

THE POET AND HIS INNER WORLD: SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE
IN THE POETRY OF CHRISTOPHER OKIGBO AND WOLE SOYINKA

By

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In an interview with Marjory Whitelaw published in 1965, the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo made a distinction between what he called "platform poetry," and the lyric mode he referred to as the poetry of "inward exploration." Platform poetry, he felt, is declamatory and rhetorical; but it deserves, nevertheless, the labour of the poets who write it. Still, it is a less difficult kind of poetry to write than the poetry of inward exploration:

Much more difficult...of course is inward exploration. I hope that ultimately people will start doing that sort of thing in Africa. They haven't started doing it yet.¹

Okigbo believed, on the other hand, that his poetic career began with a poetry that is inwardly oriented. As he says, "the turning point came in 1958, when I found myself wanting to know myself better, and I had to turn around and look at myself from inside."² Without doubt, Okigbo has the question of his own identity as an African poet in mind in this declaration; but the confession has a relevance that is applicable too to his inner world. In his first published work *Heavensgate* (1962), the assertion of his own identity is very much in evidence. But in such pieces as "Siren Limits" and "Distances" the poet journeyed inwards.

The self that Okigbo wished to explore is susceptible to forces that fragment:

When I talk of the self, I mean my various selves, because the self itself is made up of various elements which do not always combine happily. And when I talk of looking inward to myself, I mean turning inward to examine myself.³

The tragic tone of this passage may account for the mood of despair that pervades much of Okigbo's poetry. The various elements of which the self is made up do not always combine "happily." There is here an echo of the Yeatsian theory of

the divided self, and the consequent search for unity of being.

The conflict within is for Yeats the human inheritance of the Fall. He refers to it in the poem "Vacillation" as "those antinomies/Of day and night."⁴ Okigbo seems to subscribe to this opinion when he says that the poetry of inward exploration is written "to bring out a sense of inner disturbance."⁵ Such a poetry explores the poet's inner world, which is a world of conflict and tension. Thus, Okigbo can talk of the "self that suffers, that experiences."⁶ The suffering self is, in his case, the creative self; and its agony is of a dimension that amounts almost to a physical dissolution of the self. Equilibrium may be regained only when the poet is exorcised of the demon that lacerates his inner being.

The creative artist's constant warfare with the demon within may explain Okigbo's admiration for legendary heroes, such as Aeneas and Gilgamesh. Okigbo admires their heroic exploits but he is even more fascinated by their courage to dare the abyss within. That confrontation with the dark forces of the self is mythologized in the motif of descent into the underworld of death. Witness Maud Bodkin in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*:

*Before any great task that begins a new life and calls upon untried resources of character, the need seems to arise for some introversion of the mind upon itself and upon its past - a plunging into the depths, to gain knowledge and power over self and destiny. It is, I think, of such an introversion that the underworld journey of Aeneas is symbolic.*⁷

The literary counterpart of the epic heroes is Orpheus. Okigbo mentions him twice in the Introduction to *Labyrinths*. The poet-protagonist in the volume is an Orphic figure, a personage with "a load of destiny on his head," and one who "is about to begin a (creative) journey."⁸ In his study, *Descent and Return*, the German critic, Walter Strauss, sees Orpheus as the traditional image of the agony of poetry. That agony is linked up with Orpheus's descent into the underworld of death. The descent is for Strauss a metaphor for the creative artist's journey into the world of his own interior:

Orpheus is not only poetry; he has become, in modern times, the agony of poetry.... He is the figure, the myth, entrusted with the burden of poetry and myth. His metamorphosis is the change in poetic climate

*itself, placed against an ever-darkening sky in which poetry recedes more and more toward secret and unexplored spaces, spaces that are obscure and must be illuminated by constellations of the mind ever threatened by disaster and extinction.*⁹

In the companion poems, "Siren Limits" and "Distances," Okigbo descends into the spaces of the mind in the effort to reconcile the discordant elements of the self. The inner disturbance that plagues the poet originates from a sense of his own creative sterility. Okigbo believes that the creative thoroughfare can be opened to the questing poet only when he has annihilated his being. The annihilation is a prelude to re-birth. Therein lies the paradox of what he calls the "live-die proposition":

*"Limits" and "Distances" are man's outer and inner world projected - the phenomenal and the imaginative, not in terms of their separateness but of their relationship - an attempt to reconcile the universal opposites of life and death in a live-die proposition: one is the other and either is both.*¹⁰

