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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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acknowledge and welcome innovative experimental work. It was a similar kind of discontent that was displayed toward John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance,* which was produced at the Court during the same season in which *The Invention* premiered. It looks as though a play ending in a clear statement was what reviewers perceived to be one of the marks of successful artistry, as comments Christopher Innes on the reviews in *The Times*, 23 October 1959:

> ... the almost uniformly unfavourable reviews of the first production of *Serjeant Musgrave* [1959] were largely due to incomprehension. The allegorical elements led critics to expect an explicit moral. Since this was denied by Arden's ambiguous conclusion, the critics concluded that the play was [about] 'the brutalizing effects of war': a statement they [then] dismissed as cliché (Innes 1992: 144).

It is indeed difficult to pronounce on the goodness or badness of workmanship when dealing with an experimental and innovative piece such as *The Invention,* because one lacks the exact theoretical frame Soyinka based this play on. My own impression is that in *The Invention* Soyinka was still finding his style in theatre. He had clearly identified the theme of social importance, racism, but it seems he was still experimenting with the proper theatrical technique through which to present the idea. In this early play, Soyinka managed to capture the audience by his unique use of language more than practical, visible techniques, but he was unable to win the hearts of those that were not accustomed to his style of dramaturgy, probably because the style itself was still largely amateur and experimental.

The *Daily Mirror* (2 November 1959) is more probing in its response. Alluding to H.G. Wells and his futuristic novels, the *Daily Mirror* renames the play "A Wellsian 1976" and erroneously calls it *The Inventor.* The review gives the plot summary quite accurately, and instead of focusing on the playwright's emotional composition as does *The Times*, the *Daily Mirr*or makes an objective literary appraisal of *The Invention.* The reviewer boldly points to the overt influence of George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells (implied in the article's title), and Aldous Huxley on what it calls a "... heavy racial and political satire." Furthermore, the acting is noted to be "...

efficient, the best work coming from Roy Hepworth." Comments on the poetry renditions that preceded the play are no different from those stated in *The Times* in their unobtrusive racial slurs such as the "brief songs of *native African outlook,* delivered by *coloured and white* soloists [which were] received in the main with more politeness than comprehension" (emphasis added) (*Daily Mirror* 2 November 1959). Given the historical setting, it is understandable why the media would use such a parlance, which would be very offensive today. However, this review also exhibits the indifferent attitude of the British reviewers toward this foreign art.

The dovetailing remark that this work is supported by the Arts Council for laudable motives because, "after all, this theatre is notoriously an experimental centre", spoils the hitherto objective academic tone that opens the article; it insinuates that works from this theatre need not always be taken seriously because they, are more often than not, experiments. The description of the Court as "notorious" suggests that the reviewer does not think much of the experimental works that are staged by the Court. By the end of the article there is very little difference in tone between the appraisal in *The Times* and that in the *Daily Mirror.*

It is difficult to overlook the negative tone that glosses these two reviews. Although Soyinka's craftsmanship with words is praised, his dramatic and theatrical abilities are subjected to their fair share of unencouraging and sometimes racist criticism. It is disturbing to see the myopia of some of the British reviewers where a piece of art must always be seen from the European reference point. Where credit must be given, the reviewer tries to look for one European influence or another such as Wells, Ibsen, or Shaw, as in the case in point. Did the reviewers make no attempt to search anywhere else beyond their familiar terrain because these are the only reference points they could use for a drama presented in the English language?

Soyinka's strange dramatic idiom must have presented itself as fair game to the London reviewers who appeared to be generally inhospitable in their reception of premiere plays. The few examples below serve to illustrate the point. Osborne's

play, *Look Back in Anger*, for instance, "... did not score an immediate hit with the public or the press; several derisive reviewers attempted to give it an instant burial", Findlater (1981: 27) states. In June 1956 for instance, one Anthony Merryn wrote:

> John Osborne, in *Look Back in Anger*, has certainly succeeded, if he has done little else, in putting on to the stage one of the most irritatingly boorish, verbose and bitter young men that ever exasperated an audience. ... [It is] as if the author had tried to cram into it all that he ever suffered, felt and kept bottled up in his young life (Roberts 1988: 61).

Another unidentified reviewer damned the play as "not original in form and presentation" (Roberts 1988: 67). Of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which was staged in May 1956, Peter Bull reminds us of the London reviewers' comments like the:

> ... cries of 'Rubbish', 'It's a disgrace', 'Take it off', 'Disgusting!', 'What do you think you are doing?' [which came] wafting over the footlights ... [accompanied by] the noise of people slamming seats and crashing through exit doors ...(Roberts 1988: 58).

In December 1961, Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* was also dismissed as degeneracy. About that experience, Albee reminisces, "I was a little startled when one critic went so far as to say, 'We don't need this peculiar kind of American decadence because we already have Harold Pinter'" (Roberts 1988: 136). Albee is convinced this hostility to new plays was largely characteristic of the British reviewer because both in Berlin, where *The Zoo Story* first premiered, and in New York, the play had received good reviews. It is in the face of this that Albee laments, "The London reviews were my first unfortunate ones" (Roberts 1988: 137).

Confirming the aversion of British theatre-reviewers to new stage works and the poor reception of his play in London, Arthur Kopit, another American playwright reveals, "I can't think of a half-way decent American play that *has* been received cordially in Great Britain in the last five years" (Roberts 1988: 141).

Keeping this conservatism of the London media in mind, it is not very surprising to find that their reviews would not be sensitive to the use of racially pejorative diction when it came to reviewing an African play, something even more foreign than an English play from America. The reviewers' attitude of subtle discrimination against those that are different from themselves may be an unconscious expression of what goes on in the larger British society from which these reviewers came. There are certain indicators pointing to the fact that the wider British society in which Soyinka first practised his serious theatrical works had racially discriminatory tendencies toward blacks, albeit with subtlety. For example, the Christmas week narrative (Appendix A5) which Soyinka wrote to his friends in Nigeria while he was still a student at Leeds attests to this conjecture. Furthermore, recounting his experiences in the interview he gave when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, Soyinka admits that, " ... it was here in England, in the 1950s, that I faced the most raw brunt of racism with bus passengers, landlords and landladies, and shop stewards" (Appendix C1). Soyinka was consequently inspired to compose the poem, "Telephone Conversation". Wole Soyinka's revelation, "No Nigerian that I knew took it lying down, least of all the West Indians" (Appendix, C1), gives a glimpse of the reaction of those segregated against and thus explains Soyinka's decision to stage a play that exposed the plight of black South Africans in the hands of a racist white government in South Africa. This in itself must have been a very serious act of courage, because the play showed other super-powers' support of this hideous policy -- the British and the Americans. The decision to do this production was a very daring act indeed given the attitude of the reviewers, which Soyinka, a student of drama, must have known about.

