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A Stylistic Analysis of the Metaphor of 'Night' In Wole Soyinka's *Night*

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Abstract

This study presents a stylistic analysis of the metaphor of 'night' in Wole Soyinka's poem *Night*, exploring its linguistic and literary significance. Adopting a stylistic approach, the paper examines how Soyinka employs the metaphor of night to convey complex themes of mystery, transcendence, and the interplay between light and darkness. Through a close reading of the poem, the study investigates the poet's use of diction, imagery, and syntactic structures to construct a multifaceted representation of night as both a physical and metaphysical entity. The analysis reveals that night, in Soyinka's poetic vision, functions as a symbol of both creative inspiration and existential uncertainty, reflecting the poet's engagement with African cosmology and philosophical thought. Furthermore, the paper discusses the implications of this metaphor for a broader understanding of Soyinka's poetic style, highlighting his intricate use of language to evoke deep emotional and intellectual responses. The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Soyinka's poetry and demonstrate the richness of metaphor as a stylistic device in African literature.

Keywords

African poetry, Imagery, Metaphor, Night, Stylistic Analysis, Wole Soyinka

Introduction

The phenomenon of language is a complex one; hence, the need for a sophisticated approach to study it and this is the reason why a science has evolved to examine all its manifestations – this science is called linguistics. What is language? Language has

been variously defined by scholars but what seems to be the meeting point of the definitions is that language is a means of communication. Mcarthur (1996) also defines language as a human form of communication which uses structured vocal sounds and can be embodied in other media

such as writing, print and physical signs. In a similar vein, Murthy (2007) sees language as the medium of communication through which we express our emotions, ideas, feelings and thought to our fellow people. This presupposes that any medium through which there is a transaction of human meaning can be regarded as language. This is why language is usually divided into two basic categories: verbal language and non-verbal language. The former refers to a mode of human communication characterised by the use of vocal signs which may be spoken or written while the latter is a mode of human communication which employs non-oral signs such as movement of the body, gesticulation, etc.

Adebayo (2013) believes that language has domains. He explains that since language is related to many things and for linguistics, the scientific study of language, to be truly scientific, there is the need for it to look into all those things with which language has relation. This, Adebayo (2013) believes, called for the various branches of linguistics. One of these branches is Stylistics. According to Mikov (2013), the hunger to recognise that language should be studied in relation to its style in various domains motivated German linguist and philosopher,

Wilhelm von Humboldt, to title one of the chapters in his book, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss* (translated as *On the diversity of human language and its influence on the spiritual development of the human race*) *Functional Style*. Though Wilhelm's observation at the beginning was not purely linguistic; it was later developed into a purely scientific field by subsequent scholars. This endeavour and several others gave birth to the branch of linguistics called Stylistics. Stylistic analysis, as a methodological approach, offers particular advantages in examining metaphorical deployment. Simpson (2014, 2004) and Leech and Short (2007) have demonstrated how linguistic analysis can illuminate the aesthetic and ideological dimensions of literary language. The application of stylistic methodology to Soyinka's work builds upon established critical approaches while offering new insights into his metaphorical strategies.

As a stylistic tool, the study of metaphor in African literature has emerged as a critical area of scholarly inquiry, with researchers increasingly recognising the centrality of figurative language in articulating postcolonial experience (Ashcroft et al., 2013). Conceptual metaphor theory, as

developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), provides a robust framework for understanding how metaphorical thinking shapes both literary expression and cultural cognition. Within this theoretical paradigm, metaphors are not merely decorative linguistic features but fundamental cognitive structures that organise human understanding of abstract concepts. Recent scholarship in African literary criticism has emphasised the importance of indigenous metaphorical systems in postcolonial writing, with critics such as Ogaga Okuyade (2019) and Pius Adesanmi (2016) highlighting how African writers employ traditional symbolic frameworks to negotiate contemporary realities. This scholarly trajectory positions metaphorical analysis as essential to understanding the cultural politics embedded within African literary texts. The relationship between metaphorical language and cultural identity formation represents a crucial dimension of postcolonial literary study. Homi Bhabha's (2004) concept of cultural hybridity provides insight into how African writers negotiate between indigenous and metropolitan literary traditions. Wole Soyinka's metaphorical practice exemplifies this negotiation, drawing on Yoruba

cosmological concepts while engaging with universal themes of human experience.

