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Wole Soyinka's dystopian/utopian vision in *A Dance of the Forests*

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Although very few critics have ventured to analyze Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* owing to its apparent difficulty, yet those who have attempted simply see it as a metaphorical commentary of the sociopolitical situation in Nigeria. While their observations might be valid, taking into cognizance that the play was written in 1960 as part of the celebration of Nigeria's independence, the problem with such readings is that it does not take into account the structure of the play in which Soyinka traces the past to the present to forecast a dystopian future. While a utopic past and a dystopic present is often enacted as a narrative gesture that concomitantly leads to a utopian future, the reverse is the case in this play. What Wole Soyinka depicts is a dystopian past as well as a dystopian present and future. Therefore, my proposition in this paper is that more than being a work of post-independence disillusionment, Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* links the hopeless past with the fruitless present to project a bleak future. In this way, my point of departure in this essay is that while the writing of the play has been motivated by the betrayal of the common trust and hope as it relates to the Nigerian socio-political climate, the message of the play has a universal underpinning. In this respect, Soyinka insists that the atrocities that have so often characterized human interactions generally are unavoidable. Yet, by portraying the unavoidability of these human atrocities, Soyinka invariably quests for a futurity that is utopian. My conclusion, therefore, is that within the aesthetic trajectory of Soyinka, the boundary between dystopian and utopian visions is not clear-cut: they are one and the same. **Keywords:** *A Dance of the Forests*, dystopia, Nigerian sociopolitical situation, utopia, Wole Soyinka.

Introduction

Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* is a complex play in which there is a "gathering of the tribes" in a festivity in which the living asks their gods to invite some of their illustrious ancestors. But instead of legendary ancestors, Forest Father/Head—the supreme divinity in Soyinka's fictionalized world, sends the living "two spirits of the restless dead" referred to in the play as Dead Man and Dead Woman. Owing to the apparent difficulty of the play, very few critics have ventured to analyze it. Derek Wright points to the difficulty and elusiveness of the play when he states that it is "the most uncentered of works, there is no discernible main character or plot line, and critics have been at a loss to say what kind of play it is or if it is a play at all and not a pageant, carnival or festival" (81). Similarly, Mathew Wilson describes the play as a "baffled incomprehension" and "a resistant text that resists assimilation" (3). In his

own statement of the play's general reception, Harry Garuba observes that "One common denominator of reviews and critical commentaries on this play (Soyinka's *Dance*) is the uniform insistence that it is complex, difficult, and overladen" (qtd in Christopher Anyokwu's "Ode to Chaos and Amnesia" 122). Because Soyinka stretches the expressionistic mode of dramaturgy beyond its normative form in this play, most critics have avoided it in their hermeneutic exercises.

Adebisi Ademakinwa hints at this phenomenon when he observes that the play "has enjoyed more neglect since it was written than any other of his (Soyinka's) plays. The so-called 'complexity' of the play has been primarily responsible, thus, since it was performed for the Independence Celebration in 1960, only feeble attempts have been made to perform it..." (81). While Ademakinwa's focus is on the neglect the play has experienced in terms of its presentation on stage, the fact remains that the play has not only been feebly performed on stage, it has also received very little critical reviews relatively to other plays of Soyinka.

The issue even becomes more complicated because those who have attempted to analyze it simply regard it as a metaphorical commentary of the socio-political situation in Nigeria. One such critic is James Gibbs, who in a book review of the play, opines that "Nigeria up to and during 1960 (is) the immediate context of the play" (155). Also, Benedict Mobayode Ibitokun describes the play as "a clean record of and report on the country's (Nigeria's) behavioural patterns" (2). Whereas he applied some concepts in existential psychoanalysis in his reading of the play, he nevertheless concentrated on what he termed "the endemic slur" (3) of the socio-political situation in Nigeria. In the case of Biodun Jeyifo, though he concentrates on what he terms the "ritual problematic" of the play, he still regards it as an "appropriate response to the [...] dilemmas of post-independence, postcolonial Africa" (127). Similarly, in consonance with the suggestion of Eldred Jones, most critics have interpreted "the struggle of Esuhoro and Ogun for the half-child" at the end of the play as "a struggle for the life, the soul of the then newly independent nation of Nigeria" (Jeyifo 141).

