

Zodwa: *Thank you for your time and most valuable input.*

Ngakane: The pleasure was mine, Zodwa.. And, good luck with your research!

Zodwa: *Thank you.*

Appendix B5 **An opinionnaire: Conducted via Electronic Mail between Chicago and Pretoria on 15 October 1997**

Interviewer: **Zodwa Motsa**

Respondent: **Abiola Irele of the Chicago School of African Literature**

Zodwa: *It is often alleged that Wole Soyinka is reluctant to acknowledge his affiliation with the Angry Young Men and the Royal Court Theatre. To your knowledge, are such allegations true? If they are, why would it embarrass Soyinka to be associated with such outstanding personalities of British drama?*

Irele: I don't think he is reluctant at all to be associated with them. He writes about this phase of his life in the autobiography entitled *Ibadan*. Note however that it was much later that he met Joan [Littlewood], who wanted to do a film of one of his plays.

Zodwa: *Sloane Square 1958 to 1960: what was life like for the then budding dramatists? Were the participants a united family, equally and openly sharing skills and ideas, or it was more a case of each man for himself in these evening sessions?*

Irele: Again, Soyinka evokes the atmosphere in the book *Ibadan*. My impression after reading his account of his relation with the group is that he felt quite comfortable, saw himself as a full participant.

Zodwa: *It seems most of Soyinka's productions were scheduled for an evening slot or Sundays and they were not the main show of a given slot. Would this hint at some latent British racism or not?*

Irele: I would not put it down to racism. Perhaps they weren't sure how his plays would go down with a British audience which would have been unfamiliar with his themes, setting and even language: don't forget that Soyinka developed a very original style very early on, as a result of his adaptation of English to the cadences of his native Yoruba.

Zodwa: *What did the Royal Court do for the personal enrichment of the*

dramatist? Was it a mere convenient physical locale for meeting and presenting the theatrical gymkhana, was it a tutoring workshop like Brecht's and Stanislavsky's workshop-theatre, or it was just a cold and standoffish environment? In other words, was there any common cord binding the reader, playwright, director etc. together? If so, what was the fundamental ethos of this group of theatre practitioners?

Irele: I can't really answer this question. It needs research. You are yourself engaged in this kind of research!

Zodwa: *In comparative study, analysts will pair one artist with another only to change later and create yet another cluster. Looking at the post-World War II English playwrights, we can see that they are as different in style, dramaturgy etc. as they are many. However, these differences do not deter analysts from commenting on them as a group. What could be the common factor between Arden, Wesker and Soyinka?*

Irele: Very difficult for me to answer this question. I tend to link Soyinka more with the Irish dramatists, Synge and O'Casey in particular. He seems to me to have more in common with them than with Arden, Wesker etc. See my brief introduction to Soyinka's *The King's Horseman*, in the Norton Anthology, I am going to post it to you.

Zodwa: *Several [British] modern dramatists of the 1950s have addressed the theme of the unacceptable "now" in different ways. Soyinka for one, has, inter alia, used the approach of asserting African nationalism, excavated a pre-colonial cultural past to point as a basis for purging society of the evils of cultural imperialism and inherent human flaws. Would you say that this was a common theme at the Court -- that even Wesker and Arden were also keen on the exorcism of society's ills of the past?*

Irele: I'm not familiar enough with Arden and Wesker's works to answer this question properly. What is clear is that Soyinka's work has always had a strong moral content. The social criticism in his work is of course directly related to the specific African situation, to particulars of his own African experience.

Zodwa: *The Absurd Theatre: to what extent do you find Soyinka borrowing from the dramaturgy of the absurd theatre as he has together with Arden and Wesker been continually compared with Beckett?*

Irele: Yes! The Absurd Theatre had an impact on Soyinka's work. The best example of this is *Madmen and Specialists*. See the chapter entitled "Season of a Mind" in my book *The African Experience*.

Zodwa: *In different ways, Wole Soyinka and some of the so-called Angry Young Men are concerned with the importance of human / personal liberty. They*

severally address such serious human issues as the forces which control our lives, the loss of social security, the right to communicate [Pinter], human liberty from any oppressive boot irrespective of the colour that wears it [Soyinka], and threatened existence [Wesker]. Over the thirty years since their inception, would you say these dramatists are still angry? Are they still relevant?

Irele: I don't know about the English dramatists. But Soyinka's work has remained very relevant. The fact that today he's in exile, fearing for his life, indicates quite clearly that there is an immediate connection between his work and his options in the real world.

Zodwa: *Certain researchers like Ogbonna (1992) have alleged that Soyinka is reluctant to acknowledge his affiliation with the Angry Young Men and the Royal Court Theatre. To your knowledge, are such allegations true? If they are, why would it embarrass Wole Soyinka to be associated with such an eminent sector of British drama?*

Irele: I don't think that he is reluctant at all to be associated with them. He writes about this phase of his life in an autobiography entitled *Ibadan [The Penkelemes Years: A Memoir]*. Note however that it was much later that he met Joan [Littlewood a director in the renaissance theatre of "the Angries"] who wanted to do a film of one of his plays.

Zodwa: *There is a law of nature that says "like objects repel". In view of Wole Soyinka's reluctance to accept the label "Angry Young Man", how proper would it be to perceive his stance as a denial of reality; particularly in the sense that he had the same spirit as the "angries", he operated from the same geographical and historical platform as all of them even though they may have not instigated him to perceive human life in their terms?*

Irele: Soyinka is now more than an angry young man. He has become an embittered man of 60 plus, who finds himself cast out of his own society because of his ideas and vision.

Best Regards!

Appendix C Video / Television Broadcast

Appendix C1 Nobel Prize Coverage by Channel 4: BBC. Date: 27/2/87: Stockholm October '86: The Nobel Prize in Literature, "A Combative Soul".

University of South Africa Library: Call No. VC1436

PART I.

Introductory Commentary:

Wole Soyinka is one of the first generation of Nigeria writers. He is the first African to receive a Literary prize: *A Play of the Giants* in 1984, a satire on, *inter alia*, Idi Amin, Bokasa, and Mobuto Se Seseko.

[Several renowned scholars on African drama and on Soyinka present their comments on both Wole Soyinka and African literature. Their comments are interspersed with general remarks from the presenter of the programme. These include, inter alia, Adewale, Maje-Pearce, a Nigerian writer, James Gibbs, a British researcher and writer, Eddie Iroh, a Nigerian writer and journalist, John La Rose, a Caribbean Writer, and Henry Louis Gates Jr who lectures at Harvard University.]

Maje-Pearce :

In 1954 at 20 Wole Soyinka went to England to study English at Leeds. Wole Soyinka himself says it was here that he began to appreciate the universality of literature. It was here that he faced the most raw brunt of racism in the early 1950s to early 1960s in England with bus passengers, landlords and ladies, in shops and so forth, and Soyinka was inspired to compose the poem, "Telephone Conversation." [Furthermore, Soyinka] saw problems in the emerging state and has more to say [about such matters] than all the others.

Gibbs: Wole started post-graduate studies but left in the middle to pursue theatre at The Royal Court as a play-reader. Here he met with many playwrights and directors and this was a very good opportunity for the young playwright to get first hand experience in professional theatre.

[Reflecting on his interactions with the Royal Court Soyinka says:]

Soyinka: I had a general education, like all African school children ... inspired by a school film I had wanted to be a sea-admiral with my own fleet, then a lawyer etc. but at the back of my mind I got pulled toward writing. The days at the Royal Court were marvellous; it was good to experience this

change in theatre -- a move toward social realism for rising playwrights like Osborne, Wesker, Bond and so forth. The Royal was a theatre of ferment, the evenings there offered writers the time to do experimental theatre. The directorship of George Devine, the most brilliant manipulator of talent, is most unforgettable. This was a wonderful creative family and ... eh-eh ... when I left, I missed it. ... The first goal I had was setting up my own theatre company [so as] to practise all the theatre idioms I had acquired both abroad and at home. The research [conducted in Nigeria] was not for a thesis but [it was meant to assist me] re-explore those theatrical rituals for my own theatre company.

Gibbs: Racism was very rife and raw in 1950s' England. Soyinka speaks of experiences when at times he would sit near a white person in a bus. The person would immediately stand up and sit somewhere [else]. The year 1960 was a very exciting time for any young Nigerian playwright. Wole Soyinka won a Rockefeller grant and used it to research the rituals of Nigeria *vis à vis* theatre. But at the Royal Court, Wole mingled with the best, people like Osborne, Wesker, Bond, Devine and so forth.

Soyinka: No Nigerian that I knew took [British racism] lying down -- least of all the West Indians.

[There is footage from one of the plays. It is a one man-show presented in monologue and addressed to an imaginary listener. Soyinka uses such devices as mime, a simple stage set, and pidgin English. Asked about his standpoint on certain social issues Soyinka explains:]

Soyinka: I have a sixth sense for tyranny, I can see it coming.

Iroh: *Are you a socialist?*

Soyinka: I have never described myself by any name -- but corruption in Nigeria decided my socialist writings.

[There is a clip of Kongi's Harvest, showing an outcry against dictatorship of any form. In this drama Soyinka acts as the notorious dictator. He also acted as a chief actor in Joan Littlewood's play which was in French -- a language he did not quite know].

Iroh: *How do you perceive your role in solving problems of society?*

Soyinka: An answer to most problems cannot be found in books - problems like anomie, oppression, exploitation and repression. Every situation calls for a specific type of response; it could be silence, waiting and so forth, but this silence needs a little push; but we need to be committed to human beings and individuals, not to some body of theory. I believe very strongly and perhaps it is this which has made me fall foul to successive

governments and landed me in jail.

[Eddie Iroh goes on to remark that Soyinka always felt concerned about sociopolitical issues and his concerns he always expressed in concrete action.]

PART II.

Unidentified Interviewer:

Do you respond to politics as an artist or as a citizen?

Soyinka: Definitely as a citizen. Politics is a citizen's duty. It is all good to be uplifted by reading a moving poem or the like; but I don't believe in the writer who does nothing but write for aesthetic upliftment of the reader -- but I accept the fact that I am a very political animal, politics is every citizen's duty, I just happen to combine my artistic vocation with political fervour... .

[The background features a clip of the 1964 Civil War between General Gowon and the State of Biafra. Wole Soyinka is shown visiting the leader of Biafra to discuss a possible peaceful settlement. There is an inset of the war - children running amok, toddlers dragged by their limbs and women dodging the flying bullets in the veld. Wole Soyinka was the only eminent Nigerian who openly condemned this act of tyranny which many were labelling as just internal disturbances. He was openly committed to justice because he believed that he could not keep silent in the face of tyranny- as he was a writer with a combative soul, not the romantic recorder of tales for aesthetic pleasure and escapism. The next excerpt is on Soyinka's prison experiences about which Soyinka reflects:]

Soyinka: They were intense and disturbing. There were voices and faces that did not fail to transport me to a different level of human existence. The incident of exile I remember with mixed feelings. One could not live in the atmosphere of political deceit in Gowon's widely and blindly accepted tyranny wherein the army was an occupying force in the country. I could not function in such a society. ... I felt impotent to even address myself.

[While in exile, Soyinka wrote Death and the King's Horseman, a drama based on a 1940s episode where the colonial presence is counterpoised with the Yoruba world/metaphysics. Devices such as the chorus, women, dance, pantomime, drums, and song are used in this play.]

La Rose: The Caribbean traditional religion echoes Yoruba mythology to the letter, they have the same gods. Although Wole Soyinka writes in English, the Yoruba metaphysics comes to bear upon his arts; the traditional Africa versus Modern Africa. Like Shakespeare, Wole Soyinka writes not about very grand themes such as slavery, racism and the like, but he focuses on

the human condition such as jealousy, rivalry, small conflicts and so forth.

