

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF IMAGINATION: WOLE SOYINKA'S *SEASON OF ANOMY* AS SPECULATIVE FICTION

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Abstract

*Speculative fiction is, at bottom, a broad literary genre encompassing any fiction suffused with supernatural, fantastical, or futuristic elements. It enacts alternate history, alternate socius, alternate social, economic, and political processes. It posits an alternate, radically different future, posits what is possible in the realm of human affairs as an alternative to present reality which is often cast as an infinitely undesirable and grotesque monstrosity. At the conflation of mythmaking process and literary expression, Ikenna Dieke, in his book *The Primordial Image: African, Afro-American, and Caribbean Mythopoetic Text* theorizes that the concept of speculative fiction could be termed mythopoesis and the text which constructs or entifies it mythopoetic text. Additionally, speculative fiction enacts millennial narrative and employs elements of heroic fantasy to imagine possible futures. "This heroic fantasy," Dieke argues, "is expressed in the millenarian myth which, extrapolating from present milieu and knowledge, objectifies the hopes and fears of its time, creating infinite models of social possibility by which it evaluates the present." (284) In other words, *Season of Anomy* as speculative fiction allows us a glimpse of the present we abhor and the future we desire, the only kind of future many of us can still believe in, a future in which problems still exist, but are always met with fundamental honesty, determination and tremendous will, a world that is at once overwhelmingly attractively and ultimately reassuring.*

Key Words: speculative fiction, alternate history, millennial narrative, mythopoesis, heroic fantasy, dystopia, utopia.

INTRODUCTION

sync with the title of this essay, speculative fiction enacts the vision of a new earth, new heaven (*orbis terrarum*), and as such, it provides an expanded context for one of two forms of literature broadly identified by Andre Rousseaux and paraphrased by Charles Moeller. In *Man and Salvation in Literature*, Moeller explains Rousseaux's taxonomy between the literature of happiness and the literature of salvation. The literature of happiness attempts to demonstrate how man can create a happier life for himself. Its intention is to make man more human, supposing that man is already human, and thus seeks to embellish and improve his life. On the other hand, continues Moeller, the literature of salvation, the creative offshoot or by-product of speculative imagination, takes as its starting point the awareness of a situation in which human life has degenerated into a subhuman and

bestial level. It is fraught with unspeakable dread, horror and wretchedness, marked by the anguish of not being able to live a (decent) human life, and characterized by the human condition under the sign of menace, death and diabolism.

From the preceding lead-in intro, there are three discernible processes or variables implicated in the speculative fictional narrative. In keeping with the novel's expose, the first is the dystopian variable; the second is its parallel opposite or antonym, the utopian variable, both being employed in the exploration of social and political structures; and the third is its allegoric-mythopoeic analogue (allegoresis). All three variables are present in fairly equal proportion and articulation in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*.

Dystopia or cacotopia, as it is sometimes called, is a social and political system characterized by a focus on negatives such as mass poverty, public mistrust, police state, squalor, suffering, oppressive regime, suppression of justice, curtailment of freedom and of citizen's pursuit of happiness. It is a Hobbesian reality, of a life of continual fear and danger of violent death, where the whole life of man has become solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Sometimes, as is the case in *Season of Anomy*, dystopia manifests unimaginable violence, horror, unspeakable evil, dehumanization, possessing an almost indescribable frightening undesirability.

In a word, in a dystopia, people are oppressed; they are miserable; they are afraid, and everything they do is controlled by some "demonic" authority. This is the picture Soyinka paints of the unnamed country in *Season*, especially the Cross-river region of the country. Soyinka uses the Cross-river model to sound a warning that the latter leaves people very little room to escape their warped destiny, and that if they continued down this road, then the future would certainly be bleak and nebulous. Soyinka also uses the unnamed country, especially its Cross-river region to suggest that post-colonial Nigeria exemplifies the type of society altered in some fundamental negative ways. Though fictional and speculative, the Cross-river speaks to real world concerns about post-colonial Nigeria and the need to make a turnabout face from the precipice from which it appears to be sliding dangerously toward. The truth is that the Cross-river as depicted by Soyinka in *Season of Anomy* is the focus of terrifying evil, and Soyinka feels this unassuageable urge to offer an alternative.

Season of Anomy suggests a kind of end of civilization where life has undergone a frighteningly degenerative metamorphosis, where man has descended from the lofty heights of God's creation to the harrowingly pathetically frightening level of the beast. As with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* is linked with utopian and dystopian imagination because it shares with the former the general preoccupation with ideas of the good and awfully bad society, and as a metaphor for the different directions humanity (i.e., Nigeria of 1966) can possibly take in its choices, ending up with one of two possible futures.

