

“*The Interpreters*”: *Technique as Structure*

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SOYINKA'S NOVEL, *The Interpreters*, has a reputation for being difficult. At least one critic has described it as lacking structure, and has objected to “the chaos” of the novel.¹ Critics, on the whole, have tended to leave the novel alone, either through lack of sympathy with its complexities, or perhaps as a tacit admission of its difficulties. (There are some notable exceptions, Eldred Jones and Gerald Moore, for example.) This paper will attempt an analysis of the novel that is meant to show that it has a complex and coherent structure, and that its difficulties are to some extent exaggerated.

The Interpreters is not an easy novel on a first or second reading, and its difficulties can be summarized as arising from its language and its structure. The language is dense with significance, requiring some alertness but containing little that is inaccessible to the careful reader. Its difficulties of language are less to do with an impenetrable “obscurity” than with condensation of the links between one image and another, between one symbol and the next. The distinction between “obscurity” and condensation of language may seem to beg the question. “Obscurity” here is meant to describe an inherent inaccessibility of the material. The difficulties of *The Interpreters* arise out of Soyinka's tendency to overload his language with a density of images and ideas, and are in this case amenable to exegesis.

The novel begins nervously, Sagoe's language only coming to have a consistency and significance when we read it with the hindsight of greater knowledge. Egbo's few remarks, desultory and uninventive, seem like poor jokes. Dehinwa's relationship to Sagoe is suggested, and Bandle's extraordinary skeleton put to

good use. But the opening has a staged texture, lacking real vitality amidst the climactic chaos. What is established is that the group of friends is at a night-club ("try our Club Cambana Cubicles"), and that the sudden rains have not interrupted the group in any significant way since no one in it seems to be doing much. Dehinwa moves to protect her hair, Bandle pushes the tables and chairs out of the rain, and Egbo broods over the water dripping into his beer, which he throws away with some disgust, "polluted." With hindsight we see the consistency with which these characters have been developed, so that even these early, very brief glimpses can give hints of the kinds of people the interpreters are. Sagoe's preoccupation with verbal jugglery, saying things cleverly to disguise a greater inadequacy, the lack of will to act, can be seen from the very beginning. Egbo's edginess and moodiness is suggested by his reaction to the "pollution" of his beer, and his obsession with the past and its effect on the present is shown by the jump in time that he makes, from the filling "pool" by their "Club Cambana Cubicle" to the journey through the creeks that the friends had made to his ancestral land. Bandle, significantly, moves the tables and chairs out of the rain, suggesting at once his ability to think of others, an aspect of him that we observe with mounting respect as the novel progresses.

There is hardly enough to establish all this in the opening section without the benefit of hindsight. This becomes an important part of Soyinka's technique in the novel. The characters forage in their past for the significance of present events, and take their present knowledge back to their interpretation of past events. The reader is forced into the same pattern, as first one character and then another launches off abruptly into a reminiscence. This dynamic mode of enquiry implies Soyinka's belief that an interest in the past should not merely satisfy a narcissistic self-indulgence, but should enable the community to see the complex interdependence of present and past. Even to put the matter this way is to simplify the complexity of the relationships that Soyinka explores in *The Interpreters*.

Out of the night-club scene we are transported abruptly to the journey the interpreters had made to see Egbo's ancestral creek-town. Egbo returns to the creek-town to test out his response to

the invitation from the elders that he should succeed his grandfather as their leader. The invitation tempts him to some extent because "he knew and despised the age which sought to mutilate his beginnings."² At the same time, he recognizes that dissatisfaction with the present does not make the hand of past times less heavy with its demands. The evocative language describing Egbo's immersion in his past has an entirely different quality to that of the opening, far richer in imagery and without the jerky edginess of the night-club scene. Egbo sees the creek-town as "an interlude from reality" and this points to the paradoxical relationship that he recognizes to exist between the past and his age. The past has apparently ceased to matter to the interpreters, except in the degree to which it can be utilized to advance individual aims. That is part of its unreality, and part of its attraction. The creek-town seemed to them like an escape from "real life," a return to a simpler and more wholesome existence. This is largely an intellectual conception, since none of them, apart from Egbo, are in a position to consider the choice in any practical sense.

