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A tiger in the court: the nature and implications of Wole Soyinka's interactions at the Royal Court Theatre: 1956-1966

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be the key factor to their differing expectations. It comes as no surprise then that the African, coming from a warm communal society, would feel disregarded or even rejected by the cold, nonchalant attitude of the British. Is it possible though, that such rejection may have been racially inspired? All facts considered, this remains a complex issue of personalities and socio-cultural mores which should not have necessarily affected the main reason for these artists being at the Royal Court in the first place, launching a career in theatre.

Soyinka's own attitude, experiences, and expectations about what was going on at the Royal Court emerge in the views he shares from various platforms, and especially through Maren, his alter ego in the autobiographical novel, *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years A Memoir: 1946-1965*. Although in *Ibadan* Maren reveals what was going on in Soyinka's mind, Soyinka's actions as explained by Gibbs clash with this. Gibbs asserts that at the Royal Court, Soyinka "...was always living his own life, he was sort of hanging loose. ... Occasionally he would go along to the Royal Court, especially when there was a chance of sneaking in the back and seeing a rehearsal" (Appendix B2). This does not appear like someone who wants to have a close working relationship with others.

The conclusion that I can draw from the foregoing discussion of the different Royal Court participants is that the often polite statements about not having close links with, or keeping personal distance from, fellow theatre practitioners could be in fact a cautious affirmation of the truth that each person could not care less what happened to the next, whether or not such persons had any cultural similarities. This detachment is typical of any ambitious theatre people competing in a very intense arena.

There was indeed a cross-current of cultures at Sloane Square. It seems the British were more preoccupied with getting off the ground this project of a new national theatre while the other nationalities, like the Africans, and possibly the West Indians from former British colonies, were keen to be accommodated in this new wave of

English speaking theatre renascence, which was one way in which they could launch their own careers. Perhaps the disappointed expectations arose from the fact that these foreigners were perceived to want to launch their careers in England and not their homes in Africa or the Caribbean, a point Ricárd endorses in the interview where he postulates:

Ricárd ... if you were in George Devine's place; you are in 1959, Nigeria is going to be independent [soon] so the best thing for George Devine to do is perhaps to push Soyinka back to Nigeria. Because maybe the problem was that he saw that [Soyinka] had invented a dramatic language that was really rooted in Africa. ... Maybe ... they [the Britons] couldn't make use of [Soyinka's kind of drama].

Zodwa: *Or perhaps his drama did not make much sense to the British of the time?*

Ricárd: Perhaps. Actually I'm trying to say, in *The Lion and the Jewel*, he tries to create a dramatic idiom that has the Nigerian song and dance and so forth; there is some morphological invention. So I think that probably that is where his strength lies -- the song, dance, and language. So I really don't know, that is one idle thought just trying to put myself in George Devine's position. ... [Devine] might have said -- '... but you have created a [different] dramatic idiom. So go back to Nigeria ...' I don't know. Whereas in trying to succeed on another ground in London was not quite sensible -- maybe the best place to succeed was [back home]. ... Because sometimes you cannot make the assumption that success means succeeding in London (Appendix B3).

Ricárd's point is valid. However, what this line of thinking overlooks is that England was not the only place where Soyinka was staging his plays at the time. In 1956 Nigeria had also started the process of establishing a theatre in English under the directorship of Geoffrey Axworthy (Gibbs 1995: 37) and some of Soyinka's plays were to be produced there. Therefore to see England as the only platform for success is not accurate in the case of Wole Soyinka whose other plays were already showing and were demonstrating good box-office appeal in his home country. Even though his other plays were being staged elsewhere, staging a play at the Royal Court with Britain's best playwrights of the time was going to be a very important landmark for Soyinka, whose interest in English drama could not be questioned.

3.3.1.iv The Views of Wole Soyinka

How much homogeneity could be achieved among the black and white theatre-makers in 1950s England? The personal differences and expectations of the Court's protégés can be seen in Wole Soyinka's attitude toward the British theatre-makers he worked with. Soyinka has never minced his words about his admiration for Devine's workmanship. In his most recent autobiography he voices the feeling that to him Devine represented "... the epitome of English quintessence of the strong silent worker as he brought promising talents ... under his wing and then left them severely alone in their own unique way ..." (Soyinka 1995: 25). In this account, Soyinka fully explains the nurturing and grooming role Devine played for the young playwrights. In Soyinka's opinion, George Devine sought to encourage young and amateur talent. Where he could not produce someone's play, he offered the writer an acting role or some other part-time work in the English Stage Company, thus making some up-coming playwrights script-readers and paying them a nominal fee.

The best remembered moments in Soyinka's days at the Royal Court Theatre are the times he would sneak quietly into the back stalls to watch Devine at work, rehearsing and consulting with such playwrights as NF Simpson, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller and Sean O'Casey. Although Gibbs (Appendix B2) disputes some of these claims of Soyinka meeting with Arthur Miller, for instance, this does not alter the fact that at the Court, Wole Soyinka interacted with the best international talent of creative theatre at the time. Life did not end after the Court closed its doors. During week-ends and some evenings the dramatists "contracted" to Devine would meet at Ann and John Piper's house in a warmer environment while they read scripts, acted and improvised. This shows attempts to create a very caring and welcoming atmosphere which naturally encouraged the "creative lunacies" that Soyinka says they indulged in as a group (Soyinka 1995).

One wonders why the artists kept minimal contact amongst themselves while their patrons, such as the Pipers and Devine, seemingly tried through the home meetings

to foster a spirit that was to create more than mere workmates in some technical working group. It seems the producers wanted to make good theatre, which was to be a team-effort, while the individual dramatists each wanted to make a big name for himself, a personal effort. On the surface, this warm "Court family" contrasts very sharply with the wider host country outside the Royal Court.

In most of his writings, Soyinka never kept silent about the racist attitude of the British in general, as can be heard in "Telephone Conversation", the poem he presented the same night as *The Invention*. In this poem an African immigrant is in a telephone conversation with a landlady, apparently looking for a place to stay:

> Nothing remained
> But self-confession. 'Madam,' I warned,
> 'I hate a wasted journey -- I am African.'
> Silence. Silenced transmission of
> Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
> Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
> Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
> 'How dark?' ... I had not misheard ... 'Are you light
> Or very dark? ...'
> 'Are you dark? Or very light?' Revelation came.
> 'You mean -- like plain or milk chocolate?'
> Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
> Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
> I chose. 'West African sepia'...
> 'What's that?' ...
> 'Madam,' I pleaded, 'wouldn't you rather
> See for yourself?'[*sic*] (Soyinka 1959).

