

**ENG 213**  
**Forms of Literature III: Drama**

PROPERTY OF DISTANCE LEARNING CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

**Ibadan Distance Learning Centre Series**

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**Forms of Literature III: Drama**

**A. O. Dasylva**

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## Introduction to the Course Material

*Forms of Literature III:* Drama is designed to meet the different needs of different categories of students of drama. It is a course material that seeks to reconstruct, as accurately and as vividly as possible, the generally held views about the origin of drama from the extant culture of classical Greece, the indigenous African culture, through the middle ages of the English society, to contemporary times.

In addition, the course material provides a concise survey through an examination of the various stages and trends in the development of drama, and the dramatic forms of different cultures of the world, from ancient times to the present. In order to achieve this objective, I made a careful selection of playwrights considered sufficiently representative of the dramatic spirit and traditions of their respective times. In each case, I have concluded with sample textual analyses of some notable works. In order, to sustain the thrust and freshness of discourse, which I consider necessary in this type of comprehensive course material, I have adopted different approaches of varied intensity, scope and focus, in the sample analyses of selected dramatic texts.

The intended scope which is world drama, is meant to cater for students need in the drama courses at the undergraduate level. However, for obvious reasons, I have placed more emphasis on European and African dramatic traditions. This is informed by the desire to satisfy the immediate need of the target-audience, primarily, students of dramatic literature in African universities and colleges. This reason is also responsible for the decision to make modern African drama a priority in the final section of the book. I must confess, however, that I did encounter some difficulties, of course not in finding things to say, but in deciding what to leave unsaid.

I must quickly add, too, that there is neither an end to knowledge nor to scholarship, therefore, I have raised queries on some of the existing literary canons, particularly those that concern drama in general, and dramatic literature in particular. Where I considered any of them inadequate, I have made suggestions for replacement. In some cases, too, where I found it expedient, particularly in the light of new developments and experimentations with dramatic forms in contemporary African drama, I have suggested new ideas, or possible theory (-ies) that I considered adequate to cope with the volume of drama texts available in modern Africa.

In this course material, therefore, students of drama are likely to find well-known materials as well as unfamiliar ones which I have deliberately but carefully packaged because I consider them invaluable documents. However, the materials have also been given a touch of freshness that is bound to facilitate general comprehension. My twenty or so years of teaching drama in Nigerian colleges and universities constitute my primary inspiration.

I am grateful to Professor Francis Egbokhare, Director of Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, for encouraging me to share in his vision through the production of the reading material on Studies in Drama for Nigeria's foremost distance learning centre. Above all, I thank God.

A. O. Dasylva

# Lecture One

## Introduction

IF the theatre is where actual performance in drama takes place and, has had so much influence on human civilization for more than 25,000 years, then dramatic literature, which is drama in literary expression, serves as facilitator in understanding and appreciating drama as a significant and viable field of study. Dramatic literature in the contemporary application of the term, as we have adopted here, involves a scholarship of literary criticism that has its emphasis in drama.

Literary criticism is, however, of two types, the prescriptive and descriptive. In the former, the critic pontificates and tells the reader what he thinks and believes a given drama text must be. He relies more on speculations and/or existing literary canons. He may even evolve his own theory or set of theories. In the latter, however, the critic attempts an explanation of the form in which a given drama text is written.

The practice of literary criticism dates back to the time of Plato and Aristotle. Plato's *The Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics* are both prescriptive. In the classical times also, Aristophanes, a classical playwright in his comedy, introduced a "novel" dimension to the business of textual analytical criticism through purely creative writing as evident in *The Frogs*. His criticism in this regard is less prescriptive and largely descriptive.

Suffice it to say that each art form usually determines the criticism specific to it. In other words, the criticism of drama texts requires a specialized comprehensive activity in which case there must be a comprehensive account of the historical development and trends, the different critical schools and their ideological alignments, leading playwrights whose works embody or represent the spirit of their respective ages, and a careful selection from the pool of great drama works. All of this and more will be required to engage your mind in this study. Furthermore, the choice of an appropriate mode of a critic is equally important in the general business of criticism of drama texts. Mode in this case, implies an institutional and/or social context for the practice of criticism.

Drama as a field of study serves as an arbiter of taste, and a veritable stimulant that, of necessity, catalyzes the creative sensibilities in students of drama who otherwise might not have been aware of the tremendous critical, as well as creative potentialities which they possess. This way dramatic literature ensures the continuation of literary creativity, and at the same time, pushes further the frontiers of knowledge, particularly, of the past and contemporary dramatic trends and practice in world drama. It is also capable of speculating on what the dramatic culture is likely to be in the near future.

Our efforts in this study shall be partly informed by the significance of drama, its literature and scholarship, some of which we have highlighted above, and partly too, by the non-availability and inaccessibility of relevant materials on the subject in most African universities and colleges. It is in this regard that I have made this comprehensive and yet handy course

material available to students of drama or dramatic literature, in particular and lovers of drama in general.

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## **Ideas about the Origin of Drama**

The dominant school of thought is that drama arose from ritual. This is because in ritual there is enactment with mystical significance and dramatic elements such as costuming, impersonation, songs and music, dialogue, spectacle, and so on. This view is further strengthened by the factor of aesthetic distance that has emerged over time. People started to enjoy the dramatic elements irrespective of the ritual purpose(s) they were originally meant to serve. The aesthetic distance is believed to have come about through the cultural interaction of the different peoples of the world over time. Consequently, the ritual significance became forgotten, giving way to enactments (drama) only. Thus, enactments only came to be accepted as a result of the general public appreciation of the unique and memorable “pleasure” which they gave. This development later led to specialization and professionalization of such areas of enactments as acting, singing, drumming, etc.

### **Classical Greece**

Developments in drama seem to have lent weight to the above view. For example, according to Frank M. Whiting (1969:12), religion in classical Greece had something to do with the development of drama. Between 500 B.C. and 400 B.C. the very pattern of historical events at Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Platea, the Greeks, in the early years, had fought against overwhelming odds and had emerged with enduring military success. Consequently, they had developed a friendly, personal, human attitude towards their gods. They had emphasized in their attitude “one here rather than the hereafter”, an attitude that called for “expression, not repression”. The century had given the world Athens’ four great playwrights: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes.

It is, therefore, expected that the classical Greek religious ceremonies be in worship of a complex and imperfect god Dionysus. Dionysus was for the Greeks a being with god-like powers and immortality but endowed with human virtues and vices ranging from emotions, passion, drunkenness, revenge, love, beauty and fertility. The worship of this god had shown, in the past enactments such insinuations ranging from ecstasy to terror as are common with irrational forces in mortal man, embodied in Dionysus. The Dionysus religious ceremonies, rehearsals, fire-torch parades, etc., were an exciting and all-involving national festival which came to be performed yearly. They later developed into full-fledged drama and drama contests with a more definitive social form, and diverse modes. For example, because of its religious origin Greek tragedy had attached more importance to the chorus, in which case, some of the actions and ideas were left to the chorus and its leader. Later, Thespis who in 535 B.C. was declared the “world’s first actor”, had added one actor; Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) added a second actor, and Sophocles (497-405 B.C.) added the third.

The fact that Greek drama originated from religion, and the performance took place in the Dionysian temple, informed the banishment of violence on stage. This is why Greek tragedy does not usually end in the death of the main character(s), or in which corpses litter the stage as are common in say, Shakespearean or Senecan theatre. Similarly, the subject matter of Greek tragedy is always serious and of magnitude (ref. Aristotle’s Poetics).

## Medieval England

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire in 47AD, the Christian church became vehemently opposed to the theatre. It did everything possible to destroy the theatre because it believed that the theatre had Greco-Roman (and supposedly pagan) connections. Ironically, the rebirth of drama nevertheless came to be traced to the church in the Middle Ages.

The enduring impact which actual performance has on the human mind largely informed the dramatization by the Church of the Resurrection during the Easter service. The officiating priests had acted the various parts: the angels, the disciples, etc. The huge success it recorded had encouraged the dramatization of plays connected with Christmas and other holy days. These were called mystery plays. Even though rustic and simple, the effect of these plays on the laity (audience) was electrifying. The short plays, which were based strictly on the Scripture, became so demanding that members of the laity were made to participate as members of the cast. The public response had been very encouraging; the pressure on the actor-priests had been unprecedented. The authority in Rome intervened and directed that priests should devote their time to their primary assignment. The actor-priests withdrew and left the entire cast to the laity. By this time performance of the mystery plays had moved outside, but still within the church premises; and later to more public areas.

Slightly different from the mystery plays whose themes were based on unique events in the Scripture, are the miracle plays. The Miracle plays which developed shortly after the Mystery plays were based on the lives of saints showing scenes of torture and martyrdom; or simply showing secular romance with occasional appearance of a saint or the Virgin Mary acting as *Deus ex machina* and performing a miracle to resolve the conflict.

The Morality play, the third type of drama developed also in the medieval period. Everyman has remained the most popular in this category. It is an allegory informed by church doctrinal values bordering on holy living as the visa to heaven or God's kingdom. Everyman the protagonist is summoned by Death. The appeal of Everyman to Fellowship, Cousin, Kindred, Goods, Strength, Discretion, Five Wits, Beauty and Knowledge to accompany him to the grave fell on deaf ears. All except the frail-looking but truthful Good Deeds desert him. Of equal success is *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan which deals with the trials of a type-Christian in his journey towards heaven.

The interlude or farcical interlude is yet another type of play which had developed during the Middle Ages. The origin could not be easily traced. Some critics believe that it grew from the morality plays, other think it was from the strolling plays. What is certain, however, is that the Interlude is one additional step in the development of secular drama, the purpose of which is entertainment. The Interlude, a playlet originally designed to be performed in-between a more serious play later developed in Europe to assume the full stature of a farce. The story of Pierre Pathelin (France) the "clever" lawyer who secures the acquittal of his client, the sheep stealer, by making him answer "Baa; Baa" to every question, has always been exciting and will remain so even for future audiences.

### Indigenous Africa

Similarly, in Africa, a closer look at the religious festivals provides a rather convincing evidence which seems to give credence to the position of the "from ritual-to-drama" school. Let us take the ancestral cult and worship as an example. Because the indigenous African society is largely animist, the masquerade or the ancestral cult is familiar phenomenon. The masquerade symbolizes the ancestral spirit. Masquerading, according to Ogundeji (2000:4-5), is the most common of ritual festivals in Africa. The critic explains further:



During the (ancestral) festivals, masks of the dead fathers are brought out using theatrical effects as a means of ritual celebration. Masquerading is, in addition, used for purposes other than sacred or cultic function. It is for example, used for political, judicial and entertainment purposes. These other functions, however, are generally considered secondary (Ritual as Theatre, Theatre as Ritual, 4-5)

The significance of the egun gun festival is the visiting spirit of the ancestor. It calls for reverence and worship. There are such ceremonials as drumming, songs, dancing, acrobatic display, pouring of libations, exchange of gifts, and prayers (evocatory and invocatory), ushering in the new year's blessings, prosperity, peace, etc. For all we know, the "life" in the masquerade dress (costume) could have been a relation or a common neighbour who belongs to the masquerade lineage. It is a taboo to treat him irreverently because the masquerade is a visiting "ancestor".

The significance and relevance of the masquerade, therefore, are best appreciated in the totality of its dramatic import. For example, both the common neighbour masquerading and the worshippers are consciously engaged in a game of make believe or "let-us-pretend". This is what drama is all about. The "life" inside the masquerade is a human being, not a spirit but now, he impersonates (pretending to be) the visiting spirit of the ancestor. His gestures, guttural voice, dress (costume) and perhaps, a long cane or a cudgel (hand props) qualify him as an actor performing the role of an ancestral spirit. At the same time, the worshippers, and the on-lookers constitute the audience. The paraphernalia attached to the songs, dancing, drumming, spectacle, etc., are all veritable aesthetics for stage effect in the course of the unfolding action. This is usually associated with drama.

It is, therefore, instructive to note that most cases of traditional festivals in Africa such as described above, or others like rite-of-passage which involves shedding of blood of animals, ritual cleansing of societies have always had these festivals performed with enactment bordering on the spectacular, and with aesthetic qualities which are comparable with any formal or conventional drama. Edi festival in Ile-Ifè and Okèè'Bàdàn festival in Ibadan (both Yoruba ancient towns in Nigeria), are typical examples. Over the years, the enactments have become so overwhelming and prominent that the public is almost oblivious of the original religious intention, purposes and or significance of the festivals. It is obvious that the memorable "pleasure" derived from such entertaining enactments is largely responsible for this general attitude.

We must quickly add here that some of these traditional roles like dancing, drumming, singing, chanting and even masquerading which hitherto have been an exclusive preserve and significant constituents of traditional rites and religious worship have since been employed in secular "festivals", and at general social functions purely for entertainment. For example, in many African countries, the services of national or state cultural troupes are often engaged whenever representatives or such dignitaries as heads of state are on brief state visits. The cultural troupes are seen entertaining the state guests with ritual dances, masquerading, etc., without attachment to any religious rite. It is, therefore, believed that the secularization of these specialized constituents of traditional rituals gave rise to dramatic cultures like *Etiye'ri*, and *Efe*

folkloric tradition in some Yoruba communities, and, consequently, the more professionalized *AlárInjó* drama groups.

So far, the evidence provided above are attempts to show the extent of the plausibility of the claim by critics who hold the view that drama had evolved from religious rites, and in particular, ritual enactments.

Another school of thought has a divergent view (though less popular) different from the above on the origin of drama. It believes that ritual and drama grew simultaneously and independent of each other. It acknowledges that, even though there are enactments in rituals, they were not intended for entertainment. In a typical indigenous African setting, for example, no true worshipper ever goes to the shrine with the intention to be entertained. The so-called enactments which are integral to the worship serve a definite role of dual communication - to the worshippers in general, and the worshipped deity in particular.

Ritual enactments are believed by many to have been informed by the behavioural instincts of spirits, animals, birds, and plants, etc. For example, an account of how a religious movement, Igbe, came into being is given in the Oyeghe folk narrative and seems to give credence to this belief. It readily provides a good illustration here. Kozin Onofekohwo's Group at Kokori town performed the narrative on this occasion. The performance was recorded and transliterated by G.G. Darah in 1974:

Narrator: Hear me; hear me Adigberen (Great warrior) Hear me, hear me Pdigberen  
Whenever you grow shorter, I too grow shorter, I too grow shorter  
Chorus: Oh Adigberen  
Narrator: Whenever you grow taller I too grow taller  
Chorus: Oh Adigberen  
Narrator: Whenever you grow taller I too grow taller  
Chorus: Oh Adigberen  
Narrator: Soon Arhwaran joined in the song  
Chorus: Oh Adigberen  
Narrator: As Arhwaran  
Chorus: Oh Adigberen  
Narrator: Accoutered himself to engage the Spirits in battle  
Chorus: Oh Adigberen (As in the song sequences, the chorus continues  
with the "Oh Adigberen" refrain throughout the rest of the performances)  
Narrator: Late Reverend Ubiesha Was emptying his bowels  
In the outskirts of the town (Kokori)

By coincidence he walked in the battle zone  
There Ubiesha witnessed Arhwaran's war dance  
And when he got back home  
He prepared poles and built a temple  
At Urhievburhie area of Kokori  
When he completed the building  
He went to Kokori market to buy white chalk  
And a fan made from animal skin  
Next morning he started to perform the new dance  
Whilst he did this Kokori people jeered at him, saying:

'What kind of weird dance is this?  
 Ubiesha took careful note of the remarks.  
 The songs Arhwaran sang to do battle  
 Ubiesha appropriate them  
 This was the beginning of the Igbe religious movement  
 Whenever you grow shorter I too grow shorter  
 Whenever you grow shorter I too grow shorter  
 I say this was how Ubiesha's movement began  
 Whenever he performed the ritual dance  
 He would sit down after a dance sequence  
 And make offerings of white chalk powder  
 News of his healing powers reached Bini people  
 And they with festering sores came for treatment  
 Those with leprosy also came for cure  
 With chalk power only as medicine  
 Old leprosy were healed in seven days  
 In a week big sores were healed  
 A religious movement developed from this practice.  
 A religious movement Arhwaran's gift to Ubiesha,  
 Ubiesha acquired great fame from the inheritance.  
 Ubiesha lived long and died.  
 But this religious movement became a universal one.  
 The initial disparaging remarks made by Kokori people..  
 (The English Compendium Vols. 1&2, 2001:462-3)

Similarly, most animals and birds are attracted when they hear sounds produced by them coming from some other direction. The predictable response of the imitated animal has always been to move closer to the spot from where the sound is coming. On sighting the source of sound, if the animal or bird recognizes the source to be a human being, it is likely to behave in a friendly manner towards the human agent. The traditional snake charmer and his snake provide another good example in this regard. The charmer plays unique, unbroken tunes on his flute and makes snake-like movements and gestures that in a rather strange manner subject the viper to his will. In that single action of the charmer we recognize the seductive potency of music (via the flute) and movement (enactments). The "magical" potency of enactments and communication becomes quite obvious in human relations. For example, the power of communication is shown where a nonindigene speaks fluently the language of a society other than his. He is likely to be more welcome and appreciated than a non-native counterpart who cannot communicate in the language of that same society.

It is in the light of this that one may begin to appreciate religious enactment as a serious act of worship as conceived by the indigenous mind. In the indigenous Yoruba society for example, besides masquerading are other traditional festivals in honour of other divinities. We must quickly add, too, that the masquerade spirit of the ancestor is regarded as a divinity. Other divinities include, Osun, Sàngo, Obàtála, Ori Olóôku, Morèmi, Yemoji, Ogun, Osanyin, Yemoja, Oyà, etc., all associated with their respective festivals characterized by enactments of varying degrees. Worshippers in the course of the festivals, as the Igbe religious movement has shown above, introduce the kind of music, songs and drums the divinity or deity is associated with, as

well as cultivate specific movements or dance pattern of worship. Thus, when the songs, the drums and dances are harmoniously engaged, the effect is predictably evocative, the spirit of the worshipped deity manifests in some of the worshippers who are possessed only in the process of active participation in the religious enactments. While describing the paraphernalia and the action of the protagonist/ Sàngó's medium (elégun Sàngó) in the course of Sàngó worship, Ogundeji (2000) informs:

[T]he elégun Sàngó (Sàngó's medium) would put on the full costume of Sàngó's character with gberi Sàngó (Sàngó's vest) on top of the red yen Sàngó (Sàngó's skirt) on which flaps of leather called wab Sàngó are attached. The special hairdo of Sàngó known as osà Sàngó is worn and he has the oja Sàngó (Sàngó's girdle) on with the labcz Sàngó (Sàngó's bag) strung across his chest. He holds as hand props an osé Sàngó (Sàngó's dancing wand), a carved double-edged axe, and a sééré Sàngó (Sàngó's gourd rattle). Though the personal name of the elegun as impersonator may be Tade Ojo [or Sangotade Ojo], at the time of performance he becomes and is addressed simply as Sàngó. He dances at that moment to the bàta music and answers to Sàngó's oriki (praise poetry). He performs many magical feats such as fire spitting, insertion of a long needle into his eye, cutting of his tongue, and carrying a pot of fire with his bare hands. All these indicate the supernatural character and metaphysical knowledge of Sàngó. He moves up and down the arena of performance (oju agbo eré), while Sàngó praise poetry is chanted by members of the chorus to whom he stretches the ose Sàngó repeatedly thanking them with the statement, "O seun" (thank you), from which the osé derives its name. All these actions, movements, dance, costumes and properties together with the panegyric chant of Sàngó and the response statement are the determining factors that the person, who can be male or female, is impersonating Sàngó (7, Our parenthesis).

This is also true of most religions of the world. The distinguishing features of ritual theatre according to Ogundeji, include:

The ritual events in the festival usually manifest dramatic and theatrical features in various kinds and degrees. Some of the features are not as prominent or developed as we have them in the western-influenced modern theatre and drama. The dramatic or literary aspects of the ritual displays are, for example, greatly limited. Dialogue, in most of the ritual displays, is highly restricted. Where it occurs, it is usually in the statement and response form, or question and answer, or litanic structure. Communication among the performers on the one hand, and between performers and the audience on the other is enhanced through music, chants, songs, drumming, dancing, acrobatics

and miming. The mythological background that foregrounds the plot is also not usually elaborate. It is mainly symbolically expressed in mime and dance and its sequence is usually episodic (5).

The argument of this school of thought becomes all the more verifiable to the degree that loric traditions do exist, particularly in non-literate Africa, and even now, that are neither religious nor secularised rituals, and which exploit to the fullest the resources of drama. Story telling, praise or heroic chanting, and the epic narrative performance are some examples in this category. They are meant to act as agents of socialization, involving any or all of the following: a celebration of the society's greatness as embodied in the monumental achievements of its past heroes; pontifical agents of moral values as seen in trickster characters; a reassertion of societal vision and means of achieving the same. We can therefore conclude that drama as pure entertainment has its root in such performances and not in religious enactments.

Going by the divergent views of the two schools, it is apparent that neither is totally wrong, at the same time, neither could claim absolute correctness. The two views are largely complementary to the degree that whereas classical Greek drama can be traced to Dionysian rites, the same cannot be said of medieval English drama, regardless of official claims. It is true, though, that the bulk of medieval English plays have their source or origin traceable to the Church, there had existed at that time some traditional strolling players. The strolling players belonged to an earlier generation of drama outside the Church. For curious reasons however, they were hardly acknowledged in existing popular chronicles. We consider the medieval 'English drama incomplete without its mention because it provides a clue to the possibility of drama originating in the English society of the Middle Ages outside of the church.

There is however, an obvious convergence of the differing views. For instance, drama as "imitated action" as we know it today, has a hybrid form traceable to sacred, as well as secular enacted arts. It reinforces, more or less, Aristotle's claim that drama could be traced to two sources, imitation and the pleasure derived from imitated action. Man is believed to be the most imitative of all living creatures. That is why there is usually a way by which conventional drama involves and affects the audience. Such an affective experience is similar to the way religious enactments involve and affect the spirit of a deity or a god during worship. At the same time, conventional drama as entertainment gives memorable "pleasure" to the audience, the way a strictly secular traditional performance does.

# Lecture Two

## Drama and the Sub-Generic Forms

As a major generic form of literature, drama can either be conventional or non-conventional. It has a set of generic subsets that include ritual, history, tragedy, comedy, etc., each allowing further subdivisions and variants in form and theatrical representation of human experience. The non-conventional drama includes the Brechtian epic, and Osofisan's neo-rationalist drama, etc. Having discussed in detail the significance of ritual drama as a possible alpha factor in the development of drama in classical Greece, and in the indigenous African society, we shall illustrate extensively, what a typical African ritual drama is, using the Adám@AdÍmt Orisa Festival in Lagos', Nigeria, its possible origin, dramaturgy and significance. Again, because we find Joel Adedeji and Bode Osanyin's accounts concise and very reliable, they shall serve as our principal sources. We also hope to discuss some of the other sub-genres of drama later in chapter 3 of this book.

### Origin of Adamuorisà

Critics' views about the origin of Addmzàrsà are as controversial as they are diverse. But for the pioneering efforts of Joel Adedeji (1973) and, much later, Bode Osanyin (1983) the origin of Addmáôrisà would still have remained shrouded in obscurity. The efforts of these scholars paid off in the sense that they not only stemmed the controversies, they in addition, reduced the origin. versions to two. This we hope to contend with and also use as the basis of our discussion in this book.

### Joel Adedeji's Version

Olugbami, who was the wife of King Addo of Lagos, had no child. Her search for a child took her to an Ijebu Remo village called Ibèfun where she consulted the Ifà oracle and finally had a child after performing some rituals. The child's name was Kuti who later became ruler of Lagos as Ologunkutere from about AD 1749.

When King Ologunkutere was later informed about his "miraculous" birth, he ordered that the deity responsible for his birth be brought nearer to a place where he could occasionally offer sacrifice and worship him. Two emissaries of the king brought the Orisa from Ijebu to Okeipa in Ikoyi, Lagos. They were Ajilu and Imalakin. The yearly sacrifice and worship of the deity began from then by the Ologunkutere lineage.

### Bode Osanyin's Version

Like Joel Adedeji, oral history and records from the archives largely foreground Osanyin's version of Adámáàrsà origin. Olugbami, also called Olufaderin, a pretty woman, was a native of

Ibèfun, who was childless for a long time. Her people were so concerned about her childlessness that they consulted With the Ifà oracle. Ifà instructed that she should leave Ibfun for Lagos where she would be fruitful.

She got married to the king of Addo after her arrival in Lagos. Olugbani also the Olori Oba was the principal wife of Oba Addo who was believed to have reigned from about 1630. Olugbani had three children: Akinsenmoyin, Erelu Kuti, and Gabaro. Erelu Kuti was the only daughter. Akinsenmoyin reigned after Oba Addo and Gczbaro reigned after Akinsenmoyin. The throne was open to Olo gun Kutere and Sookun the two sons of Erelu-Kuti, after the demise of Gabaro. Ologun-Kutere reigned after Gabaro.

The people of Ibèfun heard and were happy about the fortune of their daughter, Olugbani who settled in Lagos. They sent her brothers, Malaki and Ejih, from Ibèfun to pay her a visit in Lagos. Olugbani had died before their arrival in Lagos but they met Erelu-Kuti and her sons, Oba Olo gun Kutere of Iga Iduganran and Sookun, the Ogboni of Iga Iduntafa. The emissaries from Ibèfun were happy to be associated with Lagos royal family. The two returned home with a resolve to find a way of honouring their royal relations, Malaki (Imalakin) brought Eyô from Iperu, and Ejilu (Ajilu) brought Awo Opa from Qyo to honour their worthy in-laws. This source also claimed that Eyà came to Lagos before other gods like AdImz, Oniko, Ologede, Alagere and Eyô Okolaba. They all later characterized what is now known as Addmâôrisà festival.

