

# Know Thyself: Patterns of *Anagnorisis* in the Dramatic Expression of Euripides, Shakespeare and Wole Soyinka

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I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker  
And I have seen the eternal footman hold my coat and snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid<sup>1</sup>

**T**he general understanding perceives of literature as an aesthetic and imaginary reaction to certain historical and sociocultural patterns particular to certain societies. The need, however, to explore what is beyond the particular and the local gave birth to fertile literary affinities cutting across diverse regions and histories. A search for the esoteric, the peculiar, the other, the different and a desire to climb scales into opposite realms defined, and still do, many literary works across the world. The boundlessness and limitlessness of the human creative insight informed the possibility of overbridging particular and thinly defined literary contexts towards a *mundum universum* of an outflowing and inconstant global interliterariness. It is the ‘collective unconscious’ of inherited psychic realities in need of adjustment and adaptability to suit the human desire of trying what is beyond the customary and usual. This understanding pipes with Edward Said’s argument that a literary text can serve as an “exilic, extraterritorial, and unhoused”<sup>2</sup> dynamic which renders more comprehensible Man’s, or the writer’s, search for relevance while giving more fresh rhythms to the idea of bringing what seems culturally asymmetrical to a point of negotiation and dialogue. This desired for and ethereal, yet unremittingly refreshed and purged, interconnectedness of the old and the new, of the local and universal and of the self and other constantly recurring in many notable literary spaces, with the dramatists under study being an epitome, tallies not with Terry Eagleton’s assumption of the modern dramatic expression as a “rebellious adolescence” which is in “rupture

with its parentage”<sup>3</sup> for reworking and/or updating the classics in both thematic and style and the dehiscence of one’s philosophy of approaching experience to other writers have always been a trend in groping for life’s polyphonic dimensions.

A cross- literary negotiation that brings three major dramatists who defined the world stage with their aesthetic and theatrical refinements is what the present paper is trying to throw light on. While the turning moment in a piece of drama defined as *Anagnorisis* tends to be often associated with classical Greek and Shakespearean tragic postulations, this paper takes it over to a contemporary scene and to an African context to reveal its manifestations as they prevail through Wole Soyinka’s drama. Drawing on Aristotle’s concept of *Anagnorisis* as defined in *The Poetics* and philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer’s idea of the ‘acquired character’ in *Counsels and Maxims*, this paper articulates universal literary affinities emerging between Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Euripides’ Orestes and some of Soyinka’s tragic characters notably Elesin Oba in *Death and the King’s Horseman* and Iman in the *Strong Breed*, with the intention to show how they present patterns of self-knowledge of Man in general knowing that Soyinka is greatly influenced by both dramatists. Regardless of the roles they occupy or the kinds of duties bestowed upon them, these characters share moments of indecision, churning thoughts and conflicting passions in carrying out their tasks, precluding them from managing the scheme of things. Equally impressive is that these moments, however belatedly and abruptly grasped, turn out to be the obstacles these characters need to achieve self-knowledge and recognition. This reflects the three dramatists’ literary ‘universalizability’ and their concern with exploring the complexities of the human psyche, whether in ancient Greece, Medieval/Renaissance Britain or modern Nigeria.

Accordingly, the present paper veers towards the understanding that the modern literary expression continues to negotiate with the classics yielding in innovative patterns of projecting human nature in its complexities and nuances. While each responding to the sociocultural structure and logic of his time and enjoying his own solipsistic and aesthetic peculiarity, the humanist bent of Euripidean, Shakespearean and Soyinkan literary outputs is manifest in the way the three dramatists weave into their texts a human quest for self-knowledge as experienced by both individuals and societies. While Euripides’ theatricality, symbolic and allusive in tone due to its ‘air of skepticism’ and the rebelliousness in interest it had against the general eschatological rhythms of the drama of his contemporaries, negotiated with the plights of both highly-positioned and under-represented segments of ancient Greece spotlighting an existential angst fostered by an ill-conceived social conventionalism, Shakespeare’s drama brought new and fresh insights to the Elizabethan stage for it responded to the emerging Renaissance spirit which called for the centrality of Man and his aspirations and driven by such dictums as ‘know thyself’, ‘the good individual in the good society’ and Man as ‘the measure of all things’. Soyinka’s ‘drama of essence’, as it is labeled, resonates with its precedents and speaks to the universal while being entrenched to its African

Yoruba gnosis and frames of reference. Soyinka named a “Philosopher of the Gap, or Abyss” for his concentration upon Man’s contemporary negotiation of his nihilism, invested the African dramatic scene with an aesthetic vivacity which insists upon the plurality in the African experience and the need to reach for the universal to make sense of the particular.

