

Begging Questions in Wole Soyinka's "Opera Wonyosi"

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IN AN ARTICLE published in *The American Scholar* in the summer of 1963, Wole Soyinka, a young Nigerian dramatist whose first published plays had appeared in print just a few weeks earlier, castigated an older and better-known African author, Camara Laye of Guinea, for pandering to European critical condescension by writing his second novel, *The Radiance of the King*, in a Western creative idiom. Soyinka deplored the fact that this allegedly indigenous piece of fiction was modelled so closely on Franz Kafka's *The Castle*, for he believed that:

... most intelligent readers like their Kafka straight, not geographically transposed. Even the character structure of Kafka's *Castle* has been most blatantly retained — Clarence for Mr. K.; Kafka's Barnabas the Messenger becomes the Beggar Intermediary; Arthur and Jeremiah, the unpredictable assistants, are turned into Nagoa and Noaga. We are not even spared the role of the landlord — or innkeeper — take your choice! It is truly amazing that foreign critics have contented themselves with merely dropping an occasional "Kafkaesque" — a feeble sop to integrity — since they cannot altogether ignore the more obvious imitativeness of Camara Laye's technique. (I think we can tell when the line of mere "influence" has been crossed.) Even within the primeval pit of collective allegory-consciousness, it is self-destructive to imagine that the Progresses of these black and white pilgrims have sprung from independent creative stresses.¹

There are two points worth noting here. One is Soyinka's condemnation of "the obvious imitativeness of Camara Laye's technique," particularly his blatant retention of Kafka's "character structure" in his own narrative. The other is Soyinka's emphasis on relying upon "independent creative stresses." These principles,

which in their baldest formulation may be reduced to the caveat: "Don't imitate! Create!", appear to have served Soyinka well in his own career as a writer, for today he is widely regarded as one of Africa's most original creative artists. He has defined his own distinctive idiom in drama, poetry, fiction and criticism, never allowing himself to fall too deeply under the sway of alien or autochthonous traditions of expression. In the marketplace of modern literature, where many convertible currencies are freely available, Soyinka owes surprisingly few traceable debts.

Yet in recent years he has published two plays that are undisguised adaptations of well-known European masterworks: *The Bacchae of Euripides*, which Soyinka "conceived as a communal feast, a tumultuous celebration of life,"² and *Opera Wonyosi*, an Africanization of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*.³ Soyinka had been commissioned to prepare the Greek play for performance by the National Theatre at the Old Vic in London in the summer of 1973, and in December 1977 he had made his directorial debut as Head of the Department of Dramatic Arts at the University of Ife by staging *Opera Wonyosi* in an impressive new theatre built on campus to accommodate large-scale productions. What is interesting to observe in both of these adapted works is the degree to which Soyinka modified the original texts in order to achieve his own ends. We might well ask, how much did he blatantly retain and how much did he transform in obedience to independent creative stresses?

The Bacchae of Euripides has already been commented on by a number of drama critics and scholars, the consensus view being that Soyinka succeeded in reinvesting the play with greater dimensions and complexity by introducing African elements that harmonize with the original theme but do not radically alter the nature of the drama. In other words, though he extended its basic structure and rearranged its furnishings, he did not tamper with its original design.⁴ The play was renovated, not demolished and rebuilt from the ground up according to a new architectural blueprint. One might venture to say that in form as well as content Soyinka's *Bacchae* remains more Greek than Camara Laye's *The Radiance of the King* remains German or Austrian.

The same kind of statement could be made about *Opera Wonyosi*, which follows Brecht rather slavishly in places and transforms far less of *The Threepenny Opera* than Brecht's play transformed of John Gay's eighteenth century musical drama, *The Beggar's Opera*. Soyinka seems content to pour local palm-wine into European receptacles rather than devise wholly new containers for his home-brewed spirits. *Opera Wonyosi* is a very topical Nigerian satire, but it gains much of its thrust and momentum by delivering its message in a dependable, racy vehicle of foreign manufacture. Indeed, at times Soyinka looks more like a hitchhiker than a trailblazer.

