Waiting for the Word: Samuel Beckett and Wole Soyinka

CLIVE T. PROBYN

In his 1975 study of Soyinka's plays Oyin Ogunba concludes his discussion of *The Road* by rejecting the broad label "Theatre of the Absurd" as a model for interpreting Soyinka's play. The question of European modes exerting their influence on contemporary Nigerian literatures and criticism is, of course, a contentious issue, though not one which is likely to elicit from Soyinka himself anything more than a passing reference: "I am not aware of any conscious influence on my work . . . I might aim at Brecht's kind of theatre . . . just his complete freedom with the medium of the theatre."[1] Soyinka's warning shot across the bows of source-hunters and influence-detectives is timely and clear, and the precise ideology assumed (generally covertly) in "explaining" an African text by European models needs careful scrutiny. The risk, apparently, is that a literary influence may be used, in Ogunba's phrase, "to extenuate" the intrinsic difficulties in Soyinka's play and further imply that he is merely *imitating* rather than *creating* a distinctly "African" or "original" play. Authors as well as critics are both prone to limit the significance of a literary work according to their own notions of its possible pedigree, and I think that *The Road* has created clear examples of predetermined meanings, where critical assumptions and literary preconceptions about its meaning and structure have narrowed its scope and, worse, transformed its special qualities of theatrical freedom into transgressions of conventions which are irrelevant to it. Specialness has become oblique and obscure esotericism.

This process may be illustrated by a few examples. Ogunba's confident and sympathetic reading of *The Road* consistently implies that Soyinka should have written a different sort of play. His

critical method is heavily dependent on neo-Aristotelian categories, so that having analysed the play according to its characters, themes, setting, structure, its unities, and so on, the play is found to be deficient in various ways because it does not yield up its resources to this critical approach. Equally, Femi Osofisan describes the Professor's death in *The Road* as "not valuable in communal terms as a restorative, only as a penalty for *hubris*."[2] True enough, perhaps, but the question is whether the intense ambiguity of the Professor's death (as a victim of mindless homicide, as ritual sacrifice to Ogun, or as the chance casualty in a squalid brawl) can be described at all by such conventional frameworks of theatrical nemesis. J. P. Clark's criticism of the play is an even clearer example of critical foreclosure on its meaning and method, this time with reference to its surface linguistic texture:

> Perhaps Mr. Soyinka in his use of pidgin English is aiming at *special theatric effects, too esoteric for common understanding* . . . in *The Road* he seems to have *lost his way* in the search for *proper levels* of speech for his *odd* collection of characters.[3]

Here, it seems, meanings which have been intuitively perceived in the play itself have been converted into criticisms of it. All the words I have italicized beg the essential questions with which the play is concerned. If, for example, Soyinka's characters are "odd," then there is surely a reason for so *closely* matching character with idiolect: whatever psychological or characterological norms are to be sought, they are found not as shared assumptions (either between one character and another, or between one character and audience) but strictly in terms of the idiosyncratic, self-taught languages and perceptions of each individual. Moreover, Clark's perception of "oddity" does damage to what is a central feature of the play, the idea of delinquents treated as pillars of society, a technique of social satire and political alienation used when the artist feels most radically disaffiliated from society's norms. To this extent, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (together with Brecht's later version), Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild the Great*, and Brecht's *Arturo Ui* (not to mention Jarry's *Ubu Roi*) share fundamental satirical inver-

sions. In Soyinka's own work, there is this, from the early brief sketch entitled *In Carcarem Conico*, where a society of upside-down values is reified in the "corpulent corporals, juggling judges, chop-chop-champions of the people . . . Indulgences for bankrupt bankers, defecting directors, for doctors of doctored doctorates. Indulgences for all forgers for theirs is the forging ahead."[4] Individuality here is to be defined as the criminal defection from professional norms in a society which worships success and turns a blind eye to the means.