Noting this paradox, Soyinka comments that with Devine, the Pipers, and others, "... there was the free sharing in food and drink as they all knitted the mind together creating a rarefied camaraderie and a cosseting creative indifference to the exterior setting of the gilded rat-race and hypocrisies of that genteel Britain ..." (Soyinka 1995: 25-26).

The attack on this complacence of Britain by her own people -- Devine through this new wave of theatre and through daring writers like Osborne (1956) and Arden

(1957) -- may be what attracted Soyinka to the Court. We should recall that Soyinka came from a background of unbridled protest against social injustices, to some extent inculcated by the long-standing Yoruba history of city culture (Appendix B3). His own family was in the forefront of questioning and reacting to issues of importance in society. His mother, for instance, took special interest in such issues as the local community's fluctuating prices, sanitation, and young wives' duties long before Soyinka was through with his primary school education. Adeniran's account of the influence of his mother on Soyinka's social and political development shows that although Soyinka's great-grandfather, Rev. Canon Ransome-Kuti, was a distinguished, fearless pioneer, religious leader, educationist, and politician of the late nineteenth century, it was people like Soyinka's mother, Grace Enoila Soyinka, a teacher, performer, political activist and an astute businesswoman, who influenced Soyinka's social awareness. Soyinka's own great grand-aunt, Mrs Frances Kuti, was a party leader of note in Abeokuta. Tunde Adeniran explains that Frances had been educated in England in Education, French, and domestic science. She pioneered several courses, the most important of which was a club for women, the Abeokuta Ladies' Club, in 1942, which among other things, became instrumental in the abolition of female taxation, the resignation of Alake, the ruler of Aké, and the organization of the so-called Native Authority System (Hay & Stichter 1995: 59).

Furthermore, the onset of World War II from 1939 -1945 must have "... exposed Soyinka to the core of international political issues rather early" (Adeniran 1994: 13-21). Both this childhood background and his undergraduate interests show that Soyinka had met with the kind of atmosphere he understood well when he came to Devine's "angry theatre". With such a background, it is understandable that Soyinka responded passionately to sociopolitical issues such as apartheid, the killings at Hola Camp and the Suez Crisis. It is also easier to understand why the so-called "angry theatre" attracted him so readily. Hence Ogbonna's view that the "Angry Young Men" were responsible for planting the spirit of reaction, questioning, and anger against social miscarriage of justice in Soyinka is not

accurate.

Soyinka admired what Devine did with manuscripts, actors, and the general décor at Sloane Square. As he eloquently states, he viewed Devine's entourage as "a special tribal community over which Divine presided as the benevolent chief using a theatre that broke the taboo of 'the establishment' overhauling language, form, style, and themes thus defying the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain" (Soyinka 1995: 26). One cannot help but wonder at times if Soyinka was not drawn to the Court because of both the open challenge it posed to the establishment and the audacity of the challenger in his choice of target, as he fought a very worthy cause by unheard-of methods. These were activities he had been accustomed to in his youth, as related in *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981). Furthermore, Soyinka admits to having admired Osborne for the lacerating outrage of his theme in *Look Back in Anger*. Soyinka was also impressed with the daring role of a young Dracula (the bishop) that Osborne played in Nigel Denis's *The Making of Moo*. These gave Osborne "... the image of the angry spokesman of a new generation armed with his fangs that were fastened on the jugular vein of a bloated British bourgeoisie"; Soyinka carefully paints the ensanguined picture (Soyinka 1995: 26).

Despite the well-meaning intentions of Devine and the Pipers to generate a warm environment for the theatre-makers, Soyinka had moments of acute loneliness, and often felt alone and on the periphery even within the Royal Court "family". This usually caused him to withdraw into an inner shell. Speaking of himself through his alter ego Maren in *Ibadan*, Soyinka reflects:

> ... but this stranger among them remained, at the least within himself, a stranger .... The paradox continued to plague him, this constant standing apart from them all, standing apart even from himself and watching his other being in a circle that he found at once congenial and alien ... (Soyinka 1995: 27).

Even though Soyinka's Janus-like character, of closeness to and detachment from the group, may not be solely attributed to the cold treatment he experienced in

London -- it could be felt even while he was at Leeds -- the company he kept in London actually created this feeling of forlornness even more strongly in him as he acerbically reminisces that

> No matter how he ... threw himself into the exchanges with as much ardour as any of the others [he] ... constantly... located himself at the outer edge of their concerns, their themes, even their search for techniques and styles. -- Perhaps it is not just the people at the Royal Court, it is the feeling of aloneness that can befall any young person of his age so far away from familiar culture and home (Soyinka 1995: 27).

Such moments of self-detachment in Soyinka should not be viewed as having had only a negative impact all the time because, ironically, it is this ability to stand aloof from self that allowed him the opportunity to look inward at himself, criticise, and even laugh at his own follies -- a characteristic that, in my opinion, has enabled him to explore objectively satirical possibilities in his own people and the world around. Soyinka himself acknowledges the same point when he observes that if he had not been able to stand off from himself and others and watch his other self from that unique vantage point, he would never have been able to record the idiotic and inspirational side of himself with any measure of success (Soyinka 1995: 27).

3.3.1.v *The Invention* Dêbacle

A central case that I would like to explore in regard to the experiences of Soyinka at the Royal Court focuses on *The Invention* dêbacle, the failure of his first play. When one considers the mystery surrounding the failure of this play at the box office, a number of possibilities come to mind. But first it is important to explain briefly what happened the night of the first staging of this play. The tragic flaw of *The Invention* was that, in the course of performance, the special effect failed to function at the crucial moment. The laboratory of the South African scientists did not explode when expected, but merely emitted a whimper, thus failing to give the actors an all-important cue. This technical failure turned the whole performance into a disaster.

However, one would have hoped that such a turn of events would not have been the fatal knell of future productions of the same play. Given the known fact that in theatre the unexpected may happen at any time, one would expect that these experimenting dramatists would have revisited the problem area of production and given the play a second trial instead of the instant burial it received. This was a "society" whose primary aim was to encourage experimentation. Stephen Lacey (1995: 47) describes the Royal Court group as people that engaged in projects which developed the writers' craft, by making them work with experienced teachers and directors to explore essential theatrical problems. Theirs was a theatre workshop designed to give writers the opportunity to experiment with theatre. In my opinion, therefore, the fiasco of *The Invention* should have provided an ideal testing opportunity for this noble objective.