At the beginning, Eyà had its abode at Okepa (an island) and the Oba and his people used to cross to the island to celebrate Eyô festival. It was Oba Erelu-Kuti who was said to have chosen the site because Eyô and Awo Opa would not stay among the people at Isale Eko probably due to the immense rituals associated with their celebrations. Till date, Awo Opa rituals are always celebrated to round off Adámâôrisà festival. It must be emphasized that different versions of this origin-study exist today with sources traceable to, for example, “the Igbogbo myth”, and the Eyà Ajabe of Iperu.

From the two versions, issues such as the actual hometown of Olugbani remain unknown, Ibèfun or Lagos? Whether Olugbani actually came to Ibèfun from Lagos in search of a child, or that as an Ibèfun woman she left for Lagos on the instruction of the Ife oracle; and whether Malaki and Ejilu were Ologun-Kutere’s emissaries to Ibèfun, or that as Olugbani’s siblings or kinsmen they were sent by Olugbani’s relations at Ibèfun to Lagos. These issues are far from being resolved. But two aspects remain constant and fundamental; they are (i) that the first recorded and documented performance of Addmâôrisà festival was in 1854, not necessarily the year Addmâôrisà festival began, (ii) that Malaki and Ejilu were responsible for importing Eyà and Awo Opa respectively, to Lagos.

### **Adámuorisà as Ritual Drama**

Eyà and Awo Opa, originally, were twin-ritual celebrations performed simultaneously. Eyà had originated from Iperu, while Awo Opa was brought from Oyo. They were imported to Lagos about the same time as exclusive preserve of the royal family. The royal grip that made the ritual performance an exclusive preserve of the royal family, however, became relaxed, making the ritual a little more flexible and adaptable. This was as a result of King Dosumu’s approval of Chief Apena Ajasa’s imaginativeness and creativeness, which he brought to bear on the Eyà enactments. Chief Apena Ajasa’s design with its unique peculiarities was a deliberate deviation and /or distortion of the original ritual and worship. This was largely so because it was intended for public and participation. According to Joel Adedeji, it was one Jacob Alesinloye who was about the first person outside the royal family to have adapted the Eyà

play to mark the funeral rites of his late the mother, though not without initial objection from the king. King ated Dosumu in honour of his own late mother later staged the Eyô or %ra Adámüorisà play on 13 April 1875 (J. Adedeji, 1973:6)

“The Adamuorisà play” as identified by Joel Adedeji is by every standard an African ritual drama. It has all the essential e of dramatic ingredients (elements) that make a good ritual drama. Adedeji’s detailed description of Adamuôrisà dramatic form is considered very reliable in this respect and shall be our guide in this study.

### **Plot**

The plot is simple and unilinear. Adimi, the re-incarnated Orisà(nla) is summoned to lead the rites of passage in order to facilitate the crossing over of the spirit of the deceased candidate so that he could join the ancestors. In order to accomplish the great task, AdImü sets out (i) to play the Chief Mourner at the Amokü (or Imokü) for the atonement of the sins of the deceased, (ii) to carry the offered sacrifice of expiation, on behalf of the ‘ere deceased, by way of the swept debris and filth by the Eyô groups. The Eyo are ancestral ‘spirits’ representing the inhabitants of Lagos, (iii) to face the immolation he must suffer in the hands of the Eyo as well as final ejection as carrier, beyond the lagoon.

### **Stage**

The Adámüôrsà is a play with multiple stages where performances he are held. There are four stages in all, and they are located in selected streets within and around the Lagos Island: Agbo, Iga Idunganran, Irnoku and Idumota.

**Agbodo stage** is relatively a sanctuary located at the Upper King street, and is usually put in place on the eve of performance. The performing area (stage) is enclosed with specially woven raffia mats. There, members of the Adimü cult dance to the sixteen Osugbo drums and gong. The unusual rustic spi-Ritual sound and the “Igbe” song facilitate cultic immersion and possession which are familiar scenes at Agodo.

**Iga Idunganran** palace is another stage location. Thick mats similar to those used at Agodo are also used to enclose the performing area. Here Adimu the carrier, and the mundane ruler of Lagos exchange formal homage.

**Imoku.** Here the mummy is made to lie-in-state with all the ritual paraphernalia on display - mask, hat, staff, etc. The design varies from person to person, and it is usually determined by the social status of the deceased. The “lying-in-state” will definitely be in an Iga if the deceased is from a royal family. If a white cap chief, the setting is predictably to be in a public place like the famous Glover Hall. But if the deceased is a honorary chief the setting is in a private home of the deceased. Setting, in this context, is significant in many ways; for example, it is the scene of the symbolic mourning of Adimu and where the traditional dialogue with the deceased takes place. Every Eyo pays homage by filing past the Mummy.

**Idumota** is a rectangular enclosure provided along Nnamdi Azikiwe Street around the Idumota cenotaph. The acting area is on the main road facing the grandstand. The different Eyo groups are paraded, marking the climax of the drama and the grand finale of the festival. Here people are made to witness the formal encounter between Adimü and Eyà, as well as the symbolic



submission of the latter and his final ejection as a scapegoat. It is similar to the mock-duel in the Qbàtálá festival drama at Ede an ancient town in Qsun State, Nigeria in which Oluuwin and Ajagemo, both priests, are engaged in a symbolic duel, and in which Ajagemo is defeated and taken hostage by the former. Qba Timi, the town's monarch, later pays a ransom to Oluuwin for the release of Ajagemo. The ransomed Ajagemo is then carried shoulder high among dins and ululation, singing and dancing into Timi's palace.

Richard Schechner's *The Future of Ritual* (1995) has a whole chapter on Street Theatre in one of his proposals for the future of Ritual in which "The Street is the stage".

### Setting

The AdámiiàrIsà festival is largely held on selected streets of Lagos. For example, the routes leading to the four strategic stages also constitute street stage performances; a necessary symbolic passage through which the dramatic action is enhanced. Ojá Elégba where the shrine of Es is located is one of such street stages. The shrine is significant in the sense that Adamu/Adimu must stop there on his way to Agodo, and offer symbolic sacrifices to appease Esà so that he (Adimu) may be fit enough to perform his delicate task without a hitch. Another significance of the selected streets of Lagos in the performance of Adámuorisà play is that other Eyô groups flood them later in the day to perform their symbolic sweeping.

Furthermore, the Eyo play involves several dramatis personae, these include Adimu, Eyà, Mummy, Oniko Qlógèdè, Agere, Alakete-pupa or Okolaba and Eyô Aduirn Adimá the tragic hero represents the Orisà(nla) who made the barren woman, Olugbani to be procreative. Eyo, is a tall masquerade that represents the ancestor or founder of Lagos. He speaks the Awori dialect of the Yoruba language. Mummy is the honoured deceased whose spirit is intended to be elevated to the rank of an ancestor by means of the Eyo ritual festival. Oniko is a masquerade costumed in raffia. According to Bode Qsanyin (1980:418). Oniko has acquired the status of the officiating priest. The costume is

an similar to that of Sangbeto masquerade of Togoland having an appearance of a thatched hut. The masquerade usually ushers in the day with series of rituals. Qlógèdè is a masquerade costumed in banana leaves. It represents the evoked spirit of Olugbani, wife of King of Addo summoned to witness Adimu's actions. Qlógèdè literally means the "owner of banana", in other words and according to Bode Qsanyin (1983: 419), it is the spirit of the banana tree embodying "the sweetness, the soothing and tranquilizing spirit in banana", perhaps this is why it was found convenient to represent Olugbani, perhaps not. But it is quite obvious that it is the physical and metaphysical soothing properties in banana as an object of appeasement (etutu) that make Ológèdè a god of peace. It is predictable to note that primarily Ológèdè ushers in peace in the course of the festival. Qlógèdè usually performs his own rites after Oniko's ritual offerings.

We must however add that nowadays, banana leaves are no longer used. Instead a spherical costume built of green damask, still with the impression of banana leaves, is used. Although (Al-) A.gere is regarded traditionally as an entertainer his stilts are regarded and worshipped as spirits. Adedeji identifies him as one of the witnessing masquerades. Okolaba is also known as Alaketepupa, or Olori Eyô or Olopa Eyô (the royal police) is believed in many quarters to have arrived alone and separately. Okolaba even though belongs to the Qba, that is, the king's own Eyô, he is not put in a permanent custody of any family Okolaba is moved from family to family. Eyo Adimu is a group of masquerades that serve as chorus attendants on the Adimu. Other cultic masquerades have similar attendants.

Other areas of dramatic importance in Adamuôrisà play include the use of dialogue, songs and poetry in general. Dialogue is used in the exchange of greetings or in paying homage to the Eyô masquerades;

Ope ado  
Iba Ado  
Iba Akinsiku  
Thanks be to ado  
Worship be to ado  
Worship be to Akinsiku  
(Osanyin, 1983:456)

Other examples of the use of dialogue can be found in the exchange between the cultist and Eyo as recorded by Joel Adedeji:

Cultist: Agogoro Eyà!  
(You are the imposing Eyô)  
Eyo: Mo yo fun o  
Moyo fun'ra mi.  
Emi agogoro Eyô!  
(I rejoice with you  
I rejoice with myself  
I am the imposing Eyo)  
Cultist: Pa nti wa?  
(Why have you come?)

Eyo: Pa nti se  
(Because I have a duty)

Cultist: Opa asileka siko?  
(What about the staff on the shoulder)

Eyô: Ti ehin loju  
Ni mode Iraiye  
(It is the rear part  
which weighs more in  
the precinct of Iraiye)

Cultist: Ni bo lo pade anikanjiya?  
(Where did you meet the lone sufferer?)  
(The Adamuorisà Play, 17-18)

Songs play a vital role in Adámüorisà play. For example,  
o ti f'abebe  
Fe 'ku lo o ti f'abebe  
Fe 'ku lo

Ad(mu se ohun na lo so pe  
On tifabebe  
Fe 'ku lo

(He has dispelled death  
With his magic fan  
He has dispelled death  
With his magic fan  
Adimu has given us his pledge  
To dispel death  
With his magic fan)

(Osanyin, 1983:439)

Furthermore, the songs celebrating Ejilu and Malaki's importation of Eyô and Awo Opa to Lagos are rendered in Igbe verses. Osanyin has this to say on Igbe praise songs:

"Igbe is the traditional royal song of praise. It is indeed a unique genre for Lagos. The style of singing comes from Awori land and has become the traditional music of the agreed Oloris (Queen)...The repertory of Igbe songs is essentially made of the history of royal lineage since the inception of Lagos. Igbe songs are never altered. They are handed down the ages. They have become classic.

(Bode Osanyin 414)

Describing the Igbe music, Olatunji Vidal (1980: 13), informs that it has its own set of tones and is usually accompanied on a series of agogo (hand bells).

### **Significance**

The religious functions of the Adamuôrisà play cannot be overemphasized. The festival, for example, serves dual religious purposes, funeral and purification rituals. The funeral rites of passage or the purpose of ancestrizing or deifying a deceased considered worthy of such an honour. Purification, on the other hand, is observed in the literal cleansing exercise performed by the symbolic sweeping of filth and decay off the land by Eyo masquerades, as well as in the carrier role of Adimu who becomes the satirical butt and, at the same time, the scapegoat of the appeasement rites so that peace, health and wealth might reign in the land.

Similarly, there is an apparent social dimension to the functions of the Adámuorisà play. Abiola Irele has identified three basic functions of the arts, namely, the phatic, the ludic and the ideological. The first two are associated with oral literature. The phatic is concerned with the ability of oral performances like Adámuorisà play to stimulate and encourage a sense of kinship among the people and thus establish a definitive relationship. Given the cosmopolitan outlook of the Lagos Island, the traditional setting of this festival, the inter ethnic and inter-tribal historical link with Ijebu Remo, Iperu, Qyo, Bini, etc., it is obvious that a bond of kinship has long been established among the different tribes that exist within Lagos State, and among the towns that are culturally connected through the Eyô masquerade or Adámuôrisà ritual festival.

As a political tool, the adapted version of the Adamuorisà play is particularly used as a rallying point of public opinion through the songs history is recreated. For example, borrowing the opinion which Finnegan once offered, the songs, the praise poems in Adamuorisà play “are fruitful source of currently authorized interpretation of certain historical events and genealogies”. In one of the “Igbe” songs in praise of Malaki and Ejilu in Adamuorisà play is traced to Qyo where it was alleged to have been imported to Lagos:

Omo lo si Oyo Ajaka Ajaka  
o ‘ro n mu’bo si rele.

The emissary went to Qyo Ajaka  
And brought something home  
(Osanyin, 1980: 440)

Similarly, it is possible to trace the source of Adamuôrisà festival to Igbogbo in Ijebu. This is confirmed in one of Igbogbo praise poetry:

Igbo Ilu omo Meri Ipara  
Igbogbo Eyo, Eyô Osinbokunran  
Igbogbo Eyô, Eyô Igbogbo  
Igbogbo losan Igbogbo loru  
Igbogbo Eyô ilu ti adaba mo oriki re:  
(1980-442)

It is in the light of this fact that Igbogbo community sends representatives, on invitation, to Lagos whenever Adamuôrisà festival is to be held.

Other important areas of the Adamuorisà play that are also found to be compelling include the spectacle, and the general masque-ly scenes from which audience and participants derive aesthetic satisfaction. For example, at the Imàku (Amôku) there is usually a lavish arrangement that suggests the status of the deceased. Equally lavishly dressed are those seated round the Mummy. In effect, the Addmi.iàrisà play affords the people of Lagos the opportunity to express, during the festival celebration, suppressed desires in role-playing performances.

Generally, it is characteristic of ritual drama to be situated in, or fused with, tragedy as in the case of Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*, or history, as in the case of *Adámuôrisà* play. Indeed, the former is a combination of both ritual and history. History plays are attempts at a creative documentation of actual events of communal (or national) significance and interest through enactments. William Shakespeare’s history plays in this regard include the *Richard* and the *Henry* plays. Others include two Roman Generals, *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, understandably sourced from Plutarch’s biographical works. Plutarch (AD 46? - 120) was a Greek philosopher who wrote not less than eighty biographies of famous Greeks and Romans generally known as *Plutarch’s Lives*.

In contemporary African drama, Ebrahim Hussein’s (the Tanzanian playwright) *Kinjeketile* is a dramatic recreation of the Maji-Maji war (1905-1907), against German unjust colonial rule in Tanzania. Similarly, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is an attempt by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Micere Mugo at the historical reconstruction of the Mau-Mau armed struggle in 1951 against the British imperialist (colonial) government in pre-independence Kenya. Ola

Rotimi's *Kurunmi* is a dramatisation of the Yoruba Kiriji war, while his *Hopes of the Living Dead* re-enacts the historical Lepers' legitimate revolt led by Harcourt Whyte, demanding for basic human rights to life, and for recognition as a people. King Overamwen Nogbaisi, another play by the same playwright is a graphic representation of the British imperialists' invasion of Benin City, plundering of its highly valued artefacts, and subsequent exile of its monarch, Oba Overamwen Nogbaisi. Akinwumi Isola has made similar efforts in his artistic documentation of two great Yoruba women, Efunsetan Aniwura (Iyalode Ibadan) and Madam Tinubu (the Terror of Lagos). In most of these plays and in others *suis generis* that are not mentioned in this book, a celebration of the heroic is central to their topicality.

Having been guided in our discussion by Joel Adedeji and Bode Osanyin's separate accounts on the origin, form and significance of Adómtòrisà play, as a typical indigenous African ritual drama, we shall briefly comment on other dramatic forms including tragedy, comedy, and the non-conventional drama like the theatre of the absurd/epic drama, and neo-rationalist drama. Consequently, we hope to examine as concisely as possible the nature of drama and other technicalities, for the purpose of facilitating a thorough understanding and appreciation of drama as a significant field of study.

### **Aristotelian Dramatic Principles (Conventional Drama)**

Tragedy and Comedy are two major conventional dramatic forms in their general conception and modes of imitation. "Tragedy and other Tragic Forms and Comedy and other Comic Forms." (Dapo Adelugba 1990). Tragedy is from the Greek word *tragos* (a goat), traceable to ritual sacrifice and to the goat, the sacrificial animal. It also affirms the fact that the classical Greek tragedy originated from ritual enactments and the worship of Dionysus in addition, it explains the reasons for certain peculiarities that characterize the classical Greek tragedy, including the banishment of direct violence from the stage, and the emphasis on action requiring seriousness as one engaged in a life-deter-mining• ritual, among others. Aristotle defines tragedy as:

an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions... (Poetry: Theory and Practice, 14)

Similarly, comedy is from the Greek word *komos* meaning, to revel. While tragedy is of tempered experience, comedy (or revelling) is, by implication, suggestive of a more relaxed and laughable experience. According to Aristotle, the two major forms in which most other dramatic forms are subsumed differ, however, from each other in three distinct respects: the medium (language), the objects (intent, subject matter and topicality), and the manner or mode of imitation (as in tragedy - representing men better than in reality, or in comedy - representing men worse than in reality). He argued further that the two forms are decidedly so to the degree that the choice made by a writer depends largely on the quality of his mind. He recognized two categories of writers in this regard; the more serious mind imitates noble actions, and actions of

good men (tragedy), while the more trivial mind imitates the actions of meaner persons (comedy/satire).

While we agree with Aristotle that tragedy is, to some extent, superior to comedy, recent developments, however, have shown cases of playwrights who have proved to be very good at the two dramatic forms and with no less quality of mind being applied to each. Therefore, comedy in exceptional cases and, in particular, contemporary African drama has been raised to a high artistic pedestal such that in language and style it is highly elevated, and in topicality has assumed a serious and universal dimension, giving as much pleasure as an Aristotelian tragedy.

Classical tragedy emphasizes characters, and situations that foreground their personality. The situations are such that are overwhelming and which ultimately destroy, particularly, the tragic hero. The hero is usually a *primus inter pares*, first among equals; a man of great achievements, having a royal or noble birth; a goodly natured person, but not perfect because he has an inherent weakness or tragic flaw (*hubris*) that ultimately destroys him. He is a *filius dei*, one that is favoured by the gods. The heroic is especially conceived of in terms of the protagonist's ability to take responsibility for his deed or misdeed and acceptance of his punishment with measured integrity as consequences of his "sins". Through his punishment by death or banishment, and the way he embraces it, the heroic in the protagonist is reasserted, and the nobility in human nature is redeemed. The purgation of fear and pity (*katharsis*) in the audience, which Aristotle also emphasized, is important here. Whatever *katharsis* might mean in the context that Aristotle used it, we do not intend to be dragged into the controversy. However, the point being made by this great philosopher and critic is that a good tragedy, in addition to appealing to man's intellect and provoking emotional response, must serve as a therapy of psycho-social purgation consequent on man's (the audience's) sudden fear-induced empathy and, an awareness that is informed by the tragic hero's slow but steady process of distillation of spirit. Hitherto, the hero embodied, or has been a factor or victim of, the fragility of human nature that is prone to errors. In addition, a good tragic drama must have propensity for reconciling man to the noble ideals in the tragic hero which, in spite of all odds, remain imperishable. It is in this regard that tragedy represents men better than in actual life. On the other hand comedy aims at representing men as worse than reality, to the degree that characters and actions are inverted.

An Aristotelian tragedy, structurally, is constructed on basic dramatic principles: for its subject it must have a single action and an organic plot structure, that is whole and complete, having a beginning, a middle and an end. He described loose or episodic plot in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence, as the worst. He opined that only "bad poets compose such pieces by their own fault".

### **Theatre of the Absurd/Epic Theatre**

The concept began to emerge in bits and pieces in some literary works as far back as late 19th and early 20th century. *Ubu roi* (1896 translated 1951) by Alfred Jarry is regarded by critics as a typical early absurdist theatre, to the degree that it is characterized by an unorthodox use of theatricals, including what is to be regarded as nonsense language. Surrealism, a literary movement that emerged in the early 20th century had encouraged the use of stream of consciousness, which often results in somewhat wild, disjointed, or illogical writings that now feature prominently in tragi-comic form that is now recognized as theatre of the absurd, an aftermath of the World Wars. Elements that have found their ways into absurdist theatre and hitherto had existed in, or, as literary forms include, the comedic, in which an anti-hero - a social outcast, a tramp, a drunkard, a whore, or a petty criminal- assumes the central role, and made to

turn his tragic condition in a somewhat meaningless or existentialist world to a laughable farcical or slap-stick humour. Another one is alienation effect/principle.

Another influence, to some extent, on the absurdist theatre is Antonin Artaud's collection of theoretical writings, *Le Theatre et son Double* (1938; *The Theatre and its Double*, 1958), in which he advocates for a theatre that should deliberately jolt its audience and by so doing stir it to action. A theatre in which the audience could pay close attention to topicalities, not characters. The Avant-garde theatre is also largely informed and characterized by this philosophy, and features. Similarly, the Neo-rationalist theatre, an emerging modern African dramatic form pioneered by Femi Osofisan is also characterized by such features as are common with Brecht's revolutionary Epic Theatre.

Some contemporary playwrights whose dramaturgies have been influenced by the theatre of the absurd include, Edward Albee and Sam Shepard (America); Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard (Britain); Gunter Grass and Peter Weiss (Germany); Max Frisch (Switzerland) Vaclav Havel (Czechoslovakia) Tewfik Al Hakim (Egypt); Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Ben Tomoloju, and more recently, Niyi Osundare (Nigeria).

A detailed discussion on the Epic theatre with reference to Bertolt Brecht, and Neo-rationalist theatre with special focus on Femi Osofisan's dramaturgy can be found in two separate chapters, "Modern Drama" and "African Drama", respectively, in this book.

### **The Nature of Drama and Basic Criticism**

There are basic distinguishing characteristics that differentiate drama from other genres of literature. By its very nature and form, drama is performative, therefore, by implication, it is realised primarily, through performance (enactments). There are, however, exceptions to this rule in the sense that writers like the famous Egyptian playwright, Tewfik Al Hakim, for reasons of religion and or politics, deliberately and successfully wrote plays largely meant to be read and enjoyed. Besides, quite a number of modern African playwrights including the Nobel Laureate (literature), Wole Soyinka, although they write for performance, have often had the reading audience in mind, hence the preponderance of poetry that compels on the reader special attention on every verbal suggestion that can help him make his reconstruction of the plays on the platform of his imagination. In a sense, this form of drama assumes similar features as narrative fiction or written poetry with its characteristic individuation requiring that the reader re-create actions through imagination that is defined by his level of proficiency of the language in which the play is written.

A drama production requires the competence of a play director who single-handedly interprets the action and the language of a drama text, determines the cast who translate the text into an intelligible, holistic action in a single theatrical production (or performance) and, before a live audience. By implication, the audience is spared the rigours of, and the barrier that, language and the intended action might pose since the director has already attended to them. Although what is served to the audience is the finished product of the director's interpretation of a drama text, the audience, in turn, immerses itself spontaneously in the action, and responds to the production techniques including the use of effects that make the enactments plausible.

As a result of the individualized nature of narrative fiction, a reader can afford to read a novel in bits, at his own pace, for weeks or even months without losing its logic or meaning. In addition, a novel can afford to explore a whole life experience, which accounts for its volume. Drama, on the other hand, by its nature and form, must be performed before a live audience, is act limited in time by the attention span of its audience, therefore it can neither accommodate a

whole life experience nor stretch beyond a single production at a given time. Aristotle's emphasis on imitation of an action and adherence to the three unities of time, place, and action, and in this case, unity of time, is apposite here. A drama presents a slice of life, not the whole of it. It is in the light of this that Aristotle had insisted that a good drama in terms of contextual space should not last more than a complete rotation of the earth (or a day).

However, performance duration varies from place to place, and or from one dramatic culture to another. In the West for example, a standard play production duration may last between 2 to 3 hours; in Africa, it is between 45 minutes and 2 hours, whereas in the Orient, theatrical performance may span a whole day.

Another significant difference, a corollary to the above, is the fact that a narrative fiction is neither limited in time nor space. It is characterized by incidental action, digressions, often with too many details and complex expressions which are normally left to the individual reader to decipher or decode. On the other hand, drama dispenses with such luxuries as direct description of person, places, sounds, sight, smells, or direct authorial comments that attempt to explain an action, an expression, or a gesture, etc., which occur only as stage directions, some of which the director may, or may not, consider in his production script. Unfortunately, the audience, unless he is a member of the production crew, does not have access to the play text or the director's production script which may contain some or all of that. So the audience depends solely on the director's interpretation of the drama text.

Conflict and, in most cases, conflict resolution, are central to a good drama. It is in the light of this fact that the heightening of conflict at the level of subject matter and topicality distinguishes drama from other literary genres.

Other genres may have character and dialogue or poetilogue, as in the case of poetry, the contextual process of creating similar elements in drama differs a great deal. In drama, action and character are usually exaggerated or made larger than life. While in prose narrative there is very little action and characters comment on situation instead of participating directly in it, drama demands a more overt form of action: the character's role or typification is subject to the director's interpretation. And this is, in turn, defined by the watching audience only through his action, utterances and interaction with other characters in a play. In other words, while in narrative fiction point of view is used to an advantage to the degree that it permits authorial comments and/ or intrusion, drama employs such elements as mime, dance, music, song, scenery, costume, sound effect, lighting, spectacle, etc., as mediating factors between subject matter/topicality compelling the watching audience to creatively, imaginatively, and critically participate as (an) observer, largely passively though, as the syntax of action unfolds in the course of performance. Some basic audience attitudes that dramatists often exploit besides conflict include, surprise, suspense, dramatic irony, verisimilitude and universality. These shall be discussed shortly in this chapter. Meanwhile we shall briefly examine two approaches to the criticism of dramatic literature.

