

# WORDS, RHYTHM AND MEANING: LANGUAGE AND HYBRIDITY

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## Abstract

The subversion of Western epistemological ideas and the problem of identification have been major concerns of postcolonial theory and writers. However, the extent to which postcolonial writers succeed in their endeavor to write back to the episteme is largely determined by the effectiveness of the language or their discourse. This paper deals with how language as used by postcolonial writers can unintentionally reveal a deeper or different meaning from their initial aims of answering back to an 'Other' culture that has labeled them as uncivilized and inferior. The heterogeneity of their language reveals contradictions and also points to the development of a hybridity capable of coping with a postcolonial identity crisis. In the course of this study that includes texts by Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, the native discursive medium of Tayeb Salih's novella, *Season of Migration to the North*, would also be analyzed for gaps, silences, and contradictions. A Kristevan *semanalysis* is applied to draw attention to the fluidity of the language, the repressed unconscious, and the semiotic disposition of the novelists and protagonists. Hence, these novels can offer a practical demonstration of how language can reveal the "indistinct music" and meaning of authors' memories to produce texts whose originality lies in their diversity.

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**Keywords:** Semiotic elements, phenotext, genotext

## List of Abbreviations

The following is a list of abbreviations used in parenthetical citations.

AG	<i>Arrow of God</i>
TI	<i>The Interpreters</i>
SMN	<i>Season of Migration to the North</i>

The *phenotext*: a term used by Julia Kristeva to refer to the phenomenological aspects of the signifying system.

The *genotext*: it refers to what lies within the *phenotext* and that is signs in language indicating the repressed drives of an individual.

Semiotic elements: according to Kristeva, these refer to the repressed unconscious or drives that rupture the signifying system or language.

*The beautiful things we shall write if we have talent," Proust says, "are inside us, in- distinct, like the memory of a melody which de- lights us though we are unable to recapture its outline. Those who are obsessed by this blurred memory of truths they have never known are the men who are gifted ... Talent is like a sort of memory which will enable them finally to bring this indistinct music closer to them, to hear it clearly, to note it down ... (qtd. in Naipaul 2001).*

Writing about anything, whether imaginary or real, involves the use of expressions and words that may create a certain rhythm or set the tone or mood of the text. The author's choice of words or expressions may or may not be a conscious one and the readers' reception of meaning is largely influenced by their effect. Strictly speaking, the writing act can be a spontaneous overflow of emotions as advocated by William Wordsworth, or the deliberate molding of material, according to Paul Valéry (Cronan). In either case, it usually reveals

aspects of a writer's personality. Consequently, whatever medium of artistic expression used, art would always reflect something of the inner, dream-like memories of the artist. Taking this into consideration, the use of a language other than one's mother-tongue should not necessarily indicate a disavowal of one's cultural heritage, but can be regarded as an effective demonstration of a blending of cultures. In fact, art thrives through originality to communicate certain messages, and what could be more innovative and enlightening as when one medium or language is personalized to accommodate and reflect another culture?

Furthermore, when a writer wishes to express a reaction to something or someone, or to convey a message, it is quite logical he would do so in a language familiar to the one he/she is reacting to, or to the different audiences he is trying to address. Indeed, how would it be possible to enlighten both the colonizers and the colonized about Self and 'Other'<sup>86</sup> if not in a language both are familiar with? Besides, would it not also be interesting and enlightening, in the current global atmosphere, for previously colonized peoples to witness a blending of cultures within their own native language?

In fact, the use of the English language by previously colonized countries has been a debatable issue among many postcolonial writers and critics like Ngugu Wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Leopold Senghor, Braj B. Kachru, Bill Ashcroft, Michael Ondaatje and others. Ngugi maintains that "Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (16). This is undeniable, but it is also possible to recognize that language is capable of communicating more than one culture and of revealing in-depth similarities and differences between them. It is also the suitable medium to express resistance to preconceived impressions about the colonized. In this sense, it accords with Edward Said's "strategy of resistance" which entails an "enter[ing] into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 109). Furthermore, Said asserts that writing back to the literature of the colonized may lead to more humanistic communities where "cultural hybridity and multiple identities" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 109) prevail. Consequently, a language like English, susceptible to change and development can play a significant role in reflecting national and international identity in a global world of increasing cultural interaction. The developing and changing form of the English language has not been overlooked and its malleability according to Kachru "does not have just one defining context but many – across cultures and languages" (295). From Old English, to Middle English, and to the English of today, the language has changed noticeably. This lack of fixity also makes it a comfortable medium through which postcolonial writers can write back to the continent and present a picture of their otherwise unfamiliar culture to the West and to the world.