Soyinka uses *Season of Anomy* to sound a political warning about the cataclysmic decline of Nigeria of 1966, to draw attention to real-world issues regarding Nigeria of that seeming endtime era, which if unchecked and unaddressed, could potentially lead or corral into cataclysmic consequences. His poem, "Massacre, October '66" represents a grisly reinforcement of that warning, and together with the novel, extrapolates realistic elements of contemporary Nigeria (the Igbo pogrom of 1966 in Northern Nigeria). Most critics and political pundits read both poem and novel as political warnings. Juxtaposing Aiyero and Cross-River sections of the country, the reader is offered the choice between the one the author considers ideal, and another representing the worst possible outcome. Soyinka's point is that the choices Nigeria makes might lead to a better or worse potential future for herself. The choice is obviously hers and hers alone to make. No shirking, no equivocation, no concealment. Keith M. Booker is correct when he asserts that dystopian literature is used to provide fresh

perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable.

Season of Anomy is awash with staggering examples of dystopia. The Cross-river is cast by Soyinka as *descensus ad inferos* (descent into hell), an earthly example or variant of the netherworld of Hades where evil and anarchy reign supreme, where all the great expectations of man are finally compromised and frustrated, and where the vaunted claims of civilization are finally mocked and defeated. Page after page the novel pulsates, almost to a point of unrelieved paroxysm, with citizens' blood, murder, and destructive cannibalism, the type and magnitude not witnessed before in the land, and as Soyinka suggests in his poem earlier alluded to, this is not the blood of strangers, but that of fellow citizens who suddenly found themselves in harm's way and at the cross points of an apparently motiveless malignity. Traversing the Cross-river terrain is like traversing a landscape akin to the landscape alluded to in the Eleusinian Demeter and Persephone myth. Among the ideas earliest impressed upon the mind of the primordial man is the yearly stealing away of the treasures of the earth or dawn-mother by the greedy and pitiless winter into the regions of darkness. These regions, in effect, become a prison. The lord of this cheerless abode, according to Hellenic belief, is Hades or Aides, the third of the three Kronid brothers and children of Rhea.

The protagonist Ofeyi's journey through the Cross-River enacts a journey through hell. In *Season of Anomy*, there is an apparent allusion to the Hellenic worldview which captures the existence of five great rivers which separate the world of the living represented by Aiyero from that of the dead represented by Cross-River. They include Rivers Styx, Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon and Lythe. Accompanied by the musician Zaccheus, Ofeyi apparently traverses these mythical rivers rolled into one, named by Soyinka as the Labbe River, before discovering where Iriyise is held near the city of Temoko. The Labbe pretty much like the Styx is a river of ethnic hatred and bloodshed. The Styx is the river which wraps around Hades nine times, and is the actual river that separates the land of the living from the land of the dead. It is reminiscent of the kind of vengeful hatred which Cross-river has for Aiyero, which makes the former incapable of embracing the ideology of kinder and gentler dispensation, of peace and harmony of the latter. The Acheron is known as the river of woe, sorrow and tribulation and is linked to the Styx. Thus we see the connection between ethnic violence and the unspeakable carnage committed in the town of Shage, where a man is hunted down and killed, his scrotum and penis stuffed into his mouth. The same connection is seen in Kuntua where ironically on one bright Sunday, a congregation of worshippers are set ablaze within their church building, with armed vandals posted at strategic points to butcher anyone of them daring enough to seek an escape. Ofeyi's quest brings him also to the center of the mythical Cocytus, the river of lamentation for the dead not accorded proper burial rites. Labbe's analogy to Cocytus is clear, and around here, Ofeyi and Zaccheus come upon the Tabernacle of Hope, a church where men, women, and children, wounded and hungry, but lucky enough to survive the "burial" designed for them in the Cross-river "killing fields" wells up in endless ululation of woes and lamentation.

