The Superman as Master Narrative in Wole Soyinka’s Season of Anomy

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Abstract
Wole Soyinka’s Season of Anomy is regarded by some as one of the masterpieces of African literature, but it presents challenges in reading, leading others, among them literary critics, to pronounce it a failure. There is therefore deep ambivalence over this novel, but it comes from the expectations with which the readers approach it. Literary works may share elements of structure, but that does not mean that they should all be read in the same way, with the same expectations. The history of criticism of African literature going back to the early 1970s has put in place a tradition in which literature is directly connected to the so-called social context as its referential and basis of intelligibility. In response, creative writing is increasingly in sync with this theory, and critics formed in this tradition expect each work to provide a window on that social context. It is taken in this article that this tradition of reading is the reason for the difficulty many have with Soyinka’s texts. Season of Anomy demands both close reading and application of heuristic devices from literary theory and criticism because it is indeed a literary work of art. The master narrative of the superman is applied here to motivate a literary analysis of the work. Opening up Season of Anomy in this way makes it apparent that we are dealing with a great work, deeply grounded in a tradition of art much older than the mid-20th-century theory of engagement, and not a failure of any sort.

Keywords
exile, freedom, hero, instinct, messianism

Introduction
Soyinka’s (1973) Season of Anomy is said to have raised great expectations after the success of his first novel, The Interpreters. The critics, however, found it largely disappointing. One major reason for this “critical debacle,” according to Jeyifo (2004), is that “the characters and situations . . . are too abstract, too cerebral to really come alive in ways that engage readers at deep emotional and psychological levels” (p. 197). The idea that the characters and situations were judged to be “too abstract, too cerebral to really come alive” suggests that what had been expected was a realist or a problem-solving or a reductionist narrative, demanding no critical effort from the reader, only to come along. This interest in ready-made solutions, of reading this text according to “the order of discursive meaning or trying-to-say” (Derrida, 1981, p. 362), is the mode of reading Nwagbara (2009) insists on, concluding that

the face of intellectual militancy is seen in the portraiture of the Dentist and Ofeyi, who are on the vanguard to better their society through their intellectual bent and agitation to espouse change by a call to the status quo ante. (p. 130)

However, “intellectual militancy,” rather a difficult concept, is harder still to apply as a descriptive term to the attitude or contribution of the Dentist in the struggle in Season of Anomy. However, Aisha Karim’s (2009) remark that “both of Soyinka’s novels, The interpreters and the later Season of anomy, tend toward questioning of [the] role of individual will as the agent of social transformation—a role that is generally affirmed in Soyinka’s prolific dramatic output” (p. 104), highlights that the path along which followers of Soyinka have been accustomed to come is that of the politics of his dramatic “representations.” I will argue in this article that the will at work in Season of Anomy has similar markings as the one in the dramas, but what the novel permits us to see is the framework within which this will attain universality and urgency.

Superman, the Universal Instinct’s Forward Thrust
Recent translations use the word “overman” instead of “superman” for Nietzsche’s (1963) Übermensch—“a stronger species, a higher type that arises and preserves itself under different conditions from those of the average man”
(p. 463). This individual is not exceptional; he is really a different type of human. According to Nietzsche, human civilization is relentlessly reducing humankind to “the average man.” The overman is not subject to this pressure, as he stands head and shoulders above the average man, being the aristocracy of the future:

Once we possess that common economic management of the earth that will soon be inevitable, mankind will be able to find its best meaning as a machine in the service of this economy—as a tremendous clockwork, composed of ever smaller, ever more subtly “adapted” gears; as an ever-growing superfluity of all dominating and commanding elements; as a whole of tremendous force, whose individual factors represent minimal forces, minimal values. In opposition to this dwarfing and adaptation of man to a specialized utility, a reverse movement is needed—the production of a synthetic, summarizing, justifying man for whose existence this transformation of mankind into a machine is a precondition, as a base on which he can invent his higher form of being. He needs the opposition of the masses, of the “levelled,” a feeling of distance from them! he stands on them, he lives off them. This higher form of aristocracy is that of the future. (p. 464)

Among the English writers, Bernard Shaw was probably to make the most of the overman in his drama Man and Superman, where we can read back from the speeches of Don Juan with the heightened insight of hell that this is what he sees as the well-spring of his life on earth—which is part of the reason he rejects his sentence as a hell-dweller for eternity.

