make his point more forcefully that, if his fellow students want to ape the British, they must behave in a way of which Shakespeare would approve.

This letter to the editor, in fact a retort, did not fail to elicit responses from the so-called hoodlums and eventually let loose a barrage of exchange of invectives between Soyinka and the group that had been labelled hoodlums. The letter itself shows courage in the young Soyinka where he stands up for his beliefs and admonishes bad behaviour in support of human dignity.

Another composition similar to “Decency” is the poem entitled “The Gallant’s Prayer”.

2.3.1.ii  “The Gallant’s Prayer”

The narrator in “The Gallant’s Prayer” exhibits a strong background of the chivalric courtly culture of circa the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This comes as no surprise as the poem reflects the ideals of the Pyrates Confraternity. The poetic style, tone, and theme also parody English poetry of the sixteenth century. Aptly titled, this short verse reveals a persona as a young man deeply steeped in the mores and courtesies of courtly love which were popular in Medieval English culture. This manipulation of English poetic tradition by Soyinka emphasises his level of acquaintance with classic English literature; he is able to employ its conventions, albeit light-heartedly in this poem. The persona as presented in the first and the last stanzas is a “true knight in shining armour” ready gallantly to sacrifice all, to “save a damsel in distress” as he declares:

Let me be by
When a lady’s scarf doth lie
Fallen to the ground.
Let me be nigh
When, engine stalled, she gave a sigh;
I’ll push her car around ...

O for a damsel in distress!
O for a return to King Arthur’s days
Ah! Times have been
When men drew swords for women --
O for a lady in burning house!
I'll rescue her, her blouse
Untouched by flame.
Yes, for a lady's smile, I yearn
To pass my 'Mediate, and earn
A gallant's name.

Apart from the overtly English-styled hero portrayed here, the concern and defence for the victimised is satirically expressed by the young Soyinka, using the sexual connotative metaphor:

When, engine stalled, she gave a sigh;
I'll push her car around ...

Again, one should appreciate the light-heartedness of this composition as Soyinka repeatedly uses satire to wistfully lament the forgotten manners of days gone and forgotten in the following lines:

O for a lady in burning house!
I'll rescue her, her blouse
Untouched by flame ...,

which continue to make sexual innuendos. This is hardly serious poetry. It may be confusing and misleading to see Soyinka seemingly drawn to foreign (English) virtues in order to make a social statement in an African university campus. The fact of the matter is that the women he was defending were being heckled for singing native songs, in an otherwise urbane smoker-concert evening (Lindfors 1982). But I do not believe he was merely defending them because they were presenting traditional songs. It seems Soyinka was objecting to the principle of unprovoked humiliation of one by another. These are the early signs of the pursuit of Soyinka's ethics of ensuring that all attain their "fullest human liberty" (Hayes 1986).

Furthermore, despite the foreign tool of mediation used (the courtly romantic poetry), one can sense the unashamed reproach in the persona who condemns the actions of
those persons viewed to be in the wrong in the second stanza:

    Or, when some coarse untutored imp,
    Some boorish cad insults her;
    Let me be by to make him limp;
        To make him cry ‘Mercy,’ a man much wiser
    And when some lettered gent,
    Some thing that bears the name of student,
        Maligns her under a pseudonym;
    O, let me find him!
    I’ll teach the coward
    Such pranks are wayward. [by The Gallant Captain WS’s alias]
    (Eagle 13 April 1954: 6).

Apart from revealing the writer’s urge to defend the defenceless, the subject matter and poetic style of this parody of the legendary knight and the damsel also shows the kind of colonial syllabus in which the young Soyinka was steeped during his early studies in literature. Would this then imply that Soyinka and his peers were at peace with the British colonial syllabus of the day? There can be no simple answer to such a question, but Osofisan, one of Soyinka’s contemporaries, explains the general perception of the shortcomings of this education thus:

    ... our university was conceived in bad faith. It was started, somewhat hastily in the mid-forties, to serve two purposes[,] (a) to stifle the nascent black nationalism ... (b) to train a higher cadre of colonial stooges ... the students were to be given a purely English education, to turn them into ‘black Englishmen’ and alienate them completely from their fellow countrymen (Osofisan 1981: 25-26).

Upon which Adeniran quickly points out the obvious predicament of a young student like “Wole [a mere 19 year old at the time, who] definitely could not do much about the academic orthodoxy of his time” (Adeniran 1994: 41).

However, commenting on “Decency”, Lindfors only makes the light comment that this piece of writing is Soyinka’s self-mocking poem criticising the behaviour of his fellow students and that it shows the popular kind of frivolity that pervaded the Eagle. Lindfors’s views withstanding, my opinion is that these pieces of writing convey more
than a criticism of fellow students’ unbecoming behaviour. They both reflect a fledgling campus’s vibrant culture of dialogue through the media and via the vehicle of creative arts, and they also bear signs of the writer’s personal beliefs in the humane treatment of one by another. Therefore, underlying these juvenile pieces of polemics can be seen a flicker of the humanist ethical stance in Soyinka, an attribute that was to be associated with him even later in life.

It is true that the influence of the English style of writing, though treated very lightly by Soyinka himself, is quite heavy in these early writings, as seen in the parody of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* ("Decency") and in "The Gallant’s Prayer" above. The critical question to ask is, why does this young man choose to parody such well known and serious poems in the British literary tradition? Soyinka’s light treatment of what is serious art in Britain may perhaps be viewed as a subtle display of the rejection of the colonial culture he and many Africans were subjected to at the time and many years before.

Soyinka’s reproach elicited mockery from the so-called Hooligans, one of whom even wrote: “It is only fair for me to suggest that Wole’s scurrilous pen was inspired by a new brand of ‘TAKONISM’ that is yet to be classified and given a name” (Lindfors 1982: 109).

The young Soyinka was continuously attacking the churlish behaviour of his fellow male students against women; he used the medium of literature to make his point. His "Reptiles", another article published in the *Bug*, bears a similar history to "Decency" and "The Gallant’s Prayer". Although Lindfors, who supplies the text, does not faithfully outline the circumstances that brought about this piece of writing (Lindfors 1982: 119-120), Ifoghalede Amata’s insightful account (Agdeluba 1987) reveals that this piece of corrective writing was also inspired by the unfair treatment of a young schoolgirl by college club boys who went on a drinking spree on the roof top of Hall III. The girl had come to campus to visit her elder sister and was accosted by these young men to join them in their drinking. Although Ifoghalede Amata calls the article
“The Snake” it is clearly the same article published by Lindsors, as can be deduced from Amata’s explanation that:

It was an article that with beautiful literary images made its point and made it so poignantly that more than thirty years later, the image of those undergraduates crawling on their bellies is still vivid in mind (Adelugba 1987: 24).

