Poetry's Two Estates and Shared Meanings: the Grounds of Comparative Literature

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Abstract: Literature is studied in different ways and at different levels: as works, namely the productions of geniuses, or in Heidegger's sense of made things, which at the same time share with natural things the sense of being by themselves and self-sufficient; literary works are also studied as part of cultural phenomena and part or even the expression of a cultural tradition. In certain historical reconstructions, they may also be discussed as milestones and representative portrayals of the ethos and sensibility of a period. Their study as things making up a class of phenomena which can be compared among themselves is another level which, like the approaches focusing on the work as a self-sufficient entity, calls for specific kinds of expertise. Originality as an artistic requirement may lead in the study of literature to emphasis on the unique and distinctive features, which are easily identified at the surface level, whereas comparative studies are in real terms a challenge to explore literary phenomena in depth for shared core values. In this paper, these shared values are sought in the poetic image, found to be involved in the identity of literary works qua poetry, and serve as a basis of comparative literary studies.

Keywords: depth hermeneutics, depth semantics, form, meaning, mythical image, representation, red dragon, sign, symbol, tradition.

Introduction

Meaning is a theme of central importance in all theories of literature. In what Paul Ricoeur calls 'naïve semantics' of the text, it is both decidable and easily recovered at the textual surface. Hence some speak of it as a *message* which the work is supposed to convey; others as the intention which exercises the author and provided the impetus to write. In mythological analysis, on the other hand, 'depth semantics' is already taking place and meaning is discussed at a level where it is often not immediately utilizable. Poststructuralist readings, for their part, are exercised by meaning as a problem and the question of meaning is often found in the very conceptualisation of literature by such leading poststructuralist thinkers as Foucault, Derrida, and Paul Ricoeur. That question is really what is at stake in Foucault's account, where literature is said to have nothing 'to do but to curve back in a perpetual return upon itself, as if its discourse could have no other content than the expression of its own form' (2001: 326). In Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, it is explicitly stated that literature 'is meaning rethought as form' (4). It is clear here also that this activity of rethinking meaning as form is a process that never becomes completed and finalized; hence it is part of what Ricoeur calls 'tradition', which exists to be transmitted and to be interpreted in being transmitted (1974: 17). The pursuit of meaning in literature may therefore be in terms of practical criticism of the individual work; it may be in terms of a historical reflection on literature, that is a diachronic study of the career of meaning; and it may take place as comparative literary studies, which is the synchronic dimension. In this paper, I will argue that there are identical meanings which are found in different traditions of literature and may be thought to circulate within world literature. These are some of the things that make comparative literature possible. I shall also argue that these shared meanings go back a long way and have changed in some ways in the process of evolution and transmission.

'Meaning Rethought as Form'

Myth criticism provides us with identifiable patterns of significance which recur in various forms throughout human cultural traditions. There are frequently occurring ones like crime and punishment, quest sequence, the knowledge seeker, the year god, the rough beast, mistaken identities, and the *pharmakos*. I will consider one that does not occur very frequently, the red dragon, which is in fact related to the rough beast, but differing in having a self-defined and self-centred goal and malignancy, whereas the rough beast is unmotivated and amoral. These patterns may be encountered in folktales as well as in 'highbrow' literature (Kettle, 1960). According to Stevens in *Archetype: A Natural History of the Self*,

> there are indeed … universally recurring symbols and motifs, and … these forms have been subject to the essentially biological processes of evolution (Quoted by Knox, 2005: 17).

Words like symbol, myth, significance, and archetype all come under what Cassirer calls 'symbolic forms'. They are *native* to humanity and are traced to the moment in the evolution of consciousness when language, myth, and art form one undivided unity (*Language and Myth* 93). They travel over time under the impulse of meaning which, according to Jean Knox 'implies a symbol'. Encounter with this symbol is as 'a representation' (18).

> The rough beast, the year god, the knowledge seeker, and the red dragon are representations which embody meanings. The red dragon, for instance, is encountered in the Book of Revelation

> Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, robed with the sun, standing on the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant, and in labour, crying aloud in the pangs of childbirth. Then a second sign appeared in the sky: there was a huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and each of the

seven heads crowned with a coronet. Its tail swept a third of the stars from the sky and hurled them to the ground, and the dragon stopped in front of the woman as she was at the point of giving birth, so that it could eat the child as soon as it was born. The woman was delivered of a boy, the son who was to rule all the nations with an iron sceptre, and the child was taken straight up to God and to his throne, while the woman escaped into the desert, where God had prepared a place for her to be looked after for twelve hundred and sixty days (Rev 12.1-6).

