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CHANGES IN THE NIGERIAN THEATRE
WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO FOUR
POST - SOYINKAN PLAYWRIGHTS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the
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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the main conventions governing traditional Nigerian entertainment and the development of these conventions under influences from Western drama. Wole Soyinka's development of these conventions is considered along with his influence on present day playwrights. The main section of the thesis is concerned with the further evolution of Nigerian theatrical conventions by four playwrights; Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Femi Osofisan and Bode Sowande.

The discussion is presented in three parts. In the first chapter, there is a recapitulation and evaluation of the conventions which emerged from traditional Nigerian entertainment by the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The second section consists of two chapters: the first is concerned with the period when there was strong western influence on modern Nigerian drama through the University College at Ibadan, the chapter on Wole Soyinka that follows is concerned with the further evolution of theatrical convention in his drama, the third and major section of the thesis examines the present day development of Nigerian theatrical convention through an analysis of the techniques of the four playwrights; Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Femi Osofisan and Bode Sowande.

The material in the thesis includes accounts of

interviews with Soyinka, and the four playwrights. It is hoped that this material which has not previously been collected will prove valuable to students of modern Nigerian drama. The aim of the thesis is to provide knowledge, analyse conventions and techniques and stimulate interest in Nigerian drama, particularly, that developed after Soyinka's successes in the sixties.

DEDICATION

For Musa,
Sadetu,
Iyabo, Adisa
and Abdul-Gafar.

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INTRODUCTION

Theatre is a major part of man's civilization, and this is why theatre has never ceased to develop. Every developing theatre has a tendency to explode, and it is this explosive element which has made theatre part of life.¹

Ronald Harwood's succinct description of the development of theatre can be applied to the specific case of the development of drama in Nigeria. The main body of my thesis is an examination of one such 'explosion' within Nigerian drama; one which has led to significant changes in the country's theatrical conventions and one which has created the need for a reappraisal of Wole Soyinka's position within Nigerian drama. One must hastily add that the re-examination embarked upon in this thesis does not entail a devaluation of Soyinka's prowess as an accomplished African playwright: the intention is to see him in a context formed by the newer playwrights who have emerged in Nigeria in recent years.

The main reason for embarking on this study here in England first occurred to me when I arrived in 1981 to begin my post-graduate studies at University College, Cardiff. It was with a slight sense of embarrassment that I realised that the literary scholars I met knew nothing about contemporary Nigerian playwrights of whom I myself am one. I felt that there was a need for a study such as this, if only to emphasise a continuity

in the process of history and to re-awaken the literary interest of Europe in African literature, particularly Nigerian drama. I became engulfed in the persistent search for a means through which I could initiate a re-introduction of critical approaches to Nigerian drama. It is therefore with a sense of relief that I am able to put my thoughts into words in this thesis.

Most research and published works on Nigerian drama concentrate almost entirely upon its historical development. In this light, there is no need for any further historical accounts in this study, but there is a need for an examination of theatrical conventions. And as the study does not centre on the social and anthropological history of the Nigerian people, it will emphasise the theatrical elements in these conventions rather than the social elements to which they are obviously related. The main task of this study therefore, is to examine the changes in recent Nigerian dramatic conventions and the influences of Western drama and its conventions upon Nigerian drama, to examine Soyinka's contributions to Nigerian drama which emerges from a mixture of both Western and indigenous theatrical practices and finally to examine four post-Soyinka playwrights: Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan. In the examination of these four playwrights, there will be an

attempt to show how the changes they make in their writings are consciously designed to further the process of the development of Nigerian drama. These playwrights are all aware of the great socio-political changes that have occurred in a developing third world country such as Nigeria, and they experiment with theatrical conventions in order to respond to those changes. The result inevitably is that their works diverge from early, established traditional conventions. I am hoping to show how the conventions of Nigerian theatre are used in modified forms. As there are no written records, knowledge of the traditions were handed down orally. I hope to show in particular the conventions of Nigerian theatre which originated in the 19th century.

The dissertation falls into two parts: the first part will deal with the Yoruba traditional dramatic conventions in so far as they can be seen coming into modern Nigerian comedy and tragedy. The Western elements which Soyinka and two later playwrights were to draw from will also be examined. All this will be examined with particular attention to the colonial administration plays in the form of propaganda sketches. The beginning of the first school of drama in Africa at University College, Ibadan will also be examined and the contributions of

Geoffrey Axworthy, Martin Banham and other members of staff of the University to the growth and changing conventions of Nigerian drama will be considered.

The first part will include two chapters on Wole Soyinka. The first of the two chapters will examine Soyinka's rise to power as Africa's major playwright and estimate how well he has been able to use the inherited theatrical conventions in his plays. I shall examine Soyinka's plays, and I am going to look at Western criticism, which is on the whole highly favourable to Soyinka and at the new African criticism which is less so. With such contradictory points of view to work with, I find that the main problems with Soyinka's writings, despite his great contributions to Nigerian drama, have been his use of language and his inability, or wish to do something different to identify with the immediate social problems of Nigerian society. A reason for this I conclude, may be his attempt at writing plays that overlook the immediate. I hope to examine the problem of communication with the Nigerian audience which provided the opportunity for the development of Nigerian drama.

The second of the two chapters will examine how the later playwrights are related to Soyinka. The chapter will also include a general study of the emergence of the

new playwrights. I shall be looking at the way the four playwrights have handled the inherited conventions.

The second part of the dissertation is the major part of this study. In each chapter on the four playwrights, I shall concentrate on major issues in their works through which contribution to Nigerian drama has been made.

In the chapter on Zulu Sofola, the starting point of my discussion will be to show Sofola as she attempts to create 'tragedy' within her inherited Aniocha traditional background. In studying her, as is the case throughout, I shall compare her plays, Wedlock of the Gods and King Emene, with those of Soyinka, and her use of the inherited Western conventions. In the chapter on Wale Ogunyemi, I shall examine his use of historical materials and the emergence of the epic form with an African modification. In the chapter on Bode Sowande, I shall discuss the introduction of the avant-garde playwrights. I shall examine his use of politics in drama and his handling of his inherited materials, which makes him one of the new and more politically committed playwrights in Nigeria today. It is this new wave of playwrights that Jeyifous introduces when he aptly remarks:

Of recent there has appeared a growing number of playwrights, mostly on the left, who place the weight more on social and historical determinism in the individual-society dialectic.²

In the chapter on Femi Osofisan, the second of the new and more committed playwrights, I shall examine the strong move to the left by the contemporary Nigerian playwrights. I shall discuss his use of satire and compare his use of inherited theatrical forms, especially those of Brecht, with Soyinka's use of his inherited influence.

I shall examine all these in the light of the literary 'revolution' predicted by John Arden in an article on Soyinka in The New Theatre Magazine.³ Arden felt that it was premature in the early '70s to try to re-examine Soyinka's position in Nigerian theatre. Soyinka's ability to use Western influences to develop traditional entertainment conventions, according to Arden, was due mainly to his mastery as an individual playwright in Africa where there were few playwrights in the early '70s. Also he argues that Soyinka's prowess as a successful playwright depended on his ability to synthesize the two cultures he finds himself straddling. In his article, Arden remarks that :

Western official culture - as taught in our Universities and at the Royal Court Theatre - has nothing of lasting benefit to say to Africans or Indians or anyone else in the third world. The most that can be learned, I suspect, is some degree or technique.. ... But it is becoming more and more evident every year that the ultimate end of such technique is going to be the improvement of a revolution in the third world, and nothing else. The revolution will be both national and international and directed against continued Western exploitation, both economical and cultural.⁴

The revolution which Arden foresaw started at the end of the civil war in Nigeria in 1970; indeed, it grew out of that civil war and the subsequent need for social rehabilitation. The phase of the colonial era had closed with the war; history and art in Nigeria were to find new themes better fitted to the Nigerians who had just been to war. It was a period of local renaissance and sadly Soyinka, being first in detention between 1967 and '69, and subsequently on self-imposed exile in America, England and Ghana, was not able to witness the 'revolution' even though he had helped start a move towards it. In this

way, Soyinka lost the state of conscious awareness of the minds of his Nigerian local audience which he had won with his early plays. By the time Soyinka returned to Nigeria, the local audience had developed a burning thirst for a new type of entertainment that would be, primarily, relevant to their needs as were Soyinka's post civil war works such as his play, Madman and Specialists, his poems published in two volumes, A Shuttle in the Crypt and Idanre and Other Poems and his prison notes, The Man Died, which are evolved from a level of self-scrutiny, and in contents; mournful and sardonic. However, despite their humorous qualities they are totally pessimistic for an audience which desperately needed a tinge of hope or optimism. Asked in exile in Ghana by John Agetua whether his plays reflected the loss of his ability to communicate with his immediate local audience in Nigeria, Soyinka answered:

I don't find it impossible to write at present. You see being cut off from one's sources is not completely physical How long it will be before I begin to feel the atrophy of those particular roots, I don't know. But right now I assure you that I don't feel any dearth of contact.⁵

The 'dearth of contact' with the local Nigerian audience which Soyinka did not feel after his release from prison,

resulted in the turn of attention of the new Nigerian literary critics to the new contemporary playwrights who have a better grasp of, and commitment to, the local audience. Plays were no longer just read or performed, the new literary scholars such as Jeyifous also involved themselves in analytical discussion of such matters as the acceptability of his new relevant drama to its audience. Emphasis during the revolution was laid upon direct links between art and the people. Osofisan, a critic and contemporary playwright who emerged with the literary revolution, remarks upon the stress on relevance expected of the new art by its audience when he says:

The link of any art with its audience cannot, I suppose, be over-emphasized: because there is an urban and suburban milieu, paraliterature exists, and expands with the increase in its consumption time. Consumers of art may not consciously assert this, but it has always been with regards to response of its particular public that artistic form continuously shape itself.⁶

With the many Nigerian critics to help guide the new playwrights to the new sense of awareness in the audience, the new conventions of Nigerian drama were not merely formed in performances or playscripts but also

in theory. Critics such as Biodun Jeyifous, Omolara Ogundipe Leslie, Niyi Osundare and Kole Omotoso to mention but a few, were also creating in this process a new body of commentary on Nigerian Drama upon which this thesis has found it rewarding to draw.

Because of the nature of the subject of this study, I think it is relevant to explain my position towards African drama and to the playwrights I will examine. Apart from being a playwright myself, I am a trained actor who has acted in and watched as a member of the audience, many of the plays of the four new playwrights and those written by Soyinka. Coupled with this is the fact that I have been fortunate enough to have been a pupil of Soyinka, and then a friend for the past eight years. It is an honour that has helped me greatly in the writing of this thesis. The unique experience of meeting Geoffrey Axworthy of University College Cardiff immediately after the completion of my first degree with Soyinka at the University of Ife in 1981, has also contributed greatly to an appreciation of their contributions to the development of Nigerian drama. An acquaintance with the four playwrights either as teachers or as directors in plays I have acted in, as critics of my plays or as friends, has also helped me in gathering materials for this study.

I think it will contribute to the value of the present study if I use my first hand experience to illustrate my arguments. Perhaps it might also be of value to state my view of what Nigerian theatre should be. I am in sympathy with those who take an optimistic view of Nigeria's future. All four playwrights chosen for this study: Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan diverge from Soyinka's works which I see as having more fatalistic qualities. It is becoming evident with each passing year that a developing country such as Nigeria needs an optimistic philosophy. The recurrent fatalistic themes in Soyinka's plays have been found wanting by a society which is hungry for change and yet is continually told by its most famous playwright of a bleak future.

I hope to have reached, by the end of the thesis, a conclusion about two hypotheses. First, that Nigerian drama has continued to develop in interesting ways even though it has not been so much noticed in Europe since the Soyinka phase. Secondly, to show that the four playwrights have been under-valued, having been placed under Soyinka's shadow, and it is hoped that this study would help to bring out their true value. Soyinka's contemptuous attitude towards contemporary drama may account for his negative critical response to that drama. I also hope to

support my conclusions by reference to the questionnaires and taped interviews I conducted with the four playwrights and with Soyinka, and other people directly involved with the study, such as Geoffrey Axworthy.

If questions were raised as to why there is a need to re-examine Soyinka's position in Nigerian drama, a simple answer would be that the pessimistic tragic point of views reflected in his plays no longer seem to hold either a great entertainment factor or relevance for an audience undergoing rapid socio-political and economic changes. Recent political activities, even at the time of writing, continue to highlight the need for a study of this nature to help initiate an awareness of the newer Nigerian playwrights' attempts to create a relevant theatre. In a country of political unrest and 'over-grown' teething problems, while the artists seek meanings for the word democracy, art must replace the guns of the military rulers and the corrupt and selfish minds of the 'so-called politicians' as an instrument of change.

At the time when I was writing, Nigeria was passing through the second democratic 'Federal Republic' in which embezzlement and fraud in political positions were at a peak. The elections were conducted with inadequate provision for fair procedures. The riggings, killings and abuse of democracy led to a fifth military coup in

Nigeria on the 31st of December, 1983. With such political and social unrest new demands are made on Art to become a more functional organ. Soyinka maybe aware of this, for he has reverted to writing a less metaphorical play, Requiem for a Futurologist. The success of Soyinka's attempts of engagement cannot be measured in that one play. It is the works to come that might include Soyinka in the epoch of contemporary playwrights.

It is no wonder at all that Andre Breton's demand for a functional art and Arden's prophecy of a revolution are being fulfilled in Nigerian history. It is most fitting, therefore, to re-echo Breton's statement that:

The work of art is valuable only in so far as it is vibrated by the reflexes of the future.⁷

NOTES

1. Ronald Harwood's opening speech in the BBC Two Television programme, All The World's A Stage, shown in 1984. He explains this idea in more depth in his book of the same title published by the BBC, Secker and Warburg.
2. Jeyifous, Biodun 'Patterns and Trends in Committed African Drama' Positive Review, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 23.
3. Arden, John 'Soyinka', The New Theatre Magazine, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 25-27.
4.'Soyinka', p. 26.
5. Agetua, John. Six Nigerian Writers, Bendel Newspaper Corporation, Benin City. Interview with Soyinka in Ghana while Soyinka was in self-imposed exile. p. 54.
6. Osofisan, Femi 'Demestication of an Opiate', Positive Review, Vol 1, No. 4, 1981, p. 2.
7. Andre Breton's speech - as quoted by Sandy Craig in Dreams and Destruction, Amberlane Press, Derbyshire, 1980, p. 9. I have quoted from Craig's book, as it traces twenty years of theatre development in England and the quotation is most effectively used in the same context.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHANGING FORMS OF CONVENTIONS OF THE NIGERIAN
THEATRICAL ENTERTAINMENTS

Re-enactments of social and historical events are common happenings in Africa. Huntings, killings, weddings, and manhood ceremonies, and chieftancey ceremonies are but a few of these many re-enacted events.¹ Nigeria, on which this study centres, is no different from other African countries in the African continent as regards re-enactments. It is the type of reenactment that has existed in Africa since long before the thirteenth century, that has led to a need for a study of this nature. Because dramatic re-enactments happen in small and widely dispersed groups in any one society, it has been difficult before now to find a study of this nature which attempts to unify all the different types of re-enactments. The few studies already embarked upon by early European Scholars accept the existence of such forms of dramatic expression, but what has been lacking has always remained a good description of the dramatic activities.

Although this study mainly concerns the new playwrights, it will consider the changing forms of the theatrical conventions that have been inherited by the modern playwrights. There will be throughout this study, an emphasis on the conventions as they existed when

records began to be written from the late 18th to the early 19th centuries.

Perhaps it is significant to mention that this study is the first of its kind to attempt to analyse the continuous and changing process of the theatrical conventions in Nigeria in the light of their usages by new playwrights who have emerged since Wole Soyinka. The study will, therefore, be limited to the established forms of conventions which already existed by the time of the arrival of the Western Colonial influence in the 19th century. This early part of the study will indicate ways through which such established social and theatrical entertainment conventions have been inherited, adapted, and used by the contemporary playwrights in Nigeria today.

In this chapter, mention must be made of the characteristics of early conventions of which some are shared with other theatres such as the Greek theatre. The aim of the first part of this study will be to show the existing forms of traditional entertainment and established practices before the arrival of Western influence.

At this point it is necessary to attempt to make mention of the two entertainment forms I have identified. Folk entertainment grew out of the folklore tradition of

a group of people such as a tribe. It is a means of celebrating the social aspects of the life of a tribe, hence, the major difference it has from ritual entertainment is that religious belief is not involved, nor does it involve any type of religious ritual. Neither did it need any particular occasion for its performance. It simply involved a wide scope of traditional forms of entertainment; indeed, it made use of the established tribal forms of entertainment such as folk-dance, folk-songs and most especially, folk stories which formed the very basis of all folk entertainment. These three parts of folk entertainment gradually established themselves over the years to a point where the new playwrights who inherited these conventions have been able to adapt such conventional practices and use them in their plays. In folk entertainment, the performers, also referred to as narrators, were skilled story-tellers who went from village to village with their art. The narrator usually had a group of two or three other performers who re-enacted the story while he told the story to the spectators. These illustrative enactments of the stories and the exaggeration that accompanied them formed the basis for good comedy and have led me to argue that folk entertainment is the root of modern Nigerian comedy.

Another reason for this hypothesis, is that ritual entertainment, although a form of re-enactment, is still

believed by the spectators to possess sacred qualities which are not attributed to a comic or folk performance. Through the use of stock comic characters, folk entertainment drew laughter and enjoyment from the audience. And as the audience demanded more exaggerated characters, ridicule of known social figures began to be used; thus one has the beginning of Nigerian satire. Soyinka took this comic satire one stage further in the monstrous stock characters of Kongi's Harvest, and of the Professor in The Road, both of whom he loads with the character traits of different stock characters. Their presence on stage has all the basic comedy of their stock-character forbears, but their speeches are turned to serious purpose.

The relationship between the spectators and performers was mainly one of give and take, but there was a faint line which divided the performers from the spectators. This is because, although most of the stories were known to the spectators, the performers still held the ultimate power to change the contents of the story at the end. The crux of a good performance in the folk entertainment tradition, was how well the performers were able to change the story's plot and yet hold the spectators' attention. The type of audience before the performers of folk entertainment dictated the level of change to the plot which he could effect, even if it was a well know story. For example,

when the performer was involved in the act of story-telling, and he happened to notice the presence of the King or an elderly Chief, he would quickly change the plot to include the character of a King or Chief, giving them more prominence in the action of the plot. This way he wins the heart of his listeners who admire his mastery of story-telling if, at the end of his performance, he is still able to keep to the main plot and theme of his original story. The celebratory atmosphere created in a folk entertainment often involved the spectators joining in with the songs and dances in a performance. For the Yoruba tribes, folk entertainment because it lacked the seriousness involved in ritual entertainment, and, as it did not concern itself with the religious aspect of Yoruba life, the spectators and the performers were able to express themselves more freely.

Ritual entertainment, on the other hand, deals with the religious life of the Yoruba people. It grew from the religious ritual, hence, it is serious drama, one that can be seen as having given rise to the modern day Nigerian tragedy. Ritual entertainment may be defined for the purpose of this study as a form of entertainment which is necessitated by man's need to re-create the serious and sacred aspect of his life.

This means that changes occur when religious ritual is turned into ritual entertainment and even further changes occur when ritual entertainment is turned into a Nigerian dramatic tragedy in a play. As with folk entertainment, ritual entertainment contained the use of dances, songs and myths which are in short story form and which served as the plot for the performances or ritual entertainment. The myths, as with their Greek counterparts, contain the stories of the great Yoruba gods. In serious religious ritual, the gods in the myths are the objects of the sacred celebrations. The ritual ceremony involves a worship of the gods with the belief that the gods would be moved to effect a desired change. But such belief is missing in ritual entertainment even though care is taken to use or reproduce actual songs, dances and even costumes of religious ritual. The performers in a ritual entertainment are usually members of a cult belonging to a particular god, and so are careful to distinguish between ritual entertainment and true rituals because, unlike religious ritual, performances did not take place in the shrines, they are nevertheless difficult to separate from the performances, because of the communal atmosphere that is created. Yet in the modern day tragic play the nature of the theatre separates the audience from the actors, who no longer have to be members of the religious

cult, and are far removed from the priests of religious ritual.

The emphasis in this study will be on the changing forms of Yoruba folk and ritual entertainments because most of the playwrights, such as Femi Osofisan and Wale Ogunyemi, examined in this thesis, are Yoruba, and these dramatists use forms derived from the Yoruba entertainment traditions.

As Abiola Irele remarks:

In Yorubaland we have the extraordinary situation where the vast folk literature, alive and vigorously contemporary, remains available to provide a constant support for new forms - for the literate culture developing within the language itself as a result of its reduction to writing, as well as for the new popular arts that sociological affects have brought into being . . . and beyond these, to provide a source for the new literature in English, the language through which the modern technological world made its entry into the awareness of Yoruba people and constituted itself part of their mental universe.²

The Yoruba cultural tradition has remained the richest among Nigerian tribes. With the advancement of the written culture in the early 19th century, established

practices derived from the performances of the folk and ritual entertainments, started to emerge as conventions. The conventions grew as unspoken and informal agreements between the performers and the spectators on what particular patterns the performances were to follow. The conventions also affected the use of song, dance and costume, by the performers. And the conventions dictated the level of participation of the spectators in the performances. As time proceeded, these conventions became recognisable elements of the traditional theatrical entertainments.

Because of the interwoven mixture of Nigerian cultural traditions and her long unwritten history, it has become a considerably difficult task to try to define folk or ritual entertainments. This task is made even more difficult by the presence of the Western influence of a new form of theatrical entertainment by the 19th century. What I shall try to do in this study, therefore, is to attempt to separate the forms in dramatic terms, in order to help an easy recognition of such elements when mention is made on how a contemporary playwright has been able to use dramatic elements from either the folk or ritual entertainment.

The first of these conventions was idea to do with place. An idea followed up by the modern playwrights.

It is important to note that there were appropriate avenues for each different form of entertainment. The ritual entertainments took place in the King's palaces, Temples of worship, and open shrines. The folk entertainment performances took place in the courtyards, market places, streets and King's palaces. The venues used for folk entertainment performances, enabled the performers to be freer in their movements than, when they were later moved onto the stages of the European theatre halls, the freedom of movement created by the open environment of the venue, also contributed to the spectators joining in with the performers. Soyinka's comment in his book, Myth, Literature and the African World that:

The essential problem is that the emotive progression which leads to a communal ecstasy or catharsis has been destroyed in the process of re-staging.³

highlights the influence of Western drama on the traditional form which was formerly free in expression, venue and form. Although there is an obvious difference in the use of the Western stages, the dais of the Temples and shrines on which ritual entertainments were performed served the same function as the Western stage did. The actor, as with the proscenium stage, was able to face the audience. A typical ritual entertainment for example, took place on

the dais of a temple or shrine by the carving of image representing the hero-gods, like Obatala, Shango or Ogun.⁴ This gave the impression that whatever ritual re-enactment was being performed, it had the sacred and religious blessing of the hero-gods. Folk entertainment did not need the cultic blessing of a god, but needed the folk entertainer to be able to be at ease with the various environments they used as they moved from place to place performing their comic acts. In most cases, the folk entertainer allowed environment to determine the subject matter. The narrator⁵ was quick to adapt the themes of the story as the venue suggested. For example, an invitation to the King's palace meant that the story performed would have to end with a praise of the King and his Kingdom, and an invitation to a courtyard with an audience of children, meant that the story performed had to end with a moral tale. The mastery of the narrator was reflected in the ways he was able to tell the same story to any group or audience regardless of age. The stories themselves had no fixed form, and the narrator was free to expand, to eliminate parts of the story which the performer did not think relevant to the audience, and to create new ideas in a story. The basic content of a story was simple; for example, the story of how the Tortoise fooled the Pig is simple in structure. The Tortoise went

to borrow some money from the Pig, which the friendly Pig lent him. The cunning Tortoise, aware that the Pig hated the smell of Onions, took a piece of cloth soaked in Onion sauce to the Pig who threw it away. On asking for his money back, the Tortoise claimed that he had paid him with interest with the money in the wrapped cloth. This explains why the Pig is always burrowing the earth. I have chosen this story, because it is one of the most popular stories in the Yoruba tribes, and the story also informs one of the existence of the animal world in the Yoruba fairy tales of folklore. The structure of the story provides a flexible model which a good narrator could re-shape for whatever audiences he was performing for. It was the job of a good narrator to be able to expand this story mainly through improvisation. And when he had a group, he narrated while members of his group performed the parts of the animals, with large comic gestures. An example of the dramatic version of such a story would have the narrator taking the part of the main character, the cunning Tortoise. The other members of his group would play the instruments while his assistant played the part of the Pig. The narrator had the task of getting in and out of character to continue the story or to even comment on the action of the play. Such a dramatic performance of the folk story ends with the

children audience joining in in the closing songs. As story-telling tradition is a part of Nigerian culture, the present writer including Soyinka and the modern Nigeria writers have either taken part in, listened, watched or even have to tell stories of such nature in the process of growing up. Another aspect of this flexibility is to be found in the lack of description of specific characters; this means that the performing group were free to create large, exaggerated costumes and dance movements to draw laughter from the audience.

The virtuosity of the narrator⁶ was in his ability to hold the audience's attention during the process of performance. To achieve this he had to use all the skills he had been taught by his father or older narrator. The folk entertainer belonged to a skilled profession and needed to learn all tricks of performing from the older performer. Up to the 19th century, being a narrator was an inherited job. In most cases, families belonged to the guild of story-tellers. Fathers of story-telling families handed over their group of actors, who were either members of the family themselves or part of the extended families, to their sons when the older narrators were too old to travel. Improvisation remained a keystone or oral tradition. The narrator also needed to have a good memory because there were many stories, many songs,

and also many names of the characters in them. But his memory was not infalliable, and would sometimes have to create new songs on the spur of the moment in order to conclude the story sometimes in the way the audience knew it and expected it to be. Sometimes, a very good narrator linked the moral of his story to everybody life. For example, he would tell the story of the jealous old wife who poisoned the younger wife because of her beauty. In explaining the moral of the story he would give examples of such a happening in that particular village or in one nearby. The mastery of the narrator at comic improvisation and imitation gave rise to the 20th century slap-stick comedy of Baba Sala and his theatre group. The group, founded in 1970 and directed by the Actor/Manager, Moses Olaiya, based most of its early sketches on the social lives of the Yoruba people.

Area and setting is another convention of the ritual theatrical entertainment which has changed with the development of Nigerian drama. Before the 19th century, as earlier mentioned, ritual entertainments had been carried out in their appropriate places, for example, places of worship, and temples. The Western idea of dramatic performance changed this convention. The theatre was the place, the stage was the area, and the settings were either scenery or props which only imitated the real thing. This use of scenery and settings further heightened imitation in

drama which, before the arrival of Western drama, was only in the form of the improvisation of the action. Despite the attempts of the Yoruba professional theatre groups to create actual settings for their productions of ritual plays, the limitations of the Western stage, especially in terms of size and room for the actors to move, affected how many actual props the Yoruba groups could bring on stage. Even acting gestures which up till then were large, and sometimes included acrobatic displays, and normally took place in the streets, had to be changed. I shall elaborate on this issue in this chapter when I come to discuss the effect of the Western drama on Nigerian traditional theatrical practices before the advent of the European stage and its ideas.

Songs and Music form another of the traditional theatrical conventions which remained a conventional elements of drama at the turn of the 19th century. They served the function of both entertaining and inducing the audience to partake in the entertainment. Songs were also used to express the inner desire of the singer and also to appease in ritual entertainment of gods who were being worshipped. In such ritual entertainment, the audience joined in the singing and dancing. For example, these types of songs included praise choruses for the gods which carried the desired wants from the Gods for the particular year. The Playwrights I am concerned

with in this study use these conventions as for example in Wale Ogunyemi's Obaluaye, the character Babalosa, the medicine man, leads the worshippers to the shrine of Obaluaye, the Yoruba god of Smallpox to try and persuade the god, through his effigy, to stop inflicting the Smallpox sickness on the townfolk. In a ritual movement to cleanse the worshippers, he breaks into a chant song to which the worshippers echo 'please', in order to evoke the pity of the god on them. The song reads thus:

Obaluaye please, be kind
Please!
Sanponna please, be kind
Please!
Oluaye please, be kind
Please!
Sanponna please, be kind
Please!⁷

Songs and Music have remained the oldest form of expression in the Yoruba history. The chant songs used mostly in ritual entertainment, were used as praise songs with evocative powers to effect magical happenings. Unlike the chant songs of ritual entertainment, the songs of the folk entertainment were less seriously rendered. The words of the songs in a story could be changed to give different meanings. This was a way of showing the creative mastery of the narrator. The songs in a story for example, in a complicated plot, were used to remind the audience of the earlier action and also to introduce new action or twists in the plot. For the children's

stories, songs were used to highlight the themes of the story. In ritual entertainment, songs were used to create either a 'celebratory mood' or 'communal mood'. The celebratory mood was usually created in a ritual entertainment. When the chief priest, who was the leading actor in a ritual performance, cried out that the offering had been accepted by the worshipped god, he raised a song with happy contents in which all the performers joined. The clapping, singing, and dancing all contributed to the celebratory atmosphere such an action created. The communal mood was created in the serious aspect of the performance action of ritual entertainment. The song leader, chosen for his vocal quality, often led the antiphonal songs in a very deep and serious voice, to which the audience answered. This atmosphere was usually created at the beginning of ritual entertainments when the offering had been made. Sometimes sounds were uttered in unison, and this created a mystic aura which only the performers felt. This form of communal mood was prevalent in the 20th century and also at the time of Soyinka. In fact the convention is still in force today and there is no doubt that the modern playwrights are conscious of its presence. Soyinka comments on the sacredness of music and its effect on the performer when he says:

Music is the intensive language of transition and its communicant means, the catakyst and solvent of its regenerative hoard. The actor dares not venture into this world unprepared without symbolic sacrifices and the invocation of the eudaemonic guardian of the abyss.⁸

The sacredness of music is because the communal mood is almost a trance-like one in which the audience believe something supernatural will happen. It is a mood which overpowers the will of the minds of the performers, and with the continuous rhythm of the music takes possession of the consciousness, a power which music in ritual entertainment had, and still holds when well produced. For instance, the power of music which continued through the 18th centuries have continued to be present in ritual Nigerian dances of present day Nigeria and such ritual entertainments still continue in the rural areas and village religious festivals in Nigeria.

Dance is another traditional convention which has endured over the years and still exists as not only a means of expression, but as a physical way of participation in entertainments. In the African tradition, dance also creates images of nameless and even bodiless shapes which all help to create in physical form, the rhythmic sounds produced by the big drums and the countless musical instruments. The wildness and the uninhibited nature of the movements of the African dancer , enables him or her

to be transformed into a state in which he or she is unaware of immediate surroundings but markedly aware of a continuous rhythm which his or her muscles have no choice but to obey. Dance is also an act which demands first from the dancer an awareness of entering into a different world and second, a promised satisfaction if and when the dancer surrenders all. Because Nigerian dance-gesture is symbolic, especially in ritual dance, dances are addressed to sight. For it is in this spectator-performer (dancer) relationship that ecstatic and somewhat exotic frenzy is achieved: For when dance is performed before an audience of children, there is a conscious slowing down of steps for the children to see and learn from. But when performed before grown-ups, there is a subtle invitation through gestures for the audience to join in the act, which the audience often do. On the other hand, a ritual entertainment performance for a royal audience, for an example a royal invitation by the King to his palace, a change in the dance style is automatically demanded. The dancers become highly self-conscious, and the dance steps and gestures are formalized and presented in the most expert and graceful form. Such dances and change to dance styles which existed in Nigeria of old times continue even today and is used in modern Nigerian

drama which uses the conventions of the traditions.

In Yoruba tradition, dance is in different forms. There are the social and ceremonial dances and the ritual dances. The social dances include the maiden dances, the wedding dances and the naming ceremony dances. These dances perform the functions of helping to achieve the joyous occasion, and also allow a further expression of the feelings of the dancer. For example, the wedding dance steps are sensual and erotic, informing the audience of what is to take place later in the night on the bridal mat. Ritual dances include dances of the hero-gods, cult dances, and purification dances.

In terms of enjoyment, dance, music and songs help to create, in ritual entertainment, a sense of the dynamic which generates an energetic and sacred aura. Susanne Langer in her book, Feeling and Form, describes this energy as:

the 'commanding form' and this dictates the major divisions of the work (ritual performances), the light or heavy style of its presentation the intensity of the highest feeling and most violent act, the great or small number of characters, and the degrees of their development.⁹

This rhythm creates the frenzy of excitement and fear in a ritual entertainment.

In Yoruba tradition, ritual dance is another way of recognising the gods represented in ritual entertainments. For example, Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, has specific dance steps which are usually fast and calculated. Because Ogun is the god of the hunters, his dances are more vigorous with a dynamic fusion which is missing in the dance steps of the Yoruba god Obatala, the god of creation. Dance is used in ritual entertainment to express and explore what lies outside man's everyday consciousness, long before any form of verbal utterance by the chief priest. Soyinka's description of a typical Ogun dance ceremony reproduces the power which dance infuses into a ritual happening.

The dynamic fusion in the wilful nature of Ogun, represented in the dance of lumps of ore, is complemented by the peaceful symbolism of the palm in which the ore is bound; the men's manic leaps up the hillside by the beatific recessional of the women who meet them at the foothills and accompany them home with song. Through it all - in the association of the palm frond with the wine of Ogun's error, yet the symbol of his peaceful nature; the aggressive ore and its restraining fronds, a balletic tension of balance in the men with the leaded poles; in the fusion of image and fertility....¹⁰

The ritual dances which have endured over the 18th, 19th

and even 20th centuries have continued to remain a strong and important part of the Yoruba religious ritual entertainment. Soyinka's accurate description of the Ogun dance ceremony shows a great level of consciousness of such dance ceremonies in the mind of every Yoruba boy or man. There is no doubt the present writer and the modern playwrights to be studied in this thesis are also conscious of these ceremonial festivals and from time to time borrow from the traditional conventions.

The folk entertainment used dance as a mode of expression or comic exaggeration. The story-teller used dance to punctuate movements and create distinguishing elements between the many characters in his plot. Sometimes, dance was used to inject life into a boring story. The narrator who dictated the pace of the story, urged the audience to dance and he himself danced in such a way as to draw laughter from the audience so as to shake off any trace of boredom and tiredness when he sensed that his story no longer held the audience's attention.

The traditional theatrical entertainment also had a conventional structure of performance. Unlike the Aristotelian concept of tragedy in which a play needed to have a beginning, a middle and an end, the traditional African entertainment of the 14th through to the 19th

centuries, had no distinct ends, but a beginning and numerous small climaxes. It must be understood here that this convention applied mainly to the ritual entertainment which is the basis of Nigerian dramatic tragedy. This undefined structure of the African traditional ritual entertainment, as a result of continuous practice, became a pattern which could be repeated from one season to another.

A typical ritual entertainment could go on far into the night it was never confined to the two or three hour limit of the modern European drama. For example, if it were the re-enactment of Shango, the god of thunder's death that was being celebrated, the worshippers would start the performance with a praise-chant to Shango, then go on to show him as the great and wise King. His family life would be reflected, with more snatches of his character portrayed to show that he was impatient and rash at certain times. Then the worshippers presented sketches from Shango's mythology of his use of the great thundery hammer which he wielded and how his favourite warrior failed to win the duel that Shango had made him fight against a rebellious warrior in his army. The victorious warrior is shown giving Shango an ultimatum to quit the Kingdom. Shango's sorrow and the subsequent wielding of his mighty hammer invariably killing many of his subjects is shown. Disappointed by his action,

Shango is depicted^{as} deciding to go back to his mother's village, a disgraceful act for a once powerful king and his wife, Oya. Shango is shown in the forest where he commits suicide. This scene where he commits suicide is the first small-climax in the sketch. Another small-climax is shown when, in the King's palace, Shango's voice is heard telling his people that he is not dead, but that he will rule them from the land of the dead. At the joy of the news, the villagers dance on and on till the next day, without a definite end to the re-enactment. The many small-climaxes preceded the moments of renewed vitality which the effects of Palmwine, an intoxicating local drink tapped from the Palm-tree and freely drunk during these performances, and the effects of music, dance, and the exotic atmosphere in moonlit night, created. Such a performance can still be seen in a typical Shango festival in Yoruba villages in Nigeria.

Nigerian entertainment frequently lacked electric lighting, therefore the traditional entertainment usually took place during the day or by torchlight^{or} on nights when the moon shone. Ritual and folk entertainments were often performed by actors who in actual life were members of different craft and professional guilds, an aspect of the social life of the Yoruba which is similar to the cycle drama of the Medieval craft guilds in 15th century England. The similarities do not stop there; firstly,

both guilds took part in activities primarily designed for outdoor performance and, secondly, each individual play was the responsibility of a different craft guild. Furthermore, each Medieval craft guild had its own patron saint, perhaps it was a god rather than a saint, in the case of the Yoruba craft guilds, saints were recognised as gods. But whatever the names by which the patron saints or gods were called, it was believed by members of the guilds that the saints and gods served the functions of protecting the members of the guilds and of inspiring the members of the guilds to a more productive year with the passing of the particular year being celebrated.

The performances of the different craft guilds in the Yoruba society, especially the hunters' and farmers' guild, gave cause for outward displays, and no doubt started the street performances.¹¹ For as the dancers moved from ^{to place} place/dancing round the village, the Yoruba craft guilds by the 15th century had become part of the social groupings of the Yoruba tribes. The guilds still exist in Yoruba societies today, but in scattered and none too disciplined form. The guilds still perform these entertainments, but at times, their performances have continued to draw less and less attention, even though modern Nigerian drama is conscious of their

performances and borrows from the traditional convention. The performances of these guilds have both ritual and celebrative elements about them. Each craft guild had its own hero-god. The hunter's god, Ogun, was asked for protection at the festival date set by the chief priest each year. The rivalry among the craft guilds led to a display in the streets by each guild to show how creative they were and how their zeal and mastery at their job extended to dances and songs for their hero-gods. A typical Ogun festival by the hunter's guild starts at the home of the chief hunter who received the other hunters already singing and dancing by the time they get to his house. The hunters would then dance round the village, singing and performing acrobatic displays. They would stop by the palace where they awaited the arrival of the king. On the arrival of the King, the hunters would sacrifice a dog, the sacred animal of Ogun, as an offering to the patron god. Later, the hunters would return to the shrines of Ogun, where they would re-enact the greatest kill of the year. Some of them would dress up as the animal or animals, whilst the other hunters joined the chorus of the songs raised by the main actor. Most Yoruba professional theatre groups in Nigeria today still use re-enacted stories of the craft guilds as basis for their plays. In most cases, the killing of Lions, Elephants, Boars, and Hippopotamus were considered great acts.

In the celebrations of a great killing of this nature, the actual hunter, or group of hunters, who killed the animal are involved in the re-enactment. For example, by the late 1950s and early '60s when the Yoruba professional theatre groups started to emerge, performing at nights in the many public and school halls in the country, the late Duro Ladipo's¹² Opera group used and borrowed a lot of ideas from these craft guild, sketches and enactments of the myths. Ladipo's group which was a more consciously theatrical one, made use of the old conventions as with the case of the modern Nigerian playwrights. Ladipo himself rose to fame with his group by playing the title role of Shango in Oba Koso (The King did not Hang), a play which was not a ritual, but deriving from the rituals.

Another convention of the folk entertainment was that it was mostly performed in the form known in European drama as theatre in the round. It was usually performed outdoors and moonlit nights. In this way, the narrator and his actors were able to be intimate in their performance with the audience. This may be the reason why most Nigerian plays of today are successful when performed in theatres in the round or thrust theatres.

Of all the conventions modern theatre has taken over, the narrator has been the most important to the playwright. This is why, in most of the plays written by

Nigerian playwrights, there is a character who represents the playwright both morally and in terms of building up the plot, a function normally associated with the narrator. In these cases, the characters were normally upright and good. An example can be found in the character of Fabunmi in Wale Ogunyemi's play Kiriji. The contemporary playwrights have also found his creative demands on the narrator and the audience reaction, which controls the tempo of the stories in folk entertainment, helpful in the act of playwrighting. They are forced to write, with audience response in mind and hence often enjoy a close bond with their audience.

Another convention of the folk tradition which has emerged from traditional entertainment is the chant-song. This form of entertainment was practised by the different social guilds, and each guild had its own repertoire of chant-songs. A performance of the chant-songs either involved a narrator and an enactment of his narration, characters in a dialogue of chant-songs. This type of chant-song can be said to be the main origin of the antiphonal tradition in Nigerian culture. The chants were used in the presentation of songs in a celebratory function. The chant singer, again chosen for the quality of his voice, was able to sing in whatever tone the song demanded and one characteristic feature was the accompaniment of music

and dance, all helping the performers to create the festive atmosphere. It is significant to note that, in Yoruba tradition, each god, plant or human being has a chant-song. This is called the Oriki. There are three main Yoruba poetic genres: and along with Ofo and Aro, Oriki is one of the three. The poetic genres were performed at moonlight games, at times of bereavement, and at any other time when the need arose to cheer people up. Ofo and Aro form parts of the minor genre of Yoruba spoken art; they express the significance and importance of whatever they are sung for. A typical Oriki is rendered in fast and rapid tone so that it is reproduced with the accompaniment of drums as a sing-song. Orikis are often sung for gods and human beings. A good example is Ogun's Oriki, sung by the performer, a son of Akinwande, a Yoruba family of the folk entertainment guild of story-tellers.

Now I will chant a salute to my Ogun
O Belligerent One, you are not cruel.
The Ejemu, foremost chief of Iwonran Town,
He who smartly accoutres himself and
goes to the fight.
A butterfly chances upon a civet-cat's
excrement and flies high up into the air,
Ogun, don't fight against me.
Don't play with me.
.... Some people said Ogun was a failure
as a hunter.

Ogun therefore killed a man and packed
the corpse behind the fireplace.

When some people still said that Ogun
was a failure as a hunter,
The sword which Ogun was holding in his hand
He stuck into the ground on a river bank
The sword became a plant, the plant now
called "Labalabe".
Hence the saying "No ceremony in honour
of Ogun can be performed at the river-side,
Without Labelabe's getting to know of it".
It is I, a son of Akinwande, who am performing.
I do good turns for people of decent
appearance.¹³

Some other chant songs were in the form of a riddle.
Femi Osofisan, a contemporary playwright, uses the chant-
song tradition in the beginning of his play, The Chattering
and the Song. In the play he uses the riddle-telling game
and employs animalistic expressions for a rhythm; this way,
the whole play reads like a song:

SANTRI : Buuuuuh!

YANJI: Buuu-ooh!

SONTRI: Great idea! We'll play a game
Iwori Otura
Say I am a frog ...

YANJI : And I?

SANTRI: A fish: Iwori Otura!¹⁴

Osofisan's and Wale Ogunyemi's successes as playwrights may be chiefly attributed to their use of the style of writing which has to do with a reproduction of a direct English translation of the popular Yoruba chant-songs. I shall elaborate on this point later in the thesis.

Ritual entertainment, as with the Greek ritual drama, is the main basis of the present day Nigerian drama. And serious ritual celebrations are part of the social life of the Nigerians from the earliest and primitive periods. The tragic aspect of Yoruba ritual entertainment is based ^{on} / lamentation. Soyinka's comment that:

Tragedy, in Yoruba traditional drama, is the anguish of this severance, the fragmentation of essence from self. Its music is the stricken cry of man's blind soul as he flounders in the void and crashes through a deep abyss of a spirituality and cosmic rejection.¹⁵

brings the issue of lamentation in Yoruba tragedy into a better focus. This type of lamentation has two sides to it: first, the positive, which is the happier side, and the negative, which concerns itself mainly with deaths and ritual sacrifices. Ritual lamentation in entertainment performs three functions : to honour the hero-gods and ancestors, to appease or cleanse the ills or taboo of the society, and to serve as the expression of a wide

range of conflicting emotions. Whether in happy or sad circumstances, the Yoruba ritual entertainment is based on celebration. Celebration, here, must be understood as the performance of a religious ceremony publicly and duly. In ritual tragedy, while there is the lamentation for the death of a god in the celebration of his myth, as in the case of Shango who hanged himself, there is also the celebration of his newly acquired powers to continue to live in the world beyond, where he can render protection of his followers. Deaths of relatives are seen in this way. When a father dies leaving the children behind, in lamenting his death, the Yoruba belief of a world after death consoles the family with the comfort that the deceased is now empowered to help his family if appeals are made in offerings, prayers or even in singing evocative chant-songs to the deceased.

The use of musical instruments was another convention of traditional theatrical entertainment which has survived over many years. The use of musical instruments is naturally related to dance, music and song, and helped to create the rhythm now so associated with African music - a slow deep and repetitive rhythm. Instruments, like dance steps, were associated with particular gods. Ogun's fast steps could only be achieved through the rapid-beating of both leather-skinned sides of the Bata drums.

Other instruments like the gong and beaded gourd were and are still very prominent in the production of traditional rhythm. Little beads are also tied in a string which adorn the dancers' legs and which produce a particular rhythm in the course of the dance.

These instruments exist in Nigeria today because there are professional musical instrument players who belonged to families of music makers. In Oshogbo a Yoruba town close to Ile-Ife, and in most of the other big Yoruba towns, the families who belong to the guilds of the Bata drummers are called the 'Ayans' with their names always preceded by 'Ayan'. Good examples are 'Ayanwale' or 'Ayandele', The 'Bata drums', the 'Dundun drums' the 'Iya Ilu drums' and the 'talking drums' are all drums which each family specialised in. A traditional type of drum, for example the 'Bata drums' had to be used by Obatala worshippers.

Masks have remained a very old part of the traditions of the Yoruba people. In fact masks are known to be part of the Yorubamen's first attempt to express his emotions such as fear, happiness and terror or fright. To modern Nigerian drama masks have remained part of the old tradition and culture which it is forced to borrow from. The difficulty of placing a date on the emergence of the use

of masks by the Yorubas is mainly due to the fact that there is no existing source of its origin. But by the 19th century, even up to the present, the use of masks and costumes continue to be an important aspect of social and religious aspects of the Yoruba lives. Masks are very sacred in the African social and religious life. In the Yoruba tradition, masks worn by human beings became a sacred link with ancestors. In wearing a mask the wearer is transformed into a higher being, a representative from the worlds of the spirits. Each important large family had a mask of its own. It is not known how the idea of mask wearing came to be in Yoruba land, but it is significant that family masks known as the 'Egungun' were worn long before the 18th century in celebration of the dead ancestors. In religious ritual, the period set aside for the wearing of the family mask was usually done in a week in which the family offered sacrifices and prayers for continued guidance and protection by their dead ancestors. When masks were used in ritual entertainment and subsequently tragic plays, as we shall later discover, the convention that the wearer is not human for the duration of the wearing of the mask is observed, and even the actors on stage respond to the mask wearer or masquerader in this way. But again,

as in the case of the drum makers' guild called the 'Ayans', there was the family of mask wearers. They were a specialised part of the guild of craftsmen. Families had to inform the mask makers of the type of mask they wanted. The skilled mask makers would then add particular features of the families, for example, large eyeballs, deeply cut side marks on the face, large upper lips, or long drawn face in the mask which would then be used to identify the mask and its family when it was out performing. The family mask also celebrated big village festivals such as the Ogun, Shango and Obatala festival, depending on the fact that the family worshipped one of the celebrated gods. Rivalry among family masks gave rise to a long tradition of dramatic activity, which chiefly involved one family's mask and its followers trying to outstage another with acrobatic displays, exhibitions of medicinal powers and even with a call to the performance of chant-songs, which usually represented the height of the performances of the religious ritual mask entertainment. It is significant also to note that the craft guilds used masks as part of their celebrations for most of the ritual ceremonies they performed during the festival periods. One of such sacred celebrations was the burial of a dead colleague. A good example is the 'Layewu hunters Mask' of Ilesa, another Yoruba city.