The first and most significant feature of the superman is intelligence. The present state of evolution would have to be surpassed to attain the kind of brain needed by the superman. But Don Juan is confident that this will come about inevitable by virtue of the evolutionary process and informs his interlocutor, the Devil, that from the beginning, “Life was driving at brains—at its darling object: an organ by which it can attain not only self-consciousness but self-understanding” (Shaw, 2003, p. 126). This is a brain that can find a way round any problem facing man, and it must go with a will that can desire infinitely. Whatever this will sets before itself as a goal, the brain would find a way through to “the means will be found: the brain will not fail when the will is in earnest” (p. 130). With these two faculties at his service, the superman indeed will be a “bold” individual, unconstrained by fear or morality, and certainly not a slave to convention. Nietzsche (1999) already has models of such individuals in classical literature among the writers and heroes. Such an individual refuses the role typically assigned him in the order of things in pursuit of the one he himself has assigned. In short, he is intuitive and spontaneous, instinct being for Nietzsche (2002), “The most intelligent type of intelligence discovered so far” (p. 111). Umberto Eco (1979) has noted that the superman quite often occurs in modern literature, both of the serious and of the light and diversionary kind, with attributes that may be mistaken for those of ordinary human beings:

Often the hero’s virtue is humanized, and his powers, rather than being supernatural, are the extreme realization of natural endowments such as astuteness, swiftness, fighting ability, or even the logical faculties and the pure spirit of observation found in Sherlock Holmes. (p. 107)

Following Paul Ricoeur’s (1981) guidelines for a critical reading to aim to take “account of the greatest number of facts furnished by the text” and, at the same time, offer “a qualitatively better convergence between the features which it takes into account” (pp. 175-176), it will be argued in this article that the main characters in Season of Anomy, particularly Ahime and Ofeyi, possess the features of the superman, in their high intelligence and limitless resourcefulness, in the quality of their instinctual behavior, and in being exclusively for others. The action they undertake has necessity and simultaneously comprises their exercise of freedom. As Sartre (1943) would say, “On the occasion of a certain objective structure of the world which surrounds me, [being] refers my freedom to me in the form of tasks to be freely done” (pp. 259-260). The task in the performance of which is exercise of freedom by Ahime and Ofeyi is the rescue of their country from control and exploitation by the Cartel of business and political interests: Here, freedom “passes over into necessity, becoming subordinate to the initiative of things. This freedom, it seems, no longer dares: it consents, it yields” (Ricoeur, 1966, p. 482).

The Cartel and Anomy

The Cartel of powerful individuals who run the unnamed country of Season of Anomy are undoubtedly very intelligent men, which is why they have gained and maintain control of their country’s raw materials-based economy. They comprise two businessmen, one cultural leader and the military. Their kind of intelligence, however, is different from that of the overman. Their kind of intelligence is, in Nietzsche (2002), the “will to power’ and nothing else” (p. 36). By contrast, Ofeyi’s and Ahime’s intelligence reflect the “language of a universal instinct that needs to be listened to and acted on” (pp. 141-142). This language has no regard for the self; hence, it is free from fear. Ahime, who has been part of the nurturing of the Aiyéró way of life and witnessed its flawless working by the movement of this “universal instinct,” is prompted to extend and share it with the rest of the country with no illusions whatever that it would be fiercely opposed by the Cartel.

Independently, Ofeyi has found that same way of life, having searched diligently among “models from the European world” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 12), probably a version of Karl Marx’s socialism as is found in Brecht’s (1965) The Caucasian Chalk Circle, “The land to those who till it. . . .
The sea to those who fish it” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 11). However, it is by the “universal instinct” that he hits on the idea that it is the best model to serve the interests of both the individual and society and loses no time in search of ways to propagate it. Chancing upon the Aiyéró community on a promotions tour for the Cocoa Corporation for which he works, Ofeyi sets to work immediately to disseminate his idea, to the astonishment of the Aiyéró—and to their pleasure as well. Ahime narrates as follows to Ofeyi at a renewal of acquaintances with a further visit from the Cocoa promotions man:

I told our departed Founder. I said to him, here comes a man who brings us our own view of life. And he said simply, give him the run of the meeting-house . . . how strange . . . (Soyinka, 1973, p. 11)

Ofeyi is somewhat embarrassed to admit that he had come in search of converts to this one idea: the land to those who till it; the sea to those who fish it, but Ahime stopped him.

No. It was a most beneficial thing for us, your coming here all puffed up with your sense of mission. It was good to know that our ways have always been the dream of mankind all through the ages and among people so far apart. People as different in appearance as the cocoa-pod from the yam tuber. Eating and drinking differently, worshiping gods with no common ancestors, and yet . . . (Soyinka, 1973, p. 12)

For the Aiyéró, life is integrated, from production, through exchange, ritual, and celebration, and the social body is hierarchized and bonded by vital links—Ofeyi metaphorizes this vital linkage as an “umbilical cord.” It holds the Aiyéró together among themselves and ties them to the community itself so that no matter where they travel or reside, “they all always come back” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 2). For the rest of the country, there is fragmentation. Because of this fragmentation, the people are unable to think and act together as a collective to protect themselves from the vicious injustices they experience from the Cartel.

