

Edited by: Oludolapo Ojediran

Dialectics of Texts, Performances

Dialectics of Texts, Performances and Theatrical Dynamics

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Tayo Simeon Arinde & Phillip Arthur Gborsong

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Oludolapo Ojediran, Ph.D, Tayo Simeon Arinde, Ph.D
and Philip Arthur Gborsong, Ph.D



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST



DEPARTMENT OF THE PERFORMING ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN

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Foreword

I am honoured to have been asked to write the foreword of this book written by great academics in the field of Performing and Communication Arts. It has been my pleasure to know and work with the authors over the last two decades as senior academics with great passion for writing, excellence and great organisational abilities. I have had the privilege of watching them grow academically as they create niches for themselves and I am proud of their achievements so far.

The authors, Drs. Oludolapo Ojediran, Tayo Simeon and Philip Arthur Gborsong have distinguished themselves as great scholars by putting together their intellectual precision to produce this spectacular book, *Dialectics of Texts, Performance and Theatrical Dynamics*, which presents a good reading material on various discourses on artistic issues in Africa with particular examples from Ghana and Nigeria to a much wider public.

This important book consists of ten well researched and written chapters by many scholarly endowed authors from both Ghana and Nigeria. The book covers all the essential areas of the subject matter and is a great contribution to changes in various artistic issues and discourses of theatre and communication arts. The book expresses the commitment of the authors to enriching, training and research in Performing Arts.

Each author of the chapters utilises their personal pieces of wealth of experience for an elaboration of the chosen topics and bring home to their readers in such ways that the narratives can be properly understood. I am convinced that each author have put in their intellectual erudity and depth to deal with the various topics.

The book has ten chapters and each dealt with varied topics of interests. The book embraces core academic writing styles, the

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DEATH BY PROXY IN AHMED YERIMA'S ABOBAKU AND WOLE SOYINKA'S DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

Oludolapo OJEDIRAN, & Olayinka MAGBAGBEOLA

Abstract

This study examines the concept of death by proxy in the Yoruba worldview through the textual analysis of Ahmed Yerima's Abobaku and Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman. The study pays particular attention to the concepts of acceptance, rejection and replacement in relation to death and the afterlife within the praxes of the Yoruba cultural disposition and cosmological hypothesis. A necessary detour is taken in this study to investigate the kind of symbiotic relationship that exists between an Oba (a king) and his Horseman (abobaku) and how this relationship has stood the test of time in the face of tradition, Western influence and modernisation.

Key words: *Death, pain, proxy, Wole Soyinka, Ahmed Yerima*

Introduction

From the scientific point of view, death remains the end of every living thing. In fact, death is the last inevitable phenomenon in the characteristics of living things including both plants and animals. Consequently, there are diverse perspectives towards the essence of death as there are diverse cultures and people across the world. In some cultures, death is proportionate to the termination of the existence of an entity or body. To some, death is a gate of transition from one state of matter to another. For some people, death is merely a means to an end or a continuation of life on another realm of existence.

Both Wole Soyinka and Ahmed Yerima need no introduction. What is most curious about the duo is that Soyinka, a Nobel Laureate and an internationally acclaimed writer of all genres, has in most of his plays mused on the concept of death and so does Yerima who, on his own part, is one of the most prolific playwrights in Nigeria presently.

Biodun Jeyifo remains one of the finest and most visible critics of Soyinka's works. This is corroborated by Afolayan (2018, pp. 159-160) who is of the opinion that

the essays of Jeyifo on Soyinka, indeed, provided ingenious perspectives on Soyinka's poetry. Unlike others, Jeyifo is not a critics' critic in the strict sense, as his assemblage and harmonisation of perspectives on Soyinka's works aids Soyinka's readers in the unveiling of the obscurity mask.

The choice of the two selected play-texts for this study is due to the fact that they both centre on the character of the Horseman otherwise known as the Abobaku in ancient Yoruba societies. In the time past, the Abobaku is a dignified individual who must commit ritual suicide when the king dies in order to fulfill the oath of allegiance of following the king to the afterlife so as to serve him. The Abobaku also popularly called Elesin Oba (which means, "the king's horseman") is that person, a royal wayfarer, second to the king, who receives series of wassails from all and sundry in the community. In fact, he is a revered god in his own right and everything the king touches or owns becomes his too. According to Plastow (2016, p. xxviii):

Elesin is the king's Horseman. This title carries with it considerable honour which enables its holder to live as a great chief . . . The title, which is hereditary, also comes with it one great duty: thirty days after the king's death, at the time of his burial, the Horseman must enter a trance and willingly and willfully die, in order to lead his master through the dangerous passage between the world of the living and that of the ancestors. By willfully encountering death in full knowledge of what he does, the Horseman

effectively nullifies the power of death over his people and maintains the link between different states of being essential for the well-being of the Yoruba world.