Two major and contrasting symbols are shown in the narrative: the woman clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, and crowned with twelve stars and the 'second sign', the 'huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and each of the seven heads crowned with a coronet'. The woman is a huge cosmic image and causes the heavenly luminaries to configure around her, while the huge red dragon is creating disorder, dissent, and division, sweeping a third of the stars of heaven with his tail and hurling them to the ground. Another major presence is God. But he is without 'representation'. This entity is what the philosophers call *being* itself: fullness.

God exercises a will with respect to the government of the nations, and the new born is the one designated to bring this to fulfilment. So the child is a bearer of meaning, the one 'who was to rule all the nations'. His mission has been assigned in an explicit way; the instrument by which this mission is assigned is recoverable somewhere; and one who has read this narrative, encountering that instrument (again), will not fail to make the connection that this is *he* – which recalls a Johannine passage: 'When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He' (Jn 8.28). His identity is given somewhere else. To know him is to be able to match the individual here and now with what is given elsewhere. In short, there is something of *sumbolon* about him, that is, – 'each of two halves or corresponding pieces of [some] object which two … contracting parties, broke between them, each party keeping one piece, in order to have proof of the identity' (*The Greek-English Lexicon* 1676). This child *stands* for something, in contrast to

God who does not stand for anything, but is himself, and subject of intentions. What the child stands for includes openness to the doing of the will of God. And he is linked to the woman not only in being her offspring, but also in their common alignment to the doing of the will of God.

Similarly, the red dragon stands for something: opposition to the will of God. So determined he is to oppose the doing of the will of God that he would eat and destroy the child who was going to do it. So the dragon is also symbolic and the meanings held together in this symbol include opposition to the will of God, blind hate, cruel destructiveness, and pitilessness, and unthinking readiness to destroy anything and everything on its path to the achieving of an aim.

The red dragon is seen elsewhere in the Bible, though without that name. The Herod of Matthew's Infancy Narrative is certainly a human being, but by his behaviour turns out to match the red dragon as a *sumbolon.* We read that,

> Herod was furious on realizing that he had been fooled by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or less, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men (Mt 2:16).

In the massacre of male children of Bethlehem and the surrounding district in his pursuit of one little child who he has already ascertained to be the Messiah, Herod matches the red dragon. But some of the meanings of the red dragon symbol have become more clearly manifest in him: the murderous hate born of envy and fear, the vengefulness, the suspiciousness, the ruthlessness, and cunning. The features are so pronounced in him that his name could equally serve as the name of the symbol. His name could displace, or as Derrida says, become representation in the sense of 'what takes the place of, what occupies the place of, another' (1973: 49).

In both of these biblical encounters with the red dragon, representation is by narration and transmission is as part of religious scriptures. But the meanings rethought

and enriched in the rethinking are available as a *sumbolon*, that is, one of a matching pair of objects, for use in characterising other figures and understanding other situations. Nero in Seneca's *Octavia* is an example of the red dragon figure. This can be seen in the stichomythic dialogue with Seneca following his arbitrary order to execute two perceived enemies, Plautus and Sulla:

> SENECA: Fear thou the more, that so great power is thine.
>
> NERO: My fortune doth allow all things to me.
>
> SENECA: Indulgent fortune trust more cautiously; she is a fickle goddess.
>
> NERO: 'Tis a dullard's part not to know what he may do.
>
> SENECA: 'Tis praiseworthy to do, not what one may, but what one ought.
>
> NERO: Him who lies down the crowd trample on.
>
> SENECA: Him whom they hate, they crush.
>
> NERO: The sword protects the Prince,
>
> SENECA: Still better, loyalty.
>
> NERO: A Caesar should be feared.
>
> SENECA: But more be loved.
>
> NERO: But men must fear
>
> SENECA: What is compelled is burdensome.
>
> NERO: Let them obey our orders.
>
> SENECA: Give righteous orders —
>
> NERO: I shall myself decide.
>
> SENECA: which the general thought may ratify.
>
> NERO: Reverence for the sword will ratify them (450-461).

