

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WOLE SOYINKA AS A DRAMATIST,

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS ENGAGEMENT

IN CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

by

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SUMMARY

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WOLE SOYINKA AS A DRAMATIST, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS ENGAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

This dissertation is mainly on Wole Soyinka as a dramatist. It aims to show that Soyinka, far from being an irrelevant artist as some of his fiercest critics have alleged, is a deeply committed writer whose works are characterised by a strong sense of concern with basic human values of right and wrong, good and evil. Furthermore, the dissertation shows that although Soyinka is not an admirer of Marxist aesthetics, he is certainly not in the art-for-art's-sake camp either, because he is fully aware of the utilitarian value of literature. Soyinka's works are much influenced by his social and historical background, and the dissertation shows that Soyinka's socio-political awareness pervades all these works, although it will be seen that in the later plays there is a sharpened political awareness. Although largely concerned with his own country's issues, Soyinka also emerges as a keen observer of humanity universally.

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KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

Wole Soyinka; critical analysis, evaluation, interpretation, criticism, critique, critic; drama, dramatic, dramatist; engagement, preoccupation, commitment, engage, committed writer; ideology; contemporary, colonial, pre-colonial, post-colonial, post-independence, traditional; themes, issues, concerns; art, artist, Marxism, Marxist aesthetics, art-for-art's-sake literature.

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INTRODUCTION

Some critics, for example Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa and Ihechukwu, have alleged that Wole Soyinka is nothing but a literary charlatan "who delights in masquerading as the authentic and quintessential African literary force" (1982 : 208). These same critics go on to accuse Soyinka of "cultural servitude" because of his "Euromodernist" style which makes his works "obscure" and "privatist" (Ibid. : 249).

The primary aim of this dissertation is to show that Wole Soyinka, contrary to the views of the Chinweizus, is a committed writer who is deeply and consistently preoccupied with contemporary socio-political issues.

That part of this dissertation's title which refers to "engagement in contemporary issues" should be briefly explained. "Engagement" in this discussion connotes the same as "commitment", a concept which is explained in Gray's definition of a "committed writer", who is:

[a] writer or artist who sees his work as necessarily serving a political or social programme or set of beliefs, and not merely aimed at achieving literary ends. (1984 : 49)

Gray's definition of a "committed writer", with its extended explanation of "commitment", matches Amuta's definition of "commitment", which denotes "a preoccupation with issues of socio-political contemporaneity" (1989 : 115).

"Contemporary" in this sense will carry approximately the same meaning as "post-colonial", a term which, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, is understood "to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (1989 : 2). However, the issues explored by Soyinka are wider than the simply political.

One may still ask a further question of the term "commitment": committed to what or to whom? Aristophanes, Swift, Orwell, Haggard, Ngugi, Ruark, Soyinka are all committed writers, but they are not all in one and the same camp. Aristophanes, Haggard and Ruark belong to one group, the rightist, conservative camp, while Swift, Orwell, Ngugi and Soyinka, although differing in their radicalism and revolutionary zeal, can be said to be writers with iconoclastic, sometimes socialistic tendencies. Banham actually says Aidoo, Soyinka and Ngugi stand

together in challenging present-day African politicians (Jones 1984:171-2), and Michael Thorpe notes that he has compared Soyinka "with such unsparing truth-tellers as Orwell, Koestler, and Solzhenitsyn" (1989 : 39). There is some controversy, though, about a writer such as Ekwensi. Peter Nazareth argues (quite rightly) that in Survive the Peace (1976), Ekwensi emerges as a political novelist (Gugelberger 1985 : 165 - 177). To Amuta, however, Ekwensi is a writer "without any discernible political commitment" whatsoever (Amuta 1989 : 64). Iyasere also does not think much of Ekwensi's works (Jones 1975 : 20). To this writer, Ekwensi is strictly not a committed artist, but Soyinka is. It is in this light, then, that Soyinka's commitment should be understood. It will be argued that Soyinka is a social critic who writes because he wants to articulate ordinary people's aspirations, as he once said:

FAPS

... because literature ... has to do with people, ... there is no way in which human relations, social relations, economic situations, the agonies and anguish of people can be avoided in [one's] writing. ... because I deal with human beings, I become infinitely involved in attempting to articulate their problems, their fears, their hopes, using my trade to challenge unacceptable situations in society, using that art as a means in fact of heightening the humane consciousness of people (Granqvist and Stotesbury 1989 : 68)

The theory of literary criticism that will be used in this discussion is based on Amuta's approach, which is expressed as follows:

THEORY

... it is the socio-economic, political and ideological contradictions which define the life and historical experience of the African people that form the basis of a new and more functionally relevant theoretical approach to African literature. (1989 : vii - viii)

This approach emphasises the "utilitarian" value of literature, as opposed to "art-for-art's-sake" aesthetics. Amuta's approach is therefore Marxist in orientation, as he (Amuta) explains (Ibid. : viii). This writer will adopt Amuta's approach.

* * *

Akinwade Oluwole Soyinka was born on July 13, 1934, in Isara, western Nigeria, of Ijebu parentage. (The information on Soyinka's biography is taken from an assortment of sources, mainly from Moore (1978), Jones (1988) and from the journals "Contemporary Authors" and "Contemporary Literary Criticism", of various dates and by various authors too many to list here.) A member of the

Biography

Yoruba-speaking people, Soyinka grew up in a traditional town called Abeokuta. His father, Soditan Ayodele, was a headmaster, and his mother, Eniola, was also a school teacher. Both parents were ardent Christians, and Soyinka was brought up on Christian principles.

Soyinka started his primary education in 1938 at St Peter's School, Ake, Abeokuta, completing it in 1943, and between 1944 and 1945 he attended Abeokuta Grammar School. From 1946 to 1950 he attended Government College, Ibadan, where he completed his high school education. From there he moved to University College in Ibadan, where he studied English, History and Greek, completing his degree in 1954. He then furthered his education at the School of English, University of Leeds, where he obtained a B.A. Honours Degree in English in 1957. During his stay in England, Soyinka spent eighteen months as a script reader at the Royal Court Theatre in London, a probable source of inspiration for his deep interest in theatre work (Moore 1978 :7).

Soyinka is a prolific writer, primarily of plays, as can be seen from the list of his works below. (Only those that will be discussed, or referred to, in this discussion, are included. Some of his other works were never published, and those are not included here.)

Five novels have been published by Soyinka : The Interpreters (1965), The Man Died (1972), Season of Anomy (1973), Ake: The Years of Childhood (1981) and Isara: A Voyage Around Essay (1989). (The last two are autobiographies.)

Two other prose works, collections of essays on criticism, have been published by Soyinka: Myth, Literature and the African World (1976) and Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture (1988, 1993).

His collections of poems are Idanre and Other Poems (1967), A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972), Ogun Abibiman (1976) and Mandela's Earth and Other Poems (1988).

It is, however, for his dramatic works that Soyinka is renowned, and he has had no less than fifteen full-length plays published: A Dance of the Forests (1963), The Lion and the Jewel (1963), The Swamp Dwellers (1963), Camwood on the Leaves (1973), The Trials of Brother Jero (1964), The Road (1965), The Strong

Breed (1965) and Kongi's Harvest (1967), which were all written in the late fifties and sixties.

In the 1970s, four Soyinka plays were published: Madmen and Specialists (1971), The Bacchae of Euripides (1973) - this is Soyinka's Yoruba version of Euripides's The Bacchae - Jero's Metamorphosis (1974) and Death and the King's Horseman (1975).

In the 1980s, three other Soyinka plays were published: Opera Wonyosi (1981), A Play of Giants (1984) and Requiem for a Futurologist (1985).

Soyinka is a complex man with boundless energy, as can be testified by the multiplicity of roles he has played so far. Apart from being a playwright, Soyinka has been a broadcaster, an editor, an actor (he has acted in some of his plays; in 1960 he founded a theatre troupe called The 1960 Masks, and in 1964 he founded a professional acting company called Orisun Theatre). Soyinka has also been a theatre as well as a film director (his film "Blues for a Prodigal" criticises the Shagari regime), a singer (his hit-record "Unlimited Liability Company" satirises the last years of the Shagari era) (Wright 1992 : 31), a literary critic, a researcher, a lecturer, a translator, a road safety activist, a human rights campaigner and a politician. (In December 1992, Soyinka informed this writer that he was still involved in road safety work, but that he had quit the Chairmanship of its Governing Council in 1991. He also mentioned that he had left the university system in 1985. He now lectures, mostly abroad, on a free-lance basis.)

Soyinka has won numerous awards, both literary and non-literary, some of the most notable being: the Rockefeller Foundation Grant (1960), the highly prestigious John Whiting Award (1966), the Dakar Negro Arts Festival Award (1966), and the "New Statesman" Jock Campbell Award (1968), for The Interpreters. In 1986 he was named Commander of the Federal Republic, Nigeria's second highest award, by General Babangida, then President of Nigeria. Soyinka also holds an honorary Doctor of Letters from Yale University, and another one from the University of Leeds. Amnesty International has awarded Soyinka the Prisoner of Conscience Prize. In October this year (1994), Soyinka was named Goodwill Ambassador by the United Nations, which entitles him to that organisation's travel documents. In addition, Soyinka is at present a consultant with UNESCO.

But undoubtedly Soyinka's most outstanding literary achievement was winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first African to do so. Since Soyinka's feat, two other Africans have won this very prestigious literary prize, Egypt's Naguib Mahfouz in 1988 and South Africa's Nadine Gordimer in 1991.

Explaining his uncompromising stand against unacceptable situations in society, and against any form of injustice or repression, Soyinka once declared: "For me, justice is the first condition of humanity" (Soyinka 1972a : 96). And, like other committed artists in totalitarian states, Ngugi of Kenya, or Nuruddin Farah of Somalia for instance, Soyinka has suffered physically and psychologically for his beliefs. For example, between August 1967 and October 1969, Soyinka was detained without trial by the Nigerian military authorities "on suspicion of sympathy for the Biafran rebellion" (July 1981 : 478). After the Nigerian Civil War was over in 1970, Soyinka went into voluntary exile, living mainly in Ghana and Europe, until 1975 when he returned to Nigeria after the overthrow of the dictator General Gowon. In the early eighties, for the first time, Soyinka openly aligned himself with a political party, the left-leaning People's Redemption Party (Wright 1992 : 31, Borreca 1985 : 35, Gibbs 1983 : 38). At present, Soyinka is deeply involved in the political impasse gripping Nigeria, as will be shown at the end of this introduction.

Although Soyinka is largely multidimensional, and sometimes eclectic in his style and themes (Taylor 1987 : 10 - 11), this dissertation will argue that he is primarily concerned with what Booth calls "the dilemmas of contemporary humanity" (1981 : 146). Graham-White says Soyinka "grapples directly with the social conditions and political events of modern Africa" (1974 : 125). But it is Irele who sheds the most light on Soyinka's major concerns. He says:

No serious consideration of Soyinka's writings can fail to perceive the central position and even the explicit character of the social awareness that runs through all his work. The social dimension of Soyinka's imaginative expression manifests itself as a conscious direction of the writer's meditation towards the nature of the collective experience in his society and as a full engagement of his artistic mind with the immediate issues and problems involved in life as it is carried on around him. (1981 : 199)

There is therefore little doubt as to what Soyinka is writing about. Furthermore, he is cognisant of the "functional, collective and committed" role of art (Innes 1990 : 105). Proof of this awareness can be found in Soyinka's own words. Two instances will suffice:

... anybody who is as socially and politically committed as I think I am ... (Soyinka 1984b : xiii)

At another time he said:

I am a social and political activist and I align myself directly with issues in a way that it's not difficult to define my political ideology ... (Borreca 1985 : 35)

It is this socio-political commitment that will form the governing framework of this dissertation. And this commitment has been recognised by critics such as Pribic, who calls Soyinka "a champion of political freedoms" (1990 : 421). Gibbs, too, similarly comments that "Soyinka was, and is, a kind of unofficial ombudsman in Nigeria; his name ... suggests 'instant redress'" (1983 : 30).

It is therefore baffling that there are other critics who have alleged that Soyinka's plays lack a "historical perspective", and that ordinary people in Soyinka's plays are marginalised (Ngugi 1972 : 65 - 66). Even more puzzling is the notion that Soyinka remained an uncommitted writer until the late sixties (Utudjian 1984 : 36). These critics ignore the fact that "Soyinka's first attempt at writing a play, in the 1950s, was based on his resentment of South African apartheid" (de Kock 1987 : 134). A Dance of the Forests, one of Soyinka's earliest plays, is also one of his strongest political statements. Perhaps these same critics are unaware of Soyinka's belief in "one of the social functions of literature : the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social direction" (Soyinka 1976a : 106). This dissertation will show that Soyinka is aware of "the political and social role of literature" (Cooper 1992 : 2).

It should also be noted that as early as 1967, Soyinka spelt out quite categorically what he regarded as the role of the writer in society. Castigating the African writer for doing nothing to condemn human failures, Soyinka argued that the African writer had not responded to the political moment of his society. He declared :

It seems to me that the time has now come when the African writer must have courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity. (Soyinka 1993a : 19)

He concluded his speech by spelling out the role of the artist, whom he called upon to act "as the record of the mores *and* experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time" (Ibid. : 20).

So it can be seen that Soyinka's vision of literature tallies with Amuta's theory of African literature, namely that this literature must not be art for art's sake. Instead, it must address the socio-economic, political and ideological contradictions of society (Amuta 1989 : vii). With these points in mind, Soyinka's socio-political involvement should not be in doubt.

And yet the Chinweizus talk of Soyinka as if he is totally irrelevant to modern society. They even see Soyinka's success as having been engineered by his "British manipulators and promoters". They claim :

Soyinka's success has wasted for us a generation of opportunities for our cultural liberation. This lamentable waste should indicate the enormity of our loss from that cultural coup in which Wole Soyinka... played so quisling a role. (Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa and Ihechukwu 1982 : 208 , 249)

The Chinweizus have a powerful ally in Ngugi, who, some years ago, claimed that his book, Decolonising the Mind, would be his last to be written in English. After this book, he declared he would write only in Gikuyu and Kiswahili (Ngugi 1986a : xiv). But this has not been the case, as only two articles, " Imperialism of Language : English a Language of the World?" and "Many Years[sic] Walk to Freedom: Welcome Home Mandela" in Moving the Centre are translated from the Gikuyu (Ngugi 1993 : xiii, 41). This demonstrates the impracticability of Ngugi's approach .

But to Ngugi, writing in English, or any European language for that matter, is a sign of cultural imperialism. According to him, Africans cannot claim to be free when they write in other peoples' languages. Ngugi politicises the whole issue and sees it as part of the struggle against imperialism. He wants Africans to do for their languages "what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English ; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian ; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages" (Ngugi 1986a : 29).

Soyinka finds this language debate baffling and boring, and actually dismisses the whole issue as "rubbish" (Granqvist and Stotesbury 1989 : 72). His argument is convincing, especially in the Nigerian context, which should then be extended to the whole continent of Africa. Where there are multitudes of languages, such as in Nigeria, "it would be ridiculous to limit oneself to producing in only one of those languages because that way you are not reaching the rest of the community" (Gibbs 1987 : 62). Soyinka goes on to argue that a single language such as English can

actually be a unifying factor, whereas writing in one's own local language is tantamount to "preaching sectional superiority" (Gullidge 1987 : 516).

It should be noted that Soyinka recognises the importance of indigenous languages, which are as important as any other language. He himself has written in Yoruba, but feels that he can reach more people through English, since it is the language in use by most people in Nigeria.

It is the common language between the Ibos, the Efiks, the Hausa, the Yoruba, the Ibibio and about, at the last count at least, close to some hundred different languages within an entity which we are trying to call a single nation. ... I want to be able to speak to the Ngugi wa Thiong'os, the Taban lo Liyongs, the Nurrudin Farahs. " (Granqvist and Stotesbury 1989 : 69)

While critics such as Maduakor, Amuta, Ngara, Gibbs, Katrak and Jones, to mention only a few, evaluate Soyinka's works objectively, employing sound, convincing and academic arguments to prove their point, the same cannot be said of critics such as Geoffrey Hunt, the Chinweizus, Frank Rich and Michael Thorpe. Employing their *bolekaja* criticism which is characterised by an "aggressive tone and [a] filibustering [style]" (Ngara 1990 : 8), the Chinweizus, for example, completely misinterpret Soyinka's poems "To My First White Hairs" (Chinweizu 1988 : xxii - xxvi) and "Massacre, October '66" (Soyinka 1993a : 229).

Furthermore, some of Soyinka's detractors are too scathing in their criticism of his writings. The Chinweizus, for example, sound personal, unacademic and misleading in their attacks. One can be forgiven for thinking that some of these critics are jealous and envious of Soyinka's numerous awards.

The impression may have been created that Soyinka has no faults. Obviously, this is not the case, as de Kock notes :

... Soyinka is a highly adventurous writer who does sometimes commit excesses and who often falls short of perfection. What matters more, and what is so compelling about his role as a writer within an often convulsive political environment, is his resistance to tyranny and his use of art as a weapon to provide the moral vision and judgement so entirely lacking in that environment. (1987 : 131)

In recent years, Soyinka's challenges to the authorities concerning unacceptable situations have been characterised by a no-holds-barred approach. Lamenting the fate of artists "in so-called independent, even democratic times" at the hands of

"the indigenous power inheritors in former colonial territories" (Soyinka 1990 : 112), Soyinka paints a gloomy picture in which censorship is applied ruthlessly, and Africa's culture producers, artists such as Jack Mapanje of Malawi and Maina wa Kinyatti of Kenya (to whom Schipper (1989) dedicates her book) have been imprisoned on flimsy charges. In the same article, Soyinka condemns the evils that have been perpetrated by some of Africa's most obnoxious despots such as Idi Amin, Banda, Arap Moi, Obote, Bokassa - the list is endless. He even asks whether there is any difference between the brutality of the Portuguese in their last years in Africa and the massacres in Burundi and Ruanda (Ibid. : 117). (Note that these are not the 1994 massacres.)

Addressing the Association of Nigerian Authors on 30 October 1992, Soyinka refers to a call he made in 1988 "to all African dictatorships to set a date, well before the end of this century, to terminate their existence and restore the right of self-determination to our people" (Soyinka 1988c : 7, 1993b : 2). He repeats his attack on the "military caste" (Soyinka 1993b : 3) and goes on to castigate the denial of the democratic process in Nigeria by the military.

Soyinka has not kept his views about the latest political impasse in Nigeria to himself. He has come out very strongly on the side of the democratic forces, and as before, he has been in the news. For example, on 6 September 1993, he was featured in the BBC "Focus on Africa" programme. On his return from the UK and the USA, he had his passport confiscated as soon as he set foot on Nigerian soil. He had been abroad, campaigning against the Babangida government for annulling the June 12, 1993 elections, widely believed to have been won by Chief Moshood Abiola. And recently, when the police stopped a pro-democracy march which he was leading (reminiscent of the early 1960s workers' strike in which he was also involved (Borreca 1985 : 35)) to demand an end to army rule and the release of imprisoned opposition leader, Chief Moshood Abiola, Soyinka was so angry that he decided to throw away his national merit medal - the medal he was awarded by Babangida in 1986 (Sanderson 1994 : 4). At present Soyinka has challenged the legality of the Abacha regime in the Nigerian Supreme Court, and even his United Nations passport has been seized by the military government.

This is the background information which should help the reader to appreciate the following discussion. It will be seen that "[t]here is no contradiction between Soyinka the man actively involved in Nigerian sociopolitical [sic] issues, and Soyinka the artist" (Katrak 1986 : 9). One last point needs to be added concerning

the structure of the dissertation. Although the discussion is mainly on Soyinka as a dramatist, his non-dramatic creative works, his novels and poems, will be briefly discussed in the first chapter. The reason for discussing these non-dramatic works is to show that Soyinka is consistent in the themes that he writes about. The theme of this dissertation, namely that Soyinka's plays are pre-occupied with contemporary socio-political issues, is revealed equally in his novels and poems.

In the second chapter Soyinka's plays of the sixties will be discussed, and this chapter will be divided into two parts. The first part will deal with the plays of the early sixties, while the second part will discuss the plays of the late sixties. The third chapter will discuss the plays of the seventies, and finally the fourth chapter will be devoted to Soyinka's plays of the eighties.

The plays are being considered in chronologically ordered groups because it is felt that Soyinka's socio-political awareness, although evident right from the start, can be said to sharpen and intensify with the years. Soyinka's works have a strong historical perspective, as Moore (1978 : 1) and Ralph-Bowman (1983: 81) confirm. While a non-chronological presentation would be adequate for other purposes, it is unsatisfactory in terms of the aims of this dissertation.

Chapter 1

WOLE SOYINKA'S NON-DRAMATIC CREATIVE WORKS

This chapter will be divided into two parts. In Part One Soyinka's five novels will be discussed. These are: The Interpreters (1965), The Man Died (1972), Season of Anomy (1973), Ake: The Years of Childhood (1981) and Isara: A Voyage Around Essay (1989).

In Part Two the four poetical texts will be discussed: Idanre and Other Poems (1967), A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972), Ogun Abibiman (1976) and Mandela's Earth and Other Poems (1988). All these works will be discussed very briefly, as a prelude to the main focus of the dissertation on Wole Soyinka as a dramatist. It is felt that a discussion of Soyinka which does not take into account "the totality of his work and output" (Nkosi 1981 : 190) may fail to adequately show Soyinka's main concerns.

THE NOVELS

The Interpreters (1965) falls in the group of novels termed by Amuta "the novel[s] of post-colonial disenchantment" (1989 : 127). Included in this group are other novels such as Achebe's A Man of the People (1966), Armah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968) and Serumaga's Return to the Shadows (1969). In all these works, "and many others like them" (Lazarus 1990 : 204), the authors' major concerns are post-independence problems within their specific countries (Larson 1972 : 224). Ogungbesan similarly observes a "mood of disenchantment immediately after independence" (1979 : vii), a view which is also shared by Davidson (1992 : 197).

Soyinka's concern in The Interpreters is clearly the situation of his own newly independent Nigeria in the early 1960s, and it is a disturbing picture that is portrayed in this satirical work, which exposes evils such as corruption, bribery, tribalism, racism and immorality.

"The interpreters" in this novel are young people who hold very lofty ideals about themselves and their country. They are the cream, as it were, of their society.

They constitute a group loosely centred upon the university city of Ibadan in the early years of Nigerian independence. Influenced in various ways by their contacts with the west, and pursuing their personal visions, they are in the process of evaluating their contemporaries and the new cosmopolitan society which is emerging. (Moody, Gunner and Finnegan 1984:344)

As these young people interact with various members of the society, a number of issues are touched upon.

Chief Winsala and Sir Derin are two characters who are used by Soyinka to show how corrupt some apparently respectable personalities can be, and to demonstrate that the rest of society may never know the truth about the extent of this corruption. These two eminent men are seen following Sagoe, one of the interpreters, and trying to extort fifty pounds from him. Having been on the board that interviewed Sagoe for a job a few days earlier, the two men want Sagoe to bribe them with fifty pounds so that they can help Sagoe get the job. They tell Sagoe that everything is in his hands (Soyinka (1965a : 84). Ironically, when the corrupt Sir Derin dies, voluminous praises are sung at his funeral: "his life our inspiration, his idealism our hopes, the survival of his spirit in our midst the hope for a future Nigeria, for moral irridentism [sic] and national rejuvenescence" (Ibid. : 113). The platitudes make the point.

Soyinka uses Dehinwa's mother to lampoon tribalism and regionalism: evils which have led to many terrible wars in Africa. Dehinwa's mother and aunt have travelled all the way from Lagos because it has been rumoured that Dehinwa is dating a man from the "wrong" tribe. They have come to "talk sense" into Dehinwa, because to them she is obviously wrong to fall in love with a Northerner. They wonder whether good-looking, decent men cannot be found in Ibadan that she must fall in love with a *Gambari*. (The latter is obviously a pejorative term for Hausas.) Dehinwa's mother makes it clear that she (being Yoruba) does not want a Hausa grandson (Ibid. : 37).

The issue of immorality also features prominently in The Interpreters, especially through Egbo's relationship with the unnamed girl whom he impregnates. Later the girl wants to abort the foetus, so she goes to a Dr Lumoye who makes advances to her. She is to pay in kind before he will perform the abortion but when she refuses his advances, he turns her out of his surgery. Afterwards he is heard speaking disparagingly of people like her. According to Dr Lumoye and Professor Oguazor such people deserve no sympathy because this young generation is too morally corrupt

(Ibid. : 250). The hypocrisy of the educated men is too plain to need further comment.

It should be noted that "the interpreters", for all their frustration and dissatisfaction with their society, are themselves a great disappointment to the reader because they do nothing to correct the corrupt situation which they rightly criticise. This is one of the reasons why Soyinka is often criticised, for example, by Ngugi, who says it is not enough for an artist to merely highlight society's weaknesses. The artist must suggest solutions to the failures (Ngugi 1972 : 65-66).

Ngugi's critique would be acceptable if there were proof that Soyinka is holding up "the interpreters" as models. They are certainly not to be taken as models because each has serious shortcomings (d'Almeida 1981 : 19). Instead, these "interpreters" are also Soyinka's objects of attack. Sagoe, for example, is soon corrupted by the rotten system that he has been criticising. He betrays his profession when he decides he will have to keep silent and not publish unsavoury articles, which is, as he says, the way to survive in his country. Bandele is a hopelessly lazy lecturer who takes a long time to return his students' assignments. Kola and Egbo have a violent streak in them. Egbo even exploits a young university student and ends up impregnating her, although he will not marry her. Perhaps Soyinka is trying to show that high ideals and good intentions alone are not enough for those who want to be champions against evil in society. It is easy to criticise but it is certainly more difficult actually to do something to correct the wrongs.

It is not necessary to consider all the themes dealt with in The Interpreters, because it is enough to note that the themes so far referred to are the contemporary issues of the topic of this dissertation.

* * *

The Man Died (1972), Soyinka's "powerful prison diary" (King 1988 : 340), is an angry account of his twenty-seven months in detention between 1967 and 1969. If there is any piece of writing by Soyinka which is most forthright in its themes, this is it. In this novel, Soyinka, who is also the narrator, graphically captures post-independence Africa, now gone a stage further than the corruption exposed in The Interpreters. The dismay and disillusionment of The Interpreters have degenerated to physical and psychological torture by those in power. While "the interpreters"

have been seen merely condemning but doing nothing to suggest solutions to improve matters in The Interpreters. The Man Died explores what can happen to those who may be brave enough to speak against unacceptable situations in their societies, for the novel largely describes what happened to Soyinka himself when he was arrested for criticising the military authorities who wanted to start a war against the Ibos in 1967. Irele says the book addresses "the difficulty of adjusting human aspiration to the devastating conditions imposed upon the individual fate by the elementary forces by which it is governed" (1981 : 207).

The man who died is not Soyinka, but a Nigerian journalist called Segun Sowemimo, "a victim of the tyrannical brutality which for Soyinka was typical of the style of the Gowon military regime" (Jones 1988 : 17). Arrested on a flimsy charge by the orders of a military governor, Sowemimo was savagely beaten, and when his condition worsened, he was flown to England for treatment. Unfortunately, his gangrenous leg had to be amputated. When Soyinka was in London, he wanted to get in touch with Sowemimo, but he was told that the man had been flown back to Nigeria. So Soyinka asked a colleague in Nigeria to search for Sowemimo on his behalf, and then send news of the man to him in London. Soyinka's colleague in Nigeria did find out about Sowemimo, and he sent Soyinka a reply in cable form: "The Man Died" (Soyinka 1972a : 13).

The Man Died is about justice, and three quotations from the novel underscore this point. Firstly, "this book is deservedly DEDICATED to 'LAIDE who rejected compromise and demanded JUSTICE" (Ibid. : Dedication Page). Secondly, "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny" (Ibid. : 13). And finally, "For me, justice is the first condition of humanity" (Ibid. : 96).

It can be said that Sagoe, for instance, betrays the cause of justice in The Interpreters when he decides to keep silent about the many scandals that he should have exposed by means of his paper. He condemns himself when he says, "I have known all kinds of silence, but it's time to learn some more" (Soyinka 1965a : 98). And the destruction of Sekoni's small experimental power station on the grounds that it is "junk" (Ibid. : 27-28) is a grim foretaste of the ruthlessness and callousness of the new rulers in post-independence Africa.

As one reads through The Man Died, one is constantly reminded of the horrors that have bedevilled Africa since the attainment of independence. In the preface, which was written in October 1983, just over ten years after the book was published in

1972, Soyinka mentions the "growth of Fascism in Europe, and the naked, undialectical terror which has erupted in other African nations, notably Uganda, Zaire, Malawi and Equatorial Guinea" (Soyinka 1972a : xi). Later he refers to Banda, Mobutu, Gowon and Senghor as some of the really obnoxious characters in contemporary African politics (Ibid. : 232). It should be noted that some of these despots are satirised in Soyinka's plays, which will be discussed in the next three chapters.

The anger that is displayed in The Man Died is quite understandable, because Soyinka, as with many other innocent people, suffered a great deal as a result of the Nigerian Civil War. During that time, Soyinka was detained for twenty seven months, fifteen of which were spent in solitary confinement in a tiny cell, without proper medical care, and above all on a false charge (July 1981 : 477-8, King 1988 : 340). Some of the brutality that Soyinka mentions in this book is blood-chilling, for example the treatment meted out by soldiers to Dr Arigbede and other people who were caught up in the violence of the civil war. Dr Arigbede was arrested on an unclear charge and taken to a cell

where he was hung up by the wrists and left dangling, his feet away from the ground, from specially fixed ceiling hooks. Between beatings and other forms of torture the question was incessantly put: Where is the training camp? In the progress of his ordeal he could hear the cries of others subjected to even worse treatment - as he was later to discover - in their own cells. He conceded that, unlike others, he did not undergo the agony of having broomstick switches driven up his penis! (Soyinka 1972a : vii)

The horror of the Nigerian Civil War was caused by nothing other than tribalism and regionalism, another of the contemporary issues which preoccupy Soyinka. Soyinka was arrested because he went to see Ojukwu, the leader of the Biafrans. He went to see Ojukwu in order to persuade him not to go ahead with the war, but unfortunately the Nigerian military authorities misinterpreted Soyinka's visit as support for Ojukwu.

Towards the end of the novel, Soyinka makes his stand clear regarding oppressive rulers:

These men are not merely evil, ... They are the mindlessness of evil made flesh. One should not ever stumble into their hands but seek the power to destroy them. They are pus, bile, original putrescence of Death in living shapes. They surely infect all with whom they come in touch and even from this insulation here I smell a foulness of the mind in the mere tone of their words. They breed themselves,

their types, their mutations. To seek the power to destroy them is to fulfil a moral task. (Soyinka 1972a : 228)

Soyinka's intense hatred of oppressors, and his great desire to destroy them, as he puts it in the above quotation, is probably the reason why some critics, for example Rene, regard him as a committed writer: "he is a committed writer in the sense that he fights for freedom; his '-ism' is humanism" (1990 : 80).

Finally, it should be noted that much of The Man Died corresponds in essence with Barbara Harlow's Resistance Literature , especially where she talks of the dystopia that has characterised the post-independence era in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya (1987 : 154-169). Harlow indeed mentions that works such as The Man Died , "the prison memoirs of Third World political detainees", are strongly emerging as a distinct literary genre, with an identifiable "literary and ideological solidarity" which is a product of "particular conditions of the social and political structures within which they are produced" (Ibid. : 148).

It should also be observed that in his own prison memoir, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary (1981), Ngugi quotes from The Man Died: "no matter how cunning a prisoner, the humanitarian act of courage among his gaolers plays a key role in his survival" (Ngugi 1981 : 5). Ngugi is referring to the kindness of some of the prison guards. In Soyinka's case, one warder would smuggle bits of newspaper (Soyinka 1972a : 233-4), and in Ngugi's case one warder liked talking to him, and even told Ngugi about the outside world. Ngugi remarks: "This warder is a good illustration of the truth of that observation" (1981 : 5). Ngugi's citation of The Man Died (Ngugi 1981 : 5), Kariuki's Mau Mau Detainee (Ibid. : 69, 95-6) and the Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish (Ibid. : 1) is further testimony of Soyinka's contribution to the literature of the struggle for freedom, and of his engagement in contemporary issues.

* * *

Season of Anomy (1973) can be said to be an extension of both The Interpreters and The Man Died. The frustrated and disillusioned young intellectuals in The Interpreters merely engage in passive criticism of their corrupt society but do not offer any concrete suggestions to change the status quo. In The Man Died, the narrator (Soyinka) spells out his desire that tyrants must be removed from power by being destroyed (Soyinka 1972a : 228). In Season of Anomy there are moves to destroy the evil men of power. It is therefore possible to think of this novel as

Soyinka's reaction to Marxist critics such as Ngugi who have repeatedly accused Soyinka of not going "far enough" in his works. Maduakor's observation on this matter is as follows:

Marxist critics of African literature have castigated Soyinka for presenting in his works elitist effeminate heroes who pay lip service to social change. In Season of Anomy Soyinka endeavors to accommodate the views of this school of thought by offering two characters, Ofeyi and the Dentist, who believe in revolutionary action as a means of effecting changes in society (though they differ in their methods). (1987 : 107-8)

"Anomy", sometimes written as "anomie", is the lawlessness which results from the absence of rules of conduct. In Season of Anomy this lawlessness comes about because of the antagonism between two diametrically opposed forces, the forces of progress against the forces of repression. This lawlessness sweeps the entire country. "It is this lawlessness which is symbolized by the title of the book" (Ngara 1982 : 101).

Although Season of Anomy is not a duplication of The Man Died, it is clear that the two works deal with several similar issues, namely: repression, lawlessness, greed, corruption and tribalism. It is also possible to say that as The Man Died was being written, Soyinka was already thinking of Season of Anomy, as "anomy" is mentioned at least twice in The Man Died, when Soyinka talks of the "Social Anomy of 1966" and "a state of anomy" (Soyinka 1972a : 93, 120). This implies that the two books were inspired by similar events, but mainly by the Nigerian Civil War, and they were probably conceived while Soyinka was in prison.

Season of Anomy is an angrier work than either The Interpreters or The Man Died, and the book sounds like Soyinka's call to arms to all revolutionaries, to rise against their oppressors. This seems to be Soyinka's earliest indications of his socialistic inclinations (Ngara 1982 : 99), which he has since stated in clear and categorical terms, for example in an interview where he said that he had frequently declared his stance as a socialist, "allied to the most left-leaning political parties of [his] own society" (Borreca 1985 :35).

This novel is characterised by a confrontation between two antithetical forces: on the one hand, the forces of darkness, death and destruction, represented by the Cartel and its allies, the chiefs and the army. On the other hand there are the forces of enlightenment, progress and liberation, symbolized by the communalistic ideas of Aiyero. The Cartel, "a superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder"

(Soyinka 1973b : 27), must be toppled from power, and Ofeyi and the Dentist, with the help of the Aiyero men, work out strategies to carry out this task. These are the forces that will restore sanity to the land, and the Dentist is actually a trained assassin, a guerilla with radical ideas. He strongly believes in killing terrible rulers such as Chiefs Biga, Batoki and Zaki, and the Commander-in-Chief, the props of the capitalist Cartel. This is clearly a warning to right-wing regimes, especially military ones, that they should expect confrontation from progressive forces.

Citing instances of brutality, repression, greed, corruption and tribalism in Season of Anomy would be mere repetition of what has already been mentioned. What is important, though, is to note that even today, issues such as the link between liberation and socialism are still being generally discussed in academic circles, and these issues are highlighted in Season of Anomy.

Although at the end of Season of Anomy total liberation is still a long way away, there is one consolation; the seeds of liberation have been sown. There is hope:

if only because men like [sic] Suberu who have blindly been the allies of repressive forces become aware of their sordid roles as 'privileged slaves' and reject it [sic] altogether. It is only when many more will go through the same kind of awareness that the season of anomy will die to give birth to a season of harmony. (d'Almeda 1981 : 23)

Finally, as with The Man Died, the issues in Season of Anomy correspond closely with liberation struggles from Palestine, El Salvador, Nicaragua and South Africa, which are discussed in Harlow's chapter, "Narratives of Resistance" (Harlow 1987 : 75-116). This shows that Soyinka is not only an African but also a world writer who is concerned with human problems everywhere.

