name of "racial self-retrieval", fall prey to the myth-making against which Appiah warns when he reminds the reader of the impossibility of defining what it is to be African. Thus, Soyinka argues, the distorted mirror in which they frame their images of the African, demands of the writer the consciousness of a child.[41] Their contribution to the struggle for cultural identity becomes therefore subject to Western ideology whereby the 'difference' inscribed in traditional cultural aesthetics is translated as a simple functionalism derivative of the 'childlike' mechanisms of the primitive mind. The crime he lays at the feet of these critics is the desire for a literature which will return to its reader a worldview which perpetuates the illusion of being 'untouched' by its contact with the modern world. The identities offered as ideals by this literature are, he states, no more than the reified images offered by early Hollywood films in service to a paternalist ideology of imperialism. The suicidal urge expressed by neo-Tarzanist aesthetics feeds a pessimism which permeates Soyinka's essays throughout the 1960s:

> Sermons preached on behalf of a simple-minded poetics are a wilful retreat from the dynamic nature of reality and its

> experiencing...what the neo-Tarzanists preach is a statist contextualism, the poetics of itemisation within narrowly defined areas, the separation of experience from experiencing, of matter from perceiving, of thought from reflecting. It is the poetics of death and mummification, not of life, renewal and continuity.[42]

Soyinka's attempts, as an essayist, to retrieve the complexity of thought which characterizes the experiencing of contemporary Nigerian culture, centre uniquely and unexpectedly upon a mythopoetic use of the gods of the Yoruba pantheon. Adorno describes the "unmethodical method" pursued by essayists as being the unceremonious seizing upon concepts in order to increase the density of their textured thought whilst refusing to define or contextualize those concepts beyond their juxtaposed relationship to other concepts. Thus Soyinka presses the gods into the service of cultural debate with a bewildering lack of reference to source and an apt disregard for any authoritative or anthropological discourse by which their use might be contextualized.

Critics of Soyinka's work have tended to ascribe his use of the Yoruba pantheon to the cultural influences of his upbringing and the fidelity he maintains to the Yoruba people. James Gibbs draws on autobiographical data to this end:

> On one of his holiday visits to Isara, the young Soyinka went through a rite designed to strengthen and protect him...The pattern of the festival, the concern with communal purification and the eclecticism of the celebration were important for the growing playwright and they provide an example of the kind of inspiration Soyinka found in his African background.[43]

Designed to enlighten a British readership, this is perhaps an unfair example of the forging of a narrative as a means of explaining an author's oeuvre. Eldred Durosimi Jones offers his readers a sociology-based contextualization to Soyinka's work which, unfortunately fares little better in its attempt to address the complexity to which Soyinka's naming of the gods refers:

> Traditional Yoruba life is dominated by religion. The Yoruba are surrounded by gods and spirits with whom the lives of mortals interact. In what is more an idiomatic expression for the idea of multiplicity than actual count, the Yoruba ascribe to themselves four hundred and one gods.[44]

Although Soyinka's upbringing and consequent immersion in a world interpenetrated by the constant presence of deities will obviously have proved fundamental to the formation of what he calls "the fount of my own creative inspiration",[45] explanations which refer the reader back to source are, as exemplified by Foucault's discussion of authorship, finally reductive in their return to the psychologizing principles of ideological authorial discourse. In contrast to

this approach, I would like to suggest that Soyinka's inclusion of the Yoruba pantheon in his essays be read as the seizure of a concept through which individual experience may be mediated without the possibility of its translation into the immediacy of subjective or perceptual experience. In "The Ritual Archetype", Soyinka challenges Jungian interpretation of the mythical consciousness as an attempt to counter non-understanding with a scientific discourse which uses the rational worldview as a measure of that which 'is' against an alternative worldview designated as "collective fantasy". In responding to the universalising claims of the Jungian (western) unconscious, Soyinka retorts:

> What *we* call the mythic inner world is both the psychic sub-structure and temporal subsidence, the cumulative history and empirical observations of the community. It is nonetheless primal in that time, in its cyclic reality, is fundamental to it. The inner world is not static, being constantly enriched by the moral and historic experience of man.[46]

Unlike Western theories of the unconscious therefore, Soyinka posits the "mythic inner world" as one which is knowable, subject to change, and completely integrated within the lives of those who carry consciousness of its very real existence. This is not the imagery of an unconscious which subterraneously dictates patterns of behaviour which may only be interpreted after the event by experts whose application of scientific explanations makes understandable that which is arcane to the carrier of its effects. Rather, Soyinka identifies an area of mythical experience which, via the form of his essays - and his theatrical works - he declares to be co-existent with an acute awareness and application of the reasoning mind. Thus, the concluding paragraph of his essay in response to neo-Tarzanism, offers a perception which both confounds and has the possibility of exposing to critique very foundations upon which rationalist discourse and attendant scientific positivism is built:

> The aesthetic matrix is the fount of my own creative inspiration; it influences my critical response to the creation of other cultures and validates selective eclecticism as the right of every productive being, scientist or artist. Sango is today's god of electricity, not of white-man magic-light. Ogun is today's god of precision technology, oil-rigs and space-rockets, not a benighted rustic cowering at the "iron bird".[47]

The potency of Soyinka's juxtaposition between technology and myth strikes at the heart of a fear peculiar to Western rationality which Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer debate in their seminal work ***Dialectic of Enlightenment***.[48] In a series of essays which critique the perpetuation of a worldview informed by Enlightenment thought, Adorno and Horkheimer posit the eruption of myth as a

state of consciousness in which the 'I' has not yet reached authoritative status in relation to the world of its perceptions. Thus man's relationship to the natural world, in mythological consciousness, is still one which holds in thrall that which is beyond understanding. The naming of objects is described as the gasp of fear which accompanies human existence in a world which demands accommodation and change as a vital principle of continued existence. Mythical consciousness is, therefore man in a dynamic relation to the world, where life is founded upon pain and the fear of destruction. The concept of the 'I' as a reflection of the inner ordering of perceptions - the 'I' as a promise of internalised selfhood - is obviously untenable to this form of consciousness and thus the very instability of self, of the determining 'I' becomes the promise of survival and strength in a world that demands adaptability as the sole means of survival. Citing the Homeric myths as their source, Adorno and Horkheimer describe the fragile state of mythical identity thus:

> ...the identity of the self is so much a function of the unidentical, of dissociated, unarticulated myths, that it must derive itself from those myths. The inner organization of individuality in the form of time is still so weak that the external unity and sequence of adventures remains a spatial change of scenery, of the spots sacred to the local deities by whose virtue the storm drives and tosses. Whenever in later history the self has experienced such debilitation...the narrative account of life has slipped into a sequence of adventures. Laboriously, revocable, in the image of voyaging, historical time is detached from space, the irrevocable pattern of all mythic time.[49]

The choice which Adorno and Horkheimer believe the Enlightenment to have exposed is that between man's subordination to nature or the subordination of nature to the self. Neither aspect of the choice represents 'truth' or 'reality' as the choice itself is premised upon the self in a relationship of power to that which it perceives to be the world. Neither the mythical, nor the rational worldviews therefore offer a definitive version of reality but they do have a central role to play in the determining of the autonomy of self and of the order of knowledge upon which selfhood is built. The progression of Enlightenment thought, defined as the means by which a rational explanation of the world may be arrived at via the cognitive processes of deduction and logic, is described by Adorno and Horkheimer as being dependent upon the exiling of myth from contemporary consciousness. Thus mythical time and space - these being designations of what Soyinka calls "inner space" and therefore inviolable to rational categories - are accommodated by their removal from individual perception and their placement within 'real' time as an historic moment in the development of man's process of maturation. Myth becomes therefore - for the Enlightened thinker - an object of discourse; pinned and tabulated, its exile into 'the order of things' is achieved.

The critique of Enlightenment offered by Horkheimer and Adorno, however, refuses the neatness of this procedure and, as their title suggests, they propose the possibility that far from having achieved the desired subjection of nature to self, that contemporary systems of rationality remain driven by a mythical consciousness which forms the antithesis to the unity and stability of the 'I':

> The strain of holding the I together adheres to the I in all stages; and the temptation to lose it has always been there with the blind determination to maintain it...The dread of losing the self and of abrogating together with the self the barrier between oneself and other life, the fear of death and destruction, is intimately associated with a promise of happiness which threatened civilization in every moment.[50]

Soyinka's insistence at the presence of a mythical consciousness coexistent with the rational worldview is, therefore, a radical questioning and even exposure of the ideological barricades erected as limits and boundary markers to the stable categories of the 'I' of Enlightenment thought. His wielding of the gods as weapons with which to confront the "self-appointed moulders of experience", whose armoury is precisely that upon which the rational worldview is founded, is no less than seizure upon the arrow which will strike home in the Achilles heel of that which he opposes. His placing of the gods within a language for whom their presence is anathema, at once issues a challenge to the concept of identity perpetuated by that language and makes vulnerable the alternative possibilities of identity it would seek to expose. The battlefield chosen by Soyinka is essentially an ideological one, his battle cry being the repudiation of ideological categories. The efficacy of his battle tactics however, is dependent upon the definition of a sphere of interpretation which is not itself permeated by the ideological products of discourse. As illustrated by the quotations from Jones and Gibbs however, the rational contextualization of an author's work, in service to the understanding of the reader, renders impotent even the essay form in its attempt to defy reified consciousness and offer the reader the opportunity to "reach down beyond the known for once".

Howard Barker as Essayist

> The essay is the form of the critical category of the mind. For the person who criticizes must necessarily experiment, he must create conditions under which an object becomes visible anew, and do so still differently than an author does; above all the objects frailties must be tried and tested, and this is the meaning of the slight variation the object experiences at the hands of the critic.[51]

A favourite quotation used by critics to expose the eccentricities of Howard Barker's thought processes is one in which he repudiates all ideology. The source

for this quotation may be attributed - although interpretatively and not authoritatively - to a statement made by Theodor Adorno in a preface to his collection of aphorisms which appeared under the title of *Minima Moralia*.[52] The unremitting pessimism to which he subjects the potential reader of his work, is shot through with what Adorno describes as the one ray of hope available to contemporary Western man if his existence is not to be totally and irrevocably determined by a reified consciousness which he no longer has the power to name. He urgently presses the reader to an awareness of the exigencies of the present historical moment as one which may present the final opportunity for man to make decisions concerning the future direction his society should take. The action he proposes is total opposition to the forces of production and consumption; and thus he eschews the totalizing influence of ideological categories which 'produce' the contemporary subject and fix him in his illusory relationship to society.

The idealism of Adorno's demand informs his valorization of the essay form. His own essay on the subject describes the - virtually extinct -"*homme de lettres*" as an exemplification of the refusal of the forces of production which is reflected in the essay form by its innate "critique of ideology". Howard Barker premises his work upon a belief which may prove to be no more than a leap of faith, for it is ultimately unprovable, that:

> The self denies social manipulation, even if self is partially - and I would insist only partially - socially produced.[53]

Barker's assertion that the social self does not constitute the totality of self begs the question: 'What is the self that is *not* socially produced?' It is to this question that his essays address themselves whilst remaining paradoxically aware that the self beyond social determination is that which cannot be defined within discourse and therefore requires critique of that discourse in order to make an appearance. Adorno's description of the persona of the essayist is that of a man who, by virtue of his choice of form, already presents the possibility of 'being' beyond ideological categories. For a mind which engages in the pursuit of speculative interpretation is one which has already transgressed the boundaries of 'official culture' by refuting the logical competency which upholds "the notion that all knowledge can potentially be converted to science".[54]

The essay form, and its user, may therefore be defined by their attempt to expose to debate that which may *not* be converted to science; those aspects of consciousness which, whilst rigorous and objective in their assertions may not be "distributed and recategorized under the separate persons and apparatuses of psychology and sociology".[55] Thus, the essay fragments into its diverse

components that which has been made whole by ideology and, with regard to the social individual, asks what has been rejected in order to make the social whole a viable possibility? The work of the essayist - states Adorno - is the illumination of the object from the inside, whilst that of the ideologue is the highlighting of the whole's external contours.

> The young writer who wants to learn what a work of art is, what linguistic form, aesthetic quality, and even aesthetic technique are at college will usually learn about them only haphazardly, or at best receive information taken readymade from whatever philosophy is in vogue and more or less arbitrarily applied to the content of the works in question.[56]

In contrast to the ideological approach, Barker's essays describe his journey as a writer from the contours of theatrical debate in the early 1970s; defined as the seductive 'We' of a discourse which celebrated its collective endeavour under the banner of 'A People's Art', through to the highly individualized search for a definition of the 'I' of the playwright via immanent critique of that same discourse. The essays which chart this journey are fragmentary - often touching upon isolated aspects of theatrical practice - strident in their hostility to all that is assumed to be 'self-evident', and rigorous in their anatomising of theatrical experience. Centrally, however, the 'I' which writes and the theatre which is the object of its writing remain concepts offered to the reader for interpretation.

In a paper entitled "Why I am no Playwright" [57] Barker examines the implicit assumption of craftsmanship which lies behind the linguistic designation of his profession. The play*wright's* craft, he suggests, has always been dominated by its close association with the craftsmanship of the shipwright or the wheelwright, as moulders of materials to designs ultimately serving public utility and private gain. The transference of the traditional values of this craft into theatrical production implies that the job of the playwright is the repetition of narratives, the seamless joining of structures, the planing of rough surfaces and the provision of linguistic material as fodder to the actor's craft. The danger for theatrical enterprise of the wholesale transference of the notion of 'craft' into all aspects of production is pursued by Barker in several of his essays as a possible source of contamination and destruction of the primary material upon which theatre is dependent; this being the imagination of all participants. The craftsman is not required to imagine: his imagination may even prove a danger to his profession. Rather the craftsman moulds and decorates his raw material in order to achieve mastery over inert matter; the aim of his enterprise is the making useful of that which, in its essence, was purposeless. A craft, claims Barker, exists in service to market-forces and the whimsical gratification of taste.[58]

Returning to the classical definition of the theatrical creator, Barker describes a preference for the title of 'poet' as a means of distancing himself from the crude prescriptions of commodity exchange. The poet's work he defines as that of a singular mind and imagination in search of a language equal to the objects and processes of his imagining. The commitment of the poet is not to the continuance of an unquestioned theatrical tradition but rather to the unique creation of a theatre which will return its participants once again to the fundamental question of what theatre is. The work of the playwright/poet is described by Barker in the same terms used by Max Bense to illuminate the work of the essayist: "to make the object visible anew".

Thus, Barker's playwright/poet offers his name to the eruption of an event which is innately theatrical. The central concern of his theatrical work is therefore to "multiply the body" which is historically represented by the playwright's craft as a unified tradition and to explore a specific arena of human experience which has found its artistic means of expression *only* within the framework of theatrical structures:

> Theatre has no business with research, and things are not dramatized: they are either drama or they are something else. They come into existence as art, or they are not art at all, and research is something carried out by specialists called academics or non-specialists called journalists.[59]

Barker's refusal to replicate, within the theatre's walls, the material which forms the bedrock of social existence, or to allow the crafting of raw material to define his labours, suggests that the theatre to which he gives his name will be one which denies any sense of relevance to the prioritized issues of contemporary society. Before accepting this fact, however, and allowing the title of 'art for art's sake' to do the work of interpretation, I would like once again to consider the spectator to whom the work is offered:

> An honoured audience will quarrel with what it has seen, it will go home in a state of anger, not because it disapproves, but because it has been taken where it was reluctant to go. Thus morality is created in art, by exposure to pain and illegitimate thought.[60]

The concept of 'honouring' the audience is one which allows Barker a freedom in defining its constituent parts which he finds to be lacking in conventional models of audience response. It also suggests the conferment of a rank or title over and above that which necessity requires. To go beyond the necessary, to provide the excess to demand is therefore, in this instance to search for the self which is surplus to requirement; the self beyond social determining. The "honoured" self is that which

appears at the limits of ideological thought and thus Barker suggests that the "honoured" spectator appears only when his tolerance has been stretched to the limits by the theatrical events to which he is witness. The most direct route to these limits, within theatrical experience, is the removal of efficacy from dramatic form, for without the blatant announcement of purpose and utility, the reified consciousness of productive man is unable to place itself in relation to the product. Adorno describes this moment as the one in which either the product is consigned to a metaphorical drawer marked 'I don't understand', in which case responsibility is finally deferred from the spectator back to the playwright, or the desire establishes itself to make a meeting point between that which is perceived and the perceiver. In the latter case the illusion of immediacy gives way to the immanence of creative speculation and intuitive interpretation.

Herbert Marcuse considers art to realise its vital function in contemporary society *only* when it recognizes its own powerlessness as a tool of political change:

> Like technology, art creates another universe of thought and practice against and within the existing one. But in contrast to the technical universe, the artistic universe is one of illusion, semblance, *Schein*. However this semblance is resemblance to a reality which exists as the threat and promise of the established one. In various forms of mask and silence, the artistic universe is organized by the images of a life without fear...[61]

In ***One Dimensional Man*** Marcuse strips the liberal illusion from contemporary man and reviews the state of consciousness this mask disguises. He, in common with Adorno and Horkheimer, considers that the mass industrialization of the Western world, allied to the monopolistic economy of late capitalist development and the instalment of a system of cultural politics to replace the structuralist politics of the pre-industrial era, have combined to produce a society dependent upon the mobility of a large workforce whose ambitions, goals and emotional drives must be sublimated to the smooth-running of the economic processes of the State. The human being which emerges out of this historic moment is described by Adorno as "historically condemned"; striving under the illusion of subjecthood, modern man is undergoing a process of "nullity":

> To speak immediately of the immediate is to behave much as those novelists who drape their marionettes in imitated bygone passions like cheap jewellery, and make people who are no more than component parts of machinery act as if they still had the capacity to act as subjects, and as if something depended on their actions.[62]

Marcuse describes this "standardized" being as one whose "immediate identification [is with] *his* society and, through it, with the society as a whole".[63]

The terrifying description which Marcuse proposes as being adequate to contemporary consciousness is 'man with a dimension missing', the "one dimensional man" of his title. Marcuse's central thesis is that man, as a subject of late capitalist society, has entered into a symbiotic relationship with the forces of production - ideologically represented as social identity - and that his consciousness has become identical to the standardized techniques which he employs to drive the mechanisms over which he believes he has mastery. Consciousness is thus defined as having reached a stage where experience and function have fused within a language of commodification; a series of speech acts which atrophy critical or dialectic reasoning and return emotional or intellectual thought to the speaker in a reified form which constitutes the basis of experience.

> The elements of autonomy, discovery, demonstration and critique recede before designation, assertion and imitation... Discourse is deprived of the mediations which are the stages of the process of cognition and cognitive evaluation. The concepts which comprehend the facts and thereby transcend the fact are losing their authentic linguistic representation. Without these mediations, language tends to express and promote the immediate identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence, the thing and its function.[64]

Marcuse's "one dimensional man" exists in and of a "language of total administration" and the tragedy of his being lies in the illusion that he is master of himself and of his actions.

The spectator to whom Barker addresses himself is one who is prepared to forego the administered life in order that he may be honoured as a two-dimensional human being. A phrase to which Barker returns again and again in his essays refers to the experience of "being taken out of oneself" of "not knowing oneself". The expression, common to practical linguistic usage, becomes, within the context of Barker's theatre - as outlined by his essays - redolent with meaning, for it describes both an awareness of the illusory capacity for knowledge we believe ourselves to hold over our bodies, and the moment at which the self transgresses the limits of social definition:

> I repeat that no one is educated by a play of this sort - no information, useful or otherwise, is communicated, nor is communication the essence...The promiscuity of the imagination in the Catastrophic play, its unapologetic intimacy with the forbidden - indeed the rupturing of the forbidden as a category - evacuates the territory of values. The production must become, in essence, a poem, and, like a poem, not reducible to a series of statements in other forms.[65]

The concept of promiscuity stands as an axis between the 'idea' which can be 'said' and the reflection of consciousness which refuses translation into scientific knowledge, or ideological discourse. On the one side of this axis stands the speaker who exhibits his power over language - posited as a tool of perception; a lackey to experience - on the other side stands he who is party to an awareness of the painful schism language represents in its division between the potential of man's consciousness as a mediation of his understanding of the world and the negotiated expression of that consciousness via ideologies which cement his position as a subject in society.

The promise of promiscuity lies only in its juxtaposition to the monogamous relationship of the self to systems of ideological belief perpetuated by the State. There are therefore no definable prizes or perceivable goals offered as reward, only the possibility of experiencing the fear and anxiety which lies at the limits of ideological belief and may - there is no certainty - offer potential to man beyond reified consciousness. What Barker promises to deliver to his audience in his professional capacity is the imagination freed from civic constraint and its attendant hierarchy of liberal humanist values. In order to expose the limits of Marcuse's 'one-dimensional man' he disrupts those categories of order and meaning which, for the majority of the population, form the foundation of their daily existence and dictate the means for the continued functioning of society as a whole. What is placed before the spectator is the explosion of the 'whole' revealing the diversity of its 'particulars' which refuse to add up and, as a consequence, discharge their chaotic energy to non-productive ends:

> As a form of theatre it is so overloaded, so apparently excessive in language, metaphor, event, diversity of form and image, so promiscuous in its speculation, it denies the very concept of the ordered life even as an ideal.[66]

Barker's 'promiscuity' flies in the face of - whilst maintaining its dialectic with - an ethos dedicated to economy of time and effort. At best its refusal of boundaries and categories of knowledge create a plethora premised upon ambiguity and doubt: 'promiscuous' theatre is calculated to produce individualized and individualizing anxiety. Barker's immanent theatre devotes its energies to immanence as action. In place of the 'good' or 'moral' playwright who serves his society by offering cultural clarification, he commits the untenable sin of blasting apart the hard won categories of consensual wisdom and refusing to take responsibility for the mess he may leave behind him. The challenge he issues to the spectator, and the demand inherent in his honouring of him, is to pick his way through the detritus, forging as he goes a pathway which may only be validated by the process of its making. The spectator is thus charged with the responsibility for self-fashioning; no longer a

craftsman in the service of the state, his creation becomes that of the artist whose responsibility is to the imagination.

The Playwright and Commitment

To return to the paradox with which this chapter began is to return to Barker and Soyinka's speculations upon their responsibility as playwrights, both to the medium of their expression, and to the spectator for whom the work is played. A response to this specific was offered by Soyinka in the first decade of Nigerian Independence:

> The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society *and* as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself.[67]

And by Barker in response to the "authoritarian politics" of the Thatcher years:

> The dramatist's obligation becomes an obligation not to a political position...but to his own imagination. His function becomes not to educate by his superior political knowledge, for who can trust that? but to lead into moral conflict by his superior imagination...In an age of unitary thought and propaganda, this is his first responsibility.[68]

For both playwrights the highly developed use of the imaginative faculty is an end in itself. The existence of the playwright's imagination, and the product which it engenders, is offered as a unique and vital contribution to the society which it serves. Whether as essence or obligation, this function is perceived to be the *raison d'être* of the playwright, suggesting that only via his imaginative faculty may the playwright truly come into being.

The primary use made by the playwright of his imagination as a tool of perception infers that the view of the world thus offered to the spectator will be unique. The faith placed in this uniqueness by both playwrights, I would like to suggest, is born of their absolute belief in the need for culture to cultivate, not only the appearance of a society in material terms, but also the 'other life' of the imagination which returns to each member of that society the capacity for speculation upon alternative modes of being, and the creative desire for continuous critique of what is in order that his mode of being within society may be named and evaluated as part of the functioning of that society rather than the whole of the individual's identity.

A Marxist objection to this proposition would be that in a society as thoroughly permeated by ideological belief as that of Western Europe, the imagination is

unlikely to have escaped colonization by the structures of thought which support and maintain late capitalism. If this is so, then the products of the imagination will remain ideologically bound whilst masquerading as alternative forms of perception. The question raised, therefore, concerns the nature of the imagination proffered by Soyinka and Barker, and the ways in which this imagination may differ in response to the cultural context within which their work is to be received.

Finally, this question returns one to the role of the playwright as distinct from the author and specific in its ambiguous relation to the finished product which will appear before the audience. As in the case of the essayist, both Barker and Soyinka have eschewed the ideological imperative inherent in the concept of clarity, this being the province of moralists and ideologues, and the production of a solution, this being the vocabulary of the scientist and the politician. The form which derives of their processes of thought is, like the essay, virtually extinct, offering no perceivable use-value beyond its cultural contribution to a tradition of literary endeavour. The very particular use made of the word playwright by Barker and Soyinka describes, within a culture of ideological commodification, a non-identity; a function without a role. This position of non-identity - in a society committed to the formation and stable functioning of the unifying 'I' - is the very condition which promises the unique capacity to imagine beyond the matrix of productive forces within which the 'I' of the English language lies embedded. Both Barker and Soyinka have, by virtue of their deep concern for their respective cultures, made themselves foreigners to those same cultures. Thus their work maintains an awareness of the chasm which separates the products of the social imagination from the products of the exiled imagination; in both cases it is this gap, or chasm which provides the arena for the worlds they choose to place upon the stage. Their ongoing commitment both to their form and to their audiences may therefore be describe as the maintenance of the possibility of non-identity as the basis of theatrical endeavour.

Notes

1. Wole Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*, 1st edn (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988), p.329
2. Judith Gleason also celebrates the transience of African sculpture: "There is a sense in which African artists are to be envied...their acquaintance with destruction, with the perishability of the materials of traditional African culture - the inevitable torrent, the termite, nature eradicating the works of man." "Out of the Irony of Words", *Transition* 4/18 (1965), p.36
3. Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.81
4. Howard Barker, *A Hard Heart* (London: Calder, 1992)
5. Wole Soyinka, *The Road* (Oxford: OUP, 1965)
6. Irving Wardle, "Further Scenes from the Execution of Culture", *Independent on Sunday* (8th March 1992)
7. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.88
8. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.119
9. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), p.61
10. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.37
11. Howard Barker, *The Bite of the Night* (London: Calder, 1988), p.3
12. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, pp.85-87
13. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.81
14. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.68
15. Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (London: Free Association Books, 1988), p.13
16. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.3
17. Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature: Volume One* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.103
18. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.57
19. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.45
20. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.77
21. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.75
22. Wole Soyinka, Interview with Lewis Nkosi in *African Writers Talking*, ed. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (New York: APC, 1972), p.177
23. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.36
24. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.46
25. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1986), pp.101-120, p.119
26. Foucault, *Ibid.*, p.107
27. Foucault, *Ibid.*, p.110
28. Michel Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp.29-52, p.44
29. Adorno,"The Essay as Form" in *Notes to Literature*, pp.3-23, p.9
30. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp.142-148
31. Adorno, "The Essay as Form" in *Notes to Literature*, p.13
32. Adorno, *Ibid.*,p.13
33. Gilles Deleuze, "Nomad Thought" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. David B. Allison (London: MIT Press, 1986), pp.142-149, p.146
34. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992)
35. Appiah, *Ibid.*, p.134
36. Appiah, *Ibid.*, p.132
37. Appiah, *Ibid.*, p.132
38. Appiah, *Ibid.*, p.95
39. See D.S. Izevbaye, "Language and Meaning in Wole Soyinka's *The Road*" for an exploration of the text as "a dramatization of the limits of language"

in *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, ed. James Gibbs (Washington DC: Three Continents, 1980), pp.90-103

40. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.101
41. The term "neo-Tarzanism" is used by Soyinka principally to respond to the body of criticism produced by Chinweizi, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwa Madubuike. Their major work is *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 1980)
42. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.109
43. James Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* (London:Macmillan, 1986)
44. Eldred Durosimi Jones, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Inc., 1973), p.4
45. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.329
46. Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p.35
47. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.329
48. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979)
49. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Ibid.*, p.48
50. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Ibid.*, p.33
51. Max Bense, quoted in Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, p.18
52. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1978)
53. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.165
54. Adorno, "The Essay as Form" in *Notes to Literature*, p.8
55. Adorno, *Ibid.*, p.8
56. Adorno, *Ibid.*, p.9
57. Howard Barker, "Why I am no Playwright", *Unpublished Paper* supplied by Howard Barker (1994)
58. "The verbal art is more self-conscious than the carver's craft, and it should be obvious that it is this subjectivity, this questioning voice, that distinguishes literature from anthropology or sociology in fiction or verse...the empathy of the field-worker is immensely different from the exacerbated consciousness reflecting on many things from within." Judith Gleason, "Out of the Irony of Words", *Transition* 4/18 (1965), p.38
59. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.73
60. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.47
61. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Abacus, 1972), p.187
62. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p.15
63. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, p.23
64. Marcuse, *Ibid.*, p.79
65. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.123
66. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.122
67. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.20
68. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.48

Chapter Two

Barker's Extraordinary Individuals

> The theatre is without evidence, it 'makes believe', it forces belief. The audience of the theatre comes for what it cannot obtain elsewhere in any other forum. In other words, it comes for the false, it comes for the speculative and the unproven.[1]

When Barker arraigns his theatre of illusion and ambiguity against a society which has no place for these categories he is, of course, not suggesting that the theatre he creates has moved beyond claims to truth and is operating in an ethical vacuum. Rather he uses the discourse of theatre as a means by which to critique the truth claims upon which 'reality' builds its foundations. For this reason he insists upon the necessity of the four walls which designate theatrical space as being distinct and separate from 'real' space. In so doing he attempts to restore to theatre the artifice of its begetting and the paradoxes inherent in the very visible structures of belief which support its illusory representations. Thus, the sanctification of empirical proof becomes one category amongst others which must jostle for authenticity alongside the rest.

In order to define theatrical discourse, Barker compares his own perceptions of theatre as a "black box", the walls of which act as protection against a "sea of morality" [2] which washes through the streets outside, to those of Bertolt Brecht for whom the mysteries lurking in the shadows of the black box provided an analogy for the ideological representations of reality wilfully imposed by capitalist producers upon the proletariat. The web of illusion, which for Barker provides the radical foundation of theatrical endeavour, became for Brecht further evidence of the web of falsification woven around the means of production; the sanctifying "aura" which precludes analysis. His revolutionary impulse was therefore to turn on the lights where before there was darkness; to illumine and expose the artifice which maintains theatrical illusion. The dazzling virtuosity of the Brechtian impulse has served as a metaphor for revolutionary theatre throughout the latter part of the twentieth century; Barker however, prizes the metaphor loose of its revolutionary moorings and finds:

> When Brecht commanded that the box be filled with light he was driven by the passion for enlightenment, and he knew instructions require light just as the imagination hates light and flees from it.[3]

Barker, in aligning Brecht's theatre with the imperative to enlightenment, is attempting to expose a fallacy in the analogy Brecht draws between theatrical illusion and ideological falsification. The seductive quality of Brecht's solution lies

in the simplicity of its central metaphor. Ever suspicious of simplicity, Barker questions the aesthetic reduction implicit in Brecht's theoretical position and enquires, like Theodor Adorno before him, whether or not aesthetic reduction does not lead to political reductionism and thus to the position whereby : "Bad politics becomes bad art and *vice versa.*" [4]

Adorno's reservations concerning the revolutionary impact of Brecht's theatrical innovation are helpful here because they clarify Barker's own entry into a debate which has - owing to its complexity - obtained small purchase in discussions concerning art over the past four decades. In an essay written in 1962 entitled "Commitment",[5] Adorno throws down the gauntlet to contemporary producers of art:

> Today, every phenomenon of culture...is liable to be suffocated in the cultivation of kitsch. Yet paradoxically in the same epoch it is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics...This is not a time for political works of art, but politics has migrated into autonomous works, and nowhere more so than where these seem politically dead.[6]

Adorno's argument rests upon the distance inscribed between the spectator and the artwork. Whilst he recognizes the attractiveness of Brecht's desire to strip away the 'capitalist camouflage' from his theatre, he also feels the need to expose Brecht's innate desire to instruct via easy consumption. Thus, for Adorno, Brecht's ***The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*** [7] which represents the rise of Fascism as being no more terrifying *in its complexity* than the accidental consequences of a criminal mentality is a theatre which contributes to the ideological subordination of its audience. The central issue raised by Adorno is the nature of the act of consumption to which the audience member is subjected, this being prioritized over and above the content of the product. According to this reasoning it could be said that Brecht's insistence upon the collective consumption of attitudes towards political issues veers towards a further reification of structural response in capitalist society, for it denies the hazardous and complex journey an individual must make towards a responsible understanding of the social, cultural and political forces which determine - at least in part - his existence.

The point of consumption is therefore the proof of commitment for the contemporary artist who, to follow Adorno's reasoning, must choose either to define his work according to its content - in which case it enters the marketplace and becomes subject to market forces - or according to the inability of the artwork to offer discursive identity to its content, at which point it is removed from the acknowledged sphere of consumption altogether. The second option retains the ability to critique a society based upon exchange but it is hardly pragmatic.

Brecht's pragmatism led him to make a theatre which would appeal to those same consumers whose desire was answered by the boxing ring.[8] Adorno questions whether the acknowledgement of and acquiescence to such a desire on the part of the theatre is not the point of entry into a capitalist ethics from which escape is unthinkable, purely because that theatre makes itself dependent upon the gratification of desires engendered by consumer-based ideology. Arguments countering this position would state the necessity for the re-education of the desiring subject who, within the Brechtian paradigm, has been corrupted by the wealth-driven forces of production operating in advanced society. The basic weakness of this position lies in the assumption that the spectator is an innocent, incapable of taking responsibility, and who must, therefore, be protected against corrupting influences by those who know better; by those who proclaim themselves the protectors of the soul.

The dialectic upon which Brecht's work is premissed thus becomes the "bad politics" described by Adorno. The point of easy consumption at which the spectator enters into a relationship with the work betrays an insufficient critique of the society it counters, for it leaves unscathed the central proposition which renders the proletariat passive to the forces which define his subjecthood; that which declares him to be innocent in the process of historical change.

Barker observes that the Brechtian illumination of the theatre building serves two functions; it strips away the artifice of theatrical illusion, thus instructing the spectator in the mechanics of theatrical process and simultaneously lessening the distance between the audience and the stage, but it also imposes a technique of social control upon the spectator:

> Imagination...flees its neighbours. In light you are only half-conscious of the stage and half-conscious of your neighbour. In all collective culture your neighbour controls you by his gaze. In darkness he is eliminated and you are alone with the actor.[9]

Barker equates the illuminated theatre with the banishment of the shadows of chaos and unreason which characterized the Age of Enlightenment. Developing this analogy, Barker roundly condemns the central thesis of Brecht's praxis; the development of an artform via the rigorous application of scientific method. Barker situates Brecht's faith in the progressive nature of technology within the context of Enlightenment rationality and finds theatrical discourse to be anathema to the controlled and controlling gaze of the scientific mind. In *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory* Lambert Zuidervaart offers to the reader a precis of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of Enlightenment reason:

> ...science aims at controlling nature through reduction and abstraction. Scientists reduce things to their subjection to human control. Being controllable comes to constitute the identity and unity of everything in nature, which enters a correlation with the identity and unity of the controlling subject. The scientific symbol is merely the abstract sign for the object. Scientific distance is designed to make things universally fungible and controllable.[10]

Adorno and Horkheimer use the scientific paradigm to explore the paradox man finds himself confronting in the twentieth century; namely the extent to which control is exercised over human freedom by scientific objects which exist only because of their creation as an element of man's historical struggle against nature as a dominating force and source of fear.

The thesis which emerges from ***Dialectic of Enlightenment*** states that human history is the history of man's attempted domination of nature (nature being defined as the forces which threaten the existence of mankind and are attributable to no known causes). If history is to be understood in this way then - it is Adorno and Horkheimer's claim - unless man can rid himself of the struggle for daily existence, the dialectic of domination and submission will continue to forge the chain of human development, and the source of fear - which lies at the heart of the scientific urge to objectify nature - will continue to replicate the threat against which freedom is defined.

This theoretical position enmeshes man in a cyclical progression from which there can be no escape - given the reality that man still does have to struggle daily for his survival both in the natural world and in the society which shields him from it - and yet, paradoxically, posits escape from that cycle to be the only hope for a society which is headed towards inevitable destruction at its own hands.

On the grounds of this cultural critique of Enlightenment, Barker is able to dismiss Brecht's theatrical praxis as being symptomatic of a misplaced faith in scientific progress which can lead only to further domination of the proletariat it seeks to emancipate. The alternative offered by Barker does not oppose Enlightenment *per se* but rather critiques the way in which rationality has come to serve as a veneer to techniques of domination. He thus challenges 'rational' or scientific praxis - which depends for its functioning upon the identification of use-value in all elements and areas of social life - with an 'irrational' praxis which lends identification to his work only insofar as it proves it devoid of use-value, and therefore lacking social designation. Adorno's faith in art, which in certain cases he perceives to have retained an autonomy from rationality, is echoed by Barker when he proposes:

> One day a play will be written for which men and women will miss a day's work.
> It is likely this play will itself be experienced as work.[11]

This is the aim of the autonomous artwork so lionized by Adorno; it is the thing 'in itself' which by its nature is non-discursive and contains an inherent resistance to any discursive translation. When Barker posits a play as an experience of work therefore, he offers a form of labour, or praxis, which denies the struggle for material existence as the basis of its rationality. According to the thesis offered by Adorno, the assertion of autonomy is the only means by which such a form of labour may continue to exist in a rational society.

For Adorno the autonomous artwork finds its apotheosis in the Modernist movement. He cites Samuel Beckett's ***Endgame*** [12] as one of the few examples of art which fulfil the potential contained within the sphere of autonomous creation. The uniqueness of ***Endgame***, he states, lies in its critique of traditional aesthetics which designate meaning as the unified expression of constitutive parts contained within the whole:

> [Beckett's plays] put meaning on trial. To do this as determinately as traditional artworks express positive meaning, modern artworks must be consistent in their negation of meaning. Consistency obligates a play such as ***Endgame*** to achieve the density and unity that once were supposed to constitute meaning.[13]

Thus Beckett's play constitutes not only the end of "meaning" as recognized by Enlightenment rationality, but also the end of the unified subject who is dependent upon the coherence of a unified and totalizing system of rational thought. The "meaning" which survives out of the ruins of subjectivity is necessarily non-discursive, thus having no function beyond the creation of theatrical form which achieves a consistency of rational meaninglessness.

For Adorno then, the age of Modernism represents a full-stop at the end of man's cultural endeavours. Beckett's instigation of an absurd universe, in which the subject of the Enlightenment is dismantled, heralds an age for Adorno in which:

> The last absurdity is that the peacefulness of the void and the peacefulness of reconciliation cannot be distinguished from one another. Hope skulks out of the world, which cannot conserve it any more than it can pap and bon-bons, and back to where it came from, death.[14]

Barker however, belongs to a generation of writers and thinkers for whom Clov's dream of a world in which "all would be silent and still and each thing in its last place, under the last dust." [15] must stand as a punctuation mark and not the final statement of a culture struggling with its incipient demise. For Michel Foucault,

writing in the 1960s, philosophical thought found itself echoing Nietzsche's triumphant "God is dead", but now in its secular version with man as subject of the Enlightenment gasping his last in order to pave the way for a new creation; man as a work of art.

Foucault's essay "What is Enlightenment?" [16] proceeds from a critique of Kant's interrogation of Enlightenment as a concept and proposes that the import of the Kantian enquiry rests on the constitution of 'modernity' [17] as a conceptual problematization of man's subjecthood. Thus, the question 'What are we today, now?' first posed by Kant in relation to the dawning modern era, offers an innate challenge to the 'essential' qualities of humanity which describe the humanist subject. For an elucidation of the humanist subject I quote Catherine Belsey:

> The ideology of liberal humanism assumes a world of non-contradictory (and therefore fundamentally unalterable) individuals whose unfettered consciousness is the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. It is in the interest of this ideology above all...to present the individual as free, unified, autonomous subjectivity.[18]

Foucault proceeds from the observation that Kant's use of "Enlightenment" refers not to the development of scientific reason but rather to the individual quest for knowledge as it exists in modern society. The particularity of this quest, for Kant, lies in the journey undertaken by the social individual from subjecthood, which holds the promise of control and responsibility whilst being inscribed through and through with moral dependency and submission, towards an autonomous individuality or selfhood in which the obligation to obey is no longer innate but rather the outcome of considered choice.

Foucault moves beyond the rather conservative civil liberties envisaged by Kant and extends his vision to the possibility of an autonomous individual in full possession of ethical responsibility which facilitates the formation and mastery of the self. Thus, for Foucault the Kantian question 'What are we today, now?' provides a schismatic moment - which has come to be known as modernity - in which the possibility emerged for the creation of a self beyond subjecthood; a horizon of 'meaning' beyond State-based morality.

In order to develop his argument Foucault proposes the consideration of modernity as an 'attitude' rather than an epoch. As a means of making visible this attitude he focuses upon the sphere of art and particularly the role of the imagination in the apprehension of reality:

> For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it

> otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is ...modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it.[19]

Foucault's perception of the challenge which modernity casts before humanism lies with the ability of the individual to ask of the present 'What are we today, now?' and then to fashion a self out of the re-imaging of that present. Only via this process can Foucault conceive of a non-acculturated self, which is to say a self which is not 'given' by structural and psychological determinants beyond conscious control. Throughout Foucault's writings, the self becomes possible only because of the "privileging of imagination and autonomy in enlightened modernity".[20]

He, like Kant before him, can only propose a limited sphere within which the autonomous individual might find its beginnings, and the ambitious development of Kant's thesis leads Foucault out of the civic realm and, parallelling Adorno, into the sphere of art wherein the concept of autonomy already exists. Foucault is unable to move beyond this sphere and despite his retention of the ethics pertaining to self-mastery - later to be explored at length in his *History of Sexuality* [21]- he finds no way of relating contemporary scientific discourse to an aesthetics of self-mastery. The seeds of imaginative potential which he discovered to reside in the concept of Enlightenment remain hermetically sealed within the structures of art, rendered politically impotent by discursive definition. When asked in an interview *how* one is to create the self, he replies: "From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence; we have to create ourselves as a work of art." [22]

Thus Foucault pursues the autonomous individual beyond Adorno's "death of the subject", and of 'meaning', but retains the specificity of the 'space' of the self born of imagination, and this space is consistently traced back to the sphere of art which exists only by refusing a functional role within society. Kant referred to "public space" and did not feel the need to specify art; both Adorno and Foucault recognize the paradigm of autonomy as that which art alone has come to represent.

> The walls [of the theatre] protect the actor and the audience not only from the racket of the street but also from its morality. Inside the black box, the imagination is wild and tragic and its criminality unfettered. The unspeakable is spoken. Here alone is the audience trusted with the full burden of what it has witnessed and liberated from the ideology of redemption.[23]

Barker's "black box" is a theatre which recognizes its own impotence, but - after Foucault and in contrast to Brecht - it refuses the imperative to 'make people better' resounding instead with the clamour of Kant's enquiry to which it responds with the assertion that the impotence experienced by theatrical discourse might very

well provide the root metaphor for contemporary reality. If this is so, then the very structures of theatre become articulate in their ability to confront an audience with an 'imagined present', and further to press those same structures into the service of 'imagining otherwise'. The importance of the collision between theatrical structures and social reality lies in the fertility of the imaginative spark to which theatre as a metaphor for social impotence becomes a stimulus to individual perception. And vitally, the imaginative spark precedes, and may even preclude, an understanding and analysis which would drive the spectator back into the scientific cycle of fear and destruction, described as the driving force of progress in the twentieth century by Adorno and Horkheimer.

The Actor as Agent of Transgression

Barker's delight in the ability of theatre to expose impotence and, through the medium of language, to project the possibilities for alternative modes of being beyond ideological sterility, finds a focus in the transformational qualities of the actor's art:

> **Fat Actor**
>
> He brought himself into the room
> With a rubbery step as if to show
> His corpulence did not preclude energy.
> In suffering heat he had expanded
> Verbally, was all compliments and
> Spilling his enthusiasm for the part
> Twirled spectacles in a soft, unpleasant hand.
> His teeth recoiled into a tiny hole
> Squirming at the tongue's lavishness
> And holding a cigarette aloft he
> Unwholesomely exhaled, a pitiful poise,
> This life so badly played.
>
> And then, taking the text, strolled,
> Turned and gave such a torrent of truth
> He became in acting muscular and iron
> Implacable in borrowed form,
> Only self in the imagined.[24]

The journey required by Barker of the actor is one that forgoes the safe haven of character with its attendent psychology, reason and explanation. For Barker, to charge an actor with the creation of a character is to trammel the artist within the realms of discourse and ideology. Rather, he counsels the actor to take language as his guide, believing that only the banishment of banality from the stage and the restoration of language to the actor may "rupture the imaginative blockade of the culture."[25] The actor is required to wear the language of the Barkerian text as if it were a costume; the language therefore takes the place of the internalized,

psychologized character and dictates the shape the actor will inhabit upon the stage. Thus the heightened language of performance becomes both the focus and motivation of dramatic action; it is no longer a symptom of unconscious drives and motives which draw the spectator back to character - via empathy - as a source of the progression of the plot:

> ...the language carries the momentum of the drama and the characters, through using language, can be seduced by their own articulation. So there is a sense in which perhaps the words speak the character rather than *vice versa*.[26]

Barker's use of the concept of the actor carries an innate challenge to each individual spectator: first to recognize and witness the danger of the self exposed as artifice, and second to dare to be seduced by the actor's articulation of an 'unlived life'; to dare - without the safeguards of judgement and moral indignation - to speculate upon the potential for a plurality of self built upon the foundation of a desire as yet unformed but willed into existence by the recognition of social and ideological impotence.[27]

In a passage which insists that theatre is possible only when the actor is freed from ideological constraint - "like a dog being let off a lead" [28]- Barker describes the actor as being "not quite human" [29] and in this he distinguishes the spectators' response to the actor costumed in the language of the text as being qualitatively different from the responses we have to people in everyday reality. The actor's presence, the actor's life upon the stage, is both a concentrate and exposure of the 'life' which is denied by social utilitarianism. The spectator, once in contact with the world of the actor, is invited to attend upon a potency which negatively defines the world outside the walls of the theatre and, safe within this womb-like structure, the imagination is called upon to enjoy - vicariously - the pleasure of witnessing actions which, if they were to be played out in social reality, would inevitably rain chaos and destruction upon their perpetrators.

