

FROM SOCIAL COMMITMENT TO IDEOLOGICAL AWARENESS:

A STUDY OF

SOYINKA'S THE INTERPRETERS AND SEASON OF ANOMY

By

Irene Assiba d'Almeida

Soyinka is a writer who is known to have "an instinctive distrust for ideological systems."¹ Although he holds progressive and even radical views which he beautifully expresses in his writing, Soyinka has always refused to accept "the necessity for a literary ideology"² as much as he has constantly resisted being branded. However he does advocate a "social vision" for he is indeed committed to social change and this social commitment is all-pervasive throughout his two novels. Indeed The Interpreters and Season of Anomy both constitute a variation of a theme in the sense that they deal with the same basic pre-occupation: the individual and society; not any individual, however, but chiefly the intellectual, the enlightened ego as it were and his role in society. Yet there are marked differences in the way this relationship which is central to the writer's concern is tackled in the two novels: in The Interpreters it is a social commitment which dominates, whereas an ideological awareness emanates from Season of Anomy.

In The Interpreters the main characters, the interpreters for that matter, set out to interpret their society, a society in which they feel ill at ease because of the type of values it upholds. At the same time, they go through a profound introspection to know themselves better, to cognize and analyse their actions and reactions to events and situations and, above all, to express and discuss their ideas, ideals, hopes, anxieties and frustrations. This introspection which goes along with a genuine quest for fulfillment leads the interpreters to a relentless self-discovery process which they undertake with overwhelming courage and sincerity.

The interpreters recognize the evils of the society at large and they do not spare the intellectual communities. Indeed, within the university circles there is a total lack of academic preoccupations. On the reverse, what prevails is an atmosphere of idle talk, platitudes and gossips, and all this is beautifully exhibited at the Oguazors' party where the entire conversation is focussed on pregnant students, lecturers who take prostitutes home, members of staff who do not pay their electricity bills, etc... The height of ridicule within the

university is symbolized by Professor Oguazor and his wife. He is pompous and conceited; she is artificial, fakely sophisticated and unable to extricate herself from "details of common etiquette." They both see themselves as the stronghold of morality. Indeed, Mrs. Oguazor complains that "the standard of morals has really gone down," while her husband in an affected accent declares that "the whole centry is senk in meral terpitude."³ But when certain immoral events in his life are disclosed (thanks to the gossips), his sermons on "merals" suddenly ring a bell of falsity and unbearable hypocrisy.

Dr. Lumoye is another hypocritic character who displays a tremendous sense of righteousness by refusing to abort a young pregnant student. He does not object to the abortion on moral or religious grounds but because he is "not risking seven years for someone else's pleasure" (p. 147); and he even adds: "If I tasted of it myself I would have something to show for it" (p. 147). This remark clinches the character perfectly well and the laughter which rises "genteel above the champagne bubbles" (p. 147) tells a lot on the type of jokes this august learned community enjoys. In his callousness, Dr. Lumoye shows no sign of humanity to tackle profoundly human problems and this is certainly a serious handicap for a medical doctor who is expected to soothe and heal.

The society at large is corrupt as evidenced by Sekoni's experience as an engineer. Indeed, the chairman of the council in a very typical manner gets his expatriate expert to declare Sekoni's electricity plant a junk, which enables him to buy all the equipment to his own profit while substantially compensating the "expat-expert" for his services. Sagoe who, on the other hand, wants to denounce these malpractices in his paper, discovers what journalism has become in his country: a clever bargain between different proprietors of papers to hide information, especially scandalous information relating to corruption. The well-accepted motto is: "Shut your mouth, I shut mine" (p. 95). "Plain an Simple" as says the editor-in-chief of the Independent Viewpoint. This keep-dark policy is indeed "plain and simple" but highly paradoxical for people whose primary duty is to inform.

The world of corruption and bribery is embodied by characters like Chief Winsala, Sir Derinola, the managing director of the Independent Viewpoint. But bribery and corruption can be seen at every level: a taxi driver, thinking that Sagoe is a policeman, hastily prepares to bribe him "a five-shilling note to pass on in one of the many practised sleights of hand" (p.

