in his mother tongue, Yoruba. It is the translation that has been used in the following analysis. Both the first and the last pieces in this collection are ballads that bear the same title. There are strong indications that this is not a mistake because the first ballad has the subtitle, “I Òmì à Bì Befá” and the last, “II The Ogbegbu of Gbu.” These different sub-titles have thus provided me with the leeway to perceive the two ballads as prologue and epilogue, which qualifiers I have then attached to each poem for easier distinction. Keeping in mind the possible influence of the Apidan theatre where a single performance may house many independent stories, I am persuaded to perceive these sketches as one unit comprising thirteen sub-sections that open and close with a ballad (Ballad of A Nigertian Philosophy).

This first ballad, Ballad of A Nigertian Philosophy: Òmì à Bì Befá (I shall give birth to sexuplets)?, is a dramatic poem that portrays a very disillusioned and embittered Soyinka behind the exuberant persona lost in buffoonery. Its content is conveyed in biting satire. The persona, a middle-aged man, boasts of the most atrocious intentions that he has in mind, as indicators of “achievements” in his derelict society. The poem opens with a couplet that declares his intention to go on a rampant sexual spree so as to father sexuplets. The dramatic atmosphere of disapproval at such uncurbed virility and potency is presented by the chorus that responds to this announcement with shouts of horror and alarm. Soyinka’s moral outrage at the degeneracy of social mores is very clear. In defiance of the chorus’s reaction, the persona goes on to add even more shocking acts to his list of things to achieve in this glorious state. He catalogues the building of six mansions, being chairman of six banks, having six concubines and a regular wife, running six big cars, entitlement to six government loans and being endowed with six titles that should enable him to become chief. On hearing this, the chorus takes a more active role than before; it mockingly urges him on, crying:

Chorus: That’s the style, that’s the fashion I shall father sexuplets Who rejects such a fortune let him speak out plainly I shall father sexuplets

The third stanza gives an account of what will happen to the six houses; this account
reveals the external factors that support and perpetrate this corruption: for example, the participation of the government in power, and foreign governments like the United States that turn a blind eye to such gross malpractices and in fact supply funds to perpetuate them. The rest of the poem shows the extent of the absence of accountability in matters relating to property, loans, and party loyalty in this state. The very end of the poem bluntly speaks out the author’s stance against all this corruption in the words:

(As the dancing and singing grows ecstatic a lone voice is heard — — — )
And I shall cry “Hoid Thief!”
All: Maul the bustard!
(They set to and beat him to the ground).

Without over-reading into Soyinka’s sources of influence, one is tempted to comment on the Biblical allusion to evil in the repetition of the figure six. It calls to mind the biblical reference to the mark of the antichrist (666) in The Book of Revelations. In the Bible, just before the second coming of Christ, a beast with the mark 666 rules the earth, spreading untold evil, forcing everybody to obey it, as thus explained, “... no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of the beast ... and his number is six hundred three score and six” (Revelations 13: 17-18)

Using this Christian background and in very strong language, Soyinka openly condemns the government’s blatant corruption, manifest in the moral, financial, material, and political spheres. Mocking the persona of the corrupt officials, Soyinka’s ballad exults:

I shall build six mansions reaching to the sky
I shall make myself Chairman of six banks
Six concubines I’ll keep, plus a regular wife
I shall buy six motor cars as wide as they are long
I shall take six government loans to take care of my lot
I shall take six titles and become a Chief (Soyinka 1964/65: 9).

There is an echo of the central theme of My Father’s Burden in this poem, the unbridled corruption of older government ministers. This satirical ballad opens with
a folk-song and there is dancing all the way through the rendition. Soyinka mixes African traditional dramaturgy of song and dance with the Brechtian drama of social criticism, to incite the viewer against a kind of corruption only comparable to that which will come at the end of times.

The use of poetry to communicate with society is a craft Soyinka did not necessarily acquire from the Royal Court. When we look back at the production of *The Invention*, we can see that alongside this play was cast a selection of his poetry which was to be performed that night. Furthermore, Gibbs (Appendix B2) reveals that even before any work of Soyinka’s was produced at the Royal Court the dramatist was wont to gather some of his friends in England to recite poetry. In addition to the two techniques pointed out above, this excerpt also shows Soyinka’s use of a tool of communication that he had cultivated some time earlier as an undergraduate student at Ibadan University College.

b. *In Carcarem Conicio*

The episode captured in this sketch parallels what the mid-1990s South African has come to know as the season of truth and reconciliation. However, in *In Carcarem Conicio* (*Thrown in Prison*), the element of truth seems to be far outweighed by that of blind reconciliation. This sketch is a caricature of blanket forgiveness among politicians, men of the cloth, and laymen. In the very first scene is presented a judge swearing a hoodlum and felon into a very prestigious office of state. Some time earlier, before the action of the play proper begins, this very felon had been convicted by the same judge for a hideous crime. For instance, it is revealed that:

*The spectacle, for instance, of a judge swearing into a most dignified office of state a felon, whom he had himself convicted, was without parallel in the history of forgiveness anywhere in the world* (Soyinka 1964/65: 12).

There are only three characters in this sketch. They are cast in parody. In typical stock-character style Soyinka merely names them Pope, Cleric, and Martin Luther. Such a
style of character-naming is common in both the morality plays of English medieval
drama, where characters’ names were more labels than proper family names (Self
1979), and the commedia dell’arte. The very outline of the cast suggests an episode
that will address political and religious matters. The stage is bare. In a style similar to
that of an African king’s bard, Cleric walks in front of Pope, ringing a hand-bell and in
a way making a mock-praise announcement very reminiscent of African courtly
etiquette. Cleric gives a taut summary of the nature of corruption, which is fuelled by
the general atmosphere of reconciliation (which he calls “indulgence”) in the state. This
tirade is a parody of a praise rendition, but it articulately lambasts the government for
improperly handling land deals, memorial funds, court cases and many such. The
language this character uses echoes both charismatic pulpit declamations and the
African bard’s style of heroic praise rendition:

Cleric: ... indulgences for sins committed; indulgences for sins about to be
committed ... indulgences for government by the government for the
governing ... indulgences for Memorial Funds that vanish beyond
memory ... for corpulent corporals, for juggling judges, chop-chop
champions of the people ... (Soyinka 1964/65: 12).

