A FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF MARTIN BANHAM

AFRICAN THEATRE IN PERFORMANCE

EDITED BY DELE LAYIWOLA

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Edited by
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Cover illustration: Danda (Sonny Otis) in the landboat, Morris Minnie Moke, with his wife (Fidelma Okwesa), his mother (Victoria Ezekoli), and two ozo title-holders in a scene from *Danda* at Dakar, Senegal, during the 1966 Negro Arts Festival.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

Contemporary Theatre Studies is a book series of special interest to everyone involved in theatre. It consists of monographs on influential figures, studies of movements and ideas in theatre, as well as primary material consisting of theatre-related documents, performing editions of plays in English, and English translations of plays from various vital theatre traditions worldwide.

Franc Chamberlain

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Many thanks are due to friends who have helped in the efforts to edit a festschrift in honour of Martin Banham. Among them, Charles and Barbara Barber of the West Yorkshire Playhouse governing board; playwrights Ola Rotimi and Wale Ogunyemi, as well as teacher and critic Oyin Ogunba. There are other students, but now colleagues, of Martin Banham who contributed original manuscripts: I thank Sonny Oti, Dapo Adelugba, Steve Abah, Robert Kavanagh and Tony Lopez for their forbearance as well as their enthusiasm.

I am grateful to the Institute of African Studies at Ibadan University for institutional and secretarial support.

I cannot but remember the loyalties of friends like Ato Quayson, general editor of the Theatre in African Cultures series spearheaded by Harwood Academic Publishers; editor Franc Chamberlain. Tim and Alison Cribb of Highsett, Cambridge, do not often realise how helpful and nice they have been over the years.

Playwrights Kenule Saro-Wiwa and Dele Charley, two former students of Martin, lost their lives before they could turn in their contributions; the one in a despotic political game, the other in a salutary game of football. May their deserving souls find perfect repose.

At the time I had to spend what might have been family resources on mail, long distance telephone calls and fax messages (as there is no institutional support for these in Nigeria!), my wife, Peju, and son, Okunola, showed understanding and sympathy.

Without authors and publishers whose works are cited and referenced by contributors, this work might have been a slimmer volume than now presented.

D. L.

LIST OF PLATES

INTRODUCTION

The idea of doing a *festschrift* in honour of Martin Banham is somewhat connected to the idea of the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Even more so is the memory of his senior collaborator at Ibadan in the 1950s, Geoffrey Axworthy, with whom he worked as pioneering staff of what is now Theatre Arts Department at Ibadan. In those halcyon days at University College, Ibadan, the School of Drama was just a unit of the Department of English. The present Arts Theatre was formally commissioned in November 1954, although the dining rooms and quadrangles in students' halls have been used as theatre spaces. African theatres have used open spaces and market squares for centuries.

The School of Drama, attached to the Arts Theatre, took off in 1960 with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and Geoffrey Axworthy had the good fortune of becoming its first head. Martin Banham was his assistant, or at least a co-tutor in the School. With a background of an indigenous vibrant theatre tradition and the influence of a largely European expatriate community, a lot of European plays were performed. Plays of Bernard Shaw, André Obey, Shakespeare, Gogol, Anouilh, Ibsen, Fry, Pinero, Miller, Dryden, Webster, Frisch, Mortimer, Wilder, Jonson, Yeats, Dürrenmatt, Congreve, Molière, Behan, Beckett and Pinter.

It is obvious from the list that no particular style or tradition was consciously adopted, but the variety of backgrounds prepared the way for a flourish of talents among actors and actresses such as Remi Adeleye, Ralph Opara, Dapo Adelugba, Demas Nwoko, Elizabeth Osisioma, Fola Aboaba, Wole Soyinka, Emmanuel Avbiorokoma, Sonni Oti, Fidelma Okwesa, Albert Egbe, Wale Amele, Aliyu Doma, Victoria Ezeokoli, Abiola Irele, etc. Even theatre patrons like John Ferguson and Harold Preston, who were senior members of the University community, became amateur actors in the Arts Theatre. Such was the enthusiasm that fledgling scholars and artists of the time began to think of a comparative study of African festivals and European theatre. Oyin Ogunba observes that Martin Banham influenced him in this regard. Two contributors in this anthology, Dapo Adelugba and Sonny Oti, were products of the same encounter.

Though the traditional theatres of the *Alarinjo troupes* (traditional travelling theatres) and those of the modern professional guilds, namely

those of Ogunmola, Ladipo and their various imitators were contemporaneous with the new School of Drama and the Arts Theatre, the traditional practitioners often had to refer to the 'travelling theatre' of Ibadan University for company and camaraderie. This was important for healthy growth and the development of a new tradition which would cater for the changing needs of an emergent elite. In 1960, with the help of a Rockefeller grant, the School of Drama brought in Kola Ogunmola to infuse some traditional techniques into the practice of its productions; Ogunmola also benefited from techniques of scripting, stage adaptation and acting. In September 1960, this new collaboration gave birth to the production of ***The Palmwine Drunkard***, a Yoruba opera which was adapted from Amos Tutuola's folk story of the same title published in 1952. It is the same development that attracted Duro Ladipo, the leading Nigerian tragedian, to a residency fellowship at the Institute of African Studies of the University.

Duro Ladipo had come to occupy a unique place in the development of Nigerian theatre for many reasons. The genre he practised imposed a neo-Aristotelian form on his operas and he had to study portraits and character-drawing with a greater profundity since tragedies require larger than life characterisation and portraiture contrasts. He therefore did well with his adoption of historical themes and the proscenium arch, rather than theatre in the round as folk dramas and festivals often do. In his conscious elucidation of historical themes, Wale Ogunyemi, artist-in-residence at the Institute of African Studies and also a contributor to this anthology, has been Ladipo's most accomplished protégé to date. Ogunyemi's theatre is more akin to Ladipo's than even to Wole Soyinka's in which he cut his dramatic teeth.

Before 1960, the School of Drama moved close to indigenous theatre tradition through local adaptations of European theatre, for instance the adaptation, by Geoffrey Axworthy, of Molière's ***Les Fouberies de Scapin*** as ***The Scoundrel Suberu***; and the adaptation of ***Danda*** from Nkem Nwankwo's novel of the same name. Incidentally, contributors to two of the early chapters, Dapo Adelugba and Sonny Oti, acted Suberu and Danda respectively. From 1960 onwards, the collaboration with those indigenous artists made it possible for both European-style traditions to grow in a symbiotic fashion with plays of indigenous playwrights in the indigenous languages.

In 1970/71 therefore, when the School of Drama became a full-fledged University Department offering an honours degree in Drama, the ground had been prepared for a kind of seminal intellectual tradition. A multitude of the diploma-holders and graduates from the Department of Drama are to be found in positions of responsibility around Nigeria. But because Nigeria does not have a policy of professional Actors' Equity as it is in Europe, many of them have had to diversify into other fields of

endeavour. It is therefore difficult for a professional actor or theatre director to live entirely on his craft because indigenous theatre is everywhere and cannot be privatised. A lot of theatre is seen at festivals, ceremonies and ad-hoc performances, much like the ubiquitous wood carvings. For as long as this remains so, an actors' guild of the European kind is still a thing of the future.

This notwithstanding, the Arts Theatre became the experimental ground for the plays of Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, Wale Ogunyemi, Bode Sowande and a host of budding playwrights attached to the School. In the recent past, too, the Arts Theatre has been the hub of theatrical activities for visiting companies and distinguished artists sponsored by the British Council, the American Cultural Center, the Alliance Française and the Goethe Institut.

It is true that the legacy of Theatre in Education, or Theatre on Wheels as the Ibadan travelling theatre was called, has slowed down a bit, and it runs the risk of succumbing to total collapse partly for lack of resources and partly for the ebbing enthusiasm of successive staff and leadership of the University – but this is just by way of rationalisation. The structural problems within the universities and in Nigeria as an underdeveloped nation are far more responsible for this state of affairs than any single individual or group. Thus it is for many reasons that the influence of the Ibadan School of Drama has waned. The University of Ife (presently Obafemi Awolowo University) and the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria have tried their hands at the concept of Theatre in Education or travelling theatres as well. That of Ife was known as the Guerilla Theatre, and that of Zaria as the Samaru Project, but the impact of these will continue to be a controversial subject for the future.

The place of Martin Banham in all these is not only traceable to his days at Ibadan but to his later contribution to the training and promotion of British as well as African students in teaching and research. Since editing ***Nigerian Student Verse*** at Ibadan in 1959, and helping to found the poetry journal, ***The Horn***, he has published widely in areas of British and African theatre and has done over thirty-five drama productions in Africa, Britain and the USA. At research level he has supervised at least twenty dissertations on various aspects of African dramas. He has been external examiner to over two dozen universities. He has been independent external assessor for Professor above scale for the University of California at Davis; University of Ilorin, Nigeria; University of Cape Town, South Africa; University of Virginia; University of Malawi and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

Martin has been Advisor to King Alfred's College, Winchester, for CNNA degree proposals in Drama and Television. He was on the Board of Governors of the Georgian Theatre Royal, Richmond, from 1977 to 1978; has been Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Leeds

Theatre Trust; is a member of the Board of Governors, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Yorkshire Arts Association from 1972 to 1982. He was a member of the Board of Governors, Acacia Theatre Trust, London, from 1980 to 1987; was a member of the Board of Phoenix Dance Theatre from 1985 to 1990. Martin's magnum opus, to date, has been his editorship of ***The Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*** (1988).

When Martin turned sixty on 8 December 1992, his flowing auburn hair continued to flourish as it had nearly forty years previously. The image of the "Young Martin" that Adelubga describes re-established itself again. Without a shadow of doubt, Martin will remain agile in the years ahead. Whilst we toast his health and good fortune, we look forward to further contributions in the field he can call his own – the practice of theatre. His response to the efforts on this *festschrift* appears thus:

> Many thanks for your kind letter and for your kind and generous comment about a *festschrift* on the occasion of my 60th birthday. I am touched and flattered by the thought and would regard it as a great privilege. Should such a project materialise, I would like it to represent my interest in and commitment to African theatre, and for contributors to be scholars and artists in that field specifically. It would be nice to think that original creative material could co-exist with scholarly material.

Well, such a project has materialised after 1992 and reflects his wish for a conflation of artistic and scholarly material. The facts remain that many more of Martin's students (later colleagues) might have contributed had they the time, effort or knowledge of the project. Included are all the contributions returned from a comprehensive list of his African students that he kindly made available. The final work is here just before Martin is sixty-seven. It is hoped that any future edition would contain twice the number of contributions to this present anthology.

With all good fortune for everyone's future.

Dele Layiwola

1

PROFESSOR MARTIN BANHAM: A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

Dapo Adelugba

Although Martin Banham is now sixty, it is the image of 'young Martin' that remains indelible. Born in December 1932, he came to Nigeria in September 1956 at the age of twenty-three to teach literature at the invitation of Molly Mahood. I was to come under his influence two years later when I was admitted to the University College, Ibadan, U.C.I., then a college of the University of London, in September 1958.

Martin Banham was at Ibadan during the "fences" disturbances of the 1956/57 academic session. He was said to have put up on the Notice Board in the Department of English, in the spirit of camaraderie, two significant lines from a metaphysical poem,

> "Stone walls do not a prison make
> Nor iron bars a cage."

This piece of witticism was dearly paid for by the young enthusiast, as gossip had it at that time.

Be that as it may, the image of a handsome, young intellectual with flowing, auburn hair, in white shirt and white shorts, smiling urbanely as he walks past colleagues and students on the Faculty of Arts corridors, remains vivid in my memory and I daresay also in the memories of most students of English at Ibadan in the middle to late 1950s.

I was Martin Banham's student in my "suspense year," the 1958/59 academic session. His fluency of speech and felicity in phrasing, his wit and humour, his originality in literary appreciation, his warm humanity and his love of the theatre became evident within the first few months of my association with him. In the three years of the English Honours programme I pursued from 1959 to 1962, I came to know Martin Banham and my other lecturers and our Professor, Molly Mahood, quite well. The Ibadan programme had a strong Oxbridge flavour and the tutorial system was very effective. Molly herself is an Oxonian and was already a well published scholar during my years as an undergraduate. She was very close to her students and colleagues and she invited each set of English Honours students to dinner in her house once a term. We were indeed very proud to be 'Mahoodians'.

Since a bit of university gossip, especially with the present benefit of distance in time, is unlikely to hurt anyone, it may not be out of place to reveal here that, as students, we were aware at that time of the constant by-play between Professor Molly Mahood and her two lecturers who were, in her view, perhaps a little too devoted to the theatre. Professor Mahood, a scholar of Shakespearean drama and poetry, was not against the love Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham showed for the theatre but she probably felt that they spent too much time at the Arts Theatre.

Nonetheless, the turn of events was to favour the theatre buffs. When the university started a School of Drama in 1962/63 with the assistance of a Rockefeller Foundation grant, Geoffrey J. Axworthy was on the spot to head it as Director and Martin Banham to assist him as Deputy Director. Correspondence in the files reveals that Professor Molly Mahood supported the candidacy of both Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham for the new positions for which their work at the Arts Theatre, ironically, seemed to have prepared them. Molly Mahood eagerly looked forward to the growth, in subsequent decades, of drama and theatre in Nigeria which she believed the School of Drama would help to promote. Time has proved her right.

If Martin Banham's contribution to the work of the Department of English at U.C.I. was commendable, his input in the years he spent at the School of Drama – 1962 to 1966 – was even more significant. He proved an effective lecturer in dramatic literature, dramatic criticism and theatre history as well as a good actor/actor-trainer, a good director and all-round man of the theatre. He also proved his mettle as an administrator. A good and prompt correspondent, Martin Banham was relied upon by Geoffrey Axworthy to do most of the official correspondence for the School of Drama during their years of collaboration.

In his ten years at Ibadan (1956–1966) Martin Banham contributed effectively to the growth of literature, drama and theatre arts as a lecturer, a trainer of actors, of directors and of theatre personnel in general, an arts connoisseur and critic, an arts administrator, an actor, a director, a promoter of student creative writing and productions, a broad-minded, intelligent and forward-looking pioneer and leader.

I had a direct exposure to his meticulousness as a theatre director in 1965 when I was invited from my teaching base at the Ibadan Grammar School to play the Tramp in Martin Banham's production, for the University of Ibadan Yeats Centenary celebrations, of *The Pot of Broth*. Ebun Clark, one of the lecturers at the Ibadan School of Drama who was later to do an M.Phil. at Leeds under Martin's supervision, played the role of the lady of the house in the same production. Ebun and her husband, J.P. Clark, were and have remained good friends to Martin.

Both in the Arts Theatre Production Group (ATPG), which he pioneered along with others like Geoffrey Axworthy and Harold Preston,

and in other drama and music groups of Ibadan, Martin Banham acted in a wide variety of plays, musicals and operas and directed a good range of plays in the Euro-American world repertory from the classical to the modern period.

The most remarkable aspect of Martin's decade at Ibadan was the constancy of his warm encouragement of and participation in staff and student initiatives. He published in 1960 an anthology entitled *Nigerian Student Verse,* choosing the most qualitative poems from the student-edited poetry/criticism magazine, *The Horn* (of which John Pepper Clark was pioneer editor), and from a few other student magazines. With Geoffrey Axworthy and George Jackson, he was supportive of the initiatives of the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society (UCIDS), a student group which took plays round the dining halls of the Halls of Residence, when the Arts Theatre was closed for repairs in 1960, and which embarked on country-wide tours during Easter vacations in the early 1960s along the lines of a national student policy to interact with the nation outside the ivory towers. The Theatre-on-Wheels in 1964 was a further development by Geoffrey Axworthy and his technical director, William Brown, of this initiative when the School of Drama celebrated the quatrecentenary of William Shakespeare's birth with a country-wide tour of excerpts from selected plays by the bard.

Martin Banham's literary and dramatic criticism has always shown his concern for high standards and an appreciation, even when it is severe, of honest effort. His reviews in *Ibadan* (edited by Molly Mahood), *The Horn* and in other academic and student journals and magazines show his perspicaciousness, his cosmopolitanism, his wit and humour, and would make excellent reading even today.

Professor Martin Banham has, in the twenty-six years since his return to Great Britain, become a central figure in African drama and theatre studies. He is one of the few academics occupying Drama and Theatre chairs in the United Kingdom today, and that is no mean achievement. But the work Martin did in the 1956–1966 period at Ibadan and in Nigeria stands out in its own right and looks, in retrospect, like his rehearsal for the Leeds revolution. It prepared him for his return to his *alma mater,* the University of Leeds School of English, which his Workshop Theatre has put in a key position in the drama and theatre studies map of the world on account of his firm commitment to the duality and complementarity of theory and practice.

"A merry heart goes all the way". Martin Banham's constant smile is a source of encouragement to his colleagues and students even in the most difficult and trying moments. Martin is a marvellously amiable and extremely helpful person who takes joy in the progress and success of other people. He has no room for pettiness in his heart. For example, he played a very active role in the award ceremonies of the

honorary D.Litt. of Leeds in 1973 for Wọle Soyinka (who was his junior in the Leeds English Honours programme in the 1950s) and he reportedly drove Soyinka around Leeds to find an appropriate suit to hire for the occasion. They both enjoyed that very much.

As External Examiner from 1969 to 1972, Martin Banham helped once again in the development of the University of Ibadan School of Drama during the period of Wọle Soyinka's leadership. Martin was also a constant visitor to other African countries, such as Ghana and Sierra Leone, as resource person for workshop, seminars and conferences in drama/theatre arts in the late 1960s and in the 1970s.

Martin Banham's books and articles constitute a remarkable output. *His African Theatre Today*, co-authored with Clive Wake, his *Drama in Education* co-edited with John Hodgson, and his edited *magnum opus, Cambridge Guide to World Theatre*, compiled with the collaboration of a small team of top-flight scholars in various continents as Editorial consultants, are significant landmarks. But his practical work in the theatre must always be taken into consideration in an assessment of his contribution to knowledge, ideas and skills. The Leeds Workshop Theatre has deservedly earned a high reputation in the two and a half decades of Martin's directorship of it.

Professor Martin Banham is today a central figure in Drama and theatre studies on a global level. We at Ibadan in particular and in Nigeria in general take great pride in his achievements and, in warmly wishing him more successes in the years ahead, we implore him to keep up all his good qualities and to keep the flag of excellence flying. We believe that there is a lot more yet to be accomplished. For, after all, life begins at sixty.

2

BROKEN MIRRORS: ART AND ACTUALITY IN ZIMBABWEAN THEATRE

Robert McLaren

Theatre in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe shares with other nations colonized by the British a theatre history characterized by indigenous dramatic forms suppressed in favour of white minority colonial theatre. The armed struggle for independence was also a struggle for cultural renewal and the revival of traditional performance in the service of the liberation struggle. At independence the revolutionary thrust encountered established colonial cultural institutions and practices. While the latter dominate at the public and media level, a new flourishing of democratic theatre at grassroots level has swept the country in recent years, producing numerous full-time theatre groups which carry theatre to every province.[1]

In the early years the theatre of these groups was politically engaged, often socialist or anti-apartheid in content. Since then the world has seen the collapse of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself. Apartheid in South Africa has collapsed with the birth of majority rule. In Zimbabwe an IMF Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) has been imposed, hurling the population, including the artist, into the jungle of so-called Free Market Forces. All these momentous changes have transformed the activity of the community-based theatre groups. Either to survive or simply in order to swim with the tide, most have abandoned the earlier political and socialist thrust for anything that will secure them financial assistance from donor agencies or big business or yield commercial profit.

The University of Zimbabwe began practical drama courses in 1985. In addition to productions and projects resulting from course work, the University organized extra-curricular productions and established a political theatre group, Zambuko/Izibuko ('river-crossing' in Shona and

[1] For more information on theatre in Zimbabwe see M. Banham (ed) *The Cambridge Guide To World Theatre* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 1098–9, R. Zinyemba, *Zimbabwean Drama* (Mambo, Gweru, 1986), *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 2 (June, 1990) and Faculty of Arts Drama, *The Zimbabwean Theatre Report: 1988 Retrospective* (University of Zimbabwe, Harare, 1989).

Ndebele).[2] Such activities have been open for all Zimbabweans to participate in. The aims and objectives of drama at the University of Zimbabwe were stated to be the following:

1. The determination to base our work in the lives, experiences, thoughts and culture of the Zimbabwean people and their brothers and sisters in others parts of Africa and the progressive world.
2. The effort to develop an ideological direction in key with the most progressive elements in Zimbabwean society as represented by the liberation struggle, the struggle for majority rule, the struggle against racism, colonialism and imperialism, and the struggle for a socialist Zimbabwe.

(Drama, Faculty of Arts, University of Zimbabwe)

"Disrupting the Spectacle"

In Gunter Grass's play, *The Plebeians Rehearse the Uprising*, the playwright has Bertolt Brecht rehearsing his version of *Coriolanus* when the Berlin Uprising of 1953 breaks out. *Coriolanus*, as you will recall, begins with a plebeians' uprising against the dearth of corn. Grass's play thus explores a moment when a revolutionary playwright, rehearsing an uprising in art, is overtaken by an uprising in actuality.

In South Africa a Soweto group performs in the street. In the play they perform, political prisoners are ceremoniously called out of jail. The police arrive and put an end to the ceremony. At that precise moment the police do arrive and "disrupt the spectacle" – not with dramatic impersonations but the Casspirs, guns and teargas of actual South African police. The actors jump fences and disappear behind the houses to re-group and perform again elsewhere. Again actuality has invaded art – with the important difference that in the Soweto example it is not the artifice of a playwright but a scene from life and death reality.[3]

In Africa art and actuality constantly overlay and part. Where modern drama is known and performed, art articulates itself as something distinct from actuality but only temporarily and with fragility. The performance and spectator/participant norms of many modern African plays take this for granted. This is especially so in the case of ritual where the performed act and the real thing are difficult to distance from each other.[4]

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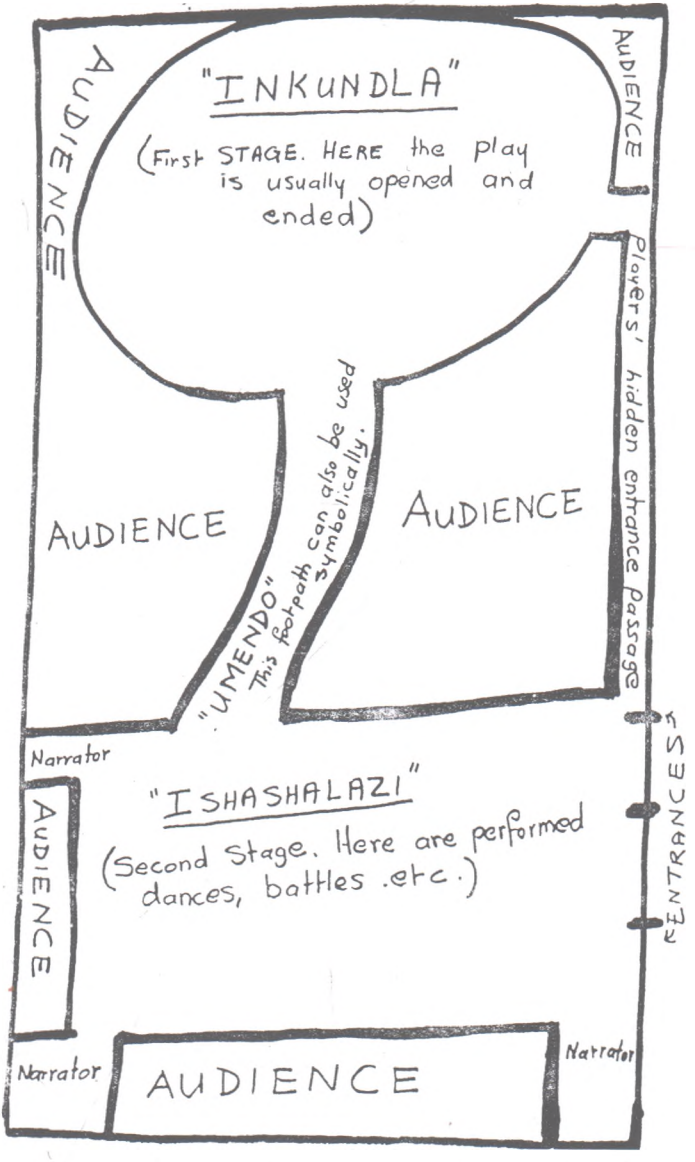
[2] See R.M. McLaren, "Theatre on the Frontline: the Political Theatre of Zambuko/Izibuko", in *TDR*, 36, 1 (Spring, 1992), pp. 90–115.

[3] A.Osipov, "African People's Theatre" (Novosti Press Agency Feature).

[4] J.P. Clark's plays in particular feature extensive use of and reference to ritual. See *Song of a Goat* in *Three Plays* (London, 1964) and *Ozidi* (London, 1966) especially the ritual preparations for the performance in the case of the latter. Also see the ritual preparations for narrative which are painstakingly followed in J. de Graft, *Muntu* (London, 1977) and E. Sutherland, *The Marriage of Anansewa* (London, 1975), as well as in C. Mutwa's *uNosilimela* (see below).



1. Stage plan by Mutova for the original production of *uNosilimela*

Staging and blocking in Africa, too, tend to facilitate this. Semi-arena, in-the-round and multiple staging are common forms. If actors play to each other by facing those they are talking or relating to in the play, the audience feels excluded and can soon become restive. Thus

opening out the action and the dialogue to include the audience is a common element of blocking in African theatre.

The work of Credo Mutwa, whose *uNosilimela*[5] is an attempt to recreate the original staging of traditional Zulu performance and adapt it to modern theatre, is full of scenes in which there is nothing to separate the spectator and the action except the tenuous and repeatedly ruptured veil of art. The wedding scene in *uNosilimela* is an example of a ceremony which, in real life, it is not normal to sit or stand and watch without joining in. In the theatre, especially where the staging encourages it, the audience therefore naturally participates in it and the fictional wedding is recreated for a moment as real – until the script reasserts itself and the veil re-descends.

Not only traditional rituals such as weddings and funerals are transformed in this way but so are more modern ones, like the political meeting, for example. Two plays by the Zimbabwean political theatre group, Zambuko/Izibuko, illustrate this, namely *Katshaa!* and *Samora Continua*.[6]

The first is an anti-apartheid agit-prop based in the *pungwe*. *Pungwes* were the all-night political meetings in the countryside at which the Zimbabwean freedom-fighters educated the peasant masses as to the aims of the struggle for independence through a mixture of slogans, speeches, songs, dances and at times dramatic sketches.

There are moments during the performance of the play, especially when the audience has had first-hand experience of the *pungwes* of the liberation struggle, that the theatre or art event is transformed and the audience actually takes over from the actors the initiation and the performance of songs and dances.

Samora Continua is a documentary play on the contemporary history of Mozambique. The use of slides showing actual places and people ensures that the element of reality as opposed to art and fiction remains strong throughout. The fact that the play is a commemoration of Samora Machel, a real person, recently killed in an aircrash, also constantly undermines its artificial framework.

There is one moment in the play when the artificial fabric is totally, though only temporarily, swept away. This is when the actors call on the

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[5] For the text of this play see G. Kente, *South African People's Plays* (London, 1981). Mutwa has written articles on early African theatre in *S'ketsh' Magazine* (Johannesburg, Summer 1973 and Summer 1974/5). There is also a review of the performance of the play in the latter. See also my article "South Africa: Where Mvelinqangi Still Limps (The Experimental Theatre of Workshop '71) in *Yale Theatre*, 8. 1 (1976), pp. 38–48. The stage plan of Mutwa's play is reprinted here.

[6] G. Kente, *South African People's Plays* (London, 1981), p. 127. The text of the play by Workshop '71 is published in this collection.

audience to sing "Kanimambo", the song that came to be very closely associated with the late President Machel. Generally a Zimbabwean audience will sing it together with the actors. At the official opening of the play in 1988 the entire audience stood up to sing it so that actors and audience joined in an act which was definitely no longer artifice but, in the same sense that the political meeting as ritual is more than art, real.

Art and actuality I

In March, 1988, students at the University of Zimbabwe demonstrated. Student numbers had gone up from 800 before independence to 8,000 and this plus the generally worsening accommodation and transport situation in the country as a whole had led to serious difficulties. In addition, and probably the main student grievance, their loan and grant had not been increased as promised earlier despite the ever-increasing cost of living.

The demonstration closed down the campus. Lectures were cancelled and barricades erected at all exits. The police were called and the ensuing confrontation resulted in injuries and teargas cannisters being fired into the residences.

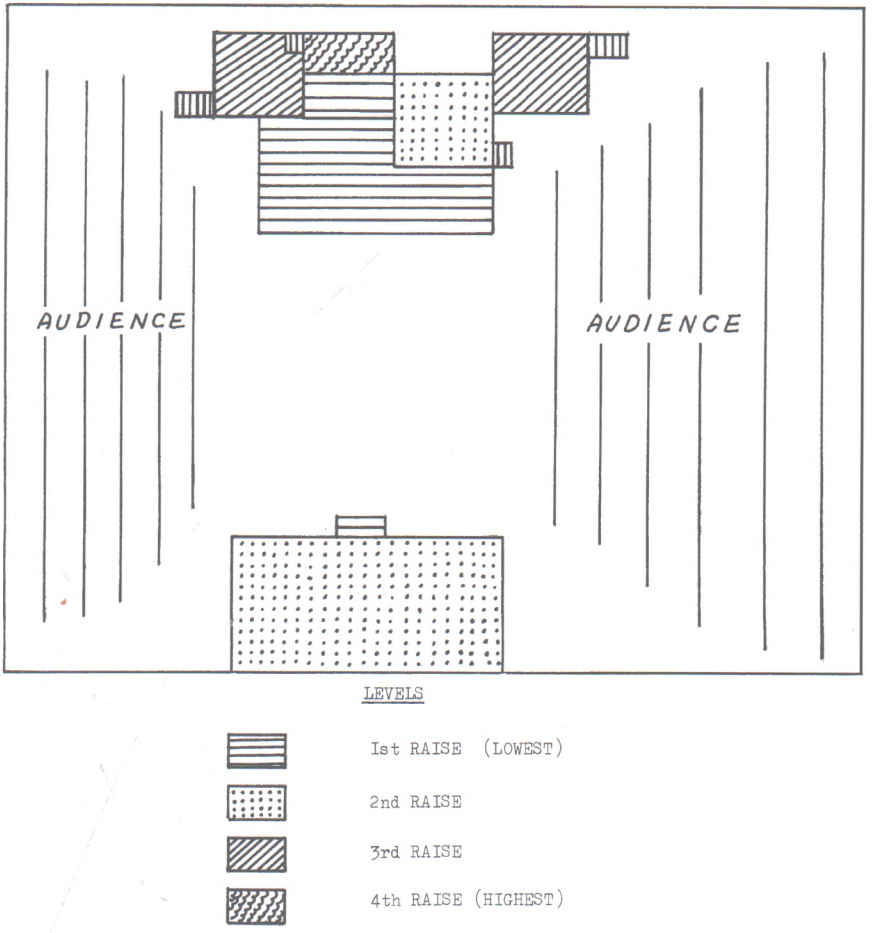
Subsequently students in the African Languages Department, working on a play in the Practical Drama I course, decided that they would make a play on the University. Ultimately entitled *Chokwadi Ndechipi* (Shona) or *Iqiniso Yiliphi* (Ndebele), literally translated as 'which is the truth?', the play depicted the expectations of families of students of different ethnic and class backgrounds, the disorienting experience of so-called 'Orientation week', the mad scramble for transport to and from the campus, a variety of bad lecturing practices, problems of inefficiency and favouritism at the library, sexual and other excesses after payout, the build-up to the demonstration, the demonstration itself, conflicting views in the community about the demonstration, and the loves and sorrows of selected private lives, which running through the material, provided a skein of plot coherence.

At the halfway stage a 'workshop performance' took place i.e. a run with discussion of the play in progress without technical back-up before an invited audience. The University Administration, the Dean of Students, the Students Representative Council and other students were invited. The administration sent a representative from the Information Office, they did not attend. Comments and suggestions offered after the run were weighed and where considered appropriate, incorporated into the play.

Finally the play was ready, the dress rehearsal had taken place and the stage was set for the opening. (See the stage plan). The cast were to assemble at 3 p.m. in the afternoon on the day of the first performance, a scheduled drama slot, in order to discuss the points arising from the

previous night's dress rehearsal and rehearse one or two sections, including the demonstration scene.

Meanwhile there had been no lectures during the morning session as the new SRC had called for an 'anti-corruption' demonstration. This was aimed at the escalating incidence of alleged corruption in the leadership of the party and government. The demonstration was scheduled to be over by lunchtime. However in the morning when the demonstrators attempted to leave the campus and move towards the city, they found a large presence of police blocking their way. It was subsequently discovered that the whole campus had been sealed off and no-one was being allowed in or out.



2. Stage plan for *Chokwadi Ndechipi/Iqiniso Yiliphi*

This provoked an angry reaction from the demonstrators and it was not long before stones were thrown and teargas fired. The police then advanced onto the campus, pursuing demonstrators wherever they could be found. This soon degenerated into pursuing *students* wherever they could be found and firing teargas cannisters into the residence dining rooms and even into dormitory cubicles.

The cast of *Chokwadi Ndechipi/Iqiniso Yiliphi* duly assembled at 3 p.m. with a number missing, either because they were caught up in onward-going scuffles with the police or because they had not come to campus in order to avoid the demonstration. They attempted to go through the points of the dress rehearsal but before they could get on to the demonstration scene, an ASM informed them that their beds and dustbins had been commandeered by demonstrators for barricades on the road outside.

Actuality already beginning to invade the world of art. Like Brecht and his actors rehearsing the uprising, they are rehearsing the March demonstration while a new demonstration is taking place all about them. The dustbins they are to use for the barricades in the theatre have been removed to serve as real barricades outside it. They are having a problem representing dramatically the firing of teargas and its effects in their stage demo. The police oblige by firing real teargas and soon the atmosphere in the hall makes it impossible for them to continue. The actors then move out of the theatre and, unlike Grass's, melt into the small groups of students manning the barricades or baiting the police. The Dean emerges through mists of teargas clutching a white handkerchief to his face to say that it is not quite the right 'atmosphere' for a performance and that the opening that night should be cancelled. It is and so are the following two attempts to open the play as efforts by the students to carry the demonstration to town and the running scuffles with the police continue into the weekend.

It is only when the real demonstration ends that their artistic recreation can take place, much in the same way that the play, *Survival*, and its closure by the police during the Soweto uprising in 1976 demonstrated that 'conventional performances of a play, no matter how militant, had become anachronistic, impossible, even a little ridiculous'.

Each night as *Chokwadi Ndechipi/Iqiniso Yiliphi* is performed in the totally, claustrophobically packed theatre, the March demonstrations are staged but provoke responses from the audience, many of whom participated in both demos, that seem to suggest they are being relived. In addition, although the demo depicted in the play is the March one, by close association and because the actors themselves incorporate the more recent material, it begins to defy the dramatic context and take on characteristics which definitely suggest that of the previous week.

Art and actuality II

The police-student feud had begun in 1986 after the killing of Samora Machel. Incensed by the murder of Samora by the Botha regime, students poured into the city centre and attacked the South African Trade Mission, the offices of South African Airways, the Malawi High Commission and the United States Embassy. The police were caught unawares. Significant damage was done and a number of people injured. The police never allowed themselves to be caught unprepared again and subsequent police appearances on campus have instead been characterized by over-reaction.

One example should suffice. Again a play – the performance of *Ndiwo Upenyu Here/Yiyo Impilo Na* (Is This Life). Halfway through the performance the actors and the audience became aware of a noisy and violent situation developing outside. It was a police–student confrontation. Police had been called when students refusing to pay to see the film, *Rambo*, which was to be screened at a nearby auditorium, forced their way in. When the police arrived it is reported they began assaulting every student in sight, including those who where queuing to pay to go in. Students retreated and began breaking up flagstones outside the theatre and hurling them, along with taunts of various degrees of provokation, at the police. The police advanced and drove the students into the residences where they and others not in any way involved in the confrontation were beaten.

The actors in the theatre preserving perfect discipline, performed the play with great courage and concentration to the end. One actress however had the misfortune to encounter a party of police as she made her way from the theatre to her room after the performance. She was severely beaten up and ended up in hospital with injuries which a year later had not yet healed. No charges were pressed.

By 1988 this and similar confrontations had created a situation in which police–student relations had seriously deteriorated.

Students doing Practical Drama do an introductory first course in which they make and perform their own play, like those who created *Chokwadi Ndechipi/Iqiniso Yiliphi* and *Ndiwo Upenyu Here/Yiyo Impilo Na*, and then a follow up in which they use that experience to work off campus making plays with the community.

In 1986, the first year in which the course had been offered, students worked at the King George VI barracks, the Central Prison, Parirenyatwa Hospital Nurses Home and in Mbare with a women's club. In 1987 they worked with unemployed youth in Highfield, mounted an STD awareness campaign on campus and made a play on right and wrong conduct with the Zimbabwe Republic Police Public Relations Department. At the performance of the police play, to police recruits at the Tomlinson Depot in Harare, it was recommended that the work should continue.

The experience in drama and playmaking was seen by the police as a valuable one and the association with students from the University as an important exercise in bridge-building.

The 1988 class decided that the work with the police should indeed continue and a number of students, including one who had worked with them the previous year, volunteered.

The first demonstration of March, 1988, had already taken place and this had substantially exacerbated the tensions between students and police. Work however began in June. At the first meeting it was agreed that police and students would work on a play focussing on police–student relations and this would be performed to a mixed police/student audience at one of the police depots and again on the university campus. The students were to research student attitudes to the police and the police were to do the same amongst their own colleagues.

The students duly did their research and presented it at the next meeting. They did not mince words. They told the police that students regard them as 'frustrated people' who 'suffer from inferiority complex and cover up their inferiority complex in violence' (Mukaronda, p. 3). 'The police are only seen on campus in times of crisis'. Their involvement in the boycott of classes was questioned. The police are seen as 'the devil's angels'. 'They are there to protect the interests of the ruling class and not the people.' At this point the police intervened, explaining that their constitution determined their duties. This was drawn up in 1965 i.e. in the colonial era, and revised in 1980 at independence. When the students asked what had changed in the revision except for the name of the police force, they were unable to say.

The students went on to say that 'the source of the police–student conflict was ... to be found in the socio-political and economic situation of Zimbabwe. The conflict was thus primarily between state and students. The police were only being used as the state's repressive machinery.'

Finally the students alleged that the police had been unduly influenced by the 'lies' in the 'state-controlled *Herald*' newspaper, in particular an editorial entitled 'Goalless UZ students'.

The police had done no research into police attitudes and there ensued a confrontational and emotional debate on the student research. As one student admitted: 'The students tended to be emotional and were set to persuade the police that they were wrong and we were right. As such we had the same weakness as the police.' (Mukaronda, p. 6) Ultimately they were able to agree on a storyline but at the next meeting the police instead announced that they would prefer the students to help them on a series of Police Files for Zimbabwe Television. The students decided to be flexible and work began on this but soon collapsed and the storyline was taken up again. At almost every rehearsal, on the days that any came at all, the police who attended were different, which meant

constant re-casting. And then the October anti-corruption demonstration took place. One of the students in the project was a member of the Students Representative Council that had called for the demonstration. Relations between the police and the University students generally were now so bad it became impossible for the police involved in the project to come on to campus to pick the students up for rehearsal and difficult for the students to continue to work with the police at all. Students also reported that the police no longer trusted them and 'were afraid and unsure of our stand after the demonstration'. (Muchirahondo, p. 6)

However the students decide to persevere and miraculously a presentation date materialises. The single performance is to be at the Tomlinson Depot again. Students from other drama courses are bused to the depot and there is a respectable audience of young policemen. The play is called *Imi Munozvionawo Sei* (What do you think of it? or How do you see it?) Before the play begins there is a song, 'Pamberi nekubatana' (Forward with Unity, i.e. between the police and students). The student actors and the police actors sing and dance together among the audience. Some members of the audience join in, others show signs of wishing to do so but the actors are not sufficiently confident to draw them in. Then the narrator introduces the play.

The play is structured in four scenes, each of which is followed by the narrator, who attempts to open a discussion with the audience on what they have just seen. At the end of the play the narrator, a student, hands over to a police officer, who chairs a general discussion of the whole play.

The first scene is at a roadblock where students travelling in a bus produce their university instead of national identity cards. They are harassed and delayed by police, who have previously been shown discussing the offending *Herald* editorial, 'Goalless UZ Students'.

The second scene is set on campus. The two students of the bus incident have missed their supper as a result of being delayed. Just then a policeman on a bicycle appears and they exact revenge by giving him inaccurate directions.

In the third scene the two students clash with a man over a lady in a bar. He reveals that he is a high-ranking police officer. The students refuse to back off and they are locked up at the officer's instructions.

The fourth and final scene is the demonstration. Hooligans amongst the students begin to throw stones. The police retaliate with teargas and our two students are arrested and hauled off to the police station.

A frank and, though controlled, emotional discussion takes place in which students and police in the audience trade verbal blows. The dialogue is still at the level of accusation and counteraccusation. It cannot really make progress until both police and students are prepared to

indulge in self-criticism. All parties agree that the contact should be continued though the police are disappointed that the same performance cannot be re-staged on the University campus, as originally planned.

An interesting use of theatre, perhaps. But what does all this have to do with the idea we have been pursuing, namely art and actuality?

Already, of course, it will have been noted that the events of real-life are being recreated in a remarkably, even uncomfortably, lifelike form. Real police acting police confronting real students acting students before an audience of police and students in a police depot. The slender veil of fiction is regularly drawn aside by the discussion that follows each scene and the play itself.

There is more, much more to it, than this. Not only have some of the students participated in the actual demonstration depicted in the play but one in particular is a member of the SRC that has called for it – and he is playing one of the two students who are arrested at the demonstration.

Halfway through the performance news reaches him that he is wanted urgently at real-life police headquarters. He does not want to go. He is frightened about what will happen to him. The play continues and a police officer offers to help him. He leaves the play during the discussion and they go to police headquarters where the student is informed that he is being charged for his part in the recent anti-corruption demonstration.

Thus a student who in a play is arrested for his part in a demo is arrested in real life for his part in the very demo in which the play depicts him being arrested.

Savouring the ambiguities of this particular invasion of art by actuality would be less acceptable if one was not able to report that all charges against the four lecturers and the students, including our actor, were dropped.

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3

*WHEN CRIMINALS TURN JUDGES**

Ola Rotimi

SETTING

A scraggly clearing in a remote section of a village in Okitipupa, Ondo State, Nigeria. A few years after the end of the Nigerian civil war.

CHARACTERS

Bar Jesus	a village, footpath preacher. About sixty-two.
Akin	a big-boned jailbird and village layabout. In his thirties.
Jide	his gambling mate of the same criminal hue – if a wee bit more on the sly side.
Boy	about nine.
Laguna	relaxedly affluent village businessman. Mid-fortyish.
Ebun	woman in her late twenties.
Abu	her husband, victim of an amputation which has since consigned him to dependence on crutches. Early thirties.

* * *

Bar Jesus: And they shall perish in fire and brimstone!

Akin: Gods! Another weekend crawls by, and no woman for me! Se you get?

Jide: My problem is money! God knows.

Bar Jesus: The sword of Gabriel shall rise on the last day, I say …

Jide: Play on!

Bar Jesus: … and strike all gamblers low, and naked in the ashes of Armageddon, I warn you!

Akin: Ohh, Bar Jesus, give us peace for our mothers' sake!

Jide: God knows, Bar Jesus, why don't you – here, fresh palmwine. Hey, Akin …

Akin: Hmm?

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* Odyssey of title: *To Sir the God of Iron (1962); Cast the first Stone (1967); When Criminals … (1990).* Dedicated to Martin Banham at 60.

Jide: ... a cala ... (*hiccups*) ... bash. Hand Bar Jesus a calabash. Let's have some peace.

Akin: Naaa! Bar Jesus, wouldn't taste our palmwine. Bar Jay, you get ... ? Jide thinks you'd fill tank with us: palmwine!

Bar Jesus: What d'you think 1st. Timothy 5;23 is talking about? "Drink no more water, b-u-t ... (*holds that word for suspense*) ... but wine for thy stomach's sake." Here – the Holy Book itself. Now, brothers, who want to open it and tell Bar Jesus he's hell-bound in robes of lies? Nobody? Then ... (*Clicks his fingers*) ... hand me the calabash.

Akin: (*Fake sorrow*) But Jide and I are Born Again sinners, Bar Jesus.

Bar Jesus: My mission, like that of the Lamb of God, is to call sinners to repentance. Pour the stuff ...

(*is served in a calabash*)

Indeed, children, there is joy in Heaven, I tell you, joy over one sinner that repenteth. Enough – prodigal, you've spilled some!

Jide: Come on, Akin – move on.

Akin: What d'you mean "move on"?

Jide: What d'you mean: what do I mean 'move on'? Isn't it your turn?

Akin: My turn? Ha! Madness has indeed steamed your brain!

Jide: But I put down –

Akin: Like it steamed your mother's womb the day you popped out into this world screaming for the help you'll never find!

Jide: You rogue! God knows, I played this card – a diamond!

Akin: (*Cooly*) Ehnn? And who put down this ace? Your mother?

Bar Jesus: The judgement of Armage ... (*hiccups*) ... geddon is at hand, brethren!

Jide: (*Yielding*) All right, all right.

Akin: Your madness is first class, brother. Se you get? Original. Not patch-patch like Peugeot brake-pads from Taiwan.

Jide: Hey, easy, easy ... !

Akin: Original madness, I swear. Imported, airtight from Germany. Which is why, like the engine of a German-built Volkswagen, your brain is (*hiccups*) ... housed in your buttocks! Crazy.

Jide: (*Calmly mordant*) I say go easy, son of a father half ape, half he-goat, milked by a mother with cow-horns for breasts. Go e-a-s-y!

Akin: Well, don't cheat! You get?

Jide: It's only a game, God knows: o-n-l-y a card game!

Akin: So, no 'mago-mago'.

Jide: No 'biri-biri' either!

Akin: Fine, play on.

Jide: Clubs – suddenly, you're all heat and fire, God knows, as though I were crushing your wife!

Bar Jesus: Rotten talk!

Akin: God's thunder split your skull!

Bar Jesus: Thou shalt not call the name of the Lord in play!

Akin: Spades!

Jide: Spades, too! I kill you! (*Guffaws in triumph*)

Akin: All right, you win – son of a crazy mother. I take you on again.

Jide: Good. What's for bank?

Akin: I knock you a ten naira.

Jide: I double it – here: Murtala on green.

Akin: Murtala is too much, let's go for red.

Jide: All right – so ... red! (*slaps down a currency note*)

Akin: (*Also slats down his bet*) Red! This time, I'll shuffle ... (*smacks his lap*) Damn these mosquitoes!

Jide: Bar Jesus – the palmwine, let me have some, please ... (*pours some for himself*)

Bar Jesus: Take little for thy stomach's ... (*hiccups*) ... sake!

Jide: No use, Bar Jesus!

Akin: Jide and I are doomed, Bar Jay.

Bar Jesus: Nooo, no!

Jide: Akin is right, B.J. – our place is hellfire, God knows, and we're not complaining, either! (*slaps his arm*) Bloody mosquitoes!

Bar Jesus: There's still time, brethren. Just one last time for you to repent and be saved in the blood of the Lamb!

Akin: We are gone, Bar Jesus – far gone on the Expressway to hell. Too late now to hit reverse gear!

Jide: (*Chuckling*) That's right!

Bar Jesus: Ahh ... That's where you're wrong. See? Wrong as the Blackman's palmwine faked sweet with the Whiteman's saccharine! Right colour, wrong taste, I tell you. Ooh, yes. You can be saved. All you need, brethren, is fa ... (*prolongs the syllable, expecting completion of the word by either of the men; none responds, so he obliges himself*) ... f-a-i-t-h!

Akin: (*Slaps his body, to swat a mosquito*) Blood-sucking beasts!

Bar Jesus: That's all, I tell you. Faith. Well, take me, for example. Five years ago, I was the most – ooh, you bedbugs think you give the police a headache? (*chortles disdainfully*) I was the craziest demon that ever confused this whole land of our fathers! (*thumps his chest manfully*) Only five years ago, I tell you. In this same Nigeria, brothers. I, Alade, the very son of Jakumo. I was the craziest – oh, you rats should have seen this son of a devil in action!

Jide: (*Exaggerated adoration*) Really!

Bar Jesus: What didn't I do? Ask me, tadpoles: What didn't I not do? Hm? The very demon of a criminal, I!

Akin: Did you rape, too! (*bursts into a teasing guffaw, joined ardently by JIDE*).

Bar Jesus: (*Disregarding the jibe, for the nonce*) But, look at me today, I tell you. I've repented and accepted Christ as my ... (*bawls suddenly now at AKIN*) ... Satan! Uncircumcized Philistine! Akin or whatever it is you call yourself ... (*whacks him on the shoulder, evoking a sharp cry of hurt*) ... Have you no other rotten thought in your rotten head beside rotten rape?

Jide: Pay no attention to him, Bar Jesus. Talk to me, I'm with you.

Bar Jesus: Lucifer!

Jide: I say don't mind him, B.J. –

Bar Jesus: (*Still fuming*) You be quiet! Sons of Eli – both of you! Hophni and Phinehas! Y-e-s, it was to save sons of Belial like you – terrors of Babylon – that Jehovah Himself spoke to me one night! "Alade," He said to me. "Alade, son of Jakumo – "

Akin: (*Taunting*) Who said?

Bar Jesus: "Alade, son of Jakumo," (*with pompous emphasis*) ... the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Elijah and Zion said to me! "Alade, son of Jakumo, cast away your heart of evil; cast away your goods; cast away money; cast away wives; cast away your ... er ... er ... your everything. Vanity upon vanity. And go! Go down unto my people ... my people, I say: save them from the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah!

Akin: Wives too? Ahh, no – I'd argue that one, brother! (*JIDE sniggers*). Se you get?

Bar Jesus: So, I hearkened unto the still small voice in the burning bush of Mount Horeb, and cast away my evil ways; cast away my goods – Vanity upon vanity; I cast away my (*emphatically*) wives; cast away my er ... er ...

Akin: (*Sarcastic*) Palmwine?

Bar Jesus: ... anyway, I began to call sinners to repentance!

Jide: (*Sounding impressed*) Hmm!

Bar Jesus: Doomed sinners, I tell you – like this (*another thwack at Akin*) ... Beelzebub!

Akin: (*Mock protest*) Ouuu! Bar Jesus, why is it only me you're splitting to bits like firewood, this evening, ehn? That's Jide, yet you –

Bar Jesus: Because you make jest of my mission, thou son of Midianitish woman!

Akin: I only asked why you didn't cast away palmwine like you did wives. Simple quest –

Bar Jesus: Because to really know the multitude, dumbhead, the servant of Jehovah must go to them, mix with them. Especially,

I tell you, especially those (*braying*)... b-e-e-y, b-e-e-y, like you: lost sheep of the earth, who have accepted gin and whisky instead of Christ as Lord and Saviour!

Jide: Is that why they call you Bar Jesus?

Bar Jesus: Like Jesus did, I tell you – mix with them, break bread with them, wash feet with them; well, d-r-i-n-k the juice of the vineyard with them: like Je... (*hiccups*)... sus did.

Akin: (*Teasing adulation*) B-a-a-a-r J-e-e-sus!

[*BAR JESUS breaks into a song – full throated – hitting some theme about 'walking in step with Jesus', the voice receding as he moves off scene, apparently to ease himself*]

Akin: Bar Jay – please, move farther away. Se you get? So the wind doesn't blow your urine into our faces. (*Guffaws*)

Jide: Ready?

Akin: Cut!

Jide: There – and this time, God knows, I deal.

Akin: No, I deal.

Jide: All right – a toss: head or tail.

Akin: Tail. Mark it, God, open!

Jide: Your luck! (*slaps his arm*) Crazy mosquitoes won't let a poor man live in peace.

Akin: Play, you're wasting time.

Jide: Spades. (*slaps a part of his body again*) Come on, let's go into that building. Can't stand these blood-sucking beasts much longer.

Akin: Too risky. Clubs.

Jide: But these mosquitoes won't let –

Akin: I said too risky! Before we know it, a crazy policeman will crawl up in there.

Jide: Hearts.

Akin: And what will happen to us?

Jide: All right, all right –

Akin: Six months in a stinking jail again!

Jide: Play on, now!

Akin: Spades! (*spits*) Six rotten months. Se you get?

Jide: Aces.

Akin: (*Still indignant*) Just because the government refused to deal you a job, and you decide to –

Jide: (*Impatient*) Ooooh!

Akin: Diamonds... To shuffle about, making money...

Bar Jesus: (*Still off scene*) Pray, Brethren.

Akin: ... Your own way...

Bar Jesus: And fast.

Akin: Rather than starve. So, six stinking months again!

Jide: Hearts.
Bar Jesus: The judgement day is at hand!
Jide: Whose building is that, anyway?
Akin: Diamonds (*grumpy nonchalance*) One rich he-goat in this village. They call him Laguna. Chief Kola Laguna.
Bar Jesus: (*Returning to scene*) Fire and brimstone shall overwhelm every corner of the earth, I warn you ... !
Jide: Aces.
Akin: Hold one minute. Going to ease myself, too. (*exits*)
Jide: But, seriously, Bar Jesus.
Bar Jesus: Seriously what?
Jide: How many wives did you run over?
Bar Jesus: Run over? It's your father who's a Petrol Tanker! You hear me? Your very own father, a Mercedes Benz Petrol Tanker out of control on the Expressway of life, running over mankind left and right and finally tipping over into a river by the roadside!
Akin: (*Laughing with mischievous delight, off scene*) Good, hit Jide for a change, and hit him hard, Bar Jay Baby!
Jide: No, what I mean is –
Bar Jesus: (*With malevolent calm*) No, no – you go home, young man, and tell your father what I mean!
Jide: All right, sorry. I meant to ask: how many ... did you marry?
Bar Jesus: I've cast them all away, I tell you. "Woman go, trouble go" ... (*hiccups*) ... as the song ... (*another hiccup*) ... says.
Akin: (*Off scene*) Bar Jesus caged seven magpies!
Jide: Really? Tough man!
Bar Jesus: Don't mind that demon. I managed only five.
Jide: Five!
Bar Jesus: And a witch.
Jide: A witch?
Bar Jesus: One of them.
Jide: Really?
Bar Jesus: I tell you ...
Jide: How's that?
Bar Jesus: ... trust no woman.
Jide: I mean, how can you tell?
Bar Jesus: (*After a hacking laugh*) How can I tell, the fool asks. Hey er ... Akin, quickly – come here!
Akin: What is it?
Bar Jesus: Just come over, fellow, urine and all, doesn't matter: come over – quick! (*laughing contemptuously at JIDE*)
Akin: (*On scene now*) I'm here?
Bar Jesus: Son, I want you to meet an African – no, a goat. That's it: a grassland goat. Now, I want you to meet a b-e-e-y,

b-e-e-y grassland he-goat, who calls himself an African, but can't tell a witch from a Reverend Sister. (*after a slight pause*) Well?

Akin: Well what, now?

Bar Jesus: Go on, teach him, teach the goat, I say.

Akin: (*Uncertainly*) Oh, er ... Yes, if ... se you get? If you lie on a woman, and she coughs – that's it.

Jide: (*Lost*) "That's it" what?

Akin: A witch.

Jide: (*Nonplussed*) Really?

Akin: Of course –

Bar Jesus: Shut up! I meant a witch, idiot – not a victim of tuberculosis!

Akin: Well, how am I supposed to know?

Bar Jesus: Then, listen. The two of you. For your own protection. Fill my calabash. (*obliged with another helping*) Oops! Now ... trust no woman. I woke up that night, I tell you. Deep in the night. Which is normal. Here is the woman. See? Sleeping. Which is normal, too. By my side. Which again is normal. Now, mark this. Her feet. The woman's two, God-given feet are resting on her pillow. Her head, the other way.

Akin: So?

Bar Jesus: (*More emphatically*) Feet, pillow; head, the other way, I tell you. Now, brethren, that ... is plain witchcraft. "Woman," I yelled at the bat, "out! Pack your things this very minute and fly home to your mother!"

Akin: Whose turn?

Jide: Yours – I played the aces.

Bar Jesus: By cock's crow, the vampire was back in my house. Five policemen for company.

Akin: Clubs.

Bar Jesus: Dogs. They sniffed around, found some ... well, goods. "Contrabands", they said – "contra ... (*hiccups*) ... bands".

Jide: Diamonds.

Bar Jesus: "Well, I'm sorry, Your Worship, I know nothing about contrabands," I tell the Magistrate. "Good," the man replies, "go to jail and beat bands for five years." (*morosely*) Hmmm. Trust no woman, brethren, trust no –

Jide: (*Panic*) Light, light – a light: over there!

Akin: The police demons, I bet you! Hide the cards.

Jide: Keep on preaching, Bar Jesus.

Bar Jesus: (*peering off-stage*) Shadow of darkness!

Jide: A little boy.

Akin: A police cat, I bet, sent to spy on us. Se you get? Let's corner him and find out!

(*AKIN and JIDE duck in an ambush, debouch in an instant, and pounce on a little BOY as he appears, carrying a lantern and a bunch of beddings*)

Boy: (*In desperation, amidst a scuffle*) Let me go. Please, let me …
Akin: Shh! Shut up that bottle-mouth of yours, or I'll cut off your tongue!
Bar Jesus: My people … let my people go, I say!
Jide: Who sent you, boy?
Akin: Now talk!
Boy: Nobody, sir – please let me –
Akin: You're lying – the police did. Yes?
Boy: No sir –
Jide: Come on, let's hang the rabbit upside down from that mango tree –
Boy: (*Hysteria*) No, no – please, don't hang me, I beg of you –
Bar Jesus: Put the boy down!
Akin: What d'you think you're doing?
Bar Jesus: You want to fight me?
Akin: I'll fight the liver out of you, if you let this rabbit skip away without telling what it wants in my yam farm! You bet your life I'll fight …
Jide: (*Mediating*) All right, all right, you let go. We'll see what the Elder One will do with him. Let go of the boy, I say!
Akin: It is well.
Bar Jesus: Son of the devil! Now, boy …
Boy: (*Tearfully*) I'm listening, Elder one.
Bar Jesus: Look in my eyes, and answer me truly. Did the police send you to spy on us?
Boy: No, Elder One, the police did not send me to –
Akin: Boy, see this knife here? One more lie, and off goes that 'little man' between your thighs!
Boy: (*More hysteria*) It's the truth! The police didn't … I swear. It was Chief Laguna who sent me. Elder one, please, don't let them cut off my 'little man'!
Akin: Chief Laguna?
Boy: It's him. Please don't cut off my 'little –
Bar Jesus: Are you his son?
Boy: No, Elder one, I only work for him.
Bar Jesus: What did he send you here to do?
Boy: I serve food in his canteen, sir –
Bar Jesus: Answer the question I asked you!
Akin: Get on with it, boy, or off goes your 'little man'!
Boy: It's true? Chief Laguna asked me to bring this lantern, and these bedsheets and pillow cases, to that building.

Jide: (*Mischievous interest*) Bedsheets, lantern, pillow cases – hmm ... that's bad business cooking, God knows.

Bar Jesus: Was anyone with him?

Boy: Yes, Elder one. Ebun was with him at that time. I swear: the police didn't send –

Akin: Which Ebun?

Boy: Abu's wife.

Bar Jesus: Abu?

Akin: The one-legged?

Boy: The weaver of baskets.

Akin: (*Irascibly*) The one-legged, basket-weaver?

Bar Jesus: Is that the Abu you mean, boy?

Boy: It's him, Elder one.

Akin: Lai la! Chief Laguna is bringing Ebun here?

Boy: I don't know.

Jide: Is she a loose woman?

Akin: Gods! I could kill her!

Bar Jesus: Where d'you live, boy?

Boy: On the other side of the village, sir. But –

Bar Jesus: Run home.

Boy: But my master, the Chief, said I should report back to him –

Akin: Gods, I'm dead!

Bar Jesus: You're not going back to him. Hear me? Hand me the bed things. Good. The lantern as well. Now, you run to your home. Small boys must not risk their little heads in the dark of night. Go on!

Jide: Off! (*Boy scampers off*)

Akin: Gods! I'll kill her!

Bar Jesus: Adultery! Fornication!

Akin: Five times, I swear by this dagger! The god of iron split my skull in three, if I lie. Five times I, Akin, I tried ... er ... er ... bargaining with that woman, I tell you. (*mimicking a woman's voice*) "I'm someone's wife," the louse said to me, "you know Abu is my husband, crippled or not. I still love him, and would do nothing to ..." (*breaks into an expletive of exasperation*) – l-a-i la ... !

Bar Jesus: Someone go get her husband, quick!

Jide: Don't look at me, Bar Jesus – I'm a stranger in this village.

Bar Jesus: Akin, you hurry on!

Akin: Me! Go get that madman? You must yourself be crazy!

Bar Jesus: Watch your tongue, boy!

Jide: What do we need the husband here for, anyhow?

Bar Jesus: Because the woman, demon, is about to lie under the bosom of a Philistine, like you. That's why.

Akin: Jide, don't let this Bible-spitting old man scare you into going anywhere. You hear me? Abu is a madman, and Bar Jesus knows too well.

Bar Jesus: So what?

Akin: "So what?" Go ask Sule what Abu did to him. "So what!"

Bar Jesus: That was different. Sule got shot at because he lizard-crept into Abu's house that night in search of Ebun.

Jide: The man shoots?

Bar Jesus: If the purpose of your entering his house is holy, why, Abu won't shoot you.

Akin: Fine, so why don't you go!

Bar Jesus: (*Wily laugh*) Oooh, I know who thou art, Lucifer! Why don't I go, is it? So that in my absence, you can pounce on Ebun when she comes here, and satisfy your flesh. You lie, Beelzebub. She shall be punished, yes, but... none of you hyenas will sink your dirty claws in her skin. Ooh, no!

Akin: Is that so!

Bar Jesus: You get ready for the fight you want!

Akin: And what about Laguna?

Bar Jesus: And what about Laguna?

Akin: (*In a fit*) Ebun will soon be dancing into that building with Laguna. You heard that. You'll let Laguna go ahead and do what he wants with her, because he has money. Is that it? Yes, rich cow Laguna can graze on Ebun because he owns a food canteen, and he rides a motorcycle. But poor Akin – Ooh, no.

Jide: Laguna owns a motorcycle?

Akin: Servant of Jehovah! Is that what you mean? Only the rich can curl round a woman. Is that it?

Jide: Brothers, wait a minute, wait a ... Laguna owns a motorcycle?

Akin: Kawasaki 125 – double silencer.

Jide: Hmm. Laguna owns a canteen, and he owns a Kawasaki, as well.

Akin: You haven't answered me, Chief Angel-of-the-Most-High. What are your going to do to Laguna?

Bar Jesus: Take my word: the woman, Ebun, and that man, Laguna, are both like the daughter of Moab and the son of Israel in the land of Shittim: Book of Numbers – 25, verse 6, I tell you! Yea, the twain are about to commit whoredom – a sin against man and against "the Most High", as you put it!

Akin: I don't care who it is against!

Bar Jesus: And the twain shall be punished, even as it is written on the holy tablets of Moses.

Akin: Wind.

Bar Jesus: Lo, they shall be purged from the face of the earth!

Akin: (*Sarcastic*) Desert wind!
Jide: Meaning what?
Bar Jesus: Aaahaa! Verily, I say to you, boy: the twain shall be tied together and stoned to death with rocks.
Jide: Stoned to death!
Bar Jesus: Aye, stoned. Stoned to death with rocks of damnation, even as it is written in the 6th. and 7th. Books of Moses the Prophet. Come on – boys, gather stones.
Akin: (*to a JIDE in uproarious laughter*) What's this son of a crazy mother laughing at? (*exits to collect stones*)
Bar Jesus: You, too, Jide – give Akin a hand.
Jide: Me? Gather stones? I'm sorry, Bar Jay, count me out of this.
Akin: (*Bawling from a distance*) Bar Jesus, don't let that tortoise get away, o! I know him too well. He'll crawl straight to Chief Laguna, or to the Police.
Bar Jesus: Aha, for thirty pieces of silver, ehn? Judas, I command you to stay here and be a soldier of Christ against iniquity!
Jide: Soldier! Who says I care to be a soldier either of Christ or of this nation's Commander-in-Chief?
Akin: (*Back on scene now, burdened with armfuls of stones*) So get out! Bar Jesus, let the cunning gnome go. Come on, tortoise, go do your very worst!
Bar Jesus: Patience. Be patient awhile.
Akin: No patience, nothing – damn him! We'll stone them both! Allah! With or without him, I swear. We'll hide in these bushes and wait, Wallahi! The moment they ride in here, God knows, we'll bash their brains out! Bet me!
Bar Jesus: Eeehh! Be quiet awhile, will you! Haba! Let's hear what Jide has in mind. Come now, son – what d'you say to all this?
Jide: It's not what I say, but what people say about Chief Laguna that matters in a business like this.
Akin: Meaning what, now?
Jide: Well, they say Laguna is a rich man.
Akin: So?
Jide: And they say Laguna has a food canteen.
Bar Jesus: So he does.
Jide: They say again: Laguna owns a Kawasaki 125.
Akin: What's all this leading to now? Gods, I hate you!
Bar Jesus: Easy, let him finish.
Jide: Well, if all what they say about Laguna is true, why then there are better ways of handling a job like this without being hanged for murder, afterwards.
Akin: Hanged for murder? Well, you're wrong. See? Dead wrong. This one is in the Bible: adult ... er ... adult ... Se you get? Bar

Jesus – tell him, tell the goat what that means. In the Bible of Moses. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, not so? And the Bible is more powerful than your stupid laws, you heathen! Adult ... !

Bar Jesus: Enough, enough –

Akin: The man is crazy. (*disgust*) Aahh, I'm going for more stones!

Jide: Gather all the stones in the land, big boy – but first, hear me to the end. This way, you won't say tomorrow that Jide didn't show a poor brother a better way to deal with life, today.

Akin: (*snorting*) What better way?

Jide: Good. Simple. As soon as Laguna and Ebun come here, we stop them.

Bar Jesus: What have we been talking about?

Jide: We must not beat them up. Mhm. Steer clear of beating and stoning!

Akin: Why?

Jide: (*Calmly caustic*) Because when the Prophet Moses gave man that licence to stone people to death, he didn't think there would ever be so many Judges in this world hungry to hang Throwers-of-stones. Se you get?

Bar Jesus: We've got that point. What's next?

Jide: Action number 1. We separate the man from the woman.

Bar Jesus: Then ...

Jide: Action 2. We seize Laguna's Kawasaki 125.

Bar Jesus: Ohoo ... so that's what you're –

Jide: Seize, I said. Seize. Not steal. We seize wealthy Chief Laguna's chariot of sin. The motorcycle. No beating, no stoning.

Bar Jesus: And no raping, either!

Akin: Why d'you look at me?

Bar Jesus: Because your eyes, son, burn with d-e-s-i-r-e!

Akin: Ehen? What about Jide's eyes?

Jide: Forget my eyes, brothers, hear my mouth. Action 3. We pin the man down, our daggers drawn, fists raised, but no blows – threats only. Action 4. We bundle him into the building, and force him to write a letter to his wife for a –

Akin: He has three wives.

Jide: (*Faster now, like one possessed*) Well, to any one of them! Who dares? The oldest wife, maybe – any one of the cattle-egrets who knows where the rich cow hides his money. Kai! This is action, brothers. He writes, ordering this wife to hand over er ... er ... hand over an amount equal to the price of a Kawasaki 1-2-5. Oohh, let's say – one hundred and fifty-five naira.

Bar Jesus and Akin: (*Stunned*) One hundred and fifty-five naira!?

Akin: Chicken pox rot your brain!

Bar Jesus: Accursed prodigal!

Jide: Anyway, whatever it is a Kawasaki 125 costs, for God's sake!

Akin: In this 1977? One thousand Eight hundred naira, you beast! Plus insurance, two live grand, money na hand!

Jide: So it is. Two thousand naira. Anyway, someone takes the letter, rides like mad on the motorcycle; hits the cow's home, grabs the 'sure banker', and comes back. The rich man gains his freedom; pretty woman returns to her husband; poor us begin a new life. Finish.

Bar Jesus: Devilish plot!

Akin: Makes sense to me. No police arrest to fear – let's face it, the rich cow wouldn't be so stupid to want to report to the police. What would he tell them? That he was caught at night flying Abu's kite inside his half-completed building? Crazy! Abu will burst his brains out! (*laughs with relief*)

Jide: Bar Jesus, what do you say?

Bar Jesus: Get thee behind me, Satan.

Akin: One point – who goes for the money?

Jide: Well, if you brothers wish me to take the risk, why not ...

Akin: Enhn ... I don't trust you.

Bar Jesus: Neither do I.

Jide: A-ah. You, too, Bar Jesus, don't trust ... me?

Bar Jesus: (*tactfully*) W-e-l-l ... er ... Let's put it this way ... er ... What I mean is ... er ... I ... er ... I don't seem to understand you yet.

Jide: It is well, then ... Bar Jesus goes for the money.

Bar Jesus: What? And leave Ebun here alone for this leopard to consume in his lust? The whole plan goes instead. Cancelled, I say!

Jide: Now, now, people – this is leading us no – listen: do we still want to punish the sinners or not?

Akin: All right, all right – I'll go, I'll go! Here – let's stamp the deal with a drink, brothers. The plan is just right. Just right. Here, knock me five, Jide brother (*sound of a loud handshake*). Sorry I blew my temper on you awhile ago. You're all right, when one thinks of it. I mean; every beast in this beastly world we live in, has his own fault, God knows. Take you, for instance, even a baby knows you're crazy. Se you get? And me? Well, enemies say I'm hot tempered. Perhaps I am hot tempered. Perhaps I'm not. (suddenly furious) All right, all right – so, I am hot tempered. Damn them, why shouldn't I be. Am I not my father's first son? He was hot-tempered too. Why shouldn't I be like my own father, when my mother didn't jump around other men, playing games? Let people talk the

rubbish they like – I take no nonsense, that's all. (going Americanese) M-a-n, I jack nobody!

Jide: (*Adulatory*) J-a-c-k no-body!

Akin: (*Expansive in deeply affected Americanese*) That's me you greet'n, baby. I jack nobody, damn it – no monkey for jungle, man; sailed like hell from Madagascar to California[1], Abosso no come no passenger! That's me, boy!

Bar Jesus: There's one more thing, people.

Akin: All's fine, Bar Jesus, baby, all is –

Bar Jesus: Shut up and listen to me, you! And don't you again talk to me in that ... that kind of loose talk you Africans of today pluck off the lips of your cowboy heroes in American cinemas! You hear me?

Jide: (*chuckling teasingly*) What did Akin say wrong now?

Bar Jesus: Calling me "baby"!

Akin: (*Joins JIDE in laughter*) Oh, that – take i-reasy, man (with a nasality that comes out as 'men')

Bar Jesus: Hear him again? Go call your father "baby". You hear? Your father is b-a-b-y. Your mother is "m-e-n".

Jide: (*Urgently*) Hey – listen, listen!

Akin: A light! It must be them. (*SOUND of a motorcycle approaching*)

Bar Jesus: We hide in the bushes; as they start swinging into the building, I give the signal – a loud cough. Then we storm ... !

Jide: All right, hurry – take cover, brothers!

[*Motorcycle appears, LAGUNA and EBUN on it; parks, they alight, EBUN, rather hesitantly*]

Laguna: Now, imagine this ... ! The stupid boy left the lantern in front of the house and disappeared. Anyway ... come on ...

Ebun: Where is this place?

Laguna: It's safe, I assure you. My duplex building ... This side of it is ready for renting – come in and see for yourself.

Ebun: I ... I don't want to ...

Laguna: Now, listen, Ebun –

Ebun: Take me back.

Laguna: Very well, then, where would you have us go? Ebun, I'm talking to you.

Ebun: I don't like this place.

Laguna: But you refused to come to my proper house downtown. What really d'you want?

[1] pronounced Californayee

Ebun: There are wives in your 'proper' house!

Laguna: I see ... (*chuckles*) Let's go to *your* house, then. You have no wives!

Ebun: Yes, go on, laugh all you want. I have no wives, but I have Abu for husband, and he means something to me! (*at the point of tears*) I don't know why you people refuse to leave us alone ...

Laguna: Is that what you want? Very well then, you don't have to work in my canteen anymore.

Ebun: So for giving me a job, you feel I owe you my body. Is that it?

Laguna: Wrong. What I feel, since you want to know, is that you're hurting your husband.

Ebun: Hurting my – how? By living with him instead of marrying you?

Laguna: By choosing to always remind him of his condition with your presence in his house.

[*A loud cough, stomping feet, as BAR JESUS and his henchmen fall on EBUN and LAGUNA. A scuffle*]

Laguna: (*Manages to stutter*) Wha ... what – who are you people and what d'you want?

Akin: Action. We want action, man, you modern lovers talk too much!

Bar Jesus: That's it – the two of you, lock up the cow inside the building, I'll tie this dog to that tree.

[*AKIN and JIDE jostle LAGUNA off into the building*]

Bar Jesus: (*Over EBUN's sobs*) Quiet! (*the impact of a slap on the cheek*) Whore! Terror of Babylon! You daughter of Herodias and Bathsheba; wife of Potiphar; of the blood of Delilal! Abomination of the earth!

Ebun: I ... I didn't do anything ...

Bar Jesus: Sshh! Jezebel, sister of the Midianitish woman. Woe unto thee, this day! You daughter of the seven sins of Nebuchadnezzar! The wicked shall not go –

Jide: (*Secretively*) Bar Jesus. Come, come over quickly.

Bar Jesus: What's happening?

Jide: (*tête à tête*) Big problem. The rich cow is ready to write the letter.

Bar Jesus: Well?

Jide: No paper.

Bar Jesus: No what?

Jide: Paper, paper – to write it on.

Bar Jesus: (*Aghast*) Lord God of ... let me see here whether ... (*a frantic rummaging in the pockets*) ... I don't have ... any piece of paper on me ... Oh, here – a pen.

Jide: Come on, Bar Jesus, p-a-p-e-r, I said ... not a blasted pen for God's sake – paper! Every educated cow carries a blasted pen about. Paper! Hurry.

Bar Jesus: (*Irascibly*) None on me, I said!

Jide: Then we are in trouble!

Bar Jesus: Why didn't you think of paper, earlier on?

Jide: No time to argue, BJ. If we fail in this business, we should just walk straight into the nearest police station, God knows, and quietly surrender.

Bar Jesus: Police Station?

Jide: What d'you think? With no paper for him to say something on, he goes away, the police come after us.

Bar Jesus: God of Israel! Today of all days, I left my Diary at home! (*hotly, to JIDE*) But you should have thought of paper before –

Jide: Listen – what about that one?

Bar Jesus: What one?

Jide: The book in your hand – isn't there a clean page in it, somewhere?

Bar Jesus: (*Thoroughly scandalized*) God's own Bible?

Jide: We are "soldiers of God" – remember? Ehn, so we use God's material to fight sin. What's wrong with that?

Bar Jesus: Satan, I shall not with my own hands destroy this temple of the Lord. You want a clean page from it, here – you tear one off yourself, with your own hands. Come on – take it!

Jide: Very well.

Bar Jesus: And the Heavens bear witness, as I turn my back on you in damnation.

Jide: (*Rips off a sheet*) There ... Ohh, turn around and take back your Bible, BJ. See? All I took is just one page.

Bar Jesus: So I see: now, out of my sight!

Jide: (*Departing*) Of course – now we're in business!

Bar Jesus: (*Voice raised at JIDE, indicating distance*) And may the sins of your act be visited upon you and your children unto the fourth and fifth generation! (*now to EBUN whose sobbing we've been hearing intermittently in the course of the preceding dialogue*) And as for you, woman, you have lain under the bosom of a Philistine! You shall be punished even as it is written in the Book of the Prophet Moses!

(*AKIN takes off on motorcycle while BAR JESUS addresses JIDE who has returned to scene, hugging a bundle of clothes*)

What's happening now?

Jide: Airtight.

Bar Jesus: He wrote it?

Jide: Of course. Replied paid. Akin has gone already.

Bar Jesus: Well, who's watching over the man in there?

Jide: No need – look!

Bar Jesus: His clothes!

Jide: From jumper down to underpants.

Bar Jesus: You're ... you're not stealing them are you?

Jide: Of course not.

Bar Jesus: So why did you strip him of them?

Jide: Safeguard against escape – have a drink.

[*The VOICE of BOY breaks in suddenly*]

Boy: Ah, there they are – hurry, Baba Abu. Hurry, the men have tied Ebun to a tree and are going to kill her – hurry!

(*BOY scuttles in followed by ABU, on crutches*)

Bar Jesus: God save us – that's the husband now!

Jide: He has a gun with him – hurry, Bar Jesus, start preaching!

Bar Jesus: (Loudly) Adultery! Fornication! God hates it, woman, you hear! Ahaa! The Lord be praised! Abu, my brother, Abu ... your wife hath been taken in adultery. Come over ... yes, come closer, brother, and see her shame. Don't shoot! First, let her confess, hear me? Don't shoot.

Abu: Ebun ... you too? You did this to ... to me? (*a wail*) People of the world! Have you no pity?

Jide: Easy, brother, justice shall have its way.

Boy: Baba Abu, this is one of the men with knives. They were going to cut off my "little man", when I refused to tell them that Ebun and my master were coming here!

Bar Jesus: That's enough, boy. Thank you for bringing Abu here. Now run home. Confess, woman, confess to your wronged husband, before it's too late!

Boy: What happened to my master?

Jide: Come now, son, respect your elders: do as you're told!

Boy: Hey! These are my master's clothes!

Jide: That's right. His jumper and ... trousers; singlet and underpants. Look at them, Abu. We seized them from the wicked man just before he ran away, naked.

Bar Jesus: (*proffers a tip*) Here, boy, buy some groundnuts with this tomorrow; now run home or you'll bear troubles too big for your little head.

Abu: Ebun, you too?

Bar Jesus: Confess, woman!
Ebun: He forced me to ... he has been bothering me for some time now.
Bar Jesus: Who has been – be specific, woman.
Ebun: My master – Chief Laguna.
Bar Jesus: That's it. Go on ...
Ebun: So, this evening, he said he would stop me from working in his canteen, if I refused again.
Bar Jesus: Did you report him to your husband?
Jide: Good question.
Ebun: No.
Bar Jesus: And why not?
Ebun: I was afraid.
Jide: Afraid!
Ebun: I didn't want to upset him.
Jide: Liar! Guilt stopped her.
Bar Jesus: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee," saith the Lord. Luke 19; 22. Go on.
Jide: Why did you follow him to this place?
Ebun: He was going to take me to his house. But I refused. So he brought me here.
Bar Jesus: Because you wanted a more secret place.
Ebun: That's not true.
Bar Jesus: You mean we're lying?
Jide: Abu, brother Abu, come closer ... here – bring your nose closer to her mouth. God knows, if the smell of Gordon's gin fails to knock you down, hang me!
Bar Jesus: She meant nothing with the man, she says; yet they drank gin together.
Ebun: It wasn't gin he gave me.
Bar Jesus: You mean we're lying?
Ebun: It was whisky.
Bar Jesus: No difference –
Jide: Gordon's Gin, Scotch Whisky: twin brothers!
Bar Jesus: The Book of Job, 15; 6: "Thine own mouth condemneth thee, not I ..."
Ebun: But I did nothing else with him ... I couldn't –
Bar Jesus: What stopped you?
Ebun: Because I couldn't forget.
Bar Jesus: Forget? Forget what, whore?
Ebun: My husband. I've known him all my life. Him alone.
Abu: You couldn't forget? (*hysterical laugh*) She couldn't forget me! She did nothing with Laguna because ... because she couldn't forget ... me ... me ... me!

Bar Jesus: (*Panic*) No, no – Abu – don't: don't raise your rifle, please. She's lying, we know, but don't shoot her, brother. It's stoning. Let's stone her! Jide, grab stones!

Ebun: It is well. Stone me ... I'm ready!

Bar Jesus: She shall be purged from the face of the earth, even as it is written in the –

Abu: Stop there! One more move, and I blast your chests open! Make just one move, I say.

Jide: Don't shoot, I beg you!

Bar Jesus: Brother Abu, what d'you think you're doing?

Abu: She is my wife!

Ebun: Let them ... stone me!

Abu: You be quiet!

Bar Jesus: You heard her confession!

Abu: Untie her!

Bar Jesus: Your wife committed adultery and you –

Abu: Untie her from that tree, or I –

Bar Jesus: Please! I heard you. Don't shoot. I'll do as you say!

Abu: And you too – both of you. Turn her loose. Now!

Jide: Of course, brother ...

Abu: Adultery did you say? I ... I've known her since childhood. I'll let you go now, Ebun. I've had no cause to suspect her. But you ... people of the world ... you won't leave us alone! Murderers! First you killed my body ... in your civil war. Blew up my leg and my manhood with your grenade. I bore that death.

Bar Jesus: Many innocent civilians got maimed in that war, brother.

Abu: Shut up! What d'you know about the war – you drunk!

Jide: We've finished untying your wife, brother; peace unto your and your –

Abu: Don't go yet, your righteous Angels of God. Stay and listen to me! The death of my body, I've borne all these years ... are you all right, Ebun? Murderers all ... Now you've come to ... to kill my spirit! (*hysterically*) Ooh, no, brothers that I will not bear. (*to a still sobbing Ebun*) Ebun, you go home. Pack up your things.

Ebun: No, I know nowhere to go!

Abu: Adultery, did you say? Well, what about the man you found with her? Where is Laguna? Why didn't you punish him as well? Tie him to this mango tree, with Ebun?

Bar Jesus: We tried brother, but the –

Abu: Shut up! You let him go because he is rich.

Jide: That's not why we –

Abu: Shut up while I speak, or I blow your brains down your throat! You didn't tie Laguna to this tree, ready to be stoned,

why? Because Laguna owns a canteen, and Laguna rides a motorcycle. Instead, you attacked the wife of a poor, one-legged, Weaver-of-baskets. Get up, Ebun. I say go home and pack up your things. You've had enough. I thank you. You can go now to your people.

Ebun: I don't want to go...

Abu: (*Voice fading as he exits*) Laguna, I'm coming for you, myself. If these angels of God let you go free, I will get you; wherever you are. In your canteen. In your very bedroom. I'll deal with you myself. This is me, Abu. I care you to come out and face me. If indeed you're a man. L-a-a-g-u-n-a-a-a-a!

Bar Jesus: God have mercy! The poor man is gone crazy.

Jide: You, Bar Jesus, are the one gone crazy, God knows! You and your stones!

Bar Jesus: Don't insult me, you –

Jide: Insult! Ha... (*mimicking Bar Jesus*) "Stone her, stone her..." The man could have blown our brains out, Bishop!

Bar Jesus: Woman, see what you've turned your husband into?

[*We still hear the echo of ABU's voice in the background, and EBUN's more audible sobbing*]

Jide: No sign of Akin yet, Bar Jesus!

Bar Jesus: He'll be back – God willing. And you, woman – get up and go home!

Ebun: No! Let me die here. I have nowhere to go.

Jide: I've never had reason to trust that big-faced rogue!

Bar Jesus: (*In tête-à-tête*) Is Laguna still in there?

Jide: Of course, all naked, he should be. I'm talking of that rogue – Akin, or whatever he calls himself. He won't come back with the money, I bet you. Son, of a thieving father and a scaly-breasted mother!

Bar Jesus: Listen!

[*The sound of a motorcycle, approaching from a distance. This is soon rudely squelched by a blast of gunshot. Then another. The shriek of a man in dire pain. A third gunshot*]

Must be Akin!

Jide: The madman shot him!

Bar Jesus: I knew this plan wouldn't work.

Jide: La ilaha illa Allah!

Bar Jesus: Let's get out of here!

Jide: Wait a minute! I think... he is... Look over there... like someone... running towards us.

Bar Jesus: How are you sure it's Akin – it could be madman Abu with his gun for all I know!

Jide: Running like that without crutches?

Bar Jesus: A policeman, then.

Jide: It's him, it's him – Akin!

Bar Jesus: The lord be praised!

Akin: (*Amidst groans of pain*) Yeee ... Orooo! Gods of our fathers ... He has killed me ... Madman Abu has – take your hands off my pockets, you thieves! Oooh, see the blood. Gods! My foot is gone! Wild boar Abu has eaten up my right foot with his madman's gun! Ooh ... ! Off your filthy hands from my –

Jide: Well did you get it?

Akin: Why did the wild boar shoot at me? Hunh? Did I rape his witch here? Why didn't he shoot ... (*a loud slap explodes*) ... I warned you: lay off my pockets!

Bar Jesus: Well, say something!

Jide: Did you get the money?

Akin: Oh, that! Of course! I got the money, you sons of mud-sucking jiggers! With my own blood, I got the money. Here ... see it. Two thousand. All green. Now, I dare any one of you sons of barren witches to come and take a penny from it! Ṣe you get?

[*The singing voice of Abu is heard approaching*]

The wild boar is after me again! (*taking off*) Kill your wife, wild boar ... come over and shoot your own wife ... let me live to a ripe old age to bury my mother, you hear?

Jide: Bar Jesus, what do we do now?

Bar Jesus: I've had enough from damned sinners, for one night! You feel free to wait here for Abu and his gun.

Jide: I'm coming with you.

Bar Jesus: Not with Laguna's clothes!

Jide: Why not? Akin seized the money, I have to seize something!

Bar Jesus: And how d'you expect the man to return to the village: naked?

Jide: That's his problem, I'm solving mine.

Bar Jesus: In that case, go your way, I go mine.

Jide: It is well.

[*ABU's singing voice gets closer, then stops*]

Abu: So, you're still here?

Ebun: I can't go home and pack out my things. I'd rather stay here and die.

Abu: (*Chuckles smugly*) Laguna is no more a man! He is ruined forever. Down he came – a rich, fat toad on a motorcycle ... speeding towards me. (*another self-satisfied chuckle*).

He thought he could scare me off the road. I grabbed "Fire-Spitter". Pointed its mouth at the motorcycle, pressed trigger ... It spat. Once. Twice. In a twinkle, rich toad Laguna turned an antelope, I tell you: leapt off the motorcycle, took to the bushes. I drew close to motorcylcle, and let Fire-Spitter blow up the petrol tank. Then I pulled back and watched fire roast up Kawasaki 125. Laguna is not a man ... (*laughs hilariously, then stops abruptly*) Stand up. Are you all right?

Ebun: Yes, I am ... Let's go home, now.

Abu: The wind is heavy this night.

Ebun: It is so ... It's going to rain.

Abu: At last.

Ebun: It is so.

Abu: And there'll soon be plenty fresh canes in the land.

Ebun: It is so. We'll both weave baskets together, from now on. I won't work for anyone else again.

Abu: Laguna is not a man!

Ebun: Laguna is finished.

The End.

4

EPOCH AND ECHO: STAGE LYRICS OF MARTIN BANHAM DAYS AT IBADAN

Sonny Oti

In 1963, Ibadan University Travelling Theatre, in its third year of National tour, staged William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. In 1965, it produced a stage adaptation of Nkem Nwankwo's novel, *Danda*, which was culturally mounted on its new theatre-on-wheels for theatre-in-the-round and arena stage effect. Stage lyrics, in Nigerian musical idiom, anchored on contemporary cosmopolitan melodies, were used as functional theatrical features of the adaptations of the two productions.

In this entry, we shall simply re-create those stage lyrics and establish a nostalgic echo of the dramatic epoch of the early and mid sixties.

Perhaps, a little background to beef up the lyrics is inevitable because a space of three decades has created a generation gap that needs be bridged. This is evident in the topical jargons which informed the phraseology of the composition in 1963 and 1965.

Martin Banham was actively involved in establishing a formal school for students of theatre arts at the University of Ibadan. He participated in creating a breeding ground for professional artists at Ibadan. He spent a good part of his youthful years as a University teacher at Ibadan, in Nigeria.

He lived the life of a silent but dynamic observer and participator, through his academic contributions, towards a modern Nigerian theatre, professionally anchored on its boisterous and vibrant historical past.

Although he was not the foreign anthropological type, he seemed to have indigenized himself privately, in Nigeria, to the extent that when he went back to England, he made a provision for exposing Nigerian theatre talents, annually, to Western school of method, through an M.A. degree programme at Leeds University.

His identification with African theatre can be summarized from the Preface of his work, *African Theatre Today*. He observes:

> theatre in Africa, today, is more alive, more positive, more functional, and more assertive than its counterpart in Europe or America. And it should be noted that the vigour of African theatre is not confined within buildings, but is free and flexible...the root of African theatre in ritual,

> seasonal rhythms, religion and communication are roots common to world theatre...

And, indeed, *The Comedy of Errors* was confined within buildings during the itinerant days of Ibadan University Travelling Theatre in 1963, whereas *Danda*, in 1965, was staged in stadia with thousands of spectators seated or standing around the huge mobile stage or even perching on tree branches around the stadium where the production ran.

In 1963, after a brief consultation between Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham, this author was directed to improvise a monologue, in pidgin, for his role as Dromio (one of the twin slaves in *The Comedy of Errors*), and also write stage lyrics wherever they would serve, in the play, as functional theatrical reliefs for his role as Dromio.

We shall begin with a prologue, sung in calypso melody, for the adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*.

(Dromio sings with a back-up of actors miming the message of the lyrics for theatrical effect).

Dromio (Singing): TWINS! TWINS!
In the town of Syracuse,
There was Ageon, the merchant,
His money gave double interest,
So, his wife double children.

Just at this very time,
A very poor woman had twins;
Who were bought up by Ageon,
To serve his own twin sons...
Waya!

Chorus: Twins, twins; Antipholus;
Twins, twins: Dromio;
Twins, twins, twins all
In the town of Ephesus

The poor twins were called Dromio,
Slaves to Antipholus;
They lived happily together,
Emilia brought them all up.

It happened that on one good day;
Ageon and his family ....
They boarded a ship for their home,
A storm got them all shipwreck'd ...
Waya!

Chorus: Twins, twins: Antipholus;
Twins, twins: Dromio
Twins, twins, twins all
In the town of Ephesus.

Ageon's family parted;
One half in Syracuse;
The other half in Ephesus
The twins divided up.

To distinguish the twins
And identify them both,
No one could ever do it,
And here the errors began …
Waya!

Chorus: Twins, twins: Antipholus;
Twins, twins: Dromio,
Twins, twins, twins all
In the town of Ephesus.

MONOLOGUE and more Stage Lyrics follow: Dromio exploits the entire space of the stage. A guitarist, masked by the wing, stage right, instrumentally backs up Dromio's stage lyrics.

Dromio: This life, na waah!
The life of a slave, no be better
life.

The other day, my mistress call me,
"Dromio, come go market go buy
me butter for your master
him breakfast"

"Yes, madam,"
She give me money. I take-am.
Na market, I run go one
time without no waste of time.

I reach market. I buy the butter.
But I no get any container to
put the butter, so I put-am
for my trouser – pocket.
But good luck no shine for me that day.
Instead, the sun wey shine, na waah!
Na helele!

I come reach house, I put my hand inside
my trouser – pocket to come-ot the butter.

Oh, my hand begin swim inside the
river of the butter inside my pocket.

When I come-ot my hand, I look my hand,
the butter ... e-e-he-e! (has melted).

("e-e-he-e!" was a eulogical ejaculation
coined by soccer fans to number the
victims of a soccer master-dribbler, in
action, during a soccer battle, as
he "maradonas" along walls of defence,
at the stadium, during the early sixties.
Of course, Dromio's theatrical "eehee!"
unseats the audience as they roar
with laughter).

Dromio (singing); So therefore, my mistress, she beat
beat, beat me up and down; she
beat, beat, beat me here and there,
she beat, beat, beat me up and down;
she beat me every where.

(back to monologue): "Foolish boy", my mistress
shout, "another day when
I send you for this kind
of market, na plate you
go carry.

Me, I gree.
So, another day she send me to market
to go buy puppy, I mean dog-pikin
wey go dey play with the baby wey
she born since one year plus.

I carry plate go the market. I buy the
dog-pikin. I stand-am for inside the
plate. I carry the plate begin waka
quick quick: jaga dugbe, dugbe jaga.

But before I reach the house proper proper,
the dog-pikin take better style
escape. E wonder me like magic

(Singing) So, she beat, beat, beat me ...
(back to monologue): My mistress vex well well.
"This boy, na coconut
water full your head
instead of brain," she
quarrelled me well well.

"Na rope you for take go
that market, no be plate."

I gree one time. In fact, I
make apologize, "Madam, I beg
you, no vex."

For final, final, e send me market, after this one,
to go buy *nama*, I mean fat meat to cook chop for
plenty stranger wey go come our house.

I thank God sey I get better wise for my
head now.

Therefore, I take the rope go the market
I buy the big meat. I take the rope
bandage the meat him body, sey-teh,
e no fit breathe sef.

I begin go home. I drag the heavy meat
for ground with the rope. E follow me.
I begin whistle better song.

But before I reach house, two dog wey dey
fight, for roadside, settle them
quarrel, automatic, and begin follow
me. Them peace no last, because they begin
quarrel over this big meat.
I try to fight them ... for where?
Instead, they chop both the meat and the rope
I take tie-am. Only the rope wey dey my hand
remain.
I fear. I no lie you, I fear well well.

Where the leg I go take reach house
go tell my mistress-madam this kind
wahala bad news?

When my mistress hear the tory,
e say, "I go pepper you today.
Na today you go know sey
harmattan na cold. You go take
your eye see your nose today. I go
come-ot the mad wey dey inside that
Your Coco-nut head today. Wait,
I dey come."

But na go, e go so, to bring *bulala*
(cane/whip) to wire my body.

How I go wait for-am? I dey

craze? Na dodge I go dodge-am
small now until the vex wey
mek she eye red don quench.

(*exit*)

Dromio re-enters, later. He walks across to a seat near the prompter's corner.

Dromio (*speaks*) Chei, if wishes were
horses, me, too, I go
ride – am.
Go inside there, go see where
my mistress, my master –
that one no old pass me
sef – and dem stranger dey
drink liquority and *tombo*, dem
dey destroy meat plus chop
with their busy – busy mouth.
No be that alone, every man hook
one woman to dig
highlife music. My own na
to labour for dem joy, while them
mouth too, dey dance with chewable.

(Singing): Every thing is expensive
Every thing is expensive
If wishes were horses
Every beggar would ride.

(speaking): My life na jankara life,
E no get head.
Dem say "trouble dey sleep, Nyanga
go wake-am." Dromio no wake
no Nyanga.
Na only question I want
ask una (you):
E dey anybody for this world
wey go gree spit come-ot
the sugar wey dem put for
him mouth? For where?
But since my mother
born me even ordinary level
salt never enter my mouth, talk
less to spit-am come-ot. Na only
Suffer-Head I be. Bitter leaf sef
sweet pass my life.

(Sings): Every thing is expensive
Every thing is expensive
If wishes were horses
Every beggar would ride.

I need a society lady
Plus an Esquire suit[1]
And a Kennedy[2]
For my Kingsway shirt[3]
but –

Every thing is expensive
Every thing is expensive
If wishes were horses
Every beggar would ride.

I need some dancing shoes
And a tuxedo jacket[4]
And a radiogram[5]
To play highlife[6]
but ===

Every thing is expensive
Every thing is expensive
If wishes were horses
Every beggar would ride.

We may conclude the presentation of *The Comedy of Errors* stage lyrics herebelow.

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[1] "Esquire": was a fashion store of the colonial days for men's imported wears in Nigeria.
[2] "Kennedy": J.F. Kennedy, the American President, was fond of a bow-tie which became fashionable in Nigeria. It was simply tagged "Kennedy" in the sixties, in Nigeria.
[3] "Kingsway": was an English superstore spread all over Nigerian big cities. It was an elitist, classey shopping centre for the "Haves". It is still lingering in existence today.
[4] "Tuxedo" jacket: was an American movie superstars' fashion, particularly for musicians. It was a longish jacket. The fashion caught up in Nigerian multi-national night clubs for vocalists and ball-room dancers.
[5] "Radiogram": was a music and sound box containing both a radio and a gramophone turn-table for playing records. It was a prestigious property for elitist sitting-rooms.
[6] "Highlife" music: was the dominant popular dance rhythm of the fifties and sixties in West Africa. It was used, in the colonial era, more as an indigenous elitist dance rhythm, in African clubs, to challenge Western ball-room dance rhythms of European clubs; waltz, tango, blues, fox-trot, quick – step etc., and to expose them as weapons of racial discrimination and apartheid).

Dromio (sings): WAYO FOR ROAD

If you meet a money-doubler,
run away,
He's after your money;
Na so so wayo (cheating)
run away,
He's after your money.
From Bu-bu-yah-yah Magician;

Run away,
He's after your money
the more you look, the less you see;
Run away,
He's after your money.

From all the roadside wayo (cheats);
Run away,
They're after your money,
Na so so wayo
Run away
They're after your money.

The era of adapting Shakespeare's texts as stage visual aid for schools' G.C.E. and School Certificate Examinations, in Nigeria, ended in 1964, with excerpts from seven plays of William Shakespeare. That year, Ibadan University joined the rest of the world to celebrate Shakespeare's quater-centenary anniversary on its first "globe" theatre-on-wheels, across Nigeria. Only the stadium could hold an audience of that magnitude.

By 1965, the Travelling Theatre of Ibadan University established a break with the traditional adaptation of Western plays. She experimented with a communal theatre of the village folks mounted on a huge theatre-on-wheels. For emphasis, it was an adaptation of Nkem Nwankwo's novel.

Danda is set in an Igbo village named Aniocha. The hero, Danda (played by this author) is a village rascal and layabout. His uncle, Ndulue Nwoji, is the first indigene to buy a car and bring to Aniocha. Danda, who has never seen a car before, does a mock take-over of the car because it is owned by his kinsman. Culturally, it is now a communal property.

Seated behind the wheels, Danda begins to praise the car and to praise Ndulue Nwoji.

The women gather round the strange vehicle and were frightened and shocked to see their figures reflecting on the shining body of the car which they called a landboat.

Danda (singing) Morris Mini Moke
Morris Mini Moke
Nothing wey dey run
like Morris Mini Moke

E shake me leke this,
E shake me leke that;
But softly softly catch monkey
Na so dem say.

Morris Mini Moke
Morris Mini Moke
Nothing wey dey run
like Morris Mini Moke

Danda switches over the praise-singing to Ndulue Nwoji, the local business tycoon

Danda (singing): Ndulue Nwoji abia
n'obodo;
Onye ayi ji agala
n'obodo;
N'oweligo-kwa ayi;
Aniocha, ñulia-nu;
Ndulue we gota moto
we gota moto anakpo
Morris Mini Moke.

(translated) Ndulue Nwoji is here
on our land.
The one we boast about,
in our land.
He has lifted us all up
By buying a landboat,
a motor car, called Morris Mini Moke

(*The women folk break into a dance on the chorus singing and dancing*)

Morris Mini moke abia (Igbo)
Morris Mini moke has come (English)
Morris Mini moke abia (Igbo)
Morris Mini Moke has come (English)

Because Danda eloped with someone else's wife, the women folk dance and tease him in a song

Eghe-eghe – Danda
Eghe-eghe – Danda

O gagh alu Nwanyi	– Danda (Igbo)
He wont marry	– Danda (English)
Onye ozo luta	– Danda (Igbo)
Someone else's wife	– Danda (English)
Okara ya njo	– Danda (Igbo)
Is now his choice	– Danda (English)
Akaliogholi	– Danda (Igbo)
Great rascal	– Danda (English)
Eghe – eghe	– Danda
Eghe – eghe	– Danda

Danda culturally rushes about in the village-square to greet the people

Danda: Kli, kli, Kli, Kli!
All: Iyaah!
Danda: Kli, Kli, Kli, Kli!
All: Iyaah!
Danda: People of our land, I greet you!

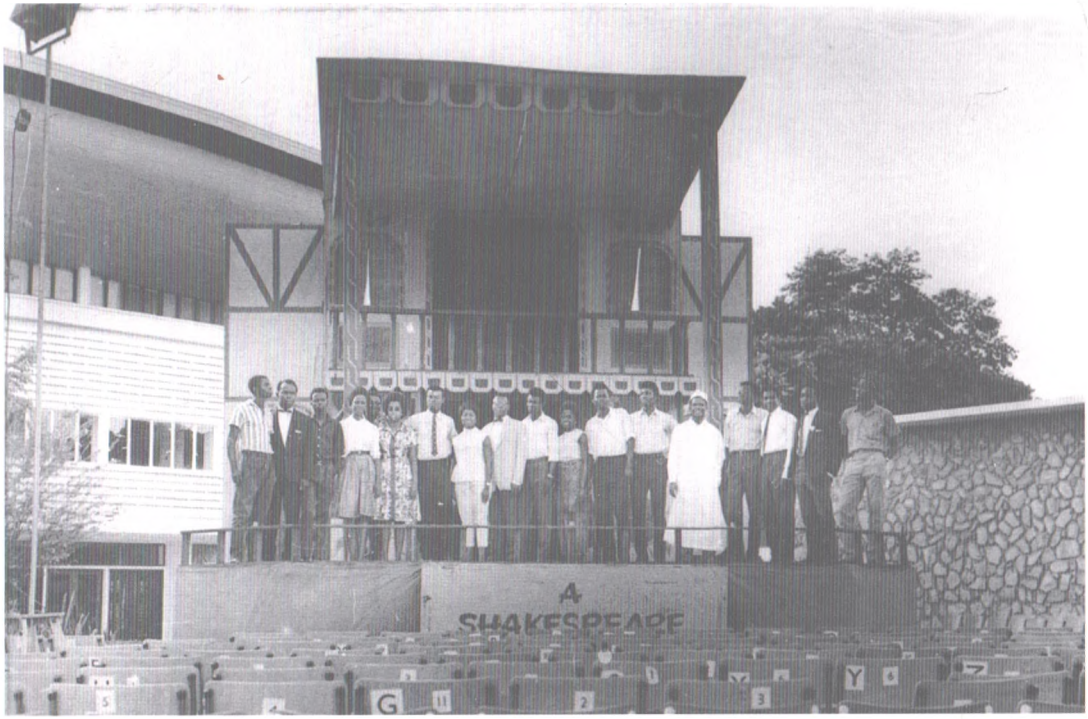
(*exit*)

As we take a ride with Danda, in Ndulue Nwoji's landboat, and as we sing along, a point has been made: that landboat is a Western product, but it is now the property of Aniocha.

For Martin Banham, his contemporaries, and the audiences of Ibadan University Travelling Theatre of the sixties, a human bridge, which they built over the passage of time, through their contribution towards a modern Nigerian theatre, is being commissioned today to monumentalize the link between 1963 and 1993 and the collapse of cultural walls across international borders and beyond the seas.

3. Danda's friends dancing round the strange landboat, Morris Mini Moke. A scene from *Danda* at the 1966 First World Negro Arts Festival in Dakar, Senegal. Third dancer from right is Alhaji Aliyu Doma who later became the 1979–83 civilian Deputy Governor of Plateau State, Nigeria.

4. Danda (Sonny Oti) in the landboat, Morris Mini Moke, with his wife (Fidelma Okwesa), his mother (Victoria Ezekoli), and two ọzọ title-holders in a scene from *Danda* at Dakar, Senegal, during the 1966 Negro Arts Festival.



5. 1964 Ibadan University Theatre-on-wheels staging excerpts from seven plays of William Shakespeare across Nigeria. This one was at Ibadan University Tower Court, with Trenchard Hall in the background. Far left is Wale Amele (later Councillor Balogun of the popular TV Village Headmaster). Far right is Sonny Oti among the cast.

5

STAGE AND STAGING IN YORUBA RITUAL DRAMA

Oyin Ogunba

Preamble

This short article is a tribute to Mr. Martin Banham on his attainment of the age of sixty years. Mr. Banham was the man who first suggested to me the idea of studying indigenous African dramatic forms. In October 1963, I was back at the University of Ibadan for a doctoral programme in the Department of English. I had toyed with the idea of writing a thesis on an aspect of the writings of W.B. Yeats, probably his plays, thanks to the enthusiasm generated for Yeatsian studies the previous session at Ibadan by a new Yeats scholar, Dr. S.B. Bushrui. It was at this stage that Mr. Banham, who was one of my lecturers at the undergraudate level, saw me and spoke with me about a different area of study. He encouraged me to come over to the newly created School of Drama (now the Department of Theatre Arts) and work on some aspects of traditional African dramatic forms. He said that the academic community had expected Mr. Wole Soyinka to write a thesis on the subject, following his Rockefeller-funded research on traditional festivals in Nigeria, but that he (Soyinka) had preferred (wisely) to use the material he gathered on the subject as an inspiration for his own creative work. It was, Mr. Banham argued, an area of study crying out to be explored and that I should come and undertake the task.

I accepted Mr. Banham's suggestion and registered for the doctoral programme in the School of Drama and completed the thesis in 1967 titled:

> "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People: a study of indigenous festivals".[1]

Since that time, the study of Yoruba festivals has been for me a life-long interest and I have extended the study to all other parts of Yorubaland.

[1] The Ijebu are a sub group of the Yoruba people. They occupy the South-eastern part of Yorubaland and are probably about 3–5 million (census figures are unreliable). Very many of them are traders and are to be found in commercial centres all over Nigeria and beyond.

It has been a most fascinating experience, and I am happy that I re-entered the world of gods, spirits and masquerades at the time I did, when I had almost lost it in the pursuit of English studies.

Definition

Ritual drama is defined as the drama which emerges from the traditional festival celebrations of the Yoruba people. This drama is not Aristotelian. It is what some people have described as *pre-drama* or *non-literate drama*, and others simply as *ritual* or *festival*.[2] Each of these terms is, however, imprecise in its own way: in the first two terms there is a tacit assumption that the narrative drama of western origin is the yardstick for all drama, and whatever is different from this is an imperfect form of the so-called standard. The other two terms (*ritual* and *festival*) do not sufficiently describe the high artistic component of these traditional ceremonies.

Ritual drama is a drama of music, masking and dance. It relies heavily on mime and symbolism, and the high point of performance is often the attainment of possession in dance, a state of ecstasy in which the dancer is transfigured and is in perfect union with the god, goddess, spirit or ancestor being celebrated.

The Earth has eyes

One of the favourite wise sayings of the Yoruba people is *Ilẹ l'oju* (literally, The Earth has eyes, or the Earth has a face). It means that the earth is not just a lifeless, physical substance, but something endowed with sensitivity and spirituality. That is why one is often advised to look at the face of the earth before stepping on it or before embarking on an important project. The earth then is conceived as a human body (presumably a woman's) and a given portion of land may have various parts corresponding to the parts of the human body. People who are endowed with inner sight and divine intelligence are believed to be able to locate the parts and approach them with the necessary caution. In such a set-up, it is the 'eyes' of the earth, or that portion of a given piece of land which constitutes the face which is important in ritual drama. This face of the earth is an archetypal one with manifestations in many places and it is the function of the intelligence to discover such places.

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[2] See Ruth Finnegan: *Oral Literature in Africa*, O.U.P. 1970, pp. 481–517.
There is also a lively discussion of the issue by several scholars in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a critical sourcebook*, edited by Yemi Ogunbiyi. Note in particular the articles by M.J.C. Echeruo, Ossie Enekwe, Ola Rotimi and J. Amankulor.

Mircea Eliade expresses a similar idea when he writes:

> "For religious man, space is not homogenous, he experiences interruptions, breaks, in it; some parts are qualitatively different from others."[3]

Yoruba ritual drama tends to be staged mostly in those places where religious man has discovered manifestations of the face of the earth.

In ritual drama the open-air stage is the typical one, although certain performances (usually secret or night ceremonies) are held indoors. Indoor ceremonies are often of a sacrificial nature and exclude a non-participating audience, whereas much of ritual drama is staged consciously for public enlightenment or edification and requires a full display in the open.

Stage Locations

In general, performances are staged in large open spaces big enough to accommodate actors and audiences who are sometimes in thousands. Groves are often huge tracts of land sufficiently spacious to take the large dramatic actions of gods and ancestors. But the main determinant of location, as noted above, is not just availability of space (even though space is important); it is rather the place that is ritually significant in the experience of the people. Such places often look commonplace enough at ordinary times, and may even be converted to other uses, like serving as children's playground. But at festival time the place assumes its metaphysical reality and is a piece of sanctified ground. Indeed, it is the ability of the community to make these psychological adjustments that facilitates the symbolism of ritual, so that a place which an hour earlier was just an improvised market place suddenly becomes the holy place of a god; and a tree which had appeared ordinary enough a short time earlier suddenly becomes the abode of spirits and ancestors.

Taking into consideration both sanctified ground and available space for performance, the following are the typical stage locations in this ritual drama:

The outskirts of a town or village. Here the groves are located and they are the traditional reservation areas for gods and ancestors. In the case of large towns such a grove may be two or three kilometres from the occupied area to make sure that future expansion does not overtake the grove. Some good examples of this used to be the Agemo groves in Imosan and Ijebu-Ode and the Obatala grove in Ile-Ife. But in recent times expansion has overtaken them, and the majesty, the supernatural awe of these

[3] Mircea Eliade: *The Sacred and the Profane*, Harper and Row, 1961, p. 20.

sacred places has all but disappeared. In the case of Ijebu-Ode the collapse has been total and the grove is no longer distinguishable. In 1966 the Agemo priests, in desperation, walled round a small portion of the grove, but that completely changed the form of the ritual drama.

Market areas. The market is a convenient place for performance, largely because of a ready audience. More importantly, however, gods, goddesses and ancestors are interested in the market-place as a nerve centre of the community, that is, a place where the earth has eyes. Examples of market places as stage locations are to be found in the Ogun celebration in Ijero and the Udiroko festival at Ado-Ekiti.

Road junctions. The road junction in traditional Yoruba thought is regarded as a mysterious place, the abode of spirits, and in particular, a favourite place of Esu, a mischievous god. Supernatural forces in the Yoruba universe tend to congregate at road junctions at particular times of the day and night, and therefore it is necessary for anyone in ritual performance to appreciate this point and pay homage to these forces whenever he reaches such a junction. An example of such a junction-performance is to be found in Ekine where the performer pays elaborate homage to the spirits of land and goddess of the sea, Olokun.

Historic places. Palace grounds, old or abandoned palace sites, particular spots where some important events took place in the experience of the community, for example, sites of hills which served as protection for the people at a certain crisis period, are important locations for performances in ritual drama. This is particularly strong in the royal traditions of the Yoruba people and examples are to be found in virtually every sizeable community in the land. We may mention Ọdun Ọba in Ondo, Ọlọọṣunta in Ikẹrẹ-Ekiti, Obiren-Ojowu in Ijebu-Ode as just a few of the examples.

Particular routes. Particular routes inside or outside a town are also important stage locations. Usually such routes are historic ones: they were used at a particular time in ancient days and were subsequently perpetuated into a ritual observance. Examples are to be found in the ritual tours in Ogun festivals all over the land, for example the Iwemọ Ogun in Ado-Ekiti, in Egungun parades and in the Agemo journey from various towns and villages to Imosan, the abode of the god.

Women's Cult houses. The frontage and environment of cult houses and of the houses of cult chiefs are important stage locations. A cult house is built only in a place where the earth has 'eyes' and is therefore well equipped for its metaphysical function. Yoruba women tend to make use of the cult-house more than their menfolk, for they hold regular weekly, monthly and bi-monthly meetings, dance and drum all night, and occasionally bring out their *orisa* in a masquerade form. The frontage and environment of such a cult house are also sanctified ground for the performance of the annual festival.

Houses of Offenders. The environment of the houses of social offenders are also important locations for ritual performance. This is particularly true of festivals of purification when the whole community gathers in front of the house of the offender, that is, someone who is adjudged by the community to have contravened its norms, and sing satirical songs about him or her. Usually such a person is a prominent member of the community, a chief, big business-man or a member of the educated elite who has sufficient space to accommodate his 'attackers'. If the space is not enough the "invaders" spread on the road and surrounding areas.

Water surfaces. In the coastal and riverine areas of Yorubaland, water surfaces and the adjoining beaches are important areas for staging performances.

> A good stretch of water, perhaps about a league, is chosen and the visiting goddess or water spirit arrives from a remote place to perform her dances on the surface of the water and adjoining land.

One of the main differences between ritual drama and other forms of drama is that the place of performance is crucial to the drama. The performance is non-transferrable, for once it is transferred it loses its character and its authenticity, and becomes almost a child's play; indeed, those who hold that ritual drama is not really drama seem to have a strong point here insofar as the drama cannot be adapted to other situations. They hinge a large part of their argument on this non-transferability. The performance location is, therefore, just as important as the action being staged, for it is the 'special space' which, together with the masking in some cases, allows the transformation from man to character or man to god to take place.

Staging

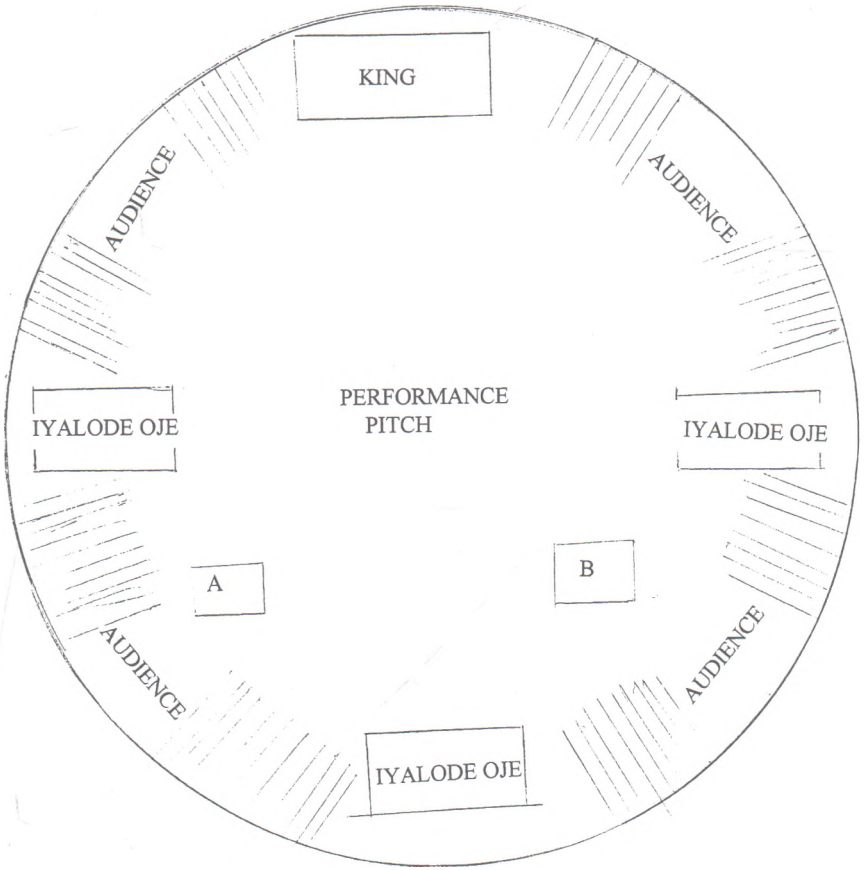
The popular notion of the stage in traditional African festivals is that of the stage-in-the-round, with actors and orchestra in the middle and the audience closing in on them in all directions and virtually suffocating them. While this is the most typical form, there is the risk of overgeneralising it for all. The stage form and the staging techniques adopted in any given festival depend on the nature and artistic goal of the festival. Whenever the aim is to demonstrate a total or near-total communal act, the tendency is to use a stage-in-the-round. But where there is differentiation or the need to show a distance between man and spirit, or between king and the populace, other forms of staging may be adopted. With our present state of knowledge three patterns of staging appear to emerge in Yoruba ritual drama namely, (i) the stage-in-the-round, (ii) the

roughly rectangular stage, and (iii) the picture-frame stage, and within each form there are significant variations:

The Stage-in-the-Round: The stage-in-the-round accommodates different degrees of audience-participation, depending on the type of festival or the particular act or episode being performed within a festival. In Plate 6 (Egungun festival at Ijebu-Igbo) in the ceremony of the third day of the Egungun festival, the king and the matrons of the cult are present and enthroned, and their presence imposes a certain order on the performance. There are also whip-carrying young men who help to restrain the audience. The Egungun masquerades have ample space for performance, including somersaulting, and, to that extent, this is a good example of a well-laid-out stage-in-the-round.

In Plate 7 (a & b), on the other hand, the very opposite of the physically well laid-out staging takes place. There are no presiding officers of the type found in Plate 6 and certainly little or no visible choreography. There are sixteen Agemo masquerades, fifteen of them fully covered from head to toe in raffia threads and also wearing head masks. The sixteenth, called Agemo Eleni (The Mat Agemo), does not wear any thread or mask, but is rather covered with a mat, and is about half the height of the other Agemo masquerades. One Agemo masquerade appears in the arena at a time, dances for about twenty to thirty minutes, and then returns to the inner apartment of the grove. After about eight or nine Agemo masquerades have danced, it is the turn of Agemo Eleni, a kind of comic interlude. Plate 7a shows a regular Agemo masquerade bestriding the stage in his dance. He is about eight or nine feet tall and is a true colossus. There are a few stalwarts who clear a path for him as he dances to make sure he is not obstructed by the surging crowd. Plate 7b represents Agemo Eleni as he frog-jumps in the arena seemingly menacing the audience. His dance is monkey-like, for he jumps on virtually everything in sight and balances perfectly on them. In order to complete the illusion of reality, that is, the belief that this Agemo is a mysterious spirit in a strange costume, women are asked to kneel down while he is performing his dance so that they may not see the half-naked figure inside the mat who contrives to dance in a squatting posture. This fact makes the staging in Plate 7b qualitatively different from that of Plate 7a. The kneeling women are usually in front, and this creates a little more space for the Agemo Eleni to dance, for the crowd suffocates a little less than that of the regular Agemo masquerade.

Plate 8, Magbo festival at Ikorodu, illustrates the ideal of a total communal performance in a stage-in-the-round. This is a purification festival in which a person is being ritually chastised, and the community correspondingly ritually cleansed, through satirical singing. Every male member of the community in this festival carries two clappers as musical



A, B. Orchestra which can be in either position A or B.

The three Iyalode Oje are on high thrones. Their presence helps to check the forward advance of the audience.

6. Staging of Egungun at Ijebu-Igbo.

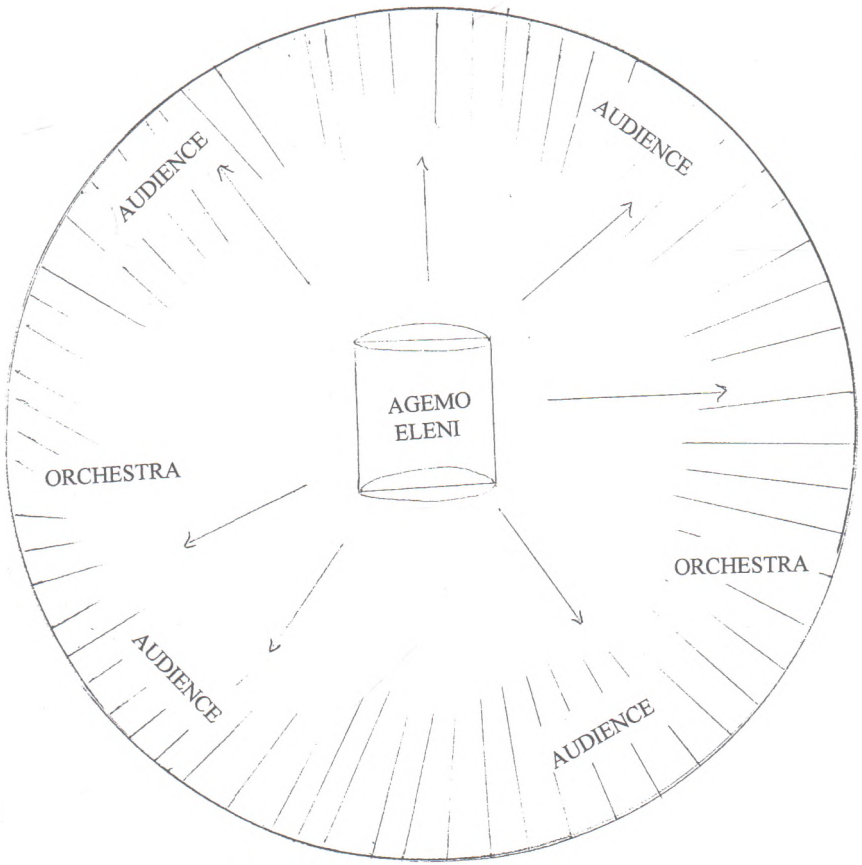
instrument. Everyone (and they may be as many as five hundred or more), except four song leaders, sits down in front of the house of the 'victim' of satirical songs for the occasion, listening to the song to be brought alive for the first time and taking part in the process of its creation. The song itself goes A-B-C-D among the song leaders before passing to the sitting, participating audience.

The Rectangular stage: Plate 9 shows the staging in a mimed dance at the Osu festival in Owu, the theme of which is the capture of Olusen by Iganmigan. The staging here is not in the round because it is the distance

7a. An ageing god dances at Imosan. Arrows show path and direction of dance. The path clears as he approaches and closes behind him. The audience is tumultous, almost suffocating.

between A and B which is really important in the setting. The point of the dance is to make the journey from A to B and demonstrate in seven symbolic movements how enemy forces were routed and Iganmigan rose triumphant. Plate 10 is an even more convincing rectangular stage form. Each of the women has to dance through the akoko trees, stay at each demarcation point for some time, achieve near-possession at the gate to the cult house and attain the ecstatic state which is the minimum standard acceptable to the presiding goddess.

Picture frame stage: There are a few examples of the picture frame pattern of staging. This may sound strange in a culture in which most performances are held in the open-air, but Plate 11 illustrates the type. In the Olua festival at Osi-Ekiti, two masked figures emerge at midnight

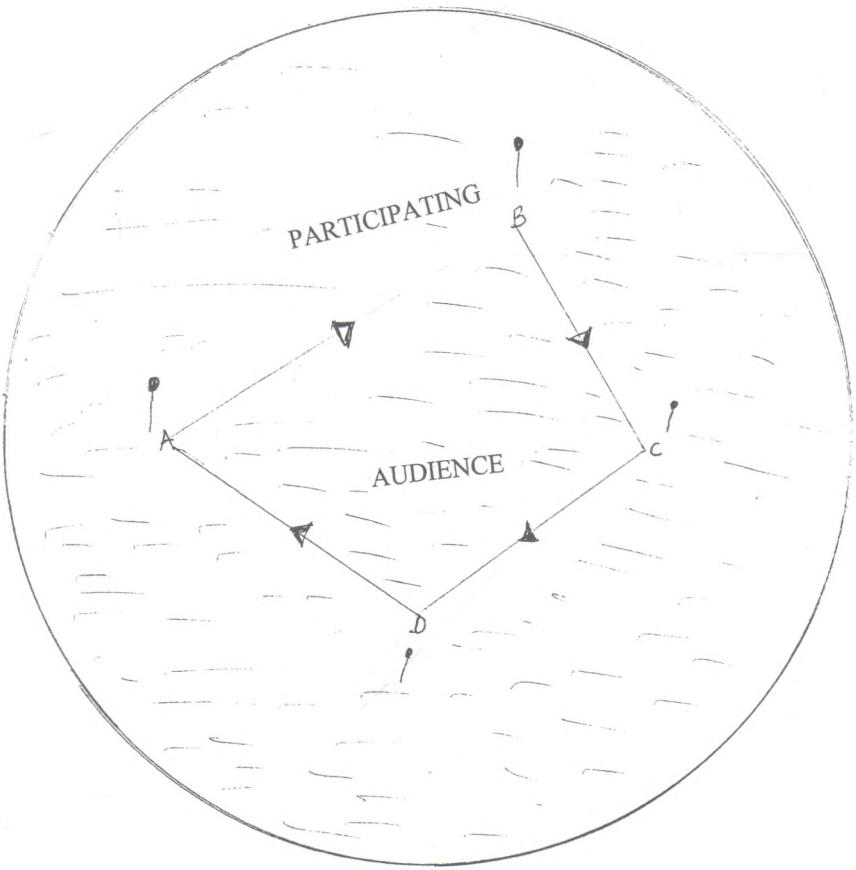


→ Direction of the frog-jump dance.

Agemo Eleni (Mat Agemo), about four feet tall, is in fact a man in pants who wraps himself in a mat to dance. To complete the illusion of reality, women are wont to kneel down when he dances.

7b. Staging of Agẹmọ Ẹlẹni at Imọsan.

(presumably representing the god of the land and his wife) and the whole community is roused to come and witness his greatness. The reputation of these masked figures is that they can rise high to about twenty feet at will and also reduce themselves to about two feet or less, also at will. This is the measure of their mysterious nature. What happens, however, is that the audience is kept at a great distance from the performing masks, and, in the near-total darkness of midnight (the stage-managers provide inadequate lighting!), the figures do sometimes appear to grow taller and shorter. With this kind of staging, even the man in the front



Song leaders.

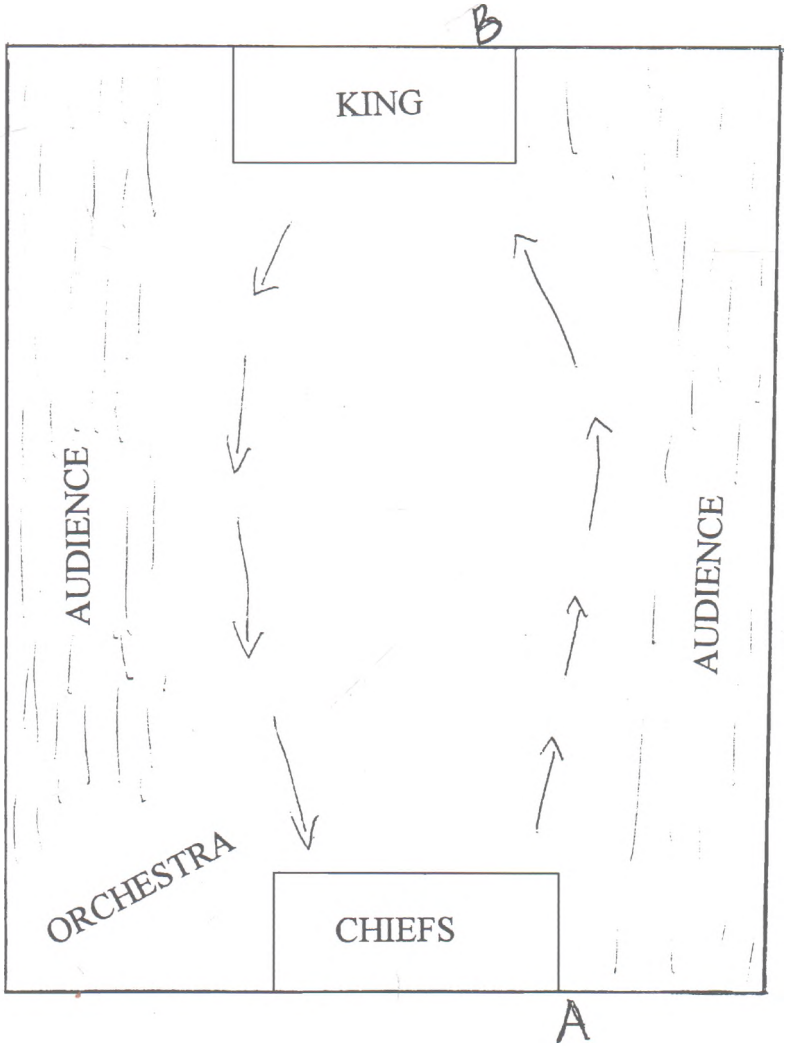
The audience in this case – sometimes about five hundred – is all seated. Only the four song leaders stand up. The participating audience is also the chorus.

8. Staging of Magbo festival at Ikorodu.

line of the audience sees only a silhouetted figure at a distance, and whenever each of the figures wants to get taller it has a trick of moving nearer the audience or first going into one of the alleys from where a taller substitute emerges. When it really wants to grow tall it goes behind the cult house where it probably mounts a platform.

Delimiting Performance Area

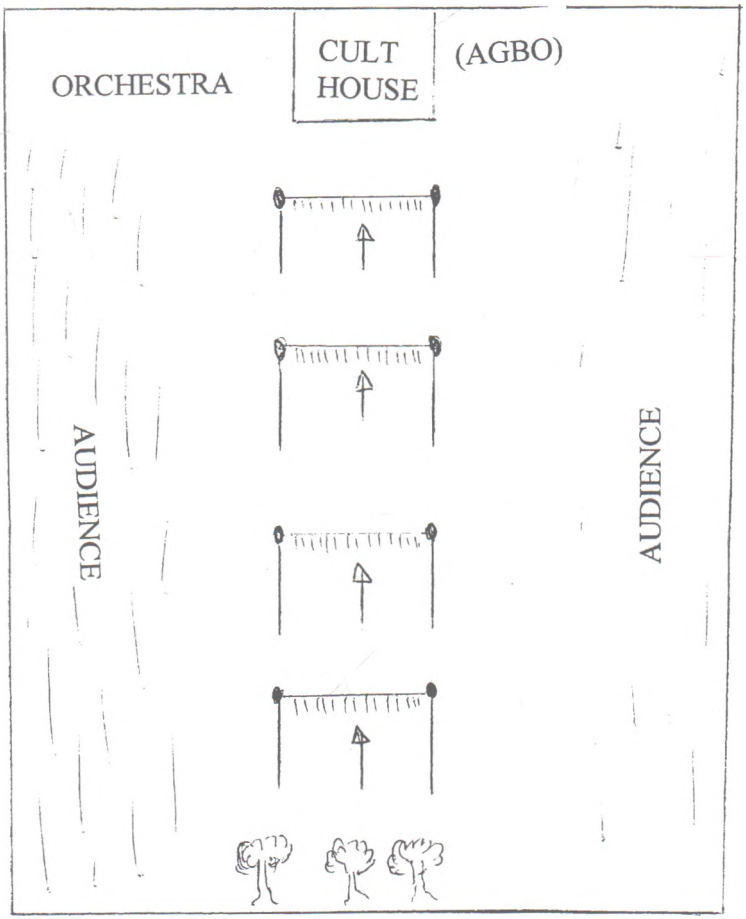
Ritual drama thrives, to a large extent, on the tension between actors and the audience at the time of performance. Stage managers are always



Direction of dance: A → B. The stray arrows shows the dancer butting into the audience in ecstatic moments of the dance.
This structure also holds for many kings' festivals, etc.

9. Aṣipa dance in the Osu festival at Owu-Ijebu.

trying to restrain the audience who, on the other hand, are always breaking through in the effort to see what is being performed. All this happens because, in most cases, there is no clear-cut physical demarcation of the performance area. As a result all kinds of make-shift devices are used to resolve the tension. They fall into two broad groups, namely, the physical



Direction of dance.

Two akoko trees with a palm branch crossbar through which the dancer goes.

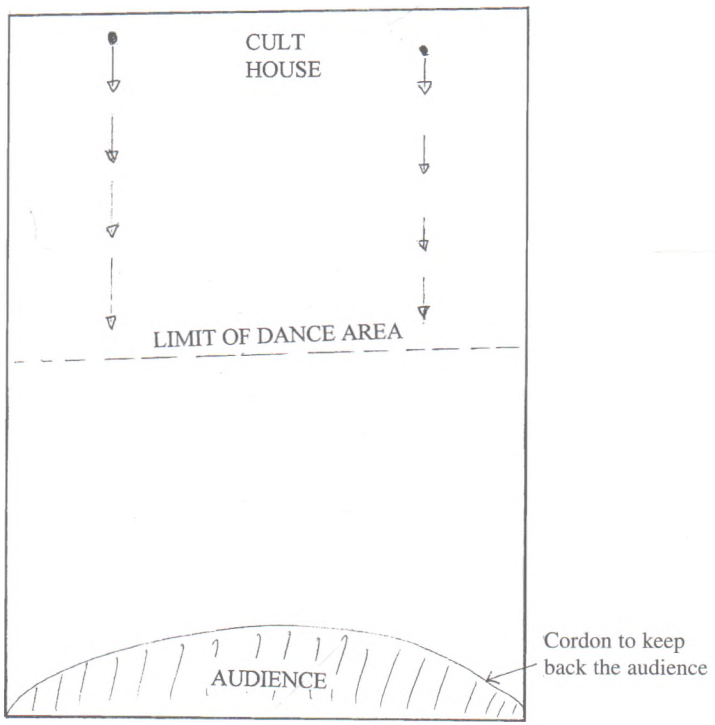
Stumps of akoko trees where all the dancers begin their performance.

10. The Oluweri women's dance at Ẹṣure.

and the metaphysical:

Physical Devices:

(i) Strong ropes are sometimes used to restrain the audience, as in the Olua festival in Osi-Ekiti mentioned above. Whenever this device is



The two masked figures dancing. They have a reputation for growing tall (about 20 feet) and short (about 2 feet) at will. But, in fact, the device used is spatial illusion. The orchestra is invisible.

11. Olua night dance at Osi-Ekiti.

used the rope has to be strong and must be policed by young men carrying whips.

(ii) In some festivals, for example Egungun, whips are carried by younger Egungun or plain-clothes men. This practice which now appears to be an essential part of Egungun ritual must have started as a device to create acting space.

(iii) In many festivals, drummers form a ring round the performing figure and thus give him some space for performance.

(iv) In ceremonies like Agemo there is a stage manager who goes in front of the masked figure and clears the ground for him.

Metaphysical Devices

(i) In certain ceremonies, as in Obiren Ojowu, the priest pours some 'magical' liquid on the ground in a circular formation and no one

may trespass into the area, thus giving the performer some acting space. It is sometimes said that whoever trespasses will become impotent. This usually acts as a very effective check.

(ii) Certain Egungun masquerades are known to scatter dangerous things (eta) with corrosive properties on the ground around the place where they are performing. People who step on them are known to develop swollen feet. This device also keeps the audience back.

(iii) It is also a taboo in certain places for a man to touch the costume of an Egungun masquerade during a performance. This also is a device to create acting space.

Conclusion

The stage locations, stage forms and staging techniques discussed above are some of the features which give Yoruba ritual drama its special character and flavour. They are also some of the principal elements which prevent the drama from being totally weaned from its religious base and inspiration. In this drama, there is a tension between religion and entertainment, and the mutual accommodation or compromise arrived at is what we have called ritual drama. That is why the drama is not fully Aristotelian, although many episodes in festival performances, especially the symbolic and mimetic ones, conform to the best tradition of dramatic presentation.

6

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY THEATRE IN HEALTH EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Oga Steve Abah

Health Care Picture

The health care system in Nigeria is nothing but a sorry affair. Let us begin to build the collage with an encounter:

> It is September 1989. The place is Onyuwei, a small village of about 1,000 people. It is an agrarian community where both men and women grow yams, cassava and water yams as staple crops. Farming is on a subsistent level.
>
> The village lies 30 kilometres in the south-easterly direction from Otukpo, the Local Government head-quarters. 20 kilometres from Otukpo the decent and all-season motorable road terminates. It is out of determination that one reaches Onyuwei, with a cloud of dust reporting your arrival, if not intrusion, into this marooned village, cut off from the outside world by a network of streams. The bravado to drive into Onyuwei can only be in the dry months (November–March). The village becomes inaccessible in the rainy months of April to October.
>
> It was this village that two facilitators from the Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance arrived on September 13 to arrange logistics for a Theatre for Integrated Development workshop scheduled for December, three months to come. The environment was green, the grasses were lush and the forest thick. In contrast however, a good number of the villagers looked sickly and dejected. A good many were coughing, showed signs of malaria and looked malnourished. The graphic completion of this sorry collage was a pathetic five-year old boy.
>
> I am going round a few house-holds greeting the villagers. In one compound I see a boy of about five sitting by himself on the ground a little distance away from his grandmother. Flies are flying round him. He is ematiated and looks very weak. I notice he has some sores on his legs. I greet Oigije, the grandmother, who presents not too different a picture from her five-year old grandson. She looks unwell and sits by her hut and fixes a vacant stare into the crossroads as if expecting someone.
>
> I greet Oigije and ask her what is wrong with the boy. She says to me "I do not know" and goes on to tell the boy to stand up. I think she wanted me to see if I knew what was wrong with him. With difficulty he gets up. But to walk to where his grandmother is sitting he needs the

> help of a walking stick! Not because he has a bad leg. He is too weak to support and move himself.
>
> I am not a medical doctor. But when I saw the boy, whom the grandmother never called by his proper name, I could tell this was an extreme case of malnutrition. I went away asking myself how a theatre workshop as the Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance was planning could address such a boy's predicament. When we came back three months later the boy had died.[1]

There are a number of issues related to this encounter. Firstly, it points to a general neglect of rural communities which is indeed a major developmental problem in Nigeria. The fact that Onyuwei and other villages in this category, and there are countless of them all over this country, cannot be easily reached is a crisis. For example millions of parents in such villages have never heard of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) or Primary Health Care (PHC). Part of the reason is absence of access roads and bridges. It is evident here that there is refusal to cater for the rural persons on two levels: one of amenities and that of health care. Yet these farmers in remote villages are the most consistent tax payers and fanatical voters in times of elections. However, they have nothing to gain for their consistency and indefatigability in performing their civic duties.

As a result their existence is a perpetual crisis framed by ignorance and lack of information. The recourse these villagers have to healthy living is indigenous medical practices. Although many indigenous herbal medications have proven their efficacy over the years, they tend to be mostly curative rather than preventative. There is a need, therefore, for the indigenous to co-exist alongside western practice in order to cope with certain emergencies. Iganya, a woman from Adankari, a village two kilometres from Onyuwei, would not then need to be walked several kilometres by a team of traditional birth attendants (TBAs) trying to deliver her of the second baby twelve and a half hours after the first one was born. Also Iganya's twins would not need to die after three months.[2]

Very often the women die in the process of child bearing. It is estimated that 21 out of every 1000 in Nigeria die during child birth. About 30 per cent of children die before the age of five. The average life

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[1] The Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA), a development NGO did a workshop on Theatre for Integrated Development (TIDE) on December 7–22, 1989 in villages of Otobi, Adankari and Onyuwei.

[2] Oga S. Abah, 'Perspectives in Popular Theatre: Orality as a Definition of New Realities', Paper presented at Conference on 'New Idioms and Alternative Expressions', University of Bayreuth, Germany (June 18–21, 1992).

span in Nigeria is 51 years compared to 75 in the United Kingdom and the U.S.A. Even so, this average life expectancy figure cannot refer to any person in the rural environment. It only refers to the urban dweller, for two reasons. The average urban dweller has better access to medical care than the villager. He has more access because he can afford the medical bills. He can also reach hospitals and clinics quite easily. This is because they are mostly located in urban centres. The second reason is that the urban person has a better food security than the farmers in the rural environment. It is possible to argue that the food cycle of plenty and famine in the villages determines the health pattern in the rural environment. In the period of plenty and harvest the people are more likely to be healthy – although malnutrition still presents a problem at this time – as against general debility in times of famine. The average Nigerian worker may, on the opposite scale, have the purchasing ability to maintain a relatively stable pattern of health all through the year.

Nigeria's Health Policy

All this are happening against the background of a National Health Policy enunciated in 1988 with a mandate "to attain the goal of health for all citizens by the year 2000 and beyond, ..." The policy adopts primary health care (PHC) as the key to attaining the goal of health for all Nigerians. The policy subscribes to the Alma Ata definition of PHC which states that,

> Primary Health Care is essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community and through their full participation and at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination.[3]

The underpinning philosophy which the policy adopts to achieve its goal is that of *social justice and equity*. A third element of interest in the policy is government's acceptance of responsibility for the health of its citizens thus,

> The various governments of the Federation have responsibilities for the health of the people which shall be fulfilled by the provision of adequate health and social services.
>
> (National Health Policy, p. 8)

Four years after the national policy adoption, it is perhaps still too early to assess its success. However, if one judges by experiences and

[3] Cited in *The National Health Policy and Strategy*, Federal Ministry of Health Lagos, Nigeria. October 1988 (pp. 7–8).

testimonies the ugly statistics may not have altered for the better yet. The state of health services and the health condition of Nigerians are still far from adequate. For example, it is estimated that only about 35 per cent of Nigeria's 88.5 million people have access to modern health care services. Look at these other figures.

- Crude death rate: 16 per 1000
- Crude birth rate: 50 per 1000
- Childhood mortality rate: 144 per 1000 aged 1–4 years
- Infant mortality rate: 85 per 1000 live births – This increases to 100–160 in rural areas (Figures obtained from National Health Policy)
- It is estimated that *one* Nigerian woman dies every *ten minutes* as a result of pregnancy complications. The incidence of vesico-vagina fistula (VVF) compounds the matter in the north of the country. Although Nigeria's population is below 2 per cent of the world total, it accounts for 15 per cent of the global maternal mortality. (Figures are from Report for the MacArthur Foundation Country Strategy for the Population Program in Nigeria.)

These figures may not change in any significant way by the year 2000. Indeed this magic year is for me, as it is for many citizens of developing countries, beginning to sound like George Orwell's *1984*.

Health for All through Privatisation?

The reality facing Nigerians is that government health system and their structures for implementation, the hospitals, have collapsed. For example, there is a pronounced shortage of doctors in government owned hospitals. This is not because doctors are not being trained. Indeed the annual output of doctors from training institutions is generally on the increase. However, more seek employment in the private sectors and go into private practice in preference to public hospitals. On average there is one doctor to 20,000 persons in Nigeria. This is far behind the World Health Organisations's (WHO) accepted ratio of 1 in 5,000.

Secondly, there is acute shortage of essential drugs in the hospitals. To aggravate matters the available drugs are too expensive for the average Nigerian to afford. As a result of the long waiting time before seeing a doctor – a minimum of three hours in most public hospitals – and the general decline in services, more Nigerians are beginning to patronise private hospitals and clinics. This patronage is not exactly out of choice. Patients have been forced to take this course. They also argue that if drug prices have increased and if in addition they have to wait for so long, they would rather go to private hospitals. Private hospitals have, in the last five years, mushroomed as a consequence.

What this all means is that the health care system has been largely commercialised. Take a look at the service charges between the public and private hospitals.

Item of Care	Public	Private
Outpatient registration	#5.00	#20.00
Consultation	Nil	#20.00
Antenatal care	#50.00	#500.00
Normal Delivery	#200.00	#350.00
Assisted Delivery	not given	#500.00
Surgical Operations:		
Major	#850.00	#1,500.00
Intermediate	#550.00	–
Minor	#350.00	#350.00

There has been an increase of between 300 and 700 per cent in the service charges between 1986 and 1992 especially in public hospitals.[4] These dismal and worrying statistics show that health for all remains a far away dream for 70 per cent of Nigerians.

The Role of Community Theatre in Health Education

Given this scenario of neglect, unbalanced health care system and, indeed of social injustice, what is the role of Community/Popular Theatre? Is Community Theatre to promote or reject establishment policies? It is perhaps not a dichotomy between acceptance and rejection but a negotiation of a balance between the two polar points.

In developing countries development programmes which include health are normally organised in five-year phases. Very often however, these programmes are botched, mismanaged and development remains only a pronouncement. For development to be real and meaningful it should be the range of social, economic and political activities in which the people fully participate and which resultant effects guarantee an equitable distribution of resources and standard of living. As Julius Nyerere argues in his book *Man and Development*.

> Development brings freedom, provided it is development of *people*. But people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves..., he develops himself by making his own decisions... and by his own full participation – as an equal – in the life of the community he lives in.[5]

[4] The figures for the public hospital are those from the Ahmadu bello University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH). The private ones were provided by Limi Hospital in Zaria.

[5] Julius K. Nyerere, *Man and Development*, London, Oxford University Press, 1974 (p. 27).

The human person is at the centre and is the *subject* of development. Development should therefore avail this subject good health. That is, put in place a health care system which he has access to and which he can afford. The human person should be guaranteed food security, i.e. perpetual availability of food at an affordable price. S/he should exercise the right to freedom of choice and expression. Also, s/he should be allowed to participate in both civil and policy matters. We are therefore talking of a totally enfranchised person in a completely democratic society. We must, however be realistic and agree that: such a person and indeed the totally democratic environment are both ideals and will remain so in the forseeable future.

The role of Community Theatre in such circumstances is to generate, encourage as well as support alternative development strategies. It also functions as a means of development communication. In Nigeria Community Theatre (C.T.) has been used to fulfil these functions in the fields of agriculture, income-generation and health.

Community/Popular Theatre is able to perform these, and other functions because it is endowed with enabling qualities.

Community Theatre

In many parts of Africa the practice known as Community Theatre is severally referred to as Popular Theatre, Peoples' Theatre, Theatre for Development or Theatre for Integrated Development. They all refer to the same practice in spite of the multiplicity of nomenclatures. Community Theatre is the theatre of the people talking to them about their own problems, in their own language, on their own terms and using their own artistic forms. Community Theatre therefore has a strong cultural implication. It should and does respect the cultural background of its environment and must operate from within to gain acceptability. What is crucially evoked here is the place of culture in communication and in development. Since Community Theatre recognises and acknowledges cultural factors it has become a way of integrating culture into development agenda. Also C.T. in defining its programme is community specific and issues oriented. This is why it deals with matters of direct relevance to the lives of the people. Thirdly, it is participatory and to a certain degree interpersonal in approach. In doing this C.T. engenders a process of intimate and detailed discussions of issues which affect, not only an amorphous aggregate called society, but individual persons who make up the community. This interpersonal approach generates confidence in the people to believe in themselves and in their abilities. The result is group identity and community cohesion. It then becomes possible for Community Theatre to mobilise for action. It is indeed a theatre of creating awareness and empowerment. It is significant and also refreshing that the analysis, awareness raising and empowerment take place in the context of entertainment. Part of the

appeal of the C.T. method is its penchant to celebrate life. Despite the numerous problems which the urban and rural poor battle with in their daily lives, their spirits express a constant desire to survive and to celebrate that survival. It is because people want to live a fulfilled life, to see their potentials and ambitions realised that they focus on problems and to solve them. In rural environments the definition and discussion of community issues may be expressed in song and dance. Also the resolution of such problems are normally greeted with songs, drumming and dancing. Therefore the performative arts of the people become very powerful media for articulating as well as analysing community issues.

Case Studies

i. The Leprosarium Project: Theatre for Information and Psychological Repair.
Look at this scenario.

> *Two persons, a man and a woman who have been cured of leprosy return to their separate villages. They are however rejected in the different communities. The community's thinking is that once a leper always a leper! Secondly, the general belief is that the disease leprosy is a curse and divine punishment on evil persons. The two persons are therefore to remain outcasts.
>
> *The pressure and psychological trauma are too great for the woman to bear. She returns to the Leprosy Centre from where she had been discharged. She asks to be taken back and to live in the Centre in spite of being cured. The doctor at the Centre counsels her and advises that she returns home and to put into practice the tailoring craft she had learned when she was an inmate at the Centre.
>
> *Meanwhile the man is going through the pangs of rejection in his own village. The woman links up with this man as she thinks they can devise a collective strategy to battle the stigma from their two neighbouring villages. They end up getting married to each other. The woman starts a tailoring business. The man sets up a carpentry workshop as he had trained as a carpenter from the Leprosy Centre. Initially they have problems; but the high quality of their products win them customers. They are also very committed community mobilisers and good organisers of community self-help programme. Husband and wife become opinion leaders and the society which despised and ostracised them initially has now accepted and, indeed begun to depend on their abilities.

A number of points are raised here. One, it is clear that the victims of leprosy are badly stigmatised and almost ostracised by society. Two, several myths surround the disease and account for the misunderstanding of both disease and patients. Three, the lepers or those who

once had leprosy are like any other person in society. In spite of their disease and/or disability, they are useful members of the community.

Leprosy which is an infectious tropical disease invades especially the nerve system in the body. The result is the swelling, numbing and eventual loss of affected parts when gangrene sets in. The parts of the body most vulnerable are the fingers, toes, nose and eyes thereby causing serious disfigurement. Among the Nigerian public leprosy is still a widely misunderstood ailment. It is believed to be hereditary; it is thought to be incurable, and is generally believed to be a curse. To compound the leprosy problem Nigerian doctors hardly ever agree to work in Leprosariums. For example, no Nigerian doctor works in the Zaria Leprosarium.

The objectives of the Leprosarium Project, in 1986 and 1988, were; therefore, to educate the public on leprosy and to enable them recognise the symptoms. It was also to enlighten them on what to do and where to go for help, and to draw attention to the trauma of sufferers and the plight of cured persons who face difficulties trying to integrate back into the society. Lastly the project was also intended to encourage Nigerian doctors to work in medical establishments dealing with leprosy patients and to help fight the disease.

The scenario above dealt largely with the trauma of rehabilitated patients. The project also addressed the basic facts and points of misunderstanding. This was contained in the second play.

Scenario # 2:

> A number of actors come on stage carrying placards. The placards name the symptoms and stages of leprosy. A doctor comes in to explain to the audience:
>
> First signs: brown patches on the body – when pricked with a sharp object the patch has no sensitivity. At this stage the disease is very easy to cure. Patches will disappear. When they reappear after a period of incubation – anything from 6 months to two years – the disease begins to attack the body system: fingers, toes, eyes, nose, etc. It is still curable except some damage may have been done. It will also take a longer time. Leprosy is not inherited and it is not a curse from God.
>
> *Two actors enter to show the doctor some patches on their bodies. They want to know if they have leprosy. The doctor confirms that one of them has leprosy; the other is free of the disease. The one with leprosy is referred to the Zaria Leprosarium.

The facts of this project were researched in the Zaria Leprosarium with the doctors and inmates. The plays were performed in the Leprosarium itself, and in the villages of Maigana and Tudun Sarki. Maigana is some 20 kilometres away from Ahmadu Bello University in the north-easternly direction as one drives towards Jos. Tundun Sarki is some six kilometres across from the University dam.

During performance the plays generated powerful emotional response among inmates of the Leprosarium. They said the plays reflected their plight accurately; a number of them expressed doubts if they would be accepted by the outside society ever again. Some declared they would not go back home even after they have been cured. In Maigana two members of the community came forward during the post-performance discussions to show patches on their bodies. They wanted the student who played the doctor in the drama to test and confirm whether or not they had leprosy. Three days after the performance in Tundun Sarki, one of the chiefs in the area came to the university to confide in one of the lecturers that he had leprosy and to ask for help.

Crisis of Operation

In spite of the positive results of this project it was a one-off exercise and did not have a programme of follow-up activities. Yet for an enlightenment programme to succeed information dissemination needs to be sustained over a long period of time. Also to assuage the pains of physical distortion which the erstwhile lepers must carry for life; and to repair battered psyches which remain sore as long as society scowls at the rehabilitated individuals, there should be constant counselling and care.

The role of theatre in health education should in recognition of these problems contribute to repairing battered psyches. However, Community Theatre can only be a means towards an end. The end lies outside theatre in concrete institutions and establishments. Very often the organisations deploying theatre for health purposes have neither institutional capability nor establishment linkages to deal with the aftermath of its activities.

ii. *Vesico Vagina Fistula (VVF): Medical Rehabilitation or Cultural Repair?*

Vesico Vagina Fistula (VVF) is a medical condition resulting from prolonged obstructed labour during child birth. VVF is an opening between the bladder and vagina. The cut known locally as 'gishiri' cut, is made by the local barber to widen the passage for the child to be born. One result of the 'gishiri' cut is that the girl cannot control her urine because the bladder may have been perforated. If the cut also penetrates the rectum the patient (or is it victim?) will leak both urine and faeces. When this happens the wife is very often rejected by the husband, the reason being that she is 'polluted'!

The VVF problem is very pronounced among young girls of between ages 11 and 15 who are married off at these tender ages. This phenomenon of early marriage is especially strong in the moslem north of Nigeria where betrothal and early marriage are regarded as a means of guaranteeing chastity and of moral preservation. Many of the child-bride

victims who have no access to medical care may turn to street begging in order to survive. A few find their way to the VVF hostel at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital (ABUTH) in Zaria where they are repaired. Repairs of VVF patients are also done in Kano. But the queue is forever long and the calamity persists.

Two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned with the problem of VVF are Women in Nigeria (WIN) and the Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA). WIN is an NGO fighting women's issues ranging from health through conjugal to property rights. NPTA is a body interested in promoting participatory development and exchange of knowledge through popular theatre and other strategies.

To address the VVF problem a number of activities have been organised over the years. One of such activities was a one-day workshop organised by Women in Nigeria on November 25, 1991. Drama was part of the enlightenment package. The story line of the drama titled *The Dilemma of Womanhood,* was straight-forward and simple:

> *A young girl called Maimuna is married off at the age of 12 to an Alhaji[6] who has *three* wives already. Maimuna is forced to marry the old man against her wish.
>
> *Not long after marriage she becomes pregnant... . A traditional birth attendant (TBA) is called in to deliver the baby. It is a difficult and complicated labour. The TBA administers several herbal mixtures to Maimuna. Where all efforts fail the TBA performs the 'gishiri' cut.
>
> *Maimuna is rushed to the hospital at last, after three days of labour. The baby is stillborn and Maimuna has VVF. She is sent away from her matrimonial home because the husband cannot stand her condition any more. Maimuna resorts to begging by day and to prostitution by night.
>
> *One day while begging Maimuna meets her childhood friend, Zainab, with whom she used to hawk groundnuts. Zainab is now a medical doctor. Maimuna relates her story to her friend. Zainab takes Maimuna to the hospital where she is repaired. Zainab also rehabilitate her friend and provides for her until she is able to support herself.

Issues

The drama which was performed by community nurses and other workers from the Yakawada Comprehensive Health Care (YCHC) contains several tangents from which to discuss the issue of vesico vagina fistulae (VVF). One, it may be out of concern for daughters to have respectability in marriage that their parents want them to marry early. Parents may also want their daughters to go to their husband's homes in their virgin innocence in order that the family reputation does not suffer. However,

[6] A man who has made the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

there are questions to ask: whose respectability is being preserved? At whose expense? Who sets the rules and who pronounces the oral judgement? It is obvious from the drama and from everyday reality in this part of Nigeria that neither the daughters nor their mothers set the rules of the game. It is the fathers, i.e. men. The motive of filial concern must now stand questioned and, indeed becomes suspect.

If the father's actions stem from genuine care then they must begin to worry about the aftermath of their daughters marrying early. It is the child-brides who become victims of this practice. They are married off at an age when they are neither psychologically nor physiologically ripe for matrimony. The trauma of leaving their parents to set up and manage homes of their own when they still need to be cared for is immense. Also these child-brides experience undue physical pain caused by sexual intercourse and child-birth; because they are not yet mature for these responsibilities. It must therefore be painful and perhaps incomprehensible to VVF victims that while following society's prescription they are rejected and abandoned when they develop VVF.

What, then should be the agenda of Community Theatre (C.T.) in matters as we are talking about here? Should it only be concerned with information which leads patients to medical centres for treatment and rehabilitation or should C.T. focus on cultural repair; that is, honing in on the practices which entrench the tradition of early marriage? It should do both. But beyond information and rehabilitation the process of cultural changes which will eventually alter the VVF picture, should be discussed in the context of empowering women. In *The Dilemma of Womanhood* it was clear that Hadiza who was Maimuna's age as well as playmate did not have to enter into marriage early and had no problem of VVF because she went to school. One, it takes time to finish schooling. This allows the girls to mature. Two, in the process of being educated the girl develops awareness and critical perception. She is therefore capable of independent choices. Education is consequently considered to be part of as well as a process towards female empowerment.

It is through providing this sort of analysis that we see the conscientizing role and power of Community Theatre. The VVF play at the WIN workshop was seen by traditional birth attendants (TBAs) and chiefs from surrounding villages. VVF patients were also participants at the workshop. At the end of the performance the VVF patients gave testimonies of their experiences. The offensive odour oozing from the patients could be perceived by the audience as the women told their painful stories. And this concretised the drama. It also was an indictment of the people and the system which made these women stand before the gathering in such brutalised and dehumanised form.

In their own contributions to the discussion the chiefs and men from the villages, as well as the TBAs confirmed the events in the drama

as true reflections of occurences in their environment. They partly accepted responsibility and also pleaded ignorance. Perhaps as recompense and expiation they promised to change things. But Community Theatre must go further than accepting promises. The CT animateurs must key their work into the activities of change agents on both local and national levels. For it is, at the end of the day, through such action strategies and concrete achievements which change the status quo that the contribution and viability of Community Theatre will be assessed.

7

THE HAND THAT FEEDS THE KING

Wale Ogunyemi

CHARACTERS

Akilapa	a royal father
Ogidan	his Body Guard
Odidi	his War Captain
Oluawo	his Ifa Priest
Aworo	Priest of the gods
Iyaagan	Priestess of the gods and leader of the womenfolk.

Masquerade
Townspeople
Warriors
Drummers.

Location – Nigeria
Time – the 20th century

I

Townsquare
There is a set of Risers Up-Stage centre which does not take too much of stage space. On it sits a highly decorated royal chair throughout this drama. It is always in silhouette until action calls for the palace. The generous space left on stage is utilized for different locations in the play to avoid drag. Voices from off-stage. Lights. People, men and women storm the auditorium. They go round members of the audience and confront them with questions.

People: Our treasures are missing, carted away. By whom, we do not know. Do you know?

Odidi: (*Hastens on to the stage in mufti*) No! Not here! You don't expect these good people to be partners in crime! (*The people leave the auditorium and join Odidi*) These people are only in transit and that is no crime. So, go to our own people since a man's enemy lives within his household. Visit neighbouring villages and there conduct your investigations. (*Exit people in different*

directions) My sincere apologies, good people, for the embarrassment. It wasn't intentional. But we are desperate. If the kite did not visit our homes in our absence and went away with our chicken, we couldn't have been so worried. The problem is: until recently, this Community was a safe repository of valuable art objects, but we woke up one morning and discovered that these treasures we so much cherish and adore; these valuable art objects that had always been our pride – our essence, were missing. Some unscrupulous people must have walked into our Shrines and made away with them to God knows where. It is ominous, hence our bid to track them down before they are carried far and beyond the seas. We need information if you have any. We need to hold someone or a group of people responsible, otherwise, you all stand suspect.

Aworo: (*Rushes in*) Odidi! Odidi!

Odidi: Aworo! Any success?

Aworo: We are doomed. Our patron god of war is also gone!

Odidi: Ogun disappeared?

Aworo: Iyaagan, Priestess of the gods, visited the shrine last night and bade Ogun good night with sacrifices, but at the break of dawn, it has vanished, the shrine swept clean of yesterday's sacrifice. She wailed to the palace but alas, the King blamed her carelessness. The whole thing is fishy, Odidi. Fishy! The rogues could not have gone far, I am sure, so we must hasten to track them down.

Odidi: And fast.

Aworo: Meanwhile, I've summoned our ancestral spirit for help. He is the one who commands issues like the shower of rain. He is a pathfinder. He will help us trace the rogues. (*The search party now returns. They are worn out and unhapppy.*) Any luck? (*They shake their heads negatively and settle down on the floor.*)

Iyaagan: (*Off stage with a shrill voice*) Agan ooooo! Agan oooo! (*Fear seizes the people. They jump up and turn their gaze towards the voice. Iyaagan enters, pacing with the wisdom of age. They make way for her.*) I look in front of me, my protector is nowhere in sight. I checked my rear, yet nothing resembled Ogun, our patron god of war. Had I known he could disappear unceremoniously, I would have found a place for him in the comfort of my bosom now that our neighbours are prepared to wrench our land from us; seeking to ruin the harmony existing between people of this peaceful community of ours. To sustain our unity, therefore, I call on those with antelope strides to wait no longer but go after the rogue. For, if you tarry, misfortune

today, democracy subverted. I entreat you to bring back our patron god so that victory on our part is assured.

(Drums approach)

Odidi: The Spirit of our ancestors are abroad, let all women depart.

(The women accompany Iyaagan out of the square. The Masquerade enters with Aworo. The Masquerade dances for the dead. He stops. He hits his sacred staff on the ground three times. Drumming stops. He begins to speak with a sepulchral tone of voice. Aworo becomes the medium in trance and speaks for the Masquerade.)

Aworo: My path is obstructed.
Odidi: We shall pave the way.
Aworo: The road I walked to these parts was smooth, but now, it is blocked by you who seek my help.
Odidi: We are all for a common goal, no bad leg, my ancestor.
Aworo: Aaah! I see deceit, intrigue, unrest. I see democracy thrown to the dogs. I wonder why you mortals cannot manage well your own affairs without outside help – without calling on us who left you solely to the administration of your own affairs. (*Masquerade makes an agonizing shrill. He turns back to face where he came. Aworo comes out of his trance, quickly manoeuvres and faces the Masquerade squarely. He pleads.*) Your grove is cosy, I know, but I pray, do not retire into its comfort so soon, my father. This is an assignment you cannot help but complete. Pity us your children. When you stand, you are worth a million. When you walk or dance, you are more than a million. Priceless are your costumes when you dance for the living. Dance, my father. Dance.

(Masquerade turns facing the right direction. People shout for joy. Music increases in tempo. Aworo follows the Masquerade out of the scene and music trails off. Night falls. The Moon breaks its gentle light. Odidi and the people break into a dirge. Soon, Aworo walks in.)

Odidi: What news?
Aworo: No luck. (*People exclaim in fear*) I've also sent for our learned Priest. He will be here at the break of dawn. The oracle will tell us if we are our own enemies.

(They begin to sing the dirge again until night gives way to daylight. Oluawo comes in with his divination bag on his shoulders.)

Oluawo: Ifa greets you all.
People: Welcome.
Oluawo: I see you didn't have a wink the whole night through.

Aworo: A night's sleep is not too much a sacrifice for the stability of our land. Consult the Oracle and tell us if our enemies are our kindred. Let him name names so that we'll know in which mortar our yams are to be pounded before it is too late. Quickly, Oluawo, for an urgent matter demands urgent attention.

(Oluawo takes his divination apparatus from his bag and studies it.)

Oluawo: I see a pendulum swinging to and fro.

Odidi) Aworo): That is confusion.

Oluawo: Once, it was to your side, Odidi. Then to the Palace.

Aworo: What is the message in plain language?

Ogidan: (*Hastens in*) Oluawo, Kabiyesi Akilapa wants you in the palace urgently!

Aworo: Whatever for? We still have to get the meaning of his divination.

Ogidan: I am acting on orders, Aworo.

Oluawo: Let me answer his call. I shall be back to unravel the mysteries of his divination.

(Oluawo collects his bag and goes out of stage with Ogidan. People watch them go.)

Aworo: The air is heavy with mystery. I wonder. May our gods protect us.

People: Amen.

Blackout

II

The Palace

(Lights come up and reveal Akilapa pacing up and down. Enter Ogidan and Oluawo.)

Oluawo) Ogidan): Kabiyesi o!

Oluawo: I was just at the point of unravelling a mystery when your messenger came calling.

Akilapa: Mystery, Oluawo? With whose permission? Mystery?

Oluawo: May be if I had had a little more time, I would have been able to unravel the mystery. A god is missing, in fact, several and your trusted lieutenants charged with the protection of these gods, sought my help to recover it.

Akilapa: Am I no longer the ruler of this land? Do I have a Priest, kept in the comfort of my palace, now feeling too big to inform me of the goings on in my land?

Oluawo: Eewo! Kabiyesi. I can never walk on the edge of your sword.

Akilapa: *Do I have a sword? Do I still have any authority over my* palace? Have you not now reduced me to the hunter dog who must always seek to bring back games for his master?

Oluawo: I am sorry, Kabiyesi, if that is the way you feel. But I thought I was acting in the best interest of all.

Akilapa: My own interest or your own self interest? You are a threat to my kingdom and you will pay for it – and dearly too. Ogidan, take him away and treat him accordingly. (Makes a motion of wringing someone's neck.) Now!

Oluawo: No.... Please.

Akilapa: Now!

Ogidan: (Hesitates) But, Kabiyesi.

Akilapa: And you too, Ogidan?

Ogidan: But, Kabiyesi...

Akilapa: My command is the rule of your existence, Ogidan. Take him away!

Oluawo: We put you on this throne, Akilapa, hoping that you will not allow your personal interest to influence your official conduct or your official decision...

Akilapa: Ogidan, What are you waiting for?

Oluawo: As you now deny me my existence, so shall you be denied by the very hand that feeds you!

(Without further hesitation, Ogidan takes Oluawo out of the palace.)

Blackout

III

Townsquare

(People storm the stage wailing. Ogidan comes in.)

Ogidan: Keep quiet!

Man: We were driven away from our land.

Woman: All my children killed!

Ogidan: By who?

People: Our sworn enemy, the Iwaro people. They captured our villages!

(Akilapa appears in the palace. Ogidan leaves the people and walks to the palace)

Ogidan: Kabiyesi, war has come. Iwaro people are at war with us. They've made good their threat to invade our border villages.

Akilapa: Call me Odidi. (*Exit Ogidan*) He is a lump in my throat, difficult to swallow, difficult to spit out. Now is time to get rid of him and his cohorts. Without the missing patron god of war, he cannot win. But win he must, or he dies.

(Odidi and Ogidan walk past the people enroute the palace. They rise and plead with Odidi)

People: Please, save us! Save us!

(Odidi ignores them and enters the palace with Ogidan)

Odidi: I heard the terrible news.

Akilapa: Then go and get your warriors together. Our villages must be liberated.

Odidi: We cannot plunge into war without first propitiating Ogun, our patron god of war which is now missing. We cannot march, now that Oluawo is missing from home.

Akilapa: Find him!

Odidi: We've combed the whole land, but no trace. I was on my way to inform you when this terrible news came. Oluawo is the one to divine and tell us what tactics can win the war in our patron's absence.

Akilapa: A difficult situation demands a drastic action, Odidi. Let the Masquerade lead the war. He is awe inspiring. Our enemies will run on his approach patron or no patron, Oluawo or no Oluawo. In addition, make incursion into Iwaro, capture their King's crown and bring it to me ... Ogidan, get my Town Crier to announce to the people that war has come. And tell Aworo to get ready for war.

(Exit Ogidan. Odidi makes to go)

One other thing, Odidi. Sit down. I failed to make Aworo see reason and bring him to my side. All my inducements were not enough to keep him quiet. I suspected he knew that I kept our treasures in a far away place. So, I want him done away with. I also want Ogidan done away with. He knows too much already. I want them destroyed – in battle! That is why they must fight side by side with you.

Odidi: Restraint, Kabiyesi. Destroying our spiritual head in battle will not only demoralise our fighting men, but also expose our homestead to danger.

Akilapa: Aworo is a thorn in my tender flesh, threatening my very existence. He and Ogidan must be removed from the face of the earth. You must do it.

Odidi: I cannot do it.

Akilapa: You will do it, Odidi! I made you captain of my Army. You licked my blood and swore on your honour to get rid of my enemies both within and outside once it is my wish.

Odidi: I learnt you killed our Oluawo.

Akilapa: You very well know that, to go against me is to die a shameful death. To grant my enemy life, no matter how close to you the person is, is to die his death. You have no choice, Odidi. You will go and win this war, but until you are back and without Aworo and Ogidan, your family's life will be in danger.

Odidi: (*Shocked*) Kabiyesi?

Akilapa: I am a tiger, and anyone who crosses my path dies! I want Aworo and Ogidan wasted! (*Makes a hasty exit*)

Odidi: (*Shouting after Akilapa*) I cannot! I will not do it! (*He storms out of the palace and walks briskly to the people waiting outside of the palace. They rise and appeal to him as they follow him out of stage.*)

Blackout

IV

The Palace

(Akilapa is worried. He paces up and down the palace. Ogidan runs in, in battle dress.)

Ogidan: Akilapa! Akilapa!

(*Akilapa is shocked and surprised to see Ogidan*)

The war is over. Iwaro captured. The crown also. Our patron god which you sold was found there, identified by Aworo and retrieved.

Akilapa: Aworo alive?

Ogidan: You wanted us dead, didn't you. Now, it is your turn, for already, the gods are angry with you.

Akilapa: Ogidan!

Ogidan: You will die!

Akilapa: Your hands reek of blood, you ought to have died – to have been killed!

Ogidan: Too late. Look at the sky and see how I will rip your stomach open.

(Ogidan makes to strike Akilapa, Akilapa dodges and runs out of the palace. Ogidan after him. War song filters in. Odidi and his warriors invade the palace. Aworo clutches on to Ogun effigy while Odidi has the crown firmly under his armpit in his battle dress. Towns people follow them in.)

Ogidan: (*Appears*) He fled.
Odidi: With your help?
Ogidan: Not on my life.

(Odidi throws his gun at Ogidan. Ogidan catches it with precision. Odidi balances the crown on top of his warrior's cap.)

Odidi: I am King!
People: (*Prostrate*) Kabiyesi!

(Odidi sits on the throne. Iyaagan comes with shouts of 'Agan ooo' immediately she enters, Aworo moves to her and surrenders the effigy to her. She holds it reverently.)

Odidi: Welcome, mother of all. We are liberated!
People: Liberated!
Iyaagan: (*Sarcastically*) Congratulations.
Odidi: Who am I to be sent on an errand and fail to bring back word.
Iyaagan: You want to be King with this uniform?
Odidi: I am King!
Iyaagan: Your role is to protect and defend the territorial integrity of this land, not to rule. That is for princes.
People: He is our king.
Iyaagan: What a disgusting figure you cut with that crown on your head.
Ogidan: I am king!
Iyaagan: Tell me. What does it take to be king?
Odidi: Fame, affluence, gallantry.
Iyaagan: You climbed a tree to tap, but employed a hatchet on your support – tragic. You heard the roar of rain, but instead of waiting for the heavenly downpour, you emptied your pots of drinkable water and in the end, the rain refused to fall. Oluawo, whose duty it is to put royal *akoko* leaf on a crowned head is no more. Oluawo, whose duty it is to thrust the royal tendon into a King's mouth and hand him the staff of office was murdered in cold blood. The god, under whose feet the laterite of royalty is to be scooped to annoint the pulse of a prince's head was displaced, though found, still needs cleansing. Where then is your claim to this throne?
People: (*Shouting her down*) What is she saying? Go home! We've suffered enough hardship. Now, we found a redeemer. Go home!

Odidi: I am King.
People: Kabiyesi!

(Odidi gestures the people to keep quiet. Silence prevails.)

Odidi: It has not been easy getting this far. Not easy securing this throne. I am here, though, to rescue this Community from total collapse, ready to infuse sanity into your crooked upbringing. From noon tomorrow, therefore, whatever art treasures in your possession must be brought to my palace. Your gods must also be brought to the common shrine which I shall build in the palace. (*The people grumble*) Whoever wants to offer sacrifices or pour libation to his or her gods must first seek my permission which I may or may not grant. (*People grumble the more. The warriors point their guns at them.*) Security of life and property henceforth remains my exclusive preserve. Anyone who tries to subvert my kingdom no matter how highly placed shalll be put to shame. Be warned and do not take my magnanimity as a sign of weakness. I am open to suggestions provided they are reasonable ... And finally, any individual or group that engages in careless talk will be ruthlessly dealt with. I greet you.

(Exit Odidi. People rise in protest, some cursing, some raining abuses. As they are about to mill out, Ogidan and warriors surround them with pointed guns. They stop dumbfounded.)

Women: (*Shout*) Agan oooo! (*Women run to Iyaagan for protection. The people now stand their ground like a dog chased to the wall, ready to fight back. A man shouts towards the palace chambers.*)
Man: You cannot ride roughshod over us, Odidi. We wanted a change for the better and not for the worse!
People: Yes!

(Ogidan hits the man with the butt of his gun. People scream and help the man to his feet. The man remains undaunted.)

Man: Renegades!
People: Renegades!
Man: I know you will not hesitate to dismember your own father for promotion undeserved!
People: Renegades! Renegades!

(Warriors take some steps backwards and train their guns on the people.)

Man: Shoot. You have the guns. Kill us and let the street be littered with our corpses! We want liberty for the individual. We want democratic principles and fairplay. We want a leader who is

above board and not one who will make his personal interest, likes and dislikes the basis of policy.

(Warriors go down on their knees and cork their guns. Iyaagan breaks into a song. The women pick up the song and begin to dance seductively, flaunting their god-given talents at the warriors with inviting smiles and gestures. The warriors are confused. They beat a slow retreat. Undaunted, the women move to them and allow their tender fingers to work on these men with guns. Warriors begin to grin sheepishly and their guns become unsteady in their hands. The women, seductively and methodically relieve them of their guns. They stop dancing. Their countenances changed suddenly. They walk backwards towards Iyaagan and Aworo with the guns.)

Iyaagan: Ogidan, we learnt you killed Oluawo.
Ogidan: I was acting on instructions.

(People scream in horror)

Iyaagan: You were not given the guns to kill the very people you were paid to protect. Very bad. We want no more guns, you hear?
People: No more guns!
Iyaagan: So, ladies, go set the guns on fire.

(Women leave the stage with the guns amidst shouts of jubilation from the people. The warriors are jerked back to reality. They make a move towards Iyaagan but Iyaagan stays them with the gestures of her hand) Wherever it pleases the wind, there it directs the forest tufts. Sit down!

(Warriors obey. Odidi emerges from the palace.)

Odidi: What is going on here?... What? What...? Iyaagan? (*To the Warriors*) And you allowed this, this mother of the night to disarm you, fools! Stand up!

(Warriors make a move to rise.)

Iyaagan: Sit down!

(Warriors go down again.)

Odidi: I see. I see. (*Makes to move down to the warriors*)
Iyaagan: Don't move!
Odidi: (*Stops in his stride*) Now that you put a spell on my warriors, you want to snuff the life out of me?
Iyaagan: Not in the least. Rather, we want a more dynamic ruler and not one who would loot our treasury and punish us for doing so. We want a benevolent ruler who will put his people's welfare above self. A man who will be respected across the land as the choice; who will make righteousness which exalts a nation his

principle. A leader who will allow decency and decorum to prevail in this land; who will not bargain our collective future for money. Someone who will be committed to the unity and security of our land. Therefore, you will be kept away from your family and acquaintances until such a time an honest and upright leader with those virtues emerges from amongst us. (*People shout in jubilation and approval.*) As for you, Ogidan, you will be tried in the people's Court for gross act of indiscipline and for Oluawo's murder. Take him away.

(The man whom Ogidan hit with the butt of his gun grabs Ogidan and leads him out of the scene.)

And you, warriors, you will remain where, from time immemorial, you belong – in Barracks!

(Iyaagan makes a hasty exit with shouts of 'Agan oo' she is followed by the townspeople amidst jubilation.)

Darkness Falls

8

ORALITY AND THE TEXT: TRENDS AND PROGNOSIS IN OSOFISAN'S *ANOTHER RAFT* AND AGBEYEGBE'S *THE KING MUST DANCE NAKED*

Austin O. Asagba

> "Traditional African culture and society are in fact contemporary, and traditional literature is all around us, alive, growing and transforming itself and still, therefore, available to our modern writers".[1]
>
> (*Abiola Irele, 1968*)

Irele's submission quoted above emphatically points to the source material of most African literary writers. Equally, without any fear of contradiction one can clearly state that from the earliest African writer to the present, the traditional oral repertoire has continued to provide the necessary cultural impetus with which to make potent socio-political statement on contemporary society. However, the differences discernible in these works anchored on individual approach, applicability and interpretation of the oral genre. In this regard, therefore, the criticism of modern African Literature *vis-à-vis* its relationship with the oral culture cannot be complete without a serious attempt to distinguish between those writers that have: (a) sought distinction in their art through a careful synthesis of the oral cultural materials and contemporary artistic reality and (b) those that have merely 'tinkered' with traditional materials for their own sake. The latter have incurred the wrath of critics and those familiar with their source of inspiration. Writing specifically on Nigerian literature, Bernth Lindfors makes a valid point when he says that:

> "Some Nigerian authors have been spectacularly successful in remolding oral art into literary art; others have been miserable failures. The degree of success or failure has often depended upon the author's resourcefulness in exploiting new aesthetic opportunities afforded by the presence of one art form within another".[2]

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[1] Abiola, Irele, "The Criticism of Modern African Literature", in Heywood, Christopher (ed.) *Perspectives of African Literature*, Heinemann, 1977, p. 8.

[2] Lindfors, Bernth, *Folklore in Nigeria*, NY: African Publishing Company, 1973, p. 32.

The art of 'remolding oral art into literary art' is an inevitable artistic prerogative open to African writers. The reasons that have informed this choice are predicted on the need to dislodge African writing of colonial vestiges and fashion out a new path for the growth of African literature and the performing arts. There is also the need to evolve an art form that is truly African and to which a majority of its people can respond poignantly. Furthermore there is the need to create a new aesthetics, both in the literary and performing arts, which is familiar, communicable and encompasses the social and political realities of the time. While the first generation of African writers may not have fully realised the above goals, the so called second generation of African writers who came to the scene from the middle of the nineteen seventies could be adjudged to have been more forthright, more daring and more explicit in their experimentation with the oral culture.

This essay focusses on Femi Osofisan's **Another Raft**[3] and Fred Agbeyegbe's **The King Must Dance Naked**[4] – two Nigerian playwrights who could be described as second generation playwrights. Specifically, this essay discusses their reworking of oral cultural material to suit their socio-political and artistic goals. Also discussed is the issue of a new theatrical African aesthetics against the backdrop of new theatrical trends and their implications for the future of literary drama and theatre in Nigeria. For the purpose of this essay *oral art* is conceived as the corpus of unwritten Nigerian art, which embodies history, myths, legends, folktales, music, song and dance; also included are praise songs, proverbs, riddles, jokes *etcetera*.

The choice of the two plays is informed by their very profound nature, especially in the abilities of the two playwrights to synthesize traditional elements of drama and modern techniques of theatre in their different attempts to mirror the corruption, moral decay, deprivation, hypocrisy of political leaders and the enveloping sense of despair in their society. The sheer artistry, simplicity and the use of appropriate natural images in the two plays create in one a sense of a total theatre in the true African sense of the word: the spectators are thoroughly entertained as well as educated. Also, **The King Must Dance Naked** has benefitted from the collaboration of the two playwrights. Agbeyegbe, in the published playtext, profusely acknowledges the benefits acquired from working with Femi Osofisan. This is a good development for African Theatre. It shows that great works of art could evolve from workshop situations and due processes of artistic collaboration.

[3] All quoted passages are from, Osofisan, Femi, *Another Raft*, Lagos Malthouse, 1988.
[4] All quoted passages are from Agbeyegbe, Fred, *The King Must Dance Naked*, Malthouse Lagos, 1990.

Femi Osofisan's *Another Raft*

Osofisan's **Another Raft** was completed in 1986 at the Mayflower Residency of the University of Iowa, and published in 1988 by Malthouse press.The play, perhaps, could be described as a watershed in the career of the playwright. Especially, coming after notable plays like **Once Upon Four Robbers, Chattering And the Song, Who is Afraid of Solarin? and Morountodun**. In these earlier plays Osofisan made a name for himself not only as a great Brechtian apologist with a knack for *Marxist* aesthetics and philosophy, but also a playwright who 'sought to reshape traditional Yoruba mythology and ritual in the light of contemporary realities',[5] and in the last analysis, makes his own myth.[6] Equally these same accolades have drawn the ire of critics and scholars alike. These critics and scholars have sometimes dismissed his earlier works as too dogmatic, excessively contrived and controversial in their message. However, in **Another Raft** one sees the coming of age of the artist/dramatist. While the play has remained consistent in Osofisan's radical views towards history, politics and society, it carries the mark of a man who has reconciled his artistic and ideological excesses with the need to truly remold and synthesize traditional Yoruba elements of theatre available to him. The end product is a well thought out play that seeks to make potent social and political statements against the backdrop of vivacious entertainment.

In concept, **Another Raft** is Osofisan's response to J.P. Clark's play, **The Raft** written in 1964. The similarities between the two plays are that they dramatize the fate of some riverine inhabitants set adrift in a raft. While Clark's version is situated in the Ijaw creeks, Osofisan situates his play in the Yoruba coastal town of Aiyedade. The predicament of Clark's characters is traceable to the occupational hazard as fishermen who depend on the sea for their livelihood. On the other hand, the predicament of Osofisan's characters results from a communal ritual cleansing mission to the shrine of Yemosa in order to avert disaster for the Aiyedade community. Also both plays could be seen as a parable of the aimless drift of the Nigerian ship of state: In this context, Clark's play centres on the situation in Nigeria immediately after independence, while Osofisan's **Another Raft** exposes the graft, corruption, political ineptitude, murder and betrayal characteristic of the military era since the middle of the 1970s to the present.

However, Osofisan in **Another Raft** goes further than dramatizing the fate of 'four lumbermen' set adrift to perdition; men whose fate have been predetermined by natural phenomena and the gods, as we see

[5] Ogunbiyi, Yemi, *"The Performing Arts in Nigerian Culture"* in, Olaniyan, Richard, (ed.) *Nigerian History and Culture*, Longman (Nigeria), 1985, p. 334.
[6] *Ibid.*

in Clark's play. On the other hand Osofisan hinges **Another Raft** on the Yoruba motif of a story-telling session at moonlight. From this premise the playwright proceeds to engage us in the dialectics of gradual dymystification of age-old religious beliefs, superstitions and ritual. Incidentally the process of dymystification starts with the story-telling motif. The story of the play is unfolded by the acolytes of the goddess of the sea, Yemosa. In parts I and II they make us believe that the whole action is make-belief. Woven around motifs of song and dance the play opens in an atmosphere of informality, jokes and conviviality. Equally, it carries the tone of serious business. Witness the speeches of the Yemosas:

Yemosa One: I am here to warn you about a number of things. Some of you come to the theatre, expecting to see a marvellous world of dreams. A magic world, full of fantastic stunts and fabulous gadgets, machines flying dizzily through the air, like say in Arabian Nights...

Yemosa Two: Or may be, at the least, a well decorated room, reeking with grandeur and luxury, peopled by beautiful damsels and colourful heroes, with whom you are singularly privileged to mix even if briefly, for the price of a ticket...

Yemosa Three: Well, my dears, this play is not like that. Our dream here, has all its eyes, awake. Just like any of our ancient moonlit nights at the story-tellers feet all we do here is an open lie, a known and visible fairy-tale, well-worn, and it is only your imagination that will colour it.

(*pp.* 2–3)

The above background provides the atmosphere for the Yemosas to assume their new roles as traditional bards. In their new roles they unfold the drama of a community plagued by inept political and religious leadership, corruption and a citizenry that lack the will power to confront their oppressors. In this atmosphere, to quote the Ifa priest, Orousi, the community 'must revive the ancient rites of collective cleansing'. The journey towards this collective cleansing becomes a pretext for the playwright to reveal the ineptitude of the political and religious leaders, as well as galvanize the citizenry to be active determinants of their fate. In the playwright's portrayal of the characters in their everyday fear, suspicion, hope and despair we are able to identify those responsible for the predicament of the Aiyedade community. The ruling class represented by Prince Lanusen and Chief Ekuroola, the Abore, and a successful Lagos tycoon, has consistently exploited the community. Through effective stage direction, the playwright reveals the class stratification, betrayal and struggle in society. In the final analysis, it is people like the boatmen, Waje and Oge, Reore, the farmer and Gbegbe, who suffer.

Ironically, in the end it is the oppressed class represented by Reore, Orousi and Oge that comes out purged from the expeditionary

rites. Their trials and tribulations have imbued them with the collective will power to fight the force that threaten their survival rather than waste their energy away in endless conflicts and recriminations.

Yemosa One: Not as long as you're willing to struggle.
Reore: Will you row with us?
Oge: Make una come join us!
Yemosa Two: On board, fellows! What are you waiting for? They've won! They've recovered their will!

(*The sea-sprites, singing their song, climb on board the raft*)
(*pp. 84–85*).

The success achieved by Osofisan in this play is traceable to the playwright's ability to synthesize modern techniques of theatre with traditional Yoruba folktale elements of song, riddles dance, proverb and anecdotes. These elements of traditional theatre do not hang on their own, but are fully integrated into the main action of the play – providing mood, meaning and information as the play unfolds. For example, in Part three, when the expeditioners are battered by storm and trapped by Water, they gather in a circle around Omitogun, hoping for answers. At this crucial point as in most parts of the play the GODDESSES enter singing:

Ki lo ti je
Te o la fe do l'oorooro
Igi oro ti e gbin sile,
Omi yin a je mbe!

O what a shame
Men are ever full of bite – O!
But your children will harvest
What you plant for tomorrow.

(*p.19*)

Osofisan presents both the Yoruba and English versions of the song (as he does with all the songs in the play) in the published text. This song which comes up frequently in the play immediately convey the degree of corruption and graft in the community. To a large extent it provides the arm of retributive justice in the present predicament of the community leaders involved in the cleansing expedition.

"You wrecked the state
Hoping t'escape retribution
You solved the chair
And flies gather,
You're throwing stones!"

(*p.19*)

In Part Five, the flashback scene which is realised in mime re-enacts Gbegbe's killing of his father. Apart from recapturing the events in part three of the play, this scene re-emphasizes the position of the play that gods and their supernatural powers are the creation of man: men must evolve the will power and determination to chart their destiny. Listen to Gbegbe:

GbegBe: He was dead before I was born! What do you know about it? He died the day he swore his life to a powerless cult. Let his goddess rescue him now!
He gave his life, but that was not enough!
They wanted my life too into the bargain, he and his goddess!
(*Breaking down*). Please ... understand! I've conquered the goddess, haven't I? I've killed her dead at last!

(*p.53*)

It is interesting to note that after the flashback scene and the rather long inspired commentary of Gbegbe on the insatiable urge in man to destroy one another (*p. 54*), the play rises to a crescendo: Lanusen's true motive on the journey is revealed. The betrayal, insensitivity and intra-class conflict of the political class are dramatized. Even the collaboration of the political class and the military elite in their continuous goal to subjugate the people for eternity becomes explicit in the drama that follows. Listen to Agunrin who has now revealed himself:

Agunrin: And to try to use men for your selfish ambitions, to settle your personal scores! All of you, eating up our lives. Deciding our fate over your greedy swindles! But the goddess has cheated you, too, if you don't know. Or you think it's an accident that we have all been brought together on this raft, you and me, and the rest of us? Prince, and you Orousi, his accomplice ...

(*p. 59*)

In spite of Ekuroola's temporary reprieve and their attempt to sacrifice Gbegbe in order to pave way for their survival, which is realised in ritual incantations (*p. 65*), the play is on full course again in its goal to systematically reveal the corruption of the ruling-class. Ironically Oge's song paves the way for the destruction of Lanusen and Ekuroola:

Oge: O ya! Away! (*starts to sing, calling out, as the others take up the response*)

Ki lo ta	What did you sell
To d'Olowo?	To be rich?
Elegede mere-mere	Pumpkin, magic pumpkin
Tetegun ponmi ola	Lily draws water of wealth
	Lily draws water of profit
	Lily draws water of wealth.

Lily draws water of life.
What did you sell to be rich?

(*p. 66*).

Another dramatic technique employed by Osofisan to reinforce meaning and develop the main action of the play is the device of a 'story-within-a story', which comes up in Part Six. The story which is rendered by the Yemosas at once becomes a riddle which must be unravelled by both the audience and the survivors of the expeditionary rites. In fact their survival hangs on their ability to unravel the riddle. The story of the dying king provides the artistic ingredients for Osofisan to reinforce the theme of collective action in man's struggles in life. It is no coincidence that at this very moment in the play, the expenditionaries are trapped by the terrible whirlpool of Olobiripo, the cause of most shipwrecks.

In spite of Orousi's belief that 'the goddess will help', it is the decision of the trio to apply themselves through collective action that saves them from destruction. Indeed, the gods are dead. And we have no better evidence of this than in the words of the sprites themselves:

Yemosa One: Gods and goddesses breed in the minds of men as hyacinths in fertile water.

Yemosa Two: And when we flower, we embellish the landscape of your imagining so colourfully, that men invest us with all kinds of extraordinary powers.

Yemosa Three: But all such powers as we have are made only by your will. Our force is your fear for, like hyacinths, we are capable of endless benefits for the use of man, but only as long as you yourselves give the command!

(*p. 83*)

Fred Agbeyegbe's *The King Must Dance Naked*

Fred Agbeyegbe's **The King Must Dance Naked**, was published in 1990, by Malthouse Press. In all its ramifications, the play could be described as experimental. Its experimental nature derives from the fact that the playwright, combining his first calling as a legal man and the innate desire to remain consistent with his artistic interests, has created a work of art that seeks to explore the spectacle, fineness and moral values of the oral genre of story-telling within a dramatic context. This artistic prerogative affords Agbeyegbe the creative medium to mirror the vagaries of history, contradictions and corruption inherent in human affairs. This playwright brings to bear on this work, a vast wealth of experience he had acquired working in the theatre.[7] Thus, in **The King Must Dance**

[7] Fred Agbeyegbe wrote his first play at the age of 14. He has to his credit plays like *Woe Unto Death, The Last Omen* and *Budoso*. His play, *Reincarnating Lovers*, was broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1963.

Naked, the playwright adapts the form of the story-telling tradition, which has intrigued and captured his imagination over time. Witness extracts from the prefatory notes, which I have quoted at length to show the working of the man's mind:

> "The sheer mimetic resources and choric presence of the traditional story-telling atmosphere has more to it than the nostalgia of youthful innocence provoked by moonlight ... how graceful to have the griot step into space and create timeless pictures of history. Now he is a tortoise and speaks like one; then a rogue, a priest or a madman. Another moment he is Obatala and you can see the symbolic purity of the god's white robe running down the velvet lips of the story-teller in meek morals. And the dances ... they start from him and string up in an epidemic train of audience and narrator. At the end of it all, of a round – the world tour through the griot's sieve, it still would have been a mystery which people must painfully reason out – The why of human behaviour.
>
> (*Prefatory Notes*)

The end result of the need to capture the essence of traditional African total theatre and at the same time mirror the social and political problems of society is, **The King Must Dance Naked**. In essence the play is contrived to symbolize the perverted electioneering campaigns, fraud, mis-use of power and political oppression typified by the Nigeria of the early eighties, when the National Party of Nigeria was in power, under President Shehu Shagari.

The play set in a nameless community (although from the name of the characters it is obvious that it is set in Agbeyegbe's Itsekiri community), and situated in the 'remote and present time', seeks to unfold a community plagued by chaos, famine and pestilence. The reigning monarch, King Omajuwa is threatened by revolt from his close Chiefs, Atseburuku and Otokuefo; the Chief Priest, Afinotan, and his subjects. The Chief Priest traces the pestilence, famine and chaos in the land to the childlessness of King Omajuwa. To compound matters, the stolen rock, a symbol of the gods is seen as a bad omen by the people. The only way the community can be regenerated is for the King to dance naked. This sacrilegious prescription creates further tension and unease in the land. In a dramatic twist, Mejebi, the boatman, appears from the blue, and confesses that he stole the rock. He further reveals his true identity as the son of Omajuwa: Omajuwa is indeed his mother!

> **Mejebi:** Yes ... my father was the son of Queen Lube, first Queen of Ogbodume, the late King. Your King's mother, Odosun, sent my father away in his infancy, to be killed, so that your king may become king. But he didn't die. Your eminent king lured my father, her half-brother into ...
>
> (*p. 61*)

The revelation of the above incestuous act sends King Omajuwa into exile, thus creating a leadership crisis. The play ends with the people's resolve to discard the hereditary method of appointing their Kings. Thus, this opens the way to a new wind of change; in this case the spirit of democracy triumphs.

From all intents and purposes, **The King Must Dance Naked** is hung on the traditional folktale motif of story-telling at moonlight. In this context, the Narrator, Orighoye, who doubles as a court musician and ably assisted by the chorus and the Dream Rakers Bank, weaves the story against the backdrop of music, song and dance. However, unlike Femi Osofisan's **Another Raft**, which explores the same traditional folktale form, Agbeyegbe's play is loosely structured and the action lacks intensity. The language lacks colour; at times creaky and does not reflect the natural fauna, vegetation and linguistic pattern of the riverine Itsekiri people which the playwright seeks to portray. Some of the speeches given to the characters appear too long, thus creating diversions and stalling the action in the play. Most affected are the speeches of the Narrator, and other principal characters like Odosun. Good examples could also be found in Movements One and Two of the play. Another defect in the play is the haphazard presentation of the story: Time sequences are not clear and are mostly hazy. Thus, at times it is difficult to keep track of the events as they unfold.

Another weakness in the play is that the playwright does not appear to have fully utilized the presence of the Dream Rakers Band and the Chorus of singers. Although, he indicates in the published text points where songs, dirges and dance are needed, yet he does not provide them – either in the vernacular or in the English language. The overall effect is that it makes reading the play ponderous and one misses the impact of these traditional songs, dirges, and dance at appropriate stages of the action of the play. The play, though full of possibilities, will need the hand of an able director to fully realize its potential.

In spite of the above, one must not lose sight of the experimental nature of the play, its potential and strong points especially as it affects the playwright's goal to explore the oral form to depict the social and political problems of his time: The drama of the incestuous act of King Omajuwa, the attendant communal chaos and the need for regeneration, afford the playwright the medium to examine his society in the eighties.

Agbeyegbe's advocacy for social and political restructuring of society comes out clearly in his portrayal of character-types, situations and conflict resolution in the play. Stock characters like Atseburuku, Afinotan, Otokuefo, Ogodobiri, Odosun *etcetera* are quite memorable and distinct in their roles in society. They are revealed not only as economic exploiters, selfish and opportunistic, but also as mischief makers who

will go to any extent to cause disaffection in society. For example witness Omajuwa's comments on his palace chiefs:

Omajuwa: Instead of living up to palatial expectations, Atseburuku went into bosom friendship with the slave dealers who were bombarding our people with bullets, money and shackles.

(*p. 9*)

To buttress the deprivation, poverty and marital disaffection unleashed on the community by the actions of the ruling class, Agbeyegbe adopts the dramatic technique of introducing a story – within a story. The domestic quarrel between Alero and Tofe, her husband, which appears in the main action of the play, reinforces how a domestic crisis could affect the larger society. Witness Alero's account of her plight:

Alero: I am in shambles. He has turned me into shrimps. He has not given me money for the past two months. And when I say there is no food, he kills me. Yesterday, he came home without any fish and I asked him why. I said other people still bring fish home despite the famine in the land. And that was all I said. He drove me out into the cold night after killing me. (*Ogodobiri goes to confer with the King*)

(*p. 11*)

Another major success of Agbeyegbe in **The King Must Dance Naked,** is his ability to effectively explore the oral form of story-telling in his artistic goal to demystify, traditional myths, cultural history, beliefs and superstitions which he believes are no longer relevant, and therefore must be discarded for society to move forward. This role is given to characters like Ololo, the court jester cum musician, who is perpetually drunk. Though he is drunk most times, his words and deeds have a piercing truth in them. Ololo not only desecrates the symbol of the gods (the rock) by stealing from it, he equally mocks the sacred dirges and songs meant to revere the gods. Witness the stage direction that precedes one of his songs:

Ololo: (*SINGING the people's dirge in jubilant and deliberate attempt to mock. At best he profanes the awe which the rock has just acquired*).

(*p. 31*)

Or, witness the dialogue that ensued between wife and husband, when Ololo is confronted for stealing from the rock:

Ogbemi: But Ololo, it is an abomination.
Ololo: So is hunger to one who loves life. Do you want to die?
Ogbemi: It is food for the gods.
Ololo: Makes it safer, no curse on it. Better than stealing from stingy, human race anyway.

Ogbemi: Ololo, they will find out.
Ololo: Not Afinotan, the fat priest. He keeps his own share at home.

In addition to the indictment of the political and religious leadership, Agbeyegbe advocates for a change in the method of appointing their kings. This could be the playwright's subtle way of indicting the political leadership in Nigeria which, in most cases, has produced the president of the country from the North. In the play, the playwright questions heredity as a method of succession. He subtly demystifies the position of the king by making him lose the awe, spiritual and political powers associated with the throne. In the end the king is derobed and humiliated out of office. In the face of mounting opposition from the palace chiefs and a restive populace who have been ignited by the revelations of Mejebi, Omajuwa gives way to the will of the people. Perhaps, indicating the end of an era:

Omajuwa: (*Away from Mejebi*): This is the end of my end. I shall dance naked! Call the drummers. (*Shrieks from backstage as women rush in with a dance of protection forming a cordon around the King. Light dims. The King removes garment to reveal the woman figure. Under her garment is a skin tight dress. She approaches Mejebi. The latter shields himself from the sight. The King breaks off the cordon in the frenzied climax of music, shrieking towards Mejebi*).

(*p. 63*).

The play ends on the note of hope; the spirit of democracy pervades the atmosphere and the 'song of the endless race' ushers in a new dawn:

'Oh what an endless race
Journey to self-knowledge
And we shall knock our heads together.
To ponder not to plunder
Tomorrow's days of the harvest
(*Refrain*)
Fruits must ripe for all
Not only for one race.

(*p. 68*)

In conclusion, the two Nigerian plays discussed in this essay, Osofisan's **Another Raft** and Agbeyegbe's **The King Must Dance Naked** are works greatly inspired and conditioned by the oral traditions of the playwrights' immediate society – in this case the form and content of the story-telling tradition. In their works they have not only adapted the form and exploited the artistic functions of oral culture, they have also succeeded in bringing this to bear on the written word, which is the

product of their western education. In the end they have succeeded in evolving a new theatrical tradition for their time. This syncretized 'culture', which could be described as original, enables them to effectively communicate their social and political messages to the generality of their audiences. While this approach is not particularly new in Nigerian drama and theatre, the artistic prerogatives of cultural demystification, re-evaluation of history and beliefs, especially as we find in Osofisan's **Another Raft** is a new theatrical thrust that has the potentials of questioning the *status quo* and in the end allowing the people to be active participants in the determination of their fate in a historical context. Also, the artistic collaboration as we find in the making of **The King Must Dance Naked** is a positive trend in the development of Nigerian Drama and Theatre.

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9

SOYINKA AND POWER: LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY IN *MADMEN* AND *SPECIALISTS*

Frances Harding

> Not an attitude but an experience drives through the action
> (Williams, 1987: 286)

1. Introduction

Many playwrights have been concerned with the contradictions of war. In *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1962), his best-known play about war, Bertolt Brecht presented some of those contradictions in the central character, Mother Courage. He presented her as the person who acts through the contradictions and situated the audience as persons who must respond to the acts. By making audience and performer participative partners in constructing and sustaining the dilemmas of war, he sets up an interactive relationship in which the audience is not entertained by others presenting the dilemmas of war, but is made to realise its equal responsibility for creating them. Wole Soyinka employed this technique in *Madmen and Specialists* (1971).

The audience initially presumes its position to be that of being good, passive and helpless, but Soyinka so places them that by the end of the play, they find themselves in a very uncertain role. Thus, like Raymond Williams who asks 'what else can be done, here, in this war across Europe?' (1987: 286), *Madmen and Specialists* enables the audience to ask questions of 'this war across' Nigeria. Soyinka selects a paternal central character rather than a maternal one, and it is the son who lives and the father who dies, not the daughter who dies while the mother lives. Like Brecht, Soyinka enables us to see that there is no single question as to whether this or that person is good or bad and no simple answer – there is 'no separable moral judgement' (Williams, 1987: 286). There are only people, families, struggling to survive in a war-torn society.

The same concern for the divisions created by war informs Joan Littlewood's play *Oh What a Lovely War* (1965). Influenced by Brecht, and

especially by *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Littlewood produced a play in which:

> ... songs came from the trenches, some from the music halls. Costumes bridged between pierrot shows and military uniform, performance styles oscillated between vaudeville and Living Newspaper productions of the Thirties, dialogue between gibberish and verbatim reproductions of Earl Haig's speeches ... hilarity faded into pathos or solemnity was displaced by obscenity. (Hayman, 1979: 136)

Soyinka, already during the late fifties numbered amongst those influential and at the time, unknown, young playwrights who worked at the Royal Court, brought a similarly eclectic stylistic approach to his war play.

Other playwrights such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo have written about the tensions arising out of war. In *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (Thiong'o and Mugo, 1976), the playwrights present the contradictions within the individual as Kimathi, the central character, goes through various 'temptations' which seek to lure him from his political commitment. At one point, Kimathi agonises:

> Who are friends and who enemies?
> Oh the agony of a lone battle!
> But I will fight to the end
> Alone
> Alone, did I say?
> No. Cast out these doubts! (1976: 51)

Soyinka's play *Madmen and Specialists* forms part of the literature that arose directly out of the Nigerian Civil War in that it takes those circumstances as its implicit content. In its exposition of the dilemmas experienced by powerful and non-powerful alike, it goes further perhaps than any other work in indicating how no one is left untouched by any war, least of all by a civil war:

> The formal submission to an uncontrollable power; the preservation of life by going on with the system ... these not only seem but are inevitable; they have to convince, as experience before the full dramatic shock can come: that life isn't preserved; that a family, before our eyes, is destroyed. (Williams, 1987: 286)

2. The play

Madmen and Specialists is one of Soyinka's four major works written following the period of his imprisonment (1967–1969) during the Nigerian Civil War. The others are *The Man Died* (1972a), *A Shuttle in the Crypt*

(1972b) and *Season of Anomy* (1973a). No artist works in such a way that one work is created in isolation from the rest, and much that Soyinka explores in *Madmen and Specialists* is found in the other three war works. It is possible, however, to consider the specifically dramatic and theatrical techniques which Soyinka used in order to write a *play* from his war experience. Whilst it has several features which are present in earlier plays and which reappear in later ones, *Madmen and Specialists* can be considered as quite different from his other dramatic writings in ways which relate to his prison experience. The language and imagery of the play, stressing self-focused power, is contrasted with an episodic and open-ended form which compels an audience into an uneasy, *judgemental* role. The statement that Soyinka wrote in *The Man Died* can be applied to *Madmen and Specialists*:

> ... perhaps it will refresh the world conscience on the continuing existence of the thousands of souls held under perverted power whose survival necessitates the self-infusion of inhuman acts. (1972a: 26)

The theme of the play is the disruption brought about by the uncontrolled exercise of power by the individual acting without external restraint, and within a system whose only authority is itself. It is self-interested power.

Madmen and Specialists is a play of words rather than action. It progresses through a series of dialogues interspersed with songs and buffoonery. The central character is Old Man's son, Bero, who is a doctor turned 'Intelligence Specialist'. He has imprisoned his father in his former surgery and much centres on his attempts to uncover the 'meaning' of 'As', the cult which Old Man invented and of which the four Mendicants are disciples. In contrast to him are the four physically and socially marginalised men known collectively as the Mendicants. Old Man's 'crime' has been to teach them to think when they might have been expected to accept passively a powerless role in society:

> Father's assignment was to help the wounded readjust to the pieces and remnants of their bodies. Instead he began to teach them to think, think, THINK. Can you picture a more treacherous deed than to place a working mind in a mangled body? (p. 37)

The chronically disabled Mendicants fulfil a choric role, informing about events and commenting on them. They propel such action as there is forward, and along with Old Man bring about the final sequence of events. In this ambivalent capacity as observers and dynamic agents, they are at once both powerful and peripheral, and finally are both victims and oppressors.

There are also three female characters who are used to represent archetypes and 'timeless' ideals. The two 'wise old women' represent accumulated wisdom and a younger woman represents a vague sense of 'good'. All three are directly connected with nature and healing. The one decisive act by the women in the play takes place at the end and is the result of action already taken by men rather than contributing to action.

Finally, there is no external source either of friction or of power as there is, for example, in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) or *Kongi's Harvest* (1967). This gives the play a strong internal focus which Soyinka has presented through his use of language and of imagery.

3. The language

The language of the play is frequently an active invasion of words, separating them into parts to give them either new meanings or non-meanings. At one point, Soyinka actively constructs new words out of fragments of Latin and French. By deconstructing the words, he also reveals the fragility of the familiar ideals associated with them:

Cripple: Pro patria mourir.
Mendicants: ... mourir mourir mourir ...
Cripple: Dulce et decorum ...
Mendicants: ... quorum quorum quorum ...
Old Man: Corum, stupes, not quorum.
Goyi: No quorum, no quorum, that's the damned trouble ...
Blindman: In ancient Athens they didn't just have a quorum, every body was there! That, children, was democracy ...
Cripple: (*singing to the tune of 'When the Saints'*)
Before I join
The saints above
I want to sit in that damned quorum
Before I join the saints above
Before I bid
This earth adieu
Before I bid this earth adieu
I want my dues from that damned quorum
Before I bid this earth adieu. (pp. 59–60)

In ascribing a self-destructive function to language in *Madmen and Specialists*, Soyinka is developing a theme found in *The Road* (1988) – the relationship between death and words – especially broken words.

In *The Road*, the old man, Professor, in his search for the 'Word', brings words and death into a direct relationship by removing the road sign saying BEND and thereby causing motor and lorry accidents. He

sells the spare parts gleaned from the wrecks for a living. For the Professor, broken signs and broken bodies, broken vehicles and broken words form a unity:

Professor: You found no broken words where the bridge swallowed them?
Samson: How could we think of such a thing?
Professor: A man must be alert in each event. (p. 85)

By the time Soyinka is writing *Madmen and Specialists*, his concern with the association between words and death has been intensified. The old man character, now called Old Man, is no longer looking for a definable entity called the Word, but has constructed his own self-validating system based on the single word 'As'. Whereas in *The Road*, the characters have to be exhorted to 'think of such a thing' – that is the relationship between words and death – by the time of writing *Madmen and Specialists* all the major characters play and act upon it continuously:

Aafaa: ... God Bless your brother

They all break out guffawing

Goyi: More grease to his elbow
Aafaa: Not forgetting his armpits.
Blindman: More power to his swagger stick!
Cripple: May light ever shine ...
Aafaa: From his braid and buttons ...
Goyi: God help her, that is some brother she has. You may say he is ... dutiful.
Cripple: Him a dutiful son? You're crazy.
Blindman: I know what he means. (*He points an imaginary gun*) Bang! All in the line of duty!

GOYI clutches his chest, slumps over.

Aafaa: Did we try him?
Cripple: Resurrect you fool. Nobody tried you yet.
Aafaa: (*in a ringing voice*) You are *accused*.
Blindman: Satisfied?
Cripple: Fair enough.
Blindman: Bang!

GOYI slumps, rinsing his hands

Nothing to do with me.
Blindman: Fair trial, no?
Aafaa: Decidedly yes.
Blindman: What does he say himself?

Goyi: Very fair trial gentlemen, I have no complaints.
Blindman: In that case, we permit you to be buried.
Goyi: You are generous gentlemen. I have a personal aversion to vultures.
Blindman: Oh, come come. Nice birds they are. They clean up after the mess. (pp. 10–11)

One of the effects of this piece is to demonstrate how a familiar system of power is propped up by the performance of an equally familiar set of words and actions which lulls the audience into a false sense of security. Everything seems to be in good order as the authoritative military-style behaviour, along with the language and rituals that support it, are recognised. Later, when Soyinka wants to present the self-generated system of 'As', the audience is jarred into again recognising the performance of familiar litanies and procedures, but neither with familiar words nor within familiar systems, and realises the fragility of both constructions. Without such a follow-up to contrast with the familiar, the mocking representation of the official position might do no more than elicit a sigh of resignation at the arbitrary nature of justice, but as it is, the audience can realise that the exercise of power is a social construct, not a naturally given order. They realise that they too may have been taken in by words and by the familiar demonstration of power without questioning the meaning behind either. They realise that they, like the Mendicants, have the power to construct and enact systems of power.

4. Imagery

Whilst words in the play are thrust apart to disgorge new meanings, the imagery and metaphors are consistenty inward-turning – body-focused and body-invading. Cannibalism is a final body-invasive act in a series which involve incising, cutting off, cutting into and piercing. The audience is introduced to this imagery in the opening scene in which the Mendicants, all already conspicuously disabled, are staking their remaining limbs or eyes in a game of dice.

Aafaa: What did you stake?
Goyi: The stump of the left arm.
Cripple: Your last?
Goyi: No, I've got one left.
Blindman: Your last. You lost the right one to me yesterday.
Goyi: Do you want it now or later?
Blindman: Keep it for now.
Cripple: When do I get my eye Aafaa?
Aafaa: Was it the right or left? (pp. 7–8)

Other body-focused imagery occurs soon after this in a reference not to death but to the unborn child – a familiar image from Soyinka's repertoire in other plays. One of the Mendicants suggests that Bero's sister, Si Bero 'spirits out foetus from the belly of a pregnant woman ... and it goes in a bottle from her brother's experiments' (p. 12). Almost immediately after this there is another reference to sharply invading the body, this time using a needle:

Blindman: ... you have touched the matter with a needle.
Goyi: Where? I'm still lost.
Aafaa: Where? I'll soon show you dumbelod. (*He lunges for Goyi's crotch*)
Goyi: (*protecting himself*) No!
Aafaa: (*He points a 'needle' held low at Goyi*) Say anything, say anything that comes into your head but SPEAK MAN! (*Twisting the needle upwards*) *Goyi, hand over crotch, yells.* (p. 14)

Even referring to the plants and herbs that Si Bero gathers and prepares for use the descriptions evokes a sense of disruption and invasion:

Goyi: First the roots.
Cripple: Then peel the barks.
Aafaa: Slice the stalks.
Cripple: Squeeze out the pulps.
Goyi: Pick the seeds.
Aafaa: Break the pods. Crack the plaster.
Cripple: Probe the wound or it will never heal.
Blindman: Cut off one root to save the other.
Aafaa: Cauterize.
Cripple: Quick-quick-quick-quick, amputate! (p. 20)

More brutal body-invasive imagery follows and reaches a first climax in the revelation of the cannibalistic feast which Bero and others were tricked into by Old Man. The audience first learns of it in a conversation between Bero and a cleric. The initial reference is made in a very jocular manner, indicating just how lightly Bero had come to regard the idea of 'man eats man':

Priest: I'm anxious to know whether he still intends to legalise cannibalism.
Bero: He does. (p. 34)

Later Bero describes his reaction to the cannibalistic feast:

> But why not? Afterwards I said why not? What is one flesh from another? So I tried again just to be sure of myself. It was the first step to power in the purest sense. (p. 36)

Old Man offers a mocking rationalisation of cannibalism, equating the men with 'intelligent' animals – like the vultures in the earlier scene. Soyinka employs a change of tense and person to suggest that cannibalism is not confined to the past or to the men at the feast. During his exultant reverie, Old Man moves from recollecting in the past tense and in the third person to addressing the audience directly:

> Your faces, gentlemen, your faces. You should see your faces ... You're drooling but I am not exactly sure why. Is there really much difference? All intelligent animals kill for food, you know, and you are intelligent animals. Eat-eat-eat-eat-eat-Eat! (p. 51)

Bero desperately wants to learn the meaning of 'As', hoping it will provide the philosophy by which he can rationalise his behaviour. The consumption of human flesh represents the gratuitous killing of people in order to feed an ideology. 'As' is the meaningless formulation of a non-existant ideology which, having been articulated, comes into existence, exists, and is both the prop of and is propped up by a 'system'. The meaning of the words is less important than articulation of words as part of a system.

5. From Brecht to egungun

While the content of *Madmen and Specialists* is focused inwardly, Soyinka has deliberately used an open form, without either closure to the drama, or a resolution of the issues raised in it. Soyinka offers no reassuring narrative form with a beginning, middle and end, and no hero with a tragic flaw. In selecting this combination of form and content, Soyinka ensures that there is no opportunity for the audience to succumb to the Aristotelian – and essentially vicarious – cathartic effect of tragedy.

The absence of a strong linear plot and the largely archetypal characters contribute to preventing the audience from developing an empathetic identification with the events and characters on-stage, and instead compels then into an interactive, critical role. This distancing of the audience from a position of total emotional identification with the characters into one in which they make rational assessments of the relationships in which the characters are involved, is best-known in relation to Brecht as *Verfremdung*, which as Elizabeth Wright points out:

> ... sets up a series of social, political and ideological interruptions that remind us that representations are not given but produced. (It) does not do away with identification but examines it critically ... showing that no representation is fixed and final ... the spectator is theatricalised in his or her own existence. (1989: 19–20)

Although it is not directly referred to, Soyinka does not wholly relinquish the supernatural even in this his most secular drama. While Jones (1983: 112) refers to the 'recurring cycles of human history', Jeyifo (1985: 42) has noted that heroes 'immersed in a supposedly "authenticating" African metaphysical or cosmogonic milieu', may provide 'a static milieu'. In *Madmen and Specialists,* the inane pursuit of a non-existant ideology, the repetition of many features, the use of only one set, and the recurrence of the opening scene through the final explicit stage directions, point to just such a static quality within cyclical time. Soyinka both creates and resolves a tension between them by reference to a spiritual dimension. The ontological emphasis, the layered metaphoric style and other features, such as the use of burlesque by the Mendicants and the play with words, associate it with the Theatre of the Absurd, yet Jones rightly comments that Soyinka has:

> ... arrived here in his own time and in his own way, in a logical development of ideas and techniques which had been hinted at in earlier plays. (1983: 106)

One of the ways can be said to derive from Soyinka's concern with the metaphysical in Yoruba religious belief. The confrontational relationship between the audience and performers in *Madmen and Specialists* is similar to that experienced in a masquerade performance. In such performance, there is no mediating force such as fiction, dialogue, or a performance space set apart from the audience, and many people have recorded their discomfiture at the immediacy of the interaction. Soyinka brought that immediacy into *Madmen and Specialists,* causing people to feel equally discomfited. The endless fragmentation of words, the repetitive song-and-dance clowning of the Mendicants, the layers of body-focused imagery, spiral endlessly on-stage to create an 'affected' space like the spinning multi-layered costume of *egungun* (Thompson, 1974: 219ff.). Soyinka's implicit use of masquerade is part of his own continuing mythopoeic understanding of the world. In his plays *The Road,* written before *Madmen and Specialists,* and in *Death and The King's Horseman,* written after it, Soyinka uses the Yoruba masquerade of the spirits of the ancestors – *egungun* – in a key role. In *egungun,* the spirits of the dead ancestors return to reassure the living of their continuing concern for them. It is a masquerade of consolation. If treated with respect, the masquerade signifies and heralds order.

Madmen and Specialists is about disorder and disruption. Much of the movement in the play can be seen as more akin to dance than to dialogue drama, for the action of the characters is expressive of their condition and could be choreographed in pure kinetic form. Similarly the fragmented dialogue could be presented as pure sound, like notes of

music which have an overall significance found in their relation to each other, rather than in single words with individual meanings. Understanding the kinetic or dance potential of *Madmen and Specialists*, it can be realised as a dance of mutilated minds and bodies. It is a dance of half-death, echoing Soyinka's reference in *The Man Died* to his own imprisonment as being 'consigned to a living death' (p. 91).

In *egungun* performance, as in much of masquerade performance, the audience plays an active 'theatricalising' role. In *egungun* this transforms the masquerade character from a living performer into a dead ancestor. The audience forms half of a conceptual system which requires not only belief in it, but a share in its practice. In performance terms, it requires not only the performance of the lead performers (the masquerades), but the audience as full supporting cast. It is this relationship of audience and performer which Soyinka is exploring in *Madmen and Specialists*. It is the collusion of the audience which effects the transition from representation to reality – from 'as' to 'is'. Old Man acclaims this transformation, from the seeming to the being, in his construction of the cult of 'As' which has generated its own reality: 'As is, and the system is its mainstay though it wear a hundred masks and a thousand outward forms' (p. 71).

In *The Road* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, the *egungun* is used outside of its correct context, and in both plays this abuse amounts to sacrilegious action which brings about death. In *The Road* Professor is responsible for engineering the masquerade to dance in the vain hope that he will 'know' death without dying: 'I must hope, even now. I cannot believe that death's revelation must be total or not at all' (p. 93). Say Tokyo Kid's efforts to have the masquerade halted are explicit: 'Stop it! Stop it! ... I say stop playing along with this sacrilege' (p. 95).

In *Death and the King's Horseman* it is the Europeans who, at a fancy-dress party, wear the *egungun* costume, and who bring about the death of Elesin's son, Olunde. The connection between the abuse of *egungun* and inevitable, imminent death is explicit:

> PILKINGS: (*in a tired voice*) Was this what you wanted?
> IYALOJA: No child, it is what you brought to be, you who play with strangers' lives, who even usurp the vestments of our dead, yet believe that the stain of death will not cling to you. (p. 76)

The situation in *Madmen and Specialists* is different in that there is no direct appearance of the *egungun*. Instead, in the last scene, the stage directions read: 'Old Man snatches surgeon's coat ... puts it on, dons cap, pulls on gloves and picks up a scalpel' (p. 77). Further on, and just as Old Man has begun to shout out his frenzied instructions, a separate stage direction reads: 'he dons mask'. Old Man, the one character in the play who meets death on stage, is also the only one to put on a mask. In so

doing, he transforms his living self into an ancestor, anticipating and inviting his own death. This reversal of the living/dead order invites the patricide which follows as the physical fulfilment of a ritual suicide which has already taken place. Whereas the Professor in *The Road* wants to encounter death through the mediation of the mask worn by someone else, Old Man is eager to be the mediator, to be the mask-wearer and thus to lure death to himself. It is a final transformation from 'as' to 'is'.

6. Conclusion

Jeyifo has written about the specificity of 'African historical tragedy', contrasting a 'bourgeois' genre of predominantly Aristotelian characteristics, with one which can be called '"realist" or "socialist" African historical tragedy', and which aims to 'show the dialectical operations between material existence and the super-structural categories of the morality, the myths and the metaphysics of the society' (1985: 42). If Soyinka has successfully sustained a tragedy of the realist or socialist genre in *Madmen and Specialists*, then it overlaps with the mythopoeic in the final scene, where there is a shift to a symbolic mode in which all the actions carry more than their own meanings.

Nevertheless the two approaches are theatrically if not ideologically compatible for in both there is little sense of protection between the audience and the play – is it in fact a play or is it simply a re-run of what Soyinka experienced in prison? How fictionalised is it? The play deliberately offers no relief at the end, no resolution of the issues raised in the play, thus heightening the sense of involvement for the audience. It is the resolution of tragedy, the closure of the events portrayed onstage, thus defining them firmly as 'not real', which enables an audience to experience catharsis rather than involvement. Yet there is another possibility inherent in the patricide. The final scene is ushered in in a crescendo of disrupted words uttered in a frenzied tirade by Old Man: '... you splint in the arrow of arrogance, the dog in dogma, tick of a heretic, the tick in politics, the mock of democracy, the mar of marxism, a tic of the fanatic' (p. 76).

He is interrupted by Cripple who wants to do the very thing which Old Man's lessons in thinking must lead him to do – ask a question. Up until this point neither the four Mendicants – whose behaviour represents self-destructive ineffectual action – nor the three women – who represent a passive acceptance of an apparently nature-based order of things – have been actively seeking change in the nature of their relationships with the Beros. At no point is the perverted authority of either of the Beros threatened or challenged. Only when Cripple tries to ask a question which may be the very one that those in power fear the most (we never find out the question), does Old Man realise the danger and shouts out: 'Shut that gaping hole or we fall through it'. Cripple persists: 'My

question is ..., At this point, in response to Old Man's 'heave him onto the table and hold him down' (p. 76). In the last speech, Soyinka brings together the inwardly-focused imagery and language of the play in an action ending in death: OLD MAN: 'Let us taste just what makes a heretic tick' (p. 77).

At this moment, Bero shoots his father. At its most obvious, it seems simply in order to save Cripple's life – a last remnant of consideration for someone else – but this cannot easily be reconciled with Bero's behaviour throughout the play. One possibility is that being the prisoner, it is Old Man who must become the scapegoat, the victim. There is however another possibility, deriving from Soyinka's mythopoeic vision and linking it to a more cyclical perception of events. As an old man, it is appropriate for Old Man to die. The plantain has withered and another is ready in its place. Old Man is not a victim but is ritually completing his life, handing over authority to his son. In donning the mask, he has already joined the ancestors and the parricide represents not disorder but the restoration of order. In this interpretation, Cripple, 'the dreamer' (p. 76), represents the threat of social change.

Ritual death as a means of maintaining cosmic order is explored further in Soyinka's next two plays, *The Bacchae of Euripedes* (1973b) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). In *Madmen and Specialists,* the death of Old Man does as much to open up some next phase in the lives of the characters as to conclude the one that the audience have shared onstage. This sense of the death as no more than a necessary hesitation in a cycle of events is reinforced by the stage direction: 'A momentary freeze on stage', before resuming action.

In the final action, Soyinka recalls the opening scene, thus visually restating the cyclical nature of events: 'The old women walk past their hut, stop at the spot where the Mendicants were first seen and look back towards the surgery'. This suggests that nothing has really changed in the course of the play – that one more death is not change, but continuity. Only the reference to the spot where the Mendicants were first seen, the 'roadside', a liminal space hints at a possibility for change. Will Cripple now ask his question of Bero? The last words of the play are those of the Mendicants, which the stage directions state stop 'midword', just as violent death might come. Or does the questioning continue unheard?

Soyinka does not again use such a confrontational, uncompromising and violent form as he uses in *Madmen and Specialists*. His next two works *The Bacchae of Euripedes* and *Death and The King's Horseman* are situated firmly in antiquity or in history. *The Bacchae of Euripedes* has a production note which states that it is a 'tumultuous celebration of life'. *Death and The King's Horseman* is dedicated in 'Affectionate Greeting' to his father 'who lately danced and joined the Ancestors'.

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10

IS RITUAL DRAMA A HUMANISTIC METHODOLOGY? THOUGHTS ON THE NEW THEATRE

Dele Layiwola

I

This paper attempts two things: first, to state that ritual engenders a certain peculiar, even false, logic that has to be understood as some kind of subjectivity. The second is that the problem of subjectivity constitutes a type or a methodology within the framework and theory of culture. It would therefore be useful for me to illustrate with a few examples of ritual drama whilst simultaneously problematising a particular style, structure, characterisation as well as the context in which they are situated. I shall use theoretical models from social anthropology as well as from folklore and ethnology in Asiatic and in African cultures. After a study of trance and convention among a Yoruba sub-tribe in Dahomey (now Benin republic), Pierre Verger, sensing that a coherent structure or style did not emerge from the study, wondered aloud:

> These festivals *give the impression* of a theatrical performance or even an operetta. Their cast, costume, orchestral accompaniment, solo and chorus differ little in spirit from the mystery and passion plays enacted in medieval Europe in the forecourts of the cathedrals. The salient difference is that in the present case the actors, if we may so call them, are in a state of trance ...
>
> In this article, I have not tried to indicate the part played by the *simulation or fraud which seem likely affect (sic) this and other forms of possession behaviour*. It is enough for us to realise that some of the trances are real, and that people in trance have acquired their conventional behaviour through the application of certain techniques during the course of a more or less lengthy initiation. [my emphasis, Verger, 1969: 64–65]

It is not difficult to perceive from the tone of Verger's concluding statements that he himself was not satisfied with the logic that emerged from the work he spent so much time and energy studying and documenting.

It certainly will not stretch the imagination to conclude that what appears real in conventional drama could become illusory, even fraudulent, in ritual. It is as if reality has been falsified. In the perception of Moore and Meyerhoff, "ritual is a declaration of form against indeterminacy, therefore indeterminacy is always present in the background of any analysis of ritual." (Assen, The Netherlands, 1977: 17). My analysis will start with Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin's *Oda Oak Oracle* (1965)

The play is based on an Ethiopian fable which legislates that Ukutee, a village belle betrothed to Shanka, a glorious son of the tribe, would have her first-born son sacrificed through the Oda Oak Oracle to the spirits of the ancestors which give life to the tribe. Shanka refuses to consummate his marriage, defying the oracle and its chorus of elders in that regard. Goaa, his friend, had been a victim of slave raiding, either by Arabs or Europeans and has lived in other civilisations, so he is more enlightened than the rest of the 'rural', conservative indigenes. He promises to use his 'foreign' wisdom to convince the oracle to rescind its decision. Halfway through the scheme, he capitulates and has Ukutee for himself. She becomes pregnant by him. In the resolution of the tragic play, a threatening cloud looms over the land, Goaa and Ukutee lose their lives and the crowd gathers to stone Shanka and Ukutee's baby girl. Gabre-Medhin weaves a tightly-structured ritual drama out of the ancient tale and gives it a certain unity of form. For instance, the play happens all in one large arena and all within twenty-four hours; giving it a unity of time, place and characterisation. The sense of tragedy in the play is underscored by the fact that the three youths at the centre of the action have some basic misunderstanding of a rigid and openly hostile tradition. Events in such a worldview, operate like taboos. The community which produces the belief to which Goaa, Shanka and Ukutee are bound is a closed, hermetic one and is gradually brooding with an undercurrent of superstition, fear and violence. Travel, study and socialisation have foisted a new civilisation on Goaa and he has become an outsider in the village he used to know. The Oda priest confirms this:

> But true, Goaa,
> Because of your inhibition
> Of the strange ones,
> You defied the wisdom
> Of our bye-gone fathers,
> And aroused their curse
> Upon all; yes ...
> You fell victim
> To their strange wisdom. [p. 26]

It is this undoing of Goaa that became actualised in the free rein he gave to his emotions: he cohabited with, and impregnated a woman dedicated

to a strange, religious penance. This sin amounted almost to hubris; the daring of a god, if not of an entire pantheon. In the ritual archetype, the sin is grievous, and punishable with death or banishment. The Oda priest, therefore, pronounces a curse on Goaa:

> Dead, you shall be outsted
> from the company of our dead.
> Alive, rude tongues of women
> shall poke at you.
> You shall be mocked
> by the young of the valley.
> You shall be shunned
> By the elders.
> In your hut,
> Among your cattle,
> Evil ghosts shall reside.
> Dead, your spirit shall wander.
> It shall be homeless,
> Restless. Without peace. [pp. 29–30]

In many traditional forms of justice, the penalty sometimes far outweighs the offence. This is part of the irrationality of the ritual archetype because underlying motives are sometimes hidden. An interesting example is the Oedipean kind of irrationality where, as it happens to Shanka in this play as well, the more the characters try to move away from their tragedy the more they inadvertently drift towards it. In the end, in spite of their helplessness, the judgement against them always appears stilted. They appear as victims of a particular bias or persecution. This is the reason Shanka moans thus in utter helplessness:

> Injustice Unjustifiable!
> What do you desire of me,
> Spirits of our fathers?
> What do you want
> Of your strong son
> Whose sweet bird of youth
> Has been caged and
> Stifled in the ills of his heart?
> Alas, bride of my choice
> Whose warmth I knew not,
> Unborn child
> Who could have been mine,
> Giant valley of my fathers
> Whose son of pride I was,
> I stand charged

By the gods of our Oda Oak.
What do you want of me
Wise interpreter?
What do you want
From the embodiment
Of your people's heroism?
From your hero with a torn heart
On a wooden horse?
What do you want of me
Wise Elders? [pp. 36–37]

The torture and annealment of spirit, and the superhuman stoicism which a ritual drama exacts from its hero(ine) is one of the prime irrationality of the ritual as a method. In possession rituals, the hero, in fact, acts as a surrogate and a vessel for the god. This is the same idea expressed by Verger thus:

> In Nigeria, the possession behaviour of *elegun Shango* is marked by spectacular demonstrations of the god's power. Often, for instance, he transfixes his tongue with a rod of iron, walks along with it in a leisurely fashion, and later takes it out without seeming to be inconvenienced by the experience. He seems unworried by what has happened even after possession is over. [1969: 53]

In the same vein, Krappe (1964: 301–09) records that the phenomenon is actually "danced out". He writes further:

> The religious dance is apt to become ecstatic in nature, particularly in connexion with such mystery cults. The classical illustrations are of course furnished by the Dionysiac ritual. Yet we have also good reason to believe that certain Hebrew prophets worked themselves into ecstacy by the same method, as do the modern dancing dervishes in the Islamic countries. Once a state of such frenzy is attained, the participants become impervious as it were to wounds.

A pictorial representation of this idea will be found in Beier (1959: plates 57–60).

The other very intriguing thing about a ritual drama such as *Oda Oak Oracle* is that the heroes and characters have a deep and abiding fear of risks as well as a penchant for the genuine misunderstanding of a certain metaphoric, "mythic" logic which governs their environment or their polity. For that reason, as they plan to avoid or move away from what they fear, the same irony draws them closer to that which they abhor. It reveals itself in *Oda Oak Oracle* that the fear of death and victimisation

which discourages Shanka from consummating his marriage is what he eventually suffers at the end of the play. His prevarication, as a matter of fact, compounds the matter.

Ebrahim Hussein's political play, *Kinjeketile* (*1970*), in using a ritual play to serve a political end, aptly highlights how the irrationality of ritual could lead to unmitigated disaster in a real life situation. Tanzania, by the turn of the last century, had fallen under the yoke of German colonialism. Men were conscripted into forced labour, they were forced to pay taxes and girls were sexually assaulted and abused. The Wamatumbi of southern Tanzania then systematically devised a plot to contain the injustice. It was difficult for them to put up a capable front because the various ethnicities were not united; hence they sought a leader. A leader eventually emerged in the guise of a prophet. That prophet was Kinjeketile of Ngarambe who claimed to have been inspired by a river spirit, Hongo. The year was 1904. He saw a vision. The people rallied round him and he was able to unite them.

Kinjeketile used water as a symbol, both of national unity as well as of invincibility in the face of Germany's superior firearms. The people actually believed that a god had inspired Kinjeketile. For instance, he would live beneath the river for days and neither drowned nor starved. He experimented with the idea of non-violence and urged caution but his followers had become overzealous and restless. They would rather go straight to war. After an initial, somewhat dubious victory, German soldiers mowed them down with superior firearms. The period of irrationality had to be reassessed. In spite of the disaster, Kinjeketile had sensitised and united the ethnic groups. The uprising – because it was inspired through the agency of water – became known as the *Maji Maji* uprising.

A philosophical point is most crucial here. The Wamatumbi have a strict hierarchy in matters of spirituality and religion. They worship one God (Mungu) who is omnipotent and has absolute control in matters concerning life or death. He alone has the prerogative concerning such matters. Under him are lesser gods and spirits – the *Miungu*, the *Mizimu* and *Hongo*. Kinjeketile confessed that his source of inspiration was Hongo, a spirit having jurisdiction over minor, subsidiary events in nature. Not even the two preceding lesser order of gods, Miungu and Mizimu have powers over matters involving war and bloodshed. Though Hongo revealed matters of bloodshed and death to Kinjeketile, he cannot have the last word on the matter; the community should have reserved the last word for Mungu Himself. This error turned out to be a disastrous oversight for Kinjeketile as well as for the community.

There was no alibi, of course, except in the fact that all the men acted under Hongo's spell. Matters of Hierarchy and uncertainity in the ritual method are, therefore, crucial parameters. In other words, when

and how can a ritual index be verified? When is it too little or too much? The irony (and irrationality) is how Kinjeketile, an articulate leader of the tribe and all his army of soldiers from among the Mkichi, the Mgindo and the Wazaramo could have succumbed to such an oversight. The fundamental logic of a ritual process is certainly different from that of an empirical process – the one is unpredictable and irrational, the other is scrupulously rational and systematic. There is a method.

John Middleton (1963, 1985) has documented a similar event in his account of the Yakan cult of Northern Uganda. There are no existing accounts to show that the Maji Maji cult and uprising had any direct influence on the Yakan cult but the principle is, correspondingly, the same. About 1915, one Prophet Rembe, a Kakwa by extraction, inaugurated the Yakan based on the principle that a certain water contained divine powers and that its application engenders a panacea for all their woes: from smallpox and rinderpest to Arab and European slavers. Rembe also envisaged a new order where men and women, old and young, were to become social equals: a form of classless society. He liberalised the idea of clan incest, he spoke with glossolalia and constantly went into trance, much like Hussein's Kinjeketile. Adherents danced all day and night until exhausted and expected to awaken to a new Utopia (Middleton, 1985: 179).

Our earlier hypothesis that all true ritual passages contained aspects of spirituality and a mental confusion of social and liminal categories is also evident here. There is no doubting that some form of mental obfuscation, illusion, even simulation of transcendence are methods characteristic of ritual dances and drama. This accounts for the projection of wishes into reality as inherent in faith and belief. Even with the most honest of intentions, delusions do occur. The same kind of conceptualisation is responsible for the creation of transvestite figures in dramatic art. Verger describes the appearance of a male Sango votary, wearing the hair and apparels of a woman:

> The possessed elegun is to be the incarnation of Sango for seventeen days. His hair is plaited in the shape of a crest and his body is powdered with red camwood. He is dressed in an *iyeri* (skirt), a circle of scarves tied to a belt and swinging to the least movement, and a *bante*, an apron made of ram leather completely covered by cowrie shells sewn side by side. [1969: 52]

Middleton also describes a situation when the seasons 'go wrong', and women may dress up a hunter like a woman and dance with him across the community to correct the chaos and restore the seasons with the help of a rain-maker (1985: 178). Transvestism thus becomes a salient feature of ritual and fertility art.

II

At the beginning of this essay, we cited Pierre Verger as he tries to create a model for the festival he saw, comparing it to an operetta; to mystery and passion plays of medieval Europe as they relate to cathedrals and religious events. It is known that Drama develops among human beings through ritual with the purpose of reconciling him to environment and the knowledge of his being. The basis of ritual lay so much in the imitation (rather than the dramatisation) of action; otherwise termed mimesis. There is generally a community chorus and the presentation of extraordinary spectacle or tableaux. But sustained linguistic dialogue, as opposed to danced and musical communication, is often absent. It is for this absence of sustained dialogue that Alain Ricard (1983) classifies this genre as a mere theatricalisation of ritual, rather than drama. Ricard argues that a Western-style drama cannot emerge from the tradition of ritual performance unless it is re-interpreted by virtue of individual creativity. We might as well quote him:

> We have only, with Egungun societies, touched on an aspect of the rituals: the spectacular aspect, the real-life theatre of dance, song, mime, and play. We have noticed the individualisation of characters through the wearing of masks, a certain selection of space, and the embryo of drama. But in certain rather complex rituals, we can see the beginnings of a dramatic action, with the essential characteristics of theatre – especially the unfolding of action with high and low moments, crisis and denouement. [p. 52]

There is no doubt that Ricard's conviction is valid and he argues consistently as Hilda Kuper (1968) does that,

> Ritual is not theatre. It instructs through involvement, not entertainment. In ritual everyone must participate; no one can walk out or object to the subject. The participants are the audience. Though ritual is not designed as art, it is a sort of art – of masks, song, music and dance. [1968: 90]

In many dramas of Africa similar to the examples I have cited in the first section of this paper, it is difficult to draw the line between what constitutes a residuum of ritual, and what constitutes real-life theatre. There is always a total theatre context where songs, music, mime, action and dialogue co-mingle and one is often left in no doubt that visual images are contrived derivatives of the ritual and festivals we see at harvests along the boulevards and the arena of kings' market. Hence the same elements "of masks, song, music and dance" which Kuper sees in ritual are the same for the total theatre event. The fact that there is no explicit dialogue or storyline referring to a particular subject does not

mean that the subject is not being dealt with implicitly. An example of the possible conflation of ritual and theatre in scripted plays is evident in Wole Soyinka's recondite plays: *The Road* (1965) and *Death and the King's Horseman* (1981). Even the brilliant arguments of Alain Ricard seem to fight hard around a cul-de-sac as he wonders moments later:

> The legitimate caution against the confusion of ritual with theatre and the theories on the origin of theatre which follow from this should not blind us. We must distinguish between performed theatre and real-life theatre, but how can we always trace the frontier between the two experiences? As far as we know now, the differences between the performance of 'Koteba' and Egungun 'masquerades' seem to be the presence of dialogue in the former and its absence in the latter. And for rituals, is it possible to distinguish between participation and performance? Are some of them not experienced as 'spectacle' in the very society whose social cohesion they should reinforce? [1983: 52]

The questions raised in this quote are ably answered by Grotowski's intervention in the fourth section of this essay. Ricard's contention here would seem to be where to draw the line between ritual and drama; consequently for him, the boundary is a matter of degree. This, as we expect, must be as varied as we expect to find the shapes of heads or of noses. It is therefore a subjective criteria. The point is not to claim that artistic notions are objective, or need be so, but that the criteria of spoken dialogue and audience participation alone cannot be used for differentiating between ritual *per se* and ritual theatre as a distinct sub-genre. In many African performances, similar to those I cited above, the audience, as in a pop arena, is encouraged to sing and dance along, and experience purgation through mass participation and intense mental and emotional experience. In the same vein, monologues, dialogues, trialogues and scriptograms are, at a certain degree of performance, symbolic and deeply intuitive. We must now turn to the ritual dramas of Athens to draw a comparison and some solution (or even compromise) on certain specific methods of ritual and festival drama.

The most ancient link between the theatre and the game would probably be about 535 B.C. when Pisistratus of Athens first invited Thespis of Icaria to participate in the dramatic contest held biannually to mark the festival of Dionysos. Aeschylus was the first extant dramatist to win the contest in 499 B.C. The high point of the Dionysian ceremonies every January and March respectively (Hunt, 1962: 12) was usually the drama contest. The latter ceremony in spring, called the Greater or City Dionysia was the more interesting of the two festivals and audiences often number up to 16,000 (Hunt, 1962: 13). Though an impresario or festival director (called the Archon) chose the scripts and assigned actors, the panel of judges for the contest were chosen by lot. Should the choice

of the winner prove unpopular, the Archon and the panel of judges were penalised. The playwright and actors of the winning team got public recognition, honour and a little financial reward.

The contest inspired plays of great quality as well as quantity, and most probably intensified the feeling of independence among individual playwrights. To enhance the quality of performance, it increased acting capacity and a greater sense of individuality on the part of the actors. It will most likely have a deleterious effect on the size of the chorus and a corresponding increase in dialogue rather than choral presentation. Hunt has noted that,

> The origins of Athenian theatre were not dramatic, but purely choral, the performances being by a chorus and a leader. Consequently in the earliest Greek drama the chorus is the principal participant in the action. In the earliest extant tragedy of Aeschylus – *The Suppliants* – the chorus consisted of fifty members, ... ; later this number was reduced to twelve for tragedy and twenty-four for comedy. Dialogue alternated between chanting to the music of the pipe or the lyre, and spoken dialogue. Sometimes the whole chorus spoke or sang together ... . The styles were accompanied by stylized gestures and by dance. (1962: 14)

Given the development of the contest, Thespis introduced a first actor, and as the spirit of contest and game flourished, Aeschylus and Sophocles introduced the second and third actors respectively.

The theoretical point I seek to make here is that there is a link between any ritual and drama whose plot and outcome is easily predictable by the community because they are aware of the story line of the play; they have as valid a patent as the playwright or the actor. So writing a ritual or traditional play is always a collaborative or collective event, the community being (even if vicariously) part of the 'writing' and the performance. On the other hand, the fact that playwrighting became the subject of a contest with some material reward and approbation, gradually took it away from the public and made it, largely, the property of one man. Even more important was the fact that whilst the outcome of a ritual event was almost always predictable, that of a game or contest involving two or more contenders was not.

III

S.J. Tambiah (1979), in a profound attempt to identify ritual performance and contextualise it followed the theories of many social anthropologists, including Levi-Strauss and Radcliffe-Brown. He posited, and quite rightly, that ritual, festival and play belong to one paradigmatic set. A play, like ritual, "constitutes a stepping out of real life into a temporary sphere of

activity with a disposition all of its own (limitation of time); it also takes place in a marked off space, the playground and ritual stage sharing this 'limitation of space'; it assumes a fixed, culturally ordained form, constituted of 'elements of repetition and alternation (as in a refrain) which are like the warp and woof of a fabric'; it is a 'contest for something' as well as a 'representation' of something ... it 'creates order and is order', and in an imperfect world it brings temporary perfection".

However, Tambiah, after Levi-Strauss (1966) advances the argument a step further, saying that there is far more tension and uncertainty inherent in the outcome of a play or contest than in a ritual event. This, for him and Levi-Strauss, constitutes the major difference between a ritual and a play. The rule in all games often allow for unlimited number of matches and any side could win in a game. It means that, often, results are far from apparent, and there are possibilities and chances. It is therefore a fluid system which gives room for entropy and disequilibrium. Whereas a ritual is like a favoured instance of a game whereby the resolution is directed towards a certain degree of equilibrium:

> Games thus appear to have a disjunctive effect: they end in the establishment of a difference beween individual players or teams where originally there was no indication of inequality. And at the end of the game they are distinguished into winners and losers. Ritual, on the other hand, is the exact inverse; it conjoins for it brings about a union ... or in any case an organic relation between two initially separate groups, one ideally merging with the person of the officiant and the other with the collectivity of the faithful. [Levi-Strauss, 1966: 32]

In ritual dramas, the plot and structure development are geared towards the attainment of a certain sense of well-being. Even if the deployment of ideas and episodes do not pre-empt the denouement of a performance, the ordering is such that a particular outcome is re-assured. There is a longing towards a resolution of chaos, be it personal, communal or cosmic. This is the preferred basis for some intensity of performance as described by Verger. A certain degree of self-dismemberment or *sparagmos* is, in the same vein, almost always visible in the ceremonies and religious observances of many indigenous African churches or traditional festivals. The actor, 'officiant', or dramatic vessel lends his/herself to a certain welling up of forces from the solar plexus and whirls in the ring of illusion into which (s)he has submerged his/herself. In the assumed sequence of ritual, no harm can come to him/her even if wounds were inflicted on him/her in this trance-like state (Compare Verger, 1969: 53)

One factor that cannot always be rationalised or gainsaid is the fact that all overt dramas of this kind, by mere predilection or prompt to action; whether in gesture, speech or dance possess an implicit social

process. There is therefore a certain level of equilibrium generated in performances of play and of ritual as the recent collaborative works of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner reveal (Turner, 1982: 73–74). It is equally interesting to note that events in ritual theatre, much like the classical definition of a dramatic event with a visible beginning, middle and end; what Arnold Van Gennep would symbolically term 'preliminal, 'liminal' and 'post-liminal' (Gennep, 1960). Like actual drama, therefore, ritual is imbued with an irreversible sequence, a plot and a generative structure associated with all performance genres. Turner represents the point unequivocally thus:

> Ritual is, in its most typical cross-cultural expressions, a synchronisation of many performative genres, and is often ordered by dramatic structure, a plot, frequently involving sacrifice or self-sacrifice, which energizes and gives emotional coloring to the interdependent communicative codes which express in manifold ways the meaning inherent in the dramatic *leitmotiv*. In so far as it is "dramatic", ritual contains a distanced and generalized re-duplication of the agnostic process of the social drama. Ritual, therefore, is not "threadbare" but "richly textured" by virtue of its varied interweavings of the productions of mind and senses. [1982: 81]

IV

In a recent attempt, Richard Schechner (1993) speculates broadly and profoundly on the future of ritual as a 'theatrical', performative event. He grasps with a definition as such:

> Rituals have been considered (1) as part of the evolutionary development of animals; (2) as structures with formal qualities and definable relationships; (3) as symbolic systems of meaning; (4) as performative actions or processes; (5) as experiences. These categories overlap. It is also clear that rituals are not safe deposit vaults of accepted ideas but in many cases dynamic performative systems generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in new ways. [Schechner, 1993: 228]

Tambiah (1979), in an attempt that predates both Turner (1979, 1982) and Schechner (1993) had remarkably arrived at a working definition of ritual which sums up the perceptions of both his contemporaries like this:

> Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition).

> Ritual action in its constitutive features is performative in these three senses: in the Austinian sense of performative wherein saying something is also doing something as a conventional act; in the quite different sense of a staged performance that uses multiple media by which the participants experience the event intensively; and in the third sense of indexical values – I derive this concept from Pierce – being attached to and inferred by actors during the performance. [Tambiah, 1979: 119]

It is an easy derivative from all I have quoted above that Tambiah, Turner and Schechner consider ritual to be a specialised form of theatre seeing that 'in theatre too, behaviour is rearranged, condensed, exaggerated, and made rhythmic. Theatre employs colorful costumes and masks as well as face and body painting every bit as impressive as a peacock's tail or a moose's antlers (Schechner, 1993: 231). The violence or selfdismemberment of ritual is equally displayed in theatre even when it is deferred for the purposes of illusion and suspense. The stage metaphors in which events are concealed or substituted with contingent items are both present in ritual and in theatre. Hence it is no less theatre than it is ritual when there is a sacerdotal substitution of bread and wine for the flesh and blood of Christ (Schechner: 231); the purpose of any ritual or theatre is afterall not to create transfixed, material events but an imitation of the same in a manner that elicits pathos as Aristotle elucidates.

The discussion of violence and eroticism as a recurring characteristic of theatre and ritual are well known. It can be patently argued that without a conflict-generating circumstance there can be no theatre; afterall as we indicated earlier, ritual must aim to resolve some tension and substitute a situation of equilibrium. Though the resolution of chaos or attendant equilibrium may be delayed or deferred, there is an abiding reassurance that it is man's last hope. Violent, bloody and erotically charged as Sophocles presented the tale of Oedipus, the audience and the supplicant chorus do not lose sight of the fact that the tearing apart of Jocasta and Oedipus will reset a balance in the rhythm of their cosmos. It is only in this way that ritual helps to transcend the banal in everyday life, raising it to the status of archetypes and banalising it again by mere repetition or redundancy.

Nowhere is the life of modern man more ritualised than in the theatre where he surrenders at the box office beside the theatre entrance, his prejudices, doctrines and beliefs theretofore to encounter a new image fired and mediated by others. At one level, the audience representing society at large are challenged across the gulf by an actor or body of actors who are victims in a rite. Though he claims to represent the events by acting, the audience cast their judgement on him as they experience that other world through him, and dump him thereafter as an impostor.

After each performance or episode, the actor is a spent salvo, like the ritual vessel used and drained like the god at a possession rite.

Enactment or re-enactment as it appears in modern dramaturgy has driven scores of producers, among them Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, Richard Schechner, Felicitas Goodman, Antonin Artaud, Augusto Boal and Reza Abdoh to the brink of that pristine violence in the search for new forms of theatre. For this reason, the new theatre is ritual and the embodiment thereof to retrieve the spent force that is modern man. To do this, the drama of the next millennium will continually seek to create a man-centred, actor-oriented stage where paraphernalia and stage properties are decentred and the depths of the human persona dug out and revealed as moments of truth from a forgotten past. At that point theatrical experiments will regain what it lost since the time of the Greeks and since Shakespeare. It will reinstate that imaginative connectedness to its past and to its glories. We must also note that an actor or actress in a play acts out his or her roles and interprets them to an audience who stand in opposition to him or her. Not so in a ritual play, the actor here is a performer, a priest(ess), mediator and dancer; a magician and a warrior. He is a privileged incarnate in a concept or a cult of ideas. This exactly is what Grotowski strains to recapture in these lines:

> The performer, with a capital letter, is a man of action. He is not a man who plays another. He is a dancer, a priest, a warrior: he is outside aesthetic genres. Ritual is performance, an accomplished action, an act. Degenerated ritual is a spectacle. I don't want to discover something new but something forgotten. Something which is so old that all distinctions between aesthetic genres are no longer of use … . Essence interests me because in it nothing is sociological. It is what you did not receive from others, what did not come from outside, what is not learned … . One access to the creative way consists of discovering in yourself an ancient corporality to which you are bound by a strong ancestral relation … . Starting from details you can discover in you or somebody other – your grandfather, your mother. A photo, a memory of wrinkles, the distant echo of a color of the voice enables you to reconstruct a corporality. First, the corporality of somebody known, and then more and more distant, the corporality of the unknown one, the ancestor. Is this corporality literally as it was? Maybe not literally – but yet as it might have been. You can arrive very far back, as if your memory awoke … , as if you recall Performer of the primal ritual … . With the breakthrough – as in the return of an exile – can one touch something which is no longer linked to origins but – if I dare say – to the origin? I believe so.
>
> [Grotowski, 1988: 36–40; quoted in Schechner, 1993: 254–5]

In conclusion, it might just be logical to say that the concept of a ritual theatre and its new methodology has foregrounded and re-defined

the mission of the actor on the post-modern stage. Given the zeal and depth of its new practitioners, the conservative conception of ritual as an enigmatic, primitive accretion of religion has freed itself from the confines of a stereotypical course. What remains for the audience of the theatre is to aggregate the potentials of this new form and consolidate its rigours for the reformulation of society at large.

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11

FOR MARTIN BANHAM

Shall we go for a walk
Out on the high moor
Or stony lookout ridge
Over the Yorkshire dales?

Or on a damp grey day
Take the crushed stone path
That edges Roundhay lake
And leads the Shadwell way?

Shall we see the one heron
Who stares at the cold water
No luckier than Leeds anglers?
He seems to be getting on.

Well met on the high path.
Professor Banham I presume,
Native of High Wycombe
Guide to the theatre world.

Opener-up of the deepest
Dark lands of England
To the benign influence
Of African intelligence

And play upon the word
Spoken live on stage
In the real world of theatre.
Which is where we are

If anywhere ourselves
Out in the dark, looking
At the bright day's action.
Martin, while we may

Shall we go for a walk
Out on the high moor
Or stony lookout ridge
Over the Yorkshire dales?

Or on a damp grey day
Take the crushed stone path
That edges Roundhay lake
And leads the Shadwell way?

Tony Lopez

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Sonny Oti is Professor and former Chair of Theatre Arts at the University of Jos in Nigeria. Like Adelugba, he was also a pioneering member of the Ibadan *Masques* and is often remarked for his legendary role as Danda in Nkem Nwankwo's novel of the same name.

Ola Rotimi, renowned dramatist and actor has held Chairs in Playwriting and Directing at the Universities of Portharcourt and Ife, Nigeria respectively. At Ife, he founded the professional repertory, *Ori Olokun* Theatre named after the antiquarian Ife bronze head. Rotimi who became famous for such plays as *The Gods are Not to Blame; Kurunmi; and Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* is one of Nigeria's most accomplished playwrights.

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CONTEMPORARY THEATRE STUDIES • VOLUME 35

African Theatre in Performance

A Festschrift in Honour of Martin Banham

Edited by Dele Layiwola

In this lively and varied tribute to Martin Banham, Dele Layiwola has assembled critical commentaries and two plays which focus primarily on Nigerian theatre – both traditional and contemporary.

Dele Layiwola, Dapo Adelugba and Sonny Oti trace the beginnings of the School of Drama in 1960, at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, where Martin Banham played a key and influential role in the growth of a thriving Nigerian theatre scene by presenting classics of the European theatre repertoire and simultaneously encouraging the creation of a new theatre based on traditional Nigerian theatre forms.

This comparative approach is taken up in Dele Layiwola's study of ritual and drama in the context of various traditions worldwide, while Oyin Ogunba presents a lucid picture of the complex use of theatre space in Yoruba ritual drama.

Harsh everyday realities, both physical and political, are graphically demonstrated by Robert McClaren (Zimbabwe) and Oga Steve Abah (Nigeria) who both show surprising and alarming links between extreme actual experiences and theatre creation and performance.

The texts of the two plays – *When Criminals Turn Judges* by Ola Rotimi, and *The Hand That Feeds the King*, by Wale Ogunyemi – are followed by Austin O. Asagba's study of oral tradition and text in plays by Osofisan and Agbeyegbe, and by Frances Harding's study on power, language and imagery in Wole Soyinka's plays.

About the Editor

Dr Dele Layiwola is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan in Nigeria, where he is Editor of African Notes and teaches African theatre and dance forms. Recently he was Visiting Commonwealth Fellow at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, and is Co-Editor (Nigeria) for Harwood Academic Publishers' Theatre in African Cultures videotape and text series.

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