The hunters masquerade dance was performed annually and at the funerals of prominent hunters in the city and its environs. The animal-skin worn by two of the masqueraders is the occupational symbol of the hunters. The skins are those of the various 'big game' believed to have been killed during the hunters' lifetime. The 'Gangan drum', the special drum of Ogun, the patron-god of hunters was usually used to achieve the dramatic effect which was created with collective participation. But the mask was the essence of the sacred ceremony. In the presence of the mask, was the representation of Ogun, the hero-god and all the dead ancestors of the hunters. And the importance of the masquerade was always further highlighted as the masquerade was put at the centre of the ritual sacrifice.

Perhaps it is helpful to mention that mask, music, dance, songs and costumes all add up to show how the first type of actor in Nigerian traditional theatrical history was able to change his state from the common local citizen to that of the performer who was able to effect a change of state, so as to project his awareness outside himself, into other worlds which only intuition could sense as cohabiting with everyday reality.

In folk entertainment, mask also served the symbolic function as it did in ritual entertainment. For the

narrator, mask gave him the opportunity to play many characters. This opportunity to assume many roles helped, in particular, the narrator who was too poor to employ many actors or performers to work with him. He made the masks for each character in the play, and again between the audience and performers there was the unwritten agreement that when he donned a particular mask, he had changed his state to the character whose mask he was wearing. The use of masks in folk entertainment, which later gave rise to a troupe of performers called the Yoruba Alarinjo entertainment group in the 18th century,¹⁶ thrived on exaggeration. The masks in most cases were of known social characters in the village. And because the characters caricatured were not dead the comic mask did not bear the sacred belief which was attributed to the ritual mask. The Alarinjo performers, mainly made up of skilled actors who had learnt their trade as narrators but were finding it hard to survive on their own, worked with a palace attached company whose function was to entertain the characters. It was this primary function which must have dictated the comic tone the Alarinjo entertainment group was to take. They made masks of palace officials and of the villagers, giving the king a chance to meet his people first in comic situations and also the performers a chance to satirize any of the King's actions

which they did not agree with the creating little sketches which caricatured even the King. At first their masks were stock characters, bearing a close similarity to the *commedia dell'Arte* of the Italian drama. The stock mask included the Greedy, the Dumb, the Drunk, the Gossip, the Glutton, the Butcher and the Eavesdropper, and as the colonial administration came to Nigeria to rule, the mask of the 'Oyibo' came to be made and used. It was recognisable for its long protruding nose, long moustache, white painted face, and helmet. With their involvement in satiric displays of the King and his household, the Alarinjo were thrown out of the palaces' protection and care, but they continued in small groups, later influencing one of the great Yoruba stage comedians, Moses Olaiya and his Baba Sala theatre group. Moses Olaiya, in his sketches, mirrored the social life of the Yorubas more closely with an occasional use of mask. But his social characters were also stock characters who had been influenced by the Alarinjo group. His stock characters, such as Baba Sala, the old man, Sala his young handsome son, Sisi, the young girl friend of his son whom the old man wants as his young wife, and Adisa his friend who advises him against his action, has an even closer similarity with the *commedia dell'Arte* of the Italian comedy. Despite the close similarities in the contents of the performances, characters,

to the *commedia dell'Arte*, I must make it clear that there is no connection and that the developments of both theatre traditions are entirely separate.

The costumes have remained the most constant convention of traditional entertainment. Like the mask, costumes were used to effect a change of state. And when exaggerated, costumes created laughter from the audience. There were also specific costumes for specific characters, and the audience accepted the new character in front of them. But when religious ritual was turned to ritual entertainment, it was difficult to create the correct costumes, mainly because the Yoruba myths described the costumes worn by the hero-gods up to the last detail, therefore, it was difficult to improvise. The performers of such myth stories have had to cope with the task of reproducing costumes which have close resemblance to the original. The late Duro Ladipo's portrayal of Shango was further liked for his attempts to create the actual costumes of the real Shango hero-god as the worshippers know him to be. It is significant that once Ladipo donned the costume, even his fellow actors treated him with the respect and awe attributed to the chief priests themselves or even on the gods.

The creation of ritual drama from ritual entertainment or serious religious ritual around the beginning of

the 19th century can therefore be seen as a major break in traditional and religious convention. And whatever amount of the original ritual entertainment is added to a ritual play, the difference becomes apparent in the absence of the communal mood. Anthony Graham-White defines in his book, The Drama of Black Africa, the basic distinction between ritual and drama when he aptly remarks that the difference:

lies in the belief that a ritual will have consequences beyond itself. A ritual is functional : it is expected to produce results in the future. In dramatic performance, on the other hand, expectations stop when it ends.¹⁷

This distinction means that the element of belief present in the organic action of the religious ritual proceedings is not there when the audience sit to watch a ritual drama. But ritual drama attempts to create the songs, actions, mood and thematic importance which the religious ritual contains. It is this seriousness of contents which make ritual entertainment a base for the modern Yoruba dramatic tragedy, whether in English or in Yoruba languages. Another distinction between ritual and drama is the powerful effect ritual has on the audience. This is the inability of the audience to divorce its emotion from the close involvement achieved with the action of ritual entertainment.

Myths have remained the most valuable part of the

ritual entertainment inherited by the modern Nigerian playwrights. In the old form of ritual entertainment, the stories of the hero-gods contained in the myths were acted out. The modern playwrights use myths to highlight their themes. Myths are reworked as part of the play so that they no longer hold the African sensibility alone, but have a relevance to contemporary issues in present day Nigeria. A good example of a contemporary use of myth can be found in Femi Osofisan's Morountodun a play in which an old myth is blended with a political uprising in the Western part of Nigeria in 1968. The myth the playwright uses is the Yoruba Moremi myth, one in which Moremi, the wife of the King of Ife, decides to risk her life by being captured by the Ibo enemy. This way she hoped to learn the secret of the brave Ibo warriors. The plan is put into action and Moremi is captured. She learns the secret of the Ibos and returns home to tell her husband who later leads his army against the Ibos and wins. In Osofisan's play, Morountodun, the conflict is about the government spy. She goes into the farmer's camp, believing that she is the reincarnation of Moremi, the goddess in the Yoruba myth. But on getting to the farmer's uprising, she fails to return to the government Police who sent her to spy on the farmers in the first place. Osofisan re-works the Yoruba myth by not allowing Titubi to return to the government she works for, to make a

report on her experience and on her knowledge of the farmers' secrets (their uprising against the government), which was what Moremi in the Yoruba myth did. The refusal by Titubi to inform on the farmers for the government which Osofisan introduces to the play, is to show the playwright's intended message. Believing in the Marxist ideology of an equal state, with little or no class division, Osofisan is able to make the point through Titubi, the main character in the play. She is the daughter of the rich Alhadja, who was afraid for her daughter to live with the farmers and experience the hardship (which they do). Yet the daughter forges a new class alliance symbolised by her appearance, at the end of the play, in the garments of a farmer.

The performances were called 'concert shows'. They were made up of songs and the presentation of a few sketches which dealt with a freed slave's¹ past experiences abroad. But like the morality plays, the sketches also had moral subjects.

Another change in the conditions of dramatic performances was the creation of the position of actor-manager in theatre groups. The position was common among the Yoruba professional theatre groups. In 1944 Hubert Ogunde¹⁸ became the first actor-manager of the professional Nigerian theatre group. Although the plays of the Yoruba

professional groups included dances and songs, they were used as the opening-glees to the play proper which were 'composed' by the actor-manager.

One more change to the convention of traditional Nigerian theatrical entertainment, was the inclusion of pidgin English in the previously dominant Yoruba speaking plays performed by the Yoruba professional groups. Most of Ogunde's satirical plays like Worse than Crime (1947), Herbert Macaulay (1946), and Towards Liberty (1947), which were mainly anti-colonial government plays, were in pidgin English - a cross between the English language and the vernacular speech.

Another change in traditional theatrical entertainment was the new sense of touring professionalism which the Yoruba theatre groups introduced. This influence had come directly from the visit of Hubert Ogunde to England in 1946, where he was able to see the travelling tradition of English theatres. The tours of the Yoruba theatre groups stretched over the whole of the country, giving new meaning to the work of the actor.

The actors were no longer seen as occasional performers who entertained the public. The sale of tickets for performances of these professional groups, also helped to give a sense of professionalism to the job of the actor. The payment for tickets was different to the non-payment

performances of the traditional entertainment. The fees also meant that higher standards were expected from the performers. The audiences sitting in the new theatre halls also became influenced by the proscenium structure of the halls. The structure of the theatre halls helped to create a new type of convention where the actors were paid to act and to be watched; in the old convention it was hard to draw a line between the audience and performers. The influence of the Western drama, and its generated spirit of performance resulted in the taking over of some Western subject matter such as Everyman (which was already a Western dramatic influence). Duro Ladipo produced the play in the late '50s, translating it into the Yoruba language. It was titled Eda. In his adaptation, the symbolism of the linguistic change is made apparent in the allegorical characters of the European version which is carried into the Yoruba version to reflect the Yoruba grotesque life. As with the medieval performers, the Yoruba performers of Ladipo's theatre group, gave theatrical life to abstractions like 'Money' or 'Good deeds'. The character of 'Money' in the Yoruba version, proves false in a scene that is simple, direct and yet physically powerful. The distinctive Yoruba style of the portrayal of such allegorical characters was reflected in the costumes. For example, the character 'Money' wore a costume with banknote patterns. In Ladipo's adaptation,

and in an even more recent adaptation in English by Obotunde Ijimire, titled Everyman, the Christian mythology of heaven and hell was replaced by the Yoruba concept of reincarnation. In Ijimere's version, as in Ladipo's, the character, Everyman, promises at the end of the play to return in the shape of all mankind, having learnt his lessons about the weakness of man. In the play, Everyman steps forward and says:

EVERYMAN (Wildly): Oh let me try again!
Olodumare, owner of heaven,
Owner of the Sun!
Grant me another beginning,
That I may prove myself.¹⁹

With the growth of modern Nigerian drama, the Yoruba professional theatre groups, which were first to illustrate how Western drama influenced the Nigerian theatrical tradition, still used traditional costumes effectively. The contemporary playwrights, including Soyinka, also use costumes and masks when necessary for dramatic effect in their plays. A good example can be found in Wale Ogunyemi's Oke Langbodo in which the playwright employs the use of mask, costumes, dance and music in such a way that the Western audience would be able to appreciate their aesthetic beauty in the play. The witches and demons in the play all wear terrifying mask and costumes which introduce them even before they speak as evil spirits.

These were the conventions of established social

and cultural entertainments which were to form the basic background of every new African playwright, beginning with the early plays of James Ene-Henshaw,²⁰ Soyinka and the four new playwrights to be examined in this study. The mention of foreign influences must not be misunderstood. These were not radical influences enforced on the Nigerian entertainers, instead, they were ideas which were first alien to the Nigerians and which later became ways through which Nigerian entertainment forms could be extended, and draw upon theatrical traditions of other parts of the world. Anthony Graham-White's quotation from his book, The Drama of Black Africa shows the inter-connections of ideas which took place during the period of colonialism:

The real contribution of Colonialism, however, was to provide models for the development of a literary drama. In its origins and early development, the literary drama bears little relation for traditional drama, but in the last decade, playwrights have sought to find in traditional drama, ways to vitalize a stiff and fundamentally alien genre into a truly African form of theatrical expression.²¹

The development of Nigerian drama from 1900 was sporadic and a chronological study is difficult to achieve. The English influences on traditional theatrical enter-

tainment occurred in different groups almost at the same time. I shall attempt in this Chapter to trace an historical development with the hope that this will highlight the ways through which traditional theatrical conventions were influenced by English drama. As the traditional entertainment developed, the freed slaves who had arrived from America through Liberia and Sierra Leone by the early 1800s,²² started their own forms of entertainment. Their entertainment shows included minstrel shows and negro spirituals with no serious dramatic performances of plays. The significance of the freed slaves in the development of Nigeria then was that with some of them educated, they were able to help build up a class of 'native literates'.²³ And the specific influence of their shows was that the shows served as a bridge between the traditional and Western cultures. The shows also introduced the use of the public halls to the traditional Yoruba professional groups.

An influence of the morality plays which was carried through from the Yoruba adaptations into the theatre in English was the allegorical technique. The original Everyman, for example, has characters such as Good Deeds, Knowledge, and Beauty who conform, by their reactions in the play, to the meaning of their names. These characters gained easy popularity with the Nigerian audience. The allegorical technique influenced the

playwrights of the drama in English. Femi Osofisan in particular, continuing the allegorical technique inherited from the Christian morality plays, gives his characters names which conform with the social ideas held by such characters in real Nigerian social life. In Morountodun and Once Upon Four Robbers, a female character called Alhaja - a female counterpart of the Alhadji (Muslim who goes on the holy pilgrimage to Mecca), ironically represents the financial affluent, corrupt, socially and religiously hypocritical woman in Nigerian society. The name Alhaja, as used by Osofisan, helps to transcend both the characters and play into a deeper meaning for the Nigerian audience who, consciously or not, recognise the social ills of the society of which Alhaja is the epitome.

It is significant at this point, to mention the existence of the Administration-sponsored plays and their performances. These plays were mainly in the form of sketches written by civil servants in the Colonial Ministry of Information and acted by the employees of the ministry. Drama was used by the Ministry of Information, as a basis for the instructive and informative functions of the government. No one knows how the idea of using sketches for information services started, but by 1984, the sketches had become very popular in the provincial villages. This form of dramatic practice ended in the

late '50s with the introduction of films by the advertisers of popular British beverages such as: Milo, Ovaltine, Bongo Tea, Kettle Tea and Tobacco companies.

The sketches portrayed situations in the villages with regard to the ruling colonial government and how much information the government wanted the villagers to know. It was a very effective way of informing the many uneducated Nigerian villagers of their duties to the colonial government. The sketches were devised by the white colonial officials of the Ministry of Information. It must be mentioned here that there are no records of these sketches anymore in Nigeria. As most of the sketches were destroyed during the change-over of governments in October, 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence, I have relied on Chief Haruna as my main source of information for this early dramatic activity by the colonial administration. The sketches had no titles, but were recognised for the subjects they treated. A sketch had an opening, a middle and an end. The opening dealt with problems and the intended reason for the short performance. The white colonial officer, through the translator, who was also an actor in the group, told the audience the plot of the sketch. This approach made it simpler for the audience to understand. A sketch on payments of taxes, involved two Ministry employees and a white official. One of the black actors played Mr. Good, while the other played Mr. Bad.

The sketch would start with Mr. Bad being ill and taken to the hospital by Mr. Good. Following the government directives that medical help should not be given to non tax payers, Mr. Bad is discovered through questioning, as a tax evader. He is made to pay the tax and treated by the white official who plays the Doctor.

The effectiveness of such a sketch was in the pidgin English spoken by the black actors. Most of the audience admired the ability of these actors to speak in English, and hence, it was a further encouragement to send their children to school. The evening usually ended with a series of dances by the villagers, and there is no doubt that such early dramatic activities by the colonial administrators helped to influence dramatic activities.

A proof of such influence is remarked upon by Chief Haruna, an old actor of the colonial ministry who usually acted the part of Mr. Bad:

Wen we finish de play, and anoder day come, den you go see small children dey play say, 'you be Misita Bad'. And some time wen we wan make our chief Hapy, I go organize de boys as our Oyinbo (white official) dey organize we for work. And we go do play, and as e bi say na only me speak good English, I do do the Oyinbo (white official's) part. We dey laf -
o veri much.²⁴

This type of comic and almost burlesque performances of the administration plays, must be seen as the introduction of the 'white-man' as a comic figure which is still present in theatrical practices in Nigerian villages today. And in more recent cases as with the National Television at Enugu, the comic figure of the 'whiteman' has continued to be reflected in the comedy Television series, Itchioku, which mocks the white official Magistrates and their translators, who, during the colonial period, seldom understood one another, and yet passed judgements on serious cases. Masks with long noses was another way the new comic figure in the shape of the whiteman was introduced.

By the late 1940s and '50s, the first changes in traditional theatrical conventions had been effected in the form of the emergence of the position of the actor-manager, the use of a mixture of pidgin English and the vernacular, the introduction of the theatre structure and the new fee paying sense of professionalism introduced to the theatre. The late '50s saw a new kind of influence of the English theatre through the academic syllabus of the Nigerian students. This was the period when the terms 'traditional theatrical entertainment' and 'concert shows' were replaced by the term, drama. And as Colleges and the University Colleges were being founded, drama as a subject was introduced into the School syllabuses in the form of the works of Shakespeare, Shaw and the Greek plays in English translation which

were taught in Schools. Outside the Secondary Schools and University College, Ibadan, the term drama was also used. With regard to the audience, there was little they could do, even if they wanted to, to stop the new dramatic conventions of the English theatre which were influencing the traditional ones. The presence of the colonial administrators helped in the process of assimilation. It must be noted, though, that the audience enjoyed the new wave of dramatic shows which occurred during this period. The differences to the audiences appeared to be in culture, but both dramatic forms achieved the same goal, enjoyment and entertainment. Soyinka attempts to clarify this difference in his book when he remarks:

the difference which we are seeking to define between European and African drama as one of man's formal presentation of experience is not simply a difference of style or form, nor is it confined to drama alone. It is representative of the essential differences between one culture whose very artifacts are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths and another, whose creative impulses are directed by period dialectics.²⁶

Soyinka's comment mentions the cultural difference the audience found with the English theatre.

A great influence of the English theatre on traditional entertainment was the introduction of the works of Shakespeare to Nigerian drama. His popularity was mainly due to the 'strange' dialect of English he used in his plays. To understand or read Shakespeare became a new level for the educated intellectual to attain. The fascination of Shakespeare for the undergraduates of the University College, Ibadan, who studied Latin and other classics, was the mastery of a new form of 'colloquial' English.

The professional Yoruba theatre groups who lacked the understanding of Shakespeare's language, were very determined to include similar themes in Shakespeare's works, in their plays. Again, as with the adaptations of the morality plays, the actor-managers read the texts and re-told the plots of their group members, who acted them out in Yoruba. For the professional Yoruba theatre groups, and their local audience, the similarities of Shakespeare's plays such as Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, Julius Caesar, Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet, with regard to the presentation of the human emotions and situations of the Yoruba social life was fascinating. Human emotions such as the lust for power, the passionate hatred and love, jealousy and the cunning behaviour of Shakespeare's villains, could easily be related to by the audience. An example of such influence can be found in Wale Ogunyemi's

adaptation of Macbeth into a Yoruba version titled Aare Akogun (1969).

Shakespeare's influence on Nigerian drama in English was mainly on the play as a text. His influence affected the emergence of the playwright in Nigerian drama who was responsible for writing the texts. It was a great change from the old oral adaptations of early English plays performed by the Christian societies mentioned earlier. The structure of Shakespeare's texts was a great model for writing plays to the young Nigerian playwrights. A good example can be found in the plays of James Ene-Henshaw such as Medicine for Love, which he wrote in five acts and blank verse in the late '40s.

Another change in the convention of traditional entertainment was that the English drama and its performances were not as associated with festivals as traditional entertainment mentioned in the first chapter was. The English plays only needed a period of preparation. Once the lines were learnt by heart, and the director, another new role introduced to Nigerian drama, had found in rehearsals that the play was ready for showing to an audience, the play could be produced. This was very different from the traditional entertainment which was usually done as the art of a festive activity.

The structure of the Western stage was another influence on Nigerian entertainment. Most of the Western plays were written for the proscenium stage and Nigerian actors who were used to playing in the round or on thrust stages found it difficult to adapt themselves to the new type of raised platform acting. A major acting problem was that the new structure of the theatre also limited audience participation which the actors were used to in traditional performances. The introduction of the theatre as a place for performances was the major convention which this new theatre brought. Oyin Ogunba remarks in his book, Theatre in Africa, that:

Prior to the advent of the whiteman, Africans did not have 'theatres' in the Western or Oriental sense. Nobody in Africa built structures specially designated 'playhouses' which served the purposes of entertainment or dramatic instruction and nothing else. Though there were arenas for performances, they were not constructed in strict geometric dimension like those of the ancient Greeks.²⁷

The new theatres were for indoor performances. One major element of the new theatre as to the traditional arenas such as the court-yards, shrines, temples and the King's palaces, was the technology it involved. It used lights, sets, scenery and props, all of which were alien to the traditional theatrical entertainment.

By 1948, the University College, Ibadan was founded under the auspices of the University of London. Student dramatic activity was minimal in the first decade of the College. And as Professor Dapo Adelugba, then a student of the University remarks:

The plays presented were stale, old English or American plays with poor dramatic content and without any bearing on the tastes of Nigerian audiences. These were obviously selections by students in their impressionable, imitative stage, with little idea of their needs or their audiences.²⁸

But whatever might be the criticism, these first attempts of the University drama remained and began the growth of the Nigerian drama in English within the University campuses.

By 1959, the dramatic activities at the University College Ibadan, had started to act as a challenge to graduating students of the College. The ex-students now working in the Ibadan township, continued the act of entertainment outside the University campus. The first thing the ex-students did was to start their own dramatic group in English. The first of such groups, was 'The Players of the Dawn'. The theatre group was formed by a number of friends including Segun Olusola, Christopher Kolade and Taiye Ayorinde. Most of the other members of the group including those mentioned above, were civil

servants who worked with the Radio and Television stations at Ibadan. But the productions of the plays by the group were not better than the early attempts by the Arts theatre group dramatic societies. The plays the Arts theatre group presented included Adre Obey's Noah (1957), Jean Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon, Ibsen's An Enemy of the People (1960), and Sophocles' Antigone. The productions of the plays were held in School and public halls. Their audience comprised mainly of civil servants, University undergraduates, and staff of the University College.

During this period; the theatre in English lost most of its audience to the well produced dynamic, and vernacular speaking theatres which seemed to the Yoruba audience relevant to their own lives. The Yoruba theatre of Hubert Ogunde had been able, by the late '50s, to synthesize the conventional practices of Western drama with those of the old traditional performances. And with the many varieties of plays, by both Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo's theatre group, not many of the indigenous Yorubas bothered to see the plays in English, which were considered boring and thematically irrelevant to the Nigerian society. The theatre in English was then forced to remain within the University Campus where it could get an appreciating audience.

Three major reasons account for the development of

the theatre in English in the Ibadan University Campus rather than in the Society outside the University. The first reason for the development of theatre in English as entertainment, was the provision of an audience for the plays shown. This added a new sense of awareness to drama, because up to the mid 1980s drama was not highly regarded as a serious subject outside the University. The University was seen as a citadel of education: respectable, necessary and important. To include drama in its activities and entertainment. Most parents during this period (and ironically today) wanted their children to either be Medical Doctors or Lawyers and this attitude was carried through to government functionaries such as Banks who were not prepared to help the few groups founded outside the Campus. The second reason for the development of the theatre in English inside the University Campus came as a result of the first reason given above. The University travelling theatre group and students dramatic society groups was funded by the University or student levies. As money was not their immediate problem, theatre in English was able to develop within the Campus. The reason can be seen as the reason why outside groups such as the Players of the Dawn did not survive long on its own. And thirdly, the University, apart from its respected position in the Nigerian

society, was seen as a protected place in which Nigerian drama in English could develop. These reasons, which also contributed to the frustration of early attempts to organise theatre groups in English such as Players of the Dawn, have still remained factors why the theatres in English have remained with the Universities and their drama departments up till today. It is hoped that the present work could help generate enough awareness so that the theatres in English can get out of the Universities and begin to survive on their own. Axworthy's significance in the history of the development of Nigerian drama was in his search for ways through which the Nigerian audience could be attracted back to the theatre in English.

Axworthy arrived in Nigeria in 1956 with the aim of developing the potential of the 1955 newly built arts theatre hall of the University College. In an interview with me, he recalled his first reaction on the state of the Nigerian local English speaking theatre groups and the effects such productions had on the audience when he says:

What I set out to do once I got to Ibadan was to add to the vocabulary of the artists, and to give them a wider range of theatre experience

from which they could work. I did not like the idea of doing English plays for an African audience. A good example of such productions was Man from the Ministry which was done rather awkwardly in the first weeks of my arrival. Another play was also being performed by the Players of the Dawn. The group liked the English plays, but were not prepared to adapt such plays to the Nigerian experience. Most of the members of the group had been overseas, and had seen plays done at the West End or local theatres in England, and without second thought to the audience relevance of such plays, had produced them for their pleasure.²⁹

For Axworthy, the problem was not only audience relevance but, also, that most of the English plays had English cultural habits which were alien to the local Nigerian audience. He gives an example when he says:

I remember saying to Christopher Kolade, a member of the Players of the Dawn, during a run of the performance of one of their English plays which was about a girl who tried to commit suicide by gas poisoning. She is saved in the play, because the shilling runs out. I asked how he thought the audience, who did not know about gas and the shilling meter would be able to understand the play, but he insisted, and the group did the run, which I

doubt ever got the kind of local audience which the University theatre or the local Yoruba theatres got.

This is why I set out to try and inform students about various theatre traditions in the world, and how they can be best adapted to become relevant for the audience and their social reality.³⁰

Axworthy had come from England determined to achieve his aim of adapting English plays for the Nigerian audience. In 1957, he met Wole Soyinka in London. Soyinka, working then at the Royal Court Theatre, gave him several of his scripts including The Lion and the Jewel and Swamp Dwellers. The first production of these two plays in 1959 by the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society (U.C.I.D.S) helped to instil the confidence which Axworthy felt was lacking when he arrived, in the undergraduates who, up till that time, had not seriously thought of writing full length plays with Nigerian characters and themes. Dapo Adelugba, who was then a student, recalls the challenge which Soyinka's plays had thrown up, when he remarks:

For the students, however, this was a challenge to write their own plays, for did not Wole Soyinka do his first two years of undergraduate work at U.C.I.?³¹

With the successes of Soyinka's plays, Axworthy had

succeeded in creating a new enthusiasm from the students who only needed to be pointed in the right direction towards achieving a well synthesized Nigerian drama in English which assimilated influence from the English drama.

Axworthy's next aim was to take the theatre outside the University Campus of Ibadan to the local audience. A good chance came from him to first experiment with the Ibadan audience within the University Campus when in January 1960 the Arts Theatre, the building used for play productions, was closed for repairs and rebuilding. Borrowing an old Oxford tradition, in March 1960, the students wrote little sketches which were all produced and taken to each hall of residence. This was a very successful exercise, as many more people saw the play than would have done had it been shown at the Arts theatre. This venture has been aptly praised by Martin Banham who became the deputy director of the School of drama during this period:

Just as dramatic activity in the college is establishing a reputation and a following, we are deprived of the use of the theatre. This has been a blow, but it is encouraging to see how in at least one instance the handicap has served as a stimulus. The University College Dramatic Society, harnessing the enthusiasm of Geoffrey

Axworthy, decided to take the plays to the people as the people were unable to come to the plays. This exercise in dramatic democracy was a great success.³²

The success of his attempts at developing the Nigerian drama in English made Axworthy turn to the initial problem of the University Students' drama society and the members of the Players of the Dawn, which was in selecting and adapting good English plays for productions.

The play that was chosen for the first adaptational production for the newly formed University travelling theatre group was Moliere's Les Foberies de Scapin. No one is sure of the reason why this play was chosen by Axworthy and the students, but Molly Mahood's comment on the final production suggests a very plausible reason:

Anywhere between Badagry and Calabar one comes across people with a passion for litigation, exasperated with the law's delays and darkly suspicious of legal chicanery; parents who think their children's marriages are a matter for parental choice; and retainers who consider themselves - and often are - one of the family. Moliere's Valets have more in common with the dependents of a wealthy African household than they have with the servants of a European drawing room comedy. In some way, the adaptation improved on

the original. The pidgin of the second Valet was the big success of the evening.³³

Axworthy made use of the help of four students; Dapo Adelugba, Alfred Opubor, Brownson Dede and Ernest Ekong in the adaptation. The title of Moliere's play was changed to That Scoundrel Suberu; one of the students who helped with the adaptation explains why the name was changed:

Apart ^{from} the alliterative grace of the title, the name 'Suberu' has connotations of mischief, roguery and prans-terishness. Even more Scapinesque in suggestive force is the short form 'Sube' used more often than the full name in the script.³⁴

In a tour of the Western region of Nigeria, the play was very successful. The audience found it different from the other productions in English they had seen. The success of the Suberu in 1960 and the whole programme since 1957 in Arts Theatre impressed the Rockefeller foundation that they offered a grant of US\$250,000 to fund the school of drama from 1962 - 67.

With £300 funds made from the earlier production of Suberu, the School of drama was encouraged to produce Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew in March 1962. A Nigerian adaptation of Shakespeare's play was a major challenge to Axworthy and his group of students, who

prepared to make the production as African as possible. Axworthy's description of a typical night of production best reveals the style which the group used in adapting Shakespeare for the Nigerian stage:

The audience would arrive - not by any means on time or all at once - to find the playing area quite unprepared. A few crates and lights on stands, a man sweeping up with all the time in the world, a windup gramophone, with apparently only one high-life record, repeating itself until even this ran down. An embarrassed announcement from the Company Manager (played incidentally by Dapo Adelugba) that the company due to some mishap, only too credible on such a journey, would not be coming. They invade the stage demanding a performance, even if they have to make it themselves. They turn out the costume boxes, change, and make-up in front of the audience, whilst getting a rundown of the plot.

Finally, apparently reading from scripts, they haltingly begin the play. This pretence is slowly dropped until the audience catches on. A murmur of excitement passes around the hall, followed by sometimes minutes of hilarity, for every Nigerian loves a good practical joke. This convention entirely wins the involvement of the

audience. An equation is set up between the character in the play and the person playing him. Grumio, for instance, is a cheerful illiterate, who paraphrases Shakespeare's line, apparently on whispered hints from the prompt corner, into pidgin. We see not Kathrine alone, but an emancipated young Nigerian woman, playing her under protest, taking the sting out of her final submission by going on strike until all the men in the company - and even members of the audience - are begging her to continue, they won't take her words seriously, the show must go on Audience reaction to such shows was so meaningful that I have even now not quite adapted to the restrained behaviour of English audiences even when they are enjoying themselves.³⁵

After the successful run of The Taming of the Shrew, Axworthy and the theatre group went on to adapt Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors for the Easter vacation of 1963. The adaptation was very much along the same lines as that of The Taming of the Shrew. Axworthy says that the production was done by the students in reaction to a challenge issued by the Nottingham Playhouse who had toured West Africa with Shakespeare's Macbeth and Twelfth Night along with Bernard Shaw's Arms and the Man.

According to Axworthy, the students in the University theatre group were not impressed with the productions of the Nottingham Playhouse. The British group had performed their plays with the British audience in mind. Their costumes and delivery of lines had been too English for the local Nigerian audience, including the students who were still caught up with finding the meaning and understanding the speeches of their English teachers. Urging Axworthy and the other members of staff on, the students were determined on understanding the problems they found with the English theatre group in their own proposed production of Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors. To deal with the problem of tackling the complicated plot of the play and to enhance audience understanding, Axworthy and his students borrowed a leaf from the folk entertainment style of presentation. They used the traditional conventions mentioned in regard to songs and costumes and included the use of Pidgin English so that the audience could relate more closely to their performances. Not familiar with Nigerian songs at this stage of his stay, Axworthy asked Sonny Oti, a student of his, to write the songs for the production. In an interview he gave me, ^{Sonny} Oti recalled how Axworthy confronted him with the challenge:

After the success of my part in the production of Bertolt Brecht's

The Caucasian Chalk Circle in which I played the Monk, I was appointed to serve on the Executive Committee of the Dramatic Society which I joined during the transitional academic session (1962/63) which saw University College, Ibadan, transform to University of Ibadan. I was named the Assistant to Geoffrey Axworthy, the founder and first Director of the School of Drama in the production of The Comedy of Errors. Axworthy gave me a 'blind-Cheque' as it were, when he said:

"Since you said you are a song-writer (this was my assertion in the audition proforma) write me a Nigerian musical synopsis of the play : The Comedy of Errors. Also, I give you liberty to look at the play, and relating to its theme, do songs_{as} you find relevant to theatrical areas."

With the songs Sonny Oti wrote for the production, Axworthy added that Yoruba folk Opera tradition of having an opening-glee. The opening-glee was made up of song and dance used for beginning shows. Axworthy recounts the style which was achieved in the production with the influences from both the Western and traditional theatre conventions:

We opened our productions with very saturated bright lighting, heavily

dramatic light, while the Merchant was doing his speech. One must remember that The Comedy of Errors is one of Shakespeare's first comedy plays and the play made our attempts even more difficult of staging it in the African way. The play as Shakespeare wrote it, started with a long retrospective speech, which is a very long speech. What we did in our adaptation, was to get Sonny Oti and one of his mates who were going to play the two Dromios to sit in front with the audience and the actor who played the Merchant came on stage. When he started his long speech, they interrupted him and asked:

"What do you think you are doing?"
and the actor playing the Merchant said:

"Well, I'm doing The Comedy of Errors."

And Sonny Oti said:

"Ha, that is not the way to do The Comedy of Errors".

They went on stage and did it in a kind of opening-gee which the Yoruba folk artists like Ogunmola were using to open their plays. And we found out again that this attempt to bring the theatre closer to the Nigerian audience was making our productions acceptable to the local audience. Sonny Oti wrote lots of songs for the production, and we had this idea of an alternative end, where the two pairs of twins meet we thought it would be interesting to have twins everywhere, so

they made hundreds of these twin dolls which were passed around the house as they sang the song Oti had composed for the production called 'Twins, Twins'.³⁶

With the success of The Comedy of Errors in 1963, Axworthy's choice for the 1964 production was an adaptation of Nkem Nwankwo's novel, Danda. Axworthy explains his choice for this novel when he says:

In 1964, I thought the time had come for us to try something which was totally a Nigerian play. Nkem Nwankwo, who was a student of English had written a novel titled, Danda. I read it and thought that this was a perfect story which could be adapted to a play. For me it showed the social values of the Nigerian society at that time. It dealt with the arrival of the motor car and its impact on poor innocent villagers, and new heroes from cities. It also dealt with extended family problems and the corrupt influence of big cities on poor innocent men. I wanted to do this in the round and I thought we could do a parody of the long American cars, but I got a Mini Moke from a motors company (S.C.O.A.) as an advertisement stunt, and we used it on stage. Sonny Oti wrote a song on this.³⁷

With the success that followed the production of the

adaptation in 1965 when it was shown in the Black Arts Festival in Dakar, Axworthy showed his students who were later to control the schools of drama in Nigeria, that a theatre was most effective when it was thematically relevant to its local audience whatever the language, was most important, especially, in a developing country. The thematic relevance had to include the method and style of production. Such an awareness helped the University College Ibadan theatre group rival their vernacular speaking counterparts in the Yoruba professional theatre groups.

In the 1962/63 academic session, Axworthy felt that there was a need to create an atmosphere where both the Yoruba professional theatre groups and the University College drama department could work together. Kola Ogunmola's operatic company was invited to the Campus on a six months resident contract. The major point of interest in the programme was that the Yoruba theatre of Ogunmola was very keen on learning from the University the technological elements which up till then were on a makeshift scale in their productions.

Axworthy explains in the preface to the script that resulted in the final production of Amos Tutuola's novel The Palmwine Drinkard:

The primary object of our scheme was to give him a period of six months free from the economic pressures to which such a company is always subjected, to go over his past work and learn something of modern techniques of lighting and presentation.³⁸

The exchange programme was a remarkable success, and this started a new practice of the close workings of Yoruba professional groups with the Institute of African studies in Nigerian Universities today. Most importantly, the University of Ibadan African Studies department has continued the tradition of working with the local Yoruba theatres from which many productions and plays texts have emerged. Axworthy's scheme with Ogunmola's group not only initiated a practice where play scripts could be used for the productions of the local Yoruba professional groups, the scheme also created a forum for the exchange of ideas. Axworthy describes the exchange of ideas when he says:

He accepted the offer to work with us, and one of the first things he had to learn was the use of the front of the stage. This is because the Yoruba group was used to having very small stages in the public and school halls they performed in. Ogunmola's group also liked our electric lighting, which was different from the Kerosine lanterns they were used to performing with. The electric lights were brighter, and we had to teach the actors to be more precise in their acting

as the audience saw more clearly with the lights on.

On the other hand, we had to learn the zeal with which Ogunmola and his actors carried and portrayed the characters they played. It was mainly a give and take process. We were borrowing from him and vice versa. I was interested in his method of work, his style. I had never seen anything like this. His opening-rites with which he starts his plays, was most interesting and fascinating. The energetic dances and songs always started and created the atmosphere for the audience to enjoy the play. We tried this out in our own productions of some of Shakespeare's plays we did.³⁹

It is significant to note that Ogunmola is now remembered mostly for his acting ability in this particular production. This is mainly because by working with the University, Axworthy had given him the needed exposure to the University Campus elite such as Soyinka, Adedeji, and Adelugba.

By 1967, the time of ensuing civil war, Axworthy returned to England. Martin Banham had left earlier in 1966. But there remained Denes Nwoko, Joel Adedeji including Wole Soyinka. The first members of staff of the University of Ibadan School of Drama had started a tradition which was to continue to the present day. This is because, up till

today, most of the theatre in English that was developed have remained with the Universities. The sense of audience grasp and the enthusiastic challenge which the School of Drama threw to students has continued as a tradition among the Universities. It is no wonder therefore to find that the playwrights examined in this dissertation have remained with the Universities while trying to retain the interest of the audience whom Axworthy and the other members of staff of the school of Drama had helped to introduce.

With the positive direction geared towards the English influences, and the gradual changes made to the old practices of the traditional performances, more plays began to emerge, as did productions. By the time Soyinka arrived from England in 1959 to start work as a lecturer at the University of Ibadan School of Drama, many developments had been made by the colonial administrators, Axworthy, the members of staff of the School of Drama, and the students of the School, in the creation of a new drama.

NOTES

1. See Akin Mabogunje, 'The Land and Peoples of West Africa', History of West Africa Vol. 1 (Eds) J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, Longman Nigeria Limited, Ibadan, 1977 pp. 1 - 32. For more information see Dary II Forde, African Worlds, Oxford University Press, New York, 1970.
2. Irele, Abiola. The African Experience in Literature and Ideology, Heinemann, London, 1981 p. 175.
3. Soyinka, Wole, Myth, Literature and the African World, Cambridge University Press, London, 1976. pp. 5-6.
4. These are just three of the many Yoruba gods. For further reading see E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief.
5. Although there are different versions of this story, the structure is the same.
6. More work has been done on the narrator as a first-hand craftsman, and the structure of different performances in Nigerian tribes.
7. Ogunyemi, Wale Obaluaye, Institute of African Studies University of Ibadan, Bi-lingual literary text, 1972. p. 59.
8. Soyinka, Wole. Myth. p. 56.
9. Langer, Susanne. Feeling and Form; A Theory of Art, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1977. pp. 188-207.

10. Soyinka, Wole. Myth. p. 31.
11. Joel Adedeji argues that the Alarinjo street theatre of the Yoruba gave rise to the street theatre in Nigeria but it is difficult to say this, as almost all traditional entertainment activities were performed in the streets.
12. Duro Ladipo's groups continued after his death to show plays of this nature. The group is now led by his wife Abiodun Ladipo.
13. Chant reproduced from Soyinka's collection of poems, Poems of Black Africa, African Writers Series, Heinemann Books, London, 1982, pp. 55 - 57. See complete chant in Appendix Twelve.
14. Osofisan, Femi. The Chattering and the Song, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1977. p. 2.
15. Soyinka. Myth. p. 145.
16. See Joel Adedeji's chapter, 'The Alarinjo Travelling Theatre', in Theatre in Africa, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1978 (Ed) Abiola Irele and Oyin Ogunba.
17. Graham-White, Anthony. The Drama of Black Africa, Samuel French's Publishers, New York, 1974. p. 17.
18. For more detailed information on Hubert Ogunde see Clark, E. Hubert Ogunde : The Making of Nigerian Theatre, Oxford University Press, Ibadan, 1979.

19. Ijimere, Obotunde, The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., London, 1976. p. 74.
20. Ene-Henshaw, James. (b. 1924) a medical doctor, wrote most of his plays such as This is Our Chance, Children of the Goddess and Medicine for Love in England. The plays were witty and very entertaining but have never been considered as having any scholarly elements worth mentioning in my study. Most of his plays are now acted by primary schools.
21. Graham-White. The Drama of Black Africa. p. 59.
22. Prof. B. Oloruntimehin in his essay 'The Impact of the Abolition Movements on the Social and Political Development of West Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries'. African Notes, Vol. VII No 1 puts the entry date of the freed slaves in the 1800s. pp. 38 - 58.
23. For a more detailed account of the effects of the freed slaves on the Nigerian Society in regard to the development of literature and drama, see Asein Omo Samuel, 'Literature and Society in Lagos'. (Late 19th early 20th Centuries) Nigeria Magazine no. 117 - 118, 1975. pp. 22 - 32.

24. Interview given to the writer by Chief Haruna in Auchi, Bendel State, Nigeria in December, 1982. He worked with the Ministry of Information for the Crown from 1937 - 56.
25. Soyinka. Myth. p. 38.
26. Ogunba, Oyin and Irele Abiola. (Eds). Theatre in Africa, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan 1978. p. 9.
27. Adelugba, Dapo. Nationalism and the Awakening National Theatre in Nigeria, M.A. thesis submitted in 1964 for the University of California, L.A. p. 24.
28. Interview Geoffrey Axworthy gave me in Cardiff, 1981.
29. Ibid.
30. Adelugba. M.A. thesis, 1964. p. 45.
31. Banham, Martin. Ibadan, no. 8, 1961.
32. Mahood, Molly. Ibadan, no. 10, 1962.
33. Adelugba, M.A. thesis, 1964. p. 46.
34. Axworthy, Geoffrey. 'The Performing Arts in Nigeria' a footnote, Third World Theatres (1) Nigeria, New Theatre Magazine, Bristol University.

35. Interview and letter from Professor Soni Oti at the University of Jos in Nigeria, 1981.
36. Axworthy, Interview, 1981. See Appendix Six for complete text of the Twins Twins song.
37. Ibid. See Appendix Seven for the Minimoke song
38. Axworthy, Geoffrey. 'Preface', The Palmwine Drinkard, Kola Ogunmola, University of Ibadan Press, 1968. p. 1.
39. Axworthy. Interview with the present writer, Cardiff, 1982.

CHAPTER TWO

WOLE SOYINKA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN THEATRE
CONVENTIONS

For the greater number of our contemporary African playwrights, the individual is almost wholly self-determined, even when they pay lipservice to the force of African customs and tradition. Soyinka is the greatest exemplar of this tendency and his enormous talent apart, this is the main reason why he is beloved of the Western liberal critics. For them, in Soyinka's works the pumping heart of the individual, the lines of experience and destiny on his face and in his person, the consciousness of personal moral choice and responsibility, appear clearly in African drama for the first time. They see in Soyinka's plays, with eminent justification, Western bourgeois individualism incarnate.¹

This leftist quotation from the Marxist literary magazine, Positive Review, written by one of the new and radical Nigerian literary critics, Biodun Jeyifous, gives a succinct description of the major difference between Soyinka's plays and those of more contemporary Nigerian playwrights. At the same time, the quotation introduces the tone and language of contemporary Nigerian dramatic criticism in an examination of Soyinka's position in Nigerian drama which I shall examine later in this chapter.

Soyinka was born on 13th July 1934 in Ijebu Isara to his Christian parents, Ayo and Eniola. He grew up in a Yoruba world rich in cultural and traditional materials of which his parents were prominent members. His father was the Headmaster at the major primary school, St. Peter's Primary School, Ake in Abeokuta, a factor which contributed to his starting school at an early age of three.² The sleeve note on Soyinka's autobiography, Ake: The Years of Childhood, gives the best description of the world which contributed to his future career as a writer:

A world in which spirits and wood deamons were as real and intrusive as catechists, traders, kings, educators, missionaries, social strife of iron discipline....

Wole Soyinka traces eleven years of growing up in a world that was alternately hostile and secure, cruel and tender.³

The quotation applies to the world created in most of Soyinka's plays, and shows the influence that Yoruba tradition has had on his plays and other literary works.

An attempt to analyse Soyinka's career has forever remained a difficult task, because he evades any one single category. Over the years he has established himself as a playwright, novelist and poet, not to mention

the fact that he is also an actor and a director of most of his own plays and those of other playwrights. But it is Soyinka the playwright who has remained the most attractive to the scholars, not just because he has written more plays than novels or poems, but because it is as a dramatist that Soyinka has had most impact on the development of Nigerian Literary history. Yet it remains a very difficult task to continue to examine Soyinka's career as a playwright because of the way he has been able to slide from one category of writing to another. I am not alone in this difficulty, for the scholars who attempt to specialize in Soyinka's works, such as Gerald Moore, Oyin Ogunba and James Gibbs, are forever caught up with a sense of amazement, surprise and respect for Soyinka's ever rising creative career.

I am concerned in this chapter to attempt to explore ways in which Soyinka developed the theatrical conventions he inherited from both Western and traditional cultures and how well he has used his legacy. His plays will be examined with close reference to the use of his style, language and traditional conventions such as the use of dance, songs and cultural attitudes.

It is significant to note at this point that Soyinka is a Yoruba man, and that all his plays are written from his experience of the everyday Yoruba life.

When he tries to find the difference between the belief of the contemporaneous existence within the daily experience of the European man and the Yoruba man, Soyinka is seeking a difference which is also reflected in his plays:

The Yoruba is not, like European man, concerned with the purely conceptual aspects of time; they are too concretely realised in his own life, religion, sensitivity, to be mere tags for explaining the metaphysical order of his world. If we may put the same thing in fleshed-out cognitions, life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn.⁴

It is also significant to note that although the ideas and most of the traditional and cultural materials in Soyinka's plays were and are still part of his concretely realised life as a Yoruba man, Soyinka did not start to put down his ideas in play form until he came to England to read for a degree in English at the University of Leeds in 1954. Yet, it must not be assumed that Soyinka's interest in theatre began that late in his life. His main interest in theatre started in school, at the Government College Ibadan which he attended from 1947 to 1952.

