In the seventies, Nigeria experienced a series of military regimes in which the entire constitution, or parts of it, was suspended and power concentrated in the hands of soldiers who ruled by decree. The rule by decree concentrated authority in the hands of the military elite, thereby making it a form of authoritarian rule. In Africa, countries like Ghana, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea and Uganda have proved susceptible to dictatorship when they gave birth to such men as Kwame Nkrumah, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, Marcias Nguema and Idi Amin. And without exception, all the African nations which have non-elected military leaders – Nigeria, Republic of Benin, Zaire, Togo, Sudan, Somalia, Niger, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mozambique – showed definite signs of dictatorship. The inclination of these countries towards “strong-man” regimes has been traced to the feudalistic background of African traditional institutions and to the fact that colonialism did not actually cancel this form of rule but strengthened it as the colonial powers, especially in British territories, ruled “indirectly” through the African chiefs. At independence, only a negligible minority of native intellectuals capable of political thought and action emerged and the strong belief of these intellectuals in rapid progress – urbanization, industrialization, education, welfare state – could only be brought to accomplishment through dictatorship.

Soyinka believes that Nigeria of the period he writes, that is, Nigeria of the Military regime of the 70s was one of dictatorship. He has devoted a whole book of historical accuracy to his experience of dictatorship in The Man Died:

I experience this solidarity only with such of my people as share in this humiliation of tyranny. I exclude and ignore all others. Whatever the factors that made a dictatorship inevitable in the first place, those factors no longer exist. The present dictatorship is a degrading imposition. It is additionally humiliating because, in my knowledge and yours, this dictatorship has exceeded a thousand fold in brutish arrogance, in repressiveness, in material corruption and in systematic reversal of all original revolutionary purposes the worst excesses of the pre-1966 government of civilians. This is a shameful admission but it is the truth. (15)
Wole Soyinka was most vocal in his treatment of dictatorship in the play *Opera Wonyosi* (1977). His protest turns into subversion when he mentions actual names and places in this play, which were only hinted at in *Kongi’s Harvest*. The Foreword to the play is important for its mentioning of the names of “singularly repellent and vicious dictators who feature in the play: ‘President-for-life’ Idi Amin . . . ‘Emperor-for-life’ Jean-Bedel Bokassa . . . and ‘President-for-Keeps’ Marcias Nguema . . .” (i). 1979 was an “unprecedented Year of the Purge” for these dictators.

Soyinka’s fundamental question is how dictators succeed in retaining power so long. He has numerous answers. First, is the “active connivance and mutual protection” by other dictators and rulers in Africa. Secondly, international ignorance is carefully nurtured by the diplomatic representatives in various nations. Thirdly, there are false reports given by “expatriate elites” in order to protect their self-interest. Fourth, there is the existence of “moulders of ‘informed’ public opinion”, who, pampered by a deceptive “privileged” reception by the dictator and his agents fail to see that such is not the lot of the masses. Finally, there is the presence of “dispassionate observers of society” who are not even vocally committed towards the eradication of dictatorship.

It is for these “observers of society” that Soyinka exposes the inhumanity of dictatorship in *Opera Wonyosi*. He makes a full-frontal satirical attack on the values of Nigerian petty bourgeoisie who benefit materially from the tyrants of dictatorship. He rejects this evil system by condemning it in revolting images. Another evidence of his protest turning subversive is his resorting to Brechtian techniques of alienation. Modeling his play after Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*, *Opera Wonyosi* exhorts all Africans to fight against dictatorship wherever it rears its head.

*Opera Wonyosi* was first performed at the University of Ife’s convocation ceremony on December 16, 1977. The title plays on the meanings of the word ‘opera’ in Yoruba and English. Accented thus: òpérá in Yoruba means ‘The fool buys ...’ In English, it refers to a very elaborate and expensive form of theatre in which every word is sung to the accompaniment of a large orchestra. Wonyosi was a very expensive type of lace (it cost about $1000 a meter!) for which there was a craze at this time in Nigerian high society. In a prefatory note to the original manuscript of the play which circulated after its production, Soyinka writes:
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 institutionalized 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 ... (Lindfors, Research on Wole Soyinka 156)

His play is modeled on two European Plays: Bertolt Brecht's Die Dreigroschenöper (The Threepenny Opera) (1928), which itself was a twentieth century version of a play composed exactly two hundred years before – John Gay's The Beggars' Opera (1728). Both titles, like Soyinka's, are ironical and reflect the fact that both the plays were critical of their societies. Gay satirized the Whig ascendancy in London, which was dominated by Sir Robert Walpole, the First Minister of the Cabinet who advised the German born King of England, George I; Brecht satirized the excesses of the Weimar Republic in Germany, which was set up after the defeat of Germany in the First World War and before Adolf Hitler’s rise to power.

Neither satire was revolutionary. Gay certainly did not seek the dissolution of the aristocracy – or of the emergent bourgeoisie. His satire was directed against individuals and his play aimed at personal reform. Brecht, however, did intend a more fundamental political impact when presenting his play. Using Gay's story of double-dealing and betrayal amongst the criminal and urban destitute, Brecht's play attempts a class analysis and is an indictment of capitalism and the late bourgeois world, Ironically, his play has proved very popular with audiences of the very class he is seeking to undermine through his satire. Like Gay's play, which had phenomenal success on London stages for over a century, Brecht's Threepenny Opera made his reputation as a playwright in Europe and the play has been translated into a number of European languages and frequently revived in the west since 1928.
Part of the reason for the success of both these plays is the music. Gay’s Play was a new art form when it first appeared: a ‘ballad opera’. That is to say, the play was not a full opera in which every word was sung- indeed, another aspect of its satire was its attack on the fashionable Italian opera of the time – but a play interspersed with songs. The words of the songs were related to the play – they were usually ironical and focused the criticism of people or society – but the tunes were the familiar and popular ballad tunes of the time. Some of these ballads were genuine folk ballads; but most were songs recently composed and popular in London in the 1720s. The tunes, therefore, were very melodious, variously haunting or lively, while the songs themselves were witty and satirical. The art form of the ballad opera has remained popular since Gay introduced it – it is now known in North America and Britain as the ‘musical’, though musicals tend to be more sentimental than satirical.