For Egbo, the illusion of unreality is difficult to maintain, since to him the creek-town represents the need to make a decision between a return to it and his life in the city. But even he participates in the illusion of unreality, even encourages it, for while he remains at that self-deluding distance from the creek-town he can continue to see it as the archetypal community, content with its silence and its ancient peace. The appearance of a man on the bank "breaks the crust of time," making it impossible for Egbo to continue the illusion. The timeless dream-world is replaced by specific images of his own childhood, dislocating the longing for a return to roots into a fear of the demands that the past and its survivors would make on him. In the end, he feels the pull of the past as the pull of death:

He acknowledged it finally, this was a place of death. And admitted too that he was drawn to it, drawn to it as a dream of isolation, smelling its archaic menace and the violent undertows, unable to deny its dark vitality. (p. 12)

Egbo's ambivalence about the past and its relation to the present reflects the novel's structure. The shifts in time allow us to con-

trast the view of a past event by offering a new vantage on the present. The aimless brooding during the night-club scene enables us to see Egbo's attraction to the "dream of isolation." There is no real likelihood that a return to roots will be sufficient for Egbo. He feels the narrowness of the demands of the past too keenly to risk his freedom for the satisfaction of "a dream of isolation." For with the shattering of the illusion of unreality comes also the acknowledgement that the image of the community as languishing in peace and contentment was another illusion. The creek-town depended on the "vital smuggling routes" which it controlled, and to which it owed its prosperity. The flashback from the night-club to the creek has allowed Soyinka to expose the inadequacies of Egbo's present by probing the potential of his past action, while at the same time allowing Egbo to question the assumption on which the perception of that potential is based.

A similar use of time-switch is used to reveal Sekoni as a character. When we first meet him, he is offering a different interpretation of the past from the negative one held by Egbo. Egbo demands to know, a little provocatively, why the dead should not be forgotten if they "are not strong enough to be ever-present in our being" (p. 9). Sekoni is the least articulate of the interpreters, and yet it is he who is given the most optimistic messages. The Alhaji, or at times the Sheikh, the wise and learned man, is hardly able to make himself understood through a terrible stutter. Soyinka does not spare us:

"Ththat is why wwe must acc-c-cept the universal d-d-dome, b-b-because ththere is no d-d-direction. The b-b-bridge is the d-d-dome of rreligion and b-b-bridges d-d-don't jjust g-g-go from hhere to ththere; a bridge also faces backwards." (p. 9)

The protest Sekoni is struggling to make consists, at one level, of a demand for continuity, for connections. Where Egbo sees the past as parasitic on the present, Sekoni sees it more idealistically, as unified with the present and the future. The unifying force is "rreligion," faith. The prophet of continuity is remarkably incoherent, and his conception of what the "b-b-bridge" is, remains an intensely felt experience that never quite achieves lucidity.

Soyinka handles the character of Sekoni with considerable sensitivity. He avoids the facile categorization of the man of faith as either a self-deluding fool or as a moral paragon. Nevertheless, Sekoni's idealism is treated as a real potential whose contradictions are symbolized by the character's inability to utter it with confidence.

Sekoni's protest is also an assertion of the necessity to struggle for the connections, and this aspect of his protest finds true and lucid expression in his carving of "The Wrestler." Unlike the ejaculations on the "d-d-dome," on the continuity of human experience, which remain intense but incoherent and explosive outbursts, "The Wrestler" depicts man in the archetypal struggle to make sense of his world. With "The Wrestler" Sekoni has moved beyond any of the other interpreters, beyond the sham of the arrogant satire and the self-indulgent rage of Sagoe and Egbo, beyond the detachment and the tentativeness of Kola and Bandele. Sekoni's discovery that the "b-b-bridge" is also man's struggle to understand his world, was arrived at after a shattering failure.