The article Amata is referring to has such descriptions:

I hate snakes. I hate all reptiles with a hatred that is born of fear. ... I’d rather face an infuriated bull - then, at least, I can see what’s coming to me. ...Until the last holidays I, too, did not realize that the college had so many of them. But we do! They exist in shirts and trousers, they browse in the library and behave like gentlemen. ... I called them snakes. Yes, only a snake’s brain could have thought of a description like “wriggling her waist like a wounded snake” (Lindsors 1982: 119).

Advocating women’s right to dignity and fair treatment therefore becomes an attribute that cannot be overlooked in the young Soyinka. On this issue Bernth Lindsors further comments.

Soyinka, who had written many gallant articles in defence of ‘ladies’ maligned, heckled, or in some way abused by his peers at the university, ... responded to the ideals and courtesies of courtly love. ... As well as being a humorist, the teenage Soyinka appears to have been a pragmatic romantic (Lindsors 1982: 122).

Why was Wole Soyinka so interested in the issue of women’s welfare? A quick overview of his own experiences as a child could provide part of the answer. Two generations of Soyinka’s own maternal family are renowned for initiating a number of projects that improved the well-being of women in Nigeria. This could be one of many explanations why Soyinka was drawn to supporting the welfare of women, and perhaps his juvenile disposition made chivalric romances appeal to him, as one of the better ways to meet the demands of this noble principle acquired from home.

Consequently, the writer’s seeming youthful preoccupation, the campaign for the respectable treatment of women by male students, witnessed in these early writings,
may have been more than just a juvenile hobby acquired on campus. It should therefore not have come as a surprise when he later took up the same theme of women’s emancipation in *The Lion and the Jewel*, much to the disdain of some of the English theatre reviewers who were shocked at the audacity of an African playwright “... beating an African drum about female emancipation” (*The Evening News* 13 December 1966).

The point of interest, nonetheless, is that apart from showing the nascent principle of standing up for the freedom of expression of those denied such a freedom, Wole Soyinka’s writings also exhibit the beginnings of his practice of using the media and literature as both weapons and vehicles to structure social behaviour. Concern for the fair treatment of others and literature as a medium of voicing such ethical ideals were to become Wole Soyinka’s distinguishing traits in later life.

2.3.1.iii  

**Sundry Short Verse and Prose**

Soyinka’s published writings were not always the campus polemics sampled above. Some of his poems took the form of encouragement to fellow students to put into practice their creative abilities, as shown in the first piece of writing below (Appendix A3). Furthermore, using a humour-filled style and slightly biting wit, the editor of the *Eagle* and the *Bug* would take upon himself the parental role of guiding and reminding fellow students of their expected function on campus (as is seen in Appendix A4). These provocative comic fillers also served to advertise the magazines but they never failed to elicit a response from fellow students.

Appendix A3

Exercise your risible faculties
Without losing critical power:
The “Eagle” has all specialities;
Come, taste both sweet and sour (*Eagle* 3. 3 13 April, 1953: 7).

Appendix A4
Do some people know that it [is] sheer common-sense to let [the] students inside a classroom come out before they begin to crowd the door? Or is it the thirst for knowledge that turns students into Rushians (Eagle 3,1 1953:6)?

Some of these quips and rhymes were left unsigned but most researchers believe that Soyinka wrote most of them, as he is known to have written half of the Eagle he edited (Lindfors 1982: 85).

In all the foregoing pieces of lighthearted writing can be observed something in the character of the emerging writer. Seemingly, the nature of the Bug was to stir up some controversy on petty and serious issues of campus life. The target of humour and rebuke was never confined to students only. Wole Soyinka’s position as editor afforded him the privilege to “...occasionally [sting] so close to official nerve centers that [at some point the publication] had to be temporarily squashed by the administration” (Lindfors 1982: 86). In these pieces of writing Soyinka emerges as a chivalrous young man who also has in abundance qualities of wit, playfulness, and mockery which Lindfors so expertly contrasts with the sober but urbane manner of Chinua Achebe, also a student at the same college although a few years ahead of Wole Soyinka. I share Lindfors’s observation that both these young men, who were willing to risk taking an unpopular stand to teach their fellows some manners, later emerged as Africa’s most articulate social critics (Lindfors 1982: 110). Both Soyinka and Achebe never stopped taking such a self-destructive position to speak for the powerless in the larger society.

The most recent testimony to this conviction is the maiden issue of the African Markets magazine (November 1999), where both Achebe and Soyinka stand out as representatives of the literary voice, amongst the political and economic giants of the continent such as Kofi Annan (United Nations Secretary General), and President Thabo Mbeki (South Africa). Achebe’s article, “Africa is People”, bewails the plight of the continuous sidelining of the people of Africa by economic superpowers, in the process of world economic decision making. Achebe urges the IMF and the World Bank to consider wiping off the inadvertently incurred debt of Africa, to allow her
peoples to compete fairly with the world (Achebe 1999: 6-7). On the other hand, Wole Soyinka’s keynote address to the same forum, “Culture Democracy and Renewal”, cautions against the destruction of popular culture by insidious figures that act as parallel governments, *inter alia* (Soyinka 1999: 26-28). Forty years on, these two writers are still the voice of protest.

As is now well established, going to England did not bring Soyinka’s active creativity to a halt. Soyinka’s pen never stopped. When he was at Leeds it seems he concentrated more on producing short prose than the anecdotes and poetry that were a familiar sight in the *Bug* and the *Eagle*. One piece that reveals much about the writer in the making is the self-mocking letter he wrote to some of his friends back home during the Christmas season as shown in Appendix A5 below:

Appendix A5

I’ve just had a most hectic, exhilarating, exhausting etc., etc., Christmas week at one of the most beautiful country-places of England -- the Great Park, Windsor. It was exhausting physically, mentally and in several cases -- emotionally. Ahem! It was a Xmas Party arranged for International Students, and take it from me boys, the female section of that party was a hundred percent what Father Christmas ordered.