Soyinka's decision to send the larger part of his collection of plays to Nigeria, instead of continuing where *The Invention* debacle had left its mark, begs a few questions. For instance, one wonders if, among other considerations, it was not an act of self-protection from the difficult British media to try a different audience at home. It is, in fact, very tempting to entertain such thoughts. However, such easy assumptions are challenged by Moore's account that at the time Soyinka had a good

collection of plays in his hands which he was ready to try out anywhere. Furthermore some of his plays could not be staged in England because of casting problems, so taking his plays to Nigeria may have been the most practical thing to do.

3.4.4 Soyinka's Reviews Some Six Years Later

Having premiered more successfully at home -- as discussed in Chapter 4 -- Soyinka returned to England, as if to give the British reviewers yet another chance to adjudicate him and perhaps prove their own fairness in recording unbiased judgement. It was five to six years later when some of his early plays were staged in England for the first time. It is quite clear from the response Soyinka drew this second time that by now he had earned himself a respectable place in British theatre circles. Whereas he had attracted the meagre response of less than five newspapers earlier in 1959, this time around a total of over twenty different newspapers responded to the Royal Court's production of *The Lion and the Jewel.* Another obvious difference is the length of the commentaries. The reviews are much longer and richer than they were before. Reflection on the responses to *The Lion and the Jewel,* performed in 1966 at The Royal Court, and very briefly, *The Road,* performed a year earlier at the Theatre Royal in Stratford illustrates the point.

Jeremy Kingston of *Punch* (21 December 1966) still makes similar conventional assumptions to those of most of his colleagues half a decade earlier. Like his predecessors, Kingston continues to look for an endless list of European influences on African art of note. Questioning the playwright's ingenuity to create, Kingston cites a long list of probable European influences behind Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* but sorely overlooks the most probable progenitor, African Yoruba folklore. This attitude is reflected in such statements as "... the wily man who pretends to be impotent in order to win a pretty maid is a character almost as old as the art of storytelling. He crops up in Greek comedy, the Decameron, the Arabian Nights ...". Offering a good précis of the story which highlights Sidi, Kingston remarks on the

playwright's linguistic abilities and acknowledges that the story is adeptly recounted in good, symbolic language, but he challenges the verisimilitude of some of Soyinka's characters as he remarks:

> This light-hearted story is ingeniously told in the direct language that contains many vivid similes and abstract nouns scarcely at all [*sic*] except when the author makes sympathetic fun of the schoolteacher in love by having him speak as though he had learned English from Elizabethan sonnets. *Whether or not the Yoruba people actually talk as colourfully as they do in this play*, it is Mr. Soyinka's skill that gives them such liveliness on the stage and presents them all, old and young, devious or simple, so affectionately (emphasis added) (*Punch* 21 December 1966).

Overall, Kingston's appraisal has a sense of objectivity; it acknowledges the quality of the mime, dance and song, and it also appreciates the acting abilities of the cast which, though not perfect, are not a complete failure either.

The opening remarks of Felix Barker of *The Evening News* (13 December) are noteworthy for their racist slant and attack on the play's badness of taste. Barker states, "We were in for a Nigerian play with an all-coloured cast, *The Lion and the Jewel*, by Wole Soyinka, and if the director of the English Stage Company thinks it is a masterpiece that is just too bad." Even though such racial references are excusable within the historical setting where they were made, one would never find any phrase like "Arden's *The Waters of Babylon,* with an all-white cast."

Hereafter, Barker's remarks reveal that he does not see eye to eye with O'Donovan, the producer; he cannot even relate to the subject matter of the play which, in his conviction, is an imitation of some European work. The comment:

> To find a playwright today beating an African drum about female emancipation is rather like encountering a modern Ibsen black-face, and while Mr Soyinka's play has some occasional felicities it does not go very deep. It lacks dramatic excitement and is unconvincingly acted by an obviously inexperienced cast

shows the British reviewers to be so parochial in view as to believe that the subject

matter of women's emancipation, as championed by Lakunle in this play, is a sole monopoly of western Europe, that only writers like Ibsen have the right to address these issues in dramatic art.

The comments of the anonymous critic from the *Illustrated London News* (24 December) are even more acerbic. The reviewer registers his disappointment with an unidentified newspaper for daring to rank *The Lion and the Jewel* not far too short of a masterpiece. His disbelief comes out very clearly in the statement:

> Could it have looked like that from the front rows? Glumly, I doubt it. What I saw and heard from the middle of the house was a mild and artless Nigerian comedy, with an occasional good line, a few dances, and a cast -- endearing, I agree -- that offered charm instead of technique. ... these enterprising visitors and their dramatist, Wole Soyinka, have still much to learn. ... Maybe we shall watch their progress on later visits to the Court.

Although responding five months after the production of *The Lion and the Jewel,* the unidentified reviewer of *Queen* (4 May 1967) also works very hard to find European influences on Soyinka's comedy. Even though this reviewer can see the remarkable style of infusing irony from language in situation, he quickly reverts to the patronizing view of drawing parallels and jaundiced comparisons between African literature and the "classical" (implicitly European). Consequently he perceives the presence of more parallels between Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel,* particularly in the dramatis personae, plot schemes, and the vehicle of satire as he explains:

> This could almost be a scene out of Ben Jonson and in many ways the Bale, the Lion of the title, is like the Fox in *Volpone.* ... But it is not just the stratagems that are similar: in both cases we have a piece of play-acting inside the play ... But altogether it is a sloppy production, which overdoes the horse-play and fails to make up its mind between the two possibilities of giving us the play straight as a period comedy and sending it up. Sent up sufficiently, it might have been very funny.

