

WOLE SOYINKA IN BADAN



Genius in Time & Space

In commemoration of his **80th Birthday**
and award of **Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters (D. Litt.)**
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

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GENIUS IN TIME & SPACE

In commemoration of his 80th birthday and award of Honorary Degree of
Doctor of Letters (D. Litt.), University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

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WOLE SOYINKA AND IBADAN

A Voyage around WS: The Poetry

By Doyin Aguoru

Ibadan

Ibadan. For Wole Soyinka Ibadan is a symbolic space. A place of freedom, a place of enlightenment, a place of experimentation, a place of research, a place of exploration, a place of rebellion and a place of diverse persecutions.

A place of freedom because the first time Wole Soyinka travelled out of Abeokuta without his parents, it was for a qualifying exam into a Government College in Ibadan. A place of enlightenment, because from Ibadan as base he witnessed, understood and participated in the grim struggles for the growth of a nascent Nigeria. Nostalgia fills Wole's mind as he re-images his sojourns first, as a candidate for admission into Government College Apataganga and his days as a student under the tutelage of several teachers. His mind travelled back to Mr Long, the stickler for precision, Mr Jefferies, the stumpy 'white hypocrite' in whose class he first understood conflict, and the unforgettable impact of Mr Kaye, his teacher, who introduced him to great speeches, classical poetry and drama.

University College, Ibadan offered Wole Soyinka admission into the Faculty of Arts as a young adult. Those years in Ibadan were for him years of enlightenment, years of acquiring knowledge, years of bouncing off the

prior church experiences and indoctrination in Government College with the stark realities of life and human relations. University College, Ibadan was a bigger platform for bold experimentations in the creative arts: short stories, poetic effusions, prentice campus journalism- doing more of what had started in GCI. For him, learning continued through inquiry and burgeoning imaginativeness.

Ibadan aided non-conformism. It provided a space for the spirit of revolution, and rebirth; a room large enough to rebel against colonial structures and sensibilities within the academic, social and social-cultural contexts. University College, Ibadan was the place where the voice of Soyinka the critic rose through the publication of critical and experimental thoughts, of feature articles, editorials as well as satirical criticism of the conduct of members of the academic community. The campus magazine served as the humble beginning for his later interventions in national and international fora.

A scholarship granted by the University of Leeds took him to England for a Bachelor's degree and culminated in the widening of his intellectual and social horizon. Throughout his time in Leeds, his Ibadan strings were never severed as he continued to write and publish essays in *The Eagle* and *The Criterion*, those prime student publications of the University College, Ibadan.

Ibadan, not Ake, his maternal home town and birthplace in Abeokuta, received Wole back from Europe early in 1960 when he returned with the Rockefeller Foundation grant. He became a Rockefeller Fellow researching

into African drama. The city of Ibadan once again received a nostalgic Soyinka who deliberately shunned the welcome observances and oblations that families, friends and loved ones of people who have been abroad have transformed into elaborate welcome parties upon their return. He insisted that he had to be driven through the ancient city of Ibadan before taking up his position at the University College. Such was his attachment to Ibadan that it was in Apataganga the location of his former high school that he looked forward to being cured of his nostalgia, rather than Ake.

University College Ibadan became a full-fledged university on 27th January 1967; the University establishment placed an advert for the position of the Director of the School of Drama. Applicants were expected to possess among other qualifications:

A degree or professional qualification in drama, relevant experience in the teaching of theatre history and dramatic literature with an added experience in research as well as practical experience in theatre and the teaching of performing arts with exposure to departmental administration.

It would seem that the benefits and the total package attached to this position as at the time it was advertised was equivalent to that of the position of an Associate Professor. Records reveal that between 27th January and 1st September 1967, a certain Mr Wole Soyinka, who had been nationally visible upon his return from overseas on the eve of the 1960 independence had applied for the position and had been offered the job. His letter of employment was signed by the Acting Registrar, Mr D.R. Oduaran, while records in the Registry filed by the Acting Deputy Registrar,

Mr S.J. Okudu, on the 23rd of June 1967 acknowledged that he had accepted the offer.

Premonitions, School of Drama and Sense of Responsibility

He had premonitions. Premonitions that suggested that even though his appointment as the Director of the School of Drama was a good offer, his tenure was going to be itinerant. It occurred to him time and again that his stay in Ibadan would be shorter than his stay was in University of Lagos. He had no justifiable explanation for these inklings but he could keenly sense them. His mind constantly twirled with the thought of what must be done. The structures he needed to put in place before the time that 'the time' that had not yet even begun would be up.