Soyinka wrote a few sketches for the school end of year 'concerts'. His first literary efforts appeared in the College's annuals or literary magazines. In a recorded Radio interview of August 1962, Soyinka revealed his early interest in drama when he says:

I would say I began writing seriously, or rather taking myself seriously, taking writing seriously about three, four years ago, but I can presume that I have always been interested in writing. In school, I wrote the usual little sketches for production, the occasional verse, you know, the short story, etc., and I think about 1951 I had the great excitement, of having a short story of mine broadcast on the Nigerian Broadcasting Service and that was sort of my first public performance.⁵

Soyinka continued his interest in drama and in literary self expression when he joined the University College Ibadan in 1952, an institution then affiliated with the University of London. He left Ibadan in 1954 and came to England where he enrolled for an English degree in the same year. It is the four years he spent at Leeds and later the eighteen months he was to spend at the Royal Court Theatre as a play reader that finally encouraged Soyinka wholeheartedly to pursue his interest in drama.

At Leeds, the then Professor of English, G. Wilson Knight, a major influence on Soyinka, helped him to

concentrate on drama and also to start the search for a definition of tragedy in Nigerian drama has become associated with each tragic play of Soyinka. Soyinka's search for the meaning of tragedy centres upon his attempts to identify the myths behind Yoruba gods, upon tragic pathos, and his attempts to link the Yoruba gods, Obatala and Ogun, with the Greek deities, Apollo and Dionysus. In fact Soyinka was later to choose Ogun as his patron-god as I discuss later in this chapter.

Perhaps it would be helpful to mention that it is more difficult to trace a chronological pattern of the development of Soyinka's writing career than it is to identify meanings in his plays. This is because with each new play, there is the inclusion of new and experimental elements with technique, style or language. It is even more significant to mention that it is only recently that Soyinka's early background and influence have become known to most scholars through the publication of his autobiography, ake: The Years of Childhood, in 1982.⁶ It is in this autobiography that the origins of the more famous Soyinka characters, such as Amope in The Trials of Brother Jero and Professor in The Road, are revealed in the real characters of Soyinka's mother and family friend, Adesina.

I will start my examination of the influences upon

Soyinka with his early childhood at Abeokuta, Isara and Ibadan because, whatever he later wrote about in England, revealed the importance of these early experiences. And mainly because Soyinka has been known to say that he is influenced by everything he sees, reads or come in contact with.

Soyinka's autobiography is the simplest and most direct work written by him. The first person singular technique with its strong narrative line presents the world in which Soyinka grew up with vivid images. This more than helps the reader and most of all the interested scholar of Soyinka to understand more about the background to his works which had hitherto remained a mystery to the non-Yoruba audience or reader. From his autobiography, it is evident that Soyinka's early plays such as The Lion and the Jewel, The Swamp Dwellers and The Strong Breed, were mainly influenced directly from his early childhood.

His parents were fond of him, he was especially close to his father whom he refers to as 'Essay' in his autobiography. This freedom to express himself freely to his father, without fear of rebuff or punishment, an uncommon happening between first sons and their fathers in Nigerian Societies, is the reason why Soyinka chose

satire as his main pre-occupation in his later political plays and why he is still not afraid to express himself against ^{the} government. This fearless attitude, which grew out of a free and open relationship with his parents, although it has led him to spend some years in prison, has also earned him the respect as the most outspoken and politically minded writer in Africa.

In the autobiography, it is his experience of growing up in Abeokuta at a period when the social history of Nigeria was changing and leading up to the period of the national independence that is most featured. Soyinka talks about the effects of the second world war on his society and its environment, and the reader is made to understand why Soyinka was determined to stop the Nigerian civil war and why there is a negative attitude to war in his much later play, Madmen and Specialist. But most of all it is the important relations and interconnections of the Soyinka family that help the reader to explain his autobiography. His unique experience of being related to the traditional rulers of Isara and Abeokuta, both powerful rulers in the period Soyinka writes about, further explains how the characters of Baroka in The Lion and Oba Danlola, in Kongi's Harvest first came to his mind.

He also learnt from his relatives in Isara about the social behaviours, the folk stories and mostly, the Yoruba traditional songs and dances he was later to use in

his plays. In his nostalgic journey back to his childhood, Soyinka fondly remembered the experience of going to Isara on visit when he says:

It was understood that the children of the Headmaster did not prostrate themselves in greeting; our chaperon always saw to that. The children of Headmaster on arrival for Christmas and New Year had to be taken round to every house whose inmates would be mortally offended otherwise. On the streets we met relations, family friends, gnarled and ancient figures of Isara, chiefs, King-makers, cult priests and priestesses, the elders of Osugbo who pierced one through and through with their eyes, then stood back to await the accustomed homage.⁷

From his dramatic descriptions of his parents and their very interesting characters, Soyinka's autobiography also presents the reader with the background to some of his characters in the play. His mother, whom he refers to as 'Wild Christian' because of her devoutness to the Christian religion, shows a glimpse of Amope's character in his play, The Trials of Brother Jero. His description of his mother almost applies to Amope's characterisation in the play.

... My own mother, for instance, was a terror. Not by nature, but she was a trader, gentle person, when she got fed up and wanted to collect her debts

from her customers - it is no
joke - suddenly she was transformed.⁸

One also sees the same process in his time at Abeokuta and Isara where he first encounters some of the other characters who were later to appear in his plays and poems. A good example can be seen in the figure of the Professor in The Road who is based on Adesina, a friend of the Soyinka family and who is also a deacon of the church. Like the Professor in The Road, Adesina embezzles church funds and is sent out of the Parish. Soyinka writes:

I never did discover how Adesina had lost his position with the Synod, and if he ever got it back. He left the house, like so many others before him, dejected, tearful. His eyes cast a last appealing look at Wild Christian who had stayed on the periphery of the discussion; normally she would not even remain there, but Synod somehow involved her as well since it was a church affair. To the man who could not be trusted with funds, I heard her play the same dutiful role I had now learnt to expect: "Well you know, it's the Headmaster's decision. I couldn't ask him to act against his conscience."⁹

In The Road, the hero, the Professor, lives in the presence of death, and he lives off the presence of death. He prepares his followers, Salubi, Samson and Kotonu for death - and by implication, for life. The benefit of the Professor's death which although helps his character to perform the

role of the teacher, guide or forerunner leaves the audience still searching for the meaning of life which the Professor refers to as the 'word' in the play. When he dies, the mystery of the embezzlement is never solved. There are similarities between the real life case of Adesina and the fictional case of the Professor. In the play, the characters Samson and Salubi who play the parts of Soyinka's parents in the real life case say:

SALUBI: What time he tief the church funds then?

SAMSON: He didn't stęal anything.

SALUBI:(Shrugs) One of these days I will find out where he hides the money.

SAMSON: You try. Professor will cockroach you like an old newspaper.

SALUBI: You think I fear all dat in nonsense?

SAMSON (Wistfully): The parish was really hot soup in those days. Politics no get dramatic pass am.¹⁰

Another way the traditional background of Soyinka's childhood has influenced his writing, was to present Soyinka with more serious characters from the Yoruba traditional beliefs as in the persons of Bukola and Mrs. B. who is her mother. In Bukola, Soyinka informs the readers in his autobiography of his first encounter with a major character in Yoruba traditional belief, the 'abiku' - a child who has

the strange powers to be born, die and be born again, inflicting the parents with emotional pain and depression. Soyinka describes his first encounter with an abiku thus:

Suddenly her eyes would turn inwards, showing nothing but the whites. She would do it for our benefit whenever we asked her...

... From her safe distance Tinu threatened to report to our parents if I encouraged her. Bukola merely replied that she could, but only if I was sure I could call her back. I was not very sure I could do that. Looking at her, I wondered how Mrs. B. coped with such a supernatural being who died, was re-born, died again and kept going and coming as often as she pleased. As we walked, the bells on her anklets jingled, driving off her companions from the other world who pestered her incessantly pleading that she rejoin them.¹¹

Such magical belief, strange as it may sound, reflects the traditional beliefs of the Yoruba which in most cases were meant to be believed wholly without questions. Soyinka reflects this same magical world in his plays. A Dance of the Forests, a most complex play in terms of structure portraying for the first time his tragic imagination, shows the fears Soyinka held for Nigeria and, indeed, for Africa in the sixties, the stage of independence

of the West African countries.

Soyinka finds a significant link with the recurrent cycle of the abiku and the ills of a developing society such as the one in Nigeria. But, as with the recurrent tragic journey back and forth, for within the context of the abiku, it is tragic to survive death. Soyinka does not see any hope for the future of countries in the Third World such as Nigeria. The pessimistic ending of the play, the complex structure and the language conspire to make it one of the least favourite plays of Soyinka. But the abiku theme is well presented in the play. There is the continued empathy of Soyinka for Mrs. B. who is portrayed as Dead Woman and abiku or Half-Child in the play who plays the part of Bukola. As in the real life of Soyinka's autobiography, Soyinka fails to solve the mystery of the abiku even though Eshuoro, the devil god, presides over the discussion.

HALF-CHILD : I found an egg, smooth as a
sea-pebble.

ESHUORO: (gleefully) Took it home with
him, Warmed it in his bed of rushes
And in the night the egg was hatched
And the serpent came and swallowed him.
(The Half-Child begins to spin round
and round, till he is quite giddy.
Stops suddenly).

HALF-CHILD: Still I fear the fated bearing
Still I circle yawning wombs.

DEAD WOMAN: Better not know the bearing
Better not to bear the weaning
I who grow the branded navel
Shudder at the visitation
Shall my breast again be severed
Again and yet again be severed
From its right of sanctity?
Child, your hand is pure as sorrow
Free me of the endless burden,
Let this gourd, let this gourd
Break beyond my hearth....¹²

The parallel between the Dead Woman and Nigerian society is quite clear both being trapped in a recurrent cycle of ill happenings and continued sorrow. The truth of such a statement has been proven by Nigerian history since independence and since the play's first performance in 1960, for there has been a record of five bloody coups and a civil war in which many lives were lost. Soyinka himself, like Demoke the artist in the play, has had to bear the burden of the artist, the gifted forseer of the society, and furthermore like Demoke, the artists, is spurred on by Ogun the Yoruba god of creation, yet is also caught in the web woven for the artist in the process of expressing his inspired and gifted weapon, the gift of seeing and speaking.

But whatever specific traces of Soyinka's background can be distinguished in his autobiography as an influence on his works, it is the Yoruba culture in totality that has

served as the predominant influence upon them. This has been noted by Abiola Irele:

Yoruba culture has played an integrative role in the process of acculturation which all African societies have undergone, in such a way that this process can be seen today as one largely of adaptation, the adjustment of the native culture with the foreign, the harmonization of two ways of life into a new entity.

The integrative role of Yoruba culture in the situation of contact created by the advent of Western culture is fully reflected in the work of the Yoruba writer, not only at the level of content analysis of individual works, which reveals the direct working-out of the process, but more significantly in the pattern of evolution established by the interconnections between the various levels of literary expression in Yorubaland.¹³

Irele's perceptive general comment about Yoruba culture can be applied to Soyinka's.

Through the use of myth Soyinka has allowed Yoruba culture to predominate over Western Form and conventions. Yet, at the same time, it is Soyinka's use of myths which has provoked the critical tone of the new, radical critics

in Nigeria who search for the weak points in Soyinka's style and complexity of meaning. Soyinka has concentrated on the Yoruba myths with which he is well acquainted and which, he says,

.... arise from man's attempt to externalise and communicate his inner intuition.¹⁴

When he uses myths, it is in an individual way, one in which the playwright does not aim at popularising old myths, but one which celebrates them while seeking for possible new meanings within the world created for his characters. It is no wonder therefore that Soyinka says:

...when I use myths it is necessary for me to blend it to my requirements. I don't believe in carbon-copies in any art form. You have to select what you want from the traditional sources and distort it if necessary.¹⁵

But this distortion, selection and individualising, no matter how cleverly reflected to beautiful, rhetorical language, leaves the audience, and especially the non-Nigerian or Yoruba reader, very confused. Such a reader or audience is forced into an unnecessary search for a grandiose meaning behind the myth and hence it becomes mystified or accrues meanings that Soyinka may not want

attributed to it.

But when all is said and done, Soyinka remains the first Nigerian playwright to include myths in his works, and consequently one is able to understand the reasons for the occasional fault one may find in his use of myths. It is this very use of myth that has fascinated Western critics and scholars and led them to believe that Soyinka has always written his plays out of a close relationship with his Yoruba culture: a fact that cannot be disproved. It is therefore clear to the reader of Martin Banham's article 'Playwright/Producer/Actor/Academic: Wole Soyinka in the Nigerian theatre' why the writer, in trying to find the reasons for Soyinka's dominance, continues to return to the aspect of culture - drawn from Soyinka's use of myths. In the article, Banham proposes three possible reasons:

- (a) Soyinka has worked within the context of the living theatre, and not as poet isolated from his audience.
- (b) Soyinka's subjects have been taken directly from the convulsions of his own society and his own times.
- (c) His theatrical 'method' has been sufficiently recognisable in international terms to draw attention to himself and his culture.¹⁶

There has been a reciprocal effect in Soyinka's use of myths, for myths have helped him in his personal discovery of traditional values and in this assessment of the relationship between artistic personality and the power of the collective consciousness. Although three possible reasons suggested by Banham agree with the early works of Soyinka, his later plays have continued to leave such reasons to question.

While Soyinka has helped to popularize most of the Igbalo myths which may have become unknown even to some Igbalo men, let alone to his Western audience within himself. A type of identity within himself. A type of identity which has developed the playwright's ideology and provided a base upon which Soyinka has built his writing experience. He first acknowledged this effect in an essay for G. Wilson Knight titled 'The Fourth Stage' when he wrote:

The persistent search for the meaning of tragedy, for a re-definition in terms of cultural or private experience is, at the least, man's recognition of certain areas of depth-experience which are not satisfactorily explained by general aesthetic theories; and, of all the subjective unease that is aroused by man's creative insights, that wrench within the human psyche which we vaguely define as 'tragedy' is the most insistent voice that bids us return to our own sources. There, illusively, hovers being and non-being

his dubiousness as essence and matter
intimations of transience and eternity,
and the harrowing drives between uniqueness
and Oneness.¹⁷

This element of rediscovery through myth has also exerted a great influence on the new playwrights, most especially the new radical ones, such as Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan. For in engaging in the re-definition of self within the traditional values of collective consciousness of the Yoruba culture, they have been able to write plays which have progressed both in the use of myth, and also in the dissemination of those myths to an audience that was in danger of forgetting their mythological inheritance. Osofisan, one of the new playwrights chosen for this study, in trying to evaluate Soyinka's influence on the new breed of playwrights in his article 'Tiger on the Stage: Wole Soyinka', states the fact clearly:

Soyinka has helped to reintegrate
us into the world of our ancestors.
Ogun, his personal patron god, is no
longer a pagan abstraction, nor are the
rest of the opulent Yoruba pantheon.¹⁸

Soyinka processes myths in his work. This makes for wide scope of possible meanings and gives the works an intellectual quality which is sometimes missed by even intelligent native audiences.

In Soyinka's writing, his use of myths has always been coupled with his employment of the traditional Yoruba cosmology. The first evidence that Soyinka wanted to evolve a dramatic theory of his own, first occurred in his essay 'The Fourth Stage'. In this, Soyinka travels back into Yoruba cosmology and the world of myths in order to find comparisons with the Greek theory of tragedy, or with the Appolonian and Dionysian theory of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. Perhaps before going deeply into Soyinka's theory of dramatic tragedy, it would be helpful to mention that this theory was formulated under the influence of G. Wilson Knight and Nietzsche.

John Arden's statement is fulfilled when he says that:

Western official culture - as taught in our universities and at the Royal Court Theatre - has nothing of lasting benefit to say to Africans or Indians or anyone else in the Third World. The most that can be learned, I suspect, is some degree of technique. Wole Soyinka has learnt this - and learnt it very well.¹⁹

This influence was also enhanced by his knowledge and experience of Yoruba myth. The dramatic 'theory' which Soyinka evolved from these influences, added respectability to Nigerian and African drama in the eyes of foreign

scholars. Because through the 'theory' African and Nigerian drama could be studied along-side the Western theories of drama. Soyinka's 'theory' had also thrown an intellectual 'light' on Nigerian or African drama which up till then (late '70s) had been considered as primitive entertainment by the foreign scholars. But as he developed his theories, he became further removed away from his original audience.

This issue of the influence of 'Western official culture' on Soyinka leads one to mention his experience at Leeds where he first came directly into contact with an English school of drama and ideas. Enrolling at Leeds in 1954, where he was to spend the next three years, Soyinka arrived at a time when the University was particularly active in theatre and drama offering many productions of classical and modern European plays. Also, G. Wilson Knight, whose position as a most respectable, imaginative, but as Soyinka was to later become, controversial dramatic critic was already well established. Impressed by Soyinka's swiftness and originality of mind, Knight can be said to have influenced Soyinka in those formative years at Leeds with what Gerald Moore refers to as:

his insistence in his criticism
upon penetrating always to the structure
of symbolism underlying dramatic ritual.²⁰

Knight's influence can be traced in the essay 'The Fourth Stage', in which Soyinka sought the meaning of tragedy for the Yoruba in terms of dramatic symbolism and 'the poetry of action', terms already familiar to readers of Knight's criticism of the plays of Shakespeare or Ibsen. And the effect of Knight's influence is made apparent in Soyinka's close analysis of Knight's theory while seeking a representation of such a theory within his Yoruba culture.

In discussing the dramatic theory of Soyinka which was to revolutionise the conventions and outlook of Nigerian traditional entertainments and was to signal the birth of a modern Nigerian drama, one must examine the point of influence and departure from the dramatic theories of both Nietzsche and Knight. Nietzsche and Knight reconsider the link between drama and ritual which was originally suggested by Aristotle, and develop the concept of the effect of a play on an audience which contrasts with that of Soyinka. In Aristotle's theory, put forward in The Poetics, the inclusion of the audience in the performance of ritual drama occurred in the catharsis of pity and fear for the protagonist in his struggle with gods. An empathy felt for the protagonist by the audience. The protagonist is presented as being weakened by his human error or flaw which the audience share, and yet faces a

pre-determined struggle with a higher being, an experience they fear and pity him for. Nietzsche was to develop this idea of audience effect further by the inclusion of his idea that for the experience of drama to be achieved in performance, the individual had to achieve a 'subliminal perception' of a communal consciousness. This type of perception was to be achieved as the individual member of the audience related the experience of the protagonist to his internal psychological conflict both as an individual and a member of the society for whom the play is being shown. Knight accepts Nietzsche's theory but extends the relationship of the audience and the play beyond Nietzsche's exclusive concern with Greek ritual and drama to consider Elizabethan, neo-classic, Wagnerian and modern drama. Knight also discusses ritual in psychoanalytic terms concentrating on psychosexual conflict.

Ritual and drama are agents, as civilization advances the agency becomes more psychological but its action persists.²¹

Knight also argues that Nietzsche's two principles correspond on the human plane to the sexes, female and male, and can be found at work within the context as well as form of Greek tragedy. Therefore the protagonist, as is the case with some of Ibsen's protagonists, need not be a .

male character, yet the same amount of relationship must exist between the audience and the tragic moment of the protagonist exclusive concern with the relationship between ritual and tragedy. His concern was more metaphorical, he disregarded the historical link between the experience of ritual and the experience of drama and stressed most vehemently, the importance of the audience-effect in a typical Nigerian ritual performance. And he developed even further Knight's approach to the modern drama of Ibsen redefining the experience of drama in relationship to revolutionary or liberating social consciousness. This idea was to be influential on contemporary Nigerian playwrights. Ann B. Davis in her article, 'The dramatic theories of Soyinka', an article in which she sought the differences between Soyinka's theory and those of his influences, says that Soyinka's theory:

is a theory of drama which focuses on contemporary drama, while Nietzsche develops a theory of Greek tragedy, and Knight develops a theory of drama based on a reconsideration of Greek tragedy. ... The theory is also unique in that it focuses on the dynamics of social and psychological processes within the dramatic experience only in terms of individual of psychological processes within the dramatic experience, whereas the theories of Nietzsche and Knight are concerned with the dramatic experience only in terms of individual psychological processes.²²

Soyinka's dramatic theory develops out of his Yoruba background. It is in Yoruba culture and cosmology that one finds the similarities Soyinka was looking for, to fit in with his theory of drama. As the first step towards seeking his redefinition of Nigerian ritual drama, Soyinka disregarded the folk entertainment form mentioned and examined in chapter one. This may be because he was concentrating on ritual and tragedy or that he did not consider folk entertainment serious enough to be mentioned in his dramatic theory. Or a more acceptable explanation could be that he was again illustrating his freedom as the pioneer of such an idea to select what materials he needed from the Yoruba cultural traditions. In this sense, one can argue that Soyinka's theory of drama which concentrated on tragedy alone is incomplete; for drama, even in the history of Greek drama has two sides to its development, tragedy and comedy. One might be too hasty to criticize Soyinka's disregard of comedy, but his continuous pre-occupation with the serious tragic situation of the Nigerian society in his plays forces one to accept the fact that for Soyinka, comedy either does not exist, or if it does it does so merely to entice the audience into his biting, sadistic and bitter satire.

Soyinka's theory was also to take him into the heart of the Yoruba mythic world, in which he found the myths of the hero-gods most useful and appropriate.

For his joy is great at finding the fitting examples in Yoruba culture for the Greek hero-gods:

Such is Apollo's resemblance to the serene art of Obatala the pure unsullied one, to the 'essence' idiom of his rituals, that it is tempting to place him at the end of a creative axis with Ogun, in a parallel evolutionary relationship to Nietzsche's Dionysos-Apollo brotherhood.²³

To two Yoruba hero-gods, Obatala, the god of creation, and Ogun, the god of iron, creative urge, instinct and the protector of the hunters, Soyinka was to add a third, Shango, the Yoruba god of thunder. For Soyinka the three gods were to form the three symbolic differences in the use of gods in his plays. Soyinka himself explains their importance when he says:

The three deities that concern us here are Ogun, Obatala and Shango. They are represented in drama by the passage-rites of the hero-gods, a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonise with his environment, physical, social and psychic.²⁴

Wanting his Yoruba tragedy to plunge straight into the 'chthonic realm' and 'psychic cycle', Soyinka chose

Ogun as the best example of the three gods to carry his ideas through. In Ogun, Soyinka had found the resemblance to Greek god Dionysus. Firstly, because Ogun possesses a type of frenzy which could be compared to Dionysiac frenzy. Secondly, Ogun possessed the revolutionary grandeur which the other Yoruba gods lacked, and thirdly, but most importantly, to Soyinka, Ogun was the first actor of the three Yoruba gods. This was mainly because of his spiritual re-assembling which did not require a 'coping with actuality' in the ritual enactment of his devotees. This in turn made Ogun the possessor of the final step towards annihilation, the unresisting mouthpiece of gods and also the mediant voice of the gods, but one who stood as it were beside himself, 'observant, understanding, creating'.

Soyinka's theory, never formulated or even contemplated before by any African, made him the most talked about intellectual artist of the African world. Most of his Western critics do not understand his theory, in fact no one can boast of a complete understanding of Soyinka's theory except, probably, Soyinka himself. This is a very essential aspect in the understanding of Soyinka's works. Because the theory provides a 'key' to his more complex plays such as 'A Dance of the Forests.' This is a failing ^{in itself} / which leads his audience to suffer because Soyinka's

theory is too obscure. In the development of Nigerian drama, he has swung Nigerian drama out of reach of any other type of African drama. Soyinka more than anyone else had maintained the lead in the development of Nigerian drama which Axworthy and his members of staff started at the University of Ibadan. In Soyinka's development, and in the birth of a new and modern drama, the Nigerian was to be proud to say that he had a dramatic experience which could justly be compared to the Greek dramatic experience. A claim which can be justified because both Greek and Nigerian drama are rooted in a current and meaningful mythological system. But Soyinka, in formulating the new theory of modern Nigerian drama had changed most of the traditional theatrical conventions. In the highly selective process of evolving his theory, Soyinka had disregarded the useful and traditional conventions. In the highly selective process of evolving his theory, Soyinka had disregarded the useful and traditional conventions attributed to the folk entertainment and to the person of the narrator. In starting from the world of the hero-gods, Soyinka had left the world of the living for the cosmic one of the gods. But while attributing the benefit of the first actor to his patron-god, Ogun, Soyinka had neglected the fact that human-beings make the world of the hero-gods come alive. And again I must insist that in evaluating Soyinka's plays in terms

of Soyinka's theory, no matter how intellectual and progressive it may appear to be, one can only talk about half of Yoruba culture.

Since Soyinka concentrated on tragedy, he evolved a new type of ritual theatre : one in which theatre was to be seen as an arena in which man attempts to come to terms with himself. The first function of Soyinka's new ritual theatre was to establish a spatial medium not merely as a physical area for the acting of plays, but also as a vehicle in which simulated events could be carried through as a manageable contraction of the cosmic envelope. Within which man- no matter how deeply buried in his consciousness and will to survive, was afraid to exist. Therefore, man sought ways through which he could escape into a better world in which his hero-gods exist and serve as examples.

Soyinka believed that the audience should feel anxiety for the protagonist. An anxiety which Soyinka refers to as the 'fundamental anxiety' in order to differentiate this form of anxiety to what he calls the 'technical anxiety'. The type that evolves pity and fear for the Greek protagonist. To further differentiate the two types of anxieties. Soyinka defines the 'fundamental anxiety' as an experience of an individual feeling through anxiety which makes the individual part of a communal

entity. To effect the transformation, the individual must surrender himself into a state of 'self-submergence in a universal essence', where instead of the individual feeling of fear or pity for the protagonist, there is a joint communal feeling from the audience. When achieved, Soyinka had recreated one of the prevailing conventions of ritual entertainment. Consciously, Soyinka uses this as a set aim when he writes his tragic plays, but it remains debatable whether unconsciously, such similarities are inevitable when given the finite number of dramatic technique and dramatic experience. In Myth, Literature and the African World, Soyinka explains the basis of the anxiety:

Well, ritual theatre has an additional, far more fundamental anxiety. Indeed, it is correct to say that the technical anxiety even where it exists - after all it does exist; the element of creative form is never absent even in the most so-called primitive consciousness - so, where it does exist, it is never so profoundly engaged as with a modern manifestation. The real unvoiced fear is: will this protagonist survive confrontation with forces that exist within the dangerous area of transformation? Entering that microcosmos involves a loss of individuation, a self-submergence in universal essence. It is an act undertaken on behalf of the community, and the welfare of that protagonist is inseparable from that of the total community.²⁵

Whatever one thinks Soyinka's theory of ritual theatre is, it is how he has been able to apply such theoretical views and how well he has handled inherited conventions in his plays that is most important. And this is the aspect I shall now concentrate upon.

The first of Soyinka's inherited material from the traditional Yoruba culture are myths. As earlier mentioned in this chapter, myths form the basis of Soyinka's writing. In their use in some of his plays, especially the tragic plays, Soyinka is able to instil the tragic presence into his protagonist. Apart from the myth of the hero-gods which fascinated Soyinka and is very helpful is an understanding of his theory of drama, the Yoruba myth of life after death is another pre-occupation of Soyinka in his plays such as A Dance of the Forests and a much later play, Death and the King's Horseman. Soyinka has been able to find the Yoruba myth of the willed-death, very good material for his tragic plays. It is best to start this examination of Soyinka's major use of traditional mythic materials with the myth of the willed-death because Soyinka's early play The Strong Breed is based on this myth.

In The Strong Breed, Soyinka focuses on the animal scapegoat tradition of the Yorubas. This tradition was based on the killing of a scapegoat to wash away the sins and the early ills of a community. For Soyinka, the

scapegoat myth possessed the aura of the tragic and dramatic protagonist. In his handling of the myth, Soyinka re-applies the myth and also adapts it in order to achieve a reexamination of the scapegoat myth within a contemporary African or Yoruba context.

In the play, Eman, the village dispenser is the second stranger after Ifada, the hunchback cripple, in the village. He is in love with Sunma, the daughter of Jaguna a village chief. The village is in the period of celebrating the annual year of purification, in which a stranger is beaten and made to symbolically carry the sins of the village. The play begins in the evening of the night of the ritual beating. The play starts with the two main characters, Sunma and Eman. Sunma, aware that her lover was the second stranger in the village, is uneasy about the night. She tries to get her lover out of the village before night falls. But Eman is determined to stay in the village for the night in order to witness the ceremony. But as the play unfolds; the audience learn that it is the crippled boy called Ifada who is the choice of the village. Sunma tries to make her lover heed to her attempts to convince him to leave Ifada alone. During the night of the celebration, Ifada runs away before he is fully prepared for the ritual beating. Ifada takes refuge at Eman's house. The chiefs in charge of the

celebration, Oroge and Jaguna, chase Ifada to Eman's house. And in their exchange of words Eman dares the chiefs to pick another carrier, in fact he dares the village men to give themselves up as carriers. The chiefs, in order to punish Eman for his abuse and his questioning of their tradition, pick on him the only other stranger. Eman again escapes before he is fully prepared for the ritual celebration: he runs off and is chased about in the village until the chiefs set a trap for him. He is killed and the purification festival is fulfilled.

In adapting the myth of the scapegoat into what Soyinka claims to be a tragic play, Soyinka uses the technique where he saves the only explanation for Eman's destiny as the carrier for the end of the play. This is because even during a production, the audience questions the lack of reasoning on the part of the villagers in wanting to get rid of their only dispenser. Eldred Durosimi Jones explains the choice of Eman, the only village dispenser, as the carrier of the village evils in a symbolic sense. One that negates any form of reality.

To Jones;

Eman's sacrifice is modelled
on the sacrifice of Christ,
whose death is recalled by a
number of subtle references.

Like Christ, Eman is both
teacher and healer.²⁷

The problem with such an analogy is that throughout the play there is no evident significance and conscious awareness of the playwright making such comparisons. Jones' comparisons with Christ, therefore, become a way in which the critic has chosen to explain one of the many inadequacies of Soyinka's play. As the play unfolds, one is able to see that, as with The Lion and the Jewel, Soyinka was prepared to go against in favour of the traditional values of the community. The reason why Eman, the educated man, becomes a carrier is because he belongs to the family of 'strong breeds', chosen to be sacrificial carriers. In the chase scene where Eman is to be caught and used as the scapegoat, the crucial point of the play is made. Eman emerges on stage wounded and dripping sweat and blood, as if caught in a web of time he meets his father who is referred to in the play as Old Man. It is Old Man who tells Eman why he must die.

OLD MAN: Come nearer... we will never meet
again, son. Not on this side of
the flesh. What I do not know is
whether you will return to take my
place.

EMAN: I will never come back.

OLD MAN: Do you know what you are saying?
Ours is a strong breed that can
take this boat to the river year.

after year and wax stronger on
it I have taken down each year's
evils for over twenty years. I
hoped you would follow me.

EMAN : My life here died with Omae.

OLD MAN: Omae died giving birth to your child
and you think the world is ended.
Eman, my pain did not begin when Omae
died. Since you sent her to stay with
me son, I lived with the burden of
knowing that this child would die bearing
your son.

EMAN: Father...

OLD MAN: Don't you know that it was the same
with you? And me? No woman survives
the bearing of the strong ones. Son,
it is not the mouth of the boaster that
says he belongs to the strong breed.
It is the tongue that it red with pain
and black with sorrow. Twelve years you
were away my son, and for those twelve
years I knew the love of an old man of
his daughter and the pain of a man help-
lessly awaiting his loss.²⁸

In the technique of inserting an explanatory scene within
the play, Soyinka succeeds in adapting the myth in such a way
that the death of the protagonist is accepted by the audience

who now know that being educated does not have anything to do with a chosen destiny, like the one Eman has. Like the Eleshin Oba, the King's Horseman in Death and the King's Horseman, Eman must die like the father before him and like his son by the dead Omae. In using the myth of the scapegoat in his play, Soyinka also seeks for ways through which the audience may feel an empathy for the protagonist when at the end of the play the two chiefs, having killed Eman and performed the sacrificial rites with his body, are taken aback with the reaction of the village people who are supposed to be happy after the ritual has been done. The chiefs, commenting on the faces of fear and guilt of the villagers say:

JAGUNA: 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?²⁰

The tragic effects go even deeper, for the action of Jaguna the chief, in killing the lover of his daughter, breaks all relationship between father and child of his family. The greatest use of the traditional materials Soyinka employs in the play is achieved when the play is performed in the round and with dim lights all the time. This enables

a transformation among the audience into the world presented in the play. So that at the end of the performance, the audience, having been so involved in the play, are left feeling empty and dissatisfied. In The Strong Breed Soyinka disregards reality, despite the fact that he aims to show reality in order to create his much professed change with his works. Soyinka does not name the village perhaps because he intends to allow his audience to situate the village in any part of Nigeria. But the refusal to situate it, creates the difficulty which arises when attempts are made at a critical study. Not helped by Igbo names and the Yoruba culture presented in the play, the new radical playwrights and critics have been led to believe that Soyinka neglects the existence of reality in this play. An argument profounded against the play, is that Soyinka blurs-out the sense of awareness of the villagers in terms of the importance of a dispenser. He weighs a need to survive against tradition and allows tradition to over-rule such need. The village chief, Jaguna, in selecting the dispenser as the carrier and subsequently giving orders for his death, does not acknowledge the existence of any type of law and order - not even of the local police authority. This presentation in itself is unrealistic to the true Nigerian society. And the new radical critics reject such a play for its inability to portray the true

Yoruba society or whatever society the playwright intended. The respectability he gives to tradition by killing the only enlightened man in the village, is blamed on Soyinka's attempts to show the foreign reader or member of the audience, not from the same background a fascinating, magical, even beautiful but primitive, lawless and cannibalistic world - a type of world which the blackman has continued over the years to reject. A world which Soyinka pretended to know so well is his early plays, but a world which, now enlightened, questions Soyinka's reasons for such a portrayal.

The next aspect of Soyinka's handling of inherited materials is his ability to put across such materials in his play. This has to do with the skill and technique which Soyinka has learnt over the years while writing and also which must have started or taken greater root in Soyinka's writing career with his experience as a play-reader at the Royal Court Theatre. It is hard to define what Soyinka's particular duties were as a play-reader. But as the title of the job suggests, there is no doubt that Soyinka must have read so many good scripts of some of the most radical plays and playwrights in England in the eighteen months he spent with the Royal Court Theatre. He must also have read many bad scripts and so could have learnt something that way. There is also no doubt that Soyinka saw

so many plays in the other numerous theatre halls in London. And also as play-reader, stage-manager, prompt boy, props man, Soyinka was gaining enough experience to last him in the years in which he was to write his best plays.

Soyinka's unique quality of technique stems from his refusal to be branded with any type of ideological stance. For him he was a writer who wanted change or to effect it. And any work of art which he wrote was a pioneer work which was opening new horizons of the human mind and the 'human intellect' and such work was by nature a force for change - a medium for change. Again it was a way which Soyinka wanted to use to avoid being pinned down to one form of style or technique. He wanted each new play to be an experiment of its own, and also an outlet for his ideas. He thought he had evolved a complex enough theory of tragedy and so did not bother himself with new ideas and political ideology which would only limit his writing scope. It must also be mentioned that why the question of ideology is important in this examination is that during the period Soyinka wrote his early plays, (late '50s and 60s) other African poets, novelists and politicians such as Leopold Senghor and Kwame Nkrumah were engaged in the definition of self. Soyinka did not want to be dragged into such definition. He thought he had achieved enough

self-identity in his journey back to his roots while searching for the meaning of tragedy. In an interview during that period concerning his thought and personal reaction to the non-existence of a type of ideology in his early works, Soyinka replied:

I would rather not be bracketed with those pseudo-Stalinists-Leninists and Maoists who are totally unproductive and merely protect themselves behind a whole barrage of terminologies which bear no relation to the immediate needs of society.³⁰

But as the 70s and '80s were to come and, as I shall examine in the next chapter on the rise of the new playwrights such an ideological stance gave Soyinka problems with the new radical Marxist critics.

Soyinka's non-conformity with any type of ideological stance as earlier mentioned, enabled him to use his Western inherited technique freely. It is most difficult to attempt to find a trace of Soyinka's major influences in terms of playwriting technique without running the risk of literalism and pedantry. It is even more difficult to point to one playwright as a major influence. For Soyinka if anything, has emerged as the greatest selector of experience and materials among African writers. Therefore, one is forced to examine Soyinka's technique in

materials as they appear in his plays.

The first technique in transmitting his materials is the use of language. It must be clear here that Soyinka writes all his plays and literary works in the English language. Soyinka's language is affected by the form of drama which ^{he} has chosen to write. This is the tragic form. And in Soyinka's tragedy, transformation and transition is most prominent as the protagonist must evolve round in the three worlds of the living, dead, and the unborn before the end of the tragic action. It may be said therefore, that as the protagonist is transformed, so are the levels of the language of Soyinka. Most of Soyinka's tragic characters come from, and belong to, a long-lost historical epoch. Therefore, when they emerge in Soyinka's play and are made to speak in the English language, the level of speech and dialogue must be made to match the rich original Yoruba idiomatic expression which is often archaic and difficult.

Soyinka has the rare gift of what the Western critics call 'the mastery of the English language'. In such a translation involved with the speeches or dialogue of Soyinka's characters into English, he has had to resort to the use of verse in most cases. For verse comes in either when the playwright is dealing with high sentiments as in the trance-like dance to death of the King's Horseman in

Death and the King's Horseman, or in great affairs of state, as the angry chants of the royal dirgeman in Kongi's Harvest in which the verse of the chant singer informs the audience of the state of mind of the king, or in long soliloquies which Soyinka integrates into short dialogue hooks: where the character involved in the soliloquy is only answered back by punctuations from the crowd or music. It must be understood that all these forms of verse usages by Soyinka are outside any realistic contemporary use of language by today's common Yoruba man.

In understanding Soyinka's use of language, and how he has been able to transmit his intended ideas to the audience, one must understand that Soyinka sees language within the tragic meaning of Ogun, his patron-god. This means that language must be poetic, highly charged, symbolic and mythembryonic. In the ritual theatre Soyinka posits, language:

... reverts in religious rites to its
pristine existence, eschewing the sterile
limits of particularisation
Language is still the embryo of thought
and music where myth is daily companion,
for there language is constantly mytho-
poetic. Language in Yoruba tragic music
therefore undergoes transformation through
myth into a secret ('masonic) correspondence
with the symbolism of tragedy, a symbolic
medium of spiritual emotions within the
heart of the choric union.³¹

It is only in the understanding of Soyinka's use of language within these levels that his characters, the more difficult ones such as the Professor in The Road Forest Father in A Dance of the Forests, the Mendicants in Madmen and Specialists come to life within the world Soyinka creates for them. And it is only when they come alive that Soyinka's drama is understood and enjoyed and Martin Esslin's remark that:

...the need to resort to verse, or later, to poetic prose, has provided Wole Soyinka with a powerful incentive and a marvellous training in evolving a language all his own which has now, when he is at the height of his powers, made him into one of the finest poetic playwrights who have ever written in English. It is high time that this is recognised.³²

becomes a genuine commendation. But the irony is that for most of the illiterate Nigerian local audience whom Soyinka writes from their culture, the characters never come alive. This may be that they lack the intellectual mind required for the understanding of Soyinka's plays, even when the characters speak in prose. Or that Soyinka's works, as the new radical critics suggest, are written for a select few who are regarded as the members of the 'bourgeois class'. Language, it must be said, has remained Soyinka's main problem with his audience, local Nigerian actors and even educated scholars. This accounts

for the limited popularity Soyinka's plays have with the Nigerian audience, and more recently, the audience outside Nigeria. For example, a review by Dick Saunders of the Chicago performance of The Road, directed by Wole Soyinka and performed by the actors of the Goodman Theatre in May 1984, mentions symbols and language as the main problem toward the audience understanding of the play. In the review Dick Saunders aptly remarks:

The language is enough of a challenge that the playbill includes a glossary. The most powerful moments are the rare ones when words give way to the ritual of throbbing drums and flying feet.³³

Soyinka's use of the plot and structure in his plays have remained his greatest influence on the new playwrights whom I shall later examine. For Soyinka's plots are usually short and straightforward, except in the case of A Dance of the Forests. The plots always reflect the social point of view of the playwright. A play such as Kongi's Harvest can be said to be about the conflict of tradition with new forms of governments in Africa, especially the dictatorship governments. Hence in such a short statement, the play can be understood with the social level and political level the playwright intends.

Soyinka's structure is not the conventional type of five acts or Ibsen's three act plays. If there is

any trace of influence from Bertolt Brecht at all, it is in the episodic structure of each scene. This style enables Soyinka to be able to rewrite, delete or change scenes during a run of a play or during productions: an element which is most useful to him because he is then able to include current political issues into his plays.

Soyinka also employs the technique of flash backs, mime, play within a play, role changing for the character, in such a way that within each act of his plays which Soyinka calls 'parts', he is able to include much more materials than he could have had, had he written the plays in the conventional acts and scenes structure. In the mime and role changing technique, Soyinka is able to include in his experimental theatre the inherited influence of the story-telling tradition of the traditional theatrical entertainment of the Yoruba people.

By the time Soyinka returned to Nigeria in 1959, his theory of drama had already been formed, some of his more popular plays such as The Trials of Brother Jero, The Swamp Dwellers, The Strong Breed and The Lion and the Jewel, had been written and were being prepared for their first showing in Nigeria. Soyinka himself had arrived with such high level of reputation from England. He had published, and had his plays performed at the Royal Court Theatre. His experience was most fitting for the person to

take over from Geoffrey Axworthy when he was to leave. But before Soyinka took over as head of the school of Brama, he had first started his play groups, a tradition which he had picked up from working at the Royal Court Theatre, and which he was to teach the new playwrights to be discussed later. His major influences on Nigerian drama was to start on his arrival. Osofisan, an actor in his group, a student of his, and later to become one of the new playwrights mentioned in this study lists the stages of Soyinka's influences when he says:

Before Soyinka, there was no professional theatre company to undertake the production of plays in English, even though companies like those of Hubert Ogunda, which acted their plays in the vernacular were flourishing. To fill this vacuum, Soyinka founded, on his return from Britain, the 1960 Mask, and later the Orisun theatre, in which considerable numbers of contemporary actors, writers, and directors had their first professional training and experience.³⁴

And in the dramatic theory of Soyinka's tragedy and his Ogun patron-god image, Soyinka had

helped to reintegrate us into the world of our ancestors. Ogun his patron-god, is no longer a pagan abstraction.³⁵

Soyinka also helped in the forming of writer's unions and workshops, especially the Mbari Center in Ibadan in which the function was like that of the Royal Court Theatre, a center which was established for the benefit of new writers.

1959 to 1966 were very good and productive years for Soyinka. In his new status, which was one of respect for his intellectual and young powerful mind, Soyinka began to have a new energy which the youths could associate with. He then became the spokesman of the new generation. Soyinka was then led to believe, with the impact he was making with his Newspaper articles, that he had acquired a new power within the Nigerian society. A power whose illusions were wiped away when the military government put Soyinka in detention in 1967. It was this period of absence that evolved a literary revolution in which all the fine qualities of Soyinka's writing career mentioned here began to be questioned. As I am going on to show in the next chapter, Soyinka in later years has lost touch with the local audience, but he has remained a major part of the development of contemporary Nigerian drama. But it must be noted that as with all pioneers of new ideas, Soyinka had done his best and as he still lives today, continues to develop Nigerian drama. For in him, Nigeria had finally found the synthesis of both the Western culture and the traditional theatrical entertainment which

Axworthy and the other members of staff of the oldest drama school in Africa had started.

NOTES

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24. Ibid. p. 1.
25. Soyinka, Myth. p. 42.
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CHAPTER THREE

POST-SOYINKAN PLAYWRIGHTS : EMERGENCE
AND NEW FORMS

This chapter is concerned with the introduction of the four post-Soyinkan playwrights. The chapter also attempts to find the emergence of these playwrights, their works, and contributions to modern Nigerian drama.

By the time Soyinka was put in detention in September 1967 because of his activities in trying to stop the ensuing Civil War and also because of his published newspaper article entitled 'Let's think about the aftermath of this War', a big gap was created in the African literary scene which new playwrights were to fill. This is because before Soyinka's detention, he had achieved a type of eminence as the leading African man of letters. In the genres of poetry and prose, Soyinka had excelled all other poets with his much talked about poem, 'Telephone Conversation', in which Soyinka made mention of the plight of the African abroad. In 1970, after his release from detention, Soyinka also started the new wave of Nigerian films by making a film version of his play, *Kongi's Harvest*, with the American Calpenny Film Company, Soyinka, showing his brilliance as an actor, played the starring role, *Kongi*.

But with all these achievements, which included his publication of his prison poems and prison notes, The Man Died, Soyinka's problems with his plays, especially in

terms of the audience assimilation, continued. The failure to be clear in his plays of the intended themes was not helped by his prison experience. His continuous search for the meaning of tragedy, and the prison experience while in solitary confinement, made Soyinka begin to evolve a language and a means of saying things or ways of writing about his subject matters with an understanding known to him alone. The levels of symbolism in his earlier difficult plays such as The Road and A Dance of the Forests, became even easier when compared to his post-war plays such as Madmen and Specialists. Soyinka's refusal to simplify the use of language and symbolic meanings, showed itself most clearly in the almost obsessive determination of the playwright to write from an individual point of view what was becoming a form of engaged art. This form of engaged art led to the loss of audience understanding of Soyinka's plays. In speeches such as this:

I would say again that I'm not usually conscious of the audience for whom I am writing.¹

Soyinka continued to disregard the importance and the effect of his works on the Nigerian audiences. With his absence from the Nigerian literary scene during the period he was in detention, his self-imposed exile and loss of pre-eminence allowed new writers such as Zulu Sofola,

Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan, to begin to enter on to the scene.

Although it is difficult to place a date on the emergence of the post-Soyinka writers, 1970 would be a very considerable date for a recognition of the new forms of theatre in Nigeria. In this study, I wish to limit the scope to the rise of four contemporary playwrights: Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan. All the four playwrights were born between 1938 and 1948. Like Soyinka they were able to experience within the same period of development the traditional theatrical conventions examined earlier in this study.

Before going deeply into the examination of the four playwrights, it would be useful to this study to attempt to enumerate the criteria for the selection of these playwrights. Because of the content of their plays, these playwrights are emerging as major playwrights following Soyinka. I have chosen them for this study because they all write plays with new forms and techniques different from that of Soyinka. The playwrights have also been chosen because of the new techniques and forms employed in the writing of their plays which have achieved a type of audience-relevance and a committed theatre.

Another major criterion for choosing these four

playwrights has been the difference in the thematic form and didactic theatre which is hoped would help Nigerian drama achieve a further evolutionary development. One that would bring about new ideas which are less radical in political activities, but more immediate and beneficial to the common man. The richness of such a theatrical approach, especially to a developing third world country, has created the 'missing gap' in terms of 'relevance' and 'commitment' often found in the plays of Soyinka. This difference in the thematic form and the didactic theatre enables one to draw a line between Soyinka and the contemporary playwrights - a line which can be regarded as the difference between the pioneer and the modern playwrights.

It is also important to note that such changes in the theatre of a development in a nation like Nigeria is worth mentioning, especially when it "also" affects the development of theatre conventions which have remained part of the culture of a people. The new playwrights chosen for this study also show a new type of vitality and promise. Apart from continuing the works of Soyinka as a playwright and director, the new writers have also continued the growth of Nigerian drama to one with effective commercial and professional elements. In the case of Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan, the word 'avant-garde' is most applicable. This is because of the radical changes

in the content of their plays and the experimental theatre which their plays have continued to adopt. Two ways in which society has contributed to the growth of the 'avant-garde' playwrights have been first, through the freer social attitudes of the Nigerian society and governments. This new sense of tolerance, is also tempered by the playwrights' awareness or sensitivity in the plays of the new playwrights. Satire, as in the case of Soyinka, is not very direct. Instead, the new playwrights present situation, comic and satirical in essence, and allow the audience to watch and find out their faults without a straight and often offending reaction at the recognition of oneself. This is unlike Soyinka's plays which have, in most cases, led to Soyinka being sued or abused by political individuals. Secondly, the growth of the experimental theatre has also been due to the increasing number of theatre venues and theatre groups in which the new playwrights can have their plays read, directed and rewritten while the play is still being rehearsed. This has been due mainly to a new type of professional actors, who, unlike the members of Soyinka's old groups such as the 1960 Masks and the Orisun theatre have the time for rehearsals and are not over-committed to their jobs. This also means that the playwright can write plays for a group of actors who would then improve the plot structure and dialogue of the play in

a type of theatre workshop. And most of all, the audience partake in the process of development of the new experimental theatre by making their reaction known to either the playwright or members of his group. And in most cases the suggestions of the members of the audience are on production nights. This allows the playwright to cut off parts of the play that do not have the approval of the audience, or which need re-writing for the audience to understand his meaning. Osofisan and Sowande have written most of their plays this way. I have had an experience with Osofisan, who, during the rehearsal of Morountodun at the University of Ife, had to change parts of the play because at the workshop, before the casting was made, members of the audience invited, suggested that certain parts of the play be changed for the understanding of the play by the Ife audience, on which the play was to have more impact as it was written on an old Ife myth.

It is most important, at this stage of the examination, to mention the issue of influence and originality with regards to the four playwrights. This will be examined further in the different chapters on each playwright. For the purpose of this discussion, I shall refer to influence as unconscious imitations, and imitation, as directed influence. This means that influence is considered as part of the growing experience of the playwright

which forces its way through when the creative process is in motion. Each of the new playwrights, especially Osofisan and Sowande who write plays that have the same satirical points of view as those written by Soyinka, are examined within their environment, inherited conventions of the traditional theatre, and ways through which the inherited experience have been transmitted into their works. This mutual interdependence reflected in the works of the new playwrights, distinguish their plays from those of Soyinka.

My definition of influence which also serves as guideline for the criticism of the plays of the new playwrights mentioned in this study, conforms with Joseph Shaw's, a critic of contemporary German theatre, who also mentions the issue of influence among the new German playwrights when he says:

... influence shows that influenced author producing work which is essentially his own. Influence is not confined to individual details or images or borrowings or even sources - though it may include them - but is something pervasive, something organically involved in and presented through artistic works.²

The first part of this quotation helps to introduce originality which in this study points to the level at which the playwright is able to put down his influence and

experience while still maintaining a form easily recognisable as his own. The issue of influence is partly mentioned in this study as all four playwrights are still writing and, therefore, are subjected to the process of growth and development of style. In discussing originality, I have examined it in the light of direct and indirect influence. The direct influence being the traditional, 'Shakespearean', 'Axworthian', and even 'Soyinkan' experience discussed earlier in this study, along with each playwright's personal exposure, be it American theatre as in the case of Sofola, French theatre as in the case of Sowande and Osofisan, or both the local and Western mixture and dramatic activities as in the case of Ogunyemi. In the case of direct influence, personal and more controlled experience is considered. This type of influence may not be ^{artistic} \angle or literary, but experiences which go on to form the subconscious of the writer, and invariably his ideology. In the light of such argument, originality must be seen to supply to the creative innovations in the forms or contents as well as reinterpretations and combinations of ingredients borrowed from diverse models.

It is therefore interesting to note that any comparison of the influence and originality in the plays of Soyinka, would create negative results and materials for comparative literature. The negative results, which are

often due to each writer's search for a better medium, result in certain cases in new playwrights refuting any element or trace of influence however ridiculous, by the older writer. Professor Anna Balakian in her article, 'influence and literary fortune: the Equivocal Junction of two methods', says that the negative results are regards influences are due to:

the influences of authors of the same nationality and language upon which other are negative influences, the result reactions, for generations often tend to be rivals of each other and in the name of individualism reject in the work of their elders what they consider to be the conventions of the past.³

It is therefore understandable when Sowande, said of having been influenced greatly by Soyinka in the writing of his play, The Night Before, by Kole Omotoso, a literary critic and Nigerian novelist, in 1979, vehemently refused Soyinka's influence when he replied to the critic in a newspaper article by saying that:

Soyinka did not influence my writing The Night Before. The play is based on my University experience at Ife, which Soyinka did not attend. And if any influence is found at all in the play, it would be of my French experience gained over the years in my studies of French drama and literature.⁴

This type of playwright's rejection of any trace of influence from a playwright much older, conforms with Professor Balakian's observation in her article, and also shows the younger playwright desperately searching for a sense of originality and individuality.

Ogunyemi and Sofola are less concerned with this search for the sense of originality because of the difference in style to the more radical plays of Soyinka. But the same cannot be said of Osofisan and Sowande, who are forever trying to create a new experimental theatre which, though influenced by Soyinka, can find an originality of its own.

The new writers were made to understand the demands the society wanted and the types of writers they also wanted to read and see. As Niyi Osundare observes, the new writer did not have to know :

how things are, but how they could or should be. He (the new writer) must not only lead the people to the top of the mountain and point out the promised land, he must also show them how to get there.⁵

A difference was found with the works of Soyinka who only exposed the ills of the society without suggestions of how the problems of the society could be solved.

Questions may be asked regarding whether the playwright

needs to solve problems raised in his plays. An answer would be yes, especially for a playwright who writes for a majority of ill-educated audience, and whose participations in political activities are that of a person who seems to have the answers. Soyinka's accurate portrayal of the ills of the society is one in which the audience hope would end in a way in which a better society would be achieved. The new playwrights, lacking the political experience of Soyinka, have to learn gradually with each new play they write.

In the writings of the new playwrights, satires could not be written without an ideological stance. Sowande and Osofisan, who chose to write satires or plays with political undertones, created the new type of protagonist. Unlike Soyinka's protagonist, who was the scape-goat, super-human actor, the new protagonist was in fact not a single person. He was only a member of the new group, the suffering and the lower class. The protagonists found themselves, as in the plays of Sowande and Osofisan, in a common situation filled with social ills and bourgeois corrupted people who were presented as the common enemy. In the new plays, the group of peasants were given a new sense of dignity. The peasants were also given a new sense of purpose to recognise the problems of their society and join together and fight to make better their situation.

The other two playwrights chosen for this study also changed the image of the scapegoat as the protagonist in their plays. More reasons for the tragic happenings to a protagonist were presented. Unlike Soyinka's Emma in The Strong Breed, who finds himself unable to run away from the decreed traditional and tragical function of his family heritage, the new protagonists were aware of the reasons for their tragic fall.

The use of symbolism or symbolic meaning in the new plays was also limited. Unlike Soyinka's plays where the use of symbolism had almost become excessive in the sense that the symbolic images served as impediments towards the understanding of the already complicated plots, the new plays had to have simple and straightforward subject matters. The new writers presented life in a more naturalistic sense than Soyinka. The playwrights also raised moral questions and tried to explain the reason for the tragic happenings to their characters mainly through presenting the characters within their social environment, which was familiar to the audience and in which the audience recognised both the failings of the characters and those of themselves within the plays.

The greatest change in the conventions of the theatres, such as the use of songs, traditional materials, the use of the English language and the structure of writing, inherited by the new playwrights, was the

attitude of both the audience and playwrights to the theatre in English language. By 1977, the dominating figure of Soyinka within his theatre groups and even on the Nigerian stages, had changed. Theatre was no longer the Playwright's theatre, but the people's theatre. The mass audience were dictating the types of plays they wanted on their stages. They owned the money and could now influence the choice of a good local playwright. As regards the playwrights themselves, all the forms Soyinka had mastered to evolve the playwright's theatre such as his use of language, his use of symbolism, and his inclusion of the intellectual twist in the structure and plot of his plays, were changed by the new playwrights. One may argue that the changes by the new playwrights were made because the new playwrights lacked the skill of Soyinka to handle such delicate materials in their plays. A simple answer would be a refusal of such a contention, because first, the new playwrights were as exposed to Western dramatic conventions and technique as Soyinka, having themselves studied abroad. Secondly, the new playwrights were more academically exposed than Soyinka because at least three out of the four playwrights chosen for this study hold a Doctor of Philosophy degree in dramatic literature, and it is not the case that they are unaware of the techniques employed by Soyinka in his plays; but the answer is that all the new playwrights were aware of

their local audience and, unlike Soyinka, they were not prepared to make any deliberate quirk at eluding their immediate audience with unnecessary techniques which could lead to an obscurity of the meanings of their works to the audience. Ironically, this type of writing, viewed as a substandard way of playwriting by the Western critics, still entailed its own form of a writer's engagement, one which involved a more committed style of writing. For the new politically committed drama criticizes not only contemporary political social situations as with the plays of Soyinka, but they also question Nigeria's cultural roots. Thus, finding deeper explanations to the socio-political problems in the country: An element some of Soyinka's plays lack. And unlike Soyinka, who depends on his findings in his search for the meaning of tragedy which make each play of his, part of his explorations for new forms and ideas of tragedy, the use of contemporary material by modern playwrights is done in such a way that the plays would be both current and instructive. Another element which, because of Soyinka's rhetoric language in most of his plays, is missing. John Arden's precise description of this process needs mention, in order to show the major differences between Soyinka's use of contemporary materials and that of the new playwrights. Arden says:

The use of material of the contemporary world and present it on the public stage is the commonly accepted purpose of playwrights, and there are several ways in which this can be done....

What I am deeply concerned with is the problem of translating the concrete life of today into terms of poetry that shall at the one time both illustrate that life and set it within the historical and legendary tradition of our (also Nigerian) culture.⁶

This problem of using contemporary materials is one which the contemporary Nigerian playwright has to tackle. But, although it is still too early for an appraisal on how well they have coped with it, the mere effort of starting to make meaning in a very relevant way to the audience by their attempts to translate the 'concrete life of today into simple poetry', is an achievement.

For a more organic reason, the contemporary playwright has had to identify himself in a very different form from Soyinka. Aware of Arden's 'half-way house' classification of Soyinka when he says that:

It is the plays from West African of the next generation which will make his position really clear to us⁷.

the new playwrights have to seek a more defined identity, one which would not give their plays any type of awkward

double root, such as the plays of Soyinka. All the four playwrights chosen for this study have again opted for a more immediate identity - one which simply guides the playwright into an awareness of his audience. In his attempts to define identity in a playwright, Arden in his chapter, 'Telling a true tale' in New Theatre Voices, observes a new type of identity which I find also applicable to the new Nigerian playwrights. He says:

I am writing in English (British "Nigerian" English) and primarily for an English ("Nigerian" English) audience. Therefore I am concerned to express my themes in terms of British (English "Nigerian" British), but not exclusively tradition. This is not chauvinism but a prudent limitation of scope. Art may be truly international, but there are dangers in being too wide open to unassimilated influences from north, south, east and west.⁸

In Arden's definition, audience-relevance is again highlighted. The 'prudent limitation of scope' or an attempt to interpret the influences from the outside world within the Nigerian context reflects negatively at times on the works of the new Nigerian playwrights by their local references. This also answers the questions, for whom does the Nigerian playwright write? And when is a playwright successful? Is it when he is known at home or when he

is acclaimed by foreign audiences? A good analogy would be that of the greatest English playwright, William Shakespeare, who first had to be accepted by the British and popular within the English stage history and audiences over the centuries, before his works could be spread to other parts of the world, including Africa. In a simple analysis such as this, however biased it may seem, Soyinka's place in Nigeria and even African drama becomes questionable, and a need to introduce new playwrights and their new forms becomes more and more apparent.

John Arden's statements reproduced in this chapter and others in the thesis, are chosen because, having himself been a colleague of Soyinka at the Royal Court Theatre, Arden has continued to influence the new Nigerian Playwrights, with his plays and ideas of the new radical theatre. It must also be recalled that Arden, along with Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker, Joan Littlewood, Peter Brook and George Devine, started what has become known as the new wave of British theatre between 1956 to 1963.

The four playwrights chosen for this study are to be used to examine the position of Soyinka in contemporary Nigerian drama. By the end of this study, it is hoped that my examination of each of the new playwrights would have shown the developing stages of Nigerian drama. And as the next decade looks uncertain for third world countries, especially in terms of the underlying economic

dilemma and on the surface, the age of vulgar opulence for the selected few and rich citizens, the Nigerian theatre continues to need new radical playwrights with a positively committed sense to fight the often harrowing demands of the society. In this case, there is room for development, and in the words of William Faulkner, when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, his remarks on the general and universal physical fear for the young writer becomes re-echoed in the African situation. And as Faulkner aptly observes, the young writer's task is that:

He must teach himself that the basest
of all things is to be afraid and,
teaching himself that, forget it for
ever, leaving no room in his workshop
for anything but the old verities
and truths of the heart...

Until he relearns these things, he will
write as though he stood among and
watched the end of man.⁹

Maybe Soyinka's inability to 'relearn' the meaning of life of the Nigerians long after the civil war, leaves him as Faulkner suggests, 'watching the end of man within the world which Soyinka writes from'. But the danger and effect of such estranged writing is what I have already mentioned as engaged art. To avoid making the same mistakes, the new playwrights have been able to recognise that as the

functions of the contemporary theatre changes, so must the playwrights. Torn between two cultures, a meaning must be found in their works which must be both functional and relevant. Such new demands on the playwright has prompted Chinua Achebe, one of Nigeria's major novelists, to try and seek new functions for the creator or artist. He says that the artist:

.... is an inspirer and a motivator, a spiritual rainmaker and provider of spiritual cassava, he is a teacher: his role is also that of a prayer or sprinkler of disinfectant over the human environment. He is equally a mirror who says to his people : look, such is the colour of your hearts, do you think this was how your heart was made to look like?¹⁰

Achebe's remarks in which he attempts to situate the functions of the artist within a cultural and social evaluation, helps one in the understanding of why Soyinka's place has become continuously questioned by the critics and theatre audience. Yet the theatre in Nigeria is still developing, so there is room for Soyinka and many more old playwrights who find the new radical. But the problems confronting the new playwrights, as Niyi Osundare, a Nigerian critic, observes, give more room for the growth of the radical new experimental theatre. The reason Osundare gives is because of the

social situations in Nigeria and most developing third world countries. In his criticism, Osundare remarks:

The African writer today is confronted by innumerable problems. A victim of a badly managed, multinationals - imposed or foreign-supported political regime, an ossified colonial bureaucracy whose monstrous inefficiency can be seen and felt everywhere in the form of irregular power supply, dry water taps, and an utterly poor communication system, the African writer often finds prevailing circumstances not only hostile to his creative enterprise, but also inimical to the social impact of his works.¹¹

The only solution the new playwrights have sought for this problem is a movement to a more committed drama. Even now the playwrights who write in the more traditional and formal convention of writing such as Sofola and Ogunyemi are beginning to change the subject matters of their plays to more current issues. Ogunyemi's social satire, The Divorce, mirrors a modern marital problem in a Nigerian family, where promiscuity of the new Nigerian educated women contributes to the almost tragic situation. Tayo, the main character in the play, almost goes to bed with her long lost brother. Sofola also left her formal traditional materials when she wrote The Sweet Trap, a play which mirrors the new uncultured idea of 'women's-lib' to the Nigerian culture. Sofola in the play does not spare any effort to show how out of place such a foreign culture, such as 'women's-lib' is within the Nigerian

society when not assimilated with a sense of compromise. Even Soyinka, while I embarked on this study, has started to involve himself in writing an experimental play, which although it is in the same light as his early popular street sketches of the late 1950s, portrays the present day decadent society in Nigeria. The play is about the gullible and gluttonous character called Godspcak Igbehodan, who is a futurologist engaged in trying to swindle his followers out of their money by predicting a lot of lies to his followers. The play ends with the followers becoming aware of their foolery and stupidity in believing in the powers of the futurologists. Again, Soyinka uses the play as a direct satire on the many futurologists in Nigeria today, engaged in swindling the poor people. He entitles the play, Requiem for a Futurologist, a title befitting his pessimistic theme in the play. In the January 1983 production of the play, which I saw at the University of Ife, though Soyinka makes a conscious effort to reach out to the audience and communicate the problems treated in the play to them, there was still the excessive show of the ills in the society to the audience, leaving the audience, helpless and the problems, unsolved. It is hoped that a study of this nature would also help Soyinka understand his communication-problem with the audience, and try to improve on the gesture he has already started to make with this new play to improve his relationship with his immediate Nigerian audience.

The post-Soyinka playwrights have also helped to develop new roles for the new theatre. Apart from the primary roles of the theatre which are to entertain educate and instruct, the contemporary theatre not only entertains, by providing the arena for the exceptional performer and playwright. This may/^{be}because of the new experimental quality of the theatre, where, as with the old traditional performer, the new performer is allowed to perform with full vigour and energy, only this time on his own with little or no audience participation.

In conclusion, it must be noted that, because of the limited funds and audience for the theatre in English, and because it is difficult for even a great Nigerian playwright like Soyinka to survive on the royalties of his plays, most of the post-Soyinka playwrights, including the ones chosen for this study, work and live within the Nigerian Universities. The major reason may be the same reason Axworthy started the School of Drama at Ibadan: availability of an educated and appreciative audience and also the presence of the students - or free actors - who are more interested in the learning process and experience rather than financial gains. Two of the playwrights chosen for this study have remained with the University of Ibadan for one more reason. For, apart from the prestige of the school of Drama being the first in the country, they have stayed on to continue the work of Axworthy, Banham, Soyinka and the other

members of staff of the School who started the move towards developing the Nigerian drama in English. It is therefore right for one to be more optimistic that Nigerian drama has a hopeful future, especially with the coming generation who grow even more radical and whose craving for the experimental and relevant theatre continues to progress in a more reflected theatre for the future. And as new forms develop, so do new conventions, often always a moderation of the old ones.

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4. Sowande Bode, interview with me at Ibadan Dec. 28 1982.
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CHAPTER FOUR

SULU SOFOLA

Zulu Sofola was born in June 1938 in the Aniocha area of Bendel State of Nigeria. Her father was a village chief and a teacher when she was young. Through her father, and an early elementary and Secondary School background in Aniocha, she was able to gain a broad view of the socio-cultural values of the place where she was born. She left for the United States of America, where she graduated in English at the Virginia Union University, Richmond, and she gained a Master degree in Drama at the Catholic University of America, Washington, in 1965. She came back to Nigeria and joined the Staff of the University of Ibadan in 1969 and was awarded a Doctorate in Drama at the same University in 1976. She is presently at the University of Ilorin, where she teaches Drama as a Senior Lecturer.

Her writing career has made her the major woman playwright in Nigeria. With her cultural background in Aniocha, and her Western education, she was able to start writing at an early age. Her unique opportunity of having a village chief as a father in a major reason why she was able to view at first hand the drama in the culture of her people. She herself gives the reason for writing at an early age:

It appears that my stay in the U.S.
at such an early age inspired me.
Actually, it seems rather strange that
it would, but it is the main thing

that inspired me, because people were constantly asking me about my country, my culture and so forth. And I found myself wanting to know more and having the desire to tell the people. The more I explained, the more I found that if I went into writing I would do more.¹

The art form which she chose to use to express her ideas was drama. This was because, as she says:

I see drama as an attempt on the part of the sensitive artist to try to present the human condition so that man might observe and see if he can find answers to the questions that he has always asked.²

Being in America, the only language in which she could express herself to the American audience was English, although because of the content of her plays, one would have preferred her to have written them in the vernacular Ibo language of the Aniocha people whom she portrays in most of her plays.

Her early plays were written with the main purpose of communication in mind. It was during this period in America that she wrote her major plays; Wedlock of the Gods (1968), The Deer and the Hunter's Pearl (1969) King Emene (1968). These plays were based on the society and cultural values of the Aniocha part of Nigeria where she had spent her early childhood. Her academic thesis

for both the Master and Doctoral degrees, which were on cultural traditions of the Aniocha people, helped to show that most of Sofola's plays have been products of the findings from her academic researches in contrasts to her cultural background and Western cultural influence.

The concern of this chapter is to examine Sofola's concept of tragedy in contrast to Soyinka's. Her concept of tragedy is based on the social concept and traditions of the Aniocha people. This differs immediately from Soyinka's concept of tragedy which is situated in the Yoruba cultural life.

In Sofola's plays such as The Disturbed Peace of Christmas (1971), The Wizard of Law (1975), Old Wines are Tasty (1977), and Sweet Trap (1982) she places an emphasis on the individual within a social environment, and the tragedy of the individual occurs when the individual comes in conflict with the society. This concept of tragedy which I shall examine presently differs from that reflected in the works of Soyinka, who, for example, in his plays The Strong Breed, Kongi's Harvest and The Bacchae of Euripides are based on the scapegoat figure. The main difference here, lies in the tragic action, which in Sofola's plays, unlike Soyinka's, takes place when the individual desires change in social values

despite the fixed social traditions of his or her society. Her characters, as is true of all playwrights, then become a mirror of the people. And in most cases it is the Aniocha people and their themes who dominate her plays.

An examination of Sofola's attempts to blend inherited African and Western conventions of theatrical performance are reflected better in her thematic preoccupation. As earlier suggested, she relies very much on traditional materials such as the religions, the customs and the human emotions of the Aniocha people. Her attempts to place these traditional materials within the new type of society in Nigeria today after her experience with the Western culture, helps her to achieve a continuous thematic relevance for the Nigerian audience. Each play introduces new social values that have affected the lives of such individual. In an interview in 1982 for a Nigerian Magazine, Sofola remarks:

There are three categories right now from which any writer, creative writer, can take his material. It can be strictly traditional. It can be conflict in culture. Or it can be strictly the Western educated, Western oriented African situation, so you have the elite. Now I write within the three worlds but I deal with problems I find that are somehow strong in the daily lives of the people.³

For Sofola, it is within the 'three worlds' she mentions above that enables her to achieve the sense of immediacy which her plays possess. In most of her plays, traditions and customs are presented as the set of morals of the characters in the plays. She highlights these customs and traditions with the will of the society in her tragic plays as Nemesis. The protagonist is punished by Nemesis when he or she breaks or goes against the customs of the society.

Her earlier plays, for example, The Disturbed Peace of Christmas and The Wizard of Law, although elementary and almost farcical in structure, still possess the moral value of goodness such as the need for children to be obedient to their parents and the need to be an upright citizen, not as deceitful as Lawyer Ramoni in The Wizard of Law. It is the moral elements in these simple and very entertaining plays which make them very popular with Secondary Schools in Nigeria. Her early plays such as The Wizard of Law and Disturbed Peace of Christmas can be seen as influence of Western morality traditions mentioned earlier.

In the Disturbed Peace of Christmas, Sofola is pre-occupied with the theme of a developing society and a more daring group of young people such as Ayo and Titi. Titi is made pregnant by Ayo and the two families fail to understand the children's action which seems to be a

disturbance to the coming Christmas celebrations. The cold reaction of the family almost forces the young couple to a desperate action, for example, committing abortion. But a last minute change of hearts by the parents who are helped to make up their minds by the celebrations of Christ's birth makes the Christmas a happy occasion.

Sofola uses the play to discuss the new problems of youth which did not exist on such a large scale before the '70s. She appeals to the parents of children who get into trouble like Ayo and Titi to be more understanding about their children's action. She does this in the play through Mrs Bandele, an elderly woman when she says:

MRS BANDELE: You may punish Ayo and his father as you like, but please don't use Titi, your own daughter, to do it (Mr. Ajayi is staring at her) I myself had thought that our Christian Youth Club should be destroyed because a girl made a mistake, but why should one mistake destroy the good work of many years? Anybody can make a mistake, but we must forgive as God forgives us. (Ajayi still looking on) That you plan to hide Titi away in some unknown village is not a good thing. I must tell you. Don't you know that a young girl like her who knows nothing about

pregnancy and childbirth could easily die in it? Surely, we are all annoyed with these young people, but we must forgive and look after them. (A pause)⁴.

It is this sense of immediacy to her local audience in Sofola's themes concerning the social problems of the Nigerian people that accounts for her popularity as a major playwright. Her characterisation which is often achieved by long dialogue and speeches, also enables Sofola to write didactic moral plays, which she often refers to as 'tragedy'.

Her much later play, The Sweet Trap, also examines changing values of womanhood in Nigerian society. Probing into the new women's liberation movement in Nigeria in the '70s, she wrote The Sweet Trap to give her negative reaction to the women's liberation movement and its conflicts with the African traditional place for women which expects women to be wise, polite, and respectful to their husbands. Interestingly, Sofola wrote the play as a commissioned work for the University Teachers Wives Association of the University of Ibadan for the celebration of the 1975 year of women. Sofola has suffered much negative criticism from the young Nigerian women for her portrayal of women in this play. But a close examination of the play shows that the women have failed to understand Sofola's intended message, which is more a call for caution, and for constructive reasons for women's liberation. In her defence,

Sofola has insisted that the Western culture, no matter how powerful its influence is on the women, cannot radically change strong traditional ideas except if there is a compromise. She describes her stance on traditional values not as a backward step but as a recognition of her love for traditions from which she draws the moral issues in her plays.

The play is about a group of women's liberation activists who, in achieving their desires as liberated women, no longer respected their husbands or saw a need to partake in their duties as housewives. The turbulence in their homes which almost ends their marriages are warnings that new radical Western cultures must be assimilated slowly. Mrs. Jinadu, a character in the play, argues this point with the women when Fatima, an uneducated housewife, says:

That I will buy what I want and do
what I want whether or not he has given
his approval.

MRS. JINADU: That is not a good attitude on
your part.

FATIMA: It is a good attitude. Simply
because I am not a University graduate
he thinks he can treat me anyhow.
What graduate wife will accept such
nonsense from her husband?

MRS JINADU: It is not so, I am a University graduate myself, but my happiness is in what I can do to make my husband happy.⁵

The women resent this argument and go ahead and have a party in defiance of their husbands' wishes. The party is ruined by the local celebrants of the Oke Ibadan manhood ceremony, and the women return home ashamed of their behaviour.

The play is written in three acts, a more convenient form of writing in terms of the modern European traditions than the plays of Soyinka which are usually written in what he calls 'parts'. But the play is experimental in that it is one of the very few plays dominated by female characters.

The three acts of the play show a more than direct influence from the drama of the late 20th century, especially the three act plays of Ibsen. In *The Sweet Trap*, the first act introduces the theme of the play. The play starts in the house of the Sotubos - a family of a University lecturer whose wife, Clara, is planning on having a birthday party despite the disapproval of her husband. Other characters include Mrs. Ajala, who is the instigator of the idea of the women's lib, and Mrs. Jinadu, the wife of another lecturer who is a moderate in terms of women's lib. Mrs. Clara Sotubo insists on having a birthday celebration and is urged on by Mrs. Ajala and her other

friends. During the 1979 production of the play at Ibadan, the performance started with musical percussion going on in the background to register to the audience that there is the festival of Okebadan, a purification ceremony in which the female sex were exempted and mocked. With such a beginning of the play, Sofola prepared the audience for a deeper meaning for the struggle of the women to social freedom, as the religious festival and the refusal to grant a birthday party are all part of the social bondage in which the women found themselves. In the second act, the second side to the argument of the women's liberation ideas proposed by the women in the first act is presented through the character of Mrs. Jinadu. The women go ahead with their plans to have a party and Mrs Ajala gives up her house for use for the party. The women are determined to use the party as a way of showing their husbands that they do not need their permission to have a party or do anything. During the performance, Sofola continues to use the Okebadan festival music heard as background accompaniment to the dialogue as the presence of the cultural bondage in which the women have always found themselves. Mrs. Jinadu refuses to join the women in their act, but instead pleads that the women try and find a compromise with their husbands, especially in terms of the party which all the husbands are against. In scene three of the second act, the party

takes place. But it is stopped when two intruders come to disturb the party, by ridiculing the women, being themselves celebrants of the Okebadan festival. This angers the women, who blame one another for the husbands' pleasure at finding the party stopped. The third act shows the resolution of the problem which the whole party affair has caused within the Sotubo family. Dr. Jinadu and Mrs. Jinadu, who are related to the Sotubos, come to see the Sotubos and try to settle their family problems. To advise Clara, Mrs. Jinadu tells her:

Yes, families have their fights, but the husband is a woman's most precious jewel and so is treated with tender care. So also is a man's wife and heart that keeps the blood pumping through the man's veins. Destroy this heart and the man is dead. All couples recognize these facts. So no matter how embittered, couples never invite on themselves the type of humiliation that we witnessed last night.⁶

At the end of the play, Clara asks for forgiveness from her husband, and decides never to join any form of women's-lib. The audience, as with the ones I saw the play with in 1979, leave the theatre with Mrs. Jinadu's moral message.

Another play, Old Wines are Tasty, has a sombre resolution and Sofola calls it a 'tragedy'. The play,

as with The Sweet Trap, is experimental, the fact being that women do not only dominate the actions of the play, but they also take part in achieving the moral theme with which most of Sofola's plays are pre-occupied. The play, situated in the village, like most of Soyinka's early plays such as The Lion and the Jewel and Swamp Dwellers, is more current in its subject matter. Where Soyinka's plays are concerned with the conflict between Western and traditional culture, Sofola's play concerns itself with struggle in the search for the self within her protagonist, Okebuno. In her self-directed performance of the play at the Theatre Arts of the University of Ibadan in 1974, Okebuno is portrayed as the confused Nigerian of the '70s. Not as stupid in recognizing the problems of a non-compromise of both the Western and traditional culture as Lakunle, the village teacher in Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel, but one who fails to draw a line between the levels of a man's behaviour between a sense of moderation and self-importance. The time of the play is also as current in the Nigerian social history, unlike most of Soyinka's early plays, as December 1983 before the military take-over in Nigeria.

In performance, as with The Sweet Trap, Sofola registers the element of time and place by using the

traditional theatrical convention of music. Apart from the typical parlour or sitting room revealed when the curtains rise, there is the background music of 'good local music' which situates the play within its social environment. With such a painful naturalistic setting, Sofola was prepared to show the audience a play which represented their social life and from which she was soon to highlight her moral message. The dialogue and acting style, which was naturalistically reproduced, also helped the audience to understand the immediate social-relevance of the play.

The plot unfolds in performance again with the same three act pattern of most of Sofola's plays. The first act shows Okebuno and his wife, Nneka's, arrival at the village. His mother, Anyasi, receives them happily along with his uncle, Akuagwu. Through the long dialogue written mostly in prose, the audience learn of Okebuno's reason for coming home through Ego, his mother's cousin, in a prayer rendered to the family ancestors:

EGO: Let our God lead us to greater
glories. (The women say Ise!)
Lagos has chosen you to bring
Aniocha to them, you will carry
it to them! (They say Ise!)
The whiteman has brought us their
way of valuing people; you will not
only rule the blackman, but the

whiteman himself. (They say Ise!)
May Mkpitime guide you; may she be
your eyes; may she be your mouth; may
our ancestors crown your head with all
the good things of life.⁷

During the first act, the audience also learn that Okebuno is also a no-nonsense man. He has come to see the candidacy of his local government area, and he is not prepared to be the typical Nigerian politician who has to bribe his way through an election, and an African politician who seeks a candidacy with an awareness of the financial, cultural holds of his people on his person before he is even nominated. During the second scene of the first act, the audience learn of the proposed meeting later that evening of the elders of Okebuno's party for a formal introduction. But his uncles, Ego and Akuagwu, think that the meeting is too soon and that Okebuno ought to have given his villagers time to understand what he wanted of them. It is during this discussion that the audience learn of Okebuno's stubborn behaviour which his mother, Anyasi, blames on his Western education abroad:

You are not in Lagos. We are here in our home town among our people. I have told that bey what well-trained people do. That he has whiteman's education does not wipe out our ways. He must respect our people. A man stays in the house to

welcome his visitors when he comes
home on leave.⁸

Okebuno does not take any heed to his mother's advice; he goes ahead in the second act to have the fatal meeting where the audience are introduced to another character, Okolo, who comes to the meeting, aware of Okebuno's stubborn character and disrespect for tradition. Being an ambitious man himself, and wanting the nomination, Okolo decides to use Okebuno's character-failing to his full advantage. He contrasts Okebuno's rash reception of the village elders with a reception of honour and respect. He also counters Okebuno's direct sense of business with one of bribery, gifts and presents. Although less academically qualified than Okebuno, it is evident that Okolo will win the election. At the end of the second act, Okebuno, dejected with the reaction of the elders who walk away from the meeting showing their displeasure of the choice of Okebuno in Lagos, returns to his mother's house, packs his things and decides to leave that night. But after much persuasion Okebuno decides to stay till the next day. His meeting at the Executive Office of the party again in all ill-fated banquet with Okolo, who is announced as the choice of the elders, leaves Okebuno speechless. He returns home and decides to drive back to Lagos in a confused state of mind. The second scene of the third act starts with the reception of the news of Okebuno's death in a car accident

on his way to Lagos. Sofola highlights the play as a didactic moral play with Akuagwu's speech with a slower local music to show the mood and also to move the audience to pity for Anyasi who has lost a son and who, in the background, shows grief by crying:

AKUAGWU: And he won't humble himself and learn. Those boys know that one who calls an Idigbe child a bastard is made to pay the worst fines of the land because it is a crime. But they threw it into his face with impunity because they know how the elders feel about him. They know that no elder would take up arms to protect the dignity of a son who has no respect for the tradition of the land.⁹

With regards to the performance of the play, it is the characterisation and the language that the audience would find most interesting. Although the language, as with most of the plays Sofola calls tragedy, fails to make Old Wines are Tasty a tragedy, it helps characterisation. From the long speeches, Sofola is able to give the audience a lot of information, but the language needs to be reworked for the play to achieve any type of tragic effect. It is also the long speeches full of information and written in prose that adds the didactic moral element to the play. The elders such as Akuagwu and the little anecdotes in their speeches to portray meaning show Sofola's attempt to translate her

language into English, and at certain times the translation is so close that it fascinates the audience.

It is in Sofola's plays, The Wedlock of the Gods and King Emene, that her ability to blend inherited conventions of African theatrical performances and Western drama is best shown. Examples can be found in the structures of both plays and their dramatic substance, especially the three acts plot which, as earlier mentioned, is influenced by the three act plays of Ibsen. The blend mentioned here is found in the flow achieved in the performances of both plays. I shall base the examination of both plays on the production of King Emene at Ibadan Arts Theatre in 1978 and of Wedlock of the Gods in 1980.

The first of the two major plays for this study, Wedlock of the Gods, is based on a cosmic myth of the Aniocha people which explains why there is lightning, thunder, and the rainbow. In an interview Sofola gave me at Ibadan in 1982, she says:

I wrote Wedlock of the Gods as a celebration of the cosmic myth of two lovers who explain for us (the Aniocha people) the existence of lightning, thunder, and the rainbow. For me the play was written to explore the roots in the ritual of death and mourning.¹⁰

The myth is about a young girl in love with a man she had wanted to marry. But the parents of the man refuse to grant the lovers permission to marry. The saddened girl, Ogowoma, goes under a tree where she cries all day. The god of the sky sees her crying, takes pity on the lovers, and decides to take them to the sky. This shows the existence of gods in Sofola's world too, but in contrast to the Yoruba world, Sofola's gods are reproduced on stage as characters as with use of Yoruba gods of Ogunyemi in Obaluaye and Eshu Elegbara, and Soyinka's Ogun in A Dance of the Forests. The god of the sky in the myth makes the bride the goddess of lightning and the bridegroom is made the god of thunder, and when they embrace in the sky there in the rainbow.

Mention must be made here that although Sofola says that she wrote the play to celebrate the cosmic myth, the myth is not reflected or reproduced in the play proper. As a matter of fact, the only relevance to the myth in the play is in the portrayal of the two lovers involved in a continuous struggle for survival and who die vowing to continue their love, impossible on earth, as thunder and lightning in the heavens beyond. As Uloko says in the final scene before he dies, having himself drunk the potent potion of slow death of Odibei:

Ours is the wedlock of the gods.
Together we shall forever be lightning
And thunder - inseparable!
Our love shall live forever;
Your light to keep it aglow,
My thunder to demolish all obstacles.
We shall leave this cursed place;
We shall ride to where there is peace!
The rain shall cool our sweats and pains;
The sun shall dry our tears;
The stars shall crown our heads;
The night shall hide and protect us.
Over and around we shall together roam;
Beautifying as we impress!¹¹

The plot is simple and straightforward. Ogwoma, the heroine, is a young, pretty girl in love with Uloko, who was not able to pay the high bride price Ogwoma's family wanted at the time she was to get married. Odibei, the mother of Adigwu who comes from another family, is able to find the money for the bride price and marries Ogwoma to her son. The play begins when we learn of Adigwu's mysterious death and Odibei's determination to find out who killed her son or what circumstances led to his death. We also learn of a taboo broken by Ogwoma at a time when she was supposed to be mourning her dead husband. The taboo is against her being pregnant by Uloko, her lover. Odibei discovers this act and the tragedy set in. Odibei is convinced that Ogwoma's disgraceful action led to her son's death. At the end of the play Odibei

kills Ogwoma through her supernatural powers as a witch. The theatrical method used by Sofola was to create the image of the magic pot in which Odibei could control the actions of Ogwoma whom the audience were made to believe she could see. Ogwoma is put in a trance-like state by the magic of Odibei and she is then controlled like a zombie to the potent potion which Odibei intends to kill her with. As Ogwoma dies, Uloko, her lover, bursts into the room, sees what has taken place, and maddened by the death of Ogwoma, kills Odibei and then commits suicide by drinking the same medicinal potion.

In the play, Sofola sets out to question two aspects of her traditional background. She views the conservative aspects of her people within the conflict of the more radical minds of the young people of Aniocha who have liberal ideas about the sacred traditions, just as the two lovers in the play do. The two aspects are first, the effects of arranged marriages and the problems this type of marriage causes when the forced bride is in love with another man. And second, the pains and sorrows which usually come with adultery which is a forbidden practice in a close knit society such as the one presented in the play.

The second play, King Emene, is used by the playwright

to explore the action of an individual against the practice of the Aniocha people which forbids the killing of a human being. In the play, Nneobi, the King's mother, kills the rightful heir to the throne so that her son might be king. But her son's reign is not a peaceful one. The tragic action sets in at the beginning of the play when the reason for the lack of peace in the land is sought. The Greek tragic influence is apparent from the beginning of the play, which has an opening similar to that of Sophocles' play, Oedipus Rex. Obiageli, the mother of the deceased heir, loses her son mysteriously and like Odibei in Wedlock of the Gods, is determined to find out who and what killed her son. At the beginning of the performance of the play, Obiageli seeks the help of the soothsayer, who says it is Nneobi who killed her son. Obiageli's earlier action of killing Nneobi's son, makes her son, the king, not pure enough to perform the kingly duties of the purification week, a sacred festival performed by the king. As the action of the play unfolds, we find out that the king is not a good ruler. He does not respect the advice of the elders nor the traditions of the land. For example, in defiance of the advice of the previous Chief Priest, he goes into the peace week ceremonies and is attacked by the holy snake. He discovers his mother's sin when it is too late and the land had rejected him; dejected, he then goes on to commit suicide.

As with Wedlock of the Gods, the major theme is the revelation of hidden sins and how nemesis catches up with the guilty individual. Tradition is also presented in both plays as the entity sinned against.

But there are many differences between Sofola's play and Sophocles' especially in the contents of the play and in the driving force that leads the tragic hero to his fall. In Oedipus Rex, the tragic hero, or protagonist, is born to follow the decree of the gods. Oedipus, the king, cannot escape his fate, he is to kill his father, marry his mother, and have children by her. It is his attempts to avert such a curse and the uselessness of those attempts that draw the empathy which the audience feel for him. But in the case of King Emene, it is ambition, rashness and lust for power, all faults that can be found in any individual, that bring about his tragic fall. Whether he is aware or not of his mother's action, it does not save him, as he himself was not good enough to attract the pity of the audience long before the play ends. Even the Palace chiefs sigh with relief when they hear the news of his death. In the play, he makes every move which leads him further into destruction, well aware of the consequences of his action.

The same can be said of the lovers in Wedlock of the Gods. The law of the land says that the woman in mourning must never allow another man to visit her, let alone

become pregnant by him. Custom also has it that on the death of a young woman's husband, she should be made over to the brother of her late husband if he had one, and where none exists, sacrifices and ceremonies have to be made to free her and allow her to marry into another family. Sofola appears to be critical of the custom where the woman is made over to her late husband's brother. She does this by eliminating the thought from the minds of the lovers. They do not even consider this alternative to their getting married because Ogwoma's late husband had a brother to whom Odibei was ready to make her over. Again, in making the lovers break this custom, Sofola is able to continue to seal their fate, by increasing their sins against the society. Thus another custom is broken by the lovers and nemesis must set in. Odibei, the mother-in-law's only mistake was in her haste to punish the lovers. She takes laws into her hands, and dies in the process. But, in accord with tradition, she kills: therefore she must die. This almost mathematical and logical sequence of action, and its results, is the core of the social concept of tragedy which Sofola has explored and contributed as an alternative to the inherited conventions of Greek tragedy.

Both productions were directed by Zulu Sofola, who is possessive of her plays and also very selective as

regards who she gives permission to direct them. To date, only Dapo Adelugba has been given permission to direct the play in an earlier production of King Emene in 1968 in which Sofola acted the part of Nneobi, the mother of the King.

Both plays, King Emene and Wedlock of the Gods, are referred to as tragic plays by Sofola. But it is Sofola's use of her traditional inherited theatrical conventions such as the use of music, costumes, songs, dances and closeness to her materials in terms of language that has accounted for the play's success during performances. And again, although Sofola refers to Wedlock of the Gods as a tragedy, the plot of the play even during performance is altogether too simple and transparent for it to merit serious consideration in the genre of tragedy. From the point of view of dramatic substance during performance and diction, King Emene remains Sofola's most successful play. Sofola as with Soyinka and the other three contemporary playwrights chosen for this study write in ^{the} English language. But, as earlier mentioned in the third chapter, Sofola and the other new playwrights have continued to seek a form of simpler use of the English language which is close to the original vernacular language of the playwright which, in the case of Sofola, is Ibo. It is such special use of the English language, for example Odibei's speech to Uloko in Act One, scene one,

when she scolds him of having made a widow pregnant just to show the power of his manhood:

Some of you young men need to be reminded that not all cutlasses that went to the farm are used. Some just don't cut that deep. A man is not a man simply because he parades an okra sprout.¹²

that show the flaws in Sofola's use of metaphor. The success of such special use of the English language which hinges seriously on Sofola's translations from the vernacular, is that it makes meaning to the Nigerian local audience in performance despite the linguistic problems her use of the English language may have. Such linguistic problems are missing from Soyinka's well 'polished' English which in performance accounts for the limited success achieved by his plays. A contrast can be seen in the Historian's speech to the Warrior in Soyinka's A Dance of the Forests when he says:

HISTORIAN: But quiet Soldier! I have here the whole history of Troy. If you were not the swillage of pigs and could read the writings of wiser men, I would show you the magnificence of the destruction of a beautiful city. I would reveal to you the attainments of men which lifted mankind to the ranks of gods and demi-gods.¹³

Words like 'Troy', 'swillage of pigs', 'attainments of men', need further illustration, and demand certain academic qualities from an audience of mostly non-educated people before an understanding of the speech can be achieved. This is one reason why Sofola's plays are more popular than Soyinka's plays with the Nigerian audience. A further comparison of Sofola's use of language may also be the reason/^{given} by Dr. Nasiru Akanji in criticizing Soyinka's language in his plays says that:

Soyinka's plays communicate for as long as Soyinka shares with us the meaning of his characters' action and utterances and their reasons for them.

and the reason he gives is that:

... it appears Soyinka is sometimes so pre-occupied with the promotion of his ideas that he fails to provide the proper dramaturgic peg upon which such ideas can be hung.¹⁴

This idea is quite debatable. There is no doubt that, being aware of her predecessor's problem in terms of audience acceptance in the African world, Sofola has tried to re-direct her works, concerning herself with simple action, less symbolism and more local representation and identification with the characters. On the other

hand, critics arguing for Soyinka, may say that she writes in such 'simple' language because she lacks the mastery, creative and manipulatory genius of Wole Soyinka. But when the question of relevance, mentioned in chapter four is asked, contemporary playwrights like Sofola, Ogunyemi, Sowande and Osofisan have emerged as more relevant to the Nigerian local audience. This is because of their ability, even after having been exposed to the same academic and foreign experiences as Soyinka, to be able to play down the element of influence in favour of audience-relevance. This I regard as the main difference between Soyinka and the contemporary playwrights.

Originality in Sofola's works may seem rather premature to sum up, but it can be said to show in the simplicity of language, her subject matter, for example her continuous appeal for the respect for the traditions and customs of the society, and her social concept of tragedy which I shall examine later in this chapter. But all these qualities are due to the influence of her traditional background which, as I earlier said, was due to an influence of her father as a chief in the village.

Her use of her traditional background is very similar to Soyinka's use of his Yoruba traditional background, but the difference is that while Sofola is pre-occupied with

the constant call for the respect of tradition, Soyinka seems to take a step forward in his attempts in his plays like The Bacchae of Euripides to place African tradition on the same ^{parallel} with the Western tradition.

Sofola's concept of social tragedy is best portrayed in the two plays I shall examine in this study. They are : Wedlock of the Gods and King Emene. The concept is embedded in the people's cosmology, their idea of the origin and nature of the universe which involves the understanding of the forces that control man, the meaning of man's existence, and the human condition in life and the ultimate end of life which is death. Sofola's definition of tragedy within this context is that tragedy is seen as a 'purposive volitional' involvement in a serious action which is moral and 'desirable' but whose consequences are painful. An example can be found in Wedlock of the Gods, where the two lovers are aware at the beginning of the play of the consequences of breaking tradition and having an affair a few days after the woman's husband's death. For the two lovers, when they die through the magical powers of Odibei as punishment for their actions at the end of the play, it is because they choose their fate and suffer for it.

The Aristotelian concept of tragedy defines tragedy as being:

a process of imitating an action which has serious implications, is complete, and possesses magnitude by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, with

each of its varieties found separately in the parts enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through a narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts which have those emotional characteristics.¹⁵

Sofola's social concept of tragedy is also evolved from the traditional origins especially within the society. This means that, for a tragic action to occur to a character, he or she need not possess the 'magnitude' of either being a 'Queen' or 'King' as in the Greek plays. Uloko, the male lover of Ogwoma, the widow in Wedlock of the Gods, is a mere hunter or farmer. But by being a tragic character in Sofola's play, he is still as powerful a protagonist as most of the Greek tragic heroes such as Prometheus and Oedipus, especially through quality of characterisation, thought and language. The strength of such tragic and dramatic qualities of the protagonist in Sofola's plays must be viewed within the 'tragic concept' which she poses. At the end of the performance of Wedlock of the Gods, the pity felt for the protagonists by the audience is measured against the law of the society which the lovers have broken. Throughout the performance, the broken law is echoed through the elder characters who feel that Ogwoma should not have considered herself free of her late husband's family after his death. She should have completed the period of mourning and been inherited, according to tradition, by

her husband's brother in the tradition of leviration and that she should never have become pregnant by her lover who, from the beginning of the play, holds her heart. It is with such serious taboos against traditions, which from the beginning of the performance have been made to attract the audience's reasoning, especially through the technique of directing the speeches to the audience, that the audience are left to judge Sofola's protagonist.

The concept of tragedy which Sofola posits, and which the present writer deems fit to mention, is limited and total trust in its dramatic possibilities has been further developed theoretically in Sofola's doctorate degree thesis titled The tragic themes in a Nigerian ritual drama (The Igwe as a case study) for the University of Ibadan in 1977.

The concept is based on the cosmological myths and beliefs of the Aniocha people who come from the Eastern part of Nigeria. Such myths concern man, nature, his life and death which are taken into consideration for the attainment of the status of a protagonist as this constitutes the attributes of the tragic experiences and suffering. Sofola's 'concept of tragedy' believes in the existence of destiny. For, right from the beginning of the performance of Wedlock of the Gods, the audience are made to anticipate the tragic ending to the play as it begins with an angry, suffering old mother, Odibei, determined to avenge her son's death. As the first act unfolds and the audience learn of the taboos

broken by the lovers, it becomes more and more evident that doom awaits them. Sofola's concept of tragedy also borders on the power of black magic, witchcraft and hence her themes, as with the theme of Wedlock of the Gods and her other plays, contain a great deal of fatalism. Good examples can be found in Wedlock of the Gods where Sofola introduces the witch in the person of Odibei, the embittered mother of the dead husband, determined to avenge her son's death by resorting to her supernatural powers which in the third act and first scene put Ogwoma in a trance-like state where she is able to kill her.

In Sofola's doctoral thesis, she tries to list out in order of experiences, actions which can occur to an individual or a group of individuals as the lovers in Wedlock of the Gods to make them protagonists.

1. An introduction of new items into one's book of destiny while still on earth.
2. The incarnation of Uke, the devil, in an individual.
3. The disorganisation of an individual's destiny with evil charms.
4. A stubborn assertion of an individual's will against the common good.¹⁶

Written from a tragic experience of the Igwe people, of which the present writer does not claim an authoritative

understanding, it is revealed in Sofola's 'strange list' that gods plays little or no part in the tragic actions of the Igwe people. This may account for the reason why some of Sofola's plays such as Old Wines are Tasty, which she refers to as 'serious' and 'tragic' plays, are seen by the audience or non-Igwe reader as 'simple morality and didactic plays'. For in the social concept of tragedy which Sofola writes, tragedy is usually achieved as in the case of Wedlock of the Gods which results in the death of the two lovers, not by way of conflict with a higher being, but man in conflict with man as in the play Odibei, the embittered mother. In most cases, as with the lovers, the protagonists emerge when they break society's laws, therefore, committing taboos. This creates a disorganisation of an individual's destiny with evil charms such as witchcraft or black magic. In performance, Sofola uses Nigerian theatrical conventions to express these ancient notions. The case of Nneobi, the Queen Mother, who kills Obiageli's son in King Emene, is a good example. In performance, Sofola uses dance, music, costumes and songs to highlight the fall of the Queen Mother, who is discovered as having killed a right-ful king. By that action Obiageli tampers with the destinies of the would-have-been King and Queen Mother, Obiageli, who prays to Mkpitime, the goddess of peace, to

avenge her son's untimely death. In the final scene, apart from the solo flute which sets the tempo of an ensuing tragedy, Sofola also includes the forces of nature in the form of thunder and lightning aimed at the king and his mother to destroy them. In terms of sustaining the action, the characters do not make long speeches but short ones, so that the action - the actual moment of the king killing his mother, is received by the audience. A good example is when the king armed with a dagger, seeks the place where he can find his mother and destroy her.

KING: Where is she?

NNEOBI: Leave me! Let me die!

KING: (Swings the dagger madly) Where is that cursed woman?

NNEOBI: Let me die!

QUEEN: Oh my husband.¹⁷

The tragic fall of Nneobi, as in most Greek tragic plays, remains in conformity with the concept of nemesis and repercussion of an evil deed in Sofola's social tragedy. In performance, Nneobi, as a witch figure, is not presented. It is her actions, and Obiageli's accusations that reveal to the audience that she must possess supernatural powers. The effect of the power of her magic is seen in the succumbed state of mind in which the audience find the king in the second act, scene two,

when he speaks harshly to his wife and Obiageli in favour of his mother. And the audience are convinced that she is very powerful because, in putting the king under her powers, she is able to make him become a rash person, she is able to effect his dismissal of the Omu, the leader of the women's section of the government who is bent on revealing the ills of her past actions. In using the technique borrowed from Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, the action of the final scene where the king dies is reported by Ojei to the audience:

SEKWUTE: What!

NNEOBI: (Still crying backstage) Ogugus my son.

OJEI: He is in a pool of blood.¹⁸

The sound of the royal horn heard backstage in low tune, with sad punctuations of the drums at intervals, make the dirge sung backstage and later on stage by Ojei and Sekwute effective enough to move the audience to pity for the King who is mourned by the lone voice of his wife.

Soyinka's concept of tragedy is slightly different from that of Sofola, but more similar to the Greek concept of tragedy. This is mainly because gods dominate the myths and social lives of the Yorubas. The similarity in the existence of the gods of both the Yoruba and the Greek mythologies has enabled Soyinka to seek a parallel with the

Greek concept of tragedy, thus beginning with Nietzsche's Dionysian-Apollonian brotherhood. For Soyinka, Ogun, is equal to the Greek god Dionysos, is best understood in Hellenic values as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues! His protagonist unlike Sofola's is caught in the web of destruction while in conflict with his god.

Another contribution of Sofola to contemporary Nigerian drama of which mention has been made in the inclusion of dominating female characters in her plays. This is a new convention for Nigerian drama - whether in the traditional entertainment or today's modern drama. Even the plays of Wole Soyinka played down the role of women. Women were presented in his plays as subordinates to men, seductive or timid as Sidi in The Lion and the Jewel. Sofola's plays such as King Emene and Wedlock of the Gods, gave women starring roles. The plays were about them, and for the first time, more aspects of the woman as an individual in her own right were presented.

Her mastery in handling the strength and weaknesses of her women is what makes her tragic plays socially realistic. Being a woman herself, Sofola writes from an intimate knowledge of her female characters. But from her many plays with dominating female characters, it is the traditional plays and the portrayal of the female characters that have been

most successful. The reason for this is that Sofola's belief of what her plays advocate in the cause of the modern woman is often not agreeable with the modern Nigerian women. On the other hand Sofola is at her best when she portrays the traditional woman within her world as with Odibei and Obiageli in Wedlock of the Gods and King Emene. Sofola's mastery in handling such traditional characters is achieved in the bitter state of mind which the women find themselves. Throughout the first act of the Wedlock of the Gods, Odibei's repeated line is:

My son cannot die a shameful death.¹⁹

This bitterness of losing her son, like Obiageli, leads her into the angry person bent on revenge. Sofola's female characters, especially Obiageli and Odibei, are reflected better when put under pressure. Both women lose their sons and are angered and geared towards revenge. In the performances of both plays not much is seen of Obiageli and Odibei for a good appreciation of how well the playwright develops her female characters. This is a technique employed by the playwright in order to have a consistency with the angry characters the audience see at the beginning of both plays. Wedlock of the Gods starts with Odibei seeking the medicine that killed her son, consistently searching for the reason for her son's death, and when she found it in act three, scene one, she sends a message to the victim of her anger, Ogwoma, in an embittered riddle:

The rat will not rush into the bush
this time. I am ready. (To Nneka)
Tell your rat that there is no bush
she will run to that Odibei will not
enter.²⁰

Obiageli in King Emene is again allowed to appear in the play for a very limited time. The first time she appears in act one, scene two, it is to evoke the goddess, Mkpitime to take revenge for her son's death. And although she does not take an active part in the tragic action where the king dies in the final scene in the third act, she serves as a constant reminder of the reason for the King's tragedy. Although these women are successful within the types of plays Sofola writes, her more modern women are not as successful. Good examples are the female characters in The Sweet Trap. Sofola, in an interview she gave Wole Adamolekun in 1981, says that The Sweet Trap was not:

an attempt to advocate women's
desires but an attempt to define
women's place in the society, at
least in our society herein
Nigeria.²¹

But the young or modern Nigerian woman disagrees with the achievement of the play. Juli Adeoye, an actress with the University of Ibadan Masques and who has acted in most of Sofola's plays, including the part of Clara Sotubo in The Sweet Trap in the 1981 production at Ibadan, says:

Sofola sees the women from her own traditional experience. She does not reflect the problems of the modern woman. In The Sweet Trap, she says women should remain where they are put. There is the absence of an optimistic future for the plight of women, especially the male domination in a typical Nigerian society. Playing the part of Clara Sotubo was most tasking for me, because I did not believe in her, she is presented as someone who has not got a mind of her own. And at the end of the play the audience, the females, hated her for being submissive and defeatist.²²

It is understandable that an actress and most of the young girls in Nigeria should feel this way. The speeches of some of the male characters, especially at the beginning of the play when Dr. Sotubo tells his wife in the argument whether she should have a party or not that:

Get it into your head once and for all that your university education does not raise you above the illiterate fish seller in the market. Your degree does not make the slightest difference. You are a woman and must be treated as a subordinate. Your wishes, your desires and choices are subject to my pleasure and mood. Anything I say is law and unalterable. When I say something it stays; whether you like it or not, dear?²³

It is evident to the members of the audience at the end of the play, that Sofola fails to tackle the main problems of the modern day woman, And it is hoped that The Sweet Trap is only the beginning of Sofola's inclusion of the modern woman in her plays. And as with the success she has had with her more traditional village woman such as Odibei and Obiageli whom I shall now concentrate upon, she would achieve with time and many more plays a true definition of a woman's place in the Nigerian society of the twenty first century. This differs from Soyinka's handling of his female characters such as Segi in Kongi's Harvest and Sidi in Lion and the Jewel, who are often portrayed as cunning, beautiful ruthless and destroyers of men. He uses them as baits for the male protagonists.

It is no wonder that James Gibbs in writing the study aid to Kongi's Harvest comments that:

Soyinka's young women are often similar to one another. He has a tendency to idealize and allegorize and this weakens his presentation of Segi and indeed this whole drama, which depends on being rooted in reality.²⁴

In continuing the examination of the influence of Greek tragedy and Greek playwrights on Sofola, it is in the treatment of women that there appears to be a major difference. The Greek playwright who comes to mind because of the continuous treatment of women in his plays

is Euripides. In highlighting Euripides' obsession with women in his plays, Paul Roche, in the introduction to his book, The Three Plays of Euripides, says:

As to women, Euripides was obsessed with their plight. Out of his nineteen extant plays, no fewer than twelve are about women. Although he does not always portray them in the best of colours, he is so much in their favor that at least two of his tragedies, Medea and Alcestis, are propaganda tracts for women's liberation.²⁵

This quotation by Roche highlights a similarity in Sofola's treatment of women and that of Euripides' women characters. Her obsession is with the plight of women which comes about not only because Sofola, unlike Euripides, is a woman, but also because she lives within the society her women characters inhabit. As she aptly remarked in an interview she gave me at Ibadan on December 20, 1982:

My interest in women's plight is from deep down. Say, in my subconscious. I find that I must explore their problems within the society, ~~whether~~ whether a traditional one or a modern one as in Sweet Trap. I hope my plays help them to identify themselves and seek better ways of being prepared and ready in a rapidly changing world.²⁶

From this quotation, one finds that she sees herself as

spokeswoman for the Nigerian women. Definitely not as a radical one, as she shows in her negative reaction to women's liberation in Sweet Trap. But when her women turn sour, as in the case of Odibei and Obiageli in the two plays examined here, their fury knows no limit. It is her tragic plays which brings colour to the women characters. They possess such powerful frenzy that even Euripides' tragedies of similar themes, Medes Alcestis, do not equal.

A good example can be found in the opening scene of the first act of Wedlock of the Gods. Odibei starts the play with Otubo, Ogwoma's friend, in an angry mood which builds up to the frenzy which seizes her at the scene where she makes Ogwoma kill herself. The opening dialogue informs the audience of the ensuing bitter danger:

ODIBEI: (Thinking aloud). My son
cannot die a shameful death.
It must be somewhere.
(Footsteps are heard. She
stops and waits to see who it
is.)

OTUBO: (Calling from outside) Ogwoma,
is Odibei with you? (No answer)
Ogwoma....

ODIBEI: Come in if you like.
(Otubo enters).

OTUBO: Are you alone?

ODIBEI: (Still searching) What do you want?

OTUBO: Ogwoma is not in?

ODIBEI: (talking to herself) It must be somewhere.

OTUBO: (Stares at her a bit). What is the matter with you, Odibei?

ODIBEI: (Still talking to herself) Adigwu cannot die like that.²⁷

It is such destructive anger which Otubo was later in scene one of the third act to refer in a translated traditional Ibo proverb when she says:

OTUBO: This will not do. Anger leads nowhere. We cannot set fire to a whole house just to kill one rat because when the house is on fire the rat runs into the bush.²⁸

Roche's observation of Euripides' treatment of women helps to further highlight the comparison between the treatment of women characters by both playwrights.

Moreover, when one of his (Euripides') women turns sour, be it Medea or a Phaedra, it is because her man has

let her down. And when one of Euripides' women turns sour, she turns savage, is eaten up with the passion to get even with her man and is driven to an animal fury that is all too human.²⁹

Sofola's women, Obiageli and Odibei, do not possess the beauty of Medea and Phaedra. They are old women, and in love not with their male lovers as with Euripides' women, but with their only possessions - their sons. Sofola uses sons, because of the traditional value of a son to a family, and also to show the degree of the loss when their sons die mysteriously and much to the anguish of their mothers. An example of the depth of the anguish mothers feel is reflected in Obiageli's speech to Nneobi, the mother of the King, in scene two of the first act, where the two characters confront each other on stage with accusations of ill deeds. Obiageli informs Nneobi that she suspects her of having killed her son so that Nneobi's son might be king. During the performance she walks up to the centre stage, unties her costume and re-ties it tightly, a common way in which Nigerian women show that they are angry and ready for a confrontation, and she says:

OBIAGELI: What does it matter what my present station in life is? Whether I live or die makes no difference. Suffering is second nature to me and no one knows it better than you. My flesh has become hardened. Your hands have taught me

OBIAGELI : the value of silent suffering intermingled with patience and hope for peace and justice. I believe that one day the truth about the death of my son will be revealed. That day will surely come and these breasts that nursed my son in vain will kflow with the milk of joy. My son will rejoice in his grave for at last his untimely and unjust death will have been avenged.³⁰

Her explanation of the animal fury in her two wronged women, suggest that such a fury is a universal trait for women:

A woman wronged, especially when she believes she has been wronged unjustly seldom remains human at the moment she decides to avenge the wrong. Odibei, for example, is a weak old woman. She cannot fight Uloko in a duel. She is ashamed by their action, and since she brought Ugwoma to the family, by marrying her for her son, she must do away with her. She finds that she is driven to the wall. And like an animal, she must fight back.³¹

In act three, scene two, where Odibei fights back and is transformed into a witch, her language changes.

This is a departure from realism, and the seriousness in the transformation reflects the seriousness involved in the traditional theatrical entertainment, especially in the ritual form examined in chapter one. The whole scene is a reproduction of the ritual ceremony involved in the witch's attempt to kill her victim. Sofola's demand in the 'Production Note' that the whole scene takes place in the bush makes the attempt to recapture the realistic background of traditional theatrical entertainment. The production of Wedlock of the Gods which I saw in 1980, directed by the playwright, was set in a proscenium stage. The bush was reproduced by the set designer with cut plants and trees which surrounded Odibei. Odibei herself was made to stoop near the oozing pot which smoked and with blue lights created an eerie atmosphere. Odibei's speech also contains a new type of supernatural command.

ODIBEI: My God, the worst is done!
Ogwoma walks on the path that
reeks with blood (She picks
up the snail shell and blows
the powder). Let me feel you
your power (She puts it down,
looks directly into the pot filled
with snake and speaks directly into
it. She shakes the gourd at app-
ropriate intervals.) The vulture does
not see the corpse and resist it.
The dog does not see human dung
and resist it; The antelope does not
hear its death and refuse to dance:

Ogwoma cannot hear your call and refuse to answer!
Bring her here!
Lead her to me;
Bring her here not knowing what she is doing!
Lead her and make her do whatever she is doing!
Lead her and make her do whatever I bid!
Ogwoma, your soul is summoned;
(Ogwoma appears in a trance and walks towards Odibei)
Your soul is wanted;
Come, come and not look back!
Come, and answer your call!
Come and not look back. (Ogwoma reaches her and
stops)³²

She speaks incantations which have enough effect on Odibei to put her in a trance. This helps to create the magical effect especially when spoken to a pot oozing with smoke. It is in this scene that the images of Shakespeare's three witches in Macbeth and of Medea are recalled. It is not clear whether Sofola had these two plays in mind, but there is no doubt that Sofola must have come across these plays during her educational years in both the Nigerian and American schools. And as mentioned in chapter two, the influence on traditional theatrical entertainment of Shakespeare was in the similarities found in the characters presented in Shakespeare's plays and those found in the traditional Nigerian society.

In Wedlock of the Gods, Odibei, like the witches in Macbeth, talks to her victim through a pot, and as in Medea, wonder and enchantment set in. Odibei with her evil

powers is able to put Ogwoma into a trance and make her obey her desires:

ODIEBEI: Go to your house, open the door and enter. Behind your water pot is another small pot. Open it and say into it once, 'I have done what the land forbids'. Cup your hand thrice saying before each drink, 'I have done what the land forbid forbids', 'Let me perish', 'Let my blood appease the disgraced spirit of my husband'. Close the pot and wait for whatever comes.³³

Having obeyed Odibei's wish, Ogwoma begins to die slowly. Uloko, her lover, who had been looking for her comes, sees what has happened and in anger he kills Odibei. In the play we see revenge as the spirit of transformation, and how it blinds the sense of reason, and makes the character concerned become a savage eaten up with a passion to get even with the offender which drives them into 'an animal fury'.

The death of both lovers at the end of the play shows that the playwright did not set out to write a play about love but to write about the end of a fatal romance in a society which forbids it. The way the lovers die, especially through poisoning has made some critics like Adelugba and Ogunbiyi compare the play with Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. A critical study of both plays shows dissimilarities, for in Shakespeare's

play, it is the family feud more than the laws of a society that sets the tragic action in motion. Although both couples attempt in both plays to be accepted by their families, their attempts are entirely on different levels. And at the end of Shakespeare's play, the only reason for the death of the lovers is the mistake in the timing and the impatience to allow the sleeping drug to wear off. This tragedy draws pity from the audience. In Sofola's play, the lovers are destined to die, either by the evil magical trance of Odibei or by the mere action which they have committed which is punishable by society. The audience's pity is controlled and measured against the broken taboo.

Another difference is in the effect of the tragic actions in both plays. In Romeo and Juliet, the two families end their feud, but the three families of Ogwoma, Odibei and Uloko will forever remain in enmity.

King Emene possesses a better background of magical wonder and enchantment than Wedlock of the Gods. It is a play dominated by women. Nneobi, the tragic figure in the play, breaks the sacred tradition of succession to the throne, and bears the consequences by losing her son, the king, and her highly regarded position of Queen Mother. There is also the Queen, a timid character who is given to the good life and loses any type of

control over her husband. The most powerful woman in the play is the Omu, who is also the chief Priestess of Mkpitime, the goddess of the peace week. The peace week is the week when the king is transformed into a god and enters the shrine to carry the problems of his citizens to their god. According to tradition, the king must be pure and undefiled when he goes into the peace week. It is through the Omu that the Queen Mother's action in which she killed Obiageli's son, who is supposed to be the rightful heir, is known to be a sin against the goddess, Mkpitime. Obiageli herself is a devout worshipper of the goddess. The disgrace of the king in having been chased out by the snake can be seen as the protection of the goddess for the cause of her followers. For it is not long after Obiageli has evoked the spirit of the goddess to action in her incantatory chants that the King's downfall occurs. Her chants, like those of Odibei in Wedlock of the Gods, are directed towards a supernatural being and results are expected. This would have a musical accompaniment.

OBIAGELI: You whose uncompromising hatred
of injustice has forced you to
depart the company of Anwai and
Oshimili.
Listen to my endless cry and save me !
My eyes have become a desert;
My dreams are turned into frightful
nightmares;

OBIAGELI: My heart aches for succour;
Oh kind goddess of the helpless,
Show me a sigh of hope!
I ask not for the throne that was
rightly his,
Nor do I ask for death to bring
my son back to me.
Comfort the broken heart of a mother
Whom injustice has robbed of
joy and peace
Soothe my burning heart and
Let justice reign again.³⁴

In the goddess' action we see a similarity to Euripides' Hippolytus for, a woman, the goddess, Mkpitime, knows the anguish of a woman losing her son; like Aphrodite, she must reward a follower by avenging the ill done against her, and this way the goddess is able to punish the non-believer, Nneobi. The job of the goddess is made even simpler by the human flaws in the King. He is rash and like Creon in Sophocles' Antigone, does not listen to the Soothsayer or to the Omu's advice. He relentlessly determines to find the sinner in the Palace for a confession that would lead to his own tragedy. In his bad-tempered impatience, the king takes sides with his mother against the elders and a goddess. The play is made even more colourful by the idea that the Queen Mother, a witch, meets her match when she attempts to possess the will of the goddess. In the scene where the king goes into the shrine, Sofola's use of the forces of nature can be seen as a Shakespearean influence already

mentioned in creating, as in Julius Caesar, a tragic foreboding. She uses the pretentious freaks of nature as in the days before Caesar is killed to prepare the audience for the coming tragedy. Sofola uses Obiageli's dream - which is similar to Calphurnia's dream - to warn the king of the ensuing danger, but like Caesar he fails to see sense in the dream and goes on to a tragic death.

The structure of the play is similar to that used in The Wedlock of the Gods, it is in three main acts - the first act introducing the problem of Obiageli to seek the murderer of her son. The second act introduces the problems the king is having with his kingdom, and the problems faced with the preparation of the peace week celebration. The third act is the one where all the problems are resolved. The king and his mother die in shame and Obiageli's son is avenged.

The language of the play, as in Wedlock of the Gods, is a mixture of prose and verse. The language changes as earlier mentioned when the embittered woman, Obiageli, evokes the supernatural powers of the goddess, Mkpitime. Sofola uses dance and music which are major influences of the traditional theatrical entertainment mentioned in the first chapter. In the 'Production Note' of Wedlock of the Gods the performance I watched at Ibadan, Sofola demands that:

Slow, mournful music to create a sad atmosphere may be played at the beginning and end of each scene, during intervals and in the death scene while Ibekwe and Nneka cover the corpses.³⁵

Such slow music as with the ending dirge of King Emene lends a tragic ending to the performances of both plays. Sofola does not write songs into her plays. The songs used in performance emerge from two sources. First, the Aniocha people portrayed in her plays give enough materials in terms of songs to the productions. Sofola, directing her plays herself, uses songs naturally from her cultural background. She also relies on musical instruments for dramatic effects. The 1980 production of Wedlock of the Gods was most of the time punctuated by a lone accompaniment of the traditional Ibo flute.

The traditional contents of the play obviously helps to situate the traditional costumes which her play, such as Wedlock of the Gods, demands. Sofola is also forceful about the particular costumes which are used in the productions of her plays. In the 'Production Note' of The Wedlock of the Gods, Sofola insists that:

Ogwoma, Odibei and Nneka should wear dark clothes to indicate people in mourning. No blouses, shoes or jewellery although their clothes should be a little brighter. All the women should wear headpieces but

not impressive or attractive ones. Odibei should reflect a mother in mourning in her costume and general composure.³⁶

For Sofola, costumes create authenticity in the production. Its performance, especially that of King Emene, the setting of the traditional royal courtyard which Sofola tried to recreate on a proscenium stage and the costumes and the stately language of the characters, which borrows effectively from the stately diction of the original Ibo, helps to mirror the Aniocha society which the playwright intends.

The reason for the success of Sofola's style is her ability to blend the demands of both inherited theatre conventions in her plays, has been her understanding of the Nigerian audience she writes for. The simplicity of the structure of her plays and the language used, almost seen as elementary when compared to the complex structure of Soyinka's plays, has been the main tool for her popularity.

Sofola's use of the English language has also differed from Soyinka's. The earlier mentioned, Sofola attempts to translate the vernacular Aniocha language into English. This is the reason why Sofola advocates a new type of English, the type she uses in her plays:

I feel they (European readers) should allow us to get our own Nigerian English. This will help both the playwright and the audience to feel at ease with the writing and performance of a play.³⁷

As shown in Sofola's plays, for example, Akuagwu's speech in Old Wines are Tasy, when he says:

AKWAGWU: Keep quiet! (A pause) A madman who does not know that he is mad cannot be cured. This boy is mad but doesn't know it. I saw the shame and tried to cover him with my cloth, but he threw it back at me; threw his nose in the air and fouled the air with his rectum. The elders took to their heels leaving me standing with a crown of shame.³⁸

The 'Nigerian English' is a bridge towards a direct translation of the Nigerian vernacular into simple correct English, with more regard given to the colloquial speech than correct tenses, syntax and semantics. This may be disturbing to the British English readers, but the same goes for the American and Australian or even European who comes from a tradition where different dialects of English are spoken and used in plays.

In Sofola's plays the simplicity of language reflects the simplicity of meaning and themes.

This means that as with Soyinka's plays, such as The Road, in which meaning is often lost in the symbolic search for the meaning of the 'road', Sofola's plays deal with one main theme and allow the characters to partake in resolving the problem of the protagonists without leaving even the uneducated members of the audience, as in Soyinka's difficult plays, confused.

In keeping with the convention of the Nigerian playwrights including Soyinka, Sofola uses African speech patterns and proverbs in her plays. A good example can be found in Wedlock of the Gods, at the meeting of the elders:

IBEKWE: (Standing) Diokpa Ata, members of Onowu family, welcome. The tortoise says that his problems are his problems and therefore cannot be crushed by them. So, he carries his problems on his back wherever he goes.³⁹

The use of such a proverb which comes from the traditional speech convention enables the playwright to put more meaning into a speech without making it longer than the normal speech in a dialogue, this may be limiting in terms of the understanding by the non-African reader, but the direct translations of her proverbs usually help to carry the meaning through.

Her use of the traditional speech pattern in proverbs allows for the inclusion of the pidgin English in the dialogue of some of her characters. Soyinka uses English too, especially in The Road where the touts and drivers speak it. The use of pidgin English - a cross between correct English language and the vernacular language - in plays shows that the characters are not educated. Or it shows that the characters find it easier to speak in pidgin in order to carry a particular message through. But in most cases, pidgin English is used because the playwrights want their characters to speak it so as to achieve a particular effect: for example, to portray reality. An example can be found in Sofola's The Disturbed Peace of Christmas, when Olu tells the first shepherd in the Christian nativity play that Titi is pregnant, he speaks in pidgin English, so that the non-speaker would not be able to understand:

OLU: Have you not heard?

FIRST SHEPHERD: Heard what?

OLU: Tori deh plenty - o.

SECOND SHEPHERD: Eh-eh, na wetin be de tori?

OLU: Titi don get belleh.⁴⁰

Professor Adelugba's view on this type of usage of the colloquial speech in plays in his essay 'Six authors in

search of a language' is that it helps to portray the character more clearly: the reader is able to identify with the character and it also shows a realistic presentation of the way most Nigerian elders speak. This view by Adelugba also explains Soyinka's use of proverbs in his plays. Soyinka, in using proverbs, is more cautious about the ungrammatical use of certain words; in selecting words which make meaning to the English readers, he loses the original traditional meaning even further in his English translation. The proverb becomes too polished for any sense of identification and relevance to be achieved by the Nigerian audience. An example of Soyinka's proverb reads thus:

AGBOREKO

Have you seen a woman throw
away her pestle when she really
needs to pound yam? When Iredade
took her case to Orunmila, he
said, if the worm doesn't jig near
the roost the fowl may still want
to peck, but at least it can't say
the worm was throwing dust in
his face.⁴¹

In this proverb, Soyinka's translation is covered up by his intended philosophical meaning, such that the common myth of Orunmila is given a new meaning - the only one Soyinka intends the audience to grasp. In this way, as

with Sofola's proverbs, there is an element of obscurity to the majority of the audience from whose culture the proverb has been translated in the first place. This example of Soyinka's use of proverb which comes from one of his most difficult plays, A Dance of the Forests, does not make the play's understanding more accessible.

Happily, Sofola has no problems with the publications and productions of her works. Except for The Disturbed Peace of Christmas, which was published by Daystar Press, a local publisher, her major works have been alternatively published by either Evans Brothers limited or Heinemann Publishers. Both publishing firms have branches all over the world, and this means that circulation of her works is well carried out. She is well known outside the country, most especially in the United States. Two of her plays have been translated to different languages; Old Wines are Tasty into the Yoruba language, and King Emene has been produced in Norway after having been translated into the Norwegian language. This means an increase in an international audience for her works.

As regards the production of her plays, being a lecturer at a Drama School such as Ibadan, which has the tradition of the travelling theatre established by Axworthy and later developed into a professional theatre group by Soyinka, Professor Joel Adedeji and Adelugba while

each of them was Head of the School, Sofola has a vantage position of having her plays directed and acted by her students. And with the Arts Theatre which has a proscenium stage, the University campus audience have an opportunity to see her plays before they are taken on tour. It is no wonder, therefore, to learn of Sofola's successes with her plays which have benefitted from the tests of performance. Sofola herself acknowledges the positive gains of such a practice when she says:

My plays so far have got good responses from the uneducated. By that I mean the non-literate. If they can follow the action as they see it they can really understand what's happening and they get with it. I'm trying to react to the general masses, maybe I should put it that way. And I feel too that if a problem that a play deals with is at the heart of human existence it will reach any audience. So I'm not trying to write for the highbrow or for people who understand the human situation and who can identify with human problems.⁴²

It is such an awareness of a playwright's intentions that has made Sofola a major contemporary force amongst the new Nigerian playwrights.

NOTES

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27. Sofola, Zulu. Wedlock. pp. 5-6.
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29. Roche Paul. (tranalated), Three Plays of Euripides, Norton of Co. Inc. New York. p.vii (introduction).
30. Sofola Z. King Emene: Tragedy of a Rebellion, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1974. p. 8.
31. Sofola's interview with Author, December 1982, Ibadan.
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33. Ibid, p. 53.
34. Sofola, Zulu. King Emene, p. 7.
35. Sofola, July. Wedlock. p. 4.
36. Ibid. p. 3.

37. Sofola's interview, Drum. p. 45.
38. Sofola, Zulu. Old Wines. pp. 41-42.
39. _____ Wedlock, p. 25.
40. _____ The Disturbed Peace of Christmas.
p. 27.
41. Soyinka A Dance of the Forests. p. 40
42. Sofola's interview, Drum. p. 44.

CHAPTER FIVE

WALE OGUNYEMI

Wale Ogunyemi was born in 1939 at Igbajo, a Yoruba town in Oyo State of Nigeria. He grew up in this area of rich Yoruba tradition and customs, acquainting himself with traditional materials of the history of the Yoruba people. He had his primary and secondary educations in Igbajo, developing a keen interest in the plays of Shakespeare on his later career which I shall examine further when I come to discuss the issue of Western influences on his works.

He came into active theatre when he auditioned in 1959 for the first Yoruba play on Television titled, Agogunrin. From there, he joined a theatre group called Theatre Express in Oshogbo, where he wrote his first drama sketches including Business Headache of 1966. Between 1959 and 1960, Ogunyemi worked with the School of Drama at the University College, Ibadan. He joined Wole Soyinka's 1960 Masks and subsequently Orisun Theatre. While Soyinka was in prison, he wrote plays for the group. He later joined the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ibadan as a Senior Artist and Writer.

Because of the many plays which he has written and their popularity with the Nigerian audience, Ogunyemi has remained the most prolific Nigerian playwright.

Most of his plays written in both English and Yoruba language allow for understanding by a much greater audience than any other Nigerian playwright. This ability has been mainly due to Ogunyemi's experience working with the Yoruba professional theatre groups and the theatre groups who perform plays in English.

The main concern of this chapter will be to examine Ogunyemi's use of historical materials and how the materials he uses influence the changing conventions of traditional entertainment discussed in chapter one. In this chapter, I shall concentrate on Ogunyemi's use of historical materials in contrast to Soyinka's.

Particular attention will be given to two plays: Kiriji (1976), and Ijaye War (1970). These two plays have remained the best examples of the use of historical materials in plays written in Nigeria today, and they also are the most suitable for this study because of the historical contents in them, and the plays have remained the best examples of how Ogunyemi has been able to use inherited traditional and historical materials in his plays.

As mentioned earlier, Ogunyemi's plays have grown out of three main sources of influence. First, the availability of historical materials in which his great grandmother has remained a major traditional influence.

She was an Owu, a very powerful and influential chief of the Igbajo Palace. Through her, Ogunyemi was able to learn about most traditional customs, including the Court entertainments which are reflected in his plays. A good example can be found in his first full length play, The Scheme, which he wrote in 1967. It is about an incident concerning the conflict between a chief, Odolofin, and the Priestess of a goddess, an event which truly happened in 1947 and which Ogunyemi has turned into a play. The Scheme explores the intrigues and power of the Yoruba gods. It is about Odolofin, a village chief who had earlier caused the Priestess of Esile, Lojuse, to kill her own cow as a sacrifice. During the festival of Ogun, the Yoruba god of Iron, the Priestess is determined to have her revenge on Odolofin and accuses him of stealing it. The village elders forgive him and return the effigy to the shrine. The Priestess still determined to punish the chief takes the effigy to his house again and the second time the elders believe the Priestess, and punish the chief by sending him out of the village. The goddess, on seeing what her Priestess had done, is angered and the Priestess goes mad and is shamed.

A second source of influence can be found in his academic experience and his encounter with works of Shakespeare. His interests in Shakespeare are mainly in the similarity to Shakespeare's world, human emotions,

and the use of historical materials in Shakespeare's plays. He believed that Shakespeare's works, when well adapted, could achieve a thematic relevance to Nigerian social life.

Another reason for the appeal of Shakespeare's plays to him was that he had lived in the Palace in his younger days as a boy at Igbajo, and this enabled him to identify easily with the kings, their ambitions and tragic falls, which he must have witnessed while growing up at the Palace. It is no wonder that by 1969 Ogunyemi had translated for his own purposes Shakespeare's Macbeth into a Yoruba play titled Aare Akogun. In his adaptation, Ogunyemi relied on the 19th century Yoruba history of wars and great Yoruba warriors. The plot of Macbeth suited Ogunyemi's plot. A great Yoruba general is told by the witches on his way back from war that he would rise to become the ruler of the Oyo Empire. Ambitious, he kills the ruling king and is later killed by the son of the late king. The presence of the witches and the ambitious kings and Princes found in the Yoruba history enabled the audience to accept Ogunyemi's adaptation, which was true of the period he wrote about.

A third influence on Ogunyemi has remained the theatre itself. His ability to work with both English and Yoruba theatres has accounted for his many plays.

His experience at Oshogbo with the Yoruba professional theatre groups of Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo, gave him more materials to work with. Writing for these theatre groups has given him the ability to be able to write his plays first in the Yoruba language and then translate them to the English language, hence allowing his plays to be performed by a greater number of actors and seen by a greater number of the audience than any other Nigerian playwright.

His early work as an actor with Axworthy at Ibadan must have influenced his idea of the practical theatre of Western drama. And when Soyinka came in 1959 from England, Ogunyemi also joined his theatre groups, even continuing the Orisun theatre group along with Dapo Adelugba while Soyinka was in prison. The experience gained by working with this theatre is reflected in the successes of the performances of his plays on stage. An understanding of this third influence allows James Gibbs and Patience Addo's comment that:

Wale Ogunyemi is an actor as well as a playwright and his plays benefit, as do Soyinka's and Rotimi's by being written from an intimate, practical knowledge of the theatre.¹

to become even more evident in the careers of Ogunyemi, and the other new playwrights such as: Osofisan and Sowande, whose successes as playwrights

depend on this intimacy with the theatre as actor, playwright and director.

His other plays, all products of these influences, were written between 1970 and 1979. They are : Eshu Elegbara (1970), Obaluaye (1972), Ijaye War (1970), The Vow (1973), We Can Always Create, The Sign of the Rainbow (1973), The Divorce (1977), The Family and Kiriji (1976). In 1977, he wrote a nationally commissioned play which was the Nigerian entry for the second World Black Arts Festival. It was titled Oke Langbodo, and was based on Wole Soyinka's novel, A Forest of a Thousand Demons.

Ogunyemi's major contribution to Nigerian drama has remained his use of history in drama. It is the history of the Yorubas that is his primary source of materials. The Yorubas more than any other ethnic tribe in Nigeria have a history of inter-tribal wars. The life span of these were mainly from the 18th to the 19th centuries. It is these wars, the heroes of the wars and the lessons which the wars teach that fascinate Ogunyemi in his writings. The two plays which best serve as examples of his handling of historical materials are: Ijaye War (1970), and Kiriji (1976). The plays are concerned with the Yoruba empire of the 19th century. The approximate dates have been estimated by historians as being between 1859 and 1886. The Ijaye war, the earlier of the two wars, was fought about

1859 to 1862, and Kiriiji war at about 1877 to 1886. Both wars ended mainly due to the intervention of the colonial administrators who later annexed all the territory into what became Nigeria in 1898. In his plays, drama and history became a means for a celebration and a re-telling of the history of Yoruba people.

I write historical plays, because first, I want to attempt to capture and document the history of our people. And also, I want to set history into entertainment. Make it more attractive than it appears on the pages of the colonial chronicals.²

As history is reworked and used by him in his plays, it forms a basis for good drama.

The structures of Ijaye War and Kiriiji are not consistent with one another. Ijaye War is not written in acts, instead it is in fourteen scenes which are titled. Kiriiji is in two acts and an epilogue. It is the historical sequence which dictates the plot of the plays, hence the presence of what Adelugba refers to as 'epi-grammatic qualities' - which refers mainly to the titling of each scene. For example, In Ijaye War two of the titles are: 'Peace meeting at Ibadan', 'IKurunmi's Palace in Ijaye'. This can be seen as an influence of Brecht's episodic drama.

The plots of both plays are simple and the playwrights' thematic pre-occupations are made clear.

Ijaye War's theme is the need to uphold tradition and how it effects a man's principle. The central plot surrounds the person of Kurunmi, a powerful warrior of Ijaye. The war starts over a disagreement on whether the son should succeed the father on the father's death. Alaafin of Oyo, the old King of Oyo of which Ijaye is a vesaal, dies. And before his death, he demands that his son should succeed him. This is a break in tradition as the son is buried along with his father. The old king had got the support of Ibadan, a powerful group of warriors led by Ogunmola to agree to defend his desire. Kurunmi, a great stickler for tradition refused to accept the king's choice and demands that he should be killed. But the Ibadans having sworn allegiance to the new King, and disliking Kurunmi's earlier war victories, influenced the new king Adelu into a war against the Ijaye people.

Kiriji's main subject is of the revolt of vassal states against strong inhuman controls. The plot again involves the Ibadan warriors who defeated Kurunmi in the Ijaye war. The play starts with a delayed uprising against strong Ibadan policies of vassal rule. The Ekitis are frightened of the officers of Law, called Ajeles, imposed on them by the Ibadan rulers. The play's sub-plot indirectly features on an Ekiti warrior, Fabunmi, whose

dynamic and revolutionary spirit leads his people to a revolt against the Ibadans. The major theme of the play is the playwright's call for all the Yorubas to unite with one another. A theme which also fits in with the present political situations among the Yorubas today. Fabunmi, a wise young warrior, realizes that the reason why the Ibadans have remained the conquerors of other Yoruba tribes, has been their sense of unity and their possession of the new guns. He calls for such a unity in the Ekiti camp against a common enemy. The Ekitis, now united, apply to their children working in Lagos to send them modern guns to fight the Ibadans. With the guns and a new united front, they began to defeat the Ibadans until the colonial administrator intervenes to bring about a much desired peace.

The two plays, as with most of Ogunyemi's plays are written in blank verse, but when he writes the songs he uses the poetic style. The speeches are mostly written in prose form, which conform with the usually long and descriptive pattern of speech by the Yorubas when speaking the Yoruba language.

One must pause here to consider Ogunyemi's use of the traditional theatrical conventions mentioned earlier in the first chapter. Because Ogunyemi's plays portray the history of the Yoruba people, he has chosen to

include most of the conventions mentioned in chapter one which were practiced in both the folk and ritual entertainments. The episodic structure of his plays enables him to present history in different ways. Like the narrator mentioned in the first chapter, Ogunyemi uses long speeches which introduce and set the scene for his play to take place. A good example can be found in *Ijaye War* in the opening scene when Balogun Ibikunle says:

Balogun Ibikunle - it is not our intention to isolate Ijaye, rather it is Kurunmi who is the architect of Ijaye's isolation. You know, don't you, Oje, that it was rebellion that broke the old Oyo Kingdom and to guard against such further occurrences Atiba laid down a policy that there should be one kingdom to which all cases and problems should be brought. This is what we see fit and are adhering to with full co-operation from all sides.³

With this speech, as with most of the long speeches of the narrator in the folk tradition, the audience are able to understand the main subject of the play. By mentioning Oje and speaking directly to him, Ogunyemi is able, indirectly, to speak to the audience informing them of the history of the Oyo kingdom and the problem which is going to be solved at the end of the play.

Ogunyemi's use of traditional conventions relates a great deal to the oral tradition of the Yoruba people. This includes, mainly, the use of songs. Ogunyemi uses all the forms of traditional songs mentioned in the first chapter. This includes the chant song and the ritual antiphonal songs with the chorus. A good example can be found in Kiriji :

SOLO: Ara a ma dale yi
Ara (People), do not betray this land

CHORUS: Siye, siye,
Children of our mothers,

SOLO: E ma dale yi
Do not betray this land.

CHORUS: Siye,
Children of our mothers

SOLO: Ibadan ko wa ni'keru
The Ibadan put us into slavery.

CHORUS: Siye
Children of our mothers.

SOLO: Ibadan dagi beeyan mi
Ibadan treated my people badly.⁴

There is also the use of the praise chants, which Ogunyemi translates from the original Yoruba language into English. His translation which reads like the

translations of Sofola's proverbs which are done in simple English, tries still to keep the meaning and poetic flow found in the original. A good example can be found in Eshu Elegbara where Ogun, the Yoruba god of Iron praises the might of Eshu, the Yoruba god of evil. This is at the end of the play. Eshu Elegbara is disillusioned with the world of the hero-gods, where he had lost the election of being King. He returns to earth, determined to cause havoc and disharmony among human beings. His first victims, Lakashegbe and Tamodu are made to fight each other through the supernatural powers of Eshu Ogun, the hunter god, seeing all that had taken place, sings the chant song to appease Eshu and, at the same time, inform the human beings of their new predicaments. During performance, the scene is most effective with Ogun in front stage chanting the son while Eshu dances in silhouette, obviously pleased. The praise chant in poetic narrative verse reads thus:

OGUN: Poor children
They know not
Which hand conveys the morsel
Into the mouth.
They do not know Eshu, Laaroye
I laughed at them as I watched
From my hunting vantage point.
They do not know that
It was that curse 'hunger will tame a
Lion'
Which made Eshu elect
To become Orunmila's errand boy.

OGUN:

Eshu Laluu
The crossroad dweller
The trickster god of mischief
Hefty like a lion.
He knotted the front hari
With that of the occiput.
Who knows him
Does not cross him
Him who he crosses
Knows him not.
He is the one who,
On the ninth day
Of his wedding
Stole two hundred from Oya
And when challenged replied:
Two hundred is
Too cheap an amount on
Which to take offence.
The terrible stranger
You shouldn't discuss
When he is angry
He hits a stone
Until it bleeds.
When he is angry
He sits on the skin
of an ant.⁵

And when Ogunyemi realizes that a translation of a particular chant song would lose its effect on the audience when rendered in English, he reproduces it in its original form.

The effect of an English translation would be lost during a performance for the local Nigerian audience. This does not imply that no dramatic effect would be achieved if the song was translated into English. But the chant song, when translated, would lose its evocative effect and meaning to the Yoruba members of the audience. During performance, the renditions of the chant song, when well delivered, adds a sense of authenticity and colour, while situating the play within its cultural origins. A good example can be found in Kurunmi's chant song in *Ijaye war* which can only be effective when rendered in its original form:

Ah! IKurunmi Onalu
A tooro chun bi eni kole
Okunrin siisii loru
Okoo Mosadiwin
Aroworetu
Agbosogun, okunrin daindain.
Ila tiiri ko.⁶

Proverbs form a great part of the Yoruba speech pattern. For the Yorubas, proverbs are words of wisdom rendered in speech of wisemen, and also proverbs are used to save the speaker from unnecessary descriptions while engaged in a dialogue. Proverbs whether in Yoruba or in Ibo, form part of the rich oral tradition of Nigerians. It is no wonder that most of the contemporary playwrights, including Soyinka, rely on the use of proverbs; this shows a great influence of the traditional theatrical

entertainment because proverbs were mostly used in their performances.

Ogunyemi uses proverbs in the same way as Sofola. Which is mainly a direct translation of the proverb into English language, still achieving the effect of the proverb when rendered in its original form. This difference from Soyinka's use lies in his attempts to 'polish' the proverbs by using words which enables the foreign audience to make sense of it but loses the meaning of the proverb to the typical Nigerian audience. A good example of Ogunyemi's use of language can be found in Kurunmi's speech to Labudanu in Ijaye War:

...a bird, no matter how thick
the grove, meanders its way through
it with style, without crashing into
any of the trees.⁷

Long phrases of this nature are used as analogies or explanatory statements to make the young and lacking in patience in the play understand the wisdom of life, a part of the Yoruba culture which even Soyinka, with his careful choice of what aspect of Yoruba language to leave out in translations of his proverbs, cannot ignore.

Ogunyemi's proverbs are merely translations into English and, unlike Soyinka's, attempts are not made to

go beyond the symbolic meanings. He believes that the audience should be able to understand the proverbs within the context of the plays and his concern is in the maintaining and retaining of the full meaning of a proverb even after translation. A good example can be found in Kiriji, when Awoyemi says:

When the Antelope, the harmless animal of beauty, is confronted by a jury of four comprising the restless Hyena, the juggling Jaguar, the spotted Tiger and, at the head of them all the roving master of the forest, the Lion, the Antelope does nothing. But bows his head to them in fear; does what they direct and follows the way they lead.⁸

Such rather long proverbs tend to confuse the non-Yoruba or Nigerian audience, whose task it is, to first find the symbolic meaning of each animal before the meaning of the proverb becomes clear. But among the Nigerian audience, the meaning is clear and the proverb even helps the understanding of the play.

The essence of the style of Wale Ogunyemi, as with the plays of Sofola, lies in the simplicity of the English language. The only difference is that while Sofola translates from the Ibo language, Ogunyemi translates from Yoruba language. It is this attempt at a direct translation of the Yoruba language into English, that

Adelugba in his review of Ogunyemi's Kiriji, calls 'Yorubanglish'. The main problem according to Adelugba in this review was in the grammatic usage and syntax placed in the dialogue, and in scenes where close transposition from the original Yoruba takes place. He sees this problem arising especially in 'The Cross Bow' scene where many proverbs are spoken by Deji (King) of Akure and Ogedemgbe the Ekiti warrior. In his review Adelugba also sees the language problem as one which arises when:

'Yoruba logic begets 'Yoruba English' and this raises the question - how do we define correctness?'
Ogedemgbe says for instance:

"I am not a coward, my king, nor am I a fool to have thrown open the gates of Ilesha to the Ibadan. They tricked me into it and you cannot be wiser than a man who deceives you."

Adelugba feels that the problem of such a phrase like

'You cannot be wiser than a man who deceives you'⁹

is in the oddity it presents in the phrasing. But this problem is most found when the play is being read

because even Adelugba agrees that, in the production of Kiriji which he directed at the courtyard of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan in December 1971:

Its authenticity was no doubt eked out by the skill of the performers and their use of tonality.

My explanation for this problem is that the thoughts and materials used for his plays come to Ogunyemi first in Yoruba language. He is then faced with the problem of translating his Yoruba materials into English. And in some cases, 'correctness' as highlighted by Adelugba in his review of Kiriji, of such English or Yoruba English translation does not appear as obvious as long as the meaning in Yoruba is reflected in the transposition to him.

Although the types of English used in his plays is often not grammatically correct, Martin Banham defends this, when he remarks that:

There are occasions when the English - perhaps as a result of attempting close transposition from the original Yoruba - is stilted and awkward, but the moments are balanced by some alert dialogue and by a strong sense of spectacle. Audiences respond intimately to the familiar passage of the action in many of these plays, and Ogunyemi shares with Clark and Rotimi an ability to use the familiar stories of his culture in

an illuminating way.¹¹

Another explanation for Ogunyemi's use of English language is in the hero-god figures who form the bulk of his protagonist characters in the historical plays. And moreover, as mentioned by Martin Banham, there is the question of reaching a large number of the audience. It is understandable therefore, when Ogunyemi remarks:

When I write, I write for the masses, everybody who comes to the theatre hall must understand my play, even the uneducated market woman. That is why when I write traditional plays, it is usually to emphasize, to educate, and to project the rich culture of our people. There is no way I can achieve this in complex English.¹²

His style accounts for the successes of these plays with the Nigerian audience. Which has made him the most popular playwright in Nigeria.

In Kiriji and Ijaye War, as in most of his plays, Ogunyemi uses the normal rhythm of English. In Kiriji language is employed to achieve characterization. The playwright employs language in such a way that the audience is aware that he takes sides with the Ekiti people (his tribal group), against the Ibadans. An example of this nature can be found in the doddering speech of Osi the Ibadan warrior when he tries to give reason

for the enforcement of vassal rule and enslavement on the Ekitis:

People of Ijeshaland, chiefs and warriors, I bring greetings from Aare Latosa and from the Baale of Ibadan and all the war chiefs. They wish you well and admire your timely surrender. But, as you all know, a city without a king is not a good city. Therefore, we shall now give you someone who will take care of you and your homesteads. We are enforcing him on you, mind you, but it is the cow that ate yam seedlings who says we should curse the cowhead.¹³

The effect of such doddering speeches causes the uprising. As with Shakespeare's portrayal of the French as drunken, lazy braggarts in Henry V, Ogunyemi presents the Ibadan characters especially the war generals as inexperienced, ineffective, boastful warriors who fail when compared to the more valiant, reasonable, tactful, patient and understanding warriors of Ekiti.

In Ijaye War, Ogunyemi attempts to recreate the language spoken during the 19th century by the Yorubas. The songs and Yoruba dialect reproduced are not in today's Yoruba colloquial language. For example, the war song of the Ibadan warriors is reproduced in its original archaic form:

Kanakana Ajibade
Chan, ohan ni n dun
Ohan!
A r'Egba lokankan a se bogun ni
Ija suke suke ni ja Egba
Ija lile lile ni ja Oyo
Ohan!¹⁴

and although translated into the English language:

Ajibade's mascot has a croaky voice
Sounds croaky
Croaky.
We saw the Egbas at a great distance
We thought they are fighters
Tactless warriors are the Egbas
Great warriors are the Oyo.¹⁵

the audience is still aware of the translation from the archaic dialect, as the dramatic effect is achieved from the rendition: Language does not define characterization in this play as it does in Kiriji. The colonial character such as Mr. Roper, Rev. and Mrs. Mann speak in the same way as the African characters do, and this limits the acceptance of their character portrayal.

In these plays, it is the Western influence of the epic tradition in which there is the celebration of a continuous narrative and the achievement of one or more heroic personages of history, or tradition, that is most apparent as being Ogunyemi's pre-occupation. The Western epic poetry grew out of the oral tradition through the secondary epics of Rome, Italy, Spain and

England. The same can be said of Ogunyemi's epic plays. But the origin and the development differs, from Ogunyemi's epic drama which grows out of the rich Yoruba traditions of myths, folktale, oral chants, incantations and dirges. There is a great sense of similarity in the form of the epic poetry in its oral forms as well as in its changing art forms i.e. epic drama, epic cinema, etc.

The classical Yoruba epic like those poems in Homeric and the Trojan cycles were sung out with the epic hero's fame linked with his bard. As earlier mentioned in chapter one, in the Yoruba society the hunters practised it mostly. It was a cultic attitude of greetings, praising or approving the deeds of the heroes concerned. Ogunyemi uses this form of oral chant in Kurunmi's praise song in Ijaye War.

But included with these qualities of the epic, were also two major functions; the epic had to entertain as well as celebrate the historical materials used. This is well achieved in the plays of Ogunyemi which attempt to present the Yoruba history, the wars, the time of peace, and the people of the period. In the preface to the texts and the 'Author's notes' to the production hand-outs, Ogunyemi is quick to mention that he hopes that the audience are not bored with historical details, but also entertained.

In Ogunyemi's epic plays, such as Kiriji and Ijaye War, there is the surpassing sense of the dimensions of realism. This means that there is a representation of the history of the Yorubas in Ogunyemi's plays. Ogunyemi is also aware that the historical materials have to be as realistic as possible for the Yoruba members of the audience to relate. The realism of the historical materials in both plays examined here, are shown by the amount of research studies which the playwright says he underwent before writing. Ogunyemi attempts to create a balance between both fighting sides, the Ekitis and Ibadans in Kiriji, and the Ibadans and the Egbas in Ijaye War. In Ijaye War, Kurunmi is not presented as in other plays of the same history, as a holy and good general. Ogunyemi attempts to present a balance in Kurunmi's character as the great and valiant warrior who is also proud, boastful and rash. The audience accept the character presented because of the human qualities he possesses. This works mostly because of the selected historical materials which Ogunyemi builds round the characters in order to present a history to which the audience can relate; since the history of the Yoruba remains a continuous and functional part of their everyday life.

Secondly, it enables the audience to go beyond the realistic dimension presented in the play by creating new meanings for history. For example, through a play

like Kiriji, the audience are able to create new meanings in the understanding of the problems of the civil war then and the 1967 civil war in Nigeria: they are also warned through the play against any further civil wars in the future. It is then understandable, when Ogunyemi aptly remarks:

I write historical plays in order to document the history of our people which is becoming a forgotten past of the lives of the present Yorubas and hope that new meanings would be got from the plays. And also I write for the entertainment of my audience. I want them to meet Kurunmi the great hero and also appreciate Kurunmi the actor.¹⁶

So as with the great Western epic writers of poetry, drama or cinema, Ogunyemi hopes that his plays, despite the historical perspective, show in a sense, the writer's nostalgia for the glories of the past. They must not be seen as works which have history as their subjects alone, but as history being included in the work of art. Because Ogunyemi is widely travelled and well read, I could expect him to be aware of Piscator and Brecht.

But it contrasts with the epic drama of Erwin Piscator which, like Ogunyemi's epic plays, grew out of

a Western tradition of epic. Piscator says:

Our pieces were incitements with
which we wished to engage in living
history, and act politics.¹⁷

The comparisons to Piscator and Brecht are most relevant to this study, because they give for an analysis in the difference between Ogunyemi's plays and those of other epic playwrights. The two playwrights also show the presence of Ogunyemi's influence when such exists. Ogunyemi's approach to politics, unlike Piscator's is a negative one. His plays are devoid of any type of ideological stance. This contrast to Piscator's conventional approach of his epic theatre, may be explained by the social reality for which Ogunyemi writes. For in a country dominated by military coups, a Civil War and untold hardships for the poor, and invariably a prison detention of the playwright who is pre-occupied with plays that are found to possess political incitements, as Soyinka's experience shows, one then understands why Ogunyemi's epics lack any form of politics.

But Ogunyemi sees the use of politics and the epic theatre as a problem for the individual. In an interview with me at Ibadan, he explained that his play lack any form of incitements because of his personal reaction to ideologies and politics:

I do not like any type of ideology,
I hate politics and do not think
that the writer should engage himself
in these, but I think my historical
plays are to inform the country on
aspects that have happened in the past
history and seek for ways which we can
learn from whatever mistakes of the
past shown in my plays.¹⁸

This view may be influenced by Ogunyemi's belief that for history to be effective political plays, such as Piscator's distortions and adaptations to history, have to take place. It is the moral issues of history that are his main concern in his African deliberate adaptation of European epic forms. In this case, he believes that his plays must be presented as entertainment and nothing more to be effective especially with the Nigerian audience. So unlike Piscator's remark in his book, The Political Theatre, that 'We banned the word Art', art forms the main reason for Ogunyemi's plays.

If one is to continue the comparison of Ogunyemi's epic drama with the epic drama of another European playwright whose epic drama like Ogunyemi's was influenced by the Western form of epic tradition, Bertolt Brecht would come to mind. But as Ogunyemi says of Brecht and his epic theatre:

I have read and even acted in Brecht's plays, But his epic theatre is different from mine and he does not influence my historical play in any way.¹⁹

If there is any tinge of influence at all, it would be in the similarity achieved by Brecht and Ogunyemi's epic plays which is reflected in the instructive and entertaining elements of their plays. Although Adelugba in a review of his production of Ogunyemi's Kiriji says:

Whether or not the playwright used the word 'epic' in the Brechtian sense is a moot point, but clearly he subtitled the play, 'an epic on Ekitiparapo war in the nineteenth century'; and some of the titles of the situations in the play have a crisp, epigrammatic quality - 'The Bleak Beginning'. 'The Misty Morning', - 'The Death Approach', 'Behold the Gun' - which are reminiscent of Brecht and the epic theatre.²⁰

But one must not totally agree with Adelugba's comment, despite the fact that it seems very sensible to say that Ogunyemi's descriptive sub-titles are rather like Brecht's. This is because as earlier explained in this chapter, the 'epigrammatic quality' which Adelugba mentions, is also due to the historical flow which Ogunyemi hopes to achieve while engaged in the process of selective historical material which he breaks into episodes in his plays. And besides, Brecht's use of songs as well as sub-titles were mainly a deliberate means of interrupting the play: of taking the wind out of the actors' sails and showing the actual mechanism of the work. In Ogunyemi's plays, the sub-titles do not appear on cardboard as in Brecht's performances. But the similarities

in style between Ogunyemi and Brecht remain a fact. Another reason for the 'epigrammatic quality' would be Ogunyemi's technique of being able to present the play as an attempt at an objective presentation of their history. Brecht has not been known to be engaged in such a technique, which would not have been helpful to his highly objective epic theatre which adopted openly the Marxist ideology. And in Brecht's epic theatre, Marxism posits the existence of a material universe, outside of, independent of, but accessible to man's consciousness, knowledge, and activity and amenable to his influence.

Unlike Brecht's epic theory of his characters as inquiry, there is a limit to the depth of characterization in Ogunyemi's plays. This means that Brecht's estrangement theory which considers characters and incident as historically conditioned and transitory, does not affect Ogunyemi's character. His characters are from the historical past and the environment is created for them through actions and details in dialogue. Ogunyemi's songs are not written or created by him: they are mostly songs, as with the Kurunmi song, reproduced in their original form or songs transposed into English. The songs in Kiriji and Ijaye War, especially the war songs, have definite meanings. A good example is the song sung by the Ibadan warriors in Kiriji in the scene where they surround the captured Ekiti warriors. During the 1971 performance the

Ibadan warriors danced round the Ekiti captives in such a way that the mockery intended through the song was further highlighted. The song which reads thus:

IBADAN WARRIORS: Jijo iya ka woo!
Do a dance of shame!
Jijo iya ka wood!
Do a dance of shame!
Panla sigi san san san -
The way in idiot does it -
Penla!
Does it!
Jigo iya ka woo
Do a dance of shame,²¹

is specifically a mockery song, and unlike the songs of Brecht, does not possess the organic or functional elements. The songs of Ogunyemi's plays also help the aesthetic value of Ogunyemi's play also help the aesthetic value of Ogunyemi's plays.

Another modification of Western European epic by Ogunyemi, is absence of any one major hero in his plays. The Yoruba culture forbids this. No wonder then that in writing his version of the nineteenth century Yoruba Ijaye war, he fails to show the deeds of any one great hero. This is unlike Oja Rotimi's version of the same history which be titled, Kurunmi after the great general of the Ijaye warriors in which he chose to

celebrate the figure of Kurunmi. Ogunyemi prefers to call version Ijaye War because as he remarks:

When one comes to study the history of the Yorubas, it is the Ijaye war that we find, before we meet Kurunmi the great Ijaye warrior. But Kurunmi was not the only great warrior in the war. There are many other warriors, for example, those from Ibadan, Abeokuta, Oyo. And most importantly, Ijaye war is not about Kurunmi, but about the upholding of traditions and the changing tides of past life. Kurunmi died for what he believed in, but so did his followers. That, we respect them for.²²

It is this avoidance of focusing on any one character in Ogunyemi's plays which enables him to give moral message at the end of his plays. This way, his epic plays are tinged with fear, which serve as warnings towards the future, especially the wars, the deaths, the lack of trust and the blind ambitions portrayed by the great heroes in his plays. For example, in Ijaye War, he ends the play with a war chant which only goes to re-echo the continuous existence of war even after the revelation of the ills of war in the plays. In Kiriji, Ogunyemi is philosophical at the end of the play. Ami, the Ibadan warrior, not too sure about the peace achieved by the colonial

administrator's intervention, says:

Ami - We may bid arms goodbye today,
but there will always be wars, my
friend, until the day the cat and the
mouse learn to live together as brothers.
But I am afraid, that day will never
come.²³

Finally, like every epic, Ogunyemi's epic is a partisan one. In Kiriji and Ijaye War, there is the uncritical support for both the Ekiti and Ijaye warriors by the playwright. In Kiriji, there is the playwright's belief in their fight for freedom from the rule of Ibadans. And most of all, there is the show of the playwright's pride for being a Yoruba man. This reflects in the themes of his plays, which are primarily partisan in nature before any national meaning can be read into them. The immediate appeal of his epics is first of all to the Yoruba. In his remarks, Ogunyemi makes his position clear when he says:

We, the Yorubas are so many. We
can be one big family. We have the
Oduduwa myth to hold us together. But
we are the most divided tribe in Nigeria.
History proves it so. The only pity is
that we are making no attempts to change
it. I hope my plays serve as a sense
of awareness to this much desired change.²⁴

But the national, if not African essence of the truth and realistic elements found in the endings of his plays, are often the message that they hold. This being that history repeats itself. It is this uncared for awareness of the recurrence of history which is Ogunyemi's pre-occupation. Maybe this issue can be best explained by his desire for a new meaning for his epics, when he remarks:

History, the world over is the same. It is only when we read about a foreign history that we begin to reflect on ours. My historical plays are accepted everywhere they are shown, even by foreigners. But my hope is that we do not appreciate or dislike the character in the historical plays alone, but also to seek means at which we can correct some bad aspects of history and also continue the good aspects. I suppose that is what they are written to do.²⁵

Another way through which Ogunyemi has been able to influence the changing conventions by his use of historical materials is deeply rooted in his interest in the historical plays of Shakespeare which, as earlier mentioned, he came in contact with while in School.

Shakespeare's influence on Ogunyemi's writing is more evident in Kiriji than in Ijaye War. In Kiriji, Ogunyemi as with the plays of Shakespeare approaches

drama with preconceptions, for one thing, his moral sense, which is unwavering. It is Ogunyemi's moral sense of 'Unity' that he hopes to highlight as theme despite Ogunyemi's sympathy with the Ekiti people. He highlights unity in the play in such a way that it becomes more of a national call for unity than a playwright's inclusion of a theme in his or her play. For example, the play starts with the call for unity by Fabunmi Abe who later leads the Ekiti warriors against the Ibadans:

FABUNMI: If Ibadan war boys have the power to seize the world, they will cripple the nation in the name of oppression and dwarf all who refuse to be oppressed. That is why you and I, sons and daughters of Ekiti, must unite to free our land from the over-ambitious Ibadan warriors who wreck another man's house to mend their own.²⁵

Ogunyemi gives the reason for the lack of unity among Ekiti people at the end of the play. The reason he gives for the lack of unity is the absence of contentment among the ambitious Ibadan people. But in Ami's speech in the last scene, Ogunyemi prepares his audience for the reality which his play mentions and the moral message to be learnt from the play.

AMI: The war will never be over, my friend, until the day every man learns to be contented with whatever is destined to be his. But contentment, well, that's only for the dead.²⁷

The reason for the civil way among the Yorubas who should have been at peace with one another is the same as with Shakespeare's villains. In Kiriji, there is the absence of one major protagonist, which means that all these villainous qualities mentioned above belong to the society presented in the play, and to avert further tragic action such as deaths in the wars, it has to be a general resolution of the people to be aware of their faults and decide as they do in Kiriji, to stop fighting. This makes Ogunyemi's plays examples of attempts to show the communal way of life of the Africans mentioned in chapter one, which even involves the sharing of both the good and bad ills that happen to a society.

The treatment of the three witches in Kiriji, shows another influence from Shakespeare, but reflects a weaker portrayal of Shakespeare's three witches in Macbeth. The presence of the witches must not be totally seen as influence from Shakespeare's play, because witches exist in Africa as in the Scottish culture which Shakespeare wrote about in his play. The problem with the witches in Ogunyemi's play is that they are not as dramatically effective as Shakespeare's

witches are in Macbeth. Although as with Shakespeare's play, Ogunyemi's witches introduce themselves as supernatural beings:

IYAMI I: I am the bird of the Ocean

IYAMI II: The bird of the woods.

IYAMI III: And I, the heavenly bird.

IYAMIS: The sky is not our limit. Heaven
is not our limit.

IYAMI I: But the world we hold in our feathery
palms. The world is in our hands.

IYAMI III: We can be men

IYAMI I: We can be women.

IYAMI III: We can be neither men nor
women.

IYAMI I: We are ageless.²⁸

they fail to control the play the way the witches of Shakespeare do. In Kiriji, the Iyamis or witches decide to take sides with the Ekitis against the Ibadans, but it is the skill and style of the Ekitis coupled with their unifying sense of unity that wins them the war. At no time are the Iyamis presented as the controllers of man's fate, nor do they lend any metaphysical or physical help to the Ekitis. They are so irrelevant to the action of the play that their scene could be cut out of the play and it would still be complete and effective.

As with Shakespeare's early career, Ogunyemi's early plays are historical ones. It is Shakespeare's ability to blend history and drama, switch from fantasy to history and still write a good historical play that has remained a great fascination for Ogunyemi. In Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth, there is the presence of the history, time, language of the periods and countries he wrote about so that all these qualities help the understanding of his audience. Ogunyemi uses this treatment of history in Kiriji and Ijaye War. In both plays, the Yoruba life reflected can be referred to as the 'primitive' period of Yoruba civilization. Ogunyemi shows the Yoruba civilization especially within the context of his plays which is warfare, 'respect' and 'honour' are the two words which exist in the social and military life of the Yorubas presented. The use of the cultural beliefs, especially when we encounter the conflict of the traditional religions and Western Christianity, choral chant songs and even the colloquial dialogue, which Ogunyemi painfully attempts to translate, all give the placement in time and the documentation of history which the playwright strives to create.

In the examination of Wale Ogunyemi's use of historical materials in his plays such as Kiriji and Ijaye War, it would be of interest to try and compare his use of historical materials ^{to} that of Ola Rotimi. Rotimi is a Nigerian playwright who is more known as a very good director of plays than a playwright. But his

plays, such as Sophocles' Oedipus Rex adaptation which Rotimi titled The Gods are not to Blame and his more historical plays such as Ovaranwen Nogbaisi and Kurunmi his play based on the Ijaye War have earned him a place among the known Nigerian playwrights. Rotimi's plays, when directed by him, are most effective with the Nigerian audience. He uses the same type of simplified form of the English language in his plays as Ogunyemi's. The only difference his plays, especially the historical play such as Kurunmi has to Ogunyemi's Ijaye War which uses the same historical materials is that Rotimi believes in the figure of the tragic actor. This means that his historical plays such as Kurunmi emerge as highly dramatic and tragic, because the historical materials are selected and used in play to reflect this. On the other hand Ogunyemi does not weave the plot of his play round one main hero. This does not make the play less dramatic or tragically effective in performance instead, it adds to the historical authenticity of the play, making it as Ogunyemi says, I agree, more concrete as a document of history while still entertaining and instructing.

In this way, we find a further change in the conventions governing the use of history in drama, developed by Soyinka. In Soyinka's historical plays, there is the celebration of history in the light of the myth behind it,

a preoccupation of his in Death and the King's Horseman, or his use of history as an organic material for satire as Soyinka does in Opera Wonyosi. The reason for Soyinka's use of history this way may be because Brecht and Shakespeare fascinate Soyinka when it comes to the use of historical materials.

Unlike the plays of Ogunyemi, Soyinka sees history as a repetitive cycle and only certain relevant issues in history are to be reworked for immediate meanings to the playwright's desired theme. In Ogunyemi's plays, there is also the interest in the repetitive cycle of history, but it is the substance of history, the hero warriors, and the documentation of history that fascinates him. He believes that the moral of historical drama can best be understood when it is well documented. Shakespeare's plays do not agree with such historical forms entirely, for underneath his documentation of history, his plays contain certain satirical and political relevance. It can be said that Ogunyemi's historical plays and their written style is based on the folk entertainment mentioned in the first chapter, where the playwright like the narrator in the folk entertainment, employs all the elements of traditional theatrical entertainment and ends with a moral message for the audience. And yet in recognising these limiting factors in Ogunyemi's use of history and drama, one

begins to see them as the teething problems of the young playwright, especially with his early plays. And as Ogunyemi is still a living playwright, it is hoped that as Shakespeare encountered the same problems in his early plays, Ogunyemi will also be able to improve with his later plays. It is also hoped that the improvement will also be reflected in his style and technique of writing historical plays.

The optimistic view reflected above, is influenced by John Arthos' remarks in his book, Shakespeare: The Early Writing, in which mention is made of Shakespeare's early problems at blending history and drama which have served in later studies as factors which:

... helps us in studying these early works as we think of them in the light of the later accomplishments. We see in the earliest comedies and histories not only that he (Shakespeare) is discovering the forms he will need later, we see that the forms themselves are leading into speculation and understanding that will be his as one of the wisest of men.²⁹

In the case of Ogunyemi, maybe not 'one of the wisest of men', like Shakespeare, but one of the best and most popular of contemporary West African playwrights, which he is striving to become. It is enough then to see

Ogunyemi within the perspective which Adelugba places him in when he remarks in his review of his production of Kiriji that he sees Ogunyemi as part of the new contemporary wave of playwrights:

in the wake of a good many African writers who are helping their compatriots to focus their attention on the memorable events and the significant heroes in Africa's as yet inadequately documented history.³⁰

Ogunyemi's advantage as with Sofola and even Soyinka, as regards the production of his plays, has been due to his association with the University. Ogunyemi works at the University of Ibadan, where most of his plays are performed. And as his career shows, Ogunyemi's plays have been known to be very successful on stage, and that is why he writes his best plays while working with a theatre group. It is no wonder, therefore, that James Gibbs and Patience Addo recognize this element in Ogunyemi's writings when they remark that:

... it is to be hoped that Ogunyemi will be able to find a group with whom he can work closely and creatively, assured of regular production and able to follow his plays through rehearsal and on-to the 'stage'.³¹

Ogunyemi is working closely with the University of Ibadan Masques - the professional group affiliated with the University and is aware of the point mentioned by the two critics, for it is only through the productions of his plays that he can improve his writings.

It is during the productions of his plays, such as the 1971 production of Kiriji by the Department of Theatre Arts at Ibadan that Ogunyemi's use of the traditional conventions and how such conventions work in performances are shown.

Although from the script, it was evident that the playwright had the proscenium theatre in mind when he wrote the play, the Director of the play, Dapo Adelugba, who worked closely with the playwright during the period of writing and subsequently rehearsals, chose to move the play out of the constricting proscenium framework of the Arts theatre building into the open courtyard of the Institute of African Studies. The style of staging was the open thrust. Through this style, the production achieved a 'presentational' rather than a 'representational' approach. A series of platforms of three different heights and what was called the 'apron grass' was used. This meant that the play could be viewed from three different directions by the audience and also from three

different sitting levels. Entrances and exits were made through the audience of whom I was one. To the audience such style suggested the episodic nature of the piece and with lights focusing only on the area in use at any particular moment, it also involved the audience in the performance to a maximum degree. By the open thrust staging, the action was projected within the audience, and the audience-actor relationship was further improved. Songs and chants were mostly enjoyed as actors remained at center stage to deliver such chant songs, which in turn echoed within the audience and invariably created a type of communal atmosphere of the traditional theatrical entertainment earlier mentioned.

It must be mentioned here that most of the credits of the success of the production must go to the directorial skill of Adelugba who made the play come very much alive. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that Ogunyemi had written Kiriji as with Ijaye War with so many potentials for creativity by the director.

One major problem which the play presented, was the number of cast. In writing the play Ogunyemi had included about one hundred characters, and in writing the play for the proscenium stage, he hoped for the doubling of some parts - where a character could play more than one character by changing costumes backstage. But with an open thrust stage, such practice could not be done. Instead,

Adelugba continued the 1962 programme of assisting promising artistes and troupes started by Axworthy. Adelugba invited the Oluyole theatre group. With the local Yoruba theatre group, Adelugba was able to give his drama student-actors a chance to view the unhibited acting style of the group. The student-actors were again able to see a group which, acted mainly in the vernacular, interpret a play written in English which dealt with a subject matter that was part of their historical experience. With regard to the production proper, the group added colour to the performance. The actors were not given English spoken parts but they did the bulk of the singing, dancing and the bits in Yoruba language which further lent a note of originality to the performance while further situating the play within its social and historical environment.

The inclusion of war songs and dances, a traditional theatrical convention by the playwright, further helped the audience-actor relationship. The war chants of the Ibadans 'Muso, Muso, Muso!' were often echoed in a unified shout 'Muso!' by members of the audience who were, through cultural experience, already acquainted with the significance and the wordings of the song. In scene eight, where the Ibadan warriors were ready to attack the Ekitis at Igbajo, the war song:

Yio te oo
Will be disgraced!
Yio te oo
Will be disgraced!
Ekiti to foju
Any Ekiti who confronts Ibadan
Yio te oo
Will be disgraced³²

becomes very effective when the audience join in the chant. Ogunyemi was also careful to use traditional Yoruba songs which had simple repetitive chorus which the audience could easily join in. During the performance, such songs were rendered with the actors searching at the audience with their eyes and gestures, urging the audience to join in the chant. And as the audience were full of Ibadan people, it was sung with unified energy.

The war dances, another convention of the traditional entertainment were most effective. Like the dance of the hero gods mentioned in the first chapter, the war dances had specific dance steps. The invitation of a local Yoruba professional theatre group which thrived on the enactments of traditional myths and folk-stories, helped to achieve the specific dance steps. To the Yoruba actors, the dance steps came easily, uninhibited by modern 'disco' or 'pop' dance steps as the students, the professional Yoruba actors, were able to lend their wealth of experience to the performance which in addition to the fights the gestures, the dialogue and songs, formed a fluid

whole. The warriors' dances were energetic with bast beating rhythms from the 'bata' and 'dundun' drums not to mention the 'talking drum' which constantly accompanied the chant songs.

The costumes were actual reproductions of the real costumes in 1870, the period Ogunyemi wrote about in the play. It must be remembered that as there were no pictures then, most of the costumes were reproduced from descriptions handed down through oral history by the old warriors. Whatever distortions had been made in the description of the costumes were irrelevant as no one knows what the originals really looked like. But the costumes used in the performance were very similar. Colour was used to differentiate the warriors from both camps. The Ibadans who also had the typical Ibadan tribal marks wore red costumes to differentiate them from the Ekiti warriors who wore striped costumes, also with Ekiti tribal marks. The costume of the kings, the white colonial officials, and even the towns people were all reproduced. He further situated the play in the history of the Yorubas and added colour to the play.

Through the 1971 production, Ogunyemi was able to learn through experience and as mentioned by Gibbs and Addo in an earlier quotation, of the problems with the first draft.

The production of the play, also enabled the playwright to add new materials to the play and to take away materials which had not been successful during the stage performance. For example, the excessively long discussion scene of the Ibadan warriors at their camp before going to war against the Ekitis, had been taken out in the final draft and made to attain the fluid whole which the play in performance is supposed to achieve.

It is significant to note that Ogunyemi has remained with the University of Ibadan where, with the students, the Television Station, the local Yoruba professional groups and most of all, the University professional theatre - Unibadan Masques - his many plays, whether written in English or Yoruba have been performed. As with most of his plays, Ogunyemi uses the first drafts as experimental pieces upon which a performance and subsequently a final draft could be written. And with such close relationship with the groups he works with, and also the materials he uses, Ogunyemi has remained the most prolific playwright in Nigeria.

NOTES

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2. Interview with me on the 5th January, 1983, at Ibadan.
3. Ogunyemi W. Ijaye War, Orisun acting edition, Ibadan, 1970. p. 13.
4. ————— Kiriji, African University Press, Lagos, 1976. pp. 4 - 5.
5. ————— Eshu Elegbara, Orisun acting editions, Ibadan 1970. pp. 54 - 55.
6. ————— Ijaye War. p. 19
7. Ibid., p. 41.
8. Ogunyemi. Kiriji. p. 5.
9. Adelugba D. 'Kiriji, the concept of theatre exploration' African Notes, Vol. vii No. 1. p. 114.
10. Ibid. p. 115.
11. Banham M. & Wake C. African Theatre Today, Pitman Publishing, South Africa, 1976. p. 46.
12. See ref. note no. 2.
13. Ogunyemi. Kiriji. p. 10.

14. _____ Ijaye War. p. 53
15. Ibid. p. 66.
16. See ref. no. 2.
17. Piscator Erwin. The Political Theatre, Eyre Methuen, London 1963. p. 250.
18. See ref. note no. 2.
19. Ibid.
20. Ogunyemi. Kiriji. p. 41
21. See ref. no. 9. p. 107.
22. See ref. note no. 2.
23. Ogunyemi. Kiriji. p. 76.
24. See ref. note no. 2.
25. Ibid.
26. See ref. note no. 4. p. 3.
27. Ibid. p. 75.
28. Ibid. pp. 31 - 32.
29. Arthos John. Shakespeare: The Early Writings, Bowes and Bowes, London, 1972. pp. 1-7.
30. See ref. note no. 9. p. 115.
31. Gibbs and Addo 'Wale Ogunyemi'. p. 29.
32. Ogunyemi Kiriji. p. 42

CHAPTER SIX

BODE SOWANDE

Bode Sowande was born in Ibadan in 1948. The Sowande family were originally freed Saro slaves who had come from America to settle in Nigeria. They were Christians, and Bode Sowande's grand-father and most of the members of his family were able to play the piano. The Sowandes also helped in organizing the Handel Festival mentioned earlier in the first chapter. They were also active in the concert shows given by the Christian societies in Lagos. This means that during his early years, Bode Sowande had been exposed to musical tradition with a strong Christian influence which he now uses in his plays, and which I hope to examine later in this study. Like Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, Sowande attended Government College Ibadan where he also shared as with Osofisan, in the experience of working with Derek Bullock, the then Principal of the School who involved the students vigorously in dramatic activities. With this early background of an introduction to drama and social entertainment, Sowande, left for the University of Ife where he read for a Bachelor degree in French. It was at Ife that he met Ola Rotimi, the then Director of the University of Ife Theatre Company, which like the Unibadan Masque of the University of Ibadan, was a professional theatre group. Ola Rotimi's directorial

influence helped to introduce Sowande to the professional theatre in English. At the same time, he joined Soyinka's Orisun theatre group, which acted plays written in English. Under the directives of Dapo Adelugba, and like Ogunyemi and Osofisan, Sowande wrote plays to sustain the Orisun theatre which was finding it difficult to survive on purely stage productions. Luckily for the group, the Ibadan Television Station gave them a regular slot. Adelugba, who was running the group in Soyinka's absence, needed all the scripts he could get to sustain the slot for a year.

It is important to note that it was while writing such sketches for the group, that Ogunyemi, Osofisan and Sowande were able to develop their writing skills. The television, as a medium for the production of his plays, has continued to influence most of Sowande's scripts. In most cases, the scripts are first written for television before the stage adaptation. A good example is the sequel to Farewell to Babylon, which is titled Flamingo. It has its first television reviewing in January, 1983, and up to the time of writing this chapter, is yet to adopt a stage version. The interest Sowande has in television, is similar to the interest Orisun Theatre had in the late '60s, during Soyinka's absence, when they turned to television as a means for easy

finance to sustain the group. Sowande's group, the Odu Themes, which survives mainly on the productions of Sowande's plays, uses television as a means for financial survival, especially as the competition with the University sponsored groups is very hard to meet up to.

Sowande left for England to read for a Doctorate at Sheffield University. He graduated in 1977 and returned to Ibadan where he joined the School of Drama, and he still works as a Senior Lecturer. He has also continued to run his privately founded Odu Themes (1972).

His writing career started with his first play written in 1966 which is titled, Whose Victory? In 1970, he wrote Paint Me Blacker, a play which dealt with the racial discrimination against Africans overseas, especially in France, Amerrica and England. He wrote the play in France for the Nigerian entry in the 1971 French Festival in Paris, and in 1972, at the end of his University education in Ife, he wrote The Night Before. In 1976, at Sheffield University, he finally finished his two major plays: Farewell to Babylon and A Sanctus for Women. In 1980, he wrote a play which portrayed the problem of a Nigerian Musician, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti had with the Military government in Nigeria which led to the burning down of Fela's house which was called 'KalaKuta

Republic'. In portraying the tragic happening to Fela the musician as what could happen to any other Nigerian, he wrote, Kalakuta Cross Currents. In 1982, he wrote a sequel to Farewell to Babylon which he titled, Flamingo.

My main concern in this chapter is to examine Sowande's use of politics in drama, drawing some close comparisons with the works of Soyinka, and also examine how well Sowande has been able to use inherited materials and conventions in his plays and therefore help the developing process of Nigerian drama. For this study, I have chosen two of Sowande's plays: The Night Before and Farewell to Babylon. This is because these two plays are the best examples of Sowande's use of politics in drama. And out of all the works of Sowande, these two plays are published and are in complete form. The other plays are constantly being reviewed and rewritten.

The Night Before, is about the effects of the history of Nigeria and her social changes of the early 1970's on six University graduating students. The phrase, 'the Night Before', which is the title of the play, is symbolic in the sense that the play takes place on the night before the graduation ceremony of the six students. The play also deals with the destruction of the illusion of a better society outside the University campus which the students had believed until the night before their leaving the campus. It is written in English, but the speech

patterns at certain times reflects a direct translation of the Yoruba language to English, earlier mentioned in the chapter on Wale Ogunyemi. The students in the play, until when their illusions are destroyed by the happenings of the night, believe in a better and perfect country which they refer to as Babylon. It is not known why Sowande used Babylon. The West Indian Rastafarian's use of the word Babylon as a promised land of hope and better future fits in with the use of Babylon as the alternative, better society in both The Night Before and Farewell to Babylon. It might be helpful to point out that another reason why it is baffling to the critic of Sowande's use of the word Babylon, is that the Rastafarian belief is centered on East Africa, particularly, Ethiopia. It is the promised utopia of the worshippers of the late ruler of Ethiopia, Haile Salassie. The belief is centered on Salassie as the grandchild of Queen of Sheba of Egypt and of King Solomon who is to lead the blacks in the West Indies to freedom and redemption from all colonial holds. The idea of Babylon is reflected in most of the reggae songs from whom Sowande like most West Africans must have picked up the idea.

The six students in The Night Before ; Moniran, Dabira, Nibidi, Onita, Ibilola and Moye are involved throughout the play in discussive arguments about their experiences in the University, their hopes for a better

future, and the disillusionment which they start to feel as the play ends. There is also the sub-plot which helps to highlight the disillusionment felt by Dabira at the end of the play. The plot is about Dabira's dream of a happy future with Ibilola, whom he hopes to marry after their graduation. But on the eve of their graduation, she allows Onita to make love to her, and at the same time, agrees to marry Onita instead. Dabira finds out, and becomes disillusioned with life, the ideals of a better future which he had held up to that night, and with himself.

The play reflects the playwright's experience at the University of Ife and this is further highlighted in the character, Onita, which he models after himself. The similarity in their experiences does not extend beyond the University experience and the belief in an alternative society for Nigeria. Sowande is yet to experience Onita persecution. In the 'Author's note' to the play, the playwright confirms this limitation of experience when he says:

In 1971 between the tensions of my French degree exams at the University of Ife, the creation of The Night Before became a compulsive experience. Then, the recent flash-points in students' agitations for an 'alternative society' were still branded in my memory. So too were the escapades in the drinking bars and in the 'Palmwine Drinking Club' - a gathering of curious minds from students to lecturers and other patrons.¹

The play reflects a meeting of the people Sowande refers to as 'curious minds'. All the six characters believe in different ideals in achieving their goals of a better future. Moniran, who along with Omita, retain their character traits of the believer and the non-believer in Farewell to Babylon, are the two main characters, Sowande uses to explain the importance of Babylon to the Nigerian society. In The Night Before, the difference in both characters becomes evident when Moniran gradually becoming disillusioned with the idea of a better society, having failed to be voted in as the President of the students' Union says:

I don't know what I want. But I know
what I don't want. The rat race.
Tell me you will enter the rat race,
never knowing your direction but
following the great traffic. Have
you ever looked at the great mass
that moves across Lagos every
morning? From dawn to dusk? Hot,
congested, slow. Then imagine it
is a mass of rats. Thousands and
thousands, scurrying about. Big,
small, thin, fat, sick, healthy.
And they all squeak, bite each other,
run over each other, some die, some
live - but they go on moving, in
Lagos; thousands and thousands.
Like a mass of rats.²

This ambitious element in his character is carried through when, in Farewell to Babylon, he becomes an agent for the government. Onita on the other hand, remains the model character of the playwright and also the model character of the fighter for a better and true alternative society for Nigeria. Onita, like the playwright is an artist, he, also like the playwright, is regarded as an eccentric and yet, like Sowande, he is to collect a first class degree in his field. Experiencing the disillusionment as the others on the night before, he is the only one who still believes in the ideals of a true Babylon, and also the only one who suggests new ways through which Babylon could still be achieved. In his speech to the others, he says:

What awaits us is what frightens me. We tried every means. We sponsored Moniran in the Students' Union election. Go there, we said. Clear up the mess. They wanted to clear us out. He lost. Now what do we expect for the future? We have been behind the gates of the University these past years, protected by our own vain dreams. (Looks around.) Tonight please let us all come together as a last gesture of solidarity. (Ibilola and Dabira enter hand in hand). Let this eve be a night of reconciliation a vigil of hope. Let us enjoy the joys of our reminiscence. Perhaps then we shall not see the failures ahead.³

Farewell to Babylon, the sequel to The Night Before, centers around the failures ahead of the six graduating students. Especially, through the experience of Moniran, who becomes the head of state security referred to as 'The Octopus'. A special branch of the government which was established to help eject all believers in the cause of a better, alternative society. Moniran, having been disillusioned in his attempt to achieve power through a just and fair election at School, and also determined not to join the rat race, becomes a ruthless and ambitious individual who forgets the ideals of the dream for a Babylon in The Night Before. The 'Author's note' again shows his search for the true alternative society in Farewell to Babylon.

This is a testimony to the lives of those who live under the dictatorships that grow like hydra, especially in the Third World. The play witnesses a triumphant thrust within 'Babylon', expressing the groans and pains of those who fight to say 'Farewell to Babylon', showing the price they pay. As they succeed, their euphoria is muted by their experience, but we recognised the common bond of humanity. We realise the urgency of the need to strive for an alternative society.⁴

The plot of the play is further entangled with the

history of the Nigerian farmers revolt which Osofisan also uses in Morountodun. Onita, now a Doctor of Philosophy, is disillusioned with the University life in which he was a prominent lecturer. He leaves his job to live with the farmers whom he sees as the true fighters for the alternative society which he has believed in since his undergraduate days in The Night Before. During a recent clash with the farmers in their camp, Onita is captured and put in detention by Moniran, who is prepared despite their friendship to punish him for joining the farmers against his government. The sub-plot deals with Moniran's attempts to destroy the strong union of solidarity of the farmers by sending Jolomi, his girlfriend, and also an officer of the state security as a spy, to the farmer's camp. Jolomi gets into the farmer's camp to seek for their leader, Dansaki. She finds him admires him, but does her job in betraying the farmer's plans. The government conquers the farmers and puts an end to the uprising but Jolomi returns having learnt of a new type of solidarity and of a much better society than the one she works for. She also learns, during her trip to the farmer's camp, that a man like Moniran was not the type of man to create the alternative society she had experienced while staying with the farmers. She returns disillusioned with the government and breaks her engagement with him. Moniran, having

conquered the farmers' revolt, becomes even stronger, he partakes in a coup which overthrows the civilian government he worked for. The playwright returns to the main plot by showing Onita in prison trying to influence the prisoners Yulli, the youthful students' Union leader, Cookie, a musician convicted for murder, and Seriki, a leader of the farmers. Onita is killed by Cookie, who finds Onita too 'good' for the present society. In Onita's death, the playwright is able to continue the reign of the non-believers in a better society and the growth of the dictatorship governments which even now has become a system of government in some Third World countries, including Nigeria. The play ends on a pessimistic note, only to be countered in its sequel, *Flamingo*, a play in which the new students are able to see the faults of the first group of students in The Night Before, and having learnt, as Jolomi does, of the effect of a united front against the forces like Moniran, who is against the progress of a society towards a better future. From the Television production of the play in December 1982 through to January 1983 New Year celebrations, the final scene is a celebrative one in which all the property of Moniran is ritually burnt. It is the flames of the property of Moniran which symbolically ended an era of oppressed rule that the playwright coined the title of the play which is, 'let all flames go'.

The joyous end to the play heralds a new and an optimistic future in which a much better society can be created.

The structure of both plays is very similar. The Night Before is not divided into parts or scenes, instead, it is a long narrative, where actors come on stage and leave with the action of the play still continuing. Sowande relies on the convention of direct speech by the story-teller to the audience mentioned in the examination of the folk traditional entertainment. It must also be noted that Sowande's use of the direct speech to the audience may also be linked to the direct speech of Bertolt Brecht. A good example can be found in Onita's opening speech, which the playwright uses to introduce his characters to the audience. In the production of the play which I saw in 1981 at the Oduduwa Hall in the University of Ife, Sowande, the director of the production, made Onita come forward and speak directly to the auditorium full of the members of the audience. This technique is also used by Osofisan in some of his plays, as it is most effective in drawing the attention of the audience. In Onita's speech:

ONITA: (To the audience). We came in here as initiates to the oracle, the University. In Africa! The University. We were thirsty for knowledge. Everything we questioned, and definitions poured galore in the lectures. What is politics, we asked.⁵

the audience through the technique of the direct speech, is able to follow the narrative of the play as the plot unfolds. For as in the practice of the storyteller in the traditional folk entertainment, an actor during the production, comes forward to the audience and informs them of the action that is not shown in the play proper. And because it is a play where so many views are put forward by the different actors, the playwright is able to re-echo the main issue in the discussion through the actor so that the audience do not lose the trend of the argument in the play.

Another technique used in the play is the play within a play technique. It is very difficult to trace which foreign influence this technique comes from. But Soyinka used it a lot in most of his early plays, especially The Road where the driver and the tout Kotonu and Samson, are constantly involved in the re-enactment of their experiences on the road. Because Sowande read and even acted in most of Soyinka's early plays, and because Soyinka's technique of writing has remained the greatest influence on new playwrights, it would be right to suggest that Soyinka's use of the play within a play technique must have influenced Sowande. The technique starts with a direct speech to the audience to follow the re-enactment about to take place. A good example can be found in the description of Toro's problems

with his boss at work after his graduation.

NIBIDI: (To the audience) It was that enemy that finished my friend Toro. He left the University two years ago. T.K.A. the rebel called it the Egg or sometimes the Womb. I won't explain it, but you watch what happened to him.

MONIRAN: What was he?

NIBIDI: An architect and civil engineer.. like me. He went into the Public Works and Department of New Environment. (He assumes the dramatic role of Toro, brings out a sheet of paper from his pocket.)
Moye, you will be Toro's boss.

MOYE: (Assuming the role) young man, have you drawn up the plan?⁶

Such re-enactments, which can be seen as an influence from the practice of the story-teller for the folk traditional entertainment, help the playwright to include materials which are not directly involved with the main plot, and also help to achieve the narrative form which the audience are used to.

Sowande also uses songs in his plays. Unlike the songs of Ogunyemi, Sowande's songs are not reproduced

from traditional Yoruba culture, but the popular folk and Christian songs. They are chanted out as ululations to express the state of mind of the characters who most of the time are engaged in Sowande's major pre-occupation, which is the call for an alternative society. Because of their political content Sowande's songs are often rendered as chanted slogans on stage. Sowande is particular about his choice of songs, because for him the joint rendition of songs by the audience and the actors, helps to reflect the communal atmosphere which the playwright intends. In this case, Sowande has had to rely mostly on his Christian background mentioned earlier in this chapter, by using the Christian popular songs which he assumes are known and can be sung by most of the members of the audience. A good example can be found in The Night Before, where during the mime scene of the dead student the actors on stage render a Christian salvation song which reads thus:

Oh Lord deliver Daniel,
Oh Lord deliver Moses,
Oh Lord deliver Israel,
Why don't you deliver us!

Oh Lord fight this oppression,
Oh Lord build up this nation
Oh Lord burn this Babylon,
Why don't you deliver us!

Oh Lord give us the fire,
Oh Lord lead us in battle,
Oh Lord burn this Babylon,
Why don't you deliver us!⁷

From the contents of the second and third stanzas, Sowande's inclusion and change of the original Christian songs and wordings in the songs is shown. He does this so that he is able to effect a thematic relevance of the song to the contents of the play. In The Night Before, Sowande also uses songs to portray the emotions of the characters on stage. A good example can be found in the scene where the actors go over their activities during the election of the Students' Union President in which Moniran lost. The students render the chant of their intended policy had Moniran won. The chant is rendered directly to the audience, in this way Sowande hopes that Moniran's long speech which contains the elements and factors for the tribal problems of the earlier Nigerian politics before the coup, will enable the audience to learn not to allow such tribal factions to divide the country or lead them to a civil war again.

