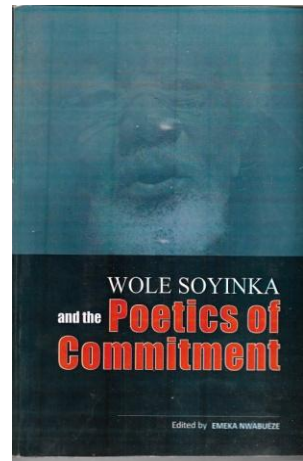


**Attributions and perspectives in *Wole Soyinka and the Poetics of Commitment***



**Emeka Aniago\***

Emeka Nwabueze (ed). *Wole Soyinka and the Poetics of Commitment*. Enugu: CNC Publishers, 2018. Pp. 341.

In *Wole Soyinka and the Poetics of Commitment*, the editor Emeka Nwabueze has brought together in a volume a collection of thirty-two articles contributed by forty-two scholars. The articles in this book are reviewed and edited papers presented by the authors at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chinua Achebe International Conference at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka with the term, ‘Wole Soyinka and the Literature of Commitment’ from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018. The essays in this book are grouped into seven sub-sections. The first group of essays titled ‘Wole Soyinka and the Creative Presence’ has three papers. In the first paper titled ‘Transcending the Limits of the Word: Soyinka, Discursive Strategies and the Perpetual Presence’, Emeka Nwabueze examines the nuances of change, particularly the ‘fear of change’ as captured in Wole Soyinka’s drama *Death and the King’s Horseman* in relation to the context of change as a form of final human transition. Thus, Nwabueze

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points at the social cost of people's refusal to continue with subsisting trado-cultural definition of natural order and destiny. Nwabueze also blames lack of courage to follow through an earmarked responsibility as the protagonist's (Elesin) major hubris. Nwabueze's attribution in this paper revolves around nuances of the inevitability of change in ideology and perception as result of evolving societal modernisation. Also Nwabueze's analysis points at the importance of understanding one's duty from the outset and the importance of courage needed to carry-out such duty for the general good and well-being of the community concerned. In the second play *The Lion and the Jewel*, Nwabueze discusses the nuances of transition as it relates to transition from youthful strength and beauty, to old age related fatigue and ugliness. Again, he alludes to the centrality of courage and the reason why people need to accept natural order, rather than become bitter and pained as well as jealous towards the young, who are in their prime. In the second essay, captioned 'Committing Literature to the Voiceless Majority: Commitment in the Era of Alternative Truths', the author Hope Eghagha revolves around the authors desire to interrogate both past and contemporary experiences with a view to indentify where and how the anomalies and the retrogressive tendencies in governance and community life started in a bid to seek practical and functional remedies. Thus, Eghagha discusses how art can be appropriated as a tool and medium of social criticism and orientation. Eghagha's essay also emphasizes on the strength and contribution of the creative writer in social awareness creation, using Woles Soyinka's attempts as example. In the third paper titled 'Soyinka's Philosophical Treatise on Religion: Salvation or Savagery' the author Patrick Ebewo analytically reviews Soyinka's philosophies on religion as portrayed in his public proclamations and writings. Focusing on Soyinka's dramatic satires, Ebewo notes, "religion – Traditional, Christian, and Islamic – is viewed not wholly as a heaven of saints but also as a school for sinners" (2018, 28). Thus, Ebewo observes that other plays by Soyinka such as *Requiem for a Futurologist*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *Opera Wonyesi* and *The Road* expose as well as portray this point of view. In the area of public utterances which are captured in Newspapers, Ebewo critically reviews nuances of Soyinka's position on the attributions and suppositions that debate and discuss about religion is too delicate. Rather, Ebewo examines Soyinka's inclination, which suggests that the ills emanating from miss-practice of religion should be subject of open and fair discuss.