In such company, you soon discover that life is very full of ups and downs. I noticed one evening that one of these belles kept stealing glances at my dusty face. But I didn’t jump to any conclusion. When she repeated this performance the following day, however, I assured myself that I’d made a hit and began to expand myself. On the third day, during a dance, she hardly took her eyes off me and I decided that I must bring things to a head. So I asked her why she kept looking at my charming face. She looked embarrassed and said, “Oh, I’m sure you’ll think me impertinent.” “Oh no, not I,” I quickly assured her, “say whatever it is.”

“Well, I was just wondering ...” and there she hesitated. Goodness, I thought, was she going to ask me if I was married? Had she really fallen for me that hard? She took another look at my face and completed her sentence -- “I was just wondering,” she said, “how many average-sized noses can be made out of yours.” (Lindfors 1982: 85-86).

This short piece of prose shows the meticulous word monger in Soyinka. But more than that, there appears a flicker of what would later embellish his satiric drama; the text shows the artist’s ability to laugh at his own self while he simultaneously uses a
rare wit to expose the racist world view of the British. 

At this stage the body of Soyinka's writing is basically still juvenilia. However, I cannot discount the fact that these 1950s writings are a prelude to the Soyinka that emerged later. The youthful Soyinka loved theatre although the written texts for this genre are not available. Humour and satire is an outstanding feature in Soyinka's early works. The choice of satire is quite useful as it enhances the writer's own desire to expose the foibles of society for admonition and ultimate correction. Soyinka's world view at this stage is that of wanting humans to accord one another tolerance and respect, be they the English administrative staff of a college residence hall or the rustic African undergraduate male students. He also appears as one who had assumed the duty of guiding people on matters of acceptable and responsible social decorum.

2.4 Going to the Royal Court Theatre

It is this budding artist who comes to Devine at the Royal Court Theatre in the late 1950s, enthusiastically participating in a number of theatre-orientated activities such as presenting some of his poems and plays, facing the scrutiny of the theatre reviewers, struggling with production challenges, and basking in the warmth of the writers' club with Ann Piper and her husband as patrons. The brief writing-cum-theatre history of Wole Soyinka outlined in this chapter is not very different from that of his British contemporaries, Arnold Wesker and John Arden. Below I briefly sketch the theatre and writing background of these two writers so as to provide some understanding of their experiences before they worked with George Devine. It is in the next chapter that their works are studied more closely. I admit, this is a very limited account owing to the fact that the focus of my discussion here is Wole Soyinka.

2.4.1 John Arden and Arnold Wesker in the Early 1950s

It would be fascinating to explore all the early works of Arden and Wesker so as to find their vision of the world at this early stage of their writing and perhaps also to see

58
how it compares with that of Soyinka’s. Michael L. Counts provides an account of Arden’s early writing as having appeared in 1955 when his first play *All Fall Down*, cited as a Victorian comedy, was performed in the Edinburgh College of Arts with fellow students (Demastes 1996: 3-4). I am however, unable to examine Arden’s *All Fall Down* and *The Life of Man*; neither is available; it is only Wesker’s *Pools* that I managed to procure.

Like Wole Soyinka, John Arden had university education before he came to the Royal Court Theatre. However, his academic training was not in the literary arts. Born in Barnsley, Yorkshire on 26 October 1930, John Arden graduated from King’s College Cambridge in 1953, receiving a D.A. in architecture. Two years later he received a diploma in architecture from the Edinburgh College of Arts. Arden was not to pursue his career as an architect because in 1957, four years after his graduation, he left his job for playwriting.

Because of the nature of his themes, which scrutinised the basic social tensions between aggressive survivors and the institutions meant to pacify them (Weintraub 1982: 5), Arden was immediately branded an “angry young man” by critics of the day. Furthermore, his use of Brechtian theatre techniques such as dialogue commingled with verse, and scenes interspersed with ballad flashbacks as we find in *The Waters of Babylon*, made his drama even more strange to the audience. This subject is fully discussed in the following chapter.

An account of Arden’s writing career shows that he was not confined to one category of drama, nor was he one to follow a popular trend of the time. As early as the 1960s, Arden’s repertoire included a variety of radio, stage, and screen plays. When Osborne shook the theatre with *Look Back in Anger*, Arden is reported to have produced a radio play, *The Life of Man*. This drama was written partly in verse and partly in prose, a style that was far different from that of other dramatists of the time. In his introduction to Arden’s collection of three plays, John Russell Taylor explains that the subject of this play was semi-allegorical and heavy with myth and esoteric lore (Arden
The next play that Arden wrote is merely described as a verse drama on a subject drawn from the Arthurian legends. Like Wole Soyinka, Arden's love for writing was shown quite early in life. Some of his school efforts included a tragedy about the death of Hitler written in the style of *Samson Agonistes*. He also wrote a pseudo-Elizabethan verse drama on the Gunpowder Plot. It seems Arden himself regards all these foregoing works as apprentice material (Arden 1974: 9).

Nevertheless, it can be deduced that John Arden was not a novice in the dramatic arts when he came to interact with the Royal Court. Even though he was a student of architecture, at school and university, Arden took a more detailed and scholarly interest in English literature and the history of drama (Cohn 1991: 183). It is therefore conceivable to assume that whatever style and material he used in his theatre, he did so with some insight and awareness of what he was doing. In 1957 Arden even won the BBC Northern Region prize for *The Life of Man*. It is this play that Arden sees as the real début of his career as dramatist. When he was commissioned to write a piece for the Royal Court Theatre, Arden's first attempt was unsuccessful. His luck only changed for the better when he submitted *The Waters of Babylon* (produced on 20 October 1957). This, like most trial plays, was first assigned to the session popularly called Sunday night without décor. All along John Arden had been an architectural assistant in London. After his success with *The Waters of Babylon*, Arden then left architecture to devote himself to theatre.

Before staging his plays at the Royal Court Theatre, John Arden had won himself fair recognition in the field of literature. Ideally the plays *All Fall Down* (1955 Edinburgh) and *Life of Man* (1956 BBC radio) should be analysed here as works which were wrought before the Royal Court era. In the following chapter (Chapter 3) there is a close study of the Arden's very first Royal Court production, *Waters of Babylon*, (produced on 20 October 1957 at the Royal Court Theatre), two years before Soyinka staged *The Invention*. Having worked on the stage, radio, and the screen plays prior to coming to the Royal Court, Arden had taken it upon himself to study performance drama informally. Perhaps it is in the course of such study that he was drawn to the
The last dramatist that I briefly examine is Arnold Wesker, who was born in Stepney in 1932. Wesker's literary education came mainly from listening to BBC radio and reading books. He pursued several trades before he settled on play writing. These included making furniture and being a pastrycook, a trade that was to later provide the seedbed for thematic and referential inspiration in such of his plays as *The Kitchen*, *Chicken Soup With Barley*, and *Chips With Everything*. Wesker's early work is the short story *Pools*, which was written in 1956 and published 1958. The Royal Court Theatre's biographical information on Arnold Wesker (14 July 1958) states that Wesker had hoped this short story could be developed into a film. This shows that although he wrote *Pools* as a prose piece, performance was uppermost in his interests. Wesker gave *Pools, The Kitchen*, and *Chicken Soup With Barley* to Lindsay, hoping to be introduced to Devine's Royal Court Theatre. However, George Devine did not produce any of Wesker's plays immediately at the Court, but advised that they should be first tried out at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. It was only a year later (1959) that they were accepted at the Royal Court -- *The Kitchen* for two nights' experimental performances.

