

“No Text is an Island”: Intertextuality in the Drama of Hope Eghagha

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Abstract

*Intertextuality is a persistent conceptual framework on which many Nigerian plays are constructed. Starting with Soyinka and Clark-Bekederemo, playwrights in Nigeria tend to rewrite and hold dialogues with their predecessors' works. As a concept, intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva to encapsulate issues of “re-writing”, re-visioning, confrontation, adaptation, processes of borrowing, re-interpretation, interrogation/debate with older texts. It lends credence to T.S. Eliot's idea in “Tradition and Individual Talent”. Its focus is examining codes, themes, images of older texts found in new ones. Thus, Intertextuality features prominently in Eghagha's Death Not a Redeemer. This paper focuses on this play by exploring some of the ways in which Eghagha rewrites the themes and motifs of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. The central point linking these plays is ritual death. Has this concept been challenged, modified and translated by the playwright? What has he taken or jettisoned in order to envision a certain cultural life? The paper concludes that Eghagha has reproduced and extended the dramatic situation by incorporating the dynamics of a postcolonial African state.*

Works of literature, after all are built from systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works of literature. The systems, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture in general are also crucial to the meaning of a work of literature. Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorist now call intertextual. (Graham Allen. *Intertextuality*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. p1)

Introduction

The above remark negates the age-long idea that the interpretation of a work lies solely within the work. According to Chandler, “one of the weaknesses of structuralist semiotics is the tendency to treat individual texts as discrete, closed-off entities and to focus exclusively on internal structures.” (1) Intertextuality has challenged the view and affirms that “no text is an island”. In order to extract meanings from a work, it is expedient to relate such work with others in “a network of textual relations” (Allen 1). Kristeva declares that “every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which imposes a universe on it” (cited in Culler 1981, 105). In other words, rather than focusing only on the structure of a text, she suggests that we examine its “structuration” – i.e. how the parts came into existence. This act involves taking into consideration precursors from which the new work may have emanated.

It is within this purview that this paper seeks to highlight ways in which Eghagha’s *Death Not a Redeemer* holds textual relations with Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*. This study intends to show how Eghagha is able to create a new play that implicitly interrogates the form and content of Soyinka’s classic. Soyinka as a precursor has influenced Eghagha’s first play.

Conceptual Framework

Crucial to our analysis is the term Intertextuality. It refers to the manner in which texts borrow from other texts, a new text gains more meaning through its referencing and evocation of an old text. Drawing sustenance from the works of F. de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes in the structuralist and post-structuralist schools, Julia Kristeva in the 1960s coined the word “intertextuality” to account for different forms of adaptations, echoes, concepts, images or events that can be drawn from different texts. It could be in form of “a text” being read “in light of another text, in which case all of the assumptions and implications surrounding the other text shed light on and shape the way a text is interpreted.”

Intertextuality “is often associated with the notions of pastiche, imitation and the mixing of already established styles and practices.”

(Allen 5) As a concept, it encapsulates issues of derivativeness, interconnectedness and transposition.

With the foregoing in mind, Gbemisola Adeoti examines adaptation in Nigerian drama using the works of Soyinka, Femi Osofisan and Ahmed Yerima. In the study, Adeoti explores the nature, motives and forms of adaptation in the selected playwrights. Jane Plastow in “A Debate on Tactics for the Best Way to Overthrow Vile Regimes: Osofisan Writes Back at Ngugi and Mugo” examines the whole idea of writers “writing back” to other writers in Ngugi and Mugo’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and Osofisan’s *Morountodun*. She argues that there are similar scenes in both plays and the only difference is the ideological import of the two plays. She posits that there are direct lifts, parallels and obvious thematic and structural influences from Ngugi’s to Osofisan’s. It is along these lines that this paper discusses the notion of Intertextuality in the works of Soyinka and Eghagha.