His "experimental Power station," built with civilizing zeal in the remote station where he had been assigned to cool his idealistic heels, is officially condemned as "junk," a verdict arrived at through greed and cynicism. At one level, this is bitter satire on another breed of interpreters: the corruption and the lack of vision of the black power-elite combining with the "expat. expert's" pliability in the service of greed, to destroy the idealistic and sensitive reformer. At another level, Sekoni's failure and subsequent "discovery" of the necessity to wrestle some sense out of life, contrasts with his naive idealism as a returning engineer:

Sekoni, qualified engineer, had looked over the railings every day of his sea voyage home. And the sea sprays built him bridges and hospitals, and the large trailing furrow became a deafening waterfall denying human will until he gathered it between his fingers, made the water run in the lower channels of his palm, directing it against the primeval giants on the forest banks. (p. 26)

Obi Okonkwo in *No Longer At Ease* gazes towards Nigeria with a similar burning naivety. Obi is forced into corruption by his own perception of the demands his position in his society make

on him. Sekoni is thwarted into madness. His failure is already hinted at in the impractical piety of what he sees as his role in social progress. Soyinka invites us to question Sekoni's idealistic self-importance. The inflated rhetoric and the abstract nature of Sekoni's dream make this clear enough. On the other hand, we are left in no doubt about the importance of his "discovery." The self-expression that comes about with this knowledge makes the carving of "The Wrestler" an act of "frenzy and desperation, as if time stood in his way" (p. 100). The "discovery" indicates his potential in real human terms compared to idealistic day-dreams of the returning engineer, a potential he is never able to realize fully. For, like his friends, he too is evasive and never quite confronts himself with the implications of his new knowledge. In the end, it was his "short-sightedness" that contributed to his destruction. The "discovery" had come a little late, to a man who had learned to be afraid of the world:

The Dome cracked above Sekoni's short-sighted head one messy night. Too late he saw the insanity of a lorry parked right in his path, a swerve turned into a skid and cruel arabesques of tyres. A futile heap of metal, and Sekoni's body lay surprised across the open door, showers of laminated glass around him, his beard one fastness of blood and wet earth. (p. 155)

Sekoni himself becomes the victim of the technological progress he had sought to bring. His achievement never quite fulfilled, he is nevertheless the most positive of the interpreters. His exploration is active, his life is without the destructive spite and pointless cynicism of Egbo and Sagoe. Significantly, his friends mourn him deeply, but without thought of comforting others. Egbo "fled to the rocks by the bridge until the funeral was over where unseen he shed his bitter, angry tears" (p. 155). Sagoe's self-indulgent cynicism is seen for what it is as he is "locked in beer and vomit for a week," agreeing to be quiet only when Dehinwa read to him from his book on the philosophy of shitting. Kola worked "blindly in spasms of grief and unbelieving," leaving to Bandlele "the agony of consoling Alhaji Sekoni," the grief-stricken father.

Bandlele we know little about to begin with. Sekoni's death allows us to compare his response to that of the others. In Part Two of the novel we become aware of Bandlele as the one who is

becoming critical of the relative callousness of his friends. After the visit to Lazarus' church he mocks his friends for having thought only of what they could get out of the prophet, and chides them for having made no effort to understand what the man could have wanted out of them. Sagoe, the man with a cynical turn of wit, accuses Bandele of being "so fuckin' superior," while Kola expresses Bandele's stance more accurately when he says:

"Damn it, Bandele, what's going on anyway! You have become so insufferably critical and interfering."