Whilst their interpretations of the play being one of post-independence disillusionment might be valid, taking into cognizance that the play was written in 1960 as part of the celebration of Nigeria's independence, the problem with such readings is that it does not take into account the structure of the play in which Soyinka traces the past to the present to forecast a dystopian future. According to Simon Gikandi, creative works of the African post-independence disillusionment are not works "of how colonialism ruined Africa, but of how African leaders aborted the great hopes and expectations of indigenous rule. This was literature bristling with indignation and dripping with venom and vitriol" (359). Similarly, Nair Supriya appears to suggest that "[t]he phrase 'Great Expectations and the Mourning After' aptly sums up the narrative trajectory of (the fictions) of post-independence malaise". While Soyinka's play under consideration can then be described as a work of post-

independence disillusionment since it is concerned with the configuration of things in Nigeria when it was written in 1960, it also transcends such categorization with its foundational structure which compares the present with the past to telescope the future. In other words, it is reductive to see Soyinka's play as just a work of post-independence disillusionment because it is not just concerned with criticizing the status-quo, but also concerned with the criticism of the past. In this context, Soyinka's characters are not so much victims of the present configuration of their society as they are of their past actions.

As Christopher Anyokwu explains, "The deliberate attempt on the part of (Soyinka's) human community (in *A Dance of the Forests*) to suppress its inglorious past and choose instead to excavate the more heroic aspects of the past foreground man's selective amnesia and the spirituo-moral chaos in which it is mired" ("Ode to Chaos" 120–121). He then adds that according to Soyinka in this play, "humans do not always wish to critically examine their past actions in order to properly make sense of the present" ("Ode to Chaos" 121). In this way, my point of departure in this essay is that while the writing of the play has been motivated by the betrayal of the common trust and hope as it relates to the Nigerian socio-political climate, the message of the play has a universal underpinning.

Wole Soyinka's dystopian/utopian vision in *A Dance of the Forests*

The structure of a play is an important ingredient in the determination of the artistic vision of a playwright. But the structure to which I refer in this paper is not the conventional dramatic structure of exposition, complication, climax, anti-climax, and denouement that is the paraphernalia of plays in general; but the plot structure that is distinctive to individual plays or artistic visions. Booker identifies this distinctive plot structure, especially as it pertains to dystopian/utopian artistic vision, when he avers that "Utopia and dystopia are very much part of the same project in that both describe an other world, spatially and/or temporally removed from that of the author and/or intended readership" (qtd in Richard Phillips 190). Therefore, using faraway imagined places is a feature of utopic and dystopic imagination. The only difference perhaps is that whereas in a dystopian landscape the faraway imagined place is in the past, in a utopian poetic space it is in the past as well as in the future. Michella Erica Green describes Butler's works as "dystopian because she (Butler) insists on confronting problems that have occurred so often in human communities" (qtd in Jim Miller 339). That dystopian works confronts "problems that have occurred so often in human communities" implies that it is a work that is not just concerned with human atrocities in the present but also in the past. It is this that figures in Soyinka's play under consideration. The play takes its readers to "an other world" that is far removed and unfamiliar. Arguably, among Soyinka's plays, it is *A Dance of the Forests* that takes

its readers/or audience to a distant past to the Court of Mata Kharibu about eight centuries earlier (*Dance* 51). While Biodun Jeyifo sees the structure of the play as being “formalistically extravagant” and as not being controlled as well as polished (122), the point to be noted is that the geographical elusiveness of Soyinka’s setting of a distant past in this play hints at its vision of utopianism or dystopianism.

However, while a utopian past and dystopian present is often enacted as a narrative gesture that concomitantly leads to a futurity that is utopian (Paul F. Starrs and John B. Wright 98), the reverse is the case in this play. What Wole Soyinka depicts is a dystopian past as well as a dystopian present and future. In this way, Soyinka rejects *négritude’s* glorification and idealization of the African past. Based on this negative reconstruction of the African past, which is antithetical to its glorification in the works of *négritude* writers, Soyinka insists, to borrow the words of Wendy Brown, that there is no “lost way of life and a lost course of pursuits” (qtd. in Robyn Wiegman 806). That Soyinka rejects *négritude’s* idealization of the African past is significant within the aesthetics of utopianism. This is so because in a work that quest for a utopian future, the past must be reconstructed in such a way that the living seek to recapture the past in the future. But as Anyokwu observes “Soyinka” in this play “dramatizes man’s proclivity to selectively ‘edit’ his past, turn a blind eye to the warts and welts of his ignoble past and choose to highlight the halcyon days instead” (121). Likewise, according to Glenn A. Odom, what is revealed in this play of Soyinka is that the future will continue to repeat the present” (207), and one might add “and the past.” So while the “Jews thirsted for the lost kingdom of Isreal; the English, for the Saxon Golden Age; and the Chinese, for the Taoist Age of Perfect Virtue” (Starrs and Wright 98), what Soyinka posits with his poetic ruminations is that there is nothing glorious in the African past, and nothing euphoric about the present. For instance, the atrocities committed by the actors in the Court of Mata Kharibu eight centuries earlier are repeated by their reincarnated self under different circumstances in the present world.