Cast as the conventional “court fool”, Cleric points out all these acts of corruption in
gaiety. He is shunted about by Pope, to whom he clings like a leech. Soyinka uses this
character’s mock-poetic speech to manipulate language and he achieves the comical
alliteration, which is common in his works, as he plays with sounds like “corpulent
corporals”, “juggling judges”, and “chop champions”. Pope is a state advocate,
warning known picketers like Martin Luther and his fellow intellectuals against any
protest posters, because the state is more ferocious than before: where there was
excommunication there is now raw incarceration. Soyinka parodies the Roman
Catholic prayers for the dead, “Requiem aeternum dona eis domine ...” when he uses
Pope to recite, “In carcere conicio in detentio preventione in aeternum ... (“thrown
in prison awaiting trial for eternity”). This also implies a prisoner eternally awaiting
trial. Like Lucky in Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot, Cleric is kicked and shoved
forward, but he does not disengage himself from his master, Pope. He continues to
request state pardon and indulgence for a myriad of offences such as “... bankrupt
bankers, defecting directors, doctors of doctored doctorates ... all forgers for theirs is forging ahead ...”, which all reflect topical scandals of the time.

At the end of the performance, there is an unhappy triumvirate: the state, the church, and the intelligentsia. On the surface, the above scene can provide very good slapstick humour, but Soyinka’s underlying outcry against the deadly marriage of the church and state against the intelligentsia is quite clear in the doctrine being blatantly preached by Pope to the intelligentsia of this society. In the style of the “Angry theatre”, Soyinka is forthright in exposing the decadence of the Nigerian state.

c. Babuzu Lion Heart

Babuzu Lion Heart is a hilarious political comedy. With the typically Soyinkan small cast of five characters, song, and dance, the dramatist presents a mockery of this greedy, amoral, self-indulgent old man. Soyinka’s criticism cuts right across the social spectrum and focuses on the folly of a British educated medical doctor whose greed and overweening pride almost see his heart literally scooped out of its chamber while he breathes. There are parallels between this sketch and the longer play, The Lion and the Jewel, albeit on a smaller scale. The antics of an antediluvian suitor trying to win the heart of a teenage girl, the overt absence of reverence for overseas education -- from someone who had just experienced it and thus knows what he is speaking about -- trickery and deceit for personal gain and glory are found in this play too. The drama ends with a twist in the tale as the general citizenry falls for the chicanery of the doctor’s tricks. The audience asks itself, “who wins in this roller coaster ride?” Babuzu Lion Heart is a brief revue that barely uses any stage props, like the drama of the commedia dell’arte. The nature of this sketch suggests that it can be easily performed in an open space. Some form of open theatre is perhaps the kind of performance stage Soyinka had in mind for this street drama. Perhaps a platform in a market square would be ideal, just as the case was with the medieval plays, as well as the commedia dell’arte troupe performances in Europe. Furthermore, weather conditions would not be such a major factor, seeing that Nigeria is basically an
equatorial country that is warm all year round. The chief advantage of this kind of theatre, to produce a more intimate physical relationship between actor and audience (Albright et al 1968: 137), would still be enjoyed by Soyinka’s out-door audience, particularly because folk theatre was nothing new to the Nigerians, whose rich theatre culture Soyinka continues to emphasise in his 1998 interview with Harry Kreisler, “... I come from a society which is very rich in theatrical traditions” (http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/Elberg/Soyinka/soyinka-con.html, 8 March 2000, “Writing Theater Arts, and Political Activism: Conversation With Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka”).

d. **Vintage Scenes: Onitsha Market**

This sketch is the most typically anti-illusionist of Soyinka’s short plays. The entire action in this sketch is presented in mime. There are only three characters: First Sickly Looking Man, Second Sickly Looking Man and One Man behind the mat-screen. The simple staging is in keeping with the principles of “the poor theatre” as well as of Brecht’s theatre, where techniques are used to expose those mechanics of performance that are usually concealed by naturalistic dramaturgy such as “...a half-curtain above which set changes [can] be seen” (Innes 1992: 122). Similarly, Soyinka’s stage set is described as just one mat screen about 4½ ft high, and by inference, the rest of the stage is bare save for this one piece of décor.

In the opening scene Soyinka successfultly conjures up the mood of fatal sickness through the mimed action of these “walking corpses” who are so ill they can barely greet each other and shake hands. The mood is to change dramatically when First Sickly Looking Man pulls down his trousers, pushes his buttocks toward the mat and receives an inoculation. The effect of this elixir is detected from the changing face of the patient. At the end of this exercise this man is transformed on stage and is eventually so revived that he can even dance the atilogwu, a vigorous Ibo dance, can also chant slogans of a political party with choric support from backstage, and then stamps off the stage “...full of demonic energy” (Soyinka 1964/65: 22). Then there
appears a head above the mat-screen and two hands holding an enormous hypodermic syringe with a twelve-inch long needle. This head merely calls, "Next!"; then there is a blackout as the "act" ends.

These hyperbolic gestures notwithstanding, the thematic point of this sketch is clear: the Nigerian society is very sick. To regain its lost health and vitality it has to be inoculated, so that it expels the ills from within and lives again. It is a plain didactic metaphor, typical of Brechtian didactic newspaper theatre. Because it is plain, it is good for street theatre. The sophistication of an orthodox theatre would not be ideal for the masses Soyinka was trying to reach at this time. So he uses an admixture of the commedia dell' arte and farce, as indicated by the exposed body parts, as well as the Brechtian parable, song, and dance to transmit the message.

e.  

*For Better for Worse*

*For Better for Worse* is yet another blatant attack on the government of the day. The totalitarian powers of the ruling party are acerbically described in the opening stage directions:

> [Performed at the height of the 1963/64 dissolution spree by two famous politicians and their henchmen. At that period in politics, a poultry [sic] could be ordered dissolved for not laying eggs ready stamped with the symbol of the party. The one thing they wouldn't dissolve was what the people wanted most -- the House of Assembly] (Soyinka 1964/65: 22).

As is the norm in Soyinka’s sketches, there are only two characters, with type names: A and B. The stage is again bare, holding the two characters, who are stuck together like Siamese twins. The essence of these characters' argument, whether they are moving forward or backward, reveals the slapstick satire Soyinka is presenting in this sketch. These political party leaders, as it emerges, have no clue whether the country they are stirring is going backward or forward, as illustrated by their stage-movement, for instance:
[Pause, during which they move round one circle. They stop.]
A. I think we ought to change direction.

They eventually end up moving around in circles. It turns out that they have actually exhausted all possible kinds of movements and thus they have no more games to play. Then they start dissolving the local council, closing down all police stations and kindergartens while markets, bars, and nightclubs have had no licence renewals granted. These two are celebrating because they have achieved their greatest ambition: they wade in rivers of blood, they are in the "golden centre of milk and honey" (Soyinka 1964/65: 24). Then they make their final resolution:

B: I told you I’m bored with dissolving.
A: Oh come on, just this once, for old times’ sake.
B: No. I have a better idea. We’ll keep the House --
A: [sulkily] No.

