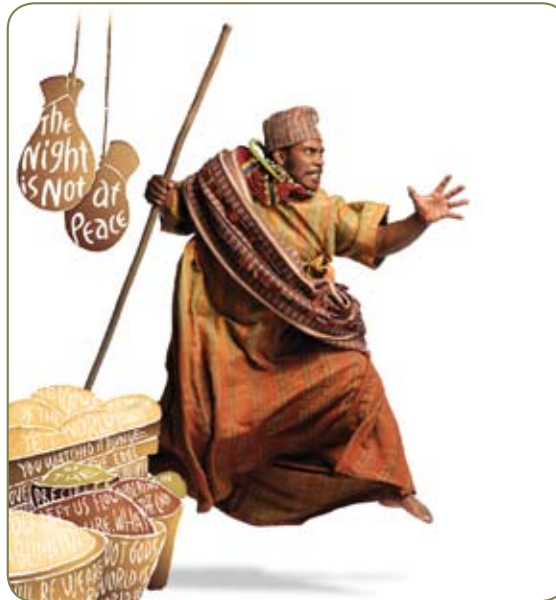


Death and the King's Horseman

FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

From the time I was first a candidate for the job of OSF artistic director, there was one idea about which I had absolute clarity and unshakeable passion: to expand our classical work outside the Western canon. Even as we acknowledge Shakespeare's unique genius, we need to celebrate other traditions of world culture. Our field too often relies on literature from the English-speaking world, and as world citizens, we can and must do better. As we work to bring you plays from the world stage that honor Shakespeare as our inspiration, we will deepen our human connection to the global web of history, politics and peoples.

– Bill Rauch



G. Valmont Thomas, *Praise-Singer*

By Wole Soyinka
February 14 – July 5, 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 **A Brief Synopsis and Character Who's Who**
- 3 **Rituals Wait for No Man** *The events of the play from the Yoruba perspective.*
- 4 **The Visit of the Not-I-Bird** *Elesin claims his readiness for death as he boastfully recites a playful, satirical poem about others who avoid the end of life.*
- 5 **Yoruba Belief and the Horseman's Duty** *What's at stake in this play for the Yoruba people.*
- 7 **The British Colonial Legacy** *A complicated history.*
- 8 **A Politically Engaged Artist** *Nobel prize winner Wole Soyinka has made art a vehicle for social justice.*
- 9 **Writers and Their Work** *A Dramatists Guild interview with the playwright.*
- 13 **Wole Soyinka** *A life chronology.*
- 14 **Further Reading** *Print and online resources.*

OTHER OSF PRODUCTIONS FROM THE WORLD STAGE

2008 The Clay Cart
Attributed to Shudraka
(Ancient India, circa 4th century)

A Synopsis

Death and the King's Horseman, a tragic drama by Nigeria's Nobel Laureate playwright Wole Soyinka, opens with vibrant drumming and a Praise-Singer creating a celebratory atmosphere in a Nigerian outdoor market. Accompanying them is a man full of life, the protagonist, Elesin Oba. He has chosen this marketplace of life in which to enact ritual suicide, his communal duty.

According to Yoruba ritual practice, Elesin, the king's horseman, must die 30 days after the king's death to accompany him into the other world. The Praise-Singer's riddle-filled poetry reminds Elesin of his duty to serve, after death, as intermediary to the living. Elesin boasts that he will not fail.

As Elesin chants the story of the Not-I Bird, a premonition of death, Iyaloja, the powerful Mother of the Market, enters with other women. They drape this man of honor resplendently in bright red alari cloth and richly woven sanyan.

Elesin spots a beautiful young woman whom he wishes to wed—a strange request just before death. He reassures the women that, like an old sap-laden plantain, he will die after his physical desire is fulfilled. Iyaloja agrees reluctantly since she does not wish to offend him, and she trusts him to complete his obligation.

The tragic events in the play unfold within the historical context of British colonial presence among the Yoruba.

Yoruba talking-drums send out an ominous rumble as British District Officer Simon Pilkings and his wife, Jane, dance the tango on their veranda, preparing for a costume ball that evening. They're wearing egungun garments (used for sacred Yoruba death rituals). Amusa, a Yoruba police sergeant, is appalled at their casual desecration of the masks. He informs Pilkings that Elesin is about to commit ritual suicide as part of Yoruba custom.

Elesin's name arouses Pilkings' annoyance—previously, he had helped Elesin's son, Olunde, to attend medical school in London over Elesin's strong objections. Pilkings, reluctant to deal with the impending suicide (barbaric in his eyes), sends Amusa to arrest Elesin. As district officer, he would rather attend the ball in honor of the visiting British prince.

Amusa's attempt to arrest Elesin in the marketplace is blocked by the market women guarding the bridal chamber. They raucously tease Amusa for his loss of manhood by serving whites. He flees. Elesin emerges, recognizing that it is time.

Elesin appears to get hypnotized by the powerful gbedu drums and the Praise-Singer's chants. He declares that he is no longer bound to the earth. His trance-like dance movements guide him toward the death passage.

The action then moves to the European ball at the Residency. Olunde appears, having just arrived from London. He tells Jane that he had received a telegram announcing the king's death and knew that, by tradition, his father would die a month later. An educated man with one foot in each culture, Olunde wants to advise Pilkings not to interfere in the ritual. He draws a distinction between Elesin's death as a communal duty and what he's observed of the "mass suicide" in World War II Europe.

But it is too late. Elesin misses the ritual timing of his death. The colonial officers arrive and take him to prison. As the king's horseman who failed to die, Elesin is tainted and dishonored. His people are left on the edge of a precipice without connection to the ancestral realm. Their world with its rituals and ceremonies has been overturned, and they are left shaken and adrift.

Who's Who

Praise-Singer A poet, trained in Yoruba tradition of reciting praise-poetry and incantations full of adulation as well as warning during a ritual ceremony.

Elesin The king's Horseman, a hereditary role that requires a Yoruba male—who, as an important chieftain and a friend to the king, has received the best of everything throughout his life—to commit ritual suicide 30 days after the king's passing.

Iyaloja Mother of the Market, a respected and powerful woman. Iyaloja is both a loving adviser to the younger market women as well as a leader with authority over Elesin during the ceremony of ritual suicide.

Simon Pilkings An efficient but arrogant district officer who represents British colonial presence in Oyo. He finds indigenous customs a nuisance when they interfere with his enforcement of British law and order in the colony.

Jane Pilkings Pilkings' wife. She is more sensitive in her dealings with the Yoruba but still a product of her time.

Amusa A Yoruba who converted to Islam. A police sergeant who works for Simon Pilkings in the British colonial administration.

Joseph The Pilkings' houseboy who converted to Christianity.

Olunde Elesin's eldest son, studying medicine in London, who returns home to bury his father, whom he expects to commit ritual suicide after the death of the king.