[There is an insert of A Play of the Giants. It highlights the rule of power and greed spanning 10-15 years in Africa's leaders such as Mobuto Se Seseko and Idi Amin. The leaders are all exposed to ridicule. Soyinka uses the technique of satire to convey theme.]

General Comment:

In exile, Soyinka became more socialist and more militant, he joined certain socialist movements in London and Ghana like SABA [Socialist Association of Black Africa] to promote socialist goals in Africa. This was spurred on by experiences in the ex-Portuguese colonies in which independence was won under very difficult conditions compared to their ex-English counterparts.

Soyinka is compared to such writers as John Milton and Leo Tolstoy because of his role as a social secular visionary; putting his life on the line for personal convictions. The Nobel prize was a great day for Africa and African Literature -- an award in recognition of intellectual achievement by Western standards. Asked as to what his responsibilities were now that he had won the Nobel Prize, Soyinka replied:]

Soyinka: First, I must seize back my freedom as fast as possible as the Nobel Prize is a very enslaving event. My responsibilities are social/political. I remain the voice for certain unheard sections of society, particularly of my people. I intend to fulfill that responsibility.

End

Appendix D

Letters

Appendix D1

From Arnold Wesker to James Gibbs

From: ARNOLD WESKER
27 BISHOPS ROAD, LONDON, N6 4HR

To: James Gibbs
8 Victoria Square
Bristol BS8 4ET
6 December, 1982

Dear Mr. Gibbs.

I'm afraid I can't be help to you [*sic*]. I have no recollection of my conversations with Wole. We didn't have much contact. I didn't really have much contact with people in the theatre, except during the period, brief, of the writers meetings [*sic*].

I'm happy if Wole defined himself through oposing [*sic*] me, but his opposition took place in his imagination. I was never actually there to contradict what may have been his mistaken interpretations of my work.

The only thing I can say about the characters in my Trilogy is that they are my family. Most of what is in the plays actually happened or was said. There are one or two imaginative leaps, but mostly they are an autobiographical record.

Of course all records, in art, are selective. He may not have liked what I selected, but by now I have twenty five years of work and each work elaborates upon the work before. His views would only be authoritative [*sic*] now if he knew the whole oeuvre -- stories included.

Good luck

Yours Sincerely
(Wesker's signature)

[Enclosed is a copy of the original]

ARNOLD WESKER

27 BISHOPS ROAD, LONDON, N6 4HR

James Gibbs
8 Victoria Square
Bristol BS8 4ET

6 December 1982

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Of course all records, in art, are selective. He may not have liked what I selected, but by now I have twenty five years of work and each work elaborates upon the work before. His views would only be authoritative now if he knew the whole oeuvre - stories included.

Good luck

Yours sincerely



Appendix D2

From Arnold Wesker to Zodwa Sithebe (Née Motsa)

ARNOLD WESKER

Hay on Wye Hereford HR3 5RJ
Tel +44 01497 820 473
Fax +44 01497 821 005
E-mail
100662.437@compuserve.com

Ms Zodwa Sithebe
110 Barringer Square
London SW17 8EF

22 February, 1996 14:06

Dear Ms Sithebe

Forgive me I receive so many requests for interviews or to answer questionnaires from students around the world doing theses on my work that it's impossible to accede to them.

Besides, I think most students ask questions they should be answering themselves.

You'll find most of what you want in my plays, stories, and two books of essays. Perhaps most of all you'll find a great deal in my recent autobiography *As Much As I Dare*.

Enclosed, as a kick-start, is a brochure about the seven volumes of my plays published by Penguin Books, and a recent short bio sheet.

Good luck.

Kind wishes
(Wesker's signature)

[Enclosed is a copy of the original]

ARNOLD WESKER

Hay on Wye Hereford HR3 5RJ
Tel: +44 01497 820 473 Fax: +44 01497 821 005
e-mail: 100662.437@compuserve.com

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110 Barringer Square
London SW17 8EF

22 February, 1996 14:06

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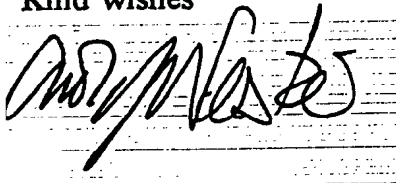
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Enclosed, as a kick-start, is a brochure about the seven volumes of my plays published by Penguin Books, and a recent short bio. sheet.

Good luck.

Kind wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arnold Wesker', is written over a series of horizontal lines. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Arnold' being more legible than the last name 'Wesker'.

DM A WELLSIAN 1976

Royal Court Theatre: *The Inventor*, by Wole Soyinka.

THE author of this dramatic fantasy, a Nigerian graduate of Leeds University, presupposes a fallen American space missile in 1976 which turns the world's coloured people white.

Its single act is laid in a futuristic laboratory down a disused Johannesburg mine where scientists pursue mysterious research to improve humanity.

The author, plainly influenced by Shaw, Wells, and Aldous Huxley, adds some heavy racial and political satire into the often humorous lines, although the first half is often bewildering.



ing. Acting is efficient, the best work coming from Roy Hepworth, the pompous, suave laboratory director.

The Arts Council is supporting the play financially, no doubt from laudable motives. After all, this theatre is notoriously an experimental centre.

The play was preceded by brief poems and songs of native African outlook, delivered by coloured and white soloists. They were received in the main with more politeness than comprehension.—P. L. M.

J.M. Nov. 2nd 1959

AFRICAN PLAYWRIGHT

WILLAND POET

We must hope that the reception given at the Royal Court last night to verses and songs by Mr. Wole Soyinka and to his one-act play *The Invention* will make this Nigerian writer less suspicious of the London theatre than he gives the impression of being. Whenever he allowed a reader or a character to speak directly to the audience, the audience responded. It went more than half way towards doing so even when Mr. Soyinka plainly was not addressing it. If he thinks this was prompted by the thing he hates most, a patronizing attitude on the part of a white audience, it will be a pity. It was prompted by respect for his gift for words.

When his words were clear, clarity was their most striking quality. At those times he had written briefly, without repeating himself, and then suddenly the wish to do just that, to say it all over again, became too strong for him. What his last comment was on the relationship between the races most of us will never know. For instead of making it at the end of *The Invention* he made a joke, or else, figuratively speaking, he mumbled. So the comment was lost. For us, a pity.

T. Nov. 2nd 1959

Theatre

Where Spades Are Trumps

By ALAN BRIEN



The Invention. (Royal Court, Sunday.)—**The Marriage-Go-Round.** (Piccadilly.)—**Rullo.** (Strand.)

AFRICA is our only distressed area. Our new proletariat is entirely black. Now that the British are all honorary members of Whites, the colour bar remains the sole source of guilt and shame in this best of all welfare states. So runs the most popular lecture in the honours school of Engsoc under Prof. Gaitskell. At best this is a half-truth, but there is just enough of the lie in this thesis to convince those fiery middle-class revolutionaries who whistle up a tumbrel as happily as they hail a taxi. It gives them endless opportunities for spiritual abasement before a faraway working class who are so much more picturesque and pugilistic than their home-grown equivalent. Personally I believe in calling a spade a spade but never a bloody nigger. Nevertheless, I think it is simply inverted race prejudice to believe that Spades are always trumps. In what for the sake of sociological shorthand can be called the Royal Court foyer, the presence of a Negro in a play is becoming very near to being a guarantee of a masterpiece. Two blacks do not make a white—but two blacks trying to make a white is still a good box-office theme. In the Thirties, Left-wing intellectuals consistently overpraised anything written by a worker. In the Fifties they overpraise anything written by a Negro. In both cases their amazed delight that someone from the lower depths can actually put words into sentences is not only irrelevant but also betrays an unconscious contempt for the very group they are supposed to be championing.

These unfashionable reflections are occasioned by the programme of poetry and drama last Sunday at the Royal Court written and directed by Wole Soyinka. Mr. Soyinka is a fluent, funny and angry West African, but he has not yet begun to understand how to work out a verse or to organise a play. It certainly would be one in the eye for Lord Malvern and Julian Amery if Wole Soyinka were a genius as a playwright just as it would have been one in the eye for Neville Chamberlain and T. S. Eliot if B. L. Coombes had been a genius as a novelist. Unfortunately wishful thinking, or even 're-thinking' (whatever that is), is no substitute for talent.

Mr. Soyinka's verse was mainly in the cata-Logue manner with clumsy pamphleteering

phrases ('untransmuted emotion,' 'venery,' 'chillun worse than their sires') leading into unusual and unprecise images ('the moon bounds like a fried egg in oil'). The humour was occasionally attractively raw and tough, but the readers delivered their lines either with earnest amateur incoherence or self-consciously professional tartness. The farther away from the Chelsea street-poet he went, the more natural and affecting Mr. Soyinka became. His play, *The Invention*, revealed his limitations even more embarrassingly. The original idea was quite sharp and provocative—an errant American rocket-bomb has landed in South Africa in 1976. The most frightening result of its radioactive blast has been a confusion of the pigments so that no one knows what colour his neighbour really is. In an old mine shaft the first citizens of the republic, the conscripted pseudo-scientists, sweat away to discover an infallible test of colouring. But now the idea has been kicked off, it must be passed from player to player until it smacks the goal. Mr. Soyinka has no way out of the narrative dilemmas he has set himself. Eventually he tries to abolish them all with a version of the Emperor's-New-Clothes device. The humours and the horrors of the situation are both too easy. A cartoon Southern Senator gets some obvious laughs ('Why, lynching is almost a thing of the past with us—except among the kids, of course'). The scientists practise primitive sorcery—they search out impostors by pounding entrails in a mortar, by sniffing the underclothing of corpses ('So Muriel was pregnant'), and by savouring suspicious urine ('He was one of our best wine-tasters once'). The whole tone is ten times heavier and cornier than any of the agitprop from the old Unity Theatre. At times, it seems more and more like an anti-white *Der Stürmer*.

Still, I can't help admiring the way the Royal Court keeps open ring on Sundays for any unknown challenger who likes to clamber on to the canvas. I only wish the Courtiers in the audience would not behave as if to be knocked out in public were some kind of victory. I also wish that more of them could be persuaded to support the really new and genuine achievements produced there—such as John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. This baffling, haunting sequence of sinister daguerrotypes defies summing-up in a sentence. Whatever else it is, it certainly is not, in the *Observer's* fatuous phrase, 'a ponderous parable wherein Victorian regulars explain military life.' It is a collector's piece—whatever you collect.

POEMS

SECTION I

1. An African Proverb
2. "Conversational Fragment".
3. Telephone Conversation.
4. "On A Recent Competition Organised by a National Newspaper for the best Photo Print of God's face."
5. Queue.
6. My Next-Door Neighbour.
7. Audience to the Author.
8. To A Lady Who Meant Well.
9. Epitaph.
10. Poisoners of the World, Unite!
11. The Blacksmith's Song from "The House of Bangjij".
12. Stage.
13. Half-Caste.

SECTION II

14. "Alagemo" (A Dance of the Life-Cycle).
15. Invocation Dance.
16. "Abiku" - The Myth of Infant Mortality.
17. Extracts from "A Dance of the African Forest"-
 - i. Testimony of the Dead Mother.
 - ii. Chorus of the Spirits.
 - iii. The March.

Poems read by Thomas Baptiste, Miriam Brickman, Aleksander Browne, Graham Crowden, Roy Hepworth, Jeremy Longhurst, Pearl Prescod, Bryan Pringle, Olu Sowande, Jim Taylor and Wole Soyinka.