> The audience is stirred at a subconscious level by the sheer volume of imagined life which the actors present...The possibility that is unlocked in the relations between characters drags the idea of hidden life into the forefront of consciousness. It is an acutely painful, and a half-reluctant, experience, to which individuals frequently return.[30]

Barker's description of the actor as "not entirely human" affords the profession the possibility of semi-divine status. This perception is shared by American scholar Michael Goldman whose book ***The Actor's Freedom*** [31] attempts an ontological study of the actor as a function of critique in Western society. Goldman suggests that the actor's ability to 'play' beyond the confines of social responsibility is a

central component of theatrical potency. What Barker describes as "not quite human", Goldman defines as "ontological subversion"; that is the ability of the actor to shift identity at will, to flout social taboos by embracing 'otherness' as a condition of freedom. This transgressional impulse, which Goldman and Barker place at the centre of theatrical endeavour, both privileges and transforms the space traversed by the actor; it makes of it a space within which the law, both natural and civic, may be transgressed - or imagined otherwise - without fear of intervention or retribution. Goldman likens the uncanny powers of the actor to the special privileges of the dead; they both remind us of a world beyond the grasp of reality, and thus throw into sharp relief the world of the living:

> The actor is beyond us because he is disguised; he both is and is not himself. The actor's body is possessed by something other, that is at once the particular object of his mimesis and a vaguer more numinous source...it corresponds to otherness itself in its threatening aspect, all that generality of terror man has tried, apparently from his earliest days, to enact so as to control.[32]

Actors who have worked on Barker's texts find themselves striving for a language which could adequately describe the process they have undergone. The actors interviewed by David Ian Rabey, whose responses form an appendix to his study of Barker's *oeuvre*,[33] are almost unanimous in their perception that Barker is the actor's playwright *par excellence* because his use of the actor demands a process whereby question are asked of the 'self' rather than of the character. The ambiguity of this statement arises from the fact that Barker's work strips the actor of his safety-net - character as function of the plot - and exposes the actor's art - self as function of language - to the spectator's gaze. Actor Maggie Steed describes her work on Barker's texts thus:

> You have to learn to let the words in, which you have to learn over and over again, because of the screaming defences you have to discard to let yourself follow the power of the language... Some people will be upset, some people will feel they've seen their lives onstage - that tells you that you exist, as very few other things tell you.[34]

Actor Ian McDiarmid, who throughout the eighties proclaimed his professional allegiance to Barker's theatrical vision and for whom Barker has written a number of stage roles and the poetic monologue ***Don't Exaggerate***,[35] describes the work of the Barkerian actor as a process of struggle which when placed before an audience becomes a discourse of liberation:

> His work liberates within people what they want, perhaps need expressed and is regarded with fear in an atmosphere of prescription. This can also be true of acting which aspires to put an audience in touch with its own pain.[36]

What Barker requires of the actor is not what he *is* but what language can make of him. The power he perceives to be inherent in poetic language is contained in its imperative to move beyond the functional towards the potential of the non-ideological self; the self which may not be contained within the bounds of a society based on reason and logic. In insisting upon the actor's leap from impotent subjecthood to potent self, Barker is pursuing the Foucauldian boundary marked by authorship as a bulwark against fear, and confirming what neither Foucault nor Adorno felt confident to state; that only in affirming social impotence may the self emerge as a response to the fearful condition of State sanctified subjecthood. Michael Goldman articulates the Foucauldian boundary in the following way:

> In taking on the spirit of another body, the actor leaps the gap between the fearful self and the frightful other...the actor is a figure of power and danger, of pity and fear, because he is at once the otherness that threatens - now uncannily animate and strutting the stage in front of us - and the threatened self, daring in its exposure and ambition. We "identify" with the character he plays, with him-playing-the-character, because we respond to the energy with which he inhabits his new identity.[37]

Thus, the process undertaken by the actor assumes a newly-acquired eloquence when considered as the paradoxical affirmation of the impotent subject. The actor's journey acquires the potential for potency because of an historical collision between art and reality whereby theatre achieves its greatest power; the possibility of offering articulation to the lives of its spectators.

Whilst the process undergone by the actor is antecedent to performance, the progress of the Barkerian text mirrors in action the actor's leap "between fearful self and frightful other". The terrifying gap, or chasm which Barker's language exposes for the actor as artist of the self also forms the content of the Barkerian play, allowing the spectator not only to witness the fruits of struggle via the actor's performance but also to participate - via the imagination - in the Kantian enquiry which underpins the thrust of Barker's language: 'What is it that we are today, now?' For Foucault, the texts which return to the reader the questions which lie at the source of the writer's relationship to language belong in a specific category of literature and require a specific response; these texts he names as "transgressional".

The Transgressional Text

> The beauty of the [transgressional] text lies in the fact that it cannot be judged according to any existing rules, that no concept is adequate to it, no form of knowledge able to measure up to it. It opens up 'new space' of analysis or judgement demanding different categories, rules and strategies of interpretation.[38]

The text to which Michel Foucault is referring is the memoir of the murderer, Pierre Rivière: ***I Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother.***[39] The source of Foucault's fascination with this particular murderer - he does not suggest that murder *per se* is the pre-condition of creativity - is that Rivière attempted to re-create, or rather to invent himself, and further to immortalize the self he had invented, in the teeth of the official discourses of the French State. This was achieved by his terrifying - and insane - commitment to an action which proved indefinable within the framework of extant discursive subjecthood. In his memoir the French peasant, Pierre Rivière, recounts the murder of his mother, his sister and his brother, the sole motive for which - he claims - was to write an account of the murder after the event of their deaths and his imprisonment. Foucault ascribes to this textual voice a transgressional 'beauty' both by virtue of the willed unreason that brought it into being, and the resultant aberrational authorship which has indeed lent immortality to a voice which never should have existed. Pierre Rivière's text was authored outside the defining principles inscribed through the official discourses of the State; it was neither commissioned nor was it required but the foundation of legal discourse rests upon the collection and collation of all documents relating to the process of criminal enquiry and prosecution, thus Rivière's unassimilable text achieves immortality via the very system which should have ensured its effective non-existence. It is this miraculous paradox which, for Foucault, constitutes the seductive power of the text. The conditions of its production render the text conceptually impossible and therefore immune to normative categories of response. The memoir achieves the status of what Adorno defines as "true commodity";[40] a thing in itself, for itself, utterly lacking in moral or economic utility. Rivière's text represents nothing beyond the struggle to create a visible self in place of the State defined impotence which he perceives to be the status of his subjecthood.

> [Transgression] must be detached from its questionable association to ethics if we want to understand it and to begin thinking from it and in the space it denotes...Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being - affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens up this zone to existence for the first time.[41]

Thus Foucault refuses to read Rivière's text from a position of moral superiority; a position which does no more than satisfy the urge to consolidate and affirm the

ideological self as a unified expression of the 'whole' and consign the author of the memoir to the ranks of the criminally insane. Instead, Foucault draws the reader's attention to the text which has *replaced* the State-sanctioned identity of its author, who literally dies in order that he may come into being. This authorless text he describes as a light which proves the illumination of the boundaries of ideology; the foundation of a discourse in its own right. The role of 'witness' is thus suggested to the reader, rather than the role of 'judge'. The complicity suggested by the witnessing of an event is, for Foucault, the precondition to the clearance of a space circumscribed by, and yet not subject to, the system of ethics which was the condition of its engendering. The complicity and engagement of a reader who is prepared to risk the loosening of ideological bonds is, therefore, essential to the text's achievement of its transgressional potential; this being the creation of a temporary silence contained within and yet beyond the civic imagination of official discourse. The silence allows the text to speak on its own terms; to express a forbidden aesthetic which renders to the reader a 'criminal' beauty, momentarily, before being submerged once again in the clamour of moral appropriation. Foucault's description of this moment as the illumination of a 'criminal' aesthetic which is found to be beautiful, is wholly dependent upon the futility of that moment and the impotence of its progenitor. The reader is unable to empathize with Rivière but in the place of empathy there emerges the possibility of awe or wonderment at that which has no place in our rational understanding of the world.

The document produced by Rivière allows Foucault to define authorship as more than the production of a text; the memoir affirms the power of refusal in its demands to be judged according to an aesthetic based on an ethics of self-definition rather than State-based morality. When situated within the limits of normative discourse, Foucault's description of the text as "beautiful" raised - from fellow critics - responses steeped in moral indignation, which demanded to know whether it was not perversity itself to sanctify a text engendered by violence and murder. When the context of normative authorship/ownership is removed the text returns to the reader the possibility of a transgressive discursivity linked, but not subordinated, to the civic world of socializing ethics; the text becomes therefore, an invitation to test the transgressive possibilities of the imaginative impulse.

Barker, writing on the source of his imaginative impulse as a playwright states:

> I wrote because I needed to. I wrote for myself. But that seemed unforgivable. Only more recently did I understand that in writing for myself I also served others, and that, in not serving myself, I could not serve others. The more self-limiting an author is, the less useful to his fellow human beings; the more he dares, the more he explores, the more immoral he is the better he serves. Then he or she becomes the enemy of collective lying.[42]

The "collective lie" to which Barker refers is the unified ideological perception of the liberal humanist self which Rivière's text, as espoused by Foucault, transgresses. In order to affirm the non-ideological self, Barker defines himself *against* a normative discourse, situating his need - to write for himself - in transgressional opposition to the authorial function; to serve others. Barker's wielding of these two imperatives, which normative discourse would seek to wed through a process of compromise, reveals the splitting of the self from the subject and the self's resultant criminality which declares - as a means of survival - an enmity towards regimes that would limit his intent. Barker's criminality of the self may also be described as an act of Nietzschean "self-affirmation" which equates the imposition of limits with a "slave-ethics" which "begins by saying *no* to an 'outside', an 'other', a non-self, and that *no* is its creative act".[43]

The Last Supper

> ***The Last Supper*** is beautiful in language and form...whilst being wholly un-ideological. The play is no longer a proposition about politics at all, though it is certainly about freedom. Rather it is a journey without maps and without clear instructions to the audience, which is sometimes pained by the absence of hidden orders ('Detest this character', 'See the manipulation here', etc.).[44]

Barker's ***The Last Supper***,[45] written in 1988 and performed by The Wrestling School Company in the same year, takes as its central concern the emergence of the self in a society for whom 'the people' have become the civic and secular equivalent of the voice of God. In this play Barker centralizes for the first time the classical convention of the chorus. It is through their agency - as collective identity - that the extraordinary, but ultimately impotent, individual Lvov is able to emerge. Barker's use of classical convention as an element of the play's theatrical form is juxtaposed with the use of the biblical narrative which describes Jesus' initiation of the twelve disciples into the teachings of the Father/God, and the consummation of those teachings on the occasion of the Passover feast at which he is betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Also present in Barker's text are the parables as a form of illustration and clarification. The chorus, the gospels and the parables are all forms characterized by their didactic intent; Barker relieves them of this function and creates in its wake a 'people' whose verbal banality is limited to the repeated chanting of slogans, a Christ figure who founds a discourse based upon his wholesome contempt and mistrust of their chanted demands, and a series of parables which, far from providing imagistic clarification to the spectator, offer bold and startling images of unreason. Barker has written a gospel for the modern State; his Christ, Lvov, is the epitome of Foucault's transgressive author of the self.

The Last Supper opens with a prologue to the play which acknowledges the very real need to negotiate a 'mode of watching' for the spectator:

> **The play contains no information**
> Aren't you tired of journalists?
> Oh, aren't you tired of journalists?
> No one will hold your hand tonight
> Nor oil you with humour.[46]

In the opening moments of the play what could easily pass as a threat is offered by the playwright as a promise, inviting complicity with that which is normally dreaded: the loss of coherent meaning. Barker places the opening words in the mouth of a ravaged aristocrat, Ivory, matching the criminality of the author's desired compact with his audience with the decadent rhetoric of a figure who is historically wholly untrustworthy. The prologue affirms the renunciation of 'truth' as a precondition of the power of language. By removing its efficacy from trustworthy intention Barker attempts to remind the spectator that language - when refused as a functional unit of communication - proffers the bloom of excess and the dangerous possibility of seduction. Barker describes his attempted compact with the spectator as that of the criminal who would seduce: "the cruelty of the world made manifest and found to be - *beautiful*." [47]

Thus, Barker charges his actors not with the task of clearly transferring the author's meaning from page to stage, but rather with the discovery of transgressional seduction proferred by the power of the spoken word. This charge is mirrored by the central preoccupation of the text which explores the seductive power of language, both in its ability to excite the listener's criminal imagination and in the opportunity it offers to its speaker for self-invention.

The major action of the play is the preparation of a feast to which Lvov has summoned his twelve 'disciples'. Set in a war-ravaged but non-specific landscape, his followers are forced to traverse battlefields and expose themselves to the exigencies of war in order to be with him. The meal itself is an impossibility; only the catching, skinning and cooking of a dog makes the table replete. For Lvov, the invitation is an imperative to self-authorship, equating the crimes committed on the outward journey with each disciples need to make that journey. Of all the disciples the least noticed, the most easily forgotten, is Ella who, we discover in the course of the play, may have murdered her child in order to be able to travel to the gathering. As in the case of Rivière, however, the action of murder does not guarantee the visibility of the murderer. As Lvov suggests, the murder defines the *need* for self-authorship, it is not yet the *act* of self-authorship. He cautions the

disciples therefore against the urge to pity Ella and insists that only contempt for her non-visibility may open to her the possibility of self-invention; what Barker calls the "catastrophic" experience of self.[48] Huddled under a table, Ella tells the murder as a means of self-generation; although she is assured of a hearing within the theatrical context of the play's performance only the sustained power of her rhetoric in relating the 'beauty' of her criminal transgression assures her of the disciples' attention. The creation of Ella's 'text' - for which we have no proof or evidence - is received in silence, by which the playwright would seem to suggest that the consequences of self-authorship do not guarantee the confirmation of the spectator's response; rather they may negate the need for it.

It is Ella who echoes the problems inherent in the making and practice of transgressive discourse. She returns the paradox to Lvov thus:

> It was obvious, Lvov, you would attract to you all those for whom the normal state of life was nauseating, the mad, the critical, the lawless, the impatient, and that this very following by its character, would discredit you with those who form the mass of our society. Can you explain how you intend to move from the minority to the majority? [49]

The barely concealed threat suggested by Ella's demand for explanation, which is couched within the normative framework of the imperative to mass-dissemination, raises question concerning the 'place' of transgression as a discourse. The disturbing 'beauty' of the transgressional aesthetic - which Lvov demands of each of the disciples in place of personality, or character - is dependent upon the demarcation of limits which define transgressional being. To 'access' transgression is therefore to negate its potency, for such an action will return "limitlessness" to the strictly defined contours of ideological, limited - and thus normative - subjecthood. The paradox described by disruptive or transgressive discourse is its dependence upon the lines or demarcations of normality which it crosses and re-crosses in order to exist. Foucault describes the normative/transgressive axis thus:

> ...[the] constant verticality which confronts European culture with what it is not, establishes its range by its own derangement...a realm where what is in question is the limits rather than the identity of culture.[50]

In *The Last Supper* Barker attempts to capture the essence of this axis via the corporeal presence of the actors' bodies and their movement through structures which may be made visible only by the processes of theatrical creation within a bounded space. What he places before the spectator is the creative moment of individual recognition of limited being, and the attendant choice which such awareness incurs. In this way he replicates in the stage-life of the actor the moment

of 'immorality' he recognizes to be the condition of the author; the birth of the extraordinary individual who exists without the possibility of defining the nature of that existence beyond an awareness of the limits crossed in the process of the journey. One of Lvov's disciples, Ivory, articulates the privilege of aristocracy as being an awareness that limits are no more than lines to be crossed in the process of defining self; the line is the impossible confronted, and found to be entirely - and terrifyingly - possible. Ivory states:

> I ate a woman once, who came to picnic on the terrace. It's not impossible. She sat in a cloud of finery and all the time the ribbons on her hat went twitter, twitter. How perfect she was clothed, and how perfect unclothed. How perfect her skin, and how perfect her inside. Her exterior, and her interior...[51]

Lvov's messianic qualities reside in his refusal of the "creative no" of Nietzsche's "slave ethic". In so doing he becomes a discursive space to which those are drawn for whom subjecthood denies life. Thus the space of the stage becomes a sphere within which critique of Enlightenment ideals becomes possible: 'freedom' is recognized as a thin disguise for the willing forbearance of the captive, and 'kindness' as a mute expression of shame. Both freedom and kindness are exposed as effects of Nietzsche's 'no'; limits which bar the self to imaginings beyond the known. Paradoxically, however, the space which Lvov creates for his disciples concomitantly ties him incontrovertibly to those limits he would seek to transcend but must constantly traverse. Those limits are as necessary to the formation of his transgressive credo as his invitations are to the self-formative instincts of his followers. Barker has Lvov dream "terrible truths" therefore, echoes of Foucault's "regimes of truth" which take shape upon the stage in the form of a chorus mouthing the platitudes of compromise and consolation. This is the "majority" of which Ella speaks, and its power is that of a secular and civic God, emerging from the detritus of State sanctified religion. The Chorus is built on the certainty of collective truths and declares its credo triumphant by virtue of its affirmation of 'the people':

Lvov
We are the people
And the people see your slipping self
Give us a slogan
We love a slogan
We will carve your slogan on the bridge
Why don't you give us a slogan you snob
(*A cloud of laughter*)
Are you afraid?
We also are afraid
We stand behind our doors with pokers
(*A cloud of laughter*)
You knock the weak aside

We can't have that!
You ridicule the masses
We can't have that!
(*Pause. A sound of desolation*) [52]

The disembodied laughter, which hovers above the action of ***The Last Supper*** like a cloud, scatters its totalitarian impulse to conformity by refusing the silence of incomprehension which is so necessary to transgressive discourse. The laughter, like a bray of fear seeks to destroy or negate that which it cannot understand. Lvov, as the creator of a space within which the beauty of the transgressive aesthetic may appear, must remain umbilically linked to the people; he dreams their discourses in order to deny them in his waking state. He is as utterly dependent upon them as was Rivière upon the systems of administration which circumscribed and defined his limited state of being. Like Rivière, who wrote his memoir whilst awaiting execution, Lvov knows that the condition of his being, of his self-affirming knowingness, exists only upon the pre-condition of his death. Sadly he observes in his followers an urge towards homogeneity parading as an intensification of faith and sustained by their confidence in an ability to outdo Lvov in 'Lvovness'. Barker describes Lvov's condition thus:

> ...a charisma at the end of its tether. Lvov has a household of 'servants', all of whom have renounced or try to renounce their egos in the interests of service to another.[53]

The love which the disciples demonstrate for their Messiah stops short of taking responsibility for the individual urge to 'otherness', by piling up servitude in the form of slavish imitation. The founding gesture of discursivity - in this case Lvov's denial of eternal truths as the fundamental basis for human activity - is now threatened by the creation of a canon. Forjacks, the torturer, has written down every 'teaching' uttered by Lvov and is now in the process of noting and obliterating contradiction. Apollo, the poet, has learnt Lvov by heart and recites his utterances as a form of doggerel. Lvov recognizes these actions to be a desire for his death; the action which will enshrine 'Lvovness' and make of his teachings a monument to the alter-ego, a pilgrimage for the weary at heart. He resolves, therefore, to die at the hands of those who would 'be' him and, in a parody of the scriptural text, to provide the sustenance of his body to those gathered in his name. This final action refuses the possibility of the disciples' identification with their Saviour and insists instead upon complicity with the crime his body represents.

In the moments following the communal cannibalism a silence is called for in the stage directions, followed by a cacophony which once again reverts to silence. Their moment of transgression confounds their presumed 'understanding' of Lvov's

words - which is revealed to be no more than a parroting of his style - and they face the terror of becoming authors in their own right. The weight of individual responsibility hangs heavy upon each of the criminals; Lvov's final invitation to transgressional discourse. The doubting disciple, Sloman, whose need for Lvov is demonstrated through the tortured juxtaposition of a slavish devotion to the master and a shame-ridden diatribe on democracy, offers a solution to their despair: he insists that they hold hands, thus subsuming individual rupture in the formation of a chorus of self-abrogating fear. The play closes with an expression of what Barker calls, "both a cry of solidarity but also of mutual enslavement".[54] Roped in their formation of choral oneness by a triumphant Officer in search of dissidents, and within earshot of celebrations announcing the war's end, the disciples conclude thus:

Susannah: He had the flavour of -

All: **Don't mention it!**

Susannah: He had the texture of -

All: **Don't dare describe it!**

(*Pause. The knot of Disciples drifts, first one way, and then another. The cloud passes overhead.*) [55]

The birth of transgressive potential is thus denied by the refusal of each of the disciples to initiate the painful process of extraordinary individuality in their own right. They, like the cloud of laughter, drift aimlessly and mutually co-operative in their confirmation of hopeless impotence.

The desired effect of this final image of the play is described by Barker as the imposition of "anxiety" or "loss" upon the spectator [56] who is in his/her turn offered the choice between an assimilation of the play's meaning within the safe boundaries of choral appreciation (the spectator identifies with the audience as a whole or mass), or an individual grappling with the potential for transgression and ambiguity which forms the fabric of the play's theatrical structure. The purgation of emotions and the catharsis which accompanies it - this being the resolution of the classical text which allows the spectator to experience himself at once as identifiable with both the hero and the chorus in more or less equal parts - is what Barker's text attempts to refuse the spectator. Neither the actions of the stage, nor the emotions they have engendered, find any satisfying resolution within the boundaries of the theatrical event. Rather, the questions through and by which Barker has created lives 'other' to the norms of ideological subjecthood, and with which the actors have wrestled in order to find shapes within which to house them,

are finally returned to the spectator who, in turn, is invited to grapple with the self that is non-identical with the whole:

> Transgressive writing...claims to clear an ideological space: a space for action, experimentation, chance, freedom, mobility. It also breaks with the notion that writing is the product of a single and simple self. The self may be dispersed by transgressive writing because such writing provides its readers with no stable and 'realist' linguistic codes by which to position themselves, no author or characters to be identified with.[57]

The Transgressive Reader

What Foucault's writings on transgression expose is the need for the transgressive reader/spectator as a vital component of the transgressive text. Thus, the possibility for transgressive readings of texts is dependent upon an individual effort of will to clear an ideological space; what one might call the willed creation of a meeting point between the text and the reader/spectator's perception of the text. The absence or refusal of this willed effort allows the reader/spectator no choice but to return to systems of classification which offer judgement in place of interpretation. Adorno describes the will-less reader or spectator as a dupe to the benign imperialism exercised by the State upon the soul:

> Cultivated Philistines are in the habit of requiring that a work of art 'give' them something. They no longer take umbrage at works that are radical, but fall back on the shamelessly modest assertion that they do not understand. This eliminates even opposition, their last negative relationship to truth, and the offending object is smilingly catalogued among its kind, consumer commodities that can be chosen or refused without even having to take responsibility for doing so.[58]

This abrogation of responsibility is, for Adorno, both a symptom of the Culture Industry's totalitarian impulse to a rubber-stamping of culture 'for all' (which is pre-packaged and comes 'ready-to-use'), and the victory of the 'whole', fuelled by forces of production, over the generation and recognition of the 'particular'. Throughout Adorno's writings, the 'will' may be described as the force of the dialectic which refuses the 'progress' towards synthesis. Rather, the dialectic repeatedly splits and refracts offering a multiplicity of possibilities in place of resolution. The force which drives the perverse or "negative dialectic" is the individual responsibility to *interpret*; the risking of the annihilation of certainty and subjecthood via combative entry into the text. The force of production, with regard interpretation, is individual and played for the highest stakes of subjecthood and self, whilst the forces of production which fuel the well-oiled machinery of the

Culture Industry are mass-oriented and the stakes are the anonymous demographic grouping of a people as a 'population' or 'public'.

> To interpret is to run a risk, to risk a wager...The *act* of interpreting is the surge of life. Interpretation is not an operation added onto the will to live; it is not an accessory operation that the subject resigns himself to after having acquitted himself of his immediate and mundane tasks; for him *to be* and *to interpret* are one and the same.[59]

Jean Granier, in his discussion of Nietzsche's use of the concept of interpretation, offers an abrupt *volte face* on the arguments pressed by critics in pursuit of 'access' and 'simplification'. He suggests that an urge to life, a hunger for growth, actually defines the the modern social being who *requires* the ambiguous or provocative text as sustenance, whether that text be social, political or literary. The 'text' is here being defined as the growth, development and condition of language; language being the medium through which we 'will' our 'selves' into existence. To deny or negate the ambiguous nature of language - to follow Granier's argument - and the complexity it continually returns to the speaker, reader or listener, is therefore to deny the "will to live" which its usage continually strives to affirm. Without the striving, without the constant battle for interpretation which defines the speaker as *more* than a medium or channel for information, both language and the subject positioned within language first cease to generate and then become functional only in the generation of greater productive forces. To return to Marcuse's argument, they become one with the machines they believe themselves to have mastery over.

Granier's interpretation of Nietzsche thus suggests that it is an integral condition of modern humanity, as reflected by their medium of expression, to require complexity over and above the imparting of information. Denial of this need is also the expression of a will which requires discipline and fortitude in its progress through linguistic codes and forms of communication. The call for clarity and simplicity could, to follow Granier's proposition, be described as the assertion of a counter-will, an inverted desire to negate that which gives life to the excessive, non-ideological self. Given this possibility, for the playwright, poet or author to offer anything less than the full onslaught of language pressed into the service of the human imagination - these professions having sole responsibility to language as the raw material through which they create - is to be the bearer of death, not to the corporeal being who encounters his work but rather to the social being for whom language provides the sole entry into selfhood.

The cultural anthropologist Victor Turner focuses upon man's need for symbolic representation as a means of expressing the cultural complexity of his condition. In considering the role of ritual in the development of linguistic and cultural

expression, he notes that the use of symbol in ritual enactment is always 'multi-vocal', consisting of two poles of meaning: "the ideological (socio-moral) and the sensory".[60] To each of these poles he attributes clusters of meaning, the former being concerned with the regulation of social life and the development of moral sensibility, and the latter being concerned with the life which is denied by the needs of society; the non-ideological elements of being. The enactment of ritual he describes as "an exchange of properties between the two poles, flooding the ideological with emotional (and therefore motivational) elements and thus transforming coercive social control into felt desire". [61] Turner emphasizes the danger involved in ritual exchange of properties, its social resolution being dependent upon a solid belief in the *need* for social and ideological restraint. This 'dangerous' moment Turner has labelled as liminal, which he defines thus:

> The 'subjunctive mood' of culture, the mood of maybe, might be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire, depending upon which of the trinity, cognition, affect and connotation (thought, feeling, or intention) is situally dominant...Liminality can perhaps be described as fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage, but a striving after new forms and structure.[62]

The liminal is dependent upon the blurring of boundaries and the erasure of stable categories of meaning. It is a state of transition which requires of its participants the ability to take responsibility for changes of perception and the attendant moral chaos which these may incur. The participant shares the authorship of the liminal moment and barters, in the process, authoritative truths for a chaotic testing and exploration of those truths. Liminality is then, a suspension of social boundaries in the interest of individual apprehension and transgression. It is a temporary state which challenges the existing order but does not necessarily promote wholesale changes in that structure. Rather the liminal moment allows participants to view their society from a different perspective; to take responsibility for the decisions effected by the processes of communal decision making. Liminality restores a balance whereby the communal aspects of social organization are informed by an individual understanding of the need which underpins their emergence.

In *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*, Bernice Martin suggests that access to liminal forms in complex industrial societies is usually limited and policed by institutional control. Sex, sacred worship and art all allow the potential for liminal experience but only within the recognized limits of social tolerance. In the mainly secular societies of twentieth century Western Europe, Martin cites art as an important provider of individual liminal experience, she also, however, recognizes that the importance attached to group definitions - national, familial, professional - painfully raises the stakes for the individual who risks, in the liminal moment, the

free-fall of original interpretation without the safety-net of assured communal re-integration:

> Liminality is an inherently unstable and precarious condition. It entails embracing *anomie* for the sake of the expanded creative possibilities it can offer and for the experience of existential *communitas* - the pure brotherhood of the 'high', the drunk and the inspired. Real and painful *anomie* without compensating alternative 'group' solidarity is always a risk.[63]

The level of risk incurred by the individual who embraces liminality ensures an efficient system of border-controls kept in place, not only by the regulators of social thought but also by the individual him/herself. Martin considers one of the most effective controls to be the concept of the 'Enlightenment' text; a concept which carries the assumption that every text requires a key to its understanding which, once acquired, will unlock the door to its mysteries and allow the full educational impact to flood the receiver. This relationship to the text as 'educator' and the reader's reliance upon a master interpreter to illumine the way to knowledge, ensures firstly that any boundaries transgressed have been tested for safety beforehand, and secondly, that with the acknowledgement of a master-key a community of readership is established which will act as safeguard to the lone explorer. The goal of the 'enlightened' reader is an understanding of the text; the goal of the interpretative - or transgressive - reader is the potential of the text to excavate meaning, to feed the excesses of the self. This latter reader, in his/her desire to forge a meeting place with the text, is described by Martin as "a time-bomb in the system".[64]

Barker's *Uncle Vanya*.

> In rescuing Vanya from resentment I lent him no solution, since there is no solution to a life. My Vanya is however, cleansed of bad blood, his actions liberated from the sterile calculations of the pleasure-principle, and his will to self creation triumphant over guilt. In making him anew, I seized on the single instrument Chekhov had, as it were, left lying idly in his own text.[65]

Written in 1992 and as yet unperformed, Howard Barker's ***Uncle Vanya*** attempts to rescue Vanya - the man of *anomie*, the bearer of liminal impulse - from the murderous invitation to pity which Barker perceives to characterize the Chekhovian text. Barker's Introduction to his version is strident in its hostility to the original and yet offers no authority of approach beyond the violent creative urge occasioned by a personal interpretation of Chekhov's play. Thus, speculation upon the cultural accretions amassed by the text in the process of translation and assimilation into the Western literary canon are absent. Research into the historical context from which

the work emerged is shunned. Biographical details which may have informed the formal structure of the play and the configuration of its characters are ignored. Barker makes Vanya anew by refusing the critical key to the Enlightenment sanctum of understanding. The 'key' he affirms is no more than the apology for murder; the murder not only of the angry man, or man of *anomie* as dramatic character, but also of the spectator who is invited to 'learn' - via the actions of the play - that the quelling of 'irrational' rage, and the acceptance of the futility of the human will may well be the best that we can hope for on the earthly plane. Barker offers a personal interpretation of Chekhov's characters as beings willed into submission by their Author/God; their own wills having been subordinated to the extent that 'peace' becomes a weary assimilation into the brotherhood of death. Thus the final speech given to Sonya by Chekhov becomes a renunciation of the will to interpret; a martyr's paean to the mysterious calm of the soul engendered by passivity.

> We reverence him because
> We reverence Chekhov
> Because in such a confined space the melancholy of
> Not tragedy
> The melancholy of
> Our unlived life is exquisitely redeemed
> We are forgiven
> We are forgiven [66]

The "confined space" has, for Barker, profound theatrical implications. The dramatic malaise occasioned by the realist convention of the 'fourth wall' which imprisons characters, confining dramatic expression to bourgeois taste and sensibility, is a theme which is revisited throughout Barker's dramatic works of the eighties and nineties. The room, being also the locus of the family, favours a humanistic discourse which is underwritten by the bourgeois pre-occupation with ownership and consumption, thus forcing language in the role of reconciliation and social compromise. What Barker rejects is the stage representation of a totality existing within the bounds of the familial sphere, a sphere which finds its unifying principle in the bourgeois desire that life should continue unchanged.[67] The wall-papered battlements which encase the 'unlived life' of the Chekhovian milieu also provide a place of incubation for "the man of *ressentiment*"; the Nietzschean archetype for whom suffering born of the weakness of the will provides a foundation for moral superiority:

> His soul squints; his mind loves hide-outs, secret paths, and back doors; everything that is hidden seems to him his own world, his security, his comfort; he is expert in silence, in long memory, in waiting, in provisional self-deprecation, and in self-humiliation..[68]

Thus Chekhov's theatrical structures, which Barker determines to excavate, are perceived as structures of confinement; fortifications behind which shelter what Nietzsche has called: "a shrunken, almost ludicrous species, a herd animal, something full of good will, sickly and mediocre...the European of today..." [69]

Barker's stated aim is to rescue Vanya from his state of ludicrous self-immolation; from the Chekhovian cult of failure. The figure of Vanya as such is, of course, only a chimera but for Barker the savagery which has hewn this human mould invades not only the *dramatis personae* but also the spectator of the work. The play is therefore described as a "*danse macabre*"; an invitation to partake in a sickness unto death:

> By the power of his pity Chekhov subdues our innate sense of other life and innoculates us against the desire to become ourselves. Vanya, the greatest of his characterizations, is the apotheosis of self-denial. In this broken soul the audience is enabled to pity itself. It is necessary for our own spiritual health to know Vanya need not be Vanya.[70]

In this passage, extracted from Barker's short Introduction to his version of ***Uncle Vanya*** which he titles: "Notes on the Necessity for a Version of Chekhov's ***Uncle Vanya***", the playwright uses two conflicting concepts of theatrical structure in order to invite interrogation of the organizing principles which form the foundation of the Chekhovian text. Thus, the Classical structuring of tragic form, as defined by Aristotle in ***The Poetics*** [71] (and susequently revised and refined by the process of its translation into the European languages), is challenged by the Nietzschean concept of the 'aesthetic' (echoing Nietzsche's own assault upon the development of Classical form in ***The Birth of Tragedy***),[72] upon which is founded the concept of the will to interpretation.

Both the writings of Aristotle and Nietzsche return to the reader fundamental questions concerning the relationship of the 'human' nature to the creative arts, and the means by which art may illumine and influence the relationship man has to the world of his perceptions. For Aristotle, the world presented upon the stage offers the means by which the chaos of stimuli - occasioned by the perceiving and interpreting faculties of man - may be contained within frameworks of crafted organization. The 'divine' perspective, or 'grand' interpretation of chaotic stimuli and events, which the playwright is able to place before the spectator, stands as a blueprint for reasoned understanding of life's exigencies. It is an experiment tested upon the actions of man and conducted within carefully controlled conditions. The 'beauty' of the theatrical text - as defined in ***The Poetics*** - lies in the 'perfection' of the theatrical form: the organizing of chaotic material in such a way as to produce patterns of logic and pathways of reason indiscenable to the protagonist but

revealed in perfect clarity for the audience. The 'successful' tragedy will therefore produce for the spectator an illusory - but nevertheless wholly convincing - 'whole' in place of a mass of particulars. This effect is achieved by the structuring of a linear progression of events hermetically sealed in terms of action and meaning. The 'meaning' of the Tragedy is visited upon the spectator via both emotion and intellect, thus *proving* the truths espoused through the actions of the stage by the effects of those actions creating resonances with the lived experiences of their audience. At the end of the theatrical event the illusory 'husk' of the stage action is safely discarded but the kernel of 'truth' assimilated into the subjective responses of the spectator, travels with the audience into the 'reality' of their lives beyond the theatrical parameters of the auditorium.

The Nietzschean 'aesthetic' refuses the Aristotelian distinction between an illusory life of the stage and the reality which circumscribes it. Rather life, like art, is perceived by Nietzsche (after Schopenhauer) [73] to be a systematic pursuance of illusory order. Any order which might be achieved in the course of this endeavour must therefore be recognized to be no more than a seductive respite from the chaos which fundamentally affirms man's existence. 'Being' is thus a framework which lends temporary boundaries to that chaos, described by Jean Granier in the following terms:

> The phenomenon of being is a 'text' and not a painting (which would display its contents to naive perception or to the philosopher's intelligence), it is essentially ambiguous: it witholds as much as it shows, it is an opaque revalation, a blurred sense - in short, *an enigma*. Because of this quality of ambiguity, Nietzsche will call the phenomenon a *mask* or *veil*.[74]

'Being' provides the supreme paradox for Nietzsche, for the mask is not a device with which to disguise reality, it *is* reality insofar as reality may be achieved via the perceptive faculties. And yet it is also illusion; man's defence against the "wisdom of Silenus" which counsels: "What would be best for you is quite beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best is to die soon." [75] The pessimism which underpins Nietzsche's philosophy thus leads him to the assertion that only via the aesthetic may life find its justification in the mind of men, and only via art may the terror of life's chaotic indifference to the well-being of man be overcome.

From Schopenhauer, Nietzsche borrows the concept of "*principium individuationis*" in order to inscribe, in archetypal form, his imagery of man's relation to the natural world. The *principium* is a state of consciousness which recognizes the horror of existence and in an ultimate act of defiance hews out a shape or boundary from within which the sense-making faculties may begin to

operate successfully. Thus the individual is born by the creation of limits to consciousness which deny knowledge of that which lies outside, outside being defined as 'the abyss', or terrifying 'other'. Nietzsche, in ***The Birth of Tragedy***, borrows from Schopenhauer the following metaphor as an apt description of man's illusory perception of the world:

> Even as on an immense, raging sea, assailed by huge wave crests, a man sits in a little rowboat trusting his frail craft, so, amidst the furious torments of this world, the individual sits tranquilly, supported by the *principium individuationis* and relying on it.[76]

Julian Young comments upon this passage, suggesting that its allure for Nietzsche lies in "the metaphysical certainty that history is a cycle of creation and destruction. It is guaranteed that whatever happiness and security an individual achieves will, in the end, be smashed." [77] The Nietzschean pessimism of the creative/destructive circle thus confronts the illusory 'progess' of the Aristotelian linear structure and denounces as self-delusion the concept that models or frameworks of provisional meaning can produce a healthy society or a creative context within which man may realize his potential. The dialectic which Barker places in his Introduction is therefore one which interrogates the corner-stone of thought to which theatre - as an art form - must constantly address itself, namely 'What is Being?' The structure of the play reflects this dialectic in that the source of Barker's ***Uncle Vanya*** is a 'text': man represented as character (mask, veil), the actions of man entrapped within the framework of language and form, and the world represented as a totality which is bounded and given its limits by the moulder or maker of illusion - Chekhov himself.

Barker inserts his interpretative wedge into the smoothly crafted surfaces of Chekhov's play by allowing the characters to speak the name of their original creator. The effect is startling and serves to shatter their potential to inspire empathic response. Empathy is defined here as the charging of emotional impulses founded on the spectator's 'recognition' of him/herself within the play, thus achieving a state of 'forgetfulness' whereby the spectator's imagination makes 'real' that which would be unbearable were it to occur in reality. Barker's Chekhovian characters, aspiring to be no more 'real' than 'text' and therefore - in Nietzschean terms, reality itself - require *interpretation* rather than empathy in order to exist. The 'recognition' factor involved in empathic response requires the remembering and reassertion of what is already known. Interpretation however requires a propulsion of the mind's faculties driven by a realization - often shocking or startling - that one does not 'know' or 'recognize' that which is being presented. The willed immersion of both actor and spectator in the fiction of the stage event is replaced in Barker's text by exposure of the fiction's construction:

Maryia: Forgive me for saying so, Jean, but you have changed so much in the last year I positively don't recognize you -

Vanya: **I have a gun**

Maryia: You were a man of positive convictions, an inspiring personality and now -

Vanya: **This gun**

Astrov: Oh, shut up about your silly gun -

Vanya: **Was given me by Chekhov.** (*Pause*) And having given it to me, he was profoundly sorry... (*He sobs*) [78]

The spectators of Barker's ***Uncle Vanya*** are invited to partake - via their interpretative faculty - in the process of Vanya becoming other than Chekhov made him. This process begins with Vanya's discovery of the gun, this being analogous to Bernice Martin's "time-bomb in the system"; it is what Barker "seizes on" where Chekhov left it "lying idly in his own text". Vanya's retrieval, and subsequent use of the gun is significant because, in the Chekhovian original, it is the 'particular' which refuses to return to the 'whole'. Chekhov's gun is a stage-property belonging to the conventions of melodrama and thus robbed of its articulation in the delicate weblike Chekhovian structure. It is interesting to note that Vanya's entrance wielding a gun, in the original, is a moment of tragi-comedy; a moment beyond which the dignity of Vanya's rage cannot survive. Barker returns the gun to Vanya but lends him, in addition, the power of interpretation with regard the object. The powerful conjunction of object and interpretation transforms the gun into Turner's "multi-vocal" ritual object which has the power to facilitate the liminal flooding and exchange of meanings which drives Chekhov's characters one by one over and through the boundaries of delimitation set firmly in place by their original creator.

The gun passes like a charge of energy between the characters making possible that which the linear Chekhovian structure denied. The audience is invited to witness the collapse of linear logic and with it the chaotic emergence of 'potential' as extraordinary texts overflow the boundaries of naturalistic character. Vanya shoots Serebryakov, Astrov fucks Helena, Sonya strangles Astrov because he will not comply with her need for a child. These actions - however extreme - do not achieve resolution; the dead refuse to die and return to mouth platitudes with a swelling choral conviction. Rather, the extremity of the stage action serves to expose hidden possibilities and shatter the naturalistic conventions of the Chekhovian text. The emergence of the liminal produces a multiplicity of structures in place of the schematic wholeness of the 'authored' text. Thus the walls of the family home become identical with the normally invisible structure of theatrical

form; their illusory solidity crumbles - literally - as the power of the liminal state is realized successively by the characters exposing the fragility of the foundations upon which their 'hopelessness' is built.

By removing empathy as a possible response Barker attempts to display the power of consensual imagination in colluding to build self-limiting fortifications. The harnessing of individual interpretation as a force by which to topple those same structures carries in its wake the terror of an unleashed, chaotic energy, but at the same time provides material for textual re-invention and self-fashioning; a concept which returns to the individual the responsibility formerly attributed - in an act of self-denial - to an author or creator.

As the Chekhovian text splits at the seams, Chekhov himself is drawn into the world of his imaginings; an image which recalls the Foucauldian notion that the author as a discourse acts as an adhesive to the cracks and absences of the literary text. His entrance is preceded by the surging of (Nietzschean) waves onto the stage:

> *(A sudden sound of further collapse, both masonry and splintering wood. Telyeghin ducks. This shock is followed by a surge of sound as waves break and flow with the appearance of the sea. Telyeghin points, in dumb astonishment, to the spectacle.)*
> **Maryia:** Oh, look, a view!
>
> **Sonya:** The sea!
>
> **Vanya:** **The sea! The sea!** (*They gawp, rejoice.*) Chekhov won't come now...
>
> **Marina:** (*entering*) The tea urn's gone! Look, the tea urn's in the sea!
>
> *(They laugh. Marina picks up random small objects and pelts the urn. Sonya joins her.)* [79]

Their certainty that the sea will be their salvation from Chekhov is founded upon their newly-found freedom from his controlling reins. Their confidence is born of their exuberance at being able to confront catastrophe and make themselves anew in the wake of its devastating effects. The liminal state is a temporary one however, and the counteracting force of social boundary-making, Nietzsche's *principium individuationis*, is not underestimated by Barker who makes the sea the herald of the "frail bark" which both protects and enslaves Chekhov in his limited being.. Maryia is the first to sight the boat and, seeing that its passenger is in danger of drowning, rushes to urge the others to retrieve him from the murderous waves:

Sonya: The sea is so -

Maryia: Even the swimmers drown...(*Vanya looks at her.*)

Vanya: We must guard our lives. Having made our lives, we must be on guard for them. We must stand guard over our creations.

Maryia: Yes...

Vanya: Let him drown, therefore.
Mother.
Can you do that?
Watch?
Just watch? (*Pause*)

Maryia: My instinct - my whole instinct is to -

Vanya: No, that is not your instinct. (*Pause*)

Maryia: Isn't it?

Vanya: No. You no longer know the difference between you instinct and your culture. It is your culture that impels you to rescue someone who might perhaps, who knows, be your worst enemy.[80]

It is Maryia's 'culture' however which wins out; for it is culture which harnesses her directionless desire and gives it purpose. In this instance she seizes upon the opportunity to channel her excessive energies into a possible martyrdom in order to save an unknown man's life. The lure of utility proves stronger for Maryia than Vanya's invitation to interpret the event. Her 'culture' insists that the emotional response must be the 'truth' of the event. Vanya - remade by Barker as an open text - stands in the action of the play as an 'invitation to speculation'; through him the spectator too is invited to loose the bonds of culture and stand before events as witness rather than social subject. As Maryia rushes joyfully to her cultural summons, Vanya suddenly realizes the identity of the drowning man and searches frantically for the gun which has fallen into the hands of Telyeghin, Chekhov's faithful servant and self-appointed policeman of the naturalistic soul. The first act of the play ends with Maryia's triumphant cry of "He's alive!"; a frantic and near hysterical affirmation of life - any life - no matter the nature of the carrier.

Chekhov is indeed alive but Barker makes his life a blighted one. The Chekhov who parades before his cowering creations knows he is a dying man. In contrast to Maryia's celebration of life, he carries the physician's awareness of life as co-existence with the blight of disease. Chekhov becomes therefore the carrier of death which is reborn in each of his creations and transmitted to all with whom they come into contact. This process of diseased creation is self-conscious, fed by

the desire to create a community of sufferers, to "pour [himself] like liquid from a jug into the void of another" [81]:

> *(Chekhov goes to Maryia, and unbuttons her dress at the breast. He exposes her breasts. Others watch...)*
> **Chekhov:** Her breasts...are not without their power...like birds in an abandoned nest...they shan't be - and that's the beauty of it - shan't ever be touched...and if they were...how swiftly they would rise and fill like - they shan't however, **shan't be, shan't be...!** (*Maryia nods, weeping.*) [82]

The power exerted by Chekhov over his characters resides in his insistence that they share his impotence; that they even find beauty and comfort in their impotent states. The burden of pain which each of these characters has to bear is finely measured out by Chekhov to produce no more than a dull ache, the sharpness of the occasional spasm being tempered with resignation. Barker makes of Chekhov a murderer because he refuses the charge of art to assert the potency of the imagination in finding potential beyond the impotence of subjecthood. Only in Vanya does Barker perceive the possibility of a pain that may burst the boundaries of pity and kindness which perpetuate and nurture self-destructive power. For Barker the martyr is not a worthy subject for the drama. It is *amor fati* which transfigures the suffering of the martyr and makes of their resignation a mask of beauty. In refusing the martyr Barker refuses pain as an end in itself in drama; rather he embraces pain as the birth of the created self; the stimulus which drives the individual towards an irrational raging at the conditions of his existence. Thus Barker describes his creations as being born out of "the search for a reason not to commit suicide".[83]

Barker describes the creation of character as 'text' as "the refusal of the individual to leave the personality unexcavated, the eruption of will into areas of social piety";[84] in so doing he makes active a relationship with anguish which he believes to have been muted and deadened by centuries of State-bound Christian culture. Barker's Vanya becomes a redeemer of pain via his irrational ragings against 'the way things are'. He also accompanies Chekhov to the moment of his death, forced into the role of confessor by his fading creator. Chekhov confides:

> One day I hoped I would reach out and tell myself, pour myself like a liquid from a jug into the void of another, all, entire, to the last drop, how I struggled with this dream to pour myself into another man! A woman! To be drained...! (*Pause. There are sounds on the beach of voices.*) And in abandoning that dream, I found something like freedom. In discarding all that was arguably, the best in me, I found a peace of sorts.[85]

As the author dies the sea recedes leaving his wracked creations drifting amongst the wreckage of the Naturalistic stage. As the tide ebbs so too does the liminal state; the gun becomes a gun once more and the trappings of the familial home are returned to their habitual positions. Barker offers no false hope, nor does he fashion ready-made pathways to freedom. Rather the 'texts' or aspects of being which populate the stage, must now be responsible for the continuance or otherwise of the drama. Like Lvov's disciples they must undergo the severest test of their unleashed potential by becoming one with the criminal passion which engendered their new-found selves; they must feed on the transgressional substance of the crime in order to generate.