The 'night' metaphor in African cultural contexts carries specific connotations relating to ancestral communication, spiritual transformation, and communal ritual practice. Understanding these cultural resonances is essential for accurate interpretation of Soyinka's metaphorical deployment. Recent anthropological studies (Drewal, 2018; Barber, 2016) have illuminated the symbolic significance of darkness within Yoruba traditional practice, providing crucial context for literary analysis. The continued relevance of Soyinka's work to contemporary African and global contexts justifies sustained critical attention. Current discussions surrounding authoritarianism, cultural authenticity, and postcolonial identity find resonance in his metaphorical explorations of darkness and illumination. The 'night' metaphor, as deployed by Soyinka, speaks to universal human experiences while maintaining specific cultural moorings. Recent political developments across Africa have renewed interest in Soyinka's political writing, with scholars noting the prescient quality of his metaphorical articulations of authoritarian governance (Adeleke, 2020; Okonkwo,

2021). This contemporary relevance underscores the importance of understanding his metaphorical strategies for current literary and political discourse. Furthermore, the application of contemporary stylistic methodology to African literary texts contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonise literary criticism through attention to linguistic and cultural specificity. This approach acknowledges the sophisticated literary techniques employed by African writers to avoid the cultural imperialism implicit in purely Western critical frameworks.

Soyinka's contribution to world literature extends beyond his Nobel Prize recognition to encompass his role as a cultural theorist and political activist. His theoretical concept of the "fourth stage" – the transitional realm between the living, the dead, the unborn, and the gods – provides crucial context for understanding his metaphorical practice (Soyinka, 1976). This philosophical framework illuminates how 'night' functions within his literary imagination as a space of transformation and revelation. The political dimensions of Soyinka's work cannot be divorced from his metaphorical practice. His experiences of imprisonment during Nigeria's civil war, documented in *The Man*

Died (1972), inform his understanding of darkness as both literal confinement and metaphorical representation of political oppression. This biographical context enriches the interpretative possibilities surrounding his deployment of night imagery.

Critical scholarship on Soyinka has established his mastery of metaphorical language while acknowledging the complexity of his symbolic systems. James Gibbs (2019) and Biodun Jeyifo (2012) have examined various aspects of Soyinka's literary technique, yet comprehensive stylistic analysis of specific metaphorical patterns remains underexplored. This research gap provides justification for focused examination of the 'night' metaphor in Soyinka's poem of the same name. The choice of 'night' as the focus of analysis reflects both its prominence within Soyinka's corpus and its cultural significance within African literary tradition. This metaphor serves as a productive site for exploring the intersection of linguistic technique, cultural meaning, and political expression that characterises Soyinka's literary achievement. It is therefore important to study how Soyinka explored its use – alongside other stylistic devices – to pass his messages and

meaning across and bring the text closer to the readers through meaningful interpretations.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Concept of Metaphor

Simpson (2014) describes metaphor as an important feature of Cognitive Stylistics, which is interested in the way we transfer mental constructs and in the way we map one mental representation onto another when we read texts. He said Stylisticians have consistently drawn attention to this system of conceptual transfer in both literary and in everyday discourse, hence the identification of metaphor along with metonymy as figures of speech and means through which conceptual transfers are carried out.

According to Abrams and Harpham (2015), a metaphor is a figure of speech that is used for rhetorical effect to directly refer to one thing by mentioning another. They posit that it may provide or obscure clarity or identify hidden similarities between two ideas. They add that metaphors are often compared to other types of figurative language, such as antithesis, hyperbole, metonymy and simile. One of the most commonly cited examples of a metaphor in English literature comes from

the "All the world's a stage" monologue from *As You Like It*:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely
players;
They have their exits and their
entrances ...”

(William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*)

Against the above literary view of metaphor, some theorists have suggested that metaphors are not merely stylistic, but cognitively important as well. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, thought and action – and not just in language. The duo described metaphor as a comparison that shows how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in another important way. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) explain how a metaphor is simply understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another with the example that a speaker can put ideas or objects into containers, and then send them along a conduit to a listener who removes the object from the container to make meaning of it. They explained that communication is something that ideas go into and the container is separate from the ideas themselves. The authors suggested that communication can be viewed as a machine: “Communication is not

what one does with the machine, but is the machine itself.”