The main problem the people face from the Cartel is exploitation. These four powerful individuals have more or less absolute control of the country’s productive sectors and therefore of the people’s lives. There is some regional variation, however. In Cross-river, Zaki Amuri, a kind of feudal overlord is in control of the land, which he can contract away to mining corporations for free exploitation. In this way, even the nomadic herders are directly affected by his policies driven in part by a profit motive, and in part by obsequious deference to light-complexioned expatriates. As the tribesman, Salau, who has been brought before him for “agitation” explains,

Your Highness, as you know, the white men have been digging on those lands for a long time. They pay us something, but what does it come to your Highness? Nothing much. When they have finished with the land it is useless. Nothing but rocks. The rain washes the best soil away once they have been at it. Apart from a small patch here and there. A goat turns up his nose at the grass that grows there. (Soyinka, 1973, p. 123)

In the coco-growing area, Chief Batoki’s sphere of influence, the arrangement seems to be that his cocoa corporation takes over from the farmers the marketing and processing of the produce. In this way, this cocoa-based cash-crop economy is fully in his control. Control of the production and marketing of the country’s natural resources and cash-crop economy gives the Cartel leverage over the state apparatuses, the political system, the judiciary, and the apparatuses of law enforcement and security, and secures for them an enforced loyalty from the people. They also use superstitious practices and rituals to try and keep these people in a “life-long indenture to emptiness” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 316).

The social order presided over by the Cartel seems unacceptable to all, except those who profit from it. But the responses differ. The people are driven to an uprising from time to time, which the Cartel and the government ruthlessly deal with. The musical director of the Cocoa Beans Orchestra, Zaccheus, Ofeyi’s friend, is as disgusted as everyone else but wants to keep out of politics, taking solace in his art. He even tries to urge his strategy of evasion on Ofeyi:

Hey man, why don’t you just stay with us. I mean instead of being also against them, just be with us. Leave them alone to go to hell where they’re heading anyway. . . . You can keep it simple if you want to. B Sharp is B Sharp. Call it C if you like but when Zack says B Sharp that’s what it is. And if you want you can keep things clear and simple like I do. (Soyinka, 1973, p. 76)

He does not succeed in converting Ofeyi; rather he finds himself dragged into the fray in opposition to the Cartel in part through loyalty to Ofeyi and in part through the force of circumstances, and may have changed his views about commitment in the process. But he fairly lays aside his art for this struggle.

Demakin, or the Dentist as Ofeyi calls him, who has trained for armed opposition against states of affairs of the kind supervised by the Cartel, judges that the case in hand should be dealt with by selective assassinations. When Ofeyi turns out not to be forthcoming in guiding him in the decision which member of the Cartel would do the most damage to the system if taken out, he lights on a plan to kill them all off in one go. According to him,

It was the first chance we ever had to get all four together, at one blow; the situation was even appropriate, they were meeting to plot the fine details of this horror. Well, I needn’t tell you we failed. (Soyinka, 1973, p. 217)

The “horror” is the Cartel’s response to a much grander scheme by Ahime and Ofeyi to replace the system altogether and resolve the situation radically.

In committing themselves to replacing the oppressive system of the Cartel with one which protects the humanity and dignity of the ordinary people, Ahime and Ofeyi, the overmen
of this narrative are taking on a task that Nietzsche (1999) calls “Titanic.” Here, we have

that sudden swell of the Dionysiac tide [which] lifts the separate little waves of individuals onto its back, just as the Titan Atlas, brother of Prometheus, lifted up the earth. This Titanic urge to become, as it were, the Atlas of all single beings, and to carry them on a broad back higher and higher, further and further, is the common feature shared by the Promethean and the Dionysiac. (p. 57)

Ideally, the overman occurs singly in classical works as Nietzsche discusses them. But it appears that in Season of Anomy, both Atlas and his brother Prometheus are at work. Ofeyi, as Prometheus, is committed to bringing enlightenment to all the people. He aims “to educate on a truly comprehensive scale” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 104), for which he needs “Time.” He is proceeding with this task through the jingles and the promotional musical dramas he writes for the Cocoa Beans Orchestra. A great example of this is his Pandora that is first presented to the public at the garden party of the Chairman of the Cocoa Board. This is a puppet show in which sections of the population, sufficiently well healed to be invited to an exclusive party by the head of the Cartel’s Cocoa Corporation, are confronted with what they themselves know to be the root cause of the problems of their country—the “terrible quads” responsible for the political, economic, and social underdevelopment of their country; its inability to become truly independent; and its structure of inequality in which the ordinary people are intimidated, exploited, and systematically pauperized, whereas the privileged get only richer and more powerful. It begins with a presentation of images of the pests and diseases the cocoa tree is prone to, which the cocoa farmers must deal with to save their crops from ruin:

After the initial cautionary villains, so familiar to the farming audiences, had emerged from the black-painted pod—the same long-suffering, multi-purposed pod—after them came the unexpected. Four familiar faces, puppet-form, suspended also from balloons, faces whose identities none, not even of those present, dared claim to recognize—Ofeyi had counted on this—faces whose names were whispered with dread even in the harshest sanctuaries of the underworld. These, the real powers of the Cartel unfurled with linked arms as the balloons flew higher and the strings were unravelled. In the uneven movements of the balloon barrage they appeared to do a slow macabre dance of the magic circle, heads slowly turning side to side in contemplation of a prostrate world. With the extra buoyancy of the larger balloons they soon overtook the lesser hazards, the drippy scaly microbious shapes that hovered lazily over the garden while Zaccheus at his clowning best leant, panting, on the lid he had hastily shut. But his moon-horror face was no longer acting as he saw the four bogy-men. Until they emerged after the weeds, the viruses, the swollen shoot and other plagues of the cocoa farmer he had not suspected their presence in the box.

The applause was mild, uncertain. It hovered between a refusal to recognize the four linked figures—the “terrible quads” according to the christening of their own genteel circles—and realization that failure to applaud the technical display was admission of their recognition. The guests mostly began to wonder if they would ever attend another garden party. If one was not safe from such dilemmas in the very home of one of the top servants of the Cartel . . . ! (Soyinka, 1973, pp. 45-46)

This dramatic strategy of presenting the audience with causes of problems, dilemmas, and arguments is familiar from Brecht’s epic theater, where the aim is to awaken the mental and physical energies of the audience and demand decisions of them (Bentley, 1981). The oppressive force of the Cartel is so strong everywhere and the mindlessness of their exercise of violence in their pursuit of the will to power so daunting that the people, especially the well to do, protect themselves by exercise of “false consciousness,” where there is a gap “between individuals’ thought and the (objective) interest of the class to which they belong” (Balkin, 1998, p. 116). For the ability to activate false consciousness among people who might otherwise be outraged and seek retribution is a facility an oppressive system ordinarily uses to protect itself from opposition.

Although his community is a kind of communalist anachronism which, thanks to its geographical isolation, has been able to preserve its cultural and ideological identity over time, Ahime is aware of the rest of the country, and his community has sons and daughters seeded everywhere in the country and in constant communication with the home community. Ahime is the truly Dionysian hero overflowing all boundaries. His attitude is similar to Don Juan’s in Man and Superman, according to whom,

As long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the law of my life. That is the working within me of Life’s incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer self-understanding. (Shaw, 2003, p. 137)

Ahime’s pursuit of the project of social transformation therefore drives all before it: Ofeyi’s peaceful and necessarily slow process of education “on a truly comprehensive scale” has a place in it, and so also Demakin’s impatient anger that aims to bring about change instantly—or perhaps affording the people leeway—by eliminating the individuals he holds responsible for the sorry plight of the country. He deploys all these forces in the field, not leaving out deception even in managing his human resources where there was a chance they might prefer to have as little as possible to do with one another. Reasonable (Apolline) Ofeyi will work out for himself that Demakin has a role in the struggle and willingly extends cooperation to him to the extent of bringing home for him from abroad his deadly weapons of insurgency. With him is occasionally Taiila, the emanation of light. We
read about her in an encounter with a church leader in the Tabernacle of Hope:

The man hesitated while. His eyes were fixed on Taiila and he seemed to want to say something. Finally he smiled a little, the tenseness and work-burden that appeared to have knitted together the corners of his eyes dissolved. “You are a very beautiful lady” he said.

Surprised but pleased, Taiila thanked him but he continued, “Not just beautiful but full of light. He glanced round the dank room. ‘This room feels radiant, it must be your presence’” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 266).

As the emanation of light, she is a force of reason and moderation. According to Geuss (1999), the Apolline “embodies the drive toward distinction, discreteness and individuality, toward the drawing and respecting of boundaries and limits; he teaches an ethic of moderation and self-control” (p. xi). She is with Ofeyi at times he needs to think things through carefully. But Ofeyi sees her as standing:

...for only one part of my longing ...