There are two basic critical approaches. Most critics choose to approach the study of drama either as literature or as theatre. As literature the emphasis is on action, whereas as theatre the emphasis is on performance. Performance, for instance, implies concrete effect and emotional impact attained on stage. Action, on the other hand, implies such things as symbolism, the message, and the structural rhythm of the work which apparently are nonspecific and non-concrete. With drama as theatre, analysis of dialogic effects would involve nuances of speech and varied registers which are discoverable in the dialogue of the characters. But as literature, language is considered under style, metaphoric use of language (figures of speech) as well as



language as a conveyor of meaning, that is, a vehicle of exploration of the themes of the work. As theatre the emphasis is on role-playing; the critic pays close attention to how actors play roles, whereas, as literature, it is on character and characterization, that is, how well and how memorably characters are created. As theatre, spatial patterns or, simply, acting areas as they relate to very concrete effects in terms of relation to action in a physical sense are brought under focus. On the other hand, in drama as literature, setting or milieu or environment), which is more generalized and inherent in the text is emphasized.

The use of these terms can best be understood through direct experience of producing plays and teaching them as literature, by a direct cross-reference from one to the other, such that literary expression is fundamentally sharpened by theatrical experience. Many people, however, do not have such exposure or convergence in which circumstance, the option is to cultivate the habit of visualizing texts on the stage through imaginative collaboration between a printed text and the sub-text. In other words, all patterns of effects are achieved in production. The justification for integration arises from what Aristotle had discovered long ago, the fact that drama as an imitative and or performative art, is superior to all other art forms. Besides, it is the most effective and most sociological of all literary arts.

Besides dialogue, song, character, etc., which we have discussed earlier in this chapter, the ordering of the story line (plot) in a drama is quite unlike what obtains in say, narrative fiction. This is largely because drama is more tightly structured. In narrative fiction, for example, there is a main plot (and, in some cases, a sub-plot), all divided into chapters. In a drama, events/episodes are divided into Acts and Scenes. The number of such acts or scenes has kept changing since the classical Greek times till date. In the classical Greek period a play was divided into five episodes or scenes. Each scene was marked at the end by the introit of a chorus. A chorus is a wise old man-character, rich in experience, and often represents the mind of a discerning audience. The Elizabethan plays had shorter irregular scenes, and usually of five acts. In recent times however, playwrights, as well as directors are at liberty to choose, or combine, from a variety of forms.

### **Mimesis**

This is essentially a medium of communication through an expressive movement, a non-verbal body "language". Some playwrights do specify its use in order to achieve specific effects. The railway construction scene in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*; the opening scene, as well as the encounter between Odewale and King Adetusa in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* are good examples.

Play directors are usually at liberty to include such physical actions as facial expressions, and other forms of non-verbal expressive devices like kinesis which a playwright may not have thought of originally, for the purpose of reinforcing an action which otherwise would have been a cut-and-dried action that is as lifeless as the cold printed text from which it is taken. Quite naturally, mimesis encourages spontaneity and, in some cases, humour. Besides, it reinforces topicality, and contributes to the development of the plot.

### **Kinesis/Dance**

Like mimesis, it is significantly an expressive art form often used to suggest an intense emotion, or simply, a state of being. Two major sources of dance are traceable to ritual worship and social entertainment. In either case it is often complemented with musical accompaniments. The chorus

in the classical Greek drama accompanied his song with suggestive kinesis. The Elizabethan comedic drama, Shakespearian in particular, often had those characters whose conflicts were resolved engage in a ring-dance. In contemporary African drama characterized by unpredictable and limitless free style, dance comes in very handy. At the opening scene of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Elesin Oba engages in one of his vibrant dancing steps as he hurries through the market. Again in the same play, we catch a glimpse of a masque-like ballroom dance, simultaneously with a quasi- masque "dance" organised in honour of the visiting Prince from England. In Ben Tomoloju's *Jankariwo* and, especially, in Femi Osofisan's neo-rationalist drama, dance and music are prominent features often intended to reinforce the alienation effect, as well as delineate one scene from the other.

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## **Surprise**

There are basic attitudes of the audience upon which a dramatist can play. They are surprise, suspense, dramatic irony, conflict, universality and verisimilitude. Surprise entails taking the audience unawares. Dramatists like Shakespeare seldom use it. In *Othello*, however, it becomes apparent as Othello tells how he took the turbaned Turk by the throat and smote him. Similarly in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* the audience least expects Elesin Oba to commit suicide at the point he does; neither is Tonye's suicide expected in John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's *Song of a Goat*. Suspense is holding the audience in poised expectancy. It is a constant essential element in the theatre. It is highly dramatic and advances to a richer level of interest in dramatic irony when the expectant audience also like some omniscient gods on mount Olympus, is quite aware of the forces shaping events still hidden from the persona(e) of the drama. This sense of sharing in the movement of destiny is one area in which drama rouses the human spirit.

## **Dramatic Irony**

This arises when a situation appears in one light to a character in a play, but in quite a different light to other characters and/or to the audience. The most apparent instance of this is in cases of mistaken identity, as when in *The Comedy of Errors* the twins are confused. Dramatic irony is capable of reinforcing a tragic situation as when an otherwise understanding audience watches helplessly as Oedipus is driven unwittingly to his doom; or Julius Caesar's rebuff of Artemidrus with: "What touches us most shall last be served", before addressing the conspirators as "friends".

## **Universality**

Many Afrocentric critics would rather this aspect of the discourse be dropped on the suspicion that the idea of universality is the West's attempt to "globalize" through imposition, its literary culture and canons on the rest of the world. Perhaps they are right, perhaps not. We strongly feel, however, that the concept of universality has its own merit, and drama scholarship is incomplete without discussing it. Also our drama students must not be denied the acknowledge.

The whole concept of universality has to do with the sense within a play in which characters, whether individualized and recognizable as persons, or presented as types or symbols, reach beyond their circumstances to wider implications. What is happening to these characters happens, or might happen to anybody outside the world of the theatre. The means by which a play established this sense of universality varies from play to play. For example, Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* attain it partly because of the human limitations of the characters, and the seemingly accidental and life-like nature of the events. But the medieval English morality play *Everyman* addresses the issue of universality directly through its topicality and characterization. From the outset, it ignores the individual and establishes a wider meaning through characters that are direct universal icons. The main subject and mover of action around whom events revolve is every MAN.

We must quickly add here also that whichever way universality is conceived and achieved, it is the measure of such universal thrust, that is, seeing beyond the immediate (known) events of the drama, that it achieves a lasting philosophical significance.

## **Verisimilitude**

In drama, particularly, realistic and naturalistic drama, the appearance of truth or reality is desirable. This is why the dramatist seeks to present a “slice of life” to the audience as ready as it is to grant the necessary “suspension of disbelief”. While plausibility defines a good literary work, including drama, credibility is not essential to a good drama. No doubt, one may judge it for education or for propaganda or for art’s sake, but the likelihood of the happenings is immaterial. What is important is the consistency of the events with the pattern that a drama sets for itself within the structure and mood of its own world, whether or not such a world is realistic. Such events must be in agreement with the established conventions. It is, in other words, the consistency with the norms of the evoked universe of the play that determines truth in art. This is why art, particularly drama, is judged in reference not to all human knowledge, but to its own world - its own coherent growth, mood and structure. But we must emphasize that beyond the truth in art is the issue of universality, which relates to life outside a play.

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# LECTURE THREE

## Major Dramatic Forms Tragedy

CLASSIFICATION of drama in this study is largely informed by the usual conventional forms namely, Tragedy, Comedy (satire), Epic, Burlesque (one-act play), Tragi-comedy, Farce, Slapstick, Melodrama, Ballad, Opera, etc. The first three — tragedy, comedy, and the epic drama, we regard as the primary forms while others constitute their subsets. It is our intention in this chapter to focus attention more on the principal dramatic forms, partly because they are basic forms which most students are likely to keep encountering in their study of drama, and partly because of space constraint since we intend to be as detailed as possible. Besides, dramatic forms that we consider secondary in this study do not bear as much significance in form, content, quality and quantity as to make their relevance imperative in this study.

### Classical Greek Tragedy

Tragic drama in classical Greece, particularly since the early decades of 5 B.C., had quite distinct changes and phases in the course of its development over the ages. The form of classical Greek tragedy that has come to be recognised by critics is the tragic form approved of by the great classical literary critic, Aristotle, in his poetics. At the time Aristotle wrote the poetics, Greek tragic drama had come of age in terms of quantity and quality, having evolved through the lyric tragedy, the surplises, the old and the middle tragedies. For example, Thespis had added one actor to the chorus (considered as the protagonist at the time); Aeschylus, also the first of the great playwrights had added a second actor, while Sophocles, the playwright whose Oedipus Rex served as Aristotle's model in poetics, had added a third actor. Therefore, it was possible for a critic of Aristotle's status to formulate a set of literary canons which, to date, have wielded so much influence on literary creativity and criticism not only in classical Greece but throughout the entire world.

There are several characteristics that are fundamental to Greek tragedy, some of which are worth mentioning here. Classical Greek tragedy according to Aristotle was intended to serve a definite purpose of effecting a catharsis. Catharsis is a purgatorial process through which the soul of man is purged through fear and pity. This cathartic feeling is better experienced than explained because no explanation has successfully captured the psychic trauma that the audience experiences when watching a Greek tragedy or any other play rich in cathartic elements.

Greek tragedy, we must quickly add, does not end in the death of the tragic hero. For example, Oedipus the King is left alive and free. Even though he chooses to go into self-exile, he

is redeemed and, to a great extent, perfected or ennobled through suffering. Through suffering he experiences a distillation of spirit, purged of his excesses and flaws. And like every Aristotelian tragic hero, he never has a second chance at least, not as king of Thebes.

It is instructive to note also that the idea of “greatness” in classical Greece does not reside in the fact that the hero is by all standards a very good person in his carriage and a *primus inter pares*. It is not the fact of not being perfect either, but his humble and personal acknowledgement of his shortcomings, and the apparent transformation from the initial state of imperfection to a state of “perfection”, having passed from innocence to experience. But more importantly, it is his willingness to accept his fate towards the end of the play that constitutes the heroic and which is worthy of emulation.

Three recognizable elements are contributory to the making or unmaking of a tragic hero. These include the supernatural forces, the society, and the protagonist's personal weakness or tragic flaw (*hubris*). The Greek society believed in the existence and invincible powers of the gods or supernatural forces. This is given graphic representation in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. To these great playwrights and others like William Shakespeare, Ola Rotimi and John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, man is to the gods a mere toy whose misfortunes are their delight. This is aptly captured in the words of Shakespeare's Henry, “. . . As flies unto wanton boys, so are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport”. This is why anyone would wonder why the gods decide to put a curse, from birth, on Oedipus, or Odewale. Or on Zifa's lineage, or why Olotu, Ogrope, Kengide and Ibobo are doomed even before setting off on their makeshift raft.

In Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, the influence of the supernatural forces is evident in apparently every stage of the development of the plot. The prologue hints at the unusual riddle of the Sphinx, which must be unravelled. At the birth of baby Oedipus we again notice the presence of the supernatural forces, particularly the pronouncement of a curse on Oedipus, as revealed by the oracle. That the conspiracy of Queen Jocasta and King Laius to destroy the baby in order to stall the wish of the gods is aborted in an unusual and questionable manner, clearly points to the fact that the gods are truly in charge. Consequently, the stage is set for the encounter between father, King Laius and son, Oedipus, leading to the dual-crime of patricide and regicide and the attendant consequences. Similarly, it is only logical to refer to Oedipus as a *filius dei* in the course of his steady rise to grace: saved from being sacrificed; taken care of in his childhood by foster parents no less royal; endowed with an unusual power to overpower and destroy King Laius and his guards, as well as imbued with inspirational power to unravel the riddle of the Sphinx, then, finally made King. No doubt, Oedipus' new status as King finally brings him to the terminus of one favoured by the gods ironically, it also complete his accursed earthly mission of patricide and incest.

Similarly, human failings, either of individuals or the group, have contributed in various ways to the making and unmaking of Oedipus. The failure of the shepherd-servant to carry out the instruction to abandon the baby to die on the mountainside readily prepares the ground for Oedipus' ill-fated journey through life. The only survivor when King Laius meets his hot death deliberately gives wrong information on the King's manner of death. Current information would have given a clearer and early clue to the shrouded identity of Oedipus. Furthermore, the decision of the society (Thebes) to make him Oedipus King (a non-native (?)) as his reward for destroying the powers of the Sphinx brings him in direct contact with his mother, Jocasta, who also had children by him.

In Ola Rotimi's adaptation of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, titled *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, the various contributions of the society are much more forceful and distinct. The

domestication of the play, which is informed by certain idiosyncrasies that apparently characterize a post-colonial African society, is crafted so perfectly to reflect how society has contributed to both the heroic stature, as well as the fall of King Odewale. For example, the issue of land dispute which has sacked many communities in Africa, the problem of ethnicity and tribalism; and the problem of land dispute and land-fraudsters - all of which most African communities still have to contend with today. They are social problems, and man-made. But for envy, Odewale's drunken uncle, who sees the possibility of the former inheriting the great wealth of the hunter Ogundele and his wife Mobike, Odewale's foster parents, would not have referred to Odewale as "a butterfly", the statement which sends him on a quest of his true identity. But for Kakalu, son of Atiki, who defrauds Odewale by selling a parcel of land which belongs to King Adetusa, there would not have been any encounter between Odewale and the King who later turns out to be his biological father. The misunderstanding arising from the true ownership of the land could have been resolved amicably but for the tribalistic tendency in both King Adetusa and Odewale. King Adetusa pokes fun at the twisted tongue or "bush language" of Odewale. For Odewale, it is the last thing he hardly could bear: to see his "tribe" insulted. He vows: "I'll die first". He kills the elderly man, his father, and thus fulfils the first assignment of the gods.

In addition, having successfully led the Kutuje people against the Ikolus, the former willingly crown Odewale, contrary to the traditional procedure, king in recognition of his immense contribution. This well intended gesture turns out to be the last straw that seals his fate to the degree that it serves as a catalyst to his fulfilment of the gods' final mission for him, the heinous crime of incest. All of the above show the extent of society's contribution to making a tragic hero of Odewale, like Oedipus Rex.

A protagonist's tragic weakness or flaw, otherwise called "hubris", is equally fundamental to the tragic process. By tragic flaw we mean a personal weakness innate in the protagonist, and which he/she can neither contain nor change. For example, King Oedipus shares similar traits of personal weakness with King Odewale. Both are choleric, as well as aggressive in their impatience. Both are blind in their pride. We may consider these traits, too, as necessary complements of heroic virtues like courage, determination, prowess, etc. Oedipus is a highly committed King and so is Odewale, almost to a fault. In his determination to help his people, he treats with irreverence the sacred institutions and their representatives. He despises the much revered gods in his desperate quest for definite answers to 'his' people's many problems. In other words he is good but not perfect. He would not have done what he did if he had been more prudent and less acerbic with the use of words especially on Baba Fakunle, the elderly Ifà priest, and his chiefs; he could have been a little less self-confident when Aderopo on bringing back a message from Ile Ifé, cautions on the need to make the report a private one.

There is, however, the need to recognize the thin membrane that delineates a tragic hero and a tragic figure. The tragic figure also is driven by the three fundamental forces discussed above. However, unlike the tragic hero who undergoes a distillation of spirit, completely transformed and his soul ennobled through suffering, and therefore, is worthy of emulation, the tragic figure does not undergo such a transformation or rebirth despite his suffering. The tragic figure is intransigent, unbending and irredeemable, and therefore not worthy of emulation. It is in the light of the tragic and the nobility which entrains the heroic in a Greek tragedy that its subject matter is always serious and of magnitude.

Other important characteristics pointed out by Aristotle include, the three classical unities - unities of time, place and action. In a well-crafted classical tragedy the whole action is confined to a locale. Unity of action requires that only one single action take place at a time, on the stage.

Unity of action also informs the principle of the purity of the genre in which there is but one single plot, with no digression. Because of the magnitude of its subject matter and the seriousness it evinces, Greek tragedy does not accommodate any manner of comic relief. This is also linked with the structure of the tragic plot which, Aristotle has insisted, must be organically whole having a beginning, a middle and an end. In other words, it must have a tight plot.

As suggested elsewhere in this study, banishment of violence or of the direct display of it in classical Greek tragedy is most likely to have been informed by the religious origin of classical Greek drama. Most plays had been performed right in the temples of some gods, and which invariably did not permit a direct display of violence. It is also possible to conclude that since the primary objectives of the classical Greek tragedy had been to entertain as well as encourage noble behaviour, any display of direct violence was carried out off stage and then reported on stage. For the same reason, the violent encounter between King Laius and Oedipus does not take place before the audience; rather it is reported on stage. Similarly, Jocasta hangs herself offstage. Her action is then reported on stage. King Oedipus plucks his eyes off stage but later appears on stage to show himself.

While the tragic spirit in a Sophoclean tragedy is formed both by wrongdoing, which works out its own punishment, as well as disasters without justifiable cause(s), the Aeschylean tragedy is strictly one of moral cause and effect. For example, in *Agamemnon* the first of Aeschylus's trilogy (*Agamemnon*, *The Choephoroi* and *The Eumenides*) begins at dawn with the news of Troy's fall brought to the queen, Clytemnestra, via the signal first, in addition to the news that Agamemnon the King is arriving soon. The news significantly propels the tragic action to a steady rise. Clytemnestra's apparent hatred for Agamemnon is rekindled. Agamemnon the king had sacrificed the queen's daughter, Iphigenia, in order to facilitate the sailing of the Greek fleet against Troy some ten years earlier. Besides, Clytemnestra plans with her new lover, the King's arch-enemy, Aegisthus, a way of eliminating the king. Agamemnon on his return is accompanied by Cassandra, his visionary but "sick" mistress. The King is welcome back with false show of affection into the palace and then to his death. This is similar to Shakespeare's doomed protagonist, Caesar in *Julius Caesar* who, having apologized for his delay, is ushered into the capitol with pomp by the conspirators. The same "warm" conspirators right inside the capitol later murder him. *Agamemnon* ends with Agamemnon's murderers appearing before the Chorus and justifying their action with the fact of Agamemnon's previous crimes against them. In T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* a modern English drama, a similar scene occurs in which the murderous knights defend their murder of the "rebellious" Beckett the Arch Bishop of Canterbury.

The *Choephoroi* starts off years later with Aegisthus and Clytemnestra firmly established as King and Queen while Agamemnon's death remains unavenged. The King and the Queen have both hardly given any thought to Agamemnon's children's capability to avenge their father's murder. Apollo reunites the children, Electra, and Orestes after a spell of forced separation. Orestes succeeds in killing both Aegisthus and his own mother Clytemnestra. Even though there may be enough justification for the killing of Aegisthus, his father's murderer, Orestes' killing of his own mother, a co-murderer of his father is against natural law. Orestes is found guilty of the blood of his mother. His vengeful act brings upon him suffering and misfortune.

The third play *The Eumenides* again revolves round Orestes as he is made to suffer years of torture. He later appeals for a trial in the court of Justice in Athens. The goddess Athena



intervenes after a long controversy and gets Orestes acquitted. This way the whole tragic action is resolved and the blood feud terminated.

### **The Elizabethan Tragedy**

Athens' victory over Persia in the early years of 5th century B.C. predictably placed Athens on the world map as a world power. Besides becoming commercially prosperous, Greece had enjoyed relative peace and political stability. Trade and commerce, and the theatre had flourished simultaneously. The commercial activities had brought people of diverse culture together and the theatre had benefited a great deal from the apparent cross-pollination of cultures and the subsequent theatrical fertilization. The prevailing atmosphere had induced creative sensibilities to the degree that production of high quality plays had blossomed.

Similarly, following the defeat of the Spanish Armada by England in 1588, England became a world power to be reckoned with. Commercial activities flourished and, as in the days of classical Athens, people with different cultural backgrounds had interacted. Again, the influence of the inter-culture fertilization was enormous, particularly, on the Elizabethan theatre where there was an obvious admixture of the medieval and the renaissance English views about life in general. The greatness of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries is traceable to these influences.

Gorboduc (1562), by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton marked the beginning of serious drama in Renaissance England. This was a tragedy of bloody revenge, in the tradition of Senecan tragedy. During the period, a number of playwrights who were products of Oxford or Cambridge universities had emerged. They included John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe. Even though these "university wits" had produced plays which were technically and topically very good, their plays, many of which were lost a long time ago, were not popular. Of the group, Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), born the same year as Shakespeare, and holder of a master's degree from Cambridge University, a poet and playwright, was by far the most successful. He is reckoned the greatest tragic playwright, after William Shakespeare. Renaissance England attained its theatrical maturity through the contributions of Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare. We shall briefly treat three Shakespearian plays generally considered by critics to represent the Elizabethan tragedy.

### **Shakespearian Tragedy**

In 1600 Twelfth Night was completed. Between 1600 and 1610, all the great tragedies were composed. Shakespeare had been writing comedies during the period. For this development in the writing career of Shakespeare scholars have suggested many reasons.

One of such reasons was said to have bordered on Shakespeare's psychological frame of mind. He was said to be quite unhappy, following a series of misfortunes that befell him at the time. For example, his son had died; he had lost his mistress, and his trusted friend and patron had been unfaithful. The trauma was believed to have brought gloom and pessimism which consequently found expression in the bitterness of theme and the violence of language.

Another reason adduced was Shakespeare's interest in new artistic experiment through expressions. Shakespeare seemed not to have been contented with his past successes, particularly in the comedies and in his search for a more demanding mode, he had turned to tragedies.

Some critics have suggested too that there were more fundamental reasons which touched on wider national issues and which, in turn, had informed the emergence of Shakespeare's tragedies between 1600 and 1610. For example, the Elizabethan age had ended with the

execution of the Earl of Essex in 1601, two years before the death of the Queen. The effect of these historical events had brought upon Shakespeare a feeling of shock and disillusionment. After Queen Elizabeth reigned King James I. The nation experienced a steady fall in normal standards; and there emerged the Jacobean Age, of disenchantment, disillusionment and bitterness - an era of gloom and pessimism.

Tragedy before Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare had been concerned with the Kings. In medieval times, the tragic concept was woven round the death or disaster of the hero. The typical Shakespearian tragic hero is not necessarily a King or someone of noble birth, but highly placed with excellent qualities and a personality of grandeur. For example, Hamlet and Lear are Kings, Macbeth is a nobleman who becomes King, while Julius Caesar and Gaius Coriolanus are two Roman Army Generals. Most significantly it is the qualities in these characters that are being emphasized. Othello, the Moor of Venice, excelled by sheer merit of his excellent qualities.

In classical Greek tragedy, recognition is given to three elemental forces: supernatural, societal, and hubris or tragic flaw. Similarly, Shakespearian tragedy accommodates the three elements as represented in the direct involvement of the supernatural forces or their agents, witches and recognizable ominous signs in Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and The Tempest; societal forces in Othello's trust of Iago; societal influences in Julius Caesar and Coriolanus. The tragic hero, even though of excellent personality, is not completely absolved from blame. Caesar's tragedy stems from the fact that he is convinced he will find a good support in Brutus, his very close friend. But to his utter dismay, Brutus draws his dagger, gestures his approval of the conspirators' action, and adds his own cut to the numerous others. Brutus stabs his best friend, Caesar. For Caesar it is an experience of self-discovery; that something is fundamentally wrong with himself and not with his killers any more since his trusted friend, Brutus, is even one of them. He admits therefore that he is not fit to live if he is so unwanted as to warrant his best friend having a hand in his murder. "Then falls Caesar", we must emphasize here, is not a stage direction. It is Julius Caesar's admission or willingness to accept the conspirators' verdict: that since the Romans find his life unbearable he deserves to die. Julius Caesar thus completes his tragic heroic cycle through his last minute regeneration.

This again, brings us to the deep moral and spiritual significance of Shakespearian tragedy. For instance, at the beginning of a Shakespearian tragedy we observe human relationships which are severed by the end of the tragic play. Important values, in other words, are affirmed more emphatically at the end. Similarly, cathartic elements abound in Shakespearian tragedy. Catharsis here essentially amplifies the sense of greatness as the audience is privileged to watch the grandeur of a human soul passing through purgatory or through redemptive suffering.

Despite these striking characteristics which it shares with classical Greek tragedy, Shakespearian tragedy differs in a number of ways. For example, there is no strict adherence to the three classical unities. On the issue of time, Shakespearian tragedy does not recognize the twenty-four hour limit of action as suggested by Aristotle. The concept of unity of place is not accommodated in many of Shakespeare's tragic plays. Antony and Cleopatra, for example, bestrides at least, two different nations, Rome and Egypt.

Furthermore, the classical unity of action coupled with such details as, (i) purity of the genre, that is, absence of digression, or a topically unidirectional plot devoid of things like comic relief, etc (ii) one single action taking place at a time on stage, are not adhered to in Shakespearian tragedy.

Peripeteia/denouement, which has been inappropriately described as reversal of fortunes, is a feature of classical tragedy. It is also present in Shakespearian tragedy foregrounding the dramatic irony: Othello's trust of Jago is a good example. Other examples exist in Matheth, King Lear, and Julius Caesar.

Anagnorisis, the recognition of the reversal of fortune leading to the regeneration of the tragic hero through a distillation of spirit, constitutes an important characteristic of classical Greek tragedy. The process of regeneration is achieved through the anagnorisis. The Shakespearian tragic hero by the end of the play is never the same as he was at the beginning of the play. He is thoroughly purged, cleansed, re-born. He recognizes the forces he has battled blindly with, particularly his tragic flaw to the degree that, had he a second chance to re-live his life, he would never have been as ignorant or as crude. Unfortunately, there is never such a second chance for tragic heroes.