In the closing moments of the play Vanya alone displays the Nietzschean will to overcome a weary passivity which has spread once again across the stage. The Chekhovian/Aristotelian text survives liminal onslaught but the absences - once veiled by the authorial name - are now voids; the walls are now in ruins. The death of Chekhov proves the death of so much that was treasured by his creations that they now attempt, through the effort of willed memory, to make themselves monuments to his craft: the winding of wool, the making of tea, the ticking of the clock - these actions achieve once more their uni-vocal status as symbols of a life muted by compliant despair. A doorway stands open upon the stage, however, beckoning the inhabitants of the room towards the possibility of an 'other' life which has been glimpsed and shunned. Where once Chekhov stood guard there is now an exit for those whose wills are equal to its challenge.

The Chekhovian wrecks - these remnants of character - may be likened to what Gilles Deleuze, after Nietzsche has described as "deterritorialized" passengers on a raft:

> [They] row together, they are not supposed to like one another, they fight with one another, they eat one another. To row together is to share, to share something beyond the law, contract or institution. It is a period of drifting.[86]

Like Lvov's disciples the Chekhovian remnants drift, unable to retrace their steps back to the solid structures of their original world - for they have known the potency of the interpretative text - but with no promise, or hope, to guide them through the open door. Only Vanya finds the strength to leave, quietly walking into the darkness beyond the door because there is nowhere else to go and no life to be gained by remaining. Vanya's quitting of the "Chekhovian madhouse" achieves what Lvov's disciples could not; textual discourse is let loose from its contextual moorings thus placing before the spectator the final imperative to interpretation. The new Vanya, having confounded the Chekhovian codes, conventions and

systems of thought, passes the threshold beyond which the spectator, like the characters left upon the stage, cannot follow, except with the aid of the transgressive imagination. As time passes both Maryia and Sonya assert "He'll be back"; time passes and he does not return. The lights fade.

Notes

1. Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.73
2. "Against the walls of the theatre there washes continuously the sea of morality and debate. The walls protect the actor and the audience not only from the racket of the street but also from its morality." Barker, *Ibid.*, p.78
3. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.74
4. Theodor Adorno, quoted in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p.36. Commenting upon Brecht's *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*, Adorno states, "Instead of a conspiracy of the wealthy and powerful, we are given a trivial gangster organization, the cabbage trust. The true horror of fascism is conjured away; it is no longer a slow end-product of the concentration of social power, but mere hazard, like an accident or crime." Theodor Adorno, "Commitment", *New Left Review* 87-88 (Sep-Dec 1974), p.81
5. Theodor Adorno, "Commitment", *New Left Review* 87-88 (Nov-Dec 1974), pp.75-89
6. Adorno, "Commitment", *New Left Review*, p.79
7. Bertolt Brecht, *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* in *Plays:Three* (London: Methuen, 1987)
8. See Bertolt Brecht, "Emphasis on Sport" in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willet (London: Methuen 1978), pp.6-9
9. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.74
10. Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, p.133
11. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.24
12. For Theodor Adorno's critique of *Endgame* see "Trying to Understand *Endgame*", *Notes to Literature: Volume One* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 241-275
13. Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, p.175
14. Adorno,"Trying to Understand *Endgame*" in *Notes to Literature*, p.274
15. Samuel Beckett quoted in Adorno, *Ibid.*, p.274
16. Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Peregrine, 1986), pp.32-50
17. "Modernity is often characterized in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment." Foucault, *Ibid.*, p.39
18. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), p.7
19. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment " in *Foucault Reader*, ed. Rabinow, p.41
20. Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.177
21. Foucault's exploration of the construction of western sexuality is published in three volumes. The concept of "self-mastery" is considered specifically in Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, Volume Three* (London: Penguin, 1990)
22. Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", *Foucault Reader*, ed. Rabinow, pp.340-372, p.351
23. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.78
24. Howard Barker, *Don't Exaggerate (desire and abuse)* (London: Calder, 1985), p.56
25. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.18
26. Charles Lamb interviewing Howard Barker in Barker, *Ibid.*, p.162
27. The use of impotence as an element of Howard Barker's dramatic texts has also been discussed by David Ian Rabey in "For the Absent Truth Erect: Impotence and Potency in Howard Barker's Recent Drama" in *Essays in Drama* (Ontario: University of Guelph, 1991), pp.31-37
28. "To be 'taken out of yourself' - the very thing demanded of the actor - is to be like the dog let off its lead, the lead being conscience, the lead being responsibility and loyalty." Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.77
29. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.75

30. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.154
31. Michael Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom* (New York: Viking Press, 1975)
32. Goldman, *Ibid.*, p.11
33. David Ian Rabey, *Howard Barker: Politics and Desire* (London: Macmillan, 1989)
34. Maggie Steed quoted in Rabey, *Ibid.*, p.269
35. "The act of acting is in itself the articulation of an intellectual and emotional response. We are essentially doers, performers, celebrants of the moment, and in today's theatre, with its disproportionate emphasis on matters academic and sociological, this is a difficult truth to hang on to; difficult but vital if theatre is to continue to re-invent itself...Barker's work recognises this and the closeness of our working association is contingent on that simple fact." Ian McDiarmid, "Howard Barker: A Personal View" in *Gambit* 11/41, ed. Tony Dunn (London: Calder, 1984), pp.93-98, p.94
36. Ian McDiarmid quoted in Rabey, *Howard Barker*, p.284
37. Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom*, p.122
38. David Carroll, *Paraesthetics* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.109
39. Frank Jellinek (trans.), *I Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother*, with an introduction by Michel Foucault (New York: Pantheon, 1975)
40. "Adorno conceives things as commodities and as congealed processes. By posing as autonomous entities...artworks are produced as artifacts and experienced as phenomena. Both characteristics are essential to the artwork and they contradict each other", Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, p.182
41. Michel Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp.29-52, p.35
42. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, pp.76-77
43. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* I:X in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals* (London: Doubleday, 1990), pp.170-171
44. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.152
45. Howard Barker, *The Last Supper* (London:Calder, 1988)
46. Barker, *The Last Supper*, p.2 (It is characteristic of Barker's texts to include words, lines or passages in emboldened type. These are not accompanied by author's comment, but suggest to the actor a moment of emotional emphasis which may mark a discovery or transition occurring in his/her relationship to the language. When quoting from Barker's plays I have reproduced the emboldened passages as indicated in the Calder texts.)
47. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.116
48. "A theatre of Catastrophe, like the tragic theatre, insists on the limits of tolerance as its territory." Barker, *Ibid.*, p.52 This corresponds to Adorno's statement: "Playing with elements of reality without any mirroring, taking no stand and finding pleasure in this freedom from prescribed activity, exposes more than would taking a stand with the intent to expose. The name of the catastrophe is to be spoken only in silence. The catastrophe that has befallen the whole is illuminated in the horrors of the last catastrophe; but only in those horrors, not when one looks at its origins." Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" in *Notes to Literature*, p.249
49. Barker, *The Last Supper*, p.38
50. Carrol, Paraesthetics, p.110
51. Barker, *The Last Supper*, p.50
52. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.26
53. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.169
54. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.147
55. Barker, The Last Supper, p.56
56. Brian Crow makes a similar observation concerning the response of the spectator to the character of the Professor in Wole Soyinka's *The Road*: "Soyinka encourages the audience to inhabit the tension of its own uncertainty." in "Soyinka and the Romantic Tradition" in *Before Our Very*

Eyes: A Tribute to Wole Soyinka, ed. Dapo Adelugba (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1987), p.165

57. During, *Foucault and Literature*, pp.7-8
58. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1974), p.216
59. Jean Granier, "Perspectivism and Interpretation" in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (London: MIT Press, 1985), pp.190-200, p.193
60. Bernice Martin, *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p.49
61. Martin, *Ibid.*, p.49
62. Victor Turner, "Are There Universals of Performance?" in *By Means of Performance*, eds. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p.12
63. Martin, *Contemporary Cultural Change*, p.51
64. Martin, *Ibid.*, p.51
65. Howard Barker, *Uncle Vanya*, in *Collected Plays Vol Two* (London: Calder, 1993), pp.292-293
66. Barker, *Uncle Vanya*, p.311
67. For a very clear discussion on the introduction of the 'room' into modern drama, see Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (Harmondsworth: Pelican 1973), pp.386-390
68. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* I:X, p.172 Mark Seem offers an interesting and illuminating paraphrase of Nietzsche's remarks on the 'man of *ressentiment*': "Such a man needs very much to believe in some neutral, independent 'subject' - the ego - for he is prompted by an instinct of self affirmation and self-preservation that cares little about preserving or affirming life." (*The Genealogy of Morals* I:XIII, p.180) Mark Seem, Introduction to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (London: Athlone Press, 1984), p.xvi
69. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.71
70. Barker, *Uncle Vanya*, p.292
71. T.S.Dorsch (trans.), *Aristotle/Horace/Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)
72. Nietzsche cites Euripides, rather than Aristotle, as the founder of what have become known as Classical aesthetics. See Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* XI, pp.69-75
73. For a detailed discussion of the Schopenhauer's influence upon Nietzsche's writings on art, see Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosohy of Art* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp.5-24
74. Jean Granier, "Nietzsche's Conception of Chaos" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. Allison, pp.135-141, p.135
75. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* III, p.29
76. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, I, p.22
77. Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, p.41
78. Barker, *Uncle Vanya*, p.298
79. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.314
80. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.324
81. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.333
82. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.331
83. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.164
84. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.144
85. Barker, *Uncle Vanya*, p.334
86. Gilles Deleuze, "Nomad Thought" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. Allison, p.144

Chapter Three

Art and the Revolutionary Individual

> The State is a mass of fictions held together by superior power. I believe this has been the case as long as the State existed. The problem is to judge which fictions are necessary ones.[1]

When Wole Soyinka returned to his native Nigeria on January 1st 1960,[2] he was neither returning to the Africa of his ancestors, nor to the colonized State which he had left five years previously. Rather, he returned as a stranger to the newly liberated Nation-State of Nigeria; a curious historical mutation which had maintained the shape and administrative structures characterizing colonial rule, but with the addition of an ideological impulse to national self-determination which gave the stamp of ownership to structures which nevertheless remained, as Chinua Achebe was five years later to remind his fellow Nigerians, "the arbitrary creation of the British." [3]

The first chapter of Wole Soyinka's fictional autobiography ***Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*** recounts the author's return to a Nigeria anticipating Independence. Details concerning the years spent as a student in Leeds and his subsequent employment with the Royal Court Theatre in London are woven effortlessly into the easy flow of a conversation between old friends following the progression of a car journey between Lagos airport and Ibadan. The lightness of tone effected by the narrative is, however, occasionally punctured in order to allow the eruption of an altogether different *timbre*:

> *Did you have to sneak home like a thief in the night?* [4]

This interrogative is posed by Soyinka's authorial self to the fictional self which replaces him within the parameters of the text. The Soyinkian self which makes its appearance in language is not therefore identical with the Soyinka that writes, and the fictional product - as if to emphasize its status as fiction - carries a bewildering multiplicity of familial and familiar names, thus suggesting to the reader that no *one* Soyinka may bear the narrative of the political and cultural turmoil which characterized the first decade of Nigerian Independence. The authorial question does not intrude directly into the narrative but it inserts itself into the interstices of the text, in-between paragraphs and accentuated absences which occasionally sear the conversational tone. At such moments the reader is left stranded in the void which gapes between the question and the flow of the self-assured *badinage* which insistently fails to answer it. The refusal of the narrative to supply answers and the re-iteration of the unanswered question leaves an opening in the text which,

Soyinka would seem to imply, may represent a space which he, as a stranger to national self-determination in Nigeria, was able to occupy on his return to Britain. This is the space of individual enquiry, posited in response to nationalist development, which erupts into his autobiography as a gap, forced in the narrative of subjective experience, serving to replace the certainty of the self positioned within language with a sense of unresolved history, and the echo of narratives which might otherwise be subdued in the interests of linear development.

Soyinka's choice to create a fictional version of himself through which his "Penkelemes Years" will be explored, provides his readership with a paradox. Whilst autobiography would normally offer a self-reflexive journey through the certainties of linear temporal/spatial categories, offering the digressions of self-discovery only as an addendum to the form, Soyinka offers an alternative formal device whereby the effect of history upon the author is recounted as the wholly partisan fictionalising of the self; a process which asserts that only the fictionalizing or doubling of the self as a subject of discourse allows for the exposure of absence, or schism, which is the space of self-production or regeneration. Thus, Soyinka the author writes the non-identical Maren (this being his most frequent form of address) as a means of making visible both the fiction and the discourses which bound and confirm the shapes that fiction assumes. Foucault reminds us that it is the function of discourse to produce objects of knowledge as a form of proof or evidence to support its claims to authority.[5] Soyinka would seem to share this perspective on the historical production of subjecthood. By exposing the discourses through which the self becomes visible *and* exposing the frames of those discourses as a boundary beyond which the questions proliferate the possibilities of selfhood, Soyinka indicates to his readership the possibility of a self which lies outside the realm of discourse, a self which cannot be named - but is nevertheless present - and must therefore hover between the author and his fictional creation.

The reader needs no method of analysis to discern this narrative disjuncture, its appearance is very much the intention of the writer and as the chapters unfold Soyinka uses the ill-fitting suit of Nigerian nationhood to allow himself an objectivity more suited to the exile than the citizen, whilst maintaining the citizen's intimate and subjective knowledge of the developing society which he, as author, seeks to objectify. Literary critic, Homi K. Bhabha, in an essay which debates the location of individual identity within national discourse, offers the example of the "ethnographer" as a social role which exposes for the subject/citizen of the Nation-State the possibility of a creative potential within the ideological framework of which he is a part:

> The ethnographic demands that the observer himself is a part of his observation and this requires that the field of knowledge - the total social fact - must be appropriated from the outside like a thing, but like a thing which comprises within itself the subjective understanding of the indigenous.[6]

The 'inside' and 'outside' of Bhabha's "ethnographer" are non-identical; the collision of the two modes of being is an act of violence enacted upon the object in the process of attempting a cultural articulation of the subject. The discourse represented by the ethnographer 'knows' and imposes the framework by which the object may become visible - as a product of discourse - and yet is also aware, by virtue of being subject to the discourse, of the supplementary, or excess which resists naming and is therefore 'forgotten' in the pursuit of progressive discursive development.

Soyinka's use of the concept of fractured identity, or rather, the fracturing of identity as a response to nationalist discourse, is reiterated in a comment offered during the course of an interview for *Spear* magazine in 1966:

> ...every nation tries to believe something about itself which is never true. The image is always different from the reality.[7]

In likening the discursive creation of the nation to the fictionalizing of reality, Soyinka once again exposes both the discourse which confers visibility and, by negative definition, that which is supplementary to the progression of the discourse and therefore unnameable. This time it is the Kantian imperative, 'What are we today, now?', that hovers between the duelling identities which Soyinka attempts to demonstrate, and any response to that question must now be located within the gap of indeterminacy which Soyinka's exposure of the national proclivity to fictional realities reveals. This positioning of the Enlightenment question *par excellence* between what we would *like* to believe ourselves to be and the knowledge that we are 'other' to that version of ourselves, offers - rather in the same vein as Bhabha's "ethnographer" - the creative possibility inherent in the imposition of national discourse. This possibility is, however, dependent upon a recognition of the constructed nature of nationalist 'reality'; a reality which historians continually feel the need to remind their readers is no way 'natural':

> Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all not it is what it seems to itself...The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism...is itself in the least contingent and accidental.[8]

What Ernest Gellner would seem to suggest is that the extraordinary power of nationalism as a discourse lies not in its content, which repeatedly reveals itself -

once placed within the context of its source of visibility - to be arbitrary, but rather in the form it assumes as a structural framework of perception through which its subjects are invited to view a constructed representation of the world which - owing to the fixed perspective offered by the frame - achieves the illusory capacity to appear as a total, all-encompassing, and above all, *natural* perspective on reality. If this is so, then it follows that an integral part of the development of nationalist movements must be the disguising of the frame which holds the illusion in place, or the invisibility of the discourse which maintains the illusion. For to reveal the totalizing reality offered by nationalism to be nothing more than a trick of perspective would be to loosen the subjective hold it undoubtedly has upon the civic imagination.

Ernest Renan, one of the major architects of nationalist discourse in Europe, defined, in an address entitled "What is a Nation?" [9] which was offered at the Sorbonne in 1882, the twin principles upon which the formation of the nation is dependent:

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.[10]

Renan's address focusses not upon the nation as a political structure, but rather upon the "soul" of the nation as a "spiritual principle". Thus, the nation replicates on a grand scale, all that is best in man; it is offered as an opportunity to dramatize the nobility of the European races upon a world stage which will henceforth define as 'other' all that does not reflect the moral supremacy of the major Nation-State protagonists. Renan saw in nationalism the opportunity to rewrite history from the perspective of those who held the balance of power. Although one might argue that the origins of history as a discourse lie in this very goal, the radical aspect of Renan's address lay in his inclusion of 'the people' as prime movers in the development of the will to nationhood. Thus, 'the people' were to be invited to partake for the first time in the realm of power, described by Renan as the constant reiteration of "a daily plebiscite".[11] That is to say, that the people were to play a major role in the fictionalizing of their history and the reformations of identity which this would necessarily involve. In return they would share the reflected glory of their nation and be intimately identified with that which defined the supremacy of their race. Renan articulates as central to the formation of this "clearly expressed desire to continue a common life"[12] the need, on a national scale, to 'forget' historical events which may "constitute a danger for [the principle of]

nationality."[13] The defining characteristics of the race therefore, must include the affirmation of a common need to purge itself of those aspects of historical circumstance that might make questionable its claim to power as a 'natural' attribute of the pure in soul. Thus, the people become the willing accomplices to processes which allow them common identification with a nobility and stature which had hitherto passed through the bloodlines of the ruling families. The final measure of the success of nationalist discourse would be, inevitably, the ability of its progenitors to 'forget' the constructed nature of the perspective offered, thus treating as 'natural' a wholly fictionalized and perspectivized worldview.

Karl W.Deutsch, writing on the processes of social communication in the early 1960s offers the following definition of nationalism as an antidote to Renan's national "soul":

> In the age of nationalism, a *nationality* is a people pressing to acquire a measure of effective control over the behaviour of its members. It is a people striving to equip itself with power, with some machinery of compulsion strong enough to make the enforcement of its commands sufficiently probable to aid in the spread of habits of voluntary compliance with them.[14]

The "effective control" achieved by the architects of nationalist discourse is undeniable, and its ideological power, which constitutes a morality based on the rags and patches of selected historical glories, continues to seduce emergent 'peoples' using exactly the same strategies of identification as those outlined just over a century ago by Renan. The cultural drive of nationalism is, however, only a symptom of the force which underpins its appearance in world politics, this being the transition of established dynastic States to competitive industrial powers. The establishment of industrial trade in an expanding world market necessitated the creation of a workforce who could be depended upon to serve the interests of the nation's economy before their own; thus, the nation - as an abstract concept - and the invisible force of the economy had to be placed within a structure which would prove accessible to the imaginative impulses of those whose lives it would determine. Anthony D. Smith has described the subsequent development of nationalist discourse as the creation of a 'faith':

> Nationalism as a 'civic religion', in the sense that Rousseau recommended, is really a secular rival and replacement for traditional world religions, even though in practice it may enter into alliances with them or utilise some of their motifs for its own ends. It is an urban secular vision and movement parading and feeding off some of the latter's symbols and emotions.[15]

The adoption of national discourse by the African States could be viewed almost as an inevitability given the historical circumstances of the continent by the 1950s. The colonization of Africa had been effected by the creation of States where before there had been a tribal territorialization of the land-mass. The nationalist wars of the 1950s, whether fought physically or ideologically, strove to assert ownership not only of the land which had been seized by foreign powers but also of the concept of state-nationhood which had given economic stability - within the context of an expanding world market - to the disparate tribal structures of the African continent. The wars of Independence were not therefore wars which asserted the right of the tribes to retrieve their land and their political structures, but rather the right of a newly formed 'people' to reap and administer the benefits and opportunities for trade made possible by the industrial organization and production of raw materials. The demand for a withdrawal of an occupying force was, of course, a 'natural' one, but the discursive demand for a return to the purity of the African race - which in many cases fuelled the unity of purpose with which the wars of the 1950s were fought - was complicated by the fact that what was actually being fought over was a structure of political intent - of European origin - which would irretrievably condition the lives of those who were to live within its bounds. Clifford Geertz in ***The Interpretation of Cultures*** [16] states unequivocally that the imposition of nationhood upon a people - often effected in the name of purity - actually forces them into a process of change which leads ever further away from a 'traditional' perception of reality:

> The granular images into which individuals' view of who they are and who they aren't, so intensely bound in traditional society, [are] challenged by the more general, vaguer but no less charged conceptions of collective identity based on a diffuse sense of common destiny, that tends to characterize industrialized states. The men who raised this challenge, the nationalist intellectuals, were thus launching a revolution as much cultural as it was political. They were attempting to transform the symbolic framework through which the people experienced social reality and thus, to the extent that life is what we make of it all, that reality itself.[17]

In the same essay, Geertz isolates Nigeria as an example of the complicated processes through which national discourse must work if it is to achieve the status of a reality for those living under its *aegis*. Geertz observes that whilst other African States, simultaneously involved in the struggle against an occupying force, "saw a progressive unification of diverse elements into an intensely solidary opposition",[18] Nigeria was virtually unique in its schismatic power-broking. The artificial boundaries which defined the modern State of Nigeria soon became secondary as the more ancient boundaries between the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and the Igbo re-emerged. These older boundaries highlighted the scramble for a share

of the power and their hasty internal ratification displayed an urgent need to dissipate hostilities in the crucial years preceding British withdrawal. Nationalism, in its early stages in Nigeria, did not therefore succeed in uniting the disparate tribal peoples of the State. Rather, the excessive energy and fervour, induced by the call to self-determination, fuelled the fierce growth of localized nation-building, each faction fighting for the lion-share of a power which would eventually fall to a Nigerian State unified by nothing more than territorial boundaries.

The mis-firing of the nationalist charge in Nigeria meant that the framework within which the unified perspective of communal intent becomes possible was exposed as a structure of political expediency. In ***National Self-Determination in Post-Colonial Africa***,[19] Benjamin Neuberger argues that the call for self-determination in colonial Africa posed no problems so long as nationalism could be defined by the short-term aim of ousting the colonial power. Thus, the 'natural' aspects of the movement had to be emphasized and the immediacy of the struggle for liberation, with little or no priority being given to the political structures which would replace colonial rule. Neuberger's suggestion is that for self-determination to succeed as a concept which would unify disparate peoples it had to be seen as an eruption of an instinct, rather than an episode in the consolidation of political structures which would inform the future of the African States.[20] The failure of this ideological loop exposes nationalism as a political mechanism which is wholly un-natural in its progress towards unity and social cohesion, what Bhabha describes as the founding of "the progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion - *the many as one*".[21]

When Wole Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1960, therefore, he was returning to a State which was in the process of redoubling its attempts to 'naturalize' the fiction of nationhood in the teeth of a reality riven with disjuncture and disparity. In the latter half of Nigeria's first decade of Independence, in an essay entitled "The Writer in a Modern African State",[22] Soyinka provided the readership of ***Transition*** magazine with a precise analysis of the effects of nationalist discourse upon the divided peoples of the Nigerian State, taking as his metaphor the ideological construction of the nationalist writer whose state-defined morality replaces the ethics of the non-ideological 'artist':

> In the modern African state especially, the position of the writer has been such that he is in fact the very prop of state-machinery. Independence in every instance has meant an emergency pooling of every mental resource. The writer must, for the moment at least (he persuades himself) postpone that unique reflection on experience and events which is what makes a writer - and constitute himself into a part of that machinery that will actually shape events.[23]

Soyinka continues by charting, with precision, the three phases which constitute at once the consolidation of the Nation-State and the - concomitant - decline of the artist's autonomy in relation to that state. The first phase is described by Soyinka as the sacrifice of the artist's 'visionary' role in the name of cultural unification and stability. (Here are echoes of Neuberger's warning that only the de-historicized, instinctual, call to anti-colonial arms will serve the true aims of nationalism.) The individual artistic 're-creative consciousness' is subsumed under the burden of responsibility placed upon the artist to engender and create a unified people. Thus the temptation to play a part in the shaping of epochal events is held out as lure to the artist, who is invited to perceive art as integral to social determination; as an educational force through which the people may be enlightened. The title of cultural definer is offered, in return for self denial, couched in the comforting, if ultimately compromising, framework of social altruism.

The second phase celebrates the freedom of the newly-emerged state from the tyranny of an oppressive colonial regime, and requires of the writer a commitment to the maintenance of stability and the sacrifice of any counter-ideological stances which might endanger the still fragile unity. The 'monolithic stresses' which accompany political transition thus necessitate the writer's continued adherence to a clearly defined cultural policy in the name of social coherence. Soyinka cites this second phase as the dawning of the writer's realization that, far from serving his society, he is in fact being called upon to create rigid ideological tram-lines from which the only escape is total derailment. At this stage in his analysis, Soyinka separates the role of the *artist*, described as "The record of the mores and experience of his society *and* as the voice of vision in his own time" [24] from that of the *writer* whose assimilation into the cultural project of nation-building has by now compromised his work with little or no hope of negotiation or future objectivity. In this second phase, Soyinka ruefully and bitterly echoes Renan as he likens 'the future of the state' to a web which binds the writer to a hastily convened body, or fictionalized 'people' who will henceforth constitute his readership or audience and whose continued adherence to the national fiction will become his aim.

The third phase outlined is the bleakest and one which would appear to be irreversible; he describes this phase as disillusionment. The lack of vision demonstrated by the majority of Nigerian writers has, writes Soyinka, left them no means by which to define themselves except within the framework of state-regulating mechanisms which now alone provide them, and their readership, with their *raison d'être*. Their future is thus described by Soyinka as being entrenched within a dichotomy of assimilation and denial, with no means of positioning their work outside the aspirations of national culture, and the politics of state progress.

The choice he perceives to confront the writer at this stage in national development is significantly one which denies 'choice' as a concept encompassing freedom, rather choice is placed within the context of capitulation and defeat:

> When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon. But there can be no further distractions with universal concerns whose balm is spread on abstract wounds, not on the gaping yaws of black humanity.[25]

Thus, the choice of the writer is to have no choice at all with regard his relationship to his society, or rather his choice is one which is predetermined as soon as his aims become conjoined with the political structures which define his society. The process outlined by Soyinka may be described as the progress of the individual towards full citizenship; the citizen being defined in this instance as a partner in marriage to the political structures inherent in nationalist discourse. The marriage contract demands a monogamous relationship with the state conditional upon which is an enjoyment of the fruits and comforts of a national culture which offers choice, diversity and a stake in the power-base, in return for a self-willed fidelity to the *status quo*. The offspring of this union is a new form of identity which links each to each in a parody of social equality. The ambiguous ideals of the Enlightenment - truth, freedom and justice - which had at least held out the promise of ethical interpretations are replaced with the moral solidity of a system of state regulated 'rights', the acquisition of which defines one's status as a fully qualified member of society.

Homi Bhabha, in considering how one may unpick the binding narratives which describe the union of the citizen with the state, suggests:

> We may begin by questioning that progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion - *the many as the one* - shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and by theorists who treat gender, class, or race as radically 'expressive' social totalities.[26]

Soyinka's refusal of the "progressive metaphor" and all that inclusion within its bounds would entail, allows him to stand outside his exposition of national monogamy, placing a distance between the writer and himself. The position he occupies is designated as that of the artist and by terms of his own definition this makes him an exile and stranger to the national fiction which binds its citizens. The fictional 'Maren' who passes - in the course of Soyinka's ***Ibadan*** - through the early years of Nigerian Independence is the fruit of a choice Soyinka - as artist - has retained. Maren is *not* Soyinka, rather he is the autonomous creation *of*

Soyinka, and as such he is defined as much by the absences which surround him as by the discourses which give shape and visibility to his actions.

The gap which Soyinka places between the author and his fictional creation - the gap being characterized by the interrogative - is replicated in his description of the artist who stands as a question mark to his readership/audience, proclaiming an ethical relationship to his society in place of the ready-made morals inscribed in national identity.

Theatre and National Culture

In a recent essay, included in a collection published to celebrate Wole Soyinka's sixtieth birthday,[27] the Nigerian playwright Femi Osofisan recalls his early admiration of Soyinka's work, culminating in his presence, as a young spectator, at the playwright's own production of ***Kongi's Harvest*** [28] at The Arts Theatre in Ibadan.

> I had never seen anything like this. It brought back to sight the splendour of a world that was once ours but which we had lost; it recalled even to my young and fragile mind the poetry of my people's original essence. I felt transported, ennobled; I was thoroughly soaked in the play's spectacular universe; I didn't want it to end.[29]

The recollected response of Osofisan as a schoolboy in awe of the great Nigerian playwright continues untainted until, as a young man considering a career in playwrighting himself, he was given a small role in the first production of ***Madmen and Specialists*** [30] directed by Soyinka himself at Ibadan in 1971. Osofisan ruefully recalls the first ebbing of his admiration when, at the initial readthrough of the play, one of the actors asked, on behalf of the whole cast, if Soyinka would be so good as to offer an explanation of the play's meaning, and was met with the retort that "they should be patient, and let the meaning come to them." [31] The rehearsal period which followed is described by Osofisan as "nothing less than sheer torment" as the collected group of actors worked self-sufficiently towards a style of playing which would articulate the dense form of Soyinka's written text. Osofisan gives no indication that Soyinka's direction guided them in any way towards performance but he does emphasize the power one of the lead actors drew from the script by building his role, not on the rational basis of characterization, but rather upon a series of unrelated metamorphoses, or transformations, which parallelled the irrational leaps of logic made by the text itself.

Almost with a breath of relief, Osofisan admits that the meaning of the play was made clear by the process of finding a way to play it. His attempted description of

what that meaning was however, stumbles and stutters in its attempts to find a language equal to the comprehension achieved by the actors:

> *Madmen*...does not narrate a story as such; its main purpose, instead, is to narrate a historical *situation*, one that is macabre, and immensely frightening, by animating it with graphic and telling illustrations. Its goal is not catharsis therefore, but rather, shock and psychic wounding...Hence you could not say what the play was *about*, only what it did to your psyche and to your mind. You could not summarise it; you could only *experience* it! [32]

Osofisan continues by considering what effect Soyinka had hoped that the play would have upon his audience. In answering this enquiry Osofisan displays a curious lapse of memory concerning his own - earlier - response to ***Kongi's Harvest***, and chooses to concentrate instead upon the possibility of social amelioration. Thus, he hypothesizes the possibility of a "collective guilt" arising from the chastening experience of watching the play and a subsequent atonement for the very recent realities of war which Nigeria had experienced on the occasion of Biafra's attempted secession and the bloody civil war which had ensued.

Osofisan's attempts to 'justify' Soyinka's work as theatre occur on behalf of the mass audience watching a performance; the effects and possibilities inherent in this process are considered to be quite different from those which he, as an individual, had experienced both as spectator and as actor. Thus, his own triumphant understanding that one could not summarise Soyinka's work, rather one could "only *experience* it!" becomes, a prelude to defeat when placed before the insistent imperative of the spectator's *perceived* need for clarity and explanation:

> As actors we had had a privileged access no doubt into the play's disturbing universe, since we had had weeks to grow into it, grow with it, and ingest it. But the audience which comes to Soyinka's play, without the benefit of such long contemplation, cannot but leave confused. And the question is, why should such a consummate artist, with such a mastery of the theatre's resources, be content to leave this swampy distance between himself and his audience? [33]

Interestingly, Osofisan concludes by acknowledging the fulfilment Soyinka's work offers him as an actor, but insists that the intensely creative engagement which characterizes this fulfilment is not possible in its relationship to the spectators, perceived here in a passive role to the artistic product. Thus, the active, creative principle is offered as an attribute of the 'I' by Osofisan, but not of the 'We' or 'They' which characterizes his descriptions of the audience as a mass. As a playwright he articulates his felt responsibility to be to the production of "information and lucidity" which are considered to be essential

> ...because our people were at a crucial juncture of history, at which all the options must be stripped naked, for decisions were waiting to be taken on whether we would forever remain victims, or recover, in Cabral's words, 'the upward paths of our history'. In fulfilment of such objectives, it seemed to me, although still only fleetingly, a new aesthetic, different from Soyinka's, would have to be created.[34]

Kenyan playwright and novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o also considers theatre to be a vital tool in the creation and maintenance of an 'educated' audience. For him, the specific possibilities for education, offered by theatre, supply the antidote to decades of imperialist education. In a series of critical essays, which appeared under the collective title of *Decolonising the Mind*,[35] Ngũgĩ pursues the argument that the all-pervasive system of colonial education had as its goal the creation of a mutant race; Africans who had thoroughly imbibed the ideals and values of the Western worldview. What he considers more damaging however are the implanted seeds of self-hatred which he perceives to be an integral part of colonial education policies. Thus, any aspects of African culture which had refused assimiliation into the practices and perceptions of the colonial masters were - according to Ngũgĩ's argument - defined only by their 'otherness' in relation to civilization and its benefits. The 'other' self which identified itself through such practices had therefore to be rejected as part of the educational process. For Ngũgĩ, the hope of African national culture lay with those who had been untouched by literary contamination; the peasantry, whose historical and cultural identification had remained embedded within the oral tradition:

> It was imperialism that had stopped the free development of the national traditions of theatre rooted in the ritual and ceremonial practices of the peasantry. The real language of African theatre could only be found among the people - the peasantry in particular - in their life, history and struggles.[36]

Ngũgĩ uses the concept of a 'national' culture with which to imply the undisturbed continuance of a unified history and cultural tradition in Africa. The words 'peasantry' and 'people' are used interchangeably as a means of fortifying the notion of a social structure which existed prior to colonial rule thus claiming the authority of precedence with regard to racial purity and authenticity. His insertion of 'the people' as a concept linked to the assertion of a 'national' culture pre-dating colonialism is problematic precisely because these signifiers of nationalist discourse serve to fictionalize the historical narrative which Ngũgĩ claims to be unearthing in the name of authenticity. The discourse used by Ngũgĩ therefore, has as its real aim an historical transformation of the object it describes. Homi Bhabha, in critiquing Renan's strategic use of the 'people' to political ends, offers a definition of 'the people' as a concept:

> The people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process.[37]

The 'people' to whom Ngũgĩ apparently gives supreme authority are, therefore, by virtue of the nationalist discourse to which they are subjected, in reality no more than signifiers serving the purposes of a political agenda quite alien to the 'experiences' which that agenda would appear to invoke. Without the definition of the 'people' however, Ngũgĩ could not pursue his argument, for adherence to the letter of his aims would, far from promoting a culturally unified future for the African states, actually dissolve both the concept of the State and the administrative processes by which it maintains it arbitrarily imposed shape.

The disjuncture in Ngũgĩ's argument occurs between the project of retrieving traditional forms of communication and expression, and the overwriting of the tribal structures, which gave birth to those forms, with a national discourse of Western origin. The theatre stands in relation to this discourse as a carrier of cultural artefacts which have essentially to be annexed in the interests of industrial modernization and economic development. The effect of this amputation is to make impotent but *visible* the products of a once potent and dynamic form of artistic expression. Within Ngũgĩ's discourse, visibility is conditional upon the application of a frame through which the object may be viewed. The frame which endows visibility also ensures the clarity of a sharp focus for the perceptions of the viewer. The particular frame offered by the nationalist playwright is social utility but the caption which accompanies the landscape suggests authenticity and freedom. Thus reality is fictionalized causing the "swampy distance", which Soyinka maintains to be the location of the artist, to give way to the firmer terrain offered by the clearly etched horizons of a national culture.

> The artist who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically towards the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are in fact the cast-offs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilised once and for all. But the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realise that the truths of the nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.[38]

Franz Fanon, in his essay on "National Culture", accepts the fact of the nation as an historic structure which is inescapable for the African continent. He also

recognizes national culture to be the adhesive which will hold together the disparate peoples of the African nations, but he refuses the numbing stasis that such a culture may impose upon the subjective consciousness of its objects. The fictionalization of the frameworks of identity which characterized European national identity are therefore used by Fanon as possible sources of critique and creative regeneration once applied to the contemporary African condition. Thus he defines national culture as an articulation of the process of nationhood rather than the purely pragmatic - and inevitable - product of its imposition. History, for Fanon, is not the fictional narrative which produces a linear progression of events leading incontrovertibly to the present moment, rather it occurs *in* the present moment and is therefore in a constant state of flux, reflecting not only the present but also the possibility of future configurations. History, according to Fanon's definition, becomes both the form and content of culture, but it is a history which cannot yet be named for it exists only in the moment of its telling; it is history as presence rather than history as mastered narrative. What Fanon proposes is a truly revolutionary refusal - in nationalist terms - of history as a solution to present ills; in its place he counsels the retrieval of history as "the seething pot" which bubbles with the paradoxical assertion of being and to which man must constantly return in order to feed the fount of his particular existence:

> A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people created itself and keeps itself in existence.[39]

The charge Fanon sets before the artist, and by extension to the people he serves, is to refuse the vicarious national identity offered as a short cut to the glorious future progress of the unified State. He thus cautions against the creation of a population, or mass work-force and urges that culture retain the dignifying proportions of art in its ability to hold up to its spectators, not a mirror of state perceptions, but rather a mirror which allows each individual to place and define himself as a unique 'particular' within the framework of the whole.

Soyinka's Play for Independence

A number of Soyinka's commentators have made the - almost inevitable - link between *A Dance of the Forests*,[40] which was first performed during the period of the Nigerian Independence celebrations in 1960, and the state of the nascent nation at that time. Many of them note the dense symbolism of Soyinka's text and attempt to effect a clearing in the eponymous forest for their readers by offering a series of equations as a 'key' to the meaning of what has been described as "the kind of unsuccessful early work out of which several successes can be carved." [41]

Critics tend to remain frustrated however, in their attempts to decode the work as an analogy to nation formation, finding that symbols which would initially seem to offer a rich vein of meaning, ultimately implode, denying the facility of uni-vocal utterance to their interpreter. Derek Wright, the most recent writer to join the ever growing army of critics who have done battle with Soyinka's texts, suggests, in ***Wole Soyinka Revisited***,[42] that the 'meaning' of ***A Dance of the Forests*** may lie, not in the clarification of the playwright's purpose, but may rather reside in the impossibility of producing uni-vocal symbols at a time of national transition. Wright uses Victor Turner's concept of "liminal space" as a designated arena of activity within which both dramatic action and national transition coincide. Thus, for Wright, Soyinka's play becomes analogous to the ritual rite of passage during which an individual - or in this case a people - passes from one state of being to another.[43] The liminal state, which occurs midway between the two stable categories of being - for example, between adolescence and adulthood - he perceives to equate with the process Nigeria was undergoing at this particular moment in her history. Wright uses this mode of interpretation to consider the climactic events of Soyinka's work, central to which is the release of a "Half-Child" - which many critics have considered to be a symbol representing the Nation-State - from centuries of incubation in his dead mother's womb, and an ensuing battle over ownership of the child, fought between gods and humans. It is Demoke, the mortal artist, to whom responsibility finally falls concerning the future of the mutant being. Wright comments:

> The business of the Half-Child is tantalizingly elliptical, operating on too many and too tenuously abstract levels, at which the different possibilities and permutations - historical, mythological, metaphysical - tend to cancel one another out and dissolve meaning, as if there were some basic, insurmountable ambivalence, or ultimate aporia at the core of symbolism. At transitional stages, whether in the personal or national context, human decisions are bound to be hedged around with qualifications and dilemmas; no 'correct' choice is possible.[44]

Wright proceeds to demonstrate that the problem presented to the spectator in the form of the Half-Child remains dramaturgically unsatisfying as, at a crucial moment in the play, both spectator and protagonist share the experience of moral vertigo: "It is simply not clear from the dramatic symbolism what the alternative choices to Demoke would be and what they would signify...or whether there is really any choice at all." [45] For Wright, Soyinka's choice of symbol fails dramatically because it is unable to achieve, at a decisive moment, the symbolic framework within which the concepts of 'choice' and 'progress' would allow for movement towards a recognizable, and unified goal. According to Wright's interpretation, symbolic failure disallows the movement of transition and in its

place emerges a condition of weary stasis in which the chaotic and cataclysmic events of the play, involving gods, humans and ancestral spirits, return one finally to where one began with little hope of change or cause for celebration.

Alternatively Gerald Moore, writing in 1978,[46] suggests that Demoke's return of the Half-Child to its mother's dead womb signifies a rejection, on the part of the playwright, of political solutions and the "collective salvation" which they would appear to offer:

> It is the very profundity of the play's meaning which makes me a little sceptical of interpretations which would see the Half-Child simply as representing the destiny of Nigeria, now to be saved at Independence by a change in the hearts of men, of which Demoke's action is symbolic. My feeling is rather that Soyinka does not believe in collective salvations at all; it lies in the breast of every man to find his particular god and strive towards unity with him.[47]

Moore concludes his analysis of the play with a comment which is shared by Eldred Durosmi Jones in his book *The Writings of Wole Soyinka*,[48] namely that nationalist readings of the play offer a limited interpretation for the critic, but a consideration of the play as a discourse upon 'man' taps a more fertile vein, rendering up to the reader a profound debate concerning "the regeneration of man rather than to any temporal political concept which ignores man's immemorial nature." [49]

In adding my voice to the already swollen ranks of commentary upon Soyinka's play, I would like to suggest that *A Dance of the Forests*, rather than trying to articulate, or reflect the process of national transition, actually attempts an articulation of nationalism's 'other' face; the *reality* which is constituted by its exile from the fiction of nationalism in its attempts to achieve its long term goals of rapid industrial growth and economic stability. Thus, I am in agreement with Jones and Moore in their exposure of a layered textual discourse on the condition of 'man', or 'being' in Soyinka's play, but I would like to propose, in addition to this, that *A Dance of the Forests* actually critiques nationalism as a concept by gathering up the remnants discarded by the streamlining processes of its discourse and builds out of these fragments a storehouse of cultural possibility which will stake its claim on the imaginative faculties of its spectators; the creative imagination also being an exile to the civic processes of State-Nationalism, it having been replaced by its pale shadow in the form of racial glorification.

In the opening section of this chapter a quotation from Clifford Geertz suggested that nationalist discourse attempts the revolutionary task of transforming the symbolic framework through which its constructed 'people' will perceive the

world. The nature of this symbolic framework is likely to derive from Western origin, this being the source of nationalist structures, and it is feasible therefore to presume that the meanings attached to symbolic representation in a pre-nationalist state will differ radically from those of the post-Independence phase. In discussing Soyinka's theatrical output I would suggest that consideration of symbolic 'meaning' is essential if one is to allow the text to generate the possibilities for individual interpretation which - as I shall propose - were intended by its author.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, in *In My Father's House*, suggests that the application of symbolic meaning arises as a need of the industrialized worldview to confirm the central tenets of its rational, truth-defining doctrine of first principles founded on a system of logical deduction. He first describes the use of symbolism in traditional societies as a process of equivalence which is self-conscious and pragmatic in its honouring of deities or elders. Thus a propitiation to the gods may involve the 'symbolic' gift of gold-dust as a measure of respect equivalent to that which would be shown to a fellow human being. The gold-dust - as a symbol - does not stand in for, it is not doubled in the practice of the ceremonial, rather it is a gesture which recognizes the essential difference between the material and spiritual; the gods do not *need* gold-dust but the offering reflects a material order *and* the transcendence of that order through the processes of ritual or the ceremonial. Essentially however, the gold-dust remains gold-dust although the content (monetary worth) is overwhelmed by the articulation of its form (respect and honour).

By comparison Appiah offers the following anecdote as an example of the conscious application of symbolic meaning as a test of 'truth':

> The basic symbolist thought is neatly (if ironically) captured in this formulation of the Cameroonian philosopher M. Hegba: 'One approach to the phenomena of magic and sorcery would be to suppose that we find ourselves facing a symbolic language...A man who flies through the air, who changes himself into an animal, or who makes himself invisible at will...cannot be anything but a coded language whose key we have simply to discover. We would then be reassured.' Simply put, the symbolists are able to treat traditional believers as reassuringly rational only because they deny that traditional people mean what they say.[50]

The basic difference between the two applications of symbolic meaning involves therefore a contestation of the truth value attributed to different perceptions of the world which emerge via the medium of language. Thus the Western application of symbolism provides the framework for a discursive colonialism whereby perceptions not immediately comprehensible to rational logic undergo a process of translation and interpretation, only to reappear in comfortingly familiar terms whilst simultaneously assimilating the speaker into a new framework of meaning.

In this instance power is demonstrated via its ability to accommodate even the most outrageous assaults on its defining rationale.

