Abstract – This essay starts with the Guyanan author Wilson Harris’s observation that Wole Soyinka’s play *The Road* has close affinities with Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Rather than trace possible direct influences, I discuss certain shared features: a charismatic central character, perilous travels, imposture, seduction, grandiosity, blasphemous conduct, and an ambivalent but forceful death. Despite (or even because of) the differences in origin, milieu, genre, and the exercise of political power, these works share a complex relationship to orality and literacy and an ultimate awareness of what cannot be expressed in words.

**Keywords:** Wole Soyinka, Joseph Conrad, Orality, Intoxicating language, Prose fiction Theatricality, Liminality