Similarly, the forest where Ofeyi meets Pa Ahime, the Dentist, and other Aiyero citizens also smacks of lamentation. And just like the spirits or ghosts of those not given proper and deserving burial come up to torment the living, their oppressors, it is in this forest where Pa Ahime and the rest of the Aiyero contingent hastily plan to scamper out of the zone of death. Of greater significance is Ofeyi's search which takes him to the Temoko prison where Iriyise is incarcerated. This search is a symbolic analogue to the journey to the river Phlegethon. Plato *Phaedo* describes Phlegethon as a stream of fire which coils around the earth and flows into the depths of Tartarus. Similarly, in Dante's *Inferno*, in the seventh circle of Hell, it is portrayed as a river of blood where tortured souls are boiled alive, and where those who have committed crimes of violence, murders, etc are summarily punished. And the centaurs patrol the circle, shooting arrows at those who try to rise above their allotted level in the

river. It is in this Tartarus, the Death Cell, the innermost part of the prison-hell, the dungeon of suffering and torment, where madmen and villains, and victims too, including Iriyise are held in this macabre drama of ineffable violence and burgeoning insanity. As Temoko is the nerve-center of the dystopian Cross-river, the journey to the Temoko prison is cast by Soyinka as a movement into the deepest part of Hell.

A significant part of the millennial and terminal vision of *Season of Anomy* lies in its depiction of the scenario of death and destruction in Cross-river. In this sense, the novel can be regarded as a veritable danse macabre which is linked inexorably with Soyinka's vision of the endtime. The following passage shows not only a ghoulish image of unrelenting deathness, but also a deepening crisis of man's fall from the pastoral grace of Eden which corresponds roughly to an endtime in Soyinkan sense:

. . . Twenty miles from Irelu a woman was dragged from her bed, sliced open at the belly. She was not even dead when they left her guts spilling in a messy afterbirth between her thighs. The assailants stuffed her mouth with a roll of the court orders she had served on them and set the grotesque cigar alight. A family of twenty, three generations in all wiped out in a noon of vengeance. An agent on the run from mob rage had fired wildly into his pursuers felling two, fled and barricaded himself in his own house. He was still scrabbling for more cartridges when they came upon him, a huge wave borne solely on pain and rage. (Soyinka, 1994, p. 109-110).

The image of the perpetrators of the genocide against the Aiyero people is presented as diabolic hunters feeding on the blood of the innocent. Soyinka describes one of the encounters between them and their victims in the town of Kuntua. It is an encounter replete with all the horror of devilish machinations. The following is a description of one of the gruesome encounters at the outskirts of Kuntua as assailants surround a man with the intent to kill him:

A movement from the stunned creature, a stirring in the matted rags, a twig, a tubercular arm scrabbled on the tar... again all was still. Only for an instant. The eyes of the watching group were suddenly alerted... the varnished skull of one-he seemed to be the oldest among them...someone unsheated a dagger, placed it in his hand. It rose, glinted briefly in the sun and the old man stooped and drew it across the throat of the prostrate figure... their faces betrayed neither thought nor feeling.... The men vanished as silently into the forest as they emerged. Numbed by the scenec and locked on the lifeless principal of the night-mare spectacle, neither Ofeyi nor Zacchaeus had seen them go. They stood riverted to the enlarged emptiness in the statre of the dead man, incapable of motion or will, zacchaeus was the first to grow coherent, now that he had fought and controlled the bilge that rose to his throat (Soyinka, 1994, p. 398-399).

The slaughter and mutilation gets increasingly gorier and gorier, with the entire landscape sharing in the carnage, attracting the vultures. As Ofeyi and Zaccheus drive through the terrain, Soyinka tells us,

They drove through the high grass expanse interspersed with shrub shaded waterholes, pocked by anthills, thorn trees, baobab and the locust bean trees. Beyond the vultures and a few hidden hyenas, nothing moved in these grasslands but the cats, and he came gradually to feel the existence of one, even of the advertising variety right beneath his bonnet. It was a soothing sensation. Nothing filtered through into the saloon but the purring contentment of the sleek-furred creature coiled among the maze of wires, cylinders, bolts and knots. It defied the outer furnace of a sun that burnt fiercer as they moved ever northwards, passed a feral tingle into his fingertips

which became sensitive to road surface, wind-drag, to sun haze and the shadow flash of passing vultures. His bare toes on the pedals traced the course of fuel atoms from the source of combustion, felt the easy rhythms of pistons in their cylinders. Leaves blew in his hair, the catwind sniffed his tyre spools, he experienced again the oiling of his viscera as when he watched the mechanic slurp the dark viscostatic fluid-patronized by all the major firms sir, all those who have to depend on efficient transport-relaxing fully, he admitted that when the car spun seemingly on only two wheels he distinctly sensed the heavy colloid hold the vehicle in a maternal ease (Soyinka, 1994, p. 401-402)

