CHAPTER VI
Wole Soyinka's reputation rests perhaps most firmly on his work for the theatre. His plays have proved themselves on the stages of three continents. Therefore the ways in which he presents and dramatizes his themes require a great deal of consideration. All the literary genres that he has attempted project his various themes, but it is drama that has given him better scope than poetry or fiction. The reasons for this can be sought in the lyric's narrower spheres and the novel's commitment to the elements of ordinary everyday experience of the individual in relation to society. The dramatic form best suits his themes. He employs various dramatic and theatrical techniques bringing about a perfect synthesis between the regional and the universal elements in his plays. He has, with ease, bridged what he calls the artificial gap between the theatre in Yoruba and the theatre in English. When asked whether it had been proved that drama, because it has a popular base, is a more powerful force for making social analysis and criticism than other art forms, he said thus:

I think the very property of the theatre, which is one of enactment, lends itself to many interpretive channels and this makes it more powerful force for social comment than other forms. The question in a play is constantly being re-examined, re-examined in the light of new information, of new developments in society and of the increasing
awareness of the participants in any play. Since theatre, even at the most audience-remote in the West, is still a participant medium.... it has to interact with the audience, so there is always a level of participation. And this interrogates constantly the situation within the place, this permanent question and answer being given in any performance. Of course in societies where the level of participation, of interaction, is even greater the theatre becomes very obviously a tool for social analysis.¹

The various theatrical devices employed by Soyinka to highlight his plays on the stage externally include stage directions, sound and light effects, blackouts, pageantry, sudden shift of scenes, music and dance. The dramatic devices, which are internally and inextricably woven into the plot of the play are rituals, festivals, metaphors, symbols, satire, flashback, traditional music, biblical parallels, masquerades and so on making it extremely vital on the stage. He explained in one of his interviews that

...one must make sure that one talks relevantly to his prospective audience and that means relevant in terms, in terms of structure, forms, symbols, metaphors. You must be able to engage them in a mutually creative way. They must themselves feel
that they are part and parcel of the creative process...Write on themes which are meaningful to you, on actual situations...write on things which are immediate to your experience and after you have acquired the technique and facility for deploying characters on an increasingly wide canvas then you can expand.\textsuperscript{2}

Wole Soyinka depicts a world in which modern themes are inextricably linked to folk tradition and ritual observance. Alienation, hypocrisy, sin and expiation and the cyclical pattern of life and death are viewed within the framework of a civilization seeking new values without destroying its heritage. He dramatizes these themes with sensitivity. His speech ranges from prose to poetry to song. He employs all the visual and sensual devices at his command to create a total theatrical experience.

Soyinka works from the implicit premise that the stage can be a vehicle for man's deepest and most meaningful experiences. His skill is essentially dramatic. He uses numerous and accurate theatrical instructions for the staging of his plays. In most of his plays he gives stage directions relative to the work as a whole. The obvious purpose of stage directions is to help the director stage the play and the actors play the parts. In his plays the directions are numerous, long, detailed and often not restricted to mere technical aspects. These are notable for their detail and accuracy. They deal at length with all aspects of staging: setting and costumes, mime and dance,
light effects, acting, reactions of the characters to one another (or interplay), movements on the stage, etc.

As regards the setting, Soyinka's directions are very elaborate, particularly at the beginning of the play or before a mime, a scene or a part. For instance in The Lion and the Jewel, the playwright's stage directions comprise no less than twenty-one lines. A series of elements is described or suggested; not only the setting and the costumes (market place with odan tree, school, physical description of Sidi and Lakunle, the way they are dressed, the different props, a chant, a buzzing noise, clapping of hands, etc) but also the movements on the stage, the gestures and even the beginning of the action. The elaborate directions reveal that the playwright has a complete and detailed vision of the entire scene. Perhaps he tunes with G.B.Shaw who puts it thus:

The obvious purpose is to make the audience believe that real things are happening to real people.³

Soyinka's ingenious use of theatrical devices like lights and sounds reveals his modern conception of staging. In Kongi's Harvest, he makes use of light in the staging of the first part:
The actor alternates between two scenes, both of which are present on different parts of the stage and are brought into plane in tune by lights.  

Soyinka makes a deft use of visual devices in his play. He introduces audio-visual devices such as pictures, cyclorama, photographs, as is evident in the following lines:

On a huge cyclorama which completely dominates the stage, pictures are projected of various buildings, factories, dams, etc...finally, of course, a monster photo of the great man himself.

The same elaborateness can be noticed as regards sound effects. He manifests a punctilious interest in music, sounds and rhythm:

...and the sustained chord of a juju band guitar gone typically mad.
Loud chord on guitar and into the next scene.
...From inside the music rises.
Secretary strikes the gong, there is no response.
The rhythm of the pounding emerges triumphant, the dance grows frenzied.
Sometimes sound and light effects are used as an introduction, as a conclusion to the play, before, or after the primary text.

as the iron grating descends and hits the ground with a loud final clang

BLACK OUT
THE END.\textsuperscript{11}

Further, this play abounds with instructions concerning action and movements on the stage. These instructions are remarkably numerous and precise from the simplest to the most elaborate type:

Enter Dende \textsuperscript{12}

‘Dende runs off \textsuperscript{13}

Soyinka cleverly uses the technique of sudden shift of scenes. Together with sound and light effects, this type of directions is also used as a transition between two scenes. The playwright indicates how to pass from action to a change of setting then to move on to action again by using characters as stagehands then as characters again. In \textit{Kongi’s Harvest}:

...and the character’s brigade march in, uniformed, heavy mallets swinging from their waists. They clear the stage and reset it for the harvest scene...They sing their anthem as they
work, and form and execute a couple of parade movements to the last verse or two.  

