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**LIBERAL HUMANISM IN THE
POETRY OF T.S. ELIOT AND
WOLE SOYINKA**

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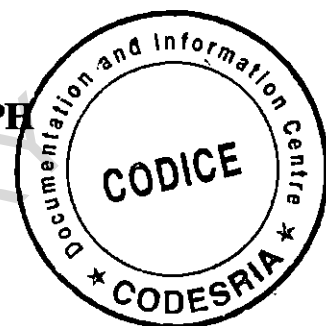
**LIBERAL HUMANISM IN THE POETRY OF
T.S. ELIOT AND WOLE SOYINKA**

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BY

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
TO THE SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES**

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ABSTRACT

T.S. Eliot and Wole Soyinka are modern writers whose literary works share what several Western and African critics consider as obscure writing and controversial social visions. Also, both writers have been described as liberal humanists, though there is a paucity of scholarly works in terms of an elaborate and systematic analysis of their art in the context of the theory and practice of liberal humanism. This study attempts to answer some of these questions about the two writers through a theoretical exploration of their poetry drawing upon the critical appliances of liberal humanism, which offers itself as the major ideological plank upon which the works of the writers are established. It explores the nature and elements of liberal humanism in the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka; it illustrates how their literary practice mirrors the essence of this humanism as a philosophical experience and a historical criticism of their societies; it identifies and explores differences in their liberal humanism; and it relates their liberal humanist assumptions and practices to contemporary social experiences in the West and in Africa. It elaborately examines the idea of liberal humanism in its attempt to achieve the broad objective of a thorough ideological classification of the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka.

This work draws upon four tools of literary criticism: practical criticism, comparative criticism, cross-disciplinary approach, and deconstructive criticism. It uses the close reading strategy of practical criticism to decode the nature and essence of liberal humanism in the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka. It employs comparative analysis to establish the similarities and differences in the works of the two poets. It adopts a cross-disciplinary approach to the knowledge of liberal humanism to give the study a comprehensive focus in terms of relevance to global human and societal development.

Through the deconstructive technique, the study vividly illustrates the limits and ambivalences of the humanist imagination in the two writers. The study substantially draws on recent theory and criticism and is, accordingly, fairly speculative.

The study contributes to the existing body of critical knowledge of T.S. Eliot and Wole Soyinka as major liberal humanist writers by providing new insights into the workings of, and contradictions in, liberal humanism as represented in their poetry. It reveals that the nature and demonstration of the humanist influence on their poetry are essentially enigmatic and dialectical. Their works encapsulate commitment to the free spirit of tradition, as they strive to achieve poetic balance between humans as individuals and the communitarian essence of society.

The two writers share the ethos of humanistic writing in the contexts of classical, religious, cultural and pluralist thinking and practice. These contexts significantly impact upon the various characteristics of language that shape their works. Importantly, the study illustrates critical similarities and differences not only in the works of the two writers, but also in the context of the respective locales of the contemporary human and societal experiences that they represent.

Keywords: Criticism; Dialectics; Humanism; Liberalism; Poetry.

CERTIFICATION

We certify that this research work was carried out by Yakubu, Uduopegeme Monday Joseph (Matric. No.: 0505005011) in the Department of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, under our supervision.

Prof. Oyin Ogunba
Signature Date

Prof. Lekan Oyegoke
Signature Date

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DEDICATION

To the evergreen and inspiring memories of

My father, Joseph Otiyabe Yakubu,

My teachers and friends, Oyin Ogunba and Emmanuel Babalola,

And my friend, Biodun Shogunle.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

(1.1) BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Thomas Stearns Eliot and Wole Soyinka are modern writers whose literary works are imbued with a sense of historic mission. In several ways and at various times, their works have represented the peak of literary responsiveness to contemporary human and societal issues. Eliot's status as a writer and critic in the first half of the 20th century was one of reverence in the literary world of Europe and America. His achievement as a major authority in literary and cultural criticism and theory was widely acknowledged (see, for examples, Leavis, 1932; Matthiessen, 1958; Brooks, 1966; Rajan, 1966; and Thormahlen, 1994; among several others). Thus he became synonymous with the entire foundation of literary studies in the West in his life-time (Davidson, 1999).

Soyinka has had the historical advantage of belonging to the first generation of modern African writers of literature in English. He has written extensively in all the major genres of the discipline - poetry, prose, drama, criticism, theory, and autobiography - and the originality and profundity of his contribution have placed much sparkle in his portfolio. At the close of the 20th century, he had become the most authoritative literary personality in the entire African continent and one of the foremost in the world (see, for examples, Adelugba, 1987; Gibbs and Lindfors, 1993; Maja - Pearce, 1994; and Wright, 1996; among several others). The study thus explores the works of two aptly representative figures of Western and African literatures.

(1.2) JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Eliot and Soyinka possess, define and relate liberal values to spheres of experience within their environment and beyond. They share what could be loosely described as a form of intellectual asperity, what several Western and African critics consider as obscure verse and a controversial social vision (Ricks, 1988; Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike, 1985, etc.). Significantly, this study provides such textual exegesis that should necessitate a positive review of a dominant critical attitude to the questions of accessibility and social vision.

(1.3) SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is relevant to literary scholars who desire deeper insights into the essence of the writings and philosophies of Eliot and Soyinka. Importantly also, it is relevant to the works of scholars in the humanities and social sciences as a poetic demonstration and a critical re-appraisal of liberal humanism as the dominant contemporary socio-political theory and practice.

(1.4) STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Though much has been written about the works of Eliot and Soyinka, especially regarding the issue of social relevance (as would be later discussed), this study identifies one particular classification of their writings by critics. This is that the two writers capture the temper and substance of liberal humanism. The classification is one that has long awaited a systematic and thorough investigation, especially in a context that focuses primarily on the poetry of the two writers - separately and

comparatively. The study thus attempts to fill in that critical gap regarding what can be described as the overriding philosophy and vision of the poetry of the two writers.

(1.5) RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Various literary, critical and cultural issues are thrown up by a study of this nature. These issues, presented in the form of research questions, serve in providing necessary guide towards a proper appreciation of the significance of the study. Importantly, the study attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is liberal humanism, and what are its manifestations in poetry?
2. What is the nature of liberal humanism in the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Wole Soyinka?
3. What are the elements of liberal humanism in the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka?
4. What are the critical views of Eliot and Soyinka on the theory of liberal humanism?
5. How do the works of the two writers mirror the significance of liberal humanism as a philosophical experience and a historical criticism of society?
6. Are there similarities and differences in the critical and poetic manifestations of liberal humanism in the two writers?
7. What are the contradictions in liberal humanism as can be deduced from the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka?

8. What are the critical assumptions of liberal humanism? How do these relate to the ideas of civil liberty, social justice, morality, and democracy in Europe and Africa, using the works of the two writers as reference?
9. What are the theoretical (and possible empirical) implications of the Eliotic and Soyinkan poetics of liberal humanism for literary studies and the general European and African societies represented by the two writers?

(1.6) OBJECTIVES

In specific terms, the study has been guided by the following objectives:

1. To establish the nature and elements of liberal humanism in the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Wole Soyinka;
2. To explore how the writers' literary practice mirrors the essence of liberal humanism as a philosophical experience and a historical criticism of their societies;
3. To identify and explore differences in their liberal humanism;
4. To relate their liberal humanist assumptions to ideas of civil liberty, social justice, morality and democracy; and.
5. To examine the theoretical (and possible empirical) implications of their liberal humanism for literary studies.

Within the purview of the first objective, the study seeks to capture the status, identity and individuality of Eliot's and Soyinka's art in a highly political world. It relates these categories of analysis to such issues as authorial authority, aesthetic authenticity, the timelessness of art, the supposed universality of culture, and the morality of social criticism. A major highlight of the second objective is the writers'

dialectical attitude to the social experience of human 'moral nature' in relation to questions of fundamental rights and corresponding responsibilities.

Though Eliot and Soyinka may belong, broadly speaking, to the same humanist tradition, there are significant differences in the expression of their liberal humanism in poetry (as in practice). Their indigenous cultures and different socio-political climates affect their assumptions about the constituent elements of liberal humanism as practice, in ways that are significantly different. Identifying the differences in their works and exploring how they reflect contemporary realities of disparate worldviews are the thrusts of the third objective.

In part, this study builds on the informed assumption that liberal humanism substantially constitutes or strives at constituting the bedrock of several intellectual, religious, economic, and socio-political practices in several contemporary Western and African communities. Drawing upon the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka, therefore, and within the ambience of the fourth and fifth objectives, the study critiques the theory and practice of liberal humanism. It explains the extent to which the socio-political theory has been relevant to the historical and contemporary experiences of Western and African communities, and delineates its implications for literature and society in the present age.

(1.7) SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into six parts each constituting a chapter. These are:

Chapter One: *Introduction*. This chapter establishes the justification for the study through a discussion of the objectives, research questions, scope and relevance of the thesis.

Chapter Two: *Review of Related Literature*. This chapter discusses some of the various works and critics who have described Eliot and Soyinka as liberal humanists, the contexts in which they have done so, and how their assertions indicate the type of gaps that have informed this study. It also explores the theoretical contexts of the study. Humanism is explained in its various manifestations and focus is gradually narrowed down to the liberal mode which is the concern of the study. After discussing the combination of the two ideological planks of humanism and liberalism, there is a presentation of how these relate to and play themselves out in poetry generally.

Chapter Three: *Methodology*. This chapter discusses the approaches adopted in the examination of the works of Eliot and Soyinka. The analyses of the poems draw upon a deconstructive and cross disciplinary technique that enables the reader to capture the elements, essence as well as contradictions of liberal humanism (especially in their practice). Deconstructive analysis requires a close reading of the text; thus practical criticism offers itself as an essential component of the methodology. Examining similarities and differences in the liberal humanist practice of the two writers also implies that the study draws upon techniques of comparative analysis. These various bits are adequately explored in this chapter.

Chapter Four: *The Humanism of Eliot and Soyinka*. This chapter is divided into two broad parts. The first examines Eliot's works in various sections that depict the writer's historical background, moral imagination and commitment to social progress. In discussing Eliot's sense of history, the study explores the varied humanist influences on Eliot, and establishes links between his poetry and the various aspects

of the liberal humanist tradition. The Eliotic moral imagination focuses on the timeless humanist search for the essence of the human life. It examines the uniqueness of man as a humanist preoccupation, the reconstruction of human individualism, the tragic nature of human life, and the humanist's resilient faith in humanity - the evidence of hope. The latter section of this first part focuses on the Eliotic search for social progress and the deconstructive imperative. It examines various humanist themes in Eliot's poetry in the context of the practical cultural and socio-political implications they hold for society. It also examines the essence of Eliot's humanism from the perspectives of religious re-awakening, education and culture, nationalism and imperialism, and the political economics of liberal humanism.

The second part is divided into various sections that explore specific critical dimensions in Soyinka's humanism. It examines the influences that have shaped his poetic sensibilities into a predominantly liberal humanist type. The major issues here include the poet's cultural history versus his sense of history vis-a-vis the interplay of memory and imagination in the exposition of liberal humanist poetics. The chapter also discusses Soyinka's poetic activism as humanism. The concern here is to establish the extent to which, through poetry, Soyinka has pursued the agenda of liberal humanism in various spheres of human endeavour in relation to the individual as well as to society at large.

Chapter Five. *Conclusion: Comparative Re-Appraisals.* Drawing upon the discourses of liberal humanism in the poetry of the two writers, this chapter examines the similarities and differences in their liberal humanist practice, how these similarities and differences are produced by their different cultures, and the theoretical

implications of their humanist practices for literary studies and for society. The conclusion to the thesis forms the latter part of the chapter. In the main, it delineates theoretical relationships based on the arguments in the various chapters.

(1.8) CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

The study contributes to the existing corpus of critical knowledge of T.S. Eliot and Wole Soyinka as major liberal humanist writers. It provides new insights into the nature and scope of liberal humanism as represented in their poetry. Importantly, it illustrates critical similarities and differences not only in the works of the two writers, but also in the context of the respective locales of the contemporary human and societal experiences that they represent.

This study explores some seeming virgin fields, especially in terms of the radical positive revision of the dominant 'Establishment' interpretation of Eliot, and the context of the critical comparison between Eliot and Soyinka. Importantly also, the study elaborately re-examines and strengthens the idea of the very dialectical nature of man [as individual] and human society, and thus emphasises the essentialism of the deconstructive and multidisciplinary approaches to contemporary literary and social research, and most importantly, to the critical actualisation of [re]new[ed] visions of and for human[ism].

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

(2.1) ON ELIOT AND SOYINKA

Starting with Eliot, it is important to observe that there is probably no modern English writer who has received as much critical attention in books and journal articles. Beyond literary studies, Eliot seems to be the quintessential symbol of 20th century Western cultural experience, an experience which encapsulates various conciliatory as well as contradictory values and responses, and culminates in modernism. It is largely within the context of this modernist force of negation, the Darwinian struggle of fragmentary elements, the pressure of fusion and diffusion, and the ultimate task of achieving the beauty of a poetic (and sometimes chaotic) order of expression that Eliot finds his meaning and pre-eminent status as a 20th century writer. The achievements of Eliot spring primarily from his commitment to poetry as an art, not just a social commentary (Matthiessen, 1958).

Yet Eliot's importance as a poet encapsulates social issues of the moment as it does the question of aesthetics. His poetry captures life, and that life, essentially, is modernism. Art, for him, becomes a form that reflects the temper and vision of a society excessively preoccupied with materialism and consequently defined by metaphors of decay, death, and renewal. Thus, in form as well as content, his poetry depicts mystical and apocalyptic modes of existence, both of which indicate tensed sensibilities of modernism and produce the search for nothing (Libby, 1984).

The early stage of Eliot's development as a modernist poet can be situated in his psychoanalytical interrogation of the coherence of character and the stability of the

transcendental ego (Bush, 1983a, 1983b; Easthope, 1983; see also, Childs, 1997). His poetry is exploratory; it is in this vein, for instance, that *The Waste Land* (and one could add James Joyce's *Ulysses*) ranks as the apogee of modernist authenticity. Dreams and hallucinations become aesthetic means as well as reflections of nature, consciousness, and experience. This fragmentary form of existence precipitates irony through the continual deference of self-knowledge (Jay, 1984; Libby, 1984), and the shuttling of self between 'moments' of immanence and transcendence, both of which constitute reality for Eliot.

This reality takes the form of a paradoxical crave for some assumed universally consistent moral and aesthetic values (Stern, 1971: 22-27), and depicts Eliot as a writer who examines 'with proper seriousness those strata of human experience which are modern art's peculiar purpose to disclose' (White, 1978:31). Gerald Graff (1983: 591-610) describes this commitment to humanity as the hallmark of Eliot's poetry and as depicting a humanist heritage which leaves no room for 'ideological' discourse. He is 'liberal' only within the range of such an 'elitism' that contradicts the spirit of post-modernism's political divergence (Hutcheon, 1988:24). These assertions, no doubt, are directly linked to the question of the nature of Eliot's poetic strength and social vision.

Eliot, who in his life-time and many years after had become something of a colossal institution in Europe and America, became much a subject of intellectual 'bashing' at the turn of the 20th century. The issues are numerous and range from aspects of stylistic and grammatical infelicities (Johnson, 1985) and obscurantism (Everett, 1994) to grave accusations as: 'canon Eliot' (Sherry, 1987: 917) creates illusions about the impersonality of art in order to situate his own work in a unified historical context (Ellmann, 1987); Eliot's poetic preeminence is largely a product of

alumni solidarity in the academia (Ozick, 1989); Eliot is a racist, an anti-semitic, and a hater of women (Ricks, 1988; and Gilbert and Gubar, 1988; 1989; among several others). Michael Hasting's play, *Tom and Viv* (1985), depicts raw hostility towards Eliot, even at a somewhat personal level. Harold Bloom (1985) dismisses him (Eliot) for the self-misrepresentation of his own poetic sensibility, and states the impermanence of his work. And as Ozick (1989) would argue, the literary epoch represented by Eliot is dead; the contemporary generation does not know who 'that immortal, sovereign rock' is.

The bashing is just a side constantly exposed to the streaks of revisionism and the 'newfangledness' that came to characterise much of Western scholarship, North America's especially in the late 20th century. This is not to undermine the issues raised by the stated critics; but the issues, definitely, would have to be brought into full critical focus in a work like this which seeks to re-examine the poet's social vision in the context of liberal humanist poetics. The point has to be made, however, that the concern in this work transcends the publicity that Eliot as a poet enjoyed either in his life-time, or in the present dispensation.

A poet whose impact on 20th century Anglo-American poetry remains enormous, and continues to function as a critical yardstick for measuring the works of other writers (whether one does this from a positive or negative perspective) cannot but be relevant. 'Canon Eliot' remains a key point in the entire Western literary tradition, and contemporary Western writers have to understand their place within that tradition for them to successfully fit their talents into the Eliotic 'mind of Europe' which, ultimately, belongs not to Eliot but to the West. Thus, the lasting issue is the historical and cultural value of Eliot's works; and this constitutes the focus of the study.

Like Eliot in his own time, Soyinka at the turn of the 20th century had become not just one of the most critical phenomena in the development of African literature, but more important, one of the first African writers to attain the status of a canon in world literature. His works depict him as a literary activist who engages issues of contemporary social relevance, focusing mostly on gray aspects of human experience in society and revealing a heart and disposition that constantly pursue the improvement of humanity and society. His vision, however, does not terminate at a mere social commitment in art; thus his political activism in his home country, Nigeria, lends a community-based collaborative dimension to his writings.

The primary cultural identity of his art reflects his background in the Yoruba cosmology, from which spring of inspiration he captures various principles of human experience in a mode that often portrays the somewhat cumbersome fragmentary nature of modernist art. Essentially, his art is analogic, and aspects of the Yoruba indigenous culture serve as basis for his universalisation of human experience and values: a literary streak that points at the direction of humanist practice. Thus, Okpewho (1986:11) describes Soyinka as one of the greatest African writers in terms of his use of indigenous traditional values and practices to achieve creative and symbolic literary heights within which 'the larger issues of human existence' are thoroughly explored. Soyinka moves from 'the timeless cultural history of his people' to depict the depth of Africa's varied experiences, and to speak to 'a larger human universe'.

The scope and importance of this cultural attitude to art have been stressed by several other critics. Ogunba (1975), Irele (1981), Larsen (1983), Sotto (1985), and Gibbs (1986), among others, explore the historical influences on Soyinka and throw much light on how key elements of the Yoruba language, mythology, and

metaphysics became the defining characteristics of his thematic concerns. His art often encapsulates some binary structures of human and social experiences, and reflects in a significant proportion, the Yoruba idea of and attitude to thinking. Ogunbade-Leslie (1986) has therefore argued that his exploration of human creative and destructive capabilities depicts an existentialist reality (a liberal humanist feature) that is universal in scope and of timeless relevance. Soyinka keeps 'a lively interest in political affairs all over the world, especially the fate of oppressed man in various totalitarian and demented regimes. This eternal watchfulness of his has made him a very useful citizen not only of his country, but of the world at large...' (Ogunbade, 1994:7).

Irele (1986) conceives of this cultural affiliation as merely symbolic of the essential humanity of men and women everywhere. It indicates Soyinka's responsiveness to his immediate environment and the relationship between that environment and the challenges of the changing global realities of a modern age. This responsiveness has created a significant room for the understanding of aspects of Africa's cultural heritage in the global cultural marketplace (Gordimer, 1994), and it encapsulates the artist's scheme towards 'a genuine popular revolutionary consciousness' (Izevbaye, 1987: 181).

Beyond exploring basic facts about the varied phenomena of existence, life and death especially (Roscoe 1971:37), Soyinka's works 'graduate' into being thoroughly engaged with the dialectics of the fundamental values of freedom, rights and dignity not only for Africans, but for the entire human race (Jeyifo, 1986; 1988; Gibbs and Lindfors, 1993; Wright, 1996). It is largely within this arena of thought that his discourses of art and politics merge into a humanist mode of political participation. His works become representative of the fusion of such impressive skills

and schemes, which produce sounds of humanity's movement in history and in contemporary times.

In spite of the widely-acclaimed commitment to human development, Soyinka's art poses its own problems within the practice of criticism, and this often has to do with the question of social relevance. Arguing from a Marxist perspective, Ngugi wa Thiong'O (1972:65) states that liberal humanism extols individual liberty and initiative above 'the creative struggle of the masses', and therefore, Soyinka does not 'see the present in the historical perspective of conflict and struggle'. A similar critical attitude regarding historical shortcomings and a poor reflection of social class dynamics has been expressed in the writings of Osofisan (1978) and Jeyifo (1978).

Meanwhile, Moore (1980), Nkosi (1981), Booth (1986), and Amuta (1988) have all challenged Soyinka's social vision as essentially apocalyptic, and at best, as conveying the fantasies of mythological existence. Charges of obscurantism, in his poetry especially, have been quite common among critics and students alike (see, for instance, Maduakor, 1987). And from Chinweizu, Jemie & Madubuike (1983) comes an organised thesis which painstakingly seeks to explain Soyinka's art as illustrative of the artist's own cultural dislocation and subservience to a foreign European culture.

All of these issues significantly reflect critics' interpretation of various aspects of conflict in Soyinka's literary and social vision. They interrogate the nature of his liberal humanist engagement with art. But some of their interrogations do, in fact, more often than not, authenticate rather than deny the essence of liberal humanism in literature and in society. And where they fail to authenticate, they affirm the introspective attribute of liberal humanist art. Thus, the study also captures Soyinka's subsequent creative and critical responsiveness (through his later works), which assuage some of the 'negative' criticisms levelled against liberal humanist art

(Osofisan, 1994; Osundare, 1994), and places him on a more authoritative platform for explaining and defining historical and socio-cultural issues in contemporary times.

The authorities cited above point to the liberal and humanistic slant in the art of Eliot and Soyinka, though without any significantly elaborate examination of the nature and depth of their (i.e. the critics') assertions as they relate to the idea of liberal humanism. The two writers hold in common a predominating moral and social commitment. This commitment subjects their artistic sensibilities to the joys and woes of the modern man. Their poetry thus assumes forms that derive from a creative process which combines the 'activism' of the human subconscious with a critically-cultivated consciousness. This commitment to man's moral and social development and the optimum utility of his imaginative capability is a major index of their liberal humanism. They place man's moral, social and intellectual progress at the centre of all their creative activities. Thus they could be called humanist writers. Also, their attitude to the issue of human experience and progress allows for a free and logical interpretation of rules. This makes their humanism a liberal type.

Their humanism accounts comprehensively for the positive and negative constituents of human nature, society and development. Although the poets somewhat dissociate themselves from the materialistic values of their age, they still maintain faith in the structure of contemporary bourgeois society whose existence is steeped in materialism. Their major goal, however, remains that of making man seek moral, social and intellectual greatness as a natural imperative. It is, therefore, a subject of critical interest to extensively examine the nature and scope of their liberal humanism as can be extracted from their poetry.

(2.2) THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study is situated within the theoretical framework of liberal humanism, which is the major philosophical basis of modern Western epistemology. It also has a very significant cultural underpinning in other autochthonous as well as contemporary communities. Thus, it is not in any way new to the Western or even African worldviews. It is important, however, that we first examine what humanism means before we seek to explore its liberal manifestations.

(2.2.1) Humanism Explained

Humanism first appeared as a distinct philosophical order in the 5th century B.C. amongst the Sophists of Athens. There are, however, several historians of philosophy who have situated its modern genesis within the Italian 'lay intellectuals' movement of 14th century (Kristeller, 1964, 1979; Skinner, 1978; Witt, 2000). Kristeller's work, for example, explores the origin of humanism from the practical social roles of humanists in the Italian society of the 14th and 15th centuries. The humanists were teachers and lawyers, primarily concerned with grammar, rhetoric, and the writing of politics, history, and ethics. Implicit in their activities was a shared and sometimes overwhelming belief in the unique nature and dignity of human beings. Their roles in Italy crystallised from three different sources: a burgeoning interest in grammar which started in France and was 'domesticated' by the Italian 'lay intellectuals'; a resuscitation of interest in classical literature, history and culture; and the emergence of the practice of rhetoric in the local community. The combination of these factors changed the thinking pattern and socio-cultural landscape of Italy and set on course the movement towards a modern Europe premised on the philosophy of humanism.

A key point in the humanist activities of the period was the promotion of an intensive educational agenda that focused on reading, writing, and rhetoric. Associated with these three elements were the demands for good appreciation of texts, literature especially, a lucid, logical and convincing art of composition, and an oracular delivery of speech. From these evolved an intellectual style of living in which reason based on such attributes as inference, demonstration, and 'empirical syllogism' (Kant, 1781), became the superintending factor in individual as well as public thoughts and relations, especially among the upper classes.

But the pursuit of reason was not going to constitute a sufficiently strong basis for humanist fellow-feeling and social cohesion. The 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, for example, were characterised by religious wars, persecutions, witch-hunting, and various forms of violence, all of which indicated a culture of intolerance. Religions which 'essentially' professed the powers and means of salvation for humankind pursued their agendas in such ways that precipitated not salvation or dignity for the human person, but wars, violence and sorrows. The question then was: if human progress (or salvation) is the ultimate goal of all human activities (religion inclusive), how is it that the contradictory beliefs and logic of ideological and religious persons tend towards conflict and destruction? The importance of the question underlies a phenomenon that featured prominently in the rise of humanism: the practice of rhetoric revealed that a rhetor could argue convincingly on any side of an issue. This largely influenced the formation of skeptical tempers regarding beliefs and, in fact, the nature of reason and rhetoric.

Thus humanism assumed a philosophical disposition that is essentially introspective and that ponders extensively on the non-finality of its own propositions. Consequently, it asserts the non-violability of the individual conscience and

'pontificates' on the uses of persuasion (based on ethics) and tolerance for the actualisation of humanist societies. Tolerance did not become synonymous with liberty (see Remer, 1996); but in the context of the humanist practices of the 14th to 16th centuries, it laid the foundation for 'a rational and liberal system of thought' (Jordan, 1965), which provided a conducive atmosphere for the European Renaissance (Kristeller, 1961). The impact of humanism, consequently, spread across the whole of Western Europe. Its rhetorical elements became manifest even in established political and religious institutions, and this was subsequently a prominent factor in the origin and rise of religious Protestantism and political liberalism (Goodman and Mackey, 1990; Remer, 1996; Krays and Stone, 2000). The humanist experience gradually redefined the entire epistemological and socio-cultural landscape of Western Europe and constituted the material and metaphysical superstructure on which the society has moved through ages to the contemporary period.

Humanism, therefore, is basically concerned with the question of what a good human life means and how such can be attained in the present existence. What has always mattered most to its proponents is the nature, business and end of all human life. Pythagoras, the Greek Mathematician/Philosopher of classical antiquity, has thus observed that the human person is the beginning and end, the measure and centre of all things in the world. Following the logic of this observation, humanist philosophers, historians, literary critics, poets, and sociologists, among others, have sought to find genuine solutions to the problems of humanity. Generally, therefore, humanism pursues the total moral and social development of the human race. It seeks to establish that man has an internal essence that differentiates him from and elevates him above all other beings. This humanist search is the supreme essence of literature itself. Thus, Yury Bondarev (1966:15) posits that human beings are an eternal theme, which must

be continuously explored for the sake of human and societal development. This is the thrust of humanism.

There has, however, ensued over time an endless debate as to what the right approach to this challenge (of the appropriate form of human development) should be. This debate is itself a reflection of the critical temper of humanist practice, a temper that is skeptical about self as well as texts, and that uses its skepticism as a springboard for enlarging its search for better paradigms within which the human person and society can be constantly improved. As a result, its centuries-old traditions have produced inheritors who conceptualise and espouse its philosophy and practice in ways simply reflective of humanism as belonging not only to the classical and renaissance ages, but also to the age of modernism and post-modernism in literature and in society. Thus, there have been several brands of humanism: Classical, Christian, Bhuddist, Secular or Scientific, Existentialist, Socialist, and Liberal, among others.

In a strict academic sense, humanism was a literary movement during the Renaissance period and its major occupation was the study of ancient Greek and Roman classics, which were considered as expressive of man's greatest values and thus capable of elevating the individual to a height of moral and social grandeur. Humanists of the classical disposition, therefore, study and apply the Greco-Roman classics as the only form of true religion through which humankind can attain his best as individual and society. For them, the profundity of any literary work lies in imitating the ancient Greco-Roman canons of value, taste and beauty. The practice of this brand of humanism was most common during the English Renaissance period. Thus, the humanists of this period were often referred to as the Renaissance humanists.

Christian humanism conceives of human culture as progressive only within the context of the human life being solely rooted in the doctrines of Jesus Christ. For one of its greatest proponents, Desiderius Erasmus (Rummel, 1990), it is a strict adherence to Christ's teaching of loving one's neighbour as oneself: God's love only resides at the centre of man's heart. This implies that when one loves God, such a person's love and goodness will naturally flow to his fellow human beings. Thus, while classical humanism is essentially anthropocentric, Christian humanism explores human development through faith in Christ's love for humankind, the human need for that love and the importance of sharing that love with one's fellows. This type of humanism, however, is just one, though seemingly the most popular, among several types that are of a religious nature. There are humanisms based on Bhuddism, Islam and several other religions of the world, Africa's traditional religions included.

Secular humanism is a scientific, philosophical and/or cultural conceptualisation of man as the centre of all concerns in the universe. This excludes all forms of theological explanations relating to human origin or essence. It explores humanity in the various contexts of atheism, agnosticism, pragmatism, naturalism, and scientism. In its most scientific form, it seeks to replace orthodox religion with science and makes the knowledge that derives from such the chief means by which human beings can be free and fully developed. Because this scientific knowledge is often made to attain the status of an ultimate truth, secular humanism is also described as religious or dogmatic in form. Its adherents seek to make science and technology a discipline which centres on man's moral and social development, and to which humankind can creatively relate. They seek to organise 'human knowledge for the purpose of human progress' (Reiser 1961:240). They leave issues of human development 'to the free play of thought, so long as thought is kept free' (Elvin 1961:

272). For them, '... it is impossible to strip the human element out from even our most abstract theorising' (James 1920:450). This brand of humanism is defined by F.C.S. Schiller (1907:12) as 'the perception that the philosophic problem concerns human beings striving to comprehend a world of human experience by the resources of the human minds.'

For the secular or scientific humanists, therefore, the essence of life can only be established through the potentials of the human intellect. The positive challenges that these potentials pose to human progress must then determine the trend of moral, social and technological development in society. It is within the scope of this humanist vision that J.S. Huxley (1963:19) asserts that man is 'the key idea' as well as 'the agent for the whole future of evolution on this planet.'

In addition to the above, there is existentialist humanism. As propounded by Jean Paul Sartre, the existentialists hold that because man's existence or definite historical state precedes whatever essence or indispensable inner properties he has, human progress can only be determined in the varying contexts of specific conditions and environment. Existentialist humanism is, therefore, a form of humanistic concern which is highly pragmatic and individualistic. What is good or bad cannot be defined in any absolute terms except as indicated by the need of the hour by one individual in relation to other individuals and by one community in relation to other communities.

Socialist humanism derives from the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who both conceive of all realities in terms of matter, and of human development as determined by how matter, in moving within space and time, creates forces of opposition in society. Socialist humanism, therefore, is founded on the ideals of socialism: man can only be free and fully developed after he destroys the causes of oppression, poverty and suffering in society. This entails a proletariat struggle against

the 'inhumanity' of the capitalist system. Though this brand of humanism has been widely condemned because of its wide atrocities against humanity by means of its violent strategy, its attempt at developing economic and socio-political theoretical contexts as the most significant aspects of social experience remains a major influence on the development of human thought in relation to actualising the peak of human capabilities in society.

For liberal humanism, which adjoins the other brands of humanism at several junctures, two broad philosophical theories are involved. These are liberalism and humanism. Liberal humanism is thus a form of humanism that is interlocked with the socio-political philosophy of liberalism.

(2.2.2) Liberalism Explained

Liberalism as a socio-political tradition, philosophy and theory advocates that for human beings to realise their full potentials as individuals and as responsible citizens in society, they need an enabling environment which accords with their 'nature' as 'free moral agents' and which affords them responsibility for their own choices. It emphasises the essence of the fundamental rights of the individual and the need for intellectual, moral, social, economic and political self-determination. The rights it pursues include the freedom of thought, conscience and expression, and the freedom of association. There are also the rights to own property, to vote or be voted for, and the ultimate right to life. These rights are based on the assumption that man, in the state of nature, is essentially a free being and that the 'burden of proof' is on 'those who are against liberty; who contend for any restriction or prohibition.... The *a priori* assumption is in favour of freedom' (Mill, 1991 [1859]: 472). This assumption is described by Gaus (1996: 162-166) as the 'fundamental liberal principle'. This principle implies that there is need to justify every condition capable of limiting the

freedom of the individual (for example, the state, political authority and law). A liberal is thus a person who believes in the liberty of the human person (Cranston, 1967).

Essentially, liberalism is an idea which has evolved through several historical processes and in the context of ever-changing political perspectives and practices. Thus, it possesses a variety of conceptions and meanings which have often derived from the idiosyncratic attributes of particular times, theorists, authors, and politicians. In Europe, the idea first emerged as a definite and organised political movement in the early 19th century (Vincent, 1992). Prior to this time, one would say that liberalism as theory and practice was in bits and pieces all over the continent, and earlier liberals were not thought of in the definite sense of ideologists.

As background to the development of this brand of political thought, Manent (1995) depicts the tyrannies of empires and monarchies and the authoritarianism of the church, both of which created a compelling need for a political system that would accommodate individual freedom and rights. Such critical interventions of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1985) had cultivated an intellectual atmosphere of fear by stressing that political order in society is predominantly evil, violent, and supported by the fears of the common people who become protected by a monarchy with absolute powers. It is against this background of the 'dialectic of the master and slave' (Hegel, 1954) that Locke (1967) proffers a classical and legal approach to solving the common fear, which he defines as hunger. For him, tyranny and oppression are irrationalities which arise in the first place because man's right to property has been usurped within the prevailing political system. The freedom of the individual in his drive for fulfillment is primarily associated with his nature as a labourer and an owner. Labouring and owning one's property confers on one self-dignity, indicates

one's freedom to life, and the capacity to be equal with other men. In other words, the autonomy of the individual encourages individual property-ownership and becomes a strong basis for the practice of capitalism.

Classical liberals thus create effective links between liberty and private property, and between private property and the protection of liberty, links which invariably create justification for the existence of government in society (Locke, 1660 [1689]). These links and their justification are captured by the theory of social contract (Hobbes, 1648 [1651]; Rousseau, 1753 [1762]; and Kant, 1783 [1797]), which is founded on the theory of all men as free and equal, and which emphasises the essence of the state in terms of the need to protect freedom and equality. This theory thus constitutes the foundation of the formative period of the idea of liberalism.

In the Victorian age, liberalism became a more pointed ideological issue. For Mill, one of the theory's greatest proponents, liberalism is based on morality: the essence of the value of human individuality. He argues from the premise of reason that all men as individuals are naturally different from each other and it is 'morally' wrong to oppress or deprive anybody of his rights for whatever differences. Respect for individuality means an acceptance of the values of diversity. It is this acceptance that makes tolerance a fundamental virtue of the liberals.

At the core of Mill's postulations are such concepts as liberty, individualism, well-being, sociability, democracy, and rationality (see Mills, 1969; 1977a; 1977b). He sought to create a balance between the needs of the individual and the common good of society by advocating an equitable redistribution of wealth through taxation, and such policies that would eradicate economic monopolies. His works have been a major influence on the development of liberal thought in contemporary times. His

concept of liberalism engages the paradigms of social responsibility without which liberty can only be treated with suspicion.

Individuality, difference and tolerance thus become core values that define a liberal order. Morality is defined not in terms of religious doctrines or experience, but in terms of such attributes and practices that are capable of developing the human person and his capacities:

Individuality is the same thing with development...it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce well-developed human beings.... what more can be said of any condition of human affairs than that it brings humans themselves nearer to the best thing they can be? or what can be said of any obstruction to good, than that it prevents this? (Mill, 1991 [1859]: 71).

Mill's theory of liberal ethical values subsequently provided the basis for a regime of liberal rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What is morally right must be defined by interest in the values of individuality and the utilitarian corollaries of human development (see also, Bentham, 1780).

Yet, there are critically contrasting dimensions to the Millian liberal moral order. Kantian liberalism postulates 'moral contractualism' on the basis of the plurality of persons, identities, and conceptions of the good life, all of which emphasise the relativity of liberal values and the need to evolve liberal perfectionism through rational social consensus (Kant, 1965 [1797]; Sandel, 1982; Gaus, 1990; Reiman, 1990). Hobbesian scholars depict the mirage of such a liberal imagination which fails to recognise that all men are 'self-interest agents' and that only a social order which achieves the consensus of numerous self-interests and leaves enough room for the emergence of new self-interests, continual defections, and the renewal of consensus

would have taken adequate cognisance of the human character in its natural state (Hobbes, 1948 [1651]; Gauthier, 1986; see also, Gaus, 1996).

Liberty as the core value of liberalism and as postulated and defined by several liberal thinkers could be either negative or positive. Isaiah Berlin (1969:118-72) has advocated the negative idea of liberty, which encapsulates the amount of freedom which an individual has in his relationship with other individuals and the state. He defines liberty strictly in terms of the degree of the absence of external force or coercion in an individual's social experience. Berlin establishes his thesis on the ground that human values or the values of the individual are plural; that it is impossible to meet up with the demands of all the values of the individual; and that the achievement of one value or end often implies the loss or absence of some others. His argument indicates that human beings are naturally bound to follow different ways and styles of living. This implies, for example, that the pursuit of economic wealth may not necessarily be considered a higher value than the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure.

Significantly too, the life of a gipsy, or a libertine does not necessarily imply any inferiority to that of a devoted religious priest, an austere business entrepreneur, or a spartan university professor. 'Human goals are many' (Berlin, 171) and only the individual can make a choice that is right for himself. This diversity should be acknowledged by societal and state structures, such that their interruptions of the individual's life would be most minimal and justifiable (in the context of the good or happiness of the public). Freedom in this situation is indicated by the degree of interference or obstruction which an individual encounters from others viz-a-viz the degree of ability and activity that the person would otherwise have exhibited.

The positive idea of liberty indicates the limit to which the individual determines or controls his own life. It is associated with the wish of the 'dominant self' linked with reason always making calculations on behalf of the 'empirical self'. The scale of accord between these two selves in a person becomes the ultimate determiner of the degree of freedom which one possesses. The idea of true self-autonomy is presupposed by positive liberty. True self-autonomy implies that the individual controls his impulses, desires, and lives out his life the way he genuinely wants to and not out of compulsion or fear (Green, 1986 [1895]; Benn, 1988; Dworkin, 1988).

Yet, liberals of this school of thought believe in some necessary forms of interventions in helping the individual attain real autonomy. They believe that paternalistic and welfarist interferences promote conditions of freedom. Thus a parent could impose certain values on a child, an act which may seem to curtail the child's freedom, but which may ultimately help the child to appreciate his individuality and the autonomy of his own being. The same applies to the relationship between a paternalist and a drug addict or an alcoholic. The paternalist prevents the child from developing such dangerous impulses that may inhibit his true freedom as a child and later as an adult. The drug addict whose life becomes confined and is imposed upon in terms of some rehabilitative activities can, in the words of Rousseau (1973 [1762]), be said to be being 'forced to be free'. Positive freedom implies that the individual is subjected to certain conditions that could enhance his (sense of) self-autonomy. Such conditions constitute the hallmark of a welfarist state.

These definitions provide critical insights into the nature of liberty. They indicate that there is no such concept as absolute liberty or freedom without responsibility, either in the context of man in society or just by himself. Freedom is

thus a relative matter. Decreased intervention does not necessarily corroborate the idea of freedom. Also, state laws (no matter how minimal) place restrictions on the individual, and thus negate the whole idea of liberty. Regarding positive liberty, the individual as driven by his ambitions, which could sometimes be in conflict with the desires or targets of other individuals or society, is often in a shifty state of self-knowledge; thus liberty becomes enigmatic. These are problems of definition which liberal theorists have had to grapple with.

Thus, since the nineteenth century till contemporary times, the two schools continue to dominate the liberal imagination in the conceptualisation of individual freedom and societal progress. Enthusiasts of negative liberty have come to be described as neo-classical liberals, championed by the likes of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, who argue that a free society is one in which the coercion of individuals is minimal. These liberals posit that social welfare policies are a major means by which individuals are deprived of their freedom in society. Through such policies, government has authority over distribution, and thus pursues the redistribution of economic benefits for the good of the less advantaged members of society. This system often infringes upon the personal freedom of the more productive members of society who are often compelled to pay more taxes.

The neo-classical liberals thus downgrade the principle of distributive justice in a liberal state (see Hayek, 1944, 1960; Seldon, 1961; Friedman, 1962; Nozick, 1974; Green, 1987; and Gamble, 1994). They argue that the functions of government should not go beyond the protection of lives and property from internal and external aggressors, the promotion of free and competitive markets, and a necessary minimal support regarding projects/services that are impossible for individuals to achieve by themselves.

'No state more extensive than the minimal state can be justified' (Nozick, 297). This minimal state is one which does not force people to behave in ways or do things that deprive them of their freedom, except where such acts of the state are conspicuously seen to provide protection against force and fraud in society. Neo-classical liberals thus believe in the organisation of economic activities through private initiatives in a free market context. A liberal society for them is necessarily capitalistic in the sense that each member of society is allowed to employ labour and amass capital freely. It is a society that is consistent with the idea of private property/free enterprise. On the one hand, liberty itself is thought of as a property of man, or as synonymous with private property; on the other, private property guarantees the protection of the liberty of individuals against state tyranny (Hayek, 1978; Gaus, 1994). Private property (rights) is (are) 'the guardian of every other right' (Ely, 1992:26).

While there is an overt relationship between negative liberty and neo-classical liberalism, the latter drawing directly from the strengths of the former in terms of objective and strategy, positive liberty and modern or 'welfare state' liberalism share a common strategy but with seemingly different objectives. The modern liberals go beyond liberty for the sake of liberty; they conceive of equality as the essence of liberty. Modern liberals support paternalism and welfarism as means of creating equality in a liberal state. Some of its exponents are John Chapman, John Rawls and Charles Lindblom. They hold the view that the economically advantaged members of society often attain their wealth through some forms of exploitation and/or often do not count themselves responsible to those thus exploited.

To redress this inequality, therefore, they argue for a system in which a part of the wealth of the advantaged minority will be re-distributed for the good of all.

According to their model, government taxes the profits that accrue to capital, and that becomes a means of redistribution of wealth through investments in social welfare programmes and public services. Government seeks to give her citizens equal opportunities in terms of employment and productivity, and compensates the disutility of those not in any employment through some social security schemes.

In the model of the modern liberals, it is inevitable that a scale of inequalities in income will always ensue. That should, however, always be as a result of differences in individual capability and efforts, in addition to other rational economic laws that produce differences in output. Everyone should have the opportunity of operating within an environment that is free and fair. Furthermore, 'all forms of monopoly and oligopoly would be eliminated and the doctrine of consumer sovereignty would prevail' (Koerner, 1985: 312). The modern or 'welfare state' liberals thus consider as contradictory, any state which allows individual liberty in a sense that encourages economic inequalities (see Chapman, 1967; Rawls, 1967; 1971; and Lindblom, 1977; see also, Mill, 1991 [1859]; 1976 [1871]). They express faith in a responsible form of government capable of supervising economic activities in ways that [re]create or [re]distribute opportunities in a just manner in society.

In spite of the differences between the neo-classical and the modern or 'welfare state' brands of liberalism, the philosophy as a whole remains the only political theory that guarantees economic 'freedom' at the level of the individual. It is on this premise that it serves as a guide to the pursuit of a democratic social order at national and international levels of organisation. The order it creates is necessarily liberal, pluralistic, juridical and polyarchic. In essence, it sufficiently accommodates various political groups and cultures which all share a sense of equality in terms of participation in the political process. It also cuts across the rank and file of society;

that is, it is evenly responsive to individual aspirations within the state. It is a system of thinking which should ideally seek to discourage forms of discrimination against women and ethnic minorities. And beyond the confines of nationalism, liberalism can also be reflected in the relationship and dealings of men and women of various nations. More significantly, it could culminate in a liberal democratic international order in the relationship among the various nations of the world. These have always been and continue to remain the challenges of liberalism in the contemporary world.

The two schools of thought broadly reflect the development of ideas and practices around liberalism, which in contemporary times have attained more heights of meaning and political engagement than ever. Integrated into the core of liberal thought in the present are such intellectual and social issues as environmental conservation, women's rights and equality with men, communitarianism, postmodernism, and a minimal and responsible use of political power (Meadowcroft, 1996). Liberalism thus reflects some dynamism of spirit by which it absorbs criticisms and constantly reconfigures its axes of thought and practice to the reality of emerging superior liberal logic.

Significantly, the liberal movement has been closely associated with the question of reason, which has often shaped much of society's perception of and attitude to the liberal philosophy. Within the movement itself, there are two schools of thought regarding the question of reason. The first is the rationalist school which places its defence of science and secular thought against the religious and superstitious character of society. Represented by Voltaire, Hegel and Marx, amongst others, the rationalists have implicit faith in man's ability to study, understand and dominate or control his environment. They operate on the premise of a thorough understanding of the broad and specific body of rules that govern both the natural and

social worlds. The human mind is thus conceived as the index of freedom and rational thinking.

The second school (i.e. the empiricists), represented by Karl Popper (1945) and Hayek (1976), argues for the limits of reason. It does not debunk the essence of reason in human experience; however, it stresses the ignorance associated with human experience, the resultant liberal virtues being caution, tolerance, experimentation and a guiding knowledge of human fallibility, which breeds an inner humility. Its thinking and practice are thus guided by a critical suspicion of the self, borne out of an appreciation of the limits of knowledge. According to Hayek (1976:20), the 'body of rules' by which rationalists seek to explain the world are actually made necessary by the conditions of human ignorance and the persistent impossibility of a total knowledge of the world.

To conclude this section, liberalism is a broad socio-political theory and it could be an impossible task for any liberal to fully embrace or encompass its various elements, theories and dimensions all of which intersect at various junctions. It is, however, important to observe that in spite of the liberals' own claims to objectivity and universality, liberalism has often been generally perceived as a socio-political philosophy which is essentially Western in theory and in practice. Its philosophical conceptualisation has often been situated as a product of Western scholarship. It certainly constitutes the foundation for 'western modes of thinking' (Hutcheon 1988:8; see also, Besley; 1980; and Waugh, 1984). However, it is mostly by the sheer force of imperialistic might and diplomacy (which encapsulates the politics of knowledge production and transmission) that the West has been able to present this philosophy as one which originates from them, but which has assumed a universal outlook.

Liberalism is thus taught in the regular school curriculum in several African institutions of learning as one of the theories of governance, which was handed down to the 'natives' by their colonial masters. Its abstract individualism is viewed as extremely counter to Africa's communal practices. Its concept of freedom is perceived as differently constituted from the indigenous African practice where it has often been argued (see, for example, Mazrui, 1980: 46-69; Idowu, 1973) that the values held in common by any community constitute the sphere of authority.

A major reason why this is so, that is, why liberalism is considered indigenous to the West is because Western scholarship, for some centuries, has been able to document its philosophy and experience of a liberal state in an organised and consistent manner. Western philosophers, poets, historians, and anthropologists wrote extensively about the emergent liberal state in Europe. This knowledge was widely disseminated through the programme of colonisation. But this should not imply that the colonised peoples who did not write books about their own experience in society had any experience lesser in scope and significance than their colonisers who did.

A second reason is that the system of values that is indigenous to the Western experience of liberalism has become the yardstick by which African practices are interpreted, evaluated or judged by many Western leaders, scholars and writers, and to a lesser but critical extent by many Africans in the Diaspora as well as continental Africans. It is thus significant that Wole Soyinka observed:

We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation - this time by a universal humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of their world and their history, their social neuroses and their value systems. (1976: X).

The attitude of the West to issues of democratisation in Africa in the late 20th century, which was conceived almost, if not solely, within Western indigenous paradigms is a typical example. At best, it always seemed a remote possibility to many Western scholars and politicians that Africa could have had, and, in fact, did have its own indigenous forms of liberalism as theory and practice within various systems of government that were traditionally democratic in nature, in spite of the inherent shortcomings, which are not uncommon to Western liberal practices as well.

Furthermore, in spite of what we might call the pretences of Western scholarship about the sources of knowledge, there is an apparent strong link between the modern, 'welfare state' school of liberalism captured in contemporary Western scholarship, but significantly also in the practice of the age-long traditional Africa's welfarism as the essence of individual liberty, communalism and the state. This influence or relationship could have resulted from the contact established with the colonised peoples by Western explorers, administrators, missionaries, and scholars before and since the time of colonial conquest. It is thus a challenge to contemporary African scholars to investigate the African past and present in a comparative and cross-disciplinary context, and come up with the constituents of autochthonous and modern African liberalism.

It is necessary that this challenge be tackled from a literary base because it is common knowledge that several Western scholars still do evaluate Africa as the heart of darkness painted by Joseph Conrad many decades ago. For example, in the critical opinion of the contributors to Ross Murfin's *Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism* published in 1989, Africa continues to be the heart of darkness devoid of any liberal values even at the close of the 20th century. In fact, Western scholarship about the nature and essence of the traditional African

experience has been characterised by a 'combination of silence and blindness' (Osundare, 1993:17) or what Biodun Jeyifo (1990:10) has described as 'unfair selectivity and preferred visions'. The point is that there is an African liberalism indigenous to the African peoples.

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which is an African response to Western imperialistic attitude to African culture, one finds an indigenous society (i.e. Umuofia) which is highly republican in structure. Okonkwo's individualistic drive for a distinctive personality, wealth and fame, Obierika's resilience in spite of communal odds, the indication of capitalist tendencies and the choice of Christianity by some of the indigenous people, among others, are reflective of a liberal traditional community. And the practice of liberalism in Umuofia is such that makes for societal cohesion because the people keep in touch with their cultural roots.

The relevance of the foregoing to contemporary African experience indicates that liberalism is more than a Western theory or practice. Thus, a study like this offers the opportunity to [re]establish the knowledge of liberalism in the local context of at least two broad cultures - Western and African.

(2.2.3) What is Liberal Humanism?

The concept of liberalism thus far explained constitutes the theoretical basis of the humanism that is qualified as liberal. Liberal humanism thus conceives of human progress in the context of accommodating the rights of the individual within the limits of reason as a means to individual and societal grandeur. It is a secular alternative, we could argue, to the concept of a universal Christian brotherhood. It is essentially favourable to individual liberty, social reforms, political progress and the anthropomorphism of religious doctrines. It is the philosophical base of bourgeois

democracy, which conceptualises historical progress as a product of the human intelligence, liberal education, moral values, and the diffusion of the ideals of democracy.

Liberal humanism presupposes that it is man's primary responsibility to determine questions relating to his moral existence. It adopts an approach of free-thinking in adjudging what is good and what is evil. To an extent, it embodies a form of moral skepticism as stated by Bruce Ackerman (1980: 368): 'There are no moral meanings hidden in the bowels of the universe ... All there is is you and I struggling in a world that neither we nor any other thing created.' This skepticism, however, is more apparent than real because, in spite of the fact that liberal humanism preaches liberty and equality in a plural society, it tries to impose a way of life which is fixed and could sometimes contradict the moral basis of its philosophy in relation to other philosophies of life.

In terms of the conceptualisation of the moral individual, the philosophy of liberal humanism is a paradoxical one. Man is a unique being different from animals and machines. He alone stands in the highest capacity of reason and feeling. This uniqueness leads him to a god-like height where he re-creates the world to suit his needs and tastes. In spite of this, he is also a tragic being who by the evidence of history and contemporary empirical facts, uses his strengths sometimes for his own self-destruction, in addition to the ever bitter confrontation of death as his ultimate extinguisher. The human person is corrupt beyond the point of any total redemption, though he still strives to explore his potentials for a dignified life. This accounts for the use of satire by humanist writers who often live with a sense of suspicion directed not only at society but also at themselves (Fussell, 1965).

Liberal humanism posits that human potentials can only be realised in their fullest through the use of the mind and the imagination in creative ways. This underscores the essence of education, which ranks high in the liberal humanists' agenda. This use of the mind as representing the means of creating symbols in human beings is reflected by the devotion to symbolism in most humanist literary writings as exemplified by T.S. Eliot and Wole Soyinka, among others. Alongside this in relation to the imaginative essence is the profundity of the evaluative spirit in contemplating issues about human beings and their environment.

Furthermore, liberal humanists often venerate the past, particularly such elements which depict that in spite of man's fatal existence, there exists a human experience which is psychologically uplifting and challenging to the human potential for moral and social aggrandisement. In art, this often finds expression in elegiac forms. Drawing upon the experience of critics of the classical period, the humanist writer conceives of the role of literature in society as that which imitates reality and teaches through delight. For them, literature should seek the moral and social improvement of humanity because man is the heart of life in the universe.

Liberal humanism is a universal culture which allows for free-thinking and every form of 'civilised' religion and philosophy which is tolerant of divergent views and ways of life. To sum up this idea in the words of Joseph Wood Krutch (1959:197),

... a humanist is anyone who rejects the attempt to describe or account for man wholly on the basis of physics, chemistry, and animal behaviour. He is anyone who believes that will, reason, and purpose are real and significant; that value and justice are aspects of a reality called good and evil and rest upon some foundation other than custom; that consciousness is far from being a mere epiphenomenon that is the most tremendous of actualities; that the unmeasurable may be significant; or, to sum it all up, that those human realities which

sometimes seem to exist only in the human mind are the perceptions, rather than merely the creations, of that mind.

In terms of socio-political utility, liberal humanism teaches that the basic concerns of all human beings transcend their particular class or group interest; thus ignorance, deception, lethargy, and poor judgement are the primary sources of conflicts in society and not the material interest of opposing groups as postulated by Marxism. To combat these, liberal humanists advocate the reconciliation of opposing groups through appeals to the moral conscience of individuals and nations. They believe in negotiating peace and equality through such institutions as the law courts, boards of industrial arbitration and regional and global organisations like the Organisation of Africa Unity, the European Economic Community, the Economic Community of West African States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and the United Nations, among others. In spite of how they might be adjudged by their critics, the operations of these organisations can be properly situated within the perspective of a prominent American humanist, Corliss Lamont (1949:7): 'the chief end of human life is to work for the happiness of man upon this earth and within the confines of Nature that is his home'.

Thus liberal humanism supports such progressive causes as struggles against colonialism and imperialism, racism, class and gender discrimination, religious fanaticism, child abuse, violence and terrorism, environmental pollution, economic deprivations, political marginalisation, and other forms of abuses regarding the rights of men and women. Ultimately, it pursues the enrichment of the human life through the disentanglement of the lurking potentialities inherent in the human person.

In spite of its claims to objectivity and universality, and its role as the most dominant defining element in the global political economy, the idea of humanism has been a consistent subject of attack from ideological inclinations. The criticisms include such issues as an imperialist pretence to universalism, excessive traditionalism and paradoxical crave for idealistic human beings (Heidegger, 1971; Grassi, 1983); the lack of a dialectical historical context of human struggle, the replacement of the 'more benign' authority of religion with an 'imperialist' humanistic studies, and the 'liberalism' and pluralism of liberalism only on liberal humanism's own terms (Eagleton, 1983; Fuery and Mansfield, 2000; see also, Bennet, 1990); the legalistic structuring of supposed liberal essence of the individualism (Lyotard, 1984; 1991); among others.

These issues have extensively interrogated the essence and credibility of the liberal humanist idea and practice such that in contemporary times, the term liberal humanism evokes uncomplimentary feelings and reactions even within intellectual circles. Yet the dominant and most popular social movement of humanity in the present age remains situated within the liberal humanist tradition (as would be largely demonstrated in this study). Exploring the poetics of liberal humanism, therefore, would inevitably entail an engagement of the theory in the context of an exegesis of the poetry of T.S Eliot and Wole Soyinka.

