

Beyond Entertainment: A Reflection on Drama and Theatre

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Introduction: Being Human

Drama is a human art. Since human beings generate the crises in society and also create the means for their elimination, it is proper for us to begin this presentation with an exploration of what being human entails. Thomas Aquinas' assertion that humans are "made almost on a par with the angels" in their ability to acquire and apply knowledge is reassuring; however, human beings share some basic characteristics of other animals, namely: "love for power and uninhibited sexual aggression" (Oke 4), which frequently generate conflicts in human communities. Some plays demonstrate these traits, for example, *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus (525-456 B.C).

Human beings are unpredictable. It is, therefore very difficult to know what an individual really means, believes or intends to do. If we compare humans with animals, the dishonesty of human beings is accentuated. When a dog, for instance, is agitated, it barks. When it is happy to see another animal or a human being, it wags its tail. On the other hand, the smile on a human face is often deceptive, but not so with infants, because they have not learnt to pretend. However, from adolescence to adulthood, humans cannot be predicted. They may pretend to be happy with you when they are bitter. In that case, the smiles on their faces are mere camouflage. A dictionary definition of the word "camouflage" clarifies what we are talking about: "behaviour that is deliberately meant to hide the truth: Her angry words were camouflage for the way she felt (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2004). Prophet Jeremiah therefore says: "Who can understand the human heart? There is nothing else so deceitful" (Jeremiah 17:9).

This provides much thrills for readers of fiction, as well as theatre audiences. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is a good example of this human trait. Brutus achieves his aim of killing Julius Caesar through betrayal, while Mark Anthony gets the support of the masses through a speech marked by deceptive turns. He starts off by telling the audience: "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him...", thus giving the impression that he is not bothered by his assassination.

Humans are very curious or inquisitive, but at the same time, are very secretive. There is, therefore, a great divide between private and public life. Humans work very hard to present good image of themselves in public through dress codes and composure. Women, in particular, spend much time and money making up. Men, on the other hand, take a lot of risks in asserting their manhood. Certainly all these involve pretence.

The effort of humans to improve their image often generates self-assertiveness and self praise. Human beings hardly accept that they are at fault or wrong. Their self-centred nature is more pronounced in less successful or capable individuals who frequently draw attention to themselves, in order to divert attention from their inadequacies. The saying that an empty drum makes the loudest sound is appropriate here. Human imitative talents of "impersonation" are sometimes used by such individuals for objectives that are criminal or antisocial. Those involved in Advanced Fee Fraud (419), for example, practise impersonation while carrying out their deals or schemes. Their activities in commercial areas and churches are widespread. Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* is a good example of the place of fraudulent impersonation in holy places. Deception and manipulation are possible because humans are susceptible to them.

One of the most powerful traits in human relationship is the natural attraction between males and females across social, political and geographical boundaries. They therefore seek bliss and self-fulfilment in their relationships. But for many of them, it is futile. This may lead to negative consequences, such as separation, and divorce which "unleash series of traumatic events over which one may have little control" (Onyekwere 27). Part of the problem is the inability of most human beings to control their sexual drives. Although considered higher than animals, humans frequently manifest what may be considered demeaning in their relationship with their partners. Sociologists inform us that humans "have no genetically programmed directives to behave in particular ways" (Haralambos and Holborn, vii), and that their behaviour

“is largely determined by culture” (ix). The question is: How well does culture succeed in controlling human beings so that they can control their sexuality?

Despite human spirituality, many people are less able to control their sexual drives than some animal species. For example, while many humans are unfaithful to their partners, dogs demonstrate better control of themselves. Female dogs, for example, do not tolerate any mates that they have not chosen from several others. Dogs demonstrate better control of their sexuality than human beings. The relationship between two mates is maintained even after delivery, resulting from their contact.

Luckily, despite the pain in their relationship with the opposite sex, humans are in many ways free of the disaster resulting from the sexual relationship of some animal species. Whereas human mates are usually rejuvenated by their union, some male animals die after mating. For example, the female praying mantis clasps the male within her thighs, “ensconces his head between her teeth and with the swiftness of a guillotine blade chops it off” (Enekwe, “Lady Death” *“Broken Pots”*, 30). Another example is the relationship of spiders. After mating, the female, called “Black widow”, which is usually twice the size of her mate, guzzles him up.

However, human “love” relationship is also a risky affair, because human beings are dishonest and unpredictable, as we have noted. An event reported in a newspaper recently throws light on this issue. Abimbola, a final year female, law student travelled to Kogi State from Ado Ekiti to submit her final year project at Kogi State University, Anyigba. She was accompanied by Titi, another female student who was also to submit her project. The father of the latter had driven from Abuja to Ekiti to convey both of them to Anyigba.

On receiving a call from Wale, her boyfriend, informing her that he was sick and needed to see her, Abimbola, accompanied by Titi, went to see him. Their mutilated corpses were later found side by-side with that of another lady in a shallow river near Wale’s residence. It was suspected that their death “might not be unconnected with rituals...” (p 2).

Eager to produce the first lawyer in their family, Abimbola’s parents had purchased a brand new car for her “for being outstanding among her parents’ four children” (2). Abimbola’s aunt, talking about Abimbola’s relationship with Wale, told newsmen:

She talked about Wale and their relationship which we initially objected to, but when she had no other boy friend and insisted that it was Wale Adeboye or nobody else, we went along and she promised to bring him

home only for us to be called to come for her corpse (Olukole,2).

There are many other negative traits, such as greed and jealousy. Psychological factors, not easily perceptible, dominate human life. Freud presents three basic psychic components of the human mind, as follows: *Ego*: “the conscious organizing part of the mind that functions according to ... the reality principle”; *Id*: “the unconscious, which is governed by primitive urges and desires, usually sexual in nature”; *Super-ego*: “the conscience, the giver of the moral law ... principles of right” (Kohl, 184). It is necessary to emphasize that conscience provides means of resisting the pull of the negative traits discussed earlier. When there is balance between the *ego*, the *id* and *super-ego*, life can be smooth and peaceful. But, this situation is hardly common. What is typical is imbalance among the three components, resulting in painful and frustrating existence (Kohl 184). Freud’s theories about humans have not been totally accepted, but they remain relevant in any discussion of human nature.

Our problems as human beings start in infancy. Barrault explains: First, the child in vegetable existence is *one*. But when he/she becomes aware that others are seeing him/her, he/she becomes aware of others. This is second birth, which causes the child to project a second being, the person he/she wants to seem. At that stage, the child is no longer himself/herself, but another. In the words of Jean-Louis Barrault (1972:20):

The others weigh in on us. The community involves us, oppresses us, feeds us in case of need. The exchanges between the individual and the community begin. And we begin to live on two planes: that which we believe we are and that which we want to seem. In fact, it is on three planes that we live; because we are mistaken about what we believe we are. This third plane is what we are not, and in effect it is that of which we are ignorant. From the moment the human being becomes aware of others, he lives hidden behind his person in the same way that the warrior takes refuge in his shield. From then on, the human being will not only have to fight the others, but will also have to avoid being dominated by his own person.

Therefore we have dual personalities, and move on at least three planes:

“What we are
What we believe we are
What we want to appear to others”
Which, as a revelation in majority of us,

“gives the desire to become acquainted with the behaviour of the others” (1992:21).

As a result of the above traits, tension and anxiety dominate human lives, and generate many social and psychological problems. How do humans deal with these problems? Sociologists tell us that, “More than any other species, humans rely for their survival on behaviour patterns that are learned” (Haralambos and Holborn, vii). This is mainly because they are limited in terms of biological instinct (Hodges, 66). The following passage (Haralambos and Holborn, viii) clarifies the process of human development in society:

... a newborn human baby is helpless ... In order to survive, it must learn the skills, knowledge and accepted ways of behaving of the society into which it is born. It must learn a way of life; in sociological terminology, it must learn the culture of its society.

Culture is defined as “the set of learned behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, values, and ideals that are characteristic of a particular society or population” (Ember & Ember, 17). According to Ralph Linton, the culture of a society is the people’s way of life: ‘the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation’ (Haralambos & Holborn, viii). The two essential qualities of culture are: ‘first, it is learned, second, it is shared.’ Without culture, there would be no human society (Haralambos and Holborn, p.viii). We are also informed that socialization is ‘the process by which individuals learn the culture of their society’ (Haralambos, *et al*, p.ix). Culture is, therefore, defined as a lifelong process’ without which ‘an individual would bear little resemblance to any human being defined as normal by the standards of his or her society’ (ix).

Religion and the arts are major instruments of socialization, often employed to counter stressful factors in life. Problems of parents and their children are normally tackled within the family through prayers, admonitions, folktales, etc. But, to address issues that touch the whole community, much more engaging methods are used. Songs and dances put the people in the right mood, so they can listen to the prayers and admonitions of priests and leaders. To ensure that the messages are understood and internalized by the members of the community, their priests and/or leaders use music, dance and drama. During festivals, in pre-modern societies, deities and ancestors of a community are made present through masking and other forms of impersonation. Full-scale

dramatic performances are usually presented for the delight and edification of the people. As human societies evolved through time, religion and drama considered first cousins by Oyin Ogunba (41) separated, as secularism evolved.

Aristotle, states in his *Poetics*, that imitation is natural to man from childhood, "because he is the most imitative creature ... and learns at first by imitation" (Selden 1988:47. According to Jean Mouroux, a child possesses three traits, namely: imagination, affection and imitation" (12-13). Beyer and Lee are of the view that "a child imitates those he admires and then adds his own levels of "person" drawn from his observation and imagination" (15).

As we have noted, imitation permeates human active life, but it is most potent in the dramatic form, where it is for the public. The word "impersonate", which the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* explains as "to pretend to be somebody in order to deceive people or to entertain them", is crucial in our discussion of the nature and relevance of drama, for it goes beyond mere imitation. In impersonation, one becomes another person in order to achieve good or bad intentions. The impersonator of another person with personal or private intentions is not an actor, because an actor is trained to perform for the good of the public (an audience). The actor's motivation is love, as Jean-Louis Barrault explains:

It is through the greatest love of life, and particularly of man, that the actor, called on by his profession, will come to resemble the man he wants to interpret, the man he wants to become. Here we are far from impotence, far from evasion of life. The theatrical vocation is a vocation of giving of self. (26)

An impersonator, driven by personal or anti-social interests, is not interested in the acquisition and perfection of acting skills. On the other hand, the actor, aware of the enormous skills required to hold an audience, strives continuously to excel. Esslin lists the required skills and potentials of the actor (*The Field of Drama*, 61):

In addition to the basic meaning-generating quality of his own personality and erotic magnetism, the actor has at his disposal an array of sign systems, which could be grouped as comprising, on the one hand, those derived from the expressive technique based on the use of his or her body: use of the voice in modulating the text, facial expression, gesture ('Kinesics'), and grouping or movement in space ('proxemics') and, on the other hand, those the actor carries on his body: make-up and costume".

To clarify the place of drama in human life, let us consider the term “play instinct” which is also natural in human beings, and is linked to drama. In *Anatomy of Drama*, Esslin states that the play instinct is “one of the basic human drives, essential for the survival of the individual as well as the species”, and that it can be regarded as more than a mere pastime, “since it is profoundly linked to the basic make-up of our species” (1976:20).

Play is described as “pleasurable activity that is engaged in for its own sake”, and has the following positive effects on children: facilitating human adjustment, helping the child to master anxieties and conflicts (Santrock, 240). Tension is relieved in play, making it possible for the child to cope with life’s problems. Play also permits the child to let off excess physical energy and to release pent-up tensions” (Santrok, 240).

The play instinct is also manifest in adults. Thus, men and women utilize pretence in their private and public lives as a means of dealing with the intricacies of inter-personal relationships. For instance, regardless of disagreement between relatives, neighbours or friends, normal human beings are likely to create an accommodating atmosphere in public, so as not to give negative impression of themselves. In interaction with friends or neighbours, humans often crack jokes, calling one another names that normally would be considered inappropriate. For instance, somebody may say to another, “You stupid fellow”, knowing fully well that he/she would regard it as a joke, and therefore would not be offended. There is an equivalence of this in the play of dogs as they bark, bare their teeth and tumble over one another, which is both play and training for real encounters with other animals.

Indispensable Role of Theatre in Society

According to Luis Vargas, “the strongly religious ancestry of the theatre is a factor... of greater importance than is generally realised” (13); “... the poet who wrote the plays, the actors, singers and officials connected with the productions were looked upon as ministers of religion and as such sacred and inviolate...” (27). The festival of the City Dionysia in Athens, Greece, was religious and had “considerable bearing on the character and temper of the classical Greek drama” (25). That was why priests were given places of honour in the theatre. For instance, the priest of Dionysus had a central seat. This was because drama is a potent instrument of socialisation (Esslin, 1976:20-1). Apart from this, drama is an instrument of thought, a cognitive process, a form of philosophising in concrete terms (Esslin, 21). Drama/theatre is also an experimental

laboratory for the testing of human behaviour in given situations (Esslin, 1976: 21). According to Ruth L. Saw, Aristotle thinks that “we need to be purged of pity and fear because human beings left alone tend to feel these emotions to excess and become less efficient in their daily lives”, and the effect of drama “is of calming and tranquilising the citizens so that after the excitement of a tragic performance, they will go home quietly and take up their civic duties again” (Saw, 88-9).

Barrault sees theatre as an activity that is “useful to the public, since it purifies and revitalises human beings” and “reassures them against anxiety and against solitude” (25-6). According to Gorelik, dramatic technique is not a goal in itself but a means to an end which is “to influence life by the theatrical means” (p.5). Also “... theatre in its own province picks up our unclear thoughts and carries them onward to clarity. Healthy theatre is not just a pleasant stupor” (Gorelik, p. 6).

The main objective of this presentation is to show that theatre goes beyond entertainment, despite the mounting crises that have made some grow afraid of new ideas, preferring to concentrate on craftsmanship and imagination, unrelated to ideas. (Gorelik, 7-8). In rejecting this negation of ideas in theatre practice, Gorelik states that “new ideas do not necessarily create artists but artists of real size must have new ideas out of which to create” (9).

As we emphasise drama in this discourse, the intention is not to imply that other art forms are not relevant to socialisation. All of them are relevant and have unique effects. Thus, according to Irwin Edman, one of the chief functions of all artists is to render experience arresting by giving it life. The three main functions of art are intensification, clarification and interpretation of experience, and drama and fiction “clarify and deepen for us emotional incidents of familiar human situations”, and make ideas “intimate and alive” (26); thus, “a mood half articulate and half recognised in its confused recurrence becomes, as it were, clarified forever in a poem or a novel or a drama. A floating impression becomes fixed in the vivid system of music or letters” (28). A good example of the social impact of the arts is provided by Soul star, James Brown (RIP) whose song “I’m black and I’m proud”, is described as “a landmark 1968 statement of racial pride” (*Vanguard*, Dec. 27, 2006, p. 15). According to a report, “The song showed...that lyrics and music and a song can change society” (15). But drama is the most powerful art form especially with regard to socialisation, and other forms of human transformation. To clarify the place of drama, let us compare it with the visual, verbal, auditory and cinematic arts.

Comparing Drama with Other Art Forms

We begin with a working definition of drama: Drama is an art form in which actors, people pretending to be other people, animals, birds, spirits, ideas, etc, entertain through what they do or say. According to R.F. Clarke, it is not easy to explain the meaning of drama, because it is often used to refer to sensational events “exciting” and “breathtaking”. Thus, “we read of someone’s ‘dramatic’ escape from terrible danger or, of the ‘drama’ of a hard-fought football match” (1965:5). To understand drama, we must see it from the point of view of actors, whether they are present in flesh and blood or are projected shadows upon a screen or puppets (Esslin 1976: 10-11).

The place where drama takes place is usually called theatre, which “exists when it is occurring” (Beckerman 1970:6), while people who assemble to watch a drama presentation are called an audience. Like all other art forms, drama is created by human intelligence, imagination and skill. (Sontag 1979:368). Its contents may be from everyday happenings, history, legends, myth, etc. It could also be pure fantasy or complete fabrication. Whatever its contents, drama is always organized artistically, in accordance with principles of art accepted by the society in which it is produced. (Beckerman, 21). However, drama differs from other art forms, both in its physical condition and the manner in which it is produced.

Visual Art: Sculpture

Sculpture is one of the most enduring genres of visual art, mainly because it is produced on solid objects, such as wood, bronze, copper, brass, clay, stone, etc., which resist decay and bad weather. Because of this, archaeologists have relied on sculpture to study mankind through the ages.

Sculpture is visual art, because we perceive it mainly with our eyes. Like drama, it can represent individuals - historical or legendary figures, heroes, gods, saints, etc. Sculpture also can represent groups of people. By presenting a series of episodes that can be connected, sculptors can tell stories or express certain ideas. In all this, sculpture is like drama, yet, it is not drama. Why? Sculpture has no life. This is the fundamental difference between it and drama which is impossible without real human beings whom we refer to as actors.

Verbal Art: Fiction

When we read a novel, a short story, or even a play script, we cannot see (with our eyes) the characters and their situations. We have to imagine the characters and settings told about by the writer through words on paper. This is quite unlike what happens when we watch a drama performance which appeals to us mainly through the senses. We actually see the characters, represented by actors, real human beings. We also may see their settings, their costumes and props (what they use, such as hoes, plates). We can also hear the sound of these people. We hear them talk, sing, cry or laugh. If a plate falls on the floor, we hear its clatter. All this is not possible when we read a novel, a play script or short story.

Here we need to stress that a play script or a printed play is not drama. It is incapable of allowing us to see the characters or hear them. It is, just like a novel, printed words. A play must be performed before it can be regarded as drama; performing it means that actors must be involved in bringing it to life before an audience. According to D.C. Muecke "Literature with languages as its medium is inescapably ideational" (1982:5), whereas, the non-verbal arts "appeal in the first instance to and through the senses" (5).

There is another significant difference between fiction and drama. When we read fiction, we usually do so alone, for reading is usually a private affair. But drama is meant to be watched in public. This means that several people, or even large crowds in their thousands, can watch a performance at the same time, in one location. Moreover, the novel can be put away, taken up, re-read, whereas theatre is spontaneous, which means that it is like life which cannot be interrupted at will (Beckerman, 1970: 129; cited in Wilson 1988: 4) Thus, drama is "a kaleidoscopic adventure which the audience passes with each instance a direct immediate experience" and, unlike the novel which is mainly read, "a play is written to be performed" (Wilson, 4). During a performance, the audience is given an effect of an actual experience taking place before it. Whereas a reader of a novel gains an impression of what may have occurred, the spectator in a drama performance has the impression that what he sees is happening right before him (Hatlen 1962:22). More than any other art form, drama is very much like our everyday life, for it shows us, especially in realistic and naturalistic forms, as real human beings "in a real place for the duration of real time" (Devlin 1989:3; Nelms: p.1). Drama gives us "the illusion of men and women actually

living and breathing before the audiences' eyes". (Grebanier 1961:5) But, we must remember always that drama is not real life. Like sculpture, fiction or any other art form, it is make-believe, an illusion or impression of reality. However, drama has its own reality, though it may be based on actuality.

Another very important difference between fiction and drama is that, whereas the enjoyment of fiction does not have to involve other people in a direct sense, appreciation of drama is a result of collaboration of several other artists who bring their expertise, skills and special effects into the production of a play.

Auditory Art: Music

How does drama differ from a musical performance or show? A musical performance is similar to drama in a number of respects. To begin with, it involves human beings who sing and perform musical instruments before an audience, producing sounds which combine in unique ways to delight an audience or listeners. As in drama, the audience in a musical show can see and hear the performers, if the performance is presented live. Yet, a musical performance is not drama, because the musicians or singers are not actors. They are not pretending to be other people, things, ideas, etc.

But if musicians and/or singers decide to act out what they sing, which has become a practice these days, their performance can be regarded as drama, depending on the extent of their roles as actors.

Cinematic Art: Film

In comparing drama and film, we may well start by recognizing that cinema had an early connection with theatre arts. In fact, several of the earliest films were filmed plays, and a good number of early film stars started off as actors in the theatre. Both cinema and drama involve many artists who collaborate to realize a production. For this reason, filmed versions of a staged play have been considered to be drama (Esslin 1987:29). However, film actors on a cinema screen are not presented to film goers as living human beings. They are merely images of real human beings whose activities have been recorded by film cameras. Because of this, there is no actor-audience relationship that is typical of the theatre (Wilson 1988:13). The exchange between actors and their audience cannot be possible in the cinema (Sontag 1979:366). The "live" nature of the theatre distinguishes it from radio, television and film productions. In the

cinema, the director arranges the images (the shots) to achieve his artistic objective. "It is the work of the man who arranges the images, not the work of the actors themselves that reaches us, the viewers" (Beckerman 7) No matter how successful a film is, it can never achieve the sense of liveness that is fundamental to theatre experience:

The experience of being in the presence of the performer is more important to theatre than anything else. No matter how closely a film follows the story of a play, no matter how involved we are with the people on the screen, we are always in the presence of an image, never a person (Wilson 1988:13).

From the foregoing, it is clear that drama is a unique and powerful art. Because it is a "cumulative series of sights, sounds and impressions occurring through time" (Wilson, 3), it conveys a rich and varied experience of human life and action, which is not possible in other art forms. Whereas sculpture does not involve the senses of hearing, fiction does not emphasize any of the senses, except in indirect form, and music involves primarily the sense of hearing, drama involves the senses of seeing and hearing simultaneously. Other performed arts, such as film, music and dance, also engage the senses of seeing and hearing simultaneously, but this does not make them drama. In the case of film, actual human presence is replaced by images. In music and dance, as we have pointed out, the performers are not usually pretending to be other people, ideas or things. Drama is unique because of the very important role of the audience in its creation. As Sonia Moore explains, "in other arts, the audience sees the result of a creative process, in theatre, the audience is present during the process" (p.20)

Misunderstanding and Misrepresentation of Drama

We have gone this length to compare drama and other art forms, because it is widely misunderstood and frequently misinterpreted. Some, for example regard it as literature, modelled after European, especially Greek forms. Non-European forms of drama are considered to be inadequate and are, therefore, usually referred to as rituals, which are considered to be dramatically limited. This has generated controversies, especially between the so-called evolutionists and the relativists, as Philip Adedotun Ogundeji explains:

Owing to the limitation of the literary scope of these ritual performances, some scholars would not wish to regard them as drama. They prefer to

see them as containing only “dramatic and quasi-dramatic features” and call them “pre-drama” or “embryonic drama” (Mahood 1966, Finnegan 1970, Echeruo 1973 and de Graft 1976). But other scholars, including Ogunba, Adedeji, Enekwe and Soyinka, have argued the opposite (2000: 6).

We shall throw more light on this issue as we proceed. Understandably, the unwillingness of our educated elite to accept indigenous African dramas has resulted in their neglect, while European forms of drama are emphasized. But, the place of African drama based on European models is not assured, because they have not been accepted by the masses, who consider them strange. Elsewhere, I have stated “that what we usually consider as modern drama is actually the continuation of European theatrical traditions” (Enekwe, 1978: 39). Saint Gbilekaa (1997:212) reasons along this line, when he points out that the university theatre is elitist and that its use of a foreign language is alienating.

Surprisingly, some scholars describe its present status as a decline. But, it would be more appropriate to say that it has not taken roots, unlike the popular theatre which “emphasises the use of vernacular or indigenous languages, as well as, artistic institution”, and therefore “eliminates the communication gap and elitism of the university or conventional theatre and enhances a spirit of belonging and identification” (Gbilekaa 212). A theatre, such as the latter, would serve well as an instrument of socialisation and socio-political transformation.

As we argue that drama is not meant for entertainment primarily, we acknowledge the importance of entertainment, for as Eric Bentley explains, “it is because art is fun that it can succeed in being didactic, for there is no true teaching except in eagerness, amusement, delight, inspiration”(228). A glance at some traditions of theatre reveals the transformational and radical impact of drama. The main aim has always been to improve and stabilize society. These objectives are manifested in different forms and styles worldwide.

The Socio-Political, Psychological, and Economic Relevance of Drama

There is a significant evidence of the use of drama as a political instrument. It is interesting to observe that theatre has been a major instrument of democratisation all over the world. The Greek theatre of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus served an emerging democracy because of its reliance on public speaking to a large audience, “with a view to persuading a majority” (Ley, 34). Certainly, we know that

democracy is not possible without dialogue. Thus, in Greece, occasionally “particularly during times of political instability”, theatres were “used as political meeting places” (Ley, 35). The political nature of Shakespearean theatre is often played down, but the fact is that he provoked discussion and debate and challenged views. A lot of Shakespeare’s drama was political, but done in a way that he could get away with it (CNN, London, 17-9-04). During the second world, Shakespeare’s *Henry V* was constantly performed to boost the morale of British soldiers and populace.

The Igbo *Okumkpo*, performed after the dry season, is described as “Afikpo theatre par excellence” by Simon Ottenberg (1975:13) who writes that “the essence of the play is the direct ridicule and satirizing of real persons and topical events, clothed in ritualized and superficially religious terms” (p.129). *Okumkpo* “is a medium through which the young and middle-aged adults can air feelings about their elders that they could not otherwise explore directly in public”, and “a tension-reducing mechanism for traditionalistic and progressive young men and for the elders who are watching the performance, in a social system in which generational conflicts are inherent” (135). The political objective of *Okumkpo* is made clear in the following passage:

The criticisms in the play serve to control the elders’ behaviour, to cut down and level off the tendency of individuals to develop power and to move toward a rank individualism, which is considered destructive to the community (135).

Another example of the overt political function of drama is provided by the *Eégún aláré*, masked players of the Yoruba, who are said to have grown out of a political crisis. According to Philip Adedotun Ògúndèjì, “the first performance was used for a satirical and didactic purpose to reprimand and teach the erring members of the *Òyómèsi* ruling council a lesson” (18). The people believe in the masquerade as a “citizen of heaven, a divinity...”, and its reverence “is further enhanced rather than diminished by its theatrical and dramatic involvement” (Ògúndèjì, 21). Ògúndèjì is of the view that “the involvement of the heavenly ‘father’ in entertainment and edification through the *Eégún aláré* performances also helps in the balancing of the emotion of the individual and the society as a whole” (22). We are also informed by Ògúndèjì that:

The *Eégún aláré* are also regarded as custodians of the moral, history and the general culture of the society through their performances. They are said to be contributing both to social unity and peace, and to the

unity of man and the spiritual world. It is on this basis that we submit that the masquerade as a performer does not diminish in reverence in a dramatic situation; rather, his presence compels some degree of apparent respectability to the dramatic situation (22).

The Tiv Kwagh-Hir is another example of what Hagher calls “the confluence of theatre and political action in society” (p.87), because it was used to facilitate the Tiv revolt of 1960 and 1963. According to Hagher (86-7):

The organization of the grassroots political party, the U.M.B.C, was similar to the cellular structure of the Kwagh-hir. The Tiv people turned on other members considered agents of governmental repression in Tivland. They burnt their houses, farms and food stores. As they did this, they were dressed in the costumes similar to those worn by the Kwagh-Hir players.

For well-established institutions or societies, drama is an indispensable instrument for social and political control. Thus, the Soviet government placed it under the authority of Commissar of Education, because it was considered “a national treasure, formerly reserved for the middle and upper classes, to be made available to the proletariat” (Brockett, 1990:534). During the Soviet revolution, theatre was regarded as a weapon in response to the capitalist propaganda of other countries, according to Gorelik, who adds that “partisan propaganda is the order of the day in modern theatre” (10). “The cleavage between nationalist states, the conflict in interests between capital and labour, the distress caused by economic failure, gave added occasion for the use of theatre as outright propaganda” (Gorelik,10).

The Ethiopian Amharic political ghost play, *Skeletons in Pages*, is another example of the link between theatre and politics. A mixture of drama, pantomime and melodrama, it rests uniquely on the Ethiopians’ “sense of ancient heritage, a predisposition for instructional entertainment, and devout participation in the country’s centuries-old form of Christianity” (Bear, 35).

There is also significant evidence about the use of theatre to disempower people. In his review of Ipi-Tombi, a South African play that “opened in Johannesburg in 1974 and played for 122 weeks”, Russell Vandenbroucke draws attention to the subtle condescending and paternalistic racial intention of its producers, bent on presenting blacks as simple and childlike (68). Also as a matter of policy, European colonizers encouraged indigenous African performances, “within the limits of

colonial cultural forms, as part of a general attempt at ideological rather than political control of the nationalist bourgeoisie" (Kerr, 39).

We also note the contribution of university based theatres and the community or popular theatres involved in mobilization of Nigerian masses for social and political empowerment. According to Gbilekaa(1997), beginning from the nineteen seventies, "plays were not written for entertainment only" (Introduction).

After discussing political theatre, let us consider also theatres that are primarily for business, for example, the American theatre of the nineteen sixties when commercial considerations completely dominated "any aesthetic ones" (Arthur Lithgow, 1967:197). The "arts market" was considered "one of the fastest growing markets in the United States today" (185). By early 1970s, it was yielding about seven billion dollars a year. The consequences of commercialisation are clear in the following passage by Arthur Lithgow (1967:197):

Missing are the traditional, well-established resident theatres in the manner of the European repertory theatres. Missing, therefore, is professional training in a professional milieu, for all the excellence of theatre departments of various universities.

The foregoing confirms our view that drama goes beyond entertainment. But, to fully appreciate the indispensable place of drama in human society, we need to consider it from the psychological point of view. Denys J. Saunders informs us that our memories of experiences are usually in the form of mind *pictures*, because we understand things we see more easily than abstract ideas presented just in words (1974:15). Visuals speed up the learning process, since "a relevant picture will present information very much more quickly than long, wordy descriptions" (16). They also make learning process more real, thereby improving memory. Saunders explains that "most adult have vivid memories of things seen in their youth but often cannot remember wordy exhortations heard only a day or two previously" (16). For Saunders, drama is not just another form of entertainment or novelty, "but can be a very enriching educational experience for those involved" (92). As role play, drama "is good for exploring and clarifying problems and also for testing possible solutions"(93). In learning, experiences are received through the five senses – sight, sound, smell, taste and touch (Saunders 10-11).

In establishing the school of drama in the University College, Ibadan, in 1963, the colonial administration listed its aim as "offering

entertainment to the public and aiding the appreciation of literature through the exploitation of the by-product of the theatre" (11). Adedeji considers this "an alienative role", which "only created the impression that the theatre is an entertainment par excellence – the pastime of the elite – an expediency which reproduces the gains or products of western civilization" (11-12). In planning the programme at Ibadan, Adedeji, therefore, sought to relate theatre arts to "attitudinal changes in the society," which would facilitate the cultural development of Nigeria (16). Adedeji's views about designing theatre discipline are very relevant to our topic: "Beyond Entertainment ...".

Beginning from the creation aspect of culture – the literary, the visual and the performing arts which when materialised express the essence of cultures – this is the basis of progressive living. There is the philosophical aspect of culture which embraces the realm of ideas, beliefs, concepts and values of a people which come into full view either for reflection or provocation or both. Then lastly there in (sic) the institutional aspect of culture the value of which is usually disregarded or ignored. It exists when the theatre is used for social and political action; when it is used as a weapon of change ... (17).

The above has been my main objective as a theatre practitioner and scholar. Kalu Uka reasons along the above line when he declares: "practically, usefulness to the society is the purpose of drama and theatre – traditional, modern, post-modern, however defined or conceptualized, in consonance with nature" (24).

We must return to the issue of the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of drama. Yes, it is very true, indeed. The negative uses of theatre to appeal to sexual excitement, money-making and cheap laughter, encouraged by governments that are interested in distracting people's minds and lulling their critical sense has been exposed by Barrault (17-18). Because the play instinct is embodied in our nature as human beings, some people tend to treat drama as mere diversion, thus encouraging exhibitionism and narcissism" (Barrault 26). It is therefore not surprising that the producers of Nigerian home videos for example, give little or no attention to the art of acting. Because theatre is a "convergence of arts," it is "considered aesthetically impure and minor" (Barrault 19), and therefore subordinate to literature, especially the printed form which only the educationally literate can enjoy.

It is disappointing to observe that some theatre scholars and artists misunderstand and misrepresent theatre arts. To begin with, they consider the European or occidental forms as universal models. Some,

especially the purveyors of evolutionist theories regard drama and ritual as antipodal. Elsewhere, I have dealt extensively with the latter aberration (*Igbo Masks: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre* and "Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland" etc. In his *Visions and Revisions: Essays on African Literatures and Criticism* (1991) Oyekan Owomeyela, the leader of what Inih Akpan Ebong calls the Alienists (Uka 22), is of the view that neither drama nor epic is indigenous to Africa, even though he accepts that drama is natural to man. However, the view that drama is not indigenous to Africa is no longer accepted in serious discourse worldwide.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the evolutionist theory is not based on objective or empirical evidence. This is confirmed by Brockett and Hildy who state that "one must rely primarily on speculation, since there is little concrete evidence on which to draw" (1). Dominic K. Aggyeman rejects the Evolutionist theory, because "the biological analogy did not quite fit the nature of society" (4). The racist origin of Evolutionist theory is quite clear. According to Oke, the explorers who wrote about foreign peoples and cultures, often gave sensational or at least entertaining accounts of the physical appearances and social life of the people they came across on their voyages" (5). The perceptions of explorers and other who wrote about colonized peoples affected negatively research into non-western forms of art.

As we conclude this discussion on the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of drama, let us take serious note of the fact that "each human group ... has its own unique culture," comprising "language, means of making a living, arrangement of family life, the focus of group loyalties and ways of perceiving the world, both the physical world and the world beyond" (Oke19). Speaking about culture, Jacques Chirac who recently vacated the post of the president of France, said, "Any culture, big or small, has something to teach us, something unique, something which any balanced fair world needs "(BBC News, 2004/11/19).

Considering what we have discussed so far, it would be proper for us to ask: What is the place of drama in communities? Why is it that performances hardly take place as was the case before our encounter with western European culture? We have already noted that the unwillingness of our elite to recognize and appreciate indigenous forms of drama is responsible for lack of interest in performances. Colonization and globalisation have created disoriented leaders and people who regard their indigenous cultures as irrelevant.

But one may ask why the European model was also not popular. As we have already noted, the European model has not taken root because of

its strangeness to the people, including educated ones. The strangeness results mainly from communication gap, caused by use of foreign languages and resources. I have dealt with this issue in detail elsewhere, stating that "I do not object to foreign influences; after all, no culture can grow without them" (Enekwe 1976: 64). Continuing, I state as follows:

But I deplore a cultural contact that leads to the destruction of our culture, thereby inducing in our people a sense of rootlessness. We need a modern theatre that has its roots in the Nigerian soil and can therefore absorb foreign elements without losing its own character. We must insist that the Nigerian culture be the medium within which synthesis of values occurs so that the indigenous culture does not become a mere shadow of the European culture. Nigerian dramatists must study the aesthetic habits of our own people so as to create a relevant and viable theatre.

In another article, published two years later, the issue is also addressed (Enekwe 1978:28):

Modern Nigerian drama groups are not nourished by the indigenous culture. They are like shrubs shrivelling in an unsuitable soil. From this, it is clear that subject-matter alone does not create a form. That a play is based on an African experience in an African environment does not make it African unless the form says so. It is not African until its form derives from the African experience that is meaningful to those for whom it is supposedly written. Similarly, a play is not African if it expresses a foreign perception of the world, one which denies the cultural frame of reference of the society about which it deals. In every instance, form and content must reflect each other.

>From the above perspective, we advise that our communities, including educational institutions, should ensure that our people are allowed and encouraged to perform drama, based on their creativity and skills. In every institution, there should be at least one theatre or gathering space where people can rediscover and fulfil themselves, instead of spending their time in beer parlours. Parents should be involved in its planning and organisation. This will facilitate socialisation, thereby reducing the antisocial attitudes that threaten our existence and future.

Dramatists are more concerned with "public or social morality especially with questions of good government, universal justice and individual worth or value on the one hand, and love or national order on the other" (Taylor 104-5). We need to confront and tackle the issues that

threaten the future of our youths, including sexual harassment, examination malpractice, idleness, corruption etc. The situation could have been worst without the encouragement by religious bodies which have consistently mobilised drama performances against immorality and anti-social activities. For example, in 2002 and 2003, the Nigerian Association of Catholic Lecturers of Nigerian Universities (NACLONU), University of Nigeria, Branch, sponsored some plays on television. They focused on examination malpractice and sexual harassment which are rampant in Nigerian educational institutions, especially in the Universities. Unfortunately, the programme fizzled out, owing to lack of funds. This is regrettable. If the performances had been presented live in front of live audiences, they would have had more impact. In the meantime, "sexual harassment in Nigerian institutions of higher level is a problem of considerable magnitude... due to the gravity of the physical, psychological, academic, social and legal implications it may have" (Ohia 2007:1).

Every community has its own culture and an obligation to maintain it. It is the surest way of ensuring stability and peace in our society. Art has been described as a catalyst for change and transformation (BBC, 9-4-00). We need to remind ourselves that drama and literature keep the memory of the people alive. The performing arts departments should not limit themselves to performances during convocation. The fruits of their work should also be frequently relished by the immediate communities as well as the surrounding ones.

It is, of course, evident from my presentation that no style should be imposed. In other words, the culture of the participants should be manifest in their products. Once we inculcate a culture of performance, the community will be enriched from all angles.

It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that looking down on one's indigenous culture is not peculiar to us. From theatre history, we know that Italian academics looked down on their indigenous culture, took foreign (Romans) names and delighted in speaking Latin (Macgowan and Melnitz, 1959:27). We know that the English also looked down on their language which was considered inferior to Latin, the language, of their conquerors. Today, some Nigerians abandon their indigenous languages, while enthroning English. We only hope that we go beyond this state to recognise and develop our cultures. That is the only way we can free ourselves from what Adedeji describes as the syndrome of "colonial mentality" (17).

My advice to our creative artists and scholars is that, in our study of drama, we must rely on sociology because human behaviour which is our subject “is largely shaped by the groups to which people belong and by the social interaction that takes places within those groups” (Robertson, 1981: 4). Bernard Beckerman emphasizes the sociological impact of drama. According to him:

Much has been said about the individuality of our response to a play. But the achievement of drama is its ability to crystallize the response of a random audience. Whatever the individual perception may be, the theatre seeks to override the personal and realise a public effect (1968, 35-36).

From Music, English to Theatre

I became interested in the actor’s craft quite early in life. My acting talents were enhanced in the mid nineteen fifties when I frequented a cinema house owned by a Lebanese family at Coal Camp (Ogbette), Enugu. Lawrence Olivier, starring in William Shakespeare’s *Henry the Fifth*, held me spellbound with his acting skills.

In 1963, shortly after I concluded my secondary school education, I joined a theatre group, called Ogui Players (later renamed Eastern Nigeria Theatre Group), which met weekly at the British Council Building on Ogui Road, Asata Enugu. Its director was Mr. John Ekwere, a producer with the Nigerian Television, Enugu, in which I was a regular singer and guitarist on a popular television programme, called Ukonu’s Club, produced by Mazi Ukonu, a veteran television star. It was in the same programme that Sunny Okosuns began his musical career. At that point in time, I did not have a plan for my future, mainly because my father was unhappy about my activities as a musician, known as Ozzie Melody. He made it clear that he would not sponsor me for further studies, unless I was prepared to study engineering or medicine. After I got a job as a Third Class clerk at the Ministry of Local Government, Enugu, my father confronted me one day and said that I should remove my guitar from our residence or pack out. I chose the second option.

In the meantime, I remained in the Eastern Nigeria Theatre Group, and during a workshop on acting, conducted by a British actress at the British Council, Ogui Road, Enugu, my talents as an actor were revealed, as I was the best actor in a test conducted by the British actress. From then on, Mr. John D Ekwere began taking me very seriously as an actor, even during the Nigeria-Biafra war.

In 1964, an undergraduate of the University of Nigeria, called Emmanuel Igbokwe, whom I taught guitar playing whenever he was on holiday, convinced me to take an entrance to the University. I would have preferred to be admitted to the Department of Music, but I was afraid that my father would not support me. I thought he would be more accommodating if I studied English. But, he remained adamant, after I was admitted to the Department of English. Igbokwe, my friend, tried in vain to convince him. My father lodged a complaint with Dr. Simon Onwu, the first Igbo doctor, and our relation, about my refusal to study medicine or engineering. Dr. Onwu invited me for discussion and afterwards advised my father to allow me to study the course of my choice. Nevertheless, my father refused to pay my school fees at the University of Nigeria. However, he later agreed to give me pocket money every month. This was a pittance.

At that time, first year students were based in the Enugu Campus, so I was able to perform on television every Saturday night, and collect my allowance, the following week. I was able to go on with my studies with my weekly allowance from the Television house, and a stipend from the University of Nigeria Enugu Campus Library where I served part-time. Occasionally, Okosuns and I and others would travel to the television studio at Aba, now in Abia State, on Sunday morning to perform at night. We would return to Enugu early Monday morning so as to go to work.

However, in my second year, I relocated to Nsukka with others. From then on, I could not perform on television every week, and therefore did not collect weekly allowances. Also I could not continue my part-time work in the library. I rented a room somewhere opposite where African Continental Bank is located on University Road. I was downbeat. One day, after telling an undergraduate friend about my intention to withdraw from the University, I saw a notice on a wall of the Hansberry Building where the Department of English was housed at that time. Approaching, I saw that it was an announcement about the University of Nigeria Foundation Bursary Award, given to the best students in the first year. I had never heard of it, but while reading, I saw my name under the Department of English. I could not believe my eyes, but there was no time for doubt. At the Bursary, my first year's school fees were refunded to me, and subsequently, my school fees were paid every session, even after the Nigeria-Biafra war that began in 1967 and ended in 1970.

After the war, students returned to the two campuses to resume studies. It was a very frustrating period. Soldiers frequently raided the hostels to search for arms. To restore life into the campus, I founded the

Oak Theatre, a student theatre group. Our inauguration took place in my room (201 Aja Nwachukwu Hall). I requested Mr. Kalu Uka (now Professor Kalu Uka) to be our patron and director.

Following an excellent performance in the 1971 degree examination, I was appointed a part-time lecturer in the Department of English. In 1972, I was made a junior Research Fellow, but soon after my creative works, especially "The Last Battle" - a story- earned me the Columbia University Writing Fellowship. Like other junior research fellows who won fellowships or scholarships in Europe and the USA, I applied for study leave. Whereas others got approval my application was rejected by the Vice-Chancellor at the time (Prof. H.C. Kodilinye). I resigned my appointment as junior fellow and flew to the United States to register for Master of Fine Arts programme at Columbia University, New York

On completion of my M.F.A., I was admitted to study Theatre Arts at Columbia University. By the time I completed my Master of Philosophy in Theatre, I was very deep into European theatre studies, especially Elizabethan theatre and the modern European theatre. However, I did not write my doctoral thesis on any of them. Rather, I decided to counter the theories that non-Europeans have no drama. I settled for the masked tradition of Igboland. At first, my supervisor, Prof. Bernard Beckerman, a Shakespearean scholar, and intellectual icon, was sceptical and hesitant because of the widely held view that Africans had no indigenous drama, which some African scholars had accepted.

But, just at that time, the *Yale Theatre Journal*, published by Yale University, accepted my article, entitled, "Modern Nigerian Theatre: What Tradition?" On reading the letter accepting my article, Beckerman was elated. He placed his hand on my back and said, "We will work together". Soon after, I earned my Master of philosophy degree. I was appointed an Associate in the Department of English, Columbia University, New York. Before the defence of my doctoral thesis, called dissertation at Columbia University, Beckerman invited me to a restaurant on Broadway to discuss it. To keep the appointment he had postponed his leave. He told me that "Igbo Masks..." had clarified certain issues he was grappling with in a research project and that he would make use of some of my ideas, and acknowledge my contribution. Although he died before the publication of the work, the book he talked about, entitled *Theatrical Presentation: Performer, Audience and Act*, edited by his wife, Gloria and his protégé (William Coco), was published in 1990, with adequate acknowledgement of my work.

The Sub-Department of Dramatic Arts, UNN

From inception, the drama programme in the University of Nigeria was ensconced in the Department of English where it was taught as literature, in spite of the Joint Universities action committee's endorsement of an independent Dramatic Arts in 1965, which was echoed by the Hartle Committee in 1972, the Elton Committee in 1973, etc. (Amankulor, "National Culture, the Arts of the Theatre and the University of Nigeria", 1984:4-5) In 1975, when I had enrolled into the Master of Philosophy programme at Columbia University, I received a letter from Dr. D.I. Nwoga, the Head, Department of English, University of Nigeria, who stated as follows: "I find from your file that you had to resign your appointment before you left for further studies. I hope that does not mean that when you complete your studies, you have no intension of returning to us". In my response, I told him that I would think about it.

Prof. Emmanuel N. Obiechina and Prof. Chinua Achebe also joined in asking me to return, mainly to help start a proposed Sub-Department of Dramatic Arts. Painfully, but with deep respect for my academic mentors, I resigned my appointment at Columbia, despite efforts of Bernard Beckerman to keep me close to him. I returned in 1978 and, with Dr. J.N. Amankulor and Mr. Kalu Uka (now Prof. Kalu Uka) and Dom Asomba, drew up the curriculum for the Sub-Department, which hived off from the Department of English in 1982/83 session. Dr. J.N. Amankulor was the first coordinator of the Sub-Department (1983-1986), followed by Enekwel (1986-1989). The Sub-Department was eventually elevated to a full department in 2004.

My days were actively spent in theatre practice and scholarship. In 1980, the Department of English, under Chinua Achebe, gave me full support for the Oak Theatre production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with which we toured secondary schools in the Eastern States. Earlier, it had been staged for the 1980 convocation. In 1984, I directed the *Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo, as a convocation play for the University of Nigeria. Impressed by the production, the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. F.N. Ndili, with the support of Alhaji Ali Munguno, the then Pro-Chancellor, gave my troupe full financial and logistic support which made it possible for us to perform in the major higher institutions, including University of Benin, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, and University of Port-Harcourt. The troupe also performed in Abuja Capital Territory, under the ministerial control of late General Mamman Vatsa. So, the production

of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, which I directed, is the first modern theatre production in Abuja Capital Territory. In his remarks, Gen. Vatsa said that the production would assure Nigerians of the reality of Abuja Capital Territory. In a Report of the Sub-Department of Dramatic Arts to the Justice Robert Okara led visitation panel, the then Coordinator of the Sub-Department, Dr Amankulor , stated:

In 1983/84 session, our production of the play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, directed by Dr Onuora Ossie Enekwe hit the headlines within the country and abroad as a very successful and meaningful African drama. Its positive lessons in patriotism and nationalism were widely acknowledged, as well as its artistic excellence.

Before the exodus of talented theatre scholars and practitioners, such as late Prof. J.N Amankulor, Kalu Uka (now Professor Uka) Dr. Chimalum Nwankwo, Esiaba Irobi, Eni-Jones Umuko and Osita Okagbue, etc., the Sub-Department was a beehive, presenting a wide variety of plays that touched on various theatre traditions, allowing members to fulfil themselves. I remember fondly that academic staff and students participated as actors, actresses, etc. in the productions. In those years, we had regular productions at noon, under the name Noon Theatre, in Paul Robeson Building where students practised what they were taught. They were encouraged to write plays, direct them or play any other relevant roles. In 1997 and 1998, we went on two very successful tours, on invitation by the Shell Petroleum Club in Warri, to stage Onuora Ossie Enekwe's *Dance of Restoration*, directed by Mr. Felix Egwuda, and Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi*, directed by Mr. Oyibo Eze.

One of the major problems I encountered was frequent abandonment of posts for greener pasture by the academic staff. I also encountered a lot of problems in trying to recover the Paul Robeson Building from the Department of Mass Communication that had virtually taken it over. But, having burnt my boat behind me, I resolved to stay on in order to achieve my dream of improving and strengthening the drama programme at the University of Nigeria. After many years of application to the Postgraduate School, our MA, Ph.D and D.Phil programmes, which I designed, were approved. It was a very encouraging development that showed that drama had at last taken roots in the University of Nigeria.

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