To the last utterance Soyinka attaches the footnote, “With gratitude to Bertolt Brecht”, probably implying that this comment, that “when there is no more ... to dissolve, the people must go”, was originally made by Bertolt Brecht. Furthermore, the style of the piece is itself very Brechtian.

The greed, destructiveness, and stupidity of government leaders is satirised by this most simplistic of Soyinka’s creations in this particular collection. Again his drama is blatantly didactic and is written in a style which leaves very little to the imagination because it is not necessarily for an intellectual appeal; it is meant to agitate emotions.

1. Symbolic Peace, Symbolic Gifts

Symbolic Peace, Symbolic Gifts also exhibits the now familiar character-naming style, of using labels instead of names. In this sketch there are four characters namely, A: Away politician, B: Home Politician, Signboard Man, and Old Man. The action takes
place in a residential area where A and B are touring B’s region. Both these men are leaders though in different areas of the same country. They are on a guided tour and Away Politician is being pelted with rotten eggs. The whole action comprises different types of walking, as the writer directs: “They travel some more”, “They travel again”, “They turn and travel”, “They parade”, “They tour”. The theme that Soyinka is presenting is the seeming busy-ness of government officials when, in fact, they are doing nothing. This rather monotonous action is revived by the tirade of complaints issuing from the guest of honour, A, and doused by quickly created apologies from the host, B. The only locale where the visiting politician and his entourage eventually get some semblance of peace turns out to be a deserted place with no imagined subordinates to wave to. The streets are deserted because of the twenty-four hour curfew, allegedly demanded by the residents. Soyinka attacks the stupid laws of the country which oppress the ordinary citizen and ironically deprive the law-makers of a doting crowd of followers.

A. There is no one to wave to.
B. Do wave all the same. They’ll see you.
A. Why are the streets deserted?
B. Well, we have a kind of curfew.
A. What! In broad daylight?...
B. The people demanded it. They said protect us from destructive elements from outside. It was popular demand (Soyinka 1964/65: 26-27).

The cover-up lies of the host politician are very obvious. But underneath this statement lies an even more serious revelation, the terrible violation of human rights by those in power, who claim that the people like what they are being made to go through. This is more cruelly emphasised by the comments the politician makes further, that he also obeys this democracy because by nightfall he is indoors too, his house fortified with an electrified fence, burglar-proofed windows, a dog, twelve night guards and twenty police dogs. Soyinka depicts the grim truth that the entire populace is in some form of bondage in this newly-independent state.

In a very prosaic exposé, Soyinka points out all the ills of this community, using one-
line utterances. A further jibe at this “democratic” society reveals that people in this area do not go to work anymore. In the same foolish denial technique, B asks self-assuredly, “When there is money, why should people work?” (Soyinka 1964/65: 28). He perceives this as a mark of prosperity. But the tell-tale signs of poverty are everywhere, as prices of basic food-stuffs soar and there is more paper money in the pocket of the regular farmer. Some Nigerians’ blind worship of the British monarch also comes under attack, as shown in this excerpt:

O.M.: [peering] You know -- I don’t see the Prince of Wales. Is the Prince of Wales not here?
B: He didn’t come ...
The gifts. What has happened to them? The symbolic gifts ...
Yes, but where is the broom?
O.M.: The ram ate it ...
B: Alright. Present the sword.
O.M.: We give you this symbolic sword that you may use it to cut down all the enemies of the Queen (Soyinka 1964/65: 30).

The whole tour is to offer symbolic gifts, as the title declares. When the time for such a gesture comes, a broom to sweep clean any corruption, a sword to cut down all the enemies of the Queen, a white ram for hope of glory, are offered as gifts, as briefly heard in the dialogue above. There is an interesting turn of events in the story when the ram eats up the broom and is inadvertently killed and eaten by Old Man and the police. This political satire ends with the host blaming the intellectuals for the debacle and Old Man belting out a gutsy rendition of the British national anthem, “God Save the Queen.” Soyinka’s complaint is directed at the supposed self-governing state which, despite the granting of self-rule, still exhibits acts of the oppression of the African by the African, accompanied by blind elevation and veneration of the British monarch.

g. **Obstacle Race**

This is yet another satirical commentary on the political scene in Nigeria which was not designed for a naturalist theatre. There are four characters and the stage set consists of two chairs that represent the seats of a car. An affected British lady is being driven
around. She is a visitor to Nigeria, seemingly a tourist.

In this sketch, the focus of criticism is the infrastructure of Nigeria and the cowardly act of passing the buck, as shown in character B in Symbolic Peace, Symbolic Gifts above. Unlike B, who is always apologetic, the driver in Obstacle Race offers no excuse but gives wry, humour-filled explanations for some of these shortcomings the visitor is exposed to. The probing questions of the Lady and the tireless answers of the Driver are used quite effectively to present the story of the terrible road and safety situation in this area. It is through these characters that we hear of the ill-placed signboard that has led many cars to the fatal bottom of the ditch, the self-serving and sadistic police that position their check-point in the middle of the road, and at a very dangerous point at that, a road that has more pot-holes and ditches than it has safe patches, a river-bank whose bridge has been washed off, forcing tourists to be ferried across by a hefty man. Out of sheer frustration with the lady’s questions and perhaps with the “brain dead” government, the driver’s double entendre cuts back in his answer to the question about why there is no drainage system to the drenched roads and why there is no bridge:

Lady: The road ... there? But why isn’t it drained?
Driver: Drained ma’am? Drained? But we are only washing the roads ma’am ...
Lady: What a quaint custom ... 
Driver: I told you ma’am, it’s an annual event.
Lady: They’re washing a much larger bit here.
Driver: Not here ma’am, it’s the bridge getting washed here.
Lady: But I don’t see any bridge.
Driver: Oh it’s a thorough-going operation ma’am. They take the bridge to pieces, wash down all the parts separately, then put it back together again (Soyinka 1964/65: 36-37).