Nero is driven by his desires and wishes. He recognizes no external constraint of any kind. Action is based on what he may permit himself to do, whether or not he has the means to do it, and the force to withstand opposition and compel obedience. This attitude was to give rise to what was known as the Reign of Terror under the French Revolution,

although the leaders of this revolution were presumably pursuing a certain conception of social order and political culture based on principles outside themselves. This is why to this day some social thinkers continue to pay court to the 'ideal' of the French Revolution. Nero, however, sees his own desires and wishes as supreme reality. In the above he displays great arrogance, but also unveils another dimension of meaning in the symbolism of the red dragon, namely that underlying his arrogant abuse of power and murderous egotism is fear: 'Him who lies down the crowd trample on'. It is in fact Seneca's use of the 'ought sentence … the primary linguistic form in which morality finds expression' (Habermas, 1994: 40), that causes him to lose his cool. The whole idea of a morality which might be binding upon him is intolerable to him.

Like all figures of the red dragon, Nero will override and trample anything and everything in the bid to attain his aim. Nothing matters to him; nothing has value, except the object he has in view, whatever this may be. He is the centre of his own universe and wants everything else to circulate around himself. In vain Seneca tries to get him to factor into his thinking the unknown: whether he can attain his aim; whether he can keep it in his control when attained, and for how long.

There is no evidence of knowledge of the biblical tradition of the red dragon in Seneca's *Octavia*. In point of fact, the meanings associated with that symbol do not originate in the Bible, nor is it a question of meanings evolving independently in another culture. There is rather a common origin in the moment of emergence of consciousness. But the meanings continue to be rethought, and we are seeing further dimensions of them in representation of Nero/the red dragon in *Octavia.* The 'red dragon' is of course a biblical figure. It has become a *sign* freighted with meaning, not in I. A. Richards's sense of a 'vehicle', but rather in Derrida's sense of 'the charged signifier' (*Of Grammatology* 286*)*, 'charged with history' (289), and '*with making pass, from one subject to another, the identity* of a *signified* object, of a *meaning* or of a *concept* rightfully separable from the process of passage and from the signifying operation' (*Positions* 23). We are dealing with meanings

which pre-exist the moment of configuration with a name. And 'Herod' or 'Nero' may equally serve as the name, being a 'substantial embodiment' (Cassirer) of the old meanings with their new elaborations. These are storied names and they do indeed become bywords in the different traditions and cultures where they are encountered because, as Cassirer has shown,

> There is nothing beside or beyond it whereby it could be measured or to which it could be compared; its mere presence is the sum of all Being. At this point, the word which denotes that thought content is not a mere conventional symbol, but is merged with its object in an indissoluble unity. The conscious experience is not merely wedded to the word, but is consumed by it. Whatever has been fixed by a name, henceforth is not only real, but is Reality. The potential between "symbol" and "meaning" is resolved; in place of a more or less adequate "expression", we find a relation of identity, of complete congruence between "image" and "object," between the name and the thing (*Language and Myth* 58)

In the history of symbolic forms, there are human names that have been used for symbols and become 'consumed' by the meanings in question, such as Oedipus, Prometheus, Adam, and Faustus. These great symbols have tended to be transmitted in tragic sequences. Some like the red dragon seem to be amenable to both tragic sequences as in the Herod narrative and *Octavia*, as well as in the comic, as in the apocalyptic narrative. These are some of the modes in which literature may be encountered in any tradition of literature.

Biblical poetry, where some of the best known examples of apocalyptic literature are found, makes up one tradition of poetry. It is part of world literature precisely because of the recognizable meanings which link it to other poetic traditions. Czeslaw Milosz's imagery in which the poet has a participatory role 'in the management of the estate of poetry, [] that in his own language and also that of world poetry' (*The Book of Luminous Things* xv*)* will be trivial if understood in terms of helping to maintain by adding to the

archives in question. It says a great deal more if the meanings being transmitted in each traditions are human meanings, belonging to humanity, possession and the capability to process which are essential in what it means to be human. The rethinking the meaning in an individual poem, is at the same time its being rethought by the tradition and by humanity in its shared poetic forms.

