

## Rapture and Rupture in the Liminal World

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**B**rowsing through the records of this Association, I was most intrigued to discover that Mikhail Gorbachev had preceded me onto this podium. If there is a retired political figure who would be universally considered as an authority on unusual manifestations of mental diseases, especially among political dissidents, surely it has to be someone from within the ruling echelon of the former Soviet Union. Even non-students of establishment ways of dealing with political dissidents in the Soviet empire, especially during the Stalinist era, must know that the psychiatric route was a specialty of such systems. Within those borders, as in others of the same mould, a dissident was simply declared—to put it elegantly—a madman. Medical and political sciences had consummated a marriage of convenience.

However, when you do think of it, isn't madness a classification we routinely apply to an individual who does not inhabit the world of reality, one who lives entirely in a world of his own, a liminal existence that is filled with "illusions," because its realities do not conform to ours? If society allowed such delusions to propagate their own inner verities, may they not threaten to overwhelm the imperatives of predictability and its controls, that is, ideological certitudes and their social props, our sense of order, and, thus, undermine the sense of material security of society? Such minds are dangerous, and nowhere more so than in a revolutionary order. They undermine calculations, schematic tidiness and, most especially in the case of ideologies that claim to be progressive, delay the attainment of a sociopolitical utopia. Where utopia is seen as the inevitable conclusion of a scientifically prescribed revolution, the dissident is seen not only to be mad, but to be a danger to, and enemy of, rationality. The solution is to institutionalize such victims of a neurological disorder, to isolate them in the wastes of Siberia and other holding pens where their deliriums cannot infect the rest of society.

In order to ensure that they were proven certifiable, and remained so, such patients were often administered mind-bending drugs of varying degrees of potency—all depending on whether or not the patient was deemed open to rehabilitation or incurable—among which latter grouping we would place, for instance, a Solzhenitzyn or a Josef Brodsky. There is no evidence, mind you, that neurosurgeons were also co-opted into the mind altering process but, what does it matter? The critical target was the dissident's state of mind. If that mind could not be attuned to ideological conformity with the rest of society, that is,

society as interpreted and decreed by Party authority, then it had to be quarantined, left to its own liminal devices, but, additionally, as we have already pointed out, assisted to sink deeper into its own world of the unreal.

Dissect it how you will, this policy or proceeding of state was a truly striking piece of political sociology. Dialectical materialism, the bedrock of communist ideology was really taken to the extreme—I shall proceed to explain in what manner. Reality is basically antithetical to imagination, even where it forms the basis of that same imagination. It is incompatible with the supernatural, the metaphysical, and other forms of other-world conceptualizations that amount to a liminal advocacy. When you permit any notion within society that is outside what is directly derived from reality, and that includes a concept of the world as it is *not*, but as it *could* be, a world that is based on the ideal, you critique, or insert a note of skepticism into all convictions that derive from the empirical world. If dreams could be monitored and censored within such a society, the state would create a Ministry of Dreams with a strong censorship department. Do make a note, at this point of a contradiction that is embedded in this persecution of idealism—we shall return to it as we proceed.

For now, let me observe that I have found it somewhat puzzling that, since the fall of Communism, nothing has emerged regarding neurosurgical experiments that may have been conducted at the time, to map out the dream zones and excise such sections of the brain that are responsible for that criminal, deviationist, and reactionary disorder known as dreaming. I find it extremely unlikely that such a system failed to produce its own Dr. Mengele. It is quite conceivable that such experiments were carried out, but that the records have magically disappeared. Perhaps neurosurgeons have decided to close ranks professionally around their formerly misguided colleagues—we don't really know. Like Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, I fear that we may never find the evidence thereof. So, let me simply call attention to the fact that there is a thin dividing line, indeed a common ground, between the sociologies of the dreamers and their persecutors. Utopia, after all, is dreaming the world as it is *not*, but as it *could* or *should* be. Thus, we are justified in suggesting that even the ideology that claimed to be grounded in materiality, one that denounced most other forms of apprehension of existence and phenomena—especially religion—as *false consciousness*, did take its inspiration from some kind of liminal occupancy. To be able to see what exists as a yet unachieved stage of its own becoming, is no different from dreaming or imagining, and, thus, an act of projection from within a liminal world. A liminal world

is one that exists on the nebulous borders of material reality, yet is capable of being conjured up by the mind, and become, in turn, the habitation of such a mind. In other words, we are confronted with a rather disturbing question—between the dreaming of the ideologue, and the dreaming of the dissident, who was actually the madman? This contradiction should not, however, be blamed for the collapse of that communist edifice. Otherwise, we also damn the builder—any builder of what merely exists in the mind, or the future. Not every structure that collapses or evaporates is a mirage or can be dismissed as yet another illusion.