The music for Brecht’s play was composed by Kurt Weill, then a young composer and friend of Brecht, who, like Brecht, later had to flee his homeland Germany when Hitler was in power. Weill composed his music jointly with Brecht who wrote the sharp acerbic words of the songs. He used jazz and some popular music, whilst striving for a more profound and social meaning through the music. All three operas are set in the underworld of criminals, pimps, prostitutes and beggars. And the conflict is between two underworld characters for more power and a wider sphere of operations. One of the men is known as the King of the Beggars. He has turned the begging of the deformed and distressed into a profitable and well-run business. His power comes form the cynical manipulation of the processes of the law: he both protects criminals and betrays them and he ‘protects’ the beggars – or has them beaten up. In Soyinka’s play this man is Chief Anikura: in Brecht’s and Gay’s plays he is called Peachum. The other man is a big-time robber: in Gay’s play a highway robber; in all three plays the leader of a gang of robbers, known as Captain MacHeath, Mack the Knife, Mackie.

Bemth Lindfors in his essay “Begging Questions in Wole Soyinka’s Opera Wonyosi” says:

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. (150)
In Brecht’s play, and after him in Soyinka’s play, both these men struggle for supremacy within the unbroken continuum of the criminal, professional and business worlds for a monopoly of the pickings. Brecht laboriously tried to show that, under capitalism, there is no difference between the morality of legal business practice and of crime. Capitalism itself is state crime. ‘What’, asks one of the characters in The Threepenny Opera, ‘is robbing a bank compared with founding a bank?’ Soyinka is less concerned to prove this link than simply to demonstrate a more general indictment of greed, materialism and exploitation, in a system in which ‘socialists’ are as culpable as ‘capitalists’.

Though the Central African Republic, on the eve of its being renamed the Central African Empire, is central to the play, two other countries are linked to it. They are Nigeria, whose Civil War exiles have become a formidable force in Central African Republic, and which exports horrible security experts to help perpetuate the reign of Boky’s dictatorship, and Uganda, whose dictator, Idi Amin, is a personal friend of Emperor Boky. While, on the apparent level, the link between these three countries is one of social decadence, there is the bond of dictatorship that exists among the three on a subtle level.

But it is on the relationship between Idi Amin and Emperor Boky that the play dwells at some length. Both of them are murderers. They know how to silence the voice they do not want to hear and how to kill for pleasure. They bedeck themselves in fashionable medals and try to outdo each other in titles. The competition for title and supremacy between the two “friends” reaches such a height that Boky wants to win and end it once and for all:

Amin forced on me my coming elevation you know. He’d become a gross caricature of everything I represent, so the only choice left was to aim far above his horizon – nothing less than a black Napoleon. Now you must admit that was original thinking – that was really outclassing that nigger – I mean, how do you top the Imperial crown? No way baby, no way . . . After the imperial crowing, protocol will be so strictly observed that only God will be granted the occasional interview – and even then, strictly by appointment. (26)
Opera Wonyosi is thoroughly grounded on the Nigerian-Africa socio-political environment. In
the story, MacHeath marries the daughter of Chief Anikura, Polly. This brings Anikura into
direct conflict with MacHeath, not simply because of the abduction of his daughter or for her
sake, but because it puts the secrets of his business into MacHeath’s hands and so allows him to
gain control of it. Anikura MacHeath is accused twice. The first time he gets released by the
machinations of Polly, who has taken over MacHeath’s criminal operations, turned them into
legal big business and now runs the gang as a limited liability company. She corrupts the
judiciary. In response, Anikura corrupts the very law-makers themselves, who overthrow the
ruling of the judiciary and have MacHeath rearrested and condemned to death by the firing
squad. Mackie is saved at the very last moment by an imperial pardon – imperial, because all the
action of the play takes place in the Nigerian Quarter in Bangui during the run-up to Bokasa’s
Coronation in the short-lived Central African Empire. It turns out that his pardon was partly
engineered by Anikura himself. Polly has become the brains behind MacHeath’s enterprises,
whose scale of operations is now vastly increased by being amalgamated with the multinationals;
she and her father are now members of that comprador class which leeches society and of which,
in real life, Emperor Bokasa was the apotheosis.

Opera Wonyosi is – not necessarily by intent – a satirical inversion of Madmen and Specialists. It
shows how peace, and oil wealth (which succeeded the Nigerian Civil War) can mutilate the
population, emotionally and physically, just as much as the war did. War and trade are a part of
the same process, and are inseparable from each other. The Old Man who has sought to enlighten
the maimed of the war about the nature of exploitation, has become the totally cynical Chief
Anikura, ‘King’ of beggars within a society in which everyone begs. The mendicants who
struggled forward to self-awareness, have become the people they parodied: the professionals.
Now, the politicians, the lawyers, the professors play the role of beggars; and by begging, in the
gutter, learn how to beg and grovel for high office. There is a deeper irony here, for those
parodying the beggars are the one who made the real beggars. Bero, the specialist, and his sister,
have in this play become husband and wife, with their roles reversed. Polly, Anikura’s daughter,
is the aggressor, bent on acquiring economic wealth and power by any means. She is also an
example of what Si Bero, pliant and uselessly good, in Madmen and Specialist, could so easily
become. As Polly’s parents comment: ‘She’s such a sensitive child that you don’t want to
mention blood to her’. MacHeath’s execution (which does not happen, in fact) is a pseudo-
sacrifice; and a demonstration of how sacrifice can be degraded into a cheap public spectacle appealing to not the noblest but the basest instincts in man.

The only people in *Madmen and Specialists* who are not represented are the earth mothers and, indeed, what is absent altogether form the satire is the metaphysical dimension. This has some significance when we come to consider how Soyinka’s criticism of his society has developed. But before we can do this we need to see how the very specific satire is used to develop a criticism of Soyinka’s society. For this play is not about man or society, the African or African society. It is a critique that is specific to time and place: Nigeria at the end of the 1970s.

The structure of *Opera Wonyosi* is sequential and quite simple. The play is given a theatrical ‘frame’ by Dee-Jay, the disc-jockey or master of ceremonies. He introduces the play, and indicates its musical form; its begging theme – ‘... that’s what the whole nation is doing – begging for a slice of the action’; its topicality and its satirical targets – ‘I’m yet to decide whether such a way-out opera should be named after the beggars, the army, the bandits, the police, the cash-madams, the students, the trade-unionists, the Alhajis and Alhajas, the Aladura, the Academics, the Holy Radicals, Holy Patriarchs and Unholy Heresiarchs...’ (SSP 303).