In the past, critics have tried in vain to locate anagnorisis in a play like Julius Caesar. They have, consequently, denied the protagonist, Julius Caesar, the full status of a tragic hero. He is considered not to have experienced a distillation of spirit and so remains an unregenerated tragic figure. However, a more careful look at the play proves the contrary. No doubt, we see Julius Caesar in his grandeur; he is of excellent character, but he is not perfect. Whether or not he is ambitious, he is self-conceited and is consumed in his obsessive quest for what is a perfect (moral), or ideal state; a governance informed by good conscience and an established code of conduct and the rule of law. Julius Caesar's uncompromising position is mistaken for pride and pig-headedness. The conspirators are convinced that if for any reason Julius Caesar is crowned king he is likely to turn a dangerous dictator. The only solution they conceive of is, "death to the dictator". His discovery of Brutus his closest friend and confidant as one of the conspirators compels his acknowledgement of the true reality, and an affirmation of his irrelevance in Rome, hence his rejection by the ruling class in Rome.

Although most of Shakespeare's tragedies do have organically whole plot-structure, the claim of tightness of the plot is tenable in so far as cases of comic relief, and other digressional events are considered contributive to the development of the plot or the reinforcement of the theme. This is similar to what obtains in major epic poems where the use of digressions reinforces rather than weakens the plot, or the theme(s).

Although the subject matter of Shakespearian tragedy is serious and of magnitude, the Elizabethan spirit tends to accommodate comic scenes even in tragedy. They heighten, through suspense and surprise, the tragic action. Besides, in order to allow for a similar amplification in the use of spectacle, different actions are often allowed to go on simultaneously on stage. Usually this is backed up with masque-like scenery and other stage effects like music and the use of pipes. The use of the spectacular is observed in the direct display of violence on stage, such as war scenes, which often lead to death and corpses littering the stage. These developments are anti-classical principles of banishment of violence on stage, but they do essentially form major characteristics of Elizabethan tragedy. We shall briefly undertake textual analyses of two Shakespearian tragedies.

### **King Lear**

Of all the tragedies written by William Shakespeare, King Lear has most complex plot. There is an abundance of materials in the play. These include events and experiences involving a large number of characters, many of whom are of great dramatic significance. One notices, however,

in the play that the different elements of a vast and variegated plot are packaged in such a way that the final effect is neither diffused nor lacking in focus.

The most apparent device which foregrounds Shakespeare's good management of a plot as diverse as *King Lear* is the inter-relationship of the various characters in terms of plot and dramatic action. For example, Gloucester, who appears at the beginning as one of the men in Lear's court, becomes an associate of the usurpers and then a devoted helper of the king, and later a victim of the usurpers. This way his actions become almost part of the main plot. Similarly, the tracing of Edgar's fate is brought close to the main plot by his association with Lear, his aiding Gloucester and, the significance of his contributions to the plot in Act VIII. In addition, Edmund's plotting against Edgar and Gloucester could easily have been a separate line of action but it is again, woven into the main plot through the two sisters who are involved with Edmund. It is instructive to emphasize, too, that Shakespeare's conscious management of a complex plot in *King Lear* is noticeable in the way he binds together the public and private emotion and the resolution of private conflicts - between parents and children; between rival lovers and which also determine the state of affairs in the kingdom.

In order to achieve this unity, Shakespeare has chosen to shed aspects that are of less dramatic importance in order to avoid unnecessary distraction from the main thrust of the topicality: For example, after the scene of Cordelia's betrothal - a scene which particularly exposes Lear's obtuseness - we no longer hear or see anything of France and Burgundy. Similarly, Kent and Cordelia we see only in relation to Lear, nothing is known about their private lives as individuals. In the same vein, Cornwall and Albany are presented only in their relationship to the principal characters, and no more.

Although the techniques of "mechanical" relationship and "load shedding" foreground largely the impression of unity, there is the more significant fact that we must dig deeper beyond the plot surface in order to bring out the meaning to which all the characters contribute.

In order to understand the meaning of the play, we have to examine the Lear-Gloucester plots which converge and work together. In this case, similarities are perceivable: each parent is deceived by one child or children, leading to the mistreatment of another child who ironically returns to treat his unkind parents with a genuine filial affection. At the same time, there are differences in terms of detail so that Shakespeare would not be simply repeating the same tune. Besides, the Gloucester-plot begins and ends before the Lear-plot so that, by its shorter duration, the Gloucester-plot is deliberately subsumed under the Lear's: hence the Gloucester-plot constitutes a sub-plot which especially reinforces the Lear-plot.

Lear and Gloucester are both good examples of the tragic hero. We empathize with both, even though we realize that their sufferings are logically connected with, and largely informed by, their hubris. In both, the tragic flaw is situated in the error of understating. For example, both reason wrongly and misjudge their children. Lear, without questioning the rightness of his action or decision, imposes his will upon others. Gloucester falls in with the will of others without questioning their rightness. Thus, structurally, Gloucester is considered a complement to, rather than a duplicate of, Lear. In the two men, Shakespeare shows the basic forms that may inform the tragic error in understanding: one imposes error, the other accepts; and the latter has quite logically, the secondary role.

Another significant device by which the different characters are brought close together is through the symbolic function of kinship in the play. In both the Lear and Gloucester stories, the children are presented not merely as individuals with their different temperaments but also as personifications of the different traits which are in conflict in their fathers. In this light, Edmund

is an amplified version of Gloucester's concern for material well being, while Edgar represents Gloucester's gullibility and kindness. Cordelia embodies in an amplified way, too, the good side of Lear while Goneril and Regan project the rational and ruthless side of their father.

The meaning of the play is what contributes most to the impression of unity and its powerful effect. The tragedy of Lear and Gloucester is, no doubt, a comment on the efficacy of human reason. Ironically, enlightenment and awareness come to both men through suffering in the hands of children they trust. The fact that both men attain regeneration before their death is significant. Besides being a characteristic of a tragic hero, it underlines the pattern that Shakespeare emphasizes in King Lear.

### **Antony and Cleopatra**

This is one of the longest of Shakespeare's plays, with forty-two long scenes. The plot spreads into three continents, quite un-Aristotelian, and for which reason adherents of neo-classical principles have vehemently criticized Shakespeare's utter disregard for unity of place. In *All for Love* (1677), Dryden attempts to rewrite the play, giving it a classical unity of place but without success. Dryden's edition has proved far inferior. Regardless of the numerous lengthy scenes, Shakespeare manages the scenes and the plot of Antony and Cleopatra with an unprecedented skill, especially in his handling of the brisk war scenes showing elaborate spectacles as soldiers move from one continent to another. Often for the same reason the play has been described by critics as "panoramic" because of its general observation of the whole world. Although the Elizabethan theatre was somewhat devoid of spectacle, Shakespeare's dramaturgy is largely characterized by spectacle, and in the case of Antony and Cleopatra, for example, there is a preponderant use of poetry for the purpose of evoking the notion of spectacle.

It is instructive too, to note that despite the lavish love of the two principal characters, and the significance of their political status and responsibilities they also represent the decay and decline of Roman imperialism. Because the society could not accommodate or condone the kind of decay that the two worlds (Roman and Egyptian) represent, their representatives are terminated at the end of the play, metaphorically clearing the political stable for a new, and morally disciplined dispensation. In other words, it is a question of moral, the fact that the society can no longer stand the kind of self-centered adult delinquents that Antony and Cleopatra have apparently turned out to be.

Usually, the play is regarded as being on the borderline of tragedy. It is one of those Shakespearean plays that were informed by Roman history and sourced through materials from Plutarch's *Makers of Rome*. Others in this category include Julius Caesar and Coriolanus. Even though Antony and Cleopatra is highly regarded, it is not usually classified as a tragedy in view of its form and topicality which foreground the dramatic action, the death of the major characters notwithstanding. As we have explained elsewhere in this study, Shakespearean tragedy is largely hinged on the magnitude of a man battling with Fate—a man who is incapacitated by his own tragic flaw to appreciate early enough a clear perception of reality. This is not so with Antony and Cleopatra which is apparently anti-moral and therefore lacking in noble deeds. The two principal characters possess clear visions but even deliberately choose their own ways of life. In a more contemporary sense Antony lacks excellent moral and he is grossly irresponsible. A Roman General who suffers a decline in his career as a soldier. He is like the biblical "rich fool" who loses the whole world in order to gain the object of his heart's desire, Cleopatra.

Like John Milton who, in his Renaissance epic, *Paradise Lost*, concentrates more on the activities of the fallen Satan and his cohorts, Shakespeare gives prominence more to Antony's

failure than his success. Like *Romeo and Juliet*, the play is a romance but instead of juvenile delinquency found in *Romeo and Juliet*, this time around, adults display the delinquency, as we watch both Antony and Cleopatra engage in an illegal love affair and wanton puerility. The lovers are quite aware of possible opposition but choose rather unwittingly to pursue their personal interest in a Promethean fashion and stubbornness, regardless of the serious implications of their irresponsible behaviours. In what could be described as a Byronic or Luciferian spirit, they willingly sacrifice themselves to the goddess of love in the end. To them it is an escape from the reality of marital life.

The beauty of Cleopatra, the Egyptian Queen, ensnares Antony. He is recalled to Rome on the grounds of threatening civil wars and the death of his wife Fluvia. The misunderstanding between Octavius Caesar and Antony is settled and sealed with Octavia's marriage to Antony. The triumvirs make peace with Pompey. Caesar, however, attacks and defeats Pompey, gets rid of Lepidus, and "speaks scantily" of Antony. Antony returns to Cleopatra and makes ready for war. At Actium, Antony's fleet is defeated. His friend Enobarbus deserts him. The climax of these unfolding events is the false report on Cleopatra's death, for which Antony stabs himself, and he is carried to Cleopatra. He finally dies in her arms. To avoid being disgraced as a captive, Cleopatra kills herself.

Shakespeare's thematic preoccupations revolve round the passionate surrender to an illicit love. The victory of the so-called illicit love over practical politics and moral concerns; and the significance of the victory of the ill-fated lovers over circumstances, even in death. This brings us to the question of love, and how Shakespeare perceives it.

There are two broad ways of looking at the issue. It is either we simply hinge our speculation on the fact that, as a guardian of his society's mores, the playwright does not approve of moral indiscipline of any form, and especially the one that threatens the home. Besides, given the unpredictable socio-political climate of the first decade of the 17th Century (1601-1610), when William Shakespeare is believed to have written most of his tragic plays, the playwright seems to be sending a warning to politicians and public office holders of the consequences of divided loyalty. In other words, no responsible leader pursues personal interest at the expense of the people. The warning is still very relevant today.

At another level, it is obvious that Shakespeare believes very much in the concept of love. However, love as a universal phenomenon is complex to comprehend and yet often taken for granted. Shakespeare's contention seems to be that love's mercuric magnitude is such that no human heart could contain, (control) or even harbour. Because of societal barriers the world does not provide enough room for love to survive and flourish. Therefore, the world chokes love's agents and in the process makes the agents victims of circumstances rather than of love. For example, the fact of Antony's failure to wake up to his responsibilities as an Army General and political pundit, and his utter disregard of basic moral codes, are sufficient to stifle the love the two lovers have for each other. Besides, it is the society that determines rightly or wrongly, what is moral and what is not. This is evident in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In his historical account, Plutarch condemned Antony's love. According to Plutarch, Antony, though a great man, was ruined by gross indiscipline and promiscuity. But as a true creative writer, and since art is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence with reality, Shakespeare chooses to pitch his tent independent of Plutarch's controversial pontification. Therefore, Shakespeare's presentation of Antony has again further complicated the already complex controversy. Even now audience and critics are divided on this point. Shakespeare's moral disapproval is strongly modified with sympathy, and even admiration, for the doomed

hero. This has greatly influenced the divided reactions. It may therefore be too hasty and rather facile to refer to the play as an “immoral play”, as some critics would have us believe.

Moral, spiritual and the sociological decline of the principal characters are encapsulated in the theme of decay and couched in appropriate sea, or aquatic imagery. This is because of the setting of the play. Therefore, ample examples of imagery of decay abound in Antony and Cleopatra. Antony is likened to a leaking ship that must be abandoned and left to sink. Caesar, suggesting seaside or storm, similarly refers to him as “the ebbd man”. The Nile River and its creatures (Act II.v), again emphasize the steady decline and disorder that the two lovers represent. The reference to Cleopatra’s desire for an inglorious burial and flies feeding on her unattended body should she fail to win Antony’s love, also points to the idea of decay.

### **Characterization**

#### **Antony**

No doubt, he is unfaithful and does seem quite oblivious of the reality of marital life. The artistry here is in the psychic projection of the conflict within Antony. Antony, many critics believed, is a conventional heartless “playboy” considering his response to the news of his wife’s death. He is a shrewd politician and Machiavellian to have married Octavia for political reasons only. However, some other critics hold a contrary view. They believed that Antony is neither heartless nor shrewd but that his heart is suspended somewhere else. For this reason he chooses to lose all in pursuit of his true love. With Cleopatra his search for true love terminates and everything else is a distraction. He is a generous giver. Enobarbus describes him as a “mine of bounty”, while Cleopatra captures Antony’s giving spirit in the following line: “For his bounty-there was no winter” As an accomplished career soldier, he wins respect, loyalty and love.

#### **Cleopatra**

She is an epitome of the goddess of love and beauty. She is consistent and truthful. Many unpleasant things have been said about her but even at that she is no less wonderful and admirable. The point here is that many consider Cleopatra as a big-time prostitute. Critics are able to deduce this fact from her own statement, “those of us who trade in love”; some critics get the feeling that perhaps she believes that she is a trader of love. Perhaps not, the statement could as well mean: women who are genuinely in love. There is also the suspicion that Cleopatra probably intends to overwhelm Antony with “love”, as most women of questionable virtue often do, so that the bliss of the marriage institution can become a mere illusion. Again critics draw their conclusion from the fact that, in order to be sure of Antony’s love for her, she feigns death but its consequence proves disastrous for the two lovers. Our argument however is that, were Cleopatra a sex-trader, she could have switched to Octavius Caesar when Alexandria falls. Cleopatra, quite predictably, remains loving and faithful to the end. This is a proven case of a truly genuine love.

### **Structure**

The opening scene of Antony and Cleopatra lacks definite action and fails to set off a realistic plot. The universe of the play is a rather vast one spanning two continents, Europe and Africa, and characters shuttle between Rome in Italy and Egypt in Africa. The sequence of the numerous scenes does suggest the vastness of the distance covered. For example, for more than three whole scenes in Act I, Antony is on his journey to Rome from Egypt. The consistency on the part of characters seems to suggest natural and

unpredictable human impulses. The play has very little decisive action but makes up for this technical deficiency with its rich dialogue and poetry. Often, Antony is at the centre of the stage, or the subject of dramatic discourse until his death in Act IV. The complexity of Antony's nature has brought about different dialectical but complementary criticisms more than of most Shakespeare's notable heroes, including Hamlet and Othello.

In conclusion, it is perhaps necessary to recognize Shakespeare's reasons for the choice of the "noble" for the purpose of tragedy. This is traceable to the classical/Aristotelian tragic tradition and spirit that places emphasis on hubris or personal tragic flaws arising largely from "pride". This is probably informed by the common adage: Pride comes before a fall. The 17th and 18th French critics have correctly interpreted Aristotle's intention to mean: tragedy represented the life of princes; comedy depicted the actions of the people. Shakespeare shared the view that divinity always has a hand in the appointment of a king (or a leader of the people); as such he is interested in his affairs and how he conducts himself. The king is answerable to the divinity for his conduct. In other words, only the divinity reserves the right to punish an erring monarch. It is for this reason that Shakespeare frowns at regicide no matter how seemingly justifiable. The aftermath of such a crime has always been catastrophic for culprits in his plays Macbeth and Julius Caesar, among others, are good examples.

Shakespeare's position, we suspect, might primarily have been aimed at artistic fulfilment, and or meant to be a political statement considering the political scenario of power succession and problems arising from the law of primogeniture, etc. The classical Greek society had regarded a king as half-god, a *filius dei* that related to the higher gods who determined the affairs of men. Therefore, the fall of such an exalted persona is predictably dramatic and the impact is likely to endure in the psyche of the audience than if it has been otherwise.

Besides his choice of persona for the purpose of tragedy, Shakespeare believed that the syntax of actions must weave an exceptional calamity, or a great misfortune culminating in the death of the highly exalted man.



## Lecture Four

### Major Dramatic Forms

#### Comedy

This is a term loosely used, and generally applied to a wide range of dramatic writings. As a form of drama, comedy is concerned with man's relation to society, and deals with experience considered rather suitable than questionable. Comedy as a dramatic form varies in terms of mode, topicality, technique and quality. This has given rise to two broad categories of comedy: high comedy and low comedy. These are further categorized into comedy of manners, comedy of humours, intrigue comedy, etc. High comedy, for example, utilizes mature effects of comedy of character. In other words, it draws its effects from a complex view of character and does not depend on farcical intrigue or any such situation as is common with low comedy.

Similarly, comedy of humour is a kind of comedy of character informed by "the humorous" or such traits as avarice, jealousy, etc., of character. However, there is always the tendency for oversimplification of an otherwise serious issue due to the farcical dimension of this variety of comedy. Comedy of humours reached its perfection in France with Moliere. It was, however, the "perfect" type that was not very popular in England for a long time. The English audience seemed to be warmer-hearted than the French, they liked to empathize with the characters on the stage, and laugh with and/or at them. Ben Jonson, a notable proponent of the comedy of humours, wielded a great deal of influence on the English audience. Thereafter, to enjoy a Jonsonian comedy of humours, the audience must detach themselves from empathizing with the actors in the play. For example, sorrow for a man who is jealous is made to be less funny, if at all. The English audience preferred a character like Falstaff who enjoys his own absurdities and laughs along with the audience.

"Comedy of manners" is also linked with characters. This is because the term "manners" suggests ethics and moral actions. And since they are expressed through the comedy of manners it is more or less the same as "comedy of character." It is a comedy that wittily presents fashionable life. The comic element in this case derives not so much from the characters as it does from the way the playwright expresses the peculiar traits. The playwright, in other words, laughs at humanity, and urges his audience to do the same.

### **Classical Greek Comedy**

Comedy had served and, still serves, a definite function like tragedy. It is also remotely connected with the religious rites of fertility and reproduction. Aristotle berated comedy as lower in quality of topicality and technical details. He defined comedy as an artistic imitation of men of an inferior moral bent, and writers of comedy were lampooners who did not rise above their fancy. Faulty not in every way, however, but to the degree that their shortcomings are ludicrous, for the ludicrous is a specie or path not all of the ugly. He argued further that the ludicrous might be described as a kind of shortcoming and deformity that does not strike us as painful and does not cause harm to others. Aristophanes's advent and contributions to classical Greek comedy marked a significant turning point in the development of the form in general. Aristophanes imposed a more direct sociological function on comedy. With him, comedy became an instrument of attack on social and political misdemeanor. It became an invective against Athenian leaders and institutions that constituted themselves into agents of oppression and corruption.

### **Aristophanes (448-c-385 BC)**

Even though there were writers of comedies during his period, Aristophanes remained the greatest of them all. He was fortunate to have had most of his plays preserved. The quality of his plays showed that he was a man of unusual brilliance and wit. He was constantly crusading for a return to the good old days and always opposing any new idea. This is why most critics describe him as being conservative. He exercised the freedom of speech almost to a fault. He is one playwright who could sometimes be at his best and at other times at his worst. Most of his plays, including *The Frogs*, *The Birds*, and *The Clouds*, draw their titles from the choruses respectively. The role of the choruses has provided much mixture of ribaldry, satire and poetry.

### **The Frogs**

This is, perhaps, the best known among his plays. This is probably so because *The Frogs* provides an effective avenue for Aristophanes to make his position known on what he considers as artistic beauty. *The Frogs* allows Aristophanes bold ground to pontificate, even if indirectly.

The play is premised on the historical fact that Sophocles and Euripides had died in the same year (about 405BC) and as a result Athens was suddenly thrown into literary darkness. Athens had no major tragic poet. This historical event readily provided Aristophanes with the raw material for *The Frogs*. The play opens with Dionysus expressing concern about the absence of any major tragic poet and his decision to visit Hades to demand the return of Euripides.

Dionysus and his servant Xanthias set out on the epic journey, the former disguising as the legendary Hercules who was said to have successfully visited Hades before then. Dionysus, like Hercules, wears a lion's skin and carries a club. The two characters later arrive at the door of Aeacus (Judge of the dead). Unknown to Dionysus, Hercules in the previous journey had strangled the Judge's watchdog. Thus, when he introduces himself as Hercules, the reaction of Aeacus is a hostile, aggressive tongue-lashing. Hercules is so overwhelmed by fear that he literally falls to the ground.

Back to his senses, Dionysus strongly concludes that it may no longer be safe to appear as Hercules, so he decides to switch roles with his servant Xanthias. He puts on his servant's dress while the servant puts on Hercules's dress. The door opens again but this time a beautiful maid of Porphyrion appears to welcome Xanthias now "Hercules". But before Xanthias could join the waiting dancing girls, Dionysus again forces him to switch roles just in time to face a

raging landlady. They are arrested by Aeacus' guards. In order to escape torture, Dionysus insists that he is a god. A god or not, the captors decide to torture both Xanthias and Dionysus. It is believed that if he were a god, then Dionysus would not feel any pain. Dionysus feels the pain that leads to a rather hilarious endurance contest.

Shortly after, both Xanthias and Dionysus arrive at the realm of Pluto where they find Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles. A trial is set in motion to decide who should return to Athens among the three great tragic poets. Sophocles voluntarily withdraws, leaving Euripides and Aeschylus in the contest. Finally the greater is determined by literally weighing the verse of each of them. Aeschylus wins the contest.

An imaginary contest between the two playwrights, Aeschylus and Euripides, for the purpose of a critical evaluation of their plays provides the organizing motif. The contest in *The Frogs* does not, however, give full or exhaustive estimate of the two contestants. Similarly, Aristophanes's judgments cannot be drawn into a clearly defined critical mode. However, certain points are noteworthy; these include his views which are always grounded in good sense; the consistency with which he expresses discontentment with excesses and affectations of any kind; the presentation of his ideas and views on the poets in more concrete terms than those of his contemporaries. He achieves this by setting the two poets before the audience in order to reveal themselves through his method of selective quotations, "authorial" comments or the quotations; and intelligible parody. All these are informed by the close attention Aristophanes pays to the texts and which in some sense foreshadows modern textual analysis by critics.

The mode of contest is more or less a straightforward one. Aeschylus and Euripides in a literal pair of scales alternately weight lines from each other's plays. At the end of the competition Aeschylus emerges as the poet with weightier lines. He has to give ground on a few artistic points. In the final rounds, the rightness of logic of the political advice offered by each poet is also determined. In the course of the dispute a number of weaknesses and idiosyncrasies of the two poets are revealed. This approach affords the audience a fair assessment of the two poets' good qualities. For example, the authorial admiration of Euripides even while ridiculing him. This is an admiration that is quite different from familiarity. It enables him to select the more telling lines or phrases to use on Euripides an admiration that informs his "gentleman" language on Euripides. He is good-natured and never abusive in his handling of the poet. It is an admiration that does not call to question Euripides's reputation or personal qualities, and that accords his artistic merit.

Euripides's artistic merits include the fact that he clarifies tragedy through his skilful use of prologues that explain details and give a clear picture of subsequent events. In addition, Euripides has a flair for dialogue (an important element of drama) as opposed to the set-speech method of Aeschylus. Similarly, Euripides's realism and or rationalism tend to bring tragedy closer to real life than was possible for his contemporaries and poets before him. It is observed also that in the art and craft of tragedy Aristotle had rated Euripides slightly higher than Aeschylus.

Aeschylus's victory, we must point out, is more on moral ground - dignity and virtue, than on any other consideration. Euripides, on the other hand, has a realistic, colloquial and a rather undignified style. He is also accused of immorality and sophistry when he reminds Dionysus that the god has sworn to take him back to the world of the living. Dionysus then responds with the fateful words from Euripides's own play, *Hippolytus*; "only my tongue has sworn". It is apparent that Aristophanes has not been quite objective when balancing Aeschylus and Euripides and by no means does he leave Aeschylus unscathed. Part of Aeschylus's

shortcomings is his high-flown phrases, arrogant and straining compounds, against which Euripides protests; “Let us at least use the language of men”. Similar protests have since been replicated by generations of critics like Chinweizu, et al., in their reaction to the writings of poets like Christopher Okigbo and Wole Soyinka. It is in the light of this that Aeschylus’s frequent use of “undramatic” sentences or inaccessible language is attacked.

However, Aeschylus’s shortcomings notwithstanding, the bias in his favour is not easily discernible because he is presented with dignity and poise whereas Euripides is dismissed with quick ease, and almost impudently. Again, it will be recalled that Euripides triggers off the issue of “moral” in the first instance in his response to the question of the grounds a poet should be admired:

‘What gifts do you hold that a poet should have to be worthy of men’s admiration?’

To which Euripides responds:

“If his art is true and his counsel sound, and if he brings help to the nation by making men better in some respect.”

In other words, it requires a superlative craftsmanship, and the skill of a talented teacher capable of making men better through wise counsel. Aristophanes, no doubt, knows the primary duty of the poet even in the present circumstance, which is to entertain. This is also supported by Aristotle and now, by Euripides whose plays are informed by patriotic zeal. Even then, Aristophanes knows that beyond the socio-political crisis Athens had need of dignity and a sense of honour, for which Aeschylus had stood in his plays, and again maintained in the critical fireworks as represented in *The Frogs*.

Aeschylus, for instance, strongly believes that even when ugly things are there in nature, a poet has no business depicting them, contrary to what we have in *Phaedra*:

Euripides: And Phaedra. . .you think her story is false, imagined by me, a mere fiction?

Aeschylus: Unhappily no. She is real. But a poet should seek to avoid the depiction of evil, should hide it, not drag into view its ugly and odious features. For children have tutors guide them aright, young manhood has poets for teachers.

In other words, we must write of the fair and the good. Even the use of the language of the common man is frowned at. This brings us to the great judgment? The decision is obviously predictable. At first, Dionysus’s assignment is almost completed, as he must choose between the lyre and the tambourine girl:

One I think clever, the other delights me ... whichever is likely to advise the city well, him I intend to take back –

But later he declares:

“... him I choose in whom my soul delights.”