In *The Road* individuals are individualists, fashioning their own language from a more or less rootless and anarchic social matrix built up painfully out of the deficient conventions of an inherited world. Professor is idiosyncratic to the point of a messianic schizophrenia, rejecting all "normal" frames of reference in his quest for the Word; he is a spiritual outcast and an intellectual buccaneer who destroys surface and conventional meanings by substituting esoteric significance in something as mundane as a football pools coupon. For him, in a world denied received meanings and acknowledged interpreters, truth can only lie in secret signposts which only the initiates can decipher. What Clark sees as an error of artistry is in fact the reverse, a central theme objectified in the language itself.

The question, then, is not whether Soyinka is borrowing from or is influenced by Absurd theatre (a vague term, if we include the disparate talents of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Albee, Pinter), but whether a comparative approach to *The Road* by way of examples of the Absurd genre offers resources of meaning and interpretation which *neither* limits its meaning *nor* reduces it to an imitation of a European mode. As a starting point we might remind ourselves of those two comments by Camus and Ionesco which Esslin deploys as "keys" to the Absurd:

> A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

> Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless . . .[5]

There may, indeed, be a prima facie case for considering such a diagnosis of alienation as a peculiarly precise description of post-colonialism amongst those whose colonial acculturation is now denied its reason for existence. But before developing such implications, one fundamental difference must be stressed: the consciousness of absurdity and futility which marks the characters in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* (for example) is not present in Soyinka's play. Professor is perhaps only once (and that immediately before his death) in doubt about the validity of his quest. He never admits that the quest itself is futile. Though paranoid in some respects he nevertheless maintains his dogged belief that the meaning of life and death, and the state of transition between the two, will be revealed to him. Yet in both Soyinka and Beckett there is no argument about the absurdity of waiting for the illuminating word: merely a depiction of its being in theatrical terms. These respective theatrical statements are each arranged around the search for meaning in a world which provides no more than teasing clues. Their central and common feature (in *Godot* and *The Road*) is the road, which comes and goes nowhere except from the oblivion of birth to the dissolution of death, providing an illusion of progress, an ineluctible movement of transition from an inadequate present to an unknowable future. In each, characters are locked into their private worlds either by the cage of language, or by unfathomable silences. Murano and Godot are both deaf mutes.

Language devoid of meaning and silence pregnant with significance bind all three plays very closely. The unfathomable silence of Murano, perhaps carrying the truth about the life-to-death transition ("crawling out of the darkness, from the last suck of the throat of death . . . with the spirit of a god in him")[6] personifies the mystery of *The Road*. Professor's quest for the Word by means of an imprisoned God who never speaks parallels the desperate hopes of Estragon and Vladimir turning to the dumb Lucky and the blind Pozzo for a sign of God's acknowledgement. But Professor and Pozzo turn out to be false prophets. Their sad-

ism reveals that they too are suffering victims of an inscrutable process, content to pass on their frustration to those lesser beings who look on them as saviours. Lucky and Murano's significance is of a Delphic obscurity: ambiguous, but never, clearly, misleading. If Beckett and Soyinka each uses the play as an image of the search for revelation and meaning, then a silent endgame, an attempt to name the un-nameable, replaces the expected conclusion with a series of further questions. If not reduced to downright bafflement, the reader is left with a hermeneutic puzzle and a sense of the banality of any questions about "meaning." In both plays we are presented with the collapse of conventional spiritual explanations (the Professor's career as a lay reader was summarily terminated by his thefts and his preference for exact ritual forms instead of inner realities; Estragon and Vladimir's memory of religion, shrunk to a memory of the thieves' crucifixion and pictures of the Dead Sea); and in both plays we are presented with a precise atavism — with the elusive possibility that a God may reappear in person or in some other manifestation.

Superficially, it would seem that the two plays are unlike in their exploitation of language. *The Road* is an exuberant pastiche of contrasting and interconnected languages: the more or less standard English of Professor (occasionally marked by a Biblical locution such as "And must they so noise their presence about"); Samson's pidgin-English; the cinema slang and gangster idiom of Say Tokyo Kid; the Yoruba song and dirge. By comparison, *Godot* seems linguistically impoverished, monotonous, colourless. Yet each provides the same image of language spiralling around a central core of incommunicable meaning. Soyinka's polyglottal starting point does not conceal but emphasizes the vacuity, and perhaps the chief effect of the Yoruba ceremonial dirge-chorus, strong and sinister though it is, is that its meanings are simply unchallengeably impervious to explanation. Beckett's style of self-cancelling dialogue (as Esslin puts it, "each line obliterates what was said in the previous line") is paralleled in *The Road* by Professor's portentous evasion: "The Word needs no vulgar light of day to be manifest" (I, 193). In the central event in the play, Kotonu and Samson's re-enactment of the multiple deaths at the broken bridge, a chasm is also revealed in the language used to