* * *

Ake: The Years of Childhood (1981) is Soyinka's autobiographical account of his first eleven years in Ake (Gibbs 1987 : 56), a small town in Nigeria where he (Soyinka) spent his childhood. This book's "primary value is for the light it throws on the young Soyinka's view of the world and the early impressions which formed the imaginative storehouse that was to produce the later works" (Jones 1988 : 32). The book should be studied by the Soyinka scholar, because it sheds further light on some of the factors which influenced the young Wole who later became the controversial literary giant that Soyinka is today.

Asked a few years ago why, even as a little boy, he always displayed such insatiable curiosity, and why he was always questioning everything, unlike other little children, Soyinka's answer was that he had found he did not readily accept everything. Why that is so, he does not know (Gullidge 1987 : 517). It would seem, therefore, that Soyinka's nonconformist/ iconoclastic tendencies (Jones 1978 : 25) are inborn. The man has always been an advocate of justice and so reading this novel should help readers of Soyinka to "detect the seeds which later flowed into ideas, themes and metaphors"; a reading which should also help critics to see Soyinka's "first stirrings of a social conscience" (Jones 1988 : 23).

Although filled with many happy occasions, it is an extremely harsh and brutal world that Wole sometimes portrays during his childhood. The children are punished for all sorts of misdemeanours. His own mother, Wild Christian, so called because of her fanatical interpretation of Christian tenets, is uncompromising in demanding impeccable behaviour from her children, and her standards are so high that it is almost impossible not to break the rules. The children are constantly reminded of "the spirit of the devil" (Soyinka 1981a : 80), but young Wole's precocious mind is quick to see many glaring instances of injustice and inconsistency in the adult world. For example, Wole deeply resents the humiliation his elder sister, Tinu, experiences because she is not as bright as her younger brother (Wole) (Ibid. : 80).

It takes only one incident for Wole to verbalise his utter disgust with the world of grown-ups; he thoroughly beats his younger brother, Dipo, who has actually provoked the fight. Everyone condemns Wole and, on reflection, he finds this puzzling:

I was overwhelmed by only one fact – there was neither justice nor logic in the world of grown-ups. I had imagined that I was the aggrieved one. ... Where was I at fault? ... the entire world was united in finding me guilty of attempted fratricide, and there was nowhere I could seek redress. (Ibid. :104)

His thoughts and feelings about the world of grown-ups are also revealed when he is talking to Father, who is actually his grandfather, in Isara, his father's natal home. During the conversation with Father, Wole remembers the fight with Dipo, and how he had been "simply puzzled that no one else [had] appeared to share [his] deep sense of injustice" (Ibid. : 81). He then makes the following statement:

Father, they are not very consistent are they? Punishing us when

we fight outside, then provoking my brother against me? (Ibid. : 14)

Nothing that Father says can satisfy Wole because there are so many instances of such injustice and cruelty. For example, there is the unfortunate young girl who still wets her bed although she is already sixteen. She is humiliated by being forced to march in the streets where she sings a song of shame, at the same time being whipped now and then. There is also the savage caning of school boys, twenty four lashes in one instance (Ibid. : 172), and thirty six in another (Ibid. : 167), at the end of which the offenders are expected to say, "Thank you, Principal".

But Wole's iconoclastic streak is shown when he challenges what he regards as one of the most humiliatingly backward customs during his childhood, the abominable practice where young people must prostrate themselves before their elders. It should be noted that even in The Interpreters, Egbo challenges this practice, and is savagely whipped for greeting his guardian while standing. On being reminded that he should prostrate himself, he protests, and tells his guardian : "If I only kneel to God why should I prostrate to you?" (Soyinka 1965a :17) Wole does the same thing and makes a statement similar to Egbo's: "If I don't prostrate myself to God, why should I prostrate to you? You are just a man like my father aren't you?" (Soyinka 1981a : 128)

It can therefore be deduced that Wole and Egbo represent the same person, Soyinka, and this view is supported by Moore who says that Egbo is "the most authorial of the characters" (1978 : 72). This means that the theme of the brutal treatment of children is among Soyinka's overriding concerns, because both Egbo and Wole seem particularly concerned about this issue.

Towards the end of the autobiography, Wole shifts the focus of attention from himself to the Egba Women's Union in their "confrontation with African and European symbols of imperial rule" (Crehan, Haney II and Lindeborg 1990 : 55). It would appear that this part of the novel was written specifically to address the colonial question, in keeping with what Soyinka believes is the function of the artist in African society, namely to act as the "record of the mores and experience of his society *and* as the voice of vision in his own time" (Soyinka 1993a : 20). Despite frequent allegations that Soyinka's works lack a historical perspective, Ake: The Years of Childhood has a strong historical content in its last quarter. Soyinka has explained that the African writer, having come out of the colonial setup, must of necessity revisit that colonial experience, "being able now to look back and examine certain things which he used to take for granted" (Gullidge 1987 : 519). Soyinka

is supported in this view by Schipper, who says: "In African countries art and society seem to be more strongly intertwined than in the West" (1989 : 62).

Looked at in this way, the final chapters of Ake: The Years of Childhood, chapters thirteen to the end, can be seen as "Soyinka's guerilla attacks on colonial power" (Crehan, Haney II and Lindeborg 1990 : 56). What starts as a harmless women's club, first focusing on adult literacy, is soon transformed into a discussion group which deals with issues such as "hygiene, community development, self-help programmes, market and commodity prices" (Soyinka 1981a : 180-1). But the club is further transformed into a powerful political movement whose aim is to drive out the "tormentors" and "bloodsuckers" who have made life intolerable for the Egba women as they are harassed, arrested and tortured by the tax people (Ibid. : 182-3). These bloodsuckers are the local police, the market wardens, the chiefs, the Kabiyesi (the local king), who are all working under the District Officer, the powerful representative of the colonial government. Organised as close comrades (Ibid. : 183), the angry women confront the local king, whom they insult with a new song, and force him to abdicate (Ibid. : 223). The District Officer is told a few truths about racism by Mrs. Kuti, the impressive leader of the women (Ibid. : 224-7). The oppressed people have had enough, and they will not take any more.

In The Interpreters, the idealistic young people merely expose the faults of the corrupt leaders. In The Man Died there is a call to destroy these evil leaders (Soyinka 1972a : 228) and in Season of Anomy Ofeyi and the Dentist are in the forefront of revolutionary action against the despotic authorities. Ake: The Years of Childhood, in addition to highlighting the theme of the brutal treatment of children, also takes up the idea of the fight against repression. Since Isara: A Voyage Around Essay, the novel to be discussed next, also deals with themes similar to those in Ake: The Years of Childhood, it can be argued that there is a persistent socio-political thread that runs through these Soyinka works.

* * *

The last of Soyinka's novels to be discussed is Isara: A Voyage Around Essay (1989). This novel is written in the same vein as Ake: The Years of Childhood. Isara: A Voyage Around Essay is about young Soyinka in his father's village, Isara. Soyinka explains in the author's note that he borrowed the book's subtitle from John Mortimer's play, A Voyage Round My Father. "Essay" is from the initials of Soyinka's father's names, Soditan Akinyode, S.A. (Gullidge 1987 : 511). The book

takes the reader back to the late 1920s, and covers the early years of British colonialism in Nigeria, stopping during the 1940s .

Soyinka's belief that the past, the present and the future are inseparably linked is also extended to explain the link between the dead, the living and the unborn. This view is clearly stated in Myth, Literature and the African World (1976:10). Although written well after the other works, Isara: A Voyage Around Essay should be seen as a completion of the cyclic link in the lives of Nigerians. Soyinka affords his readers an opportunity to see the seeds of the thoughts, feelings and actions of modern Nigerians (Soyinka 1989 : vi).

This novel deals with a wide range of themes, both political and social. One of these is the theme of the brutal treatment of children where they are savagely whipped at school (Ibid. : 4, 110, 112, 132). This harsh treatment is practised even in the home where children are reminded that they have no right to ask questions (Ibid. : 16). This theme features prominently in Ake: The Years of Childhood, as well as in The Interpreters, as already discussed above.

Soyinka also reveals the senselessness of xenophobia. This is a theme that has already been alluded to in The Interpreters. Sago, a Northerner, is called a *gambari*, which is an insulting term for a Hausaman (Soyinka 1965a : 37, 254). In Isara: A Voyage Around Essay Damian, an outsider, is also addressed pejoratively: "this *kobokobo* beggar" (Soyinka 1989 : 23) and "Edo-alien" (Ibid. : 255). In the end, though, Damian is accepted in the society when he has proved himself a hard worker. Soyinka here emphasizes the need to tolerate outsiders.

The ugly face of factional fighting is shown when rival groups clash over the choice of a new king. Cutlasses are flashed, people are beaten up and lives are lost during these clashes (Ibid. : 217, 227). Soyinka's hatred of unnecessary wars and irresponsible soldiers is evident in this novel. The soldiers are seen looting shops, raiding government warehouses and urinating in public after a night of heavy drinking. Soyinka talks of war bringing out the worst in everyone. He refers to soldiers as a menace, and observes that because of war, people become corrupt, since everyone thinks of making as much money as quickly as possible (Ibid. : 69, 188, 189).

The issues of racialism and colonialism are also raised in this novel. Soyinka has

stated that the colonial process was, on reflection, a most humiliating and insulting experience (Gullidge 1987: 523). One example of this insulting attitude is a statement from a colonialist who says that everyone knows that the West African Negro is not yet ready to govern himself (Soyinka 1989: 156). It is known that the main purpose of establishing colonies was not to train the colonized in self-government, as JanMohamed (1985: 62) and Davidson (1992: 11, 201) confirm. And so the statement from the colonialist that everyone knows that the West African Negro is not yet ready for independence merely exposes the vacuity behind colonialism. Looked at in this way, the book can be said to contain Soyinka's attacks on colonialism.

And finally Soyinka exposes charlatanism as epitomised in Ray Gunnar, who exploits the gullible West African youths. Gunnar sets up a bogus correspondence school in England, claiming to offer a wide range of courses. In the process "professor" Gunnar makes plenty of money by cheating his prospective "students" (Soyinka 1989: 178). Gunnar represents fake political and religious leaders, those who live off the gullibility of the people whose cause they claim to champion. The theme of gullibility will be encountered in the discussion of several plays later in this dissertation.

* * *

Soyinka's Four Poetical Works

In this section, Soyinka's four volumes of poetry will be discussed, namely: Idanre and Other Poems (1967), A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972), Ogun Abibiman (1976) and Mandela's Earth and Other Poems (1988). As in the case of the novels, the discussion will be very brief, and an attempt will be made to demonstrate that even in his poems, Soyinka still emerges as a committed writer who is preoccupied with contemporary issues.

The section of Idanre and Other Poems entitled "October '66" contains five short poems which Maduakor says "were inspired by the civil disturbances that rocked the foundations of Nigeria in the sixties and which led to the civil war that lasted from 1967 - 1970. They deal, therefore, with war and its savagery" (1987: 30). Soyinka again shows a sensitivity to issues surrounding himself, which leads to Jones's calling him "a serious poet concerned with grave issues which face him as a

man in first of all his own country Nigeria, but eventually as a man living in the twentieth century" (1988 :143).

Before the war started, Soyinka worked very hard trying to persuade the two rival sides to reach a compromise. His efforts were misinterpreted by the Nigerian military authorities, and he was later detained because it was thought that he was on the side of the Biafrans (July 1981 : 478). Soyinka opposed this war not because he is a pacifist. He strongly believes that war should be a last resort, and would support war as long as it is in defence of liberty (Soyinka 1972a : 19, 49, 73). This is the stand Soyinka adopts in The Man Died and Season of Anomy and, it will be shown below, in Ogun Abibiman.

There is a very strong temptation to say that the narrator in each "October '66" poem is Soyinka himself, because the narrator echoes Soyinka's views on war in general, as well as on the Nigerian Civil War in particular. For instance, in "Ikeja, Friday, Four O'clock", the narrator is against this war, so he refers to the battle-bound troops as the "unbidden offering" because their lives will be lost unnecessarily. There is a suggestion that the reason for this war is a lie. This war is a result of intense anger which has made it impossible for rationality to prevail. Tolerance and compromise have not been given a chance.

The narrator sees these trucks as gourds carrying some liquid with which the earth will quench its thirst:

They were but gourds for earth to drink therefrom
The laden trucks, mirage of breath and form
(Soyinka 1967a : 49)

It should be pointed out that "gourds" also suggests that the soldiers have now been dehumanised, and this idea is taken up when these battle-bound troops are referred to as "mirage of breath and form". This could be because the soldiers' camouflage outfit makes them appear indistinct. It could also be that the high speed of the laden trucks, as well as the dust that is raised by these same trucks, cause the soldiers to appear as phantoms. This view is shared by Maduakor who says these soldiers have "lost their human identity and are perceived only as apparitions" (1987 : 30). The narrator's plea is that there should be no unnecessary waste of human life.

The idea of the idiocy and wastefulness of war is sharpened in "Harvest of Hate". War is a result of hatred among people. When there is war, nothing goes right, as symbolized by the idea that the sun does not travel its full course but dies at mid-

morning. There is no laughter, and, most unfortunately many lives are lost. The flames of a raging fire burn everything.

For wings womb-moist from the sanctuary of nests
 Fall, unfledged to the tribute of fire.
 (Soyinka 1967a : 50)

A picture is created of young lives being lost because of the war: a painful and gloomy situation.

In "Massacre, October '66", the narrator reports the killing of so-called strangers in northern Nigeria in October 1966. This poem, just as all the others in this section, is based on an actual event, as Soyinka himself recounts (Soyinka 1972a : 118-122). These massacres eventually led to the start of what later became known as the Nigerian Civil War. The narrator is Soyinka, who is in temporary exile in Tegel, Germany, where he is reminded, by the falling acorns, of the killing that is going on in Nigeria. It is autumn and he sees acorns falling from an oak tree. The dying leaves and the acorns on which he treads remind Soyinka of the skulls that are being crushed at home.

I trod on acorns; each shell's detonation
 Aped the skull's uniqueness
 (Soyinka 1967a : 51)

It should be noted that this is one of Soyinka's works which have been interpreted in a puzzling manner by the Chinweizus, as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. The Chinweizus accuse Gibbs of employing "somnambulist criticism" in his article, "'Larsony' with a Difference" (Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa and Ihechukwu 1986 : 49). One is tempted to say that these critics are themselves employing "somnambulist criticism" in their interpretation of "Massacre, October '66". Suffice it to say that Soyinka himself (1993a : 254, 299) responds to the Chinweizus, pointing out why their interpretation is wrong.

"Civilian and Soldier" presents two antithetically ranged forces. On the one hand there is the civilian who represents the life-giving forces. On the other hand is the soldier who symbolises all that is evil, death and destruction. While the civilian offers the soldier "meat and bread", and "a gourd of wine", the soldier brings his gun and bullets to the people, destroying everything in the course of performing his duties.

The civilian further talks of his "quandry" [sic] and the soldier's "plight" and "confusion". All these are a result of the war. But in the end the civilian makes it clear that he understands the soldier's predicament; the soldier is nothing but a victim of circumstance, because the answer to the question at the very end of the poem, querying whether the soldier knows what the war is all about, is most likely that he does not (Jones 1988 : 180).

"For Fajuyi" is also based on an actual event, the death of Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi. This poem gives a concrete example of the wastefulness of war, because Fajuyi "was Soyinka's ideal soldier, a true nationalist and a dedicated socialist " (Maduakor 1987 : 32, 33). The poem makes it clear that men of the ilk of Fajuyi are not common, as very few of them are produced at any given time. The narrator calls those who killed Fajuyi "weeds", and this leaves the readers in no doubt about Soyinka's disgust with these murderers.

The "October '66" poems have eloquently shown the savagery of war.

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A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972) is a collection of poems written by Soyinka while he was in prison between August 1967 and October 1969. The poems do not record Soyinka's prison experiences as such, which are recorded in The Man Died. In A Shuttle in the Crypt Soyinka chronicles the thoughts that came to his mind as he sat, lonely, for months and months in a tiny cell (the crypt).

Imprisonment without trial is an unjust action and is an issue which is often raised by human rights groups such as Amnesty International. In A Shuttle in the Crypt this injustice is highlighted in "Four Archetypes", especially in the poems "Joseph" and "Gulliver". These archetypes are used by Soyinka as metaphors for injustice. Joseph is the Biblical character who was thrown into jail on trumped up charges by Potiphar's wife. She tried to lure Joseph to bed but when Joseph refused, she accused Joseph of trying to violate her honour (Genesis 39 : 1- 23). In "Gulliver" (taken from Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels), Gulliver is someone who abhors unjust war. He refuses to help the Lilliputian king in his plan to completely crush the enemy, and the king hatches a plan to punish Gulliver. Fortunately, Gulliver escapes.

In some respects, Soyinka is like Joseph and Gulliver. He was imprisoned on a wrong charge when he angered the Nigerian authorities by speaking against the war with the Ibos (Maduakor 1987 : 37).

As if imprisonment without trial were not bad enough, some prisoners are at times subjected to inhuman treatment, perhaps until they die in prison. In "Chimes of Silence" readers are presented with examples of ill-treatment of prisoners. This is also the case in "Wailing Wall" and "Purgatory" (Soyinka 1972b : 34, 38).

In all this savage treatment of fellow human beings, where some are even hanged with reckless abandon, Soyinka clearly states that such deeds are unjust. He says so explicitly in "Procession" :

Let no man speak of justice, guilt.
Far away, blood-stained in their
Tens of thousands, hands that damned.
These wretches to the pit triumph
(Ibid. : 41)

Lastly, in "Live Burial" we see a continuation of the ill-treatment on prisoners, but this time the prisoner is Soyinka himself. He is kept in a cell that is

Sixteen paces
By twenty-three. They hold
Siege against humanity
And Truth
Employing time to drill through to his sanity
(Ibid. : 60)

Later, readers learn of an official medical report about the prisoner, that he sleeps and eats well, and that his doctors have found nothing wrong with his health. The report is of course untrue.

"Flowers for my Land" has many images of war and destruction: "death", "horror", "scavengers", "ordure", and the country itself is called a "garden of decay". The point is clear, that Soyinka sees war as cruel, hence his belief that it should be the very last resort: a stand he takes in Ogun Abibiman.

* * *

Ogun Abibiman (1976) is "a long poetic tribute to the struggle for liberation on the African continent" (Zell, Bundy and Coulon 1983 : 488). According to Ngara, this poem "shows a definite development [in Soyinka's works] in the direction of a committed Pan-Africanism" (1990 : 96). Ngara continues: "Ogun Abibiman reflects a new and genuine Africa-centred consciousness in Soyinka. This is an important step in writing socially committed literature" (Ibid. : 102). Amuta also expresses a similar view (1989 : 67). The poem is dedicated to the memory of the dead and the maimed of Soweto, and was written as a celebration of Samora Machel's declaration of war against the then minority regime of Ian Smith. It is a different kind of war, as far as Soyinka is concerned. This is a war in defence of liberty, the only kind of war Soyinka will support (Soyinka 1972a : 49).

According to Jones (1988 : 3-14), in Yoruba mythology, Ogun is the god of war and creativity. "Abibiman" means Black People. The poem is therefore a call to the oppressed Blacks to take up arms and fight for their liberty and right to self-determination. In this fight, the process of liberation will be bloody and painful (Booth 1981:170). Whole stretches of land will writhe from end to end. Farmlands will be deserted and there will be mass starvation (Soyinka 1976b : 1, 3).

The war that Ogun is being asked to lead has been embarked on as a last resort, because other forms of trying to gain liberation have failed. These include sanctions, dialogue, protests and diplomacy (Soyinka 1976b : 6).

* * *

Mandela's Earth and Other Poems (1988) continues the theme of liberation as expressed in Ogun Abibiman. The outside cover of the text introduces this volume as follows: "The poems on Mandela comment on one another, deepening our response to the nature of political immolation".

Mandela needs no introduction. He was once referred to as the world's most famous political prisoner - he spent 27 years in prison - and is now (November 1994) the President of South Africa, having been elected to that post after South Africa's first post-apartheid elections in April 1994. So in Mandela's Earth and Other Poems, Soyinka deals with the politics of South Africa, and by implication about Africa more generally.

The narrator is wondering what kind of person Mandela is. He says he is frightened by Mandela's logic in having refused the many attempts that were made to get him (Mandela) out of prison. To all these offers Mandela said "No".

Are you bigger than Nkomati? Blacker
Than hands that signed away a continent for ease?
(Soyinka 1988b : 22)

The reference is to the Nkomati Accord, the non-aggression pact that was signed between South Africa and the front-line states of southern Africa. The narrator wonders whether it is wise for Mandela to continue as a prisoner on Robben Island. It would make so much sense, after such a long time in prison, for any ordinary human being to succumb to the lure of his own personal freedom and accept offers of being released. Soyinka's intention is to show Mandela's courage and determination in the struggle for liberation and justice.

The poem also accuses the South African government authorities of complicity in the death of anti-apartheid campaigners such as Steve Biko, Ruth First and many others, some of whom are alleged to have committed suicide by jumping from multi-storey buildings.

I saw your hand in Biko's death, ...
(Soyinka 1988b : 8)

There is also a reference to the burning of Winnie Mandela's home, as well as the confiscation of her bedspread by the South African police (Ibid. : 11). The same brutal policemen are later shown disrupting a funeral gathering in Soweto (Ibid.:19). The whole situation is one of violence and brutality towards the defenceless people of South Africa.

It has been noted in the discussion on the novels that Soyinka hates dictators. This attitude emerges quite clearly in "The Apotheosis of Master Sergeant Doe". Doe is the former President of Liberia who seized power in a bloody coup in 1980. He ruled for ten years, during which time he wreaked havoc on his country. He was himself overthrown in 1990, and was killed after first being tortured.

Doe's early years were full of promise, but after some time he became ruthless:

Lean your entry, in studied saviour's form
Combat fatigued, self-styled a cleansing storm.

.....
 Stayed simple Master Sergeant.....
 (Soyinka 1988b : 32)

As time went on, the country became full of skulls and there were squeals of humans dying the death of pigs (Ibid. : 33).

The narrator mentions that Doe copied this brutality from some of Africa's masters of repression, Bokassa, Macias Nguema, and Idi Amin Dada. It should be noted, again, that these despots are satirised in Soyinka's plays, which will be discussed in the next three chapters. The narrator's great fear, not to be realised, is that Doe might set a new record for staying in power.

The four volumes of Soyinka's poems that have been discussed in the second part of this chapter have demonstrated that Soyinka is a committed writer who concerns himself with contemporary issues such as war and its savagery, the injustice of imprisonment without trial, the struggle for freedom by oppressed peoples, and South African politics as well as with the African situation in general.

The whole chapter has shown that Soyinka's socio-political awareness is evident in his novels and poems. In the next three chapters, it will be shown that this preoccupation with socio-political contemporary issues runs through all his plays.

Chapter 2

WOLE SOYINKA'S PLAYS OF THE SIXTIES

This chapter will be divided into two parts. In Part One, Soyinka's earliest plays will be discussed. These are: The Lion and the Jewel (1963), The Swamp Dwellers (1963), Camwood on the Leaves (1973), The Trials of Brother Jero (1964) and A Dance of the Forests (1963). The first two plays were staged as early as 1958, while the last three were all written in 1960.

In Part Two of the chapter, The Strong Breed (1964), The Road (1965) and Kongi's Harvest (1967) will be discussed. These three plays mark the end of Soyinka's dramatic output in the 1960s.

The grouping of the plays in the above way is more chronological than thematic, but it will be shown that in the first four plays, Soyinka's main concerns are non-political. Only A Dance of the Forests deals with, among other themes, political issues. This is important to point out because Soyinka is sometimes thought of only as a political writer. It should be stressed that Soyinka's engagement with contemporary issues is much wider, and to focus only on his political themes is to limit him unnecessarily.

The late fifties and early sixties saw the demise of colonial rule in most parts of Africa. The colonial period had seen the building of modern towns and cities, as well as the introduction of formal education. Afterwards, this westernization and urbanisation put some of the old, traditional values under pressure. It is against this backdrop that plays such as The Lion and the Jewel and The Swamp Dwellers should be approached. Moore observes that these two plays deal with nearly the same material (1976 : 26). It is for this reason that they will be discussed one after the other. Irele talks of "Soyinka's social concern first [finding] expression in his work through the satirical vein of his early comedies, such as The Lion and the Jewel and The Trials of Brother Jero" (1981 : 198). Considered together with Camwood on the Leaves, these four plays can be said to have something in common. Each one of them has a charlatan, as will be shown below. It is significant that A Dance of the Forests was written specifically to comment on Nigerian Independence in 1960.

* * *

When Geoffrey Hunt talks of Soyinka's "sudden detachment from his indigenous society" (Gugelberger 1985 : 67), he is probably not aware that Soyinka's plays were inspired by "the fundamental truths of his community" (Katrak 1986 : 10). For example, an article about Charlie Chaplin at sixty years of age, marrying a young wife of seventeen, triggered off The Lion and the Jewel. This is how Baroka came into existence, as Soyinka himself explains:

I knew that some of these old men had actually won these new wives against the stiff competition of some younger men, some of them school teachers who came to the villages. Lakunle was based on those who thought: 'This girl has got to be impressed by my canvas shoes.' Mind you, the younger men didn't speak the language that those girls understood and they were beaten by the old men. That's how The Lion and the Jewel came to be written.

(Gibbs 1987 : 67)

It should be stressed, right away, that some critics have completely misinterpreted not only The Lion and the Jewel but also other works of Soyinka. This has been caused by "the extravagant delusion that Soyinka believes in a full-hearted espousal of African values" (Gates 1984 : 47). Probyn, for example, says that Soyinka is "simultaneously a traditionalist and a pathfinder" (1981 : 5). Blishen, too, says "Soyinka is not a writer who believes that 'progress' is always a good thing. As a small example, he shares Baroka's view that modern roads are 'murderous'" (1975 : 11-12). This implies that Baroka speaks for Soyinka, hence the wrong notion that Soyinka is on the side of traditional values in The Lion and the Jewel. Then there is Geoffrey Hunt who claims that Soyinka is a romanticist with a "nostalgia for the security of traditional values". Hunt even goes on to quote Peter Nazareth to prove the claim that Soyinka wants traditional ways of life to be retained, and, according to Hunt, The Lion and the Jewel is a Negritude play which extols the African past (Gugelberger 1985 : 65-71).

These are grossly misleading interpretations because Soyinka does not believe in glorifying the past, as he stated as early as 1967: "The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past" (Soyinka 1993a : 18). Furthermore, it will be shown that in all the plays which do refer to the past, or to traditional customs, plays such as A Dance of the Forests, The Swamp Dwellers, The Strong Breed, Death and the King's Horseman, Soyinka is in fact very critical of the

African past itself and the traditional customs in these plays. If Soyinka had wanted to show the superiority of traditional forces over modern ones he would have written a different play from The Lion and the Jewel.

The Lion and the Jewel was written in about 1957, while Soyinka was still a student at the University of Leeds (King 1988 : 341). The play was staged in London in 1958 (Pribic 1990 : 420). Although Soyinka was physically in England, spiritually he must have been in his country, Nigeria, because it is easy to see the connection between his criticism of priggish western-educated young people in early poems such as "The Immigrant" and "...And the Other Immigrant" on the one hand, and in The Lion and the Jewel on the other. Goodwin's reference to the immigrant as "foolishly complacent" (1982:108) would be appropriate for Lakunle, the self-styled messiah of Ilujinle in The Lion and the Jewel.

In an interview a few years ago, Soyinka was asked whether The Lion and the Jewel shows the clash of Western culture and traditional culture. His answer was:

No. There is no clash because there is no Western culture there. What you have is a misconceived, very narrow and very superficial concept of Western culture as stated by Lakunle. You also have the old man defending his turf against any encroachment from outside. Lakunle is *not* a representative of Western culture, ... (Gibbs 1987 : 79)

It is important to emphasize that Baroka himself does not represent traditional culture in this play. The fact that the play appeared when many writers were agonizing about their being torn between two cultures should not mean that The Lion and the Jewel is about a culture clash (Gibbs 1987 : 80).

This simple play is set in a small village and concerns a young man who thinks that because of his (little) education he is a beacon of progress in his entire village. Lakunle is only a primary school teacher, and it would not be too far-fetched to imagine that he is probably untrained. It is likely that Lakunle is teaching in a bush school because he could not get a job in a town. Being such an admirer of Lagos and Ibadan, he would have taken full advantage of his qualifications to work and live there. But now he is a comic figure whose head is stuffed with all sorts of ideas about progress and civilisation. He sees himself as the leader in the crusade against backwardness, and boasts:

Alone I stand for progress

(Soyinka 1963b : 26)

Through Lakunle, Soyinka satirises vanity, especially that of so-called educated people who find themselves in the midst of the so-called uneducated. Lakunle is an extremely proud fellow who despises everything traditional. He blindly adores all western customs and habits. Soyinka makes it obvious right from the beginning that Lakunle is not to be taken seriously. This emerges from the description of what Lakunle is wearing.

He is dressed in an old-style English suit, threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small. His tie is done in a very small knot, disappearing beneath a shiny black waist-coat. He wears twenty-three-inch-bottom trousers, and blanco-white tennis shoes.

(Ibid. : 1)

Ironically, the champion of modernity is wearing an old-style suit. This is a pointer to the confusion in Lakunle's nature. His suit is threadbare, perhaps because of over-use, as it is his only one. He has probably washed the suit, instead of sending it to the dry-cleaners. Again, over-use has resulted in his waist-coat becoming shiny black. It is also possible that he has been ironing the waist-coat too frequently. In addition he is wearing tennis shoes instead of proper leather shoes. This description suggests that Lakunle is a poor teacher who has no money to buy new, decent clothes. Soyinka already indicates that Lakunle is ill-suited for the role he is trying to play. No wonder Sadiku tells him:

What a poor figure you cut!

(Ibid. : 36)

Lakunle's utterances are also very amusing, although it is not his intention to amuse. To him bride-price is

A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,
Rejected, denounced, accursed,
Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,
Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.
Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable. (Ibid. : 7)

Lakunle's muddle-headedness is displayed again here, because he has used some words wrongly: "excommunicated", "remarkable" and "unpalatable" cannot be used to denounce bride-price. To make matters worse, he feebly concludes the list with

"unpalatable", thereby completely ruining his whole case. It can be suggested that Lakunle's outburst against bride-price is because he is so poor that he would not be able to afford it. He is merely hiding behind "modern" and "educated" sentiments.

Apart from displaying a shaky mastery of certain academic topics, Lakunle is also insufferably haughty: he insults almost everyone in the village. For instance, he calls the villagers "Idlers... good-for-nothing shameless men" (Ibid. : 3), "pigs" (Ibid.), a "race of savages" (Ibid.), "these bush minds" (Ibid. : 6). What everybody enjoys playing is to Lakunle "foolery" and "a game of idiots" (Ibid. : 14) and "childish nonsense" (Ibid. : 17). He does not want to participate because he claims he has work of more importance.

To Lakunle, Sidi is "as stubborn [a]s an illiterate goat" (Ibid. : 2). She is an "[i]gnorant girl" (Ibid. : 8), a "bush girl" who will always remain "uncivilized" and "primitive" (Ibid. : 9). Sadiku is "a woman of the bush" (Ibid. : 36) with "a withered face" and a "simple and unformed" mind (Ibid. : 37).

Perhaps the most vituperative words are directed towards the Bale. Lakunle first calls him "that crafty rogue", a "past master of self-indulgence" (Ibid. : 5). He is also termed

The greedy dog!
Insatiate camel of a foolish, doting race; (Ibid. : 19)

Later, he is called

... a savage thing, degenerate
He would beat a helpless woman if he could.. (Ibid. : 35)

And finally

Baroka is a creature of the wilds,
Untutored, mannerless, devoid of grace. (Ibid. : 58)

By insulting nearly everyone, Lakunle shows himself to be a total misfit in the village. He unknowingly condemns himself as an outcast who must go and live somewhere else. But it is unlikely that Lakunle would fit in the city. Firstly, his

clothes would simply make him more of a clown than a townsman. Also, his ideas about being modern would not make sense to real city dwellers. The solution for Lakunle lies in his changing his whole outlook on life. He needs real education: that is learning how to live with other people, not his shallow book education.

Even when Lakunle thinks he means well, he ends up being extremely offensive. He tells Sidi that women have a smaller brain than men; that is why they are called the weaker sex. All this is in his books, he says (Ibid. : 4). Lakunle is not aware that he is displaying anti-feminine sentiments. But in Sidi he finds more than his match: she tells him that he is really nothing but the madman of the village who calls himself a teacher. His big, loud words mean nothing. They merely make people laugh and choke in their cups (Ibid. : 4).

Again Sidi asks him :

The weaker sex, is it?
Is it a weaker breed who pounds the yam
Or bends all day to plant the millet
With a child strapped to her back? (Ibid. : 4)

This is clear, powerful thinking by Sidi, and Lakunle cannot find any sound argument to counter Sidi's logic. It is becoming clear that Sidi and Lakunle are incompatible, for Sidi deserves better than Lakunle. She would not be happy if she were to be married to Lakunle, whose idea of being civilized means rejecting all traditional customs and habits. He tells Sidi:

Together we shall sit at table
- Not on the floor - and eat
Not with fingers, but with knives
And forks, and breakable plates
Like civilized beings. (Ibid. : 8)

He will walk side by side and arm in arm with his wife. He will provide her with high-heeled shoes and lipstick. She will have to learn dances such as the waltz and fox-trot. He continues:

And we'll spend the week-end in night-clubs at Ibadan.
Oh I must show you the grandeur of towns
We'll live there if you like or merely pay visits.
So choose. Be a modern wife, look me in the eye
And give me a little kiss - like this.
(*Kisses her.*) (Ibid. : 9)

It has already been pointed out that Lakunle would not fit in the city simply because he has a totally wrong concept of city life. Ball-room dancing, night-clubs, kissing in public are surely *not* marks of civilization. When Sidi tells him she does not like kissing because to her it is so unclean, Lakunle replies that she is uncivilized and primitive. All educated men, and all Christians, kiss their wives. "It is the way of civilized romance" (Ibid.: 9). The absurdity is too obvious to demand comment.

Sidi then leaves Lakunle, quite understandably so, for the Bale, although it must be pointed out that she does not know what the outcome will be when she first goes to the Bale's palace. Sidi has been driven by self-pride to go and taunt the Bale, for she has been told by Sadiku that the Bale is now impotent.

When Sidi rudely and proudly says:

Sadiku, I am young and brimming; he is spent.
I am the twinkle of a jewel
But he is the hind-quarters of a lion! (Ibid.: 23)

It is as if she has learnt this pride and vanity from Lakunle. Such arrogance and haughtiness take away all the admiration and support Sidi may have gained so far. The Bale is not known as "the fox" for nothing. He is shown as defeating plans to build a railway through Ilujinle, and Sidi falls into the Bale's trap. She is finally seduced by Baroka. Her hubristic behaviour could only end in this "disaster".

But the "disaster" is temporary, as Sidi finally decides to marry Baroka. She says to Lakunle:

Why do you think that after him
I could endure the touch of another man?
I who have felt the strength
The perpetual youthful zest
Of the panther of the trees?
And would I choose a watered-down
A beardless version of unripened man? (Ibid.: 63)

It seems as if the wheel has turned for Lakunle. The proud "scholar" who was insulting everyone at the beginning is now on the receiving end. He is pushed to the ground, told to get out of the way, and called a "book-nourished shrimp" (Ibid.: 63).

In the end Lakunle fails in his mission to "civilize" the village. He loses to a more mature rival, the Bale, who, though not wholly admirable, is at least level-headed

and understands the world around himself. The Bale's physical strength (shown when he defeats the wrestler, and also from Sidi's testimony) is symbolic of his superiority over Lakunle, who is actually so weak physically that he is thrown to the ground by Sidi on more than one occasion (Ibid. : 4, 63). Lakunle's ideas would only bring chaos to the village. Under Baroka, the situation is not perfect, but there is stability.

Unlike Lakunle who has no respect for the old order, the Bale sees the need for the young and the old to come together. He says:

The proof of wisdom is the wish to learn
 Even from children. And the haste of youth
 Must learn its temper from the gloss
 Of ancient leather, from a strength
 Knit close along the grain. The school teacher
 And I, must learn one from the other. ...

..... (Ibid. : 53-4)

Although the Bale here seems to speak for Soyinka, it would be incorrect to conclude that this is the case right through the play. The dramatist, it must be remembered, wanted to portray old men (not necessarily representing traditional life) in a more positive light than the confused young men. Baroka, then, is not representative of traditional culture, just as Lakunle does not represent modern culture. Again, Soyinka explains:

Baroka himself does not represent any culture as such. He is somebody exploiting certain aspects of his culture for the benefit of Number One, Baroka. ... [H]e represents a last ditch defence against external intervention in his little pocket.