The double entendre continues as the driver drops the Lady at the edge of the river, comforting her with the news that there is an efficient car hire and link-service. This link-up scheme turns out to be an igiripo, who appears in a loincloth. To ferry her across the river, he thrusts his head between her thighs and carries her to a point where she will start another chain of “car lifts” numbering five. The frustration of the citizens
is deftly expressed through the figure of driver while Soyinka uses his subtle satire to express his disgust with Nigeria’s terrible road system and law enforcement.

h. *Death Before Discourtesy*

This farcical satire has biographical veracity. *Death Before Discourtesy* is based on the degeneration of a university, sparked off by the dismissal of a professor for allegedly being rude to a government official. It goes on to depict the lifestyle of another academic whose attitude towards overbearing government officials is horridly accommodating. This is one of very few revues by Soyinka whose décor brings to mind the English “kitchen sink” drama of the 1950s. The décor attempts to depict the naturalistic setting of the home of a middle-class family:

*[Set: A living room with stairs to bedroom upstairs. Doors lead from stage to other rooms on the ground floor. During the introduction, the family of Daani, in full view, are seen reacting variously to the television programme they are watching]* (Soyinka 1964/65: 38-39).

Apart from this, everything else resembles most of the other sketches that have been examined. There is a small cast of five characters. The play’s action takes place in a living room with a flight of stairs that leads to the bedrooms. Blended with this realist décor are elements of overt slapstick and verbal humour, which are not associated with realist theatre.

The cast is introduced in a slightly different way from that hitherto seen in Soyinka’s drama. The playwright uses a dramatic technique that is very similar to the style of African folk-tale introduction, where a narrator, who is outside the cast, addresses the audience directly. This technique is also used by Brecht where “the character [that] introduces the events and comments upon them is not an abstraction but part of the action. [Furthermore,] there is a direct address from a choric figure [to the audience]” (Innes 1992: 125). Similarly, in this revue, the playwright states that these introductions are “spoken by someone who comes on-stage” (Soyinka 1964/65: 39). He introduces the cast, describing some of its salient attributes thus:
It is a Yoruba family, but please -- (humours the audience) Lad
es and gentlemen, the family of the Honourable Chief the Dr. Olambiwon
tu Daani, M.B.E., O.B.E., Order of the Green Tiger, L.L.D. (Honorary University of Nowhere), also K.C.M.G. (if everything goes well on the Queen’s birthday) etc. We introduce you to his daughter Mini, who has just returned from the Sorbonne in Paris, his son called Junior, who is on holiday from Eton, and finally, Sir the Chief the Honourable the Dr. Daani himself ... (Soyinka 1964/65: 39).

Furthermore, the narrator sheds some light on both the direction and purpose of the ensuing action in these words:

Tonight therefore, we will attempt to show you a typical Nigerian home in an endeavour to prove the point that national character is built within the home. This then, is a typical Nigerian upper-class family. It is a Yoruba family ... (Soyinka 1964/65: 39).

These forthright comments on the aim of the drama are preceded by very sombre observations on the national front, the remarks of the narrator which bluntly analyse the good works and the wrongdoings of Nigeria before referring the audience back to the “play”, used as a blunt illustration to expose these sore issues of national degeneracy.

Through this type of introduction, Soyinka continues to apply certain Brechtian principles of theatre. The introduction distances the audience from emotional involvement in the action; it ensures that the audience is engaged mentally in the stage-action. In the very first lines of his speech, the narrator prods the audience into thinking about the fundamental virtues of Nigeria. He proclaims:

Ladies and gentlemen, the reputation of this country has been built on our hospitality, our unfailing courtesy to strangers and our ability to remain unruffled in the face of provocation. These qualities have guaranteed the stability of the nation, and ensured a steady stream of foreign investors (Soyinka 1964/65: 39).

The comments of the narrator are used as a technique to tone down the illusion usually
associated with theatre performances. Instead, they emphasise the reality that this is
a play, not a real life event, thus bringing about the Brechtian verfremdungseffekt.

The object of attack and ridicule in this satire is Daani, the university professor who is
only too eager to pander to the whims and insensitive demands of self-serving
government officials. His lack of patriotism is seen in his children who are sent to lily-
white institutions abroad, Mini in France and Junior in England. While laying bare the
greed, lust and immorality of government officials, here represented by the highly
conceited Boro, Soyinka also cautions the African family about distasteful values
picked up by their children in schools of a different culture. This is represented by
Junior, who never misses the opportunity to correct everyone’s English grammar and
pronunciation. Boro’s retinue takes over the sleeping rooms of the family and Daani
cannot stand up for his family; he would rather quarrel with his son, for standing up for
Daani’s rights, than order the unannounced visitors out. Some of the action is
presented mainly in vivid mime, for instance, the night scene when the lecherous Boro
is trying to sleep with their host’s daughter:

[Lights snap out, when they come up again dimly, the stage is empty. Boro
tip-toes downstairs, pound notes in hand, face lecherously anticipatory. Turns
the knob and opens the door slowly. Suddenly he howls with pain and emerges
with Junior’s teeth buried in his calf. Junior hangs on grimly half-way
through the stage before he lets go. Boro bolts his room] (Soyinka 1964/65:
45).

Soyinka also uses word and action, as seen in the caricature on Daani’s stupid love for
the self-serving government, taken from the scene when a beautiful news reader
concludes her session on television. Soyinka uses slapstick in its crudest form:

Junior: Dad, I want to see her face. You’ve got your bum in the way.
Daani: (swivels around, shocked) Junior! You’ve used that word
again!
Junior: Do move aside daddy.
Daani: I don’t like your language.
In that stooping position, with his bum to the audience, the
national anthem traps him and he freezes there until it ends
Daani: (straightening up) You see what you did?
Junior: You could have stood up. Most people do.
By the end of the story, Mini has slept with Boro, but her father still displays the most irritating lack of insight and urgent desire to ignore all that which might upset Boro, his petty fixation being that Junior must apologise for inadvertently insulting Boro. But Junior wins the heart of the audience by having the nerve to stand up for the truth, despite his age and misdirected social grooming. As Daani asks the family to kneel and pray at the end, Junior agrees on the condition that these invading strangers be given a well-deserved kick behind.

Soyinka's crude satire is not confined to the government only; it is a beam that flashes across the entire Nigerian society, political, religious, and academic.

i. **Go North Old Man**

In *Go North Old Man* we are presented a caricature of "... the betrayal of yet another 'independent' medium of public information and objective reporting ..." (Soyinka 1964/65: 50). The satire itself is on the so-called highly-learned citizens who have abdicated their duties as thinkers and moulders of errant behaviour; but the story is based on the ethics of journalism. It is a commentary on the gross violation of the freedom of the press. It criticises the gagged mouth of state journalism, a violation of fundamental human rights, and the freedom of the press. With a cast of six, Soyinka shows a similar weakness in male leaders to that he shows in *Death Before Discourtesy*. Bodija, the boss of the Independent Broadcasting Station, is a man who cannot stand up for truth and justice when in the presence of the political leader, called His Highness and sometimes His Presence. All Bodija manages to emit in their first encounter is the salute, "ranka dede, ranka dede" 11, -- a greeting for an August Person, Soyinka explains (1964/65:50). The politician insolently takes him to task for a series of wrongdoings in his broadcasting corporation, such as distorting his party's image, truthfully reporting on the strike and on the elections, for the partiality exhibited in the quotation from the Bible while marginalising the Koran, and the newscasters' mispronunciation of the party's name, NBC, which comes out as NPC -- a rival party.
His tirade goes:

The Secretary: ... and that is part of your prejudice and partiality. You quoted the Bible to his Highness. Why did you not quote the Koran? Answer, answer, why not the Koran? Ranka dede, ranka dede ...