The peaceful part?

Yes. The stillness.

Her face was suffused with sudden radiance. Ofeyi stared at her in surprise.

I know I shall be able to help you attain that. Some day. I know that everything is linked. You must believe that. And I am striving to obtain a glimpse of the entire network. I know I will arrive at a state of detached consciousness where I shall stand aside and comprehend it all in one instant. Even if it last only one moment, it will be enough for me. And for you. Yes, for you. That is what makes me happy. (Soyinka, 1973, p. 100)

This force, that knows that things are linked and yet distinct and in search of the meaning of it all, is part of the Life Force in *Man and Superman*, which

is evolving today a mind’s eye that shall see, not the physical world, but the purpose of Life, and thereby enable the individual to work for that purpose instead of thwarting and baffling it by setting up shortsighted personal aims as at present. (Shaw, 2003, pp. 126-127)

Ofeyi is a man who needs to strike a balance, who is plied by two opposite forces signified by two women who recur in succession in his life by force of what Achebe (1988) would call “the Power of Event.” The contemplative one who is going to confound the most frightening situations, the one who has not only had time to think about the situation at home, but also has clearer ideas how to go about it. He also has met a compatriot Demakin, “the Dentist,” who is a professional performer rehearsing for a road show, and so on. By reference to these two figures, Ofeyi’s identity as “the philosophic man” is articulated; that is, “he who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will, and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means” (Shaw, 2003, p. 127). In this, he is unlike Ahime, who is driven mainly by the “universal instinct.” But they share in common what Nietzsche (1999) also calls a “Titanic love” for humanity (p. 27) and would spare themselves no pain to change the lot of those who suffer for the profit of the few. However, Titanic energy, whether striving or loving, is associated with tragic reversal in Nietzsche as it involves excess, which is the content of hubris. So the point about Titanic striving is its aim, not its outcome.

The seizure of Iriyise by the Zaki marks the unleashing of anarchy, when at a word from this man, the most atrocious mass murders, savage brutalities, degradation, and abominating of the dead and the dying are carried out by marauding tribesmen, in many cases former neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, military personnel specially drafted for the purpose, and also officers of the law. The entire Cross-river region where the Zaki is really the sole authority is one vast hell; people from other regions have to flee or be dispatched if sighted. Churches serving as places of refuge for the hunted peoples are surrounded by armed men, doused in petrol, and set on fire. Those who manage to find transport to convey them from this hell are ambushed along the roads or even surprised in the motor parks and massacred to the last infant. The special target are of course the *Aiyéró* who have been seeded in workplaces and among the populace to serve as cells for the spread of the communalist ideology, but also those they have converted to the new ideology and people of non-Cross-river ethnic groups.

**Superman in Imagery: Messianism**

Ofeyi combines the characteristics of the philosophic man with those of a messiah. He is packed off on a “study leave” with recommendation to tour the world’s most industrialized countries when the Cocoa Board is becoming uncomfortable with the subversive and confrontational materials appearing in his jingles for his promotional campaigns in “hopes of his eventual salvation” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 21). He comes home with a more deepened conviction of the need to get rid of the “Cartel’s superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder” and try and bring an end to “the new phase of slavery” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 27); he also has clearer ideas how to go about it. He has not only had time to think about the situation at home, but he has also met a compatriot Demakin, “the Dentist,” who is
equally exercised by the same problem, though on a wider scale. It is a pattern this man sees throughout Africa and has broken off his training as a dentist for one in insurgency as a revolutionary to combat and resolve. In their interaction, Ofeyi is to recognize that there is a potential role for armed opposition in combating the Cartel entrenched in their country and ripping it off. Demakin for his part, concedes him, because “charity does begin at home” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 103), to join forces to sort out the home front first.

Ofeyi’s arrival back to the country at the end of his “study leave” abroad sees him hastening to Aiyéró to seek help to put his plan into operation. He needs the youth of Aiyéró residing in different parts of the country for this and puts his request to Ahime:

You have men all over the country. . . . In nearly all the major towns. They are scattered all over, in every factory and industry. Lend them to me for two years. And after that. . . . (Soyinka, 1973, p. 27)

Not knowing that this is the reason the Aiyéró are settled all over the country, to be the “leaven” that would transform society from within, Ofeyi is asking for them intending to put them to this very use. Ahime’s ready willingness to sanction Ofeyi’s plan and allow free access to the youths leaves him with a further problem:

But I can’t just go to them and say . . .