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### **Italian Renaissance Comedy**

From the 14th century new concepts of drama spread through Europe until 1650 AD, after which they dominated the European theatre till as late as the 19th century. After 1450AD, the revival of interest in classical learning accelerated. The Roman became the focus of “universal” study. Seneca’s Tragedies were regarded as illustrations of moral lessons and of rhetoric. The comedies of Plautus and Terence, which were valued as models of oral styles and productions based on these influences, were presented at the courts and Academies. They were performed by court poets, court architects and painters and acted by courtiers to the music of court musicians. They were simply called *Commedia erudita* but the productions were largely amateurish.

However, there were other plays performed by professional troupes whose works could be traced to Atellan Farces of Rome, traceable to, and preserved since, the Middle Ages. These were the comedies of the professional players that were later referred to as the *commedia dell’arte*. It marked the beginning of opera, as well as a revival of pastoral drama.

The opera, for example, came into being unintended and by sheer coincidence through misrepresentation and misinterpretation of Greek tragedies by Peri and Rinuccini, two enthusiastic scholars who had erroneously thought that Greek tragedies had been sung. Their premiere production of *Dafne* had marked the world first ever opera. It was a dramatic form not bound by any classic restrictions. This exercised liberty, as well as its characteristic scenic embellishment further led to its popularity and rapid growth.

Even though the pastoral drama in the 16th century Italy was of low quality, it is worth our attention particularly because of the contributions of Torquato Tasso (1544 - 1595), whose plays though idyllic and rather sentimental, possess an air of sincerity and nostalgic beauty which had created wide appeal and wielded much influence. The best example of comedies of the time was Niccolo Machiavelli’s *La Mandragola* (The Mandrake) in 1550. The general characteristics of the form of comedy prevalent at the time had included the following:

#### **Improvisation**

Actors worked from a plot outline made up of both dialogue and action. Each actor played the same character throughout his career, so there was much repetition of lines, etc. **LAZZI** were bits of standardized comic business indicated in the plot line. Furthermore, actors who played the straight characters, for example, the young lovers, usually took notebooks in which they recorded and memorized sentiments lifted from poetry and some other popular literary works.

#### **Spontaneity**

Acting was fresh and rather spontaneous requiring great concentration since no one could predict what the other actors would do or say next. Characters were largely stock-types.

#### **Characterization**

It is instructive to note that the straight roles were those of young lovers called *Innamorato* (male), *Innamorata* (female) or *amoroso* (m) and *amorasa* (f). They were witty, beautiful, fashionable and without masks. Each company (professional) had one or two pairs. The stock-plot follows the pattern whereby an elderly father usually opposes the young man in love. At the same time, the young lady is sophisticated and a courtly damsel.

Furthermore, character-roles are divided into masters and servants. There are three types of masters: the captain, a braggart and a coward. He boasts of his prowess in love and battle only to be discredited on the long run. The second master is the merchant (elderly), and usually the

father of one of the lovers, although he is also courting a young woman. He has a large hooked nose and he is bearded. The third master, the Doctor, is usually an established doctor of law in the society. Usually pompous, through the use of bombast and Latin he tries to show off his false learning. He is always wearing an academic gown. He is often tricked and cheated. He is a tyrant of a father, a jealous husband.

The servants are called Zanni, usually two of them, one clever, the other stupid. There is also a maid Fantesia Columbi who attends to the Innamorata. Maids are young, vulgar and witty. Sometimes they are wives to servants or mistresses of old men. The most popular of the Zanni was Arlecchin, a very cunning dancer and an acrobat, always at the centre of any intrigue in the plot. His clothes showed irregular lousy patches, suggestive of abject poverty. He carried a wooded sword called slapstick. Another servant called Bnghella or the Scapion, was a cruel, witty and cynical person. Often they are interchangeable that is, the captain or Brighella.

Finally, there was Punchinelo. He could be a servant or the host of an Inn, or a merchant. He was alternately stupid and shrewd, wicked and loving, dull and witty. He was also the origin of the English puppet of the Punch and Judy shows. He had an enormous long nose, a hunchback, a straight pointed chin and wore a long pointed hat.

### **English Renaissance**

Darwin's *Origin of Species*, as well as Nicolo Machiavelli's *True Politic Method of Enslavement and Expropriation* and *The Prince* had had an overwhelming influence on the national psyche, modes and moods of the European nations, and the Renaissance English society in particular, to the degree that imperialism, individualism and obsession with crude power and/or material acquisition, offered a new meaning to life itself. Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, among others, were preoccupied in their works with topicalities that addressed these worrisome psychosocial development.

## **Elizabethan Comedy**

### **William Shakespeare**

Again, for the sake of brevity, our references shall be limited to the works of two great comic playwrights of the period, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Ben Jonson (1572-1637). What immediately strikes one about these two great playwrights is the irony that has become a role player in their respective lives. Many, including this writer, consider Shakespeare as the greatest writer who ever lived, even though he had no college degree unlike many of his contemporaries. Often he was described as a "country boy" with no college education but ironically he had outdistanced his contemporaries in literary value that has endured to date. His contribution to Elizabethan comedy has remained almost unequalled.

Shakespeare's comedies are a lot different from those of his contemporaries. He, no doubt, drew his inspiration from within and outside his immediate society. These sources and materials were made to undergo a severe transformation through the mill of his unusual creative sensibility such that they are completely different and unique whether as tragedy, or comedy, or as poetry.

Shakespearian comedies are often categorized as humorous comedy, often having a pastoral and romantic setting. Similarly the plots are almost unrealistic and one might wonder if some of them are realizable on a modern stage.

However, this does not mean that Shakespeare was out of touch with reality; therefore, we still find in his comedic cosmos “inferior” characters like servants, as well as “superior or noble” characters, that is, highly placed men: Dukes, Princes, heroes and heroines.

The subject of love that engaged his social vision in some of his tragedies is, again, the main and dominating emotion in most Shakespearian comedies. The hero is a lover, and the syntax of actions is determined by the course of love which does not run without complications, when it is genuine. The comedies illustrate this. The plot is manipulated in such a way that both fancy and intrigues are balanced in equal proportions. Therefore, through some complexities, the ending proves pleasurable and satisfactory.

Another exciting feature that makes Shakespearian comedy unique is his choice of appropriate organizing motifs: shipwreck, exile, or some such catastrophe. Closely linked with these primary motifs is the issue of disguise and/or mistaken identity: the heroine assumes a boy’s garment, for example, Rosalind, Portia, Viola - performed by Elizabethan boy-actors. The significance of the mistaken identity to the development of the plot is not so much the suspense as the confusion engendered by it.

There are also plenty music of exquisite lyrics written by Shakespeare scattered all over the plays. Furthermore there are comic characters (including clowns) of different types. They include, Lancelot Gobo and his father, Festi-Jacques, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, and Sir Peter Belch-Malvolio. On a more general note, there is abundant goodwill and cheer. There is, in other words, a sense of universal well being, and besides Malvolio, who is an exception, there is a general absence of darker forces. It is almost unbelievable that Shakespeare’s dramatic shift in his writing career from tragedy to comedy did not in any way affect his sense of the comedic. Except perhaps it can be argued that his tragic-comedies are indeed tragedy in transition, perhaps not. This, among other reasons, has informed our choice of *The Tempest*, a tragi-comedy for analytical purposes in the present study.

### **The Tempest**

Shakespeare’s sources for the subject of *The Tempest* are the narratives of the wreck of Sir George Somers, Sir Thomas Gates, William Strachey, Sylvester Jourdan, Richard Rich and a few others on the Bermudas in July 1609. The plot is built around Prospero, Duke of Milan who, due to an unusual negligence on his part being more interested in books and magic than in the effective running of his dukedom, is expelled by his brother Antonio. He is put to sea on a rotten ship with his little daughter, Miranda. They reach an island inhabited by a semi-human creature, Caliban, son of Sycora, the witch who has imprisoned Ariel, a spirit. But Prospero through his superior magic makes the two his servants.

Twelve years later, the point where the play actually begins, Prospero through his magic causes a shipwreck of King Alonso of Naples and his followers, including his brother Sebastian; his son Ferdinand; the honest Counsellor, Gonzalo; and Prospero’s own brother, Antonio. Ferdinand, in the course of the shipwreck, is separated from the others; this gives him the erroneous impression that he is the only survivor. He meets Miranda and at once falls in love through the design of Prospero’s magical power, even though Prospero feigns ignorance and accuses Ferdinand of being a spy and forces him into slave labour.

Meanwhile, Sebastian and Antonio attempt to murder Alonso and Gonzalo, and Caliban who has met Stephano and Trinculo, a drunken butler and a jester, persuades them to murder Prospero. Ferdinand is released from his spell by Prospero, gives Miranda to him, and makes Ariel present a masque before the lovers. Prospero interrupts the entertainment in order to drive



off Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, as well as bring the spell-bound king Alonso and his courtiers into his cell. Prospero forgives his brother Antonio, but makes him promise to restore his dukedom, and himself restores Ferdinand to king Alonso. The ship crew is found to be safe. Prospero renounces his magic, frees Ariel, and all prepare to set sail for Italy, leaving Caliban once more as the sole occupant of the island. This is one of the plays where Shakespeare adheres to the classical unities of time, place and action. The acting time takes less than one full day, and at one single location. In addition there is singularity of action.

In terms of form and structure, *The Tempest* is a romance. It belongs to the category of Shakespeare's last plays. A feature of plays in this category is that they are largely improbable and they are tragi-comedies.

The play, as earlier pointed out, is informed by the historical experience of the age of exploration. It was a period when many stories went round the strangeness of discovered "strange" places like the Bermudas triangle. It is an advance allegory bordering on a powerful satire. It is also a masque crafted in an Elizabethan style and form. The play pursues a similar theme as *Measure for Measure*, another Shakespeare's play about power and or authority, among other things. There is a subtle warning that power is transient, therefore, the holder of power if he is negligent, or abuses it is bound to end up in catastrophe. This warning is given eloquence in Prospero, a duke - a man of power and authority but who prefers to pursue personal interests at the expense of State welfare. He delegates his power to his deputies. However, delegating power should not be misconstrued to mean relegation of one's responsibility, which is the case here leading to usurpation of power.

The circumstance of power in the play involves a call for internal vigilance and close monitoring of accredited agents of delegated powers. Betrayal of trust is a theme central to the play. Not only does Antonio betray the trust of Prospero, Prospero as ives duke betrays his people by failing to live up to expectation in the discharging his duties faithfully.

Shakespeare obviously is in sympathy with the Authority or the status quo. This reflects in Prospero drifting off and losing his dukedom, and later restored. Prospero's maroon experience serves as a purgatorial process after which he becomes a wiser man who is likely to behave more responsively and responsibly as a restored Duke.

*The Tempest* is an allegory of the western man who subdues his environment in particular and nature in general, through sophisticated technology. Prospero, by the time he quits the throne forcefully, is subjected to disgrace. He is later seen to have improved. He subdues his environment. He is a scholar, magician and a shrewd ruler of the island, etc. Prospero like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is admirable and self-reliant. But then Prospero is not a total admirable man considering his relationship with Caliban. Prospero regards Caliban as an evil that must be contained or eliminated. This is to suggest the evil of modern civilization in relation to the colonization of Africa and the Americas. The question, then, is who is the true owner of the island, Prospero or Caliban? Prospero releases Caliban and uses him to carry out his wishes. He completely subdues Caliban and treats him as he would a slave. This is racism. The racist whites seem to draw their conclusion in their justification of Prospero's enslavement of Caliban on the fact that Caliban is half-beast, half- human. But is this not the same feeling of the racist whites in the former apartheid South Africa about the black? Or European slavers, and later, colonial masters of the African continent?

*The Tempest*, to other critics is a powerful satire on the invasion of colonial powers on people of other races. The allegorical dimension of the play is apparent in the moral end, or futility of colonization. For example, Prospero - the colonizer - finally leaves the island, while

Caliban, the original owner, stays on. In other words, however long colonialism (or apartheid) lasts, it is bound to fail and the original inhabitants shall continue to inherit their nature-giver land.

Furthermore, like every colonized state all over the world, the island gains nothing in the end. Prospero, like all colonial powers, only does those things that are directly useful to him. Caliban is reduced to a slave; he is not given the right to education. He is made to lose confidence in himself and in his race. Ariel is left to wander away, etc. Similarly, the aftermath of colonialism is the complete disorientation of a sense of judgment and the gross dislocation of the cultural values of the colonized.

The sea-storm is a predominant symbol that evolves its own peculiar imagery in the play. It suggests that man by virtue of his existence, is in the storm of life- the storm that sends Prospero away to an island, and the storm that brings both Ferdinand and Miranda together. The duo symbolizes love on the one hand, and on the other hand, the former stands for religion and the latter, intellectualism. In other words, love, godliness and knowledge can bring an enduring solution to the storm (problems) in man's life.

Masque elements abound in the play - music (a lot of it), dancing, courtiers, and spirits, all in multi-coloured costumes. In addition the thrust of the dramatic action and sustained use of contrastive situations, and parallelism have helped to determine the dramatic interest. For example, such contrast includes:

- i. Prospero the duke, versus Prospero the intellectual, the magician.
- ii. Prospero the helpless and dethroned duke, versus Prospero the selfish and ruthless ruler of the island.
- iii. Antonio the usurper versus Antonio the captive.
- iv. Antonio versus Prospero: Prospero versus Caliban.

### **Ben Jonson**

Ben Jonson is outstanding among those comic playwrights who succeeded William Shakespeare. Unlike Shakespeare, he was a "university wit". He was a daring Elizabethan, a social critic who fought both with the pen as well as with the sword (as an English volunteer). His tragedies, which he highly regarded, did not score much success with the public, particularly, the Elizabethan audience. This was partly because of the unnaturalness of the plays which reveal Jonson's conscious attempt to write in the correct classic style. The scholastic technicalities had made his tragedy plays rather inaccessible to the Elizabethan audience. The tragedy generally considered to be the best he ever wrote is *Sejanus*.

Jonson, however, scored tremendous success in comedy. He stands out as Shakespeare's only contemporary rival. As a matter of fact, he is apparently superior to Shakespeare as a comedic satirist. As an academic, there is always an informing theory for any of his efforts at playwrighting. This is why he is a significant bus stop in the history of dramatic criticism. One of such theories associated with him is that of the "comedy of humours", a concept foregrounded in medieval physiology and which also informed largely his comedies. They include *Everyman in His Humour*, and *Everyman out of His Humour*. However, in terms of vigour, topicality and plot technicalities, they cannot compare with what is now known as his four masterpieces: *Volpone*; *The Alchemist*; *Epicoene*; and *Batholomew Fair*. Of the four, *Epicoene* is perhaps the

funniest while *Volpone* (or *The Fox*) is the best of them all. It is in the light of this assessment that we shall briefly comment on *Volpone*.

Even though *The Alchemist* decisively deals with fundamental issues that we can easily identify with, *Volpone* was not written to simply amuse or entertain. But rather, it is a direct attack on the viciousness of the human race. It is concerned more with a strange kind of greed and individualism. It is no wonder therefore that it is less accommodating and much bitterer. It is instructive to note also that since Shakespeare and Jonson were contemporaries, it is an irony that the informing social circumstances that had moved the former into writing his great tragedies had predictably moved the latter into writing *Volpone*, among others.

In a rather subjective manner Jonson attempts to direct the thinking of his audience, though boastfully. This he does in the Prologue, which contains a great deal of self-advertisement and self-confidence — to a great extent justifiable. Jonson boasts of writing the play in less than five weeks but that it will take five generations for anyone to mend it. He lays claim to originality and to universal qualities such as didacticism, the classical unities of time, place and action; and the organic plot-structure.

On a more general note, it is indeed less accommodating than *The Alchemist*. For example, in *The Alchemist*, the main tricksters are mere ordinary people. The society is, no doubt infested with greed and the common people are making a great deal out of it. We are faced with, according to Bamidele (2000):

a real world of experience in which avarice leads man to be craving for quick riches. All the characters in the play run after money and material wealth in a fashion that shows the mockery of human futility (82).

In *Volpone*, however, the main character is of the middle class. Our first encounter with *Volpone* quite naturally shocks us, he is literally worshipping his wealth. The implication of this is that we feel that the society is unwittingly provoking the wrath of God. The position of God is seriously threatened. He is now being displaced by the advent of wealth, the new god.

Generally, *Volpone* does not provoke an atmosphere of merry tricks but we certainly are confronted with the reality of God's wrath informed by the monster-god (money). It is a wide-ranging satire (or criticism) of the society embracing every class of people. *Volpone* fools the people and rather than they have his wealth, he out-tricks (outwits) them. No doubt, the whole thing turns sour for him in the end. The play, like *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, is more of a tragi-comedy. Even though the evil in the society as represented by the main characters is finally destroyed, a lot of things have been made to suffer decay.

## LECTURE FIVE

### 19th Century Russian Theatre

#### **Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector***

THE *Government Inspector* which was written in 1835 was said to have been inspired by a suggestion from the great poet and dramatist Alexander Pushkin at the time he (Gogol) was writing his novel he is best known for, *Mertvye Dushi I-II* (1842, *Dead Souls*). Gogol's incredible ability at comedic representation (lampooning) of human and social foibles earned him the appellation, "the Russian Dickens", a 'playful' exposé of the defects of human character. As a great Russian novelist, dramatist, satirist, and influenced by a surrealist spirit, he founded the so-called critical realism in Russian literature. Gogol carefully but humorously caricatures Russian society of the 19th century in *The Government Inspector*.

The Mayor of a remote provincial Russian town holds an emergency meeting with his cabinet members in his house, to intimate them with the 'unpleasant' news of the Visit of an Inspector-General from Petersburg with secret orders to assess the province. He is visiting incognito. The Mayor suggests some plans to his cabinet to cover the apparent official ineptitude and gross corruption that characterize his government.

Hlestakov, a petty official from the capital who is on his way to visit his uncle in Saratov, arrives in the town and checks into the hotel. He has no money, having lost everything but the shirt off his back to drinks and gambling (cards). At the point his credit gets used up and the hotel proprietor reports him to the Provincial officials with the purpose of getting him thrown into jail for his inability to pay his bills, the unusual happens.

The people of the town, beginning with the corrupt Mayor, his wife, Anna Andretevna, and his beautiful young daughter, Marya Antonovna, take Hlestakov for the much-talked-about and dreaded bureaucrat, the government inspector being expected, on official business to assess and report the goings-on in the Province; members of the Mayor's cabinet, court, swindle and cajole in the effort to outwit one another. They bribe and seduce the 'government inspector' with money and... the Mayor's beautiful daughter married off to him in order that he may write a favourable report on their performances. Hlestakov happily adapts to his new role and exploits the situation. Whatever pleasure comes the young impostor's way, he welcomes and makes the best of. Shortly after his departure, or more or less, escape from the provincial town his true identity is revealed. The Mayor, his family and members of his cabinet realize they have been fooled! At this point a tall, mustached gendarme dressed like a soldier enters to announce the arrival of His Excellency, the (real) Inspector-General.

#### **Setting**

The immediate setting is a remote provincial Russian town. The *Government Inspector* is historically set in the unusual bureaucracy of the nineteenth-century Russian government. While commenting on the social setting and reality which informed the play, and that he artistically responds to, the playwright declares; "In *The Government Inspector*, I tried to gather in one heap all that was bad in Russia through the regular practices of "bribery and extortion." In the Russian

society represented in *The Government Inspector*, the public officials tyrannized the local population of Russian towns through extreme bureaucratic red tapes. It is the case of an otherwise great nation choked by the tyranny of government officials and officialdom.

The organizing motif of the play is, a “mistaken identity”: it involves a “vagabond”, Hlestakov, who is mistaken by corrupt village officials for a high government official in charge of assessing the performance of others. At the centre of the conflict are, on the one hand, the Mayor, a cunning official, his wife and daughter, and on the other hand, Hlestakov, a nonentity who, in error, is taken to be the Inspector, incognito. The panicky Provincial officials collectively and individually try to curry the “Inspector’s” flavour through bribery, in the bid to cover their despicable tracks. The thrust of the comedy is largely sustained by the officials’ attempt to outwit one another, and as each tries to wriggle out of the “Inspector’s” plying eyes, by implicating the other.

### **A Historical Study**

Quite a lot of references on the history of the 19th century Russian society abound in *The Government Inspector*, such that they pose a challenge in accessing the overall message of the play. The references demand a thorough understanding in relation to the topicality of *The Government Inspector* in order to appreciate the full thematic implications of Gogol’s play.

Nikolai Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* is informed by the unusual bureaucracy of the nineteenth-century Russian government. The play is basically a satirical comment on the moral atrophy of the elite ruling class, as well as the intellectuals of the nineteenth century Russian society. The playwright satirizes and lampoons the cupidity, the stupidity as well as the corruption that have become endemic and that have reached a ridiculous peak among the bureaucratic officials, the rich and the peasants, of the Russian society.

The relevance of the thematic preoccupations of the play to the contemporary reality is that they are also applicable to most developing nations of the world, Africa in particular.

### **Events and their Significance**

#### **Act 1**

The Mayor and other local government officials discuss the visiting Government Inspector and explore the possibility of initiating a grand design to cover up the extent of their corruption. The problem with the visit is that since the Petersburg official is visiting incognito there is the likelihood to be caught unawares. To prevent this is the reason for the emergency meeting. Judge asserts that he is not concerned about the government inspector, because the legal ‘system is (in) capable of coping with the situation.

The playwright adopts a methodical approach to the characterization process. In this scene we encounter each officer, hear what the Mayor as the Provincial head, says about each officer, listen to what they say about one another, and through what they do. We begin to form our opinion on each officer and on the entire cabinet. Each ministry is a picture of gloom, moral decadence, and self-centredness, culminating in the mockery of the essence of governance, which includes selfless service and purposeful leadership.

Through the Mayor’s remarks and chastisement of his officers it is apparent that he is very familiar with every officer’s lethargy and degree of moral decay. He seems to know what Petersburg expects of himself and his entire cabinet but chooses to close his eyes to the dismal performance of his entire cabinet in office. This is because he is equally culpable. The lives and the welfare of the citizenry are not of priority to the Provincial government. It is evident also that

such an official visitation and assessment exercise have hardly ever been experienced in the Province before now. The remoteness of the location of the Province, and the failure on the part of Petersburg's periodic visitation have contributed to the perpetuation and spread of official corruption, as well as encouraged total neglect of the citizenry.

## II.i

Yosif, Hlestakov's servant gives a full account of how life has been with him and his master, Mr Ivan Alexandrovitch Hlestakov who is a Junior Official from Petersburg since they both left the city two weeks ago. Hlestakov has engaged in a reckless living style: wine, women, gambling and, etc. All the money sent to him by his father has been squandered. Often he has had to pawn his clothing, etc. in gambling, now he is so broke that he could no longer pay his piled up hotel bills. The proprietor's decision not to serve Hlestakov and his servant any food is already having serious effect on Yosif and his master. Besides, the Proprietor is reporting the debtor to the Police and the Mayor of the town. Our first encounter with Hlestakov in this scene also confirms all that Yosif has said about his master.

The Mayor encounters Hlestakov, mistaken him for the much expected Petersburg official. Hlestakov thinks the proprietor comes to arrest him to be taken to prison. His entire thinking and reaction are centered on his determination not to be thrown into prison on account of the debt he owes the hotel. The Mayor on his part tries desperately to impress and please the 'Petersburg Official' who he and a few members of his cabinet that come with him believe Providence has helped them to discover regardless of his coming incognito. The Mayor and those that come with him succeeds in 'bribing' the 'Petersburg Official', the 'Official' gives the impression that it is a loan that he intends to refund as soon as he returns to Petersburg.

In an attempt to impress the 'Petersburg Official' further, the Mayor offers to relocate him to a more homely setting by hosting him in his own house. Hlestakov who is enjoying every development agrees to be hosted by the Mayor. The Mayor plans to send Peter Dobchinsky, the town landowner, ahead with two notes, one to Zemlyanika at the hospital, and the other note, to inform his wife "to prepare the reception for our honoured guest" (p.46) She should in addition be ready to receive the guest not with a dinner, but a special brand of wine, vodka and some home-grown Madeira. The Mayor writes the notes, hands them to Dobchinsky, leaves the hotel with his guest and arranges the guest's luggage to be brought to his house.

This scene is central to the process of characterization in the play. Through Yosif's rather long opening speech/complaints, the audience is able to know a lot about Hlestakov, his master, who is obviously a delinquent: an obsessed gambler, an alcoholic, a pub crawler, a shameless debtor, a trickster cum- swindler, a liar, an opportunist, etc.

Through Hlestakov's similarly long complaint about the reality of his society, as well as his subsequent actions, the audience is able to confirm all that Yosif says about him and about the society. If Hlestakov represents the average government official in the State capital of Petersburg, then there is hardly any difference in what obtains in the city and in the suburbs. Official corruption, reckless living, and general indiscipline. It is the socioeconomic decay, which characterized the 19th Russian society that Gogol, the playwright, attempts to satirize in this play. It is revealed through Hlestakov and Yosif; that the 19th Russian society as represented in the play is largely a classed and/or capitalist one with a wide gap between the haves and the havenots (the rich and the poor); that the society is obsessed with the acquisition of wealth by all means; that the society worships money and position; that the rich can get away

with anything, including murder; a society of cheats and exploiters; a society that has lost its conscience and in which the poor can hardly survive, etc.

It is also evident that, given Yosif's remark on his master's reckless life and lack of financial prudence, among other things, he is more intelligent than his master, Hlestakov. (p.36) Of significance is the apparent reversal of fortune which occurs to Hlestakov: rather be arrested and thrown into jail, he suddenly finds himself being given a V.I.P reception and treatment by the same people who could have issued his warrant of arrest and committed to prison; rather than be harassed by his creditors and turned into a homeless beggar, he is overwhelmed with money and unmerited favour, he becomes the special guest of the Mayor, the choicest of the Mayor's rooms, etc.

