Hope Eghagha and the New Counter-Discourse in *Death, Not a Redeemer*

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Abstract
This article identifies an inward rupture in the practice of counter-discourse amongst African writers and critics. It reveals how a range of credos embedded in African literature, including drama and theatre, such as negritude, African personality, pan-Africanism, etc., and originated by African writers/literati, to both contest and reverse imperialismôs depressing rhetoric against African civilization, now attains the locus of power and, co-instantaneously, conferred a certain hegemony which privileges pristine African values above all other alternate apprehensions of the universe in contemporary Africa. Drawing from content analysis as its research method, this article derives its theoretical foundations from the New Counter-Discourse, itself, an offshoot of Counter-Discourse, which assumes the moral gait of a faction that interrogates, from within Africa, the unwholesome perpetuation of African values as the dominant ideology in the activity of cultural production rather than situating them in a network or continuum of equitable or mutually accommodating discourses. The primary sources of information are derivable from Hope Eghaghaôs *Death, Not a Redeemer* and Wole Soyinkaôs *Death and the King's Horseman* while its secondary sources are critical analyses of both theories and texts gleaned from the library.

Keywords: Hope Eghagha, New Counter-Discourse, Wole Soyinka, *Death, Not a Redeemer*

Introduction

This article is an examination of the contestatory verbiage and subversive strategies inherent in Hope Eghaghaôs play, *Death, Not*

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a Redeemer, which gazes back at the textual ideologies and credo of a dominant post-colonial and post-Negritudinist text, *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka. Hope Eghagha is, equally, a poet, playwright and an avid producer of plays. After a sustained career as a professional play producer/director founding and managing small theatre companies in western Nigeria, Eghagha joined the faculty of the University of Lagos as a lecturer in the Department of English, where he has also served the Head of English. Eghagha believes in the messianic mission of drama in redeeming the past or history. Writing on the ñbackgroundò of *Onowawi Shall Rise Again*, Eghagha admits that ñthis play you are about to read has been inspired by the story found in Okpe historyò (Onowawi vii). He locates the plot of *Death, Not A Redeemer* ñwithin a modern society and its polity, with all its attendant imperativesò that make him embrace ñwith all sense of responsibility the scope, dimensions and nature of contemporary conflictsò (ñPreface to the Playò). Eghagha is himself, at present, preoccupied with some sort of grassroots political mobilization among the local Urhobo people in Delta State of Nigeria where he hails from.

The New Counter-Discourse

According to Michel Foucault, the French philosopher and social historian, ñcounter-discourse is a discourse that challenges the original discourseôs legitimacyò. The term *discourse*, as it is conceptualized within fields of study in the humanities and the social sciences ñdescribes a formal way of thinking that can be expressed through language, a social boundary that defines what can be said about a specific topicò (Discourse 1). Discourses are esteemed as having the ability to influence subtly or affect our view of the world. This is the import in Teun A. van Dijkôs conceptualization that ñdiscourse may describe (prescribe, account for, etc.,) events, actions and actors and may do so in many ways: more or less explicitly or implicitly, more or less generally or specifically, more or less precisely or vaguely, with many or few details, as background or as foreground, and so onò (1). Thus, in Sara Mills analysis of Foucaultôs use of the term, ódiscourseô

subsumes within it the notion that ñ we can only think about and experience material objects and the world as a whole through discourses and the structure it imposes on our thinking ò (Berman, 5-6). Foucaultôs view is reinforced by David R. Howarth, Aletta J. Norval and Yanis Stravakakisôs assertion that human beings ñinhabit a world of meaningful discourses and practices, and cannot conceive or think about objects outside itò (3). They configure ñdiscourse or discoursesò as referring to ñsystems of meaningful practices that form the identities of objects and subjectsò (3-4). From the theoretical schematization of Dijk,

> It has become widely accepted that discourse is profoundly embedded in society and culture, and hence, closely related also to all forms of power, power abuse and social inequality. It has been shown how ethnic prejudices and ideologies are daily produced and reproduced by political and media discourse of the elites, and thus contribute to the reproduction of racism. The same is true for everyday sexism in many kinds of discourse ï from conversation to advertising ï and the reproduction of the system of male domination. (1)

Insights from Helen Tiffin indicate that works of a counter-discursive temperament, especially those respecting contemporary post-colonial art, philosophies, and literature involve a radical dismantling, subversion and appropriation of dominant ñEuropean discoursesò (17). She portrays the activity of counter-discourse inherent in post-colonial text as prevalent with ñrereading and rewritingò (18), a suffusion of ñsubversive manoeuvresò (18). Counter-discourse also involves what Sara Suleri describes as, ñThe decentering of discourse, the focus on the significance of language and writing in the construction of experience, the use of the subversive strategies of mimicry, parody and ironyò (113). Counter-discourse belongs to the category of discourse analysis called ñCritical Discourse.ò According to Nina Berman, the

objective of critical discourse studies is ñto reveal the oppressive structures of cultural discourses and to raise awareness of the power dynamics inherent in the multifaceted manifestations of languageò (4).