Chinua Achebe, a major critic of Joseph Conrad, is one of the earliest African writers to provide readers with a vision of what is inside the darkness Conrad found impenetrable in his *Heart of Darkness*. His opinion of the English language as a suitable medium to write back to the West shows close affinities to that of Edward Said. He considers using the Other's language can open the void between cultures and reveal a Third, or hybrid, Space which Homi K. Bhabha explains as one that,

Open[s] the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism or multi-culturalism of the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity* ... It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, antinationalist, histories of the 'people'. It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space', we may elude the

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<sup>86</sup> Note: 'Self' and 'Other' are capitalized whenever they refer to a binary opposition between colonizers and colonized respectively.

politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (“Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences” 209)

Also, in spite of insistence by writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong’o upon using one’s cultural language in order to preserve one’s heritage and enhance national identity, one cannot deny that postcolonial writers using the English language help provide an awareness of themselves and pave the way towards a middle space in which both Self and Other can meet. In this way, comparative literature is provided with rich analyzable material from which similarities and differences in cultures and societies can be appreciated; according to Ashcroft, “The post-colonial text brings language and meaning to a discursive site in which they are mutually constituted” (PSR 300). Ashcroft also refers to this middle space as the “‘metonymic gap’ installed by strategies of language variance” (302) through which self and other are encouraged to meet and interact. More importantly, even though Tayeb Salih has written in his native tongue, his novel includes many cultural references from the colonizing culture. In this manner, he provides tangible evidence of how the native language and culture can co-exist with that of the dominating culture. In so doing, he provides hope for the development and construction of a hybrid and fluid identity capable of surviving between two worlds and two cultures. In fact, Salih’s novella, as will be seen, is not far removed from the other novels in this study with respect to the portrayal of inner conflict. These texts, irrespective of their cultural background, share the desire to identify with their past and their present. Furthermore, in spite of differences in each writer’s style and technique, through which the effects of colonization are made obvious, the problem of identification with another culture seems to be the dominant issue. Basically, the chosen postcolonial novels portray the poverty and corruption of their respective societies against that of the main protagonists’ “disorder of identity” (Royle 59). A Kristevan *semanalysis* can help identify the disturbance resulting from a confrontation with a different and alien culture. It would seek to identify, through the gaps, silences and contradictions in the texts, the semiotic disposition of both the novelists and their protagonists and their “capacity for renewing the order in which [they are] inescapably caught up” (“The System and the Speaking Subject” 29).

To elucidate, a Kristevan *semanalysis* seeks to identify the significance of the semiotic elements in the *semiotic chora* as revealed through the *signifying process*. *Significance* is, according to Kristeva, “the meaning produced by the semiotic in conjunction with the symbolic” (qtd. in McAfee 38). For, Kristeva, it is the *semiotic chora*, the repressed in the real and the imaginary, that accompanies the subject through the process of becoming a social being. This repressed can be identified in the symbolic elements, words, and rhythm of language as used by the subject and is associated with the maternal. As a result, “No living, speaking being is immune from semiotic disruptions” (McAfee 39). Since every person has a “particular sexuality” (“Julia Kristeva in Conversation” 339) resulting from a unique form of repression, the semiotic elements that rupture the symbolic differ from one person to another. In most cases, the semiotic “tends to gain the upper hand at the expense of the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego’s judging consciousness” (qtd. in McAfee 38). Therefore, it is in language, in its silences and contradictions, and its rhythms or poetic language that signs of oppression or repression can be identified. Consequently, a *semanalysis* of the selected postcolonial texts can help disclose signs of the repressed semiotic that ruptures their symbolic or language.

## I.

In Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, readers are led into Conrad’s impenetrable darkness through a discourse as simple and fluid as the culture he tries to depict. Mbye Cham states that Achebe’s English is molded “to exploit creatively the flexibility and expressive resources of one’s [African as well as European] linguistic heritage and legacy” (qtd. in Arana 498). What has been misrecognised as primitive and uncivilized by the colonizer’s gaze, is

presented as simply a different civilization with a common humanity. Achebe writes back to Conrad in the imported language of the colonizers to fill the blanks left by Marlow. In *Arrow of God*, he leads us into the heartbeat of the forest that Marlow was too afraid to venture into, and portrays the simple life of an African tribe with its complicated rituals and beliefs. Yet, in a novel intended to debunk the myth of the Dark Continent, Achebe's language reveals the weakness of the African individual while the colonizer is all the time on the margins of the text, in a separate space. Consequently, this novel can be considered as an attempt to help postcolonial individuals identify their weaknesses and go beyond the physically and mentally restrictive notions of constantly blaming the colonizers for their misfortune. It is in the character of the protagonist Ezeulu that the psychological imbalance of leaders in African society is presented as one in need of transformation and change to cope with the impending cultural and political changes.

The bi-patrite structure (Nnolim 258) of the novel keeps the colonizers at a distance and maintains their difference. The early colonial world portrayed is a vivid picture similar to what Fanon has described as a country,

cut in two... the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native. (37)

Though the White man influences the development of the plot, the conflict created is not presented as the main cause of the community's disintegration. According to Paulin Hountondji, Achebe represents culture in Africa "as something invented and in constant need of reinvention (qtd. in Kortenaar 31). He uses the colonizers' language, "to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood" (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 50). In fact, the weakness and fragility of the culture is highlighted by the language variance used, and in certain respects points to certain aspects of culture that justify what is believed as the colonizers' misrecognition of their backwardness.