(2.3) LIBERAL HUMANISM AND POETRY

Literary artists whose works exemplify the essence of liberal humanism in society in addition to Eliot and Soyinka, include Henry James, Virginia Woolf, George Eliot, E. M. Forster, Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara, among others. These are writers who are largely aware of the contemporary problems associated with modern civilisation

and thus relate their humanism to issues that revolve around moral and socio-political development. They pursue an agenda of human aggrandisement through education in a modern society whose lack of sympathy, and sometimes, utter disregard for the ideals of liberal humanism keeps growing continuously mainly as a result of a social system that leaves many people in want and insecurity. However, the greatest challenge of the age is to relate the liberal humanists 'optimistic faith in progress... to their realistic treatment of the individual and society' (Cox , 1963:10-11). This, in the words of Lionel Trilling (1961:264-65) is 'the great work of ... restoration and the reconstruction of the will'.

Artists of the liberal humanist disposition conceive of literary studies as a discipline that engages itself with objective truths. The artist's socio-political commitment is situated, in the main, within the framework of a human-oriented intellectual free-play. The language of an objectively written text or poem is thus expected to do no more than skillfully describe the experience of an artist. The objectivity is in the truthfulness of the description to the experience.

Though the experience itself which is often judged by the humanist critic from the viewpoint of authorial intention could be apolitical, the formal study of the description is often political. For the liberal humanists, therefore, literature portrays the truths of humanity in fictive forms. These forms are objective because they derive from the author's intention, which is itself objective, at least, in the context of art as an alternate life.

Gerald Graff (1979:86) who is a strong proponent of liberal humanism in art has thus observed: 'We all become value-free objectivists to some extent when we attempt to make sure our value judgements rest on an unbiased understanding of the object'. Graff actually suggests that knowledge comes before the evaluative act, thus

a critic can judge how well a poem has been treated once he knows what the object of such a poem is. For him, the crisis of the subjective tendency is a problem of the material-minded middle class whose ideological notion of truth derives from their sectarian interest.

Liberal humanists also believe in the singularity of the literary text in terms of meaning. The text derives as an original form from the author's mind and in spite of the shades of meaning which it might be given by critics of different ideological and intellectual dispositions, its meaning remains constant in relation to the author's unchanging intention. An advocate of this humanist logic, E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (who believes in Edmund Husserl's theory of pure phenomenology which states that irrespective of what their experiences are, individuals always intend the same object), argues for the 'synonymity of meaning' which would aid 'understanding' in an objective context. According to him,

When I "intend" a box, there are at least three distinguishable aspects of that event. First, there is the object as perceived by me; second, there is the act by which I perceive the object; and finally, there is (for physical things) the object which exists independently of my perceptual act. The first two aspects of the event Husserl calls "intentional object" and "intentional act" respectively. Husserl's point, then, is that different intentional acts (on different occasions) "intend" on identical intentional object. (1967:129).

For Hirsch, therefore, the meaning shared by all in relation to the perception of 'an identical intentional object' is what matters in literary studies.

Furthermore, liberal humanist artists draw largely upon the issues explored in texts of the classical period and conceive of them as the great tradition with which all literature to the present time have had to relate. The basic elements of this profession are captured by Eliot in his seminal essay in which he discusses the relevance of the

individual talent within a literary tradition that is timeless (i.e., stretched from the distant past of humanity to the present and remains relevant for the future) and universal (i.e. cuts across the various cultures within which men and women in different parts of the world exist) in scope. For the liberal humanists, therefore, traditional classical values, which incorporate moral virtues and social responsibility, are an integral aspect of good art. For writers of the modernist persuasion within this humanism, art constitutes a complex structural re-visioning of nostalgic responsibility to a past that was reasonably materialistic.

Paradoxically, however, their basic procedure outfaces the past with the entire experience of time present, which is always in a state of 'hemorrhage' (see Ibitokun, 2005, for a detailed critical engagement with the question of the humanistic interface of being and time in literature). The current times herein indicated carry in them a form of critical knowledge that outplays the whole history of human civilisation and stands on its own with a somewhat celebrated near-detachment from tradition. Within this literary epoch, form and style rather than subject matter becomes the most outstanding characteristics of their art.

To capture vividly the changes in the modern age - political and industrial revolutions, growth of science and intellectualism, decline of religious faith, and the dynamics of globalisation in a changing or new world order - all of which significantly variegates the texture of society, these writers seek to realise a modern idiom in their works, poetry particularly. This is an idiom precipitated by change in taste and everyday use of language both of which are consequent upon the new realities of the modern age. That the speech and vision of the modern man differ from those of previous times have meant that the artists of the age needed to restructure

deliberately the form of their art in order to appropriately re-mould the experience of their time. Soyinka has thus stated:

We must stress the language; stress it, impact and compact it, fragment and re-assemble it with no apology, as required to bear the burden of experience and of experiencing (1976:20).

Form, as an artistic equivalence of changing social taste and sensibility, thus rises to the speed and sophistication of modern technology and brings to focus the rhythms of a highly intellectualized and "motorised" humanity. It is an engagement with language which, 'through self-transcending efforts, a wholesome humanistic employment of the word towards integrity and self-transparency in our mutable pluralistic polyglottal world becomes an imperative. The more successful we are in this task, the more cultured and civilised we would have become' (Ibitokun, 2003:36). Language for the liberal humanist writer is thus a tool, a means as well as an end. Also, form, as an artistic imperative, rises to the speed and sophistication of modern technology and brings to focus the rhythms of a highly intellectualised humanity.

Modern experience has meant for the liberal humanist-artists a re-fashioning of patterns of life and belief which bring to bear on individual lives the visions of modern pursuits. Against the backdrop of institutionalised oppression in society, these artists see themselves as bearing the torch of hope, a medicinal dose to the hitherto hopeless. Beyond this missionary target, however, they seek a form of art that accommodates past and present experiences in symbols of wholeness. This wholeness is such that translates the materialism of the modern age into symbols of ethereal essence in the human mind. It is a wholeness that brings the contraries of existence together in a relationship of balance and counter-balance as a means of maintaining the liberal humanist vision of cosmic continuity.

It is also characteristic of liberal humanist artists to attempt the establishment of art as an alternate form of life. As a result of their peculiar insight into the non-literary sensations of life, they practise writing as something hallucinatory from which actual life experiences like sexual relations, violence, social upheavals, scientific inventions, and other forms of modern experience could be realised. In essence, their works are a means of discovering the immaterial and sensual elements that effect and sustain order in the human person's inner life and social relations as against the crisis and disorder of societal organisation.

The poetry of Eliot and Soyinka vividly illustrates this phenomenon. To achieve this single sensation in both life and art, without any confusion, they follow a strict route of mental discipline in creativity, not in the form that culminates in the rhyme couplets of the Augustans, but that which approximates the substantiality and dynamism of realised sensations within and beyond the limited vigour of scientific development, social revolutions and the modern political world order all of which are supra-idiosyncratic. J.P. Hodin (1961:28) has thus observed that the results of such cognitive writings which are 'often highly specialised and elaborate on an analytical basis are organised into a new visual order ... of universal significance and without limitations in time.'

Both Hodin and Matthew Arnold hold the view that the essence of this liberal order is 'synthesis and exposition'. This synthesis, for Hodin, breeds a novel style in modern art. For Arnold, however, the essence of this artistic synthesis is holistic: it generates from 'a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere, by a certain order of ideas', and consummates at the highest point of beauty, 'the most effective and attractive combinations' (1954:353). Forms of dualism which, therefore, characterise modern liberal humanist art are intellect and spirit, ideas and presentation, and

synthesis and exposition. These forms constitute the literary bedrock from which would be explored the challenges of contemporary liberal humanist development in the West and in Africa.

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the stated objectives of this research, we have drawn upon four different but simple and relevant tools of literary study. These are practical criticism, comparative criticism, a cross-disciplinary approach (which is limited to History, Sociology and Philosophy), and a deconstructive approach.

To decode the nature and essence of liberal humanism in the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka, we have embarked upon a close reading of the poems. Hence the use of practical criticism as a method. To establish similarities and differences in the understanding and attitude of the two poets to the subject, there is the need for a comparative study. To give the study a comprehensive focus as relevant for any contemporary research which seeks to explore the significance of its subject for global human and societal development, there is the need for a cross-disciplinary approach to the knowledge of liberal humanism. And we have used the deconstructive technique to vividly illustrate the limits and ambivalence of the humanist imagination in Eliot and Soyinka.

(3.1) PRACTICAL CRITICISM

This implies a close study of the individual poems. We largely follow the methods of I. A. Richards as exemplified in *Practical Criticism* and Cleanth Brooks' 'Literary Criticism: Marvell's "Horatian Ode"'. This means straining to fathom the essential qualities in the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka through reference to subtle details.

Meaning is thus established through such aspects as sense, feeling, tone, and intention. The metaphoric language and the poetic forms of the two writers are critically examined with the aim of delineating the constituents of their humanism. This mode of interpretation partly helps to debunk to some extent the notion of their poems as composed of an impenetrable language.

It is important to observe that even Richards in his attempt at defining what literary criticism should be becomes more or less humanistic. He writes about achieving the meaning of a work 'by considering it in a frame of feelings whose sincerity is beyond our questioning' (1960:290). These feelings are nothing more than what liberal humanists try to grapple with:

- i. Man's loneliness (the isolation of the human situation).
- ii. The facts of birth, and of death, in their inexplicable oddity.
- iii. The inconceivable immensity of the Universe.
- iv. Man's place in the perspective of time.
- v. The enormity of his ignorance (Richards 1960:290).

This frame of reference by Richards speaks for claim to objectivity by liberal humanists. The inclusion of Brooks as an exemplar in our methodology is meant to add the historical dimension to Richards' explicative theory of criticism. Brooks believes that 'the critic needs the help of the historian' to the extent that such an assistance does not impinge upon the integrity of the poem as a poem (1963:127). Thus in dabbling forth and back from history in his study of Andrew Marvell's 'Horatian Ode', Brooks uses historical evidence only to amplify that which already exists in the poem, but does not force such on the total appreciation of the poem as an independent form. This approach is relevant because it create some intellectual ease in discussing the poems of Eliot and Soyinka within a humanistic frame of reference that is simultaneously timeless and universal. However, it has been used to a limited

degree because the historical approach which we draw upon within a cross-disciplinary context transcends the Brooksonian limit on the use of history in criticism.

(3.2) COMPARATIVE CRITICISM

This method entails the direct comparison of one work, artist, or literary epoch with another. It is a general method that does not draw upon any distinct literary theory, yet it cuts across various approaches to literary criticism. In this study, therefore, we have compared the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka basically from the view-point of what constitutes liberal humanism in modern art, and how their poems reflect the nature and limits of liberal humanism in their societies.

(3.3) A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

In addition to the already discussed methods, this study builds bridges between literature and at least, three other disciplines (i.e. History, Sociology and Philosophy). There is an attempt to transcend the production of a mere localised version of knowledge particularly at a period like this when epistemological norm demands collaboration among the various disciplines. The challenge here is that any study that must create new and comprehensive visions for global development must possess in it a capacity for re-conceptualising intellectual production in forms which acknowledge border-crossing as a holistic global methodology.

In terms of history, our major concern has been to illustrate how some events of human and societal relevance informed the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka, and how their poems, in turn, reflect upon the experience of individuals, societies and the entire human race in relation to humanist and liberal principles. Their poems are used to explore liberal humanism as the ideological and cultural history of Europe and Africa.

There is a thorough search for meaningful historical patterns, which possess a uniformity and continuity capable of illustrating the enduring elements of liberal humanism in the two societies.

The study is sociological to the extent that it explores how Eliot and Soyinka in their poems have reflected upon the social forces that have determined the structure of liberal humanism in their societies. Their works thus serve as means through which we have examined the roles and implications of these social forces in the developmental process in Europe and Africa. Though we do not intend to dabble into issues of pure sociological analysis (we leave that to the professional sociologists), however, we have largely drawn upon the method called 'perspectival consensus' which Roland Robertson has described as 'highly desirable in respect of categories of variables which should enter into all forms of sociological analysis' and which attempt 'to reconcile the basic "paradigms" of sociology - conflict and consensus; conflict and equilibrium; action and system...' (1974:108-9).

In addition to the above, there is a philosophical approach within which the research has been able to cast Europe's and Africa's experience of liberal humanism in a dialectical mould as a means of proffering practical solutions to some of the problems that are discussed. Philosophy in this context is explained as a world-view which incorporates the position of man in the universe as well as the intellectual significance of his moral, socio-political, economic and metaphysical ideals. Our concern here is mostly with Philosophy as a prognostic art: a theory of criticism which investigates and challenges established notions and may thus lead to 'new discourses, new sciences, new philosophical research programs and thus new objective truth' (Rorty, 1980: 378-9). This would help us to understand 'who we are and what we might become' (Nielsen, 1987:104).

(3.4) DECONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

This is a literary technique through which we seek to establish a free-play of interpretation that transcends the Western concept of liberal humanism. We apply the methods of two notable figures in the development of the deconstructive theory: Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. The reason for this choice is simple. Derrida's deconstructive criticism (see, for instance, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, 1973) is primarily directed at western epistemology which is essentially liberal humanist. Thus, that immediately suits the subject of our research. For de Man (1988), he has been extensively pre-occupied with the application of deconstruction to literary texts, and his primary interest has been the illustration of how a text always does something different from what it says. This does not mean that the former's criticism is exclusively conceptual while the latter is exclusively rhetorical. It only reflects the emphasis in their methodology as they both are conceptual as well as rhetorical in their various works.

Deconstruction as an approach to literary criticism aims at questioning the order of things rather than accounting for them. According to J. Hillis Miller (1989:574), it is a 'discriminating testing out' of the presupposition that underlie empirical and intellectual understanding the end of which is an unraveling of truths that speak for themselves. This means an illustration of the instability of meaning through a decentering of the metaphysical assumptions of ideas embedded in written texts which are traditionally privileged over discourse.

In his exposition of deconstruction, Derrida observes that the West has taken for granted such ideas as God, man, goodness, truth, et cetera as preceding human understanding, and that these are often explained in relation to their contraries (1989:231-32). The concept of authority is also one of these givens, which according

to Derrida, exists in a structure conceived of as a centre. This centre is significant in that it governs the structure but is not accounted for itself within the structure. It can be simply explained as the theories of origin and of referentiality. Thus deconstructive criticism for Derrida denotes:

...two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign... The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology - in other words, through the history of all of his history - has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game (1989:242).

This technique is evident in Derrida's critique of structuralism as represented by the postulations of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss, and by Edmund Husserl's *Phenomenology* (see Derrida, 1973, 1976 and 1989). Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (1989:208) suggest that three terms of major relevance to literary theory and criticism could be distilled from Derrida's works. These are textuality, undecidability, and strategy. Textuality means any knowledge that is expressed 'as a text within a system of differences' (208). Because of such a context, it becomes impossible for meaning to attain any stable plains. As a result, the deconstructive critic is always 'reversing and reinscribing the terms of a hierarchy' in his study of literature (208). The whole process is considered as being merely playful and rhetorical, but underneath this playfulness lies the subversion of the seriousness attached to the hitherto assumed superiority of Western epistemology. This is where deconstruction as methodology and as objective becomes a philosophical and literary weapon of cultural and socio-political re-thinking.

While Derrida's practice cuts across several disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, theology, linguistics, theatre, and literature, Paul de Man is more prolific in his deconstructive reading of literature. He applies a system close to the methods of practical criticism in opposing rhetoric to grammar as forms that convey different meanings within any particular text. In his reading of W. B. Yeats' poem, 'Among School Children', he observes from the line: 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?' that the grammatical and the rhetorical readings both 'engage each other in direct confrontation' such that it is impossible to decide which is more valid (de Man, 1989:255-256).

The implication that this holds for the reader is that it places him in a new position where he sees the text as providing information meant for interrogation as a way of understanding the plurality of truth more comprehensively. For de Man, therefore, deconstruction is an integral part of a text, and not something foreign to it.

Thus he posits:

Any question about the rhetorical mode of a literary text is always a rhetorical question which does not even know whether it is really questioning. The resulting pathos is an anxiety (or bliss, depending on one's momentary mood or individual temperament) of ignorance, not an anxiety of reference... not as an emotive reaction to what language does, but as an emotive reaction to the impossibility of knowing what it might be up to. Literature as well as criticism - the difference between them being delusive - is condemned (or privileged) to be forever the most rigorous and, consequently, the most unreliable language in terms of which man names and transforms himself (1989:260-61).

This condemnation of literature to a state of self-contradictions is one that has risen out of the practice of deconstruction from which other post-structuralist approaches to literary criticism took an example. In essence, we may not discover any perfectly coherent and consistent system in the deconstructive study of the poetry of

Eliot and Soyinka because the methodology is 'a self-reflective discourse, which constantly divides itself against itself and transgresses its own systems' (Young, 1981:7). If any such coherent and comprehensive system does exist, it would be no more than that of a continuously shifting and vicissitudinous meanings or perspectives. This, however, poses no major problem of critical analysis because it is a critical legacy of liberal humanism to contemporary postmodernist disposition and practice which are still largely intrinsically defined by humanist principles.

(3.5) SOURCES OF MATERIAL

In this research, we largely depend on our own personal and critical appraisal of the poems of Eliot and Soyinka. The range of primary sources in this study are Eliot's *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (1974) (which comprises all of Eliot's major poems) and Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1982), and *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1989).

Importantly, particular poems from these anthologies illustrate various aspects of the poets' liberal humanism. It is by identifying their liberal humanist characteristics as separately and sometimes collectively manifest in the various poems that we are able to arrive at the ideological summation which this thesis seeks to achieve. Secondary materials on the poets and texts that illustrate or discuss various aspects of liberal humanism have also been drawn upon.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: THE HUMANISM OF ELIOT AND SOYINKA

PART ONE: T.S. ELIOT

(4.1) THE HISTORICAL SENSE

People are only influenced in the direction in which they want to go, and influence consists, largely in making them conscious of their wishes to proceed in that direction. (*The Criterion*, xvi (1937) 667, in Eliot/Ricks, 1996:385).

It is doubtful that Eliot in his lifetime would have ever accepted to be categorically classified as a poet of a liberal humanist temper. His commitment to the authorities of tradition and religion, for example, seems to depict a philosophy which differs from and somewhat negates the essence of liberal humanist values. His supposed belief in man's innate depravity encapsulates a sense of anti-romanticism, produces an antipathy in his attitude to the political creed of liberalism, and makes him lean towards an authoritarian vision of art and society (Smidt, 1961; Thomas, 1975).

Eagleton (1987: 223) conceives of his mission to Europe as a historic one which seeks to redefine 'the organic unity of its cultural traditions', and to 'radically reconstruct' the beleaguered liberal humanist English literary culture into 'a classicism which would eradicate the last vestiges of "whiggism" (Protestantism, liberalism, romanticism, humanism) through the surrender of "personality" to order reason, authority and tradition'.

Thus, while Eliot as a person might never have had the opportunity to remonstrate with the major assertion of a work such as this, there are at least two sets

of critics (as indicated above) who have done that, probably, on his behalf. This first places him at the exact opposite of the liberal humanist idea; the second places him in a dialectical context within which he (Eliot) struggles against, but also, rather paradoxically, for values of liberal humanism. Both sides are relevant to this study because what they do is turn liberal humanism's searchlight on itself, a depiction of the idea's introspective practice, which often gravitates towards critical suspension, interrogation, denial, reformation, and re-validation. These are essential procedural elements in articulating liberal humanist practice, and exposing strengths and weaknesses in the ideology.

It is important, however, to make a few remarks that could aid our understanding of this study. The primary interest in this study is not in how the poet describes or sees himself. Though biographical references necessarily support the dominant proposition, the study does not strive to be biographical. Rather, it seeks ample evidence within Eliot's works to buttress the claim to ideology. There is thus a conscious attempt to achieve a critical distinction between Eliot the man or poet, and the poet persona. Though the man and his philosophy largely shape the poetry, Prufrock, for example, remains in the realm of the liberal humanist imagination and does not become Eliot. The guiding attitude in this study is not the exclusive critical approach of the 20th century Eliot establishment or the pervasive revisionism of the present day. Just as the text in contemporary deconstructionist discourse, all writers are themselves made of various layers of meanings and values.

There may be found no writers who exist or practice in an ideological framework absolutely exclusive of other inclinations. And even within the same ideology, there is always a gap between theory and practice which in the Eliotic perspective, is 'the Shadow' (*Collected Poems*, 92). And within 'the Shadow' are a

myriad of interpretations of idea and reality. We will therefore find in Eliot's essays, a critical engagement of liberal humanism and its shortcomings, both of which constitute dialectical issues in his poetry and aspects of his life. Between his essays and poetry, we will also find the humanist crave for 'perfection' and its 'follies', which sometimes make the man no different from the subject of his criticism as would be seen, for example, in Eliot's writings about Matthew Arnold and William Wordsworth, among others. Essentially, therefore, the study of Eliot's poetry engages the virtues and vices of liberal humanist theory and practice.

(4.2) HUMANIST INFLUENCES

Personalities and sources that we admire often exert considerable influence in the shaping of our sensibilities. In creative writing particularly, such personalities and sources could be literary, philosophical, historical, sociological, etc. It is important to understand that some of the personalities or texts that might have had a humanist influence on a writer do not necessarily have to be predominantly humanist in essence or form. What we are looking at is the movement of different isolated humanist attributes from different sources into a whole. Such a convergence, in spite of minor alterations and inconsistencies, becomes predominantly humanist. Some of the influences could be spontaneous and dramatic; but more often than not, they inscribe themselves gradually through subliminal outlets.

Sometimes, we even imbibe some ideas, or patterns of thought, or practices to which we do not really subscribe from persons, texts, and traditions which function in our minds in a somewhat mentoring capacity. That literary traditions have this much authority over writers is, no doubt, a proposition that would make Eliot sleep well in his grave, vide: 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Though Eliot has asserted his

moral right regarding the expression of his individual talents, which is what has made him the great artist that he is, a prelude to that assertion and a major constitutive element of his outstanding talents is the influence of tradition on his poetic sensibilities. To draw upon his own thesis on this idea, influence is not tantamount to mere inheritance: 'Tradition is a matter of much wider significance... if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour' (Eliot, 1999: 14).

The labour to situate himself within tradition is as much philosophical as it is literary. Eliot's doctoral thesis (which he submitted to Harvard University) on the philosophy of Francis Herbert Bradley and his later essay on Bradley (1999:444-55) both indicate that his study of the English philosopher was a major influence on the development of his humanist career in poetry. His doctoral work was on *Experience and the Object of Knowledge in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley* (Eliot, 1964). At the base of Bradley's philosophy (Bradley, 1893; 1914; and 1927; see also, Wollheim, 1970; 169 - 93; Jain, 1992: 63 - 81) is the concept of 'Immediate Experience'.

The concept encapsulates two levels at which human knowledge is defined and articulated. The first indicates that the terms of immediacy cover the processes and acts of feeling and knowing, and that these primary points of experience eventually constitute the grounds upon which a metaphysical consciousness or knowledge is established. The second captures 'Immediate Experience' in the context of the fusion of the temporal with the 'Absolute' to produce 'Truth'. The two levels reflect the gradation of experience and knowledge, and the philosophical attempt to place order on the fragmentary nature of man's total experience. The typology essentially favours the assimilation of self, ego, and the physical world into a metaphysical existence within which a 'higher reality' is situated.

Bradley's philosophy holds much fascination for Eliot in terms of the degrees of disparity between reality and idealism. He considers the differentiation of the mental and the physical, or the internal and the external, to be logical, though relative (Eliot, 1964: 32, 55). He, however, conceives of Bradley's philosophy as inadequate because the latter privileges feeling over thought, whereas Eliot believes that thought precedes feeling, or at most, exists with it side by side. Therefore, immediate experience for him entails the processes of thinking and analyzing, which somewhat tends toward 'annihilation and utter night' (1964:31). The absolute is non-existent; in fact, it is a state of 'absolute zero' (1964:200). Thus, an 'inescapable exclusion from absolute experience' characterises the global human condition and becomes a defining feature of Eliot's early poetry (Miller, 1966: 136). If Eliot was this critical of Bradley's philosophy, the question then is: what does he make of it in terms of positive appreciation and influence?

Bradley's philosophy serves the predominant purpose of the poet crystallising his own thought-processes regarding questions of human experience. The system of order which he (Bradley) seeks to erect, Eliot posits, simply changes the object-subject relationship of the 'reality' he grapples with and casts doubt on metaphysical systems of knowing. To the metaphysical theorist, theorising conceives of appearance and reality as logically connected. But this connection might not be logical to anyone outside the system, Eliot claims. What is achieved, therefore, is not the construction of absolute relations, but the poetic relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge. The 'truthful' depiction of this relationship in interpretation and analysis constitutes for Eliot the logical basis of claim to philosophical and empirical knowledge. This later constituted a strong background to his conceptualisation of the

theory of the objective-correlative, which is a backbone concept in his poetry as well as in the development of New Criticism in the 20th century.

Eliot's criticism of Bradley indicates the limitations of philosophical theories to provide a totalising framework within which the corpus of 'real' human experience can be systematically explained. At the centre of his thesis are such concepts as 'idea', 'mental content', 'image', and 'reference' (all of which depict core issues in New Criticism). The idea points to its reference and that reference is not outside the idea: 'Every idea means itself' (1964:56). Eliot faults Bradley's theory for situating the reference in a world outside of the idea. For Bradley, there is just one world which exists in a gradation of meanings based on different levels of experience, and words serve the mere purpose of facilitation of classifications and relations within that world. But this is not so for Eliot: there are two worlds; one made up of objects and the other of words. The world of words refers to objects within its own world and though these objects often have ideational parallels in the world of objects, they refer not to the world of objects but to their own world:

A reference to an identity.... is the identity, in the sense in which a word is that which it denotes. An identity is intended, and it could not have been intended we say, unless it was there: but its being 'there' consists simply in the intention, and has no other meaning (1964:143).

Effectively, therefore, the humanist literary practice which privileges authorial intention and authority over political interpretations finds roots in Eliot's early philosophising, which was facilitated by his study of Bradley. Hence, the world of words has its own 'finite centre' (1964:147) as different from the 'finite centre' of the world of objects.

The concept of finite centres creates support for Eliot's theory of the impersonality of the poet. Even though writers live in the world of objects from which they draw materials for artistic composition, their literary engagement is with objects in the world of words. The poet escapes from himself into a world where he becomes impersonal; his mind reaches out not to himself but to objects in the world of words. It is important to observe that at the background of this theory of poetic impersonality is Eliot's own rejection of 'the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul' (1928:50) .

In essence, therefore, Eliot's poetic theory of impersonality is a natural sequence to his doctoral thesis. This indicates that the revisionist critics' allegation (see Segmour-Jones, 2001; Bate, 2001; among others) that Eliot evolved the impersonality theory for the purpose of diverting attention from a biographical reading of his poetry and of covering his 'dirty tracks', is misplaced and mischievous. In the context of his early philosophical studies is his search for humanist values which privilege scientific thought over metaphysical and political considerations, and which seek to understand the human experience in its modern fragmentary form before cultivating for it a system of scholarship that pursues the agenda of humanist order.

Though Eliot objects to several critical areas of Bradley's philosophy (which in any case provided for him a strong platform for trying to sort out and arrange his own thoughts), he describes the influence of Bradley's personality and writings as possessing 'an indubitable claim to permanence' (1999:445). For him, this is reflected primarily in his style of writing, which has a 'perfect' blend with his subject; and his modesty of life which, combined with 'the intellectual passion' of his works, makes him a compelling personality. To the extent that Eliot's poetry possesses a form

which is as fragmentary as the intended object and reflective of the modernist practice of form as indicative of meaning, the claim to Bradley's stylistic influence would remain authentic. He explores a dominant ironic mode in his poetry, separating the suffering mind from the creative mind and achieving a dualistic objectification of self through the portrayal of both form and object as experience.

But more important is Eliot's own striving for values that encapsulate civilisation and universality, both of which are fundamental elements of humanist thought. It is in this sphere of social experience (as different from the logic of philosophy) that Eliot situates Bradley's achievement: 'he replaced a philosophy which was crude and raw and provincial by one which was, in comparison, catholic, civilized, and universal' (1999:448-49). That Eliot goes further in his essay on Bradley to express the Eurocentric nature and aspiration of his admired values points to the allegation of European provincialism against the dominant western conceptualisation of the idea of liberal humanism. That he subscribes to the values and 'vices' of the ideology is on the one hand, a reflection of Bradley's influence (among other influences), and on the other, an indication of the ideological strand that defines his commitment in art.

It is in the context of appraising Bradley that he warns against the danger inherent in a philosophy in which the human being surrenders his will to a divine order. He objects to Bradley's philosophical 'direction of diminishing the value and dignity of the individual, of sacrificing him to a church or a state' (1999:452), thus stressing the essence of individualism in the humanist agenda. Within this agenda in his essay on Bradley are other issues as human mortality and the quest for salvation, which brings about the phenomenon of religion and its corollary - morality.

The humanist grapples with the eternal theme of human progress, and progress does extend to mean some forms of continuity after the present existence. Hence, liberal humanism is not averse to any religious or philosophical inclination which provides psychological assurance to human beings about the possibilities of their well-being in the hereafter, in so far as such does not stand opposed to a system of ethics that support the dignity of human life in the present existence. And regarding this system of ethics which is described as 'a philosophy of common sense' (1999:454) (a typical liberal humanist mode of assumption), Eliot turns to the classical tradition of philosophical and poetic ideals. He calls for 'a careful study of Renaissance Humanists... [with] an eye which can see the past in its place with its definite differences from the present, and yet so lively that it shall be present to us as the present' (1999:63-64). It is in this context that Dante's works serve as a monumental influence in the shaping of his own poetry.

In his essay, 'What Dante Means to Me' (in *To Criticize the Critic*, 1965), he claims that no other writer has had as much influence on his own development as a poet. He learnt from Dante what poetry means both as a craft and as 'a moral lesson' (133). He learnt from Dante the humanist intellectual venture of attempting to unravel and transcend details of human nature and experience beyond the scope of ordinariness, as well as the humanist venture of capturing the entire circumstance of the 'emotional range' of humanity. The former marries the imaginative practice of the poet to an evaluative spirit, while the latter encapsulates varied emotions, stretching from the sad stories of human frailties to the 'beatific vision[s]' of the human life. These represent a peak in the image of the poet as a liberal humanist.

Acts of creativity and evaluation in Dante relate to how he serves the growth of his language. For Eliot, he uses words in a manner that captures the great

possibilities of language, that helps people to 'comprehend the incomprehensible' (134), and that enriches (access to) meaning. Dante fulfils Eliot's search for a European culture by his use of the Italian language in a way that gravitates toward 'a universal Latin', an Eliotic term which (he assumes) captures the thinking objects and patterns of various European nationalities. Hence, it is easier (Eliot claims) to translate Dante's poetry from its Italian original into Latin, or other major European languages, than can be said for Shakespeare or any latter English writer. This makes Dante 'first a European' (1999: 239) and fits him into Eliot's humanist historical framework of a period 'when Europe was still more or less one' (1999:242). The major criteria by which he thus assesses various poets and defines what poetry should be are the elements of universality in terms of language, style and subject matter:

.... I do not wish to be thought to claim a universality for Dante which I deny to Shakespeare or Moliere or Sophocles. Shakespeare, or even Sophocles, or even Racine and Moliere, are dealing with what is as universally human as the material of Dante; but they had no choice but to deal with it in a more local way... He [Dante] not only thought in a way in which every man of his culture in the whole of Europe then thought, but he employed a method which was common and commonly understood throughout Europe (1999: 240-42).

Another aspect of Dante's universalism is his use of allegory which depicts an essentially European outlook, but equally important, possesses 'clear visual images' (1999:242). Dante's poetry is an imaginative recap of the realism of dreams and visions in his age. Of particular interest to Eliot, especially in his reading of the *Inferno*, is the depiction of Hell as a 'state', not a 'place'. The humanist concept of progress finds despicable the experience of human suffering in the present existence and does not subscribe to the idea of a hell-fire where human beings will burn

forever. Hell is in the mind and can be experienced through 'the projection of sensory images' (1999:250), which connect to unpleasant immediate experience.

Similarly, Eliot doubts the Christian doctrine of 'the resurrection of the body' claiming for it 'a deeper meaning than we understand (1999:250). Though he conceives of Christianity as the guiding element of European civilisation, he situates his religious sensibility within a humanist framework which appreciates the problems of human depravity, but still conceives of man as 'the measure of all things'. Even in the context of religious faith, the mental index remains a superintending force in the evaluation of issues. Yet, Eliot asserts a difference between 'philosophical belief and poetic assent' (1999:257), going back to the impersonality theory of poetry defined by the humanist apolitical world of words.

Dante is, therefore, a great poet not just because of the universality of his language [use] and profundity of thought, but also because he symbolises poetic impersonality. He captures the Eliotic objective poetic emotions in a simple language so compressed with meaning that a few lines would take paragraphs to elucidate. The experiences he explores are impersonal, though of much philosophical value. And even where there is an element of religious propaganda in his works (as Eliot later admits in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 1975:96), he is assigned the virtue of *responsibleness*, which primary aim is to paint, not persuade; hence the reader does not have to subscribe to Dante's faith for him to partake of the pleasure of the work. While this is possible to any reader, it is doubtful that such could have been Eliot's own experience as he himself at age seventy-three, stated: 'There is one poet... who impressed me profoundly when I was twenty-one... one poet who remains the comfort and amazement of my age...Dante' (1965:23).

In other words, even in his old age, humanism remained Eliot's classical inclination. We can talk of no less of such an ideological disposition in his poetry as he himself has asserted in the several allusions to Dante in such poems as *The Waste Land* and *Little Gidding*, amongst other several connections that have been made of his poetry and Dante's by critics (see, as examples, Manganiello, 1989; Malagi, 1992). Manganiello's work especially is very elaborate in illustrating parallels in the styles and thoughts of the two poets, except that it reaches the extreme where a strong impression is established that Eliot probably lacks a mind of his own and would not have written a single line but for Dante. In admitting Dante's enormous influence, caution should be taken not to deprive Eliot of his own poetic individuality, which remains significantly different from Dante's in form as well as content. Yet Manganiello might only have served Eliot's purpose at least to the logical limit that Heaney's proposition about the modern poet would hold true:

... when great poets turn to the great masters of the past, they turn to an image of their own creation, one which is likely to be a reflection of their own imaginative needs, their own artistic inclinations and procedures (1985:5).

Turning to great masters of the past could, in significant proportion, be informed by personal experience with great masters of the present. Eliot attests to the much debt he owed his 'old teacher and master, Irving Babbit'. The influence of Babbit meant for him a commitment to the humanist ideals of moral discipline and classicism. To digress a bit, it is important to understand that Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism and the subsequent somewhat 'mid-way diversion' from his early poetic and philosophical inclinations could not have effected much changes in the nature of his commitment in poetry. A major reason for this is that he switched to Anglicanism

in 1927, a period after he had published his landmark poems: 'Prufrock', *The Waste Land*, 'The Hollow Men', etc. The 'Ariel Poems' and 'Ash-Wednesday' were published between 1927 and 1930, a period during which, one would say, his new faith was at the early stage of crystallisation, even though some of his recurrent images had equally become 'baptized' (Martin 1970:113).

It is important to note that Eliot never made an open declaration of his new faith for a long time until he was challenged to it by Babbitt. It would thus be of interest in this study to see the extent to which Christianity affected the texture of his humanism. Yet, it should be noted that even before his baptism, the texture of his poetic language was significantly reflective of one with a sound background in the Christian religion.

Babbitt's commitment to humanism preceded Eliot's entry into Harvard as an undergraduate. Thus Eliot was able to benefit from his largely formed ideas about the 'right' values in the study of the humanities, values which centred around the essence of classicism and tradition. He (Babbitt) stressed the need to study the ancient Greek philosophers and poets if one must understand the art of good writing or criticism. The classical temper 'in its purest form' leads the aspiring writer or critic to a devoted 'service of a high impersonal reason' and teaches him the virtues of 'restraint and discipline' as well as a sense of proportion and pervading law' (Babbitt, 1908:174). That these qualities became the hallmark of Eliot's consecration to poetry is an indication of the path that he had himself chosen to tread. In this regard, his essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', can be seen as a creative recap of Babbitt's humanism.

Similarly, Babbitt's imprint looms over Eliot's life-time condemnation of the 'vague emotionality and the apotheosis of science' of the Romanticism (Schwartz,

1990:324). Thus his lessons exist side by side the making of Eliot's critical sensibility. The same would go for his major teaching course at Harvard: French. He introduced Eliot to the French neoclassicists to whom Eliot largely devoted himself in later life both in study and in poetry. It is with his vast undergraduate experience of Babbitt that Eliot approached several of the subsequent influences on his career.

After his baptism, Christianity gradually became a major consideration for Eliot in the association of his person and thoughts with any ideological bent. He brought his master's humanism under critical examination, an indication of the somewhat independent development of his mind in spite of Babbitt's much influence. In his essays, 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt' (1999; first published 1928 as a response to Babbitt's book, *Democracy and Leadership*) and 'Second Thoughts about Humanism' (1999, first published 1929 as a follow-up to the previous essay), we come closer to what Eliot really thinks of humanism and the extent to which he, from his own testimony, associates with it. In both essays, he identifies two humanisms: the pure and the positivistic. The first is closely associated with religion, while the second strives to constitute itself into a religion.

In his first essay, Eliot criticises his master for thinking in terms of positivistic humanism. One of Babbitt's concerns is how human beings can achieve moral discipline by aspiring to 'natural' or 'humanistic' values. For Eliot, such values do not exist outside of themselves but in the context of religion. He argues that the history of Europe has been closely linked with Christianity from which liberal Protestantism evolved, and from which humanist thoughts began to crystallise. Thus, pure humanism in Europe is a corollary of genuine Christian sentiments and habits and cannot stand on its own.

Eliot turns Babbitt's own examples of those he regarded as humanists - Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, and Erasmus - against his (Babbitt's) thesis. He posits that Confucius made his mark by 'fitting in with popular religion,' Buddha by establishing a religion which recognised the 'dependence of the human upon the divine', and that Socrates and Erasmus did not tamper with the 'fabric' of religion. For humanism to be meaningful, therefore, it has to work with religion. It probably constitutes the critical element of reason required by religions for them to be truly responsive to human needs, but it is not an alternative to religion.

Eliot subscribes to the political aspect of Babbitt's humanism. Democracy as a form of government is an acceptable replacement for 'the outer restraints of Kingship' and aristocracy. The focus should shift from the individual being controlled by external authorities to the individual being controlled by himself. But what check would there be when the individual becomes a servant of his own precarious notions and judgment? There is thus the need for religion as an 'inner control'. Eliot argues that without such apparatuses of religion to appeal to the human soul, the success of temporal political control would be much limited.

The control of religion is not synonymous with being controlled by the priests or a committee of human beings. It simply means that true subscription to a faith makes a person to freely direct himself by the ethical standards of his profession. The ethical standards described as 'the higher will' are made up of 'external objects' and 'objective values' which appeal to, rather than seek to impose themselves on the individual. With such a religious superstructure upholding individual control, society attains a height of order which does not violate the conscience and individualism of its members. Yet Eliot exhibits such humanist scepticism which explores the 'history and vicissitudes' of society and therefore, becomes reluctant 'to

place all the hopes of humanity' on any one institution, religious or political. His concern is not to repudiate humanism, but to point out the shortcomings of its positivistic brand 'so that the [entire] structure may not crash beneath an excessive weight'.

In 'Second Thoughts About Humanism', he conceives of the humanist as a member of a global culture and of the function of humanism as one which concerns itself more with common sense than with 'reason'. Eliot reiterates the essence of his dialectical approach to the humanist ethos:

My previous note has been interpreted, I am afraid, as an 'attack' on humanism from a narrow sectarian point of view. It was not intended to be an attack. Having myself begun as a disciple of Mr. Babbit, and feeling, *as I do*, that I have rejected nothing that seems to me positive in his teaching, I was hardly qualified to 'attack' humanism. I was concerned rather to point out the weak point in its defence, before some genuine enemy took advantage of them. It can be - and is already - of immense value: but it must be subjected to criticism while there is still time. (481, emphasis added).

Eliot pitches humanism against fanaticism, dogmatism and philosophical theories that fail to take cognizance of the entire breath of human experience in terms of the natural as well as the supernatural. Understanding human experience entails a proper reading of man's ability to 'recognise supernatural realities', not just invent them. Hence the humanist artist grapples with constituents of such realities which, he assumes, are given and can be seen in ordinary life, but which require a critical capability to recapture in art form. A humanism which divests man of the experience of the soul and the supernatural merely places him in a natural world at the same level with animals and becomes essentially preoccupied with the *animality* of existence, not the humanity that defines humanism.

Eliot's religious approach to the question of humanism underscores his belief in human depravity which, for him, constitutes an essential knowledge for anyone who is committed to the pursuit of human progress. Holding a contrary view largely amounts to subscribing to the romantic vision of a sinless and perfect man. In line with Christian doctrine and the influence of T.E. Hulme to whom he makes constant reference, Eliot sees man as a carrier of the original sin; thus he is intrinsically depraved. But this depravity is not such that places a hopeless condition on humanity. There is a state of perfection towards which man must always strive, and though he can never attain it, he can occasionally or often, achieve feats by which he shares of the bliss of perfection even though he is himself not perfect. But such feats can only come through much discipline. Hence the essence of the 'creative and liberating' orders of religious and political institutions in society. This view is contingent not on the ideal, but on the stark realities of modern experience. It is a 'pure humanistic attitude' which is not opposed to a religious inclination.

Eliot, therefore, proposes what he conceives as the functions of true humanism, which can be summarised in four words: culture, tolerance, persuasion, and criticism. As culture, humanism is a way of life subscribed to primarily by intellectual aristocrats. Eliot states that it is not meant to be ideological because it is based on common sense - a typical liberal humanist assumption which describes all other approaches to life, except liberal humanism, as ideological! On tolerance, humanism accommodates divergent views, including those which it does not endorse, but with a provision that they operate within acceptable ethical bounds. And humanism tolerates even its positivistic disciples!

On persuasion, humanism appropriates the rhetorical temper of that classical age and promotes the business of winning people to the side of any argument or life-

style not through the weapons of force, but through convincing and persuasive words of logic. As criticism, it serves as 'a mediating and corrective ingredient' in the pursuit of religious and socio-political values in society, and thus constitutes a core element of civilisation in the modern age. These functions of humanism hold no opposition to genuine religious (or Christian) sentiments, and *vice versa*. Rather, humanism and religion work together especially in critically cultivated sensibilities as Eliot's.

Through the agency of Babbalanza as teacher, Eliot found a great appeal in the works of the French symbolist writers of literature. Of note among the writers are Laforgue, Valery, Corbiere, Mallarme, Rimbaud, and the father of them all, Charles Baudelaire. Symbolist poetry for them meant the exploration of man's inner being and psychological depth through objects which are capable of achieving vast spectrums of meaning beyond the names they bear. Such objects as symbols are meant not only to state, but also to evoke feelings and establish an atmosphere of possibilities and suggestiveness that make meaning rather indefinite. Writing or interpreting poetry thus becomes an exercise that is mentally excruciating, and this is the symbolist tradition that defines such early works of Eliot as 'Prufrock' and *The Waste Land*.

In his comparative work on the early Eliot and Baudelaire, Weinberg (1969) uncovers several similarities in 'phrasing and substance' (7) between the two writers. Hargrove (1978) discusses concepts like landscapes as shared symbols between Eliot and Baudelaire, and Everett (1980) relates Eliot's philosophical approach to poetry to Valery, Baudelaire, and Mallarme. The symbolist tradition is an essential element of humanist art: art which appeals primarily to human reason; art which seeks for itself a primary existence not in the realm of politics or propaganda, but in its own world as art; art which exists in the realm of 'high culture' and necessitates discrimination

against other forms which essential appeal is to sentiments (for example, popular culture). The French symbolists thus strengthened Eliot's commitment to the impersonal theory of poetry through their definition of poetry as an alternate life.

While the relationship between Eliot and most of his literary influences are distant in the sense that he relates directly not with the writers but their works, his contact with Ezra Pound is different because the latter lived in his (Eliot's) lifetime and exerted an immediate and personal influence over the development of Eliot's poetic sensibilities. Pound was an accomplished poet with the heart of a mentor to young and aspiring poets of his time. He assisted Eliot with the publication of his early poems, but more important, edited many of those poems ('Prufrock', *The Waste Land*, etc.) himself. Eliot's gratitude at that period could not have been better expressed than having *The Waste Land* dedicated to Pound. But his appreciation of Pound is more profound:

Mr. Pound proceeds by acquiring the entire past; and when the entire past is acquired, the constituents fall into place and the present is revealed. Such a method involves immense capacities of learning and of dominating one's learning, and the peculiarity of expressing oneself through historical masks. Mr. Pound has a unique gift of expression through some phase of past life. This is not archaeology or pedantry, but one method, and a very high method of poetry (Eliot 1919 in Howarth, 1965:132).

This appreciation of the historic sense in Pound reflects a similarity of thought with Eliot's own publication of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in the same year.

Two years earlier (i.e. 1917), Eliot had published a work, *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry*, in which he indicated that there can be no significant discussion of modern poetry without the mention of Pound. He captures Pound as a poet who places the demand of knowledge and mental capacity on his readers. Pound's poems

require 'a trained ear, or at least the willingness to be trained' (9). His use of language and metrical style are situated within the modernist poetic tradition which indicates the temper of the poet and which engages the reader as much as the theme of a work.

Eliot captures the tension in his verse, arising from the 'constant opposition' between freedom and order as symbolised by Pound's free verse, and as depictive of the dilemma of the modern humanist age of which he was himself on the way to becoming a major influence. He conceives of Pound's poetry as an 'organic whole' not in the sense of the Romantic poets, but in terms of capturing vast human experiences and their tensions in the beauty of a free but highly metrical and condensed poetic language. These are features which characterise Eliot's poetry not just through his own talent, but also, through the influence of Pound as poet, editor, and mentor.

(4.3) HUMANIST TRADITION

A practical guide to an insightful study of Eliot could be Eliot's own statement regarding the dialectical nature of knowledge: 'Any assertion about the world, or any ultimate statement about any object in the world, will inevitably be an interpretation' (1916; published 1964). Eliot's doctoral thesis, his poetry and plays, and most of his critical statements indicate a strong belief that there can be no absolutes in human experience. This implies that he cannot be interpreted 'strictly' within 'fixed' paradigms of liberal humanism. But this does not in any way imply a negation of our thesis. Rather, it reinforces an ideology's accommodating capacity for the [re]interpretation of experience, and for consistent self-criticism. What Eliot does, therefore, is to use his understanding of the nature of human experience to

[re]interpret the tenets of an ideology. He is thus much concerned with the question of individual existence in relation to society, past (tradition) and present.

Eliot's theoretical and poetic concept of order revolves round the establishment of tradition and how an individual relates with it. In his seminal essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', he spells this relationship in a somewhat definitive manner. He conceives of European literature as a universal whole, encapsulating works of the past and the present, and reflecting how the past continues to shape the present, and how both the past and present would always shape the future. No relevant writer operates in a vacuum. To make any significant input into literature, a writer must have studied and be critically aware of what those before him have done.

This awareness or what Eliot calls 'the historic sense', entails creating a distinction between aspects of the past that can be best situated only within the past, and those that continue to possess relevance to the present. It is by his ability to create such a distinction that a writer defines the place of his own talent within the global context. The issue Eliot raises is very fundamental to the maintenance of quality in creative writing as well as criticism: how do we determine a writer's ingenious contribution or artistic excellence except in a comparative context which first establishes a yardstick for the measurement of values?

Does commitment to tradition obliterate the essence of individualism? The answer is no. For Eliot, the writer bears the same relationship to literary tradition as an individual bears to society. An individual is a free moral being, but even his understanding of what his freedom means is shaped by society. In the same way, a writer uses his free imagination to define art, but even the way he conceives of imagination and art are largely shaped by tradition. If his work is a mere imitation of

tradition without anything new or creative, then the 'art' is dubious. But if he imitates tradition in an imaginative way explorative of both subject and form, then, not only does he become a part of the literary tradition, he also establishes his own individuality within the canon. It is only in the context of the latter that the poet gains his relevance:

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervision of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered, and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are re-adjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (1999: 15).

Thus, art exists in a form of perpetuity, and its value is timeless. Art is always art and 'never improves', though its material changes. This seeming conservatism of the humanist disposition in art (as in society) is more indicative of a crave for order and stability, than the 'rootless' experimentations of hydrophobic individualism and literary anarchy.

In *After Strange Gods* (1934), Eliot mourns the loss of roots that had begun to characterise European literature. He makes no pretence about assuming the posture of a moralist to criticise a society that had become 'worm-eaten with liberalism', liberalism contextualised as a way of life absolutely free of moral standards, a brand of liberalism which sought to negate the gains of a classical and religious humanism. Following modern society's declining allegiance to Christian and classical cultures, writers struggling for a new sense of meaning had evolved systems of thought and imagery that sought to overthrow the entire foundation of centuries of Christian and classical thoughts in Europe. Some of D.H. Lawrence's writings explored humanity

as an amoral experience and without any 'social sense'. W. B. Yeats experimented with poetic forms that possessed immense astrological veneration. Eliot identifies in James Joyce some tacit points of rejection of orthodox Christianity.

Ezra Pound comes to represent an exclusively secular cosmopolitan spirit reflecting not just post-orthodox Christianity, but also a 'narrow post-Protestant art prejudice' (41). Eliot thus regrets that

...with the disappearance of the idea of Original Sin, with the disappearance of the idea of intense moral struggle, the human beings presented to us both in poetry and in prose fiction today, and more patently among the serious writers than in the underworld of letters, tend to become less and less real. It is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle depending upon spiritual sanctions, rather than in those 'bewildering minutes' in which we are all very much alike, that men and women come nearest to being real. If you do away with this struggle, and maintain that by tolerance, benevolence, inoffensiveness and a redistribution or increasing of purchasing power, combined with a devotion, on the part of an elite, to Art, the world will be as good as anyone could require, then you must expect human beings to become more and more vaporous. (42).

In art (as in the European society), Christian values suffered a critical and somewhat apocryphal eruption. Even for the likes of G.M. Hopkins and Eliot who still held to the Christian ethos, there was the struggle to achieve new forms of meaning through old paradigms for them to remain relevant in a changing society. The essence of the struggle for Eliot was to maintain a progressive balance between the free spirit of creativity and the regulatory spirit of tradition. The absence of one or the other would be indicative of barrenness or chaos. And what was missing was not creativity, but tradition. Hence, the loss of tradition was 'A Primer of Modern Heresy'.

It is important to state that the term 'tradition', for Eliot, does not indicate something static, neither is it a mere 'maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs' (1934:

18). It is a creative co-existence of the old and the new in a manner that produces a perpetuity of 'fundamental' cultural values and social progress. Hence, he warns against the dangers of trying to achieve clean breaks, of 'clinging to an old tradition, or attempting to re-establish one', or 'of confusing the vital and the unessential, the real and the sentimental' (18).

Tradition is amenable to change and an essence of allegiance to it is to 'stimulate the life which produced' the values and conditions with which it is associated. Greater leaps for the present can be discovered from past successes; escape or salvation from possible mistakes or follies in the present can be discovered from past failures. Thus the attitude to the past is not one of undue sentiment, but of a critical appreciation:

Tradition may be conceived as a by-product of right living, not to be aimed at directly. It is of the blood, so to speak, rather than of the brain: it is the means by which the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present. In the co-operation of both is the reconciliation of thought and feeling.

Eliot, no doubt, venerates the individual talent as represented by several contemporary writers whose ingenuity and contribution to the European literary canon he admits. But paradoxically, his understanding of human nature (deriving primarily from his belief in the idea of original sin, and secondarily from his sense of human history) produces in him a suspicious attitude toward that same individual talent. Hence his condemnation of George Eliot's 'individualist morals' and Thomas Hardy's 'extreme emotionalism'. The point his argument leads to is the question of 'standards of criticism', which in the terms of humanism and New Criticism, have to be of an objective and scientific nature, capable of distinguishing between what is permanent and what is temporal, of subjecting a work of art to a validity test that is

not based on a writer's 'seductive personality' which could be a function of the vicissitudes of his own existence, but on tradition that is constantly criticised and updated 'under the supervision' of the established collective religious consciousness.

Two questions arise from the foregoing. First, if tradition means this much to Eliot, what does it entail? Second, what are the constituent values of the religious orthodoxy he preaches? With reference to tradition, Eliot's interest lies in the great literature of the past, the literature of the classical age especially and its formulation of 'the mind of Europe' or the foundation of the humanistic values upon which modern Europe is established. Though his bias, we could say, is for the great authors of Latin and Greek literature of classical antiquity, he observes that the values of the classical age stretch across several periods, thus the broader concern should be for works of art that encapsulate 'classical qualities'.

In 'What is a Classic?' (1944: 115-131), he states that 'maturity' is the one word which defines classical literature: maturity of civilisation, maturity of language, maturity of literature, and maturity of the writer's mind. Maturity of civilisation has to do with the developed history and prevalent and ethical conditions of a people at the particular period of a writer. The civilisation of an age invariably influences the development of a writer's mind and makes it more conducive for intellectual growth than would otherwise have been. It also gives to the writer a 'maturity of manners' which is a reflection of the ethical and social maturity that civilisation bestows on society. Maturity of language has to do with a language which attains a universal status capable of unifying not only provincial languages, but also provincial peoples. Here Eliot specifically refers to Latin which functions as parent language to several European languages. The closer a writer's use of a provincial language approximates to an understanding of Latin, the more mature he is considered (and this is one of

Eliot's major credits for Dante). The maturity of literature is determined by the maturity of society and how a writer successfully captures such. All these qualities sum up to the requirements of universality and timelessness in art.

Among writers who have exhibited these characteristics to various commendable degrees are Shakespeare, Christopher Marlow, John Milton, Alexander Pope, Racine, and Moliere. But Virgil is 'the classic of all Europe'. For Eliot, he captures 'the consciousness of Rome and the supreme voice of her language'. Thus he is the measure of classical literature, and the criterion by which writers of subsequent generations must be judged. And Dante is the 'Son of Virgil' to whom he bequeathed the legacy of 'a vision he could never himself enjoy'; and which Dante, like Virgil, bequeathed to his own 'Son', Eliot!

In Eliot's schema, Europe is conceived of as the universe of a race with several 'provincial' literatures possessing their greatness only in relation to their 'place in a larger pattern, a pattern set in Rome'. 'The blood-stream of European literature is Latin' because even Greek and Greece must be accessed through Rome. Therefore, Roman literature has had and fulfilled the destiny of producing the classics for Europe. This is a definitive and fundamental art which has to be maintained: 'the task does not have to be done again'. The classical age is thus associated with freedom in two ways. The first indicates freedom from chaos (literary and social), because there is now a yardstick by which judgments can be made. The second indicates the price of the freedom: watchfulness and an allegiance to the established tradition. This engaging freedom of the classical spirit predicated Europe's movement 'towards a Christian culture' which subsequently constituted the 'spiritual' basis upon which the classical tradition thrived. Thus, in addition to classicism, one or two other

issues come to the fore: Christianity and Culture (to some extent, they could be separated; but in most cases, Eliot seems to use them interchangeably or as one).

Eliot's theory of culture depicts the humanist distinction of high culture from mass or popular culture. His primary interest is in high culture, hence he conceives of culture as capable of decline, not just adulteration. There is thus a purist attitude to cultural issues, and a 'conscious aim to achieve culture' is supported. In defining culture (1949), Eliot stresses the need to focus on that which cuts across an entire society because largely, it is the culture of the larger society that determines the cultures of individuals, groups and classes within it. An attempt to isolate the individual from the society would amount or degenerate to the abstract individualism of neutral liberalism. The individual develops to appreciate social values of whatever brand and as he becomes more conscious of his personality, he shares of the tensions within his society even before or as he strives to contribute to its culture.