Bodija: His Highness wishes to make this. Your announcers must learn to mind their Bs and Ps ...
Whenever your people -- say N.B.C., they succeed in making it sound like -- N.P.C. (Soyinka 1964/65: 52, 53).

In all these blatant accusations the chief editor is petrified and apologetic; he cannot go beyond the greeting rhetoric. The politician wants a total grip on the newscasters: he wants them to doctor the news in the government’s favour.

The theme of older men wanting to sleep with under-age girls comes up again in this satire. Just as in The Lion and the Jewel, and fleetingly in Death Before Discourtesy, even here His Presence offers to give the chief editor a young girl of fifteen as a token of forgiveness and understanding, while eleven to thirteen year-old children are reserved for His Presence’s favourite lieutenants. The role of the News Editor, a junior staff member, is similar to that of Junior in the story above. Whenever the Boss falls prostrate in undue respect to His Presence, it is this junior officer who has the sense to nudge him and try to make him retain his upright position:

Editor: Boss you have to say something.
Bodija: Enh?
Editor: You have to make a reply. Make the speech I prepared for you.
Bodija: (Throwing himself down again) We are very sorry sir. My corporation is very sorry, sir.
Secretary: Please, explanations please.
Bodija: Ranka dede, ranka dede!
Editor: (Hustily pulls his Boss). Perhaps I can be of help sir. What our boss is trying to say is that we have always done our best ...
(Soyinka 1964/65: 51).

The Secretary to His Presence is a typical boot-licker who questions and punished at will all those deemed to be out of favour with his boss. It is clear that Soyinka’s anger
is directed at the boss of the broadcasting corporation, who betrays the intelligentsia by abdicating the role of being a firm and uncompromising leader in society.

j. *Nigerian National Mart*

This sketch offers no dramatic action at all. Its introduction merely states the occasion, the name, the events of 1962 to 1965 and especially the 1964 Federal Elections, and the set is a table, a chair, and a blackboard on which is pasted the graph to which the commentator and sole character refers as he makes his running commentary. Soyinka continues to use a simplicity of décor and a small cast. The text comprises a commentary on the performance of the "stock market" and a factual graph of the Nigerian "economic" climate, named the Nigerian National Mart, from April 1964 to March 1965.

This is a parody of the stock market but instead of commenting on monetary issues, the comments are on the fluctuating climate of the various Nigerian political parties, much like the currencies of various parts of the world. The stock names are in fact names of various political parties: "The Thugs Party Stalwarts and Bodyguard Inc.", "Obas, Chief & Sons Ltd.", "Politicians Unlimited", and "The Insurance Company." And for each of these the political profile is outlined as would be the course in charting the performance of stocks. All four have lost their trading muscle, as the first has only thirteen shares left and therefore cannot trade, the second team's bubble has burst and it is left with one penny to a hundred shares, the third's position registers a fall from seven to thirteen, and finally, the Insurance Company has decided to take voluntary liquidation.

The central theme of the sketch is the generally unpleasant atmosphere of economic crisis in the country, rumours of undercover bargaining, house-to-house deals where the black market threatens the open market, and haggling that has become a national recreational sport. The commentator merely traces the activities of each party during the period of one year, which reflect that some have merged with certain organisations,
others have experienced breakaways, a fall, or gone into voluntary liquidation. There is a narrow line between fiction and fact, but the tone of bemused ridicule in the author is very obvious. The thematic point Soyinka is making is about the seemingly confused state of national politics whose effects on the state of Nigeria are ghastly, as they directly affect the economy.

k.  

_Childe Internationale_

Although this play was for a long time part of the _Before the Blackout_ collection, it was eventually published independently (1987) by Fountain Publications in Ibadan. This stage play was first performed in 1964 in the Orisun Theatre. Even though it was conceived more than three decades ago, perhaps to address a topical social problem in the burgeoning Nigerian middle-class, the central theme of _Childe Internationale_ is still very topical today even here in southern Africa. Central to the theme is the deculturised African child who has been uprooted from her base, taken to and educated in a white private school, only to come back completely brainwashed and a terrible embarrassment to her parents who, in spite of all their riches and influential position, have not been wise enough to preempt the damage caused by cultural disassociation in their offspring. The predicament for the father, who sees this damage, is that the other parent, the mother, does not see anything wrong with their child. Her blind favouritism actually perpetuates the damage in the child as can be deduced here:

Titi:       Oh how wet you can get mum. Do you really believe in that God crap?
Wife:      Don’t you?
Titi:       Of course not. All that God business is for the birds.
Politician: What is all this rubbish and nonsense talk for heaven’s sake ...?
Wife:      Please ... Kotun. Let her ask questions. It is only natural at her age.
Politician: Questions wey not get head?
Titi:       Mummy?
Politician: Oh shut your mout’!
Wife:      Kotun. I’ve warned you. Don’t give this girl a complex.

In this play Soyinka attacks certain people in his African society who become so
attached to western norms that they abhor their own Africanness. These turncoats of
culture are represented by Titi and her mother. This 26-page long drama uses humour
and light-hearted satire to expose some of the most hilarious, and yet very annoying,
habits of affectation with which those who have been abroad -- colloquially called the
"been-tos" -- pester those that have not. These affectations are more pronounced here
because the two camps are within one very small family. Titi, the main character, is the
only child and the pride of her naïve but very self-assured mother, called "Wife", and
the "native proper" husband, simply called "Politician". These three carry the dramatic
action of the story, supported by just two other characters, Alvin, who is Titi's
American boyfriend, and Godwin, the housekeeper. Whereas the scorn was poured on
Daani in Death Before Discourtesy, here it is emitted on both Titi and her mother.
The travails of Politician relating to his undisciplined wife and daughter are exposed
fully as shown here:

Wife: Did you get a good report dear?
Titi: I don't know. What the hell do reports matter anyway? ... They are like statistics they don't tell you a thing.
Politician: [sternly] Did they not give you a report?
Titi: How the heck do I know? After all this is only the first term. May be they gave me one may be not, I can't remember.
Politician: You can't remember? Did your headmaster not give you any letter for me?
Titi: Gee dad I'm tired. Can't it wait?
Wife: Okay, you can show it to me later darling.
Politician: What is this all about? It is either she was given a report or she was not. Were you given a report?
Titi: Gee dad you sure are persistent (Soyinka 1964/65: 60-61).