Drawing from the above, it is worthy of mention that the two Horsemen dramatised by Soyinka and Yerima are succeeded in death, one by his eldest son and the other by his pregnant wife. This is the reason why this study investigates the manner in which both playwrights have reflected on the essence and effect of death by proxy in a culture that is faced with an age-long tradition and the advent of modernity.

Synopses of *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Abobaku*

The action of *Death and the King's Horseman*, according to Wole Soyinka in the preface to the play-text, is based on a real event that took place in Oyo, ancient Yorubá city of Nigeria in the 1940s. The king has just died a month ago and is to be buried as tradition demands. According to the local law, his dog, his favourite horse and his horseman must accompany to the afterlife. Elesin is ready but just before his departure, the District Officer Pilkings learns about the prepared ritual suicide and orders Elesin's arrest. Meanwhile, Olunde, Elesin's son, who had previously left for England to study medicine returns home to bury his father. As Olunde prepares to leave, Pilkings and an enchained Elesin arrive on the scene, leading to a confrontation between father and son.

Elesin is imprisoned in a cell, watched by Pilkings, police officers, and his young wife, with whom he has recently shared connubial rites. Iyaloja, the matriarch of village women, visits him at the prison and scolds Elesin for failing to uphold his honour and fulfilling his duty. She announces the impending arrival of a "burden" brought on by Pilkings, which proves to be the corpse of Olunde, who has committed the ritual suicide in his father's place. When Pilkings uncovers the body, Elesin hangs himself in his cell with his chains to complete the circle of anti-heroism.

Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku* tells the story of Ajibade and his pregnant wife, Faramola. Ajibade is the king's horseman and the

king has passed away. As custom demands, Ajibade is expected to commit ritual suicide so as to accompany the late king to the afterlife but he absconds and becomes king in a new village. Ajibade begins to have series of terrible dreams. He consults the oracle and it is revealed that he must perform an oath that he had promised in the past. Delegates are sent from Ajibade's former village to remind him of his oath to the late king and the aftermath of his delay. Ajibade and pregnant Faramola eventually die as the raving anger of the king's spirit roves around.

Death by Proxy in Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku*

Yerima's *Abobaku* opens with a puzzling conundrum as Faramola, the wife of Ajibade, the Abobaku who must willingly lay down his life at the death of the king as custom demands, is agitating on the beclouded mystery of the king's illness. She senses that the king has a little while longer to live and so does her husband. She, however, cannot stand the death of her husband, and would rather prefer that she and her unborn child put down her lives in his stead. The reason for her decision is justified in the excerpt below:

FARAMOLA: I too made an oath once to him. Like today, he did not hear me say it but in my heart of hearts, I said it and I will do it. Baba, I owe him my life, so mine I will freely give.

ILARI: No child, you owe him nothing. Your oath was just a joyful promise of a lover. Let him be, let him go.

FARAMOLA: Father, you forget so easily. This fool, my husband, risked his life to save me once, remember?

ILARI: When?

FARAMOLA: Ah, so it is true? When they shaved your hair, they indeed shaved your memory. (pause.) when I was but eight years old, sick to the point of death and Baba Ifadeyi said I needed a husband ... a bold self-sacrificing stupid child to carry the sacrifice to the footpath of Esu. Remember, Father, even after you told the boy how

dangerous the task was, he swallowed the *akara and eko* and in one swift motion, he lifted my sacrifice then hopped out of the house. Remember, Father. I can never forget that favour. He saved my life once. He saved your daughter/s life. I ... we, must pay him back tonight with his life. (*Abobaku*, 2015, p. 31)

Abobaku, a play based on the long existing culture of dying with the king in Yoruba land. A play that x-rays the cultural belief and practice in Yoruba land whereby Ajibade, the king's Abobaku vows to live and die with King Karounwi. His faithful allegiance is put to test when the king dies and he is reluctant to die. Despite all efforts to save Ajibade from dying with the king, there is more to it which makes the effort valueless. While Faramola, Ajibade's wife is ready to die in his place, just like Olunde in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, their death becomes questionable in line with the tradition they are trying to save. This is because they are not the people who swear the oath with the king.