Okigbo's statement here has far-reaching implications. Opposites, he implies, are mutually interdependent: the inner world is related to the outer; life recalls death. The reconciliation of these opposites is the synthesis from which the cycle begins again. Thus, although "Siren Limits" and "Distances" explore Okigbo's inner world, the surfacing from the depths of the poet's own interior brings him into contact with the world of physical reality. The surfacing may take the form of an awakening from dream, or it may imply that consciousness has been regained, and that the poet is once more in contact with the material world. In the case of Okigbo, to whom physical dissolution is a metaphor for the struggles of the creative mind, the awakening or the return from the journey into the interior signals the end of creative agony. Borrowing a phrase from Joyce, Okigbo calls this condition "a state of aesthetic grace":

*The self that suffers, that experiences, ultimately finds fulfilment in a form of psychic union with the supreme spirit (muse) that is both destructive and creative. The process is one of sensual anaesthesia, of total liberation from all physical and emotional tension, the end result, a state of aesthetic grace.*¹¹

Dream and trance prepare the way for Okigbo's entry into the inner landscape of creative tension. Yeats refers to this landscape as the imagination's dim Kingdom, and he holds that all visionaries have entered into it in a state of trance.¹² In Okigbo's "Siren Limits I," the poet-protagonist is "Summoned at offside of/dream remembered."¹³ The subsequent stanzas insist on the importance of dream-condition as a necessary prelude for the poet's exploration of his inner world:

*Between sleep and waking
I hang up my egg-shells
To you of palm grove.*¹⁴

The Nigerian critic, Donatus Nwoga, has noted that the function of "Siren Limits I" is "prefatory." It creates, in his own words, "a pervading atmosphere of time and setting, describing a state of half-dream, half-reality."¹⁵ The atmosphere evoked in the verse in question is predominantly oneiric. The "you" of the last line is the personage addressed later in the poem as "Queen of the damp half-light."¹⁶ She is the poet's muse, or Mother Idoto. In the Introduction to *Labyrinths* Okigbo associates her with Robert Graves's "White Goddess."

The image of "half-light" locates the poet further in the twilight zone between night and day, and between dream and reality. To enter into this zone of experience, the poet must be "disembodied," that is, go out of the body. The elimination of the body is what Okigbo talks of as hanging up "my egg-shells." One will recall that Okigbo said in the Introduction to *Labyrinths* that his protagonist would become "disembodied" in his pursuit of the white elephant.

In Okigbo's "Siren Limits," the exploration of the landscape of the poet's inner world begins in section II:

*Into the soul
The selves extended their branches,
Into the moments of each living hour
Feeling for audience*

*Straining thin among the echoes.*¹⁷

Poetry such as this, wrote Soyinka in an indirect homage to Okigbo, is the work of a poet who can confront the "world beneath the matter, the realities of the mystic kingdom in which other black writers are wont to explore lineaments of body or soul."¹⁸ Other critics have associated this stanza with Okigbo's need for a literary audience at one time in his career. This view is not being contested. But important too is the fact that Okigbo must have been convinced that the kind of work which would

rank him among the great authors of the past (those referred to as "poplars" in a preceding stanza) must be of a quality that is born out of the anguish of the soul. For, did not Yeats say that "all the great poems of the world have their foundations fixed in agony."¹⁹ In the first stanza of "Siren Limits II," Okigbo is "a shrub among the poplars." In order to attain to light (to grow to the size and stature of the "poplars") his plant-roots must seek the "sap" of life from the soil of his own soul:

*FOR HE WAS a shrub among the poplars,
Needing more roots
More sap to grow to sunlight
Thirsting for sunlight,*

A low growth among the forest.²⁰

The line "Thirsting for sunlight" in the above quote, and "Straining thin among the echoes" in the previous, are metaphorical expressions of the agony of composition. Caught up in a similar creative throes in *Heavensgate*, Okigbo lamented "Stretch, stretch, O antennae."²¹ In "Siren Limits I," the agony of the dance is no longer stated but dramatized. The self descends into the soul's abyss in order to fulfill "each moment in a/broken monody."²² "Straining," "thirsting," and "stretching" are metaphors for the artist's battle with himself. Okigbo wrote in the Introduction to *Labyrinths* that such battles can be as fierce as the "swell of the silent sea, the great heaving dream at its highest, the thunder of splitting pods."²³ The high moments of this interior battle he calls the "crisis point" in "Siren Limits III":