Amidst all these negative reviews and subtle innuendos of unacknowledged adaptations can still be found the neutral and almost non-committal vantage point of Phillip Hope-Wallace of *The Guardian.* Offering quite a solid précis of the plot,

Hope-Wallace does caution the producer to improve on the acting and the general production of the play. This middle ground is also found in two other reviews provided by *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Times,* both of 13 December. W.A Darlington of *The Daily Telegraph* presents a view that tries to stay objective while it struggles to avoid certain racist remarks like "a Negro" company. Darlington has obviously done some background reading on Wole Soyinka, since he acknowledges that the writer is a prolific Nigerian dramatist doing remarkable pioneer work for the theatre in his own country. He also offers more informed comments on the theme, the plot, and major characters, further praising the dramatist for his attractive comic sense. Darlington's minor dissatisfaction comes with the actors's dialogue: he points out that the actors are "completely at home with song and dance but a little stilted in dialogue." About the drama as a whole, Darlington remarks:

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

Actors such as Lionel Ngakane (Baroka), Femi Euba (Lakunle), Hannah Bright-Taylor (Sidi) and Jumoke Debayo (Sadiku) are duly praised for their good acting.

Similarly, the unidentified reviewer of *The Sunday Times* generally offers a friendlier and more respectful review, though not so overly pampering. He points out the naïve and childlike nature of some scenes, some charming while others are ribald and true to human nature. Like many of his compatriots, this reviewer feels Soyinka lacks originality as he declares that " ... the plot is obviously reminiscent of *The Country Wife."* The reviewer continues to give forthright advice on the presentation of some aspects of theme, stating that:

> ... the social ideas on which it is founded -- that the upper classes are essentially superior to the meritocracy, which is contemptible, mean, self-righteous and cowardly -- need a subtler touch than the author appears to give (*The Sunday Times*).

He then takes to task the director's seeming ignorance of the glaring fact that the play is not original. "Its director Desmond O'Donovan is too intelligent not to know that *The Lion and the Jewel* is both derivative and reactionary, but perhaps the Royal Court audiences will be less clear- sighted", the reviewer complains. It seems that even this appraisal still reflects the view that the British art reservoir is being plundered by foreign artists without acknowledgement.

Like most British theatre reviewers, this critic also makes too much of the perceived lack of originality in Wole Soyinka's play. If, for argument's sake, it were proven that *The Lion and the Jewel* was indeed derived from Wycherly's *The Country Wife* or from any number of plays by Ibsen, Shaw, Ben Jonson, or Shakespeare, what was O'Donovan to do to confirm his intelligence of awareness? What crime would Soyinka and the hundreds of other playwrights have committed by translating, adapting, or being influenced indirectly by their forebears? One would expect that critics who have behind them a very long history of the literary arts would know better than Soyinka's reviewers seem to. Adaptation, borrowing, and being influenced by predecessors and contemporaries are not such heinous crimes in literature. The presence of influences from other writers should not have been viewed so negatively by the reviewing media, as all works of literature have literary parents and grandparents. It is true, as Peter Brook (1968) explains elaborately, that the vital role of the critic in serving the theatre is to hound out incompetence. The difficulty of making theatre must be accepted. Brook further clarifies that the task of being a critic "... is ... if truly practised, the hardest medium of all: it is merciless, there is no room for error, or for waste" (Brook 1968: 31). However, I am of the opinion that the writer, the play, the production, and the critic should all form an unbroken chain to make art meaningful. The critic should be part of the whole and not perceive himself or herself as an outsider whose sole task is to pontificate on the art that is part of his / her profession.

A long awaited break from this barrage of criticism comes with Peter Lewis's article

entitled "As the Bard Himself Might Have Put it" (*The Daily Mail,* 13 December). Lewis's review differs from the majority of his contemporaries' by presenting a very positive view of the production. Lewis draws our attention to a style of diction that is very reminiscent of Shakespeare and somewhat malapropistic in this comedy, such as Sidi's answer, "Tell your lord that I will none of him". What Lewis is probably remarking on is the amusement of the English theatre-goer at hearing an African village girl of the 1950s talking like a character in a play by Shakespeare. Lewis continues to motivate his overall analysis very convincingly and he lauds the talent of craftsmanship in genuine humour, dance, and mime, and the general wit of the characters as he explains:

> This Nigerian play ... leaves the critic a little uncertain of his duty. ... I much enjoyed the freshness and high spirits of the cast and the novel experience of laughing at genuine African humour expressed in witty character studies. ... There is also wry humour and some amusing performances especially from Lionel Ngakane, as the hairy old chief. O'Donovan's production includes some most agreeable drum dancing.

The tone of this article is more positive than some of the foregoing reviews. Lewis achieves an objective balance in not glossing over Soyinka's shortcomings, as can be seen from his remark:

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

Lewis's discussion extends to the nature of Soyinka's theme and setting, calling them "unusual" and concluding that this unusual kind of the drama does befit an English Stage Company because "the unusual is what the English Stage Company should be about."

Finally, yet another positive review comes from the unnamed critic of *The Times* (13 December) who acknowledges this to be Soyinka's third play to be staged in

London. From the outset, this reviewer states that "... this work alone is enough to establish Nigeria as the most fertile new source of English-speaking drama." For the first time, there is an inverse and favourable comparison of Soyinka with other -- supposedly more recognised -- playwrights like John Millington Synge. The reviewer points out very clearly that to compare Soyinka with Synge of the Western Isles would not do Soyinka any justice as he is "... dealing not only with a rich folk-material, but with the impact of the modern world on tribal customs [and] to find a parallel of his work in English drama [one] would have to go back to the Elizabethans." Furthermore, this reviewer has obviously taken the trouble to do some background reading on Soyinka. He also ably offers very informed comment on central themes in the writer's other works (*The Interpreters* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*). Praising Soyinka for being a highly sophisticated craftsman, the review also perceives *The Lion and the Jewel* as a praiseworthy comedy and satire, stating that:

> In this superb comedy *The Lion and the Jewel* the butt is a "progressive" village school teacher, but this time the satire is kindlier. ... And nowhere does Soyinka's technique show more brilliantly than in his ability to include extensive group mimes and dances ... without in any way digressing from the main action.

This review also offers a taut précis of the plot from the point of view of Lakunle, the misguided proponent of Western civilisation; it praises Soyinka's ingenuity of plot, of the rich, expressive range of speech idioms and it also praises O'Donovan, the director, for his originality of scene production. There is no trace of condescension as is common in most of the reviews. The point of interest is the sharply contrasting views of reviewers on the characteristic of the laden plot structure. Many negative reviews hinge on the complaint that Soyinka takes too long to say what he wants to say, while *The Times* appraises his craftsmanship in being able to control the main action-line and not lose focus. The quality of individual performance, especially that of Lionel Ngakane (as Baroka) and Hannah Bright-Taylor (as Sidi), is warmly appraised.