The opening lines of *A Dance of the Forests*, spoken for the first time during the Nigerian Independence celebrations in 1960, are offered as an overt challenge to the new symbolic order operating within the boundaries of the Nigerian state:

> I know who the Dead Ones are. They are the guests of the Human Community who are neighbours to us of the Forest. It is their Feast, the Gathering of the Tribes. Their councillors met and said, Our forefathers must be present at this Feast. They asked us for ancestors, for illustrious ancestors, and I said to *Forest Head*, let me answer their request. And I sent two spirits of the restless dead...[51]

This speech is addressed to the spectators by Aroni, the Lame One, who, as Oyin Ogunba has pointed out,[52] is a spirit existing outside human conceptions of time. His knowledge of the Dead is not therefore contingent upon political agenda which seek to press the dead into the service of the living, rather - for Aroni - the Dead are what they are; stinking corpses whose untimely resurrection fills all who look upon them with dread and loathing. In passing language through the non-temporal head of Aroni, Soyinka achieves the revelation of a reality which the symbolic framework of nationalist discourse has sought to disguise; thus Independence reverts to the "Gathering of the Tribes", "Community" describes nothing more specific than the Humans who live alongside the spirits in the forest, and the more ambiguous title of "Feast" replaces the celebrations of national unity. What Soyinka achieves in these opening moments of the play is what Bhabha has described as "the minus in the origin":

> ...the anteriority of signification as a position of social and cultural knowledge, this time of the 'before' of signification, which will not issue harmoniously into the present like the continuity of tradition - invented or otherwise.[53]

Put at its simplest, Soyinka confronts his audience with the challenge to *remember* before the symbolic framework of nationalism makes remembering redundant in the face of a new set of citizen-based priorities which counsel *forgetting* as a necessary precursor to progress. To impose a symbolic interpretation upon these opening words, which many critics have attempted, would be to make analogous the "Gathering of the Tribes" with the Independence celebrations. This would in fact be a falsification of Soyinka's purpose for it would remove the gap - Bhabha's minus - and return the particular, which Soyinka is attempting to articulate, back to the illusory confines of the all-encompassing whole.

The play's location in the Forest has been likened to Shakespeare's ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** [54] but easy comparisons are as likely to mislead as are symbolic impositions made upon the text. The three mortals who traverse the forest groves are not lovers, nor are they fleeing the law in pursuit of love's irrational essence. Demoke the Carver, Rola the Courtesan and Adenebi the Council Orator *know* the world of the forest and do not for one moment succumb to the belief that they have lived through nothing more than a dream. Nor does Soyinka offer any representations of civilization against which the chimera of the forest must battle for its status as reality, rather the forest is the only framework within which the spectator is invited to lodge his perceptions. The gap the audience has to leap in an apprehension of the play's logic may be great but the defining framework offered by Shakespeare's Athens is absent as an integral element of the stage world.

Soyinka's forest is essentially a place without boundaries, either spatial or temporal and in this way it avoids what Benedict Anderson in ***Imagined Communities*** [55] has described as the novelistic representation of nationhood:

> The movement of the solitary hero through a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside. The picaresque *tour d'horizon* - hospitals, prisons, remote villages, monasteries, Indians, Negroes - is nonetheless not a *tour de monde*. The horizon is clearly bounded.[56]

Anderson compares the temporal and spatial representations of the novel - which he considers to be the national form *par excellence* - with the production of legends, chronicles and sacred texts, and finds the naturalism of novelistic narrative to be the articulation of " homogeneous, empty time", a phrase which he acknowledges as Walter Benjamin's. It is Anderson's suggestion that the novel exists outside the movement of history and places the actions of its characters in an eternal 'meanwhile' which is measured not by a genealogical relationship to the source or origin of the thought processes which define a people, but rather by "transverse, cross-time, marked...by temporal co-incidence, and measured by clock and calendar".[57] Thus, the characters of a novel progress through a time and space bounded on all sides by a history which defines their state of being in the world and yet remain annexed from that history by the protective 'limits' or horizons of national discourse which shields them by putting on 'hold' all that would prove a distraction or digression to the moral progress of the citizen.

In designating the forest as the space of dramatic action, Soyinka is attempting to return his spectators to a place of imaginative signification which exists as anterior to novelistic, nationalist, empty space. This forest is specific in its origins, being peopled with ancestors, spirits, gods, and mortals of the Yoruba Tribe. The forest

is not conceptual in its origins therefore, rather it is a place within which Fanon's present history may manifest itself; it is the fount of Yoruba thought - as perceived by the playwright - and as such it carries the possibility for transformation of all who enter its sphere. Upon entering the forest the mortals find themselves subject to a shifting temporal and spatial logic which allows for the eruption of history into their present lives thus confounding any sense of history as a 'point of arrival'. 'Ropo Sekoni, in his essay "Metaphor as a Basis of Form in Soyinka's Drama" [58] describes the time which operates in the forest as follows:

> ...the playwright's effort in intensifying the spatialized dramatic event is subtly objectified by his use of three different dimensions of time: ancestral, social-historical, and transitional. Essentially, these three temporal dimensions refer to three distinct points on the Yoruba cosmological space-time continuum.[59]

The time through which the action of the play passes has a distinct origin which may be understood only as a means of perceiving the world from a particular viewpoint with particular priorities held in place by the demands its looped convolutions makes upon those who are defined by its bounds. The "Yoruba cosmological space-time continuum" to which Sekoni refers is a process of cyclical repetition which ensures that Yoruba thought never escapes the origins which gave birth to that thought. The three designations offered by Sekoni correspond to the Yoruba description of time and space as articulated by Soyinka in his essay "The Fourth Stage":

> The Yoruba is not, like European man, concerned with the purely conceptual aspects of time; they are too concretely realised in his own life religion, sensitivity, to be mere tags for explaining the metaphysical order of his world. If we may put the same thing in fleshed-out cognitions, life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn. All are vitally within the intimations and affectiveness of life, beyond mere abstract conceptualisation.[60]

As Soyinka clearly states, the time of the forest is not time subject to symbolic translation, which in this case is described as abstract conceptualization, rather time carries within it the imperative to *remember*, in sharp distinction to Ernest Renan's national imperative to collective *forgetting*. Thus ***A Dance of the Forests*** quite simply offers its spectators a framework through which to perceive the world which patently cannot co-exist with the nationalist framework and must therefore be sacrificed if the Nation-State is to achieve fulfilment.

Given the anteriority of Soyinka's framework, the frustration of critics who would try to overlay the events of the play with symbolic representations of national origin becomes an historic event in itself, for the inefficacy of the process proves

the falsity of the nationalist equation. To return to Derek Wright's proposition that a time of national transition is marked by the impossibility of producing "uni-vocal symbols", we may now replace this with a counter proposition which states that a time of national transition is marked by a plethora of uni-vocal symbols which actually seek to negate the reality of a people's transitional state. What is offered in its place is an abstract, conceptual time which short-cuts the process by offering in its stead a rubber-stamped, ready-made, cultural product which, owing to its status as a doubling, or falsification of reality, can only make sense if it is considered symbolically. Dorothy Rowe, in ***Wanting Everything***,[61] offers an apt description of the transitional individual, subject to the processes of nationalist discourse:

> Power is the right to define how others should define reality. We all want this right, but we do not want the hard work of working out the definitions of everything. So we accept other people's definitions for some areas of our experience, but mark out other areas on our own.[62]

Soyinka's ***A Dance of the Forests*** overtly refuses the moral 'We' which informs and naturalizes Rowe's discourse and states that the rejection of "the hard work of working out the definitions of everything" actually signals the death of the 'people' nationalism pretends to glorify. For what are 'We', Soyinka would seem to ask, if not the eternal return to the questions which define our origins as a people?

If one applies the Yoruba conception of time to the events which occur in ***A Dance of the Forests***, the *interlinking* of the three different cyclical patternings, described as the time of the ancestors, of the living and of the unborn, are shown to be integral to the space of ethical questioning which this chapter has again and again found to be also the space which Soyinka desires to occupy. The play begins with the three spheres shown to be co-existant but separate, with points of contact between them proving ineffectual in terms of historical articulation. Thus, the three mortals flee the onslaught of the "Gathering", but have no means of knowing why they experience a growing distaste for the excesses of feasting. Both Rola and Adenebi attribute their flight to a need to escape from houses full of unwanted relatives whose arrival marks the beginning of the festivities. Demoke, the carver has fled from the unveiling of his own work; a large totem which was commissioned to mark the importance of the event. When faced with the incredulity of his companions at the carver's desire to shun the mass adoration which his work has provoked, Demoke replies:

> For one thing, I did not know what it was all about. The council met and decided that they wanted it done. In secret. The tree was in a grove of Oro, so it was possible to keep it hidden. Later I learnt it was meant for the gathering of the tribes. When I finished it, the

> grove was cleared of all the other trees, the bush was razed and a motor road built right up to it. It looked different. It was no longer my work. I fled from it.[63]

Demoke's work is shown to have undergone a transformation akin to that of a 'people' in the process of nationalism. As Una Maclean has pointed out, the totem was "carved from the living trunk of a tree" [64] just as the Nation-State is hewn from the essential characteristics of divers peoples, but once the surrounding trees and bushes have been obliterated and a "motor road" put in their place, the totem (as living emblem of family or tribe) is no longer what it was; it has become the product of political motivation, subject to a new set of symbolic significations. Just as Demoke has no means of 'knowing' what it is that he has created, so his companions have no means of 'knowing' what the forces are that have driven them to the quietness of the forest clearing. It is this state of 'not knowing' which is important to their journey through the forest and their entry into Soyinka's 'interrogative space' is aided by the presence of a disguised Forest Head who offers them no solutions but rather urges them to a questioning of their present condition.

The ancestral time of the play is inhabited by forest spirits, gods, and the two animate corpses to whom Aroni has extended the official invitation issued by the same committees which commissioned Demoke's totem. One might expect that the lack of understanding and knowledge exhibited by the mortals would find its compensating factor in the cycle of ancestral life, but then that would be to fall prey to a nationalist discourse which attempts to disguise the makeshift nature of the present by obeisance to a more certain past. Soyinka bestows upon the ancestors an ignorance and impotence which at the very least rivals that of the mortals in its inability to recognize, understand or change the cycles of history which they must repeatedly encounter. The sprawl of ignorance which gapes in the gap between the living and the dead is exposed by Soyinka within moments of the corpses emergence from the floor of the forest:

> **Dead W'man:** The world is big but the dead are bigger. We've been dying since the beginning; the living try but the gap always widens. What is it to them from whom I descended!
>
> **Dead Man:** It was a mistake from the beginning. It is a long way to travel the understreams to be present where the living make merry. What is it to me? I want nothing more. Nothing at all.
>
> **Dead W'man:** I have been a fool. It is a hard thing to carry this child for a hundred generations. And I thought...when I was asked, I thought...here was a chance to return the living to the living that I may sleep lighter.[65]

The desire of the Dead Woman to rid herself of the life which ruins her sleep, and of the Dead Man to "want nothing more", suggests an absolute schism between the

those who inhabit the past and their counterparts in the present. This is not the gap of creative questioning but rather the absence of thought and the abdication of a responsibility to interpret the repetitive patterns of their multiple lives. Both the Councillors' invitation and the Dead Woman's acceptance are misjudged, for in each case responsibility is being effectively denied in an attempt to shift the burden of knowledge onto the shoulders of another.

The two gods which inhabit the ancestral time of the play are Ogun and Eshuoro,[66] both of whom sanction violence but with the distinction that Ogun's urge to destruction is defined within the context of the creative act and thus is visited upon the innocent and the guilty alike, whilst Eshuoro's vengeance is meted out to those he perceives to be guilty, as an act of punishment. These warlike and warring deities choose their mortal advocates and enact their rivalry, via them, upon the earthly plane of the living. For those mortals who are championed by Ogun and Eshuoro however, the power which visits itself upon them is autocratic, unchosen and unknowable.

Demoke, who Ogun claims as his own and under his protection, is given two opportunities by Soyinka to describe the carving of the totem, and in particular the crucial moment at which he, possessed by Ogun, threw to his death a young apprentice - and advocate to Eshuoro - who, knowing his master's fear of heights, had climbed above him to the top of the tree to carve amongst the uppermost branches. I shall quote first from the second of the two descriptions; an extraordinary eruption of poetic language which is completely uncharacteristic of the Demoke who has thus far sheltered behind a prosaic derogation of his individual art in the carving of the totem:

> My axe was executioner at Oro's neck. Alone,
> Alone I cut the strands that mocked me, till head
> And boastful slave lay side by side, and I
> Demoke, sat in the shoulders of the tree,
> My spirit set free and singing, my hands,
> My father's hands possessed by demons of blood
> And I carved three days and nights till tools
> Were blunted, and these hands, my father's hands
> Swelled big as the tree-trunk.[67]

Demoke's confession of his crime, and its resultant creativity, is occasioned by his terror at encountering the Dead and the possibility of retribution from beyond the grave. The long verse monologue which gives form to his confession, however, is akin to the act of possession which drives his creativity, for the crime is made to transcend its earthly consequences by shifting the responsibility to Ogun and Eshuoro, thus making Demoke innocent; a vessel to the warring factions. This is in

stark contrast to the other description offered by Demoke, this time in prose and entirely lacking reference to the gods:

> I watched it. I took part in it. There is nothing ignoble in a fall from that height. The wind cleaned him as he fell. And it goes further. I mean, for me, it goes further. Perhaps it is because I am a slave to heights. You see, I can go so far, so high, but one step further than that and I am seized with dizziness. Where my hands are burning to work, where my hands are trembling to mould, my body will not take me. Is that not a lack of fulfilment? If I can pull my body up further than it will go, I would willingly fall to my death after.[68]

In the poetic version of the death, Demoke is ennobled as Ogun's carver whose triumph over the slave Oremole is celebrated by a creative frenzy guided by the possessing force of the god. In the prose however, we learn of Demoke's will, as a mortal, to overcome the fear of the highest branches of the *araba* tree in order to fulfil the desire his own craft has created in him. The meeting point which Ogun makes between the carver and the god is that of a violent possession which makes the totem complete but at the cost of Demoke's human will; the top portion of the tree is lopped off at the same time as Oremole falls to the ground. Thus, the act which would have brought Demoke closer to the divine realm, in its overcoming of human frailty, is pre-empted by a jealous god whose warlike instincts refuse to recognize Demoke's incipient will, pursuing instead a divine will to autocracy. Paradoxically, Ogun's act of possession drives the chasm between the gods and men deeper, leaving both factions impotent in the face of events which shape, or rather distort, the spatio/temporal time of the present.

Oyin Ogunba has suggested that in ***A Dance of the Forests*** Soyinka has "discovered his god, Ogun" [69] referring to the Yoruba belief that each individual member of society has a responsibility to take upon himself the worship of a chosen god plucked from the Yoruba pantheon. Ulli Beier, in an article which appeared in the Independence issue of ***Black Orpheus*** describes the nature of this worship:

> Each *orisha* represents a different archetypal personality and each worshipper must create a harmonious relationship between himself and his *orisha* that is most congenial to him. Each group of worshippers is also responsible to the community as a whole, to see that the divine force with which they have established communication shall not be harmful to the community.[70]

From Beier's description we may see that the early events of Soyinka's play offer a stark contrast to Yoruba belief rather than an exposition of its tenets. Choice is once more absent as the earthly vessels to divinity are no more than pawns to power struggles occurring in a realm of which they are largely ignorant. An

alternative reading of the relationship Soyinka draws between the gods and mortals might suggest that the violent visitation of the gods acts as an illumination or enlightenment to latent desires which, in the case of Demoke, find their fulfilment in the paradoxically destructive act of creation. I would argue, however, that this is a weaker option given the description of the two gods offered by the figure of the meta-creator, Forest Head:

> Soon, I will not tell you from the humans, so closely have their habits grown on you. Did I summon this welcoming for your prowess or for ends of my own? Take care how you tempt my vanity. Eshuoro, you came here to bathe in blood, Ogun, you to defend the foibles of your ward. Let this night alone, when I lay out the rites of the dead or my anger will surpass your spleen.[71]

The inference of this speech would seem to suggest that the gods, far from offering inspiration to mortals to reach beyond the human to a greater potential, have rather succumbed to the petty rivalries of the human realm and threaten destruction to the community by playing out those rivalries on the grand scale allotted to divine action. The assertion, made by Ogunba, therefore, that in *A Dance of the Forests* Soyinka has discovered his god, Ogun, bears little fruit upon close examination of the text. In its place I would suggest that Soyinka has made the discovery that the gods become more than mere reflections of life on the human plane only when a meeting point is forged by mortals and gods alike, beyond the mundane but still within the farthest reaches of the human will. Only an assertion of the will makes the union of god and man a fruitful one, and only through this aspiration is society saved from the naked blood-lust of the gods untempered by human mediation.

The final sphere of the triumvirate named by Soyinka and Sekoni is that of the "unborn"; the cycle of time and space which describes future events. In *A Dance of the Forests* the unborn child lives but paradoxically the sustenance of its life is death; it is nurtured in the womb of its mother's corpse. The child's genealogy is offered to the spectator via an eruption of historical time effected by the two timeless entities, Aroni and Forest Father. Soyinka is specific in his definition of historical time, and he puts into the mouth of the Forest Crier the nature of the summons and the patternings of time its retrieval represents:

> When spells are cast
> And the dead invoked by the living, only such
> May resume their body corporeal as are summoned
> When the understreams that whirl them endlessly
> Complete a circle. Only such may regain
> Voice auditorial as are summoned when their link
> With the living has fully repeated its nature, has
> Re-impressed fully on the tapestry of Igbehinadun
> In approximate duplicate of actions, be they

> Of good, or of evil, of violence or carelessness;
> In approximate duplicate of motives, be they
> Illusory, tangible, commendable or damnable.[72]

The Crier continues by insisting that the dead are being invoked at request of the living; that the eruption of historical time into the present is the fruit of a genealogical link between past protagonists and their present counterparts. The inference contained within the Crier's speech is that the desire to call up the dead, on the part of the living, is always conditional upon the links already forged in the historical development of specific societies. The replication of those links makes the chain which binds a people to a specific history, and inscribes a patterning of repetitious cycles which would appear to be inescapable. Soyinka places in the mouth of the Crier, not an explanation of history, but rather a warning that societies calling up their past will inevitably call up pre-images of that which exists in the present (owing to the particular perspective they bring to the exercise). In "The Writer in the Modern African State" Soyinka repeats this warning but with the rider that the use of history is absolutely "dependent upon the sensibility that recalls it".[73] The society, therefore, that wishes history to serve the projects and ambitions of the present, without a thorough investigation of the linkages which have made that present, is likely to shun that which fails to offer the desired mirror image and, as in the case of nationalist discourse, retain only those aspects best suited to what are perceived as contemporary needs. There is, however, always the possibility, when the spirits of the dead are invoked, of the concomitant appearance of a sensibility which first recognizes the link which binds the past to the present and then refuses the apparent inevitability of the link's continued progress through the present and into the future. Thus, the eruption of the "court of Mata Kharibu" into the present, in which we see the three mortals playing out the roles which they have repeated throughout eight centuries, signifies as both a savage indictment on the society which has built itself on such foundations, and a hope that the sensibility may be present which could have the courage to break the link of cyclical repetition.

The link itself is contextualized by a court ruled by the autocracy of Mata Kharibu's leadership. The crisis which offers specificity to the events enacted, is the outbreak of war occasioned by Kharibu's desire for the infamous Madame Tortoise who, like Helen of Troy, may be obtained only as a result of extraordinary human sacrifice. As the Court Historian elucidates, the magnitude of the sacrifice offers a measure of Kharibu's power and desire, it is not therefore the place of the foot-soldier to question the *nature* of that sacrifice, but rather to celebrate the glorious destiny in which he has been given a part to play. History, the historian suggests is built not by him who questions but rather by he who recognizes the potential of the past for the consolidation of future glory:

Historian: War is the only consistency that past ages afford us. It is the legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. Soldiers have never questioned bloodshed. The cause is always the accident your Majesty, and war is the Destiny. This man is a traitor. He must be in the enemy's pay.

Kharibu: He has taken sixty of my best soldiers with him.

Historian: Your Highness has been to lenient. Is the nation to ignore the challenge of greatness because of the petty-mindedness of a few cowards and traitors.[74]

The "traitor" to whom they refer is none other than the Dead Man whose corpse has stumbled in search of recognition through the forest glades. He is the man who refuses the fiction imposed upon his actions by those who write the narrative of national glory. His confrontation with power does no more than to consolidate the nature of that power which - through his own questioning - he has come to understand, holds in absolute contempt those who, within the context of Kharibu's call to arms, would be described as national heroes. The exclusion of questioning from the nation's narrative translates the Dead Man as Warrior into the traitor, coward and slave. What national discourse cannot support, without endangering the exposure of its fictional limitations, it must translate - a process which Soyinka has described as the 'cannibalism' which appears to underpin human development.[75]

The Warrior is condemned by Kharibu to be sold as a slave, an apt punishment for one who has come to the knowledge that this is the condition upon which his loyalty is founded. Madame Tortoise, whose understanding of power is based upon the promotion of desire for that which will always remain out of reach, adds her own punishment in response to his refusal of that desire; the Warrior is to be castrated and offered as a eunuch to prospective buyers. His wife, the Dead Woman, who witnesses this terrifying transformation of her husband under the onslaught of naked and exposed power calls first for mercy and then for pity, both exhortations being those of the slave who has understood the gaping chasm between power and its objects.

Thus the genealogy of the child, who continued to live in the womb of his mother after her suicide, is shown to be the repetition of a moment which perpetuates war and power as a link in the human cannibalistic continuum, but also a moment which instigates questioning as the fracturing of national narrative and the subsequent exposure of the frame which holds them in place. The spectator learns from Forest Father that this same sequence of events has visited itself upon countless generations, and he himself has been witness to its inevitable consequences as time after time the 'major' figures of the drama have been

celebrated in preference to the 'minor' players whose counter-narrative awaits the conditions for its fashioning; the child did not die but lay in a dead womb awaiting the midwife equal to the its historical birth.

I have attempted, thus far, to demonstrate the separation - within the parameters of Soyinka's text - of the three cycles which constitute Yoruba time. The re-integration of these three separate loops would, I suggest, constitute a state of transition in which the structures defining Yoruba belief, and the nature of time which articulates that belief, offer the opportunity for self-reflexivity and an historical perception which would counter frameworks competing for the symbolic representation of human existence.

The state of transition is called into existence by Forest Father. Significantly the changes to the play's setting - as demanded by Soyinka's stage-directions - accompany the entrance for the first time of the figure of the Questioner:

> *...a dark, wet, atmosphere, dripping moisture, and soft, moist soil. A palm-tree sways at a low angle, broken but still alive. Seemingly lightning-reduced stumps. Rotting wood all over the ground. A mound or two here and there. Footfalls are muffled. First, there is total stillness, emphasized by the sound of moisture dripping to the ground.* ***Forest Head*** *is sitting on a large stone, statuesque,* ***The Questioner*** *stands beside him.*[76]

Here is the swamp which Osofisan perceived to be the measure of the distance Soyinka placed between himself and his spectators. The swamp, as an image of transition is something that had already exercised Soyinka's imagination in the writing of his play ***The Swamp Dwellers*** [77] and was to return again and again in his work throughout the next ten years. In its context of ***A Dance of the Forests*** the moisture-laden mediation of the stage space certainly heralds the most theatrically challenging portion of the play both for the performers and for their audience. Soyinka uses the process of transition to allow an explosion of cultural and theatrical diversity. There is a bewildering sequence of disguise and revelation, the appearance of visions, a terrifying dance performed with knives by child acrobats; central use is made of the child's game *ampe* and, for the first time in Soyinka's work, possession is enacted upon the stage. The Master of Ceremonies is Forest Head; the swamp is the domain of the creator and his drawing of the disparate protagonists, who had, until this moment been unaware of the creative possibilities inherent in the intertwining of the separate loops, suggests the potential for change. Having been rejected by the mortal organizers of the Feast, the Dead Man and Woman are now welcomed by Forest Head and invited to witness an alternative celebration; one which begins with the figure of the Questioner. Urged gently to answer to the spirit of enquiry, we learn from the Dead Man's mouth that he did

not die as a result of his castration, but rather lived to experience a "new beginning" after his years of slavery, a new peace followed the acceptance of castration. As the Questioner reminds him that his final years found him "sleek and fat" the Dead Man spits out the bitter retort that the peace he found was that of the "gelded pig". At this decisive moment, as the corpse of history begins to articulate that which *he* knows to be the bitter fruit of one who turns accomplice to power, the Questioner turns accuser, stemming the narrative which has begun to unfold and reviving the discourse which would once again make the slave the mute witness to his own destruction. Aroni intervenes and Eshuoro is discovered beneath the Questioner's mask. Forest Head refuses to let his willed subversion of the rite destroy the dance of transition and the Interpreter is called upon to take his place.

The three mortals, led by the Interpreter enter the space in a state of "resigned passivity" as the order is given by Forest Head for the Half-Child to be released from his mother's womb. The Child's entry into the world is accompanied by "A Figure in Red" who dogs his footsteps and engages him in a game of *sesan* which he ultimately loses. The momentous moment of his birth is effected in the explosion of language issuing forth from the possessed bodies of the mortals. In them animate and inanimate is joined as the spirits of the elements blast forth in a recognition of the future which may yet be born. The full terror of the natural world, which Soyinka attempts to achieve via a juxtaposition of the passive bodies of the possessed and the vibrant power of the language which passes through them, suggests the possibility of a different order to that which reigned in the court of Mata Kharibu. The unleashed elements may inspire fear and awe in those who are subject to their might but they do not share the ambition of man, nor do they glory in the blood that might be shed as a consequence of that might. The power that accompanies the Half-Child's birth is one without human traits; it is the antecedent to approximations of power attempted in the human realm and shows itself, in Soyinka's theatrical representation, as a force which passes through man without attempting to bend man to its will. With these forces the Forest Head encompasses his timeless world and welcomes the Half Child to the potential which is held there, as yet unrecognized.

The first order of natural elements then gives way to a species unrecognized by their creator. In a cloud of dust the army of Ants traverses the stage, answering questions and bewilderment with the resignation of the forgotten:

Ant Leader: We are the ones remembered
When nations build...

Another: ...with tombstones.

Another: We are the dried leaves, impaled
On one-eyed broom.

Another: We are the headless bodies when
The spade of progress delves.

Another: The ones that never looked up when
The wind turned suddenly, erupting
In our heads.

Another: Down the axis of the world, from
The whirlwind to the frozen drifts,
We are the ever legion of the world,
Smitten, for - 'the good to come'.[78]

It may be worth noting at this stage that in the original production, which was directed by Soyinka, the playwright also took the role of Forest Head. This seems particularly apt when considering the nature of the realm of creation over which he holds sway. Again and again the "forgotten" take the stage in order to pursue an eloquence denied them by a discourse of power which finds its definition, not through symbols which take a central position on the stage, but rather through definitions which define a world 'out there'; a world which has been forcibly ejected in order that they might find a visibility denied them elsewhere. Thus the Leader of the Ants is able to articulate the violence to which concepts such as freedom and choice are subject only because he is encompassed by a frame which has as its purpose the questioning of what it is that speaks, rather than the determination of identity via function and subjectification to discourse. The radical possibility for change which Soyinka posits in ***A Dance of the Forests*** is the potential for discursive creation lying latent in the discarded remnants of official discourse; what he asks of his audience is to refuse to 'forget' and by so doing to reject their position in the ranks of the forgotten:

> The aim of cultural difference is to re-articulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying *singularity* of the 'other' that resists totalization - the repetition that will not return to the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding-*to* does not add-up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other spaces of subaltern signification.[79]

The *insertion* of the Forest Head's swamp of transition within which the *alternative* feast of welcome for the dead may take place, halts the progress of the repetitious cycles of history - certainly for an audience stumbling upon Soyinka's play in the midst of the *official* Independence celebrations - and produces an incarnation-in-the-flesh of the minus-in-origin; the child which refuses the death of its parents. The irrationality of this image is, of course, its safeguard; in its very essence it refuses all the laws of logic which drive the discourses of the Nation-State. As

such, it confounds the reasoning faculties of the mind and demands interpretation which, as we have already seen will not be answered in this case by the short-cut of symbolism. The Half-Child will not, therefore, be assimilated into the sum of existing knowledge; in this way it points towards a future which is not yet determined, towards the possibility of a different order of knowledge which confounds the linear progression of nationalist discourse.

The dance of the Half-Child involves the repetitious use of two motifs which articulate the forces which threaten to stunt his potential presence in the world. Both are performed by the hideous incarnations named as the Triplets, and both impose rhythms of a continuity which prove life-threatening, in very different ways, to the fragile 'otherness' of the new force upon the stage. The first is the game of *ampe* which punctuates the actions of the Triplets and, as Ogunba explains, carries the refrain of "Do as I do. We are the same".[80] The second is the acrobatic dance which is described in the stage-directions as a series of 'throws' which involve the catching of that which is thrown - in this case, the Half-Child - upon the point of two knives. The totalitarian impulse described by the first game, and the potential for murderous violence upon which the acrobatic dance is premised are qualities further charged by the grotesque appearance and savagely threatening discourse which the Triplets carry with them onto the stage. Soyinka describes their entrances thus:

Enter the first of the Triplets. It is the lower trunk of a body, with arms. Loose, uncontrolled manner.
First Triplet: Has anyone found the Means? I am the End that will justify it.

Enter Second Triplet. An over-blown head, drooling.

Second Triplet: I am the Greater Cause, standing ever ready, excusing the crimes of today for tomorrow's mirage. Hungry I come, hearing there was a feast for the dead...Am I expected?

Enter the Third Triplet, fanged and bloody.

Third Triplet: I find I am Posterity. Can no one see on what milk I have been nourished? [81]

The three ghastly mutations suggest the future which awaits if the Half-Child does not grow to maturity; they are his mirror image within the discourse of nationalism. They also parallel, with a precision which suggests the absence of co-incidence, the three stages outlined by Soyinka in "The Writer in the Modern African State". In the furious climax of the dance, into which are drawn the ancestors, the mortals and the unborn, only Forest Head and Aroni remain aloof from the action, reflecting for the spectators a point of observation from which

they may observe the strategies of a game which, if the Half-child fails to survive, could prove chillingly predictive of their lives beyond the theatre's walls.

It is Demoke who successfully intercepts the deadly games and finally holds the Half-Child in his arms. The responsibility which he carries at this moment is to bring the child to maturity in the teeth of forces which have not been banished from the stage, even though their object has been seized from them:

> *All eyes are intent upon* ***Demoke*** *until he makes up his mind; he gives the child to the* ***Dead Woman.*** *Immediately,* ***Aroni*** *leads out the* ***Dead Woman*** *with the* ***Half-Child.*** *Forest Head takes a final look at the gathering, goes off.* ***Eshuoro*** *gives a loud yell of triumph, rushes offstage,...The* ***Triplets*** *follow gleefully.*[82]

This decision has baffled those critics who require a triumph for Demoke, over the evil forces of the Triplets and the bloodthirsty Eshuoro. As the stage-directions demonstrate, however, there is no solution to be found in Demoke's action and no certainty as to the future he has in some way helped to mould. I may only add my suggestion to the numerous interpretations which have already been offered, but I think that the exiling of the Nation-State from this equation in particular offers a context which is helpful in considering the implications of Soyinka's text. The Half-Child, the fragile future, dependent upon the articulation of a cultural difference which finds its sustenance in questioning official discourse, is returned to the womb of its dead mother, within whose bounds it has achieved the continuance of its half-life, by Demoke the carver, who recognizes his present inability to take responsibility for the growth and maturation of its nascent potential. The disappearance from the stage of this threat is perceived as a triumph by the carriers of official discourse, but the promise - integral to the child's return to the womb - is that the cycle which brought it forth will bring it forth again. Thus, Demoke's unwillingness to expose the child to forces against which he is incapable of defending himself or his potential ward, is indicative of another birth; the carver's realization that an individual journey must be made before one takes upon oneself the responsibility of a people's future. Thus, the birth of the 'revolutionary' individual in Soyinka's work is offered as a paradox via two images: first, the Half-Child is returned to his Dead mother's womb to await the possibility of rebirth, and secondly, Demoke the carver - who held the Child in his arms - returns to his new society to attempt his journey from craftsman to artist.

In the closing moments of the play, Demoke revisits the totem and having passed through the now silent crowd of celebrants that cluster around its base, he begins to climb. On his head Eshuoro places a sacrificial basket, and Soyinka announces the final dance in a stage-direction which reads: *"Dance of the Unwilling Sacrifice."*

Certain that Demoke will not achieve his purpose, Eshuoro celebrates his second triumph, but the figure continues out of sight and, enraged, the god sets the *araba* tree alight in order that the presumptuous mortal will at last be defeated. His fall is broken, however, by Ogun who now shows a gentler aspect, though tempered by the retention of his weaponry.

In order to follow through the line of my interpretation I need to turn now to the earliest version of the play which is published by Robert Fraser in a collection of critical essays entitled ***Research on Wole Soyinka***.[83] In this version, the dialogue allowed the mortals on the dawning of the day after the celebrations is lengthier than in the later version, and the development of the relationship between Demoke and Ogun is more clearly drawn. Carrying the weapons - a gun and a cutlass - which Ogun has left by his sleeping figure, and dressed now as a hunter, Demoke states:

> Ogun warned me.
> *Showing his weapons and apparel*
> He prepared me.
> And I...I find it is within my nature.[84]

Demoke has made his meeting place with Ogun, by testing the imaginative impulse which willed him to create beyond his own limitations. In carving out this meeting-place, Ogun has become the protector of Demoke, rather than the dictator who ignores human endeavour in order to perpetuate his divine will. The inference is that by the end of the play the possibility has emerged for the cojoining of human and divine will, thus securing future potential founded upon a structure of Yoruba belief which may retain its status only as anteriority to a dominant discourse, but nevertheless has survived - at least in the space made by Soyinka's play - the will to forget which is so central to the endorsement of that discourse.

In his introduction to the collected essays of Wole Soyinka, Biodun Jeyifo exposes what appears to be a contradiction in the last paragraph of "The Writer in a Modern African State".[85] The sentence in question reads: "A concern with culture strengthens society, but not a concern with mythology." Placing this statement in the context of later works, in which Soyinka pursues a mythopoeic origin for Yoruba tragedy this does indeed present the reader with a dilemma. Soyinka's radical revision of Yoruba mythology, however, serves a very different purpose from the practice he yokes together with the ambiguous concept of 'culture'. A culture which uses racial myths as a curative to present ills is a society which empties myth of its content and smothers its form by forcing it to signify 'Truth and Authenticity'. For Soyinka, this usage of myth, offered in its reified form, must be rejected if the radical aspect of its narrative structure is to retain any hold

on the creative imagination. Myth must therefore find a new structure, and a new nominal designation in order to avoid the reification of the imagination in response to its flattened narrative form. In his later works, Soyinka was to yoke myth with tragedy in order to achieve the maturation of the fragile Half-Child - Soyinka's revolutionary individual - born of a space of questioning, situated between the Creator/Author and the combative arena, within which fictions battle for precedence in the imaginative matrix out of which the potential for numerous futures may be formed.

Notes

1. Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.153
2. This is the date cited by Wole Soyinka in *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (London: Methuen, 1994), p.1
3. Chinua Achebe, "English and the African Writer" in *Transition* 4/18 (1965), pp.27-30, p.28
4. Soyinka, *Ibadan*, this italicized sentence disrupts the narrative of Chapter One four times.
5. Simon During comments that Foucault defines 'discourse' as the patterning of *énoncés* or statements of knowledge. These achieve scientific, or 'normative' status once they begin to "produce statements about their own 'norms of verification'" and " define their own conditions of possibility in formal axioms." Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.95-101
6. Homi K. Bhabha, "DisseminNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.291-322, p.301
7. Wole Soyinka, "Interview with Alan Akarogun" in *Spear Magazine* (May 1966), pp.16-19, quoted in Ketu H. Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p.138
8. E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.56
9. Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", trans. Martin Thom, in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, pp.8-22
10. Renan, *Ibid.*, p.19
11. Renan, *Ibid.*, p.19
12. Renan, *Ibid.*, p.19
13. Renan, *Ibid.*, p.11
14. Karl A. Deutsch, "Nationalism and Social Communication" in *Nationalism*, eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp.26-29, p.28
15. Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971), p.xxvii
16. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)
17. Geertz, *Ibid.*, p.238
18. Geertz, *Ibid.*, p.302
19. Benjamin Neuberger, *National Self-Determination in Post-Colonial Africa* (Colorado: Lynne Reinner Pubs., 1986)
20. "African anti-colonial nationalism adopted the ideas of the European Enlightenment and presented its cause as enlightened and democratic. The slogans of anti-colonialism were similar to those of the democratic revolution in Europe: equality, government by consent, sovreignty of the people, self-determination and independence. In addition, anti-colonial nationalism, like any other national movement, was bound to resort to history in order to demonstrate that colonial conquest and occupation replaced pre-colonial independence and freedom." Neuberger, *Ibid.*, p.43
21. Bhabha, "DisseminNation" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha, p.294
22. Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State" in *Transition* 6/31 (June/July 1967). All quotations in this study will refer to the republication of Soyinka's essay in *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988), pp.15-20
23. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.16
24. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.20
25. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.20
26. Bhabha, "DisseminNation" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha, p.294

27. Femi Osofisan, "Wole Soyinka and a Living Dramatist: a Playwright's Encounter with Soyinka's Drama" in *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal*, ed. Adewale Maja-Pearce (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994), pp.43-60
28. Wole Soyinka, *Kongi's Harvest* in *Collected Plays Two* (Oxford: OUP 1974) For production history and bibliographical information on reviews see James Gibbs, "The Masks Hatched Out" in *Theatre Research International* 7/3 (1982),pp.180-206, pp.183-184, p.also reprinted in James Gibbs & Bernth Lindfors (eds.) *Research on Wole Soyinka* (Alberta: Africa World Press, 1993), pp.51-80, p.55
29. Femi Osofisan, "Living Dramatist" in *An Appraisal*, ed. Maja-Pearce, p.47
30. Wole Soyinka, *Madmen and Specialists* in *Collected Plays Two*. For production history see Gibbs, "The Masks Hatched Out", *Theatre Research International*, pp.184-185 or *Research on Wole Soyinka*, eds. Gibbs & Lindfors, p.57
31. Osofisan, "Living Dramatist" in *An Appraisal*, ed. Maja-Pearce, p.51
32. Osofisan, *Ibid*, p.51; James Gibbs makes a comparable observation with regard to Soyinka's *The Road*: "it is not a play to be understood but to be experienced. It does not reach any conclusions, it is content to take us through an ordeal, to take us a little bit further along 'the road of life' - the original title of the play - and to leave us at the end emotionally exhausted." James Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.80
33. Osofisan, *Ibid.*, p.52
34. Osofisan, *Ibid.*, p.52
35. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986)
36. Ngũgĩ, *Ibid.*, p.41
37. Bhabha, "DissemiNation" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha, p.297
38. Franz Fanon, *The Damned* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963), p.181
39. Fanon, *Ibid.*, p.188
40. Wole Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests* in *Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973). "First produced by Soyinka at Yaba Technical College and the Arts Theatre, 20.9.60 with 1960 Masks." James Gibbs, "The Masks Hatched Out", *Theatre Research International*, p.182, *Research on Wole Soyinka*, eds. Gibbs & Lindfors, p.54
41. Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka*, p.70
42. Derek Wright, *Wole Soyinka Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993)
43. "The movement of transition...is a bizarre movement and the conflict which tends to dominate each play is there not just for its own sake but as a reflection of the widening gulf between the vast majority of people who are merely drifting on and, on the other hand, a handful of people with sufficient insight and awareness to be concerned about the nature and direction of the movement." Oyin Ogunba, *The Movement of Transition* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975), p.3
44. Wright, *Wole Soyinka Revisited*, p.86
45. Wright, *Ibid.*, p.87
46. Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1978)
47. Moore, *Ibid.*, p.39
48. Eldred Durosimi Jones, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973)
49. Moore, *Ibid.*, p.39
50. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), p.187
51. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.5 (Aroni's speech appears in the text prior to the stage directions describing the locus of action. It is not clear therefore, whether Soyinka intended the speech to be spoken or read.)
52. "In Yoruba world-order Aroni, a scarlet-breasted sun bird, is an omniscient, ubiquitous and timeless spirit, hence his cognomen...thus when he presents the past and the present and looks ahead to the future he does so as a being

to whom the whole of human history has been divinely revealed." Ogunba, *The Movement of Transition*, p.70

53. Bhabha, "DissemiNation" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha, p.310
54. "The minor spirits create an atmosphere reminiscent of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*...and the whole result is the most Shakespearean of Soyinka's plays. The scene is set - ancestors, spiritual beings and humans are met together." John Ferguson, "Nigerian Drama in English" in *Modern Drama* XI/1 (1968), pp.10-26, p.23
55. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflecting the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso & Left Books, 1983)
56. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p.35
57. Anderson, *Ibid.*, p.30
58. 'Ropo Sekoni, "Metaphor as a Basis of Form in Soyinka's Drama" in *Research on Wole Soyinka*, eds. James Gibbs and Bernth Lindfors (Alberta: Africa World Press, 1993), pp.81-92
59. Sekoni, *Ibid.*, p.85
60. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.23
61. Dorothy Rowe, *Wanting Everything* (London: Harper Collins, 1991)
62. Dorothy Rowe, "Wanting Everything" in the *Guardian* (23rd August 1991)
63. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.11
64. Una Maclean, "Wole Soyinka's International Drama" in *Black Orpheus* 15 (August 1964), pp.46-51, p.47
65. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.8
66. "Throughout Soyinka's drama[s], there is a central antagonism between two forces, one pursuing revelation, the other consistently denying, rejecting or negating that pursuit. The first force is embodied in Ogun and his surrogates, the second in what we might call Eshuoro-figures, after the character of that name." Brian Crow, "Soyinka and the Romantic Tradition" in *Before Our Very Eyes: A Tribute to Wole Soyinka*, ed. Dapo Adelugba (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1987), p.163
67. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.27
68. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, pp.19-20
69. Ogunba, *The Movement of Transition*, p.101
70. Ulli Beier, "Ibo and Yoruba Art: A Comparison" in *Black Orpheus* 8 (1960), pp.46-50, p.50
71. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.59
72. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.45
73. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.19
74. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.51
75. "I find that the main thing is my own personal conviction or observation that human beings are simply cannibals all over the world so that their main preoccupation seems to be eating up one another." Wole Soyinka in *African Writers Talking*, eds. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (New York: APC, 1972), p.173
76. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.60
77. Wole Soyinka, *The Swamp Dwellers* in *Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973)
78. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.68
79. Bhabha, "Dissemination" in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha, p.312
80. Ogunba, *The Movement of Transition*, p.92
81. Soyinka, *A Dance of the Forests*, p.69
82. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, pp.71-72
83. Robert Fraser, "Four Alternative Endings to Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*" in *Research on Wole Soyinka*, eds. Gibbs & Lindfors, pp.93-106
84. Fraser, *Ibid.*, p.98
85. "When, in 'The Writer in a Modern African State' we encounter the sentence 'A concern with culture strengthens society, but not a concern with mythology", we know that it *seems* atypical of Soyinka only to the degree that we ignore or fail to recognise the existence in Soyinka's essays of the attempt at a dialectical 'mythoclastic' inversion of his basic mythopoeic

aesthetics." Biodun Jeyifo, "Introduction: Wole Soyinka and the Tropes of Disalienation" in Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, pp.xxv-xxvi

Chapter Four

How Do We Escape From History?

> I Must Create a System or be Enslav'd by another Man's.
> I Will not Reason & Compare: My Business is to Create.
> **William Blake. Jerusalem. Plate 10, Line 20.**

In the theatrical texts considered thus far, both Barker's 'extraordinary' and Soyinka's 'revolutionary' individuals emerge as reactive forces in response to ideological bodies of discourse manifesting themselves as the motor of a society committed to the production of subject/citizens. Vanya rejects an existence conditional upon an authored aesthetic of defeat; Demoke refuses a final capitulation to forces essentially antithetical to the artistic will, and Lvov urges the eruption of transgressional identity in order to deny the redemptive promise of 'the people' as the mask of God. In each of these instances, that which is denied by the individual is a language which would seek to make the 'I' of the speaker identical with a body of knowledge, historically constituted and consensually recognized to be the 'truth' of social being. The historical 'I', the 'I' which is the product of history, is therefore tested in these plays and found to be incomplete in its representation of human life:

> Historical 'data' is [*sic*] permanently, irretrievably and irrevocably, incomplete. (Dedicated materialists of the ideological paradise - take note!) Which is why the creative (or re-creative) imagination has any function in the world. 'Systems' may be elicited from the incomplete data, naturally at the expense of regarding the missing, the distorted, the incomplete as non-existent or irrelevant. Not so, says the creative originator...[1]

The inference of Wole Soyinka's statement is that the 'I' constituted by historical discourse is wrought at the expense of that which would problematize or retard its stable and laborious progression through linear time. To refer to oneself as 'I' therefore, without making the statement conditional upon immanent critique, is to render the subject that speaks a system constituted upon, and redeemed by, the illusory progress of scientific rationalism.

Where Vanya, Lvov, and Demoke succeed in their resistance of both the historical 'I' and the reified culture which is its mode of subjective expression, is in their discovery of the limits of rational thought; in their traversing of the fear-encrusted boundaries which offer the illusion of security to those who find a home within its bounds. They remain however, umbilically linked to that against which they react, stranded in the 'outside' of society's bounds, with no apparent choice beyond a reluctant return - as foreigners - to that which has ceased to define them.

Victor Turner's "liminal" space has already been discussed in reference to Barker's *Uncle Vanya* and Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. This designation of a space "betwixt and between" which describes the "neither/nor" of its inhabitants, posits a ritual affirmation of faith on the part of a society to which its journeymen will return. This 'rite of passage' recognizes the need to identify the foreigner within the bounds of social experience, and determines that the growth of the individual actually requires confrontation with 'otherness' in order that adulthood may reflect the responsibility to a balancing of communal and individual desires which is believed to be inherent in the mutual maintenance of social order. When however - as in the case of Vanya, Lvov and Demoke - the return from the liminal state signifies a departure from the human in order to embrace a society which has failed in its balancing of individual will with the communal assertion of social organization, then the limited function of the liminal accorded within the framework of social life undergoes a radical translation. Where the liminal has been defined as the terror of a chaos from which the individual will gladly return, with a renewed commitment to the social order which shields him from it, the work of Barker and Soyinka would seem to suggest that - for the artist - the liminal offers a potential which is denied by society and that the temporary release afforded by its eradication of categorical boundaries may prove - on the whole - less terrifying than the bloodless fraternity of despair which proffers social redemption.