Achebe's simple language is infused with a special touch that makes it musical and fluid. While proud to portray the dancing, rituals, songs, superstitions and proverbs of the African culture, he also sadly reflects the mental turmoil of Ezeulu in the face of change. Such a unique rhythmical touch is achieved through the masterful merging of traditional African proverbs with the acquired English language – combining the oral with the written, the symbolic with the semiotic. This fusion of the semiotic with the symbolic is indicative of his continued connection with the maternal or his mother-land. Proverbs reflect the African culture in an abundance of metaphorical content which, "has always, in the western tradition, had the privilege of revealing unexpected truth" (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 50). Proverbs characteristic of the African oral culture, render the text a poetic quality providing it with "power rhythms' which reproduce the culture by some process of embodiment" (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 51). The images they invoke and the manner in which they are constantly embedded in almost all of the discourses in the narrative, with the exception of those related to colonizers, is evidence of the bold intervention of a language variance within the master discourse. Achebe has used the language of the father in a "pulsation of sign and rhythm" (Kristeva, "Desire in Language" 107). As the narrative progresses, the paraphernalia of traditional life and the proverbial rhythm that punctuates his narrative, gradually gains pace and reaches its height towards the end with the death of Obika, in a sort of climatic tension prior to the actual intervention of the colonizers and the subsequent harvesting of yams "in the name of the son" (AG 230).

The distance between the colonizers and the colonized is re-enforced by difference in the nature of the language. The colonizers' use of "administrative jargon" (Nnolim 257) stands in sharp contrast to the proverbial and musical oral language used in Umuaro. Consequently metonymy is recognized as an attribute of the colonizers' language while metaphor is ascribed to the language of the colonized. Paul de Man and Homi Bhabha explain this preference of metaphor as based upon an inherent feature of identity and totality which encourages a "universalist reading" (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 51) rather than a culturally specific one. As such, it is quite a suitable technique considering Achebe's text as a writing back from one culture to another. As for metonymy, it is interesting to note that Achebe's Englishman is called "Winterbottom" in symbolic reference to his native land and is given prominence with his constant grumbling about the unbearable heat. His discomfort from the hot weather and fear of the darkness is further reflected in the white man's anxious rhetorical questions concerning the "heart-beat of the African darkness" (29).

Indeed, the distance of the colonizers from the centre of the villages at that moment in time, indicates that both cultures had as not as yet come into close religious and cultural contact with each other. When this does eventually happen, it is not due to Umuaro's hospitality towards them, since many native men were still hostile towards the white man, but to their own internal conflict. In a narrower sense, the breakdown of their society is a result of the psychological build-up of chiefs like Ezeulu, obsessed with the idea of power. The following passage from the novel indicates Ezeulu's ambitious nature as the basis of the conflict with his rivals Nwaka and Ezidemili, and also reveals the manner in which proverbs skillfully and naturally permeate language:

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast...but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his... No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival—no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. (3)

Thus, it is Ezeulu's desire to determine the extent to which he can exert control over his clan which is the driving force of his actions that ultimately leads to his downfall. Towards the end of the narrative, Ezeulu recognizes another kind of power, the power of writing with its more distinct use of signs: the white man "had power... he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand" (AG 189). An oral culture is therefore confronted with the power of a written one. He returns from exile to once more encourage Oduche, his son, to master writing. Yet, by stubbornly refusing to name the New Yam Feast, the yams become signs of transformation as his people are driven to harvest their yams shielded by the new religion; they convert from a pagan to the Christian religion.

As the omniscient narrator with a god's eye-view, Achebe, is also a medium representative of power and authority manipulating both his main protagonist and major Whiteman character to achieve his purpose. He turns Ezeulu into an arrow in his "bow" or narrative and uses Winterbottom to set the plot in motion as he requests to meet Ezeulu from his distant marginal space. Ezeulu's actions can be considered to reflect that of postcolonial and neocolonial rulers who believe they are independent from their own people. It is therefore appropriate for Achebe to remark that Ezeulu's "implacable assailant having stood over him for a little while stepped on him as on an insect and crushed him under the heel in the dust" (AG 229). His downfall also leaves the message "that no man however great was greater than his people" (AG 230). As for Captain Winterbottom, he goes into a coma just at the moment when Ezeulu is detained at headquarters, and the omniscient narrator appropriately remarks at the end of the narrative, "it looked as though the gods and the *powers of event* finding

Winterbottom handy had used him and left him again in order as they found him” (AG 230, my italics). In effect, these *powers of event* are set by the narrator himself. This establishes that Achebe has merely used the Whiteman to highlight Ezeulu’s shortcomings.