This is a gory picture of political and ethnic violence directed against the Aiyero people and other 'strangers,' first presented as a kind of pharmakoid act of savagery, and second inflicted as a perverse act of motiveless malignity. As in Thomas Hood's poem, "The Last Man," or better yet as in Jewish holocaust fiction, men under the inciteful banner, first of religious zealotry, and second of political tribal jingoism and instigation by the Cartel and the Junta, have become a grisly pack of psychopaths and murderers. Like Edward Bryant in "Among the Dead," Soyinka carries his speculative and terminal vision to its ultimate grotesquerie. For example, Soyinka's description of the ghoulish scene near Labbe bridge has all the eerie reverberations of an actively willed evil:

Thinking of this, Ofeyi walked further upriver, making for a tributary whose white sandbanks stood out sharply in his mind from a journey some years before. Coming upon it sooner than he thought he inspected it carefully, sniffed the air and peered into the bushes. It was possible that even this part of the river had shared in the haulage of putrefaction. Still, after this bridge it was even more certain that no stream remained unpolluted, no pool existed in which a man could throw a stone without bursting a bloated skin of decay. Not even the wells, for in their mindlessness the hordes of the Cartel had not refrained from soiling the needs of the living for pure sources. It took no energy to kill or maim, it took much to bury the dead. The wells and inland waters proved receptive, insatiable. When the streets were piled high and the vultures proved too tardy scavengers, glutted beyond their airborne dreams in this mostly barren landscape, then the trucks moved in, gathered up the gruesome debris and tipped them into reservoirs. A train bearing refugees to safety had stopped over a bridge, emptied one wagon full of corpses into the gorge below. When the bolts were first removed the bodies simply fell out, tumbled towards the thin ribbon of water far below the narrow bridge. Then the sanitation men in their brown uniforms, handkerchiefs tied to their lowerfaces began to haul out the others one by one, prodding through the metal gaps to push into the void those which were caught between the girders of the bridge (Soyinka, 1994, p.427)

Apart from human exhaustion, nature too is exhausted. The Cartel's heavy-handed operation also bears witness to the exhaustion of the energy of the natural order. Aside from the Cartel's destruction of the lush virgin forests of Aiyero, there is also the wasted emanation that is the Cross-river topography. With dwindling trees, scrawny leaves, scorched sky, 'gorges whose precarious sides sheered into the netherworld,' what remains is a scatological picture of nothing but a stinking haze which hung over [and seemed] to seep from a source of hidden putrefaction.

Soyinka does not merely render the physical attributes of the Cross-River landscape; instead he demonstrates that its nerve-center, Temoko, is the stark horridness of entrance, the slow penetration of the terrain by an awakening, disconsolate but determined archaeological voyager. Ofeyi is that voyager who must look death in the eye, shaken but unfazed.

Counterposing the dystopian is the utopian variable which is imbricated in the Aiyero ideal. Soyinka's speculative fiction takes the existing world of the Cross-River and attempts to change it by asking 'what if there is a way out. . .what if there is another governmental system... what if there are processes that cater to the needs of the people for peace, tranquility, the absence of violence, the spirit of accommodation in which the vast majority will benefit?' whereas the Cross-River is an allegorical symbol of blood lust, large-scale violence, terror, victimization, murder and mutilation, brutal and mindless killing, Aiyero, on the other hand, offers a superior alternative and charts the future course of society. It is a course of social justice, fairness and equity. This vision of the intrinsic goodness or superiority of Aiyero, Soyinka believes must be spread throughout the society. Upon that, Soyinka suggests, lies the transformation, indeed the salvation of society. The person on whose shoulders this enormous responsibility of spreading the Aiyero message lies is Ofeyi. The Aiyero ideal is superior to what is seen and experienced elsewhere: the people themselves remain so upright and attached because according to the author in the novel "they live by an idea, their lives are bound up by the one idea... they cannot be corrupted or swayed." (Soyinka 1975, p. 261). A critic once said that the Aiyero ideal transcends the narrow confines of the ethnic group (ethnic jingoism) by virtue of its universal validity. Soyinka asserts in the novel that the ways of Aiyero have always been the dream of mankind all through the ages and among people so far apart. Ofeyi is driven by love to go down to the underworld, to suffer all manner of distress and discomfort for the sake of his one love Iriyise, thus by that act, he represents the awakening of the affectionate conscience. It is the absence of this affectionate conscience, the pervasiveness of inordinate and motiveless hatred, that characterizes the Cross-River region.