In short, the works that Arnold Wesker wrote before he was attached to the Royal Court Theatre include: *Pools: A Short Story* (1956), *The Kitchen* (1956), *Chicken Soup With Barley* (1958) and *Roots* (1959). Wesker had taken such keen interest in theatre that around 1956 he saved enough money to study in the London School of Film Technique. To date (2000), Wesker's writings include television and film scripts, short stories, poetry, and essays.

2.4.1.i *Pools: A Short Story*

*Pools: A Short Story* is an exposé of the main character's fluctuating thoughts and emotions as she awaits a life-changing incident. It features a Jewish widow, Mrs Hyams, who lives alone in an East End apartment in London. The only relatives she
has are her married children, Stephen, who lives in the same city, and Aida who lives in Jamaica. The central conflict on which the story turns is old Mrs Hyams’s fantasies about winning some £75,000 in “Pools”, a local lottery contest. Wesker tautly presents the strained family relations, broken-down communication between family members subtly expressed through the curt exchange of words between mother and son, and the repeated silences interspersed with outbursts of anger from Stephen, like: “Then they were silent for some minutes. ... They drank two cups of tea each and the conversation slugged with not much enthusiasm” (Wesker 1956: 36).

The parents’ loneliness and the abject poverty of these Jewish families is also well depicted through Mrs Hyams’s interactions with her son’s family visits, and her encounter with another lonely woman, Mrs Levy, who is even more destitute than herself. More poignantly, the dramatist in the making can be seen in Wesker’s graphic description of indoor setting -- as if giving stage directions:

... further back into some dark corner was an old deal table littered with an assortment of unopened tins of soup, jars, cupboard boxes and papers. A sideboard stood on three legs, littered with pans; on the mantelpiece was a glass case containing a stuffed bird and, curiously, a pile of pipe cases (Wesker 1956: 32),

and the catalogue of types of food as well as the explicit account of the characters’ actions:

... Mrs. Levy stepped back, drew her fingers to her mouth ... [Mrs. Hyams] collected the dirty dishes, having drunk the remainder of her tea standing up, and took them outside to the little table on the landing (Wesker 1956: 32,34),

all attesting to the emerging dramatist whose faithfulness to detail is typically realist.

This short story is in many ways a precursor of the drama that was to distinguish Wesker in later years. Additionally, there are distinct hallmarks in Pools that anticipate key themes in the drama that followed. For example, the cast is a Jewish family that lives in a run-down East End area, it is headed by a woman, and the only male figure
is a tempestuous young man who is perpetually angry with the world around, as
Wesker explains:

His [Stephen’s] disproportion would not have mattered had he been a gay
person. As it was his heavy features were worsened by a bored, gutteral look
which so many young Jewish men have upon their face. Stephen was bored
with his job, his family and himself. He and his generation had not the stamina
of their parents (Wesker 1956: 36).

Another feature is the theme of disillusionment that comes out more strongly toward
the end of the story. Because of the poverty that her family suffers, Mrs Hyams
entertains the dream of hitting a jackpot of £75,000 and even continuously budgets as
if she had this money. Her pain is gradually revealed in her low spirits and
disappointed utterances, like “We got no real dreams any more” (Wesker 1956: 37).
However, it is even more succinctly reflected in the dramatic twist of fate at the end
of the story where she cuts short her much deserved vacation outside London, comes
back to the city to buy the paper and even phones the award-giving offices to insist on
being given her prize. When it becomes clear to her that there is actually no prize won,
her bitter disillusionment with society and herself is expressed thus.

Her feelings were bruised, but she and the world were quite normal now.
“Why,” she said to herself, “should Mrs. Hyams win £75,000 anyway?” She
walked out of the toilet into the huge dome of the station. “Who is Mrs.
Hyams?” Idly she bumped into someone and said: “I beg your pardon,” then
continued among the crowds and answered herself: “She is no one. She’s

The burgeoning writer’s concern with socio-political matters that centre on the people
of Jewish origin can be seen in this early writing. Wesker’s ease with domestic
settings, particularly the kitchen, is also discernible in this short story. The graphic
detail of the realist dramatist in the making marks even this early work.

2.5 Summary

Various observations can be made from a comparison of the activities of the three
dramatists before they came to the Royal Court Theatre. From the foregoing survey it can be deduced that even before meeting with George Devine, Arden, Soyinka, and Wesker had individually developed a very strong love for writing long before they emerged as notable dramatists. These three young men had clearly sallied out into the world of public scrutiny before they came to the camp of the Royal Court Theatre. They had each identified their personal ethos in life as can be deduced from issues of concern in their early writings. It has also emerged that they all had the common interest of committedness to social situations as they affected humankind. Here, their world view converges on the concern about serious ethical issues such as human self determination, liberty, and duty.

Another interesting revelation is that Arden, Soyinka, and Wesker had simultaneously veered toward the performing arts but not exclusively so, as we observe that they still wrote very good prose that won certain literary prizes. As they came to Devine, these three young men were all well learned craftsmen with tertiary training albeit in different disciplines. Focusing more sharply on Soyinka, it can be safely concluded that at this early stage, the social critic in the making is very discernible. This is seen in the writer’s probing nature, his desire not to keep silent in the face of injustice, albeit commingled with schoolboy pranks. This tendency to ruffle feathers depicts Soyinka as a very alert young man and a promisingly fearless social critic. His early works also reflect the young writer’s devotion to other reserves of literature, the European classics, over and above his solid grounding in his cultural African ethics. As emerged later in life, Soyinka’s fascination with European classical works can be seen, inter alia, in his adaptation of Euripides’s Bacchae which he gives the title The Bacchae of Euripides (1973), and his version of Brecht’s Three Penny Opera which he calls Opera Wonyosi (1977)!

