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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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Which is what I must not be [*sic*] (Arden 1974: 81).

Krank neither wants to face up to reality nor be associated with any definite identity. This supposedly highly philosophical and metaphysical view of life reveals that Krank's perceived despair is in the absence of meaningful causes to fight. It therefore gives him his well-sought excuse not to tie himself down to any socially definable identity; endorsing his philosophy of wanting to exist in isolation as an illusion and perhaps successfully avoid paying for his offences. Krank's well-considered observation on the absurdity of life further justifies his stance, that making meaning out of this crazy life is the last thing he wants to waste his energies on:

> The world is running mad in every direction.
> It is quicksilver, shattered, here, here, here,
> All over the floor. Go on, hurtle after it,
> Chase it, dear Paul. But I choose to follow
> Only such fragments as I can easily catch,
> I catch them, I keep them such time as I choose,
> Then roll them away down to follow another [*sic*] (Arden 1974: 81).

Krank does not despair but refuses to participate in the absurdities of war and life while urging people like Paul on, because they believe there are fixed, worthy causes to fight.

> Krank: So many thousands of people in so large a cold field. How did they get into it? And what do they expect to find? [*dies*]. (Arden 1974: 97).

We can see that it is very difficult to pin Arden down to the specific moral position propagated by Krank in this play. Naturally, this is disturbing because we do want to understand the theme of the play, but it is opaque. In "John Arden's *The Waters of Babylon*: a Maverick on the 'New Wave'", Jeffrey Roberts remarks that John Arden "... has a perplexing tendency to withhold judgement of [whatever] order or ... behaviour of [an] individual who struggles within it ... [perhaps] because he is much more aware of the irrationality of human experience ..."(Wike 1995: 5). *The*

Waters of Babylon illustrates that there are no simple answers to problems. The audience is subjected to a battery of facts and postulations and it must ferret out their significance. This leads me to agree with Jeffrey Roberts's opinion that Arden's is the theatre of illusion and as such it is also "... a theatre of persuasion. Arden's theatre [therefore], like Shakespeare's -- like Brecht's -- is a theatre of skepticism and questioning" (Wike 1995: 7). Unfortunately, as Arden achieves this objective of creating a questioning theatre model, his theme is not well communicated to the audience, or rather it is not well understood. For that we cannot blame the dramatist.

3.4.5 Arden's Theatre Reviews

Like Wole Soyinka, Arden was fair game for the theatre reviewers in Britain. His type of drama did not at all go down well with the media. The following reviews of *The Waters of Babylon* reflect the unfavourable reception of Arden's works. *The Times* (21 October 1957) rudely dismisses the play as "... a noisy and shapeless work by Mr John Arden ... [which] ... even at the end of the play [is still] full of fanfare [while] the theme, [which is] his purpose in writing the play remain[s] obscure." The review tries to provide a brief plot précis and to define the play's central conflict but the perception that Arden's skill fails the test in the handling of this massive material is emphatically conveyed. Even the producer, Graham Evans, comes under fire for failing to clarify the play's theme. Only the actors receive praise, and it is very sparse.

The *Daily Telegraph* (21 October 1957) highlights a successful section of the play -- the politician's campaign scene at Hyde Park -- by making it the sub-title of the article, "A Play Without Style: A Hyde Park Scene". As if out of embarrassment, the reviewer, only identified as RPMG, first makes some excuses for Devine's type of theatre by explaining that the object of these Royal Court productions without scenery is to experiment with new authors, actors, and ideas. Swiftly, the focus of the review goes to the Hyde Park scene, calling it a memorable scene with actors that were commendable, including " ... the coloured actress Lucille Mapp, who

supplied the decoration ...". Lucille Mapp was playing the role of the beautiful Bathsheba and, the racist qualifier notwithstanding, the "decoration" the reviewer is probably referring to is her physical beauty. Of the author, the review only points out that it can be said his initial idea seemed promising. The insinuation is that Arden was unable to control his material, which seemed to have had a good start but lost its focus somewhere along the way. There is an unaffected comment on Arden's language and style, which is reported to be imagistic, and the dialogue which is said to be reminiscent of Dylan Thomas and Brecht.

The *Daily Mail* (21 October 1957) is equally negative about Arden's *The Waters of Babylon.* Its sarcastic title, "It's Hazy and Promising", summarises the thrust of the review. The reviewer, C.W., calls this "...a crazy tragi-comic strip of a play" and continues to criticise Arden that " ... simply 'through a haze of words' only [he] glimpse[s] a high promise and nothing else." The reviewer's perception of the chracters is also not positive; for example:

> 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 ... .

Kenneth Tynan's review entitled "The Ego Triumphant" six days later presents a more reflective analysis of Arden's play. Tynan of *The Observer* (27 October 1957) compares Arden's play with another, called *The Egg* by, Félicien Marceau thus:

> 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 bustlers in an ethical vacuum, the legitimate offspring of Monsieur Verdoux. And I find it significant that each ... tells his story directly in the first person to the audience.

Tynan's analysis brings out more positive aspects of Arden's play than has been done hitherto. He takes some pains to provide a deeper analysis of the underlying ideology of *The Waters of Babylon.* But it must be noted here that the subtle

innuendoes about unacknowledged borrowing or European influences, that beleaguered Soyinka's work, do not feature here. Arden's Krank is only said to be "the legitimate offspring of Monsieur Verdoux" by Charles Chaplin; there is no complaint that he should have acknowledged his mentors as appears in the reviews of Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel.*

Devine's determination to promote his young artists was not to be dampened by such criticism as was received by Soyinka and Arden on their first plays. Devine's unflagging support of his protegés was yet to be seen in his handling of the case of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, another play by Arden. *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance: An Unhistorical Parable* (produced on 22 October 1959) was Arden's third Royal Court production, following *Live Like Pigs* produced on 30 September 1958, the year that also saw the production of *When Is a Door Not a Door?* -- also one of Arden's plays -- at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. Devine's determination to succeed at this experimental theatre is seen in his overarching benevolence toward the disastrous reception of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance.* About this strong championship of his play Arden reveals more of Devine's partiality in the preface to his collection of plays:

> ... as an illustration of this doctrine [the playwright's right to fail] ... [George Devine] would frequently quote the case of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* - a play which lost the theatre ... ten thousand pounds, but which he nevertheless had insisted upon presenting in the teeth of hostile critics and different audiences until acceptance of its qualities was finally secured (Arden 1977: 5).

