


BA Research
Project

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M Y T H & W O R L D V I E W
IN SOYINKA'S DEATH & THE KING'S
HORSEMAN & OLA ROTMI'S THE
GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME

C A L E B A D O H

**MYTH AND WORLDVIEW IN WOLE SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KINGS*
HORSEMAN AND OLA ROTIMI'S *THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME***

BY

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this project was carried out by **Adoh Caleb Ifeanyichukwu** under my supervision

.....

..... **DR ADENIJI ABIODUN**

DATE

SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God Almighty whose strength and favour saw me through my four years at the University of Lagos and for a successful completion of this research project.

I also dedicate this project to every single member of my family. You guys rock! I super love you guys—Dad, Mum, Josh, Ruthy and my Kid brother, Precious.

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INTRODUCTION

AIMS OF STUDY

The central plank of this study is to identify and examine the concept of myth and how tradition, culture coupled with history form the foundation of a people's myth. This project will analyse the elements that combine to carve myths-- not a haphazard espousal, but a critical analysis of history, the element that explains the state of things. In simplified terms, this study seeks to critically give readers a panoramic view on how the worldview and philosophy of a people , in terms of death, predestination and birth form the myth that is passed down from generation to generation. This study also seeks to analyse what I call the "artistic and cultural consciousness" of the writer, that is, to determine the writer's standpoint and to evaluate the creative ingenuity of the writer in incorporating cultural ideologies into the art of composing literature. The African artist is not of the school of thought that believes in the “art for art sake” philosophy, but the African artist sees art as the medium for the communication of “truths” that pervade the spheres of the African society. In a much larger sense, the African artist is concerned with the “*utile*” function of his construct rather than the “*dulce*” function of art.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This research project is as a result of ENG 153, *Introduction To Drama*, which triggered my interest in myths and how philosophical beliefs form the basis of human existence. The course exposed me to various aspects of African and Greek dramaturgy, revealing them not only as aesthetic constructs, but more importantly, as creations borne out of the need for cultural uniqueness, encapsulating deep aspects of a culture. This research seeks to change the supposed

“worldview” of certain critics who are mostly non-Africans, who critique the employment of myths by African writers as “aesthetically-motivated”. Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the Kings Horseman* and Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame* are aimed at revealing the distinct nature cum strangeness of the African society. This is evident in Ola Rotimi’s Adaptation of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. He perfectly adapts the work to reveal the point of view of the Yoruba people in response to birth, death and predestination. *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines culture as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organisation of a particular country or group.” That is, the total representation of a people’s thinking and way of life. Culture is not wholly formed around its conventional elements: language, dressing, food etc., these are minute aspects that are set in motion by communal experiences which give birth to the ideologies and sense-perception that form the basis of diverse cultural elements. A popular African quote says “the story is more important than the storyteller”. This means that the story is the binding element that unites legendary and historic events performed by ancestors with the present society. It is therefore imperative that the society preserves even for generations unborn the “story”, which may represent the culture and the mythology of the people.

In the same way, cultural beliefs and myths do not come to exist just like the “big-bang theory”, but they assume their acceptance not in spontaneity, but a gradual process, which thereafter becomes accepted by the people who make up the society. However, anthropologists define culture as what everybody has. In the same vein, a society cannot exist if its members do not mutually agree to a consensus, with a view to “marrying” all perspectives in order to live in communion. Therefore, society can only be functional when individuals come together, bringing with them their independent ideologies or values to what I call the “community square”, with the aim of establishing a unifying belief system. Myths exists in every society, therefore myths are

an important aspect of any culture. To an uninformed audience, myths are generally perceived to be philosophical and highly speculative--speculative in a sense that myths are seen as non-factual experiences.

The introduction of the word “worldview”, in the project serves as a backdrop, which helps to give a better understanding of myths and their existing relationship with religion, anthropology and cultural history. A school of thought also believes that myths are generally referred to be hypothetical, based on conjecture and speculation. But this research will reveal that a society’s mythical beliefs can only be understood only from the point of view of those who belong to such societies. According to Christian postulates and philosophy, the death and resurrection of Christ is aimed at saving mankind from sin and its retribution. Also, Islamic adherents posit that believing in Allah and the message of the holy Prophet Muhammad is the only way to paradise. To non-believers, the Christian and Islamic beliefs are mere myths founded on speculation, but to the devout followers, the crux of their followership is more than a religion but a lifestyle they have come to “live”.

This means that in order to understand myths, one must first understand that any society has the right to view the world around them from a unique vantage point, and one must analyse the history of a people without any bias. This research will explore the *weltanschauung*, the worldview of the Yoruba people, with a view to understanding why they see the world around them from a certain perspective. Wole Soyinka’s play *Death and the King’s Horseman* and Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame* reveal the “collective consciousness” of the Yoruba people, and it is therefore imperative to study the mythic cum archetypal symbols prevalent in the text to be reviewed. African societies do not see physical things as sacred as beliefs, myths and their

culture. It is therefore important to evaluate the sacredness of myths and how it adds to a society's identity and psyche. Worldview is employed in this research project because it is only through worldview that questions posed by myths are answered.

A lot of research has been conducted on the study of myths, but only a few research projects have studied myths in relation with cultural philosophy. A lot of these research projects study the keywords-- 'myth' and 'worldview' in isolation. While some research projects erroneously believe that myths are historic fictions. This project seeks to establish a synthesis between myth and worldview--'worldview,' an explanation of myths. This espousal thereby gives a fuller and a much richer perspective--revealing the motive behind these actions. This project will explore values, ethics, emotions, philosophy and beliefs peculiar to both writers of the texts to be analysed and their characters. This project evaluates the established connectedness of myth and worldview.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are:

1. To establish the relationship that exists between myths and worldview;
2. To explore and analyse mythic symbols and their significance, thereby revealing cultural themes e.g. Death, predestination, ritual etc. in the books to be reviewed; And
3. To explore the differences and similarities that exist in the books to be reviewed, that is, analysing both writers' points of view.

SCOPE OF STUDY

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* will be used critically to analyse the keywords--myth and worldview. This study will give a general overview of the two terms and how they function interdependently. These books contain a plethora of myths and their significance with history and worldview. These books carry the idea of mythology from a completely unique standpoint—the Yoruba point of view. This project is completely concerned with the issue of the metaphysical, rather than the physical. The Yoruban idea of the metaphysical is inherently identified in these plays. These books do not merely identify the existence of myths, rather they advance the thesis of this project—the fact that one cannot understand the concept of myth, without introducing the idea of worldview. In other words, worldview with history helps to explain myths. Unlike other books which have talked about myths, these books—*The Gods Are Not to Blame* and *Death and the King's Horseman* relate myths with culture. Most importantly, from an aesthetic standpoint, these books do not only emphasise myths and worldview, but they also emphasise the fact that oral African resources are employed in order to properly advance the focal point of these works.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Contrary to the defunct view that myths are borne out of superstition--a fictitious event orchestrated by a people. "Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend"(Schorer 29). The mythic or better called mythological approach will give a more insightful and incisive analysis and exploration of myth

and worldview in this research. This approach will be used as a guiding post so as to enable a critical and proper analysis.

The mythic or mythological criticism is a literary approach that is extensively related to other fields like anthropology, psychology, religion and cultural philosophies which seek to identify and explore in succinct terms the concept of myth and mythic symbols. This approach is rigorous and wide in its application, unlike other literary approaches. Archetypes or archetypal symbols are an important aspect of the mythological approach. These symbols are not universally interpreted but analysed from a specific culture's point of view, for example, death, creation, the celestial bodies, predestination are identified as common archetypal symbols and themes; however, they can only be understood when placed within the context of a people's existence. The mythic approach is not only concerned with myths in their entirety, but with the 'whys' behind these myths.

According to Aristotle's law of causality, the explanation of why things happen, the mythic approach extensively looks at the motivating factors that determine these myths. The mythical approach supplies explanation to different culture's beliefs, thereby constructively evaluating the author's artistic creativity. Most importantly, the mythological approach seeks to analyse and expatiate on significant ideas peculiar to all types of myths--be it religious or cultural e.g. Sacrifice, ritual, creation, and death. This can be found in most myths e.g. Jesus' birth and death, a significant example. Rudolf Otto is a significant contributor to myth criticism. He established the concept of the *numinous*. *The Free Dictionary by Farlex* posits that the *numinous* is an English adjective taken from the Latin word, *numen* and which is used to describe the power or

the presence of divinity. Carl Gustav Jung and Carl Lewis frequently used this concept in their writing.