The overall impression created by the above commentary is that there is a collage of both good and damning reviews on this African playwright, as is expected in evaluating any new play. Generally, there is more negative criticism of Soyinka. However the broad picture shows attitudes that range from the very condescending, sometimes cynical, to those lightly peppered with the odd positive remarks and those that are openly positive, bearing very encouraging, probing, and at times, quite erudite remarks. This tone is actually not much different from that which prevailed in the reviews of *The Road* a year earlier -- not included in this discussion. Looking at the attitude of the media toward Soyinka's plays staged in England, one finds a slight change from 1959 to 1966. Although the theatre-going public still has those people who believe every artist is striving to measure up to "English standards" as the only yardstick of good and acceptable literature, there are other reviewers who acknowledge good workmanship, foreign as it may be. As they criticise any non-British work, some of the British critics' lenses are more ready to look only for traces of European influence, and failing to find this in any satisfactory degree, they quickly criticise the playwright for his inability to measure up to this or that externally imposed mentor. They make no effort to explore other possible influences that may originate from other cultures not immediately associated with Britain.

There is no denying that Soyinka was indeed influenced by European art. My, argument however, is that it is not only Europe shaped his drama, he was influenced by a rich background of theatre forms from Nigeria, a point the reviewers did not explore but quickly branded anything they could not understand as poor workmanship. I share Brook's view on the critic and theatre, which the London reviewers are seemingly not putting into practice, that:

> It is important that [the critic] has an image of how a theatre could be in his [*sic*] community and should revise this image around each experience he receives. ... [As an insider, he should be] plunging into meetings, talking, discussing, watching and intervening; ... putting his hands on the medium and attempting to work it himself to establish vital contact [but] not connivance with theatre (Brook 1968: 32, 33).

Those reviewers who are dissatisfied with certain aspects of a production should, after stating their point of criticism, also propose a redemptive alternative that the theatre makers may try.

3.4.5 John Arden's Royal Court Plays

The challenge faced by innovative playwrights of the late 1950s like Wole Soyinka, Edward Bond, and John Arden was how to make a breakthrough with new theatre techniques in a society that was not familiar with such techniques. As demonstrated above, the London theatre-going public was not very welcoming of foreignness of art. A good illustration is the reception of Genet's *The Blacks* of which Brook relates that:

> In Paris [,] witnessed by intellectuals, the play was baroque literary entertainment; in London, where no audience could be found who cared about either French literature or Negroes, the play was meaningless (Brook 1968: 74).

Because, like Wole Soyinka, Arden used the Brechtian model of dramaturgy and strove to use theatre as a pivot for change (Bermel 1977: 127,136),the often rigid theatre reviewers predictably failed to appreciate his theatrical techniques, as the critical reception of *The Waters of Babylon* proves.

3.4.5.i *The Waters of Babylon*

Arden's *The Waters of Babylon* was first staged on 20 October 1957 at the Royal Court Theatre, two years before Wole Soyinka's *The Invention.* Set in London in the wake of World War II, this three-act play depicts a few disreputable activities of a Polish architect-cum-pimp, Sigismafred Krankiewicz (Krank). Krank lives a double life. He works as an assistant architect but also leads a morally unacceptable life at night; he runs a brothel. He pretends to have left behind his former life where he worked for the Nazi soldiers and he claims to be a victim of Buchenwald. However, people who know his other life, such as Teresa the prostitute and Paul his

fellow Polish compatriot, surface and disturb the good image that he wants to present. Paul wants Krank to remain patriotic to the cause of the Polish. Paul wants to explode a bomb on two Soviet dignitaries who will be visiting London and he needs a place to set off the bomb. He then blackmails Krank to agree to settle an old debt of £500.00, money which the latter had borrowed from Josef, Paul's second cousin, in 1946. Krank does not want to associate himself with overt political activities for fear of self exposure and probable imprisonment for war crimes. Seemingly Krank is trying to hide from the Special Branch and the M.I.5. He shouts back at Paul who is taunting him, "My 'elusive habits' were designed to protect me from women, from creditors, from my tenants, from *my own old convictions* ..." [emphasis added] (Arden 1974: 39). It is clear that Krank was deeply involved in criminal activities during the war but that now he wants to run away from that kind of life as he reveals, "... Bombs, violence, conspiracy, *all of it again* ... I was alone, and confident, an uninvolved. Now look at me ... I must remain uninvolved" [emphasis added] (Arden 1974: 40). Because he cannot pay his debt, though, Krank finds himself drawn back into political conflicts as Paul extorts him into letting his home be used as the place to make a bomb plot against Khrushchev and Bulganin, who are visiting London. These were in fact the first two Soviet leaders to come to the West to visit a head of state. Seeing a way of paying the debt, Krank is lured by the scheming British Butterthwaite to rig the local government municipal lotteries with the promise that thousands of pounds can be made from this. As he tries to free himself of this political wrangle at the end of the play, Krank is wrongly accused by the police of being in collusion with Paul. Paul draws a revolver to shoot Henry Ginger, who is cockney, and strongly opposed to the government's seemingly lax attitude toward foreigners. Unfortunately Paul misses his target and fatally wounds Krank instead.

Krank's identity is elusive since he works as a reputable architect in the day while clandestinely being the landlord of an overcrowded brothel. He surrounds himself with an array of picturesque low-life, yet cheerful, characters such as pimps, prostitutes, corrupt local politicians, and self-righteous associates like Councillor

Caligula and Henry Ginger.

In this drama, Arden addresses several topics such as prostitution, the ethics of local government, British foreign policy on immigrants and local citizenry, sponsored gambling, and the motley of foreign ethnic groups residing in the heart of London. Arden's title is an allusion to the verse "By the Waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion" (Psalms 137: 1). This text carries the despair of the Jews in captivity. Another significant biblical reference could be the Babylon of corruption referred to in Revelations 17: 5 that states, "Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations". These allusions jointly point to the premise on which the characters and theme are based. London is presented as a "Babylon", an island of people in exile, and the activities of Krank compare to the moral decay of the symbolic Babylon of the end of times.