However, Richards (1937) postulates that a metaphor has two parts: the tenor and the vehicle. Richards (1937) says the tenor is the subject to which attributes are ascribed while the vehicle is the object whose attributes are borrowed. For example, in the *As You Like It* extract above, “*the world*” is compared to a stage, describing it with the attributes of “*the stage*”; “*the world*” is the tenor, and “*a stage*” is the vehicle; “*men and women*” is the secondary tenor, and “*players*” is the secondary vehicle. But Simpson (2004) says a metaphor is a process of mapping between two different conceptual domains. He said the different domains are known as the target domain and the source domain. He said, “The target domain is the topic or concept that you want to describe through the metaphor while the source domain refers to the concept that you draw upon in order to create the metaphorical construction.”

Etymological and Cultural Dimensions of Night

The term *night*, derived from the Old English *niht*, stems from the Proto-Germanic *nahts* and Proto-Indo-European root *nókʷts*, related to Latin *nox* and Greek *nyx* (Harper, 2023).

Though originally denoting a period of darkness, over time it has attracted symbolic and cultural meanings. In African cultures, especially among the Yoruba, *night* signifies a sacred temporal space where spiritual activities occur. It is traditionally associated with ancestors, deities, and mystical experiences (Abimbola, 1997). The night provides a backdrop for rituals, dreams, and metaphysical transitions. Soyinka, drawing from this indigenous cosmology, imbues *night* with layered significance—rendering it a site for both fear and transcendence, mortality and rebirth. In essence, *night* in Soyinka's poetic metaphor serves as a palimpsest, bearing traces of Western etymological development while being inscribed with African spiritual and cultural realities. The concept of night transcends mere temporal darkness, embodying rich symbolic and cultural significances across diverse literary traditions. In African literary discourse, night represents a complex metaphorical landscape that intertwines historical, psychological, and cultural narratives.

Etymologically, the concept of night connects to primordial human experiences of vulnerability, mystery, and transformation. According to Okpewho (2016), night in

African literary traditions serves multiple conceptual functions such as being a metaphysical realm bridging human and spiritual experiences; a space of collective memory and ancestral wisdom; and a symbolic representation of historical and political oppression. In postcolonial literature, *night* often emerges as a metaphor of darkness not only in a literal sense but also in relation to colonial subjugation, identity loss, exile, and resistance. African writers have used *night* to symbolise the psychological and socio-political conditions imposed by colonialism. Chinua Achebe (1958), for instance, portrays colonial intrusion as a form of darkness descending upon indigenous civilisations. Similarly, Soyinka's use of *night* in his poem transcends physical obscurity; it connotes a journey into the unknown—a metaphorical voyage through spiritual and political uncertainty.

Politically, *night* has served as a metaphor for oppression, dictatorship, and the loss of civil liberties, particularly in African literary and dramatic traditions. Soyinka, who was detained during Nigeria's civil strife, frequently uses the motif of darkness to critique authoritarianism and systemic injustice. In the context of *Night*, the metaphor evokes not only personal darkness

but also societal breakdown. As Soyinka (1972) explains in his prison memoir *The Man Died*, the darkness of incarceration reflects broader political decay. Thus, night stands for the suffocating silence imposed by tyranny, the invisibility of truth, and the terror of state violence. Fanon (1961) suggests that such metaphorical representations are crucial in articulating the psychological and political experiences of colonised peoples, transforming night from a temporal concept into a profound symbolic landscape of struggle and potential liberation.

Moreover, *night* becomes a potent symbol of rupture, liminality, and transformation in works by authors like Derek Walcott and Ben Okri. As a transitional moment, night in postcolonial literature enables a re-imagining of identity and history from the margins (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2013). Soyinka's metaphorical night, thus, belongs within a broader literary discourse where darkness enables critique, survival, and artistic illumination. The metaphor of night is potent in expressing collective disillusionment and resistance. It calls attention to the “nightfall” of moral leadership and the shadow that haunts postcolonial nationhood. In the context of African postcolonial literature, night emerges

as a powerful political metaphor. It symbolises the darkness of colonial oppression; periods of political repression and resistance and potential for revolutionary transformation. Postcolonial literature employs night as a potent metaphorical construct that goes beyond literal darkness. Scholars like Ashcroft et al. (2002) argue that night becomes a strategic linguistic device for:

- a) representing colonial subjugation;
- b) articulating resistance and psychological liberation; and
- c) negotiating complex identities in post-imperial contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