The partiality with which Arden's third play is treated stands out more clearly when set against the manner in which Soyinka's first, and sadly only, attempt at staging in the 1950s was treated by the Royal Court Theatre. This may support the supposition made earlier that the primary focus for Devine was local British talent. Although he may have had nothing personal against Soyinka, the latter's plays were perhaps not of immediate concern to the Royal Court. Another possibility may be that there were many other playwrights who were awaiting their first chance to stage

plays at the Royal Court. Soyinka's chance had come and gone.

3.4.6 Arnold Wesker

To date Arnold Wesker has been writing for about five decades. His notable achievements can be seen, *inter alia*, in the seven volumes of plays he has written (there are about 29 plays in total). This study concerns itself with a part of Volume 1, the so-called *Wesker Trilogy* which comprises *Chicken Soup With Barley, Roots,* and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem.* I closely study *Chicken Soup With Barley* for the reason that, although some biographers list it after *Roots*, my own findings reveal that this is Wesker's earlier play of the two. In the *Daily Mirror/Mail* (11 April 1960) Wesker gives an account of how he started writing and reveals that at age 21 he came to the conclusion that he was not a writer, although he kept on making notes for plays. " Then I wrote *Chicken Soup With Barley* and I suddenly knew that this was *it.* I knew it at the time and that's how I became a playwright."

3.4.6.i *Chicken Soup With Barley*

Wesker's play uses a panoramic time setting. It spans two decades, starting on 4th October 1936 (Act I), with Act II set in April 1946 and October 1947, and then showing events of November 1955 and December 1956 in the last Act. Wesker traces the course of the gradual deflation of political commitment in a West End Jewish community comprising young men in their early twenties: Sarah's family with two teenagers (Ada and Ronnie), a less committed husband (Harry), her brother (Hymie Kossof) and Harry's sister (Cissie). The zest that characterises the young people and almost everybody in the first act is slowly replaced by disillusionment, despair, and depreciation of faith in almost everybody as the younger members marry and seek business for financial self-improvement, a more meaningful cause to pursue than fickle politics. Against all odds, Sarah keeps her faith in the goodwill of socialist ideals till the end. The continual deterioration of Harry's health stands as a strong symbol of the fading of hope, love and commitment in the whole community. At the beginning of the play Harry shows no strong commitment to the

political demonstration his fellow Jews are planning against the Fascists. The Fascists want to hold several public meetings in London in support of the full-blown war in Spain that has drawn in the Jews. Many Jews continue to die, yet the war is supposed to be between the Fascists and the Communists. The slogan on the socialist party members' placards reads. "Madrid today -- London tomorrow" (Wesker 1959: 14). The whole East End neighbourhood is ready to block the free movement of the Fascists. Harry, on the other hand, actually prefers to run and hide at his mother's home when the situation becomes unbearable. In Act II (ten years later) he is weakened by a stroke, Ada is married and has mellowed a little. In the last Act, Harry suffers another stroke that leaves him with both paralysis and incontinence. Observing the sad condition in Sarah's house, Monty laments, "Poor Sarah and Harry, Jesus! It's all come to this?" (Wesker 1959: 63).

The central statement of the play is enunciated toward the end. The sense of despair in the young is brought about by capitalist Great Britain's apparent indifference toward people of socialist inclinations, like the European Jews living there. Monty, who has become more interested in financial self-improvement, tries passionately to justify his "disillusionment" with the very socialist party he used to support. The disillusionment is based on the realisation that people like fellow party members, antifascist Great Britain, and even those not aligned with Jewish socialism, the Trotskyists, are not what one perceives them to be. There is much dishonesty in politics, Monty urges Sarah to believe. He tries to explain his reason for turning his back on politics by arguing:

> Monty: Sarah, remember Spain? ... did Dave ever tell you the way some of the Party members refused to fight alongside the Trotskyists? And one or two of the Trotskyists didn't come back and *they weren't killed in the fighting either*? And remember Itzack Pheffer -- the Soviet Yiddish writer? ... Where is Itzack Pheffer? everyone used to say. Well, now we know, don't we. The great '*leader*' is dead. The whole committee of the Jewish Anti-Fascist League were shot! Shot ... *In our land of socialism* [emphasis added] (Wesker1959: 61).[13]

As if speaking his own feelings of disillusionment with great causes through the voice of Monty, Wesker further crystallises his point thus:

> Monty: I haven't got any solutions anymore. I'm not a capitalist. ...I just make a comfortable living and I'm happy. ... A man can't do anything anymore ... There's nothing more to life than a house, some friends, and a family -- take my word. ... Who can I trust? It's a big, lousy world of mad politicians -- I can't trust them, Sarah. (Wesker 1959: 61, 62).

The outspokenness and angry outbursts of both Monty and Ronnie are reminiscent of Osborne's Jimmy Porter, the angry young man who protests, "Nobody thinks, nobody cares" (Osborne 1956: 13). On his return from Paris where he served as a cook, Ronnie engages in what one may call the grand peripeteia scene with his mother. He is angry and disillusioned with his mother's socialist cause. He declares:

> Ronnie: Were we cheated or did we cheat on ourselves? ... I've lost my faith, I've lost my ambition. ... Political institutions -- society, they don't really affect people that much. ... The family you always wanted has disintegrated, and the great ideal you always cherished has exploded in front of your eyes. But you won't face it. You just refuse to face it. ... You're a pathological case Mother ... You're still a *communist* (Wesker 1959: 72-72).

Ronnie is probably referring to the hurtful experience of the destruction of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee by Stalin in November 1948, where his secret agents murdered one of its prominent leaders, Mikhoels. The irony is that Stalin had initiated this league but turned around and annihilated it. Like Monty, Ronnie does not understand why Sarah should cling to such fickle institutions and ideals .

Wesker'splay uses realist theatre techniques. Most of his stage directions depict a true-to-life scene. The opening of the play is an example:

> *A fire is burning. One door, at the back and left of the room, leads to the bedroom. A window, left, looks up to the street. To the right is another door which leads to the kitchen, which is seen ...*

[SARA KAHN *is in the kitchen washing up...*] (Wesker 1959: 13).

The "kitchen-sink" hallmark can also be seen in the place setting that introduces the audience to the whole play. The use of song by Wesker is very different from the Brechtian style found in Arden's *The Waters of Babylon.* This drama is characterised by the scarcity of poetry and song which is common in Arden's play. The only time Wesker uses song is to emphasise setting and theme. None of his characters advance the plot by singing lyrics that reveal new aspects of the story, as do Arden's (*The Waters of Babylon*) in the mode of Brecht. Wesker does not specify e exact songs instead, he mentions the song as part of the stage directions explaining setting and casting the mood thus, " [SARA KAHN is ...] *humming to herself*", and "*From outside we hear a band playing a revolutionary song*" (Wesker 1959: 13).

Another marked difference between Wesker's type of theatre and Arden's is the "absence of the audience" in the play. Like a true box-set, the drama unfolds in front of the audience without once acknowledging the audience's presence either in speech or in action. This is the kind of theatre the British theatre-going public was accustomed to, as the response of the reviewers reflected below affirms.

3.4.6 Theatre Reviews of Arnold Wesker:

Although only *Chicken Soup With Barley* has been analysed in this study, the theatre reviews below do not solely focus on this play but refer to the production of the trilogy as a whole, thus providing a wider feeling of the playwright's general success with the three plays. This wider commentary however is helpful because apart from giving a view of the playwright's expertise in more than one play, it also captures the same season within which Soyinka's début production was made, thus allowing for a more representative comparison of attitude.

Just as Wole Soyinka deals with the colonial experiences of the African people in some of his early plays, similarly, Wesker's early drama also addresses the themes

of European politics, such as Joseph Stalin's anti-Semitic genocide, as well as social classism in Britain. It openly confronts familiar social situations within a particular sector of British society. Wesker writes mainly about his own Jewish family background -- he was born of a Russian father and a Hungarian mother. As a product of a working-class background, Wesker used his drama to explore the problems of that class. His thematic concerns are perhaps the internal emancipation of people within the class they are born into. For example, *The Kitchen* offers a deep, realistic insight into the punitive and inhumane stresses of working conditions even in a modern welfare state; both *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* and *Roots* deal directly with the problems of working class intellectual liberation. Perhaps because of the familiar subject matter that questioned sociopolitical issues and the realist theatre that he used, Wesker was more favourably received by the theatre reviewers than either Soyinka or Arden. These dramatists' predicament is better explained by Jeffrey Roberts who reminds us that:

> The works of playwrights such as Harold Pinter [who was influenced by Beckett and Ionesco] and those of John Arden [who was influenced by Brecht] ... seemed both foreign and puzzling to the British audiences, compared to those of Osborne and Wesker which were received with warmth and enthusiasm (Wike 1995: 4).

Wesker's kind of drama was indeed what the viewers were familiar with, as a survey of the reviews shows.

The following are indications of the warm reception Wesker was accorded by the British theatre-going public. In 1958, he received the Arts Council of Great Britain Award of £300.00 for a promising new playwright. In 1959 he was awarded a prize, by the *Evening Star*, for the most promising British dramatist of the year, and then *Roots* was performed at the Royal Court the same year. Thus the reviews of this play are earliest even though this was not necessarily the first of Wesker's plays.

I have chosen to focus on only five reviews of *Roots* commenting on the production of both the Belgrade Theatre (25 May 1959) and the Royal Court Theatre (1

July1959). Entitled, "Play With New and Good Idea: Virtues of Mr Wesker's *Roots*", the review from *Times* gives this cautious yet warm response:

> Mr Arnold Wesker's *Roots* is ... a controversial play which produced divergent views 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, this idea is a good one.

This review goes on to explore this "good idea" in two to three sentences before moving on to comment on Wesker's dramaturgy. It remarks on " ... sentimentalizing about family ties, the importance of keeping close contact with [one's] origins ...". On Wesker's theatre techniques the reviewer observes that "there is cause for reservation in the manner that Wesker has embodied his ideas in dramatic action". The most glaring cause for concern is said to centre on the fact that most characters are inarticulate, they talk interminably without saying anything of substance, the characters are also boring and they bore the audience in turn, the play itself suffers from being spread over three repetitious acts, and that the dialogue is often too close to reality, as there seems to have been no act of selection for dramatic presentation by the writer.

Nevertheless, the review ends with hearty praise for Joan Plowright's acting abilities. In my assessment of the above given review, there seem to be so many demerits in Wesker's play that it is a source of wonder why there was even a favourable title to the article. D.A. Darlington's own review in the *Daily Telegraph* ("Play Triumph for Plowright: Galvanised Girl") does not beat about the bush; it is an outright rave review for the actress, Plowright. Darlington has very little to say for or against the Royal Court production, save that he agrees with all that his colleague had written when the play had premiered at the Belgrade Theatre. The rest of his article lauds Joan Plowright. The *Daily Mirror*'s review, entitled "Glitter on the Farm", is yet another record of rave reviews for Joan Plowright. This review balances its input by providing a good synopsis of the play and an equally long critique of the same.

> 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 doltish family of farm labourers as mentally and socially ambitious as the animals they tend.

There is no biting criticism of Wesker's overall dramatic idea, but in kid-gloves the reviewer kindly points out that:

> ... very little happens except that the phoney intellectual boyfriend 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.

Thereafter the discussion falls back on praises of Plowright's acting abilities, like the other reviews. It is interesting to note that the same paper castigated Arden's first Royal Court production two years earlier, calling it a hazy idea where nothing else happens. Why are the critics focusing on the actress and not on the play itself? There is cause to believe that they are coyly avoiding exposing the demerit of poor workmanship in *Roots* because this play is cast in a form acceptable to them. In tune with the labelling spirit of the time, the *Evening News* focuses on Plowright and calls her the "Perplexed Young Woman" (perhaps drawing a hackneyed parallel to the label "the Angry Young Men"). Obviously, the reviewer (F.B.) has nothing but praise for Wesker's play, as borne out by the words, "There is no room in an ink-thirsty newspaper to do real justice to this very interesting play, or its excellent production by John Dexter." Sold on the habit of comparison, F.B. goes on to equate Plowright to Beatrice, an actress who acted the part of Nora Helmer in a production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

The review from *The Times* (8 March 1960) reports on a collective opinion of reviews from the United States of America after *Roots* had premiered in Broadway. The title of this article reads: "NY Critics Divided on Wesker's Play" (on 7 March). The report relates that:

> Mr Arnold Wesker's *Roots* ... 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 the opinion among the dramatic critics seems to be that there is no doubting the writer's talent but *Roots* is, except for its closing scene, a dull play.