Thus, we can see that Soyinka's instructions in the play are so accurate that the director is left with little room for personal invention and initiative. Though he mostly stages his own plays, he takes pains to write such elaborate directions. These directions are intended for other directors who would eventually stage his plays. As an African playwright, he fears that other directors, European and American in particular, might turn his plays into some exotic, ridiculous and meaningless pieces. He wants to avoid any misunderstanding and misinterpretation of his plays whatsoever. He wants to convey his message without any ambiguity. In a different staging, so as not to mislead the audience he is very precise, punctilious even about the way his plays should be produced.

Soyinka's plays make considerable demands on the actors, particularly of versatility in projecting different modes of stylization in gesture and movement. Music and dance enrich the texture throughout his plays. In Kongi's Harvest, music is all-important. The play could happily be expanded into a musical with a score as full of pointed contrast, grave nostalgia, and lyrical mockery as the text. We notice traditional drumming and singing for Danlola; electronically amplified military march music for Kongi; amplified juju, with its synthesis of sounds and instruments, for Segi's club. The movement of the actors on stage is to some extent determined by the music, but should be pointedly choreographed to become another expressive instrument. In
Danlola's area it is static, or else engaged in the easy yet formal swirling of traditional dancing; Danlola's supporters turn out in gorgeous swelled out robes whereas on Kongi's side movement is regimented, angular, machine-like. Costume and colours also underline the contrasts: traditional robes for Danlola, a certain dusty splendour of colour, muted deep dyes. Kongi's adherents should all be uniformed, like himself: stark white and khaki; the organizing secretary in a grey suit, the New Aweri likewise in uniform. Costumes in Segi's club should be stylish, but plainly cut; the colours electric, bright, but harmonious.

Whereas *A Dance of the Forests* demands sophisticated professionalism in stagecraft, costume, and make-up, as well as accomplished acting styles, *Kongi's Harvest* could be performed by amateurs, provided the direction stresses the patterns of similarity and contrast on which the satirical comedy largely rests.

Soyinka's plays abound with symbols. He effectively brings about the synthesis of several layers of meaning with the help of highly complex and compactly worked out system of symbols. For him, the Yoruba gods have proved to be fertile sources of ideas as they have provided the playwright with the key figures in building up the symbolic superstructures.

At the very core of Soyinka's art is Ogun, with all the symbolic associations irretrievably linked with various facets of the deity who represents sheer driving energy, creative in general but destructive at times.
He has used Ogun as a symbol to illustrate the duality of human nature and its unpredictable character. He is the god of creation and of destruction and he is presented as a benevolent deity, defending humanity against the impish. In The Dance of the Forests, Demoke, the protagonist, is the protégé of Ogun, the patron god of carvers. He creates the magnificent totem, which is the centrepiece of the gathering of the tribes, but exhibits the destructive principle, first by the very act of denuding the tree of its natural foliage, an act of desecration. The more significant act of destruction is Demoke’s murder of his own apprentice out of pique. His act of creation thus involved destruction, even the destruction of another human being. In addition to Ogun there are symbols of other native gods and spirits who represent the extra-human forces that influence human actions. They are Erinle, the animal god, Eshu, the god of fate, Oro, the god of punishment and death, and many others.

Soyinka has also employed native rituals and festivals like Agemo, Egungun and Oro, which are rich in symbolic significance. Agemo- the cult of the dead, or a religious cult of flesh of flesh dissolution, Oro- the cult of sacrifice-refers to an individuals sacrifice for the benefit of the community, voluntary or otherwise; Egungun- worshipping of ancestors. He has drawn heavily upon meanings associated with these rituals, and has made them richer, adding several new aspects of interpretation leading to universal significance.

Another group of symbols, employed by Soyinka in his plays are the disabled or deformed characters like the Blind beggar, the Hunch back
and the one-legged Imp who represent abstractions and additions in human nature. Other important symbols include ‘The Yam’ of Kongi’s Harvest and ‘As’ in Madmen and Specialists and ‘The Word’ in The Road. ‘The Yam’ is a conscious symbol drawn from convention—the idea, a ritual to be performed by the accepted political and spiritual ruler. ‘The Yam’ is an illusive something which transcends logical significance. It is not physically realizable, yet its symbolic (spiritual) significance is the total cause of social and dramatic conflict. In the play the symbol enables the intellect to form a wealth of associations from its own memory and experience ranging from the Bible to contemporary culture and history. Eventually ‘The Yam’ becomes the sole source of existence for Kongi, the beginning of History and the total transition from the Old to the New Order.

‘AS’ in Madmen and Specialists is a symbol embodying abstract ideas through the concretization of dreams and its details. It is an internal symbol. Soyinka wants the audience to realize ‘AS’ as a conceptual framework for oppression. The characters in the play are physical manifestations of the essence of a life in a social system under the guiding principle of the symbolic ‘AS’. Its realization is via the subjugation of a realistic consciousness by the fleeting expressionistic mirages of the essence.