One of Achebe’s main concerns with respect to identity development is the issue of blame. In fact, there are certain important events in the narrative that play upon this word or the issue of constantly blaming the Other. Ezeulu reminds the elders during the land dispute that “our fathers did not fight a war of blame” (18). Later, it appears that Ezeulu himself applies blame unfairly. When Oduche imprisons the sacred python in a box, his father blames him for such an action when in fact he should also carry part of the blame for sending him there in the first place. Edogo angrily reminds his father that he sent Oduche there implying ‘blame’ though not actually pronouncing the word. Ezeulu once more uses it in the wrong place when he says, “I blame Obika for his fiery temper...” (53). It appears there is no direct connection between the abomination his son is supposed to have committed and how he is punished for it; when Obika is whipped by the Whiteman, Edogo is upset at his father’s reaction in which, he “did not ask him what happened before blaming him” (AG 99). Once more, Ezeulu tells the leaders of Umuaro that he cannot allow them to eat the Yams, commit a sacrilege, and take the blame for it. Even more interesting, Ezeulu’s clansmen decide to harvest their yams for a second burial saying that they could not be blamed for such an action, as “the fault was Ezeulu’s” (AG 217). Thus, blaming someone where blame is due or not seems to be one of Achebe’s concerns.

The omniscient narrator not only takes us into Ezeulu’s thoughts but also into those of Edogo, his eldest son and this is where Edogo’s significance lies; according to Olakunle George, “Achebe is an artist-figure, a literate incarnation of Edogo the carver” (359). It is Edogo who is bold enough to point out his fathers’ faults, and through his thoughts “rendered in a combination of omniscient narration and interior monologue” (George 354) readers are informed of the selfish and manipulative side of Ezeulu. His father disapproves of him, and also resents his relationship to his half-brother. When he visits his father’s friend Akubue to tell him of his doubts concerning the priest-hood, he is misunderstood and looked upon with “pity and a little contempt” (126) even though he does not ‘blame’ Edogo at first for being concerned. It is also interesting to notice that the mask he carves at the end has ‘a certain fineness which belonged...to a Maiden Spirit’ (200) and which indicates the merging of the feminine with the masculine just as Achebe merges the oral with the written tradition.

In addition to a certain pre-occupation with “blame”, one of the most recurrent images in the novel is that of the lizard in the proverb, “The lizard who threw confusion into his mother’s funeral rite did he expect outsiders to carry the burden of honoring his dead?” (AG 125). This is “one of the controlling metaphors of the entire novel in a way that inextricably ties it with the total meaning of the work”, claims Charles Nnolim (260). In effect, the image of the lizard runs parallel with the incidents of the narrative related to blame and confusion until the end where it is used to explain what has happened to Ezeulu.

In such a narrative, Achebe attempts to show Africans that they are not “the victims but the makers of their own history” (Kortenaar 40). Though it is unfair and ironical that Ezeulu goes mad while Winterbottom is accorded a somewhat happy ending, this harsh sense of justice, when brought to the attention of readers who either share or are familiar with aspects of Ezeulu’s character, can draw attention to the significance of a re-definition of identity. Achebe portrays both colonial and postcolonial individuals as prejudiced. He seems to be blaming the postcolonial condition upon the African individual’s narcissistic obsession with power and not on the colonial presence. In using the colonizer’s language, he does not repress his semiotic, but rather infuses it through proverbs, with an excess of metaphors, creating “a literate form unlike poetry or the traditional epic—[that] has served to encode the mother’s folktale in a new idiom, a new linguistic transaction” (George 358). His style

therefore, with its gaps and contradictions, enlightens the West about a culture they have never understood, answers back to Conrad, while revealing the weakness of an African chief.

## II.

In a similar and yet slightly different account of loss and frustration, Wole Soyinka's language in *The Interpreters* portrays a "multi-cultural reality" (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 30) in which postcolonial individuals attempt to locate themselves. His experiments with the English language mark him as a postcolonial writer in a class of his own. He imbues African traditional mythological characters into his narrative thereby diverting from the established norms of the English language and "offer[ing] a new idiom or language of apprehending postcolonial identity" (Msiska xv). Whereas Achebe's narrative abounds with proverbs, Soyinka moulds his with African mythology in a more complex style so as "to create a new tradition, that of the Afro-European novel" (Wa Thiong'o 70). Such a bold experimentation with language is proof of Soyinka's creativity and authenticity and sheds light upon "the cultural specificity of African culture in the context of its complementarity with and difference from other cultures" (Msiska xxix).

Soyinka infuses his language with African mythology to help shape the apathetic and depressed postcolonial identity of his African intellectuals. Myths in this novel become the stepping stones of their country's culture through which they can recognize and appreciate their position in relation to others. Though the characters seem like ambiguous masks at the beginning, their development works in parallelism with that of the Yoruba Pantheon of the gods that is being painted by Kola, one of the intellectuals. The Pantheon is a portrait of the characters in the novel with each representing a mythological god. Since these mythological gods "are the primal foundations of African culture, and therefore of history" (Macebuh 29), it is through them that the novel's protagonists can show signs of changes and development. Furthermore, using these aspects of African culture endows the narrative with a unique African texture that makes it stand apart from other novels written in the English language. According to Abiola Irele, "one of the functions which this return to the African source has served... has been to effect a cultural differentiation of their creations from those of the metropolitan writers, and thus to afford some kind of psychological satisfaction to the African writer in his striving for an original medium" (25/26).