—Ketu H. Katrak, University of California, Irvine

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Rituals Wait for No Man

A moment of hesitation throws a universe out of whack

An outdoor market in Nigeria begins to close for the day. Women carry baskets, colorful woven cloth-bolts are taken down, stalls are emptied. In Nobel Prize-winning playwright Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, the end of this day starts the play. The vibrant, larger-than-life Elesin Oba enters, followed by his drummers and Praise-Singer. Yoruba drums send joyous messages of a ceremonial ritual about to unfold. The Yoruba king died 30 days before and now, according to ancient ritual, Elesin, the Horseman, is about to commit ritual suicide to accompany the king on his journey to the ancestral world.

Elesin confronts his imminent death with poetic exuberance: "I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes/Watch me dance along the narrowing path/ Glazed by the soles of my great precursors/ My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside."

But Elesin fails in his task, and Soyinka's philosophical dramatization of a human being facing death follows. What are the reasons for such ultimate self-sacrifice demanded by this tradition? Why does he fail? And what are the consequences of that failure?

For answers, we must enter Soyinka's own Yoruba (indigenous people of western Nigeria) world, where the living, the dead and even the unborn are linked integrally. Death, especially of an elderly person, is not a final event, but rather a passage from the human world to that of the living ancestors. Soyinka has said that Elesin's death, undertaken for his people, is "a kind of willed withdrawal from the life-force." Elesin must step into death "as an act of [human] will." But if Elesin fails, his people will have no connection to the gods; the ritual act uncompleted will throw their world out of harmony.

Death and the King's Horseman is set in 1940s West Africa (Oyo kingdom), at a time when Yoruba cultural practices

collided with British colonial dominance. The play is based on a real life incident, when a colonial administrator's attempt to stop a Yoruba ritual resulted in a tragedy that impacted both cultures. Soyinka uses the bare bones of the historical event as a frame for a metaphysical exploration of life and death.

The first scene of the play is filled with poetry, music and drumming. As Elesin, who as the king's companion has had a luxurious life, proudly prepares for his death, he's halted by the sight of a beautiful young woman. He must have this one last moment of pleasure before he goes. Since the community dares not refuse his last wish, Elesin takes her as his wife. He intends his brief time with her to be an interlude, followed by his death. Iyaloja, the powerful Mother of the Market Women, prepares his bridal bed but warns him to make sure the seed he leaves behind "attracts no curse."

The play then moves to the world of the British colonialists, filled with rituals of a different sort. British District Officer Simon Pilkings and his wife, Jane, dressed for a masked ball in honor of the visiting prince, are dancing a tango on the veranda of their bungalow. They are wearing sacred egungun masks that Pilkings has confiscated from one of the villagers. They hope these masks will win them first prize at the ball.

Amusa, a Yoruba policeman who works for the colonialists, is horrified at the sight of this desecration of the masks. They are used only in sacred ritual when a masked dancer embodies an ancestor, bringing him/her to "life," imitating that individual's mannerisms and style of walking and talking. While he has come to report on Elesin's impending ritual suicide, he's unable to talk to the Pilkings while they are wearing the masks of death. They are bemused at his discomfort.

The sound of drums in the distance makes Pilkings uneasy, and he calls in the houseboy, Joseph, a Yoruba converted to Christianity, to explain their meaning. Joseph admits to being confused about the drums' message—is it signaling a wedding celebration or funeral mourning? As it turns out, both are in process.

Back at the market, Elesin steps out of the bridal chamber and recognizes that his time has come. The music and drumming draw him into heightened consciousness and a semi-hypnotic dance that will draw him into death.

Previously, Pilkings had helped send Olunde, Elesin's son, to medical school in England, despite his father's strong objections. Simon and Jane feel relieved that they have "saved" Olunde from his culture.

At the ball, Olunde, shows up, having just arrived from London by ship. He had received a telegram informing him of the king's death and booked passage to come bury his father, whom he knew would commit ritual suicide. Erudite and quietly confident, he has one foot in both the British and Yoruba worlds, and has harsh words for what he's learned about the British penchant for the "mass suicide" of war.

"I had plenty of time to study your people," he says. "I saw nothing, finally, that gave you the right to pass judgment on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all."

The tragedy lies in the gaps of knowledge and communication between the two cultures. Even when there is dialogue—as when Jane and Olunde discuss an incident where a British captain blew himself up with his ship in order to save lives—the two have very different perspectives: Jane cannot fathom such an act, whereas Olunde finds it inspiring.

Meanwhile, Pilkings has gone in search

Continued on page 4

of Elesin, hoping to stop the ritual suicide before it happens. He sees his action as an honorable attempt to thwart a barbaric practice. So the play has set us up for two different cultures, both on fixed paths, thundering inexorably toward the other. What appears backward to one group is meaningful to another. Elesin's duty is to die as Pilkings' duty is to arrest Elesin.

Elesin's marriage to the young woman, even though it interrupts his path, embodies his desire for life. Soyinka sympathizes with such human drive for life as well as its universal fear of death, and gives Elesin pause—just enough time to miss his death window. Far from celebrating this “backward tradition” of ritual suicide, the playwright subtly questions the heavy demand of a tradition that requires a man's life.

Ultimately, as in ritual, the trials of Soyinka's tragic protagonist bring insights—sobering and painful—into the living community. The play ends with Iyaloja's significant linking of the Yoruba worlds: “Now, forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn.” But the community's fate is uncertain—will the tradition of ritualized death continue? The community remains shrouded in silent anticipation and sorrow. Will it realign itself since this calamity has tilted its world from its groove? These are questions the audience may ponder as it leaves the theater, lights coming up from Soyinka's darkly resonant world.

—Ketu H. Katrak

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The Visit of the “Not-I bird”

During the play's ceremonial opening in the marketplace, Elesin Oba chants and enacts, through poetic imagery, satiric dance and dramatic role-playing, a long, philosophical and enchanting story of the “Not-I bird.”

A visit from this bird is a premonition of death. Its call is considered a bad omen, so humans and animals disclaim hearing it. They try to escape by saying “Not-I” implying, “please do not tell me that my earthly time is over.”

Soyinka invents the “Not-I bird” chant/story from the complete phrase used among the Yoruba: “It-is-not-I-who-saw-that-bird-of-ill-omen,” that is recited as a prayer/incantation to keep death away.

The spirited Elesin, facing self-imposed death, uses this chant to illustrate that, unlike most humans and animals, he does not quiver at this bird's call since he is ready to die. Indeed, he will welcome the bird's call and offer it hospitality.

He entertains the market women and his male retinue of drummers and the Praise-Singer by role-playing a hunter, a farmer and a tapper (one who extracts palm-wine from specific trees), who quake nervously, as do the hyena and civet upon hearing this bird's call.

Elesin also enacts a courtesan all decked up to see the Chief Tax Officer, but who suddenly hears the dreaded sound. So, she sends a double-entendre message with light-hearted foreboding: “Tell him [death] I'm ill: my period has come suddenly/ But not-I hope-my time.” Elesin even portrays a kinsman Ifawomi (not in the play), a diviner, who trembles at hearing a disturbing rustling in the leaves.

Although Elesin's story of the “Not-I bird” narrates a serious subject, it is told with whimsy. It is ironic that Elesin's bragging about his courage in facing death falls flat when he misses the appropriate time to die. The telling of this lengthy story gives a brief pause to the dramatic action, almost duplicating a death experience when time stops.

—Ketu H. Katrak, University of California, Irvine

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Yoruba Belief and the Horseman's Duty

What's at stake for the Yoruba people

In order to grasp the significance of the horseman's duty in *Death and the King's Horseman*, it is important to understand the Yoruba belief structure, in which there are four, closely connected realms of existence in delicate balance:

The Realm of Living: This is the everyday world humans inhabit. A Yoruba proverb refers to this realm as "The Marketplace." In Soyinka's play, Act One takes place in the marketplace.

The Realm of the Unborn: The Unborn have not yet come into the world of the Living. They are the ones for whom all things must be kept in order and balance for the future of the Yoruba people.

The Realm of the Dead: These are the ones who have lived—and indeed, they may live again. For now, they keep an eye on the goings-on in the Living Realm. This is also the world of the Yoruba Gods, who are extremely lively and complex. The same Yoruba proverb referred to above names this place as

"Home." From this realm (also called the realm of the Ancestors/Gods), the Unborn move to the Realm of the Living. And so the cycle is complete.

The Realm of the Abyss: The Abyss is the place of ghosts, wandering spirits, strangers and terrible forces whose goals are to destroy the harmony of the Yoruba world. The Unborn must travel safely through this realm to arrive in the land of the Living. Occasionally, an important sacrificial individual with a potent life force (in the play, Elesin, the king's horseman) must challenge these forces to build a bridge across the Abyss. When that bridge is built, the Unborn can cross to the world of the Living.

Yoruba believe the transition from the Realm of the Living to the abode of the dead is not finite, as many other cultures do. It is just part of what Wole Soyinka describes as the "cyclical reality" of the "Yoruba worldview." Each person comes to this life, from the world of the Unborn, through the

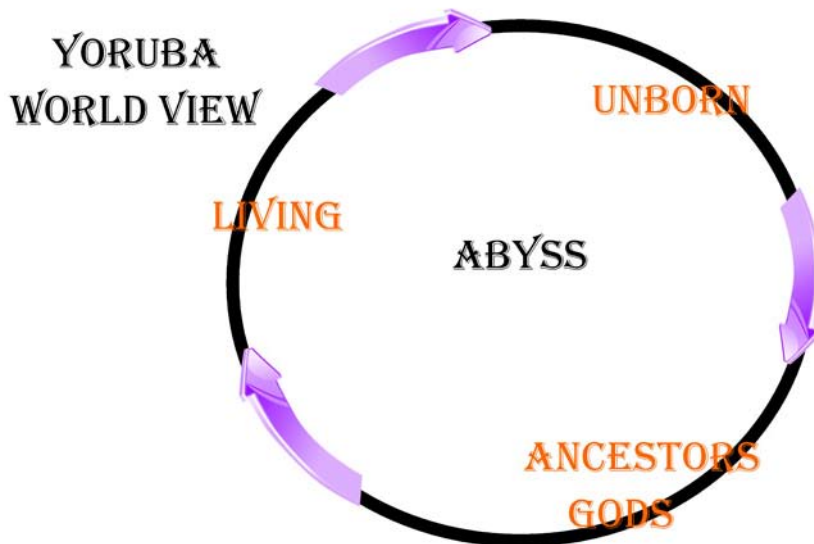
"abyss of transition." And each will leave again through this archetypal realm.

As the Unborn move through the Realm of the Dead, they gather their attributes. When a child comes into this world, he or she carries with them aspects of a former ancestor who is reborn in the child. For example, the Unborn will look like an ancestral grandfather or be good at math like an ancestral aunt. In this realm, the Unborn also receive attributes from the Gods, like wisdom or being a trickster.

When the time comes to leave this earth, it is not the end of existence. Yoruba scholar Bòlaji Idowu explains: "Death is not the end of life. It is only a means whereby the present earthly existence is changed for another. After death, man passes into a 'life beyond,' which is called Èhin-ìwà—'After-Life.'"

The experience in the After-Life for the Yoruba is said to be based primarily on a person's conduct on earth. Most Yoruba believe the dead go on to a place known as Òrun, where Olódùmarè (God) and the òrìsà (the divinities) dwell." For those who have been meritorious in this life, the After-Life is a pleasant representation of life here on this planet "minus," according to Odowu, "all the earthly sorrows and toils." For those who have committed sins, the After-Life is a place of endless suffering.

The biggest benefit for those who have led a good life is the chance to be remembered by the living. To be remembered is to be kept alive, to remain within the *Sasa* period—the realm of the Living, the Unborn and the Ancestors. Once an ancestor has been forgotten, he or she simply slips into the vast expanse of the *Zamani*, where the gods, divinities and spirits dwell. As long as ancestors remain within the *Sasa* period, they are able to help those on earth: They are in a sense bilingual,



Continued on page 6

Yoruba Belief... *continued from p. 5*

able to speak the language of men as well as the language of the spirits and of God. In exchange for being ritually remembered, the living-dead watch over the family and can be contacted for advice and guidance.

These physical and metaphysical worlds are kept in harmony through regular, meaningful interaction. The overarching task here is to keep the good will of the ancestors. When a Yoruba king dies, he travels to the Realm of the Dead to speak to the ancestors on behalf of the Living. Doing so assures the well-being of the human community.

In the Realm of the Living, a king travels everywhere by horse, escorted by his horseman. Yoruba belief dictates that within 30 days of a king's death, his horseman must follow him in ritual death. The horseman's job is to accompany the king through the Abyss in his passage from the Realm of the Living to the Realm of the Dead. If the horseman fails in his duty, the king may get lost and never arrive, or he may become so angry that he persuades the ancestors to do harm instead of good to the humans.

In the play, Elesin's death does not represent an end to an individual life but marks the transition of his spirit from one realm of existence to another. The horseman's death to serve his king is an honor and responsibility on which his people's existence depends. When the Living successfully cross over into the ancestral, spiritual world they make way for the Unborn to be released into the world of the Living, maintaining the cyclical flow of the cosmos. If the horseman does not fulfill his ritual obligation, the gulf between the Unborn and the Living will not be bridged. The community will be left vulnerable to wrathful spiritual forces, and the balance of the cosmos cannot be maintained.



The British Colonial Legacy

A complicated history

Death and the King's Horseman is set in the Oyo Kingdom, in southwestern Nigeria, in the 1940s. The play is based on a real incident in Nigeria in 1946, when time-honored tribal customs met inflexible British bureaucracy, with tragic results. For dramatic reasons, Soyinka moved the time of the play back a few years, to before the end of World War II.

To understand the play, it helps to set it within the context of its history. The playwright digs into the long and complicated relationship between colonizers and Nigerians and whites' misunderstanding of—and resistance to—African culture and rituals.

The powerful Oyo Kingdom, established around 1450, was populated by the Yoruba people, of whom Soyinka belongs. The kingdom's wealth and dominance was based on trading, farming and a trained army. It was at its height from 1650 to 1750, collapsing around 1820. The Atlantic slave trade boomed from the 1500s to 1850s, after which British colonial rule was established.

While the slave trade was primarily run by Europeans, Africans themselves, including those in states such as Oyo, participated by “stealing” or tricking humans.

Present-day Nigeria and Ghana (then called the Gold Coast) were major sources of human slaves, partly because of a denser population as well as ports for slave-holding ships to dock. The most devastating impact of the slave trade was the depopulation of Africa: Some 12 million able-bodied men and women were taken to the Americas.

Once slavery was abolished in Britain in 1834, the slave trade, especially from West Africa, ceased, which had major economic impact on local African economies. Britain, Germany, and

France then began to divide up the “Dark Continent” for raw materials and markets in what was termed the “scramble for Africa.”

The British entered 19th-century Oyo when it was one of the largest West African states. Starting in 1850, British merchants began to establish themselves along the West African coast. Nigeria was officially colonized in 1901.

The colonial practice of “indirect rule” (1884–1934), which used existing tribal structures and traditions for establishing rules, while the colonists worked behind the scenes and held veto power, was highly unpopular. It gave power to petty chieftains who spoke even a smattering of English and would carry out colonial administrative needs.

Communication problems, added to a basic misunderstanding of cultural differences, were problematic. These cultural rifts show up in *Death and the King's Horseman* in comic ways, as in the scene between the market women and their compatriot, Amusa, who works for the colonizers. But more important, they are the cause of the tragic events in the play.

Missionary activity accompanied colonial administration. The British agreed to encourage Christian conversion mainly in southern Nigeria, among the Yoruba. Incentives such as education and health care helped win converts, like Soyinka's parents. The North was and remains primarily Islamic.

In 1914, northern and southern Nigeria were amalgamated. As in other British colonies, such as India, Western education trained natives for colonial administration. Ironically, it also encouraged challenges to colonialism.

Although the British held Nigeria as a colony for 60 years—much less than their time in colonies such as India or

Trinidad—the devastation to African cultures was severe. The colonizers promulgated racist stereotypes of European superiority. They denigrated oral traditions, rituals, religion and language as backward—even barbaric. Soyinka portrays the British district officer, Simon Pilkings, holding such views in the play.

Nigeria won independence in 1960. Like other African postcolonial nation-states that had separate kingdoms prior to colonization, it was created as a national entity. The new boundaries ignored ethnic and linguistic similarities and differences across national borders. This led to continuing conflicts, as in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), when oil-rich East Nigeria (Biafra) wanted to secede.

The British colonial legacy in Nigeria has been a double-edged sword for the natives. British-style parliamentary democracy did not have historical roots in many African cultures. Precolonial political structures were replaced by an imposed, top-down system of governance. Democratic ideals of freedom and the rule of law are generally considered desirable for human societies, and Soyinka remains an indefatigable champion of these values.

—Ketu H. Katrak, University of California, Irvine

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A Politically Engaged Artist

Activism into Art

Nigeria's leading dramatist, Wole Soyinka (pronounced Sho-YIN-ka), was the first black African to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1986. With more than 30 literary works—dramas, poems, novels, essays and memoirs—Soyinka is a significant figure in world literature today. Above all, he is a pioneering man of theatre in his native home, where he formed two companies: the 1960 Masks and the Orisun Players.

He believes that artists have the same civic responsibilities in society as traders, businessmen, students and teachers. This aspect of his life work is often misunderstood, since his writing explores metaphysical issues, as in *Death and the King's Horseman*.

Soyinka's work for the stage is eclectic—blending African themes, Yoruba rituals and myths and Western dramatic techniques. He remarks famously that traditionalism does not mean wearing “raffia skirts.”

Born in 1934 in Ijebu-Isara, Nigeria, Soyinka learned Christian ideas from his parents, both converts. Through his grandfather, he was exposed to indigenous religion and Yoruba gods, to whom he feels spiritually akin.

Soyinka's life-work is rooted in an early boyhood experience. He received incisions on his ankles and wrists, a ritual act directed by his grandfather intended to instill courage in an individual.

He attended University College, Ibadan, and later completed his B.A. at the University of Leeds, where he studied with Shakespeare scholar G. Wilson Knight. He returned to Nigeria with a Rockefeller Fellowship, which enabled him to study his own culture, traveling across the country observing festivals of Yoruba gods that inspired his plays.

Soyinka, the man and the political commentator, was a household name

in Nigeria even before his Nobel Prize. He was a frequent contributor to local newspapers criticizing social injustice.

The writer's outspokenness has led to conflicts with successive Nigerian military regimes, and he turned his activism into art. During the Nigerian Civil War, he was imprisoned from 1967–1969 and kept in solitary confinement, as recorded in his prison memoir, *The Man Died*. The title was inspired by a note he received in prison: “The man dies in all those who keep silent in the face of tyranny.” In *A Play of Giants*, Soyinka dramatizes the continent's dismal legacy of dictators as “a parade of monsters.”

In the 1980s, during Shehu Shagari's “democratic” regime, he released a popular record, “Unlimited Liability Company,” for which he wrote satirical lyrics and music critical of the regime.

In the 1990s, dictator Sani Abacha unleashed another brutal reign of terror that included public executions. Soyinka, a vocal critic, was branded dangerous and his passport impounded. He escaped Abacha's killers under cover of darkness into a neighboring African country, then to France and to the United States. When civilian rule returned in 1999, Soyinka accepted an emeritus post at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife, Nigeria, on the condition that military officers be barred from serving as chancellor.

Soyinka has also published many political essays during a career that has spanned more than 50 years. He discusses the sad state of his native land and of the African continent in two volumes: *The Open Sore of a Continent* and *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness*. His wide-ranging political vision analyzes the horrors of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and he ponders the lessons of post-apartheid South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Nigeria.

Soyinka has never sought political office, choosing to remain a citizen, free to criticize “the oppressive boot,” as he puts it, irrespective of the “color of the foot that wears it.”

The 74-year-old Soyinka has taught at universities across Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States, including Harvard, Emory, Cambridge and Cornell. Since 2007, he has been the President's Marymount Institute Professor in Residence at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

He is the recipient of numerous honorary doctorates, including from the University of Leeds and Harvard University. His awards and honors include Overseas Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge, and Fellow at the Society for the Humanities, Cornell University. He has served on the UNESCO Board for Artistic Freedom and on the Executive Board of the Writers in Exile Program at the University of Nevada.

Soyinka can best be described as an artist-cum-activist. Despite his periods of voluntary exile outside Nigeria when his life has been threatened, he has continuously fought for a democratic society where ordinary Nigerians can live in dignity. He remains an artist committed to democracy and freedom for people across the world.

“My one abiding religion” he notes, “is human liberty.”

—Ketu H. Katrak, University of California, Irvine

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Writers and Their Work

A New Dramatists interview with Wole Soyinka by Gregory Bossler

Wole Soyinka's art is inseparable from his politics, and in 1986, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature in part for his dedication to literature as an agent of social change. He was born in 1934 in Abeokuta, former capital of the Egba kingdom, which was assumed into the British colony of Nigeria. Since childhood, Soyinka has been wrestling with the legacy of that colonial birthright. He studied at University College of Ibadan in Nigeria and Leeds University in England, where he began his theatrical apprenticeship at London's Royal Court Theatre. In 1960, he formed his own acting company, Masks, which produced *A Dance of the Forests*, about the "recurrent cycle of stupidities" of Africa's native, neocolonial politicians. Soyinka continued writing politically charged plays, novels, poetry, and improvisational "guerrilla theater" for the next seven years, until he was arrested for illegally traveling to Biafra during Nigeria's civil war and was jailed without trial. When the civil war ended, he was released and went into exile for six years. He began a second exile in 1994, after Chief Moshood Abiola's election was annulled and Gen. Sani Abacha issued a warrant for Soyinka's arrest for terrorist bombings in Lagos. In 1997, Soyinka was charged in absentia for treason. After Abacha died in 1998, interim ruler Gen. Abdusalam Abubakar met Soyinka in New York to discuss the laureate's pardon and return to Nigeria, which Soyinka did in October 1998. The Dramatist spoke with Soyinka soon after the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo and the publication of *The Burden of Memory*, Soyinka's essays about reconciliation, the "near intolerable burden" of memory, and how art "can hold together the burden of memory and the hope of forgiveness" to nourish reconciliation.

GREGORY BOSSLER: I wanted to start by asking you about recent events. I know that in October you finally ended your second exile and went back to Nigeria. From what I understand, the crowd was a bit enthusiastic when you arrived.

SOYINKA: Well, that's putting it mildly. It was quite an overwhelming experience, very overwhelming, very touching, and also challenging, because it meant that so much expectation was still placed on me as a member of society, as a member of the community.

BOSSLER: You also gave a couple of speeches there when you arrived.



Playwright Wole Soyinka (Photo by Glenn Cratty, Loyola Marymount College)

SOYINKA: Yes, indeed. In fact, one reason I went home as soon as I did was because the program that we—the United Democratic Front of Nigeria and other movements that fought Abacha to a standstill—were convinced was absolutely necessary for the restoration of democracy in that country was obviously being rejected. The interim regime of Abdusalam had decided to go straight for immediate elections. So, I considered it essential that certain points be made, certain areas of core issues be laid out, before the people got carried away by the excitement of what we considered would be a most unsuitable and a most confusing election. There was no preparation made, no time really to form partnerships based on concrete issues and ideologies, no time at all for those who actually fought for this democracy to come together. In other words, the people who were going to win in the election were the collaborators of Sani Abacha who had amassed enormous resources by this very treacherous pattern of collaboration. I felt it necessary that these issues be laid clearly before the people, before they went into any elections that had become inevitable. The least we could do was to speak directly to the people, so at least we could minimize the damage likely to be done by this hasty election.

BOSSLER: You have in the past expressed concern about the quick sense of euphoria that people seem to grab onto, as they did

when the civil war was over in 1970. You just don't trust that sense of euphoria very well.

SOYINKA: It's a very dangerous feeling but, at the same time, a perfectly understandable one. Many people don't have the luxury to reexamine the issues that created the crisis and to ask if they have really been resolved or merely been pushed under the carpet, with the inevitable consequence that they will again resurface and probably exact a greater toll on the people than before. Each time there is a seeming resolution of a crisis, and I use the word "seeming" very deliberately, of course there is an immediate sense of relief. Certain strictures have been taken out of civic life. Certain gestures of reconciliation have become evident. Some ill-gotten wealth, shall we say, has been recovered, so people think, "Oh, well, things are not as bad as they used to be," but in fact, it would be always the beginning of a new round of explosions.

BOSSLER: So, are you still very wary of President Obasanjo?

SOYINKA: I am very wary, but I recognize that it's important to quickly make encouraging sounds when a specific route is being taken that has its positive side. Otherwise, one becomes a permanent doomsayer and loses credibility. I'm very wary even about the process by which he came to power. It's a flawed process, and that has its inevitable consequences. In fact, those are becoming quite apparent. At the same time, sometimes an individual is catapulted into a situation where he realizes that he has an opportunity to redress even his own past transgressions, and then we may find that society is being pushed in certain positive directions that people didn't think were possible before. It's that mixture of readiness to approve specific actions, specific reforms, while constantly alerting the population that flawed beginnings sometimes carry seeds of their own destruction.

BOSSLER: In your most recent publication, *The Burden of Memory*, you talk about reconciliation. It seems almost that you're laying out what you think needs to be done to start to heal the different factions in the country.

SOYINKA: In *The Burden of Memory*, I lay emphasis on restitution as a prerequisite of reconciliation. Reconciliation for me is almost a theological concept. Restitution has to do with tackling the material condi-

Continued on page 10

tions that lead to the process of injustice in society and the concrete means of redressing those issues. The first thing of course is the truth. That is the most important. Even if restitution does not take place after that, by exposing the truth and making people aware in a heightened way, in a formalized and structured way, they become very conscious of the trauma that has been inflicted on society. That for me is the principal, the primary objective. To me, restitution follows naturally in the process of justice, and after that, if reconciliation comes, it is a bonus to society, but even more important than reconciliation is healing. For me, healing goes with restitution. Reconciliation is never guaranteed with healing. Reconciliation is never guaranteed with restitution, but I certainly hold a view that healing is a byproduct of restitution.

BOSSLER: To get at the truth, to not have memory be forgotten, is that where the artist can have his primary effect on the process?

SOYINKA: Yes, indeed. The role of the artist here is very crucial, whether the artist is a writer or the artist is a plastic artist or a musician. The seizure of the material of memory and its expression in forms that appeal to what I call the "visceral receptivity" of a population, that really is where the substance of memory is lodged, and it is the artist, I believe, who successfully brings this out most effectively. In fact, he is able to integrate this into the day-to-day awareness of people, the awareness of their present constantly interwoven with the memory that has been very softly, metaphorically, or even directly given a new life by the artist. Of course, the role of the politician is also important. The politician has a choice to either execute the mandate of memory or, the worse for society, to pretend that the mandate does not exist.

BOSSLER: In *Burden of Memory*, you said that the poet sometimes anticipates the vision of the statesman.

SOYINKA: I think very often, most of the time, the artist does, and the worse for them. That's why they get into trouble all the time. I spoke about the luxury of stepping aside, which is a very disquieting luxury. That kind of luxury is not for the artist's comfort. On the contrary, it's one of the most uncomfortable forms of luxury that exists.

BOSSLER: You have said that not all artists bear this responsibility, yet you seem compelled to take on that responsibility.

SOYINKA: That is true enough. I'm always the first to acknowledge that this burden should not necessarily be placed on the artist, if the artist does not have that temperament. It is, incidentally, a temperament that I wish I didn't have. I have very often thought that, if I had a choice in the matter, I would rather have been a different kind of an artist, but unfortunately, I am endowed with this temperament.

BOSSLER: So, your art has chosen you, in a sense?

SOYINKA: I'm afraid so. I didn't have much choice in the matter. I wasn't consulted at all.

BOSSLER: What do you think your background, coming from the Yoruba and being schooled in England, owes to that? Many writers of your generation were caught in that dichotomy between the colonial and the native cultures, but you seem to have responded to it very politically.

SOYINKA: My background as a child, I think, probably has something to do with this particular temperament. I don't know that my experience in England formed my temperament. I underwent my childhood during quite a bit of political turmoil in my native town, Abeokuta. I was involved even as a little boy in the political contest between the women's movement and the feudal and oppressive monarch, the alake of Abeokuta. Then, my family has always been politically minded, especially during the nationalist struggle against British colonialism. In that sense, colonialism—which was very real to me as a child, especially as it was constantly debated by my uncles, aunts, father, and mother—the sense of being products of a monumental injustice, of imposition, of external dominance was always in the background of my formation. Add to that the very concrete and real struggle against the feudal dispensation, which also had the collaboration of the British colonial officers in that part of the country, these formed the basis of my political upbringing.

BOSSLER: As far as your artistic upbringing, though, you started to become attracted to the theater when you were in school in England, and I wonder if it was because, as you have said, theater is the most revolutionary art form.

SOYINKA: I think there's little doubt that I was inclined toward theater because theater can make such an immediate impact. I also come from a very strong theatrical tradition. The Yoruba tradition of theater, which still exists today, is a very powerful cultural force within the society. It's a multimedia kind of theater, much given to improvisation, very mobile, very flexible. I also grew up with the traditional forms of theater, the theater of the Egungun ancestral masquerade, for instance, which the strolling players used to perform through the streets. Many forms of theater were going on around me. That background was very important. When I went to study literature formally, I think that background pushed me immediately into the direction of dramatic specialization.

BOSSLER: Yet, as for the social effect of theater, you say in *Burden of Memory* that there's a limit to what the dramatist can do, especially in revealing the truth.

SOYINKA: Not just the dramatist but the artist in general, and that's where the frustration comes in. What leads poets like Christopher Okigbo to throw down his pen, pick up his gun in defense of Biafra, and die on the warfront? What nerve drove various writers during the Fascist surge in Spain to form an artists brigade in the Spanish civil war, during which several artists lost their lives? What is it except the moment when the individual recognizes that he's a member of the human community, a member of his immediate society, before even being an artist? Suddenly, the tools of literature become inadequate. Simply, the writer senses that these tools are not enough. The material of literature cannot unset the urgency of the moment. The material of literature needs a visionary, an alarmist, or a cautionary intelligence, but very often, that is not sufficiently disseminated, the warnings are not heeded, and the artist realizes that the tools of literature or the brush are suddenly no longer enough. Then he makes a decision, for better or worse. There's no time to judge the appropriateness of that decision. Is it better to continue using the tools of creativity? No. The situation becomes so overwhelming that the human being in the artist makes the critical decision.

BOSSLER: The ability of art to create that sense of community, is that what you were doing with the Area Boys in Kingston, Jamaica?

SOYINKA: Oh, yes, the kind of theater in which I come to life, really, has always been a theater that relates in a very direct and visceral way to the specific community. In other words, when I feel the theater that I'm producing, that I'm creating has either emerged from the specific community and/or is being reintegrated into the community, I get a wonderful sense of fulfillment. My time in Jamaica was the only period of creative fulfillment I enjoyed during all those years of fighting the dictator Sani Abacha. It was a marvelous interlude and so different from what I was doing in Nigeria. It was a very fulfilling experience.

BOSSLER: In *Burden of Memory*, it also seems that you are criticizing Léopold Senghor for wanting to make one universal culture as opposed to letting people celebrate their own culture.

SOYINKA: I believe that all cultures are tributaries to the world pool of civilization, and I consider it only natural, only logical that each individual artist prefers his own culture. If one doesn't, who else will? However, in the case of Senghor, he takes the French almost as the source of world civilization. He privileges French culture and doesn't make any bones about it. For him, this is something he passionately believes. As a comparative culturalist, I suppose he has the right to make that kind of judgment, but I believe that he makes excessive obeisance to French culture. I was raised in Anglo-Saxon culture in addition to my own. For me, Anglo-Saxon culture is another tributary. I do not privilege it over Germanic culture, over Italian culture, over French culture, or over Japanese culture. In the field of theater, for instance, I find a greater affinity between Yoruba theater and, for instance, Japanese noh theater or Greek classical theater than I find between, let us say, Nigerian contemporary theater and American contemporary theater or British contemporary theater. That kind of eliciting of affinities is a normal, very creative, and regenerative process for any artist. The almost philosophical grounding that Senghor elicits for privileging French culture is something that I find very strange and that not just I but other African writers have criticized.

BOSSLER: When you formed the Masks company, was that an attempt to navigate

the confluence of those two tributaries, the Anglo-Saxon and Yoruba, toward a new type of theater?

SOYINKA: Yes, of course. To utter a cliché, culture is not static—and neither are the arts. The theater that I chose, or that chose me, the kind of theater that I practiced could not be the kind of theater that I inherited as a Yoruba. This is not to deny that some classical modes, including Yoruba classical theater, deserve to be preserved, not merely as museum pieces but as certain formalisms to be studied and enjoyed in their own right, like Japanese noh or kabuki theater. I was in Japan quite recently for a theater festival, and I was absolutely refreshed to see their very stylized, beautiful, and antique theatrical communication. The Bolshoi Ballet and other classical forms, societies try to preserve them in their pristine form. Of course, they are only a small fraction of a people's artistic productivity. The traditional resources never restrict the contemporary forms. One adds, one integrates, one subtracts, or one plays variations with various experiences of theater or other art forms with which one comes in contact. This was what I tried to do, firstly with the Masks and later with the Orisun Theater, a form of dramaturgy that follows me everywhere, that I also practiced when I was in Kingston, Jamaica.

BOSSLER: Under colonization, those traditional theatrical forms didn't fare too well, as neither did the society. However, after independence, did making theater become easier or harder?

SOYINKA: Putting it all together was difficult simply because of lack of resources, but the artistic aspect was not a great difficulty. In other words, the material was there and I knew where to look for the material that I wanted to integrate into what was essentially a contemporary play, *A Dance of the Forests*. No, it was lack of resources, including even theater space, which meant you had to rehearse where you could. We rehearsed in most unorthodox ways. I eventually managed to bring together a passable show. The same pattern has continued up to today with many forms of contemporary theater.

BOSSLER: So, the obstacles that you faced in the Orisun company were more practical than political?

SOYINKA: Oh, no, they became heavily political. The practical difficulties in Masks continued also in Orisun Theater, but the practical difficulties became complicated further by the political, because Orisun Theater set out from the word "go" to be a political tool.

BOSSLER: When you were back in Nigeria recently, did you have a chance to see any live theater? I understand it's not faring too well in the country.

SOYINKA: No, it's not. It's not faring too well right now. There wasn't anything to see while I was there, not that I would necessarily have found time for it in the very short, brief period that I spent there. Theater was hammered heavily under Sani Abacha, at least meaningful theater, and television had taken its toll earlier on and during Abacha's period. The facile teledrama had pushed away the resourcefulness and intelligence of live theater in many instances. Then the cheap video films became a source of livelihood for many traditional artists. These films, what you might call "exploitation movies," were made and shot in about two weeks for virtually nothing and immediately marketed. All this contributed to kill theater, but I think one of the biggest blows was the reign of terror of Sani Abacha, which made even existing live theater extremely cautious and unadventurous.

BOSSLER: Under the new democracy, are you hopeful that theater will, if not thrive, at least survive?

SOYINKA: Oh, no question, I think there is going to be a resurgence of live theater.

BOSSLER: What do you think are the political issues that need to be addressed by artists like yourself who are of that temperament?

SOYINKA: Society has retrogressed quite a lot. The values in society have become brutalized, cheapened, and I think that writers are going to address those issues of general society in a very acute way. The present democratic dispensation is also going to come under the searchlight of artists. The shenanigans of the politicians, they never lose their foibles, I'm afraid.

BOSSLER: Even in this country.

SOYINKA: Yes, I noticed. ... We should see a resurgence of the Orisun-type theater, what I call "guerilla theater," both on campuses as well as in the streets.

Continued on page 12

BOSSLER: What about the problems with Shell Oil Company, what Ken Saro-Wiwa and his movement was fighting, is that something that has yet to be sufficiently addressed?

SOYINKA: It's still very much unresolved. All one can say is that the oil companies are learning that they now have to be on their very best behavior. It's been demonstrated to them clearly that allying with an autocratic power rather than dealing with the communities from whose soil they draw their profits, that is a very shortsighted policy. The Delta has been aflame for the past few years, even before the death of Abacha. Things moved from Ogun to Edo and other river areas, and the violence became even more escalated after the death of Abacha. The present head of state, Obasanjo, recognizes that it has to be one of his immediate priorities. Even before he was elected, when he was campaigning, he met with the leaders in those areas. He's set up a special commission to deal with the problems there and to prepare a new formula of revenue allocation and development in the oil-producing areas. Quite a bit is happening, and I wait to see how it further develops. However, the oil companies now understand that the former process of collaboration, which enabled them to use the forces of central government for repressing the indigent in the oil-producing areas, has been terminated and not only because of the transfer to democracy but also the militant upsurge in those areas.

BOSSLER: It seems to be one situation where the tools of art are insufficient, and people have become militant.

SOYINKA: Yes, the late Ken Saro-Wiwa was one writer who recognized that. So did other writers. You'd be astonished at the number of writers who had to flee Nigeria clandestinely during Abacha's regime, and to take their works outside, publish outside, and then sneak back very quietly and lay low, making sure that attention was not focused on them. Despite that, quite a number still landed in jail, the young poets and so on who insisted on dealing with the problem in their writings. They underwent some unpleasant passages at the hands of Sani Abacha's goons.

BOSSLER: When you talk about an artist seizing memory and making sure that it survives, isn't there an inherent danger that

it could also become propaganda, for either side.

SOYINKA: Yes, indeed. The theology of "let the dead bury their dead" is very strong within traumatized societies. Look at what is happening in Sierra Leone today. How do you begin to address the level of bestiality that was so reckless, so rampant, so indiscriminating, much of it committed by the boy soldiers who became far more involved in atrocities than even those who trained them? Reintegrating those youth into society is a priority for the community, and one can understand why they believe that, if the artist insists on elevating the function of memory, you disrupt the process of reintegration. However, each profession must assume its own responsibility. Certain functions belong to the keepers of memory and certain functions to the territory of justice. One area of responsibility simply cannot exclude the other. The artist cannot say memory is sufficient and allow people to be tortured by the constant evocation of the past. That would be as lopsided and impractical as dispensing with the functions of memory.

BOSSLER: How do you approach your function as a teacher of drama? What do you impart to your students as important to become dramatists?

SOYINKA: First, there is the teaching of dramatic literature that takes a fundamentally comparative view. In other words, I find the teaching of drama to be particularly enlightening when one is able to draw out the similarity of inspiration across various cultures and civilizations. Then, there is of course my own particular theatrical tendency, in other words, the way I enjoy using the stage and interpreting material on the stage, which is a very personal exchange between the student and myself. It's a dual approach of objective comparison and then subjective representation, which of course is a result of my own experimentation, my own eclectic culture. This is what I try to impart to the students.

BOSSLER: Are you saying that the wider read you are the better dramatist you are?

SOYINKA: It's not just a question of being wider read. It's a consciousness of the existence of other modes of culture. That's what matters. Sometimes, excessive wide reading gets in the way, like the millipede that keeps counting his feet and never manages

to walk. What matters is awareness, the elimination of insularity, which incidentally is a problem of students in this country. The teaching of the arts and literature is a very insular one in this country. That is one huge obstacle which I find I always have to overcome. There is what I call a rather "illiberal approach" to the teaching of humanities, an over-heavy dependence on a narrow, canonical approach to literature and the arts.

BOSSLER: It seems to me though, especially at the university level in the past couple of years in this country, there has been a sort of obsession almost the other way with political correctness.

SOYINKA: That's an expression that I loathe, incidentally, but the movement toward multiculturalism is a very good one, although it's very young and has not yet entrenched itself in the creative consciousness of many theater practitioners. From time to time, you have a wave of what I call "magpie eclecticism." For instance, you might have a sudden fashion for tantric art sweeping the avant-garde, without any real in-depth appreciation, understanding, or application. It's just a temporary fad. You've had periodic consciousness of otherness overtake the American artistic world from time to time, but the continuum of multicultural awareness is only beginning. It is very recent, certainly less than a decade in any real, meaningful sense.

BOSSLER: Do you think we are approaching a global community?

SOYINKA: I think we are, but it shouldn't be done out of this horrendous, rather superficial, and some-times even narrow, censorious manner called political correctness. It should be done almost in a spirit of what I call "eclectic consumption habit," with an emphasis on the word "habit." From that point of view, I would say that we are approaching the terrain of a global cultural consciousness, however, I hope without ever losing the uniqueness of one's individual culture, whether Italian, Slavic, or American. I very much believe in "vive la différence," at the same as I believe in a global approach to culture.

BOSSLER: One medium that has been most effective in fostering that global culture is film, but I believe you've only written only one film.

SOYINKA: I'm glad you used the expression "written." For a moment, I thought you were

Continued on page 13

going to accuse me, correctly, of having actually attempted to make a film, which I prefer to forget. I attempted to direct a film, which was disastrous, and then I collaborated in another film that I also prefer not to remember. I'm still waiting until I can a film I want to make.

BOSSLER: So, in the future, you might tackle that medium?

SOYINKA: Oh, yes, I very much want to. I think I have a couple of films in my mind, which must however be done under the right circumstances. The ad hoc approach just did not work for me, so I'm going to be patient.

BOSSLER: It was sort of a "guerilla cinema"?

SOYINKA: That is correct. You put it exactly right. In fact, it was so guerilla that we had to move from location to location, we couldn't stay too long in one place, because we would be found, and that spelled enormous danger. So, staying in one location and filming all the sequences for that location—without dismantling, moving somewhere else, and then coming back later on—that is the way to do a film. This one was crazy. For the safety of everybody, we had to stay on the move.

BOSSLER: You kept the cameras rolling as you got into the cars?

SOYINKA: You could put it that way, yes. We had bodyguards on the periphery of the location while filming was going on. It was that kind of adventurousness. It was exciting at the time, but it is not a way to make films.

BOSSLER: Theatrically, what are you waiting to tackle? What is coming up next?

SOYINKA: I am supposed to be a collaborating with Arthur Miller on the Ubu theme transported to the African continent. That is supposed to come out sometime next year. The project began last year and really should have materialized this year, but we agreed to shift it, while I tackled the Abacha incubus.

BOSSLER: Finally, what do you think is in the future for Nigerian theater, particularly the traveling theaters?

SOYINKA: The traveling theaters, I sincerely hope, are going to come back with a big rebound. Again, it's usually an economic problem. The practitioners had to go into cheap video and television just to survive. As the

economy improves, we're going to see them rebound, and they're going to be even more intentionally and socially relevant than they were before. Then, the contemporary English-language theater is going to move out a lot more from the campus citadels, which I tried to do when I was teaching in Ife and other universities. I believe we are going to see more "café theater," the kind of Living Theater you had in Greenwich Village in the sixties. That's the kind of theater I would really love to see, which I hope will finally become established. There have been tentative attempts in the past, but I'm hoping that we will see a steadiness of this form of theater, one which takes it material from the people and gives it back to the people directly.

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Wole Soyinka

Selected Chronology

1934 Born in Abeokuta, western Nigeria, son of Samuel Ayodele and Grace Eniola Soyinka.

1948–50 Student at Government College, Ibadan, an elite high school in western Nigeria; starts writing poems.

1952–54 Student at University College, Ibadan. Excels in literature and languages, including French and Greek.

1954–57 Attends the University of Leeds in northern England. Obtains a BA English Honors degree in 1957. Begins writing two plays, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*.

1958 Works as a play reader at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Directs *The Swamp Dwellers*.

1960 Nigerian independence from Britain. Returns to Nigeria and starts research on African drama as a Rockefeller Research Fellow. Writes *Camwood on the Leaves* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*. Forms the 1960 Masks, a theater group, which produces

A Dance of the Forests, written to celebrate Nigerian independence.

1962 Appointed a lecturer in English at the University of Ife. Resigns in protest at the policies of the western Nigerian regional government.

1964 Active in western Nigerian politics. Forms The Orisun Theatre Company.

1965 Senior lecturer at the University of Lagos. Publication of his first novel, *The Interpreters*. Arrested for holding up a radio station in Ibadan, but acquitted for lack of evidence.

1966 Two military coups in Nigeria put the country on the brink of civil war.

1967 The eastern region of Nigeria cedes from the Nigerian Federation and renames itself Biafra; the ensuing civil war lasts for three years. Awarded the John Whiting Drama Award (with Tom Stoppard). Arrested and incarcerated without charges because of his efforts to end the civil war. He is not released from prison until 1969.

1968 Awarded Jock Campbell – New Statesman Literary Award for *The Interpreters*.

1969 Released from prison and becomes head of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan.

1972 Publication of *The Man Died*, his prison memoirs.

1973 Visiting Professor at the University of Sheffield and Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge.

1974 Cofounds the Union of Writers of the African Peoples and is elected Secretary General.

1975 Returns to Nigeria and is appointed Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Ife. Publication of *Death and the King's Horseman*.

1976 Publishes *Myth, Literature and the African World* and *Ogun Abibiman*.

1977 Administrator of the International Festival of African and Negro Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in Lagos. Directs Opera Wonyosi.

1979 Directs *Death and the King's Horseman* at the Goodman Theater, Chicago, and later at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D. C.

Continued on page 14

1981 Visiting Professor at Yale University. Publication of *Aké*, an autobiography covering his childhood years.

1984 Releases *Blues for a Prodigal*, a film on the disputed Nigerian elections of 1983.

1986 Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1994 Publication of *Ibadan: The "Pen-klemes" Years—a Memoir*, the third part of an autobiographical trilogy covering the years 1946–1965.

1995 Involved in the organization of massive protests following the cancellation by the military regime of the federal elections won by Moshood Abiola.

1996 Forced into exile after his life is threatened by the military regime. Launches an international campaign against the Nigerian dictatorship. Publication of *Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigeria Crisis*.

1997 Charged with treason by the Nigerian military regime and tried in absentia.

1998 Returns to Nigeria.

1999 Publication of *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness* and a new volume of poems entitled *Outsiders*.

2001 The play *King Baabu* is published, which satirizes African dictatorship.

2002 *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*, a collection of poems is published.

2005 Becomes one of the spearheads of an alternative National conference, PRONACO.

2006 *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, the newest installment of his memoirs, is published. He cancelled his keynote speech for the annual S.E.A. Write Awards Ceremony in Bangkok to protest the Thai military's successful coup against the government.

2007 Calls for the cancellation of the Presidential elections held two weeks earlier in his native Nigeria because of the widespread fraud and violence that characterized the process.

Soyinka is currently the Elias Ghanem Professor of Creative Writing at the English department of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and the President's Marymount Institute Professor in Residence at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.



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Online Resources

Soyinka's 1986 Nobel lecture (including audio). http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1986/soyinka-lecture.html

Writing, Theater and Political Activism Interview with Wole Soyinka: Conversations with History series, University of California, Berkeley (video). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wosbdrigdRc>

Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts. Includes interviews, reviews, excerpts of Soyinka's writing, etc. <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/soyinka/index.html>

"Structural Coherence of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*." *The College Literature*, Spring 2004. Craig McLuckie. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3709/is_200404/ai_n9344965

"Suicide in African Culture: *Things Fall Apart* and *Death and the King's Horsemen*." Cynthia Scott. http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/306534/suicide_in_african_culture_things_fall.html?cat=37

"Colonized and Losing Faith in *Death and the King's Horseman*." James Wolfe. http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/17554/colonized_and_losing_faith_in_death.html?cat=38

"Ironic (Colonial) Developments in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*." Josh Coito. http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/185686/ironic_colonial_developments_in_soyinkas.html?cat=38

Assessment of the differences between Yoruba and Western attitudes toward suicide. <http://www.planetpapers.com/Assets/1463.php>

YouTube Link

www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4oQJZ2TEVI
Link to a clip of Nigerian master drummer Adebisi Adeleke, who performs in OSF's production of *Death and the King's Horseman*. Adeleke, born into a lineage of professional Praise Talking Drummers, is a 4th generation drummer who learned his art from his father. He currently lives and teaches in Atlanta, Georgia.



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