(Gibbs 1987 : 80)

Lakunle, Soyinka again explains, is a caricature (Gibbs 1987 : 73). Soyinka even goes to the extent of saying that anyone who interprets Lakunle to represent an educated African is actually insulting Africans, as Hunt says (Gugelberger 1985 : 72). Lakunle "is nothing but an object of fun. Only Geoffrey Hunt in his innocence or obsessive *hate* - only Mr Hunt could propose, to an African community, the figure of Lakunle as representative of the educated 'progressive'" (Soyinka 1993a : 283).

The fact that the Charlie Chaplin article in England immediately reminded Soyinka of the situation in his country is strong testimony of this dramatist's attachment to his community, a clear demonstration of the man's social awareness.

* * *

The Swamp Dwellers (1963) must have been written after Soyinka's graduation and when he was a substitute teacher in London. The play was first staged in 1958 in London (Pribic 1990 : 420) and in 1959 it was staged in Ibadan (Jones 1988: 39). While Lakunle is a harmless false leader of modernism, the Kadiye in The Swamp Dwellers is also a false leader, but a sinister one who can have disastrous effects on his society. Both The Lion and the Jewel and The Swamp Dwellers can be said to deal with the theme of the false leader, a view supported by Jones (1988 : 54), although it should be pointed out that Jones clearly makes an error when he talks of the Kadiye as if he is a character in The Strong Breed. The Kadiye is a character in The Swamp Dwellers; Eman's tutor in The Strong Breed resembles the Kadiye in a small way, but of that later on.

Soyinka explains that The Swamp Dwellers was triggered by a report about the discovery of oil in delta regions of Nigeria. He says:

I began thinking about the effects - I had no idea what the reality would be ... the effect that kind of sudden access to wealth would have on interpersonal relationship in a rural, largely peasant, society, which literally always lived on the edge of poverty. I'd seen examples like that before, where sudden access to cocos [sic] wealth had created a crisis for society. (Gibbs 1987 : 68)

Although the "conflict-between-the-new-and-the-old" interpretation ("the line of least resistance" (Gibbs 1987 : 79)) is sometimes seen as a simplistic way of analysing some of Soyinka's literary works, that assessment certainly holds true for The Swamp Dwellers, but it should be stressed that the play is obviously about more than this conflict. Katrak sheds some light about this play, and says:

In The Swamp Dwellers Soyinka dramatizes how past practices which have become conventions and customs and thus followed blindly through otherwise changing times have disastrous effects on the present lives of the villagers. (1986 : 135)

The "youth-drain" from the swamp-village into the city is not difficult to explain. There is a hint that all is not well right from the beginning of the play. The description of the scene evokes an atmosphere of discomfort and suffering.

The scene is a hut on stilts, built on one of the scattered semi-firm islands in the swamps. ... The walls are marsh stakes plaited with hemp ropes.

Later it is mentioned that

Alu appears to suffer more than the normal viciousness of the swamp flies. She has a flick by her side which she uses frequently, yelling whenever a bite has caught her unawares.

(Soyinka 1969 : 3)

Life is uncomfortable in the village. Makuri understands why their other son left:

Awuchike got sick of this place and went into the city.

Shortly after this, he explains why the young people desert the village:

All the young men go into the big town to try their hand at making money... only some of them remember their folk and send word once in a while.

(Ibid. : 6)

The elderly couple remember times when life was not too difficult. Again it is Makuri who voices this memory:

... those days were really good. Even when times were harsh and the swamp overran the land, we were able to laugh ... but these young people... They are no sooner born than they want to get out of the village as if it carried a plague...

(Ibid. : 10)

The point being made is that while the older generation is satisfied with the state of things, the youth are not. It seems quite reasonable for these young people to be going to try their hand at money-making in the city. It would be a display of lack of imagination for them not to go where the grass is greener. There is nothing apparently wrong with this spirit of adventure.

The major problem, though, is the fate of the youths once they are in the city. There, they lose all their humanity. Again, it is Makuri who mentions the effect of the city on the youths:

It ruins them. The city ruins them. What do they
seek except money? (Ibid. : 10)

An example of the dehumanising effect of the city on the youths is the case of Gonushi's son, who left his wife and children and has not been heard of since (Ibid. : 11). Another example of a person who has been corrupted by the city is Awuchike, Igwezu's twin brother. Precisely what Awuchike did to Igwezu is not mentioned, but Igwezu says that for a while they lived together. Then Igwezu talks of meeting the harshness of the city and the nakedness of its hostility. He later

saw its knife sever the ties and the love of kinship,
and turn brother against brother... (Ibid. : 30)

Awuchike apparently did everything possible to frustrate his own brother's progress, even going to the extent of stealing his wife. The past is so painful for Igwezu that he feels it is even better not to talk about what happened.

The wound heals quicker if it is left unopened.
What took place is not worth the memory ... (Ibid. : 32)

The young people are attracted to the city, but the city "kills" them. That is why Igwezu says of his brother:

He is dead. (Ibid. : 30)

.....

Awuchike is dead to you and to this house.
Let us not raise his ghost. (Ibid. : 32)

This, then, is the dilemma of the new generation. The village is no place in which to continue living. It is therefore understandable that the youths migrate into the city, but that the city dehumanizes these youths. In the end, the better course of action is unclear. Perhaps it could be hoped that when Igwezu returns to the city, he will now be a wiser person, through his contact with the Beggar. He will probably avoid the mistakes that have been made by the other youths. Interpreted in this way, Igwezu's leaving, on the advice of the Beggar, is therefore a positive move.

When Igwezu says to the Beggar:

You sightless ones are known to be gifted with more
than human wisdom. (Ibid. : 36)

he more than sums up the Beggar's role in this play. It is the blind man who "sees" that the Kadiye is a charlatan. The Beggar infuses a new spirit into Igwezu, a spirit of rebellion and inquisitiveness, and through this spirit, the traditional conservatism of the village is challenged. It is for this reason that Jones says this play is "an examination of a society in a state of change" (1988 : 39). The point should be stressed that, unlike its contemporary, The Lion and the Jewel, The Swamp Dwellers has a sadder and gloomier mood, perhaps because this time the dilemma facing the society is more complex than in The Lion and the Jewel. Igwezu raises very significant issues and deserves to be taken more seriously than Lakunle, who is just a figure of fun, and who should be dismissed with the contempt that he deserves. This is why Lakunle should be viewed as a harmless charlatan, unlike the Kadiye.

As a priest, a holy man and Servant of the Serpent of the Swamp, the Kadiye is highly respected in the village. Through him the villagers offer sacrifices that should ensure prosperity and good fortune for their village. But it is gradually revealed that the Kadiye is nothing but a corrupt and greedy leader.

When the Kadiye approaches, Makuri orders his wife to make the place fit to receive him. She must clean away all the litter, and most importantly, she must see that there is some brew for him (Ibid. : 18).

The Kadiye is described as "a big voluminous creature ... , smooth-faced" (Ibid.:19). This contrasts with the description of the Beggar: "the blind man is tall and straight" (Ibid. : 12). While the Kadiye is called "a creature", the Beggar is called a "man". Soyinka suggests that the priest is to be held in contempt while the Beggar is to be respected.

It would seem that even Makuri, deep in his heart, has no respect for the Kadiye. Soon after the Kadiye has left the house, Makuri calls him "The pot-bellied pig!" and wishes Igwezu could, while shaving him, slash his chin (Ibid. : 23). While the Kadiye is insulted, the Beggar has his feet washed, wiped dry and rubbed with ointment (Ibid. : 24). This action symbolizes the total acceptance of the Beggar into the community.

Igwezu's conversation with the Beggar is full of questions, and in this way the truth about the Kadiye gradually emerges. For example:

IGWEZU: ... Is it not strange that his skin is tender? Is it not strange that he is smooth and well-preserved?

BEGGAR:[*eagerly*.] Is he fat, master? When he spoke,
I detected a certain bulk in his voice.

IGWEZU: Ay, he is fat. He rolls himself like a fat and greasy
porpoise. (Ibid. : 28)

A short while later, the Beggar asks:

How does the Serpent fare in times of dearth? Does he
thrive on poisonous crabs? Does he drink the ooze of
the mire? (Ibid. : 29)

The point being made is that the Kadiye has a tender and well-preserved skin simply because he cheats the villagers. In times of dearth the Kadiye lives well and is well-kept and nourished by the food that he squeezes from the suffering peasants.

Earlier, before the arrival of Igwezu, the Beggar has asked Makuri about the possibility of taking a piece of land and redeeming it from the swamp.

If a man is willing to drain the filth away and make the land yield
coco-yams and lettuce - will they let him? (Ibid. : 17)

This question has shocked Makuri because such a deed would be taking land away from the Serpent. It would be challenging the authority of the Kadiye. Later, the Beggar asks Igwezu:

Do you serve the Serpent, Master? Do you believe with the old man
that the land may not be redeemed? That the rotting swamps may not
be purified? (Ibid. : 29)

The Beggar is questioning the Kadiye's supremacy in land matters. Igwezu is, at the same time, being challenged to see that the Kadiye has no right to have such a firm hold on land issues. So the Beggar teaches Igwezu, it can be said, to question many of the village's long-held archaic and superstitious traditions.

While Igwezu and the Beggar expose the Kadiye's greed and corruption, Makuri and Alu are shocked beyond description. Makuri calls the Beggar's questions about reclaiming the land "profanities" (Ibid. : 17) and "sacrilege" (Ibid. : 30). Alu urges her son to speak better of the holy man (Ibid. : 28). Later, Alu cannot take what is being said, so she slowly goes out of the room (Ibid. : 36).

Igwezu asks the Kadiye many questions, all meant to challenge him about the whole notion of the sacrifices that the villagers have been making. To Igwezu it is clear that

these rituals do not work. Sacrifices are nothing but superstitious nonsense. The priest is asked again:

[*slowly and disgustedly.*] Why are you so fat, Kadiye? (Ibid. : 38)

These words are so disturbing to the drummer that he runs away. The Kadiye's servant also runs out when he hears Igwezu asking:

If I slew all the cattle in the land and sacrificed every measure
of goodness, would it make any difference to our lives, Kadiye?
Would it make any difference to our fates? (Ibid. : 39)

Through these words, "the efficacy of sacrifice" is questioned (Katrak 1986:135).

The Kadiye is so shocked that he nearly chokes as he asks Makuri to speak to his son.

Do you think that you can make an ass of the Kadiye?..
Do you think that you can pour your sacrilege into my ears
with impunity? (Soyinka 1969 : 39)

The Kadiye has certainly been made more than an ass, but his last words, as he storms out, threaten Igwezu.

You will pay, I swear it ... You will pay for this. (Ibid. : 39)

The old order has been challenged. At one point Igwezu has ordered his father to be quiet (Ibid. : 38): this action marks the final break between father and son. Igwezu must go back to the city because he must run away from inevitable punishment by the Kadiye; he must also go away because he has demonstrated that he is a misfit in the village. He no longer believes in the values of the village. He says:

Only the old and the children stay here.
Only the innocent and the dotards. (Ibid. : 41)

The Beggar remains alone on the stage. He blesses Igwezu, and it can be assumed that Igwezu will now be more successful in life, having absorbed so much wisdom from the Beggar. Perhaps the Beggar will stand his ground against the Kadiye, who will probably want to expel him from the village. But the fact that when the play ends, the moonlight falls on the Beggar, signifies that he is the symbol of light and progress. He is the torch-bearer who may initiate some improvements in the village.

In The Swamp Dwellers, therefore, Soyinka has once again addressed the familiar themes of greed and corruption, which evils are practised by the village priest, the Kadiye. We have also seen the conflict between the old and the new, and some of the unpleasant effects of the city on people, such as brother turning against brother. The play has once again demonstrated Soyinka's social awareness.

* * *

Just as Lakunle is a false champion of modernism, and the Kadiye is a fake village priest, Reverend Erinjobi in Camwood on the Leaves is also a false champion, this time of Christianity. It would seem that Soyinka has a score to settle with some religions. First of all, he refers to religion in general as "the most primitive of all human instincts" (Soyinka 1993a : 246). To Soyinka, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam are "the more rampant institutional superstitions" (Ibid. : 279), and Christianity itself is "a pagan religion" (Gibbs 1987 : 71), "the world's best organised superstition" (Soyinka 1993a : 285). In a recent interview, Soyinka explained that although he was raised in a Christian community, his Christian beliefs were never deep, and that he had left Christianity a long time ago, probably because he had too much of it as a child (Gullidge 1987 : 511-512).

In The Interpreters and in Soyinka's autobiographies, there are several instances where children are treated very savagely by the elders. These cases are noted by the young Wole, especially in Ake: The Years of Childhood, as examples of the harsh and unfair world of adults, many of whom profess to be Christians. It is this hypocrisy which Soyinka exposes and condemns in Camwood on the Leaves.

This is one of Soyinka's relatively lesser known plays. It is puzzling why critics have not commented on this play. This could be because Soyinka is usually associated with mystical or political themes, but this is a straight-forward play and there is no mention of politics at all. The play was first broadcast by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation in November 1960 (Soyinka 1984a : 88).

"Camwood" is a West African hardwood tree that has a red dye. The title of the play therefore refers to the red dye of this tree being splashed on the leaves as this tree is cut down. Looked at another way, the hardwood tree is symbolic of the hard-hearted and severe Reverend Erinjobi, whose blood spills on the leaves of the bushes when his rebellious son, Isola, finally shoots him down.

This play deals with at least two themes. It is a vitriolic attack on child abuse, and also on hypocrisy. Reverend Erinjobi, the doctrinaire pastor, treats his son, Isola, so harshly that the young man is forced to revolt against his father's authority and religion. Erinjobi actually terrorises everyone in his family, including his very young children and his wife, Moji. Isola's "crime" is that he has impregnated a young girl, Morounke. Mr and Mrs. Olumorin, the girl's parents, are equally vicious in their condemnation of Isola. Only one person remains sensible in this sea of insanity, and that is Moji, the boy's mother. When Isola finally shoots his father, it can be understood that the young man's patience has been stretched to the limit.

Erinjobi is a terror to everyone in his family. This status is ironic, because love and happiness should flow in the house of a minister of religion, especially. In Erinjobi's house fear and hatred abound. Even his little children are aware that they must not make any noise within the house. They walk about with "timid footsteps", and try to ensure that the baby's cries do not go out of control (Soyinka 1984b : 89). When Erinjobi suddenly opens a door, Moji is so terrified that she gasps and says:

God help me now, he's here.

Sobbing, she pleads earnestly, trying not to be heard.

My son, before he gets here. ... (Ibid. : 90)

The way in which Moji is struck by terror as Erinjobi comes closer and closer is shown by her near-panicky state when she struggles to complete her sentences before Erinjobi bellows orders that she should go downstairs. She desperately tries to protect her son.

He is not being stubborn, Reverend. You mustn't think he is not repentant. He is merely praying in his room.

Praying for forgiveness. (Ibid. : 90 -91)

Moji's pleas for mercy on her son fall on deaf ears. Instead, on being annoyed by the distressed cries of a baby, Erinjobi orders all of the children to go downstairs.

... Go to your mother's room and shut the door. I don't want a sound from any of you, is that clear? Not a sound. (Ibid. : 91)

Such, then, is the harshness of Erinjobi to his wife and children. In his presence, they are miserable and confused. But his hard-heartedness is displayed more clearly when Erinjobi disowns his son.

MOJI. He is your son, Reverend ...

ERINJOBI. My son? I disown him. He is no son of mine – nor yours!
(Ibid. : 91)

Except for a very brief period at the end of the play where Erinjobi calls Isola "son", the pastor calls Isola by many abominable names: a "creature" (Ibid. : 91), "that creation of the devil" (Ibid. : 92), "a thief and adulterer" (Ibid. : 102), "this son of evil" (Ibid. : 109), "you child of the devil" (Ibid. : 118), "worthless child" (Ibid. : 119), "godless child" (Ibid. : 121), "lost child" (Ibid. : 123) and "this fornicator" (Ibid. : 123).

Erinjobi also shows excessive hatred for his son in statements such as: "I have sworn that he will not spend another night under my roof" (Ibid.:102) and "Oh, cursed be the day when I mistook that child for my son" (Ibid. : 113).

These are bitter insults indeed, but Erinjobi's heartlessness towards Isola is not confined to mere words. The minister is shown violently assaulting his son. The boy's life is an endless nightmare and Soyinka brings this quality out by showing Isola re-living his past in dreams. For instance, Erinjobi is angered that his son has been associating with "pagans" and dancing with the "egungun". Erinjobi reacts with typical cruelty to this abomination.

The pastor's son, eating and drinking sordid pottages with pagans of the town ... (*Hitting him.*) Is that the bad name you're bent on giving me you worthless child?(*He hits him again.*) Is it? Is it?

'Is it' 'Is it' [sic] is heard over and over again accompanied by a blow, gaining in intensity with each repetition. ISOLA gets more and more restless, groaning... (Ibid. : 119)

Having been beaten so frequently, Isola decides to challenge his father's authority. He deliberately provokes Erinjobi, at times when Erinjobi is away, but also in his hearing. For example, when Erinjobi calls him, Isola answers as if he is being called by Morounke. This enrages Erinjobi, who rains repeated blows on his son. Shortly after this, Erinjobi is shown pulling Isola so roughly that the boy falls (Ibid. : 121). In spite of Moji's pleas for mercy, Erinjobi disgraces his son by dragging him along the street. His words are a crushing blow to the boy's self-respect.

... I knew you were damned the moment you began to follow the masqueraders ... Oh you were damned from the start ... playing with gutter children... singing heathen songs... slipping out at night and nobody knowing what bestiality you would commit before the break of day! (Ibid. : 122 -3)

It should be noted that in Ake: The Years of Childhood, the young Wole is warned by his mother of grave consequences if his father hears that Wole is planning to go and watch egungun (Soyinka 1972a : 32). Again, Erinjobi disgracing his son by dragging him along the street echoes the humiliation of the bed-wetting girl in Ake: The Years of Childhood (Ibid. : 86-89). These incidents underscore Soyinka's consistency in exposing child abuse.

Morounke's parents can be forgiven for being angry with Isola at his having impregnated their daughter. However, their insults towards Isola, which are no different from Erinjobi's, cannot be condoned. To Mrs. Olumorin Isola is a "depraved son" with "godforsaken ways" (Soyinka 1984b : 110). She also calls him a "murderer" who must give her back her Morounke before the Lord curses him for his "wickedness" (Ibid. : 111). Isola is also "a child stealer" and a "kidnapper" (Ibid. : 113), "a shameless boy", "the devil's own offspring" (Ibid. : 125).

Only Moji seems to understand the problems associated with growing up. She speaks much sense:

A child's mistake... he has deserved no curses, only correction.
(Ibid. : 113)

She alone seems to understand that two wrongs do not make a right. She tells Mrs. Olumorin:

But my son is cornered there still, and you are turning him into an animal. (Ibid. : 134)

Faced with such lack of love and unreasonableness, both Isola and Morounke have no choice but to turn against their parents. Isola begins to see his father as a troublesome snake, the boa. Erinjobi's cruelty is further shown when the wicked snake is seen picking up baby tortoises and dashing them against the rock. At the same time that Isola equates Erinjobi with the evil snake, he calls the mother tortoise by his own mother's name, Moji. Again, this action is symbolic. Moji and the tortoise are epitomes of suffering mothers. The tortoise is tortured by the snake which kills her children by smashing them on a rock, while Moji watches in helpless terror as Erinjobi brutalizes her children, especially Isola. Moji is to the tortoise as Erinjobi is to the snake. In the end, Isola finds he has to kill the snake if he is to have any peace.

The child-parent bond has been destroyed in both Isola's and Morounke's cases. Erinjobi has been responsible for this outcome, because of his brutality towards his son. As a result, Isola loses respect for his father. When Erinjobi tries to talk about forgiveness, Isola will not listen. Instead, he calls his father by his name, Erinjobi.

In a speech heavily laden with irony, Erinjobi unwittingly condemns himself and those of his kind.

Get going and look after your own sins. Get going you hypocrites, go on, get away. ... Get away before the Lord reveals your own hidden corruptness and slaps you hard with them. [sic] (Ibid. : 123)

The hypocrites Erinjobi unknowingly refers to are himself and the Olumorins. His punishment is his death, and the Olumorins are disowned by their daughter, who actually calls her mother a witch and bites her father before she runs away to join Isola (Ibid. : 133).

The contemporary issues of child abuse and sham Christianity are clearly Soyinka's concerns in this play, for Erinjobi is the antithesis of a man of God. He knows the theory, but not the practice, of Christianity. Forgiveness, love and tolerance are to him virtues to talk about, but not to practise.

After the murder of Erinjobi, the audience is likely to ask questions, for example, whether this outcome is to be regretted or not. It is possible that some people will support Isola, noting that the boy has no choice but to kill his father. Erinjobi's death is therefore welcome because society is a better place without him. Interpreted this way, it can be said that the dramatist is on the side of the suffering children in this play. This view is in keeping with Soyinka's "passion for human liberty and a deep respect for the quality of human life" (Katrak 1986 : 9). Soyinka's preoccupation with contemporary issues has been adequately demonstrated in Camwood on the Leaves.

* * *

Soyinka explains that he wrote The Trials of Brother Jero "from personal contact with ... Aladura churches" (that is revivalist churches) (Soyinka 1993a : 301). This play continues the attack on false prophets, already seen in the three plays which have been discussed so far.

The Trials of Brother Jero was written in 1960, the year Soyinka returned to Nigeria after his studies in England. This is another of Soyinka's farces, and in this play, the "prophet", Jero, dominates the action from beginning to end. While Camwood on the Leaves is sad and grim, The Trials of Brother Jero is racy and humorous. Reverend Erinjobi appals and disgusts the audience while Brother Jero provides much comedy. In Jero, Soyinka has created a character whom the audience cannot but like, even when it is clear that the character is in the wrong.

The play satirizes religious charlatanism and gullibility. At the same time, Soyinka shows how difficult it can be to escape the clutches of quacks and tricksters such as Brother Jero. This is evident right from the beginning of the play where the prophet is first introduced. The completely dark stage symbolizes the depth of the ignorance in the world in which the Jeros operate. The prophet himself is portrayed as a beacon in this world of ignorance and darkness.

The prophet "speaks directly and with his accustomed loftiness to the audience". He is "a neatly bearded man"; he has well-combed, thick and high hair. "Suave is the word for him" (Soyinka 1969 : 45). This is a confident, self-assured man who has his feet on the ground, who knows what he wants and how he will get it.

Even when the prophet is lying, he seems to be telling the truth. As a man of God, he is expected to be honest, but Brother Jero utters lies, truths and half truths all mixed together. For instance he says he is a Prophet, a prophet by birth and by inclination (Ibid. : 45). This is a mere claim, but he follows it with a statement that is true:

You have probably seen many of us on the streets, many with their own churches, many inland, many on the coast, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead, (Ibid. : 45)

Then he continues with pure lies:

many curing the deaf, many raising the dead. (Ibid. : 45)

These continual shifts in his "testimony" make the Prophet sound credible. It is clear that the Prophet is honest in his lies. He knows he is lying but he speaks so confidently that his dishonesty is almost impossible to detect. He is a past master of trickery – the perfect confidence trickster. His suavity helps him to dupe both the audience and his followers.

Brother Jero exposes himself in various ways. Sometimes he makes accusing pronouncements about other people, but these accusations are really truer of Brother Jero than of their targets. For instance, he refers to the other "prophets" he sees on the beach as "Charlatans!" (Ibid. : 54). Yet he is a charlatan too, perhaps an even worse one. He also shouts to Chume: "Apostate!" "Traitor!". But if there is one person who is guilty of betraying the Christian faith, Brother Jero is that person. And a little while later, he calls Chume : "sinner... harbourer of Ashtoreth ... Protector of Baal" (Ibid. : 58). By his own admission, Brother Jero is a womanizer. He states clearly he has one weakness - women (Ibid. : 47). He later prays that his love and lust for the daughters of Eve should be torn from his heart (Ibid. : 56). So it is Brother Jero, not Chume, who is possibly the greater sinner. Thus, in trying to accuse others, Brother Jero only condemns himself.

Sometimes Brother Jero's statements are unintentionally ironic, such as when he talks of himself as "a man of God" (Ibid. : 55). With the womanizing, lying and cheating in his life, he is far from being "a man of God". And when Amope demands her money from him, he complains:

One pound eight for this little cape. It is sheer robbery. (Ibid. : 55)

Amope, not Brother Jero, should be complaining of "sheer robbery". And when he calls the young girl who goes swimming every morning "Dirty-looking thing" (Ibid. : 55), it is obvious he thinks the exact opposite. Similarly, "the Velvet-hearted Jeroboam" (Ibid. : 54) should be understood to mean something rather different; perhaps "the silver-tongued" Jeroboam.

But sometimes there is no attempt at all by Brother Jero to disguise his meaning. He addresses the audience directly and squarely, and means what he says. This happens in several parts of the play. For instance, he explains why he must get a new name, "Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade" (Ibid. : 54). This has been his ambition, he says.

You've got to have a name that appeals to the imagination - because the imagination is a thing of the spirit - it must catch the imagination of the crowd. Yes, one must move with modern times. Lack of colour gets one nowhere even in the Prophet's business. (Ibid. : 54)

There is no beating about the bush as far as his intentions are concerned. Brother Jero intends to use a colourful outward appearance to capture as many victims as possible. He calls himself "Brother", a term which is meant to indicate his equality

with his fellow religionists. His name, "Jeroboam", has been carefully chosen. This is the name of the king of northern Israel in about the tenth century B.C. and sounds suitably religious. The cape he bought from Amope is also meant to enhance his outward appearance and hide the reality that Brother Jero is a crook.

He is also direct about his job, which he calls first a "trade" (Ibid. : 45), and then a "business" (Ibid : 54). His followers and fellow-worshippers are to him "customers" and he sees himself as a "shop-keeper".

I am glad I got here before any customers – I mean worshippers,
– well, customers if you like. I always get that feeling every
morning that I am a shop-keeper waiting for customers. (Ibid. : 55)

"Trade", "business", "customers" and "shop-keeper" are all words associated with the commercial, money-making world. Brother Jero is directly indicating that he is looking for money. He is not interested in preaching and spreading the word of God.

Brother Jero's relationship with his key disciple, Chume, is based on the leader exploiting the vanity of his pupil. The former is insincere about God, but the latter believes everything that Brother Jero says about God. This insincerity of Brother Jero emerges when he refers to Chume as "too crude" (Ibid. : 57). This is after Chume has joined Jero in prayer and both have been saying: "Abraka, Abraka, Hebra, Hebra, Hebra, ... " (Ibid. : 56).

After pretending he had known it was Chume, Jero later makes it clear he knew that it was Chume the moment he (Chume) opened his mouth.

Only Brother Chume reverts to that animal jabber when he
gets his spiritual excitement. And that is much too often for
my liking. (Ibid. : 57)

Brother Jero has also fooled all his followers, including Chume, into believing that he (Jero) sleeps on the beach, and that he is something of an ascetic (Ibid : 57). All this is proof of Jero's two-facedness.

The impression may have been created that Jero succeeds in cheating everyone. He does not. Amope is one such person who is not fooled: for instance she wonders how Jero can call himself a man of God (Ibid. : 51). Jero later tries to escape from Amope by saying he must go and get the money from the post office. Amope is not impressed by this and she calls Jero a "bearded debtor" (Ibid. : 51), "A thief of a

Prophet" (Ibid. : 53), and "that good-for-nothing" (Ibid. : 68). Chume himself finally wakes up to the truth and calls Jero "Adulterer! Woman-thief!" (Ibid. : 76)

Brother Jero, in spite of the numerous indications that he is a false prophet, nevertheless manages to thrive. This is because there are many gullible people who find themselves easy prey to tricksters such as Brother Jero. These are not only people such as Chume, or the Penitent (Ibid. : 62), or the Woman Bystander (Ibid. : 72), but also people such as the Member of the Federal House. In a speech full of irony, the Member first tells Jero to go away.

Go and practice [sic] your fraudulence on another person
of greater gullibility. (Ibid. : 73)

However, Jero's velvet tongue soon wins him over. In the past, Jero has won "customers" by promising them that something wonderful will happen in future. For instance, one man has been promised he will be a chief in his own village. Another man has been promised that he will be the first Prime Minister of the new Mid-North-East-State, when it is created (Ibid. : 60). One woman has been coming because she is barren. The Member is promised he will be Minister for War.

Soyinka suggests that as long as there are dissatisfied members of society, and there will always be, as long as there are nincompoops such as the Member, and as long as there are scoundrels such as Brother Jero, charlatanism will always thrive. And the fact that when the play ends Jero appears to the Member as an angel (Ibid : 77) suggests an elevated status for the prophet. The play ends on a victory note for charlatans - and the audience has been shown why this is so.

It is tempting to dismiss Brother Jero as merely a charlatan, much like Lakunle, since both characters are extremely amusing caricatures, but it would be wrong to do so. Lakunle is a false leader, and, as expected, nobody follows him. Brother Jero, however, has a taint of villainy in his character. He ruthlessly exploits the gullibility of his community, and is cunning enough to outmanoeuvre and make Chume suffer. As Jones notes, "Brother Jero ends the play a more sinister figure than he began" (1988 : 83). Having tasted power, Brother Jero can only be corrupted by this power, an eventuality which will come to pass in Jero's Metamorphosis.

The fact that Soyinka wrote The Trials of Brother Jero after carefully observing revivalist churches is further evidence of his social awareness, a point which is

corroborated by Katrak who says Soyinka's plays were inspired by the "fundamental truths of his community" (1986 : 10).

* * *

The four plays that have been discussed so far share a common feature; each is concerned with the theme of the false leader. While in these four plays there is no direct mention of politics, A Dance of the Forests clearly has a political thrust, especially considering why it was written, as Soyinka explains:

A Dance of the Forests was ... triggered by Independence, by my knowledge of the leaders who were about to take over the reins of the country. I realised that after Independence some of those new rulers were going to act exactly like their forebears did, just exploit the people. I was interested in taking another look at that history and saying: 'The euphoria should be tempered by the internal history of oppression'. (Gibbs 1987 : 68)

Soyinka further explains that he wrote A Dance of the Forests after he had come into contact with Nigeria's first set of legislators, during Nigeria's partial self-government. These legislators had visited the United Kingdom, and after listening to, and watching them closely, Soyinka says that he received "political satori", instant illumination:

I realised that the first enemy was within. If there was any shadow of doubt left, it was soon removed by the pattern of thought which developed among my erstwhile 'comrades' for whom all thought of liberation in Southern Africa, etc, also suddenly disappeared, but for very different reasons. They could not wait to return home and get a slice of 'independence cake', because that was all independence meant to them: 'step fast into the shoes of the departing whites before other people get there. It was then that I began to write A Dance of the Forests, which takes a jaundiced view of the much-vaunted glorious past of Africa. And I suppose since then I've been doing nothing but the *danse macabre* in this political jungle of ours. (Soyinka 1984b : xiii)

The above quotations show that in A Dance of the Forests Soyinka's "socio-political commitment can primarily be defined in a nationalistic sense" (Amuta 1989 : 67). Although written specifically to mark Nigeria's independence, this play is also concerned with humankind in general, and poses questions about human nature, especially about the future. Soyinka firmly believes that literature has a social function: "the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social

direction" (Soyinka 1976a : 106). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin also note that this observation is a feature of post-colonial literature (1989 : 36). Katrak, too, makes a similar observation, noting that this play explores the theme of nation-building (1986 : 138). At the same time, the play examines "some universal and eternal weaknesses in human nature like greed, corruption, and envy, which hinder this task" (Ibid.).

The assertion by Hunt that Soyinka is "undoubtedly a romanticist" who has "[a] tendency to look to tradition and a more meaningful past" (Gugelberger 1986 : 68) is clearly baffling when weighed against a play such as A Dance of the Forests. Soyinka does not romanticise about the past in this play. On the contrary, Soyinka wrote this play because "he wished to puncture a nostalgic idealizing of the past" (Katrak 1986 : 138).

It is from Agboreko and Eshuoro that the meaning of A Dance of the Forests emerges most clearly. Firstly, Agboreko says:

Aroni is Wisdom itself. When he means to expose the weaknesses of human lives, there is nothing can stop him. (Soyinka 1963a : 35)

A short while later, Agboreko says:

No doubt it is another cunning thought of Aroni. To let the living condemn themselves. (Ibid. : 37)

And then Eshuoro says:

Aroni means to let the humans judge themselves. (Ibid. : 46)

This play, then, is about human conduct, where the living, through their actions, will expose their folly to one another, as well as to the audience. When Dead Woman and Dead Man push their heads out and break up the soil (Ibid. : 3), one is reminded of germinating seeds, new plants coming to life. This image is appropriate here as the new life can be taken to represent the birth of the Nigerian nation. But the shoots that come up are not young, new lives. They are a fat, bloated man and a pregnant woman. These rather unpleasant-to-look-at figures symbolize, on the one hand, an ugly past, and on the other, an ugly new nation (Nigeria) that is being born. Either way, the picture is gloomy and pessimistic.

The Dead Ones have come as guests of the Living Ones in their feast, the Gathering of the Tribes. But the Dead Ones are rejected by the humans. Rola, in particular, is scathing in her condemnation of Dead Man.

You look disgusting ...

What a nerve you have. Do you think because you are out of town you, in your condition, can stop me and talk to me ? (Ibid. : 4)

Later, she calls the Dead "obscenities" (Ibid : 8). This rejection of their ancestors by the humans is symbolic of self-denial, a rejection of one's past and history. The humans will have nothing to do with their ancestors (their past), and in that way they deny themselves the chance of being shown their past deeds, mistakes included. This means that the humans will have no chance of learning the truth about their history. The point being made is that without being in contact with the past, the humans cannot reconstruct their present and their future.

Once the Dead Ones have been snubbed, they move away and the Town Dwellers take the stage. Rola and Adenebi reveal themselves as selfish individuals who do not want to have much to do with their relatives.

ADENEBI: ... You start your own family, expect to look after your wife and children, lead - you know - a proper family life. Privacy ... very important ... some measure of privacy. But how do you manage that when a lot of brats are delivered at your door because their great grandparents happen to have been neighbours of your great grand-uncles.

ROLA: This whole family business sickens me. Let everybody lead their own lives. (Ibid. : 5 - 6)

It is frequently said that the family is the most basic unit of human society, and that without the family unit, human society would not survive. The fact that 1994 was declared "The Year of the Family" by the United Nations, for example, underscores its importance. The kind of selfishness being suggested by Adenebi, and the total rejection of the family by Rola, are therefore to be condemned by any civilised society, because without the family, and without relatives, human beings cannot survive. Adenebi and Rola are therefore proposing a recipe for disaster, and the course of the play bears this out.

Obanegi, alone among the Town Dwellers, seems to be the voice of reason. It is through answers to his questions that the unpleasant side of human nature is revealed. As a filing clerk for the courts he knows much about people's history

(Ibid. : 15). His favourite area of investigation is passenger lorries, which explains why he knows about two infamous lorries, the Chimney of Ereko and the Incinerator.

It is the Incinerator that has been in the news lately. Initially built to carry only forty people, the Incinerator has been involved in a ghastly smash in which sixty five people have been killed, with only five survivors. People are wondering how seventy passengers could fit in a vehicle that was supposed to carry only forty. Obaneji makes it clear that one of Adenebi's office workers took a bribe to change the capacity to seventy:

One of your office workers took a bribe. A real substantial bribe. And he changed the capacity to seventy. (Ibid. : 16)

Demoke and Rola sound shocked by this, but not Adenebi. When Obaneji wants to find out more about this vehicle from Adenebi, he (Adenebi) becomes edgy and defensive.

OBANEJI: Mr. Adenebi. What office do you hold in the council?

ADENEBI: [*angrily.*] What do you imply?

OBANEJI: You misunderstand me. I only meant, are you in a position to find out something for me?

ADENEBI: [*warily.*] That depends. I am only the official Orator to the Council, but ...

OBANEJI: You do wield some authority.

ADENEBI: Yes. Certainly.

OBANEJI: You see, I want to close my files on this particular lorry - the Incinerator.

And my records won't be complete unless I have the name of the man who did it - you know, the one who took the bribe. Do you think you can help me there?

ADENEBI: Since you are so clever and so knowledgeable, why don't you find that yourself?