### On *Anagnorisis*

Reflecting on whether he would be daring enough ‘to force the moment to its crisis’<sup>4</sup>, Prufrock, in the epigraph, experiences internal anxieties and conflicts of a powerless man striving to come to terms with a reality that denies him all means to control the circumstances around him, let alone making a decision whether to act or not. He is frustrated, lacking self-comprehension or recognition and feeling paralyzed like an ‘etherized patient’ who perceives his surroundings in faint images and actions. Eliot’s poem was written in an era during which man’s desire to come to terms with his loss and inertia was in resonance with his fellows’ melodramatic and stymied *cri du coeur* fluctuating between a past that held false promises and a present inability to reverse the course of events. Such an in-betweenness rendered the task of understanding the self like what Laurence Senelick calls “propinquity”<sup>5</sup>; a feeling of intimacy and familiarity with the surrounding context, yet, feeling existentially distanced and unapproachable.

Be that as it may, being a crucial element in the development of a tragic character into a stable individual able to make wise decisions both personal and communal, *anagnorisis* (translated as self-revelation or self-knowledge), according to Aristotle, has to be experienced by the character to understand what went wrong and why. As defined in *The Poetics*, *anagnorisis* refers to, ‘a discovery, a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, in the personages marked for good or evil fortunes’<sup>6</sup>. The fully aware character is the one who, after experiencing pain and falling prey to wrong choices and turnings, becomes able to determine the proper course of action that would allow him to maintain his social standing and apprehend the intricacies that made him restless or undecided towards an action that is vital for his and the well-being of others. According to philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, acquiring some degree of self-knowledge translates into a new version of character, previously unexplored, now acquired to help the individual assume a new stance that will give meaning to his experience; this moment of his individuality that manifests itself to him shows him his aspirations and their limitations. In his worldly philosophy and his concept of the “acquired character” in *Counsels and Maxims* and in the context of Aristotle’s theorization about *anagnorisis*, Schopenhauer says:

...Although a man is always the same, he does not always understand himself, but often *fails to recognize himself* until he has *acquired some degree of real self-knowledge*. In this way, *an insight into that which alone of all he wills and is able to do by dint of his individuality*, is made difficult for him. He finds in himself the tendencies to all the various human aspirations and abilities, but the different degrees of these in his individuality do not become clear to him without experience<sup>7</sup>. (emphasis added)

The idea of the 'acquired character' breeds transformation, self-discovery and a questioning of one's own traits in the face of the unexpected. In his philosophy of self and character, Schopenhauer posits that, passing through moments of introspection, of self-examination, these characters, however beleaguered and restless, would appear in another light as persons capable of taking and effecting decisions; they would start afresh as transformed individuals ready to act upon their own circumstances to transmute all feelings of hesitation and restlessness into a firm assertion of the self. They will end up thinking out new ideas for themselves and those in need of their insight and newly-acquired knowledge.

### **Wole Soyinka's Drama of Essence: an African Version of the Universal**

In an interview with Karen L. Morell (1974), Soyinka said:

First of all, I believe implicitly that any work of art which opens up the horizons of the human mind, the human intellect is by its very nature a force of change, a medium for change<sup>8</sup>.

This was the answer of Wole Soyinka when he was asked about the ethics of his theater. It is the answer of a writer with a sensibility towards not just the Nigerian African condition but also the entire human condition as one of his primary concerns. In his characterization, Soyinka portrays figures that fit our understanding and interpretation of the ambiguities of human nature. We get across characters whose ultimate lust for power and domination making use of the positions they are entrusted with to serve their personal purposes usually at the cost of the communal good, (*Kongi's Harvest*), others experiencing internal tensions in pursuing their noble goals when those around them welcome their ideas with reluctance and ridicule (*The Strong Breed*). We also confront characters facing serious hostility in trying to undertake actions relevant to the wellbeing of their societies; societies that, in most cases, turn out to be a hindering factor instead of supporting and upholding new ideas (*The Swamp Dwellers*). As odd as it might seem, we meet some other exceptional characters who have chosen for themselves a different path; whereas some might estrange themselves to escape societal pressures to search for truth and live life as they see appropriate, others may definitely reject any future conformity to societal norms creating for themselves codes of conduct that allow them the possibility to act for themselves (*The Road*). In this regard, and in relation to Soyinka's plays, Oyin Ogunba maintains that:

Today's African may be a little more bizarre than his contemporaries, but he still has the same essence. Thus, it is universal human nature that is explored in these plays, only the setting is particularized in time and space. We are confronted with the same problems, the same intensity of feelings and the same conventional solutions or lack of solutions<sup>9</sup>.