Dee-Jay also functions as a narrator, providing a link between the scenes: and at the climax of the play it is he who reads out Bokasa’s proclamation announcing the amnesty for criminals, which enables MacHeath to escape the firing squad. Each scene contains one or two songs which serve to widen the relevance of the events in the scene and to extend the satire.

The first scene is set in Anikura’s Place which is known as ‘Home from home for the homeless,’ in the Nigerian Quarter in Bangui. His business is a sort of beggars’ union or rather, a beggars’ protection society: if they don’t let him ‘protect’ them they get beaten up or handed over to the police. He is helped in running the business by his wife, known as De Madam. There are various types of begging outfit. Anikura exhibits these to a new recruit to the business: ‘the Cheerful Cripple: Victim of Modern Road Traffic’; ‘War casualty’; Tapha – Psychotic; Victim of Modern Industry. It is not the beggars who are being satirized, but the system which creates these types of mental and physical deformities and a song about the ‘Cement Bonanza’ in Nigeria in 1977 makes the satire specific by referring to the scandal when hundreds of cargo ships waited outside Lagos harbour for months to off-load a ludicrously large order by the army for cement. The song’s title is: ‘Big man chop cement; cement chop small man’.
The structure of the song emphasizes the irony. There are three verses, in which the laborers unloading the cement round-the-clock sing of their luck at getting what seems like good pay and overtime. The refrain, however, expresses, the labourers' later realization that the cement fumes have given them Fibrositis and drastically shortened their lives: “And the overtime pay comes to mere chicken feed/When the cement tycoon has filled out his greed” (Six Plays 306).

The song is sung by Anikura’s beggars. Like the songs in Brecht’s play, the songs in Opera Wonyosi are not meant to be sung naturalistically. Instead, the play stops, the people come on to the stage, and the song is sung as a ‘number’ at a pop concert. The message of the song is therefore addressed directly to the audience. It is a comment on the situations within the play, and a focusing of the satire. In the cement song the satire is attacking two levels of greed: the knowing and culpable greed of the cement tycoon, and the ignorant greed, on a much more limited scale, of the labourer.

Ahmed, destitute and therefore a new recruit to the business, is given his outfit; then we are given the first development in the story. Polly, the only child of Chief Anikura and De Madam is not to be found at home and her parents very much fear that she has run off and married Captain MacHeath. A second number is sung, this time ‘by Chief and De Madam: ‘The song of ngh-ngh-ngh’. Having taken their time to sing this song, De Madam and Anikura then rush off to search for Polly.

Polly has indeed run off with Mackie, the Captain, and the second scene shows her wedding, in the stables of the Polo Club. This place is transformed into a reception room by a vast array of consumer durables, stolen for the occasion of the wedding by Mack’s gang. Mack and Polly seek the glamour of the good life. Mack is determined to whip his gang of crooks into shape and to give them more class. However, the whole scene is a debasement of this expensive life-style, and both Mack and Polly reveal during the course of the scene that they can be just as coarse and unscrupulous as any other crook when the occasion demands. Style is merely a thin covering over avarice. Mack comments disparagingly of one of his gang: ‘He eats caviar with a knife. With a blood-stained knife!’ We have an image of the society and it refers to everyone: refinement is only bought with the blood of others.

The prophet Jerubabel comes in, and by means of spurious analogies he is able to justify his being there to bless the marriage. The whole company then sing a ‘hymn’ to the happy couple
which expresses the hope that Mack will never end up as the main attraction at the Bar Beach show – a reference to the public executions which regularly took place at this time at Bar Beach in Lagos, (on the whole only small-time crooks were shot).

The Commissioner of Police joins the wedding party. In the play he is variously called Tiger Brown (his name in Brecht’s play) or Smith. Soyinka reserves a special loathing for this character. He is totally venal and completely corrupt; and in his train the whole police force is committed to corruption. In fact it has become so hot for him back home in Nigeria that he has been loaned indefinitely to Bokasa and the Central Africa Empire. He is also very stupid. Mack and Smith/Brown have a bond which supposedly goes back to when both were soldiers in the civil war. They sing a song, which is heavily ironical, about their spirit of camaraderie: “Khaki is a man’s best friend”. Again, the structure of the song reflects its irony. The four verses sing of patriotism, glory, power, while the refrain or chorus sings of the reality of the civil war and comments that while the nation is one, the soldier’s bodies are definitely not:

   We know who won and who got undone
   No thought of keeping his body one
   It’s scattered form Bendel to Bonny Town (Six Plays 328)

The song satirizes the rhetoric of the Nigerian civil war: neither side was really fighting for an ideal but for possession of the oil. What has it got to do with the wedding which is taking place? On one level it reflects the materialism which lies beneath occasions such as weddings: marriage and war are business propositions and the reality is often different form the high-flown rhetoric. The scene has shown us, therefore, the exact nature of the relationship between play and MacHeath, and of the relationship between MacHeath and the Commissioner of Police. The ‘innocent and sensitive’ young girl has married the master crook for what she can get out of it; and the most wanted criminal consorts with the Chief of Police.

There was, indeed, an actual coronation ceremony of President Bokassa, represented by Emperor Boky in the play, in which Bokassa changed his title from President to Emperor, and the name of his country from Central African Republic to Central African Empire. His crown and throne were made of gold, and the entire resources of an impoverished, land-locked nation were said to have gone toward that coronation. Opera Wonyosi ties this up with the wedding ceremony of the
former Head of State on Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon, when Boky says, “Even during your Civil War in Nigeria, your Chief had a wedding that was from accounts right princely. Straight out of the Arabian Nights...” (337). Not only was that wedding performed with pomp and pageantry, but, according to the “Textual Notes” to the play, “commemoratory stamps were printed and launched throughout Nigerian embassies while this then Head of State claimed the (late) capture of a Biafran stronghold as his wedding present” (407). Boky argues that if the Nigerian populace did not riot over Gowon’s extravagance at a time its sons and daughters were killing themselves at a war that could have been avoided, then there should be no riots by the hungry people of Central African Republic over his own extravagance. This is Soyinka’s way of attacking not only the dictators but those “dispassionate observers of society” who in their indolence maintain dictatorship, by default.