Wole Soyinka emerges as one who is opening up to any form of influence from the eclectic world around him; a world that has a motley influence ranging from the traditional African, through the current social environment, to the imaginary literary world that he encounters in his academic studies. These are the facets that form his
base as he comes to Devine’s world of practical theatre. Notable is also the fact that Soyinka does not wait like a lifeless receptacle to be filled with life’s experiences, he probes situations that surround him and reacts to things that he observes around him, even this early in his literary career. This observation is firmly endorsed by Gibbs in my interview with him:

Gibbs: He was preparing for exams and he was a sort of person that read and reacted, he didn’t just absorb; so we should find him reacting to those traditions ... So he responded to things (Appendix B2).

The foregoing observations on Wole Soyinka’s response to social affairs are further supported by the playwright himself, years later, when he reveals his innermost values and calling thus:

I have one abiding religion - human liberty ... conditioned to the truth that life is meaningless, insulting, without fullest liberty and in spite of despairing knowledge that words alone seem unable to guarantee its possession, my writing grows more and more preoccupied with the theme of the oppressive boot, the irrelevance of the colour of the foot that wears it and the struggle for individuality (emphasis added) (Hayes 1986).

In one interview published by Duerden and Pieterse (1962), Soyinka located the beginnings of his writing career at a much later date than the foregoing discussion reveals. His words were:

I would say I began my writing seriously four years ago [that would be 1958] but ... 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 and so forth (Duerden & Pieterse 1962: 171-72).

Citing 1958 as the year in which he began writing may not be quite true. As can be seen above, when asked, Soyinka quotes a much later date as the début of his writing career, and yet findings of my research reveal that his writing was noticed as early as his undergraduate college years at Ibadan. Even though he may have written something earlier on, at the Government College (later called the University College
of Ibadan) Soyinka fully exploited the opportunity to make his compositions interact with the society he lived in -- with fellow students and the teaching staff. His contributions to the campus magazines, and sketches for school concerts, evidently formed the seedbed of the dramatist and society's analyst that we encounter in later years.

To conclude, my observation is that this phase of Soyinka's life presents the writer as an enthusiastic participant in the social, political, and academic spheres of campus life. Furthermore, as editor of the *Eagle*, Soyinka exhibits an independent and critical mind, often using the indirect tools of humour and satire to lobby for his own point of view. He seems to be the kind of individual who warmly embraces life and is ready to learn from its diverse sources of knowledge. Nevertheless, the young Soyinka's readiness to participate in life's "drama" does not imply any gullibility; his questioning mind pits him against all sorts of people and situations which he does not accept willy-nilly as given, but these challenges instead make him stop, question, criticize, and direct even in this very small sector of life, the campus life. Soyinka is endowed with much vibrant spirit within himself, such that the environment within which he lived only served to sharpen an already keen mind. It is therefore clear that the personality that authored these Ibadan and Leeds works did not exude any deep-seated anger; it was teeming with alertness, forthrightness, outspokenness, humour, and defence of justice. These early works do not show any trace of a sombre mood in the artist but rather the probing nature of a curious "child" who is not at all blind to the imperial yoke placed on the African's neck.
End notes to Chapter 2

1 Lindfors (1982: 182) gives an elaborate explanation of this Takonism alluded to in the exchange of invectives. His explanation is that Takonism was a coinage given to all advocates of women’s rights on campus after a student called S.A.N. Takon had written an article entitled “Give Our Female Undergraduates Their Rights”. This had appeared in a January 1951 edition of the Bug.

2 The role of both Soyinka’s mother, Grace Eniola Soyinka, his great grandfather Rev. Canon Ransom-Kuti, and his great-grand aunt, Frances Funmilayo Anikulapo Kuti, in the betterment of the women and children of the Yoruba and the rest of Nigeria are discussed by Adeniran (1994) and Robertson in Hay & Stichter (1995: 59) respectively.

3 The previous year, on Sunday November 23 1952, Chinua Achebe, a fellow undergraduate student of Soyinka’s, had also registered his utmost annoyance at similar discourteous pranks of fellow students. Achebe had also written an article entitled “Hiawatha” to the Bug to remonstrate against the incivility of these students. Achebe’s “Hiawatha” is recorded in Lindfors (1982: 107).

4 Although discussed widely by researchers, unfortunately, this play was never published. This has made it difficult for this research to probe and analyse Arden’s thought, style and technique first hand. The same is true of Life of Mui (1956).

5 In the introduction to Arden’s and D’Arcy’s Three Plays: The Waters of Babylon, Live Like Pigs, The Happy Haven (1964: 9) John Russell Taylor records the title of this play as Sweeney Agonistes while Lourdeaux in Weintraub (1982: 5) puts the title down as Samson Agonistes.

6 This archival information is taken from the biographical details of Arnold Wesker which I received from the Theatre Arts Museum as well as from the published flyers that Arnold Wesker himself sent me.

7 Brecht’s Three Penny Opera was itself an adaptation of Gay’s Beggar’s Opera (Jones 1988: 131).

8 Wole Soyinka was a member of the Progressive Party, which was a political party organization set up in opposition to the more powerful Student Dynamic Party on campus.
CHAPTER THREE

The Royal Court: Theatre of Ferment

The days at the Royal Court were marvellous. It was good to experience this change in theatre -- a move toward social realism for rising playwrights like Osborne, Wesker, Bond, and so forth ... (Soyinka in Hayes 1986).

3.1 Introduction

The sociopolitical milieu in which Wole Soyinka, John Arden, and Arnold Wesker first presented their serious stage works was the watershed of English theatre between the older illusionist and the new wave non-illusionistic theatre. The decade of the 1950s was also a period in history that was beleaguered with many sociopolitical incidents of interest. Memorable is the beginning of the granting of self-rule to former British colonies in Africa, starting with Ghana in 1957. Britain engaged in a sequence of generally peaceful handovers in Africa and the Caribbean (Gardner & Berenson 1994: 57). Writers from these former colonies were drawn to those subjects that dealt with Africa’s colonial encounter with the West. From the middle of the 1950s there were several disturbances such as the 1956 Hungarian insurrections, the Anglo-French invasion of the Suez Canal, caused by Egypt’s President Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company in July 1956, and the 1959 Mau-Mau uprisings in Kenya where many Africans died a horrific death at Hola Camp. Both the Suez Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary occurred while Soyinka was a student at Leeds, and non-British students at Leeds University protested openly against these. James Gibbs describes the 1956 atmosphere thus:

Suez polarised the Leeds student community, and the national press reported extensive violence on the streets of the city ... . Both London evening papers carried lurid reports of the fighting between coloured and white
students ... (Gibbs 1995: 21).