Although the American theatre reviewers are reportedly more favourable than their British counterparts, they still exhibit similar forthright remarks, such as John McClain's which states: "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." McClain refers to the dullness of the first and the second acts of the play, which was a common complaint of most of the reviews.

When the whole trilogy was eventually staged, the media came out more openly to promote Wesker. For instance, the response of the *Observer* (28 August 1960) to the trilogy was to note that "[Wesker's] dramatic method ... is realistic ...", which makes it easy to yield to the idea that the form of the play was what the audience wanted and was used to. *The Daily Mirror* (11 April 1959) ran a long coverage in the column "Robert Muller at the Theatre", entitled "A Top Playwright Talks About the Dangers of Success: The Haunting Fear of Mr. Wesker." Words like "top" and "success" show that the reviewer holds Wesker in high esteem. In this same review, Muller proclaims that a playwright who holds the future of British drama has been uncovered; he states, "... Mr. Wesker is [the future], and should remain [so], for a talent like his is rare and precious and infinitely brittle." It is however the cautious, self-effacing comments of Wesker's in the same article that confirm the bias of the media toward his works:

> Critics use certain words to describe one's work and one remembers these words when one is working. One thinks, "My God, this stuff doesn't contain any of the elements they were talking about." Then there are obvious dangers of flattery; if one is told often enough one is good, one ends up believing it.

Perhaps because the theatre-going public could relate to the style of dramaturgy Wesker used, the fact that two thirds of the play was not satisfactory became less

contentious than the charges of poor workmanship or a fuzzy thematic idea that were levelled against the works of Soyinka and Arden.

Looking at the three dramatists' plays, it appears that Wole Soyinka compares very closely with John Arden in terms of theatrical style. Arnold Wesker's dramatic strategy and theatrical style are different. The three dramatists only show some similarities in content, perhaps because of the spirit of the time which proliferated protest and anger. The plays address subjects that voice some discomfiture about certain social situations. Although the forms used by Arden and Soyinka are similar in places, each writer still has his own distinct quality in preoccupation with theme. For instance Soyinka deals with racial and ethical concerns, Arden with the disillusionment brought about by the collapse of values (as seen in the despair borne in the title *The Waters of Babylon*), and Wesker with classism, disillusionment and the broken dreams in a cruel, fickle world. All three dramatists are angry about society. Explaining why the media would favour Wesker over Arden, for instance, Jeffrey Roberts reminds us that

> ... the majority of these new playwrights, including Wesker and ... Osborne, chose more often the conventional styles traditionally associated with social realism, dating back to Shaw and Ibsen. ... [This kind of drama] had cultivated and satisfied the urge of the audience to identify itself vicariously with the stage characters and their circumstances; as a result most of the anti-realist forms -- expressionism, epic theatre, absurdism -- were still met by [a] qualified reception (Wike 1995: 3, 4).

3.5. The British Media and Devine's Playwrights

It is not an easy task to establish the voice of the society at large on the merits and demerits of a contentious subject like performance art. Despite the fact that the British theatre reviewers were a very critical institution, I have chosen them to establish some professional opinion on these performances. The media critic has been used therefore to try and establish the atmosphere within which the dramatists first presented their works; the underlying objective in citing such reviews being the

examination of the British society that received these New Wave dramatists. It is true, however, that this exercise has its own limitations, owing to the fact that a reporter or an editor can hardly be seen completely to represent the holistic voice of theatre-goers. It is also common knowledge that even within this same body of professional commentators, there is room for disagreement and disparity of views and tastes. Newspaper writers do not necessarily represent the professional critic of literature. However, in the absence of the data that cover some of these other evaluating bodies, the voice of the newswriter has been taken to reveal some aspects of the general feeling of the theatre-goers toward the plays that were performed.

Given the prevailing racist attitude toward minorities in Britain at the time, it must have been an act of letting the cat among the pigeons for Devine to produce works of unknown African writers in the heart of London, a place that had been, until then, long used to theatre as the preserve of the upper middle-class. Additionally, the general public had conditioned itself to the rigours of certain conventions of theatre common in the drama of playwrights such as Shaw and Ibsen, which had been popular for some fifty years. This had been the kind of theatre that propagated the ideal text structure of a play as *pièce bien faîte* (a well-made play) with three acts where the first gives an exposition, the second a situation, and the last a denouément or discussion. The language common here was prose; overwrought verse was a thing of the Elizabethan past. This drama did have one clear hero (or anti-hero) whose travails on stage were an embodiment of a clearly discernible idea that could be traced as unfolding and developing to an expected resolution at the end of the play. The staging technique had been designed to be very realistic, since certain methods which tended to downplay the realistic presentation of life -- for example, the soliloquy and the aside -- were discarded as unrealistic. This is the theatre that propagated the idea of a box-set that concretized the imaginary fourth wall between life on stage and life outside, where the audience was. It actually sought to portray life as realistically and as best it could. Following the trend that had been set in other parts of the Western world like France, Germany and the United States of America after World War II, many playwrights of the New Wave theatre introduced a counter-wave to this realist tradition.

3.6 Summary

The foregoing discussion presents the views and feelings given by authors, and an analysis of newspaper reviews, on a few productions. The picture of Devine that emerges is that of a very strong and determined advocate for the New Wave theatre of the 1950s. His noble ethos and admirable vision for theatre can be seen in these productions. However, a slight element of favouritism is also displayed in his treatment of the young playwrights in his care, as can be seen in the contrasting promotions of *The Invention* and *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*. Both Wole Soyinka and John Arden were not so well received by the convention-seeking British theatre-goers. George Devine's reaction to these productions shows that he was more lenient with Arden than with Soyinka, especially because both *The Invention* and *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* were first staged in the same year (1959) and they elicited a similar kind of response from the theatre reviewers. The media was intolerant with them both and favoured Wesker instead.

The lingering question has been, "Why was Arden rejected?" It is very tempting to draw the conclusion that the "deviant" style, technique and general dramaturgy of many of Devine's disciples naturally shocked the theatre-going public. The new dramatists' strange and non-conformist theatrical style could not escape the label of artistic flabbiness. A man of Devine's level of enlightenment must have known that the hostility and scepticism of the theatre-critics was incited by the novelty of his experimental theatre. Additionally, the subject matter favoured by these Royal Court dramatists did not help their stand with the media-critics either. The New Wave dramatists had the audacity to address issues hitherto treated with less forthrightness. The only conclusion I can draw is that this society was not quite ready to swallow and digest this new brand of theatre. In an attempt to find a solution Jeffrey Roberts even makes the suggestion that when Devine presented this type of theatre to the public, the British theatre-goers should have first been given some re-education on topics like anti-illusionistic techniques, deviation from the well-made-play, the co-mingling of verse and prose (Wike 1995: 3), so that theatrical forms like expressionism, the epic theatre, and the absurd theatre would

not be met with such a qualified reception. Roberts's expectations are rather far-fetched. It is unclear how such a project could have been implemented without doing what Devine's protégés did, presenting the plays.

