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## Cognitive and Perceptual Modes in Wole Soyinka's "Prisonettes"

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### Abstract:

*Prison literature has constituted an interesting area of study in literary scholarship, partly because critics have always recognised its capacity to record and perpetuate important human beliefs and ideologies. Prison poetry in particular has enjoyed a pride of place amongst prison literature in Africa. Some of the foremost African authors have chosen to reflect on their prison experience in poetic form (Dennis Brutus, Okot p'Bitek, Jack Mapanje, etc.), perhaps, in addition to other factors, because of the compactness of the form which would seem to suit the constraints imposed by prison conditions while preserving monumental human ideals. The poetry treated in this particular study is the political prison poetry and deserves to be viewed in this light. The study examined prison poetry by Wole Soyinka and adopted the theory of phenomenology to interpret poems selected from Wole Soyinka's *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972). Foregrounded in this study are two modes of consciousness - cognition and perception - which are essential elements of prison poetry, and means of 'breaking into' the experiential patterns inherent in a literary work of art. The study highlighted the poet's abusive ferocity as a reaction against Nigerian political aggressiveness and the manner of his coping with the situation.*

**Keywords:** Political prison poetry, phenomenology, consciousness, cognition, perception, experiential patterns

### 1. Introduction

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, poetry is 'writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm'. Poetry is the oldest form of literature and it probably dates back to the creation of hunting poetry in prehistoric Africa (Finnegan, 112). Poetry, it can be safely said, is a form of literature in which ideas and emotions are more condensed than in other forms of literature. The experiences detailed in poetry are, more often than not, very subjective and personal. As such, meaning springs quickly to the mind, revealed in each turn of the constituent word, and derived from a collision of the poet's life-world with the critic's life-world, rendering itself subjective.

### 2. The 'Prisonettes'

Though Soyinka's 'Prisonettes' are unlike conventional sonnets in form, they nevertheless share with the sonnet the feature of brevity. The sonnet is made up of 14 lines and the 'Prisonettes' are grouped into five lines. The 'Prisonettes' adopts this 'virtue' of brevity while discarding with the sonnet structure, for as Soyinka puts it,

The form was quite arbitrary, something short enough and as self-containing  
as possible to remain in the head until, at nighttime or in a slack moment of  
surveillance I could transfer it to the inside of a cigarette packet or an equally  
precious scrap of salvage (*A Shuttle in the Crypt*, 59).

Ultimately, it would seem that it is this factor of conciseness that actually informed the poet's decision to make the poems in this section of the collection a variation of the sonnet. More than this, Soyinka's coinage has everything to do with his confinement, and as such, reflects this prison status. Also, the shortness of the verses is suggestive of the fragmentary and embittered nature of the thoughts of a mind under duress, and the staccato-like product of such mind. The poems treated in this study, "Live Burial", "Flowers for My Land", "Animystic Spells", "Background and Friezes", and "Future Plans", altogether reveal an embittered and disappointed experiential pattern that appears to be a direct reaction against an abusive and aggressive polity.

### 3. The Geneva School's Critical Methodology

Phenomenology, the theory of consciousness and essence, and the science of pure phenomena (Eagleton, 55), was developed by the German thinker Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Taking their cue from Husserl (and others to a lesser extent), Georges Poulet (1902-1991) and other members of the Geneva School attempt to remain metaphysically neutral when approaching a literary text and to merely experience and explicate what is in the literary work itself. The Geneva critic distinguishes this method from what is referred to as 'metaphysical' literary criticisms which interpret literature in terms of a critic's own world view and not the poet's as integrated into the literary work. Magliola (1977) summarizes the Geneva critic's argument in the following words:

For the Geneva School, however, the experiential world of the author as enverbalized in the text is all-important: as we shall see, it is the “center” and *foyer* of the text, and ultimately imparts whatever meaningful coherence the poetic text displays. At bottom, I surmise most Geneva critics avoid metapersonal criticism simply because it entails...a commitment to metaphysics (8).

For the Geneva critic, therefore, the *moi profond* or inner self of the literary text is that of the author or that aspect of the author which “crosses over” into poetic expressions. Consequently, the reader’s task is to “live” the experience of this *moi profond* as it is “inviscerated” (Magliola, 9) in the text.

Geneva critics study a specific literary work for experiential patterns. They expect these patterns to function as “an organic network responsible for the work’s unity” (Magliola, 48). This network of experiential patterns is regarded as the work’s essential structure. It has been noted that the notion of intense scrutiny and focus on essential structure remarkably parallels Husserl’s concept of phenomenological intuition of essential structure (Magliola, 48). The next step for the Geneva critic is also quite analogous to Husserl’s phenomenological typology. Here, the major elements of the individual literary work are described, and the essential structure is used as the rubric of descriptive classification. As the critic moves from one work to another, scrutinizing each for its essential structure, he finds that some latent experiential patterns recur with some frequency. These patterns maintain the same meaning throughout the collected works, and as this system of patterning begins to crystallize for the critic, he may realise that it helps illuminate a particularly obscure pattern in any one given work.

An underlying experiential pattern is “vitalized” and made manifest on the surface level by a surface configuration. Three methods of *entrée* into experiential pattern occur most frequently in Genevan critical practice. These are the modal method, the content method, and the linguistic method (Magliola, 52). The first method, *entrée* and classification in terms of the modes of consciousness, usually applies the modal categories of cognition, volition, emotion, perception, time, and space. Two of these modes, cognition and perception, are foregrounded in this study as it is believed they significantly inform Soyinka’s mental state at this crucial junction in his existence.

#### 4. Cognitive Patterns in the ‘Prisonnettes’: Denial, Death and Claustrophobia

According to some critics (Gbilekaa, 197), Soyinka’s real concern is with personal freedom and its negation in death as his works exude extreme individualism. In Dunmade’s (2017) words, ‘Soyinka mythologizes death and creates a ritual.... The poet depicts death as inevitable and suggests its agency only varies’ (194). The poet-speaker in the first of the ‘Prisonnettes’, ‘Live Burial’, is preoccupied with death and recognises a world that curtails human freedom both physically and mentally. This is expressed in the lines describing the poet’s cell room:

Sixteen paces  
By twenty-three. They hold  
Siege against humanity  
And Truth  
Employing time to drill through his sanity (lines 1-5).

The sense of claustrophobia is also expressed vividly here. When a healthy man’s movements are restricted to only “sixteen by twenty-three paces” for a long period of time, we can only begin to imagine how cooped up he must feel. Indeed, the poet paces the cell room not to measure its length and breadth, but to expel the sense of claustrophobia that the smallness of the room inspires.

While the words appear simple enough, there is a symbolic presentation of the knowledge of incarceration and claustrophobia in the poem in the reference to “Truth” (line 4). The “Truth” here is to be seen as a metaphor representing the poet himself. The poet depicts the smallness of his cell room which imprisons “Truth” and also ‘cognises’ that his gaolers deliberately deny him human companionship because they would employ ‘time’ as a means of torture. Also resonating in “Live Burial” is a recognition of the similarity between being cooped up in such confined space and being buried. Being cooped up alone, to a claustrophobe, is tantamount to being buried alive. Just as the word “drill” (line 5) suggests a gradual but forceful wearing away, the poet’s advocacy along with his sanity is supposed to be eventually eroded by time.

The title “Live Burial” functions more than a metaphor for gagging ‘Truth’ as, for the prisoner, it is almost an actuality. The poet, who paces his cell room, is full of restless energy, like the trapped shuttle, that is denied any outlet. The claustrophobic conditions, therefore, prey on the poet’s mind and he imagines himself as dying or even dead. The similarity with being buried alive is a strong catalyst for the thought of premature death. This awareness of death is echoed in the reference to the “corpses” in stanza 2 where the Classical heroine Antigone wants to unearth “Corpses of yester-/Year” (line 9). The “corpses” here is interpreted as “Truth”. For his attempt to unearth “Truth”, the poet is to be punished with death carried out by being sealed alive in the “necropolis” (line 12). The reference to the River Styx in the “Stygian Mysteries” (line 15) further reinforces the idea of death. Other words that betray a cognitive fascination with death are “ghoul” (line 37) – with whom the poet equates one of his prison guards, “hanging” (line 38), “gallows” (line 41), and other phenomena concretised in the poet’s febrile imagination.

Though it is his civic values and convictions that landed him in prison, the poet nevertheless identifies himself with another - Antigone - who defied authorities in Classical Greek mythology. He ‘suddenly’ becomes aware that his is not the first instance when a citizen would suffer for challenging injustice. This realisation hits him with the force of an epiphany; this is reflected in the use of the apostrophe (!) after “Lover of Antigone!” (line 7). Also suggestive in this

instance is the use of the solitary word "Schismatic" in the preceding line. Does the poet equate his isolation from reality to being ideologically removed from the powers that be as implied in the word "schism"? Is that why he is now "Lover of Antigone!"? What is obvious, however, is the fact that the poet recognises "Truth" as being buried or dead. This is shown to be the case when the poet asks "You will unearth/Corpses of yester-/Year?" (lines 8-10), indicating an awareness of the punishment such "foolishness" attracts.

In paralleling himself with Greek mythology concerning death in some of the "Prisonnettes", especially "Live Burial", the poet betrays a cognitive pattern that views denial of freedom and negation of "Truth" as equivalent to death, hence most phenomena find reference in death. The third stanza reveals this awareness. Here, the poet acknowledges that his gaolers are meting out on him two types of death. This sense is carried over from the previous stanza where they wanted to 'know' whether the poet would reveal the "Truth" about the mistakes of the present administration and "Expose manure of present birth?" (line 10). As such, the poet 'acknowledges' that to "Seal him live/In that same necropolis" (lines 11-12) is as much to silence and kill his "Truth" by removing him from the struggle as to kill his mind by inhuman isolation and torture. The reference, some stanzas further, to Galileo Galilei, the Italian inventor who refused to recant, reinforces this experiential pattern.

In the second poem, "Flowers for My Land", the poet uses fauna imagery to evoke the dearth/death of youth in the land brought about by their forced participation in the Nigerian Civil War. The poet persona draws attention to his "thoughts" on the current and future state of the country when he acknowledges and admits:

I cannot tell  
The gardens here are furrowed still and bare...  
Death alike  
We sow. Each novel horror  
Whets inhuman appetites

I do not/ Dare to think these bones will bloom tomorrow (lines 4-10).

The image of death thickens further as the poet registers his comprehension of the direness of the Nigeria situation, which is likened to a garden of decay, in the following words:

Garlands  
Of scavengers weigh  
Heavy on human breasts  
Such  
Are flowers that fill the garden of decay (lines 11-15).

And even "Blue kites" (line 18) - birds of prey- smell the carnage. Like the "Four steel kites, riders/On shrouded towers" (lines 22-23), the blue kites are harbingers of death. Who would therefore "think/Their arms are spread to scatter mountain flowers?" (lines 24-25). Not the poet! He "knows" they bring death and a truncation of the hope of tomorrow. He also knows of flowers unseen which "Distil beatific dawns/But tares/Withhold possession of our mangled lawns" (lines 33-35). The poet categorically demonstrates that for him the killing of youths (flowers) in the war by the steel kites is also tantamount to a denial of a future for the dead youths as well as the whole country which is being deprived of the talent of these young victims. The poet observes that "tares/Withhold possession of our mangled lawns" (line 35), indicating mutilation. There is also a resonance of claustrophobia in this line. The tares are choking the life out of the flowers just as the air seems to be gradually drained out of a small room/space for the claustrophobe.

Soyinka's "Flowers for My Land" describes the hypocrisy of the powerful merchants of death who "feed their thoughts upon the bounty of death" (line 60) and make profit from the suffering of the masses. These purveyors of death would achieve their diabolic aim of reducing the poet to a vegetative state through 'confinement' and denial - two agents and heralds of death. The poem is also filled with images that emphasize the process of decay. The seeds of development and advancement have been "split and browse/In ordure, corruption" (lines 27-28) while "From/Beds of worm/Ivory towers uphold the charnel house" (lines 28-30). The poet would then encourage the masses - victims of denial - to ignite (line 89) and rise to the occasion to fight injustice.

The poet, though without bitterness and sarcasm but with an ominous aloofness, continues this fascination with death and denial in "Animystic Spells", a chant-like repertoire closely resembling an African witch doctor's rendition during a metaphysical trance. This poem can be viewed as a temporal interlude, akin to the Zen-Buddhist meditation (only enverbalized), in which the poet reflects on the general state of mortality. The soul is presented during a transcendent journey into the alien spirit realm of the dead, the "fourth stage", as it were. The poet, as such, assumes the status of an animist priest to portray imagistically the chaotic visions with which the animist is inundated during his flight into mystical mysteries. The first stanza of part I depicts the poet's arrival in the death-realm as he must "Walk among the faceless" (line 2) on shard-strewn "secret passages of night" (line 7). Time dissolves in this mystical matrix, and lacks all significance for this priest-poet as he is "discarding/Weights of time/In clutching and possession - yokes of death" (line 13-15). Truly, this is a realm in which only the dead are allowed.