The foundational work of Lakoff and Johnson (2003) revolutionised understanding of metaphor from mere linguistic ornamentation to fundamental cognitive structures that organise human thought and experience. Their conceptual metaphor theory posits that metaphors are not simply matters of language but of thought and action, arguing that human conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphorical in nature. This theoretical framework proves particularly relevant to literary analysis as it

provides tools for understanding how metaphorical language shapes both textual meaning and reader interpretation. The theory's core principles include:

- **Systematicity:** Metaphorical mappings are not random but follow systematic patterns based on experiential correlations
- **Unidirectionality:** Metaphorical mappings typically proceed from concrete source domains to abstract target domains
- **Partial Mapping:** Only selected aspects of source domains are mapped onto target domains
- **Cultural Grounding:** Metaphorical systems are shaped by cultural experience and social context

Building upon this foundation, Kövecses (2010) advanced the study of cultural variation in metaphorical thinking, demonstrating how different cultural contexts generate distinct metaphorical mappings for universal human experiences. His work on cultural metaphors provides crucial insights for analysing African literary texts, as it acknowledges the culturally specific dimensions of metaphorical understanding while maintaining attention to

cross-cultural patterns of metaphorical cognition. Semino (2008) and Semino et al (2018) further develop these insights through her analysis of metaphor in literary discourse, arguing that literary metaphors often challenge conventional conceptual mappings while drawing upon established metaphorical frameworks. Her work demonstrates how literary texts exploit the creative potential of metaphorical language to generate new understanding and emotional responses, a perspective particularly relevant to postcolonial literary contexts where writers often subvert conventional symbolic systems.

The theory is adopted as the primary theoretical framework because it provides: **systematic analytical procedures** for identifying and analysing metaphorical patterns; **cognitive grounding** that explains why certain metaphorical mappings are more effective than others; **cultural sensitivity** that acknowledges the role of cultural experience in shaping metaphorical understanding; and **empirical foundation** supported by extensive research in cognitive linguistics and psychology. The theory integrates these perspectives to create a comprehensive analytical approach by recognising the multidimensional nature of metaphorical representation; employing

interdisciplinary methodological strategies; maintaining sensitivity to cultural and historical contexts; exploring the dynamic interplay between linguistic form and cultural meaning; close textual analysis; looking at contextual historical investigation; revealing linguistic and semiotic deconstruction; creating a comparative cultural analysis; and providing interdisciplinary interpretative strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design with a focus on literary stylistic analysis. The research design is interpretive, employing close textual analysis in the examination of the metaphorical representation of 'night' in Wole Soyinka's selected work. The approach allowed for an in-depth examination of linguistic and literary devices, emphasising the interpretative nature of literary criticism. The study utilised purposive sampling to select specific texts from the poem for analysis. The metaphors involving *night* and its various constructs were the focus of the study's analyses. The poem was chosen due to its explicit use of night as a metaphorical construct; significant thematic development around nocturnal imagery; representation of

different literary genres in Soyinka's work. Data collection involved a comprehensive textual analysis and close reading of the selected poem as well as a systematic documentation of metaphorical instances and contextual interpretation of night metaphors. Data analysis followed a structured qualitative content analysis approach, which involved comprehensive text scanning, identification of night-related metaphorical instances, explanation of metaphorical representations and interpretative analysis.

ANALYSIS OF THE METAPHOR OF 'NIGHT' AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Stylistics is a combination of linguistic analysis and literary criticism. The study is an intensive study of metaphor through a close textual analysis of the poem, *Night*. Below is the text of the poem:

Night
Your hand is heavy, Night,
upon my brow,
I bear no heart mercuric like
the clouds, to dare.
Exacerbation from your
subtle plough.

Woman as a clam, on the sea's
crescent.
I saw your jealous eye quench the
sea's

Fluorescence, dance on the pulse
incessant

Of the waves. And I stood, drained
Submitting like the sands, blood and
brine
Coursing to the roots. Night, you
rained

Serrated shadows through dank
leaves
Till, bathed in warm suffusion of your
dappled cells
Sensations pained me, faceless, silent
as night thieves.

Hide me now, when night children
haunt the earth
I must hear none! These misted calls
will yet
Undo me; naked, unbidden, at Night's
muted birth.