It was as if Bandele was a long praying mantis. Visibly he retracted into a hole, feelers trodden on like an incautious ant; and he only said, "None of you minds much what suffering you cause." (p. 179)

Sekoni hinted in Part One that it is not enough to arrive from abroad with ideals, see them dashed and retire into an arrogant, satirical contempt for society. Bandele, in Part Two, in a more overtly critical way, probes the actions and motives of his friends, drawing attention to their inadequacy. It is no coincidence that Sekoni's "The Wrestler" "was unmistakably Bandele," for not only is Bandele's "unique figure" appropriate for the depiction of the human struggle to wrestle with life, but in Part Two we recognize him as symbolically appropriate as well. Sekoni and Bandele between them alert us to the inadequacies of the interpreters, and of the stance they have adopted towards their society. It would not be enough to see Soyinka's novel as only an attack on the corruption and crass greed of the old guard, for it is not shown that the new interpreters are able to offer something significantly better. Indeed, in Part Two we are led quite clearly to their failure as individuals.

Sagoe, whose fanciful verbalizing opens the novel, has no alternative to offer to the rottenness of the old guard. His very language denies him the possibility. His wit is satirical, destructive, and we appreciate its full effect in the carnage that occurs at the Oguazor party. The incident sparkles with unrestrained mockery of the stuffed shirts, the hollow men of the new elite. "A buzz of wit, genteel laughter and character slaughter welcomed them from the drive and they entered the house of death"

(p. 139). There is more to try Sagoe: the fruit is plastic. He wonders if the brains of his hosts are equally "petrified," for the fruit clusters are generously scattered in large bunches and in a range of patterns all over the house. The depiction of Professor Oguazor and his wife, the tone of voice they are given to speak with, their pathetic attempts at ceremony and "etiquette" make the satire uninhibitedly savage — and enjoyable. The Oguazors and their friends have been set up, like targets in a shooting gallery, then righteously and hilariously knocked down. The effect, however, is also to give us no possibility of understanding their motivation, of perceiving the qualities that must underlie their crassness. We are led to believe that this is all there is to them. It is interesting that it is Sagoe, the least responsible and the most self-indulgent of the interpreters, who actively wages the war against the Oguazors, hurling the "petrified" fruit as missiles. Sagoe is unlikely to want to make the effort to understand the Oguazors, as he himself recognizes, since he does not "have to live with them." His actions are obviously influenced by this. He scourges the Oguazors as if they were the scapegoats for the "elite" of his society, but the act remains only marginally symbolic since Sagoe's obvious, personal relish for his task succeeds in the end in emphasizing his contempt for social form rather than leading us to a clearer understanding of the confused elitism of the Oguazors.

The description of the scene is hilarious. The last few thoughts of Pinkshore, the sacrificial expatriate sketched in for ritual slaughter, bring the chapter to an end. It is part of Soyinka's satirical skill that with a few deft lines he can give us a view of the European expatriate's underlying mistrust and fear of Africa, as in a moment of panic his mind grasps wildly at the stereotypes of savagery:

Sagoe flung the lemon. It took Pinkshore full on the mouth, soft, wet from the grass and sudden. His brain spinning instant solutions found mysterious terror — witch-moth, bat-shit, murder, knobkerry, death, Africa at night. . . . (p. 152)

Neither Sagoe nor any of the other interpreters question their right to condemn the Oguazors. It is right, however, that we

should question the ends of this chapter. The satirist has a limited objective but is always in danger of mocking what is apparently grotesque rather than pointing to what is morally objectionable. We have already seen that Soyinka's ends are more than satirical. He invites us to explore and question those he has placed in a position to voice a social dissatisfaction. Sagoe's actions, therefore, have to be seen critically. They are an uninhibited expression of his disgust with the Oguazors and their friends, carried out in a kind of voidante frenzy, albeit a moral one, evacuating the anger out of his mind. He is, of course, primarily expressing his contempt, the same kind of feeling that lay behind the Book of Enlightenment. In that, he mocks academic earnestness by writing a thesis on shit. At the same time, these extreme forms of expression establish his status as a wit. He deflects Dehinwa from seriously scrutinizing him by constant references to this status, emphasizing his eccentricity and his "irrepressible" humour. The Book is evidence of Sagoe's predilection for the gesture that satisfies his sense of justice and does not commit him further. The eruption at the Oguazors' is another example, as is the article on Sekoni which he knew would not be accepted but would allow him to feel a righteous anger. He joins the train of "the boot coffin mourners" "automatically," out of a feeling of sympathy for their ridiculous show. In his sympathy he is unable to resist taking one of the wreaths from Sir Derinola's train and putting it on the "poor" coffin, but he cannot stay to speak to the grateful mourners. He tells himself that he is fleeing from them for fear that he might be tempted to use them in his newspaper column. One cannot help feeling that he feels himself justified in his flight because he has made the gesture of sympathy. His excremental obsessions, like his "drink lobes" and his "emotional stomach" are the necessary props for his idiosyncrasy and eccentricity, an unwillingness to be responsible. Seen in such a light, as a gesture of disgust, the Oguazor incident serves both a satirical purpose and is at the same time consistent with Sagoe's character. Motivated by injustice and hypocrisy to act, he is yet unwilling that demands should be made of him.