The patterning of thought in dramatic form, for instance, opens up certain possibilities. The participant in a dialogue may receive information and be persuaded; there may be genuine communicative action in which the participants 'arrive rationally at agreement about goals and purposes' (Habermas 1971: 316); it can also fail to bring about intersubjectivity. In the above dialogue, Seneca's self-engagement to persuade and bring about a change of attitude on the part of Nero fails. The dialogue soon overheats from full lines to half-lines, Nero the first to become impatient and short, with his *Calcat iacentem vulgus* ('Him who lies down the crowd trample on'). His violent nature is reflected here, as well as unwillingness to consider any viewpoint but his own. So the dialogue is doomed from the beginning.

Art is of course a chief method of transmission of the symbol, the archetypal meanings which according to Derrida, literature ceaselessly rethinks – not in a rational mode, the way of philosophy, but within the format imposed by one form or another (*Writing and Difference* 4). For example, in *Octavia*, the successive moves by the participants in the discourse gives the impression of 'reciprocal respect', a requirement if practical discourse is to lead to a negotiated agreement, as it 'represents a reciprocal pragmatic condition of participants in interaction ascribing themselves rights and duties' in 'complete reciprocity' (Habermas, 1994: 44-45). But it is obvious that 'arguments and justifications' are ruled out as the means of reaching agreement mainly because of Nero's attitude.

The rethinking of meaning in art is not only as it is produced by form, it already implicates a diachronic process. Paul Ricoeur elucidates this process under what he calls 'tradition'.

> Interpretation does not spring from nowhere; rather, one interprets in order to make explicit, to extend, and so to keep alive the tradition itself, inside which one always remains. It is in this sense that the time of interpretation belongs in some way to the time of tradition. But tradition in return, even understood as the transmission of a *depositum*, remains a dead tradition if it is not the continual interpretation of this deposit: our "heritage" is not a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful and which by this very act is replenished. Every tradition lives by grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living (1974: 27).

There are traditions, but there is also tradition itself, and both have their histories. In each the content (*depositum)* is constantly rethought and reinterpreted; and this rethinking and re-interpretation is at the same time the handing on of that content. Therefore, even if we are dealing with, say, the same item of meaning over time, it changes somewhat in a new work where it is again encountered.

Africa and the Two Estates

The debate about the language of African literature was immediately succeeded by one on who was qualified to be a critic of African literature. Both those questions actually go back to Obiajunwa Wali (1961), when he demanded that African literature together with its criticism ought to be in African languages. The debate on the language of African literature did not bring about any appreciable change, because as I have shown elsewhere some dimensions of the question do not appear to have been opened up at all, particularly the aspect of the literary language, which was not ready and waiting, but needed to be

developed through focused, sustained, and creative effort. No doubt, the ready availability of English with its fully developed literary resources was a major reason why the effort to evolve an appropriate literary language for the vernacular was not undertaken. However, the use of English by the literary intellectuals had a major unintended consequence. The use and in fact adoption of the language of the former colonists was politically expedient, especially in multi-ethnic situations. But the failure of the leading cultural figures, the writers and critics, to contest this practice and instead falling in line with it was confirmation of control of the linguistic space by the languages of the former colonists in the newly independent countries. On the other hand, use of the vernacular for so significant a cultural production as literary art would not only have given the vernacular the basis and the means to contest domination of the linguistic space, it would have hampered the development of loyalty and sense of affiliation to a state created by an act of will of European powers as their overseas 'possession' and sphere of exclusive rights of exploitation.

The debate was noisy and hastily conducted; it then quickly blew over. Even more important is that it ended on a dogmatic note, settling on a view of literature as an instrument with which to do certain things and effect certain changes relevant to the being of society. On this note, what mattered was the task assigned literature, whether to teach the people that they had a civilization of their own and also where and how things went wrong in their history (Achebe), or whether to strive to gain control of power *metaphorically* on behalf of the people and re-engineering and re-structuring society to become more respectful and supportive of individual freedoms and aspirations (Soyinka); whether the business was the undermining and dismantling of the colonial infrastructure (Nkosi), protesting or leading protest against colonialism and neo-colonialism, imperialism, racism, and abuse of power, or following Arnold's notion of 'criticism of life', attempting to correct unenlightened ways, or following Sartre's theory of 'engagement', taking action to sniff out and expose imposture, corruption, and