What may frustrate many spectators is that there seems to be no definite standpoint taken by the writer on any of these issues; they are merely depicted without Arden's own views and attitude being conveyed. Conventional criticism usually singles out a hero -- and a supportive group of foreground characters -- in whom is embodied the central idea of the story. These characters' attributes of good or bad usually work as a guide to the revelation and understanding of the moral bent of the playwright and the statement she / he wants to make. Such compartmentalisation of character into the conventional types is not found in *The Waters of Babylon.* The audience's psychological expectations of finding a former Nazi soldier to be an outright villain are thwarted when Krank is presented as a benevolent pimp citizen of England. Joseph Caligula, the upright "Negro" who attacks racism with Sunday spiritual rhetoric, falls prey to the flirtatious Bathsheba's enticing schemes and he capitulates and sleeps with her. Characters like the parliamentarian Mr Loap and Henry Ginger are all too complex to be easily pigeon-holed into a category, as " ... there is no clear separation of the people in the play into good and bad, heroic and villainous ..." (Wike 1995: 11). Arden creates his characters to stand as individuals with both virtues and faults and therefore does not allow them to

represent any specific type in society. The technique of not focusing on a single heroic protagonist, as we would like Krank to be, but to have the action cover the whole range of the post-war theme with a myriad of personalities, is a typical Brechtian device of the epic theatre (Innes 1992: 25).

Arden's non-committal handling of theme and depiction of character has made many critics conclude that there is a determined refusal in the playwright to take sides with any of his characters and to wind up any of the issues of debate he raises through their action. Perhaps, like Artaud (Bermel 1977), Arden does not want to use his characters to preach a particular point of argument. Rather he wants to use them to expose the audience to certain situations. Unfortunately, there has emerged a general perception among critics of Arden that he never puts across any concrete statement, but touches on issues and leaves them hanging, thus inciting hostile responses from the audience-critics. This may well be true about some of Arden's plays, but I do not share this general view concerning *The Waters of Babylon.* In this play I can still detect an underlying idea interwoven in the action, an idea which challenges the intellect of the viewing audience and critic alike: this is the subject of identity and illusion.

The critics' dissatisfaction with Arden's artistic skills may be attributed to their conditioned expectations of finding in a play a single hero who embodies a palpable idea -- this clearly comes from a society that desires heroes while the playwright may be aiming at demystifying that very concept. In my view Arden's *The Waters of Babylon* does present a statement or idea which is sustained from the beginning of the play to its concluding point. For instance, if one were to view the entire cast as a *collective hero* (Gassner 1965: 36-37) and the society -- here represented by the audience -- as an external "character" that represents the antagonistic force in the drama, one would establish Arden's statement of theme. If for instance one did not isolate individual characters as carriers of specific statements but instead, viewed Arden's characters as a group-hero, it would emerge that each character bears a segment of the whole -- the concept of the sullied persona (the anti-hero). In the

same way Soyinka's defect-fraught cast of *The Invention* depicts a physically and psychologically marred polis. Hence there is actually no *heroism* to talk of in *The Waters of Babylon.*

Like Soyinka in *The Invention,* Arden metaphorically uses negative character-traits to point out some larger societal flaw. The characters in *The Waters of Babylon* have some defect or another. The minor difference is that Arden's characters bear personality flaws instead of the mainly physical flaws found in Soyinka's. Such flaws mar the characters' profile. To give an example, Krank, the should-be hero, runs a brothel by night and has a shady past connecting him to the Nazis; Councillor Caligula the "Negro" and self-appointed liberator of black people, ends up in bed with the prostitute, Bathsheba; Butterthwaite does not see any wrong in rigging the lottery and defrauding the state; several politicians of local government, like right-wing extremist Henry Ginger, are not exemplars of upright behaviour. They readily engage in espionage activity, selling out and backstabbing colleagues. All this is done without a twinge of conscience. Blackmail, lying, and clandestine deals are the order of the day in this society. All are tainted. The society that is the antagonistic force is a society whose financial policies, social affairs and political ideals have had a major role to play in the shaping of many of these flawed personae. They do not reflect society, they reveal what society does to humankind. For example, the negative influence of the wider European sociopolitical structure is seen in the travails of Krank, whose life seems to be that of a victim of the strong force of the whirlpool of circumstance: first the Polish war offices, the Russian camp, the Nazi camp, and now the shadow of the past that engulfs and kills him as he tries to escape it. As the curtain falls Krank dies an emotional death that is marked by a lengthy speech of self-exposition. The question the drama seems to pose is: "Whose hands are clean?"

The idea of identity is cast in developmental phases from the beginning to the end of the play. It centres on the life of Krank, although there are other minor characters who embody other themes in less prominent ways. Arden explores the

primal theme of identity by means of three major technical devices; clothing, name, and verbal utterances. He starts gradually with the elementary techniques of costume change, and moves on to name change, and ultimately, uses the utterance of highly philosophical statements as shown below.

The change of costume affords the characters a means of changing from one persona to another. In Act 1, there is a process of metamorphosis as Krank changes costume from the ordinary garb to what Arden defines as "... a dark suit, made-up bow-tie, white shirt, carrying an umbrella. He has changed his spectacles for heavy horn-rims", and then utters, "The Russians are coming to London" (Arden 1974: 29). To ensure that this external statement is not lost to simple décor, Arden makes Krank endorse this identity shift by these words:

> Krank: My employment, as you observe, is now immaculate, professional, appropriate to this body sparkling new from its matutinal rebirth ... I am a man of no one condition having no more no country, no place, time, action, no social soul. I am easy and able to choose whatever alien figure I shall cut, where and wherever I am ... (Arden 1974: 29).

In typical Brechtian style, Krank addresses the audience and presents a character, thus distancing the audience from the illusion of the play. Furthermore, the above statement reveals that the fickle identity which attire affords the character enables him to escape being tied down to one place of reference; no one can vouch that Krank belongs to any particular place, he cannot be pigeon-holed. He is a free agent of whatever chosen mission. It should further disturb the audience's intellect to hear him profess that he is "a man of no social soul." The audience would ask itself, "Has he changed, if at all, from the heartless Krank of the Buchenwald extermination camp despite his claim that he merely polished shoes there?"

Similarly, in Act 2, Canor Cassidy, the Irish immigrant who is usually shoddily dressed as a station cleaner, changes into a very immaculate suit when he poses as an agent for Krank the pimp, collecting incoming Irish girls at Euston station.

Interestingly, he bitterly vilifies Krank for spoiling Teresa, his little sister, calling him "... a beastly fellow who brought [her] to such grief and shame ... in the very flowering of [her] maiden's beauty" (Arden 1974: 63), yet the question that looms large in the audience's mind is how Krank's identity differs from that of Cassidy's, and how stable and dependable anyone's identity can be said to be.