Ajibade returns from Gbalefefe, where he runs to and almost becomes their king due to the tradition of making a stranger king. He discovers his wife in the ritual attire who has already drank the ritual mixture to die in place of him. Nevertheless, death becomes inevitable in the play. Ilari dies as a result of his treachery right in the room where King Karounwi is laid, Faramola dies with the unborn child, and Ajibade also dies leaving Mama (Faramola's mother) in a state of lunacy. Ahmed Yerima on the back cover of the play sees that, "*Abobaku* is a foray into the traditional institution examining the age-long belief in the idea of a king having an abobaku, a man whose life is to be cut short by the death of the king". While the play questions the relevance of an Abobaku, it dances in tune with the existing tradition, else all the death in the play.

Abobaku showcases love and death as a way of obeying the cultural norms. Readers see mother's love in line with Mama and Faramola who goes all out to make sure that her daughter does not die, but all her effort is futile as her abiku daughter eventually dies. Faramola loves her husband to the extent of dying in his place, she

tries to convince her father, Ilari who also dies at the end. Ilari's reluctance to help is shown in her discussion with her daughter because he knows the implication of what they what him to do:

FARAMOLA: My husband must not die he cannot die! Let us cut the noose from his neck, let us set him free, father.

ILARI: With what? To where? His fate is doomed, child..

FARAMOLA: Wake up, husband. Ogun's sword dangles, your neck its target. Awake, husband, this is not the time to shut your eyes even by the mistake if fate. (Ajibade jumps up) (pp.31-32)

With the above dialogue, the love between the father and daughter makes Ilari do what he is not supposed to do. The love between Faramola and her husband makes her become a victim of death by proxy as well. Readers also notice that Faramola's actions are controlled by the metaphysical as she is also an abiku who's other name is Ketiku.

Like any other tragedy, *Abobaku* also treats serious issue that has to do with life and death revolving around love and sacrifices. In the play, Mama is seen as the embodiment of sacrifice as she loses everything within the twinkling of an eye. Yerima presents death, fear, love, anger, betrayal, commitment, determination and pain as an avenue to pass his tragic message across to his readers. Death in the play is at various level whereby readers see the death of Abiku, death by promise (oath taking), the ritual suicide by Baba Kekere, the death of Faramola, the death of the king, the and death of the unborn child which creates fear, pain and the reality of tragedy. However, Yerima tells a story with a tragic plot which incorporates realistic conflict and acceptable level of illusion that evoke the symbols of ritual, sacred representations and cultural recognition.

Death by Proxy in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

The dramaturgy of Wole Soyinka and his romance with his hero-god have been examined by scholars such as Peters (1978) and Akoh (2006). After comparing the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean values with the Yoruba gods; Ogun, Sango and Obatala, Soyinka (1976, pp. 142-145) argues that, "the mysteries of Ògún and choric ecstasy of revelers ... plunges straight into the 'chthonic realm', the seething cauldron of the dark world will and psyche, the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming ..."

The Ogunian metaphysics dominates Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* which opens with the death of the king who has just died a month ago and is to be buried as tradition demands. According to the local law, his dog, his favourite horse and his horseman must accompany to the afterlife. Elesin is ready but just before his departure, the District Officer Pilkings learns about the prepared ritual suicide and orders Elesin's arrest. Meanwhile, Olunde, Elesin's son, who had previously left for England to study medicine returns home to bury his father. As Olunde prepares to leave, Pilkings and an enchained Elesin arrive on the scene, leading to a confrontation between father and son.

Elesin is imprisoned in a cell, watched by Pilkings, police officers, and his young wife, with whom he has recently shared connubial rites. Iyaloja, the matriarch of village women, visits him at the prison and scolds Elesin for failing to uphold his honour and fulfilling his duty. She announces the impending arrival of a "burden" brought on by Pilkings, which proves to be the corpse of Olunde, who has committed the ritual suicide in his father's place. When Pilkings uncovers the body, Elesin hangs himself in his cell with his chains to complete the circle of anti-heroism.