There are three possible reasons why the play's productions were stopped. First, it could have been the playwright's own reticent and overly critical other self that resulted in the blocking of any further visits to the failed play. Soyinka was a very self-critical and sensitive individual, as can be seen in some of the reviews of *The Invention* below. He loathed patronising gestures of any kind. Considering such a complex character composition, one wonders if the harsh treatment his play received was not partly attributable to his self-castigating personality. Given the fact that Soyinka can be his worst critic at times, it would come as no surprise to hear him acknowledge that the production was a disaster and taking the full blame for it, even though he was not the production manager. Secondly, the seemingly insensitive treatment of *The Invention* by the Court may be attributed to the Royal Court's desire not to participate in the subject matter it carried. Possibly Devine ignored the Nigerian playwright's aborted attempt because nationally the latter fell outside the radius of his immediate interests. Such a view is borne out by some of Soyinka's comments about subtle rejection at the Royal Court. He reveals:

> Soon [I] ceased to permit any of this to surprise or disturb [me], simply letting go and enjoying the luxury of absorbing it all and withdrawing, inwardly detached, saying to [myself]: it doesn't matter anyway; this is not

my world (Soyinka 1995: 27).

I would like to assume there was more to the play's non-supportive treatment than just that treacherous technical failure which supposedly became the key reason for the discontinuation of the entire production and any possible subsequent performance. For instance, when one considers that the thematic issues addressed in *The Invention* were very topical and highly provocative for the white audience of the time and place, it is understandable why a British theatre-going public would find it difficult to welcome this play, and the Royal Court found it easier to neglect the grooming of such a play. Seeing that this treatment was not necessarily directed at the person of Soyinka, who came back later to present some of his plays, the last possibility is that *The Invention* was perhaps of poor quality.

I link this conjecture with the opinion of several researchers and associates of Wole Soyinka who subtly suggest that perhaps this play was not the best work of the craftsman's hand. The few people that I have had the privilege to discuss this with include James Gibbs, Alain Ricárd, and Lionel Ngakane.

In Gibbs's opinion, this was a terrible play. Unfortunately, Gibbs does not explain whether this demerit lies in the play's theme or staging techniques. His crisp comment is, "He has tried to bury it!"(Appendix B2). James Gibbs dwells more on the impracticability of fighting somebody else's cause from a distance. He criticises Soyinka for taking upon himself a calling that would be better pursued by those closest to its roots, like the black South Africans themselves, which insinuates that the fault lay in the theme. It would be helpful to try and understand Soyinka's "unjustifiable" interests in South African politics from the point of view that at the time, any affront by Europeans on an African was perceived by the rest of Africa as an attack on the continent. To the same view Gibbs's more thoughtfully considered opinion attests that

> The decision of the South African regime to embrace the doctrine of "Separate Development" was a deeply-felt insult and a challenge to "men of

> colour" everywhere. [And to] those, like Soyinka, who, against amazing odds, were using their brains alongside whites, in white lands, in white languages, and triumphing, it was a gage thrown down (Gibbs 1995: 18).

I may add here that the reaction to the imposition of apartheid was not only confined to blacks and Africans in England. For example, Innes mentions Edward Bond's "anti-apartheid [and] nuclear disarmament sketches [which were] written for specific protest meetings" (Innes 1992: 93-94). This should suggest that the theme of *The Invention* was not necessarily out of place in England at the time.

Although Gibbs agrees that *The Invention* has a strong theme, he observes that Soyinka was not keen on taking up its subject again in any of the plays that followed (Appendix B2). Alain Ricárd is not very familiar with the play in question, but his insight into Devine's perceived (mal)treatment of *The Invention*'s production is very revealing. Ricárd (Appendix B3) sees Devine's lack of enthusiasm to support Soyinka as a strategic diplomatic move to urge the dramatist back to Africa where his remarkable dramatic idiom would be more understood, and perhaps better developed than in a foreign country like England, a place which was still battling with the establishment of its own new theatre traditions.

If one conflates these critics' views, it seems that both *The Invention* and its inventor, Wole Soyinka, were in the wrong place at the right time. It could be that although the use of the theatre to protest against social injustices was something the Court supported, perhaps dealing with the theme the of social ills of a distant country in another continent, as apartheid and South Africa were, was not of immediate concern to the Royal Court. Its noble justifications notwithstanding, it is clear that in the 1950s England was not the ideal place for Soyinka to launch his career in performance arts, given that his primary concern at the time was the atrocities that were being experienced by blacks in South Africa, as explains James Gibbs (1995). In support of the same opinion, Lionel Ngakane, in his introduction of Soyinka as guest speaker in *Writers in Conversation* (1984), remarks that " Wole is an artist concerned with the continent of Africa."

My conclusion is also supported by Lionel Ngakane's input. In my interview with him in 1998, Ngakane speculates on several possibilities regarding the fate of *The Invention*, such as the foreignness of subject matter at the time of performance, and the absence of a director who fully understood and empathised with the material, as the British directors were preoccupied with a different project from the plight of blacks at the hands of whites in South Africa. He further speculates that perhaps the play was probably not considered good enough. Unfortunately, Ngakane does not expand on this point, thus making it difficult for one to view this as a statement of fact or opinion. This supposition will partly be evaluated by the analysis of the play's text later.

Many assumptions may be made about the artistic and theatrical merits of *The Invention*, but the fact remains that whatever the quality of the play or production, the theatre makers should have known that a performance may be set off-course by certain unforeseen technicalities. The playwright himself may have been very self-castigating because of age and personality, but that should have hardly meant the instant burial of the play. This may point to the absence of a good support-base for an up-coming black artist at the time. To this end, Ngakane explains that in the 1950s "black playwrights ... had to struggle to get the recognition they deserved in what was a hostile environment, not only for writers, but for the black population of Britain [in general]" (Appendix B4). The deduction that can be made is that the Royal Court was primarily for local talent first. Even though it may be argued that there were foreign artists such as Arthur Miller, Brecht, and Beckett whose plays were staged at the Royal Court at different times, we need to recall that these playwrights did not come to England to seek assistance in and an introduction to professional theatre. They came as professionals to perform their plays after they had in some way established themselves outside of Britain.