About these two political issues, "Soyinka ... felt somewhat isolated and alienated" and even complained, "...I heard my English colleagues declare, at the time of Suez, that they were proud to be Englishmen ..." (Gibbs 1995: 21). In addition to all this, the South African government heightened apartheid, the policy of separate development, that had been institutionalised in 1948. This policy must have provoked ill-feelings against the whites. It therefore comes as no surprise to hear that Soyinka's politics while he was at Leeds University were:

... dominated by a concern for what was happening in South Africa, and by colonialism. He sometimes took responsibility for selling Anti-Apartheid papers in the university's refectory and he has described his attempts to get plays about South Africa into shape. It was not surprising that in 1959 he directed his play set in South Africa, The Invention, or that much later he produced a drama based on the inquest into the death of Steve Biko. Soyinka's earliest (un-shaped) South African plays are not available, but The Invention is (Gibbs 1995: 18).

It would be expected that such events induce negative reactions from the so-called subjects of the British empire, or anyone who cares about the fair treatment of humans by fellow humans, for that matter. Such a climate easily inspired the spirit of protest in writers, as further witnessed in the young Soyinka's poem on nuclear explosions in the Sahara and his participation in an improvised sketch on the Hola camp massacre (Appendix B2). In Writers in Conversations (1984), a video series of writers presenting lectures on creative writing, Soyinka refers, inter alia, to the role of the Royal Court Theatre in facilitating the presentation of protest literature. He cites the poem he presented in one of the evenings at the Court protesting against what he metaphorically calls France's decision to "lay nuclear eggs in [Soyinka's] own backyard". Soyinka only recites a few lines of the poem which run:

You whom the superpowers condemn  
To vague on meaning future fears [sic]  
Regret we cannot oblige you  
By sooner dropping dead (Writers in Conversation 1984).
All these sociopolitical activities occurred concurrently with a theatre revolution in England, pioneered by George Devine and Tony Richardson in the very theatre that gave Soyinka the platform to recite the above poem and to stage other works. The year 1956 was also the year of Samuel Beckett’s début with *Waiting for Godot* in the West End and the first visit of Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble theatre troupe to London (Findlater 1981: 29). Brecht, who had unfortunately died of a heart attack a few weeks before his company visited England for the first time, presented the British theatre with stage techniques that were very foreign, despite the fact that Devine himself was behind their adoption. Devine’s interest in Brecht is better explained by Doty and Harbin’s commentary that:

In the fall and winter of 1955, before taking over the Royal Court in February, 1956, Devine toured his production of *King Lear*. During the tour in Germany, Devine met for the first time Bertolt Brecht and his wife, Helene Weigel. Devine... visited Brecht’s Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in East Berlin, where they saw *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Impressed with the theatre’s permanent surround, Devine attempted a similar installation for the Royal Court .... Devine also admired the production’s “simplicity, beauty and honesty”... (Doty & Harbin 1990: 206).

Brecht’s theatre is known for its socialist inclinations. It is a protest theatre at heart, and as is demonstrated later in this research, Soyinka draws freely from both Brecht and Beckett. The foregoing account serves to illustrate the fact that protests against political injustices such as nuclear projects were activities in which George Devine’s theatre openly participated during this period. For example, the Royal Court theatre-makers carried placards and banners of protest against war-related issues such as bombs in what was known as the Aldermaston March¹. Evidently, Devine’s theatre did not only confine itself to staging plays but it also became openly involved in issues of social interest. It is against such a backdrop that Wole Soyinka came to work with Devine. And this glimpse of what was happening outside the theatre should assist in the understanding of the plays and their social context.

The prime objective of the present chapter, therefore, is to provide an overview of the activities of the playwrights and an analysis of the plays they presented at the
Royal Court Theatre. Another area of interest is the theatre-going public for whom these plays were performed. I would like to establish what the viewers' attitude was toward Devine's theatre. Most critical is the media reception of these new playwrights.

The examination of these plays is cross-textual. The plays analysed are the first attempt of each dramatist which was produced with the guidance of George Devine's workshop theatre and writers' group, for example, The Invention, Waters of Babylon, and Chicken Soup With Barley. This analysis is accompanied by an examination of newspaper reviews of the performances of these plays, as well as by the general theatrical profile of the reviewed playwright. Such a two-pronged approach should provide a background against which unfolds the details of what actually occurred at the Royal Court. Both the close study of the dramatists' activities at the Court, and the analysis of the viewers' response to their productions, should assist the process of establishing the ethos of the Royal Court theatre of the late 1950s to mid 1960s. Finally, it would be rewarding to know the Court's impact on its protégés, like Wole Soyinka. This subject is fully explored in the next chapter.

3.2 Previous Research

Even though documentation on Wole Soyinka's activities with the English Stage Company is far outweighed by information about the British playwrights' contributions and their general involvement in the activities at the Royal Court Theatre, there has been some research done by James Gibbs, Bernth Lindfors, Gerald Moore, et al. Lindfors (1982) briefly reveals that from Leeds the young Soyinka did not go straight back to Nigeria but stayed in London, taking up several lines of freelance employment in different places. It is unfortunate that Gibbs's Talking With Paper (1995) mainly covers the Ibadan to Leeds period; it briefly states that from Leeds Soyinka went to London and spent the next three years there before returning home in 1960. In the account of the history of the English Stage Company, spanning 25 years, Richard Findlater (1981) provides pictorial and
written evidence of the annual Aldermaston March that Soyinka participated in while at the Royal Court. Findlater's focus is not on Soyinka's activities and level of involvement but he merely records that the young dramatist was part of the protest group from the Royal Court Theatre.