In the next scene, which is by way of an interlude, Dee-Jay introduces us to Emperor Bokasa himself. It must be remembered that the play was written while this grotesque head of state was still in power, and this scene was no doubt intended as a vicious attack on a ruling African leader, whom Soyinka totally despises. Bokasa is created as a parody, but with the sense that the real Bokasa is already a parody of himself. He marches onto the stage with his squad and initially behaves like a sergeant major. Thus he addresses the audience, not as in a public address, but as though he was standing outside his society and commenting on himself with brutal frankness, boasting of his viciousness. Then he transforms his speech into a dance in which his squad mimes trampling people to death. Bokasa finally joins in, with immense energy and enjoyment, yelling at the band: “give me that Lagosian – mob rallying rhythm!” (334).

Soyinka shows what apathy towards a dictatorship can lead to by bringing another historical fact into the play; the massacre of schoolchildren by Bokassa’s agents, after they had been rounded up, at the command of the Emperor himself. In carrying out this affair, Boky compares himself to King Herod whose “right” and “worthy example” is worthy of emulation, and then goes on to exhort the squad he has brought in to carry out his heinous crime that, but for Herod, could have been unique:

Those [schoolchildren] are ingrates at your feet. Juvenile delinquents. Future criminals.
Little ingrates! Putative parricides! Pulp me their little brains! Wastrels! Prodigal sons!

This speech is important not only for the massacre but also for its depiction of the effects of dictatorship. Where one man takes decisions and controls affairs, the limited vision would give rise to social menaces. The good aspect of the speech is in the mentioning of subversives, bohemians, human rightists and liberals who must necessarily pose a challenge to the dictator. But then there is the sad realization that in decimating children, the Emperor has gone to the ultimate in protecting his dictatorship, for the killing of the young means the destruction of future leaders and hope. There is the feeling that Boky’s empire will be without people. Hence the important stage direction which tells us that finally Boky “realizes he’s alone.” So it must be, for the dictator, by dealing out death and stifling liberty, excludes himself from the province of free man.

Brown – or Smith – Bokasa’s (Nigerian) Chief of Police has been summoned by Bokasa to watch this display; and his amused presence throughout the ‘imperial stomp’ reflects the collusion with Bokasa of at least some members of Nigerian society and the Nigerian body politic. At the end of the stomp the story is moved on a little, for Brown is given specific instructions to avoid any riots or disturbances by the poor during his coronation.

The critic Biodun Jeyifo 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” (322).
The next scene, set once again in Anikura’s establishment, reveals Brown carrying out his instructions from Bokasa. He hopes to sort out Anikura and lock up his beggars for the duration. A hint has been dropped in Brown’s ear by MacHeath that Anikura was planning something. Anikura turns the tables on this dumb Chief of Police: unless MacHeath is arrested immediately, thousands and thousands of the poor will march in front of the royal chariot and be filmed on television. The threat of the poor disrupting Boky’s coronation is Anikura’s ploy to force Brown to arrest MacHeath. Such a demonstration is not intended by Anikura to benefit the poor whom he controls.

A song at this point reflects the cheapness of life for ordinary Nigerians. It is called ‘Who killed Nio-Niga?’ Soyinka has based it on a famous syncopated marching song: ‘Who killed Cook Robin?’ In the play, the song is highly schematic. A beggar sings the first verse, ‘Who killed Nio-Niga/I, said Sir Beggar …’; the second verse, ‘Who caught Nio-Niga / I, said Chief Freelance …’ is sung by tiger Brown; the third verse, ‘Who heard Nio-Niga / I, said Professor …’ by Anikura; the fourth verse, ‘Who sold Nio-Niga / I, said Ma Trader …’ is sung by De Madam, the fifth verse, ‘Who carved Nio-Niga / I, said Doc Morgans …’ by another Beggar, and so on. When it comes to the last verse, ‘Who’ll solve Case Niga?’ the song abruptly stops, and there is silence, while everyone who has characterized a verse goes earnestly about his business. The stage direction describes it thus: ‘Bigger’ puffs his cigar smugly, ‘Army’ salutes, ‘Police’ drills, ‘Doc’ sheathes his stethoscope (Six Plays 343).

The chorus, which throughout the song has sung of the callous lack of interest of people, now finally turns its criticism on the audience in the theater:

Poor Nio-Niga is a – rotting on the route A2
And a stream of cars passing – including you
And a long stream of cars of the New Republic. (Six Plays 343-44)

The following scene takes place back in the Polo Club stables, now Mack’s headquarters, and converted into a Board Room by clearing the wedding table, around which are seated Polly. Mack and members of the gang: ‘The solemnity of the scene suggests a parody of a Board meeting’. Polly has just tipped off her husband that her father is about to have him arrested. During the course of the scene, Polly takes over as Boss of the gang, now called the Firm, and
asserts her authority physically over the gang with the help of a heavy ledger. She proposes that
the criminal operations become respectable by affiliating with a new multinational corporation
with special holding in developing countries. Shares have already been bought by Polly for
various people in high position in Bangui as an investment against any future charges of
corruption.

At the same time, Polly dresses Mack in Wonyosi — the amazingly expensive lace — and the rest
of the gang in slightly less expensive blue lace. On the stage, therefore, before the audience’s
eyes, the gang of crooks is transformed into a group of Nigerian businessmen. Brown comes in
to arrest Mack, who is nevertheless able to make his escape in his Wonyosi outfit. Polly and
Brown spar with each other, verbally, over the size of the bribe to get Mack off once he is
arrested, and then Polly sings a song about her transformation into a tough business lady.