He could not figure how or know what was going to be or how it was going to be - he just acknowledged an inner sense of urgency. He pondered consistently on the niggling thoughts and persistent feelings. He could not exactly state why he thought so, but as he rocked his mind back and forth it occurred to him that it had something to do with the rising action and the conflicts developing in the political arena and the centre of the Nigerian nation state.

He had to do something about his appointment as the Director of the School of Drama before he got involved in other things, he mused. He felt a keen sense of urgency and he knew it was time to act. The time was now. He had the whole of August before his official resumption as Director. He had deliberately left University of Lagos, July ending to avoid an overlap in his work and commitments in Lagos.

He thought of the elections that had taken place in the West and the role he had to play. He reflected on the consequences of his actions and the extensive trials he had to undergo. Akintola had taken steps that would have further jeopardised the sanctity of the electoral system. He could not sit on the fence; he had worried about the pros and cons. He had got involved because he had to get involved. He brought himself back to the present. He would swing into action by telling Mr Axworthy he wanted to understudy him and work closely with him until the new session commenced when he will resume as head of the school. During that period he would begin to work on his plans. He noted the points on a notepad:

- New techniques of rehearsals
- Oral forms of performance
- Ritual drama
- Styling...

He thought of the new collaborations with artists at home and those he met abroad he had ideas and made a mental note of the resource persons he had planned to bring in to strengthen the School of Drama. He thought of persuasive ways of attracting resource persons. Nigeria had prospects, his involvement in the Mbari Club and the successes recorded on that platform even with Ulli Beier and Es'kia Mphahlele proved this. The School of Drama must begin to generate new waves, fresh ideas and fresh concepts. The Drama School must begin to serve as the intellectual base of theatricality and must be the watering hole to others that will spring up after it. He thought of collaborations to be made with the media who were already eager to see the changes that will be made in the School of Drama that will

now be led by a Nigerian Director ... In his characteristic way, he needed to ensure that his second coming in to the University of Ibadan campus, would break new grounds.

He decided it was important to steer clear of distractions and detractors. He would not want any skirmish with the likes of N.K. A. and the admin personnel who seemed to do nothing but sniff around his quarters to find out if he sat on the chairs or if his cushions were on the floor...

If...? But what if ? What if...? What if the political situation grew worse? What if the Easterners carried out their threat to secede? What if a full-fledged war broke out? What if the merchants and stakeholders who promote war by distributing arms and ammunition divert their merchandise to Nigeria? What if? What if? What if ... Would he be at ease directing the School of Drama, theorizing and producing plays while the roof of the nation goes on fire? Will there be interventions? In any and every way... and by all means? What if...? He felt a huge sensation about the whole situation. He was familiar with the feeling; he calmly sensed the rate at which his heartbeat. What if...? He thought once more. His eyes brighten and he wilfully brings himself back to the School of Drama.

So much to do, he scribbled down the plans as he stroked his beard.

He recalls how his parents had come to Ibadan to warn him to keep off the politicians when the fellow, whose identity they refused to reveal, had run to Abeokuta to inform them about his new antic. Who else but Akinkoyi could dare crush the ego of the 'uncivil' Madame Evanti, the Governor

General's special guest who had been flown over from the United States to perform at the ceremonies where he (Wole Soyinka) had been appointed Master of Ceremonies? His determination to keep strictly to time, having allotted Madame Evanti more time than any other artiste at the gala evening that was to round off the festivities marking the installation of Chief Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Zik of Africa, as Governor General of the nation, was seen as a national affront.

Shrugging off the weight, he picks his file and calmly walks out of the office. Some of the students that had been chatting stop to greet him as he locks the door of his makeshift office. The cheerful response and his deeply resonating voice belie his tumultuous thoughts. He recalls, as he walks down in the direction of the Faculty of Arts, his firm resolve never to get involved in such ceremonies again. If only his family didn't love him so much and if only they didn't constantly worry about his well-being. If only he could carry out his plans and activities without the *gbeboruns* and busybodies of this world dashing off with half-truths and made-up lies about him...If these busybodies and nosy fell as will not keep hurrying off to Abeokuta or to his loved ones with all sorts of information in mock concern: 'Oh Wole this! Wole that! He is up to this or up to that!'... If only ... If only... and if not only that the nation was in such a... anyway those thoughts are for later.

For now he had work to do, he had to plan and to motivate the staff and students so that the next academic session can be strategically productive ...the teaching, rehearsals and productions well as the scripts. He waves to a few persons as he walks down the hall of residence of students. He

deliberately takes a longer route to afford him a few more minutes of reflection. Soyinka sits on the concrete chairs under the trees lining Kuti Hall. A hall named in honour of his remarkable uncle, Rev I.O Ransome Kuti. He flips through the notes he had made on the plain sheets in his file.