Soyinka’s plays are well influenced by his Yoruba traditional background but we should also acknowledge the impact of other influences as well in his works. He received his basic education up to University level in Nigeria. The content of this education was essentially Christian European.
The Yoruba world in which he grew up was one that had been heavily infused with Christian doctrine and symbolism. His parents were both Christians and firm believers in Christianity. He has declared that he is no longer a practising Christian, but the influence of Christianity on his work is quite apparent. He continues to make use of Christian symbolism consciously or unconsciously in his work.

In his plays there are many ideational and situational echoes of the Bible. Scattered throughout Soyinka’s writings one comes across parodies of Christian rituals and satires on Christian beliefs. In spite of all this, the influence of Christianity on his art persists and can be seen in his recurrent themes, motifs and symbols and in the flavour of his language. Some African critics have found this free flow of Christian symbolism into his writing even after his rejection of Christianity as a faith rather baffling and disturbing. In his free use of Christian symbols and allusions one also sees evidence of his being convinced of the vitality of his culture. He agrees that it is difficult to escape from the endemic effect of great religions and affirms the right of a poet or an artist to draw analogous symbols from whatever faith or mythology is available to him.

In The Strong Breed the central character of Eman is drawn on parallel lines with Christ. Eman dramatizes the need for sacrifice, which is the only sure means of expiation or retribution even to one’s own self. Eman’s path has been a lonely one from the beginning. He starts as Adam and later metamorphoses to that vital part of the line of Adam-Jesus Christ, who in turn,
is a revolutionary. As an iconoclast, he breaks a taboo, leaves the village, resents Omae's (his wife) death which is predictable, refuses to take up a career as a carrier (here, he has metamorphosed into Christ who abandons the trade of a carpenter for a higher calling), and goes to another village, where he answers the call of his blood by finally becoming a carrier. He thinks, he suffers; he errs and grabs the opportunity for expiation, which leads to fulfillment. His sacrifice is reminiscent of Christ's passion and subsequent crucifixion. Like Christ, he too is a teacher and healer. His conscious sacrifice for those who are unable to understand or appreciate him is another point of similarity. In his presentation, Soyinka superimposes African religion on Christian mythology, each vying for supremacy in a rather disconcerting manner.

Eldred D. Jones in The Writing of Wole Soyinka writes:

Towards the climax of the physical sacrifice, his body flinches, and he needs water. Eman's pathetic appeal to the girl who betrays him parallels Christ's agonized cry 'I thirst'. Eman's death, like Christ's stuns the people in whose name it had been demanded, and leaves a remarkable impression on some unlikely minds.¹⁵

As Eman says in The Strong Breed:

This is an important period of my life.... We learn
things...Don't you see, I am becoming a man. For
the first time, I understand that I have a life to
fulfill....  

Eman is a martyr to society. He offers his life to an ungrateful society when, by doing nothing or obeying the voice of an easy prudence (represented by Sunma) he could have gone on living. He is a lone sufferer like Christ. The lone suffering of Christ is something of a hallmark that Soyinka gives in varying degrees to many of his protagonists. He presents the scapegoat as a saviour, a type of Christ, who carries away the sins of the world in order, ostensibly, to make the world a better place. On the use of Christian symbolism, he commented thus:

I think it is illiterate to say that though I have renounced Christianity as a religion I should not get any aesthetic delight out of it....And to suggest that I shouldn't appreciate the architecture of a church or appreciate a Christian tale or use a Christian symbol is absurd. And more especially, what these people do not realize is that Christian religion is a pagan religion. The dates, the rituals, the Crucifixion, these are all symbols of renewal. Christianity itself was based on pagan religions. The Rites of passage exist in all civilizations and they meet at so many points.
The satirical element dominates in almost all plays of Soyinka. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from the established norms. He wants us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation, which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious laughter.

Satire, in Soyinka's plays, must be seen in the contemporary social and political setting in which it is written. In his case, this means looking at contemporary Africa and in particular Nigeria. He indicts not only the power mongers at the helm of political affairs, but also the acquiescing civilian citizenry in the culture of corruption that has come to characterize many modern states today. He uses the scaffold of satire to return again and again to his pet themes: transition-the momentum of modernity and its devastating impact on traditional morality, the generation gap, western interests in African political and economic affairs, corruption-the human potential for cannibalism, the different guises that tyranny wears -civilian and military, ritual and redemption, spirituality, festivity and the need for seasonal regeneration of the society, and finally, the revolutionary and conservative roles that women play in the history of most African societies.

The play Kongi's Harvest is a satire on the contemporary political scene prevailing at that time, attacking directly the politicians who have shaped the present direction of modern Africa. The play also grew out of Soyinka's concern with human rights and political liberties out of his conviction
that the role of political activist was an important and honorable one, out of his perception of political developments in the continent of Africa and out of his anxiety to root his theatre in the idioms of African festival performances. Many allusions in the play refer to Nkrumah. Dictators rise and fall, but Kongism has never been dethroned in black Africa. Kongism is a dogma on whose altar human beings are sacrificed. Kongi preys on his subjects. He exploits them and slowly starves them to death.

"Damn their greedy guts I eat nothing at all"

He barks at their complaints. Instead of partaking of the feast of the New Yam, Kongi is left alone on the dais with a human head on the salver, a cannibal, nourished on a diet different from that of other men.