The relationship of the liminal to the society for which it provides release is, however, ultimately dialectical, having as its goal the reunion of the individual with the communal; the synthesis of the particular with the whole. The goal of the liminal is therefore the progress of the social whole, suggesting that any alternative definitions of reality which may emerge from the experience will find a limited articulation only in the process of their re-integration into the totalizing framework of social belief.

Whilst Victor Turner's liminal state finds its origins in tribal structures, French philosopher Julia Kristeva contextualizes its processes within the framework of national discourse and identity. Thus, the dialectical relationship experienced by the individual in the liminal state is defined by Kristeva as a space of "anxiety" in which the sense of self as foreigner *and* native to one's own society causes a tremor in the solid foundations of the 'I' which normally depends for its functioning upon being identical with that which speaks:

> Before the foreigner, the native recalls her own incompleteness; she becomes anxious. The body that becomes anxious is both the personal body of the native and the political body of the nation. The foreigner threatens the borders of the symbolic - and national - order.[2]

Kristeva's concern is to demonstrate that the constitution of national boundaries as the markers of a native identity are actually a projection of the means by which we designate the otherness from which the historical 'I' shields the speaker. The discovery of "the stranger within",[3] or the foreigner who defies the 'truth' at the basis of identity is therefore a radical challenge to the 'I' and the beginnings of a resistance to that which it articulates. This initial blurring of the boundary, with its concomitant swelling of anxiety at the recognition that what had appeared to be a fortification is in fact an abyss, a nowhere, a nothing, is described by Kristeva as the state of "not yet";[4] a mirroring of Bhabha's "eternal meanwhile" through which the citizen/subject traverses waiting for the changes which historical progress continually promises and eternally refuses to honour. Both spaces reflect the other's impotence; both spaces treat the 'I' as a fetish, and cling to its contours in desperation at the possibility of non-being - a being without inherent meaning - which its absence would proclaim. The difference between the two spaces lies in the journeys they inspire: the "meanwhile" signposts the triumph of man as a concept - historical man - whilst the "not yet" points towards a retrieval of the chaotic debris which history has discarded - cultural becoming.

The existence of the liminal, or the state of anxiety, is premised upon the growth and development of society; it answers the negative of that which is communally posited as positive. The problem for the artist, and for the textual creations which issue from his work, is to break the dialectic which continually confirms that which he is attempting to critique and therefore offer back to society images of itself which resist the categorical codifications of the rational mind:

> I use history not for nostalgia, but to hack away at comforting images of the past in order to evoke, or unlock, feelings about the present. I don't do this for a political purpose, I do it to subvert conventions of thought. It's what theatre does supremely well.[5]

Barker's recognition of history as a means by which to escape dialectical thought, shares with Soyinka the perception that history is essentially incomplete, and that contemporary systems of thought are founded upon an illusory mechanism which suggests that the genealogy of man has unswervingly progressed towards his contemporary manifestation. Thus, the narrative runs, a complete knowledge of man is entirely possible because he has never, at any moment in history, desired anything other than what we have actually achieved in our present state. Manifestations of man in history are therefore perceived to be gestatory forms which prefigure that which we are now. The use of history, in Barker's and Soyinka's work, suggests - to the contrary - that the systematized product of the historical dialectic reflects rather an incompleteness; a human being denuded of countless discarded historical begettings:

> This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows heavenward. This storm is what we call progress.[6]

Walter Benjamin's description of history, inspired by Paul Klee's "Angelus Novalus" aptly describes the terror from which "the storm of progress" both delivers man and ultimately re-turns him. Benjamin's interpretation makes of history a redemptive disguise by which man attempts to flee the catastrophic debris of human culture to which he, nevertheless, remains obsessively inclined. The storm blowing up from Paradise is none other than the 'I' which both precludes return and tangles itself within the angel's wings, making impossible the soaring and autonomous flight which was their original promise. Thus, the half-man, half-god finds himself propelled towards a future he may not contemplate without losing sight of a past he finds he cannot, after all, redeem or make whole.

It is precisely that which is not redeemed which provides the material for the plays with which this chapter is concerned. Whilst the 'liminal', or 'not yet' requires an artistic transgression of the boundaries of contemporary thought, the space of the historical provides the artist with his *raison d'être*; an imaginative system of creation wrought out of the debris of the unredeemed in the human chain of progress. Both playwrights therefore attempt that which Benjamin's "angel" finds impossible, precisely because they do not share with the angel the desire to make whole, or heal that which is broken or catastrophic. Rather, they renege upon the responsibilities the historical 'I' proffers and determine to joyfully affirm that which holds history in thrall; that in ourselves which is beyond the designation of boundaries and 'otherness', that which is literally unrecognizable as a manifestation of the human procession through history.

For Michel Foucault, the pile of debris, the space of catastrophe to which historicized man may not return, is a sphere of silence which proves the habitat of the poet. It is also a space unmarked by the cartographer's skills, for it lacks the discursive boundaries which have furnished the bodily contours of contemporary man. What body is it, he enquires, that could people this space? What is it that grows on the sustenance of that which the State has forgotten?:

> The space, at once empty and populated, of all those words without a language which allow the person who lends an ear to hear a muffled noise from below history, the stubborn murmuring of a language which seems to speak quite by itself, without a speaking subject and without an interlocutor, huddled in on itself, breaking down before it has reached any formulation and lapsing back without any fuss into the silence from which it was never separated.[7]

Foucault's stratification which suggests a space *below* history is translated by Herbert Marcuse into the designation of a space before or after history. He posits, in response to the body which may be described only by reference to social classifications such as race, gender and class, a roll-call of the "disruptive characters" which peopled the literature of a pre-technological culture. The ranks, he notes, are spearheaded by those whose existence was not premised upon the pursuit of a 'living'; the world they inhabit is not yet defined by the instrumentality of their existence in relation to the known world of defined objects:

> ...the artist, the prostitute, the adultress, the great criminal and outcast, the warrior, the rebel-poet, the devil, the fool... To be sure, these characters have not disappeared from the literature of advanced industrial society, but they survive essentially transformed... They are no longer images of another way of life but rather freaks or types of the same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established world.[8]

Marcuse continues by asserting that the accommodation of the outcast into a system which affirms established reality is not, however, complete. In these characters - which read like a cast list to the majority of Barker and Soyinka's plays - there remains the echo of a promise which both pre-dates *and*, Marcuse suggests, post-dates the political collapse of culture which characterizes the industrial age. He insists that these characters continue to haunt our consciousness, and to promise the potential of a life beyond the society which relies upon reification as its only means of cultural reproduction.

Speaking from a similar position, Theodor Adorno recognizes in art the possibility of an aesthetic sphere which would be subject to a system of laws and practices evolved, not in opposition to the progress of reason, but rather in resistance to the bloodless abstractions an historically constituted system of logical reasoning could be predicted to produce. The aesthetic is a system which mirrors Enlightenment reason but finds its logic in creative reason, thus committing itself to the production of that which is uselessly beautiful in man; in that which resists reification because it cannot produce, its only function being to affirm its own existence:

> [At the end of the 18th century] the various arts were removed from the context of everyday life and conceived of as something that could be treated as a whole... As the realm of non-purposive creation and disinterested pleasure, this whole was contrasted with the life of society which it seemed the task of the future to order rationally, in strict adaptation to definable ends.[9]

For Adorno, the space of art and its autonomous aesthetic constitutes a safe haven for prolonged cultural hibernation, given that this chimerical sphere is defined only by its uselessness and therefore remains beyond the grasp of utilitarian imaginings. Adorno, like Nietzsche,[10] places his hope in the preservation of that which is useless in culture in order to await the listener, or spectator that may, once again, respond to an imagination forged in resistance to the concept of man's usefulness. The commitment of the artist is, therefore, to an aesthetic born of a vigilant critical resistance to the forces of reification which threaten constantly to flush out the hiding-places of bodies defined by their process of becoming non-identical with historical representation

For both Adorno and Marcuse, the creation of an aesthetic is the forging of a space of historical critique. This space both pre-dates and promises a post-dating of historical man for it is the prizing loose of pain and terror from social utility in order to create an image of man overcoming the horror of existence through a will unmediated by society, precisely because it occurs where society is not; in the debris which could not be made whole. Aesthetic creation trails the movement of identity from an historically constituted position - the systematized 'I' - to a culturally regulated sphere within which the 'I', rather than designating a fixed position *within* the law, itself constitutes the law upon which activity is founded. Most important, the aesthetic is a sphere which refuses the social concept of communal responsibility; its sole function is to maintain itself within its contemporary historical context and the product - that which, were it not recognized as beautiful would disappear completely - is utterly useless as an inducement to the continuation of purposive life:

> Art amends conceptual knowledge in that [art] attains, on its own and in complete isolation, what conceptual knowledge vainly expects to learn from its focus on the... subject-object relation, which is that an objective quality discloses itself through subjective effort.[11]

The separation of art from society at the end of the eighteenth century offers, for Adorno, the promise that bodies uncodified by State practices may still find the possibility of appearance so long as the artist recognizes his potential as the creator of that which resists the definition of thought as a model for practical application. Processes of reason posit thought as the precursor to action; the artist produces thought *as* action thus reproducing an imaginative realm which presents the

spectator with the potential for a critical distance from the systems which seek to translate its impulses. Adorno's assertion is therefore that the "muffled noise from below history" which Foucault perceives to be clothed in silence, may have a body and that its appearance is dependent upon the artist who attempts the excavation of the aesthetic.

The Forging of the Aesthetic in Howard Barker's *Victory*.

Victory: Choices in Reaction [12]- first staged at the Royal Court in 1983 - was not the first of Barker's plays to take historical event as its subject matter, but it was the first in which he determined that his relationship to the audience was henceforth to be that of resistance rather than acquiescence:

> Because the audience dominates the playwright, he is unlikely to be the instrument by which the theatre undergoes profound changes of function. The poet on the other hand, may lead the audience, albeit unwillingly, into new relations with the stage quite simply because he does not *care* about them, but regards them as privileged witnesses to a rare event.[13]

Barker distinguishes himself from the playwright, not only by refusing the playwright's *craft*, but also by resisting his function as being that of a man "who thinks in his time." Barker suggests that the poet, once freed from the need to gratify the social and familial concerns of his spectators, may discover the oxygen inherent in an obligation to discordancy, a word which shares a close proximity with Nietzsche's "untimeliness". To be untimely is to breathe a different air to that which clings about the stifled larynx of 'timely' duty and responsible citizenship. It is to lend appearance and articulation to that which the historical present *cannot* sustain: that which - in man - stands testament to a defiance of the worldview gainfully preferred by contemporary discourse. Thus, the untimely man recognizes as perspective that which his contemporaries believe to be the limits of their horizon. By taking up his position on that horizon he may therefore both discern the nature of the perspective and employ his vision to seek out the origins of the skewed fore and hind sight which have produced present reality. The untimely man is one who does not believe in the present, nor does he aspire to belong to the present. Rather, he defines the present as that which he is not, seeking in its place a body which will clothe the difference his being asserts; that which will make him unrecognisable to the perspective he critiques. Only by being that to which no name may be attached may the untimely man alter the sense of historical perspective; only by seizing upon that which it is impossible to comprehend may he bear witness to change. The discordant poet, Barker states, requires of the theatre that which it - as an institution - perceives to be impossible, from scenes which

cannot be staged, to stage-directions which defy the imagination,[14] to characters one cannot comprehend. It is possible, Barker continues that the poet that requires the impossible will be perceived to be a bad playwright, for he refuses the limits of the craftsman's practical imagination, but only by refusing the reality of those limits and demanding thought that goes beyond practical application will the theatre discover both the potential and the essential laws of self-assertion which govern its appearance as more than a scion of State-based culture.

In citing his relationship to *Victory* as being that of the poet, Barker is, therefore, making his claim upon the artist's right to excavate the aesthetic of his age. He takes as his tools the existing theatre, defined as a systematic codification of art, and history, as the subject matter with which his play concerns itself. He, like William Blake in the quotation which opens this chapter, resists enslavement by the act of creating; an artistic labour which has no comparative paradigm in the reasoned logic of production and therefore constitutes a system in its own right.

The events of *Victory* take as their setting the restoration of Charles II to the English throne following the degeneration of Oliver Cromwell's Republic. The structure of the play places the spectator on the periphery, or horizon, of a radically unstable social configuration which nevertheless does contain the seeds of a rationalized and ordered worldview but visible only as if viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. The administered world of historical reality sits at the centre of Barker's play, straddling the gap in the two-act structure. The all-encompassing Enlightenment logic with which contemporary Western man is familiar finds its framed appearance as "An Interlude", thus reversing the perspective which would suggest the omnipresence of the historical viewpoint. The Interlude, which satirizes the origins of the capitalist economic base is certainly the most confidently crafted of the episodes which make up Barker's text; a fact which he debates in an interview given shortly after the first production of the play at the Royal Court:

> Watching rehearsals of *Victory* I recognized that I most enjoyed the scenes that were quite bereft of satire - the scenes on the Thames estuary for example - but that for sheer effect the Banker's scene carried most weight. I am for passion in the theatre and satire is at the opposite pole. It's a matter of finding the courage.[15]

Despite the fact that it is only via the alienating tropes of passion that Barker allows his spectators the respite of his satirical lampoon, his recognition of its power to outweigh passion upon the stage became a prelude to his rejection of its form within his work. Henceforth it was to be regarded as a remnant of the playwright's desire to gratify and is therefore finally discarded. What Barker mistrusts in satire

is the ease with which it denudes of terror that of which the spectator perhaps has most need to be terrified. In an article published in 1986 in the *Guardian*,[16] Barker was unequivocal in his damning of satire as a form which he perceives to aid the progress of the authoritarian state: "It is culture reduced to playing the spoons. The stockbroker laughs, and the satirist plays the spoons." [17]

If the Interlude could be relied upon, in the original production, to induce a sense of comfort and relief in its spectators, the first scene of the play is celebrated for its ability to cause the *exeunt* of a sizeable minority of the audience. The cause of offence is the repeated use of the word 'cunt' by Gaukroger, an agent of the king whose function it is to locate and supervise the exhumation of traitorous corpses. Barker's re-iteration of the word is - of course - intended to shock, but the desire is not to expose the audience to gratuitous verbal violence. Rather 'cunt' is used to introduce language as an historicized object rather than a timeless mode of expression. Language, in *Victory*, designates character as an outside, an exterior, which trumpets perspective as the active contestation of forces which, for the most part, resist synthesis in their desire to own, or impose their will upon, the bodies of others. Barker returns rhetoric to the theatre, in place of the psychologized character, thus allowing language to retrieve its verbal richness as an agency by which the speaker may pronounce a view of the world which asserts its right to exist, not as a truth, but rather as the manifestation of a will which has the ability to impose its reality upon others:

> It is not for nothing that the word 'cunt' operates both as the most extreme notation of abuse and also the furtherest reach of desire, and not only in male speech, and in attempting to eliminate the word the thing itself is eliminated, since nothing can stand in for it. Since what cannot be expressed cannot exist dramatically, the attempt to abolish the word becomes an attack on the body itself - a veiled attempt to remove the body from dramatic space.[18]

In an essay which responds to accusations of obscenity levelled at his work, Barker asks 'What is the will that articulates itself?' when the question "Do you really need those words?" is asked. The issue, he suggests, has nothing to do with obscenity, but rather concerns the ownership of the body and the proprietorship of the means by which the body may make an appearance in discourse. The question, for Barker, exposes the process of colonization by which the body has become both the subject and object of scientific discourse. Barker asserts - after Adorno - that the artist must resist the discursive persuasion of the colonizers, and maintain an artistic ownership of the body in the faith that the aestheticized object would prove a source of resistance to the reified consciousness which "return[s] the body to the biology class where eroticism is displaced and desire corrupted into a squalid fetishism." [19]

The alienation to which Barker subjects the spectator in the opening moments of *Victory* is akin, therefore, to a moral vertigo produced by the destabilization of categories which hold both the idea of the audience 'body', and the positioning of the individual body - as subject - in discourse, in place. This de-centring of meaning and jumbling of categories imposed upon an audience without warning or introduction offers a 'sense' of history which far exceeds the researched detail of the costume drama. It is interesting to note that a number of newspaper critics were careful to point out to their readers that *Victory* in fact had nothing to do with history, but was rather a historical peg upon which Barker could hang his love of dramatic excess. Anthony Curtiss of the *Financial Times* offers a fairly representative voice:

> Mr Barker is jolly careful not to say that his play is intended to be historical. The history emerges throwaway fashion from the dialogue. History is the basis for a dramatic fable about the condition of England in a post-revolutionary period. The moral is obscure...[20]

The need for critics to distinguish 'history' as other to that which Barker portrays upon the stage, negatively defines the official version as that which centralizes the known and the recognizable, leaving to the imagination only the task of fleshing out the characters that furnish the illustrative events. Barker, in resistance to this version, offers a history which is ūnrecognizable by virtue of the fact that it is shorn of the dialectic, thus replacing the forged chains of reason, truth and meaning, with eruptions of desire manifesting themselves upon the site of the body. He fractures contemporary historical discourse, therefore, in order to glimpse the blood and guts of a language which was discarded in order that 'We' might exist.

That which has greatest proximity to the spectators at the beginning of Barker's *Victory* is that which proves least recognizable from the perspectives offered by the ideological frameworks of the late twentieth century. The device is simple; Barker examines first that which is furthest away, both temporally and spatially, from the administrative heartbeat of a society which is already awakening to the potential of property-ownership as the basis of economic power. The first images of the play are concerned with a very different image of power which is negotiated as a form of transaction executed over an open grave. The corpse of the Republican Idealist, Bradshaw is disclosed, in a moment of shameful defeat, by his secretary, Scrope, and passes into the ownership of his enemies; the recently returned loyalists to the monarchy. The transaction is marked physically by the removal of the corpse in order that it may be exhibited, and verbally in the imposition of corporeality upon the skeleton which had previously received a fleshless sanctification offered by

Scrope in memory of his betrayed mentor. Bradshaw has died a saint and is now resurrected as a traitor:

> **Gaukroger:** We never had one out of a field. Under the whispering cow shit and adulterous hips. Gob open to clay and the milkmaid's hot little puddle. But in sight of church steeple, I notice. How picturesque he was and diligent. Was he, Mr Scrope? Cunt picturesque your master? [21]

Here is a rationality which has as its motor the appearance of power as visited upon the fleshy contours of the body. This power is an overt force which above all desires to be seen, to be public, to make a spectacle of its ability to transform that which passes into its hands. It is, above all, the visiting of the imaginative impulse upon corporeal reality; thus, the restoration of the flesh of the monarch is celebrated by the exhibition of the fleshless corpses of his enemies. The gain is a forced re-entry into the popular imagination; the return of the exiled body.

The closer the actions of the play take the audience to the secret meeting of the Bankers in the vaults of the Bank of England the more ambivalent becomes this particular manifestation of power. For the Bankers, the chaos inflicted on the countryside by rampaging cavaliers has no symbolic power, the status accorded to it being its use as a means of distracting the monarchists from the real business of State which involves a wholesale confiscation of their property for the benefit of the new economic order. The Bankers are history minus the flesh; their progress depends upon the abstraction of power from matter and the conceptualizing of the relationship man has to the world of his perceptions. For Charles, the force their bodies carry is an alien one, impervious and secret. It is a power which refuses to acknowledge itself, thus confounding the imagination of the newly restored monarch:

> **Hambro:** I prefer not to imagine -
>
> **Charles:** Billy won't imagine! Billy won't! (*He goes close to him.*) Or don't it really matter any more? (*Pause*) Billy, I do not like you awfully. You have such cold grey eyes and never fuck nobody. I wish I was cleverer, I would follow your tricks like the dog to the bitch's arse. I think you entertain some sort of treason.
>
> **Hambro:** Treason?
>
> **Charles:** (*mocking*) What! Treason! What! (*He smiles.*) No, Billy, darling, I mean I don't think you love me, do you, my flesh, the bone and blood of Charlie? Do you?
> Really love me? [22]

The return of Charles to England is heralded by Ball, a cavalier, as "the restoration of old lewdness and the reign of fucking." [23] For him, 'old' England is carried in the body as unmediated desire, furnishing his imagination with the imposition of sovereign power upon those he designates as victims, whose bodies may be split asunder by the naked force of a sexual will. Love, for Ball, lies in the image of that which he is not; in puritan women who excite his imagination to a devastation of their willed order. In his first encounter with Susan Bradshaw, widow to the exhumed corpse - and carrier of the major narrative of the play - Ball takes the opportunity to display a vibrant corporeality which recognizes power as the chaos of the body at war with the limits of the flesh:

> Oh, breathe on me your English breath, sweeter than roses, but then you have had English gardens to wipe your rump against, I have not but I am not angry, no, I'm not, I have licked Frenchmen's bums for nourishment and Spaniards' crotches! Breathe on me, breathe on me, do, when you stand there icy in your purity I could really dagger you with my old cavalier dick, that or murder, carry on informing Billy.[24]

By contrast, the first image Barker offers of Susan Bradshaw is that of a woman drenched in the puritanical will of her husband's memory. She is visited in her home by Ball and Roast, an erstwhile supporter of the republic and now a civil servant, in order that she might be informed of her husband's fate. Three versions of England converge at this early stage in the play, each forged in language and intimating, via the scope of its discourse, the choices offered to those subjugated to its linguistically defined boundaries. Ball, the agent of bodily chaos is contrasted to Roast who heralds a 'new world' born in the teeth of imaginative failure; a world in which the systematic pragmatism of progress necessitates the ideological mediation of desire. Bradshaw, locked into the memory of an abandoned ideal, trapped by her own will within the stranglehold of her husband's utopian stasis, finds herself subject to actions over which she has no control. She is therefore propelled towards the defeated life of the victim, crying her anguish at the tragic injustice of her fate.

Pinioned by forces which refuse the possibility of choice, the puritan Susan *must* embrace an entirely predictable life of pious resignation. Suddenly trapped in the 'meanwhile' of Bhabha's "empty, homogeneous time" her role is akin to that of characters in a novel who transverse but never enter the flow of the linear development. Thus, denied novelistic fulfilment, they are doomed to the repetition of actions and behaviour which determine the authenticity of the novel without ever participating in its progress. The one choice open to Susan, if she is to carry her will beyond the confines of the reactive liminal, is to embrace the forces which threaten to destroy her but as a means of making herself anew. The nature of her

resistance is therefore the willed creation of a body that affirms; that discovers itself to be a work of 'art' in order to survive the destruction of that which believed itself to be authentic.

Barker, in allowing Bradshaw's process of aesthetic transformation to carry the narrative of the play, refuses his audience the possibility of empathic response. Bradshaw the victim destroys that in herself which makes victimhood possible: a process which, as Barker has commented, makes her thoroughly unlikeable:

> What occurs in the form of consecutive scenes, or in real time played on the stage, inevitably implies a moral perspective unless the seductive effect of the stage is subverted, as I attempted in ***Victory***... to prevent the audience wandering into a state of dreamy sympathy with a preordained morality, the sort of Christian-humanist ethic that says all victims are good. Susan Bradshaw is relentlessly bad, even if she is the victim of political pendulums.[25]

The transition from historical functionary to active player may be likened to the emergence of Bradshaw as an actor rather than a character. Theatrical discourse provides these two designations of 'being' upon the stage which, although offering discrete categorizations, are mutually dependent as agents of the 'appearance' of life within the stage's boundaries. The epistemology of this balanced combination - which forms the genealogical history of the actor - may be traced back to Aristotle who, defined unequivocally the relationship of the actor to character as a means of securing the desired effect of the tragic drama upon its spectators.

In chapter six of the *Poetics*, entitled "A Description of Tragedy",[26] Aristotle places the actor at the base of an hierarchical structuring of tragic form, which finds its apex in 'action' and its active agent in 'character'. In contemporary translations, character is defined by its service to the representation of the actions which form the raw material of the plot, and it is this combination of elements to which is attributed the stimulation of 'tragic emotion'. Aristotle emphasizes the fact that tragedy is *not* character based, and even goes so far as to suggest that a well constructed tragedy should work upon its audience without the necessity of characters being present. The source of tragic art is, for Aristotle, the ordering of the events which will form the construction of the plot. In the drawing of character, therefore, he cautions:

> ...one must always bear in mind what will be either necessary or probable; in other words, it should be necessary or probable that such and such a person should say or do such and such a thing, and similarly that this particular incident should follow on that.[27]

Of the actor, Aristotle has little to say, except that his presence is not integral to the action, would most likely distract from the fragile web which holds the audience in thrall to the poet's art, and that his major function is to serve as the invisible mouthpiece to the tragic language.

There are two points to be made here, both of which are pertinent to Barker's construction of the action of *Victory*. First, Aristotle's analysis is clear in its designation of that part of man which may be abstracted in order to illustrate action. Character is not conceived as a begetter of action, nor does its presence or absence either eliminate or determine the history of which it is a part. The tragic character, therefore, exists as a functionary of the plot; plot being defined by Aristotle as:

> ...a unified whole; and its various incidents must be so arranged that if any one of them is differently placed or taken away the effect of wholeness will be seriously disrupted. For if the presence or absence of something makes no apparent difference, it is no real part of the whole.[28]

My second point concerns the actor, who bears no relation either to plot or to character, the power of tragedy being: "independent both of performance and actors." [29] Thus, the ordered actions of tragedy are carried by the abstracted characteristics of man, in service to an historical progression, and given animation by the actor who must maintain an invisibility in order to hold the theatrical illusion in place. In his imposition of the categorical imperative upon the life of the stage event, Aristotle demands the absolute subordination of the actor to the representation of abstracted man which will appear upon the stage. In doing so he banishes from theatrical discourse the question for which the stage is supremely fashioned: "Who is it that speaks?" In ousting the actor, who carries the art of dissimulation as a badge of his trade, Aristotle refers the spectator back to the proper name of the historical character - which is identical with its theatrical representation - as the very origin and source of 'truth' within the text. The perspectivism made possible by the presence of the actor, who 'plays' his role rather than being identical with the roles allotted to him, is thus negated as a fundamental precept of theatrical discourse, leaving to historical event the dramatic spectrum that which may more properly be claimed to be the province of the actor

The character in service to history carries the pathos of victimhood; 'character' being the focus of forces against which action is shown to be futile. The history is already written, man's part in it is to illustrate his inevitable obeisance to patternings of life beyond his comprehension. The response invited by man as character/victim is that of pity. Gilles Deleuze offers a Nietzschean interpretation of pity as a stimulus to non-affirmative life:

> What is pity? It is this tolerance for states of life close to zero. Pity is the love of life, but of the weak, sick, reactive life. It is militant and announces the final victory of the poor, the suffering, the powerless and the small. It is divine and gives them this victory. *Who* feels pity? Precisely those who can only tolerate life when it is reactive, those who need this life and this triumph, those who build their temples on the marshy ground of such a life.[30]

Susan Bradshaw, recognizing her choice to be that of embracing victimhood or embracing the forces of reaction in order to make of herself the actor, or dissembler, who *knowingly* acquiesces to that which seeks her destruction, begins by refusing the Aristotelian caution that character should adhere to the possible, or probable. In a series of linguistic shifts she wills herself to dare to imagine beyond the confines of the world she has forged for herself and finds in her daughter's pity the stimulus required to the imaginative leap necessary to her travail beyond the known:

Bradshaw: They have found him. And stuck his head on a pole. (*Cropper goes to her, embraces her.*) Through his brain. His poor brain. An old spike. (*She parts from her.*) Or not, do you think? I say brain, but that's silly, that really is silly, the brain I'd have thought, being soft -

Cropper: Shh -

Bradshaw: The very first thing to rot, I expect, I imagine would -

Cropper: Don't imagine -

Bradshaw: I want to imagine! Would go liquid or possibly - I have not seen a brain - dry up like a nut - a rattling nut -

Cropper: Shh!

Bradshaw: ...in the skull - a pebble - or imagine -

Cropper: Don't imagine -

Bradshaw: I will imagine! Stop telling me not to imagine! [31]

Susan Bradshaw finds in her daughter's pity-filled remonstrations the means by which to defy history. She uses a will born of the imagination first to transform the abstracted memory of her husband's intellectual body into the disintegrating vision lent to her by his enemies. Thus, the perfection of the punishment visited upon him by the King's forces - the making flesh of a man whose instinct was to deny the corporeal - is now inflicted a second time by his wife, not as the eruption of repressed desire, but rather as the creation of an impossible desire; to survive her own accommodation and capitulation to forces she recognizes as superior to her own inherited strategies of resistance.

Bradshaw's physical journey through the terrain of the play begins with her decision travel to London to retrieve her husband's 'bits', furnished with the understanding that in order to attempt this paradoxical act of piety she must "learn to be a dog now" thus eschewing the impotence of historically determined dignity in favour of a survival wrought in the exigencies of culturally determined struggle.

Bradshaw re-makes herself in the image of that which her husband sought to expunge from his utopia, published under the title of ***Harmonia Britannia***. In so doing she rejects his *paean* to ordered stasis and discovers her body capable of another life; one which triumphs in its ability to 'act', rather than to consider 'action' and therefore to replace judgement with critique. Bradshaw's plunge into the sea of forces, which circulate as satellites to the kernel of history without ever conjoining their energy to its progress, sets free a life absented from gain or advantage. Thus, Susan's transformations, although premised upon her personal quest to return her husband to his home, become manifestations of untimeliness: the joyful affirmation of a life which bears no relation to the images of 'happiness' perpetuated by ideological frameworks of belief. Bradshaw's determination to say 'yes' to all that is 'no' in her makes of her body a battleground, which draws its sustenance from the routing and destruction of every instinct that calls her to pity, forgiveness or shame:

> Yes means no resistance. Yes means going with the current. Yes means lying down when it rains and standing up when its sunny. Yes urge. Yes womb. Yes power. I lived with a man whose no was in the middle of his heart, whose no kept him thin as a bone and stole the juices from him. No is pain and yes is pleasure, no is man and yes is nature. Yes is old age and no is early death. Yes is laughter, no is torture. I hate no. No is misery and lonely nights.[32]

This rhetoric is offered as an 'education' by Bradshaw, (who has been reduced to begging) to Devonshire, the King's mistress - described by Susan as "the worst bitch in the kingdom" - on a beach on the Thames Estuary. The strength of Bradshaw's words lies not only in the powerful rhetoric they employ but also in the brutal disjuncture which is discerned between choice and happiness. Susan strips life of its capacity to offer 'happiness' and finds in its stead the ambiguous 'joy' of the body as a site of transformation, not at the hands of a sovereign power, but rather through the breadth and capacity of an imagination no longer trammelled by the need to reconcile contradiction. This untrammelled creativity makes of life an art, and of life's actions an aesthetic, constantly surprising with the possibility of active critique, that which had formerly appeared to be inviolable.

Having reached London, Bradshaw finds herself in the garden of Clegg, the King's poet, in the presence of Milton whom Clegg hides "in case one day he writes a

good thing in adversity". Confronted with her husband's erstwhile colleague Bradshaw's response is to ignore the genius and castigate the man who has failed to maintain the power to hold her in thrall:

Bradshaw: I do think it's impossible to respect a genius when he's out of luck. I do. I quailed before you once, couldn't bring myself to speak - not that Bradshaw wanted me to, did he - just cart the sandwiches this way and that - but really, you made me tremble, and now you move me so little I could - (*With sudden inspiration, she slaps his face.*)

Milton: **Aaaggghhh!**

Clegg: (*Returning with a tray*) Oh, don't do that...

Milton: **Aaarrrhhh!**

Scrope: (*To Bradshaw*) **I hate you for that!**

Bradshaw: (*In delight*) No, look -

Scrope: **Hate you for that!**

Bradshaw: See what I did!

Scrope: **Ugly! Ugly!** [33]

Bradshaw's delight at having found the inspiration to offer a humiliating slap to the blind poet is translated by Milton himself into that which is comprehensible and applicable to political allegory; he returns her action to history, making of her the vessel of forces beyond her comprehension. Barker, however, refuses this action its historical import. Bradshaw declares to Milton that she has "broken herself into pieces to do this"; the slap articulates a new mastery, a new body which refuses as its goal political or historical utility. This, Barker declares to be a moment of 'beauty', despite the ugliness of the spectacle, for Bradshaw has found the triumph of the actor over the character *and* discovered that it is a triumph which finally lies not in the action but in the ability to articulate the instinct without fear for its consequences.

The play ends with the return of Susan to her daughter's home, carrying the bones of Bradshaw in a sack. She offers the remains to Cropper, who is unable to appreciate the weight of meaning woven into their retrieval, and responds by announcing her own resurrection of Bradshaw's body; the translation from the Latin of ***Harmonia Britannia*** which she intends to put into print. Juxtaposed with Cropper's dream of an accessed readership for her father's utopia, is the image of Bradshaw, in her arms the child which is the result of a rape, and at the end of a rope, Ball, the now mutilated rapist, whom she has chosen to take as her husband. Bradshaw has travelled where history wasn't, and in her rejection of either utopian

stasis, or dialectical progress, has returned to her daughter the debris that could not be redeemed; that chose to triumph in the life which made contradiction a victory over the inert or reactive life. In the closing moments of the play, the actions are shown to be futile; the price of the digression from history a rendering of Susan, in the apotheosis of her pain, a grotesque site of wrought meaning without consequence - the nightmarish wound from which the ***Harmonia*** will shield its future historical readership.

There is no explanation for Bradshaw's actions, and as the lights fade she passes into her daughter's house, declaring "there is nowhere to go in the end, but where you came from, is there?" This is not an act of reconciliation however, rather the return defines change and the triumph inscribed in the new Susan's body is a triumph over the Aristotelian dictum:

> ...whatever is beautiful, whether it be a living creature or an object made up of various parts, must necessarily not only have its parts properly ordered, but also be of an appropriate size, for beauty is bound up with size and order.[34]

Bradshaw the actor has said 'yes' to that which Aristotle refuses and thus discovered a drama wherein the chaos of perceptions is subject to the patterning of an individual aesthetic, which finds the self to be utterly dissimilar to the historical structure of the State, although having in common certain of its elements. Life, intimates Barker's Bradshaw, is subject to endless configurations, all of which return us to "where we came from". The actor knows that 'order' is the censorship of transformation, and that the desire to 'play' that which one is not affirms the potential of human culture. To posit 'order' as beauty and the possibility of perfection, is to fear change as the opening to catastrophe; in catastrophe Susan finds the possibility that creation itself, as a critique of what *is*, is the only order that does not return to the 'meanwhile' that which has dared the transgression of 'not yet'.

The 'beauty' posited by Aristotle stands in stark contrast to Barker's creation of Susan Bradshaw. Where Aristotle insists upon order and wholeness, Barker asks whether we don't, as human beings, require the possibility of a beauty made up of that which cannot be redeemed or made whole:

> The wound is the aim of the new theatre and the intention of the actor. His performance will create the wound and the wound will be the subject of continuing anxiety... Slowly the audience will discover the new theatre to be a necessity for its moral and emotional survival. It will endure the wound as a man drawn from a swamp endures the pain of the rope.[35]

The Nature of Redemption in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

> What is this reconciliation with history? Not even ***Death and the King's Horseman***, that purposefully 'unmediated' piece can be proposed as representing a society 'reconciled with history.[36]

Wole Soyinka's ***Death and the King's Horseman*** [37] is a play which has acted as a rallying cry to the redemptive urges of contemporary critics who, like Benjamin's "angel", long to gaze into the future but find their gaze fixed upon the catastrophic past which signals the inability of progress - the storm blown up from Paradise - to encompass all that man is. Written during Soyinka's Fellowship at Churchill College, Cambridge, in a period of self-imposed exile following the Nigerian civil war and his imprisonment at the hands of the Gowon regime, ***Death and the King's Horseman*** is the only one of Soyinka's plays to deal directly with a verifiable historical incident. Like Barker, however, Soyinka's attitude towards the treatment of history as dramatic material shuns the illustrative in order to examine the conceptual uses to which history - as a patterning of contemporary perceptions - is currently subject. The importance attributed to the means by which it shuns official discursive formulations may be gauged by the extremity of response it has elicited from critics who contest the right of the author to offer a fabricated version of events which may be proven to be otherwise by recourse to documentary evidence. The insistence by critics such as Femi Osofisan and Biodun Jeyifo,[38] that what Soyinka has 'created' must be categorized as reactionary myth, rather than history is, as this section will debate, a contestation over the 'rights' to fabricated history and the ownership of the discourse which supports historical fabrication as political expediency. This contestation of rights is in itself a part of the historicizing of the role of the artist in relation to the cultural and political needs of his society. The question concerning how those needs are determined, and by whom, returns us to the formulations of nationalist discourse as the shaping of a logic which determines, not only economic progress, but also the shapes and contours within which the thoughts and aspirations of its citizens may reside.

In ***National Self-Determination in Post-Colonial Africa***, Benjamin Neuberger suggests that the success of nationalist discourse rests upon its provision of a philosophical vessel - "a collectivization of Kant's idea of the autonomous will of individuals" [39] - which promises an enquiry into, and therefore a centralization of, identity as the motor to the development of democratic systems. The vessel proves however to be drained of its content, leaving only the shell of enquiry without the substance which would sustain its rigour. The content of the vessel is found to be the political expediency of State-based systems of economics, housed in the trappings of a concept which gains a universalized meaning only because it is

unable to offer the sophisticated particularity of response necessary to the categories it proposes.

Neuberger asserts that any enquiry into the nature of nationalist discourse must first return to basic questions concerning the nature of the 'self' and its positioning in relation to the equally nebulous concept of the 'nation', together with its abstracted catalyst 'determination'. Neuberger's proposal runs thus: that shorn of the means to interrogate the philosophical concepts promised by nationalist discourse, the only definition of the self which will be made available within its contours is a version written from the perspective of politicians. The culture which that self articulates will therefore manifest itself in the reiteration of its political origins, and the history which will support those manifestations will be the consequence of a process of selection whereby history will appear to make inevitable that which is defined by its fabricated progress towards the present moment. History, culture and the self all become objects of a nationalist discourse, therefore, out of which may be wrought the politics of identity which names as 'natural', 'sacred', and 'given' that which is expedient. In response to this, Soyinka proffers, in ***Death and the King's Horseman***, the potential posited by the artist as the maker of identificatory moulds of experience. In both cases the source involves fabricated material, but the *use* to which that material is put becomes a major aspect of Soyinka's text.

The status accorded to Elesin Oba, the eponymous Horseman of Soyinka's play, is that of a man who is able to name himself:

Elesin: .... You all know
What I am.

Praise: That rock that turns its open lodes
Into the path of lightning. A gay
Thoroughbred whose stride disdains
To falter though an adder reared
Suddenly in his path.

Elesin: My rein is loosened.
I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes
Watch me dance along the narrowing path
Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.
My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside.[40]

Elesin's self-knowledge is born of the fact that he is the carrier of a tradition which states that one month after the death of the King, his Horseman - through an act of will imposed upon the flesh - follows his master into the realm of death. As a man who carries the exact timing and manner of his death with him, Elesin's life is accorded the status of one who exceeds the merely human by virtue of the fact that he demonstrates a willing accommodation to that which cannot be avoided, and in

doing so transforms the terror afforded by death into joyful affirmation of a life circumscribed by the certain knowledge of its final dissolution.

The failure of Elesin's will, at the moment of his entry into death, and his subsequent shame at having lost the name by which his life was given meaning, form the twin foci of Soyinka's play. His structuring of the events, which prove a catalyst to the exposure of his major concerns, involves, as has been amply documented, the alteration of both the time and the geography of the original incident. The willed death of the Horseman is thus written as having taken place during the Second World War, a few years earlier than the newspaper report of the incident appeared, and the Horseman's son, Olunde, is transported to Britain for his education, rather than Ghana. Soyinka's manipulation of events brings into sharp focus the relationship between the white, colonial presence and the African communities under their rule. This factor, which is described as 'incidental' by Soyinka, has been commented upon broadly by critics as a central element of Soyinka's stagecraft:

> Despite Soyinka's insistence on the incidental quality of the Europeans, it cannot be denied that one of the main ways in which the play's Yoruba values are dramatically defined is by contrast with the attitudes of the uncomprehending whites. Theatrically, this is a most effective device, since the overwhelming majority of any audience (black or white) will be ideologically more attuned to individualistic ideology than to the communalist values represented in the central religious sacrifice of the play.[41]

Whilst James Booth is undoubtedly accurate in his recognition of Soyinka's stagecraft, he, like a number of other critics writing on this work, assumes that the comparison to be drawn in the play depends upon the imposition of a value system whereby the ideologically saturated and individualist oriented whites are shown to be the villains of the piece, whilst the ritually oriented communalist blacks live a life in cosmic harmony and thus prove themselves superior by comparison. Biodun Jeyifo, in his essay on the play, offers an extreme reading of this polarized conflict of values and suggests that there is an inherent conservatism in Soyinka's approach:

> ...the supernatural or metaphysical element...also serves as proof of 'Africanness', and the more dense and impenetrable the better. And conformism to the dramatised custom or metaphysics is the hallmark of this cultural and metaphysical immersion.[42]

Soyinka unambiguously asserts, both in the Preface to his play, and in his essay "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?" - which attempts to answer the criticism his work has elicited - that the re-ordering of the elements which make up the original report involve, not a dialectical structuring of cause and effect, but rather an exploration

of ritual as the aestheticization of perennial values current in social constructions, and its relationship to 'meaning' in the contemporary world. The producer of the play is warned that the essential theme of the play is its "threnodic essence",[43] and that any over-balancing towards a comparative treatment of the two cultures involved will weaken this delicate strand which weaves between the white and black worlds represented. Soyinka asks his spectators, critics and readers to consider history not as the recounting of events with more or less verisimilitude, but rather the historicization of death as an ultimate source of historical meaning, both within the play, and within the cultures represented. His decision to place the action within the context of the Second World War thus becomes relevant once one considers this event too to be a pivotal moment for the Western world in its re-negotiation of ritualized attitudes towards the dead:

> A study of society, even of contemporary society reveals that Man resorts to the strangest devices for nullifying that unanswerable nullity of History, progress, materialist certitude, etc. *as experienced*, in the phenomenon of death. Now that is the ultimate, imponderable dialectic over which tragic poetry builds its symbolic edifice. It is better than nothing, and *nothing* is precisely what is offered even by the most radical and humanistic systems of world or self-apprehension, faced with this one definitive human experience, and of its surrogate relations in the 'tragic' fortunes of the individual in socio-political contexts.[44]

Tragic poetry, for Soyinka, exposes a silence which no system can adequately contain or make subject to processes of social amelioration. The question underpinning the play therefore concerns the individual's relationship with death, at a moment when the systems which maintain, support or create meaning in life finally reveal their paucity in the face of a nothingness to which they ultimately return us. Soyinka thus attempts in his play to confront that within the human being that gives the lie to politically-redeemed man, by challenging him with that which culture continually picks apart whilst history mourns its inability to mend it.

The distinction between culture and history in ***Death and the King's Horseman*** is offered during the course of a conversation between Jane Pilkings, wife to Pilkings the District Officer whose responsibility it is to stop Elesin's willed death, and Olunde, son and heir to Elesin who, by the good offices of the Pilkings has travelled to England in order to study medicine and now, having been sent news of the King's death, returns to his home to bury his father's corpse. The exchange takes place during a fancy-dress ball, held at the Residency, which is being honoured by the presence of the Prince of Wales, bedecked in the costume of a seventeenth century European. Jane Pilkings is wearing a confiscated *egúngún* masquerade and Olunde is attired in a contemporary European suit. The intricacy of the layered cultural articulation which offers the context to their conversation is

extraordinary in itself, as is the concept of a fancy-dress ball offering diversion from the mighty collision of forces raging in the war that is contemporaneously consuming a large proportion of the world. Thus, Soyinka dresses Royalty in history, and not in any history, but in the costume of the seventeenth century which saw the overthrow of the monarchy and the demise of sovereign power, He gives to Jane Pilkings the costume of an African cult of the dead, thus lending her the voice of death itself, and Olunde, wearing the European suit which articulates conformism to established values, is isolated, not only by his presence as a black at a white gathering, but also by his visual articulation of codes which have been ritually overturned - as Jane explains - in order to attempt "The preservation of sanity in the midst of chaos." [45] The idea that chaos must be imitated as a means to controlling it is every bit as complicated a ritual as the African rituals represented in the play, and Olunde's incursion paradoxically, makes the esotericism of the event complete.

Olunde, having failed to find Pilkings in order to warn him against interference in his father's death, encounters Jane and becomes embroiled in a conversation which highlights the perspectivism of the two cultures to which they stand as representatives. Olunde explains that his proximity to the suffering caused by the war has allowed him an understanding of the white races as the 'survivors' of history; a title which grows in significance throughout the course of the play. Jane, by contrast describes her contact with the war as peripheral:

Jane: Mind you there is the occasional bit of excitement like that ship that was blown up on the harbour.

Olunde: Here? Do you mean through enemy action?

Jane: Oh no, the war hasn't come that close. The captain did it himself. I don't quite understand it really. Simon tried to explain. The ship had to be blown up because it had become dangerous to the other ships, even to the city itself. Hundreds of the coastal population would have died.

Olunde: Maybe it was loaded with ammunition and had caught fire. Or some of those lethal gases they've been experimenting on.

Jane: Something like that. The captain blew himself up with it. Deliberately. Simon said someone had to remain on board to light the fuse.

Olunde: It must have been a very short fuse.

Jane: (*shrugs*) I don't know much about it. Only that there was no other way to save lives. No time to devise anything else. The captain took the decision and carried it out.

Olunde: Yes...I quite believe it. I met men like that in England.

Jane: Oh just look at me! Fancy welcoming you back with such morbid news. Stale too. It was at least six months ago.

Olunde: I don't find it morbid at all. I find it rather inspiring. It is an affirmative commentary on life.

Jane: What is?

Olunde: That captain's self-sacrifice.

Jane: Nonsense. Life should never be thrown deliberately away.

Olunde: And the innocent people round the harbour?