He may just make a trip to the East. He had Igbo friends; he had to find out how to dissuade his Igbo friends. He also had to dissuade Ojukwu as well. A foe may become a friend if the rhetoric is strategically planned. Of course the rhetoric will be ... it has to be, he thought ...chuckling softly. Wole Soyinka had carefully thought about the national issues and was yet to find one good reason or in fact a partially good reason why the nation had to go to war. There was no need to allow the half-child go to war against itself ... He nods his head in firm resolve, stands up with papers in hand goes in search of Axworthy.

Interventions and Incarceration

He knew it. He knew the inklings were not for nothing. It is clear, the battle line is drawn. There have been killings and there will be more senseless killings. The time was now...

He reflected on "the gunman episode" of 1965. He could still see the shock on the faces of the occupants of that studio, at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. Akinwande Oshin, Lajide Ishola, Stephen Oyewole and John Okungbina. The full text played on his mind:

This is a voice, the true voice of the people of Western Nigeria and all the voices are saying very simply:

Akintola get out;

Akintola, get out and take with you your band of renegades who have lost with you any pretence to humanity, and have become nothing but murdering beasts.

Take with you your goons, who would sooner kill and maim, than acknowledge that you are all now an outcast to human society. The lawful government of Western Nigeria is the UPGA government, elected by the people of the West.

Let every self-seeking impostor get out now before the people, losing patience, wash the streets in their polluted blood. Get out and take with you your lepers, your things, your army, your police, in their kits and armoured cars frightening the old women in the markets, pumping bullets through the doors of female students and dragging their brave bodies down concrete steps because they dare protest.

The children loathe you; mothers curse you all men despise you. And all the youths of this country long for the moment when your presence will no longer pollute their hope for descent future.

In the name of Oduduwa and our generation, get out! Before the frustration of ten million people, their anger and their justice in an all consuming fire come over your heads.

And to you the Police, who think you merely obey orders; to you the Army, who commit these crimes in the name of obedience and to you our *Obas* who have lost shame, honour, dignity; to

you the civil servants, Radio, Press, who think more of your bellies than the legacy you have bequeathed to our generation; to you the intellectuals, who sit while acts of horror are committed before your eyes; to you, Priests, Bishops, Imams, who do not use your pulpits for the benefit of our generation: we remind you that the floods that have waited many years to break loose will not have the leisure to choose between the hovels and the palaces ...

Soyinka an Enemy of Convention

He will not be an intellectual who sits while acts of horror are committed before his very eyes. He just has to be in the cross fire. He would have to dare it, make that trip to the East. Oh! Family ties! He could literally hear a million voices; family, friends and foes. Wole, not again! Not after the gunman trial! *Not after it seemed as if your life is eventually beginning to take shape! Your family, children are now all together! Igbos aren't worth the effort!* Then the condemnations: *Are you the only one in Nigeria?* "Beast of no nation!" He could hear the GCI boys yell in condemnation as they had done when he told Mr Jefferies in his class that frogs were edible "you are going to pay for this for a long time you too-know idiot!" He winced as he remembered the blow that landed on his head "Gb'iam!'", that's for knowing too much! Then, "That's only the beginning" - he was told - "From now on you'll see, Mr Too-Clever! We have tolerated all your nonsense far too long." He winced again as he recalled the excruciating pain he had gracefully borne in his foot from the injury he sustained from one of the bullies who attacked him even when he had found the picture of the edible frog in an encyclopaedia in the school library. He was still harassed before

he could be vindicated. (These matters are materials for memoirs in later life, he mused).

He reflected on other similar experiences and had a deep-seated conviction that he will have to continually live with his internal turmoil but always follow the voice of his conscience. Moreover, his wife understands, they had discussed it times without number and their position was almost always the same. His sense of responsibility will not permit him to do less. The School of Drama could run on automatic with the template he had drawn up and the plans he had put in place for its execution most of the people he discussed these with had bought in to his vision.

His trip to the East will only take a few days. He will come back and find a way to discuss with Gowon and his administration...Oh he did come back, after two years and several months of incarceration.

He came back changed, changed in many ways. He learnt about the loyalties and betrayals of his friends and foes alike. He refused to be broken as he had strengthened himself while in isolation and he would not be broken upon his return. He chose to be strong. His mind reinforced his spirit as well as his body. The energies were subdued but not abated. His mind twirled.

He was back and he had to control the momentum...the force of freedom, the excitement of his return; at home and at work, the pace at which he executed his ideas. In the School of Drama things had changed. Without doubt, Dexter Lyndersay had faithfully run the school effectively in his

absence. Nature abhors vacuum. His own posture had to change. He encountered change personified while in prison. He had become popular or, better still, notorious and his new identity was a part of the change. Even the students, particularly those who were offered admission while he was away, peered at him as if he was a rare species or a specimen... He was a bit uneasy with the hushed tones he that had become some sort of signature tune since he returned, particularly when he came into large gatherings. He could live with all that till they got used to seeing him around again. He was certain that they thought he was queer. He acknowledged and returned all greetings but he had very little reasons to smile or laugh. Really he had none. He was free but he knew he was still held captive. He had to be free, and his mind would work it out...The horrors of the war and the loss of his friends lived with him and the situation of the country had gone from bad to worse.

The thoughts come to him as he sat at his table as Director of the School of Drama. He had to put a temporary end to the productions of the Orisun Theatre on the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV). Dapo Adelugba and Wale Ogunyemi had done well, they continued to coordinate the actors and they had maintained his presence in the media impressively...The young fellows, he knew, were disappointed but there had to be a strategic repositioning.

He found the departmental files and sundry records valuable for providing a clear picture of what had transpired in his absence. His UI Personal File ID is No. 990. Records in files were likely going to be more factual than different versions of the stories that would be narrated by his colleagues

even if he had the patience to hear the stories they had to tell. He painstakingly examined the files particularly those with correspondences that had to do with him. He read the letters written by his faithful colleagues, including those they had written to the university administration to argue for his position to be kept.

Professor Feuser and A. C Brench, for instance had written:

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Wole Soyinka's Pf.

D/R

15 15

The Acting Vice-Chancellor,
Professor A. Brown, C.B.E.,
University of Ibadan.

You may have seen this
This requires talking to
W. Feuser, Dr Feuser etc.
A.C. Branch personally and
assuring them the
22nd December, 1967
This is insinuating

Dear Professor Brown,

Upon receiving the new University of Ibadan Calendar for
the 1967-68 session we have noted with dismay on p. 161 under the
heading "School of Drama" that the post of Director of that
School has been listed as being vacant.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the incumbent of
that post is Mr. Wole Soyinka, Africa's leading playwright, now
under detention for alleged political offenses.

As colleagues of Mr. Soyinka and academics concerned with
research into African literature we have followed his case
closely. Since we are not aware that Mr. Soyinka has so far been
tried in a court of law and convicted of any offense, or that
Council has taken any action to remove him from office, we deem
it highly unfair and irregular that the University should delete
his name from the staff list.

Yours sincerely,

Co. Feuser
A.C. Branch

(W. Feuser, A.C. Branch,
Senior Lecturers in the Department of
Modern Languages)

cc The Registrar.

File in Dr Feuser's
file with a copy in
Wole Soyinka's file

He smiled as he picked up the letters written by his wife. She had remained
resolute and strong, caring for the children while simultaneously
challenging the Gowon government as well as the university administration

She combined all this and solicitously held briefs for him in as many ways as she could.

She had written several letters. The one he held was striking, an "Open Letter to General Gowon" dated 31st October and titled: Concerning the Detention of my Husband Mr. Wole Soyinka. It reads in part:

Secondly, a most mischievous slant has been put on my husband's trip to the East to see Ojukwu. There was nothing clandestine about this. On the contrary, he had communicated his intention to do this to a representative of the Federal Military Government and was even assured of a "safe conduct" as far as the areas controlled by the Federal Troops.

My husband has been solely motivated by a deep-felt conviction that Nigeria should not go to war against itself. The announcement of war had very much shaken him, and as soon as he came back from his trip overseas, he had set about seeing what could be done to salvage the situation. He had discussed this with Father Martins of the Army, who had explained to him that Ojukwu was the aggressor, he had to ask for a ceasefire, and it was to this end, that Ojukwu might reconsider his stand that my husband travelled to the East, at his own risk.

In pursuance of his conviction that war could serve no useful purpose, he had also written his controversial article advocating ceasefire from both sides ... What the public does not know also is that he had also sought, without success, a personal interview with Major-Gen. Gowon himself. He had hoped that some useful purpose might be served by such an interview. In all this, I

cannot see the acts of a man secretly in league with Ojukwu against his country...

She rounded up her letter with five submissions: one a demand for fresh and investigations to be made into her husband's involvement with Biafra, two, an emphatic denial of the allegations made against him, three, soliciting for permission to see her him, four, soliciting for other members of his family be granted access to him and finally that she should be allowed to monitor the medical attention he was receiving.

She states the obvious in closing her letter, something that the government seemed oblivious of or decidedly adverse to, she writes:

Throughout the ages the role of the artist in the society has always been an uneasy one, and my husband certainly is no exception to that rule. The artist in the society has been an essentially misunderstood being. This I believe is the crux of the matter. I insist that justice be done and publicly be seen to have been done.