The New Counter-Discourse, itself, emanates from the assumption that, there is, presently, in African literature and film, a tendency to create and enforce what Aghogho Akpome describes as ñnew dominant discourses which centre and privilege the national and pan-African in the collective imaginary of postcolonial citizensò (406). That is, the extrapolation and intensification of the African experience in the annals of epochal analyses, theorizing and representation to the extent of essentialism. Examples can be found in the discourses on African personality, nationality and ontology, and the gamut of gnosis and episteme that underpin them; and which strew the writings of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Femi Osofisan, Gabre Mendhin, Efua Sutherland, Taofik Al Hakim, Kalu Uka, Ngugi wa Thiongôo, Kofi Awoonor, Amos Tutuola, Elechi Amadi, etc.; the films of Sembene Ousmane, Tunde Kelani, Hubert Ogunde and the profuse ócanonô of Nollywood films (and their counterparts in other parts of Africa). For instance, the internal, structural dynamics and credo of these African literatures and films are an embryogeny of *negritude* which Senghor, himself, describes as ñthe sum of the cultural values of the black worldò (196), and a consummation of what Chinweizu, *et al.* portray as ñthe flavor of African life [as] a matter of contemporary realities é as well as of the cultural inheritance from the pastò (240).

While in Chinweizuôs estimation these African literary and film productions ñhave historically been deployed for the avowed purposes of decolonization and for the envisaged socio-political development of previously colonized societiesò (Akpome, 405), many of them containerize, equally, something of ña repetition of the canonical terms of imperialismôs conceptual frameworkò (Parry 276). That is, expressing what Terdiman denominates as ñthe dialectic of discursive struggleò (Parry 275) in which each of these authors and producers uses ñthe same categories and vocabularies as texts or social control it contestsò (Dollimore 95) through a strategy of inscription described by Michel Foucault as

ñdeploying just those terms which relegated it to that state in the first place- including ónatureô and óessenceôò (Dollimore 96). In other words, while these films, narratives and dramatic writings ñchallenge, subvert and undermine the ruling ideologies, and nowhere more so than in overthrowing the hierarchy of colonizer/colonized, the speech and stance of the colonized, refusing a position of subjugation, and dispensing with the terms of the colonizerôs definitionsò (Parry 275). They, equally, construct the same ñstructure of power it seeks to repudiateò (Chatterjee 43) in their attempt to return its own anti-colonialist look back at the *Empire*. By so doing, these films and literary narratives transgress Tiffinôs rule of the thumb that, a counter-discursive work ñdoes not seek to subvert the dominant [discourse] with a view to taking its placeò (18).

The new counter-discourse does counter-identify itself against and opposes ñthe dominant [national] discourse and beyond that again to its European progenitorò (Tiffin 20). Many of these contemporary African narratives have a predilection for ñconsciously or unconsciously re-[invoking] those very hegemonic assumptions against which the postcolonial text has, from its inception, been directedò (Tiffin 95) thereby running the risk of ñbecoming colonizers in their turnò (Tiffin 95). In other words, Eghaghaôs *Death, Not a Redeemer* inserts dialectics into the dominant ontology of Soyinkaôs *Death and the King's Horseman* which is the existence of three complementary planes of existence normatively sketched in discursive praxis, properly, as the world of the ancestors, the living and the unborn.

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*

Within its Janus-faced architectonics as a nugget of sublime, creative artifice, and real verifiable history, *Death and the King's Horseman* rehearses the lascivious escapades of a munificent flirt, Elesin Oba, the Kingôs Horseman, who craves to mobilize one or all the complementary essences of transition, namely, death, life, and birth, before his ritual suicide on the night of the Kingôs burial. He fails in this ñPromethean raid on the durable resources of the transitional realmò (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 33).