Throughout the novel, the social satire is all-pervasive and encompasses many more areas. The society and the evils th

are inherent in it are seen through the interpreters' eyes, the interpreters who indeed are severely critical of the existing order. Given the fact that they are so disgusted by their society, one would have expected the interpreters to act in a positive way so as to change the situation or at least to sow the seeds that will bring the society to a new germination. But is it possible to affirm that the interpreters are really committed to social change? Egbo is the one who clearly poses the problem of commitment in the following terms:

Is it so impossible to seal off the past and let it alone? Let it stay in its harmless anachronistic unit so we can go deep into it at will and leave it without commitment, without imposition. A man needs that, especially when the present, equally futile, distinguishes itself only by a particularly abject lack of courage. (p. 121)

Of course the problem of commitment as formulated by Egbo here stems from an attempt to solve a personal problem of choice between accepting a chieftaincy over the Osa people and continuing to work in the Foreign Office. The chieftaincy represents the claims of a past that Egbo is not willing to actualize. Kola also feels that the past can be painful and prevent individuals from living successfully in the present; that is why he expresses the following wish: "If only we were, if only we were and felt nothing of the enslaving cords...and owe neither dead nor living nothing of ourselves" (p. 245); and, he contemplates a situation where the past would cease to be a burden "so that when the present breaks over our heads we quickly find a new law for living" (p. 245). Sekoni, on the other hand, finds it impossible to draw a dividing line between past and present. He sees things in a global perspective, viewing the world as an ensemble. Nothing can be isolated, separated from the whole. That is what he tries to express in his recurrent concept of "the dome of continuity" linking past to present, love to religion, love to life, life to death. Sekoni's ideas seem to be more consonant with those of Soyinka; for the writer, in his novels and his plays alike, has always been preoccupied with the relationship between past and present. And this preoccupation is all the more important in The Interpreters since the characters are trying to define their role within the society. To be able to do so, they should indeed be able to place themselves in a historical context by looking back to the past, understanding the present and preparing for the future.

However, in Egbo's case, the chieftaincy does not only

bring out the problem of reconciliation between past and present, but also a problem of choice. "A man's gift of life should be separate," he claims, "an unrelated thing. All choice must come from within him, not from the prompting of the past" (p. 120). In actual fact, Egbo rejects all idea of choice, probably because he is unable to make any. Even in his emotional life he falters between Simi, the dangerous prostitute who initiates him into the mysteries and ecstasies of lovemaking, and the young unnamed student with whom he has a relationship that bears a more spiritual touch. By the close of the novel, Egbo is still at a loss as to what to do with his pregnant girlfriend. There is an intimation that he will cling to Simi "like a choice of a man drowning" (p. 251). Egbo always has split feelings; he proves totally unable to make crucial decisions and, instead of choosing, he prefers to "move with the tide." This inability to make choices is, without any doubt, a serious weakness in Egbo as an individual and also as an interpreter; for, it puts him in a situation where it will be difficult for him to judge the choices of the society he is criticizing, since he is himself unable to make any

Another characteristic that the interpreters share is the fact that they--with the exception of Bandele perhaps--are all dissatisfied with life. One way or another, they are not fulfilled. Sagoe, for instance, encounters his first difficulties when scouting for a job as a journalist and here Soyinka seizes the opportunity to show corruption at work in the way interviews are conducted to select qualified staff for various posts. After getting a job, he finds out that, in his country, journalism is nothing more than "a swap of silence and he realizes that he has to learn to be silent to cope with the society: "Silence...silence," he says, "I have known all kinds of silence but it is time to learn some more" (p. 98). It is by virtue of this "silence" that Sagoe is unable to throw open to the public the story of the electricity plant. It is the same "silence" that prevents him from reporting that, in a cosmopolitan city like Lagos, shit is being spread in the street, right in front of a school and in a residential area. The editor-in-chief is opposed to this publication--in spite of all the pictures Sagoe can produce to back his facts--on the allegation that such a publication would "offend the general reader" (p. 108). When it is not the Establishment who imposes silence on him, his own relatives send him delegations to plead caution, thus exercising a kind of autocensorship. That is why, as far as his profession is concerned, Sagoe does not find any job satisfaction and is, therefore, not fulfilled. Sekon experiences the same kind of frustrations in his job. A well-trained engineer, he dreams of building bridges, hospitals, plants, etc., in a society which needs them tremendously. But he soon discovers that an abysmal gap separates dreams from