Egbo is a "stronga-head," a violent, obstinate man. He is both astonishingly daring, and surprisingly weak and uncertain. We

see him exploring his feelings and his thoughts more assiduously than any of the other interpreters. In his case, the flashbacks actually seem like Egbo trying to understand his past. His obsession with "roots" gives us a chance to measure him up against them, and to find him short of the early daring and curiosity. He now thinks of himself as an apostate, absolutely neutral. He allows others to make decisions and carry him along "with the tide." We can contrast this with the Egbo who had gone to spend the night by the water of the Oshun grove at Oshogbo as a child, and who had found eventually a confinement in the stillness and depth of the quiet water:

"I loved life to be still, mysterious. I took my books down there to read, during the holidays. But later, I began to go further, down towards the old suspension bridge where the water ran freely, over rocks and white sand. And there was sunshine. There was depth also in that turbulence, at least I felt down into darkness from an unfettered sky. It was so different from the grove where depth swamped me; at the bridge it was elusive, you had to pierce it, arrowed like a bird." (p. 9)

This tension that exists between the need to feel the unity of experience and environment, and a revulsion from the quiet "depth" of the grove might be read as a contrast between the silted calm of tradition and the new turbulence, and relative freedom, of a changing world. Egbo's ambivalence is clear. His return to the creek-town is a testing out of his desire to return to the quiet "sources." His discovery that it was "a place of death" is a reassertion of his reluctance to lose his freedom, an expression of his discomfort at the thought of being "absorbed." His "apostacy," if we believe in it, is the only sense of equilibrium that he can afford and still maintain the tension. It amounts to an unwillingness to commit himself, either to the constraints of custom, or to the indecency of propping up "the herald-men of the future." He sees the choices ahead of him as kinds of death, "merely a question of drowning . . . resolving itself always only into a choice of drowning" (p. 120).

But, he is not quite as unnerved as such neutrality would suggest, rather he is a "predator on nature," unwilling to concede to, only able to exploit his circumstances. His "apostacy" is

both a weakness, it is a giving up of choices, and a strength, it allows the fiction of an impending decision. Held in this tension, he acts out of a personal hedonism, daring himself to deeds of self-assertion and unwilling to be tolerant of weakness. His disgust with Joe Golder makes the point. His use of the dancing woman, for all the gasps of "the Black Immanent," is exploitative and intended only to satisfy a jaded lust. His seduction of the unnamed girl, the earnest, independent young student, is another example of his predatory selfishness. He takes the girl to his "shrine," apparently with honourable intentions, probes and examines her for his own needs and finds himself lonely and wanting. The "stronga-head" takes the girl with "eager hands." "The centre pure ran raw red blood, spilling on the toe of the god, and afterwards he washed this for her, protesting shamefacedly, in the river" (p. 134). He agrees not to see the girl again. He discovers later that she had become pregnant and had had to leave the University. His anger at the mockery of her by Dr Lumoye stirs him to a murdering hate. His eyes have "the glare of a savage dog" as he approaches the doctor. It is only Bandele's "interference," showing up the Oguazors and the doctor for the callous hypocrites that they were, while at the same time reminding Egbo that it was his action, indulged in to satisfy a personal need, that had brought about the "tragedy," that prevents the working out of the scene into some violent echo of the Oguazor party. Thus, Bandele, at the end of the novel, confronts the Oguazors with their selective "morality," and reminds Egbo that his "apostacy" is only a kind of licence to live off the decisions of others without accepting his share of the responsibility. The true "apostate" hangs not torn between two choices, but has no need of choices. Like Noah, the thief rescued from the mob and groomed by Lazarus into a latter day saviour, the "apostate" is vacuous, empty rather than tense between two courses as Egbo is.

