**Dedication by Wole Soyinka**

**for Moremi, 1963**

Earth will not share the rafter's envy; dung floors

Break, not the gecko's slight skin, but its fall

Taste this soil for death and plumb her deep for life

As this yam, wholly earthed, yet a living tuber

To the warmth of waters, earthed as springs

As roots of baobab, as the hearth.

The air will not deny you. Like a top

Spin you on the navel of the storm, for the hoe

That roots the forests plows a path for squirrels.

Be ageless as dark peat, but only that rain's

Fingers, not the feet of men, may wash you over.

Long wear the sun's shadow; run naked to the night.

Peppers green and red—child—your tongue arch

To scorpion tail, spit straight return to danger's threats

Yet coo with the brown pigeon, tendril dew between your lips.

Shield you like the flesh of palms, skyward held

Cuspids in thorn nesting, insealed as the heart of kernel—

A woman's flesh is oil—child, palm oil on your tongue

Is suppleness to life, and wine of this gourd

From self-same timeless run of runnels as refill

Your podlings, child, weaned from yours we embrace

Earth's honeyed milk, wine of the only rib.

Now roll your tongue in honey till your cheeks are

Swarming honeycombs—your world needs sweetening, child.

Camwood round the heart, chalk for flight

Of blemish—see? it dawns!—antimony beneath

Armpits like a goddess, and leave this taste

Long on your lips, of salt, that you may seek

None from tears. This, rain-water, is the gift

Of gods—drink of its purity, bear fruits in season.

Fruits then to your lips: haste to repay

The debt of birth. Yield man-tides like the sea

And ebbing, leave a meaning of the fossilled sands.

Wole Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934 at Abeokuta, near Ibadan in western Nigeria. After preparatory university studies in 1954 at Government College in Ibadan, he continued at the University of Leeds, where, in 1973, he received his doctorate. During the six years spent in England, he was a dramaturgist at the Royal Court Theater in London 1958-1959. In 1960, he was awarded a Rockefeller bursary and returned to Nigeria to study African drama. At the same time, he taught drama and literature at various universities in Ibadan, Lagos, and Ife.

During the civil war in Nigeria, Soyinka appealed in an article for cease-fire. For this he was arrested in 1967, accused of conspiring with the Biafra rebels, and was held as a political prisoner for 22 months until 1969. Soyinka has published about 20 works: drama, novels and poetry. He writes in English and his literary language is marked by great scope and richness of words.

The poem displays a tone of hopefulness and guidance. He is exclaiming that the people of Nigeria must be hopeful for the future of the country with their newfound independence, as well as hopeful for the future of their newly preserved land. The literal image of the dung floor breaking the lizard's fall, but not its skin, tells us that the earth is there to protect us, not to harm us, and implies that we ought to, in return, protect the earth.

Soyinka's poem is also to be read through a paternal lens towards his recently birthed daughter. While Soyinka is hopeful towards the future of Nigeria as a whole, he also gives off the impression that he is looking forward to bright times to come for his daughter, advising her to plumb the earth for life.

Soyinka's makes a metaphoric comparison between a spinning top and a natural storm. The spinning top is a direct correlation to an incoming storm like a hurricane or tornado. Hurricanes and tornados completely uproot the land and in doing so the repair that takes place in the aftermath of the storm creates new habitats for the animals. Sometimes, what is destructive in our minds, like a storm, can be beneficial for the earth.

**Be ageless as dark peat, but only that rain's**

**fingers, not the feet of men, may wash you over*.***

Soyinka communicating his protectiveness over his daughter with the help of simile. He is describing that she should not allow for people to walk all over her in the same way in which people walk all over the national park.

Soyinka's expresses parenting skills and the way in which he nurtures his daughter. He is advising his daughter to be poisonous like a scorpion: both fierce and intimidating. But, he is also explaining to his daughter that she must be gentle and kind like a pigeon. This fatherly advice exclaims that his daughter must be sharp and dangerous, but she also must have gracious, courteous and warm-hearted qualities to make her a well-rounded individual.

One can infer that when Soyinka writes ***Shield you like the flesh of palms***, he is referring to the way in which the earth will always be our protector. The earth will keep the people from harm in a similar manner to which a parent would keep their child out of harm at all costs. Soyinka writes that ***A woman's flesh is oil--child, palm oil on your tongue****.* Nigeria, Soyinka's birthplace, is one of the largest producers of palm oil. By stating that a ***woman's flesh is oil*** is bringing his subject to life. The caesura used in the last sentence of this stanza is placed in such a way that makes it seem like Soyinka is speaking directly to another person.

*Now roll your tongue in honey till your cheeks are*

*Swarming honeycombs-- your world needs sweetening, child*,

Soyinka uses extremely sweet and charming diction to convey his message. This delightful string of words could either be taken as a tone of hopefulness for Nigeria, where added *sweetening* into the life of Nigerian's after their long fight for independence is necessary. The appealing diction could also be taken as fatherly hopefulness and cheer for his daughter, where he is wishing nothing but sweetness and honey upon his young daughter.

It sounds like he is giving advice to his readers. He is exclaiming that people should not taste the salt from their tears because there is no longer room for sadness in such a remarkable, happy, and independent time. People should be embracing the natural beauties that occur on the earth; however, they should be careful not to overuse the resources provided to us when we ***bear fruits in season*. *Fruits then to your lips: haste to repay/ the debt of birth.***

When one takes fruit from the earth it takes an extremely long time to regrow and replenish the earth with its stolen resource. The *debt of birth* is the birth of a person and the toll that a single birth takes on the earth's resources.

In a similar way to which we overuse the earth's resources, in doing so, we also have taken for granted all the natural beauty that was there before us. In hopes of industrializing, we have corrupted the earth's natural materials and assets to the point that so few things, nowadays, are natural. Everything is man-made. There are *man-tides*, due to the toll that global has taken on the world. Additionally, there are *fossilled sands*, because even the sand, which is supposed to be one of the most natural resources made of only crushed shells, has been replaced by man-made plastics and other human trash.

The Baobab tree is endemic to Africa, and is known as the tree of life. In this stanza, Woyinka describes how the yam, a tuber vegetable grown deep in the earth is connected to the idea of the roots of the Baobab and the image of a hearth. By connecting these images, he is developing a sense that all life stems from the roots of the earth and that our true home is on our native soil, reminding us that we are part of the Earth, rather than separate from it.

Moremi here has three distinct, yet intertwined meanings.

First, Moremi is the name of Wole Woyinka's daughter.

Secondly, Moremi is a game reserve in Botswana created to protect Africa's rich land and ecosystem, notably formed by the indigenous population.

Finally, Moremi is a Goddess in the Yoruba tradition.

Soyinka mingles all three of these meanings thorough out his poem, writing both an ode to the creation of a national park as well as a letter to his daughter, honouring the Yoroban tradition.