As if to corroborate his argument in 'Second Thoughts About Humanism' that humanism is the culture of the elite, Eliot in his *Definition of Culture* reiterates that the creation and promotion of high culture is the responsibility of the elite, thus equating high culture to humanism. The tacit endorsement Eliot gives to a class-structured society and his appreciation of some human beings as superior to others in terms of mental endowments points back to and authenticates individual differences, private initiatives, idiosyncratic struggles, and an essential inequality among human beings. The presence of class stratification and elitism provides vigour in society. A classless society in which everyone is an elite would mean that 'every individual starts without advantage or handicap' and gets to 'that station of life which he is best fitted to fill'. This is idealism. Yet Eliot does not subscribe to that neutral liberalism in which the individual is defined as completely separate from society, or *vice versa*:

What I have advanced is not a “defence of aristocracy”- an emphasis upon the importance of one organ of society. Rather it is a plea on behalf of a form of society in which an aristocracy should have a peculiar and essential function, as peculiar and essential as the function of any other part of society. What is important is a structure of society in which there will be, from “top” to “bottom”, a continuous gradation of cultural levels: it is important to remember that we should not consider the upper levels as possessing more culture than the lower, but as representing a more conscious culture and a greater specialization of culture. I incline to believe that no true democracy can maintain itself unless it contains these different levels of culture. (1949:47).

The stratification of culture should, to a 'reasonable' extent, accommodate unity as well as diversity. The excess of the former produces 'barbarism'; the excess of the latter produces 'decadence'. Both precipitate oppressive regimes. There should thus be a balance of both in the interaction within and between cultures in geo-politics and religion. Significantly, when Eliot published his thesis on culture, the Second 'World' War had just ended. He had witnessed the first war in the second decade of the century. His concept of a culture in decline was largely informed by the unprecedented levels of human irrationality and social anarchy that had come to characterise European life.

Orthodox Christianity, and to a lesser extent, classical values, which seemed to have held the peoples of Europe together in a somewhat loose unity were both in decrepitude. For there to be stability and social cohesion, people needed to have something common that held them together. There was an urgent and crucial need to reformulate a framework which could appeal to the conscience and sensibilities of Europe. Such a framework must be based upon and refer allegiance to a religious/supernatural order of existence and an overwhelming myth of racial unity. The former relates to the Christian tradition and the superintending role of the church

as an institution; the latter encapsulates socio-political solidarity among the citizenry and within and among the states all of which are possessed by notions of a common political destiny.

(4.4) INDIVIDUALISM RECONSTRUCTED

For Eliot,

A man is both an individual and a member. Instead of "individual", I shall use the word "person". His personality is unique and not to be violated; but he is equally created to be a member of society. When society is conceived as merely a sum of individuals, you get the chaos of liberal democracy. When the person is wholly subordinated to society, you get the dehumanization of fascism or communism. The extreme, however, may meet. For what liberal democracy really recognizes is a sum, not of persons, but individuals: that is to say, not the variety and uniqueness of persons, but the purely material individuation of the old-fashioned or Democritean atom. And this is disrespect to the person. For the person is no longer a person if wholly isolated from the community; and the community is no longer a community if it does not consist of persons. A man is not himself unless he is a member; and he cannot be a member unless he is also something alone. Man's membership and his solitude must be taken together. There are moments... when a man may be nearly crushed by the terrible awareness of his isolation from every other human being; and I pity him if he finds himself only alone with himself and his meanness and futility, alone without God... (1935:20).

This is individualism in a context that captures responsiveness to social realities. Eliot seeks to reconcile two critical extremes within a phenomenological framework that indicates natural dependence between man and society and thus simultaneously stresses the relevance of individual liberty as well as communitarianism. The essence of individualism is not primarily for the purpose of material benefits that could accrue to individuals on a fast track, but more important, is the value of difference which defines the unique identities of persons and actuates the fulfillment of such persons through the assembling of individual creative energies into a communitarian whole.

Put in some other words, 'I am I only in relation to objects' (Eliot, 1964:158). 'Man must not be sacrificed' by society; but he could willingly sacrifice himself for society (Eliot, 1932:470). Being sacrificed means not just the violation of the individual's conscience, but also, the erasure of his consciousness by a 'mass-identity'. Individualism in this case thus assumes the stature of a social imposition which essentially reduces the person. But self-sacrifice indicates a willing association with communitarian values which possess such essence that is of a progressive and 'universal' nature.

Eliot therefore condemns outright the ideologies of communism and fascism. He examines the individual from the perspective of Buddhism and queries the contradiction inherent in a form of 'voluntary extinction' and 'the most arduous self-discipline' juxtaposed with a forced individuality devoid of an essential natural fervour (1932). But alongside his philosophical attempt at reconstructing individualism is his poetic exploration of who the individual is.

In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', he presents in the form of a dramatic monologue, the complex psychological, social, physical, and metaphysical nature of the human person. The poem opens with an epigraph from Dante's *Inferno* (xxvii,61-6): 'If I thought my answer were to one who ever could return to the world, this flame should shake no more; but since none ever did return alive from this depth, if what I hear be true, without fear of infamy I answer thee'. The illness indicates that the poem that follows is a burning material embodying intense passion and thought; yet signifying a proposition with uncertain answers because the addressee, already in hell, can make no response. It embeds the seed of an ironic encounter because it is founded on the supposition that there is a version of a story taken as truth.

The title of the poem indicates that it is a love song, thus the invitation at the beginning: 'Let us go then, you and I'. The sentence modifier, 'then', depicts that an argument or event had preceded the invitation, possibly pointing to the epigraph with a statement as: if the dead cannot respond to the flames of passion and thought that characterise human experience in the here and now, let us waste time no more for we ourselves might soon be dead. Let us, straightway, 'go and make our visit'. But two issues immediately come to the fore: who are the 'you and I' and where are they going to? If the 'you and I' are taken to mean the poet persona and his lover, then the question arises that since they are already together, where then are they going to make a visit, and why?

Evening is the period of the visit and it is captured in the image of time as an 'etherised' patient, implying for the visitors a moment of general low consciousness which creates an enabling environment for the exploration of sensual possibilities. This is reinforced through such images as 'certain half-deserted streets', 'restless nights', 'one-night cheap hotels', etc.

These images portray the nature of the streets they follow and bear the mark of the 'tedious argument' that would characterise Prufrock's subtle thoughts and attitude. They lead to the 'overwhelming question' that informs the visit, and thereby constitute an essential reflection of the contents of Prufrock's mind.

Prufrock and 'his lover' reach their destination: 'In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo'. Two activities go on in the room: the moving about of the women, and the discussion of art, Michelangelo's particularly. The essence of the former cannot be immediately determined. It is therefore taken that the latter constitutes the only important activity taking place in the room. But Prufrock has not come this far merely to discuss art and artists. Thus his mind drifts away from the

room and encounters 'the yellow frog' which assumes the characteristics of a cat rubbing 'its back upon the window panes', and interacting with the concrete element in the house - the pools, 'the soot that falls from chimneys', the terrace - as well as the abstract elements of the poet persona's mind - 'the corners of the evening', and the 'soft October night'. After having occupied itself with its own pleasure, it allows itself to fall asleep. That it has all the time in the world to do all it wishes, and retires when it wishes, becomes for Prufrock the beginning of his own dilemma. Now he believes that like the fog, he will have all the time he needs to pursue his own pleasure. But this belief begins to unravel his own difficulties which, more importantly, reflect a critical human predicament.

Prufrock will have 'To prepare a face to meet the faces' that he meets because there is the need for a positively constructed psychological and social form. Following the monologue of his individuality is the need for some socially-motivated preparation because his individuality is in need of self-fulfillment and social relevance, in a context where both reinforce each other. The essence of life becomes interwoven with the flow of time; yet human experience remains fixed in practically enigmatic modes of being, constantly destroying and creating, being filled with vision but always revising the visions and thus plagued with the moral problem of indecision. That man has 'time yet for a hundred indecisions ... Before the taking of a toast and tea' suggests that he may not be able to help himself on more serious issues of life, except probably, that 'a toast and tea' become symbolic of the quest for self-improvement. In this regard, man's failure or snail-like movement to progress becomes symptomatic of the phenomenon of natural depravity, which Prufrock represents.

The women are still engaged with their discussion of Michelangelo, which seems to be their primary concern. They exhibit their freedom of movement and speech, and depict a sense of high culture in their ability to extensively appreciate a canonical sculptor. For Prufrock who is alone (giving the impression that his supposed lover is no one but his alter-ego), the immediate challenge is to break into the company with his passionate desire for a woman (or women). But there is also a predominant feeling of timidity in him: Can I do it? How will I do it? 'Do I dare?' He spends plenty of time 'to wonder' and concludes that there is 'Time to turn back and descend the stair' because the women might put him off.

His worry shifts from his own timidity to the type of comments the women will likely make: a bald spot is expanding on his head; he looks cutely dressed, but his arms and legs are skeletal. If 'I dare', there would be an uproar; the earth would lose its peace because the talk would change from the great Michelangelo to the ridiculous Prufrock. Thus he keeps going forth and back, to dare or not to dare.

In the meantime, he occupies himself with exploring a claim to wide knowledge. He knows all the women and how they have spent their lives. Thus he wonders why he has cheapened himself so much as to 'measure out my life with coffee spoons', all for the sake of a sensual desire. Even the women singing and playing in the other room, he knows them and can recognise their transition to extinction. He thinks they may be in need of him, but he cannot take anything for granted. Yet, he is not going away. He thinks of the eyes that would fix him in 'a formulated phrase', a subtle reference to how society continuously constructs and reconstructs individuals through its structures of relationships, norms and expectations, such that what ultimately makes a person is less of pure individualism and more of acquired individualism. Hence the individual thus formulated can do the

bidding of his formulators - sprawl on a pin, wriggle on a well, etc. His life is spent in measures like a cigarette, and all he is left with is 'the butt-ends' of his 'days' and ways' which he is anxious to 'spit out' if that would mean a regain of himself. But he is not sure of anything and can, therefore, not take any chances.

Prufrock has probably had the opportunity of being close to these women. He has observed the texture and ornaments of their arms in half-dark moments and in day-light. He has perceived the pleasant smell of their dresses and has been enchanted. He has observed 'the bracelet and white and bare' arms 'lie along a table' in a manner which, to him, is simply appealing. Now he chooses to presume that a subtle invitation is being made. But, 'how should I begin?' How do I start a conversation? He asks himself. He thinks of a narrative along the line of his own condition, of lonely men 'leaning out of windows' with smoke rising 'from their pipes' in the dust of their lives. Prufrock only partakes of a universal phenomenon: that the individual without the company of his fellow human beings suffers a psychological reduction of his person. Like Nebuchadnezzar in the Bible, he could become 'a pair of ragged claws', 'scuttling across' not the jungle with animals, but 'the floors of silent seas'. His lonely life would probably be more dangerous to him than to anyone else because no matter how immaculate and calm the seas might appear, the reality of its depth would only mean 'death by water' for any daring poor soul.

Eventually, Prufrock, in his mind, makes a move. He finds himself in one of the rooms with a woman in a 'one-night cheap hotel'. Time passes 'peacefully' and both of them have 'stretched, on the floor', she pretending to be asleep, or tired, or ill in order to attract attention. He smoothens her hair with his 'long fingers', tensed all

over and thinking: 'Should I, after tea and cakes and ice,/ Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?'

This is the momentous point. Prufrock has come this close to a woman who appears very willing to share sensual pleasure with him. He had wept, prayed and fasted for this moment. He had drafted God into his psychological attack. He had even suffered physical injury and his head had 'grown slightly bald' because of how much he had worried. He wonders why he has gone through all these travails in spite of the fact that he is not a prophet and his sensual crave is not a big issue. Here the poem assumes an ironic twist: 'here's no great matter'; yet at the same time, he watches his moment of 'greatness flicker'. No doubt, sensual matters are often given the status of triviality in public affairs. But what can be of more harm to a person's sanity and fulfillment than reaching the object for which one has been madly in pursuit and at that decisive moment, lacking the psychological stamina to tango and twine around a willing partner? And though Prufrock claims not to be a prophet, he, in fact, becomes a seer of his own damnation: 'I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker'. He has desperately searched for pleasure; but what he receives is a picture of his mortality. Fear grips him and displaces the steam of his disabled passion for ejaculation.

In a moment, he begins to preach a sermon to himself: what would it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul? If after that preparatory session, the refreshments and the bedroom talk, we had 'squeezed' ourselves into each other, what would it have profited us? Where would the dramatisation of our metaphysical conceit have taken us? Possibly, 'towards some overwhelming question', the question with which Prufrock began his sojourn and the question which remains unasked and unanswered after the dissipation of his energy. Possibly,

towards some fundamental truth: 'I am Lazarus, come from the dead,/ Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'.

It is an overwhelming question that cannot be asked because it assumes a form of arrogant absoluteness, a supposed comprehensive knowledge of the paradoxical realities of the known and the unknown. A man who has returned from the dead, like Lazarus, can claim that he has seen it all. Yet, neither in the case of Lazarus in the Bible nor of Prufrock dying and resurrecting in a 'one-night cheap hotel' can it be said that any of them saw it all. In both cases, it was at best a dark night. Except seeing it all implies the overwhelming consciousness of human depravity. Thus, if it were hell that Prufrock saw in the world beyond, his nature remains unchanged.

In a moment, he begins to set a pillow by the lady's head, 'throwing off' her shawl in final preparation for the long-awaited act. There is no direct evidence whatever of the lady's objection. But again, he becomes grounded by his own inner conflict, his uncertainty of desire, and his revision of decision. He moves away from the lady and turns towards the windows: 'That is not what I meant at all. That is not it, at all'. Certainly, Prufrock could have meant anything: a mere admiration for the lady, an attempt just to humour her to some extent, a mischievous play, a crave for sexual intercourse, an expression of some form of mental derangement, a research observation for a book, etc. The poet, at this point, assigns to him the proclamation of a modernist and, in fact, 'postmodernist liberal humanist proclamation: 'It is impossible to say just what I mean!'

What Prufrock means is not just what he says but also, who he is. At both levels, the reader is confounded. Who he is presents a continuous shift. What he says is determined by who he is at each moment, which is a function of his depravity and psychological instability, among other variants. Thus, meaning is evasive because the

human person possesses a depth of experience that cannot be completely explored, not even by the person himself. Prufrock is conscious of his dilemma and acutely anxious not to become like Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet. The issue for him is not 'To be or not to be'. He wants to be, whatever it entails. He wants to be progressive, to 'start a scene' and finish it, and also, to portray himself as the real gentleman:

...an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous-
Almost, at times, the fool.

We have seen Prufrock exhibit these characteristics in the poem and corroborate the humanist search for progress through such stated elements of supposed universally acceptable civilised practice. This is a practice which, sometimes, makes the humanist appear ridiculous and foolish because he always has to contend with 'debased,' authoritarian, fanatical and anarchist elements in society. He has to tolerate that which he does not accept. He has to seek the general progress of his society. He has to be persuasive about his convictions in a politically and religiously dogmatic society. And sometimes, his logic sounds obtuse and too indulging for an audience bent on achieving political goals no matter the rights and lives that are trampled upon.

Sometimes, he appears indecisive because, for him, one human being is as important as a million, thus decision involving human lives are very delicate. Options have to be weighed. Society has to achieve progress, which comes not in one leap but gradually and incrementally. Yet the individual must not be violated. In many cases, the reactionary, irredentist, and fanatical forces in society prevail over

this urbane humanist spirit. Overt force rather than pacification, dialogue, and compromise becomes the order. And at times, the humanist appears 'almost ridiculous'. Like Prufrock, he grows old, wearing 'the bottoms of [his] trousers rolled'.

He becomes more self-searching and retrospective, but also, more suspicious of human intentions and society. He does not give up on his struggle to improve himself and his society because he knows that progress is incremental and would always be intercepted by major heart-breaking backward leaps. But by his acute criticism of human failure (and an appropriate sense of his own shortcomings), he becomes a more 'lonely' person, sometimes seeking solace in the quiet elements of nature. Prufrock reasserts his individualism. Back to the consciousness that always vacillates, he contemplates parting his 'hair behind' and eating 'a peach'. He goes to the beach, putting on unusual 'white flannel trousers' (instead of beach clothes), to listen to the mermaids sing to each other. He does not think they will sing to him because back in the city, 'all men seek their own and here on the beach, he sees the mermaids ride away 'seaward' to sing to themselves. Nature, it seems, keeps its own.

Yet, he derives much pleasure from this visit to the sea, a pleasure that becomes essentially romantic reminding the reader of the encounter with Nature in Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey'. Here he 'rediscovers' his alter-ego and they linger and are swallowed by the beauty and serenity of Nature around them until people's voices come to disturb their peace and again, they are back to a turbulent world.

In 'Prufrock', Eliot explores the depth of the human mind focusing on elements that depict the impermanence of his psychological constitution, which is primarily structured on the condition of his moral depravity. He also discusses the significance of the individual as possessing his own internal logic of being which

defines him as different from the other person, even though this logic is always in a shifty state such that comprehensive attempts to classify the human being and explain his behaviour only amount, at best, to approximations.

Eliot also contextualises the essence of the individual person in the relationship he bears to his community. Prufrock's psychological make-up is shaped not just by his own nature as a person, but also significantly, by his environment. Furthermore, even his own fulfillment as an individual is largely adjudged by his role in society. Thus he is 'glad to be of use' and strives 'to swell a progress'. The relationship between the individual and society in Eliot's humanist conceptualisation is thus a symbolic one, a creative practice of inter-dependence and interactions that seek to reduce areas of tension. The extent to which this succeeds is a different question altogether and a pointer to humanism's own internal conflict.

(4.5) THE MORAL IMAGINATION

Liberal humanists are fundamentally concerned with the moral existence of humans. They ceaselessly search for answers to questions that derive from such in order to determine humanity's true essence and position in a universe that is constituted, albeit presumptuously, by their own prescribed hierarchies of values, which they often adjudge synchronic with the rhythms of human nature. They are obsessed with the image of 'natural' virtues in society. In art, they conceive of this as the terminus of imaginative success. Thus Samuel Johnson, a prominent humanist writer of the Augustan era, observes in the *Life of Milton* (1963) that 'we are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance.' In essence, writers made of the humanist persuasion occupy themselves with several issues which are relevant to the political and socio-economic survival of the human community in general. Such

conventionalities, however, exist at a level of subservience to their ideas of the human ethical experience. This experience, in the modern age to which a writer like Eliot belongs, incorporates all shades of the interpretative history of human development.

For humanist writers, therefore, the supreme goal of literature is to teach universal values of 'truths' in an artistic atmosphere that elicits pleasure. They view this moral education as a means through which humans can realise the splendour of the humanist ideals, which aim to transport humanity beyond the aberrations of history on to a level of rationality within which people could get to relate with one another and their environment in a veracious cosmic order. The exposition of the humanist moral objective, especially as we have it in Eliot, can be examined from two or three major perspectives. These are the uniqueness and the tragic nature of man, and the evidence of hope. These may not be exhaustive of what constitutes Eliot's moral concerns, but they encapsulate the fundamental and main patterns of thought and feeling in his poetry.

(4.6) THE UNIQUENESS AND TRAGIC NATURE OF MAN

The liberal humanism of Eliot leads him to pore over and affirm man's meaningfulness as a singular being within a universe that is shared with other living things and scientific inventions. The objective of this differentiating affirmation is to articulate what constitutes man's moral responsibilities to himself and his fellow humans. This is quite significant particularly in a modern age that has not only witnessed two calamitous world wars, but has ceaselessly suffered a failure of law and order with the traditional institutions that make up local, national, and international

authorities being eroded by an alleged and intimidating post-humanist scourge. The situation is simply appalling because:

Man is no longer to be the measure of all things, the center of the universe. He has been measured and found to an undistinguished bit of matter different in no essential way from bacteria, stones, and trees. His goals and purposes; his egocentric notions of past, present, and future; his faith in his power to predict and, through prediction, to control his destiny - all these are called into question, considered irrelevant, or deemed trivial (Meyer, 1987:13).

The experience of man in modern society has continued to 'worsen'. It is thus within such a context that liberal humanists seek to assert man's uniqueness as man and the essence of his spiritual and psychological being by which he functions as a non-animal and non-mechanical being.

In making this differentiation, Arthur Lovejoy (1961) has described man as possessing an 'other-consciousness which is deeply interwoven with his self-consciousness'. This 'other-consciousness' is an innate element that spurs him to an expression of pleasure, desire, thought, or feeling within himself as effected by those that constitute his environment.

For Eliot, 'Man is man because he can recognize supernatural realities... everything in man can be traced as a development from below.' This depicts the humanist's concept of man's unique capacity for the critical appreciation of all situations and events. For humanist philosophers like Joseph Wood Krutch (1959) and Norman Brown (1959), this is a capacity that differentiates man from other animals and makes him evolve such traditional and ritual forms that encapsulate the essence of his moral existence. No one is left in doubt, therefore, regarding the type of situations that spur human festivities. Man,

... is the only creature who laughs ... and who blushes. He is the only creature who stands upright. He is the only creature who feels disinclined to perform sexual intercourse in public...Man is the only creature who contrives rituals for the important stages of life, rituals like christenings, namings, puberty and initiation rites, marriage ceremonies, testimonial banquets, *festschriften*, and funerals. (Fussell, 1965: 23).

Humanists thus concern themselves with the attributes that define what man truly is. But what the humanists of the modern liberal stock consider foremost in this attempt to define man is his capacity to grapple with ideas and images that portray the singularity of his existence. Man's place in the universe is that of a supreme order within established institutions like religious sects and democratic government, all of which seek to perpetually validate the sanctity of human life and his nature as *capax rationis*. It is this that invests him with the quality of differentiating between the morally good and evil. The human mind and its imaginative plenitude thus become a directory for locating the truly human attributes and the moral essence of such.

'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' explores the complex and essentially unique nature of the human person at the psychological, social, physical, and metaphysical levels. The combination of these four dimensions of the living character called man is what he is because his consciousness functions interactively within these various dimensions. Hence, the possibilities of the open-ended interpretations of the poem. Also, the poem constantly seeks to stress the search for the meaning of existence. Human life is situated in time and the struggle for a universal, man-defined relevance: ' I am Lazarus, come from the dead,/ Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all' (16).

Only man can claim to know all, not just about the universe, but also about time and his place in time. For in the first instance, time, which is otherwise infinite, has been reconstructed and delimited to suit the desires and purposes of man. More

important, however, is that man's constructions of the universe and time often present pictures of a consistent and logical order to the human mind. Even in an extreme case as the psychological chaos that characterises the existence of Prufrock, the reader is able to reconcile himself to the image of Prufrock as a rational being. It is his rationality that marries, in an agreeable form, the split elements of his personality, such that he is absolutely incapable of disintegrating from his environment.

In 'A Song for Simeon', Eliot captures several of the unique attributes of man. Against the backdrops of the overwhelming presence of nature, man's life is characterised by a persistent search for peace - not just peace for the world, but also and more important, peace for the soul of the individual. This search for peace leads to all sorts of metaphysical constructions embodied by that exclusively supreme expression of religious faith, which becomes the organizing principle for many human activities. The misery of the present: 'cords and scourges and lamentation', 'the mountain of desolation', 'material sorrow', and 'season of decease'; and the fears of the unknown: 'Who shall remember my house, where shall live my / children's children / When the time of sorrow is come?' precipitate turbulence in the heart of man.

Simeon has lived for eighty years and is full of experience, but has no future. He has 'kept faith and fast', and has engaged in various forms of good works towards the poor and downtrodden. These are all features of human reason and experience and stand him out from other forms of animate and non-animate existence. The capability to search for personal fulfillment through supposed altruistic commitments is exclusively man's. Yet, glory often comes with decision:

I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,
I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.

Let thy servant depart
Having seen thy salvation (112).

The poem captures the gross inability to ponder on the uniqueness of the human person without a direct portrayal of his tragic existence. At the surface, the reader is presented with man's paradoxical sensibilities: God's salvation does not seem to save man from his own tiredness with life; rather, it pulls him 'towards the dead land'. Equally significant, however, the passage also encapsulates the fertile imagination of man; he quits the stage at the most propitious moment when he thinks 'salvation' is assured. Here, the evidence of hope becomes that lasting characteristic of man, one that follows him to his grave and, supposedly, beyond.

There is probably not much that has been written by writers generally that has captured, in very elaborate and vivid forms, the moral imagination of liberal humanism as what Eliot offers in 'The Waste Land'. First published in 1922, shortly after the First World War, the title of the poem itself indicates the author's concern with a system of values from which judgment has to be made. The judgment made depicts the moral objective of the liberal imagination; it reveals the poet's worries about the uncertainties of the times, the erosion of faith, pervasive social instability and upheavals, the emergence of chaotic cities, the failure of memory and the death of desire, man's movement towards self-annihilation, and an illusory search for 'the peace which passes understanding'.

The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 was a significant indicator of the failure of European civilisation and the much-talked-about epochs of the Enlightenment and the Renaissance. Such a catastrophe constituted the terminal of centuries of modernisation and the age-long practice of Christianity. A war that is unprecedented in the history of humanity thus shook the moral foundation on which

the European society had conceived its proud existence. For Eliot as a witness, therefore, the event simply marked the conversion of Europe from the supposed centre of civilisation which it was, to not just a waste land, but *The Waste Land*. In his search for civilisation in a more wholesome form, he had migrated from the United States of America to Europe (England particularly). But the disappointment he was to encounter was almost measureless. Humanism had conceived of man as 'the measure of all things'. But now, man (in Europe) had displaced himself from the centre, had set aflame the earth which he inhabited, and had moved into the jungle to share with beasts their land and space. European life had become synonymous with animal existence, and the centuries-old claim to superior intelligence and morality was called into question and thrown over-board.

The Waste Land begins with images of death, burial, cruelty, and 'the dead land', in a season when lilacs actually fill the land. These beautiful flowers that give sweet smell provide a cover from the unpleasant sight and stench of corpses all over the land. This is also an odd mixture of human and natural elements: memory (the past) and desire (the present) fail to generate intelligent solutions to the challenges of existence; winter produces not cold but warmth and people are hardly aware of the snow because they are more concerned with the depreciating state of their stomachs; and when warmth is expected, all there is is rain and cold. The times have become quite unpredictable and, like the poet-persona, people seek psychological refuge in coffee bars where they hope to stimulate their lives. Such awakening of their 'Dull roots' also come with the assertion of identities and the essentialising tendencies that characterise war situations: "I am not Russian at all; I come from Lithuania; I am real German" (63; translation taken from Southam, 1981:88). Also, there were fond memories of childhood - the excitement and fear of children going out on a sledge

during winter, climbing the mountain and experiencing the pleasure of 'free' up there, and reading as they migrate from place to place. Examined from the perspectives of either the serious talk about identities and the expression of political solidarity, or the light talk about childhood experiences, the reader is presented with a people whose lives are in the doldrums and have become too eager to fill them with any available stuff.

The house is falling; European civilisation is falling because the roots cannot 'clutch' anymore. The tree no longer has branches and fruits on it. The roots (i.e. the moral basis) have been torpedoed and all there is now is 'A heap of broken images'. The statement is authoritative because its introductory address 'Son of man' is reminiscent of the voice of God in the Bible. The 'broken images' suggest the disintegration of the system, and that is the only thing that the 'son of man' knows. His knowledge is, therefore, not one that reveals the depth of human and divine possibilities, but a catastrophic consciousness of decline and failure, a phenomenon that is also elaborately explored by the stream of consciousness technique which the poet draws upon. The case, it seems, appears hopeless because when God spoke to Ezekiel, dry bones became living human beings. Through Moses, water came out of the rocks. But here, the 'dry stone' does not offer even the mere 'sound of water'. The tree is dead and can, therefore, no longer provide any cover.

All there is between the 'broken images' and the shadow of the 'red rock' is the dreadful emotions elicited by the presence of a decomposing corpse. The singing about parting ways and the use of hyacinths bring to mind the atmosphere of funeral. The dead man had himself offered hyacinths to the 'hyacinths girl' a year ago. Now she remembers that on that occasion, she had found herself in the twilight of life and

death, her speech, sight and consciousness all failing and silence presiding over her being. Now again, the sea is 'desolate and empty' (64; Southam, 89).

The next section of the poem (lines 43-59) presents some paradoxes that define the modern human condition. Madame Sosotris, a popular clairvoyante, 'Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe'. Yet, she suffers 'a bad cold' for which she finds no solution. More tragic, however, is that her practice, constituted by 'a wicked pack of cards', is largely characterised by the promise of doom: 'the drowned Phoenician Sailor', Belladonna the aged lady, 'the man with three staves', 'the one-eyed merchant', and 'the Hanged man'. Whatever positive attributes these descriptions might hold in the context of their original mythic occurrences, all get upturned by the verdict: 'Fear death by water'. The line that immediately follows ('I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.') indicates the possibility that many people are treading the path of 'death by water'. There are also limits beyond which even Sosotris cannot speak for herself: 'one must be so careful these days'.

The fragmentariness of the poem in terms of form is essentially depictive of the type of fragments to which cultural values and human existence have been reduced in Europe. The form is as much the message as the contents. It facilitates 'shifts of centre of attention and mood' and fuels an 'apocalyptic visionary force' in the poem (Spender, 1975:106). Modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has meant man's struggle with his own spiritual disintegration. The loss of innocence and faith has precipitated the crisis of the soul and the dilemma of split personalities. Thus Prufrock's life is forever besieged by the 'woe' of making a moral decision. In 'The Waste Land', however, we come across several personalities and voices in the past and present, as well as cities and nations all caught in the web of moral decline.

The Waste Land is that city that can no longer be described as real. London is the foremost city in England; it is the exact embodiment of Eliot's search for a 'truly' civil society. But the next fragment of thought and experience throws up a brutal truth: the utter collapse of civilisation. London is an 'Unreal City' where many people have been undone by death. Civilisation has been replaced by modernity, which is nothing more than a catchword for the meeting between the dying and the dead. The city is filled with people who wear sorrows and sighs on their faces. Visions of hope had become evasive or elusive as each man's eyes could not lead him beyond his feet. The London crowd is compared to a river that would always flow in whatever direction the wind directs. The loss of civilisation, therefore, has meant the collapse of a will power, of a mental logic and spiritual stamina.

London as the Waste Land becomes comparable to Dante's *Inferno*; it is, indeed, a journey through hell. Man is depicted at the peak of his loneliness. His expectations have really degenerated:

'Stetson!
'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
'That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
'Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed? (65).

Even man himself can no longer be described as real. The collapse of his cultural values and moral essence have affected his understanding of his environment and the interpretation of his events. His perception is faulty; his mental judgment is devoid of sincerity. Therefore, he is an unreal man!

Part 11 of *The Waste Land*, 'A Game of Chess', presents the crisis of deep emotional commitment to relationships, marriage especially. Respectable marital relationships in which roles are properly defined and pursued are one of the high

points of ancient European civilisation. Marriage as an institution offered one of the most stable platforms for the perpetuation of desired cultural values in society. Of course, this institution itself, in the Eliotic perspective, draws upon the practice of religious faith for its own sustenance. But the collapse of faith and of age-old marital values portends a double tragedy for human society.

This part of the poem can be divided into two sections. The first provides a detailed description of a lady seated at a dressing-table. In all sense of the word, her physical appearance and her environment are simply majestic: her chair is like 'a burnished throne'; the walls and floor around her are made of marble; 'the glitter of her jewels' and the light reflected upon the table by the glass created a world of sensual satisfaction; etc. Her life was defined by material and aesthetic splendour. Yet, no sooner is she compared to a nightingale whose voice is 'inviolable' than she is also depicted as an irredeemable prisoner of the world: 'And still she cried, and still the world pursues'. Her life becomes reflective of the 'withered stumps of time', 'leaned out' until she is 'savagely still'.

The second initiates a conversation between the lady and a friend. As depicted in the earlier part, the lady has advanced tremendously in the sphere of marital acquisition. But the fibre of noble passion and spirituality has weakened. Her state and sense of solitude have worsened. She cries for company; she cries for fellowship. She desires and seeks for knowledge of the other. But she never achieves her desire. Her life is defined by existence in 'rats' alley/where the dead men lost their bones'. All she understands is noise. Her life, like those of the other personalities in *The Waste Land*, encapsulates the neurosis of a fallen civilisation; a civilisation that no longer makes meaning to the living, and which as a result, has precipitated a stream of absurdity in human experience. There are fundamental questions to be answered: 'Are

you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?' There is life; there is 'that Shakespearian Rag' in the head and it is elegant and intelligent. Yet the woman remains directionless and uncertain of the future.

The conversation moves to the pub. It is presented in the form of a reported speech by the woman whose mental ability and spirituality is shallow, but who now assumes the responsibility of educating and civilising Lil in a marital relationship. The woman, no doubt, cuts the image of an ironic character and therein lies her tragic existence. She 'knows' and 'teaches' the 'truth', but her life is far from being true.

The refrain, 'HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME', points at the pace of activities and the type of social pressure that have become characteristic of the modern age. Even with the invention of machines that have eased the burden of human labour, man's life has become 'extremely motivated', and he is ever engaged at a *frenetic* speed with the race to beat time. This condition has become characteristic of every aspect of his life. Thus, even in such a private affair as the relationship between spouses, Lil is constantly reminded of the pressure of time, and of the urgent need to fix her life within the emergent frame of social expectations.

Before the imminent return of her demobilised soldier-husband, she is expected to justify the money she had received from him by making herself 'a bit smart'. That means wearing a superficial appearance; changing her set of teeth to make herself more sexually appealing to her husband, Albert. The consequences of failure in such a 'trivial' matter is that Albert would get himself a new wife (or wives). But if Albert is reluctant to do that, then other women would help themselves to him. Either way, Lil would lose. So, she must help herself by giving Albert 'a good time'. For such a contextually 'candid' advice, Lil gives her 'friend' a straight and suspicious look. The decline of social trust, no doubt, is one of the numerous

consequences of the deceased civilisation for which *The Waste Land* performs the function of an elegy. Not only in the relationship between Lil and her zealous adviser is the problem so prominent; there is not a single fragment of thought or experience in the entire poem that pursues the tenets of love and trust in any positive form without an essential and critical negation.

Lil is scolded for being so ancient at only thirty-one. But her antique appearance does not have to do with the pursuit of civilisation; she has merely worn herself out through intense sexual activities and five child-births. The assurance of medical experts has not improved her condition. Yet, Albert is not likely to leave her alone. After all, it is assumed that she got married because she wanted children! And she really does not seem to have a choice because 'Albert was home' and would prefer 'to get the beauty of it hot'. The tragedy of the modern man thus conveyed is that even in a seeming atmosphere of possibilities and options, society often compels man to do not his wishes but its own will. The guests take their leave and Lil is left with Albert to go through the ritual of sex and probably prepare for another period of pregnancy and child-birth. The tragedy of the marital life in the modern age is thus captured by a relationship characterised not by an overflow of good feeling and love, but by the dictates of society and the pressure to create acceptable impressions. Within such an existence, the woman is depicted as a sex service and child production apparatus, and the husband as the lord of the manor. Yet, modernism seeks to conceive of itself as a context of civilisation!

Part III of *The Waste Land* ('The Fire Sermon') presents in an extensive form, several allusions and fragments of experience through an elaborate stream of consciousness technique that simultaneously achieves a fusion and contrast of past

and present. The title of this part alludes to Buddha's sermon on the preeminence of fire in the structure of human experience and the arrangement of the universe:

... forms are on fire... impression received by the eye are on fire; and where sensation, pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent, originates in dependence on impression received by the eye, that also is on fire. And with what are these on fire? With the fire of passion, says I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation... (quoted in Southam, 1981: 102-3).

The poem, like the Buddha sermon, grapples with such modernist flames that have furthered the image of 'Unreal City' and an unreal humanity. At the side of the river, there is no true calm or peace because of the destruction of the tent, the loss of some sacred values. Even such adventurous lovers as the nymphs and 'their friends', the loitering heirs of City directors', have all gone away from what used to be a resort of pleasure, leaving behind no clues by which they can contact each other or be contacted by anyone. On his own part, the speaker, like the children of Israel in their moment of lamentation by the rivers of Babylon, sat 'By the waters of Leman' and wept. As he recalled the sweet memories of a civilised and humanistic past and contrasts those with tragedy of the present loss and depravity, he wept. As he recalled the voices and love notes of the renaissance and metaphysical writers, Andrew Marvell's particularly, all he could hear at his own back is 'a cold blast', the clattering of bones, and the spread of a chuckle.

On the river bank and through the vegetation, only a rat can be found. The riverside, a symbol of joy and peace, had been deserted by all the people. The speaker had himself withdrawn to 'fishing in the dull canal', where again he recalls the tragedy of the times. Alluding to Ferdinand in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, he muses 'upon the king my brother's wreck/And on the king my father's death before him'.

The tragedy is personal, but it is also general. We cannot tell if the 'white bodies naked on the low damp ground' are still alive or dead. But certainly, the 'bones cast in a little low dry garret' are not those of living beings, and for a long time they have been kept company 'by the rat's foot only'. This brings to the fore some simple but fundamental questions: in spite of all his accomplishments and glories, what is the value of man's life, after all? Could it be all noise and nothingness? If it was ever of any value, could it really have degenerated below comparison with a rat's foot?

Now, the speaker has to grapple with changed times; with the new fashionable, but destructive elements of modernity:

But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweetney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.

Modernity has encapsulated the development of technology to a degree that human life and societal values have changed so drastically that man in the modern age has become almost completely different from what he used to be in periods that can be described as pre-modern. For Mrs. Porter and her daughter, the modern age offers the appearance of a better life. In fact, they live a very convenient and flamboyant lifestyle, with much sexual satisfaction. But as portrayed by their personalities, the depth of the modern life fails to transcend the exploration of material wealth and the sexual capabilities of the human person. 'Genuine' spiritual and cultural values have collapsed, and where some remnants do exist, they struggle to thrive only on the periphery of society.

In mourning the emergence of unreal cities and unreal people, the poet observes that nature is always a constant in the universe. It is only man that has changed and is working at changing his environment. Nature remains as sweet and

soothing as ever. Hence the refrain, 'Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song'. His song, he promises, would not be 'loud or long'. He sings of Mr. Eugenides, the merchant of Smyrna who cuts the image of a typical continental capitalist transacting business in London: long beards, 'a pocket full of currants', a briefcase or bag full of essential documents, lunch at Canon Street Hotel, and at the end of work, a weekend of [homo] sexual indulgences at the metropole.

Then he alludes to and sings of Tiresias, the bisexual Greek legend with prophetic powers. Eliot in his notes, describes Tiresias as 'the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest' (collected poems, 82). Tiresias, 'although a mere spectator', offers a consciousness that traverses past and present stages and experiences of civilisation. At the dying but decisive hour of decision, when the human mind works like an engine, 'Like a taxi throbbing waiting', Tiresias sees the assumed essences of lives: the sailor returning home from sea, the typist returning home for tea and concerned about setting her bed properly.

Lines 215 - 229 capture and stress work, home and sex. The old man 'perceives the scene' and understands that in their circumstances, the characters within the passage, and in fact, the characters in the entire poem can be nothing more or less than human engines programmed towards some particular and predictable ends. Their consciousness is arrested, drifted away from a genuinely free individualistic temper, and conditioned by the vague ethos of a modern society. Individualism is allowed a function in *The Waste Land* largely in the context of strict social programming. Thus, a significant proportion of the individual constructed by Eliot in Prufrock becomes deconstructed by the characters in *The Waste Land*. Where Prufrock was largely a psychological question, man in 'The Waste Land' is presented as a de-individualised social dilemma divided not so much between self and

community, but much more between various conflicting segments of a diverse and constantly changing society.

Tiresias witnesses the arrival of the young house agent's clerk compared to a Bradford millionaire. Money and sex have become an inseparable pair in the conceptualisation of modern existence. After meal, the young clerk's lover becomes 'bored and tired'. For the young clerk, that implies that it was time he embarked upon the major aspect of his agenda. He

Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreprieved, if undesired
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.

Tiresias himself had 'foresuffered' the experience of the young clerk (and even more), being a bisexual. He had, in fact, used the same bed as the two lovers. He had descended to the depth of civilisation, had 'walked among the lowest of the dead', in fact, he had not only 'seen it all', he had experienced it all. Essentially, therefore, there seem to be no significant difference in terms of the value of life between the materially-minded and those with a similitude of spirituality in the modern age. Tiresias' interest in watching the scene is thus as significant, in terms of the pleasure it elicits, as the romantic act itself.

The young clerk finishes his turn, gives a kiss, and takes a bow through the dark stairs. The response of his lover is mechanical. She behaves as though nothing had happened. Each stage of experience, for her, is pleasurable. She is glad that the sexual play is over. She recalls the song of Olivia in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1759: 32):

When lovely woman stoops to folly
And finds too late that men betray
What charm can sooth her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?
The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover
And wring his bosom - is to die.

Goldsmith wrote of civilisation in the classical times and during the Renaissance. For Eliot, however, the head of civilisation has been turned upside down. The lover in *The Waste Land* thinks more of the folly of Olivia than of her own lifestyle. For her, shame and honour can take a flight; pleasure must always run its course:

When lonely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

The contrast is enormous. For the modern lover, honour has shifted in meaning from all ancient connotations to whatever heightens the sensuous desires. Life has become descriptive not of those noble and time-tested emotions based on the logic of classical and Renaissance art and philosophy, but on the 'cash and carry' logic of a profit-crazy and sex-driven society. Yet, the issue of which constitutes the stronger logic becomes a question of perception, preference, and experience. Civilisation could be conceived in the context of contrasts and opposites; but more important, it is here conceived within the ambience of movements and progression. The past and the present constitute not separate entities of experience in the spatio-temporal arrangement of the universe, but a continuum of time and experience within

a fixed global space, with modifications that may not necessarily affect the fibre of being.

The lady plays her music so loud that Tiresias hears it faraway where he was 'upon the waters' and 'along the strand, up Queen Victoria Street'. This reminds him of how sometimes even when not in a public bar, the mandoline, though of a 'pleasant whining', is played so loud that it becomes 'a clatter and a chatter' to both the ears and the soul. The noise gets to the fish market as well as the magnificent city church of St. Magnus Martyr.

In the next fragment, Eliot presents 'The Song of the Thames Daughters'. The song captures the changing times and the hazardous challenges of existence: the river has become polluted with 'oil and tar'; nothing appears constant anymore; even the monarchy is adrift in thought and character. More fragments accentuate the 'scenery of drifts': 'Trams and dusty trees', a boring Highbury, a destructive 'Richmond and Kew', a down-cast heart, weeping, another promise of 'a new start', silence, etc. In spite of the soothing essence of a seaside resort (i.e. Margate Sands), the mind continues to fail; logic cannot stand; and as a result, humility is forced down on people who now 'expect Nothing'. This last fragment depicts the liberal humanist placement of the mind as the index of rationality. The failure of the mind, therefore, becomes synonymous with the drift towards chaos and disintegration.

Yet, such a failure could also have its logic where a people possess that critical spirit that elicits a necessary suspicion of self and precipitates an interrogation of received values and established practices. Though the liberal humanist parades a subtle arrogance in ascribing common sense to his theories, beliefs, opinions, and assumptions, he is also aware of the fallibility of his person, the limitations of logic, and the possibilities of 'new truths' and unexplored realities. Thus, the humility of

mind is conceived by him as a *sine qua non* for genuine intellectual practice and social development.

Eliot (as he states in his notes) draws line 307 from St. Augustine's Confession: 'to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang about all mine ears'. St. Augustine here writes about the 'sensual temptations' that laid siege to his youth (Southam, 1981: 102). The good life can be attained not by a leap, but by progression through learning, experience and age. But again, as before, life is on fire; everything is on fire. There is the possibility of salvation for a few, but it is in fact, a probability. The only lasting element in the section is fire.

Part IV (in ten lines) captures the tragic nature of human existence within a single fragment. Phlebas, a man tall and handsome like anyone else that ever lived, suddenly got drowned in a deep sea. Phlebas had risen high in life and had 'passed the stages of his age and youth'. The swelling of the deep sea no longer frightens him because he has been swallowed up by the sea. He is no food for the sea birds. The pursuit of profit and the fear of loss have become distant. He has reached the bottom of existence where there is neither hope nor strength. And the poet warns the reader: 'Consider Phlebas', who was once a great man!

'What the Thunder Said' reiterates the collapse of western civilisation through images that depict man's doomed state and the fall of strong cities: 'Sweaty faces', 'frosty silence', 'agony', 'strong places', 'prisons', 'dead mountain', 'dry sterile thunder without rain', 'red sullen faces', 'mud cracked houses', 'Murmur of maternal lamentation', 'cracks and reforms and bursts', 'falling towers', etc. The living are presented with only two fatalistic options: to be either dead or be dying. And they are anxious about 'achieving' any of these because death or dying offers the only immediate and concrete mode of salvation from their failed existence and society.

They lived 'Amongst the rock' where 'one cannot stop and think', where they are dying of thirst because there is no water, where quite abnormally, even their 'sweat is dry', where there is no rest of body or mind, 'But red sullen faces sneer and snarl/ From doors of mud cracked houses.' If only there were water, the human body and soul would enjoy some refreshing. But life has become a dangerous desert, without even a mere sound of hope.

There is an extensive allusion to the betrayal, arrest, death and 'resurrection' of Christ and this further underscores the tragic experience of man. But after the 'resurrection' in this case, the reader is uncertain of the exact nature or character of the 'intruder'. What follows the 'resurrection' is not peace and salvation to mankind, but the rising voices of 'maternal lamentation', confused and hooded people 'swarming over endless plains', still waiting for their salvation. But salvation seems far-fetched. What is real is

Falling towers
Jerusalem Athena Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal.

As the towers are upturned in the air, human sterility is drawn into question; animals acquire the face of humans; and the bells toll the death of civilised values and the reduction of the source of human experience to 'empty cisterns and exhausted wells'. Human voices have become dry of 'genuine' cultural substance. Even the chapel, that ancient symbol of religious worship and the necessary searching and renewal of the soul, has decayed. The refreshing tunes of the old-time choir have been replaced by the grasses 'Singing over the tumbled graves'. The wind and dry bones share the pews, with a cock on the rooftop playing the role of God and watching over its church. Eliot captures the moral and cultural tragedy of the modern man in a

comical dimension. The loss of faith has brought with it a critical mode of moral disintegration which redesigns the landscape of faith as an absurdist theatre.

Nature itself seems to respond to the 'odd' condition of man: the Indian River Ganges had sunken; the clouds gather over the holy mountain, but the leaves can find no rain; the jungle has been made submissive and silenced; and amidst the drought, there was the speaking thunder. The thunder spoke about dying human values: self-control, good works, and a humanistic heart. A 'moment's surrender' to man's sensuous emotions can never be recovered by an entire 'age of prudence'. This is a fact of life so obvious to the human mind but never truly learnt. Hence the vacuity and meaninglessness of his life: 'our empty rooms'. Another tragedy of the human experience is the failure of man to think appropriately about the cosmic quandary of existence in relation to himself until he reaches the twilight region when he actually confirms his life as a prison, thinks of the light (or key) he had spurned, but has become incapable of even responding cheerfully to the calm sea; incapable of saving himself.

The closing lines of the poem (423-33) reiterate the quest motif with which the poet has engaged the reader in the various fragments of experience: 'I sat upon the shore / fishing...' Behind him is the 'arid plain', lands or nations that have lost their productivity, that have become lawless and chaotic, but waiting with hope that they would be set in order. Before him is London Bridge, the current symbol of the country's technological development, falling and disintegrating; around him are fragments of human and material ruins, and the double tragedy of bereavement and insanity. The human condition has deteriorated; has become so distressing, so catastrophic, so evil. Yet, there is hope; hope of 'the peace that passes understanding': Shantih shantih shantih.

In several other poems depicting attributes of the human person, Eliot expresses the humanist perception of the human character. This character is largely conveyed through the capacity of thought and the experience of relationships at various levels. In 'Portrait of a Lady', the poet captures the censorious element of thought in the (desired or desirable) relationship between a woman and a lover. Love relationship often unravels a psychological portrait of human persons: the mental arrangement of scenes, a rehearsal of 'things to be said', or left unsaid, a self assurance of the other's capacity to understand, the banishing of the memory of a 'buried life' and a relishing of one's youthfulness and sexual vigour, the fear of incompatibility and of love becoming cold, the anxiety of not knowing what is happening because lovers are 'really in the dark', and the creeps of the possibility and imminence of eternal separation. These elements of thoughts and feeling stand man out from other things, living and non-living.

The human being thinks of himself and the value and substance of his fellow human beings. 'You do not know how much they mean to me, my friends'. The essence of friends underscores the non-desirability of a lonely existence. Life is composed of 'so much of odds and ends', but it is human company, amidst the 'qualities upon which friendship lives', that make those difficult times tolerable. The events in society would be of little or no social relevance to the individual if there are no friends with whom they can be discussed. Man as individual is still essentially a social being. Hence, 'I shall sit here, serving tea to friends'; we 'correct our watches by the public clocks' / Then sit for half an hour and drink our bocks'. Such a sociable existence presents the world as 'wonderful and youthful' and makes man 'feel immeasurably at peace'. Yet such a peace has a twinge of irony because it is founded on 'the friendship and sympathy/Of one about to reach her journey's end'.

The poem captures man's search for his own essence. It subtly establishes and then interrogates the phenomenon of social classes; explores the vagaries of love relationship; points at the collapse of social trust ('Another bank defaulter has confessed') and security ('A Greek was murdered at a polish dance'); and brings man himself to the front stage to ruminate with equanimity on the question of his own death:

This music is successful with a 'dying fall'
Now that we talk of dying -
And should I have the right to smile?

In 'Preludes', the poet is concerned with 'The thousand sordid images' that define or illustrate the human personality: 'burnt-out ends of smoky days', 'gusty shower wraps', 'grimy scraps of withered leaves', 'broken blinds and chimney-pots', 'a blackened street', an 'Infinitely suffering thing', etc. The human personality is a deep and complex one that cannot be easily described within any simple category of experience, local or universal.

Thus, in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', man is depicted as an 'extraordinary' being, full of memory. Man reasons, but he also remembers vividly the bits of past experiences in life. Yet, he is a being so unstable in his ways. On this windy night, he experiences the failure of memory. 'Morning at the Window' reveals a condition of human beings of a lower social class - housemaids who sprout 'despondently' with 'damp souls', 'twisted faces', 'muddy skirts', and 'aimless smiles'. 'Aunt Helen' conveys a reversal of the presentation of housemaids in 'Morning at the Window'. In spite of the social barriers, human beings (housemaids and footmen in this instance) would seize any available opportunity to achieve their sensuous desire even if the moment is not quite appropriate. Helen Slingsby has just died and a mournful silence

has filled the entire street. But right on her dining-table sat the footman and one of the housemaids, caressing each other - what they would not dare when Helen was alive. Like evening in 'The Boston Evening Transcript', Helen's death wakens 'the appetites of life in some'; 'The Dresden clock continued ticking on the mantelpiece' as though nothing had happened. And really, in spite of the creeps and empathy, human life does not come to a halt because someone important has died.

Eliot presents the phenomenon of change in 'Cousin Nancy'. Nancy, by her dances, represents modernism. Though members of the older generation were quite uncertain about their feeling towards the new epoch, they knew that life could not remain the same anymore. Yet, nearby are the guardians of tradition, Matthew and Waldo, ready to defend the ancient faith with their lives.

'Mr. Apollinax' cuts the image of a modern man. He is a tourist whose excitement at his 'new discoveries' is described as wild: 'His laughter tinkled among the teacups'; 'He laughed like an irresponsible foetus. / His laughter was submarine and profound'. Though 'a charming man, and widely travelled, his speech conveys a lot of ambiguities, which make him a true symbol of the modernist temper. Also, the poet persona who could have challenged his ambiguities or supposed meaninglessness is himself preoccupied with his own indecision and distracted by memory.

In 'Hysteria', we meet a lady and a gentleman whose momentary intention depicts the psychology of a sexual orientation. Right in the open, the lady's laughter and 'the shaking of her breasts' drive a strong desire into the gentleman. He becomes 'lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles'. An elderly waiter suggests that the couple could have some privacy in the garden. But the sexually excited gentleman could not admit to himself what his real desire is. Ironically, rather, he plots to stop the shaking of the lady's breasts!

'Conversation Galante' depicts some of the characteristics of the human person in a modern age. The first stanza points to the phenomenon of tourist existence - distress, distraction, and digression. Yet, the modern man in his search for meaning and pleasure must continue to travel around and subject himself to difficult conditions of change. We fill our lives with activities and pleasure in a bid to 'body forth our own vacuity'. Man is forever a maker of humour because his social /material life is made up only of fabricated stuff; his 'vagrant moods' can be given any 'twist'. Therefore, he cannot be taken too seriously. His fabricated existence is always shifty. He is 'The eternal enemy of the absolute'.

(4.7) THE EVIDENCE OF HOPE

Though the liberal humanist imagination conceives of human existence largely in terms of the tragic, it does not leave man without hope, neither does it foreclose the possibility of salvation. In Eliot's poetic production, therefore, there is always the evidence of hope offered to the dying and disintegrating man, even though hope always seems upturned at the next moment. Hope is premised on the concept of man as a free moral agent. Although man has degenerated to a tragic existence, he still possesses the capacity to free himself from his self-inflicted chaos, disorder and free fall. This will is based on the instrument of reason which is situated in him and which, to all intents and purposes, constitutes the basis for moral strength and rediscovery. Human progress is thus entirely within his own capability. His reason could lead him to a redemptive act of the will. The human condition, therefore, is never a completely hopeless case.

(4.7.1) The Paradox of Salvation

'The Hippopotamus' is a crucial reflection of the possibilities of hope in Eliot's conceptualisation of humanism. The poem encapsulates the reversible tendencies within two broad categories of the tragic and the seemingly hopeful experiences of the human person. The life of the hippopotamus indicates the tragedy of a graceless, iniquity-ridden generation; but the 'True Church' seems to radiate with light, love and the peace that passes all understanding. The hippopotamus has an appearance of strength and stability, yet the reality is that it is 'merely flesh and blood', and 'susceptible to nervous shock' like all 'weak and frail' beings. Its aspirations and activities are defined in terms of 'material ends'. Hence it lacks the depth of that inner refreshing offered by spiritual or metaphysical ruminations. The life of the hippopotamus reflects the demise of faith in the modern man. Human and social values have been reduced to the search for and attainment of physical and material comfort. This condition of being has, in fact, become the centre of major global critical discourses and the dominant ideologies that rule the world. Capitalism and socialism, with all their attendant structures and implications, are of major interest to the hippopotamus.

The hippopotamus also portrays the self-determinism of the modern man. Because he is graceless - either as a result of his fall from grace, or his failure to receive grace, or his refusal or inability to appreciate the 'foreign' ways of a non-material mode of living - he works out his own salvation in ways that make meaning to the understanding of his immediate environment. He concerns himself with little or nothing of the phenomenon that transcends his senses. Salvation for him means earthly pleasure and the only legitimate way of achieving it is through work. Thus, 'the hippopotamus's day / is passed in sleep; at night he hunts'. It is not so much the

material[istic] existence of the hippopotamus that reveals him to the reader as a tragic being, as it is his subsequent supernatural metamorphoses conceived side by side the 'fall' of the 'True Church'. Yet, it is in that metamorphoses that we obtain the evidence of hope.

The presentation of the 'True Church' in the poem captures a broad spectrum of life without struggle. It is a church founded 'upon a rock', and therefore, it 'can never fail'. It is a church never shaken by material circumstances because it perpetually 'gather[s] in its dividend' from both its vicinity and from overseas through evangelistic acts propelled by military might. The church does not only possess the material wealth of the world; it also has an exclusive claim to God. More important, it has become 'one with God'. Thus, it has indeed become God. The development, no doubt, is a tragic twist to the seeming progress of the human race. The psychologically re-assuring human search for peace, salvation and God leads the human person not necessarily to God, but to the awesome height of godhood and absolutism, a height which simultaneously and ironically contrasts itself from and ultimately becomes reconciled with the elemental premises of ignorance.

The church, like God, can therefore work in 'mysterious ways'. It can 'sleep and feed at once'. It needs no work or sweat because human beings work, sweat, bleed and die on its behalf. Thus, its life, as perpetuity, is eternally assured. The real cost of this life of the church in an 'eternal' pleasure dome is the tragic existence of the hippopotamus, whose broad back and ability to rest on its belly even 'in the mud' convey the image of the modern man as a beast of burden - in spite of all scientific, industrial and technological advancements. Modernity has transformed the nature of human labour into a seemingly simple field of work compared to experience in pre-industrial societies. Yet human beings in the industrialised societies cannot lay greater

claim to stress-free lives than their counterparts of the generation of the hippopotamus. There is an ironic branching off of the presentation of the human tragedy. The circle of human weakness and frailty is broken:

I saw the 'potamus take wing
Ascending from the damp savannas,
And quiring angels round him sing
The praise of God, in loud hosannas.