Kongi already has the power but wants the spirituality, which is inherent in the obaship. With the Oba’s surrender of the new Yam, continuity would have been established between the new regime and the traditional predecessor. Kongi is presented as an intensification of the tyranny of the traditional regime. But Kongism is also a decisive break with the past. Kongi’s ascendancy spells the doom of tradition itself. His order ‘to replace’ the old superstitious festival by a state ceremony governed by the principle of ‘Enlightened Ritualism’ means the destruction of what is authentically African. The life of the state will henceforth reflect the austere and joyless personality of its ruler. As Oba Danlola’s drummer sings:

This is the last

Our feet shall touch together
We thought the tune
Obeyed us to the soul
But the drums are newly shaped
And stiff-arms strain
On stubborn crooks, so
Delve with the left foot
For ill-luck; once more
With the left alone, for disaster
Is the only certainty we know. 19

Oba Danlola, sad, living in poverty, is still surrounded by a remnant of his faithful people. His only resistance to the new state is that he and his followers sing a satirical version of the National Anthem and he wears the national flag under his robes. However he retains the fire when he speaks sarcastically to the guard:

Good friend, you merely stopped
My drums. But they were silenced
On the day when Kongi set aside
My props of wisdom, the day he
Drove the old Aweri from their seats
What is a king without a clan
Of Elders? 20
Kongi wants to project an image of having made a clean break from the past. Only the fifth Aweri (wise men) is cynical about everything. When the fourth Aweri says that they might consider a scientific image and the third Aweri refers to the last publication, the fifth Aweri spews out:

Ah yes, No proverbs, only ideograms in algebraic quantum,s. If the square of xqy (zbc) equals QA into the square root of X1 then the progressive forces must prevail once the reactionary in the span of 32 of a single generation. 21

Here, Soyinka is undoubtedly being satirical about Nkrumah, particularly Nkrumah’s conscientism where he tries to create a new postcolonial philosophy and rest this philosophy on the foundation of mathematical formulae! Just as it was alleged that others wrote Nkrumah’s books for him, in this play it is the Aweris who write books for Kongi. Of more importance is the fact that words like ‘progressive’ and ‘reactionary’ are shown to be totally meaningless as used by Kongi’s advisers. These words hide the reality of a terrible demagogic, corrupt and soulless dictatorship.

Kongi’s advisers are all corrupt. As the secretary says, corruption is not only the naked acquisition of wealth at all costs. When accused by the Aweri of being corrupt, he retaliates by accusing them of corruption:
I know the sight of cash is printed over with
INSULT for upright men like you and intellectual
minds. Oh no, not cash, But position, Yes position!
And the power of being so close to power. Well its
difficult but I'll see what I can do! You understand,
my private feelings cannot come into this but that's
the position.... Bribed with the bribe of an all-
powerful signature across a timeless detention
order. 22

It seems Kongi is a composite of the worst aspects of Banda and
Nkrumah. The desire for fame, for praise as an intellectual, the craving to be
hero-worshipped, the refusal to brook any opposition, the desire almost to be
built up into a god.... And the people closest to him give him exactly what he
wants for their own ends. In the end, dissidents plan to assassinate Kongi.
However, the assassination attempt fails and the dissidents are killed
immediately. Segi presents Kongi with mutilated head of Segi's father instead
of the New Yam. The shock of being confronted by the actual results of his
cruelty paralyses Kongi and throws all into confusion.

The play pins down perfectly the kind of cruel, paranoiac black
dictatorship that apparently is new to the experience of Africa. It is a black
comedy hardening on satire. In fact Soyinka was giving vent to his hatred of
the whole system. He said that the play was not about Kongi but about
Kongism. It has been suggested that there are resemblances between the
character of Kongi and that of ex-president Nkrumah. The play was first presented in December 1965, while Nkrumah was still in power and it can be said that Kongism has never been dethroned in Black Africa.

Thus Soyinka, despite the very specific and political nature of some of his satire, is concerned with attitudes rather than political blue-prints, with positions not parties. Kongi is not Nkrumah or Banda or anyone else, he is a combination of the repressive, anti-life propensities, which Soyinka associated, with certain aspects of a breed of leaders.

In A Dance of the Forests Soyinka uses satire to emphasize the futility of the independence that Nigeria was about to receive. The play projects a festive atmosphere wherein the celebrants (elders) ask the tree gods to send back their glorious ancestors to join in the celebrations to be held at the gathering of the tribes. But the gods send back a moldy warrior and his pregnant wife, who come not to join in the celebrations, but, strangely to accuse the celebrants. He deliberately wanted to warn the celebrants that nothing would change even after independence. He gives us a flashback of Mata Kharibu’s court where we find rampant corruption and cruelty. In fact, some of the reincarnations are of people who were corrupt in the past and whose nature is no different in the present. The playwright, marshalls the entire history of the Nigerians-physical, religious, spiritual, economic and psychic-to warn the celebrants that there was corruption and cruelty in the past and there could be corruption and cruelty even in the future, for humanity has not changed. He states that if we claim that the glories of the past are part
of our heritage, we must also accept responsibility for all the evil and horrible things done by man to man in the past. The following lines in the play illustrate this:

Forest Head: Every day. Every hour, where will it end? Child, there is no choice but one of suffering.

Dead Man: Three lives I led since first I went away. But still my first possesses me. The pattern is unchanged.

The above lines show Soyinka’s desperation and hopelessness of the past as of the future. Indirectly he gave notice that the prospects for Nigeria in the year of independence were grim. Even in an interview, he said:

A Dance of the Forests was triggered by Independence, by my knowledge of the leaders who were about to take over the reins of the country. I realized that after independence some of those new rulers were going to act exactly like their forebears did, just exploit the people. I was interested in taking another look at that history and saying ‘The euphoria should be tempered by the reality of the internal history of oppression.’ In our society this included the slave trade, in which the
middlemen, who were Africans, collaborated actively! In other words, I thought that Independence should be a sobering look at history, no just euphoria, and so on.24

Madmen and Specialists is a mordantly satiric portrait of violence as an ingrained characteristic of human nature and human society. The play depicts a world composed of specialists and victims gone mad. In terms of the play's symbolic meaning, the fact that a rationale is lacking for the slaughter reflects on the uncertain fate of the crippled masses of people who are at the mercy of despotic rulers. The rulers themselves vainly seek to justify their senseless violence and caprice, which they frame into religious sounding credos. Soyinka's grim satire on the present state of the world is made poignant by the old man's modest proposal that as a conservationist measure, officers and the rank and file of the army begin to eat the flesh of war victims.

In a major speech by Blind man Soyinka also satirizes the covetousness, which reveals itself in the tenacious clinging to power by individuals, in the proliferation and economic and political dominance by corporations and political parties, and in the perpetuation of colonies by powerful nations. The original speech he writes for the blindman makes topical allusions to the old colonial powers, to the new regimes of Africa, to class and race prejudices and, in reference to Katangese, to the armed struggle in the former Belgian Congo which parallels the Nigeria-Biafra war in the clash of big power interests:
It was our duty and a historical necessity. It is our
duty and a historical beauty. What we have, we
hold. What though the winds of change is blowing
over this entire continent, our principles and
traditions—yes, must be maintained...

The speech parodies former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan’s
‘wind of change’ pronouncement, in the nineteen fifties, on approaching
independence for colonies in Africa. The Blind man, here, symbolizes the
blind passions and policies of powerful men who torture or eliminate the few
questioning men in society who dare to challenge their leader’s actions. The
questioning voice, cannot, however, be stifled indefinitely. Thus, it will
continue to question the historical beauty and necessity of internecine wars
waged by world powers out of rivalry or, like the Nigerian Civilian War, backed
by the technological weapons of these powers for their own self interest. He
satirizes the leaders of developing nations like Nigeria who, in pursuit of their
self will, seem to be striving to match the violence rather than the virtues of
western technology. Thus, Soyinka does not confine himself to Nigeria in his
satire of power-seekers engaged in war: the civil war in Nigeria was, after all,
only one of the many wars of mankind.

The Road is a satirical attack on the official order of things, expanded
theatrically, through the Professor, to the pervasive corruption of Nigerian life.
Soyinka subtly uses the image of ‘the road’ to show the hidden dangers on
the road He uses this image of the road and explores through those who live
in constant touch with death upon it, the vulnerability of all men. The characters of The Road live off the proceeds of death and constantly under its shadow. As Samson says:

...Every self respecting tout is already in the motor park badgering passengers...Part-time tout part time burglar. In any case they are the pestilence of the trade.... Which kind police? They will form line in front of my house every morning to receive their tip.26

Even Soyinka's feature essay in the Daily Express on March 28, 1962, p.4, talks about bad roads, bad users, bad deaths in Nigeria. The essay suggests the combination of outrage, satirical energy, and the compassion that underlies his most fascinating play. It is surprising that death at the curve in the road approaching a bridge should be the motive for a play about political and religious problems and conflicts.

Soyinka makes use of dance and mime in his play The Lion and the Jewel. It is a light-hearted satirical comedy. The play, set in a small village, presents Lakunle, the clumsy schoolteacher who boasts of modernity in the midst of traditionalism. He tries to woo Sidi, a village belle. However Lakunle refuses to contemplate such a barbaric thing as bride price. Sidi mocks Lakunle and is herself seduced by the cunning old Baroka- the village Chief. Through dance and mime these scenes are rendered as plays within play in
an ingenious way. Sidi protests that she must have bride price in a famous exchange with Lakunle.

Lakunle : On my head let fall their scorn
Sidi : They will say I was no virgin
That I was forced to sell my shame
And marry you without a price.
Lakunle : A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,
Rejected, denounced, accursed
Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,
Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant,
Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable. 27

Thus Soyinka very subtly makes the point that basic strengths and virtues cannot be over-ruled by shallow posturing in the name of progress.

The play The Trials of Brother Jero is a light hearted satire of the machinations of the Bar Beach prophets. Soyinka, through this play, captures the strange and real world of the religious sects that are found in such profusion in such cities as Lagos, but also broadens his aim sufficiently to take in amongst the gullible the politicians and the values of society in general. The worshippers' great prayer is for God’s more immediate and tangible benefits on earth.
Jero, self proclaimed Articulate Hero of Christ's crusade, is an accomplished confidence trickster living on the gullibility of others. He manages to stay clear of trouble only by the most enterprising contortions and most un-prophet like pragmatism. His worshippers are his livelihood and his antics in pursuit of his living are ingenious and hilarious. The worshippers' great prayer is for God's more immediate and tangible benefits on earth.

...Tell our wives not to give us trouble. And
give us money to have a happy home....

Yes Father, those who are Messengers today, make
them Senior Service tomorrow

Those who are petty trader today, make them
big contractor tomorrow...