Summarily, the poet describes nightfall and its effect on him. Through a series of images he conjures up a picture of the insidious yet approach of night to which he must submit, the silhouettes that are characteristic of night due to the play of light, the mist that announces evening and the warmth that is generally felt in the early part of night in the tropics. There is an impression of self-identification, of the poet being merged in the landscape he is describing. But paradoxically, there is a hint of terror, because night also is the time when evil people operate. And the poet asks to be

hidden and protected from the evil forces. There is here a suggestion of the complexity of night – it provides rest, it terrifies and it provides cover.

Wole Soyinka's poem "Night" presents a complex tapestry of metaphorical representations that transform the concept of night from a mere temporal phenomenon into a profound symbolic entity. This analysis will deconstruct the multiple layers of meaning embedded in Soyinka's metaphorical construction of night, examining the linguistic, cultural, and philosophical dimensions that emerge from the text. Language has been the primary vehicle through which literature – in all its forms – pass across its message and delivers its aesthetic beauty. It is in this light that the linguistic elements of the poem would be examined below to unveil the metaphor therein. As explained above, metaphor could be both literal and conceptual. However, in this study, both sets of concept would be examined.

Metaphorically, the poem presents the complexities of night as known to human beings. Night is a time of the day when rest is most sought after by most human beings after a hard day's job. It is also the time of the day when some seek one form of enjoyment or

the other to calm their nerves after the day's work. While some seek to rest at night, some others use the cover of the night to perpetrate evil acts, which is metaphorically and ironically their own ways of earning a living.

Night as Sentient Being/Personification

The most immediate metaphorical representation in the poem is the personification of night as a sentient entity with agency and power:

*Your hand is heavy, Night, upon my
brow*

This opening line establishes night not as an abstract concept but as an active force capable of physical interaction with the speaker. The capitalisation of "Night" throughout the poem reinforces this personification, elevating it to the status of a proper noun—a being rather than merely a period of darkness (Okpewho, 2010). This personification creates what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identify as an ontological metaphor, where an abstract concept is granted the properties of a living entity. These apostrophic addresses establish a dialogic relationship between the speaker and night, suggesting an intimate communion between human consciousness and cosmic force. According to Nyamndi (2006), such

personification in African poetry often draws from traditional cosmological perspectives where natural phenomena are understood as animate and conscious entities. From the first description of night in the first stanza of the poem, Soyinka employs metaphor. The poet writes: *Your hand is heavy, Night, upon my brow*. Although, literally, this line could be referred to as personification as it gives human attributes to an inanimate object – ascribing a hand to Night and describing same as *heavy*. But a stylistic examination of this reveals that it is one of the metaphorical elements of night in the poem. The poet describes the effect that night has on him with the words *hand* and *heavy*. These words reveal that the poet reverts night as the events and the mystery surrounding that time of the day bear a toll on him.

Night as Cultivator/Agricultural Metaphor

A subtle but significant metaphorical layer emerges in the lines:

*I bear no heart mercuric like the clouds, to
dare*

Exacerbation from your subtle plough.

Here, night is metaphorically represented as a cultivator with a “subtle plough.” This

agricultural metaphor transforms night into a force that tills the soil of human consciousness, suggesting a generative potential within darkness. The plough, an instrument of cultivation, implies that night is not merely a passive state but an active process of transformation and potential growth. This metaphorical construction aligns with what Quayson (1997) identifies as a recurrent trope in African literature—the representation of natural forces as participants in cycles of destruction and renewal. The metaphor suggests that night’s darkness, rather than representing mere absence, contains the potential for future fruition.

The above lines further describe the metaphorical nature of the poem. Complementing the first line, the poet persona metaphorically describes how he could not stop the night from carrying on its actions or the activities going on in it. The words *bear, mercuric* and the phrase *like the clouds* although could be literally described as a simile as used in line 2, but the ending of the line, which has the words *to dare* has effectively combined with the third line to make the idea created by the lines metaphorical. The poet persona does not have a lively or active (mercuric) heart like the

clouds, which are usually beautiful at night. The persona cannot stop the night from ticking away and he cannot also worsen the situations going on in the night. This is described in the words in the third line, which enjamb from the second line.