Name change is the second device that Arden uses to portray the issue of identity. Throughout the play we watch certain characters repeatedly changing from one name to the next. This is done so as to hide their real identities from some members of society. Teresa Cassidy for instance, presents herself as Miss Delaroy to Loap and Barbara, and she omits to tell them that she has already met Krank whom she first told that she was Miss Lonegan. It is later revealed that she is in fact Miss Cassidy, Canor's sister. As her elusive identity falls under scrutiny, Teresa also exposes Krank's identity in this heated exchange:

Krank:	Your name, Teresa, it was not always 'Delaroy'.
Teresa:	Neither was your name always -- whatever you said it was.
Krank:	Ah, there you are in error. Long before I was anything else, my name was without doubt -- But yours used to be --
Teresa:	Flaherty was it, or may be Delaney? When you first picked me up on Euston arrival platform ... (Arden 1974: 33).

Again in Act 3, Butterthwaite gives Krank another name, Cash, to disguise his true identity during the plot to rig the local lottery. It is understandable that Krank has to repeatedly disguise himself to survive, and these disguises continue to advance the theme of identity. For example, to help him further alienate this new form from the known Krank, he adds the disguise of attire used in earlier scenes. When Teresa worries that his identity will be exposed as he is appearing in public for the first time, Krank responds, "... But not as Krank. As Cash. No one in this part of London has ever seen me in this suit, or these spectacles, or washed, or shaved, or brushed. ..." (Arden 1974: 78). Krank's identity cover has become even more complex, it is the name Cash and the newly styled dress code. It is at this point that the audience may find itself asking, "Who is Krank? What is Krank?" And Krank himself asks this

same all-important question.

The most sophisticated vantage point from which Arden addresses the theme of an identity-crisis is found in the philosophical statements made by the characters. These utterances, coming mainly from Krank, are tied to the concept of one's dwelling place as a clue-bearer to identity. Conventionally, people are identified by the places they live in and the countries they are citizens of, so that one's base becomes a component of one's identity. Contrary to this, Arden's characters vehemently refuse to be tied down to some concrete base; they are forced by pressures they cannot control to assume a "floating identity". Krank, the proponent and defender of this philosophy, disclaims citizenship of any place, whether of Poland or of England. When Paul, the committed Polish nationalist, urges him to help in the assassination of the coming Russians to show Polish patriotism and the fact that he has not forgotten his roots, Krank's outburst in Act 1 is, "I am no longer a citizen of anywhere" (Arden 1974: 37). In Act 3, Paul discovers the grim truth that the identity of an erstwhile respectable Polish prisoner, which he had all along assumed to be Krank's, is false because the latter had actually been a servant of the German soldiers. Paul's protestations of betrayal are countered with this self-exonerating retort from Krank:

> Krank: ... I did not ask to be posted to Buchenwald. That was the time of the world, that I know to myself I have no year, town, or family, the house of Krank is to be always an empty house ... In Buchenwald was I prisoner, was I convenient soldier ... So many thousands of people all *lost in that field.* Who knows *what I was*? [emphasis added] (Arden 1974: 80-81).

Krank's "angry" protestations strive to direct the audience's attention to the "real" culprit responsible for tarnishing the identities of humankind, warring society. The view that he wants to express is that larger sociopolitical forces prey on individuals such as he, subjecting them to the untold trauma of war and corroding their all-important identity and fullest freedom; this despite the appearance of serving in a

prestigious office of the Germans, although as a menial servant. What one finds very disturbing is Krank's moral stance of self-righteousness and self-pity, which completely obscures the plight of the individual Jews who were driven to the gas chambers. Krank wants the audience to believe that because of the war, all humanity is lost in some cold field of facelessness, hence nobody can stake any claim to foolproof knowledge of one solid indisputable identity. The fact that in a war nobody knows who the next person really is, is the sad absurdity of life, he proclaims. Unfortunately, Krank seems to forget that his argument would only hold in a conventional war scenario. He seems grossly to downplay the fact that Buchenwald was not a normal battlefield but an extermination camp which Hitler had designed for the cold murder of innocent Jews. Hence Krank's role as soldier here is morally objectionable. Could it be that Arden is also casting doubt on the issue of misguided self-perception as personified by Krank? Arden's disturbing statement on identity heightens to a conclusion at the end of Krank's life, the point at which the play also ends. Several other members of society confront Krank about who he really is, and he is obliged to admit to a hitherto unexposed identity. However he never fails to point out that none is free of blame. As he is dying, Krank calls the three women, Teresa, Bathsheba, and Barbara fully to disclose his true identity because he is now prepared to obey the laws of society and be attached to place, time, and purpose. He beckons them in Act 3:

> Krank: ... Ladies, come here --
> Bathsheba, Teresa, Barbara -- Miss Baulkfast:
> I'm going to declare my identity at last.
> Place and time, and purpose,
> Are now to be chosen for me.
> I cannot any longer do without knowing them --
> (Arden 1974: 96).

Krank's utterance that place, time, and purpose are now to be chosen for him reveal that he perceives himself to be a victim and not an agent in control of his fate.

Arden's view seems to be that societal conditions can impact on human freedom and identity. It is therefore not safe to judge others. One also perceives that identity is

dynamic, it is no stalagmite as it cannot be fossilised while humans still breathe and walk.

The parallel theme of illusion versus reality complements that of identity, just discussed above. Unlike the tautly structured layout of the theme of identity, the theme of illusion comes out elliptically and it is mainly explored toward the end of the play through verbal statements and song. Like Brecht, Arden sets out to disturb the audience's comfort zone by using a battery of background information which is seemingly loosely connected to the central story, yet very important. A case in point occurs in Act 1 in Barbara's office where Teresa, Mr Loap's mistress blurts suggestively, "Or boys throwing bombs" (Arden 1974: 35), almost exposing the ploy into which Paul wants to draw Krank. Teresa's remark comes soon after Krank receives a telephone call from Paul about the Russians' visit. Both the phone call and Teresa's comment may seem like a digression to the main incident of Loap's consultation with the architects. However, as the drama develops this issue becomes central to the story. In action, Arden positions characters in such a way that the audience's sense of focus on reality is disturbed. For instance, while characters are engaged with the story on stage, they break the theatrical convention and address the audience directly, making it difficult to know the dividing line between viewer and actor. Here again, Arden uses the typical Brechtian anti-illusionist device of breaking the fourth wall and making the audience participate in action. For example, at his death, Krank explodes into a long poetic speech on death. He remembers that the actual audience -- which he also chooses to perceive as the audience at the lottery gala -- may have many questions about the bomb, the aborted rigging of the lottery, the true nature of Teresa the harlot, the extent of other characters' involvement in the plot to cheat the municipality, and his own identity. Krank therefore "nobly" sets out to enlighten both the "viewers" and the fellow cast members:

> So, only a few minutes to live,
> I must see can I not give
> Some clearer conclusion to this *play*
> To order your lives the neatest way,

> For when after *the voters* have gone home (emphasis added) (Arden 1974: 96).