A Debate on the Concept of Sacrificial Death

Death, Not a Redeemer is Eghagha’s first play in which he holds a debate with Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* on the concept of ritual death. The issue of sacrificial death has begotten a play by Duro Ladipo entitled *Iku Olokun Esin*. Ulli Feier later translated this play into English as *The King is Dead (Oba Waja)* which is in a collection entitled *Three Yoruba Plays* by Duro Ladipo. In fact, Ogundele (2000:105) asserts that this story started as an oral form until it assumes a fixed written form after several performances by the Duro Ladipo group. He also states that the play was also constructed on the “account given by Samuel Johnson in his *History of the Yorubas*. Ladipo has taken from the history of the Yorubas and has dramatized the issue of ritual death. Like Soyinka’s later work, the District officer intervened in the culture of the people by arresting Olori Elesin but unlike Soyinka’s, Ladipo is faithful to the original story by showing the son of the Olori Elesin as a trader in Ghana. Dawudu, as he is called (name given to the first son of the family) comes from Ghana to meet his father who should have died. The horror of this meeting is too much for him as the implication was gross. To save the honour of his family, Dawudu stabs himself. It is also interesting to note that the dead Alaafin appears to Olori Elesin to

admonish him that the earth, “the mother of all, judge between you and me” (64). In other words, the dead king corroborates the peoples’ belief that Olori Elesin was a let-down, a disgrace as he fails to willingly lay down his life according to tradition.

This section of the paper intends to examine the similarities between Soyinka and Eghagha’s plays and establish that Soyinka’s play represents the point of departure for Eghagha’s. Eghagha has not merely reworked the theme of sacrificial death but has infused it with some relevant happenings in our society thereby moving the story forward.

Soyinka has been greatly fascinated by the theme of sacrificial death as shown in several of his plays such as *The Strong Breed*, *The Bacchae of Euripides* and *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Bayo Williams’ insight on this issue is useful here as he has also identified Soyinka’s penchant for dramatization of the death trope in “the mental and physical destruction of Sekoni in *The Interpreters*, the killing of the Old Man in *Madmen and Specialists* and the annihilation of the Professor in *The Road*”. All of these are underscored by a strong ritual tone.

Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* has been acknowledged as the most profound of his tragic works. (Bayo Williams, Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele) Like Duro Ladipo, he has taken from Yoruba myth and history to construct this play. However, Soyinka concentrates the action of the play on that night when Elesin Oba must “take the plunge” – commit suicide. The play opens on Elesin’s journey with the praise singer to the market. At the market, amidst women, he decides to take a new bride. Then, Simon Pilkings, the white District Officer arrests Elesin. In his view, he was saving Elesin from a barbaric, primitive and atavistic act.

Elesin’s son – Olunde who is studying abroad comes home to bury his father but accidentally meets him still alive in the prison of the white man. He goes home to kill himself in place of his father. Olunde’s desperate action is to affirm the honour of his family. This notion of

honour among Yoruba is significant. The refusal of Elesin to die is believed to be a collective tragedy.

The Yoruba proverb, “ba a ku la a dere, eeyan o suwon laaye” (one’s godly quality is not appreciated until after one’s demise; one is considered bad when one is alive) (Ladipo 61) or the one that states: ka ku lomode lo yeni, ju ka dagba lagba iya” (To die when one is young is befitting than to become a foolish elder and be alive). These proverbs reinforce the Yoruba belief that death is honourable. It becomes expedient therefore for Soyinka “to look beyond Elesin to his son, Olunde ...” (Williams 74). Bayo Williams continues:

Consumed by his contempt and hatred for the hypocrisy and cant of western civilisation, bewildered by his father’s lack of honour, Olunde chooses suicide as a means of redeeming the honour of his society and expiating what must have seemed to him as his father’s abominable cowardice and treachery. (75)

Critics such as Biodun Jeyifo have taken Soyinka up for what they consider a reactionary resolution. To them, it is wrong for the young sap to die for the old.

Eghagha has equally been enamoured with this theme especially as it is used in Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*. He has read and staged the play and become familiar with it so much as to discover the loopholes and gaps in the construction of this play. He states:

Ever since my first encounter with the historical anecdote of the King’s Horseman who reneged on his lifelong contract with sacrificial death, I have been fascinated by the abounding potentials of the plot. (Preface V)

However, the immediate spur for writing this play; Eghagha claims, is the article entitled “Ritual and Political Unconscious”. Williams, in “Ritual and the Political Unconscious: The Case of *Death and the King’s Horseman*” discusses the role of Elesin – the Horseman in a fast fading, feudal society struggling with the presence of the “other” – white colonialist empire. He posits that:

Within Soyinka's corpus, *Death and the King's Horseman* has achieved the status of a classic. Critics with the formalist bias have hailed its superb characterisation, its haunting beauty, and above all its lyrical grandeur, although an oppositional critic such as Biodun Jeyifo has objected to the lyrical beauty of the play on the ideological ground that it seduces us into accepting what he considers to be Soyinka's reactionary worldview in the play..., but whatever the case might be, even the objections reinforce the consensus view that the play is possibly the most intensely poetic of all Soyinka's dramatic writing (72).

