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CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN THE WAKE OF POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND WOLE SOYINKA

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To the loving memory of Dr. Clare BRANDABUR

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has consisted of:

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Leman DEMİRBAŞ

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ABSTRACT

Leman DEMİRBAŞ **June 2015**

CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN THE WAKE OF POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND WOLE SOYINKA

This study examines the role of William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka in the promotion of cultural identity in the process of postcolonial reformation of their countries, reflected in their respective plays *King's Threshold,* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. I demonstrate that both Yeats and Soyinka used theatre, both as a means to examine the imposed ideology of English colonialism, and as a lens through which to promote a new national consciousness and cultural identity, based on pre-colonial national heritage. The study is limited to *The King's Threshold* by Yeats, and *Death and The King's Horseman* by Soyinka, selected for their considerable stylistic and thematic resemblances. Both plays deal with an oppressive kingly power that will eventually cause the death of the protagonists, and both author portray suicide within their native cultural context. Both playwrights revive cultural authenticity through the employment of traditional myths, laws, and history. At the same time, they use Western notions of theatre, notably the ancient form of tragedy, for narration. While they acknowledge the principles of classical tragedy that lies at the heart of European literature, both Yeats and Soyinka promote the customs, and untainted mythology of their own culture.

Key words:

William Butler Yeats, Wole Soyinka, *King's Threshold*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, cultural nationalism, national identity, postcolonial theatre, decolonization of theatre

KISA ÖZET

Leman DEMİRBAŞ **Haziran 2015**

SÖMÜRGECİLİK SONRASI DİRENİŞ YOLUNDA KÜLTÜREL MİLLİYETÇİLİK: WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS VE WOLE SOYINKA KARŞILAŞTIRMASI

Bu çalışmada, sömürgecilik sonrası dönüşüm esnasında kültürel kimlik oluşumuna yaptıkları katkı bakımından William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka'yı oyunları -sırasıyla- The King's Threshold ve Death and the King's Horseman yordamıyla incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmada hem Yeats'in hem de Soyinka'nın, İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin kendi ülkeleri üzerindeki zorlamacılığını incelemek, ve İrlanda ve Nijerya'nın sömürge öncesi miraslarından beslenen yeni ulusal bilinç ve kültürel kimliği geliştirmek için oyunlarını kullandıkları gösterilmektedir, Biçimsel ve tematik benzerlikleri bakımından bu çalışma Soyinka'nın *Death and The King's Horseman* ve Yeats'in *The King's Threshold* adlı oyunları ile sınırlıdır. Bu oyunlar birçok yönden benzerlik gösterdikleri için seçilmişlerdir. Her iki oyun da, baş kahramanların ölümüne yol açan kralın baskıcı gücüdür. Yazarların kendi yerel kültürlerinde yer alan bu gönüllü intiharları tasvir biçimi bakımından benzerlik göstermektedir. Her iki oyun yazarı da, geleneksel efsaneleri, toplumsal kuralları ve tarihi kullanarak kültürel özgünlüklerini canlandırmışlardır. Aynı zamanda anlatım için ise Batı'ya ait tiyatro mefhumlarını -daha ziyade de trajedinin antik şekillerini- kullanmışlardır. Hem Yeats hem de Soyinka bir yandan Avrupa edebiyatının en önemli yazı türlerinden biri olan klasik trajedinin prensiplerini kabul ederken öte yandan da kültürlerini ve tahrip edilmemiş mitolojilerini önplana çıkarmışlardır. Fakat ikisi de ihtişamlı eski düzeni tam da bu düzenlerin ölmeye yüz tuttukları zamanlarda anlatmışlardır.

Key words:

William Butler Yeats, Wole Soyinka, *King's Threshold*, *Death and the King's Horseman*, kültürel milliyetçilik, ulusal kimlik, sömürgecilik sonrası tiyatro, tiyatroda dekolonizasyon

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PREFACE

This thesis grew out of the similar themes of death and tragedy between Soyinka's and Yeats's selected plays, with the inspiration of my former advisor Dr. Clare Brandabur who sadly passed away before this thesis was completed. We set out on this journey together, but her health problems did not allow us to complete it together. She became a great inspiration to me in my path to pursue academic career, and not to remain silent in the face of oppression. I remember her with gratitude. The very complex nature of the thesis topic that she proposed to me, caused some sleepless nights. I came to realize that my topic requires an interdisciplinary study of different fields, including African studies, Irish studies, theatre studies, and postcolonial studies, and I have employed this interdisciplinary approach to find my way to a comparative analysis of two different tragedies from different parts of the world. The more I read, the more I discovered on the subject. As I was not familiar with Yoruba and Irish cultural contexts, and traditions, I had to spend much time studying this vast area of literature for two years before I was finally ready to begin writing. I put a lot of effort into all phases of this thesis, and I am glad to contribute to the area with novelty of the topic on these canonical texts. I hope that this thesis inspires other colleagues to study on the vast comparative area of Irish and Yoruba cultures.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study examines William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka on the promotion of cultural identity in the process of postcolonial reformation, as it is proposed in their respective plays, *King's Threshold,* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. I demonstrate that Yeats and Soyinka use drama to examine the imposed ideology of English colonialism on their countries, and as a lens through which to promote a new national consciousness and cultural identity based on the pre-colonial heritage of Ireland and Nigeria. The study is limited to *The King's Threshold* (referred to as *Threshold*) by Yeats, and *Death and The King's Horseman* (referred yo as *Horseman*) by Soyinka based on their considerable stylistic and thematic resemblances. Both Yeats and Soyinka ground their plays in classical Greek tragedy, which adheres to Aristotle's unity of time, place, and action, and the fall of the tragic hero. Applying Greek tragedy to their own cultural situation, they utilize native mythology and history, which have been mostly ruined by colonial exploitation and have lost importance in the presence of Western superiority. While Yeats borrows from Brehon law and bardic institutions of pre-colonial Ireland, Soyinka's Western structure of theatre is infused with myth, tradition, and the history of Yorubaland. In addition, each deals with oppressive kingly power that will eventually cause the death of the protagonists, and each author's style of portraying this voluntary self-murder is within their native cultural context and indigenous history. Therefore, both revive cultural authenticity with the employment of traditional myths, laws, and history and at the same time use Western notions of theatre, notably the ancient form of tragedy, for narration. While they acknowledge the principles of classical tragedy that lies at the heart of European literature, both Yeats and Soyinka promote the customs, and ancient mythology of their culture. However, both picture the old glorious order in its dying moments, an obvious injury of colonialism.

The main question posed by this thesis is: "How similar are these two very separate works?" To answer that, I will discuss in this thesis that both Yeats and

Soyinka act as promoters of cultural nationalism in the newly imagined nations, and they seek ways to evoke national identity in the colonized souls of their society by reinstating folklore, mythology, and value systems of the nation. While Yeats emerges as a romantic nationalist, Soyinka embraces a more objective nationalism, distancing himself from any kind of romanticism or self-glorification. To explore this question thoroughly, I will provide background information in the following chapters. Chapter 2 will cover historical transformations of Ireland and Nigeria from colonial subjects to postcolonial nation states, in order to lay out the cultural contexts of the authors, which merge at one point in history with Christian missionaries in Ireland. The crucial point is the colonial burden of their countries that have haunted their territories for years, and each author's role to save their people from the ghost of colonialism through a revival of culturally authentic literature. In the process of nation-building, Yeats and Soyinka became prominent figures to inspire their community. They understand language and literature for decolonization, yet without fully rejecting the English structures. Yeats aspired to be a "nationalist" author, developing the idea of a National Theatre to be founded upon the Abbey Theatre with Lady Gregory. Even though Yeats is mostly known for his romantic and modernist poetry, he was a strong advocate of Irish independence and freedom. Witnessing the growing protests for Home Rule and cruel military suppressions like Bloody Sunday and the War of Independence, he incorporated both political as well as mythological figures, especially in his early writings. Soyinka, on the other hand, has been a social activist all his life, criticizing government corruption, and the ruling classes for recreating colonial oppression of its people in a neo-colonial mask. He was even sent to prison and exiled for his critical speech.

Both Yeats and Soyinka are prominent writers not only for their influential works but also for their authenticity, which led their way to the Nobel Prize for literature. Their writings were affected by and nourished from the roots of societies, its cultural richness, its ideals, and its mythology, but at the same time as eminent figures among their people, they affected and nourished their society with their literature. Even though William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka are from different nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and era, there is one splendid truth that ties them

together behind these seeming differences: belief in freedom. Even though both Yeats and Soyinka grew up in societies colonized by England, they never lost faith in their own culture and traditions. In their productions, both were heavily influenced by Western modes of writing, especially by the conventions of Greek tragedy, enhanced by indigenous values and myths, and both writers were fearless in their criticism.

For some critics, colonialization was not a fact for Ireland. The geographical proximity of Ireland to England, and the involvement of several Irishmen in the colonization of Africa as missionaries and as slave-owners, made historians question the validity of 'colonization' in Ireland. Unlike their African counterparts, the Irish were not distinguished by their skin color or physical traits, but they still were not 'eligible' to join their white superiors. The racial identity of Irishmen was always identified with cultural difference and non-English traits. The forms of otherness were turned into caricatures on the stage. According to Kiberd, Victorian music halls were accustomed to this caricature of stage Irishman: a rude man who "wore trousers, drank endlessly, swore wildly, and spoke a broken but colorful brand of English, salted with Gaelic exclamation" (21) Thus, it is not possible to put the process of colonialism into one certain frame. It takes various shapes in various cultures. The fact that Irish independence occurred before the rise of colonial/postcolonial studies does not make it a lesser colony. Nationalists in Ireland did not use the word "decolonize" but "de-Anglicize" instead. As Joe Cleary explains in his article "Irish Studies, Colonial Questions," empire historians D.K. Fieldhouse and George Fredrickson have divided worldwide colonies into four basic categories: administrative, plantation, pure settlement and mixed settlement[1].

Administrative colonies are aimed at "military, economic and administrative control of politically strategic region," and usually benefit from economic values and resources in the country like minerals, and destroy the traditional structure of the society, conducted either by European colonial officers or by cooperating indigenous

[1] For full discussion, see D. K. Fieldhouse's *The Colonial Empires: a Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth century* (London, 1965), George Fredrickson's *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism and Social Inequality* (Middletown, 1985), and for the taxonomy see Jürgen Osterhammel's *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton, 1997).

ruling élites. Colonies in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia are examples. Plantation colonies are ruled by much larger groups of European settlers, and "the mode of economic production rests essentially on the forced labor of imported workers to produce specialized staples for the world market." Settlement colonies, like in the United States, Canada, and Australia, annihilate indigenous populations and push remnants to restricted reservation areas in order to create settlements for pioneers. In mixed settlement colonies, as in the highland societies of South America, South Africa, and Palestine, inhabitants are not exterminated but lessened in population because of "warfare and brutal exploitation," deployed in order to "monopolize control of the land" so that it is made extensively "European" (Cleary, 29-31). In a "mixed settlement," the indigenous people are not annihilated, but the settler culture becomes centralized. Typically there are many lives lost in the native population due to disease and warfare, which allows the settlers to monopolize land and replace political and cultural institutions with their own. Arguably, this type of colonization occurred in Ireland at the hands of the British. The thousands who died as a result of the Great Famine (with virtually no aid from England) made way for expanding British domination and conveniently thinned out the Irish population. "Pure settlement" colonization, on the other hand, entails extermination and/or relocation of native peoples. With low levels of miscegenation (specifically reproduction among whites and "non whites") the colonized country becomes homogeneously European in cultural character (qtd. in Mann 71). This type of settlement clearly describes the Native American Indian experience at the time when white settlers landed in the U.S., but in some respects it describes the invasive situation the Irish faced as well. Ireland was systematically colonized on a modern proto-capitalist basis in the early modern period.

Both counties experienced colonization closely, and out of this experience, both borrowed a language of the colonial powers that they use as well as the native. But the cultural nationalism, which marks the start of postcolonialism, bring language discussions. While Irish is the official language of the Republic, it is English, which is spoken widely. By contrast, in Nigeria the linguistic situation is more complicated. English is the official language among approximately two

hundred and fifty living languages in the country, in order to facilitate the cultural and linguistic unity of the country. In such a complicated context, it is believed by nationalist intellectuals that the revival of pre-colonial culture and traditions in literature were to be successful only if the native language, Irish or Yoruba, is employed. On the other side of the coin, there were writers who were still nationalists but refused to write in the native tongue but in English. I will address these discussions in Chapter 2, with a concise description of colonialism, postcolonialism, and the influence of Soyinka and Yeats during this process in their countries. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the self-sacrifice of the protagonist as a result of compelling kingly power. I believe the challenge of the hero against the King in both plays reveals the authors' challenge to colonial hegemony. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that both playwrights extensively borrowed from native mythology, yet both blend native elements of their culture with European forms, namely tragedy, and create a "syncretic theatre" as Balme (2006) proposes, which I will discuss in the final chapter.

After giving an overview of my study, I feel a need to explain some of the terminology I use. I greatly benefitted from *Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts* by Bill Ashcroft Gareth Griffith, Helen Tiffin. To begin, colonialism is used to refer to the practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people by another. It involves a form of conquest to benefit European nations economically and strategically, and requires a policy of establishing settlements to exploit the resources. The term colonialism is strongly associated with imperialism. As Said discusses in *Culture and Imperialism*, the word imperialism, "means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory," while colonialism, "which is almost always a consequence of imperialism," is used to refer "the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Said 8). In Said's diagram, "imperialism" stands for the ideological force while "colonialism" refers to the practice of these forces. Bill Ashcroft and his friends suggest that the ideology of race was also important for the "construction and naturalization of an unequal form of intercultural relations," even for the colonization of "white" races (41). They observe that the notion of race was accompanied by

racism and racial prejudice, for the justification of the white man's superiority over the colonized. While European colonial powers hide their economic gains under the mask of 'carrying civilization' in a paternalistic mode, colonized peoples were made passive by the negative construction of self, and othering.

In opposition to colonialism, the term post-colonialism is proposed by historians to refer to the damaging effects of colonization. In the *Empire Writes Back*, the term postcolonial is described as covering "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). Therefore, I use the term not as a reference to a politically defined historical period, namely after independence, which is actually a post-colonial state. However, postcolonialism means the resistance of previously colonized subjects. It is the discourse that analyzes, explains, and responds to the cultural legacies and established conceptions of colonialism. Postcolonial theatre, therefore, aims to free the narratives and artistic traditions of indigenous peoples from colonial constraints. (Ukaegbu, 71)

The Eurocentric conceptions of European colonization on "the other," gave way to the rise of nationalism in colonial states. Native subjects who are tired of humiliation and degradation of their culture, leaned more on their culture and strove for the truthful representation of their race. Famous scholar Anthony Smith defines nationalism as "an ideological moment for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'" (73). Nationalism for him is not merely an ideology but a social phenomenon. So he links nationalism with the multi-dimensional term, national identity. Smith defines nation as "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (14). National identity, thus, reflects the complex nature of a nation.

Cultural nationalism, according to theorist Richard Kearney, includes ethnicity but cannot be reduced to it. But cultural nationalism includes language, art, literature, sports, dance and music, too (Introduction xv). According to John Hutchinson, cultural nationalism contributes deeply to the task of nation building. He argues that cultural nationalism undertakes a positive role in the modernization

process of a nation, since it puts forward "an evolutionary vision of the community." Thus nationalists function like "moral innovators […] establishing ideological movements at times of social crisis in order to transform the belief-system of the communities, and provide models of socio-political guide" (30-31).

Explaining the role of the arts in nationalism, Anthony Smith says that nationalists, who are "intent on celebrating or commemorating the nation, are drawn to the dramatic and creative possibilities of artistic media and genres," through which the nationalist artist can "reconstruct the sights, sounds and images of the nation in all its concrete specificity" (92). To reconstruct national images, he says, the artists wander in the "cult of the golden ages" (49).

Both Yeats and Soyinka undertake the leading role of the intellectual in their societies. Though Soyinka has not wished to be a "leader" of his people, it was the destiny of any successful African writer. As Femi Osafisan says, "the art of narration in our communities has always served didactic as well as pleasurable ends" (83). Perhaps the most famous representation and criticism of the native intellectual in postcolonial states is described by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon situates native intellectuals in the role of affirmation of native culture:

> It was with the greatest delight that they discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory, and solemnity. The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. (169)

In *Scars of Conquest Masks of Resistance*, Olaniyan argues three "discursive formations": a) the hegemonic, colonialist Eurocentric, b) the counter-hegemonic, anticolonialist Afrocentric, and c) an emerging post-Afrocentric to subvert both previous two (11). In this terminology, Eurocentric discourse settles on essentializations of black cultures as inferior, while Afrocentric discourse develops arguments on privileging African ways in binary opposition to European norms, taken with stereotyping again. Barbara Suess makes a similar categorization on Ireland, though she avoids definite terms and restricts it to the conditions of the nineteenth century, arguing "three contradictory significations": first is the imperialist essentializations that associated Irishness with barbarism, inferiority, and

femininity. The second phase consists of Irish political and cultural nationalisms to tackle counter narratives of former Irish stereotypes with positive but equally essentialist discourse of the Irish people as descendants of an honorable race. The last phase in her argument is the socioeconomic demands to establish progress in materialistic terms in which Englishness is considered as modern (235). I find this discussion useful as an overview of postcolonial literature. The first phase of hegemonic colonialism has examples in both Irish and African literature. Since Spencer's writings (1596) on Ireland, a whole European tradition thought the Irish to be a separate and inferior race: generally barbarous, feminine, and primitive. Likewise, Nigerian people, and generally African people were thought to be inferior. The most obvious example of this is the institution of slavery that was nothing more than brutal torture. This ideology was reflected in literature. In Joseph Conrad's canonical book *Heart of Darkness*, the Africans are pictured as "cannibals," "savage," and "inhuman." The second phase of the counter-hegemonic, anticolonialist is reflected in the works of nationalist writers. It was Douglas Hyde in Ireland defended Celticism for the revival of national culture, while Negritude writers in Africa and Nigeria, like Leopold Senghor, created an idealized image of the native. With the urge to replace dominant Western forms in literature, postcolonialist writers tended to retrieve their source from the pre-colonial past of Africa. In this process most authors, like Synge, James Joyce, Tutuola, and Achebe realized that it is not possible to totally escape from Western influence. As a consequence, they embraced "hybridity as an aesthetic form" (Oniwe 6). Language was not the sole definer of a people's literature (Ojaide 43). Yeats and Soyinka, I believe, belong to that third phase of post-Celticism and post-Africanism, which I refer to the broader and inclusive term of post-nationalism. The stand that they take in their cultural literature is more a fusion of both cultures of English and local. Both borrowed their source from the indigenous culture but presented it in English outlook, both for structure and for language. Reinstating a pre-colonial heritage of folklore, they defended the fusion of two resources rather than abandoning the English. For instance, Said describes Yeats as a nationalist author who was "deeply affiliated and interacting with his native traditions, the historical and political context of his times, and the complex situation of being a poet writing in English in a

turbulently nationalistic Ireland (*Culture and Imperialism* 265). Soyinka, on the other hand, was nationalist in his own way. He rejected any kind of idealization, even of Negritude. He was always disturbed with romanticizing and idealizing the African past, because he believed that true self-apprehension for the African cannot be acquired through feeding cultural binarism and essentialism. He never intended to underestimate the Negritude movement, but he is disturbed by its adherence to a "Manichean tradition of European thought" (*Myth, Literature, and the Africa World* 127). For him, "A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces." National aspirations of the authors are considered important for the decolonization of their communities since "the period of nationalist anti-imperialist resistance" comes before a more "liberationist anti-imperialist resistance" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 76) even though the secondary phase is more emancipatory, the primary nationalist attempts are more crucial for they lay the grounds for the latter.

For both Yeats and Soyinka, theatre has been an important means for reshaping culture and fortifying cultural identity. It borrows from poetry, prose, and visual arts to represent the atmosphere of the text, through which it connects with the culture of a nation. Yeats and Soyinka used theatre reawaken cultural identity and remind the people of their forgotten heritage. Theater in Africa as well as in Nigeria was a part of the daily rhythm of life. It was entertainment, moral instruction, and also "a strict matter of life and death and communal survival" (Thiong'o 37).

William Butler Yeats was born in Sligo, on the west coast of Ireland, in July 1865. He was descended from a family of rectors in the protestant Church of Ireland. Both sides of Yeats's family were descended from the English, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. His grandfather, William Butler Yeats, was a minister on the western coastal areas of Ireland. His father John Butler Yeats was a lawyer who changed his career to be a painter, and his mother Susan Mary Pollexfen was the daughter of a wealthy family from county Sligo. Yeats's family moved back and forth between Sligo and London because of John Yeats's aspirations to be a painter. His father was a supporter of nationalism and the nationalist movement in the country. Irishman in London, Englishman in Ireland, Yeats grew up as a hybrid. This upbringing had an immense effect in his life and literature, for he was always in a quest for identity and

spirituality. He started primary school in England and enrolled for high school in Dublin where he wrote his first poem. From his early years he started writing poems and essays. Generally his works were under the influence of Shelly and Blake. In 1887, Yeats and his family returned to London, where in 1890, he established the Rymer's Club, a group of poets. *The Wanderings of Oisin*, his first collection of poems, was published in 1889. It was his first and probably most extensive work. The same year Yeats met Maud Gonne, a poet, feminist, and fervent nationalist. Yeats became increasingly passionate about her, and she became his muse and source of unrequited love. He proposed to her several times until her marriage in 1903, but at each attempt Yeats was rejected. Years later, he cut off communication with her and eventually married at the age of 51.

His personal relationships with nationalist radicals such as John O'Leary, Douglas Hyde, and Maud Gonne, made him more nationalistic. He even registered in the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In an attempt to forge national consciousness, he decided to start a national theatre. In 1899, Yeats co-founded the Irish Literary Theatre, which would later turn into the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. It was to be a platform for Celtic and Irish plays. As part of a cultural revival, Yeats fought to give Irishmen a theatre of their own, one that they could depict their real life and experiences. Yeats was "eager to discover his identity as an Irishman" (Karim 53). He wished to give the true image of Irish people instead of a stage caricature. As the chief dramatist, he staged his plays there, most famously *Catheleen ni Houlihan*, with Maud Gonne portraying the main character.

Yeats witnessed the crucial moments in Irish history, which eventually shaped the direction of his art: the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell (1890), the expansion nationalism during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Easter Rising (1916), the War of Independence (1919-1921), the separation of Northern Ireland as a new state, and the inevitable Civil War (1922-1923), and the official emergence of the Irish Republic (1937). This affected Yeats's development as an artist. His early work sounded more nationalist, according to Edward Said, while his more mature writings until 1928 were "to reconcile the inevitable violence of the colonial conflict with the everyday politics of an ongoing national struggle." Throughout his career,

Yeats published a great number of poems, plays, and Irish folktales. In 1923, Yeats was awarded by the Nobel Prize for Literature for his contribution to English and Irish literature. In 1922 he was appointed to the first Irish Senate and also reelected for the second term in 1925. As a senator of the Free Irish State, he participated in the "postcolonial project of nation-building, and ran some risk of being shot by republicans" (Howes 40). In his earlier works, Yeats revealed his nationalist aspirations. However, toward the end of his career, Yeats saw that his nationalist attempts failed to be reflected in society because of the high modernism of the era, and he started experimenting in poetry and theater. He was especially affected by the Japanese Noh Theatre that he was introduced to by Ezra Pound.

Yeats has been a controversial writer in a postcolonial context. While some critics like Edward Said declare him as a nationalist writer, some others like Stephen Regan believe that Yeats's nationalism was overlooked and misunderstood. Said describes William Butler Yeats as "a great modern Irish poet" in *Culture and Imperialism.* He was "deeply affiliated and interact[ed] with his native traditions, the historical and political context of his times, and the complex situation of being a poet writing in English in a turbulently nationalistic Ireland (265). In spite of his fame among writers of English literature and European modernism, according to Said, he is a "great national poet" who did not hesitate to articulate "the experiences, the aspirations, and the restorative vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power" (266).

Utilizing Celtic mythological heritage of the sixth century and harmonizing it with elements of classical tragedy in *The King's Threshold*, Yeats dramatized the story of Bardic poet Seanchan. The supreme ruler of the land, King Guaire banishes Seanchan from his place at court due to the pressure of his courtiers, who believe that a man of letters has no place among them. Seanchan asks for the rights of poets at the King's table and lies at the threshold of the palace, going on a hunger strike. According to an old custom of Brehon Laws of ancient Irish mythology, when a man starves at the threshold of the one who accuses him, he disgraces that threshold forever. Afraid to be disgraced, but unwilling to reply to a questioning of his ultimate authority, the King denies Seanchan's the poet rights at the royal court and summons

Seanchan's pupils, the notables of the society, his own daughters and at last Seanchan's fiancée in order to induce his hunger strike. Seanchan honorably sustains his claim but dies at the King's threshold in the end. Thus, the traditional unity between poet and king in Celtic custom is broken.

The ending of the play was drastically changed since it was first written and performed in Dublin, in 1903. Yeats previously had given a rather positive end to the play: the King gave his crown and his promise to Seanchan to carry on his place at the court. However; this ending did not fit perfectly to the story according to Yeats, who was affected by Lady Gregory. Over the years Yeats made several revisions until 1930, and he totally changed the ending in 1920. In this new and last ending, Seanchan was killed, which appropriately gives the story more the feeling of Greek tragedy as Yeats always wished to do. On this change in the last scene, the death of Terence McSwiney was very effective. McSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, went on hunger strike in a London prison during the Irish War of Independence, and it resulted in his death in 1920. Yeats was so upset by his death that the next year, together with Lady Gregory, he opened the Abbey Theatre to actors and playwrights to stage a play about McSwiney.

One of the pioneers of African literature in English, Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, western Nigeria, in 1934. European culture and Yoruba background became equally dominant in his upbringing. Born into a distinguished Anglicized family, Soyinka grew up among the Christian élite in colonial Nigeria. His father was a schoolteacher, and his mother was a shopkeeper. As Soyinka narrates in his autobiography *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, his mother was a "Wild Christian," a religious devout.

Soyinka's family was deeply religious and Westernized. Especially his maternal side was very much into the growing élite: his grandfather was a minister in the local church and his uncle was the principal of Abeokuta Grammar School. But on the paternal side he was very close to native Yoruba culture. His grandfather brought national consciousness to Soyinka, introducing him to the Yoruba world, tradition, and rituals. After his primary and secondary education in Abeokuta, he attended the Government College at Ibadan, which was seen as an "island of

European culture in the midst of a sea of barbarism" (Gikandi, xi). At government college Ibadan he was introduced to the Greek classics, which would be reflected in his theatre. Then Soyinka studied two years at the University College, Ibadan, which was an affiliate of the University of London. There he was not only occupied seriously with the canonical texts of English literature ranging from Shakespeare to Yeats, but he was also introduced to the future major writers of African literature and became friends with Achebe, Clark, and Okigbo. Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, counting Soyinka among the writers of the " Mbari Generation" together with Achebe, Clark, and Okigbo, says that they were the first generation of university-educated Nigerians (41). By writing English, they took advantage of print literature and positioned themselves as symbolic brokers of that modernity" (Suhr-Sytsma 41).

In 1954, Soyinka left Nigeria to study English at the University of Leeds in England and started his lifelong journey in the theatre, writing plays for the Royal Court Theatre. In 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence, he published *A Dance of The Forests*, and it was staged at the Independence Day celebrations of Nigeria. After a worldwide fame which came with A Dance, Soyinka has published various texts including five autobiographies: *Ake: Years of Childhood, The Man Died; Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka; Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years-A Memoir, 1945-67; Isara: A Voyage around Essay; You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. He also wrote two novels *The Interpreters,* and *Season of Anomy*, essay collections *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture;* and *Myth, Literature, and the African World*; poetry collections (including *Idanre and other poems*) and finally numerous plays of powerful political dramas, metaphysical plays, and comedies. Throughout his career, he was involved in politics. Because of his efforts to prevent upcoming civil war, he was arrested by the government and imprisoned for two years. Upon his release, he was sent into forced exile in 1970. Soyinka came back to Nigeria in 1975 to teach at the University of Ife but did not retreat from criticizing the corruption in government. As a result, his autobiography *The Man Died* was banned in 1984, and in 1996 Soyinka had to leave the country. While in exile he was even accused of treason by the government, but Soyinka never withdrew from his fight against corruption and neo-colonization by the local élites, and the government. African

dictators, especially Nigerian leaders General Ibrahim Babandiga and Sani Abacha, have always been targets of attack in his works and speeches.