Jane: Oh, how does one know? The whole thing was probably exaggerated anyway.[46]

I have quoted this passage at length in order to offer a commentary upon the processes Soyinka employs as a means of mediating the original material from which the play emerged. He has Jane Pilkings relate to Olunde, reported details from an incident which is already marked by linear time as an historical event. Wole Soyinka describes the genesis of ***Death and the King's Horseman*** as being the reported details offered to him by his colleague Ulli Beier as material which might prove suitable for a theatrical treatment. Although I am in no way suggesting a likeness between theatrical character and the real persons involved, the transition from death as an article of news to death as the articulation of a cultural aesthetic is one which has distinct relevance to the structural requirements of Soyinka's play. For Jane, the event signals a failure of systems of control, making morbid reading in its confirmation of waste as a by-product of historical progress. Her non-understanding of the causes finally makes of the event a sad accident; its technical inexplicability leaving her nothing to learn from its occurrence. She is as unable to read its cultural articulation as she to decipher the context of the fancy-ball within which Soyinka has placed her; the captain's death, like the visit of royalty, is newsworthy only so long as its informational content remains relevant, as the memory of the sensation fades, so does the ability to render its contingent meaning, returning to silence that which has no place in functional discourse.

Olunde offers back to Jane a meaning which places in death the affirmation of life as a worthy inheritance. He translates the passing on of news into the immensity of will shown by the captain in his decision to act rather than to contemplate the consequences of his action. The speed with which the decision had to be taken is, for Olunde, the essence of the inspiration it affords him, for it by-passes support systems and technological solutions, thus making a kind of beauty possible, even in the midst of a barbaric utilisation of industrial resources. The willed death of the captain, whilst aboard a ship laden with the agencies of death, in order to circumvent a localised loss of life which is designated as innocent merely by virtue

of the fact that their deaths were not the goal of the load, has as its basis the irrationalism of a bodily instinct which overcomes its terror of nullity *in spite of* the systems of reason to which it is subject.

Where Olunde sees beauty, Jane suggests that possibly there was exaggeration, thus closing the subject which threatens to disorder its status as news and suggest her possible complicity in that which cannot be understood rationally. The captain is consigned once more to history, but it is no accident that Soyinka has his act of self-sacrifice precede the imminent failure of the Elesin's attempted affirmation in death.

For Olunde, death is redeemed of its relegation to history by its potential for the eruption of a tragic lexicon where all other linguistic utterance fails. This is language in process; a meaning wrought out of nothingness which must return to silence and yet provides a beacon to the beauty of human endeavour in confronting that return to silence. Gerald Moore in his appraisal of Soyinka's work, considers the language with which Elesin's act of self-immolation is bounded, noting the constant intimations of cosmic disaster offered to the Horseman by his community as dire warnings of the consequences should his will fail him at the vital moment of deathly embrace. The meaning carried by the Horseman's joyful will to death is immense - as intimated by the terrifying consequences its failure promises to those left behind - but ultimately paradoxical in terms of the function it serves. Moore comments - with barely concealed irritation - upon the community's catastrophic prognostications which follow in the wake of Elesin's loss of will:

> All are united at least in their insistence that we are not dealing with a single incident, however poignant, but with a climacteric in the failure of African civilization to maintain its integrity and hold its own course. *Do not all of them exaggerate?* In the language of myth, the Elesin's dishonour might spell all these things. In the language of history, it was the process of change, at every level and in every corner of Yoruba society, which made such an incident inevitable. (My italics) [47]

Moore is unable to reconcile the enormity of the import with which Soyinka has endowed what, after all, was already an outmoded practice and therefore proves the exception rather than the rule to Yoruba custom within the time frame offered it by the play. Moore, like Jane Pilkings, suggests that the exaggeration of response, in which Elesin is described as having "tilted the world from its course and crashed it beyond the edge of emptiness...",[48] may have relevance within the mythical world, but really has nothing to do with contemporary history which quite clearly demonstrates the fact that the failure of the ritual process does not result in the tipping of the world over the 'edge of emptiness'; an antiquated belief which hardly

does justice to the progress of Yoruba thought throughout the last hundred years of its historical development. Moore thus arrives at a similar conclusion to that articulated in Biodun Jeyifo's essay, namely that Soyinka's play offers its spectators a "vision that is not without its nobility" [49] but one which signally fails to acknowledge the historical complexities with which the contemporary imagination must grapple. The suggestion is, that Soyinka's evocation of a "feudal" Yoruba society, which attempts a simplified understanding of the world, is inherently flawed as a commentary upon recent historical events.

Simon Pilkings, the play's District Officer, shares Jeyifo's and Moore's incomprehension at the continued existence and intransigence of a 'feudal' system of belief which defies the inevitable progress of history towards civilization. He is a man lacking a metaphysical imagination, which he would call superstition, and this condition demonstrates itself as a clumsy arrogance which refuses to respect that which affords no rational explanation. He, like his wife, dons the *egúngún* as a fancy dress, and fails to comprehend his Sergeant Amusa's reaction to it:

Pilkings: What the hell is the matter with you man!

Jane: Your costume darling. Our fancy dress.

Pilkings: Oh hell, I'd forgotten all about that. (*Lifts the face mask over his head showing his face. His wife follows suit.*)

Jane: I think you've shocked his big pagan heart bless him.

Pilkings: Nonsense, he's a Moslem. Come on Amusa, you don't believe in all this nonsense do you? I thought you were a good Muslem.

Amusa: Mista Pirinkin, I beg you sir, what you think you do with that dress? It belong to dead cult, not for human being.

Pilkings: Oh Amusa, what a let down you are. I swear by you at the club you know - thank God for Amusa, he doesn't believe in any mumbo-jumbo. And now look at you! [50]

Amusa's words, within the context of Soyinka's play, of course achieve an ambiguity with their suggestion that only the non-human, the dead, would dare to don the *egúngún* masquerade. This is an ambiguity which Soyinka leaves hanging throughout the sequences prior to, and at, the fancy dress ball; the transgression visits no punishment upon the wearers, beyond the perception it allows Soyinka to lend to his spectators. The real danger that Simon represents within the play, however, is born of his limited imagination ; an absence which allows the casting of himself within the role of the redeemer. Thus, on hearing of Elesin's proposed suicide he has only two modes of reason by which to negotiate his response to it; first, in an attempt to pursue his own plans to go to the ball, he attempts a liberal

attitude of *laissez-faire*, suggesting that if ritual suicide is where their beliefs have got them, then he has no responsibility for the consequences. Prompted by his wife to a consideration of his principles, he adopts the second mode, which declares his duty to be that of preventing the potential waste of a human life, at which point he, in cheerful ignorance, departs to set the structures of containment in place which for him represent the solution to this particular situation.

The playwright and critic, Femi Osofisan, offers a commentary upon ***Death and the King's Horseman*** which perceives the return to mythic source actually articulates a desire, on the part of society from which it issues to come to terms with the historical progression by which that society is ultimately defined:

> The humanist asserts that a subliminal mythopoeic intuition identifies all humanity, that in every society at whatever age of growth or decadence, the progressive humane impulse - that is the human urge to come to terms with history or even to transcend mundane imbecilities, resolves itself ultimately and dynamically into a continual drive to invoke the ancient communal psyche, through a dance - even transient - backwards into the womb of primaeval chaos...Then the archetypal myths are again resuscitated, the symbols renewed, the community is again reconciled with history.[51]

How different is Osofisan's strategy to that employed by Simon Pilkings in his attempt to contain 'pagan ritual' within the barricades of redemptive reason? The strength of Soyinka's play lies in its ability to make ridiculous the efforts of the white race in dealing with a system of belief beyond the comprehension of the secular mind. The strategy employed by Soyinka, in order to effect the transformation of reason into laughable clumsiness, is to satirize the milieu which they inhabit, thus denuding of power a structure which, in actuality, underpins and maintains a global system of politics. Osofisan's strategy is to contain, within a universalized dialectic of humane progression, the return to source as a means of strengthening the resolve to historical reconciliation. Thus, the 'source' becomes a function of rationality, accommodated into structures for which its contradictory impulses pose no threat so long as they may be categorized within a framework which suggests their cultural benefit for humanity. Amilcar Cabran, in a short passage which provides an afterword to Jeyifo's essay, offers a clear example of the utility factor which must be brought to bear upon the concept of myth as an element of historical progression:

> The 'return to source' is of no historical importance unless it brings not only real movement in the struggle for independence, but also complete and absolute identification with the hopes of the mass of the people, who contest not only the foreign culture, but also the foreign domination as a whole. Otherwise, the 'return to source' is nothing more than an attempt to find short-term benefits - knowingly or unknowingly a kind of political opportunism.[52]

The implication in this short passage offered by Cabral is that the use of source must be respected as a function of 'the greater good' and that any individualistic manipulation or fabrication actually constitutes political transgression of codes operating as a covert policing of ideological boundaries of containment. In response to the warnings offered by his compatriots, Soyinka insistently demands to know what it is that critics fear in his work, 'fear' being that which he perceives to fuel their desire for an ideological redemption of his artistic creations. What danger may be constituted by the use of the artistic imagination in response to the "irrevocably incomplete" 'data' retrieved from the annals of historical record, he enquires. Soyinka's reiterated request concerning the nature of the danger his work poses, may or may not be a wry application of contrived innocence in response to the defensive 'manning of the ideological barricades' which his play has elicited. The answer to these questions is, of course, impossible without an exposure of the nationalist discourse which holds them in place, and must remain invisible - even to its progenitors - if its 'naturalness' is to be maintained. It is to historians of that discourse that we must turn, therefore, in order to clarify the ideological disquiet which disguises itself in the discourse of literary criticism. Benjamin Neuberger states:

> History is hardly an objective, clearly discernible test for the existence of a national self. Even for the well established nations of Europe, most of the objective common history covers less than two centuries, although subjective national myths greatly expand the period of common national experience. For nationalists, history has always meant, in fact, selective history. Nationalists, whose objective is to foster a sense of identity and solidarity, to establish a chain of heroes, or to prove their case for certain historical boundaries, pick up those raisins from the cake of history which support and rationalize their cause.[53]

Soyinka's choice of material is, he insists, a response to the inherent theatricality afforded by the incident. By contrast, Soyinka observes that Jeyifo questions the suitability of his *selection* of material, suggesting that the ideological commitment of the critic is being willingly subverted by the processes of mind displayed by the playwright. It is suggested, therefore, that Soyinka might have selected more 'suitable' examples displaying "more egalitarian African cosmogonic and metaphysical systems, the erosion of which ideological and political progressives can, with greater reason regret." [54]

Soyinka demonstrates the schema of his play quite simply by allowing Olunde, in his conversation with Jane, to encapsulate for her the differing priorities of the systems from which they inherit the matrix of identity. "I know how history is made" states Olunde; it "is the art of calling things by names which don't remotely describe them." [55] The simplicity with which Olunde describes a systematic and reasoned response to the world which depends for its efficacy upon the draining of the creative imagination is, of course, countered by the innate challenge offered by Soyinka to the spectator, to designate by name the actions of Elesin in his creative attempt to realise the terrifying potential of the man who is able to name himself, without recourse to explanatory systems of discursive reason. In the terrifying moment in which Elesin fails in his will to die, and is dragged by Pilkings into the hall of the Residency, in the midst of the fancy dress ball, he re-iterates Olunde's observation as a howl of despair: "Give me back the name you have taken away from me you ghost from the land of the nameless!" [56]

Elesin is Soyinka's artist, the product of a blood-line which takes life as its raw material and effortlessly transforms the mundane, through its translation into poetic metaphor, into a multi-layered existence richly-clad in an inexhaustible flow of creative possibilities. Elesin carries the responsibility for naming the world through which he walks, and by so doing he names himself as the storehouse for cultural potential:

Elesin: The world I know is good.

Women: We know you'll leave it so.

Elesin: 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.

Women: We know you'll leave it so.

Elesin: 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 navel of the world is that
Endless cord which links us all
To the great origin. If I lose my way
The trailing cord will bring me back to the roots.[57]

The 'being' of Elesin is honoured as a 'promise' by the community from which he emerges. He is thus accorded the status of the semi-divine during his lifetime, in order that he may offer affirmation and re-creation as proof of the possibility that life may joyfully be embraced in all its aspects. Elesin carries in his body the

creative imagination of his race: he may thus be described as the communal creation of an aesthetic which functions, not at a practical level, but rather in its purposeless pursuit of the beautiful, the ambiguous and the terror-free existence. This imagined being is made possible by the distance it maintains from reality; by its ignorance of the mechanisms of survival, and its freedom from the rules which bind social, communal behaviour in lawful patternings. Elesin is imaginative transgression, but transgression which is willed and acknowledged as a part of that from which it is wrought, rather than - as in discursive reason - a tabooed 'other', against which systems of morality may be defined.[58]

Elesin determines to spend his last hours in the market amongst the women; this being the environment within which the adoration and nurturance of his being is at its greatest. The market women are not however drawn by Soyinka as dupes to the seductive presence of the King's Horseman; they indulge him in all demands and negate the possibility of judgement upon one so adored, but as Iyaloja, the 'Mother of the market', makes clear, his existence is the articulation of a transaction which must be honoured if the world which is balanced between his promise and their desire is not to crash "beyond the edge of emptiness" leaving behind only the dregs through which survivors wade, bereft of the fortress of meaning so painfully wrought and maintained. The price Elesin must pay, in order to prove worthy of the adoration heaped upon him, is to demonstrate his victory over the terrors of nullity proffered by death's boundary, and enter willingly the realm which man may not know, thus demonstrating with his flesh the certainty that death itself is not the end of life, but rather the transformation of that life back into the imaginative matrix from which it first emerged:

Elesin: How my friend would read
Desire in my eyes before I knew the cause
However rare, however precious, it was mine.

Women: The town, the very land was yours.

Elesin: The world was mine. Our joint hands
Raised houseposts of trust that withstood
The siege of envy and the termites of time.
But the twilight hour brings bats and rodents -
Shall I yield them cause to foul the rafters? [59]

Iyaloja's fear grows however, when Elesin makes a last request from which she recoils before unwillingly acceding to his demand. Many commentaries have suggested that Elesin's request to marry, on the night of his death, the woman to whom Iyaloja's son is betrothed, carries the kernel of his failure; the desire of the flesh proving stronger than the willed resolve to die. This explanation, however negates the nature of the transaction between Elesin and his fount of creation; his adorers. I would like to suggest, in its stead, the possibility that the seeds of failure

occur at the moment of Iyaloja's recoil from Elesin's request, for this is the moment at which the first schism appears between the identification of the women with the desires of their created aesthetic. The conditions under which the girl is 'given' to Elesin are weighted with a sense of 'duty' quite out of keeping with his earlier relationship to the market-women.

The *actual* reasons for Elesin's failure are never ascertained by Soyinka. The spectators are offered the beginnings of his 'dance of transition', but are then transported to the Residency, leaving the events which fuel the violent repercussions of the latter part of the play to their imaginations. The last act opens with the now caged Elesin under the protection of Pilkings. Throughout the course of the act, the world which Iyaloja has predicted as the outcome of failure finds its representation in a series of violent recriminations which demonstrate the dregs of a humanity shorn of the creative imagination by which the affirmation of life might be sustained. Perhaps the ugliest of its manifestations is the eruption of blame as a means by which despair may be contained. Elesin turns the power of his rhetoric upon Pilkings, visiting upon him a stream of invective and hate before inverting the emotive essence of his language and turning it upon his own flesh, making shameful his marriage with the market-girl which, relieved of its poetic layering, becomes a lust for flesh which has outweighed the desire of the imaginative will.[60] Iyaloja witnesses his desperation and pours further scorn upon him:

> 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 faeces of the hunter.[61]

With the world they had created between them irrevocably destroyed, Iyaloja has one last symptom of catastrophe with which to confront Elesin. She is permitted by Pilkings to bring in her burden, having pleaded with his reason to acknowledge a 'meaning' which is not his own whilst recognizing that her plea already institutes a bondage to systems that will henceforth bound her actions. The corpse of Olunde is finally allowed to be presented to his father:

> 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.[62]

The horror of Olunde's death lies in it inability to articulate affirmation without concurrently exposing failure. It lacks the absence of purpose which was to define the beauty of Elesin's death, mirroring rather the self-sacrifice of the sea-captain

who wrought his will to death in the exigency of duty-bound honour. Olunde's death saves no-one, the world of the creative consciousness is already schismatized; Olunde's death is no more than capitulation to an outmoded ritual. Confronted with his son's corpse, the Elesin strangles himself with the loop the chain which binds him to his prison. Pilkings, in the only moment of beauty allowed him by Soyinka in the play, rushes to the lifeless body and attempts to breathe life into its inert matter, watched by Iyaloja who marvels at his actions asking: "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?" [63] For Pilkings, of course, the question has no answer, his actions being those of a man who believes himself to be a redeemer without the accompanying knowledge which would allow him to question the nature of redemption beyond the categorical imperative inscribed in Enlightenment rationality which deems life, any life, to be preferable to death.

Iyaloja makes it clear that there is no whole to be made out of the shards left behind by Elesin. The closing moments of the play bear comparison with the final speeches offered to an uncertain future faced by the survivors who are left to contemplate the two corpses of of a shattered world at the end of Shakespeare's ***King Lear***. Commentators of ***Death and the King's Horseman*** have suggested that Iyaloja's final words to the pregnant bride Elesin has left behind suggest a hope for the restoration of a lost world, but when placed against ***King Lear*** they offer the possibility of an alternative reading:

Albany: Our present business
Is general woe. (*To Kent and Edgar*)
Friends of my soul, you twain
Rule in this realm, and the gored state sustain.

Kent: I have a journey, sir, shortly to go:
My master calls me; I must not say no.

Edgar: The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say
The oldest hath borne most: we that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.[64]

And from the final moments of ***Death and the King's Horseman***:

(*Iyaloja turns to the* **Bride** *who has remained motionless throughout.*)

Iyaloja: Child.

(*The girl takes up a little earth, walks calmly into the cell and closes* ***Elesin's*** *eyes. She then pours some earth over each eyelid and comes out again.*)

Iyaloja: Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn.

(She goes off accompanied by the Bride. The dirge rises in volume.)[65]

In both excerpts "a gored state" is all that is left to the survivors and the future will be born of remnants and dishonour. Iyaloja's final words suggest a flattening of the densely layered existence to which Elesin's life stood as a promise. The matrix of the living, the dead and the unborn is cast asunder and in its place is the possibility of survival, held in sharp contrast to the richness of joyous transformation. The lament with which Soyinka closes the play may therefore be understood as a 'threnody' for the living, who have known the potential held within the aesthetic as a manifestation of communal consciousness and now must live in the midst of its absence. History, one might surmise, from the structure of Soyinka's text, defines a life which has forgotten the very possibility of aesthetic potential and therefore wrenches meaning from nothing more than its strategies of survival.

Notes

1. Wole Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*, 1st edn (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988), pp.110-111
2. Noëlle McAfee, "Abject Strangers: Towards an Ethics of Respect" in *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, ed. Kelly Oliver (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.116-134, p.123
3. "[Kristeva] links the idea of the foreigner as stranger to the stranger within us...the way we treat foreigners is inherently tied to the way we treat our own unconscious. It is only by coming to terms with the stranger within that we can come to terms with those in our midst." McAfee, *Ibid.*, p.116
4. The "not yet" may be likened to a recognition of "abjection" which may be defined as "the ambiguous, the in-between, what defies boundaries, a complete resistance to unity...Abjection is fundamentally 'what disturbs identity, system, order' so, the corpse, the traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he's a saviour...the one who is abject lacks authenticity, that is, lacks any moral consistency." John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.160
5. Howard Barker interviewed by Tony Dunn, *Gambit* 11/41, ed. Tony Dunn (London: Calder, 1984), pp.33-44, p.35
6. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp.257-58
7. Michel Foucault quoted in David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), p.95
8. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Abacus, 1972), p.59
9. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* with "Foreward" by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.42
10. "Adorno saw...that a philosophical theory claiming that progress may be realized in society must also be willing to name a social agency for this. Incapable of discovering such an agency within society and thus of securing progress philosophically, Adorno drew the pessimistic conclusion that he must develop philosophical strategies of hibernation." Jochen Shalte-Sasse, *Ibid.*, p.xviii
11. Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p.113
12. Howard Barker, *Victory: Choices in Reaction* in *Collected Plays Vol One* (London: Calder, 1990)
13. Howard Barker, "Why I am no Playwright" *Unpublished Paper* supplied by Howard Barker (1994)
14. Barker's 'impossible' stage-directions make of setting and design a complex structure of thought: "...the castle in *The Castle* is not set but the outcome of spiritual despair, and the burned out gaol in *The Hang of the Gaol* a massive shade of frustrated longing." Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.21
15. Howard Barker interviewed by Tony Dunn in *Gambit*, ed. Tony Dunn, p.35
16. Howard Barker, "Fortynine Asides for a Tragic Theatre" in the *Guardian* (10th February 1986) also reprinted in Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, pp.17-19
17. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.17
18. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.30
19. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.30
20. Anthony Curtiss, "*Victory*/Royal Court" in *Financial Times* (28th March 1983)
21. Barker, *Victory*, p.136
22. Barker, *Ibid.*, pp.149-150
23. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.156
24. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.137

25. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.121
26. T.S.Dorsch (trans.), *Aristotle/Horace/Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp.38-41
27. Dorsch, *Ibid.*, p.52
28. Dorsch, *Ibid.*, p.43
29. Dorsch, *Ibid.*, p.41
30. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), pp.149-150
31. Barker, *Victory*, p.141
32. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.174
33. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.181
34. Dorsch, *Aristotle*, p.42
35. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.68
36. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.121
37. Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Methuen, 1975)
38. "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?" is an essay written in answer to specific criticisms made by Osofisan and Jeyifo. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, pp.110-131
39. Benjamin Neuberger, *National Self-Determination in Post-Colonial Africa* (Colorado: Lynne Reinner Pubs., 1986), p.4
40. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.14
41. James Booth, "Self-Sacrifice and Human Sacrifice in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*" in *Research on Wole Soyinka*, eds. James Gibbs and Bernth Lindfors (Alberta: Africa World Press, 1993), pp.127-146, p.131
42. Biodun Jeyifo, "Ideology and Tragic Epistemology: The Emergent Paradigms in Contemporary African Drama" in *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama* (London: New Beacon Books, 1983), pp.23-45, p.42
43. Soyinka, "Author's Note", *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.6
44. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, pp.126-127
45. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.53
46. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.51
47. Gerald Moore, *Twelve African Writers* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p.224
48. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.75
49. Moore, *Twelve African Writers*, p.227
50. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.24
51. Femi Osofisan, quoted in Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.121
52. Jeyifo, "Ideology and Tragic Epistemology" in *The Truthful Lie*, p.43
53. Neuberger, *National Self-Determination in Post-Colonial Africa*, p.43
54. Jeyifo, "Ideology and Tragic Epistemology" in *The Truthful Lie*, p.35
55. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.54
56. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.60
57. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, pp.17-18
58. David Richards perceives Elesin to be an individual, rather than communal creation. Commenting upon his rendition of the 'Not-I bird' he states: "...in the plenum of his tale all but Elesin are subjects of death; his egocentricity soars, putting him beyond the natural world, beyond the world of men, beyond even the gods." David Richards, "*òwe l'esin òrò*: Proverbs Like Horses: Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*" in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XIX/1 (1984), pp.86-97, p.88
59. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, pp.14-15
60. David Richards offers an interesting insight into Elesin's speeches in the last act: "Elesin in his disgrace introduces...an imitation of philosophical expression without the formulae nor the rhapsodic qualities of proverb or metaphysic. It jars on the ear and wrenches the carefully established rhythm of the proverbial speech, (that rhythm which constituted part of the play's 'meaning',) out of his metre; language without 'decorum'." in Richards "Proverbs Like Horses", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, p. 95
61. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.68
62. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.75

63. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.76
64. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, V.III, 1.320-326
65. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*, p.76.

Chapter Five

The Triumph of Illusion

A nation dies when it no longer has the strength to invent new gods, new myths, new absurdities; its idols blur and vanish; it seeks them elsewhere, and feels alone before unknown monsters. This too is decadence. But if one of these monsters prevails, another world sets itself in motion, crude, dim, intolerant, until it exhausts its god and emancipates itself from him; for man is free - and sterile - only in the interval when the gods die; slave - and creative - only in the interval when, as tyrants, they flourish.[1]

The American essayist, Susan Sontag, has described the European essayist and philosopher, E.M.Cioran as the thinker of "impossible states of being" and "unthinkable thoughts." [2] The European pessimism which Sontag perceives to permeate his writing demonstrates itself in the cannibalistic act of thought devouring itself and surviving beyond the point of destruction to flourish anew, sustained only by the desire to create out of the wreckage new forms, which at the moment of their inception, proceed once more to split and engage in the mortal combat which finally proves the only means of their survival: "the thinker plays the roles of both protagonist and antagonist. He is both suffering Prometheus and the remorseless eagle who consumes his perpetually regenerated entrails." [3] Cioran, like Theodor Adorno, is in relentless pursuit of the split dialectic which forever resists the moment of synthesis, creating in its stead a plethora of 'gaps' or 'abysses' into which thought plunges, risking self-annihilation, in order to resist the cessation of what Soyinka has called "the tragic consciousness";[4] the experience of language as risk and wager, whereby the desire to create overwhelms the fear of the unknowable void to which, in an act of faith, the thinker must surrender himself.

When Cioran writes of the nation, he refers not only to the discourse which supports the body of invention through which nationalist thought makes its appearance, but also to the individual consciousness which it seeks to invigorate through the processes of socio-political and cultural systems of administration. The enslaved forms of 'creation' to which he refers are those which provide life with its storehouse of meanings; which endow lives with qualities guaranteed to shield the living from an 'unhealthy' or 'decadent' engagement with finitude:

> A civilization begins to decline the moment Life becomes its sole obsession. Epochs of *apogee* cultivate *values* for their own sake: life is only a means of realizing them; the individual is not aware of living, he *lives* - happy slave of the forms he engenders, tends, and idolizes. Affectivity dominates and fills him.[5]

A nation's decline, states Cioran, produces symptoms which demonstrate the draining of those ideological vessels which provide citizenship with its palliative 'affectivity'. In the wake of a national subjective consciousness, which is only partially recognized by its erstwhile citizens to have been in the gift of the State, fear replaces the emotional security of 'prejudice' - which national discourse nurtures as an ancestral bloodline of inheritance - and with the loss of this ideological shield to 'otherness' the emasculated masses confront their own sterility in the face of a communally forged language which no longer speaks the 'truth'.

Cioran, alongside Foucault, Adorno, Horkheimer, Nietzsche, Marcuse and Kristeva, may be described as a philosopher of the schism, or gap, which emerges when belief fails; when the 'organicism' of systems dissolves to reveal the conceptual dogma upon which its 'natural' emotional growth had been dependent. The origins of this phenomenon of the philosopher as traverser of the abyss, or ideological 'code-breaker', is ascribed by Gilles Deleuze to the revolutionary writings of Nietzsche who, in resistance to the epochal creation of Marxist and Freudian bureaucracies of State and Family, attempted the creation of a philosophy that wrote for an 'other' body; one which would confound the codifications which returned to either national or familial systems the individual experience of man.as a creative being.[6]

It is no coincidence that Nietzsche's philosophy charting the decline of the European races, and the rise of the 'sickly' reactive doctrines of morality which he perceived to fuel the nihilism of a burgeoning victim-based culture, emerged parallel to the rapid growth of nationalist discourse throughout Europe; a movement which eschewed philosophy - although retaining certain aspects of its vocabulary - and embraced, in its stead, the certainty provided by ideological systems of belief committed to the scientific progress afforded by processes of dialectical thought. Thus, Nietzsche's cry of "God is Dead!" was a cry from the void which marked the commencement of the modern secular age. The 'other' body to which he addressed his writings was a product of that void: "Look at the good and the just! What do they hate the most? The one who breaks their table of values, the destroyer, the criminal; but it is he, the creator." [7]

Gilles Deleuze describes Nietzsche's philosophy as a relentless attempt to break the codes which - at the end of the nineteenth century - furnished man's future as a creature of scientific progress - the dialectical man of Platonic origins - and create, out of the wracked language of immanent critique, a body which would be immune to codification; which would be born of a will wrought in resistance to 'man' as imagined by any system that sought only his containment or functional assimilation. In place of the *realpolitik* by which national discourse forged its

progress, Nietzsche proposed the reign of the creator and the institution of a "grand politics":

> ...having been the only one to preserve the power of creating, he will steer the world toward a goal that necessarily remains unknown to men. He will reign inasmuch as he will incarnate precisely the possibility of a future. The Caesarism of the Overman...must be understood as a *tyranny of an artist*...art is henceforth to be acknowledged as the highest value...the principle of evaluation has been fundamentally turned about. [8]

Nietzsche, at a moment in European history when philosophy had been made redundant as a tool by which the world might be understood - its processes of abstraction having been overtaken by the political production of an historical consciousness as a means of 'making sense' of both man and his relationship to the world of which he is a part - made of philosophy an eruption which flooded language with the chaos of its own creative possibilities. In resistance to the scientific ordering of that which already exists, he placed hope in the hands of the artist whose innate need to create would resist the historicizing tendency and embrace instead the artistic consciousness fuelled by an intimate knowledge of illusion and transformation. Forever cast adrift from the moorings of scientific proof, the Nietzschean artist would cleave unerringly to a faith born of the dictum which states: "It is not a failing not to know the end at the beginning." [9]

Nietzsche's schismatic philosophy attempts no less than the overturning of historical consciousness and a redefinition of the principles upon which philosophical discourse is founded. After Nietzsche, philosophy would have to confront that which the meta-discourse of nationalist identity could only disguise by the furnishing of ideological organization of systems of belief which were already threadbare in their propagation of meaning. Nietzschean philosophy posited an image of European man as a species that had willed the destruction of its own ability to create and was therefore trapped in a retrograde motion - the symptoms of which were, paradoxically, change and progress - towards the nihilistic immolation of language itself, the very source by which 'man' names himself and makes of his existence a creative storehouse of possibility. Nietzsche heralds the age in which history triumphs by making of all that has gone before no more than a stumbling and error-ridden preparation of what is to be, leaving man stranded in the 'meanwhile' of a redundant set of beliefs, denuded of his ability either to affirm the iconoclastic act of which he is a product, or to stem the progress for which he stands as a promise. The Nietzschean Europeans are a haunted race; they are the men who "cannot venerate themselves." [10]

The function of philosophy, after Nietzsche, could no longer be defined as an investigation into the nature of 'being', which in turn occasioned the relinquishing of the Ideal as a founding premise. Rather, the philosopher was now to stand as guardian to the abyss to which man would inevitably return, sounding its depths and contemplating the possible transformations which man would have to undergo if he was to survive the onslaught of its unknown terrors. Philosophy becomes in the twentieth century therefore, a rearguard action:

> Philosophy does not serve the State or the Church, who have other concerns. It serves no established power. The cause of philosophy is to *sadden*. A philosophy that saddens no one, that annoys no one, is not a philosophy. It is useful for harming stupidity, for turning stupidity into something shameful. Its only use is the exposure of all forms of baseness of thought... Finally turning thought into something aggressive, active and affirmative. Creating free men, that is to say men who do not confuse the aims of culture with the benefit of State, morality or religion.[11]

Cioran names the abyss to which he stands as guardian "*a state of non-suicide*";[12] a realm wherein the inhabitants recognize that only the willing of their own death can retrieve dignity and yet they persist in life. For Adorno, the abyss finds its apotheosis in the rise of fascism where the progress of technology meets the production of death as a 'natural' outcome of the logical procedures of reason combined with the irrationality which underpins their scientifically proven premiss. Kristeva describes the abyss as a state of abjection:

> Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other... Strangely the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder... a symptom that precisely turns 'we' into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible.[13]

Foucault describes the abyss as that which lies beneath history, that which only the poet may retrieve from silence and only then in the knowledge that it is to the silence that the "stubborn murmuring of a language which seems to speak quite by itself" must return.

For each of them the abyss bears a knowledge which, if confronted will expose the terror from which systems of accommodation to the world 'as it is' would seek to shield its citizens; namely that man is not what we *thought* he was, thus constituting in his place the possibility of having to think differently but now knowing that thought may not be trusted as anything other than the production of illusions, the reality of which is verified by nothing other than their appearance in the world of our perceptions. If 'man' may no longer be venerated as a species

capable of adduction, he must henceforth stand in awe of his ability to furnish the world with illusory forms. Only in the triumph of illusion does the abyss find meaning beyond its inherent proclamation of the death of Man.

Man "is the chatterbox of the universe" states Cioran, "he speaks in the name of others; his self loves the plural." [14] It is to the poet that Cioran turns for respite from the fetters of a language which, in its conjoining of the one with the many, has ceased to render back to man the possibility of naming what he is. The poet, alternately described as the artist, is, for Cioran, alone amongst men in his ability to 'speak in his own name',[15] his discovery being that language, like life, was not made for proving, but rather for the affirmation of human audacity in the face of infinite terror. Cioran describes the poet's language as a virus in the blood, a pounding in the veins which when it breaks the silence out of which it is engendered, emits the howl of Lear, the overflowing excesses of Hamlet's soliloquies, Baudelaire's lament for *life*, none of which, he opines, have ever been successfully translated into the systematized conditions of a language predicated upon 'We'. The artist, states Cioran, stands sentinel to the preservation of a language which meets the experience of pain and suffering as an equal; Lear's howl of pain is the howl born of an understanding which dares to survive that which is intolerable to it, making the name of Lear one with the howl out of which he is wrought. The poet's language is the affirmation of the tragic individual as a representative of the willing traverser of the abyss:

> The nature of a faith, even if it must fail, is to elude the Irreparable. (What could Shakespeare have done with a martyr?) The true hero fights and dies in the name of his destiny, and not in the name of a belief. His existence eliminates any notion of an escape... He tends to his *dénouement* and instinctively manages everything to bring about events fatal to himself. Fatality being his vital juice, every way out can be no more than a disloyalty to his destruction.[16]

The paradox afforded by the spectacle of suffering to which the tragic hero devotes his life becomes, as critic George Steiner has stated in his seminal work ***The Death of Tragedy***,[17] anathema to a society for whom history is no more than a progression towards the redemption of pain and pursuit of the 'solution' which will stem suffering. Such an age is one which seeks deliverance from the exigencies of tragic experience. A language wrought in the absence of the tragic is, however, a language underpinned by a loss of faith in man as an object of veneration. The transition undergone by a language that ceases to take as its priority the naming of the individual who speaks in order to embrace a description of the collective of which he is a part, contains within its journey the experience of irreparable loss. Only tragic poetry can meet the suffering contained within the arena of absence; within the gap between redemptive belief and the inevitable exposure of its artifice.

In *The Joyful Wisdom*,[18] Nietzsche considers the relationship of the spectator to the 'theatrical artist' - a term which he uses to describe both author and actor of the stage event. With persistent reference to the stage as a locus of affirmation, he comments - in an aphorism entitled *What we should be Grateful for.* - upon the essential perspectivism offered by the actor:

> It is only the artists, and especially the theatrical artists who have furnished men with eyes and ears to hear and see with some pleasure what everyone is in himself, what he experiences and aims at: it is only *they* who have taught us how to estimate the hero that is concealed in each of these common-place men, and the art of looking at ourselves from a distance as heroes, and as it were simplified and transfigured, - the art of 'putting ourselves on the stage' before ourselves.[19]

It is to the artist of the theatre that Nietzsche ascribes the diminishing art of perspectivizing individual perception. The ability to perceive the heroic in man - which is to say that part of man which retains a distance from his civic environment - is, for him, the antidote to social regeneration and redemption. The need for redemption makes victims of us all, states Nietzsche, and the state of victimhood is threefold. First, the seeker of redemption is the victim of life's injustices for which reparation must be sought in a transcendent existence. Secondly, the existence of transcendent vision makes present life unbearable, thus making the seeker a victim to impossible desires the gratification of which is achievable only through the annulment, or death, of what is. Thirdly, the state of transcendence is premised upon a hatred of life; it is therefore the genesis of an internalised consciousness which desires its own death in pursuit of 'happiness'. The image of man as victim is, for Nietzsche, symptomatic of a 'will to death' or nihilistic striving which characterizes the modern European races.

The paradox upon which his philosophy hinges lies in the desire for death which is shared both by the seeker of eternal life - the herd animal - and the seeker of his own destruction - the tragic hero. The victim is no more than the slave with death as his master, caught in a deadly embrace which has historically been named as the dialectic. Every attempt made by the slave to ward off death's terrors is met by a new and more terrifying manifestation of the power it must continue to wield if redemption is to maintain its promise. The tragic hero is man freed of the dialectic into the terror of a world without redemption. He is, therefore, the man for whom death, in the absence of belief, provides the only certainty of release from pain. For tragic man life becomes a joyful affirmation because there is nothing else; he is thus in partnership with death; the name he bears being his sole stake on existence as, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, "designations of intensity inscribed upon a body that could be the earth or a book, but could also be the suffering body..." [20] The

suffering individual who makes of his life a tragic destiny claims an equality with death by declaring his relationship to life as nothing more than *appearance* wrought in the exigency of a will to overcome that which is known to be inevitable. Thus tragic language penetrates the silence which is death itself. The tragic hero is an actor whose sole purpose in living is the searching out of roles equal to the will which expresses itself through his being. The end is known in the beginning, but - as in the theatrical event - each performance has its unique flavour; the possibility of singular interpretation. Rather as Lear could not be played *well* by an actor who refused to shun at the beginning, the knowledge of his end, so - Nietzsche states - the affirmative man lives his life in the full knowledge that action is futility, and bearing this knowledge, still desires to act for the joy of it. To accept the role of the victim is, for Nietzsche, to give a bad performance of life, the will to *ressentiment* being a substitution for willed individual performance. The tragic actor is the supreme performer who makes of his life a statement of equality with death; 'I am nothing', the actor's performance states, 'making me master of my appearance if not of my life.' Nietzsche returns in Book Five of ***The Joyful Wisdom*** to *The Problem of the Actor* and enquires:

> Falsity with a good conscience; delight in dissimulation breaking forth as power, pushing aside, overflowing, and sometimes extinguishing the so-called 'character'; the inner longing to play a role, to assume a mask, to put on an *appearance*; a surplus of capacity for adaptations of every kind, which can no longer gratify themselves in the service of the nearest and narrowest utility: all that perhaps does not pertain *solely* to the actor in himself? [21]

Nietzsche continues by considering that the actor's necessarily promiscuous relationship to life as *appearance* surely bears more than a passing resemblance to the "lowest orders" of society whose continued existence is dependent upon the creation of fleeting masks forged in answer to the need for adaptation and accommodation in the face of "shifting pressure and constraint." And yet the sense of affirmative *play* suggested by their forced dissembling is held in check both by promises of redemption and by faith in the reality of the 'I' which is reflected in the 'We' as authenticity and 'truth'. The multiplicity of the 'I' as represented by the chimerical appearance of the mask is not therefore deemed to be reality, but rather pragmatic method from which safe return is guaranteed to the confines of the ideologically constituted unity of subjective experience, which is in fact a return to nothing more than continued victimhood and *ressentiment*. Nietzsche's desire to 'overturn the tables of values' and instigate the '*tyranny of the artist*' is therefore a challenge to the innate negation of 'joy' which scientific discourse has systematically pursued in the name of ideological 'happiness', or freedom from pain. Paradoxically, it is to tragedy - to the placing of one's life upon the stage as

magnified ambition - that enslaved man must turn if he is to 'remember' the artist in himself: man as the creator of values and systems, rather than the as victim of their administration.

In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*,[22] the American scholar Stephen Greenblatt offers a study of six Elizabethan authors. Of the six, Christopher Marlowe, the tragedian, proves to be the exception to the rule upon which the book premises its theoretical base, for according to Greenblatt's defining features of the age, Marlowe is 'an untimely man'; his work standing as anathema to the contemporary values of the Elizabethan age. Amongst the six authors studied, Marlowe is the rogue-card whose theatre is all resistance; forging a bridge over the chasm of drained belief and paving the way to the dark relentlessness of the Jacobean theatre which was to follow hard upon his death. In his Introduction, Greenblatt isolates the period of the Renaissance as an age in which "the power to impose a shape upon oneself", considered as an activity central to social hierarchy, was eroded in favour of an ethos that embraced the newly developing social mobility of the Elizabethan era. The Renaissance, states Greenblatt, was the age in which man's identity entered into a dialectical relationship with institutions of the State as a means of mapping the abstract social space which, in the absence of God, had become subject to the art of the mortal cartographer. Thus, the process of 'self-fashioning' - a concept already in currency at this time - was newly negotiated as a means of articulating a struggle fought within the linguistic arena of literary production:

> Autonomy is an issue but not the sole or even the central issue: the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity - that of others at least as often as one's own.[23]

In this model, the orthodoxies offered by the institutions of the State represent a stable defining boundary for the 'I' within which the individual is 'free' to explore the limited fluidity of the improvised self. Thus, man relieves himself of what Catherine Belsey has described as "the solitude and uncertainty that haunt the humanist subject";[24] the inability of the speaker to define himself as the origin of the 'I', but in turn subjects himself to the governing narrative of State politics and power.

Of the two playwrights chosen for study by Greenblatt, Shakespeare is named as the true Elizabethan; a cultural conservative who accepts his culture as a defining boundary and improvises his own role within the framework offered by its orthodoxies. Marlowe however, comes closer to making his theatre an aberrational paradigm for radical self-fashioning; he side-steps the certainty offered by the cultural and historical dialectic of the State and defines his work against the

governing principles of the Elizabethan world-order. Greenblatt is quick to point out that Marlowe's theatrical embrace of all that the Elizabethan worldview held to be alien or 'other' binds him inextricably to that same order, but it is Marlowe alone, amongst his known contemporaries, who dares to expose as fictions both the creation of a stable identity, and the goals which drive the will of the individual towards his social fulfilment:

> Each of Marlowe's plays constitutes reality in a manner radically different from the plays that preceded it, just as his work as a whole marks a startling departure from the drama of his time. Each of his heroes makes a different leap from inchoate appetite to the all-consuming project: what is necessary in one play is accidental or absent in the next. Only the leap itself is always necessary, at once necessary and absurd, for it is the embracing of a fiction rendered desirable by the intoxication of language, by the will to play.[25]

Marlowe's theatre is, for Greenblatt, a site which exposes the terror underpinning social formation; it is the gauntlet of a world unbounded and unmapped, thrown to the self-determining and joyful will of the radical individual who discovers himself to be no more than actor or arch-dissembler. Marlowe retrieves the stage as the space which defines the actor, thus eschewing its confines as the contained confinement of character. In Marlowe's plays the actor himself becomes the raw material of the drama, his active will the driving mechanism of the plot. The protagonists are actors insofar as they know the worlds they inhabit to be fictional; it is through language alone that their wrought reality maintains its shape and purpose. The ultimate ambition of Marlovian heroes is described by Greenblatt as a desire "to be a character in Marlowe's plays." [26] Their creative instinct resists sublimation and discharges itself instead in the service of a futile and absurd ambition:

> The will to play flaunts society's cherished orthodoxies, embraces what the culture finds loathsome or frightening, transforms the serious into the joke and then unsettles the category of the joke by taking it seriously, courts self-destruction in the interest of the anarchic discharge of its energy. This is play on the brink of an abyss, absolute play.[27]

Greenblatt's description of the Marlovian stage, and his analysis of the figures which traverse "the essential meaninglessness of theatrical space" [28] - a space he equates with the emptiness of a world drained of God's creative imprint - concedes 'nothingness' to be the condition of appearance, and finds that the shape of the stage event, which owes its audacious power to the naming of itself as illusion, constitutes radical disturbance in its confrontation with an emergent and rational 'truth' from which the tragic hero must eventually be effaced. Marlowe's theatre breaks with the Aristotelian system in its exposure of the actor as the agent of the

plot and sole *raison d'être* for the event itself. In so doing he de-historicizes the action, making of history an 'eternal recurrence' wherein the "leap from inchoate appetite to all-consuming project" is repeated compulsively, each successive manifestation mapping man within the framework of catastrophic destiny. Marlowe's heroes were however flashes of brilliance in a world for which the cycle of glorious failure was becoming anathema; where the hero's audacity was doomed to become the arrogant usurpation of a power which assumed an individual life to have more significance than the lives of nations, peoples or masses. A modern politics has no place for heroes exhibiting neither victimhood nor doctrine:

> Reason creeps in like a thief in the night and the most gloriously unreasoning heroism crumbles eventually before the erosion of rationality. If an aim is *necessarily* futile, persistence in it turns out to be no longer heroic but stupid and admiration for the ill-starred hero, doomed by his very heroism too is irrational. This is the predicament in which we stand.[29]

The Tragic Source in Barker's and Soyinka's Theatres

The 'tragic' or 'untimely' man is described by Cioran as one who makes of thought "an extreme act, a risk", in that thought is turned against the thinker in an attempt to "acquire the habit of existence". [30] The tragic form in both Soyinka's and Barker's work describes a theatre which has turned against itself, refusing the dialectical illusion of synthesis, or end product, setting in its place the refractory impulses of an aesthetic drive determined by the interpretative will of the creator. An aesthetics of creation has Nietzschean philosophy as its source; its origins being an overt resistance to the Kantian formulation which places aesthetic sensibility in the spectator's disinterested contemplation of art as an object or totality. The Kantian aesthetic is not concerned with questions regarding the means by which the object appears before the spectator, nor in the interests the object may serve by virtue of its appearance; rather the contemplative mode seeks beauty - or its absence - in the formal qualities of the art object, thus ascribing to it a neutrality which in turn becomes an aspect of its beauty. The Nietzschean aesthetic, in its function as a critique of Kant's philosophy, urges the eviction of the spectator - as the progenitor of the social value which the art object will eventually acquire - from the *concept* of the creative act.[31] This means that creativity must re-define itself in the absence of a reception aesthetic which would grant to its appearance approval or disapproval, which is not to say that it embraces the aims of *l'art pour l'art* - a formation which is vilified by Nietzsche - rather the artist is required to dare, risk, wager the appearance in art of an ethical transformation.