A quick interjection here: in justice, it is rather unfortunate that it is the architect of *perestroika*, Mikhail Gorbachev, who should have triggered off my musings on the degeneration of a basically humanistic ideology—such as socialism—into a paranoid pursuit of absolute dictatorship and social conformism, a phase when that ideology was turned into a repressive tool for power consolidation at its crudest and most anti-human. Gorbachev is rightly credited as being one of the prime agents for dismantling what had become an elaborate structure of deceit, one which—let us never forget this—was, however, propelled by a genuine and fervent faith in the attainability of a societal ideal: the eradication of exploitation of any being, any social class, by another, the end of social alienation, of class distinctions and the establishment of an egalitarian community of man. Gorbachev and I have met, by the way, and for an event that threw us together for a number of days, so there was some opportunity for a modest exchange of ideas. I was able to observe him closely, fascinated by the phenomenon of a once powerful world figure who actually supervised the vaporization of a seemingly impregnable social order that labored toward an ideal society.

Alas, ideals are often fed on the sheer rapture of the visionary, and one calls such historic passages to mind only because they offer us a caution about the contradictory nature that may be found in the most seductive catechisms. A violent repudiation of idealization, that is, of idealist thought turns out to be impelled by an unwavering dedication to the ideal—this is the contradiction to which I earlier referred. The evangelists of a dreamt-of order turn out to be no less visionary than the very visionaries who end up being sacrificed on the altar of a humanist idealism, in this case labeled revisionists, deviationists, etc. Utopianism, to which belong all millenarian and allied efforts to redirect society toward perfection, seems to be the common denominator and impulse of all who think beyond the present, yet the present is the only reality by which we can all uniformly swear. To believe in that future, to direct contemporary existence as no more than a preliminary stage in the attainment of a flawless future is to convict oneself of a certain level of dissociated existence; one exists in a space between the present and the future—a sociopolitical liminality, sometimes of the religious kind. And so we are again assailed by the question: who, in such societies, should have been the proper candidate for psychiatric intervention? A Karl Marx, Lenin, or Trotsky (i.e., the ideologues on the one hand), let us call them the prophets of revolution, or, on the other hand, a Mandelstam, Solzhenitsyn, or

Josef Brodsky, that trio representing the domain of poet and allied artistic visionaries?

Perhaps these considerations would not have arisen but for the complementary methods that were used by the custodians of power and their cheerleaders to bring about such a millenarian objective. A crude, but apt, reminder of this lunatic extreme of futurism is the phenomenon of a leader such as Pol Pot, whose utopian pursuit—I decline to call it vision—required, in his view, the liquidation of the intellectual, artistic, and professional classes in their millions, and the destruction of urban existence in favor of what amounted, in the end, to nothing more than a neo-Luddite vision of existence, a reversion to rural purity at its most rudimentary. It was this patent contradiction, I am certain, that must have invested the minds of men like Gorbachev, or indeed Khrushchev, as they struggled to survive under the paranoid rule of Stalin, with his criminalities and suffocating personality cult. They awaited the ideal moment for exposing the truth and unchaining millions of humanity, not only in the Soviet Union, but also among its satellites, including a number of idealist sympathizers around the world. This was a clandestine, risk-laden enterprise, dedicated to the explosion of a monumental delusion that operated in the real, but derived its authority from the liminal.

Questions will continue to occupy historians for years to come, and, perhaps, only the candid memoirs of the principal actors of that period will eventually enlighten both the once committed, doctrinaire disciples of the utopian vision and their bewildered observers, answering questions that involved the internal mental adjustments that were demanded of them in arbitrating between the empirical world and that other, one that occupied a space that we can truly describe as one of idealistic liminality, one which, however, presented itself as the product of scientific or dialectical reasoning and whose system seemed to take a special pleasure in sacrificing millions of humanity in the effort to make palpable what existed only on the extreme reaches of a liminal world.