He was not surprised she had written that. He knew the stuff she was made of. He saw another written by her to the Acting Vice-Chancellor on the 20th November 1967 on the position of the university management concerning her husband's incarceration. Some of the letters, memos and minutes of meetings revealed that the entire Department and some prominent members of the faculty had written, in his favour, to the management of the university at different times in his absence. It was also clear to him that

there were various degrees of sincerity and diverse interests. His position had been sustained despite the fact that he had been imprisoned by a government whose head was also Visitor to the university. No doubt, they could have appointed another Director, the University administrators had to be pro-government to be considered loyal to the government in power and they 'were' pro-government.

There were other contentious issues raging in the university. The School of Drama was being transformed into a full-fledged department. The manner of referring to a person who occupied the status of an Associate Professor was being modified. The choice to be made was between title 'Reader' or 'Associate Professor'. He was conscious of certain political under- and overtones which had sadly crept into the University System. In his case, he wondered if the position of the Head of the Department which the School of Drama was metamorphosing into should not have been advertised. Administrators, he thought aloud, were 'just a bunch of pedantic fellows'. He had written to turn down the 'promotion', and had to write again because he noted that despite his posture it had been published in the university bulletin. The controversies over his promotion should not have arisen.

It was commonsensical; he had been appointed Director of The School of Drama, a position that was synonymous in every way with the position of an Associate Professor. How could his current assessment still earn him the position of Associate Professor which he already occupied? He looked through the letter sent to him by the Registrar once again. That was partly why he ran through the files to see if see if any other position that

contradicted what was known to everyone had been taken while he was away. He had heard about the other schools of thought that sought to counter the letters written by the Dean of the Faculty in regard of his promotion.

A number of these minute-minded "pedantic fellows" believed that playwriting, directing and production of plays were un-academic tasks. They insisted that scholarship could only be measured by the number of books or critical essays published by a scholar. Nothing but opinionated perspectives on the academic enterprise could prompt such a stance. He had neither the time nor the patience to bandy words with such "illiterate" literates. He had written to turn down the Associate Professor offer. If the controversies persisted, he would only do the obvious. He could discuss this with the Vice Chancellor or the Registrar. He could see him at the staff club. He had the intention to spend sometime in the club in the evening and he might just come across either or both of them.

Soyinka parks his vehicle under the trees of the Staff Club and sees the Vice-Chancellor in company of some members of the university community that he isn't exactly familiar with. Having exchanged pleasantries, the dialogue goes thus:

'Vice-Chancellor, I will like to have a word with you in private if you do not object.

'Right away?' asked Mr Vice-Chancellor.

'Right away if you don't mind. I figure you must have received my letter.'

'Yes. I did.'

'I have turned down the offer for the reasons I clearly stated in the letter I addressed to the Registrar. I will like to officially inform you of my intention to withdraw my services from the university.'

The Vice-Chancellor is a bit taken aback.

'I will also like to proceed on a terminal leave if it is okay with you.'

'Oh! the startled VC exclaimed.

'Mr Soyinka, I wasn't quite expecting you to come up with that. Can you give me some time to go through the records and get back to you on the issues you have raised?'

'Of course', with a half-smile. 'I will also follow up with a note to remind you of our discussion. Thanks for your time and do have a happy evening.'

Soyinka felt a deep relief that he had finally let that off his mind. He had work to do, and scarcely enough time to do it. He had concepts to develop and plays to write. He had to develop the notes he had made while in prison, the rage and the pathos particularly of the poems he had scribbled while incarcerated seemed to be slipping through his thoughts and through his fingers. The department had woken up during the rehearsals of

Madmen and Specialists. Jimi Solanke and Femi Johnson brought the play to life. His style of directing and production was unorthodox. He often smiled in his mind at the puzzled sidelong looks he got from some of the perplexed members of the cast and his colleagues. Nonetheless, he knew what he wanted, his style; the diction and the imagery was intentional...to shock his audience with the horrors of war that they may desist from the folly of choosing war as an option in resolution of crisis. He had discovered Femi Osofisan in the production of *Madmen and Specialists*; he metamorphosed with the play... There were others but... he really needed a break. The last thing he needed was to be encumbered by the University and its administrative politics.

