

Historical, Moral, and Political Learned in Dance in the Forest

Name

Course

Date

Soyinka's play, *A dance in the forest*, was performed for the first time during Nigeria's independence and explore many issues related to independent movement in Nigeria, relation of tradition to the history, and Nigerian politics. In this play, Soyinka seems to stress that it is the duty of Nigerians to get rid of the evil out of the society. The play warns to the people of Nigeria that if they if they do not remain alert, history will repeat itself and people would repeat their mistakes (Melamu, 2001).

Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* begins with the Dead Woman and the Dead Man emerging from the ground, which is mysterious. Among the characters, there seem to be no protagonist or antagonist and the normal practice where gods act as an antagonist of the subject is jettisoned. The play includes a story in which the living invites their dead ancestors to grace their celebration. This is not only a distortion and exaggeration of reality, but also a fictional that overrides the reality of the whole story. The whole play establishes Soyinka's as a moralist and the story is an inflation of Wole Soyinka's social-political concern.

The play is a social-political commentary set in 1960 as part celebration of Nigeria's independence, which mean that the story opines much more than critics have acknowledged. The play includes Ogun (god) who has been displayed in the story as a symbol of the alliance of disparities. He is describe as "the Dionysian-Apollonian-Promethean essence," which mean that he is the god or creation as well as destruction, god of love and at the same time god of hatred, and god of protection as well as punishment. In the play, Soyinka seems to convey that what is good can also be a term as bad. Unlike in Hegelian philosophy where the contraries naturally resolve themselves, according to Soyinka's imaginative world they do not resolve. Rather, they may resolve in negativity (Melamu, 2001).

While in one hand we judge Prometheus for stealing, on the other hand, we sympathize with him because he stole to prosecute an act of kindness. Soyinka uses Ogun to represent principles of individualism vs. collectiveness, civilization vs. permissivity, and light vs. darkness. That is why the play ends without any of the three major conflicts. That is, between Ogun and Eshuro; between living and the dead, and conflict between livings and the unborn is resolved. “Ogun enters the stage bearing Demoke, looking at the sky anxiously; he carries a gun and cutlass; the sun creeps through; Ogun gently down Demoke, leaves his weapons beside him, flees; Eshuro is still dancing as the foremost of the beaters break on the scene and later flees after his Jester” (Soyinka, 1963, P. 76). In this episode, it could be hard to understand the action of leading Dead Woman with Half-child out of the stage. Thus, the play raises more questions more than answers (Melamu, 2001).

Soyinka’s dramatic play also reveals his vision of humanity as metaphysical and mythological. He seems to believe that the human existence is characterized by consciousness, ability to reason and act on their lived experience. However, according to Soyinka’s play Yoruba seem to be displayed as different from European people who are with purely conceptual aspect of time. It is clear that, unlike the western Yoruba see human existence as being made up of the living, dead and the unborn. He views the “the present human” as the “child of the past” and the “further of future” (Soyinka, 1963, P. 36). Yoruba believes existence of continuity in the world of living, which includes the born and unborn. Therefore, according to Soyinka, human’s life is cycling with no beginning and no end. It conveys that the life of the dead has its continuation in that of living, which in turn continues in that of unborn. This is seen in the episode where there is an umbilical cord tying the living to their dead ancestors and their unborn children. The dead

Man and the Dead Woman symbolize the past of the living while the Half-child symbolizes the future. All are tied together in a metonymic quest for the essence and the meaning of life.

Soyinka uses Rola/Madame Tortoise to convey a prostitute who is responsible for death of men now and eight centuries ago, she was also a prostitute queen responsible for death of Dead Man and Dead Woman and many others in senseless war. Here the writer seem to condemn a woman for being prostitute and this represent how women in Sonyika's world are treated.

It is also important to note that according to the writer's world, Rola seems not to differentiate between the capitalistic tendencies of businessmen who ruin the poor through their own action. They seem to argue that they are the product of their society the same way the society is the product of her. They are also unworthy on their reasoning that "when one was killed, was it killing on my behalves? When he kills herself, can it be claim that he did it for me? He only did for himself, so leave me out of this." (Soyinka, 1963, P. 36) Instead of seeing Rola's prostitution as responsible for dead of men, Rola argues that men kill themselves because of their ego. Therefore, what Soyinka reveal is that as long as women are blamed for their prostitution, men should also be blamed for patronizing them. Therefore, Soyinka cautions the society for making simple moral judgments (Melamu, 2001).

Soyinka's play displays the Forest Farther as subprime Deity in Soyinka's world. The fact that he is displayed as forest father is enough to suggest that his omnipotent figure. The Forest Father also reveals also that "the fooleries of being whom I have fashioned closer to me weary and distress me." (Soyinka, 1963, P. 31) This reveals that Forest Father is the creator in according to Soyinka's imaginative world. It is also revealed through Ogun that Forest Father are

spiritual and have metaphysical power as he acknowledges that he is the one “ masquerading as Obaneji” to bring the other character judgment.

He has the power to take up any form, which shows that he is omnipresence. Yet in spite of knowing everything, as a deity, he still says that he has seen so much. “Oh no. I have seen so much. It simply doesn't impress me, that's all... I have told you, recognition is the curse I carry with me. I don't want to know any more” (Soyinka, 1963).

References

Melamu, M. J. (2001). Demoke's Totem: The Role of the Artist in Soyinka's A Dance of the Forest. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 3(1), 43.

Soyinka, W. (1963). *A dance of the forest*. London: Oxford University Press.