It would be dangerous to dismiss that world simply because it has lost its force, because the principle that once sustained it—the irony of its own inner contradictions—is still very much with us, and is manifested today in even more virulent forms. The tension between the ideal and the material world, let it be emphasized, is not limited to the secular ideological order or, shall we call it disorder? So, let us proceed, in a contrasting mode, to another world of the visionary that makes no bones about its very basis in liminality, although, of course, the occupants of that zone would consider it nothing less than blasphemy to describe their zone of existence thus. Indeed, they would consider it a blasphemy that deserves no less than a terminal excommunication, a terminal *fatwa*. To dare propose that their reality may be nothing more than just another liminal zone of conjecture, of no more validity than a utopianism that is no different from, shall we say, the communist utopia, is to stand accused of attempted deicide. For some of us, however, paradise and hell are purely liminal projections, no matter whether described as Nirvana, Valhalla, chthonic realm, Styx, *orun rere*, or *orun apadi*, two Yoruba expressions for the realm of the saved and the realm of the damned, etc.

## Purgatory as Liminality

The Christian structure of liminality is actually very sophisticated. Between present reality, the world of the living, and what we have described as the liminal—paradise and hell—Christianity has inserted the notion of purgatory, that half-way house that should be adjudged, in my view, as the most exquisite form of conceptual torture that was ever devised by the human mind. To grasp the full dimension of its sadistic basis, you only have to project yourself into a prison confinement while awaiting sentence. You do not know whether, in the end, you will be acquitted and discharged into freedom, or sentenced and given your number, tin plate and plastic cutlery, and allocation of visiting hours. That waiting-room known as Purgatory is one of those cruel spaces, an intermediate liminality before that true liminal terminus (in a realist's language), one that the Christian religion has devised to torture humanity into carrying out orders of the earthly priesthood.

The Islamic faith is a contrast in geography. Within that religion, there is no halfway house—you are either in or out. For the extreme, totally mind-sapped occupants of the fanatic zone of that faith, what are, for us, liminal zones of existence are material and palpable, even sensuous. Within this domain of conviction, both secular and religious ideologies achieve concordance—it is nothing less than a sacral zone, one that is inviolate, doctrinaire, omniscient, and vengeful. This constitutes an irony that seems to be lost on our world, despite the fact that the secular utopia and the theocratic seem to be fused in a passionate struggle for palpable territory, for the control of this here-and-now zone of existence and its inhabitants. The deductions of that grotesque identity of purpose—that meeting point of both secular and theocratic in Utopia—I regret to say, have not been given their due by an increasingly puzzled world. When it is recognized that the instinct that once drove the secular, and presently drives the theocratic, into a contest for the real world (and, by the real world, I do refer to this world of you and me, of here and now)—once that instinct is acknowledged, it is possible that those who are most menaced will embark on realistic strategies that will release their world from what I have described elsewhere, especially in my 2004 BBC series of lectures, as a climate of fear.

Conceptualizing worlds is all very well; it is the sometimes manic drive, involving even the dismissal of scruples, the readiness to sacrifice other humans in order to translate such imaginings into the real, to enforce the laws of their reality on the rest of us, the swathes of destruction that are cut through community and nations, that concern us as members of what I would term the utopia-deficient community. It is not that we are not possessed of the possibilities of the ideal, or its attainability, we simply tend to pause and question the cost of the “means” for humanity and the value of the “end” in that well known alibi: the end justifies the means. And then, even more critically, we tend to scrutinize the human agency by which the vision of Utopia is pursued. Often, such a close inspection leads to the following question: beyond a commitment to and pursuit of the utopian ideal, is there perhaps something else, some other craving, that drives those whom we have loosely described as millenarians

and visionaries? Something apart from a vision of the ideal to which such minds are prone? What, in addition to a societal projection, did Josef Stalin have in common with Pol Pot, or indeed with that American millenarian, the Reverend Jim Jones, who transported his utopia to Guyana after a gruesome beginning in Hollywood, a vision that ended it in a spectacular massacre or, as some prefer to read it, mass suicide? What is the unique element that is common to the operations of such minds? We shall move towards that answer in a moment.

## Prescription from the World Health Organization

So far, I have acknowledged only Gorbachev's role in the triggering off of the thoughts that led to the choice of my theme for this address. However, that former leader would be relieved to learn that he shares this responsibility with someone else. What is more, this person happens to be a relation, a cousin, who was a psychiatrist by profession. A former Deputy Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), he died only 2 years ago. Perhaps some of you interacted with him—Professor Thomas Lambo—during his international rounds of duty. What is the connection? Simply in the following recommendation that Lambo made to the world, but most directly to his immediate constituency, the African continent, with its affliction of erratic, incontinent, and often homicidal leadership. That recommendation was this: all political leaders should be subjected to an annual psychiatric examination as long as they remain in office.