OBANEJI: Please ... it is only for the sake of records ...

ADENEBI: Then to hell with your records. Have you no feeling for those who died? Are you just an insensitive, inhuman block? (Ibid. : 17)

The fact that Adenebi reacts, first angrily, then warily, and then angrily again, leading to his outburst, is a clear pointer to his guilt. Adenebi has judged and condemned himself as the corrupt council officer who accepted the bribe to change the capacity of the vehicle from forty to seventy passengers.

Obaneji continues to ask his probing questions, and through the answers more information is revealed about the other members of the community, Demoke and Rola. Demoke confesses his terrible crime, the murder of his apprentice carver, and adds that he would not mind dying in that same way as well. Rola, too, is not ashamed

to reveal her true nature. As a prostitute, her wish is to die at the hands of a man. She would not mind being strangled by a man, as long as this is in the act of love-making. She has actually had some of her lovers killed, so she too, like Demoke, is a murderer.

Rola and Demoke tell the truth about themselves. Redemption and regeneration, the dramatist implies, belong to those who are honest, Rola and Demoke. It is no wonder that Adenebi decides to part ways with his erstwhile companions.

ADENEBI: [*rises*.] I think I must leave your company. He talks like a lost lunatic and you are worse than the devil. I don't want to be involved in your types. (Ibid. : 25)

Demoke goes a step further than Rola in truthfulness because when the Dead Pair appear again, he boldly approaches Dead Man. Demoke wants to find out whether Oremole, the carver that he killed, accuses him in the land of the dead (Ibid : 25). The point being made here is that the truth, no matter how unpalatable, must be spoken. Demoke is an admirable, though uncomfortable, character because of his truthfulness.

This hatred of the truth, the fear of being exposed for what they are in reality, is the very reason why the living drive away their guests from the underworld. It is Old Man who says many unpleasant things about these visitors. For instance:

These guests we were sent are slaves and lackeys. They have only come to undermine our strength. To preach to us how ignoble we are. They are disgruntled creatures who have come to accuse their superiors as if this were a court of law. We have courts for the oppressed. Let them go somewhere else. (Ibid. : 33)

So the Dead must be chased away because the Living do not want to be associated with what they see as the evil past. According to Adenebi they had wanted

The builders of empires. The descendants of our great nobility.
(Ibid. : 32)

The point being made here is that, too often, the African past has been presented only in glowing terms, to the total exclusion of the ugly component. Such a presentation is wrong. The evil part should not be hidden away. The negritudinists, in particular, were very fond of idealizing African history. This is what has made Soyinka say:

The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination

of the past. Of course, the past exists, the real African consciousness establishes this – the past exists now, this moment, it is coexistent in present awareness. It clarifies the present and explains the future, but it is not a fleshpot for escapist indulgence, ... (Soyinka 1993a : 19)

It should be pointed out that the words and actions of Forest Head (Obaneji) can be taken to be Soyinka's. There are two reasons for suggesting this. One is that the person who played Forest Head (Obaneji) in the 1960 production of the play is called Elow; that is Wole, spelt backwards. The other reason is Moore's: "Soyinka himself undertook the important part of Forest Father" (1978 : 16). There is also a photograph of Soyinka, as Forest Father, with his delegate Aroni (Moore 1978 : 83).

After Adenebi's request to be shown "the builders of empires", Forest Head asks Aroni to do exactly that. The audience is taken as far back as eight centuries, possibly more, and on show is one of the great African empires – that of His Majesty Mata Kharibu. It is obvious that Soyinka wants to question the notion that everything in the African past was rosy. Mata Kharibu is a fine example of a despot. He is a cruel ruler who is faced with rebellion from his army captain. He has had the Warrior put in leg irons, and shouts at him, calling him a slave who dared to think. As with all despots, Kharibu hates the Warrior for daring to think, and when the soldier tries to protest, the emperor slaps him across the face (Soyinka 1963a : 53). The Warrior's life is saved by the Physician who suddenly jumps forward as Mata Kharibu raises his sword, ready to chop off his (the Warrior's) head.

No amount of intimidation and ill-treatment can whittle away the Warrior's determination to defy the emperor. He remains very brave, refusing to fight what he regards as an unjust war.

WARRIOR: It is an unjust war. I cannot lead my men into battle merely to recover the trousseau of any woman.

PHYSICIAN: Ah. But do you not see? It goes further than that. It is no longer the war of the queen's wardrobe. The war is now an affair of honour.

WARRIOR: An affair of honour? Since when was it an honourable thing to steal the wife of a brother chieftain?

PHYSICIAN: Can you really judge the action of another?

WARRIOR: No. But the results, and when they affect me and men who place their trust in me. ... Mata Kharibu thought, hoped that the dishonoured king would go to war on her account. There he was wrong. It seems her rightful husband does not consider that your new queen is worth a battle. But Mata Kharibu is so bent on bloodshed that he sends him a new message. Release the goods of this woman I took from you if there will be peace between us. Is this the action of a ruler who values the peace of his subjects? (ibid. : 54)

Kharibu is shown to be a blood-thirsty bully whose reason for wanting to go to war is spurious. But he is not alone in this kind of thinking. The Historian, one of the most unpleasant characters in this play, says:

this is war as it should be fought ... over nothing (Ibid. : 62)

The Physician fails to make the Warrior change his mind. He says future generations will call the Warrior a traitor. The Warrior's answer is one that condemns all of humanity:

WARRIOR: Unborn generations will be cannibals most worshipful Physician.
Unborn generations will, as we have done, eat up one another.
(Ibid. : 55)

A short while later, the Warrior expresses a wish that Kharibu could alter the unnatural pattern of men who are always eating up one another (Ibid : 56). His words echo those of Eshuoro, one of the spirits, earlier :

But if the humans, as always, wreak havoc on their own heads,
who are we to stop them? (Ibid. : 47)

When all efforts to make the Warrior change his mind fail, he is sold into slavery. This deed brings in another horrible side of the African past – the savagery and cruelty of trading in human lives. The Africans themselves were active participants in this horrible business, as Soyinka stated in one interview (Gibbs 1987 : 68). There are historical records to prove this participation by Africans in slavery, notably by historians such as Wilson (1984 : 75) and Davidson (1992 : 25, 34, 42). A Dance of the Forests throws some light on this African participation in the slave trade. The Slave-Dealer is a greedy merchant who wants to stuff his human cargo into his coffin of a vessel. The Physician tries to point out that the Slave-Dealer does not have enough space to transport sixty slaves. The Historian is summoned to come and verify whether the Slave-Dealer has the space in his vessel.

... My new vessel is capable of transporting the whole of Kharibu's court. ... The Honourable Historian here can testify to it. I took him aboard ... [*Behind his back, he passes a bag of money to the Historian, who takes it, feels it and pockets it.*] ... only this afternoon, and showed him every plank and rope ... ask him yourself.

HISTORIAN: That is a fact. Mata Kharibu and all his ancestors would be proud to ride in such a boat. (Ibid. : 61)

Now, the Historian happens to be the same person as Adenebi. In his present life, this man has been accepting bribes at his work place to change the capacity of a lorry from forty to seventy passengers. This shows that Adenebi has the same qualities in both lives – dishonesty and corruption.

Madam Tortoise (Rola) is seen trying to seduce the Warrior. She calls Mata Kharibu a fool, and asks the Warrior whether he has no wish to sit where the emperor sits.

I can save you. I can save you alone, or with your men. Choose.
Choose. Why should a man be wasted? Why must you waste yourself
for a fool like Kharibu? Choose, and let me be with you. (Ibid. : 64)

When she fails to seduce the Warrior, she orders that he be gelded before being finally sold into slavery. So Madame Tortoise, too, is the same evil person in her present life as she was in her other life. Demoke too (Court Poet) has not changed. These correspondences demonstrate the repetitive pattern of human weakness: a hundred generations will not make any difference. Rene calls this repetitive pattern "the cyclical vision of history" (1990 : 69).

Soyinka has argued that African gods can be used to explain African society. Wherever these gods are used, they are "a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonise with his environment, physical, social and psychic" (Soyinka 1976a : 1). He further explains that these gods have symbolic roles: "their symbolic roles are identified by man as the role of an intermediary quester, an explorer into territories of 'essence-ideal' around whose edges man fearfully skirts" (Ibid.).

The spirits in this play are children of Forest Head. Spirits such as Murete and Eshuoro can be taken to represent humans, just as animals in African folk tales represent human beings (Schipper 1982 : 38). So, the vices that are seen in these spirits can be said to be human vices. Eshuoro, for instance, stands for vengefulness, spitefulness and destructiveness; he is a bitter spirit whose sole aim is to seek vengeance. The moment he comes in, he immediately quarrels with Murete, scolding and insulting him. He also tortures Murete, and at one time he (Eshuoro) even wishes to smash Murete with a tree branch (Soyinka 1963a : 48). Eshuoro, furthermore, threatens vengeance on Demoke, for killing Oremole. Before he rushes out, he vows:

I'll be revenged. Eshuoro, I,
I'll be revenged, I'll be revenged... . (Ibid. : 49)

Later, this same Eshuoro is seen quarrelling with Ogun, who is protecting Demoke. Eshuoro wants to avenge Oremole, who was killed by Demoke. Eshuoro actually wants to throttle Ogun. They are separated by Forest Head, who scolds them:

Soon, I will not tell you from the humans, so closely have their habits
grown on you. ... Take care how you tempt my vanity. Eshuoro, you
came to bathe in blood, Ogun, you to defend the foibles of your ward.
(Ibid. : 67)

It seems there is nothing but bad behaviour everywhere, from humans and from gods. As Pribic mentions, Soyinka's understanding of the Yoruba (and African) world view is that humans and gods co-exist (1990 : 420), and this view is clearly expressed in A Dance of the Forests. This pessimism about human nature is reinforced by the birth of the Half-Child and the appearance of other child monstrosities. The Half-Child symbolizes the incompleteness of man, as well as the (abortive) independence of the new nation (Nigeria) that was being born when the play was written and produced. It is an ugly future that is being forecast. The past has been shown to have been a-not-too-rosy one, and indications are that matters will continue as they were. The down-trodden will continue to suffer, as Ant Leader explains when being questioned by Forest Head:

We take our colour from the loam
..., and they tread us
Underfoot.

... The world is old
But the rust of a million years
Has left the chains unloosened. (Soyinka 1963a : 77)

Independence may have come, but the nature of leaders is such that there will be no improvement in the lives of the common people. This is what drives Forest Head to say:

Trouble me no further. The fooleries of beings whom I have fashioned
closer to me weary and distress me. Yet I must persist, knowing that
nothing is ever altered. (Ibid. : 83)

In spite of being lumped with "obscurantist" literature (Amuta 1983 : 58), A Dance of the Forests is a good illustration of the principles Soyinka set forth before and after the play was written and staged ... [he has] repeatedly demonstrated that he would not compromise about truth and freedom, and like [the Warrior] ... [he has] had to pay dearly for this firm stand" (Rene 1990 : 83).

When A Dance of the Forests was staged in Nigeria, it proved very popular, even with "the masses". This popularity greatly pleased Soyinka, as he commented:

What I found personally gratifying, and what I consider the validity

of my work, was that the so-called illiterate group of the community – the stewards, the drivers ... the really uneducated non-academic world ... they were coming to see the play every night ... if you allowed them. They felt the thing through all the way, and they came night after night and enjoyed it tremendously. (Soyinka 1993a : 256)

It can therefore be said that some of the "obscurantist" charges which are often levelled at Soyinka have little substance and need to be reviewed. Nkosi, indeed, warns against "the kind of criticism which rests purely on the fact that Soyinka is 'difficult'" (1981 : 189). A statement such as Soyinka "ignores the urgent and simple needs of his people" (Booth 1981 : 119), a clear echo of Ngugi's charge that Soyinka "ignores the creative struggle of the masses" (Ngugi 1972 : 65) does not sound convincing, especially in the light of the reaction of the ordinary people to A Dance of the Forests.

Soyinka's condemnation of his society's evils has continued in the discussion of the five plays in Part One of this chapter. In Chapter One, themes such as child abuse, charlatanism, gullibility, to mention only a few, were highlighted. The same themes, and others, have featured in this section. Soyinka's concern with repression, and his condemnation of certain still current barbaric traditional customs, themes which were apparent in Chapter One, will emerge again in the next section in the discussion of plays such as Kongi's Harvest and The Strong Breed: similar and consistent social and political themes pervade Soyinka's work.

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PART TWO

SOYINKA'S PLAYS OF THE SIXTIES

One critic has surmised: "It is possible that Soyinka unconsciously believes in the invincibility of decadent traditions" (Ahmed 1984:121). Such an assessment could only have been made after a very superficial reading and simplistic interpretation of Soyinka's works. It is unfortunate that there is no evidence provided by Ahmed to back his claim. Indeed, no matter which work one chooses, one will find that, if anything, Soyinka is against decadent traditions. This standpoint is true in plays such as A Dance of the Forests, The Swamp Dwellers, and Camwood on the Leaves. This will be the case in The Strong Breed. To suggest that Soyinka is a secret admirer of decadent traditions is to accuse the man of insensitivity to his society's problems and aspirations. On the contrary, this dissertation argues that the consistent thread in Soyinka's writing is his social and political commitment (Jones 1988 : 11 - 12).

The fact that The Strong Breed (1964) has no specific setting, either historical or geographical, serves to emphasize the universality of the vices that Soyinka condemns in this play. If ever a play was forthright in its import, it is this work, for here the audience is shown how decadent and degenerate human behaviour can become. Soyinka "wipes out the idea of a romantic, idyllic rural life in the African village. Evil is as all-pervasive here as it is in the rest of the world; violence exists" (Jones 1978 : 32). It is for this reason that Ahmed's conjecture is astounding. Soyinka, it must be stated once again, does not believe in the good old days, as was demonstrated above in the discussion of works such as A Dance of the Forests and The Swamp Dwellers.

Soyinka is not the only writer to condemn backward customs in traditional societies. Achebe's novels, Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease, for instance, strongly attack practices such as the slaying of twins and ostracisation of castes, the *osu*. In the same vein, Soyinka attacks the carrier system in The Strong Breed. More than that, Soyinka shows why this practice exists, and how it affects the villagers. This is what Johnson calls the "etiology of evil" (1986 : 365). People are gripped by a strong desire to become wholesome, and in pursuit of that frenzied urge, they become evil (Ibid. : 365). The play "examines maladaptive responses that come in the urge to be well" (Ibid.).

Soyinka's condemnation of cruel and narrow traditional life (Graham-White 1974 : 126) in The Swamp Dwellers is continued in The Strong Breed, for here the audience is shown a good man, Eman, being subjected to brutal treatment by the villagers whom he has been serving so well as both teacher and healer. Eman embodies all that is good in a person, and his name suggests just that – Heman – a strong, manly man. He is strong not only physically, but also morally. He is also a teacher and a healer both literally and figuratively, for through him Soyinka shows how the society lacks humanity.

Eman's moral superiority over everyone in the village is demonstrated in his relationship with Ifada, the village half-wit. Everybody treats Ifada contemptuously, as if he is a leper. But Eman is seen patting him on the head, which act makes the boy grin happily. When Sunma shouts at Ifada, telling him to get away, to take his foolish face away and to stop crawling around like some horrible insect (Soyinka 1969 : 82), Eman protects the poor boy. He understands that Ifada did not choose to be disabled (Ibid.). Furthermore, Ifada does not harm anyone, and makes himself useful by running errands in the village.

EMAN: He is not a madman, he is just a little more unlucky than other children. (Ibid. : 83)

With his deeper, moral perception, Eman understands that what Ifada needs most is acceptance and love, not rejection and insults. It is with this understanding of Ifada as the "symbol of need" (Jones 1988 : 73), that Eman has even tried to start a farm for the poor fellow. The farm has not been successful, but Eman does not blame Ifada at all. He realises he made a mistake by choosing the wrong venture for Ifada. He should have asked Ifada first if he was interested in farming (Soyinka 1969 : 83).

When Sunma continues to refer to Ifada as a non-human who fills her with revulsion and disgust (Ibid. : 83 - 84), Eman tells her she has been behaving cruelly to the boy.

EMAN: It was cruel of you. And to Ifada who is so helpless and alone. We are the only friends he has. (Ibid. : 84)

Eman is the epitome of goodness and "represents a responsiveness to human need whenever it arises" (Jones 1988 : 73). It is no wonder that he finds himself protecting Ifada, who is trying to run away from the village elders when Ifada has been chosen as the carrier. Ifada will be whipped and chased out of the village on this last day of the year, and when the new year starts, it is believed, the sins of the village will have been driven away. In this village the carrier has to be a foreigner, and Ifada has been allowed to stay here only because he must be the carrier this particular day.

To Eman, it does not make sense that a helpless child such as Ifada should be made to take part in a ritual he does not understand. Even when Sunma says it is none of his business (Soyinka 1969 : 95), Eman lifts Ifada bodily and carries him into the inner room (Ibid : 96). When everybody is baying for Ifada's blood, only Eman can see that this is wrong. He asks:

But why did you pick on a helpless boy. [sic] Obviously he is not willing.

In my home, we believe that a man should be willing. (Ibid. : 97)

This poses a clear challenge to the elders of the village. Later Eman says that the elders are not behaving like men, and he goes on to tell them that a village which cannot produce its own carrier contains no men (Ibid. : 98).

At this stage it is important to point out that it seems as if Soyinka has no quarrel with this ritual *per se*. What he is condemning is the victimisation of people such as Ifada. For the ritual to have meaning, the participant must fully understand what is happening. This is why Eman asks:

Does it really have meaning to use one as unwilling as that. [sic] (Ibid. : 99)

It can be concluded, therefore, that Eman sees the way the ritual is practised in his village as much better than the way it is practised in this village. Here, the custom "seems more cowardly and less morally respectable than that of Eman's people" (Booth 1992 : 15).

Because Eman cannot stand the idea that Ifada has been forced to be the carrier, he decides to take the poor boy's place. This deed is something only the strong can do. Eman is not aware of the fact that he belongs to "the strong breed", and no matter what he does, he cannot rebel against his family calling. One of the mental flashbacks in this play makes this clear, in the meeting between Eman and his father. Eman is told that even if he says he is "unfitted" to do the work of a carrier he will find himself doing the job.

OLD MAN: Your own blood will betray you son, because you cannot hold it back. If you make it do less than this, it will rush to your head and burst it open. I say what I know son. (Soyinka 1969 : 105)

It can therefore be said that Eman's strong blood makes him rush to Ifada's rescue, but Jaguna's taunting words may also have incited Eman to action. This event occurs after Eman has exposed the flaws in the way the village carries out this ritual.

JAGUNA: You see, it is easy to talk. You say there are no men in this village because they cannot provide a willing carrier. And yet I heard Oroge tell you we only use strangers. There is only one other stranger in the village, but I have not heard him offer himself [*spits*] It is so easy to talk is it not? (Ibid. : 99)

These words sting Eman. The suggestion that he is a coward who only talks but does nothing forces him to take Ifada's place as the carrier of the society's sins. Eman, though, is later seen trying to escape from the villagers. This action is somewhat puzzling, but it should be remembered that though earlier Eman has talked of his unsuitability for the task his father has told him of his strong blood (Ibid. : 104 - 105).

Eman's moral superiority is also highlighted in his relationship with his tutor, a lecherous old man who loves "pinching the girls' bottoms" (Ibid. : 109). When the tutor finds Omae, Eman's lover, in the initiation camp, he (the tutor) sees an opportunity of satisfying his sexual lust. After asking Eman to go into his hut, the tutor advances on the girl:

... now now my little daughter, you need not be afraid of me.

OMAE: [*spiritedly*.] I am not.

TUTOR: Good. Very good. We ought to be friendly. [*His voice becomes leering*.] Now this is nothing to worry you my daughter ... a very small thing indeed. Although of course if I were to let it slip that your young Eman had broken a strong taboo, it might go hard on him you know. I am sure you would not like that to happen, would you? (Ibid. : 111)

Efforts to force the girl into his hut fail, and Eman, who has obviously been watching the lecher's advances on Omae, emerges to announce that he is breaking off his initiation and that he is leaving the village. This is reminiscent of the clash between Igwezu and the Kadiye in The Swamp Dwellers. In both plays, the clash is symbolic of the challenge posed to retrogressive traditional practices by new, enlightened forces. This is further proof that Soyinka is not a blind believer in the invincibility of decadent traditions, a point amply expressed in the following quotation:

Despite his high regard for traditional African culture, Soyinka has always been prudent in basing the themes of his plays on an idea from the traditional culture. His nostalgia is devoid of sentimentality. He praises and chastises when need be (Olorounto 1988 : 297)

Thus Eman continues his fight against evil when he denounces the tutor. Perhaps the villagers will begin to see the tutor for what he really is, a fake. He is not the right man to be teaching the initiates how to become real men (Soyinka 1969 : 110).

If Eman is the saviour who represents all that is good (Jones 1988 : 73), the Girl is his antithesis. She is the play's most sinister character because she is greatly indifferent to sorrow and suffering (Moore 1978 : 51). Ogunyemi sees the sick girl as "a miniature of the village" (Jones 1978 : 31). These views are correct. The sick girl represents her village, which too can be said to be in need of a cure.

At first the Girl is a very sympathetic character, especially when Sunma says of her:

She is not a child. She is as evil as the rest of them.
(Soyinka 1969 : 86)

But this sympathy soon disappears when the Girl says to Ifada:

You have a head like a spider's egg, and your mouth dribbles like a roof. But there is no one else. Would you play? (Ibid.)

These are very cruel words. But the Girl does not stop here, as a little while later she tortures Ifada further.

[... *with surprising venom.*] But just because you are helping me, don't think it is going to cure you. I am the one who will get well at midnight, do you understand? It is my carrier and it is for me alone. (Ibid. : 87)

The Girl treats Ifada with insensitive cruelty, just as the sick society is treating both Ifada and Eman, the two foreigners. The Girl completes her role as a really evil person when, on being asked by Eman to bring him some water to drink, she goes off, seemingly to do so, but really to call Eman's pursuers. She comes back with Jaguna and Oroge, and although he still manages to escape, they have been told of Eman's dire need for water to quench his thirst. They know where to wait for him.

Early in the play, Sunma appears as another unpleasant character, especially because of what she says about Ifada and the Girl. It later becomes apparent that she is really not on the side of the villagers. Her cruelty results from her frustration at failing to keep Eman out of harm's way. She knows the village will pick a stranger on the eve of the new year to serve as the carrier. Sunma is nervous because of the danger she sees hanging over her lover's head. Ifada will only bring the villagers to her house, and to confirm her fears, they do come and take Ifada away. Sunma makes it clear that she is not on the villagers' side. She tells Eman it would be better if he left, because the villagers really do not want him.

SUNMA: You think they love you? Do you think they care at all for what you - or I- do for them ?

EMAN: *Them?* These are your own people. Sometimes you talk as if you were a stranger too.

SUNMA: I wonder if I really sprang from here. I know they are evil and I am not. From the oldest to the smallest child, they are nourished in evil and unwholesomeness in which I have no part. (Ibid. : 88)

Sunma may sound boastful about her own uprightness, but there is some truth in what she says about her people. She, too, is a symbol of change, because while everyone else hates strangers, she has actually fallen in love with one, and has lived with him amongst her people. When Eman says he will not leave because he has found peace here , she says:

I haven't. For a while I thought that too, but I found there could be no peace in the midst of so much cruelty. (Ibid. : 89)

When the villagers come for the escaped Ifada, Sunma tries to explain to her father, Jaguna, who says that he no longer trusts her (Ibid. : 97) and orders the men to take her

home. Later, Sunma comes flying and claws at her father, calling him a "murderer". Jaguna angrily strikes her so hard that she falls to her knees.

Soyinka makes Oroge more likeable than Jaguna. His purpose is probably to show that not all people in a given society should be seen to be the same, further proof of Soyinka's balanced commitment. "He praises and chastises when need be" (Olorunto 1988 : 297). Oroge represents the voice of reason, and Jaguna represents blind loyalty to the traditions of the village. In his anger, he disowns his own daughter:

Let me cripple the harlot for life.

OROGE: That is a wicked thought Jaguna. ... Nothing in anger – do you forget what tonight is?

JAGUNA: Can you blame me for forgetting?

OROGE: This is an unhappy night for us all. I fear what is to come of it.

JAGUNA: Let's go. I cannot restrain myself in this creature's presence.
My own daughter ... and for a stranger ... (Ibid. : 107)

Events have taken an ominous turn. Oroge's words imply that something terrible is about to happen. Earlier, Jaguna has hinted that simply whipping and driving the carrier out of the village will not be enough, as there has been too much contamination already (Ibid. : 106).

Jaguna continues to say the year will demand more than the villagers thought, and when Oroge asks him to explain what he means, Jaguna's answer is in the form of a question:

Do we have to talk with the full mouth ? (Ibid. : 106)

Driven by the need to drink water, Eman goes to the stream, in the sacred trees. Jaguna has set a vicious trap for Eman. In a continuation of the first mental flashback, Eman is seen talking to his father who is walking on a path towards the stream. The Old Man is on his final journey as a carrier of his village's sins. Eman asks his father to wait for him, but Eman is told to go the other way. When the Old Man breaks into a trot, Eman runs behind, and falls into Jaguna's trap. The sound of twigs breaking and a sudden trembling in the branches, and the silence (Ibid. : 118), mean that Eman has been hanged.

The death of Eman should be met with ecstatic jubilation by the villagers, but it is not. Quite the opposite happens, as the villagers are shown to be "subdued and guilty" (Ibid. : 119) and Jaguna talks of the cowardice of the men. He says:

We did it for them. It was all for their own common good.
 What did it benefit me whether the man lived or died. But did
 you see them? One and all they looked up at the man and words
 died in their throats.

Women could not have behaved so shamefully. One by one they
 crept off like sick dogs. Not one could raise a curse.

OROGE: It was not only him they fled. Do you see how unattended we are? (Ibid.)

The reaction of the villagers shows that Jaguna and Oroge have lost the following and loyalty of the people. A pall of sadness and confusion hangs over the community. The people are not convinced their sins have been carried away. If anything, they feel the killing of Eman is wicked. But this sacrifice changes the people. The village will not be the same again (Katrak 1986 : 150), because a need to question one of the society's traditions has been demonstrated. This is why Jones compares Eman to Christ whose blood is said to have washed away our sins in order to make the world a better place (1978 : 30, 34). Soyinka castigates a backward custom which is still practised, and shows that what is evil in traditional life must be discarded.

* * *

The Road (1965) is another of those plays of Soyinka which are often described as "obscure and too metaphysical" (Moody 1989 :100) or "knotty, problematic and contradictory" (Ibid. : 106). But, just as has been illustrated in A Dance of the Forests, and as will be shown in Madmen and Specialists, The Road need not be seen in such negative terms. This highly symbolic play addresses many socio-political themes, and, apart from some of the enigmatic sections, The Road once more establishes Soyinka as a man deeply concerned with the problems of his society.

It is worth noting that the original title of this play was "The Road of Life" (Probyn 1981: 36, Maduakor 1987 : 210). This title was ironical, a view supported by Probyn when he remarks that the play deals with the theme of human waste and loss of life. He continues: "In one sense the play's subject is the senseless and self-perpetuating waste of life on an actual road and more generally on the road of life" (1981 : 48).

Soyinka's concern with road safety is demonstrated by the active support he has given to the Nigerian Road Safety Committee, which he chaired until recently. In Idanre and Other Poems, there is a section entitled "Of the Road", and one poem, "Death in the Dawn", was inspired by a road smash. Soyinka explains this background in the preface to the

poem: "Driving to Lagos one morning a white cockerel flew out of the dusk and smashed itself against my windscreen. A mile further I came across a motor accident and a freshly dead man in the smash" (Soyinka 1967a : 10). In the poem itself, the mother prays:

...Child
May you never walk
When the road waits, famished. (Ibid. : 11)

In The Road, Samson says nearly the same "prayer":

May we never walk when the road waits, famished. (Soyinka 1965b : 60)

This link between the words in the poem and in the play emphasises Soyinka's concern with the dangers of road travel.

The notes for the producer, and the prefatory poem, "Alegemo", are included by Soyinka to simplify matters for readers in their interpretation of The Road. The significant point to make is that the poem brings out one of Soyinka's strongest beliefs about his concept of the Yoruba (and African) world view. This is the link between the past, present and the future, or between the dead, the living and the unborn: a theme central to A Dance of the Forests.

Soyinka strongly believes in the influence of the gods on people's lives, and one of his favourite gods is the Yoruba god of destruction and creation, Ogun. It has been said that in the poem "Alegemo", Agemo is the equivalent of Ogun (Maduakor 1987 : 197 - 200). This god is also a god of both creation and destruction, just as Ogun is. In a way, the poem prepares the audience for death, which is one of the major themes of the play. One could say that the spirit of Agemo is talking of itself as having come from the dead:

My roots have come out in the other world

This is a foreshadowing of Murano, who is an embodiment of the suspension of death. The "pathways of the sun" are the movement of the sun from east, resembling birth, to the west, resembling death. In the same way, the play opens at dawn, suggesting the dawn of a new era. Unfortunately this era is one characterised by chaos and confusion. This disorder is conveyed by the coming into view of the road-side shack. Right from the start, Soyinka makes it clear that he is portraying a society in which values have been turned upside down: a point which emerges in the very first stage directions. The play will take place in a road-side "shack", the fence is "ragged", the church has a "tightly shut stained-glass" window. The mammy-waggon is "lop-sided" and "minus its wheels".

All these are symbolic of a society that has been ruined by man. Both the secular and the religious worlds are being criticised by Soyinka. The fact that the church window is closed and stained is a criticism of the Christian church's lack of transparency.

A further indication that things have fallen apart is the ill-spelling: AKSIDENT STORE - ALL PART AVAILEBUL (for ACCIDENT STORE - ALL PARTS AVAILABLE). The proprietor of this store is himself muddled, with lop-sided ideas about life and death. Professor's store mirrors its owner and the owner mirrors the store. Each is symptomatic of a breakdown in society's values. Professor's philosophy has no wheels and cannot therefore take him anywhere.

The layabouts are almost dead with sleep because of the previous night's carousing. They "are sprawled on the floor and on benches", "among rubble of worn tyres, hubs, twisted bumpers etc" (Soyinka 1965b : 1). Samson is seen going out and urinating against the wall (Ibid.). One can imagine the nauseating sanitary conditions around the store. The picture Soyinka paints is one of a society which "literally lacks direction and common purpose. It has the road, it lacks a driver" (Probyn 1981: 51).

Right from the start, Soyinka indicates his displeasure with his society. The play was written at a time when Nigerian independence was proving more and more disappointing, and one critic sums up the whole issue thus:

While Soyinka has over the years actively protested real road conditions in Africa, figuratively he speculates in the play where Nigeria is headed on the road of independence, ... The early 1960s were characterised by political turmoil, and it turned out that Nigeria was veering toward a disastrous wreck in the form of a civil war, 1967 -70. In The Road, Soyinka predicts that crash. (Phillips 1990 : 140)

It is with the above quotation in mind that The Road should be discussed. Jones rightly terms the play an unflattering satire about nearly all aspects of Nigerian life (1988 : 98). It becomes very difficult to talk of a single theme for this play because practically every character seems to be a vehicle for a theme, or themes.

At the heart of the play is the enigmatic Professor whose life is dominated by a quest for something he calls the Word. Just as the Professor himself, with his ironical name, can be dismissed as nothing but a madman, his search for the Word can similarly be given short shrift as much ado about nothing. The only point at which the Professor can be

taken seriously is when he is seen as a vehicle of satire concerning a corrupt society (Jones 1988 : 91).

As with Lakunle in The Lion and the Jewel, the Professor's first appearance strikes the audience because of the clothes he is wearing. His "Victorian outfit – tails, top-hat etc., all threadbare and shiny at the lapels from much ironing" (Soyinka 1965b : 8), the pocket-watch and his monocle, all symbolise the incongruity of the man and all that he represents to his society.

The people around the Professor think he is mad. Salubi, for instance, refers to him as "that madman" who makes "abracadabra with spirits" (Ibid. : 4, 5). Samson says he cannot understand the man because he sleeps in the church yard with dead bodies (Ibid. : 5). Say Tokyo Kid sees the Professor as "that crazy guy" who is "gonna go too far" one of these days (Ibid : 25). Everything the Professor says is crazy talk, and Salubi further says that once the police catch him, they will throw the Professor in the lunatic asylum of the prison (Ibid. : 32). Lastly, Samson actually tells the Professor:

I always thought you weren't as mad as people thought.
... You are a very confusing person Professor. I can't
follow you at all. (Ibid. : 63)

The Professor is therefore perceived as mad by those around him. And since he is also the leader of the layabouts, Soyinka seems to be burlesquing African leaders soon after the attainment of independence in the 1960s. The layabouts have been referred to as "symbols of a purposeless existence" (Jones 1988 : 91). The Professor can then be seen as a parody of a political leader, and Phillips corroborates this view by referring to the Professor as "a kind of political tyrant" (1990 : 148).

There is nothing in the Professor's actions which is admirable. He failed as a lay-reader and Sunday School teacher. He was excommunicated for embezzling church funds, but even before he was caught stealing from the church, his conduct had displeased the bishop. For example, one Palm Sunday he taught his pupils that the palm is a symbol of the ever-abundance of palm wine, "a covenant that the world shall not perish from thirst" (Soyinka 1965b : 89). In the end the Professor was dismissed for blasphemy (Ibid. : 69).

Having failed in the church, the Professor starts a new life both as a leader of the layabouts and as a businessman dealing in second-hand motor car spare parts. To maintain a hold on his followers he assumes his philosopher charade. It is not clear whether he genuinely believes in his mission, or whether he is merely using his

"madness" as a screen for his evil deeds. If he is truly mad, it is unlikely he would refer to himself as such, but he does, in his conversation with Samson about the Word.

Do you think I spend every living moment looking
for that? What do you think I am - a madman? (Ibid. : 46)

Again, the Professor understands quite well why Kotonu does not want to drive again.

... He was touched [*Looks round at Kotonu and then taps his head.*] - here. I've known madmen on both sides of the grave, but he ... [*Shakes his head pitying.*] Don't expect him to drive again. (Ibid. : 47)

It would therefore seem that the Professor has moments when he is sane, such as in the above instances. But there are other times when there is no doubt at all that he is insane. For example, he cannot recognize his own place and finally believes he is actually lost. Samson tells the Professor that he (Samson) owns the place and that he is in fact a millionaire (Ibid. : 10). Later, the Professor recounts this incident:

I had a strange experience this morning. Missed my way and was received into the palace of a millionaire... (Ibid. : 47)

In the final analysis it does not matter really whether the Professor is mad or not. Soyinka still makes his point; which is to criticise the leadership of the African states in the 1960s. The Professor is the epitome of corruption and greed, and his perpetual search for the Word (an attempt to conquer death?) can be seen as a "greedy desire to possess everything" (Phillips 1990 : 150), a theme that will be further illustrated in Kongi's Harvest.

The Professor's search for the Word is an attempt to discover the essence of death. He embarks on this quest for knowledge in the hope that it will give him power over life and death: a power which will elevate him to the status of the gods. His excessive greed drives him to want to live forever. Such a mission turns the Professor into "an entrepreneur of the most corrupt sort" (Phillips 1990 : 143). He causes road accidents by removing road-signs (such as the BEND sign post). He does this for two reasons; firstly he wants to "study" the dead people, hopefully until he has unlocked the mystery of death. Secondly, he wants to strip the wrecks and the corpses of items which he will take to his AKSIDENT STORE.

Such is his depravity that he is keeping an accident victim, Murano, as his study specimen. But Murano is now mute, and can really be of no use to the Professor, as he

cannot explain the essence of death. "This paradox shows not only the futility but also the irrelevance of Professor's search" (Ibid. : 145).

In his saner moments, the Professor knows the dangers of his quest:

Such dangers beset us who seek after the Word (Soyinka 1965b : 10)

and also

Conjuration is no light matter you know.
Never fool around with spirits. (Ibid. : 39)

Unlike their leader, the layabouts are not going to dabble in the sacrilegious game the Professor is playing. Firstly, Samson categorically refuses to accompany the Professor to an accident scene.

PROFESSOR: ... The place I speak of is not far from here, if you wish to come ... you should be shown this truth of my endeavours.

SAMSON: No thank you very much. I don't willingly seek out unpleasant sights. (Ibid. : 11)

Later, in the *egungun* dance, even the leader of the thugs, Say Tokyo Kid, tells the Professor that he is fooling around where he has no business (Ibid. : 93).