Readers of *The Interpreters* can also experience "the abyss of postcolonial transition" (Msiska 112) as they progress through a figurative and ambiguous language never lacking in symbolism and mysticism. According to Sanley Macebuh, "Language in Soyinka is difficult, harsh, sometimes tortured; his syntax is often archaic; his verbal structures sometimes impenetrable... And bearing in mind his basic preoccupation with myth, it might on the face of it appear an insupportable contradiction that the language of myth is usually simple" (31). The novel's first sentence sets the tone of complexity in an ambiguous sentence structure and meaning, "Metal on concrete jars my drink lobes" (TI 7). This obscurity is further complicated by an account of the characters' actions without the reader being actually told what is going on. Such constraints or 'semiotic functions' in the language lack rhythm or poetic effects because they are "drawn from the drives' register of a desiring body, both identifying with and rejecting a community" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 108). This 'signifying disposition' within language can be recognized by any ego going through a similar crisis of identification, and is a "jubilant recognition that, in "modern" literature, replaces petty aesthetic pleasure" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 109).

Macebuh further explains this complex projection of mythology as a reflection of the author's repressed drive: "Part, at least, of our impression of the harsh inscrutableness of Soyinka's language may be seen as an exact equivalent in words of that unease of the mind that is the lot of all those who have suffered a modification of vision through colonialism" (31). Therefore, in this novel, borders between the *phentotext* and the *genotext* are blurred as

both form and content share a sense of ambivalence which has rendered it open to various interpretations. Femi Abodunrin explains that part of the novel's ambivalence lies in the fact that characters in Nigeria are using an English language they cannot identify with, and which also fails to express some of their needs. For example, "When Winsala reaches this point in his grim discussion with Sagoe, he stops speaking English altogether. What would have followed 'the grin and outspread hands' in the logic of the English language would be 'Are you going to agree to give us a bribe?'" (TI 156). Nevertheless, Soyinka's complex language reveals "the movement of rejection and appropriation of the other" (Kristeva, "Desire in Language" 110).

More importantly, one cannot miss the excellent poetic nature of Soyinka's language with its metaphors and images. The beautiful portrayal of the African girl dancing, "She was immense...she filled the floor with her body...and she moved slowly, intensely, wrapped in the song and the rhythm of the rain" (TI 22) and Simi, the "Queen Bee" are among the numerous poetic evocations. Death is personified in quite a paradoxical manner, "for death to come at Sagoe rather like a rude child, its sticky tongue hanging out" (TI 110). Even Sagoe's criticism of philosophical 'isms' produces a certain rhythm, a "dirge" as he calls it. He comically and satirically infuses his philosophy of "voidancy" with bowel movements. His criticism of "isms" calls to mind philosophies which Derrida has also referred to as "theoretical monsters" (Royle 115). The temporary satisfaction Sagoe obtains by reading his philosophies to Mathias produces a satisfaction, a *jouissance*, as his repressed instinctual drives are purged.

Moreover, the rhythmic and poetic quality in the description of Egbo's experience of the transitional abyss under the bridge is captivating:

And morning came, baring lodes in rocks, spanning a grid-iron in the distance; it was a rainbow of planed grey steel and rock-spun girders lifting on pillars from the bowers of the earth. Egbo rose and looked around him, bathing and wondering at life, for it seemed to him that he was born again, he felt night now as a womb of the gods and a passage for travelers ...

He left with a gift that he could not define upon his body, for what traveler beards the gods in their den and departs without a divine boon. Knowledge he called it, a power for beauty often... (TI 127).

In the above passage Soyinka merges natural elements and modern ones with mythology producing a beautiful image of a rainbow created by the bridge over the river. Inspired by Ogun, Soyinka's favorite muse, Egbo leaves this place. It is striking and vivid passages like this that have earned Soyinka the title of a 'mythopoiest' with an imagination that is, "in quite a fundamental sense, a mythic imagination" (Macebuh 29).

We can also identify with the sorrow of Sekoni's father as he worries about the son he had forsaken for marrying a Christian. His anger is compared to that of Shakespeare's Lear, "his *haji* mantle blown about his shoulders like the mane of Lear on an asphalt heath" (TI 98). Later on, Sekoni's death leaves his friends sadly devastated, and Soyinka's rendering of the road accident that kills him is expressed in a beautiful evocative language in which myth, emotion, and blood are smoothly blended:

The rains of May become in July the slit arteries of the sacrificial bull, a million bleeding punctures of the sky-bull hidden in convulsive cloud humps, black, overfed for this one event, nourished on horizon tops of endless choice grazing, distant beyond giraffe reach. Some competition there is below, as bridges yield right of way to lorries packed to the running-board, and the wet tar spins mirages of unsped-limits to heroic cars...the blood of earth-dwellers mingles with blanched streams of the mocking bull, and flows into currents eternally below earth. (155)



It can be noticed that Soyinka's creative use of punctuation marks enhances the spiritual quality of his language: he defers the comma until after the word "grazing" though sentence meaning would have been less complicated had it been placed after "choice". Expressions like, "mirages of un-speed-limits" are also interesting as they produce a mood of intense sadness combined with harsh criticism upon the tragic reality of bad roads and careless driving. In effect, careless driving has been one of Soyinka's main concerns, and Sekoni's death reflects this concern that is also based upon real life events. According to Mpalive-Hankson Msiska, "On a personal level, it is said that Soyinka was deeply affected by the death, in a road accident, of his best friend Segun Alowolo, as he explains in an article written in around the same time as *The Road*" (113).