Addressing himself both to the audience and the actors and telling the truth as a dying man, he explains that there is no bomb, so the Bolshevik tyrants can be welcomed freely, that Cassidy stole the bomb, that Bathsheba was colluding with himself to cheat Councillor Caligula, that both Bathsheba and Teresa should be forgiven. The "play" Krank is talking about could be both the confusion on stage about the lottery and bombs, as well as this very play, *The Waters of Babylon,* whose multifaceted conflict should supposedly be neatly concluded before the audience disperses. Similarly, the "voters" could be the audience that has to assess the play, or they could be the adjudicators at the lottery session. Arden creates a play within-a play and then makes some of the characters assume the role of "director" inside the larger play. Arden is probably using this Brechtian demystifying[12] device as a reminder that the figures on stage are actors, playing roles. Just like Krank, Butterthwaite, as "director" of both his fellow actors and the audience after the death of Krank, states:

> Notwithstanding, Krank is dead.
> I am going to sing you a song:
> ...
> Now let's divide up like and sing it as a round
> Then after that all the fold can go home ... (Arden 1974: 97).

It is now quite difficult to see the dividing line between illusion and reality as they both merge into one. This technique of deliberate audience involvement enables Arden to apply the Brechtian convention that removes all meaningful distance between reality and fancy. It can be seen that characters on stage at times ignore the "chasm" between themselves and the audience, thus "violating" the principle of illusion and reality. The previous wave of theatre -- the realistic theatre -- had overwrought form in theatre by making stage illusion very strong, to the point that the audience became a body of eavesdroppers on the action on stage. The fourth wall between the audience and actors on stage was very palpable, hence the reference to "box set", and the doing away with certain theatrical conventions such

as the aside and the soliloquy, which acknowledged the presence of a second party to the action on stage, other than that of fellow-actors (Gassner 1965: 30-31). Consequently, our sense of reality is teased as we ask, "what is life, what is play?", typically a Brechtian principle. Arden's technique of breaching the fourth wall is a non-realistic device where the actor and audience are urged to participate communally in the life-experience displayed as a *lambeau d'existence* (fragment of life) on stage to destroy conventional expectations. This theme of illusion in *The Waters of Babylon* can thus be perceived as both idea and form, as it points toward a certain theatre type to be further discussed below.

Arden's three-act play may mislead one rashly to categorise it as the hitherto prevalent "Scribean Well-Made-Play [with] the exposition-complication-development-crisis-denouément" plot-pattern that limited the discussion to the conclusion (Innes 1992: 20). It is a common occurrence that younger writers are influenced by their predecessors. Similarly, Arden's work should echo some aspects of the theatre of playwrights in previous generations. Like his predecessors, Arden does present the three acts but deviates from the norm by treating matters of exposition and situation in the first act, the situation and part of the denouément in the second, and then leaves the discussion phase hanging in the last as it ends with certain issues not neatly tied up in conclusion. This third act seems to be open-ended; in fact it is a pause, and not a definite conclusion. There is a sense of unravelling of the conflict, albeit incomplete. This point is given more depth in the discussion of idea above.

However, as shown, Arden adopts a distinctively Brechtian style of presentation. Technical devices like the sound of a whizzing train which provides place setting and also breaks scenes, folk songs, chants, dance, and poetic renditions, all work together to flavour his drama. The train can be viewed as a demarcation between scenes on one hand, as well as a device corresponding to the Brechtian strategy of objectifying the content of a scene on the other. Similarly poetry, including songs, chants, traditional English ballads and verse, is at times used to separate larger

divisions of the play, as can be seen at the end of Act 1 and Act 3; again, here we witness the typical Brechtian ballad singer who normally presents episodes as illustrative material where a ballad opens each scene (Innes 1992:123-124). The speech is laden with poetry and is not exclusively reserved for any one character; most characters have a fair share of chants, songs or verse in their speech. The function of poetry is mainly the mundane love ballads and folk-chants that display romantic emotions and sexuality usually rendered by the women, for example:

Teresa: I'll finish me song first.
'Oh if you love a lady
And you know she loves you good
You can lie her down in thorn and briars
Or in a wild green wood ... (Arden 1974: 57).
...
My love is like a thornbush
On the middle of the moor
The winds have blown it back and bare
Except for one white flower ... (Arden 1974: 71).

Bathsheba: Say I was the moon, you was the sun,
Each one as near and as far as from each one,
Draw a circle, walk it round ...
Draw a circle on the ground (Arden 1974: 71).

There are also short chants of self-exultation by the less prominent male characters, such as Henry Ginger the Cockney xenophobe, who sings:

Henry Ginger: Henry Ginger quick and hot:
Against Conspiracy and Plot,
Though the fool policeman sleeps
Henry Ginger wakes and creeps.
He tracks down Subversive Threat,
And he'll rescue England yet (Arden 1974: 58).

Arden also uses more serious ballads on serious matters of life, like hidden secrets of the past, and horrendous reminiscences of the Nazi slaughter camps. Arden introduces this kind of ballad early in the play to establish the proper thematic context of shady characters like Krank, whose war crimes they must be made to face

up to. Significantly, these highly wrought verses are often given to Krank the central character, who is employed to reflect the depravity of the Nazi execution camps through the device of song. It is the latter function that I would like to explore a little more.

Arden uses poetry to reveal character, past events, and to complement theme. When the mood of the character is highly charged with emotion, Arden employs very rich poetic devices. Those aspects of plot that do not come to the fore with the normal action are reflected in Krank's songs and ballads. This is the same device Brecht uses, for example in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* where the songs of the Singer and the Chorus advance plot and provide new information about the Governor, Grusha Vashnadze and the Child, *et al.* Arden's first song is the seemingly misplaced Dolorous song that alludes to the three most infamous death camps of the Nazis: Belsen, Auschwitz, and Buchenwald (Arden 1974: 21-22). Unbeknown to the entertained Bathsheba, these places open a very dark page in Krank's life, what he calls the true story of his life. The song jolts Krank from the present and drops him in the war-filled past as he remorsefully recalls:

Krank: Remember what perhaps by now I ought to have forgotten.
After all, more than ten years ... I will sing
As I went down by Belsen town
I saw my mother there
She said, go by, go by my son, go by
But leave with me here
Your lovely yellow hair.