That I sent you? Of course you can’t. Because I don’t send you. They are all free men who live, as you say, by a certain idea. If your own goals correspond to that idea, then all you have to do is go to them . . . if your idea fulfills their own constant readiness for service . . . (Soyinka, 1973, p. 28)

The story of Moses being sent to go and rescue the people of Israel from Pharaoh’s Egypt is recalled in this dialogue. “Go to them and say . . . That I sent you” particularly echoes it. In this case, however, it is not the Aiyéró people who need to be saved. Ofeyi’s request is rather that through them salvation might reach the whole people of this unnamed country.

The backlash of the Cartel prompted by this effort is with enthusiastic help from the poor people themselves who are at the receiving end of the Cartel’s superstructure of exploitation and abuse. These exploited and impoverished classes turn out to be extraordinarily cunning in inventing cruel and degrading tortures for their victims. Ofeyi, who is touring the region during the mayhem, having witnessed the enthusiasm of the murder gangs and portrayal of “the will to violence” (Kappeler, 1995) in unwitting condonation of the Cartel’s will to power is left with the sense that “a relish had coloured their actions, a deep hunger for perversion both in inventiveness and magnitude, as if they sought to balance unnatural mutations, their human forms with a vengeful outrage on the face of humanity” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 276). The level of involvement, fairly taking into their own hands the hunting down and destruction of the Aiyéró and so-called strangers from outside Cross-river is as if the people have, by their own choice, rejected the salvation Ofeyi was bringing them.

But there are indications that this effort has not been in vain. For instance, the Lieutenant who helps Ofeyi and Zaccheus to find the secret assembling place of the Aiyéró survivors from the still simmering violence of the Cartel and the people of Cross-river in preparation for their long march back to the ancient home community is full of respect for the work they had done during the time they are attempting to instill new ideas and attitudes in the people and restructure Cross-river from within. He is aware of that work and gives Ofeyi directions to find “those experimental farms that rather became the pattern[,] I believe the model came from down your way, some place called Aiyéró” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 210). Similarly, there is a sense in his remark, “It will take months, if not years to sort out Cross-river, I mean really to sort it out. That includes . . . .” which is broken off before he has got it all out, that in his view, things will not continue to be left in the Zaki’s hands. But the first fruit of his messianic effort is seen in Temoko itself where he is able to convert and bring along with him into the world of freedom Suberu, trustworthy helper of the governor of the great prison, who having served out his long prison term for serious crime freely chooses to remain in the prison, acting as the personal assistant and bodyguard of the prison governor and his ruthless one-man anti-riot squad. He is thus a figure of the ordinary people the Cartel gets to do its dirty job against the interests of their own class. The governor himself tells Ofeyi about him:

He doesn’t know what it is to think but he is first class. Very dependable man—as long as you give him precise orders. Not like my paid staff. They can’t distinguish between initiative and contravention of orders. Especially this new breed they are recruiting fresh from school. They think they know everything. Too-know, that’s the trouble with them. Suberu now, he has no education and he is supposed to be a prisoner, but he is my right-hand man. He can run the whole place single-handed if I am suddenly taken ill. (Soyinka, 1973, pp. 289-290)

He is one person Ofeyi directly addresses his revolutionary message to. Wordlessly, he accepts the message straightforward, and places himself in Ofeyi’s band of the free as they march out of Temoko. It recalls the closing scene of the Passion of Jesus when he promises the repentant thief a place with him in Paradise (Lk 23.43).

His own friend, Zaccheus and confidant who has followed him to Cross-river in search of Iriyise and stuck with him through the search not just because of friendship but because of the force of his personality, also undergoes conversion. In the final scene at Temoko, we see that he has finally shed his misgivings and fear and entered into the action, making the mission his own, and is acting independently to further it:
The persistence struck him at last and he looked closely at the seated ring, watching them for any surreptitious motion. But their eyes were fixed on the leading actors of the evening rites. Finally he looked along the fence until he reached the outside wall with its crown of bottle tops and barbed-wire tunnels. A shea-butter tree rose over and dominated the wall from without. Unable at first to believe the apparition, he traced the moon face of Zaccheus, partly camouflaged by the leaves. Seeing himself perceived at last Zaccheus grinned from ear to ear, signalled to Ofeyi to wait at his post. His face disappeared only for a few moments; when it returned, he dangled a step-ladder a few inches over the wall, shook it gently and drew it back again. Ofeyi signalled that he understood, came down from his perch and sat down to think. (Soyinka, 1973, p. 312)

He has organized the rescue of Ofeyi who has traced his Iriyise to the bowels of Temoko prison only to become incapacitated with baton blows to the back of the head from Suberu and detained there.