*And this is the crisis point,
The twilight moment between
sleep and waking.²⁴*

The ordeal has its own reward; for the dissolution of the self is a prelude to rebirth:

*And voice that is reborn transpires,
Not thro' pores in the flesh,
but the soul's back-bone.²⁵*

"Transpire" may at first suggest evaporation. But Okigbo has in mind the gradual emergence of the reborn voice (the art-work itself) into light:

*And out of the solitude
Voice and soul with selves unite
Riding the echoes,*

Horsemen of the apocalypse;

*And crowned with one self
The name displays its foliage
Hanging low*

A green cloud above the forest.²⁶

That inner turmoil out of which works of "changeless metal" are born (to quote Yeats once more) is suggested with images of combat in "Limits IV." A poetic image rooted like a flagpole in the poet's own heart clamours for articulation, but this privilege is denied the poet until he has done battle with the "supreme spirit that is both destructive and creative." That spirit is the muse to whose cruelty the poet surrenders himself willingly as a gesture of self-immolation:

*AN IMAGE insists
From flag pole of the heart;
Her image distracts
With the cruelty of the rose...*

*Oblong-headed lioness-
No shield is proof against her-
Wound me, O sea-weed
Face, blinded like strong-room.²⁷*

Creative effort is for Okigbo as difficult as the attempt to recapture the outlines of an important but elusive dream. As he puts it in the Introduction to *Labyrinths*:

*The present dream clamoured to be born a
cadenced cry: silence to appease the fever
of flight beyond the iron gate.²⁸*

In the first stanza of the passage from "Siren Limits IV," the poet's clamouring voice is muffled by the indifference of the midwife muse who is unwilling to assist the pregnant poet at the moment of labour. The images that suggest the struggles of the creative mind in stanza two include "shield," "wound," and "lioness." Since the battle is not a physical one (the poet is still in a state of trance) the scene is as internalized as the soil of the heart on which the poetic flagpole is rooted. The interior struggle here is the counterpart of the descent movement in "Limits II." Here, however, the trance is prolonged. There is no surfacing as yet from the deep. The poet is still exiled to the limits of his interior world. "The LIMITS," Okigbo wrote elsewhere, "were the limits of a dream."²⁹ Thus both the poet himself and the reader await his final resurrection. "Siren Limits" comes to a close on this

note of waiting:

*When you have finished
& done up my stitches
Wake me near the altar,
& this poem will be finished...³⁰*

The transitional links between "Siren Limits" and "Distances" are provided by Okigbo both in his Introduction to *Labyrinths* and in the main body of "Siren Limits" itself. In the Introduction he writes:

*Distances is...a poem of homecoming,
but of homecoming in its spiritual and
psychic aspects. The quest broken off
after "Siren Limits" is resumed, this
time in the unconscious.³¹*

The poetic quest is broken off at the point when Okigbo says at the end of "Siren Limits":

*When you have finished
& done up my stitches,
Wake me near the altar,
& this poem will be finished...*

The elliptical periods at the end of the last line suggest that the quest has been suspended.

Okigbo says that the quest in "Distances" has taken place in the unconscious, by which he means the world of the interior. I have argued on the evidence of the poem itself and on the evidence of Okigbo's testimony elsewhere that the experience related in "Siren Limits" took place also in a world of the interior. On the question of connection between the two poems, there is this significant passage from "Siren Limits":

*Distances of her armpit-fragrance
Turn chloroform enough for my patience-³²*

These lines occur in one of the closing stanzas of "Siren Limits." From the first word of the above verse, Okigbo borrowed the title of the poem "Distances" which is the culmination of the experience begun in "Siren Limits." The word "Distances" has a connotation that is related to "Limits." Both suggest that which is distant and far away. In both poems the poet is spiritually away, lodged in imagination's dim kingdom. The dream motif is what Okigbo calls the "spiritual and psychic aspect" of his quest.

That the transition achieved earlier in "Siren Limits" from life to death, from the physical world to the spiritual, and from the external landscape to the interior, is still in force in "Distances" is indicated by the strategic statement in the first line of the poem that "flesh" has been transformed into "phantom":

*FROM FLESH into phantom on the horizontal stone
I was the sole witness to my homecoming...³³*

The second line strikes the note of homecoming, of the poet's arrival at the palace of his muse. The first line is only a brief suggestion of the trials that must accompany that final moment of spiritual illumination. Still, the motif of departure is central in "Distances" in its overall effect:

*For in the inflorescence of the white chamber,
a voice from very far away, chanted, and the
chamber descanted the birthday of earth,
paddled me home through some dark labyrinth,
from laughter to the dream.³⁴*

"Laughter" is for Okigbo a feature of the waking life, while "dream" is associated with the unconscious. Okigbo's muse, whether she is "lioness" or "Idoto," seems to have been abstracted into the single image of "white goddess" by the evocation in the above stanza of the image of "white chamber." Okigbo betrays this tendency when he says that

*several presences haunt the complex of rooms
and ante-rooms, of halls and corridors that
lead to the palace of the White Goddess,
and in which a country visitor might easily
lose his way.³⁵*

The "country visitor" is the questing poet; and the "rooms and ante-rooms" stand for what Yeats called the "still cave of poetry."³⁶ They are the "dark/labyrinth" through which the poet is to be paddled home to the celestial palace of the muses. This palace is a place of joy and of song. Its chambers are lighted, and they resound with the song of life: "the birthday of earth." Ironically, however, the poet can reach it only after he has passed through the gates of hell symbolised by the image of "anti-hill" (abyss):

*Miner into my solitude,
incarnate voice of the dream,
you will go,
with me as your acolyte,
again into the anti-hill...³⁷*

Okigbo will descend a second time into the underworld of his being for such is the penalty that awaits the creative endeavour of every subjective artist. "Distances II" is therefore pervaded by images of death and of self dissolution. Okigbo speaks in this section of his "anguish," his "solitude," and of his "scattered/cry". Death, who had ambushed both the questing poet and his fellow pilgrims at the beginning of this section, has, by the end of it, literally torn them to pieces:

*At her feet rolled their heads like cut fruits;
about her fell
their severed members, numerous as locusts.*

*Like split wood left to dry, the dismembered
joints of the ministrants piled high.*

*She bathed her knees in the blood of attendants
her smock in entrails of ministrants...³⁸*

The image of "crucifix" in Sections III and IV re-emphasizes the ordeal of the suffering poet. In his quest for poetic secrets, the poet must journey through what is called in "Distances IV" the "hollow centre" of awareness. The creative secret itself Okigbo couched in a language that is both magical and esoteric: "the catatonic pingpong/of the evanescent halo..."³⁹ Engulfed within the "intangible void" of the self, the poet pictures himself in "Distances V" as a mule trying to ascend the edges of an abyss:

*SWEAT OVER hoof in ascending gestures-
each step is the step of the mule in the abyss-⁴⁰*

Poetry, which is the objective of his quest, is invested with multiple attributes. It is the "music woven into the funerary role," the "water in the tunnel," the "open laughter of the grape or vine," the "question in the inkwell." The poet, we are told is heading

*to that sanctuary at the earth's molten bowel
for the music woven into the funerary rose
the water in the tunnel its effervescent laughter
the open laughter of the grape or vine
the question in the inkwell the answer on the
monocle
the unanswerable question in the tabernacle's
silence-⁴¹*

The "sanctuary at the earth's molten bowel" becomes a "cavern" in "Distances VI," to which the poet is summoned by his muse:

*Come into my cavern.
Shake the mildew from your hair;
Let your ear listen:
My mouth calls from a cavern...⁴²*

The summoning implies that the poet who has been hovering on the twilight zone between sleeping and waking is to regain full consciousness. His awakening from dream, an awakening the reader may have awaited from the end of "Siren Limits," is accompanied with a rhythmic intensity appropriate for a moment of an illuminating creative epiphany. In the second half of "Distances VI" the awakened poet is "darkening homeward" from dream into consciousness, from hell into outer space, from the interior landscape into the external, with the energy of a startled wolf:

*And at this chaste instance of delineated
anguish,
the same voice, importunate, aglow with the
goddess---
unquenchable, yellow, darkening homeward
like a cry of wolf above crumbling houses--
strips the dream naked,
bares the entrails.⁴³*

Having been so uproarously aroused, that is, fully inspired, the poet-lover can boast of gaining entry into the muse's bridal chamber:

*I have fed out of the drum
I have drunk out of the cymbal
I have entered your bridal
chamber; and lo,
I am the sole witness to my homecoming.⁴⁴*

With Okigbo then, purgatory is a necessary condition for the creative soul in search of aesthetic grace; and this is true to some extent of the Soyinka of the poems of *A Shuttle in the Crypt*. For the voice one hears in most of the poems of the volume is the voice of a soul familiar with that tragic soliloquy which Yeats calls the "speech of soul with itself."⁴⁵ The volume, writes Soyinka, "is a map of the course trodden by the mind."⁴⁶ The mind is embodied in the image of "shuttle" and its underworld cavern, otherwise known as prison, is represented as "crypt." Soyinka described the shuttle as "a unique species of the caged animal, a restless bolt of energy, a trapped weaver-bird."⁴⁷ Its moral qualities recall the attributes with which Soyinka's god, Ogun, is associated; for the shuttle is also a "Secretive seed, shrine, kernel, phallus and well of creative mysteries."⁴⁸ As a "restless bolt of

energy," the shuttle served Soyinka as a befitting symbol for his own restless soul. "Self-identification with this essence of innate repletion," he writes, "was a natural weapon to employ against the dangers of an inhuman isolation."⁴⁹

The tragedy is that Soyinka's own soul, a kernel of energy, is entrapped in void of a hollow dry crypt. In the poem "Vault Centre," the shuttle was immobilised in the still centre of night, and in another poem "Space," it overcame the abyss of the crypt. But in the poems of the section of *A Shuttle* entitled "Animystic Spells," the shuttle is caught up once more in a landscape of night. In Soyinka's prison notes, *The Man Died*, which is *A Shuttle's* prose companion, the crypt is visualized as one immense universe of void. Within his prison void, Soyinka is driven by solitude to speculate on certain metaphysical questions. How does the mind grapple with Emptiness?⁵⁰ he asked in chapter thirty-three of the book. The answer is that the mind must struggle to achieve full mastery over Nothingness. To Soyinka, mastery is achievable through the creative act. "In the home of death the living is sole creator."⁵¹ But the mind that must so engage has its own penalty. To muster the courage to will existence out of nothing, a mind entrapped in Emptiness must "empty inwards...must plunge from the physical platform into primordial abyss."⁵² All lonely minds have this propensity to retreat into the soul's indwellings in moments of crisis, argues Soyinka. God delved within and said: "Let there be light."⁵³ Therein lies His own strategy, argues Soyinka, for overcoming the terrors of His own loneliness. The same instinct for awful daring rescued Pluto from his own loneliness:

*There being nothing worse to do, Pluto tried
to discover tunnels even from the dead nether-
world into deeper bowels of Void.*⁵⁴

Imagining himself as the "sole creator" in the home of death, Soyinka saw a parallel between himself and God, and between himself and Pluto. Like these, he will create from the dark interior of his own mind. "Animystic Spells" is the title given to the poems he wrote in his prison tomb. The term "Animystic" seeks to define the state of the mind that gave birth to those poems. Such a mind is under the spell of "self-hypnosis," resulting in "a state of weightlessness...familiar enough to those who dabble in the more esoteric religions."⁵⁵ There is a further glossary on the operation of the animystic imagination in *The Man Died*:

*In the muting of sounds which overtakes the
senses the mind drifts easily into tran-
scendental moods, wiping out environment,*

reality, fragmenting slowly till it becomes
one with specks of dust in ether.⁵⁶

In Soyinka's case, the animystic mood dawns on the poet in his moments of despair. What rescues the mind from its own terrors are words. Most of the poems of "Animystic Spells" are verbalizations of the poet's mental hallucinations. They make no pretense to meaning other than what is implied in a heroic cry whose sound reassures the poet. Soyinka calls these poems

Fragments
We cannot hold...
Parings of intuition
Footsteps
*Passing and repassing the door of recognition.*⁵⁷

The poems treat of seizures of hallucinations, nightmares and dreams that invade the mind. Necessarily, their landscape is interior, appropriate for the inward orientation of the mind that created them. In part I the poet is talking to the creatures of his own fantasy. Among these is his ghostly self, his subconscious self whom he urges to join the companions of his own entombed existence (whom he calls "the faceless") in their journey to death's kingdom in the netherworld described in the poem as the "anterooms of night's inbirth":

First you must
Walk among the faceless
Their feet are shod in earth
And dung
*Caryatids in anterooms of night's inbirth.*⁵⁸

