

# The Road

Wole Soyinka

# Colonialism

- ▶ Economic reasons- World war I and II
- ▶ Colonialism provided a huge natural resource base for small European powers
- ▶ Colonies provided ready markets for finished products
- ▶ Religious The need to spread Christianity
- ▶ Cultural The White Mans Burden
- ▶ Because British felt they were more civilized and had the only correct religion, they felt it was imperative that they go out and transform every soul.

# Nigerian Literature

- ▶ Nigeria is one of the most divided nations in the world, both religiously and tribally
- ▶ Consequently, it has had an extremely difficult time cohering together as a nation
- ▶ It has also given birth to two of the most important modern writers in the world Wole Soyinka (Yoruba) and Chinua Achebe (Igbo) both of whom have had to write in English in order to reach the majority of people in their own country.

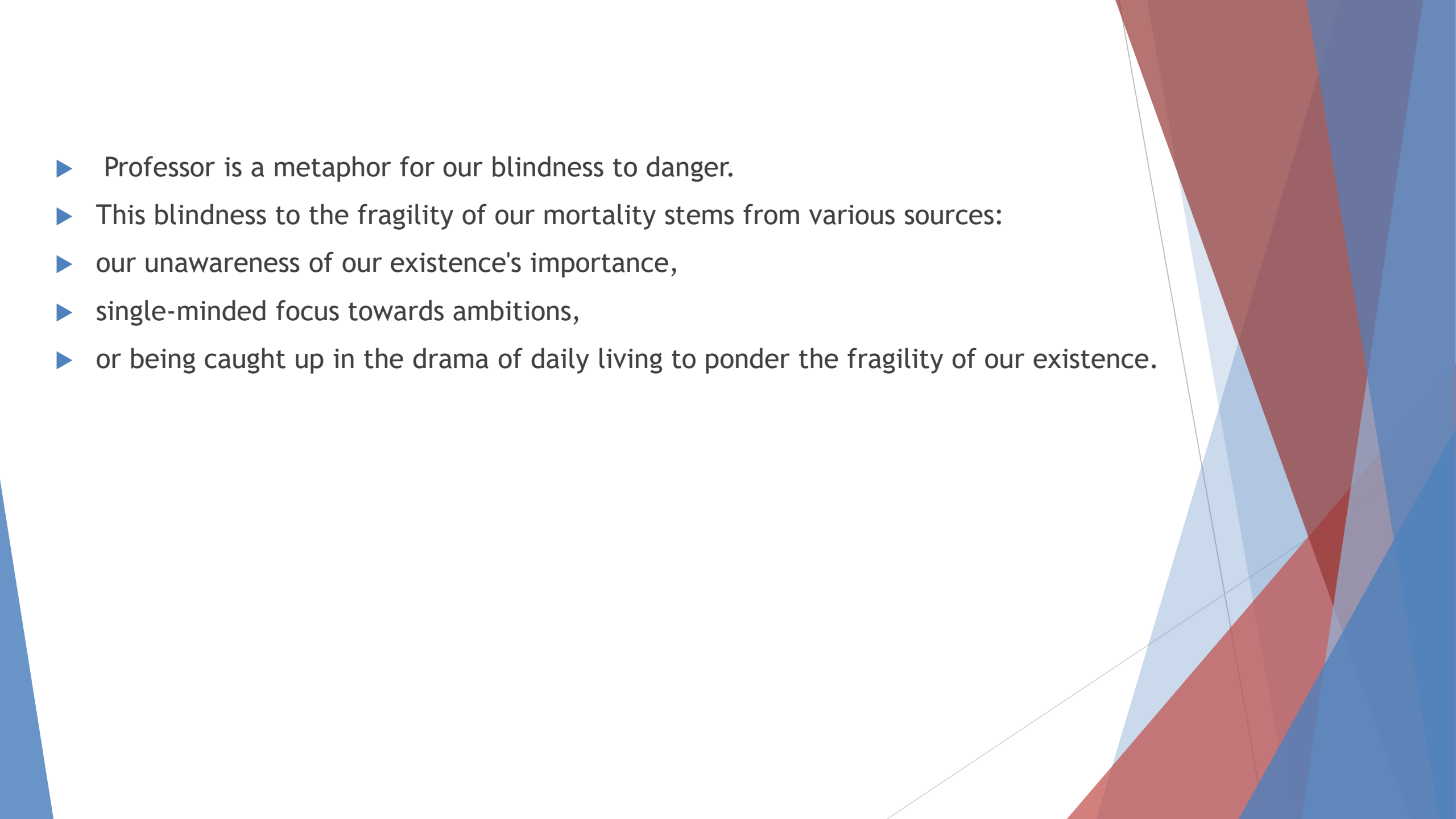
# Wole Soyinka

- ▶ Educated in Europe, especially in the works of Shakespeare.
- ▶ Later adopted the traditional Yoruba religion.
- ▶ Worked in his dramas to combine Yoruba traditions with Western literary forms.
- ▶ Won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.

- ▶ The Road is tragedy and comedy evocative of the Shakespearean style.
- ▶ It dramatizes the lives of a gang of drivers and truck-park layabouts. As underprivileged and uneducated people (only one of them, Professor, is educated) in a city undergoing rapid modernization
- ▶ They battle with unemployment and seek different ways of making both ends meet.
- ▶ The characters' subject matter is economic and material
- ▶ They also take a special interest in supernatural matters.
- ▶ They attempt to grasp the mystery that surrounds the character of Murano,
- ▶ Murano is regarded by Professor as the living embodiment of the world existing between the realms of the dead and the living.

# Death in the play

- ▶ The central topic of the play is death.
- ▶ The titular road is not just a figurative "road to death" but also a literal one that the main characters travel on.
- ▶ The play is also mythological in nature and incorporates various Yoruba folklore and cultural artifacts.
- ▶ The road in question is ruled by the god of death, Ogun.
- ▶ He administers death and destruction through Professor.
- ▶ The latter would trick drivers on the road by displacing road signs that warn of dangers ahead.

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- ▶ Professor is a metaphor for our blindness to danger.
  - ▶ This blindness to the fragility of our mortality stems from various sources:
  - ▶ our unawareness of our existence's importance,
  - ▶ single-minded focus towards ambitions,
  - ▶ or being caught up in the drama of daily living to ponder the fragility of our existence.

- ▶ The drivers' aimless existence, waiting for jobs, drinking, sleeping, dreaming of an exciting future is dominated by the powerful presence of the Professor.
- ▶ They want to understand the concept of the Word to which Professor makes reference.
- ▶ Some of them think it necessary to make dog-sacrifice rituals for Ogun, the Yoruba god of fire and creativity.
  
- ▶ The professor runs an establishment providing spare parts for vehicles, which are looted from road accident sites.
  
- ▶ This occupation promotes personal quest for the meaning of death, which encounters him at the end of the play.
- ▶ The play ends with the fatal stabbing of Professor by Say Tokyo, one of the lorry drivers, due to the former's encroachment on the power of Ogun that they all revere.



- ▶ All of the characters in the play are in some way connected to death.
- ▶ Some are agents of death
- ▶ others are "scholars of death," learning through their experiences with losses.
- ▶ Visible tension between the mortals and the gods is explicit.
- ▶ The Yoruba dance in the beginning is specifically choreographed to enact our attempt to suspend time and thus suspend the coming of death.