Radical Departure

Soyinka could not justify the basis for the withdrawal of his resignation letter. He had contended fiercely within himself that it was either for the students, or for some of his colleagues who had stuck out their necks for him at one point or the other and those who looked up to him in a way or another. He had argued back and forth that it was his sense of responsibility towards developing and promoting that circle of influence under his control. He did not want to leave things hanging: unsupervised theses, dramatic productions, and other matters. So he had withdrawn the letters: To sum it all up, he had to admit that it was his love and attachment to Ibadan. But now he had come to a full realization that it was time to leave. He had been composing two letters. He stands up from his seat and counts some paces from one end of the room to the other. Then, he moves

away from the table and walks up to the window with a sigh. He had to do this again.

It was not for the sake of his ego that he was set to stir the hornet's nest, neither was he angry at the deprivation. He had to do it for his sanity, to sanitize the system and for posterity. He walks back to the table and picks up the two letters he had been drafting, one to his colleagues and students, the other to the Registrar.

He read it aloud, Mr Kaye had taught him to read his poetic effusion aloud, and it read:

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70

8800
Consult with Mr. Soyinka
As Chairman of A&P
A&P
7-11-71

Mr. Soyinka
This should go to
along with the
Please of Mr. Soyinka
30th September, 1971
comment of Mr. Soyinka
Tax also not done
little Soyinka's salary
22/3/72

The Registrar
University of Ibadan
Ibadan.

Sir,

Kindly transmit to the appropriate quarters this letter which constitutes my resignation from the university. Since an earlier resignation of mine created a vacuum which was eagerly filled by unsavoury speculations I shall this time include a comment or two.

One of my most frequent criticisms of our society is this : that the average holder of a high position simply will not accept when it is time for him to resign. I must not now myself succumb to this disease. Certain differences between the university Administration and myself are so fundamental as to be, I now recognise, clearly irreconcilable. This makes my position untenable.

A small contributory detail: I have not up till now received a reply to my letter of January 3rd in which, among other matters, I raised the possibility of cutting short my leave of absence to resume duty for the examinations term. I now understand that the coolness to this offer stems from the materialist motives given to it by certain members of the committee. When matters descend to this level of calculated smears it is time to withdraw and to turn one's energies to less degrading pursuits.

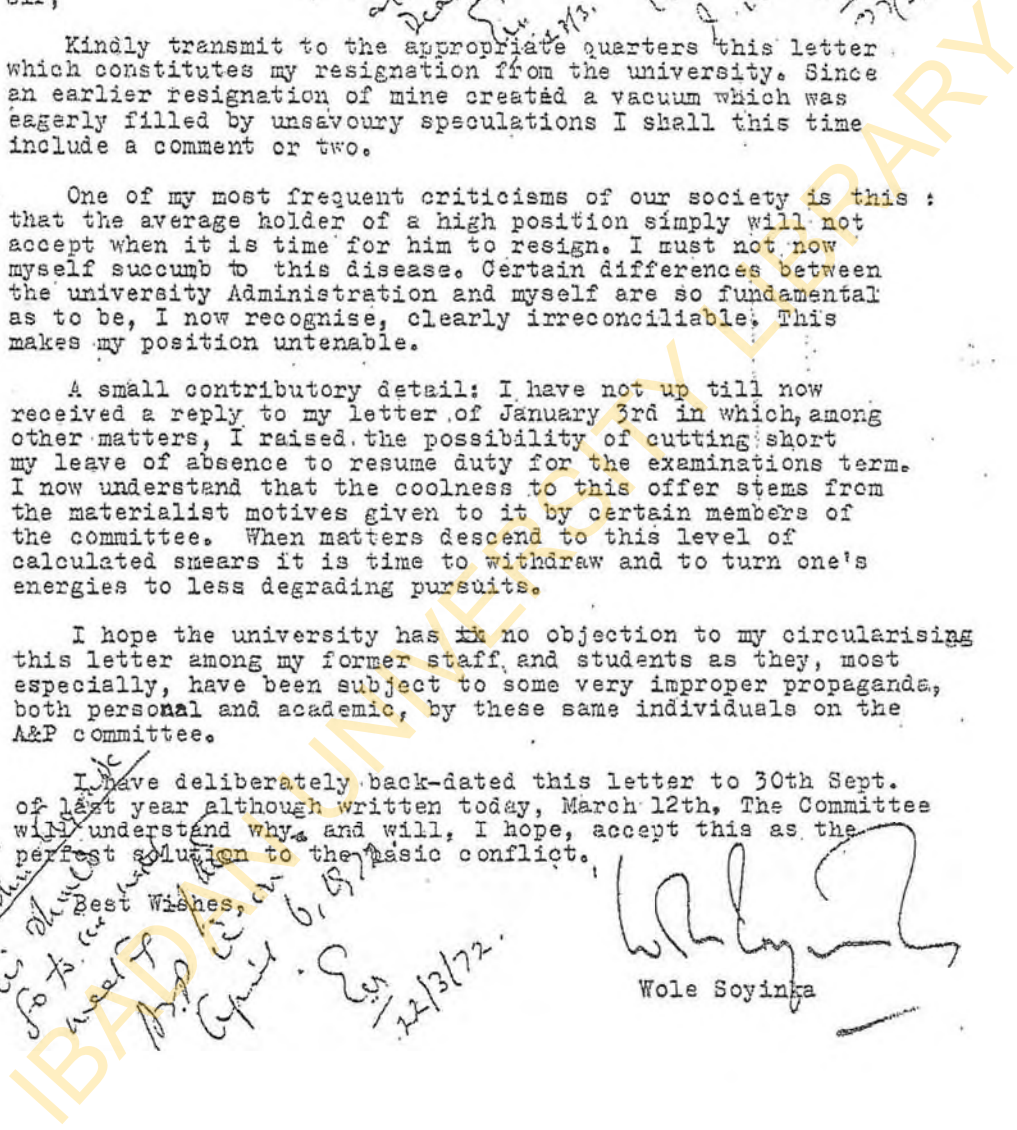
I hope the university has ~~no~~ no objection to my circularising this letter among my former staff, and students as they, most especially, have been subject to some very improper propaganda, both personal and academic, by these same individuals on the A&P committee.