The song is accompanied by a dance, performed by a chorus of women, who first sing of the
‘attack trade’ which was carried on by Nigerian women across enemy lines during the war. In the
second chorus they mime, with the help of Brown’s officers who feign being shot and dying, the
process of trading in the midst of death. The stage direction describes the dance: (... The women
march over them, stop to empty their pockets, take off their watches and carry on business
throughout the chorus...). This song and mime-dance ends the first half of the play; and Soyinka
extends the irony by having the women immediately emerge in the interval among the audience
selling to its members those wares which they have just ‘robbed’ from the ‘corpses’

In the first scene of the second half of the play Mack, who is still on the run and not yet arrested,
visits the brothel of his favourite harlot, Sukie. De Madam anticipates his visit there and so lays
her trap to get him arrested. This involves bribing Sukie. The action is deliberately contrived and
artificially arranged. In counterpoint to the deals and arrangements is the shadowy figure of
Jenny Leveller who scrubs the steps of the brothel and refuses to take bribes. She sings a
powerful song about how, one day, she will take revenge on society. The essence of her role and
the theme of her song both come from Brecht’s play, though the character there is integral to the
plot. In Soyinka’s plays, Jenny Leveller is only an incidental part of the scene, but stands as an
angry comment on it and on the whole of society.
Scene 7 is in the prison. Mack has been arrested. He tries to bribe, with his Wonyosi outfit, his gaoler, a fellow-countryman named Dogo, who in the end insists on hard cash together with the suit. Brown, then Polly, visit Mack; then Mack’s other wife, Lucy, the daughter of the Prison Governor, forces her way in, and Mack has to do some fast talking as the rival wives press their claims for his person. In the end it is Polly who organizes his escape, though not through bribes at the lower end of the social scale but by a stay of execution signed by the Deputy Chief Justice himself. Polly extracts from Mack a promise that he will become respectable ‘No treacherous women. No dangerous adventures. Let’s go legitimate like the bigger crooks. It’s the easy life for me, which is a song about self-interest at all levels’, closes the scene.

So Mack gets let off, on a technical point relating to secret societies. The next scene is back in Anikura’s establishment, where the Chief is determining on new ways of getting MacHeath arrested. He has managed to lure to his place someone who holds real power in the state, Colonel Moses, who advises Bokasa on all his decrees and who is also on loan from the Nigerian army-government. The satire changes at this point from lampoon and parody to something much more serious, direct and personally specific. Colonel Moses is not caricatured. He is soft-spoken and exudes authority rather than violent aggression. Everybody instinctively defers to him and the beggars positively grovel.

Anikura’s proposition that he lightly bend the laws he has made so that the ruling of the judiciary can be overturned in MacHeath’s case, meets with a frigid reception. Moses rises to go. However, at this point and quite by accident, his true nature is revealed: he is an actual sadist who gains sexual pleasure from beating people. He prowls the streets at night to find victims among the poor whom he can beat for his pleasure. Anikura now has him in his grasp.

It has been revealed during the course of the scene that many of Anikura’s beggars are in fact, professors, lawyers, doctors, agriculturalists and so on, who are learning in Anikura’s establishment how to beg for high office. A powerful image has been licking the shows of the army in the person of this sadistic Moses. Now it seems possible to frame Colonel Moses, at least in Bangui with its paranoid and violent Emperor; and the beggar-professionals plan how to get him hooked. The Nigerian army itself is to be accused of being a secret society on the basis of the army’s repeated verdict that those involved in civil riots and civilian murders were ‘unknown soldiers’.
The play has now become a direct attack upon the army, mounted, paradoxically, through an extremely reticent figure, whose characterization lacks any extravagance on stage, and who is therefore in marked contrast to the frenzy and excesses of the other characters. Soyinka has withheld parody from the portrayal of Moses. He feels that we can scorn and ridicule the corruption, the begging for high position, and the idiocies of Bokasa, but when we come to the army in Nigeria, its malignant nature, while it ruled, existed beyond satire and parody.

As far as the story is concerned. Anikura’s case against Moses is not especially convincing – even though Moses himself is convinced by it, and he goes off to have MacHeath rearrested. The final scene is Mack’s execution by firing squad. The frenzy and parody return to the stage with a speeded-up version of the music for the song ‘Who killed Nio-Niga?’ and everybody cheering the crowning of Bokasa, while his goon squad hunt out troublemakers. The coronation is made synonymous with the public executions, staged as part of the festivities. The passion of the crowd for grotesque public slaughter knows no bounds, and the public fall over each other in order to get good seats. Dee-Jay acts as a roving news-reporter, and allows everyone he interviews to condemn himself out of his own mouth. All those connected with the condemned MacHeath adopt suitable public poses: Polly is in tears, and De Madam is threatening to take her home; the whores of Mack’s favourite brothel have been converted to the CSU (Christian Scripture Union) and do a chorus-line dance to the hymn ‘Just a closer walk with thee’. The various religions claim Mackie till they hear he has no money, then they give up. Mack’s last request is to be allowed to sing a song: ‘Mackie’s farewell’. In it he attacks both Bokasa and and the mindless, sycophantic public.

Then Bokasa’s courier arrives, granting an amnesty not to political detainees but to criminals, the final parody of the play.

Anikura steps forward out of the play, and gives a concluding speech in which, perhaps with the voice of the playwright, he warns against easy solutions, like the Emperor’s courier arriving with a pardon, to society’s problems. He warns the audience against radicals and socialists.

Beware certain well-tuned voices
That clamour loudest: ‘Justice – for – all’
A ragged coat does not virtue make
– Here I stand as your prime example – (Six Plays 403)
He warns them against Highway Robbers and their more respectable counterparts, the business tycoons:

Nor is the predator the champion of rights,
A brave Robin Hood equalizing the loot...
In proof my son-in-law is more ample. (Six Plays 404)

Instead, we have to look and see who is really benefiting in the society – ‘Who really accumulates and exercises/ Power over others?’ In the end it is power, not money, that counts, Anikura’s final statement is unequivocal: “I tell you – / Power is delicious, (Turns sharply) Heel!” (Six Plays 404).

This last word is the command of the master to his trained dog to follow close by his heels. The beggars, like dogs, shuffle towards him and cringe by his feet. Then there is a massive procession, headed by Bokasa in his chariot drawn by slaves, behind whom everybody falls in rank order, to the tune that opened the play, ‘Mack the knife’.

Anikura’s final statement – “Power is delicious” takes us to the heart of Opera Wonyosi, and also sets the play apart from Brecht’s The Threepenny Opera. Anyone who seeks to control the lives of other people is, for Soyinka, suspect, no matter where he is on the political spectrum. He concludes that, in the end, money means power, rather than possessions. And power, unlike wealth which is limited and limiting in its possibilities, knows no constraints.