describe an event and the language of metaphysical interpretation of that event. This well-known passage shocks the audience by playing off narrative against theatrical immediacy (like the frequent Absurdist technique of suddenly acknowledging the audience's silent presence):

KOTONU: I swear it was what I saw. The lorry was filled with people but there was not one face among them... [*The Professor continues scribbling fast.*]

SAMSON: Because they had rags on their faces. It was only a kola nut lorry from the North and the rear half was filled with people. The truck was top-heavy as always. And they had cloths on their faces to keep out the dust.

KOTONU: Oh yes the dust. The wraith of dust which pursued them.

SAMSON: There you are, you admit it — the dust. How could you see anything for dust? Only vague shapes...

KOTONU: But it cleared I tell you. Before my eyes it cleared and I saw I was mistaken. It was an open truck and it carried nothing but stacks and stacks of beheaded fish, and oh God the smell of stockfish! But we caught up with them finally... at the broken bridge, and you shouted —

SAMSON: Look out Kotonu! [*A violent screech of brakes.*]

KOTONU: It's all right. I've seen it. (I, 196)

In this passage the image of the broken bridge and the theme of private obsession (in Kotonu's case coloured by the deep wounds of his closeness to death and the memory of his father's dying) which destroys communication on a simple denotative level are fused completely. Each is anguished by the other's incomprehension, and Samson's solace raises only greater pain for Kotonu. Meanings, intentions, and interpretations, are set at odds with each other in the same way as Hamm's chronic remark in *Endgame* ("We're getting on") and the final stage direction of *Godot* ("Yes, let's go." *They do not move.*) similarly provide empty if ironic markers of an indefinable progress. In particular, Hamm and Professor each lives in a demented world of private images, surrounded by a disciple or disciples, the bond between them being a symbiotic paradox of love-hate, patron-client, de-

pendent-oppressor relationships. The articulate blind lead the inarticulate blind in countries where the one-eyed man is king. Lucky's speech in Act I of *Godot* is a conditional sentence ("Given the existence . . ."),[7] without predicate or point. Professor's final injunction to his followers, given at the point of death, reinforces a central Absurdist tenet: "Be even like the road itself . . . Breathe like the road. Be the road . . . Breathe like the road, be even like the road itself. . . ." (I, 228-29) — a benediction which complements Estragon's "discovery," "Yet, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come —"[8]

In *Endgame* Clov states the unavoidable pain of continuing life, the humiliation of a journey without intelligible destination: ". . . it'll never end, I'll never go. (*Pause.*) Then one day, suddenly, it ends, it changes. I don't understand, it dies, or it's me, I don't understand that either. I ask the words that remain — sleeping, waking, morning, evening. They have nothing to say."[9] Before his death Professor's speech contains the same hint of enervating waste, a brief glimpse into his own terrifying isolation temporarily concealed by the excitement of cheating death by foreknowledge:

> Surely I am not alone. If I am that, then I have wasted evenings of instruction on you. [*Mildly, almost with tiredness.*] You dregs, you emptied faces, have I shared my thoughts with you for nothing? (I, 227)

This is a rare moment of self-awareness in the play, a climactic epiphany, for whereas Beckett's characters (like Stoppard's duo in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*) are dimly conscious of acting a part in some inscrutable playwright's scheme of action, Soyinka's characters in *The Road* have few moments like this. Their temporarily vivid language brilliantly illuminates their past but provides no means of working out their destinies. Professor (like Lucky) builds his shaky world-view on the regurgitated scraps of technical argot (the language of the missionary church, the credit company, the newspapers, the law, the pools company, and so on — all types of "official," self-supporting structures which have failed to satisfy the spiritual needs), and thus chooses

to "pick my words only among rejects" (I, 220). He hopes that new life will spring from dead letters and yesterday's news by a process of random revelation ("cabalistic" is Soyinka's typically precise word for this process, and one is reminded of the mad linguistic schemes for a universal language in Swift's Academy of Lagado). For both dramatists a world governed by contingency incarnate produces a tragi-comic vision of loss and desperate energies.