Politician stands his ground throughout the play, his dignity is untarnished as he fights
to the end to stand up for, and affirm, his duties and position of authority as head of the
family.

This hilarious, farcical satire addresses a number of interrelated issues such as table
manners, pronunciation of certain English words, the general etiquette of conduct in
a family. These are mainly Politician's glaring "mistakes", which his daughter and wife
spend the larger part of the play exposing and trying to correct. For example, he is repeatedly called to order for his failure to summon the cook not by ringing the bell but rather by shouting, and his dislike for the French potatoes which he mistakes for coco yam, especially prepared for Titi and not for him because native food always upsets her stomach. Politician is continually accused of displaying terrible table manners. His wife and daughter perceive him to be culturally rough-edged. Throughout this civilising exercise, Politician’s sense of annoyance is growing steadily. He explodes when Titi insolutely refers to her own grandfather as primitive — this is when they discuss the proposed holiday activities and the subject of the weather forecast and rainmakers comes up.

Titi: Mummy, is it really true that we still have primitives who can make rain fall?
Wife: Some people make that claim.
Titi: But it’s all superstitious. I suppose there are still superstitious natives about. Why doesn’t the government educate them? ...
Politician: Baba baba re, your father’s father, that is the person you are calling a superstitious native. Because he is still alive he is a great rainmaker. So you can go and tell that to your son of the ambassador.
Titi: How smashing! Just think mummy, we’ve got a primitive in the family. Is your father also a jujuman, mummy? (Soyinka 1964/65: 63).

For the larger part, the mother’s focus is unashamedly on Titi and not on her husband. Politician cannot accept the Westernised manner of greeting such as kissing, a habit his daughter has adopted in the last three months she has been in a French school. And being repeatedly called silly, “square”, and old-fashioned for insisting that parents be informed before the boyfriend is invited home to dinner, makes him very angry. By contrast, his wife is very lax in discipline. For a large part of the play, Politician seems to bow under the women’s control, offering passive resistance. However, this stance changes dramatically when Alvin, Titi’s American boyfriend, comes for a visit. The first step in asserting his authority is when Politician chases the American boy out. He then threatens to ask the school to reimburse him for part of the money he had paid toward school fees; still he gets no respect from Titi. He goes on to assert himself fully
by cancelling his appointment at the politicians' meeting, and changes the set Westernised menu to "native" food. But before they eat, he announces their "first course", which is to give his disrespectful daughter a hiding. Instead, Wife is spanked; sobbing, she in turn administers the spanking to Titi. The story ends with Godwin being ordered by Politician to bring the "second course", the African dish. At the end the audience has the feeling that proper order has been restored in this household: the head of the family is the man and his word is final.

One very positive attribute is the ease with which younger playgoers can associate themselves with its subject matter, that transcends age, time and culture. Unlike the other plays, Childe Internationale is a fuller drama and can be performed successfully on a conventional stage.

I. Press Conference

This is yet another of Soyinka's blatant attacks on those persons he sees as poisonous for the country's much-needed transition to stability and self-rule. This piece is set after rigged elections have been held. Instead of admitting culpability, the guilty party hides behind many irrelevancies while he boasts of a string of overseas degrees and spouts empty slogans. It is again the theme only that the writer is presenting; there is nothing else to suggest good theatrical or dramatic quality in this sketch. It is thus only useful as a social, topical satire, that is not meant for orthodox theatre.

m. Ballad of A Nigerian Philosophy: II The Obugbu of Gbu

Soyinka's style in parodying serious English poetry, first encountered in the Ibadan university magazine of the early 1950s, resurfaces in this ballad. Soyinka acknowledges the verse-source of his ballad as "The Vicar of Bray," by stating "to the tune of 'The Vicar of Bray' " underneath his poem's title. "The Vicar of Bray" is a satire of hypocrisy and self-serving opportunism in religious convictions. It is about the unsteady allegiance of the vicar in the 54-year period dating from the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 to the accession of George I in 1714. In "The Vicar of Bray" the
narrator, who is the vicar, continually justifies his fickle loyalty to all the different monarchs that ascend the throne of England from King Charles II (1660), followed by King James, King William, and Queen Anne, up to King George I in 1714 (Appendix A8). Like the Vicar, Soyinka’s narrator, a king, also profusely defends his questionable loyalty. He adapts himself and retains his position through the various political periods of colonialism, fighting for freedom, and the end of colonial rule. Soyinka presents an opportunist and fickle persona who betrays his untrustworthiness by successfully avoiding taking a firm stand against a government that is not serving its citizens properly.

The Ballad of A Nigerian Philosophy is by comparison more artistically designed than some of the sketches we have seen so far. The first stanza satirises the African kings who were usually illiterate and very greedy as they participated in the slave trade, selling fellow people in exchange for beads and ostrich feathers:

When Africa was the white-man’s’ grave
And none but fools came hither
I sold my subjects old or brave
For beads and ostrich feather
Impressed all treaties with my thumb
In blood -- at my suggestion
And here I stay till Kingdom come
A King beyond all question [sic] (Soyinka 1964/65: 73).

The next stanza is a jibe at the “wait-and-see” strategy of the opportunist. The writer enhances his point with an allusion to John Milton’s sonnet “On His Blindness”, “They also serve who stand and wait till the fighting is over.” As in the earliest poems in the Ibadan University magazine, this poem is a parody of the sombre mood of the original verse-source:

... thousands at his bidding speed
And post o’er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait (Chapman et al. 1988: 64).

Using his renowned technique of blending an amalgam of traditions, Soyinka borrows
from John Milton the concept with which he cynically chides his fellow man for the negative attitude to waiting. He comes just short of openly condemning waiting as cowardice in the second stanza which reads:

When isms filled the daily page  
And Freedom was the fashion  
I straddled fences pleading age  
And purged my throne of passion  
‘Tis kingly strategy to be late  
‘Tis better late than never  
They also serve who stand and wait  
Till all the fighting is over (Soyinka 1964/65: 73).

The third and last stanza is more dramatic and pictorial. It is a record of the time in history when British rule ended and the Union Jack was pulled down, causing jubilation marked by varied activities:

The day the Union Jack came down  
I burnt my royal photos  
I drove white traders out of town  
Defiled the Catholic grottos  
I summoned the D.O. to my court  
Abused his great grandmother  
Nationalism became a royal sport  
Without the sweat and bother (Soyinka 1964/65: 73).