Other records are in the lists of works produced from 1956 to 1975 by Terry W. Browne (1975: 103-111). This happens to be an appendix containing a table which reflects that there was the 1959 production of *The Invention* by Wole Soyinka, but nothing is said about his day-to-day activities (Browne 1975: 105). Incidentally, the works of Arden and Wesker produced from 1958 are also recorded here. Browne spends a little more time commenting on Arden's and Wesker's first four to five plays, delving into their involvement in sociopolitical skirmishes between the state and the theatre, in which both these writers' names formed part of Laurence Olivier's defence testimony in a court case² (Browne 1975: 64-65). Browne further discusses the working relations that existed between Wesker and the Court director, John Dexter. For all three playwrights there is consistent coverage of individual works' box office ratings, production costs, and profit. However, the theatre-reviewers' attitude of hostility toward Soyinka seemed to have slightly thawed seven years later, when there appeared a very brief appraisal of his *The Lion and the Jewel*. In this review Terry Brown only made a passing reference to *The Lion and the Jewel*; his main focus was on some dialectic confusion at the Royal Court Theatre which was not directly connected to Soyinka's play. The dispute Terry Browne is writing about was a clash between the then Director of the Royal Court, William Gaskill, and critics. The reviewers were unhappy about Gaskill's production of *Macbeth* which they viewed as having been "... totally non-illusionistic and [having] used many 'Brechtian' devices" (Browne 1975: 77).

After the Management Committee's announcement, the furore of the battle died down as abruptly as it had begun and the critics were at the Royal Court for the next production, *The Lion and the Jewel*, a new play by the Nigerian Wole Soyinka. Nearly all the critics liked the play and only Felix Barker of the *Evening News* referred to the recent dispute (Browne 1975: 81).
3.3 The Three Dramatists at the Royal Court Theatre

Having completed his BA degree in English in 1957, Wole Soyinka is reported to have started post-graduate studies but left in the middle to pursue a profession in writing and performance at the Royal Court. Here the twenty-three year-old Soyinka worked for three years as a bouncer, a co-teacher of English at local high schools, a bartender, and script reader at the Royal Court Theatre (Lindfors 1982: 111-112). Soyinka also worked for the BBC as both journalist and anchor person for the West African programme known as “Calling West Africa”. As a play reader, he was expected to be involved in inviting scripts from prospective playwrights, and to evaluate them for possible production at the theatre, as Gibbs explains (Appendix B2). It is here that he met many playwrights and directors of renown. This acquaintance actually provided a very good opportunity for the young playwright to obtain first hand experience in professional theatre, so explains James Gibbs in the 1987 interview recorded in Stockholm (Appendix C1).

Soyinka was very active in the productions at the Royal Court. Subsequently, he eventually produced The Invention, his very first play. Wole Soyinka’s all-important task at the Court involved critiquing and screening manuscripts for this emerging British theatre. It may be safely assumed that the young Soyinka’s understanding of drama must have been quite extensive to be involved with such a task at such a crucial moment in the history of British theatre. With a well-grounded formal university degree in English literature, this young man's expertise and effervescent love for theatre must have attracted George Devine, who was seeking to develop up-and-coming artists.

John Arden's history differs slightly from Wole Soyinka’s. As early as 1955, Arden had started to present plays for production and was not necessarily aided by George Devine since he had already produced his first play in Edinburgh. Furthermore, his radio play, Life of Man, won him a prize in 1956. His coming to the Royal Court in 1957 and the staging of The Waters of Babylon on 20 October 1957 may therefore
be perceived as the first milestone in the meaningful breakthrough that was sought by aspiring playwrights. Arden's history with Devine is a little older than that of both Wole Soyinka and Arnold Wesker's. Arden did not confine himself to the Royal Court in these early years; he continued to produce plays with other companies, while not cutting all his ties with the Royal Court. For example, *When Is a Door Not a Door?* was produced in 1958 at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London.

The third playwright, Arnold Wesker, also has a slightly different pre-Royal Court history. In 1956 Wesker had met Lindsay Anderson and showed him *Pools*. However, Anderson, who had read *The Kitchen* and *Chicken Soup With Barley*, brought these plays to Devine's attention for the possibility of having them staged at the Royal Court, but Devine did not stage these plays immediately. It remains unclear whether Devine did this because he was not too enthusiastic about the plays. Devine passed *Chicken Soup With Barley* on to the Belgrade Theatre where it was produced on 24 May, and later at the Court on 7 July under the direction of John Dexter. It was not until 11 September, 1959 that *The Kitchen* was produced at the Royal Court Theatre. It is therefore at the Belgrade Theatre that Wesker first had a taste of the productions of *The Kitchen* (1958) and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* and *Roots* (1959), only having them transferred to the Court a week later in each case.

On the other hand, Soyinka, whose play, *The Lion and the Jewel*, had been received with enthusiasm by the Royal Court from the onset, could not have it staged due to the fact that there could not be created an adequate cast in London at the time (Moore 1978). Nevertheless, Wole Soyinka liaised with Devine in more than just the usual manner the of prospective writer trying his luck through submitting a manuscript. It appears that Devine had very disinterested judgement when screening and deciding on each prospective writer's script. It was perhaps more the desire to give new talent a chance than the pigment or race of the writer that decided the drama's production fate, as can be surmised in the cases of his reception of the three
playwrights discussed above. When accepted for performance at Sloane Square, for instance, all three writers’ works were first produced under the slot called “Sunday night without décor”.

Although they were drawn to the Royal Court in different ways, these three young men must have had the potential Devine was looking for, as is shown by his ultimate acceptance of their plays for performance at the Royal Court. From the foregoing discussion it can be deduced that Devine’s criterion for accepting prospective playwrights was based on merit and potential.

3.3.1 Interactions at the Royal Court

What exactly happened in Sloane Square? An exploration of the interpersonal relations, testimonies of certain members of the Royal Court, and an evaluation of plays produced at the Royal Court are used as reference points below to try and establish, in some way, what happened there during Soyinka’s stay in London.

3.3.1.i Interpersonal relations

The prevailing sociopolitical and cultural milieu in London and the rest of Great Britain was a very trying experience for young African artists like Soyinka. Lionel Ngakane reminds us that:

When one considers the year 1959, one has to think about black playwrights at the time. They had to struggle to get the recognition they deserved in what was still a hostile environment, not only for writers but for the Black population of Britain [in general] (Appendix B4).