As I went down by Auschwitz town
I saw my brother there
He said, go by, go by my brother, go by
But leave with me here
The lovely strong tooth from your skull.

As I went down by Buchenwald town
And there for my sweetheart I sought
But she whispered, go by, go by Oh my darling, go by
You leave with me here
The lovely strong red blood of your heart
(Arden 1974: 21).

The second emotionally charged song is yet another three-stanza ballad that recounts acts of his mortally shooting of children in a row. These children then rise from the dead to seek revenge on both Krank and his beloved, so recounts the ballad:

Krank: O when I was young
I played with a gun
And all the other children in a row
I shot them through the head
Till they lay down dead ...

But the children they arose
And came creeping from the ground
And they fired silver bullets up my stair ...

They drove down the doors,
And set fire to my roof ... (Arden 1974: 40-41).

With the triumph of the ultimate revenge of the Jewish victims, Arden concludes Act 1. This may be taken as an indication of Arden's own moral stand on the issue of the Jewish genocide -- where the guilty Krank is hunted down and destroyed by the hand of the very innocent children he mercilessly murdered. When forced to tell the truth about his true identity by Henry Ginger's exposure of his shady past, the emotional Krank owns up to the truth about himself and further reveals the complexity of the issue of identity crisis in an abnormal society (Arden 1974: 81).

At other times there is an ill-definable admixture of prose and verse within a speech of a single character. One would expect that Arden's use of elements familiar to the English would not repel his audience because the playwright had:

> ... sought to go beyond the metropolitan into the working-class of English towns and villages ... to draw upon elements of native English drama such as song and dance, the tradition of balladry [which was] reminiscent of mediaeval morality and mystery plays (Wike 1995: 5).

But, as happened with Brecht's plays in London, this "unorthodox" use of verse is

perhaps the reason that Arden's language use failed to impress many theatre-goers who reviewed his plays.

Arden continues to emulate Brecht even in the structural design of the drama; his play does not employ the conventional scene break. Instead the clear conventional breaks in Arden are reserved for the Acts where he states that there is a curtain fall. This act break is a deviation from Brecht. Like Brecht, Arden presents scenes as an uninterrupted flow of action from one setting to the next, the only change being made known by a new stage set, the change of character composition on stage, the change of characters' costume and, of course, the change in the topic of discussion. For example Arden directs:

> [*Exit* CASSIDY.]
> [KRANK *comes forward as the scene closes* (Arden 1974: 29)
> ...
> *[Noise of train passing.]*
> ...
> Krank: Excellent thought. Let's all go and listen.
> [*They come downstage as the scene closes.*] (Arden 1974: 47)

Arden's language is noteworthy for its deviation from the bourgeois convention that discouraged certain utterances relating to bodily parts and functions. In contrast, Arden's characters indulge in outright ribaldry at times. This is not the preserve of any class, as one finds in Shakespearean drama, where the churls freely indulge in Rabelaisian humour, while the nobles use more elevated language. In Arden's play the same absence of class distinction is observed in the apportionment of high-wrought prose and verse; it is open terrain for all and anybody in the cast can dabble in it. Language is also consciously used to introduce incoming characters and to enlighten the viewers about place and time setting, much as Brecht does, for example, in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* where after the Prologue, the "scene" entitled "The Noble Child" opens with these lines by the Singer:

The Singer — In olden times, in a bloody time,
There ruled in a Caucasian city --
Men called it City of the Damned --

A Governor.
His name was Georgi Abashwili ... (Brecht 1982: 123).

Similarly, Krank's opening speech is full of information that makes known the hour of day, the season, and the location where the play is set. Soon thereafter, in monologue, the character informs the audience about the array of character types to be encountered as the play unfolds (Arden 1974: 19). This Brechtian technique of interacting with the audience about matters of action on stage is also found much later in this play, where we find characters informing the audience where they are or who is to enter the stage to continue the action. Consider the following:

Krank:	Well here we are at the underground station. Good morning.
	...
Krank:	[*walking around by one side of the stage*] Baker Street Station. Here is that extremely convenient arrangement ... (Arden 1974: 28),

and also the introduction of characters:

Henry Ginger:	.... but I mean to have my words with him. Here he comes. I don't like his looks....[*Enter Paul*]. ...
Cassidy:	... Here's Charlie Butterthwaite ... [*Enter Butterthwaite carrying a pair of large cymbals.*] (Arden 1974: 74, 75).

This device of making the audience interact with the actors and action has two advantages for a Brechtian theatre: first it destroys the illusion that usually surrounds box-set productions; second, it facilitates the involvement of intellect over emotion in the audience, thus ultimately putting into play Brecht's renowned *verfremdungseffekt.*

In addition, Arden also uses stage directions scattered throughout the play which stipulate that characters should openly address certain speeches or sounds directly to the audience.

Arden's style of breaking the illusion of addressing the audience directly, and of using language to inform the viewer, can also be seen to be a conscious effort to apply certain principles of Brecht's style of theatre. Cassidy's pseudo-grandiloquent outburst on recovering consciousness at the end of Act 2 reminds the audience of the absurdity of life. Cassidy seems to be making an important observation on serious metaphysical issues, only to let the audience's expectations down with the reference to whisky:

Cassidy: Oh God, what a world -- it's nothing but misery -- fornication, shame and misery: and never a drop of whisky in between (Arden 1974: 73).

Arden achieves the distancing effect by depriving the audience of the luxury of being emotionally taken up by the present character and theme. For instance, no sooner does Cassidy engage our minds in the "sublime" issues of ephemeral life than he instantly drops us into bathos by craving liquor.

Similarly, Krank goes into a mock-heroic poetic harangue reminiscing about the historical tragedy of Poland, lamenting how he had to wash the boots of the Russian officers and then serve as a German soldier. Krank's eternal philosophy is that even though he was not labelled as a prisoner, he was one -- he volunteered to serve in that office as a means of survival. It seems as though Krank is justifying his choice of service and identity because *everyone* was lost in that cold field, so who knows for sure what any other person was? His punchy words on life's absurdity and meaninglessness reflect in the lament:

Krank: But I don't know what *you* are.
...all of the rest of you ...
This is lunacy ....
This was the cause, the carrying through
Of all the insensate war
This is the rage and purposed madness of your lives,
That *I,* Krank, do not know. I *will* not know it,
Because, if I know it, from that tight day forward,
I am a man of time, place, society and accident: