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Derek Walcott's *The Odyssey*: A Post-Colonial "Odd Assay"¹ of the Epic Genre as a Regenerative Source of "Latent Cross-Culturalities"

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Derek Walcott's *The Odyssey*. A *Stage Version* was commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1992. That a Caribbean poet and playwright should be asked by the most venerable theatre institution in England to dramatise Homer's epic raises a few questions. Symbolically and interestingly enough, Walcott won the Nobel Prize for Literature within the week the play premiered at the RSC. So, Stratford called a post-colonial bard from a "far archipelago" to rewrite the "master narrative" of European civilisation, Homer's *The Odyssey*. Does the post-colonial writer, in all creative freedom and integrity, "write back to the centre," or does he seek some classical validation or legitimisation through the appropriation of a Western literary monument? Does the "centre" attempt to recuperate the talent blooming in its margins to regenerate its own imagination? Is this theatrical project the visible and official sign of an ancient but subterranean reconfiguration of the creative imagination, one whose virtue it is precisely to have neither boundary nor centre? Walcott's *The Odyssey* encapsulates all these problematic questions and takes us to what lies at the heart of post-modern literary analysis: a questioning of the concept of unity and homogeneity as well as an unmasking of the mechanisms that we know as "binary oppositions": the centre versus the margins, classical culture versus popular cultures, "master narrative" versus "smaller narratives." According to Lyotard, the two principal conditions of postmodernism are break-up and reconstruction on the one hand, and the loss of a belief in

¹ Assay/n: 1 b: a chemical test to determine the presence or absence or more often the quantity of one or more components of a material; c: tested purity, value or character; d: a substance to be tested or being tested; 2 a: archaic: assault, attack. Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*.

an overarching "metanarrative" on the other. Walcott's rewriting of Homer's epic does offer such a deconstructive literary revision: it evinces a geographic recontextualisation of the Mediterranean epic, a destabilisation of the genre, a decentering of the subject through the metaphor of exile, as well as self-referential metatheatrical features akin to another "epic" theatre, Brecht's conception of dramaturgy. But it probes much deeper beneath the surface of a post-modern textual disarticulation and offers partial glimpses of subterranean poetic and mythic recurrences. It especially does so through a creolisation rooted in the Caribbean landscape, folklore and poetic imagery, as well as in Yoruba cosmology. It reveals a comparative scrutinising of archetypal patterns in order to disclose "latent cross-culturalities" (Harris, "Quetzalcoatl" 40, quoted in Maes-Jelinek 37), i.e. a subterranean cross-cultural polyphonic structure.

In this essay, I want to focus on the problematic relation between postmodernism as a theoretical force spurting from a "crisis of representation and values" in Western societies and the post-colonial rhetorical strategies of intertextuality, irony, and questioning of history as displayed in Walcott's *The Odyssey*. Walcott's adaptation shows a subtle shift from a self-reflexive, fragmented, discontinuous, palimpsestic, thus experimental post-modern play to an intuitive, reconnecting, revisionary, Protean, thus cross-cultural text. To a post-modern refusal of closure, the play opposes a cross-cultural intimating of unresolvable partiality of vision epitomised in the trinity of blind poets, Homeric *alter egos* echoing and transforming the epic poem across space and time.

To channel the discussion on postmodernism and on cross-culturalism as a possible alternative to its "depthlessness" (Jameson 6),² I wish to concentrate on a double dimension of Walcott's rewriting, i.e. his questioning of the epic genre as a founding narrative and the subsequent deconstructive reading of its rhetoric on the one hand, and his poetics/politics of relocation of the epic on the other. Walcott's cartographic reconfiguration of the epic unites the Mediterranean (Europe and Africa/Egypt) and the Atlantic world (Africa/Nigeria and the Caribbean) through the fluid continuity of the poetic imagination, thereby transforming Homer's epic into a true overarching "metanarrative" released from its cultural fixity. Cross-culturalism, as it has been coined and defined by the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, implies the existence of "an unbroken thread that runs throughout humanity" (Harris, *Radical Imagination* 26). This fundamentally essentialist conception of human

² This comparison between postmodernism and cross-culturalism as theoretical forces engendered by the contemporary "sense of an ending" (Kermode, quoted in Maes-Jelinek 145) and void is eloquently discussed by Hena Maes-Jelinek in her seminal

creativity, closer to philosophy than theory, seems to lie at the heart of Walcott's *The Odyssey* and allows a glimpse of latent bridges between cultures through the intuitive discovery of metaphorical and mythical similarities.