Soyinka's omniscient narration also serves to project some of his favorite mythological figures, like Ogun, Obatala, Sango, and Esumare, unto his main character. This integration results in a novel that contains a "complex interweaving of myth and history" (Msiska 6) and "offers a new semiotic form" (44). Out of this form, Soyinka projects fragments of himself concerned with various disturbing aspects in society. He expresses, through his varied characters, and in a plurality of voices, satire, comedy, irony, sadness, anger and frustration. Hence, with respect to the gods mentioned, Egbo is uneasy about his past, Bandele is at odds with the present, Sango is bitterly critical of the hypocritical and corrupt individuals, and Lazarus provides his own interpretation of religion; one that is meant to reform and change the poor lost souls in society. These characters are, in a way, reminiscent of the author's concerns with the prevailing neocolonial atmosphere of the country. Towards the end, they develop into unified whole reflected in their representation within a single frame, in the Yoruba Pantheon. Similarly, the novel presents this image of characters gathered together, and leaves a certain twist or opening, as Egbo leaves the circle of friends. In this way, Soyinka demonstrates how a unique African identity can be constructed. An identity that holds its cultural history in reverence while surviving in a modern atmosphere; one capable of being responsible in the present through a more active participation in society.

What is striking in this novel is that its "deliberate ambiguities" (Osofisan 185) produce a cathartic effect for both the author and the readers in the same manner as that experienced by the various characters in the novel. Through Soyinka's poetic language, the polyphony of discursive voices, the bewildering sentence structure, mythological gods, and the different art forms of music, painting, and sculpture, we are led into the transitional abyss of the novel in order to emerge with a certain notion of a hybrid identity. Though the ending is suspended, the characters seem to have broken the circle of passivity in an "unbelieving" stance caused by Bandele's bold curse on the hypocritical doctor and politicians. With Bandele's profound words, his expression of freedom of the will, the readers almost fall into a stupor not unlike that of the bewildered characters themselves. Following this overhanging and dizzy sensation, one would imagine that the characters would awaken to a stronger sense of self or to a different perspective on self-identity.

Inspired by Ogun, the "titular god" (Macebuh 36), Soyinka uses his creative talent to modify the English language and make it coincide with the qualities of the Yoruba mythic language to reflect his concern for the construction of an African identity that can combine both tradition with modernity; as Macebuh explains, "the type of English he chooses is likely to reflect this concern, to reflect the search for roots" (35). Ato Quayson also elucidates upon this tendency to transfer myth into "an Africanist cultural discourse" as one that "seeks to forge a metaphysical African community" (213/214).

### III.

It appears therefore that through these novels written in English, early signs of a hybrid identity are emerging. As for novels written in the native tongue, Tayeb Salih's

novella, *Season of Migration to the North*, provides a discourse in which the presence of the dominant culture is strongly felt in spite of the medium used. Following the intense personal struggle of two protagonists within two opposing cultures, the novella portrays the construction and development of a hybrid identity. It can be said that this novella is adequate proof that “even a novel in Bengali or Gikuyu is inevitably a cross-cultural hybrid” (*The Empire Writes Back* 28).

Denys Johnson-Davies “one of the most renowned Arabic-to-English translators” (Nassar), does justice to the original Arabic version by remaining faithful to the poetic qualities of the Arabic language. The novella’s abundance of similes and metaphors, of women, together with its allusions and intertextual qualities is an adequate display of “the fusion of cultures” (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 30) as it demonstrates how diverse cultural qualities can meet within a single linguistic space. In effect, the narrator tells his tale in a fluid metaphorical language that grafts aspects of Western literature into an Arabic novel, merging the self with the Other in much the same manner as Mahjoub, his friend, does in his grafting of a tree. It is a dialectic portrayal of cross-cultural conflicts in an attempt to arrive at an interlocking relation between the two, one in which a fluid and hybrid identity can foster a much needed spirit of nationhood in a complex postcolonial society.