#### Act II. i

Dobshinsky arrives at the Mayor's house, reports on the visitor. His information is largely muddled up but sufficient enough to excite Anna and Mazya, mother and daughter, respectively. Yosif arrives at the Mayor's house carrying a trunk that belongs to his master. Through an informal interview with Yosif, more incredible information about his master emerges, making mother and daughter itching to see the 'general'. The guest enters with the host and others.

Apparently, the team has had lunch at the community's hospital. Now in the house of the Mayor, the special guest is being served with 'special' wine, while his mouth runs unchecked. Here, one observes what seems like a hide-and-seek game of deceit, subterfuge, hypocrisy and trickstery, between the Mayor, host and his special guest, the 'Petersburg Official', Hlestakov: For example, the Mayor rates his cabinet as the best among its contemporaries for selfless service to the people, vigilance, good government, effective healthcare delivery system, and that he does not engage in a game of cards (gambling), etc. Curious enough, the Charity Commissioner (CC), one of the members of the Mayor's cabinet is not in the least impressed by his boss's shameless lies. Hlestakov on his part, also makes some incredible claims: of having great men and Diplomats as associates, that he is a great friend of pretty actresses, that he is author of a number of great literary works, and that he earns as much as 40,000 roubles a year as editor, etc.

On one occasion, Marya almost punctures Hlestakov's false claim of authorship/editorship, but for the quick and courteous intervention of Anna, her mother, for fear of upsetting their guest Hlestakov towards the end of the scene is so drunk that he is gone tipsy and incoherent. He is held to prevent him from falling. The scene provides information first, on the home front: at the domestic level, Anna and Marya, mother and daughter, respectively are engaged in inanities or vainglory. Their major concern is looking good in some choice dresses. Second, the scene reveals the true nature of the principal characters, the Mayor - host, and Hlestakov, his guest, as birds of the same feather. Both men are tricksters of the same stock: this is confirmed as both engage each other in a pseudo hide-and-seek game of tall lies and wild claims, deceits and subterfuge. Examples: The Mayor in addition to bribing Hlestakov plans to knock him off with vodka and a vaxy strong local wine, Madeira. -This, according to the Mayor, would make it possible for him to work on his guest.

It is also implied that the Mayor in his desperate bid to save his job and have a favourable report on his administration, may have had it in mind to use his beautiful daughter as bait to seduce the 'Petersburg Official'. This, many critics believe, could have informed his playing host to the 'important guest'. The information about the hospital and the general. healthcare delivery

system provided by the Mayor is false. The impression being created about a people's government, selfless service, transparency, etc. is all a ruse.

Hlestakov is not any better. His wild claims about authorship of great literary works; his huge income as 'editor'; his powerful connection with the military, as well as people in power, etc., are further testimony. It is observed that the apparent nervousness and/or hesitation in Hlestakov soon disappears as he consciously and cleverly weaves himself into the syntax of his new role of a 'conquistador', a role he occasionally over-plays, thereby overreaching himself. One can safely speculate that a folktale game similar to the common 'tug-of-war' between a big animal, the Elephant, who counts on his size and the small animal, the trickster Tortoise, who trusts in his wit, has commenced. The Mayor, the big animal, relies on his old tricks and seems to be succeeding, at least up to this point. The bribe he and some members of his cabinet offer the 'visitor'; his unusual 'baits' - the daughter and, perhaps, the wife, who seem to be very excited playing hostesses to the 'august visitor'; all culminating in Hlestakov's apparent drunkenness, are clear indication that the Mayor is in the lead, if it must be a 'race'. The ultimate winner who is yet to emerge may finally be revealed as the plot unfolds further.

### Act III. i

Hlestakov according to the Mayor, "has given in at last, ... told us a good deal more than necessary." (p.60) Now he is sleeping having had too much alcohol. The Mayor takes necessary precaution to ensure that nothing disturbs or wakes him up. A little but unwarranted argument develops between Anna and Marya, mother and daughter, respectively, over which of them the young official from Petersburg seems to have preference for. Anna asserts her motherhood on her daughter, Matya. The Mayor ponders on a number of claims by his guest and considers them incredible. He seems to be satisfied with the development so far. Already, the Mayor's efforts are yielding results to the degree that he has been able to douse the general fear of uncertainty, and of any possible threat to his office as Provincial head. He assumes, it seems, to be getting along well with the 'Petersburg official.

Mother and daughter inquire for information about Hlestakov's preference on matters relating to ladies or women, and love life from Yosif, and since such enquiries are apparently irrelevant to the Mayor's immediate plan or need, he dismisses them both for being preoccupied with inanities, and for causing unnecessary distraction. The Mayor takes over the enquiries from the two ladies in a manner that suggests a determination to completely achieve his objective. Yosif shows an impressive degree of intelligence in the way he answers the Mayor's queries; he seizes every opportunity to feather his own nest. His cleverness pays off in the end; he receives a double gratification from the Mayor so that he could give his master, Hlestakov, a favourable report on account of the Mayor's hospitality and benefactions, which he, like his master, has benefited immensely from.

'Who bells the cat?' seems to be the question agitating the minds of the Mayor and some members of his cabinet, having agreed to bribe the young Official from Petersburg they all mistake for Ivan Alexandrovitch. No one seems to be courageous enough, or willing to go inside the room where the officer is and offer bribe to the dreaded officer for fear of such a criminal act being counted against whoever does. In the process, they constitute a rowdy bunch, like some school children.

Hlestakov wakes up, discusses Anna and her daughter, Maiya with Yosif. It is assumed that going by the impression already created by Hlestakov in the two ladies, he can have their



hearts just for the asking, but characteristic of Hlestakov, he finds it rather difficult to make up his mind on which of the two ladies he should settle for, as event will show shortly in the scene.

Judge enters to see Hlestakov, after some initial fumbling he manages to drop some money which Hlestakov picks up immediately, drawing the attention of the Judge, supposedly that it dropped in error. Judge gladly foregoes the money, although Hlestakov insists he would rather have it as a loan since he lost all he had on card gaming in the course of his journey from Petersburg. Judge leaves, and Luka Lukitch, the School Superintendent (SS) enters rather timidly. A more confident Hlestakov offers him a cigar, questions him on his preference for women, etc. Finally, Hlestakov requests for a loan of 400 roubles which he promises to refund as soon as he gets home. The SS gratuitously hands over the money to Hlestakov and exit.

Zemlyanika, the Charity Commissioner enters Hlestakov's room next. Hlestakov acknowledges the good lunch the former gave him. The CC in a holier-than-thou fashion runs down all his colleagues. Besides him who, in his self-estimation, is 'most zealous', all his other colleagues are rogues, incompetent, adulterers, cheats, exploiters, extortionists, gluttons, and largely morally bankrupt, etc. Finally, before the CC takes his exit Hlestakov requests for a loan of 400 roubles which he gladly obliges him.

Bob and Dob come in together next. Request for a loan by Hlestakov from both does not yield any positive result. Rather, while treating it dismissively, they come up with their own unusual requests: Dob, for example, wants his eldest son who was born outside wedlock to be given a legal status of a legitimate child; Bob, on his part, wants his name mentioned to the nobles back in Petersburg.

Apparently, Hlestakov seems to realize just then that he is being mistaken for some official, it sounds incredible and newsworthy. He decides to contact a journalist friend through a letter and inform him about his experience, although he is no longer sure of his contact address.

Yosif is now apprehensive of the strange developments. The sudden change of fortune or social status notwithstanding, he considers it too risky to delay any further in the town should the real Ivan Alexandrovitch arrive the town just then. He urges his master that they both should leave town immediately. Hlestakov characteristically procrastinates, insists that they wait till the next day. He writes his letter, and hands it to Yosif.

Some of the town's people, in particular shopkeepers (merchants), bring their petitions to the 'Petersburg Official', Hlestakov. The petitions concern atrocities committed by the Mayor against the citizenry. While some want him removed, and some want him charged to court, others want him fined for his many heinous crimes. On each occasion, regardless of the gravity of the crimes allegedly committed against the complainants Hlestakov still asks for his usual loan (request) of 400 roubles or less, which the petitioners generously give in the hope that he will do something drastic about their petitions.

Hlestakov attempts to exploit the innocence of Marya by making love advances to her. Anna, Marya's mother, comes in just in time to find Hlestakov on his knees presumably pleading for Marya's love. Anna sends Matya out of the room. Hlestakov dramatically switches to Anna, attempts to seduce her. Hlestakov to Anna: 'No! It is you I love!' (p.76). He is still on his knees when Marya bursts into the room to the embarrassment of the mother. Anna scolds Marya for misbehaving like a three year-old. Again, Hlestakov, in a rather very dramatic manner, holds Marya's hand and begs for her mother's blessing as in a formal marriage.

An agitated Mayor enters, apparently disturbed by the fact that the town's people have come to lodge series of complaints on him to 'Alexandrovitch'. He makes a desperate effort to

dissuade his guest from believing all the allegations made against him by the town's people. It is difficult to follow his logic, his defense confirms further that the allegations are true.

At first, the Mayor finds it difficult to believe his wife, Anna when she informs him about the request of their guest to have the hand of their daughter in marriage. As soon as the picture becomes quite clear he speedily grants his approval. 'What a change in things !'(p.78)

Yosif enters to inform his master that the horses meant for his departure are ready. The Mayor is surprised by the sudden decision, but he is pleased to the degree that his guest's departure is in connection with the proposed marriage between Marya and his host who must seek his 'rich' uncle's blessing before he goes ahead with the marriage. The Mayor provides an additional 400 roubles to take care of Hlestakov's need on the one day-journey, although the latter likes to assume it is an additional loan taken for the purpose of making a round figure of 800 roubles. When asked why he chooses to go in the ordinary public chaise, he replies: '...I prefer it; springs make my head ache.'(p.79) A Persian rug is provided for the comfort of the 'in-law-to-be'

- i. (a) I wish I knew how much of all that stuff he told us was true! But why shouldn't it be?... He probably threw in a few fibs. Nothing is ever said without a few fibs. (p. 59)
- (b) ... Distinguished people ought to be something to look at, but this little whipper-snapper might be anybody! (p.60)
- (c) How he kept it up at the inn, and concocted all those stories and taradiddles that a century wouldn't make sense of (p.60)
- (d) But he's given in at last...

Since these statements are made by the Mayor suggesting his candid opinion on, and general impression of, Hlestakov, one is likely to conclude that the Mayor is quite observant, intelligent, a 'seasoned' administrator and trickster who knows his onion:

By implication, statement (a) & (c) are indicative of the Mayor's awareness of Hlestakov's incredible lies, probably, to impress his audience. He also believes that the effect of the alcohol must have been largely responsible for this; (b) suggests that the Mayor definitely expects a better decorum from his guest as a respected Official from Petersburg. An officer of the guest's stature is expected to be a roll model, a highly cultured and charismatic man both in carriage and leadership style. All these he could not find in his guest, making him to conclude that his guest might just have been anybody. Statement (d) suggests that his plan is already yielding results, far beyond what he hitherto has anticipated. The Mayor, no doubt, has an agenda: to get his guest drunk with alcohol in order to extract from him as much information as he may find very useful, and to facilitate a favourable report on his administration and Province. According to him; 'When a man's in drink it all comes out. What's in the heart comes out of the mouth.'

There is a deliberate suspense created by the playwright which is meant to create the impression that Hlestakov's gimmicks as an impostor is about to be exposed/revealed. Furthermore, one gets the impression that since the Mayor seems to know this much or, suspects his guest that much, he is not likely to fall any further for Hlestakov's subterfuge and tricks. The

suspense is further intensified by the fact that the audience might just as well anticipate an abrupt end of the play any moment from now since, it seems, Hlestakov is about to be caught off guard.

Yosif, like his master, is also taking full advantage of his sudden change of fortune, by cleverly feathering his own nest. It is important to find out why the Journalist, Tryapichkin does not have a fixed address.(p.70) It is simply because of the fear of being arrested or detained over the flimsiest excuse: like writing on any subject that the government might regard as 'embarrassing' publication. The Russian government was apparently hostile to the Press to the degree that there was neither Press freedom nor freedom of expression during the same period.

The Mayor acting on the prompting of Yosif, offers the latter some gratifications in order to have a favorable report when the issue of welfare of Yosif gets to his master. No doubt, the Mayor and members of his cabinet are aware of the fact that taking and giving a bribe is illegal. They also know that, given their dismal performance in government, the only option left for them if a positive report about them must get to Petersburg, is to bribe the official from the Headquarters. Their dilemma, therefore, is: how should they go about it without making it look as if they are trying to corrupt the official? How must they do it without the official taking offence at such a gesture? In other words, who bells the cat? These are part of the questions agitating the minds of the Mayor and his team. The same awareness of the illegality of bribery whether taken or offered, informs Hlestakov's insistence on taking whatever is offered or given him as loans.

"...the daughter is quite good looking, and I think the mother is ready for anything..." (p.63), speaks volume. It may interest one to take a look at some of what the statement might suggest. The Judge, at last, goes first to bribe the 'Official' from Petersburg. Others follow suit. It is important to note the method adopted by each provincial member in giving bribe to the Petersburg official. Of significance: the CC, a highly corrupt man, a mischief maker and a gossip, playing the saint while run every other person down; and the duo, Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky, who, though contribute as little as 65 roubles (pp. 68&90), do not see any reason to bribe or grant any loan no matter how little the amount, to the 'Petersburg Official'. Rather, they, make their own request and extract a promise from the great 'Official' from the city: to legitimize a child born out wedlock; and to let those in government, the highly influential aristocrats know that a Bobchinsky exists somewhere in the remote corner of the State.

Two things are observable immediately: One suspects that 19th Russian legislation could not have favoured children that were born out of wedlock, and Gogol, in a rather subtle manner, satirizes this very important issue. Similarly, one gets the feeling that arising from the agitated Bobchinsky, the poor masses that constitute the majority in Russian society were neither reckoned with nor catered for during the same period. The implication of Bobchinsky's request is the need to recognize the existence of the poor masses and accommodate their need and general welfare in the scheme of things.

The timely warning given by Yosif that it was time he and his master left before they are discovered to be impostors and cheats, suggests that he is a wiser person than his master, regardless of his low social status. It leads to another crucial point that Gogol is trying to make in the play: the fact that the masses may be poor and trodden upon does not detract from recognizing that they are a bunch of intelligent people. The playwright has shown that people of very low social status are often more intelligent or clever than those who, by virtue of their social status think they are superior: The main plot which involves Hlestakov and Yosif on the one hand, and the Mayor and his cabinet on the other hand, is a good example. Similarly, at the subplot level one finds Yosif's sense of judgment and/or quality of discourse when silhouetted against his master's much more logical.

Hlestakov's statement, "...They seem to have taken me for somebody very important in the Government.. ." (p.69) by implication, means that he does not set out deliberately to swindle or cheat. His behaviour up to this point of self-realization is likely guided by the understanding that it must be the way by which the community treats its visitors. His servant further confirms this. Yosif immediately sees the inherent danger, should the people realize that Hlestakov is not the much-expected Petersburg Official. It is the, reason for Yosifs advice that they must escape immediately from the town before the people detect their true identity.

The petitions 'by the town's people, in particular the merchants, and later, the women, constitute the true "window" onto the reality of C 19th Russian society: cofruct officials extorting, exploiting, stealing, molesting, killing and maiming the helpless citizenry; unlawful detention of innocent people, and general abuse of office by government officials. The people desperately desire an intervention, by any means, for equity and justice. It reveals, in addition, how corrupt officials swap people in the course of army recruitment. (pp.71-74) Siberia, a distant and severely cold part of the country also features as a purgatory for offenders or lawbreakers during the same period.

Matya and Anna, her mother, in a way, represent C19th women, 'Ladies' in the hinterland of Russia. Very excited by whatever comes from the city, which they consider as the standard, therefore, worthy of emulation. They also would like to be associated with anything that has to do with Aristocrats, hence their anxiety and excitement the moment the 'august' visitor arrives their home. Marya is definitely not a cheap girl, rather she is innocent and very intelligent. She reacts sharply when she perceives that the 'guest' is almost taking undue advantage of her simplicity/innocence: "You think because I'm s country girl, that.. .(tries to get, away).. .You are just making fun of us poor provincials"(p.75) Besides, she is the first to notice some irregularities in one of the wild claims of Hlestakov:

ANNA: Then "Youri Miloslavsky" must be your work, too?

HLEST: Yes, that's another

ANNA: But mummy! It says on the cover that a Mr Zagoskin wrote it! (p.56)

Apparently, Anna is not as quick witted as her daughter, Marya. She obviously has a weakness, and Hlestakov seems to have observed her correctly: '...ready to do anything, but I don't know why, but I like this kind of life'.(p.77) She is ready to be Hlestakov's mistress, from all indication. This is presumably so because it is a common practice in the society. This is evident in the CC's report on the illicit affair between the judge and Dobchinsky's wife, and the allegation that all Dobchinsky's children resemble the judge and not Dobchinsky (pp.66&67)

xiv) Hlestakov attempts to seduce Maxya, and later, her mother, Anna, in view of the excitement exhibited by the two ladies but it almost upturns his game of double deals, although he wriggles cleverly out of the problem as quickly as he can. He finally settles for Marya and asks for her hand in marriage to which her parents immediately grant approval.

Act III. ii

The .Mayor, wife and daughter are seen relishing their sudden "fortune". In a manner comparable to 'building-one's-castle-in-the- air,' the Mayor and his wife now as about-to-be in-laws of a very important government dignitary are seen mapping and rehearsing what their immediate future is likely to be. By virtue of being inlaws of an 'influential personage', they now begin to enjoy the presumed eievated status. The Mayor sends for those merchants who had

dared to write petitions against him and vows to deal more ruthlessly with them and others. The merchants arrive, and are tongue-lashed by the Mayor. They plead for pardon. Congratulatory messages pour in from the cabinet members, as well as a number of people.

While relishing the euphoria of the assumed new status of 'a General-in-waiting' as more congratulatory messages pour in, the Postmaster enters, apparently dazed with some strange discovery. After much pressure from the anxious listeners, including the Mayor, the Postmaster clumsily presents a letter purportedly written by the 'Petersburg Official' to a friend. It is discovered that they all have been fooled, swindled! Besides, the impostor has some uncomplimentary things to say about everyone in the Mayor's cabinet. A tall man dressed in army uniform bursts into the room to announce the arrival of the actual Inspector-general and that he, His Excellency, requires the presence of the visibly shaken Mayor.

There is a reversal of fortune for the Mayor who is now the to-be in-law of "a very important personage"; a new social status he proudly relishes, to the envy of many. It is evident that the Mayor is obsessed with acquisition of power by any means, certainly not to improve the life of the citizenry but for selfish ends. This is a graphic representation of the reality of 19th Russian ruling class which, among other things, Gogol satirizes in the play.

The Mayor is a racist, hence his invectives and acerbic verbal attack on non-Russians, the 'goat-bearded' Jews. The hatred he has for the Jewish merchants is undisguised. It approximates the impression of the Russian officials, (and even the Germans, although the play does include this fact, but it culminated in the destruction of well over six million Jews in the Gas Chamber on Hitler's order, during the World War II). The Mayor is vindictive, promises to use his new position to deal ruthlessly with all his detractors, especially, Jewish merchants.

The Mayor and his wife, Anna, in manners, attitude and carriage, compare favourably with the protagonist, Don Quixote of the great classical Spanish novel titled, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Part I, 1605; Part II, 1615), written by Miguel de Cervantes: the adventure of a country gentleman driven mad by reading chivalric romances of horse-riding heroic Knights fighting battles, fighting dragons, etc. Quixote not only believes the stories as factual, he dreams of being a horse-riding Knight, and actually lives out the dream by acquiring a frail-looking horse, dressing up like some ill-equipped Knight and literally going out in search of battles and dragons. His mission ends up in a total disaster, when in the course of his epic journey he comes across some Windmills and he launches an attack with his rake-like lance on them because he thinks they must be some dragons. In this case, the Mayor is Don Quixote, obsessed with power, his hubris, wants to be a General, unfortunately, he lacks what it takes to be a real General, and so his tragedy is predictable. Similarly, Anna who seems to share her husband's dream of being a General's wife is also to share of her husband's fate.

The CC and the Judge are not in the least impressed; this is evident in their "asides". (pp. 85, 86) Although the play is not a tragedy in the strict sense of the term, it has its own unique form, and its plot shares a number of features with the classical Greek/Aristotelian drama. In the course of the development of the plot, there are recognizable features similar to, but not quite in the order of the classical Greek tragedy: the betrothal is the Climax; the Discovery is the revelation of the true identity of the impostor, Hlestakov. It leads to Denouement, that is, a reversal of fortune such that rather than be feared because of his newly acquired social status, the Mayor, his wife and daughter are now being pitied most of all for their follies and general loss (psychosocial pain, public embarrassment, as well as material loss, p. 91). The announcement of the arrival of the real Inspector-General marks the Anti-climax.

The moral lessons (didactic import) are similar to those that can be drawn from some popular folk trickster narrative in which a small animal like Tortoise, or Deer, or Spider or Toad (or in the case of western literature, Brer Rabbit) challenges a much bigger animal like a Hippo, or Elephant, or Horse, or Dog, to a race or a tug-of-war competition, etc. In each case the overconfident bigger animal loses for relying on his size and strength. The smaller animal wins the competition using his wits. In the play under reference Hlestakov, a much junior officer outwits the Mayor and others. The confession of the Mayor is apposite here:

How could I, how could I? I-I-I've been a fool! After thirty years in the service ... I've never been taken in in my life! Not a tradesman, not a contractor has ever got the better of me, never! I've swindled the swindlers by the thousand! Rogues and rascals, that would have stolen the whole world, I've thpped'em all up! I've hoodwinked three governors! Not that goveinors are anything much... (p.91)

The over confident Mayor is outwitted by a much less junior officer, like the big animals who relied so much on their physiognomy and size, and got outwitted by less significant animals.

The play is a 'comedy of errors' to the degree that Gogol, the playwright, employs the very common device of "mistaken identity" to create a very compelling satirical comedy.

The structure of the play is compact, and the pace of action is very swift. This is largely so probably because of the Molierinspired plot structure. Notwithstanding, the episodes are so closely knitted that, in the words of Belinsky; "They are all indispensable parts of one artistic whole... thus constituting a selfsufficient world of its own."

In a manner characteristic of epic drama popularized later by Bertolt Brecht, characters are deliberately made to swap roles, contrary to existing dramatic traditions. For example, in the conventional drama only the nobles or the royal- or blue-blooded characters are capable of heroic deeds. The commoners/peasants serve as backdrops: fools, nagging wives, gravediggers, etc. In the epic drama however, the good-for-nothings, riff-raffs, vagabonds, drunkards, street whores, and rogues, etc., 'shock the society' by making acting as real human beings that they are, regardless of their social status; and by implication, capable of performing heroic deeds. Often, epic dramatists often present these 'wretched. of-the-earth', to borrow the words of Walter Rodney, as better equipped with superior intelligence than the so-called nobles. It is in this sense that one may begin to appreciate why Gogol creates Hlestakov, a drunk and gambler as a likeable character, and why he succeeds in swindling a self-confessed swindler like the Mayor and makes a fool of his wife and daughter, as well as other highly placed people in the Province.

In the same vein, in the conventional drama, parents and masters are likely to be presented as wiser and better-experienced people than their wards or subordinates. In The Government Inspector the playwright presents Marya as a wiser and more intelligent person than Anna, her mother. It is also the case with Yosif, Hlestakov's servant, who is presented as possessing a more superior intellect than his master.

Another area of difference that is noticeable in Gogol's The Government Inspector is the idea of a diffused (in this case, trickster) hero as opposed to a monomental or single hero which characterizes a conventional drama. Hlestakov and his servant, Yosif, rightly qualify as collective or plurimental (trickster) hero. Indeed, most of the characters, including the Mayor, his cabinet members, Anna the Mayor's wife, Hlestakov and Yosif, the merchants, with the

exception of a few ones like Ivanovna, wife of a sergeant, and Poshlyopkina, wife of the town locksmith, are trickster characters of varying degrees. The opening of the play shows the Mayor and his cabinet trying to fine-tune their plans to deceive the expected Petersburg Official. A trickster depends on 'trickcraft'. In a trickster drama of this nature a lot depends on the playwright's unusual sense of humour, imaginativeness and creativeness. Like his counterpart oral trickster story narrator, Gogol employs wits, humour as well as over exaggeration for effect, thereby presenting a caricature of personages and social reality of his time. Of the characters in the play, the Mayor and Hlestakov/Yosif stand out. The Mayor is a self-confessed swindler and certainly, the duo, Hlestakov/Yosif, constitute the collective trickster hero for outwitting the Mayor and his people. To a great degree, Hlestakov/Yosif qualify as the plural hero because they are completely in charge of the situation; they dictate the pace and the tempo of actions. The playwright, in turn, determines the characterology using the characters to define themselves and others, while the audience, is made to determine the characters as they individually and/or collectively relate to each other, and to one another.

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## LECTURE SIX

### Modern Drama

CULTURE defines and determines civilization generally, the theatre serves as a veritable means and mirror by which it is either reflected or refracted. Between 1900 and 2003 there have been more plays published and produced than in all of the preceding centuries put together. The hi-tech scientific breakthrough is largely responsible for this. For instance, it has reduced the whole world to a small global village through an advanced computerized means of information and transportation, which are of varying degrees of velocity. The advanced technology has further facilitated verbal communication not only through the print but also through electronic audio/visual technology and the computer. No doubt, this development has produced its own culture with its many advantages, as well as enough “germs” to destroy it.

There now exist abundant and rich ideas through cross-fertilization of dramatic cultures, which, in some cases, border on theatre cultural miscegenation. This again has given rise to movements and counter-movements, theories and counter-theories of the so-called universal dimension. A drama production of magnitude and of huge success, or a concept (theory) developed in say, Berlin, London or New York soon found a variety of expressions in other parts of the globe almost immediately. This has often led to instability and complex contradictions everywhere.