Take the "character structure" of the opera, for instance. Soyinka does not bother to change the names of a number of his dramatis personae, retaining the traditional Captain Macheath (i.e., Mack the Knife), Hookfinger Jake, Police Commissioner "Tiger" Brown, Jimmy, Polly, Jenny, Sukie and Lucy. Even when he does introduce a new name, the name itself does not necessarily signal a change in the role or personality of the character to whom it is given: Chief Jonathan Anikura, proprietor of a business school for beggars known as the "Home from Home for the Homeless," clearly mirrors Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum, and his wife, "De Madam," plays essentially the same part as Mrs. Celia Peachum in the Gay and Brecht operas. The only new characters of any significance are representatives of various professions: a military man, Colonel Moses; a university academic, Professor Bamgbapo; a lawyer, Alatako; and a media man, "Dee-Jay," who serves as a Master of Ceremonies throughout the play, usurping and enlarging the role of the Streetsinger in *The Threepenny Opera*. One comically inflated character readily identifiable as a notorious contemporary personage is Emperor Boky, a hilarious caricature of Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic,⁵ whose imperial coronation, like that of the Queen in Brecht's rendition, serves as the occasion for Macheath's royal reprieve at the end of the melodrama, thereby providing the happy ending that Gay, Brecht and Soyinka sardonically agree light opera demands.

In addition to populating *Opera Wonyosi* with such clowns and clones, Soyinka also took over most of Brecht's plot, organiz-

ing the dramatic action into virtually the same sequence of scenes as had been used in *The Threepenny Opera*. Among Soyinka's most notable innovations was a marvellously funny scene in Part One, said to have lasted about twenty minutes on the stage,⁶ in which Emperor Boky rants about revolutionary culture, denounces his friend Idi Amin for daring to wear more medals than he himself does, and vigorously drills his goon squad in murderous mayhem. One reviewer of the University of Ife production noted that the disarmingly gay and rollicking manner in which Soyinka presented human decadence and stupidity in this scene, reminding the audience all the while of their own complicity in such inane corruption, made him feel like he was "being served a mixture of poison and excrement on a platter of gold."⁷ Another innovation, introduced in Part Two, was a kangaroo court scene in which Colonel Moses, a Nigerian Legal and Security Adviser to Emperor Boky, is tried by Anikura's beggars and associates and is found guilty of belonging to a Secret Society, the very kind of organization that Colonel Moses has been striving to eradicate through use of military force. Ironically, the Secret Society to which Colonel Moses is accused of belonging is the Army itself, which is shown to operate according to principles identical to those of other covert organizations and blood brotherhoods officially defined as illegal. Here Soyinka is having fun with the same kind of paradox that had intrigued his predecessors: that people high and low, powerful and powerless, were equally corrupt, the only difference being that those at the bottom of society often got punished for their crimes.

The songs Soyinka used in *Opera Wonyosi* came from a variety of sources, hardly any of which were African. He grafted new words onto well-known Euro-American tunes, much as Gay had done with old English airs in *The Beggar's Opera*. For instance, he borrowed Kurt Weill's famous score for the theme song, the "Moritat of Mackie the Knife," but changed Brecht's lyrics to suit his Nigerian audience; he also retained Weill's music for "Pirate Jenny" in a later scene.⁸ Similarly, the English ballad "Who Killed Cock Robin?" became transformed into "Who Killed Nio-Niga?" Other melodies recognizable from Soyinka's lyrics include such popular favourites as "The Saint Louis Blues,"

the hippopotamus song from Michael Flanders and Donald Swann's "At the Drop of a Hat," and at least one Nigerian "highlife" tune,⁹ but there is no evidence that any traditional African songs or indigenous musical instruments were utilized. Musically *Opera Wonyosi* was an eclectic Western medley.

This is not to say that Soyinka's effort to adapt an alien art form was unsuccessful. *Opera Wonyosi* may have retained a Brechtian structure and a Gayish agility of wit, but Soyinka managed to turn the flavour of the farce into something characteristically African. Indeed, though all the action is presented as taking place in the Central African Republic, it is not difficult to identify specific Nigerian targets of his satire.¹⁰ Even Emperor Boky is a representative figure hand-picked from an extended family of African military rulers, some of whom were in power in Nigeria when this opera was composed and performed. Military rule itself is mercilessly lampooned, and the charges brought against Colonel Moses at his trial — charges of arson, rape, assault, and murder alleged by the government to have been committed by "unknown soldiers" — have an uncomfortably close correlation with real happenings in postwar Nigeria. It is not surprising that at least one member of Soyinka's cast felt that a good deal of the military satire might have to be toned down or eliminated if the opera were to be performed outside the university campus.¹¹ Soyinka was tweaking some very prominent public noses, just as John Gay had done 250 years before.