The passage through Temoko itself is another key narrative moment as it parallels the Harrowing of Hell known in ancient Christian tradition as a stage after the death of Jesus on the Cross and his Resurrection from the dead. According to that tradition, he descends into hell, and passing through, rescues and leads to salvation the souls of the just imprisoned there.

Exile, Quests, and Passages

Exile is a motif that runs through Season of Anomy and present in all its phases. Ordinarily it is thought of as a “geographical metaphor,” namely, “a synonym of the uprooted experience of living abroad, away from one’s motherland” (Zeng, 2010, p. 1). But it may take place as “self-fragmentation and truncation”; it may equally take place in “the acute, liminal experience of self-estrangement and self-disintegration, for which death is the only adequate metaphor,” as well as in the disjointing of poetic matter from form (Zeng, 2010, p. 3). Thus, the fragmentation and atomization of the masses away from their common interests and their use by their exploiters against people of their own class may be analyzed as forms of exile. Similarly, there is exile in the conjunction of political messages and cocoa promotional jingles. Some forms of exile involve the interplay of other literary master narratives such as quest and rite of passage and are therefore particularly important for the work.

Geographical exile afflicts both the Aiyéró and Ofeyi. The Aiyéró, cut off from their parent community Aiyétómá, are familiar with exile and probably have ingrained as something to draw on wherever they find themselves techniques of survival in a strange environment and how in every circumstance to begin again. They seem not to sink their roots in a place of sojourn and are suitable for Ofeyi’s purpose for this very reason; and yet, as he notes, they always come back to Aiyéró:

It was an act of faith by the community to send the restless generation to work at whatever new industries were opened in the rest of the country, trusting that the new acquired skills would be brought back to aid the already self-sufficing community. And this was the unusual feature which intrigued the cocoa promotions man. They all returned. The neon cities could not lure them away. The umbilical cord, no matter how far it stretched, never did snap. (Soyinka, 1973, pp. 2-3)

Neither the sense of motherland nor of shared history appears to be enough to account for this phenomenon. It had to be something stronger than both: an idea. “They live by an idea, their lives are bound up by the one idea [so] they cannot be corrupted, or swayed” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 27). If they live by an idea, their lives bound up by the one idea, would it not be all the more certain that they would be prepared to die for that idea? At the planning stage, Ofeyi does not factor in this possibility; so he is ridden with the sense of guilt when this people with whose help he is pushing his idea of communalism to urban and industrial areas of the country are persecuted and massacred for it, a fact about which the text maintains a strict silence, even though it underlies the thoughtfulness of the major characters at their first meeting at the assembling place of the survivors (Soyinka, 1973, p. 215).

Ofeyi himself has but tenuous ethnic roots and few are the references that link him to a definite patch of the earth. We have seen that the Aiyéró come from down his way and they probably share knowledge of Ogun, and his mother tongue is the same spoken by the Batokis, Chief Batoki being the Western arm of the Cartel Axis. There may be some kind of relationship between them as well. The usual elements of social identity play hardly any role in his life—or they have been assimilated into the mission of his kind of superman, whose “life is dedicated to the battle against the forces of evil” (Eco, 1979, p. 108). Accordingly, his human relationships are limited to his mistress Iriyise and professional associates of which Zaccheus is a special friend. He has also been adopted as it were by Ahime of the Aiyéró. From these and his homeland, he is physically separated by the imposition of “study leave” by his boss in the cocoa corporation. In reality, he has always been morally and ideologically disjointed from the rest of the educated and professional classes: The geographical exile has the effect of doubling his exile status. Morally, his heart is with the people, although he is physically far from them: to him, they are “distant suppliants” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 136), whether he is in or out of the country. The effort he is undertaking is on behalf of the people, but it is unlikely that the physical gap will be bridged. He will always remain rootless and an exile.

The sojourn abroad serves a major structural function, as it provides him what Greimas calls “a helper” (Heinen, 2009, p. 201), that is, Demakin, the trained militant who will supply the armed method of opposition, which Ofeyi understands his revolution will require. At the mythic level, this
Demakin is his double, the one “who gazes at the subject with the subject’s own eyes” (Chiesa, 2007, p. 166). We have a sense of this when the two men meet unexpectedly in Cross-river in Ahime’s tent at the assembling place:

A copper-haired head bent down to let himself into the tent and stopped at the sight of Ofeyi. They stared at each other for a wordless moment. Then the Dentist grinned, came fully into the tent. (Soyinka, 1973, p. 217)

There is another meeting, unexpected by Ofeyi, at the rescue of both himself and Iriyise from Temoko, where we read that “in the light of the outside bulbs the wiry copper hairs glinted unambiguously and the Dentist’s face confronted his” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 317). Similarly, from time to time, when they are together, Demakin’s voice sounds to him as if disembodied; when he himself speaks, it is as if “to himself” (Soyinka, 1973, pp. 136-137).