The hostility of the reviewers was directed against the innovative theatrical styles. Those playwrights who, unlike Osborne and Wesker, chose not to follow the conventional style of traditional realism would be criticised more harshly. This kind of reception was not confined to race and colour as most non-conventional experiments, such as the Brechtian theatre, the theatre of cruelty and the absurd theatre, were equally unenthusiastically received. It is therefore obvious that the "failure" of writers like Arden was due to the puzzlement with which their brand of plays was perceived, not necessarily the artistic failure of their craftsmanship as the newspapers would have the world believe. Similarly, Soyinka's perceived "failure" may, *inter alia*, be attributed to the fact that his audience was unacquainted with the kind of theatre he was presenting.

Another possibility is that *The Invention* was not a good piece of theatre after all. Neither the Royal Court, whose charge the young playwright was, nor the playwright himself granted the play a second chance. It may be surmised that Devine had nothing against the person of Soyinka, who continued with all his other activities at the Court till the end of his stay. Although very important, staging a play was not actually the only thing that Soyinka did at the Court. Explaining the way in which Devine's programme worked, Findlater reveals that:

> George Devine set his junior recruits to work for a time as assistants to him, spending time in the office and the workshops, getting to know about both stage management and theatre business .... Within a year or two he usually encouraged them to work outside the [Royal Court] theatre (Findlater 1981: 43).

Findlater's information suggests that even though *The Invention* had failed on stage, there were many other areas of theatre-making for which Soyinka was being groomed and which justified his continued participation at the theatre till the time

he decided to return to Nigeria.

I also suspect that Soyinka's "foreign" subject matter justified many a British theatre-goer, including Devine, in not giving the play any committed attention. It is true that drama depends on social contexts. The predicament of the English viewing public, in its inability insightfully to comment on an African play, is understood. For a moment, leaving aside certain underlying attitudes of the reviewer, one can appreciate that it is indeed unreasonable to expect of a foreign audience any fair criticism of an African playwright presenting an African play which is set in an African sociopolitical-cultural milieu. Esslin's perception provides relief and also waters down the feeling of unfair prejudice when he states:

> This dependence of drama on social contexts explains ... why so few French or German plays ever achieve success in the English-speaking world, and why, even within the English-speaking world, the great successes in the West End of London so often prove a dismal failure on Broadway and vice versa. It is very rare that the strangeness of social context is a factor in favour of an imported play (Beier 1979: 282).

The poor reception of foreign theatre in London discussed above may therefore be attributed to the fact that it is difficult fairly to evaluate foreign art. It is perhaps more advisable for the critic who has to comment on foreign art to admit his / her ignorance, than to assume a judgmental stance on something to which he or she can only relate through the language it is conveyed in, Esslin (1966) argues.

Esslin continues to suggest the principle that the wider appreciation of drama be achieved by evaluating such internal qualities as the universality of subject matter, the supreme craftsmanship of the play's construction and a great poetic expression that should equally appeal to all nationalities of all periods. Many reviews of Soyinka's plays appreciate both his poetic diction and the subject matter, which they often ascribe to renowned European literary figures. It is the craftsmanship of the play that some criticise, just as is the case with Arden. Despite the foreignness of subject matter and strange dramaturgy, even in these early plays Soyinka is

praised for being a highly gifted manipulator of poetic expression.

3.6.1 The Ethos of the Court

From the above discussion, it can be deduced that the English Stage Company was a theatre in search of a new identity, changing the old visage to embrace a more eclectic and "universal" character. In its pursuit of relevance in a fast changing Britain, The Royal Court Theatre sought to effect action programmes whose primary aim was to search for and groom new writers (and a new voice) for the theatre; it sought to conscientize the writer and the society about contemporary issues that theatre had to explore in the wake of the end of the Second World War. Furthermore, Devine was also keen on taking theatre beyond the confines of Britain, hence the distinct and continuous inclusion of plays of foreign playwrights such as Arthur Miller, Beckett, and Ionesco in the repertoire of the early production list at the Court (Browne 1975: 103-104). The kind of foreign theatre that Devine desired to blend into his project included a wide variety of traditions, such as can be seen from the array of foreign playwrights, whose works were shown in London and were seemingly instituted as canons to emulate. In fact, Devine openly embraced these non-English theatre-ideals like those of the German Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, who, though of Irish origin, wrote in French and English. Devine's sense of blending local British with "foreign"techniques was confined to Europe and Western English speaking countries like the United States. With the advantage of experience behind them, Brecht and Arthur Miller were welcomed as theatre-practitioners who were bringing something worthwhile to embellish the new British theatre with. It is unfortunate that the African dramatist whose people also had a rich -- though largely oral -- theatrical background, could not share with England -- at the same level as Brecht and Beckett -- what Yoruba theatre had to offer, essentially because at the time he was still participating in theatre as an amateur. It is therefore understandable why Soyinka spent many months researching the Nigerian oral theatre after leaving the Royal Court Theatre.

The Royal Court Theatre also accommodated the so-called English minorities by

opening "... its stage to the world [and] bringing in the English minorities, the Pakistanis, West Indians, and Africans with a whole series of plays ..."(Doty & Harbin 1990: 208). It seems that, in the opinion of the English, what Devine did for the so-called English minorities was very laudable. The Court became a home for exiled artists, fledgling artists, and artists with a new vision for theatre, where writers were at liberty to experiment at will with new forms of dramaturgy, style, technique, and new themes.

I reiterate in conclusion that those artists whose type of drama was novel were not positively welcomed by the British theatre-going public, but writers like Wesker were acceptable because their dramatic form was conventional. In summary, despite Devine's goodwill, the British media tended to patronise and label Soyinka as Nigerian, sometimes a "native", yet it failed to label Arthur Miller as American, Ionesco as French (born in Romania), and Wesker as British with a Jewish background. The media presented a very tough challenge both to Soyinka and other artists whose plays were perceived to be unorthodox. But the days at the Royal Court offered Wole Soyinka, then a burgeoning dramaturge, a very stimulating environment in which to practise living theatre.