Salih’s language reveals how the “thetic phase”, that which “marks a threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic” (Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language” 102) can be made to disappear in what is also known as a “‘second-degree thetic’, i.e., a resumption of the functioning characteristic of the semiotic *chora* within the signifying device of language. This is precisely what artistic practices, and notably poetic language, demonstrate” (Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language” 103). It appears that both the *phenotext* and *genotext* merge together in a novella that lacks a definite structure, as boundaries between the present and the past are blurred through the shadow-like presence of Mustafa Sa’eed who hovers over the narrative between presence and absence. Furthermore, the narrator’s psychic disturbance is not only reflected through the narrative structure but also through the inherent semiotic qualities of his language. In fact, it is this eruption of the maternal *chora* in his language that attempts to achieve a certain balance in the narrative and to maintain his position in a patriarchal society in which the fear of castration plays a dominant role in the development of identity. As a result, at the end of his narrative, what emerges is a fluid and bi-cultural identity, one who is “half-way between north and south” (SMN 167) and whose will to survive arises out of his sense of responsibility to his immediate family that can be achieved through a reconciliation of the differences between cultures, and through an active involvement in society. This final state also answers the narrator’s desperate question towards the middle of the narrative, “Where lies the mean? Where the middle way?” (SMN 108).

Like Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, the dominant atmosphere is one of ambivalence and ambiguity. However, the source of ambiguity in Salih’s narrative is different from that of Soyinka’s in the sense that it arises out of the absences, shadows, contradictions, and rhetorical questions within the narrative voices rather than out of the structure of the language used. Combined with the above sources of ambiguity are allusions to Othello and to various Arabic and Western writers. Moreover, the use of the two protagonists is similar to Conrad’s style, what Saree Makdisi and R. S. Krishnan have also recognized as an intertextual similarity. With a blend of the Western and the Eastern, Salih’s text comes to occupy a hybrid space in a dialectical relationship between two others: “the symbolic other and the semiotic Other” (Margaroni and Lechte 99).

In a nostalgic mood and in a language characterized by running metaphors and repetitions providing a rhythmic sensation and fluid atmosphere, the un-named narrator describes his return from England. Upon his arrival, he says he felt “as though a piece of ice were melting inside me, as though I were some frozen substance on which the sun had shone”

(1). The beautiful natural elements depicted in such a simple poetic language indicates his *jouissance* at returning to the maternal – his motherland. Musa Al-Halool also notes that,

The rich, green fronds gracefully dangling from the palm trees, the wind wafting through the wheat fields, the cooing turtle doves, the murmur of Nile, the incantations and strength of his eighty-eight year old grandfather all reassure the narrator that, like the sturdy trunk of the palm tree in his backyard, he too, has roots and a purpose. (33)

However, as the narrative progresses he becomes aware that his long absence has made him different from the rest of the villagers. His feelings of estrangement are worsened by the ambiguous presence of Mustafa Sa'eed whose narrative takes up a substantial amount of the narrative space. Sa'eed tells his story in a language with even more vague, secretive and strange happenings. In fact, his language is not much different from the narrator's in its use of metaphors; he compares himself first to a rubber ball, "I was like something rounded, made of rubber" (20), then to a sharp instrument "my mind was like a sharp knife" (22), preparing both the narrator and the reader for the ensuing depiction of violence. His obsession with the feminine is realized when he compares Cairo to a European woman in the form of Mrs. Robinson (25). In a way, his attachment to Mrs. Robinson can be considered as a child's longing for the mother. As he travels away from his country, home and mother, he unconsciously desires the feminine and the maternal to feel secure and at ease in the overbearing patriarchal and racial atmosphere of England. Also, to satisfy the Other's gaze and feel accepted in society, he satisfies their desire by projecting the image of the Orient as the mystical place they have always been fascinated with. He does so through his relationship with the three women in a beautiful poetic language that establishes his position as their semiotic Other:

sandalwood and incense; the ostrich feathers and ivory and ebony figurines; the paintings and drawings of forests of palm trees along the shores of the Nile, boats with sails like doves' wings, suns setting over the mountains of the Red Sea, camel caravans wending their way along sand dunes on the borders of the Yemen, baobab trees in Kordofan, naked girls from the tribes of the Zandi, the Nuer and the Shuluk, fields of banana and coffee on the Equator, old temples in the district of Nubia; Arabic books with decorated covers written in ornate Kufic script; Persian carpets, pink curtains, large mirrors on the walls, and coloured lights in the corners... (SMN 146)

His room in England is in sharp contrast to the one in the Sudan into which no one is allowed to enter, especially women. Upon beholding the room in the Sudan, the narrator's surprise is suitably expressed: "Good God, the four walls from floor to ceiling were filled, shelf upon shelf, with books and more books and yet more books" (136). The damp and grey atmosphere here is in sharp contrast to his other more 'feminine' room in England. What is significant is that, in the two essentially patriarchal societies, these two rooms provide a breathing space for the protagonist Sa'eed. Due to the overpowering atmosphere of the repressed *jouissance* in the Real of English women, such a room in the midst of the oppressive symbolic English atmosphere would be considered a haven. As for the room in his house in the Sudan, it represents a space, an outlet, for the emergence of his own repressed semiotic emotions amid the oppressive atmosphere of his native Sudan. He gives vent to his repressed through sketches and portraits of his former girlfriends and by writing poetry. These are satisfying actions for the cathartic effect they produce.