In order to comprehend what Nietzsche means by 'ethical transformation' we must first consider his perception of Kant's 'disinterested' spectator:

> He is the person who considers the action that he does not perform - precisely because he does not perform it - as something to evaluate from the standpoint of the advantage which he draws or can draw from it. The person who does not act considers that he possesses a natural light over action, that he deserves to derive advantage or profit from it.[32]

Thus, what Kant describes as 'disinterestedness' reveals for Nietzsche the 'slave-ethics' of *ressentiment* which by a process of commonality transforms the artwork into an alternative manifestation of vested interest. The ethics of the artist are proposed by Nietzsche as an antidote to the nihilistic impulses of reactive forces - although the antidote goes only so far as to confer upon nihilism an affirmative aspect - in that they are forged in the process of daring and audacious creation rather than death-desiring negation. The transformative affectivity of the artist's work is therefore required to stimulate in the spectator the dawning consciousness of an 'other' life under the 'skin' of the State which struggles to birth stifled by the classifications of 'what is' and awaiting its naming as 'what might be.' The Nietzschean artist is to probe the spectator's individual will to name himself; to re-member the body which reason, in its unificatory impulses, has spread across a range of discourses thus betraying its alternative purpose: the dismantling of the corporeal in order that the conceptual, and therefore comprehensible, man might be born.

The emergence of the tragic in Barker's and Soyinka's theatres is not an ambition with which they begin their dramatic writing but rather a necessity that emerges as a consequence of their engagement with theatrical form and practice. As has already been discussed, their individual pursuit of the means by which they might name themselves in relation to their work engenders not only a critique - in the form of essays - of the social constructions which seek to define their profession and its functions, but also a radical investigation into the nature of the drama *produced* by social and ideological classifications. The act of naming their mode of production as being that of the artist or poet has little impact *per se*, but the genealogical impact of its perspectivized relationship to theatrical discourse substantially shifts the priorities demonstrated by the stage event and its relationship to both the institutional organization of theatre and the audiences engendered by that institution.

In Howard Barker's ***The Europeans***,[33] the newly-restored Hapsburg Monarch, Leopold, gathers together a group of critics with whom he intends to debate the possible emergence of a new art for a new age:

A circle of Critics at The Imperial Academy of Art. Leopold enters to polite applause.

Leopold: Not the room as we would want it. Not the salon we would choose, the swags being somewhat chipped and the putti lacking gilt, but in such pock-marked landscapes imagination might erupt, I call upon you to elucidate the principles of a new art, because the stir of Europe from its sleep commands a terrible and unrelenting movement of the soul. I only have half an hour. What shall the art be like now, you say! [34]

Having sent orders from the triumphant battlefield that the Vienna to which he will return should retain the chaotic ruin of the siege, the primary task Leopold attempts is the self-conscious charting of the city's reconstruction as the locus of cultural and moral values. The imperative issued by Leopold has as its premiss the imposition of order upon the chaos by which they are surrounded. As a liberal monarch he requires of his thinkers an art authenticated by its emergence from the ashes of a culture which is poised to - once again - rise phoenix-like from the very teeth of the Turkish onslaught.

Leopold discovers in the responses of his critics, that there are no creators amongst them, rather they are the makers and instigators of conceptual values minus action. Thus a "People's art", loud in its celebration of heroism and future happiness, is pitched against an "art of shame", proposed by the unpopular Bomberg who cries his fury at those who would claim or own the people without for a moment placing their individual trust in those same people. Leopold, noting - guardedly - that the violent rhetoric aroused by the question of artistic commitment somewhat surpasses the courage of the speakers in confronting the Turks, turns to his commissioned artist in order to test the temper of the creative consciousness. The Painter, confronted by "the bullies of the mind" reveals an artistic sensibility which utterly lacks the will which would make of his cultivated emotional state an act of imaginative affirmation. The iconoclastic attacks of populist critics reduce him to a sobbing incoherence which is answered by the clumsy and impotent attempt of Bomberg to visit his anger physically upon the body of Arst, the People's man.

The silent observer of this spectacle is Starhemberg; Barker's reluctant war hero, described by Leopold's Empress as "a cold and wonderfully imagined man." [35] Recognizing the impulse of the artist in the actions of the post-war man, the Empress confers on him the title of the 'actor', in recognition of his ability to evade the role the State would seek to cast him in, as heroic saviour and defender of the new Europe. The actorly impulse demonstrated by Starhemberg is one that resists a definition of his wartime actions as service to the State. The imposition of titles he recognizes as the collective suffocation of shame and in its stead he seeks

actions which absent from the effects of war the State-bestowed honours which would serve to neutralize its potential for the eruption of a life-affirming nihilism.

Starhemberg proves himself the true artist when, urged to a response by Leopold, he reveals the foundations of a creative aesthetic which depends for its existence upon a reception which acknowledges not the truth of its utterances but rather the manifestation of an imaginative will that engenders them:

> What I need. And what there will be. I need an art which will recall pain. The art that will be will be all flourishes and celebration. I need an art that will plummet through the floor of consciousness and free the unborn self. The art that will be will be extravagant and dazzling. I need an art that will shatter the mirror in which we pose. The art that will be will be all mirrors. I want to make a new man and a new woman but only from the pieces of the old. The new man and new woman will insist on their utter novelty. I ask a lot. The new art will ask nothing.[36]

Starhemberg's need stands as a challenge to the utterly predictable art of a State reconciled to its past. The art is a tragic one insofar as it answers need - and makes of that need its aesthetic - without evaluating the cost, in terms of advantage or loss, for human life, *per se*. The will which speaks Starhemberg's 'need' is the continuation of the conditions of battle in artistic form; it is the individual articulation of that which the action of war answers in the human spirit beyond its collective ideological defence against guilt. The "art which will be" will attempt to stamp itself upon consciousness as a point of arrival, be it the arrival of the populus at shame or celebration; the art *needed* by Starhemberg would deny its goal to be the iteration of being, and posits instead the possibility that a creative ethics finds a veneration of man in his ceaseless pursuit of 'becoming'. To 'become' in Nietzschean terminology is to resist cultural *ressentiment* - this being the creation of culture as a series of iconic excuses for man's proliferated shame and bad conscience - with an artistic will to imaginative interpretation or speculation upon that in man which eternally recurs as the basis of his creative drive. Art and culture are, for Nietzsche, the willed return of originatory impulses from which the reactive forces of society find their flowering. The synthesis attempted by society - as a system of accumulated values - is no more than reaction against man's attempts to become more than he is; thus society seeks to save man from the tragic impulse of a life affirmed by death, and succeeds only by sublimating the instinct to death and sanctifying its reified form in a language permeated by an ideological fetishism for life.

For Barker, after Nietzsche, the theatre which takes as its raw material the actor, finds its apotheosis in the tragic form, renamed as a 'theatre of Catastrophe'; its *apogee* being the moments of man's 'sterility' when belief fails and he is faced

once again with the choice to either rebuild reason through an act of collective 'forgetting', or to affirm the life of the 'unborn' self which struggles into being only at the tremendous individual cost of an assertion that the pain of a life which knows the immanence of death is good:

> ...a theatre of Catastrophe takes as its material the individual and the individual's ability to effect self-identification in a collective or historical nightmare, the moment of beauty is the moment of collision between two wills, the will of the irrational protagonist (the non-ideological) and the will of the irrational State (the officially ideological).[37]

In the work of Wole Soyinka, the tragic impulse finds its birth in a recognition of life as a cycle from which man must constantly seek severance. There is a point of return to which Wole Soyinka's writings continually take his readers, or spectators; this is the swampland to which are committed the futile heroes of revolutionary intent. Soyinka's self-description as an artist, in resistance to the socio-political ideologues of Nation-State formation, forces in his work, the repeated emergence of a site which rivals the structures of national architecture and yet permits limited access only, it being the manifestation of a fertile cultural imagining necessarily beyond the reach of the nationally redeemed. This is the swampland where the road to belief ends and the marshes of unredeemed stretch to fill the horizon.

Thus, in "Who's Afraid of Elesin Oba?", Soyinka takes the reader to a causeway, forged over the swamps which have claimed as victims the fallen bodies of a defeated insurrection: "I stood where Fidel Castro probably stood while the reel of his existence raced through his mind in one violent flashback. I stood, in other words, on a terrain that was severally and simultaneously tragic poetry and revolutionary will." [38] The multifaceted complexity of this terrain is revisited in ***The Man Died***,[39] an autobiographical account of the Soyinka's incarceration during the Nigerian civil war. In chapter twelve the factual accounts of his arrest and solitary confinement, alongside speculation concerning the political agenda to which his life had become inescapably subject, gives way to an interrogation of the creative aesthetics which would lend articulation to his state of being:

> Time vanished. I turned to stone. The world retreated into fumes of swampland.
>
> I have been here before. I have passed through this present point again and again...Desolation increases with my acute certainty that the sensation is deeper than the mere located place or event. It is closer to a phase of being...this ritual of transition is a perpetual one and the acquisition of experience in fording the pass does not lessen its overwhelming sadness...

> What meaning then shall I attach to it, what name, what definition give to the monstrosity of this birth? I try to feed some muscularity into the marshmallow of sensations.[40]

The "muscularity" sought by Soyinka resides in a refusal of the "tragic lure!" which he perceives to offer only a return to the limitations of the "human spirit." Citing Oedipus he vilifies the socially redemptive hero who emerges as proof to the gathered populace that the tragic will has found sublimation in "the blind oracular figure." Soyinka, like Nietzsche, grants that there are conditions of despair from which the human being could not be expected to recover but - again following Nietzsche - he refuses this statement as a negation of life and insists that the eruption of will required in order to confront despair and still choose life initiates the retrieval of "superhuman energies" which would redefine human purpose and finally confront "the historical conspiracy, the literal brain-washing" [41] which elevates the martyrdom of the hero and vanquishes the life-affirming endeavour of his will.

Soyinka is at his most Nietzschean in this moment when his public voice, which had maintained a political, artistic and intellectual appearance in Nigeria throughout the years preceding Biafra's attempted secession, was negated. Throughout his period of imprisonment rumours abounded concerning his death, and the overwhelming feeling described by the writer of ***The Man Died*** is the awareness of non-existence; of a body and a voice which had been temporally and spatially frozen by Gowon's regime. Soyinka's response is to recognize his condition to be no different from that of the masses who are lured by the promise of moral redemption into lives that constitute no more than a systematized and State-sanctioned authorship of their deaths. His only choice is therefore to "think against" that which is deemed to be the 'human' in him and thus produce a manifestation of the will Nietzsche proclaimed to be the 'truth' of tragic intent, a 'truth' which precedes the Aristotelian schema wherein tragedy is hijacked by reason and brought to pity and fear:

> That longing in all human beings that will sooner expend last breath on words of affirmation than conserve it on behalf of life, believing that life is justified if only at the moment of quitting it, the remnant spittle of a parched tongue is launched against the enemy in one defiant gesture of contempt, supplying a final action of hope, of encouragement for the living, validating one's entire being in that last gesture or in a word of affirmation.[42]

The source of Soyinka's tragic form, as manifested in his dramatic writings, lies in his refusal of resignation as an attribute befitting heroism. In refusing the "tragic lure!" he excavates the will that drives a hero whose appearance is conditional upon 'the good of the people', and finds this will to be a scion of the vested political

interests which first creates the "mindless mob" and then renders to them the sacrifice of the potential they possess to be anything other than a mirror of State *virtu*. The task of the artist, he declares, is to retrieve the 'revolutionary' will of a 'people' by exposing the source of their existence to lie, not in the *conservation* of the race - this being akin to the musty relics of life exhibited in a museum culture - but rather in the fearless embrace of actions which may find their *nemesis* in the ultimate destruction of that race in order - paradoxically - that it may be liberated from fear.

In "The Credo of Being and Nothingness",[43] Soyinka examines religious belief as a symptom of fear masquerading as a totalized understanding of the world. He shares with Cioran the conviction that the tragic hero is man freed from systems of fear-based belief and posits in resistance to their "murderous" versions of humanity, the myth-based gods of the Yoruba pantheon. The myths which brought these deities into being, he contends, were paradigms of man in search of knowledge but lacking the political instinct which furnished knowledge with its contemporary corollary, institutionalized power. The Yoruba pantheon lacks therefore the dictum which he perceives to drive the major world religions, namely: "I believe, therefore I am." Soyinka's inherent critique of Cartesian rationality allows him further, the recognition of a second absence, concomitant upon the first: "You do not believe, therefore you are not."[44]

In his seminal essay "The Fourth Stage",[45] Soyinka attempts an account of the Yoruba tragic aesthetic. This essay is a landmark in literary intent, both because it marks the first attempt by an African writer to create a non-western *poetics*, and also because the task Soyinka undertakes is supremely self-conscious in that he attempts the *writing* of that which is non-discursive; which does not take as its priority the rational validity of the premiss upon which it is founded. In so doing Soyinka's intent meets Nietzschean philosophy insofar as Nietzsche posits as the 'birth' of tragedy the moment at which the mythical orientation of man collides with the birth of historical or reason-based man.[46] Tragedy is, for Nietzsche, the sublimation of myth into literary form; a process which draws into the arena of dramatic art the contending deities of Apollo "the god of light [who] reigns over the fair illusion of our inner world of fantasy",[47] and Dionysos through whose worship man "feels himself to be godlike and strides with the same elation and ecstasy as the gods he has seen in his dreams." [48]

In Nietzsche's ***The Birth of Tragedy***, Apollo, the moulder of illusions which make the suffering life bearable, contends with the transformational qualities of Dionysos which defy plastic form in their promiscuous relationship to a life underpinned by rational purpose. The task of the tragic poet is to render, in language, that which

explodes the reasoning capabilities of written linguistic usage; the will of the Nietzschean tragic poet comprises the writing of man in his desire to be more than the creative impulses of his language will allow - it is the transcendence of language as proof of being in order that language may represent man in the condition of his 'becoming'. Thus Nietzschean tragedy is the constant re-ordering of that which 'is' as a means of discovering that which may be. The tragic poet takes as his material language as utility and transforms it into language as irresponsible and promiscuous possibility:

> Acting is...a contradiction of the tragic spirit, yet it is also its natural complement. To act, the Promethean instinct of rebellion, channels anguish into creative purpose which releases man from a totally destructive despair, releasing from within him the most energetic, deeply combative inventions...Only the battle of the will is thus primally creative; from its spiritual stress springs the soul's despairing cry which proves its own solace...[49]

In "The Fourth Stage", written as the collapse of the Nigerian State became an inevitability, Soyinka makes of his "swampland" a domain, and names it as the "chthonic realm"; as the birth-site of the tragic will. Soyinka peoples the realm with mythological deities both from the Nietzschean Greek pantheon and from the Yoruba, but he maintains contemporary links with the society to which he stands as artist by locating its bounds in a stage of consciousness beyond the three stages of despair and nationalist capitulation outlined in "The Writer in a Modern African State".[50] This is the 'Fourth Stage' wherein the death of the writer may herald the rebirth of the artist and of the race to which he stands as paradoxical promise.

Soyinka parallels Nietzsche's deities - Apollo and Dionysos - with Obatala "the placid essence of creation" and Ogun "the creative urge and instinct, the essence of creativity." [51] Where Nietzsche proposed tragedy as a provisional synthesis of his two contradictory elements however - a synthesis he was later to reject as a manifestation of the dialectic - Soyinka refuses "Obatala's patient suffering" as the "well-known aesthetics of the saint" [52] and allows only the rebellious impulse of Ogun the status of mythopoeic tragedy.

Ogun is described by Soyinka as the first 'actor', the transitive verb being used ritually *and* theatrically in order to maintain the ambiguity which lies at the heart of the actor's profession. The terrifying plunge of the deity into the chthonic realm, "the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche" [53] answers a need shared by gods and man alike, to reunite the divine essence of the Yoruba race with the manifestation of man as finite, incomplete and lacking the "re-creative intelligence" which makes of his suffering a burden to be borne rather than a pathway to transitional will. The metaphysical abyss stands in direct contradiction to Utopian

ideals which might promise man a release from his present suffering via the agency of future progress or the ameliorative affects of historical understanding. Soyinka is firm in his resolve that tragic destiny resides in the moment at which man recognizes himself to be present as object only, to forces which threaten the annihilation of that which is perceived to be 'self'. This is man shorn of the individual self, as active principle, and relegated to the ranks of the 'We', whilst his conceptual counterparts - wrought of discursive evolution - take centre stage as protagonist and antagonist, now recast in the roles of thesis and antithesis. The only scenario available to man's usurpers is a driven progress towards a synthesis to which the historical man of the 'meanwhile' stands as spectator. The tragic moment described by "The Fourth Stage" is the fruit of a choice whereby man, perceiving incipient sterility, siezes upon his destiny and in an act of supreme hubris, resolves to take possession of the prize which is sought by forces inimical to life:

> [W]hen man is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts (the material of drama) have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of this gulf, he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses upon his spiritual or psychic perception. It is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of will.[54]

It is at the moment when life disallows action, either through the disabling of the individual's physical impact upon his environment or through an individual cessation of belief in the efficacy of action, that Soyinka posits Ogun as the choice confronting that which in man refuses to die; the creative will. Ogun is described as the embodiment of 'Will'; the paradoxical understanding that creation and destruction are the twinned contradictions which fuel the artistic consciousness of man: "he is a profound artist only to the degree to which he comprehends and expresses the principle of destruction and re-creation." [55] Ogun is neither *pathos* - this being the domain of Obatala - nor redemptive idyll. The danger inherent in Ogun as challenging will resides in Soyinka's combination of his artistic impulse with a knowledge and harnessing of technology. Thus Ogun is the wielder of iron-ore, the carrier of metallic construction and creation to man. His journeying across the gulf of transition results, not only in the forging of an artistic will but also in the Promethean gift to man of a potentially murderous knowledge of technological progress. Finally, Ogun is a warlike god; he shares none of Obatala's serenity and his founding myth contains within it an account of his warlike ecstasy which leads, tragically, to the annihilation of his own race. Ogun is not the carrier of a morality to man; he is finally a force inimical to systems of social survival, his concern being the irresponsible retrieval of an instinct for life.

Myth, states Soyinka, is the history of a people's will, rather than a recounting of their historical progress. Myth bears witness to the means by which a race survives its own destruction through the willed processes of creation and re-creation. What Soyinka is ultimately attempting to express in his Yoruba poetics is a supremely Nietzschean position whereby race is symptomatic of a 'Will to Life' which counters the social organization of life as a mode of surviving the knowledge of death. Nietzsche describes cultural ethos - as opposed to social ethos - in the following way:

> The finished product of species activity is *not* the responsible man himself or the moral man, but the autonomous and supramoral man...He alone "is able to" promise, precisely because he is no longer responsible to any tribunal. The product of culture is not the man who obeys the law, but the sovereign and legislative individual who defines himself by power over himself, over destiny, over the law: the light, the free, the *irresponsible*.[56]

Soyinka's deity, Ogun, forges the abyss, and is torn apart by chthonic forces in the process, as a means of reconstituting the Will which forms a communicative link between man and the creation of his deities. The existence in mythical memory of Ogun's anguish and final triumph represents the only hope at a moment. when Soyinka perceived the 'tragic' destiny to be once more confronting Yoruba consciousness. Underpinning "The Fourth Stage" is an awareness perpetuated throughout his prison writings, namely, that the 'man' dies who indifferently delivers his destiny into the hands of others, thereby forgetting that to live is to dare confrontation with the abyss of non-belief.

Howard Barker's Mythical Realm of Catastrophe.

> [E]very generation of archaeologists who dug at Troy/Hisarlik found what they wanted to find, and made of the story what they would. Schliemann, Dorpfeld, Blegen all did it, and I suppose we go on doing it today: such is the power of the legend that most people have found it impossible to exclude it from discussion of the *evidence*.[57]

It was the age of Enlightenment that made of the Trojan War a legend; the search for historical proof of its existence in chronological time wrenched Troy from its mythical moorings and attempted its re-location in an historical narrative accessible to contemporary interpretation. Howard Barker's ***The Bite of the Night***,[58] first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in September 1988, shuns the illumination provided by archaeological excavation and has his catastrophic hero, Dr Savage, seek the darkness of the Classical myth: "Darkness permits the thought, darkness licenses, it bites, and sometimes you can be bitten by love and sometimes by fear." [59]

Barker takes as his setting for ***The Bite of the Night***, "*The Ruins of a University*" described by the archaelogist Schleimann - whose narrative creation of an historical Troy parallels the progress of Savage into the depths of its mythical structures - as a "terrible place" where "tortured thinkers thrashed each other in pursuit of a deity they called Truth." [60] Here we encounter Dr Savage, the last of the lecturers to quit the site of demolition, flanked by the remnants of his family and secretly observed by his erstwhile wife who declares her freedom to reside in the choice she has made to 'lose herself' in the chaos of fallen cities where structures of civilized intent give way to the plunge of the victors' flesh into "the well of skirt." [61]

Contrary to Schleimann's observations, Dr Savage seeks, not Truth, but Knowledge which, he declares, is founded upon belief. The circle of dependency from which Savage seeks deliverance via the vehement iteration of his detestation for reified experience is made up of his son, his father and his one remaining student, all of whom are subject to the violent scorn of his invective, none of whom are able to break the bonds of hatred which hold them in their structured relationships of mutual impotence and shame. Hogbin, the student requires of Savage a foothold of truth upon which he may hoist himself beyond the confines of a mundane existence. The Homeric myth is for both of them the articulation of a need to journey beyond the politics of *ressentiment*; a desire which is demonstrated in their mutual fracturing of academic debate:

Hogbin: I heard the reggae through the wall. The beat bored into me. I looked at Homer. Dead letters swum before my eyes. Old Europe struggling with the beat. The beat! The fucking beat! **Give us knowledge, Doctor Savage!** (*Pause*)

Savage: The Trojan War. (*Pause*) The Trojan War occurred because a married woman lent her body to a stranger. (*Pause*) That's all for today. (*Pause*)

Hogbin: I knew that.

Savage: Excellent.

Hogbin: **I knew that, git.**

Savage: You read it. You did not know it. Knowledge is belief. (*He gets up to go.*)

Hogbin: **Don't get up.** (*Pause*) The seduction of Helen. The seduction of Helen is a metaphor for the commercial success of the tribes of Asia Minor and the subsequent collapse of the Peloponnesian carrying trade. Only a military alliance of the Greek states restored the monopoly. In classical fashion the outcome of trade wars is the enslavement of populations in the interests of cost-free labour and the eradication of the infrastructure of the rival enterprise, namely the razing of cities. (*Pause*)

Savage: No, it was cunt.[62]

In the absence of institutional academic ambition, the debate becomes a description of need and desire. The Trojan War is for both of them an absence or void into which may be poured the exigencies of a life as yet unlived. The archaeologist, Schleimann - by contrast - seeks in his excavations to extract and translate artifacts which prove the existence of an 'ancient' world causally linked to our own by the thread of history. He digs in order to discover "the bed, the seed and womb of Europe" in a time 'before', to be designated as the birth of European culture against which future development and progress may be measured.

Where Schleimann seeks the scientific proof of his theorem that a legendary Troy may be discovered in the geological stratifications of the archaelogist's dig, Doctor Savage, the Homerist, initiates an excavation of the mind's encrustations in his quest for the mythical Troy sedimented in the contemporary European imagination. Barker, like Soyinka, makes of his hero's quest a process of transition whereby the journey undertaken by Savage charts the progress of contemporary historical man towards the possibility of his imaginatively confronting the creative impulse of his own eruptive genealogy. The individual excavation of the mind's strata becomes, therefore, the dramatic conflict of the Barkerian stage, and the spectator is invited to witness Savage, a man who thinks 'against himself', becoming both antagonist and protagonist in the catastrophic action of the play's events.

Barker describes Savage's mythical excavations as a "series of inspirations" which free him from domestic dependency and let fly the imaginative impulse to mythical orientation. The 'family life' is to Savage what reading books of Marxist theory is to his student Hogbin; the substitution of a discursive codification for the experience of man as "the product of culture", the latter being defined by the power he brings to bear upon himself, his destiny and the law. The Doctor, having hugged the impotence of his hatred, arrives at the juncture of despair in his recognition of the Enlightened life as a muted cry of deferred death:

> I woke in the night. I woke in the night and the sky was purple with the bruise of cities. I thought of avenues where they sleep the sleep of family love, the pillowcase, the nightdress, the twitching of the poodle. **You call that life?** [63]

Resolving to embrace the fear against which domesticity provides fortification, Savage relieves himself of his family, rejecting the space they occupy as representative of a site of a reconciliation with death, and commits himself to the realm of the mythical imagination, the boundaries of which are, as yet unknown to him. To this end Savage gives his son away to the wholly untrustworthy Macluby, in order that he may be apprenticed to the soap trade, and forces his father to

commit suicide, through a brutal exposition on the nature of their familial relationship:

> **Savage:** I hated you. Your mundane opinions. Your repetition of half-truths. Straddling my back. You burden. You dead weight...Give us some time for my own needs. Old bones. Old pelt. [64]

In this dramatic moment of violent speculation, Savage is inspired to an understanding of knowledge as that which lies beyond pity and kindness. This is what Nietzsche has described as the "*species-activity*" of man in the formation of his culture: "the labour performed by man upon himself during the greater part of the existence of the human race, his entire *prehistoric* labour ...notwithstanding the severity, tyranny, stupidity and idiocy involved in it." [65] Thus, the dying father's reminiscences concerning an episode in his life - redolent with nostalgic images of a freedom glimpsed during his experiences as a soldier in the Second World War - provide for the audience a momentary respite of recognition and pity, but these are juxtaposed with a Savage for whom the excoriation of guilt and memory as delicious regret, represents an opening of the floodgates to an alternative structure of knowledge, born of the pain-sodden night. Now freed into a mode of experience which acknowledges its audacious hunger for individual 'truth', Savage is able to make of the stage a world of speculative enactment over which hovers Foucault's ominous statement: "Knowledge is not for understanding; it is made for cutting." [66]

With his family gone, Dr Savage's academic obsession with Helen of Troy becomes a speculative reality. The moral accretions torn away, Savage enters into a union with Helen which explodes the received conventions of love in its participants' mutual exploration of a desire engendered by violence and pain. Their relationship is characterized by its physical immediacy, but the framework within which its catastrophic potential may be unleashed is - necessarily - mythical:

> Helen of Troy is described by Homer and all who follow him as youthful, beautiful, impossible-to-see-without-desire, etc., and Helen herself as reluctant, the victim of her appearance, and so on. But we know beauty has nothing to do with desire, and that a beautiful woman cannot launch a thousand ships, whereas we suspect that a desirable woman might.[67]

Savage finds in Helen "all that is unknowable" and discovers, according to Barker's schema, that desire, freed from its finite goals of procreation, progress and reconciled union, serves as a pretext to the mayhem of Nietzsche's "*species-activity*", which in turn allows man to know himself as a being beyond rational understanding. In ***The Bite of the Night***, the iconic figure of Helen is made flesh by Barker who de-fetishizes the Homeric idolatry of youthful perfection by

showing her in her maturity. With age comes the recognition of her manipulated persona and in the ruins of vanquished Troy she berates her creator, Homer, for making of her body a solution to the mythical question-mark her presence might otherwise continue to engender. In a prosody which celebrates violence, she too knows violence, she insists, and in songs which celebrate her beauty she questions the absence of her will:

> I loved Troy, because Troy was to sin. Why did you never say that? But him who took me there was not a sinner only an exhibitionist, and not my equal. **Don't you know what hell it is to find no man your equal?** Say that in your next book. That was the agony of Troy, not slippery swords or old men massacred...[68]

Only in Savage, the seeker after knowledge, does Helen find a worthy adversary in catastrophic intent. Helen 'loves' Savage insofar as his violent irresponsibility calls to life in her the eruption of a willed power - formerly negated by Homer - in its confrontation with death.

In selecting the confrontation of his domestic self with his passion for Helen, Dr Savage is forced to confront knowledge as belief in its most terrifying aspect; namely the desire to *know* that which is unknowable and thus to destroy the ôbject of veneration in an individual re-creation of its essence. Knowledge is the action of human perception upon the body which proves impervious to thought; as such it is unmerciless in the unleashing of its force and the contending of its amoral will. Barker, in commenting upon Nigel Terry's portrayal of Savage in the RSC's production of the play, noted the importance of "innocence" as the seed of his violent onslaught upon Helen's body:

> He found a posture in which to watch the unforgivable act. In this posture he conveyed the combination of horror and curiosity that attends all of us in the presence of pain. Eventually, this posture developed an ease, a casualness, an objectivity, which was the essence of his corruption. In the beginning he suffered the horror of parting with sympathy, and at the end, he bathed in his own indifference. Thus in this figuring of the body, he revealed the labour of his journey.[69]

The "pruning" of Helen's body, which leaves her at the end of the play a shaved torso, begins with Savage's discovery of rhetoric as political instinct. As Savage's journeying through the strata of mythical thought progresses, so Troy transforms, manifesting itself in a succession of regimes, each one offering an articulation of power masquerading as belief, and each one extending the inventiveness of Savage's monstrous thoughts in relation to Helen as the object of his desire for knowledge. In the second of the twelve Troys through which Savage and Helen will pass, public celebration has become an edict by which to censor privacy and

the power of the individual will. Spawned by the guard of the victorious army, "Happy Troy" insists upon the retrieval of instinct and the instantaneous translation of thought into accessed speech. Urged into eager participation by Shade, the brutish creator of the new constitution, Savage passes his first sentence upon Helen's body, seduced by a hunger for the knowledge of thought as retributive action:

Shade: I see no place for Helen, do you, Savage? No place for her in Laughing Troy? Her ego and her filthy legs? Her mouth and acts of endless privacy? She is all I and this is the age of we...

Savage: I has no arms. (*Pause. He looks up, half-curious.*) Does it? The letter? (*Pause*) I is a single stem? (*Pause*)

Creusa: (*With rising horror*) Oh, God, he's -

Shade: (*To Savage*) Go on. More cogitation. Further elaboration of the infant thought...

Creusa: Listen -

Savage: **I think because I have to.**

Shade: Oh, yes, you do, you do.

Savage: **And having thought it - out thought! Vile object, out for scrutiny!** [70]

Savage's union with a politics that will sanction the birth of the monstrous thought and absolve him of the responsibility for its affectivity lends him a temporary power over the development of Troy and, in his passion for Helen - who remains, despite her loss of limbs, unknowable and desirable - the "gulf of imagination yawns" promising a limitless striving to reach to the end of thought itself.

The final seminar, offered by Savage to his pupil Hogbin, involves the transmission of knowledge under the guise of political expediency. Hogbin, having fathered an imperfect child, is, in the context of the third Troy - named "Mum's Troy" wherein the voice of the child is interpreted as law - named as a "genetic criminal". Confronted with the possibility of a violent death, he appeals to Savage, now masquerading as the Patriarch, to offer his advice. In response Savage recollects the mythical mist proffered by Athene as a disguise and suggests that maybe 'opinion' may serve as a mist with which to confound one's enemies when all other hiding-places have proved useless. Heeding his advice, Hogbin graduates from student to find his true vocation as "accountant", the word being used in Barker's work to define the instrument of rational organization visited upon the chaos of undefined experience. Hogbin begins his transition with a return to the ruins of Helen's body, which he names as the source to which all blame might be

attached. In a process of knowing self-effacement he elevates the innate instinct of the common soldiers who arrive to take him to his death, and suggests that lurking behind the utilitarian violence of their profession may be a foetal knowledge of the world struggling to find its birth in the articulation of a value system, or morality. Helen, Hogbin suggests, may be the cause of their unhappiness; the boundary beyond which lies their scarcely comprehended potential for fulfilment. The shaving of Helen's limbs, Hogbin acknowledges, can mean little to soldiers carrying out orders, but the naming of Helen as a crime against their assumed rights as human beings may prove the key to a life with future purpose. Draped in the disguise of language, Hogbin effects the miracle which Nietzsche attributes to the eruption of the "slave-mentality"; he separates action from language and places in the schism between the two a moral sensibility masquerading as 'belief':

> [Popular morality] espouses no belief more ardently than that it is within the discretion of the strong to be weak, of the bird of prey to be a lamb. Thus they assume the right of calling the bird of prey to account for being a bird of prey. We can hear the oppressed, downtrodden, violated whispering among themselves with the wily vengefulness of the impotent, 'Let us be unlike those evil ones. Let us be good. And the good shall be he who does not do violence...who shuns all that is evil, and altogether asks very little of life.' [71]

As the light of incipient belief shines upon the soldiers faces, Hogbin arrives at an understanding that **"The - Word - Saves - Life!"**, [72] in making impotent the active force to which - henceforth - language will stand as judgement and redemption. The perfection of Hogbin's strategy lies not only in the saving of his own skin but also the refutation of violence on the part of his erstwhile aggressors. It is to Hogbin, therefore, in his role as saviour and divine legislator, that the next stage of Helen's pruning falls. Equal to the argument, but not to the action, Hogbin relieves himself of the stage presence of Savage - who proves the triumphant possibility of the impossible act - and allows the death which had proved inspiration to his strategic manipulation of language, to now permeate his body in full gaze of the spectators. Hogbin wills his own death as a wholly paradoxical affirmation of a life which refuses to offer itself as evidence to the shameful approbation of a 'slave-ethics'; a redemption born of fear.

The 'catastrophic' form of Barker's play lies in its central collision between the mythical Helen who is the manifestation, in flesh and language, of a pure will which cannot cease willing even though the outcome may be devastating, and the mortal Dr Savage whose will - in its requirement for belief - is unalterably sublimated by an instinct for survival. Thus, like his theatrical predecessor in the quest for knowledge, Dr Faustus, the will to know is predicated upon the

continuation of life and not upon the voraciousness of a will which knows its death to be immanent. In loving Savage, Helen knows that she embraces a will equal to her own but one which must, if it is to survive, destroy her. As the action of the play proceeds it is the nature of her death which assumes vital importance to her; this being essential to her articulation of her final triumph over knowledge. As Troy falls for the last time, Savage explores the dawning realisation that he hates Helen and orders, by political decree, that she should die. Intuiting this she cries:

> I want to be killed. But in a gush of violence. I want to be beaten out of life by some mad male all red about the neck and veins outstanding like the protesting prostitute in the bite of the night, discovered all brain and sheet and stocking. **Not this cold political thing.**[73]

Helen's 'cold' death is no more than the retraction of Savage's will from her corporeal being as a prelude to her cultural assimilation into a version of the Homeric legend cleansed of the mythical blood and guts into which the Doctor first desired to plunge his hungry mind. Savage's son, who at the beginning of the play is apprenticed to the soap trade, now discerns an 'opening' for Helen, via the transformation of her essential qualities into a perfumed commodity to which all women will have equal access. The final 'pruning' of Helen is thus the levelling of her experience to an equality shared by all women everywhere: Helen is to become universally 'understood'.

For Savage, the final act of destruction, which destroys in the pursuit of knowledge the very object which served as stimulus to his quest, leads him to his greatest discovery. Confronting Helen's executioner he insists that his moment of triumph is shared:

> **Savage:** **I insist that you imagine.** (*Epsom stops sweeping.*) To have had Helen, imagine it...
>
> **Epsom:** Trying...
>
> **Savage:** Yes, but to have had Helen, and to have no longer, **Imagine that.** (*Epsom shrugs*) The greater the love, the more terrible the knowledge of its absence. No sooner did she love me than I longed for her death, **And you call yourself a monster!** (*Pause*) [74]

The immense will to knowledge possessed by Savage, now fed by his final act of iconoclasm, kills not only his desire which wrought the action of the drama, but also absents from the imagination the possibility of Helen as anything other than history's Trojan whore. Barker, however, refuses Savage's political transformation of Helen, and has her survive in the ruins of Troy. Savage ends the play in the ruins of the University, alone in his awareness that the will he carries has the

capacity only to destroy. Now indifferently acknowledged by his successful son, Savage attempts, like his father before him, to commit suicide with the shard of a broken plate. Finding himself unable to enact violence upon his own flesh, he looks to Macluby, the Soap Boiler, to explain his impotence:

Macluby: What do you think suicide is, a solitary act? It's peopled with absences.

Savage: I have absences.

Macluby: You murdered everything, and long for nothing. Aren't you already dead? (*He picks up his bag and walks away.*)

Savage: That's knowledge, then...[75]

Barker leaves his spectators with the terrifying spectacle of man as an object of disgust; the emblem of catastrophe in a world which, like Helen, has been shorn of its potential for the affirmative mobility of desire. Savage begins the play with a need to 'adore' the genius of Homer; in a godless existence the myth of Troy alone offers him the possibility of veneration for a 'life' which would burst the contours of sublimated vengeance and hate. In myth he relocates the power of life as the 'appearance' of desire beyond recourse to judgement and morality. The catastrophe of his discovery lies in the innate condition of his own appearance as the seeker after knowledge; the manifestation of contemporary man. To love Helen is, therefore - for Savage - to anatomise both Helen's body and his own desire in order that meaning retain its transcendence of a fleshy corporeality:

> Nihilism, the experience of the exhaustion of meaning, amounts to a grand weariness, a 'grand disgust', on the part of man, directed toward himself as well. Nothing is worth much anymore, everything comes down to the same thing, everything is equalized. Everything is the same and equivalent: the true and the false, the good and the bad. Everything is outdated, used up, old, dilapidated, dying: an undefined agony of meaning, an unending twilight: not a definite annihilation of significations, but their indefinite collapse.[76]

In ***The Bite of the Night***, Barker poses - for both the actor and the spectator - the Nietzschean question which concerns itself not with the temporal/historical persona, but rather with the condition to which man must address himself if his nature is to be understood: 'What is the will that articulates man?' The catastrophe recognized by the play is that of a species wholly regulated by an instinct to destruction, without its concomitant urge to create. The 'end' of man, represented by the final image of Savage slumped in the ruins of thought, articulates a weary disgust with the cycle of a 'will to knowledge' premised upon the destruction of the object of that knowledge.

Homer, when considering the creation of his *Odyssey* earlier in the play admits:

> When Troy fell I followed Odysseus. I followed him because I could not bring myself to look into the ruins. We all knew, there was a history in the ruins. But I thought, there will be no public for a song about the ruins...[77]

Barker makes of the ruins of Troy a 'threnody' to be repeated at every ruined site from which the gaze of the pioneers of progress have turned. The threnody is, however, a lament for death and not death itself. In *The Bite of the Night* Savage dares to act upon the will to knowledge, and finds that the journey inscribed in its progress leads to the end of belief, to nihilism. The result of his dare is to return to the place where he began; the ruins of knowledge, now transformed into the abyss of non-belief. The futility of Savage's quest, paradoxically, presents the possibility for a 'life' which embraces absence as its condition. The radical nature of Barker's catastrophic theatre is to dare to leave his spectator no means of redemption; thus the play ends with both Savage and spectator contemplating ruined belief and finding there a history to which artistic consciousness alone stands sentinel.

Wole Soyinka's Asphalt Swamp.

Although Wole Soyinka's adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* [78] could be said to illustrate most clearly the tragic schema initiated in "The Fourth Stage", *The Road*. [79] which shares its gestational period with that of the essay on Yoruba tragic form - seems to me to offer a more intimate - and therefore uncertain - relationship with the stage as a site of tragic potential. In *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*,[80] Katrak offers the following quotation as illustration of the status the play achieves in Soyinka's *oeuvre*:

> *The Road* is based on what I might call a personal intimacy which I have developed with a certain aspect of the road...it is a very strange personal experience which developed out of my travels on the road. It was almost a kind of exorcism writing that play...I consider *The Road* one of the three personal plays I have written...It concerns the reality of death.[81]

The play - despite the fact that Soyinka describes its form as filmic - utilizes a classical structure within which the events of a day, between sunrise and sunset, are placed before the spectator. There is one location only for the action, this being "*a road-side shack*" which doubles as a store selling spare-parts and a palm-wine bar, erected in the shadow of an imposing Victorian church-steeple. The action of the play conforms to Aristotelian unity in that it concerns the quest of its protagonist "Professor" for "the Word" by which everyday life may be illumined as 'meaning' rather than as the desultory re-iteration of existence. The frame provided by

Soyinka's demonstration of the Classical form is however broken by the addition of a prologue and epilogue which attribute mythical, rather than historical, consequence to the events unfolding in the course of the drama. Thus, in place of the telling of a narrative by which the *dramatis personae* may be contextualized as characters, Soyinka offers the articulation of a silence in his lyrical exposition of the "the religious cult of flesh dissolution": the *agemo*.

The *agemo* is described by Soyinka in a prefatory note as "the movement of transition; it is used in the play as a visual suspension of death." [82] His framing of the drama with a poetic statement concerning a state of ritual consciousness which attempts mortal comprehension of death as the absence of 'appearance' in life, thus lends an alternative status to the actor/characters that take part in the intervening events:

> The thing about *agemo* that I use essentially in a sort of representative way, is a masquerade. There are many forms of *agemo* festival. Some *agemo* are just like any other *egúngún* masquerade. There are certain others who dance within mats rolled around their bodies. The human being, the form, is there [inside the mats]. After a while, this form dances, dances into a terrific whirl and then it just collapses. There is absolutely nothing inside the mat...It's actually a kind of illusion but it's done in the open, in the courtyard, and suddenly one sees that there is nothing, just a fold of mats, collapsed.[83]

In a poem which prefaces the action of the play, and in the words spoken by the Professor at the play's close, Soyinka attempts to reproduce in language that which the *agemo* offers as an illusion in the courtyard; the clothing of nothingness in material form.[84] As this contextualizing device suggests, the themes of death as absence, and of life as the illusion of mobility and presence are revisited throughout ***The Road***, thus making of theatre a paradigm for the transformative possibilities inherent in the apprehension of illusion as a central matrix of man's perceptions.

Many of Soyinka's commentators have described ***The Road*** as interrupted ritual, and Oyin Ogunba extends this thesis to suggest that such interruption allows Soyinka examination of his major pre-occupation as a dramatist: "The stage between being and not-being." [85] This reading of the text creates, I would like to suggest, an over-dependence upon a central understanding of the figure of Murano, a mute palm-wine tapper who has been adopted by the Professor following his being wrenched from a state of trance during a Driver's Festival celebrating Ogun, the god of the road. Murano, the carrier of the Ogunian mask in the festival, appears in the action of the play as a non-character, his condition being that of one suspended between the life of the mortal and Ogun's divine essence; his tongue

locked into a silence, perpetually in thrall to the apprehension of non-being to which the *egúngún* carriers are traditionally privy.[86] Through Murano, the Professor hopes to achieve communication with the essence to which the *egúngún* mask gives appearance; the knowledge of life which is borne by the dead. To this end he nurtures the mute, anxiously awaiting the moment when "the crust cracks" [87] and the divine essence emerges from its mortal chrysalis in the form of language saturated with knowledge.

Derek Wright in ***Wole Soyinka Revisted*** perceives the same dramatic problems inherent in Murano as are exhibited in the appearance on stage of the "Half-Child" in ***A Dance of the Forests.*** Once more, Soyinka appears to be presenting to his spectators a symbol for which the matrix of meaning remains obsure, or at the very least ambiguous, thus creating in the centre of his dramatic structure an absence or void which proves potentially deleterious to the fragile structuring of the dramatic action to which it serves as pivot. Once more, Wright attempts to equate the dramatic figure with the social conditions of its engendering:

> Murano is an image of the new nation-state, suspended between worlds and uncertain of its survival of the historical accident of independence, and the road is the historical track upon which it careers aimlessly forward in its passage between a lost past and an ill-prepared, uncertain future.[88]

Although this reading may prove seductive in its creation of a 'meaning' for what Soyinka has essentially created as a blank page to be placed before both the Professor and the spectator, it in no way answers, or even applies itself to, the overriding concerns of Soyinka's drama. Wright, in his analysis, falls prey to the same delusion as the Professor, in his assumption that Murano's silence is the masking of substantive knowledge. It may be more profitable to consider that what Soyinka achieves in the figure of Murano is the presentation of the unmasked mystery of the death cult which proves to be nothing more than a mute palm-wine tapper who, without the appearance of the mask - which clothes mortal flesh in the appearance of divine essence - articulates 'nothing' beyond the trade by which he earns his living.

Although Murano is the carrier of the *agemo* in the play's narrative structure, the arcane knowledge which he is presumed by the Professor to possess serves, I would like to suggest, as merely an element of the mythical structure which allows the events of the dramatic action to transcend the Aristotelian determination of tragic form. Let us return for a moment to Soyinka's description of the *agemo* as "a kind of illusion...done in the open, in a courtyard" and consider how this parallels the stage event which he then places before his audience as a discourse on

death. The concept of 'acting' is of central importance in ***The Road***, probably more so than in any other play, and it is not by co-incidence that the 'actor' achieves centrality in a play which takes as its *dramatis personae* men whose lot it is to deal in death. These are the satellites who find their 'living' on the fringes of the carrying trade supported by the vast networks of roads so essential to the industrial life and progress of the nation. For Soyinka, the road is the life pulse of an organism; it bleeds its waste with the regularity of a woman's menstrual cycle, its foundations are fertile with the growth of twisted metal wrought into signs of hazard and warning, and it has its harvest of death which provides sustenance to those who understand its dark husbandry. In Soyinka's play it is the understanding of death provided, or articulated, by this organism which proves the central fascination of the action.

In ***The Road*** Soyinka gathers upon the stage an exclusively male cast, reminiscent of the *egúngún* masquerade, or death cult, which allows only men to participate in its rites, whose lives represent nothing more than a waiting-room for death. These are the layabouts, touts, drivers and forgers who contribute to their society nothing more than the proliferated potential for accidental or untimely death.[89] They are the new mythology spawned of the asphalt who, like the mythic deities of the Yoruba pantheon, find in the maws of death the transformative potential which lends to life its joyous and terrifying illusion of reality. Soyinka's transgressors are, however, unknowing in their unique relationship to death; a fact which is underlined by the presence of the - relatively - educated and charismatic Professor who seeks meaning where those who gather at his nightly dispensation of palm-wine require no more than the continued suspension of their inevitable deaths.

Soyinka's assembled cast are not, therefore, the willing traversers of the abyss, although their deity is the same Ogun who forged the first road in his attempt to link human and divine essence. Rather they are accidental inhabitants of the void which denies them tragic status but nevertheless acquaints them intimately with a stage of existence outside the parameters of the Nation-State frame. Their lack of a national identity lends to them the consummate art of the actor and concomitant to this, the creation of a pantheon of heroes all of whom are distinguished not by their preparedness for death, but rather by the rapidity by which their absence in life was effected:

Kotonu: Where is Sigidi Ope? Where is Sapele Joe who took on six policemen at the crossing and knocked them all into the river?

