Wole Soyinka’s book, *Between Defective Memory and the Public Lie: A Personal Odyssey in the Republic of Liars*, has elicited a lot of controversy and public ire in Nigeria. To many it would appear as a gratuitous piece of self-indulgence in that it addresses mainly his real or perceived detractors and critics. As a piece of editing writing, where does it stand? One is forced to say quite low on the level of art. It does not seek to soothe frayed nerves or draw upon the finer emotions as expected from much of Soyinka’s previous work. Prompting and written in anger as he himself clearly revealed in press interviews. Even before the book’s release, headlines screamed about Soyinka’s intention to draw blood from those perceived to have wronged him. So what is there to gain in the literary outburst of a man we have grown accustomed to displaying public tantrums time and again? One would have to admit, not much.

As many other autobiographical offerings, Soyinka is the sole protagonist more or less in his own perennally interesting story. If he had chosen the path of Nobel winner ‘Great Man’, it is a progressively empty and meaningless future might have been his and then he would gradually lose political relevance and probably become a less valued cultural icon; so rather let not bear unbearable sedate climes. Hearts might as well tremble upon sleeves until he returns again for the umpteenth eruption; let the will of Ogun serve to rend asunder and not place us into that false state of sleep.

Soyinka is still raging in his final days with an attitude that says: ‘I shall entertain you, I shall infuriate you, and by Jove, you shan’t be bored!’ It seems as if Soyinka is laughing to himself and isn’t concerned with methodically developing another one of his poisoned darts. But too much vitriol might become too much for everyone. Once again for the umpteenth eruption; let the will of Ogun serve to rend asunder and not place us into that false state of sleep.

Soyinka’s main gripe against Obasanjo, with whom he had previously maintained a suspect degree of cordiality, is that he had been judged an incompetent political analyst even though he might be a skilled hunter of wild game and a connoisseur of fine wines. Soyinka in turn described Obasanjo as ‘economically illiterate’ in press interviews preceding the release of *Between Defective Memory and the Public Lie*.

Soyinka is able to show how the pathologies of power in Nigeria attract and nurture unsavoury characters such as the aforementioned Salawu, Abiola Ogundokun and Godwin Daraboh. These offensive characters surface each time there is a change of government, offering their services to anyone interested in their penchant for slander, blackmail and all kind of subversive activities usually committed on behalf of feckless public functionaries. Regarding such characters, Soyinka writes, ‘the nation should however, for failing to strip such beings nakedly publishing, exposing, for civic edification, the infestation of its moral claims by liars in whom we encounter the approximation or even maximisation of Obasanjo’s admittedly defective and deflective trial: Fraud, Rogue, Murder’ (sic, p. 81). There is evidently something missing in the sentence cited above but this does not diminish Soyinka’s thirst for blood as he would rather have moral renegades shamefully divested of their clothes and probably whipped in a market square as added retribution. This kind of hunger for vengeance has always been a hallmark of Soyinka’s career, especially when crossed by those he views as hustlers and opportunists.

Major Salawu is depicted as being thoroughly corrupt. Ogundokun built a professional career as a ‘smut disseminator’. Obasanjo is called a ‘seasoned predator’ who seems to be keener on inexhaustible capacity for ‘infantile mischief and for mind-boggling provocations’, as described in a brief chapter cynically entitled ‘The philosopher-king’. Not all of Soyinka’s adversaries come from the political field. Chimezie, an author of mixed Afrocentric credentials and a reputation for digging into Soyinka at every chance for his perceived Eurocentric orientation, least of all, winning the Nobel Prize for literature, is a target of brutal eccoration and is labelled a plagiarist to boot. He is also branded Chichidodo, whose major characteristic as a bird is ‘a love of human excrement – but with a difference!’ As it dines on this human emission, it apparently makes a sound akin to – to express how much the stuff disgusts it, thereafter resuming his feast with gusto’ (p. 35). Peter Enahoro, aka Peter Pan, an author and journalist, courts Soyinka’s vexatious mood by suggesting he was a common lackey of the Machiavellian General Ibrahim Babangida. And for that contravention, Soyinka refused to shake hands with him when they met in public.

Oftentimes, Soyinka’s caustic attacks are not without wit, a lot of which is not really translatable. Soyinka continually straddles common Nigerian idiomatic expressions and standard English to create an impact and ambience that would be specific as well as rare for native users of the language. For instance, the former Governor of Ogun State, Gbenga Daniel, is bestowed the moniker Daani Elebo. Elebo is a pun for both party animal and fetish lover and can be employed as such in a seemingly inexhaustible capacity – ‘Daani Elebo’ is bestowed the moniker Daani Elebo. Governor of Ogun State, Gbenga Daniel, is evidently a thorn in Soyinka’s flesh as well as other well-intentioned Nigerians.

It is not unusual that Soyinka would court such considerable antagonism as his book produced. In strutting his stuff in the public realm, which in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, is a domain of amorality and impunity. He would have us believe that his interventions in that conflicted realm is indicated by his choice of opponents. How, now, has he been transformed in that fractious sphere? Certainly not very successful judging from the list of persons who have managed to provoke his ire and the others who would end up doing so when they read his latest book.