The philosophic man “who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world” seems to be one kind of personality different from—and opposed to the one who is able to display the newspaper photograph of a murdered judge and declare with metallic and cold indifference, “I did that,” as Demakin does (Soyinka, 1973, p. 107): yet, this is what has been done—part of what has to be done—in carrying forward Ofeyi’s messianic mission. Such moral dilemmas and bi-polar attitudes are what often account for the poetic necessity of “the other as double” (Chiesa, 2007, p. 164).

Ofeyi’s exile and passage through the European world yields him the model of society he wants to transform his country into (Soyinka, 1973, p. 12); it yields him also not only his own double, but that of Iriyise as well. This is Taiila, the contemplative, oriented to the world of peacefulness, quietude, and saintliness, whereas Iriyise is in the eye of the storm sweeping through Cross-river, and also the abductee of the Zaki, who wants her as “a personal bonus” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 159). Iriyise has a great psychological role to play in the revolution for which she needs enhancement from Taiila’s contemplation. Such moral dilemmas and bi-polar attitudes are what often account for the poetic necessity of “the other as double” (Chiesa, 2007, p. 164).

Iriyise is a woman like Iriyise becomes for them a Chantal, a Deborah, torch and standard-bearer, super-mistress of universal insurgence. When the moment arrives that “in the light of the outside bulbs the wiry copper hairs glinted unambiguously and the Dentist’s face confronted his” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 317). Similarly, from time to time, when they are together, Demakin’s voice sounds to him as if disembodied; when he himself speaks, it is as if “to himself” (Soyinka, 1973, pp. 136-137).

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Iriyise’s passage through Cross-river is undertaken because of the orchestrated chaos in Cross-river, where the people of Aiyéró and others considered as strangers there are being hunted down and slaughtered in their countless numbers. It has given him a sense of “Failure. Was this the smell, the colour, the phantasma of failure?” (Soyinka, 1973, p. 89). He has to help rescue those who are still alive and fleeing for their lives. Along the way, he learns that Iriyise has been abducted by the Zaki. This passage accounts for almost two thirds of the novel. He is to come away from it with the main quest object, Iriyise, who is no longer just his mistress, but the “torch and standard-bearer, super-mistress of universal insurgence.” There are several other passages within this main passage; for example, through Dr. Chalil’s mortuary, out of which he recovers Taiila; through the Tabernacle of Hope where, among other things, he learns not to tar all the people of Cross-river with the Zaki’s brush; and through Temoko itself, hell, prison, and dungeon, the Zaki’s chosen hiding place for his quest object.

**Conclusion**

The superman is a metaphor of which the echoes richly resonate between *Season of Anomy* and certain significant works of the literary past, ranging from G. B. Shaw’s *Man and Superman*, through Nietzsche, *The Bible* and the Greco-Roman classics. Thus, *Season of Anomy* is a highly complex novel and what Brandt would call a “strong text” (as cited in Hunt, 1996), which resists reductionist readings and easy appropriations. Historically, the search for messages, moral viewpoints, and political positions has been the method of approach to this text, resulting in much frustration as none of the readily recognizable moulds seems to work with it. An early foray away from the moulds prevalent in discussions of African literature is the classical story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Undoubtedly there is more to this than mere echo effect from the names of Ofeyi and Iriyise. But that legend is too narrow a platform and does not extend beyond the Temoko passage. So it can hardly indicate a purpose and structure of meaning echoing throughout the whole work and comprehending its length and breadth. What had been lacking in efforts to account for this work is an enabling heuristic device to piece this novel together in all its phases and apparent discordances. Such is the effective application of the model of the superman master narrative in this article. Literature demands a mode of close reading that is archaeological in Michel Foucault’s sense. Far from searching for a paraphrase to put for the specific order of words as its meaning or seeking to “transgress the text toward something other than it” (Derrida, 1967/1997, p. 158), this method aims “to turn words around in order to perceive all that is being said through them and despite them” (Foucault, 2002, p. 325). The archaeological method is not recommended for selected texts; it pertains to literary texts qua mythopoeisis, where the bits and pieces and echoes from myth and other works are
usually much more important than they may appear at first. As Northrop Frye (1970) has shown,

Literature may have life, reality, experience, nature, imaginative truth, social conditions, or what you will for its content; but literature itself is not made out of these things. Poetry can only be made out of other poems; novels out of other novels. (p. 97)

This is not a charter for validation of source hunting; it is a cue that in close reading, the echoes and resonances are always well worth following up as potential leads to interpretation.

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