Samson: Overshot the pontoon, went down with his lorry.

Kotonu: And Saidu-Say? Indian Charlie who taught us driving? Well, tried to teach you anyway and wore out his soul in the

attempt. Where is Humphrey Bogart? Cimarron Kid? Have you known any other driver take an oil-tanker from Port Harcourt to Kaduna non-stop since Muftau died? Where is Sergeant Burma who treated his tanker like a child's toy?

Samson: Just the same...

Kotonu: Sergeant Burma was never moved by these accidents. He told me himself how once he was stripping down a crash and found the driver was an old comrade from the front. He took him to the mortuary but first he stopped to remove all the tyres.

Samson: He wasn't human.

Kotonu: But he was. He was.[90]

Kotonu's roll-call is made up of fictitious identities which give no indication of any existence beyond that linked to the life of the road. This is a world of heroes and mythologies which, as Kotonu has to remind Samson, is also a representation of humanity. In addition to the semi-deification of the drivers and touts via the acquisition of names which carry with them a history of their owners' triumphs over death, Soyinka makes of their costumes a mask which, again parallelling the *egúngún*, offers the appearance of animated death rather than self-evident life. Early on in the play's action, Salubi, who lacks even the status of a carrier of forged documents and thus is forced into a ceaseless struggle to make his 'appearance' in the gathered throng, acquires a driver's uniform which, he is convinced, will secure for him the living to which it acts as a sign. Samson, observing the transformed Salubi, comments upon the blood-stains with which it is smeared at the front. Notwithstanding Salubi's protestations that they are merely palm-wine stains, the spectator is given an insight into the nature of an existence which depends for its continuity upon the re-animation of the uniforms of the dead.

The means by which the living cleave to an identity which will differentiate them from the ranks of their dead colleagues, and the dangers of self-effacement confronted by those living in such close proximity with death, is illustrated by Soyinka in an incident which involves Samson in the mimicry of his erstwhile colleague, Sergeant Burma. Urged into an imitation of Burma's characteristics by the assembled crowd of palm-wine drinkers, Samson takes the opportunity to display his skills as actor and impersonator. Beginning with the voice, and then progressing to take on the physical characteristics, he finally 'inhabits' his uniform and offers a Burma-like oration on the nature of the road-trade:

Samson: Business na business. If you see accident make you tell me I go run go there before those useless men steal all the spare part finish.

P.Joe: Sergeant Burma looked forward to retiring and doing the spare part business full time. But of course his brakes failed going down a hill...

(*The group begins to dirge, softly as if singing to themselves. Samson's face begins to show horror and he gasps as he realizes what he has been doing.*)

Samson: (*Tearing off the clothes.*) God forgive me! Oh God, forgive me. Just see, I have been fooling around pretending to be a dead man. Oh God I was only playing I hope you realize. I was only playing.[91]

The fine line drawn between acting and possession is one to which Soyinka returns in a number of his plays.[92] In ***The Road***, however, the mystery of the dissolution of the self and its reconstitution as acted appearance forms part of the major substance of the play. The dramatic device that allows Samson's playful imitation to suddenly open to him the chasm of non-being, is one which reflects the structure of the play as a whole. The bargain struck by each of Soyinka's characters with the road, and with the death it promises them, is to experience life in the joyful indifference to moral and social boundaries thus being possessors of a knowledge unbearable to those for whom death remains an undefined terror. Each of them knows that the road will claim them, and that the heroism and audacity of their short lives is born of a comradeship with the agent of their own dissolution. Theirs is therefore a brutal existence transversed with the eruption into life of death itself. The translation of death into disappearance, which constitutes a willed unknowingness on the part of the layabouts, makes of their lives however, agencies which serve to proliferate death as a condition denuded of its creative potential. Their dulling of pain in response to death as an everyday occurence and source of profitable trade, habituates them to a realm of non-being in which their lives mirror the muted potential of Murano's 'trance-state'; only their occupations articulate them, beyond that is nothingness.

The alien in the group, and the catalyst to the climax of the dramatic action, is the Professor. He alone seeks knowledge in a milieu characterized by its awareness of death as the final arbiter of human life. Soyinka has described this figure as: "Charlatan, outcast yet communal, teacher and quester, innocent and cunning, a stray among strays, priest and profaner, moulder and iconoclast." [93] He is, like those with whom he surrounds himself, unassimilable into any framework which would seek homogeneity as its goal, and yet he remains an outcast amongst the drivers and touts because he seeks, outside the confines of society, that which only society could offer him; a palliative by which to "cheat fear." Unlike Samson, Kotonu *et al*, the Professor has known and been ejected from a moral framework which had once promised meaning to his life. We learn in the course of the action that in his earlier years he has been a devout churchgoer, famed for his readings of

the holy 'Word'. Consequent upon accusations concerning the disappearance of church funds, the Professor is forced to leave the church and makes his home in its shadow amongst those the church despises; the men for whom morality holds no meaningful injunction as a boundary to action.

The Professor also wears the masquerade of death suspended: he appears "*in Victorian outfit - tails, top-hat etc., all thread-bare and shiny.*" [94] His costume is perhaps most obvious in its declaration of the dead men to whom it stands as testimony; the Professor is the carrier of a system of morals which has as its uniform the garb of a solemnity equal to that of the Undertaker. It is also the outfit of the stage-illusionist, or quack doctor thus visiting upon the Professor an identificatory ambiguity which far surpasses even Samson's adroit mimicry. In his new incarnation the Professor has become a forger of driving-licenses, thus furnishing the means for the perpetuation of the road's harvest of accidents, although remaining distanced from the brutal reality of the violent crop.

The Professor chooses to steep himself in the culture of death afforded by the shelter of the church's perimeter wall. He spends his nights in the graveyard, seeking an unholy communion with souls wrenched from their lives as a result of traffic accidents, and his days are passed in the raking of the road's remnants, seeking for signs which will illuminate with meaning the carrion flesh of the victims:

> **Prof**: There are dangers in the Quest I know, but the Word may be found companion not to life, but Death. Three souls you know, fled up that tree. You would think, to see it, that the motor-car had tried to clamber after them. Oh there was such an angry buzz but the matter was beyond repair. They died, all three of them crucified on rigid branches. I found this word growing where their blood had spread and sunk along plough scouring of the wheel.[95]

The prize with which the Professor has returned from the scene of carnage is nothing more than a twisted metal sign - ironically exposed by the accident - bearing the word '**BEND**'. This he adds to his treasury of linguistic remnants, made up of bills, torn newspapers and pools coupons, all of which attain a meaning contingent upon their accidental discovery and retrieval. The Professor desires to create a system, wrought in the arbitrary conjunction of linguistic signs, with which to crack the edifice of the looming church, which mocks with its solidity the incompleteness of those lives which find their shelter beyond its bounds. He therefore huddles amongst those for whom morality proves no injuction, and yet remains bound to that which he attempts to reject, by a desire to transcend and therefore escape death's silence.

The acquisition of Murano represents for the Professor a sign that his Quest is finally approaching its goal. In holding to ransom the agent of death, he is persuaded that soon the silence will be broken that frustrates his attempts to extract from the thugs the essence of their knowledge of mortality. Murano is the Professor's trump card in his endeavour to cheat death. He, unlike the frequenters of his shack, refuses the open confrontation offered by the road, preferring instead to document and detail the reports, in a desperate effort to glean from the *objective* standpoint of the observer that which defies rational comprehension. Believing himself in possession of the final secret, he nurtures the mute Murano, patiently awaiting the moment in which the floodgates will open to expose the 'Word' or knowledge which will wash away the fear of death's terrors:

> **Prof:** When a man has one leg in each world, his legs are never the same. The big toe of Murano's foot - the left one of course - rests on the slumbering chrysalis of the Word. When that crust cracks my friends - you and I, that is the moment we await. That is the moment of our rehabilitation. When that crust cracks...[96]

As the sun sets on the action of the play, the Professor is finally driven to issue the invitation to death which will make of his Quest a reality in its confrontation with mortality. Goaded to an act of transgression, the Professor determines to restore Murano's voice and penetrate the veil of silence which surrounds him by making him once more don the masquerade and complete the interrupted dance of the *agemo*. To witness the *agemo* is forbidden by traditional Yoruba belief, as is the dancing of the *agemo* 'out of season'. The Professor's transgression is, therefore, twofold and the crisis deepens as the thugs and layabouts are ordered by him to facilitate Murano's possession and witness the transgression of their orthodoxies. The Professor, in daring to pierce the boundaries of traditional belief polarizes his relationship to the gathered men, by treating as 'play' that which transcends the accidental reality of death which they they have become accustomed to confronting daily.

In a programme note accompanying the Talawa Company's London production of *The Road* in 1992, Kole Omotoso offers the following note as an accompaniment to the performance:

> What would seem to be a joyous gift, man's play consciousness, when it probes things beyond and above itself leads to disaster. But those who watch go away with a gift, not of the Aristotelian order but of another kind of tragic benevolence: a vision of the possibility of human dare, the vision that lies beneath all human and humane achievements. Wole Soyinka's tragedies work at this level of vision.[97]

For Omotoso, the dare undertaken by the Professor in his scornful refusal of traditional belief, opens the stage to the possibility of transformation, whereby character, costume, language and meaning, achieve a doubling of appearance thus allowing theatrical illusion to become a 'truth' in itself. The dance of the *agemo* is both illusion and reality; a stage trick *and* the presence of death which makes of mortal life a divine jest.

In the final moments of ***The Road***, the tragic potential of the play is realized in the Professor's desire to risk all in order to achieve his will to knowledge. In confronting the accommodative belief which perpetuates the daily harvest of the road's accidents, the Professor finally confronts the essence that has eluded both the thugs and - as a consequence of the dramatic structure - the spectators. As the *agemo* nears its climax, forcing each of the figures that people the stage to witness, not the accidental harvest of the road, but rather the invited presence of death as a combatant in the Quest for life, the thugs effect their vengeance upon the audacious darer and the Professor falls to the ground, stabbed in the back by Say Tokyo Kid.

The Kid's mortal blow does not however stem the terrifying flow of language steeped, at last, in the knowledge of death. The Professor's eloquence does not fail him as he utters Soyinka's epilogue which in itself attempts to break the silence to which the *agemo* stands testimony. Confronting the abyss of non-being, the Professor articulates the life of which the road is only a manifestation; this is Soyinka's vision of man that makes in his image a world of objects through which the horrors of humanity may be perpetuated. In the road, he opines, we may - if we dare - read the essence of what we are and what we desire:

> Breathe like the road. Be the road. Coil yourself in dreams, lay flat in treachery and deceit and at the moment of a trusting step, rear your head and strike the traveller in his confidence, swallow him whole or break him on the earth. Spread a broad sheet for death with the length and time of the sun between you until the one face multiplies and the one shadow is cast by all the doomed. Breathe like the road, be even like the road itself...[98]

As in Barker's ***The Bite of the Night***, the final moments of ***The Road*** bear witness to a vision accessible only to those who make of their destiny a pathway to the brink of the abyss of non-belief. Of all the figures in Soyinka's play, only the Professor, with his last breath, testifies to the terrifying knowledge of one who has plunged. His audacity, however, has dragged - unwillingly - the partakers of Murano's palm-wine communion, to the very edge of the void, thus forcing them to confront the essence of a death from which accommodative belief had shielded them.

In making of his play the ritual and dramatic enactment of the *agemo*, Soyinka too breaks the taboo which holds the mysteries of the death cult in place. In challenging, and testing belief, however, he exposes to danger, not only traditional systems of thought and enquiry, but also the reified accretions which threaten to encase belief in fortifications of fear which shield adherents from the monstrous forms of humanity to which their thought has given birth. Soyinka's essay, "The Fourth Stage" describes Ogun as the carrier of iron-ore to man but is careful in its warning that the god does not furnish his gift with a moral remonstration; man therefore is made responsible for the use or abuse of its properties. In *The Road*, Ogun is treated by the drivers and touts as the deity to whom final responsibility for a death on the road may be attributed. The Professor's last speech removes the possibility of such redemption and suggests that myth is, paradoxically, the antidote to redemptive belief, in that its deities offer in their changing aspects, a terrifying reflection of that which lurks beneath the comforting adherence to repeated and unquestioned ritual. As the lights fade on the action, the spectator is confronted by the god of the road unmasked by the questor after knowledge. The implication of the speech, as it is written in the text, is that it should cyclically repeat itself over and over.

> For a long time [I] could not accept why Ogun, the Creative God should also be the agency of death...Interpretation of his domain, the Road, proved particulary depressing and symbolically uninspiring especially inasmuch as the road is so obviously part of the same cyclic order. I know of nothing more futile, more monotonous or boring than a circle.[99]

Whilst Soyinka duplicates the cyclical at the end of *The Road*, it is a circle from which man may extricate himself, only however, if he - like the Professor - can arrive at the moment of the audacious and fundamentally human dare which forces him to confront the mythical imaginings which prove the underbelly to life's appearance.

Notes

1. E.M.Cioran, *A Short History of Decay* (London: Quartet, 1990), p.112
2. Susan Sontag, "'Thinking Against Oneself': Reflections on Cioran" in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.74-95, p.81
3. Sontag, *Ibid.*, pp.80-81
4. "In tragic consciousness the votary's psyche reaches out beyond the realm of nothingness (or spiritual chaos) which is potentially destructive of human awareness, through areas of terror and blind energies into a ritual empathy with the gods, the eternal presence, who once preceded him in parallel awareness of their own incompletion." Wole Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*, 1st edn. (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988) p.25
5. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, p.111
6. "Nietzsche's task lies...beyond all the codes of past, present, and future, to transmit something that does not and will not allow itself to be codified. To transmit it to a new body, to invent a body that can receive it and spill it forth; a body that would be our own, the earth's, or even something written..." Gilles Deleuze, "Nomad Thought" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. David B.Allison (London: MIT Press, 1985), pp.142-149, p.142
7. Nietzsche quoted in Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), p.177
8. Michael Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. Allison, pp.5-36, pp.26-27
9. Howard Barker, *The Castle* in *Collected Plays Vol One* (London: Calder, 1990), p.220
10. "...after having killed God - i.e., after having recognized the nothingness of the 'true world' - and after having placed himself where God once was,, Man continues to be haunted by his iconoclastic act: he cannot venerate himself, and soon ends up by turning his impiety against himself and smashing this new idol." Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language" in Allison, *The New Nietzsche*, ed. Allison, pp.14-15
11. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p.106
12. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, p.19
13. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991)
14. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*, p.17
15. "Anyone who speaks in the name of others is always an imposter. Politicians, reformers, and all who rely on a collective pretext are cheats. There is only the artist who lie is not a total one, for he invents only himself." Cioran, *Ibid.*, p.17
16. Cioran, *Ibid.*, p.83
17. George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961)
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, trans. Thomas Common (London: T.N.Foulis, 1910)
19. Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom* II:78, pp.109-110
20. Deleuze, "Nomad Thought" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. Allison, p.146
21. Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom* V:361, p.318
22. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)
23. Greenblatt, *Ibid.*, p.1
24. Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 1985), p.92
25. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p.219
26. Greenblatt, *Ibid.*, p.221
27. Greenblatt, *Ibid.*, p.220
28. "[Marlowe]...insist[s] upon the essential meaninglessness of theatrical space, the vacancy that is the dark side of its power to imitate any place. This vacancy - quite literally, this absence of scenery - is the equivalent in

the medium of the theater to the secularization of space, the abolition of qualitative up and down...", Greenblatt, *Ibid.*, p.195

29. Harold Osborne, "The Concept of Tragedy" in *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 15 (1975), pp.197-203, p.201
30. E.M.Cioran quoted in Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, p.80
31. "[T]he significance of works of art lies less in the effect they have on the spectator, reader or listener *qua* static, finished totalities, than in the shaping of human affectivity as dynamic creations or achievements of the artist. In other words they count less as self contained totalities...than as the products of a particular impulse, in short, as the achievements of the interpretative will to power, sublimated into the aesthetic drive.", Matthew Rampley, "Physiology as Art: Nietzsche on Form" in *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33/3 (July 1993), pp.271-282, p.277
32. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p.74
33. Howard Barker, *The Europeans* (London: Calder, 1990)
34. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.28
35. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.11
36. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.31
37. Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.59
38. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.119
39. Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died* (London: Arrow, 1985)
40. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, pp.87-88
41. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.89
42. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.91
43. Wole Soyinka, "The Credo of Being and Nothingness" in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*, 2nd edn. (London: Methuen, 1993), pp.231-247
44. Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*, 2nd edn, p. 246
45. Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage" in *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, 1st edn., pp.21-34
46. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* V in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals* (London: Doubleday, 1990), pp.36-42
47. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, I, p.21
48. Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, p.24
49. Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage" *in Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.25
50. Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State" in *Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, 1st edn., pp.15-20
51. Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage" *in Art, Dialogue & Outrage*, p.22
52. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.23
53. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.22
54. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.27
55. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.27
56. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p.137
57. Michael Wood, "The Search for Homer's Troy" in *The Listener* (28th Feb 1985), pp.14-15, p.14
58. Howard Barker, *The Bite of the Night* (London: Calder, 1988)
59. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.74. In reading Karl Jaspers I came across the following gloss and thought it pertinent to Barker's title: "The *passion for the night* breaks through every order...it is the urge to ruin oneself in the world in order to complete oneself in the depth of worldlessness...The irrational urge to darkness, to the earth, to the mother, to the race, to ruin and the end of all order." in Paul Arthur Schilpp (ed.), "Glossary, translations and definitions of terms used by Karl Jaspers", *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (New York: Tudor, 1957), pp.xvi-xxiv, p.xxi
60. Barker, *The Bite of the Night*, p.90
61. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.5
62. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.8
63. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.7
64. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.11

65. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* II:II in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals* (London: Doubleday, 1990), p.190
66. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1986), pp.76-100, p.88
67. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.145
68. Barker, *The Bite of the Night*, p.25
69. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, pp.63-64
70. Barker, *The Bite of the Night*, p.33
71. Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, I:XIII, p.179
72. Barker, *The Bite of the Night*, p.60
73. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.82
74. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.83
75. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.90
76. Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language" in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. Allison, p.13
77. Barker, *The Bite of the Night*, p.55
78. Wole Soyinka, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (London: Methuen, 1982)
79. Wole Soyinka, *The Road* (Oxford: OUP, 1965) For production history see James Gibbs, "The Masks Hatched Out" in *Theatre Research International* 7/3 (1982) pp.180-206, p.185 or *Research on Wole Soyinka*, eds. James Gibbs and Bernth Lindfors (Alberta: Africa World Press, 1993), pp.51-79, p.56
80. Ketu H. Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986)
81. Wole Soyinka, "Interview with Alan Akarogun" in *Spear Magazine* (May 1966), pp.16-19, quoted in Katrak, *Ibid.*, p.65
82. Soyinka, "For the Producer" in *The Road*
83. Wole Soyinka quoted in Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*, p.68
84. Soyinka, "Alagemo" in *The Road*
85. Oyin Ogunba, *The Movement of Transition* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975), p.139
86. "The ancestral garments, which totally conceal the wearer and transform the human features, stress the separation between realms and at the same time demonstrate their interpenetration. The man who puts on his family *egúngún* attire (*ago*) also puts on the spiritual powers of the ancestors, and is thus invested with powers beyond his normal ability. The masquerade expresses a magnetic fusion of entities into one unified whole as opposed to an imitating actor who 'expresses a cognitive relationship between separate entities.' The *egúngún* does not symbolize the ancestors; it is the ancestors. S.O.Babayemi, *Egúngún Among the Oyo Yoruba* (Nigeria: Board Publications Ltd., 1980), p.38
87. Soyinka, *The Road*, p.45
88. Derek Wright, *Wole Soyinka Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), p.90
89. Ebeogu comments on the democratic nature of Ogun worship: "The multi-faceted nature of Ogun as a god has...given rise to his being worshipped by people from all walks of life in Yorubaland." Afam Ebeogu, "From *Idanre* to *Ogun Abibiman*: An Examination of Soyinka's Use of Ogun Images" in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XV/1 (August 1980), pp.84-96, p.86
90. Soyinka, *The Road*, p.21
91. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.83
92. "The actor who understands his art...knows that no matter how deeply he immerses himself in the role of the fictional character there is always a psychological point of safety beyond which he dare not go, lest he be swept out of his depth and get carried away on the uncertain currents of hysteria and ecstasy...acting is at its most electrifying when it dares to go as close as possible to the psychological safety point, *the farthest limit within control* - the brink of possession. J.C. de Graft, "Roots in African Drama and

Theatre" in *African Literature Today* 8 (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976), pp.1-25. p.6

93. Wole Soyinka, "Program Notes", Goodman Theatre production 1984, quoted in Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*, p.74
94. Soyinka, *The Road*, p.8
95. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, pp.11-12
96. Soyinka, *Ibid.*, p.45
97. Kole Omotoso, "I Was Only Playing", *Programme note* to Talawa Theatre Company's production of *The Road* at the Cochrane Theatre Feb/March 1992
98. Soyinka, *The Road*, p.96
99. Wole Soyinka quoted in Katrak, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy*, p.66

In Conclusion

In the closing moments of Euripides' *The Women of Troy*,[1] Hecabe, in her anguish, announces that she has "seen the cold abyss of truth." Urged by the Chorus to disclose her vision, she proclaims:

> All through these years the gods had but one end in mind,
> No other destiny than this for me, and Troy -
> The one city they chose for their especial hate.
> Our sacrifices and our prayers have all been vain.
> Yet, had not heaven cast down our greatness and engulfed
> All in the earth's depth, Troy would be a name unknown,
> Our agony unrecorded, and those songs unsung
> Which we shall give to poets of a future age.[2]

Hecabe's lamentation in the ruins of Troy is a moment of theatrical transformation in which the artistic sublimation of her agony makes anew the speaker. The 'tragic' Hecabe is the 'victim' Hecabe doubled by the effects of theatrical space and made anew by a language which in turn finds enrichment via her lamentation. She, like the Professor and Dr Savage, achieves her knowledge in recognizing the 'cold abyss' of a world inimical to human fortune, and forges her destiny in the moment at which she dares to name herself as consequent to that knowledge. In this moment of creative passion, she knows what it is to be human. Euripides allows Hecabe, in the course of her short threnodic lament, the progress from character to actor, thus recognizing in her pain the body of wisdom out of which her race is born.

Andrew Gurr, in "Third-World Drama: Soyinka and Tragedy",[3] comments that "Faith in human progress, even Brecht's espousal of it as a possibility, is not really reconcilable with the view of the cosmos which tragedy embodies." [4] The inference is that tragedy perpetuates a chronicle of human experience which radically challenges the official history of State. Throughout this study I have argued that the work of Wole Soyinka and Howard Barker is linked by the root-metaphor of a journeying through unmapped space, with only the pioneering imagination of the artist as guide to the terrain. In the course of this journey, throughout which theatrical form has emerged as the product of social critique, both have re-discovered the tragic individual upon the stage, and in so doing have attempted the radical re-definition of contemporary theatrical discourse. In embracing the concept of the artist, each - within widely differing cultural contexts - has attempted to slip the net of social cartography, and return to the imagination the exiled vista of thought untrammelled by ideological fear.

I have suggested that the journey of the artist begins with a promiscuous relationship to his society, and that only in the creation of art which takes its premiss to be 'uselessness' may the contemporary artist free himself from the shackles of utilitarian or ideological productivity. The theatres which emerge from this 'promiscuity' have marked both Soyinka and Barker as cultural anomalies. The resultant attacks, criticisms and doses of measured advice have, concomitantly, served both authors as the means by which to expose and critique the discourses which seek to appropriate culture as a tool of social progress.

For Soyinka, in the dawning of the new Nigerian Nation State, and Barker who has described the Thatcher years as "an era of authoritarian government" [5] in which "a government of the extreme right...base[d] its moral status on the idea of the infallibility of the People...",[6] the democratic ideal of their respective cultures has been exposed as no more than a cynical pseudo-democracy utilizing a conceptual vocabulary of populist egalitarianism by which to dismantle difference in a society pledged to economic and technological progress. The theatre thus provides a vocabulary by which to explore the philosophical concepts of 'being' which rapidly lose currency in a language dedicated to the ideological 'We' in preference to the potentially non-ideological 'I'. In naming themselves as poet or artist, both Barker and Soyinka claim their right to speak *to* the Nation rather than *for* the Nation.

I have emphasized Barker's and Soyinka's relationship to the actor as the primary carrier of 'meaning' in a theatre dedicated to a spatial orientation born of the emotional power of the individual. The 'journey' of the actor from social being to Goldman's "fearful other" is one that serves as paradigmatic to the experience of both the artist in his, specifically defined, service to his society and to the spectator who encounters his work. Ian McDiarmid, commenting upon his relationship to Howard Barker's work, has stated that Barker is the only contemporary playwright who allows the actor to "become possessed" by the language of the text.[7] Possession is of central importance to Soyinka's use of the actor within his plays, its occurrence being suggestive of a spatial and temporal awareness of being as 'becoming' which wholly transcends, and partially negates, the social orientation of the individual. To be possessed is to be freed into the authority of a language or behaviour which denies 'proof' as the basis of its utterance, and relies instead upon the immediacy and affect of its communication upon those who witness. Although the contextual meaning of 'possession' is quite different for a European actor from that of the Nigerian, or more specifically, Yoruba actor, I would contend that the mystery of the actor's transformation upon the stage and the power attendant upon its occurrence, is of central import to the work of both Soyinka and Barker as artists working in theatre.

The fascination exercised by these two authors with regard the actor is not least contingent upon the layered structuring of language achieved by the 'doubling' of its articulation. Thus, the words spoken by the actor refuse a monogamous relationship to meaning by dint of the fact that the speaker becomes wholly untrustworthy as the source or origin of their articulation. In this way the ambiguity of 'meaning' which allows the 'truth' content of the utterance to be consequent upon cultural perspective is returned to the listener, or witness of the theatrical event, as a pivotal element of the experience. 'Culture' is, therefore, re-admitted into the very fabric of language; language being defined in this context as the performed relationship of meaning to individual utterance.

This study has attempted to chart the journey of the playwright from social functionary to individual creator, or artist. Without an awareness of the nature of that journey, the creative potential for communication of their work is severely limited; there is a danger that they will be relegated to the Adornian drawer marked 'I don't understand'.[8] The charting of the journey serves, however, not only as a means to elucidate the context within which such work should be read or experienced, but also to prize open areas of artistic debate which are in danger of remaining sealed from view as the discourse which supports theatrical creation leans ever more heavily towards public approval as the yardstick of artistic merit.

Finally, the artist stands in the nature of a cultural dare for his society, just as the actor dares on behalf of the spectator. In charting the journey from playwright to artist, I have also charted the search for the defining parameters of the dare which prove specific to social and political structures operating as policed boundaries to human experience. In making themselves exiles to ideological citizenship, both Soyinka and Barker have discovered a seam of human experience which has as its priority, not a faith in human progress but rather an affirmation of 'the will to life' which must be quelled if progress is to be achieved. This 'tragic', or 'catastrophic' race which peoples Soyinka and Barker's stages are neither reflections of the Yoruba nor the British, although their existence is ultimately dependent upon the defined boundaries of those categories. These are instead the creations that face without fear the nihilism inherent in an Enlightened, liberal-humanist worldview dedicated to the rationalizing of human resources. To dare, for these creations, is to know, like Hecabe, that destiny wrought in the knowledge of nihilism, provides the uniquely *theatrical* chronicle of human endeavour. Whilst the causal chains of rationalizing history demand the perception that 'man is thus'; the actor, placed by the artist upon the stage, repeatedly returns for his creative thrust to the insistent and unanswerable question: "What is it to be human?"

Notes

1. Euripides, *The Women of Troy* in *The Bacchae and Other Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)
2. Euripides, *Ibid.*, 1.1239-1246, p.130
3. Andrew Gurr, Third-World Drama: Soyinka and Tragedy" in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* X/3 (April 1976), pp.45-52
4. Gurr, *Ibid.*, p.47
5. Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.48
6. Barker, *Ibid.*, p.35
7. Ian McDiarmid quoted from an *Unpublished Interview* conducted by Emma Brown at the Almeida Theatre (1995)
8. "One is just too stupid, too old-fashioned, one simply can't keep up, and the more one belittles oneself the more one can be sure of swelling the mighty unison of the *vox inhumana populi*, the judging power of the petrified *Zeitgeist*. Incomprehensibility, that benefits no-one, from being an inflammatory crime becomes pitiable folly." Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1978), p.216

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

a) Plays by Howard Barker

Barker, Howard, *The Last Supper* (London: Calder, 1988)

- *The Bite of the Night* (London: Calder, 1988)

- *The Europeans* (London: Calder, 1990)

- *Victory: Choices in Reaction* in *Collected Plays Vol One* (London: Calder, 1990)

- *Uncle Vanya* in *Collected Plays Vol Two* (London: Calder, 1993)

Essays and Articles by Howard Barker

Barker, Howard, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 2nd edition with Introduction by Amanda Price (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993)

- "Some Notes on Witnessing the Play", *RSC Programme* for *The Bite of the Night* (1988)

- "The Truth Behind Goya's Grin", *Guardian* (8th July 1992)

- "Why I am no Playwright", *Unpublished Paper* (1994)

b) Plays by Wole Soyinka

Soyinka, Wole, *The Road* (Oxford: OUP, 1965)

- *A Dance of the Forests* in *Collected Plays One* (Oxford: OUP, 1973)

- *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Methuen, 1975)

Essays and Articles by Wole Soyinka

Soyinka, Wole, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976)

- *Art, Dialogue & Outrage* (a), 1st edition with Introduction by Biodun Jeyifo (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988)

- *Art, Dialogue & Outrage* (b), 2nd edition with following omissions: "Drama and the Idioms of Liberation", "Aesthetic Illusions", "Post Mortem for a 'Death...'". Additional Material: "Of Berlin and Other Walls", "New Frontiers for Old", "The Credo of Being and Nothingness" (London: Methuen, 1993)

SECONDARY SOURCES

a) Selected Works by, or referring to, Howard Barker

Barker, Howard, *Cheek* in *New Short Plays 3* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972)

- *The Hang of the Gaol* in *The Hang of the Gaol and Heaven* (Playscript 94) (London: Calder, 1982)

- *Don't Exaggerate (desire and abuse)* (London: Calder, 1985)

- *The Breath of the Crowd* (London: Calder, 1986)

- *Gary the Thief/Gary Upright* (London: Calder, 1987)

- *Lullabies for the Impatient* (London: Calder, 1988)

- *Collected Plays Vol One* (*Claw, No End of Blame, Scenes from an Execution, Victory, The Castle*) (London: Calder, 1990)

- *The Ascent of Monte Grappa* (London: Calder, 1991)

- *A Hard Heart* (London: Calder, 1992)

- *Collected Plays Vol Two* (*The Love of a Good Man, The Possibilities, Brutopia, Rome, Uncle Vanya, Ten Dilemmas*) (London: Calder, 1993)

- *Minna* (Leeds: Alumnus, 1994)

Billington, Michael, "Helen and a Troy Boy" (Review of *A Bite of the Night*) *Guardian* (7th September 1988)

Bell, Leslie (ed.), *Contradictory Theatres* (Essex: Essex University Press, 1984)

Curtiss, Anthony, "*Victory*/Royal Court" *Financial Times* (28th March 1992)

Donesky, Finlay, "Oppression, Resistance and the Writer's Testament: Howard Barker interviewed", *New Theatre Quarterly* II/8 (1986), pp. 336-344

Dunn, Tony (ed), "Howard Barker Special Issue", *Gambit* 11/41 (London: Calder, 1984)

Gottleib, Vera, "Thatcher's Theatre - or, After Equus", *New Theatre Quarterly* IV/14 (1988), pp. 99-104

Hewison, Robert, "A Radical to Wrestle With" (review of *Seven Lears*) *The Sunday Times* (14th January 1990)

Hiley, Jim, "Barker's Bite" (Preview of *Pity in History*) *Radio Times* (29th June-5th July 1985)

- "The Trojan Mores" (Review of *A Bite of the Night*) *The Listener* (15th September 1988)

Kemp, Peter, "Hard Acts to Swallow" (Review of *The Bite of the Night*) *Independent* (7th September 1985)

Klotz, Günther, "Howard Barker: Paradigm of Postmodernism", *New Theatre Quarterly* VII/25 (1991), pp.20-26

Lennon, Peter, "The Civil Warrior" (Profile of Howard Barker) *Guardian* (13th February 1992)

Marks, Laurence, "Off-Beat Track" (review of *The Possibilities*) *Guardian* (21st February 1988)

Page, Adrian (ed.), *The Death of the Playwright* (London: Macmillan, 1992)

Rabey, David Ian, *Howard Barker: Politics and Desire* (London: Macmillan, 1989)

- "For the Absent Truth Erect: Impotence and Potency in Howard Barker's Recent Drama", *Essays in Theatre* (Ontario: University of Guelph, 1991), pp.31-37

- "'What do you See': Howard Barker's *The Europeans*", *Studies in Theatre Production* 6 (1992), pp.23-34

Shaughnessy, Robert, "Howard Barker, The Wrestling School, and the Cult of the Author", *New Theatre Quarterly* V/19 (1989), pp.264-271

Spencer, Charles, "Barker Bad as his Bite" (Review of *The Bite of the Night*) *Daily Telegraph* (7th September 1988)

Thomas, Alan, "Howard Barker: Modern Allegorist", *Modern Drama* XXXV/3 (1992), pp.433-443

Thomson, Peter, "Humanism and Catastrophe: A Note on Howard Barker's Polarities", *Studies in Theatre Production* 10 (1994), p.39

Trussler, Simon, "The Small Rediscovery of Dignity" (Howard Barker interviewed) in *New Theatre Voices of the Seventies*, ed. Simon Trussler (London: Methuen, 1980)

Wardle, Irving, "Bloody Troytown" (Review of *The Bite of the Night*) *The Times* (7th September 1988)

- "Further Scenes from the Execution of Culture" (Joint review of *A Hard Heart* and *The Road*) *Independent* (8th March 1992)

b) Selected Works by, or referring to, Wole Soyinka

Achebe, Chinua, "English and the African Writer", *Transition* 4/18 (1965), pp.34-38

Adelugba, Dapo (ed.), *Before Our Very Eyes: A Tribute to Wole Soyinka* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1987)

Armitstead, Clare, "Twisty Road" (review of *The Road*) *Guardian* (4th March 1992)

Banham, Martin, "Initiates and Outsiders: The Theatre of Africa in the Theatres of Europe", *The University of Leeds Review* 33 (1990-91), pp.51-58

Booth, James, *Writers and Politics in Nigeria* (London: Hodder, 1981)

- "Self-Sacrifice and Human sacrifice in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*", *Research in African Literatures* 19/4 (1988), pp.529-550

- "Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka", *Ariel* 23/1 (1992), pp.7-24

Duerden, Dennis and Pieterse, Cosmo (eds.), *African Writers Talking* (New York: APC, 1972)

Ebeogu, Afam, "From *Idanre* to *Ogun Abibiman*: An Examination of Soyinka's Use of Ogun's Images", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XV/1 (1980), pp.84-96

Etherton, Michael, *The Development of African Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1982)

Ferguson, John, "Nigerian Drama in English", *Modern Drama* XI/1 (1968), pp.10-26

Gates, Henry Louis Jnr, "Criticism in the Jungle", in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jnr (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.1-24

Gibbs, James, "The Origins of *A Dance of the Forests*", *African Literature Today 8* ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp.66-71

Gibbs, James (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* (Washington DC: Three Continents, 1980)

- "The Masks Hatched Out", *Theatre Research International* 7/3 (1982), pp.180-206

- "Tear the Painted Masks. Join the Poison Stains: A Preliminary Study of Wole Soyinka's Writings for the Nigerian Press", *Research in African Literatures* 14/1 (1983), pp.3-44

- *Wole Soyinka* (London: Macmillan, 1986)

Gibbs, James and Lindfors, Bernth (eds.), *Research on Wole Soyinka* (Alberta: Africa World Press, 1993)

Gurr, Andrew, "Third-World Drama: Soyinka and Tragedy", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* X/3 (1976), pp.45-52

Jeyifo, Biodun, *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama* (London: New Beacon Books, 1985)

Jones, Eldred Durosimi, *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973)

Katamba, Francis, "Death and Man in the Earlier Works of Wole Soyinka", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* IX/3 (1975), pp.63-71)

Katrak, Ketu H., *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986)

Laurence, Margaret, *Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966* (London: Macmillan, 1968)

Maclean, Una, "Wole Soyinka's International Drama", *Black Orpheus* 15 (1964), pp.46-51

Maduakor, Obi, *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to his Writing* (London: Garland Press, 1986)

Maduka, Chukwudi T., "The African Writer and the Drama of Social Change", *Ariel* 12/3 (1981), pp.5-18

- "African Religious Beliefs in Literary Imagination: *ogbanje* and *abiku* in Chinua Achebe, J.P.Clark and Wole Soyinka", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XXII/1 (1987), pp.17-30

Maja-Pearce, Adewale, *Who's Afraid of Wole Soyinka?:Essays on Censorship* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1991)

Maja-Pearce, Adewale (ed.), *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994)

Moody, David, "The Prodigal Father: Discursive Rupture in the Plays of Wole Soyinka", *Ariel* 23/1 (1992), pp.25-38

Moore, Gerald, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1978)

- *Twelve African Writers* (London: Hutchinson, 1980)

Ogunba, Oyin, *The Movement of Transition* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975)

Ogunbiyi, Yemi (ed.), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981)

Omotoso, Kole, "I Was Only Playing", *Programme note* to Talawa Theatre Co's production of *The Road* at the Cochrane Theatre (Feb/March 1992)

Probyn, Clive T., "Waiting for the Word: Samuel Beckett and Wole Soyinka", *Ariel* 12/3 (1981), pp.35-48)

Priebe, Richard, "Escaping the Nightmare of History: The Development of a Mythic Consciousness in West African Literature", *Ariel* 4/2 (1973), pp.55-67

Ricard, Alain, *Theatre and Nationalism: Wole Soyinka and LeRoi Jones*, trans. Femi Osofisan (Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1983)

Richards, David, "*òwe l'esin òrò*: Proverbs Like Horses: Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* XIX/1 (1984), pp.86-97

Rohmer, Martin, "Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester", *New Theatre Quarterly* X/37 (1994), pp.57-69

Sekoni, 'Ropo, "Metaphor as a Basis of Form in Soyinka's Drama", *Research in African Literatures* 14/1 (1983), pp.45-57

Soyinka, Wole, *Idanre and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967)

- *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London: Methuen, 1972)

- *Collected Plays One* (*A Dance of the Forests, The Swamp Dwellers, The Strong Breed, The Road, The Bacchae of Euripides*) (Oxford: OUP, 1973)

- *Collected Plays Two* (*The Lion and the Jewel, Kongi's Harvest, The Trials of Brother Jero, Jero's Metamorphosis, Madmen and Specialists*) (Oxford: OUP, 1974)

- *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (London: Methuen, 1982)

- *Aké* (London: Arena, 1983)

- *A Play of Giants* (London: Methuen, 1984)

- *Requiem for a Futurologist* (London: Rex Collins, 1985)

- *The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka* (London: Arrow, 1985)

- *Isara: A Voyage around "Essay"* (London: Methuen, 1990)

- *From Zia With Love and A Scourge of Hyacinths* (London: Methuen, 1994)

- *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years* (London: Methuen, 1994)

Wilkinson, Jane (ed.), *Talking with African writers* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1992)

Wilkinson, Nick, "Demoke's Choice in Soyinka's A Dance of the Forests", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* X/3 (1976), pp.22-27

Wright, Derek, "Ritual and revolution: Soyinka's Dramatic Theory", *Ariel* 23/1 (1992), pp.39-58

- *Wole Soyinka Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993)

c) Theoretical Texts

i) Key texts used in this study

Adorno, Theodor W. and Horkheimer, Max, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979)

Appiah, Kwame Anthony, *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992)

Bhabha, Homi K.(ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990)

Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Peregrine, 1986), pp.101-120.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals* (London: Doubleday, 1990)

ii) Background reading

Adorno, Theodor W., "Commitment", *New Left Review* 87-88 (Nov-Dec 1974), pp.75-90

- *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1974)

- *Notes to Literature: Volume One* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)

- *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991)

Alexander, J.C. and Seidman, S. (eds.), *Culture and Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990)

Allison, David B. (ed.), *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (London: MIT Press, 1985)

Althusser, Louis, *For Marx* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969)

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1st edn (London: Verso & Left Books, 1983)

Babayemi, S.O., *Egúngún Among the Oyo Yoruba* (Nigeria: Board Publications Ltd, 1980)

Barthes, Roland, *Critical Essays* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1972)

- *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1973)

- *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977)

Beckett, Samuel, *Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964)

Beier, Ulli, "Sango Shrine of the Timi of Ede", *Black Orpheus* 4 (1958), pp.30-35

- "Ibo and Yoruba Art: A Comparison", *Black Orpheus* 8 (1960), pp.46-50

Belsey, Catherine, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Routledge, 1985)

Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1969)

Bernauer, James and Rasmussen, David (eds.) *The Final Foucault* (London: MIT Press, 1988)

Blau, Herbert, *To All Appearances: Ideology and Performance* (Routledge: London, 1992)

Bouchard, Donald F. (ed. and introduction), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977)

Bowie, Andrew, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990)

Brecht, Bertolt, *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* in *Plays:Three* (London: Methuen, 1987)

Bürger, Peter, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* with Foreward by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

Carroll, David, *Paraesthetics* (London: Methuen, 1987)

Cioran, E.M., *A Short History of Decay* (London: Quartet, 1990)

De Graft, J.C., "Roots in African Drama and Theatre" in *African Literature Today 8*, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones (Oxford: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 3-25

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, with Preface by Michel Foucault and Introduction by Mark Seem (London: Athlone Press, 1984)

Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone Press, 1986)

Dews, Peter, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987)

Dorsch, T.S. (trans.), *Aristotle/Horace/Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)

Dreyfuss, Hubert L. and Rabinow, Paul (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (London: Harvester, 1982)

During, Simon, *Foucault and Literature: Towards a Genealogy of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Eagleton, Terry, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)

Euripides, *The Women of Troy* in *The Bacchae and Other Plays* (Harmondworth: Penguin, 1973)

Fanon, Franz, *The Damned* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963)

Fishman, Joshua, *Language and Nationalism* (Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1972)

Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization* (London: Tavistock, 1967)

- *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (London: Penguin, 1990)

- *The Care of Self: The History of Sexuality, Volume Three* (London: Penguin, 1990)

- *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume Two* (London: Penguin, 1992)

Freud, Sigmund, "The Uncanny", *The Standard Edition* Vol XVII (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp.219-255

Gane, Mike and Johnson Terry (eds.), *Foucault's New Domains* (London: Routledge, 1993)

Gaskill, William, *A Sense of Direction: Life at the Royal Court* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988)

Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973)

Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983)

Girard, René, *Violence and the Sacred* (London: John Hopkins Press Ltd, 1977)

Gleason, Judith, "Out of the Irony of Words", *Transition* 4/18 (1965), pp.34-38

Goldman, Michael, *The Actor's Freedom* (New York: Viking Press, 1975)

Goodwin, K.L., *National Identity* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1970)

Gotrick, Kacke, *Apidan Theatre and Modern Drama* (Almquist and Wishell International, 1984)

Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)

- *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Gutman, Huck, Hutton, Patrick H. and Martin, Luther H. (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock, 1988)

Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983)

Hobsbawm, Eric, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990)

Homer, *The Odyssey* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991)

Hoy, David Couzens (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)

Jameson, Frederic, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Jellinek, Frank, *I Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother*, with an introduction by Michel Foucault (New York: Pantheon, 1975)

Keane, John, "Democracy's Poison Fruit", *Times Literary Supplement* (21st August 1992)

Kearney, Richard, *The Wake of the Imagination: Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture* (London: Hutchinson, 1988)

Kedourie, Elie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1985)

King, Bruce, *New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World* (London: Macmillan, 1980)

Kristeva, Julia, *Strangers to Ourselves* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991)

Lechte, John, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990)

Macey, David, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Hutchinson, 1993)

Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Abacus, 1972)

- *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (London: Free Association Books, 1988)

Martin, Bernice, *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981)

May, Keith M., *Nietzsche and the Spirit of Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1990)

Moy, Toril (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)

Neuberger, Benjamin, *National Self-Determination in Post-Colonial Africa* (Colorado: Lynne Reinner Pubs., 1986)

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986)

- *The Joyful Wisdom* trans. Thomas Common (London: T.N.Foulis, 1910)

- *Beyond Good and Evil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)

- *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)

- *Ecce Homo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979)

Oliver, Kelly (ed.), *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing* (London: Routledge, 1993)

Orr, John, *Tragic Drama and Modern Society* (London: Macmillan, 1989)

Osborne, Harold, "The Concept of Tragedy", *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 15 (1975), pp.197-203

Pavis, Patrice, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992)

Pippin, Feenberg and Webel (eds.), *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia* (London: Macmillan, 1988)

Rabinow, Paul (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1986)

Rampley, Matthew, "Physiology as Art: Nietzsche on Form", *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33/3 (July 1993), pp.271-282

Rowe, Dorothy, "Wanting Everything", *Guardian* (23rd August 1991)

Schechner, Richard and Appel, Willa, *By Means of Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990)

Schilpp, Paul Arthur (ed.), *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (New York: Tudor, 1957)

Schipper, Mineke, *Beyond the Boundaries: African Literature and Literary Theory* (London: Allison & Busby, 1989)

Schlesinger, Philip, *Media, State and Nation: Political Violence and Collective Identities* (London: Sage Publications, 1991)

Shakespeare, William, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

- *King Lear*

Sinfield, Alan, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989)

Smith, Anthony D., *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971)

Sontag, Susan, *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Vintage, 1994)

Steiner, George, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961)

Turner, Victor, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1974)

Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986)

- *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1986)

Williams, Raymond, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966)

- *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973)

Willet, John (ed. and trans.), *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1978)

Wilsmore, S.J., "The New Attack on Humanism in the Arts", *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 27/4 (1987), pp.335-344

Wood, Michael, "The Search for Homer's Troy", *The Listener* (28th Feb 1985), pp.14-15

Worthen, William B., *The Idea of the Actor: Drama and the Ethics of Performance* (Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1984)

Young, Julian, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993)

Zuidervaart, Lambert, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993)