To illustrate how Soyinka gave his adaptation of a foreign entertainment a local resonance, here is a portion of the scene in which a fresh recruit to Peachum's Establishment for Beggars is being introduced to the costumes that will enable him to ply his new trade most effectively.¹² Gay did not have a scene of this sort in *The Beggar's Opera*, so we'll start with Brecht's version in *The Threepenny Opera*:

(He draws back the linen curtain in front of a showcase in which are standing five wax models.)

FILCH: What's that?

PEACHUM: These are the five basic types of misery best adapted to touching the human heart. The sight of them induces that un-

natural state of mind in which a man is actually willing to give money away.

Outfit A: Victim of the Progress of Modern Traffic. The Cheerful Cripple, always good-tempered — (*He demonstrates it.*) — always carefree, effect heightened by a mutilated arm.

Outfit B: Victim of the Art of War. The Troublesome Twitcher, annoys passers-by, his job is to arouse disgust — (*He demonstrates it.*) — modified by medals.

Outfit C: Victim of the Industrial Boom. The Pitiably Blind, or the High School of the Art of Begging. (*PEACHUM displays him, advancing unsteadily toward FILCH. At the moment when he bumps into FILCH, the latter screams with horror. PEACHUM stops instantly, gazes at him in amazement, and suddenly roars:*) He feels pity! You'll never make a beggar — not in a lifetime. That sort of behaviour is only fit for the passers-by! Then it's Outfit D!

Now here is Soyinka's Nigerian elaboration of the same scene :

AHMED: (*recoiling*) What's that?

ANIKURA: (*in formal lecturing voice*) These represent the five types of misery most likely to touch people's hearts. The sight of them brings about that unnatural state of mind in which people are actually willing to give money away. (Selects one.) That's the cheerful cripple — victim of modern road traffic. We call it the Nigerian special. The next model — War Casualty. Can't stop twitching you see. Now that first puts off the public. But the sight of the war medals he's wearing softens them. The third model — we call it the Taphy-Psychotic.* It's got a whip you see. He rushes around in a frenzy as if he's going to flog you. But that's where we put in the variation. He doesn't actually flog you. He stops with his hands raised and breaks into an idiot's grin — and you realize he's only soft in the head. You are so relieved you give him money. Number Four. Victim of Modern Industry. Collapsed chest. That sits down well with the business tycoons. Remember the Cement Bonanza? Well, to clear those ports they had the hungry sods moving the cement bags round the clock. Pay was — good to decent, and every labourer earned all the overtime he could. What no one bothered to tell them was the effect of breathing in cement dust 12 to 18 hours a day. It's called Fibrositoris. Same as in asbestos factories. Wait, I'll tell you all about it in a song. (*Looking up at Dee-jay.*) Accompaniment please.

*TAPHY: A by-word now for the authorized flogging of Nigerian citizens by soldiers for alleged traffic infractions, etc. Neither women nor the elderly were spared this experience of public humiliation.

DEE-JAY: Ladies and Gentlemen, Chief Anikura and present Company will now sing a song entitled: Big Man Chop Cement; Cement Chop Small Man.

Big Man Chop Cement; Cement Chop Small Man

A labourer's life is a healthy one
 It's fresh air from dawn till the sun goes down
 Clean exercise; see how those muscles bulge
 Power beyond you my bookish don
 And what if a man does himself indulge
 At night when the bloody labour is done
 Every cloud has its silver lining
 Clouds of cement ensure my dining
 A mound of eba washed down in palm wine
 And overtime pay brings the suzies* in line.

Chorus:

I know now it's true — life is a wheeze
 The proof's in my lungs when I sneeze
 Well, my chest is congested
 But the port's decongested
 While I breathe like a dying accordion
 Seven more years says the surgeon
 And you end on a slab of cement
 It ends on a slab of cement.