It may be tempting to say that *The Road* is *about* language. But this, I believe, would be misguided, since it would make the play feed off itself for meaning. Though Beckett and Soyinka each shows the degradation of language and its imprecision, the cause is not the language (which is only a tool) but the collapse of social assumptions, common purposes, moral direction and spiritual certainties which once gave it an apparent strength. Only one result of this is that both dramatists share the ability to extract from ordinary discourse and apparently casual remarks an unnerving and ambiguous shock. If general statements are now invalid, then the random detail is made to carry a vast burden of significance. Lucky's speech in *Godot* lists sports such as "tennis football running cycling swimming flying" (p. 29), and so on, in such a way and in such a context that we regard them as rule-bound (and therefore counterfeit) images of the game of life itself, substituting arbitrary codes for the contingencies of actual living. In the same way, Samson's innocent remark that on the football pools, "You can make your fortune on it quite easily," meets with the astonishing retort of Professor:

> You cannot read, and I presume you cannot write, but you can unriddle the signs of the Scheme that baffle even me, whose whole life is devoted to the study of the enigmatic Word? Do you actually make this modest claim for yourself? (I, 204)

Pozzo, Hamm, and Professor are all interrogated for their oracular wisdom, and each reacts with an angry petulance based on the pained awareness of their own vulnerability:

> POZZO: I woke up one fine day as blind as Fortune. (*Pause.*) Sometimes I wonder if I'm not still asleep.
>
> VLADIMIR: And when was that?

POZZO: I don't know.

VLADIMIR: But no later than yesterday —

POZZO: (*violently*) Don't question me! The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too.

VLADIMIR: Well just fancy that! I could have sworn it was just the opposite. (p. 55)

When Professor is interrogated he counters the awkward question of his precise purpose in life with a lie: "Do you think I spend every living moment looking for that? [i.e., the Word.] What do you think I am — a madman?" (I, 188). Alleged wisdom in each of the plays is defined negatively as the ability to maintain superiority, a sadistic oppression of the enquiring by the ignorant.

The question of madness arises in all three plays: as Estragon puts it: "We are all born mad. Some remain so" (p. 51). In any discussion of *The Road* the question of Professor's sanity is inextricable from our reaction to his death, its meaning and its importance. Put bluntly, the choice seems to be between despising him as a knave, as an agent of death and a force for spiritual anarchy, or sympathizing with him as a sublime fool, a lost Faustian soul struggling against atavistic forces which destroy his vast ambitions. Unlike Faustus, some of whose ambitions may have resulted in social progress, Professor's aims are exclusively egocentric: his search for the essence of death is an individual, self-aggrandizing quest which ruthlessly sacrifices the lives of others in its course. Again, there is no easy classical category for him. Hamm, Pozzo, and Professor are all dominating, patrician figures living off the needs and aspirations of their inferiors. Each is a pathfinder able to recognize signposts but unable to interpret them. Each puts the question, none poses more than an illusion of revelation. Professor's point about Murano sums up their common predicament:

> And waiting, waiting till his tongue be released, [*desperately*] in patience and confidence, for he is not like you others whose faces are equally blank but share no purpose with the Word. (I, 223)

Murano, suspended at the very moment he impersonates the god Ogun in masquerade, rests his big toe on the slumbering chrysalis of the Word, and points his keeper to a transformation which will