This is due to stirrings from encrustations of concupiscence which make him rush to the market where he desires for a young bride as ñthe abyss across which (his) body must be drawnò and as a ñfinal gift of the living to their emissary to the land of the ancestorsò (*Death and the King's Horseman* 65*)*.

The marriage is duly consummated and, ñapotheosis, the joining of energies in cosmic continuity follows logicallyò (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 11). In fact, Iyaloja claims that: ñthe fruit of such is rare. It will be neither of this world nor of the next, nor of the world behind us. As if the timelessness of the ancestor world and the unborn have joined spirits to wring an issue of the elusive being of passageò (*Death and the King's Horseman* 22). Elesin bends his will and is promptly arrested by Pilkings, the colonial District Officer. Elesinôs son, Olunde, returns from England (where he was sent by the Pilkingses to study Medicine and Surgery) and commits suicide in his fatherôs stead in response to a certain inexplicable afflatus.

But the playôs thematic concretion is more fundamental, sketched largely on a meta-physical canvas and exhibited through a mundane apparatus labelled Elesin who presumably embodies ñthe universe of the Yoruba mind ï the world of the living, the dead and the unborn, and the numinous passage which links all: transitionò (*Death and the King's Horseman* 7). In this extremely dark play, Soyinka explores the role of the spiritual elect in a human community. He seems to make the point that there is apparently always a choice for the elect between escaping responsibility and taking it up squarely in spite of the prospect of doom. For, as Oyin Ogunba notes, ñthe truly elect, such as Olunde, feels an inner compulsion, a tumultuous excitement to act his part. He rushes headlong to his task and to inevitable tragedyò (16). Elesinôs fall, on the other hand, is the result of a hubristic act. Weak, vacillating, treacherous and disloyal, his human unit constitutes the (mechanism) of his downfall. Elesin remains ñan ethical archetype of the Yoruba tragic protagonist. His journey is a parable of confrontation with destinyò (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 14).

Hope Eghagha's *Death, Not a Redeemer*

Covalently*, Death, Not a Redeemer* by Hope Eghagha relives the obstinate refusal of Chief Israel Zachariah Karia to commit suicide in defiance of the traditional injunction that demands of the Kingôs horseman to do so in order to go ahead and make preparations in the spirit world for the arrival of the Oba (the traditional Yoruba title for ñKingò). The Oba is always buried after the death and burial of the horseman. The cardinal pretext for Chief Kariaôs refusal to die is his new-found Christian convictions which have twined him to a ñborn againò Christian church. This decision not to die enrages his wife, Avbero, who emphasizes to Chief Karia that ñAs horseman to the sleeping king, the bond that unites you must continue hereafter. You are bound by the ropes of tradition. Death is the vehicle which you must enteré é ò (*Death, Not a Redeemer* 3). Her overzealousness to have her husband, Chief Karia, take his life does not emanate from any iota of fidelity to tradition, but from a desire to be set free from her marriage to Chief Karia in order that she could get married to her true love of all times called Jolomi.

The Eldersô Enclave is equally disturbed because it has received clues about Chief Kariaôs resolve not to commit suicide and has, therefore, decided to question him. Chief Karia receives enormous support from his local Christian church, having the belief that, ñThe ransom sacrifice which Jesus Christ the righteous made for all mankind does not need a second motion. Praise the Lord!ò (*Death, Not a Redeemer* 29); his son, Sankaria, who lives and works in London, on arrival in Nigeria declares, ñWhere I studied, any practice which impinges on the rights of the people, is thrown into the garbage heap. The people change. The great Queen now pays tax!ò *(Death, Not a Redeemer* 45). Sankaria reckons the tradition of the horseman as deriving from a ñprimitive, feudalist mentalityò (*Death, Not A Redeemer* 44). To him, such an institution is used ñto facilitate feudalism, oppression, slavery, dehumanization and é é .ò (*Death, Not a Redeemer* 45). Consequently, Sankaria obtains a letter from an attorney-at-law to the Otota ñpreventing the council (of Elders) from commenting on the matter because it is already a subject of litigationò (*Death, Not a Redeemer* 47). After a heated legal contest at the law court, the

Judge makes the following submission, among others, as his judgment:

> ...I would like to affirm an operative principle in the rule of law: any practice, custom, tradition, ritual, no matter how ancient or considered sacred that clashes with the Law, must give way to the course of the Law in order to have justiceé . It is unreasonable for anybody to believe that a horseman must serve his master both here in the land of the living, and in the land of the deadé . It is a heartless and barbaric practice that must not be practiced. This court, therefore, rules that the custom of ritual suicide is atavistic, offensive to the universal declaration of Human Rights, offensive to natural justiceé . The Law does not recognize any ritual suicide. This court, therefore, rules that Chief Karia should not be compelled in any way to perform a barbaric act which ought to have been jettisoned long before now. This is my judgment (*Jubilation outside*). (*Death, Not a Redeemer* 78-80)

Death, Not a Redeemer infuses counter-discourses which make it operate as a counter-text against Wole Soyinkaôs *Death and the King's Horseman*. The playôs overt and ineluctable ideology is the disturbance of what Sekoni, a character in Wole Soyinkaôs *The Interpreters* calls ñthe dome of continuity, which is what life is... the universal domeò (9) which is a philosophical shorthand for the complex structure and symbolism of the primeval African ontology that, ñLife is not divided into measurable moments of time, as in Western thought, but into three interpenetrating phases: pre-life, life and after- lifeò (Jonathan 164) and presented with a plenitude of representations in many post-independence African writers such as Senghor, Achebe and Wole Soyinka.

In *Nocturnes*, for instance, Senghor underscores the

connection among the stages of existence by stressing the ubiquity of the ever-present óAncestorô in his veins, recalling ñthe abyssal night in our motherò, the ñmemory of times without historyé Before we were bornò (19, 13). In *Things Fall Apart,* Achebe invokes the presence of *egwugwu* (ancestral masquerades) and a plethora of other masked spirits to intervene in human affairs. Equally, the characterization of Ezinma as *ogbanje* (called *Abiku* in Yoruba), that is, children who are believed to have been reborn after their death, provides strident amplifications of these interpenetrating realms of existence. Soyinkaôs *A Dance of the Forests* recuperates two ancestors besides an epiphany of gods and spirits who reappear to provide object lessons for their human progenies. This African ontology suggests that ñthere is a considerable interaction among the different levels of existence, the true passage of an entity from one level to another is marked by an indispensable rite of transitionò (Peters, 164). According to Soyinka, in an essay entitled ñThe Fourth Stageò, there is ñThe Fourth area of experience (which is) the immeasurable gulf of transitionò (*Myth, Literature and the African World,* 148). He describes the ñFourth stageò as an abyss that separates the other stages of existence: the past, present and future (which are represented by the ancestors, the living and the unborn). Indeed, *Death and the King's Horseman* is a thesis play that enunciates Soyinkaôs and [Yoruba-based] Africanôs belief in a universe where ñthe past is the ancestorsô, the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unbornò (148).

The specific moments of counter-discursivity have to be noted. For instance, whereas the canonical text, that is, *Death and the King's Horseman*, is set in the old Yoruba town of Oyo, in the present-day Oyo State, Western Nigeria, *Death, Not A Redeemer* is set in a fictive locale called Ijigbo Kingdom. In fact the reliquary of names on the *Dramatis Personae* vacillates between Yoruba and Edo/Delta cultures in the present Western and South-South Nigeria respectively.

Death and the King's Horseman is, here, called a ócanonical textô in the sense of Mathew Reiszôs definition of canon as a ñlist of great booksò and canonical texts as ñthe most influential books

ever writtenò [http:www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/matherwð reisz/1022.bio] and which have the force of authority in particular higher education disciplines and curriculum. Thus, a canon would be a key text that defines a subject [or a discipline and the discourses they generate], set academic agendas and/or even change lives. Such a book has potentials to ñgenerate outrage, astonishment and disagreementò (Mathew Reisz). Reisz defines canon as ñbooks that everybody has heard of and that long featured in undergraduate overviews of ñWestern thoughtsò. Derived, etymologically, from an ancient Greek word meaning ómeasuring rodô, John Sutherland defines literary canon as ñthat nucleus of literature that [is] worthy of study at university, or of immortality in óclassicô reprint libraries é or found in the anthologies of literatures marketed for educational institutionsò (60). Sutherland submits that ñthe canon exists primarily to winnow out from the chaff what Arnold calls óthe best that has been thought and said in the world; literatureôs richest harvestôò (61)

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the Obaôs burial and, consequently, Elesinôs death by suicide is announced by what Pilkings calls ñbloody drums. Do you hear how they go on and on?ò (p. 26). According to Josephôs (a houseboy of the Pilkingses) interpretation, ñThe king died last month. Tonight is his burial but they canôt bury him, the Elesin must die so as to accompany him to heavenò (p. 27). The horseman in Soyinkaôs text has a son called Olunde who, on hearing of the kingôs death returns home from England where he is studying medicine and surgery. Says Olunde to Jane Pilkings: ñI came home to bury my fatherò (p.52). When he discovers that Elesin has delayed his suicide, and has been arrested and detained by the colonial authority, Olunde promptly takes his life in the place of his father. The reason for that action, according to Iyaloja, is, ñBecause the son could not let honour fly out of doors, he stopped it with his life. The son has proved the father, Elesinò (p.75).

In Eghaghaôs play, on the other hand, the Obaôs demise is announced by a *'Voice on Radio'* (*Death, Not A Redeemer, 1*). Moreover, the horseman, Elesin, in *Death and the King's Horseman*, fails to commit suicide because of ñthe moist contact of

living earth between my fingersò and ñthe renewal of famished embers lodged eternally in the heart of manò which ñoverwhelmed one with a thousand fold temptations to linger a little whileò (*Death and the King's Horseman* 69). Chief Israel Zachariah Karia, on the other hand, refuses to die point blank because of his new found Christian convictions. His son, Sankaria, returns from England where he lives (just like Olunde in *Death and the King's Horseman*). But instead of Sankaria committing suicide following the failure of his father, Chief Israel Zachariah, to do so, he strengthens his fatherôs abstinence from committing suicide. He does this by obtaining a court summons for the Council of Elders that would prevent them from deliberating on the matter, instead should head to the court for the determination of the case.

While Elesin has a young bride who, from the stage direction, ñwalks calmly into the cell and closes Elesins eyesò (*Death and the King's Horseman* 76), overwhelmed with grief; Chief Karia has a young wife called Avberosuo (Avbero for short) who is not grieving but desires that her husband, Chief Karia, dies so that she can be reunited with her youthful lover, Jolomi. Elesin, in *Death and the King's Horseman,* seizes his young bride, in a blatant disregard of tradition, from Iyalojaôs son, while in Eghaghaôs *Death, Not A Redeemer* Avberosuo is given to Chief Karia by the late king, ñHis Royal Highness, Oba Abednego Adamuda Okoromole, the Firstò as an incentive to have him fulfil his obligation of dying to accompany the King. According to Avbero, his wife, ñMy father wanted to cement the relationship between the two families, master and servant, thatôs why he ordered me to marry youò (*Death, Not a Redeemer* 7). We learn from 3rd Chief that, ñMaster and servant became friends, and then in-laws. Once he gave his daughter to Karia, I knew the coconut fruit would leakò (*Death, Not a Redeemer* 54). Whereas, in addition, Soyinkaôs text envelopes the identity of the King and his horseman in shrouds of mystique, the King in Eghaghaôs text is identified specifically as Oba Abednego Adamuda Okoromole the First, and his horseman, as Chief Israel Zachariah Karia. Eghaghaôs particularistic identification of the King and his horseman in *Death, Not a*

Redeemer seeks to dismantle the universalist, or óthe universal manô or óverymanô notion that is usually built around anonymous characters in narrative and dramatic writings such as can be found in Chaucerôs *A Canterbury Tales* and óthe Property Manô in Robert Boltôs *A Man for All Seasons.*

The prevalent notion in Elesinôs self-invocations, variously, as ñthe spirit that dares the opening of the last door of passage (*Death and the King's Horseman* 21) and ñthe Kingôs favourite horse (that) is about to follow his masterò (*Death and the King's Horseman* 39) amplify his belief in the profundity of the ancestor world, that of the unborn as well as the world of the living. In a conversation with Praise Singer and Women, Elesin claims:

> Elesin: My rein is loosened. I am master of my fate. When the hour comes watch me dance along the narrowing path glazed by the soles of my great precursors. My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside.
> Women: You will not delay?
> Elesin: Where the storm pleases, and when, it directs. The giants of the forest. When friendship summons is when the true comrade goes.
> Women: Nothing will hold you back?
> Elesin: Nothing. What! Has no one told you yet? I go to keep my friend and master company é . Life has an end. A life that will outlive Fame and friendship begs another name. (*Death and the King's Horseman* 13-14).

While demanding that he would savour the sweetness of a young bride before his death, Elesin resonates the cord that binds the living, the dead and the unborn as his justification.

> Iyaloja: The best is yours. We know you for a man of honour.
> Elesin: Who speaks of pleasure? O women,

> listen! Pleasure palls. Our acts should have meaning. The sap of the plantain never dries. You have seen the young shoot swelling Even as the parent stalk begins to wither. Women, let my going be likened to the twilight hour of the plantain
> Women: What does he mean Iyaloja? This language is the language of our elders, we do not fully grasp it.
> Iyaloja : I dare not understand you yet Elesin.
> Elesin: All you who stand before the spirit that dares the opening of the last door of passage, dare to rid my going of regrets! My wish transcends the blotting out of thought in one mere momentôs tremor of the senses. Do me credit. And do me honour. I am girded for the route beyond Burdens of waste and longing. Then let me travel light. Let Seeds that will not serve the stomach On the way remain behind. Let it take root In the earth of my choice, in this earth I leave behind.
> Iyaloja: The voice I hear are already touched by the waiting fingers of our departed. I dare not refuse. (*Death and the King's Horseman* 19-20)

Chief Karia, on the other hand, is a Christian convert who believes ñChrist has died for all. We no longer need sacrificial deaths, voluntary or otherwiseò (*Death, Not a Redeemer 8*). Much of his convictions are contained in an argument with Avbero, his wife, over his unwillingness to die.

> Avbero: é You have been sanctified unto death through the wish of the people. Karia: No, you are wrong. The blood of Jesus has sanctified me unto life.
> Avbero: Husband, but the blood of Jesus did not prevent you from enjoying the pleasure

reserved for the kingôs horseman é .

Karia: has it ever occurred to you that your father arranged this marriage in order to stop this senseless human sacrifice? Avbero: I refuse to be drawn into any discussion that will tarnish the image of my departed father. Where has honour gone? é

Karia: What constitutes disgrace is a matter of opinion. I am concerned with the principle. Itôs a sin for a man to take his life. I enjoyed the pleasures of the horseman only before my spiritual rebirth. Since then, I have abstained from all appearances of evil. I have been purified by the Lordôs blood.

Avbero: Jesus died to purify you! Karia: Yes. And you too

Avbero: Yet you do not want to die and leave your people in harmony. How selfish you are!

Karia: Do not compare me with the Saviour. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Prince of Peace, Lion of the Tribe of Judah. In fact, he is The Son of God. His blood is different from mineé .

Avbero: é . The concept of sacrificial death is common to é .

Karia: Christ died for ALL. We no longer need sacrificial deaths, voluntary or otherwise.

(*Death, Not a Redeemer* 7-8)

While Elesin and Olunde strangulate themselves in *Death and the King's Horseman,* Chief Karia and his son, Sankaria, are instructed against committing suicide both by the tenets of Christian religion and the institutions of liberal democracy such as the law court. Chief Karia and Sankaria are moving against the whole edifice of ancestral veneration. In addition, the archaeology

of oratorical praxes expressible in the two plays differs in both its linguistic symbolism and their aestheticism. Language in *Death and the King's Horseman* fits succinctly into the partly lyrical and partly elegiac mechanics of traditional Yoruba ritual, described by Soyinka as straddling ñthe modernist gulf between symbol and expository action and dialogue with the essence of poetry, a perfect unity rarely encountered on the modern African stage. The language constitutes the tragic pulse and the transcendental nature of poetry over the medium of transmission, language, music or movementò (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 55). The Yoruba characters speak in concocted verse laden with poetic imageries exploited from the vast semiological resources of their culture and tradition. These Yoruba characters seem to translate their native language directly into English. But the European characters speak in unfeigned everyday prose.

The dialogue also oscillates between cynical riddles and banal, vulgar jokes. The Praise Singer warns Elesin against his trip to the market in riddles, thus: ñI know the women will cover you in damask and *alari* but when the wind blows cold from behind, thatôs when the fowl knows his true friendsò (*Death and the King's Horseman* 8). Subsequently, when the Praise Singer would re-echo the riddle about the ñcockerelò, Elesin counters it with a superior one:

> Praise Singer: The cockerel must not be seen without his feathers.
> Elesin: Nor will the Not I bird be much longer without his nest.
> Praise Singer (*stopped in his lyric strides*): The Not I bird,
> Elesin? All respect to our elders but, is there really such a bird?
> Elesin: Could it be that he failed to knock on your door?
> Praise Singer: Elesinôs riddles are not merely the nut in the kernel that cracks human teeth; he also buries the kernel in hot

> embers and dares a manôs finger to draw it out (*Death and the King's Horseman* 11).

The comic encounter between Amusa, his Constables and the market women is realized on a platter of vulgar jokes.

> That this stage of the action is at the marketplace in the twilight of evening
> Amusa: I tell you women for the last time to comot my road. I am here on official business.
> Woman: Official business! You whitemanôs eunuch? Official business is taking place where you want to go and it is a business you wouldnôt understand.
> Woman (*makes a quick tug at the Constable's baton*): That doesnôt fool anyone, you know? It is the one you carry under your governmentôs knickers that counts. (*She bends low as if to peep under the baggy shorts. The embarrassed constable quickly puts his knees together. The women roar*) (*Death and the King's Horseman* 34).

The dialogue also contains considerable praise names or what the Yoruba designate as ñorikiò. This is the Praise Singerôs primary weapon both for indulging and urging Elesin on in his self-immolatory mission. For instance, the Praise Singer calls him *snake- on the- loose* in dark passages of the market! *Bed bug who wages war on the mat* and receives the thanks of the vanquishedé . *Hunter who carries his powder horn on the hips* and fires crouching or standing! *Warrior who never makes the excuse of the whining cowardé . Oka- rearing- from- a- camouflage -of- leaves,* before he strikes the victim is already proneé *a stallion… on the grass….*(*Death and the King's Horseman* 19*).* (Italics are mine).

The characters also use proverbs ornamented with glittering verbal pictorial effects that unravel the themes of the play. For

example, Elesin likens his desire for the young bride as the cycle of the plantain where the old gives way to the young through the reproductive processes and death. After Olunde commits suicide in his fatherôs place, Iyaloja uses the same proverb with the same visual substance to confront Elesin, asking, ó$ you who know well the cycle of the plantain: is it the parent shoot which withers to give sap to the younger, does your wisdom see it running the other way? (*Death and the King's Horseman* 70).

This shuffle of proverbs, nativized phrases, oriki, riddles and jokes bequeaths the play with beatific passages of lyricism. The self-destructive principles embodied in some of these proverbs, praise names, riddles and jokes, are sponged from the community through the medium of the suffering protagonist. Language in a tragic drama of *Death and the King's Horseman's* magnitude (and tragic poetry as a whole) operate through the homeopathic principles, and it should cause no surprise to find the expression ópraise songô attached to some of Elesinôs wanton lewdness, and deployed with non-critical, adulatory and joyous involvement.

On the other hand, language in Eghaghaôs *Death, Not a Redeemer* is contemplated to realize the idealism of popular communicative nuances that do not seek the laurel of a privileged identification with the aristocracy. Deeply encrusted maze of semiological and oblique phraseologies that reduces much of the communication in *Death and the King's Horseman* to a kaleidoscope of shifting nativized hieroglyphs are discarded for simple, quotidian, everyday speeches that are uncluttered from flowery and ostentatious prosodies in Eghaghaôs *Death, Not a Redeemer*.

For instance, Elesinôs prospected ritual suicide and the subsequent burial of the Oba is announced with the insistent beating of deep-sounding, local drums, ñthe deep sound of *gbeduò*, that rave and becloud the psyche of the Pilkingses. It takes Joseph, their houseboy, to interpret to them what these eerie drumbeats represent; whereas the death of the Oba in Eghaghaôs play is announced on a transistor radio. Archetypal artefacts imbued with ancestral awe such as the *egungun* costumes with which the Pilkingses are regaled, and are approached with aesthetic distance

by the ethnically assimilated elements in the play such as Sergeant Amusa and Olunde as representing ódeathô are not invoked in *Death, Not a Redeemer.* Thus, language in *Death, Not a Redeemer* operates to demystify, in Christian terms, the obtuse Yoruba traditional liturgy of tragic self-sacrifice propagated in Soyinkaôs *Death and the King's Horseman*.

The subterranean ideological and textual mechanics of *Death, Not a Redeemer* are, presumably, shaped or devised with a view to dismantling the hegemonic discourses of power and its cultural conduits inherent in *Death and the King's Horseman*, especially in its self-grounding in an African universe manifesting a tripartite, complementary planes of existence, namely; the world of the living, the ancestors and the unborn. It is this Soyinkaôs ñoriginal discourseôs legitimacyò (Foucault 1), characterized by what Tiffin calls a ñcentrist philosophyò (19) ascribed to the Yoruba by Soyinka, and which ingests a propensity to "perpetuate a political conservatism or blindness which sidesteps the challenges the 'margins' of any constituted subject inevitably pose" (Tiffin, 19) that *Death, Not a Redeemer* seeks to challenge.

Further Remarks/Conclusion

Conclusively, Eghaghaôs text valorizes, with gusto, what Pechey describes as ñthe pluralizing and carnivalizing spirit of modern writingò (61). Eghaghaôs intent is to create a pragmatic simulacrum and reality of the contemporary African world, as a unit of the global post-colony, that ñrecognizes the radical discontinuity between the pre-colonial past, and the present direction of African lifeò (Irele 14). That is, a realization that ñthe axis of the world in which [the African] is living is shifting from its grounding in the institutions and values of the traditional culture, towards a new point of orientation determined by the impact of an alien culture, specifically Western civilizationò (Irele 15). Therefore representation should be viewed, in the opinion of Jenny Sharpe, as ñsomething other than the simple recuperation of lost testimoniesò (98). It is only for nativist or nationalist cultural projects that such an attempt to reproduce the purity of the pre-colonial African mores will appear to have the pontification of a worthwhile pursuit. Such purism derives from a mis-recognition or

an underestimation of the heterogeneity to which colonial cultures are predisposed from the primal moments of colonization.

The temperament of Eghaghaôs text towards *Death and the King's Horseman* secures a rich pretext in Homi K. Bhabhaôs warning that, national quests for cultural self-ratification which, invariably, answers to an ingrained quest for origination, should be avoided since they would, easily, ñreplicate imperial cognitive process, re-invoking their values and practices in an attempted constitution of an independent identityò (Tiffin 21). According to Bhabba, "Although the refractions of a Western tradition are accepted as ironical (if not tragic), the demand for a literary tradition, a history, is put in exactly same historicist and realist terms--the familiar quest for an origin that will authorize a beginning." (Tiffin 21). It is in this sense that Tiffin adjures, equally, that, the ñconstruction of the *essentially Nigerian* or the *'essentially' Australian* invokes exclusivist systems which replicate universalist paradigms" (Tiffin 21).

The truth is that Soyinkaôs purported ñuniverse of the Yoruba mindò (*'Author's Preface'*), for example, in ancient Yoruba town of Oyo in the first quarter of the twentieth century during which the incidents are dated, was already implicated in what Pechey calls ñup-to-date replays of the crisis of transition [and] rich in situations of crossing and of the Protean cultural gaze;é criss-crossed by margins, a dense texture of boundariesò (63). The religious environment of the play betrays an ascendancy of polyphony in the exercise of worship exacerbated by the prevalence of Christianity and Islam alongside traditional or indigenous religious practices. Christianity is practiced by Pilkings, Jane and their African converts; they do not believe in ancestral worship. This explains why Joseph, the African servant of the Pilkingses, is not bothered about the *egungun* dress. Says Joseph, ñé master is Whiteman and good Christian. Blackman juju canôt touch masterò (*Death and the King's Horseman, 29*). This Christian God is worshipped through lighting a ócandleô, óbowing of headô and ówhisperingô to the óflameô (*Death and the King's Horseman, 73-74*). Islam is also practiced as it is the case with Amusa, another character in the play.

That means that there was no longer a virginal ócosmos of Yoruba mindô at the time the incidents occurred than it can be supposed at the time of writing *Death and the King's Horseman* in 1976. What Eghagha wishes us to see is that challenges to a previous representation (in this case, Soyinkaôs *Death and the King's Horseman*) within his own representation (in this case, *Death Not a Redeemer*) do not threaten the cultural or historical propinquity of the previous one, nor seem to burst the seams of the previous workôs representation. On the contrary, ñthey reinforce its claim upon our attentionò (Pechey 61). Literary and cultural resistance to white colonial ethos (through the process of nativization involving both utterances and practices) suggested in *Death and the King's Horseman*, under these conditions of multiculturalism is, necessarily, subject to what Stephen Slemon charts as ñforms of contractual understanding between text and reader, one which is embedded in an experiential dimension and buttressed by a political and cultural aesthetic at work in the cultureò (106). This, then, provides the logical ground for a counter-discursive inscription by Eghagha against a ócanonicalô text such as Soyinkaôs *Death and the King's Horseman*. The counter-discursivity of *Death Not A Redeemer* is pinioned to redeem *Death and the King's Horseman* from what Tiffin calls ñproblems of a post-colonial essentialism (undesirable . . . as recursively imperialistic or assimilative)ò (Tiffin 22)

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