Howbeit our backgrounds are, we find in these characters some aspects that we can identify with, qualities that we do sympathize with and inadequacies and flaws that we justify as being mere reflections of the complexities of human nature. Ogunba, in commenting on the universal character of Soyinka's dramatic expression, further asserts:

This is why he is able to recognize a sameness of disposition in characters as apparently different as the ancient Helen of Troy, the medieval Madame Tortoise and the modern Rola. This is also why he regards Oba Danlola and Kongi as kindred spirits and finds the same cunning tendency in the Biblical Serpent and the serpent of the Swamps. Human crimes or foibles are outsidetime and place and so there is no need to upbraid some while extolling others<sup>10</sup>.

It is always thought that the corresponding side of Soyinka's "*rootedness is his cosmopolitanism*"<sup>11</sup> in the sense that the Yoruba and African roots that form the crux of Soyinka's writings do equally manifest as his human universal roots. Reading Soyinka's plays often calls to mind the settings and themes of the plays of Euripides, Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht and Jean- Paul Sartre. This purports to the fact that the task of projecting the human experience in its entirety, of bringing to center stage the paralyzed condition of man and his constant search for a convenient source of salvation cuts across cultural boundaries. Wherever in the world, we hear of individuals and societies striving under the grip of the same situations of desolation and hopelessness inciting their artists and writers to respond with fine literary productions. In the following passage, NgugiWaThiong'O comments on the fact that whatever tropes a work of art would assume, the ideas it furnishes would basically cling to one shared universal essence:

The universal is contained in the particular just as the particular is contained in the universal. We are all human beings but the fact of our being human does not manifest itself in its abstraction but in the particularity of real living human beings of different climes and races<sup>12</sup>.

Soyinka's plays, therefore, embrace the bonds of universal human thought in terms of human suffering and the human quest to attain salvation and regeneration. Although he sets his works in Africa, with the African character lending them a local color, Soyinka gives his works a modern universal twist in trying to keep up with the cycle of universal human values. He sees an affinity between the types of experiences his characters project and those projected in world literature. This is due to the fact that Soyinka prioritizes the role of tragedy in broaching the question of human nature and essentially its paradoxical propensities, and this justifies the way he relates his writing experience to that of world literature. His mechanism of initiating change in society reflects the modernist impulse that works towards the perfection of the individual as it also operates within the bounds of the existentialist frame of thought. Equally evident in Soyinka's plays is the notion that evoking the urgent needs of the modern Nigerian predicament means giving a possibility to approach the universal; a universal reality that makes any effort at reforming the human condition a shared experience in world literature. In the dramatist's words:

I have been preoccupied with the process of apprehending my own world in its full complexity, also through its contemporary progression and distortions ... For after (or simultaneously with) an externally directed and conclusive confrontation on

the continent must come a reinstatement of the values authentic to that society modified only by the demands of a contemporary world<sup>13</sup>.

Soyinka makes his characters' attempts at self-knowledge extend to reflect the whole society's desire to achieve understanding and recognition. He relates his writing experience to that of world literature as he probes into an entire human condition through valuing the role of tragedy to understand human nature and its often paradoxical inclinations. Soyinka's characters, the ideas and thoughts they cherish negotiate with some other major characters representative of the world stage finely enacting the human predicament and man's need for self-comprehension and change.

### **Elesin Oba and Hamlet: Staccato Pathways to Self-knowledge**

In Soyinka's plays, the characters' struggles for self-knowledge have several frontiers. I have suggested in an earlier research that the tragedy of a certain character comes about when he tries to strike a balance between personal desires and the desires of the collective especially because the figure of the hero is often associated with the idea of salvation that limits his freedom of choice. In his plays, Soyinka gives his characters opportunities to experience moments of introspection so as to explore their drives and their limitations. The plays are rife with feelings of guilt, escapism, confession and remorse that shape the process by which his protagonists end up identifying themselves and realizing their inadequacies and flaws. In *DKH*, Elesin's attempt at self-knowledge manifests itself in the way he wavers amidst his thoughts of responsibility to take action and the justifications he forwards so as to make others understand that he is apt for the task accorded to him and that his sense of desire has not failed him. From the outset, Elesin speaks of himself as one who is greatly trusted to hold the potential of his people in his hands. Over and above, he muses with others' incapacities for such a great task judging their merits and defects, and this gives him more self-assurance and conviction of distinctness:

**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

**Women:** You will not delay?

**Elesin:** Where the storm pleases, and when, it directs

The giants of the forests. When friendship summons

Is when the true comrade goes.

**Women:** Nothing will hold you back?

**Elesin:** Nothing. What! Has no one told you yet?

I go to keep my friend and master company.

Who says the mouth does not believe in

"No, I have chewed all that before?" I say

I have<sup>14</sup>.