I say those who dey push bicycle, give them
Big car tomorrow........ 28

Soyinka uses 'the flashback device' in many of his plays. This technique shows his flexibility as he easily shuttles from the past to the present to the future in his plays. He surrenders historical, sociological, or biographical sweep for a brief succession of evocative scenes that range freely through past, present and future. This technique demonstrates the fusion of various elements in his plays. It is a cinematic term and perhaps it may be said that he is or has been perhaps influenced by the cinema. His use of this technique however shows a flexible mind, which never merely copies.
Indeed this use is so varied that in no two plays does he exactly repeat himself.

Soyinka's use of the flashback in *A Dance of the Forests* is structurally integral to the play. He uses this technique as a vehicle for an ironic comment on human history. From the hubbub attending a contemporary celebration (a gathering of the tribes) in which we have been shown some rather unedifying human types. He, with the aid of the forest head, transports the characters with the great African past, into the court of Mata Kharibu. We are led to expect splendour allied to noble conduct. The court is indeed a splendid one. Mata Kharibu is a great warrior. Madame Tortoise who sends men to their deaths has a touch of Cleopatra. All the trappings that could give modern Africans a warm glow of pride in their past are present.

The play itself starts with the arrival of ancestors to a feast, the gathering of the tribes. It has been arranged by the elders and the guests of the human community who constitute a dead man and a dead woman. The dead man in his former life was a captain in Mata Kharibu's court and the dead woman was his wife. In previous life they were linked in violence and blood with four of the living generation. The most notorious of them is Rola, a whore, formerly Madame Tortoise. Another is Adenebi, the Court Orator, at present, was the Court Historian previously and Demoke, the carver, was formerly a poet in Mata Kharibu's court. The second part of the play takes place in Mata Kharibu's court and the total dramatization is a flashback of the above characters.
The Road also uses the flashback device to bring an even greater variety of levels of meaning to his play. He uses flashback to give two of his characters particular qualities. From Professor's background it is clear that he is a man who has moved between 'worlds', between social environments and cosmological systems. He moves between two levels of reality without effort, unaware that for most people the planes are separated. The other character who moves easily from one plane to another is Samson. He has a histrionic talent and takes delight in dressing-up, giving impersonations, telling stories with sound effects or making cinema shows. There are sequences in the play when actors present episodes, which happened before the play began. The two sequences that can be described as flashbacks are 'The Narrow Escape at the Wooden Bridge' and 'The Drivers' Festival'.

In The Lion and the Jewel Soyinka enacts his flashbacks through song, mime and dance. Through these devices he makes an easy and natural transition from spoken word to song and dance which are connected with the natural environment of the play. He makes an easy transition from the present into recent history, and this device gives depth to the play. In the play, the dance enacting the earlier visit of the photographer is in full swing and for the time being we are in the past. Then right on the cue the chief, the Bale, comes in and interrupts the proceedings, momentarily returning the scene to the present. But when he orders the dance to continue, with himself as a participant, the scene returns to the past. Thus within a few moments the present is sandwiched between two slices of the past.
One of the simplest uses of the flashback is seen in *The Swamp Dwellers*, where the shift into the past is not enacted, but it is recreated through dialogue. The scene is that in which Alu and Makuri, now old and sedentary recall the strange excitement of their wedding night. Alu stubbornly refuses to recall the strange consummation that she had instigated, and Makuri impishly jogs her memory.

Makuri: You’re a stubborn old hen....Won’t you tell how you dragged me from the house and we went across the swamps, though it was so dark that I could not see the whites of your eyes ?

Alu (stubbornly ): I do not remember

Makuri: The whole village said that the twins Were the very colour of the swamp---

Eh-----Alu ?

Inspite of the fact that the flashback is not enacted it adds a lively new dimension to the rather sad couple on the stage, but more importantly for the play as a whole, lays the foundation for one of its basic ironies. The twins conceived in such high spirits in the mire of the village, now grown up, encounter each other in the city, become the embodiments of the city, which ‘reared itself in the air, and with the strength of its legs of brass kicked the adventurer in the small of the back.’
Soyinka’s plays abound with rites, rituals and festivals. Since his childhood he had this intense, individual experience of rites designed to strengthen and protect the community. He shared with the community the New Year festivals, which lasted for several days. At the heart of Yoruba New Year celebrations are, characteristically, purification rites, in celebrating them, innovations as long as they conform to Yoruba aesthetic principles are permissible, they are encouraged. The pattern of the festival, the concern with communal purification and the eclecticism of the celebration were important for the growing playwright and they provide the example of the kind of inspiration Soyinka found in his African background. It is through the intelligent and dramatic use of ritual, mime and dance and spectacle that Soyinka excels in communicating to his audience a sense of continuity between past and present, of the relationship between mankind’s collective experience and primeval fears and desires of the individual.

Soyinka finds the Ogun myth to be the prototype for his description of the ritual process in the bridging of the gulf between the deities and mankind. He was fascinated from an early age by the god Ogun. Over the years, he has returned again and again to this figure of Yoruba cosmology, the patron deity of the soldiers of all who work with metal, a just god, an inventive pioneering spirit, an artist and creator who is capable of ferocious acts of destructive violence. Since at least the early fifties, he has pondered the significance of Ogun’s duality, his combination of creativity and destructiveness. He has developed a theory of drama based on a subjective analysis of Ogun festivals, which illuminate the tragic vision embodied in his plays. He was also intrigued
by the conventions, idioms, meanings and themes of such deities and
festivals. The festivals were created around juxtapositions, contrasts and
comparisons rather than character or narrative- which loom so large in the
European tradition of drama.