Eghagha confesses, in an interview with me, his fascination with the language and theme of Soyinka's play. He admits his interest with the idea of someone committing suicide in place of another. This fascination led to his questioning of the import behind such acts. He says: "Was it necessary? In terms of development, of growth, what can the death of another add to the society?" (Personal interview with the playwright)

With these thoughts in mind, Bayo William's article helped to concretise his thoughts and he decided to transpose Soyinka's seminal play, "fast forward" it in time to contemporary times. He begins to question the place of sacrificial death in modern life. He opines:

Can "death" redeem a degenerate society? How can "death"; that evil of all evils, serve as a transition vehicle, as a tool for societal cohesion? Need we burn our prophets on altars of anarchy or tradition in order to gain wisdom? What informs the decision of a young man to commit suicide in place of his father ... (Preface VI)

Eghagha queries the heroism attached to death. To him, death is not only a finality, the evil of all evils, but a waste of human resource.

This prodding led to the birth of *Death, Not a Redeemer*, a play that redefines the myth of sacrificial death and places it within the

contemporary world of a postcolonial state with all the heritages of the West such as the Christian religion and the law courts.

Death, not a Redeemer opens with a prologue which renders in a poetic form what to expect in the first scene of the play. It is interesting to note that in Soyinka's version, there is no narrator. This Brechtian feature, employed by Eghagha, helps to remove any illusion that may be attached to the incidents as it occurs at the beginning of almost every act of the play. The essential usefulness of the prologue lies in setting the tone and mood of the play and introducing the theme. It also situates it by discussing the issue of life and death.

A major departure from Soyinka's play can be seen in the first scene of the play. Whereas Elesin-Oba is heralded on to the stage by a praise-singer, whose singing, praising and dancing dogs the steps of Elesin, in Eghagha's version, the first scene problematises the "concept of carrier". In other words, right from this first scene, the audience is aware of the conflicts (both physical and psychological) in the mind and in the abode of Karia. While Karia's mind is in turmoil, his physical background is in a more tumultuous state. Here is a traditional man who has been well-stepped into tradition as a "carrier" but his abode bears both the insignia of his office, Christian images and modern gadgets like a TV and a Radio set. These symbols reflect the state of his mind and his physical standing. He is a man willing to enjoy the good of diverse cultures. This seeming ambivalence foreshadows the conflicts in the play.

The conflict of the play is both internal and external. Karia is at loggerheads with his wife who is a staunch supporter of the Yoruba tradition. As the late king's daughter, Avbero, Karia's wife is willing to lose a husband who will serve her father in the other world. Karia, thus faces severe antagonism from his wife. She cannot understand Karia's wavering faith and taunts his resolve not to take "the plunge." Avbero believes that sacrificial death is a matter of tradition, service, and honour but to Karia, it is a sin for a man to commit suicide. Furthermore, Karia's resolve is informed by his newly accepted religion, Christianity which stipulates that Jesus Christ "died for all. We no longer need sacrificial death, voluntary or otherwise." (Eghagha 8). Here, Eghagha makes recourse to the Biblical idea of Christ as a redeemer. Christ's death on

the cross redeems the whole of humanity, why then should another man die again?

On the other hand, the external conflict rests on Karia and the elders. The Elders represent tradition and are ready to perpetuate and entrench it. They want Karia to fulfil the role the society has placed on him right from birth and are uncompromising about this.