Soon after this assuring self-praise, Elesin starts to give space to the possibility that his task might be distracted. As if he wants others to understand that he might fall prey to outward influence and that it is not a matter of imperfection in his character. He tells the market women:

**Elesin:** I embrace it. And let me tell you, women  
 I like this farewell that the world designed,  
*Unless my eyes deceive me, unless*  
 We are already parted, the world and I,  
*And all that breeds desire is lodged*  
*Among our tireless ancestors.* Tell me friends,  
 Am I still earthed in that beloved market  
 Of my youth? Or could it be my will  
 Has outleapt the conscious act and I have come  
 Among the great departed?<sup>15</sup> (emphasis added)

The two above exchanges project Elesin in a mood of self-assessment: conflicting passions between assuring feelings of eagerness and readiness to fulfill his task of performing the last ritual dance that would assure the link of this world with the world after according to the Yoruba understanding of reality on the one hand, and the evasive possibilities he creates that he might be beguiled by one reason or another, on the other. In his essay, “The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions”, Emile Durkheim forwards the idea that inner contradiction is a feature that is inherent in any social being. He stresses the fact that human beings have the tendency to desire one thing and desire its opposite even though one side often tends to be hidden to the outward world and which the others cannot easily perceive. He opines that:

We cannot pursue moral ends without causing a split within ourselves, without offending the instincts and the penchants that are deeply rooted in our bodies. There is no moral act that does not imply sacrifice, for, as Kant has shown, the law of duty cannot be obeyed without humiliating our individual....how can we belong entirely to ourselves, and entirely to others at one and the same time<sup>16</sup>.

Within the same line of thought, the modernists also speak of achieving salvation through experiencing damnation in the sense that the one who is destined to experience the final joy of salvation is the one whose spirit suffers the pains and mysteries of damnation. The existentialists, on their part, theorize about the paradoxical dimension of human nature through bringing the idea of understanding in confrontation; only after a confrontation between our inner desires on the one hand, and a confrontation with the outward environment that in most cases refuses to accommodate our ideas on the other, that one can end up understanding his purpose in life and his stance in it. This is what is often termed in psychoanalysis as ‘ambivalence’; a kind of shuttling of emotions or a fluctuation between desiring one thing and desiring its opposite. In many literary works, we get across characters exhibiting contrasting views and conflicting passions in their stands towards themselves or towards others and this often results in a kind of a friction between various factions in society, for every

faction thinks its desires have to be favored whatever outcomes this might entail on society.

Elesin, hence, emerges as an individual who knows his path, one who is aware of his duty and of the retributive implications the failing of which might finally entail. He strives to find a middle way between the promise he made to his people and the beauty of life he can no longer resist. While Elesin is hindered by the constraints of his desires and propensities, he always uses his inner positivism and resourcefulness to draw a positive and strong image of himself in the eyes of those around him. Even though he finds earthly pleasures irresistible, he strives to remain firm so as to prove worthy of the glorification heaped upon him and that he is no kind of those who fear to enter the unknown. About this state of mind, Carl Jung comments:

In the realm of consciousness we are our own masters; we seem to be the factors themselves. But if we step through the door of the shadow we discover with terror that we are the objects of unseen factors. To know this is decidedly unpleasant, for nothing is more disillusioning than the discovery of our own inadequacy<sup>17</sup>.

This is the difficult task of questioning one's own inadequacies in the face of external communal as well as cosmic demands. Elesin wants to satisfy his inner call for life pleasures; at the same time, he wants to show his allegiance to his society's need for continuity and rejuvenation. In the eyes of those around him, however, Elesin's hesitation puts him in a guilty position. Iyaloja attests to his desperation and says:

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<sup>18</sup>.

Sharing much of Elesin's hesitations and distractions, Hamlet's tragedy is caused by his complex and constantly restless state of mind. Hamlet's character here is approached according to his role as a prince and reformer of Denmark. The picture of Hamlet that we, all readers, perceive from the overall character of the play is that he is a prince of great insight, one who enjoys great power for reflection, and a character who constantly meditates on the secrets of human destiny and the mysteries of the unknown. In each of his soliloquies, Hamlet moves from one state of mind to another, never ceasing to conjure up man's fate in the face of outward conditions and demands<sup>19</sup>. This ambitious and knowledgeable man who values the beauty and serenity of life is called upon to avenge a dead father which compels him to measure life again with a different lens. Nevertheless, before Hamlet meets his final destination with death being finally killed, he passes through hard moments in trying to inflict death on those he wants to take revenge from. He experiences the task of inflicting death on others before he himself receives it at the end. Seeking a balance between these conflicting emotions lies at the heart of Hamlet's tragedy. Hamlet's agitated state of mind is emphasized by many critics. In the words of Dr. Samuel Johnson:

...A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away. All duties are holy for him; the present is too hard. Impossibilities have been required of him; not in themselves impossibilities, but such for him. He winds, and turns, and torments himself; he advances and recoils; is ever put in mind, ever puts himself in mind; at last does all but lose his purpose from his thoughts; yet still without recovering his peace of mind<sup>20</sup>.