As an isthmian text, Walcott's *The Odyssey* thus connects three traditions, cultures, and sensibilities, a balance foregrounded straight from the beginning with a "Prologue" sung by Blind Billy Blue, a blues/calypso singer, a Protean Homeric *alter ego*, whose verse "stitches" (54, 122) stories across the seas. Throughout the play, he assumes the part of the two Homeric blind court poets, Demodocus and Phemius, the first a poet in Scheria at Alcinous' palace, the second in Ithaca. Significantly, Walcott displaces these two Homeric projections (Hammer, "*The Odyssey*", 103): Demodocus becomes Ithaca's poet and Phemius the bard at the Court of King Alcinous. This fusion of three characters—the Homeric story-teller whose voice introduces *The Odyssey* and the two displaced court poets—suggests a fluid continuity of the poetic voice echoing through space and time:

Since that first blind singer, others will sing down the ages

Of the heart in its harbour, then long years after Troy, after Troy. (160)

They represent crucial articulations of a larger discursive setting in which the Aegean text is constantly stretched by the Atlantic world. Just as Odysseus passes "through this world's pillars, the gate of human knowledge" (i.e. through Hercules' columns separating the Mediterranean sea from the Atlantic ocean; 27) and reaches for the "Other(s)" side beyond his own geographic and cultural sphere, Phemius' poem "will ride time to unknown archipelagoes" (59), and Demodocus, coming from "a far archipelago," connects both worlds with a common source of imagination, "the sea [that] speaks the same language around the world's shores" (122).

The "sound of surf" opening the Prologue sets from the very beginning the metaphor of the sea as a poetic continuity of imaginative visions and revisions through a cross-cultural dialogue:

Andra moi ennepe mousa polutropon hos mala polla ...

The shuttle of the sea moves back and forth on this line,

All night, like the surf, she shuttles and doesn't fall

Asleep, then her rosy fingers at dawn unstitch the design. (1)

The first verse³ of Homer's *Odyssey* preserved in its original Greek form signals the cross-cultural dialogic pattern of Walcott's version. The

Walcott thus brings into sharp focus the ambivalent nature of homecoming and injects his own Caribbean sensibility into the core of the Greek text: the figure of Odysseus appears as a personification of the "Caribbean poetic subjectivity [...] a migrant condition perennially poised between journeying and a desire for home" (Thieme). When Odysseus is shipwrecked on Sheria, Nausicaa notices: "the map of the world's on your back. The skin's peeling" (50). Odysseus' back, like a turtle's, represents the somatic expression of his psychic heritage: the world has become his home, his exile a "pleasure" (Lanning *The Pleasures of Exile*). This Donne-like metaphysical conceit reflects in cartographic terms the restlessly questing Caribbean spirit longing for a "home," but at the same time resisting psychic and cultural enclosure.

The metaphor of cartography also provides the model for a post-modern artistic expression which recharts the space of the contemporary "alienated city" and enables the "practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble" (Jameson 51). Jameson called this organising principle "cognitive mapping," a concept that applies to social, aesthetic, theoretical as well as ideological formations. But "the very global space of the postmodernist or multinational moment" (Jameson 53) remains strictly confined to the post-industrial city, the "urban [...] unrepresentable totality" (51), where the individual is no longer able to "map and remap [...] alternative trajectories to reconnect with the 'ensemble of society's structures as a whole'" (51). The post-modern cartography, "cognitive mapping," thus excludes socio-cultural spaces outside its own sphere of emergence and development. In other words, the margins of the post-modern "cognitive" map still represent "blanks," discarded territories "beyond the gate of [post-modern] imagination" (*Odyssey* 35) and interest.

Contrasting with the suffocating space of the post-modern "alienated city," the sea metaphor is a key concept in the work of Walcott, who by adapting Homer's *Odyssey* creatively opens the geographically enclosed Mediterranean world and expands it to the New World. Odysseus' exile across the seas reflects an existential condition which allows the "mapping and remapping" of overarching "alternative trajectories." The "sea's bitterness" (10) is equated with the "bitter ecstasy" (120) of homecoming, the "homeless parasite" (124) he is perceived to be on his return to Ithaca conjures up "the homeless waves" (109) whose rhythm still makes "the earth sway under [his] feet" (112).