Blood of the lamb shall wash him clean
And him shall heavenly arms enfold
Among the saints he shall be seen
Performing on a harp of gold.

He shall be washed as white as snow
By all the martyr'd virgins Kist...

Of course, man as hippopotamus has been an unclean, dirty beast of burden. But now, there is held out to him the promise of redemption, of cleanliness and purity of spirit, of company amongst the real saints, of spirit-elevating performances 'on a harp of gold', of a possible 'romantic' affair with virgins, of the presence and peace of God. This promise is founded on some concrete, albeit mysterious growth of wings and flight. Human experience is characterised by occasional ascension 'from the damp savannas', occasional flights to salvation and sainthood. And on such occasions are held out the promise of hope, a cosmic reassurance that the tragic is only one sphere, albeit a major one, of a constantly changing order.

The salvation of the hippopotamus becomes the failure and fall of the 'True Church', which indeed has all the while thrived on hypocritical claims. There is a swapping of positions and benefits between the hippopotamus and the church. The church, wrapped in tradition, and in spite of all hope, suffers damnation. The battle has not been for the strong and mighty, neither has the race been for the swift. God indeed 'works in a mysterious way', the implication being that as bad and as sinful as

mankind is, hope and salvation may not be deferred forever. But the mystery of divine manifestation or intervention may not on its own alone facilitate human progress. It must be coupled with self-redemptive acts on the human part.

(4.7.2) Spatio-Temporal Balancing

Yet, conceptualising the evidence of hope in the Eliotic schema is not a mere swapping of places between the hopeful and the hopeless. 'Four Quartets' presents the phenomenon as an intricate interplay of assumed contraries in human and societal experiences. Hope is in balance and in balancing. The contrasts and displacements within which hope is achieved in 'The Hippopotamus' are resolved in the 'Four Quartets'. There is an attempt at coherence and synthesis: a reconciliation of a kind of Anglican interpretation of Christian faith (representing the church) with the philosophies of Bradley, Babbit and the followers of Bhudha (representing the hippopotamus); a reconciliation of the travails of humanity and the spirit of religious faith; a skilful search for order, structure, stability and meaning amidst the tragic conditions of humanity; a 'universal' and poetic resolution of the conflict between dogma and scepticism (Sharrock, 1977; Dillistone, 1981; Libby, 1984). The poem explores the humanist's approach at resolving the fundamental opposites of human existence.

'Four Quartets' can be regarded as one long poem made up of four parts with each consisting of five movements. Each part, however, can stand on its own as a poem. The first part, 'Burnt Norton', presents the reader an attempt at resolving the temporal differences in human experiences. Time is a major determinant of how human beings perceive reality. Reality itself is affected and adjusted by time (and, of course, space). Thus, whether the issue at stake relates to the condition of the object,

the perception of the object, or even the memory of the object, human experiences are moderated by time. All time is one. The past, the present and the future are all interrelated and are, in fact, inseparable. What Eliot does in the opening lines of 'Burnt Norton' is to problematise the idea of history, the notion and attitude that conceives of the past as a distinct block of time, and therefore seeks to rationalise the inevitability of an ever changing cosmic order.

Eliot's goal, no doubt, bespeaks the tenet of some conservative inclinations. Yet it achieves a desirable 'liberal' objective of replacing history with myth in the pursuit of some idyllic modes of existence. Eliot leads the reader from the thesis that all time is one and all reality is one to establish a basis for imperial thinking and imperial doing: the Eurocentric 'myth of the homogenous past' (see Hirsch,). The current reality of a divided Europe and of a non-homogenous present is swallowed up by a mythic ideology which insists that the present must re-situate itself in the homogenous past. In spite of the critical subjectivity and the provisionality of myth as a point of view, Eliot seeks to raise it to a degree of respectability and acceptability by its placement in the realm of the imagination. For him, it is upon this singularity of the European reality of history that must be founded the future of European cultural and political development. The driving motive for his adoption of an approach that draws upon a mythic ideology, therefore, can only be founded on his search for hope, for a liberating future, for cultural renaissance and socio-political progress in the European continent.

Time is always in an ironic mode: simultaneously present and lost. And within this irony is 'a word of speculation', hypothetical questions about things that were not but which actually point in the same direction as those that are. Thus the human mind always engages itself in the polemics of 'the road not taken'. The purpose of such

condition of consciousness is difficult to decipher, but at the least, it reveals the complexity of the human mind. The human mind is compared to a garden, which has room for as many echoes as are available. There is a preference for a condition of fluidity (i.e. echoes) in the poet's [re]construction of the mind, over the substantial elements of the garden (plants, flowers, fruits, etc.) as a symbolic realm of the mental experience. In actuality, a singing bird leads the production of echoes. Its real music is 'hidden' and 'unheard'. Its echoes seem deceptive. Other birds follow its path. The environment is serene: singing birds, 'music hidden in the shrubbery', movement 'without pressure', admirable roses, etc.

Yet the echoes produced the possibility of the human mind derailing from the concrete dignity of nature and being deceived: 'human kind cannot bear very much reality'. The human mind thinks of 'the drained pool' even when, in spite of sunlight, 'the pool [is] filled with water'. Though 'the leaves [are] full of children', the mind still grapples, in the main, with echoes. In spite of the tragic nature and preference of the mind, the poet tells us that the evidence of hope is always present with the human person. Yet, the human tragedy seems accentuated by the failure of vision, the failure to grapple with the reality of the present salvation, or its semblance.

The second movement in 'Burnt Norton' opens with a descriptive scene of natural elements being associated with acts of negating the environment. Such phrases as, 'Clot the bedded axle-tree', 'Sings below inveterate scars', and 'figured in the drift of stars' indicate chaotic conditions of existence. Even when 'we move above the moving tree' and seem to have transcended primitive characteristics, the human experience has remained basically the same: 'the boardhound and the boar/pursue their pattern as before'. Yet in nature, all differences are 'reconciled among the stars'. What the poet does, therefore, in the remaining lines in the movement is to proffer a

philosophical base upon which the crises and quests of human existence are 'purportedly' resolved.

This base is described as 'the still point of the turning world'. The still point is neither a fixity, nor a staccato. It is the point at which all opposites are reconciled in a dance. The point encapsulates the state of being and non-being, flesh and spirit, movement and immobility, 'ascent and decline'. This is the point of stability, the point of hope, the point that embodies an answer to every question, the point without which the human tragedy would persist. It is a timeless and placeless point that offers man 'inner freedom' from 'action and suffering'. The freedom it offers really frees man from the bondage of his own mind. However, it allows man the dignity and 'grace of sense'. Man is a bright shining light that is simultaneously 'still and moving'; whose eventual life is made meaningful by the marriage of new and old experiences, and who achieves 'completion' by the co-existence of 'partial ecstasy' and 'partial horror' in his personality.

There is a parallel between the 'wholesome' contraries of human experience and the idea of time. Past and future cease to be distinct blocks of time as they become chained together in cosmic existence (just as ecstasy and horror play themselves out in the same body). It is therefore not time that changes but the weak human body. Through space and time, the human body continues to depreciate until it finally passes into decay and oblivion. Yet, time protects not the individual but the humankind from both eternal bliss and external expiration. These two conditions cannot be endured by the human person. Ignorance makes human beings think that 'heaven and damnation' are fully comprehensible phenomena. But this is a tragic irony because man himself is unconscious of the reality that even an entire life experience can give him only 'a little consciousness' both of himself as an individual

and his environment. Man's exaggerated claims of consciousness is thus situated in his ignorance regarding the nature and workings of time. He appreciates time mostly through memory, and because memory links the past with the future (the present is always elusive), memory always seems to unite all time and, consequently, conquer time.

The next movement takes the reader to a twilight region: 'a place of disaffection', 'a dimlight', 'neither daylight... nor darkness'. The region seems incapable of elevating matter to the noble state of 'lucid stillness', of converting shadows into beauty no matter how temporal, of making the soul pure. The plain of twilight existence leaves the soul largely sensual and vain. But it is not completely hopeless because the 'plenitude' of vanity is not total; there still exists some 'vacancy' for the ethereal. Though the human faces look 'strained', 'time-ridden', 'distracted', 'vanity-stricken', 'empty of meaning', possessed by 'sick feelings', lacking 'concentration', and 'whirled by the cold wind', there is 'a flicker' that 'wind [s] in and out' to keep hope flying. Each moment of the flicker's appearance and disappearance produces not a sigh of relief from the beleaguered beings, but a belch. The flicker has the effect of a good meal, which makes the gluttonous eater heavy, dull and lazy. Thus, human beings continue to descend 'into the world of perpetual solitude' and 'internal darkness'. His sense and spirit all suffer 'deprivation and destitution', and 'This is the one way' in which the world continues to move: 'not in movement / But abstention from movement'.

Trying to regulate time (which is what the bell does in the fourth movement) is a practical way of killing the day. Otherwise, day is eternal. The only real change to day as a concept (not component) of time is temporal and superficial: 'The black cloud carries the sun away'. Yet, after all the climatic changes of the day and seasons,

day remains a permanent phenomenon: 'the light is still/at the still point of the turning world'.

The fifth movement discusses the relationship between words and time in the context of human attempts at capturing the conventional notions of the spatio-temporal realities of individuals and societies. It is by the existence of language (i.e. words) that we produce concepts and frameworks of time. Words (and music) share a significant characteristic of the living (i.e. they move). Because they live, it follows logically that they also die. In essence, language exists only in the framework of time and can, therefore, not completely comprehend or capture the nature and workings of time.

Furthermore, words are delimited by the contexts of usage, and more important, by the users. They (words) pass into 'silence' when not in spoken use. But that 'silence' is compared to the stillness of 'a Chinese jar' which 'moves perpetually in its stillness'. Though language shares in the tragedy of humanity (i.e. the inevitability of death), when in a highly patterned, poetic and written form, it tends towards the actualisation of timelessness. It thus becomes impossible to think or plan towards it in terms of historical epochs or blocks of time. It has no beginning and no end because 'the end and the beginning were always there/Before the beginning and after the end' and all time, past and future, is always the shifty 'now'. The poet narrates the condition of language:

Words strain,
Crack and sometime break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
Always assail them. The word in the desert
Is most attacked by voices of temptation
The crying shadow in the funeral dance,

The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

In the absence of a pattern is the imminence of death, and this constitutes the poet's concern for language in this movement. The concept of form or pattern is represented by movement. The structure of the 'Four Quartets', each in five movements, thus encapsulates a demonstration of the thematic preoccupation. The various issues raised in the poem accelerate a mental re-evaluation of the conditions of universal existence in relation to the phenomenon of time in the contrastive context of 'un-being and being', of local perceptions and cosmic realities. Even perceptions as experience are subdued by the timelessness of time. The 'waste sad time' itself becomes just one of the manifestations of the pattern which stretches from time 'before the beginning' to time 'after the end'. 'Burnt Norton' thus sets the pace in stirring the human imagination for a critical engagement with metaphysical essences and experiences (time, memory, and language) upon which a genuine understanding of man's moral being can be achieved. It seeks to lead the reader in the act of dialectical balancing, and up to that point of stillness, which is synonymous with the peace in the soul and intellect.

(4.7.3) The Still Point

In 'East Coker', the poet explores the dialectical and deconstructive dimensions of social experience. The consistent negation of human and social capability runs through the five movements. In the first movement, we are presented with the impermanence of material goods and matrimony. Houses, factories, and all physical structures 'rise and fall', and between rising and falling, they are in a permanent state of change. Marriages are celebrated with music and dance. After many years of youth spent under the scorching sun to cultivate 'the corn', couples are 'lifted in country

mirth... Eating and drinking'. But then, for the living and the non-living, there are 'Dawn points' when 'Wrinkles and slides' set in, a re-echo of the words of the preacher in Ecclesiastes,

There is a time for building
And a time for living and for generation
And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto.

The second movement expands the theme of the constancy of change presented in the first. Climatic changes that were hitherto thought to be regular have become unpredictable and elements in a galaxy have become hostile and antagonistic, seeking to bring 'The world to that destructive fire...' The gulf between expectations (or hope) and actualities has continued to widen. Change has outdone traditional contents of hope and 'the wisdom of age'. Yet, humanity reaches the still point again. Man has been deceived by nature and experience to the point that being deceived again, he really can no longer be deceived because the knowledge of his failure has become a pattern; no new harm can be done, and each moment of 'a new and shocking' failure only represents an opportunity for self-evaluation. The pattern is founded not on the folly, nor wisdom, 'of old men'. The lesson is 'the wisdom of humanity'. Permanent change can only teach us to be wary of our judgment. As Father Ratti put it in Robert Anton Wilson's *The Earth Will Shake* (1988: 56),

... true humility did not mean a sense of worthlessness or the kind of timidity that caused some people to be cheated and bullied all their lives. The virtue of humility... was merely the faculty of intelligence operating properly. "The man of wisdom... Fears [only] himself. He knows who it is who tells him the most plausible lies he wants to believe"... Real humility was more complicated: it was like walking around two steps behind yourself watching everything you did.

The still point is thus the moment of humility, the moment of critical self-realization, the moment of acts of self-redemption founded on the knowledge of limitations and failures, the moment of the knowledge of the permanence of ignorance in the mind of the self. 'Humility is endless'. The humble person lives with the overwhelming consciousness of change; like all monuments and geniuses, like all houses and dancers, he lives with a working knowledge that he also will sometime go 'under the sea' or 'under the hill'. The truthfulness of that knowledge constitutes momentary consolation and a life-long salvation.

In the third movement, the poet seeks to justify the essence of humility. Exciting personalities and experiences in society are all associated with darkness and death. Captains, merchant bankers, writers, academicians, statesmen, rulers, etc., are not exempted in any way from the 'fact' of life as a dark spot. Even the powerful Stock Exchanges and body of directors all partake of 'the silent funeral'. The funeral is everybody's funeral, yet 'there is no one to bury'. The peace of the individual, therefore, is in the acceptance of that dispossessing reality. Humility is 'the darkness of God' and this the poet invites upon himself. When the 'lights are extinguished' and the scenes change, only the humble keep pace with the movements of time. When the 'lights are extinguished' and faith, love and 'hope are all in the waiting', the humble waits 'without thought' because he is 'not ready for thought', and 'the darkness shall be [his]light'. By the 'way wherein there is no ecstasy', he will arrive at new destinations; by 'the way of ignorance', he will arrive at new knowledge; by 'the way of dispossession', he will arrive at riches; by the way of the other, he will arrive at new Self. His ignorance shall become his knowledge, and his possession shall become his poverty.

With the use of metaphysical conceits, the fourth movement embodies a reminiscence of John Donne's 'Hymne to God my God, in My Sicknesses': 'our only health is the disease/If we obey the dying nurse'; 'to be restored, our sickness must grow worse'; if we do well, we shall/Dye of the absolute paternal care'; 'if to be warmed, then I must freeze'. Eliot's use of conceits here furthers his postulation about the 'still point' theory through the attempt at reconciling life's contraries. This attempt becomes commonplace in the last stanza of the movement when he alludes to the bitter and bloody experience of Jesus at Golgotha, an experience which, ironically, the church has always celebrated as Good Friday. The church's logic of the havoc and death perpetrated on 'Good Friday' is founded on the Eliotic 'still point' theory, which, in this case, is the assumed moment when death becomes vicarious and achieves salvation for humankind.

The fifth movement discusses the end of an individual's life as the summation of experiences which realization only indicates a stark beginning. The beginning and the end or the conditions of birth and death cannot be conceptualised in terms of when one becomes physically or bodily present in the world, or the moment when the breath is extinguished and the heart ceases to function. They are value-laden concepts that point at the duality and quality of being. The human body without a soul will be compared to a mere structure of water, sand and cement, or 'Houses [that] rise and fall, crumble, are extended/Are removed, destroyed, restored...', or replaced. The soul is the intellectual engine-house of the body, and its qualities as determined by the degree of education (not the classroom stuff), its knowledge of itself and its environment, and a spirit of peace with nature, are the factors that indicate when a person has been born and when a person dies. And since the actualisation of these

factors is a life-time process, the moment of birth and the moment of death are indecisive.

Thus, 'In my beginning is my end...In my end is my beginning'. Between the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end (there is no beginning of the beginning or end of the end) is 'the middle way'. The middle way is the period of grappling with language, 'trying to learn to use words', always making 'new start[s]' and always experiencing 'a different kind of failure'. It is a period of crises: mastering the use of words only when they are no longer necessary; being articulate only with the wrong audience; failing to control one's emotions; discovering success only where vicious people have succeeded several times; dealing 'under conditions that seem unpropitious'; experiencing the lonely, 'homeless' state of the human person; and probably reaching the knowledge that life is synonymous with struggles, trials, failures, and the vexation of spirit. Thus,

As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
Of dead and living. Not the intense moments
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment...
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation...
Of the petrel and the porpoise.

(4.7.4) Faring Towards Cosmic Freedom

In 'The Dry Salvages', the poet situates the phenomena of faith and fate in the context of time and nature. Man no longer seeks an understanding of nature; he, in fact, becomes one with nature and by that development, begins to 'apprehend/The point of intersection of the timeless/With time'. Being reconciled with nature, he appears to have conquered nature. Having confronted the 'sullen, untamed and intractable'

weaver through his ingenuity and industry, the river, which hitherto is 'a strong brown god', becomes the worshipper of man: 'The river is within us, the sea is all about us'. Man becomes the 'many voices [and] many gods' of the sea. Yet again, in a deconstructive twist, having conquered time and nature through acts of faith, 'the tolling bell' reverses all human calculations and manoeuvres to 'unweave, unwind, unravel/And piece together the past and the future'. The human tragedy is re-enacted as, in the darkness that precedes dawn, the past and future are wiped away. For godlike man, the never-ending time stops and the bell 'clangs'.

The second movement indicates that oneness with nature could actually mean that he has become swallowed up and wasted by the sea, and not that he has successfully contained the sea's 'seasons and rages'. His experience is described by such words and phrases as, 'the soundless wailing', 'The silent withering of autumn flowers', 'motionless', 'drifting wreckages', 'unprayable prayer', 'calamitous annunciation', 'a motionless/years of living among the breakage', 'failing powers', 'drifting boat with a slow leakage', ocean 'littered with wastage'. Though the movement pretends to capture man's movement of annunciation, what it presents is no more than the tragic birth of man into the deep womb of the sea. Thus, the wailing of the victim is 'voiceless'; its pain is 'painless and motionless'; it is a 'drifting wreckage' who manages to say a final prayer to 'Death its God! Here human life is depicted as a birth into death.

There is a change in perception as one grows older. Time past is no longer a pattern of 'mere sequence' produced 'by superficial notions of evolution'. What matters about the past is not the past, the 'sense of well-being,/fruition', fulfillment, security or affection, / or even a very good dinner', but the sudden illumination of those 'moments of happiness'. It is in that illumination that even the dying finds joy,

death is turned into birth. In that illumination, the essence of the pleasant human experience is meaningfully regained. The illumination becomes the ultimate moment of human happiness as it encapsulates not just the particular pleasure of the individual, but of several human generations; and death is conquered through the memory.

Sudden illumination from recollected experience can also be received through what is described as the wonderful act of looking backwards 'behind the assurance/of recorded history' in order to get a glimpse of 'the primitive terror'. Memory and history, quite significantly, give the human person a thorough understanding of his/her conditions of existence vis-à-vis universal human stories. It provides for the individual an understanding of the 'permanent' and timeless 'moments of agony' which is the human lot. Yet, it is not so much our own agony that teaches us the important lesson of life as it is the agony of other people. This is because there is always a greater element of detachment from the suffering of other people such that we are always able to assess their experiences in a somewhat objective, critical and unqualified manner. This, of course, does not make the individual's own experience less meaningful.

It is observed, however, that the contents of experience presented through the memory are essentially pleasant and positive, while those presented through history indicate terror and agony. As people grow older, their perceptions and experiences of life continue to change; their personalities continue to change; but their agony remains constant. And alongside the constancy of agony is the spirit of equanimity, the constancy of suffering and smiling: time destroys, and time also preserves. The human tragedy is thus never a complete experience. The consciousness that suffering is inevitable, regular and universal is a consolation. The recollection of the moments

of pleasure and the knowledge acquired through suffering are indicators of the limits of tragedy. And in spite of the ever-changing landscape of human experience, the perpetual presence of a smile on the face of the individual portrays a spirit that would not be easily broken, or at worst, a moral confrontation of fate through calm acceptance.

In the third movement, Eliot simultaneously builds upon and deconstructs the synthesis of the movements of pleasure and agony which he creates in the second movement. He tentatively alludes to Hare Krishna's preachments about voyagers and the future. The future is a song difficult to decipher because it is in a faded state. Yet, it is not a hopeless condition. The only certainty is in the fact of its continuous change, and this in itself suits the ever-changing conditions of the human person. The movement explores the depth of man's psychological being: the shuttle between grief and relief, the movement within 'different lives', the changes in perception, mood and purpose, etc. Even on a daily basis, man is always changing. The man who boards a train at a station is not the same man 'who will arrive at any terminus'. The voyager who sees 'the harbour receding' is not the same person who disembarks.

The changes are largely in the mind. The mind is always in a state of contemplation, action, and change. But the changes also always apply to the human body. The voyager thus suffers 'the trial and judgement of the sea'. In spite of the struggle to escape from 'the past/into different lives', the past is never finished and the future is hardly ever before us. Thus, whatever the vicissitudes, the poet conceives of life as a 'field of battle' full, not of warriors, but of voyagers and his admonition is 'Not fare well, /But fare forward'.

Faring forward implies an understanding of the concept of retreat because 'the way up is the way down, the way forward is the /way back'. Essentially, therefore, the

'real destination' of life is life. Living one's life from 'birth' to 'death' (in the psychological sense of the word) is not about preparing for any 'real' life outside of the here and now. It is neither about building for the future in the material and earthly sense, nor is it about sacrificing earthly gains for heavenly glory. The real destination is here and now. There is no other life to prepare for than the life of the moment. The poet echoes existentialism in establishing the essence of life. His purpose is not ideology. Rather, it is to capture the quintessential experience of humanity, an experience which transcends all ideologies - and this is the liberal humanist ideology. Thus, by the injunction to 'fare forward', he shifts the post towards the search for some essence.

In the fourth movement, the poet indicates hope. He invokes the prayer and mercy of the 'Queen of Heaven' for the 'safety' and 'peace' of the deceased, the endangered, and the bereaved. The sea has undone many people. The invention of man (i.e. the ship) to conquer nature (i.e. the sea) has again re-echoed the failure of the human imagination. Yet, the 'perpetual angelus' redeems man from absolute death. Though violent nature tends to undo man, there is the overwhelming assurance of the mercy of 'Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory', there is the confidence of a [re] birth.

The human imagination rises again to explore the dimensions of past and future existence. It traverses the galaxy, accesses spirits, examines behaviours, horoscope, diseases, biographies, omens, wombs, tombs, dreams, and various spheres of experience that seem hidden from the ordinary eye. The imagination is thus never conquered. Rather, it explores time and attains the apprehension of 'The point of intersection of the timeless', the point at which all contraries are reconciled and all time is one. But the attainment of that state of mind is not a general phenomenon.

Only those who have devoted themselves to the intellectual search for the human essence through the attainment of self-knowledge and humanity, and through 'a lifetime's death in love, /Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender' accomplish such a state of sainthood. It is within this framework that we can distil Eliot's concept of elitism, the importance of a leadership class which has attained the peak of intellectual and cultural aggrandizement and can thus provide the proper tenor of development for society (Eliot, 1939; 1948; see also, Raymond Williams, 1963: 285 -325).

The poet returns to the general experience of the masses' 'unattended/moment, the moment in and out of time'. People, he posits, are the music they listen to and without them would be no music. Such music, which is the tune of life, is made of hints and guesses and can be broken into smaller bits: 'prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action'. The human person as music achieves 'the impossible union/of spheres of existence'. The actualisation of a pattern, a rhythm of 'right action' becomes for him the 'freedom from time and the constraints of the environment. But this is a goal achieved only in the mind of those who have attained the Eliotic state of sainthood. For most people, it is a dream 'Never here to be realised'.

Yet the non-realisation of that state does not imply defeat. The human spirit goes on fighting, struggling and trying because it would not concede defeat. Ultimately, it achieves contentment in the knowledge that its 'temporal reversion nourish[es] ... The life of significant soil'. The endless multiplication of human life becomes for man the most outstanding evidence for his victory over tragedy and death. The life of the individual is ultimately sustained in the communal spirit in which all lives become one and the perpetuity of that one life becomes the cardinal indicator of human freedom.

In the last ten lines of the fifth movement, therefore, Eliot reconciles the humanist idea of individualism with the essence of cosmic freedom by reference to and emphasis on the significance of community for the purpose of 'Incarnation' as well as the genuine actualisation of the union of contraries. The community becomes a necessary limit of the expression or existence of individualism, and without it, individualism would be non-existent or extinct. Through the community, the 'temporal reversion' of the individual is nourished into an ethereal [re]birth.

(4.7.5) The Possibility of Transcendence

'Little Gidding' is the last of the 'Four Quartets' and, in the main, it takes the reader back to the certainty and conditions of a catastrophic existence. In the first movement, the poet shuttles between the particularly local and the universal ambiances of experience. Nature, it seems, has become quite unpredictable. Climatic changes and changes in the circle of day and night point at the enigmatic conditions that have begun to define human lives. Various activities and strategies of business and relationship lead to one major destination: broken purposes and despair. Even the mind, which is the index of human reason, seems no longer capable of comprehending its own purposes, and where such purposes are comprehended, they are 'altered in fulfilment'.

The result is that prayer replaces idea and reason. 'Sense and notion' are suspended for a deliberate waiting upon providence. The development suggests the helplessness of the human person. The situation is universal. But of particular concern to the poet is the nearness of England, his adopted homeland, to the demise of intellectualism and civilisation. Yet, for Eliot, England is the apogee of modern civilisation, 'the intersection of the timeless moment'. Whatever the subjectivity one

attaches to such a description, the reality of the corruption of the supposed 'still point' of human civilisation indicates the imminent death of reason and the collapse of the human essence.

The second movement explores the theme of the death in greater details. The tragedy of the human condition is conveyed by such phrases and images as 'burnt roses,' 'Dead water and dead sand', 'perched eviscerate soil', 'vanity of toil', 'Laugh[ter] without mirth', 'the marred foundations', and 'a story ended'. Man's failure is the failure of the entire universe. The air, the earth, water and fire all lose their relevance in the absence of human existence. This implies the significance of man as the 'measure of all things'. Yet the absence of these elements indicates despair and 'the death of hope' for humankind.

It is at this point of despair and death, at the moment described as 'the uncertain hour', the 'interminable night', and 'the recurrent end', that the poet persona encounters a live image of death presented by a deceased 'master' who is 'Both intimate and unidentifiable'. The encounter produces in the poet persona a simultaneous experience of life and death, and was a crucial maker of the intersection of realities and time. A split personality thus sometimes becomes the critical manifestation of the Eliotic 'still point'. The experience is encircled by an ironic consciousness.

The poet wonders that the 'dead master' is alive; the 'dead master' wonders that the poet persona is dead! Their perception persists in the opposite directions, although the two persons are 'compliant' to the tragic trend of the human race, and are 'Too strong to each other for misunderstanding'. The poet alludes to the failure of his memory, and the dead master to the failure of his speech. However, the dead master

proceeds to offer a lecture, which significantly reminds the poet of his own thought about existence.

The dead master discusses the phenomena of language and age in the context of time. Language, he states, is an ever-changing art meant to suit and capture the experience of the moment. Having left his 'body on a distant shore' some time ago, the dead master communicates in a tongue 'beyond the language of the living': 'so I find words I never thought to speak/In streets I never thought I should revisit'. The essence of the discourse is to unravel how language stretches the human mind to the conditions of existence in time before and time after. But this essence points again at the tragedy of the human person: it is primarily through speech that language is purified and invigorated; yet the master shows a reluctance to use speech. The likely demise of speech and of language might thus become a critical indicator of man's movement towards the extinction of civilisation.

This is a concern which Eliot has expressed in some of his critical works. In his essay on 'The Social Function of Poetry' for example, he establishes the use of poetry for the refinement of the English language and European civilisation. A degenerate use of language, for him, only bespeaks the mode of cultural disorientation that had become characteristic of his age. Eliot posits that poetry has a 'deliberate, conscious and social purpose'. Specifically, he assigns to poetry the primary function of preserving, extending and improving the language of the poet's people:

... the influence of poetry... makes a difference to the speech, to the sensibility, to the lives of all members of a society, to all the members of the community, to the whole people, whether they read and enjoy poetry or not: even, in fact, whether they know the names of their greatest poets or not... poetry can to some extent preserve, and even restore, the beauty of a language; it can and should also help it to develop, to be just as subtle and precise in the more complicated conditions and for the changing purposes of modern life, as it was in and for a simpler age (Eliot, 1945:22-23).

The concern of the 'dead master' for the purification of 'the dialect' thus points towards the poet's own thought about poetry, language and the development of a 'living and healthy' culture.

The second theme explored by the dead master focuses on the phenomenon of aging: 'the gifts reserved for age'. The gifts are described as a 'crown' meant as a reward for the efforts of a lifetime. The crown has three components all of which point at man as a tragic being. The first is the weakening of the senses and the body, described by such phrases as 'cold friction', 'bitter tastelessness', 'fall asunder'. Here man is depicted as a tired being. The second is the consciousness that human folly abounds around him and that his anger against such would be another degree of folly because he suffers 'the impotence of rage'. However, he is capable of a laughter that is meant to hurt where people do not find any amusement. His gift here is to make fun of people when they fail and fall.

The third is the torment of memory. He discovers that he has not lived a life that is consistent with his current knowledge of the truth. Quite often, his actions have been a movement from 'wrong to wrong', his motives have been less than noble. He remembers the ills he has done to others even on occasions when he thought he was being principled. He re-enacts his false life with a 'rending pain' and finds that the applauses of sycophants were no more than 'strings'. His conscience burns again with life and begins to haunt him. He becomes restless because his spirit is exasperated. Age, for him, becomes a movement in regrets. However, the dead master holds out the lamp of hope for this despondent aged person.

There is the possibility of restoration and an attainment of the 'still point'. But this can only come if the soul is passed through a 'refining fire'. And this the man is

already experiencing. Self-discovery of a lifetime is a poetic gift because not all fools would reach that state. For those who would, there is a restoration of hope where knowledge brings about a contrite and humble spirit. At this point, age changes from the tragic indicator it has been into a redemptive element. The man's life is now lived as a response to lessons of a lifetime. 'Like a dancer', he moves and acts in measured steps. His age becomes the symbol of his rebirth, and the rebirth of all human beings who have grown to decay, discovered themselves, passed through the 'refining fire', and have become dancers.

In the third movement, the poet discusses three conditions which relate to memory and history. These are the conditions of attachment, detachment and indifference to self, things and persons. The conditions look alike because they can all be described as the experience between death and life. Yet, there are conditions created by circumstances in which human beings find themselves. Attachment to a country, for example, is thus a question of cultivation which is strengthened by memory. Whether the individual considers the importance of his country to him, memory ensures an attachment that is beyond mere desire and that transcends time. But history provides the basis of reason, of attachment and servitude, or detachment and freedom. But there is also a point of indifference to the 'faces and places' that constitute the country. This is the grey point of experience. Here the self, in spite of attachment or detachment, ceases to be. Even the faces and the places of the country have all vanished. The country as a Being is continually 'renewed [and] transfigured', but the physical demise of the self wipes away the consciousness of memory and history and leads the individual to a state of indifference towards his country.

The state of indifference is essential because without the vanishing of those who have had attachment to or detachment from the country; there will be no rebirth.

What would be is a perpetuation of 'old factions' and 'old policies'. For the poet it is thanks to goodness that sin has ensured the mortality of man. It is necessary and proper that the human race, through sin, became depraved and thus earned the judgement of death. In a critical negation of the Original Sin, however, the poet illustrates that what really obtains is the death of 'faces and places', not of humanity. And that death, essentially is poetic because it transcends self and structure, and commits itself to the divine task of the transfiguration of the nation. The implications are crucial for liberal humanist thinking. The individual derives his being from the community. Through his experience of memory and history which produces an intricate web of attachments and detachments, he shares his individuality with his community. Of course, his individuality inscribes itself in its own ways upon the self and the community. But ultimately, the self, through death, surrenders to the community thus enhancing (the possibility of) the communal or national experience of regeneration. This becomes the ultimate pattern. Hence the refrain: 'All shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well'.

The death of the individual assumes the status of a symbol of peace and regeneration for the community. Thus, there is a celebration of the dead. In their death is our life; and in our death shall be the life of those after us. Yet, the dead should not be celebrated more than the living because their death would have been of no use if there were no living who are actually dying and whose eventual death would make room for other lives. In this movement, therefore, the poet creates a crucial link between living beings and their ancestors, and uses the link to establish the timelessness of human life and the all-important place of the community in the sustenance of these universal conditions.

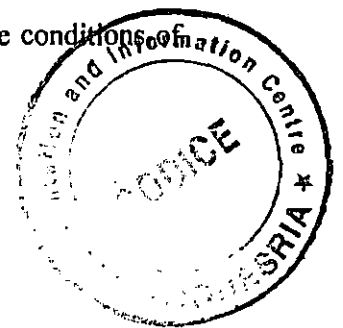
In the fourth movement, the poet asserts that man's 'only hope' (or despair, as some might choose to call it), 'Lies in the choice of pyre', or where there is a refusal to choose, the pyre still. It is only through death, represented here by the ceremonial burning of the dead body, that man would be free from 'sin and error'. Death is synonymous with freedom, and the burning of the dead body with redemption from mortality. This is a complex phenomenon of 'Love'. Love perpetuates the 'torment' and 'intolerable' acts of burning. It is an act that 'human power' cannot stop or remove because, in spite of all contrary feelings, 'We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fore'. The pyre becomes the 'refining fire' of love which saves man from the destructive fire of hell. While the human soul is refined by that painful act of love, the community that makes the pyre ensures the timeless continuity of its own existence.

The fifth movement of 'Little Gidding' sums up the entire synthesis project of Eliot. It does not reverse the poet's view of the timelessness of time, but leaves some room for doubt and the possibility of some expectations. Thus the poet in the very first line indicates that it might not be always that the beginning is synonymous with the end: 'What we call the beginning is often the end.' His use of 'often' is contradicted by the use of 'always'. Yet, 'The end is where we start from.' The poet illustrates the point with the example of a playwright's phrases or sentence. A good sentence is complete in itself and no single word constitutes the beginning or end of the sentence. Rather, all the words 'dance together' as a 'complete consort'. Likewise, every imaginative or poetic use of language points at one single experience: the description of life, which beginning and end is death. Significantly, therefore, the Eliotic pattern strikes a correlative cord with the *abiku* syndrome, which becomes everyman's experience. Thus,

We die with the dying:
See, they depart and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.

In spite of the supposed universality of this condition of man's movement in the circle of time, the poet betrays his prejudice through his anglicisation of history and civilisation. Having established that only through history can a people be liberated from the restrictive constructs of time and elevated to 'a pattern/Of timeless moments', which transcends the evanescence of the rose and the yew-tree, the poet descends from that ethereal height of philosophisation to locate England as the symbol of that still point in man's universal experience. Also, he places at the centre of that still point the church to which he ascribes acts of 'Love' and the message of salvation. Eliot constricts himself below eurocentrism to conceive and articulate history in a mode that is essentially anglocentric.

Yet, back to the realm of the philosophical, anglocentrism re-assumes the paraphernalia of universality. Human beings everywhere are restless by nature and would thus never 'cease from exploration', even though the result of the endless activities is to always arrive at the point 'where we started'. But again, arriving at the starting point never seems to achieve the consciousness of once-upon-a-time encounter. Human existence is thus made complex by an elaborate irony which ensures man's perpetual presence on a spasmodic plain. Though ultimately, there is the undesirable marriage of hell and heaven, or 'the fire and the rose', after the various attempts at synthesising existential contraries, the 'Four Quartets' ends on the note of a promise. Whatever the tragic ironies of the human life, therefore, the human person remains a unique being whose life preeminently transcends the conditions of



contraries. Hence, the re-assurance 'all shall be well and/All manner of thing shall be well'.

(4.8) SOCIAL VISION AND DECONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENTS OF THE POSITIVE ELEMENT

To use a term as 'social vision' is to assume great consistency and particularity in the works of Eliot. That would be an assumption too costly to make because Eliot himself has covered such broad strands of poetic, critical and social discourses that his vast postulations have become incapable of escaping self-contradictions. Importantly, what we are trying to do in this study is to distil to an adequate level, such critical elements by which we may confidently place the poetry of Eliot within the liberal humanist bracket.

One of the major poems that portray critical aspects of Eliot's social vision is 'Choruses from "The Rock"'. Though originally written as part of a poetic-drama designed for a church event, the dramatic-poem largely captures the essence of much of Eliot's views about the human person, society, the idea of progress, and man's relationship with God. However, it is a poem which appreciation should be preceded by an understanding of *The Idea of a Christian Society*. This is important because the latter seems to spell out in simple and accessible prose some of the critical ideas embedded in the poem.

As set out by Eliot himself, his general objective In *The Idea of a Christian Society* is to discuss 'the organisation of values, and a direction of religious thought which must inevitably proceed to a criticism of political and economic systems (1982:42). Particularly, Eliot was not concerned with the creation of a programme or a set of rules by which a society can be described as Christian. Rather, his

preoccupation is to depict that much of the West that is often described as Christian are only so to the extent that they do not penalise the official or ceremonial profession of the Christian faith. He stresses that in practice, such societies are governed by values that largely negate 'the conscious pursuit of the Christian life' (61). The aim of the essay, as stated by Eliot is not evangelism but social criticism. Eliot's criticism is, of course, situated to challenge social attitudes that make the West unworthy of the name 'Christian Society'. Such attitudes are prevalent in the organisation of basic and macro economic activities that necessarily impede the spirit and piety of Christianity.

The core of Eliot's criticism against social practice in the West is that it is hinged on what he describes as the 'sanctity' of liberalism and democracy. He does not conceive of the two terms as similar he seems fairly well disposed to the idea of democracy especially in the context of political governance, but is critical of the idea of liberalism especially in terms of its abstract individualism, so-called. Eliot's problem is not with the dangers of social and political tyrannies and the violence of the human will which liberalism confronts, but with the unrestrained tendencies inherent in its practice, and which become largely manifest in religious life:

By destroying traditional habits of the people, by dissolving their natural collective consciousness into individual constituents, by licensing the opinions of the most foolish, by substituting instruction for education, by encouraging cleverness rather than wisdom, the upstart rather than the qualified, by fostering a notion of *getting on* to which the alternative is a hopeless apathy, liberalism can prepare the way for that which is its own negation: the artificial, mechanized or brutalized control which is a desperate remedy for its chaos. (49).

Some of the issues raised are problems associated with the practice of liberalism and are not necessarily denied by even staunch liberals. Of course, Eliot's own critique comes with a tinge of religious sentimentalism and a partly unwholesome estimate of liberalism's approach to the question and strategies of

human development. Thus, he does not quarrel with the gains of political liberalism, which adored monument is democracy. If Eliot is not anti-democratic, then he cannot be anti-liberal because democracy stems directly from liberalism. This again indicates that the core of Eliot's argument is not against liberalism, but against certain elements and dispositions of liberal practice and its critical individualistic extensions. Importantly for Eliot, liberalism 'is a necessary negative element' (50), which should not take the place of the positive element in society. That positive element is situated in religion, and in Eliot's schema, it is the idea and practice of a Christian society in which liberalism serves the crucial purpose of checks and corrections, and not the primary purpose of guide and direction. Liberalism is, therefore, not to be 'rejected or extirpated, as an evil for which there is a simple alternative' (50). In the context on his criticism of liberalism, Eliot places conservation in the same bracket as the former. This indicates that the issue is not about Eliot's leaning towards liberal or conservative practice, but about how such practice fits into or is framed within the superstructure of religion as society's guiding principle. Yet, Eliot has his doubts about liberalism's acceptance of such framing that would reduce it (i.e. liberalism) to a place of secondary importance after religion.

His thesis of a Christian society stresses the essence of religious faith as primarily a communitarian value and, therefore, stands directly opposed to liberalism's attitude to religion as primarily a private affair. He is concerned with the prevalence of order in society, which is to be found in religion: 'the only possibility of control and balance is a religious control and balance... the only hopeful course for a society which would thrive and continue its creative activity in the arts of civilization, is to become Christian' (55). He differentiates between a Christian community and a community of Christians, the former having to do with a society where the Christian

faith has become 'ingrained' and constitutes 'a largely unconscious behaviour' (58) of the citizens, and the latter relating to a small number of people (in a community) who live their lives in strict adherence to Christian principles. A community of Christians would largely illustrate liberalism's principle of toleration and mutual co-existence. Christians within such a community do not necessarily exert any significant measure of control and balance as to achieve social order based on Christian principles within the community. But a Christian community influences and compels the individual to organise his life according to popular practice, which is essentially Christian. Thus, control and balance are the hallmarks of such a society.

Without saying it, Eliot's arrangement still goes back to underscoring the essence of liberalism even in his desired Christian society, and importantly, he seeks liberalism's help and becomes susceptible to the dangers of liberal practice in his desire to achieve as well as check 'control' and 'balance'. In terms of consequences of practice, the liberal state and the Christian society share common characteristics, albeit at different stages of development:

A state of affairs in which we shall have regimentation and conformity, without respect for the needs of the individual soul: the Puritanism of a hygienic morality in the interest of efficiency: uniformity of opinion through propaganda, and art only encourage when it flatters the official doctrines of the time (54 -55).

Essentially, therefore, Eliot envisages a liberal Christian society. He draws up an opposite, a pagan society which speaks largely to the brand of humanism that is empty of religion. As he explains in 'Second Thoughts on Humanism', his quarrel was not with humanism but with such brand which seeks to elevate a negative element to the position of the positive. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, his criticism of liberalism speaks to a Christian humanism which should be the superstructure of

socio-political and economic practice in society. But such humanism must not equate totalitarianism, hence a return to the ethos of liberal practice.

In his polemics on humanism and liberalism, it seems that Eliot has a consistent strategy of vehemently attacking an entire subject or idea just because he does not subscribe to a part of the whole, even though his own ideas support or are founded on or supported by other critical aspects of that whole. A weak aspect of Eliot's social criticism is his poor appreciation of the non-purity of commitment to ideology, and the critical interdependence of all ideologies. These two elements constitute a crisis of interpretation that obstructs a holistic understanding of the nature of theory as critical approximations of signifiers and the ways they interact in the human mind. Importantly, the ethos of a Christian society and those of liberal practice are not in mutual conflict. A Christian society is certainly more restrictive than a liberal society, yet we may not say that the latter is the antithesis of the former. Even within Eliot's schema, his criticism of liberalism and of a Christian society that is totalitarian merely underscores the essence of liberal humanism framed around the values of Christian principles. Yet we may not achieve a fuller picture of the ultimate ends of ideological practices because, as Eliot himself admits in respect of liberalism (51), all ideologies carry within them such elements that precipitate a cycle of denials, subversions and renewals, the chief result being the impermanence of the nature of the idea.

It is important to state that Eliot's idea of and desire for a Christian society does not have a universal design. In other words, he thinks of such society only in respect of the experience of Britain, America and other western nations that have had a tradition or history of widespread Christian profession and, probably, practice. This is to the extent that first, he does not seek to impose his idea of Christianity on non-

Christian societies and second, he actually approves of other religious faiths like Islam and Hinduism. In fact, he claims: 'I am asking no more of the British Christian, than is characteristics of the ordinary Moslem or Hindu', and thereby implies that he admits of the existence of Moslem societies and Hindu societies. Such religious societies depict 'a respect for the religious life, for the life of prayer and contemplation, and for those who attempt to practice it' (79 -80). These virtues characterise life in a religious society and Eliot places them as the definitive positive elements in society. At their opposite is the culture of excessive materialism precipitated and supported by the unbridled practice of liberal ethics, and leading up to the MOB-ilisation of society:

The more highly industrialized the country, the more easily a materialistic philosophy will flourish in it, and the more deadly that philosophy will be. Britain has been highly industrialized longer than any other country. And the tendency of unlimited industrialism is to create bodies of men and women- of all classes-detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob. And a mob will be no less a mob if it is well fed, well clothed, well housed, and well disciplined. (53).

Two issues seem to concern Eliot in the above passage: commitment to (classical) tradition and to the Christian faith. These two elements nurture the individuals spiritually in the context of shared communal practices. But they tend to be impeded by 'unlimited industrialism which by-product is the de-essentialisation and massification of culture, unhealthy populism and vulgarity and the MOB-ilisation of people who otherwise would have been trained in the traditions of classicism and Christianity. The reference to (classical) tradition indicates that Eliot's Christian society is not averse to the foundations of liberal thinking in the West, which is classicism. Thus, in spite of his criticism, and of his crave for an idyllic Christian

society, he is at the same time drawn to the ethos of a liberal temper and learning, which natural sequence is or should be liberal practice.

Significantly, 'choruses from "The Rock"' is an elaborate poetic illustration of the social vision espoused by Eliot in the essay just discussed. Three major issues define the poet's concern and the movement of thoughts in the long poem: man's restless runs and 'endless cycle', the search for balance, and the essence of that balance. The drama of human existence around which the poet pontificates upon his idea of social progress is structured on the various individualistic, communal and mythopoetic presentation and interventions that characterise the 'choruses'.

The poem opens by comparing man's life and activism to 'The Eagle (soaring in the summit of Heaven', and to a hunter who 'pursue[s] his circuit' with his dogs. The tenor of the comparison is the restlessness and endlessness that characterise the lives of the eagle and the hunter- at their worst. At man's best, it is a life of upheavals and a similitude of certainty and progress: 'perpetual revolution' and 'perpetual recurrence of determined seasons'. Spring and autumn come and go like men are born and grow to die. And between man's birth and death is

The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment (161).

The result of mental and physical activities is the amassing of knowledge, which is the definitive element of human greatness as well as the critical indicator of his spiritual poverty. Man possesses great 'knowledge of motion' (i.e. various activities), of 'speech (i.e. the ability for great communication and interaction) and 'of words' (i.e. the making of meaning and logical effects in various contexts of individual and social existence). With his knowledge, he soars in 'the summit of

Heaven' like the eagle. His knowledge encapsulates such large volumes of essential information that have been translated into elevated standards of material existence.

But it is a lopsided or problematic acquisition. Man has not acquired knowledge of stillness and of silence. Thus he wobbles in the 'ignorance of the Word' (not words'). 'The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries' have been characterised by human and social materiality and motion without the balance of the contrastive ends, the 'stillness' and 'silence' that achieve the knowledge of and oneness with God: 'be *still* and *know* that I am God.' The result is that man's knowledge, defined by his materiality, leads him 'farther from GOD' and nearer to his ignorance and eternal extermination. Through 'unlimited industrialism', man has achieved enhanced standards of living, but has lost 'the wisdom' and 'the Life' of 'GOD'. Thus does Eliot set the tone in the first stanza of the first movement of 'choruses' for the elaborate dramatic-poetic discourse that takes place in the poem that is probably the most illustrative of his positively-expressed social vision of society.

The second stanza introduces the specific locale around which the entire poem is situated. The poet-persona cuts the image of a sojourner by his continuous movement from one place to the other: 'I journeyed to London', 'I journeyed to the suburbs', etc. He shares the identity of the Christian as a pilgrim, but here we have an intellectual or critic-pilgrim, one whose purpose is to research into and discover people's attitude to the question of religious faith. As a pilgrim, his desire would be to discover fellow human beings of shared values. But his conclusions are far-flung from the base of his presumptuous calculations. For the poet, religious faith is the primary, positive element that should shape and define the spirit and activities of human beings in society. But what he encounters is disappointment. In London, time is allotted to every segment of life and human activity. London is 'the time kept city'. Even the

London River does not just flow as a natural course; it flows in response to development in the capital markets of the major cities of the world. In other words, London is an unnatural city, what Eliot describes in 'The Waste Land' as 'Unreal city'. Human beings have re-created the city. Industrialism and the commercial issue of bonds and shares dictate the character of daily experience in the city.

To his consternation, the poet is confronted by a society that prefers to and is working towards having more 'chop-houses' and fewer churches. Categorically, the church is presented as a Sunday affair: 'Men do not need the church/in the place where they work...' it would be apparent from previous and subsequent discourses that Eliot's concern here is not the church as a physical structure, but as symbol of that positive value that should guide and control society. The issue here, for him, probably indicates the trouble that liberalism has supposedly created; that is, that free rein of thought that has produced such humanistic activism not centred around religious faith as its governing principle. Thus, in light of Eliot's critical postulations, we would not talk of London as a Christian society.

The problem of the erosion of faith is not restricted to the city and the people therein. The poet journeys to the suburbs and encounters cold sentiments about faith. Six days are for work, and the seventh day which used to be for church is now for picnics, or for staying back at home and reading the papers if the weather is unfriendly and does not encourage going out. The purpose of the church as a structure for religious worship has been redefined: people go to church 'only for important weddings'.

After the first two stanzas of the first movement in which we are introduced in general and specific terms to the governing thematic concern of the entire poem, the chorus leader comes in to introduce the Rock, supposedly the Voice of God or the

Representative of God. Southam (1981:151) quotes Psalm 136:26 and Mathew 16:18 to illustrate that the Rock signifies 'God in his aspect of supporting strength for weak mankind': 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation'; 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church'. The latter verse seems more appropriate to the introduction given by the chorus leader. The Rock is described as 'The Watcher. The Stranger... the Witness. The Critic... the God-shaken. Apparently, he shares some of the attributes of God, but may not be God because he is subject to God. What is more important, however, is not the full personal identity of the Rock, but what he stands for: the mind of God, which very importantly too, is the mind of the poet. After all, it is the poet's own interpretation of the mind of God that he presents to us as the words of the Rock in the poem.

The Rock presents man's misfortune in three categories of experience: full, demanding and stressful employment ('ceaseless labour'), the more stressful state of unemployment ('ceaseless idleness') and the unpleasant conditions of under-employment ('irregular labour'). The irony is that there is enough work for every man in God's 'winepress'. But that is a path not chosen by the vast majority of men. The Rock itself admits:

I know
That it is hard to be really useful, resigning
The thing that men count for happiness, seeking
The good deeds that lead to obscurity, accepting
With equal face those that bring ignominy,
The applause of all or the love of none. (162).

Men would rather invest their resources where they are certain of reaping good material returns and earthly fame. But the Rock advises on 'proper sowing', that is a form of investment that cares not much about material dividends but about the value of the church as primary constituent of a healthy and secure social existence.

That value is underscored by the constant cycle of human experience:

The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.

...
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil. (163).

Evil persists in the world, but the church is the earthly symbol of God. The turning globe is thus a reflection of the struggles, interchanges and intersections of the church and the world, and these invariably lay emphasis on the impermanence of the nature of the struggle between Good and Evil. For the poet, the struggle is captured in the common neglect of places of worship and in the spiritual desertification of the neighbourhood and the city, both being indicators of the prevalence of Evil. 'The good man is the builder, if he builds what is good; but what is good is represented by the church and since no one seems interested in building the church, the indication is that there are no good people anymore. Yet the poet negates himself by placing rationality and enlightenment of the opposite end of Good. If the human beings whom he admonishes to goodness lack 'rational and enlightened mind(s)', how will they 'make perfect (their) will'? Thus, 'the perpetual struggle of Good and Evil' may sometimes transcend the manifestations of disguise and become real interfaces of shared experience.

'The lights fade' and the Rock presents scenes of men in labour. The first encapsulates the chants of dreamers. These are employed people whose dreams seem pitched far away from the realities they pursue. They seek to recreate society from old, rotten elements into a newness of being: 'new brick', 'new mortar', 'new stone', 'new timbers', and 'new speech'. It is a Christian society that the workmen envisage: 'A church for all'; but it is also a society in which everyone is gainfully employed. Certainly, this is not the preoccupation of idle people. The unemployed sing the songs

of despair. Their faces are 'lowered' and they 'shiver' in dark cold rooms. Their lives are a burden to society, and there are no obituaries of their death in the newspaper.

As would be deduced from the second movement, Eliot seemed to say that the idle people are the men and women of his own generation who have abandoned the values of Christianity, 'the foundation/Of apostles and prophets, (of) Christ Jesus himself the chief cornerstone', and 'now sit helpless in a ruined house'. The 'workmen' are the truly happy people because they have cultivated lives of faith, and having built themselves on the foundation of Christ, have achieved meaning and strength for their existence. This presentation reiterates Eliot's critical postulation of religion as the primary, positive constituent of human and social existence, and as the assured foundation for an ordered and moral society. The 'unemployed' are thus a representation of man's state of directionlessness and despair in the absence of faith in God, in spite of the height of material and industrial accomplishment that might have been attained.

For once, Eliot's poetry seems to give a strong support to some of his critical assertions. But to what extent does he sustain this? Of course, within the first movement itself, we find elements of the poetic narrative that seem to subvert the dichotomy he seeks to create. For example, we do not find much of a struggle between Good and Evil as we do the manifestation of an interface between two supposedly distinct forces of existence. Also, it is the 'unemployed', the poet's representation of the faithless, that come off as humble and loving, not the 'workmen', the poet's representation of a Christian society whose principles of living are summed up in the phrases: 'A church for all' (with such possible interpretation as 'God for all') and 'Each man to his work' (as 'Each man for himself'). The 'unemployed' feel humbled by their hard experience of life. They understand the

loneliness of human existence, the coldness of poverty, and the low esteem of a life without work. But they also understand, whether willingly or by some compulsion, the joy or accepted feelings of shared lives. Thus, again, there are intersections of experience between lives of faith and the poet's own description of the faithless.

Having assigned to the workmen the place of faith with productive work, the poet stresses the need for constant building in the second movement. The condition of the faithless and the unemployed should be avoided. They are unemployed because they are not engaged in service to God, thus the foundation of their lives is not founded upon 'the chief cornerstone'. The result is that they are 'born to idleness, to frittered lives and/squalid deaths, embittered scorn in honeyless lives.' Significantly, theirs are lives that seem lacking in terms of happiness because of some spiritual vacuum: their building is 'not fitly framed together... for a habitation of GOD in the spirit'. Eliot criticises humanism that lacks religious faith: the unemployed are concerned with questions regarding the 'right relations of men, but not to relations of men to GOD'. Yet, he justifies a life of faith, so-called, which may be lacking in critical aspects of humanistic concern. Once faith is assured, it does not matter if industrialism promotes capitalism to its unwholesome ends, colonialism included:

When your fathers fixed the place of GOD,
And settled all the inconvenient saints,
Apostles, martyrs, in a kind of Whipsnade,
Then they could get about imperial expansion
Accompanied by industrial development.
Exporting iron, coal and cotton goods
And intellectual enlightenment
And everything, including capital
And several versions of the Word of GOD:
The British race assured of a mission
Performed it, but left much at home unsure.

Racist sentiments and colonialism in Eliot's presentation is, of course, a major contradiction of the life of faith and love of neighbour that he preaches. But it does not seem to matter much to the poet what his superior race does after so-called a life of faith is assured at home. Colonising and civilising 'pagan' nations must become 'a mission' of 'the British race'.

For the poet, the only condition to be satisfied at home is for his adopted country, Britain, to (re)dedicate itself to the church, whose values and practices are the legacy bequeathed to the nation by their forebears. That (re)dedication must be a regular practice because the church is always engaged with the struggle between Good and Evil; it is 'forever decaying within and attacked from without', thus it demands constant (re) building. The church stands to suffer at all times. People neglect the worship of God at times of prosperity; prosperity breeds self-sufficiency and spiritual lethargy. And at times of adversity, people despair and decry the worship of God. The attitude on both sides indicates that the church is always in a state of crises. For it to be strong, therefore, it 'must be forever building'.