Ramond M. Coulombe of *Quantum Muse* magazine avers that the classic answer to the question of what is speculative fiction is that it is the fiction of 'what if?' Using this as a cue, Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* wrestles with the question, what if we had a governmental system that was honest but non-murderous, "fantastically corrupt," and at the same time fundamentally compassionate? The question seems to have found its answers in the Aiyero Ideal. The traditional system of Aiyero is a counterpoint of the murderous triumvirate of the exploitative Cocoa Cartel, the thanatic and genocidal system of the Cross-river domain, and the killing fields mentality of the military junta. That is why the latter seeks almost relentlessly to eliminate the former, since the former in its view constitutes clear and present danger and represents an existential threat to its murderous existence and ideational formulation. Aiyero is the traditional conservative African socialist system and yet it practices what President George W. Bush calls "compassionate conservatism." It is humane in its outlook and worldview, with its citizens living at peace with itself and with the rest of the world. We are told that the people of Aiyero are drawn into the mystique and enduring value system of Aiyero. That is why they keep coming back to it, time and time again. Obi Maduakor in his essay "Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*: Ofeyi's Quest," suggests that the Aiyero Ideal is a movement, and as such, could be likened to Soyinka's Third Force represented by Col. Victor Banjo. But there is a critical difference which must be pointed out. Victor Banjo's Third Force lacks visionary idealism and is pretty much anchored in military violence. The Aiyero Ideal, on the other hand, eschews violence. Banjo's Third Force was a catastrophic failure, forged as it were out of colossal deception and sabotage. Aiyero, on the other hand, is genuine, forged out of a genuine desire to institute an alternate socius built on a new gentler consciousness. Although its success is limited, and even short-lived, there is a strong suggestion that the consciousness-raising which it initiates will one day take root and germinate across the land, across the ethnic divide. The end of the novel is imbued with optimism, a kind of optimism that is not possible in the dark and diabolical world of Zaki Amuri and Chief Batoki.

The Aiyero Ideal is premised on the enduring values of humanness and sympathetic relatedness. That humanness and sympathetic relatedness is woven into the vision of the Shage Dam project which is

envisageable across the nation. Maduako believes that “Shage is important as Aiyero’s most crucial contact with the outside world which is represented by the universe of the Cartel.” (1980, p. 87). The German philosopher Immanuel Kant will help us to understand the moral superiority of Aiyero’s Shage project as part of the latter’s overall ethical idealism which is advocated as a healthy alternative to the Cartel’s voracious cut-throat economics. A Shage project, as a visible manifestation of the Aiyero idealism and proselytization, is predicated on the principle of fairness and fair play as opposed to the exploitative oligopoly of the Cartel’s murderous economics.

As mentioned earlier, in contrasting the economic ventures of Aiyero and the Cartel, Soyinka introduces what can be regarded as the literary rendition of the Kantian ethics. Kant, in his signature book on ethics, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, cautions against using people as a mere means to one’s own end. That’s exactly what the Cartel is doing in the novel. We will return to this a little later. Kant goes on to say that to use someone as a mere means, is to involve them in a scheme of action to which they didn’t or could not in principle consent. Involving someone, Kant continues in a scheme of action or a plan one has is all right as long as that person genuinely consents. If she/he consents, it means that they have some plan of their own in which one’s plan plays a role. Individual and collective violations of Kantian morality include, on the one hand, lying or otherwise deceiving people to get them, or coercing, and on the other various kinds of oppression of subordinate to enrich the dominant group (Cartel/Military Junta). The latter are incapable of treating people as ends in themselves, as Kant insists: in other words, are incapable of acting in Kantian terms, justly and beneficently. Kant opines: Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own self or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.

Ultimately, the preceding quote constitutes the very heart of Kantian moral theory known as “The Categorical Imperative.” In other words, for Kant, it is immoral to use another person merely as a means to an end and that people must under all circumstances, be treated as ends in themselves. Herein lies the clear dichotomy between the Aiyero system represented by Ofeyi, Iriyise, the Custodian of the Grain and Pa Ahime, and the Cartel’s. Kant’s theory of The Categorical Imperative focuses on the sovereignty of an individual where that individual is considered a rational being and this rational individual for Kant is to be kept at the center of everything. Everything should be for him or her and he or she must not be for achieving something else for someone else. Let us now look at the contrastive features between the Cartel’s and the Aiyero’s in very concrete terms. First, whereas Aiyero sees individuals like Ofeyi and Iriyise as ends in themselves, the Cartel perceives human individuals as footstools or mere means to an end. The reason is that Aiyero sees her citizens as rational human beings and so should be treated as an end in themselves and not as a means to something else. But for the Cartel, individuals should be treated as pliable tools of manipulation and so deserve not to be respected for their inherent worth and value. For the Custodian of the Grain and Pa Ahime, each human being or each citizen of Aiyero has inherent value which must be respected. Whereas the Cartel employs at times the instruments of deception and coercion, even brute force, the Aiyero leaders use gentle persuasion and affability, relying instead on the relative superiority of her ideas. The Cartel/Military Junta cannot act beneficently because they are incapable of seeking others’ happiness.