His return home has Tennysonian accents which are echoed by Anticlea, Odysseus' mother:

Wasn't this the promise I made you, Odysseus,

That in an oak's crooked shade you would take your ease

Greek text recedes in three dots, both eroded and regenerated by the eternal flux of creativity, "the shuttle of the sea." The tidal motion is associated with Penelope's endless weaving and unweaving of the tapestry, "just as the sea's shuttle weaves and unweaves her foam" (135). The metaphor of the sea as a poetic site is emphasised in Penelope's transformation of her twenty years of waiting into a fecund creativity: although "that hot blue sea stays empty [...] its line is my bow-string, and its waves my lyre" (21). Just as the horizon is an ever-receding line blurred by the movement of the waves, poetic revisions represent creative rhythms that ceaselessly produce mutating meanings, a dynamic whose very *meaning* actually lies in its own motion: "the gates of imagination never close [if] harp songs ripple the water" (35, 25). Revisionary waves and weaves produce "knot[s] of pain" (129) echoing in the "sibilance [of the] surf" (37). The unstitched knots of Penelope's tapestry, whose completion is constantly deferred, are juxtaposed to the useless nautical knots of Odysseus' lost vessel, whose return home is constantly deferred. Both slow, repeating motions are conflated into a single metaphor of the revisionary poetic process, "verse stitch[ing] stories across the seas" (54, 122). The perpetual deferral of closure embodied in the tapestry corresponds to Odysseus' perpetual wandering across the seas which seems to end but resonates with ambiguous Tennysonian accents. Indeed, Penelope's association of the sea with the lyre echoes another recurrent metaphor which blends poetic creativity and the fecund possibility of exile, i.e. the metaphorical association of Odysseus with the turtle whose shell Hermes transformed into a lyre. Odysseus inherits Achilles' shield after arguing with Ajax who, bitterly looking at the shield "covering" Odysseus, curses him: "Bear it, you turtle! Take ten years to reach your coast" (4). Just as the turtle carries its "home" on its back, Odysseus accumulates in his twenty years of wandering memories that form the very "shell" of his personality, his mythified as well as dark sides:

ODYSSEUS

My house has dark rooms that I dare not examine.

PENELOPE

Where's your house?

ODYSSEUS

Here. (He touches his temple)

The crab moves with its property.

PENELOPE

And turtles. (131)

Quiet as a statue, with a stone bench for your plinth,
That here in this orchard is where you would end your days,
With memories as sweet as the honeycomb's labyrinth?
Now your heart heaves, not from the Cyclops' boulders
But that your mother's prophecy should come to pass? (158-59)

"Quiet as a statue" expresses Odysseus' fear of stasis, and the "stone bench" suggests the petrified world he would have to bear if his mother's vision were to materialise. Against the perspective of homecoming as sterile fixity come Athena's final words: "the harbour of home is what your wanderings mean" (159), echoing Menelaus' conception of home as "God's trial. We earn home like everything else" (29). "God's trial" before "earning home" is here "desupernaturalised" and interpreted as the existential ordeal of confronting the "soundless shadows" (151) of his mother and of his dead friends. The invocation of the dead through the blood of a sacrificed ram as it is depicted in Homer's "The Book of the Dead" is culturally transposed into an Afro-Caribbean Vodun ceremony in which Zeus and Athena are invoked alongside Ogun, Erzulie, and Shango. "Odysseus' eyes are wrapped in a black cloth" (88) and he is given a wooden sword which symbolises the duality of human nature as well as of the cosmic order: "the world/the underworld", "body/soul" (88), life/death, known/unknown. As an archetypal protagonist of the chthonic realm" (Soyinka, "Morality" 3), "the shadow of imagination" (85), he undertakes an inner voyage whereby these antinomies will make "each other whole" (88) and which, as a result, will enable him to reach Ithaca with a deeper knowledge of himself.