Hamlet's monologues are very relevant to inform his complex and tormented state of mind:

Yes, you poor ghost! From my memory,  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All advice from books, all past pressures  
That youth and observation put there.  
Your commandment alone shall live  
Within my brain, unmixed with lesser  
Matter<sup>21</sup>.

The above soliloquy rightly reveals Hamlet's state of mind when he was addressed by his father's ghost that reminds him of the duty that lies ahead. Hamlet's words show his readiness to embrace his responsibility, he seems to have a firm belief in his task and that no force in the world would stand in his way. And as a prince of Denmark, to preserve the throne from being usurped, he assures his father that he would "*wipe away all trivial fond records.*" Soon after these self-affirming and assertive words, Hamlet's wavering mind starts to manifest itself. He starts to speak of himself as unfit for the avenging task and that he is no more different from those from whom he is seeking revenge. He scorns and rebukes himself and he seems that he lost trust both in his capacity to accomplish the task and in the outward circumstances that, according to him, grow just to be more disturbing and paralyzing. He contemplates:

Oh, what a rogue I am! Am I a coward?  
I must be, or I would have fed all the birds  
With the king's body—that bloody villain!  
Oh, revenge!  
I, the son of a dear father murdered,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must unpack my heart with words<sup>22</sup>.

This feeling of hesitation, of passivity and inability to take a step forward keeps him in a state of constant questioning. Whereas things seemed clear and worth sacrificing himself for, now he blames the circumstances for turning against him and blocking his way to revenge. This calls to mind the way Elesin starts to accuse his surroundings for delaying his dance to death except of himself. But, the more we get across instances of Hamlet delaying his action, the more we can understand how much he really values his task and how much he is preoccupied with his role. Life, for Hamlet, seems a mystery and that any attempt at understanding its enigmatic nature would lead just to further

confusion and self-remorse. Resolving the secret of life, Hamlet seems to tell us, would make a skeptic of every one of us. Therefore, the form of self-knowledge that Hamlet experiences at the end of the play reveals itself in the fact that he becomes able to draw some conclusions about human nature and destiny, the most insightful of all is that the quest for the meaning of life is trivial if we are not able to understand our role and purpose in it. After a long time of indecisiveness, Hamlet, at last, approaches his task but only after a true conviction of its importance in changing the scheme of things. While Elesin Oba looks at death as a step into a new life, a crucial beginning into a spiritual communion with the forebears and a point of honor for the living, Hamlet considers it as having little dignity, as the great equalizer that makes all men equal. In Hamlet, as in *DKH*, the issues of individual responsibility and destiny do overlap to lead Hamlet to his tragic end in a graveyard setting and Elesin Oba in a prison cell chained and disgraced

### **Iman and Orestes: Actuating Consummation in Estrangement**

In *The Strong Breed*, Eman's questioning stance of his people's values and customs leads him to a transformation, yet this does not keep him from experiencing emotional conflict and pain. *TSB* dramatizes the tale of Eman, a teacher and at the same time a descendant of the "strong breed" of persons who have always inherited the responsibility of 'carrying' the community's sins on their shoulders in acts of self-sacrifice. Reluctant to perform the duty in his home village, Eman escapes but naively volunteers for the role in a strange village unaware of the differences between the custom for which he has been trained and the one for which he has volunteered. The play opens with an annual end of year when a purification ritual has to be enacted to banish the evil of the previous year and to approach the New Year with a sense of purging. In the village in which Eman is a stranger, and as custom demands, strangers are used for this purging task. There are two strangers in the village: Eman, the school teacher, and Ifada, the idiot who is the apparent choice. Regarding the play and the ritual, Soyinka said in an interview:

This is another play (The Strong Breed) in which I have used these African ceremonies where the town is cleansed in the new year where you have sort of a carrier....these people go through the town and the real meaning. The significance of it is that they sort of take away a lot of evils from the town<sup>23</sup>.

Eman's father in the play insists on the greatness that lies at the heart of Eman's duty that distinguishes the strong breed from the rest of humanity. Unprepared, however, to take the responsibility bestowed on him by his inheritance, Eman flees his home village to find himself stepping forward as the year's scapegoat in a strange village and, overtaken by his blood, lays down his life on behalf of a community that is not his. From the outset of the play, we are made to understand that Eman finds solace in being strange, he likes to be strange. The following exchange between Eman and Sunma overtly refers to this:

**Sunma:** I am not trying to share your life. I know you too well by now. But at least we worked together since you came. Is there nothing at all I deserve to know?

**Eman:** Let me continue a stranger- especially to you. Those who have much to give fulfill themselves only in total loneliness.