I have deliberately back-dated this letter to 30th Sept. of last year although written today, March 12th. The Committee will understand why, and will, I hope, accept this as the perfect solution to the basic conflict.

Best Wishes, Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka

① This should go to Mr. Soyinka
Best Wishes, Wole Soyinka
22/3/72



He nodded his head, just as he wanted it to read. It was straight to the point and without fripperies. He dotted the 'i's and crossed the 't's. He picked up the other draft and read:

27th March, 1972.

Colleagues/

I have had swift reactions from some of you over my resignation. Since they are all uniformly optimistic about a possible change of mind on my part, let me not encourage false hopes by delaying a reply. My decision stands.

Let me try however to do something about the complaint that my letter was too cryptic. First, it is necessarily so. I have no wish to create a situation which would involve me in devoting any further time and attention to people whom I profoundly despise. They have had all the attention they deserve from me, a lot more than they deserve except in a more general context.

Which leads to one elaboration I can make. As some of you are aware, I tend to view the university not in isolation but in the larger context of our entire social phenomenon. When faced for instance with the swollen emptiness of those types who, by a series of accidents are in a position to play destructive roles in decision-making within the university, I see them solely as twin-specimens to larger menaces which bedevil society and constantly stultify real progress. Faced with such a recognition this question becomes increasingly insistent: is it really an intelligent commitment which tries to cope with the nibbling propensities of these minnows? is it not time to tackle the plague in a far more fundamental manner?

I have never seen my task at any university in which I have taught as being limited to pouring knowledge across the gulf which separates tutor and pupil. For those who do not know it already, this is not the place to go into a definition of what I consider the true role of a university teacher. Such a role, with all its commitments, is jeopardised and becomes suspect the moment that I have to pay attention to my own personal place within the university hierarchy. This is the most personal of the two or three main causes which lie at the heart of my present decision. On the one hand, I look forward with impatience to the inevitable moment when the present expedient but valueless and dishonest rankings in all the Nigerian universities will be replaced by a new system which eliminates the desperation which goes into the canvassing, bargaining, denigrating, begging, cheating, forging and even specialised forms of bribery. On the other hand, trapped within the system by the very fact of working within it, it is not possible for me to accept for myself a situation which empowers lightweights of intellect and performance, the political professors, the professional committeemen, and other snug university upstarts to pronounce on my achievements; much less insult them by derisive offers. Such a situation makes demands on me on behalf of myself. Since I cannot even entertain such an idea I am left only with one course. Resignation.

Such a withdrawal must not therefore be thought of as a negative act but a positive course. Since my work with certain students is not yet completed, it is likely that I shall seek some kind of attachment to another university in the country for a further brief period. I want it understood however that this represents a very final break with the university system as it stands today in the country. When the universities are finally caught up and shaken to their foundations in the authentic value convulsions which are now inescapable for the entire country, it will be possible

to integrate myself into one. For the moment, those who can must cut themselves off from corrupted systems and commence the work for a lasting alternative.

Very sincere greetings,

Wole Soyinka

Addressed to all Staff and Students of the Drama Department, individually.

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He rendered it like the text of one of the *Two Famous Speeches in World History*. He smiled upon recollection of the time and effort he invested in rendering those speeches as a school boy. His mind was made up. He remembered his initial premonition when he took up the job. He was now more convinced than ever that he will always be an itinerant scholar. He had work to do at University of Ibadan, he had done it, the structures were in place, and the watering hole had been created and will continue to be a high traffic area for the dramatic arts even beyond Nigeria. His work was done and it was time to leave.