Night as Container/Spatial Metaphor

Throughout the poem, night is metaphorically constructed as a spatial dimension—a container with depth and interiority:

...Night, you rained

Serrated shadows through dank leaves

*Till, bathed in warm suffusion of your
dappled cells*

*Sensations pained me, faceless, silent as
night thieves. (Soyinka, Night)*

This representation transforms night from a temporal concept into a spatial one, creating what cognitive linguists term a container metaphor (Kövecses, 2010). Night becomes not simply a time but a place—a dimension with an interior that contains stillness and potential. The spatial metaphor is reinforced through references to night's "unbroken sleep" and the invitation to "flatten pinnacles in memory," suggesting that night possesses depth and topography. This spatial conceptualisation transforms night into a

landscape that can be navigated and inhabited, rather than merely experienced temporally. The last line of the third stanza, which also run into the fourth stanza, further explain the metaphor of night in the poem.

A cursory look at the lines above reveals the conceptual metaphor hidden therein. The poet further described the elements that make the night beautiful but also fearsome. Night *rained/ Serrated shadows through dank leaves*. This expression is a metaphorical description of what plants look like at night. They are *dank* (damp and cold) after the expiration of the day's sun. Hence, they create shadows that are uneven and unequal in length (*serrated*). Night also makes the plants *faceless, silent as night thieves* after it has marked them with spots of colour (*dappled*). This means that the poet acknowledges that a part of the evil-doers in the night are thieves, who are mostly masked (*faceless*) and carry out their activities quietly (*silent*) like the night plants, whose only sound mostly come from the night's gentle breeze.

Night as Psychological State

Beyond physical and spatial representations, Soyinka constructs night as a metaphor for psychological states:

*Serrated shadows through
dank leaves
Till, bathed in warm
suffusion of your dappled cells
Sensations pained me,
faceless, silent as night thieves.*

Night becomes a metaphor for a form of consciousness—a meditative state characterised by unbroken contemplation and the potential for strange communion. This psychological metaphor transforms night from an external phenomenon into an internal state of being. Jeyifo (2012) argues that Soyinka frequently employs natural phenomena as metaphors for psychological states, creating a bridge between external reality and internal experience. In this construction, night is not merely darkness in the external world but a state of mind—a psychological disposition characterised by depth, calm, and potential revelation.

In the last stanza, the metaphor of night in the poem reaches its crescendo as the poet – apparently enveloped by the fear and beauty being described from the first stanza –

entreats night to protect him from the evil of itself. The poet writes:

*Hide me now, when night
children haunt the earth
I must hear none! These
misted calls will yet
Undo me; naked, unbidden,
at Night's muted birth. (Soyinka,
Night)*

The three lines of the last stanza create a metaphorical image of the evils that go on in the night – when every evil-doer comes out to carry out their nefarious activities. The clause *when night children haunt the earth* metaphorically explains that a lot of activities are carried out by *night children* as they *haunt the earth*. The poet seeks cover by pleading with night to *hide me now...* and commanding that *I must hear none...* also metaphorically explains how bad these actions could be for refuge to be sought from them.

Night as Primordial Force

A deeper metaphorical layer emerges when night is constructed as a primordial cosmic force:

*Woman as a clam, on the
sea's crescent.*

*I saw your jealous eye
quench the sea's*

*Fluorescence, dance on the
pulse incessant*

*Hide me now, when night
children haunt the earth*

*I must hear none! These
misted calls will yet*

*Undo me; naked, unbidden,
at Night's muted birth*

Though not directly naming night, this extract creates an association between night, the feminine, and primordial origins. The crescent beach evokes lunar imagery traditionally associated with night, while the image of the woman/clam bearing the “world’s tears” suggests night as a container of primordial suffering and experience. This metaphorical construction draws from what Gates (1988) identifies as a common feature in African literary traditions—the representation of cosmic forces through gendered imagery that connects natural phenomena to mythic origins. Night becomes not merely darkness but a generative, feminine cosmic principle containing both suffering and potential renewal.

Night as Epistemological Metaphor

Arguably the most profound metaphorical construction is night as an epistemological state—a way of knowing and understanding:

The invitation to “hide me now...” suggests that night represents a particular form of consciousness where hierarchies of knowledge are dissolved. This metaphorically constructs night not merely as absence of light but as a different mode of knowing—one characterised by flatness rather than prominence, calm rather than agitation. According to Irele (2001), Soyinka frequently employs night as a metaphor for alternative epistemologies—ways of knowing that exist beyond rational daylight thinking. Night becomes a metaphor for intuitive, non-hierarchical understanding that contrasts with the supposedly clear vision of daylight rationality.