Much as this development has widened the scope of scholastic discourse in general, it has done very little in the establishment of much needed principles that could have served as basis for a thorough evaluation and proper understanding of drama. Perhaps except in one or two instances where specific principles are applicable in a more general term, each playwright, each ideologue, each critic tends to be unique in his aloneness. Again, we have applied the term unique in this case, rather loosely.

Despite the apparent chaos which the bulk of modern drama is associated with, we can conveniently locate three distinct theatrical modes/forms. They include (a) the theatre of entertainment: melodrama, farce, romantic comedy and musical plays which are now common with our mass media drama productions, namely, motion pictures, and, lately, home videos. Radio and television are good examples of theatre strictly meant for entertainment. (b) The theatre of realism involves plays that give insight into the problems of real people. The playwrights, as well as those who patronize the production of such plays believe in man's ability to improve through rational and pragmatic understanding. The playwrights in this category include Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) who is believed to have pioneered the modern drama, as we know it today. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) is another important playwright in the category. Though their choices of techniques differ a great deal, both Ibsen and Brecht share a basic concern for man's problems and the belief that through greater human understanding and determination, every human problem can be rationally encountered, and, therefore, can be solved; (c) the third category is the theatre of disillusionment. It is generally informed by the



post-world wars philosophy of Existentialism, which is foregrounded by despair, cruelty, and general absurdity. It has no faith in religion, conventional values or in any rational ideas. Martin Esslin's (1968) remark is apposite here;

The decline of religious faith was asked until the end of the second world war by the substitute religion of faith in progress, naturalism, and various totalisation fallacies. All this was shattered by war (23).

The station of man in life is the now; no hope is entertained for the future. To the existentialist, a man's life is but a stream of sorrow punctuated by falls and cataracts of momentary happiness. Existentialism is a frustrated outcry against the human condition. Man is now his own victim; through science he has unleashed upon himself an unprecedented violence and ugliness potent enough to annihilate him. It informed the theatre of the Absurd. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus are proponents of existential philosophy, while Samuel Beckett, the most known, "the most read and the most produced" (Bamidele, 2000:97), is believed to have popularized the theatre of the Absurd through his plays, especially, *Waiting for Godot*, among others.

Besides Eugene Ionesco, and Arthur Adamov, other contemporary playwrights whose dramaturgies have been influenced by theatre of the absurd include Edward Albee (1928-) and Sam Shepard (1943- ) who are both Americans. Albee is the author of *The Zoo Story* (1959), *The American Dream* (1961), *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), and *Three Tall Women* (1991), among others. He is a three-time-winner of the Pulitzer Prize in drama. Shepard's *Buried Child* (1978) also won the Pulitzer Prize in drama. Harold Pinter (1930-) and Tom Stoppard (born Thomas Straussler, 1937- ), are both British. Pinter is famous for his comedies of menace that cynically and humorously depict people, or expose characters' alienation from each other. Stoppard's plays are characterized by a fusion of the English tradition of the "comedy of manners" and contemporary topicalities. The plays include *The Real Inspector Hound* (1968), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favor* (1977), *Hapgood* (1988), among others. Besides, Stoppard is known for his linguistic inventiveness, as well as plot inversions as necessary thrust for his plays. Wilhem Gunter Grass (1927-) and Peter Weiss are both Germans. Grass is both a literary giant and political activist. His early plays which were published in English in *Four Plays* (1967), include *Hochwasser* (*Flood*), *Onkel, Onkel*, (*Mister, Mister*), *Noch zehn Minuten his Buffalo* (*Only Ten Minutes to Buffalo*), and *Die bosen Koche* (*The Wicked Cooks*).

Max Rudolf Frisch (1911-1991), was a Swiss playwright and novelist. Notable among his plays are *The Chinese Wall* (1946; trans. 1961); *Andorra* (1961; trans. 1962); and *The Firebugs* (1958; trans. 1962). *The Chinese Wall*, for example, is an experimental play, a farce of combined ancient and modern settings, characters, emphasizing self-destructiveness. *Andorra* is a tragic allegory on the consequences of anti-Semitism, while *The Firebugs* is a farce. Vaclav Havel (1936- ), a Czech political leader and a great dramatist. He worked as an assistant director with a Prague theatre company. Havel's first play, *Zahradni Slavnost* (*The Garden Party*), satirizes dehumanization through government bureaucracy. *Vyrozumen*, another play of his, satirizes life under Communism. He was awarded the 1969 edition of the Australian State Prize for European Literature.

We must emphasize also that our categorization of the theatrical forms in modern drama is borne more out of analytical convenience than any other consideration. By implication therefore, it may not be advisable to evaluate any modern drama from any one point of view. Our

intention in arriving at such a classification, among others, is to stimulate our critical sensibilities, and especially, our sense of appreciation in understanding each theatrical form that is located in what has come to be understood as "modern drama"

As a way of representing the basic dramatic forms in modern drama, we shall briefly discuss selected plays by Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), Arthur Miller (b. 1915-), and Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)

### **Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)**

Whether in his *Pygmalion* which was first performed in 1913 or in *Arms and the Man* which came much later, Shaw has always been preoccupied with humour that has a touch of satire through the use of superb skill. In other words, Shaw's plays are predominantly satiric comedies. Lanre Bamidele (2001:10) identifies a satiric comedy as a form of drama characterized by an exaggeration of faults with dramatic wit or sarcasm. It is objective and rational and it aims at correcting manners, morals and ideas. Other playwrights associated with this form of comedy include, Ben Jonson, William Congreve, Sean O'Casey, Moliere and John Gay, and in Africa, Wole Soyinka, among others.

### **Pygmalion**

The First produced in 1913 and, later, in 1938, it was also turned into a film with only some slight amendments. It shows Shaw as a superb playwright. It is predictably a satire on the false societal values. The play is an exploration of romantic themes in a highly sophisticated and a rather artificial world. Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle do not as a matter of fact fit into the traditional role of a romantic couple; neither does the play end in the usual romantic form. Rather, for play-ending we have a comprehensive "epilogue" which Shaw directs our attention to as the "sequel" to the play. It states in part:

The rest of the story, need not be shown in actions, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their laziness on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the rag shop in which Romance keeps its stock of "happy endings" to misfit all stories.

Though Higgins and Alfred Doolittle essentially ridicule the moral atrophy of the middle class, Shaw would still have made his satirical points even without Doolittle, and even if Higgins had remained silent about his intentions in the play. Shaw's characters have the unpredictable unique quality only found in truly rounded characters in fiction.

Bernard Shaw's thesis in *Pygmalion* seems to suggest the discovery of new possibilities and gradual development of qualities in Higgins and Eliza as the plot unfolds steadily. Shaw definitely would want his audience to watch (in the theatre of our imagination) and think about his characters as they hear them talk and act in the unfolding syntax of action. In essence, Shaw's dramatic interest lies not so much in the romantic possibilities as in the social criticism (satire) which the transformation of Eliza permits. This intention is well articulated in the Preface to the play:

It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot-cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else.

Until his death in 1950, Shaw had continued to write plays, engage in politics and social reform, and comment on a range of topics including evolution, criminology, education, war, religion and marriage. For example, Shaw makes a comprehensive remark on the synoptic gospels in the preface to *Androcles and the Lion*, he examines the medieval Church and questions the idea of sainthood in the preface to *Saint Joan*; it will be recalled that sainthood and martyrdom, especially, constitute the central focus in T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* too. In 1925, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. By the time of Shaw's death in 1950, he had become the foremost English dramatist of his period. His high sense of intelligent humours and preference for character development rather than plot distinguish him and his drama from those of his contemporaries.

### **Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965)**

Eliot is a great poet, a great critic, and a great neo-classical playwright whose life and art wielded so much of great influence among writers in English during the first half of the twentieth century as they do even now. He once summarized the totality of his life's philosophy in a celebrated phrase in the following words; "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and Anglo-Catholic in religiously religion".

A thoroughbred "university Wit", Eliot attended Harvard University, the Sorbonne in Paris, and Oxford University in England. Following the First World War experience the much cherished optimism of the Victorian Age crumbled and the society became fragmented, ushering in a phase of enquiries. The basis of the once established status quo and other certainties were being questioned. Eliot's age of fragmented spirit found eloquent expressions in his poems "The Waste Land" and "The Hollow Men." Similarly, *Murder in the Cathedral* (a play) occupies a significant place in the discourse of Eliot's art.

### **Murder in the Cathedral**

This is a unique neo-classical tragedy. It is a verse drama whose poetry must be closely studied to comprehend and appreciate its topical and stylistic thrust. Rather than serve mere aesthetic purpose, the poetry of the drama is integral to the play's dramatic action. It is also instructive to note that the main action subsists in Beckett himself, that is, it is an internal struggle which is active and destructive. However, judging from the external conflict which involves the knights who murder him, Beckett would seem a rather passive character. This is implied in one of the Knights' statements later in the play. He, indeed, excuses Thomas Beckett of inviting his own death.

Furthermore, unlike the classical tragedy where an old man indicating experience, among other things, usually represents the Chorus, the playwright has chosen as his Chorus a group of helpless old women who can in no way affect the action of the play. The Chorus is made to perform its traditional role as a unifying and commenting interpreter. Therefore, the Chorus in this regard is made to comment upon the action and indicate most significantly the deliberate but subtle imposition of Beckett's murder on the people. Therefore the poetry of the Chorus is

designed in a way that is potent enough to convey powerfully what is both important and dramatic where no external action has been of any effect.

Often critics have described the play as lacking in 'action', in other words, that the play is rather passive. Similarly, critics have wondered if martyrdom or sainthood should warrant any dramatic discourse at all. No doubt, Eliot is aware of the problem, and as such he has made Beckett himself to reflect upon it as indicated in his sermon;

We do not think of a martyr simply as a good Christian who has been killed because he is a Christian: for that would be solely to mourn. We do not think of him simply as a good Christian who has been elevated to the company of the Saints: for what would be simply to rejoice ... Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint...

Murder in the Cathedral is indeed a controversial drama of content and of form. It will therefore be unfair to impose any particular opinion on students of this drama. This is particularly so because there are several questions with open-ended answers. The controversies are inconclusive. For example, if it is agreed upon that the speeches of the three Priests (that is, after the Herald's announcement) provide exposition, and considering the particular comment on Beckett's "pride", how do the speeches look forward to the events to come?

Similarly, the speeches of the first three Tempters seem to have been anticipated by the three Priests, as well as anticipate the speeches of the three Knights. It is also obvious that though Beckett expects the first three Tempters, he does not expect the fourth. One might want to know the significance of the role of the fourth Tempter since there is hardly any clue to Eliot's decision to end this section of the play by having the three Priests, the Chorus and the Tempters joining to appeal to Beckett. Still more unanswered puzzles: Has the "Interlude", which consists of the sermon, fulfilled its traditional role? What has it contributed to the dramatic action, and to the plot structure of the play?

That Beckett demands that the Priests unbar the door to let in the murderers has been a serious subject of controversy bordering on whether or not he is an active protagonist in the crisis of the play. This is because Beckett's decision at that point no longer makes him a passive character, yet it is not the intention of Eliot to make Beckett seem to invite his own death for the purpose of being a martyr through a pure act of self-will informed by pride. Has Eliot succeeded in making Beckett an active protagonist as well as freed him from the allegation that he indeed has "sought" martyrdom?

The Knights' defense of their action we must emphasize more of an improvisation than a part of the actual historical events. But the question then is, why is the defiance rendered in pure modern prose? Has this to do with Eliot's thematic intention? Another point of interest is whether or not the role of the Chorus in Murder in the Cathedral is any different from that of its (their) classical counterpart of Sophocles, Euripides or Aeschylus?

Finally, fundamental to the understanding of Murder in the Cathedral is Eliot's boldness to break with realism in virtually every way, not only by its verse form, but that it has a chorus and the characters are made to speak directly to the audience. The play, rather than be regarded as just a slice of life, is itself the ritual.

### **Arthur Miller (b.1915-)**

Both Arthur Miller and his contemporary, Tennessee Williams (1914-1983) can logically be located among the playwrights of disillusionment or despair like Eugene Gladstone O' Neill (1888. 1953). The artistic vision of both playwrights is complementary. For instance, Williams probe both the mental, as well as the emotional ills of life, while Miller probes with similar passion, thrust and skill, the social and psychological forces militating against and steadily destroying, mankind. Miller's plays include: All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, The Crucible, A View from the Bridge and much later, After the Fall and Incident at Vichy. Death of a Salesman is obviously the most popular and perhaps the best of his plays.

### **Death of a Salesman**

Miller's attempt at a modern tragedy scores a relatively huge success with his play, Death of a Salesman. It is the story of Willy Loman, an ordinary, American middle-aged salesman. Through the playwright's skilful handling, even though Loman does not possess the touch of nobility of George Barnwell, he is made to achieve a considerable measure of tragic stature. A number of factors are, no doubt, responsible for this besides Miller's force of language and skill. Loman encapsulates the tragic essence of most common men who are not just obsessed with but literally worship the so-called modern "bitch goddess, success". He is a victim of some vain though, attractive ideals. Loman seems to know his onions, the essentials, such as athletic prowess, good fellowship, popularity and influence. However, the reality of his existence coupled with his persistent failures have begun to dawn on him by the time the play begins. And through a series of flashbacks we are brought into the knowledge of the unbroken chain of sorrows into which the seeming "glittering" ideals have dragged him. In the end, Loman who otherwise could have been a happy parent and a successful carpenter ends up committing suicide.

### **Bertolt Brecht**

He was a German-born dramatist. He had lived in California between 1941 and 1947, the year he voluntarily left the United States for Europe. His leaving the States is not unconnected with his free confession of his Communist sympathies before the Un-American Activities Committee of the American Senate which had summoned him. In 1949 he returned to Germany and settled in East Berlin where he founded his own theatrical company, the Berliner Ensemble. He had produced an outstanding series of plays for the Deutsche's theatre. These included Mother Courage and Puntilla and other productions adapted from both the classical as well as contemporary repertoires with apparent significant departure from known orthodox dramatic conventions. Edward Roditi in a review in the New York Times described Brecht's theatre as "the cynosure of the German literary world as well as Europe's most important subsidized avant-garde theatre."

In London, The Spectator had conferred on its theatre "the only great theatre at present in operation" (1955). Two years earlier, 1953, Paris Le Monde had summarized the theatrical experience Brecht had successfully injected into the literary culture in the following words, "Energetic, forceful, full of pain and humour".

### **Epic Theatre/Drama**

There is a major factor responsible for Brecht's theatrical success; it is the rather unusual or unorthodox theatrical conceptualization. Brecht in theory, for instance, seemed to say that ideas and more importantly reason or intellect should take the place of the usual excitement and emotion deliberately aimed at, and that are associated with conventional drama. Brecht's theatre

is hinged on sociological mores foregrounded by a consciousness characterized by a deep compassion, not “sentiment”, for fellowmen, a lyric sense of poetry and, prudence of language. Therefore, Brecht had sought to educate and enlighten his audience rather than ignite its emotion. But at the same time he hardly succeeded in suppressing his lyrical “sensuousness” which he hitherto expended on the poetry that underlines the grim realities that informed his topicalities.

The epic theatre is, indeed, a theatrical revolution. Some critics have described, and correctly too, this brand of theatre as a rather exaggerated lawlessness and an embittered reaction against the shortcomings of orthodox morality. The outcast, for example, a city whore, or the drunk, or the disillusioned nonentity, or the house-help etc., becomes the ‘hero/heroine’. The ‘hero/heroine,’ is deliberately romanticized and made an inverted idealist deliberately silhouetted against, and hitting back at, the moral atrophy of his/her society and, in particular, the system that has turned him/her into a victim. Nearly all Brechts early plays are informed by the half-romantic, half-satiric and didactic Anglo- Saxon/medieval world. The plays marked the beginning of a theatrical revolution that seemed much more favoured by, and apparently more relevant to, the realities of his time and much more even now, than the conventional theatre of his contemporaries. This is so because, even though the early plays were sourced from this known background, his adaptations were not uncritical. There was a deliberate subversion in their transplantation leading to a rupturing of the original syntax of action and artistic vision that more readily yields to, or provides for sociological, particularly economic enquiries.

Brecht’s middle plays are largely oriental in setting. The Good Woman of Setzuan, The Caucasian Chalk Circle and Turandot are Eastern. The shift in the setting of his plays marked another turn in the mode of the plays which are less story-like court investigation.

Most, if not all, of Brecht’s plays are fraught with some degree of unreality particularly in the overgeneralization of characters, and events which are made to appear bigger than they actually represent. Consequently, not only are the settings kept remote, the actual moral problems which form the basis of the topicality are often over simplified almost beyond recognition, steeped in contradictions. For example, Brecht may present the good poor man or the bad rich man without giving any clue as to what makes the character good or bad. This mechanical class- informed virtue is observable in The Good Woman of Setzuan and The Caucasian Chalk Circle.

### **Main Features of the Epic Drama/Theatre**

Marxism largely influences Brecht’s dramaturgy, even though the playwright was never a card-carrying member. Similarly, although he consciously ensured that his theatrical poetics transcended ideological dogmatism, one such derived influence that is so apparent on his theatre is the idea of dialectics, the inherent contradictions, etc. in any classed society. It marks Brecht’s sense of the incompatible, the comedic, as well as his social vision. He takes particular interest in such unresolved dialectics: conflicts, contradictions, in the individual like Shen Te, and in society itself as represented in The Good Woman of Setzuan. The unresolved dialectics, among other factors, gives Brecht’s theatre its apparent uniqueness. Thus the Epic theatre is full of conflicts (contradictions), surprises and inconsistencies.

Brecht’s characters are usually caricatures, or deliberately complicated living beings like Galileo or Courage, each of whom ends up dwarfing both the ideals which he/she represents. For example, Galileo recounts his earlier held principle. Similarly, his theatrical interest lies in the combination of barely reconcilable features: education and entertainment; individual and collective; myth and skepticism; fiction and reality.

Furthermore, there is a deliberate “banishment” of the “spectacular” from the stage. The stage is made unemotional and un hypnotic primarily because actors merely demonstrate and illustrate. The audience is in no way emotionally involved. The theatre appeals strictly to human reasoning intellect. This is achieved through the use of “alienation” effect. One such means is the banishment of the spectacular earlier referred to. Another means is by way of establishing the events at the beginning of each episode either by having a summary of the scene boldly written on a canvas for the audience to see and read as in Galileo, or through a narrator/commentator, or through one of the characters as is the case in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*.

The Epic theatre shares a number of characteristics with Epic poetry. For example, it is narrative in form and in content, and episodic in plot-structure. Besides, it sources materials from local myths and legends, not as ends in themselves but as a means to ideologically motivated ends. It has a rather purified language lacking in irrelevant flavour. The language identifies with the speaker who simply states what exactly he means. There is also the use of unrhymed verse, and songs either summarizing, or commenting on a scene or simply introducing the next scene.

### **The Caucasian Chalk Circle**

A prelude shows two farming groups meeting in 1945 to decide on which side should take ownership of a certain controversial fertile valley. Then the two groups are told the following story which constitutes the play proper. It is set in feudal Georgia, before the invention of firearms.

The Governor of a Georgian city is overthrown and killed by a nobles’ revolt. His wife escapes, abandons her baby-son in preference for some other valuables and wealth. Grusha, a servant girl chooses to rescue the baby at the risk of her own life. She succeeds later in rescuing and escaping with the baby to her brother’s abode in the mountains. In order to have an acceptable status, and not to be regarded as an unmarried mother, Grusha has to marry a supposedly dying peasant. At the end of the revolt, the Governor’s wife sends troops to fetch Grusha and the child back to the city, and sues for the child’s return. In Act Four, the story flashes back to the day of the revolt showing Azdak, a drunkard and a village rogue, whom the rebel soldiers had appointed as a judge. In the last Act, he tries the case and quite unexpected of Azdak, he settles the matter by revising the old test of the chalk “circle”. Almost like the biblical where whose child king Solomon had ordered to be cut into two, the child is given to Grusha because she cannot bear the excruciating pain the child is to be put through should she engage in the traditional tug-of-war with the Governor’s wife over the child. At the same time Azdak grants Grusha a divorce so that she can return to her fiancé. The lesson from this is that the child is not returned to his biological mother because she fails to behave like a true mother. He is, instead, given to a lady who, though not a mother, has proved to have the qualities of a true mother. Similarly, the rich valley should go to the group that serves it best.

It is a narrative play with an episodic plot structure. The play has a prelude and five Acts. It has a chorus of three or four singers in unrhymed irregular verse. There are twelve songs, four of which are sung by the singers.

Other points to note include the apparent ambivalence in the presentation of the characters, that is, the inconsistency of roles. For instance, some characters like Azdak and Grusha are engaged in dual roles. The point of interest here is that in epic theatre there is simplicity of characterization, particularly, doubling in which a character performs two different roles without the rigours of changing into complex costumes, for example, Azdak the tramp-like village rogue (a drunkard) and Azdak the judge, Grusha the servant and Grusha the “mother”.

One observes a fundamental contradiction in the informing logic of the resolution of the conflict in this play. The implication it has for the justification or otherwise of colonialism cannot be ignored in the light of the playwright's ideological alignment. This is significant and is capable of provoking a post-colonial discourse: the disputed fertile land should go to the group that serves it best, even when the group is not the original owner!

### **The Good Woman of Setzuan**

The play is a philosophical criticism of the concept of "good-ness" in a world characterized by evil. It concludes that although it is nearly impossible to be good, with great and uncompromising determination, it is still possible to be positively oriented in a predominantly evil world. Again, characteristic of epic drama, the play is a parable set in pre-war China, in the capital of Setzuan province.

Three Chinese gods having heard the prayers of the people whose country is badly hit economically decide to come down to help out of their predicaments. The gods apparently tired and wretched-looking search fruitlessly for any good person to stay the night with. A city whore, Shen Te's door is the only one that welcomes them for the night at their arrival. Having been impressed by her warmth and kindness of heart, they provide her with money to establish a profitable little shop. But some greedy relatives, and opportunists and cheats "prey" on her and almost ruin her. She finally saves her self from being ruined by disguising as a wicked, selfish male cousin who puts to check the parasites' activities and puts them to profitable use. "He" thereby manages to earn enough to enable Shen Te to continue her generous and good life.

Characteristic of epic theatre, The Good Woman of Setzuan is narrative, and has an episodic plot-structure. There are ten scenes/Acts in all, with six songs, a prologue and a verse epilogue, short interludes, and prose with heightened passages, coupled with sections of free verse.



# Lecture Seven

## Contemporary African Drama

### Introduction

The term “contemporary” or “modern” in the sense intended here is essentially concerned with African plays written by Africans on, particularly, colonial and postcolonial African experience. For the purpose of this study, the emphasis shall be primarily on African drama south of the Sahara. Perhaps with the exception of the Egyptian playwright, Tewfik Al Hakim’s collection of plays, *Fate of a Cockroach* (1954, trans. 1973), North African drama and cultures share greater affinities with the Arab world than with sub-Saharan cultures.

Besides Sekyi Kobina’s *The Blinkards* (1915) from the former Gold Coast (now Ghana), which stirs among other things, the nouveaux riches Fanti of Cape Coast, not much is known to have been written during the colonial era in Africa. We must quickly add, however, that South Africa is an exception here, because until recently (1994), it never experienced true independence, yet quite a number of plays have emerged from that part of Africa. Some of such early plays known to have been written include, Herbert Isaac Ernest’s *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongquase the Liberator* (1935), and Lewis Nkosi’s *Rhythm of Violence*. (1964) The South African plays are unique in their expression of the anguish, the struggle for survival, as well as the aspirations of the Africans in the former apartheid South Africa. Indeed, South African plays were integral to the collective anti-apartheid struggle. Post-apartheid South Africa has indeed evolved a regenerated theatre phenomenon considered appropriate for the emergence of a “new” nation needing a more focused reorientation to cope with its wounded and dislocated psyche, as well as for purposes of reconciliation, rehabilitation and general reconstruction. In this regard, community-based theatrical activities for development had emerged in line with the spirit of the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg, in the township prisons among the inmates, the hospitals, the markets and other public places.

In essence, modern African drama experienced a rapid growth only after the independence of most African states. It largely informs its organizing topicality and motif, (neo/post) colonialism. For example, the colonial effort at stifling and/or outlawing indigenous African belief systems is, among other things, captured in Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975), a ritual drama. We shall shortly in this chapter do a detailed textual analysis of the play. In Rwanda and Zaire, the Church (RCM) had succeeded in injecting Christian values through the introduction of the Miracle, Mystery and Morality plays of the English Medieval society into the dramatic culture of the people. The dramatic forms went a long way in facilitating later development of modern drama in these regions for political purposes.

In Nigeria, the tradition of Concert parties popularized by ‘Bob’ Johnson, a Ghanaian (of the former Gold Coast) in the early 1920s had influenced the late Chief Hubert Ogunde. He founded the first Yoruba travelling theatre in the 1930s. Ogunde’s early plays, like the *Ruwanda* and *Zaire’s* liturgical plays, were informed by the Medieval English dramatic culture too, that is, the Mystery, Miracle and Morality plays. Ogunde’s level of social and political consciousness

matured simultaneously with his artistic vision. It informed such plays as *Strike and Hunger* (1945), *Bread and Bullets* (1951), and much later in the early 1960s, *Yoruba Ronu* to address the unusual political sophistication and violence that enveloped the then Western Nigeria. Ogunde's drama, which is characterized by long musical opening glees, stock cultural dances, acrobatic display, coupled with direct audience intrusion/ participation, has come to be known as "Ogunde Tradition" (Ogundeji 1987, 1988, 2003). The "tradition" also characterized the plays of other dramatists like Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo, Akin Ogungbe, Oyin Adejobi, and later, a host of other Yoruba theatre practitioners.