Together with the overall mood of ambiguity, intertextuality, and rhythmic flow of language, the theme of postcolonial responsibility is also brought to light. Salih's narrator makes an ironical statement that urges readers or listeners to re-consider their positions in a postcolonial atmosphere. For example, it is quite ironical that an Englishman can explain the current postcolonial and neocolonial atmosphere of the country, in a manner they themselves

should be aware of. Coming from an Englishman, this reality tends to be more striking: “You used to complain about colonialism and when we left you created the legend of neo-colonialism. It seems that our presence, in an open or undercover form, is as indispensable to you as air and water” (SMN 60).

Furthermore, the repressed instinctual drive of both narrators is released in a language that is fluid, rhythmic and musical, one which contains a variety of images that affect our senses of sight and sound: the cooing bird, the fog, the music and the dancing women in the desert. For instance, our sense of smell is invoked by the narrator’s grandfather: “When I embrace him I breathe in his unique smell which is a combination of the large mausoleum in the cemetery and the smell of an infant child” (73). This paradoxical combination is very beautiful in its suggestion of life and death. Added to this, are the contradictions that heighten the ambiguous atmosphere. For example, as the narrator grows farther apart from his surroundings, the friendly sun that greets him upon his arrival becomes the enemy (SMN 111). Even more effective are the narrator’s thoughts as he floats uncertainly between North and South, unsure of where to go, “for an indeterminate period, quiet and darkness reigned, after which I became aware of the sky moving away and drawing close, the shore rising and falling” (SMN 168). In effect, the sky and the shore are not moving, but he is. In a beautiful poetic style, he himself becomes the transferred epithet.

Thus, in an evocative poetic language, Tayeb Salih presents the psychological crisis of two characters – Sa’eed who has witnessed early colonization and played a part in it on the side of colonizers, and the un-named narrator who, like Soyinka’s intellectuals, returns to his homeland after studying abroad. As one narrator reveals his story to the other, an iteration develops. Such a repetition is initially recognized through certain similarities between the narrator and Sa’eed. In fact, it is due to this similarity that the narrator is attracted to Sa’eed. However, such a repetition is diverted at the last moment to reveal signs of difference. Instead of allowing himself to drown in the river or disappear like Sa’eed does, the narrator chooses life. At this point, a fluid identity emerges. In a way, the narrator’s gasp for breath and cry for help can “illustrate a newfound awareness of place” (Velez 200). The narrator breaks the circle of repetition with a certain difference; he is like the kink in the mobius band and may be considered an example to future postcolonial individuals seeking to develop their identities.

It is interesting that Salih, writing in his mother-tongue, produces a narrative that blends the East with the West to reveal the process of identity development. The person who finally emerges from the water is one attached to his roots while welcoming change and the colonizing Other. In fact, Salih’s novella reflects strategies of resistance that ultimately develop into identification and a desire to participate positively in society.

#### IV.

A *semanalysis* of the above postcolonial novels demonstrates the process through which a balanced postcolonial identity develops. In effect, these novels belong to what Ashcroft et al. have identified as the fourth model of postcolonial texts which,

argue for features such as hybridity and syncreticity as constitutive elements of all post-colonial literatures (syncretism is the process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension, cultural formations, merge into a single new form). (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 14)

It has been possible to follow the process of identity development and understand that arriving and sustaining a cultural identity requires constant transformation and change. Those who were initially unfathomable, primitive, and strange in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* have developed into identifiable others who are essentially similar in spite of their difference. The rhythm produced by an interesting structural deviation from the norm of the English language, by the added touch of essential attributes of authors’ cultures, interestingly provides variety to the texts intertextuality as they write back to the episteme. Furthermore, an intriguing use of

contradictions, gaps, and shadows has led readers into an abyss from which more mature, enlightened, and flexible personalities could emerge. Works of art capable of instigating a cathartic effect is an experience from which the reader can become enlightened. The writing act itself is cathartic since it expresses the writer's resistance and simultaneously reflects an inner psyche susceptible to change and hybridity. Essentially, what happens in the process of literary and poetic activity is efficiently elucidated by Kristeva:

[She] argues that in highly complex societies, transgression, and therefore revolt, is possible from a psychological perspective: being in analysis, writing a novel, making a work of art, being intensely in love – all these can be the basis of revolt and trigger for a restructuring and enriching of psychic space. (Margaroni & Lechte 93)

Thus, it can ultimately be argued that the effectiveness of a text's message lies in an author's individual style and in his/her artistic creativity and psychological status. Even though the main protagonists in these novels do not portray a well-defined hybrid identity, they do however point to a development towards such a state. Essentially, the flexible nature of the English language has made it possible for a beautiful and interesting cross-cultural merging, as has the fluid and simple 'hakawati' style of Arabic narration made it possible for Tayeb Salih to merge East and West. The postcolonial novelists under consideration therefore establish that identity is hybrid and fluid; it can come to terms with its roots and history, be open to different cultures, and be prepared to acknowledge its difference from others. From such hybrid space, an individual can live and survive harmoniously in the constantly changing and developing global atmosphere.

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