No thought for tomorrow, this Jack's all right
 Grind all day long and grind all night
 Udoji† will come when things grow dull
 Then watch me jump on a Saturday night
 I tell you this cat's right on the ball
 Like a sailor in town, high as a kite
 Twelve-inches platform, dig the sky-scraping geezer
 Superfly-dandy, sharper than razor
 Easy come, easy go, God bless Udoji
 And the season of ships and cement orgy.

From port to horizon the ships lay spent,
 Cement in the holds, on the decks, cement
 And I gave up my nights of leisure and fun
 For overtime pay makes the worker content
 Right round the clock I had a good run

*SUZIES: Local for dashing young women.

†UDOJI: Named for the 1975 wages review commission which created Nigeria's record inflation.

The money came handy, now I repent
 A man's lungs for clean air is meant
 Not for breathing in clouds of cement
 And overtime pay comes to mere chicken feed
 When the cement tycoon has filled out his greed.

Chorus

ANIKURA: Well now to the next model. (*Turning round suddenly with the costume before him. Ahmed recoils in horror.*) A blind Man, heartbreaking very effective. (*He notices Ahmed's reaction for the first time. Bawls.*) He feels pity! My God, look at you. He actually feels pity. You feel the same way as the passers-by should feel. You're only fit to be begged from. Lead him away — give him the Bleeding-Heart outfit.

Obviously, Soyinka's scene is not wholly original, but he does supply a sufficient number of local details to Nigerianize it. His home audience would immediately grasp such topical references as Taphy, Udoji, and the Lagos cement-loading scandal, and even the jokes borrowed from Brecht about the victims of road accidents and war take on a grisly parochial relevance in Nigeria. Brecht may have furnished the basic skeleton for this scene, but Soyinka is the one who animates it in *Opera Wonyosi* by adding familiar flesh and blood, then clothing the whole conception in national dress.

In the scenes in which Soyinka departs entirely from Brecht's text, he gives free rein to his antic imagination and achieves some extraordinary theatrical effects. Emperor Boky's foaming tirade, one of the comic high points in the opera, would test the versatility of any professional actor. Here is a portion of the conclusion to it — the goon squad drill:

BOKY: (*Examines his watch.*) Time for Culture. I know I should sing for you, but you can't do much with the voice in the way of Social Reality. With boots on the other hand, with or without hob-nails . . . Ready!

Rhythm Section! Ready . . . Two — Go! One-Two-Three-a' Four! One-Two-Three-a'Four! Come on! One-Two-Three-a' Four! One-Two-Three-a'Four! One-Two-Three-Dig! In! One-Two-Three-Heels In! I said Stomp! Stomp! See their eyes — Dig In! Skulls! Imperial Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! Studs In! Studs In! Toe-caps! Grind! Grind! Crotch movement! Crotch! Dig In! Dig

In! Spinal Column! Aim for the Pelvic Junction! Pelvic Junction! Grind! Grind you bastards, I said Grind! . . . Come on Inspector Brown — give us that Lagosian lynch-mob rallying rhythm.

BROWN: (*Snaps into action from a confused state.*) Yes your Imperial Majesty. One-Two-Three —

O nse mi ki-ki-ki
 O nse me ki-ki-ki
 O nse mi mon-ron-yi
 O nse mi mon-ron-yi
 O nse mi ki-ki-ki

BOKY: (*Alternating between himself stopping and exhorting the squad to greater action.*) Those are ingrates at your feet. Juvenile delinquents. Future criminals. Little ingrates! Putative parricides! Pulp me their little brains! Wastrels! Prodigal sons! Future beggars! Suspects! Vagabonds! Rascals. Unemployed. Subversives. Bohemians. Liberals. Daily paid labour. Social menaces. Habeas Corpusites. Democrats. Emotional parasites. Human Rightist Vagabonds. Society is well rid of them. They disgrace Imperial dignity. Louts. Layabouts. Now their heads are under your feet. Your chance to clean up the nation once for all. Protect property. Protect decency. Protect dignity. Scum. Parasites. What do you do with parasites? What do you do with fleas! Bugs! Leeches! Even a dog is useful. But leeches on a dog? Ticks? Lice! Lice! Lice! Crab-louse! Stomp! Imperial Stomp! Studs in. Grind! Pre-frontal lebotomy [sic] — the Imperial way! Give your Emperor a clean empire. Sanitate. Fumigate, Renovate. (*He clubs the squad right and left to give them encouragement, decimating them until the very last one keels over. Finally realizes he's alone.*) Hey, what's this? A mutiny?¹³