End notes to Chapter 3.

1 The Aldermaston March was a popular annual demonstration against nuclear arms. It is said to have been imbued with festivity as well (Findlater 1981: 16).

2 The staging of Edward Bond's *Saved* on 11 November 1965 resulted in a general outcry by the public and the Lord Chamberlain's laying of a suit against the Royal Court Theatre for staging a drama that had "[gone] to the limits of brutality" (*The Sunday Telegraph*). During the hearing that Laurence Olivier was subpoenaed by the Lord Chamberlain to give testimony on the ethos of the Royal Court. John Arden and Arnold Wesker were part of the list of notable playwrights promoted by the Royal Court Theatre over the previous ten years, Olivier testified (Browne 1975: 62-65).

3 Accounts of Wole Soyinka's academic activities are not uniform. Although it is true that he finished his BA in English it is not fully established whether he finished his MA, which he certainly registered for, according to Gibbs (1995: 35).

4 The "Sunday Night without-décor", was an arrangement which enabled the producers to present the play first as a preview to a select audience in order to gauge how well it fared before it could be shown to a larger audience for more commercial gain and critical input. This also enabled the company to save money as it was much cheaper to run compared to a full production, £100 as opposed to £5, 000 for a full production (Findlater 1981: 42).

5 Ogbonna (1992: 76) remarks that *The Invention* was staged more than once (it ran from 1 to17 November). This assertion stands in contrast to the Royal Court records of the one evening given by both Taylor (1969: 105) and Findlater (1981: 5).

6 A copy of *The Invention* still in manuscript form is part of the collection I made in Bristol and can be found at the Unisa Library under the title, *A Collection of Unpublished Dramatic Works of Wole Soyinka,* accession number 1655479 and call number 822.914 SOYI.

7 The accounts of the date of creation of *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* vary. Concerning *The Swamp Dwellers*, for instance, Jones cites the year 1959, while Sullivan talks of September 1958 where this play was entered in the University of London Drama Competition. But what can be deduced is that these were written at Leeds and are perhaps part of the collection Gibbs (1995: 1) is referring to when he recounts that, when Soyinka went to London, he already had a substantial file of creative work.

[8] The role of a mask as a technique for representational characterization in Nigerian folk-theatre is explained at length by Götrick (1984: 108,109 and 110).

[9] This same technique is also used in *The Swamp Dwellers,* where the blind beggar from the north turns out to be more insightful than the ordinary characters who have no overt handicap.

[10] This analytical survey refers to about ten of the reviews of *The Lion and the Jewel,* though more than twenty are recorded as having been written. It is only the reviews that the Theatre Museum had in its archives that are directly referred to here. Similarly, there are about twice as many reviews for *The Invention,* but the museum could only archive these two.

[11] It has been difficult in some cases to distinguish whether a review comes from the *Daily Mirror* or the *Daily Mail* as the Theatre Museum personnel at times merely provided abbreviations of the newspaper title, such as *DM* or *ST.* However, there are some cases where the entry is made in full.

[12] Brecht himself is said to have borrowed some of his techniques, such as the absence of scenery and the freedom of scene-change, from the Elizabethans and also from the Kabuki plays of the Japanese theatre (Innes 1992: 87,121-122).

[13] The Jewish Antifascist Committee was formed in April 1942 for serving the interests of Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet military through the media and personal contacts with other Jews abroad. The poet, Itsik Feffer (Monty's Itzack Pheffer) was one of the prominent members (http://metalb.unc.edu/pjones/russian/jewish.html).

CHAPTER FOUR

From the English Court to the African Streets: The Nineteen-Sixties Mask Theatre in Nigeria

> **I think there are all kinds of sources reflected in these [plays] ... 'Grafting is an Ancient Art' is one of my papers in which I look at the way in which [Soyinka brings] together different traditions, a bit like a gardener bringing one bit of plant and grafting it together with another bit of plant (Gibbs 1996).**

4.1 Introduction

At the Royal Court Theatre, Wole Soyinka had experienced, among other things, the function of theatre as an outlet for one's beliefs. There he had seen theatre operate as a vehicle for expressing ideals and views on major social issues. As illustrated in Chapter 3, Soyinka's encounter with Devine's Royal Court Theatre influenced his dramaturgy. This experience seems to have further sharpened the keen dexterity of the young playwright in many ways. Being in Europe at that particular moment in the history of theatre presented a very opportune time for a budding playwright like Soyinka. At the end of his self-styled apprenticeship in England, Soyinka went back to Nigeria. This was the year 1960, significantly the year of his own country's independence from British colonial rule. The climate in Nigeria was effervescent with preparations for independence. As everyone's hopes and dreams were revived with this charged political atmosphere, young writers like Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark, and Wole Soyinka certainly felt even more drawn toward capturing the climate of the moment in their works. The interests of this chapter, therefore, are the engagements of this young playwright in theatre during this exciting period of national rebirth. Primarily, I attempt

to ascertain whether the activities at the Royal Court Theatre had any role to play in the theatre work with which Soyinka occupied himself on his return home. I shall therefore look at the practical applications of the "theory" that Soyinka had acquired from his sojourn abroad before he returned home as a burgeoning playwright and theatre practitioner.

By the year 1960, Soyinka had moved towards balancing the two-pronged nature of his academic and professional training. He had left Nigeria in 1954 to pursue a purely academic course of study in English. But his immense love for theatre drew him to engage in theatre activities while a student at Leeds and it eventually lured him to the Royal Court at the end of his academic training. Hence he preferred to defer his Master of Arts studies (Gibbs 1986: 31; Morell 1975: 94) so as to strengthen his knowledge of practical stagecraft.

At the beginning of the 1960s the young artists who left the Royal Court had a mélange of literary cultures gleaned from both the university lecture-halls and the theatres of England and Europe. This pool of experience included the knowledge of the well-made-play, the Irish myths that were akin to his own traditional lore, Beckett's theatre of the absurd, the "angry" theatre of George Devine, Brecht's political theatre for the proletariat, the ancient Italian *commedia dell'arte* theatre, and the agitprop theatres that took performances to the street. All these theatre styles were deftly endowed with Soyinka's own individual style in the plays that he wrote after the 1950s. This chapter seeks to verify how the playwright put into use this technical and academic knowledge on returning home.