Now, permit me to reassure you that I do understand that this is a conference of neurosurgeons, not of psychiatrists. Professor Lambo was a psychiatrist, and he spoke as one. His instruments were essentially the consultation couch, a listener sensibility, empathy, and the ability to bond with even the most incompatible of patients. The image that floats before the eyes of a neurosurgeon is, in our layman's view, that of imaging devices, precision microdrills, and the scalpel. Oh, I nearly forgot, hacksaws for taking off the skull. I recognize that I take liberties, in these days of microspecialization, in lumping together both brain surgeons and neurosurgeons, in short, all disciplines that tackle the human mental processes. I promise I shall not go so far as to bring in electricians, simply because the psychiatric treatment sometimes involves shock treatment for some mental disorders. As for psychiatrists, we know that when this department has given up, the neurosurgeon takes over. Well, the psychiatrist rarely gives up, but medical history—and even ongoing medical practice in some places—is not without case histories of state-approved recourse to the drill and scalpel after the psychiatrist has thrown in the towel.

My purpose is simply to exploit the fact that the human mind is a field of exploration for many of us, especially those who happen to have been born into, or strayed into, the world of dictators and allied political monstrosities. We often ask ourselves the question: what is it exactly that makes them what they are? And we find ourselves relieved that it is not just we laymen and women—but also the political activists, teachers, artists, and technocrats—who find ourselves engrossed in such abnormalities. The just mentioned Professor Thomas Lambo, during his

duty tours as Deputy Director of WHO, must have been exercised by direct contacts with a number of political leaders in Africa and other continents. Indeed, I think that many of you gathered here today must have considered allied proposition from time to time within your constituencies, most especially those who have experienced totalitarian rule, even in its most benign manifestation.

### A Personal Testimony

We move now to the third impetus for today's thematic choice—that impetus being none other than the present speaker—and here is how. It involved a personal odyssey, one whose hold over my existence, almost in entirety, for nearly 5 years in advanced age, came to an end 7 years ago—in 1999 to be exact—enabling me and a number of others, to regain my homeland after 5 years in exile and to recover a more humane tempo of existence that seemed permanently lost.

The main player of this recent Nigerian history was a general by the name Sanni Abacha, and he held a hundred million people by the throat for 5 years of a virtual reign of terror until, in a rather unexpected manner, he took his leave of the world. The cause of death was also reported to be rapture, but that was rapture of a rather different kind, induced, we learned, by overexertion in the arms of three female companions. When that terminal event happened, I was actually in the state of Israel. A CNN representative immediately tracked me down, seeking to know my response to this dramatic turn in Nigerian politics. Of course, my instinctive reaction was Caution! Extreme caution. When you have been locked in a life-and-death struggle with a monstrosity, and you are informed, out of the blue, that the life threat has evaporated, you don't immediately throw a street party. So, the question I put to the CNN correspondent was this: Have they cut him up as yet? I know his feudal mind. He may be faking it, just to see who among his followers are weeping and wailing and who are throwing all-night parties. First take out his brain, then cut him in small pieces, to make sure he doesn't wake up suddenly during postmortem.

As a matter of fact you could say that my concerns were not entirely divorced from the interest of medical science. After all, if I may take you back to the beginning of this discourse, a rather similar course was decreed by the Soviet Politburo on the death of Vladimir Lenin, the founding father of the communist Soviet Union. Lenin's body was embalmed and put on display. But, first, his brain was taken out, all in the interest of science, or so we are told. It was carefully preserved until a team of brain surgeons could be assembled to probe into his grey matter. Lenin was considered and venerated as a being apart, a genius both on the intellectual plane and in the organizational domain. The world deserved to know just what his brain-matter consisted of.

Most of the world wanted a piece of Lenin—just as today, but from a different perspective, the same can be said of Nelson Mandela. And so, one version states that bits and pieces of the brain were sent in different directions for detailed analysis, especially among the Soviet satellite states. There have been no published results. Again, I stand to be corrected—beyond the fact that both the total mass and specific gravity of his brain—volume divided by weight, from my schooldays recollection—

were considered above average, if not outright superhuman. Now, was that a good or bad thing? Lenin's hagiographers were, of course, in no two minds about this—their findings spelled “genius,” and a kind of genius who alone could both visualize and attain the communist utopia. All these considerations proclaimed Vladimir Lenin a giant among mere mortals.