At the end of the novel, Simi re-approaches Egbo. Simi is the image of sensuous womanhood and it was through her that Egbo had discovered a profane ecstasy of the senses as she had led him through his first act of sex:

For exquisite though it was, it meant pain, and he who had been ready so long and was ready now found that the fight lay in retaining the moment in hanging by the fingertips to a sharp-edged precipice while the blood coursed sweetly down his mouth. And his mind flew over his life, wondering what this meant within what he ever was or would become. . . . Good God, in darkness let me be. . . . (p. 60)

In contrast to those ecstatic moments, Egbo no longer feels a reassurance in Simi's presence. As Simi approaches him he feels only a renewal of the demands of his freedom. His "disgust" is beginning to turn into a kind of self-hate, the extreme distortion of self-blame. Simi, we realize, no longer answers his needs. In the calm depths of her eyes he sees only the stillness that had threatened to "swamp" him at the Oshun grove in Oshogbo. He now watches her as "she walked towards him, eyes ocean-clams with her peculiar sadness . . . like a choice of a man drowning he was saying . . . only like a choice of drowning" (p. 251). The novel ends with those words. They leave an echo of Egbo's real fear. He is not an apostate, he is *afraid* to choose, and that is the "stronga-head's" greatest weakness.

The Interpreters, as we have seen, goes beyond satirizing the old guard. A few, brief brush-strokes are enough to reveal the "Managing Director" — the stock character of West African fiction — another Nanga, Koomson or H. R. H. Brempong. Chief Winsala receives rather more detailed treatment and comes out a pathetic drunken man, led away by Sagoe from the taunts and insults of the waiters. Sir Derinola is a little more complex; behind the grasping hand we glimpse the human being every now and again. These and the Oguazors are the old interpreters, the elite of the "establishment," whose self-serving hypocrisy — Professor Oguazor condemning the "merality" of the young, pregnant girl while his own illegitimate child is very dear to him — has unfitted them as moral leaders and examples. The new interpreters expose these men, men whose age should have demanded respect but whose greed and corruption has made them unfit for it. Sagoe walks away from Winsala with "the smell of the new order" following him out, "and he longed for a strong rind of lemon" (p. 85). Later on, Sagoe goes further

when his condemnation of the new order becomes more sweeping. The bridge that separates the cemetery from the rest of the city, the dead from the living, also leads to the Ikoyi suburb "where both the white remnants and the new black onyinbos lived in colonial vacuity" (p. 111).

Yet at the same time as we accept the justice of much of what the new interpreters say, we are conscious of their inadequacies too. The novel probes these, alerting us from an easy identification and too compliant a reading. Bandlele complains of the arrogance of their stance as self-appointed judges when he speaks of Lazarus and his Apostles as another breed of interpreters. The implication is that Sagoe, Egbo, Kola and the rest have no reason to assume that they are able to judge their society with any greater conviction than the brought-to-life Lazarus and his followers. Bandlele's is something of a rhetorical point: his objections are in the nature of a warning against the blind arrogance of assuming that others have accepted their right to pronounce on the community, or that others have no dreams of their own to interpret. He warns his friends: "Just be careful. When you create your own myth don't carelessly promote another's, and perhaps a more harmful one" (p. 178). Sagoe and the others refuse to take Bandlele's objections seriously. Kola will get one more figure for his pantheon (as it turns out he gets two, for both Noah and Lazarus sit for him). Sagoe will have his story, centre spread, but none of them are prepared for the tragedy which their casual meddling helps to bring about, the death of the boy Noah. Of course, the interpreters did not wittingly participate in the tragedy, but their lack of care for others, their assumption that they have the right to judge but not to be judged, makes them selfishly careless of the boy. In this sense, Lazarus and his care for the lost and the weak, is a more selfless and a more understanding interpreter of his community and his time. The prophet's dreams, however, are not of this world, and that in its own way makes him blind to those very weaknesses he had sought to save his brethren from. The Apostles, and more spectacularly Noah, are moved to piety by the strength of will of their prophet, but neither are able to interpret the dreams that move the man.