In Nigeria, Wole Soyinka had been already preceded by his fame in the staging of *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* at the Arts Theatre, a local theatre based in Ibadan. As an emerging high profile young playwright, he was commissioned to produce a play that would celebrate the event of a nation's rite of passage: independence. The chosen play was *A Dance of the Forests*, the independence production of which was stopped before it brought about much embarrassment to all

the citizens of Nigeria, particularly the organising officials, who wished to please the British. These officials had created the entire ambience of the celebrations to honour Britain in her bloodless handover of power to Nigeria (Soyinka 1995: 64-65). Maren explains that not staging *A Dance of the Forests* was a lucky escape because, contrary to the opinion of the team that selected it without knowing what it was all about, this "work struck a discordant note in the Independence suite [because it was] subversive, cynical, iconoclastic [and] it mocked the glories of the past and was pessimistic about the future" (Soyinka 1995: 64-67). This was no setback for Soyinka, whose main desire was to set up a theatre that would capture the passing experiences of his society, an idea one can safely attribute to Devine's workshop theatre and Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, which Devine admired. In a similar fashion, Soyinka put together a troupe of actors under the name "The 1960s Masks." This was a cast of over thirty members composed of an established group of Igbo *atilogwu* dancers, civil servants, teachers, and even company workers. It was a roving theatre which was composed of varied amateur actors. This group had much promise for Soyinka, but it gradually dissolved in the 1970s and was replaced with the more permanent Orusin Theatre Company, which Soyinka had trained over time to take over from the original troupe. The following are some of the plays performed in different media, including the streets of Nigeria: *My Father's Burden* (1960), *Before the Black Out,* featuring thirteen sketches (1964/65), *The Detainee*, (1964/1965), and *The House of Banigeji* (1964).

There appear to be two groupings of Soyinka's post-Royal Court works. First there are the longer plays like *The Lion and the Jewel,* which, for easy differentiation, I have put under Group (a) and have labelled "Formal Theatre: the Major Works". The second group, Group (b), comprises shorter works such as *My Father's Burden* and sketches. These I have decided to call "Street Theatre: Sketches and Revues." I have chosen to follow this generic grouping in my analysis, and very little time is spent on the major works because they have already been discussed very well by many other scholars. So the analysis includes:

- **group (a)** Formal Theatre - the Major Works:

The Swamp Dwellers (1963)
The Lion and the Jewel (1963)

- **group (b)** Street Theatre - Sketches and Revues:

My Father's Burden (1960)
The Night of the Hunted (1962)
The House of Banigeji (1962)
Before the Blackout (comprises thirteen sketches; 1964/65)
The Detainee (radio) (1964/65) [1].

4.2 Previous Research

Before undertaking the review, I wish briefly to clarify the process of arranging the material in this sub-section. I encountered problems in putting the various plays into their supposed dates of performance and / or publication. As happened before, compartmentalising the works of Soyinka as belonging to one period or another proved a very arduous and self-defeating task even in this chapter. Soyinka is seldom bound by space and time. For instance, even though he went back home in 1960, his works never left the Royal Court and other parts of London. This section should be dealing with the plays that were not part of the 1950s "Devine experience", but were staged after that Royal Court period. And, naturally, anyone would expect this to be in Nigeria in the 1960s, where the playwright returned from London. Sadly, this turns out not to be the case. The difficulty arises when it is discovered that the first works that were staged away from the direct input of Devine appeared concurrently with the Devine / London experience as discussed in the preceding chapter. It is in fact difficult comfortably to call *The Lion and The Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* strictly post-Royal Court plays when they premiered at the Arts Theatre in Ibadan at the same time *The Invention* was being staged in London's Royal Court Theatre. Another factor is that although a play may be performed at a given time and venue, its date of composition may not always coincide with the time and place of performance. All the above notwithstanding, I will analyse both *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Swamp Dwellers* with the drama that first came out in Nigeria in 1960.

I experienced the same difficulty in categorising *The House of Banigeji*[2] which appears in the Royal Court programme on the night *The Invention* was performed in 1959, yet it is formally listed as part of the 1960s works (Gibbs 1986). In the case of *The House of Banigeji*, it is difficult to say whether this Royal Court listing was the first appearance of the exact play that was to emerge in Nigeria, or whether it was a draft of the play or even just a title that the writer was infatuated with and gave to some other pieces of work before settling it on this play later[3]. All that can be deduced here is that dating Wole Soyinka's work, or any writer's for that matter, is not a definite and conclusive exercise, as the creative process is a long and dynamic task. In short, whatever the dating history of some of the texts, the primary object of this work -- to study the dramatist's theatre and its general reception back in Nigeria after the Royal Court -- remains.

4.3 Wole Soyinka and Theatre in Africa

It would be naïve to assume that Soyinka's establishment of theatre in Nigeria was a novel experience for the continent of Africa. To believe that having been tutored in Britain he was now coming to give Africa a new experience, like writing information on a blank *tabula rasa*, would be undermining the massive documentation of Africa's, and Nigeria's own ancient and thriving culture of theatre (Götrick 1984). In African studies it is common knowledge that Africans have always had a strong history of theatre, even in pre-colonial times as the article on orature, oral lore, and modern drama by Zodwa Motsa confirms (Motsa 2000 [4]). Nigeria, for example, had a very vibrant culture of public performance, what others prefer to call ritual drama[5]. Therefore, in his pursuits of modern literary studies and the short experience he had at the Royal Court, Soyinka must have realised that there was a need to study, or perhaps revisit, the neglected branch of dramatic art, indigenous African theatre. My conjecture is borne out by discussions held with one of his contemporaries, Abiola Irele (Appendix B1), who reveals that Wole Soyinka's association with the Irish dramatists that were using their own traditional influence on their English works awakened an interest that may have already been dormant in him. It brought to the fore his desire to delve into

his own cultural base to embellish the dramaturgy of his plays with Yoruba traditional theatre artefacts, even though such plays were written in the English language. *The Road* (1960) is a good example of this practice of using an admixture of technical devices both from Africa and Europe. Alain Ricárd's explanation also reveals a little more of this blending of culturally diverse theatrical elements in these words:

> Ricárd — So I read Soyinka and I had read Synge before. I was really struck by [Soyinka's] use of the universe, the creation, poetry, and myths -- all these were fused together.
>
> ... then I was attracted by the Irish dramatists' capacity for dialect, use of language, myths, village life -- the sheer capacity to create a very strong universe centred upon the village. ... and I felt Soyinka was exactly in that mould.
>
> So I am talking to you as someone who is in comparative literature. You also get Pirandello, an Italian dramatist. So these people have been able to write about village life, giving it a mythical dimension, a universal dimension. And in French, very few people have been able to do that. I came from that perspective when I noted the similarities (Appendix B3).