The seeming infiniteness of this spirit realm evokes a desire to 'know' the unknown (part I, stanza 4). Yet, the poet knows this is impossible unless he acquires the mystical eye of the spirit region. Otherwise, he had better "look sooner on the sun" (part 2, stanza 1: line 5). The third part of the poem acknowledges a total surrender to death as it "Embraces you and I" (part iii, stanza 1: line 2). When this occurs, the past "dissolves" into nothingness and everything is clearly recognised as "woodsmoke/Rings/Across a thousand years to a bygone sage" (part iii, stanza 3: lines 3-5). Here, the doubt of the past where footsteps are "Passing and re-passing the door of recognition" (part iv, line 5), is no more. Death is

welcome since in it is the seed of "Repletion for earth's own regenerate need" (part xi, stanza 1; line 5). The poet desires this rebirth as he chants in the third stanza of part xi:

Fall seeds

Then, to mineral hands  
Flush out in your green  
And gentle blades  
Awaken minds and grow to cosmic shades.

And while the poet acknowledges that the pain denial brings is "A bitter foretaste of the death we bear" (part xiii, stanza 1: line 5), the hope of regeneration is maintained throughout the remainder of the poem. Even when "Weeds clogged" the "millet stalks", "New ears" still arose, and despite the corrupt weeds that would choke and tear them down, they still possess grains that "were ripened closer to the ground" (part xiv, stanza 2: line 5), offering hope like a new generation of Nigerians that will inevitably spring up.

## 5. Allusion to History as Recourse

Biodun Jeyifo, in a reading of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), speaks of "Soyinka's 'mythopoeic' attitude to history, his constant penchant for transforming experience into metaphysical, trans-historical, mythic dimensions" (qtd. in Maduakor, 34). Evident in many of the poems in "Prisonnettes" is a constant reference to mythological and factual history, especially Classical, Biblical, and Renaissance. Though closely linked with denial and death, this fascination with historical allusions reflects a totally independent cognitive system. Allusions to myth and history often serve a variety of purposes ranging from deepening the sense of denial and death in "Live Burial" to becoming a sarcastic tool for ridiculing the Nigerian leadership in "Future Plans". Overall, though, the theme, other than doing something specific in each poem, demonstrates that the poet is, for the most part, still in perfect control of his mind as he could make coherent references. This is a way of 'defeating' his gaolers by showing them who would see that he loses his sanity that he is perfectly sane: only a sane man would write coherently.

In "Live Burial", the poet references Sophocles by imagining himself as comparable to the Antigone of Classical Greek mythology -- a daughter of Oedipus who defies his uncle Creon to bury her brother Polynices. The usage of this particular trope by the poet goes beyond Antigone's defiance alone. It also suggests that the poet, in being imprisoned in a tomb-like place, shares the fate of Antigone who was ordered to be buried alive in a tomb by King Creon for standing up for justice.

Following this Classical trend, the "Muse" (line 45) ironically encourages his own live burial when he acknowledges his gaolers' enthusiasm to "Seal him live/In that same necropolis" (lines 11-12) from where he will access the "Stygian Mysteries" (line 15). Seeing himself as similar to the Renaissance Italian polymath Galileo is further proof of this cognitive pattern that alludes to history as a reference point. In suffering persecution for advocating right, the poet invokes comparable instances in history to reinforce his beliefs and embolden himself.

Allusions in the poems also assume Biblical undertones, or at least a religious way of understanding the world, in some of the "Prisonnettes". In "Animystic Spells" we read how

Altar-vessel  
Of one skull shall bear  
Offerings for the ascent  
Multitudes (stanza xiii, verse 2: lines 1-4).

This is evocative of the suffering of Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible who sacrifices himself for the "multitudes" so that they can be saved -- calling to mind the poet's individual suffering in the cause of struggling for his people. Also, in "Background and Friezes", a more somber poem, we see a reference to "Wise angel" (line 7) which could mean the angel of death, while the poet calls himself "God's chosen instrument" (line 23), bringing to mind the Old Testament God of vengeance. We also see what looks like another reference to the Bible story of Mary and Christ when we read

Futile shield  
Before the festive slayers  
Mother to child, prayers  
Unavailing  
The scene is old... (lines 46-50).