reality. He is in fact put on an insignificant job which has no bearing with his profession, for he is made to perform trivial duties: "s-signing vouchers and letters and b--b-bicycle allowances" (p. 27). When he is eventually given a chance to build an experimental power station, it is readily dismissed as being junk without being as much as tested. This experience frustrates and dejects him to such an extent that he ends up in a mental hospital. However, the incident impels Sekoni into seeking for another future, for another purpose in life and he comes up with the revelation of a new vocation, that of an artist. He discovers his gift as a sculptor and produces a masterpiece: the wrestler. Indeed "Sekoni was an artist who had waited for long to find himself but had done so finally and left no room for doubt" (p. 100). Kola, on the other hand, is a lecturer, but it is his role as an artist which is pushed to the forefront. Yet Kola is not entirely fulfilled as an artist and he thus confides in Monica Faseyi, the only person he can freely tell about his frustrations and disillusionments:

*You must know by now that I am not really
an artist. I never set out to be one.
But I understand the nature of art and
so I make an excellent teacher of art.
That is all. (p. 227)*

This statement clearly shows that Kola is aware of his limitations and he acknowledges the fact with great lucidity. It is only his relationship with Monica Faseyi--a deeply felt relationship enriched by a kind of harmony of feelings, a confidential tone always and lots of emotional undertones--which gives Kola a measure of fulfillment; but even then, he will never gather enough courage to bring the relationship to complete fruition. Egbo is not fulfilled either and that is perhaps why he is always attracted by water. As he explains to his young girlfriend, he cannot do without the peaceful atmosphere of the creeks and the surrounding water: "I find I need it more than all my friends, they are all busy doing something but I seem to go only from one event to the other. As if life was nothing but experience" (p. 133). Indeed, Egbo feels inadequate and, paradoxically, at the same time he fears adequacy: "Who dares to be adequate," he asks. And this fear of fulfillment is also shared by Kola who, reflecting on the nature of power, comes to the conclusion that power and the responsibilities that go along with its possession can come through diverse avenues:

*He had felt this sense of power, the knowledge
of power within his hands, of the will to trans-
form and he understood then that the medium was
of little importance, that his act, on canvas
or on human material was the process of living
and brought him the intense fear of fulfillment. (p.218)*

This search for fulfillment shows that the interpreters are not self-satisfied and that they are really trying to find a meaningful purpose in life. Indeed, they are all obsessed by the desire to create. Sekoni wants to build bridges and hospitals, Kola wishes to create through art, Sagoe aims at creation through journalism and Bandele does create consciousness in others. This is obvious when Bandele tries to get Egbo to think about his role, his commitment to the people of Osa and the demands inherent in commitment: "If you seek to transform," he tells him, "you must not be afraid of power" (p. 102). Bandele also wants to make his friends aware of their tactless attitudes, of their cynicism and callousness. "None of you minds much suffering you cause" (p. 179), he tells them when they discuss their encounter with Lazarus. It is with the Lazarus episode that Bandele starts shifting away from his friends. The gap becomes wider with Noah's death, and wider still with what happens between Egbo and the young girl who is a student of his. It is obvious that he disapproves of Egbo's attitude and that is why he is very harsh with him when delivering the girl's message, wishing to "keep [his] commitment to the minimum" (p. 234). And, it is Sekoni's exhibition which gets Bandele totally estranged from the group for he disagrees with his friends' decision to kill a ram: "What do you need the ram for? Haven't you had your sacrifice?" (p. 243) and, looking at Joe Golder's concert program, he sees the "requiem" as a sort of expiation and he deplors the fact that, by going to this exhibition cum concert, they are "all going for a needless self-flagellation." From then on, the way he acts and talks ultimately severs the bond that links him to the other interpreters. He deliberately goes to sit away from the other interpreters at the concert as if to show that his rejection is not only moral and intellectual, but also physical--a total rejection.