His play selected for this study, *Death and The King's Horseman*, is a substantial text not only for post-colonial studies but also for classical plays and cultural studies. The play's structure is simple, although it is notoriously complex in language and content, consisting of five acts that follow the Aristotelian unity of time, place, and action. The play focuses on the death of Elesin Oba, the King's Horseman. According to Yoruba customs, on the thirtieth day of the King's death, a ritual ceremony is conducted for the Horseman to kill himself and to escort the King in the afterlife. As the Horseman, Elesin Oba has to commit ritual suicide and be buried with the King. This vital mission of self-sacrifice is the one and only duty of Elesin, who is employed and prepared all his life as the King's Horseman, for which he lives as prosperous as the King himself. However, his hubris to perform the duty reveals earth-bound feelings and he fails to sacrifice when the moment comes. The colonial District Officer, who resents the ongoing 'barbaric' traditions of the past, manages to stop the ritual ceremony with the help from the hesitation of Elesin Oba. Arrested and imprisoned by the District officer, Elesin questions his life, culture, and the unexpected result. Olunde, Elesin's older son who has been studying medicine in Europe, returns home for the funeral ceremony. Living among the European 'superiors' for a long time, he appreciates his culture, instead of feeling inferior and rejecting the values he was born with. When Olunde hears of the failure of his father to secure the world of the Yorubas, he ardently fulfills the mission. In the end, Elesin strangles himself in despair realizing that he caused the destruction of his family ad society. In the "Author's Notes" to the play, Soyinka explains that the play is based on real events that occurred in Nigeria in 1945, and he admits that it became an inspiration to Duro Lapido for his *Oba Waja* before himself. Changing "the matters of detail," Soyinka adapted the story to a more suitable post-war setting and to the form of tragedy.

Death and the King's Horseman is a play that reflects Soyinka's complexity and cosmopolitanism. With the references to Yoruba belief systems, gods, and rites of passage in the content, and with the extensive use of Yoruba idioms and symbols,

the play perplexes the reader at first encounter. On the one hand, Yoruba social systems and modern day politics are merged together in the play with a focus on the existential struggle of the characters. On the other side, elements of Greek tragedy are combined with the abstract poetic language of Yoruba-English. In his review after seeing the play staged in the Royal Exchange Theatre in 1990, Martin Rohmer indicates the "dramaturgical importance of music and dance" and "verbal dialogue" as main obstacles for Western directors. After the staging of *Horseman*, Soyinka's use of language and Yoruba context have been discussed widely by his critics for the obscurity of context and the difficulty to understand the play. Marxist literary critic Biodun Jeyifo criticizes Soyinka especially for his complex language. He thinks that a work of art does not have to be complex, in contrast clarity and simplicity are pervasive in African critical discourse. He accuses Soyinka, for he "no longer write[s] to be understood, who indeed write[s] in the expectation that [he] will […] be understood" (xv).

These two plays by Yeats and Soyinka, though they differ in time, geography, and culture, come together in three particular points: both use theatrical syncretism in style, both use indigenous culture and mythology in content, and both see death as a force imposed by royal power. Death and tragedy are central for both plays, together with the use of local heritage and mythology, and the self-sacrifice of the protagonists, together with compelling kingly power. The theme of death as the result of compelling authority is used in the formation of a tragic atmosphere in both plays. In *The King's Threshold* death is in the shape of the hunger-strike that Seanchan sustains against the King in order to restore the bard's place in the council and in the society in general; while in *Death and the King's Horseman*, the self-sacrifice of Elesin Oba is conducted as a ritual ceremony in which the horseman has to be buried in a festival one month after the death of the King in order to escort the divine ruler on his way to the world of his ancestors. In contrast to the despair of death, in both plays death brings hope and regeneration to society through the employment of young followers of the protagonists, like Seanchan's pupils in *The King's Threshold* and Elesin's descendants in *Death and the King's Horseman*. The

hope implies humanity's ability to create or redesign themselves and to preserve the basic social values for the well-being of the community.

CHAPTER 2

COLONIAL CONTEXT

Take up the White Man's Burden-
Send forth the best ye breed-
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild-
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

"The White Man's Burden" Rudyard Kipling, 1899

Kipling's "the white man's burden" has been used as a euphemism for imperialism for a long time. Putting criticism of the play aside, the quote above encourages the reader to take up the white man's burden by sending the best of their countrymen to dark, uncivilized places of the earth. White men will help their new captives-the native peoples who are in need of civilization. The poem idealizes superior Englishmen who go into a country of "sullen" brutes to help those "deficient" natives who are nothing more than a half child. The imperialist mask of "carrying civilization" is formalized through the poet's affirmation, while it fortifies the essentialist binary oppositions.

England had aspired, with various shapes of representation, to forge unanimity among its citizens that they all belonged to an imagined community called Great Britain. Through hegemony, it exercised power on the countries it occupied, and through imperialism it captivated the psyches of colonized subjects to degrade their nationalistic aspirations. In the long range of colonial enterprises, England's hegemony was first applied to its close neighbors, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, leaped to Newfoundland in the seventeenth century, and with the rise of industrialism extended to Africa where colonialism was more dictatorial and brutal than in any of the previous colonies.

According to Edward Said, Britain was "leading the way in European imperialism," after the fast-paced industrial transformation in the nineteenth century. He notes in *Culture and Imperialism* that "changing social and economic structures;

new mercantilist patterns of overseas trade, naval power" all gave enormous power of control to Britain to establish colonialist settlements. As modern Irish historicist Nicholas Canny notes, it was the mask of "bringing civilization" behind colonial intentions, presented as "divine duty," that Englishmen inherited from the Romans (Canny, 588). One unchanging pattern of English colonialism is that whether they colonized Ireland, the New World, or Africa, they first claimed to civilize the 'barbaric' native inhabitants, with the natural responsibility of cultural 'superiority,' but then they find the situation too desperate to bother themselves with this mission and choose to execute the masses instead.

For Said, this Eurocentric discourse "relentlessly codified and observed everything about the non-European or peripheral world," which was performed "so thoroughly and in so detailed manner" that it nearly left no "items untouched, few cultures unstudied, few peoples and spots of land unclaimed" (Said, 268). Eurocentrism so much penetrated the occupied lands that a policy of othering was at hand putting England and English for everything good, beautiful, supreme and the others, whether Irish, African or Arab became the binary opposite for everything unwanted, rude, barbarous. As imperialism increased in scope and in depth, so too, in the colonies there emerged a self-realization and a quest for national roots.

The Irish Condition

Before it overcame one third of the world, imperialism was already a "continuous process" with close neighbors of England, starting several centuries earlier, as in Ireland. Based on information from Angus Calder's *Revolutionary Europe*, Said says "Ireland was ceded by the Pope to Henry II of England in the 1150s". And since then Irish people were seen as "barbarians" and a "degenerate race" in general whose land "had been dominated by an alien power" (Said, 266-67). On the one hand, Ireland has a history of colonialism, full of conquests, confiscation of lands, a growing colonial élite, famine, a loss of language, and degradation of cultural heritage that started with Henry II and reached its peak in the Elizabethan era. On the other hand, it is a modern postcolonial country divided into two states

where sectarian conflicts have pervaded, especially after independence. The success of Home Rule was unfortunately followed by a civil war between North and South, in which swords held against the common enemy of England were now held against each other. The Protestant majority of the North wanted to abide by Westminster, fearing the loss of "their privileged status," threatened by the IRA and Sinn Fein, while Catholics in the South saw partition as betrayal and opposed supposed Protestant privileges. The problem between Ireland and England turned into a problem within the island after 1921, concentrating on the relationship between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which has been felt more as a sectarian conflict, especially since 1969. The most effective change in Irish history was the Norman invasion. With the papal bull Laudabiliter (1155), Pope Adrianne IV granted Ireland to the King of England, Henry II and to his successors with the right to rule. The Pope was believed to be the lord of all islands and lands explored. As medieval Irish historian Katherine Simms reveals, "by virtue of a clause in the Donation of Constantine the pope was held to be lord of all the islands of the sea" (Simms, 48).

In the literature of the medieval age, the discourse that established the Irish people as barbarians was created. Thirteenth-century historian Giraldus Cambrensis, also known as Gerald of Wales, reveals examples in *The Conquest of Ireland*. The modern edition of the book, which was translated by Thomas Forester, gives us a detailed account of the English invasion of the country and the misconceptions on the Irish people. According to Cambrensis, King Henry had 'conquered' Ireland, enabling the "…subjugation of the fierce and barbarous Irish nation" inasmuch as Pope sent him "a gold ring in token of the investiture." In the words of Giraldus Cambrensis:

> King Henry […] sent envoys to Pope Adrian […] requesting him to grant a bull of privileges, by which, with the Pope' consent and authority, he should be the lord of Ireland, and have the power of *reforming* the Irish people, who were then very *ignorant* of the rudiments of the faith […] according to the usages of the English church […]. (50, emphasis added)

Cambrensis justifies the "rightful" claim of England on Ireland not only by authority of the Pope who had the claim in all sort of islands and wished to grant Ireland to the

King of England, but also by the voluntary submission and oaths of fealty of Irish lords to the English King which, according to Simms, was always seen by Romantic nationalists as a "shame" (Simms 51). Thus, in 1171 King Henry of England invaded Ireland, and became the ruler receiving homage from several kingdoms of Ireland. King John of England continued the territorial expansion of the colony. In 1185, he made his first visit to Ireland and invested the north-eastern part of Limerick to Theobald Walter, which would be one of the biggest colonies in Ireland. Even though pre-Norman Irish Kings revolted against the Crown in the mid-thirteenth century, it remained as a courageous but unsuccessful attempt like many others. Toward the fourteenth century, though, Irish lords regained much of their power.

According to Katherine Simms, Ireland can be considered to have "joined the club" after the Norman invasion, implying "the shared ideology, custom, law, and culture" of Europe that was most of the time under alliance of Christendom (44). At the beginning of the thirteenth century there was a "population explosion" in Europe and this resulted in a hunger for land, and for times when it was possible, migration. The workforce was cheap but life was expensive. So the new vast lands in Ireland, seen as a way to wealth, gave rise to colonization in Ireland. Soon many people began to migrate from all over England and Wales. Some were even from France, and English involvement in Ireland gradually took the shape of colonizing the land, rather than the primary look of territorial expansion. New settlements were founded for the colonists while the "conquerors" built moats and castles to defend the new land and their holdings (Simms 53). Normans were living side by side with Irish natives but mostly considered them as serfs, "bound to the soil like villeins of England." Only one Irish king, the Fiz-Dermots of Rathdown was assimilated into the new colonial aristocracy when the other Irish nobles were confined to the non-colonized uplands with the condition of paying annual rent to the Anglo-Norman king and joining his army whenever it was needed, which saved them from confiscation of their property and kingdom (Simms 54). Together with gradually spreading landownership of colonial settlers, culture and society were also changing and becoming "English." The English language was widely spoken in new towns around Pale, while Norman-French was spoken as the language of the upper classes.

New churches and structures were built in 'Early English Gothic style' rather than the Irish architecture of the time, with motifs and stones imported from England. Actually, colonization brought Ireland a very different face. When Henry II of England claimed the right to rule Ireland, he successfully established a colony around Dublin, known as the Pale. The Englishmen of this colony spoke English, adopted English rules for administration, and were protected under the King's name. They had enormous influence on the social and political life of the native Irish. Even though there were disputes between the two groups, some of the Norman population were assimilated into the society through marriages. Later, Yeats was attracted to this "Ascendancy past" and the Pale environment in which there was a "harmony between the Catholic peasant and Protestant landlord," and he saw it "as a model for new Ireland" (Doggett, 100).

In 1367, the Statutes of Kilkenly, a series of laws, were enacted in order to separate Irish and Anglo-Norman colonialists who were mostly merged together in social life, but it was also an acknowledgment of legal status for Irishmen. Throughout the centuries several attempts were made in order to expand English dominion on those lands, but there were still Gaelic petty kingdoms that were not subordinated to the Crown. The colony did not extended to all the island. However, major expansion of colonial power occurred during the sixteenth century, mainly after the Reformation, which created a basis of disparity and clash of ideas between Ireland and England. Previously, Ireland was the close neighbor and rightfully a mandate to the Crown granted by the Papacy, even if its people were "rude" and "barbarous," but they could be civilized. In fact they physically resembled each other: the Irish were not blacks so there was no complete separation as in other, future colonies; both were white. And the Crown had both political and economic interests in that land. For these reasons, England hoped to civilize the Irish and use them to her own ends so that she could be the supreme power of the land. But after the establishment of the Anglican Church in England, the situation became more and more complex and controversial. Henry VIII and future rulers wanted the colony to support and obey, but the Irish chose to persevere in their Catholicism. Now they were not only barbarians that need to be civilized, but also renegades or even heretics

to fight against and to re-Christianize. Thus, this period can be seen as the second and more effective phase of colonialism in Ireland.

Therefore, the greatest difference between two nations occurred when Henry VIII established English Reformation and opposed the authority of the Catholic papacy. Friars of Ireland were the first to oppose this, and the reaction of the Irish people was also the same. The FitzGerealds of Kildare had deployed an army against the King of England that was considered a religious crusade, and there were hundreds to support him. Even some English officials in Ireland withdrew their sons from the universities in England. On every level of society there was opposition. According to modern Irish historian Nicholas Canny, "Irish population which had been most consistently loyal to the Crown now refused to participate in services of the state church" (Canny, 99). On the other side, the Crown forced its colony to obey and insisted that all governmental positions required trust: "…all people appointed to positions of trust within their service should acknowledge the authority of the monarch in spiritual as well as in temporal affairs," which gave way to "English-born Protestants" in administrations (Canny, 99). According to Nicholas Canny, in the sixteenth century, Anglo-Norman's descendants enjoyed the freedom of superiority and privilege in society with their supreme loyalty to the Crown whom they saw as the "ultimate protector." Englishmen of Ireland believed that they were the "upholders of civil standards" against the "barbarism" of the natives (Canny, 88-89).

Canny explains the main ideology behind English colonization in Ireland in "The Ideology of English colonization: From Ireland to America." According to him, effective control over the country had been lost during the late medieval period, with the result that independent and autonomous Irish jurisdictions covered much of the island until the end of 16th century. But with the reign of Queen Elizabeth, "it became the avowed purpose of the government to bring all of Ireland under English control" (Canny, 577). Giving credit to Sir Henry Sidney who was lord deputy in 1565, Canny believes that his first attempt was "to colonize that part of Ulster lying east of the river Bann" (577). Sidney fortified grounds for colonization by declaring the Gaelic Irish as "unreliable and could be subdued only by force," while for the Old English who were the descendants of the early invaders, civility was possible by

persuasion (Canny, 578). Ulster Province was the realm of Hugh O'Neill, King of Ulster. He had created an effective alliance with other clans to overcome the English army, but his courageous attempt failed even though it is remembered as "the most formidable resistance to English authority" (Canny, 113). After a long fight and campaign, eventually Ulster was tied to England in 1601; their leaders left for Europe and their land was confiscated and distributed among the colonialists. The Plantation of Ulster, with its vast arable land, attracted many colonists from England, Scotland and Wales. Gradually there emerged a new colonial district, in which native Irish people were excluded from towns built by the newcomers, toward the mountainous areas. The new society of Ulster was very different from the native culture. They spoke a different language and had distinctly different cultures and traditions. The Irish were Catholic while the colonialists were mostly Protestants. These two different societies living side by side were intimidated by each other's presence. One group was angered because their land was occupied, the other was afraid because there was always a threat of rebellion. Forthcoming years witnessed many conflicts between these two societies, which continue today in Northern Ireland. However, Canny reveals that the Irish were considered both culturally and socially inferior, and "far behind the English on the ladder of development." The English saw in Gaelic Ireland and the Irish people "a cultural throwback that must be painfully dragged to modernity" (592). Sir William Parsons, an administrator in colonized Ireland, reflected this mentality in a letter: "We must change their course of government, clothing, customs, manner of holding land, language and habit of life; it will otherwise be impossible to set up in them obedience…" (Kiberd,10).

Edmund Spenser's 1596 book, *A View of the Present State of Ireland,* is another example, after Giraldus Cambrensis of misrepresentation of the Irish in literature. Spenser agreed that Irish people were not only "stubborn," "untamed," and "scarsely to know the name of law," but also "the most barbarous Nation in Christendome" of that day. As a solution he believed in necessity of abolishing uncivilized vernacular law, Brehon Law, and administer them with English laws in order to "bring them from their delight of licensious barbarisme unto the love of goodnesse and civility." This negative stereotyping was used as the primary pretext

for colonization, whether in Newfoundland, Ireland, or in Africa. Canny thinks that behind the misrepresented image of Irish people as "pagan, miserable, tyrannous […] without any knowledge of god" because there was the belief of parallelism between religion and civility. A Christian society means a civilized society, but a civilized society does not have to be Christian. The Romans whom the English admired were the holders of civilization and passed this duty to the Normans. For this reason, if the English had accepted Irish people as "religious and decent" then they would accept their civility, which would not only eliminate the chance to exploit the land and people but also would contradict the already-established notion of othering as it was exemplified in the writings of Giraldus Cambrensis and Edmund Spenser.

European settlers became prosperous landowners in colonial Ireland. According to Nicholas Canny in the *Oxford History of Ireland*, by the seventeenth century "there was no county in Ireland where some Englishmen did not establish themselves as new, progressive landowners." In the rapid pace of colonialism, some native proprietors were trying to keep up with colonial masters, "both because they wanted to be considered worthy subjects of the Crown, and because innovation could add to their wealth" through foreign tenants. By adopting the new trends of English language, fashion, and law, they were aspiring to resemble "masters" who were representatives of 'civility and modernity'. Dressing after the English, speaking the English language, and even adjusting their houses and funereal arrangements "to conform to English tastes," native landholders wished to "display their 'Englishness,' as much as the colonial English population boasted about their pompous life and style in society (116-18). It appeared that "the government's programme of Anglicization" was quite fruitful (118). On the other hand, religious connections were not as successful as in social dimension. According to Canny, "it becomes clear that two separate societies were developing in Ireland and that it was religious rather than cultural factors that now distinguished them" (119).

However, there was also hatred penetrating into the society and growing among the Irish because of colonial subjugation and the loss of once-owned lands. It eventually led to an onslaught against foreign Protestant settlers. "As many as 2.000 Protestants setters were killed in the ensuing chaos" informs Nicholas Canny, and the

outrage in Ulster expanded instantly to all of the country, causing an exaggeration of events and creating "the belief that a general massacre of Protestants had occurred in Ireland" (120-21). In the face of sharpening boundaries between communities, English and Scottish people demanded an end to the killing of Protestants. An army was raised against Irish Catholics, with Oliver Cromwell in command to take revenge. Irish rebellion was heavily pressed between 1649 and 1652 with great loss of life. Lands of Catholics were seized and redistributed among colonists and soldiers, leaving many native population landless.

The Protestant Parliament of Ireland passed several laws concerning the situation of Roman Catholics, called the Penal Laws and they were applied in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Similar to the apartheid laws of South Africa or Jim Crow Laws in America, these laws became the discriminatory outcome of sectarian differences in colonial Ireland. The purpose of the law was to deprive the native Irish Catholic population of their fundamental legal rights in religious, social, political, and economic life, "by deliberately defining the haves and the have-nots, the politically powerful and the oppressed, on the basis of religion" (University of Minnesota Law Library, 2000). In consequence, Catholics in Ireland and in Britain were punished for practicing the Catholic religion, and were prohibited from owning land, holding public office, voting, entering the professions, teaching, and owning firearms. Tension between the English rulers and Irish population never ceased. After a rebellion in 1798, the Irish government and parliament was abolished, and Ireland formally became part of the United Kingdom with the Act of union in 1801.

Later, beginning in 1841, fail of potato crop haunted the Irish people who suffered from famine for six years. The Great Famine, also known as Potato Famine had catastrophic consequences in the short and long run in Ireland. Kiberd describes the famine as a "massive exodus" (2) because it started a flow of migration out of the country. Cleary notes that "about a million people died and a million and a half emigrated" during the Famine, and for a single decade between 1841 and 1851 population of Ireland was "reduced by 20 per cent." Over the long term, there was a "stream of emigration" and "more than 4 million people left" the country before World War I (41). The ones who could not migrate to another country moved to

cities from rural towns, which was also a move from national culture, tradition, and even language. Connecting Famine with the "policy of Anglicization and cultural assimilation," Cleary observes that "economic stagnation, famine and flight, industrial underdevelopment, the superimposition of English on Gaelic culture, the spread of new pseudo-scientific racialist doctrines to legitimate empire and notions of British superiority all lent force to that conception" (Cleary, 42). Famine became the catastrophic dimension of colonization in Ireland because no help came to Ireland from England. According to Kiberd, popular peasant idea was that "God sent the potato-blight, but the English caused the Famine" (21). In other words, Famine devastated a nation's self confidence in itself to be a distinct nation and "enforced a radical consideration" of the question of national character (Deane, Strange Country 50).

Growing discontent of the Irish people with Empire caused rebellions and a quest for independence in the nineteenth century. The awareness of colonial hegemony led the way to armed struggle by Irish nationalists. Still, many English scholars like Matthew Arnold believe in the superiority of the British to rule over Irish culture. During the Home Rule crisis, Arnold argued that "the Irish could never properly govern themselves," since they were too "idle and imprudent" for the mission (Kiberd, Inventing 31). The claims of Arnold would later be discarded by Yeats in his article, "The Celtic Element in Literature."

After all oppositions, in 1914 Home Rule was granted to Ireland by England who, "after all, had established title to most of Ireland by right of conquest" in the eleventh century (Canny, 579), but because of the outbreak of World War I it was delayed till 1920. However, the Irish people, tired of English rule on their lands, wanted independence and raised an armed rebellion on Easter Sunday, 23 April 1916. It was not only against political subjugation but also against all kinds of subjugation Irishmen had suffered. The rebellion was harshly crushed by English authorities after several days of fighting, and executing leaders of the rebellion, including two famous IRA supporters Patrick Pearse and James Connolly. Yeats was so much affected with the event that he wrote one of the most powerful political poems of the 20th century: "Easter 1916". Telling the story of Irish republicans on

the way to independence, he asks "Too long a sacrifice/ Can make a stone of the heart./ O when may it suffice?" (*Poems* 85). Months later, Yeats told Lady Gregory in a letter, "I am trying to write a poem on the men executed "terrible beauty has born again"… I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me and I am very despondent about the future." He emphasized that, "if the English conservative party had made a declaration that they did not intend to rescind the Home Rule Bill, there would have been no rebellion" (*Letters, Oxford Edition*, 463).

In the first elections after Easter Rising, the Sinn Fein party had the government and instead of participating with the British, they founded an independent Irish parliament with the leadership of Eamon De Valera. A war of independence between 1919 and 1921 freed Ireland from the yoke of England but still it did not end the struggle for freedom of the nation. While raising arms against one common enemy, Irish people now came into conflict with themselves. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 divided the country into two: the independent Irish Free State consisted of 26 counties in the south, and Northern Ireland consisted of six counties in Ulster to remain within the United Kingdom. Most Irish were outraged with the treaty, feeling deceived and disappointed because for them it did not mean full independence. As a result, a civil war broke out in 1921 that lasted for two years. Until 1921, the problem was between Ireland and England and the focus was on Ireland's independence from England. After 1921, the problem was within the island, concentrating on the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Since 1969 the emphasis has been on the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

However, the mixed experience of Irish people as both exponents and victims of British imperialism has been an issue because Ireland was so close to the occupying power. As Joe Cleary puts it in "Irish Studies, Colonial Questions," there is much opposition to the situation of colonialism in Ireland by some historians, who claim that its proximity to Empire made them similar in every aspect and allies on many occasions, as during the colonization of Africa by sending missionaries.[1]

[1] For a detailed discussion on the anti-colonial situation of Ireland, see Davis Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London, 1991).

Cleary says that "its integration to the United Kingdom granted Ireland privileges enjoyed by no other nations. Ireland sent MPs to Westminster, something that neither the British white settler colonies nor the Asian and African colonies did (Cleary, 40). According to cultural critic Clare Carroll, it is a fact that the Irish became settlers in North America, and served in the army as soldiers and officers in India, but it is also true that in the seventeenth century they were "forcibly taken" by the colonizers "as indentured servants into the Caribbean" and they even rose up "in rebellion with African slaves" (Carroll, 4). However, benefits of geographical closeness to England cover neither the atrocities of warfare, relocation of natives, and state-supported policy of othering during invasion, nor the representations of Gaelic people as "barbarous" and "uncivilized." Being the first English colony, Ireland became a "training ground for the colonists to North America" (Carroll, 3). As Friedrich Engels, returning form a visit to Ireland, told in a letter to Karl Marx in 1856, "Ireland may be regarded as the first English colony and as one which because of its proximity is still governed exactly in the old way, and here one can observe that the so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies (cited in Cleary, 42-43). Professor of Irish studies and novelist, Seamus Deane, also displays Algeria as the closest analogy to Ireland's geographical proximity. Algeria too was "incorporated within [a] metropolitan system," and "remained a colony of France" for a long time, which "intensified the bitterness of the separation between Algeria and France," just like in the case of Ireland (Dumbness and Eloquence, 111). Said's comments on the complex nature of Irish colonialism draw an end to the discussion: "true the physical geographical connections are closer between England and Ireland than England and India […] but the imperial relationship is there in all classes. Irish people can never be English any more than Cambodians or Algerians can be French (*Culture and Imperialism*, 275).

On the other hand, perfect autonomy of colonized Ireland was probable never achieved in politics or in culture. More than any other colony, Ireland was subjected to innumerable transformations for centuries. The process of decolonization required an equally long time to recover from colonial representations. The painful but

successful political resistance against England brought with it cultural resistance in the postcolonial context. There was a quest for autonomy and authenticity in cultural institutions of the country. As Said notes, One of the first tasks of resistance was "to reclaim, rename and reinhabit the land," which was a pathway to "a whole set of further assertions, recoveries, and identifications." This search of authenticity for the Irishmen was "for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history," which could be re-built through a new worldview of the ancient past, a past that is free from all colonial representations and full of local heroes, myths, and traditions (*Culture and Imperialism*, 270-73). Nationalism or a "culture of resistance" in Said's terms, emerged long before the political independence in Ireland. It was rooted in the long-lasting struggle for rights and independence by Sinn Fein and later in an armed struggle by the Irish Republican Army.[1] At the turn of the twentieth century political decolonization had already tuned into literary and cultural decolonization.

As Declan Kiberd remarks, "postcolonial writing does not begin only when the occupier withdraws; rather it is initiated at that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance" (6). From this point of view, postcolonial literature in Ireland started long before independence, but in the nineteenth century with the rise of cultural nationalism that appeared in politics as well as in literature. The Young Ireland movement had the pioneering role in the promotion of cultural nationalism that inspired later movements at the turn of the century. The movement grew out of a weekly newspaper, *Nation,* in 1842, and was shaped by a group of intellectuals including Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon and Charles Gavan Duffy, who advocated the study of Irish history and the revival of the Irish language as the primary means of home rule. The rise of French nationalism at the time caused the group to be arrested by the English government with the fear of rebellion; however, the idea of independence and cultural revival had already permeated the souls of the Irish people. On many different grounds, national aspirations led intellectuals to form movements. From the ashes of the Young Ireland Movement a new movement, called Fenians arose. Under the leadership of James

[1] To learn more on the nationalism of the country, see George Boyce's *Nationalism in Ireland* (1991).

Stephens, they were the political branch of nationalism in the country, which would be known later as the Irish Republican Brotherhood. A new wave of groups emerged in the national attempts of de-Anglicization: Gaelic Athletic Association (1884), Irish Literary Society (1891), and Gaelic League (1893). Intellectuals ranging from Samuel Ferguson to Standish O'Grady, from Michael Collins to Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge, and Douglas Hyde, to W.B. Yeats promoted the Celtic past in the re-formation of Irish cultural identity. Gathered and conspired on the idea of politically and culturally independent Ireland, they strove for the cultural rejuvenation.

The literature at the turn of the century became a major source to promote and reshape Irish identity in quest of independence. As Seamus Deane writes in his introduction of *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, literature produced at the turn of the century was an attempt "to overcome and replace the colonial experience by something other, something that would be native and yet not provincial" (3-4). Especially after the Easter Rising in 1916, Irish writers aspired to re-imagine the Irish nation and national identity through an intrusion and a reversion of colonialist discourse. The hope for an independent Ireland was fortified with the turning back to the pre-colonial Celtic culture. Nationalist writers were taking the initiative in the representation of Celtic geography as edenic, mythical, natural, wild, and feminine. The colonialist stereotypes of Ireland were converted and attributed a positive meaning. This discourse of decolonizing Ireland followed two basic patterns, according to Elleke Boehmer: First of all, writers romanticized their past, and challenged colonialist essentialism by writing within the community, as we also observe in the writings of Achebe. The second method for nationalist writers was to give a "nativist response" (113-14). Authors adhere to the colonialist stereotypes and divisions but reversed the dichotomy of civilized and uncivilized. Attributing a positive meaning to national elements of previously essentialist images, like Negritude poets they idealized the national pre-colonial heritage. As Declan Kiberd argues in *Inventing Ireland,* Irish nationalists "embraced the more insulting clichés of Anglo-Saxonist theory to attribute them a positive connotation: "The modem English, seeing themselves as secular, progressive and rational, had deemed the neighboring islanders to be superstitious, backward, and irrational. The strategy of

the revivalists thus became clear: for bad words substitute good ones, for superstitious use religious, for backward say traditional, for irrational suggest emotional" (32). Yeats, for instance, prompted the identification of Irishness with the rural, the imaginative and the feminine, linking colonialist accounts of Giraldus, Spenser and Arnold to a positive meaning. These notions of nativist literature are natural response after the colonial encounter that forces the colonized to think in the boundaries of binary oppositions, which they tend to utilize for counter-argument, but for Said it is anything but to accept given dichotomies of the colonialist hegemony. For the case of Negritude movement in African literature, he says "adoring the Negro is as sick as abominating him" (275). The atmosphere of literary revival, mostly referred as Celtic Twilight, was strengthened by the foundation of a national theatre. Irish Literary Theatre was founded in 1899 by Yeats and Lady Augusta, and Lady Gregory, devoted to fostering Irish poetic drama. However, it did not reached the desired success because of arguments raised over the employment of English actors in Irish plays. In 1902, it was taken over by the Irish National Dramatic Society, led by W.G. and Frank J. Fay and formed to present Irish actors in Irish plays. Thus the name of the national theatre changed several times until its doors were re-opened by Yeats and Lady Gregory under the name of the Abbey Theatre in 1904, with which many leading figures of the Irish literary renaissance were closely associated. In "Our Irish Theatre," Lady Gregory shares the manifesto of the Abbey Theatre:

> We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. (in Harrington)

The Abbey would become a defining dramatic society in Ireland, housing some of the nation's greatest dramatic playwrights and plays, which continue to this day. The Abbey had the leading role in society, especially with the plays of Yeats to shape emerging postcolonial nationalism.[1]

Colonialism was wrapped in different shapes in Ireland ranging from invasion and direct political rule, to political, economic, and linguistic decline of the native peoples. Language as the fundamental medium of communication and cultural interaction has been at the center of arguments in the decolonization process. Imposition of the English language by the colonizer institutions, which despised native Irish, is a known fact. Webb says that English has been "the language of the conqueror and the instrument of colonial power," while Irish in opposition "remained the language of the outlawed and the dispossessed" (232). As a result, Irish was in decline for centuries. Kiberd says that since the 1650s, "it had ceased to be a medium in which an intellectual life was possible, becoming the language of the poor" (133). However, the Great Famine also had an important share on the decline of Irish language. Disappointment at the long-lasting colonial subjugation turned into desperation in the years of famine. It is noted that only a quarter of the population was recorded as speaking the language after 1851. Later decades following the Famine pushed rural people to the urban cities where their children were made to learn a standardized vernacular, English. According to Kiberd for the remaining Irish, "a life conducted through the medium of English became a sort of exile" (Inventing 2). In "Dumbness and Eloquence" Seamus Deane allies the decline in language with the Famine and rapid modernization. Giving accounts of research conducted by the government to record memories of the Famine, he deduces that there were two basic beliefs in the community: that the Famine was genocide, and that it was a divine punishment on the Irish people. After the Famine, together with "industrialization, urbanization, educational policy," the Irish language was associated with backwardness and suffering in opposition to the modernist face of

[1] Rebecca Lynn Stout effectively argues role of Abbey in "In Dreams Begins Responsibility: The Role of Irish Drama and the Abbey Theatre in the Formation of Post-Colonial Irish Identity." The aim of founding the Abbey for Yeats was "to teach the Irish people a new way of understanding themselves as Irish – to redefine Irish nationality so that the new Irish nation could be properly built" (30).

the English language, which weakened the national character of the Irish, "if it survived at all." An example of this was the famous Irish leader Daniel O'Connell, who supported the abandonment of Irish and the use of English instead, because it was believed that "native language was a barrier to civilization" (112-14).

Language revival was most effectively conducted by the Gaelic League, founded in 1893 after the fall of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Supporters of the revival who were writers mostly from middle-upper class Protestant backgrounds, studied and re-examined the Irish language, which helped the recovery of a national consciousness. Nationalistic efforts would be successful when they embrace Gaelic language. Yeats and the other Revivalists knew that a national literature was crucial to gain full independence – "even verses of inferior quality could inspire reaction and rebellion" (Joczik, 9). Especially for Hyde and MacNeill, the restoration of the language, and subsequently the Irish heritage was a powerful prerequisite of the de-Anglicizing process. For a long time, the Irish language was associated with poverty and weakness while English language became associated with power and welfare. For revivalist, it was time to release Irish language from negative connotations within the boundaries of English and promote its authenticity. This task of revival of ancient heritage to shape Irishmen was "the grand destiny" in Kiberd's words, of both Yeats and his generation. For instance, Oscar Wilde, one of the first intellectuals from Ireland, moved to London with the aim of reconstructing the image of the Irishman. Wilde was an Irishman among London élite "whose only weapon against Anglo-Saxon prejudice was to become more English than the English themselves" (Kiberd, 3). The aim was evident for Wilde, like other intellectuals and nationalists of the time, but the language to accommodate on the road of revival was not that evident. In his elaborate speech delivered before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin, in November 1892, Hyde sees the revival of the Irish language as the primary condition of cultural nationalism and long-hoped-for independence. Complaining about the "illogical position of men who drop their own language to speak English," he cries that they "lost the notes of nationality, our language and customs" (Conradh na Gaeilge Shasana Nua). While some nationalists were emphasizing the use of the Irish language for Irish literature, some others thought it was a harsh task to conduct. After

all, the Irish language did not have as wide audience as English, and the speakers of the language among the writers were very few. Joczik underlines the Revivalists' concern for the audience: "if they were to create a national literature, they must also create a national audience" (9). The English language would provide the widest audience as the 'default language' of the country. While radical nationalists saw that as a betrayal of the country, more liberal intellectuals defended the use of English for the representation of Irish material.[1] Wilde took the side of the second group, reproaching "I am Irish by race but the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare" (qtd. in Kiberd).

In any case, postcolonial authors can hardly avoid the problem of language: the medium of expression has to be decided in a country where people are torn apart from their native language and sent into the arms of English. In Africa and Nigeria, similar discussions occurred only a few decades later. Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who decided to write no more in English but in his native language Gikuyu, discusses the language of African literature in his well-known *Decolonizing the Mind*. Emphasizing that imperialism and colonialism is not a slogan but a reality, he defends the use of native language, as Chief Fagunwa did to decolonize the mind of native people since he believes the English language has been forced upon them as a means of "spiritual subjugation" (9).

On the other hand, other intellectuals like Baldwin and Achebe approve the use of English for national literature. The English language that has been the language of colonization now could be used as a weapon against it. Baldwin is quite clear about this previous dislike and later acceptance of the English language:

> My quarrel with English language has been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I began to see the matter another way […] Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, then it might be made to bear

[1] To read more on the Irish language discussions, see Laura O'Connor's *Haunted English: The Celtic Fringe, The British Empire and De-Anglicization* (2006) and Declan Kiberd's *The Irish Writer and The World* (2005). To research more on the role of Yeats in nationalism and Irish language discussions, see Phillip Marcus's *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance* (1987).

> the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test.

Chinua Achebe, supports the claims of writers-in-mother-language but reveals that national literature is also possible through English, especially for himself. In "English Language and the African Writer," he elaborates upon fashioning a new English, one that is "altered to suit new African surroundings," so that, borrowing from Baldwin, it would "carry the weight of my African experience." His ideas are the most explicit when he famously writes, "I have been given this language and I intend to use it" (20-21).

If we turn back to the Irish situation, Kiberd notes in retrospect that the Irish "coolly abandoned their language in the belief that it was an obstacle to progress" (Inventing 649). This linguistic complication was a barrier for Yeats, too. He failed to gain fluency in the Gaelic language after several attempts; Yeats was forced to write in English, unlike his contemporary Douglas Hyde and Lady Augusta. Against Hyde's speech, on the necessity of Gaelic-language resurrection in order to completely erase British influence, Yeats defended that it is possible to produce Irish literature in English but with "an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style" and to represent "the histories and romances of the great men of the past" in English, to make a "golden bridge between the old and the new" (Yeats *Collected Letters*). Although he rejected the idea of Irish as the national language, Yeats carefully included Irish phrases, and more importantly, Irish motifs in his writings, through which he gave "a voice and a history to those who have been deprived of the consciousness of both" (Deane, Introduction, 6). He established a connection between the Irish past and the present state by taking pre-Christian heritage as the focal point. Yeats says in "If I were Four-and-Twenty":

> I have three interests; interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the other, but gradually my love of literature and my belief in nationality came together. Then for years I said to myself that these two had nothing to do with my form of philosophy […] now all three are, I think, one, or rather all three are a discrete expression of a single conviction. (*Later Essays* 34)

He did not know Gaelic to produce purely Irish tradition, but he utilized translations of ancient myths and tales to fuse culture in his writings.[1] Yeats summed up his thoughts on the question of language with the famous phrase from "A General Introduction to My Work": "Gaelic is my national language; but it is not my mother tongue" (Major Works 385). His answer to the call of Hyde to de-Anglicize Ireland was with a question:

> Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language? Can we not keep the continuity of the nation's life not be doing what Dr. Hyde has practically pronounced impossible but by translating or re-telling in English, which shall have an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style, all that is best of the ancient literature?" (*Uncollected Prose* 57)

He stresses that the English language would also provide a larger audience for his cause:

> Let us by all means prevent the decay of the tongue where we can, and preserve it always among us as a learned language to be a fountain of nationality in our midst, but do not let us base upon it our hopes of nationhood. When we remember the majesty of Cuchulain and the beauty of sorrowing Deirdre we should not forget that it is that majesty and beauty which are immortal, not the perishing tongue that first told of them. (The De-Anglicising of Ireland)

Yeats was not chauvinistic in his nationalism but closer to nativism than Soyinka, if we consider the idealization of the Celtic past in his works. He was a "great national poet" in Said's words, who wished to retrieve the edenic homeland. He supported Irish mythology for the inspiration of the colonized Irish soul, but he used English as a medium despite the contemporary language discussions. Like other counterparts from different postcolonial states, Yeats utilized extensively from the myth and legends of the ancient Celts to forge an image of national Ireland. He looked at the

[1] In *The Poetics of Politics: Yeats and the Founding of the State*, David Lloyd reflects upon Yeats's pivotal status in the Irish Literary Revival.

past with a nostalgia and idealization, with a quest to shape the future of his country. In his writings, he "crafted a utopian Irish past," one that is embellished with the myth-fantasy world of the Celts, full of bards, heroes, gods and fairies (Boehmer, 114). Yeats's Ireland was romantic, pastoral, and peaceful, where peasant and aristocrat, Catholic and Protestant lived happily together. With this nostalgia, he also used historical narrative, "to counter the negative images of colonial rule" (Boehmer, 115). His play *The King's Threshold* is an example of this challenge to colonial representation. Avoiding shallowness, he aimed to combine simplicity of a nationalist discourse of past with the complexity of classical literature. The play reveals a certain time in history, whose ideal cohesion is shaken by the new order of the King. With his use of poetic diction, Yeats gives his characters a decency and delicacy, in opposition to the attribution of 'barbarism' of colonial narratives. The peace is broken when the King imposes power on the bard, to make him leave the court. However, the bard's reaction to this authority is through ancient laws, fasting at the doorsteps of the King, to lay blame for his suffering.

The Nigerian Condition

"The colonization of West Africa was part of the larger story of Western imperialism, driven by European power rivalries and the economic imperatives of the Industrial Revolution" says Nigerian scholar Awam Amkpa in the Introduction of *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires*. The colonization of Nigeria and in general terms of Africa was conducted as a part of the long journey of powerful Europeans who wished to 'civilize' the world and 'save' the souls of native peoples under the teachings of Christianity. The story of colonization in Nigeria that we are familiar with, was almost identical, but somewhat harsher than the story of colonization in Ireland, perhaps because the colonizing power was the same England. Though the motives for colonization and imperialism were the same, historical circumstances were different. The Industrial Revolution, to draw a line, was the milestone in Africa's colonial history, which created an avid quest for new markets, raw materials, and new technological advancement that assured power to the powerful.

The Berlin conference in 1884 became the landmark "to regulate the terms of Western engagement in Africa," since the collapse of slave trade organizations (Amkpa, 4). The emerging scramble for Africa thus formalized the political and economic interests of the European powers to provide supplies for industrialism and please the lust for land. The region of Nigeria fell to England's share among other competing European countries. To facilitate the colonial rule, Amkpa narrates, Nigeria was divided into two regions of North and South. While the South, which provided marine transportation, was chosen for the settlement of administration, the North was controlled through connection with existing chieftains. Nigeria fell victim to a devious divide and rule policy. When it was decided by the Crown in 1914 that the two states should be merged under the union of one country, the tribes of Nigeria were already sharpened against each other. Colonial organization of the ethnic groups were organized according to the three biggest tribes: the Yorubas, Hausas, and Igbos.

The name 'Nigeria' itself is derived from the river Niger but the word itself is a very late invention of colonization, proposed first in 1897 by Kirk-Greene to avoid confusion. Before that the colonized geography was referred with several names, including Colony of Lagos, Guinea Coast, Slave Coast, Niger Sudan. The first Europeans to arrive on the West African coast were the Portuguese, funded by Prince Henry, the famous Portuguese patron, with a hope to bring riches to Portugal. After the establishment of a trading post, the Elmina Castle, with the permission of the Benin kingdom in 1480, the trade between Europeans and African peoples started. Even though the trade was mainly centered on luxury goods such as textiles, pepper, and gold at first, slave transportation began making up a small percentage of the overall trade. It was with the discovery of America in the fifteenth century and the establishment of plantations in the sixteenth century that slavery became an important aspect of the Atlantic trade since there emerged a need for man power to work the fields. At this time, slave ports were scattered on the West Coast: the Bight of Benin on the west, the Bight of Biafra on the east. In this rush of European countries for gaining more power in the slave trade, Nigeria became known as the "Slave Coast." The total number of slaves are not known but it is estimated that

between 1600 and 1800 alone, the ports of the Bight of Benin shipped out 1,473,100 slaves.[1] It is also notable that because of the vast numbers of slave transportation, the Yoruba culture of Nigeria is traced into the African communities of Brazil, the West Indies, and in the United States of America. With the guilt of slavery, European countries acquired manpower and a work force to develop emerging industry, while Africans were held back by a resentment of inferiority.[2]

According to Falola and Heaton, England had already established a monopoly of the slave trade on the West Coast by 1712. Yet a century later, the slave trade was declared illegal and the interest of the country turned to ''legitimate'' commerce, which meant legitimate adjustments for the usurpation of African wealth. On the other hand, the other countries were working with an effort to fill the gap of English retreat from slave trade. The slave trade in the country, however, continued until the 1850s. On the other hand, while northern parts of Nigeria were united under the Islamic jihad of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early nineteenth century, the south was witnessing the fall of the Oyo Empire, the biggest local power of the South because of the internal conflicts in the 1830s. The Oyo's gradual decline after the 1750s and the inevitable fall during the nineteenth century resulted in wars among the Yoruba states, fighting each other "to fill the power vacuum created by the Oyo's decline" (Falola, Heaton 75). These tribal wars, in which Ibadan emerged as the dominant power, was terminated with the negotiation of peace in 1886 by the English, who did not miss the opportunity to interfere in the politics of the area for its economic gain. Nigeria was officially a colony of England with the annexation of Lagos to the Crown in 1861. By then, English ships were already active again in the trade of legitimate goods like palm oil and ivory. For the succeeding years, Coleman notes, "the trade in Nigerian products grew very rapidly and was conducted first by

[1] According to Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton slave supplies came mostly from the hinterlands. Most slaves were produced in wars and raids conducted by large empires, particularly of Oyo in the interior, and were then transported to the coast to be sold to European traders. Slaves in the Bight of Benin were sold to Europeans only on the coast; Europeans did not venture inland to capture or purchase slaves themselves. Also, enslavement in the Bight of Biafra was much more commonly the result of judicial rulings, orders by oracles, and, above all, kidnapping (54).

[2] Slave narratives are excellent sources to see the brutality of slavery. See Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African*.(1789)

European traders and companies," which were later granted to the Crown, united under the Royal Niger Company in 1886 (41). With The Berlin Conference, therefore, the economic and political interests of England on the Nigerian colony was recognized and secured by all supreme powers of the time.

The British motives for the colonization of the land was secured in the second half of the nineteenth century with annexation of Lagos and the Berlin Conference; now its impact domain was expanding toward the hinterland. With the discovery of inland rivers, especially the Niger, the English had access to the interior. Colonial administration was fortified with treaty agreements with a number of Yoruba states by 1890. According to Tunde Oduwobi, Yoruba chieftains did not have much choice than to conform since "a less friendly disposition was viewed by the British as unacceptable" (20). In the course of events, resisting local chieftains were punished for their attitude: the Ijebu Kingdom was conquered for obstructing trade, King Jaja of Opodu and Itsekiri Prince Nana was exiled for the same reason. Sokoto Caliphate was the last to fall before the colonial authority (Oduwobi 20). After the "firm monopoly of trade" of the Royal Niger Company, the English government took over its mission under the name of Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, in 1900. The English government had divided the land for its own use, and frequently reclassified different regions for administrative purposes. By 1903 British dominance had been extended through three branches: The Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Though many parts of the protectorates continued to resist against colonial rule, they were silenced with military power. At the end, The Protectorate of the South, The Protectorate of the North, and the colony of Lagos were amalgamated under the title of Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. The native system of administration was conducted under this English superstructure. With the guidance of Governor-general Sir Frederick Lugard, the colony was managed successfully. To facilitate the inland administration of the colony and to expedite commerce that was mostly crops (groundnuts, cotton, cocoa, palm) and minerals (tin, gold, silver, diamonds), the English government made large-scale improvements on the transportation and communication infrastructure, building roads, railways, telegraphs, and ports. The

native people were made subjects of the Crown: their administration was replaced by Englishmen, their local laws were replaced with the law of English policeman and soldiers, their social and cultural values were replaced by English ways. Nothing of their own was important, valuable, or even alive.

Christian missionaries became influential in the politics and social structure of Nigerian territories, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. Though Christianity had been introduced to the region by Portuguese traders in the fifteenth century, very few of them were successful in the mission of conversion. In the aftermath of the 1840s, however, missionary activity and influence expanded rapidly, reaching to Badagry, Abeokuta, and Ibadan.[1] Many Nigerian communities were suspicious towards missionaries and their schools at first, even considering them as a threat to tradition and culture. However, by the late nineteenth century, according to Falola and Heaton, "Nigerians were taking advantage of the opportunities that a European education in a mission school could offer, of which the most notable was the ability to read and write in English" (127). Education and Christion missions were substantial vehicles for the "civilization" of native populations. Unlike merchants, they were ready to penetrate into the most remote areas with determination to Christianize the "barbarous" and "heathen" Africans. Roman Catholic missionaries had arrived in the land as early as 1516, but Protestant missionaries were more effective, increasing their population in the colony sevenfold 1938 since the beginning of the century (Coleman 92-93). For them, African ways of ceremonies, deities, and ritual death were evidence of their barbarism, and their lack of civility and true religion. Thus, as a first thing to do they banned all customs and traditions: ceremonies, dancing, music, marriage payment, polygamy, ancestor worship, African names and traditional birth or funeral ceremonies. These cautions were the results of the dominant English idea of superiority. And the colonial mission of Europeanization and civilization of the natives went hand in hand with missionary activities. As the important agents of the acculturation process in colonization, missionaries imposed European norms, apart from religion, onto the

[1] As a valuable support for their aim, missionaries came with Christianized African ex-slaves. Perhaps the most famous example of an ex-slave turned Christian missionary in the Nigerian region was Samuel Ajayi Crowther.

native people, undervaluing their own ways and customs. All education activities and schools were conducted under missionaries and the schools taught Nigerian children "to aspire to the virtues of white Christian civilization" (Coleman 114). The content of their curriculum forced students to learn the Western canon and the language of education was English. Since missionaries saw Africans as a tabula rasa, with no past civilization, no valuable history, no literature, and no manners, they were establishing their own history, literature, and manners. Deeds of the Crown, its wars, and its colonial mission were elevated as glories of a superior civilization, while all that is African was despised and strongly discouraged. The children of Nigeria were raised with the Bible on one hand, and Shakespeare on the other, without any insight into their own culture, literature, tales, or history. The conversion of Christianity and imitation of English in all ways, alienated the native children from their own culture.

The society of Nigeria was heavily transforming under the colonial rule of England. As a part of the colonizing process, the English enforced their language and literature in its institutions. What colonialism did through social instruments, especially through education, according to Kenyan scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o was to throw a "cultural bomb," one that would "annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" (3). Thiong'o who experienced colonization first hand, stresses that this cultural bomb undermined people's self confidence in their nations, showing it as a "wasteland" that they would only wish to distance themselves from with the most opposite, the colonizer's nation. Education has been an important instrument for the colonization of African people. As Ngugi says, "the nights of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and blackboard" so that "language was the means of spiritual subjugation (9). He narrates his childhood experiences in the primary school which were chaired by Englishmen. He tells in retrospect that one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking his mother tongue Gikuyu in the school. The punishments were several but the most striking one is to hang a metal plate on the neck, written "I am Stupid" or "I am a donkey." For the identification of the "criminal," students were encouraged to tell on each other. On the other hand attitude

to the use of English was the opposite: “any achievement in spoken or written English as highly rewarded” and whoever failed English exam would not pass on the other courses no matter how good they answered in nationwide African Preliminary Examination (12). Language and literature in the education system was only alienating Nigerian children from themselves, and their communities. Instead of oral literature and freedom in their native tongue, they were literally forced into the European world, language and literature. Ngugi says that the “colonial child was made to see the world where he stands in it as seen and defined by or reflected in the culture of the language of imposition” (17). The center of meaning in the imagination of the child was turned into European norms and styles.

The military conquest is only real and durable with the cultural conquest that is most effectively maintained through the institutions of education and language. English language has the most important task in the colonization of the spirit because “language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (Thiong’o 16). All other aspirations of the colonials that dragged them to the land of the Africans, both political and economic, were easier to conduct with colonization of a mental universe that could change how they perceive themselves and their relationship to the other. This mental control over people’s identities was strengthened with the deliberate humiliation of their language, culture, traditions, art, theatre, literature, and music, most of which were banned from society by the missionaries. To rule this heterogeneous community, the English language became “the dominant language of administration, socialization and communication in colonial Nigeria” (Amkpa 4). English was not only the established lingua franca but also a sign of modernity that colonized peoples were subconsciously forced to acknowledge. From language to education, and from dressing to social life, people were surrounded with “cultural trappings” of the master who wished to assimilate uncivilized black man into “Englishness” (Amkpa 4). Colonization, like slavery, was founded on the destruction and humiliation of the community’s belief in its culture, while, in opposition, consciously elevating the ways of the colonizer. In their challenge to long-pervasive Eurocentric discourse, postcolonial writers emphasized

that the colonized had a rich culture and history prior to European domination. The imposition of European language was "integral to the mental colonization of the Africans" (Quaicce Llyodetta 1). By replacing the indigenous languages with English, the Europeans redefined the languages of the colonized as uncivilized. Now, however, the language that was once used as a tool of oppression is being used as a weapon against it. It has been the most powerful instrument of resistance and decolonization.

The racism and humiliation of colonial rule inspired the growth of anti-colonial resistance in the area. A new generation of anti-colonial activists emerged during the 1930s, calling for greater involvement of Nigerians in the governance of Nigeria and a halt to white supremacy. Led by European-educated Nigerians, the new nationalist movements had the same basic goal: "replacing the alien British government with an indigenous Nigerian government" (Falola 136). One of the first movements was Lagos Youth Movement founded in 1936, which later developed into a larger Nigerian Youth Movement. According to James Coleman, Nigerian educated youth who were the leading figures in the emergence of nationalism, is the one contribution of Western education that created a separate class of intellectuals equipped with the skills, knowledge, ambition, and aspirations to challenge the Nigerian colonial government as well as the native rulers aftermath of independence (115). This Westernized élite would be the most active supporter of nationalism and independence in the coming years. Udogowi also draws attention to external influences on the growth of Nigerian nationalism. The writings of W. du Bois and B.T. Washington influenced the emancipation of the black race and the promotion of black consciousness. Especially with the outbreak of W.W II, the bubble of European strength and invincibility was burst and nationalist movements acted vigorously in their resistance.

Nigerian Independence was achieved in 1960. However, as Amkpa summarizes the situation, "formal independence from English colonialism did not bring freedom to Nigeria's hopeful multitudes" (8). The colonial policy of privileging one tribe over another underlined the conflicts among them, which still

pervades the country.[1] Unequal geo-political divisions of the country, which gave the Northern region more than half the size of the whole, created disputes among the leading tribes. The main reason for dispute was that half of the membership in the House of Representatives would belong to the Northern politicians, which meant that the North would always have a predominant influence in the country's affairs. Thus, high hopes of Independence did not put an end to the problems within the country. Following the departure of English administrators, a series of political crises occurred, ending up with the overthrow of the democratic government by military coups from the 1960s to the 1990s. With the first usurpation of civilian government in 1966, the coercive rule of the 'new' system was perpetuated. Thus, the hopes of escape from colonialism and imperialism were devastated with dictatorships of the neo-colonial state. On the other hand, economic interests of the West were fed by the local government through the oil companies, which resumed the country's dependence on ex-colonizing patrons. This gave way to a new ruling élite, who were the indigenous twins of the past colonial administrations and were as corrupt as the neo-colonial system itself. Falola and Heaton note that "Nigeria's stability and prestige had been greatly damaged by a decade of political corruption, economic underdevelopment, and military coups" (158). The eastern Igbos of Nigeria seceded from the country in 1967 and proclaimed the Independent Republic of Biafra, causing a civil war that lasted for two and a half years and the death of approximately two million people. The aftermath of civil war was "an oil boom gave financial reinforcement to a new wave of state nationalism upheld by a succession of authoritarian regimes" (Amkpa 22). As the country's tiny elite became chauvinistically nationalist, it developed a taste for whatever it did not produce. Nigeria imported every consumable commodity, quickly becoming a neo-colonial satellite state clinging to the periphery of the industrialized West.

The post-independence era of Nigeria did not turn out as was hoped. However, the opposition to neo-colonial corruption was challenged by the democratic activism of an educated élite who were fighting the corruption in the

[1] For a detailed discussion on the ethic conflicts in Nigeria, see Ukoha Ukiwo's article "Politics, Ethno-religious Conficts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria."

government and were building a new idea of nationalism. The University of Ife where Wole Soyinka was the chair at the Department of Dramatic Arts led the way. A new class of European-educated, literate, English-speaking Nigerian Christians emerged in southern Nigeria, keen on holding the colonial régime responsible for its actions and demanding a greater role for Nigerians in their own governance. Scholars, artists, and politicians came together in their quest of "developing a distinct and recognizable national culture in order to bring Nigerians together as a single people and to grow national pride by contributing something distinctly Nigerian to world culture in general" (Falola and Heaton, 160). One of the first tasks of nationalists in the post-colonial era was to revive ancient culture and customs, to save his countrymen from the inflicted colonial stigma of white supremacy. The role of literature and theatre was immense in the process of decolonizing the soul of Nigeria. Now Nigerian authors were set to work to reveal the real Africa in their writings, free from racism and essentialism. Chief Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale*, translated as *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* by Soyinka, emerged as the first and most widely read novel written in the Yoruba language. Written in 1938, the novel is a perfect example of Yoruba folk tales in both structure and content. Chinua Achebe, perhaps Nigeria's most famous writer, published his masterpiece *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. The novel portrays the clash between Nigeria's white colonial government and the traditional culture of the indigenous Igbo people by deconstructing stereotypical European narrations of indigenous people. Amos Tutuola wrote *The Palm-wine Drinkard* in 1952. The novel soon became a cornerstone in Nigerian literature with its rich indigenous cosmology, narrative in the form of African folktales, and the use of pidgin. Perhaps the greatest writer next in line in modern times and the greatest dramatist of the country is Wole Soyinka. Counting Soyinka among the writers of the "Mbari Generation" together with Achebe, Clark, and Okigbo, Suhr-Sytsma says that they were the first generation of university-educated Nigerians who had the leading role in the rejuvenation of nationalist thought (41).

Like other African writers, estranged from their roots due to colonial education, Soyinka became a student of his own culture and folklore. For example,

Soyinka searched into Yoruba oral literature and theatre between 1959 and 1961, so that he incorporated oral literature in his writing to give a flavor of authenticity and to reflect the rich source of his native land. He includes oral traditions to link an African past with present experience, to localize the content of his works, to educate fellow Africans, to give them confidence in their cultural heritage, and to enlighten outsiders and help them get rid of false impressions about African cultures acquired from years of cultural misrepresentation. In other words, the postcolonial aim of writers like Soyinka is to turn back to the ancient culture of the Yoruba, as a rich source for stylistic and dramaturgical aspirations and as a rejuvenation to the native literature. Soon this authentic of oral literature incorporated in his plays increased his fame, and brought him the Nobel Prize in literature in 1986.

With the era of postcolonial writing, an intellectual war has started to resist and to dismantle the effects of colonialism in all domains. The cultural nationalism that went hand in hand with political movements, required the re-establishment and resurrection of pre-colonial culture and traditions of the black man. Negritude, a word coined by Aimé Césaire, emerged to resist Eurocentrism in the arts and literature, with an embrace of their past and their nationality. Like its other African counterparts, Nigerian intellectuals leaned on nativism, whereby they defend their native culture against misconceptions. The negritude writers asserted their African roots to fight against colonial prejudice. Even though at times the poets have romanticized the African past, their exaggerated portrayal is a weapon against cultural annihilation. According to Tanure Ojaide, usually they use "negative images to describe alien culture and positive ones to describe African way of life" (47). African writers, in asserting their cultural identity, condemn Western intervention as disruptive of the growth and development of African culture through colonialism. However, it was as dangerous as accepting white supremacy since this kind of binary opposition, even though it elevates native culture, reflects Eurocentrism in itself.

Theatre has been an important means to challenge Eurocentric misconceptions and to revive pre-colonial culture. Although it is not possible to speak of a national theatre like Yeats and Lady Gregory achieved in Ireland with the Abbey Theatre, theatre is still a significant means for colonized Africans who

struggle at the margins of a given colonial modernity. Amkpa writes, "theatre became for us, the principal vehicle of decolonizing reform, just as it had served an earlier generation as a prime strategy of anticolonial resistance" (9). Theatre for Nigerians was not restricted to hallways and stages but was an integral part of their lives: "as practiced in auditoria, market places, community halls, schools, streets, and in religious and secular ceremonies, theatre came to mean a symbolic interpretation of social reality that facilitated communication, socialization, and community" (Amkpa 5). The Alarinjo Theatre, which was developed from rituals of the Egungun, was a popular traditional form among the Yoruba. The first accounts of this theatre are seen in the journals of Hugh Clappperton and Richard Lander. However, all traditional theatres were condemned by missionaries who considered theatre as "pagan rites" (Adedeji 6). The first theatrical form of entertainment of the Christianized élite was the concerts, modeled after the Victorian music hall. These concerts "were organized not only to meet social and economic needs but the intellectual and also to satisfy spiritual motives" (Adedeji 8). With a wave of cultural nationalism, educated Nigerians at the turn of the twentieth century aspired to resurrect the African past and traditions through theatre, which eventually led to the building of Glover Memorial Hall, and Ilupesi Hall in 1910. The coming World War disrupted theatre activities around the country but rise of political nationalism after the war increased attempts to produce national theatre. The true renewal came with Hubert Ogunde, who is considered the father of Nigerian theatre. Adedeji says that "Ogunde's design had not only revolutionized the content, form, and style of the Yoruba Opera, but had also brought it into full-time professionalism" (12). Impressed by the Nigerian Youth Movement, Ogunde's operas achieved the nationalist demand for a cultural revival, which later led him to be charged in court. After independence there was a need for theatre that would not be an imitation of the

Western theatre but an authentically African one.[1] Colonial representations of African identity were both provoked and challenged by "the proliferation of counter texts contesting those representations" in the postcolonial period through theatre (Amkpa 6). A known technique for African playwrights was adaptation of Greek plays whose context of local deities and mythology suited well the African context. Classical Greek drama has been a target for postcolonial playwrights to create a counter-discourse. African writers adapting Greek tragedies, including Soyinka, want to claim that these ancient texts are not the cultural heritage of Europe only, but are theirs too, and that the black man is not "evil" as it is narrated. Weyenberg says that "by offering Greek tragedies as theirs, the playwrights indirectly yet effectively undermine Eurocentric claims of ownership and authority" (22). For the decolonization of the stage, which requires a rejection of all hegemonic notions of culture and ethnicity, playwrights benefitted from the ancient texts of Greek theatre to incite "a new discourse," one that stands at the same distance to all cultures, one that critiques, "even as it identifies the colonizer's power and the colonized's powerlessness" (Wetmore, 44).

Theatre in English produced a number of Nigerian playwrights and dramatists, of whom the most distinguished is Wole Soyinka. His use of the theatre to mirror the corruption in government and to revive pre-colonial traditional norms, has been seen as "a purposeful social and political commitment" (Adedeji 16). In his plays and articles Soyinka rejects any attempt to glamorize the African past, thus refuting both Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. Soyinka founded a new theatre theory with "Fourth Stage," one that would be African as well as universal. His essay provided a philosophical framework for Yoruba theatre and his syncretic use of dramaturgy. A dramatic portrayal of this is *Death and the King's Horseman,* in which the practice of ritual suicide was already failing and needed no colonial intervention to stop. The colonial officer's intervention resulted in a greater tragedy

[1] Postcolonialism engages with resistance and seeks to deconstruct the essentialist burden of colonialism on the colonized. However, as in the Irish case, the language for the decolonization of literature was a hot debate. While some writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o defended the use of native tongues, some others like Chiuna Achebe thought that the English language would also help their cause.

"in the waste of two lives" (Ojaide, 47). Wole Soyinka in his *Death and the King's Horseman* depicted the story of Horseman of the Oyo King, navigating at the in-between territory and struggling to determine which part of the world they belong to. The plot of the play is actually based on the historical facts of Nigeria. Soyinka says in the Author's Note that he changed only the "matters of detail." This incident was previously used by Duro Lapido in his play *Oba Waja,* which is translated by Ulli Beier as *The King is Dead*. Unlike Soyinka's version, it is more based on the colonial interruption without the metaphysical condition of human experience. Compared to Lapido, it is clear that Soyinka gives much weight to the pre-ceremonial phase with Elesin's fancy stories, his new marriage, arguments of colonial superimposition, and strong characterization of Iyolaja and Praise-Singer.

So far, with the colonial and postcolonial process of Ireland and Nigeria, we have seen how similar are both the experience of the countries and the role of Yeats and Soyinka in the revival of their culture and traditions. However, the connection of Ireland and Nigeria is beyond the tragedies of Yeats and Soyinka. Long before them, Nigerian intellectuals were well acquainted with Irish writers. The greatest example of this is the festivals for Irish writers. For the centenary celebrations of Yeats, major intellectuals of Nigeria. Soyinka, Okigbo, and Clark who were students at the University of Ibadan at the time, published a collection of essays in his honor. Six years later, another Irish poet, J.M. Synge was celebrated, with production of his plays and a published collection of essays on the poet. It seems an interesting event to celebrate the hundredth birthday of an Irish poet in a Nigerian university. However, Irish literature has always been a part of the school curriculum in Nigeria, from primary schools to secondary schools and universities. As Clark points out, the Irish content of the English department of Ibadan was "truly remarkable" (285). Nigerian students read extensively on Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett, though not knowing that they are Irish. In the 1950's when Soyinka was an undergraduate at the English Department of University College Ibadan, he came in contact with the thoughts and plays of the Irish Literary Revival and realized the valid parallels between their own enthusiasm in the Celtic Revival and contemporary African literature. Thus, Soyinka as well as his fellow

African intellectuals in Ibadan was well acquainted with the important aspects of Yeats's writings in Irish literature, a fact that caught the attention of several scholars (Asanga, Gibbs). Like Yeats, who infused the ancient past of Ireland into contemporary literature, Soyinka aspired to do so with a revival of untouched African oral literature, traditional motifs, and worldviews. Yeats's religiously devotion to Celtic mythology and heroes of the past parallels Soyinka's devotion - both literary and religious - to the god Ogun, African realities of *abiku*, *egungun*, and rites of passages. It can readily be said that in his cultural nationalism to revive African -specifically Yoruba- values against Eurocentric discourse of England with a firm loyalty to local mythology, Soyinka follows Yeats and the Revivalists. As Siga Asanga discusses, like Irish dramatists half a century ago, Soyinka aspired to "perpetuate a worldview radically different from the cosmopolitan, colonial attitude" (32). Perhaps he was not able to start a dramatic movement like Yeats did with Abbey Theatre, but he established a semi-professional theatre group The Mask when he returned to Nigeria in 1960. Thus, similarity of historical background created similarity of ways of cultural nationalism in Yeats and Soyinka. Eldred Jones highlights this similarity in "Wole Soyinka: Critical Approaches:"

> Soyinka's dream for Nigerian theatre is similar to that of Yeats for Irish theatre. It is to produce a theatre which has its roots in the Nigerian tradition and speaks to Nigeria and the world through that tradition. The playwright therefore has to find a way to induce the world to accept that tradition. (qtd.in Asanga 21)

Another factor for the recognition of Ireland and Irish poets in Nigeria, Clark accentuates, dates back to the missionaries[1], long before the settled system of school education. Irish who "came to Nigeria primarily as school masters," had a great Catholic missionary network and educational system in Nigeria (Omenka, 133). In their primary and secondary schools, where "all children regardless of religion, tribe

[1] In his discussion of the retarded development of the vernacular among Igbo community against the promotion of English language by missionaries, Nicholas Omenka talks about Irish missionaries and narrates several occasions. He says the Irish fathers especially were "committed supporters of the school" (132). Apart from the examples given in this thesis, his discussion is also a valuable one. See Omenka's article, "The Role of the Catholic Mission in the Development of Vernacular Literature in Eastern Nigeria."

or sex" were accepted. Also, Obi Nwakanma in his thorough biography of Christopher Okigbo, *Thirsting for Sunlight,* who was a lifelong friend of Soyinka since school years in 1948, mentions that there were colonial officials and missionaries from Commonwealth countries, and most notably Irish priests and nuns. While counting background of Okigbo's parents, it is said that James Okigbo (C. Okigbo's father), "was one of the earliest converts to the Catholic Church through missionary works of the charismatic Irish priest, Joseph Shanan" (6). It is understood that Irish missionaries had been there with English men for a long time, so that they created a respecting public atmosphere for themselves. They were effective in the lives of not only Okigbo family but also Eastern Nigeria in general. Talking about Okigbo's childhood education in the Catholic Church of Adazi, Nwakanma says in the infant classes, he was first taught of nursery rhymes by Irish nuns (19). Nwakanma says that Irish priests were very effective in the region, so that Okigbo named them in his poetry. Two of these influential Irish priests were Reverend Fathers Flanagan and Leidan. Father Flanagan was later iconized in Okigbo's *Limits* as a man of religious propaganda. Similarly, Awam Amkpa in *Theater and Postcolonial Desires* narrates his own acquaintance with Irish priests in St Thomas Secondary School. He mentions the school principle Father James Gillick who chose to speak in his native Gaelic rather than English for reading a poem. Amkpa shares that he was surprised as a child over "Irish Father's rejection of Englishness" because the community he lived in including his parents had embraced "Christianity and Englishness" with a quick enthusiasm.

Moreover, Kenyan scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, takes attention to the colonial primary-school education and reveals un-Englishness of colonial education in his narration of childhood experiences:

> The syllabus of English Department for instance meant a study of the history of English literature from Shakespeare, Spencer, and Milton to James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, I. A. […] what was more important was that they (English writers) all fell within English tradition except in the study of drama where names like those of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Aristotle or Ibsen, Chekhov,

> Stringberg, Synge would appear quaint and strange in their very unEnglishness (90-93).

As it is discussed, colonial history marks the history of both Nigeria and Ireland, shaping and perhaps changing the future of both countries. As much as colonialism, postcolonial attempts of cultural nationalism is quite similar. In both countries, there emerged a need to revive cultural heritage of pre-colonial past, the untainted point of national history. The task of revival for the rise of cultural nationalism was easier for the Irish, compared to Nigerians. While Irish were descendants of the Celtic people, Nigeria had multiple ethnic communities and nationalities. The cultural and political context for their countries became very effective on Yeats and Soyinka: As Shakespeare used Denmark, Yeast used Celtic past, and Soyinka has used Yoruba world as social context. Both Yeats and Soyinka developed their literature in this environment, to which they participated and contributed ambitiously, and which they reflected in their works, respectively *The King's Threshold* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. Both authors' writings bear the enthusiasm and determination of cultural nationalism to decolonize native literature, which stands up to their colonial history. Thus, the similarity between Yeats and Soyinka and their given plays is perhaps not of a coincidence but of a long- pervaded fate, and acquaintance.

CHAPTER 3

KINGLY POWER AND THE STRUGGLE OF THE HERO

"Life is honor. It ends when honor ends."
Soyinka, *Death and The King's Horseman*

Human sacrifice has long been a part of literature, as a means of reclamation of rights and authority. James Booth writes, "human sacrifice lies at the heart of European perceptions of the primitive," because "sanctity of the individual" is the main principle at the bottom of European ideology and the very idea of self-sacrifice shakes this principle (Human Sacrifice in Literature 7-10). What distinguishes Yeats and Soyinka from the vast literature is their specific cultural context. In the wake of the postcolonial awakening that their countries have awaited for years, both Yeats and Soyinka employ sacrifice in their plays against compelling authority, putting communal good before the personal adventures of the king. In both *The King's Threshold* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, the authority of the King to make life and death decisions over his subjects is prominent. Strong kingly power brings the voluntary suicide of heroes. In both plays, I propose this idea of kingly power is being questioned, but each drama questions and tests this absolute power in a different way. The unfolding of events is clear in *King's Threshold.* As ancient laws require, Yeats's Seanchan fasts at the doorstep of the King to reclaim his rightful place, poetry's place, at the court of the King, and he sacrifices himself to reclaim the honor of arts in the society. Despite all the efforts of the King to dissuade him from his hunger strike, Seanchan does not give up from his cause and dies for honor and for the continuity of ancient tradition. In Soyinka, however, the sacrifice is twofold. For Elesin Oba, the King's Horseman, the situation is reversed. His sacrifice is *intentionally* required by the society to escort the deceased King of Oyo, whose authority is more godly and permeated into the layers of society. All his life, Elesin was taught, expected, and honored for this one mission of death at the appointed place and time. However, Elesin lacks the will to face death when the hour comes, and he postpones his mission for the sake of the bridal chamber. He ultimately fails

at self-sacrifice with the intrusion of colonial officers, and he is disgraced in the society for condemning Alaafin to the tumbling void. On the other hand, his son Olunde, who is next in bloodline for ritual sacrifice, kills himself to save the world of the Yorubas from the curse and disaster it fell into. Olunde's sacrifice is both for the good of his community and against the colonial authority that wishes to prevent this "savage" custom. Seeing the dead body of his son, Elesin cannot put up with the shame, and he strangles himself in prison. In other words, while Seanchan stands against the authority of the king to uphold a deteriorating tradition, Olunde stands against the colonial administration, and rejects its authority to interfere in the Yoruba cultural world. On the other hand, I read the disputed death of Elesin Oba as a criticism of local authority, that of Alaafin, whose pressure on Elesin for self-sacrifice, even if he is dead, is evident.

Oppression versus Hero in Yeats's The King's Threshold

The King's Threshold premiered in October 1903, and reflects Yeats's quest for "simplicity and brevity" (Popkin 73). Yeats was not sympathetic with longer dramaturgical structures, except for *The Countess Cathleen*. Yeats considered *The King's Threshold* to be his "most mature work" as he wrote in a letter in 1907, before any revisions. Upon its premiere in 1903 and publication in 1904, the play was well received by critics and soon became a commercial success at the Abbey. In the one act structure of the play, Yeats investigates the role of the arts and literature in shaping the social and political life of society. From his stand point, art is the only truth that connects every branch of society together. Yeats began writing the play in 1903 amid great personal turmoil,[1] and he revised it several times until 1930. The most radical revision occurred in the version of 1920, in which Yeats totally changed the structure from a happy ending comedy to a mournful tragedy. In a note, as Kielly writes, Yeats admitted that "I had originally intended to end the play tragically and would have done so but for a friend (Lady Gregory) who used to say, "O do write

[1] The long unrequited love of Yeats, Maud Gonne married Major John MacBride in February. When Yeats heard the news, he was devastated. Earlier, he had proposed to Maud Gonne several times, but she rejected him. See David Holdeman's *The Cambridge Introduction to W.B. Yeats*.

comedy & and have a few happy moments in the Theatre'" (*Threshold* 53). Yeats's primary desire for a tragedy was also prevented by his concerns for perfection. He saw tragic effect as fragile, so that even a small wrong would spoil it.

The first scenario of the play was created with Lady Gregory on Easter vacation of 1903 at Coole. Because of his eye problems, Yeats needed the help of Lady Gregory to dictate the story. In the first draft, the stage opened with Seanchan's pupils, who discuss at great length Seanchan's eminence and dignity. They seem to worry about what will happen if Seanchan dies in the hunger strike, and they want to bring him food. Yeats changed this beginning since it was "too directly self-referential" (*King's Threshold* 33). Instead, in the second draft the King enters and summons Seanchan's pupils. He explains them the reason of Seanchan's fasting, trying to gain their help. As the great bard of Ireland, he had a seat at the King's table, a common tradition known by all. However, King Guaire banned him from his court, with the provocation of his courtiers "who long had thought it against their dignity/ for a mere man of words to sit amongst them" (Threshold 570). Seanchan challenges the King both for his own honor as well as for the continuity of tradition. Seanchan starts fasting at the King's threshold, as a native law says. The King is worried about his own name, which could be disgraced:

> For there is a custom,
>
> An old and foolish custom that if a man
>
> Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
>
> Upon another's threshold till he die,
>
> The common people, for all time to come,
>
> Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
>
> Even though it be the King's. (569)

For fear of disgrace, the King summons all nobles and couriers to make Seanchan eat again. He is on the third day of fasting, and may die soon, leaving the King with eternal shame. Then Yeats includes people from all social ranks: Courtier, Mayor, Monk, Soldier, Princes, and peasants, each visit Seanchan with the word of the King. Seanchan expresses the significance and vitality of his resistance through fasting

throughout the play, and persuades some of them with a Socratic dialogue. The loneliness that Smith points to as a feature of Yeats's heroes, is the faith of Seanchan (78). His heroism sets him apart from the community and distinguishes his character. In his claim for the ancient right of the poet to sit at the King's council, Seanchan "not only represent[s] literature but also ideals, values and identity of the nation," so he is not a mere man of letters but a bard. It is only Seanchan the bard who resists King Guaire, not Monk, Mayor, Soldier, or Chamberlain. All prove to be hollow men who ran after their own interest. For instance, the Monk, a symbol religious guidance, merely flatters the King and his authority with conformism. When the Monk came to Seanchan to convince him to eat, he says: "I think [your God] perches on the King's strong hand. But it must be that he is still too wild. You must not weary in your work; a king is often weary, and he needs a God to be a comfort to him" (594). The monk makes the King more satisfied with this authority instead of advising him well. The poet, on the other hand, brings wisdom from what is in Eden. Seanchan represents morality better than the Monk. The Soldier, protector of the nation, also does not seem to conceive the essence of Seanchan's fasting. He is easily tempted by the pleasure of dancing with beautiful women rather than pondering the culture of the country. The Chamberlain, on the other hand, insists that it is not only Seanchan but he also can honor poetry:

> That's not altogether true, for I,
> As you should know, have written poetry.
> And often when the table has been cleared,
> And candles lighted, the King calls for me,
> And I repeat it to him. [….]
> Where I am honored, poetry is honored- In some measure. (591)

The Chamberlain's appreciation of poetry is not to guide people with his wisdom, but to entertain the King. Seanchan knows that he is a man who works for economic gain, so he gives a sharp reply: "if you are a poet,/ Cry out that the King's money would not buy" (591). None of the noble class, but his friends are there to support him in his rightful cause, since they are not deceived by the political and economic power of the King. First, his pupils, then Brian and cripples, and finally his fiancée

came to support him in his cause. Seeing all other doors are closed, the King himself comes in the end to talk to Seanchan. According to the first version of the play, the King becomes soft-hearted before Seanchan's determination:

> King: (Standing before Seanchan)
>
> Seanchan, you have refused
>
> Everyone I have sent you,
>
> & now I have come to you
>
> Myself. I have come to you,
>
> Giving up my pride. Give up
>
> Your pride. There was a
>
> Time when you loved me, & now
>
> You are making my kingship
>
> Very hard for me. (Threshold, Berg B)

In return, Seanchan refuses to yield. Angered for Seanchan's stiffness, the King threatens to kill his disciples if Seanchan does not eat. To his surprise, all disciples defend Seanchan against the King, who say "die Seanchan, & proclaim rights of the poets." Left in weakness, the King surrenders to Seanchan's strong will and kneels before him, placing his crown on the head of Seanchan: "Here is my crown. Do as you will." Seanchan, rising with the help of his disciples, places the crown back on the King's head: "it is for us who made the crown to give back the crown." Thus, Yeats brings reconciliation between Seanchan and the King, and the play ends happily. In the next drafts of the play, Yeats constantly played with the characterization, especially with the girl, the cripples, and the servant. Sometimes he pictures the Soldier and the Chamberlain too sharply, and at other times he plays with the names of the characters, but the main structure of Seanchan's fasting and the happy ending remains.

In the version of 1920, Yeats manipulates the character of the King, turning him into a more arrogant and authoritarian ruler. After sending several men and women to convince Seanchan, he comes himself and talks to Seanchan in a less caring manner than the previous versions:

King: […] And yet if I give way I must offend

My courtiers and nobles till they, too,

Strike at the crown. What would you have of me?

Seanchan: When did the poets promise safety, King?

King: […] I have been patient enough though I am a king,

And have the means to force you. But that's ended,

And I am but a king, and you a subject.

Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither. (*Threshold* 605)

Angered at Seanchan's persistence in his hunger strike, the King orders his soldiers to kill Seanchan's disciples, whom the King advises to "beg (their) life of him." As in the earlier versions, the disciples stand against the King in support of Seanchan's claim: "Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets." Seanchan is already close to his end. Bidding farewell to his disciples, he says:

Come nearer me that I may know how face

Differs from face & and touch you with my hands.

O more that kin, O more than children could be,

For children are born out of our blood

And share our frailty. O my chicks, my chicks!

That I have fed nourished underneath my wings

And fed upon my soul. (*Threshold* 606)

Seanchan is at his last moments, but he is tranquil. Embracing his death with serenity, he directs his last words to the King:

When I and these are dead

We should be carried to some windy hill

To lie there with uncovered face awhile

That mankind and that leper there may know

Dead faces laugh. [He falls and then rises]

King! King! Dead faces laugh! [He dies]. (*Threshold* 607)

With his last remarks Seanchan assures the King that he has not given up his ideals, his rights, and his honor. Reminding the King of the death that will fall upon everyone one day, he reveals he is not afraid of death. On the contrary, he acknowledges death in honor, in a kind of triumph that "filled his heart with joy" as the Oldest Pupil says. In this way, Yeats makes his hero persevere in the hunger strike in a strong stability and power of the will, instead of the previous happy ending. This new structure, that changes the whole meaning of the play, must have had a strong meaning for the playwright, who made a radical turn from the original version.

The reason for this change is possibly the protests of the Irish nationalists of the time, who fasted in non-violent resistance in their quest for independence, most famous of which is the death of Sinn Fein Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney who was elected to the office of Mayor, after the murder of the previous Lord Mayor Thomas MacCurtain. On 12August, 1920, MacSwiney was arrested and imprisoned in Brixton prison. Upon his arrest and unjust imprisonment, he began a long-term hunger strike, which received much public attention and sympathy. He was an important figure in his native city. Kielly says that he had a major role in the cultural and political life in Cork: "he founded the Celtic Literary Society in 1901 and with Daniel Corkery established the Cork Dramatic Society in 1908. He edited the paper Fianna Fail and also wrote poetry and plays such as *The Revolutionist* and *The Wooing of Emer* (in *King's Threshold* 51). He was also active in the Easter Rising of 1916, being second-in command but he had dispersed his men before the riot. Several weeks before his death, MacSwiney said that "I want you to bear witness that I die a soldier of the Irish Republic. God save Ireland" (Metress, "The Hungerstrike - The Final Struggle"). His eventual imprisonment and hunger strike gained public support. George Sweeney quotes from a unionist newspaper bulletin from 2September, in his article, "Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self Sacrifice," which reflects the social reaction to his hunger strike:

> Despite the government, the Lord Mayor of Cork has stirred imagination and pity. Argument on the merits of his case has become subordinate to those sentiments which dramatic spectacle of a man confronting death for the sake

> of an ideal was certain to evoke among Christian people. Alderman MacSwiney, a man whose name is unknown outside of his own city, will, if he dies, take the rank with Fitzgerald, with Emmet, and with Tone in the martyrology of Ireland – his memory infinitely more eloquent and infinitely more subversive of peace than he himself could ever be. (427-28)

MacSwiney eventually died in London prison after seventy-four days of hunger strike, on 25October, 1920, believing that "it is not those who inflict the most but those who suffer the most who will conquer" (Walsh). Yeats was so impressed by his hunger strike that, prior to his death, he wrote Lady Gregory on 28September, 1920 and mentioned his intention to revise *King's Threshold*: "If I feel I can do it I shall give it a tragic end it has always needed and make some other changes. Events this Autumn may make it very appropriate. If I can come down we would talk over the chance of good performance" (*Threshold* 50). With the death of MacSwiney, both national and international media focused on the nationalist struggles in Ireland. Soon he became the "symbol of Irish resistance to British rule" (Sweeney 428). In his hometown Cork, his funeral day was declared a day of national mourning. Deeply affected from his death from hunger strike, Yeats and Lady Gregory staged MacSwiney's play *The Revolutionist* at the Abbey Theatre the following February. Kielly notes that Yeats was psychologically forced to reconsider *The King's Threshold* again after the death of MacSwiney. Yeats postponed the change since he lacked strength in himself for some time. He completed the new revision on 26October, giving it a tragic ending. In the new version of the play, Seanchan the bard maintains his hunger strike, like MacSwiney, and meets death in the end. Yeats pictures MacSwiney in Seanchan's character. Like MacSwiney, Seanchan is a man of tradition and committed to his nation.

The "old" custom of hunger strike as a means of attaining justice, is a deeply-rooted tradition in Ireland. It is a fundamental part of ancient Irish law and mythology. The history of hunger-strike dates back to pre-colonial times, when the community was governed with a strong tradition of oral laws. Prior to English rule, Ireland had its own indigenous system of law dating to the Celts in the seventh century and surviving until the seventeenth century. Known as a part of the local law

- Brehon Laws - the hunger strike was performed as a method of protest and challenge. Fergus Kelly informs us about the use of hunger-strike in *Early Irish Law*: "If the defendant is of full *nemed* rank, […] early Irish law uses the practice of fasting (troscud) against a person of high status to pressurize him into conceding justice" (29). The hunger strike generally takes place outside the defendant's house. Kelly says that hunger strike does not last too long, generally it is to be from sundown to sunrise so that the person misses the main evening meal. Fasting is not perpetuated till death, so death rarely occurred. However, if the debtor allows the plaintiff to die, the debtor would be responsible for the death. This oral law of fasting was transformed to religion. With the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, fasting was linked to God, with the self-sacrifice of Christ.[1] However, until the Gaelic Revival of the late nineteenth century, it was mostly forgotten. In the wave of cultural nationalism, there was a quest of writers to unearth Gaelic roots to recreate an Irish national identity. This cultural renaissance contributed to the resurrection of Gaelic literary and cultural heritage, with a special attention to Cuchulain. The ancient hero-god Cuchulain, on whom Yeats had published four plays, revoked the idea of self-sacrifice. With the political turbulence of the early twentieth century, the cult of hunger strike and self-sacrifice as a weapon was used extensively. Sweeney writes the revival of the ancient custom of fasting in numbers:

> In the ten-year period 1913-23 there were at least fifty hunger strikes involving both male and female prisoners in Ireland. During the nine years 1913-22, around 1000 prisoners took part in hunger strikes and in 1923 almost 8000 political prisoners participated in this form of political confrontation, in a protest which lasted several weeks. The hunger strikes were directed against both the British government (1913-22) and the Irish Free State authorities (1923). (424)

Hunger-strike was held by political prisoners as a protest of their imprisonment and of poor prison conditions. Especially after the Easter Rising of 1916, fasting has been used widely in Irish politics. With the Irish nationalist leaders of the Rising, Patrick

[1] Christianity had a great effect on the Irish. Sweeney argues that in the pre-famine period "one-third of Ireland's Catholic population of just under four million attended Mass regularly" (422).

Pearce and James Connolly, the idea of hunger strike was turned into a voluntary sacrifice for the nation.[1] Yeats was in London during the Rising, and he expressed his sorrow for the event with the poem "Easter 1916." But the most noted hunger strike of the first quarter of the twentieth century was that of Terence MacSwiney, whose death devastated the whole country. As I have discussed, Yeats was deeply influenced by his death from hunger strike.

Seanchan dies to reassert the ancient laws and to honor his ideals. Yeats pictures him as an honorable man, a bard who is loyal to the deep-rooted traditions of his country. Even if his protest against the ultimate authority of the King means his annihilation, Seanchan willingly sacrifices himself for his ideals and for the protection of arts in the society. With his fasting at the threshold of the King, Seanchan puts the guilt at the King's door. Even the dead body of Seanchan is enough to break the hegemony of the King. Seanchan's hunger strike is also a protest to provoke national unity and warn the community about kingly oppression. In the personage of Seanchan, Yeats remembers Irish nationalists and honors the martyrs of independence struggles like Patrick Pearce and James Connolly, who were killed at the Easter Rising of 1916, as well as Terence MacSwiney, who died at hunger strike in a London prison. In both cases, death is the ultimate answer to a specific kingly power and with the purpose of the communal good. Thus, as Barbara Suess notes, the play displays "not only the dangers of choosing to accept an imposed discipline" but also how social crisis reflects "the ease with which even the most autonomous of Others (or we) can be implicated in the tyrannical process" (200-201).

[1] By the end of the Irish Civil War period, the hunger strike was already incorporated into militant republicanism. In 1981, Irish history witnessed one of the most effective hunger strikes in Maze Prison, so that even Turkish political prisoners were inspired from them. Ten IRA political prisoners started a hunger strike against inhuman conditions in prison. Led by Bobby Sands, they took the gaze of the world on themselves. However, because of Margaret Thatcher's unbending 'iron fist' Bobby Sands died on the sixty sixth day of his fasting. His nine comrades died in the following four months. See Bobby Sands's *One Day in My Life*; and David Beresford's *Ten Men Dead*.

Oppression versus Hero in Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman

Soyinka takes his plot for *Death and the King's Horseman* from an historical event that was decribed by Ulli Beier. The Alaafin-King of Oyo, Oba Siyenbola Oladigbolu died in December 1944. For the burial of the Alaafin, his Horseman, Olokun Esin Jinadu was required to commit ritual suicide one month later, in January 1945, to escort the King in the afterworld. However, the ritual ceremony was prevented by Colonial District Officer Captain J.A. MacKenzie, who thought the ceremony was a savage custom. Upon the anarchy of incomplete ritual, Olokun Esin's last born son, Mutana, replaced his father and sacrificed his own life. Soyinka was so much taken by the story that the very concept stuck in his head until one day at Churchill College he found himself writing about it. By the time he wrote *Death and The King's Horseman*, the incident had already inspired a play in Yoruba by Duro Lapido, Oba Waja, which was translated by Beier as *The King is Dead*. Duro Lapido's version is based on the colonial intrusion and indigenous response to it; it lacks the metaphysical dimension that Soyinka emphasized. Perhaps the only metaphysical priority is the entrance of the dead Alaafin to curse his horseman: "You have failed to come and give me food. Alone I wander in darkness, unattended. Let earth, the mother of all, judge between you and me […] and you will pay for your betrayal" (Oba Waja 82). Lapido's arrangement of the play is more like a ritual, composed mostly of by chorus, elders, and market women. The only specified characters are Olori Elesin, his son Dawudu, the District Officer, and his wife. Soyinka added many dimensions including the pre-ceremonial preparation of Elesin's dialogues with the market women, his infamous marriage to a new bride, and the development of the idea of colonial intrusion by colonial administrators like egungun mask, the fancy-dress ball at the Residency, and Jane's imperialist discussion with Olunde. However, in the Author's Note of the play, Soyinka warns the reader as well as the possible producer against the "facile tag of clash of cultures," accusing this kind of tendency to be a "perverse mentality." Soyinka openly states that to focus merely on the "colonial factor" and the seeming "clash of cultures" in the play would be missing the play's essence, since the essence is "largely metaphysical" (3). However, in spite of Soyinka's claims, I agree with

Pervez, Barnaby, and Appiah that the colonial context of the play cannot be so easily ignored. In my reading of *Death and the King's Horseman*, I realize that the colonial factor permeates every layer of the play, especially the small diversion in the original plot-line and Lapido's play (of course I do not mean to say that he must adhere to either) that Soyinka defends for "minor reasons of dramaturgy" (3). I believe that such elimination or prohibition is "absurd" (Appiah 163), since Soyinka delicately infuses it into the sequence of events, from the beginning until the end.[1] As McNulty says, the "shadow of postcolonial Nigeria retroactively haunts the action on stage" (2). Therefore, the "clash of cultures" may not be the main theme in the play, but this does not eliminate its existence.

Soyinka's reworking of the historical event in 1946 reveals much about power dynamics in the community. As Pervez remarks, the play reveals both the political practices of the colonial administrations in pre-Independence Nigeria and the Nigerian responses to these practices in the light of their commitment to Yoruba worldview. Even so, Olunde, who is seen as the author's voice by many critics, stands against colonial politics and interference in local customs. He is portrayed as Nietzschean superman, or Soyinka's Ogun, in his courageous attempt to face colonialism and reproach its defenders. Olunde is the one to question and to challenge colonial authority, as well as the one to sacrifice his own life for the good of his own community, whose metaphysical unity is already shaken by colonial intrusion. Whereas Elesin Oba, the protagonist in the play, seems to challenge local authority with his failure at the crucial moment of ritual sacrifice. Fighting with his internal forces, his will to power, throughout the play, Elesin cannot find enough encouragement, to dare the passage of transition. Therefore, I propose that *Death and the King's Horseman* is a criticism of imposing the kingly power of both Yoruba culture and European colonialism. In his criticism, Soyinka has the same political edge toward each. To explain my interpretation I will discuss Elesin first.

[1] In the context that the play is built upon, colonial power dynamics are so obvious that one cannot ignore Appiah's question: Why does Soyinka feel the need to conceal his purpose? (163). However, I do not intend to open this discussion, so as not to diverge from my main purpose here.

The play opens thirty days after the death of Alaafin, King of the Oyo Empire, on the day of his burial. Elesin Oba, Horseman of Alaafin, has to be buried too, together with the favorite horse and dog of the King, to lead his master in the afterlife. Eldred Jones affirms that Elesin's sacrifice is crucial to "maintain the integrity of a civilization at a crucial point in its history" (128). He was prepared for and carefully taught this ritual all his life, and for this reason, he enjoyed all the privileges of becoming friends with the King. Enjoying all the privileges of a horseman, he feasts with the King. He knows his earthbound feelings and he fears death inside, but he still carries the proud horseman image on the outside, as kingly power above him requires. Now the time has come for Elesin to pay what he promised long before, even before he was born. As his father did, as his descendants will, Elesin has to commit ritual suicide, to secure the transitional gulf between the world of the living and the world of the dead. For the native people, the death of the horseman is a simple necessity. As Joseph comments, "he will not kill anybody or no one will kill him. He will simply die" (29). The praise singer, loyal friend of Elesin, escorts him wherever he goes. On the way to the market place, at the beginning of the scene, he calls Elesin: "Elesin Oba! Howu! What tryst is this cockerel goes to keep such haste that he must leave his tail behind?" (5). The very first phrase of the play reveals Elesin's eagerness for worldly pleasures and sexuality. As Maduakador unveils the proverb, the imagery of cockerel in the Praise-singer's words symbolizes Elesin's sexuality. But it also implies the Praise-Singer's awareness of it. The praise singer is loyal to Elesin, but he is also a careful observant of his deeds, like Iyaloja. The praise singer and Iyolaja are the "collective consciousness of the Yoruba tradition" together, becoming observers and promoters of local tradition (Barnaby 136). The dead King sustains his authority through them. Iyolaja's name is the indicator of her role in the society: -ıya=mother and –loja=of the market. As the sages of Yoruba society, Iyolaja and Praise-singer sense the doubts and hesitation of Elesin that even he is afraid to acknowledge himself. Therefore, both warn Elesin implicitly at the beginning, and remind him of the honor of sacrifice:

> Praise-Singer: Your name will be like the sweet berry a child places under his tongue to sweeten the passage of food. The world will never sit it out.

Elesin: Come then. This market is my roost. When I come among women I am a chicken with hundred mothers. I become a monarch whose palace is built with tenderness and beauty.

Praise-Singer: They love to spoil you but beware. The hands of women also weaken the unwary. (8)

To the "insistent reminders" of his "onerous duty," Elesin responds by underestimating death in lyrical narrations of not-I bird (Adeleke 78). Elesin is irritated with the constant reminding of his mission. In return for the implications of honor in his duty, Elesin childishly gets sullen, to the surprise of the market women:

Women: We know you for a man of honor.

Elesin: Stop! Enough of that!

Women (puzzled, they whisper among themselves, turning mostly to Iyaloja.)

Iyaloja: What is it? Did we say something to give offence? Have we slighted him in some way? (14)

Elesin is a man of "enormous vitality" as Soyinka describes in the stage directions. Throughout the play we see how he is trapped between nature and culture. He wants to get married again, to wear colorful cloths, and to feel the pleasures of life. On the day of the burial, which is considered to be a holy ritual for the community, Elesin jeopardizes both his determination and persistence to commit suicide, and his people's future, with his marriage to a young bride like the forbidden apple of Adam. Iyolaja and the market women are very delicate about Elesin's supposed suicide so as to escort the King in the afterlife so that their world will be safe. Thus, they carefully indulge Elesin's requests:

Iyaloja: Only the curses of the departed are to be feared. The claims of one whose foot is on the threshold of their abode surpasses even the claims of blood. It is impiety even to place hindrances in their ways. (16)

With the first act, the audience realizes Elesin's high status among his kinsmen. His words, proverbs, and parables often require a well-cultivated cultural background to understand and, sometimes he even becomes obscure for the market women too. After consummation of his marriage, Elesin is ready for the fulfillment of his duty.

Everyone, gathered in the market place, "wait the glorious emergence of the voyager" (Maduakador 269). Listening to the drums, Elesin dances to his death in semi-hypnosis: "his dance is one of solemn, regal motions, each gesture of the body is made with a solemn finality" (Horseman 44). Going into a mode of trance during his dance, he feels the presence of Alaafin. Elesin is no longer Oba but Alaafin, "an acknowledgement of the new relationship, […] as if the two were now in union" (Richards 269). The doors of transition are opened for Elesin:

> Praise-Singer: Elesin, Alafin, can you hear my voice?
>
> Elesin: Faintly, my friend, faintly.
>
> Praise-Singer: Elesin, Alafin, can you hear my call?
>
> Elesin: Faintly, my king, faintly. (41)

However, he fails in the act of self-murder. The failure comes with a hesitation at the exact moment and is fortified by the intrusion of District Officer Pilkings, who had no tolerance for native customs. Since he learned of the ritual ceremony for the burial of the King, he tried to prevent it by sending Amusa, police sergeant, to warn them. For Pilkings, Elesin's death is "a mechanism for breaking civilized, colonial laws" (Adeleke 84). Pilkings's Eurocentric viewpoint automatically misunderstands the nature of this sacrifice. By interrupting ritual death, he believes he has saved Elesin from a tragedy:

> Elesin: The night is not at peace, ghostly one. The world is not at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world for ever. There is no sleep in the world tonight.
>
> Pilkings: It is still a good bargain if the world should lose one night's sleep as the price of saving a man's life.
>
> Elesin: You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it. (50)

Elesin Oba is very much aware of the consequences of his failure to finalize the ritual ceremony. He is devastated at the presence of Pilkings and his community. But his opposition to confinement cannot go beyond rebuff and lamentation, because as Coleman informs us, "all obas, emirs knew that their power were depended on the good will of district offices as well as the consent of their peoples" (41).

Elesin is humiliated by Iyaloja for his failure, rejected from his place in the community. Despite his self-awareness, he is afraid to express his because of the strong social norms and kingly power which are represented by Iyolaja and the Praise-Singer in the play, because he knows that he will be harshly criticized for it. What Elesin requests in return is only understanding:

> Elesin: My powers deserted me. My charms, my spells, even my voice lacked strength when I made summon the powers that would lead me over the last measure of earth into the land of the fleshless. You saw it Iyaloja. You saw me struggle to retrieve my will from the power of the stranger whose shadow fell across the doorway and left me floundering and blundering in a maze I had never before encountered. My senses were numbed when the touch of cold iron came upon my wrists. I could do nothing to save myself. (55)

But before Iyaloja, Elesin talks to his bride in private, sitting next to him in prison cell. He confesses his inner weakness with utmost sincerity and sorrow. The scene is reflective that he is a victim of kingly power and authority, which will drag him to his own tragedy in the end:

> Elesin: First I blamed the white man, then I blamed my gods for deserting me. Now I feel I want to blame you for the mystery of the sapping of my will. But blame is a strange peace offering for a man to bring a world he has deeply wronged, and to its innocent dwellers […] my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man who came violently into my fading presence, there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. I would have shaken it off, already my foot had begun to lift but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled. (71)

The lustful nature of Elesin Oba is discussed by critics with harsh accusation because of his failure to bridge the worlds of the Yoruba, yet even this speech explains a lot about his victimization. I believe that Elesin Oba's failure at self-killing is not a betrayal, as critics like Maduakador suggests, but he is as destroyed as the rest of the community. In the end he cannot bear the burden of public humiliation and exclusion, and terminates his life in a prison cell of colonial administration. Craig W.

McLuckie puts it: “What has been implicit throughout the play is now explicit—the bare power structure of the white colony,” that Soyinka tried to disguise (157).

Like the community, and Alaafin in the void, Elesin suffered and became humiliated among his own kinsmen because of his lack of will. But I think that the very idea of ritual death was not suited to his nature, which arouse sympathy for him. The “earth-held limbs” that Elesin acknowledges in the end is not a result of his marriage - it is only a catalytic event - but it is his nature. First of all, Elesin pursued a pre-destined life. He did not choose to be horseman but he was appointed because of his bloodline. His fate gave him the heavy task of ritual sacrifice, which gives his hesitation a sympathetic look. Elesin is far from being a scapegoat or a betrayer, as it is mostly argued, but he is a victim of kingly power and authority. Secondly, Elesin’s creation, his nature is opposite of what duty requires. To expect him to give up on his worldly desires and to commit ritual suicide for the community is, to put in the simplest words, like expecting bees to give up on flowers, or a baby to cast aside its toys. Elesin’s mission is crucial but it is not his nature. Throughout the play, it is observed that he tried to inspire confidence in himself, more than he tried to assure the community. He was expecting himself, to perform the duty because it was what he was taught and was imposed on him for years. But he failed in the end because facing death was not an easy task to do based on social imposition and authority. Life is precious and it requires strong willpower and persistence. He could have done it, as he did in the end, if he had enough courage and will power. Soyinka reveals his existential struggle in the play. From the beginning, he has been in conflict with his own alter ego, his own nature. As stated in the play, this duty was given him as a family tradition: “It is not he who calls himself Elesin Oba, it is his blood that says it. As it called out to his father before him and will to his son after him” (38). He, as a man of vitality and cheerful life, did not wish to die inwardly. But he was trying his best, because the importance of his duty had become essential in his life. It was long taught to him. When he is reminded of his waiting death, Elesin assures the Praise-Singer, and also himself in his presence, to follow the rightful path:

Elesin: Ah! Companions of this living world

What a thing is, that even those

We call immortal

Should fear to die

[……]

My reign is loosened.

I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes

Watch me dance along the narrow path

Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.

My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside. (12-13)

However, at the end of the road he is defeated by his humanly fear of death and his quest for vitality. His momentarily hesitation reverses his fate. The kingly power that desired his voluntary suicide lamented him this time, speaking through Iyaloja and the Praise-Singer. He could not endure the shame and humiliation, and he strangled himself with chains, "where the slaves were stored before being taken down to the coast." This last scene of regret and futile death arouses sympathy in the reader. Iyaloja says: "He is gone at last into the passage but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on the meat and throw him bones. The passage is clogged with droppings from the King's stallion; he will arrive all stained in dung" (83).

Olunde, the second hero of the play and son of Elesin, emerges to save his community and to restore his family name. Olunde who has been viewed as the spokesman for the playwright by critics, is armed with all necessary psychological and intellectual power and "immense personal courage" so that he becomes the "perfect match and counterfoil to the arrogance and chauvinism of the colonial administrators" (Williams 74). When we first confront him in act four, he proves to be the only Yoruba character in the play, "who is able to enter into a useful debate with Jane Pilkings regarding cultural relativity" (Pervez 69). Appropriately "dressed in a sober Western suit," Olunde represents the African intellectual, who is familiar with both Yoruba folklore and the English world-view (Horseman 40). With the support of Pilkings, he had travelled to Britain to study medicine some time ago. Upon receiving a telegram about the death of Alaafin, he returns home to attend

funeral ceremonies, peacefully acknowledging the burial of his father. Jane, wife of Simon Pilkings, is surprised in his tranquility, and checks Olunde several times:

> Jane: Oh, so you are shocked after all. How disappointing.
>
> Olunde: No I am not 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. (54-55)

He witnessed the World War II, a detail Soyinka added for "minor reasons of dramaturgy." He saw Europe in its true face and "in wartime vulnerabilities" to quote from Olakunle George (81). He has observed Western ways in detail, and learned the true place of his community among Western powers. He realized that they are not "barbarians," it is the Western mind who calls them so, to create excuses for their exploitation. He saved himself from turning into a colonial puppet in Europe. He argues self-assuredly and reasonably with Jane about European essentialism:

> Olunde: You white races know how to survive; I've seen proof of that. By all logical and natural laws in this war should end with all the white races wiping out one another, wiping out their so-called civilization for all time and reverting to a state of primitivism the like of which has so far only existed in your imagination when you thought of us. I thought all that at the beginning. Then I slowly realized that your greatest art is the art of survival. But at least have the humility to let others survive in their own way. (58)

Olunde vigorously contests the colonial mentality with a powerful discussion of voluntary death for the common good. As a response to Jane's prejudice about ritual death, he asks "is that worse than mass suicide? Mrs. Pilkings, what do you call what those young men are sent to do by their generals in the war? (58).

In the face of colonial oppression, Olunde is ready to engage in counter-discourse against the colonialists to reaffirm his cultural identity as well as his freedom back. He belittles the colonialist mentality of Jane, "You believe that everything which appears to make sense was learnt from you" (58). Jane seems to understand the self-sacrifice of the British captain who blew himself up with the ship to save "hundreds of the coastal population" since the ship was loaded with ammunition:

> Jane: The captain blew himself up with it. Deliberately. Simon said someone had to remain on board to light the fuse. […] 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. (55)

Olunde also praises the captain, calling his decision as an "inspiriting, affirmative commentary on life" (51). He ties to reveal to Jane that the voluntary death of the captain and his father's ritual death are fundamentally the same: both acts are necessary to save lives of many others. However, Jane remains "a stubborn cultural chauvinist." She is unable to grasp the similarity, mainly because she cannot equate African tradition with European examples (Kang 171). She understands Olunde's discussion as a fancy welcoming: "However cleverly you try to put it, it is still a barbaric custom. It is even worse -it's feudal! The king dies and a chieftain must be buried with him. How feudalistic can you get!" (58).

Jane's intolerance of the native culture reveals her deep-rooted colonial mentality that holds together everything she believes in. Even though she is pictured as moderate and soft with womanly compassion and kindness, Jane is still as intolerant as Simon Pilkings, the caricature of colonial administrators in their shallow-mindedness and lack of insight into native culture. Jane proves to be as ignorant as her husband in his understanding of native culture and values. Olunde's discussion of cultural relativity compels "Jane's agreement, if not respect" (George 82). However; Olunde's intention is not to argue further, he wishes to talk to Simon Pilkings about his possible intervention to the ritual. As soon as the security of the Yoruba world is ensured, he intends to return to his studies:

> Jane: Don't let anything make you away your training.
>
> Olunde (genuinely surprised): of course not. What a strange idea. I intend to return and complete my training. Once the burial of my father is over. (25)

Pilkings, on the other hand, is very careful not to permit any kind of local "barbarism." He is also intimidated by the possible disturbance of His Highness. While remaining blind to their own barbarism of exploitation and colonialism, he can easily blame the indigenous people of "savage custom." Pilkings does not consider indigenous people as equal human beings to himself. Even the Christianized Joseph,

the houseboy, or Muslim Amusa, the police sergeant, is not valuable companion to him. In return, his authority in the kingdom is most rejected by the native people. Not only Pilkings but also native sergeants who are close to the colonial administration are rejected by the Oyo community. In his confrontation with market girls, Amusa is humiliated for this very reason.

> Amusa: I tell you woman for last time to commot my road. I am here on official business.
>
> Woman: Official business you white ma's eunuch? Official business is taking place where you want to go and it's a business you wouldn't understand. (36)

Another concern for Pilkings, beyond saving a life to restate his law in the area, is the presence of the Prince of Wales who has been on a tour of the colonies. Any kind of social turmoil or riot would damage his authority, even endanger his career, if the Prince's safety would be in danger. The resident, who is more concerned about his own career in the colony, explains this fact quite clearly:

> Resident: You realize how disastrous it would have been if things had erupted while His Highness was here.
>
> Pilkings: I wasn't aware of the whole business until tonight, sir.
>
> Resident: Nose to the ground Pilkings, nose to the ground! If we let all these little things slip past us where would the empire be eh? Tell me that. Where would we all be? […]
>
> Pilkings: You could tell him the truth sir.
>
> Resident: I could? No no no Pilkings, that would never do. What! Go and tell him there is a riot just two miles away from him? This is supposed to be a secure colony of His Majesty, Pilkings. (51)

However, Pilkings's intervention into the ritual performance "ironically undermines the whole colonial authority rather than reinforces it" (Kang 181). Despite all his efforts to prevent ritual suicide, he actually causes more than one death.

The confrontation of Olunde with his father, arrested by colonial policeman, is one of the most tragic moments in the play. Olunde is shocked and disappointed in his father's failure. He immediately leaves the presence of Elesin, denouncing him:

"I have no father, eater of left-overs" (66). Olunde voluntarily sacrifices himself, in his father's place. His death saves the Yoruba world from "tumbling in the void of strangers" (*Horseman* 62) and becomes "a cause for rejoicing" (Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* 125). I share Adebayo Williams's remark that in Olunde's presence, Soyinka "counterpose[s] the dominant culture of the ancient Oyo kingdom against equally hegemonic culture of the white invaders" (77).

Olunde's death in the final scene does not mean, however, that Soyinka sees death as the ultimate choice for the well-being of the society and encourages it, as some critics like Jeyifo claim. On the contrary, Soyinka acknowledges and embraces his country's history with confidence and shows how colonial interruption could harm the country much more than itself, because while the laws requires the sacrifice of one man, the colonial administration that boasts of the superiority of its laws and customs, did nothing more than raise the number of the dead. What is common in both ruling system is that kingly power and death are the result of its oppression. Thus, Soyinka "challenge(s) authoritarianism" in *Death and the King's Horseman*, "whether derived from colonial or indigenous sources" (Ampka 31) as a reflection of his quest for postcolonial transformation in the era of nation-building.

The ancient Oyo Empire is pictured in its dying moments: a colonial power that disdains local customs now rules in the area, there are local converts to the colonialists' religion such as Sergeant Amusa, and the King's Horseman who has been destined all his life, hesitates over the requirements of his cultural cosmology, possibly because of the freedom of the new colonizer worldview. (We cannot say that he is "a man of his time" but he has doubts about his own cultural system, which prevents his suicide.) Likewise, the kingdom and the times that Seanchan defends are about to be destroyed, and he acts as a one-man guerilla force. He is the last and only poet to defend his place at the King's court. In both plays, even if the new social order gains ascendancy over the old order, the future is not hopeless and dark. Seanchan has his young pupil, and Elesin has his unborn baby.

In conclusion, the portrayal of the robust heroes by Yeats and Soyinka against the strong imposing authority of the king is an important reflection of their own national condition since both Ireland and Nigeria are struggling to be saved from the

yoke of England. In the era of cultural nationalism that they write from, Yeats and Soyinka harshly question the ultimate power of the king and kingdom of Great Britain, and imply that it may take heroic sacrifice to achieve freedom. In the personage of Olunde, Soyinka privileges native law over the laws of colonial system that is perpetuated through prison cells. Olunde becomes an activist, like Soyinka, who fights against colonial power, even at the expense of his own life as he honors his native traditions. His protest against colonialism, however, is cultivated through his Europeanized looks and language. He challenges colonial authority with their own weapons. Elesin's struggle and death mainly result from his lack of will to finalize ritual ceremony. I read his failure not as betrayal but as fate. In his hesitation to sacrifice, Elesin in a way challenges local authority which has a greater significance than his individual quest.

Like Olunde, Seanchan dies to reassert the ancient laws and to honor his ideals. Yeats pictures him as an honorary man, a bard who is loyal to the deep-rooted traditions of his country. Even if his protest against the ultimate authority of the King means his annihilation, Seanchan willingly sacrifices himself for his ideals and for the protection of the arts in society. With his fasting at the King's threshold, Seanchan puts the guilt at the King's door. Even the dead body of Seanchan is enough to break the hegemony of the King. In the personage of Seanchan, Yeats remembers Irish nationalists and honors the martyrs of independence struggles, like Patrick Pearce and James Connolly, who were killed in the Easter Rising of 1916, as well as Terence MacSwiney, who died at hunger strike in a London prison. In both cases death is the ultimate answer to a specific kingly power, and with the goal of the communal good. These nationalists Seanchan and Olunde sacrifice their lives not only as a challenge to supreme authority, but also as a sacrifice for the common good. The reader will possibly ask, Are Yeats and Soyinka striving for anarchy, or a no-ruler state? Certainly not. They the particular ruler, whose ultimate authority leaves no space for the individual, and who colonizes and exploits. They stand against the corruption of this specific authority who governs for his own ends. However, as Suess notes, "the King Guaires of the world," whose only function is

"to weaken the society in which they hope to foster prosperity," will always exist (199).

CHAPTER 4
NATIONAL HERITAGE OF MYTHGOLOGY

The world is a marketplace; heaven is home.
Traditional Yoruba proverb

Great poetry does not teach us anything—it changes us.
W.B.Yeats

Native mythology is a great source for Yeats and Soyinka. As Akporji states both authors employ ancient mythology and ritual "to express their consciousness of socio-political imperatives, precisely because of its communal or audience affective qualities" (46). She sees Yeats's mystical and occultist associations as "the natural consequences of his identification with the peasant ideal, of his deliberate denial of the rational, materialistic and a-spiritual world of his compeers in favor of the spiritual world of the Irish peasants" (47). Similarly, Soyinka acknowledges the Yoruba worldview as his "muse" (James, "An Interview with Soyinka"). Soyinka, "manipulator of myth," reflects Yoruba mythology and world-view in the play (Maduakador 385). As Anthony Smith asserts, this kind of return to an ancient past, through a series of myths can help the nation form "a composite nationalist mythology" (49).

Yeats and Myth

In a Senate speech on 19April 1923, Yeats explained to his fellow senators the inspiration of his literature: the "greater portion of my own writings have been founded upon the old literature of Ireland. […] The movement I am connected with, the whole poetic movement of modern Ireland, has drawn a great portion of this inspiration from the Old Bardic literature" (quoted in *King's Threshold*). Like his Revivalist companions, Yeats wished to unite Ireland with all aspects of native tradition in his writing: myth, legend, custom, folklore, religion, and thought. From

poetry to theatre,[1] Yeats employed mythic elements in his writing to reinstate cultural authenticity in the emerging Irish nation. *King's Threshold* is remarkable in its portrayal of ancient Celtic culture, though pictured in its dying moments, to reflect ancient myth and tradition. As discussed in the previous chapter, the very idea of fasting at the doorstep of a person, even a King, derives from the ancient Brehon Law of Celtic Ireland. Another important imagery of Celtic mythology is the bardic school. Yeats acknowledges the power of the bards in the play with Brian's words: "they can give a great name or a bad one." He wanted to revive "the great bardic order, with its perfect artifice and imperfect art," which "had gone down in the wars of the seventeenth century" (qtd. in Marcus 10).

The idea of prophet-poet was the main ideology of ancient mythology. Bards combined in themselves both the national and the universal, the real and the mystic, literature and politics. Bards were traditionally vested with enormous power in their communities. Barbara Suess notes that "visitors to Ireland in the sixteenth century wrote frequently and with awe on the subject of bardic authority, in letters and poems that evince the integrality of bards to ancient Irish culture" (283). In the narrations of Lady Wilde, bards even had a "malefic power," that is stronger than the glance of the Evil Eye. Therefore, the poet's curse was more dreaded and more fatal than any other form of imprecation, "for the bard had the mystic prophet power." They could foresee and denounce: "No man could escape from the judgment pronounced by a poet over one he desired to injure," for poets are "The Men of The Word" (Wilde 246-47).

However, the power of Gaelic bards, as Kiberd observes, began to disintegrate after 1600, with the extending influence of English over Ireland (*Irish Writer and The World* 70). The rise of colonialism in Ireland brought the denial of the bardic past of Ireland by the colonialists, because Irish nationalism was "both feared and despised" in England (Bassnett 16). With the rise of postcolonialism at turn of the twentieth century, Irish literature saw a powerful drive of intellectuals

[1] Yeats as playwright is mostly acknowledged with his Ulster cycle plays-that feature Cuchulain as protagonist. Also, *Cathleen ni Houlain* and *Countess Cathleen* are Yeats's most famous plays, promoting nationalism.

toward rediscovering the past. As Pkorna argues, the search for authentic identity and tradition is a phase of the post-colonial experience when the native asserts the nationality of the colonized in mystical terms (9). Attempting to establish a national literature in the era of independence struggles, Yeats used Irish myths and folktales "as common denominators, well-known cultural symbols which had been rehearsed for centuries" (Joczik 112). In "a desire to write for his race," he turned to the ancient mythology and culture of Celtic Ireland (Welsh 43). As a source of his writing, he greatly admired Standish O'Grady and Lady Wilde. Especially Lady Wilde's mysticism and her view of the Irish peasant as unique among Celts, inspired Yeats "to approach Irish folklore from a national rather than international perspective" (Joczik 19). At a time when materialism and modernism was at its height, Yeats "made a bardic compact to return the poetic voice of the center of culture" (Schuchard xxi).

Ever since he was a young poet, Yeats had become a student of bardic traditions. Seeing himself as the inheritor of the Irish bardic traditions, Yeats proposed a national Irish literature for the awakening of cultural identity, because, as he says, "national traditions [are] not hidden in libraries, but living in the minds of the populace" (qtd. in Schuchard 3). As Philip Marcus says, he saw bardic tradition as "the key force behind the emergence of Irish national and racial being" (257). To Yeats, the imperfect art of the Irish bard, and peasant tradition need to be preserved and enriched by poets in the new century. The duty of the poet, like the bards, is to master Irish resources.[1] Apart from fusing Celtic elements into his literature, he also published three books on Irish mythology, whose objective, for Sundmark, was more

[1] In his famous poem, "Under Ben Bulben," Yeats actually encourages modern poets to sing about the heroic past:

> Irish poets, learn your trade,
> Sing whatever is well made,[…]
> Sing the peasantry, and then
> Hard-riding country gentlemen, […]
> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry. (*Major Works* 166)

Also, Sajjadul Karim discusses "Wanderings of Oisin" and "Stolen Child" as representatives of the mythic poetry of Yeats. See "Celtic Tradition: The Guiding Force of William Butler Yeats."

legends, myths, and ghost stories than fairy tales (102): *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry, The Celtic Twilight,* and *Mythologies.*

Yeats believed that *The King's Threshold* was his best play so far, "constructed rather like a Greek play" (*Threshold* 33). Set in an Ireland of the mythical past, the play focuses on a disagreement between Seanchan the bard, and Guaire the king of Gort. The King is convinced by his chancellors that "a mere man of words" to sit amongst them would be "against his dignity." Guaire decided to break the tradition that existed for centuries, and to send Seanchan from his court. The plot is shaped around Seanchan's gradual decline into death, and his Socratic discussion along the way with people of various titles, who try to convince him to end his fast. However, the surrounding people generally do not go beyond their selfish perspectives and do not really care about Seanchan. With the revealed dissipation of the King's council and lords, Yeats presents Seanchan as the "conduit to spiritual core of the national identity." He is the only one among others who has the ability to warn the King for "the discontinuity between that identity and their present state of being" (Cusack 108). By casting out Seanchan from his council, the King not only ignores the prophetic role of the bard in the community, but he also breaks ancient tradition, both of which are at the core of the oral society. In his arrogance, the King destroys Irish identity and leaves his threshold, his home, and his country with the curse of Seanchan.

Seanchan is the source of Irish tradition and the carrier of the cultural heritage. As the representative of ancient bardic tradition, he is the inheritor and celebrator of traditional values. He is the great bard of the country, "the most powerful influence in the land" in Yeats's terms. As Yeats noted in a review: "No gist they demanded might be refused them. One king being asked for his eye by a bard in quest of an excuse for rousing the people against him plucked it out and gave it" (*Uncollected Prose* 82). The power of the bard Seanchan is derived from his artistic skill. He is a man of words, which is the very reason that the King's couriers belittle him. What they fear is that Seanchan can give a great name or a bad one. He is the master of poetry, and chants, the means of fame in oral society. Seanchan's

Oldest Pupil, honors poetry's grace and reminds the audience of Seanchan's authority over words:

> [. . .] the poets hung
> Images of the life that was in Eden
> About the child-bed of the world, that it,
> Looking upon those images, might bear
> Triumphant children. (573)

Seanchan's dialectic to remind his pupils of the importance of the arts, reveals the strong root of art in the Celtic tradition. This time he asks how a man should guard those Edenic images. The oldest pupil replies:

> I answered […]
> That he should guard them as he Men of Dea
> Guard their treasures, as the Grail King guards
> His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse
> The jewel that is underneath is horn,
> Pouring out life for it as one pours out
> Sweet heady wine. (570)

Seanchan asks again his pupil what would happen if the arts perish in the world. He answers that terror will fall upon the earth, the peace will be disturbed, like a woman who gives birth to a "hare-lipped child." With these attributions, clearly poets are the guardians of the world and spirituality. They possess a Platonic ability to perceive both the material world of realities and the ideal world of the imagination. Without the guidance of poets, humanity will neither reach the ideal nor grasp the material. Thus, the controversy between Seanchan and the King is actually between political power and bardic tradition. When he denounces Seanchan from his place in the court and degrades him as beneath his courtiers, the King sacrifices not only Seanchan, but the tradition, ideals, values, and spirituality of the nation, to worldly power, position, and the material. But he forgets that even worldly possessions gain meaning and value with the words of the poets: "the King's money would not buy,/ Nor the high circle consecrate his head,/ If poets had never christened gold" (42). It is the poet and

his magical words that attribute meaning to the world. However, it seems that only Seanchan's close friends acknowledge this. With the sorrow of Seanchan's upcoming death, they try to convince him to live:

> Youngest Pupil: (throwing himself at Seanchan's feet)
>
> Why did you take me from my father's fields?
>
> If you would leave me now, what shall I love?
>
> Where shall I go? What shall I set my hands to?
>
> And why have you put music in my ears,
>
> If you would send me to the clattering houses?
>
> I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,
>
> For how could I sing verses or make music
>
> With none to praise me, and a broken heart?
>
> Seanchan: what was it that the poets promised you,
>
> If it was not their sorrow? (575)

Seanchan is powerful both in his claim and in his stand. His will is so strong that he does not give up on his claim. Cripples, who represent commoners, are well aware of the bardic tradition and its power. One says to the other: "if I were a King I wouldn't meddle with him, there is something queer about a man that makes rhymes" (577). In the mosaic of the Celtic world, Yeats represents various characters from the Celtic world, but he elevates the common people above the noble class, whose only interest is money, power, and comfort - not culture or tradition.

Yeats creates more sympathy with Seanchan by emphasizing his heroic qualities of honor and honesty, in contrast to the materialistic qualities of the nobles:

> Mayor: the King was said to be the most
>
> Friendly, and we have reason for thinking that he
>
> Was about to give us those grazing lands we so much
>
> Need, being so pinched that our mowers mow with
>
> Knives between the stones. We ask nothing but what
>
> was reasonable. We ask you for the sake of the town

to do what the King wants and then maybe he'll do

what we want; we ask nothing but what's reasonable. (594)

With this speech, the Mayor is revealed to be the least sympathetic character in the play. He cares about honor and tradition more than wealth. He proposes the same thing to Seanchan. If Seanchan can become "reasonable," he can be saved from death and granted lands. However, the true poet "takes his inspiration from the types of great emotion, rather than from personality or realism" (Welsh 52). Seanchan prefers to sacrifice his life rather than his honor. In his claim, he is not individualistic but communal. He is the "guardian" of the arts and poetry, he cannot leave them unguarded. He is not interested in what is "reasonable" but what is spiritual. Rather than renouncing the poet's right to stand in the king's court, he prefers an honorable death. Brian, loyal servant of Seanchan, cannot stand the egoistic talk of the Mayor:

Brian: Get away and leave the place to me, for your sack's empty.

Mayor: Is it get away? Is that the way I am to be spoken to?

Am I not mayor? Am I not in authority? Am I not in

The King's place? Answer me that.

Brian: Then show the people what a king is like, root up

Old customs, old habits, old rights. (594)

Brian wittingly answers the Mayor, reproaching his unjust deeds. The Mayor was one of the people in the King's council who pervaded the King to bid Seanchan from his chair. In continuous praise of the Mayor to the King, Brian and the cripples reveal his dishonor, cursing him. The scene reveals that in his arrogance, the King is also dooming himself:

Mayor: he might, if he'd a mind to it,

Be digging out our tongues,

Or dragging out our hair,

[…….]

But for his kindness and softness that is in him

First cripple: The curse of the poor be upon him

The curse of the widows be upon him

[…….]

Until he be as rotten as an old mushroom!

Second Cripple: The curse of the wrinkles be upon him

[…….]

Brian: and nobody will sing for him.

And nobody will hunt for him.

And nobody will fish for him.

And nobody will pray for him.

But ever and always curse him and abuse him. (584)

The King sends several people to Seanchan: the Chamberlain, Monk, Soldier, two Princesses, two girls, and his fiancée Fedelm. None convinces Seanchan to eat. Seanchan rebukes them in his witty dialogues. The Chamberlain claims that he reads poetry for the King, so he honors the arts, but Seanchan humiliates him: If you are a poet,/ cry out that King's money would not buy." Monk proves to be a conformist, whose hand perches on the King's hand. He is far from being a religious guide to the King but a comfort: "a King/ is often weary, and needs a God/ to be a comfort to him." On the other hand, the Soldier, the military power of the kingdom, is easily distracted with the presence of the girls. He does not care about arts or ancient customs. He is only interested in his sword and pleasure from women: "I will not interfere, and if he starve/ for being obstinate and stiff in the neck,/ 'this but good riddance." When all his men fail, King decides to send his beautiful daughters to Seanchan, bribing him with worldly pleasures: "My father bid us say/ that, though he cannot have you at his table,/ You may ask any other thing you like /and he will give it to you. We carry you/ with our own hands a dish and cup of wine." Seanchan belittles them and rejects their proposal: "A little while before your birth / I saw your mother sitting by the road / in a high chair; and when a leper passed/ she pointed him the way into town/ I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your hands/ I will find out if they were contaminated" (590).

Rejecting all corrupted souls from his presence, Seanchan is left with his disciple and fiancée through the end. They attempt to convince Seanchan to eat, but seeing his seriousness, they now support him in his claim. Even the King comes, in the last scene, to frighten Seanchan with killing his pupils, but Seanchan dies in honor. He welcomes death with open arms.

Yeats's notes on the play reveals that he "took the plot from a Middle Irish story about the demands of the poets at the court of King Guaire, but twisted it about and revised its moral that the poet might have the best of it" *(*quoted in Suess, 184). The sources he utilized for the play is Professor Owen's *The Proceedings of the Great Bardic Institution* (1860), Lady Wilde's *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* (1887), and Edwin Ellis's *Sancan the Bard* (1895). However, the earliest source that Yeats utilized in his writing of the play is Owen's translation of proceedings. In this book, both Seanchan and King Guaire are present, though with in more different characters. Seanchan, the aged poet, was elected as chief bard of Connacht, after poet Dalian. King Guaire gives a feast to honor him. At a feast that continued for three days and three nights Seanchan perceived the excessive consumption of food and drink. Then he "became very churlish, and said, that he would not taste of food or drink until the nobles of Connaught were dismissed from the mansion." The guests left but Seanchan continued his fasting for three days and three nights without food or drink. Even though King Guaire sent food, he rejected it. Later, he decided to eat an egg but sees that mice had eaten it. In an anger, he satirized the mice with a poem and ten mice fell dead immediately. Then Seanchan saw the tribe of the cats wanted to satirize their chief, "lord and Brehon, namely, Irusan, son of Arusan" for he was the one responsible for the mice. Mighty Irsuan resented Seanchan's satire and captured him with his tribe. At the end of the story, Irusan gives Seanchan back to the court of King Guaire. When Lady Wilde narrated the story of Seanchan in *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland,* she was more focused on the incident of Seanchan and the Cat King. She told the story under the title, "Seanchan the bard and the King of Cats." On the other hand, Ellis's book pictured Seanchan and King Guaire closer to Yeats's

characterization. As Declan Kielly notes, Yeats learned about the story first from Owen's version and then changed the characterization with Ellis's version.

Soyinka and Myth

The rich source of Yoruba mythology has always been an inspiration to Soyinka. He remarkably formulated the connections between Yoruba mythology and religion and infused it into his writings. Though his plays are in English and borrow several aspects from Western drama, his content is authentically African. In this fusion of European and African theater, Soyinka not only achieved a prominent role in African theatre, but also placed his native mythology as an equal counterpart to European literature. In his quest for awakening cultural nationalism, he extensively borrowed from Yoruba folklore. As Irele affirms, it is this deep-rooted culture that "gives a special character" to Soyinka's writings as well as to the general "literary creation in Africa today" (4). In *Horseman*, Soyinka employs many aspects of the Yoruba world-view. Primarily, indigenous context of the play is derived from Yoruba customs. The horseman, the best friend and guardian of the King of Oyo, has to commit ritual suicide to provide King's transition to the world of the dead. Even though Elesin's inner drive is not strong enough to perpetuate the tradition, the community believes he will complete the ritual act, because for them death is simpler than to our understanding. In the cyclical nature of Yoruba time, the community believes that past, present, and future is intertwined. This union is represented in three realms of existence: the world of the dead, the world of the living, and the world of the unborn. The only transition among these worlds is provided in "the fourth stage," the chthonic realm of being. In this existential paradigm, the dead king Alaafin represents the world of the ancestors. Elesin's young bride, with the seed of a baby, represents the world of the unborn. The world of the living is filled with Iyolaja, the Praise Singer, and others. Elesin, on the other hand, is the only person chosen for the transitions and connections of these worlds. He is in the fourth stage, in the metaphysical rite of passage. His failure signifies the distortion of unity among the realms and a consequent collapse of the peace and continuity of society. On the other hand, egungun masks, which are perceived as costume by Jane and Simon

Pilkings, represent the deceased ancestors. Through egungun masks that are worn by specially selected performers, dead-cults visit their families and speak to them. In the play, Soyinka defamilarizes the masks in the hands of the colonial officer who lacks the understanding of native customs and traditions. Also, through the use of proverbs, tales, songs, and music, Soyinka "deliberately manipulates" African oral tradition, which gives the play a unique flavor (Omigbule 97).[1] However, since the analysis of each element requires a much longer discussion that will deflect us from the main purpose of this thesis, my main discussion here will be mainly centered on Yoruba mythology.

It is primarily in *Myth, Literature, and The African World*, his early collection of essays, and in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* that Soyinka constructs a theoretical framework for African theatre. The understanding of Yoruba mythology and world views is crucial in understanding the complex structure of *Death and the King's Horseman*. Without an insight into Yoruba mythology and culture, as Ojaide assures from his experiences in teaching the play, the meaning of the play is ambiguous for many readers, because of its connection to the cosmic structure of the Yoruba and mythopoetic language of the characters ("Death and The King's Horseman in Classroom"). The audience who is not familiar with the Yoruba worldview and proverbial language is confronted with considerable problems because mythopoetic structure is linked mainly to mythology and tradition.

Soyinka sees African tragedy in parallel with Greek antiquity, "where man did, like the African, exist in cosmic totality" (Myth, 3). Like Nietzschean Dionysus, Ogun is the representation of dynamic forces that are both creative and destructive. Among the three main deities[2] of Ogun, Obatala, and Sango, Ogun is the muse for

[1] For a more detailed discussion on the use of proverbs, see Omigbule's "Proverbs in Wole Soyinka's Construction of Paradox in *The Lion and The Jewel* and *Death and The King's Horseman*."

[2] The three main deities are counted because of Soyinka's adherence to them. Otherwise there are hundreds of deities in Yorubaland, some are local while some others are more general. Wiiliam Broen's article on Yoruba gods is a very enlightening source. In contrast to the cultural bias of the West against Africans that they have no concept of God or religion, Brown focuses on Yoruba, Gikuyu, and Zulu and their understating of God in his article. According to Brown, Olodumare is the most commonly used name for God among the Yorubas. He is believed to be "holy," "wise," "self-existent," "self-born," "omnipresent," and "owner/controller of life". The lesser gods "are considered to be the spiritual ministers or vicars of Olodumare." The earthly king, known as oni among the Yoruba, is thought to be similar to god Olodumare, since he is also an almighty ruler and helped by various vicars.

Soyinka. Mostly known as the god of iron, metalcraft, hunting, and warfare, Ogun's realm of influence has expanded to include several new elements that include iron and metal. As Sandra Barnes notes, Ogun conventionally represents two images. "The one is terrifying specter: a violent warrior, fully armed and laden with frightening charms and medicines to kill his foes. The other is society's ideal male: a leader known for his sexual prowess, who nurtures, protects and relentlessly pursues truth, equity, justice" (2). Though Ogun is mostly known for these two forms, he is believed to have many faces by his devotees.[1] He is the master of the "chthonic realm, a storehouse for creative and destructive essences," for he is the one to dare and to bridge the world of the dead and the world of the living. As Bolaji Idowu narrates:

> When the earth had been founded and its furniture arranged, Ogun and a number of other deities set out to possess the earth and take up their allotted offices. But they come to al-halt at a place of "no-road." Orisa-nla tried to cut through, but his machete bent because it was of lead. Of all the divinities, it was Ogun who possessed the implement which was adequate for the task. (85)

Ogun not only created the path to connect the world of the livings, he also provided the encounters of the other deities with the world. In Soyinka's words, he "not only dared to look into the transitional essence but triumphantly bridged it" (Art 36). When Ogun entered the human community, he was "confined to solitary existence in the palace of Ori-Oke" because of his savage sports of hunting (Katrak 49). Changing his frightening appearance, he was accepted by the town of Ire as their King. When a war came upon us, Ogun both killed his enemies and his friends alike, as he was drunk from palm-wine. Thus, he retreated back to his castle, as the only one to survive, and he never returned to the world of the living. Narrating the story, Soyinka explains that Ogun bears both creative and destructive forces in himself, first finding the bridge then killing friend and foe alike. Therefore, he is the ultimate "darer," the embodiment of hubris and will:

[1] Sandra represents the emblem of Ogun in the "Old World" as a snake biting its tail and feeding on itself. Thus he is "an unending repetition of destruction in order to regenerate" (18).

> Ogun is embodiment of Will, and the Will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man. The only one who has himself undergone the experience of disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and whose psychic resources laid under stress by the forces most inimical to individual assertion, only he can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions. The resulting sensibility is also the sensibility of the artist, and he is a profound artist only to the degree he comprehends and expresses this principle of destruction and re-creation. (Art 32-33)

It is Ogun who connects rites of passage. He is a symbolic representation of the "numinous area of transition." For Soyinka, Ogun is the "first actor, first suffering deity, first creative energy, the first challenger and the first conqueror of transition" (Art 27-40).

Having successfully devised a theory of Yoruba tragedy especially in "Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy" in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*, he presents that African "drama is all essence: captivity, suffering, and redemption." Soyinka sees the stage as a "ritual arena of confrontation." As Richards explains, ritual drama is a "communal experience undertaken by the individual on behalf of the community" (271). Tragedy for Soyinka is a representative of what he names the "chthonic realm, a storehouse for creative and destructive essences." Therefore it requires a challenger, an Ogunian conqueror, to provide the metaphysical amalgamation for the well-being of the community. The stage then becomes "the ritual arena of confrontation" for the hero.

Yoruba people believe in a cyclic concept of time. Past, present and future is woven together in the Yoruba worldview, and are represented as the world of the dead, the world of the living and the world of the unborn. Another area of existence that provides transition among these realms is the "fourth stage." Soyinka says that this existential gulf needs to be "constantly diminished by the sacrifices" to preserve the cosmic totality of the universe (*Art* 29). In contrast to the European worldview, the African concept of god is interdependent with the world, and they create a cosmic totality together. Gods need to be reunited with men, to become more complete and to experience the human in themselves, as men need to be unified with gods to feel

the divine in themselves. In other words, the world of the living and the ancestors are not separate realms, but are a unity. Likewise, the world of the unborn is also connected with the world of the living. When a baby is born, he may turn back to his realms- by dying if he is not pleased with his family, yet as an *abiku* he can repetitively visit his mother to haunt. Thus, death is not the end of life for Yoruba people; as Lawal observes, "it is merely a dematerialization of the vital breath and soul" and "a transformation from earthly to spiritual existence" (51). They can come back to the world of the living. Babatunde Lawal reveals the original idea of this tradition:

> According to Yoruba anthology, when Supreme Being, Olodumare, decided to create man, he asked one of the gods, Obatala, to mould man's physical body from clay. And after Obatala created the image, Olodumare breathed life into it, so that the man is a sort of a sculpture animated by the breath of Olodumare. The sculpture remains alive as long as the vital breath (soul) dwells in it. Withdrawal of soul results in death and physical body decomposes into clay which it was originally. (51-52)

For this reason, death is associated with masks, the sculptures of clay in Yoruba culture. The visible surface is temporary but the soul, as a part of Olodumare's breath, will never perish. Especially a King is accepted as immortal. Lawal asserts that a King can only "change position, it is forbidden to say that he is dead" (56). Once the burial ceremony is conducted properly, the deceased ancestors can visit earth and speak to his people through an egungun[1] mask, mostly made by their children. Egungun mask represents the "Living Dead" in the Yoruba community (Lawal 57). It is through the egungun masks that Ara Orun- visitor spirit from heavens- arrives on earth in a physical form to meet his living family. Thus, the mask, which made men conquer death, evolved into the egungun cult. According to

[1] Babatunde Lawal describes emergence of egungun and its legend in his interesting argument: According to the legend, when death and its followers invaded the city of Ife and killed the people cruelly, those who remained went to the Oni the king of the time and other gods to ask for help. None but Amaiyegun promised to save them. He brought colorful cloths and sewed them into an egungun costume, sacrificing animals in the process. Wearing the costume of egungun, he waited with his people behind the tees for the death to come, and when it came, Amaiyegun came out to fight them. Death and his followers fled in terror and never came back to Ife again (50-51). For the full discussion of death and the egungun cult, see Lawal's article.

Joel Adedeji's narration in "The Origin and Form of the Yoruba Masque Theatre," the first accounts of the Yoruba masque theatre are contained in the journals of Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander, "who stayed at the capital of Kingdom of Oyo as guests of Alafin in 1826 and had the pleasure of watching a mask-theatre performance -even though they classified it as pantomime" (255). It is believed that ancestor-worship which is called baba (father) and egungun later (masquerade) started during the reign of Sango, probably around the fourteenth century. After the death of his beloved father Oranyan, the founder and ruler of Oyo Kingdom, Sango wanted to secure his memory and with a special ceremony he "brought the reincarnated spirit of his father to the outskirts of Oyo" and placed an old woman to worship his spirit. She was supposed to "bring him out as masquerade during an evocation ceremony." Adedeji narrates that in years "this ceremony of bringing the spirit of the deceased head of the lineage to the homestead became formalized as permanent feature of Yoruba funeral ceremony," and later turned into masque theatre.[1] For Adedeji, the history of Yoruba masque theatre is inseparable from the history of Oyo Kingdom and the growth of socio-political life there. He cannot be denied, because prosperous times of King Abiodun saw the first boost of professional theatre in the eighteenth century; but with the emergence of the slave trade, forthcoming invasions, and the replacement of settlements further development of egungun theatre was prevented[2] (253-57).

David Richards explains that "performers of egungun are always men," like Elesin Oba "hidden under layers of clothing, sometimes carrying whips, and speaking in disguised voices since they are Ara Orun, messengers from heavens." The performers are acknowledged as visiting spirits of dead ancestors, "reincarnated

[1] The root elements of the theatre are the mask, the chant, and the dance; but a performance is the sum total of these and the unified product of gesture and costume. *Death and the King's Horseman* bears all three elements inside, not as a unified whole, but as strategies of dramaturgy in several various scenes.

[2] With the coming of foreign powers to the land of the Oyo, which Adedeji calls "corroding influence of external forces," theatrical activities were affected badly: Muslim powers prohibited theatre, and for the Christian missionaries to come later egungun ceremony was "intolerable." Adedeji recounts this situation as follows: both Christian converts and the growing élite class in the Yoruba society maintained an attitude of indifference to the traditional theatre and looked down on this kind of amusement. Instead, they developed new forms of entertainment and these spread out with increasing Christian European civilization and education." The missionaries showed a European way of entertainment, which brought a disintegrating blow against the traditional theatre (258).

in the form of the masqueraders" (270). Richards assures their place in the Yoruba community:

> In social crises they are called on to carry away ills, execute criminals, and expel dangerous individuals. In less turbulent times they entertain the village. In the annual masquerades, the mask that covers the entire body is worn by selected men of the community, and at other times it is kept in secrecy. (271)

Thus, egungun festivals become both a celebration of death and rejoicing for the return of ancestors. In act two and four mythical imagery of egungun is presented controversially in the play: egungun costumes are worn by the colonial administrator and his wife. A serious masquerade cloth that refers to dead ancestors who can control human destinies on earth, means nothing to them. Through the egungun mask, Derek Wright notes, Yoruba people "prevent petrification that follows from the preservation of dead things and ensure[s] a continuous flux of self-renewal" (12). However, for Pilkings it is a mere 'fancy' costume, impressive enough to catch the interest of the visiting Prince. Soyinka gives a distorted image of egungun in the colonial context of the play. He defamilarizes the egungun mask, reflecting it as a costume for the Pilkings family to wear at the ball. In the hands of colonial administrators, the proper image of egungun is distorted and alienated from its original context.

Death, as the title itself indicates, is the protagonist of *Death and The King's Horseman*. Beyond Elesin and Olunde's sacrifice, it is intertwined in people's lives in its mythic resonance. As Soyinka highlights in the Author's Note, "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 dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transition," which could be best realized "through an evocation of music from the abyss of transition." The king has died thirty days ago, and as the audience we are summoned to witness the ritual ceremony of his burial, which Elesin *needs* to attend with a self-sacrifice. Throughout the acts, the audience witnesses his inner struggle on the idea of death, which makes the whole play as Maduakador notes, a ritual performance (269). Elesin has to commit ritual suicide to escort Alaafin, waiting in the chthonic realm, to the

realm of the ancestors. The ritual is pivotal in Yoruba worldview, because "not until all the funeral rites have been performed will the soul of the deceased be able to proceed to heaven." Also, any possible failure to complete all the burial rites will delay his transition, and the dead will "wander about earth, constituting a menace to the living" (Lawal 54).

The opening of the scene is at the market place, which has a great significance in Yoruba life. As the main center of business and social-cultural activities, it is also the place to conduct ritual ceremonies. Greeting the market traders, Elesin rushes toward the market, his favorite place. Elesin's ritual suicide is imperative, as an "Ogunian paradigm of transition" (Wright 12). He has to bridge the two worlds in order, to pass through "the numinous area of transition." This daring act, however, requires a strong will because "to dare transition is the ultimate test of human spirit." Soyinka confirms that it is an act of hubris to die: "the whirlpool of transition requires both hubristic complements as catalyst to its continuous regeneration" (Art 27-40). Praise- Singer, faithful company of Elesin in his difficult task, observes that Elesin lacks such a powerful will. Worried about Elesin's fondness for women, the Praise-Singer warns him about the importance of ritual, and reminds him of the possible dangers if he fails:

> Elesin: This night I'll lay my head upon their lap and go to sleep […] But the smell of their flesh, their sweat, the smell of indigo on their cloth, this is the last air I wish to breathe as I go to meet my great forebears.
>
> Praise-Singer: In their time the world was never tilted from its groove, it shall not be yours.
>
> Elesin: The gods have said no. (8)

When he is intrigued from the continuous implications of his duty by Iyaloja and the Praise-Singer, two loyal representatives of the King's authority, Elesin responds with the recital of the not-I bird poem. The not-I bird, which is a symbol of death, visits various people to call them to death. Each persona from the society enters into his tale, all dominated with the fear of death. With the chant of the not-I bird, Elesin builds "a vivid description of the traditional Yoruba polis," a world of farmers, priests, hunters, gods, and animals (Richards 267). Like the Alejanrino masquerade,

his poem includes the social, natural, and metaphysical worlds of the Yoruba. Among all of them Elesin boasts that he is the only one who welcomes death fearlessly:

> Elesin: Ah! Companions of this living world
>
> What a thing is, that even those
>
> We call immortal
>
> Should fear to die.
>
> Iyaloja: But you, husband of multitudes?
>
> Elesin: I, when that not-I bird perched
>
> Upon my roof, bade im seek his nest again.
>
> Safe, without care or fear. I unrolled
>
> My welcome mat for him to see.
>
> [……..…….]
>
> My reign is loosened.
>
> I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes
>
> Watch me dance along the narrow path
>
> Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.
>
> My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside. (12-13)

Elesin guarantees his commitment to the required cause, though Iyaloja fears the opposite. When Elesin wants to marry a new bride, she warns him not be tricked by the lust of women. As a man on the day of ritual ceremony, he is supposed to focus on his duty and commit ritual suicide at the appointed time and place. The gulf of transition that "must be constantly diminished by sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf," awaits him. (Art 29). His death is a simple necessity to the community as Joseph, one of the converted natives, affirms: he "will not kill anybody and no one will kill him. He will simply die" (27) Elesin's death is simple for the Yoruba community because "community in this context makes no distinction between the dead, the living and the unborn" (Ralph-Bowman 82). His death is not an end, but a journey to a different

realm. Elesin's duty is the simple reenactment of the contiguous relationship of these three realms.

When the time comes for Elesin to attend Alaafin, he slowly dances into death, in the rhythm of drums. In a mode of trance he is dancing in solemn and regal motions among the market women, who also join him in his dance. The doors of transition are opened for him. Elesin now feels the presence of Alaafin:

> Praise-Singer: Elesin, Alaafin, can you hear my voice?
>
> Elesin: Faintly, my friend, faintly.
>
> Praise-Singer: Elesin, Alaafin, can you hear my call?
>
> Elesin: Faintly, my king, faintly. (44)

Elesin's soul is now merged with Alaafin, a necessary union for the ritual ceremony. Like an egungun masquerader, but in absence of a mask, Elesin talks with the dead King, Alaafin. The Praise-Singer, who starts as himself, is transformed to the voice of King. This dialogue of spirits is a reflection of egungun. As David Richards emphasizes, "in the rituals of the dead the word escapes from human identities as language becomes the possession of the ancestors" (269). Thus, the visiting spirit of the King speaks in the ritual. Nevertheless, Elesin cannot find enough *will*, or *hubris* to die, being defeated by his "basic human instinct for survival" (Katrak 89). He hesitates in his mission because of his "earth-held limbs" (*Horseman* 65). The presence of the colonial administration to prevent the ritual, interrupt him, and is a "catalytic incident." Elesin is sent to prison, cursed by his community for the rest of his life; sits in prison with shame, horror, and regret. He is conscious of the results of his failure:

> Iyolaja: He knows the meaning of a king's passage, he was not born yesterday. He knows the peril to the race when our dead father, who goes as intermediary, waits and waits and knows he is betrayed. He knows it will not stay for laggards who drag their feet in dung and vomit, whose lips are reeking of the left-overs of lesser men. He knows he has condemned our King to wander in the void of evil with beings who are enemies of life. (Horseman 78)

The King, waiting in the void in despair, will come and curse the community. The Yoruba world is "wrenched from its true course, […] smashed on the boulders of the great void" (*Horseman* 8-9). Iyaloja, who fulfilled every request of Elesin, for it is "only the curses of the departed are to be feared," now calls him to account, but Elesin has no more explanations. Blaming the white man for intrusion, he expects understanding. However, he is doomed for his very nature and cannot be forgiven. His son Olunde has already stepped forward to save his family name and community.

In conclusion, there are differences and similarities in the cultural projects of Yeats and Soyinka. Yeats hoped his drama would revitalize Irish myth and in this way, foster cultural nationalism. Celtic mythology and Irish motifs were a rich source for him. As the co-founder of the Irish Dramatic Movement, Yeats believed and prompted that the cultural unity of his nation would be recreated through dramatization of Irish myths and legends, and through the revival of racial memory. The Irish past, full of Kings, Queens, fairies, and heroes, are the evidence of the glory of his race at a time when the English did not exist. The rediscovery of such a past, one that is free from all humiliations, restrictions and boundaries, is a way of returning Irish people to their national pride. His plays were English in language, like Soyinka's, but they belonged to the native homeland in content and in spirit.

Like Yeats, Soyinka attempted to revive his cultural roots. He worked on pre-colonial mythology and traditions of Yoruba culture. He successfully theorized his ideas on African theatre mainly in "the Fourth Stage" and created grounds for African theatre that he describes with his patron god Ogun. In *Death and The King's Horseman*, Soyinka utilizes his theories of drama and gives a picture of Yoruba culture, though in decline. In his use of native mythology, Soyinka was not a romantic like Yeats. He described Yoruba culture in an objective manner.

CHAPTER 5
TRAGEDY AND SYNCRETISM

Zeus, whose will has marked for man the sole way where wisdom lies,
ordered one eternal plan: Man must suffer to be wise.
Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*.

In his recent monumental book *Decolonizing The Stage*, Christopher Balme lays out the framework to the theatrical responses against imperialism, and offers a number of formal strategies for the decolonization of the stage, based on the postcolonial theoretical approach. Deriving the term "syncretism" from comparative religion, Balme adapts it to theatre studies in an attempt to demonstrate a methodology for the analysis of theatrical works that utilize both European and indigenous theatrical structures to form a creative work of art. Even though this combination of local dynamics with Western techniques has been recognized recently by a few postcolonial critics, Balme emerges as the first scholar to come up with the term and to describe it as a methodology. He propounds the term "theatrical syncretism" for the condition of culturally heterogeneous performances that create an amalgamation of Western and indigenous theatrical forms. It is crucial for his concept of syncretic theatre to include a fusion of different performance styles and the incorporation of ritual and mythic elements "to find a new way of presenting in theatrical terms a postcolonial society in the process of change" (13).

The term syncretic theatre was proposed by Balme, and implies the fusion of European traditions of theatre with the elements of local culture and mythology in the content, which is applicable to both Yeats's *King's Threshold* and Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman*. Both utilize Aristotle's and Nietzsche's ideas on tragedy for the construction of their plays, and both borrow from national mythology and tradition for the evolution of plot and characters. This fusion is an important means for postcolonial writers including Yeats and Soyinka as it proposes not only to revitalize their own culture and traditions through theatre, but also to stand against the misconceptions about their society. Western cultural imperialism was influential

on theatre as well as in any other institutions of colonized countries, which gave birth to theatrical formations imitating realistic, logocentric and dialogue-based Western theatre with a scorn of local theatrical traditions. But with the acceleration of decolonization in the twentieth century, a need for a more authentic theatre emerged. Against the hegemonic aesthetics of normative Western theatrical concepts, in the postcolonial period there was a quest for an authentic theatre that reflected the consciousness of the society, and their cultural heritage and mythology.

Postcolonial theatre reflects "a space for the expression of linguistic resistance to colonialism and imperialism" by re-examining the effect of the colonial legacy and Western essentialism on the colonized (Peyma 49). It achieves this primary function with the representation of an alternative perspective against the dominant Eurocentric accounts. Therefore, postcolonial theatre is syncretic in that it merges "different cultures into a form that aims to retain cultural integrity of the specific materials used while forging new texts and theatre practices" (Gilbert and Tompkins 36). Essentialist accounts of colonialism is challenged with the glorification of ancient heritage and tradition. Deconstruction of the colonial meta-narrative facilitates the recognition of the colonized on equal terms, not at a secondary place after European. This process of deconstruction is a long and complex path that requires rethinking written history, cultural narratives, and established identities. More importantly, it requires an open mind with a well-supported intellectual background that dares to dismantle and build up again. Both Yeats and Soyinka had this courage. They used the native mythology and customs of their countries to represent an objective picture of the cultural identity.

Postcolonial drama is mostly centered on myth and ritual and relies on non-verbal communication devices for representation and mise-en-scène. The theatrical use of dance, music, and song help the writer not only to dismantle conventional theatrical forms but also to reflect the authenticity and traditions of the culture. In postcolonial theatre these non-dialogic means of theatre have been widely used by playwrights like Ola Rotimi, J.P. Clark, Femi Osafisan, and Soyinka. Non-verbal actions of dance, music, and costume gain importance in postcolonial drama, reflecting the authenticity of the culture. Dance "as a culturally coded activity"

(Gilbert and Tompkins 239) makes the audience concentrate on the performing body, and its significance undertakes the important mission of non-verbal communication and representation. Playwrights, especially in African theatre, use not only conventional English but also pidgin and creole. It has been a common pattern in postcolonial literature that writers use the subjects of rediscovery of national identity and reaffirmation of cultural values, especially through ancient classics. Playwrights from Africa usually rewrite classical works to reverse the colonial bias and to voice their political views.

Yeats and Soyinka, making their plays in the form of Greek tragedy not only oppose Eurocentric possession and the mystification of the Ancient Greek heritage by claiming it as a universal value rather than a golden crown to boast of, and they also oppose the dichotomy of "West and the rest" to use Said's expression.

Balme writes in the Introduction of *Decolonizing the Stage* that explicit boundaries between the West and the colonized countries resulted in "hierarchization" of genres with a privileging of the Western canon and a disdain for the "polyphonic potential" of local forms, which were evident in early examples of colonial drama. Therefore he saw theatrical syncretism, "based on mutual respect and reciprocal exchange of values," as a response "against this Western tendency to "homogenize, to exclude, to strive for a state of "purity." He describes the need for a syncretic theatre:

> In the conceptual world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries clear cultural boundaries were essential for cementing identity. Furthermore they expressed notions of difference and even superiority vis-à-vis other nations and cultures. In this world-view, which encapsulates the essence of colonialism in both its paternalistic and aggressive, exploitative manifestations, any suggestion of mingling and interchange was synonymous with dilution, deracination, and breakdown. Today, however, we find even in Western discourse a tendency to reassess syncretism as an incentive and creative process. (8)

Now with syncretism, theatre reflected their own culture and mythology, including dance and music that were seen as better commentators in the theatre than

language. The important elements were ritualization, strategies of language use, the use of the actor's body, masking, dance, and music, and experiments with dramatic space that Balme discusses in separate chapters.

Both tragedy and the perception of tragic hero has undergone a slow evolution in time, a consistent journey from Aristotle's first definition until the current day. Even though Aristotle's *Poetics* became the authoritative text on the criticism of tragedy, his ideal structure of tragedy was slightly questioned even by his contemporary Euripides, who ignored peripeteia and anagnorisis, and revealed violence on stage like in *Bacchae*. First revolutionary progress was implemented in the Elizabethan age by Shakespeare, who not only rejected peripeteia but also denied the three Aristotelian unities, and involved subplots to the main storyline, like in *Romeo and Juliet*. When we come to the nineteenth century, Nietzsche rejected the Aristotelian hero who is unconscious of his tragic deeds but proposed in return the Superman, the hero who can face the conflict between his inner drive and the reality, and who embraces the pain and suffering of his existence. Nietzsche's concept of tragedy as emerging from the conflicting experience of the Dionysian and the Apollonian profoundly shifted the idea of the theatre in the nineteenth century and inspired many playwrights, including, in our case, Yeats and Soyinka.

However, it is not my intention here to give a timeline of the evolution of tragedy, but to depict a concise picture in relation to my main discussion on the selected works of Yeats and Soyinka. Nietzsche's ideas on tragedy are equally important with the idea of Aristotle in my discussion of tragic structure in Yeats and Soyinka's plays since both authors studied Greek tragedy and were affected very much by the ideas of Nietzsche. Each writer took the idea of Greek tragedy and applied it to his own cultural situation of the ruin colonial exploitation made of their own cultural mythology. Yeats turned his play into a tragedy after several years of editing although he had earlier created as a comedy following the advice of Lady Gregory. The events of the 1916 uprising, and the successive Independence and Civil War led him to question the fate of his country as well as his relationship as a Poet, like Seanchan, to the needs of his community. Yeats then decided to give it a tragic ending, a structure that was suited better to his desires. Soyinka, on the other hand,

takes the structure of Greek tragedy and adapts it to the Yoruba context of myth and ritual sacrifice.

What is tragedy?

Semantically tragedy is derived from the Greek word *tragôidia,* (*tragos*) meaning a goat and (*oidos*) meaning song. It sounds like "a goat song" but critics do not have a certain information about its etymological background. According to Aristotle's accounts in the *Poetics*, tragedy originated from the authors of dithyramb that were hymns, or choral songs in honor of the wine god Dionysus in the spring festivals, and in time these dithyramb hymns turned into theatrical performances. In respect to this, Greek plays were performed in the contest at Athens called the Great Dionysia or City Dionysia, as a part of the festival in honor of the god Dionysus. Each of three tragedians of the contest were granted the sponsorship to produce plays in the festival. Playwrights of the ancient theatre derived their content form Greek mythology and their plays were presented as a part of the ritual celebration for the god Dionysus. These ritual practices that dominated religion in ancient Greek, functioned as intermediary between gods and humans. For this purpose, sacrifice was also involved in rituals. The festivals in the City Dionysia were opened with the sacrificial offerings in honor of god Dionysus. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz says that sacrifice and dedication was significant in Greek culture to establish proper relations and to communicate with the gods. (67-68) Therefore, it can be said that tragedy is "fittingly part of the god's festival" (Rabinowitz, 71-96).

As the first literary critic, Aristotle laid the foundations for ideal tragedy and the tragic hero in his *Poetics,* and he gives a thorough framework for the discussion. According to Aristotle, tragedy is "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of those emotions" (*Poetics*, VI). In Aristotle's understanding of ideal tragedy, plot and character are successively the most important elements of tragedy out of the six constitutive parts including plot, character, theme, language, music, and spectacle.

Plot, as the first principle, is "the soul of tragedy," which is achieved by unity of time, place, and action. It has to be a "serious" matter, mostly extracted from mythology or the nobility and "of certain magnitude," with a "complete" and coherent structure in order to serve the purposes of both entertainment and instruction to the audience. According to Aristotle, plot is supposed to be "a beautiful whole," developing in a cause-and-effect chain, with a good "beginning, a middle, and an end." It is necessary for a well-structured tragedy to occur "within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that," which gives us unity of time. Considering the Athenian stage, unity of action indicates that all the plot must evolve on the stage in a linear time flow: there is no revealing of past or future but the present. Unity of action is achieved with the coherent chain of events, which gives us plot, which Aristotle gives weight in his discussion (*Poetics*, Part IIV).

Ideal characterization of the tragic hero must be complex and well-structured, and he must be from the nobility. But the hero is not the "exemplary human being," he must be "impressive but flawed" in order to give the audience the pleasure of learning from the mistakes (Ahrensdorf 169). His language must be poetic, embellished in "rhythm and harmony" with good diction. As Aristotle puts it in his argument, the tragic hero is far from extreme characterization: he is "a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty" (*Poetics* Part XIII). Therefore, tragedy must depict the downfall of a noble hero whose misfortune usually through the combination of hubris and fate, or the will of the gods. However; it cannot be a virtuous man passing from happiness to misery, a bad man passing from misery to happiness, or the downfall of a wicked man, because none of them could bring catharsis in the audience through pity and fear, nor could it inspire morality. From his complex character, Aristotle highlights the nobility of the hero and makes it the primary condition: "He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous- a personage like Oedipus." The hero of tragedy takes life and his own existence seriously and seeks valuable goals because he is more than an ordinary man. His decisions can change the fate of others. This definition brings us to the term hamartia, which is usually interpreted as a "tragic flaw." However; in *Poetics* the

flaw does not stem from the character of the protagonist but it is more likely a misjudgment shaped around the fate of the hero, and revealed as an incident within the play for the purposes of peripeteia (reversal of situation) and anagnorisis (recognition). The Oedipus of Sophocles mistakenly kills his father on the way to Thebes and marries his own mother, but he only realizes at in the end. His hamartia does not originates from a flaw or depravity in his character but from a failure to recognize his blood relatives. However, he pays for his ignorance with self-mutilation and exile when anagnorisis occurs. Peripeteia happens when the protagonist causes a situation in opposition to his intention at the beginning, and anagnorisis represents "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune." For Aristotle, peripeteia and anagnorisis are essential parts for a complex tragedy, but it is also possible to make simpler plot without them (*Poetics*, Part XI).

After the revelation of plot and reversal of action, a "scene of suffering" is presented on stage, which can be death, agony, or bodily wounds. The tragic hero has to face serious consequences depending on his critical decision of hamartia, but it does not have to be death necessarily. The punishment can be imposed on the hero in different ways. In *Oedipus the King*, the hero Oedipus does not die but blinds himself and is sent into exile. In terms of this misunderstanding that every tragedy must end with death, Sorkin Rabinowitz comments that the change in the fate of the protagonist can turn in either directions: from bad to good, or from good to bad. Though Aristotle does not require the fall of the protagonist, he prefers it to bring catharsis (cleansing and relief), by arousing pity and fear in the audience for the purpose of teaching moral values. For this purpose, violence is fit into the sequence of events in a Greek tragedy, but it is often affirmed that it is not enacted on stage since it could shock the audience. Generally, violence takes place off stage and the audience is informed about the incident through a messenger. On the other hand, actors used masks as a convention to reveal character. All the actors who were supposed to be men, wore masks that helped them to emphasize the prototypical character. Sorkin Rabinowitz notes that the masks were representations of typology of characters and they were an important part of formalism in the ancient theatre. The

masks did not have exaggerated features but the mouth was made wide open, even "visible behind the mask," to help the audience hear the speech (29).

Aristotle's definition of tragedy and the tragic hero established an authority on dramatic structure for a long time. According to Akporji, the Renaissance period was the summit of Aristotelian norms. In the eighteenth century, the *Poetics* was canonized during the neo-classical period. Neo-classicist writers like Sir Philip Sidney (*Apology for Poetry*) echoed the ancient concept of poetry-literature which was conceived to be born of mimesis as the primary educator of human beings. Shakespeare was an exception to his era. He discarded not only peripeteia and anagnorisis but also the Aristotelian unities of time, place and action. In opposition to classical understanding of hamartia, his heroes are not mistaken or in ignorance to commit the tragic flaw, but were conscious individuals who decide their own fate. Othello kills Desdemona not mistakenly but consciously, for the purpose of justice, and Hamlet decides to kill his blood relative Claudius to take revenge. The tragic hero then vacillates between morality and law, between impulse and reality. Hamlet is well aware of the circumstances, in which he is involved, but would Oedipus commit his tragic flaw if he knew the truth about his family?

The perception of tragedy, along with the ideal hero, has evolved and changed faces in literature history. When we come to the nineteenth century, Hegel created a radical turn in the conceptions of tragedy. For him, tragedy becomes "a way of representing the conflicts suffered by Spirit in its descent into the world" (Poole 59). However; the tragic conflict for Hegel was not between right and wrong, which would make a simple melodrama, but between right and right based on the inner drive of the hero and the social institutions, which could bring perfection. Friedrich Nietzsche, who became the leading voice of modern drama, took this idea of conflict one step further and claimed that pain and conflict is the soul of all art as well as Greek tragedy. According to Nietzsche, the theatre was the human instrument for "accessing and understanding the cosmos," as well as for "engaging and interpreting life" (Kornhaber 8). By capturing the dynamic energy of life, tragedy is to reveal order out of chaos to create art. Accordingly, tragedy is supposed to reveal "the deepest and most horrifying truths about ourselves," but achieves it in such a way

that “makes the news not merely bearable, but welcome, enlivening, and even intoxicating” (Ridley 9).

As he famously argues in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy From the Spirit of Music*, tragedy is inextricably born out of constitutive and conflicting principles of Dionysian and Apollonian impulses. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, establishing grounds for the Greek tragedy, Nietzsche gives accounts of its birth “from the spirit of music” and its decadence at the hands of Socratic rationalism and eventually Christianity. On another level, he envisions tragedy as based on the aesthetics of music and myth, through which he pictures Wagner’s music as the link between lost Greek culture and emerging German aesthetics. The spirit of music and myth is established on the double impulse of Apollonian and Dionysian. The Apollonian comes from Apollo, Greek god of sunlight, prophecy, and poetry, while the Dionysian comes from Dionysus, the god of creativity, fertility, wine, and ecstasy. In Nietzsche’s terminology, while Apollo is the god of plastic arts like sculpture, Dionysus is the god of music and visual arts. Thus, while Apollo is the representational outer structure, Dionysus is the non-representational essence. “These two very different drives,” Nietzsche notes, “run in parallel with one another and continually stimulat[e] each other to ever new and more powerful births” (19). It is through their conflicting principles that tragedy as well as the tragic hero is born. His understating of theatre was a fusion of uncontrolled joy and the rigid structure, the real and the appearance, in other terms, the Dionysian impulse and Apollonian form. As Ridley comments, “without Dionysus, the drama would merely sustain and reinforce the illusion of human individuality,” and without Apollo, “the drama would destroy its spectators, at any rate psychologically” (14). Tragedy, in Nietzsche’s view, was the expression of a vital and creative culture.

In opposition to Aristotle’s animosity to extremism of the hero, Nietzsche felt it is the primary duty, the sole justification of his existence, because life required courage to live and to risk. As he clarifies in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in contrast to Socratic rationalism and fake serenity of Euripides’s plays, the tragic hero, exemplified in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, honestly and daringly encounters the world’s chaotic and cruel face. For him, it is the characteristic of the

weak to escape suffering and take shelter in the false serenity of rationalism. The tragic human being does not hide behind reason but "faces the true chaos of the world unblinkingly" (Ahrensdorf 154), however "harmful and dangerous" it is (Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil*, 37). The daring and uncompromising spirit of the tragic hero that he terms a *Superman*[1] is admired, since he attempted to demonstrate his will to take action against fate or the gods, at the expense of pain, even death. This "profound suffering" makes him "noble": "it separates" (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 166). Nietzsche suggests that, through the agony of facing the painful truth about the world and its indifference to man, and more importantly through the "heroic sacrifice of happiness and well-being that such courageous truthfulness entails," the tragic human being affirms his humanity as well as his nobility (Ahrensdorf 155). In this daring act, the Will to Power, a term that Nietzsche borrows from Schopenhauer, is essential since it is the "ultimate force which determines human behavior and cultural forms" (Smith, XXX). Nietzschean hero always bears the Will to face the truth and to undertake his own responsibility. His requirements for nobility and the tragic hero, then, contrast with Aristotelian pity, fear, and catharsis. The true experience of tragedy for Nietzsche is not through pity for the tragic hero or terror for the audience, or painful chaos of the world, but it is "an austerely satisfying feeling of power and pleasure" (Ahrensdorf 155) in the hero's courage to face and embrace "the terror and horror of existence" (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 28). The tragic feeling is achieved not through Aristotelian pity and fear, but through the eternal joy of self-realization, of being the captain of oneself, and of truth about the world that is embraced in pleasure with all its pain and harshness. Thus, the tragic hero is an embracer of truth and pain, as willingly as his own tragic end. The hero, as Superman will be "strong and demand strength," and he will be "his own self-sufficient arbiter" (Warbake 373).

Both Aristotle's and Nietzsche's ideas on tragedy are a prerequisite to the discussion of Yeats and Soyinka and both extensively read and were influenced by Nietzsche's ideas of conflict. Nietzsche's ideas on the birth of tragedy found echoes

[1] For a more detailed discussion of the Nietzschean Superman, see John Warbeke's "Friedrich Nietzsche, Antichrist, Superman, and Pragmatist." And for a discussion on Nietzsche's ideas of tragedy in a nutshell, see Dennis Sweet's "*The Birth of "The Birth of Tragedy*."

in the attempts of Yeats and Soyinka for a rebirth of tragedy, one that is based on the folklore of their indigenous cultures. Like Sophocles and Euripides, Yeats and Soyinka derived a secular poetics from the national mythology and cultural heritage to fuse them with Greek elements of tragedy. This rebirth of Greek tragedy and its fusion with aspirations of cultural nationalism was essential in the formative years of postcolonial literature in their countries. Similar to Nietzsche, Yeats and Soyinka place tragedy a metaphysical framework, between a noble man and his relationship to his universe. Their tragic hero is drawn from the national mythological heritage of Celts and Yorubas, and his destiny is shaped by his nature and his responses to suffering and metaphysical change. The hero is represented, in Nietzsche's words, primarily as a superman or *Ubermensch*, one who has the courage to face and create his own destiny, self-possessed, self-affirming. He is distinguished from other people not only with his "hubristic qualities" but also as "an embracer of all the contraries within himself" (Akporji 62-63).

Syncretism in Yeats's King's Threshold

Restoring the authority, dignity and identity of ancient Ireland, Yeats was inspired by Greek tragedy, for which he studied Aristotle and Nietzsche extensively in the early years of the twentieth century (Moses; Kornhaber; Zwerdling; Nesbitt Oppel). What he found so attractive in Nietzsche was a similar dislike of European modernity, and a common conviction that it might be "resisted by bringing a cultural rebirth of the spirit of ancient tragic drama" (Moses 562). His interest in classical drama shaped his understanding of how a play should be. In opposition to the emerging socialist tendencies in theatre, whose focus was turning to the 'common man,' Yeats's interest was on the ancient theater that he wished to add to the repertory of the Abbey Theatre. Yeats was particularly fond of the theatre of Dionysus, which was once the center of the life of Athens. He wished to create an Irish equivalent of Greek theater that the people would watch the "sacred drama of their own history, with every spectator finding self and neighbor, finding all the world there as we find the sun in the bright spot under the looking glass" (Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 166-67). His powerful interest even led him to readapt

Sophocles's *Oedipus*, the best example of tragedy for Aristotle and Nietzsche, which was repeatedly banned from the English stage by the Lord Chamberlain's office (Serpillo, "Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus").Yeats did not know Greek, so he had to find a good translator for the ideal adaptation. The process of finding the perfect translator and the perfect translation took so much time that the project was forgotten until 1926, when it was finally staged at the Abbey Theatre.

Yeats was also an admirer of Nietzsche and *The Birth of Tragedy* in particular. According to Nesbitt Oppel, Yeats's extensive study of Nietzsche between 1902 and 1904 was decisive in his thought and art, as well as in *The King's Threshold*. In her discussion, she defends that Yeats wrote *Threshold* "during the spring and summer of his initial enthusiasm for Nietzsche": "Yeats wants to establish a "ritual" form of drama — something like Greek tragedy, in which the chorus acted as a link between audience and play, and through its chanting and dancing represented the collective Dionysian spirit of music against which the individual Apollonian conflict could be played out" (144). Nietzsche's concept of opposing but completing forces, Apollonian and Dionysian, was an idea that Yeats took delight in. In a 1903letter, Yeats says, "I have always felt that the soul has two movements primarily: one to transcend forms, and the other to create forms. Nietzsche calls these the Dionysiac and Apollonic respectively (quoted in Smith 109). Smith comments on Yeats's influential reading of Nietzsche that "in a time of great social and political turbulence like that of Yeats's own age, such a simple philosophy seemed to explain a great many contemporary events (110). This duality and the synthesis of opposing forces suits well his intentions of revival of his beloved Celtic past, where the natural and the spiritual co-existed. Yeats's idea for the Irish theatre was a kind of bridge between ancient theatre and Celtic culture, both of which utilized mythology and the supernatural. Classical Athens was the ideal for him, and Greek tragedy stood for excellence in art. Thus, his ideas conflicted with other Abbey playwrights who were influenced by the realism of Ibsen's theatre, and were focused on social issues. But Yeats saw himself as "the guardian of the ancient culture" (Akporji 64). His endeavors to found a "new national culture" based on "a tragic re-presentation" of ancient Celtic heritage of legends and myths provides a successful example of

relating ancient tragedy with the cultural nationalism of his time (Moses 563). For Yeats, such a return to the Celtic heroic past and legends would free and fortify the spirit of Irishman, a dream that could be achieved only through ritual dramas, like that of Cuchulain.

In his attempts to revive national mythology in a structure of Greek tragedy, Yeats published *King's Threshold* in 1904. In a letter to his actor friend Frank Fay in 1903, Yeats informs him on his play: "it is quite a long an elaborate play, and is constructed rather like a Greek play. I think it is the best thing I have ever done, and with the beautiful costumes that are being made for it, it should make something of a stir" (Threshold 34). Especially the opening of the play was immense for Yeats, "as if it were a Greek play" (Threshold 38). Fusing tragic elements in *King's Threshold* with Celtic mythology, Yeats created the syncretism that Balme advocated. To Yeats's taste, the play actually includes several elements of tragedy. Picturing Ireland in the pre-colonial world of the Celts, Yeats centers his play on the role of art and the artist in the society. His protagonist Seanchan is excluded from the affairs of the state, which means a break with ancient custom. In his challenge to the King, Seanchan starts hunger strike on the king's threshold, as "old custom" requires. If he dies on the threshold, he would be naming the owner of the house - King - as guilty, and the King will remain in eternal disgrace. Yeats abides by the Aristotelian unity of time, place, and action in his one-act play. Thus, Aristotle's main definition of tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament" suits quite readily to *The King's Threshold*. Yeats reworks the Seanchan story from Celtic mythology, changing him a bit for his own dramaturgical intentions. Though it does not evoke pity or fear, since Yeats portrays a good man who is destined to die.

As the protagonist of the play, Seanchan is a classical hero, closer to Nietzschean Dionysus. Throughout the play he is tested physically and emotionally. Ultimately he is forced to meet death, which he acknowledges in serenity "for the sake of his own beliefs and honor as well as for the sake of his people" (Suess 191). He has strong will to power, so that even his fiancée Fedelm cannot turn him from his cause. Each character makes his way to Seanchan to deter him from the honorary

challenge against compelling power. Yeats pictures the King in a panic because his ultimate authority is being questioned, and even threatened by Seanchan's fasting. The King is uneasy. He lurks around and sends his best men and women under the counter to deter Seanchan. If the King fails and Seanchan dies, the King is the one at fault, according to custom. He summons pupils of Seanchan to "persuade him to eat or drink" because it is the third day of his fasting. Even yesterday the King "thought that hunger and weakness had been enough" to take his life:

I called to hither, and all my hope's in you,
And certain of his neighours and good friends
That I have sent for. While he is lying there
Perishing, my good name in the world
Is perishing also. I cannot give way,
Because I am King; because if I give way,
My nobles would call me a weakling, and it may be
The very throne be shaken. (571)

King is afraid of being shamed by Seanchan's hunger strike at his threshold, but he is also afraid of the continuity of his throne and authority. Therefore, he does not retreat, which would shake his supreme authority as King. Thus, several other characters from the ruling class and common people are sent to Seanchan. His Oldest Pupil, in sorrow at Seanchan's condition, comes forward to talk, but his master is too weakened to know him at first sight.

Seanchan: My oldest pupil? No, that cannot be,
For it is some one of the country of the crowds
That have been round about me from sunrise,
And I am tricked by dreams; but I'll refute them.
[…….....]
Tell on, for I begin to know the voice.
What evil thing will come upon the world
If the arts perish?

Oldest Pupil: ıf the Arts should perish

The world that lacked them would be like a woman.

That looking on the clove lips of a hare,

Brings forth a hare-lipped child. (573-74)

In a kind of Socratic dialectic, Seanchan both reminds his pupils of the importance of the arts, and he reinstates his rightful claim to have a seat on the King's council. His argument reveals his powerful will to power, his inner drive to preserve ancient tradition, his welcoming of worldly agony, and his spiritual strength. He is like a Nietzschean tragic hero, a Superman who is self-reliant and self-affirmative. Inspired by Seanchan's argument, his pupils agree with him on the ancient rights of poets.

With the presence of courtiers and Seanchan's friends, we are presented with two opposing groups: the "dehumanized figures of the King's party," and the "warmly human and sentimentalized followers of Seanchan" (Taylor 45). In their talk to Seanchan, Yeats depicts the hypocrisy and corruption of the King's council.

The Mayor of Kinvara is described in the least sympathetic way, because of his arrogant character. He comes to speak to Seanchan not for the poet's sake, but for the possibility of losing the lands that the King once promised. He doesn't even care about Seanchan's death but his own gains and appearance: "What is he saying? I never understood a poet's talk more than the baa of a sheep." In the character of Mayor, Yeats criticizes the ugly side of political order in which one in power will always find support of less-influential men who would pursue their gain and interest, not the truth:

Mayor: (to second cripple): how dare you take his (King's) name into your mouth, how

Dare you lift your voice against the King.

Brian: how dare you praise him? I will have nobody praise him or any other king that robs my master.

Mayor: and hadn't he the right to? And hadn't he the right

To strike your master's head off, being the King?

Or your head, or my head! I say, Long live the King!

Because he didn't take our heads from us, call out long live to him. (582)

King Guaire feels certain of his ultimate 'authority,' disclosing that he is the King and he can take whatever he wants; he even sees the right to murder Seanchan's pupils to challenge his obstinacy. The presence of Seanchan's starving figure on the King's threshold threatens the King's peace, his reputation, and the stability of his kingdom (Suess 193). Instead of maintaining order merely by reaffirming Seanchan's place at court, he threatens Seanchan with his pupils. At heart, the King is aware of the fallacy of taking Seanchan's right, but sycophants' flatters ensures him of his irresistible authority and sovereignty. However, his hubris and oppression only weakens the society that is now deprived of the guidance of Seanchan.

Yeats also criticizes religion with a metaphor of a bird that "perches on the King's strong hand" (593). In the play, it is affirmed that the powerful ruler will always get support from religion, politics, and solders, who are clappers of the King rather than true advisors. To the monk, Seanchan says: "You must not weary in your work" to criticize conformist and materialist attitudes of the monk who uses God to fit the needs of the King. The most tragic scene is the confrontation of Seanchan with his fiancée Fedelm, which becomes the hardest trial of Seanchan's will:

Fedelm: Seanchan! Seanchan!

Seanchan: is this your hand, Fedelm?

I have been looking at your hand

That is up yonder.

Fedelm: I have come for you.

[…….]

And can you remember that I promised

That I would come and take you home with me

When I'd the harvest in? and now I've come,

And you must come away, and come on the instant. (600)

Seeing his beloved Fedelm, Seanchan forgets his fasting at first. In the course of the romantic dialogue, Seanchan, who is quite weakened and seems sleepy, forgets why he is there and what is happening around him. It is only when Fedelm gives him

food, Seanchan collects himself and reassures his will to pursue the rightful claim of bards: “I must not eat it- but that’s beyond your wit. Child! Child! I must not eat it, though I die.”

In the last scene, the King himself comes to Seanchan, and threatens to kill his pupils, but Seanchan dies in honor and joy. Seanchan's choice to die for his non-conformist beliefs does not seem to promise the desired effect. Apart from poets and Fedelm, none of the ruling class who were expected to lay blame at the threshold of the king, seem to blame the king. Nevertheless, the heroic death of Seanchan is not totally pessimistic. Young pupils will follow his ideals even though they may not be able to reclaim the poet’s seat at the King’s court again.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the ending of the play was changed in 1920 upon the death of Terence MacSwiney. In the latest version, Seanchan welcomes death in a “Dionysian ecstasy” (Taylor 42). Yeats is more content with the tragic ending of the play, as he already intended in the very beginning. In 1921, when October Robinson wanted to direct *The King’s Threshold* again at the Abbey Theater, Yeats accepted his offer, yet warned him to use the latest version, the one with a tragic ending: “do not start typing or rehearsing unless you have my new version.” That same day, as Kielly notes, Yeats wrote a letter to Lady Gregory that his new tragic ending is a “great improvement & much more topical- as it suggest the Lord Mayor of Cork.” For Yeats, the new ending of *The King’s Threshold* was “one of the best bit[s] of dramatic writing I have done.” (in *Threshold* 53)

Syncretism in Soyinka’s Death and The King’s Horseman

Greek tragedy has always been an interest of Soyinka. Like other African writers, Greek culture was a part of his upbringing in colonial Nigeria, where schoolchildren were taught literary tenets of Europe instead of African. However, it is important to note that these Greek tragedies were used “to legitimize” the superiority of the English race as the rightful inheritors of civilized Europe (Weyenberg 13-41). As a response, for the decolonization of literature, they were the most adapted texts by African playwrights, who turned their gaze to Greek tragedies to comment on the contemporary politics at home and abroad. *Antigone*, and

Bacchae were popular to rework for their political relevance to apartheid Africa. According to Weyenberg, adaptation of Greek texts by African playwrights is a valuable strategy, especially because "by offering Greek tragedy as theirs, the playwrights indirectly yet effectively undermined Eurocentric claims of ownership and authority" (14). Soyinka reworked specifically *The Bacchae* of Euripides, and Greek tragedy as a universal value of the arts lay at the foundations of his understanding of drama that he fused with Yoruba tradition. Borrowing from Nietzsche's ideas on Greek tragedy, he represented the theory of Yoruba ritual drama as an equivalent to the Greek counterpart.

Soyinka, in his attempts to challenge Eurocentric discourse, asserted the value of Yoruba culture, making it take priority over Greek tragedy by showing how the ritual (of communion) allows a vital resolution to the divided modern world of Nigeria. In Response to Nietzschean understanding of tragedy he creates a theory of Yoruba ritual tragedy, taking the influence one step further than Yeats. Seeing modern tragedy through a synthesis of Yoruba and Western forms of tragedy, Soyinka defines drama as a "cleansing, binding, communal, recreative force" (*Myth*, 4). His proposal for a theory of Yoruba tragedy in "Fourth Stage," represents the similarities between Greek and Yoruba deities. Equating Yoruba mythology with the Greek counterpart in his discussion, Soyinka argues that Yoruba tragedy is understood best with the god Ogun whom he presents as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues. He agrees with the duality of forces in Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian instincts, but adds another dimension - Promethean, unifying all three forces under his patron god Ogun. Ogun, god of creativity and destruction, is the first artist, a Nietzschean Superman, and the heart of Yoruba tragic art, since he is the first protagonist to dare the abyss of the chthonic realm. Thus, he defines tragedy as the "anguish of severance," referring to fragmentation and incompleteness of deities, and the act of transition (30). Soyinka, like Nietzsche, elevates the will of the protagonist to be a prerequisite of 'act,' because "nothing but the will rescues being from annihilation within the abyss" (31-31). Will to power bears both destructiveness and creativity in itself, just like the symbolism of Ogun. The tragic hero has the will and hubris within it, as a tragic

necessity. Similar to the wisdom and pride of the Nietzschean hero, Soyinka sees hubris as the root of tragedy, since "powerful tragic drama follows upon the act of hubris and myth exacts this attendant penalty from the hero where he has actually emerged victor of a conflict" (Soyinka, *Art* 36). Nevertheless, against Nietzsche's categorization of music above language, Soyinka's theory of Yoruba tragedy includes both music and poetry in harmony. Even music is referred to as the "embodiment of the tragic spirit" and language is a cohesive dimension to this universality of music (30).

In *Myth Literature and the African World*, Soyinka states that his drama is "representative of the essential differences between two world-views," one Western and the other African (38). The idea of fusion of both norms of dramaturgy repeats several occasions throughout the book. In the essay "Ideology and the Social Vision (2)," Soyinka writes of imaginative liberation for postcolonial writers, derived from the "authentic images of African reality: "They [images] are familiar and closest to hand; they are not governed by rigid orthodoxies, […] a natural syncretism and continuing process of this activity is the reality of African metaphysical systems" (*Myth* 121). Accordingly, unlike Western drama, which "habitually reflects the abandonment of a belief in a culture as defined within man's knowledge of fundamental, unchanging relationships between himself and society and within the larger context of the observable universe," African drama's goal is one in which the conflict attains "a harmonious resolution for plenitude and the well-being of the community" (Myth 38). Therefore Elesin's tragic failure in *Death and The King's Horseman* to mediate this fourth space of transition is not just an individual defeat but is representative of an entire community and ideology. The play's message is ultimately one of maintaining culture and community rather than abandoning it for selfish individual concerns or external forces such as colonialism.

Among other plays of Soyinka*, Death and the King's Horseman* is a valuable example of syncretism between African and Greek conceptions of tragedy. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Soyinka's play is rooted in the African culture and dramaturgy, but the staging of the play was formed mostly in Western theatrical modes, at the heart of which lies Greek tragedy. On multiple layers of content like

plot, characterization, as well as on dramatic style Soyinka blended elements of Greek tragedy with his native Yoruba culture and tragedy. This fusion is such a powerful one that, upon reading the play for the first time, Henry Louis Gates, who was a graduate student of Soyinka at that time, identifies it as a "great tragedy," with a "classically Greek" structure. As an overview, *Death and the King's Horseman* is a fusion of Western modes of tragedy, which is highlighted with Aristotelian and Nietzschean discussions, and indigenous forms from Yoruba world-view and folklore, like rites of passage, dramaturgy of egungun, and elements of oral literature like story-telling, proverbs and music. For Conradie, the play contains "all elements of tragedy" (136). The sequence of events follow the Aristotelian unity of time, place, and action. Soyinka divided the play into five chapters, through a linear flow of time that happens in less than twenty-four hours, probably in an evening and night. The unity of place is a bit stretched between the market place, colonial Residency and the home of the District Officer. The plot, to begin with, is revealed to be "serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative" (Aristotle VI). As the horseman of the deceased King, Elesin has to attend him with a ritual ceremony through which he will commit suicide and escort his King in the abyss of transition. For the very duty, he is admired by all in his community, as the words of the Praise-Singer testify. The complex and well-structured character of Elesin is embellished with the highly poetic language of the noblemen, with rhythm and harmony. He chants stories, speaks a heavily metaphorical language that even his people cannot grasp at times. The nobility of his character is revealed in all levels.

With the opening of the scene, we are presented with Elesin's tragic conflict between his immediate duty as it is constantly reminded by the Praise-singer and Iyolaja, and his own unconscious desires. When he is tempted by the women of the marketplace at the very beginning of the play, the Praise-Singer warns him: "beware. The hands of women also weaken the unwary" (8). We learn that he is "a man of enormous vitality," but also a man who is crucially to commit ritual suicide as the custom requires. However, Elesin is a tragic hero, having "the grandeur, dignity and

pathos of Oedipus, the questioning anguish of Hamlet" and his hubris will lead him to his downfall (Bowman qtd.in Booth). In other words, he is pictured as an alloy of Ogun and Dionysus, and the only one to bridge the gap between the world of the living and the dead. He *seems* to bear the courage to dare, to pass the transition and to face suffering for the realization his Dionysian Will. The gravity and difficulty of his task give him hubris, for "the whirlpool of transition requires […] hubristic complements as catalyst to its continuous regeneration" (Soyinka, *Art* 37). Even his son Olunde is sure of Elesin's strong Will. He confidently assures Jane of his father's death with the sound of drums: "Yes, Mrs. Pilkings, my father is dead. His will-power has always been enormous" (*Horseman* 60). With his proud stand among the community as the Horseman of the King, he cannot be said to be an "exemplary human being," but a flawed one. His unconscious reluctance is implied throughout the play, with his insistence on a new bride and his sullen talk when he was refused at first, his desire for colorful cloths for the matrimonial union, and his story of the Not-I bird. Like an Aristotelian tragic hero, he is "a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty" (*Poetics* Part XIII). Therefore, his transformation from a noble man in his society to "eater-of leftovers" is through the unfortunate combination of his hubris and fate. His fondness of worldly pleasures becomes concrete in his wish to marry a young bride who would become "his fatal Cleopatra" (Izevbaye), and to be decked in rich clothes. On another level, Eldred Jones affirms that Elesin's sacrifice is crucial to "maintain the integrity of a civilization at a crucial point in its history." The seriousness of the duty is constantly emphasized by the Praise-Singer and Iyolaja, the mother of the market women:

> Praise-Singer: There is only one home to the life of a river-mussel; there is only one home to the life of a tortoise; there is only on shelter 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 boulders of great void, whose world will give us shelter?
>
> Elesin: It did not in the time of my forebears, it shall not in mine. (9)

The ritual is crucial; it must be performed "at the right time, in the prescribed manner, and in the designated place," because otherwise the king's soul will be "doomed" to wander "in dishonor" (Williams 72-73). As the ritual gathers place in the marketplace Elesin's enthusiasm seems to diminish. Iyolaja, the wise mother of the community, has also sensed the earth-bound feelings of Elesin since the beginning and cautiously warns him of his responsibility to release the community from its burden, implying the possible consequences if he does not fulfil the given duty:

> Iyolaja: 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 taste the ashes of the world when they step out at dawn to breathe the morning dew […] You wish to travel light. Well, the earth is yours. But be sure the seed you leave in it attracts no curse. (23)

The second act, which reflects most the conflicting yet completing forms of two different cultures, opens on the veranda of the house of District Officer Simon Pilkings. Mr. Pilkings and his wife Jane are dancing to practice for the fancy dress ball at the colonial Residency, but in egungun costumes, which is part of a serious cult as explained in the preceding chapter. In Yoruba folklore, as Peggy Harper explains, egungun signifies "earth cult centering round the appearance of the masked figures which are feared and respected as the reincarnated ancestors of the community (284). Therefore, the native houseboy Joseph and the policeman Amusa are shocked to see him, and even cannot dare to talk to him. The costume signifies the "dead cult" for indigenous people, even if for Pilkings, it is merely a fancy dress to surprise guests at the ball. Amusa, though he is a Muslim convert, treats egungun with respect, because "it is a matter of death" and "how can man talk against death to person in uniform of death?" (26). With his refusal to talk to Pilkings in egungun costume, Soyinka reveals Amusa's understanding and respect for the native culture, in opposition to Pilkings utter disregard for traditional sensibilities. However, Pilkings learns the news of Elesin's suicide and wants to stop the event. At one point it is a scandal in the presence of the Prince, and another level he sees the ritual death as merely an individual suicide. As he has no insight into the native culture, he is

ignorant of the magnitude of the duty. For the third act, we turn our gaze simultaneously to the market place again. Amusa, as native policeman, fails in his attempt to stop the event and is even ridiculed for his closeness to the District officer. Amusa, depicted as a stereotype of a local policeman, creates a comical atmosphere in the play, especially through his fight with the market girls. Amusa curries favor with the colonial administrator but in return he is rejected both by the colonizers and by his own kinsmen. The mockery of the girls of Amusa is a "lively sketch" of the English club (Gilbertova 90). Soyinka uses it as comic relief:

-And how do you find the place?

-The natives are allright.

-Friendly?

-Tractable.

-Not a teeny-weeny bit restless?

-Well, a teeny-weeny bit restless.

-One might even say, difficult?

-Indeed one might be tempted to say, difficult.

-But you do manage to cope?

-Yes indeed I do. I have a rather faithful ox called Amusa.

-He's loyal?

-Absolutely. (30)

In a moment, Elesin appears with his accepted fate. He dances through the music in a trance to rejoin his King. He faintly hears what the Praise-Singer tells him. It is the exact moment that he lived for, he is respected for, and he is hoped for.

The final Act is set a few hours later, in the basement of the Pilkings home, where once slaves were kept. Elesin, who failed in his duty, is chained in a prison cell with his new bride. Despite the "fatal call of duty," he did not have the will power to face the ultimate moment of sacrifice (Jones, 126). His tragic conflict is both internal and external. He has to come to terms with his subconscious needs and desires to live instead of to die and to rejoice instead of to retire from the pleasures of the world, of which he seems incapable. His lack of will makes him hesitate in his

duty at the gulf of transition when the exact moment comes. With the intervention of external forces in this inner war of Elesin, the ritual performance fails totally, but the issue of his guilt is complicated. His soul is in conflict since the beginning, but he is not courageous enough to act like a Nietzschean superman who has the courage and wisdom to face his own fate and the eventual consequences. On the contrary, he is Aristotelian hero who embodies hamartia without being aware of it. His failure, or hamartia, does not stem from moral depravity or vice in his character, but from a flaw in judgment and realization.

Elesin is defeated by internal forces of his own lack of will power and by the external forces of the colonial confrontation that has been discussed immensely by the critics. In the course of the events, the colonial factor proves to be "a catalytic incident merely," as Soyinka underlines in the Author's Note, since "the confrontation in this play is largely metaphysical, contained in the human vehicle which is Elesin and the universe of the Yoruba mind" (3). Still it must be noted that Elesin's hesitation left him behind; however, if it were not for colonial intrusion, he might have completed the ritual under the social pressure of the Praise-Singer and Iyolaja. At any rate, this failure reverses the situation (peripeteia, in Aristotle's terms) not only for Elesin, but also for the community. Similar to the common trait of Greek tragedies, Elesin experiences anagnorisis and strangles himself with chains in his prison cell after the recognition of his own failure in the outcome. First, he denies his hesitation and looks for his new bride and District Officer to blame. But he confesses his guilt only to his fatal Cleopatra. His confession is quite sincere:

> Elesin (speaking to his new wife): My young bride, did you hear the ghostly one? You sit and sob in your silent heart but say nothing to all this. First I blamed the white man, then I blamed gods for deserting me. Now I feel I want to blame you for the mystery of sapping of my will. But blame is a strange peace offering for a man to bring a world he has deeply wronged, and to its innocent dweller… I confess to you, daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man who came violently into my fading presence, there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. I would

> have shaken it off, already my foot had begun to lift but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled. (53)

His hesitation in his fateful duty is fortified by the interference of the District Officer; yet Elesin's failure to respond to the call of duty has cosmic consequences. Elesin's tragedy is not simply his failure of will, but also a failure of "communal will," which gives the play a sense of classical Greek tragedy (Gates 70). This communal failure, yet, has consequences. The society that once honored him will call him to account. Iyolaja, as the wisdom and sound of her community came to Elesin with surprising news, but she humiliates him for drenching their world at the abyss of transition:

> Iyolaja: You have betrayed us. We fed you sweatmeats such as we hoped awaited you on the other side. But you said No, I must eat the world's leftovers. We said you were the hunter who brought the quarry down; to you belonged the vital portions of the game. No, you said, I am the hunter's dog and I shall eat the entrails of the game and the faeces of the hunter [...]. We said, the dew on earth's surface was for you to wash your feet along the slopes of honor. You said No, I shall step in the vomit of cats and the droppings of mice; I shall fight them for the left-overs of the world. (74-75)

Elesin, too, is aware of the damage done by his failure in the ritual. When he is confronted with Pilkings, he expresses this damage: "You did not save my life, District Officer. You destroyed it" (67). He is at first overwhelmed by the very idea of impending death, but soon by the shame and guilt of the failure of death. He is extensively aware of the circumstances born out of this failure; he was taught the importance of his mission for all his life. Now, Alaafin is alone in the middle passage, unable to participate either in this world of the living or in the world of the dead. Yoruba world is shaken with his curse, and suffering. Elesin fears the consequences and fears his community. When he is confronted with Iyolaja, the wisdom and mouthpiece of the Yoruba community, he cannot explain what he previously confessed to his young bride, but childishly defends himself:

> My powers deserted me. My charms, my spells, even my voice lacked strength when I made to summon the powers that would lead me over the last measure

> of earth into the land of the fleshless. You saw it, Iyaloja. You saw me struggle to retrieve my will from the power of the stranger whose shadow fell across the doorway and left me floundering and blundering in a maze I had never encountered. My senses were numbed when the touch of cold iron came upon my wrists. I could do nothing to save myself. (74-75)

His ritual sacrifice is required to re-assert the cosmic totality of the Yoruba world. In the background, Olunde, as the next horseman in the bloodline, fulfills Elesin's incomplete mission and becomes society's hope for regeneration and continuity. Even as a European educated man who plans to return to his medical studies in Europe, he bears stronger will power than his father. Olunde restores his family honor, stained by his father's failure, by giving up from his own life. The Praise-Singer informs Elesin of the tragic struggle: "Your heir has taken the burden on himself. What the end will be, we are not gods to tell. [...] Our world is tumbling in the void of strangers, Elesin" (82-83). Elesin is shocked with the news; his honor and his name, which failed, are carried out by his son. With the shame to see the deceased body of Olunde to save the Yoruba world, he punishes himself with death on stage. What he failed to achieve before, now occurs within the most unsuitable environment, in a prison cell and in chains. The reason was simple, the will power that once he lacked, now gave him the courage to kill himself to avoid shame. With an Aristotelian anagnorisis, he shares the destiny of tragic heroes, of *Oedipus* and of *Antigone,* and punishes himself on stage. However; it must be noted that his death relieves his burden only on the personal level. He can only save his soul from the disgrace of ritual failure, not from the burden of unfulfilled duty.

In other words, the ending of the play is complex and ambiguous. The ritual has been completed by Olunde, who was not supposed to, and at the same time Elesin killed himself too, which occurred later than expected. As Eugene McNulty states a "fatal imbalance" has fallen onto the Yoruba world since "the laws of life and death, and the power to define the correct relationship between the two stages, have been usurped" (6). The dramatic conflict of the play is multi-layered as well as its characters. There is not a simple binary contradiction as Amkpa notes, *Horseman* "presents dramatic conflict as multilayered and complex rather than a Manichean

contest between well-defined heroes and villains" (29).There are no definite good and bad characters in Soyinka's play, but there is an existential struggle of individuals. But the victory belongs to Olunde, who put his head above the parapet to reenact the security of the Yoruba world with his Ogunian transition through the rite of passage.

Syncretism in the play is also reflected with the use of language. Soyinka's greatest achievement in his play is his language. According to Gates, the play examplifies "the creation of a compelling world through language, in language and of language" (73). The language of Soyinka is a complex English that is loaded with cultural motifs, metaphors, and proverbs of Yoruba culture. As Balme emphasizes, the "linguistic authenticity" of the play derives from the extensive use of "ethno-text;" the English language is "forced to accommodate the concepts and the linguistic forms of the Yoruba world" (136-37). Its language is hybrid and complex, a representative of complex ethnicity and cultural identity of the Yoruba people. It is neither fully English nor Yoruba, like the people of the land. In that, Soyinka makes his English language indigenous: "The spectator not familiar with Yoruba language is confronted with considerable problems because this verse-like language is linked mainly to referential system of Yoruba proverbial culture" (Balme 135). The language of the characters reflects a fusion of two different cultures, African and European. Native characters speak Africanized-English, heavily loaded with Yoruba metaphysics, proverbs, stories and chants which belong for Tanure Ojaide, to a traditional African "evening fire-side school" (44). Mythopoetic language of native characters bears the rhythm and harmony of oral tradition based on ifa oracles and oracular sayings. But when they want, they can speak a very cultivated English. Market girls, in their mimicry of Amusa, and Olunde, in his cultivated discussion of imperialism and colonials discourse, are eminent examples of the ability to use English like the colonizer master. English 'masters' speak in a simpler prose, with rather short sentences and daily words, while Amusa, hybrid sergeant identified but rejected by both cultures, speaks hybrid pidgin language.

The music[1] is also an example of syncretism that bears a Nietzschean combination and conflict of opposing forces. The Yoruba music is a natural expression of life. Western dramatic expressions are challenged through nonverbal modes of communication. Music constitutes a great part in the tragedy and it is often supported with songs, dance, and mask. The sound of the drums are like codes to decipher to a native ear. The drums, which "effectively convey the social drama" of Elesin and the Yoruba people (Hepburn 603), and are tragic symbols in the ritual. Moreover, rhythm and dance, which are the core of Yoruba daily life, is presented on many occasions as cultural signifiers. The play opens with music and dance. In scene three, Elesin's matrimonial consummation is celebrated at the market place by women with dance and song. More importantly, Elesin dances through death in rhythm and harmony and trance. From another perspective, music has a function of differentiation as well as of compromise. Against Yoruba drums that play throughout the play, Soyinka uses Western counterpart – tango - in contrast to Yoruba music and dance. The opening of the fourth scene at the Residency is a perfect reflection of conflicting but blending cultural norms of Yoruba and English. At first impression, Soyinka portrays a local police band that plays Rule Britannica, "badly," as the Prince enters (*Horseman* 49). The native men who are made colonial subjects are *trying* to adapt the ways of European civilization, but they fail. Again in the ballroom, the orchestra plays a Viennese waltz that is not of the highest musical standard (*Horseman* 37). They fail in a music that neither belongs to them nor reflects their identity. While the outer space is filled naturally with Yoruba customs, dance, and music that is heard from the balcony of the Residency, the inner space is filled with a weird European and African fusion that does not match. On the one hand, we have Jane and Simon in egungun mask, trying to impress the Prince, while

[1] Music had a deep significance as a means of spiritualty in Yoruba folklore. Especially in the ritual performances, it is seen as a reflection of existential reality that brings gods to the earth. Out of various forms of music, which is always accompanied with drumming, songs, and dance, each tone is associated with a specific meaning or deity. This is how Joseph in the play, could realize from the sound of drums that there is both a wedding and a death happening at the same time. Omojola says that "because the ultimate purpose of Yoruba religious rituals is to give vitality and meaning to social experience and enhance the quality of life, the Yoruba performer often conceives the expressive domains of song, drumming, dance, costume and masks as a metalanguage that connects humans and deities in the task of social engineering" (31). For more insight on the subject, see Bode Omojola's "Rhythms of the Gods: Music and Spirituality in Yoruba culture."

on the other we have other guests in seventeenth-century European masks. The European music, masks, and dance are blended with African band-players, African egungun mask, and African music that is heard from outside.

At the end of the discussion we can agree with George Steiner's definition of tragedy as "the meeting point between the metaphysical and the poetic" (4). Both Yeats and Soyinka achieve this difficult realm of being through their fusion of cultural heritage with Aristotelian norms to reach a syncretic theatre in their plays. In both plays, the dramatization of tragic conflict concerns not only individual identity but also the cultural identity of the community. According to Barbara Suess, Yeats enlarges the scope of the term "identity" and makes it more "inclusive, flexible, and broad-minded," in contrast to former essentialist definitions (xv). With the strong character of Seanchan, who goes on hunger strike for his honorable cause in a slowly degenerating environment, Yeats's play displays power relations and the oppression of royal power to destroy bardic influence in the society. Soyinka, on the other hand, reflects Yoruba ideology that privileges the welfare of the community before the welfare of the individual, so that Elesin's tragedy becomes a tragedy of the community. Both protagonists are noble, suitable to Greek tragedy. While Yeats's Seanchan has an enormous will to resist, Soyinka's Elesin is defeated, and fails in his mission of transition. Thus, both Yeats and Soyinka merge native mythology and cultural codes with Greek tragedy, basic form of European theatre; they achieve a syncretic theatre that is composed of fusions, which are important for the playwrights, since they are promoting cultural awareness and encouraging their communities to uncover their ancient roots. In the process of postcolonial transformation, they reach a wider audience through their use of English language, for which both Yeats and Soyinka have been criticized.

CONCLUSION

"The Greatest sin a man can commit against his race
is to bring the work of the dead to nothing."
W.B. Yeats

As David Lloyd observes, the aim of colonialism is the transformation and displacement of indigenous culture, in addition to economic and political interests. Ireland and Nigeria are two specific examples to compare cultural transformation and alienation in the colonial period. In the context of colonialism and postcolonialism I have situated Yeats's *The King's Threshold* and Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman* within the mosaic of postcolonial transformation of their countries, while they attempt to revive an authentic national identity.

Beyond the cultural context of postcolonialism, Yeats and Soyinka shared hybrid identities. Both authors were born into middle-class Christian families that put them closer to the ruling colonial élite and their manners, and at the same time they provided them with a realization of the oppressed majority and an appreciation of indigenous culture and traditions. Yeats came from an Anglo-Irish Protestant family with a family lineage that reaches back to the Duke of Ormond. Similarly, Soyinka was born into a privileged Christian family of Abeokuta, to educated parents. Their commitment to a broader perspective of nations originates considerably from their hybrid background. Both studied Western theatre, especially Greek, which gave them an understanding of classical theatrical conventions. They then combined this understanding with their indigenous culture to re-awaken a national and cultural identity in a postcolonial process. Both had reason to undertake this leadership role, considering the colonial process in both countries. Both used theatre as a powerful medium.

In this study I demonstrated that William Butler Yeats and Wole Soyinka contributed to the promotion of cultural identity in *The King's Threshold* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. I argued that both Yeats and Soyinka used drama both as a means to examine the imposing ideology of English colonialism on their countries,

and as a lens through which to promote a new national consciousness and cultural identity based on the pre-colonial heritage of Ireland and Nigeria. Applying Greek tragedy to their own cultural situation, they utilize native mythology and history, which had been mostly ruined by colonial exploitation and had lost importance in the presence of Western superiority. While Yeats borrows immensely from Brehon Law and the bardic institutions of pre-colonial Ireland, Soyinka's Western structure of theatre is infused with myth, tradition, and the history of Yorubaland. In addition, both deal with oppressive kingly power that will eventually cause the death of the protagonists, and each author's style of portraying this voluntary self-murder is within their native cultural context and indigenous history. Both revive cultural authenticity with the employment of traditional myths, laws, and history, and at the same time use Western notions of theatre, notably the ancient form of tragedy, for narration.

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