Aiyero perfectly understands Kant’s injunction that everything is for themselves. They are ends. An example is the Worker’s Vanguard at the Shage Dam Project, an extension of the Aiyero ideal which seeks to employ all things to fulfill the ends which are human beings, their progress, their satisfaction and comfort. But the Cartel’s murderous propensity effectively destroys the dream of a fair and equitable worker’s vanguard, including the project itself. In other words, the Cartel uses the instrument of endangerment, including endangering the human rights of the individual. Aiyero

adheres strictly to the human rights of her citizens. Unlike the Cartel, Aiyero tries to adhere to the rights which make each individual the center of benefit. In Aiyero, under no circumstances, is an individual considered as a means for fulfilling someone else's aims. When citizens are used as a means, it is meant for the greatest good for the greatest number. That is the essence of the Shage Dam Project where there are cooperative efforts to achieve greater benefits, with each cooperating individual taking care of and the benefits are based on, as stated earlier, on the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number.

The third pattern as we indicated earlier is the allegorical/mythopoeic. In this regard as with other great modern artists, Soyinka's use of the allegorical mode speaks to the knowledge that since meaningful stories are nearly always applicable to larger issues about humanity, allegories may be read into many stories which modern authors may or may not have recognized. But in Soyinka's case, *Season of Anomy* is not only latent with allegorical meaning, but also grows out of a specific allegorical narrative, that of Cerberus, the legendary ginormous doggy with three heads whose job is to guard the gates of Hell and to sniff out the living who might be trying to sneak out of the Underworld.

In furthering his speculative fictional engagement, Soyinka employs the allegorical frame to illustrate complex moral ideas in ways that are striking and memorable. One such allegory employed artfully by the author is the mythic story of a Greek Cerberus whom Soyinka transplants and subsequently renames Suberu in *Season of Anomy*. The story of Cerberus conveys important moral meaning through symbolic figuration which together creates the moral *cum* political meaning which Soyinka wishes to convey. The characteristic of Soyinka's Suberu while drawn on the Greek mythological Cerberus reminds us of what Northrop Frye terms in his bold discourse as "continuum of allegory," a spectrum that ranges far from what he terms the "naïve allegory" of *The Faire Queen* to the more private allegories of modern paradox literature. In this perspective, in a naïve allegory, according to Frye are not fully three dimensional, for each aspect of their individual personalities and the events that befall them embody some kind of moral quality or other abstraction. In other words, in a naïve allegory, the allegory has been selected first and the details merely flesh it out. This is the case with Soyinka's story about Suberu, the guardian of the gates of the Temoko prison where Ofeyi's girlfriend Iriyise is held incommunicado. Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* and in particular his story about Suberu, reminds one of classical allegory. In classical literature, one of the best-known examples of allegory in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* which forms a part of his larger work *The Republic*.

In this allegory, Plato describes a group of people who have lived, chained in a cave all of their lives, facing a blank wall. The people watch shadows projected on the wall by things passing in front of a fire behind them and begin to ascribe forms to these shadows, using language to identify their world. According to the allegory, the shadows are as close as the prisoners get to viewing reality, until one of them finds his way into the outside world where he sees the actual objects that produced the shadows. He tries to tell the people in the cave of his discovery, but they do not believe him and vehemently resist his efforts to free them so they can see for themselves. Suberu is like Plato's cave inmates and like them, he has been chained all his life to a vicious cycle of evil and infamy supervised by men like Zaki and Karaun. For twenty long years, this vicious cycle is all that he has known. In fact, there is a strong suggestion that Cerberus and Suberu may be said to be cognate words representing evil.