Soyinka makes use of Yoruba festivals to make his plays theatrically
vital. He found several festivals useful in his play, The New Yam Festival,
The purification, The New Year festival etc. Kongi’s Harvest is based on the
New Yam festival – a symbol of harvest, which embodies fertility of the tribe
and guarantees, continued procreation through harmonious interaction with
nature. It is an occasion for cleansing and symbolizes the purgation of the
clan’s sins. The New Yam festival lies at the heart and soul of the community
and imposes an onerous burden of responsibility on its divine ruler. Thus the
feast of the New Yam is an indispensable ritual of celebration in traditional
black Africa.

The Dance of the forests is another play which is constructed on the
pattern of a New Year Festival. Soyinka continues to draw inspiration from
rites and rituals such as The Gathering of the Tribes, The Chorus of the
Spirits, The Chorus of the Ants, The Masque of the Triplets and Dance of the
Half-child. It mainly employs the Egungun Festival, which is celebrated to
worship the ancestors. Annual ‘egungun’ festival is an ancestral masquerade,
which involved vigils, the sacrifice of animals on the grave of ancestors,
dances at the palaces of obas or chiefs and processions with masquerades
around the town. Soyinka as a boy, learnt about the masque-dramaturges; the
egungun opidan-which involved and included acrobatic dances and dance
dramas. A popular piece 'The Masque of the Bride' was frequently used to bring the performance to an end. The conventions and concerns of the masque, including the attitude to characterization, the use of stylized gesture and dance, the emphasis on fertility and the procession off as a means of concluding a performance, provided Soyinka with an indigenous form on which he could draw in his declared aim of combining African performance idioms with the 'European' tradition of dialogue drama.

The Road makes use of several cults and myths as its framework. The play centers mainly on three figures-Ogun, the Abiku and Agemo-each bringing a complex set of motifs. Ogun fulfils three functions in the play. He is the 'dog-eater' god, the invisible but omnipresent and awesome deity that presides over all action and events and holds sway over the road. The road is the realm and the hunting ground, the altar where all sacrifices must be offered. He is also the first protagonist, an archetypal figure in the ritual dramam represented in the play: he was the first to tread the road, the pilgrim who traveled the chthonic realm to establish communication between gods and humanbeings. Abiku is the wanderer child who dies and returns again and again to plague the mother. In the play the wanderers-travellers experience the same death wish. The Agemo phase is the intermediary state between life and death represented by Murano, who is constantly in the transitional phase. Thus these three aspects of Yoruba cosmology leads Soyinka to insert cult celebration, dances and songs as well as the mask idiom into the dramatic structure.
The New Year Festival meant a desire for purification. Individuals and communities, he observed, felt the need to purge themselves of bloodguilt after killing an enemy, kinsman or animal, or of unburdening themselves of the evil that had accumulated over a period. Sometimes the purgation took the form of an expiatory dance around the body of the victim. Sometimes, it involved selecting a ‘carrier’, a stranger or a retarded individual who was ‘prepared’, led through the streets and expelled from the town bearing the curses and the evil of the community.

The Strong Breed is a tragedy based on Yoruba ritual of Oro sacrifice, usually observed on New Year’s eve. A man considered to be the ‘carrier’ of all evils of the village for the past one year, is tortured to death and hanged at midnight heralding the new year, thus warding off all the evils for the future. The play deals with the theme in all its crude details, the ritual gaining universal significance from the symbolic values attached to it by the playwright. Animal scapegoats were used frequently in the ritual, but human sacrifices were not infrequent.

Eman, the main protagonist in the play, runs away from home deserting his role, deserting his father, his wife Omae, refusing to take over the hereditary role of his father. He fears death as he belongs to the family of ‘the strong breed’. He reaches a new village and takes shelter in Sunma’s house. In this village the Oro sacrifice is taking place and a carrier named Ifada runs into Sunma’s house. Sunma curses him and asks him to leave but Eman gives him refuge. Jaguna, Sunma’s father restrains him and says:
A carrier should end up in the bush, not in a house. Anyone who doesn’t guard his door when the carrier goes by has himself to blame.  

When Eman refuses to let go Ifada, saying that Ifada is not willing, Jaguna says:

Jaguna: Ifada is a godsend. Does he have to be willing?

Oroge: ... it is not a cheap task for anybody. No one in his senses would do such a job. Why do you think we give refuge to idiots like him?

But you ought to know that no carrier may return to the village. If he does, the people will stone him to death...Surely it is too much to ask a man to give up his own soil...He shall be willing. Not only willing but actually joyous. I am the one that prepares them all, and I have seen worse... 

In the end Eman becomes the carrier and Jaguna says:

Then it is a sorry world to live in. We did it for them. It was all for their common good.

The play ends with Eman’s sacrifice. He thinks, he suffers, he errs, and thinks again. He grabs the opportunity for expiation which leads to fulfillment.
Thus the play is about the ritual of purification at the end of the year, which is tied up with the whole business of self sacrifice, the acceptance of the role of carrier in society on whatever level.