The narrator’s newly acquired disrespect for the imperial order is glaring as he adapts himself to the slogans of nationalism in order to survive in the changed political atmosphere. The historical narrative in the three stanzas is continuously interrupted with a chorus that repeatedly reminds the audience that no matter who rules this society, the narrator’s position will remain unchanged:

And this is the law I do maintain  
Till death, and so would you Sir  
That whatsoever Big Noise may reign  
I’ll be the Ogbugbu of Gbu,¹⁷ sir (Soyinka 1964/65:73).
This chorus compares with that of the Vicar of Bray who also declares:

And this is Law, I will maintain
Unto my dying day, Sir,
That whatsoever King shall reign
I will be Vicar of Bray, Sir!

My perception of this ballad as an epilogue to all the eleven sketches and revues endorses the notion of growth and continued disillusionment in the narrator, whom we first encounter in the “prologue” ballad. The omniscient voice of the “epilogue” narrator is now distinct and instead of satire, there is cynicism and impatience with greedy opportunists, an attitude that has been evident in all the sketches.

4.5.1.iv.  

The Detainee

This is a radio script dated August 1965. An inscription by James Gibbs on this manuscript states that there is no page one. The cover page bears clues to salient information regarding the performance history of this play.

THE DETAINEE
by
Wole Soyinka

CAST

KONU  ....  .....  WOLE SOYINKA
ZIMOLE  .....  .....  BANJO SOLARU

Rec: 28.8.65 (1000-1700) Studio S.5: Tape: 7½ TBU 382089
Duration: 27'00"

Cue in:  “You are fat, Zimole …”
Cue out:  “... [clang of gates]"

TRANSMISSION:  5.9.65: 1118-1148 BST:  East Africa : PURPLE
8.9.65: 1230-1300 BST:  West Africa : PURPLE
12.9.65: 1230-1300 BST:  West Africa : PURPLE
I admit that some of the information falls outside the interests of this research and means very little to me as it is in codes that I am not conversant with. However, my concern lies in the testimony to the place of broadcast -- East and West Africa -- the date, which is 28 August 1965, the cast size, and the length of the play, which is 27 minutes.

Like several of Soyinka’s political plays, The Detainee is a reflection of the destructive effects corrupt politics can have on friends, the family, and one’s own integrity. Konu, Zimole, and Haruzai are old friends who used to belong to the same political party. In earlier times, Konu had coined the nickname, “The Torch” for Haruzai because of his sharpness of thought. Konu admired Haruzai so much that he believed Haruzai was their political party’s guiding light at the moment. “But we must never, never hesitate to use it as a fire, to scorch obstructive undergrowth!” (Soyinka 1965: 6) declaimed Zimole, some time earlier. Little did Konu know that this friendship was only intact in Konu’s eyes.

Although it is difficult to confirm with the absence of the first page, the setting of the play is the prison cell where Zimole has come to see Konu, the main character played by Soyinka himself. The action unfolds through the use of flashes of past events revealed in the conversation between Konu and Zimole. Zimole’s outbursts help expose his cunning and treacherous nature. For instance, we learn that Konu was unwittingly trapped and detained under the Preventive Detention Act, which he designed himself.

Despite the fact that this was supposed to have been only preventive detention, Konu has been subjected to untold suffering, solitary confinement, no exercise facility, no reading material save propaganda, and he is only permitted to exercise in the corridors, near the wall or the front line of the cells (Soyinka 1965: 8). The adverse effects of this acute isolation can be understood from Konu’s sharpened sense of hearing; he can even tell the number as well as the kind of people walking outside by listening to their footsteps -- the hostile, the treacherous, and those given to espionage are all betrayed
by their steps. As a sign of the extent of the social decadence, Konu has developed a friendship with a deaf-and-dumb guard and Haruzai the rat, also the namesake of Haruzai "the Torch", who ordered his detention. Another of Konu's pastimes in the past eight weeks has been to watch how far the mildew spreads in an hour. The extent of the reduction of life to nothingness is evident in this dreary activity that Konu preoccupies himself with.

Zimole fails to articulate clearly his main mission in coming to the prison cells; he keeps rambling about a number of matters. First he tells his friend there has been an outbreak of fresh riots in the wake of another attempt on the president's life -- and Konu is the prime suspect, he reveals:

Konu: Why have they come, Zimole? Did you bring them? Why are they guarding the door?
Zimole: I ... don't ... know anything about it. But I can guess.
Konu: Am I to be transferred?
Zimole: I give you my word, I don't know anything. Listen Konu, what I was beginning to tell you ... there has been a new riot. And another attempt was made on the President's life.
Konu: [bursts into a harsh laughter] And they think I organised it from here? (Soyinka 1965: 14).

Zimole's inability to communicate clearly and efficiently exposes his incompetence in helping Konu. The climax of the incident is the shattering discovery that Konu's seventeen-year-old-son, Eseki, the alleged suspect in the attempted assassination of the President, was arrested early that same morning and he may be hanged because he is now over sixteen years of age. No further details are given on Eseki's crime. In his ramblings of self-pity, Zimole sees the arrest of Eseki, who is in his charge, as a ploy to discredit Zimole after two years of faithful support of the government. Konu selflessly advises his friend to denounce Eseki and save his own neck. The detained Konu has full trust in Eseki; he reassures Zimole that whatever stance Zimole takes, Eseki will understand. Konu flatly refuses Zimole permission to send his other children to exile abroad, but insists that they must rather stay with a relative in another part of the country (Soyinka 1965: 19).
The theme of the unprotected child resurfaces in this revue. It has been seen in the Westernised brat of *Childe Internationale*, the trapped and deflowered girl of *The Lion and the Jewel*, and the bribery token of *My Father’s Burden*. Because it appears so persistently in several of Soyinka’s works, one even begins to perceive it as a motif. Unlike in *Childe Internationale* and *Death Before Discourtesy*, the tone and treatment of this sub-theme is even more sombre in *The Detainee*. As in *The House of Banigeji* and *The Night of the Hunted*, first the world of innocence is shattered by the seeming unavailability of support from childhood friends, Kolu and Zimole, the incarceration and pending hanging of a minor -- Eseki -- the emptiness that has been created by the departure of both the mother, Taluba, and the homeless offspring hitherto in Zimole’s care. Secondly, the theme of filial loyalty inversely attacked in *My Father’s Burden* and tinged with the burden of duty in *The Swamp Dwellers* is addressed yet again in *The Detainee*, where Zimole’s failure to uphold brotherhood piety is displaced by young Eseki who traverses his father’s path to detention. The central concern of this sketch seems to be, in the main, the wreckage of ordinary families caused by a dictatorial regime in society. As is the case with all the short plays that have been discussed, Soyinka’s primary anger is directed at the government of the day, for its abuse of power and destruction of the normal life which is every citizen’s basic right.