never take place in communicable terms. Professor's mistake is in attempting to penetrate and arrogate to himself the mysterious essence of death which his society has enshrined in the religious rite of Ogun. This is a specific, ethnic resource (i.e., Yoruba mythology, which Soyinka has placed on the world's stage alongside the great myths of the Graeco-Roman and Christian patterns) for which there is no parallel in Beckett. What I would argue here is that the all-enclosing (Yoruba) mythology, which might have served like the classical Greek chorus, *also* fails to provide a hubristic climax and a context in which we might have seen Professor's death as an act of divine retribution. There is no evidence in the play to regard the Ogun mythology as anything other than superstition, another false trail, another outmoded structure. Hamm's valetudinarian paranoia and vicious egocentricity have left him playing endless variations on the theme of exhibitionist mortality. For Pozzo there is no dignity in death and neither will there be any epiphany: he is lost in time and, like Professor when he first enters the Aksident stores at the beginning of the play, he has no memory. In each play the only reality is the present continuity, a drift towards oblivion. The journey along the road of life (Soyinka's original choice of title for *The Road*) must be made because we have no choice, even though the process will certainly be characterized by deprivation, illusion, pain, violence, and the certainty of collective doom. This being so, the actual mechanism of Professor's death, through the frenzied panic of Say Tokyo Kid and his attempt to stop what he calls Professor's "sacrilege," is precisely appropriate: it is a *muddle* of cause, accident, "justice," panic, retribution, which serves to highlight the tragic ingredients of loss, waste, and that feeling of complicity which is present in all of these plays. As at the end of *Godot* and *Endgame* the final moment of *The Road* returns us to the unsolved questions and an ambiguous expression of discontinuities. The most powerful image in all three plays concerns the most important discontinuity of all, life-in-death. In *Godot* there is Pozzo's remark: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (p. 57). In *The Road* Kotonu is urged to make a propitiatory sacrifice of a dog to

Ogun, in order to keep the Drivers alive. Professor transcribes the sentiment with a startling image of human dissolution:

> PROFESSOR (*writing*): Below that bridge, a black rise of buttocks, two unyielding thighs and that red trickle like a woman washing her monthly pain in a thin river. So many lives rush in and out between her legs, and most of it a waste. (I, 197)

Clov opens the door of his existential cell and remarks: "I am so bowed I only see my feet, if I open my eyes, and between my legs a little trail of black dust. I say to myself that the earth is extinguished, though I never saw it lit" (p. 81).

Hamm's refrain, "We're getting on," and Professor's instruction to be like the road thus go beyond a simple tragic ending for the individual to a truly absurdist counsel of hope in despair. After a searching exposure of false paths no attempt is made to offer alternatives beyond the knowledge that the accepted directions are also insufficient. Without a revelation, contingency rules the world. When Professor sends for a parcel of guguru he ignores what it contains and examines the newspaper in which it is wrapped. He is driven to utter an anguished demand: "Oh God, the enormity of unknown burdens, of hidden wisdoms . . . say the Word in our time, O Lord, utter the hidden Word" (I, 203). The fiinal illusion to crumble is his obsession that the truth about life and death is contained or containable in verbal terms: his sanctuary of words is violated by the sinister and drug-induced frenzy of Say Tokyo Kid. The false prophet is swept away to a death lacking both dignity and meaning.

Soyinka's emphasis on ritual sacrifice is profoundly ambiguous, and is, of course, quite alien to Beckett's manner. Shakespearian tragedy requires sacrifice for the purgation of evil, but Beckett's tragi-comedy exposes the futility of sacrifice not only because the human will is dead but because there is no higher purpose to be served by such an act. The greatest pain, as we have seen (and as Kent reminds us in *King Lear*) is no death but continuing life. Say Tokyo Kid is a poor guardian of traditional spiritual values, but the fact that he is the one to kill Professor has led some to argue that he indicates what one critic has called a "predatory traditionalism."[10] But Soyinka's word for this is characteristically

more blunt and carries no metaphysical meaning at all: cannibalism. Professor is not sacrificed, he is murdered in a clumsy scuffle.[11] As an ending to the play, Professor's death may leave us more puzzled than disturbed. This sense of detachment is, I think, a feature of the play as a whole (just as it is in the puppet-like world of Brecht).