**Sunma:** Then there is no love in what you do.

**Eman:** There is. Love comes to me more easily with strangers.

**Sunma:** that is unnatural.

**Eman:** Not for me. I know I find consummation only when I have spent myself for a total stranger<sup>24</sup>.

Eman knows very well why he prefers living as a stranger. This estrangement gives him a space for contemplation and reflection that he becomes able to learn much about the petty feelings of those around him. It helps him to see in others what they are unable to understand about themselves but, at the same time, it tortures him as it deepens his fears of others who are blind to truth and who are unable to understand him or welcome his ideas. He says to Omae:

A man must go on his own, go where no one can help him, and test his strength. Because he may find himself one day sitting alone in a wall as round as that. In there, my mind could hold no other thought. I may never have such moments again to myself. Don't dare to come and steal any more of it.<sup>25</sup>

By constantly evading the task of the carrier in both his home village and the new one, Eman wants others to understand how much hollow and useless is the custom they are valuing and for which disabled ones like Efada, or enlightening individuals like Eman are wastefully given. In the play, Eman seems to hold the view that this carrier custom has been performed in the village for ages but people seem not to be purged and that their spiritual state seems stagnant about the task being approached unwillingly by the carrier. Thus, he wants to stress the point that for the purging task to have the transforming results desired out of it, the carrier has to feel the burden of the duty and he ought to perform it with a sense of responsibility. Only in that way can this custom be said to hold a potential for the community's rejuvenation. This motivates us to ask, are there any signs that do inform the villagers' transformed state of mind or make us assume that they are undergoing a process of self-apprehension and recognition? At the end of the play, Jaguna says that "women could not have behaved so shamefully. One by one they crept off like sick dogs"<sup>26</sup>. The villagers, mainly the leaders, are now seen going back to the village with hearts full of pity and remorse of what happened. Hence, we might argue that Eman's clashing views with the villagers helped produce a sense of awareness on both sides. As in Soyinka's line of thought, Eliot similarly thinks that the most important recognition and self-knowledge that we constantly experience are most of the time constructed by our interactions with the outward world that does reveal to us things we cannot easily perceive on our own:

The self, we find, seems to depend upon a world, which in turn depends upon it; and nowhere, I repeat, can we find anything original or ultimate. And the self depends upon other selves; it is not given as a direct experience, but is an interpretation of experience by interaction with other selves.<sup>27</sup>

Eliot grants a crucial role to the enviroing circumstances to have a hand in our process to get knowledge about our strengths and weaknesses. This is what can be clearly revealed about Eman's character in that it could develop through time due to the pressures of duty he lives under and which both his home village and the new village exercise upon him; as a descendent of the strong breed in his home village and a stranger in the new one. Having such an enlightened spirit, Eman tries to set himself as an example to be emulated, being dissatisfied with the role of a preacher.

Euripides' Orestes, sharing most of the previous characters' restless intellect, has often been approached for the mutability and lack of constancy that characterize his character. Euripides is thought of as a tragedian who "exhibits a more sympathetic concern for the currents of intellectual challenge in the fifth century B.C.E., currents of skepticism, impiety, and secular humanism"<sup>28</sup>. The Euripidean character often tends to be conscious and skeptical of everything surrounding him looking at the world with a critical eye. Of all the tragic characters that Euripides created on stage, Orestes is said to be the most representative. In the traditional tale that Euripides adopts in his play *Orestes*, Orestes is presented as faced with a moral dilemma unable to make the right choice about a seemingly impossible action; that is the killing of his mother. Orestes faces an impossible choice here: in order to avenge his father, he has to kill his own mother, Clytemnestra<sup>29</sup>. While Orestes knew the dreadful implications of the blood crime he committed; he feels obliged to fulfill a religious duty required of him by his patron god Apollo, because of a messenger sent by the god in Delphi ordering him to accomplish the murder and to which Orestes took an oath. Orestes decides then to follow his patron's wish and to kill Clytemnestra: "As the slayer of his mother, Orestes may be open to condemnation, but he is praiseworthy as the avenger of his father"<sup>30</sup>. Owing to the matricide he commits and the difficult and agonizing state of mind he is put in, between an avenger and a killer, Orestes is presented, from the outset of the play, as a maniac, suffering from mental disorder and being taken care of by his sister Electra. His sister Electra describes his state of mind as follows:

**Electra:** After that poor Orestes grew so ill.  
Infected with a savage wasting sickness,  
he's collapsed in bed and lies there, driven  
into fits of madness by his mother's blood.<sup>31</sup>

Although diseased and unconscious, in his lonely monologues, Orestes seems to be well aware of the gravity of his act and its future implications:

**Menelaus:** What's wrong with you?  
What's the sickness that's destroying you?  
**Orestes:** It's here—in my mind—because I'm aware  
I've done something horrific.<sup>32</sup>