So far, so good. Let us not forget, however, that there was more than one power struggle during Lenin's rule—an intense, often lethal, jockeying for positions within the Party. One ruthless faction was headed by Josef Stalin, truly obsessed with being the heir-designate, who—some versions insist—actually finished Lenin off. By the time of his death, Lenin had long become disillusioned with the butcher—he did say unprintable things about him—and was planning to remove him from the succession line. Not that Lenin was innocent of the atrocities that were committed in the name of Utopia, but even he—albeit belatedly—understood that he had created a Frankenstein. As Secretary-General of the Communist Party, Stalin was the hub of the machinery of state that oversaw the elimination of millions who were routinely demonized as the very scum of humanity, designated anti-party agents, revisionists, capitalist running dogs, kulaks and, of course, bourgeois intellectuals. We need to search for clues as to why certain types of humanity are actually capable of the elimination of other beings in the fulfillment of a goal, often a mere abstraction, sometimes called a vision, and one that actually declares itself validated by the need to elevate humanity to sublime heights and create a new race of beings.

There could have been more than one kind of motivation, therefore, in the decision to subject Lenin's brain to the scalpel. I can so vividly conjure up the picture of Stalin, when he heard of the death of Lenin, thundering down to his faithfuls, just as I did, in the case of Sanni Abacha—take out his brain, take it out before it deteriorates! For the sake of science and humanity, excavate that fertile brain, pickle it, and send it to the neurosurgeons. Stalin needed to be absolutely certain that his Boss had not simply fallen into a coma, might wake up suddenly and complete the Party reorganization that would have left him out in the cold. Mind you, I haven't read that anywhere, but I dare anyone to contradict my thesis.

To some among my listeners here, even if they are diehard capitalists, it may sound blasphemous to speak of Vladimir Lenin and Sanni Abacha in the same breath, but consider the following: leaving aside the fact that both were dictators, believers in the absolutism of political power, they both espoused a like ideology—that of the equitable distribution of resources. Lenin worked to make this operative among the proletariat, the peasants, not that he was particularly fond of the latter, and other formerly disadvantaged sections of society. His Nigerian counterpart operated a similar even-handed principle in the distribution of wealth, indeed his philosophy was a kind of a double equity. First, the national treasury was evenly divided between himself and the nation—that was the first stage. The second was that nearly all the international banking consortiums of the world had a fair share of this private acquisition. This has, of course, created near insurmountable problems for succeeding governments in their efforts to find out just where these mind-boggling sums are located, some of them permanently beyond discovery

or recovery—from Switzerland to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to Namibia and Eastern Europe, and some yet undetected off-shore location, such as the Cayman Islands.

### A Loss to Scientific Enquiry

Abacha was buried in his hometown in Northern Nigeria, with unbelievably indecent haste, leading many both at home and abroad to suggest that his former cohorts—like the Stalinist faction—had something to hide. What a loss to science and humanity this was! For Sanni Abacha, like Lenin, was a genius. Even over and above notorious national looters like Mobutu Sese Seko, Abacha, in merely 5 years, succeeded in depriving the Nigerian treasury reserves of, it is modestly estimated, \$25 billion dollars! That required not only economic brilliance, but nerves of ice. Dare we say that the brains of such a man did not deserve the attention of the most dedicated of experts of the brain and of the entire nervous system? It is much too late for my cousin's function—that of a psychoanalyst—at least, I have yet to learn of any dialogue between a psychiatrist and a corpse. By contrast, for the neurosurgical trade, with death, life is just beginning. I am convinced that a crime against humanity was committed on the day that Sanni Abacha was hastily shoved into a hole without a preliminary extraction of his brain. A postmortem on his brain, however, may have yielded clues to the unravelling of an undeniable abnormality, because nearly the whole world agrees that never in human history has so much been taken from so many by so few, and in so short a time!

There are historic precedents. Quite a fair number of brain surgeons, especially in more primitive times, which must be held to extend into mid-20th century, fought for the possession of executed criminals, with the specific purpose being to dissect their brains and see if there existed a physiological malformation that can be held responsible for the criminal mind. The learned journals are filled with debates on the size and shapes of brains that may denote, in advance, the potential criminal—including the actual nature of the propensities—petty larceny, sexual predatoriness, material corruption, homicide, sadism, etc. We know that some psychiatric diagnoses terminate in neurosurgical conclusions, so both are permanent collaborators in the probing of the mystery of the mind.