This matches in manic intensity some of the looniest harangues in Soyinka's canon — everything from Brother Chume's prayers in *The Trial of Brother Jero* to the Professor's philosophizing in *The Road to the Old Man's curse* in *Madmen and Specialists*. It is vintage Soyinka, not leftover Brecht or mock Gay. By taking such liberties with the text and making it say something entirely new, Soyinka stamps his own individuality on the vehicle he has borrowed. Thus, *Opera Wonyosi*, though a lineal descendant of European light opera, has enough native strains in it to stand on its own as a separate but equal work of pop art. Like Brecht's reworking of Gay, it is a hardy hybrid achievement, a bastard with admirable integrity.

Soyinka's purpose in writing this opera was to satirize Nigeria in the mid-1970's, a period marked by military rule and an economic boom fueled by oil. In a prefatory note to the original playscript Soyinka stated that:

Opera Wonyosi has been written at a high period of Nigeria's social decadence the like of which will probably never again be experienced. The post Civil-war years, after an initial period of uncertainty — two or three years at the most — has witnessed Nigeria's self-engorgement at the banquet of highway robberies, public executions, public floggings and other institutionalised sadisms, arsons, individual and mass megalomania, racketeering, hoarding epidemic, road abuse and reckless slaughter exhibitionism — state and individual, callous and contemptuous ostentation, casual cruelties, wanton destruction, slummification, Nairamania and its attendant atavism (ritual murder for wealth), an orgy of physical filth, champagne, usury, gadgetry, blood . . . the near-total collapse of human communication. There are sounds however of slithering brakes at the very edge of the precipice. . . .¹⁴

Opera Wonyosi apparently was meant to restore human communication, to put more pressure on the slithering brakes. Soyinka attempted to do this by holding up to ridicule and scorn many of the social atrocities committed in the morally confused postwar era. The story of Mack the Knife was a convenient peg on which to hang his charges against his countrymen, for the underworld ambience of such a traditional villain-hero was sufficiently distanced in time and place to provide a large-scale perspective on the subject of human depravity, thereby imbuing the dramatic action with a semblance of "universality," yet at the same time that ambience resembled so closely the cutthroat, dog-eat-dog atmosphere of the "high period of Nigeria's social decadence" that Mackie could be easily assimilated as a local folk-hero/villain. Nigerian audiences would not be likely to question the stylized squalor of the beggar's world portrayed in this opera, for that would be tantamount to denying the surreal dimensions of their own corrupted world. Soyinka had chosen an excellent warped mirror to reflect the absurdities of an unbalanced age. As he said rather playfully in the playbill to the original production at the University of Ife:

We proudly affirm that the genius of race portrayed in this opera is entirely, indisputably and vibrantly Nigerian. We therefore insist, in view of all the above, that the characters in this opera are either strangers or fictitious, for Nigeria is stranger than fiction, and that any resemblance to any Nigerian living or dead, is purely accidental, unintentional and instructive.¹⁵

It may be no mere coincidence that both Brecht and Soyinka reworked the story of Mack the Knife in a postwar era, for both must have felt that their countrymen had learned nothing from the horrors of the holocaust. Man's reluctant return to depravity after such catastrophe must have struck them as dangerously idiotic. To show up this dark, benighted side of human nature, both turned to light opera, sugarcoating the bitter message they wished to convey to a complacent populace. By making people laugh at something absurdly close to home, they sought to make them think.

Brecht, however, fashioned his opera as a comment on the evil inherent in all mankind and reinforced by manmade institutions. As Peachum sings in the finale to Act One :

There is of course no more to add.
The world is poor and men are bad.
We would be good, instead of base
But this old world is not that kind of place.¹⁶

Soyinka, on the other hand, spoke primarily of the evils visible in Nigeria. Like Gay, he was striking out at specific targets in his own society, so his was a more topical satire than Brecht's.¹⁷ But whereas Gay was content to expose social evils without denouncing them or inquiring into their origins, Soyinka was interested in provoking his audience to raise questions about what their world was coming to and why. At the end of *Opera Wonyosi* Anikura sings:

What we must look for is the real beneficiary
Who does it profit? That question soon
Overtakes all your slogans — who gains?
Who really accumulates and exercises
Power over others?¹⁸

Soyinka thus stands in a middle ground between Gay and Brecht. He has more social commitment than Gay but less pessimism than

Brecht. He appears to believe that reform is possible so long as one can recognize and speak out against the evils that man brings upon man. *Opera Wonyosi* is his attempt to contribute to the reform of contemporary Nigeria through song, dance, and satirical laughter.