All of these reinforce a cognitive pattern that falls back unto the past as a means of referencing and comprehending the present. And the ability to make these cognitive relations by dialoging with other texts and events is an indication that the poet is not yet 'dead' -- like they want him to be. He has to remain alive to combat their tyranny since "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny" (*The Man Died*, 13). The motifs of suffering and sacrifice are also in line with what the poet, in the preface to the "Prisonnettes", calls "self-destructively quiescent and forgiving" (*Shuttle*, 59), further exemplifying an aspect of the prison-poet temperament - another being "the 'crucifying' or letting-out-rage" aspect that is prominent in "Live Burial" and "Flowers for My Land".

In the final poem of "Prisonnettes", "Future Plans", the poet alludes to contemporary history to emphasize the madness that reigns supreme in the Nigerian polity and also reveal a certain cognitive dissonance when he compiles a list of despots across the world. Evident in this section of the "Prisonnettes" is that sense of dissonance in the poet's cognition. This cognitive dissonance is reflected when the poet begins to reel off the names of some world and African despots as if they belong in a special club - a society of tyrants. The fact that some of these names are misspelt (Mier, Verwood) reveals a dissonance in the poet's cognition. Here, we see Mao Tse Tung in alliance with the rival Chinese Nationalist Party leader

Chiang Kai; all this while the Socialist Ghanaian leader Nkrumah makes a pact with the Apartheid champion Verwood (Verwoerd) witnessed by Malawi president-for-life Banda.

## 6. Perceptual Patterns in the “Prisonnettes”

Perceptual pattern is basic and essential to Soyinka’s “Prisonnettes”. The obvious ones, however, are the patterns that involve “Battle Commemoration”, detected by the visual and the somatosensory senses, “Death”, detected by the visual sense, and Surreal Humour, also visually sensed. The poet employs the “Battle Commemoration” pattern in virtually all the poems in “Prisonnettes” but most especially in “Background and Friezes”. The title of the poem itself is suggestive of the world of commemorating battles through architectural art. This art, “frieze”, often serves as a background depicting figures engaged in battles. In a way then, this suggests a perceptual preoccupation with the Civil War – a war that also serves as background to the poet’s incarceration.

War is a phenomenon that always raises the poet’s ire and which he attacks in most of his other works. It is against this backdrop of death and war that the poet therefore “perceives” his time in solitary confinement. Thus death, visually beheld like graffiti on the wall, is painted vividly and is varied in

A thousand ways – sudden

To piecemeal. Virgins bled

At lepers’ orgies

The streets were cobbled with unnumbered dead (lines 2-5).

Yet, like one of the ‘background’ figures commemorated in the “friezes”, “Jacques d’Odan (presumably General Gowon or, more broadly, the federal government) is deceitful enough to keep up his seemingly humane prosecution of the Biafra war. At the same time the General turns a blind eye to the atrocity being committed in the prison while narcissistically absolving and preening himself as he

Rinses

Clean fingers in a bowl

Of blood, and humbly adds

Pips and crowns

To a General make-weight of his shoulder-pads (lines 11-15).

The paradox in “humbly adds/Pips and crowns...” is further evidence of Jacques d’Odan’s dubiousness. The poem’s concern suddenly shifts at this point as the poet, rather than continuing to indulgently view the scenario as a gruesome work of art, begins to give vent to his bitterness at the injustice of his situation. Though his expression becomes increasingly individuated and harder to decipher, the perceptual pattern that involves “Death” is still discernible. Now, the poet “perceives” himself as an instrument of death through which God expresses His wrath, “a cursing martyr” (“Joseph”, line 4). He appeals to the auditory sense when he intones:

Street singers

Chant my tune: I am

God’s chosen instrument

Do I hear –

Played upon by fat unholy fingers? (lines 21-25).

After threatening to one day exact revenge upon his gaolers by making them “Drive into the sea at my approach!” (line 30), the poet reverts back to viewing his experience in terms of battle commemoration. His usage of “Cairns” (line 44) suggests, on another level, a sensation of being buried alive. In a way, “the pebble” that the beach “visually” hides (lines 41-42) are like “the skeleton of hate” (line 45) that the poet must contain within or else it devours him. In another way, the bones are the relics that serve as the visual commemoration of the civil strife. This somatosensory reaction is also normal when we consider that the poet is most likely put in an underground-like cell room and isolated as if buried alive. But since “prayers” are “Unavailing” (lines 48-49), perhaps the poet has no choice but to give vent to his rage. Finally, the poet becomes the ultimate commemoration of the oppressors’ “humane” prosecution of the war and their “decent” treatment of prisoners of war. A section of “Live Burial” is re-echoed in “Background and Friezes” as we read:

Week seventy-five:

Observers welcome. Cheap

Conducted tours – behold!