MONIRAN : Zebra power! The answer to racial problems. (On the pedestal) I have it now. Vote for me. (To the audience) All you beautiful people, we shall build a new citadel that will be the symbol of the solidarity of man on earth.

MONIRAN: The Zebra seed must be planted.
The Zebra fruit must yield. The
seed of materialism, nepotism,
ethnocentricism, sectionalism,
 .. politicalism, etc.
etc., must be destroyed anywhere
it takes root. Zebra must grow.
Zebra power for the depolarisation
of all tensions. Zebra power for the
humanisations of all races.

NIBIDI : Stop!
(To the audience) You will vote
and we shall build!

ALL : You will vote!
And we shall build!

MONITAN We will win!
And we shall build!

ALL: We will win!
And we shall build!⁸

Sowande also uses the chorus of the Yoruba war songs for the hunters. In such usage, the song expresses the call to unify against a common enemy. A good example can be found in The Night Before, when the students face the anti-riot squad. The scene reads thus:

(The others change movement into martial march. NIBIDI now separates from them addressing the audience).

The anti-riot squad were the crack-shots of counter-insurgency - and they did their job well.

MONIRAN: Wee-waa! (Marching)

ONIRAN: Wee-waa! (Marching)

DABIRA: Wee-waa!
Wee-waa!

NIBIDI: Those boots on gravel, marching.
We stopped. They flooded us with lights.
They marched on the formation.⁹

Farewell to Babylon is written in two parts, another practice that can be said to be an influence indirectly from Soyinka's early plays such as A Dance of the Forests. The two parts of Sowande's play are titled: The first part as 'Patience' and the second and final part as 'Countdown'. Unlike The Night Before, the plot of Farewell to Babylon is not a long narrative of arguments, instead, it deals with more characters and scene changes. It is written in the English language, and most of the dialogue is in prose form, except when the characters break into a song or a chant.

Sowande uses the folk entertainment tradition a lot in this play. A good example can be found in his use of the Elephant and Tortoise story as parody of the socio-political reality which he writes about in the play. The tyranny and dictatorial characteristics of the Elephant who felt that because of his size and power he was born to rule the animal kingdom, is countered by the Tortoise's small size

and power he was born to rule the animal Kingdom, is countered by the Tortoise's small size and clever wits which bring about the fall of the Elephant. In the parody, Sowande wants his audience to learn from the mistakes of the Elephant. And also Sowande intends to reassure his audience of the hope to win the struggle against power-lusting people like Moniran and the Field Marshal. In using the story known to his audience, Sowande wants them to easily recall the story from their memory, and listen more to the thematic element in the parody rather than to the story itself. That is why he starts the story with a direct speech to the audience through Onita, the teacher, when he says:

ONITA: And now to him who has just
discovered an ageless truth.
Listen to the story of the
Elephant who was made King.
A very useful story. It always
preceded the first lecture to my
first year students of philosophy.¹⁰

The story is done in pantomime, again an exaggerated form of parodying the politicians, who like the Elephant, are caught up in the web of power and senseless assumption of their presence in the local politics of their country. This is a good example of the use of inherited cultural background by a contemporary playwright. As Osofisan does with the Yoruba myth of Moremi in his play Morountodun,

which I will examine later, Sowande is able to rework a folk tale so that it does not serve only as a piece of entertainment, but also as a vital part of his political theme in his play. And at the end of the pantomime, Onita who uses the audience as his first-year students of philosophy, again addresses them directly, playing the part of the teacher and narrator who highlights the moral of the story after its performance. At the end of the pantomime, Onita says:

ONITA: There is the pit the Elephant
lies today. In an African jungle.
Dying slowly. Nobody can pull
him out. He is dying a very slow
death. And now tell me, my dear first-
year students of philosophy, with
what will you save the world?
With truth or falsehood?¹¹

Another parody which is shown in the play is again based on the playwright's Christian background. Most of the Christian songs used by Sowande, apart from being the most popular Christian songs in Nigeria, are also songs he must have learnt from his organist father when he was young. His knowledge of the Bible is evident in the way he is able to parody significant happenings in the Bible to fit in with his argument for an alternative society, such as the one which the playwright is pre-occupied with in Farewell to Babylon. A good example can be found in Cookie's speech

about the creation of the world which reflects the first sign of insanity from him, before he becomes so disillusioned with life that he kills Onita. In the speech Cookie says:

COOKIE: (Mood changes. Friendlier) True.
Hey, how do you know that?
The tongue, the almighty ruler.
(They turn to him curiously)
Every trumpeter knows its worth.
Your tongue your trumpet and ululate
the rhythms.

The throat of the apprentice trumpeter
bleeds if he does his tonguing badly.
But one thing I remember are the notes.
And just now, at this moment I realise
that for every day of creation, there
is a note of music.

(Clearly, with proud solemnity)

On the seventh key the octave changes.
And on the seventh day God rested and
looked at the Earth and it was good.
Before we came along.

Fellow prisoners! The keyboard of
music as a parallel to the sequence
of divine creation cannot be a coincidence.

(Excited) It is Law!

(The others are attentive)

God created and rested on the
seventh day.

The seventh key balances the harmonies
of music.¹²

Sowande no doubt uses the speech also to show his knowledge of music an influence from his childhood. Another influence of his family's background which is reflected in his play is the use of the Negro spirituals. Growing up in a family which was from the descendants of freed slaves, negro spiritual songs have been sung in his home, for Sowande remodels the songs again from their original contexts into a current context, still bearing the revolutionary element which it bore with the slaves. For example his use of a song like, 'We Shall Overcome' which reads thus:

We shall overcome, we shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe
That we shall overcome some day.¹³

and his demand in the footnote which follows the song that:

"The programme notes should contain the song. 'We shall Overcome' to encourage full audience participation at the relevant time. Any other protest song can be substituted if desired, but the immense popularity of 'We Shall Overcome' is an advantage.¹⁴

shows the communal atmosphere which he hopes to create, one which echoes a unified voice of protest by his audience

against the agents of tyranny.

Because of the use of traditional Yoruba characters such as the farmers and their cult, Sowande uses songs associated with the farmers guild in his play. In order to achieve their dramatic effects, Sowande reproduces these songs in their original Yoruba context, with English translations for the benefit of his non-Yoruba audience. The songs are not rendered in English even during productions. A good example can be found in the farmer's ritual song which again Sowande demands must be danced in the specific farmer's dance-steps to achieve symbolic meaning. The song which reads thus:

Ajankoro dugbe-dugbe-Heavy occult buden
Ajankoro dugbe-dugbe-Heavy occult weight.
A rubo eboda na o - We can say, our ritual
Succeeded:
Ajankoro dugbe-dugbe - This heavy weight
of sacrifice
Ajankoro dugbe-dugbe-Burdensom gold of alchemy.
Ile mi lona, bowo ba' - Money stay in my
nlo, ko ya wa o homestead.
Ajankoro dugbe-dugbe- This burden, golden.
Ajankoro dugbe-dugbe - This burden is guarded.
Ile mi lona b'iku ba n lo - Death our dance is
not yet.
ko re wa o - Stay away.

A rubo ebe da na - Our ritual was accepted.
Ajankoro dugbe-dugbe - A weight in the Oracle's
womb.¹⁵

enables Sowande to use another conventional element of the traditional theatrical entertainment, which is dance. Before the song, Sowande deliberately specifies the whole dance sequence:

(The chant of farmers fill the scene,
This is the ceremony in ritual procedure.
The men form a circle round a symbolic
mortar. ODULOJU and another young
farmer 'pound' to rhythm as the song
proceeds. DANSAKI and two other
farmers form a circle round them
strategically, holding their guns. Even
though voices of women and men mix in
chant the women are as yet not visible.
Heavy ritual drums, synchronise with
the pounding of the pestles and mortar,
chanting. Plaintive in movement,
heavy as the 'mortar').¹⁶

Sowande also uses the oral chant tradition of the Yoruba folklore mentioned in the first chapter more specifically - the praise chant, referred to in Yoruba as the Oriki within its original context in Yoruba tradition. Jolomi who claimed to be from the Onikoyi family is made to recite the chant song of the Onikoyi family as a test of her claim. She does, and hence is accepted by Danaaki to be a true daughter of the farmers. In the chanting

to the song, Sowande again uses the original accompaniment which is a steady rhythm under the recital of the song by a Talking drum. In the production of the play which I saw at the University of Ibadan in 1982, and which Sowande directed, even the speeches of Dansaki are rendered in such a way that it fits in with the steady rhythm of the chant. The contents of the chant also explore traditional values of importance which the playwright compares with the values of the corrupt society. The chant reads thus:

JOLOMI: No tree grows under the shadow
of another And when he says I am the
Iroko tree, You can only take shelter under me,
You cannot grow,
Onikoyi is not a proud man,
He only likes to be the master.

DANSAKI: True, daughter, true. That is
Onikoyi.

JOLOMI: Onikoyi went hunting and found a
dead lion. What is this? Who did
this, he asked. There is no better
hunter of lions than Onikoyi. Before
you sound your gun in the forest pay
homage to Onikoyi. Onikoyi is not a
proud man, he is only a master hunter.

DANSAKI: True daughter, true.
(The lone talking drum maintains the
rhythm under).

JOLOMI: Onikoyi came riding his horse,
straight from the palace.
At once he stopped his gallop.
What is it, they asked.
A fresh woman from the stream
Glowing in the sun.
But your courtyard is full already,
she said.¹⁷

The language used in both plays is English, except for the Yoruba songs reproduced in their original Yoruba contexts. There is the tendency by the playwright in trying to portray his characters as Nigerians within the naturalistic setting in his plays, to use at certain times, the everyday spoken English in the dialogue of his characters. A good example can be found in Ibilola's speech to Onita in regard to the emotional affection she has for him.

IBILOLA : Calm down, Onita. You know I
am engaged now. Well, I did have
some feelings for you, but its
over.¹⁸

The expression 'I did have some feelings for you', although not accepted in terms of its sense and its usage within the context the playwright uses it, is true of the colloquial English spoken by most Nigerian University students. Another example of Sowande's use of language can be seen in Ibilola's remarks about the drunken state which she finds Onita. In the speech she says:

IBIOLA: (Getting more and more anxious)
 It is too late. The drink is
 troubling you, Onita.¹⁹

The expression, 'The drink is troubling you', appears to be a direct translation from the Yoruba language into English. In a production, such speeches are easily picked up by the local Nigerian audience, but the English reader would find such a statement disturbing in terms of semantics. The modern Nigerian playwrights, on the other hand, have had to adopt such practice - the inclusion of colloquial speech into their plays, so that the audience would be able to relate better to the plays, and reflect the social reality in most of the naturalistic plays they write.

Sowande's use of Nigerian history is different from the recurrent cycle of happenings which Soyinka sees as history and uses in his plays. For Sowande, history is mingled with politics and in its examination, history serves as a good therapy towards a hope and more beneficial future. His political plays do not emanate from a political ideology. He is neither a Marxist nor a believer of any type of political system of governing people. In this light, Sowande serves as a good example for the playwright concerned with making social and political criticisms of the society he inhabits. His stance is against any form of oppressive type of government. And in the case of the society he presents in both

The Night Before and Farewell to Babylon, there is the obvious mirroring of a society which has misplaced its moral values and which the playwright seems fit to portray. The playwright also suggests ways through which a better society can be achieved. This society is what Sowande refers to as 'Babylon'. But the two plays present ways through which a type of elimination can be done of people not qualified to enter into Sowande's chosen 'Utopia'. This is where the biblical meaning of his use of 'Babylon' is reflected in his political preoccupation in both plays. The characters, such as the farmers, the six students and most significantly, Moniran and Onita, are in search of the playwright's promised land and must undergo their experiences in the plays to find it.

So when Dabira burns his academic gown in The Night Before, and says:

And that is all you offer me for this new day? Is this what this place has made you or have you always been yourself? Gentlemen, brothers, comrades, what on God's earth is this? Is this my first lesson in the new school?²⁰

he drops out of the search for the promised land which the playwright tries to find for the Nigerian society. The whole play portrays the disillusionment involved in the search for an alternative society.

The playwright even questions the generation he chooses for his search of the alternative society. But in choosing his generation and in writing about his experiences at the University of Ife, an experience with which I am well acquainted, having myself attended the University, Sowande writes about the political happenings in the University campus as a preparatory exercise for the real world outside the campus. The real reflection of the social history in Nigeria is presented in the comic anecdotes in the little play within a play the mime sequence, and the introduction of the parody technique with folk stories in the Yoruba folklore tradition. Sowande's remarks that:

For my type of political theatre to be effective, I employ all the different types of traditional entertainment forms. I also employ a lot of comedy in my satire and the Nigerian audiences always enjoy a play which combines sense and humour. That is the only way to write an effective political drama.²¹

shows the realistic presentation of the Nigerian social history in his plays. His plays do not exaggerate political events. Toro's case history, despite its funny presentation which reflects a subtle type of exaggeration, is not amusing at all. It presents the social reality and frustration often encountered by the

young graduates after their graduation from the University with dreams of effecting some changes in their working places. The naturalistic presentation of history and its effects on the Nigerian society compliments C.D. Innes' remarks in his book, Modern German Drama.

In his book, Innes says:

For theatre to be politically effective every element of pretence must be eliminated. Only the minimal requirements are retained - an audience, who in the media-age need not even be present, and an action structured to reveal the underlying assumptions or disguised realities of society.²²

It is this elimination of pretence in Sowande's political plays that make them effective. Where a graduate from a Nigerian or African University such as myself, would find it easier to identify with the problems of the six University students in The Night Before, no African president, dead or alive, would even pause for one moment to compare his or herself with Soyinka's exaggerated and almost burlesque political characters reflected in Kongi, in Kongi's Harvest and Emperor Boky in Opera Wonyosi, who are embodiments of different characters in real political history. It can be said, therefore that while Soyinka's satire thrives on exaggerated and monstrous political characters, Sowande's political characters, if there are any, are from the everyday

life of his audience. It is understandable then, that Sowande's political plays, despite the simplicity in their presentations and contents, are more popular with an illiterate Nigerian audience, who find it hard to understand the complex characters of the Nigerian politicians, let alone politicians of the other African countries.

In Sowande's plays, as well as Osofisan's, there is the introduction of the new protagonist. Unlike the tragic protagonist found in most of the ritual entertainment sketches which Soyinka uses in his plays, the protagonist in Sowande's plays is in most cases, not one single person, but a group of people, especially, a society, all involved in a tragic experience and all seeking a way to rectify their position. In Sowande's protagonist:

the essential fact about man is not his class nor his immortal soul but his individual psychology, and what is significant about the social structure is its molecular unit, the family.

Man is motivated by his personality rather than by an external fate.²³

This type of protagonist is reflected in the character of Moniran, whose personality changes when in The Night

Before, he loses all type of belief in the search for an alternative society after losing the election to a student he did not think was better than him. His realisation of the uselessness of the alternative society, and the change in his personality in Farewell to Babylon, shows how in Flamingo, the sequel which completes the trilogy, this personality which changes for the worse, leads to his death and tragic fall. Throughout the three plays, Moniran is shown to be conscious of his every action in the play. In The Night Before, his tragic fall begins when he decides to join the fast and corrupt world. To him, it was the only alternative to a world where dedication was needed and life was not going to be easy as it was in the University campus. In Farewell to Babylon, where the hope for a better Babylon is put aside for a corrupt world in which fascism and a dictatorship government ruled, Moniran is seen in conflict within himself. After his first meeting with Jolomi in which she is finally sent to spy on the farmers, Moniran turns to the audience and pours out the thoughts of his troubled heart for there he was making a decision to close his eyes to the alternative society which up till then he had believed in. In the scene he says:

What would you do, should you dream
of an illumination? A bright lamp
that you held in your dream from youth,
and now you find your feet lead you to
the gates of hell. Would you say to the
Devil, I come to fetch embers to burn
Babylon? You would be a fool if you did.

So you keep sealed lips, and live
a dangerous existence.²⁴

Thus making up his mind to continue in the path of power which has brought him to such an esteemed position as the dreaded 'Octopus'. He enjoys the fruits of power and gives up his lover, childhood friend, and beliefs to join in the coup which brings Major Kasa, power, and himself even more power. At the end of the play, he again turns pensively to the audience asking them to accept him for what he has become, and at the same time he gives due regard to the stubborn nature of Onita which sets him out as a hero. In the speech, he says:

You are born alone
You dream to exist and live with others.
Then you die alone and humanity buries
you like Dr. Onita
Only if you are a hero.²⁵

Onita's tragic fall is embedded in the reason why Moniran failed to win the election. The cause for an alternative society lacked any form of compromise, and the rashness of such tough demands on a nation or society so deep in decadence was not to be accepted. Onita himself gives the reason why the election failed:

And that was the election.
I saw them carry Moniran aloft.

Oh yes, we campaigned in style.
Something new was in the campus.
We sang and danced. We sang songs
of hope. 'Moderation' they shouted
back. What was moderation? It must
be how to compromise. We could not
compromise. Moniran lost the election by
a large margin and that seemed to be the
end of our dreams.²⁶

It is this lack of moderation that leads him to resigning
his position as lecturer from the University, and living
with farmers. Even the wife he so lusted for in his school
days is not good enough to join him in his search for the
alternative society. It is the sense of inadequacy which
the holder of such views as Onita held about the alternative
society, which leads to his death in the prison. In the
scene where he is strangled to death by Cookie the drug
addict, Onita condemns Cookie, and rejects Cookie's chance
of finding the alternative society when he says:

Why don't you ^{try} / and see through Cloud
Nine.
Cookie?
You are slightly lost to your own reality.
Cookie.
Coke
Cocaine
They rhyme like music.
Leave me alone, Cookie.²⁷

The presence of the history and politics of the Nigerian

society in both plays is reflected in the dialogue of the characters or in their mime scenes, which are used as flash-backs for historical representations.

In The Night Before, the presence of the six students and level of their intellectual search for self identity, represents the state of mind, and the sudden awareness the Nigerian students had during the civil war and after. In this play, the playwright breaks from Western imported playwrighting conventions of writing a play with a plot of story. It also breaks with the traditional convention of entertainment in which the performers or actors enact a story. The play is, instead, a continuous ^{and} / discussive speeches of six students. Hence, introducing a new type of discussive play in Nigerian playwrighting in English. This was between 1968 to 1977. It started first with the military coups where the old politicians to whom respect was given and who had made the country believe that they were born to rule, were killed or sent to prison. They had been accused of encouraging 'materialism', 'nepotism' 'section', 'politicalism', and 'tribalism'. In short, they had failed the whole nation in the search for a better country than the one the British Colonial government had left. All the accusations above were given as the reasons for the 1967 civil war by military government. The generations of the old politicians had failed Nigeria, and there was a

turn towards the University students who were now referred to as 'the rulers of tomorrow'. It equipped them with a new sense of importance, and a new type of energy which more than often were spiritually inspired by palmwine and discussions of the different types of governments practised by other countries. It was also the period of slogans, a period of revolts against anything. As Sowande's characters so aptly describe the period:

ALL: We protest!

NIBIDI: Against what? At first it was just a feeling. The tension mounted. Exams were a few days away. The Vice-Chancellor had made new rules for the halls. Clean our rooms and wash our bedding for national savings and in one word.

ALL : We protest!
(They begin to sway forward as if about to spring).

NIBIDI: Still we had no reason ^{to} / march. News came from Europe. Student demonstrations in Paris, in Germany, in London. Protests everywhere. This must be the awaited moment of Liberation. Keep foreign interests out of our civil war. Students of the world united!²⁸

As Sowande's characters show, the new sense of revolt was first started by the idealist students while campaigning in the University Students' Union. This started their frustration. First by their loss of the election, and secondly, the examples of other graduates of the University, such as Toro, who through their experiences outside the University campus, had shown that there was more frustration outside the University. A type, as in the case of Toro, strong enough to send a well behaved and knowledgeable student to the madhouse. The frustration of the students leads to their disillusionment with their idea of the alternative society, and a further call for the destruction of their formally dream society called 'Babylon'. This type of disillusionment led to questions such as the one Onita asks on seeing how frustrated they were becoming:

ONITA: The past! The past beats in
in my head like heavy mortars.
Are we before our time? What do
they want of us in this generation?²⁹

It was such confusing statements that revealed the state of minds of the students who had been made to believe that they were the rulers of tomorrow, and then had all their ideas refused and their efforts frustrated.

Nibidi's long speech describes the burial ceremony of Kunle Adepoju, a student of the University of Ibadan

who was shot by the anti-riot Police squad in 1972, in a student demonstration.

It was the time of lamentation a few days later in another slow march: the death march. We marched across the town, slowly carrying the dead body. We sang. We hummed. The women joined us, a chorus of lamenting mothers. The men joined us, perplexed. Business came to a halt. Tears came from the eyes of mourners. It could have been their own son, or daughter, or sister or brother.

This was the march of the people.
Only it was a death march.
This was the funeral of a victim, the scape-goat.
We swore in pain.
We groaned in pain.
Babylon had killed one of us.
What do they want of us in this generation,
Are we before our time?
What do they want of us in this generation?
Shall we die before our time?³⁰

The case of the students' plight is further developed in Farewell to Babylon, again with close representation of the Nigerian history Sowande portrays in the character of Yulli the Students' Union leader put in prison, the real National Students' Union, Segun Okeowo,

who was imprisoned by the Olusegun Obasanjo government when the Students' Union was decreed against, and officially outlawed. Okeowo's frustration is even greater than that reflected by Yulli. At the peak of Okeowo's recognition as a future leader of tomorrow, in 1976, he was appointed as a member of the constitution drafting committee by the same government. But in 1977, being a final year student of English at the University of Lagos, Okeowo, still a member of the committee, led the students against the fee paying decree which the military government had made. Okeowo was expelled from the University and ordered by the Military government not to be re-admitted until a lapse of four years. He was later re-admitted to the University of Ife where he graduated in 1981, having lost almost all the self-confidence he had in himself as a person.

Farewell to Babylon also shows the historical happening of the farmers' uprising which has remained major materials for contemporary Nigerian playwrights such as Osofisan and Sowande. The 1976 farmers' uprising in Nigeria when used by both playwrights as materials for their plays, is often one of admiration for the solidarity and strong belief in the cause of the farmers that is reflected. Whether in Osofisan's Morountodun, or Sowande's play, it is how a group of uneducated farmers

were able to stand up against the military government that the playwrights highlight. But the presence of Titubi in Osofisan's play and Jolomi in Sowande's play, show on what level the playwrights want their plays to be seen. The fate of the real Police-woman of the 1967 uprising, who served as the spy which led to the fall of the farmers' uprising, has remained obscure to the Nigerian public. Not much was written about her after the uprising was stopped. It is the mystery about her silence, that the playwrights have seized upon in their plays to recreate new values for her job as a spy. As I hope to examine later, Osofisan uses Titubi as an agent of progress. She decides to stay with the farmers, hence, recognising a better society than the one she came from. This is also reflected in the character of Jolomi in Sowande's play. But the love affair between Marshall and Titubi in Osofisan's play, Morountodun, or the love affair between Moniran and Jolomi in Farewell to Babylon, are the creations of the playwrights who use these affairs to highlight the thematic preoccupations.

Another example of Sowande's use of historical materials in Farewell to Babylon, is in the coup against the Field Marshal which portrays the presence of political and military coup in Nigeria since 1966 and up to the time of my writing this chapter. The Field Marshal's final speech before his departure for the meeting of

the Organisation of African Brotherhood reflects the same speech given in the circumstances by General Yakubu Gowon, before his departure for the meeting of the Organisation of African Unity, and after which, as with the case of Sowande's Field Marshal, he was overthrown by the government of the late General Murtala Mohammed. Sowande uses this historical material in the context of the speech of the Field Marshal, and through the presence of the ambitious characters such as Major Kasa and Moniran, he shows the continuous process of having Nigerian military coups and the reasons given for the coups. The irony of such changes in government is reflected in Moniran's speech to Jolomi, while trying to explain the goals of the new government:

Everyone will participate in the new government. Everybody, Even the offenders in their punishment and the Field Marshal in his enforced exile.³¹

For Sowande, such promises by a government which rules by decrees are just political gestures for the purpose of gaining acceptance with the people. The playwright does not hesitate to show that he does not give much regard to a government not voted into power. The song, 'Prayer in a Dictatorship' further highlights the playwright's position. It reads thus:

Prayer in a Dictatorship

If it be a government
of the people
for the people
by the people
Pray let it be.

If it be a conscious step
to the rule
by the law
that is just
Pray let it be.

BUT

If it be an iron grip.
Of one man, or many
in a clique, centreheld,
In a web strong as steel,
Pray rise Judas and resurrect in this rank,
perform a duty,
for once,
a wholesome duty;
Be Brutus to their Nero,
Forsake this dictator, his retaineral
dislodge them!
Their conscience poured into fire
to yield its lava or cast of gold-divine-
Before damnation day - Before D-Day.
And Earth and Heaven. will say, Amen for ever.³²

It is the handling and the use of inherited materials such

as Sowande's use of songs, the history of his country, and his personal foresight as a playwright that have made Sowande, a young developing playwright, whose works have begun to make an impact on the social reality of his people. The major influence of Western drama has been to teach him the technique which I have mentioned in my examination of how to present the materials which his country is so full of, without much conflict with the sensitive military governments in Nigeria.

His themes do not reflect the socio-political situation in Nigeria alone, but in fact, it is the history of Third World countries that is reflected in his plays. It is no wonder, therefore, that Sowande declines to associate himself and his works with any type of political ideology. In an interview with him, he confirms his lack of ideological stance as one which avoids any type of stereo-type classifications of his works. In the interview he says:

My ideology is one that deals with an oppressed society. It is far from a strait-jacketed form of political ideology. Oppression - any form of it ... breeds violence. I write against such violence, as it must not be allowed to create negative results. My plays suggest ways that a society can effect change. Yet, the society must be aware of what type of change they want. As a writer, my task is to point the way.³³

The hope of such a study as this, is that he continues to point out the way, to a Nigerian society, or African societies who in their desperate need for change, also need critics such as Osofisan and Sowande.

NOTES

1. Sowande, Bode. Farewell to Babylon and Other Plays
Longman Drumbeat, London, 1979.
The Night Before. p. 7.
2. The Night Before. p. 15.
3. Ibid. pp. 20 - 21.
4. Ibid. p. 55.
5. Ibid. p.12
6. Ibid. p. 21.
7. Ibid. pp. 39 - 40.
8. Ibid. pp. 27 - 28.
9. Ibid. p. 38.
10. Farewell to Babylon. p. 99
11. Ibid. p. 103.
12. Ibid. pp. 98 - 99.
13. Ibid. p. 58.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. pp. 70 - 71
16. Ibid. p. 70.
17. Ibid. pp. 85 - 86.

18. The Night Before. p. 31.
19. Ibid. p. 32.
20. Ibid. p. 45.
21. Interview with me, Ibadan, 1982.
22. Innes, Christopher. Modern German Drama, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1979. p. 47.
23. Ibid. p. 56.
24. Farewell to Babylon. p. 65.
25. Ibid. pp. 126 - 127.
26. Sowande. The Night Before. p. 28.
27. _____ Farewell. p. 121.
28. _____ The Night Before. p. 36.
29. Ibid. p. 25.
30. Ibid. p. 40.
31. Sawande. Farewell. p. 126
32. Ibid. p. 57.
33. Interview Sowande gave me at Ibadan in 1982.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FEMI OSOFISAN

All literature is the consequence of leisure; bourgeois art, which prose fiction is, developed to feed the leisure of bourgeois workers, and correspondingly, class divisions show in the plurality of fictional genres, with paraliterature responding primarily, though not exclusively, to the taste of the lower classes, modern civilization, in the Western world in particular, has gathered vast numbers of the populace into the urban centres, around the teeming industries and has gradually relieved its workers, through the complicity of technology, of the more harrowing tasks of manual labour. At the same time in a superbly tragic paradox, it created a new anguish, the burden of leisure.¹

This quotation from Femi Osofisan's article, 'Domestication of an Opiate: Western Paraesthetics and the growth of Ekwensi tradition', forms the basis and total outlook of Osofisan's Marxist ideology reflected in his plays. Osofisan has evolved a new and dynamic leftist convention within developing Nigerian dramatic conventions.

Born in 1946 in the Yoruba area of Ijebu Ode in

Nigeria, he had his Secondary education at the Government College Ibadan: the same School that Soyinka and Sowande attended. Like Sowande he was fortunate enough to work with the Principal of the School Derek Bullock, who generated creative activities in the School. He became a student of French at the University of Ibadan in 1965. It was at the University that he began to take drama seriously. He took part in the later productions of Geoffrey Axworthy, especially Danda where he was given a major role. He worked with Wole Soyinka when he took over as Director of the Drama School after Axworthy, taking part in Soyinka's film version of his play Kongi's Harvest. He also joined the Orisun Theatre which Soyinka had founded before going into detention. Under Dapo Adelugba, in the absence of Soyinka, Osofisan, as with Ogunyemi and Sowande wrote short television sketches to keep the group going. He graduated from the University of Ibadan in 1969 and with Soyinka's encouragement, went to Paris in the early months of 1970 where he was to work with many French theatres. Soyinka was also in Paris at the time and through him Osofisan was able to meet Peter Brook, Samuel Beckett and to watch plays by Brecht, Ionesco and Grotowski. With the period of the radical theatre at its peak in Europe, Osofisan became a Marxist, while at the same time working with the Black Theatre in Paris. He returned from France in 1977, and again joined the Theatre Arts department of the University of Ibadan under Soyinka. That year he played the

Blindman in Soyinka's Madmen and Specialists at the Arts Theatre in Ibadan. He enrolled for a Doctoral research programme in French and African drama in 1972. He graduated in 1975 and he stayed on at the University of Ibadan as a Senior Lecturer until 1982. He is presently Professor of Drama at the University of Benin. With the limitations on the number of Theatre groups in English because of financial constraints, Osofisan founded the ^{KaKaun} Sela Kompani for the productions of his plays. Osofisan, writes in the English language, and in French. His first play is The Chattering and the Song. In this play, as mentioned in the first chapter, Osofisan incorporates dance and music to evolve a type of drama which is becoming known as Osofisan's style. The play was written in 1976 and shows, as I hope to examine later in this chapter, how Osofisan has been able to use^{the} inherited traditional theatrical conventions and achieve a new type of contemporary Nigerian drama. His second play, Who's Afraid of Solarin which was first produced at Ibadan in 1977, was an adaptation of Gogol's The Government Inspector in which Osofisan uses local figures. The play is based on a true life character, Dr. Tai Solarin, who was a such feared former Public Complaints Commissioner in Ogun, Oyo and Ondo States of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In the play, Osofisan reveals the corruption

the villages, which is an attempt by the playwright to show the roots of the ills of the Nigerian society. The panic and attempts to cover the ill-gotten wealth and misplaced records is very typical of the Nigerian society of today. The form the adaptation takes is slightly different from Osofisan's other plays, because there is no inclusion of music or dance in the play: the original dramatic form of Gogol's play is retained but adapted to Nigerian social and local life. This means that the play is in the realistic Western style. An example of this form of adaptation can be found in the Councillor for Education's speech:

COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION : I can't,
my friends. Really I can't. I've had an
unfortunate education. I went through
school in those days when examination
leakages were famous. And I never made
the University like our dear colleague
here, who even had the singular fortune
to be taught by the great Awo and Zik
of Africa.²

Here an understanding of whom Awo and Zik are in African and Nigerian history is necessary for the understanding of the pun in the speech. They are the politicians who helped Nigeria obtain her independence in 1960. The local figures in the adaptation and their actions to cover up their ill-deeds also helps the adaptation as their action in the play is very typical of the Nigerian society of today. Osofisan then wrote Once Upon Four Robbers (1980)

a play which portrayed the social stigma of armed robbery in Nigeria. In the play, Osofisan ventures to point out that the real robbery and corruption was being done in the Government offices and it was the Government officials who were, in their corrupt ways, creating the society which forced armed robbers to take up arms against innocent citizens. He also speaks against the military decree which puts armed robbers at the execution stake, and suggests that, it is the Civil Servants and Ministers who should be executed. In the play, Osofisan uses music and dance inherited mainly from the folk entertainment conventions. There is the character known as the Story-Teller who starts the play with the 'Song of the Story-Teller' which reads thus:

An ancient tale I will tell you
Tale ancient and modern
A tale of four armed robbers
Dangerous highwaymen
Freebooters, source of fears
Like kites, eaters of accursed
sacrifice
Visitors who leave the house
desolate
Despatchers of lives to heaven.³

The song in seven stanzas is sung at intervals in the play to enhance the narrative technique employed by the playwright. The dramatic effects achieved by such technique

is that it helps to lend a further entertainment value to the play while also helping to situate it. More recently, Osofisan has gone further than any other Nigerian playwright in trying to re-apply to contemporary issues those old myths of the Yoruba cultural traditions that are also used by Soyinka and Ogunyemi.

He does this successfully in his play Morountodun (1979) where he uses an old myth of Moremi to search for a new meaning to a more recent uprising in the Yoruba area of Ibadan. I will examine this more fully later in this chapter. His very recent plays Midnight Hotel (1982) and Farewell to a Cannibal Rage (1983) continue to show Osofisan's preoccupation with the search for the root cause of the ills in Nigerian society. In these plays, he reveals the affluence of the rich who possess their ill-gotten wealth and the poor who remain helpless in the society. He also hopes for a change in the situation, with either a revolution by the oppressed, or, as in the case of Who is Afraid of Solarin? (1977), some good government officials who will effect changes in the country. And if one were to reflect on the coup and the changes in the Nigerian government since 1983, Osofisan's vision in his plays is not very far-fetched.

Osofisan's plays possess both dialectic and didactic elements. The plays raise current social issues in Nigeria, examine them in terms of the rich and the poor classes, and then instruct the audience on ways in which the playwright thinks that the problems can be solved. Morountodun (1979) and The Chattering and the Song (1975) investigates the ills of the oppressed in the Nigerian society and Osofisan suggests an alternative society like the one mentioned in the Sowande chapter. Osofisan relies mainly on the rich Yoruba cultural myths of folk stories to achieve the themes in his plays. In Once Upon Four Robbers, he uses a Yoruba story of four robbers to show his own four robbers who find themselves in the predicament of having to steal, because of the need to survive. The reason for such an act is that the society does not provide any future for innocent and hardworking citizens.

I am concerned in this chapter to show how Osofisan has been able to develop further the conventions of the Nigerian drama concerning satire, immediately following Soyinka's development of the satirical conventions. His interest in satire started with his encounter with Soyinka at Ibadan in the late 1960s. By then, Soyinka's plays The Lion and the Jewel, Strong Breed, Camwood on the Leaves and the political sketches of the Before the Blackout series had been written with Osofisan taking

part in some of them. It becomes expected to find in Osofisan's essay, 'Tiger on the Stage: Wole Soyinka', a continuous list of praises for Soyinka's 'electic genius'. In the essay, which gives Osofisan's account of Soyinka's influence on him, he remarks:

It is evident, therefore, from the foregoing that Soyinka's influence has been quite extensive on contemporary Nigerian theatre, indeed, on the entire field of literary creativity in the country.....Soyinka is also the country's first modern incarnation of the Malvarian idealist and activist, the romantic who voluntarily risks his own security and even survival in a daring physical intervention in political violence.⁴

Osofisan even acknowledges Soyinka's influence on his life which he separates in his remarks from being an influence on his works. Osofisan observes:

Soyinka's style of living, no less than his artistic achievements, has attached a considerable number of acolytes. Of the writers and playwrights of the writer's generation, many consciously model themselves after Wole Soyinka.⁵

It must be noted, however, that Osofisan has since denied

the influence he mentions here in a desperate bid to be seen as an individual playwright. But however strongly Osofisan disclaims his earlier acknowledgements of Soyinka's influence on his life, he cannot refute the influence of Soyinka on his works which he so truthfully acknowledges in the same essay:

That play (Madmen and Specialists) also partly influenced the writer's (he, Osofisan's) own ambitious drama, The Chattering and the Song in which an attempt was made to probe the state of hysteria and neurosis which results from the impact of socia-cultural disorder upon a group of very sensitive youths, the ultimate chaos and pathos of our intimate relationships in such circumstances.⁶

Having been thus influenced by Soyinka, Osofisan as most of the contemporary Nigerian playwrights mentioned here, had to look for a point of separation which his plays could be seen as those belonging to a different individual, rather than have his plays seen as works merely inspired by Soyinka.

The way in which Osofisan chose to differentiate himself and his plays from those of Soyinka, was firstly

to find a way of writing a simpler form of English language which the mass local Nigerian audience would watch and understand. Secondly, he had to limit the symbolic element and concentrate more on one issue in his plays. This way, his Marxist ideas could be put across simply as the rich against the oppressed poor, rather than be made obscure by the inclusion of a variety of meanings. This may be glimpsed as a recipe for very inferior drama and some critics, but it has helped to initiate new angles towards the audience understanding of new Nigerian drama. This difference has been well noted as a major one by Biodun Jeyifous, a radical critic of the left, when he aptly remarks:

Osofisan's gaze is steadier, his weapons more varied, his perspectives more optimistic than Soyinka's.⁷

In an interview he gave me at Ibadan in 1983, Osofisan himself agreed with this remark. His explanation for his limited treatment of themes was that it also allowed him to put across to the audience the thematic element of the play without confusing the audience with a variety of symbolic themes as in most of Soyinka's plays, especially The Road and A Dance of the Forests.

Another thematic difference between the plays of

Osofisan and those of Soyinka, is the optimistic point noted by Jeyifous in the quotations above. In keeping with the element of tragic paradox mentioned by Osofisan in the opening quotation of the chapter he sees an optimistic hope for Nigeria, even within the tragic social situations presented in his plays. For example, within the decadent society of corrupt government officials in Who's Afraid of Solarin? there is still a tinge of hope for a better society in the play. The play does not fail to show the fright felt by the officials on the thought of the visiting Public Complaints Commissioner.

Soyinka on the other hand, presents only moments of optimism in his plays. In Madmen and Specialists, the old man forces his son, the Specialist, to kill him in order to distract him from shooting the earth mothers. The uselessness of this action is that the old man dies and leaves the earth mothers to the mercy of his son. Invariably, a continuous process of revolting tragic scenes in the play reveals Soyinka's own view of life itself. The root of this view can best be explained in an examination of the outlook on life and history by the two playwrights.

Osofisan's comments about Soyinka's outlook to life further explains this point:

Soyinka looks at life and sees it as merely a recurrent cycle in human history.⁸

To Soyinka, history when reconstructed in his plays, as in the character of Mata Karibu in A Dance of the Forests, serves the function of showing the replay of history and life as tragic experiences which would come again and again. Thus it makes Soyinka's play, a good example of what Osofisan in the earlier quotation refers to as the 'superbly tragic paradox' which creates 'a new anguish, the burden of leisure'. But in Osofisan's plays, the reconstruction of history is for the sake of a revolutionary change, and this dominates his more recent plays. He thinks of the tragic incidents in history in the light of tragic experiences, a passing phase which must be corrected when it recurs in life. His plays, therefore, dramatise questions which are directed to the audience; he suggests ways of achieving revolutions, of what stuff revolutionary leaders are made. As he aptly remarks:

My plays provide more than a limit of the tragic drift. And they go a long way to show the Nigerian audience the difference between a pessimistic and an optimistic society. They are humans and must therefore always hope.⁹

This is made clearer in Who's Afraid of Solarin?, a play whose title derives from Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of

Virginia Woolf? (1962) even though there is no evidence of Albee's influence. In Osofisan's play, the real Public Complaints Commissioner never arrives, the fear instilled in the corrupt officials is enough to give a new type of hope to the socially oppressed characters like Polycap, the house boy. The Local Authority Executive Council, having spent their energy enticing the wrong Public Complaints Commissioner are left unprepared for the real, ruthless and uncorrupt Commissioner. It must be hoped that the real Commissioner is beyond corruption. The Chairman's closing speech also helps to strengthen the hope of the audience that the end of the corrupt officials was near:

CHAIRMAN: I ask you, how could this happen to me? Ah Gbonmiayelobiojo, you've grown senile. Your brain is nothing but sawdust. Thirty years in politics, and no one could ever outsmart me! Not one Police Officer could find me! Three governors, three probes, and not the slightest shred of evidence against me. And now, a simpering little punk comes up and makes a fool of me! Come, my dear people, our world is ending. We've grown old. The younger crooks have taken over the trade and they'll stop at nothing. I'm going on voluntary retirement...¹⁰

Another play where Osofisan's sense of optimism is highlighted in his non naturalistic play, The Chattering and the Song. In this play, the playwright uses a 19th century

incident of a popular rebellion crushed by brutal repression. This is presented as a play within a play and has a deep connection with the triangle of love and hate relationship among Sojtri, Mokan and Yajin . Yajin discovers that she loves Sontri instead of her fiancée, Mokan, who accepts the situation with an unusual calmness. But Mokan, secretly burning with anger and jealousy, becomes a weapon for the government, especially when he learns that Sontri, who has always been against the government, drifts into the Civil War and later becomes a partisan of the farmer's movement. In the play within a play, Mokan and Sontri decide to play a game which involves the use of songs and the taking up of roles. In the game, Mokan becomes a palace guard who arrests Sontri. Leje, the farmer's leader, who has always monitored Sontri and Mokan's movements and actions, and who is also aware of the intricate love triangle which holds them apart, determines to lead a new revolution which would exclude Sontri and the jealous government spy, Mokan, who would tell the government of the farmer's plans. In excluding Sontri, he also succeeds in excluding the complex passions of the three main characters in the play. In ending the play this way, the playwright is able to give the audience the hope of a better future for the farmers, especially after they have been able, through a good leader, to plan their revolution. The play within a play technique is part of the Nigerian

entertainment tradition, but it also has the bearings of Brechtian influence. The song, especially the farmer's anthem, surely stems from the Brechtian influence. The play ends with the farmer's anthem in which the playwright re-achœes his optimism.

THE FARMER'S ANTHEM

1. When everyone's a farmer
We'll grow enough food
In the land
No insurrection
When all are freed
Less exploitation
You eat all you need.

Refrain

So clear the forest
Turn up the soil
Add fertilisers
Bring in the seeds
Take out the corn
Bring in the yarms
Plant them in earth
Tend them with care
Watch them grow with time
In season
Harvest is coming
In the land.

2. When everyone's a farmer
We ll wipe out the pests
In the land
No more injustice
Labour's for all
No more oppression
All hands to hoe.¹¹

Such optimism is missing in Soyinka's Kongi's Harvest. In Soyinka's play, the regime which takes over from the brutal and dictatorial government of Kongi is not sure of the alternative plans for a better future for the people. At the end of the play, Soyinka re-echoes the note of pessimism with the stage movement of 'the iron grating descends and hits the ground with a loud, final clang'. Any form of hope is locked away behind the 'iron grating'.

Another convention which has developed with the satirical plays of Osofisan is the use of myth. Unlike Soyinka, he does not have an abiding concern for the significance of myths. Moreover, he is not a scholar of myths and he has not a mythic imagination, such as Soyinka's. Instead, Osofisan used history and myth to give a more focused relevance to his themes. This is in contrast to Soyinka's use of myths which give several symbolic meanings to his plays. Recognising this difference, Osofisan says:

The difference between Soyinka and myself is that Soyinka is a metaphysical

thinker. He blames the ills of the society on the acts of the gods. Although he personally acts against the authority, but his plays show the uselessness of action. I believe that man, and not gods make the world they live in. The ills of our society are caused by men who must create a better society.¹²

The main difference in their use of myths can be seen as the difference which occurs between a pioneer writer, and a modernist one. Osofisan being the modernist writer, uses myth in an ironic way and treats it in his plays with an apparent presence of an optimistic belief in the future of the modern day Nigeria, while Soyinka is inspired by myths.

Soyinka concerns himself with the inner thoughts of man, hence, his 'cyclic circle' and the 'chthonic realm', in which belief is the key to an understanding.

For let it always be recalled that myths arise from man's attempts to externalise and communicate his inner intuitions.¹³

It is then easy to understand when one reads his preface to Death and the King's Horseman where Soyinka demands that the reader be more aware of the celebration of the myth

of the self-willed death, rather than the colonial conflict with cultural tradition. Soyinka is more concerned with the celebration of the religious ritual whereby the King's Horseman dies willingly with the King. The success of this use of myth lies Soyinka's highly poetic rhetoric and wealth of meanings rather than in the play's functional relevance to reality. In Osofisan's Morountodun, myth is used to suit the imperatives of contemporary Nigeria. The playwright uses two different stories to achieve the desired theme which is a call for a calculated energy towards the defeat of the oppression and injustice that ensnares people in the purgatory of poverty, suffering and insecurity. First, there is the use of the historical incident of the farmers' uprising in Western Nigeria in 1969. Titubi, the major character in the play, is the daughter of a rich Alhaja who starts the play with an attempt to stop a play against the bourgeois class. She is arrested by the Police Inspector who enrolls her as a spy. She is captured by the farmers, and taken to their camp where she learns their secrets of how the farmers have been able to organize themselves. It is here that Osofisan introduces the Moremi myth. Moremi, a Queen of ancient Ife, allowed herself to be captured to Ife's enemies, the Ibos, in order that she might learn the

secrets of the Ibos. She does, and returns to tell the Ifes who defeat the Ibos. Titubi sees herself throughout the play as the reincarnation of Moremi until she discovers that she believes in the reason for the farmers uprising, and therefore stays with them ..

In using the Moremi style, the reader finds that only the act of sacrifice by both women and the act of oppression of injustice, are the similarities between the myth and the historical event. The twist in Titubi's decision not to go back to the oppressors serve as the relevant message to modern day Nigeria. Osofisan does not worship the myth of Moremi, instead he uses everyday reality to ^{show} the changes of the modern world and how it effects Moremi's action.

The use of myth also brings to light the issue of the patron gods used by the two playwrights as mentors in their careers. This must be seen as an influence of Soyinka upon Osofisan, for he acknowledges that:

Soyinka has helped to reintegrate us into the world of our ancestors. Ogun, his personal patron god, is no longer his pagan abstraction, nor are the rest of the opulent Yoruba pantheon. Moreover, there have been critics like Gerald Moore, Oyin Ogunba, Eldred Jones, and Abiola Irele to bring to our door-

step the once elusive jewels of Soyinka's poetic quarrying, so that even a metaphysical quest like The Road can now be valued sympathetically.¹⁴

Soyinka's patron god has always remained Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, creativity, and destruction. Soyinka's influence on Osofisan also extends to the need for a patron god as a means of relating to both the ideological and traditional Yoruba background of both playwrights. For Soyinka, Ogun inhabits the metaphysical realm of his tragedy. He observes that Ogun appears on Yoruba metaphysics:

as embodiment of the social, communal will invested in a protagonist of its choice. It is as a paradigm of this experience of dissolution and re-integration that the actor in the ritual of archetypes can be understood.¹⁵

But it is Soyinka's glorification of Ogun, and his attempts at achieving Ogun's pattern of tragic exploits which Osofisan sees as the main thematic problem with Soyinka. For he aptly remarks :

I deliberately took my stand against Ogun, who stands for poetry and war. My patron god is Ifa. I see Ifa as a symbol of knowledge, progress and

hope for a better future. Ogun is
a pessimist, he thrives on tragedy,
Ifa is as optimistic as me.¹⁶

This idea of the patron god as used by Osofisan and Soyinka may be viewed as an act of continuing a common practice among the Yoruba households. In Yorubaland, each household has its own personal god. The god is seen as the protective diety of the family. The gods also are included as part of the names of each child from the family. A good example would be a man from the Ogun family would be named Ogunbiyi or Ogundele. It is interesting therefore to find Soyinka chooses Ogun as his patron god not Oso the diety of his family. The same applies to Osofisan whose family diety is Oso. In this case Soyinka's choice of Ogun and Osofisan's choice of Ifa must be accepted as their patron gods for the reasons given by the playwrights. And although the gods chosen by the playwrights are not their family dieties, they do continue a Yoruba tradition which has been adapted and even reworked by these playwrights for achieving more functions of that of the artistic and creative essence in their works.