NOTES

- ¹ Wole Soyinka, "From a Common Back Cloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image," *American Scholar*, 32 (1963), 387-88.
- ² Wole Soyinka, "Production Note," *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (New York: Norton, 1973), n.p.
- ³ *Opera Wonyosi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). The play was initially called "The Wonyosopera," and the explanatory note on the title page of the original playscript which read, "Also known as *The Beggar's Opera*, *The Threepenny Opera*. In the manner of Bertold [sic] Brecht from a theme by John Gay," suggests that Soyinka was more in debt to Brecht than to Gay. I am grateful to Deirdre La Pin and Yemi Ogunbiyi for providing me with copies of this playscript.
- ⁴ See, e.g., E. J. Asgill, "African Adaptations of Greek Tragedies," *African Literature Today*, 11 (1980), 175-89; K. E. Senanu, "The Exigencies of Adaptation: The Case of Soyinka's *Baachae*," in *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka*, ed. James Gibbs (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980), pp. 108-12; and Albert Hunt, "Amateurs in Horror," *New Society*, 9 August 1975, pp. 342-43, and reprinted in Gibbs, *Critical Perspectives*, pp. 113-15.
- ⁵ In the "Acknowledgements and Disclaimers" printed on page 2 of the playbill for the University of Ife production of the play, Soyinka stated: "The author both on his own behalf and that of his collaborators, the late John Gay and Bertolt Brecht, acknowledges his indebtedness to His Imperial Dimunitive [sic] Emperor Bokassa I of Central Africa, who solved the geographical dilemma of this opera by taking a timely stride backwards into pre-history." I am grateful to Deirdre La Pin for providing me with a copy of this playbill.
- ⁶ Biodun Jeyifo, "Wole Soyinka, 'Opera Wonosi,'" *Positive Review* (Ile-Ife), 1 (1978), 22.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Mario Relich, "Soyinka's 'Beggar's Opera,'" *West Africa*, 30 January 1978, pp. 188-89, and reprinted in Gibbs, *Critical Perspectives*, p. 128.
- ⁹ Kole Omotoso [interviewed by Alex Tetteh-Lartey], "Arts and Africa," *BBC African Service*, No. 228 (n.d.), p. 4.
- ¹⁰ Soyinka states in the "Acknowledgements and Disclaimers" page of the playbill for the original University of Ife production that aside from Emperor Bokassa, "the genius of race portrayed in this opera is entirely, indisputably and vibrantly Nigerian."
- ¹¹ Omotoso, p. 6.
- ¹² Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp. 8-9; Wole Soyinka, *Opera Wonyosi*, pp. 7-9.
- ¹³ *Opera Wonyosi*, pp. 26-29.

- ¹⁴ Preface to unpublished playscript of *Opera Wonyosi*. Not included in published play.
- ¹⁵ "Acknowledgements and Disclaimers," playbill for University of Ife production of *Opera Wonyosi*, p. 2.
- ¹⁶ *The Threepenny Opera*, p. 41.
- ¹⁷ For comparisons of the Brecht and Gay operas, see Judith Johnson Sherwin, "The World is Mean and Man Uncouth," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 35 (1959), 258-70, and Ulrich Weisstein, "Brecht's Victorian Version of Gay: Imitation and Originality in the *Dreigroschenoper*," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 7 (1970), 314-35.
- ¹⁸ *Opera Wonyosi*, p. 83. The question is similar to that asked in Ayi Kwei Armah's novel *Why Are We so Blest?* (London: Heinemann, 1974), by the one-legged veteran in the hospital who is seeking to understand the results of the French Revolution: "Who gained? That is all I want to know. Who Won?" (p. 24). It is probably safe to assume that Soyinka would have been familiar with Armah's novel.