Say Tokyo regards the Professor's role in this dance as sacrilege and in the ensuing fight, the Professor is stabbed to death. The Professor dies in spite of his deep desire to cheat death. His mission has failed dismally, and his death symbolises the removal of a corrupt leader from his subjects.

Apart from showing the folly of pursuing ultimate power, a syndrome that manifests itself in some leaders calling themselves "Life President", Soyinka also shows the Professor as greedy for money. He is a specialist forger of drivers' licences as well as an extortionist who charges what he calls consultancy fees (Ibid. : 36, 43). He also steals from Samson (Ibid. : 62). All these cases are symptomatic of leaders who steal from their (literally) poor followers. The Professor's love of money is so strong that he even tells his age in monetary terms.

... I am not yet sixty. Fifty-nine pounds seven shillings and twenty-one pence – that is my real age. (Ibid. : 38)

The other characters, it can be suggested, are either vehicles of, or butts for, Soyinka's satire of his society. Everyone except Murano is guilty of one vice or another. Samson, Kotonu and Salubi symbolise skilled but unemployed members of society, symbols of a society on a road to nowhere. Their existence is purposeless, as they spend their time doing nothing and preying on one another.

Samson's Biblical name is both symbolic and ironic. He was God's champion against the pagan Philistines. In the play he is called Champion Tout of Motor Parks, but his glory is in the past. Now, just as with Kotonu and Salubi, he has been condemned to frustration and inactivity. His major role is in the parodies that he plays.

Firstly, he plays the African millionaire. He dishes out money to police officers so that they do not arrest his drivers. This is most impressively done and the scene starts with a kind of prayer:

Give us this day our daily bribe. Amen. (Soyinka 1965b : 6)

And then in perfect order, officers first, the policemen, from the Superintendent down to the newest recruit, receive their bribes. This is institutionalized corruption, and the implication is that society's law enforcers are all corrupt. If that is the case, then the rest of the society is rotten.

Then Salubi remarks that money is power. Samson then demonstrates how these rich and powerful men "enjoy" life.

Now I want you to take the car - the long one - and drive along the Marina at two o'clock. All the fine fine girls just coming from offices, the young and tender faces fresh from school - give them lift to my house. Old bones like me put fresh tonic in his blood.(Ibid. : 8)

The Professor has been shown as a forger of licences, a fact already familiar to Particulars-Joe, the uniformed policeman who finds Say Tokyo Kid and his gang dragging on the hemp, and instead of arresting these law-breakers, actually joins them in the hemp-smoking. It is no wonder The Gang sing:

You police are all the same...
Taking bribes is all you know ... (Ibid. : 79)

Soyinka has depicted a society where even thugs know that the police are corrupt. There is also collaboration among criminals, as Tokyo Kid has been seen fraternising with

Particulars-Joe, and Particulars-Joe is seen discussing the criminal world with the Professor.

PROFESSOR: How is the criminal world my friend?

PARTICULARS-JOE: More lucrative everyday Professor. (Ibid. : 75)

Particulars-Joe has also been a friend to Sergeant Burma. These two were in the front together during the Burma campaign, and through them Soyinka exposes the fallacy that there may be valid reasons for starting a war. (Although war in the cause of uprooting evil systems such as apartheid is justifiable, according to Soyinka.) It is Particulars-Joe who makes the point:

... It is peaceful to fight a war which one does not understand,
to kill human beings who never seduced your wife or poisoned
your water... (Ibid. : 81 - 82)

In A Dance of the Forests the Warrior is severely punished because he refuses to fight a war which he thinks has no justification. Soyinka himself was imprisoned for over two years for criticising the Nigerian government when it decided to go to war against the Ibos in 1967 (Schipper 1982 : 137).

In Sergeant Burma the evil effects of war on a person's soul are typified. War dehumanises people, and this is the reason why Samson tells Kotonu:

...You cannot pretend to be an out-and-out cannibal like
Sergeant Burma. (Soyinka 1965b : 20)

Later, Kotonu says:

Sergeant Burma was never moved by these accidents.
He told me himself how once he was stripping down
a crash victim and found that the driver was an old
comrade from the front. He took him to the mortuary
but first he stopped to remove all the tyres.

SAMSON: He wasn't human. (Ibid. : 21)

The point that Soyinka is making is too obvious to demand further comment. Suffice it to say that Soyinka has done in The Road what he once said he would always do: use his trade to challenge unacceptable situations in society (Granqvist & Stotesbury 1989 : 69).

Finally, it should be noted that Professor's death is beneficial to his community as society has been rid of an evil man, much in the same way as Reverend Erinjobi's death

is a blessing to his community. Soyinka clearly detests oppressive leaders, a point which also emerges in Kongi's Harvest, the next play to be discussed.

* * *

Kongi's Harvest (1967) was written after some African states had achieved nationhood. Some of these countries were gradually sliding into the grip of despots, notably Ghana, under Nkrumah, and Malawi, under Banda (Moore 1978 : 62 , Ahmed 1984 : 122). Being the socially and politically committed man that he is (Soyinka 1984(b) : xiii), Soyinka found himself being forced to assume "an increasingly public role as a champion of political freedoms" (Pribic 1990 : 421). Kongi's Harvest is therefore one of Soyinka's plays which comes "closest to a direct comment upon the contemporary political scene in Africa". The play is a satirical comedy upon the emergent style and rhetoric of African dictatorship (Moore 1978 : 61).

Kongi is the President of an imaginary state, Isma, so called because the nation's word factory, the Reformed Aweri Fraternity, churns out "ism" after "ism" as precepts to be used as guiding principles in running the country. Kongi wants to preside over a New Yam ceremony, a ritual hitherto the preserve of the traditional ruler, the Oba, to mark the start of a new harvest season. But the "harvest" in the title of the play is ironic because in the end Kongi's despotic rule leads to chaos and the disintegration of the nation.

Soyinka prepares the readers for this disaster by prefacing the play with a section entitled "Hemlock". Hemlock is the poisonous plant, a brew of which the Greek philosopher, Socrates, drank to end his life. Kongi has sowed hemlock on the land and the harvest will be bitter. This result ties up with Danlola's words at the end of this section:

... disaster
Is the only certainty we know. (Soyinka 1967b : 10)

It is in this negative sense that "harvest" is used, for Kongi's actions will yield nothing but confusion and misery. In addition to the new yam, he will be presented with a man's head, a direct outcome of his repression.

Danlola's first appearance is as a prisoner of Kongi, but he is taking part in a royal dance to a song which seems to be mocking Kongi's new regime, and at the same time challenging it to a fight. The opening lines of the anthem are:

The pot that will eat fat

Its bottom must be scorched
 The squirrel that will long crack nuts
 Its footpad must be sore
 The sweetest wine has flowed down
 The tapper's shattered shins (Soyinka 1967b : 1)

The song says that there is no sweet without sweat. The good things of life do not come easily; they have to be fought for. Danlola is prepared for a long and bitter fight with the new regime. Already he has spent a year in detention.

The country is a land of "isms", and these new ideas are collectively called "scientificism" - perhaps a deliberate echo of Nkrumah's "consciencism". "Scientificism" could be a hybrid term from "scientific socialism", and even if this is not so, Soyinka certainly satirizes, not scientific socialism *per se*, but the blind adoption of strange and alien ideologies (King 1988 : 340). The criticism is in the fact that the proponents of the ideology do not understand what the ideology means. The Reformed Aweri Fraternity, who are supposed to be the new regime's "think tank", show that they are propagating a doctrine they do not understand.

SIXTH: What image exactly is positive scientificism?

THIRD: Whatever it is, it is not long-winded proverbs and senile pronouncements. In fact we could say a step has already been taken in that direction. If you've read our Leader's last publication.

FIFTH: Ah yes. Nor proverbs nor verse, only ideograms in algebraic quantum. If the square of $XQY(2bc)$ equals QA into the square root of X , then the progressive forces must prevail over the reactionary in the span of .32 of a single generation.

FOURTH: I trust you understand that as well as you remember it.

FIFTH: No. As well as *you* understand it. (Soyinka 1967b : 13)

Kongi's regime is characterised by words, a situation which prompts Danlola to mock "ismism" as nothing but "a harvest of words" (Ibid. : 1).

In "Hemlock" readers are given snippets about Kongi, but this information is not enough to form a full picture of the man. It later emerges that Oba Danlola is not the only one who has been put in detention (euphemistically called P.D., for Preventive Detention). Many other people, husbands, sons and brothers are rotting in forgotten places (Ibid. : 77). All the leaders of dissident groups have also been imprisoned (Ibid:39). Some of the detainees have actually been tried in Kongi's courts and have been condemned to death. Kongi is therefore shown as a ruthless tyrant who will not brook any opposition: those who stand in his way are mercilessly crushed.

The man, who claims to like "harmony" (Ibid. : 35), is really nothing but a "Messiah of Pain", a "Prophet of Agony" (Ibid. : 79). He has a sycophantic Secretary to do all the dirty work for him. In addition there are the Right and Left Ears of State, the symbols of State Intelligence. Kongi has also set up a formidable propaganda machine which is master-minded by the so-called Reformed Aweri Fraternity. But perhaps most important of all is the Carpenters' Brigade, the ruthless private army which Kongi has established chiefly to deal physically with dissidents. He expects the carpenters to spit fire on his enemies (Ibid. : 66). Kongi himself mentions the complementarity in the relationship between the Aweris and the carpenters.

They complement my sleepy Aweris here. These ones look after
my intellectual needs, the Brigade take care of the occasional physical
requirements. (Ibid. : 36)

These are the men whose

... arms make omelet of
Stubborn heads, via police truncheons. (Ibid. : 57)

They are conscious, and proud, of their role, as can be gleaned from their song:

Men of peace and honour
Are the Carpenters' Brigade
.....
We spread the creed of Kongism
To every son and daughter
And heads too slow to learn it
Will feel our mallets' weight
.....
And Kongi is our Saviour
Redeemer, prince of power
For Isma and for Kongi
We're proud to live or die! (Ibid. : 65)

The symbolic and ironic nature of the brigades' name (carpenters) is worth noting. As carpenters, they will shape the people (just as real carpenters shape wood) into Kongi's adherents, and the irony is that they are not carpenters at all. Their mallets are used to force "Kongism" into people's heads. Again, echoes of "Marxism", "Leninism", "Maoism" seem inevitable. The men are shown marching down stage, "with stiff mallet-wielding arms pistoning up in the Nazi-salute" (Ibid. : 66). The ruthlessness and violence suggested here is too obvious to need comment.

In his greed and thirst for immortality, Kongi has coined innumerable titles for himself. Among these is the "Spirit of Harvest", and he nearly runs mad, literally, when the Secretary says the Carpenters' Brigade's song is an invocation to the Spirit of Harvest to

lend him (Kongi) strength. He only calms down when the Secretary assures him that he is actually more than that – he *is* a benevolent Spirit of Harvest, and the year will be known as the year of Kongi's Harvest. Everything shall date from that year.

KONGI:*[rapt in the idea.]* You mean, things like 200 K.H.

SECRETARY: A.H. my Leader. After the Harvest. In a thousand years, one thousand A.H. And last year shall be referred to as 1B.H. ...

KONGI: No, K.H. is less ambiguous. The year of Kongi's Harvest. Then for the purpose of back-dating, B.K.H. Before Kongi's Harvest. ...

(Ibid. : 37)

The scheme will of course place Kongi's status on a par with that of Christ, whose life is used for dating in the Christian calendar, Before Christ (B.C.) and Anno Domini (A.D.). Kongi has also made sure that the country's major structures are named after him: Kongi Terminus, Kongi University, Kongi Dam, Kongi Refineries, Kongi Airport, etc. (Ibid. : 64). Kongi himself says he is everything and everyone in Isma (Ibid. : 81).

Not satisfied with all the political power he has bestowed on himself, Kongi works tirelessly to divest Oba Danlola of his spiritual power. But Danlola is a stubborn old man who is unwilling, naturally, to surrender to Kongi. Danlola is prevailed upon by his nephew, Daodu, and his lover, Segi, to submit to Kongi's request.

Segi and Daodu complement Danlola as Kongi's opponents. Segi's father is one of the five men awaiting execution, and Daodu is Sarumi's son and heir to Danlola. On the surface of things, then, Kongi has some quite formidable opposition.

The antithetical polarisation between Kongi and the Segi/Daodu alliance is emphasised by the stage craft of "First Part". Indeed it has been suggested that while Kongi and his henchmen stand for death, darkness and destruction, the Segi/Daodu camp is symptomatic of progress, life and growth (Jones 1988 : 100). This is borne out by the lighting when each camp comes into view. For example, "Kongi is seen dimly in his own cell" (Soyinka 1967b : 11), but Segi and Daodu are surrounded by coloured lights (Ibid.:13). Kongi is a prisoner of his political system but Segi and Daodu are dancing to vigorous music. And when the Secretary and his two spies enter the night club, they pollute the jovial atmosphere. These representatives of Kongi's hated regime are unwelcome in the night club.

Daodu's opposition to Kongi is pushed a step further by the fact that he (Daodu) has set up a thriving farming venture to rival Kongi's not-so-successful state cooperatives. The

yam that is to be presented to Kongi at the festival is from one of Daodu's farms, which won the New Yam competition.

Segi has been appointed the leader of the Women's Corps, who have also decided to ally themselves with Daodu's Farm Settlement, and these will now form a strong counter to Kongi's Carpenters' Brigade, which has been weakened by desertions.

At the presentation ceremony, the rebellious women show remarkable courage, taunting Kongi with the words of their song:

Oh here is a new wonder of wonders
Kongi they say, will eat the king's yam [sic] (Ibid. : 74)

At the same time the women "curtsey to the seated obas, [and] perform a brief insulting gesture as they dance past the Reformed Aweri" (Ibid.). When Daodu finally stands up to speak, his speech is full of venom. Echoing Danlola's anthem in "Hemlock", Daodu calls on all the world to denounce "all Prophets of Agony" (the Kongis of this world). He appeals to freedom fighters to recognise "that pain may be endured in the pursuit of ending pain and fighting terror" (Ibid. : 79). And in an open challenge to Kongi, Daodu continues:

So let him, the Jesus of Isma, let him, who has
assumed the mantle of Messiah, accept from my
farming settlement this gift of soil and remember
that a human life once buried cannot, like this
yam sprout anew. Let him take from the palm
only its wine and not crucify lives upon it.

Unfortunately, these words do not seem to have any effect on Kongi. It has already been hinted that one of the vices of the new regime is its insensitivity to people's feelings. The regime spews its propaganda

With government rediffusion sets
Which talk and talk and never
Take a lone word in reply. (Ibid. : 2)

At this point, when Daodu expects something to happen, possibly the assassination of Kongi, Segi's father is shot dead outside. Things go wrong and Daodu's last words are:

We failed again. (Ibid. : 81)

After the dismal failure of the plan to unseat Kongi, indications are that all his opponents will run away to a neighbouring country. The iron grating that descends and hits the

ground with a loud clang at the end of the play is suggestive of the iron grip that Kongi has on Isma. With the leaders of the opposition in exile, it can be assumed that Kongi's paranoid schizophrenia will only worsen. This is why Olorunto sees Kongi as another fitting example of the "modern trickster with immeasurable capacity for deceit, incorrigible moral degeneration and political tyranny" (1988 : 300). Kongi's Harvest can be said to be one of the first of Soyinka's plays to point quite clearly to the evils of totalitarianism in Africa. Later plays such as Madmen and Specialists, Jero's Metamorphosis, Opera Wonyosi and A Play of the Giants continue in a similar vein.

In the eight plays that were discussed in this chapter, Soyinka's themes have covered the whole spectrum of humanity. Man's foibles have been lampooned in nearly every play. Soyinka has shown himself a consistently politically and socially committed writer who is concerned with what happens around him.

CHAPTER 3

WOLE SOYINKA'S PLAYS OF THE SEVENTIES

In this chapter, Soyinka's plays of the seventies will be discussed, namely: Madmen and Specialists (1971), Jero's Metamorphosis (1973) and Death and the King's Horseman (1975). It will be shown that in these works Soyinka, while clearly still critical of his society's evils, is now more acerbic and caustic. His emphasis has definitely shifted from myths and spiritual matters. (It should be remembered, however, that Myth, Literature and the African World was published in 1976.) His approach is now more secular, and is pre-occupied with what Amuta calls "the communal responsibility of the committed artist" (1988 : 127).

This radicalisation is a result of what happened personally to Soyinka, first in 1965, and then between 1967 and 1969. His brief detention, and later acquittal, after being charged with substituting his own tape for one that was supposed to be broadcast by the Prime Minister, Mr Akintola, in 1965, is documented in several works, but notably in Jones (1988 : xiii), King (1988 : 343) and Soyinka (1972a : 156 - 9). It was believed that Mr Akintola had fraudulently won the premiership, and Soyinka's tape was to call on him to step down. And then, between 1967 and 1969, Soyinka was detained by the Nigerian Federal Government authorities for questioning the moral and ideological basis of the war against the Ibos of eastern Nigeria. Despite international pleas for his release, he spent twenty seven months in detention, most of this time in solitary confinement in a tiny cell.

After his release, Soyinka is quoted as saying: "Whatever it was I believed in before I was locked up, I came out a fanatic in those things" (Zell, Bundy and Coulon 1983 : 492). "Whatever" are Soyinka's political views, it can be suggested. Indeed, this is confirmed by July who says: "If there were any official hopes that imprisonment might have diluted the intensity of Soyinka's political beliefs or the firmness of his artistic commitment, these were rudely shattered two years later when he published his bitter account of prison experience The Man Died" (1981:478). July might well have included Maduakor's "trilogy on the Nigerian civil war" (1987 : xi), namely : Madmen and Specialists (1971), A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972) and Season of Anomy (1973). These four texts comprise "Soyinka's prison quartet" (Pribic 1990 : 424).

This new anger and sharpened [socio-political] awareness (Moore 1978 :1) can be found in each of Soyinka's creative works of the seventies and eighties: the poems Ogun Abibiman (1976) and Mandela's Earth and Other Poems (1988), the autobiographies, Ake: The Years of Childhood (1981) and Isara: A Voyage Around Essay (1989), the three plays that will be discussed in this chapter, and the three plays that will be discussed in the following chapter, namely: Opera Wonyosi (1981), A Play of Giants (1984) and Requiem for a Futurologist (1985).

Looked at in this way, it is justifiable to talk of Soyinka's detention as having revolutionized his "view of literature as a political weapon" (Ogungbesan 1979 : 5). More important, it will be shown that there is a consistent theme running through Soyinka's creative works: what Pribic calls "a thread of social realism and moral commitment" (1990 : 452).

* * *

Madmen and Specialists is foreshadowed by the "October '66" poems, in which Soyinka laments the unnecessary loss of human life in a senseless war. Indeed, he paints a grim picture in which soldiers have lost their human identity. The dehumanisation implied in these poems is encountered in full measure in Madmen and Specialists. This view is echoed by Jones who sees "the erosion of humanity" as the trademark of this play (1988 :119).

In The Lion and the Jewel, Sidi calls Lakunle "the madman of Ilujinle" (Soyinka 1963b : 3). Professor is also called "madman" and "crazy guy" by Salubi and Say Tokyo Kid respectively in The Road (Soyinka 1965b : 4, 25). In Kongi's Harvest Kongi, too, behaves like a madman, especially where he is told that one of his most wanted opponents has escaped from detention (Soyinka 1967b : 47). Indeed, one critic actually calls Kongi "a madman" (July 1981 : 482). In Madmen and Specialists, Dr Bero emerges as a composite of all these madmen, and many more. He is the epitome of evil.

The "madmen" in this play are the military leaders, represented by Bero. Their actions, for example the eating of human flesh, resemble those of lunatics. But from the leaders' point of view, anyone who challenges their authority is a "madman". Old Man and the Mendicants are, as far as the leaders are concerned, "madmen". This is Bero's explanation of the situation regarding Old Man's detention. Bero tells Si Bero

that their father is suffering from "mind sickness", and so he had to be locked up, for his own sake. The Mendicants, too, are said to be insane (Soyinka 1971 : 31, 37, 38).

The "specialists" are, again, Dr Bero and his co-leaders. Before Bero even appears, the Mendicants mention that he is a specialist who is known as always achieving his goals. They say he is a specialist in extracting the truth, and the audience is then shown how this is achieved, by torturing a suspect until he faints (Ibid. : 14 - 15). Later, Bero himself boasts:

... The Specialist they called me, and a specialist is - well a specialist. You analyse, you diagnose, you - (*He aims an imaginary gun.*) - prescribe. (Ibid. : 31-32)

Dr Bero and the other leaders are straightaway characterised as specialists in torture and brutality. They know everything, it seems, and they have solutions to every problem. Once they have decided on a course of action, they dictate it to everyone else. If anyone tries to oppose them, that person is shot.

Madmen and Specialists aims to portray the worst in human nature, and Dr Bero is arguably one of the most obnoxious characters ever created by Soyinka. The first mention of Bero is in reference to his home and surgery, and it is indicated that this surgery is "down in a cellar" (Soyinka 1971 : 7). The location of the surgery underground immediately brings to mind Hades, the underworld, and from the outset Bero is associated with death. Next, barks and herbs (Ibid. : 7) are juxtaposed with horribly deformed beggars. This positioning is to show the audience how awry life has become, and also demonstrates Bero's metamorphosis: from a healer to a destroyer of life. (The herbs and barks represent his former vocation as a doctor, and the Mendicants represent the damage that Bero and the other leaders have caused.)

When Bero joined the war, he was in the Medical Corps but he later switched jobs, to become the head of the Intelligence Section (Ibid. : 31). In his new vocation Bero has become a completely transformed person (hence the term metamorphosis). He has swapped his doctor's paraphernalia for a swagger-stick, braids and buttons (Ibid. : 10, 23). And a revolver is now part of him because he carries and flashes it any time he is annoyed (Ibid. : 56, 66, 76, 77).

Bero's metamorphosis has made him power hungry, callous and cruel. Goyi feels that Si Bero, his sister, must be pitied for having such a monster of a brother. And from

what the Mendicants say, it becomes obvious that Bero will not hesitate to kill anyone who tries to obstruct him in his work:

BLINDMAN. I know what he means. (*He points an imaginary gun.*) All in the line of duty. (Ibid. : 10 - 11)

When Si Bero wants to wash Bero's feet with palm wine in a ceremonial cleansing act, Bero refuses.

BERO. (*stepping back to prevent her from taking off his boots*). Bare feet, wet earth. We've wetted your good earth with something more potent than that you know.

SI BERO. Not you. Neither you nor Father. You had nothing to do with it. On the contrary. (Ibid. : 28)

Bero has changed so much that he even boasts of the blood that he has spilt. Later, he makes it clear to his sister that he has now joined the Big Braids (Ibid. : 31), and that what he seeks is total control of everything.

... Control, sister, control. Power comes from bending Nature to your will. (Ibid. : 31)

He next tells his sister that the first step to gaining ultimate power was when he started eating human flesh.

... It was the first step to power you understand. Power in its purest sense. The end of inhibitions. The conquest of the weakness of your too human flesh with all its sentiments. (Ibid. : 36)

Therefore, Bero is now not only a killer, but also a cannibal who actually finds human flesh delicious. This causes the Priest to run away from him (Ibid. : 35), and then his sister (Ibid. : 40).

Bero's encounter with the Earth Mothers deepens the audience's negative impression of him. He is seen "holstering a revolver" (Ibid. : 56), and when the Old Women want him to pay them, he insults one of them.

... What is a thing like you still doing alive?

...I am giving you warning to clear out of here. Pick up your lice and rags and get out. (Ibid. : 56, 57)

After their conversation, Iya Agba calls Bero "young fool" because she has seen that his journey to damnation is irreversible.

So it can be said that when Bero started eating human flesh, he signed his pact with the devil. This is the time he joined a new religion, As. From the Mendicants' prayer:

As - Was - Is - Now - As Ever Shall Be - (Ibid. : 40)

it emerges that this system has been in existence from time immemorial; it is here today and it will always be there. It is part of man's degenerate nature; what Eshuoro mentions in A Dance of the Forests when he talks of humans always wreaking havoc on their own heads (Soyinka 1963a : 47). The obstinate and pervasive nature of As is man's recurrent inhumanity and corruption. This evil system encompasses all forms of dictatorship, oppression, exploitation, social injustice, blind pursuit of self-interest and any other imaginable abominations (Maduakor 1987 : 229).

Further insight into As is provided by Aafaa's alphabetised explanation of the system from A to I. As with any system of belief, those who believe in As have to undergo some form of mental adjustment. Adjustment of Ego to the Acceptance of As is what Bero and his fellow murderers did when they decided to start eating human flesh. They closed their minds to any reasoning; this is Blindness in As. Having blindly accepted the system, the converts then show Contentment, full satisfaction with As, no matter what the consequences. D in As stands for Destiny, which means that As is an end in itself. As has a target: it aims at achieving a goal: the attainment of total power by the rulers, and the total oppression of the victims. D also stands for Duty. Nobody, nothing, can stand in the way of one who is on As duty. Blindman has already parodied Bero on duty. D in addition stands for Divinity. This means that As is regarded by its adherents as a holy religion. E stands for Epilepsy: As is a sickness which renders its victims insensible to their actions. F stands for Fart. Metaphorically, As stinks. It is a nauseating system. G stands for God, who is the same as D. This God is the new god as well as the old god (Soyinka 1971 : 36). But now Aafaa explains I before H. I stands for I am I: proof of the absolute power that Bero and the other leaders have acquired. No one can question their authority. This is the trademark of all tyrants. Finally, Aafaa glosses H "Humanity! Humanity the Ultimate Sacrifice of As, the eternal oblation on the altar of As" (Ibid. : 52). This statement means what it says. In an As system, humanity suffers. It is a callous system where human lives count for nothing.

Aafaa puts H last because he wants the audience to remember his explanation of H longer than the other explanations. The erosion of human dignity is this play's target, and there is abundant proof of As in operation.

For a start, the Mendicants' deformities are a result of the war that has been going on. It is worth noting that no reason is given for this war: because there is no reason, just as with the war in which the Warrior refuses to fight. It is a war over nothing (Soyinka 1963a : 62).

The detention of political dissidents is an evil practice, but the imprisonment of a father by his own son is almost unimaginable. Yet this is how Bero treats his father. The Old Man proved "dangerous", Bero explains:

... Father's assignment was to help the wounded adjust to the pieces and remnants of their bodies. Physically. Teach them to make baskets if they still had fingers. To use their mouths to ply needles if they had none, or use it to sing if their vocal cords had not been shot away. Teach them to amuse themselves, make something of themselves. Instead he began to teach them to think, think, THINK! Can you picture a more treacherous deed than to place a working mind in a mangled body?

(Soyinka 1971 : 37)

This explanation is reminiscent of the conflict between Mata Kharibu and the Warrior, when the former accuses the latter of daring to think, and the Warrior consequently pleads guilty to possession of thought (Soyinka 1963a : 53).

Old Man's ideas were interpreted as dangerous by Bero and the other leaders. And yet when Old Man suggested that they should start eating the people who were being killed during the war, the leaders listened to him. Until the time Old Man is brought home, Bero still regards him as dangerous. Like a person suffering from an infectious disease, the Old Man must be quarantined (Soyinka 1971 : 52).

The "infectious disease" is nothing but the Old Man's ability to think perceptively, and the leaders fear that he will politicise the people, who will then rise against their oppressors. But the Old Man has already succeeded considerably with the Mendicants, especially Aafaa, which is why Bero says that whenever the Mendicants open their mouths, he can hear the Old Man (Ibid. : 37).

Bero locks up Old Man because he regards him as a subversive element, just as Kongi has kept Oba Danlola in preventive detention for nearly a year (Soyinka 1967b : 15). It is not hard to see a parallel between Soyinka's own lengthy detention by the Nigerian military authorities and Old Man's detention by Bero, who represents the war-time leaders. Maduakor, indeed, observes that Old Man in this play is Soyinka's *alter ego* (1987 : 220).

Once in detention, Old Man is treated very inhumanely. He is kept in an underground cell. (This is reminiscent of Soyinka's own detention in a crypt.) This incarceration is followed by other forms of barbaric treatment. In spite of being assured that he will be afforded all the usual comforts, the Old Man is denied many basic necessities. He cannot communicate with the outside world because he is denied pen and paper. His favourite pipe and tobacco are taken away, and his watch, glasses, and money have all been stolen from him (Soyinka 1971: 47-48).

But it is the mock-trial sessions which show the full horror of the travesty of justice in an As system. The condemned man, Goyi, is shot before he is even tried. But then it is remembered that he was not given a fair trial, so he is ordered to resurrect himself. He is tried, convicted and shot again. The executioners of justice are smug about the trial, and even ask the condemned man what he thinks of his trial. Goyi says everything was very fair: the irony is too obvious to merit comment.

It should be remembered that Soyinka's criticism in Madmen and Specialists is aimed squarely at what he later calls "the crimes committed by a power drunk soldiery against a cowed and defenceless people" (Soyinka 1981b : 3 of Introduction). The criticism of the soldiers is most virulent after the "trial". Cripple talks of "bastards" and then spits. Soyinka here expresses how disgusting such soldiers are. Aafaa continues:

... In a way you may call us vultures. We clean up the mess made by others. The populace should be grateful for our presence. (*He turns slowly round*) If there is anyone here who does not approve us, just say so and we quit. (*His hand makes the motion of half-drawing out a gun.*) I mean we are not here because we like it. We stay at immense sacrifice to ourselves, our leisure, our desires, vocation, specialisation, etcetera, etcetera. The moment you say, Go, we ... (*He gives another inspection all round, smiles broadly and turns to the others.*) They insist we stay. (Soyinka 1971 : 11)

Aafaa's speech is riddled with irony. Soldiers are vultures - birds of prey that thrive on carrion. The eating of human flesh is seen to be now part of normal life for Bero and his fellow leaders. And the soldiers' explanations of why they seize power, and their reasons for clinging to it, are as laughable as they are unconvincing. The whole episode is a graphic echo of Squealer's speech in Animal Farm when he has to explain why only the pigs drink milk and eat apples.

'Comrades!' he cried. 'You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? Many

of us actually dislike milk and apples. I dislike them myself. Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health. Milk and apples (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig. We pigs are brain-workers. The whole management and organization of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for *your* sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back! ...
(Orwell 1945 : 24)

And so the lies continue. Firstly, it can be seen that the soldiers stay on in power not because the populace want them to rule for those long periods, but rather because the people are so cowed that they are not able to voice their displeasure. Secondly, the soldiers, just like the pigs, are in power for their own selfish ends.

Soyinka also criticises the ruthless treatment that is sometimes meted out to those people who are suspected to be subversives. This is shown by the Mendicants when they burlesque a torture scene. Firstly, Aafaa lunges for Goyi's crotch, which the latter tries to protect. Aafaa says Goyi has no further use for his genitals, and Cripple wonders whether Bero would torture his father that way. Aafaa then assumes Bero's role. He becomes a specialist in extracting the truth, and keeps on pushing the needle upwards until Goyi faints. When Goyi tries to use the conveniences he finds he is unable to do so. His torturers laugh at him. Aafaa asks him:

... What's the matter? No wan' pee-pee? Pee-pee pee-pee?
No more pee-pee? I know what it is. (Soyinka 1971 : 15)

Goyi cannot pass water because of the pain he has endured. This torture is reminiscent of the suffering inflicted on Dr Arigbede and other victims in The Man Died, when they had broomstick switches driven up their penises (Soyinka 1972a : vii).

Later, Bero tells his father what nearly happened to him:

They would have killed you, you know that? If I hadn't had you hidden away they would have killed you slowly.

... They wanted to kill you, mutilate you, hang you upside down then stuff your mouth with your own genitals.
(Soyinka 1971 : 49)

The leaders are heartless, truly specialists in torture and other sadisms (Amuta 1988 : 120).

One of the strengths of Madmen and Specialists, especially in terms of socio-political commitment, can be said to be the way in which words are used throughout the play. Even single words, which at first may seem to mean absolutely nothing, are later found to be loaded with meanings which express the themes of the play. Aafaa's attempt to explain As alphabetically is a case in point.

This distortion of meaning is what the Mendicants achieve on several occasions. For example, when they recall the visit of the First Lady to the Home of the Disabled, Aafaa changes "disabled" to "de-balled". This will remind the audience of what Bero has said earlier in his conversation with the Priest:

... Human flesh is delicious. Of course, not all parts of the body. I prefer the balls myself. (Soyinka 1971 : 35)

It would seem that the President was some sort of pedant, but Aafaa changes "pedant" to "pendant", then calls the Head of State a "bloody pendant". "Bloody" suggests that the man's hands are dripping with the blood of his victims. He is hanging round people's necks like the proverbial millstone, so that everyone would obviously wish to get rid of him. The First Lady is said to have been "gushpillating": a creation of Cripple's, perhaps from a combination of "gush" and "palpitating". She is a corpulent creature, and so perhaps sweat is gushing from her body, which is quivering at the same time. The picture is that of someone who is too fat from eating too much – a consequence of the benefits of leadership in an As system!

Again, certain words trigger others, which can ultimately be associated with some of the evils of As. Thus "smoke" immediately echoes "smoke-screen". This reminds Old Man of other words: "pronouncements", "manifestos" and "charades". Blindman is in turn reminded of expressions such as "running water", "running mouths" and "election promises" (Soyinka 1971: 64). All these words refer to the lies and cheap promises made by politicians as they canvass for votes. In the end the sufferers are the people who choke in silence.

Through this verbal theatrics (Maduakor 1987 : 236) Soyinka manages to attack as many evils of As as possible, without having to rely on a story or plot structure for the play. Even "neutral" words are manipulated to trigger other words with sinister ideas, and in this way the play succeeds in maintaining its sinister undertones. For example:

OLD MAN. ... A lamp has its uses.
AAFAA. So electricity.

GOYI. Bleeah. Election promises.
 CRIPPLE. What we want is individual manifestos.
 AAFAA. Manifesto for every freak? General Electric!
 OLD MAN. Electrocutes. Electric chair. Electrodes on the nerve-centres
 - your favourite pastime, I believe? Tell me something.
 What hasn't been abused? (Soyinka 1971 : 66)

On the surface, this exchange sounds like drivel, but it is a bitter condemnation of the practice of making election promises which are never fulfilled. The Old Man then mentions other forms of torture used by the specialists in brutality. The audience has already been shown a suspect being tortured with a needle (Ibid. : 15), and also a prisoner being tortured psychologically (Ibid. : 46-8). This time it is physical torture again, but now using electricity. No wonder Old Man asks what hasn't been abused. It is worth noting that Bero is so deeply unsettled when he is reminded of his cruelty that he takes out his gun. He has to suppress an urge to shoot his father: the truth hurts.

Ironically, Bero himself joins in the "game", as the references to electricity cause him to mention lightning. When his father asks him whether lightning can strike him, Bero says yes. This enables Old Man to score another point against the leaders. In spite of all the power they surround themselves with, these despots are not immortal.

OLD MAN. (*quiet [sic] triumphant smile*). Then you're not omnipotent.
 You can't do a flood and you - (*Pause*) - can't always dodge
 lightning. Why do you ape the non-existent one who can? Why
 do you ape nothing?

BERO. You tax my patience. Better watch out in future.

OLD MAN (*quietly*). The future?

BERO. The future, yes. The End ...

OLD MAN. Justifies the meanness.

BERO (*again, angry reaction. He controls himself*). (Soyinka 1971 : 66)

In The Road the Professor has been seeking, vainly, a way of cheating death, and Kongi has also been trying to immortalize himself. Bero himself has talked of bending Nature and controlling lives (Soyinka 1971 : 31, 63). Old Man's wisdom brings the truth too close for comfort. No human being, no matter how powerful he thinks he is, can become God. Naturally, Bero is angered by this simple statement of fact, especially when Old Man goes on to remind Bero that leaders like him achieve their goals through cruelty (meanness).

Soyinka's socio-political consciousness is not restricted to criticism of misrule in Africa. On some occasions, Soyinka does attack other evils such as colonialism and racism. These attacks are sometimes so subtle that they may be unnoticed. That is why Lindeborg calls them "guerilla attacks" (Crehan, Haney II and Lindeborg 1990 : 56). Examples of such attacks can be found in Ake: The Years of Childhood and Isara: A Voyage Around Essay, as well as in Madmen and Specialists.