Adenebi in his prior existence, eight hundred years ago, was the Court Historian to Mata Kharibu, and he argues that “War is the only consistency that past ages afford us” (57), thereby facilitating the death of many soldiers in a “senseless war” that he encouraged; and at present he is the corrupt Council Orator responsible for the death of 65 passengers on a lorry he had licensed to carry passengers beyond its stipulated capacity. Another major character is Rola/Madam Tortoise who in her previous world was a whore, and Mata Kharibu’s wife responsible for the death of Dead Man and Dead Woman. She is in fact likened to Helen of Troy since it is her prostitution that caused the war, which Adenebi (Kharibu’s Court Historian) described as “divine carnage” (*Dance* 57). And in her present world, she is still a prostitute responsible for the demise of her two lovers. Also, there is Demoke, the carver who at present killed his apprentice out of envy; and who in his former existence as Court poet to Mata

Kharibu tacitly supported bloodshed by not speaking against the waging of a senseless war.

Michella Erica Green in her analysis of Octavia Butler's XENOGENESIS trilogy maintains that Butler's works "border on the dystopian because she insists on confronting problems that have occurred so often in human communities that they seem almost an unavoidable part of human nature" (qtd in Jim Miller 339). Likewise, Wiegman sees the apocalyptic or dystopic as a work "which writes the present as the failure of the future" (807). This is what obtains in *A Dance of the Forests* in which Soyinka stretches Wiegman's explanation/or observation by writing the past and the present as the failure of the future. This is evident, as already noted, from the past and present violent actions of Soyinka's major characters. This is a play therefore in which the past and the present conflate in a metonymic reenactment of violence and bloodshed. Soyinka traces the history of a hopeless past, and compares it with a defective present to forecast a bleak future. It is exactly as noted by Jane Wilkinson that the play invites its audience "to face (the) past and future without any romantic illusions" (qtd in Gibbs 156). In this regard, my argument in this paper is that more than being a work of post-independence disillusionment, Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* enacts a dystopian vision of humanity in general, and the African continent in particular. Sunday O. Anozie says as much when he observes that as much as the play is African, "it is also universal in its application" (84).

According to R. Elwood, "derived from the Greek *dys* (bad, diseased, inverted) and *topos* (place), dystopia is conceived as a bad, diseased or inverted place" (qtd in Phillips 190). And commenting on this definition, Phillips rightly observes that dystopia "is all that utopia is not." He then adds that while utopias "are characterized by positive attributes such as natural abundance and beauty, sensual gratification, moral order, and social harmony; dystopias (are characterized) by the absence or opposite of these things" (190). The latter is unmistakable in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*, which is typified in all ramifications by a negative landscape. Jeyifo, for instance, has described the play as "the most pessimistic in Soyinka's dramatic corpus" (120). He also views the play as being among Soyinka's "dark brooding plays" (120).

The dystopian landscape of the play is further made definite and unambiguous by the story line in which there is a "gathering of the tribes" in a festivity in which the living asks their gods to invite some of their illustrious ancestors. These illustrious ancestors are supposed to be reminders of a magnificent past, which concomitantly is a telescoping of a glorious future. But instead of legendary ancestors, Forest Father/Head—the supreme divinity in Soyinka's fictionalized world, sends the living "two spirits of the restless dead" referred to in the play as Dead Man and Dead Woman (*Dance* 11). As an all-knowing god in Soyinka's aesthetic universe, it is significant that Forest Father chooses to send lackeys instead of great forebears. A logical interpretation then is that there are no great ancestors of this community of humans. As hinted in the

play, the supposed glory of the empires of Mali, Songhai, Lisabi, and Zimbabwe is all a mirage (*Dance* 33). For instance, the historical Mata Kharibu who Obi Maduakor describes as a “great African warlord” (176) is anything but great as portrayed in this play.

Moreover, for this feast of the Human Community, their Council resolved to carve a totem as a symbol of the great re-union between the living and their dead ancestors (*Dance* 2). But rather than uniting the community, the totem generated rancour. Demoke who was appointed to carve it, chose unwisely to carve *araba*—Oro’s sacred tree which is the abode of Eshuoro (*Dance* 2). *Eshu* in Yoruba means the Devil himself, while *araba* is believed to be the highest tree in the forest. Thus, Demoke’s action of carving *araba* is not just a sacrilege against the sacred tree, but also an affront against *Eshu* (the Devil himself) who lives in the tree. In the prologue to the play, Aroni (Lieutenant to Forest Father) states:

Even this might have passed unnoticed by Oro if Demoke had left *araba*’s height undiminished. But Demoke is a victim of giddiness and cannot gain *araba*’s heights. He would shorten the tree, but apprentice to him is one OREMOLE, a follower of Oro who fought against this sacrilege to his god. And Oremole won support with his mockery of the carver who was tied to earth. The apprentice began to work above his master’s head; Demoke reached a hand and plucked him down. (2)

By creating a situation in which Demoke strikes down his apprentice out of spite and jealousy, Soyinka parodies the festivity of this human community. The supposed symbol of unity of this human community is in fact a symbol of conflict and rancour. Moreover, although the totem was meant to reach the sky (*Dance* 32), Demoke diminishes its height. This is nothing, but dystopian. That the symbol of this community that is supposed to reach the sky is diminished is a metaphorical manifestation that this community of humans cannot grow beyond their imperfection, neither can they escape it.

It is also significant that the Dead Man and Dead Woman have come not to celebrate with the living, but to judge them. Their repeated imploration “Will you take my case?” (3), which is also the opening statement of the play is an indication that they have come to right the wrong against them in their previous existence, eight centuries ago. Accordingly, instead of the festivity being characterized by social harmony, what is witnessed is acrimony between citizens, between the living and the dead, and between the divinities of the tribe. For instance, the Dead Man and the Dead Woman have come in judgment against the living, whilst the living tries to get rid of them. In this respect, Soyinka insists that the atrocities that have so often characterized human interactions are unavoidable. Yet, the depiction of the unavoidability of these human atrocities is implicitly a desire for a better world. In other words, the dystopian images in Soyinka’s play are strongly tied to his utopian vision. Jeyifo says as much with his

observation that Soyinka's most ambitious plays, among which is *A Dance of the Forests* are "appropriate responses to the human and social crises and dilemmas of post-independence, postcolonial Africa and beyond these, the crises and malaise of the modern world" (127). This appropriate dramatic response takes the form of a corrective through condemnation in Soyinka's artistic vision.

The manner in which this is so can be further seen in Jim Miller's observation regarding Octavia Butler's dystopian worldview in her XENOGENESIS trilogy. According to him, "Butler does not offer a full-blown utopian 'blueprint' in her work, but rather a post-apocalyptic hoping informed by the lessons of the past" (336). It is within this frame of reference that Soyinka's dystopian setting of the past, present, and future is concomitantly a desire for a utopian future. G. G. Darah notes that "the satirist (artist) discerns beneath the world of vice, wickedness and failure, a kind of ideal world attainable only if people heed the satirist's prescription for uprightness implied in his condemnation of individuals" (qtd in Christopher Anyokwu's "Hope Eghagha as a Poet" 4). Similarly, James T. Presley sees utopias as works "which satirize [...] the manners, customs, pursuits, and follies of the age or nation in which the writer lives" (qtd in Peter Fitting 123). Even though Soyinka's work is not categorically a satire, yet it condemns the past and present follies of his characters. Giving this context, the Dead Woman's observation that "A hundred generations has made no difference" (*Dance* 26) is in itself a wish or desire for a better future. Also, the play's criticism of Adenebi, the corrupt Council Orator responsible for the death of 65 passengers on a lorry he (Adenebi) had licensed to carry passengers beyond its stipulated capacity can be read as a warning that such should not repeat itself in the future. In effect, Soyinka uses his play to warn his readers about the essence of learning from the lessons of the past.

As Miller rightly observes, "dystopias [are] motivated out of a utopian pessimism in that they force us to confront the dystopian elements...so that we can work through them and begin again" (337). In this sense, Dead Woman's observation that nothing has changed after eight centuries is in itself a call for a new beginning that would guarantee a promising future. The past is gone, the present is here, but the future is yet to come. By painting a dystopian past and present, and forecasting a gloomy future, Soyinka warns that the mistakes of the past and the present should be avoided for a better future. It is perhaps in this vein that Sunday O. Anozie remarks that "*A Dance of the Forests* gave warning of disaster in 1960" (83). Soyinka's wish, therefore, is not so much that the disaster or doom he predicts would come to pass, but that it should be avoided.

In an essay entitled "Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures" in which Robyn Wiegman interrogates the question "Is There Life After Identity Politics?" (805), she seems to suggest that the import of the question lies not in its predictive element, but in its warning about the need for social transformation in the field of feminist studies.

Therefore, the anxiety implicated in the question is not so much that the future of feministic studies is doomed, but the need to revive and re-engineer it. In this wise, artistic predictions are uttered not so much for them to be fulfilled as to avert their fulfillment. This is pointedly the case with Soyinka's play. Abiola Irele concurs with this argument when he states that "For all the gloom that traverses (Soyinka's) work, and which is a reflection of our objective condition [...] (it) is in its primary nature a call to an active process of regeneration" (168). The interpretative burden of Anozie's and Irele's remarks as well as Wiegman's argument is that Soyinka's play is more of a warning rather than a prophecy.

Despite the dystopian images that populate Soyinka's play, he still hints at the regeneration of the human world. For instance, the plot which is in itself dystopian, still has a utopian element implicated in it. As already stated, the plot of this play is one in which there is a "gathering of the tribes" in a festivity in which the living asks their gods to invite some of their illustrious ancestors. These illustrious ancestors are supposed to be reminders of a magnificent past. But instead of legendary ancestors, Forest Father/Head—the supreme divinity of the play, sends the living "two spirits of the restless dead" (*Dance* 11). It is this action of Forest Father that sets in motion the conflict of the play between the dead and the living, and between humans and the gods. But beyond these conflicts is the new world envisaged by Soyinka: a world in which, to borrow the words of Miller, all that is presently separated are united (Miller 338).

In his comment of Butler's fictitious world in which humans and aliens inhabit the same space, Miller states that what is explored is "the possibilities for alternative and non-hierarchical definitions of gender and identity within which the difference of aliens and others can be accommodated rather than repressed" (337). He then adds that "any form of literature that seeks to help us see things anew is driven by a utopian impulse even if the work in question is dystopian" (337). Similarly, Ulrich Bach in his "Sacher-Masoch's Utopian Peripheries" maintains that a work with a utopian vision must "transcend the *status quo*" (204). Also, Karl Mannheim remarks that utopias "evoke images transcending those of the present reality" (qtd in Bach 204). This is exactly what obtains in Soyinka's poetic universe, despite its dystopic and apocalyptic elements. By creating an aesthetic universe in which the living and the dead, and humans and divinities interact freely with one another, Soyinka transcends the status quo and helps his audience to see things anew.

Michelle Erica Green notes that "utopia is a Greek pun that can be read as 'nowhere' (utopia) or 'good place' (eutopia) (qtd in Miller 339). And commenting on this, Miller opines that "Utopian thinking forces us to engage the discrepancy between what is and what could be" (339). Similarly, latching on Lyman Tower Sargents' 1994 work, Lucy Sargisson sees utopianism as "social dreaming" (1). According to her, "Utopianism [...] is an umbrella term referring to a way of seeing and approaching

the world and to subsequent ways of representing what is perceived of the world" (1). Soyinka's play under consideration is not an enactment of "what is" but "what could be." It is not the way the world is, but his perception of how the world should be configured. It is noteworthy that this play is entitled *A Dance of the Forests* and not *Forest*. Taking into cognizance the major characters of this play, it can be extrapolated that there are three forests in the play: the forest of the gods, the forest of the dead, and that of the living; and as portrayed in the play, the three forests are in close proximity to one another. The Dirge-Man in this play, for instance, tells the living to "Leave the dead some room to dance" (iv). It then means that in this play Soyinka breaks down the boundaries between life and death, and between humans and the divinities as a way of enacting a new world that is different from the present world. Thus, in contrast to Odom's argument that the ending envisaged by Soyinka in this play "remains obscure" (205), it can be seen that he envisages a future utopian world in which all stratificational privileges, divisions and boundaries would be eradicated.

But what difference does it make if divisions and boundaries are eradicated and there are still conflicts as depicted in Soyinka's imaginative universe? It is worthy to note that a utopian world is not a perfect world. It is as Green rightly maintains that "a utopia does not have to be a 'perfect' society" (qtd in Miller 339). And commenting on this, Miller argues that "if this is the case, then utopian fiction has more to do with social/cultural/economic critique than with imagining perfection" (339). The argument of Green and Miller is that in a dystopian/utopian work; the socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and socio-cultural dynamics are critiqued not so much with the aim of achieving a perfect society, as that of achieving a better community. What is, therefore, significant in a utopian vision is not so much a perfect world as it is a better world or new beginnings in which there is a change in the status quo: what Jim Miller describes as "a post-apocalyptic hoping informed by the lessons of the past" (336).

This is implied in the statement of Forest Head/Father, the creator and supreme deity in Soyinka's aesthetic universe:

Trouble me no further. The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned close to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, nothing is ever altered. My secret is my eternal burden—to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness—knowing full well it is all futility. Yet I must do this alone, and no more, since to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumoured ineffectuality complete; hoping that when I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, in new beginnings... (88).

The ellipsis in the above quotation is as rendered in the play; and linguistic scholars have noted the aesthetic function of ellipsis. For example, Keith Grant-Davie in an essay, "Functional Redundancy and Ellipsis as Strategies in Reading and Writing"

observes that when a text is elliptical in its intent, it relies on the readers to fill the missing gap (461). He then adds:

Ellipsis in language seems to have two main functions: first it allows efficient reading if the reader has enough background knowledge to allow ready inferences of what has been omitted; and second, by requiring readers to make inferences, it makes the writing more engaging, more intellectually or aesthetically stimulating. [...] Elliptical uses of language can be suggestive, denying full disclosure, inviting the reader to participate in the making of meaning. (461)

This is what Soyinka expects of his readers/audience. More than participating in the making of meaning, he wants his readers/audience, in the same dramatic strategy of Bertolt Brecht in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, to write the end to Forest Father's statement. In the epilogue to Brecht's play, the playwright acknowledges that the ending is not satisfactory, and he implores the readers/audience to write their own ending. However, in contrast to Brecht's dramatic strategy of alienation or distancing effect, which impresses on the audience that what they are watching on stage is not real life, Soyinka's ellipsis forces his readers to be engaged in the consequences of their action based on the play's warning. Therefore, the end Soyinka's audience is going to write would be predicated on whether they have heeded his artistic warning or not. Accordingly, despite the acknowledgement of his ineffectuality in the affairs of the human community, Forest Father still hints at a "post-apocalyptic hoping" that is informed by the lessons of the past. As he himself suggests, his fundamental reason of wanting to torture awareness from the souls of the living is that, perhaps, in new beginnings they are going to have a change of heart, which obviously will lead to a better community. Thus, while Darko Suvin sees Utopian fiction as "the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community" (qtd in Fitting 125), what Soyinka enacts is a reversal of such "quasi-human community" in which the inhabitants have reached perfection.

Conclusion

In effect, Soyinka's imaginative intervention/or contribution to the anthology of Utopian literary genre is that a writer does not necessarily have to create an imaginary future setting in which the inhabitants have attained perfection as in Thomas More's *Utopia* and Chancellor Bacon's *New Atlantis* as a demonstration of his/her utopian vision. Utopia does not necessarily have to be about a place. Sargisson says as much in her explanation that utopia is "the good place which is no place" (1). It can, therefore, be about an idea or a change in status quo. In this respect, Soyinka rearticulates the critical yardstick for measuring and identifying utopian vision in imaginative works.

Furthermore, it can be argued within the framework of this essay that Soyinka's artistic rumination within the ambit of utopian literary genre is that the past must not be (re)constructed in such a way that it is idealized and romanticized as a projection of a blissful future. For him (Soyinka), the past and the present must be criticized for the future to be hopeful. As can already be deciphered, he critiques the past and the present, and forecasts a dystopian future as a means to orient action that would avert its fulfillment. Therefore, Soyinka's dystopian landscape is strongly tied with his utopian vision. He condemns and criticizes the past and the present actions of his major characters, and predicts a bleak future so that humans in general and Africans in particular would avoid the mistakes of the past and the present in the future. It is in this sense that his dystopian vision is concomitantly a desire for a utopian future.

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