But, of course, we dare not confine ourselves to dictatorships only—our meeting place at this moment bears eloquent testimony to that. Even the conduct of democratically elected leaders distinctly cautions that there is a common thread that runs through political leadership mentality. That thread defies classification under political ideologies, culture, race, religion, and even duration in office. In other words, this disposition is not one that we can even attribute, without any qualification, to the stress of office or, on the other hand, the novelty of office. As the saying goes, it seems to come with the territory—we shall not further delay the naming of that common attribute, that tantalizing zone of rapture—earlier hinted at.

### The Ultimate Rapture

And so, finally, to the crucial question, the common attribute that places all these men of power—both the enlightened and the evolutionary throwbacks—in a common zone of

the liminal? And I shall pose this question from known facts about our negative exemplars, because this is the kind of mind that, I think, most urgently requires the ministrations of our neuroscientists. That question is: was material loot, be it directly from the Central bank or from the Nigerian oil revenue, the only exaction that this dictator imposed on the Nigerian people? We now confront the main theme of this discourse, one that I set aside earlier on—the commodity that links even the visionary with the venal in terms of ruler and ruled. It is safe to claim that neurosurgeons, individually or as a professional entity, have simply never preoccupied themselves with the phenomenon of power. Why should they? I have myself never preoccupied myself with neurosurgery. Well, as you might have begun to infer from our discourse so far, all that is about to change. A purposed collaboration must begin. I have no hesitation whatsoever in alerting your profession to the possibility that this may represent your greatest challenge ever, the last frontier yet unconquered by the acknowledged geniuses of the psychopathology of the brain, of the nervous system. Of synapses and lobotomies. And our joint goal is none other than to unravel the mystery of—here it comes!—Power, as a derivative of the very functions of the neural system.

We, for our part, can preoccupy ourselves all we want with formulating theories of the sociology—and, indeed, the very philosophy—of power. I have dabbled a bit in this direction, if only at the urgings of self-protection, the logic of “know your enemy,” etc., but suppose that the answer is to be found in the actual composition of the neural system? There is nothing original about my proposal. Power, after all, is also a by-product of the criminal mind. We know that part of the rapist's rapture, a quite different element from sexual gratification, derives from the total domination of his victim. Crimes against humanity have been recognized as a category of crimes all on their own, and so, what is applicable to the convicted felon is surely just as valid for the political criminal, who makes the nearest accessible humanity their victim. What makes their minds tick? The Pol Pots, the Nicolaie Caecescus, the Idi Amins, the Josef Stalins, the Hilters, the Reverend Joneses, Macias Nguemas, Miriam Mengistus, etc., who do these things against fellow beings? I have seen maps of the brain, segmented, denoting the zones that are responsible for certain human impulses, emotions, and even skills, those which respond to certain external stimuli, such as sexual arousal or spiritual rapture. The neural system that sustains these has been the subject of numerous dissertations. Power, surely, is a claimant to one of these systems. Or, perhaps they are simply cells that exist in the entire cerebrouneural circuit, but have a tendency to run riot and reproduce themselves, like cancerous cells, and, well, you know the rest better than I. So, to the rescue, ladies and gentlemen of the dissecting table, assist humanity by mapping out that zone of rapture that subsists in its own self-determined world, that autonomous zone in which Power exists in rapturous liminality until it ruptures like a long festering, purulent boil, spattering prostrate humanity with its toxic fluids.

The very ontology of power is recognizable as pure rapture. Power is intimately linked with self-love, a self-absorption whose moments of reality are experienced before the mirror, not necessarily the physically reflecting one that is ritualized every morning before sauntering out to deal with inferior humanity. Mirror, mirror

on the wall, who's the greatest of them all? But, the one that is projected onto a captive populace, so that one's self-glory is experienced, by The Leader—simply by looking at his adoring or subjugated citizens. It is a mirror that also goes by the name solipsism, one that is virtually embedded in the subject's brain, so that, no matter the activity—whether receiving foreign delegations, dictating to a bevy of assistants the order of the day, exercising or denying the prerogative of mercy, or simply sitting on the throne of power, staring into space, the power absorbed experiences others through this sheer transparency that also operates as a reflection or projection of himself.