The "you" of the first line may have also been addressed to Soyinka's crypt. For he insists that there is a hell within a hell. The hell within a hell he calls the "inner crypt." In moments of intense agony, the shuttle may experience death more than once. Such is the case when Soyinka is driven by the increasing bombardment of his crypt by death-dealing sounds to imagine himself as a risen Lazarus who is doomed to die again: "Lazarus rises, enters the inner crypt and awaits the rolling of the stone into its night position."⁵⁹ The poet is focusing attention on the "inner crypt" when he says in poem III of "Animystic Spells" that

Death
Embraces you and I
A twilight cone is
Meeting-place
*The silent junction of the grey abyss.*⁶⁰

The "faceless" company of the first poem are apparitions that exist in the poet's own imagination. Soyinka knows them for what they are: "Extensions of my restless eye and mind."⁶¹ Such apparitions occur so frequently to the mind that it has been conditioned by its loneliness and despair to endow them with concrete bodies. In *The Man Died* Soyinka has this testimony:

*Locked and barred from a more direct
communion, a human assertiveness has
reached me through the cosmos, a proud,
inextinguishable promethean sparks among
dead bodies, astral wraiths, failed deities,
tinsel decorations in barren space.⁶²*

As noted before, the animystic mind is susceptible to fits of fantasies. In one of such hallucinatory seizures Soyinka imagined himself to have been drowned in a lake. The lake conjured up by his mind is a subterranean chasm buried in the "opal caverns of the mind":

*Buried lakes:
My feet, satanic cleft
Spring-divining feet have mined
Buried lakes
Calms in opal caverns of the mind.⁶³*

The unstraightened syntax of this stanza renders these lines complicated. The Poet's satanic feet seem to have cast about for water, but there is no pure fountain except the Lethean waters of the poet's own mind described as "Calms in opal caverns of the mind." Images such as "buried," "satanic," and "cavern" emphasize the subterranean setting as well as the poet's buried existence. In *The Man Died*, Soyinka wrote of a lake which he called "an underground cavern, sealed from end to end":

*There is no handhold within, only a roar in the
ears of the vault, a naked earth-core
dementia, shrapnels of water making for
pulse centres creating disruption.⁶⁴*

In an earlier passage, he imagined his demented consciousness as a placid lake encased in an "insulating capsule." But the placidity did not last long. The capsule disintegrated under the impact of fear, and the poet sank back with the waves into the silt-bed of his underworld lake. It is this experience apparently that Soyinka's mind has captured in one animystic moment.

In another poem of the Animystic series Soyinka's mind tried to leap out of its prison cave but the dark forces within

the cave are stronger. The attempt brought the poet only as far as the roof of his sealed world - "the skyscrapers of the mind." He realized afterwards that only through memory can he escape from the cell of the mind:

*Soughs of wings
Moonsward on night, guides
To skyscrapes of the mind
Unfettered
Now begins the flight on memory tides.*⁶⁵

With the exhaustion of the creative potentials of animystic moments, the mind can rely on memory and reminiscences for its own survival. The poems of *A Shuttle* entitled "Phases of Peril" and "Four Archetypes" are constructed on the framework of memory. Thoughts recollected in moments of agonised tranquility serve the poet as ghostly companions in his prison underworld. For this reason, he sees himself in the poem "Ulysses" as a "heritage of thought," haunting "the music of the mind."⁶⁶ The poet's own memories and thoughts are as ghostly as his entombed self. These memories and thoughts are deliberately coloured with images related to death since the poet is living a kind of life-in-death existence in his crypt. In the poem "When Seasons Change," the poet's own memories and reminiscences are "Shrouds of seasons gone," "mouse-eaten thoughts" "peeled/From time's corpses."⁶⁷

The scene of the actions and events reconstructed from memory are restricted to the compass points of the mind. Since the poet is a citizen of the world of the mind, his reminiscences and recollections are necessarily referred to that same mental arena. The just cause for which the poet is fighting is seen, for instance, as "spires, rooted in the quagmires of the human mind." From the mind's quagmire, these spires of justice will rise to "purer lights/And wing aloft a salvaged essence/Transcending death."⁶⁸ Soyinka seems to be predicting, through this imagery, the ultimate triumph of the cause for which he was imprisoned, and suggesting thereby his own final conquest of the abyss of the crypt. Both the cause he stands for and he himself will ultimately transcend the present legacy of death.