Trumpeter : Fela Ransomekuti

Drummer : Ambrose Campbell

INTERVAL

THE INVENTION by Wole Soyinka

Bishop Kalinga..... Olu Sowande
Public Prosecutor..... Aleksander Browne
Cruger..... Jeremy Longhurst
Bytron..... Graham Crowden
Fremuler..... Bryan Pringle
Neubaten..... Jim Taylor
Hardiburr..... David Ryder
Glu..... Jeanne Watts
Destus..... Peter Wyatt
The Director of the Laboratories..... Roy Hepworth
Briklemaline) The Envoys..... (Peter Stephens
Mrs. Higgins) Barbara Hicks
A Guard..... Colln Blakely
The Voices..... Barry Wilsher, Colln Blakely, Michael Hunt
and Ursula Franklin

THE YEAR IS 1976. The action of the play takes place in the laboratory at the South Africa Restoration Vaults within a disused mine-shaft in Johannesburg.

Stage Manager..... Luigi Vanelli
Assistant Stage Manager..... Ursula Franklin
Lighting Consultant..... John Porter

The laboratory equipment supplied by Baird & Tatlock Ltd.; Broadhurst, Clarkson & Co. Ltd., and The Tintometer Ltd. Furniture by the Old Times Furnishing Co. Ltd., Special Properties by Theatre Zoo. Costumes supplied by Morris Angel & Son Ltd.

Colln Blakely, Michael Hunt and Barry Wilsher are appearing in SERJEANT MUSGRAVE'S DANCE at the Royal Court Theatre. Barbara Hicks, David Ryder, Peter Stephens and Peter Wyatt are appearing in LOOK AFTER LULU at the New Theatre. Bryan Pringle is appearing in ONE MORE RIVER at the Westminster Theatre.

TIMES MONDAY NOVEMBER 28 1966

Nigerian play for Court Theatre

Wole Soyinka, a young Nigerian writer who was educated at Leeds University and was a member of the Royal Court Theatre group of writers, is to have his comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* produced at the Royal Court Theatre on December 8. It will be his second play for the Court, the other was *The Invention*, which Mr. Soyinka directed in 1959. He has since returned to Nigeria, where he runs two theatre companies.

The Lion and the Jewel is a comedy with music and dancing directed by Desmond O'Donovan and designed by Jocelyn Herbert. This will be Jocelyn Herbert's first work for the stage since *A Patriot For Me* in 1965. The production will be in conjunction with the Tjine Players, a group of African actors living in London and is particularly appropriate it is said for the Christmas holidays for older children as well as adults. Heading the cast of 21 are Hannah Bright-Taylor as Sidi, the Jewel of Ilujinle, Jomoke Debayo as Sadiku the chief wife, Willie Payne as the Bale of Ilujinle and Femi Euba as Lakunle the schoolteacher.

There is one scene in *The Lion and the Jewel* where the Bale, the head of the village, is having his hair pulled out of his armpit by his favourite wife. Sensuously, lovingly, she massages the spot around the selected hair with her forefinger. Sharply, she tweaks it out. The Bale's quick intake of breath merges into a long gratified sigh of pleasure. That could almost be a scene out of Ben Jonson and in many ways the Bale, the lion of the title, is like the Fox in *Volpone*. Intent on luring the village beauty into his bedroom he spreads the same rumour that Volpone uses to get Celia into his—that he has become impotent. But it is not just the stratagems that are similar; in both cases we have a piece of play-acting inside the play, which helps to gain sympathy for the witty seducer and to satirise the naivety of the gulls. And in both cases we can enter into enjoying the playwright's playfulness. The irony has spread from the language into the situation. In comparison, Lonsdale's fun and games seem schoolboyish. His central joke is that the Duke (Michael Denison) and the rich woman (Dulcie Gray) who are trying out the 'little man' (Robert Fleming) and the young girl (Polly Adams) as marriage partners both find that the worms and the tables turn. The goods that they have had on approval refuse to be shipped. But there is so much exaggeration in the meekness of the meek characters and of selfish arrogance in the selfish, arrogant characters that the whole thing is every bit as hard to believe in as Robert Fleming's snoring on his falling out of an armchair when Dulcie Gray wakes him up with a record of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. In any case, it is asking a lot of him, and of our credulity, to cast him as a man of thirty-eight without even cutting the line that refers to his age. But altogether it is a sloppy production which overdoes the home play and fails to make up its mind between the two possibilities of giving us the play straight as a period comedy and sending it up. Sent up sufficiently it might have been very funny. Q 4/1/67

Queen Jan. 4, 1967

by Jeremy Kingston

THE wily man who pretends to be impotent in order to win a pretty maid is a character almost as old as the art of storytelling. He crops up in Greek comedy, the Decameron, the Arabian Nights. His exploits were probably chuckled over by First Dynasty Egyptians and I expect the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood owes something to him as well. His latest appearance is in Wole Soyinka's merry comedy with music *The Lion and the Jewel* (Royal Court) as the old chief of a Nigerian village whose roving eye is caught by a local belle. A colour photograph of this luscious creature has been published in a Lagos magazine and she now considers herself too famous to marry the local schoolteacher—particularly since this young man's modern principles won't permit him to pay the bride price. Even the chief is beneath her, which is why he has to spread rumours of his misfortune and rely on her vanity. The rivalry between these two men is also represented as the conflict between different ways of life, old tribalism finally proving the better of ill-assimilated sophistication. The young Lakunle, seeing the benefits of civilisation in terms of knives and forks and breakable plates, is indignant that the chief should have bribed a white engineer to keep the railway away from the village. "Where is our school of ballroom dancing?" he demands, looking scornfully around at the village huts. "Who here can throw a cocktail party?"

This light-hearted story is ingeniously told in direct language that contains many vivid similes and abstract nouns scarcely at all except when the author makes sympathetic fun of the schoolteacher in love by having him speak as though he had learned English from Elizabethan sonnets. Whether or not the Yoruba people actually talk as colourfully as they do in this play, it is Mr. Soyinka's skill that gives them such liveliness on the stage and presents them all, old and young, devious or simple, so affectionately.

Led by Femi Euba, Hannah Bright-Taylor and Lionel Ngakane, the cast are enthusiastic but, on the first night, not always at their ease during long speeches. Obligated to stand listening silently where naturally they would interrupt every few sentences, there was sometimes uncertainty what to do with hands and when to alter expressions. The seduction scene, too, could be played less earnestly. Jubilant dancing and an excellent mimed version of a car journey—human "wheels" collapsing when the air gives out—are an important part of the evening's enjoyment. P. 21/1/66

Punch Dec. 21, 1966

PLAY'S DIRECTOR ILL

Daily Telegraph Theatre Correspondent 11/12/66

The play by Wole Soyinka, "The Lion and the Jewel", which was to have opened at the Royal Court Theatre today week, has been postponed until Dec. 12. The delay has been caused by the illness of Desmond O'Donovan, the director.

D.T. Dec. 1, 1966

OPENING POSTPONED

Owing to the illness of the director, the opening date of *The Lion and the Jewel*, by Wole Soyinka, at the Royal Court Theatre will now be Monday, December 12, instead of December 8 as previously announced. T 2-12/66

4 Twin Dec. 2, 1966

Slimming Made Easy

Stage Sixty, who are presenting "The Road" by the Nigerian writer, Wole Soyinka, as part of the Festival, last night celebrated the opening of their second brave year at the Theatre Royal, Stratford.

On view in the midst of an evening of "experimental music and spontaneous events" produced with the help of the Institute of Contemporary Arts will be the theatre's remarkable new safety-curtain painted by Bernard Cohen.

David Thompson, the artistic director, who tells me that the worries of his first year in the East End theatre have lost him a stone in weight, has not yet been able to plan the second season beyond Christmas.

But there is no question of giving up, and though the venture would be impossible without financial backing from the East End councils there have been some surprisingly large audiences for both early Shaw and the Greeks.

Daily Telegraph: 2.9.1965

Rumbustious Start to Festival

Theatre Royal, Stratford, E.: *The Road* (Wole Soyinka)

The drama side of the Commonwealth Arts Festival certainly gets off to a rumbustious start with this play by the young Nigerian writer, Wole Soyinka. Rambling and discursive though it is, it exercises a weird fascination.

Set in a tumbledown drivers' haven in Nigeria, it shows the dominance of the road over the inhabitants. It can either provide them with a precarious livelihood or confront them with gruesome death. Being the cause of a fatal accident has led one driver to quit the road and turn to profiteering. His passenger a tout, dependent on him for his own living, pleads with him to resume his driving career.

This plausible situation provides the motive-power for three-quarters of the play. Then the apparent resurrection of the accident's victim and the violent stabbing of the haven's maniacally religious proprietor, who has engineered it, plunges the play into facile melodrama. Before this panicky conclusion, though, Mr. Soyinka shows that he has a gift for naturalistic dialogue, flecked with bright imagery, and a sharp eye for character.

The basic situation may be static but the dramatist's answer to that is periodically to take our minds off it. He achieves this partly by bringing on a group of singers and musicians who either underline a passage with the rhythm of their drumbeats or inject into a situation a spurious, but nevertheless welcome, excitement. Alternatively he allows the characters to reminisce about or even reenact some past incident. He may not have a great structural sense but he has the compensatory ability to divert our attention.

David Thompson's production matches the play's non-European mobility of mood with reasonable agility. The performances, though, are wildly uneven. Bari Jonson has the right nervous excitement as the unemployed tout and Rudolph Walker's immobilized driver has a stricken repose. Too many of the other actors conceal an absence of technique under an excess of emotion. As always at this theatre, there is a high standard of design. Ken Calder's superbly ramshackle set provides a feast for the eye during the occasional longeurs.

Times: 15.9.1965

Nigreen author of talent

By ERIC SHORTER
MADDENINGLY mysterious, compellingly exotic and crammed with African superstition, "The Road," by Wole Soyinka, begins the Commonwealth Arts Festival at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, E.

To enjoy the play to its full extent you probably need to be Nigerian, and even then extra patient.

The one clear thing about this vivid evening is that in Mr. Soyinka Nigeria has an author, if not a dramatist, of remarkable talent and with a forceful command of the English language in Yoruba terms.

Whether he is as gifted theatrically must be doubted, because until the ritualised and inevitably violent end with its masks and murders and a god-apparent, his play does not move forward, but spends most of its time catching up with itself, so to speak.

It is a technique which Ibsen developed to a highly refined art, and Mr. Soyinka is much less skilful in tying up loose ends and also keeping a grip on our imaginations.

But if you do not find this frayed feeling oppressive, the strange tale of a very dangerous African highway offers many incidental pleasures to the eye and ear.

The central figure is a sort of unfrocked lay reader who acquires his own delusions of grandeur and a god he can call his own. He also runs a lorry drivers' rest with dubious integrity.

Moot point

It is also a moot point for most of the evening whether he is not involved in several acts of highwaymanship, of which reports keep coming in.

It is, however, the visual qualities of David Thompson's production in Ken Calder's shambled setting which hold the attention best: the look of the thing, the atmosphere and particularly the acting of Bari Jonson as a driver's frustrated mate, Rudolph Walker as a disenchanted son of the road, and Horace James as the top-hatted mystic.

Daily Telegraph: 15.9.1965

The taxicab god

By JULIAN HOLLAND

The Road, by Wole Soyinka: Theatre Royal, Stratford East

A PLAY by an African is a rare enough offering on a European stage. A strange, exciting, bewildering, original play by an African on a London stage merits a much bigger audience than the few souls present last night on the third night of this major drama offering in the Commonwealth Arts Festival.

I do not myself pretend to have understood half of Soyinka's play. I am sure for one thing that I have got the plot all wrong. But throughout the evening I was thrilled enough to want to understand and pleased that I was being offered in such a festival something that was not immediately within my comprehension.

Curiously, for all its bizarre setting (a truck driver's shack in Nigeria), its cast (coloured drivers and an unfrocked Sunday school teacher) and its plot (a road accident that may—with delicious irony—have involved the running down of a god, Ogun, the protector of taxi-drivers and truckmen, on his feast day), the play unfolds like a play by Ibsen.

It is full of wry humour: the constant irony of hearing, whenever two men are bantering, the one who gets the upper hand assuming the tone and superiority of the white man.

"I am fit to drive the Queen of England," says one. "One look at you and she'd abdicate," replies another.

The present cast is wildly uneven, the deficiencies of some emphasised by two magnificent performances by Bari Jonson and Horace James.

Perhaps the most interesting thing of all about *The Road* is that it is a play with coloured actors that has nothing to do with racialism. It is new and puzzling and if you have any curiosity left in you, go to see it.

Daily Mail: 17.9.1965

THE ROAD at the Theatre Royal, E 15 by Gerard Fay

"THE ROAD," by Wole Soyinka, at the Theatre Royal, Stratford E 15, is one of the early birds of the Commonwealth flock. I cannot think that it is going to catch the worm. There is a borderline between articulateness and mere verbosity which a certain sort of dramatist can teeter about on so skilfully that he gives a new dimension to language.

Mr Soyinka has not reached that stage yet though he shows some signs of being on the way. He uses our language, his language, with love and some passion. When he knows, or perhaps more accurately when he can make us others know what he is trying to say, he will be going places. On the evidence of this play he is still looking for a destination.

It is all highly symbolic: the road is not really a road, the drivers not really drivers, the trucks not really trucks. The "professor" has some elements of priest, some of witch doctor, some of God, perhaps, but he is hardly a strong enough character to bear so much of the play on his back—nor is Horace James a strong enough actor to conceal the inadequacy of his part.

There is richness of voice, for instance, from Bari Jonson and Rudolph Walker, beguiling enough to let the mind relax for long passages of dialogue before it is suddenly pulled up sharply by the question: "What on earth are they talking about?" Vigour of movement and vividness of dress please the eye in the same way. But this does not all add up to a satisfying or exciting play in Stratford, E 15, whatever impact it may have in Lagos.

I suppose there is a chance that having seen the play gradually killing itself on the first night the director may do something in the way of salvaging it—for instance by cutting the last act very severely and by keeping the promise of the programme, that the play will be performed with one interval and will finish by 10 o'clock, which is just about the time many Commonwealth citizens like to start on their long road home from Stratford.

Guardian: 15.9.1965

THEATRE: HAKULU HOBSON

Africa: mask & face

I CANNOT help feeling that the first week of the Commonwealth Arts Festival has not shown the London theatre at its best. Little encouragement has been given to the Nigerian openings at the Theatre Royal, Stratford, and at the Scala. The fashionable competition of a West End premiere proved

THEATRE

by Jeremy Kingston

THE first dramatic contribution to the current Commonwealth Arts Festival is Wole Soyinka's *The Road*, directed by David Thompson at the Theatre Royal, Stratford. I found it difficult to follow this story of Nigerian long-distance truck-drivers, living in superstitious dread of a God of the Road who demands his regular sacrifice of victims, either from accidents or otherwise. My interest perked up in the second act when the hints of calamity seemed to be moving towards an intelligible climax but the last act dissipated itself in a whirl of ritual magic, masks and arbitrary murders. Bari Jonson's passenger tout, in despair because his driver refuses to go back on the road after the death of a friend, seemed a convincing portrait. So, perhaps, was Horace James's crazed old Professor, once a lay-preacher, now a forger of driving-licences. Mr. Soyinka certainly conjures up an atmosphere of terror and mystery, and West African audiences may find the development of his drama logical and its climax proper and satisfying. To an audience knowing nothing or little of the cultural setting the play's meaning must remain impenetrable.

Times: 22.9.1965

Sunday Times: 19.9.1965

NEARLY A FESTIVAL

The Commonwealth Arts Festival was a rather sad affair. No doubt there are statistics coming to prove that numerically it was a failure at all, but if the other events were like the theatre then anti-climax overshadowed it like a black cloud. The visitors did their stuff where it failed was in the image which somehow came across, and they couldn't be expected to know about that. Despite the fireworks and Prince Philip, such events as the Australian Ballet, Canadian Folk Dance and Nigerian Theatre are all bound to seem provincial unless a determined effort is made to project them as a part of a larger, exciting, reality should have been rounded up in a more interesting people dragged into showing obvious interest. Wole Soyinka's excitement for the Berlin Ensemble for the Moscow Arts Theatre, but the prospect of the Commonwealth had the depressing feeling of duty.

In the event they brought some of the best theatre seen in London recently. It would have been a very thin fortnight indeed without them. There was a new dramatist who will be watched eagerly, the Nigerian, Wole Soyinka, whose play *The Road* was directed by David Thompson at the Theatre Royal, Stratford. It is set in a drivers' shack in Nigeria, peopled by out-of-work drivers, drivers' tout, and layabouts trying to acquire the necessary driving licence by hook, crook or forgery. Over it presides the Professor, a half-crazed fallen preacher, given to cunning apocalyptic speeches, and an endless search for The Word which he thinks to find in battered bundles of the tabloid press. There is Kotun who has retired from being a driver before the road gets him, and Kotun's tout, who is frantic to get him back on the route. And over it all there is the myth of 'the Road', part way of life, part a god, who must be placated by sacrifice before he takes his toll of human life.

It is an extraordinary hotch-potch, with music and dancing heightening the complex flash-backs to the point of ritual, but Soyinka is in full control of his characters, his plot and of the language. As for the production, this is the first time we have seen a coloured cast playing in English with perfect ease and conviction. David Thompson has seized his performers and wrung performances out of them. The stage is hummingly alive.

QUEEN: 6.10.1965

As the Bard himself might have put it . . .

By PETER LEWIS
The Lion and the Jewel,
by Wole Soyinka.
Royal Court Theatre.

THIS Nigerian play, performed by a company of African actors, leaves the critic a little uncertain of his duty.

On the one hand I much enjoyed the freshness and high spirits of the cast and the novel experience of laughing at genuine African humour expressed in witty character studies.

On the other hand it's no use denying that Mr. Soyinka takes more than his time to tell his story. We are not used to these leisurely ways. And the acting often seems grossly overacted, to us at least, although it may be quite realistic as a portrayal of the characters of a small Nigerian village.

It needed a little patience at times, but I got a good deal of pleasure from it. The story is simple. The lion is the Bale, or head of the village, who prides himself on his vigour

THEATRE

In his 60s and one of whose kinkier pleasures is to have the hairs plucked from his armpits by his favourite concubine. ("Ahl! That gave more pain than pleasure, you vengeful woman!")

The jewel is the village beauty who has become the cover girl of the latest issue of *Drum*.

Her admirer, the schoolmaster, wants to introduce Western ways—one man, one wife, a bicycle for the chief, beauty contests and tea drinking instead of palm wine.

In particular, he wants to abolish the bride-price paid by the husband for a girl's hand. He can't afford it.

He is a pathetic comedian who is fated to wear a waistcoat that never meets his trousers. Of course he doesn't stand a chance. With patient cunning the lion gets the jewel to embrace what he calls "the rich mustiness of age."

There is a lot of near-Shakespearean language in this village. "Tell your lord that I will none of him," says the girl at one point. There is also wry humour and some amusing performances especially from Lionel Ngakane, as the hairy old chief, Desmond O'Donovan's production includes some most agreeable drum dancing.

DM Dec. 13 1966

Now, I am afraid, my compliments are practically exhausted. I have seldom been more startled than to read, in an august newspaper, a review of *The Lion and the Jewel* (Royal Court) which put it not far short of a masterpiece. Could it have looked like that from the front rows? Glumly, I doubt it. What I saw and heard from the middle of the house was a mild and artless Nigerian comedy, with an occasional good line, a few dances, and a cast—endearing, I agree—that offered a drowsy charm instead of technique.

Charm, yes (observe Hannah Bright-Taylor); but these enterprising visitors and their dramatist, Wole Soyinka, have still much to learn, especially in the all-important matter of projection. Maybe we shall watch their progress on later visits to the Court.

1. L. N. Dec. 24. 1966

FELIX BARKER

Solemnly repeating, "I must not be flippant, trivial, or unkind to William Gaskill," I approached the Royal Court Theatre last night for the first time since the brouhaha after "Macbeth."

We were in for a Nigerian play with an all-coloured cast, "The Lion and the Jewel," by Wole Soyinka, and if the director of the English Stage Company thinks it a masterpiece that is just too bad.

I know I shall not be helping the tarnished reputation of the critics by telling you what I found most interesting.

It was a scene in which a tribal chief obtains a perverse pleasure by having his hairs plucked from under his armpits by his favourite concubine. Now, that I didn't know about!

'BRIDE MONEY'

It will also probably get me into trouble with the play's producer, Desmond O'Donovan. He will see the play as having a social message about the European influence (or rather the failure of it) on primitive tribalism.

The village schoolmaster (Femi Euba) is a serious young man with a vocabulary like Roget's "Thesaurus," who wears white pinstripes and an evening dress waistcoat. But with his European education he declines to bring "bride money"—a dowry—to his marriage with a village girl (Hannah Bright-Taylor, a lovely creature sculpted from smiling ebony).

He contends this would make her just a bought chattel. But she feels insulted and gives herself to the wily old chieftain (Lionel Ngakane), whose main amorous play is to promise to put her picture on an issue of postage stamps.

To find a playwright today beating an African drum about

E. N. Dec. 13, 1966



female emancipation is rather like encountering a modern Mrs. Soyinka's play has some occasional felicities it does not go very deep.

It lacks dramatic excitement and is unconvincingly acted by an obviously inexperienced cast.

But the author has a certain humour and his theme and setting are unusual. And the unusual, it seems to me, is what the English Stage Company should be about.

THE LION & the JEWEL at the Royal Court

by Philip Hope-Wallace G 13/12/66

AN African village wooing is to be seen at the Royal Court Theatre for the next few weeks. The Ijinde Theatre Company presents "The Lion and the Jewel" by the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka, described as a comedy with music (i.e. some colourful folklore incursions with drums, dance, and ju-ju). The anecdote is amusing—Maupassant would not have disdained it. In its exotic Yoruba world and customs it has an edge which similar doings in Devonshire or Alberta might lack.

There is a set by Jocelyn Herbert, highly successful, depicting an operatic palm tree against a blown-up photo of a Nigerian compound. The production and acting may well pick up a little; they were indifferent enough last night but quite well received. With actors of this standard, encouragement does wonders.

A Europeanised schoolmaster (funny in itself to Royal Court audiences) is a great stickler for monogamy but is dilatory about the bride-price for the village belle, Sidi. Meanwhile the old ram of a headman, far from monogamous, desires her as his latest wife. But his chief wife, sly and elderly, tells him the girl has learned that he is now impotent and the sixty-year-old paterfamilias indeed laments his falling virility. Old wife, with young sought-after, cavort and chuckle round an emasculated idol. But the old man was playing a trick. Sidi presently dashes on stage in tears. With European chivalry, the schoolmaster offers still to marry her. But she rounds on him in contempt and makes off on her own, full of ancient pride. We see that he won't take long to console himself either. This is funny in a cynical but rather meagre manner. Femi Euba, Hannah Bright-Taylor, Lionel Ngakane, and Jumoke Debayo are principally involved.

G. Dec. 13, 1966

Sheer ingenuity of Soyinka's plot

Royal Court Theatre: The Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka

FROM OUR DRAMA CRITIC

This is the third play by Wole Soyinka to appear in London since last year, and this work alone is enough to establish Nigeria as the most fertile new source of English-speaking drama since Joyce's discovery of the Western Isles. Even this comparison does Soyinka less than justice, for he is dealing not only with a rich folk material, but with the impact of the modern world on tribal custom: to find any parallel for his work in English drama you have to go back to the Elizabethans.

Soyinka, who took a degree in this country and was once attached to the Royal Court, is a highly sophisticated craftsman: and what he seems to fear more than anything else is the ruin of his country by semi-literate mountebanks in positions of authority. A main target in his novel *The Interpreters* were the westernised affectations of the Ibadan academic community; and in *The Trials of Brother Jero* (seen at Hampstead in June) his victims were the politicians and "beach divines" of Lagos.

In this superb comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* the butt is a "progressive" village schoolteacher, but this time the satire is kinder. Lakunle is not a hypocrite: he genuinely means it when he looks despairingly at the windowless huts and cries: "Who here can throw a cocktail party?" In a few years he may have turned into a smug Lagos clerk, but in the meanwhile—far from exploiting a gullible public—he is an outsider, a forlorn bespectacled figure in the midst of exuberant tribal life, unable to marry his girl because he

cannot compromise his progressive principles by paying the bride price.

The girl becomes the prize in a tug-of-war between Lakunle and the forces of tradition, represented by the village headman, Baroka, who wishes to add her to his well-stocked harem. Baroka is known locally as "the fox," a title he earns during the play with a display of intrigue as masterly as anything in Ben Jonson. But the point is that he has been obliged to develop this craft to survive in the modern world.

It is tempting to linger over the sheer ingenuity of Soyinka's plot. But what comes over even more strongly in Desmond O'Donovan's production in his originality of scene construction (a sparring match in proverbs, reflected in a simultaneous wrestling bout), and the richly expressive range of speech idioms.

Besides this, there is the rhythmic abundance of tribal life itself. And nowhere does Soyinka's technique show more brilliantly than in his ability to include extensive group mimes and dances (there is a marvellous broken-down car number) without in any way digressing from the main action.

As one would expect the African Ijinkle Company come into their own whenever the action passes over into music. It will be a long time before I forget Jumoke Debayo celebrating her victory in the marriage war by circling a castrated statue in a bush rumba. What is more surprising is the quality of the individual performances, especially those of Lionel Ngakane as Baroka and Hannah Bright-Taylor who plays the girl's development to maturity with intense sexual presence.

Twins Dec. 13, 1966

Simple parable of African life

By W. A. DARLINGTON

AN interesting evening at the Royal Court in a noisy yet unexciting way, when a Negro company under the direction of Desmond O'Donovan appeared in Wole Soyinka's "The Lion and the Jewel."

Soyinka, a Nigerian who is doing remarkable pioneer work for the theatre in his own country, is a prolific dramatist whose play "The Road" has already been seen in London.

His new play has a simple but serious theme. It is a warning to Africans that if they want to get the best from their contact with European culture, they should not copy slavishly the manners and customs of the West. They should make the best use of it they can while remaining themselves.

Lakunle, a village school-teacher whose invariable garb is sports-coat, pullover, shirt, tie, slacks, socks and sneakers, is trying to convert Sidi, the village belle, to his own way of thinking.

He tries to stop her carrying water-pail, on her head, on the ingenious plea that it will shorten her neck. When he tries kissing her, she is disgusted. She thinks it an unhealthy habit.

However, she will marry him any time, so long as he defers to local custom and pays up the bride's fee. This he will not do. It is, he says, a barbaric idea. Deadlock.

Sidi is not an accredited belle for nothing. Other men desire her, in particular the local ruler—a remarkable man in his own way—who wants to add her to his collection of wives. The school-teacher is left to take his suburban ideas elsewhere.

This simple parable is worked out against a background of African life which involves much expressive and symbolised dancing and singing to the beat of drums. It is all novel enough to hold one's attention completely, and the author has an attractive comic sense.

The company, completely at home with song and dance, tend to be a little stilted when it comes to dialogue. However, there are good performances from Hannah Bright-Taylor (Sidi), Femi Euba (the teacher) Lionel Ngakane (the headman, or Bale) and Jumoke Debayo (his head wife).

D. T. Dec. 13, 1966

But when one comes up against Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* at the Royal Court one really does get a bit of a shock. The hazards of criticising adversely a play at this theatre are considerable. And indeed it would be churlish not to admit that there is in several scenes of the play a naive and childlike simplicity. The courtship of the saucy African village maiden by the conceited schoolmaster full of undigested western ideas is charming; the elderly wife's triumphant dance when she thinks that her unfaithful husband is impotent is ribald and true to human nature. Jocelyn Herbert's sets—a spreading palm tree against a background photograph of a Nigerian village—are evocative and pleasant. But the plot is obviously reminiscent of "The Country Wife." The social ideas on which it is founded—that the upper classes are essentially superior to the meritocracy, which is contemptible, mean, self-righteous and cowardly—need a subtler touch than the author appears able to give them. Its director, Desmond O'Donovan, is too intelligent not to know that "The Lion and the Jewel" is both derivative and reactionary, but perhaps the Royal Court audiences will be less clear-sighted.

S. Twin Dec. 18, 1966

E2 Reviews on Arden

THE ENGLISH STAGE
SOCIETY
THE WATERS OF BABYLON
By JOHN ARDEN

The English Stage Society's new series of Sunday evening productions without *décor* opened inauspiciously last night at the Royal Court Theatre with a performance of *The Waters of Babylon*, a noisy and shapeless work by Mr. John Arden.

When, at the end of the play, the main figure lay bullet-ridden before a Union Jack and the survivors—a couple of West Indians, a drunken Irishman, and a shady councillor—surged forward singing a part-song to the accompaniment of clashing cymbals, Mr. Arden's theme, indeed, his purpose in writing the play, remained obscure.

At the beginning we discover Krank unshaven and alone in his house, a disreputable place where, he tells us, 80 people are lodged. Two of them appear—a West Indian prostitute and an Irish lavatory attendant. As Krank himself is a Pole, it seems that the play may concern racial minorities in London. The idea soon has to be discarded when Krank changes into a business suit and assumes his respectable daytime occupation. Fresh material pours in ceaselessly. A comic politician is brought in as an aunt sally; a scheme is devised to run a crooked lottery; Krank is involved in a bomb plot.

Having assembled so much material Mr. Arden laboriously develops it so that in the end everything is more or less patched up. But his inventiveness is never more than painstaking, and one's interest in both plot and characters evaporates long before the play is over.

Although Mr. Graham Evans's production failed to clarify the play, it made much of the isolated theatrical passages—a satiric interlude of Hyde Park oratory, and a catastrophic public meeting. The acting was competent.

T. Oct: 21st 1955

PLAY WITHOUT
STYLE
A HYDE PARK SCENE

The series of Sunday night plays without scenery, started at the Royal Court during the summer, was resumed there last night with a production of "The Waters of Babylon," a first play by John Arden.

The object, it will be recalled, is to give, economically, opportunities to new authors, actors and producers. On this occasion the producer, Graham Evans, came out as well as anyone. His staging of a scene set among the orators of Hyde Park on a Sunday provided most of the evening's amusement.

Next came the actors, who gave commendably coherent accounts of characters lying between fantasy and reality. I should mention Robert Stephens, consistent in a longish part, Donald Bradley and Phyllida Law, both exuberant as Irish types, Peter Collingwood, George Tovey and the coloured actress Lucille Mapp, who supplied the decoration.

Of the author it can only be said that his initial idea seemed promising. His expatriate or displaced persons—Polish, Irish and West Indian—brought together in a London bawdy house seemed worth a more disciplined study.

Dialogue full of metaphors and similes echoing Dylan Thomas, songs à la Brecht and the appearance, but not substance, of a Shavian extravaganza were poor substitutes for order and style.

R. P. M. G.

D.T. Oct: 21st 1955

THEATRE
It's hazy and
promising

The Waters of Babylon. By John Arden. Royal Court Theatre.

THIS crazy, tragi-comic strip of a play launched a new series of Sunday night try-outs without *décor* at the theatre that discovered *Look Back in Anger*.

The author, a 27-year-old Yorkshire poet, has thrown together a rabble of exiles in London.

They include a Pole (Robert Stephens), two West Indians (Lucille Mapp and Mark Shurland), and a wild Irish brother and sister richly played by Donald Bradley and Phyllida Law.

Through the haze of words I glimpse a high promise.

C. W.

D.H. Oct: 21st 1955

The Ego Triumphant
By KENNETH TYNAN

BY a pretty coincidence, last week brought to London two plays with virtually interchangeable heroes. Both Krank in John Arden's *The Waters of Babylon* (a Sunday-night production at the Royal Court) and Magis in Félicien Marceau's *The Egg* (Saville) are experts in the theory and practice of enlightened self-interest. Both are outsiders who discover that the official, insider world is just as chaotic as their own; that no principles are changeless, no truths absolute; that life, in fact, is nothing but a series of accidents enacted against a background of complete moral anarchy. This being so, why not exploit it up to the hilt? Use your knowledge of "the system" to outwit "the system," since in a world of hypocrites the liar is king. Everything depends on luck, and luck is amoral.

Mr. Arden's Krank is a brothel-keeper, an extortionate landlord and a party to fraud; M. Marceau's Magis is thief, pimp and murderer; but neither of them would dream of stooping to hypocrisy. They are both diligent busters in an ethical vacuum, the legitimate offspring of Monsieur Verdoux. And I find it significant that each, scorning obliquity, tells his story directly in the first person to the audience.

Both, by our standards, are cynical devils, but Mr. Arden's hero differs in one vital respect from M. Marceau's: he gets killed at the end. Whether this was meant to be retribution or pure bad luck I am not sure, for by that time the play had collapsed into allegorical ruins; but the fact remains that in Mr. Arden's world "the claims of the Ideal" still have a place, however flimsy. Krank is a Polish refugee contentedly exploiting a stable of picturesque whores and a houseful of eighty Calcutta-packed tenants when his peace is disturbed by a vengeful compatriot bent on blowing up Khrushchev and Bulganin. To finance his bomb the nationalist blackmails Krank into promoting a rigged municipal lottery. This in turn involves the co-operation of a Negro councillor, and an Irish tart. . . . In short, the general theme—immigrants corrupted by life in Britain—is obscured by over-illustration. A mound of eccentric details, includ-

ing an entire sub-plot madly set in an architect's office, stands between us and the author's meaning. In a wholly realistic play this would not matter so much, but Mr. Arden's piece (like certain novels by Miss Murdoch and Mr. Wain) is on the fringe of fantasy throughout; and when an author takes us into no-man's-land we are entitled to ask for signposts.

Although it ended in confusion, the bumpy trip was full of memorable landmarks. Apart from Robert Stephens as the pathetically unscrupulous Krank, we had a gaudy West Indian slut by Lucille Mapp, her walk a wobble of carnal parentheses; a fallen Irish beauty, magnificently played by Phyllida Law, whose smile of recognition and complicity on meeting Miss Mapp set the whole house applauding; and a frenzied Hyde Park xenophobe, sketched to the life by George Tovey. When Mr. Arden writes the full-scale Jonsonian satire that may well be within his powers, I hope he is once again blessed with a director as galvanic as Graham Evans.

O.B. Oct: 27th 1955

The Arts

Half an Hour
Too LongEndless Dialogue
Takes Its Toll

Sailor Sawney, WILFRID LAWSON
Big Rachel, ANNA MANAHAN
Col, ALAN DOBIE
Rosie, MARGARETTA D'ARCY
Sally, DAPHNE FOREMAN
Mr. Jackson, NIGEL DAVENPORT
Mrs. Jackson, PEGGY ANN CLIFFORD
Doreen, JACQUELINE HUSKEY
Blackmouth, ROBERT SHAW
The Old Croaker, MADGE BRINDLEY
Daffodil, FRANCES CUKA
An Official, ALFRED LYNCH
Produced by Mr. GEORGE DEVINE and
ANTHONY PAGE

In *Live Like Pigs* at the Royal Court Theatre Mr. John Arden describes the introduction into a modern housing estate of a family born to squalor. If he wishes to make out some sort of case for them it is unfortunate that he has to put his clients into the witness box. They turn the house into a sty.

The old sailor who boasts of having been known at sea as a killer refuses to work. His woman (rather improbably) seduces the husband of the respectable fat woman living next door. Her son makes frustrating advances to the neighbour's daughter. They steal; they double-cross each other; they start internal affrays in which knives and bottles are the weapons; one of their unauthorized lodgers stabs a policeman; they behave, in short, rather worse than self-respecting pigs. It is no wonder that we in the jury feel after hearing their evidence that if they have anything to say for themselves Mr. Arden has not put them in the way of saying it.

Yet the play has some good scenes. The seduction of the sneaky neighbour has a wry humour with a flavour peculiar to itself. A quarrel over one of the women leading to a general fight is well managed. Mr. Arden gives the impression that if he knew when to stop he could tell a good story for the stage. But he goes on endlessly till every scene has lost its momentum and the audience is wearied of taking in scrappy information that is doubtfully relevant. This particular play would be twice as effective if the producers, Mr. George Devine and Mr. Anthony Page, had taken out at least half an hour's dialogue.

The acting is uneven. Mr. Wilfrid Lawson acts thoroughly into the skin of the old sailor who rambles on rather like a character in *Under Milk Wood*. Miss Frances Cuka makes something mildly pathetic of the girl who is a half-witted sensualist, and Miss Anna Manahan looks the full-blooded wild animal that Big Rachel is supposed to be, though her accent remains impeccably civilized. But they are all handicapped by the play's failure to draw any adequate contrast between the awful family and other families on the housing estate.

The goings on in the pig-sty seem for most part of the time to be taking place in a social vacuum; and the spectacle of human beings behaving as uninhibited animals is, after all, of limited interest.

T. Oct. 1st 1958
THE TIMES

CAVEMEN IN A
COUNCIL HOUSE
WILD DOINGS AT THE
ROYAL COURT

By RONALD HASTINGS

The theme of "Live Like Pigs," an extraordinary play by John Arden at the Royal Court last night, is freedom, the freedom of choice very few of us face.

The Welfare State, it says, you can take or leave, but blame only yourself for the consequences.

A wild mob, half gypsy, half Irish, half everything, is compulsorily housed on a council estate. All roaring like Ancient Pistol, swearing great oaths and with wreaths of glory round their heads, they descend on respectability with the instincts and habits of cavemen evacuated to ancient Rome.

In no time their house is a pigsty. Like a flock of magpies they steal the tools given them at work, their neighbours' washing, husbands and daughters, until eventually they rob them of their self-control.

POSITIONS REVERSED

By the end of the second act the theme had been fairly put. If at times rather spasmodically, and there the play could have ended. But in the third act the positions are reversed.

The neighbours now become the unruly mob and the Sawney family hide like rabbits in their hutch, but not before one of them has been nearly torn apart and another knocked silly with stone. In the end it is only the arrival of the police, the uniformed symbol of respectability, which saves them.

Throughout the whole ghastly, danse macabre three performances stood out—Anna Manahan, magnificently physical as Big Rachel, Alan Dobie, with a smooth, menacing strongly reminiscent of Richard Widmark as Col, her son, and Robert Shaw as Blackmouth, the wildest of them all.

It was not a comfortable evening. Whenever we laughed, as we often did, it was always at our own brand of conventionality. There were brief moments of true lyrical expression, but I would not include the ballads which introduced each new scene. These were more often embarrassing and artificial in the way of pre-war theatrical experiments.

In the ballad which served as prologue the singer told us that England was a free country; if you had no money you were free to starve. This one might describe as a loaded observation. The limits of freedom are the limits of responsibility.

D.T. Oct. 1st 1958
DAILY TELEGRAPH

Savage,
brutish,
squalid
AND A GREAT
NEW TALENT

By CECIL WILSON

Live Like Pigs, by John Arden,
Royal Court Theatre.

THIS play's title is an insult to pigs. I would sooner share a sty with the filthiest of them than venture within a mile of Mr. Arden's revolting humans.

Vividly through the highly theatrical eyes of a 27-year-old architect turned full-time dramatist we see life in the raw as lived today on a council housing estate in the industrial North.

The characters are a foul group of pseudo-gipsies, bent on turning the Welfare State into an ill-fare State, who have been turned out of their caravan and allowed to infest one of these grim new houses.

It is difficult to tell who is living with whom within these festering walls, or for that matter why. All seem to be illegitimate, without a moral or a scruple between them.

Besieged

They shuffle about in their rotting rags stupefied with animal lust, wallowing in their brutish ignorance and dirt, and obeying only the law of the flick knife.

In the end their respectable, houseproud neighbours, abused beyond endurance, join forces to besiege their hovel with something of their own savagery until the police arrive to clean them out of it.

The play, written in the fashionable mixture of earthy prose and lofty poetry—far too lofty for these slobbering, illiterate mouths—is a septic sore in three acts; a dramatised cesspool. But it reveals a tremendous new talent.

Such self-inflicted squalor begins to ply since there is nothing wrong with these monsters that a bar of soap, an honest unskilled job, and a little social suspicion could not put right.

But the remarkable thing is that Mr. Arden has drawn such a compelling drama from such basically undramatic material.

George Devine's production is powerful enough in itself without the prodding of a dreary singing commentary, but it owes much to the setting of Wilfrid Lawson, Anna Manahan, Alan Dobie, and Peggy Ann Clifford.

LIVE LIKE PIGS 110 Court
THE half-dozen filthy hogs whom John Arden shows coming to live in a council house somewhere in Yorkshire never change their clothes nor comb their hair. They sleep and fornicate on rags on the floor. They differ from animals only in that animals have been known to wash themselves. Their first action on coming into the trim, neat house to which the local council, against their will, has assigned them, is to remove the chain from the lavatory, thus disabling it. The action is symbolic. They do not wish to be clean. They do not wish to be made to be clean.

What is interesting in all this is Mr. Arden's attitude to the repulsive Sawney family. He approves of them. He is a believer in individual freedom, even when this means the freedom to live like pigs. According to the strictest rules of the Manchester School, and sanctified by the great name of Ricardo, he condemns the Welfare State in what must be the English Stage Company's first anti-Socialist play.

This is significant and even absorbing as a piece of sociology, but at the beginning of the evening it makes for decidedly dull drama. The opening scenes are disjointed, the dialogue is violent without being expressive, and the eye is offended by spectacles almost entirely repellent.

But, theatrically the piece is rescued by a remarkable feat of production by George Devine and Anthony Page in a slick-knife fight between Robert Shaw and Alan Dobie. Afterwards Mr. Arden's argument develops dramatic as well as dialectic fervour, and when the outraged neighbours riot in front of the Sawneys' house the bewilderment of these obnoxious creatures, who genuinely cannot understand why vermin are disliked, rouses in one's heart at any rate an echo of emotion. It looks as though the English Stage Company has discovered another new dramatist.

S.T. Oct. 5th 1958
SUNDAY TIMES

I cannot guess what the characters of "Live Like Pigs" would have made of "Valmout". The play at the Royal Court, with a hardly enticing title, introduces a dramatist, John Arden, who before long will have something to say in theatre. He does not say much in the press play, even if he has clearly startled himself at thought of a group of near-animal nomads given its head with a new house on a Council estate. I effort to express the thought in terms of theatre has produced a squalid, over-written piece that does contrive now and then to be frighteningly atmospheric. For the sake of passages in third act, one will remember Mr. Arden (and company, in particular Wilfrid Lawson's menace), but there is also a good deal—those blasé ballad-links, for example—that I am quite ready to forget.

A FAMILY OF MISFITS

By Philip Hope-Wallace

The latest play at the Royal Court Theatre is the work of a 27-year-old Yorkshireman, John Arden, who tells a long and ill-organised tale of a problem family of misfits from a caravan site who, as the title puts it, "Live Like Pigs" and give offence to the neighbours when dumped in a council house. The neighbours finally turn on them.

The author solicits compassion for these feckless humans and he has a good ear for the sort of talk they would talk and also for elementary characterisation. But this does not go so far, which is perhaps what presses some well-considered players to overact. The main defect of the play as a work of art is its shapelessness; the efforts to end the last act were positively painful in their lack of decision or skill.

But the squalor will be much admired, no doubt. Rinsings from "The Lower Depths" and "Tobacco Road" given a

H.G. Oct. 2nd 1958
MANCHESTER GUARDIAN

POINTLESS AND MACABRE

By ROBERT MULLER

The Happy Haven, by John Arden: Royal Court Theatre.

LIKE Mr. Coward, John Arden—the more-promising author of *Live Like Pigs* and *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*—has chosen Old Age as the subject for his latest play.

But there all resemblance ends. For the best I can find to say for *The Happy Haven* is that it scrupulously avoids mediocrity.

For two hours and a half this macabre little joke without point goes from bad to worse and ends in chaos. It makes a mockery of "progressive" or even "experimental" theatre.

It astonishes me that Mr. George Devine should have considered this ill-judged effort good enough to follow Mr. Weaker's trilogy. It is scheduled to run for four weeks.

Decay

The scene is a Nursing Home for Old People "not far away from London." It is run by a heavy, vowel-twisting Rugger hearty, who is on the point of discovering the elixir of life. (Lots of schoolboy fun with scientific equipment.)

We meet five of his patients in varying stages of senility and decay, who play darts and hopscotch, cheat and steal, drink tea and intrigue. Between them they share not one ounce of humanity.

In the second half the patients await and discuss their imminent rejuvenation, and decide they do not wish to be young again.

In the end they turn the tables on their tormentor, and inject the elixir into his buttocks, and the curtain comes down on the tableau of the doctor, now a dumb little boy, clutching a teddybear. Hilarious.

D.F. Sept. 15/1960

MILTON SHULMAN
at the Theatre

The masks, Mr. Arden, didn't help one bit

ANY playwright attempting a satirical comedy must possess either verbal wit or a communicable sense of humour.

On the evidence of *THE HAPPY HAVEN* at the Royal Court, Mr. John Arden seems to have none of the former and a very sluggish version of the latter.

Nor does he make life easier for his audiences by being perversely reticent about letting us know what he is up to.

By using bits of German expressionist symbolism masks of the commedia dell'arte, snatches of early English ballads, Mr. Arden tries to blind us with theatrical science.

THE ELIXIR

But of what use is all this technical legendism when all it has to pull out of its silk hat is a very tiny string of the flags of all nations?

At *The Happy Haven*, a nursing-home for old people, Dr. Copperthwaite is concocting an elixir which will make his patients young again.

Five elderly victims, disguised in grotesque masks which enable them to "act" only with their rolling eyeballs, are at

John Arden is one of our most interesting new dramatists. So I hope speedily to forget his disastrous, hideous "experimental" play at the Royal Court, *The Happy Haven*.

This vicious charade in an old-folks home has neither point nor saving wit.

SD FRANK LEWIS
S.D. Sept. 15/1960

Does it mean anything? Did the author wish to convey to us the inhumanity of homes for the aged? Is he trying to show us how the souls of old people corrode when deprived of love? If so, why does he set out to make us laugh at these pathetic grotesques?

Why, in a painful effort to avoid sentiment, does he strain for the grimest burlesque, which is ugly when it isn't being downright childish?