Furthermore, the use of the words and phrases *Night*, *Serrated shadows*, *night children*, *naked*, *Night's muted birth*, *misted calls* and *warm suffusion* all points to the metaphor of Night in the poem as they help to pass across the meaning as generated by the poet.

Dialectical Tensions within the Night Metaphor

A critical aspect of Soyinka's metaphorical construction is the dialectical tension between seemingly contradictory properties attributed to night:

- *Night is both heavy ("Your hand is heavy") and subtle ("your subtle plough")*

- *Night contains both potency and calm*

- *Night is addressed both as an external entity and invoked as an internal state*

This dialectical construction creates what McClintock (2006) terms a "doubling" effect, where the metaphor simultaneously operates at multiple levels of meaning. Night becomes a complex metaphorical construct that resists simple binary oppositions, instead embodying complementary contradictions.

Stylistic Significance of Night Metaphors

The stylistic analysis reveals several significant features in Soyinka's metaphorical construction of night:

1. **Multidimensional Symbolism:** Night functions simultaneously as a physical entity, psychological state, epistemological condition, and primordial force.

2. **Cultural Synthesis:** The metaphorical representations draw from both indigenous African cosmological perspectives and modernist literary techniques.
3. **Linguistic Innovation:** The poem transforms conventional understanding of night through unexpected collocations and semantic shifts.
4. **Metaphorical Density:** Multiple metaphorical constructions are layered within a relatively brief text, creating remarkable semantic density.
5. **Dialectical Representation:** The metaphorical constructions embrace seemingly contradictory properties, creating a complex symbolic system.

The analysis of "Night" reveals Soyinka's exceptional ability to transform a conventional concept through sophisticated metaphorical construction. Night emerges not as a simple absence of light but as a complex, multidimensional symbolic construct that operates simultaneously across physical, psychological, epistemological, and cosmological domains. The metaphorical representations in the poem reflect both Soyinka's rootedness in Yoruba cosmological traditions and his engagement

with modernist poetic techniques. The night metaphors function as a bridge between cultural perspectives, demonstrating the potential of poetic language to transform conventional understanding through imaginative reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis carried out and the findings, it can be said that the use of language is a significant part of the metaphorical meaning of the poem as it reveals the message, themes and context. The language is not straightforward as there are deviations which foreground the elements of metaphor in the work. The research reveals that Soyinka's metaphorical deployment of 'night' transcends mere literary device, emerging as a profound symbolic system that encapsulates multiple layers of meaning. Night, in Soyinka's literary universe, operates as a complex metaphorical landscape that simultaneously portends that:

- a) The metaphor of night functions as a powerful allegorical representation of colonial oppression, political darkness, and the struggle for cultural and national liberation. It symbolises periods of historical obscurity and the challenges of postcolonial reconstruction.
- b) Night emerges as a metaphorical space of introspection, representing human psychological depths, existential uncertainties, and the profound internal struggles of individual and collective consciousness.
- c) Soyinka's night metaphor is deeply rooted in African cosmological understanding, integrating traditional mythological perspectives with contemporary literary expression. It reflects a nuanced interaction between indigenous symbolic systems and modern literary techniques.
- d) The study demonstrates Soyinka's exceptional ability to manipulate linguistic resources, transforming the metaphor of night into a dynamic, multidimensional semantic construct that challenges conventional representational strategies.

The research conclusively establishes that Soyinka's metaphorical treatment of night is not merely a stylistic choice but a profound philosophical and artistic statement. It represents a complex interpretative framework through which broader existential, cultural, and political narratives are articulated and explored. Theoretically, the study contributes to the understanding of

metaphorical construction in postcolonial literature, offering insights into how literary metaphors can function as sophisticated systems of meaning-making. Methodologically, it demonstrates the potential of integrated stylistic analysis in uncovering the intricate layers of literary texts. By revealing the sophisticated metaphorical strategies employed by Soyinka, this research underscores the power of literary language to transcend literal representation, creating complex symbolic universes that engage with profound human experiences and cultural dynamics. The study contributes to the body of work on the implicative impact of 'night' in African literature as well as the body of work on stylistics – particularly metaphor. The study also creates a room for further examination of how Soyinka employs 'night' in his other body of works.

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