In the final stages of Ake: The Years of Childhood Soyinka describes a women's protest movement against excessive taxation by a British District Officer. There is also a charge that the dropping of the atom bomb on Japan was a racist act. One of the women protesters asks the District Officer to explain why the bomb was dropped on Japan, but not on Germany. The woman's answer is: because Germany is a white race while the Japanese are just a dirty yellow people.

I know you, the white mentality: Japanese, Chinese, Africans,
we are all subhuman. You would drop an atom bomb on
Abeokuta or any of your colonies if it suited you!
(Soyinka 1981a : 224)

From Isara: A Voyage Around Essay two examples of racist tendencies which are indirectly targeted occur, firstly where white teachers at St Simeon's seem to have furtively enjoyed a racial joke at the expense of the black students whom they call "Simeans" (Soyinka 1989 : 66) - a simian being a monkey or an ape. Secondly, someone later says the League of Nations is racist.

Yes, they should be called that. They are all in league against
us, black people! (Soyinka 1989 : 156)

In Madmen and Specialists, the Mendicants parody an address by a colonial officer at the height of African nationalism in the early 1960s. In January 1960, the British Prime Minister, Mr Harold Macmillan toured Africa. He addressed the Parliament of South Africa in Cape Town, where he pointed out that the pressures for self-rule could not be ignored. The major thrust of his speech was:

... the most striking of all the impressions that I have formed
since I left London a month ago, is of the strength of this
African national consciousness. In different places it takes
different forms, but it is happening everywhere. The wind of
change is blowing through this continent and, whether we
like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a
political fact. (Gibbons 1986 : 5)

In Madmen and Specialists (Soyinka 1971 : 69-71), Soyinka clearly tackles the British colonial officers who tried to justify their continued grip on the colonies. It

is significant that Blindman plays the role of the colonial officer. Soyinka suggests that the imperialists had no vision when they went into the business of colonialism. But the officer claims the British had a duty to seize the colonies. They were not attracted by the mineral wealth of the colonies – the copper, manganese and oil were quite incidental. They did it for the benefit of the natives! (The parallels with Squealer's and Afaa's explanations are obvious.)

It should be noted that some authorities on African literature and history have commented on the rationale behind the colonization of Africa. Schipper, for example, makes it clear that "European colonization of Africa had as its main purpose the gaining of wealth and power" (1982 : 85-86). Davidson makes a similar observation (1992 : 11, 201).

The colonialists will not be expelled, so the officer says. They will fight what he calls the black menace to the last man. They will defend their principles, standards and traditions. After all, he says, they have nothing in common with the stinking hordes. The brutes must be suppressed, otherwise they will murder their white masters in their sleep. There is also the danger that the black men might marry their daughters. Even more frightening is the possibility of the blacks raping the white women. The colonialist's view of the colonized as primitive and savage is typical (JanMohamed 1985 : 62). Rape, the officer says, is more natural to the blacks than marriage. The officer tells the audience that the colonizers will fight on, in spite of all the pressure .

But it is clear that the officer's argument is based on pure lies and wrong premises. Confucius was neither an African nor an atomic scientist. The whole speech is nothing but a load of racist hogwash. Soyinka has said that most of the British colonial officers that he encountered were illiterate fools (Gulledge 1985 : 522). Blindman's parody confirms this.

Towards the end of the play Bero's patience with his father has been stretched to the limit. Bero has been shown to be a deadly despot, and so it is a question of time before he shoots Old Man. He is afforded this opportunity when he finds his father just about to operate on Cripple, who has been trying to ask a question, but in an As system thinking is not allowed. As a result , Cripple is now a heretic. He must be operated on, to find out just what makes a heretic tick (Soyinka 1971:77). It is at this point that Bero shoots his father dead. Once he has done this, Bero has also "killed" himself. Earlier, his father has said:

I am the last proof of the human in you. (Ibid. : 49)

Bero has revolted the audience right through the play, so when he shoots his father he signs his own death warrant. After all, Iya Agba has already called him "carrion" (Ibid : 74). So it should be imagined that he will now live a life of bloodshed and tyranny. His father warned him:

Once you begin there is no stopping. (Ibid. : 49)

Although Madmen and Specialists was triggered by the Nigerian Civil War, the dramatist deals with the theme of war "in such general terms that it applies universally" (Katrak 1986 : 151). Soyinka's socio-political commitment can therefore be said to extend beyond his immediate environment, a point which makes him a truly relevant artist of this century.

* * *

Jero's Metamorphosis (1973) was published at a time when military coups were being staged with such reckless abandon that they seemed fashionable. In West Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin and Togo, for example, and Uganda in East Africa, were all affected by this menace. Nigeria itself experienced two coups in 1966, the second of which installed Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon who ruled Nigeria until he himself was overthrown in 1975. It was against this backdrop that Jero's Metamorphosis was written. The play is therefore another arrow aimed at military rulers, like other Soyinkan works of the same period, notably Kongi's Harvest, Madmen and Specialists, The Man Died and Season of Anomy. All these are superb examples of works in which "the figure of the dictator has received Soyinka's undivided attention" and in which he puts political tyrants in the dock (Utudjian 1984 : 42). The writings show man's thirst for power, and the methods used by the villains to acquire that power are ruthless and violent. There is one difference, though. Jero, the phoney prophet-turned -General, is a merry devil cast in the mould of Shakespeare's King Richard the Third. But he is no less ruthless. Perhaps he is the most dangerous type of trickster because he does not look dangerous. He is a typical example of what Olorunto calls modern scheming giants (1988 : 297).

Jero's Metamorphosis can be appreciated better if it is read together with, and after, The Trials of Brother Jero. This is because in some sections of Jero's

Metamorphosis there are references to The Trials of Brother Jero, and two of the key characters, Jero himself and Chume, appear in both plays.

Even before the play begins, Jero has already demonstrated his guile. This is when he turned the tables on the Chief Eviction Officer who had come to serve him with an eviction notice. The officer had come along with his confidential secretary, ostensibly for her to take notes, but actually to seduce her. Prophet Jero started preaching at the officer, but it was the secretary who became "converted" (Soyinka 1973a : 56-57). In the end, the officer was overwhelmed by Jero's "hot holiness" and fled, leaving a confidential file with the secretary (Ibid. : 87). Jero then employed the girl as his private secretary.

In this file there are proposals to clear the prophets - "riff-raff", "so-called evangelists" - (Ibid. : 78) from the beach, because their presence is delaying the establishment of a large-scale tourist industry (Ibid. : 58). Jero immediately sees a chance to enhance his status, because the proposal of the tourist board is to have

... one respectable religious denomination to be licensed to operate on the Bar Beach. Such a body will say prayers before and after execution, and where appropriate will administer the last rites to the condemned. They will be provided a point of vantage where they will preach to the public on the evil of crime and the morals to be drawn from the miserable end of felons. After which their brass band shall provide religious music. (Ibid. : 79)

The proposal offers a wonderful opportunity for considerable power and fame for Jero. His aim is to acquire the monopoly of capturing the hundreds of thousands of people who will come to watch the public executions (Ibid. : 80). Jero then embarks on a plan to win the leadership of the religious body, which will bring the highest and mightiest under what he calls his spiritual guidance (Ibid.).

The fact that Jero has his mind so much on a large framed picture of a uniformed figure, most likely the military ruler delivering a speech, indicates clearly what he is scheming - a similarly high military title, and perhaps similar status and power. Caleb is right to say that Jero is now thinking big (Ibid. : 81). Jero himself makes it clear that he wants to imitate the

very form and shape of the rulers of the land. (Ibid. : 82)

Jero has changed in the sense that he is now a big-time trickster. He is no longer the phoney of The Trials of Brother Jero, where he had to make do with only a few coins

from here and there. This time he aims to catch really big fish, "the highest and the mightiest" (Ibid. : 80), "the rulers" (Ibid. : 81). His congregation will number "hundreds of thousands" (Ibid. : 80). He even has an office, not merely the shack of The Trials of Brother Jero. The office is quite a comfortable one, and there is a full-time private secretary too. But the change is like that of a chameleon. It is not the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, but of a wolf donning sheep's clothing.

When the play was published in 1973, Nigeria had been under military rule since 1966. The country had gone through a devastating civil war. The national politics had changed, and there was therefore a need for people to change their way of thinking to suit the times if they were to survive. This is why Jero decides to go military. He must change his tactics so as to be in line with the times. He needs a new image, and it is a military one (Ibid. : 82, 83, 88). Jero then decides to mobilise his fellow prophets to form one powerful military church, the Church of Apostolic Salvation Army. He does not reveal that he intends to be absolute head of this church, although Shadrach can see this will be the case.

Jero is a very cunning schemer, as one can see in the way he dictates the letter to the secretary. He keeps changing some of the original words and phrases. For example, he wants everyone

to forget old enmities and bury the hatchet in the head
of a common enemy ...

Then he decides to stop at "bury the hatchet" because the rest sounds unchristian (Ibid. : 47). He also changes "summon" to "invite". Jero is so calculating because he does not want his mission to fail. He has to be very careful with every move he makes. He tells the audience why this is so:

To survive we need full-bodied tactics. (Ibid. : 49)

Therefore, his letter of invitation is very carefully worded. It must sound polite, and therefore other prophets are called "equals before God and servants of his will" and "shepherds of the Lord" (Ibid. : 48). And yet outside the letter, Jero calls his brother prophets "cut-throats", "dope-peddlers", "smugglers and stolen goods receivers" and "ex-convicts", some of whom should long ago have been publicly executed (Ibid. : 49). Indeed, Matthew is said to be a sex maniac, a fornicator, and Isaac is said to be a drunkard, con-man and forger (Ibid. : 75-6).

Among the prophets, Ananaias stands out as the most effective specimen who is be used to satirize religious charlatanism. Like his Biblical namesake, Ananaias is a liar. He also has a hideous past. He is a former inmate of Kiri Kiri Prison, and his name has been linked with crimes such as arson, unlawful wounding and attempted murder (Ibid. : 54). Once he finds out that Jero knows about his seedy past, Ananaias does not deny anything. He claims to have been reformed after he got the call. Then he begs Jero not to be too hard on him:

ANANAIAS. I mean to say, Brother Jero, you are pretty hard on a man.
You know yourself business is slow ... A man must eat ...
(Ibid. : 54)

Ananaias has said it quite clearly: propheteering is a business, a means of making money. It is not intended to win souls for the Lord.

The point becomes even clearer afterwards when Ananaias says:

things haven't been going well lately. No contribution,
nothing at all. The congregation have shrunk to nothing and
even them as comes, all I get is the story of their family
troubles. They no longer pay tithes.

JERO. You were greedy, Brother Ananaias. If every man of a
hundred congregation paid a tithe at the end of every
month he is going to notice very soon that a tithe from
everyone means several times what each man is earning.
And all that for one man - you - alone! That's why
they stopped coming. (Ibid. : 54-5)

The point needs no further belabouring. The prophets are interested in profit, and those who are not as sly as Jero are likely to lose their following as soon as their flock detect they are being fleeced.

It is not everyone, fortunately, who is fooled by these fake prophets. The Chief Executive Officer speaks his mind quite clearly. To this man, Jero is "a mere charlatan" , "the devil himself". He tries to show Rebecca the truth:

you permit yourself to be bamboozled by a fake
prophet, a transparent charlatan ... All the prophets
on this beach are devils ... (Ibid. : 58)

It would seem that while people such as Ananaias are clear about the reasons why they go about shouting the word of God, those such as Sister Rebecca are innocent victims who are genuinely tricked into the whole thing. Rebecca represents the

gullible members of society who accept the doctrines of the prophets hook, line and sinker. To Rebecca, Jero is a Saviour. That is why she defends him so admirably, telling the executive officer that it is the devil that speaks in him and makes him call Jero such bad names.

REBECCA. Shameless sinners who acquire wealth from the misfortune of others? Will you make money off sin and iniquity? Oh sir, you must let Brother Jero talk to you about the evil in your plans. To make money out of sin is to bring sin upon the dwellers of your city. ... The Lord speaks in me. I am the mouthpiece of his will. Give up this plan and let the prophets continue the blessed task of turning men back to the path of goodness and decency ... (Ibid. : 58-59)

What Rebecca does not see is that the so-called prophets make much money in the name of turning sinners back to the path of goodness and decency. It is because of such blind and unquestioning loyalty that the charlatans are able to thrive.

Dedicated, yet simple people such as Rebecca may work themselves into a frenzy, during which time they mumble much nonsense. Rebecca goes into such a trance, trembling from head to foot, gyrating and talking about the kingdom of heaven over and over. Whether Rebecca is really possessed is not clear, but Ananias uses this supposedly holy occasion for practical gain. Like the devil, he quotes scriptures to suit his end, even going to the extent of completely changing some of the lines from the Bible.

Verily I say unto you it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a police man or woman to enter the kingdom of heaven ... (Ibid. : 60)

He later steals the executive officer's umbrella and bowler, as well as a piece of bread and drink from the cupboard. This is a most humorous incident but it is meant to represent the theft and exploitation that is performed by the "prophets" in the name of God.

While Rebecca is used to represent blind loyalty, Chume's case is a different example of gullibility. It borders on downright stupidity, unlike Rebecca's which is largely innocent. As already mentioned, this is the same Chume as in The Trials of Brother Jero. He is the man who was thrown into an asylum through the machinations of Jero. The fact that Jero manages to win Chume over to his side speaks volumes for the prophet's guile.

Chume is one of the vital pieces in Jero's grand scheme. He is wanted as a trumpeter in the brass band that will provide religious music in the public executions at Bar Beach (Ibid. : 79). Taking advantage of Chume's naivety, Jero uses total lies and flattery to woo Chume over to his side. For example, Jero lies about Major Silva and all white men. He tells Chume that these whites are merely exploiting him.

People who don't even understand the musical soul which
the Lord has given you? ... that man is an enemy believe me.
An enemy. He does not understand you. I am sure they are all
like that.

CHUME. They are not all like that. Captain Winston ...

JERO. A white man. He is not one of us. And you know yourself
he's a hypocrite. All white men are hypocrites. (Ibid. : 68)

Jero is not only a liar but also a shameless racist. The audience has not been shown anything to suggest that Captain Winston is a hypocrite, or that all white men are hypocrites. Instead, there has been much to justify calling Jero himself a hypocrite, including his actions at this very moment. He wants Chume to join him, not because he is concerned with Chume's welfare, but because he wants to advance his own cause. This is hypocrisy of a high order.

Racism, as with tribalism, is a cheap means of winning support from people. It is the kind of technique used by dictators such as Hitler to rally people to their parties. Jero is using exactly the same evil tactic, and this scene is a bitter indictment of power seekers.

After a long sermon in which forgiveness, mercy, God's judgement and much more feature, Chume's initial anger melts, especially when Jero mentions something about Chume's coming promotion.

Praise the Lord for the gift of reason and gift of life.
Then praise him also for your coming promotion,
yes, your coming promotion for this is the glad tidings of
which I am the humble bearer.

CHUME (*hesitant*). Promotion?

JERO. Of whose glad tidings I am made humble bearer. I send you,
Prophet Jero, said the Lord. Blessed are the peacemakers
for they shall inherit the kingdom. Make your peace with
Brother Chume and take with you this peace-offering, the
good tidings of his coming promotion.

CHUME. Promotion? How can?

JERO (*sternly*). Do you doubt, Brother Chume? Do you doubt my
prophecy? Has your sojourn among lunatics made you
forget who prophesied war and have we not lived to see it
come to pass? Do you trust in me and praise the Lord or
do you confess yourself a waverer at this hour of trial.

CHUME. Praise the Lord. (Ibid. : 70)

And so the trickery goes on until Jero elevates Chume to the status of a holy prophet, which is actually not the promotion that he came to announce. This is only the beginning of the bright future ahead in Chume's life. In the end Chume is won completely over, and Jero finally manages to assemble a strong team of prophets who will form one church, which will be given the monopoly of preaching at Bar Beach.

One prophet, Shadrach, opposes Jero right from the beginning, but not on the principle of uniting with other prophets. The problem is that unity would be to his, that is Shadrach's, disadvantage. This is because right now he leads the Shadrach-Medrach-Abednego Apostolic Trinity Church, and he claims this church has

a twenty thousand strong congregation all over the country. These include men from all walks of life including very high ranks within the uniformed profession. (Ibid. : 81)

Shadrach's proposal is that all other denominations should be absorbed into his church. Earlier, Shadrach has appeared as a very lofty fellow who regards himself as some sort of royalty. He speaks in terms of "we" even when he is referring to himself alone.

We refuse to sit down. . . . We have been slighted and we make known our protest. . . . We have been treated with less courtesy than becomes the leader of a denomination twenty thousand strong. . . . We protest. (Ibid. : 73)

The egoism displayed by Shadrach is typical of megalomaniacs, of whom he is an excellent representative. He is no different from Jero in respect of seeking power and fame. The only difference is that Jero is the more cunning of the two, which is the reason why those who support him are rewarded with ranks. For example, Ananias becomes Sergeant Major; Rebecca, Colonel; Isaac, Major; Matthew, Captain; Caleb, Lieutenant-Colonel and Chume, Colonel (Ibid. : 83-84).

This awarding of titles serves to ridicule the promotions that are sometimes made in the army. The recipients of the new titles have not done anything in their profession to merit promotion. They are being honoured for being yes-persons and for being friends with the big man. Conversely, those who oppose the leader are dealt with ruthlessly. Shadrach has been warned by Brother Jero, who considers himself a spiritual empire builder:

JERO. . . . Those who are not with us, are against us. This is the

Salvation Army with a difference. (Ibid. : 82)

Brother Jero will brook no opposition, especially when he is so close to attaining his goal. He has duped even the military rulers, whom he has told that his new church has prophesied long life for the regime. He declares that the new church is also satisfied with the public executions because they are aimed at stamping out armed robbery, and all these things are so pleasing to the Lord that he has granted eternal life to the regime (Ibid. : 81).

The gullible army men are depicted as fools who are very easy to trick. They have failed to see that the turning of Bar Beach into a national public execution amphitheatre is symbolic of the rot that has eaten into the fabric of the nation. They have failed to see that it is callous to generate revenue through public executions.

Having been tricked by Jero, the military men begin to show signs of awarding to him the monopoly to preach at the public executions. Shadrach is therefore a spoiler and he must be destroyed, never to rise again. After all, as far as Jero is concerned, he (Jero) has been sent by God to bring light into this sinful world.

We hold office by divine grace, in perpetuity. (Ibid. : 84)

Under the direct command of Ananias, now Sergeant, and with Brigadier Joshua, formerly Chume, in the forefront, Jero, now General, issues orders that all the shacks at the beach should be razed to the ground.

By dawn the entire beach must be cleansed of all pestilential separatist shacks which infest the holy atmosphere of the united apostolate of the Lord. Beginning naturally with Apostate Shadrach's unholy den. The fire and the sword, Ananias, the fire and the sword. Light up the night of evil with the flames of holiness! Consecrate the grounds for the Bar Beach Spectacular! (Ibid. : 92)

Jero has been seen in civilian clothes, and very corrupt he was. Now he has gone military, and there are many signs that he will be an unscrupulous tyrant. The fact that he believes he is a leader by divine grace makes him a frightening prospect for a ruler. With the likes of Ananias now in charge of the army of God, it is not hard to imagine what life is going to be. It will be hell on earth.

Jero's assumption of the rank of "General" symbolises the coming into power of military, in place of civilian, rulers. Jero is in full control. He has hung his own

large photograph in his office and has good reason to feel happy with himself, as is shown by his "amiable-charlatan grin" at the end of the play. And his last words:

After all, it is the fashion these days to be a desk General

are a criticism by Soyinka of military rulers. The words mean what they say. Soldiers seize power not for altruistic, but for selfish, reasons. This point was dealt with in the discussion of Madmen and Specialists, and a parallel was quoted from Animal Farm. All these works are a damning indictment of tyrannical rulers, so that Soyinka is once again clearly articulating one of the most pressing problems of his society.

* * *

At the beginning of this chapter, reference is made to anger and sharpened awareness as obvious features of Soyinka's creative works during the seventies. This reaction to human folly has been demonstrated in Madmen and Specialists and Jero's Metamorphosis. Death and the King's Horseman (1975) will be found to share these characteristics. In addition, Soyinka's historical consciousness will be found to have intensified and to have acquired a more overt political edge (Amuta 1988 :117).

Death and the King's Horseman is a tragedy constructed on the same lines as Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958). In both of these works there is a colonial district officer who expedites the tragedy. Soyinka calls this colonial factor "a catalytic incident merely" (1975: Author's Note). This means that the final tragedy would have happened, even without the district officer. Elesin's character is bound to lead to tragedy, but this denouement is expedited by Pilkings, just as it is Okonkwo's character that is largely responsible for the final tragedy in Things Fall Apart.

Schipper (1982 : 86) notes that the colonial situation as experienced by Africans is rendered in plays such as Oba Waja by Duro Ladipo, Kinjeketile by Tanzania's Hussein (which texts this writer unfortunately could not have access to) and Death and the King's Horseman. Oba Waja (Yoruba for "The King is Dead") and Death and the King's Horseman are both based on the same, real incident which took place in Nigeria during the 1940s.

The incident of a British colonial official called Frank Hives who adopts a "nonsense attitude in the execution of his duties among natives whom he regards as

'primitive savages'" (Booth 1992 : 7-9) strikingly resembles the actions of the colonials in Death and the King's Horseman. Frank Hives and Simon Pilkings regard themselves as representatives of "the enlightened European" (Booth 1992 : 9) who have to break up what they consider superstitious rituals. The interference of Europeans in situations which they did not fully understand often led to tragic consequences. It is for this reason that works such as Things Fall Apart and Death and the King's Horseman should be regarded "as [studies] in colonial diplomatic blunder" (Peterson and Rutherford 1990 : 87).

Death and the King's Horseman is set in the colonial period in the 1940s, but was published in 1975, fifteen years after the end of colonial rule in Nigeria. This setting is similar to Ake: The Years of Childhood and Isara: A Voyage Around Essay, both of which are set in the 1930s and 1940s, but were published in 1981 and 1989 respectively. The reason could be that Soyinka realised that he had omitted something very important from the colonial past. All his creative works deal largely with problems of the post-colonial, independence era. The colonial question is dealt with merely in an incidental manner in works such as the two autobiographies mentioned above, and in only two pages in Madmen and Specialists.

In one of the interviews which Soyinka gave in 1987, he complains of a damaging and negative review of Death and the King's Horseman by a critic of the New York Times. Soyinka is annoyed with the critic (Frank Rich) for suggesting that Death and the King's Horseman "would have been a fuller play if there had not been the political aspect" (Soyinka 1988a : 332). Soyinka is also accused by Rich of giving "trite speeches to white characters" as well as of "stereo-typing the natives, the Africans" (Ibid. : 334).

Yet, Soyinka explains, the play received excellent reviews from other critics in Chicago and Washington D.C. (Ibid. : 333). Frank Rich's "slandorous misinterpretations" (Ibid. : 336), Soyinka states, are a result of that critic's "dishonest outlook on the arts" (Ibid. : 337). Calling Frank Rich "a liar" (Ibid. : 339), Soyinka further mentions that Frank Rich is not alone in this kind of unintellectual criticism. "We have a few like him in Nigeria too" (Ibid. : 342).

Frank Rich's interpretation of Death and the King's Horseman cannot be accurate, especially considering that when Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for Literature, this play was singled out "as one of the works of Wole Soyinka which so impressed [the Nobel officials] that they thought he was worthy of [the prize]" (Ibid. : 344).

Soyinka casts his mind back to the African formative past and this time he addresses the colonial question fully and squarely. His purpose is stated quite clearly in a 1987 interview in the United States. He mentions that most of the British colonial officers he encountered were illiterate fools. (This is the reason for giving the white characters trite speeches.) He also remarks that the colonial masters made the little boys march in starched shirts and shorts, parading, saluting and singing "Rule Britannia" on Empire Day. Looking back, this incident was very humiliating. Soyinka hits back at the colonials for what they put him through as a child (Gulledge 1987 : 522-3). Williams confirms this when he says that Soyinka condemns "the arrogance and cultural chauvinism of Western imperialism" (1993 : 72).

The predominant theme in this play is racial prejudice, epitomised in the Pilkingses, especially in Simon Pilkings, the District Officer. His wife, Jane, seems less prejudiced against Africans than the District Officer. However, it should be noted that this play is a double-edged criticism of both the traditional and colonial worlds. Although it is largely an anti-colonial play, Soyinka also criticises ritual suicide, though indirectly. Katrak confirms this view, stating that "the subtlety with which [Soyinka] has cast the dice for and against this ritual of suicide [has] misled critics ... into believing that the playwright is celebrating the custom" (1986 : 89). Katrak further explains that Soyinka's criticism of ritual murder is implied in his (Soyinka's) "sympathy to Elesin's basic human instinct for survival rather than for death" (ibid.). Viewed in this way, Soyinka's commitment can be said to be balanced, and this is why Olorounto says Soyinka praises and chastises as and when the need arises (1988 : 297).

Elesin Oba, the King's horseman, fails to carry out his duties at the last moment. According to custom, the King's horseman should, thirty days after the King's death, commit ritual suicide and accompany the King to the world of the dead. Failure to do so can only lead to chaos and disorder. Elesin becomes weak and flinches at the last, crucial hour. There is agitation everywhere, and, wanting to prevent the suicide, the District Officer orders the Elesin to be imprisoned. All this happens when His Royal Highness, the Prince, is visiting. Olunde, the Elesin's son, returns from England, and seeing the looming danger, not only to the society, but also to his family, he decides to save the situation by committing suicide himself. On being shown the dead body of his son, the Elesin quickly kills himself, but he is already too late. He has failed, undoubtedly, in his duties as a leader.

The point Soyinka is making is that pre-colonial societies, in spite of their shortcomings, had their own system of order and harmony. This emerges also in Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country. Arthur Jarvis, a white liberal, ironically murdered by an African youth, has left an article on the causes of unrest in the country. He also explains how the whites have contributed to the destruction of traditional African society. His argument is that there was something admirable in that society. He says:

The old tribal system was, for all its violence and savagery,
for all its superstition and witchcraft, a moral system.
(Paton 1948 : 127)

The Praise-Singer, Iyaloja, the Women, the Girls and Olunde make many statements throughout the play and, through these characters' statements, Soyinka reinforces his point. For example, Soyinka condemns slavery in the Praise-Singer's words:

... the white slavers came and went, they took away
the heart of our race, they bore away the mind and
muscle of our race. (Soyinka 1975 : 10)

Soyinka's condemnation of this evil system is so clear that no further comment is needed. Soyinka is, of course, not the only writer to make this attack on slavery. In How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1972), Rodney, for example advances arguments to support Soyinka's indictment of white slavers.

In *Elesin*, Soyinka has created the sort of highly-placed personality who becomes corrupted by the power he has been enjoying. *Elesin* is good material for a tragic hero. He falls from honour and grace to shame and ignominy through foibles in his character. It seems that the Praise-Singer and the Women know that the *Elesin* is not a very strong character. Early in the play the Praise-Singer warns him when he boasts about the wonderful treatment he is often given by the women every time he comes to the market.

ELESIN: ... This market is my roost. When I come among the women
I am a chicken with a hundred mothers. I become a monarch whose
palace is built with tenderness and beauty.
PRAISE-SINGER: They love to spoil you but beware. The hands of women
also weaken the unwary. (Ibid. : 10)

The "tenderness and beauty" of the women will be the *Elesin's* undoing. He is evidently a hedonist, judging from what he says:

... This night I'll lay my head upon their lap and go to sleep. ...
But the smell of their flesh, their sweat, the smell of indigo

on their cloth, this is the last air I wish to breathe as I go to meet my great forebears. (Ibid. : 10)

Elesin knows what is expected of him, and he keeps on assuring the people that he will not fail them when the great moment comes.

... I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes
Watch me dance along the narrowing path
Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.
My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside.

WOMEN: You will not delay?

...
Nothing will hold you back?

ELESIN: Nothing. (Ibid : 14)

But Elesin's knowledge and understanding of his role are confined to words which are not matched by deeds. His spirit is willing but his flesh is weak. Perhaps the Elesin was spoiled during his days with the King, for he was given anything he wanted.

... In all my life
As Horseman of the King, the juiciest
Fruit on every tree was mine. I saw,
I touched, I wooed, rarely was the answer No. (Ibid. : 18)

Herein lies the source of the problem of the King's horseman. He has been a greedy, lecherous man. No wonder he is called "a cockerel", "snake-on-the-loose in dark passages of the market" (Ibid. : 19).

When he sees a pretty girl entering Iyaloja's stall, he is attracted by the girl's buttocks and thighs. An idea comes to his mind. As a voyager, he wants to travel light. Iyaloja, rather ironically, remarks:

The best is yours. We know you for a man of honour.
You are not one who eats and leaves nothing on his plate for children. Did you not say it yourself? Not one who blights the happiness of others for a moment's pleasure. (Ibid. : 20)

But the Elesin brings unhappiness to the girl, to her husband-to-be, to his son Olunde, and indeed to the whole community. He is a pleasure lover whose philosophy has been to eat, drink and be merry, as aptly expressed by Iyaloja:

The living must eat and drink. (Ibid. : 22)

When the young girl is finally brought to him, "Elesin's face glows with pleasure" (Ibid. : 23). His timing has been poor, because he chooses to indulge himself in sexual gratification on the night that he must commit ritual suicide in order to

accompany the King. He later gets detained, because the District Officer wants to prevent this suicide.

The District Officer and his wife need sympathy more than condemnation, for it is clear that most of what they say stems more from prejudice than from mere ignorance. In many sections of Part 2, the couple take turns in uttering racist insults about Africans. They represent prejudice at its worst. They also show no respect for the customs of the people, since they wear the sacred ancestral dress in their rehearsal for the evening fancy dress show, where all the whites will be meeting the Prince.

When Amusa, the Native Administration policeman, enters and is horrified to see the Pilkingses in "fancy dress", dancing, Pilkings says that Amusa is acting most strangely. Jane replies:

I think you've shocked his big pagan heart bless him.

PILKINGS: Nonsense, he's a Moslem. Come on Amusa, you don't believe in all this nonsense do you? I thought you were a good Moslem. (Ibid. : 24)

Typical of the colonialist's notion of the world of the colonized as "a literal repository of evil" (JanMohamed 1983 : 3), to the Pilkingses, the people's customs and beliefs are "mumbo-jumbo", "rubbish", "this little joke", "confounded nuisance", "some barbaric custom", "such a horrible custom", "some strange custom", and "superstitious nonsense". Pilkings calls the Elesin "the old pagan" and to him the black people are "sly, devious bastards". Later Pilkings says:

These natives here? Good gracious. They'll open their mouths and yap with you about their family secrets before you can stop them. Only the other day ... (Ibid. : 29)

Even Christian baptism, something non-traditional in Africa but an important part of British tradition, is referred to as "that holy water nonsense" by Pilkings (Ibid. : 30). The Resident is no better than Pilkings, as can be deduced from what he says:

A bit of colour always appeals to the native.

The other colonial, the aide-de-camp, thinks like his fellow whites. He addresses Olunde as an "impudent nigger" (Ibid. : 55) who must learn how to answer civil questions when he has been asked them. Then the officer continues:

... These natives put a suit on and they get high opinions of themselves. (Ibid. : 56)

All the whites in the play are presented in very unfavourable terms. Soyinka's aim is to criticise the spirit behind colonialism, which is that white values were superior and clean, while those of black people were dirty. Again, this is typical of the colonial mentality at the heart of which can be found the notion of "the theory of the whiteman's burden and the rhetoric of savagery and the need to civilise" (JanMohamed 1983 : 9). But, to puncture this superiority complex, Soyinka describes the actions of the whites in negative terms. In Pilkings's bungalow, there is "an old hand-cranked gramophone" (Ibid. : 23). Later, in the Residency, the band plays "Rule Britannia" very badly. This is symbolic of the critical way in which Soyinka regards the colonialists. They claim to be superior, but their words and actions suggest the opposite.

It is through Olunde that Soyinka pours out all the scorn he has against the British colonialists. Williams corroborates this view, even calling Olunde Soyinka's ideological spokesman (1993 : 74). For this reason, Olunde's exchanges with Jane need particular attention. For example, in the argument about the desecration of the ancestral mask, Jane asks if Olunde is shocked.

OLUNDE: No I am not shocked Mrs Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand. (Soyinka 1975 : 50)

Later Olunde tells Mrs Pilkings:

... I had plenty of time to study your people. I saw nothing, finally, that gave you the right to pass judgement on other peoples and their ways. Nothing at all. (Ibid. : 54)

Soyinka's point is so clear that it needs no further comment. The Pilkingses continue to live in their own world of ignorance and arrogance, even when Olunde tries to explain how matters stand. To Jane's credit, she seems prepared to listen to Olunde. She appreciates the fact that there are many issues which are difficult to grasp in the host culture.

JANE: ... I feel it has to do with the many things we don't really grasp about you people. At least you can explain. (Ibid. : 56)

Jane's preparedness to listen means she can now learn to respect the traditional beliefs of the people, even if she may not fully understand and can never fully share

in them. Her respect for the traditional customs will definitely make her understand the people themselves, and in that way a better world will be built (Dowthwaite 1992 : 20).

Seeing that Jane is prepared to listen, Olunde then explains how everything must be performed according to the rules laid down. He is fully aware of his duties, and so he does not want to make a mistake.

... I didn't want to do anything wrong, something
which might jeopardise the welfare of my people.
(Soyinka 1975 : 57)

Olunde then tries to thank Pilkings for everything that he has done, including trying to stop the ritual suicide.

Mr Pilkings, I appreciate what you tried to do. I want you
to believe that. I can only tell you it would have been a
terrible calamity if you'd succeeded. (Ibid. : 57)

Naturally, Pilkings cannot believe his ears. To him, Olunde is talking nonsense, as usual. It takes Olunde to tell Pilkings that by now he must realize that there are things that he can neither understand nor help (Ibid. : 58). This really should make Pilkings a wiser man, but he is too intent on preventing what he sees as a savage custom. A short while later, it dawns on Olunde that his father will now never be able to fulfill his ritual. Olunde sees his father humiliated as he is handcuffed and gagged. Elesin himself is ashamed of his new status as a prisoner of the white man. He is seen asking for pardon.

ELESIN: Olunde?(He moves his head, inspecting him from side to
side.) Olunde! (He collapses slowly at OLUNDE'S feet.) Oh
son, don't let the sight of your father turn you blind! (Ibid. : 60)

Olunde finds himself with no choice but to disown his father, even calling him "eater of left-overs" (Ibid. : 61). This reaction sends Elesin crashing down on his knees, sobbing into the ground.

The final picture of Elesin is a very poignant one. He is no longer the dignified, graceful, lovable dancer of the beginning of the play. Instead, he is a miserable prisoner in a guarded cell, his wrists encased in thick iron bracelets, chained together (Ibid.). His exchanges with Pilkings are, nevertheless, characterised by

honesty and good sense. He tells Pilkings how he (Pilkings), has shattered the peace of the world forever. Pilkings did not save his life but, rather, destroyed it.

... And not merely my life but the lives of many. ... If I wished you well, I would pray that you not stay long enough to see the disaster you have brought upon us. (Ibid. : 62)

The world has been turned upside down, and this reversal has been symbolised by Elesin falling before his son. What is clear all along is that Elesin is trying to regain his dignity, and he succeeds, to an extent, by being honest. He knows his son has disowned him.

The contempt of my own son rescued something of my shame at your hands. ... He will avenge my shame, white one. His spirit will destroy you and yours. (Ibid. : 63)

If there was ever any doubt about the real cause of Elesin's tragedy, Elesin himself clears that doubt when he talks to the young bride during his imprisonment.

... First I blamed the white man, then I blamed my gods for deserting me. Now I feel I want to blame you for the mystery of the sapping of my will. ... your warmth and youth brought new insights of this world to me and turned my feet leaden on this side of the abyss. For I confess to you, daughter, my weakness came not merely from the abomination of the white man who came violently into my fading presence; there was also a weight of longing on my earth-held limbs. I would have shaken it off, already my foot had begun to lift but then, the white ghost entered and all was defiled. (Ibid. : 65)

This speech tallies with the point made in Soyinka's preface, that the colonial factor is merely catalytic. Elesin is as much to blame for the tragedy as British colonial arrogance. Elesin is to be blamed for his greed, and the British colonials for their blind prejudice, which makes them take the wrong course of action.

Iyaloja and the Praise-Singer enter to expose the Elesin's weakness further. They repeat that he has betrayed the people and brought shame to them. All he can do is to ask Iyaloja to stop torturing him. A short while later news comes that Olunde has committed suicide, because "he could not bear to let honour fly out of doors" (Ibid. : 75). On hearing this, Elesin strangles himself. All efforts to save him prove unfruitful, and so in the end both father and son are dead.