The essay ‘Soyinka, the Writer and Social Commitment’ starting with the paper titled ‘Re-reading Commitment Literature: Soyinka’s Model in *Season of Anomy*’, written by Adaoma Igwedibia and Dina Yerima, equates the nuances of social vision with portrayal of commitment by Soyinka in extrapolation of social realities in *Season of Anomy*. The authors’ extrapolation is captured in the following comment: “from a reading of Wole Soyinka’s writings as well as his personal actions, this title (public intellectual) can be conferred on him as he represents, criticizes and seeks to change things in the society” thus, “he establishes firmly, his role as a public intellectual whose commitment is evident in his works” (Igwedibia & Yerima 2018, 38). The authors’ emphasis is primarily on Soyinka’s acclaimed application of his drama as a means of discussing social realities and as an avenue of projecting possible ways of assessing and solving subsisting social problems. In the next paper titled ‘Adaptation of Soyinka’s Works: Upgrading Theatre Scenery to Meet the Digital Challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ the authors Richard Umezina and Ijeoma Orji interpretively present suggestions on how scenography will be made to key into the emerging global trend. The authors discuss the variables and dimensions to rapid technological advancement as it relates to scenography and how this reality can be harnessed to enhance theatrical production and audience experience. The authors relate their suppositions to the stage performance of Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* as directed by Agozie Ugwu at the Congress Hall of Transcorp Hilton Hotel Abuja on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2018, to access the adaptability of modernised technology in the production’s scenic design. In the next paper titled ‘Beautification of Ignoble Acts: Lessons from Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*’ the focus of the author Oguejiofor Victor Omeje is on the perspectives that explain the practice of human sacrifices. Omeje examines Soyinka’s play *Death and the King’s Horseman* in a bid to illuminate on the social vision and ideology that lubricates the worldview of the enacted era and people in the play. Also Omeje’s paper examines Soyinka’s supposed inclination on human sacrifice as projected in the focus play and discusses the subsisting point-of-views. In the next paper entitled ‘Villains, Victims and Self Reawakening in Ola Rotimi’s *IF...The Tragedy of the Rules* and Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero*’ the author Gabriel Otsemobor examines the social realities of ‘the oppressed’ and ‘the oppressor’ which he tags ‘the predators’ and ‘the preys’ as subsumed in plays he used for his analysis. In many ways

Otsemobor uses his paper as a means of interrogating the historical as well as the contemporary Nigeria's social class dynamics and realities within the playwright's social vision. The next paper 'The Nigerian Civil War and the Weight of Soyinka's Interventions in *A Shuttle in the Crypt*' written by Chukwuka Nwachukwu Ogbu presents Soyinka's resourcefulness as a writer, humanist, activist, and a philosopher before concentrating on his purview, thoughts and suppositions in his work *A Shuttle in the Crypt*. Thus, the paper ex-rays Soyinka's Nigeria's civil war period prison time poetry *A Shuttle in the Crypt* with emphasis on 'four archetypes' – Joseph, Hamlet, Gulliver, and Ulysses. Ogbu attempts to "uncover the weight of Soyinka's intervention and sensibility that drove and sustained him throughout his incarceration" and the contexts of his humanist philosophy which is propelled towards national re-birth through progressive social vision and orientation. Following Ogbu's paper is Maureen Nwando Onyejegbu's contribution titled 'African History and Literature: The Roles of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka in Promoting Nigerian History'. In this paper Onyejegbu looks at the contributions of Nigerian literary icons Achebe and Soyinka in the aspect of using "their works to address issues, solidify and expand African history in general and Nigerian history in particular" (Onyejegbu 2018, 96). Thus, Onyejegbu attempts to reaffirm through her paper that literature is a great piece of art and platform which is capable of propagating the history of any nation or continent for the betterment of the people.

In the next category captioned 'Culture and Religion in Soyinka's Works' which includes four essays, starting with the paper titled 'Social Revolution in the Works of Wole Soyinka and the Biblical Prophet Amos' by Ngozi Josephine Akah. In this paper Akah examines the nature of revolution action in the contemporary Nigerian nation as exemplified in Soyinka's works. More so Akah's paper examines the consistency of people's quest and desire for change. Similarly, the next essay by Ejike E. Nwabueze and Mercy Okoye titled 'An Analysis of Religious Language and its Adverse Effects on Religious Nigerians as Portrayed in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*' centres on religion and the society. In this paper the authors attempt to analyze how religious languages can influence the followers of a given religious leader as exemplified in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. Also the authors examine the adverse effects of religious languages on the religious Nigerians and ways to reduce or eliminate the adverse effects on them. Just as in preceding paper, the next paper titled 'Religious

Hypocrisy in Wole Soyinka's Play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*: The Relevance to Contemporary Nigeria Society' contributed by Chioma P. Onuorah also centres on religion and the society. In her paper Onuorah examines the origins of religion; different definitions of religion and the functions religion serve in the society. Onuorah also looks at the nuances of religious hypocrisy in Nigerian contemporary society as presented in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* and attempts to proffer viable ways of addressing the problems of religious hypocrisy. She suggested the kinds of attitude which must be adopted to balance the issues of religion in a contemporary society such as Nigeria. In the next paper titled 'Wole Soyinka and the Ritual Drama' the author Chidubem Nwaogaidu attempts to discuss Wole Soyinka's question: can ritual be called drama; at what moment can a religious or mythic celebration be considered or transformed into drama? Does this question lie in their capacity to transfer from habitual to alien environment. Thus, Nwaogaidu attempts to establish that the archetypal nature of ritual could be understood from the integral nature of drama where the individual is withdrawn into a primal reality.

The next category of essays entitled 'Politics and Leadership in Soyinka's Works' contains four essays, starting with the paper titled 'Exploring Soyinka's Convictions Around the Nigerian Civil War as Portrayed in *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*' written by Jude Ani. In the paper Ani attempts an analytical review of Soyinka's political disposition and his inclination beginning from the post-colonial era through the squabbles prelude to civil war, subsumed in the sub-headings: Soyinka's fight for True democracy before the war: A Background; Soyinka's Idea of a Third Force Verse Awolowo's and Ojukwu's Resolves; Soyinka's Third Force Idea Verse, The Realities of the Midwest Invasion. Thus, Ani's paper presents history through a point-of-view. The next paper 'Soyinka's Paradigm and Leadership: Literary Strategies for Development in Africa, The Nigerian Focus' by Ishola Abdullahi attempts to broadly answer a research question which aims to discuss Wole Soyinka's contributions as a creative writer towards the choice of leadership in Nigeria. The author Abdullahi reviews Soyinka's works and leadership in Nigeria in a bid to generate plausible suppositions. Similarly, the next paper looks at polity and it is titled 'Ideology, Leadership and Social Commitment in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *Kongi's Harvest*. In this paper the authors Edith Awogu-Maduagwu and Olusegun Omidiora focus on interpretation of the aforementioned plays as texts

that subsume the realities of African leadership and the dilemma of commitment. The authors examine the ideas of leadership in the plays under the sub-title 'The dilemma of Leadership in *Kongi's Harvest* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. They came up with interpretive inclination of Soyinka's portrayals as a form of social criticism. More on polity the next paper titled 'A Critical Analysis of Soyinka's Political Activism in *The Man Died*' by Jeff Unaegbu and Jude Ani reviews Soyinka's foot-prints as a political activist through the trajectory of his work *The Man Died*. Major areas touched in the paper are the reasons Soyinka was framed and incarcerated.

In 'Language, Style and Narrative in Soyinka's Works' there are six essays, commencing with the paper titled 'A Linguistic Re-Reading of Soyinka's *Abiku*' by Ngozi Anyachonkeya. In this paper Anyachonkeya attempts to take another hard look at the linguistic abstraction called *Abiku*, its semiotics, its attribution as a metaphysical reality and how the worldview of the people defines it. Also Anyachonkeya interrogates African belief system as it relates to the thought of life after death in relation to Soyinka's works. In the next paper titled, 'The Language of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*: A Reflection of Yoruba Culture' Raji Lateef Olatunji examines the associative features of language application in *Death and the King's Horseman*. In the paper Olatunji discusses the local specific realities that help to establish the link between the language and the society. In the following paper titled 'Metaphor as Conceptual Constructs of Corruption and Identity in Selected Wole Soyinka's Poems' by Onyedikachi Okodo, Ejike C. Idoko and Livina N. Emeodi, the authors review the application of metaphor by Soyinka in his authorial attempt to portray the realities of corruption and the place of identity in his poems. More so the paper examines the application of metaphor and the relationship to the interpretive community as a means of assessing the aptness of attributions and significations. In the paper titled 'Beyond the Rhetoric of Mythos: Myth and Ritual in the Poetry of Wole Soyinka' Stella Okoye-Ugwu examines how Soyinka in his poetry has managed to move beyond the mere deployment of mythic ideation to the placement of his poetry on its own universal pedestal. Thus Okoye-Ugwu examines the uniqueness through the application of mythology, as well as the figuration and signification of Soyinka's poetry. In the next paper titled 'Poetics of Man's Duality, exploitation and preservation in Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists*' the authors Isaiah Fortress, Edwin Onwuka and Anya

Egwu interpret the contexts of duality in *Madmen and Specialists*. Their paper attempt to illuminate on the paradoxical essence in human nature particularly the nuances and attributions of otherness in relation to *Madmen and Specialists* and the character's psychological and ideological leanings. Thus, the authors attempt to rationalize the concept of man's capacity for appreciating good and evil depending on the choice he makes, in relation to Soyinka's portrayal in *Madmen and Specialists* and its wider implication to the social realities, both historical and contemporary. In the next paper titled "Wordsmith before the Anvil of Truth: Forging the Conscious Voice in Wole Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and Mandela's *Earth*", Dominic J. Aboi attempts the use of New Historicism to discuss Soyinka's creative courage and moral aptitude as demonstrated in *A Shuttle in the Crypt* and Mandela's *Earth*. Furthermore Aboi attempts to examine how the lost of voice(s) have given rise to human rights violations, unjust incarcerations, denials of both individual and public wills, liberties and conscience, lost of human life among others.

In 'Soyinka and the Post-Colonial Thoughts' starting with chapter twenty-four titled 'The Bicycle Metaphor and the Nigerian Dilemma in Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*' Ndubuisi Nnanna examines the play's parody of the early 1970's oil boom period in Nigeria. Nnanna applies 'Bicycle' as a symbol to demonstrate the national economic disaster that resulted from the mismanagement of the oil boom revenue by the Nigerian government. Thus, Nnanna draws attention to the historical utility of the *Beautification of Area Boy* for memory preservation and as an important reminder of the mistakes of the past as a restraint for the present and warning for the future. In the next paper titled '(Dys)Utopia Representations and the Question of Commitment: A Study of Wole Soyinka and Others' Bem C. Atyev carries out a comparative study of Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 'Orpheus and Eurydice', *Othello*, *Things Fall Apart*, *In the Castle of My Skin*, and *A House for Mr. Biswas*' from a post-colonial perspective within the purview of coloniality. Atyev's paper carries out a comparative criticism of the focus texts from across cultural and linguistic parallels in order to appreciate the common denominator of utopia and dystopia that are embedded therein. His essay concludes that subsumed in coloniality is not just blames for colonization but the on-going dysfunctional behaviour of the most African leaders and bourgeois. The next paper captioned 'Myth in African Drama: A Postcolonial Assessment of Soyinka's *Death and*

*the King's Horseman* by Martha E. Onuh explores the application of myth in establishing a worldview that diametrically opposes the Western worldview and notion of what constitutes a tragedy. The essay examines the portrayal of the Yoruba purview on myth surrounding the world of the living, the dead and the unborn. Thus, the paper discusses the place of myth in expressing the belief system of a people and how drama taps into this traditional medium of expressing certain truths about a people and their worldview. In the next paper titled '*The Swamp Dwellers: A Similitude to Present Day*' Kasarachi C. Okpeh and Daniel I. Chibuko examine Soyinka's application of drama as a means of projecting the injustice and dehumanizing conditions of the Niger Delta inhabitants as a result of the oil exploration in the region. The authors relate how the thematic purview of Soyinka in the *The Swamp Dwellers* relates to the socio-economic realities in the contemporary Nigeria of 2019, typified in the following focus terms, Religion versus Rationality, Cultural Conservatism, Cowardly Inertia, Political Deception, and Begging Licence which define in many ways the relationship subsisting between the governors and the governed, the elite and non-elite, the rich and the poor in modern Nigeria.

The section titled 'Theory and Criticism of Soyinka' beginning with chapter Twenty-eight captioned 'Ritual, Spatial Medium and Cosmic Tension in the Works of Wole Soyinka' gives Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu focus on how Soyinka's plays are akin to a cocktail of symbolic use of the spatial medium to orchestrate the ever-present cosmic tension that man finds himself. Nwaozuzu through examples in Soyinka's plays show that conflict portrayal in the plays are often cast in the mould of mythic symbolism driven by very evocative language and action which may appear rhythmic and allusive. Thus, the author seeks to examine how Soyinka employs spatial medium or arrangement to orchestrate ritual and cosmic tension in his plays, particularly the involvement of imageries, songs, dance, evocative dialogue and action. The next paper titled 'Myth as History: Wole Soyinka as Cultural Watchdog in *A Dance of the Forest, Madmen and Specialists*, and *Death and the King's Horseman* by Ifeoma C. Onwugbufo and Donald O. Omagu apply the theoretical purview of New Criticism and Formalism to discuss the application of myth in selected plays of Soyinka. The paper examines how Soyinka applies his plays as a means of re-inventing culture. In the following paper titled 'Interrogating the Chthonic Realm of Chasm: Heroic Archetype in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*,



Cindy A. Ezeugwu examines the contexts and nuances of human sacrifice either as a voluntary or involuntary process in Yoruba history, folklore, and myth as encapsulated in the selected plays. Ezeugwu examines this under the following sub-headings – The reality of Chasm, Essence of Chaos, and The Hero as an Interrogator in *The Strong Breed*. In the next paper titled ‘Kindred Phenomena from the Region of the Uncanny in Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed*’ Gideon U. Umezurike examines the feeling of the uncanny as an existential phenomena as projected in Soyinka’s *The Strong Breed*. The author predominates on the place of fear as human reality and experience which pervades outcomes and decisions as well as the effects it has on willingness to accept and face realities of life and challenges as the consistent problem of man. In the last paper and chapter titled ‘*The Man Died*: Social Criticism in Soyinka’s Works’ Chineme E. Okeke revisits Soyinka’s portrayal of abuse of power by the political leaders, the lack functional social institutions and structures. Okeke suggests in this paper how Soyinka observes that these leadership problems and anomalies will ultimately aid in holding political leaders accountable. Okeke also points out how Soyinka decries the disturbing docile disposition and apathy of the masses in view of political leaders’ crimes, and the troubling socio-economic upheavals spreading in Africa. Thus, Okeke through this paper relates Soyinka’s disenchantments, pains and visions in the focus text.

In summary, all the papers in the volume *Wole Soyinka and the Poetics of Commitment* in many ways bring to the front burner the ideas, ideals, ideology, philosophy, and worldview which Soyinka had for years nurtured and professed.