malpractice and advocating ways to root out these – which was very common among the writers during the 1970s and 1980s. African writing may certainly be said never to have shied away from what Said calls 'the major social and economic outside facts of their existence – colonialism and imperialism'; and it has been fully supported in this by the critics. For some of the kinds of purposes assigned literature, the new-acquired language was probably considered *more* handy and *more* effective, since the target audience was potentially unlimited. Phanuel Egejuru has in fact concluded that the real audience of African literature was outside Africa; hence none of the vernaculars could have been appropriate. Although there have been a few attempts to produce African language literature, modern African literature has continued to be dominantly in the languages of the former colonists. Some of the younger writers in Nigeria, for example, are people who have grown up in middle-class households where the idea in child upbringing was to give the children a head start in formal education by training them to speak English exclusively from the time they began to utter their first words. This practice, even if they went on later to learn their mother tongues, would have so distanced them from the idiomatic forms and other poetically relevant resources that the possibility of an authentic vernacular language literature would indeed be remote.

The question put about the language of criticism was veered away into the qualifications of the critic of African literature, and while the language qualification was dropped following the trend in the creative department, criticism restricted itself largely to African – or perhaps Black – literature. The qualification of the critic was understood in terms of the *affirmative/activist* orientation which had been imposed on the literature. As a result, little effort was made to relate modern African literature to world literature. But since 'reading is comparing' (Riffaterre 407), African literature has tended in the criticism to be referenced to the 'social outside facts' and placed side by side with social criticism as things of the same kind.

There is probably need to move the African literary texts 'from a surface semantics, that of the narrated myth, to a depth semantics, that of the boundary situations which constitute the ultimate "referent" of the myth' (Ricoeur, 1981: 217), to see the deep relationships they hold to other literary texts and traditions, relationships which are connected to their identity as literary texts. At the level of 'naïve interpretation', these texts appear to share the same concerns over social practice and national and cultural histories with social commentaries and histories; at the level of depth interpretation, the text becomes a 'genuine object of understanding' (218), not a pointer to something outside itself. The surface semantics of Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy,* for example, has often been in terms of a fictionalized version of the author's prison notes, *The Man Died.* The *cartel* is seen as a model for some real situation, not a mythic image; and so there is no question of what might be the 'ultimate referent' of that myth. A depth semantics of the mythic image, however, reveals the red dragon. In a personal way, Zaki Amuri, the 'gross Cross-river quad of the Cartel' is that red dragon. Here is a representation in which the mythological image is in full display:

> Zaccheus shook his head in firm rejection. 'No man, not this time. You are way way off. When we get there you'll see what I mean. Not a ghost in the streets Ofe. Just the flies and the vultures and the bully-boys raking every movement with their bullets. Aristo couldn't move fast enough to exploit that situation.'
>
> 'Maybe you're right. But they did come for her. They didn't just come to raid an enemy hang-out and maybe capture a beautiful slave. They came for her and were ready to kill the lot of you even without your standing in the way. They did not want any witnesses. Look Zack, they knew she was there. Whoever organized it knew where to find her.'
>
> 'Sure they knew. Didn't we have posters all over the place?'

'Aristo had been trying to sell her to that gross Cross-river quad of the Cartel. I know he took the news of my last session with the Corpse to him – in person. By air. The trouble-shooter entrusted him with the report.'

Zaccheus looked at him as if he now suspected his reason. 'So you think Amuri set up the whole thing, shot up the town and extended it all over Cross-river just for one dame? Look man, I know Celestial does funny things to ….'

'Iri was just a personal bonus. So was what was done to your band. They were after the men of Aiyéró everywhere. But they have to disguise it by unleashing death on a far wider scale' (158-159).

Iriyise/Celestial is a woman of extraordinary beauty, who 'does funny things to men'. To get hold of her, the Zaki who up to now has exercised absolute power in Cross-river, is prepared to shoot up a whole town in this part of the country he runs like private property. But Iriyise is only a 'personal bonus'. His aim is to reassert his absolute and total domination in the region, first by wiping out 'the men of Aiyéró' who had been conscientizing the people of Cross-river about their conditions of existence in which they have no rights whatever, their rights as human beings and citizens so routinely overridden by the Zaki that they see the order of things under him as *normal*. His aim, however, is through indiscriminate massacres to re-instil fear of his person among the Cross-river people.