Drumming and dancing with folk songs, in which all Africans engage and to which profuse allusions are made by African writers are a source of joy to all Africans. Soyinka’s every play employs this cultural activity. Many religious festivals are usually celebrated with dancing in which practically all men and women of every age group take part. There are many kinds of songs, some for enjoyment, some to preach morals. Some are in praise of gods, especially on feast days, or in praise of important personalities. Some are for the marriage ceremony or for serious events like funerals. The people’s beliefs and attitudes to life are embedded in their songs and so they have appropriate songs for any situation. These songs are regarded as a major activity during which people show their joy or sorrow or, in the case of religious festivals, their reverence and devotion. Thus almost all his plays make use of rites, rituals, festivals, dance, drumming and so on. In an interview Soyinka said:

It is important to make the play organic, do not incorporate music and dance in a contrived way. There is no question at all that any play which succeeds in integrating music, dance, masks and so on is at least one dimension richer than the purely literary forms of theatre. And there is no
shortage of themes at all in African society, which provide the opportunity to indulge in musical drama if that is your forte. The South African theatre is an example of that: a lot of South African plays grew from street music and other areas provide similar examples.33

. . . Soyinka employs dramatic verse to fulfill a variety of purposes. He uses verse to describe the archetypal figures and the primary ideas behind them. They also imply that it is particularly attuned to the themes and moods of his serious drama. In all instances verse occurs whenever the text adopts a ritual, incantation or mystical tone that expresses man's attempt to establish a relationship between himself and the cosmic forces, or his actual possession by them. At these moments the human creature become inhabited by a primeval impetus to give voice to their desire to explore the chthonic abyss, to bridge the gap between their own condition and the other stages of existence that they dimly surmise.

The play A Dance of the Forests is one of the best-suited plays to outline the forms and functions of verse in his drama. Besides being amply supplied with verse, it stands as a preliminary exploration by the dramatist of the resources of his art on the prosodic plane. Verse passages occur at many places in the play, which are purely recitative, narrative and declarative. Such is the case when Demoke recounts his confrontation with Oremole in a re-enactment of the primal conflict between creation and destruction.
Envy, but not from the prowess of his adze.
The world knew of Demoke, son and son to carvers;

………………………………………………

But Ogun touched me at the forge, and I slept
Weary at his feet.  

Such verse passages occur at nine places in the play. However the only verse dialogue in the play is the examination of Dead Woman and Dad Man by Eushoro/Questioner in the trial scene:

Took it home with him,
Warmed it in his bed of rushes

………………………………………………

Let this gourd, let this gourd
Break beyond my hearth...  

The use of verse confers a mythical quality. By resorting to verse the playwright seeks to imbue his language with a faculty inherent in the tragic rites - a faculty which he defines in Myth, Literature and the African World:

Language in Yoruba tragic music undergoes transformation through myth into a secret (Masonic) correspondence with the symbolism of tragedy, a symbolic medium spiritual emotions
within the heart of the choric union. It transcends particularization (of meaning) to tap the source whence spring the familiar weird melodies. This Masonic union of sign and melody, the true tragic music, unearths cosmic uncertainties which pervade human existence, reveals the magnitude and power of creation, but above all creates a harrowing sense of omni-directional vastness where the creative intelligence resides and prompts the soul to futile exploration.  

The potency of the verse, arising from melody and rhythm, contributes to create that 'masonic correspondence', as also does the beating of the drums in his plays. The verse in his play does not exhibit regular patterns of rhyme. Verses of different length are combined with groups of more regularly patterned lines. The repetitions of rhythms and sounds remain essential, however the interplay of variations is governed by dramatic purpose, whereas repetition prevailed in the songs and dirges, creating an incantatory, ritual, obsessive atmosphere. The songs, laments, and prayers, and the verse dialogues are conceived in terms of rhythm and sound as much as in terms of articulate meaning.

Verse fulfils another related function. Like the drums, it plays an essential role in producing the trance during which the spirits come to visit the living. The rhythmical variations of the verse, like those of the drums, denote
the intensity of the possession; they even suggest the nature of this possession, and the significance of the chthonic message. His use of verse not only signals that communication is being sought or established with the Unknownable, it constitutes a medium in its own right—-a medium that contributes both viscerally and spiritually to the spectator’s grasp of the play’s meaning. Combining verse with metaphor, Soyinka takes articulate discourse beyond the dead ends of rational understanding to the insights into a particular culture and into man’s relationship with himself and the universe conveyed by poetic apprehension.

Soyinka prefers to keep verse for moments of poetic intensity. However sometimes it can become an instrument of parody, as it does in Kongi’s Harvest, where the doggerel characterizing the members of Kongi’s group contrasts with the elegiac or satirical verse of Danlola and his retinue as much as with the lyrical one used by Daodu, Segi, and the celebrants of the feast. And in the comedies like The Lion and the Jewel, the verse is employed extensively to envelop the play in a gentle ironic, naively pastoral atmosphere. Thus we can say that the verse of his drama is protean. It can take on opposite forms and fill opposite ends. But its original contribution to the dramatic art seems to lie in its capacity to put the metrical resources of language to the same use as is made of music and drumming in ritual ceremonies. The rhythms of verse magically recreate the elemental fears and desires which the rhythmical confusion or uniformity of ordinary speech is incapable of invoking. Almost all the plays of Soyinka have a harmonious
blend of verse, song, dance and mime, thus adding versatility to his dramaturgy.
NOTES


5. Ibid., p.115.

6. Ibid., p.72.

7. Ibid., p.78.

8. Ibid., p.87.

9. Ibid., p.90.

10. Ibid., p.131.

11. Ibid., p.131.

12. Ibid., p.104.


19. Ibid., p.66.

20. Ibid., p.63.


22. Ibid., pp.26-27.


31 Ibid., p.128.

32 Ibid., pp.128-129.


35 Ibid., p.70.