One can deduce that it was not just Devine and protest theatre that Soyinka added to his repertoire; other domains like the literary aspects of Irish drama which lured him toward his own indigenous oral base enriched the dramatic idiom that he wanted to create. This line of thinking supports Ricárd's opinion on the possible reasons for Devine's act of not encouraging the young Soyinka to stay on and be assimilated into the English theatre fraternity (Appendix B3). It is therefore easy to understand why, on his return to Nigeria, Soyinka chose to do intense research into African traditional drama, a venture which saw him travel the length and breadth of the country studying and recording rituals, traditional festivals, and masquerades that had a bearing on dramatic arts (Moore 1971: 9). He could have easily settled for a comfortable job as a lecturer in the English Department as many would have done. It seems that after the European experience the young Soyinka was still eager to be enriched by the yet untapped local reservoir of theatre art. This comes out more clearly in his televised discussion with students and staff of the School of Drama at Penthouse Theater [*sic*]

in the United States in 1973:

> Soyinka: I'll give a brief history. I returned to Nigeria for the first time in four and half years in 1960. My last year and a half in England, when I should have been working for my higher degree, I spent out of preference, in the theater [*sic*] in London. I was just sitting in on rehearsals, being a play-reader for the Royal Court Theatre, and twice doing experimental productions on my own, both at the Royal Court Theatre and at the Annual Students' Drama Festival for which I got together a company and we worked up a little production. ... Oh, there was a third [play we produced] which there is simply no script of. It was a kind of semi-political improvisation on the Hola Camp theme ... we did some kind of living theater improvisation around it. Anyway, with this [theatre] background the first thing I wanted to do when I got back to Nigeria was to get my own company together (Morell 1975: 94).

With this varied cross-cultural repertoire of theatre and drama, Wole Soyinka wanted to strengthen his artistic base to be able to have a rich resource from which to create the kind of theatre he had envisioned. The argument that Soyinka's best comes out in the act of blending and mixing is further supported by another of his contemporaries, James Gibbs (1996), who analogically calls it the art of grafting plants by the gardener:

> Gibbs: Well, I think that when you look at [the *commedia dell'arte*][6] you will find that it's popular theatre. ... It uses stereotypes, it uses masks, and I think Soyinka found that there were parallels. And he liked cultural coincidences; he liked to find links between things -- I think he was influenced by Shakespeare in various ways and he read a lot of Shakespeare. He did a world drama course with George Wilson Knight and you can see the kinds of things that Knight taught in *The Golden Labyrinth.* He looked at classical, Elizabethan, and contemporary drama. Knight also taught a course on Ibsen that Soyinka took. He was preparing for exams and he was a sort of person that read and reacted, he didn't just absorb; so we should find him reacting to those traditions.
>
> (*Pause*) So he responded to things.
>
> So -- um -- then you can look at the plays that he wrote, you can look at *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Swamp Dwellers* and

> I think there are all kinds of sources reflected in these -- um -- also look at *The Dance of the Forests* ... I have written on that. "Grafting is an Ancient Art", is one of my papers in which I look at the way in which he brought together different traditions a bit like a gardener bringing one bit of plant and grafting it together with another bit of plant. It's a huge topic and it goes on, every time he writes a new play you think uh ... I have seen that, there is a bit of that or that, so he's responding very widely to a whole range of influences (Appendix B2).

Gibbs's remarks confirm that Soyinka is a craftsman who creates and recreates from a wide variety of sources. Unlike some of the British theatre reviewers who tend to emphasise unacknowledged "poaching" from European art, Gibbs points to the wide spectrum of influences in Soyinka's plays. In summary, I am persuaded to believe that Soyinka's experiences in Europe before 1960 and in Nigeria after 1960 were part of an ongoing learning process that he allowed himself to experience in his quest for a more eclectic immersion in the dramatic arts.

With the upsurge of corruption in the newly-established Nigerian government, disquiet arose amongst many Nigerians and Soyinka used the voice that he knew was most effective, theatre, to register his feelings and opinions about such matters. This political climate brought the kind of reaction in Wole Soyinka that made him institute a theatre of commitment, what Ricárd sagely calls the "guerrilla theatre", which is incidentally also very Brechtian in its attempt to influence people's political views and thought, as well as similar to the "poor theatre" associated with Jerzy Grotowski. As has been discussed, Soyinka uses this theatre to respond to situations, particularly sociopolitically challenging circumstances. His own admission, in one of a series of interviews after he had received the Nobel Prize for Literature, endorses both James Gibbs's and Abiola Irele's observations thus:

> Soyinka: I have a sixth sense for tyranny, I can see it coming.
>
> *Eddie Iroh:* *Are you a socialist?*
>
> Soyinka: I have never described myself by any name -- but corruption in Nigeria decided my socialist writings.

Eddie 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 et cetera. 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 gaol.

Another Interviewer: *Do you respond to politics as an artist or as a citizen?*

Soyinka: Definitely as a citizen. ... 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 ... (Appendix C1).

These comments show that Wole Soyinka as an individual feels heavily obligated to react to social injustices, perhaps owing to his personality, his upbringing, and the general Yoruba background. In the same vein and using the same interview, Wole Soyinka sheds some light on his alleged socialist image. He alludes to *Kongi's Harvest*, a play which can be perceived as an outcry against dictatorship of any form, of which the film clip (Appendix C1) shows the playwright himself cast as the notorious dictator. Soyinka's discussion with the interviewer further hints at the connection between literary art and social commitment, a topic which will be pursued further in the last chapter of this research. In short, this foregoing section serves to establish that Wole Soyinka writes in reaction to a prevailing situation and that his art is a kaleidoscope of the cultural experiences that he has had. He does not necessarily follow a linear approach in creative art for example, the well-made play the British media would perhaps have preferred him to create. To explore his post-Royal Court activities, the following discussion first focuses on those plays categorised as the major plays.

4.4 The Début of Wole Soyinka's Theatre

The primary concern at this point is to find out the ways in which Wole Soyinka's