To achieve their aim, they could reason with Karia by appealing to his sense of integrity or they could apply black magic. The last option is what puts fear into Karia and his son, Sankaria. This fear leads to the involvement of the state law court. Karia, through his son is praying the court to prevail on the Elders to desist from any acts that can lead to his death within six months. Karia and his son have done the impossible by suing the community; the community that has fed them. They seem to forget the fate of Okonkwo and Ezeulu in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* respectively. Achebe aligns with the Igbo belief that no man fights against his community and wins.

The conflicts between Karia and the church on one hand and Karia and tradition, on the other hand, are symbolically represented in the Christians vigil of praying and singing and the sound of heavy drums respectively. He is caught in the middle and this confusion is represented by trance. Karia, of course is in a trance but the playwright resolves this fight in favour of the Christians when Karia collapses and faces the Christians with the cries of Halleluyah renting the air. The death of Karia at the end confuses both the Elders and the Christians but affirms finally that death is the ultimate finality of man. While the Christians saw the hand of God, the Elders saw the hands of the ancestors.

Eghagha has departed from Soyinka by introducing into the concept of “carrier” new and modern views. He has involved the Christian religion and the state judiciary to further complicate the conflict between man and the world of the ancestors. These two legacies of Western culture are facts of our colonial inheritance which the African man cannot easily wish away. These colonial facts must therefore be brought to bear on conflicts in our societies.

The playwright equally engages in a collective debate on the fate of Karia and its implications for the whole society by bringing in the youth. These are young, educated and politically conscious people. To him, these are members of the society whose opinions should matter in the affairs of such a society. Soyinka is silent about the place of the youth in his own play except in a hilarious scene where they displayed their education and made a fool of Amusa.

Death Not A Redeemer is set in Ijigbo land presumably South-West, Nigeria. It is a community steeped in traditional African culture despite the influence of the colonial “incident” –Christianity – and modern values like western education and laws. It is in effect a society on the brink of change.

Karia has an epicurean nature; he loves life and he is not in a hurry to terminate it because of some customs. He does not vacillate between taking or not taking “the plunge”. He knows he will not take the plunge but he seeks the help and understanding from the Christian religion, family, and community. The late king has allowed his daughter to marry Karia, who is an underdog, to probably cement and strengthen their relationship. This goes to show the King’s progressive attitude even though as a King, he cannot challenge tradition. Karia may have the same ebullience as Elesin Oba but does not possess his character. Elesin’s stature and personality stand larger than Karia’s. Elesin does not show any atom of fear concerning his fate. In fact, he revels in the joys that it has fetched him, such that when he was to take the plunge, he waits a little to enjoy that “earthly” part of him that remains. However, he is arrested by the long arm of District Colonial Officer – Mr. Pilkings.

Other characters with whom one can find equivalents in the play are Avbero and Iyaloja on one hand, Sankaria and Olunde on the other hand. Avbero like Iyaloja is a traditionalist but a deceitful one. She hides under culture to perpetuate her adulterous act. It pleases her to marry Karia because of tradition but she finds solace and comfort in Jolomi, her secret lover whom she later elopes with. She is cunning, manipulative, untruthful and irresponsible. She is also adept at switching in and out of different emotions. This can be seen at the end

of Act One, Scene Two where she flirts with Jolomi only to abruptly put on a sad mood feigning sadness at the impending death of her husband. Avbero cannot measure up to the stature of Iyaloja who could let go of her son's bride because of culture and who at the end help to carry the corpse of Olunde to his father. Avbero is an example of female infidelity. At the same time, she is a metaphor for those who are in leadership position but exploit these positions for their own selfish interests.

Olori Elesin's son in Ladipo's play is Dawodu, a trader in Ghana. In Soyinka's, he is Olunde. In Olunde, Eghagha sees Sankaria. Both are children of great men on whose shoulders rest the fate of their communities. Olunde and Sankaria have been sent abroad to acquire western education and are thereby exposed to western culture simultaneously. However, while Olunde goes to study medicine, Sankaria studies Economics. Despite Olunde's education and exposure, he denounces his arrested father as an "eater of leftovers" and goes on to commit suicide in order to redeem the honour of his lineage. Sankaria's Economics and not Medicine like Olunde is important in that this study has exposed him to modern society which is dominated by capitalism. Economics as a field of study exposes Sankaria to the socio-economic dynamics of society. He, also, must have studied Karl Marx and this has shaped his consciousness towards oppression in the society and he has acquired knowledge that will help him to uplift his people from exploitation and poverty (Interview with the playwright). Like Olunde, Sankaria is the playwright's ideological voice. However, he is courageous and determined not to die unlike Olunde.

Sankaria, as the name suggests, is the son of Karia who is a "carrier" (Karia). He represents the elites, the educated modern class who wants to move the society forward. He employs the advantages of modern apparatus of the law to lay a foundation, a reference point for his future abdication of the "carrier" responsibility. He is willing to go to any length to prove this point. He employs a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) to argue his father's and ultimately his own case. He confronts Avbero with the fact of her infidelity in the presence of Karia thereby exposing her ulterior motive in canvassing for Karia's

death. One could hear the playwright's voice in Sankaria's as he campaigns for change. In fact, given the playwright's social temper and attitude towards change, it can safely be said that Sankaria is his mouthpiece. He conveys the playwright's radical ideas about ritual suicide, values that are crucial to the development of the society. In the final analysis, the most vocal voice in the play is Sankaria's. However, one must state that Sankaria is merely using his father as the catalyst for change. His support for his father is merely for his own gain not for the love he has for him.

Jolomi, Avbero's secret lover is introduced as a diversion on one hand and on the other to argue that many who claim to support tradition do it for selfish reasons for such is the case of Avbero.

Another major deviation from Soyinka's version is the resolution of the play. The death of Elesin, although belated, is still the tragedy of the whole Yoruba race in that Olunde's death may have preceded his. Still, it is a matter for the community. But Karia's departure for a holiday after the court judgment and subsequent death a year later matters only to his immediate family not for the community since he has been "exorcised" from the Elders' conclave and its affiliations.

Death, Not a Redeemer is a radical re-appraisal of the theme of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. This play is in the same category as Femi Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed*. Harry Garuba identifies this inclination to challenge older plays and lists such as: J.P. Clark's *The Raft* as Osofisan's *Another Raft*, Sophocles' *Antigone* as Osofisan's *Tegonni* and Rwandan Genocide as *Reel Rwanda*. As a matter of fact, Osofisan has referred to himself as an "incorrigible plagiarist" (Plastow 2006:193). The philosophy guiding the writing of such plays is the young writers' refusal to valorise a dim past or glorify an essence that is at once primitive and retrogressive. What Eghagha has done in this play is to examine the concept of death and heroism from a radical perspective.

The story of ancient Yoruba kingdom on which Ladipo and Soyinka draw from shows a fast fading feudalistic society. The culture of the people was being eroded by the presence of the white colonialists

represented in both books by the District Officer either as John in Duro Ladipo's or Simon Pilkings in Wole Soyinka's. This presence depicts a contrary culture which Soyinka himself in the Author's Note to this play has advised to be played down.

However, the force this white presence represents conflicts strongly with the Yoruba culture and ultimately disrupts the ritual that is to be. The implication for that disruption is great for the people. The "colonial encounter" is one that cannot be wished away in a hurry as the vestiges of it abide with us still.

Eghagha in *Death, Not a Redeemer* has moved the socio-political setting of the play forward by situating it in a postcolonial setting where all the features of the colonial rule exist side by side with the African tradition. The setting of Eghagha's play is postcolonial Nigeria. The whites had left but their apparatus of office such as the Law courts and Christianity are deeply entrenched into our way of life. That is why a traditional ruler who is meant to defend the customs of his people can imbibe Christianity and exploit Christianity for his cowardly act. That is why Sankaria can take the community to court and employ the services of a Senior Advocate of Nigeria to argue his case in court.

The playwright has also drawn from the political history of Nigeria to reinforce his attitude towards heroism and sacrificial death. It is interesting to note that subtle references to socio-political issues in the Nigerian society are made in the play to validate the playwright's idea. Why should Muritala Muhammed, a one-time head of state of Nigeria dispense with his guards? Why should Adekunle Fajuyi of Western Nigeria offer to die with Aguiyi Ironsi? To him, those deaths might be heroic now but what about the gap those men left in their families? (Eghagha 1998:43) All these deaths are in one way or another sacrificial. The question Eghagha seems to ask is that must we become heroes only after our death? He asks "how can death, that evil of all evils, serve as a transition vehicle, as a tool for societal cohesion?" (Preface VI).

Eghagha sees these deaths as unnecessary and sheer waste of human resources. This is the central conflict dramatized between Sankaria and Avbero. Avbero believes (like the die-hard traditionalists) that death brings heroism but Sankaria counters this in this lengthy quotation which is the crux of the matter in this play:

Sankaria: You have elevated death to the status of heroism?

Avbero: Who talks about death? We speak of sacrifice. Death is only a Vehicle

Sankaria: Sacrifice my foot! I condemn any sacrifice that must include death. No man's life can replace another?

Avbero: What about soldiers who lay down their lives for their country?

Sankaria: No sane man ever joins the Army, particularly the Army of our country, with the intention of dying. Deaths are accidental. In fact, soldiers would rather kill than be killed.

Avbero: Yet they die. Warriors die fighting so that there might be peace.

Sankaria: Don't live in any illusion. Ask all the men who have joined our country's Army. They have done so to survive. They all would really like to retire as Generals and live happily ever after. Look around you. Don't you envy the retired soldiers? They dominate all sectors of the economy?

Avbero: What about the Colonel, the host in the land of the sunset who lost his life protecting his guest, the General? Was it not an act of gallantry?

Sankaria: Sheer waste of human resources.

Avbero: The people do not think so!

Sankaria: Which people? His sons? His wife? Dependants? Or do you refer to the writers of history and their media prostitutes?

- Avbero: But he has immortalised his name!
- Sankaria: Did his death change anything? Did it improve the life of his country? Did it stop the descent into anarchy and war?
- Avbero: No it didn't. But his family members hold their heads high. They have honour and prestige.
- Sankaria: Sacrificial gallantry sounds so good in the books. The trauma lasts forever.
- Avbero: That's a lie. What about the other General? The one who came as a reformer and dispensed with personal security. Was this death not beneficial to the nation?
- Sankaria: In what way Let us not encourage our courageous men to die in the name of martyrdom. They should struggle to live and transform lives If death is a pre-requisite for heroism, I'd rather not be a hero.... Perhaps we do not need heroes anymore, at least, not dead ones. Your primitive, feudalist mentality holds you and your likes in perpetual bondage Your plight is made despicable by the lascivious and adulterous desires of your black, hypocritical heart. (42-44)

In this quotation lies Eghagha's argument in this play. The import of sacrificial death is argued and illustrations of "sacrificial lambs" in Nigeria political history are given in a bid to see its futility. As recorded by Falola et al (1991:110-124), the military coup of January 15, 1966 led to the death of many military officers and politicians. The second coup of July 29, 1966 was a reprisal which eventually led to the death of Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi who was visiting the western region. Lt Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, his host, was killed alongside. To the traditional Yorubas, there is honour after death and it is more desirable than a life of disgrace. Sankaria, however sees sacrificial death as a waste.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to discuss the Intertextual relations between Duro Ladipo's *Oba Waja (The King is Dead)*, Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and Hope Eghagha's *Death, Not a Redeemer*. The concept of sacrificial death is central to these texts. There are, however, points of divergence either by ideological colourations, faithfulness to the historical fact or otherwise and issues of individual attitude and perceptions.

Eghagha has taken Soyinka's play and transposed it to another setting whereby the conflict is no longer between a traditional African culture and a foreign one as portrayed in Soyinka's but between colonial imperatives and African tradition in a postcolonial environment. The conflict is between Karia and the traditional elders/chiefs who hold fast to customs on the one hand, and Karia's Christian religion and the judiciary on the other. Eghagha has not just taken the concept of ritual death but he has modified it in the light of new dynamics in the society. He did not reproduce merely but extended the dramatic situation. He has written at a time when colonial vestiges are fragmenting our society. Even though, Soyinka's play depicts "the power and glory" of the Yoruba race in the face of colonialism in a language that is fascinating, Eghagha queries this essence. Therefore, he makes Sankaria an Economics student, aware of the vagaries of the society, reject this custom and find solace in the law court to adjudicate on an issue that is beyond the court. Whether or not this is an acceptable interpretation of history and myth as recorded by Duro Ladipo and Wole Soyinka is left for posterity to assess.

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