Soyinka's preoccupation with evil saturates the entire novel but more so in Ofeyi's encounter with Suberu. Soyinka puts it in *Season*, this way:

Ofeyi wondered... was the blood lust that seized upon the populace just another legacy of climate? Or was there a truly metaphysic condition called evil, present in epidemic proportions... for this was not a mere question of slaughter. A relish had

coloured their actions, a deep hunger of perversion both in inventiveness and magnitude, as if they sought to balance unnatural mutations, their human forms with a vengeful outrage on the face of humanity. (Soyinka, 1994, p. 509-510)

In her book, *Evil in Modern Thought* (2002), Susan Neiman traces philosophy's struggles with evil over several hundred years. Prior to the modernist era, inquiry into the concept of evil was dominated by theodicy, which correlates with the attempt to reconcile a good and omnipotent deity with evil in the world. For Soyinka, the problem of evil is fundamentally a secular one, focusing primarily on the moral category: the evil that men do. His novel *Season of Anomy* belongs to what might be characterized as the post-theodicy era. Soyinka neither shares Hegel's explanation that evils are necessary steps in the march of history nor Nietzsche's argument that evil is a problem we brought on ourselves by inventing moral categories that don't reflect the ways of the natural world. Rather, Soyinka in his conception of evil, suggests that evil is a clear moral category of its own, defined by acts of intentional malevolence. Soyinka, however, in *Season of Anomy* goes beyond the latter argument that evil actions require evil intentions. The evil associated with the character of Suberu goes beyond the suggestion of possession by a satanic or any other kind of supernatural force. Rather it is evil imbricated in agency, human agency. Suberu is not really born evil. Soyinka suggests that it is evil inculcated in him and habituated over 20 years or so. But at the end, Suberu turns his back on that evil reality like Plato's prisoners who are freed from the cave, perceiving life not as one long, dark evil manufactured by Karaun and Zaki Amuri, but as one in which there is a possibility of loving his fellow human beings. Plato's prisoners could not break free from their condition until they came outside to perceive the sun, an archetypal symbol of enlightenment. In similar vein, Suberu could not break the bonds of Temoko and free himself from the chains of phenomenal state just as the prisoners could not free themselves from their chains until confronted by Ofeyi's superior moral and rational argument to embrace the world of good, unencumbered by radical evil. In other words miraculously, Suberu escapes his bondage to Karaun, the governor of Temoko, a man from whom a lot of evil has emanated and subsequently, finds redemption through Ofeyi's superior proselytization.

Soyinka's notion of evil is akin to Plato's conception of same. Plato writes that there are relatively few ways to do good, but there are countless ways to do evil. Suberu has chosen or has been forced to choose one of those countless ways. Soyinka demonstrates that Suberu's way has had much greater impact on citizens' lives and has engendered much suffering. If one reads carefully, specific sections or passages of Plato's *The Republic*, *The Timaeus* and *The Laws*, one would notice that Plato was indeed seriously engaged with the problem of evil, identifying with the corporeal constituent of the universe as the cause of his existence. In the Temoko prison, this corporeal constituent is evident. Soyinka like Plato is appalled by the pain and injustice men inflict upon one another, appalled at the sight of the unbounded power of human beings to wreak havoc and destruction among the living entities inhabiting this earth. With the character of Suberu, Soyinka like Plato demonstrates the evil that living entities experience and this poses before us not only the practical problem of survival in a hostile environment such as Temoko and Kuntua in particular and Cross River in general, but also the existential problem of whether and how a life laced with suffering and punctuated by death can have any positive meaning.

Against Suberu's ostensible maleficence, Soyinka like Plato demonstrates in *Season* that the world does indeed contain a great deal of evil given the maleficent acts and laundry list of the misery and wickedness of men such as members of the Cartel, Zaki Amuri, Karaun and Chief Batoki. In foregrounding this maleficence, Soyinka juxtaposes the Christian Church, particularly the Tabernacle of Hope Church and the wicked acts of the Cartel, the Suberus and Amuris of the world, and Soyinka uses this juxtaposition to argue like Plato, that God is not to blame for the evils of the world, that the latter is the personal responsibility, the ascribing of all evil to the individual soul, of locating the

source of evil right in the human soul. By juxtaposition, Soyinka like Plato acknowledges the coexistence and co-presence of benevolent Deity on the one hand, and of numerous evils on the other, underscoring a complex paradox. Soyinka in *Season* as Plato in his *Republic* is not concerned with the problem of evil in the universe as an abstract whole but instead with evil in human life, that is, evil in so far as human beings experience it and suffer from it. Soyinka suggests that the fact that humans are not all living well, but are instead miserable and unhappy, shows the extent to which evil has ravaged the hearts of men.

In other words, Soyinka like Plato and his master Socrates, is presenting the problem of evil from the anthropocentric point of view. When one thinks of Suberu, one is subjected to the thought of pain and of moral depravity. For Soyinka and Plato, the problem of evil emanates from the free agency of man who wields that evil independently of God, while the Church in particular, the Tabernacle of Hope is offered with the aim of justifying God's ways to man, a contrary impulse, evil and its agency, project human pain and suffering, even unto innocent children of God. So, Suberu's turnaround at the end appears to be informed by Plato's position. Plato in the *Myth of Er* suggests that nobody, even the most depraved human being, is at liberty to choose not to make a choice. Making up one's mind and getting started with the new life is according to Plato, absolutely obligatory. The alternative will be to remain in the bardo state indefinitely or remain utterly inactive refraining from making decisions. Despite the ironic juxtaposition of the Tabernacle of Hope Church and the evil that men do, such juxtaposition Soyinka suggests, underguards God's goodness in the face of the numerous evils that human kind unleashes and encounters.

Furthermore, Soyinka's image of Suberu reminds one of Soren Kierkegaard's image of Cerberus. Cerberus remains in Kierkegaard's imagination as the mythological representation of unbearable evil. Remarkably, Cerberus mythological episodes as well as his occurrence within Kierkegaard's works offer the reader the vision of the possibility of rising above and triumphing over himself, a triumph which could never in fact occur without the threat and defiance of failure and despair, and which could only come from experiences of confrontation, resilience and resistance. Soyinka's as Kierkegaard's extensive knowledge of classical literature rings loud and clear and this knowledge would result in the recovery of the Cerberus figure. Here, Soyinka conflates the need for superior rationalization and methodological discourse enabling him to find meaning for Suberu in his own imagery. This study is of the opinion that there are striking resemblances between Kierkegaard's imagizing of Greek Cerberus and Soyinka's depiction of Suberu, both characters and denizens of the underworld—for Cerberus, the underworld of Hades with Pluto at the helm of affairs and for Suberu, the Cross River/Temoko with Zaki Amuri and Karaun at the helm of affairs. This study posits that Soyinka's transformation of Suberu at the logical insistence of Ofeyi is remarkably akin to the German poet's transformation/rendition of the Christian salvation of the embodiment of malevolence and the most diabolical creature in ancient mythology. Both Kierkegaard's and Soyinka's efforts at transformation represent serious attempts not only to endure but ultimately to prevail over infernal monstrosity underscoring a basic affinity between those who take from the fecundity of ancient mythology, an inspiring element for their writing, and perceptions of the modern world.

In conclusion, the insistent message of *Season of Anomy*, in keeping with its speculative optimism, is that even in the midst of annihilated, human trust, even in the midst of bottomless hopelessness, even in these challenging and incredibly divisive times, there is still a reason for hope. As Jack Eagle opines in his blog; the reason is that we all have access to the greatest capacity ever created—consciousness—the indefatigable will to endure and ultimately prevail. Soyinka as a novelist, employs the resources of his active imagination to direct our consciousness and conscience away from death and destruction, including thanatic impulses toward life, creative living and humane collaboration. Soyinka uses the novel to extrapolate from Nigeria of 1966 and to try to anticipate

where Nigerians will be one day, both as a people and as a country. The novel as speculative fiction in the words of Lida E. Duillen of Twilight Times [<http://www.twilighttimes.com>] pushes the boundaries of imagination. It forces us to think and provide, a new insight into how nature. *Season of Anomy* asks the simple question. It is a question that needs to be asked—what is it to be human? Is it to kill and maim or is it to be gentle, to show love and compassion to fellow human beings. On a broader visionary level, Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* insists on a human point of view putting ordinary people and inserting them in extraordinary circumstances. The difference between Egbo of Soyinka's first novel, *The Interpreters* and Ofeyi of *Season of Anomy* is what separates Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* from the earlier novels in African Literature, is that the latter were set within the boundaries given by society at the time they were written. But *Season of Anomy* manifests a great leap of reason and humanity by creating characters such as Ofeyi, Iriyise and Zaccheus Suberu by lifting them above their circumstances. They rise to become extraordinary persons in extraordinary circumstances. They rise above the moment; they become more human before. The readers have no choice but to identify with them, with their dream of a better tomorrow. In effect, the leaders become the nascent heroes of a new society being envisaged by the author, becoming more than by living the life on the pages of the novel.

Finally, *Season of Anomy* expands our knowledge of what is possible. Ofeyi's success with Suberu, alluded to earlier above, demonstrates that, according to Annie Neugebauer in "What Is Speculative Fiction?" knowledge grows and belief shifts, and these are the things that inform our concept of what is possible in human affairs.

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