4.6 Summary

Theatre, particularly protest theatre, is an extremely dynamic tool of social interaction. As Soyinka explains to Harry Kreisler, “Theatre is more than a text. It is the most evolutionary art form” ([http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/Elberp/Soyinka/soyinka-con.html](http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/Elberp/Soyinka/soyinka-con.html), 8 March 2000, “Writing Theater Arts, and Political Activism: Conversation With Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka”). It is therefore unfortunate that the foregoing discussion has had to focus on the text, seriously compromising the theatrical vitality of the art form. Although the sketches may seem like poorly constructed drama in terms of “formal orthodox theatre”, it seems that Soyinka consciously created these sketches to address the corruption in Nigeria as well as to contribute to the development of the young performing artists of the Orisun theatre he had founded.
This assumption arises from the revelation the playwright makes to Kreisler about the "guerrilla theatre"13 genre that he still continues to use even today. In the 1998 interview, Kreisler asks:

Kreisler: Most recently you've been in Jamaica and you've been working with inner city kids along the lines that we're talking about.

Soyinka: Yes. It was one of the happier experiences I've had since I went into exile ... I had not ... been aware of how deeply, profound similarities there were between ... the deprived youth of ... Lagos, and the deprived or inner-city youths of Kingston. And some of the things I did were very similar to what I used to do in Nigeria. Take the kid, that was the basis of the foundation of Orisun Theater [sic], which I've run for a number of years in Nigeria. ... [We wrote] little sketches about [the] Jamaican children which were then worked upon by a small team .... [Eventually], they built their own repertoire of sketches and songs depicting [life] (http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/Elberg/Soyinka/soyinka-con.html, 8 March 2000, "Writing Theater Arts, and Political Activism: Conversation With Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka").

In this discussion, Soyinka outlines the differences between three types of theatre. There is what he calls the "well-made" theatre of Broadway or the West End which presents a completed work with a star cast. This he distinguishes from the theatre that emerges from the community which assumes at least two forms. Soyinka explains that:

There is the kind of theater [sic] where a side of the community is encouraged to bring out its themes, and those themes are worked over either by a separate group or by a core company in relation to that community. Or a kind ... which I describe as "guerrilla theater"[sic], which is a group which studies a situation within a community and responds to that situation, those anomalies, those problems, theatrically (http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/Elberg/Soyinka/soyinka-con.html, 8 March 2000, "Writing Theater Arts, and Political Activism: Conversation With Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka").

Obviously, the sketches of the mid-1960s analysed above would fall in the latter category, while the Jamaican experience goes into the first form of community theatre.
4.6.1 Reception of the Revues and Sketches

Unlike performances presented formally in theatres, these revues and sketches do not have formal newspaper reviews from which to draw a commentary on their reception in society. This is understandable, given the fact that by its nature, political street theatre does not aim to accommodate the luxury enjoyed by other forms of theatre that are largely aimed at entertainment. Seeing that political theatre is aimed at influencing ordinary people, it is fast and moves on quickly from place to place, not wishing to call the attention of the authorities by formal reviews. Nonetheless, it is desirable to know how this kind of theatre was received. I have therefore turned to the events surrounding the playwright’s life, as well as his own input in interviews to gauge his theatre’s impact on Nigeria. It has surfaced that Soyinka’s theatre was not so warmly welcomed by the state, as is explained in the Emory Magazine:

In 1960, Soyinka returned to Nigeria to study West African drama at the University of Ibadan. The following year, [he] wrote a number radio of plays until the government quashed his efforts for being overly critical (1997: 3).

The medium of radio suggested by this comment is one of several that Soyinka used to reach society at large. He also used television as well as the stage. His plays’ reception on stage by the general public is very different from the government’s, Soyinka’s comments reveal:

But what I found personally gratifying and what I considered the validity of my work, was that the so-called illiterate group of the community, the stewards, the drivers -- the really uneducated non-academic world -- they were coming to see the show every night, and they used to come backstage and ask if they could come in without paying, because they never had the money to pay for it. ... I never asked what they made of it. ... The important thing is that there was something in it, enough to make them want to see it again, and I think this is true of most of the Nigerian audience. The only time when they become quite frankly lazy is when they find that [when they reject what seems strange to them] they are supported by a columnist in the paper ... but when left to themselves ... I have no doubt that we have one of the most interested audiences, in any event, in any cultural event in Nigeria. (Duerden & Pieterse 1972: 177)\(^{14}\).
Clearly, the playwright weighs more the response of the audience to a production than that of the critic and scientific evaluator. Some form of evaluation of the sketches' literary merit may be seen in the following discussion I had with Alain Ricárd:

**Zodwa:** There is another period which I would like to hear about, but it is not in England. It is back in Nigeria. After the [Nigerian] independence, Soyinka wrote a lot of revues and sketches. When I go through that material I feel he was not at his best as an artist. I am referring to such works as Before the Blackout. It seems to me he was very eager to put across a theme and he forgot about some of the theatrical attributes that embellish a work of art. So, when I compare some of these works with, say, The Lion and the Jewel. The Lion and the Jewel comes out a jewel, for instance. What I want to ask is: should political demands justify artistic negligence (because I think that is what is happening in this case)?

**Ricárd:** No they shouldn't of course. Ya I agree with you about the revues of Mr Soyinka. I -- I was never really interested by those. But I think what he was doing there was to rally up people, round them up for a specific immediate cause.

**Zodwa:** Did he succeed in doing that and how were these revues received by the public?

**Ricárd:** I don't know. What fascinated me was that he created groups -- he created theatre groups; so there was a lot of activity and he has always been involved in that kind of thing -- what he calls guerilla theatre.

**Zodwa:** Guerilla theatre? That is an interesting concept!

**Ricárd:** But I'm really not very familiar with those years. As I said, I'd rather learn from you -- what you think of these revues. Do you think they are too fierce, political pieces?

**Zodwa:** Well, to me they appear too didactic, too blatant.

**Ricárd:** I'm glad you are telling me this because I read them after I had done my first work on Soyinka. I admit I wasn't very impressed by these works, to be frank.

**Zodwa:** The thing is, I'm trying to focus on his minor works.

**Ricárd:** Well, I think that is very important, I think it's important. But