The church, as earlier noted, represents the ethos of the Christian life. Importantly for Eliot, it also emasculates the idea of community and communitarian values, from which background he attacks and negates the idea of abstract individualism. In the penultimate stanza of the second movement, he presents a contrastive illustration of these two notions. The community is indicated by a life of togetherness by several individuals who live their lives in relation to one another and 'in praise of GOD'. Eliot recognises the individuality of the human person, but that individuality is nurtured in a community of faith, that is, 'not a society of saints, but of ordinary men, of men whose Christianity is communal before being individual (1982:79; (1939). Having been thus nurtured by shared communal faith, the

individual does not live an abstracted and separated life. What Eliot disparaged about this brand of individualism is the indifference of man to fellow man: a man who does not know or care 'who his neighbour is? Unless his neighbour makes too much disturbance'; a family, so-called, where each member lives a life very separated from everyone else and where sharing is absent. Each person lives on 'ribbon roads'; their lives and the context of their activities are such narrowed strips that cannot freely accommodate other people. People are locked up in the world of self. But this is a style of living that should be 'cast down'. There is 'much to build, much to restore' around the communitarian values of a Christian society.

The third movement opens with 'the Word of the LORD' received by the prophet and given out by the poet. The 'divine message' does not draw directly upon any known scripture, but has the solemn, prophetic cadence of the Old Testament. The poet illustrates how what he assumes to be the secondary, corrective elements of social development have displaced the positive, rudimentary milieu of religious faith and its social appurtenances. He also captures how that displacement has brought about such paradoxes that effectively drain man's efforts at development and leave him with ashen results. Thus, men's great designs only produce 'miserable cities'; and great enlightenment only brings about a 'wretched generation'. Greatness has produced ruins because the essential primary element is missing: work without faith is dead, as the Bible put it. But also, man has been unable to cope with the challenging intricacies of his own greatness: 'Betrayed in the mazes of (his) ingenuities / Sold by the proceeds of (his) proper inventions' (169). He is himself confused by his own works. The poet reiterates the critical limitations of self-help, which human theories of development not centred around the worship and Word of God would always amount to.

How has man abandoned God for his own ingenuity, or what are the contrastive features of the positive and the negative constituents of human and social experience? Man's natural endowments have been directed away from a natural response to divine order. He raises neither his hands to God in worship, nor his speech in prayers. Rather, his hands are perpetually engaged in material designs and his speech in 'endless palaver'. Social commissions have become a replacement for God's laws. Man has become the representation of deceit and self-contradictions. Thus, the lips 'express friendly sentiments' at the same time as the hearts are filled with 'reciprocal distrust'. The modern man is famous for classical indecision, 'futile speculation and unconsidered action', even though he is endowed with the 'power of choice'.

In this first stanza of the third movement, Eliot seems to take prominent features of liberal humanist practice and turn them on their heads from the rhetorical angle of pitching them against Christian values. The stanza reads like a critique of human enlightenment, technological designs, modern judicial systems, the freedom of speech, the complexity of the mind as the index of true freedom and rationality, social education, etc. Men are keen on writing and publishing books, and expanding the frontiers of human knowledge, 'but not the Word of GOD'. They are interested in building mansions and skyscrapers, 'but not the House of GOD'. And even when they offer God a place of abode, it is 'a house of plaster, with corrugated roofing'; it is a house filled not with Bibles but with 'a litter of Sunday newspaper'. There seems to be a quarrel between God and man, between divine knowledge and human knowledge, between Christianity and liberal humanism. But this is largely the poet's own creation. The supposed features of contradiction in the presentation do not throw themselves up for such an examination. Rather, they are not uncommon facilities of

social progress established through such historical processes that have incorporated a large corpus of the liberal humanist characters of religious faith. The image and sentiments that flow out at the end of the opening stanza are thus not those of 'miserable cities' and a 'wretched generation' as the poet seems to convey, but those of the synthesis of experience and social progress.

The first and second male voices, of course, lend credence to the effort of the poet-persona to portray modern man as 'Forgetful' of God's Word and 'Forgotten' by God because of his own godless condition. Beyond the physical, material monuments of technology, man is only a compound of progress and problems, and empty of any eternal value. There is no certainty of security to his existence, not even in his own immediate, material world. First is the problem of man's evil attribute and his consequent menace to fellow man: 'A thousand policemen directing the traffic / Cannot tell you why you come or where you go' (179).

Man's primary problem of insecurity is in man's heart: 'the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?' (*Jeremiah 17:9*). Also, peace and security is in God: 'I have loved the beauty of Thy House, the peace of Thy sanctuary'. But since man has become godless, again, he cannot access those positive conditions.

Most family values revolve around some form of religious faith. Therefore, godless people do not have homes because they lack the foundation of such 'divine' institutions. Though there are 'shelters and institutions' in society, man remains an exposed being, because his security is primarily a spiritual or metaphysical matter. Thus, in spite of 'the grandeur of (his) mind and the glory of (his) action'- the arts, inventions, 'daring enterprises', astrology, books philosophies of rational morality', career, leisure, and the unending plotting of happiness'- he will someday wake up and

abandon his materiality for the reality of the condition of his soul before the eternal inquisitor:

O my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger,
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions

...

Though you forget the way to the Temple
There is one who remembers the way to your door:
Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
You shall not deny the Stranger.

Apparently, the poet's concern is about the balance of human considerations of work and faith, of earthly pursuits and divine devotion, of the human body and its soul, of life and after life. The lack of balance would always precipitate crisis. The story of Nehemiah the prophet in the fourth movement reiterates the importance of balance, which should be the guiding principle in how 'men must build': 'the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other'. The fifth movement bolsters the presentation in the third and fourth. Man is endangered by his own heart and his own species. He is incapable of 'excellent intentions' because his heart is 'impure'. His heart is also proud because he will not submit himself to the authority of God's Word. And because he is proud and impure, his home as well as city are proud and impure. He cuts the image of 'snakes and dogs', of an enemy in the camp. Therefore, there is the overwhelming feeling of the attitude of prayer in the movement. The poet seeks deliverance not only from his neighbour, but also from himself because he is like every other man whom he describes. But it is not so much his contemplative mood and prayer that strike a cord in the reader as it is his apt portrayal of the duality of human nature conveyed by the Bible characters drawn upon in the movement. Though Christian, this portrayal is also an excellent engagement of the liberal humanist's attitude to the question of human nature which comes in binary forms that are not

necessarily mutually exclusive or opposites.

The story of Nehemiah struggling to survive in spite of being 'encompassed with snakes and dogs' is described as 'tales of Christian persecution in the sixth movement. The poet suggests that only those who have a shared experience of Nehemiah's faith can understand the challenges of religious piety. He uses analogous explanations to drive home the point: those who live near a bank would often appreciate the security of their money; those who live near a police station would often appreciate their security from hooligans and robbers. In the same way, those whose lives are close to the church would appreciate the story of Nehemiah as an apologue of faith. Without knowing it, probably, the poet by his analogies seems to negate all that he has tried to establish in the previous movements: 'we build in vain unless the Lord builds with us! His analogies indicate that there is security in nearness to a bank or a police station. Invariably, he iterates the strength of the structures of a liberal humanist society which he seems to want to run down. He reinforces this deconstructive slant by asking:

Do you think that the faith has conquered the World?
And that lions no longer need keepers?
Do you need to be told that whatever has been, can still be?

Certainly, there is no running away from the structured and legacies of a liberal humanist order, which is the predominant direction of man's historical and contemporary development. Otherwise, there would be an inevitable return to the age of primitiveness and barbarity. Yet,

Do you need to be told that even such modest attainments
As you can boast in the way of polite society
Will hardly survive the faith to which they owe their significance?

Eliot again comes out here with what he seems to truly believe and wishes to say - the complementarity of faith and humanism. Of course, for him, humanism owes its significance to faith and though each seems to have its unique place in the way society is structured, they do actually co-exist in the essential context in which he analyses and [re]envision human progress.

Yet again, faith and humanism seem to often go in different directions. The one is tender where the other is hard, and vice-versa. While faith preaches against a life of evil and sin and engages adherents on the issue of 'Life and Death', humanism evolves escape routes - 'From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good'.

The poet thinks of humanism without faith as pretence to truth. For any society that lacks the balance he advocates, there would always be 'tales of Christian persecution' - the perpetual crucifixion of Christ, and the shedding of the blood of martyrs and saints. He 'indicts' his own vision for 'idealism' because he admits that there shall always be Christian persecution. The implication is that in spite of the degrees of co-existence that might be achieved between faith and humanism, modern society continuously moves in the direction of humanistic concerns and pursuits, thus consistently building 'the steps' upon which the 'blood of Martyrs is to flow'. Significantly, the church has always suffered persecution. Persecution has strengthened the church and facilitated its spread. Its fate is not about to change, otherwise it moves towards its own extinction. Invariably, therefore, for the church to stay continuously challenged and remain strong, there must be a thriving of what, for Eliot, is its negative coefficient, which, in this case, is liberal humanism.

In the seventh movement, the poet engages the question of man's return to primitiveness and bestiality. The movement opens with the echo of the very first verse

of the Bible: 'in the beginning GOD created the world'. Preceding God's work was 'Waste and void', 'darkness upon the face of the deep'. After creation, man parted ways with God through his disobedience. He became a blind and 'vain thing'. His life became empty of God's intended essence. To fill in the gap created by his fall and depravity, he 'created' his own gods; he worshipped snakes, trees and devils. He devised religious practices which offered him a similitude of light and knowledge. But the irony of depraved man's ingenuity was that his 'light was ever surrounded and shot with darkness'. In spite of the unending circles of religious rites, he soon reached 'a dead end stirred with a flicker of life'. He had made almost a full return to the period before creation, a period exclusively defined by Waste and void'. Man slid into insignificance and darkness because his life lost the essence of God the creator.

The poet talks of God's redemptive grace that sought to restore depraved man to a state of peace with God and to the path of meaningful progress. The coming of Christ stands out as the epoch of restoration and salvation in human history. It is described as 'a moment in time and of time'. It is the critical moment of history because its relevance stretches back to man's origin, fall and depravity, and forward to the end of time and to eternity. It holds such meaning that gives life even to the concept of time itself. Without it, human history would have remained a continuum of 'Waste and void' and time does not exist in void. At a superficial level, this is reflected in the Christian calendar organized around the notions of Before Christ (B.C.) and *anno Domini* (A.D.).

In spite of that defining and definitive moment of history, the poet himself casts doubt on the impact of Christ's work. Though Christ, through his 'Passion and Sacrifice', earned salvation for an undeserving mankind, there is no certainty of man's movement 'from light to light, in the light of the Word'. The poet begins the sentence

with the use of the word 'seemed' and shortly after, indicates that in spite of the 'Passion and Sacrifice', man has remained 'bestial', 'carnal', 'self-seeking', and 'selfish and purblind as ever before'. Regrettably, man has not left his old ways. He is

... always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming
[his] march on the way that lit by the light;
Often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet
following no other way.

The point of significance for the poet is that from the period of Christ's advent to the close of the pre-modern age, man has remained as depraved and rebellious as ever. But importantly, he always returns to the path of faith, thus retaining a flicker of hope for his ultimate salvation. For the liberal humanist, Eliot's presentation here offers acceptable seeming contradictions of experience: man as a natural being has always been the same through the ages and in all climes; human nature hardly changes; though Christ was a revolutionary, human progress has always been incremental and would always remain so; religion offers psychological salvation and is often a mode of escapism. These assertions would account for why the poet himself, a chief proponent of faith, does not seem to pontificate categorically on the impact of Christ's sacrifice. His concern, it seems, is not so much the question of faith as a life-changing experience, but the issue of communal dedication to the structures of religious bonds and organisations. Yet the latter, in the summation of his postulations in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, cannot be unrelated to the former, though it cannot be asserted that one equates the other.

The poet mourns that something unpleasant and unprecedented has happened: 'Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say, but for no god'. But the contradiction which he sets up here is immediately resolved because he wastes no time in admitting that the new gods worshipped by modern man are Reason, Money

and Power. Importantly, therefore, man has only 'progressed' from the worship of 'snakes and trees' (animism) to a life of enlightenment, technology and modernity. For the poet, this implies advancing 'progressively backwards'. He again compares the degeneration to the pre-creation state of 'Waste and void'. The Church, which is his symbol of faith, has not been silenced, but 'is no longer regarded, not even opposed'. He wonders if it is the church that has failed mankind, or vice versa.

Significantly, the poet seems to miss out the dialectics of the church's own existence. Can 'Reason, Money and Power' be separated from the life of the church, or even a life of faith? Though the Enlightenment is in major proportions a response to Christian dogma and the overbearing authority of the church, the church cannot neatly separate itself from the background to and processes that gave birth to the age of Reason. Importantly also, the church is a major benefactor as well as beneficiary of modernity. Probably, the church even in Eliotic terms, is no longer opposed largely because there has been a critical injection of its values into modern society, or because the values and practices of society have become integrated to such a degree that peaceful co-existence is now easily achieved, or because the church has acquiesced with some or most of the ways of modern society such that it ceases to be the object of persecution. There could be other possibilities, but most critical is the fact that the elements of Reason, Money and Power on the one hand, and the structure of the church on the other do not exist in mutually exclusive contexts. There are high levels of interactions and integration such that even make most viable the possibility of the modern church's dialectics being defined largely by the Reason, Money and Power as guiding principles of faith.

In the eight movement, the poet returns to God with complaint of a lost crusade. At one time, Christian Europe had set out in the mission of evangelising the

East and parts of Africa. But that crusade was soon turned on its head. The crusade collapsed because of the evil of the crusaders- their 'avarice, lechery, treachery, envy, sloth, gluttony, jealousy, pride'- and the crusaders themselves now stand in need of a crusade: 'The heathen are come into thine inheritance, / And thy temple have they defiled'.

Europe the crusader has become 'rapacious and lustful', 'sunken in moral corruption', 'well broken, diseased and beggared', 'cracked by the sun of the East'. Great faith defined the lives of the crusaders before they ventured out of the continent. But now that the crusades have been 'unmade', Europe would take chances no more, not even with the question of what had become their shared traditional religious faith:

Our age is an age of moderate virtue
And of moderate vice
When men will not lay down the cross
Because they will never assume it.

Yet the poet believes that 'nothing is impossible... To men of faith and conviction'. Praying to God again, he hopes for a revival of faith in the land. But then also, men must 'make perfect (their) will' because such re-awakening of spirit would not come without a personal and communal sense of spiritual responsibility. Essentially, the eight movement raises the question of the relevance of crusades and evangelism in a modern age that has become adequately familiar with issues of various faiths and that is characterised by the elements of freedom and choice.

In the ninth movement, the poet seeks to establish a balance between faith and reason, between spirit and body, and between divine creation and human creativity. He debunks the notion that faith places the demands of a boring, uneventful life on its adherents who are always weighed down by the knowledge of their shortcomings. The life of faith must achieve a balance between 'the way of penitence' and 'the

joyful communion of saints'. The life of faith must have a good understanding of and lively response to the spectrum of creation. It is a life that must produce 'new form, new colour'. Its harmony is described by such phrases as 'the life of music', 'the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of incantation'. When that life is achieved, man places all his gifts and powers at the service of God. But God's service here now implies man's own creativity geared towards general human 'dignity, grace and order./ And intellectual pleasures of the senses'. Significantly, this is humanism. Significantly too, it is a liberal model of humanism because the level of the intellectual with which the poet is concerned points at the human mind as the index of reason and acceptable social conduct.

In this movement, Eliot re-establishes in a poetic context the idea of positive and negative elements of social progress. Faith is primary to the human life and constitutes the foundation upon which his own creativity is founded. The element of human creativity must remain in the realm of the negative not because they are opposed to the positive (they sometimes could be) but because, in the main, they derive from the positive and as well constitute necessary checks on elements of excess within the positive. For Eliot, therefore, faith is positive and primary; humanism is imperative:

For man is joined spirit and body,
And therefore must serve as spirit and body.
Visible and invisible, two world's meets in Man;
Visible and invisible must meet in His Temple;
You must not deny the body.

Faith is crucial, but there is no running away from the actual challenges of achieving social order and human progress, and that is the point and place of liberal humanism in society.

The ideal condition of a perfect marriage of faith and humanism may not be achieved in the current Eliotic dispensation; but the poet contents himself with some degree of half measures:

Be not too curious of Good and Evil;
Seek not to count the future waves of Time;
But be ye satisfied that you have light
Enough to take step and find your foothold.

Half measures they seem only because man must shuttle between light and darkness.

Even nature dictates thus:

In our rhythm of earthly life we fire of light. We are glad
When the day ends, when the play ends; and ecstasy
Is too much pain.

...

We tire of distraction or concentration, we sleep and are
glad to sleep,
Controlled by the rhythm of blood and the day and the
night and the seasons.
And we must extinguish the candle, put out the light and
relight it;
Forever must quench, forever relight the flame.

Light and darkness are presented not as opposites or contraries that must always stand in conflict against each other, but as elements that complement each other, or that accentuate the essence of each other. If 'darkness reminds us of light', then humanism must remind us of faith. Humanism in this context does not approximate darkness; rather, it is used in the sense of the Eliotic Other, faith being Same.

Having recalled the conclusion that faith and humanism must co-exist, the poet devotes the larger part of the tenth stanza to the praise of God whom he described as 'the Invisible Light'. That praise, in the main, is for the triumph of light. But more importantly, it is for the triumph of liberal humanism, which reminds us of faith either by way of denial, subversion, or reaffirmation and reinforcement.

Whatever way, it is the triumph of humanism which becomes 'the little lights for which our bodily vision is made'.

'Choruses from "The Rock"' are largely illustrative of the dialecticism of faith and liberal humanism in Eliot's poetry. They indicate that the two elements are not exclusive of each other. Rather, each captures aspects of the essence of the other. The experience of faith and its litany of dogmas point at the essence of liberal humanist ethos; liberal humanism on the other hand portrays the vast possibilities of the human mind and experience of freedom and social progress all of which ultimately begin to engage the question of man's critical limitations and the essence of faith to fill in the gaps in man as a moral and spiritual being. Basically Eliot would be described as a polemical thinker whose poetry runs in the direction of the ethos of liberal humanism, in spite of his criticism of the same in his critical works.

PART TWO: WOLE SOYINKA

(4.9) HUMANISTIC INFLUENCES

Before embarking upon an illustrative examination of the attributes of liberal humanism in Soyinka's poetry, it is important to discuss various elemental issues that border largely on the theoretical latitude of such factors and perspectives that have informed or defined the author's humanism. This is underscored by the fact that Soyinka's humanism precedes his poetic engagements and manifests largely in his various social and intellectual preoccupations.

The second part of this chapter thus examines Soyinka's humanism from various critical dimensions of experience – the early and latter humanistic influences on his personality, his thoughts and his creative and intellectual practices, a polemical engagement of his critical thoughts and practices regarding liberal humanism; and a discussion of various critical perspectives on his humanism. These dimensions would help situate Soyinka in the broad contexts of liberal humanism as the core of his *received ideology* as well as his (deliberate and) *dominant ideological motif*.

When we talk of humanistic influences, the concern entails the grand total of organized thoughts, values and declarations regarding an individual's relationship with humanists and humanistic ventures and organizations. But the dialectical nature of influence is such that also brings within our interest and focus various subliminal elements, bits of ideas and values, isolated and/or integrated experiences, etc., all of which may not be directly situated in the context of humanism as ideology but which invariably, and very importantly, add up to the ethos of faith in and practice of humanism. This is underscored by the fact that there are many people in the world who do not profess humanism, and many more who do not even understand the term

or its theoretical implications, but conduct their lives largely within the tenets of humanism.

In other words, the congregation of values and practices that constitute humanism are not all primary properties of humanism as an intellectual construction. The core values of humanism exist *a priori* the ideology and this implies that what constitute humanistic influences can very well be situated within or outside the main stream humanist movement. Influence could be directly positive, or indirectly and dialectically drawn from the negative (negative in this sense implying what the object of influence does not subscribe to, even though such still shapes the views and attitude of the object).

In these respects, we shall be discussing various critical elements that add up to humanistic influences in Wole Soyinka. These include Christianity, the Yoruba culture and tradition, classicism and modernism, and liberal democratic politics. Each of these elements and some key personalities that have defined their local practice are epochally connected to the essence and significations of Soyinka's understanding of and attitude to the human person. Importantly, they constitute 'multiple causation and over determination' (Young, 1985: 2) in the explanation of Soyinka's humanism.

(4.10) CHRISTIANITY: A ROAD TO HUMANISM

To many humanists, especially those of the 'secular' persuasion, to think of the term 'Christian humanism' or of some direct, positive relationship between Christianity and the liberal imagination, or 'worse still' between Christianity and secular humanism is to create intellectual anachronisms. For example, the typical view and attitude of the organized humanist movement in the world tilt towards freedom from

religion (see, for example, Herrick, 2003). Of course, that organised movement is essentially secular in philosophy and practice.

The said mental and social disposition is such that has created a gulf between proponents of humanism and those of Christianity, and has given the false impression that the core values of both beliefs and experiences are mutually exclusive. Many scholars with inclination towards Christianity or some other religions thus conceived of humanism as antithetical to religious faith and therefore disparage and discredit the humanist movement (see, for example, Carroll, 1993). Yet, the history and essence of both movements cannot be separated from each other. In this section, we seek to illustrate Christianity as core determination in the making of Soyinka as a liberal humanist.

(4.10.1) The Autobiographical *Problematique*

Soyinka's autobiographical work, *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, sets the tone for the author's own confession to the type and degree of influence that Christianity had on him in his childhood years. Ogunba (1994) describes the period as years of 'unrelieved Christianity', but makes haste to add definitively that 'the overwhelming influence of Soyinka's early life and of the Ake environment in which he grew up is Christianity' (4).

Our tendency in this study is to situate Ogunba's description of 'unrelieved Christianity' in the context of the autobiographical *problematique* of self-indulgence, self-perception, self-reinvention and self-reinterpretation. An overwhelming feeling that a reading of *Ake* leaves in the mind of a perceptive reader is the tendency of the author, an accomplished artist and critic, to go beyond mere illustrations of innocent childhood experiences, into *amplifying* the evolution of a creative and critical temper.

That comes off as one of the critical objectives of Soyinka's autobiography and only a critical (re)interpretation of his perception of and attitude to the emergent dominant religious faith of Ake would strike an important cord in that direction.

Importantly, the language of *Ake* polishes Soyinka's childhood memoirs far beyond the imaginations and articulations of a child between three and a half and twelve years old. That immediately creates a problem of the degree of authenticity for some of the anecdotes. The detailed narrative of numerous specific distant childhood events of over forty years would imply, amongst other probabilities, an exaggeration of memory, that suits current desires and perceptions. The elaborate use of quotations and dialogues places the burden of fictionalization on the narrative. The character of Wole in *Ake* is so consistent with the author's self portrait in other autobiographical works (see especially, *The Man Died*, *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*, and *You Must Set Forth At Dawn*) that memoirs as tools of self reconstruction become so conspicuous in the mind of perceptive readers who must also marvel at the author's immutability. The explanations of these issues have been necessitated by the need to illustrate why Soyinka's childhood in *Ake* was one of 'unrelieved Christianity'.

In the main, the issues raised here do not object to the authenticity of *Ake* as a genuine autobiographical experience, but they certainly raise questions regarding the degree of authenticity of some of the anecdotes, acceptable or exaggerated narrative details, fictionalisation, and most importantly, the objectives that have guided the making of the memoirs. A critical examination of *Ake* must strip the work of some of the author's own conceits and take the reader back to meanings, implications and evidence buried in the womb of the narrative. This implies a re-evaluation of some of the author's own judgment in light of possible contradictions within the text, and a

critical re-appraisal of intentions and motivations beyond his conscious, spoken or illustrated designs.

Soyinka was less than four years old at the point where the narrative in *Ake* commences. The first chapter of the book offers an elaborate description of the religious and cultural contexts of his upbringing. He was born in the parsonage of St. Peter's Church to a father, Essay, who was a primary school headmaster, and a mother, Eniola, who was so devoted to the Christian faith and activities that Soyinka often referred to her as 'Wild Christian'. His parents brought him up in the tradition of a typical Christian family where children participated in sessions of family devotions, attended Sunday school regularly, joined the choir, and conducted their lives, in the main, according to established Christian principles generally encapsulated in the love of God and the love of one's neighbours.

If we take the knowledge of the Christian scriptures which Soyinka displays in *Ake* as actual representation of his childhood experience and not the result of adult learning and recollection, then we must conclude that he was a devoted Sunday school pupil who listened attentively to Bible lessons and tales and, like the child that he was, learnt to associate some of the stories with his immediate experience and environment. Importantly, for example, he makes no distinction between the practice of Christianity and the idea of *egungun* or *oro*. In fact revered Christian personalities, for him, were *egungun* of sorts because they possessed similar metaphysical powers. A good illustration is Bishop Ajayi Crowther for whom he had a fixation that could be described as unusual. He associates with the Bishop by imagination, and thinks of him as a grand human figure with such 'strange transformations' (5) that situated him in the realm of spirits and ghosts in the afterlife.

The tone of Soyinka's narrative on the achievements of Rev. J.J.Ransome-Kuti depicts his pride in being related to the great cleric who 'actually ordered back several ghominids in his life-time' (5). In fact, what strikes a cord in the perceptive reader at some point is not the seeming criticism of Christianity by a three-and-a-half-to-eleven year old child, but the attempt to create a balance between cultures. There is a deliberate effort by Soyinka to always draw parallels between the indigenous and the foreign, between traditional religion and Christianity, between the Yoruba and the Western. It is on this note that we can properly situate his judgment of the encounter between J.J Ransome-Kuti and the *egungun*. The foreign, sometimes or often, constitutes the basis of acceptability, a colonial and post-colonial mentality which Soyinka shares with many of his contemporaries, in spite of his creative struggles to shrug off that toga in *Ake*.

The influences on his young mind are predominantly Christian. His parents, his educationist uncle, Ransome Kuti, Pa Delumo, etc., all joined to impress him and create one strong ambition in him – to become not a lawyer which his mother calls him, but a pastor (54). Importantly, the 'models' mentioned above and the ultimate desire which they created in Soyinka structured the nature of the 'rebellion' we find in the subject in *Ake*. The language and tone of the narrative around Christianity and the church are positively engaging and indicate the temperament of someone who criticises from inside. Apparently, Soyinka also enjoyed participation in several Christian festivities (139) and even took with him his zeal of a choir-boy around the town (150).

Though there is no gainsaying the fact that Soyinka gradually drifted away from the church and its activities, it should be averred that the core of his lived experience as a boy and later as an adult were predominantly defined by Christian

teachings and values which he had learnt, imbibed and kept with himself. The teachings manifest largely in forms of allusions and illustrations in his work; the values are reflected in such recurrent themes that become shared characteristics of the Bible and Soyinka's works. The seeming 'gradual partings of ways' is with the church as an institution, and not significantly, with Christianity and the essence of its teachings and values. In fact, Christianity is the road that leads Soyinka to liberal humanism. The much that can be conceded to him in *Ake* as fact and not fiction would be that he practiced the religion in a self-reflective way. The curiosity of a child, the innocent questioning, the mental and physical adventures, etc., all add up to a dialecticism that divests Christianity of its fundamentalism and leaves the subject with such liberal temper that defines the human person as the essence of life and the universe. The result is the overwhelming evidence of enormous influence and dialectical appreciation of Christianity in Soyinka's creative writing.

(4.10.2) Allusions and Metaphors as Influence

Ogunba (1994:5) observes: 'Although Soyinka has been in revolt against Christianity almost from the very beginning of his artistic career, nevertheless Christian situations and Christian images still appear to dominate a sizable part of his subconscious'. Hence, according to Ojaide (1994:10), Soyinka 'does not satirise Christianity. His absorptive personality blends the Christian tradition into his being'. These statements actually point to the unconscious processes and psychoanalysis: Soyinka's childhood wish to become a pastor plays itself out elaborately in his works.

Following the psychoanalytic theory of Freud (1905) (see also Smith, 1980; Wright, 1984), the constraints of an emergent critical contexts of education and 'civilisation' suppressed Soyinka's childhood desires to the extent that he would not

consciously and overtly associate with Christianity. Yet his adult self is shaped by the processes of the unconscious which exhibits that primary characteristic of free expression. Free expression, in his case, manifests in the images, allusions and metaphors of Christianity which, in classic psychoanalysis, are symptoms of the author's innermost self. In fact, following the Lacanian interpretation, Soyinka's language becomes largely implicated because suppressed wishes and dreams are put together, shaped and unravelled by such linguistic processes that indicate arbitrariness in the relationship between signifiers and signified, and that create distinctions between metaphoric and metonymic uses of language (Lacan, 1977 (1959); see also, Saussure, 1974 (1915) and Jakobson (1971). Thus, even within 'the censorship of the superego' (see Selden, 1988:222), the author sometimes intends the very opposite of what he states, or criticises not for the purpose of achieving an opposite or a change, but as a means of drawing attention to the object.

To illustrate the main issues in this section, we would draw upon some of Soyinka's works in the three genres of drama, prose fiction and poetry. Most appropriate to start with would be *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964) because the play relates most directly to religious or Christian matters of the time and we could say it was published at a time when Soyinka was still cutting his teeth as a satirist. From the author's background as a trained, well-cultivated, though critical, Christian in *Ake*, Soyinka shows great concern for the many perversions of his contemporaries who are supposed to be championing the values of faith.

He criticises not Christianity as a religion, nor even the Christian experience of miraculous performances in scriptures, but the charlatans who fake such scriptures' encounters for the purpose of extorting money from their followers many of whom are simpletons. Such fellows bear the image of distraught, intimidated and overawed

characters because their activities are founded on falsehood. He criticizes the pure materialism that is fast becoming the hallmark of Christian ministry in his country. The reader must go back to *Ake* to examine the lives of Bishop Ajayi Crowther, Rev. J.J. Ransome-Kuti, Pa Delumo and others who, for Soyinka, are symbols of Christian devotion, courage, sacrifice, integrity and service. From that background, the disposition put on by Soyinka in *The Trials of Brother Jero* would pass him for the guardian spirit of Christian practice in his society.

In *Opera Wonyosi* (in *Six Plays*, 1984), a moral vision founded largely on the values of Christian discipline and moderation and significantly reflective of the temperament of a liberal humanist seems to define the playwright's objective. The play is an invective satire that seeks to cure prurience, inordinate political ambition and excessive materialism. In *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), Soyinka draws upon the example of Christ to illustrate the play's fundamental theme: the essence of vicarious sacrifice for human and social continuity. Though he has not made any such averment in his writing, the core sacrifice upon which Christianity is established becomes for him the primary justification of his creative reconstruction of the metaphysical and social symbolisms of the communal ritual of vicarious sacrifice. After all the great praises of the text for its cultural symbolism, excellent characterisation, poetic grandeur, and as a leading model of postcolonial write-back (see Macebuh, 1976; Williams, 1994, etc), Christianity remains the metatext of *Death and the King's Horseman*. It is the dominant phenomenon of the author's metaphysical unconscious which plays itself out in the text by use of Elesin Oba as elaborate analogy.

In *The Interpreters* (1965), Soyinka transports the narrative beyond the realm of immediate social engagements reflected by attempts at grappling with the

disillusionments of post-Independence, to the question of the possibility of transformation from the mundaneness of the human self to an ethereal form of existence. Within the dialectics of the range of possibilities of experience explored by the author in the work, this transformation is situated at the highest level of social progress and it seems that any interpretation of human experience and social development which does not create enough room for an encounter with divinity and a transition to a celestial state would definitely not attain the height of the 'enigmatic' ideal that constitutes the objects of endless search by Soyinka's interpreters.

The possibilities of experience beyond the immediate material self constitute a critical element of identity and to achieve this dimension of thought within the narrative, Soyinka turns to the Bible from where he excavates Lazarus as his metaphor of transformation:

Lazarus comes to life by the discovery of a force outside himself, and by that discovery feels himself closer to God... Lazarus sees human potential for both evil and good, and after his three days with the dead he sees himself as the living link between the self's humanity and its divinity (Gurnah, 1994:67-68).

Lazarus proffers a mythic dimension to the narrative as an illustration of the relationship between and the intersections of humans and gods. The gods, without human beings, are 'anguished by a continuing sense of incompleteness, needing to recover their long-lost essence of totality' (Soyinka, 1976: 27). But human beings are equally endangered without the gods. Thus, the demonstrated incapability of the interpreters to understand and appreciate their real identities and to experience the transformation of self across the dialectical lines of materiality and divinity becomes the marker of their moral weakness and social failure. Again, it is from Christianity

that Soyinka draws the metaphor by which he establishes the major statement of *The Interpreters*.

In Soyinka's poetry, we again encounter Christianity as a major pillar in the process and substance of the author's creativity. In some poems, this manifests at the level of the critical-unconscious, a good example being 'O Roots!'. But in some others like 'Joseph (to Mrs Potiphar)' under 'Four Archetypes', 'The Dreamer' and 'Easter', the poet comes out bold to (re)establish links with the 'faith of his fathers'.

'O Roots!' parallels the evocation of a psalmist in the Bible in terms of structure and substance. It reads like the anguish of the persecuted and the cry for deliverance. The persistent cry to 'Roots' brings to mind the cry to God that runs through most of the Psalms. Importantly too, the poem encapsulates the four main requests in 'The Lord's Prayer': provision, mercy, protection, and deliverance. The years of prayers at the family altar, of reciting 'The Lords' Prayer' at school and at church, and of close association with adherents of the Christian faith (see *Ake*) have established in Soyinka's mind that attitude of prayer which seems to flow out naturally in his sober moment. The experience of prison - the loneliness, the pervasive consciousness of one's mortality, the intrusive thoughts of the hereafter, etc. - brings upon him such sobriety of spirit that makes him remember and cry out to his Roots.

In prison, the poet thinks of himself as the scion of a respectable Bible character, Joseph, whom he describes as 'the old ancestor' (1972:21). He encourages himself by association with an archetype situated in the Bible. Joseph is the archetype of the defence of truth and the cost of that defence. Though Soyinka would not subscribe to his (i.e. Joseph's) 'saintly vision' and the longsuffering of a martyr, the archetype offers him a timeless resistance to evil, the cost of his struggle notwithstanding. Evil must be confronted by truth. Joseph is also the archetype of the

creative imagination. His ability to read, decipher and give meaning to dreams and hidden thoughts placed him high above his contemporaries. For Soyinka, these virtues of truth and creativity become the foundation of social progress. They constitute the 'dreams of fire (which) resolve in light' (21). Without them, society would know no light. For their impact to be felt, those who subscribe to them must 'Wait upon the old ancestor' (21). Thus, Soyinka returns to his childhood faith and idolizes one of the fathers of that faith.

(4.10.3) Critical Engagements with Christ

We may long await very direct statements of Soyinka's implicit faith in Christ and his redemptive or regenerative mission. But we must query ourselves regarding any such expectation if we must continue to conceive of the language of literary output primarily in terms of the figurative. In "The Dreamer" (*Idanre*, 17), Soyinka explores Christ as an archetype of a 'lone figure'; he is a lone figure because of his messianic dreams. He has messianic dreams because he is a higher being, even 'Higher than tree'; he is the supernatural king, even though his throne and crown seem obscure to the worldly-minded. Even as a child, he was the Lord of lords, hence the three wise men became rebels against the authority of Herod in order to seek him out and worship him. They bring to him presents of myrrh, gold and frankincense; but the life of the messiah is not defined by any better objects or conditions. He preached the 'words' of God and fed multitudes with bread and fish ('flesh') freely and generously. Against the backdrop of their material poverty, his concern for the common people should have been sufficient evidence of the characteristics of a messiah. Their governments have not done anything as good as Christ's record. But Christ's life is nothing more than a dreamer's. In the world of harsh social realities shaped by

degenerate human beings, dreamers always tread a lonely path; messiahs always fail. Thus, from the beginning of his life as indicated in the first stanza, he is confronted with 'thorns' and 'nails'.

The second stanza brings the hope of regeneration. In spite of the persecution he suffers, the 'words' of God and food for the stomach have been distributed freely to all and sundry. The expectation of the faithfuls is the great harvest that is to come within a short period. Seeing the good work of Christ, people would travel from far and near in search of the word and the flesh. They would be 'cleansed of mould' and iniquity, and their lives would become like the 'chronicles of gold'. But that harvest, it seems, does not come. What is witnessed is the cutting down of the messiah in his prime. And rather than experience a transformation in their lives, the masses 'Mourn[s] a fruit in prime'. The messiah, a divinity that dreams of salvation for humankind, becomes a meal for the butchers, descending earthwards like 'bowed... boughs', becoming a tourist object, and offering the bitter music of contradictions – 'throes and thrones'.

Parallels could be drawn between Christ the dreamer as a lone figure and the image of the artist in society. No doubt, dreams are about creativity, and *vice versa*. Creativity is the centre of the life of an artist. Soyinka thus conceives of Christ as an artist; in fact, the master artist because he is 'Higher than tree' and wears the 'cryptic crown'. It follows therefore that all writers and artists are miniatures of Christ as a dreamer and a lone figure. They endure much suffering, seek to redeem society through their creativity, offer their lives as sacrifices for society, and ultimately seem to achieve very little or nothing because man, who always seems to be in great need of salvation, has little or no regard for messiahs and would rather have them for supper than subscribe to the tenets of salvation they offer. Importantly, therefore,

Soyinka conceives of himself as an artist moulded in the image of Christ; in fact, as a copy of the original Christ.

Soyinka does not refer to Christ as a dreamer in a derogatory sense; otherwise, he would have indicted himself and all artists. Rather, he is concerned with man's failure to appropriate the opportunities of redemption. In 'Easter' (*Idanre*, 21), a poem that reflects upon the anniversary of Christ's vicarious death and his resurrection after three days, the poet mourns that 'Decay / Caulks earth's centre'. Man has become so degenerate, remembers Christ's sacrifice every Easter, but travels the opposite direction everyday. Thus, at Easter, 'we pluck / Bleached petals for Christ's the dreamers lair'; 'We hunt / Pale tissues of the palm'; we ride on a 'winged ass' or donkey in commemoration of Christ's entry into Jerusalem 'As children (wave) frond yellow from the palm'.

Yet, Easter is a 'slow day' that does not last. Sadly, it points 'To the future decadence' because man's moral condition does not improve. If men truly believe in the sacrifice of Christ, why do they not give their lives to him in return, the poet seems to ask? Why do they prefer to remember Christ with 'Pale tissues of the palm', and not with their blood as Christ did? 'Do we not truly fear to bleed?' Christ would remain a lone figure because of man's cowardice for which the earth would continue to decay. For the poet, Easter underscores the story of human depravity, the place of sacrifice for social development, and man's perpetual failure to appreciate sacrifice and its essence. The result is what Soyinka has described as 'the cycle of human stupidity'.

For Soyinka, Christ is the archetype of the artist as a dreamer, a creator of systems. He is the ultimate of a lone figure whose 'pedigree', 'training', temperament, sense of mission, vision of society, and the nature of his sacrifice all underline the

poet's understanding of human individuality. He is the superlative representation of the sacrifice of divinity for humanity, a sacrifice which essence does not necessarily improve the human person as a moral agent, but leaves in him that perpetual aspiration for the attainment of a life of Christ which in its own context is symbolic of the good life.

(4.10.4) Between Christianity and Liberal Humanism

How does Christianity link with liberal humanism in Wole Soyinka as man and artist? Importantly, Soyinka's primary training was neither as a liberal humanist nor as a traditionalist. He was trained in a religion that emphasized such themes as human depravity, the uniqueness of the human person, the human as a free moral agent, human individuality and its limits, primary modes of capitalism, messianism, etc. These are themes that run through Soyinka's creative and critical works. Importantly also, these are themes that have lent themselves to the conceptualisation of liberal humanism as theory and practice (see Chapter 1). The point here is not to say that these values or issues are creations of Christianity, or of its progenitor, Judaism; no. We are not at this point interested in the history of the stated values or ideas, but to say that the primary reception, appreciation and practice of much of what constitutes liberal humanism in Soyinka was in the context of Christianity and that we cannot avoid that phenomenon as the overwhelming humanizing influence on his development.

This, of course, implies that Christianity and liberal humanism are not antithetical, in spite of their fundamentalisms. Though Christianity continues to question liberal humanism's arrogation of common sense to itself, and liberal humanism continues to cast aspersion on Christianity's claim to 'the way and the

truth', the development of the human being remains the central preoccupation of both persuasions. Both persuasions also espouse similar values in many cases and have over several decades and centuries continued to exert positive influence over each other.

Importantly, what Soyinka has done as evident from our discussion of his writing is to divest his own Christianity of its fundamentalism. Christian training and formal education allow a significant measure of 'liberal' thought, which we find in the young Soyinka in *Ake*. As in the case of the Enlightenment, the 'limited' room of Christian liberalism becomes the route to Soyinka's secular liberal imagination and practice. Liberal humanism is essentially humanistic and much of what Soyinka has done with it is to create a new centre around which he organises the same core values by which his Christianity is defined.

Basically, he does not deny Christianity. Within the free rein of a liberal imagination, he adopts elements of the Yoruba traditional religion as the organizing principle of his creativity. The extent to which those elements translate into actual beliefs and lived experience is a debatable matter. The definite point in the seeming stages of transition in the man and his works is that Christianity remains the overwhelming influence that must be further explained not in terms of 'the road not taken', but in terms of progression and dialecticism in the context of traditionalism and liberal humanism.

(4.11) SEARCH FOR THE PRINCIPLES OF THE YORUBA AUTOCHTHONOUS CULTURE

Evidence from *Ake: The Years of Childhood* indicates that Soyinka, in spite of the overwhelming presence of the church and its numerous activities in the community,

grew up in an environment that showcased various aspects of autochthonous cultural and religious practices. These came to him in forms of eye-witness experience, bedtime stories, direct encounters, etc. Aspects of the experience included the appreciation of ancestral masquerades, tree daemons, traditional food offering, the *abiku* phenomenon, the game of *ayo*, local food and dress, traditional medicine and psycho-spiritual remedies, hunting, the Yoruba divinities, etc. These bits of experience surrounded much of Soyinka's childhood.

Though some biographical critics may be reluctant to accept for him the description of an enthusiastic traditionalist which he tried to award himself in *Ake*, it remains that in both his consciousness and in his unconscious, traditionalism found simple but subtle modes of creative and critical engagements that would subsequently answer to the demands of changing cultural and socio-political issues and activities in the country. No doubt, the growing positive attitude of the young Soyinka to traditionalism was in a large measure a critical response to the burgeoning Yoruba cultural nationalism of the time. In other words, Soyinka is a product of the cultural essentialisation that significantly defined the imaginary and social landscape of the Yoruba in the first three quarters of the 20th century.

(4.11.1) Yoruba Cultural Nationalism as Background

Several authors have discussed various factors that gave rise to cultural nationalism among the Yoruba of Nigeria in the 19th and 20th centuries. Notably, Ade-Ajayi (1960) and Ayandele (1966) have examined the tensions that characterised the relationship between some of the European missionaries in Nigeria and many of the Western educated Nigerian elite who were members of the Christian missions in the country (see also, Ogundele, 2003). From the mid to late 19th century, the latter

category suffered various forms of (racial) discrimination in what Ade-Ajayi described as the 'competition for office' (199).

Certainly, contentions also arose in the relationship between the 'natives' and the 'foreigners' in other spheres of public life. Colonisation implied that the Europeans had the upper hand in most of the contentions. As an intimidation strategy, many of the Europeans, missionaries inclusive, alluded to the theory of the racial inferiority of blacks. This, of course, was a shocking development that demanded more than a tinge of racial reaction from the 'natives'. Ideas of political and cultural nationalism were promoted by such educated 'natives' like G.W. Johnson and E.W. Blyden. Their ideas become popular to the point that

... there developed generally among the educated Africans a more critical attitude to the unthinking adoption of European ways and ideas, as well as a greater interest in the history of the African peoples and greater sympathy for the indigenous way of life. There was in fact a minor cultural renaissance in Lagos in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Ade-Ajayi, 1960:207).

Significantly, that renaissance went beyond Lagos to various parts of Yorubaland. Abeokuta and Ibadan, for examples, became major spots of cultural activism in the first half of the 20th century. Traditional customs and institutions gradually regained a place of pride in the consciousness of many Yoruba educated elite who had previously dumped their indigenous practices for Christianity and Western traditions.

A growing and expansive intellectual activism directed at (re)discovering, (re)organising and (re)articulating various aspects of the Yoruba culture added fervour to the cultural nationalism of the Yoruba. Toyin Falola (1988) provides elaborate documentation of the types of writing that defined that era of Yoruba history. Very critical to his presentation are Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yoruba* completed in

1897 but first published in 1921, J. Raban's *A Vocabulary of the Eyo or Aku* (1830/1832), Samuel Crowther's *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (1843) and *A Grammar of the Yoruba Language* (1852), J.O George's *Historical Notes on the Yoruba Country and Its Tribes* (1897), Moses Lijadu's collections on Yoruba oral literature and traditional religion written in the Yoruba language, Otonba Payne's *Table of Principal Events in Yoruba History* (1893), James Johnson's *Yoruba Heathenism* (1899), and A.K Ajisafe's *Land and Customs of the Yoruba People* (1924), among several other works which included lecture pamphlets and newspaper articles.

In the area of creative writings, Akinwumi Isola (1988) offers critical insights into some of the titles and techniques that characterised the literary scene at the time. The works he examines were all published in Yoruba, implying that the writers did not suffer the handicap of preaching renaissance in a foreign language. They engaged their people in a language indigenous to them; they drew attention to the written authenticity of the Yoruba language; they quickened the process of the standardization of Yoruba in written communication; they enriched the vocabulary and grammar of the language by means of their creative applications; they enforced the development of the language as one of the foremost elements of renaissance. Yoruba creative writers produced works in the three major genres of literature.

In the field of poetry were such well-regarded names like Moses Lijadu, Sobo Ariobiodu, Afolabi Johnson, and Denrele Obasa, amongst others, all of who published their works between the late 19th century and the 20th century. In the area of folk drama, Adebayo Faleti's *Basorun Gaa* and *Idaamu Paadi Minkailu*, Ogunniran's *Aare-ago Arikuyeri*, etc, have been described as quite popular amongst the common people. Importantly, Isola observed that Faleti was 'a painstaking artist who

reanimates old words and strengthens them with new possibilities of meaning... (his) deliberate poetic experimentations are commendable' (76-77). Such stylistic elements, one would suspect, constituted part of the influence of the Yoruba on Soyinka's writing.

In the genre of prose fiction were the works of such writers as I.B. Thomas and Daniel Fagunwa, amongst several others. Soyinka developed such great fascination for Daniel Fagunwa that he would later translate the latter's novel, *Ogboju Ode Nimu Igbo Irunmole*, into English. A fuller study of the creative works referred to, which of course requires a working knowledge of the Yoruba grammar, would reveal the extent to which several of these authors influenced the thoughts and writing of Soyinka. Ojaide (1994:5) has observed *en passant* that the traditional literatures of the period 'had primary relevance to (Soyinka's) plays; it also enriched his poetry, especially in dialogue, chant-like rhythms, proverbs, and praise-name epithets'.

There is certainly the need for some comparative research in this area of influence on Soyinka, drawing upon the vast resources of the Yoruba language as must have been explored in the texts of Soyinka's predecessors. The important point that we have tried to establish, however, is the general relevance of the local cultural and intellectual atmosphere in the decades that preceded Soyinka's birth and that as a young man, that environment exerted enormous influence on his critical and creative writing.

The atmosphere did not necessarily negate his Christian upbringing. Ayandele (1966:256) has criticised the cultural nationalists of the time for self-contradiction because they did not discard Christianity. But that criticism becomes flawed because Soyinka, for example, illustrates what can be described as the seemingly happy marriage of Christianity and autochthonous culture. In several of his works, he

shuttles conveniently between the Christian (or the foreign or European) and the indigenous. But unlike Christianity which was initially a way of life marked out for him by his parents, traditionalism, for him, is an adopted system of beliefs and practices, and represents that element of deliberateness which defines much of his writing.

(4.11.2) A Cultivated Traditionalist Intellect

Soyinka was so enamoured of the Yoruba cultural nationalism of the early and mid 20th century that between the ages of 27 and 29, he devoted himself to the study of Yoruba folk drama courtesy of a research fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation (see Lindfors, 1993). Much of his immersion in traditionalism can be found in *Isara: A Voyage Around Essay*, which explores the intricacies of traditionalism in shaping relationships around the young Soyinka and in stimulating his sensibilities towards a robust appreciation of his autochthonous culture. The result of his background and 'formal' training in Yoruba traditions is the thorough traditionalist imagination that defines his writing. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, he sets out to establish the authenticity of the Yoruba culture by pronouncing 'persuasive parallels' between Greek religion and the Yoruba (1976:14). That justification, as noted by Kwame Appiah (1994) for example, was primarily directed at a western audience.

The text is based on lectures given at the Cambridge University in England. The major issue here for our purpose is that by the 1970s, the explication of cultural archetypes of the Yoruba world was, for Soyinka, something to be taken for granted. His claim about what he described as the 'threnodic essence' of *Death and the King's Horseman* - 'The confrontation in the play is largely metaphysical' - and his revealed

desire to conceal the primacy of the 'colonial factor' and the resultant clash of cultures in the work, provide critical insights into the attitude he wants adopted in the interpretation of his writing.

His presentation of Yoruba culture should be read primarily for the understanding of its constituents and essence, and not in the context of how it is shaped or affected by external factors. Of course, a writer as Soyinka whose writing allows varied possibilities of reading readily presents himself for sacrifice on the alter of self-contradictions by the adoption of such an attitude. But the point that these illustrate is the traditionalist thinking and attitude that mark out Soyinka separately and jointly as man and artist. The illustration of this cultivation thus becomes the hallmark of his writing.

As in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka also draws upon a traditional motif in *The Strong Breed*. Through the agency of an improvised ritual of the scapegoat in Yoruba oral traditions, the play explores the concept of heroism in the context of the struggle between tradition and modernity. Ogunba (1971a:99) has observed that,

The point of the exploration of tradition in this play is that Soyinka constructs an identity between the carrier in traditional Africa and the artist in the literate tradition of modern West Africa, or in fact of any other community. The artist carrier is saddled with the weight of human sins and foibles and his task is to help his community achieve purgation. But this is a herculean task and the artist carrier has to die in the process. So he is a sacrificial lamb.

In this and other plays, Ogunba (1971b) discussed what he describes as 'the traditional festival model' (106) upon which the explorations of various themes by Soyinka are structured. In *A Dance of the Forests*, the reader is presented with what equates the *Egungun* festival of the Yoruba.

Significantly also, he is confronted with such malevolent spirits, gods, and half humans whose natural place of abode seems to be traditional society. Soyinka illustrates that traditionalism amongst the Yoruba embodies a glorious past as well as such elements of uncanny maleficence that are not the preserve of any one human community. His venture into traditionalism is thus consistent with the typical humanist examination of the various historical and critical vistas of human experience.

In Soyinka's poetry, we encounter the profuse use of various traditional elements - myths, gods, social traditional practices, poetic forms, proverbs, allusions, etc. Ogun, Sango, Orunmila, Orisa-nla, Esu, etc., are all divine figures in Yoruba mythology alluded to for various reasons in his poetry. In 'Koko Oloro' (*Idanre*, 23), the poet adopts a traditional propitiation chant used by children to illustrate the persona's desire for life. In 'Dedication' (*Idanre*, 24-25), he draws upon the traditional Moremi legend in depicting the theme of procreation as wealth. 'Abiku' (28) captures a common Yoruba belief of the phenomenon of the half-child. In 'Idanre', the poet explores aspects of the precarious nature of the relationship between humanity and divinity in traditional society. In *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), he deploys Ogun, the Yoruba god of war and creativity, to the black liberation struggle in South Africa.

His engagement with Ogun attains the proportion of a deliberate metaphysical ideology within which divinity is transformed into concepts that embed secular significance. Much of what Soyinka does is to ignore some of the apparent shortcomings of his gods as obtained in various versions of Yoruba mythological narratives and to dwell on specific attributes that illustrate social principles that he wishes to stress in his work.

Sango is the symbol of natural, restorative justice. He was a real human being and Yoruba king who had such great power that could bring down lightning on his enemies. At his death, he was deified by the Yoruba. For Soyinka, he represents man's foray into the domain of the gods, man's ability to understand and unravel divine omnipotence through a mastery of such conditions of nature that could produce results classified in the realm of the supernatural. Sango is the seeker of equity between human beings and gods, between human beings and their environment. He is the only one who challenges the gods, who breaks into their 'storehouse for creative and destructive essences... (for) the well-being of the community' (Soyinka, 1976:2-3). Sango's dialectical mission is established on a sense of balance between man and nature. He is also the progenitor of human progress:

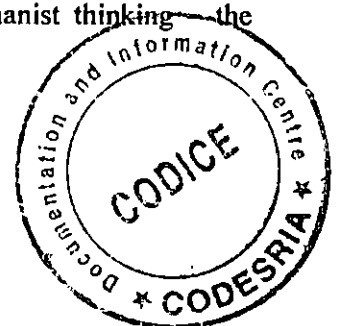
Sango the inventor, the mind of scientific curiosity, the man ahead of his time, the African who let out the first technological cry in a sea of incantatory witchcraft, therefore represents - - and this is what makes his character universal - - every nonconformist man, every human being for whom the inquiring, the exploration of new ways, experimentation, and challenges are a means of removing the strap of lead that the gods - - our own social and intellectual limitations - - impose on us as an ideological horizon (Soyinka, 1976:3)

Sango's enormous capacity for mental expansion, no doubt, depicts him as a humanist influence of choice on Soyinka's critical and creative development. He (Sango) portrays the human mind (and its elasticity) as the critical index both of reason and of development - of reason because it is the centre of rational inquiry; of development because it provides the justifications and prompts for exploration and experimentation. To a large extent, therefore, restorative justice is encapsulated in and defined within the penetrating amplitude of reason and development.

The deliberateness in Soyinka's choice from the Yoruba Pantheon and the attributes he concentrates upon points, significantly, in the direction of liberal

humanist influences and thoughts that characterised his growing up years. Obatala (also known as Orisa-nla) represents the 'virtues of social and individual accommodation: patience, suffering, peaceableness, all the imperatives of harmony in the universe, the essence of quietude and forbearance; in short, the aesthetics of the saint' (Soyinka, 1976:13). The exclusive list of noble elements reflects a conscious turning-away from Obatala's weaknesses. From the various narratives on Obatala (see, for example, Parrinder, 1967; Fadipe, 1970; Awolalu, 1979), there are such unwholesome attributes as drunkenness and treachery that defined his personality. But these do not promote a humanist agenda, even though a passing reference indicates an understanding of the possibilities of nature.

Soyinka's focus is on the principle of creation and harmony, such elements that promote social cohesion, and the appreciation of ugliness not only as an element of the varieties of nature, but more importantly of beauty. Obatala's creation of such human categories as albinos, cripples, hunchbacks, dwarfs, etc., stress the intrinsic authenticity of every created being and more importantly, the individuality of the human person. The justification of that individuality at the ordinary, physical dimension of existence implies the essentialisation of difference of the mental and metaphysical dimensions of being which, even at the surface of endeavours at understanding and interpretation, is a complex category. Difference is thus an integrated physiological, psychological, social and metaphysical phenomenon that necessitates tolerance as an imperative of harmony in human society. The adoption of Obatala as part of Soyinka's reconstructed mythology of the Yoruba Pantheon thus places the artist and his god at the very heart of liberal humanist thinking – the individuality of the human person.



Ogun is the third leg of Soyinka's mythological tripod and by far, it is to him that Soyinka assigns the overwhelming poetic descriptions that capture the dialectics of existence at the levels of the material and the transcendental. He is 'protector of the orphans' and 'roof over the homeless'. He concerns himself with finding solutions to the immediate existential problems of man. He is a committed defender of such cultural values as trust and integrity – 'the terrible guardian of the sacred oath. Ogun is

... the master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a gregarious imbiber, a reluctant leader of men and deities. He is 'Lord of the road' of Ifa; that is, he opens the way to the heart of Ifa's wisdom, thus representing the knowledge-seeking instinct, an attribute which sets him apart as the only deity who 'sought the way', and harnessed the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the god's reunion with man (Soyinka, 1976:27).