Superficially, the novel is "difficult." The changes in chronology, the density of language, do pose early problems. But there is no "chaos" in *The Interpreters*. There is a very clear structure, both in the sense of chapter construction and in the more dynamic sense of technique and method. We have already remarked on the use of the past to probe the inadequacies of the present, and this is the most pronounced and a highly successful technique, especially in Part One. The technique not only allows us to explore the characters and their potential, but is symbolic of the community's need to place the events of the moment in the context of its traditions. The subtlety of the symbolism is that it recognizes that the past has an ambivalent influence. While it illuminates the potential of the present, it also absorbs the energies of the present to resurrect itself. It is only thus that the past comes to have significance in the self-conception of the community. But unless the influence of the past is seen in dynamic equilibrium with the need for change in the present, it becomes merely a thing of "death" rather than a revitalizing force. Egbo understands the dilemma but refuses to accept the challenge.

In a less symbolic sense, *The Interpreters* has a simple and clear-cut structure. Part One begins at the night club, takes us to eat with the Faseyis and introduces us to Simi as an image of female sensuality. This is followed by the long chapter which deals with the corruption of the old guard. We see Sekoni and Kola "creating." There is a funeral, we witness the chase of Noah, we see the sacrifice of the girl at Egbo's shrine and we attend the Oguazor party. Part Two also begins at the night club. We meet Lazarus and hear his story, a contrast to the self-centred corruption of the old guard. We meet Joe Golder, an image of another kind of sensuality. We eat with the Faseyis again, we witness another chase, again involving Noah. There is a second funeral. We see Kola at work on his canvas, there is another sacrifice, this time of the boy Noah, and the novel ends with a confrontation with the Oguazors once again.³ Indeed, so concise is the structure that the comment that Eldred Jones made in his introduction to the Heinemann edition of the novel seems justified. He wrote there of the novel "giving the impression of having been totally conceived before the first word was set down"

(p. 1). Where Part One sought to establish the potential of the interpreters, Part Two shows them unable to meet the expectations they had raised. Kola's pantheon is clearly disappointing, the work of an honest artist but without the power of "The Wrestler." Sekoni is dead. Egbo is still faced with "a choice of drowning" and Sagoe is still the joker, talking of burning the Book to please Dehinwa. He has at least made a choice, to marry Dehinwa and burn the Book, in some senses accepting the need for responsibility. Bandele has adopted a critical stance, and this represents some development, as does the Kola-Monica affair. On the whole, we see little change in the "character" of the interpreters. We come to understand them more deeply as we see them responding to circumstances, but we do not follow their development from one personal crisis to another, to the point where self-knowledge confounds them or leaves them serene, as the case may be. Soyinka has chosen an approach, a form, that allows him to explore his characters, and finally to throw some doubt on the easy assumptions that they make about themselves and their community. At the same time he hints at the dynamic relationship between the past and the present, in connection with both the development of the individual and the self-apprehension of the community.

NOTES

- ¹ Ossie O. Enekwe, "Soyinka as a Novelist," *OKIKE* 9 (December 1975), pp. 72-86.
- ² Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 11. First published in London by Andre Deutsch, 1965. All further page references will be to the Heinemann edition.
- ³ A more detailed discussion of this parallel structure can be found in Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "The Interpreters — a Form of Criticism," presented as a paper at Ibadan, Nigeria, April 1973. The paper is to be published by The Three Continents Press, Washington, D.C.