He must symbolically "wound the ground" (88) and descend to the innermost reaches of his wrestling mind through "this crack of the heart-broken earth" (88). He removes "the bandage" from his eyes and, with his eyes peeled and his own wound exposed, he goes through the "womb" of the earth to reach his dead mother, Anticlea. Odysseus' utter vulnerability represents a gate within himself which opens the doors of "home." The metaphorical association of the wound with the womb comes up again in the next scene, when Odysseus reaches Ithaca after painfully passing through the "drifting rocks" Scylla and Charybdis, "curled up" on his raft and "cower[ing and] whining" (106) like a child. Simultaneously, his nurse Euryclea "is rocking a cradle" (106) and singing a lullaby:

Sleep, my liddle pickney, don't 'fraid no monsters,
As me launch your liddle cradle into dreaming seas

[...]

So, cradled in him comfort, a child see what grows
From his shadow to shapes on a nursery wall. (106)

Odysseus is reborn through the wounds of experience symbolised by his descent into Hades, and then through the womb of his own unconscious, the terrifying drifting walls, "these monsters [from] a child's imagination" (106). Wilson Harris uses a similar conflation of metaphors in his latest novel, *The Dark Jester*: it is the "experience [of] a Wound that takes us back to Childhood, a mysterious Childhood we have largely forgotten, even as it brings us close to a recognition of transfiguration, yes, transfigured possibilities, yes, and deadly dangers in ourselves, partial dangers we may reinforce into absolutes" (Harris 6). Significantly, the scar of an old wound on Odysseus' leg allows him to be recognised by his nurse under the dirty rags of a homeless beggar and welcomed "home."

The body as the metaphor of concentrated experiences is also used in the dramaturgy of the play. In the tradition of Amiri Baraka/Leroy Jones's *Dutchman*, Hades is relocated in the underground, "earth's stomach" (89), where Odysseus is confronted with his mother's reflection in a mirror. The dramatic use of a mirror presents Odysseus confronted with himself as a "being inhabited by presences" (Walcott, "Muse of History" 2), which belong to his past and with which he webs a dialogical relationship to reach another level of self-consciousness. The disclosure of a latent heteroglossia within the individual reflects on a metaphorical level the underpinning "multi-voicedness" of Walcott's *Odyssey*, now revealed as a "chambre d'échos" (*Barthes* 78), a chamber in which the echoes of other literary works ranging from the classics to popular calypso are endlessly reflected. The hellish underground is depicted as "a station, echoing arches" (89) where "every mirror echoes [the] mannerisms" (90) of the "eclipsed" presences within the self. The metaphor of the entranced voodoo devotee Odysseus holding up the mirror not to nature, as Hamlet puts it, but to his fragmented self points to a kaleidoscopic referentiality which reflects the structure of the text itself. In other words, thematic introspection corresponds to textual and dramaturgical introversion, i.e. a self-conscious turning towards the form and mechanism of the performance. This textual as well as dramaturgical ritual of deconstruction shows its ultimate disarticulation when the epic becomes split into an "alphabet of the souls, Ajax to Zeus" (92) within the space of the letter "L" drawn on the earth—a liminal space of ritual revelation which symbolises the entrance to Hell. The stark nakedness of the signs stripped of the sophistication of epic poetry and reduced to their minimal contextual meaning reveals the complete dissolution of the heroic substance of the epic when names are the only mnemonic traces left. It reflects Odysseus' angst of being "turned into a

name" (130) and thereby stripped of contradictions and ambiguities, the very stuff as man is made on. In reaction against his epic dehumanisation, he depicts himself as a "devious [...] divisive [...] liar" (53-54), echoing Phemius' intuitive assertion that

what lasts is what's crooked. The devious man survives [...] That's the way with tears. Crooked streams join their rivers. (54)

This double entendre reflected in the word "crooked" (dishonest and curved, twisted) translates Odysseus' ambivalent personality: Menelaus describes him as a "smart [...] acquisitive [...] sacker of cities," materialistically-inclined and interested in taking "his share" (32). The Odyssean virtues defined by the recurring epithets "*polutropos*" (1), "*polumechanos*, *polutlas*, *polumetis* [italics mine]"⁴ (110) are counterbalanced by their excess or perversion. These adjectives defining a positive intelligence are turned into antithetic flaws. His exceptional cleverness becomes "natural cunning" (60), the man of invention (he conceived the conspiracy of the Trojan horse) becomes the "man of evasions, man skilled at lying" (110).