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is based on a real life event that happened thus:

The Alafin (king) of Oyo, Oba Siyenbola Oladigbolu 1, died after a thirty-three-year reign. His 'Horseman',

Olokun Esin Jinadu, had led a traditionally privileged life and the people of Oyo expected that he would carry out his duty and 'follow his master' by a ritual suicide. When the Alafin died the Horseman was delivering a message in the village of Ikoyi. About three weeks later he returned to Oyo, dressed himself in white and, in a traditional build-up to committing suicide, began dancing through the streets. The British colonial officer in charge at Oyo heard of Olokun Esin's intention and ordered that the Horseman should be prevented from killing himself. When word of his father's arrest reached the Horseman's youngest son, Muraina, he killed himself in the place of Olokun Esin in order to fulfil the needs of the ritual. This story was told to Wole Soyinka in 1960 by Ulli Beier and it stayed at the back of his mind until one day in 1974, when he was at the Churchill College, Cambridge, and the play was 'triggered' when he walked past a bust of Winston Churchill. It was written very fast and given a first reading in Cambridge before being performed in Nigeria on his return home (Plastow, 2016, p. xxvii).

Due to its essentially historical nature, *Death and the King's Horseman* has attracted the attention of critics such as Ogunba (1975), Gibbs (1986), Jeyifo (2004) and Plastow (2016). In the play, Soyinka suggests the importance of the collective social and psychic aspirations of the Oyo community. Elesin is supposed to play the role of a ritual scapegoat who accedes to the world of the ancestors on behalf of the living and the unborn. This means that, his death is supposed to be a reflection of the communal will in order to ensure a renewed harmony between the constitutive worlds of traditional Yoruba cosmic order and the continuity of Oyo social-spiritual sphere.

Our first contact with the sybarite Elesin is made manifest in his choice of the market as his last major place of resort before departing the earth. The reason for this is captured in the excerpt below:

ELESIN: This is where I have known love and laughter

away from the palace. Even the richest food cloy when eaten day on end; in the market, nothing ever cloy ... they know it is here I will ride on the shoulders of the King's grooms through the pulse centres of the town. They know it is here I shall await them. I have told them (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p. 40).

The dexterous Praise-singer whom the playwright bequeaths with "arresting lyricism and characteristic rhetorical élan" (Olaniyan, 1995, p. 43), senses the danger in Elesin's dilly-dally through his decision to make the market as the last place to "touch his feet" (p. 40) before carrying out his duty:

ELESIN: This market is my roost. When I come along the women, I am a chicken with a hundred mothers. I become a monarch whose palace is built with tenderness and beauty.

PRAISE-SINGER: They love to spoil you but be aware. The hands of women also weaken the unwary (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p. 10).

What later amounts to Elesin's reassurance of his capability is his recount of the metaphor of the "Not-I-Bird" which largely translates to an infectious narrative of those who ran away when the agent of transition (death) came calling. While Elesin uses this to re-assure the people of his commitment to the task ahead of him, Praise-singer evokes in stirring terms, "a solid, self-assured auto-dynamic organic community, a community that holds tight to the essence of itself and whose authentic values survive the ravages of temporality which is navel-gazing" (Olaniyan, 1995, p. 43). Not only does Praise-singer sense the likely doom soon to befall Elesin, but so does Iyaloja, who is rather embittered by Elesin's lusts, which results in his consummating with her son's betrothed:

IYALOJA: The living must eat and drink. When the moment comes, don't turn the food to rodents' droppings in their mouth. Don't let them waste the ashes of the world when they step out at dawn to breathe the morning dew ... eating the awusa nut is not so difficult as drinking water

afterwards ... You wish to travel light. Well, the earth is yours. But be sure the seed you leave in it attracts no curse (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, pp. 22-23).

Ready (1988, p. 715) interpretes Elesin's character within the crest of Obàtálá and Ògún's frame by postulating that, "Elesin would claim for himself the Obàtálán achievement of pure essence when in fact he has not even entered the Ògúnian torture is the greatest of illusions". It is however, needful to note that, Elesin's statements, from the beginning of the play reveal that he is aware of the imminence of the 'obstruction' in his path. In his definition and cosmic appraisal of "honour", Elesin banters with the women thus:

ELESIN: Life has an end. A life that will outlive fame and friendship begs another name. What elder takes his tongue to his plate, licks it clean of every crumb? He will encounter silence when he calls on children to fulfill the smallest errand! Life is honour. It ends when honour ends . . .

WOMEN: Ah Elesin Oba, we knew you for a man of honour.

ELESIN: Then honour me. I deserve a bed of honour to lie upon.

IYALOJA: The best is yours. We knew you for a man of honour. You are not one who eats and leaves nothing on his plate for children . . . (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, pp. 16-20).