Bandele acts as a conscience even outside his group, for he is the only one who dares confront and challenge the Establishment represented by Oguazor, Lumoye and others of their kind:

He was looking at them with pity only his pity was more terrible than his hardness, inexorable. Bandele, old and immutable as the royal mothers of Benin throne, old and cruel as the Ogboni in conclave pronouncing the word. (p. 250-51)

And, the word he does pronounce, as a curse over the heads of these conceited people, is: "I hope you all live to bury your daughters" (p. 251). Indeed, it is not by mere chance that Soyinka compares Bandele to the staff of Ogboni or the royal mothers of Benin throne: it is to emphasize his strength and dignity and also his role as the one who instills consciousness

into others.

It is only Egbo who seems to lead a purposeless life; in fact, he seems to have chosen to live without a purpose. However, the fact that the interpreters seek fulfillment and are afraid of it at the same time is a measure of the complexity of the conflicts in their inner selves. It is also an ambiguous position, for it allows them to shun their responsibilities. Indeed, the water symbolism that surrounds Egbo is also a symbol of his noncommittal attitudes towards life in general. Water does not only represent for him peace, comfort, stillness and mystery, it chiefly means evasion and isolation, a way of finding "an interlude from reality." That is why, whenever he is confronted with a concrete problem, he rushes to the creeks to escape reality; for reality involves commitment and there is in commitment "a measure of tyranny," which explains why Egbo finds it much easier to "move with the tide." Even Sekoni is guilty of escapism. Indeed, if Soyinka uses the power station episode to show corruption at work, he also uses it to show Sekoni's inability to adapt to new situations however frustrating they may be. Sekoni's breakdown is indeed a form of escape in a situation where he is unable to make the necessary transition between a past pregnant with hope and a present replete with frustrations. Sagoe does not live up to his commitments either. Instead, to forget his numerous frustrations, he takes refuge in what he calls the Philosophy of Voidancy expounded in his book of Enlightenment. In fact, Sagoe lives in a perpetual malaise not only expressed in rather nebulous voidant terms, but also in physical terms. Indeed, whenever he faces a problem he suddenly suffers stomach pains and his "drink lobes" ache terribly. When these physical pains are too acute and when he can find no solace in his Book of Enlightenment, he indulges in drink.

All the interpreters have their shortcomings; even Bandle proves to be a lazy lecturer, taking ages to return his students' scripts. "If he could," a student says, "he would bring his bed into classes and lecture lying down" (p. 128). Kola, as well as Egbo, is, more than any other interpreter, afraid of fulfillment. Moreover, Egbo can also show unconcealed violence which is probably why Kola chooses him to represent Ogun, the god of iron, not the one who molds and creates, but the one who destroys. As if to justify this choice, Egbo most violently objects to being painted as "a damned bloodthirsty maniac from some maximum security zoo" (p. 233). Yet, there is in Egbo a measure of pusillanimity, for he lacks the courage to come out plainly with his disapproval of the Oguazors' and Lumoye's holier-than-thou attitude when the latter are discussing his girlfriend in a most conceited manner. As for Sagoe, by the middle of the novel, he has evolved a new vision of his

own profession; he becomes insensitive to other people's sorrows and is only concerned with the stories he can get from them to fill up the pages of his paper. To Bandele, who is critical of this attitude in connection with the albino, he retorts: "The man asked me here to use me and I earn my living from using others in turn" (p. 176). On the other hand, he disagrees with the system but readily accepts to give Winsala money to secure his job. He also uses his position and the taxi driver's fear of policemen to get away with the fact that he has forgotten his wallet at home and is therefore unable to pay for his fare. The close of the novel suggests that it is Dehinwa who, through love and understanding, will eventually wean him out of his Book of Enlightenment which he promises to burn the moment they are married. However, even if Dehinwa helps him out of the Voidant Philosophy, Sagoe will still have to overcome a few deficiencies which are not in keeping with his professed love for honesty and hatred for the evils in the society. As earlier pointed out, Sekoni is one of the most fulfilled of the interpreters and yet there is a sense of waste that surrounds him: a waste as an engineer, and a waste because of the belated discovery of his talent as an artist. However, once Sekoni finds his veritable vocation, he is able to produce a perfect work of art. He is indeed the only interpreter who is somewhat able to atone for his past by achieving something in a positive way.