Odysseus appears as an extension of the Afro-Caribbean trickster figure, Anancy.⁵ This cross-cultural association is further emphasised by his "Egyptian" slave and nurse Eurycleia, who cradled Odysseus as "Egypt [...] cradle Greece till Greece mature [sic]" (9). She says:

Nancy stories me tell you and Hodyssseus [...] People don't credit them now. Them too civilize. (8)

These flaws reveal a complexity that the Homeric Odysseus possesses but only fleetingly discloses. The final scene showing on stage the massacre of Penelope's suitors connects Odysseus' murderous revenge to the tragic hubris of the Yoruba god of iron, Ogun. As the stage darkens, Odysseus warns the suitors by uttering "say your prayers [...] it fans the forge whose anvil hammers lightning" (142). "A loud rambling noise, echoing" (145) is heard, and that "reverberation" comes from the "great door groaning from dividing iron" (145). The Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka sees Ogun as the embodiment of Yoruba tragedy, i.e. the merging of the dichotomy creation/destruction into complementary forces. In his adaptation of *The Bacchae of Euripides*, Soyinka fuses Dionysos with Ogun and describes him as "the god of seven

⁴ *Polutropos* and *polumechanos* mean "resourceful," "shrewd," but also "shifty" and "full of tricks"; *polutlas* means "much-enduring"; and *polumetis* refers to Odysseus' archetypal quality, his exceptional cleverness.

⁵ Anancy is a cultural retention of the Yoruba Voodoo god Esu Elegbara and the Fon (Benin) god Esu Legba, the crippled messenger of the gods and the guardian of the crossroads.

paths" (Soyinka 295), who "makes an anvil of the mountain-peaks/Hammers forth a thunderous will" (251). Just like Odysseus, Ogun battles the forces of the chthonic realm, "the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and becoming" (Soyinka, "Fourth Stage" 142). He forged an iron axe as Odysseus used his sword to "hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man" (Soyinka, "Morality" 27). Odysseus' mass murder of the hundred suitors is described by Penelope as "a second Troy" (154). She scornfully accuses him of "hack[ing] [his] way through mankind [and] dismember[ing] its branches" (154). Her description is strongly reminiscent of Ogun's "tragic error," i.e. his slaughtering of his own people at a battlefield in a fit of drunken madness. The cross-cultural identification of Odysseus with Ogun articulates some latent similitudes between the Greek and the Yoruba myths and thereby points to "a kind of ontological cross-culturalism which subverts and dismantles Western assumptions of a superior cultural heritage" (Maes-Jelinek, "Latent Cross-Culturalities" 1). The Greek and the Yoruba epics are thus interwoven in an intricate pattern of mythical correspondences which question and creatively contaminate the cultural purity of the genre.

At the end of the play, in a fit of vertiginous consciousness described as "madness" (151), Odysseus nearly kills the poet Blind Billy Blue/Demodocus for preserving the epic tradition and for translating the former's rejection of the war, "Troy's rain [...] Wounds. Festering diseases" (151), into the celebratory "Troy's glory" (151). The poet's epic lines are compared to a "succession of arrows [...] huge oars [...] thudding like lances on to the heart of this earth" (54). Odysseus' fury reflects the thorny intricacy of *history* and *narrative*, of factual historical *reality* and its transmission through *literature*. Odysseus wants to kill the poet "for telling boys that lie" (151), i.e., for turning a reality of destruction and suffering into a glorious epic. Unlike Jameson's understanding of the post-modern as "bereft of all historicity [where] the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (Jameson 322), Walcott suggests that the dilution of the *real* in the epic narrative represents an unbearable "lie" that must be exposed before reformulating the latent links bridging *realities*, in this case a reality of war and destruction, and the subjective imagination. As a post-colonial writer questioning the validity of the coloniser's hegemonising historiography, he sees the "significance of history [...] in both the event and its narration, however fictionalised and subjective," while postmodernism focuses on its "own awareness of this fictionalization" (Maes-Jelinek, "Teaching" 141) and the impossibility of retrieving any meaning from its referential illusions, let alone recovering a sense of purposefulness and potentiality from the debris of historical catastrophes.