In adopting the same story of Orestes that Euripides adopted in his play, J.P. Sartre, in his novel *Les Mouches* (*Flies*, 1943), speaks of Orestes as an existential man describing him to be the 'guilt stealer' in Argos as he thinks that through trying to fill the void within himself, because of feeling rootless and strange, Orestes is driven to 'steal' the

guilt of the people of Argos making it his own<sup>33</sup>. In Euripides' play, though Orestes sees the task of avenging a slayed father a decisive one, Euripides projects him in an incessant attempt to atone and purge his soul of his crime. He says to Electra:

If we could get  
just one thing, we could get lucky—*some way*  
*to save ourselves despite all expectations*  
*might fall our way from somewhere*, so we'd kill  
and not get killed ourselves. I pray for that.  
It's sweet to talk about what I desire  
in words with wings which cheer my spirit  
and don't cost anything.<sup>34</sup> (emphasis added)

As it is clear from his words, he finds a joy in revealing his inner feelings and talking about his desires of having a purged soul because as he says this would "cheer my spirit":

**Orestes:** Menelaus, I am Orestes—the man  
you asked about. I'm willing to reveal  
all the suffering I've been through.<sup>35</sup>

Much like Eman who finds peace in estrangement, Orestes, being under a heavy torment, found solace in the penalty imposed on him by the people of Argos even though he feels rootless belonging nowhere. Before being reintegrated into the city of Argos according to the solution proposed by Apollo at the end of the story, Orestes feels alienated with a strong sense of depravity. He says to Menelaus: "*Wherever I go, doors are shut to me.*"<sup>36</sup> Besides, and in like fashion with Hamlet, Orestes takes on the duty of avenging a murdered father from a slaying mother. Be that as it may, Orestes has been often compared to Hamlet and which reflects Euripides' direct influence on Shakespeare. In many respects, they share scenes of indecision, self-doubt, both being deeply pained and concerned about a father who has to be avenged:

Orestes is very much like Hamlet in other ways as well: he doubts himself and hesitates to take action; he fears that the god who commands him to take revenge may be an evil spirit in disguise; and he is given to expressing himself with soliloquies.<sup>37</sup>

He, like Hamlet, restores his energy for action, however infected by feelings of helplessness and exhaustion, by the end of the play to carry his plan against Helen and her daughter. He experiences a sudden act of awakening and awareness towards responsibility:

His feebleness, still visible at his approach is reinvigorated by the fatal forces of fever and madness; exhaustion is replaced by activity, energy, violence, and finally by strength more than natural, while the organ of thought proportionally fails, and at last is utterly overthrown.<sup>38</sup>

After a series of pains and torments for committing an abominable act, after experiencing estrangement, after his wavering feelings of despondency and delusion,

Orestes eventually and abruptly wakes up from his long sleep with a new sense of positivism towards crisis. He no longer harbors fears of the furies, the Argives or even the gods themselves, and emerges with a clear and assuring state of mind recognizing the duty bestowed upon him and firmly says:

You fool!  
Do you think I could stand to stain your neck,  
make it bloody? You weren't born a woman  
and don't belong with men. I left the house  
to stop you making such a noise. Argos  
is quick to move once it hears the alarm.  
But still I'm not afraid of matching swords  
with Menelaus.<sup>39</sup>

The best kind of self-knowledge or recognition, according to Aristotle, is when a kind of situation reversal takes place leading the character to realize his transition and gives him a capacity to compare his past and present states. This takes place when the character faces the opposite of what he expected, and this would either uplift the way he looks at himself or destroys his image in the eyes of those around him.

### **Conclusion: Matching Cords Primordially Issued**

Wole Soyinka was very often criticized by his fellow critic Chinweizu that, in his works, he tries to impel his characters as well as readers to a kind of pure individualism, and that he divorces his works from any mass character of action. As a response to this, Soyinka asserts that, as we have clearly demonstrated, that the African experience cannot solely be thought of within the bounds of mere events particular to specific people, he instead insists that a work of art would have no appeal if it tries not to reach the mysteries of human nature. This can come about, according to Soyinka, through universalizing the particular and enriching the particular from what can be delicately reaped from the universal human experience. This attitude springs from Soyinka's belief that cultures, however different, in the process of their evolution, cross-fertilize each other for the sake of generating one lived universal reality. In his respect, Soyinka opines that "in order to transmit the self-apprehension of a race, a culture, it is sometimes necessary to liberate from and relate this collective awareness to the values of others".<sup>40</sup>In absorbing the western literary idiom into his drama, Soyinka is well aware that, for his project of change to achieve the desired improvement he aims at and to inspire the masses to whom it is destined, it has to work towards the elevation of the individual through creating dramatic spaces to measure the desires and aspirations of his heroes/characters within the insurmountable restrictions and obstacles of the real world. Out of this conflict, emerges the individual with a new way to sense the events and to pass it over to the others in his society.