As with his use of history, Osofisan uses Ifa, and Yoruba god of wisdom and knowledge, to help his characters make up their minds about the revolutionary tasks before them. In Once Upon Four Robbers (1980), Alhaja, the leader

of the four robbers, not aware of the task ahead of them, and needing an encouragement within herself for the understanding of their revolutionary action, fails into a trancelike state through which the playwright narrates an incident which happened to Ifa. Through the trance, she finds meaning to their action, especially when she says:

It's always good to meet the gods again
but you're right. I pull myself together
Angola, I know how you feel, but we must
learn to forgive. Those who fight for
justice must first start in love and
generosity.¹⁷

In theatrical terms, the god comes into the plays through the main characters. In Morountodun, the god is introduced through Titubi, and in Once Upon Four Robbers, through Alhaja. The two characters are presented as people who have the characteristic qualities to lead but who lack a peace of mind, and need a clarification concerning themselves and the revolution which they are about to lead. In The Chattering and the Song the god is mentioned, it is introduced by Leje, the farmer's leader, as the source of knowledge and inspiration such that is not felt by Moka and Sontri who throughout the play are engaged in a tussle for Yajin. This precludes them from finding the internal

peace of self-control which would lead them to a place referred to by Leje, in his dialogue with Mokan as the promised land:

LEJE : I told you it's the Promised Land. To reach it you have to be pure in heart. But the road is still long my friend, so drink, drink....

MOKAN: (Whistling again) You don't mean..?

LEJE: Exactly, To him that is drunk shall more booze be given - it should be a proverb. Let them dance their fill out there. We've got more serious things on our hands.

MOKAN: You're right. It's amazing how your brain begins to function when there's booze.

LEJE: Yours doesn't work at all, even with booze. (Deliberate malice) It's your girl committing matrimony tomorrow, isn't she? With another man!¹⁸

Mokan fails to understand the meaning of the (Promised Land' and why he must be pure before he can get into the spirit of the revolution, and he is also excluded from the revolution at t he end of the play. In Once Upon Four Robbers, the presence of Ifa is felt as the audience see

Alhaja go into the trancelike state. In her long speech she strikes the symbolic message in the embodiment of Ifa as a god of hope. But it must be understood that in Osofisan's plays, Ifa does not possess the main characters, their actions are often dictated by the political situations in which they find themselves. Ifa's function is to serve as a help to their reasoning. It is also to provide a source of hope. This thrives on the faith of the characters, as Leje in The Chattering and the Song shows when he says:

LEJE: But seasons change, oppression and injustice resurface and new weapons have to be devised to eliminate them.

FUNLOLA: Your faith must run deep...

LEJE: Listen, that's how the tribe renews itself, that's how we all survive together...¹⁹

The farmers in Morountodun must revolt against the government for like the farmers led by Leje, they too want to survive. Invariably, it is the necessity to live that controls the characters' existence, and the necessity to change things about their situation that enables them to find new solutions to their predicaments.

It is this realistic presentation of Nigerian life

that has made Osofisan a more popular satirical playwright among the Nigerian audience than Soyinka. An explanation for this is offered in Osofisan's remark:

My plays provide more than a hint of the tragic state of our social predicament. I go a long way to show the Nigerian audience alternative routes towards solving their problems.²⁰

Due to the different sources of influence on Osofisan's plays, each play is an experimental piece. They show a young playwright involved in creating a play which contains a synthesis of his inherited traditional theatrical and Western dramatic conventions. The styles used in the plays emanate from both the traditional folk entertainment conventions to which the audience, despite the use of English language as in the plays of Soyinka, relates. And also there is the Western influence earlier mentioned in Osofisan's plays through the forms of Brecht and Breton. In other words, his plays entertain more than those written by Soyinka. For example, in The Chattering and the Song, Osofisan uses the Yoruba songs, dance and riddles which are part of the conventions, mentioned in chapter one, of the folk entertainment tradition. It may be argued that Soyinka also uses songs in their original form, but an explanation for that would be that while Soyinka uses songs with ritual context and known only to a small number in

the audience, Osofisan thrives on the use of folk songs. The song of the story-teller in Onee Upon Four Robbers serves as a good example here. The audience who easily recognise the song join in the single chorus line 'ALUGBINRIN GBINRIN!' without being told to do so. The chanting of each line by the story-teller:

I ton mi dori o dori²¹

and the clapping and joining in on the chorus line by the audience sets, right from the beginning of the play, the scene of an African night entertainment which always were performed in the courtyards and which I have also discussed in chapter one. It can therefore be said that the use of songs in Osofisan's plays do not only create a communal environment as with the use of songs by Soyinka, or merely serve the function of entertaining the audience, but achieve a more direct audience participation and recognition of the playwright.

The Western influences can be seen mainly through the technique used in the stage directions by the playwright. In this area it is the Brechtian influence that is the most pronounced. Brecht's epic theory which constitutes various elements of the theatre : audience, performers, form and content of the play and staging and music, has remained a major element which Osofisan has

tried to incorporate into each of his plays. There is also the element of instruction in the epic theatre of Brecht which Osofisan tries to show in his own plays. The Brechtian influence of reminding the audience of their presence in a theatre blends well with the traditional presence of the narrator. It is an easily accepted technique in his plays. Osofisan uses it most effectively in plays such as Morountodun, Farewell to a Cannibal Rage, and Midnight Hotel. In Farewell, roles are given out on stage in the style of the traditional folk story-teller. Actors discard and swap roles, enabling the audience to partake in the choice of which actor is best suited for a character. And a character, a Property Woman with a placard, as with some of Brecht's plays, situates each scene in time and place. A good example can also be seen in Midnight Hotel where Osofisan uses both the traditions of the narrator's direct speech to the audience and a major technique put forward by Brecht to effect the alienation technique which is associate with his epic theatre. In the play the character PRO, the Hotel Manager stands up to address the audience at the beginning of the play:

WELCOME TO MIDNIGHT HOTEL

Good evening

And welcome to Midnight Hotel

Tonight's dinner of song and laughter

Will be assisted by the orchestra
Here, called the petronaira Band.
Led by the one and only Songmaster,
Who, over tonight's dinner
Will preside by popular demand,
But, before you taste our dish
I'm told to ask if it's your wish
To know the background of this Hotel,
This place was built as a House of Sin
In the year Nineteen Hundred and Fourteen,
It had just three rooms at the beginning
But we've since added another sixteen
To raise the number to a round nineteen
(Or nineteen two-thirds, if you count
this place which we use only as reception
space).²²

In Midnight Hotel, Farewell and most of his other plays, as with the traditional entertainment sketches, there is an effect of an eclectic improvisation. The Brechtian sense of informality, Soyinka's influence in the handling of African satirical material, the rich traditional entertainment background, all give Osofisan the tools he needs to achieve a new developing African theatre which relates both to the quintessence of traditional African entertainment and to a developed Western drama. For it is not enough for a playwright to be pre-occupied with the promotion of his ideas if he fails to 'provide the proper dramaturgic peg upon which such ideas can be hung', he must also have the essential factor of communicating these ideas.

Another influence of Brecht on Osofisan can be found in his interest in the world-view underlies Brecht's epic theatre. Like Brecht, Osofisan openly claims or admits that he is a Marxist. And as with Brecht, 'Marxism posits the existence of a material universe, outside of, independent of, but accessible to man's consciousness, knowledge, and activity' in Osofisan's plays. The world presented in his plays reflects the real world, which is always involved in a constant process of change. His major characters like those of Brecht's are caught up in the process and are faced with the human urge to survive and to create a better world than the one they live in. And because, as with the plays of Brecht, the changes in the societies presented in the plays, occur dialectically, Osofisan's plays also possess the dialectic and didactic elements portrayed by Brecht in his plays. This is mostly because in Osofisan's plays such as Morountodun, Midnight Hotel, Once Upon Four Robbers and Farewell to a Cannibal Rage, there is the process of change which is mainly due to the result of the conflict or struggle with the oppressing authority. Osofisan's patron god mentioned earlier serves, then, as the provider of the knowledge which man needs to have in order to deal with the oppressing bourgeois class and to achieve the revolution. Osofisan's use of music

and songs in his plays owes something to Bertolt Brecht as well as the Nigerian folk entertainment tradition. He told me this in an interview he gave me at Ibadan in 1982 that:

Although I draw most of my musical experience and the use of songs from the traditional culture, I am conscious of Brecht and his use of the two dramatic elements.²³

Osofisan's plays when performed have made much impact on the audience, even when songs that are not known by them are sung in the plays. A good example of the audience participation of Osofisan's plays presented itself in the 1981 production of his play Morountodun at the University of Ife in which I took part in. During the singing of the popular folk song which is sung in praise of the female protagonist, Titubi, the audience joined in the chorus of the song.

Morountodun. Eja Osan.²⁴

Such audience participation in Osofisan's plays can be seen as a continuation of a unique convention to the African theatre or entertainment. A practice which is not very common with the more restricted audience of European theatre. Osofisan as earlier mentioned uses

songs in their original Yoruba form and sometimes writes his own music. Not being a trained musician, he has assembled or reproduced folk songs in his early plays, especially the songs used in The Chattering and the Song. But like Brecht, who collaborated with Edmund Meisel and Kurt Weill for the music used in his plays, Osofisan has worked with Tunji Oyelana, an actor and professional musician who sets the rough drafts of most of Osofisan's songs into music. The pattern the songs follow are very close to those of Brecht for the songs are based on particular popular 'high-life' or folk song renditions so that the audience may easily join in.

But whichever way the songs are rendered, they are functional songs. As with the songs of Brecht, the songs are titled. For example, as in 'The Puntila Song' or 'Baal Song' in Brecht's plays, there are the 'Song of a Far away Land' in Midnight Hotel, 'The Farmers' Anthem', in The Chattering and the Song, and the Song of the Market' in Once Upon Four Robbers to mention a few

Also like Brecht, Osofisan is able while writing his own songs, to include current issues so that they are not just sung for entertainment but also become organic: carrying very effective messages while commenting on political issues. A good example can be found in the chorus of the 'Song of a Faraway Land':

CHORUS

Oh the winners are laughing now
And storing naira
In banks abroad -
But they forget
They forget the Shah of Iran
That the season may change at noon
and bring an evening of rain oh
So let the winners go laughing on

Thus it was, in a faraway land
On a once-familiar time
That thugs came to power
With the people's desire
And their agents of terror seized the land
And wrecked the land
With a civil war
With all their killing and looting
And gave the day to the reign of Theft
Till the people had had enough
"We'll draw up a constitution", they said
"And put the real rogues in power".²⁵

The relevance of such a song can be seen in the real life happening where the government of those Osofisan refers to as 'The reign of theft' was overthrown in a coup on December 31st, 1983, the very year Osofisan produced the play for the stage. Whatever effect it had in calling for the coup is beyond the scope of this study, but it is enough that as Brecht did in a number of his plays,

Osofisan was able to foresee the fall of a decadent society and to express a hope for a better future.

As earlier mentioned, Osofisan also reproduces songs in their original Yoruba form. A good example can be found in the 'Song of the Story-teller', in Once Upon Four Robbers. The rendition of such songs in their original Yoruba Forms, enables the audience to agree with his view that when a song is rendered in its 'traditional form', it serves as synthesis of dance, music and mask, 'being especially sensitive to both the melodic and rhythmic effects of the elements of vocal repetition, alliteration, and assonance while creating sound textures as well as images'. Each play therefore, serves as an example of the use of songs towards the extent of such an exploration. The English translation of the song which reads thus:

An ancient talef will tell you
Tale ancient and modern
A tale of four armed robbers
Dangerous highway men
Freebooters, source of tears
Like Kites, eaters, of accursed sacrifices
Visitors who leave the house desolate
Dispatchers of the lives to heave.²⁶

lacks the rhythmic structure and vocal repetition of the chorus whereby, for each line sung by the story-teller, the

audience, in recognition of the song, joins in by chanting 'Alugbirin gbirin'.

Osofisan has been able to synthesize more masterfully the conventions of African entertainment with the Western drama in a way that Soyinka was not able to achieve with his early plays. In Osofisan's plays, there is a move toward a popular theatre which is relevant to the social milieu he writes for. Because of the capitalist society in which Osofisan finds himself, he has had to play down his Marxist affiliation which he portrays in his plays as the class struggle between the rich bourgeois and the oppressed poor. Nevertheless he has helped in the evolution of a committed theatre on a wider scale. In which any future plays by Osofisan may influence younger playwrights towards a committed theatre where relevance is the main goal. Osofisan's plays highlights Biodun Jeyifous' observation when he says that Osofisan's plays:

Show at least that 'Commitment' in contemporary African drama has taken a decisive turn. The main subject is revolution: its necessity or impossibility, its heterogenous socio-historical context, its prospects and possible directions.²⁷

However true this quotation may seem, it is in the plays as yet unwritten that Osofisan may or may not develop

this revolutionary commitment, for now the plays that do exist are geared towards a committed theatre, new in form and relevance to the fast changing Nigerian society. And for new plays to develop debate and discussion about revolutionary politics, it may be necessary to revolutionize the conventions governing playwrighting in productions.

To help him achieve a popularity with the Nigerian local audience, Csofisan has used the English language in his plays in such a way that the everyday colloquial English spoken by the average Nigerian, is also spoken by his characters. In contrast to Soyinka's use of the English language, Osofisan's use of the language is less redolent with symbolic meaning. His syntax and dialogue, although almost emerging from the direct translation of the Yoruba language into English that is associated with the plays of Ogunyemi and Sowande, remains more controlled and true of the colloquial spoken English of a developing literature society. And where the use of English language serves as an obstruction to the understanding of Soyinka's plays by the local Nigerian audience, it actually assists in the acceptance of plays by Osofisan.

In his plays such as Midnight Hotel and Who is Afraid of Solarin? Osofisan uses language to create a

class difference. For his oppressed characters like Polycap, the house-boy in Who is Afriad of Solarin? and Bicycle, the uneducated Receptionist assistant, speak in pidgin English. Osofisan shares his sentiments with such characters and gives them the unusual perception to see the ills in the society. This may be partly because Osofisan shows such characters as representatives of the common man who is exploited as the rich get their ill-gotten gains. In Who is Afraid of Solarin?, Polycap, despite his lack of education, recognises the problem of his society and hopes that the Public Complaints Commissioner will bring the full weight of justice to bear upon all the other corrupt officials:

POLYCAP: Them be thieves proper!
 That is what they were discussing,
 how them go deceive you so you no
 go find out before you go away!
 So I beg you sah, in the name of
 my missis, and all we pickins
 wey no dey chop nothing but their
 left-overs, no spare these wicked
 robbers at all!²⁸

Revolution is the soul of Osofisan's language. This also affects his protagonists, who, as earlier mentioned, are engaged in a struggle of man against the establishment in a changing and developing society. They are very different from Soyinka's protagonists who are engaged in a struggle

against the gods and the decreed fate of man within an unknown universe. Osofisan's protagonists have introduced, as do the protagonists in Sowande's plays, a change both in the conventional tragic heroes of folk stories and in Soyinka's tragic heroes, who, as discussed previously, descend from Greek tragedy:

Osofisan's new protagonists represent for the local Nigerian audience a great change which Osundare succinctly describes:

Those who provoke all this change,
 are not the blue blood titans we have
 grown accustomed to in bourgeois liter-
 ature (Western drama). They are peasants,
 the proleterians usually lotted in for a
 brief "comic relief" in conventional
 literature (Western drama). The writer
 here (Osofisan) gives them a new dignity,
 A new purpose, and since they are mostly
 the "Wretched of the earth", a new will
 to smash oppression. They are organised,
 aware, and united, therefore, their
 struggle is collective, so is their victory
 and their heroism.²⁹

In terms of dramatic structure, Osofisan's plays are not written in acts, but in parts. The number of these parts varies, sometimes there are three with an apilogue, or two with a prologue and an epilogue. Unlike Brecht's

episodic scenes, Osofisan's parts flow continuously through the plots of his plays. In such a practice, Osofisan breaks with Western imported conventions (Aristotle) of playwrighting in acts which have remained an important part of writing English plays by Nigerian dramatists. Osofisan writing his plays in parts, beginning a new convention in Nigerian playwrighting. A practice which the younger generation playwrights continue to emulate.

In conclusion, working at the University of Ibadan has enabled Osofisan to have his plays performed. This has also given him the opportunity to rewrite his experimental plays when they fail to achieve the desired effects during their first showing. Osofisan has also had invitations to produce his plays at the Universities and when all these opportunities fail, Osofisan's group, the Kakaun Sela Kompani, has been assembled for the purposes of production. Already Osofisan's plays have begun to inspire both the audience and the young playwrights of the new theatre of commitment in Nigeria : it is hoped that this process will long continue.

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3. _____ Once Upon Four Robbers, B10 Educational Services Ltd., Ibadan 1980. p. 21. English translation reproduced for the purpose of his work.
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7. Jeyifoug, Biodun, 'Patterns and Trends in Committed African Drama'. Positive Review Vol. 1 No. 2, 1980. p. 25.
8. Interview with me on the 22nd December, 1983, at the University of Ibadan.
9. Ibid.
10. See ref. note no. 2 pp. 81 - 82.

11. Osofisan, Femi. The Chattering and the Song, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 1977. p. 56.
12. See ref. note no. 7.
13. Soyinka, Wole. Myth Literature and the African World, Cambridge University Press, 1979. p. 3.
14. See ref. note no. 4. p. 153.
15. Ibid.
16. Op. cit. ff. no. 8.
17. See ref. note no. 3. pp. 50 - 51.
18. See ref. note no. 11. pp. 27 - 28.
19. Ibid. p. 54.
20. Op. cit. ff. no. 8.
21. op. cit. ff. no. 3. p. 14.
22. Osofisan, Femi. Midnight Hotel unpublished manuscript p. 7.
23. Interview with Osofisan at Ibadan in 1982.
24. Osofisan, Femi. Morountodun.
25. Op. cit. ff. no. 22. p. 14.

26. Op. cit. ff. no. 3. p. 8.
27. Op. cit. ff. no. 7. p. 26.
28. Op. cit. ff. no. 2. p. 20.
29. Osundare, Niyi. 'The Writer as Righter'. Seminar Paper, Department of Literature, University of Ibadan (Unpublished). p. 17.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation set out to study four playwrights who follow Soyinka and I hope I have shown how these recent playwrights have made use of, and changed what forms of conventions they inherited. I tried to find one approach which could serve as a means of tracing the development of Nigerian drama. I have also concentrated on the playwrights' handling of conventions with close references to their plays and their performances.

Throughout this thesis, I have traced the existence of forms of conventions and practices as known to the modern playwrights through what survived of them into the late 19th and 20th centuries. It has also been noted during the course of the study that it was Soyinka who pulled the conventions together, hence, becoming a great force in African drama. With changing times and different social demands, there arose a need for change in the conventions used by Soyinka. The new people who have come into the theatre in the form of critics and playwrights, have also tried to seek for individuality and recognition by raising critical issues in terms of the works of Soyinka. And such criticisms often emanate, as this study has shown, from Soyinka's complex style and language. This study has also taken into consideration praises of Soyinka by the European and American critics especially that of Marin Banham when he says:

Though Soyinka remains to an almost preserved extent a prophet without due honour in his own country, increasing attention has been drawn to his growing stature as an important literary figure of our times by European and American critics and scholars.

And in such complimentary statements, Soyinka's important position as a playwright of stature has been further highlighted.

In the study of the changing forms of conventions, I have drawn upon different scholarly views presented in journals, essays, interviews and books. And I hope I have shown how Nigerian drama, through Soyinka, is still evolving and that Soyinka is at the beginning of what looks like being a whole new era of African theatre.

Once again, it has become important to make my reactions clear towards the new playwrights and the present state of Nigerian theatre. I believe that it is important for any imaginative member of an audience to be actively 'part of' any play he or she watches, especially in a Third World country. The act of the audience being imaginatively involved therefore, depends on the style, subject and language of a play. This becomes a most relevant playwrighting element for the playwright in a Third World country such as Nigeria where less than

half of his or her audience at any one performance are literate. The effect Soyinka's plays have on the audience especially when written in the 'Soyinkan high flown language', is that it limits even further the imaginative involvement of the local audience. The new playwrights studied in this thesis on the other hand, have been able to entertain and also through language communication, appeal more to the imaginative involvement of the local audience. A point which highlights my sympathy with the new playwrights, I also share the view held by the four playwrights in the interviews they gave me, that a playwright is most successful when his works reflect the social reality of his audience. It is only then that the often asked questions, for whom does the writer write, will be best answered. Although the critics, who take an opposite view from this, say that the use of the simple form of English language is a condescension on the part of the new playwrights, the success with the audience has proved the critics wrong about condescension.

It is hoped, as the success and popularity of these four playwrights in Nigeria show, that drama would continue to become highly regarded as a form of art in which the audience can become imaginatively involved and enjoy, not as a form of exclusive art for the educated elite which most of the later plays of Soyinka are.

It is also hoped that with such acceptance of drama

by the local audience, drama would be able to get out of the protected arms of the University and go back to the people from whose culture drama has always drawn its existence.

Thirdly, it is hoped that the newer playwrights continue to become aware of the immediate importance of drama to the audience, and that they continue the trend of the politically committed theatre, which the plays of Osofisan and Sowande have already started.

Finally, it is hoped that this thesis has dealt with the two hypotheses which it set out to show. First, through the examination of the works and contributions to contemporary Nigerian drama of the new playwrights. I have hoped to show that Nigerian drama has continued to develop in interesting ways even though it has not been so much noticed in Europe since the Soyinka phase. The aim of the thesis was to bring the new developing Nigerian drama to the attention of European scholars. It is hoped that this objective has been fulfilled.

Secondly it is hoped that the second hypothesis has been proved that the new playwrights have been under-valued as a result of Soyinka's shadow. The search for their individuality through their writings, and especially the search by Osofisan and Sowande to create new styles, are attempts to break Soyinka's stronghold. It is hoped that the new playwrights do not cease their

efforts, and that continuing them, they develop the new Nigerian theatre.

It is evident throughout this study that the dominating stature of Soyinka in Nigerian or African drama was not in anyway in question. There is no attempt to discredit the mastery and honoured position of Soyinka in the history of Nigerian drama. What I have set out to do in this dissertation, is to re-assess the development of Nigerian drama and at the same time to take a closer look at other numerous developments around Soyinka and after that have remained the issue of interest to this study. It is therefore important to recognise the value of the four playwrights: Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande and Femi Osofisan.

The main finding of the dissertation concurs with John Arden's perceptive comment in the New Theatre Magazine that:

Western official culture - as taught in our (British) Universities and at the Royal Court Theatre - has nothing of lasting benefit to say to Africans or Indians or anyone else in the Third World. The most that can be learned, I suspect, is some degree of technique. Wole Soyinka has learnt it very well.

But it is becoming more and more evident every year that the ultimate end of such technique is going to be the improvement of revolution in the Third World, and

nothing else. The revolution will be both national and international and directed against continued Western exploitation, both economic and cultural. Wole Soyinka is a halfway house. It is the plays from West Africa of the next generation which will make his position clear to us.

The marvel of Arden's accurate comments on the development of Nigerian drama, is that, apart from Soyinka with whom Arden worked at The Royal Court Theatre in 1959, the Nigerian playwrights of the next generation, examined in this dissertation have only been able to read Arden's plays. But judging from this study, there is no doubt that like Arden, the contemporary Nigerian playwrights concern themselves with what Arden refers to as the :

problem of translating the concrete life of today into terms of poetry that shall of the one time both illustrate that life and set it within the historical and legendary tradition of our culture.

I have tried to make Soyinka's position clear in Nigerian drama, and I have also taken the opportunity to introduce the next generation of writers of whom Arden speaks.

It is hoped that these objectives have been achieved. And as all the playwrights discussed in this dissertation are still alive and writing, it can be

expected that the development will go further than the scope of this study and also generate new interests in the study of African drama by Western scholars. A study such as this may be seen as the first stage of a re-introduction to the critical evaluation of the growth, contributions and developments of modern Nigerian drama.

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4. Farewell to Babylon, (1976) in the Collection of three plays, Longman Drumbeat Series, London, 1979.
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Appendix One

An example of a typical advertisement of the concerts which newspapers helped to bring to the notice of the public. The Lagos Observer December 4, 1886.

Notice. A Grand Evening ENTERTAINMENT UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HIS EXCELLENCY FRED EVANS C.M.C. ACTING ADMINISTRATOR, will be given on Friday, the 10th December, BY THE PUPILS OF ST GREGORY'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL, AT THE ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL-ROOM, IGBOSHERE STREET, WHEN A CELEBRATED DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS LAURENCE AND XYSTUS WILL BE PERFORMED, The Programme will be interspersed with songs, Glees and Recitations, DOORS OPEN AT 7 P.M., PERFORMANCE TO COMMENCE AT 8 PRECISELY, ADMISSION BY TICKETS CAN BE HAD AT THE CATHOLIC BOOKSHOP, IGBOSHERE STREET, AND FROM MRS, W.W. LEWIS, Kakawa Street, MR. J.D. FAIRLEY, Marina, MR. J.A. CAMPOS, Hamburg Street, MR. J.J. DA COSTA, Marina and at The Office of The Lagos Observer, BISHOP STREET, BY KIND PERMISSION THE COLONIAL BAND WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE. THE PROCEEDS OF THE ENTERTAINMENT WILL BE APPLIED TO THE REPAIRING OF THE SCHCOLS. N.B. Programmes at 3d. each can be had seance tenante.

Appendix Two

Poster advertisement of a dramatic performance.

Reproduced from the Lagos Daily Times June 18, 1929.

COME! COME! COME!

A Native Dramatic Entertainment
The women's societies of St. John's
Church Aroloya propose to give a
Dramatic Entertainment in Yoruba at
the GLOVER MEMORIAL HALL on Friday
next the 21st instant at 8.30 p.m.
when the piece entitled

'POROYE OMO-OBA AROWOBUSOYE'
will be performed in repetition of
the cast performance by special request
under the direction of Mr. J. Majek
Akinloye.

Appendix Three

Extract from an Administration play, performed in 1948 in the Midwestern part of Nigeria by the Crown Colony Ministry of Health and Welfare. Reproduced from Chief Haruna's notes. He being a worker of the Department from 1937 - 56. He was the actor who usually played Mr. Bad.

White Official: Good evening. The workers of the Department of Information will now show you a short play which reflects the true life drama of defaulters who fail to pay their tax-rates.
Thank you.

(The interpreter speaks in vernacular, bow to the official who in turn gives the go-ahead. These short sketches were usually done in pidgin English, and a few vernacular words were added for the better understanding of the audience).

Mr Bad starts the play, lying on the bed sick, and groaning aloud.

Mr. Bad : Oh my head, I don die oh!
Oh my stomach, I don die oh!

(Knock on the door).

Yes come in.

(In comes Mr. Good).

Mr. Good: Hello Mr. Bad, are you still in the bed?

Mr. Bad: Yes. I have used all the village medicine, but this is high fever. And the witch-doctor cannot cure my illness.

Mr. Good: Do you wash your pots and change the water daily for fear of drinking Mosquito larva?

Mr. Bad: You know that I am a lazy man. I cannot wash my pots.

Mr. Good : I see. Lets go to the Dispensary.
(They leave, walk towards the white official who plays the Doctor).

Doctor: Yes, can I help you?

Mr. Good: This is my friend Sir and he is sick.

Doctor: I see. (He tests his temperature)
Do you pay your tax at all?

Mr. Bad: No Sir. I always run into the bush when the tax collectors are coming to my village.

Doctor: Then I am sorry I cannot treat you with the medicine of tax payers.

Mr. Good: Please Sir. Here is my tax payer's card. Please treat my friend.

Doctor: Okay. I will treat you because of your friend. Now give him the two shillings and six pence now so that he can register you tomorrow with the tax collectors.

Mr. Bad: Yes Sir. (Gives the money to Mr. Good)
I don die o.

(The Doctor gives him the injection and he becomes well. The play ends with the official going over the play again, a kind of highlight of the messages of the play).

The villagers in turn dance round the Van, displaying their tax cards hoping that the official puts in a report, so that their village might be developed.

Evening ends with a film show.

Appendix Four

The names of the members of staff
of the first School of Drama in
Africa. University College, Ibadan
1961.

Director	-	Geoffrey Axworthy
Assistant Director	-	Martin Banham
Technical Director	-	W.T. Brown
Designer	-	Demas Nwoko
Speech and Movement	-	Ebun Odutola
Costume	-	Mary Caswell
Technical Assistant	-	Mary Fredrick
Acting & Direction	-	Bob Moulthrop
Mime and Movement	-	Tom Herbert
Dance	-	Peggy Harper

Appendix Five

Extract from Moliere's Les Fourberies de Scapin adapted by Axworthy and his students for the beginning of the travelling University theatre of 1961.

The Scoundrel Suberu

Three students, Brownson Dede, Dapo Adelugba and Alfred Opubor, all of them students of English and Classics, did the translation of Moliere's Les Fourberies de Scapin and adapted it for a Nigerian production in March 1961. The dramatis personae of the Nigerian version read as follows:

Argante	-	Degoke
Goronte	-	Folabi
Octavo	-	Segun
Leandre	-	Wole
Zerbrinette	-	Siribiatu
Hyacinte	-	Adora
Scapin	-	Suberu
Sylvestre	-	Njoku
Nerine	-	Maggie
Carle	-	absent
Deux Porteurs	-	absent

Molly Mahood had this to say in the magazine Ibadan No. 10 about the production :

Moliere's valets have more in common with the dependents of a wealthy African household than they have with the servants of a European drawing-room comedy. In some ways the adaptation improved on the original. The pidgin of the second valet was the big success of the evening.

"je te conjure au moins de ne m'aller point brouiller avec la justice".

read flatly in the translation as

"Look Oga, I don tell say 1 no dey for Monkey club. Make you no take me gain police."

Extract from the play - Suberu

The reason given for the title by Adelugba is as follows:

Apart from the alliterative grace of the title, the name 'Suberu' has connotations of mischief, roguery and pranksterishness. Even more Scapinesque in suggestive force is the short form 'Sube' used more often than the full name in the script.

Degoke : He was compelled to marry her then?

Njoku : Yes, masser.

Suberu : . Would I tell you a lie?

Degoke : Then he must go at once and lay a complaint before a magistrate.

Suberu: That's the very thing he doesn't want to do.

Degoke: It would make it easier for me to get the marriage annulled.

Suberu: Get the marriage annulled?

Degoke: Of course.

Suberu: You'll never do that.

Degoke: Not do it?

Suberu: No.

Degoke: What! Shall I not have a father's rights, and justice for the violence done to my son?

Suberu: He'll never agree to it.

Degoke: Not agree?

Suberu: Never.

Degoke: My son?

Suberu : Your son. Would you have him own himself a coward, and admit that he was forced to do this thing? He'll take good care not to do that. Why, it would be a slur on his reputation, and make him unworthy to have you for a father.

Degoke: Rubbish!

Suberu: It's absolutely essential for his honour and for yours, that the world should think he married willingly.

Degoke: And I think it essential for his honour and his, that he should say the opposite.

Suberu: He certainly never will.

Degoke: I'll make him.

Suberu: He won't do it, I tell you.

Degoke: He shall do it, or I'll disinherit him.

Suberu: You mean that?

Degoke: I mean it.

Suberu: Very well.

Degoke: How is it very well?

Suberu: You won't disinherit him?

Degoke : I shan't disinherit him?

Suberu: No.

Degoke: No?

Suberu: No.

Degoke: Well! Here's a nice thing! I shan't disinherit my son?

Suberu: No, I tell you.

Degoke: Who will stop me?

Suberu: Yourself.

Degoke: Myself?

Suberu: Yes, you wouldn't have the heart.

Degoke: Oh, wouldn't I?

Suberu: You're joking.

Degoke: No, I'm not.

Suberu: A father's love will plead for him.

Degoke: It will do nothing of the sort.

Suberu: Yes, it will.

Degoke: I tell you it will not.

Suberu: Nonsense!

Degoke: It's no use saying 'Nonsense'.

Appendix Six

Extract from the songs used for
Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors
1963. Reproduced by the kind per-
mission of Soni Oti.

TWINS, TWINS

(A rhumba-calypso rhythm)

1. In the town of Syracuse.
There was Aegeon, the Merchant
His money gave double interest
So his wife double children

2. Just at this very time
A very poor woman had twins
Who were brought up by Aegeon
To serve his own twin-sons...waya

CHORUS: Twins, twins - Antipholus
Twins, twins - Dromio
Twins, twins - twins all
In the town of Ephesus

3. The poor twins were called Dromio
Slaves to Antipholus
They lived happily together
Aemilia brought them all up.

4. It happened that on one good day
Aegeon and his family
They boarded a ship for their home
A storm got them all shipwrecked,

5. Aegeon's family parted
One half in Syracuse
The other half in Ephesus
The twins divided up,
6. To distinguish the twins
And identify them all
No one could ever do it
And here the errors began....waya.

My mistress send me, say
mek I go market, go buy
butter.

So I go the market,
I buy the butter, but
as I no get any other thing
to put the butter inside,
I put-am for my pocket;
But the sun wey shine
that day no be small thing

So when I reach our house,
I put my hand for my
pocket to come-out the
butter, but the e-he-e (melted).

Appendix Seven

Extract of the song written by Soni
Oti for Nkem Nwankwo's Danda.

Directed by Axworthy for the School
of Drama, 1964.

The most popular song was that which
indirectly advertised Morris Minimoke
car for S.C.O.A.

MORRIS MINIMOKE

Chorus: Morris Minimoke
Morris Minimoke
Nothing wey dey run
Like Morris Minimoke

1. E shake me like this
E shake me like that
But softly catch monkey
Na so dem say

Repeat chorus

2. E move me like so
E push me like that
But nothing wey dey run
Like Morris Minimoke.

Appendix Eight

Extract from the production notes of the 400th year celebration of Shakespeare by the University of Ibadan 1964.

For the past three years the University Travelling Theatre has toured Nigeria during vacations, bringing adaptations of classic plays 'Scapin', The Taming of the Shrew, The Comedy of Errors, to tens of thousands of Nigerians, in more than thirty centres, who have little or no opportunity of seeing live theatre of professional quality. The operation has been largely self-supporting, the small capital investment being underwritten by the University and by private and commercial sponsors. The Federal Government Information Service has provided thousands of silk screened posters free of charge, and organisations such as the British Council have assisted with local arrangements.

This year, the theatre would like to make a contribution to the Shakespeare Centenary Celebrations with a more ambitious project, covering the whole of Nigeria, and perhaps other African countries, such as Ghana. We feel that on this occasion it would be less appropriate to tour with a single play of Shakespeare, and therefore propose to mount two programmes drawing on a number of

plays, in a general tribute, under the title 'A Shakespeare's Festival'. The two programme would aim at illustrating Shakespeare's analysis of Man.

Appendix Nine

Complete extract of the story of the Elephant who was made king. Extract from Bode Sowande's Farewell to Babylon pp. 99 - 103.

(The following story told by ONITA and SERIKI, is done in pantomime by YULLI and COOKIE. Acting emphasis is on the faces which in their muscular elasticity, produce various masks that reflect the sharp comic moods of the Elephant story. The vehicle of the pantomime remains, of course, the body but the mouth MUST also mime the words of the story. In the pantomime which proceeds smoothly from the preceding incident of the play, YULLI mimes SERIKI's speeches as Mr. Tortoise, COOKIE mimes ONITA's speeches as King Elephant.

Pantomime Begins

ONITA: Look at the forest. Full of creatures,
great and small. This forest must have
a king. Logically, that king must be me.
Don't choose the Lion.
Me.
Make me king.
I am the Elephant.
Make me the king of the jungle.

SERIKI: And King you will be.
I am Mr. Tortoise
My shell protects centuries of wisdom.
You want to be king, and a king you will be.
And I bow to you in homage;
Your very obedient subject, Your Majesty.

ONITA: You must not only bow.
You must lie down for me.
Prostrate, you sluggish animal!
Pay homage!
Your sheel will be my footstool.

SERIKI: No, please, King Elephant.
It is true I am sluggish.
I walk slowly because I am always thinking of
truth.

ONITA: I raise my foot, but let it come down
gently on your shell.

SERIKI: It will break.

ONITA: Will you question the king or should I bring
my foot down like a mortar or gently like a
giant's ropeose? Prostrate?

SERIKI: (Groans. Groans. Groans.)

ONITA: What have you to say to your king?

SERIKI: My shell is broken. (Groans)
I say to the King that his terrible the shell
of wisdom.

ONITA: Not to worry, Mr. Tortoise.
Whenever I want truth, I will only ask
you to bring it out of your shell of wisdom.
After all it is your shell. Cracked or
smooth.

SERIKI: (Groans. Yelps. Whines. Groans).

ONITA: The Elephant had his terrible foot on the Tortoise all day long, all night long. The Elephant was King. The tortoise was the subject like all other animals in the forest. Now, Mr. Tortoise, every morning you will say to me a word of truth. Every morning. After all you are the guardian of wisdom. Now, what is the word of truth for today? I will remove my foot and you will say it.

SERIKI: (Groans)
Crack-rattle-snap!
As I straighten up, I can hear my ancient bones crack, snap, rattle.

ONITA: Give me today's word of truth!

SERIKI: The truth, my king?

ONITA: The truth, you beast of my centuries!

SERIKI: The truth, your Majesty?

ONITA: The truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God if you Mr. Tortoise do not say it.

SERIKI: Very well then
Very well
Your majesty, you are... you are...
I cannot say it. No, I cannot say it.

ONITA: Say it!

SERIKI: The truth is... you are... a TYRANT.

ONITA: What!

Me!

And the Elephant went to one side stamping his foot in terrible rage. The forest shook and trembled with his anger.

SERIKI: The tortoise went to the other side in fear. His legs trembling in fear like a leaf in the wind. So terrible was his fear that the whole earth vibrated uneasily.

ONITA: He said that to me!

SERIKI: I should not have said that. Foolish mouth. Keep your mouth shut. I should not have said that. He is going to kill me now.

ONITA: I am going to kill you!
Ahhhh'. Yessss'.

SERIKI: The tortoise just went on trembling. Please, your majesty, don't make me pass water down my trousers.

ONITA: Only one thing can save you.

SERIKI: What, your Majesty?

ONITA: Give me another word of truth. The type that will make me happy. Stop shaking all over! And don't pass water down your trousers. Think.

SERIKI: Yes, I must think.
Think, think, think, think, THINK!
Yes your Majesty; I shall build you a throne. The best the world has ever seen. Golden, dazzling, majestic.

ONITA: Good.
So the Elephant went away, promising to return
in seven days to sit on his golden throne.

SERIKI: Quickly, quickly, quickly, QUICKLY!
He dug a pit. All day long. All night long.
Ge dug, dug, dug, and DUG! Then he got some
sticks. From here, there, there and every-
where! Spread a beautiful rug on the sticks.
Placed the throne on the rug. Happily he began
to sing and dance. We have made the Elephant
king. Golden is his throne.

ONITA: The Elephant danced slowly with majestic
power and splendour. To this thrown in the
dazzle of gold and he SAT.

(Pause)

He never stopped falling down the pit, until
he reached the bottom.

SERIKI: Aphem, it serves you right. It serves you
right. What do you think I was, a fool?
It serves you damn right!

ONITA: You traitor! You liar! I asked for truth.
You lied to me. You liar!

SERIKI: The tortoise peeped over the pit. How is
it down there? When I told you the truth
you wanted to kill me but when I lied to
you, it was music to your ears.

(The pantomime ends).

Appendix Ten

Femi Osofisan - playwright's notes in the programme of the 11th Convocation ceremony of the University of Ife in December 12 - 15, 1980.

The play was Morountodun.

The experience of bringing the drama of Moremi back here to her legendary home at Ife has been, these past weeks, quite exhilarating. Many times, as I drive through the hills at dawn, thinking over the arduous rehearsals of the previous night, her figure rises softly from the surrounding mist, and sits by me in the open car. We hold soft conversations. And the morning finds me giddy with the memories of her presence.

Later in the afternoon, however, it is Titubi who wakes me. Literally she invades my hangovers. Her voice is everywhere, raw and passionate. She is pointing, screaming, stamping her feet. I leap up, the day receives me in the riot of scandal. When, she cries, shall he build a society that is just? Tell me! When shall we eliminate poverty, misery and oppression from our midst? When will the

struggle end? Or don't you just care at all?

.....Well, it is left to you, dear friends, to answer these questions, Moremi, Titubi, their companions, all are yours for the mere price of your tickets. Take them, intoxicate yourselves with them.

And I leave you now, as my actors begin to mount the stage. As for them, members of the University of Ife Theatre and other guest artistes from the Ife community, we meet together for the first time only a few weeks ago. We worked, till even our quarrels became strategy, I think we even had time to become good friends. I will certainly be looking forward to working with the troupe again.

Appendix Eleven

Extract from Wole Soyinka's Idanre poem. A poem written for Ogu. Taken from Soyinka's Idanre and Other Poems, Eyre Methuen, London, 1969. pp. 57 - 85.

IV The Beginning

Low beneath rockshields, home of the iron One
The sun had built a fire within
Earth's heartstone. Flames in fever fits
Ran in the rock fissures, and hill surfaces
were all aglow with earth's transparency

Orisa-nla, Orunmila, Esu, Ifa were all assembled
Defeated in the quest to fraternize with man

Wordlessly he rose, sought knowledge in the hills
Ogun the lone one saw it all, the secret
Veins of matter, and the circling lodes
Sango's spent thunderbolt served him a hammer-head
His fingers touched earth-core, and it yielded

To think, a mere plague of finite chaos
Stood between the gods and man

He made a mesh of elements, from stone
of fire in earthfruit, the womb of energies
He made an anvil of peaks and kneaded
Red clay for his mould. In his hand the Weapon
Gleamed, born of the primal machanic

And this pledge he gave the heavens
I will clear a path to man

His task was ended, he declined the crown
Of deities, sought retreat in heights. But Ire
Laid skilled siege to divine withdrawal. Alas
For diplomatic arts, the Elders of Ire prevailed;
He descended, and they crowned him King

Who speaks to me in chance recesses
Who guides the finger's eye

Now he climbs in reparation, who annointed
Godhead in carnage, O let heaven loose the bolts
Of last season's dam for him to lave his fingers
Merely, and in the heady line of blood
Vultures drown: Merely,

And in the lungstreams of depleted partures
Earth is flattened. O the children of Ogun
Reaped red earth that harvest, rain
Is children's reeds and the sky a bird-pond
Until my god has bathed his hands

Who brings a god to supper, guard him well
And set his place with a long bamboo pole

Ogun is the lascivious god who takes
Seven gourdlets to war. One for gunpowder,
One for charms, two for palm wine and three
Air-sealed in polished bronze make
Storage for his sperms

My god Ogun, orphans' Shield, his home
Is terraced hills self-surmounting to the skies
Ogun path-maker, he who goes fore where other gods
Have turned. Shield of orphans, was your shield
In-spiked that day on sheltering lives?

Yet had he fled when his primal task was done
Fugitive from man and god, ever seeking hills
And rock bounds. Idanre's granite offered peace
And there he dwelt until the emissaries came-
ead us King, and warlord.

Who speaks to me I cannot tell
Who guides the hammer's fight

Gods drowse in boredom, and their pity
Is easy roused with lush obsequious rites
Because the rodent nibbled somewhat at his yam
The farmer hired a hunter, filled him with wine
And thrust a firebrand in his hand
We do not burn the woods to trap
A Squirrel; we do not ask the mountain's
Aid, to crack a walnut.

Appendix Twelve

Traditional oral chant to Ogun. Translated by Wole Soyinka from its original form. Published in Poems of Black Africa (Ed) by Wole Soyinka. Heinemann, London, 1982. pp. 55-57.

Now I will chant a salute to my Ogun
O Belligerant One, you are not cruel.
The Ejemu, foremost chief of Iwonran Town,
He who smartly accoutress himself and goes to the fight.
A butterfly chances upon a civet-cat's excrement and
flies high up into the air.
Ogun, don't fight against me.
Don't play with me.
Just be to me a giver of good luck.
You said you were playing with a child.
I saw much blood flowing from the girl's private parts.
Ogun, don't fight against me.
Don't play with me.
You said you were playing with a boy.
I saw much blood flowing from the boy's private parts.
Ogun, don't fight against me.
Don't play with me
You were playing with a pigeon.
The pigeon's head was torn from its neck.
Ogun, don't fight against me.
Don't play with me.
You were playing with a sheep.
The sheep was slaughtered with a knife
Ogun, don't fight against me.
Don't play with me.
You were playing with a male dog.
The male dog was beheaded.
Ogun, don't fight against me.
Don't play with me.
O Belligerant One, you are not cruel.

The Ejemu, foremost chief of Iwonran Town,
He who smartly accoutres himself and goes to the fight.
A butterfly chanced upon a civet-cat's excrement and flies
high up into the air.

There were initially sixteen chiefs.

In the town called Ilagbede, of these the paramount
chief was Ejitola,

Ejitola Ireni, son of Ogun,

The blacksmith who, as he speaks, lightly
strikes him hammer upon his anvil repeatedly.

Son of He who smashes up an iron implement and forges
it afresh into new form.

Son of He who dances, as if to the emele drum music,
while

holding the hollow bamboo poles used for blowing air
upon the

coal embers fire in his smithy. He who swells out like
a toad as he operates the smithy's bellows.

I will chant a salute to my Ogun

O Billigerent One, you are gentle, the Ejemu, foremost
chief of

Iwonran, He who smartly accoutres himself and goes to
the fight.

Some people said Ogun was a failure as a hunter.

Ogun therefore killed a man and packed the corpse into
a domestic fire.

Then he killed the man's wife and packed her corpse
behind the fire place.

When some people still said that Ogun was a failure as
a hunter

The sword which Ogun was holding in his hand,

He stuck into the ground on a river bank.

The sword became a plant, the plant now called '
'labelabe'.

Hence the saying "No ceremony in honour of Ogun can be
performed at the river-side,

Without Labalabe's getting to know of it".

It is I, a son of Akinwande, who am performing

I do good turns for people of decent appearance.

M.B.A.C.
USA