Another important aspect of myth criticism is the presence of archetypes and their application in the work of art. *The Free Dictionary by Farlex* defines archetypes as “an inherited pattern of thought or symbolic imagery derived from the past collective experience and present in the individual’s unconscious.”(NP).

It is therefore important to identify five major types of archetypes, and these include: the self, (the regulating centre of the psyche and the facilitator of individuation); the shadow (the opposite of the ego image often containing qualities with which the ego does not identify); the anima (the feminine image in a man’s psyche); the animus (the masculine image in a woman’s psyche)and, the persona(the image we present to the world, usually protecting the ego from negative images).

Also highly significant is the idea of the collective unconscious, which *The Free Dictionary by Farlex* defines as “a part of the unconscious mind shared by a society, a people or all humankind—the product of ancestral experience which contains such concepts as religion, science and morality ”(NP). It also sees the concept of the collective unconscious as “a part of the unconscious mind incorporating patterns of memories, instincts and experiences common to all mankind” (NP).

James Frazer is a follower of the myth-ritual school, a school of thought which believes myths emerge out of ritual during the natural process of religious evolutions. While another anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski believes that myth and myth criticism tend to reveal unreal, fictitious “revelations” of the origin of rituals, therefore providing a justification for those rituals. Mircea Eliade supports the notion that myth criticism functions to give explanation to

ritual and cultures. Mircea Eliade and Bronislaw Malinowski believe that myth cannot be separated from religion.

Sigmund Freud took on a psychological standpoint (myth in relation to psychology) in the analysis of myths in his *Interpretation of Myths*. He however saw myths as an expression and communication of repressed ideas. Another psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung talks about the "collective unconscious" and also about mythical symbols and archetypes. Rudolf Otto, Eliade, Claude Levi Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski and James George Frazer are major contributors and analysts of myth. This project seeks to expand the concept of myth and its relationship with worldview using theories and analysis of these authorities.

METHODOLOGY

This research will employ a step-by-step analysis of the salient words in the research topic, myth and worldview, in order to give a more general overview of the relationship between these concepts and how they are emphasized in the text. A thorough analysis of archetypal, mythic and cultural symbols and their existence in the texts will be done. It is important to note that Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi are devout traditionalists and followers of Yoruba mythology. However, one cannot employ the mythological approach by merely analysing the author of the text and the story without analysing the setting and the society from which both comes from.

The mythological approach looks not only at culture, but also at history--evaluating and analysing those events that underlie human behaviour which in turn create communal ideologies that trigger myth. This research project will use the writers and their characters as samples representing the entire Yoruba people. Sampling these characters will help give a better

understanding of who the Yoruba people are and what they stand for. That is, looking at the historical development, in terms of tracing the events that make up Yoruba history and how they significantly carve culture. It is said that history gives the best explanation to culture, the same way that the Christian Bible gives explanation to what the Christians believe in. The Bible chronicles the history (the birth and the death of Jesus or the creation and the after-life story) which Christians have been made to believe in.

African societies have a collective consciousness which is based on communitarian ideologies, that is, an existence not based on the individual, but on the common good of the community. In the course of this research, works and books written by authorities in this area of mythology will be read to advance this academic research. A lot of internet sources, journals and library materials will be consulted in the course of this research.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms will be used extensively and repeatedly in the course of this research. It is therefore imperative that these words are explicitly defined according to how they will function in the course of this research process. These words are not defined according to their dictionary meaning but according to their functionality.

Myth: A sacred belief of a people passed on from generations which seeks to give explanation to certain cultural and religious practices

Worldview: This is a people's complete and total way of thinking and perceiving natural and spiritual phenomena.

Ideology: This is a set of ideas that make up the perceptions, thoughts and views of an individual or a people. The word "ideology" and "worldview" will be inter-substituted in this research.

Mythology: This is the study and compilation of myths.

Mythic/Mythical/Mythological Approach : This is a literary approach that is wide in scope and related to other literary approaches and which is mainly concerned with analysing myths from different vantage points with a view to espousing thoughts and events that arise from mankind' psyche.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, two distinct methods will be employed in order to properly advance the central plank of this research project. The methods include: identifying, evaluating and reviewing of different definitions of the word “myth” posited by authorities in relation to this present paper; and identifying, evaluating and reviewing existing literature overtly related to this research project, with a view to understanding all other perspectives.

The method of identifying, evaluating and reviewing of different definitions of the word “myth” as posited by authorities in relation to this research, is to enable us get a proper grasp of the word and its overt and covert conceptualization and application. These definitions help us to identify and understand the similarities in definition and the recurrent or overarching ideas identifiable in various definitions and their manner of application in the course of this research.

Lawrence J. Hatab in his work *Myth and Philosophy*, defines myth as “a narrative which discloses a sacred world”(19). While Veronica Ions in *The World’s Mythology* says “the myth in a primitive society, that is, in its original form, is not just a tale. It is a reality. This knowledge provides man with motives for rituals and moral acts”(6). Myth according to Hatab’s definition merely states that the myth of a specific society reveals distinct aspects of a people. It is important to note that the concept of myth, though universal, differs in manner and approach from society to society. Veronica’s definition identifies that myths go beyond revealing a society’s distinctiveness. She further says that myths “are of an original, greater, more important reality, through which the present life, fate and mankind are governed” (16).

Norman Austin in his book *Meaning and Being in Myth* says “myth purports to offer an adequate explanation for everything--for the elements, and laws of nature for social structure, ethics and the dynamics of the people”(2) . This definition or explanation of the concept of myth by Norman Austin poses a significant question that this present paper seeks to answer: Does everything around a society’s culture, either concrete or abstract, revolve around the notion of myth and worldview? To an extent, it can be emphasised that the concept of myth and worldview function interdependently to concretise a society’s belief and what they represent, what he calls —“the dynamics of the people.”

The Free Dictionary by Farlex defines myth as:

A traditional, typically ancient story dealing with supernatural beings, ancestors or heroes that serve as a fundamental type in the worldview of a people...explaining aspects of the natural world or delineating the psychology, customs or ideals of the society.(NP)

A peculiar and recurrent idea that is emphasised in these definitions is that, these definitions do not bother about the authenticity of the myth of a peculiar society, but the overarching idea emphasised is the fact that myths are like a binding force uniting society, which also can be seen as what I call an “identity symbol.” The truth-value and the implausibility of the myth is not emphasised, rather they espouse the significant relationship between myth and worldview, thereby emphasizing what J. Hatab refers to as “the disclosing of a sacred world”(2).

It is important to note that these definitions do not undermine the total value of myths, but instead they identify the fact that myths reveal the distinct aspects of a society's existence. Worldview or ideology refers to a culture's total belief in the physical and the metaphysical. The concept of myth cannot be analysed in isolation, it is therefore important that myth and worldview are evaluated not as individual, independent entities but as functioning interdependently. It is therefore expedient to reiterate the aim of this research project, which is to identify how the worldview of the Yoruba people emphasises the concept of myth and how it functions in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*.

It is therefore important to evaluate literatures that are related to this research study; identifying, evaluating and reviewing their distinct standpoints. In Anyokwu's essay:

King's Horseman or Olokun-Esin? History and the Politics of Translation, he says:

For Soyinka, it will not do to indulge in culture clash theoretics. In the light of this, the mythopoetic artist is usually wont to deploy concrete human events and actions as metaphoric... Indeed, Wole Soyinka chooses to 'epochalize' History in order to expropriate its mythopoeic resourcefulness.

Here, clearly the dramatist has cashed in on the tragic essence of the 1946 saga :metaphysical confrontation, the universe of the Yoruba mind which places the historical world of the living at the centre; and the human

vehicle, Elesin.(399)

In Wole Ogundele's paper, *Death and the King's Horseman: "A Poets Quarrel with His Culture": Research in African Literature*, he takes on a view that seeks to expose the historical relevance of the Olokun-Esin myth the Yoruba people have come to believe in over the years. He says:

Oral history tells us that originally, the Olokun-Esin(master of the horse) did not have to die along with his king for any reason at all, political or metaphysical. The first to die did so willingly. The reason oral historians say, was that the particular Olokun-Esin and the king were uncommon close friends. Such was the friendship that the Olokun Esin enjoyed all the rights and privileges that the king himself had, plus all the good things of life available to the empire. When the king died, this particular Olokun Esin thought that the only way to show his love and loyalty to his friend, the dead king, was to die, too. (56)

From this excerpt from Anyokwu and Ogundele, it can be deduced that the Olokun-Esin myth came to exist in the Yoruba society from history—an historic event. And this “process” in (which the Olokun Esin must go through) which the Yoruba people have come to believe over the years was fashioned out of what I call the “sheer commitment” of the first OlokunEsin to his

king. This event of the first Olokun Esin's sacrifice has carved for the Yoruba people a belief or worldview that posits that it is imperative that a king's horseman dies with the king. Anyokwu's and Ogundele's espousal has raised some questions that this present paper seeks to answer: It is believed that African belief system and their inherent worldview come to exist by a direct interaction with the metaphysical—what I posit as “divine revelation”. The question raised now is: is the historic event (the decision of the first OlokunEsin), which is a completely human decision and a non-supernatural injunction able to create a worldview for the Yoruba people which they have come to believe in? This present paper seeks to answer this question and other various questions that will emerge in the course of this review of different related literatures.

Cheryl Sterling in her treatise *The (Un)broken Cycle in Death and King's Horseman* emphasizes her viewpoint by trying to answer the question. She says:

Asa in Yoruba translates simply to “culture” or “tradition”. It implies an awareness of the historical process, *itan* and the engagement between history and story. *Itan* has dual signification, in that it translates to both history and story. When the Yoruba employ the term *pitan*, which means “to tell history” and “to tell story”, could they be implying that in a historical retelling that there is always an element of storytelling.”(7)

She further goes on to say “it is through the concept of *asa* and *ori* that the balance between the mythic and the historic be understood” (9). She further goes on to quote Olabiyi Yai who says: “something cannot qualify as *asa*, which has not been the result of deliberate choice (sa)... by individual or collective *ori*.”(9)

As emphasized earlier, African societies' belief system and worldview is created out of a direct interaction with ancestors and gods—a numinous and divine revelation. It inherently means that cultural norms beliefs, and worldview “cannot come into place without the human agent choosing such a condition.”(9) This means that the Yoruba worldview, with respect to the first Elesin's decision is by individual choice, and which has arbitrarily become a norm society has come to believe in. Therefore we can infer that “culture and tradition are mutable in the Yoruba worldview”. (9)

This raises an important question that this present paper seeks to discuss: what is the spirituality of Elesin's death when the belief that has come to pervade their belief system came into existence by a non-spiritual process—by the first Elesin's volition?

Death, predestination and the death-rebirth theme or archetype are important aspects of the African society present in Soyinka and Ola Rotimi's construct, and this present paper intends to analyse these ideas and how they are emphasized in the texts from a Yoruba standpoint. Cheryl Sterling further talks about death from the Yoruba viewpoint. She says:

Death, it is important to understand is not the end. Death is part of the cycle of life, the cycle that links the unborn, the living and the ancestral. Crossing and linking these forces, Elesin's death is the quintessential moment of cosmic communication (12) .

Most African religions believe in the transitional power of death. For instance, the Igbo society also believes in a form of numinous passage into eternity. They emphasize the Yoruba belief that

there exists a direct relationship and interaction between the physical world and the metaphysical world. M.H Abrams talks about the death/rebirth archetype in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. He says:

the death/rebirth theme was often said to be the archetype of archetypes, and was held to be grounded in the cycle of the seasons and the organic cycle of human life; this archetype, it was claimed, occurs in primitive rituals of the king who is annually sacrificed, in widespread myths of gods who die to be reborn.(14)

Cheryl Sterling further goes on to emphasize Elesin's Human sacrifice. She says, "this is not to say that the death of the Elesin Oba is not an act of human sacrifice, but the very notion of sacrifice is pivotal in the Yoruba worldview as the propitiatory act by humankind to secure the balance of the cosmos". (14)

Regardless of the authorial heavy handedness of Soyinka towards critiquing his work as a "clash of cultures", James Booth in *Human Sacrifice in Literature: The Case of Wole Soyinka*, he says:

Soyinka adopts an organicist myth of communalism or negritude, with characteristics, metaphorical adventurousness and provocation; Soyinka attempts to rescue and rehabilitate this most irreducible symbol of primitivism ...He challenges European images of barbarism (8).

James Booth in his work further quotes Reverend Samuel Johnson who says, the name King's Horseman (Ona-OlokunEsin) for instance designates a man whose function in life is to accompany the Alafin of Oyo into the next world when he dies. That is his reason for living. He has no other option" .(4-5)

There is a big difference between the type of predestination found in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. The type of predestination placed on Elesin is the embargo placed upon him by tradition and culture—formed from the historical event that took place with the first Elesin. While the predestination placed on Odewale is from the gods. Odewale is helpless in the midst of the gods. Rev. Samuel Johnson, however, does not make this distinction.

After evaluating diverse points of view, it is therefore important to ask if the Yoruba society in its bid for communalism advocates consequentiality and the philosophy of “the greatest good for the greatest number of people”—the Jeremy Bentham's principle of utilitarianism.

Naveen Kumar in *Indigenous Traditions in Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman* quotes Tanure Ojaide who has this to say in reaction to the above question,

Order to Africans is perceived as natural and ritualistic;
to ensure harmony, the absence of which will bring calamity
to the whole group. For this reason, an individual could be
sacrificed to avoid a war or plague or any anticipated
communal' disaster. In other words the individual can

be sacrificed for the wellbeing of the society.(4)

This is probably because the African society is highly communitarian, unlike the ‘individualistic’ West. The wellbeing of the community is of great importance to the society rather than individual desires, that is a more reason why in *Death and the King’s Horseman* the characters pay great importance to the sacrifice of Elesin. For instance, Iyaloja decides to voluntarily give the girl who has been betrothed to her son—the girl also does not hold still, but she also gives herself to the “warm ‘entrance.”

Ereji Achu takes up a new point of view. He places emphasis on the mythical cum aesthetic function of the work of art. He says, “the myth reveals itself in its narrative form of the patterns adopted. The Elesin uses the symbol of the “Not-I-Bird” to give us a reverberant voice of the myth”(23). He does not only place emphasis on the mythpoesis and the history of the Yoruba people but on Soyinka’s incorporation of the aesthetic from Africa’s rich oral resources.

On the denotative level, the notion of fate and predestination is the crux of Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. This present paper seeks to analyse the play on its denotative level rather than on the connotative, which according to Felix Edjerem is the “national disaster which he (Ola Rotimi) thought was possible only because Nigerians allowed themselves to be pawns in the ‘wargames’ of the superpowers.” It is significant to note that if Ola Rotimi compares Nigeria to Odewale in the sense that Nigeria allowed itself to be controlled by superpowers, then no meaningful comparison exists between Nigeria and Odewale, because, unlike Nigeria, Odewale’s fate was sealed from the outset by the gods.

On the issue of death and predestination Felix Edjeren takes on a different point of view when he says:

the notion of fate as something which is rigidly pursued and executed and executed by the gods is foreign to Yoruba thought where fate is chosen by the individual before birth. The only thing similar to 'vindictive fatalism' in Yoruba traditional thought is the belief that one's destiny could be altered for the worse by children of the world ...hostile spirits of affliction , who do not, however, execute fate but seek to pervert it (NP).

He reacts to the overt pressure of the Greek concept of fate, tragedy and predestination in Ola Rotimi's treatise. However, he goes on to say that "the over-whelmingly ironic plot of the Greek remains in this adaptation." He caps it all by saying "the worldview presented in this play is definitely not Yoruba." (Felix)

Lloydetta Ursula Quaicoe in her Research Project, "Rethinking Greek Tragedy in African Contexts:A Study of Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka" differs from Felix's point of view. She says:

The Yoruba worldview and belief system in myths is in away similar to the Greeks.
That is why Ola Rotimi decides to employ Sophoclean tragedy.
The Greeks are known to have a great pantheon,

the same way the Yoruba people have, and their belief in the numinous. She establishes the relationship when she says, one of the most significant themes in the drama of Oedipus Rex is the struggle of man against supernatural forces. Rotimi emphasised that this struggle, which is well dramatized throughout the play, begins at birth because the idea of some relationship between the gods and humans ‘corresponds’ to the belief of West Africa.(69)

Zulu Sofola in *The Theatre in the Search for Authenticity* refutes the idea that the play is completely borne out of the Yoruban worldview, thereby emphasizing that Rotimi attempts to “clothe the Greek cosmic view in a Nigerian garb”.(134). She emphasizes the fact that Ola Rotimi’s play is completely submerged in non-African tragedy—Sophoclean and Aristotelian tragedy. Rotimi reacts to critics’ uproar when he says in *Dem Say*:

The idea of absolute subservience to the gods and acceptance of the immutability of fate which is a current motif in early drama, to a large measure dictates the direction and outcome of the original Oedipus tragedy ...Traditional Nigerian religions also do acknowledge the power of predestination.

Furthermore, our religions appreciate the wisdom
in personal submission—submission not only to the
gods of the land but also to the memory of the departed ancestors.(62-63).

This present study seeks to evaluate and identify the completely African worldview of the Yoruba people and how it is emphasized in the play with regards to completely African symbols, archetypes, the death/rebirth theme, fate, determinism and predestination.

Zulu Sofola further takes on a radical point of view in refuting the above quote made by Ola Rotimi. Zulu Sofola says,:

In Greek cosmology, destiny is forced on individuals
who are thus helplessly burdened with what they
can neither influence nor alter. They may try to run away
but they cannot escape. Their natural impulse is to fight
these natural and supernatural forces to survive. Africans
on the other hand, as we have seen, actively participate in their
own destinies, and irrational and intolerable arrangements of
their lives rarely occur. Hence, it would be inconceivable
that an African would ever be destined to kill his own father
and marry his own mother. Nor would an African god have

ordained that a child should commit murder in order to right a wrong which was still unrighted, but which had been committed earlier in his life.(134)

From my point of view, Zulu Sofola's statement, "it would be inconceivable that an African would ever be destined to kill his own father and marry his mother," emphasizes the shallowness of Zulu Sofola's treatise. Humans, according to Freud's analytic behaviour of man posit that man has a tendency to develop the oedipal tendency regardless of race and country—it is universal. The power to do good or evil is embedded deep in man's psyche.

Anyokwu in his essay *Rethinking the Tragic in Ola Rotimi's Dramaturgy*, emphasizes that "the Yoruba concept of *ori*, predestination, also holds that human beings are here on earth because of the terrestrial choice they had made in the house of Orunmila, the Yoruba god of divination" (4). He believes that the gods play a vital role in orchestrating one's "perceived" destiny, while he or she also partakes in the predestination process--: "the terrestrial choice they had made in the house Orunmila, the Yoruba god of divination"(4)

In analysing Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, one has to critically evaluate actions: the authorial input, an individual's actions and the collective actions of the characters. And this can be done and fully understood when these actions are placed and analysed not from a universal perspective, but the unique and distinct point of view of the Yoruba people. Most of these research projects study the concept of myth, the key terms related to it and its concepts in isolation. This research project seeks to synthesize the concept of mythology with the concept of worldview—using the concept of the

worldview as a backdrop in analysing mythic concepts. This project succinctly employs the concept of worldview in order to properly elucidate and define what myths generally are, and most importantly, from the point of view of the culture being studied—the Yoruba people. This present research project also seeks to analyse mythic concepts: death, rebirth, predestination. This present paper seeks to answer various questions that have been raised by these literatures. For example, the relationship of cultural history to the worldview and myth of a people, the significance of the first Elesin’s completely “physical and natural” decision to die with the king, which in turn has created the supposed numinous belief of the Elesin’s death. These present paper seeks to answer these questions and more in the course of this research.

CHAPTER THREE

Wole Soyinka in *Death and The King's Horseman* hinges on the transcendental worldview of the Yoruba people. The play relates an actual event that took place in the defunct Oyo Empire in 1944. The play focuses on Elesin Oba, the King's Horseman. In the Yoruba tradition, the Elesin must perform a ritual suicide when the king dies. This is extremely important because the King's Horseman is required to accompany the king, or to serve as a horse upon which the dead king shall successfully ride into the numinous beyond. If the ritual suicide is not performed, the Yoruba society will plunge into disarray and confusion—the king's spirit becomes angry and he is forced to make life hard for the Yoruba people. Prior to his supposed ritual suicide, he enjoys to the fullest, the things of the earth. The Women, the Praise-Singer and Iyaloja prepares Elesin psychologically and physically for his sacrifice. The Praise-Singer motivates Elesin through his *oriki*, the praise. He says of Elesin:

Praise-Singer: Far be it for me to belittle the dwellers of that place, but a man

is either born to his art or isn't. And I don't know for certain that

you'll meet my father. So who is going to sing those deeds in accents

that will pierce the deafness of the ancient ones?...I need you on

this journey and I shall be behind you(DKH.10).

The women and the entire society support him psychologically, and even sexually in order to fulfil the long tradition that has, according to Yoruba history, existed for ages. Iyaloja, in order to

fulfil the order and the bidding of tradition, gives her son's fiancé to Elesin for sexual satisfaction.

She says:

Iyaloja: The matter is no longer in our hands my son's wish is mine

I did the asking for him, the loss can be remedied. But who will
remedy the blight of closed hands on the day when all should be
openness and light(DKH.21).

As the process of Elesin's sacrifice was put in place, Simon Pilkings, a local British council ruler got wind of the information and he interrupts the ritual. He vehemently kicks against Elesin's ritual suicide because he sees it as dastardly and barbaric. Elesin's son, Olunde, returns upon hearing about the stalling of the ritual process. He takes on the dire responsibility of his father, and he dies in his place in order to fulfil and preserve the supposed order and to maintain the much needed interaction between the physical world and the metaphysical world. This throws the society into a tumult. This is so because the order of the society has been drastically altered. In the Yoruba society, it is a great evil for a son to die before the father. Elesin kills himself to save his face and to take his soul into eternal lamentation and suffering.

The Author's Note in page 6 of Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman* is highly significant in advancing the central plank of this research project, which is totally concerned with myth and how the worldview of the people go a long way to explicating their myth. Myths in all societies are generally referred to be metaphysical, spiritual and sacred. The main idea of the play is not

the clash between Pilkings and the culture of the Yoruba people. Instead, Soyinka emphasizes in the Author's note that the work should not take on:

The 'facile tag' of clash of cultures, a prejudicial label, which, quite apart from its frequent misapplication, it presupposes a potential quality in every given situation of the alien culture...the colonial factor is an incident, a catalytic incident, merely. The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind—the world of the living, the world of the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all traditions(6-7).

Ola Rotimi's play *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, takes a whole new perspective, entirely different from what Soyinka has done in his work. Soyinka delves into Yoruba history, conjoining it with the mythopoetic resourcefulness of the Yoruba tradition. While Ola Rotimi decides to adapt Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, introducing certain mythic and African elements, the original play was written from the Sophoclean cum Aristotelian point of view of tragedy and predestination. But Ola Rotimi constructively uses these concepts coupled with African ideas to form a completely unique type of drama—what I call the Yoruban drama or tragedy.

The play relates the story of the Yoruban protagonist, Odewale, who is born to the family of the Adetusas. According to Yoruba custom, the child is taken to the Ifa priest in order to decipher the destiny of the child. Odewale's destiny is predicted by the Ifas been one full of evil. The Ifa priest, Baba Fakunle says:

Baba Fakunle: This boy, he will kill his own father and then marry

his own mother (3).

One of the guards, Gbonka is asked to kill the child, but he is compassionate and he therefore gives the little child to a poor family who in return acts as his foster parents. Odewale grows up into a strong and virile young man with a terrible temper. As he grows, he is told by a diviner that he is destined to kill his own father and marry his mother. He runs away from his supposed parents in order to avert the predicted killing of his parents. He is told to stay where he is, but he decides to run away. In running away, he comes closer and closer to fulfilling the destiny. While working on a piece of land, King Adetusa, his father calls Odewale's tribe a shit tribe. In an uncontrollable fit of anger, Odewale kills King Adetusa and his men. After the death of the King, his father, Odewale goes to Kutuje and he finds out that the people of Kutuje have been invaded by the Ikolu warriors. He decides to help them . He helps them fight the Ikolu people. They are victorious against the Ikolu people. Without consulting the gods and in appreciation they make him king in the stead of the dead king, King Adetusa. He therefore marries his mother, Queen Ojuola.

Famine and sicknesses pervade Kutuje. Aderopo is requested to seek the presence of Baba Fakunle, the priest. The priest says that an evil has been committed in the land and the land has

to be purged unless the suffering and the famine will remain. This evil is the killing of King Adetusa. Without thinking, Odewale pronounces a sentence on the killer of King Adetusa. Alaka, Odewale close friend comes to inform Odewale of the death of his parents—his foster parents. Alaka further complicates issues by confessing to Odewale that the people he thought were his parents were never his parents. Gbonka presence is requested and he confirms Alaka's story. He confesses that he actually did not kill the child he was supposed to leave dying in the wilderness. Ojuola, in shock goes to her room and stabs herself. While, Odewale on the other hand is sorry. He gouges his eyes out and bans himself and his children from the Kutuje society.

It is of great importance that before a proper mythic analysis be conducted on the aesthetic constructs of Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, one must understand the context of their production and inspiration. In analysing myths, authors' perspectives go a long way in giving clues. Wole Soyinka emphasizes the mythic concept and worldview—the Yoruba complete outlook on life. Regardless of the fact that Odewale is similar to Oedipus—the fact that it (the aesthetic construct) comes from or is inspired by Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, does not make the playwright evade the ideological cum psychological preoccupation of the play in revealing how fate, determinism and predestination is emphasized in the Yoruba society.

Wole Soyinka is a complete traditionalist and a devout believer of the Yoruba religion. He writes the play in order to explicate the completely unique worldview of the Yoruba people, to which he is also part of. David Cook is quoted by Sheryl Sterling in the *Unbroken Cycle* saying:

Soyinka's metaphorical words and images are tier a of meaning which is
not just a matter of the structures of separate sentences and speeches;

it has to do with the eddying movement of the human mind, circling
round its private preoccupation, while it is carried forward publicly by
the continuous stream of situation(114).

The mythic criticism cannot be understood and properly utilised in analysing a work without understanding the artist's creative preoccupation and where he emanates, that is, his culture. Ola Rotimi is also a devout believer and follower of the African culture and tradition. Most of his works relate cultural and metaphysical clashes. *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* for example is highly cultural.

Myth criticism is a justifiable approach necessary in this research because the plays are filled with certain elements that can only be overtly exposed using the myth criticism. For example there is an overt emphasis on the collective unconscious, the presence of archetypes in their different forms and realisations, the presence of mythic symbols like death, birth, rituals and sacrifice and *mythemes*. In analysing myths, individual perspectives and the individual unconscious relating to individual characters in the play or in a society are sacrificed. Emphasis is placed on the community and the collective unconscious rather than on individual characters.

The research seeks to locate the Yoruba myth using their worldview as a backdrop in order to get a more vivid outlook on the 'whats' and 'whys' pervading the Yoruba world. In talking about Death in the Yoruba society, Soyinka introduces us to the first word in the title of his play—Death. Two major deaths are emphasized in this play while the other death is borne out of cultural patriotism. In the Yoruba tradition, it is important for the Elesin Oba, the king's

horseman to die along with the king when the king dies. This is so because the Yoruba worldview is of the perspective that the transition from the physical world of the living to the outer, metaphysical world is wrought with all sorts of dangers and it is therefore required of the Elesin to serve the purpose of conveying the king successfully into the spiritual world by offering himself as a ritual sacrifice. Wole Ogundele reveals that the first Olokun Esin did not have to die with the first king. But he decided to die with the king because of the close relationship he had with the first king.

The historic decision of the first Elesin has in turn created a type of myth which the Yoruba people have rigidly and consistently followed till this day. This is in away made possible by euhemerism, the concept that posits that myths can be explained historically and by evaluating their particular objectives and motives. A significant question raised by the first Elesin's decision to die with the king is: Can a merely human decision and the individual decision of a person create a belief system that is rigidly followed and believed by all? The answer is yes. And this research seeks to properly answer that question with proper evidence. According to Alan Watts definition in *Wikipedia*, myths:

Is to be defined as a complex of stories—some no doubt
fact, and some fantasy—which for various reasons, human
beings regard as demonstration of the inner meaning
of the universe and of the human
life (NP).

From this definition of myth, it can be deduced that myths can occur or come to exist in a society through an ancestor's decision or by through a story which is considered factual by adherents and which may be considered unrealistic and nonfactual by non-believers. This means that the concept of euhemerism is an important aspect in interpreting a people's myth—history and historic events go a long way to concretising a people's belief. The most important thing in considering myths is the fact that the story must relate the “demonstrations” of the inner meaning of the society, that is, it must be show or give clues relating to the worldview of the society in question.

Though the story that develops the Elesin Oba myth was formed from a historic decision made by the first Elesin, this decision corresponds with the inner meaning and the interpretation of human life and of the world around them and of their cosmology and ontology. Death in the Yoruba worldview is interpreted from a totally different point of view. The first death that we are introduced to is the death of the king. While the next death, is the “anticipated” death of Elesin. Sheryl in her article has this to say about the Yoruba worldview on death:

Death, it is important to understand, is not the end.

Death is part of the cycle of life, the cycle that links

the unborn, the living, and the ancestral...

Crossing and linking these forces, Elesin's death is

the quintessential moment of cosmic communication(5).

In other words, the decision of the first Elesin is proper and conceivable enough to form the myth that has pervaded their society for ages because every myth cannot exist in any society if it does

not appeal to the belief system or worldview of a particular society and if members of that society do not arbitrarily concur. That is, myth and worldview must be in sync—they are interdependent. The Yoruba people see death as a transition from this cosmic plane to another. It is similar to the Christian worldview, which believes that the earth is a preparatory ground for the real life in heaven. Another clue that makes the argument made above justifiable is the Yoruba worldview on the cyclical notion of life. Sheryl Sterling further quotes Drewal who says:

The Yoruba conceive of the universe around them as a circular totality. The top half is the realm of *orun*, which may be represented as heaven. The other world: the bottom half is *aye*, earth of the world. Orun is home to the spiritual and ancestral forces *aye* is peopled by both knowledgeable and the unknowing (2)

This idea of the ephemeral and eternal world is identified in Elesin's dialogue with the market women. He says:

Elesin: All you who stand before the spirit that dare the opening of the last door of passage, dare to rid my going of regrets. My wish transcends the blotting out of thought in one mere moment's tremor of the senses... I am girded for the route. Burdens of waste and longing. Then let me travel light(21).

In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* we are introduced to the ill-fate and destiny of the child, Odewale, who has been handed over to Gbonka in order to avert the evil destiny. One highly similar idea in Soyinka's play and in Rotimi's play is that death performs certain functions—to maintain status quo in the society and to also avert imminent dangers that will put the society in jeopardy.

Baba Fakunle: This boy he will kill his own father.

And then marry his own mother!

Narrator : Bad word!

The future is not happy,

but to resign oneself to it

is to be crippled fast.

man must struggle.

The bad future must not happen.

The only way to stop it is to kill the unlucky messenger

of the gods. Kill the boy (TGANTB.3)

According to the cyclical notion of life, the child is sent from the gods from the land of the unborn to the land of the living, *aye*. Killing him is not seen as evil, but, just like the death of Elesin, the child must die in order to avert the evil that has been anticipated. This means that in the real sense of the Yoruba view on death, the child does not really die, but is transported

through death back to the metaphysical world. The need for the death of the little Odewale at birth would have averted a lot of the trouble experienced in the play. The death of the child would have saved the Kutuje people from the death of King Adetusa, the invasion from the Ikolu soldiers, the famine and sickness pervading the land, the incest committed by Odewale, the death of Queen Ojuola and the banishment of Queen Ojuola and Odewale's children. In the African worldview, death performs a binary function—to purge a society and a medium for transition.

This is shown by the narrator who says:

Narrator: Mother sinks to the ground

in sorrow for the seed

that life must crush so soon...

Priest of Ogun ties boy's feet

with a string of cowries,

meaning sacrifice

to the gods who have sent

the boy down to this earth (TGANTB.3).

The child's soul cannot transcend these cosmic planes except by death, the same way the Christians believing in the soul of man being transported to the "other" cosmic plane through death.

Consequently, myths exist differently from society to society and these myths are controlled or determined by the existing worldview and philosophy of the people. However, without understanding the worldview and the ideological standpoint of the Yoruba people, one may not be able to come to terms with the motives that trigger certain actions in the play. For instance, the mandatory ritual sacrifice of Elesin and the supposed killing of the new born, Odewale, are good examples to buttress and support this standpoint.

Furthermore, the death archetype is an important archetype that reoccurs in myth criticism, and this is highly identifiable in Wole Soyinka's play and in Ola Rotimi's play. It is important to note that the death archetype is interpretable from different cultural perspectives. It is the archetype that explains the existence of the collective unconscious of a people. Abiodun Adeniji in his essay, *Archetypal Contemporaneity in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* quotes Holman, who defines

The archetype as an image, a descriptive detail, a plot,
a pattern or a character that frequently occurs in literature
myth, religion or folklore, and is therefore believed to
evoke profound emotions in the reader because it awakens
a primordial image in his unconscious (62).

The main thrust of Soyinka's work, *Death and the King's Horseman* is Elesin's ritual sacrifice. Rituals are mythic elements they make up an important aspect of a society's myth. A ritual can be said to mean an act or a process which is conducted rigorously and regularly in order to sustain the growth, cleansing of a people and continuous existence and interaction between a

people and their pantheon. For example, the death of Jesus according to Christian postulates is to maintain the interaction between God Almighty and the world. It also serves as a medium for the redemption of sin.

The myth-ritual school was put together by George Frazer and the Cambridge Hellenists during the study of myths. Ritual's connection with myth cannot be severed. To them, myths originate out of ritual. For example, in Greek mythology, drama came to exist through rituals and performances to Dionysius. Certain actions are in the course of creating and sustaining a myth. Realists have been termed reductionists because they believe that myths are nonfactual experiences that seek to portray a society's belief in the numinous. Adebayo Williams in his essay *Soyinka: A Collection of Essay* reacts to this viewpoint. He says: "ideology is not just mystification (that is, something that obscures the real relations of things in the world) but essential mystification; one could not imagine a human society without it." (87)

In other words, one cannot understand the collective unconscious or the unique psychic worldview of a society if we tag it "mere mystification". From this, it is obvious that the scientific age is totally reductionist. Rituals in different societies perform two major functions: to purge the society of evil; and to maintain a peaceful interaction between the physical and metaphysical world. Adebayo Williams in his essay *Ritual as Symbolism: Cultural Death and the King's Horseman* says:

Rituals therefore served as a means of re-establishing symbolic
contact with the ontological essence in the pre-industrial society.

On the sacred nature of rituals, Eliade is again invaluable when he

notes that “rituals are given sanctification and rationalisation in a culture by being referred to as supposedly divine prototypes.”

Rituals periodically reconfirm the sacredness of their origins and re-establish the ‘sacred’ as opposed to the ‘profane’ for the community performing them(90).

Adebayo Williams further says in his essay that:

It is however in *Death and the King’s Horseman* that we find Soyinka’s most explicit deployment of ritual both as an organising principle and as a surgical instrument for prising open a people’s collective consciousness at a crucial moment of their historical development. The crisis in the play stems from a threatened abortion of the ritual of human sacrifice. This indeed is a weighty moment of history, and since the play is a refraction of an actual historical event, it is bound to provide the playwright with an appropriate forum for seminal reflections on a communal impasse(91).

It is important to see how worldview is emphasized in the play. Though Soyinka emphasizes his standpoint in the author’s note, he reacts against the interpretation of the work as a “clash of cultures”. On a close reading, we can identify a clash of the personal or individual conscious

against the collective conscious of the Yoruba people. Simon Pilkings sees the ritual sacrifice not from the Yoruba worldview or perspective, but instead he sees it from a wholly western perspective as a barbaric act.

As emphasized earlier, the aborted ritual sacrifice of Elesin is the main thrust of Soyinka's work. The Elesin is part of the Yoruba society, he understands the significance of the ritual suicide—the society does. The Praise Singer says:

Praise Singer: There is only one home to the life of a river mussel.

There is only one home to the life of the tortoise;

there is only one shell to the soul of man: there is

only one world to the spirit of our race. If that world

leaves its course and smashes on the boulders of the

great void whose world would give us shelter

Elesin: It did not in the time of my forebears,

it shall not in mine(DKH.11).

It is therefore important to strike a reasonable balance between the term *etutu*, which means ritual and to place it within the context of the Yoruba society. As highlighted earlier, the Yoruba world believe in the cyclical existence of the cosmos—the land of the living, the dead and the unborn. A sort of chasm exists between each world that can only be bridged by the knowledgeable and special ones like the Elesin and also by supernatural forces. They also believe that the dead king can successfully cross from *aye* to *orun* only when the Elesin dies and

functions as a bridge over the chasm or as a horse (perhaps, like in Greek mythology—a Unicorn), carrying the King into the land beyond. And if Elesin does not perform the ritual suicide, the dead king is forced to wander the world, unable to protect his people, thereby exposing his people to all sorts of evil.

This play is highly significant because, apart from the aesthetic quality of the work, Soyinka digs out from the mythopoeic resourcefulness of the Yoruba tradition coupled with the historic event that takes place in the Oyo empire in 1944. Sheryl Sterling further says:

To Bridge this gulf, to diminish the transition, sacrifices must
be made to the forces of the other world, to allow for the
reunification of human essence and the divine. Ritual
ceremonies of appeasement harness the cosmic divide and
create order out of chaos in this luminal realm...because
of this visceral intertwining of each individual with the fate
of the entire community, a rupture in the normal functioning not
only endangers this shared reality but threatens existence itself...
Sacrifice is the curative means to resume balance in being (14).

Elesin stands at a position in the Yoruba existence in which his decision “to be or not to be” part of the ritual either makes or mars the total existence of the Yoruba physical and metaphysical ontology.

In analysing the myth-ritual concept of mythology, it is important to emphasize the ‘scapegoat archetype’. Rene Girard made mention of the scapegoat archetype in his research into myths and ritual. The ritual victim or the scapegoat pervades many African and Asian mythologies. This scapegoat archetype may not be found in all cultures but it is inherently found in certain Nigerian and African cultures.

The scapegoat archetype is important in myth criticism. It is inherently important to note that the scapegoat archetype does not apply to Elesin in *Death and The King's Horseman*. Elesin is not a victim. The first Elesin voluntarily put himself up for sacrifice because of the established worldview that pervades their society. The *Handbook of Literary Approaches* has this to say about the scapegoat archetype:

Corollary to the rite of sacrifice is the scapegoat archetype.

This motif centred in the belief that by transferring the

corruptions of the tribe to a sacred animal or person,

then by killing this scapegoat, the tribe could achieve the

cleansing and the atonement thought necessary for natural

and spiritual rebirth(NP)

In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, we can identify that the character, Odewale perfectly matches the scapegoat archetype. The gods from the outset has predicted that Odewale is going to kill his father and marry his mother. He is helpless because the gods has destined him too tread the path he is on. During the starvation and the plague that comes upon the Kutuje people, the following conversation ensues between Odewale and the First Citizen:

First Citizen: Let us sacrifice rams to the gods.

Odewale: Sacrifice, did you say? To what gods have we not
made sacrifice, my chiefs and I? Soponna, the god
of the poxes? Ela, the god of deliverance? What god?
Shango, the god of thunder and rainfall... What god has
we not called upon to help us? (TGANTB.11).

The sacrifices that have been sacrificed are not just potent enough and they are also not the right sacrifices to be sacrificed. In the Yoruba worldview, the selection of certain ritual items is based on the requirements specified by the gods. A woman in need of a child may consult *Oya* for help, and *Oya* may require her to sacrifice certain things like bangles, necklaces etc., or she may be required to sacrifice body parts of an animal—it all depends on what the gods require. Herbs and mere sacrifices are not potent enough to save the Kutuje people from the plague. Aderopo upon his return says:

Aderopo: The Oracle said that there is a curse on this land,
and until that curse is purged, our suffering will go on(19).

The curse can only be purged only if the murderer is found. Odewale is a perfect scapegoat archetype. He kills his father, King Adetusa in a fit of fury, and destiny carries him to become king and consequently, to marry his mother. The decision of the Kutuje people in crowning Odewale king without proper inquiry from the gods is directly linked to the destiny that has been predetermined by the gods. Odewale's decisions and his past brings the whole Yoruba society to

their waterloo, and only a sacrifice as potent as the blood of a scapegoat, the murderer can cleanse the evil that was perpetuated in the Kutuje kingdom. Odewale does not reveal his true persona instead he reveals to the people of Kutuje a shadow of his true self. As the play progresses we are introduced to Odewale's dark side, the aspect of his life he has always hidden. At the end of the play, he is held by his words. He is required to be the scapegoat that secures the safety of the Kutuje people.

Adebayo Williams states that:

Whatever the form ritual takes, there is a consensus among anthropologists and historians of religion that human sacrifice is the most severe and extreme form of ritual. Several reasons have been advanced...They range from the need for the reactualisation of direct relations between a people and their god to a drive towards the seasonal regeneration of the forces of the sacred(90).

This means for society to return to status quo, Odewale must completely suffer the proclamations he made:

Odewale: Slowly. We will kill him slowly so that he spends

The rest of his living days dying each moment

That passes. (21)

Another important archetype in myth criticism is the quest archetype. This archetype is identifiable in *Death and The King's Horseman* and Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. Abiodun Adeniji in his paper, *Archetypal Contemporaneity in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* says:

The quest archetype is one of the most ubiquitous in myth studies.

Essentially, this archetype refers to recurrent images depicting

man's hunger and continuing search for an ideal essence, be it

success in life, a spiritual state or the achievement of a

socio-political goal(64)

Soyinka's play is introduced, revealing to us a scene at the market square which is overtly symbolic. In the Yoruba worldview, earth is a marketplace; heaven is home—*a'yel'oja; orunnile*. Elesin is on a quest to the numinous eternal. He prepares himself for the huge task ahead. But he becomes too attached to this earth which makes him unable to complete his quest successfully. He says:

Elesin: The world I know is good

Women: We know you will leave it so

Elesin: The world I know is the bounty of

Hives after bees have swarmed.

No goodness teems with such open hands

Even the dreams of deities

Women: And we know you will leave it so

Elesin: I was born to keep it so...

Women: The world is in your hands

Elesin: I embrace it—and let me tell you, women

I like this farewell that the world designed(18).

This attachment to the world in a way makes him lose focus and drives him into losing his son, Olunde at a very young age. The Women emphasize the statement :”And we know you will keep it so” in order to realign his focus. The quest in this play is not majorly a personal quest, but it is a collective quest which must be fulfilled in order to maintain society. The collective unconscious plays an important role in making sure the individual is not emphasized but the community. One of the questions raised in the previous chapter is: Is the Yoruba community a utilitarian community, which is, based on the utilitarian concept of the “greatest good for the greatest number of people”? African societies, not excluding the Yoruba society are very communal. Individual desires are sacrificed for the collective or the communal good of the society. In the same vein, Elesin has little or no power to determine if he should die or not—he has no choice but to die—he is bound by the collective unconscious and by the Yoruba worldview. That is, an individual’s quest is sacrificed for what I call the “communal quest”.

Abiodun Adeniji says about Rotimi’s character, Odewale: “this quest is manifest in Odewale who is in search of who he is: is he the son of hunter Ogundele and his wife, Mobike or is he a butterfly pretending to be a bird as a spiteful relation of Ogundele calls him”(64). He is also on a

quest to know who killed the late King Adetusa, and above all else, he is on the quest to live his life away from the predictions that the Ifa priest made about his destiny. But the more he seeks to be liberated, the more his hubristic actions lead him to his destiny—his utter fall.

Predestination is a major element found in the myths of different societies. Predestination is defined according to *Wikipedia* as “the divine foreordaining or foreknowledge of all that will happen; with regard to the salvation of some and not others”(NP). In the myths of primitive societies, it is believed that the destiny of man is wholly determined by the gods, and the individual is left to act out the scripts written by the gods. Many African societies emphasize the predominance and relevance of predestination in their cultures. The gods control every facet of existence—the tangible and the intangible world. The concept of predestination is highly fused with determinism which according to *Wikipedia* “is a metaphysical, philosophical position stating that for everything that happens there are conditions such that, given those conditions, nothing else could happen.”(NP)

In explaining the Yoruba worldview on predestination, *Yoruba Online* posits that:

The Yoruba have a strong belief in predestination. They believe that the success or failure of a man depends to a large extent on the type of choice he made in heaven. Some people are said to have chosen a life of poverty and simplicity, while others chose a life of affluence and glamour... This belief in predestination is used

to explain the success or failure of every man on earth...It follows,
therefore, that while human effort cannot be ruled out for success or
failure, the greater part of it can be ascribed to predestination(NP)

The idea of predestination is highly paramount in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* rather than in Soyinka's play. In Ola Rotimi's play the predestination is controlled from the metaphysical cosmic plane, that is, from the land of the spirits and the unborn. While the kind of predestination found in Wole Soyinka's work is the type controlled, motivated and instituted by culture, through the first Elesin in relation to their worldview. This cultural predestination which is completely generational is in sync with the people's worldview and the gods have also in a way supported the collective unconscious or the collective perspective of the people with regards to the Elesin's ritual suicide.

Ola Rotimi in his interview with Ojuwale in *Playwrighting and Directing : An Interview with Ola Rotimi* says:

Rotimi: "You see, in Yoruba religious belief, there is something called *ayanmo*.

This means destiny. The Yoruba people, like most Africans believe in

Predestination. Predestination means the coming to the earth to do what,

in the spirit world, one has chosen to do. The Yoruba believe that there

is a father of all gods known as Olodumare, or Eleda, or Aseda, They

believe that after Eleda had created a person , He (Eleda) would ask the person one question. He would ask what that person wanted in life. The person then would kneel down . Yoruba call this AKUNLEYAN. It means “kneeling down to choose”...The person will then come to earth and fulfil what he or she has chosen and which Eleda has sanctioned.

The almighty *Eleda* only confirms the choice, and the lesser gods in various ways simply help to make sure that, that process is carried out on earth...The complete process is described in Yoruba philosophy like this, *Akunleyanni and Adeiyeba*. That means, what was chosen in the spirit world kneeling down, is what is met in the world of the human beings”(106).

This worldview however emphasizes the fact that a person’s destiny is determined by both him and the gods. The decisions a person takes on earth go a long way to determine the success of his life. The Oedipal myth from Greek mythology is inherently manifest in *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. Humans are naturally drawn to doing good or evil, but the oedipal myth is non-existent in Yoruba mythology. The inclusion or the employment of the Oedipal myth in Ola Rotimi’s play is specifically used to advance the physical and ideological idea of the story which he emphasizes in *Playwrighting and Directing : An Interview With Ola Rotimi*. He says

Rotimi: “So I asked myself; why are we blaming those nation-gods
in international politics, for our suffering and death...I say
Nigeria’s problems needn’t be blamed on other nations but on ourselves.
Our failure or progress is our responsibility, not that of others. Odewale
himself says it at the end of the play: ‘when the wood insect gathers sticks,
on its own head it carries them’”(104).

While in Soyinka’s *Death and The King’s Horseman*, Elesin is tied to what the culture instituted. He is controlled by the ordinances of the society, and he must live according to the bidding of the society. Olunde confesses in his dialogue to Jane the helplessness of his father to existing tradition:

Olunde: Yes MrsPilkings, my father is dead.

His will-power has always been enormous;

I know he is dead.

Jane: How can you be so callous! So unfeeling!

You announce your father’s own death like

a surgeon looking down on some strange...

stranger’s body! You are just a savage like all the rest (DKH.55)

The death of Olunde and the death of Elesin is totally motivated by culture. A people's belief is made to exist through a series of processes—through the ordinances of the gods and through the collective decision of the people. The Yoruba society is successful in dealing with the issue of Pilkings's interference. Prior to his interference, the gods specifically leads Elesin into his love for the physical world just in the same way Odewale is led by the gods through his actions into killing his father and committing incest.

The gods envisaged the death of Olunde and Elesin, that is why Elesin is led into his sexual escapade with Iyaloja's son's fiancé, in order to fill the chasm that Olunde's death will create. The product of Elesin's sexual escapade with the girl will fill the chasm created by Olunde. Two chasms are filled or bridged in this play—the one filled by Olunde and the one that will be filled by Elesin's unborn child. She (Iyaloja) says:

Iyaloja: And then, think of this- it makes the mind tremble

The fruit of such union is rare, it will be neither of this

world nor of the next. Nor of the world

behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor

world and the unborn have joined spirits to wrong

an issue of the elusive being of passage..Elesin (DKH.22)

An important aspect of analysing a people's myth is found in this definition of myth by *About.com* which defines myth as a “traditional story, typically revolving around the activities of gods and heroes, which purport to explain a natural phenomenon or cultural practice” (NP). Myths reveal a lot about the pantheon of a society—espousing how the gods function and in the human activities and their prevalence in determining and influencing a society's success or failure. A lot is said about the gods in Ola Rotimi's play. We are introduced to the play by the prologue which emphasizes the “rhythmic clinking of metallic objects ...then fading to a sustained softness: the rhythm of Ogun, the Yoruba God of Iron and of war (prologue).

The Yoruba people like the Greeks have a great pantheon. Like the perfect African society, the gods play an important role in their lives—in birth, their life on earth and in death. The worldview of the Yoruba people is founded on their interactions with the gods. This is emphasized in the narrator's comments:

Narrator: It is their first baby, so they bring him for blessing

To the shrine of Ogun, the God of war, of Iron

And doctor of all male children...as is the custom (TGANTB.2)

Even in trouble and affliction, the Yoruba society is conscious in beckoning the gods for help.

Odewale says:

Odewale: Sacrifice, did you say? To what gods have we not made sacrifice,

My chiefs and I? Soponna, the god of the poxes? Ela, the

god of deliverance? What god? Shango, the god of thunder and

rainfall whose showers can help wash away the evil in the soil on

which we stand? (TGANTB.11).

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, we are also introduced to the Yoruba pantheon. Sheryl Sterling compares Shango with Elesin. She quotes Soyinka who sees Elesin: “as a re-configuration of Shango, he manifests the uncontrolled aspects of the *orisa*: his passion, his terror and his unbearable guilt. Elesin’s hubris is part of the cosmic order. His imprisonment is a momentary period for him to regain his honour and like Shango’s self- imposed exile, it means death” (22). She compares Olunde with Ogun when she says: it is through Olunde, Elesin’s son, that a bridge is formed between both worlds, as Soyinka uses his character to make manifest the daring of Ogun. Olunde’s name translates to “God arrives”, and his actions parallel Ogun’s bridging of the transitional void and to defend his people’s beliefs (23). Olunde says to Mrs Pilkings:

Olunde: All these things are part of it. And anyway, my father has
been dead in my mind for nearly a month. On that journey on the
boat, I kept my mind on my duties as the one who must perform
the rites over his body. I didn’t want to do anything wrong, something
which might jeopardise the welfare of my people (DKH.57)

Finally, both writers have successfully introduced the worldview cum ideology of the Yoruba people in analysing the myths that play an important role in the Yoruba society. Wole Soyinka relied on the mythopoeic resourcefulness of the Yoruba people coupled with history to constructively espouse the distinct mythology of the Yoruba people in his play. Sheryl Sterling posits of Soyinka’s work as “generating concepts of the tragic hero from Yoruba cosmology. Soyinka explores the antithetical dynamics evoked in the interplay of tradition and change.” (32). She further says, recreating history and, the death of Elesin becomes the site for tragedy. Death

does indeed come calling, but it is Soyinka's mythopoeic representation of its willed integration into the Yoruba cosmic order that is the point of contention (35). Ola Rotimi on the other hand takes inspiration from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to recreate a completely African construct—a perfect Yoruban tragedy. Also important is the employment of proverbs, aphorisms—oral resources, by both Soyinka and Rotimi to advance their essential “Africanness”. Finally, to emphasize the necessary employment of these oral resources is to quote Chinua Achebe who says “proverbs are the palm-oil by which words are eaten.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY

The basic thrust of this research is aimed at digging into Yoruba mythology—evaluating the myth of the Yoruba society whilst using the concept of worldview as a defining factor. As identified earlier, the research seeks to synthesize these two concepts—myth and worldview with a view to understanding the Yoruba culture’s myth. The worldview looks at how they think, how they live, and how they view the society—their ontology and cosmology from a particular viewpoint.

Three major ideas or objectives were identified in the major introductory part of this project. It is noteworthy to reiterate these objectives in order to evaluate the supposed success of this project.

And these objectives are listed below:

The objectives of this study were:

1. To establish the relationship that exist between myths and worldview;
2. To explore and analyse mythic symbols and their significance, thereby revealing cultural themes e.g. death, predestination, ritual etc. in the books to be reviewed; And
3. To explore the differences and similarities that exist in the books, that is, analysing both writers’ points of view

Wole Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* were selected because of their significance to this project. These books consistently and emphatically relay the idea of myth and worldview. The books were written from the Yoruba point of view, regardless of the fact that Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Rotimi's construct explores the universal mythic theme of predestination and how it is emphasized in the Yoruba tradition. The authors of the books and their characters are used as samples to represent the Yoruba society.

The theoretical framework aspect of this project advocates the employment of myth criticism in analysing these books. The myth criticism, also known as the mythological approach and mythical criticism was selected to analyse these texts. Myth criticism contains key elements like the collective unconscious; the numinous; the archetypes, including the death/rebirth archetype, the scapegoat archetype; predestination and ritual.

These mythic elements are important elements in myth criticism. These elements reveal the significance of the myth-ritual process in relation to the distinct worldview of the Yoruba people. They see the ritual process as a means of purging society and as a medium to maintain constant communication and interaction between the tangible cosmos (earth) and the intangible cosmos (heaven). These elements are present in the books but the level of emphasis is different in the two books. For instance, the predestination theme is highly emphasized in Odewale in *The Gods Are Not To Blame* as hard determinism. In Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, the emphasis is placed on the myth-ritual process propounded by George Frazer and the Cambridge Hellenists.

In the course of this research project, so many questions were raised in the literature review aspect of this study. They include the following questions: Is the Yoruba society a utilitarian society? Can a purely human and a non-spiritual decision of the first Elesin create a myth that a society wholeheartedly believes in? And—can the gods completely control the destiny of a man’s life? These questions were analysed and answered during this project. Also significant, is the comparison between Soyinka and Ola Rotimi—their similarities and how they individually relate the myths and the inclusion of the Yoruba worldview.

FINDINGS

Archetypes and mythic elements are significant areas of the myth criticism. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines the archetype “as a primitive mental image inherited from the earliest human ancestors and supposed to be present in the collective unconscious”(NP). Archetypes and mythic elements: the collective unconscious, death, predestination, the presence of a pantheon, the scapegoat and the quest archetype, the presence of sacrifice are like language—they are universal—present in all myths. These elements are identifiable in every myth around the world. For example, the overarching ideas one tends to see in evaluating different definitions of the word, myth, is the existence of supernatural beings—a pantheon. *The Microsoft Encarta Dictionary* defines myth as “a traditional story about heroes or supernatural being, often attempting to explain the origins of natural phenomena or aspects of human behaviour” (NP).

The only thing that makes these ideas change in the manner of their application is the collective unconscious of the people. The psyche—their worldview and ideology go a long way in influencing certain ideas, archetypes and mythic elements. For example, the symbol or the archetype of the Great Mother in Greek mythology can be interpreted from the Greek point of

view. The symbol may represent something else in different cultures. For example, the symbol of the cross archetype to the Christians means salvation and liberation. But to another society, the symbol can receive another interpretation owing to their worldview. That is, myths and their elements are universal, but the worldview and ideology of a society determine the interpretation of a particular myth.

SUGGESTIONS

Apart from the use of the worldview and the collective unconscious in interpreting myths, the use of comparative mythology can go a long way to establishing the relationship that exist between different societies' mythology. A comparison in mythology can help in understanding for example, the myths in African societies. According to *Liberatormagazine.com*, an interview by Beier with Wole Soyinka, Beier says:

Beier: 'The Yoruba people have been willing to look at another

Mythology and find equivalents in their own traditions .

For example, when I first met Aderemi, the late Oba of Ife—that was at Easter 1951—he told me about the different shrines in his town and he said “you know, in Yoruba religion we know the story of Mary and Jesus” and he told me the myth of Moremi (Mary) who sacrificed her only son to save her town .And he said: “Really, Moremi is

Mary.” I was impressed, because he could see that there
was some basic metaphor that remained valid across
a variety of cultures. He knew that the basic truth is the same—
only the trappings are different.’ (NP)

Most of these ideas are universal, but they are parcelled differently. The worldview is able to change the meaning of certain archetypes. The employment of comparative mythology helps to expose a lot about diverse cultures in relation to other cultures.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the individual perspective is sacrificed for the collective good of the communal society. The myth criticism has revealed distinct aspects of the Yoruba worldview. Myths are not mere stories, factual or nonfactual. As emphasized earlier the authenticity or “unauthenticity” of a myth is not relevant because myths reveal the deepest aspects of inner psyche of a society. That is, a non-member of that society is not bound by the collective unconscious. One cannot understand a society’s myth without looking at the worldview of the particular society. Myths are not only used to signify a society’s spirituality, but these myths are used to propel a society’s unity. Wole Soyinka’s play, *Death and the King’s Horseman* and Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not To Blame* completely encapsulates this perspective—the perspective that emphasizes myths relationship with a people’s worldview.

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