Very few leaders have ever escaped that dissolution of the familiar, physical, ordinary mortal self into the zone of rapture that comes with being catapulted into a position of power over others. Unfortunately for humanity, the complement of power is subjugation, the subjugation of others, which is why the rest of humanity seeks to understand the phenomenon and seek remedies. If power were truly autoexistent, and not dependent for its manifestation on others, we would exhibit nothing more than a mere human curiosity, perhaps an amused one such as is provoked by a comic abnormality. As it is, however, a deeper understanding is needed, one that might perhaps lead to the possibilities of control over its more dangerous habitations.

Is power lodged only in the secular domain? I think we have already provided the answer to that. There is, however, one other sanctuary of power that has attained notoriety in recent times, but has historically proven itself every bit as ruthless and amoral as these others in the contention for that elixir of rapture that comes with being in control of the minds and fates of millions of humanity, and, in addition, the soul, that ultimate expression of liminal conditioning that ministers to the power lust of many, even while they coyly sublimate such craving in terms of Submission. I speak, of course, of religion. Watch out for religions that preach submission; they are the ones whose craving for domination and control leave others on the starting block in the race towards absolutism.

Religion ranks easily as one of the foremost contenders, but also cynical collaborators with rival groups, for the territory of Power. We need not look very far from this spot for our instructive examples. We must never permit ourselves to forget that, in this very nation, when even a large swathe of the globe was calling upon the American President not to go to war with Iraq, his defiance was couched in that of religious absolution: it did not matter, declared George W. Bush, what the world thought, because God had spoken on the subject, and his approval had been secured. If anyone finds it difficult to grasp such a totality of terrestrial alienation, it is only because of the fusion of politics and theology, the most dangerous cocktail that has historically inebriated some of the most powerful figures that the world has ever known. We have only to recall the processes that plunged this nation into the present quagmire, and the nature of leadership that led it into a veritable zone of perdition. Some of the audience at one of the BBC lectures to which I earlier referred, the "Climate of Fear" series, voiced outrage at my proposition of a common property in the psychology of a George W. Bush or Osama bin Laden, but isn't it obvious? They are both creatures of liminal existence, where the rapture of power—in one case the power of the quasi-state—has distanced reality. The mind

is fixated on a world that may or may not be attainable, but is certainly not the actual one we live in at the particular moment of decisions. The contrast is that, in the case of George W. Bush, confronted by the grim reality of losses and the intransigence of a common enemy. I am convinced that the rapture of an illusory victory has since worn off and there remain only regrets. The arrogance or misconceived omniscience of power, however, prevents this misguided leader from publicly acknowledging a historic blunder that bleeds the United States daily and piteously.

Rapture calls to rapture, and this is the diabolical strength of the likes of Osama bin Laden, a man in the state of permanent rapture because it feeds, and feeds others on the promises of a liminal world, one that is absolutely inexhaustible. For his followers, of course, theirs is the extreme version of a religion that offers death itself as the ultimate rapturous experience. Did anyone happen to take note of the report of the police officer after the recent rampage of a suicide squad in the holiday resort of Bali? Yes, they found the heads of the suicide bombers, intact and, in the words of the police commissioner, one of those heads was smiling! Long before that event, those who survived similar attacks, and were able to identify their assailants, reported a similar aspect of enigmatic bliss on the face of some of the attackers. They were all witnessing a moment of transcendental rapture at which time, even beyond a vision of the paradise that awaited, beyond the gates of eternal ecstasy that would open up with the instant of bodily disintegration, there was knowledge, by that being, that he manifesting his power over a group of unsuspecting victims, and indeed over millions of humanity, for he was leaving, in that instant, a signature of fear over even those who were thousands of miles away. That instant, the entire being of this individual was enveloped in that transitional space of doubled rapture, one that came from a vision of paradise, and then that of power. A brief liminal flash and then a violent transition into his world of his ultimate reality.

Do not take just the words of the Bali commissioner for this. We have also known it first-hand in our own country, Nigeria, where, about two decades ago, a Moslem sect known as the Maitasine, virtually took over the ancient Moslem city of Kano and held it hostage for several months—at first furtively, proliferating in a cellular manner—until it fell strong enough to act openly and confrontationally. Its first line enemies were not even Christians and other non-Moslems, but were other Moslems. The bedrock of their belief, when they took on the city, and the nation, was that their leader, Maitasine—a virtual clone of the Reverend Jim Jones—was the prophesied Last Imam, and that if he died before they did, he would lock the gates of paradise behind him and they would remain in limbo until the end of time. The police were not prepared for the ferocity with which the zealots launched themselves against the forces of law and order and the latter were easily routed. The Army went in, and they could not believe how ecstatically these zealots threw themselves on the points of bayonets, enraptured at the very advent of death. Eventually, it took the Air force to rout them, bombing their fortified enclaves from the air and killing their leader. His body was publicly displayed to convince his followers that the gates to paradise were now locked and that further insurgency was futile.