No effort has been spared by William Gaskill to offer us a gleaming avant-garde production, though the devices he uses can hardly be described as overpowering in their novelty.

Michael Ackland's set is an efficiently antiseptic arrangement of doors and panels, recalling Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector*.

All the players wear masks to underline their decrepitude. The doctor addresses the audience in the manner of a lecturer. Alienation runs riot. (And I am alienated, I can assure Mr. Gaskill.) Yes, we have been here before, and I do not want to go there again for a very long time to come.

Sketch

In the circumstances the cast, do very well, though they fail to engender sympathy of any kind, their acting producing only the hollowest of laughter.

Peter Bowles gives a consistent portrait of the doctor, and the patients are capably acted by Rachel Roberts, Susan Engel, Barrie Ingham, Nicholas Selby, and Frank Finlay.

Whenever the author's invention grinds to a halt we are treated to variations on a musical sketch involving an invisible dog who happens to be the first to taste the joys of rejuvenation.

Which is only apt. For once the Royal Court Theatre has sold us a pup.

D.F. Sept. 15/1960

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 15 1960

Scientist into Small Boy

Farcical Comedy

Mr. John Arden tells a mildly cautionary tale of a medical scientist fated to be dosed with his own epoch-making medicine.

Dr. Copperthwaite has found a way to rejuvenate the old people in his nursing home. Just as he is about to demonstrate his powers to an influential audience he is seized by the old people, given a shot of his own elixir and turned into a rather horrid looking small boy.

The moral of *The Happy Haven* at the Royal Court Theatre is apparently double-barrelled. Scientists seeking to confer dubious benefits on mankind should ask themselves if they are not moved chiefly by a desire for personal glory, and those of us who long for a renewal of youth would do well to learn how to grow old sensibly.

It may have occurred to Mr. Arden that he had loaded both his barrels with moral shot that long ago lost its power to strike with any very startling effect. At all events, some such reflection seems to have passed through the mind of his producer. Mr. William Gaskill decided that if the actors wore masks the play would at least make a superficial impression of novelty, and he justifies the decision in a programme note recalling quite irrelevantly the old Italian comedy. But only when the scientist is turned into a small boy are the masks in any way helpful, and that long awaited transformation could be achieved no less effectively by the ordinary processes of back stage make-up.

The simple truth is that this is a farcical comedy which takes as long to warm-up as the proverbial kettle "that knows it is being watched." All the more active among the old people spend their time spying on each other and on the doctor who is a sadist they must propitiate. They soon find out what is moving in the mind of the god. At first they are delighted that they are going to be made young again, but one of their number who is to his chagrin considered unfit for the experiment has no difficulty in explaining the trials of youth. A very old lady speaks for them all when she confesses pathetically that she has got used to being walked on and to having every decision taken for her and that she is too tired to take a more strenuous and responsible time of life.

Mr. Peter Bowles is amusingly smarmy as the cockney medical scientist, and Miss Rachel Roberts and Mr. Frank Finlay are resourceful in their display of cynicism and crookedness. There are some amusing lines, one or two situations that create a feeling of sadness, but the theatrically affected manner of telling the story has a steadily chilling effect and the farcical kettle never comes to the boil.

Times Sept. 15/1960
THE TIMES

Finally, I take over with John Arden's "The Happy Haven" (Royal Court), a tedious and tasteless affair about the near-senile patients of a nursing home for old people, run by a burlesqued doctor. Most of the actors are obliged to wear masks, similar (says the programme) "to those of the old Italian comedy." I felt like Flecker's Rafi whom "no ecstasy could help through the hours of pain."

ILLUSTRATED
LONDON NEWS

NEWS CHRONICLE, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1960

LENN HUGHES
THEATRE

When the patients revolt

The Happy Haven
Royal Court Theatre

THE home of rest has become a home of unrest because the five senile patients suddenly discover that the young doctor in charge has hit upon a chemical formula which may be the elixir of youth.

What is more, he secretly proposes to use these patients as guinea-pigs. The patients, though weary of living, have no longing to have their youth renewed.

They conspire to give the doctor an injection of his own medicine, with results which make the most ghastly last act of any play for many a long day.

Deliberately one gives no more than a hint of what happens. For this is a most rare kind of drama—a grim comedy, a witty tragedy—and one so full of the best sort of theatrical suspense that the intending playgoer's curiosity ought to be piqued beforehand, and satisfied only by a visit.

Brilliant

All this is the work of John Arden, who has a Fellowship in playwriting at Bristol University.

William Gaskill's striking production, seen there last April, has now been brought to Sloane Square.

It is a pleasure once again to watch a brilliant performance by Peter Bowles as the dictatorial young doctor.

The patients and the visitors are helped in the all-round excellence of their performances by Michael Ackland's wonderfully expressive masks. The whole thing is powerful, pungent and provocative to a degree not reached by any other of the Royal Court Theatre's school of young dramatists.

"The Happy Haven" has haunted me for five months. It is now going to haunt me for many years.

Alan Dent

THE HAPPY HAVEN

IN "Live Like Pigs" and "Serjeant Musgrave's Dance" John Arden demonstrated an exciting gift for melodrama. He now has a shot at outer at best—at significant farce. Five inmates of an old people's home, used as guinea pigs in the presiding doctor's attempts to find a rejuvenating elixir, are first delighted, then dismayed, and turn upon their keeper. Their rivalries and alliances provide some labourer fun (but further east Noel Coward is doing the same thing much better).

This quintet, indeed all the cast except the doctor, play in masks. The producer William Gaskill provides the suggest laugh of the evening in a programme note, invoking to explain these masks, "the of Italian comedy," he goes on to talk about an actor putting on a mask, looking in a mirror, and making "an immediate intuitive physical response to the image he sees there." However, he proceeds, tearing his own mask from his face, in this case "the text was rehearsed by the actors in the usual way without masks, these being assumed later. The amount, as it turned out, to more than substitute for make-up."

The oddest feature of this tedious mishmash of the Commedia dell'Arte, "Dear B..." and "Cards of Identity" lies in the character of the doctor. Embarrassingly well done by Peter Bowles, this man of science is presented as a mincey, slack-mouthed, shoddy voiced, suburban, rugger-playing, mother-dominated ass. He struts and shrinks comically embodying, if anything, a prolonged and irrelevant sneer at the grammar-school technocrat.

S.T. Sept. 18/1960

First Night
MASKED OLD PEOPLE REBEL
DT 15/9—1960
COCKNEY DOCTOR'S ELIXIR OF LIFE

By W. A. DARLINGTON
ABOUT five months ago John Arden's "The Happy Haven" was produced in the studio theatre at Bristol University, and was fully noticed by my colleague A. V. Coton.

His guess at its meaning, if any, was that it was a parable on the desirability of growing old sensibly.

I have nothing to add to that. Indeed, every play about a life-elixir from "Faust" downwards rams home the lesson that you are doomed if you try to eat your cake and have it.

Mr. Arden's five old people in a nursing-home who revolt against their doctor's plan to give them back their youth are perhaps unique simply because they revolt.

Most authors have taken it for granted that the old would like to be young again.

OLD LEGEND TWISTED
Perhaps Mr. Arden's main notion was to find out what would happen if the old legend were twisted a different way.

What does happen is that the doctor is dosed with his own medicine and turns into a child six feet high, while his patients perform a dance of triumph.

Apart from its moral, the piece is an exercise in theatricality. Masks are used for no very cogent reason except that it may be good practice for the actors to play in them.

They are certainly very good masks, made by Michael Ackland, and no doubt they assist the director, William Gaskill, in his work of stylization.

The only player without a mask is Peter Bowles, who repeats his lively Bristol performance as the Doctor and makes his voice in an unexplained Cockney accent.

My favourite character was an invisible dog.

His yelp of protest when kicked and his squeak when turned by the elixir into an invisible puppy were two of the most amusing things in an evening in which laughter rather oddly had to be sought.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

DT
Sept. 15/1960

E3 Reviews on Wesker

PLAYWRIGHT TO WATCH

Mr. Arnold Wesker Talks About the Way He Got His Chance

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

On the way through Hackney to interview Mr. Arnold Wesker, author of *Roots*, *Chicken Soup with Barley* and *The Kitchen*, a working-class world largely excluded from the theatre before 1956, and since then more and more influential, caught one's eye on every side. Youth employment bureaux, therapeutic baths and technical colleges were more prominent than street markets surviving from Gissing's East End; multiple stores, second-hand cars and housewives with loaded shopping baskets testified to busy prosperity. The political fervour of *Chicken Soup with Barley*, Act I, seemed to have dwindled to the slogan "Ban the Bomb," daubed in white on the brickwork of a railway bridge and sabotaged by "Don't," prefixed in black.

EARNING A LIVING

Mr. Wesker's basement flat is in a trim suburban avenue adjoining blocks of flats which line the main road. His living room, with television set, record player, contemporary standard lamp, abstract paintings by his wife alongside a photograph of young men playing football in the street, a bookcase devoted to good books bound in boards and a long shelf of excellent paperbacks, resembles those of many mid-century lovers of the cultured way of life. Dressed in an open-necked green shirt, narrow buff trousers and suede shoes, he himself spoke softly and readily in a standard English one might hear in any quadrangle or West End art gallery. After spells of employment as carpenter's mate, apprentice to a furnisher, bookseller's assistant, kitchen porter, plumber's mate, beet picker, seed sorter, and pastrycook, why?

A fair question," said Mr. Wesker. "I think I got it from my sister." And he named her school in Spitalfields, as if that explained everything. His own formal education, begun in Hackney at the Jewish Infants' school, continued in three elementary schools in Stepney and Hackney, rose to a climax with a course in bookkeeping, shorthand and typing at Upton House Central School, was interrupted by wartime evacuations to Ely, Buckingham, Barnstaple, and South Wales, and came to an end when he was 16 years old. Two years later national service in the R.A.F. led to a brief experience of educational duties after several transfers and much time spent on dustbins and salvage. "I suspect," said Mr. Wesker, "that I was a suspicious character because I had left-wing associations. Soon afterwards I wrote a bad novel, unpublished, about my experience in the service. I was under the influence of D. H. Lawrence at the time and able to talk about the 'oneness' of everybody at square-bathing." A Socialist, of Communist East End parentage and Russo-Hungarian ancestry, Mr. Wesker must, one feels, have been as much of a problem to his commanding officers as Aircrafman Shaw.

ORWELLIAN PERIOD

Although he took part in plays as an amateur and saw himself as Marchbanks in *Candida*, for which his slight figure and luminous brown eyes well suit him, it is by way of an interest in films that Mr. Wesker has become perhaps the most promising and mature of playwrights under 30. After an Orwellian period of kitchen work in Paris, during which he saw no plays because he couldn't afford it, just as at Buckingham he never saw Stowe or in any case doesn't remember it, he went to the London School of Film Technique and became a convert to Free Cinema.

"I owe a particular debt to Lindsay Anderson, the inspiration behind that movement. I recognized in his writings something which I was trying to do, to affirm something I felt which was in contradiction to the mood of the time, its cynicism, despair, and disillusion. For example, the poems I was writing were simple and ballad-like. The one poet who meant anything to me was Dylan Thomas. Sometimes he might seem muddled and obscure if closely analysed, but there was an unshamedness, an expression of the love of words and the love of living." In addition, Mr. Wesker admits debts to Mr. Sean O'Casey and Mr. Arthur Miller. Like Brecht, whom he did not mention, he responded across the fence of political commitment to *Waiting for Godot*: "Beckett seemed to be saying in an

odd sort of way the kind of thing I try to stress in *Roots* about the terrible lack of communication that reduces us to the rumblings of Lucky, the man in chains. One way across that gulf is indicated by Harry Khan in *Chicken Soup with Barley*, when he says: 'You can't alter people. . . . You can only give them some love and hope they'll take it.' You can't change them, but you can marry them."