This apparently provisional control over meaning is not, of course, a weakness in the play. The doubts which is raises about a society rushing heedlessly towards a violent future controlled by madmen or self-appointed messiahs may relate specifically to a moment in Nigerian history. But the strength of the play is not only its contemporaneity. In Absurdist drama plurality of meaning *is* the meaning. As Mick says in Pinter's *The Caretaker*, "Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations." So that however we evaluate the specific ethnic character of *The Road* (and particularly the Yoruba rite of transition), we are still confronted with metaphors of that single question, Who or what can provide meaning and leadership in a world fragmented by redundant orthodoxies and dazzled by cheap charisma? It may well be that Soyinka's choice of Nigerian themes and situations combines to produce an open-ended, polysemic, and esentially Absurd play which needs no pedigree stemming from Beckett in order to explain it. But the similarities are, I think, cogent. If so, then there is one further and provocative parallel. If a measure of incomprehension is typical of current reactions to *The Road*, as was the case with *Godot*, then it is also likely that complaints are yet to be heard that *The Road's* meaning is too obvious. Such was the case when *Godot* was revived in 1964, the year before *The Road*'s appearance. For both plays, and the genre which enfolds them, the twentieth century is a peculiarly responsive time, and for a reason sharply defined by Frank Kermode:

> . . . the only works we value enough to call classic are those which . . . are complex and indeterminate enough to allow us our necessary pluralities . . . the modern classic . . . offers itself only to readings which are encouraged by its failure to give a definitive account of itself. Unlike the old classic, which was expected to provide answers, this one poses a virtually infinite series of questions.[12]

The Word which Professor seeks, and the manifestation of Godot, each comes into being through the questions raised about them. In Soyinka's play the questions come thick and fast, and are registered in a multitude of languages, each sharply individualized. *The Road* is as much about a day in the life of unemployed layabouts at the side of a Nigerian road as *Waiting for Godot* is about a day in the life of a couple of disenfranchised tramps with time on their hands. Undeniably, *The Road* has deep ethnic roots and a linguistic richness emblematic of a country in transition between one heritage which has been rejected and another which has yet to be found, but then this transition (however "explicable" in political and economic terms) differs only in degree and detail from the theatrical grammar and the conclusions of the contemporary European mode. The comparison is enlightening for both.

NOTES

[1] Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse, eds., *African Writers Talking* (Heinemann: London and Ibadan, 1972), p. 172. Gerald Moore, in *Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 19, points out quite rightly the difficulty of fitting Soyinka's plays into the "classical dramatic categories." His critics have been less scrupulous. Oyin Ogunba's remarks, quoted here, may be found in his *Movement of Transition: A Study of the Plays of Wole Soyinka* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975), pp. 147-64.

[2] Femi Osofisan, "Tiger on Stage: Wole Soyinka and Nigerian Theatre," in Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele, eds., *Theatre in Africa* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1978), p. 178.

[3] J. P. Clark, *The Example of Shakespeare* (London: Longman; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 95-96.

[4] *Before the Blackout*, Orisun Acting Editions, Ibadan, n.d., pp. 12, 13, 14. Soyinka adds a note: "These sale cries would be adapted for the most topical scandals at time of performance." The list seems timeless, however.

[5] Both passages are quoted in Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), revised edition, 1968, p. 23.

[6] *The Road*, I, 223. All references are to Wole Soyinka, *Collected Plays*, 2 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 1973). Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text.

[7] *Waiting for Godot*, pp. 28-29. All references are to the Grove Press edition (New York, 1954). Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text.

[8] One component of the undisputed power and suggestiveness of Professor's final speech (quite apart from conflicting *interpretations* of it) may lie in its parodic manipulations of the sermon on the mount and its aftermath. In Matthew, 5-15, Christ makes the dumb man speak, and in giving his disciples power *against* unclean spirits, says (10.16), "be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

[9] *Endgame*, p. 81. All references are to the Grove Press edition (New York, 1958). Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text.

[10] D. S. Izevbaye, "Language and Meaning in Soyinka's *The Road*," *West African Journal of Modern Languages*, 2 (September 1976), 117-26, reprinted in Eldred Jones, ed., *African Literature Today*, No. 8 (University of Ibadan: Ibadan and London, 1976), pp. 55-65. The play, Izevbaye claims, is "about the problem of communication," a comment which the rest of this article sensibly avoids dealing with, since it is a narrowing prescription.

[11] Duerden and Pieterse, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

[12] Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 114, 121.