So, Walcott's adaptation of *The Odyssey* is grounded in a revisionary process of the epic genre whose acclaimed heroism and metaphorising compulsion lead to the disappearance of the historical subject into poetic abstraction. Walcott infiltrates into the interstices of the traditional Homeric epic a critique of the genre and is, at the metafictional level, engaged in the same conflict as Odysseus with the poet identified as the voice of "metaphor" (121). Walcott says

one reason I do not like talking about an epic is that I think it is wrong to try to ennoble people [...] And first to write history is wrong. History makes similes of people, but these people are their own nouns. (Walcott, quoted in Bruckner 397)

Instead of a glorifying, dehumanising and artificial epic language, Walcott offers an elemental epic poetics in which language and nature are engaged in a creative dialectics of sounds and meanings, in a fashioning of an elemental totality through language. The "islands" echo the name Odysseus as "sea, sea, sea" (36), "father" as "farther, farther" (37). Nature repeats the essential connection between the utterance and its wider symbolic significance, and creates a link between language and its infinite mutating reverberations across time and space. Odysseus fuses with the "sibilance" (37) of the "hissing surf" and the "hissing wheels" (139): "Odysseus. His name sounded like hissing surf" (122). The name swirls across the seas to the "green leaf and clear vowel" (109) of home, echoing Penelope's unbroken marriage vow, to the poplars and spring of Mount Neriton which talk the tongue that he recognises "from the crackle of their consonants ... Ithacan" (109). Unlike the post-modern sense of alienation, man, language, and the undetermined vastness of the *real* seem to be here organically united.

So, it seems that despite the sense of being lost in a terrifying void, despite dislocation and utter alienation, the existential "centre" still holds, the accumulated remains of fragmenting/historical experiences can be articulated. The connection between man in all his frailty and contradictions and the indeterminacy of the *real* still exist. In other words, the depth of experience beneath the surface of referential illusions or "partial appearances" (Harris, *Unfinished Genesis* 214) can be probed through the intuitive resources of "Adamic" (Walcott) language.

Walcott's *The Odyssey* creatively fluctuates between transformation and continuity, thus showing a post-colonial ambivalence which contradicts and at the same time expands the Homeric literary myth beyond the boundaries of cultural constrictions. In his *odd assay* of the epic genre, a "crucible of cultures" indeed, Walcott tests the antique text to determine the presence of essential components, recuperates these thematic *essentia*, and extracts from them a contemporary *substance* by discerning post-colonial concerns in the interspaces of the Western

narrative. Through the exploration of the transformative and therefore fertile potentialities of the Homeric text, Walcott "assays" and assaults the static character of tradition and enters a syncretic dimension of creativity capable of engendering a new cultural ethos.

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Portrayals of Masculinity/ies in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

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Wole Soyinka, the Nobel prize-winning Nigerian playwright, poet, and novelist, is considered by many to be Africa's finest writer. Though apparently influenced in his dramas by the Irish playwright J. M. Synge, Soyinka links up with traditional popular African theatre and its combination of dance, music, and action. In fact, his writing is based on the mythology of his Yoruba people. In a paper delivered at a Swedish conference in 1967, Soyinka underlined that "the artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time" (Hughes). This essay will focus on the process of gendering, on the metaphors of gendered power, and on the relation between "hegemonic" and "subordinate" masculinities as exemplified in Soyinka's highly popular comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* (first performed in 1959 and published in 1963). Soyinka's imagery does not only imply a particular perception of the relation between the sexes, it also makes statements on the social value of phenomena within a network of abstract relationships between masculinity and power. Assumptions of supremacy and hierarchy have, for many years, been a key area of postcolonial perception and imagining, turning around notions like "progress," "improvement," "tradition," "heritage," or "dislocation." Already as a young playwright, at a point when Nigeria had not yet reached independence, Soyinka was very much preoccupied with the questions of cultural difference, encounter/conflict, and the potential hybridization of social habits (as well as languages) resulting from contact with other cultures. In his play, the village of Ilujinle serves as the site of a meeting point of African and European traditions, and yet it differs radically from a black-and-white portrayal.¹ Although the white man remains absent, the Yoruba commu-

¹ Soyinka has, in many interviews, defended his conception of what the African heritage is against "Neo-Tarzanist" critics. See, for example, the "Introduction" to *Six Plays*: xiv-xvi.