This humane warmth and tolerance shone, quite without affectation, in Mr. Wesker's face as he summarized the story which first drew Mr. Anderson's attention to his talent. "It's about an old East End woman whose family has disintegrated. Her husband was killed in the war. He had always done the football pools. Then her son had done them. When her son married and her daughter moved away, the old woman had been left alone with only the pools to do. If she were to win £75,000 she would be able to get the family together again, pay off debts, buy her son



Mr. Arnold Wesker.

a house. She becomes convinced that she will win. Meanwhile the neighbours collect money to send her on a holiday in the country. She goes.

"The old woman has been very meticulous. Every Wednesday she has done her pools, every Thursday she has posted them. She has checked them in the Sunday paper, thinking there might be a mistake in the classified results on a Saturday evening. But on holiday she is staying with a couple who take no Sunday paper. The old woman goes to the village, where the shops are sold out. At length she gets her paper from a delivery boy, only to find that she has left her coupon at the house. Her habits have been disturbed and the writing sort of builds up to a state of panic. She returns, but leaves her paper on the bus. That afternoon she goes back to London, to security, and by the time she arrives is convinced, not that she ought to win the money, but that she has. It is then too late to buy a newspaper and she sends a telegram to the promoters, claiming her winnings. On the way out of the telephone box, she sees a newspaper on the floor. Shyly watching to see that nobody is looking, she picks it up, and when she finds out she has not won, accepts the situation: 'Silly Mrs. Levi. . . who are you, anyway?' This woman represents millions in England."

Mr. Wesker was at his happiest in telling this story, and only slightly less so in admitting he had had no worries about spacing the three acts of *Chicken Soup with Barley* at intervals of 10 years. "It was one advantage of being theatrically uneducated. I was not frightened of anything." He is now at work on the film script of *Hot Summer Night*, but has come to the conclusion that the director of a film should also be the adapter of any original involved. He creates, and he should arrive at the conception. I shall not do this again." Secondly, there is *I'm Talking about Jerusalem*, the third play of Mr. Wesker's trilogy, on hand and there is the prospect of a musical. "I want to make it clear that a Socialist can enjoy music and colour."

Wesker wants to lead unions to culture

PLAYWRIGHT Arnold Wesker, author of "*Roots*," has launched a campaign to bring culture to the workers through the trade unions. He calls on the T.U.C. to set up a commission to study the link between unions and the Arts.

by EDWARD GORING

He wants half-a-dozen unions to build theatres in industrial centres which have none. He urges the unions to get in first with a National Theatre.

He dreams of bringing the culture to the workers through the shop stewards and branch meetings. And he attacks the Labour Party and the unions for an "almost immoral" neglect of the Arts.

His plan

The tireless, 27-year-old Left-wing intellectual called a Press conference yesterday to outline details of the plan which has gone to every trade union secretary in Britain.

"Besides building theatres, the unions should sponsor film production," he said. "Otherwise, we'll still be at the mercy of the cultural cheapjacks and easy entertainment boys. We will continue having to put up with travesties like *I'm All Right, Jack* and *The Angry Silence*."

The culture plan would be

financed by union funds and levies.

"But we're not primarily after the money," said Mr. Wesker. "We want the unions to accept the principle that the Arts are as important as bread and butter."

So far, four unions have promised support — representing printers, cinema technicians, tobacco workers, and Civil Servants.

"It will take a long time," Mr. Wesker admitted. "There is union machinery to go through, but our first aim is to establish the principle that the Arts are not just for the nobles."



ARNOLD WESKER

Mr. Wesker sees the danger of creating a partisan movement in art. "Under no circumstances must artists be called in to work with political strings attached," says his circular to the unions.

The plan, urging the central council of the T.U.C. to discuss the subject at its next annual conference, also calls for a national trade union orchestra, union grants to members' children with talent, and a union publishing house.

Tues Sept: 21st 1959

PLAY WITH NEW AND GOOD IDEA

VIRTUE OF MR. WESKER'S ROOTS

Mr. Arnold Wesker's *Roots* is, we may take it, a controversial play. Certainly it produced a set of surprisingly divergent opinions on its first appearance at Coventry, and now the arrival of the same production in London for a short season at the Royal Court offers a chance for reappraisal.

There are a number of things to be said in its favour. For one thing, it has an idea, which is something out of the ordinary in present-day British drama. Further, the idea is a good one, and quite a new one. Amid a lot of sentimentalizing about the value of family ties, the importance of keeping close contact with our origins, and the awful consequences of a rootless society, in bursts Mr. Wesker to point out the unpopular (but surely undeniable?) truth that many people close to the earth lead brainless, pointless, ignoble lives, and that if these are our roots, the sooner we sever all connexion the better.

Ideas, unfortunately, are one thing, and drama another. When we come to consider the way Mr. Wesker has embodied his ideas in dramatic form there is more cause for reservation. To begin with, it is asking for trouble to make most of one's characters not so much inarticulate as inclined to talk interminably without saying anything. The problem of portraying boring characters without in the process boring one's audience has flouted more experienced dramatists than Mr. Wesker—even M. Ionesco has succeeded in keeping us transfixed by a string of trivialities in the one-act form.

Mr. Wesker's play suffers from being spread over three repetitious acts, while his dialogue often seems too close to reality, too little selected. And if Beatie Bryant's family are lifeless, her pretentious fiancé and his phoney values hardly offer an encouraging alternative.

The cast, faced with the task of embodying Mr. Wesker's thoughtless and too-vocal yokels, do remarkably well but the play belongs to Miss Joan Plowright, who brings bounding vitality to the one living branch growing from these dead roots.

Time (July 1, 1959)

First Night

PLAY TRIUMPH OF FOR JOAN PLOWRIGHT GALVANISED GIRL

By W. A. DARLINGTON

JOAN PLOWRIGHT, who is to my mind one of the most accomplished, quite the most interesting and easily the most versatile of our younger leading actresses, scored a personal triumph last night at the Royal Court in "*Roots*," by Arnold Wesker.

Her versatility was particularly underlined by the fact that on this same stage she had appeared in a variety of parts including the old, old woman in "*Chairs*."

But it is not now the English Stage Company that she is leading but their guests for a month, the company from the Belgrade Theatre at Coventry.

She plays with real brilliance a girl, sprung from a deeply rutted family of East Anglian peasants, who has picked up a little half-digested culture from her go-ahead lover in London—a member of the Jewish East End family created in Mr. Wesker's other play, "*Chicken Soup with Barley*,"—and who now tries to galvanise her own people into some sort of artistic appreciation.

SELF SUFFICIENT

Especially striking are two scenes. In one she introduces her reluctant and suspicious mother (Gwen Nelson—excellent) to some "good" music.

The other is the final scene of the play where, let down by her young man, she discovers she no longer needs him—she is her own independent self.

It is just a month since this play was produced at Coventry, when it was fully analysed by my colleague, Patrick Gibbs.

As I agree fully with what he said, I will not go over that ground—except to say that Mr. Wesker is obviously a dramatist to be reckoned with.

D.T. (July 1, 1959)

GLITTER ON THE FARM



By CECIL WILSON

Roots, by Arnold Wesker,
Royal Court Theatre.

JOAN PLOWRIGHT, the star who rose from the Royal Court's ranks, returned there magnificently last night in the second play by the author of *Chicken Soup and Barley*.

It seemed in her past two London roles that the golden girl of Sloane-square had lost her glitter, but it turned out to have been only a case of mis-casting.

At any rate, she proved last night that, given the right, down-to-earth character to work on, she still has no equal, and her public gave her the welcome back she deserved.

Roots, like its 27-year-old author's first play, owes its discovery to Coventry's Belgrade Theatre. The setting this time, however, is not the Jewish East End but the Gentile—East Anglia.

It shows the impact of a

homecoming daughter, breathless with big London ideas, on a dollish family of farm labourers as mentally and socially ambitious as the animals they tend.

Very little happens, except that the phoney intellectual boy friend she has invited home from London jilts her.

But Mr. Wesker, with his easy flow of eavesdropping dialogue, makes it seem much, and Miss Plowright makes it seem even more.

Gwen Nelson and Jack

D.T. (July 1, 1959)

Rodney eloquently convey the parents' dumb stupidity, but it is Joan Plowright, grinning at her own new effrontery and rapturously rubbing her nose as she quotes her beloved Ron's half-baked philosophies to an unimpressed family, who sets the evening glowing.

Perplexed Young Woman

"*Roots*," by Arnold Wesker, at the Royal Court Theatre. THE label is inevitable. After the Angry Young Man, we now have the Perplexed Young Woman.

There is not room in an ink-thirsty newspaper to do real justice to this very interesting play, or its excellent produc-

tion by John Dexter for Coventry's Belgrade Theatre Company; but Joan Plowright gives the performance of her career as Beatie, in her way a modern proletarian version of Ibsen's Nora Helmer, and Patsy Byrne, Charles Kay, Gwen Nelson, and Jack Rodney epitomise rural unease in the face of urban sophistry. F.B.

E.N. (July 1, 1959)

N.Y. CRITICS DIVIDED ON WESKER PLAY

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

NEW YORK, MARCH 7

Mr. Arnold Wesker's *Roots*, the second play of his trilogy and the first to be shown in New York, received generally favourable but unenthusiastic notices after its opening in an off-Broadway theatre last night.

The consensus of opinion among the dramatic critics seems to be that there is no doubting the playwright's talent, but that *Roots* is, except for its closing scene, a dull play. The American cast is more warmly praised. The most favourable review comes from the *New York Times* critic, Mr. Howard Taubman, who says: "though the play has shortcomings, it is in its honesty of observation and eagerness of spirit, like a breath of fresh air in a stale theatrical atmosphere."

The other critics' comments can be summed up in the last sentences of the review by Mr. John McClain, in tonight's *New York Journal American*. He writes: "Mr. Wesker has been hailed abroad as the most exciting English playwright since World War Two, but I don't believe *Roots* will earn him a similar accolade over here. Not until he gets more excitement into those first two acts."

Chelsea to Africa 26/1/59

"*ROOTS*," Arnold Wesker's play originally produced at the Royal Court Theatre in 1959, will soon be closely studied by hundreds of school-children in Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. It is the set play in the "A" level G.C.E. there this summer and next January.

The four African territories had asked the Schools Examination Department of the University of London for "something controversial connected with English social problems."

"*Roots*" was among the 10 plays London schools voted they would most like to see.

D.T. (July 26, 1967)

End Notes to Appendices

- ¹ This was an improvised performance based on the killing of 11 Kenyans at Hola Camp on the command of the British colonial government. When an improvisation to highlight this gross violation of human rights was put up by the Royal Court Theatre, Soyinka refused to participate on the eleventh hour. He did not necessarily write the play.
 - ² Soyinka's maternal home.
 - ³ This refers to an unrecorded discussion we had on 12 July 1995 while Alain Ricàrd was visiting South Africa. Our the general discussion touched on the paratextual aspects of Soyinka's drama, the Irish influence of writers like Yeats and Synge. Ricàrd also stated that there is a possibility of influence from the British novelist George Orwell. Most notable are the parallels in language in *The Lion and the Jewel*, and *A Dance of the Forests*. Ricàrd pointed out that the influence was more from greater Britain and Europe than just localised England. Specific infleunce was from the Irish, continental Europe and the Absurd theatre of Samuel Beckett. Furthermore, Shaw and Brecht's theatre of ideas appealed to Soyinka in its dramaturgy, Ricàrd explained.
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