On this account, it is no far-fetched conjecture that Devine's treatment of *The Invention* after just one night of performance[5] was very unsympathetic. Could it be

that Devine was put off by the play's daring subject matter that sought to force the British, Americans, and white South Africans to stare in the face their inhumane way of treating black people? Perhaps it was easy for Devine's theatre to dare disdainfully to challenge its own white establishment, so long as the issue was that of classism, local politics, and economy, and it perhaps became a little more challenging for the British to face the issue of racism, imperialism, and slavery that were landed on their door-step through the pens of direct victims of such practices of discrimination as addressed in *The Invention.*

The study of his earlier activities shows Soyinka reacting to various challenges that touch on social freedom and personal expression. Even about these unpalatable experiences in England, Soyinka did not let rust the inherent urge to make known his true feelings on a contentious issue. He freely spoke his mind. One such moment was during the performance in honour of the eleven men that had died at Hola Camp in Kenya during the Mau Mau insurrections. The dramatist refused to take part in a scene that he felt cheapened the sentiment it was supposed to represent. Soyinka's refusal to participate in the performance reveals much about his convictions concerning the function of live theatre. My speculation is that he felt that performing to the British audience, whose government had decreed the crushing of the Mau Mau insurrection, would trivialise the matter as the audience would probably not respond to it as it should. Therefore the value of the protest would be lost. However, when he returned to Nigeria, he thought differently, as agitprop theatre became his major weapon of consciousness raising.

During the improvisation Soyinka created a spectacle, as the late Bloke Modisane, a fellow actor and exile from South Africa, took it upon himself to haul Soyinka back on stage in the glare of the spot-light (Appendix B2). Here we see the dramatist's strong mindedness and the unbending nature that made him reject a peaceful settlement. His refusal to participate in the improvisation made Soyinka's point, but it embarrassed him very much, patently making him a living example of the motto of Lakunle, one of his major characters in *The Lion and the Jewel*, that

"A man must live or fall by his true principles" (Soyinka 1963: 61).

When I compare the Ibadan and the Leeds / London works, I notice a slight shift in the tone of Soyinka's protest works. In the earlier works Soyinka used more humour than satire, for example, the Christmas week letter (Appendix A5) and the cartoon that changed the salad menu at Ibadan college. But his more serious works assume a more scathing satirical tone and they use more satire than simple humour. The poem, "Telephone Conversation" (Appendix A6), and *The Invention*, presented for the first time the same evening, are good examples of the latter case. Despite this subtle intolerance in England in the 1950s, it is quite admirable to find no sense of lingering bitterness in Wole Soyinka some three decades later. As he reminisces about the Royal Court days, Soyinka exudes clean nostalgia and love for the immeasurable experience received from the hands of George Devine, and he enthuses:

> I had 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 Royal [Court Theatre] 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 (Appendix C1).

In short, Soyinka's reaction to the difficult sociopolitical English environment has been an admixture of delight, satire, anger, and remorse, reflected in the letters, poems and the short stories he wrote in his Leeds days such as, *inter alia*, "Telephone Conversation", *The Invention*, and *Ibadan*, respectively.

I would therefore like to test the opinion that perhaps Soyinka did not stage so successfully at Devine's theatre because his play was of poor quality. Although such an opinion can easily lead to unsubstantiated pontificating, it is a possibility which research may prove right or wrong. To explore this opinion, it may be helpful to evaluate the person of, and the circumstances around, Soyinka by looking at what

else he was doing at the time.

Wole Soyinka, then an African youth in his early twenties, had proven himself a person of outstanding qualitites even to be considered to teach English in London, to work for the BBC radio station -- which according to Gibbs (Appendix B2) was very strict with its employees' command of English at the time -- to read and evaluate manuscripts at the Royal Court Theatre, and to have submitted a play (*The Lion and the Jewel*) which facilitated his connections with the Royal Court (Sullivan 1987: 15), as well as another (*The Invention*) that was accepted right away, rehearsed, and produced. The key question then is, how did this poor workmanship of *The Invention* elude the keen eye of the screening panel through which manuscripts went before rehearsals? Why did it not surface during the course of the rehearsals?

Although it is not the place of this study to take sides, the thought that there might have been other non-theatrical factors involved here keeps returning. Nonetheless, it is proper to look at the text and form an objective conclusion regarding the dramatist's artistic abilities, although such textual examination is based only on one very early manuscript[6], and not the performance itself.

3.4 The Royal Court Plays: An Analysis

The desire of every researcher is to have the chance to go through the manuscripts of such contentious plays as *The Invention*, and establish what artistic merits or demerits there are. This analysis focuses on a close reading of the texts of some of the plays that premiered at the Royal Court Theatre. This cross-textual analysis is followed by the presentation and analysis of newspaper reviews of the very same plays. These reviews are the closest one can get to the performance. We need to keep in mind that reviews are themselves only the opinion of individuals, and do not always see the same events unfolding in the same way on stage.

The underlying aim of this sub-section is to find out the dramatists' style of theatre as well as their views on general life issues, as embodied in the themes of their plays. These salient properties of drama should facilitate the search for a common cord that bound together Devine's team of writers, and for how these playwrights affected one another's works, if at all.

When approaching the subject of form and content in drama, one does not undertake to discuss these two properties of art without expecting any problems. Theatre as an art has an added complication because it is a complex entity that embodies the varied elements of dramatic literature and stagecraft, the latter being the only vehicle through which any good drama can be made meaningful. Stage presentation is an intricate field which encapsulates all the arts of the theatre, such as acting, music, dance, scenic design, stage lighting, costume design, architecture and the stage itself, the performance space occupied by the actors and the audience. All these highly specialised segments of the performing arts add in different ways to the overall meaning and reception of a drama. My reading of the texts is therefore limited by being unable to refer to any live recording of performance, the key reason for writing drama.

Before any close textual study can be made, it is necessary to establish some arbitrary definitions of "form" and "idea". By form is meant the distinctive *structure* of a play and the distinctive *style* in which the play is cast. The term is also used more loosely to signify the general *type of theatre*, such as the theatre that Shakespeare, or Shaw, or Brecht devised, as dramatists of genius deploy the art of the stage in different ways. "Idea" here will not exclusively mean the elementary subject matter; it is in fact the underlying *world view* presented in the play or the production. It is that special fundamental theme, the ideal that is consciously developed in the crafting of the play, ultimately actualised in performance. Consequently, the body of ideas that reflect the philosophy, arguments, topics of discourse, and even propaganda cannot be excluded from my purview. In short, as Gassner (1965: 4) explains, "idea" is employed to cover something much more than

just topic, opinion, or artist's view of life, commonly discussed as content; "idea" in this discussion also denotes the *kind of theatre*. When discussing "idea" therefore, I will refer to content, philosophy, and theatre view, while "form" will reflect observations on theatre type, structure, and style in the play. Because the concepts "form" and "idea" overlap in theatre, no major effort will be made to split the fine distinctions in the discussion of these two.

3.4.1 Wole Soyinka's Royal Court Plays

Dealing with Soyinka's Royal Court productions has not been easy, particularly selecting and categorising some of these plays into the 1950s or the 1960s phases. Three plays seem to have been written in the 1957-59 era: *The Swamp Dwellers* (September 1958), *The Lion and the Jewel*, (reportedly written just before *The Swamp Dwellers*) and *The Invention* (1959). Although the account of the chronological history of each play is confused[7], what can be inferred is that *The Invention, The Lion and the Jewel*, and *The Swamp Dwellers* were among Soyinka's very first "serious" plays. These plays were made available for staging in different places such as the Royal Court (*The Invention,* 1959), the University of London Drama Competition (*The Swamp Dwellers*,1958), and the Arts Theatre in Ibadan (*The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* 1959), while Soyinka continued to work in London. It would be difficult to assert that all these were Royal Court plays, since with the benefit of hindsight, it is now known that some -- for example, the so-called independence play, *The Dance of the Forests* -- had been written way back at Leeds. Even though the Court would somehow influence the final shaping and perfection of all of its productions, the date at which the plays were written is older than the production date, a common phenomenon in play writing and staging.

Clearly, the history of Soyinka's production at the Royal Court Theatre is jagged. Accounts of the exact date of the production of *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* are not convergent. James Gibbs (1986: 29) states that these plays were written at Leeds, which places them in the years 1957 and 1958, while E.D.

Jones's account (1988: 40) reveals that three of Soyinka's plays were presented for performance in 1959. It is Jones's conviction that these should be called Soyinka's early plays. The confusion about the dates of performance is exacerbated by Gerald Moore's research, which places the works a year earlier. In his account, these plays were ready for performance by the summer of 1958, the year in which Soyinka was approached by Geoffrey Axworthy, a teacher of English at Ibadan, to provide him with drama / scripts for possible production back in Nigeria. Moore states that Soyinka offered the scripts of the two plays to Axworthy to stage in Nigeria that very same year, 1958 (Moore 1971: 7). Although his was an established voice in the BBC radio (London), and he had become a well-known participant at the Royal Court theatre as a ballad performer and play-reader, Soyinka only presented one of his four plays to Devine for production; this was *The Invention*, produced on 1 November 1959.

It is ironical that while *The Lion and the Jewel* is the one play that impressed some noted English associates of Soyinka's and actually opened doors for him at the Royal Court Theatre, this play could not be staged there until about six years later. I note with interest James Gibbs's comment that:

> Based in England, Soyinka received early encouragement from [William] Wanamaker who responded positively to *The Lion and the Jewel* ... Soyinka and some friends put on a reading [of the play] in the director's flat. A production was discussed and the impossibility of bringing together an adequate cast for any length of time sadly recognised. It was the Royal Court that came through with practical support: their reader, Anne Piper, was delighted by *The Lion and the Jewel* and drew it to the attention of George Devine. Impressed, he offered Soyinka a ... remunerated position of play-reader together with membership of the Court's Writers' Group (Gibbs 1995: 37-38).

The predicament surrounding the staging of *The Lion and the Jewel* suggests that the society in which Soyinka hoped to develop his theatrical skills was not quite ready to accommodate black artists because, as Gibbs suggests, there were not enough suitable black actors available. From the above comment, it is clear that even though the Royal Court was prepared to help the up-coming dramatist stage

his play, the situation in the country was such that there were no black actors that could present Soyinka's African drama. The question that comes to mind is whether or not it was easy for black actors to find work in London at the time. Had there been an equitable development of theatre personnel between black and white in Britain at the time, there would have been no need to forget plans for staging *The Lion and the Jewel* in 1959. Is Ricárd's observation therefore valid, that the best place for the kind of drama that Soyinka wrote was not England but Africa because even assembling a cast -- the most basic of staging requirements -- was not easy?

It is my conjecture that Soyinka made himself available to the activities of the theatre at the time with the sole aim of self-improvement. Whatever challenges he faced, Soyinka, a self-styled apprentice to George Devine, seemingly wanted to put into practice what he had acquired in his studies at Leeds or Ibadan and also to experience fully the wave of theatre that was sweeping through England at the time, irrespective of who supported him in his quest for this experience of the arts, be it the BBC, the classroom where he taught, the night clubs where he played his guitar or, most importantly, the Royal Court Theatre that offered him the use of its "play-house" to put to test his theatrical talent.

These controversial plays were to be staged in Devine's Royal Court some six years later, three years after their publication by Oxford University Press. Parenthetically, one must add that it was a statement of good standing on its own for any work to have been accepted by Oxford University Press. Therefore poor workmanship was not an issue in the case of these plays. This apparent contradiction should confirm that what works on the page may not necessarily work on the stage.

The point is, it is difficult to say which of these are Royal Court plays. In the interest of simplicity, in this section I discuss *The Invention* only and reserve the others for the post-Royal Court phase in the next chapter.

3.4.1.i *The Invention*

This forthright and blunt attack on certain social ills is a drama that Bernth Lindfors simply describes as an extravagant political satire (Lindfors 1982: 127). The ensuing analysis first tries to provide a more detailed plot summation than hitherto covered in available research. It is important first to provide a summary of this play because it is unpublished work which I only managed to acquire from the files of James Gibbs. Then the examination of the central idea through the discussion of setting and characterization follows. The remainder of the analysis is on theatre technique.

Although set seventeen years into the future, *The Invention* was written and first performed at The Royal Court Theatre in 1959. This play is a very ambitious political satire. Set in the winter of 1976 in South Africa, this one-act play is a futuristic and aptly prophetic comic satire that exposes the devastating effects and pettiness of racial discrimination. The drama features three super-powers and proponents of racism of the 1950s: the British, white South Africans, and the Americans of the deep South. The date of July 1976 is ironically important for being the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the "Declaration of Independence, and ... the Declaration of Human Rights" in America (Soyinka 1959: 1). On this day America sends to Jupiter an isotonuclear bomb to be exploded there without endangering human life. Unfortunately, like most of America's space science projects, the rocket strays and in its unguarded course it shoots from Massachussetts to Madagascar to the icebergs of the Antarctic sea, then it goes twice beneath the North Pole until every dial on earth is distorted. It finally disappears for two days and nights from sight and radar, only to resurface three days later, hovering over the Cape of Good Hope, and lands in a disused mine in Johannesburg. The major distress caused by this loose piece of science is that it soon explodes, killing humans and distorting their racial composition to such an extent that it becomes virtually impossible to distinguish blacks from whites as a result of the black population's loss of pigment. As a result, all people are obliged to submit themselves to racial testing in a laboratory where a few handpicked scientists work on the testing. This is when

one of the scientists invents a testing machine -- the invention of the play's title -- that shows within seconds what race each "specimen" actually belongs to.

In exposing this diabolic folly of humankind, *The Invention* also addresses a variety of other themes of importance. For instance, there is a reference to nepotism and favouritism through one of the victims of the human "specimen," a woman who is a former minister's relative. The issue of academic dishonesty is brought out through the inventor who cruelly steps over fellow researchers, steals a colleague's idea and passes it off as his own, thus attracting all the glory to himself. Soyinka deftly uses characterisation to advance the theme of the far-reaching extent of dehumanization. Before characters even say the first word, the playwright advises in stage directions that their "... faces could be hideously deformed or simply pasty with sickly grayishness [*sic*]" (Soyinka 1959: 1). All the researchers must be in white overalls. These are an external reflection of the depleted humanness in the white race. Another perception may be that Wole Soyinka was drawing both from the Brechtian technique of having representational character to create distance between the and actor the role. This technique is also found in the oral performance culture of the Yoruba, where suggesting a mask-like deportment of the characters is used to emphasise their representational role[8]. A group of people simply called "the guinea- pigs" also forms part of the cast (Soyinka 1959: 1). These guinea-pigs are projected as voices and they never appear on stage, except for the desperate off-stage cries of protestations of the 1st Voice, "I don't want to be a guinea-pig; I am only a simple farmer ..." (Soyinka 1959: 9). Soyinka exposes the cruelties of elevating an ideal over human life in the avaricious greed of the scientists. They are shown scrambling for new human bodies, callously calling them "fresh specimen for research" as heard in this conversation:

Destus:	What do you say now oh Bytron? We're in the run again! [*sic*]
Cruger	(*Suddenly beginning to run*) Bodies! Bodies! Fresh specimens for research (Soyinka 1959: 12).

The most shocking scene is depicted in these detailed stage directions:

[*All ... are now back and the activity mounts to a feverish pitch. Burners are turned on full, beakers bubble, flesh is ripped and bones are cracked etc. etc. Fremuler ... gathers every bit of material that the others discard and pounds them up* [sic] *in his mortar. The concentration of all is maximum. Glu muttering to himself all the time*:]

Glu: What a boon! What a boon! Business has been slack ... (Soyinka 1959: 13).

Also forming part of the cast of characters is the invention itself, which communicates with an eerie automated voice. Considering the dramatis personae, one observes that the entire cast is defective in one way or another. For example, Destus is consumed with pride and class consciousness. His prestigious job involves identifying race by analysing the nose hairs of blacks. There is also Glu, a senile old man to whom the end of the world has come since it has become impossible to distinguish the races, and then Hardiburr, "the slobbering idiot" who has been overtly cast to be the "fool" in the play. However, Hardiburr turns out to be more perceptive than the rest in the end[9]. Fremuler [probably Vermeulen] is noted for his blind and often annoying loyalty to the government and his one handicap is in speech; he stammers. Mrs Higgins, the British representative, is described as "a simpering fool". Soyinka has used her to accent the idiosyncrasies of the British. She wears a plastic smile adorned with a set of false teeth and is the epitome of pomposity. When other envoys give generously to the invention cause, she only offers £14.28p against the $25 million from the Americans. Briklemaine is a typical bloated American native of the Deep South whose ethos is clearly for the preservation of the purer races, believing in the creed that from conception, the "Negro" must accept his class, respect the white man, and keep to his own place. Briklemaine presents a beautiful gift of an exact replica in velvet and satin of the Confederate flag, and the hood of the Ku Klux Klan to the South African team of scientists (Soyinka 1959: 25).

Soyinka's use of typological characters advances the satirical theme that derides the wayward treatment of other races as inferior. The biting humour is not confined to

the Americans only. The British receive the brunt of the dramatist's satire, for example, when he jibes at "the law of bathing once a week". Soyinka is perhaps mocking those that were not too keen on taking their bath daily; he makes it appear as if there was a law passed that people should only bathe once a week.

The Invention is built on a number of satirical incidents. For instance, the failure of the South African scientific experiment is an echo of the failed American spacecraft experiment. These failures are the writer's satirical jeer at the childlike preoccupations and wasted efforts of the racist world. Soyinka accents this satire through dialogue as well, here illustrated in Bishop Kalinga's interaction with Prosecutor:

Kalinga:	And amidst this carnage, the only fact that distresses my countrymen is that they can no longer tell who is black and who is white. The wealth of the nation has gone into a laboratory where men must submit themselves to the testing of ...
Prosecutor:	One moment, you. Are you a white bishop or a black bishop?
Kalinga:	Is this a game of chess? (Soyinka 1959: 2).

The punch line of the humour does not come till the climax and end of the story where, after much secrecy, the South African team is to display the invention to their visiting and eagerly waiting counterparts from other countries. Hiding the fact that the original machine blew up, the South Africans try to pull wool over their visitors' eyes and present a newly constructed imitation. Sadly, this machine is received as the most horrid thing by the British envoy, and as disgusting with an unprepossessing appearance by Briklemaine. At this bathos, the idiot giggles and utters, "The emperor is naked!" He takes off his coat to lend to the "emperor", denying that he is a fool and defying all those who say he is.

Hardiburr	[*Whose grin has been growing wider and wider, bursts suddenly into idiotic laughter*] The Emperor is naked ...
Director	[*Between his teeth*] Somebody shut him up before he says something dangerous.
Hardiburr	They are always trying to call me a fool. He ... he. ... But I

know what it is. I am going to lend the Emperor my coat ... I'm going to lend the Emperor my coat ... [*Begins to take off his coat*].

Director [*Fiercely*] Guards! ... [*the guards hit him sharply behind the neck. He crumbles and falls. They all look relieved*]

Higgins I hate scenes. For a moment I thought the man was going to make a scene ... .

Director He's merely had one of his attacks. We put him to sleep and then he wakes, he feels much better. Now, about this invention ... .

The End (Soyinka 1959: 30-31).

As can be seen, the story ends with no great oration that declares theme, but on another lie from the director. The guards knock down the idiot and the director covers up by saying this is routine: it is one of his regular attacks. However he fails to return the interest of the visitors to the invention.

The idiot is silenced because he is able to perceive and to speak the truth about the ghastly failure of the "scientists". This traditional role of the fool in drama, especially in Shakespeare, has always been that of the one person with deeper insight into issues of the moment. Through this character, Soyinka communicates that this demeaning project and actually the general engagement of states in racial discrimination is the most dehumanising and laughable exercise ever invented by humans. Although this is not one of his best plays, it is not necessarily "horrible" as Gibbs finds it (Appendix B2). In my opinion, the play's merits also lie in content, such as the prophetic power of its visionary creator, Soyinka himself. One must appreciate the seriousness of mind and bravery in young Soyinka, in that as early as the late 1950s he was already addressing sensitive subjects such as chemical and biological warfare, a topic South Africa began to deal with openly only recently, as witnessed in the Dr Basson case (*The Star* 11 June 1998). This subject matter alone makes this a uniquely 1950s piece of literature, as it pointedly brings to the fore society's ills via the staging of the subject of racism.

This 31-page long play does not have any conventional divisions such as scenes.

Soyinka controls actor movement by stage directions and movement of character on set. The first "scene" of the play presents the elaborate time and culture setting. It also shows the mechanical scientists hard at work pulling and dragging a human specimen for testing. It exposes the pettiness of racism, the waste that goes into the pursuit of establishing which human form is that of "the true son or daughter of South Africa, the lover of the purity of races" (Soyinka 1959: 7-8). The story is presented almost exclusively through dialogue and action, for example:

Bytron	All we have to do is to wait until the baby is born, and that should establish the race of the mother.
Destus	Too many obvious snags. Suppose she has been having an affair with a black man.
In Unison	She might as well be dead! (Soyinka 1959: 16).

The main variations of these shorter exchanges are lengthy overtly didactic speeches reminiscent of George Bernard Shaw's "soapbox" plays, that were renowned for their preaching. Soyinka makes no attempt to accent the dialogue with song, dance, or mime, which techniques are a standard trademark and are common in his other works of allegedly the same era, like *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers*. This trait makes one surmise that perhaps *The Invention* is actually older than these two, in which there can be seen a definite change in style and dramaturgy. Could this dominance of discussion and idea in *The Invention* be one of the traits that Irele ascribes to Shaw's influence on Soyinka (Appendix B1)? Because of the absence of such techniques of dramaturgy as music, song, and dance, it is understandable why *The Invention* may be seen to be of poorer quality than the rest of Soyinka's plays.

The dramaturgy also differs from Soyinka's other, later work by the glaring fact that the play does not have a single, outstanding hero/protagonist in whom is embodied the main message of the story. This would certainly make it difficult for the 1950s theatre critics, who were heavily oriented to pinning down the main message and to establishing the playwright's own stance on the issue of the central message. Another fact to observe are the stage directions. Wole Soyinka attempts to apply

the Brechtian device of "breaking down the fourth wall"(Gielgud 1963). In his stage directions, Soyinka bluntly advises that certain words be spoken directly to the audience, for example he suggests that "*Long speeches were* [sic] *obvious should be directed frankly at the audience. In fact, this need not be confined to the longer speeches*" (Soyinka 1959: 1). Apart from offering guidance to actors and the director, this advice is also reminiscent of Brecht's techniques, the giving of detailed advice on the staging of the play. For example, accompanying *The Life of Galileo* is a lengthy commentary by Brecht, advising how certain aspects of the play may be staged, such as:

> *The stage decor must be such that the public believes itself to be in a room in mediaeval Italy... . The public must remain always clearly aware that it is in a theatre. ...The characterisation of Galileo should not aim at establishing the sympathetic identification and participation of the audience with him; ...* (Brecht 1974: 13, 14).

Soyinka also employs the Brechtian device of acknowledging the presence of the audience. However, when it comes to the actual application of the technique of destroying illusion by interacting with the audience, my own opinion is that *The Invention* does not at all use the anti-illusionist device with Brecht's sophistication. Peter Brook explains that Brecht would make characters in action achieve this break by causing the audience to participate in the action, like answering back to the actors and vice versa (Brook 1968: 65). The function of the stage directions in this play is generally the traditional explanation of actors' movements and gestures, for example, [*He picks up the pencil*], [*He is helping up the woman*], [*He claps. Others follow suit*] (Soyinka 1959: 23). There is also the standard use of stage properties like stubbing a cigar out, and the description of sound effects like metallic sounds and shutting the gate. Soyinka relies more on verbal than the non-verbal technique to present his idea. The dialogue carries both irony and humour in many instances, as the reviews below reveal. The conclusion that may be drawn here is that the text's strength is more in its content/subject matter, which may thus support the prevailing view that, theatrically speaking, this was not a successful play for the stage. Soyinka's gift of being a word monger can be identified even in this early

play.

The playwright's attempts to practise such Brechtian principles as the absence of a central theme-bearing hero, the breaking of the fourth wall, and stock characterisation lead to the conclusion that the hesitant beginnings of Soyinka's non-realist theatre can be seen in *The Invention.*

Political drama was popular at the Royal Court theatre in the late 1950s. The plays of Edward Bond, Arnold Wesker, and John Arden deal with topical political issues like the war and disadvantaged Jewish families. Similarly, *The Invention* presents a protest topic. It is angry in subject matter but, unlike Osborne's Jimmy Porter, the voice of the primary victim is not heard at all. Instead the folly of the perpetrator is exposed through the satirisation of the British, the white South Africans and the white Americans. Given the political era and the place where *The Invention* was staged, the subject matter of apartheid and racism was perhaps inconsequential to England's theatre-going public, despite the play's topical tone of disdain and anger that the audiences had seen in such plays as *Look Back in Anger* or *Chicken Soup With Barley.* It is possible that 1950s England was not the ideal platform to present this drama of protest. It would be perhaps more relevant in Africa. The playwright is indeed angry, but there is no sense of despair in the tone of *The Invention.* The absence of despair marks Soyinka as different from the majority of the (mainly European) absurd dramatists he is often associated with. Instead of indulging in despair, Soyinka chooses to deal with his source of dissatisfaction by subjecting the offending party, the white racists of the world, to ridicule and satire. It is clear that The Royal Court Theatre provided the obvious outlet for such themes as borne by *The Invention,* even though the subject matter did not go down well, as we see in the reviews below. But satire is a dramatic technique Soyinka had been using even in earlier writings, as is seen in the *Bug.*

3.4.2 Theatre Reviews of Wole Soyinka:

I need to emphasise that the views of the British theatre-going public can be gauged only from a limited perspective, because they are represented mainly from the point of view of a singular source, the newspaper critic-reviewers, not from that of everyone who saw the production. Furthermore, not every newspaper review of Soyinka's work is represented here. I quote only a sample of about half the probable total[10]. Another factor to keep in mind is that not everybody who goes to the theatre can make their opinions on a given production known to the general public, so researchers have to depend on whatever they can get. Given such limitations as are imposed by the historical distance and the sheer logistics mentioned above, the reader will appreciate the difficulty of capturing a balanced opinion from all those who saw and evaluated these playwrights. Nonetheless, the wide variety of newspapers from which the reviews below were gleaned should, it is hoped, present a cross-section of informed opinions current at the time. These newspapers include the following: *Daily Mail, Daily Mirror*[11], *Daily Telegraph, Evening News, Illustrated London News, Manchester Guardian, The Spectator, News Chronicle, Observer, Punch, Sunday Dispatch, Sunday Times, The Times* and *Queen.*

3.4.3 Theatre Reviews of Premiere Productions

The Times (2 November 1959) reports that the audience warmly responded to Soyinka's poetry and drama which included *inter alia,* "Telephone Conversation" and the one-act play, *The Invention.* Here the dramatist's outstanding quality as a wordsmith is confirmed yet again. However, *The Times* also paints a picture of an artist who is very shy, if not suspicious, of the English accolades.

> We must hope that the reception given at the Royal Court last night to verses and song 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 ... even when Mr

> Soyinka plainly was not addressing it. If he thinks this was prompted by the thing he hates most, a patronising attitude on the part of the audience, it will be a pity. It was prompted by respect for his gift for words.

The reviewer's comment tells a great deal about Soyinka's awareness of patronisation of "the minorities", a point Alan Brein of *The Spectator* dwells on more fully in his own review. Soyinka must have done or said something to make his suspicion plain to the British.

Comments on the quality of the play are that the playwright's words were at times very clear but that he had the weakness of tending to repeat himself. It is quite interesting to see the deep-set culture of realistic drama coming through the reviewer's criticism of the structure of Soyinka's play. Commenting on the ending of the play, the writer of this review expresses the misgiving that Soyinka's final message on the relationship between the black and the white races is not clearly conveyed: "... instead of making [a clear comment] 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" (*The Times* 2 November 1959). The desire to have a drama that makes a solid statement at the end of a play can be traced back to the conventions of realistic drama which shackled the majority of the theatre goers at that time and continued to do so even in late 1959, judging by the nature of such comments from the newspaper. When an artist deviates from this "norm" and prefers to leave the "unravelling/discussion" in the hands -- or better still, in the mind -- of the viewer, then he incites comments of dissatisfaction and harsh judgements of artistic failure to communicate his point clearly. It is indeed a pity that even within the conventions of "realism", the ending of *The Invention* is weak and the message does indeed get lost, thus easily inciting the negative reception of a hostile media.

The media's dissatisfaction with the play's ending is a stance one can sympathise with. Most reviewers were probably accustomed to the conventional Scribean exposition-complication-development-crisis-denouement structure where conclusions made a concrete theme-highlighting statement (Bermel 1977: 19). Such

reviewers therefore would easily overlook the possibility that Soyinka may have been experimenting with other forms of theatre such as the theatre of George Bernard Shaw which encouraged the view that "... a discussion need not be limited to the conclusion but [should] penetrate the plot" (Bermel 1977: 20), in order to de-emphasise incident and accentuate idea by soapbox oratory. The perception that Soyinka was emulating Shaw may be seen here in this very early play whose ending, in Shaw's own terms of theatre, still needs improvement. It seems Soyinka's play was more keen on presenting the *idea* of the absurdity of racism, and in the manner of Artaud, Soyinka was using the characters "to expose the audience to a range of their own feelings of which they were unconscious before", albeit using a very immature peice of writing like *The Invention* (Bermel 1977: 15). George Bernard Shaw's influence on Soyinka is affirmed by Irele who explains that:

> Irele: The second influence is ... [that] of the discursive theatre of Bernard Shaw and Brecht, the Theatre of Ideas. People don't know just how important Bernard Shaw was to Soyinka. Today the influence of Bernard Shaw has waned considerably, but in the 50s Bernard Shaw was the major [influence]. He was the leading English dramatist in terms of the numbers of performances and as a theatre critic. ... The important thing is that his plays were very often engaging of ideas, even in their sometimes comical and satirical way they were very engaging of ideas (Appendix B1).

The most searing and racist review was by Alan Brein of *The Spectator* (6 November). Brein sarcastically entitled this commentary, "Where Spades Are Trumps" because he attacks the Court for blindly promoting obviously weak artists. Brein condemns the Court's decision to produce Soyinka's play. He sees this as a patronising gesture and a ploy to score points of political correctness on the part of the Royal Court. His opinion is:

> ... 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 good box-office theme. In the Thirties, Left-wing intellectuals consistently overpraised anything written by a worker. In the Fifties they overpraised 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.

The word "spade" is a pejorative term for Black people in Black English Vernacular. Brein eloquently uses racist discourse and manipulates the words "spade" and "trump", as used in a game of cards, to expose the patronage of the British left wing liberals, as represented by the Court. He spends a lot of time satirising the patronising attitude of the Royal Court and criticises its decision to produce *The Invention*, an obviously inferior work, just to accommodate "the minorities". There are two levels to Brein's argument. He may be justifiably exposing the phony attitude of the Court that wants to overrate even an inferior product just to be seen to be doing the politically acceptable thing, or he may be actually feeding into the racist attitude that does not see anything good in a black writer attempting to write in English. When he finally decides to evaluate the play, Brein has very little to say about its artistic merits but, still, he acknowledges the high quality of language use, humour, and theme in *The Invention*:

> 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. ... His play, *The Invention*, revealed his limitations even more embarrassingly, [although] the original idea was quite sharp and provocative ... .

His major criticism points to "the clumsy dialogue", the "use of unprecise images", and the "tone that is ten times heavier and cornier than any of the agitprop from old Unity Theatre". Brein's fundamental problem seems to be race. The perceived artlessness of *The Invention* appears to be an offshoot of that basic point of difference, race, as he concludes his review with the advice that "[The Royal Court must] be persuaded to support the really new and genuine achievements produced there -- such as John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*." What Brein overlooks is the fact that *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* was Arden's third production at the Court, while *The Invention* was Soyinka's very first.

The hostility of the reviewers often masked their ignorance or unwillingness to