Depending on each of the three dramatists' philosophic proclivities on human nature, the process of *Anagnorisis* or self-knowledge finally makes one realize that all human beings, despite their varied personalities and intentions, bear similar universal features.

The human spirit is the same, and it is this spirit with its desire for self-apprehension which has to be tapped for societies to progress in a positive direction.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, In., *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, (London: Faber. 1963) p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 10-11.

<sup>3</sup>T. Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 7. Cited in, David Krasner, *A History of Modern Drama*, Volume I, (Blackwell Publishing, UK, 2012) pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>T.S. Eliot, *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>David Krasner, *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>6</sup>Leech, Clifford, *Tragedy*. (Routledge, London and New York, 1969) p. 64.

<sup>7</sup>Cited in Norman Stinchcombe, *Understanding Ourselves: Character and Self-knowledge in Conrad and Schopenhauer*, (Department of Philosophy, College of Arts and Law, The University of Birmingham, September 2010) p. 43.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Karen L. Morell, in Karen L. Morell (ed) *In Person - Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka at the University of Washington*. Seattle: African studies Program (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975) pp. (78-83) p. 78.

<sup>9</sup>Ogunba Oyin, "The Traditional Content of the Plays of Wole Soyinka", In. *African Literature Today*, (ed), Eldered Durosimi Jones, (Heinemann Educational Books LTD, London, 1971) (106-115) p. 115.

<sup>10</sup>Ogunba, *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup>Phrase borrowed from a lecture delivered by the American Professor Robert Elliot Fox in Lagos entitled "From Tigrity to Transcendence: The Conscience and Conscientiousness of Wole Soyinka", (Sunday Magazine, 15 July 2012).

<sup>12</sup>Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, section '3', "The Universality of Local Knowledge", pp. (25-30) (James Currey Ltd., London, 1993) p. 26.

<sup>13</sup>Soyinka Wole, *Myth, Literature and the African World*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. ix.

<sup>14</sup>Soyinka Wole, *DKH.*, op cit., p. 14.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup>Emile Durkheim, "Le dualisme de la Nature Humaine et ses conditions sociales", *Scientia* XV (1914) pp. (206-21), "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions", Emile

Durkheim et al: *Essays on Sociology and Philosophy*, (ed), Kurt H. Wolff, translated by Charles Blend, (Harvard college Library, 1960) pp. (325-340) p. 328.

<sup>17</sup> Jung, Carl Gustav, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", (1934). *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Trans. R.F.C. Hull. Ed. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, and William McGuire. Bollinger Series XX. 2nd ed. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1968) (3-41) p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> *DKH.*, p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> Likening him to Dionysus and what he calls the "Dionysiac man", Nietzsche says that both Hamlet and the Dionysiac man "have gazed into the true essence of things, they have acquired knowledge and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal existence of things, they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action." F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 40, quoted in David Krasner, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in John Russell Brown, *The Shakespeare Handbooks: Hamlet*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006) pp. 160-161.

<sup>21</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, adapted by Tom Gorman, (Saddleback Educational Publishing, 2003) (Act 1, Scene 5) p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, (Act 2, scene 2) p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Mphahlele, Ezekiel (1975) "Interview with Wole Soyinka", *African Writers Talking*. (Eds) Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse. (London: Heinemann Educational Books) p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> *TSB.*, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>26</sup> *TSB.*, p. 146.

<sup>27</sup> Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *The Sacred Wood*, (London: Methuen, 1969) p. 146.

<sup>28</sup> David Damrosch and David L. Pike (eds.), *The Longman Anthology of World Literature* (Second edition) (Longman: Pearson Education, Inc., 2009) p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Euripides, *Orestes* (Translated from Greek by Ian Johnston Vancouver, Island University Nanaimo, BC Canada), (Richer Resources Publications Arlington, USA, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> W. Verrall, Litt.D. *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides: Andromache, Helen, Heracles and Orestes*, Chap 4: "A Orestes: A fire from hell" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905) p. 204.

<sup>31</sup> *Orestes*, (Lines: 30-50), pp. 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* (Lines: 453-457), p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> In Leech Clifford, *Tragedy*, p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> *Orestes*, (Lines: 453-457), p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* (Lines: 1433-1440) p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* (Line: 430) p. 25.

<sup>37</sup> Earl Showerman, "Orestes and Hamlet: From Myth to Masterpiece: Part I", (*The Oxfordian*, Volume VII, 2004), p. 105.

<sup>38</sup> *Four Essays*, opcit., p. 245.

<sup>39</sup> *Orestes*, (Lines: 1830- 1837) p. 76.

<sup>40</sup> *Myth, Literature and the African World*, op cit., p. viii.

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