Maitasine was our own local precursor of Osama bin Laden. It is a pity that George W. Bush did not know of that history, or similar histories—a great pity, indeed, nothing short of a tragedy. All he saw was the flight of the enemy, the other man of power suffused rapture, Saddam Hussein, and his own space of rapture opening out to absorb the abandoned, and distend his own being. If he had known of the Maitasine, and history is, of course, full of Maitasines, even of opposing religious persuasions. If he had remembered that rapture calls to rapture, when he was asked, after the overrunning of Baghdad, a crucial question, he would have paused to reflect. But George W. Bush was already suspended in a zone where the palpable world had vanished, especially a world of other histories, other religions, other politics, other emotions, or other social sensibilities; he was enveloped in the ether of euphoria of

victory and power when he was asked the simple question: what if the diedhard followers of Saddam Hussein regrouped and launched a war of urban insurgency?" If George W. Bush had not then been transported to a liminal world where power, as rapture, lacks both discernment and vision, he would never have uttered those unbelievably maladroit words, the deadly wish-fulfilling words that have no parallel within this past century: "Bring them on!"

I was actually in Nigeria when I heard those words, and they made me shudder. That brief sentence, that fatal invitation to a nation's anomie, remains perhaps the most deadly wish-fulfilling pronouncement made in the past 100 years by a political leader anywhere in the world—just those three rapturous words from a leader trapped in a zone of unrelieved liminality: "Bring them on!"

### Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934 at Abeokuta, near Ibadan in western Nigeria. After preparatory university studies at Government College in Ibadan, he continued at the University of Leeds, where, in 1973, he took his doctorate. He spent the years 1958 to 1959 in England, where he was a dramaturgist at the Royal Court Theatre in London. In 1960, he was awarded a Rockefeller bursary and returned to Nigeria to study African drama. At the same time, he taught drama and literature at various universities in Ibadan, Lagos, and Ife, where, since 1975, he has been professor of comparative literature. In 1960, he founded the theatre group "The 1960 Masks" and, in 1964, the "Orisun Theatre Company," in which he has produced his own plays and taken part as actor. He has periodically been visiting professor at the universities of Cambridge, Sheffield, and Yale.

During the civil war in Nigeria, Soyinka appealed for cease-fire, an act for which he was arrested in 1967, accused of conspiring with the Biafra rebels, and held as a political prisoner for nearly 2 years. Soyinka has published approximately 20 works, including drama, novels, and poetry.

As dramatist, Soyinka has been greatly influenced by the Irish writer, J.M. Synge, but he also draws inspiration from the traditional popular African theatre and its combination of dance, music, and action. He bases his writing on the mythology of the Yoruba, which places Ogun, the god of iron and war, at its center. His first plays, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Lion and the Jewel*, were written during his time in London, were performed in Ibadan in 1958 and 1959, and were published in 1963. Later, he wrote satirical comedies, beginning with *The Trial of Brother Jero* in 1960 (published 1963) and its sequel, *Jero's Metamorphosis* in 1974 (published 1973). Soyinka's serious philosophic plays include *The Strong Breed* (1963), *The Road* (1965), and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). In *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973), he has rewritten the Bacchae for the African stage. In *Opera Wonyosi* (1981), he bases himself on John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* and Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*. Soyinka's latest dramatic works include *A Play of Giants* (1984) and *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985).

Soyinka has written two novels. *The Interpreters* (1965), which is a complicated work, has been compared to Joyce and Faulkner. In this work, six Nigerian intellectuals discuss and interpret their African experiences. In *Season of Anomy* (1973), which is based on the writer's thoughts during his imprisonment, he confronts the Orpheus and Euridice myth with the mythology of the Yoruba. Purely autobiographical are *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1972) and *Aké* (1981), an account of his childhood in which the parents' warmth and interest in their son are prominent.

Soyinka's poems, which show a close connection to his plays, are collected in *Idanre, and Other Poems* (1967), *Poems from Prison* (1969), *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), *Ogun Abibiman* (1976), and *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1988).