Our hands are clean.

The rains have fallen twice and earth is deep (lines 51-55).

We are sometimes confronted with instances of non sequiturs and surreal humour in the poems of the “Prisonnettes”. These include visual imagery in lines of “Flowers for my Land” as “Ivory towers uphold the charnel-house” (30), “Monkeys in livery dance” (55), and somatosensory paradoxes such as “a hailstone/Burning” (lines 63-64). “Animystic Spells”, being a psychic flight of fancy, also makes generous use of this device.

In “Background and Friezes”, we get another glimpse of non sequitur when the poet-speaker, after having stated the humanness of his own conducts, suddenly snaps: “Hands off/My affair’s internal” (lines 36-37), revealing his intolerance for what he perceives, rightly or wrongly, as an attempt presumably by the guard to pick his mind. This, when considered in light of the prior trend of the poem, is an abrupt digression from the theme of the poem. The last line of the same poem – “The rains have fallen twice and the earth is deep” – while appealing to the sense of sight also fulfills this criterion as it displays no apparent connection, except in the far-fetched sense of hiding the guards’ atrocity. In the last poem of the “Prisonnettes”, we are treated to a perceptual pattern that emphasizes surreal humour in order to portray the

poet's disgust with, and distrust of, the Nigerian leadership, and his desire to knock it down. Indeed, the leadership is seen as consisting of

Forgers, framers  
Fabricators inter-  
national. Chairman  
a dark horse, a circus nag turned blinkered sprinter (lines 2-5).

The leaders are portrayed as having no regard for the truth as they are seen comically as "Breaking speed/Of the truth barrier by a swooping detention decree" (lines 9-10). The poet persona goes on by citing some of the most notorious dictators and some not so notorious leaders the world has known in improbable and incongruous situations as models for the Nigeria leadership whose "Project in view" is Mao Tse Tung and the other despots. Later we see "Arafat/In flagrante cum/Golda Mier" (line 18) while "Castro" is "drunk/With Richard Nixon" (lines 18-19). That the poet keeps miswriting the names of some of these characters is reflective of the absurdness of the situation as well as his fevered perception. As such, Apartheid South Africa leader Verwoerd becomes "Verwood" while former Israel Iron Lady "Meir" becomes "Mier". All this points to a perceptual system that, though confused, is coherent enough to view the Nigeria situation (when divested of its cloak of tragedy) as comically pathetic and surrealistically humorous.

## 7. Conclusion

Soyinka has successfully expressed his mental ordeal during his prison existence using cognitive and perceptual aesthetics. His poetry presents an embittered and sarcastic cognitive and perceptual representation of death, denial, claustrophobia and dissonance/absurdity where injustice is referenced to past and present history. The poems revealed the paths and detours taken by the mind in coping with being surrounded by constant death and the threat of constant death at the hands of an illiterate class. Yet, the feeling persists that the conditions obtainable in the prison is barely worse than those outside it.

Soyinka deploys cognitive patterns greatly in some of the "Prisonnettes". The concept evolves in metaphor, especially those of Truth and Death as well as in allusions to history. The poet speaks of claustrophobia and the denial of truth as things that are equivalent to death, both physical and psychological, as well as of denial and actual death in general. This specific realisation seems to rule the poet's cognitive system while writing the "Prisonnettes". It also fuels his anger and bitterness against the oppressors. Through the motifs of death and denial, the poet is able to reiterate his cognitive pattern and depict the gruesomeness of solitary confinement.

Perception and cognition are two of the modal categories of entrée into the phenomenological ego displayed in the works of an author. Perceptual patterns that were identified in this study include those that involve battle commemoration, death, and absurd humour. Furthermore, perception and cognition are the aesthetic tools used for explaining the motifs of death, denial, claustrophobia, allusion, battle commemoration and surreal humour in the poems. Phenomenology is used to discuss the issues of perception and cognition in the poems and the theory focuses attention on the preoccupations of the poems from these perspectives.

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