Reflecting on his own solitude in "Ulysses" he sees it as a "boulder" rooted in his mind. The image of boulder is intended to suggest the immensity of the poet's solitude as well as the overwhelming odds against which he is struggling:

*On minds grown hoary from the quest
Rest, rooted even in the turmoil agency
A boulder solitude amidst wine-centred waves.*⁶⁹

From within the abyss, the poet is occasionally catapulted into outer space on the wings of "boulder solitude," where his mind is identified with all lonely minds and with all lonely wanderers. The image of an archetypal lone wanderer that comes readily to Soyinka's mind is Ulysses. In his recent publication, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka includes Ulysses among the "archetypal protagonists of the chthonic realm,"⁷⁰ the others being Okigbo's favourites: Orpheus and Gilgamesh. These heroes, wrote Soyinka, have penetrated the "netherworld in concrete and elemental terms."⁷¹ Thus in the poem "Ulysses" Soyinka sees himself as a "newcomer-wanderer." The territory of his itinerary is infinity itself:

*We embrace,
The world and I in great infinitudes.*⁷²

Soyinka is referring to the infinity of his mind when he says in the same poem:

*I grow into that portion of the world
Lapping my feet, yet bear the rain of nails
That drill within to the archetypal heart
Of all lone wanderers*⁷³

The poet whose mind is circling aimlessly within the dark abyss of his crypt has experienced the destiny of the protagonists of the chthonic realm.

By way of conclusion, it may be reaffirmed that a mind plagued by its internal contradictions has the tendency to retreat into the soul's indwellings in moments of crisis. The gesture is aesthetic with Okigbo, for it is symbolic of the artist's battle with himself. It is rather therapeutic with Soyinka to whom a dialogue with the mind was the only means of escaping the "dangers of an inhuman isolation."⁷⁴ Tomb, abyss, and cave are the external correlatives of the mind's dark interior. Thus, the persistence of these images in the work of Okigbo and Soyinka already discussed. The journey into the interior is a phenomenon that is common among highly subjective artists, according to Erich Heller.⁷⁵ Okigbo and Soyinka may be included among such artists.

Notes

1. Marjory Whitelaw, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo, 1965," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (July 1970), p. 33.
2. Whitelaw, p. 35.

3. *Ibid.*
4. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 245.
5. Whitelaw, p. 29.
6. Christopher Okigbo, *Labyrinths* (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. xi.
7. Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 124-125.
8. *Labyrinths*, pp. xiv and xi respectively for the two short quotes.
9. Walter A. Strauss, *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 17.
10. *Labyrinths*, p. xi.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. xi-xii.
12. W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 293-294. Hereafter cited as *Essays*.
13. *Labyrinths*, p. 23.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Donatus Mwoga, "Okigbo's 'Limits': An Approach to Meaning," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 7 (June 1972), p. 93.
16. *Labyrinths*, p. 23.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
18. Wole Soyinka, "And After the Narcissist?" *African Forum*, 1 (Spring 1966), p. 58.
19. W. B. Yeats, "Clarence Mangan," in *Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats*, Vol. I, ed., John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 118.
20. *Labyrinths*, p. 24.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
28. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
29. "Transition Conference Questionnaire," *Transition*, No. 5 (1962), p. 12.
30. *Labyrinths*, p. 27.
31. *Ibid.*, p. xi.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
36. W. B. Yeats, *Essays*, p. 86.
37. *Labyrinths*, p. 53.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Essays*, p. 333.
46. Wole Soyinka, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. vii. Hereafter cited as *A Shuttle*.
47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. Wole Soyinka, *The Man Died* (London: Rex Collins, 1973), p. 255.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 255.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. *A Shuttle*, p. 59.
56. *The Man Died*, p. 251.
57. *A Shuttle*, p. 68. See also *The Man Died*, p. 187.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
59. *The Man Died*, p. 268.
60. *A Shuttle*, p. 67.
61. *The Man Died*, p. 252.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *A Shuttle*, pp. 69-70.
64. *The Man Died*, p. 185.
65. *A Shuttle*, p. 70.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
70. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 3.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *A Shuttle*, p. 27.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

74. *Ibid.*, p. vii.

75. Erich Heller, *The Artist's Journey into the Interior and Other Essays*, pp. 101-170.