Iyaloja seems to represent wisdom. She is one of those who "speak with the society's ancient wisdom" (Moody 1992 : 32), and so she says the last words of the play, and

wise words they are. She addresses Pilkings as "child". This is to show how senseless the whites have been. What the colonialists have been doing is to denigrate the Africans with their "distasteful and inaccurate portrayal of Africa and its inhabitants" (JanMohamed 1983 : 185). Their contempt for the indigenous culture has greatly contributed to this tragedy. Lastly, Iyaloja tells the bride to forget the dead and the living. Instead, she should turn her mind to the unborn: that is, to the future.

In spite of Frank Rich's gross misinterpretation of Death and the King's Horseman, it should be stressed that in this play Soyinka addresses the colonial question directly. As Ralph-Bowman observes (1983 : 80), this is because Soyinka has a strong sense of history. Furthermore, Hunt's claim that there is little to choose between The Lion and the Jewel and Death and the King's Horseman (Gugelberger 1985 : 84) is another example of one of Soyinka's works being grossly misinterpreted. On the contrary, there are several significant differences between these two plays. For example, while Lakunle's (little) education causes him to become an object of fun - it is really an overkill to call him a "Frankenstein monstrosity" - (Ralph-Bowman 1983 : 87) Olunde, who is highly educated, is Soyinka's ideological mouthpiece. Again, Oba Danlola is nothing but a sly, mischievous rogue, while Elesin is "the embodiment of the culture of his people" (Ibid. : 89). Rich's and Hunt's analyses do not inspire much confidence.

Madmen and Specialists and Jero's Metamorphosis were inspired by Nigerian politics of the late sixties and early seventies, particularly the devastation of the civil war and the misrule of the military. Death and the King's Horseman was inspired by an actual event in Nigeria's colonial past. Soyinka has used all these events to comment on the evils of his society. What is more, he has been very uncompromising in his criticism of these evils. The next chapter will demonstrate how he continued in similar vein.

CHAPTER 4

WOLE SOYINKA'S PLAYS OF THE EIGHTIES

Opera Wonyosi (1981), A Play of Giants (1984) and Requiem for a Futurologist (1985) are the focus of discussion in this chapter. It has been argued that in his plays of the seventies, Soyinka is more acerbic and caustic than in his earlier plays. In the plays of the eighties, Soyinka will be found to be even more hard-hitting and more direct. The reasons for this attitude are not hard to find. When the first of these plays was written around 1977, Nigeria had been under military dictatorship since 1966. In other parts of Africa, despots were in control. For example, Idi Amin had, from 1971 right through the seventies, been bleeding Uganda dry. Other examples are Mobutu of Zaire, Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, Bokassa of the Central African Republic and Kamuzu Banda of Malawi. Outside Africa, tyrants such as Pol Pot, Pinochet, Galtieri, Papa Doc Duvalier, again to mention only a few, had been making headlines in the seventies. All these rulers were notorious for eliminating their opponents with ruthless efficiency.

This was a period of political decay, and social critics such as Soyinka had no choice but to take the bull by the horns. In his own words, Soyinka had to "speak directly, very directly" (Gibbs 1987 : 62). At this time, too, Soyinka's technique and style changed considerably. Abandoning his often-criticised "esoteric" style, Soyinka "chose to strip from his drama its complex ritual and mythological idiom ... in favour of the subversive, agitprop satiric revue ... for the purpose of urgent political communication with a mass audience" (Wright 1992 : 29). This was the time Soyinka popularized "guerilla theatre", also known as "shot-gun writing". Sketches, "usually directed at a social anomaly, [and] ... meant to challenge the corrupt or repressive authority" (Gibbs 1987 : 84), were performed in public centres such as market places. Before the highly embarrassed authorities moved in to arrest the actors, everybody would vanish into thin air.

In this chapter, Soyinka is seen to continue the anti-military crusade already begun in plays such as Madmen and Specialists and Jero's Metamorphosis. Again, it will be observed that although the anomalies that Soyinka criticises can exist in any society, Nigeria and Africa are the immediate targets. It is correct, therefore, to say that Soyinka's plays of the eighties were triggered by the worsening African political situation in the late seventies and early eighties. Utudjian also quite

rightly observes that at this time Soyinka's "social commitment and even political activism" became more noticeable "under the pressure of the Nigerian civil war and the spell of social unrest brought about by the oil boom" (1984: 37).

According to Ogunbiyi, Opera Wonyosi "is specifically [Soyinka's] caustic account of decadent post-civil war 'petro-naira' Nigeria. In more general terms, it is Soyinka's partial summation of the contemporary African situation" (1979: 3). Soyinka himself says of the play: "It catalogues the atrocities committed on the Nigerian populace by the army" (Soyinka 1993: 3). The play is freely adapted from Bertoldt Brecht's The Threepenny Opera (1928), which is itself an adaptation of John Gay's The Beggar's Opera (1728). This is not the first time Soyinka draws from European originals. For example, the poem "Gulliver" is based on an episode in Jonathan Swift's ruthless satire of human folly, Gulliver's Travels (1726). Aafaa's parody of the soldiers' excuse for their "rule-for-ever" syndrome is based on one of Squealer's speeches in George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945). Professor and Doctor Bero are replicas of Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus in Dr. Faustus (c.1588). The Bacchae of Euripides (1973) is obviously Soyinka's Yoruba version of Euripides's The Bacchae (405 B.C.). All these European originals share one common feature: they are powerful works by some noted satirists and dramatists. Soyinka calls writers such as these his "inspirational models" (Gibbs 1987: 69). This term implies that Soyinka is attacking vices which are universal, which transcend boundaries of time and space. It is for this reason that Cooper talks of Soyinka's "belief in the universality of the evils of human nature" (1982: 151). This view of Soyinka as a universalist is corroborated by Olorounto (1988: 297) and Booth (1992: 18).

In the foreword on Opera Wonyosi, Soyinka states quite clearly: "The Nigerian society which is portrayed, without one redeeming feature, is that oil-boom society of the seventies ..." when "... a power-drunk soldiery" brutalized "... a cowed and defenceless people". Soyinka also makes it clear that his intention is "to expose, reflect, indeed magnify the decadent, rotted underbelly of a society that has lost its direction [sic] jettisoned all sense of values and is careering down a precipice". The reason for such detailed introductory information is to forestall any possible misinterpretation of the play. Soyinka intends to mercilessly satirize Nigerian society without pulling any punches.

He starts this onslaught in the title of the play. Ogunbiyi (1979: 3) and Utudjian (1984: 39) explain that, written with the accent, and when freely translated into

English from Yoruba, "Opera Wonyosi" means "the dupes pay one thousand nairas a yard for the costly cloth". Straightaway, Nigerians are being depicted as fools who are chasing after trappings of wealth, here symbolised by "wonyosi" - "a costume for lunatics" (Soyinka 1981b : 30).

The fact that the play takes place in a foreign country, the Central African Republic, where the Nigerians have fled because of the civil war in their own country, is a further indictment of Nigerians. Having thrown their own country into a mess, they are now a nuisance to their neighbour. Indeed, Dee-Jay calls Nigeria a "way-out country" where "everyone acts way-out" (Ibid. : 1). Everybody is strange:

the Beggars, the Army, the Bandits, the Police, the Cash-madams
the Students, the Trade-unionists; the Alhajis and Alhajas,
the Aladura, the Academicas, the Holy Radicals, Holy Patriachs [sic]
and Unholy Heresiarchs - ... (Ibid.)

Among the aberrations to be found in Nigerian society is a widespread violation of traffic regulations. It should be noted that one of Soyinka's overriding concerns is road safety. In Idanre and Other Poems (1967), the poems in the section entitled "Of the Road" were all inspired by incidents related to road accidents. The Road (1965), whose original title was "The Road of Life" (Maduakor 1986b : 210), is in one way concerned with the senseless waste of life because of carelessness on an actual road. Soyinka's concern for lack of sanity on the roads has been shown even in his letters to the Nigerian press, and Gibbs quotes some of these letters. For example, as early as 1963, Soyinka wrote an article entitled: "Bad Roads, Bad Users, Bad Deaths" (Gibbs 1983 : 15). Another article appeared in 1977, "National Road Slaughter: We Must Show We Mean Business", in which Soyinka "recommended the imposition of crippling fines on guilty drivers" (Ibid. : 9). Then Gibbs further mentions "1979 : Year of the Road", in which Soyinka, calling himself "Special Marshal" of Oyo State Road Safety Corps, "put the case for a more serious approach to road safety" (Ibid. : 10). In Opera Wonyosi Dee-Jay includes the violation of traffic rules among the evils for which Nigerians are notorious. Nigeria is a nation of road hogs, where road users are aggressive, intolerant and incompetent.

This is also a society in which human life is very cheap, as beggars here will not hesitate to slit one's throat if one does not give them whatever they have demanded. To provide evidence of the violence ravaging the nation, Dee-Jay introduces the song "Mack the Knife", sung in honour of Macheath, the notorious gangster. The first stanza of the song is loaded with hidden meaning. On the surface, Mack is a harmless

man who cannot in any way be compared to a shark which has razor-sharp teeth. He carries only a flick-knife, which he keeps out of sight. When people die in suspicious circumstances, even when Mack is the chief suspect, these people are said to have died of some unknown diseases, or to have accidentally drowned. The truth, however, is that Mack is a ruthless, cold-blooded killer who is responsible for murdering many people, for example the Lagos doctor who was slashed to death. Even if there is no tangible evidence incriminating Mack, it does not mean that he is not guilty. Mack is a clever gangster who has connections in the police department, and his contacts ensure that any files with information which might implicate him disappear. Anyone who reports Mack to the police is killed.

The last two stanzas of the song switch to an actual event - the Igbeti marble scandal. Corrupt people stole the marble and when concerned citizens objected to this theft, these citizens started disappearing (Ogunbiyi 1979: 8). This is not the only occasion in Opera Wonyosi that an actual event is mentioned; the Nigerian civil war is referred to on several occasions. The "Lagos doctor" who was slashed to death in Ikoyi (Soyinka 1981b: 2) is most probably Dr Ademola, who was the "chief medical adviser to the federal government" and about whose murder Soyinka "upbraided the Nigerian Medical Association for not demanding a thorough investigation" (Gibbs 1983: 8, 33). There are many other actual events which are mentioned in the play and there is no need to state them here. What is important, though, is to note that Soyinka's socio-political awareness has now become even more direct.

The attack on Nigerians continues. The audience hears that after plunging their own country into a senseless civil war, the Nigerians have flocked to other countries. But they are not wanted anywhere in the world. This the audience hears from Anikura:

We are always getting thrown out of one country or another. (Soyinka 1981b: 4)

Reasons are not given, but one may presume that it is because of their anti-social habits that Nigerians cannot be tolerated by other nationalities.

Another characteristic which is said to be typical of Nigerians is that they are greedy and callous. This emerges when Anikura advises Ahmed how to "improve" his (Ahmed's) story, explaining how he became a destitute after getting stranded in Bangui, where he had come to look for his mother. Ahmed should add that he was

duped, defrauded by a fellow Nigerian who disappeared with his money. Everyone will believe him because

... They know that any Nigerian will rob his starving grandmother and push her in the swamp. (Soyinka 1981b : 4)

Worse still, Nigerians love dirt; anyone looking for where Nigerians live in Bangui should search for a sector marked by piles of garbage up to ten feet high (Ibid. : 5). And to Nigerians begging is an instinct (Ibid. : 11). These are people with no self-pride, and on whom money exerts a powerful attraction.

... The smell of money endows the dumbest Nigerian with instant intelligence. (Ibid. : 54)

It is small wonder, therefore, that Nigerians are unwanted in other countries. In their own country, crime has been legitimized. This is why Polly advises Mack that they too should go legitimate, like the bigger crooks (Ibid. : 62).

All these citations depict a Nigeria with not a single redeeming feature, where the citizens are greedy, unscrupulous, filthy lawbreakers.

At the same time that Soyinka castigates all Nigerians, he also highlights some social conditions that are unfavourable to the common man. An example of this is in the song, "Big Man Chop Cement; Cement Chop Small Man" (Ibid. : 8). This is pidgin English and "chop" means "eat". Starting ironically,

A labourer's life is a healthy one
It's fresh air from dawn till the sun goes down
Clean exercise; ...

the labourer goes on to state poignantly that he has only seven more years of life left because he has contracted tuberculosis as a result of the cement dust that has clogged his lungs. In the meantime, the poor labourer must enjoy the remainder of his short life with prostitutes in night clubs. This is really a labourer's lament, and the exploitation of, and insensitivity to, the labourer comes out quite clearly in the last four lines.

A man's lungs for clean air is meant
Not for breathing in clouds of cement
And overtime pay comes to mere chicken feed
When the cement tycoon has filled out his greed. (Soyinka 1981b : 9)

Soyinka clearly attacks the exploitation of poor, unskilled labourers by greedy business tycoons.

Another song in which Soyinka champions the cause of the masses is "It's the Easy Life for Me", which is sung by Mack while he is in prison (Ibid. : 62).

Have you seen those workers daily jostling
To catch a bus to beat the factory deadline?
And the pregnant mother wedged with elbows
Barely dodging those haphazard blows?

.....

Have you been to the hospital lately
And seen despair on faces in the line
Insolence from clerks lolling on the table
A waiting room that smells worse than a stable?

The point Soyinka is making is clear. It is obvious that to him Nigeria is a callous nation which does not care at all about those who are poor.

Soyinka has earlier been shown exposing and condemning religious fanaticism and hypocrisy in The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis. This attack is resumed in Opera Wonyosi (1981b : 3), where "smooth and sleek" Christians and "Moslems in gold turbans" are warned of the dangers that will come their way when the poor people whom they exploit discover their conning techniques. The song accuses these "pieties", both Christians and Moslems, of bankrupting their neighbours daily, and then on Sundays (for Christians), and on Fridays (for Moslems), they deny themselves pleasure by going to prayer, only to resume their dirty play the following week. This "downright castigation" of the "self-styled philanthropists" (Ogunbiyi 1979 : 8) once again clearly shows that Soyinka is against the exploitation of man by man.

In yet another song, "The Ruling Passion" (Soyinka 1981b : 57), more of the "rotted underbelly" of Nigerian society is shown. The song poses rhetorical questions about Nigerian society and its driving force, and in the process some of the country's social diseases, such as bribery, are mentioned. Nigeria is a "bloody nation" where

Corruption's the oil that greases
The national wheels and smoothes the creases
Of the body politic. (Soyinka 1981b : 58)

Another example of the rottenness that has gripped Nigeria is the leaking of examinations to female students in exchange for sex. This is very galling to hard-working male students because now even "the dumbest suzie obtains a first-class" (Ibid.).

Again in the foreword to Opera Wonyosi Soyinka mentions that there was at one time in Nigeria an "epidemic of ritual murder for the magical attainment of wealth" and there were "syndicates which kidnapped and murdered victims of *all classes* in order to convert their vital organs to wealth talismans". "Ruling Passion" goes on to mention another social disease – the passion to become wealthy. Any man who really wants to be rich is urged to go ahead and sacrifice his wife to the fetish. There will be considerable monetary rewards which will guarantee endless parties. People will forgive the rich man, perhaps because he will bribe them with his newly-found fortune. Nigerians are utterly abominable people, according to this play.

In addition to castigating Nigeria and Nigerians, Opera Wonyosi also goes on to satirize repressive military rulers, in particular "the two singularly repellent and vicious dictators who feature in the play: 'President-for-Life' Idi Amin and 'Emperor-for-Life' Jean-Bedel Bokassa" (Soyinka 1981b : Foreword). Soyinka was concerned that so much brutal savagery had been perpetrated in several countries, notably in Uganda and the Central African Republic, but that the whole world seemed unaware of this outrage. Opera Wonyosi exposes this tyranny, with no attempt at all to disguise the target of criticism. In plays such as Kongi's Harvest, Madmen and Specialists and Jero's Metamorphosis, there is no obvious indicator as to the identity of the despots being lampooned. But in Opera Wonyosi, there is no doubt at all who Emperor Boky is, or who Boky's friend is. This openness is most courageous because libel charges could have been brought against Soyinka by both Amin and Bokassa. Perhaps Soyinka wanted such a result, as he must have known there was much evidence against the tyrants. Any defamation charges would have attracted considerable attention, thereby awakening the world to the truth about these "political and moral mutants" (Soyinka 1981b : Foreword).

First in the firing line is Bokassa, whom Dee-Jay calls

Emperor Boky, Boky the Cocky ... Folksy Boky. (Ibid : 2)

The use of these pet names demonstrates the contempt with which Soyinka regards Bokassa. The man is laughable, really, and the title "Emperor" is ridiculous because the Central African Republic is too tiny, and too poor, to be called an "empire". But Boky is a queer man. His Coronation, with a capital C, is just one manifestation of his sickness.

Boky also calls himself "the Life President", and reveals that he has been to Libya, where he was converted to Islam when Ghadafi promised him 20 million dollars. But when Boky went back to ask for some more money as a contribution to his coronation, Ghadafi told him to go away, and Boky reverted to Christianity (Soyinka 1981b : 7). He was a Moslem for only two weeks. Soyinka is here criticizing religious hypocrisy; Boky, like many people in the play, is not a genuine convert.

Boky's professed love for the masses is all a massive untruth. The man who calls himself an egalitarian, a revolutionary, a man of the people, addresses his squad as "fools", "dregs", "scum" and "cretins" (Ibid. : 23 - 24). This presses home Soyinka's attack on some politicians' habits of claiming to be angels when in reality they are devils.

Again, Boky claims to love children so much that he has opened a clothes shop especially for them, ostensibly so that nobody can cheat the little fellows. This will be the only shop that will sell school uniforms. Boky's own brothers and nephews will operate the only tailors' shops where the uniforms will be sewn. All this is being done to protect the children from exploitation by greedy business people (Ibid. : 27). But it is the Emperor himself who is greedy and selfish. He is a nepotist who uses his position as Head of State to secure monopolies for his immediate relatives.

When the children are rumoured to be opposed to his idea, the "loving Papa Emperor" is really hurt that "all paternal measures to protect the little ones" are scorned (Ibid.). It is reported that the children are demonstrating with placards, singing evil songs about "their Imperial Papa". This angers the loving Emperor and the monster in him breaks loose. Calling the children "ingrates" and "parricides", he orders Inspector Brown to round them up and bring them to him. He decides he will take personal charge of punishing the children.

This is a family affair, a - minor - misunderstanding between Emperor Papa and his misguided children. It is my fatherly duty to take the lead in my own person in administering the necessary corrective measures ... (Ibid. : 28)

Taking inspiration from the Biblical tyrant King Herod (Matthew 2: 1-21), who is said to have ordered the massacre of all children under two because of his fear of Jesus, Boky first limbers up before going into a frenzy and uttering an invective against the children.

BOKY ... Juvenile delinquents. Future criminals. Little ingrates! Putative parricides! Pulp me their little brains! Wastrels! Prodigal sons! Future beggars! Suspects! Vagabonds! Rascals. Unemployed. Subversives. Bohemians. Daily paid labour. Social menaces. Habeas corpusites. Democrats. Emotional parasites. Human Rightist Vagabonds. Society is well rid of them. They disgrace Imperial dignity. Louts. Layabouts. ... Scum. Parasites. ... fleas! Bugs! Leeches! Ticks? Lice! ... Crab-louse! ... Give your Emperor a clean empire. Sanitate. Fumigate, Renovate (Ibid.: 28 - 29)

All these insults come from a man who claims to love children - the loving Papa Emperor. It is worth noting that Boky's "Massacre of the Innocents" is based on an actual event for which Bokassa was to be jailed after he was overthrown in 1979.

Boky's brutality is further demonstrated when he accuses an aide "of gross indiscretion", when the aide has really made a minor mistake by bringing in Wellington boots when Boky wants boots with hob-nails. Amid appeals for mercy, Boky orders that the man be taken away and that his tongue should be cut out (Ibid.: 25).

Boky's ruthlessness is still further displayed when he tells Inspector Brown what will happen to him if there are disturbances during the Coronation. All Nigerians will be expelled - except Inspector Brown. Boky will have him killed. His remains will remain in Bangui, and any enquiries will show that Brown left with his countrymen. Not even an international commission will discover the truth (Ibid.: 30). Boky has, clearly, perfected the skill of making people disappear.

Soyinka's campaign against the "military caste" (Soyinka 1993: 3) in Opera Wonyosi is extended to Boky's friend, Idi Amin. It is known that in real life, Soyinka did campaign against Amin in an effort to sensitize the world to Amin's reign of terror (Gibbs 1983: 4). In this play, the audience does not actually see Amin, but only hears about him through Boky. For instance, the unfortunate aide must be sent to Amin:

BOKY Drag him out. Out! Wait. Stop. Cut out his

tongue and send that silenced item to my friend
 Idi Amin, with my compliments. No. Stop.
 Send Amin the entire wretch and add that his
 tongue is not to be trusted. He'll know what to
 do. (*Exit Aide screaming, dragged out by Guards.*)
 (Soyinka 1981b : 25)

The two men are real partners in the ruthless suppression of their enemies. When Boky engages in a lengthy invective against "his friend", it emerges that Amin likes to decorate himself with medals and titles. But in criticizing Amin, Boky is also condemning himself, for both men are brutal megalomaniacs.

The anti-military crusade is continued in the trial of Colonel Moses, the personification of the "power-drunk soldiery" that Soyinka mentions in the foreword. Helpless citizens are savagely whipped by Colonel Moses, on the flimsiest of excuses. The victims of the Colonel's brutality include Jeru who had the skin of his back taken off when he was whipped by Colonel Moses.

JERU His men held me down on the bonnet of my car—
 ...My driver overtook his car and that annoyed him,
 so they chased me, held me down on the bonnet while
 he applied a koboko to my back. Twelve strokes in
 all. (Soyinka 1981b : 68)

Ahmed too has experienced the Colonel's savagery. Ahmed's crime was being found, with other homeless people, in a culvert under the bridge which served as their shelter. The vagrants were dragged out and Colonel Moses, saying that he needed some exercise, ordered that each "culprit" be given eighteen strokes (Ibid.). Yet another example of the brutalisation of the defenceless people is Bamgbapo. This time the "offence" was Bamgbapo's taking of a prostitute that the Colonel also fancied. With his face pressed into muck by the Colonel's driver, Bamgbapo was assaulted by the Colonel with his swagger-stick — until he fainted (Soyinka 1981b : 68). Before Bamgbapo passed out, he heard Colonel Moses bragging about what he used to do in Lagos:

Ha, that's cured a little of my nostalgia for good old Lagos. (Ibid. : 69)

And a short while later, Anikura mocks the Colonel:

Law-giver Moses, did you really get into your old habits ... ? (Ibid.)

This is clear evidence of the depth of the viciousness in Moses, and it is also an echo

of one of Soyinka's persistent themes, and one that is dealt with more thoroughly in A Dance of the Forests: "nothing is ever altered" about "the fooleries of beings" (Soyinka 1963a : 82).

Jeru is yet another deliberate echo of Jero the prophet in the Jero Plays. The car that overtook the Colonel's was bought for Jeru by his "grateful congregation". To Jeru, it is not the physical torture which was inflicted that he cannot stand. Colonel Moses is guilty of profanity because he humiliated a servant of God:

JERU And a holy man in my prophet's habit. Laid out on the
red-hot bonnet of my Volvo 264, flagellated [sic] like
the two thieves on either side of the Cross (Soyinka 1981b : 69)

Anikura is quite right to call Jeru a "double-dealing profaner" (Ibid.). Soyinka's attack on religious hypocrisy continues unabated.

But the Colonel's worst atrocities were perpetrated in the past when, as a service chief, his charges committed murders and other heinous crimes all over the country. It emerges from the trial that between 1970 and 1980, the military left a trail of disaster, ranging from "the burning down of villages, assault, rape, murder etc" (Ibid. : 73). But each time, the people were told that these crimes had been committed by unknown soldiers.

It is therefore fitting that Dee-Jay plays a record called "Unknown Soldiers". With all the sound effects, the record captures what happens when soldiers are on the rampage:

... the sound of smashed windscreens, bones crunching,
koboko descending, violated daughters, screaming students
(Ibid. : 74)

The case against the army continues :

ALATAKO ... Your Worship, I refer you to the widely-reported details of the burning down of the Kalakuta Republic. I refer you to the even more recent incident in Kano where a whole batallion [sic] of soldiers, because one of them was knocked down, barricaded the streets, violated all passers-by, totally innocent passers-by, maimed, looted, burnt and intimidated all and sundry without a consideration of the *merits or demerits* of their grievance. (Ibid. : 74-75)

A more fitting illustration of the behaviour of "a power-drunk soldiery against a cowed and defenceless people" cannot be found. Again, the citing of another actual

event, the burning down of the Kalakuta Republic (Gibbs 1983 : 8), underscores the seriousness with which Soyinka has written the play. He desires to strengthen his case as much as possible.

Still another social disease exposed by Soyinka in this play is hypocrisy, and Anikura is the personification of that evil. A wolf in sheep's clothing, Chief Anikura has set up a home for beggars, "Home from Home for the Homeless", ostensibly to help the poor, homeless people. In reality, however, this provides a thriving business for Anikura.

Dee-Jay's introduction of the King of Beggars is revealing: "A professional artist who belongs to the School known all through the ages as Con Art. In short, a master of the psychology of charity" (Soyinka 1981b : 3). Anikura does not hide the truth about himself, rather like Jero in The Trials of Brother Jero. The Chief's business is "getting money out of people". He understands "human nature", and knows exactly the type of "psychology" to use in order "to clutch the heart-strings and loosen the purse-strings" (Soyinka 1981b : 3 - 4). He tells Ahmed, the newest recruit, that his job is to induce charity in others, not practise it himself. The beggars actually pay a kind of joining fee before they start working for Anikura, and the instructions he gives to Ahmed show how much Anikura exploits these already-suffering people.

ANIKURA ... Don't think you are not constantly watched.
Some of your donors may be among my Auditors.
It is strictly forbidden to keep a closed bowl or use
your pockets. You will be issued standard bowls -
different shapes but with identical mechanism. You
deposit the money, press a button and the false bottom
opens and the coins fall in. It opens only one way.
Don't try to tamper with it. (Soyinka 1981b : 6)

Anikura runs a cooperative which makes so much money that there is even a need to employ auditors, but the proceeds actually belong to the Chief. Anikura symbolises corrupt leaders (such as Mr Nanga in Achebe's A Man of the People) who claim to champion the cause of the poor and down-trodden, when in fact they are enriching themselves.

Macheath, it has already been demonstrated, epitomizes organized crime. Variouslly called "a thief, arsonist, drug-peddler, murderer" by Anikura, "a notorious public figure" by De Madam and "the great bandit" by Dee-Jay, Macheath has built an impressive financial empire from his criminal activities. As a result of his

friendship with Inspector Brown, Macheath cannot be touched by the law. He explains clearly to his newly-wed wife:

Polly my dear, I want you to understand tonight, ... , why you need never worry about Commissioner Inspector Brown, ... Never, never have I in my humble capacity as safe-breaker and multiple-murderer failed to share the proceeds of my adventures with Tiger Brown. And never, never, well, almost never - has he organized a raid without giving me just that little hint in advance. (Soyinka 1981b : 21)

Such is the collusion between law and crime that it is not surprising when Polly later mentions they too should "go legitimate like the bigger crooks" (Ibid. : 62). It is a society of inverted values that Soyinka is portraying. No wonder that at the end of the play Boky signs a general amnesty for all common criminals.

One more thrust is reserved for the ordinary people, who seem to have been completely dehumanized. This point is conveyed in "The Song of Lost Innocence". People have lost their innocence and thrown all scruples away. All that they worry about is making as much money as quickly as possible, in any way - even if it means stopping to empty the pockets of dead people, and taking off their watches (Soyinka 1981b : 43 -44). This kind of callousness has been encountered in The Road when Sergeant Burma is said to have made much money from stripping down crash victims after he came back from the battle front (Soyinka 1965b : 20 -21). Madmen and Specialists can also be said to be about how war dehumanises. This time it is another war, the Nigerian Civil War, which has made people lose all their innocence.

Everyone is so excited about public executions that even schools have declared a public holiday to enable the children to watch the execution by firing squad of the infamous Macheath. A patient who has a drip-bottle still attached to his arm swears nothing will stop him from going to watch this wonderful spectacle. One woman has even divorced her husband because he did not want to let her go and watch, saying that the family should watch the episode on television.

The children said they wanted to see it live.
We spent so much time arguing I'm sure we
have missed all the best seats. God punish him!
(Soyinka 1981b : 79)

But Boky declares an amnesty for all common criminals and Macheath is spared the bullets. The play ends with everyone filing out, people according to their ranks. Boky has been crowned Emperor, Anikura still has his army of beggars, and Mack the

Knife is free again - to continue his "organised outlawry" (Soyinka 1993b : 3). Life will go on as before, and "the recurrent cycle of human stupidity" will continue. It is worth noting that this is a theme of Soyinka's other plays, notably A Dance of the Forests and Madmen and Specialists. According to Rene, this view represents the "cyclical vision of history" (1990 : 69), and Wilkinson calls it "a cycle of 'repetitions' and 'returns' in a world where repetition - repetition of the past in the present or the future, ... is seen as the principle of existence" (1989 : 70).

Opera Wonyosi has been criticised, quite fairly, for taking on too many issues in one breath, resulting in what Wright refers to as "satiric overkill" and "satiric tear-gassing" (1992 : 30). Ogunbiyi earlier expressed the same view (1979 : 7 - 8). This overloading is understandable, though. There were many aberrations, and Soyinka was probably too heated up to worry about careful planning as to which issues to expose and which to omit. In his own words, ugly situations were "now taking place more and more frequently, more noticeably, with greater impact, greater noise, effect on a global scale" (Gibbs 1987 : 33).

Whatever shortcomings Opera Wonyosi evidences, it is said that the play was very successful when it was first staged at the University of Ife at Convocation in 1977. A military governor who had been invited as a special guest "was so outraged that he wanted to walk out and then institute action against the university - and [Soyinka] of course - for such a denigration of the army's image". But later on, the governor is said to have changed his mind and to have said that the play portrayed the truth. He said that he felt ashamed to be a soldier (Soyinka 1993b : 3). Soyinka goes on to mention that the then Nigerian Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, wanted a special performance for all military officers. "He felt it would do them a lot of good to be made to confront how they were perceived by other members of society" (Ibid.).

Opera Wonyosi can therefore be said to be "a document of real value to the extent that it **attempts** [the original is bold] to capture the tempo, the mood, the contradictions, in fact, the meaning of a period in Nigerian and African history that will long be remembered" (Ogunbiyi 1979 : 14).

If ever a man dominated the political scene in Africa in the seventies, it is Idi Amin of Uganda, the semi-literate soldier who overthrew Milton Obote in 1971, and who then unleashed a reign of terror until he himself was put to flight in 1979. Appalled by the level of ignorance about what was happening in Uganda, Soyinka took it upon himself, as early as 1971, to wage a campaign against Amin. As Secretary General of the Union of Writers of the African Peoples, and as editor of "Ch'Indaba" (formerly "Transition"), Soyinka campaigned vigorously against Amin, addressing students, academics, politicians and even Heads of State, pointing out the facts about the tyranny of the Amin regime. He even wrote articles to the Nigerian press, denouncing "the murderous buffoon" (Gibbs 1983 : 4).

With the passage of time, Amin's atrocities multiplied, but still the man continued to receive support from:

group interests and ideologies as varied as those of Great Britain (which installed him in power in the first place), the United States, the Soviet Union, the Organisation of African Unity, Cuba, Libya, the PLO and Israel, not to mention the vociferous support accorded him by the cheer-leaders among the intelligentsia of the African continent and the Black Caucuses of the United States.

(Soyinka 1984b : vi)

The savagery which Amin unleashed was nearly matched by that of Bokassa in the Central African Republic, for which reason Ngugi calls these men "two hideous monstrosities" (1986b : 9). At the same time, Macias Nguema was terrorising the people of Equatorial Guinea, and Mobutu is still oppressing the people of Zaire. These men's atrocities form part of the gloomy history of Africa in the seventies, and it is in this light that A Play of Giants was written. Arguably one of Soyinka's most important political statements, this is also "one of Soyinka's darkest dramatic works" (de Kock 1987 : 134). The play represents Soyinka's "political satire at its most ferocious" (Wright 1992 : 32).

The characters Kamini, Kasco, Gunema and Tuboum represent what Wright calls a "gruesome quartet of real-life African dictators: Amin, Bokassa, Nguema of Equatorial Guinea and Mobutu of Congo" (1992 : 32). In Soyinka's own words: "No serious effort is made here to hide the identities of the real-life actors who have served as models for A Play of Giants" (Soyinka 1984b : v). Soyinka calls the men "actors" because in real life they were exactly that, actors. For example, throughout his bloody reign, Amin posed as a revolutionary leader, both political and economic. Bokassa set himself up as an "emperor", and Mobutu as an "authentic"

African, outlawing Christian names and customs. Soyinka calls them "poseurs", "theatrical personalities", and goes on to say: "Amin was of course the supreme actor. He really knew how to fool the world" (Borreca 1985 : 34).

The "giants" in the title of the play are the African Heads of State, and they are called "giants" because of the gigantic scale of their brutality. In the introduction, Soyinka calls them "monsters", "grotesqueries", "zombies" and "dwarfs". They are the "singularly repellent and vicious dictators", "the political and moral mutants" mentioned in the foreword to Opera Wonyosi.

A Play of Giants not only exposes the abuse of power; it also concerns itself with the etiology of evil, as does The Strong Breed (Johnson 1986 : 356). Soyinka's main target of criticism in A Play of Giants is Amin. This is evident from the introduction in which Soyinka provides what he calls "some personal notes". He explains in great detail what bothered him about the Ugandan situation, mainly that absolutely nothing was done to stop Amin's reign of terror. Some of the cream of Uganda's intellectuals and professionals who perished during that time are named: Byron Kadadwa, Dan Kintu and John Male. Soyinka also mentions these Ugandans in at least two other sources: (Soyinka 1990 : 117 and Soyinka 1993a : 187).

During his campaign against Amin, Soyinka condemned journalists for failing to carry out thorough investigations of the alleged events in Uganda. The truth concerning Amin's vicious reign of terror was just not being expressed. In A Play of Giants, Gudrum, the Scandinavian journalist, represents members of that profession who never did their work properly, thereby helping to keep Amin in power. Gudrum is a poor excuse for a journalist. The fact that she is described so repulsively at the beginning of the play suggests that Soyinka intends to castigate her type. She has completely abandoned all journalistic ethics and has transformed herself into Kamini's employee.

She freely joins in the discussion on subversives, claiming to know all about them, having met so many in her country. According to her, these are decadent, useless youngsters who do nothing but hang around cafes, wine-bars and disco joints. She has taken it upon herself to set the record about Kamini straight, and this "truth" will soon emerge from a book she is writing about her hero. The book, entitled "The Black Giant at Play", will show that Kamini is a very jovial family man who is an uncle to everyone in the country. Gudrum explains about the book:

It would be finished by now if I didn't have to take time dealing

with the slander spread by those Bugaran runaways in my country. They spread the most disgusting libel against the Field-Marshal. (Soyinka 1984b : 2)

In her assumed roles as Kamini's press-cum-information secretary-cum-public relations officer, Gudrum calls him the "reincarnation" of Africa's past heroes and nation builders. She has effectively been incorporated into Kamini's Intelligence Service, as he soon reminds her what to do:

You very good lady Gudrum. Just remember to give names of these subversives. Even if they refuse to come home, we find their villages. Only one treatment good for family which support guerrillas hiding in Scandinavia and other American-type countries. (Ibid. : 3)

Throughout the play, Gudrum takes it upon herself to champion Kamini's cause. She becomes more Bugaran than the Bugarans, and when the Chairman reports that the World Bank will not give Bugara a loan, Gudrum supports Kamini in his ranting and gives him the cue:

It's a plot my Life President. It is part of their deliberate economic sabotage.

KAMINI I know. Is dirty capitalist plot all over. (Ibid. : 5)

The giant sculpture should, according to Kamini, be placed in the Delegates' Passage in the entrance to the United Nations General Assembly. The Ambassador has found the right spot for the sculpture, and when the other Life Presidents have given their approval, Kamini goes on to tell the Ambassador that she must inform the Secretary-General, and that the protocol officer must see him (Kamini) to arrange the unveiling ceremony. Gudrum is asked by Kamini to give the protocol officer some advice.