Ogun embodies the challenge of human development. As 'master craftsman and artist', he represents the essence of the imagination as the nucleus of progress. As farmer, he represents man's enormous capacity for labour and economic self-sustenance. As warrior, he stands for war and as a defense against the enemy. He at once symbolises the spirit of religious piety and of boisterous amusement. He enjoys power and authority, though he presents himself as 'a reluctant leader'. He is the quintessential pathfinder who embodies the quest spirit. The significance of all of the above is that Ogun is 'constantly at the service of society for its full self-realisation' (30).

Ogun, like Sango, represents the principle of force and creativity. He is a defender of rights and a promoter of equity. But most importantly, he embodies the principles of the dialectics of experience; he is always in the act of creating and

destroying – that is, he is ‘the one who can be possessed, then dispossessed of the powers which dwell in him’ (Ricard, 1985:78, trans. by Kwaku A Gyasi).

Tidjani-Serpos underscores what we may describe as the humanist import of Soyinka’s engagement with mythology and the nature of the choices he makes from the Yoruba Pantheon and the narratives around them: ‘The gods must bring themselves under secular control and they must die while leaving intact the action principles which they concealed behind their mystical shadows’ (1996:35). In other words, the essence of the gods to Soyinka is metaphorical, not literal (see also, Ogunba, 2005).

The congregation of the selected principles of the choice-gods plays to the key points of liberal humanist thinking and practice, and it is largely to this end that Soyinka deploys the gods in his writing. Of the tripod, Ogun is his favorite or patron god because he alone possesses such dynamism that can experiment with, create, or accommodate vast possibilities of experience. He is the prototype of such contraries of being and existence that are aptly illustrative of humanists’ explanations of human nature. Significantly, therefore, Soyinka’s engagement with the principles (and to some extent, the practice) of Yoruba autochthonous culture would be described as one of the major routes to his liberal humanist attitude to art, and to life.

(4.12) FROM CLASSICISM AND MODERNISM TO A VISION OF LIBERAL HUMANISM

A critical examination of the major influences on Soyinka as a liberal humanist artist must necessarily draw upon his relationship with the mainstream western literary tradition. Soyinka’s formal and informal training as an artist and critic is largely

within that tradition. As a student of English at the Universities of Ibadan and Leeds, there was no academically established African literary tradition to have offered the subject and possible literary or ideological alternatives in English studies. His grooming was thus in that literary liberal humanism of the Euro-American society founded largely on the values of the Classical Age and re-defined in the late 18th and early 19th centuries by the spirit and experimentations of modernism.

His principal literary encounters were with liberal artists who lived in an environment that appreciated art as a crucial way of living and for whom art was 'a centrally independent way of knowing, acquiring many of the functions formerly associated with religion and religious wisdom, enlightening men and alleviating their sorrows, advancing their comprehension and their sensibilities' (Bradbury, 1971:114; see also Selden, 1988). Those artists were also humanists whose works existed side by side with man's actual experiences and were indeed aligned with such experiences. They emphasised man's humanity and broadened his capacity to appreciate his conducts, strengths, possibilities and limitations.

(4.12.1) An Obligation to Classicism

Dominant classicism is often regarded as an embodiment of the noble human values that literatures of various times and climes have tried to promote. It conceives of literature primarily as a representation of life, an imitation of nature and the truth of human experience. To achieve imitation in an appropriate degree that encapsulates the beauty of presentation and the profundity of thought, classicism emphasises the essence of rhetoric as a mode of creative discipline – the poet 'invents' his subject matter through the approximation of some grand models, draws upon stylistic forms that are pre-determined by a respected corpus of literary tradition to 'dispose' of his

subject-matter, and places upon his work the qualities of aesthetic grandeur and elevated thought through tropes, rhythms and the skill of elocution.

The three aspects can be summed up within the principle of decorum, the art of aesthetic balancing. Adequate appropriateness must be achieved between the subject, the form and the language. As Cicero enunciates, 'the grand style is best for swaying emotions, the plain style for conveying information, and the middle or 'tempered' style for giving pleasure' (Selden 1988:321). In poetry, this speaks to the appropriateness of the stylistic attributes to the status of the poetic figures and the social context of the readership (see Puttenham 1589 in Smith, 1904:154-161).

These elements of classicism are adequately illustrated in Soyinka's writing such that the question of influence becomes real. *Death and the King's Horseman* is largely illustrative of the grand style of classical writing, reminiscent of the examples of Aeschylus in *Oresteia* and Sophocles in *Oedipus*. In terms of characterisation, setting, plot and language, the plays exude the features of aesthetic beauty, grandeur and vitality. Elesin as an imitative model conveys the profundity of experience associated with the dynamics of cultural heritage and the conflicts of progression. Olunde becomes the tragic interposition of a society that suddenly finds itself on the brink of social disintegration. The setting depicts the varied elements of grandeur of the Yoruba marketplace as a critical signifier of cultural and political potency. The poetic language of discourse properly situates the play within the category of the concerns of royalty, thus making the intended tragic consequences in the story a case of a genuine classical drama.

In such plays like *The Trials of Brother Jero*, *Jero's Metamorphosis*, *Opera Wonyosi*, and *The Beatification of an Area Boy*, amongst others, Soyinka again rises to the dictum of dominant classicism, employing a 'tempered' style to achieve not

grand emotions but such low sentiments associated with comic pleasure and satire. Thus the playwright uses ludicrous characters, parodies and a language that is basically commonplace to facilitate mode of direct attack against perceived ills and foibles in his society. Significantly, these plays depict the tradition of classical comedy represented by the writing of Aristophanes (see, for example, *Lysistrata* in Heath, 1988).

In poetry, Soyinka's 'Idanre' is most illustrative of the appropriateness of subject, style and language. Ogun as model embodies the dichotomy of being in terms of the categories of divinity and humanity. Within each category, it represents the essence of the creative and destructive spirit existing within a single dialectical framework, albeit with manifold manifestations. In whatever context he functions, Ogun is the god of iron and that element of steel characterises his creative and destructive activities. How does Ogun achieve this image of 'the Iron One' (61) in 'Idanre'?

Presented in the elevated style of an epic poem, 'Idanre' is a long heroic poem that follows the examples of Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and to some extent, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In terms of value, the poem captures the story of a hero or revered character whose exploits encapsulates great significance for an entire community or race. In terms of structure, it is developed from some earlier myths of heroic performances that indicate the strengths and future of a community.

In the case of Soyinka, Ogun is invested with the power that controls the being of the Yoruba as a people. He is more than a mere poetic equivalent of the Greco-Roman divinities - Dionysus, Apollo and Prometheus. Soyinka (1976) seeks to present him as the synthesis of the classical mythological experience. He follows the

classical example of myth as a literary design in pursuing the attainment of a Yoruba culturally-determined archetype. Significantly, however, classical 'mythical displacement' in Soyinka's 'experimentation' or adoption of Ogun returns to the metaphorical essence of classical practice – a romantic emphasis that suggests 'implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience' (Frye, 1957:139).

Like the god, Ogun, the language of 'Idanre' reflects the metallic nature of being. The imagery depicts the god's work of creativity – 'Thawed', 'lit in deep cloud mirrors', 'striding vast across', 'The flaming corkscrew etches sharp affinities', 'an unstopped heaven deluge', 'white moments of my god', 'Light from the day's effacement', 'Glows in his large creative hand', etc. But it also simultaneously captures the destructive capability – 'roaring vats', 'fevered distillations', 'The fire of the axe-handed one', 'detonating peaks', 'Combatant angles', 'fresh descent', 'Fiery axe-heads', 'spiked symbols', 'wayward bolts', 'grey corrugations', etc. From the first five stanzas of the first section of the poem, there is no missing out of the attributes of the grand character that is the subject of the poem, and this is the primary function of the choice of words and such tropes that rise to the demand of an adequate, grandiloquent description of Ogun and his activities.

Soyinka continues the same tradition of the epic as a classical form in *Ogun Abibiman*. Significantly founded upon the art of rhetoric, the poem evokes a celebratory mood that engages the imagination beyond the obvious presentation of Ogun's supremacy and his resuscitation of Shaka's powers. It stresses the dawn of a desired metaphysical change in the home of the Zulu people. Ogun is again that classical model and a literary archetype that searches for and rekindles kindred spirit across the African continent and amongst kinsfolk in the Diaspora. He embodies the

essence of a redemptive and creative struggle designed to reposition a beleaguered continent on the map of contemporary socio-political and economic development.

Though the poem draws upon the traditional genre of praise-poetry common in African communities, its stylistic and structural platform would still be described as essentially classical, and its subject as situated within an autochthonous African culture. Yet, even the subject may not be described as exclusively Yoruba or African because at the level of its metamorphosis through the poet's deliberate deployment of the twin strategies of mythical displacement and literary archotyping, Ogun is returned to the domain of classical mythology as he becomes a mere Yoruba linguistic expression of such grand human experience that can be appropriately described as universal and timeless, which are the definitive attributes of the liberal humanistic values of the classical age.

(4.12.2) A Humanistic Search Across Literary Ages

Soyinka's writing encourages an appreciation of various elements of English literature that shaped the writer's literary and social sensibilities. This is achieved through overt references to and development of motifs, characters and quotable passages of English literature in his writing, a critical reflection of his immersion in a tradition that spans hundreds of years. Following his primary grounding in classicism, Soyinka has been enamoured of the works of the Elizabethan/Jacobean and the Augustan writers. Thus his writing is replete with echoes of William Shakespeare, John Milton, Andrew Maxwell, Jonathan Swift, John Dryden and Alexander Pope, amongst others.

Beyond the immediate relevance to possible local encounters that could have informed the movement of his imagination, Soyinka in 'Four Archetypes' (*A Shuttle*) explores fundamental conditions of human existence. Essentially, those conditions

subsume his local experience. In one of the four cases he examines, he looks to Christianity for an archetype. In the other three, he engages dominant figures of English literature. In Shakespeare, he draws upon Hamlet to illustrate the condition of excessive human emotions and how such precipitates a barricade around Reason and results in indecision or dislocated logic. For Soyinka, every encounter with man's 'turn and turn abouts' would find passable demonstration in Hamlet, 'the prince of doubts' (22). In Swift, he takes his readers back to the Augustan virtues of Reason and Truth to portray man and the seeming ingenuity of human institutions in ludicrous conditions. For Soyinka, Gulliver is the archetype of human 'Abnormalities of view' (26). Even in the context of his (Soyinka's) immediate modes of experiencing the world, Gulliver represents 'the critical limitations of man's capacity to know, the result being the apt illustration of his cycles of stupidity'.

'Ulysses' points at the quest motif that runs across such writings like Homer's *Odyssey*, Samuel Johnson's 'The Vanity of Human Wishes', Shelley's 'Ozymandias', Tennyson's 'Ulysses' and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Soyinka appreciates the insatiability of the human person. Man is always searching and his life and achievements are described as 'mirages on the world's reality' (29). The issues discussed in 'Four Archetypes' replay themselves in other poems and works of Soyinka. The quest motif, for example, is further illustrated by such poems like 'Death in the Dawn' and 'The Dreamer' (*Idanre*, 10,11,17). The issues 'around the existence of Gulliver are pored over in the 'October '66' poems (*Idanre*, 49-56). 'Four Archetypes' illustrates the humanist preoccupation with the study and explanation of human nature and how intrinsic human attributes shape social activities as well as the progressions and counterpoints of human experience.

(4.12.3) Modernism as a World of Humanism

Though the term 'modernism' is capable of evoking varied meanings which could sometimes be at variance with one another (see, for examples, Habermas, 1981; Childs, 2000), it also reflects in the main the direction of the congregation of influences by which Soyinka as a writer may be defined. From the first foundations of the Christian environment and upbringing, through the deliberate immersion in autochthonous traditionalism, to the training in classicism and subsequent Western writings and practices, modernism presents itself as an ideological package capable of accounting for the trends and differences that ultimately amount to the poetics of liberal humanism in Soyinka. It encapsulates a tradition of experimentation and newness that seeks to disentangle the writer from the double yoke of materialism and realism which had reached a peak in social life, scholarly practices and literature particularly in the Victorian age.

This yoke had been accentuated by radical development in scientific thought, the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the epoch of the Enlightenment. From Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fieldings to Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot, amongst others, it received apt representation in literature and was, in fact, the dominant mode of literary practice founded on the assumptions of an objective and true presentation of human experience. Modernism did not present itself as an exclusive alternative to realism in its literary or social form. This is because it still incorporated some of realism's processes and objects in its own practice.

Significantly, in literature, it sought to improve upon the shortcomings of realism - to represent the unrepresented and the under-represented. It marked the establishment of free verse in poetry, which became indicative of the creative

liberalism that realism had previously denied writers whose practice, hitherto, had been tied up to the conservative world of the iambic pentameter and its inherent linguistic and ideological constraints. It sought to transcend the mundaneness of materiality through the introduction of symbolism which grappled with the experience of life as an ethereal or metaphysical possibility. It initiated experimentations with the stream of consciousness, the unconscious, modes of perception, and various conditions of human individuality all of which emphasized values of liberalism and a critical appreciation of the human being and all the comprehensible departments of his being. Modernist writing altered literary representation of nature and life,

in a compressed, condensed, complex literature of the city, of industry and technology, war, machinery and speed, mass markets and communications, of internationalism, the New woman, the aesthete, the Nihilist and the *Flaneur* (Childs, 2000:4)

In terms of attitude to the subject, it offers a cultural and philosophical engagement of the phenomenon of modernity through the paradox of change – a celebration of technological development and its attendant improvement of standards of living and a condemnation of efforts geared at the erasure of human individuality through modernity's strategy of homogenisation through the massification of systems of thoughts, production, consumption and relationships (see Habermas, 1981; Harvey, 1989). Its attitude is at once those of enchantment, delight and positive experimentation on the one hand, and fear and reaction on the other. It celebrates material progress (not materialism), and simultaneously mourns the reduction of the human person to values that matter only in material terms. Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (in Hayward, 1956:344-45) is an apt illustration of this thematic issue:

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the Straits - on the French coast, the light
Gleams, and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

...
The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar

...
... for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Arnold's concern is the sustenance of the balance between materiality and the ethereal manifestations of the human person. Thus he describes the tasks of the modernist writer as those of 'synthesis and exposition' (1954:19).

Several writers aptly represented the form and concerns of modernism as a dominant late 19th and early 20th century ideology of art and life. Prominent amongst these in the context of writers whose works have exerted enormous influence on Soyinka's writing are Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce. These writers had themselves been directly influenced into symbolist writing through Arthur Symonds' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) which largely discussed the writings of the French symbolists – Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Stephane Mallarme, and Paul Valery. Symbolism found its way into English literary discourse for the first time through Symonds' work and effectively marked the origins of the modernist movement in that literature.

It was a reactionary movement against realism because it conceived of art as an alternate life which emphasis must be aesthetics, and not parallelism with man's

definite material experience. It, therefore, sought to free art from the burden of social experiencing by buttressing the autonomy of art from natural or material reality. It explored the world of the metaphysical by the use of such representative objects, persons and ideas that transcend the immediacy of naturalism and social realism.

In Yeats, such poems like 'The Second Coming', 'Sailing to Byzantium', 'Byzantium' and 'Among School Children' illustrate such elements of mysticism and mythology that paradoxically reflect an escape from materialism and an expansion of the boundaries of realism. Eliot's 'The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock' and *The Waste Land*, and Joyce's *Ulysses* provide such parallels that go deep into various mystical and mythic realms of experiences. The idea of the modernist project was to question seemingly established notions of 'truth' and artistic authenticity, to capture the disappointments and despairs associated with modernisation, to moan the erosion of cultural values and spiritual faith and to resuscitate interest in individualism which primary expression is situated in a form of art that is not plagued by the danger of homogeneity.

Much of Soyinka's poetry, especially in his first three collections – *Idanre and Other Poems*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and *Ogun Abibiman* illustrate enormous borrowings from the symbolist tradition. The poem 'Idanre' would be described as a good example of the symbolists' 'art for art's sake'. This is because it does not primarily answer to the question of social realism. It examines a sphere of metaphysical experience that explores the character of Ogun as a symbol of the interface of divinity and humanity, creativity and the destructive temper, temperance and excess, life and death. It is an example of the modernist dualistic system of thinking and experiencing the world. Thus, in one moment the poet seems to appreciate particular experiences of existence and in the next, the reader is presented

with an interrogation, a critique, or a negation of that same appreciated experience. A primary point of interest in a reading of 'Idanre' is the poetic beauty, the captivating trend of 'ideas and presentation'. Ogun's travel through time and space, the language that describes his character and activities, the structure of ideas, etc., combine to produce a modernist piece that has freed itself from the burden of materiality, thus tasking the reader's ability to appreciate the poem's autonomy. There is no critical concern for the poem's social equivalents. Yet the poem, like all symbolist poetry, is not escapist. It creates its own realism which only secondarily returns to speak to questions of human experience.

Poems in *A Shuttle* depict Soyinka's mastering of the symbolist art. Though these are poems written while in prison, they reflect the despair of the human spirit, and more importantly, the esotericism and mysticism of such experience. 'O Roots!' presents the incantations of a troubled spirit in the language of a mixture of religious traditions. 'Roots' is the symbol of human strength, but that strength in its state of potency, like roots generally, is not visible to the human eye. The poet situates it outside the realm of immediate reality. Yet, it is a reality that underscores the continuity of life.

In 'Conversation at Night with a Cockroach', the poet uses the cockroach as a symbol of human degeneration. Through the strategy of defamiliarisation, the poem is removed from the realm of social possibility. Cockroaches do not hold conversations with human beings. But all things are possible to modernists, hence the tradition of experimentations. In 'Four Archetypes', the poet explores the presentation of universal ideas of human existence through the use of specific personalities as their representative figures. Poems in the sections, 'Chimes of Silence' 'Procession' and 'Prisonettes' explore mental conditions of being that capture the stream of

consciousness, hypnotherapy and an engagement in mysticism. The poet's concern in the entire volume, it seems, is with the critical expansion of the range of the possibilities of representation in art. This, certainly, would underscore the disappointment encountered by many readers of Soyinka's poetry who often approach his writing with such 'great' expectations that have evolved from notable works of social realism and are almost immediately struck by the thematically-induced aesthetic distance of the symbolist vocation.

Symbolism offered English modernist writing the core attitude to the question of representation, which subsequently indicated the roadmap to the thematic development of the literature. But the issue of the dominant critical idiom of modernist writing is situated in the Imagist Movement which was started by T.E. Hulme in 1909 (see Lodge, 1972) and popularised by Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle and Richard Aldington. The Movement enunciated stylistic principles that became the creed of modernist poetry. They emphasised the importance of adherence to such virtues of classicism like the precision of thought, discipline in the use of language, scientific objectivity in terms of the directions of relationship between the subject and its presentation, and a lucid and rhythmic flow of thought and words. In part, imagism was a reaction to the indulgences and sentimentalism of Romanticism. It desired something closer to the approximations of scientific procedures, which implied a painstaking and empirical engagement with human experience, language and Reason. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, edited by Pound became the flagship of that mode of writing in the early 20th century:

...for almost the first time in English poetry, a writer seemed to be getting to grips with the consequences of modernity. Eliot borrowed from Baudelaire, mythology, Shakespeare, Eastern religion, paganism, music hall and a host of literary predecessors in order to express contemporary life in a polyphony of cultured sound bites...

dissonances, sudden transitions, shifts in rhythm and characteristically Modernist obsession with language... (Childs, 2000:99).

Soyinka's poetry is, like the modernists', patterned according to the prescriptions of Imagism. Again, 'Idanre' offers the most apt illustration of that mode of structured writing. Like most of Soyinka's poetry, it is presented in the tradition of free verse. Its subject is illuminated through a network of allusions that draw upon Classical, Christian and Yoruba mythologies. There is an exacting use of language that grapples with the subject in a structured, scientific way, drawing upon concise images to illustrate character, activities and relationships. To escape the sensationalism of Romanticism, the language of the poem is elliptic, thus stressing the exact and desired features and issues that simultaneously point at intended meanings as well as make meaning pregnant with possibilities.

Ogun's journey through Idanre is captured through specific conveyances of meaning founded primarily upon the seven divisions in the poem all of which allude to some Biblical structure of historical experience – the great flood, reconstruction after the flood, the journey motif which runs across various modes of pilgrimages, the creation, paths of war, moments of retreat and temporary peace, etc. The poet upturns Christian realism through a decentering of the Jewish God and his people and a relocation of Ogun and his people (of Idanre) into the revised narrative of what was hitherto the master narrative of Christianity. Ogun takes on the character of the Jewish God who protects and destroys his people, depending on the conditions of the moment. The broad structure of the poem draws upon Christian mythology. Then there are references to classical mythology – Zeus, Osiris, etc. But through a process of defamiliarisation, these influences are divested of their paraphernalia of recognition.

Thus the poet interrogates Christianity and Classicism as modes of representation. But that interrogation is not designed to invalidate their significance. Rather, it is to create mythical accommodation for his own symbolic figures of the Yoruba world. He writes:

All hail Saint Atunda, First revolutionary
Grand iconoclast at genesis – and the rest in logic
Zeus, Osiris, Jahweh, Christ in trifoliate
Pact with creation, and the wisdom of Orunmila, Ifa
Divining eyes, multiform (83).

Atunda is the Yoruba essence of creativity and difference, legacies which he bequeathed to Ogun. For a thorough understanding of his role in creation, he must be associated with gods from other cultures. But what the poet achieves is not mere association but a super-imposition of Atunda as a paragon of creative ingenuity and difference within a global Pantheon. His act with Atunda underscores the essence of the modernist imagination, which makes liberal humanist practice a social imperative. Freedom is underscored by the limitlessness of man's creative ingenuity. Difference essentialises human individuality, and *vice versa*. Freedom necessitates socio-political participation; difference necessitates tolerance. The combination of these values essentialises the sanctity of the human life, its rights as a free moral being, and the supremacy of the general will, which most updated and developed manifestation takes the form of popular democracy.

(4.12.4) The Ideological Consummation

For Soyinka, therefore, a long-standing engagement with critical elements of Christianity, the Yoruba autochthonous culture, classicism and modernism culminated in a critical mode of thinking as well as literary and social practice that would

appropriately be described as liberal humanist. The consummation of this humanism in terms of the public manifestations of his social practice is popular democracy:

I believe implicitly in the values of an egalitarian society and I think that sums it up. An egalitarian society means egalitarianism in justice, in economic welfare, and in the rights of each individual to achieve maximum fulfillment (1975:39).

Consistent with his mission as a writer, this belief has informed his high-level political activism in Nigeria. Some of his writing - *The Man Died* (1972), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1989), *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (2006), etc. - capture various modes of direct and indirect political struggles with which he has been involved. In spite of the agonies of life in prison and in exile at various times, his faith in the sanctity of human lives and their natural rights, as well as the significance of a necessary change from dictatorship to a full, popular democracy inspired him to embark on journeys to several parts of the world in an attempt to muster international opinion against systems of government which he considers inhuman. His humanist concern has been depicted in his opposition to oppressive regimes in several African countries like Ghana, Malawi, Angola, South Africa and Nigeria.

Though Soyinka's view of humanity is essentially tragic (he has been referred to as a poet of the 'grey region' by Adrian Roscoe (1977:84)), that only illustrates an aspect of his understanding of human nature and history. He also believes that man is capable of attaining noble heights in life. Thus, he intermingles man's history of destructiveness with his endearing feats of creativity.

As a modernist, the past for Soyinka is always relevant to the present. In fact, the past for him is 'co-existent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future, but it is not a fleshpot for escapist indulgence and it is vitally

dependent on the sensibility that recalls it' (1988:19). As a liberal humanist who is suspicious of the limits of his own understanding, however, he believes that there are

...dangers which attend the development of this historic vision – a convenient term for the total acceptance of the human heritage. A historic vision is of necessity universal and any pretence to it must first accept the demand for a total re-examination of the whole phenomenon of humanity. I regard it as dangerous, because to what else can it lead but to the destruction of the will to action? What we are observing in our own time is the total collapse of ideals, the collapse of humanity itself (1988:19).

In spite of the strong inclination in human beings towards repeating the failures of past years, faith in humanity remains a prominent poetic manifestation of Soyinka's humanism. As Stewart Crehan (1990:29) observes, 'by recognising absurdity and grappling with contradictions, (Soyinka) aims to liberate us from crass mediocrity and oppressive orthodoxy'. Soyinka had himself stressed the need to keep confronting society with 'accurate and negative reflection' in the hope that with time, 'society will recognize itself in the projection and, with or without the benefit of "scientific" explications, be moved to act in its overall self-interest' (1984:298-300).

In *The Credo of Being and Nothingness* (1991), he laments the absence of the liberal humanist ideals of religious equality, tolerance and fellow-feeling. He condemns 'religious separatism' in public institutions and preaches a 'humanistic oneness' which creates in people a 'positive knowledge of human society and the development of their sense of community' (7). He claims:

I extol, indeed, I partake with creative and humane enlargement, in the inherent and productive values of all religions, their monumental legacies to the world, their piety and unflagging spirit of the search for truth. I acknowledge that the world will be a much poorer place without the phenomenon of religion, and I do not refer merely to their architectural and artistic legacies, but even to the inspirational value of

their scriptures, the lyricism in which they are frequently couched and the intellectual challenges of their exegeses (18).

These elements of religious understanding and peace further illustrate the humanist slant in Soyinka. He confronts the reader with a poetry that is an encompassing humanist statement which aims at exposing the 'Siege against humanity / And Truth' (1972:60) in order to challenge man to paths of life that encapsulate the substance of material, moral and metaphysical grandeur. To sum it all in his words,

Humanism for me represents taking the human entity as the centre of world perception, of social organization and indeed of ethics, deciding in other words what is primarily of the greatest value for humans as opposed to some extraterrestrial or ideological authority (1997:1).

(4.13) 'IDANRE' AS DIALECTICS OF HUMANISTIC PROGRESS

In human, social and technological terms, progress is a phenomenon that can hardly be captured in one single, simple and straightforward stretch of experience. Though, as a historical constant, it explains the logic of humanism's appreciation of man's capabilities, it is constituted by a variety of human and non-human elements some of which are outside man's immediate control. Significantly, therefore, humanistic progress is not a one-sided traffic of experience to be defined purely in terms of the happy ends of human accomplishments. It is a contentious and dialectical movement of experience which incorporates positive, incremental or intermittent modes of advancement as well as considered negative dimensions of knowledge, practice and encounters that precipitate undesired 'ends'.

The sum of that combination is man's transportation to an experiential plane from where he is able to grapple adequately with the changing challenges of his existence. Yet, such a horizon is a constant of neither time nor space. Inevitably, therefore, human progress is always in a flux and change is always appropriately christened to enhance some sense of movement and possibly, an accompanying sense of fulfillment. In spite of these, progress remains a dialectical form of experience, sometimes 'attaining' the despair-provoking degree of an enigma. This humanist idea of and attitude to progress is aptly illustrated by Soyinka's 'Idanre' (1967).

According to Soyinka's claim in the preface to the poem, 'Idanre' may be described as the product of the poet's conscious state as well as a semi-consciousness that reflects modernist writing as a form of hallucinatory art:

Idanre is the record of that walk through wet woods on the outskirts of Molete, a pilgrimage to Idanre in company of presences such as dilate the head and erase known worlds (57).

The poet's explanation, in spite of its inherent abstractions of confutation that revisit modes of modernist authorial authenticity, seeks to situate meanings in the poem in the realm of the material and the metaphysical. If the sources and strategies of his narrative are both immediate and esoteric, then his intentions and possible effects may not be limited to the conception of man as a mere material being and the propitiousness associated with his immediate experience. 'Idanre' may thus be described as a comprehensive offering in humanistic thinking and practice.

The poem 'Idanre' opens with Ogun in combat. Combat here relates to the force and imagery of violence associated with the act of creation. His exploit is described as a 'deluge'. His presence is overwhelming, 'striding vast across' a virgin

world. The imagery of the first stanza of the poem compares well with biblical narrative:

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1: 2).

Thus, such images conveyed by words and phrases like 'deep cloud mirrors', 'lost', 'void's regenerate', 'wastes', 'inchoate earth' point at the moment of pre-creation. But out of that state of universal nothingness in which there were no dreams, visions or such mental or emotional excitement that could even indicate the possibility of life and relationship, Ogun, 'The Flaming corkscrew', created 'sharp affinities'. Ogun is the custodian of rain and productivity, and through his concession of an unprecedented, heavy downpour, the earth is offered its creative essence and this is often simply illustrated by the experience of harvest which always follows a successful rainy season.

That primary act of creation is repeated by Ogun on a regular annual basis – 'Ogun is still on such/combatant angles, poised to a fresh descent'. The process of creation is preceded by voidness, grey atmosphere indicative of the deep cloud and darkness, and such extreme heat that points at the possible explosion of the elements. But Ogun, 'the axe-handed one', with 'axe-heads fly(ing) about his feet' forces Sango, the god of lightening and electricity, down to the earth, deploys his (Sango's) strengths to the creative process, and ensures there are no errors in his assignments – 'the Iron one' is set 'against/All wayward bolts'.

The creative act flows perfectly – the 'Earth/Clutches' following the timely end of the downpour. The laborious, mystical process of creation is soon replaced by the humaneness of common knowledge. Man accepts Ogun's blessing (the rain) and

thus embarks on tilling the earth and cultivating seeds which multiply themselves as crops and allow mankind 'Wake naked into harvest-tide'. In the first movement of the poem, therefore, Ogun establishes the creative impulse that facilitates life and moves the world to peaks of material productivity. That creativity is the pillar of man's social, economic and metaphysical movement through space and time and it underscores the consumerist nature of his existence, and the frustrations and despair associated with his being in the absence of a consistent nude encounter with the fruits of harvest.

In the second movement, Ogun is presented as a god with a robust appetite. His portion is the first fruits of the harvest and he goes for them himself. The movement captures his first close interaction with humans in the poem – the wine-girl and the poet persona. Idanre Hill, the place where pilgrims take their rest, is also Ogun's abode. The wine-girl appears at once to be a real human being as well as a mystical figure. She seems intoxicated, partly from drinking and partly from a shared romantic relationship with the gods. And she wonders what the poet persona was searching for at such an unwholesome hour in the abode of a fearsome, demanding god. But it is not a moment of danger; it is a night of conviviality as men and gods mingled and 'awaited celebration of the crops'.

It is a night of 'benediction'. The wine-girl offers grace and wine to the company; Ogun offers her his peace, and the quiet night the assurance of its security. Yet, 'Harvest night' is not immuned from the violent disruptions that live in the womb of the earth. Thus the narrative shifts to the region of a cracked sky, 'a graying skull', 'blooded highways', misted navel, veil of darkness, 'pensive points', 'the leer of lightening', 'sadness', 'the lone face', etc. There can be no constant moments of experience around the conditions of relations with Ogun except the very

indeterminacy of that relationship. That is the nature of human relationship with the world of the supernatural or the mythical, and it is an indication of human limitation in terms of the comprehensive appreciation of such experiences that are beyond the immediate.

In the company of the humans around, Ogun walks across a farmland around Idanre hill, leaving his mark on plants and earth. He is described as 'the stone of whirling incandescence' because, in spite of the immeasurable, long periods of darkness in the journey around the hill, his presence is the essential guiding light through the 'wilderness' of constricting realities to new modes of experience. Thus he presages 'new cohesions' between agriculture and technology. Between the 'haze of corn', the 'palm towers', 'the night-birds' and the 'tension wires' is the light he produces, which is 'the godhead essence', the creative imperative that transits across nature, culture and critical inventions.

Yet, there is no creativity without labour -- 'Ogun is a demanding god'. He works hard and those that follow him must do likewise. Thus, the wine-girl and the poet persona 'honeycombed beneath his hills', 'worked red earth/of energies', extracted ores from quarries, made payment from their own scarce resources, and paved Ogun's way with 'shells, milestones of breathless bones'. The path of their journey is strewn with 'broken braids of steel/And fallen acrobats', and their security is not certain because the forest is 'a green deception' where those whom Ogun has earmarked for his meal 'ride on the wheels of death when,/The road waits, famished'.

For tourists to the rockhills of Idanre, the 'cave', 'castle', 'shrine', and 'grottos' may appear like 'playthings' of children and 'shades for browsing goats', but these are evidence of Ogun's feeding place. Ogun demands sacrifice because that is his food. But more importantly, sacrifice is essential for social development:

... growth is greener where
Rich blood has spilt; brain and marrow make
Fat manure with sheep's excrement (65).

Ogun shares the revolutionary and creative temper of the grand-revolutionary of Yoruba mythology, Atunda. Thus he is described as 'the First Boulder', the first fruit of Atunda's revolutionary act that gave birth to numerous gods of the Yoruba Pantheon. As first fruit, therefore, he occupies the position of the godhead. Like the errant Atunda, he is the carrier of the 'death chariot'. Like the creative Atunda, he is 'the creation snake/spawned tail in mouth', germinating 'dormant seeds' and resuscitating 'suspended lives'.

Like a visionary, the poet persona sees the transformation of those who have taken a ride on Ogun's 'death chariot'. That moment of death is soon translated into a celestial essence. They become the first 'humans' to taste 'the first flakes of harvest rain'. They become godchildren of Ogun who welcomes them on their voyage home where they 'join the gathering presences' of those that are subsequently regarded as ancestors. Importantly, therefore, human beings who become sacrifices to the gods serve the critical purpose of cosmic flows and continuities between living human beings, the environment and the metaphysical world. They become representational figures who 'Quench totemic thirsts, thirst of earth' on behalf of the living.

The journey drifts into turbulence and uncertainty. The poet echoes Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' ('Where ignorant armies clash by night') to emphasise the apocalyptic turn of events: 'when thunderous shields clashed/Across the heights'. The apocalypse is further described by images that elicit fear and horror: 'Thunders', 'widening wounds', 'a pale cauterizing hands', 'jewelled crucifix', 'agonic purities', 'unquiet nights', 'armoured beasts', 'Nozzles of flames', 'exploding planets', 'Whorls

of intemperate steel', 'Easters in convulsions', 'Damnations and savage salvations', etc.

The apocalypse reads like a nightmare of the poet persona during the journey around the rockhills of Idanre. Placed in juxtaposition to the godchildren of Ogun who have featured as earthly sacrifices to the gods, it also reads like a possible consequence of the dangers that await humanity in the absence of that essential vicarious link between men and gods. Thus, in place of the godchildren of Ogun whose sacrifices serve the purpose of cosmic growth and happiness are the anarchic, monster children of Ajantala, the signification of anti-family in Yoruba mythology.

And importantly still, there is no evidence that suggests a break of the apocalypse from the narrative of 'the gathering presences'. Thus, the possibility of a continuum between those whom Ogun has destined for sacrifice and the de-humanism of the apocalypse is enhanced. While these possible ranges of interpretations persist, the movement ends on the note of Ogun's reconciliation of seeming cosmic contraries:

... his fingers
Drew warring elements to a union of being
And taught the veins to dance, of earth of rock
Of tree, sky, of fire and rain, of flesh of man
And woman. Ogun is the god that ventures first
His path one loop of time, one iron coil
Earth's broken rings were healed (68).

What Ogun establishes at the end of the movement is not the idea of man subsumed in some mystical order, but the ideas of cosmic cohesion and the materiality of existence. That materiality does not debunk human duality, hence Ogun's emphasis on the 'union of being'. But importantly also, it captures the secular nature of human

interaction with fellow humans and the environment, hence an emphasis on immediate knowledge and experience.

'Pilgrimage', the third movement, stresses the essence of the revolutionary spirit as a critical precipitator of liberal thought and practice. Revolution in the context is indicated by a bold, uncommon initiative that must result in some creative and progressive outcomes. Atunda, hitherto a slave of Orisa-nla (the absolute embodiment of divinity in Yoruba mythology), rolls down a boulder which, landing on Orisanla, 'shred[s] the kernel to a million lights'. By this singular act, the authoritarianism of the godhead is abruptly terminated, and divinity becomes democratised. From this single deity is born numerous deities who specialise in different departments of life and universal concerns.

For the poet, Atunda's act is the archetype of change and progress. The most certain route to development, he seems to convey, is liberal humanism. Humanity is presented as the essence of divinity because the gods derive their relevance from human existence. Therefore, they must deploy their powers to the pursuit of human good, else 'control [would slip] Immortal grasp'. Significantly, however, human beings need not wait for the gods. Even when their 'passage' through life seems 'pre-ordained', they must facilitate the process of their own development – 'self-ordered winds / In reconstruction... Rebirth!' Thus, in spite of being a beneficiary of that archetype of democratisation, Ogun grieves because the process of achieving a fuller liberal humanist world cannot be stalled:

... on the hills of Idanre memories
Grieved him, my Hunter god, Vital
Flint of matter, total essence spilt again
On recurrent boulders

... yet I must

*This way again. Let all wait the circulation
Of time's acrobat, who pray*

*For dissolution: the chronicle abides in clay texts
And fossil textures (69).*

The process is aptly documented. The boulders are recurrent. Change is inevitable because 'time's acrobat' would circulate the universe. Ogun himself might someday become a 'victim of this perpetual change and be condemned to the 'archives/ Of deities heaved from primal burdens'. Angry against himself as a possible 'Outcast Deity', he seeks the 'season's absolution'. The poet persona walks 'in the footprints' of his god because as mortal man, the condition of his own existence is also defined by impermanence. Yet, man is the ultimate, the ever present centre of universal concern whose being is in perpetual reconstruction and re-birth.

The poet takes the narrative back to the genesis of human life when the gods – Orisa-nla, Orunmila, Esu and Ifa – attempted to 'Fraternise with man'. The poet again emphasises the centrality of mankind to universal existence. The gods could not achieve their goal because between their abode in 'the heavens' and man's place on earth is a 'plague of finite chaos'. Apparently, the work of the 'creation' (or 'evolution') of the universe was yet to be completed at the time. Man as the ultimate worldly factor was yet to receive due emphasis. The gods were yet to become essentialised in human imagination and practice. There was a critical lacuna in the finishing of the universe as a unified, cohesive form, especially in terms of linkages between physical and metaphysical beings, and between those beings and the forces of Nature. Ogun had observed the gap as well as the failed efforts of his colleagues to remedy the situation. Importantly also, he could see through and understand the workings of the physical world and its relations to the sphere of the metaphysical.

Drawing upon some of Sango's resources in addition to his 'mesh of elements', he sets out to 'clear a path to man', a task which he soon achieved.

With this feat, he becomes quite popular amongst his colleagues who offer him 'the crown of deities'. Ogun refuses to become king of the gods. Rather, he keeps to himself as 'the lone one'. But the elders of Ire (a shortened form of Idanre) would achieve what the other gods (who twice within this movement have been depicted as very susceptible to failure) fail to achieve. Through 'diplomatic arts', they besieged and persuaded him into accepting to become their king. Ogun is crowned the king of Idanre, and that becomes the beginning of a major travail for the people of the town: 'Who brings a god to supper, guard him well / And set his place with a long bamboo pole' (72).

Ogun is a god, not man. His appetite for food, water, wine, blood and women is extraordinary and hardly imaginable. He is the 'Godhead in carnage'. He needs the entire rainfall of a season for him to wash his fingers, not even bathe his whole body. The season of harvest is a misery for the people of Idanre because Ogun alone consumed all their produce; they suffer 'depleted pastures' and their 'Earth is flattened'. No doubt, Ogun is a defender of rights and a shield for orphans; he is king of Ire and would defend his people in war. But beyond the role of warrior envisaged for him as king, how does a god interpret or appreciate the question of human rights? Human rights are primarily a phenomenon of human existence and capture the secular essence of human relations.

Thus, for a god who is 'fugitive from man and god', rights are an alien phenomenon: 'Who speaks to me I cannot tell'. If the enemies of the people of Idanre had approached Ogun 'with lush obsequious rites', he would have given his assistance to them as well. It is in human nature to always seek the greatest advantage over other

people, with less thought about grave consequences. The humanistic attitude would be that human beings must evolve ways of resolving their differences and crises because the 'gods' do not [always] appreciate man's conditions of existence for man's own immediate interest. Simple conditions of living do not require extreme fire fighting measures:

We do not burn the woods to trap
A squirrel, we do not ask the mountains
Aid, to crack a walnut (72).

It is in man's place to determine safe, workable methods of achieving peaceful, progressive co-existence with his fellow men. The poet iterates that the 'Gods drowse in boredom' and would jump at any solicitation to intervene in human and societal palaver. The Idanre experience is an echo of Shakespeare's line: 'Like flies to wanton boys are we to the gods.' In other words, human beings must find human solutions to human and societal problems.

In the fifth movement, Ogun is presented in 'the battle'. He is not an ordinary warrior; he is an annihilator. He attacks the enemies and all their resources. He destroys their farmlands and houses and dries up their wells. Thus, even those that escape his axe at the war-front have nothing to return to back at 'home'. He is a possessed fighter and magician. He takes the form of a monster whenever he wishes and seems to block all 'strategic outlets' of escape. He soon disposes of the enemies and turns to slay his men. War is 'a human feast' and it matters less whose blood is spilled. All cries of 'Your men Ogun! Your men!' make no point to a 'Lust-blind god', 'a gore-drunk Hunter', a 'Monster deity'. Even his sword seems possessed. It is programmed to wreak havoc on every human warrior in sight.

Neither Ogun nor his sword understands the word 'retreat' in war. The people of Idanre mourn the day they invited a god to be their king. They have not been wise, not even their elders. They chose a 'cannibal' for their king and took no precautions to protect themselves:

To bring a god to supper is devout, yet
A wise host keeps his distance till
The Spirit one has dined his fill. What mortal
Brands a platter with an awesome name,
Or feeds him morsels choice without
Gauntlets of iron. A human feast
Is indifferent morsel to a god (76).

Ogun is not a deity of half-measures. He is described as 'a lethal arc' which must go its 'full circle'. For him, the smell of human blood is the same, in spite of typical social and racial pretences. The deity makes no differences of human supplications and the sacrificial knife: 'All prayers were one/To the Iron One'. The poet uses Ogun to illustrate a critical aspect of the humanistic venture: the sameness of man in spite of class, gender, ethnicity, race, religion and various other categories by which man has always sought to differentiate and separate himself from fellow men. This sameness is further underscored by the phenomenon of death as a common destination. Yet, man everywhere is an individual whose experience and perception of self, others and the entire phenomena of existence would always compel him to differentiate between members of his species, to moralise and essentialise existence, and to institute such patterns of relationships that precipitate the inevitability of conflict and make his existence largely tragic.

At the time Ogun realises the ironic twist in his exploits, it is already 'Too late for joy'. Truth is 'a late dawn'. The people of Ire are late at reaching the truth. Or, they seem to arrive at the right knowledge of life, war and peace when their men are

already in the 'red furnaces' and their deity in a state of remorse could offer no aid. Typically, again, the history of mankind is always replete with regrets, with late realisations of 'the road not taken'. Truth is always 'a late dawn' because human life is described as 'the two-cowries change of the dealer'. There is always a second road. There is so much of passion and failure in human endeavour that the second road always offers itself as the truth, the road that should have been taken. But this offering always comes when the deed has been done and the opportunity for change is minimal, if not lost altogether. The result is that human progress is incremental; it comes in bits and pieces because man is always prone to error and the ability to adjust or reverse himself is slow, painstaking and sometimes or often unsteady. So much energy is expended in achieving what, in retrospect, turns out to be so little in a lifetime:

Because the rodent nibbled somewhat at his yam,
The farmer hired a hunter, filled him with wine
And thrust a firebrand in his hand (72).

But after all the anger and preparation for war,

... the squirrel ran up an iroko tree
And the hunter's chase
Was ended (80).

Probably, man is not a pawn in the hands of the gods only; he is also a pawn in his own hands. He plays the game of life with himself and against himself; sometimes he wins, sometimes he loses, and sometimes he is just lost to the 'wind's possession' and cannot tell the drift of the game, or the actual, innate condition of what seems like positive or negative results. His fatalism places an eternal query on his moments of

earthly glory which are shared with the daunting seasons of futility and indeterminacy.

In 'recessional', the poet persona has a feast of meditations at the hills of Idanre on the night before harvest, which he describes as Ogun's 'Pre-banquet'. Ogun's descent to the hills is slow, probably as a reflection of his state of remorse after his havoc against the Idanre people. The worshippers pray that he would hasten his steps; not that they are anxious to participate in a meal with Ogun, or to be allowed into the vagaries of a fellowship with him. They are badly in need of harvest after a war experience that has stretched, depleted and deflated them. Ogun is the god of harvest and there can be no harvest without his 'Pre-banquet'. Yet, like a child who 'averts his eye from an elder's/Nakedness', Ogun has exposed himself but the people of Idanre seem to 'smooth (his) path/To where is home'. They would take no chances because a god who demands blood could still be 'pursued by blood (even) in his lone descent'.

The poet persona thinks that Ogun should reflect on the 'assertive act' of Atunda and be ashamed of his own destructive act. Atunda's act facilitated the multiplication of life and freedom. He is the archetype of a positive revolution and the examples of 'Zeus, Osiris, Yahweh, Christ' all trail his model of progress. In terms of creation, wisdom for living, and 'Divining eyes' for grappling with metaphysical realities, Atunda facilitated the multiplication of options and possibilities, which underscore traditional and contemporary liberal practice. Like he dutifully served Orisa-nla until the fateful day of the rolling of the boulder, Atunda still 'guards the Creative Flint' and propagates its essence: 'He shall teach us to ignite our several kilns / And glory in each bronzed emergence.'

Ogun's destructiveness must still be countered because Atunda's creative spirit, of which Ogun is the greatest partaker and dispenser, is like the 'Möbius Strip'. It is like a 'self-devouring' and self-recreating snake with a multiplicity of forms and 'Complexities of mind and motion' that can never be exhausted. Thus, Atunda as guard of 'the Creative Flint', may never be able to reverse himself of his act and, for instance, assume the authoritarianism of Orisa-nla. This is why the poet hails him as a saint.

Bringing in Atunda into the poetic narrative at this point is a design to shame Ogun because of his latest destructive attitude to his own people. But the poet soon reverses himself because that seeming destructiveness of Ogun is a critical aspect of 'the Creative Flint', one which in the main ensures man's transportation to the realm of the sublime and the ancestors. Ogun's godchildren become 'Deaf to thunder, blind to light'. There is a merging of their consciousness into 'one omni-sentient cauldron' and this becomes the representative and guiding spirit of the community.

Importantly, Ogun's seeming destructiveness becomes a critical aspect of the 'Möbius Strip' which must devour itself in order to experience the 'interlock of re-creative rings'. It underlines the essence of cosmic and communal continuities and an inevitable counterbalancing of earthly and metaphysical realities. Ogun embodies the inherent contraries of existence, which incorporates human progress as a self-evaluating, self-negating and self-promoting movement of 'mind and motion'. His activities do not reflect a pleasant combination of experience; yet they buttress the elemental and quintessential 'code of passage'.

Finally, the people of Idanre reach their destination: a peaceful, plentiful harvest. With the night of Ogun's 'Pre-banquet' comes the sense of freedom that normally accompanies the moment of plentiful supplies and food security described

by such words and phrases like 'sprout', 'progressive arcs', 'ocean/of a million roe', 'first fruits rose', 'corn sheaves rose', 'domes of eggs and flesh/of palm fruits', 'throng of golden gourds', etc. Ogun himself is the chief harvester. The town wakes to the sound of unusual, 'braided vapours' and dances in praise of Ogun, their 'groom and king' who has offered his blessing to them again. Ogun drinks in celebration, and the poet persona drinks too. Harvest is a long season of prosperity and joy, and soon, 'the forests swallow' the god, who having accomplished his missionary circle, leaves 'mankind to harvest'.

The poet persona returns to the 'pilgrim lodge' where the 'wine-girl [had] kept lone vigil' waiting for harvest. Now, they have all experienced Ogun in his fullness. They appreciate his relevance to their physical and metaphysical existence. He is the ultimate consummation of their social and spiritual activities, and their agricultural and technological endeavours. Thus,

... they moved towards resorption in his alloy essence
Primed to a fusion, primed to the sun's dispersion
Containment and communion, seed-time and harvest, palm
And pylon, Ogun's road a 'Mobius' orbit, kernel
And election, wine to alchemy (82).

At the end of the poem, Soyinka emphasises the definitive character of Ogun's role in human society. He is the chief benefactor of 'the Atunda Ideal' (Osundare, 1994:81-97), which he promotes in various significant ways. He represents the essence of creativity, of exploration and invention, of technological development and agricultural growth, of social security as the 'shield' of orphans, and of communal renewal through the symbolic essence of the 'Mobius Strip'.

Ogun's destructiveness is synonymous with evil. Yet, at the higher level of communal and cosmic existence, it underscores the need for continuity through

renewal. And renewal cannot be achieved without cleansing and purgation. Hence the attribute of violence associated with Ogun and the inevitability of negative tempers and developments in man's search for progress. Ogun is Soyinka's possible, ultimate symbol of the complex dimensions of man's historical and continuous struggles for humanistic progress. Importantly also, the critical signification of 'Idanre' as an Ogunnian text buttresses not the need for man's divinity, but the essence of the humanity of deity, which is achieved largely in the context of the secularisation of the experience of Soyinka's Yoruba deities as humanistic figures.

(4.14) HUMANISM AND THE IMAGINATION OF REGENERACY

Humanism is a philosophical way of living organised around the immediate values of human existence and how these values and their imports enhance the quality of life. As illustrated in the introductory chapters, it has a long tradition underlined by differing ideological tempers and attitudes resulting in the heterogeneousness of its form. But holding all these together is that overwhelming sense of commitment to man as an intrinsic being and his progress as a social entity. The liberal variant of humanism offers a 'simple and commonsensical' appreciation of that commitment through a mode of practice that engages the imagination as the primary site of humanistic experience. It is a site that actively relates with and draws upon the experience of the rational and emotive elements of the individual in its expression of creativity and offering of transforming capabilities to self and society. As critical imagination, it is a site that captivates human self-perception, the bugging questions

of the persistent human condition of depravity and degeneration, and the essentialisation of regeneracy as the ultimate score of man's highest possible (sense of) fulfilment.

Regeneracy, of course, raises the question of morality. But morality in core humanist traditions, liberalism included, does not equate compliance with religious codes, even though in many cases, several of those codes directly imply or enhance the idea of widely accepted positive attitudes and acts. For humanists, morality is a bio-sociological construction which emphasises time-tested principles that enhance the desired positive development of the individual and his society. Such principles include the love of self and the love of one's neighbours, integrity and honesty, hardwork, kindness and generosity, etc. These principles underscore the objective elements and appropriateness of human behaviours and attitudes, all of which enhance the individual's sense of the ethical proportions of his existence as an individual and as a social being.

Yet, human experience is replete with the universal story of moral failure or state of moral corruption. In fact, humanism itself as a philosophical and socio-political interpretation of experience is a distilled admittance of that moral failure. Otherwise, the essentialisation of its systems of thought and practice, in whatever shade or persuasion, would be unfounded. Man, in a state of nature, is a savage. His need for cultivation, civilisation and regeneracy is thus a challenge of the humanist imagination. These issues of the humanist imagination and man's regeneracy are aptly and elaborately captured in the poetry of Soyinka. Three core elements are to be emphasised in this aspect of Soyinka's work: the phenomenon of depravity, individualism and the free imagination, and the projections of regeneracy. These

elements further buttress the nature and scope of his liberal humanist attitude to art and to life.

(4.14.1) The Phenomenon of Depravity

The use of the term 'depravity' in the study is not founded on the idea of the original sin, which of course would elicit enormous interest in Christian humanists. Morality, for the liberal humanist, is a social issue, necessitated by the phenomenon of community. It encapsulates the notion and practice of self-responsibility and social responsibility, a commitment to principles that promote human welfare and human relations in ways generally considered to be positive, especially in a utilitarian sense (see Bentham, 1780). Depravity, therefore, would mean the critical absence of what has been described by various humanists, philosophers, etc., as the good life. It is synonymous with a persistent state of evil, 'an accumulation of anti-social behavior and a failure of the will to do good' (Herrick, 2006:26). There is an enormous propensity for evil in the human person, and that underscores his depravity and tragic condition. But man also has a colossal inclination to do good. He is thus an agent of choice in the question of his morality. These two sides of the moral experience are at play in the humanist poetry of Soyinka.

In 'Conversation at Night with a Cockroach' (*A Shuttle*, 5-13), the poet captures man at the very basest of the moral condition. Man - in this case, his (i.e. the poet's) captors who are supposed to be representations of the agency of law and order in society - is described as a cockroach, a household pest particularly dangerous for the spread of germs. The cockroach is seemingly ubiquitous and this indicates that its attributes and character are to be found in man everywhere. Like the cockroach, man's life is 'grimy', made dirty by the evil act of always plotting to take advantage

of others, or always promoting his self-interest at the expense of the immediate or larger community. Age provides the defense of experience for him. He is a 'cunning' character, 'oiled/As darkness, keyed in decoy rasps'. The 'subtle feelers' of the cockroach refer to man's innate ability to study situations and drive guidedly in the direction of his interests. But those interests are often constituted by destructive forces:

Our maps did not long survive your trails
To mislead, false contours from secretions
Of your poison ducts.

It seems that the very bio-psychological construction of the human person is satiated with evil potentials. What more can be the outcomes of the dwelling of 'poison ducts' in man? He is bereft of noble emotions and displays a lack of neighbourliness. He shows neither pity in daytime nor love at night. His actions are such that even make it difficult for others around him to practice being good because he

...pierce(s) holes invisible
Within the heart of nature for all
Of good to seep through unnoticed and unmourned.

Social trust is a mirage because consistently, man's character is defined by dishonest acts which always add up to destroy the essence of communitarianism, 'the heart of our concerted bond'. In spite of the much stir and bustle that accompany stories of human 'progress', at the centre of the totality of man's experience is the tragedy of his depravity:

... lost
Was the heat of purpose, soiled
Our standard of the awakened hour.

That depravity is not a condition imposed upon human existence by the supposed prescriptions and expectations of some divine order; it is man's moral failure in the light of his own enlightenment as a social being. Man also suffers the problem of a defective conditioning. He is 'sleek in dirt', 'lowered beneath the rotted roots, 'attuned / To a stale, complacent air'. Thus, the question of evil is both innate and social.

Man is always conscious of his moral condition and often tries to attune his thoughts and actions to the inspiring status of objective and socially uplifting elements. He engages in the arduous task of reforming society, of forcing out the 'impurities' in the way of the nation's progress, of 'cleans(ing) the faulted lodes'. His objectives are to improve his environment, enhance social trust, and 'forge new realities' that would help capture real freedom in an atmosphere of peace. But this is degenerate man with fabulous intentions. Soon, he becomes 'wise to portents' – 'the cyclone heat', 'coalitions new / of tried corruptions', 'wavering weather vanes', 'hidden longing', etc. Man thinks and behaves like the cockroach:

Rest. Rock not our neat foundations
With futile quarrying. Pace pulses
Of your thoughts to cycles as of water-wheels
Dipping with aged ease in wells
Of milk and honey.

Comfort is a fundamental principle of human existence, and this implies that man will always compromise other positive values to achieve and preserve a state of ease for himself. The seeming dialogue between the cockroach and the poet persona achieves the same end of depicting aspects of man's moral existence. Man's history is that of a long sojourn among human 'violators'. It is a history of man's inhumanity to man. He lives his life in perpetual quest for the 'dusks of peace'. But peace is a

mirage. Even though he has survived many violations, his hope of immortality conceived of in the humanist practice of procreation as the eternalisation of the human imprint, is quashed – ‘Our firstborn/It was that died’. His prospects are ‘uncharted’ because his genealogical continuity is determined:

... mere men
Lose footing on the peaks of deities.
The torch was quenched, the void
Of darkness rang with madness
Each his own priest, quick, easy
The act of sacrifice. We know to wait.
We nibble blood before it cakes.

Man is scavenger, and man is also the victim of his own scavenging. In straight terms, the poet captures the dialogue ‘Of the new abiding – man, ghoul, cockroach, / Jackal and brood of vile cross-breeding’. In times of seeming peace, man is a grime and cunning being; in times of hostility, he is an evil demon that kills children, destroys women pregnant with unborn children, and prepares the corpse for his meal. From his being flows ‘the floods / Of hate’s dark waters’ which fills and pollutes the earth. Thus, the natural environment is also a victim of the evil force that resides in man.

Depravity underscores the tragic nature of human existence. Significantly, death is a companion of that tragic element. Though it manifests ultimately in the annihilation of the physical body and all the elements of the vibrant life, in its primary form, it is an experience which depraved man suffers on a daily basis. It comes in many guises – ‘death in evil’, ‘death without hue’, death in ‘the cloak of scavengers’, ‘Grave-robbers’, ‘claws of greed’, death ‘in the colour of foul thoughts and whispers/fouled in tension’, ‘A contrivance... to discolour/Records’, ‘A scheming for intestate legacies’, etc. It can be critically deduced from the long list offered by the poet that depravity and death are two sides of the same coin. It would follow,

therefore, that since all men suffer death, then all men are depraved. Death is the ultimate form of moral corruption and it compromises all knowable and acceptable humanistic essences. Yet, it is the indispensable element that re-affirms and strengthens man's (sense of his) humanity:

Tears are rainfall in the house of death
Softening, purging, purifying. Tears
Are a watering shed to earth's
Unceasing wounds. This death was arid
There was no groan, no sorrowing at the wake -
Only curses. No suffering, for the senses
Were first to die. We died, the world
Turned a blank eye to the sky
And prayed: may Heaven comfort you;
On earth, our fears must teach us silence.

Death is no longer all-evil because it becomes the antithesis of depravity. For the dead, there is 'glorious' release from the trouble of the world, a quintessential freedom likened to the comfort of heaven. Through that ultimate mode of corruption, man can no longer experience depravity. For the living, there is the 'softening' of being, the purgation and purification of spirit and the wisdom and sobriety of life, all of which underline cardinal objective elements necessary for human progress in society.

Yet again, man, like the cockroach, does not change his cloak of depravity. The tragedy of his depravity is probably worsened by the ignorance of his own moral condition. This implies that he does not give much critical thought to the life he lives. This is a state of 'foreknowing contentment'. He cannot be really bothered by his condition or those of his fellow humans because nothing changes in a really fundamental way about the human being as a moral person. Thus, 'All was well. All was even / As it was in the beginning.'

The state of man's well being depicts his 'foreknowing contentment' with his own depravity and its twin component. That has been the story of mankind, a story that has never changed throughout history, and a story that may never change in spite of the permanence of the regularity of (seemingly) positive changes in society. Man cannot be bothered about the fundamental nature of his moral existence – the certainty of his depravity and the inevitability of his death. Yet, he is forever charged towards the manifestation of the objective elements of the social collective by the general idea of 'wellness'.

But how far does his effort at progress take him? In 'Death in the Dawn' (*Idanre*, 10-11), man, the traveler, the quester, 'sets forth at dawn', 'Racing joys and apprehensions for / A naked day'. The end of his progression: 'he is 'silenced in the startled hug of/ (his) invention'. In 'A Cry in the Night' (*Idanre*, 25-26), the poet persona witnesses the burial of a still-born. He mourns: 'Such tender stalk is earthed/in haste'. The 'tender stalk' is compromised by its association with the human species or by the imminence of its own humanity. Man's moral/mortal experience is thus depicted as a fundamental question of existence: how does man reconcile himself with the seemingly contradictory nature of his existence? The poet proffers an answer in 'Post Mortem' (*Idanre*, 31):

Let us love all things of grey; grey slabs
Grey scalpel, one grey sleep and form,
Grey images.

Man has to accept and live with his grey self because that is an integral part of his existence.

(4.14.2) Individualism and the Free Imagination

A recurrent theme in the writing of Soyinka, his poetry especially, is the idea of man's individuality and how that individuality is shaped by the imagination in a way that significantly distinguishes the individual from other members of society. A simple illustration of this humanist value in his poetry is the variety of thoughts and character associated with each individual that he focuses on. The poet persona is ever hardly the same person in any two poems.

In the poems under the section titled 'lone figure' (*Idanre*, 17-21), the poet paints various images of man's aloneness, a state that is principally shaped by his (i.e. man's) individuality and difference from other men. 'The Dreamer' captures Christ as a striking image of the peculiarity of individualistic thought and ambition. He possesses a messianic vision because he imagines himself in a world of his own in terms of the depth of his experience and the (self) authenticity of his authority. He is the archetype of the messiah as an individual with a redemptive and transformative vision – to 'cleanse of mould' and to bring about the 'chronicles of gold'. But that archetype also embodies the complexity of contraries – 'Mourn a fruit in Prime', 'throes and thrones'.

Christ as archetype, however, does not function only at that realm of messianic absorption. He is an illustration of the capabilities of experience situated within the human mind, the imaginative essence of man's individuality. That essence incorporates the individual as an individual who is always changing through time and space. He is also always imagining and re-creating society according to his own experience and fancy. Every man as an individual shares the imaginative attribute of the messiah, albeit at varying degrees. A critical point in this poem is that the

individual, whether as messiah or as man, is defined by his imaginative latitude, which determines the degree of his existence as a dreamer and a lone figure.

In 'Easter', the poet advances the idea of a messianic vision - man must make sacrifices for the good of humanity. In a sense, every man seems to appreciate the sacrifice of the other person, albeit at a superficial level:

Do we not truly fear to bleed? We hunt
Pale tissue of the palm, fingers groping
Ever cautious on the crown.

It would not really matter so much if the sacrifice comes from a distant person, and that seems to be the extent to which the sacrifice is appreciated. Man is so individualistic that the poet wonders how just one individual 'bough' would satisfy the thirst of millions of boughs in the forest. The free imagination underscores the ingenuity of man's existence as individual; it points in the direction of his creative capabilities and modes of transforming his environment. But it does not unmake the question of his depravity:

Decay
Caulks earth's centre; spurned we pluck
Bleached petals for the dreamer's lair.

Thus, the free imagination also plays around the question of man's moral existence. The celebration of Easter is significant for the ingenuity of its symbolism: 'coquettes / To the future decadence'. 'The Hunchback of Dugbe' seems to be an apt material representation of that decadence. The hunchback is a pungent depiction of (mal)creation as a dimension of human individuality. At the physiological level, he is the symbol of distortion as individuality. He is defined by 'his thin buttocks', 'A horse penis loin to crooked knees / Side-slapping on his thighs'. At the level of social relations, he is 'The calmest nudist / Of the roadside lunatics'. He is 'a cask of

silence' who 'prowls' at night 'on his matrix'. Psychologically, 'the world / spins on his spine, in still illusion'. He imagines the world as his own burdens of experience. The issue is probably not so much about the hunch on his back, but what society thinks of the hunch and what he feels about the attitude of society. Apparently, he is the illustration of the individual as victim of a captured imagination, an imagination that is almost solely defined by external social forces and which often results in the erosion of the creative and transformative force within the individual, or the individual being driven, like the hunchback, to the edge of lunacy.

Yet, there is a metaphysical dimension to the individuality of the hunchback. At this level, he transcends the binarity of social experience. His is the story of humanity as 'truth immune(d) / From song or terror'. The essence of his life cannot be captured within the categories of 'ugliness or beauty'. Even when his imagination fails him in the context of social experience, he still possesses that essence and distinctiveness of being that defies that stricture of homogeneity and social commentaries. 'The Hunchback of Dugbe' is a poetic statement about the ultimateness of man's individuality in spite of the colours and contours that may enhance or hamper the physiological, psychological, social and metaphysical aspects of his existence.

In Soyinkan poetics, Ogun is the paramount representation of individuality. This assertion of difference from other deities in the Yoruba Pantheon has been discussed in an earlier part of this study. His condition of aloneness is again emphasised in 'Dawn' (*Idanre*, 9). But this is done primarily in the context of depicting his imaginative and creative essence. The poem celebrates newness and the coming of a new day as the gift of Ogun's imagination – 'tearing wide / The chaste hide of the sky'. This is the ability and responsibility to explore the virgin spheres of

life and nature, a feat that can be the result of only a fertile, daring and creative mind. He is thus described as the 'one who bore the pollen highest'. Creativity and productivity are linked with an efficacious imagination and that is what counts in evaluating the extrinsic value of human individuality. An undeveloped mind is of little or no value to society and the individuality of the bearer would be critically short of communal or social significance.

Thus, in 'Around Us, Dawning' (*Idanre*, 12), man follows the example of Ogun by putting his imagination to work. He creates an aeroplane, which like Ogun, 'prowls / The rare selective heights / And spurns championship with bird'. At the social level, man's imaginative ingenuity leads him to design an object for the convenience and improved living of his fellow human beings. At the metaphysical level, man's creativity underscores the freedom of the imagination as an essence of his individuality. Like the aeroplane and like Ogun, it is only through the imagination that man can explore the 'rare selective heights' of life and nature. This latter level of human engagement is most critical because it is the engine-room of the circle of possibilities that propel and reinforce social development.

(4.14.3) Projections of Regeneracy

For liberal humanist, regeneracy is not the idea of a supernatural encounter by which an individual offers himself the claim of some instantaneous cleansing from a life of evil. It is a practical biological, imaginative and socio-technological movement towards such development that impacts positively upon the lives of humans as individuals and as community. At the biological level, it encapsulates the idea of procreation as indication of the perpetual renewal of hope for humankind. Since no two individuals are ever exactly the same in terms of all categories of psycho-

biological and social evaluation, human procreation offers those endless stretches of conceived and yet-to-be conceived possibilities of experience which could embody the gems of renewal as well as moral, social and technological grandeur for the individual and for society. In the context of the seeming fundamental nature of human depravity, each human birth further endangers man and his environment. Yet, every new baby that is born into the world raises the hope of human continuity and progress.

At the level of the imagination, humanists focus largely on artistic productions as modes of exploring man's innate creative capabilities. The arts lend themselves most easily to the exploration of the countless tracts of the human mind. Thus, they provide indepth probe into the question and dynamics of human regeneracy and couch the subject of human development in innumerable ways. In *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness* (1999), Soyinka categorically asserts the essential role of the arts in the search for human renewal. He conceives of regeneracy in the context of the dialectics of memory and forgiveness. Is it possible to achieve human regeneracy in established contexts of social conflict without the reconciliation of the opposing parties? This is just one of various elements that cut across Soyinka's writing in terms of the question of regeneracy. The critical point here, however, is that for the humanist (writer), the arts constitute that quintessential medium for the appreciation and 'recovery of lost innocence' (Soyinka, 1999:194). They also provide a platform for the coordinated exploration of original ideas.

Often, such originality of ideas manifests in social and technological developments which tend to enhance the standards of living in society. Regeneracy thus encapsulates man's progress in terms of his material well-being, and the enhancement of such inspiring cords of relationship between him and society. Any examination of the subject of regeneracy that is empty of this social objective would

invariably amount to a discourse on speculations, sentimental hopes and fantasy. The significance of the biological and artistic dimension of the subject is in great proportion geared towards facilitating the actualisation of the social objectives. The combination of these factors as positive forces should culminate in man's incremental development as a moral being. These blended elements manifest in various forms and at varying degrees in the poetry of Soyinka.

In 'Dedication' (*Idanre*, 24-25), the poet explores the symbolic essence of the birth of a child: hope for mankind. That exploration takes the form of a prayer, the evocation of the positive forces of the earth upon the child. The child is born into the solidity and stability of Mother Earth, not the transience of the rafter and 'dung floors'. It offers renewed dependable relationship between man and nature. That constitutes the concrete moral basis of human development – that is, a positive and critical appreciation of man's relationship with his environment. The child is, therefore, admonished to investigate Nature for the essences embodied in it in terms of the two encompassing elements of human experience: life and death.

The child must learn from the yam, and the poet prays that the child would be the yam tuber which, though buried in the earth, is not dead. It is a 'living tuber / To the warmth of waters'. The child has to bury itself in Nature because that is the only sure route to life. Though Nature, to the uncultivated mind, may appear virgin, pristine and far from modernisation, it is like the 'navel of the storm', the central point in a burgeoning civilisation. It is the key implement for the cultivation of modernity: 'for the hoe / That roots the forest ploughs a path for squirrels'. The child should devote itself to Nature in order to experience the freshening of 'rain's fingers' and the warmth of 'the sun's shadow'. Importantly, it must appreciate the beauty and goodness of its own body, without the artificiality of clothing. Yet, natural as it must

strive to be, it must not allow 'the feet of men' to 'wash (it) over'. It must be strong enough to assert and protect itself. Thus the poet prays:

Peppers green and red – child – your tongue arch
To scorpion tail, spit straight return to danger's threats
Yet coo with the brown pigeon, tendril dew between your lips.

The desire is not to make the child an aggressor or a bully; it is to ensure a balance of attitude to the conditions of peace and aggression. Man's depravity is such that would always manifest in offences to the sensibilities of fellow humans. But regency is not tantamount to the child becoming a treadmill for its depraved fellows. The child must shield itself like 'the flesh of palms', 'skyward held / Cuspids in thorn nesting', 'the heart of kernel'. The shield is not made of metal that would probably steel the heart. The idea is to always leave the heart open to the echoes and grace of Nature – the 'suppleness of life', the 'timeless run of runnels', 'Earth's honeyed milk', 'wine of the only rib'.

Regency is of little significance if it does not manifest in the 'worldly' happiness of the regenerate: 'your world needs sweetening, child'. The poet prays and admonishes simultaneously: 'Now roll your tongue in honey till your checks are/swarming honeycombs'. The child should possess the strength of heart and character, like a goddess, so that even when it needs the help of fellow humans, it would not be that it seeks such 'from tears'. The child should 'drink of (the) purity' of 'rain-water', 'the gift of gods', and 'bear fruits in season'.

The 'worldly' happiness of the individual, for the humanist, no doubt comes with its own responsibilities. The child must hasten to repay / 'The debt of birth'. Yes, it is an individual, but it has been born into a community of other individuals and therefore strives to live a life that promotes the well-being of the collective because

that way it also ensures the protection of its own shifting self-interest in a community of myriads of self-interests. It must possess the 'lips of salt' to sweeten the lives of those around it and to be diplomatic where necessary in order to promote peace and neighbourliness. It must always remember that man is like the sea that tides and ebbs, and must therefore not lose sight of the ephemerality of its existence. The bottom line, therefore, is that it must strive to 'leave a meaning on the fossilised sands'. The emphasis must be on the word 'meaning', that is, the meaningfulness of the life, the relevance of the life to itself and to those around it. This is because 'fossilised sands' points at the possibility of permanence as well as change. Nature itself is in a state of flux, and communities change. Thus, the meaning of a life could vary from one spatio-temporal context to the other.

That, in sum, implies the shifty nature of the experience of human regeneracy. Man has to appreciate the relevance of his moral condition on the basis of his understanding of Nature, Time and the specific context of his relationship with fellow human beings. To a large extent, the appreciation and achievement of meaning in life is a backward-looking practice of bequeathals, assessments and appropriations. Thus, contemporary generations can examine the histories and traditions that have significantly shaped or impacted upon their own appreciation of the human life and essences, and the processes (past and present) by which current practices have emerged into the living stories of their own existence. But the same generations can only speculate about how the future, in concrete terms, affects the values and practices of the present. Significantly, therefore, the meaning of life as encapsulated in the Soyinkan idea of human regeneracy is bound by the inevitable constraints of space and time, and would be ultimately assessed on the basis of the nature and value

of the social 'debt' which man may (be deemed to) have paid at the expiration of his life.

Regeneracy, for Soyinka, is not synonymous with the conceptualisation of simple life-giving and life-enhancing forces in society. There is always the deconstructive twist that affirms, queries, raises doubts, subverts, returns to reinforce faith and doubt simultaneously, and moves on and on in circles of the same process. Thus, in the organisation of poems under the section 'of birth and death', there is the presentation of thoughts in a mode that transcends a mere binarity of experience. There are critical shades of experience between life and death, and these are no simple equalisations of the experience of life and regeneracy, or of death and depravity. In 'A Cry in the Night' (*Idanre*, 25-26) the poet explores the phenomenon of the experience of stillbirth. On the one hand, the poem points at the possibility of such experience that precedes life and death. Human life explained in terms of the indispensable social consciousness of being cannot be described as realised in the 'experience' of the stillborn. Otherwise, life would be defined purely as a biological phenomenon in which case the question of regeneracy is non-existent.

On the other hand, the poem examines stillbirth as an experience of death- 'such tender stalk is earthed / In haste'. A dialectic point in the analytic polarity of the experience of the stillbirth is the inseparability of birth and death, especially as birth becomes somewhat synonymous with death. The implication here is that the phenomenon of birth as regeneracy is not exclusive of the occurrence of death as a condition of depravity, and may, in fact, carry with it some of the properties of depravity that precede death as the terminus of being.

In 'A First Death Day' (*Idanre*, 26), the poet advances the argument about the transpositionality of life and death as a definitive character of the experience of

regeneracy, and not just of depravity and regeneracy as binary forms. To regeneracy thus belong the 'wails of birth' and the 'grace' of death. A 'first birthday' is synonymous with 'a first death day'; and 'death day' here brings with it the 'deed of grace', the celebration of the victory of the poet persona – 'O death, where is thy string; O grave, where is thy victory?' (*I Corinthians* 15:55). It is least likely that the poet synchronises the thought of death with the Christian idea of the resurrection. But death becomes a category of regeneracy because the assuring knowledge of man's triumph over 'wails' and 'fears' at that critical moment of transition makes a mockery of the condition of human depravity. Death is thus the grand moment of man's escape from the depravity associated with his social existence. Yet, that moment itself constitutes the irreversible point of his movement into the abyss of eternal physical corruption, which is an immaterial issue to the extent that death entails the loss of human consciousness and the absence of the individual from the worry of society about his moral condition.

The poem 'Abiku' (*Idanre*, 28-30) provides a metaphysical dimension to the question of the nature of the relationship between life and death, and the significance of regeneracy. 'Abiku' is the Yoruba belief of the wanderer child 'who dies and returns again and again to plague the mother' (*Idanre*, 28). The poem opens with the boastfulness of the child:

In vain your bangles cast
Charmed circles at my feet
I am Abiku, calling for the first
And the repeated time.

...

Yams do not sprout in amulets
To earth Abiku's limbs.

The Abiku child is a phenomenon that shuttles between man's world of harsh social realities and the domain of a spiritual pre-life and after-death experience. The child is bound by 'a primeval oath... taken in the spirit world in the presence of the creator... the object of the oath is hidden away from ordinary human sight and usually buried under a huge tree, in the person's palm or in other impressive places' (Maduka, 1987:18; see also, Ogunyemi, 2002). The oath offers the child a strong assurance of the irreversibility of the nature of its existence by humans. Hence, its boastfulness.

The certainty of the Abiku phenomenon erases the simple categorisation of life and life-enhancing forces as element of regeneracy. The Abiku is a human that renews itself through a repeated process of birth and death. Through birth, it shares companionship with fellow human beings. Through death, it returns to the spirit world where it seems to renew its links with the 'source' of its being. Then it returns again to the human world to partake in the suffering and pleasures of earthly existence. The nature of its existence is thus one of alternation between depravity and regeneracy. Each time it returns to the human world, it is 'calling for the first' time. The implication is that the depravity of its previous earthly existence has been erased. It returns to earth as a regenerate and, no sooner, experiences depravity again.

Significantly, the Abiku child does not embark upon its rounds with the same human visage. Its character, mind, and general disposition to the environment could vary at each coming. Yet it is assumed that it is the same wanderer-child that returns each time. The critical element in the existence of the Abiku is its mytho-religious potency as a phenomenon that symbolises the human capacity for constant renewal and continuity. Its emphasis is not on human longevity but on the several turn-over of lives that an individual can make in what seems like an inestimable lifetime. It could be buttressed, therefore, that the Abiku phenomenon enriches the possibilities of the

analyses of existence. Within the spectrum of its offering, therefore, is the question of choice between the longevity of depravity and the quick turn-over of regency, amongst other possibilities.

By taking the discourse of regency to the domain of mythopoesy, Soyinka invariably introduces the issue of the limit of human knowledge in the appreciation of man's total existence. Though the Abiku phenomenon is a possibility of life, and a very artistic one at that, to what extent is man capable of appreciating an experience that is largely outside the grasp of his senses? The poem is thus a critical statement on the worrisome point of ignorance as a major condition of human existence and as a key element in the explanation of experience. The post of regency shifts to issues that border on man's knowledge of himself, man's knowledge of his environment and the universe, human assumptions and studied fabrications, and the tragic condition of human ignorance, amongst others.

In spite of the shifts of experience and analyses, Soyinka gives prominence to the simple, shared universal experience of human procreation. This is a basic approach to the issue of human renewal and continuity, stripped of the complex nuances of religious, philosophical and cultural values. In such poems as 'Koko Oloro', 'Psalm', 'Her Joy is wild', 'Bringer of Peace', and 'To One in Labour', amongst others, the poet captures the reproductive imperative of human existence in various modes of experiencing and as the index of the essential act of renewal and continuity. The child is presented as the symbol of innocence and hope for mankind. The reproductive act implies that there would always be children in the world and, in spite of the vagaries of existence, that is an overwhelming evidence of hope and regency for humanity.

The imagination of regency in Soyinka's poetry is steeped in the dialecticism of the sum total of human experience. That dialecticism engages the universal phenomenon of depravity in multi-dimensional ways that reflect man's inherent, bio-psychological and social limitations as a moral being. But man is a unique being different from animals and machines. That uniqueness is defined by his individuality, his difference one from the other, the distinctiveness of his imaginative capabilities, and his ability to respond intelligently to the conditions of his existence. He is thus able to reinvent his existence such that his life is not bogged down by his (sense of) depravity. Through biological endowments and the critical and imaginative exploration of his being and environment, he (re)orders himself onto the path of renewal and continuity.

Yet his condition of regency is neither exclusively defined by his individuality, nor is it bereft of some characters of depravity. As an individual, he does not transcend the moral limitations of living in terms that can be described as exhaustive or conclusive. However, he contributes to the social pool that becomes the key determinant of the renewal and continuity of his species. Thus, his individuality evinces a direct relevance to the progress of his community. That relevance encapsulates the peak of his experience of the regency of self and society.

(4.15) ETHOS OF HUMANISTIC STRUGGLE

A thorough appreciation of Soyinka's humanism would begin from the examination of the influences, individuals and institutions, that have contributed in significant ways in the shaping of his personality, his imagination, his art, and his relationship

with society. From the nature of those influences, a perceptive critic must begin to understand how the writer's mind works in his appreciation of the human condition. The author's background and his art necessarily depict the evolution of a type of consciousness which points at an emergent social vision. Importantly, therefore, Soyinka's humanism entails practical or realistic engagements with theoretical and development issues in society. This humanistic social commitment operates at two levels. The first is in his art; the second is in his socio-political activities. Though the focus in this study is on his art, it is almost unavoidable to discuss the nature and elements of Soyinka's social commitment in art without an occasional foray into his social politics.

Communitarianism is an integral element of Soyinka's humanism. This does not negate his belief in individualism. The core value of liberty derives from man's individuality. But man as individual lives in the community of other men. Even his sense of self is largely defined by the community, and his relationship with other men. Thus he participates in the life of his community. His participation is informed primarily by the need to protect and promote himself, and for the public good, which invariably still amount to self-protection (see Mill, 1859) because, often, the good of the public implies the well-being and happiness of the individual. Soyinka's humanism is thus individualistic and communitarian. He believes in a liberal, democratic and egalitarian society. Such a liberal society is one that encourages the fundamental rights of the citizens and the principle of openness in terms of citizens' participation in the process of government. Openness here also entails the 'Freedom (for citizens) of access to information about what is happening in society, with the opportunity of gaining wealth and the educational means to advance in society' (Herrick, 2006; 37-38). Such openness should translate into the mental and material

well-being of the citizens as individual and as society (see Popper, 1945) it should also imply that the conditions of social justice in the (re)distribution of wealth (see Rawls, 1971).

The vision and goal is to enhance the quality of life of the individual and facilitate holistic development in the community, or *vice versa*. The pursuit of this blended singular objective, in a world made up of individuals, groups, communities and nations with different histories, identities, perceptions, beliefs, approaches to issues of life, etc, often creates varying degrees of difference and tension such that make conflict an inevitable part of human experience. Even in communities or groups of seemingly like-minded people, difference and conflicts are ineluctable. The history of human (un)(der)development is necessarily dialectical. Importantly, therefore, the humanist vision of society courts a dialectical approach that incorporates positive objective forces that promote the 'common' good; it appreciates and engages unwholesome or negative elements that tend to undermine the general welfare of members of society.

In Soyinka's poetry, this vision manifests in at least two distinct and encompassing ways – the satisfaction of want and the quest for equity and these constitute the focus of the discourse in this section. They reflect much of man's positive concerns in society, engages the question of conflict as a legitimate category of social experience, and captures the forthrightness of humanist thinking and evaluation of social relations.

(4.15.1) The Satisfaction of Want

The goal of humanism is to pursue and achieve the fulfilment of man's positive potentials to the highest level of experience, thereby facilitating the holistic growth of

society. The fulfilment of such potentials, however, can be stimulated and advanced in the atmosphere of the satisfaction of man's basic needs - food, warmth, shelter, gainful employment, medical care, movement, education, etc. The absence of such an atmosphere, of course, implies the dire conditions of hunger, squalor, idleness, ignorance, illness, immobility, etc., which indicate the prevalence of an anti-human environment. Those dire conditions would necessarily precipitate unprecedented increases in crime, insecurity, social conflicts, sorrows and deaths, and take man back in the direction of base animal existence. Humanism thus has a critical worldly essence because the key factors that help to establish the primary circumstances of human existence are material.

In the 'Poems of bread and earth' (*The Shuttle*, 77-85), Soyinka discusses the issue of (the satisfaction of) human want in ways that capture three elements of contemporary experience - the basics of want, the extremities of want, and the crises of modernity. The first examines fundamental requirements of man's material existence. The second discusses the extremities of experience in the search for, or pursuit of those requirements. The third explores some of the critical issue associated with modernity as the peak of contemporary human material development. Together, the various elements indicate that the question of (the satisfaction of) human want is a complex, disputatious and dialectical matter that would not answer easily to man's socio-economic activism or the strategies of state policies and their implementations. Yet the satisfaction of human want is a fundamental prerequisite for the affirmation of the conditions by which man's humanity is certified.

'Poems of bread and earth' indicate the materiality of existence. In 'Relief' ('Or, Wedding in a Minor Way'), the poet asserts: 'Bread is magic, grace'. Bread is 'the pulse of life'. Bread is a metaphor for food, drink and money. It is the source of

human satisfaction, or relief. The poem was written during the Nigerian Civil War when the poet was in prison, and as a reaction to the wedding of Nigeria's Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, during the war (see, *The Man Died*, 1972:232-40).

The poet lampoons Gowon for his insensitivity to the nation's difficult condition:

I could laugh at one of those grisly jokes by which history compensates temporal derangements in rational thinking and human sensibilities. I could laugh at the photo of Gowon at his Island Club high-society reception, a photo in which he was happily conducting an orchestra during the devastation of a Nigerian City - there was Yakubu Nero Gowon at the reactionary centre of the Nigerian leisurely classes fiddling away while the Nation was burning (*The Man Died*, 234-5)

But here in the poem, it seems that the General tries to 'Shut those hungry mouths' of hundreds or thousands of citizens at the arena of his wedding. These are citizens who have been described as 'the victims' of the General's war against a rebelling section of the country. They are 'Locked so long with hate and fear / And fire before their eyes'. But 'Bread is magic' because it changes their moods and temporarily suspends their feelings of hate and fear. It is not the Head of State who is addressed as 'Your Excellency' or 'Your Grace' that brings renewed life and grace to the citizens; it is the free flow of bread and wine. (Good) food brings or adds elegance, beauty, joy and fellow-feeling to the human experience. Hunger sharpens hate, fear and criminality. Food is thus presented as the grace in human life. The Head of State himself shares of that grace because after he has dined and wined, his mood improves tremendously. He seeks emotional fulfilment by becoming 'surely-wived'. His life thus 'enriched', he throws open his arms of grace:

Empty that plane
Of bread, damn bread! Turn its nose
To a different wind, to a perfumed wind
Fill the hold with cake and wine

And champagne guests...

Importantly, a well-fed and emotionally fulfilled man has a greater tendency towards humanistic thoughts and activities than someone who is not.

In 'Ujamaa' (for Julius Nyerere), the poet explores the theme of (the dignity of) labour. 'Sweat' is a symbol of hard, productive work. It is not a sign of servitude or suffering. It is 'leaven for the earth', the agency through which man and society would be developed. It indicates (gainful) employment, which is the license for (good) food, shelter, warmth, education, medical care, and possibly the (re)distribution of various modes of human affection. Mother earth does not seek the homage of human cultivation of the soil for her to be satisfied with her own constitution or to replenish herself, neither do the deities have need of human sweat for them to be fed or retain the security of their ethereal abode.

Man's labour is for man's own development. Labour, also described as 'black earth hands', releases hope to humankind. It is the surest way of confronting 'death messengers' – hunger, squalor and homelessness, diseases, insecurity, etc. These messengers live among men and they actually prove themselves to be 'Grimmer than the Grim Reaper', more destructive in their piecemeal and concentrated existence than that single moment of ultimate physical annihilation. These messengers are 'insatiate / predators on humanity'; they never retreat from the human being as prey. But labour is the only answer to the ever-nagging issue of human poverty, and that is what the indigenous Tanzanian principle of '*Ujamaa*' stands for.

Though Mother earth does not require human labour for her sustenance, man's cultivation of the soil is food for the earth. More importantly also, it is 'Bread of the earth, by the earth / For the earth. Earth is all people.' *Ujamaa* is about the democratisation of wealth. Neither labour nor wealth should be the exclusive preserve

of any class in society. Julius Nyerere, a former President of Tanzania to whom the poem is dedicated, is an outstanding example in this regard. Though a leader and father of his nation, he immersed himself in work and lived a life of moderation such that could (seek to) erase some of the boundaries of class dichotomy amongst his people. He is the poet's ultimate symbol of *Ujamaa*, the principle of one earth and one people all joined together by (the dignity of) labour. Without labour, the dignity of the human person is subject to a controversial existence, to the 'insatiate Predators', and to the tragic non-actualisation of latent potentials, which of course imply the (un)(der) development of society and the regression of mankind.

Labour yields returns in the forms of crops, goods or cash, which are deployed to solving man's immediate and distant needs. Experiential wisdom also teaches about the need to save for the rainy day. Thus, a critical aspect of man's self-organisation is savings and investments. In 'Capital', the poet captures the vagaries of a money economy, especially in the relationship between an institution and the individual. First is the stock market which has grown from a rudimentary form of communal pooling of resources into a modernised, complete monetary organism that functions like a waterfall:

... a grain-spray plenitude
belched from chutes of wide-mouthed
glad satiation; I swear the grains
were singing –

But the gains of the stock exchange and its promoters are the losses of other individuals. The same policy that produces songs of joy in the Exchange 'Turns these embers of my life / To ashes'. Thus, on the other side of the money economy are individuals whose life savings and investments have been swallowed up 'in polluted seas' where others have experienced the multiplication of their funds.

The poet seems to stress the point that though 'Earth is all people' (in 'Ujamaa'), the world market does not hold equal or fair treatment for everyone. The ever-evolving systems of relationship and business interaction are filled with so many predictable and unpredictable vagaries that the world market is constantly throwing some people up and pulling others down. And no individual or group is offered the full assurance of the perpetuity of man's socio-economic struggle in the bid to keep himself afloat the tide of the sea of world economy. Also, a perceptive reader may not be able to escape from the impression in the poem that there is an element of chance in the making of man's fortunes. The first lines of the two stanzas of the poem thus begin with 'It cannot be', the poet's expression of doubt in the face of his rational interpretation of the economic variables at play. Yet, man does not leave himself to chance because the reality of progress encapsulated in the first three lines of the poem indicates that it is man that 'tended' the waterfall.

In 'Ever-Ready Bank Accounts', the poet discusses the importance of moderation in the pursuit of material wealth. Man has to strike a balance between his material and non-material values if he must achieve a holistic development of self: 'arms / Stacked too full of loaves cannot / Embrace mankind'. Excess material riches precipitate the crisis of a proper perception and appreciation of the human condition. Human beings need ever-ready bank accounts which imply that they can meet their needs as and when due. The essence of such accounts is 'Bread Bread Bread!'; that is, empowerment to grapple effectively with the necessities of life. But such empowerment must not be geared towards the self only. An ever-ready bank account should imply responsibility towards one's kith and kin, and to society in general. Otherwise,

Children slay the cockroach for a meal
Awaiting father-forager's return
The mind of hungered innocence must turn
To strange cuisine – kebab of houseflies
On a broomstick prong; beetles broiled in carapace
Slugs are scientific stores of high protein

The best of experience that many of such children have is hope deferred or hope bungled because father-forager always returns 'with empty sack' and tomorrow would not be different.

The human condition seems far from the experience of such shared love and shared responsibility. The poet-persona is always starkly confronted by the rule of the wealthy institutions and individuals: 'Charity may be a one-way street, it's not/A one-man way of life'. In other words, the needy is always advised to try next door. As a result, he goes from one point to the other searching for the evasive charity of his fellow man. The result is that 'The latest cup of supplicating hands is always / Drier than the last'.

These 'supplicating hands' live in a society of imaginative and social grandeur: 'seven-year lease', 'seven-times grander', 'seven wonder', 'seven-year plan', 'seven-times grader', 'seven-tiered modest monster for a home', 'seven-year seeds', 'sevenfold green return', etc. The poet presents the extremities of poverty and of wealth and both debase humanity. Thus, in a society of ever-ready bank accounts, human life is ironically defined by such images as 'a thousand fingers / Clutching loud at plenty', 'strange cuisine', 'mystic signs', 'black deceit', 'extortion', 'new-hatched mouths of want', 'mournful statement / Marred by sceptic stares', 'grandiose deceit', 'monster', 'stolen heights', 'barren trees', 'black despair', 'broken road', and 'A loaded question mark'.

These images indicate the corruption of man's moral dignity by the conditions of excessive materialism. Thus, while the (very) rich tend to contend with the crisis of a poor 'embrace' of mankind and humanistic values, the poor struggle with a mode of life that seems to thrive on the borders of sub-human existence. These extremities constitute the core of global concerns regarding baseline issues of human development (and the management of resources). Social materiality is thus positioned at the centre of the humanistic enterprise. The (immediate) material well-being of man as individual largely determines or shapes the extent to which he would subscribe to or participate in (the shared) humanistic values (of his society).

Yet, 'well-being' is a relative matter. There are no borders to human desire and ambition. Man shares the fate of the poet persona in 'Journey': 'I never feel I have arrived, though I come/To journey's end'. In spite of the abundance of 'bread and wine', 'love and welcome', man is an insatiable character, and this largely explains the crises that define modern existence.

The pursuit of satisfaction has 'naturally' led humanity to the point of modernity, an experience of life that is characterized by trends in industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation' and their corollaries – 'disintegration and reformation, fragmentation and rapid change, ephemerality and insecurity' (Childs, 2000:15). Overall, the standard of human living has improved from what it was ages and centuries ago. Modernity implies a 'better' way of living (and of doing things). But that 'better' way comes with its own challenges and crises. Thus, like all aspects of humanist interpretation of experience, the satisfaction of human want is also a dialectical encounter.

In 'Around Us, Dawning (*Idanre*, 12), the poet discusses the issue of facilitating human mobility, a critical need of modern man and a major requirement

for social development. The invention of the aeroplane is a testimony to man's imaginative ingenuity. Like the flowering of the imagination, the aeroplane 'prowls / The rare selective heights' of the world and takes man to the various places of his desire. It is one of the peaks of man's technological development. But, it also exposes man to an unprecedented danger in the history of people's movement from place to place. Technological grandeur is no foolproof against 'the beast's sudden / Desiccation when the sun explodes'. The failure of man's ingenuity at 'a still point in the incandescent / Onrush' implies the tragic conversion of the human person to 'a fine ash'. Modernity certainly comes with its own trouble.

Significantly, the crisis of modernity is as much socio-cultural as it is physical and material. In 'New York, U.S.A' (*Mandela's Earth and Other Poems*, 39-51), the poet presents the predicament of human existence in a modern, multi-cultural society. The poem opens with the poet persona's initiation into the cosmopolitan city of New York, an apt representation of the experience of modernity. He is a new immigrant who arrives in New York by flight. His arrival is preceded by a condition of wretchedness; he is described as a 'hapless voyager' because throughout the duration of his journey, he had no control whatever over his fate. His fate was in the hands of the pilot whose control of the plane cannot be described as 'absolute'. The worst scenario imaginable could have happened while they were flying across the Atlantic.

Modernity necessarily implies a situation whereby man is not in complete control of the instruments which he has invented for the fulfillment of a happy, developed existence. This emphasises an uncontested helplessness as an aspect of the tragic nature of man. And the 'beast', in returning man to a state of self-control, behaves as if it is intent on mocking man by offering him a 'deafening' noise 'by the engine's last descent'. Modernity has enhanced the quality of man's material

existence; but it has also removed man from the calmness of spirit, security and assurance of control which characterise a (more) natural state of existence.

This displacement is worsened by the immigrant condition of the modern man. Because he is not settled in a permanent place of abode, he soon wears himself out physically. His stressed feet produce 'disordered echoes' and he is exposed to and exploited by the 'fake bargains' of strangers in unfamiliar places. Established organisations with outlets at the international airport offer phoney discounts to ignorant immigrants. International mobility implies the mixture of people from various races and ethnic backgrounds. The poet persona is thus immediately welcome into the world of organised racism: 'FOLLOW THE SIGNS, WATCH FOR COLOUR CODES'. But that does not seem to bother him much yet because he is still

Numbed by time change, low with jet fatigue,
Disgorged in tunnels tight as blindfolds,
Entrapped with lampreys rushing to their doom...

He remains distracted by his own immediate physical inconveniences until he comes to 'a sudden stop' when he has to join one of the queues which by design demands a public declaration of immigrants' racial identities.

Modernity, as would become apparent, offers the promise of the golden fleece; but it also brings with it complicating dimensions to the question of human relationship across the various boundaries of socio-cultural experience. At that point, man is forced to 'a sudden stop' not only physically, but also mentally and socially. [Organised] racist and ethnic chauvinisms thus present themselves as some antitheses of man's search for peace and progress. Though modernity seems to accentuate the tenor of human progress, it has also provided and sharpened some of the contexts in which some antithetical conditions to progress are played out.

In the second stanza of the first movement, the poet persona describes the arena of arrival and its striking unfamiliarity. The passages do not appear friendly; he considers himself a player in 'an amphitheatre of deadly games'. But he is a poor player that frets and seems uncertain of himself. Thus, he gets the wrong boarding pass and misses his way. These wrong steps point to the uncertainties that surround the social condition of the modern man as a traveller, a voyager, an immigrant. The natives offer him a 'gash of smiles' to relax his nerves. Though he claims that he 'trust(s) them harmless', the gestures of welcome do not 'promote (his) ease'. It is good business and hospitality strategy that at various spots at the airport, there are photographs of public figures and entertainment stars staring at the visitors and 'toothsomely' pledging a welcome anthem: 'New York loves You!' But the poet persona understands that that is 'mere gesture'. He does not need anyone to tell him that New York would probably not (be able to) differentiate between him and any other person. In fact, he needs to put on his best behaviour in the city and avoid trouble; otherwise, New York may hate him so vehemently that he would need to urgently explore the option of multiple exits to secure a way out of the city.

In the second movement ('Lost Tribe'), the poet examines the superficiality of social relations in a modern market place. There is the lack of genuine feelings for one other. What appears like a close relationship is nothing more than strategies of getting money out of the other person's pocket, what the poet describes as 'Love by rote / Care by inscription. Incantations without magic'. There are the expressions of good will: 'Have a nice day now'; 'Enjoy your meal'; 'Talk it over with someone'; 'Give a nice smile to someone'; etc. But the critical question is: Do such affection and love flow back in their homes? The poet asks, 'Have you hugged your child today?' Modernity implies the dichotomisation of self into private and public parts. The

public self is always eager to create great impressions on people as a strategy for gaining social and economic advantage. The private self reflects the individual in a more genuine form with the varied elements of his goodness, foibles and (un)hidden selfishness.

Man is often much concerned about his public self. This much is emphasised in the third and fourth movements which dwell on the (power of the) media as a caricature of an authentic modern experience. The media in New York is described as 'the nation's vocal chords'. It is a tool for individual and collective 'self-expression'. But it also displaces the people from the desirable experience of Nature and the reality of daily living. The reality of the media in their lives is 'The drool of ego, fantasies unchained'. Modernity encapsulates the paradox of material advancement and psychological dislodgement through a critical distancing from social reality that is not situated within the media hype. The hype is the overwhelming constant of modern reality. Everything else changes, but the hype. Thus, 'The *Challenger* will be replaced. And astronauts. / But not the most expensive anchorman in U.S.A.'.

In the last movement of the poem ('Columbus Circle, N.Y'), the poet returns to the lived stark reality that contrasts enormously with the overpowering hype that floods people's consciousness on a daily basis. What is conspicuous here is the debris of modernity - the loud, disturbing noise, the putrefaction, 'the lingering fumes', the 'trash cans', environmental degradation, phenomenal spread of vagrants, poor moral judgments, cultural displacement, and the near-predictable end of the paradox of modernity, 'Auto-destruct'. Overwhelmed by the glee of his numerous inventions and the satisfaction of his needs, man probably always over-reaches himself and the consequence of his self-destruct is often almost automatic, or (irre)versible. Thus, like the tragic end of the story of the legendary Muhammad Ali (in 'Muhammad Ali at the

Ringside, 1985' in *Mandela's Earth*, 48-51), 'The enchantment is over but, the spell remains'. Significantly, the issue of man's development as individual and as society is so dialectical that it necessarily draws upon various elements of man's complex and often enigmatic being, thereby defying any simple classification of experience.

(4.15.2) The Quest for Equity

The quest for equity, fair-play and social justice is a core aspect of humanist thinking and practice which, for Soyinka, may be summed up in one simple sentence that connotes struggle: 'The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny' (George Mangakis, quoted in Soyinka, 1972:13). The scramble for the 'limited' resources of Nature and society, and human labour towards the satisfaction of want always precipitate conditions of conflict in society. The (re) distribution of natural and social resources and opportunities in society and the (mechanism for the) resolution of differences and conflicts should underscore the principle of fairness in human relations. But universal human experience indicates that that principle is more of an idealised condition than a lived reality. For the humanist, however, man and society must consistently work towards the full establishment of the principles of equity and social justice everywhere. This certainly implies a steady struggle against tyranny and oppression wherever they are found. This struggle is one of the hallmarks of Soyinka's humanist poetry.

In the 'October '66' poems (*Idanre*, 49-56), the poet examines and criticises various conditions of political tyranny that characterised the Nigerian socio-political scene in the years that followed political independence from colonial rule in 1960. The divisive politics of the immediate post-independence era was followed by the military coup and counter-coup of January and July 1966. The first coup, in spite of

the seeming grandeur of its intentions, had the colouration of an Igbo agenda and character, judging by the mode of its execution and eventual results. The second coup was apparently a Northern reaction to the failure of the Head of State, General J. Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo, to redress the grievances of the North following the January coup. The July coup precipitated much ethnic tension in the country. In September and October 1966, there were widespread killings of people of Igbo origin in various parts of the North. Expectedly, many of the Igbo in several parts of the country returned to the East, their home-region. The unfortunate development gradually snowballed into the outbreak of war between the Federal and the Biafran forces in July 1967. The 'October '66' poems capture Soyinka's thoughts and concern at those critical moments in Nigeria's history.

In 'Ikeja, Friday, Four O'clock', the poet paints the picture of an unrivalled wastage of human lives. He is a witness of 'the laden trucks' of corpses being moved away to their makeshift mass burial places. They are the result of the action of people who should be providing leadership for the nation. But their 'reason falters'. Thus, citizens who should be offering invaluable services to their families and communities are dehumanised, reduced to 'gourds for earth to drink therefrom'. Their place is no longer amongst the living, but with Mother Earth. They are an 'unbidden offering', an unsolicited, unnecessary sacrifice. The moment calls for general mourning because whatever side of the divide the people belong, the essence of their humanity is trampled upon in the gruesome murder of their fellow human beings. There is disgust and nausea in the land; the people suffer 'the external retch of human surfeit'. Though there are people who think of the crisis in terms of their own 'loss and profit', such people soon discover that the real condition they have to contend with is the 'dregs' of

existence, the overwhelming feeling of the contemptibility of the situation, and more critically of their own humanity.

Sad as the situation has become, the poet still thinks of a way out for the dead and the living: 'Let nought be wasted, gather up for the recurrent session'. The dead should replenish the earth and keep the hope of human life afloat by ensuring the stability and continuity of the cosmic system. That, certainly, is in the realm of the mythopoesy of Soyinka's humanism. The living must rise up to the challenge of confronting the tyrannies of 'loaves of lead, lusting in the sun's recession'. The reign of the barrel is a recurrent social situation that dehumanises man and decimates society. The death of the victims of tyranny should inspire the living into a critical and determined struggle against tyranny and oppression. Then, the victims would not have died in vain, and the living would have furthered the cause of humanistic relations in society. The poet adopts a judicious attitude by deliberately transcending the immediate conditions of grief and expounding the rationale for struggle against tyranny drawing upon those same conditions which he decides must not weigh him down.

The same conditions of tyranny are repeated in 'Harvest of Hate' and 'Massacre, October '66'. In the second poem, the poet persona could no longer tolerate the genocidal character of the political crisis. The news and sight of bloodshed are so widespread that he was beginning to suffer mental disturbance. Thus, he escapes into temporary exile: 'I borrow alien land / To stay the season of a mind'. The poem is written in Tegel, Germany, and though away from his home-country, the images of tyranny and human violation which he has witnessed would not leave him. In fact, Germany's past reminds him of Nigeria's present. The country was the centre-point of aggression that precipitated two world wars. Nigeria has

become the centre-point of internal aggression and would soon be plunged into war. Thus, the two countries share a 'brotherhood of ill'. Sadly, that brotherhood is not yet history for Nigeria: 'heads still harshly crop to whirlwinds'.

The season of the year when the poet escapes to Tegel is autumn, often regarded as a period of decline. The import for him relates to the autumn of his own country, where the dominant subject of the day has become the widespread 'arithmetic of death', the accounting of people who are dying, people who have just been massacred, and the dead that have been buried. Yet, 'the removal man is not at rest; he is still 'Dust(ing) down rare canvases' for the more people that are soon to be counted as victims of the genocide. Tyranny is a mockery of (the word of) peace, and the 'strangers' that exhibit an attitude of indifference towards the suffering of their fellow humans are also guilty of that compromise of humanistic values. The poet extends his concern about the genocide to the attitude of 'strangers' who, for him, are parties in the crisis. They are parties because no man should be silent in the face of the oppression of his fellow men, ethnic, racial, religious, national, or ideological backgrounds and inclinations notwithstanding.

Thus, in 'Malediction', the poet unleashes his anger at a woman who goes about 'shouting joy where all / the human world / shared in grief's humility'. He actually abuses her, describes her as a victim of sexual deprivation, and wishes her the experience of misfortune when the world turns to rejoicing. The poet, of course, expresses his own humanity, his moral limitations, his sexism, and a belligerent attitude that bespeaks elements of his individuality as a human and a writer. The import of his attitude, however, is that when the tables are turned, the woman would probably appreciate why she should not detach herself from the fate of her fellow

human beings, especially in conditions of the perpetration of oppression by other human beings.

The poet exhibits the attitude he had expected of the subject of 'Malediction' in the poem, 'For Fajuyi'. Fajuyi was the Governor of the Western Region during the administration of Aguiyi-Ironsi. Ironsi was in his (Fajuyi's) house in Ibadan when the coupists struck. The Governor was loyal to his Commander-in-Chief, initially refused to give him up to the coupists, and when he eventually did, being left with no other option, decided that the coupists must take him as well. Thus, he was subsequently murdered alongside Ironsi. For Soyinka, the side of the divide is of no significance when the issue at stake is the value that must be placed upon every human life. Fajuyi appreciated that value and sought to protect his boss, who was of a different ethnic group. When the protection he offered failed, he still followed the path of honour.

The crisis that plagued Nigeria since the proclamation of political independence in 1960 portrayed the leaders of the country, politicians and soldiers alike, as men who suffered a deficit of honour. But Fajuyi is the symbol of 'honour late restored'; late because the country was already engulfed in an unprecedented political and civil crisis. And that honour was itself short-lived because Fajuyi ventured early to 'a trial of Death's devising'. But that was the nature of chivalry and the challenge that fell to him in his boss's hour of need.

The restoration of honour in the nation cannot be late because Fajuyi's heroic death is inspirational and redemptive. It breaks the bounds of ethnic chauvinism, 'springs the lock of Time's denial', and offers a new lease of life that emphasises the shared humanity of all men. The poet likens it to a bridge that sojourners had to cross for them to reach home. The bridge is forgotten once home is achieved. Yet, home would not have been achieved if the bridge were not there. In Fajuyi's case, the bridge

would not be forgotten because he has not left his footprints on the sands of time that can be easily swept away by the sea. His (foot) 'prints were flagstones', hard choice-textured rocks that would remain a positive constant in the nation's psyche and history.

In the 'Epilogue' poems (*Shuttle*, 87-89), the poet extols the virtues and death of figures who, like Fajuyi, fought against the reign of tyranny in his country. In the first poem, 'And What Of It If Thus He Died?', dedicated to Victor Banjo, George Jackson and all who are like them, the poet asserts that those who give up their lives in the struggle against tyranny do so not because they cannot appreciate the pleasures of living as much as those who distance themselves from the struggle. Their senses were alive to 'beauty's promise, to laughter / in lights hours'. They were well-educated men for whom the world waited with opportunities to be thrown at them. But they were men with overwhelming social vision and commitment. For them,

Knowledge was not a golden plate
For feasts at the board of privilege
But a trowel laid to deep foundations
In sighted fingers of a master mason.

Thus, they cannot hold their peace and watch the 'winds of terror [tear] out shutters / Of [their] neighbour's home'.

For Banjo especially, 'The wrongs of day / And cries of night burnt red fissures / In chambers of his mind'. This was a noble passion against tyranny. He strongly desired the day when his countrymen and women would harness the 'unbidden depths' of the peace and wealth of the ocean that laid before them waiting to be explored. He was at the centre of that quest for a better society: 'He lit the torch to a summons / Of the great procession'. In the process, he died as a 'Burnt offering', a sacrifice necessary for the overthrow of tyranny in his land. The title of the poem

seems to indicate that there were people who had serious reservations about Banjo and the circumstances of his death. But for the poet, the nobility of the subject's intentions, the selflessness of his chosen path, the consistent struggle against oppression, and his eventual self-sacrifice in the course of that struggle are all critical indicators of the right attitude towards a humanistic society. It therefore does not matter that Banjo died in the process.

Neither would Okigbo's death be considered so much a cause for sorrow as it is another ennobling example of leadership and sacrifice in society. In 'For Christopher Okigbo', Soyinka extols the virtues of a fellow writer whose life transcends a critical literary engagement against tyranny and oppression. Okigbo had joined the Nigerian Civil War on the Biafran side and had lost his life in the war. At this point, the poet's focus seems to shift towards personalities who represent the virtues of honour, courage and sacrifice in society. It is not that his concern about the widespread violation of human lives had changed; it was more that more people like Fajuyi, Banjo and Okigbo were needed if the struggle to re-humanise his society must be won. These are 'torch-bearers' who, having rejected the 'fulfilments of the web of nails' in their own lives, engage in such societal 'cleansing rites' which (almost) always bring about the sacrifice of their own lives as 'burnt offering(s) on the heights'. Their vision is an 'Eternal provender for Time', a necessary, exemplary moral lesson for society.

Clearly articulated in the poetry of Soyinka is a humanist vision of society which focuses on man's all-round development as individual and as a social being. That development implies that, as a rule, he is able to meet his basic needs regularly. His capacity to think and act positively towards his fellow human beings is thereby significantly enhanced. But the poet also illustrates extensively that the satisfaction of

human want is not such an unchallenging task. It is girdled in the dialectics of the complexities and self-negations of the idiosyncrasies of man and the endless dimensions to captured, uncaptured and seemingly inevitable conflicting interests in social relations. It precipitates various modes of social justice in society.

This struggle is again dialectical because the nature of man and society, in terms of the elements of enigma and complexity, are unchanging. It is a struggle that necessarily consumes some of the noble and courageous proponents of humanistic values, thus further complicating the quest for those values in terms of the numerical and qualitative strength of people who are committed to the uplift of man. For the poet, however, such essential sacrifices occupy a central place in man's search for equity and social justice in a world where negative, subjective and self-serving forces often have gripping and crippling effects on society. They are a tonic for humanistic struggle and they keep alive the hope of the living.

(4.16) TRACKS OF REVOLUTION AND HUMANISTIC CONTESTS

A critical examination of Soyinka's social vision necessarily engages the question of the nature, scope and strategies of human development in terms of the achievement of man's (basic) needs and an environment that encourages the flourish of fundamental rights. It encapsulates an inescapable polemical discourse that engenders conflict, exacerbates difference, and provokes ideological, social, and even civil or physical confrontation. Also, his art portrays that the ideal of happy, contented individuals in a society that upholds the tenets of liberal democratic principles is often such a mirage that precipitates frustration and despair. The contemplation of revolutionary change is

thus not an unlikely possibility in the humanist agenda. Though aspects of the strategies of political radicalism would somewhat negate some principles of liberal humanism, the goal, significantly, would be the establishment of a liberal democratic order in society.

In the Soyinkan context, civil confrontation and violent transition are sometimes passable strategies of positive, liberal change. Though there are limits to the trajectories of the radical temper in humanist practice, the boundaries of rationality cannot be defined in a purely theoretical manner without due reference to the local contexts of engagement. Rationality sums up the correctness of interpretation of and approach to the specific character of a local struggle. It is thus a necessary accompaniment to the humanist idea of revolution, which is aptly an emergency response to a challenging condition of dehumanisation. The same justification would be allowed for the act of war which, though anti-human, still has a place in the humanist agenda of political struggle and the ultimate objectives of an international liberal democratic order.

A critical chunk of Soyinka's poetry illustrates much of the foregoing in a consistent and systematic order that underscores the inevitability of political radicalism in the context of balance between the revolutionary impulse and the rationality of a liberal temper. What must a liberal humanist writer do in the context of an intractable and combative reign of political tyranny that does not yield to humanistic concerns or dialogue? In *Ogun Abibiman* and *Mandela's Earth and other Poems*, Soyinka shifts the discourse of struggle away from the orbit of criticism which is the dominant mode in *Idanre and Other Poems* and *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, to the domain of confrontation. But confrontation has its own dialectics. Thus, the poet's presentations are both active and quiescent. These attitudes define the trajectories of

the revolutionary impulse in the various contexts of the humanistic contests in his poetry. This section is divided into two parts – the poetics of war and critical retrospection. These capture Soyinka's idea of revolution and illustrate some of the limits of rationality in liberal humanist practice.

(4.16.1) The Poetics of War

Ogun Abibiman (1976) offers a pertinent illustration of Soyinka's revolutionary spirit, especially in terms of a direct confrontation against negative elements in society. In line with the poet's background note to the poem, his vision of a liberated society is informed by the declaration of war by Mozambique against the rule of the white minority in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). That declaration by the then President of the Mozambique nation, Samora Machel, was a temporary summation of the struggle of black Africans against the domination of white minorities on the continent. The next destination, apparently, was to be apartheid South Africa, which the poet described as 'the bastion of inhumanity'.

The symbolism of Machel's declaration was that the black continent would no longer tolerate the conditions of tyranny foisted upon it by white minorities who indeed are mere settlers on the continent. That necessarily implied physical confrontation and was in accord with popular wish across the continent: 'It is best likened to the primary detonation of a people's collective will, the prelude to its absolute affirmation and manifestation' (vii). The declaration was primarily a political symbolism, which required the tonic of a poetic medium to transport it into people's subconscious and inspire in them the ethos of struggle and the possibility of their collective freedom in their own homeland in their life-time.

Ogun Abibiman is thus a critical poetic teaming up of poetry and politics, myth and legend, and humanist thoughts and military might in a war against the tyrannies of colonialism and apartheid. It is a poetic animator that seeks to marshal the black peoples and resources of the African continent into a struggle designed to bring about the establishment of a liberal democratic order. It is a racial war to the extent that the oppressed in question are blacks and their oppressors are whites. But it is not racist because the poet does not indicate any agenda of racial supremacy. The emphasis is on freedom and equality of races, which can be appropriately described as a humanist struggle.