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APPENDIX

school of drama



UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN
NIGERIA

telephone: 21051 EXT. 320
telegrams: UNIVERSITY IBADAN
director: WOLF SOYINKA

May 1, 1970

The Registrar
University of Ibadan

Sir,

I regret to give notice that I shall resign my appointment as Director of the School of Drama with effect from Sept. 30, 1970. I wish to thank the university for the opportunity, and to hope that I can be of service to the interests of the university whenever possible.

Thank you.

Wole Soyinka

*V.C.
To approve*

I.V.

*Approved
Wambo
V.C.*

S.F.O.

*Augustine
I wish
accept
resignation please.
S/S*

S.F.O.

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19

SSCO Please discuss

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

CONFIDENTIAL (2)

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

FROM: Wole Soyinka,
Department of Theatre Arts.

TO: The Registrar

REF: DATE: 2nd December, 1970.

Kindly advise me. Should not the position of Head of Department of Theatre Arts be advertised? The assumption seems to be that I automatically accede to this position but I'm beginning to wonder a little about that. Moreover, one or two situations keep cropping up which make it essential that the position be clarified as quickly as possible. I shall be grateful for your comments.

Wole Soyinka.

Copy: Vice-Chancellor

Mc
I spoke to
Mr. [unclear]
This matter is being
to stop. The papers are
already done. file this away.
[Signature]
24/1/71

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Establishments Officer (SS)

The Dean,
Faculty of Arts

P.990

24 Dec., 1970.

Headship of Theatre Arts

Theatre
The post of Mr. Wole Shoyinka, who was the Director of School of Drama, is of an Associate Professor's status. This status qualifies him as an Acting Head of the present Department of Arts to which the School was changed. We now intend to ask the Appointments & Promotions Committee meeting in January, 1971 to appoint Mr. Shoyinka formally as the Acting Head of the Department of Theatre Arts.

I should be grateful for your comments on this proposal.



M. Duku
for Establishments Officer (SS)

EDC.

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VC/A.10

9th March, 1971

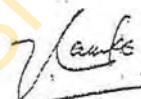
Mr Wole Soyinka,
Acting Head,
Department of Theatre Arts,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan.

Dear Mr Soyinka,

I refer to your letter of 8th March, 1971 requesting permission to be absent from the University for a month at the beginning of the 3rd term. I note this request is to enable you participate in the production of Murderous Angels by Connor Cruise O'Brien at the Theatre National Populaire, Paris.

I hereby approve your request provided your visit to Paris will not involve this University in any expense.

Yours sincerely,



(F.A. LAMBO)
Vice-Chancellor

cc: Registrar ✓
10-11 Bursar

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department of
theatre arts



UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN
NIGERIA

telephone: 21691 EXT. 330
telegrams: UNIVERSITY IBADAN
head: WOLE SOYINKA

3rd January, 1972

Acting
The ~~Secretary~~ Vice-Chancellor
University of Ibadan
Ibadan.



Dear Professor Eddington,

My doctor has now informed me that he is satisfied that I shall be able to resume normal activities from about the end of March. I would like therefore to resume duty at the beginning of the third term, April 6th as I also feel in agreement with him about my fitness. Kindly let me know as soon as possible if there is no objection to this.

Concerning another subject: in response to my letter declining the offer of the Appointments Committee to award me the title of Associate Professor, I have received - perhaps it is only by coincidence - a copy of the University Calendar for this session. It lists me as Associate Professor (sic). In case this is a newly created title by the Committee I wish to state quite clearly that I decline this also. I would like to resume duty in April under the rank (whatever it was in university grading) which I held on appointment to the university in 1967.

And this brings me to a very serious protest. I wish to know once for all if the university has the right to force a "promotion" on an employee in spite of his will on the matter. This is the second time that this strange autocratic conduct has taken place. Last session I received a letter from the former Vice-Chancellor appointing me Acting Head of the Drama Department. Before I could even reply this so-called appointment had appeared in the university Gazette and was subsequently put through the Senate papers. (I was out of the country at this senate session and had no opportunity to preview the papers - no doubt this will be proven my own fault). However, as the university was caught in a crisis over the murder of a student about that same time I made the mistake of not creating a fuss over this arbitrary conduct.

And now the university has placed in the calendar an appointment which I very definitely declined. An appointment is a two-way affair. I wish to know if the university acknowledges that it has gone too far with this sort of conduct. It is a question of importance to me individually and as a matter of principle.

copy: Association of University Teachers, Ibadan University Branch