Retrospectively, Soyinka is widely announced as a playwright who "hangs the essence of tragedy and brings it to bear on the very doorsteps of honour" (Gbilekaa, 2013, p. 123). The fact remains that, Elesin's 'refusal to die' and consequent loss of honour, as observed by Ready (1988, p. 719) is mere "self-destruction", the result of an "ego-inflation" which we have already discovered. Hunt (1985, p. 74) further expatiates on the concept of 'honour' which, according to him, is

employed in such an abstract and a-historical fashion that the hierarchical, exploitative structure of society in which it has its role, indeed its very existence, is obscured. It would not be too great an exaggeration to say that the whole play is about a particularly feudalistic idea of 'honour' (high respect, esteem, reverence accorded to exalted worth or rank), and one which the play has the effect of defending.

While Elesin's drives and motives have been examined, our radar of analysis turns to Olunde, his eldest son, who turns out to be the unprecedented hero and the harbinger of death by proxy in the play. Again, the playwright's description of Olunde, but now through Western characters – Pilkings and his wife, Jane, is worthy of scrutiny:

JANE: Oh now I remember. He was that very sensitive young man.

PILKINGS: . . . A most intelligent boy, really bright.

JANE: I rather thought he was much too sensitive you know. The kind of person you feel should be a poet munching rose petals in Bloomsbury.

PILKINGS: Well, he's going to make a first-class doctor. His mind is set on that ... (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p. 28).

Despite OLUNDE's being abroad to study medicine for some three or four years, the Pilkings' understanding and description of him is neither nicked nor disappointed by any iota of "integrationism" by Olunde, who sees the western culture as a will-o'-the-wisp. This is resplendent in Olunde's non-pretence in refusing to become an "assimilationist" as we will soon come to see. After seeing it all in the white man's land, he rather argues with Jane that:

OLUNDE: No I am shocked Mrs Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand.

JANE: . . . I take it then that you did not find your stay in

England altogether edifying (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p. 50).

Olunde's communal orientation even while studying abroad does not change, but rather become reinforced which is seen in his rather bewildering attempt to explain the notion of "self-sacrifice" to Jane:

JANE: . . . The captain blew himself up with it. Only that there was no other way to save lives. No time to devise anything else. The captain took the decision and carried it out . . . I don't know much about it. Only that there was no other way to save lives. No time to devise anything else. The captain took the decision and carried it out . . .

OLUNDE: . . . I find it rather inspiring. It is an affirmative commentary on life.

JANE: What is?

OLUNDE: That captain's self-sacrifice.

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

OLUNDE: And the innocent people . . . ?

JANE: Oh, how does one know? The whole thing was exaggerated.

OLUNDE: That was a risk the captain couldn't take (*Death and the King's Horseman*, 1975, p. 51).

Olunde is presented by Soyinka, not only as a young man, but one who understands the implication of the king's death, and by extension, the dictates and demands of communal life. This is seen when he complains that, "a relation sent it (a cable) weeks ago, and it said nothing about my father. All it said was, our King is dead. But I knew I had to return home at once to bury my father. I understood that" (p. 52).

Having expressed great confidence in his father's will-power when he says that, ". . . My father is dead. His will-power has always been enormous; I know he is dead" (p. 55), OLUNDE's display of

heroism is expressed in his shocked, wounded, forbidden but affirmative pride when he sees that his father, Elesin, for whose burial he has returned home, is still alive:

(For several moments they hold the same position. ELESIN moves a few steps forward, almost as if he is still in doubt.)

ELESIN: Olunde? *(He moves his head, inspecting him from side to side.)* Olunde! *(He collapses slowly at OLUNDE'S feet.)* Oh son, don't let the sight of your father turn you blind!

OLUNDE: *(he moves for the first time since he heard his voice, brings his head slowly down to look on him):* I have no father, eater of left-overs *(Death and the King's Horseman, 1975, pp. 60-61).*

Up to this point, Elesin has been conceived as the hero of the play, but a necessary chord of ambiguation is struck at him at this point of contact. Elesin's dilemma thus negates his own existence and inadvertently calls for another who is worthy to take his place. Subtextually, this can be deduced from Elesin's dirge to Pilkings that, "Did you not see when the world reversed itself and the father fell before his son, asking for forgiveness?" (p. 63). It is this reversal that results in the breakage of the spleen between Elesin and his son, Olunde.

According to Oladokun (2014, p. 181), Elesin's arrest and detention halts the process of a cultural pact between "a leader and his people, on one hand, and between a custodian of a community's traditional values, his ancestors and the community's future, on the other hand". Elesin watches his world of royalty, honour and favouritism collapse into the abyss of rejection and negation at the feet of his son. This makes him to commit suicide while Olunde offers himself willingly to replace his father. Although, critics such as Hunt (1985, p. 70) have observed that Olunde's death can be interpreted to mean, "the Western, divided self-dies in order that the traditional and harmonious self may be reborn", many multi-textual inferences can be drawn from

Olunde's symbolic death.