Like Nero, the Zaki uses the apparatuses of state purely for his own ends. Nothing means anything to him except what at any given moment he is aiming at. For the Zaki, however, power is not the ultimate aim. That is something he uses to secure and enhance the accumulation of material wealth. Religion is another tool of his under which the people willingly submit to a hierarchy with him at the top and the holder of all power, wealth, privilege, access to leisure, and right to be waited upon and deferred to, no matter what. This use of all socio-political institutions, including even the military government putatively running his country to assure for himself the best of everything available is a

dimension that enters into the rethinking of the red dragon in *Season of Anomy* and a point of contrast to another twentieth century sequence of the red dragon from another part of the world: the Russian Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago.* There is no suggestion in this work that the red dragon figure, Joseph Stalin, is committed to material acquisitions. Rather he is so obsessed with controlling power and being worshipped for it that he quite develops a pathological fear of losing it. The enemy to be destroyed or impeded for life through imprisonment and an array of strategies of exclusion is whoever seems to stand for the possibility of another point of view than his own. The Zaki has no need to disguise his interests, since he has successfully kept the people in ignorance. Stalin's people are educated, but he contrives to keep them in partial ignorance through a complex programme of censorship, aimed at keeping out the ideas and influence of 'the international bourgeoisie'.

In *The Gulag Archipelago*, the red dragon at last discovers the need to justify himself. Clearly, a system which has come into power through a revolution could not maintain itself in power by the same principle on which the old regime was based, which was divine right. The Stalinist system wanted total power and invoked ideology as justification for the sacrifice of civil liberties, human rights, and citizens' lives on a massive scale. We read:

> The imagination and the spiritual strength of Shakespeare's evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses. Because they had no *ideology*.
>
> Ideology—that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honours. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the

Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations.

Thanks to *ideology*, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions. This cannot be denied, nor passed over, nor suppressed. How, then, do we dare insist that evildoers do not exist? And who was it that destroyed these millions? Without evildoers there would have been no Archipelago (chapter 4).

In *Octavia,* Nero has no need to justify himself. He is a Caesar; and that in his eyes places him above everyone, above every institution and norm, a view which Seneca does not contest. He is a Caesar: that is his 'fortune'; and it comes with the right to do what he may. Being a Caesar allows *all things* to him. The Zaki makes a similar claim; and the people of Cross-river have not only been trained and intimidated into letting him have his way, they have learned to anticipate his wishes and to carry them out in all servility. It is his right to wish anything, theirs to obey. The Aiyéró migrants 'from down south', however, by suggesting that the local people do have and can lay claim to their human rights have become a thorn in his side.

Stalin does not make nor can sustain claims like the Zaki's or Nero's. But since he must exercise himself as a red dragon, he needs to fortify his will – in the sense of building a protective wall around it. That is what the ideology enables: he sets it up as an objective norm guiding every aspect of life and all socio-political relationships with himself as the servant and defender, as well as its privileged interpreter. Just like the Zaki, Nero, and Herod, the public good is what he says that it is. Those who oppose him or think differently are not *his* opponents, but enemies of the commonwealth. Stalin's ultimate aim, however, is more in line with Nero's, who wants to command and dominate. *Imperator* (commander/dictator) is really what he means when he says 'a Caesar'. What he demands of the people is therefore simple: 'Let them obey our orders.' That too is what Stalin wants. The ideology, the killings running to millions, the Archipelago, the abuse

and arbitrary denial of rights of the whole citizenry are all serving one and the same purpose: the entrenchment of a totalitarian system of dictatorship.

Conclusion

There is often a historical basis for sequences of the red dragon. For the purposes of a depth semantics of such a work, one has to bear in mind Aristotle's contrasting of history and poetry, the first dealing with the particular, the second with the universal (*The Poetics* Part 9). Surface semantics connecting literature to socio-historical experience may only lead to poetry as comprising a multiplicity of individual and unique 'estates'. Socio-historical experiences occupying the textual surface frequently overlie something of higher value, namely the poetic image. Socio-historical experience does not create this; it derives from the faculty of myth-making (Freidenberg 2006). The mythological image or symbol is what gives this kind of literature the property of universality. The image is not exhausted or even properly contained in its existential representation; for it embodies human meanings which are not tied to time and space. Surface semantics of *Season of Anomy* limits the horizon of meaning to Nigeria, just as surface semantics of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* limits its horizon to Stalinist Russia. A depth semantics of their mythical images, however, bursts open these limited and limiting horizons. Thus do we see that *The Gulag Archipelago* is as much a sequence of the red dragon as *Season of Anomy*, and that a comparative study of the two is not just possible but a task – the very service by which criticism participates in the management of the estate of world literature.

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