An African artist trying to make a breakthrough in a foreign theatre and presenting alien subject matter, albeit in the English language, was certainly faced with a bigger challenge than fellow writers of English origin. For people like Wole Soyinka, there must have been the excitement of this novel theatre, a strange, cold society, and a less than friendly reviewing media with which to deal. The pressure to excel against
those odds was understandably immense. It is easy to assume that in the face of such forces, the Royal Court dramatists and their directors would band together for the sake of the common cause, to establish the then envisaged national theatre. And it is natural to expect that since these dramatists worked under the same roof, there would be records of some form of interaction amongst them. Although not so revealing, a few references have come out in various interviews and correspondences pointing toward a common, albeit not so strong, thread of relationship amongst these artists. In a letter, perhaps responding to an earlier communication with James Gibbs, on 6 December 1982, Arnold Wesker writes from 27 Bishops Road, London that he cannot recollect any conversations with Wole Soyinka as he (Wesker) did not have much contact with people in the theatre except during brief periods of writers’ meetings. It seems Wole Soyinka had been asked to comment on Wesker’s work. From Wesker’s reaction, it can be inferred that Soyinka probably responded by saying that he would define himself through opposing Wesker in the interpretation of Wesker’s own work. Some of Wesker’s words were:

I’m afraid I can’t be help to you [sic]. I have no recollection of my conversations with Wole. We didn’t have much contact. I didn’t really have much contact with people in the theatre, except during the period, brief, of the writers meetings [sic].

I’m happy if Wole defined himself through opposing [sic] me, but his opposition took place in his imagination. I was never actually there to contradict what may have been his mistaken interpretations of my work (Appendix D1).

His brusque attitude notwithstanding, Wesker’s letter provides an indisputable record that these writers worked under the same guidance although there might not have been any strong “filial” ties among them.

Wesker appears to be a difficult personality, thorny toward everyone. He exhibits the same type of attitude toward fellow British playwrights. This element of cold detachment he also shows toward John Osborne and Pinter. For instance, when
asked if he belonged to the “Angry Young Men” movement with writers like John Osborne, Wesker once replied, “... I don't have much contact with the playwrights you are discussing and I only see Pinter or Osborne once or twice a year” (Wager 1969: 221).

Theatre reviewers' comments also show this aloofness in Wesker. Commenting on his desire to bridge the gap between theatre and the working class, the Observer (28 August 1960) reveals that “... [Wesker] plans to needle the trade unions. Despite his genuine modesty, Wesker will make this a one-man campaign rather than enlist other writers, for he distrusts committees.” It is thus easy to believe that there was also a major underlying personality factor that kept Wesker away from other writers.

Similarly, Osborne is quoted openly (and delightfully?) confessing to the presence of detachment amongst theatre-makers in one interview. He explains the impersonal relationship in these forthright words: “None of us at the Court ever had anything in common, thank God!” (Osborne 1967: 20). The British writers are keen to deny any affinity among themselves. Whatever the cause, such an attitude attests to the fact that there were no strong bonds or palpable interactions among the playwrights at Sloane Square. This therefore persuades me that to begin to look for a close-knit family atmosphere at the Royal Court Theatre is a misguided premise; Devine’s theatre was a place driven with playwrights that were keen on making a personal breakthrough in theatre. The culture of play writing and theatre is better explained by Ngakane who says:

To be a playwright, one is obviously living a solitary life, a life of ideas, of one’s philosophy, one’s vision of life. Thus no two writers can collaborate. They may have the same philosophies, but the presentations of these philosophies can never be the same. The same applies to African writers, they may have the same goals, but their history and their culture will compel them to take different routes to reach the same goal (Appendix B4).
Another area that may shed some more light on what was happening at the Court is the directors' handling of playwrights' individual productions and the ratings of the dramatists' plays at the box office. Amongst his peers, Wesker proved to be the most successful at the box office, despite the fact that his first play, *Chicken Soup With Barley*, could not be staged right away at the Royal Court. John Arden, however, started off very poorly with box office ratings (Findlater 1981: 44). His *Live Like Pigs* filled 25% of box office capacity, *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, 21% and *The Happy Haven*, a shameful 12%. Despite all the above, Devine's support for Arden never flagged. Devine's response to such glaring disaster reveals much about the principles and objectives of the Royal Court Theatre, or was it perhaps his own personal urge to promote British playwrights first and foremost? Devine even wrote to Neville Blond declaring, "We must support the people we believe in, especially if they don't have critical appeal" (Findlater 1981: 44). It is unimaginable how such continued waste of funds could have been allowed by the England Stage Company. However, when we realise that the major source of funding for such projects was the state's Arts Council itself (Lacy 1995: 42), we understand how easy it must have been for the Royal Court to keep its projects going in the face of such box-office disasters. In addition to the state subsidy, Devine also made use of the profit generated by the more successful playwrights like Osborne, Wesker, and Ionesco to support the less successful writers like Arden (Lacy 1995: 52, 53).

It remains unclear what kind of appeal Wole Soyinka had in Devine's view. Did Devine also believe that Soyinka deserved standing support, despite the kind of reception his works were given by the theatre-going public? This noble principle of wanting to support his own struggling artists shows Devine as a director whose vision for the new theatre in England could not be blurred by any negative reviewer. As Findlater explains, very few playwrights at the Court had any appeal to the media and critics. Actually the playwrights were "... at best damned with faint praise by many reviewers at first acquaintance" (Findlater 1981). This suggests that Devine
would support most of his writers as they would not naturally attract much critical appeal. But in the case of Wole Soyinka, he did not. It is difficult to know for certain if this was innocent sidelining or whether it was inadvertent, subtle racism on the part of George Devine. All assertions notwithstanding, what needs to be appreciated is that the demands of making a success of the newly innovated theatre must have been immense. My own view, therefore, is that the responsibility of starting a new theatre must have been uppermost in Devine's mind, probably making the nurturing and promotion of an alien drama an additional load.

3.3.1.iii The Views of Some Participants at the Court

It is difficult to establish with precision what exactly went on at the Royal Court four decades ago. Fortunately, some of the people who were there can still be reached. Hence, the perceptions of Lionel Ngakane on this subject are very valuable. Ngakane, the only South African who acted in Wole Soyinka's first Royal Court production of *The Lion and the Jewel*, gives the impression that although there was racism in England and Europe in general, artists at the Royal Court were mainly focussed on their professional relationship -- work. Ngakane explains that playwrights did not necessarily fraternise because of each individual's personal desire to succeed (Appendix B4). It therefore becomes clearer why Osborne seems excited about the fact that playwrights at the Court had nothing in common. From Ngakane's input, I conclude that the relationship among artists was based on the "theatre first and everything else last" principle. It could be factors like the community-based Yoruba cultural upbringing, and perhaps the personality temperament of people like Wole Soyinka, that made him more disposed to seek both the more affable social intercourse and professional recognition, which he did not receive. The warm and close interaction that Soyinka was disappointed not to have is actually an issue that the British playwrights did not worry much about. In fact it seems the latter were delighted it was not there, as Osborne declares. Most playwrights' primary desire must have been to make a success of their career in theatre. The differences in the personalities and emotional needs of these artists may

79