Soyinka's use of the death motif is not disconnected from his quest to dramatise his notion of existence through the dialectical interplay of communal will and self-sacrifice. In fact, death to Soyinka "is not a terminal point" (Gbilekaa, 2013, p. 125), but a necessary continuum. Within the horoscope of Soyinka's deeply ideological writing, the variegated meaning of death is captured in the following images: tragic death, ritual murder and ritual death.

While ritual death remains the definitive viaduct in Soyinka's death-dirge, ritual murder loosely translates to the Western glorification of the "barbarism" of some African cultures, traditions or ethos that require death sacrifices. Tragic death, which is the third interpretative pedestal, largely connotes an unfortunate occurrence in which the death of a notable figure in the community comes on an "insignificant" or "unprecedented" note, and therefore becomes "tragic". Soyinka (2013, p. 10) contextualises the interrelationship between ritual and death in the Paraclete and the confines of Christianity to the "ritualisation of the death of earth and its re-awakening" because the religion "embodies a timeless organisation . . . and reinforces the truly timeless, primordial cycle of Nature herself".

He also purges the emotions of readers by pitching the fate of father (Elesin – the anti-hero) and son (Olunde – the hero) against each other. It is this 'cathartic rebirth' that informs Soyinka's use of the death motif. Soyinka (in his novel titled, *The Interpreters*) cited in Hunt (1985, p. 64) announces (through Sekoni, one of the main characters) that:

In the dome of the cosmos, there is complete unity of life. Life is like the godhead, the plurality of its manifestations is only an illusion. The godhead is one. So is life, or death, both are contained in one single dome of existence.

Soyinka's submission above infers that, there is a sort of methodic conversation between life and death, the outcome of which manifests in the palpable domain of reality, and this is succinctly captured in *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The*

Strong Breed. In his comparison of the writing of Soyinka and Cabral, Hunt (1985, p. 69) further observes that:

For Soyinka, death is the definitive means by which cosmic unity is reasserted and rediscovered. The noble, all-redeeming death, typical of European romanticism, is a constant theme of Soyinka's plays, such as *The Strong Breed*, *The Road*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, because in Xóyínká's philosophy death is the bridge between the physical and the divine aspects of this universe, and it is through a ritual death that the unity of the two aspects is collectively achieved.

When interviewed by the BBC Radio on the radio version of *Death and the King's Horseman* directed by Alby Jones in 1995, Soyinka himself announces that:

Well, two issues are sort of elicited out of this play. One, of course, is the whole concept of death. What does death mean in different societies? The death of an individual, the death of an ideal, the death of society itself through a failure of another value which we can call honour: a sense of honour, settlement of debts. The Yoruba worldview, as you know, is one which accepts the continuity of the world of the living, the world of the ancestor and the world of the unborn. This, of course, reduces the kind of finality which death has for certain other societies. There is also the question of honour. A society loses its direction when it abandons the whole notion of there being a concept called honour, the fulfillment of pledges (Plastow, 2016, p. xlv).

The deaths of Elesin and his son, Olunde, therefore become the hallmark for our submission that, the former becomes the rejected one while the latter obviously takes his father's stead, thereby dying by proxy in order to save the community.

Conclusion

Just like Yerima (2009, p.1) sees that:

When Elesin Oba in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, dances to his death, the audience who know the essence and the seriousness of the action within the reality of the cultural and the tragic tradition, dance with him, and prods him to the impending glorious death.

This study concludes that death remains a central metaphor in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku*. Both plays innately dramatise the unacceptability of 'death by proxy' in the Yoruba cosmological hypothesis and its aftermath if practiced. Indeed, Elesin Oba and Ajibade remain archetypes of anti-heroism in the selected plays as they celebrate individualism, materialism and lack of willpower over communal living and the selflessness expected of a tragic hero. Consequently, Elesin Oba and Ajibade are expected to foster a continuum in the communal process by becoming surrogates. However, this complex surrogatism, so to speak, does not accommodate instances of replacement and this has been clearly dramatised in the two plays. This study also draws on the fact that Yerima places more stringent punishment on an absconding 'abobaku' by wiping off his generation completely. Soyinka, on the other hand soft pedals his punishment and allows for a cleansed and purged unborn generation to rid themselves of the mistakes of their father.

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