In spite of their shortcomings and weaknesses, all the interpreters are engaged in a relentless effort to know themselves fully and, to achieve this, they all need catalysts as it were, whether they are human beings or events. Indeed, Egbo needs Simi and his young girlfriend, Sagoe needs Dehinwa and Kola needs Monica Faseyi. But the interpreters as a group need Lazarus and his spiritualist beliefs as much as they need Noah for a "knowledge of the new generation of interpreters" (p. 178). Sekoni's death also serves the purpose of self-knowledge. Kola's canvas is also a means for self-discovery, for it tries to identify the interpreters and their acquaintances with the gods of the Yoruba pantheon. The Establishment also helps them in the discovery of their inner selves and even the day-to-day life forces them to come to grip with the problems of their society.

However, this analysis of the interpreters shows beyond any doubt that, in one way or another, totally or partially, they have failed to meet their commitments. This is true of even Sekoni:

Sekoni's stuttering pleas for unity, love, faith, beauty, goodness, reverence continue to flutter in vagueness and lack of foundation

*in anything concrete and practical.*⁴

But, for all their intellectual talk, their genuine quest for self-discovery, the interpreters do not achieve anything by the end of the novel. To be fair to them, their extreme lucidity and unalloyed sincerity is to be commended. They are all, in different ways and in various degrees, much concerned with their own development and are constantly questioning their lives and the relevance of their lives to the society. This relentless introspection--although a positive undertaking--constitutes a great demand on individuals and causes breakdowns and perhaps that is what partly accounts for disintegration of the group. Indeed, at the end of the novel, even the interpreters' friendship, which is such a valuable asset, is ultimately broken.

If we were to evaluate to what extent the interpreters have successfully reacted to the challenges within the society they criticize, we would be forced to give a negative verdict. Although their severe criticism is a form of protest--a vote of nonconfidence in the system--their awareness is not conducive to action and there is no attempt on their part to try and subvert the existing order; and, in an article entitled "Elitism in Soyinka's The Interpreters," Muchugu Kiiri condemns them altogether:

*The Interpreters do not attempt to change the system after being disenchanted. After their disillusionment they become cynics and use their creative powers as artists (Kola and Sekoni) and worshippers of the Yoruba gods (Egbo). While their cynicism and attack on "society" are valid and are not being underestimated the interpreters fail because the alternatives they offer are elitist. The satire on the upper society should have been a beginning, a start in leading them to align with the masses of the people. Moreover their criticism is on the surface: they do not attempt to question the fundamental factors which perpetuate such a system.*⁵

Judging from the interpreters' noncommitment to action and escapist attitudes, a good number of critics have jumped to the conclusion that Soyinka is not a committed writer himself because the passive characters he portrays in The Interpreters are not in keeping with his own pronouncements on the role of the intellectuals in society. However, this criticism of Soyinka does overlook the fact that the interpreters are not necessarily seen or given by the writer as models to be followed. If it is true that they all, to a certain extent, represent some aspects

of Soyinka's thought and responses to the society in general, it is equally true that Soyinka does not always agree with the interpreters. In fact, the relevant point to be made here is that Soyinka does not condone his interpreters; instead, he brings them all under close and critical scrutiny which shows a commitment to a more dynamic, more viable social order. Indeed Soyinka is aware of the fact that mere criticism through satire can only be a starting point:

Satire is necessarily negative in impulse. It sets out to demolish, to destroy. Satire in itself is useless...the very fact of arousing people to a negative concept, a negative attitude toward an existing situation, can and should breed in a politicized society the need to effect positive changes or to think of the possibility of creating something in turn.⁶

It is with Season of Anomy that the characters will not only feel the need to effect positive changes within the society but also actively work towards subverting the existing order in the interest of the masses. Indeed, Soyinka himself is of the opinion that individuals endeavor to find a positive alternative to the evils within society if they are somewhat politicized. None of the interpreters can be said to be politicized and that is partially why they do not feel the urge to change the status quo and therefore indulge in a passive, though by no means futuristic interpretation of a corrupt society they strongly disapprove of. In Season of Anomy Ofeyi and the Dentist are politicized. The political affiliation is not clearly stated but it is obvious that they have leftist inclinations. However, the level and nature of their involvement are not the same. Clearly Ofeyi is midway between the interpreters and the Dentist. He recognizes the need for a new social order and is ready to act in order to bring it about. That he could for a minute contemplate to turn away from this role is too bewildering a thought to be entertained, for "the truth was too bare for self-deceit, the call for urgent action too strident for any evasion."⁷ And yet he cannot just rush into action because there is room for deep thought and feeling in his life. His mind is constantly tormented by a number of reflections: his role as a man belonging to the Cocoa Corporation, what Aiyero stands for and his affiliation with it, the relationship between past and present, his own relationship with the women in his life (Iriyise and Taiila), the Cartel's maneuvers, the threatened unity of the country, the desirability of violence in a liberation struggle, his own commitment, the concepts of guilt, futility, failure, the value of artistic creation in a situation of terror, etc. Indeed Ofeyi spends much time to intellectualize, to rationalize and elucidate

his motives, his intentions and his actions. Ofeyi is a revolutionary in the making. His encounter with the Dentist will consolidate his "wavering commitment" after he has been "wallowing in the filth and compromises of Illosa" (p. 23). Indeed, Ofeyi was part of the Establishment and he could see the evils from within. Nauseated by the situation, his only means of protest came through the songs he composed to promote the cocoa production until, refusing to compromise any longer, he stops playing the game, resigns and chooses to side with the masses. Eventually Ofeyi refuses to be what Soyinka calls "the intellectuals of the Establishment" who "no matter what the status quo is, consider it their duty to find reasons to justify this."⁸

The Dentist, on the other hand, has resolved all the contradictions within Ofeyi. There is no doubt in his mind that what is needed is quick, planned and effective action.

Among the people there is also an embryo of politicization through Aiyero where a group of men and women are experiencing a communal life style. What Aiyero stands for is not clearly defined, however. The radicals dismiss the whole experience as being "the prime example of unscientific communalism, primitive and embarrassingly sentimental" (p. 2). For the Dentist it is "a piece of anachronism" filled with "woolly-minded idealists" (p. 112) and Pa Ahime discloses the goals that the community sets out to reach: "We founded Aiyero to seek truth, a better life, all the things which men run after" (p. 9). Indeed, Aiyero represents not so much a religion as a way of life, a philosophy but certainly not a politically-inclined ideology. Pa Ahime says about the men of Aiyero: "I doubt if any of them has ever joined a political party even out of curiosity" (p. 28). And yet they will constitute a revolutionary force in the hands of Ofeyi because they live by an idea. This is most significant because it is consonant with Soyinka's views; it could almost be seen as a justification--if need be--of the writer's stand establishing the fact that one need not be a political activist to effect radical changes in society. It seems that for Soyinka it is enough to be guided by an idea, an ideal of social justice, to act effectively.

Ofeyi and the Dentist will indeed muster the Aiyero men to implement the revolutionary tactics they have elected to use. Their first undertaking is to look for the cause of the people's sufferings. The evil forces are symbolized by the Cartel, an obnoxious alliance of the gun and the purse, a stronghold of political power, a monopoly of the economy, a bastion of exploitation for selfish ends, a repressive force that builds up "a superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder"(p. 27). Indeed, the Cartel perpetrates all kinds of atrocities, organizes mass killings of so-called agitators and, in the process, a good number

of innocent people die as well. In other words, because of the terrorist and fascist methods used by the Cartel, there is no social justice, no respect for human life.

Once the root of the evil is located, its eradication can be planned and Ofeyi and the Dentist use different ways to reach the same goal. Ofeyi first succeeds in getting the Corporation to accept a project of growing cocoa on the Aiyero community land, not for too long though, for the Cartel eventually opposes the venture. But there is a steady growth of the idea in Ofeyi's mind:

...the birth of the new man from the same germ as the cocoa seed, the Aiyero ideal disseminated with the same powerful propaganda machine of the Cartel throughout the land, taking hold of undirected youth and filling the vacuum of their transitional heritage with the virile shoot. (p. 19)

And this idea goes a long way, for the men of Aiyero cooperate fully, wholeheartedly, with their love for justice, their honesty and their deep sense of dedication. This is important because it evidences an idea shared by Marx, Fanon and Soyinka himself, that the intelligentsia alone cannot bring about any meaningful and radical change without the support of the masses. The men of Aiyero are indeed disseminated all over the country and their objective is "the recovery of whatever has been seized from society by a handful, remoulding society itself" (p. 117) and in the process of attaining this objective, they achieve something unique and until then unprecedented, something which in fact constitutes a threat to the Cartel and causes senseless repression "a working-tribe." That is what Ofeyi explains to Zaccheus when they are going through Shage: "New projects like the Shage Dam meant that we could start with newly created working communities. New affinities, working-class kinships as opposed to the tribal kinships" (p. 170), and this is an extremely positive achievement which emphasizes the fact that the exploited classes must of necessity be united to fight a common enemy. The newly created working-tribe thus, to a great extent, defeats the divide and rule policies devised by the Cartel to undermine the people's fight for a more viable socio-political order. On the other hand, the Shage experience is, as it were, a nationalization of the struggle which prefigures the internationalization of the struggle as advocated by Marxism.

The Dentist holds more radical views. The urgency of the situation explains his equally adamant will for urgent action. What he wants is a neat physical elimination of the members of the Cartel, not a blind elimination but a precise and effective

one and he goes about it with ruthless planning and cold calculation. His is "an unassailable logic of extraction before infection. Extract the carious tooth quickly, before it infects the others" (p. 92). The Dentist does not indulge in amateurish action and as a result insists on selective assassination: "select the real kingpins and eliminate them. It is simple, you have to hit the snake on the head to render it harmless" (p. 111). The Dentist believes that an infallible eradication of the cause also means infallible eradication of the effects and he advocates violence:

*The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For it the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things...can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence.*⁹

Fanon argues that a people engaged in a struggle must be ready for violence at all times and even for absolute violence if need be. The Dentist agrees with this totally and here again there is a marked difference between him and Ofeyi who respects the claims of violence because somehow what is undertaken must be protected from the violence exercised by the repressive forces; but, he is not convinced that violence should be the answer: "I also do not believe in violence," he tells Tailla, "but I see it, I recognize it, I must confront it" (p. 100). The Dentist, on the contrary, sees violence as a practical and effective means to reach an end; he cannot contain his growing anger at Ofeyi's crippling hesitations, and bursts out:

Self-defence is not simply waiting until a lunatic attacks you with a hatchet. When you have watched his attack on a man up the road, you don't wait any longer. But you see, you rationalists have given birth to a monster child by pretending that the lunatic can be reasoned with. That is why our people die. Because you paced in silence at the incubation of a monstrosity, preoccupied with a study of the phenomenon. Tell me, if you took a mouthful of food and you felt an acid burn your mouth, do you roll it round and round on your tongue thoughtfully or violently spit it out? (p. 134)

On the one hand, the Dentist is irritated by Ofeyi's intellectual rationalizations and, on the other, Ofeyi cannot resolve for himself the Dentist's ethics of assassination and yet, they are not in a relation of opposition, but rather in a relation of complementarity, for they feel close to each other and do recognize the importance of working together, in the same direction, profitably. Armah also emphasized the importance of solidarity which generates genuine power. In Two Thousand Seasons, Armah shows that solidarity is an indispensable tool to achieve any liberation fight, but there is another dimension to it--a moral dimension which is psychologically essential--and he thus expresses his conviction: "How deathly the separation of faculties, the separation of people; the single agent's action is wasted motion; the single agent's freedom is useless liberty."¹⁰

It is true that "the characters in The Interpreters engage themselves with the task of clarification of very many preliminary issues before an actual confrontation with the malignant forces in their society."¹¹ It is equally true that "Season of Anomy takes off where The Interpreters ends [and] is concerned with a search for how the beautiful ones can be born."¹² However, even if the characters in Season of Anomy go a giant step beyond the interpreters in terms of action, after all the joint efforts, the beautiful ones are not yet born. It is doubtful whether the Dentist has achieved anything at all in terms of bringing about any radical changes of the existing socio-political structures. He does succeed in killing the members of the Cartel, but he has nothing to place in the void and, perhaps he could be justified since he had, from the start, limited his action to assassinations. Ofeyi, however, has all along been upset by such a commitment:

Surely, when you--eliminate, you have in mind something to follow, something to replace what you eliminate. Otherwise your action is negative and futile. (p. 111)

And thus goes the Dentist's answer:

Don't ask me what I envisage. Beyond the elimination of men I know to be destructively evil, I envisage nothing. What happens after is up to people like you. (p. 120)

Maybe through the achievement of his self-imposed mission the Dentist achieves his own personal fulfillment and he does also rid the country from the reactionary forces embodied by the Cartel. The problem is that by the end of the novel we discover that Ofeyi is not willing, not ready to take over from where the Dentist has planned to stop, although he has once played a ve-

positive role. Indeed, thanks to Ofeyi, Aiyero has been called upon to play a more significant, more active role in the interests of the oppressed masses and against the Cartel. But the Cartel has somewhat succeeded in diverting his commitment by kidnapping Iriyise. His commitment to the masses then shifts to a resolute and relentless search for Iriyise through the devastated land of the Cross River which is compared to a veritable inferno.¹³ Of course, Ofeyi claims that this undertaking is indispensable for a deeper consciousness of historical events occurring in one's time, but this sounds more like a purely intellectual justification:

I'm sure every man feels the need to seize for himself the enormity of what is happening, of the time in which it is happening. Perhaps deep down I realise that the search would immerse me in the meaning of the event, lead me to a new understanding of history. (p. 218)

At the end of the novel, one is tempted to conclude that somehow the achievements are not satisfying and certainly not decisive. Yet, at the same time, it is well known that a process that would bring forth a revolution cannot be achieved overnight and is often a very slow process. The people have gone through excruciating pains, but there is hope that the sufferings and deaths are not mere senseless waste but that it is a necessary waste meant to bring about regeneration. And, it is not by chance that Soyinka makes a profuse use of the rebirth symbolism even in the titles he selects for the different parts of the novel. The hope is faint, but there is hope, nonetheless, if only because men like Suberu who have blindly been the allies of repressive forces become aware of their sordid roles as "privileged slaves" and reject it altogether. It is only when many more will go through the same kind of awareness that the season of anomy will die to give birth to a season of harmony.

Notes

1. Abiola Irele, "The Significance of Wole Soyinka," in an unpublished proceeding of a Symposium on Soyinka held at Ibadan in May 1973, organized by the Departments of English and Drama. Irele's work was the introduction to the symposium.
2. Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World, Cambridge University Press, 1976. See "Ideology and the Social Vision," p. 61.
3. Wole Soyinka, The Interpreters, A.W.S. Heinemann, 1970, p. 219. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
4. Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "The Interpreters a form of Criticism," Symposium on Soyinka, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

5. Muchugu Kiri, "Elitism in Soyinka's The Interpreters," Busara, Vol. 6, No. 1, East Africa, 1971, p. 79.
6. Karen L. Morell (ed.), In Person: Achebe, Awoonor and Soyinka, Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, 1975, p. 126.
7. Wole Soyinka, Season of Anomy, Rex Collings, London, 1977, p. 141. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.
8. J. Agetua (ed.), When the Man Died, views, reviews and interviews on Wole Soyinka's controversial book. Midwest Newspapers Corporation, Benin City, Nigeria. Interview with Wole Soyinka in Accra, 1976, p. 36.
9. Frantz Fanon, Les Damnés de la Terre, Maspero, 1961. Translated into English by Constance Farrington under the title The Wretched of the Earth, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 28.
10. Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1973, p. 210.
11. J.I. Okonkwo, "The Essential Unity of Soyinka's The Interpreters and Season of Anomy," Ufahamu, Vol. IX, No. 3, Los Angeles, 1979-80, p. 68.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
13. For an elaboration of this myth, see D. Izevbaye, "Soyinka's Black Orpheus," in Neo-African Literature and Culture, B. Lindfors and Ulla Schild (eds.), Mainz, Verlag, B. Heyman, 1976.