The poem is divided into three sections. The first, titled 'Induction', depicts violence and strategy – 'STEEL USURPS THE FOREST; SILENCE DETHRONES DIALOGUE'. The forests are losing their greenness because Nature would join forces with the oppressed in the war against their oppressors. The windstorm that violently attack 'the palm, the egret and the snail' is an indicator of the strong, emphatic force that is to characterise the war against tyranny. Deep in the forests are bright, exuberant lights that expose all hidden elements and indicate that there would be no hiding place for the forces of oppressions. Thus,

... a landmass writhes
From end to end, bathed and steeped
In stern tonalities.

There is an earthquake in the forests and a flood overwhelms the land not as a result of some heavy downpour, but as a testimony to the 'power of invocations' which would be used against the oppressors. 'Meander how (they) will', there would be no escape for the oppressors because

Our Flood's alluvial paths

Will spring the shrunken seeds;
Rains
Shall cleanse the leaves of blood.

In the third stanza, the impression is given that the revolutionary armies are already being trained in the deep of the forests. The use of arms soon replaces the symbolisms of Nature in asserting the form and force of the struggle. The sophistication of the arms possesses 'a truer fastness' that would bring about such accomplishments that have not been experienced in the seeming peacetime of suffering. But war is a ritual that must be preceded by the ritual of sacrifice to the gods. Thus, a ram is sacrificed. And sacrifice here is not the mere observance of an obligation of religion; it is a mode of man's participation in the feast and experience of deities.

The result is that the warriors of revolution become 'Tearless as dried leaves, whose stalks / Are sealed from waste'. They have feasted with the gods; they have been 'cooked' by the gods and have become steeled men who 'shed green hopes / Of nature paths'. They are thus prepared to go on the trails of the oppressors, 'who violate the old preserves / With tracks of steel / And iron frames'. And those trails are known to the warriors because the gods have equipped them not only with strength, but also knowledge and wisdom.

In the fifth stanza, the poet indicates the inevitability of victory. Nature is bound to support the warriors of revolution. If the aid of darkness is required at any point during the war, the warriors have been empowered to 'dislodge the sun'. They are possessed by the inspiring memories of 'A horde of martyrs', brethren and ancestors who have passed on in the course of the struggle, but who live on and march side by side with them on the field of battle. The soliders and arsenal at the disposal of

the revolution becomes unprecedented as Ogun joins in the war as leader of the confrontation:

Earth
Rings in unaccustomed accents
Time
Shudders at the enforced pace
Ogun
In vow of silence till the task is done,
Kindles the forge.

The importance of the struggle is underscored by Ogun's abandonment of his farmstead and the resultant loss of a planting season. That sacrifice is Ogun's mark of leadership which his soldiers must emulate.

His arrival is heralded by the sounds of bells amidst the decorated instrumentation of the Blacksmith's craft. He dances to the music of his own creation, and it is apparent that his steps are symptomatic of war. And when Ogun takes such steps, no one can 'dare restrain' him. His largeness of form is such that his 'hand unclenches / To possess the hills and forests / Pulses and habitation of men'. He is an elastic being that can expand and contract, as the occasion demands, and however he responds to situations, 'Nor god nor man can temper!'

The poet persona joins the warriors in singing the praise of their leader because Ogun 'Spurs the cause to the season of enthronement'. There is no more room for the 'subterfuge' of the oppressors. After seasons of predictions about the cessation of state tyranny, there is now a final movement towards resolution. The evidence of that finality is in the surrender of the elements of Nature to the struggle:

... the sun engorged within
The black hole of the sky,
Time and space negated, epochs impacted
Flat, and all is in the present.

The argument has transcended the realm of dialogue amongst opposing human parties. With Ogun in the field, it is now a show of gods: 'Gods shall speak to gods'; 'Let gods contend with gods!' This development is important because there can be no human match for Ogun. So the white minorities must send forth their own gods to the battle field, if they can match Ogun; otherwise, they would have to 'live' with the disaster of exposure to the god of war. Tight and tense as the situation is, the poet persona does not fail to remind his patron-god 'To stir that claimed divinity of mind and limb' because, of all the races in the world, it is his own people, the black race, that lay like a 'prostrate planet', 'a black endowment' 'spewed/Forth' from 'tortured galaxies'. He repudiates theories of afro-pessimism by challenging his god to claim an instant moment of glory for his people. Hopes are no longer to be deferred,

For we shall speak no more of rights
To the unborn bequeathed, nor will
To future hopes
The urgent mandates of our present.

There is no more time for 'Dialogue's illusion', which the oppressors have used as a strategy for 'time-pleading' and maintaining the *status quo*. No more the interventions of 'distanced statesmen, conciliators / Soon snared in slight cocoons of words!' The tongues of the oppressed have become 'swollen' and dialogue is of no use anymore.

The results of dialogue thus far have been regrettable: 'Sanctions followed Dialogue'; the massacre of 'Sharpeville followed Dialogue'. Dialogue is a strategy for stalling the protestations that are designed to follow the Sharpeville massacre. But mere protestations do not change the world. Even the outside world is not as outraged by the massacre as the poet would have expected. Talk, talk, talk and the apparent results are further sanctions against blacks, 'seductive plays of interests', 'arts of

Expediency' and 'Diplomacy'. Sadly, all the pleas against cases of violation end in 'the Court of Rights', which stand as the last resort for the oppressed. But that is not what the oppressed look forward to any more because 'Hope / Has fled the Cape mis-called – Good Hope'. Thus, when all the dogs have wagged their tails, Ogun arrives as 'the tale that wags the dog'. When all hope is lost and 'all dogs have had their day, Ogun shows his strength and support for the weak. With that knowledge of his entry into the battle, the blacks no longer seek the grace of their oppressors. Ogun is a deity who causes quake and tremble; he stands alone in his heights of strength and glory:

In time of race, no beauty slights the duiker's
In time of strength, the elephant stands alone
In time of hunt, the lion's grace is holy
In time of flight, the egret mocks the envious
In time of strife, none vies with him
Of seven paths, Ogun, who to right a wrong
Emptied reservoirs of blood in heaven
Yet raged with thirst...

Ogun embodies all the qualities required for a successful warfare and repeatedly, the poet indicates that there is no human match for him. In fact, in issues of warfare, there is no known match for him amongst the deities. He joins the war not just as god of war and creativity, but more importantly, as god of the black people, as Ogun Abibiman.

In the second movement, 'Retrospect for Marchers: Shaka!', Ogun draws upon the legendary resources of the black peoples of Southern Africa. Ogun is the archetype of the blacksmith, the god of metals. As the war begins, the 'contrivances' of the oppressors immediately give way to his instrumentation. Shaka is the legendary 'King of the amaZulu, easily Africa's most renowned nation-builder' (23). He occupies a place of distinction amongst the ancestors and he it is that summons their strengths and spirits to the war. The war draws upon all the material and metaphysical

resources of the black people. Shaka arrives with his popular battle-cry, *Sigidi* ('I have eaten!'). He treads the familiar path of military conquest, of chasing away invaders and usurpers of 'The will to being'.

With Shaka's arrival, his people are psychologically charged and set to desecrate 'The racial fount of stolen habitations' and to reclaim their 'sacred graves', the homeland of their ancestors. The second movement has been, quite appropriately, preceded by the first: Shaka, roused, / Defines his being anew in Ogun's embrace'. It is an unprecedented collaboration between the mythical and the legendary:

Turmoil on turmoil
Ogun treads the earth of Shaka.
Turmoil on the loose!
Ogun shakes the land of Shaka
All is in turmoil.

The 'act of repossession' is preceded by the tumultuous movement of god and legend. Shaka seizes the narrative and becomes both master warrior and master narrator. His imagination runs wild 'in dreams of Noliwe'. 'Bull elephants' are no match for him because he takes them 'by storm' and 'brings them low on trembling knee'. Their ivories are re-designed as trumpets used to sing the praise of Shaka as King.

Shaka acknowledges the presence and features of Ogun. Ogun's tread is characterised by 'wooded rockhills', the 'shredded mists' of Idanre', 'the heart of furnaces', 'pulsing ore', 'clangs of anvils', 'fearsome rites of passage', etc., and back in his amaZulu base, Shaka feels and knows the 'tread' as much as he is familiar with his own footsteps. He immediately seeks Ogun's strength and inspiration – 'the calm of mute championship', 'the burden of his tread up / My peace'. The success of the war against tyranny would be the most definitive moment of freedom and progress for

the peoples of southern Africa. Thus Shaka, the great legend of amaZulu history still seeks the further strengthening of his might, approaching Ogun with the cry of war.

He remembers the records of past triumphs, times when his 'sandals trampled the savannah / Smooth as the splayed hide of a bull'. Now that the war begins, it would be a total confrontation because there shall be no rest until the oppressors are routed. Where Shaka as human takes a pause, 'Ogun, the bladegrass reddened'. They have a shared mission of liberating the black people from oppression: 'Our histories meet, the forests merge / With the savannah! God and legend share company. Shaka reminds Ogun, his 'brother spirit', about how his 'dying words' had reverberated in the rockhills of Idanre when he (Shaka) was betrayed to death by his kinsmen. But he had prophesied at that time and he is back to enforce his words:

The whites have come,
And though you seize my throne, you will never
Rule this land.

The whites seem to have taken over the land. But Shaka describes them as 'termites (which) gnawed / The houseposts of our kraals even while / We made the stranger welcome'. They are 'no match / For the black soldier ants'. He is greatly excited about the idea of routing the whites. He wishes that 'the will should far outrace / Swords and sinners, human stress and loyalties'. His task would have been long accomplished. He has a thorough appreciation of the task before him and the inner force that motivates him:

... my pride of men! Their sparseness
Was the nation I would build, the earth
I sought, the dreams of race which beckoned me
From slaughter Valley to the Hills of Destiny.

Even in war, Shaka is possessed by the nobility of human and social grandeur, the idea of a great black nation and a great black race. He is a dedicated nation-builder, the 'womb of the amaZulu'. Importantly, his commitment to the war is justified by history – 'history [has] purified our goals'. The history of the blacks has been almost one very long night of oppression, suffering, discrimination, slavery, colonialism, underdevelopment, etc., and with the failure of dialogue and human reason to redress these age-old ills, confrontation against the negative forces that stand in the way of black progress becomes inevitable. Confrontation in this context must be conceived of as an essential route to socio-political liberalism and a humanistic society, and that, for Shaka, is the point of the struggle:

The task must gain completion, our fount
Of being cleansed from termites' spittle –
In this alone I seek my own completion.

He turns to Ogun and prays for the restoration of his legendary glory – 'my seeds', 'the manhood of a founder-king'. Shaka the great legend appreciates his incompleteness without the blessing of divinity. But that incompleteness has to do more with vengeance upon his treacherous kinsmen than with the war against the white oppressors. It is a desire for redress and restitution, an assuagement of the battered ego of his dying moment. His personal pride cannot be detached from the larger struggle. Ogun, who also appreciates the politics of ego, answers his prayer and the collaboration between god and legend continues in the liberation war.

The narrative is again taken over by the poet who queries man's (Shaka) interpretation of perfection and the expectation that partnership with a god (Ogun) would produce such a noble state of being. He seems to say that perfection is a human goal and that the gods are incapable of perfection except human beings first

accomplish that state. Soyinka secularises the notion of the essence of the gods; they derive their meaning from human existence. Thus, 'The gods that show remorse lay claim to man's / Forgiveness – a founder-king shall dare no less'. Shaka's perfection would necessarily come not by way of more military conquests or his surrender of 'judgment' to a god, but by a state of forgiveness and peace with his kinsmen, and the amaZulu.

Yet, he must be careful because 'Habits die hard. And time hangs heavy / Keeping watch on land beset by termites'. The descendants of his traitor-kinsmen are still much around and 'The viper knows / No kin. The bond of blood to him is – letting'. The poet also describes the traitor-kinsmen as 'the scorpion in the thatch', 'the dealer in death', 'A stink of the hyena'. But they are probably not different from Shaka himself – 'Shaka was all men'; 'What I did / Was Shaka, but Shaka was not always I'. There are thus affirmations and reversals about the human condition. Now a traitor-kinsman asserts that Shaka did not share all the characteristics of his evil brethren. Thus, Shaka was not quite 'all men'. He, as king and general,

Fought battles, invented rare techniques, created
Order from chaos, coloured the sights of men
In self-transcending visions, sought
Man's renewal in the fount of knowledge.
Raised the city of man in commonweal.

The image and spirit of Shaka in the foregoing lines is what the poet craves for and seeks to invoke. There is an essential humanistic selectivity in his engagement of the legend as he does in his choice and uses of Yoruba gods based on the secular attributes or values he wishes to emphasise. In the closing segments of the second movement, the poet highlights some of Shaka's 'antics' as 'master strategist who make-believes'. The real act of war, for him, is preceded by 'mock-heroics', the

effective communication of seeming concrete impressions that would eventually mislead the opponents into defeat. Thus, sometimes, Shaka leaves the battlefield 'drunk with self-acclaiming' because of the excitement of winning a war by mere wits. He has various strategies for winning a war. He is a great achiever who has 'built nations, Forged a new sense of being' thereby promoting some humanist development agenda. But the poet does not lose sight of the other side of Shaka's greatness:

... See what slinks home from the pit
Of night to sleep in Shaka's shadow –
A dank hyena, such a prowl
In execution in their bonds. Is Shaka's world
Rebuilt from limbs of his defenseless sours?

War and legendary grandeur are not without the elements of their own inhumanity – 'the weights of earth', 'quarrying wealth to Fleck', 'greed-glow in the eyes of strangers', 'power-lust of kin renegades', 'shaming displacement', 'fallen galaxies', etc. But inhumanity is inevitable in the struggle against inhumanity. Thus, 'the gods and the ancestors / Crowd our powers'; Ogun and Shaka take the lead in the blacks' struggle against inhumanity.

The third and final movement of the poem opens with the cries of war – *Sigidi!* The build-up to war has reached its final moment after which the 'seal against retraction' becomes irreversible. But just before the next step of total war is taken, there is a pause, the final offer of a last hope. The narrative changes from war to the song of war. The black struggle would not in any way reduce itself to the 'rhetoric (of) sightless violence'. It would insist upon the 'purity of (its) claims'. It demands justice, not love. The war is, therefore, not about the desire for a show of affection or favours from the ruling white minority. It is about requisite compensations for natural

and social responsibilities – ‘A cherished courtesan at labour’s end’. There are no illusions that the blacks would reap love at the end of the war because the oppressors who have been forced to ‘a dread embrace / Of justice, dare not pause for love’. The blacks would reap the results of their struggle, which *piece de resistance* is continuous struggle. Yet, there need be no fears because Ogun is the ‘Priest of Restitutions’.

The struggle demands no love, and offers no love in return. The question of love never featured in the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. The poet queries:

... say, pacific love
If love survives the lash, the contempt,
The silenced screams in blood-lit streets,
Say, if love outlasts the writing on the wall
In hidden cells of Death’s own masonry
Say, if love survives the tether’s end
Whose weight, whose tale
Is yet another facelessness, rudely lowered
Impersonally numbered on a tally board.

The experience of the blacks has been a history of ‘aberrations’ of years and generations, not the ‘mere’ misdeeds of a single hour or event. It is thus not yet time to preach love. The absence of love, however, does not imply the celebration of vengeance or hate.

Celebration amongst the blacks definitely implies the ‘cessation of a long despair’, the end of the imposed falsehood of the essence of being. It does not imply forgetting about the past, hence the use of the word ‘remember’ six times in six consecutive lines on page 21. But the celebrants must not allow themselves to indulge in self-pity or be carried away by the memories of an unpleasant past. They must be possessed by thoughts of a great future, ‘the awesome beauty at the door of birth’.

Apparently, Ogun and Shaka lead their people to victory in the war against the white oppressors. The poet does not capture the actual blood-letting that could have attended the war because the oppressors were immediately overawed by the collaboration of god and legend, man and nature in the fight against inhumanity. Having regained their lives and manhood, the next concern is to 'heal and to rebuild' their nation. The path to that newness of being and society is the dignity of labour and the labour of dignity. But that must necessarily be preceded by 'the hour of song', a celebration of victory to 'fortify the heart'.

The black people gather in their groups 'from hill to hill' to celebrate their freedom, and to celebrate their god and legend. Before they return to the challenges of healing and nation-building, which could be quite daunting:

... now is true need
Of song and lyric, of festal gourds
Libations, invocation of the Will's,
Transubstantiation!

The battle won, Ogun returns to his ethereal abode. He comports himself very well and confirms himself a god of the black people. He does not commit the 'error' of turning against his people as in the case of the people of Ire. Unlike the war of blacks against fellow blacks in *Idanre*, his position and attitude in the situation of racial conflict is unambiguous. Though he is the acknowledge god of war and the instruments of war, Ogun is not a racist, and does not expect his people to be racists. Ogun will go to war to defend his people against racism and tyranny, and would leave them in peace to celebrate their victory and forge a better future for themselves.

Humanism, as Soyinka illustrates in *Ogun Abibiman*, does not shy away from the contests of war. It offers a practical approach to the question of human and societal development because without necessary confrontation, the forces of evil and

tyranny would prevail over humanistic values and spirits in society. The Soyinkan poetics of war emphasises a humanistic balance between confrontation and the use of such strategies that unavoidably undermine the essence of the human life. Thus, there are ethics in warfare and 'all' cannot be fair in war because human lives are involved and such lives are critical parts of the kernel of the universe.

(4.16.2) Critical Retrospection

In *Ogun Abibiman*, Soyinka offers a mythical narrative of revolutionary change in the continent. He moves some steps further to suggest a lived, active and retrospective engagement with social change in *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems*. In this context, the figures of humanistic contests are neither gods nor historical legends, but actual living human beings who exhibit uncommon measures of principle, courage, determination, endurance, and sustained capacity for struggle. Two of such figures who have themselves become universal symbols of humanist struggle are Nelson Mandela and Winnie Mandela. These figures offer critical insights into some of the elements of political contestations and the preservation of the humanist spirit in the midst of overwhelming moral and socio-political crises.

The background to the struggle captured in the collection is the regime of racial segregation that dominated all spheres of social experience in South Africa up till the last decade of the 20th century. Nelson Mandela eventually spent 27 years in an apartheid jail, and his wife, Winnie, who continued the struggle, was subjected to various forms of abuse. Yet, these two figures held out to the 'edge of doom' till they mid-wived the birth of a new democratic South Africa. At the time of the publication of the collection, however, victory was still far-fetched as the heat of racial war was still ravaging the entire black population of the South African nation.

In 'Your Logic Frightens Me, Mandela', the poet captures the seeming bittersweet contradictions of Mandela's life. 'Bittersweet' because Mandela turns the contradictions of oppression into lessons about humanist virtues. His is the spirit that cannot be conquered by oppression, thus he represents the supremacy of life's objective force. But the process of playing out his role and attaining the status of the symbol of humanism to a large extent transcends the limits and defies the biases of the poet's reasoning. Thus, the poem opens with a statement that encapsulates wonder and fascination as well as fear and despair: 'Your logic frightens me, Mandela / Your logic frightens me'. The poet cannot understand how after many years of struggle against apartheid, after years of nurturing dreams of a free South Africa, after the movement of time have produced a summation of his activism in 'visionary hopes', after years of strategising and re-strategising, of dialogues and protestations, and of raising the tempo of the war against tyranny to a peak where all that seemed to remain was the proclamation of a 'brave new world', there is 'stillness' and 'silence' in Mandela's world. Mandela has spent over two decades in apartheid jail on Robben Island and the 'sole reality' of his existence can be described by just two words – prison and dreams.

Yet, he does not lose his mind; neither does he lose touch with the reality of his humanism, his political mission and the struggle of his people in the outside world. Long years of incarceration would not make him bow to the will of his captors, neither would he show warmth towards treacherous fellows. He has witnessed and experienced varying degrees of human violation, 'Tearing flesh and spilling blood and brain', and has been the target of a 'bag of tricks' designed to deflate and devalue his political relevance and demoralise him. But Mandela is more intelligent than his captors. He understands the treachery of their seeming peaceful postures that follow

the flow of violent streams. He understands that their 'olive branch... sprouts / Gun muzzles, barbed-wire garlands, tangled thorns / To wreath the brows of black, unwilling Christs'. He would not fall into their trap because his wisdom surpasses their experience.

Importantly also, the outside world in South Africa is only a larger prison which condition must be addressed by his own miniature jail. He is an 'unwilling Christ' and would therefore not offer himself freely to be murdered. His messianic role is conceived in terms of his own continuous existence and the birth of a 'brave new world' of freedom and opportunities for his people. His is an uncommon pattern of messianism. The carrier does not have to be extirpated if the sweetness of freedom must be adequately relished. Yet, if it is inevitable that he goes the way of other compatriots who have been martyred in the course of the struggle, he cannot be shaken by the value of his own life. Notwithstanding, there is a sub-text in the poem that buttresses the gravity of Mandela's condition and makes the reader wonder if death is not a more tolerable experience.

Death is a human experience; but Mandela's patience has assumed a proportion that transcends the human. This implies that his suffering has become extremely inhuman. He has suffered so much of hunger and malnutrition that the poet wonders, 'Do you grow food [in prison]? Do you make friends / Of mice and lizards?' Extreme hunger and extreme loneliness are the major misfortunes captured in those lines. The poet wonders how Mandela spends his days. He must have become an unwilling, self-trained player of chess, scrabble and monopoly. But he must have been such a traumatised player that he plays so 'badly' and would send himself to jail on Robben Island time and again. Probably, that has become the only life he is familiar with such that he sees no desirable options in the games. His cards read: 'Go to jail.

Go straight to jail'. Yet Mandela is not mentally deranged. He has only attained such greatness of spirit that can contain any mode of inhuman experience. He is a symbol of the possibilities of strength that lie in the human spirit.

The poet's fright is informed by his lack of familiarity with such depth of equanimity. His own life has been defined by the waywardness of youth, and middle age has not provided any necessary cure for the restlessness and the sometimes somewhat impishness of his intellectual and political activism. It thus stuns and humbles him that there is such a profoundness of humanist virtue in a much older man who has seen the very worst of life and has been to the abyss of tyranny. Mandela has had his share of political rascality and his present life is an almost unimaginable contrast to the nature of his activism in the pre-Robben Island years. Certainly, his 'pulse... has slowed with earth's / Phlegmatic turns'.

The poet compares his pulse to the placid act of taming geckos. Mandela has become so meditative that the movement of grasshoppers probably constitutes much noise around him. His body has not been conquered by his captors but by his own spirit: 'Gaze transcending distances at will'; 'Your sight sifts from moth to bulb, / Rest on its pulse-glow Fluctuations'. His system has harmonised with the seasons of nature that his response to stimuli is almost automatic. Yet his mind is so alert that he would not succumb to the 'hurricanes' of change in ways that could implicate his humanism.

His humanist vision is almost celestial that the poet wonders about the degree of 'light-years' that separates Mandela from the rest of his compatriots in the struggle. He has reached that supreme category of profound rectitude in which the indomitable challenge against apartheid and tyranny is not so much in the violence of uprisings and wars, but more in the objective, overwhelming force of his humanist vision.

Mandela has become the moral authority behind the struggle. Yet the poet cannot reconcile himself with the physical condition of his hero. He seems to forget that his hero, in his present state of moral grandeur, is largely a creation of the tribulations placed upon him by his captors. Otherwise, he probably would have been in the trenches with his compatriots-in-arms fighting hard to subvert the apartheid order in his country.

His imprisonment, however, has enriched his life beyond simple imagination. The poet is no longer frightened by his logic; now he is threatened by his bounty. He feels fear because Mandela has become a spring of life, sort of, to him. But not to him only; millions of black people across the continent now 'dance' on the 'drumskin' of his heart: 'I fear we latch, fat leeches / On your veins'. The struggle of the black world for equity and social justice has become dependent upon the continued moral strength of Mandela. But Mandela is neither omnipotent nor immortal. In his condition, he now faces the greater challenge posed by his own kinsmen and compatriots:

... Our daily imprecisions
Dull keen edges of your will.
Compromises deplete your act's repletion –
Feeding will-voided stomachs of a continent

Treacheries and compromises by fellow compatriots seem to undermine some of the values of the struggle, and these of course affect the humanity of Mandela. The poet is thus worried by 'what will be left of (his hero)' should the struggle collapse. Significantly, Mandela has held out in spite of all odds. His consistency as captured in the poem, however, indicates the unlikelihood of his own compromise or the collapse of the struggle. His moral authority provides a constant critical base for the struggle, regardless of some of his compatriots dropping out of the war. His logic and his

bounty are genuinely amazing even to a critical, revolutionary humanist consciousness like the poet's.

His constancy of purpose is captured in "No!" He said', a poem that depicts the 'rock' of which he is made. In the first stanza of the poem, there are attempts to physically eliminate Mandela. His prison has no landmarks that could at least offer explanations of familiarity, if not comfort, to its dweller. It is on a dry piece of rocky hill. His jailers have sought on several occasions to 'crush his head' against the rocks thereby terminating the struggle of his people – 'To flush the black will of his race / Back in tidal waves'. His fate would have been tragic as no amount of 'beach-combing' would have recovered his body, neither would any 'salvage operators' have returned him to life. But 'no' he said'. He fought back and ensured he kept his life to himself.

There are attempts to drown him. He suffers the torments of sea urchins and albino eels. The ghosts of that dire moment of tragic isolation are his companions of sorts. Then come the 'seducers' arranged by his jailers to lure him to the path of compromise in that critical moment when they assumed that his mind has become weak. But Mandela said 'no'. Neither the fear of death by drowning, nor the pains from sustained injuries and the excess loss of blood would break his fighting spirit. Amidst his own physical hardship, he could see merchant ship passing by in their numbers and these bring to him memories of the 'vanished years' of comfort, years that could still be reclaimed by him if he wishes. But Mandela said 'no'.

His jailers employ other strategies of blackmail: Is Mandela 'bigger than the Nkomati' accord of non-aggression? Is he the only dedicated freedom fighter? Is he more black than his compatriots who have appreciated the need for relief and ease for their brethren? They try the approach of comparing him with Rudolf Hess of the Nazi

ill-fame (which the poet explores in 'Like Rudolf Hess, The Man Said!'). His jailers preach the ethics of globalisation to him:

The axis of the world has shifted. Even the polar star
Loses its fixity, nudged by man-made planets.
The universe has shrunk. History re-echoes as
We plant new space flags of a master race.

They tell him that he is the only odd one left in a struggle that has become odd because even 'the stars' (i.e. nature) that have for long supported him have now disowned him. They point to him his state of physical injury and pain and that all of that should soon be consigned to the 'seabed of forgotten time'. They exhort him to brace up for the new challenges of racial integration and the reconstruction of 'that star planet of our galaxy' under the 'same [old] taskmasters'. His worthy portion in the new arrangement would be 'choice reserves' of 'rare diamonds'. The offer is so munificent that even Christ, who resisted the offer of all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, if he were to return a second time, would not refuse a deal. It is a deal described by the jailers as 'our Brave New World' and Mandela, now described as the 'Ancient Mariner', is invited to be a major part of the new deal. But Mandela could see through the subterfuge of his jailers. He is a man of purpose and knows that the deal falls short of true freedom for his people. Thus, he said 'no'.

He no longer sees himself as a prisoner. He appreciates his moral authority upon which the struggle in the outside world is constantly renewed. Thus he proclaims:

I am this rock, this island. I toiled,
Precedent on this soil, as in the great dark whale
Of time, Black Hole of the galaxy. Its maw
Turns steel-wrought epochs plankton – yes – and
Vomits out new worlds.

In and out of time warp, I am that rock
In the black hole of the sky.

His is the humanist spirit of conquest. The rock of his tribulation has become the rock upon which he toils against tribulation until his jailers can no longer stand his strength. Thus, he is now synonymous with the rock; neither his jailers nor their strategies of oppression can hold him down anymore. He is the rock here present on Robben Island; he is the constancy of spirit that inhabits the consciousness of black people across the continent.

Importantly, he has transcended the immediacy of black existence and the materiality of their struggles. He has become the eternal spirit of human experience in the context of the struggle against tyranny and inhumanity. He, as the rock, is a universal constant, though the immediate context of his placement is 'the black hole of the sky'. For the poet, therefore, Mandela is the unfading symbol of moral authority and the indomitable, truly revolutionary spirit of social change and progress. He embodies a critical, retrospective and dependable redefinition of the revolutionary current by which man and society are elevated to higher grounds of individual and collective grandeur in various fields of experience.

Winnie is the other arm of the symbol of humanist of struggle in the collection. In 'So Now They Burn the Roof Above Her Head', the poet explores an essential balance to the unprecedented revolutionary assertions symbolised by Mandela. Winnie offers the completion of 'the love of man and woman / Leaven in the dough of nation's love'. She and her husband embody the example of commitment not only to their relationship and family, but more importantly their nation. To break the import of that commitment, the oppressors try to tear them apart physically, psychologically and emotionally. Mandela's arrest is a turbulent experience for

Winnie. He is described as the 'bedspread' of her life. For her, however, Mandela has become the bedspread of a nation experiencing 'the pangs of birth'. He is 'like earth in hope of our remaking'. She thus situates the well-being of the nation above her emotional and other personal needs.

Though the oppressors of her husband and people adopt various strategies in their attempts to 'burn the roof above her head', Winnie, like her husband, holds out against all odds. For her oppressors, she is a 'heresiarch', a 'hypocrite', a 'witch', descriptions not untypical of chauvinistic degradations of women that hold out the torch of leadership and dignity in presumed arenas of male contestations or supremacy. But she shows the capacity to absorb the 'inquisition's bonfires'.

In spite of her own shortcomings, she remains committed to the struggle against apartheid. She refuses to succumb to attempts to obliterate her social existence and political activism, which would have impacted badly upon the struggle being led by Mandela. The poet describes her as 'The rare illuminated scroll in whose prophecies / Humanity discerns its fate'. Importantly, she represents the force of continuity, stability, sacrifice and socio-political organisation in the struggle against oppression. She thus creates a necessary balance between the configuration of values, activities and activism, and the actual battle for freedom and equity.

Soyinka continues to assert his idea of a forceful rejection of tyranny and the pursuit of a humanistic society in several other poems in *Mandela's Earth*. In 'Funeral Sermon, Soweto', he captures the regrettable handiwork of oppression in a dirgeful tone and atmosphere. He seeks to honour the bodies of the fallen heroes of the black struggle. In 'After the Deluge' and 'Apollodorus on the Niger', he regrets the pervasive culture of corruption, which provides a basis for the continuity of tyranny and social inequity on the continent of Africa. 'The Apotheosis of Master Sergeant

Doe', a former President of Liberia, indicates that tyranny is not the attribute of white racists only. Doe's principle of governance transcends the oppressive trails of the theory of a master race; he is the embodiment of the ruler as god. Thus he is appropriately described as 'Master stayer' and 'Master slayer'. And his delinquent example abounds in the black continent - 'Swinging Bokassa, Macais Nguema, Idi Amin Dada', etc. These are rulers who are scavengers of their own people. They depict the critical failure of leadership in Africa, a situation explored by the poet in 'My Tongue Does Not Marry Slogans'. The African condition has become so putrid and troubling that the poet does not fail to restate his call for a revolution: 'Since justice is but One, it must / Be seized not piecemeal but entire, or not at all'.

It cannot be lost upon a perceptive reader of Soyinka's poetry that the writer exhibits a consuming commitment to poetry as a field of critical discourse and to social activism as a means to humanistic development. It is within this framework of the marriage of his poetic and social visions that one must appreciate the mythopoetic foundations of his revolutionary ideal. That ideal encapsulates a definite call for a social/civil engagement of the forces of oppression in society. It provides a rare justification for war in the contexts of the struggle against tyranny and the all-important humanistic mission of nation-building as a critical mode of guaranteeing social and human security. It emphasises the essence of an organising principle in political struggle. That principle could be mythic (as in the case of Ogun), legendary (as in the deployment of Shaka to the Southern African struggles), or in line with his own example, a combination of the mythic and the legendary.

But around such principles, however, must be a human representation who is an embodiment of such grand moral authority that personifies the essence of the mythical and the legendary. The poet's enchantment with Mandela thus perfects the

circle of his idea of a revolutionary design of humanistic change in the circumstance of the struggle against tyranny and oppression especially at the level of racial or national experience.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION:

COMPARATIVE RE-APPRAISALS

Thus far, the study has explored various aspects of the manifestation of liberal humanism as ideology and practice in the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka. Both writers, as have been discussed, place themselves under the enormous influence of liberal and humanist writers and contexts. In spite of their criticisms of aspects of the ideology, especially in the case of Eliot, it is undeniable from the overwhelming evidence in their writing that they demonstrated the imperatives of freedom, individualism, equity and social justice as poetic essences. It is primarily for those illustrated poetic demonstrations of theirs that we have described them as liberal humanists. Importantly, however, there are various points of convergence as well as critical differences in their engagements with the idea and practice of liberal humanism. Their variety of experience significantly enriches the ideology and emphasises the elasticity of its boundaries and its containment of the variables of consensus, contradictions and conflict. This chapter focuses on a re-appraisal of the two poets with the aims of comparing and critiquing their humanistic poetics. This it does in the context of re-evaluating the experience of each poet separately and comparatively.

(5.1) THE EXERCISE OF PRECEPTS

In his writing, Eliot offers straightforward, concise statements on his thoughts about humanism. On the other hand, much of Soyinka's views on humanism are established through a deductive literary/critical practice. Largely, much of Eliot's views on humanism and liberalism are as responses or reactions to dominant issues and

developments in his time. He was forty years of age when he published 'The Humanism of Irving Babbitt', which implies that his thoughts about the idea and practice of humanism must have been thoroughly considered through time. His essay is a critique of Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* which explores humanism as 'the alternative to religion'. Eliot's concern, which is reiterated in 'Second Thoughts about Humanism' is that religious faith must remain central to the pursuit of humanistic objects. Religion appeals to the human soul and thus places a truly pious person in a state of discipline and self-control. Commitment to human progress can then be a deliberate, life-long experience. Religion is thus conceived as the foundation of genuine humanistic endeavours which, for Eliot, incorporates such elements as a general culture of 'common sense', tolerance, rhetoric or the art of persuasion, and a mode of 'intellectual aristocracy', amongst others.

The symbiosis of 'the religious and the *pure* humanistic attitude' fosters an atmosphere of 'intellectual freedom' and 'complete spiritual freedom'. A humanism that does not answer to the yearnings of the human soul would, in Eliotic terms, become discredited. In the words of a biographer, 'It was Eliot's belief that if Christianity disappeared, our civilisation would disappear with it' (Ackroyd, 1984:249). He extended that same belief to other cultures and religions.

Significantly, Eliot had witnessed the decline of religious faith, social order and the rise of anarchy in Europe. Some of the results of that degeneration were two world wars in the second and fourth decades of the 20th century. While his poetry, *The Waste Land* most especially, captures much of that chaos and confusion, his proclivity for order is prominent in his prose writing and his political activism. Political conservatism is for him a sure means of returning society to the path of moral and socio-political stability. In sum, he is a humanist to the extent that

humanism is founded upon some religious faith and makes room for full intellectual and 'spiritual' freedom and development. He is a 'liberal' to the extent that his conservatism is pitched in a dialectical relation to the various modes of the 'permissiveness' of liberalism not with the intent of denying man's individuality or freedom but with the broader objective of facilitating and achieving equity, social justice, and cultural and economic development in society.

Unlike Eliot who has directly engaged issues related to liberal humanism in society, Soyinka's humanism is almost taken for granted. Importantly, there is no critical attempt to defend or explain humanism. Unlike some attempts at separation between humanism and religion in the context in which Eliot operated, Soyinka's experience is different:

I take most of my metaphors from the Yoruba worldview. What separates that religion from the so-called universal world religions is that the human characteristics of the deities that belong in the Yoruba pantheon actually make that religion one of the most humanist types of religion you'll encounter anywhere in the world. The Yoruba philosophy drastically reduces the absolute authority of deities over the lives of human beings and therefore reduces the dependency of human beings on the interpreters of the extraterrestrial authority ... I point to this as an example of some kind of qualified humanism that predates any kind of codification of humanistic principles in European terms (Soyinka, 1997:1).

Humanism for Soyinka does not exist in the controversial social context of the Eliotic experience. Both share the critical religious context of humanistic practice. But while religion for Eliot constitutes those essential 'spiritual' and moral ingredients for humanistic living, the deities are mere symbols of secular values for Soyinka. In Eliot's situation, religion and humanism are separable, though they are not to be separated (in his view); otherwise, religion would lose its social significance and humanism would become negative, destructive and discredited. For Soyinka,

however, traditional religion and humanism are one and the same experience which point to human development as the ultimate measure of all positive and objective endeavours.

The same secular principles constitute the bedrock of Soyinka's humanism in his appropriation of Christian and classical values. His attitude underscores the centrality of individualism, equity and social justice as critical attributes of religion and humanism. These attributes define his search for a humanistic society, especially in the circumstances of popular struggles for a liberal democratic dispensation against the background of colonialism, post-independence political intolerance, and military dictatorship. His approach to socio-political issues, though situated within the broad framework of humanistic considerations, is often determined by the exigencies of a liberal disposition and the background of an indigenous culture. He would thus be more specifically characterised as a dialectical politician in his exercise of humanistic precepts. Of course, more dialectical in practice than Eliot whose poetic liberalism is elaborately steeped in a humanism that is largely shaped by conservative considerations.

(5.2) THE CHARACTER AND CONTEXTS OF IDEOLOGY

The nature of Eliot's humanism is dialectical to the extent of the juxtaposition of poetry and prose, theory and practice. As he has himself observed,

It would appear that while I maintain the most correct opinions in criticism, I do nothing but violate them in my verse; and thus appear in a double, it not double-faced role ... I should say that in one's prose reflexions one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality. (1934:26).

Ascriptions of political conservatism to Eliot are largely situated in his prose writing and his political practice. His poetry, as have been illustrated in Chapter Four, is a ready offering in liberal humanist thinking and social engagements. To some extent, therefore, his prose and poetry do not complement each other especially at the level of ideas. Yet, his prose encapsulates much of the dialecticism of his humanist imagination. His prose offers a ready criticism of some of the shortcomings and contradictions in liberal humanism.

On the other hand, the dialecticism of Soyinka's humanism is almost exclusively intercultural, intratextual and intertextual. Certainly, these elements are present in overwhelming modernist proportions in Eliot's poetry and they function as much in the capacity of outwriting one another as they re-assert and reinforce the poet's humanist ethos. But Eliot, unlike Soyinka, has the added dimension of critical self-negations in a genre outside poetry.

In terms of interculturalism, Christianity and Classicism are two traditional platforms of experience explored by both poets. They share these platforms in respect of their family backgrounds and religious upbringing, as well as the mode of formal literary training to which they were exposed. Their poetry, as illustrated in Chapter Four, depict them as thorough-going classicists in terms of the varied elements of influence that run across their works, in terms of overwhelming allusions to the classical traditions, and very importantly in terms of the thorough-going individualism of their poetic preoccupation. Classicism runs across the entire gamut of their poetic vocation.

Unlike the sameness of their unalloyed commitment to Classicism, Christianity offers different meanings to Eliot and Soyinka. The former, in spite of a Christian background, rejected the family faith of Unitarianism, an elitist Christian

sect (see Ackroyd, 1984:17-18), but soon walked the direction of formal acceptance and commitment to the Anglican Communion. Christianity, for Eliot, transcends the poetic search for symbols and motifs; it encapsulates 'the organisation of values, and a direction of religious thought which must inevitably proceed to a criticism of political and economic systems' (Eliot, 1939:42). It is also the guiding principle in the arts of creating and criticising literature. Though the most significant chunk of Eliot's poetry was written before his formal conversion to Anglicanism, the dating of his 'conversion' may be described as a social act which does not in any significant way negate the image of the Christian Eliot in, say, *The Waste Land*. Of course, that image is much stronger in the post-conversion poems like 'Four Quartets' and 'Choruses from "The Rock"'.

For Soyinka, there is the transition from the commitment of faith to one of symbolism within Christianity. The signification of the Christian faith soon became not a matter of commitment to sentiments, rituals and institutions, but one of the secularisation of the humanistic values embedded within the precepts of religion. In that vein, he gradually discovers that such values are also embodied by deities in the Yoruba traditional religion. Thus, in addition to his appreciation of his Christian background, he adopts the Yoruba traditional religion as expression of an essential cultural nationalism, and importantly for the principal purpose of humanistic adaptation. Significantly, therefore, his humanism is largely coloured by the imagination of the Yoruba autochthonous culture, with Christianity and Classicism as subtexts that answer to the values of his indigenous experience.

For Eliot on the other hand, the order of ideological colouration is Classicism as dominant culture, and Christianity as sub-culture in his pre-conversion poetry. The order gradually changes as both cultures 'seem to' swap places in the emergent

dispensation. Importantly for both poets, humanist ideological colouration is extrinsically defined by the dominance of the experiential nature of cultural narratives. At the level of ideas, the various cultures as engaged by the poets accentuate the same values of liberal humanism, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis geared at achieving set humanistic goals in different cultural circumstances.

In Eliot's poetry, those humanistic goals tilt largely towards the appreciation of a moral life and society. Hence his focus on man's moral dilemma, the endless strive for perfection, the exploration of the individual talent in that moral struggle, and the consistent reference to the classical example of humanist values. In *The Waste Land*, he is preoccupied with classicism. He constantly refers back not only as a mode of logical allegiance to the past, but more importantly in the context of a critical allegiance to a moral tradition. The poem captures the struggle between 'the medieval consciousness' and a modern condition, and between a 'visionary reality' (Spurr, 1984:) and a disordered society which is represented by the fragmentary existence of the modern age and the symbolic elevation of private neurosis as indication of the collapse of civilisation and humanist values. In 'Hollow men', Eliot offers Christianity as the 'hope of empty men'. Religion for him is the unmistakable 'mediating and corrective ingredients' in civilisation, and civilisation here necessarily incorporates a general culture of ethics and 'common sense', individualism and tolerance, the art of persuasion, and a tradition of socio-political dialecticism.

In Soyinka's writing, man's moral condition is somewhat taken for granted. The direction of his humanistic goals is emphatically socio-political. This runs through his writing in all the genres. He is thus the quintessential Yoruba writer for whom 'the balance of human life, the very sense of human existence, consists in the dynamic correlation of individual responsibility and the pressure of external events

and forces' (Irele, 1981:52). Understandably, the context of Soyinka's social existence does not afford the luxury of the elitism of the Eliotic disposition to a polity that had reached unprecedented heights of industrial and political modernity and needed to begin to check itself against the contextual 'moral' excesses of liberalism and individualism.

In Soyinka's African context, the burdens and consequences of the unprecedented historical disjunctions - the Trans-Saharan slave trade, Trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism, military coups and misgovernance, political adventurism and a widespread culture of squandermania, civil wars, and general economic and socio-political underdevelopment - pushed questions about equity and social justice, democratisation and democracy, leadership and social accountability, and other development issues to the forefront of humanist poetics and social agenda. Significantly, the two poets capture the different cultural, economic and socio-political experiences of their age and some of the major aspirations of their different peoples, one with an emphasis on the immaterial but with critical material implications, the other with an emphasis on the material with penetrating immaterial significations.

(5.3) STYLISTIC ELEMENTS

The obscureness of language is one critical shared element of the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka. This obscureness is more pronounced in Soyinka's early poetry, *Idanre* and *Shuttle* especially, than in Eliot's. It is a direct reflection of the vagaries of modernity which play out the problematic modes of human existence in an age of rapid transformations and predicaments. Their writing is a cultural response to the celebrated conditions of technological change which implies enhanced conditions of

living; but it is also a reaction to the myriads of problems that came with modernity: the homogenisation of values, the unprecedented rise of capitalism, the decline of religions faith and a paradoxical rise of religious fanaticism, new security challenges and the rise of police states, new trends in migration and racial segregation, etc.

These developments had deep, penetrating associations with man's psychological and metaphysical being and brought about unprecedented changes in social relations and structures. Language thus suddenly found itself in dire need of critical expansion and modifications to rise to the challenges of a new age. Modernist writers were at the forefront of that attempt to rescue language from the blitz of modernity. That rescue, for Eliot and Soyinka amongst other modernist writers, came in the form of stressing and stretching the language to bear the burdens of experiencing modernity.

The two writers, though in different cultural and historical modernist contexts, face a dislocated world which put their beliefs, assumptions and emotional experiences into disarray. This experience is poetically dramatised in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *The Waste Land*, *Idanre* and *Shuttle*, amongst other poems. It is largely in that context of experimentation with language that their poetry appears to many as obscure. Yet, the two writers explore such strategies as allusions, symbols and images to achieve effective poetic communication and humanistic meanings.

The humanism of their poetry is significantly characterised by the universality and timelessness of their allusions. The range cuts across Christianity, Classicism, Islam, Bhuddism, mythology, traditional religion, autochthonous cultures, English and non-English literature from antiquity, language, history, philosophy, science, etc. Importantly, their allusions are not just for the sake of the expansiveness of form. Their poetry captures new ways of alluding to the old with the intent of shocking and

awakening their readers. This is sometimes stretched to an extent that bespeaks the conceits of metaphysical poetry. Certainly, however, there is a broader scope of allusions in Eliot's poetry than in Soyinka's.

The use of allusions, quotations, references and echoes in the works of the two poets are marked modes of enhancing the imagism of their poetry. The notion of the 'image' in modernist writing functions for the purpose of conciseness and condensation of thoughts and experience. It encapsulates a direct engagement with the object or subject and the use of only words that contribute very directly to the intended meaning. The result is that imagism often produces elliptical writing, hence the obscureness and fragmentariness of the poetry of Eliot and Soyinka.

Yet, it is a critical marker of the liberal humanist imagination in its adherence to the principle of reason and the rules of classical composition, and in its rejection of the tendencies of sentimentalism which fall short of the demand of capturing the scientific complexities of modernity. Thus, in respect of *The Waste Land*, for example, Childs (2000:99) states that

... for almost the first time in English poetry, a writer seemed to be getting to grips with the consequences of modernity. Eliot borrowed from Baudelaire, mythology, Shakespeare, Eastern religion, paganism, music hall and a host of literary predecessors in order to express contemporary life in a polyphony of cultured sound bites...

His modernist art represents the act of the objectification of the experiences of the real world: 'Writing turns in on itself in a profound act of narcissism, but always troubled and over-shadowed by the social guilt of its own uselessness' (Eagleton, 1983:140).

A critical element of that narcissism in both poets is their use of symbols. This underscores the autonomy of arts from the social contexts that give rise to it. Symbolism entails an indirect representation of human reality by transcendental

experience. Eliot's 'Prufrock' captures the vagaries of the sub-conscious and the cryptic nature of human desires. In 'Portrait of a Lady', the reader is confronted with the shifty nature of human individuality and the consequent paradoxical nature of friendship.

Similar symbols that capture man's varied psychological characters run through various poems in Soyinka's *Shuttle*. In the *Idanre* poems, the symbols dwell upon various stages of man's transition as an individual voyager. In all of these poems, events, characters and expressions are emphasised through repeated words and phrases which provide consistent sound patterns and poetic meanings thus achieving structured, intellectualised rhythms in the works.

Symbolism in the two writers assume, to varying degrees, the proportions of mythical visions of life's experiences. In Eliot, such mythic concerns operate largely in the context of expanding the terrain of poetic experience. Birje-Patil (1977:) thus identifies four levels at which those concerns function in *The Waste Land*, the most representative of Eliot's mythical poetic engagement:

- i. Archetypal myths at the thematic level (Fisher King)
- ii. The morphology of myths and the form of the poem (spatial form)
- iii. Myth and the finite structure (mythic city)
- iv. Myth, Allusion and Rhetoric (symbol, archetypal anagogic, literary, non-literary).

These categories imply that the poem can be studied as a mythic representation of modernity in terms of themes and form. To that extent, therefore, various myths come together in shaping the overall structure and significance of the poem. Importantly, however, this particular mythic arrangement does not run across the gamut of Eliot's poetry. Poems like 'The Hollow Men', 'Ash-Wednesday', 'Journey of the Magi', etc, exhibit different mythic orders that indicate an

accommodating poetic vision. 'The Hollow Men', for example, is significantly developed upon the myth of heaven and hell as captured in Dante's *Divina Commedia*, and the myth of the unknown continent represented by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Continuously, the mythic arrangement in Eliot's poetry changes and runs with the vastness of his allusions and references.

It is in Eliot's prose that his mythic vision comes out strongly. In *After Strange Gods*, in spite of his latter reservations about some of the arguments he puts forward, he emphasises the importance of myth to the development of society, especially as that critical cement that holds society together. Published against the background of the Second World War, Eliot is concerned about the future of Britain and the significance of social cohesion in Europe. His is a linear vision of history which, paradoxically, implies the blurring of past shared values and experiences (see also, 'Little Gidding'). These provides the contexts for him to emphasise the myths of 'Englishness' and of European culture and unity.

In the Eliotic schema, myth functions as a literary resource to agendas of political power and to social experiences that have to be elevated to the dimension of historical authenticity. Though the Second World War had ended, the question of the future of Europe was as important as winning the war and Eliot wondered if that question, or even the war, could be won without the aid of a viable myth. Certainly, at the end of 'Four Quartets', it is apparent that there are critical tensions encapsulated in some of the ways in which a work of art represents reality and its link to the practical social and political exercise of power. Eliot is, of course, susceptible to what E.D. Hirsch (1976) has described as 'the myth of the homogenous past', which invariably evinces a political agenda. But the use of myth as a point of view in art must be dignified by the writer's imagination. *The Waste Land* and 'Four Quartets'

are thus illustrative of that mode of imaginative aggrandizement of the mythic. Yet, Eliot is not unaware of that critical phenomenon of the non-homogenous present. This runs across the bulk of his poetry, thus buttressing his own admission of a critical dichotomy between his poetry and his prose.

Myth in Soyinka's writing functions as the central organising principle of the creative imagination and social practice. His mythic principle is embodied by his pet god, Ogun, whose presence is a vitalising force to both writer and society. Ogun is the god of metal, war, exploration, harvest and creativity. The list is simply dazzling and it throws up the question: what critical aspects of human endeavour does Ogun not have authority over? It is no surprise, therefore, that he is the dominant force in Soyinka's writing.

Though Soyinka's use of myth is essentially poetic, it possesses an enigmatic political character which, like Eliot's, exhibits a racial, not racist, hue. The description of his god as Ogun Abibiman (meaning Ogun of the Black World) and his deployment of Ogun to fight the wars of black people in Southern Africa certainly produce an equivalent of the Eliotic myth of European unity. In Soyinka's case, Ogun becomes an apt representation of the myth of Black unity.

Significant as this myth is for the development of the African world, Soyinka paradoxically embodies within its representation a tragic vision of society, a cyclical sense of history -- 'Ogun's road a "Mobius" orbit' (*Idanre*, 85). The overwhelming question that the vision raises relates to man's [in]capability to redeem himself from the somewhat determined fatalism of his existence. The linearity of Eliot's sense of history in this regard offers the hope of human renewal and incremental progression, which ultimately serves the purpose, in a very positive sense, of man as 'the measure of all things'.

The attitudes of Eliot and Soyinka must, however, be placed in a dialectical context which, more aptly, captures the essence of the totality of their works. The Eliotic vision presented in 'The Hollow Men' and 'Journey of the Magi', for example, does not lend itself to the conclusions of incremental progression. Yet, Soyinka's 'Dedication' and 'Psalm' (in *Idanre*), for example, aptly corroborate the logic of a consistent piecemeal humanistic development. Mark Kinkead-Weekes (1981:229) has observed, for example, that:

Soyinka indeed has a habit of using a two-part structure to transform our view of what we have been watching: a first predominantly satiric, comic and done in human terms; a second part tragic, mythic, and aware of the forces and perspectives beyond the human.

Though written in the context of an interpretation of *The Interpreters*, that 'two-part structure' of thought runs across the entirety of Soyinka's writing, albeit not necessarily in that strict dichotomy between the comic and the tragic. The dialectical, deconstructive element is always present, lending varying critical dimensions to the creative imagination. It is in the context of this dialecticism that he and Eliot become quite similar, not only in their poetry but also in their drama.

Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*, for example, departs from his tradition of a modernist, humanistic search for progress as embodied in his poetry to accept and proffer an answer which is certified by religious traditions and the history of the Church of England. Archbishop Beckett as religious hero is no doubt a tragic figure whose death must bring about religious and social renewal in England. The tragedy thus becomes a vehicle of social progress. The same motif attempts to play itself out in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. The myth of vicarious death becomes tragic because it does not offer any alternative to the tragic victim. The attempt to

place the character in a cosmic perspective always fails because a tragedy indicates the flaw in a 'cosmic' individual as well as in the world in which he lives, which is actually always an absurd world. (Shakespeare's *King Lear* also provides a critical illustration of this tragic phenomenon in which every human being is a fool and the gods are tricksters).

Importantly, the two writers illustrate the non-exclusiveness of the directly progressive and the tragic, and of the linear and the cyclical senses of human history. A comprehensive appreciation of human nature, social history and contemporary realities would always consistently indicate the essential dialecticism of man's individuality and the relationships and structures by which society is constituted. In spite of some of the differences in the contexts, contents and approaches to the concept and experience of liberal humanism, Eliot and Soyinka elaborately share and demonstrate similar ethos of humanistic thought and practice and these define the hallmark of their poetic concerns.

This study examines the definitive spirit and character of the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Wole Soyinka as liberal humanist. Their humanism engages various dialectical phenomena like man's individuality, freedom, communitarianism, equity, social justice, social democracy, environmental conservation, religious and social morality, modernity, etc. In demonstrating the problematic nature of knowledge and experience, these poets achieve an overwhelming description of humanism at two definitional plains.

The first encapsulates liberal humanism as a general culture with various bits and pieces of its 'commonsensical' precepts practised by individuals and groups in various contexts of personal, family, group, community, national and international relationships. At this level, humanism explains society's capacity to accommodate differences while simultaneously pursuing the common good. The second category of meaning embodies an intellectual tradition of free imagination and criticism which empowers man to explore all possible vistas of thought and practice in his search for the 'cosmic' progress of his species and, equally importantly, for the well-being of the universes. Eliot and Soyinka operate at these two levels of meaning thus exhibiting a poetic consciousness that is simultaneously popular and elitist.

Each of them possesses a thorough understanding of the historical, sociological and political contexts of their times and their exploration of various humanistic matters relate to general human conditions, but more specifically to the issues of their immediate 'local' existence. A general signification of their art and attitude is that liberal humanism, in spite of its claims to common sense, universality and timelessness, must always conceive of its relevance primarily in the context of local experience. The social authenticity of the local invariably adds up to the universality of human experience. There is thus the Eliotic movement from the English, to the European, to the global, and the Soyinkan movement from the Yoruba, to the Black African, to the global. The strategy is always to emphasise the strength of human genuineness from the cluster of the local. It is a strategy that suggests 'roots' and 'authenticity', and provides the basis for a humanistic transition to a truly universalist mode of thinking and doing.

The two poets strongly demonstrate the plurality and complexity of liberal humanist thought and practice, and these sometimes assume the dimension of

ambiguity. Yet their ambiguity only illustrates an element of human condition which they profoundly explore. Their poetry exemplifies multidisciplinary as an authentic strategy of humanistic discourse. That authenticity implies the provision of information meant for interrogation as a way of understanding the plurality of truth more comprehensively (see de Man, 1983). It incorporates a literary, philosophical, sociological, psychological, historical and scientific criticism of nature, man and society. Certainly, it embodies its own contradictions as is typical of theories and the dichotomy of theory and practice. And very importantly for some of those contradictions, Eliot and Soyinka may not be dogmatic ideologists of humanism. Yet, their attitude is a critical reflection of the self-introspective nature of liberal humanism which, like all ideologies, has its own conservatives and devil's advocates.

It is evident from the study that the two writers are avant-gardists who are also critics of 'avant-garde aspirations' (see Menand, 1987:4). The wealth and beauty of their poetic vocation are embedded in the placement of their art in the context of various categories of humanist values, and importantly, in the aesthetic virtue of transcending those 'immediate' humanistic purposes.

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