Gudrum, you will give him advice? I think you have informed the World Press.

GUDRUM Of course Dr President. I am looking forward to the historic moment. In fact maybe I ought to go and inspect the location myself.

KAMINI Very good idea. Go with Ambassador and bring me report. (Ibid. : 9)

Gudrum is now the most trusted officer in Kamini's entourage. And later, when it seems the sculpture may not be finished on time, it is Gudrum who takes up the matter with the Sculptor. There has been some confusion because when the Sculptor

came to New York in the first place, he was to sculpt only Kamini for Madame Tussaud's waxworks exhibition. Now he has to sculpt "an extended family portrait". The Sculptor complains that he will never get the sculpture finished, and says he may as well pack his implements and go home. And then Gudrum tells him:

Please get this into your head. First, that sculpture is going on permanent exhibition in the United Nations. Next, you had better get it ready so we can move it there latest tomorrow night. (Soyinka 1984b : 28)

The Sculptor understandably becomes annoyed with Gudrum for giving him orders about something she does not understand. He rightly points out that as this is a wax mould, it would be too ugly to exhibit in the United Nations building. In his personal opinion the present wax model should go into the Chamber of Horrors. Gudrum, in her new role of Kamini's image builder, deliberately misinterprets the Sculptor's words.

I see. So it is your opinion that His Excellency belongs in the Chamber of Horrors?

SCULPTOR Hey, you are not offended are you? Oh come on ... what are you anyway? His mistress? What does he do to you eh ?

Without a change of expression, GUDRUM storms out of the room.
(Ibid. : 28)

Later, it becomes obvious that Gudrum has told Kamini about the Chamber of Horrors.

KAMINI What you say my friend? Kamini belong in Chamber of Horrors, not so? Not very good thing to say about Life President the Field-Marshal El-Haji, Dr Kamini, DSO, VC LD, PhD, and so on and so forth from universities all over the world. (Ibid. : 32)

And for his inadvertant statement, the Sculptor is savagely beaten. As he tries to move out of the building:

his body is forcefully propelled from outside. His muffled scream is followed by blows and the sound of stamping boots. Further groans and blows, then the sound of a body being dragged along the ground. (Ibid. : 34)

When the Sculptor next enters, he is a pitiable sight:

He is swathed in bandages from head to toe. Only his arms appear uninjured. His eyes barely peep out

through a mummified face. (Ibid. : 40)

It is the Sculptor now who is an object fit for display in the Chamber of Horrors, thanks to Gudrum, in her new role as Kamini's protector. "The Black Giant at Play" will obviously not include the Chamber of Horrors incident.

Apart from "the complacency and lethargy of journalists" (Gibbs 1983 : 8), Soyinka also severely condemned the African intelligentsia for being bemused by Amin's buffoonery and for closing "their eyes both to the viciousness of his reign and to the vacuity of his 'economic policy'" (Ibid. : 11). In A Play of Giants Professor Batey represents the African intelligentsia.

Batey's association with Kamini is motivated by racial affinity. Batey's guiding principle is: "we are black, so we must support each other". This view is corroborated by Johnson who says: "With Batey, ... the play is best summarized by the proverb which states that when the axe came into the forest, the trees said, the handle is one of us" (1986 : 356).

Like Gudrum, Batey has created for himself a post as Kamini's image-builder. It would seem that Batey was sent to Bugara by the Hyacombe City Council to set the record straight about:

... all the bad propoganda which the imperialist press was making against Kamini. They said he was killing and torturing people, and locking them up in prison - all sorts of bad things about me because I, Life President Dr Kamini, tell them to go to hell. No black man ever tell them like that before.
(Soyinka 1984b : 23)

Batey therefore went to Bugara to see with his own eyes. He travelled the length and breadth of the country and did not see any person being killed or being tortured. Instead he perceived that lies were being spread about Kamini. Batey goes on to say that as a scholar, it is now his duty to present the truth. And as a sociologist, Batey says that the problems of Bugara are purely economic. Blaming colonial history and exploitative multi-national conglomerates, Batey dismisses all those who have been shouting about the violation of human rights as hypocrites, because even in the United States human rights are constantly being violated (Ibid.).

As with Gudrum, Batey is also writing a book about Kamini, "The Black Giant at Work", and he too seems to have found a place in Kamini's big heart. He is asked to go over the speech which Kamini will deliver in the General Assembly the following

day because it was drafted by a junior secretary after Dr Kiwawa, who was to have written the main speech, had decided to run away. Batey even advises Kamini to contact Interpol who will help him catch the defectors.

When the speech has been written, Batey prepares to read it first in front of the four Life Presidents. Earlier, Batey has been elevated to something like the Chief of Protocol. He is told by Kamini that he is free to use the Bugaran Embassy as his home any time, and the Ambassador is told that Batey must be given anything he wants anytime, day and night (Ibid. : 42).

However, when Kamini has gone berserk and is preparing to launch rockets at the United Nations building, Batey lamely tries to talk sense into his hero. Before he even finishes a sentence, Kamini *gives him a back-hand swipe that knocks him flat on his back*, and tells him off:

You sneak up behind me again like that and you soon smell your mother's cunt. Get over there. You are CIA I think, to come behind a man like that. How I know you did not come to Bugara to spy for these super-powers. (Ibid. : 68)

If Professor Batey had bothered to find out the truth about Kamini, he would not have dreamt of ever writing "The Black Giant at Work".

Soyinka comments on the way in which power-mongers such as Amin succeed in retaining that power for such long periods. In A Play of Giants, "the unholy trinity" (Johnson 1986 : 356) of Kamini, Gudrum and Batey is a strong thematic factor. A common feature of dictators is self-apotheosis. They try by all possible means to turn themselves into gods, and that is why, for example, Kongi wants nearly everything in Isma to be called after himself. He himself is called "His Immortality". Professor's quest is to understand the nature of Death, so that he lives for ever. In A Play of Giants, the four leaders have called themselves Life Presidents. These are men whose dwarfish reasoning tells them that they will live forever. But *if* they should die, the world will not be forgiven if it forgets them. The life-size group sculpture is a symbol of the men's megalomania.

Before Tuboum enters, three of the leaders are already in total agreement on the treatment of subversives. Kamini is the leader in matters of this nature. He tells his brothers:

Only one thing to do to subversive - Khrr! (*A meaningful gesture across his throat*) ... We call them *kondo*. I catch any

kondo, I make him smell his mother's cunt. (Soyinka 1984b : 2)

Kamini's handling of his country's economy would be laughable if it were not pathetic. Having failed to secure a loan from the World Bank because he cannot accept the attached conditions, and after many efforts by the Chairman of the Bank of Bugara to explain to him why the World Bank will not help Bugara, Kamini orders the Chairman to print more Bugara bank notes. This will further devalue the Bugaran currency which, the Chairman tries to explain, is at present as worthless as toilet paper. This is completely misunderstood by Kamini, and the Chairman is called a "syphilitic bastard". For calling the national currency "shit paper" the Chairman will have his head dipped in a toilet bowl repeatedly.

Each time the tank full, you flush it over his head.
Push his head deep inside. ... Put your bloody foot on his
neck and press it down. (Ibid. : 8)

The Chairman is subjected to this punishment until towards the end of the play.

Kamini's brutality towards his people causes his entire delegation to the United Nations to desert him. They fear for their lives because Kamini is such an unpredictable person. But these desertions are countered by Kamini who sends his Task Force to the "culprits" villages, where their relatives will be punished in all sorts of ways, usually by being beaten and tortured to reveal the whereabouts of the deserters. Sometimes these beatings lead to death.

Before Tuboum enters, the other three Life Presidents "philosophize" about power. Kasca and Gunema dominate the discussion, while Kamini seems totally lost. Gunema cannot hide his admiration of General Franco, and this can only be for the tyrannical exercise of power for over three decades when Franco ruled Spain. To Gunema, dictators such as Franco are the real leaders. That is why, according to him, Spain was so peaceful for so long – forty years! But now that Franco is gone, everybody is making trouble in Spain (Soyinka 1984b : 10). Also to be admired in Franco is the fact that if he were the Secretary General of the United Nations he would exterminate the Zionists, something Kamini completely agrees with. The men are indeed brothers, even in their anti-Semitism.

Gunema is also a fervent admirer of Papa Doc Duvalier, the notorious despot of Haiti from 1957 to 1971. It is known that Duvalier's long tenure of office was a brutal reign of terror. And so Gunema says that Duvalier was the Franco of the Caribbean.

When it came to exercising control over his people, Gunema says Duvalier was a genius.

He turn nearly half of Haiti into zombie and the rest - (*He makes a slashing gesture across his throat.*) he send his Ton Ton Macoutes. Even the Ton Ton are zombie. Papa Doc can give them order from anywhere. He can be one end of island and think to them - do this or do that. And they do it. Distance no importance. Now that is power. (Ibid.: 11)

Not to be outdone, Kamini comes out with his own hero - Chaka - and it is well known that for all his military genius, Chaka was a ruthless tyrant (Parker and Pfukani 1989: 82-83). However, for Kamini there is an even greater reason why he should so admire Chaka. Kamini is descended from the great Chaka - a fact which has been confirmed by the History Department of the university in Bugara. Kamini's lies are so obvious that even Kasco and Gunema are forced to cough in embarrassment (Ibid.: 12).

When Tuboum enters, the team of Africa's monsters is completed. On being addressed as "Alexander", obviously the name he has been using all along, he pretends to be shocked, and corrects Kamini: he is now called Barra Boum Boum Tuboum Gbazo Tse Tse Khoru diDzo, and this is the beginning of a vigorous campaign in which all foreign names and influences are to be eliminated from his country.

Tboum's "cultural revolution" is unfortunately not accompanied by any positive changes in his country. Instead, what emerges is a picture of a country in turmoil. He has just come from suppressing a rebellion; the "cultural revolution" demonstrates only that he has power to do anything he pleases in his own country.

The terrible quads gloat over their savagery, in a scene approximating that of specialists who have met to exchange notes. Each man has his own way of imposing power on the people. Tuboum's method is cannibalism. On being asked whether the rebellion has really been suppressed, he answers proudly:

You see me here, do you not? Of course it is finished. Crushed. All the ring leaders? - Tsch!
(*He makes expressive [sic] gesture.*) (Soyinka 1984b: 18)

He goes on to boast of his fierce secret army. Anyone who has the misfortune to set his eyes on these soldiers in their camp is killed straightaway and eaten there and then. In the latest episode, they crushed the rebels and killed everyone except a handful who would be served in the celebration feast. Tuboum adds that they did not

even give the rebels a soldier's death. They hanged them, and left them hanging (Ibid : 20).

For this account, Tuboum is embraced and kissed by the other men. They are fellow cannibals - "the Incredible Anthropophagi" that Soyinka mentions in the introduction (Ibid. : x). This cannibalism immediately echoes that which is mentioned by the Warrior in A Dance of the Forests:

the unnatural pattern of men always eating up one
another. (Soyinka 1963a : 56)

and that which occurs in Madmen and Specialists. Soyinka's stand on "the cycle of human stupidity" is maintained consistently.

Gunema is a voodoo maniac who believes in dreams and whims. He once executed a captain in his army because he had dreamt that the captain would overthrow him. The man was arrested, tried, found guilty and finally shot. Another man was also to be hanged after he too had been found guilty of plotting another coup. This man's wife tried to ask the leader to have mercy on her husband. Taking advantage of the woman's plight, Gunema led her to bed. After that the man was hanged all the same, but the affair with the woman continued until Gunema got tired of her, and fearing that she was planning to avenge her husband's death, he had her garotted (Soyinka 1984b : 59).

Kasco seems somewhat different from his brother Life Presidents. He cannot be accused of committing any atrocities, like the other three men. All he has done is to agree with the other men's methods of dealing with subversives, and so really he is only guilty by association. Whereas the other three men admire what can be said to be undisputed despots, Kasco is an admirer of French culture and French leaders Napoleon and de Gaulle. The play therefore fails to depict Kasco as a "monster". Instead, Kasco emerges unscathed. He sounds more analytical and definitely more intelligent than his brothers, as can be gleaned from his decision to become emperor:

I place myself beyond politics. At the moment of my coronation, I signal to the world that I transcend the intrigues and mundaneness of politics. Now I inhabit the pure realm of power. I fear, *mes amis*, all three of you have chosen to remain in the territory of politics. (Ibid. : 21)

One may not agree with Kasco's analysis of issues, but the man is certainly not a fool. Soyinka observes that his purpose for creating Kasco intelligent is that he desires the audience to ask questions about the tyrants: if they are so intelligent, why do they behave so brutally? (Borreca 1985 : 36)

If Kasco emerges almost unscathed, the same cannot be said of Kamini. It has already been suggested that the main target of attack in A Play of Giants is Amin (Kamini), and this emerges quite clearly from what the two Russian delegates say. Speaking in Russian, the first delegate expresses his real feelings about Kamini, and then when the second one "interprets" into English, the information no longer insults Kamini. Actually, it is Tuboum who is first to be attacked; he is called

the well-known neo-colonial stooge and shameless
exploiter of his own African peoples. (Ibid. : 44)

Next, Kamini is called a "buffoon" and an "overgrown child" (ibid. : 45). And when Batey starts quarrelling with the two Russians, it is the turn of the second delegate to attack Kamini, calling him "[a] common butcher" (ibid. : 55). The second Russian even condemns Batey for associating with Kamini, throwing back at him (Batey) the accusation of opportunism Batey has used against the Russians.

2ND RUSSIAN. What was the word you used , professor?
Opportunism. It is our duty to discredit the
Western press when it tries to discredit the
instrument of our policies. ... But what about you?
You are here to write a speech for this er ... heroic
leader. But what of the peasants and workers he has
destroyed at will? You write speeches on their
behalf? (Soyinka 1984b : 55)

Kamini is being stripped naked. No amount of protection from Batey or Gudrum can save him. Far from being the reincarnation of Africa's heroes and nation-builders, as Gudrum would have the world believe, Kamini has been shown to be the reincarnation of the devil. He has excellent company in his brother Life Presidents.

A Play of Giants was inspired by Jean Genet's Le Balcon (1956) , a European original. At the beginning of this chapter, it was pointed out that some of Soyinka's other plays were also inspired by European models. There is no doubt, though, that A Play of Giants was also triggered off by the historical reality of the seventies and early eighties, a period of political and "moral decay" (Ngugi 1986b : 10). This is yet another illustration of Soyinka's belief that "wickedness is a human component cutting across race and culture" (Cooper 1982 : 150). Even if this play

"grotesquerizes" (Borrega 1985 : 36) four specific African dictators, it can be said to be a universal attack on "leadership obscenities" (Ibid. : 33).

But since the play ends on a chaotic note, critics such as Ngugi will accuse Soyinka of not going far enough, bearing in mind the following:

Although Soyinka exposes his society in breadth, the picture he draws is static, for he fails to see the present in the historical perspective of conflict and struggle. It is not enough for the African artist, standing aloof, to view society and highlight its weaknesses. He must try to go beyond this, to seek out the sources, the causes and the trends of a revolutionary struggle which has already destroyed the traditional power-map drawn up by the colonialist nations. (Ngugi 1972 : 65-66)

The Ngugis would want an ending in which the autocrats are toppled, and a progressive, democratic dispensation is put in place. Unfortunately, in A Play of Giants it is not known whether the coup leaders in Bugara are progressive or reactionary. Even if the Life Presidents do not survive the chaos in the Bugaran Embassy, there is no guarantee that conditions in their countries will improve. So Soyinka has failed the Ngugi test.

As far as Soyinka himself is concerned, he declares that he does not have to dance to the "Marxist" tune. For him it is enough that the play will cause embarrassment wherever it will be performed, especially in Africa. He continues:

I would hope that it would create political change in the minds of people, but at the same time I would even hope that it raises the question of the very morphology of power as a thing in itself, that it raises certain intellectual and philosophical questions about power, not only power in politics but power in general, even though the play does not particularly uncover other aspects of power. (Borrega 1985 : 36)

And, characteristically, Soyinka has unkind words for his critics, calling them "'ideological mouthers' ... who take refuge in ideological rhetoric to avoid direct engagement with immediate issues in society" (Ibid. : 35). Soyinka addresses Ngugi directly and says:

I know he is a believer in social revolution. He even says he is a Marxist, although I wonder about that claim in view of some of his strategies for his society. ... I find quite frankly he contradicts himself in many ways... (Gibbs 1987 : 101)

The present writer strongly agrees with Soyinka on this matter. His approach is more realistic than that of "Marxists" such as Ngugi. There is no reason why

Soyinka should go so far as to provide resolutions to conflicts in fiction when in real life some conflict situations are never resolved. Although Soyinka believes that theatre is a powerful agent of change, he realises that it is not realistic to expect all artistic works such as plays to provide resolutions to all conflict situations.

Thus, when Amuta says: "Politics and issues of a fundamentally political nature have always occupied a central position in African literature" (1989 : 56) he may have been thinking of Soyinka's works, especially those of the seventies and eighties, such as Opera Wonyosi and A Play of Giants.

* * *

In 1979, Nigeria reverted to civilian rule, after some thirteen years of military dictatorship. The military years were very difficult for ordinary Nigerians, and Opera Wonyosi tries very much to portray that life of the late seventies. Requiem for a Futurologist (1985) depicts Nigeria under the civilian government of Shehu Shagari (1979 - 1983). Contrary to expectations, this new order merely perpetuated the evils of its military predecessors. The society, which had started losing its direction, and which had "jettisoned all sense of values" under military rule, continued "careering down [the] precipice" (Soyinka 1981b : Foreword) under Shagari.

Soyinka responded to the continuing decadence in Nigerian society by producing anti-Shagari works: the "shotgun" revues, "Rice Unlimited" (1981) and "Priority Projects" (1983), the hit record "Unlimited Liability Company" (1983), and the film "Blues for a Prodigal" (1984) (Wright 1992 : 31). Unfortunately I have not been able to consult these works physically, but suffice it to say that in all of them, Soyinka mercilessly condemns the Shagari years (Gibbs 1983 and Wright 1992).

It is against this backdrop that Soyinka wrote Requiem for a Futurologist (1985), in which he satirizes Nigeria in the late seventies and early eighties, specifically the phenomenon of the "astrologists and parapsychologists who came to exercise considerable influence over public and political life during the Shagari years (the main target was one of Shagari's toadies, the powerful Dr. Godspower Oyewole)" (Wright 1992 : 31). Taken together with The Jero Plays, this play completes a trilogy on charlatanism, and Brother Jero, Brother Godspower and Brother Eleazar Hosannah are all "trickster figures" (McLuckie 1988 : 696).

Requiem for a Futurologist is modelled on Jonathan Swift's The Bickerstaff Letters (1708) in which Bickerstaff (Swift) predicts and later announces the death of the astrologer, John Partridge (Wright 1992 : 31). Once again, the use of a foreign original is clear evidence of Soyinka's belief that "the fooleries of beings" (Soyinka 1963b : 82) "cut across time, race or creed" (Cooper 1982 : 150).

In his comment on Requiem for a Futurologist, Sabor mentions that Partridge, Swift's "futurologist", had great influence on the gullible public of his time. He goes on: "In Nigeria of the 1980's, Dr. Godspower Oyewole occupied a position comparable to that of Partridge" (1989 : 49).

As in Opera Wonyosi and A Play of Giants where the disguise of certain names is so thin it might as well not be there, in Requiem for a Futurologist Dr. Godspeak Igbehodan represents a real person, Dr. Godspower Oyewole. In both cases, the first names have been carefully chosen. The futurologists intend to give the impression that they are practising their professions by divine right. Soyinka also includes extracts from newspaper predictions in the Nigerian "Sunday Times" of various dates during January 1983, where Oyewole forecast that: "4 judges will die". He is also quoted in the extract of 30th January, where he is said to have threatened to disrupt a meeting of world witches. These excerpts are meant to show that the gullibility portrayed in the play did in fact exist in Nigerian life. Although the target of attack is Nigeria, it can be extended to any society.

The play aims mainly at exposing human gullibility, and this purpose is evident in the words of Dr. Godspeak himself when he is screaming desperately to the impatient mob:

Just open your eyes and stop letting ambitious
charlatans confuse you .

.....
You gullible fools, you've been had! (Soyinka 1985 : 47)

Dr. Godspeak has been a very successful futurologist,

a real prophesier. And every paper carried
anything he had to say. Front page, centre page, back
page. His photograph right there with that pipe,
gazing through the smoke into the future. He had the
power of sight, no two ways about it. (Ibid. : 7)

At the height of his success, Dr. Godspoke even claimed to be the successor of Nostradamus, the French physician and astrologer who lived between 1503 and 1566, and was perhaps the greatest futurologist ever. According to 2ND MAN, everything which has happened since the sixteenth century, absolutely everything, was prophesied by Nostradamus:

The two World Wars. Earthquakes, famines
plagues, Hitler, Stalin, Haile Selassie. Even the Kennedy
assassinations [sic] - ... This very war they've just fought -
Britain and Argentina, (Ibid. : 8)

Nostradamus was indeed a great astrologist, but to suggest that everything that has happened since the sixteenth century was prophesied by him is clearly an exaggeration, and illustrates the extent of the gullibility of the people.

Dr. Godspoke may have been a powerful prophet, but according to 2ND MAN, who seems to speak the thoughts of the ordinary people, it was blasphemous of him (Godspoke) to claim to be Nostradamus's successor - the kind of claim that would certainly anger Nostradamus:

Suppose he was already alive, back in his own
country, in France, and then he overheard Godspoke claiming
to be his successor?

2ND WOMAN I dare say he wouldn't be pleased. Especially
with him planning his own comeback.

2ND MAN Aha. You see my point. Godspoke brought it on his
own head. (Ibid. : 8)

It is made clear that Godspoke is to blame for his predicament. There are two reasons for saying this: firstly, he it is who taught the people to be so gullible, and, secondly, he played into the hands of his ambitious and cunning protege, Hosannah Eleazar. In the words of 1ST MAN, in the good old days these two "were a mighty power in themselves" (Ibid. : 8). And as for Godspoke himself:

In his time all he had to do was open his mouth
and he captured the media. (Ibid. : 11)

He completely controlled the media (Ibid. : 7), and after ten years' hard work, Godspoke finally "brought respectability" and "gave the profession class".

Five years ago you wouldn't find us anywhere
but in some obscure corner of the newspaper,
tucked in among the local gossip. Now it's the

full centre page, with highlights front and back.
Those editors fought, yes literally fought for my
copy. ... Television cameras followed me everywhere... (Ibid. : 40)

This, then, is how powerful Dr. Godspeak has been. He has built futurology and occultism into a formidable institution - actually he himself has become an Institution. Having set himself up as a consultant, people have been coming to him "for their personal problems, their projects" and he would "predict results and advise them" (Ibid. : 36). It is no wonder, then, that on hearing of his death, the entire nation has ground to a halt. Crowds have gathered at his house:

an assortment of religious groups, curious
passers-by, tradesmen and women, newsvendors,
clairvoyants and fortune tellers doing brisk
business, journalists, television crews, etc. (Ibid. : 1)

Further evidence that the people's lives are completely dominated by astrology is their repeated reference to the signs of the zodiac. These allusions are made by different characters in the course of the play. For example:

1ST MAN I'll have you know that you are talking to a
Sagittarius and we are known to be very receptive
to psychic presences.

2ND MAN And I'm a pure-bred Scorpio and my tail rises
when I detect common story parading as the Holy
Gospel. (Ibid. : 4)

1ST WOMAN We Virgos don't hide our feelings. (Ibid. : 13)

2ND MAN We Scorpions don't get fooled a second time. (Ibid. :17)

2ND WOMAN We Libra like to give a man a long rope
to hang himself. (Ibid. : 46)

This, then, is the nature of the people. They have been turned into such ardent believers in astrology and futurology by Dr. Godspeak, and it is this weakness that Hosannah Eleazar, "the archmanipulator and master of disguise" (Wright 1992 : 31), decides to exploit in order to topple Godspeak and declare himself Nostradamus. Eleazar succeeds in tricking everyone simply because he has been an excellent disciple of Dr. Godspeak.

After sensing that his society would not take kindly to Godspeak declaring himself a successor to Nostradamus - they would call this blasphemy - and that the people would believe him (Eleazar) if he prophesied and later announced the death of his mentor, Eleazar seizes the opportunity to do exactly that during a live television

broadcast, in front of an invited audience. This event was supposed to be a demonstration of the latest system in modern parapsychology, and Godspeak had entrusted Eleazar with the responsibility of proclaiming the message that would have been transmitted to him:

GODSPEAK I shall be the mere medium and my assistant here, Brother Eleazar Hosannah, will be the voice. I shall remain unaware of the psychic knowledge which passes through me, ... It is a method which is higher than telepathy. The medium sheds the burden of knowledge and becomes a pure transmitting station of the future, ... *(He places his finger-tips around the assistant's head)* Y-ees, it's coming, my finger-tips are tingling. As I fall silent, our brother here receives knowledge which comes from a higher plane than what the stars can tell us... *(Gives sudden shudder, his finger-tips dig intensively into Eleazar's skull. Eleazar's body gives a corresponding spasm and he speaks):*

ELEAZAR *(As if in a trance)* You are a dead man, Brother Godspeak *Godspeak snatches off his fingers as if they have been burnt.)*

GODSPEAK What! Wh-wh-what did you say?

ELEAZAR *(In the same voice)* A dead man Brother Godspeak, dead. You will take ill on the 21st of December. You will worsen by the 23rd. By Boxing Day the doctors have given up hope but you defy all predictions and survive until New Year's eve. On New Year's Day, however, in the early hours of the morning ... you will expire. Thus speaketh Nostradamus.

GODSPEAK It's a lie! You're lying. (Ibid. : 38 - 39)

And from New Year's Day Dr. Godspeak is believed to be dead. Eleazar, being the treacherous fellow that he is, completely outwits everybody. He moves swiftly and ensures that obituary notices "are pasted on walls everywhere" (Ibid. : 5).

The obituary itself is a work of consummate skill:

With gratitude to God for life well spent, we regret to announce the untimely but anticipated death of our beloved brother, colleague, mentor and spiritual guide, the Rev Godspeak Igbehodan, Mystic, Clairvoyant, Parapsychologist, Occultist and Futurologist. We give thanks to God that, in spite of his brief existence, he passed the power of his knowledge into the minds of his devoted followers, who were thus enabled to predict and prepare for his death, thus lessening the pain and anguish of parting. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

.....
Signed, Brother Eleazar Hosannah on behalf of the
Universal Association of Parapsychologists. Amen. (Ibid. : 6)

The power of the written word is too much for the people. No further evidence is needed that Dr. Godspeak is dead, as clearly stated by one of them:

Ye-ah, in black and white. Difficult to deny the evidence of one's own eyes you must admit. (Ibid. : 6)

Having convinced the people that Dr. Godspoke has died, Eleazar now moves to convince Dr. Godspoke himself that indeed he is dead. He starts off by transforming himself into Godspoke's hunchbacked servant, Alaba, whose name seems to be shortened from "alabaster", that soft material which is so easy to turn into any shape. And so, as Alaba, Eleazar convinces his besieged master that the only man who can rescue him from his predicament is Dr. Semuwe. But Dr. Semuwe died years ago, as everyone knows. This is not true, says Alaba. Dr. Semuwe is not only alive but is the very man for Dr. Godspoke. So Dr. Godspoke is made to write a letter to Dr. Semuwe, "peppered with grammar", and after tricking him to part with some money, a "consultation fee" (Ibid. : 2), Alaba leaves to call Dr. Semuwe.

As the people speak, it emerges that Hosannah Eleazar's predictions are far superior to those which Godspoke has been giving out all along. Dr. Godspoke never gave specific details in his predictions such as real names, times or places. He was too vague. But not Eleazar Hosannah; he has given prediction "a real bite" (Ibid. : 15). The people are not only gullible; they are also fickle.

Hosannah Eleazar even bribes the local *egungun* to pretend it has seen a ghost, screaming as it flees in terror: "Save me, O Denizens of the other World" (Ibid. : 24). As part of his treacherous scheme, Eleazar arranges with Kilanko, the tailor, to deliver to the dead man's house the burial suit. This will strengthen the claim that Godspoke is indeed dead.

KILANKO Eleazar Hosannah sent me. He's in charge of the funeral arrangements.

1ST WOMAN O-o-o-oh. So that's it then. He's really gone.

KILANKO Of course he's gone. (Ibid. : 9)

Hosannah Eleazar has even gone so far as to arrange that the Master Carpenter should deliver the coffin.

M.C. Brother Hosannah brought me the commission sir.

He declared it was our late brother's dying wish, (Ibid. : 31)

No matter what Dr. Godspoke tries to do to prove that he is alive, the "facts" are so heavily stacked against him that he cannot win. Even when he thinks that he will

prove he is still alive by committing suicide, Dr Semuwe tells him this will not work.

SEMUWE They will think it's another of your er - devices.
 You see, they will ask themselves: why is he performing
 a suicide. And the answer will be - to prove that he was
 alive. Why is he trying to prove he was alive? Answer -
 because he knows he is dead. That's the way they will look
 at it. (Ibid. : 43)

The logic is patently absurd. Even when Dr. Godspcak tells the mob through the window that they are being confused by an ambitious charlatan who lied to the whole nation, he is insulted:

You're a shameless liar Godspcak. If you weren't dead,
 God would strike you dead for that blasphemy! (Ibid. : 47)

Soyinka depicts a situation where society does not want to be told the truth. When Godspcak told the people lies, they believed for a period of ten years and never questioned his predictions. Now he is telling them the truth, that he is alive, and the evidence is that he is talking to them and they can touch him, they do not want to believe him. Instead, they believe Eleazar who has manipulated the press and is telling the people lies. This is a society whose values have been turned upside down, and where the people are unwilling to think perceptively. These people are therefore as good as dead; they are living corpses. This is why when some of them die, they want to be buried in coffins constructed "to suit all tastes and fantasies" (Ibid. : 30). Coffins can be shaped like luxury yachts, private jets, streamlined first class railway coaches, or luxury cars such as the Mercedes 600, or the Cadillac. A very wealthy oil tycoon was actually buried in a coffin shaped like a giant television set:

... The sides were black afara, the screen was tinted
 glass. Each knob was gleaming brass. The aerials
 were authentic, nickel plated, guaranteed not to
 rust in a thousand years, retractacle [sic]. (Ibid. :30)

Before filling the grave, the aerials were pulled out to their fullest length. Because he was an oil magnate, the man believed he would watch his favourite programme, "Dallas", even in his death.

This is how sick the nation is shown to be. Dead people believe they are still alive, while the living are, to all intents and purposes, dead. Soyinka clearly condemns his society roundly and soundly for emphasizing such base values as crass

materialism. This approach is a type of madness, really, as was shown in Opera Wonyosi, where "wonyosi" is referred to as "a costume for lunatics" (Soyinka 1981b : 31).

Although most of Requiem for a Futurologist satirises human gullibility, there are passing broadsides at other societal evils. For instance, Soyinka's concern for road safety, already seen in works such as The Road, Idanre and other Poems and Opera Wonyosi, is also evident in Requiem for a Futurologist. Master Carpenter is asked whether he has been doing good business ever since he came from his country, Ghana, and he answers that he has been making excellent profits in Nigeria:

The good Lord has been kind to me,
I have found here sir, a most dependable turnover,
thanks to the highly original driving habits of your
countrymen. (Ibid. : 31)

It is hardly necessary to observe that the point being made is that Nigerians are atrocious road users, and many people are killed unnecessarily on these roads.

Towards the end of the play, politicians and soldiers come in for criticism too. This critique occurs where the crowd is yelling and hurling insults at Godspoke and other charlatans. They are said to be selfish and uncaring.

2ND WOMAN You're the same as those politicians. Promise heaven and earth when the vote is hot to catch. When they get in at last they don't deliver, not on your life.
1ST MAN Look at him, an aging boxer. Long past it but won't hang up his gloves.
2ND MAN It's more like soldiers really. When they take power they say it's only for six months. Just time enough to clean up the mess, they swear. They shoot their way through the gates of power but when it's time to quit they can't get out again. They've grown so fat the door won't take them. (Ibid. : 46)

These attacks on politicians and soldiers seem to be deliberate echoes of similar indictments in Madmen and Specialists where election promises and manifestos are said to be nothing but "pious pronouncements" (Soyinka 1981b : 64 - 65). And 2ND MAN's accusation echoes Aafaa's during his (Aafaa's) parody of soldiers:

In a way you may call us vultures. We clean up
the mess made by others. (Ibid. : 11)

Once in power, the soldiers think of all sorts of excuses to cling on to office for as long as possible. During that time, they indulge in all kinds of luxuries, and in the

end they are so fat that they cannot even come out of their offices. Again this is another reminder of the greediness that is practised by the pigs in Animal Farm, where Squealer became "so fat that he could with difficulty see out of his eyes" (Orwell 1945 : 87).

In the end, then, Hosannah Eleazar triumphs. Godspeak is tricked and told to lie down and behave as if he is really dead. The people will sign the book of condolences and file past, satisfied that Godspeak is really dead. The duped Singh and the gullible crowd are convinced that Eleazar is the reincarnation of Nostradamus, and they call him Nostradamus!

In spite of its limited political content, Requiem for a Futurologist did attract the displeasure of the Nigerian authorities in the early eighties (Wright 1992 : 32). However, although there is no doubt that the play was written in response to the worsening socio-political conditions in Nigeria just before and during Shagari's regime, it can be said that Requiem for a Futurologist suffers from being something of a duplication of The Jero Plays, where the theme of charlatanism is superbly handled. It is therefore possible that Requiem for a Futurologist may be a less successful theatrical piece of work than the other plays of Soyinka.

Soyinka's fiercest critics can be expected to strongly object to the ending of this play. Utudjian, for example, says: "Wole Soyinka is deeply involved in social and political protest without even suggesting the need for any revolutionary change to take place" (1984: 38). This critic, like Ngugi and others, would want Soyinka to "turn the stage into a fighting arena" (Ibid : 39). And so to these critics the fact that, when the play ends, Eleazar is shown "bathed in light" suggests that charlatanism wins, and people will continue being duped by false prophets. This ending is unacceptable to critics such as Ngugi.

It is really not important that Soyinka does not propose a solution to his audience. What matters most is that he exposes society's foibles. It is up to the audience to think of its own solutions to the problems which have been highlighted by the play. This is a view held by critics such as Ogunbiyi (1979 : 8) and Rene (1990 : 79 - 80).

In his works of the eighties, Soyinka exposes and attacks foibles that bedevilled mainly Nigeria in the late seventies and early eighties. But it has been shown in this chapter and in other chapters as well that Soyinka is not just a writer on Nigerian

affairs. He is also concerned with regional, African and ultimately world issues. Gibbs says Soyinka once wrote: "[M]y professional geography does not embrace only Nigeria but the African continent and beyond" (1983 : 26). Equally important, Soyinka has been shown to be concerned with society's evils cutting across time boundaries, cognisant of what Swift said to a French translator who had apologised for omitting several passages that he (the translator) had felt were not suitable for France:

If the volumes of Gulliver were designed only for the British Isles, that traveller ought to pass for a very contemptible writer. The same vices and the same follies reign everywhere; ... and the author who writes only for one city, one province, one kingdom or even one age, does not deserve to be read, let alone translated. (Hodgart 1969 : 67)

* * *

At the heart of Soyinka's writings is his concern with simple, basic human values of right and wrong, good and evil (Banham and Wake 1976 : 25). This dissertation has tried to show that wherever, and whenever, these values have been corrupted or abused, Soyinka has risen to protest. It is for this reason that this discussion has argued that Soyinka is a committed writer who is deeply and consistently concerned with contemporary issues.

Soyinka himself has, on several occasions, stated the objective of his writing quite categorically, for example when he said that one of his purposes is to use his trade to challenge unacceptable situations in society (Granqvist and Stotesbury 1989 : 68). This dissertation has aimed to demonstrate that all his works have borne out this statement, so that even some of Soyinka's fiercest detractors , such as Ngugi, have been forced to admit that he does expose his society in breadth (Ngugi 1972 : 65) , (Nkosi 1981 : 191). These critics differ from Soyinka where they want him to use the stage as a revolutionary ground. But that is another issue altogether. What is important here is that Soyinka does expose and criticise the unacceptable situations of his society, and has consistently maintained his socio-political commitment. Katrak confirms this thesis: "There is no contradiction between Soyinka the man actively involved in Nigerian sociopolitical [sic] issues, and Soyinka the artist" (1986 : 9).

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