For Soyinka, the exercise of power over others corresponds with man’s base instincts. In his plays he returns to this theme over and over again. We have seen in A Dance of the Forests, Forest Head, referring to humankind as weak, pitiable criminals, saying to the three Triplets: “You perversions are born when they acquire power over one another, and their instincts are fulfilled a thousandfold, a hundred thousandfold” (CP-I 71).

In Madmen and Specialists Bero tells his sister “It was the first step to power you understand. Power in its purest sense”. He later tells his father: “I do not need illusions. I control lives”. And Anikura, finally, states it bluntly: “Power is delicious”. Though Opera Wonyosi parades social stock characters and their sin – collaborative cannibalism – what gives the play force is the evil
of dictatorship and the realization that all excesses in social and political life occur because of “power”.

Soyinka’s obsession with the seemingly inevitable abuse of power suggests that perhaps instinctively he has some affinities with anarchism. Anarchists seek to abolish the state and to replace it with free association and voluntary co-operation of individuals and groups. However, in Africa, and in other parts of the third world, the integrity of the nation-state is the most basic principle of political life. It is the corner-stone of the OAU’s charter. State boundaries are defended against aggression by neighboring states, to the extent of bringing in non-African powers; and within the state, forces that would divide it are passionately resisted. The nation-state is perceived as a positive entity, for it transcends narrow tribalism and ethnocentricity, and it guarantees some sort of survival in the modern world.

It is, therefore, to be expected that although Soyinka attacks power structures, he does not specifically attack the nation-state, either in the abstract or in, for him, its concretization as Nigeria. Right from Nigeria’s inception, when he himself was a young playwright at the beginning of his career, he has espoused liberation yet is intensely critical of post-independence rhetoric.

There is a definite message particularly for the Nigerian audience, never to allow any dictatorial government to survive, and to be wary of one. It is in this light that Bode Sowande’s “Prayer in a Dictatorship” becomes important:

If it be a government
of the people
for the people
by the people
Pray let it be.
If it be a conscious step
to the rule
by the law
that is just
pray let it be
But ...
If it be an iron grip
of one man, or many
In a clique, centreheld,
In a web strong as steel,
Pray rise Judas and resurrect in this rank
perform a duty,
for once,
a wholesome duty;
Be Brutus to their Nero,
Forsake this dictator, his retainers; dislodge them!
Their conscience poured into fire,
to yield its lava or cast of Gold divine
Before damnation day – Before D. Day.
And Earth and Heaven will say Amen for ever.
(Quoted in Lindfors, *Research on Wole Soyinka* 145)

The manic intensity of the play, according to Berth Lindfors, highlights the vintage Soyinka, not leftover Brecht or mock Gay. Soyinka stamps his own individuality on the vehicle he has borrowed, by making it say something entirely new. 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 work of art. It is a hardy hybrid achievement which was required for Soyinka’s protest as subversion (Lindfors, *Research on Wole Soyinka* 156).

Soyinka’s onslaught continued in his next work *A Play of Giants* (1985). Soyinka regarded Idi Amin, who overthrew Milton Obote and began a reign of terror in Uganda during February 1971, as a symptom of an African disease. Using *Transition / Ch’ Indaba*, the Union of Writers of African Peoples and the Nigerian press, he waged a fierce campaign against the bloody tyranny in Uganda from the mid-seventies. In May 1979, he published a particularly densely textured and carefully structured celebration of the tyrant’s downfall, entitled ‘Happy Riddance’. The whole gruesome Ugandan sequence, from Amin’s rise to power, through his manipulation of black opinion and his posturing as a revolutionary leader to his downfall, scattered lessons which in Soyinka’s opinion, the continent had to learn. In ‘Happy Riddance’, he wrote:
An all-African commission must sit for an entire year if need be, taking evidence and educating the world yet again on the terrible price paid by ordinary human beings for the illusion of power, and the conspiracy of silence among the select club of leaders.

We are tired of the lies of the past eight years, lies with which the minds of Africans — and black peoples in America and the Caribbean have bent to accommodate a sadist, mass murderer, an incompetent administrator and political buffoon as a hero for black emulation. (79)

Elsewhere in his newspaper articles, Soyinka described Amin as an ‘overlarge child’, a ‘murderous buffoon’, ‘the tool of neo-imperialist designs’ and ‘a survivalist killer’. In the same articles he inveighed against the ‘smug, comfortable, secure, chauvinistic, self-persuaded radicals’ whom he confronted with the gory, gibbering reality of Amin and, an important point, with the reality of other Amins, other tyrants, who held sway in Africa, arranged for opponents to ‘disappear’ and survived because the people were cowed and cowardly.

Idi Amin, in the person of Kamini, bestrides A Play of Giants. A monstrosity who is exposed with a Swiftian attention to repulsive detail, Kamini embodies evil and infuses some of his own daemonic vigour and devilish virulence into Soyinka’s play about him — and his like. He is outrageous and brutal, all the more terrifying because based on an identifiable, indeed an easily recognized, original. The play continues to have relevance because, although Amin has been forced into the background, Aminism, a particularly vicious form of Kongism, has not been eliminated.

A Play of Giants was, unlike the agit-prop sketches which immediately preceded it, written for production in a well-equipped theatre building. It was scheduled for performance at Yale University during 1981/82, postponed, and published in 1984 with a note indicating that it would be presented at Yale during 1985. The delays in production had the effect of dimming memories of Amin, and of bringing to the fore the question: why was Amin able to fool so many people about so many things for so long?

A Play of Giants takes place in the Bugaran Embassy ‘a few years before the present’. The set represents a magnificent first-floor room with a wide, sweeping, stone stairway, a curving gallery, a gilt balcony and a view through trees to the United Nations Building in New York.
This is strange territory for Soyinka, who had not set a play outside Africa since 1960 and who had, generally, avoided restricting himself to a single, indoor location. The UN Building is intended to place the play precisely; ‘we’ are in an actual metropolis, close to a centre of power and hope. The Bugaran embassy, on the other hand, is the product of dramatic license: there is no such place as Bugara, no such embassy as Soyinka describes. However, Bugara clearly stands for Uganda, and as *A Play of Giants* unfolds the ornate embassy provides a constant and elegant contrast with the barbarous, vulgar viciousness of ‘the giants’ who swagger through it.

The play opens on Benfacio Gunema (a thinly disguised representation of Macias Nguemo of Equatorial Guinea), Emperor Basco (Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Empire, a sketch to set beside Boky in *Opera Wonyosi*), and Field-Marshal Kamini (Amin). Attended by a sycophantic Scandinavian journalist, Gudrum, they pose in throne-like chairs for a Sculptor. Their talk of subversives and the suppression of rebellions provides a background to the play and touches on issues which erupt into the foreground when defections are reported, escapes attempted and news of a coup in Bugara arrives. In the opening ‘brotherly’ exchanges, the Heads of State reveal their paranoia, ignorance, confusion and stomach-turning ruthlessness while the Sculptor toils away at the group portrait of them and the work of the Embassy continues.

The play retains contact at all points with the ‘boulevard’, dialogue, single set, two-act tradition of drama. There is no dancing, no music, no flash-back; there are none of the characteristics of either African Festival Theatre or of the latter-day Absurdists to ‘disturb’ a conservative western or westernised audience. *A Play of Giants* is, however, sub-titled in some scripts ‘a fantasia on the Aminian theme’ and the action becomes increasingly outrageous and extravagant as the day on which it is set progresses.

The opening exchange between the Head of State is interrupted by the arrival of the Chairman of the Bugara Central Bank with the news that the World Bank has refused to grant Bugara a huge, outright loan. Kamini’s intemperate reply includes the following: “Let World Bank tell us once and for all if it is just for rich countries and neo-colonial bastards like Hazena or if it belong to Third World countries who need loan” (*A Play of Giants* 6).

He orders the Chairman to “get back to Bugara right away and start printing more Bugara bank notes” – a command which further exposes his ignorance and incompetence. The encounter with
the Chairman continues with Kamini exhibiting his arrogant brutality: when the banker tells him that Bugaran “currency is not worth its size in toilet paper”, he describes him as “a syphilitic bastard talking worse than imperialist propaganda” and sentences him “to eat shit”. A Task Force Special (officer) drags the Chairman into a lavatory which opens onto the set and forces his head into the lavatory bowl both before and after Kamini has used it. The audience is reminded of the Chairman’s punishment from time to time during the First Part of the play as the Task force special flushes the cistern over the honest man’s head. The whole, lingering, distasteful episode illustrates one of the milder, but degrading, ways in which tyrants such as Kamini punish those who have the temerity to speak even a fraction of the truth.

Shortly after the Chairman has been dealt with the Bugaran Ambassador to the United Nations enters ‘almost apologetically’. She announces that she has found the perfect location for the group monument to African brotherhood which the Sculptor is creating: the Delegates’ Passage in the UN Building. The question of the fate of the monument, which contributes both to the plot and the symbolic quality of the play, further reveals Kamini’s conceit, ignorance, arrogance and philistinism.

The plot, however, is slender and the play’s focus is on satire and theme rather than action. Between the rather crudely arranged departures and arrivals, Soyinka directs satire at the leaders who flank Kamini. On one side sits the fascist Gunema with his Spanish interpolations and his admiration of Franco; on the other, the vain, culturally alienated Gaullist, Kasco, who proclaims that “to know French is to understand history” (11) and who obviously delights in occasions of great splendour.

The next to enter is another of the giants who give the play its title, Barra Tuboum, whose appearance recalls that of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. He makes a flamboyant entrance

... dressed in a striped animal skin ‘Mao’ outfit with matching fez-style hat. He sports an ornately carved ebony walking-stick. At his waist is strapped an ivoryhandled side-arm stuck in a holster which is also made of zebra skin. (A Play of Giants 18)

Barra Tuboum launches into an account of his ‘campaign to eliminate all foreign influences’ (he changed the names on his father’s grave) and – making his contribution to the discussion of
power and responsibility – of his military action, with the help of French paratroops, against ‘the tribe of Shabira’. The account calls to mind Mobutu’s dependence on European forces in the Shaba Province of Zaire and exposes the double standards operated by both Tuboum and Mobutu in relation to ‘authenticity’. In this instance, as in several others, the reality Soyinka is concerned with is – or was – so bizarre that the satirist’s task is not so much that of inventor as of a few artistic touches into Barra Tuboum, a ‘cowboy’ from wildest Central Africa, a clown who is utterly inconsistent in cultural and political matters.

Tuboum is given a bare five minutes centre stage before being moved over to make room for the Honourable Mayor of Hyacombe, who comes to shower praises on Kamini and to offer him, as a leader who has given black people ‘pride of race’, the freedom of Hyacombe. The Mayor, naïve, trusting and black, is accompanied by Professor Batey, who plays a larger role in the events which follow and who is guilty of greater betrayals. An eloquent academic who later shows considerable presence of mind, Batey is one of those who has helped, in the image used in ‘Happy Riddance’, to bend “the minds of Africans, and black peoples in America and the Caribbean ... to accommodate a sadist, mass murderer, an incompetent administrator and political buffoon as a hero for black emulation” (79). Batey is blinded and deafened by his proximity to Power, as embodied in Kamini: he puts his relationship with the tyrant above his loyalty to his old and valued Bugaran friends. Furthermore, he is one of those, frequently castigated by Soyinka, who excuses tyranny on environmental or behaviourist grounds, one of those sophists with sponges who are always found among the camp followers of the powerful. Batey conspicuously fails to display, or even to appreciate, those qualities which Soyinka repeatedly recommends in his prose and which emerge from A Play of Giants as virtues. These include the need to struggle for human rights, the responsibility of the individual for his own actions, the value of friendship and the need to seek out and speak out the truth if ‘the man’ is not to die.

Towards the end of Part One, Soyinka returns to the question of the destination of the sculpture and increases the tension. The Sculptor reveals that he knows nothing of the plan to put his work in the UN Building. He has, it seems, been commissioned to work on the monument so that a wax-model can be made of it for Madame Tussaud’s African exhibition in London. He is
perceptive enough to realize that the Chamber of Horrors would be an appropriate setting and incautious enough to share his perception with Gudrum. Kamini is immediately told and puts the ‘common Makongo carver’ firmly in his place; when the Sculptor attempts to escape he is thwarted and beaten. The embassy which had, at the beginning of the play, looked like a temporary studio, has by the end of Part One, become a prison. This development anticipates its transformation, during the second half of the play, into a fortress.

In Part Two, work on the monument continues, only now the Sculptor is bandaged or bound. New satirical targets are wheeled into range and the fantastic element in the play becomes more pronounced. The arrival of the Secretary-General of the UN and of Russian and American delegates ensures that the position of the UN in Africa and the involvement of the world powers in establishing and supporting Kamini emerges. Forces outside Africa, Soyinka makes clear, had used Kamini as a ‘tool’ for their neo-imperialist designs: they enabled him to torture, maim, terrorise and slaughter ‘his’ people. Kamini’s reversal of fortune’ comes quickly and decisively – a report of a coup in Bugara reaches the bickering delegates and signals that the pragmatic Russians have no more use for their instrument. The news triggers a characteristically violent response from Kamini: some of the arms supplied by the Russians and Americans for use against Bugarans are, with a twist powered by dramatic justice, pointed at delegations; a rocket-launcher, smuggled into the country with diplomatic baggage, is installed in the lavatory and, as the curtain comes down, Kamini commands his men to fire at the UN Building. This cataclysm is in a very different mood from the intrigues, the jockeying for position, the political one-upmanship and the name-calling which has preceded it; it represents the fullest manifestation of the ‘fantasia element’. The ‘great powers’ had sown the wind; Kamini makes them – or at least New Yorkers and the UN – reap his whirlwind.

_A Play of Giants_ is a virtuoso satirical display written in bile and blood. Kamini is outrageous, an extravagant creation who tugs at the restraints which keep him within a relatively ‘well-made play’ and seems about to link arms with malignant monsters such as Albert Jarry’s King Ubu. The headlong rush with which Soyinka launches himself against those he despises means that he sometimes leaves his flanks vulnerable to counter attacks. In his determination to expose the blinkered selfishness of Kamini’s financial ‘policy’, for instance, he leaves unquestioned the role
of the World Bank. In his haste to make fun of the Central Intelligence Agency, he glosses over that organization’s role in Africa. But these nit-picking criticisms are put in perspective by recalling that we do not go to the theatre to listen to discourses on the pros and cons of devaluation, and that we do not go to a Soyinka play for scrupulously balanced accounts of great power involvement in Africa. Soyinka, and this is a quality that informs much of his academic writing as well as his plays, responds viscerally to much that goes on around him. He is here, as so often, a debunker not an analyst, a caricaturist not a psychologist, an impassioned provocateur not a detached philosopher.

Yet Soyinka seems to have wanted to make this play a work of some intellectual substance as well as an explosive exposé. *A Play of Giants* contains an intermittently sustained discussion of a theme which has preoccupied Soyinka intellectually for many years: the nature of power and its relationship to responsibility. ‘Emperor’ Kasco shares his discovery that “Power comes only with the death of politics”; he maintains that since his coronation he has risen above intrigue to “inhabit the pure realm of power” (21). Gunema, by contrast, reveals that he searched for power in the supernatural, particularly in voodoo, but only found it, or, as he says, ‘tasted’ it while having sexual intercourse with a woman who hoped that by sacrificing her honour she would save her husband’s life. Barra Tuboum has an altogether simpler palate and a more direct means of satisfying his hunger for power: he relishes fighting, killing and, finally eating those who oppose him. He has brought three prisoners to New York and proposes they be consumed with cocktails (18). Kamini has no interest whatever in abstract issues, no capacity for discussing power, no aptitude for self-analysis, but thanks to his Task Force Specials and the arms at his disposal, he is ‘in power’ throughout the play. He brags about the villages and families he has destroyed in his rage at a single rebel; he repeats endlessly his barbarous threats (“he will smell his mother’s cunt”); he ensures that the chairman suffers the punishment he imposes on him (“he will eat shit”). In short, he ‘exercises’ power.

The Chairman, the Ambassador, the Mayor, Batey, the American and Russian Delegates, the Task Force Specials, the Sculptor, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and even the ‘rebels’ who, in far off Bugara, overthrow Kamini, all have power of one sort or another. Some use their power with a sense of responsibility, some do not. Soyinka, who lists Bertand Russell’s
Power among those books which have influenced him and whose nick name at the University of Ife is the name of his power-crazed leader, 'Kongi', has written a play which contains a series of pertinent comments on the theme of power and responsibility. As on previous occasions he works through contrasts, comparisons and variations; his own position emerges only slowly.

A play, any play, certainly *A Play of Giants*, is written to make an impact on audiences, on people. Not in this case, 'the People', if by that term is meant, say, the crowds in African markets and lorry parks, but people who understand English and venture inside theatres, school halls and public meeting places, an international community scattered through Africa, Europe and America. For the benefit of these people Soyinka makes an attack in English which is only slightly indirect and which only the most obtuse can fail to de-code. In choosing this style he knew that the out and out populists would condemn him for addressing 'an elite', that the sophisticated would accuse him of oversimplifying issues and employing crude devices, but that audiences, particularly in Africa, would respond. The English language – as used in the play – can be understood by millions; the bold theatrical and satirical effects can make a deep impact.

The style of the play and the very fact that Soyinka wrote it indicate his desire to communicate and his confidence that audiences – people – can be affected by theatrical experiences. But, while trying to give power to the people by making them more alert, Soyinka knows that power does not at present, in Africa, come from the people. Power, as *A Play of Giants* makes clear, comes out of the coffers of bankers, out of the cargo-holds of arms-exporting countries and out of the sky in the form of paratroopers.

*A Play of Giants* represents an attack on African leaders of unprecedented ferocity and is work of considerable courage. Its scale and its violence compel attention; Soyinka seems to stride among African tyrants past and present, pointing to their excesses, recalling their ill-deeds, and drawing attention to the forces which manipulate them. Through this play written with tears straining at the ducts, manic laughter in the throat and teeth set in a grin of grim defiance, he intended to upset and enrage, to tear the bandages from the wounds of a continent and force people to watch the blood flow. A work of this intensity was necessary to make an impact on 'the smug, comfortable, secure chauvinistic, self-persuaded radicals' – and other victims of Aminian
manipulations (Gibbs, *Wole Soyinka* 161). It was unlike anything he had written before and, produced soon after his fiftieth birthday, indicates that the time has not yet come for anything approaching a final judgment on the work of Wole Soyinka.