The Nigerian premiere University College, Ibadan, was established in 1948. It marked the beginning of a new cultural attitude in colonial Nigeria. The Mbari Club, the brainchild of Wole Soyinka and a few others, located on the Mokola hill in the heart of the ancient city of Ibadan became a beehive of cultural activities expressed both in visual art and drama performances. Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* is a seemingly, a seemingly veiled prophetic drama which expresses the playwrights concern on the uncertainty that seemed to threaten the survival of the "Half-Child". It was written for Nigeria's Independence Day celebration on October 1, 1960. Similarly, Soyinka's *Madmen and Specialists* interrogates, among other things, the logic of the Nigerian civil war that lasted thirty months, 1967-1970. John Pepper Clark (later, Clark Bekederemo), also of the Ibadan school and Soyinka's contemporary, succeeded both in locating and in situating the universal correspondence between classical Greek tragedy and the indigenous African tragic spirit through his trilogy, *Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade*, and *The Raft* (1964). This exploration was closely followed by another playwright Ola Rotimi of the University of Ife, Nigeria (now Obafemi Awolowo University). His play, *The Gods are not to Blame* (1968), is a critical adaptation of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. We shall later in this chapter, examine ClarkBekederemo's quest for a modern African tragic form, and his definition of the tragic spirit in the true African sense, in his trilogy. Furthermore, we shall attempt to determine the extent of Ola Rotimi's success in his experiment with, and exploration of, basic concepts like the fate/destiny, and their universality.

The military incursion into Nigeria's political life coming barely five years after her independence led to a new brand of neo-colonialism, and shortly after, the thirty-month civil war. Another set of Nigerian playwrights had emerged in response to the nation's strange psychosocial idiosyncrasies. They were more forthcoming in their persistent criticism of the military dictatorship than their predecessors. For example, Bode Sowande's *Afamako – The Workhorse* (1978) and *Flamingo* (1982), Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia*, examine, among other things, the themes of exploitation and corruption. Femi Osofisan had succeeded in his new experimentation with a new dramatic form by locating a universal cultural correspondence between the Brechtian epic dramatic form and Yoruba folkloric narrative form. His plays include *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), *The Midnight Hotel* (1986), *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1991.), *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* (1992).

With the unprecedented growth of post-independence African drama there have since been criticisms which have helped to enhance its quality of focus and form. African drama has come of age; it is indeed possible to harness such findings as are common with its peculiar hybrid for the purpose of evolving a body of relevant "home-grown" theories and literary canons appropriate for its criticism.

Oyin Ogunba (1977) has identified three broad categories into which modern West African plays can be placed: propaganda plays, involving politics and ideology; plays expressing culture- nationalism, or plays expressing preference for the new cultural integrationist vision;

and finally, the satiric plays. Ogunba's classification was, no doubt, relevant at the time it was first suggested way back in 1971, and possibly applicable to the whole of modern African drama too. But now that new dramatic forms have emerged, and also now that many more plays have been written, such classification cannot possibly be relevant, appropriate or applicable.

There are some apparent problems with Ogunba's classification bordering on observable inherent ambiguity of oversimplification and over-generalization. For example, there is a problem that may likely arise with the third category - the satiric play. We believe that this ought not to be a separate category in the sense that modern African drama like its African novel counterpart is largely informed by sociological factors. Therefore, it is only obvious that regardless of the nature of its topicality (political or ideological propaganda, or culture-nationalism), or form (tragedy, comedy, or the epic theatre), modern African drama has always been couched in some measured degree of satire.

Similarly, the other categories propaganda and culture-nationalism are fraught with problems too. So long as subjectivity and occasional specious discourse are fundamental to propaganda, so long shall propaganda remain integral topical interest of literary discourse on culture, politics, nationalism, etc., regardless of region or race. In other words, drama about culture or nationalism or religion, can be made to wear the garb of propaganda, subtle or caustic.

Udenta O. Udenta in *Ideological Sanction and Social Action in African Literature* (1994) takes a swipe at the early efforts at critical works on modern African drama, and in one sweep, describes them all as works more or less sponsored by the playwrights themselves. The works include, Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele's *Theatre in Africa*, Michael Etherton's *The Development of African Drama*, Eldred Jones's *The Writings of Wale Soyinka*, Oyin Ogunba's *Movement of Transition*, and such journals as *African Literature Today* No. 6, among others. According to Udenta,

What is, of course, annoying is the near critical silence on the works of the later Ngugi, the later Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Tess Onwueme and Tunde Fatunde- all revolutionary dramatists who responding to the call of their conscience, and aware of the growing heroism of the African working people create positive heroes who embody the revolutionary challenge posed to neo-colonialism and re-colonization. (94)

Udenta suspects that the observed gap was deliberate and a "conspiracy against revolutionary aesthetics in Africa, and not because of their relative newness on the scene." (94) What perhaps, the critic failed to realize is that the artistic and social vision that foreground modern African drama is developmental, and in stages, as it obtains in most societies of the world, its criticism grows with it, with time. In other words the question of any deliberate silence does not arise. The early critical works contrary to what Udenta will have us believe are great efforts that have facilitated a basic understanding of the first generation of African dramatists. While one may be tempted to share some of Udenta's sentiment and anxiety on a number of issues raised in the work under reference, we are of the opinion that he could still have made his point without being so acerbic and uncivil in the usual Bolekaja tradition. For example, his claims about, and description of, Dapo Adelugba's (edited) *Before Our Very Eyes* as "a very mediocre work..." (94), is a clear case of abuse of rights to personal opinion(s) and of claims which, unfortunately,

are false and unfounded. If the contribution of great scholars including the late Professor Joel Adedeji, Professors Bimpe Aboyade, Dan S. Izevbaye, Dapo Adelugba, and others, in a collective celebration of the unique achievement of Professor Wole Soyinka, the only Nigerian Nobel Laureate in Literature so far, is being described as “a very mediocre work”, then that source of critical judgement needs a thorough examination! Or how does one explain Udentia’s many unpardonable shortcomings in his book under reference: specious critical deductions, outrageous grammatical lapses, typographical errors and wrongly spelt words? For example, “Ngugi wa Thion’o” (p.93), instead of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, and “Dedan Krnathi” (p.95), instead of Dedan Kimathi; “play wrights” and “any thing” (p.94), instead of “playwrights” and “anything”, respectively; and grammatical hiccups like, “crippled it’s legs...” (p.94), instead of “crippled its legs...”. So many errors in just three pages. One wonders if he has any moral right to castigate anyone for that matter. We shall simply stop at that to avoid unnecessary distraction from our main focus.

Since Ogunba’s classification is hardly applicable now to modern African drama, it is not likely either, to serve our purpose in the present study. We have decided to evolve a more appropriate alternative classification for contemporary African plays. Therefore, for the convenience of our purpose in this study we shall locate our alternative classification under four broad and yet indistinct headings: culture plays, nationalist plays, rational plays, and neo-rational plays. We must quickly add here that the idea of creating four separate headings is not intended to assume a rigid delineation, or else it will fail like the previous attempt(s). This is particularly so since there is no clear distinction between the first two groups. Culture is a principal constituent of nationalism. At the same time we have many reasons to treat them as two separate entities in the context we intend to establish shortly. Culture plays and nationalist plays, the first two broad categories in our classification are informed by the factors we shall discuss immediately.

When an African drama expressly shows concern about dislocated social values or culture decadence, or it simply implies approval of the cross-fertilization of cultures (culture-integrations), its central pre-occupation is culture. Similarly, where an African play is concerned with political struggle of any ideological persuasion, the basic and informing vision is nationalism. In either culture play or nationalist play there is a possibility of an overlap, or admixture of both cultural and nationalist topicality and or ethos. Such a play we have chosen to locate under the third group, rational plays. In these three groups there is a tendency for the playwright to use propaganda, as well as exploit the resources of satire, regardless of dramatic form, tragedy or comedy.

### **Culture Plays**

Most of the African plays in this category constantly probe the newly acquired European values. There is, predictably, a constant conflict between the African culture (the old order) and the European values (the new order). Sometimes, the old and the new are satirized in a way that reduces the latter to a satiric butt in order to justify the ideals of the African culture. This is the case with Kobina Sekyi's *The Blinkards*. Sometimes, the badly digested western values are sharply highlighted. Examples abound in Mrs. Brofusem among others in *The Blinkards*, and Wole Soyinka's Lakunle, the village teacher in *The Lion and The Jewel*. There are also plays like *Blood Knot* which explore the possibility of the coexistence of the best of the old order and the best of the new order. For example, Chief Baroka, the Baale of Ilujinle and his newly acquired stamp printing machine in *The Lion and Jewel*, and the stranger-village teacher, Bambulu with his "Deux ex machine" antsnake bite serum in Ene Henshaw's *This is Our Chance*, as well as Efua Sutherland's *Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), among others, represent the cultural integrationist vision. Similarly, Joe de Graft's *Sons and Daughters* examines the predicaments of the new order under the brutal oppression of the old values. In essence, contemporary African plays that can be located in the 'culture play' category are of varied degrees. They do, however, take cognizance of the signification of African culture.

### **Nationalist Drama**

The plays in this category preoccupy with political struggles with nationalist objectives either in colonial era as represented by the highlights of the Mau-Mau and Maji-Maji arm-struggles in the colonial Kenya and in the colonial Tanzania respectively, as consciously re-presented in Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, and Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile*. Nationalist plays, in addition, express the people's disaffection, and consciously awaken their level of awareness with the sole aim of making them reject and resist colonial or post—colonial disillusionment and general oppression. They are represented by plays like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mini's *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977). It was an experimental play commissioned for performance in Kikuyu, at the village theatre of the people of Kaminiitu, Kenya. The play focuses on exploitation and resistance. In South Africa, besides Athol Fugard's *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, a new form of protest drama had evolved, including Maishe Maponye's *Hungry Earth* (1979), *Woza Albert!* (1986), a collaborative work by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. These plays in particular, capture the essence of the anguish of the African and his struggle for survival in the former apartheid South Africa. Others include Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*, and *Opera Wonyonsi*, Kole Omotoso's *The Curse*, and Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*, highlighting in a rather caustic burlesque and comedy respectively, the farce that is African leadership. In this category of African plays, the level of commitment (ideological) varies from playwright to playwright.

### **Rational Drama**

The third group of African plays, rational plays, represents plays that fuse together both cultural and nationalist objectives. For example, rites-of-passage (spi-Ritual) which are integral to African culture essentially foreground Soyinka's nationalist quest for political salvation in both *The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King's Horseman*. Similarly, in a quasi-allegorical manner, Soyinka quests into what might be the future of the young independent African state, Nigeria

(the Half—Child) in *A Dance. of the Forests*. Notable deities in the Yoruba pantheon are actively involved in the dramatic discourse.

### **Neo-Rational Drama**

The fourth group, neo-rational plays, even though made up of plays that draw their materials from African loric tradition to pursue nationalist objectives; it does not follow the usual conventions associated with Wole Soyinka or John Pepper ClarkBekederemo's dramaturgy. This rather "novel" theatrical experience deliberately subverts the essential syntax of cultural beliefs. The crop of playwrights in this category favour Marxist- Socialist ideology not so much for its party dogmatism but in the Brechtian theatrical spirit and mode. The playwrights embark on a programmatic replacement of the orthodox myths, legends, tales and the supernatural forces that peopled the extant world, with a new order of reality and new myths that are capable of serving mankind, not just a privileged class. Even though cultural icons constitute, largely, the raw materials for neo-rational plays, they are deliberately ruptured, demystified, demythified, and made to perform new functions. Culture no longer functions at the level of mundane romanticization of some morbid, moribund values, but is put at the service of the nationalistic quest for political salvation. Femi Osofisan, to whose plays we hope to give exclusive attention later in this chapter, represents this group of playwrights.

The African playwright constantly draws his materials and inspirations from the rich African philosophical hermeneutics and loric tradition. At the same time, since he is exposed to western education, more often than not, up to university level, contemporaly African drama usually benefits from the influences of the western dramatic forms and traditions. The dual exposure of the African playwright has immensely contributed to the rich and unique hybrid form (African and European) of what has now come to be known as modern African drama.

In the light of the above, we shall shortly discuss the basic forms in modern African drama with a view to exploring how some notable African playwrights have exploited the advantages of a dual exposure (to western dramatic concepts and in the African loric tradition) to evolve authentic African dramatic forms.

For our purpose in this study, we shall recognize three broad dramatic forms, viz: conventional African tragedy, conventional African comedy, and Osofisan theatre (which is neither tragedy, although it often comes very close to tragi-comedy, nor is it comedy in a true conventional sense).

It is in the light of these peculiarities, among other things, that we hope to discuss more extensively John Pepper ClarkBekederemo's early attempt at evolving an African tragic form. Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka to a great extent belong to this early school of modern African tragic drama. Therefore, their contributions shall form part of our discussion. The Nigerian Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka's efforts and the Ghanaian Joe de Graft's in the area of African comedy, shall form the basis of our discussion of conventional African comedy, while Femi Osofisan's plays and basic characteristics that distinguish his theatre from conventional African drama shall be given similar attention in the concluding part of this study.

## Lecture Eight

### Modern African Tragedy

**John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo's Thiogy:** *Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade*, *The Raft*.

WE intend, among other things, to locate the tragic form Clark-Bekederemo employed in the three plays, and show how they have contributed to his achievement as a pioneer playwright of modern African tragedy.

Form or structure plays a very significant role in a playwright's re-presentation of life. One perceives a hybrid of influences, first, of the western classical literary canons of Clark-Bekederemo's Ibadan undergraduate years, and second, the pure African traditional hermeneutics (as an Ijaw man) on his carefully constructed trilogy. We conclude therefore that form is, among other things, a veritable decoder and a mirror that reflects Clark-Bekederemo's tragic vision and artistic sensibility. Our choice of the term "trilogy" is more of convenience than in a strict conventional sense. This is regardless of the fact that the plays were published in one single volume, or that the same topicality is pursued and sustained by the same tragic spirit and form, or of observable continuity of setting and characters in two of the three plays. We hope to elaborate on this shortly.

Clark-Bekederemo's dramaturgy in this regard, seems to suggest an unusual innovation in the field of modern African drama: a hybrid of theatricalized indigenous African hermeneutics on the one hand, and on the other hand, the western neo-classical literary tradition: a combination of Aeschylean fatalism (Oyin Ogunba 1977), and Aristotelian moralizing (Robert Wren 1984); a drama that is not so much an action as a poem, typically Eliotan, presenting a spectacle less convincing, less impressive than pitiful Clark-Bekederemo no doubt, far more than T.S. Eliot in *Murder in the Cathedral*, has exploited the resources of the language of verse-drama, particularly in the plays under our present consideration; *Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade* and *The Raft*.

The verse-drama form, which the playwright has perfectly adapted, has its importance and virility reside in so elevated a language as any good religious incantation, suggesting both the thought and the action at the same time. It allows for an ambivalence of language use because of its power to convey both action and thought in a single utterance. In other words, such parameters as Clark-Bekederemo's range of experimentation and, or inventiveness on both language and the adapted verse-drama form have enabled his crucial existential interpretation of man's experience and location in time and space, the African in particular. They also constitute the playwright's bold attempt to evolve a truly modern African tragic drama which, incidentally, was in its formative stage at the time the premiere production of the trilogy hit the Nigerian stage.

We must quickly add here also that each new dramatic form, and or style is neither a total repudiation nor avoidance of the old. Rather, it is the old with added ideas. It is also instructive to note that it is, in deed, in the light of this that recent critical criteria to generic investigation have identified the tragic vision or tragic spirit in recurrent concerns the substance that a play possesses, and not in classical or in Elizabethan, or any such forms.

A playwright like Clark-Bekederemo cannot be regarded as a mere imitator of western dramatic means as critics like Ben Obumelu, Oyin Ogunba, Albert Ashaolu, Clive Wake or Robert Wren would have us believe. Rather, as Ofori Akyea and, lately, Egbe Ifie (1994) have rightly observed, the playwright's ability to weave the world, particularly, his own immediate cultural society with personal eyes and his characteristic traditional Ijaw native moods, has facilitated tremendously, the development of what we may call a unique modern African drama.

A close study of Clark-Bekederemo's Trilogy would readily reveal that the playwright's universe is a calamitous place in which his tragic personae are hardly equal to the demands or challenges. Zifa in *Song of a Goat*, for example, shows inability to bear as much pain as he must suffer. He commits suicide by drowning rather than give in to the pressure of the reality of his universe and admit being less than "a capable husband". Tufa in *The Masquerade* is confronted with the reality of his inability to cope with a world made empty by ethnic apostasy, therefore, in a despairing defiance gives himself up to be shot by an enraged in-law, Dibiri, Titi's father. Similarly, in *The Raft*, Ogro, Kengide, Olotu and Ibobo, experts in their own right, suddenly become incapable of coping with the unusual circumstance they find themselves entangled in.

Although these characters may appear rather isolated, they are by no means significant. Clark-Bekederemo's tragic characters exist in a world that they may not control but which is always aware of them. The playwright's supernatural forces have a touch of universal relativity. They are strikingly similar to those of the classical Greek pantheon; sadistic and therefore, in their wanton insensitiveness, think no more of man than of some nameless insect or plant. Or how does one explain the curse on baby Oedipus, or Zifa's family lineage, the authorial speculative vicissitude notwithstanding? Despite the apparent insensitiveness on the part of the supernatural forces, Clark-Bekederemo's universe remains man-centered. Man, and only man, constitutes its measuring parameter. Nonetheless, man is the object and not the subject of the syntax of actions in the trilogy. Apparently this is a weakness foregrounded by a "weak" ideological disposition, a betrayal of the playwright's low level of commitment, and for which Clark-Bekederemo has not been forgiven by his critics.

Femi Osofisan while using a different dramatic form, neo-rationalist theatre, has attempted a transtextual or intertextual re-presentation of Clark-Bekederemo's play, *The Raft* titled, *Another Raft*, and Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, titled, *No More the Wasted Breed*, among others, to completely humanize the characters by making them the subject, not the object of every syntax of action; real blooded humans capable of determining their destiny, and defining their location in time and space, not in some **exsanguinous??** world, but in a -world of our contemporary reality.

It is in recognition of this fact that we may posit further that Clark-Bekederemo's characteristic tragic persona tends to show a justification, not an accusation of life in which he occurs. For example, the apparent inaction and passivity on the part of Ibobo, Kengide and Olotu on the one hand, and on the other hand, Ogro's egoistic and foolish action, are largely responsible for the cause of the tragedy in *The Raft*. Zifa's rejection of a more realistic solution to his embattled virility, in other words, his refusal to accept the truth of his reality is a primary factor in the tragedy in *Song of a Goat*. Zifa, in particular, is a man given to taking actions the least advantageous to him, his hubris perhaps. We may, therefore, conclude that the tragic characters in the Trilogy to a great extent, do merit their respective fate and justify the ways of the supernatural forces.

In the light of this assertion, Clark-Bekederemo, no doubt, is able to bring some meaning and justice to the recognizable phenomenon however uncongenial and harsh the justice or the



meaning might be, considering the weight of the punishment with just one wrong step. William Van O' Connor (W43) a theorist has expressed some doubts on the possibilities of tragedy in the modern age. He skeptically opines:

If a glance at individualism in [classical] Greece and Elizabethan England indicates serious defects in our [modern] society one at least is this: individualism has been either unrestricted or all but totally repressed. There has been no sustained effort to cultivate restricted individualism that in its flowering rises above mind to spirit. Dramatic tragedy has not flourished in any other soil. (3)

If O' Connor's submission is anything to go by, most African playwrights in Clark-Bekederemo's school of tragedy including Wole Soyinka and Ola Rotimi, have fared relatively well under O' Connor's pontification, regardless of his pessimistic outburst. Clark-Bekederemo, for example, has chosen a "suitable" tragic subsoil, that is, restricted individualism. His characteristic tragic personae do certainly have "freedom", but such freedom as is determined, defined, modified or limited by both personal tragic flaws (hubris), as well as external forces. The external forces include the interference of inexplicable or supernatural forces, and societal forces represented in society's ethics or moral codes, or direct involvement of member(s) of the persona's society. These forces are all present in the Trilogy. As a matter of fact, the supernatural forces are made to assume more or less, the status of an active persona in *The Raft*. For example the raft, as well as the four occupants are already ill fated before the journey begins. The Trilogy provokes in the audience the sense of incommunicable depths of personality.

Another theorist on tragedy, Richard B. Swell (1959), is of the opinion that another central criterion for a true tragedy is that tragic conflicts should remain not in a resolvable form but rather in an unresolved ambiguous tension. If therefore, three or so decades of academic writing about Clark-Bekederemo has given us nothing else, we at least, have an assumed impression that he is a playwright of ideas who attempts to convince his audience of the adequacy, if not the superiority of his "divine" justice. But even in his Trilogy, Clark-Bekederemo handles his materials in a way that puts his idea under constant pressure. These ideas are couched in powerful irony, and are often proved false by the contexts within which they are made to occur, or sometimes contradicted by the very resolution of the plays.

Furthermore, going by the playwright's African cultural inclinations and intellectual consistency in his Trilogy, many of his critics have concluded that he is a pessimist, while others have described him as an Aeschylean fatalist. Clark-Bekederemo's quest primarily tends towards a rather universal skepticism about the meaning of, and the difference between bad and good, but which even in *Song of a Goat* remains unresolved.

The implicit optimism in this speculation is eloquently qualified by the fact that innocent and worthy persons like Tufa and Titi can be unwittingly discarded, murdered by an irate father, Diribi, in the course of the duo's effort at presumably attainable happy and fruitful married life through inter-tribal marriage. In other words, Clark-Bekederemo's tragic vision is informed by the positive implications of his total worldview, not by his characters' awareness and experiences as we usually find in classical tragedies. Therefore, though the Trilogy could be described as having genuine tragic values, the playwright's view of man's fate, no doubt, falls rather short of the full tragic affirmation to qualify as classical, Elizabethan or neo-classical tragedy. Rather, it has cut a distinct African identity for its unique hybrid form.

Again, some modern theorists have emphasized depth or intensity as a fundamental characteristic in the tragic persona. They further insisted that unless the persona can feel deeply and, at the same time, unless the playwright is capable of making his audience acknowledge that the tragic persona feels deeply and carries his suffering with conviction, the audience is not likely to be involved enough to grasp the nature and the circumstance which inform the syntax of action of the tragic character. But this does not necessarily advocate for tragedy of character over tragedy of plot or tragedy of circumstance. In Clark-Bekederemo's Trilogy, however, the intensity of the tragic personae is hardly given consideration. A common linkage is traceable in the Trilogy. For example, characterization (by proxy) in *Song of a Goat* and *The Masquerade* and the setting are common to the three plays. They seem to add a complementary dimension to the three plays for a balanced tragic realization. In essence, *Song of a Goat* is best considered under tragedy of character, *The Masquerade* under tragedy of circumstance, and *The Raft* under tragedy of plot.

Thus, the Trilogy can be distinguished by its display of a comprehensive understanding of the traditional African tragic spirit, its use of powerful symbols and symbolism, its sophisticated use of traditional folkloric materials and its choice of milieu(x) considered compatible with the intriguing momentousness of tragedy in the three plays.

Despite the encouraging number of studies on Clark-Bekederemo's tragedy, and the effort to relate the playwright to orthodox views of tragedy, viz: neo-classical, Elizabethan, African, and naturalistic, much of his dramaturgical coastline has been left unexplored or even unnoticed. Such contributions of critics like Oyin Ogunba (1977), Albert Ashaolu (1978), Robert M. Wren (1984) and Egbe Ifie (1991 and 1994), are enlightening and stimulating, but of rather partial assistance in having a comprehensive understanding and in appreciating the significance or effects of the playwright's management of form on his Trilogy. In other words, the various contributions so far have indicated the general qualities of Clark-Bekederemo's dramaturgy but have failed to deal specifically with the finer features of form which ultimately determined the unique effect it has on the playwright's audience.

Clark-Bekederemo is an experimenter to the degree that he pioneered the efforts at evolving a truly modern African tragedy. His existentialist presentation of man's station in life: as man stranded in a stream of sorrow punctuated by cataracts and falls of momentary joy, coupled with his exploratory approach are the ingrained reaction to the playwright's universe. An artist who recognizes his estranged or alienating vision, whose insight into the individual's life carries his audience beyond the four walls of the theatre; and whose organizing form and motif facilitate the rustic or near-infantile sincerity and simplicity of his interpretation and meaning of the world, his society and man, as he understands or perceives them. In other words, the playwright's authority of language and variety of topicalities in his Trilogy suggest on the one hand, a conscious experimentation with, and exploitation of, the resources of technique and form, and on the other hand, they exhibit an inherent quality of mind made possible through the playwright's exclusive choice of an emerging African tragic form.

Furthermore, Clark-Bekederemo uses a common or dominant aesthetic feature and/or organizing motif that informs the peculiar quality of tragedy in the three plays. Therefore, the playwright's chosen form tends to produce an imposed predictable effect that suggests, among other things, his ability to manipulate the attention of his audience to the crucial conflicts in the Trilogy. It is instructive to note, however, that one perceives an unusual rigidity, artificiality of experimented form in Clark-Bekederemo's subtle exploration of form and concept for modern African tragedy. His *Ibadan, and later Parvin years* (Robert Wren 1984), coupled with his

unique cultural background as a thorough-bred Ijaw, are essential informing factors that facilitated his ability to artistically weave such elements as pure traditional African philosophical hermeneutics in *Song of a Goat* and *The Masquerade*, and political history in *The Raft* into a powerful lexical and syntactic matrix which has largely remained more or less the same in Ozidi, and his post-Trilogy plays, *All for Oil* in particular.

In other words, the Trilogy contains formal classical devices and it is structured in a rather strained or mechanically imposed manner. It is, no doubt, obvious that Clark-Bekederemo did put himself to particular, as well as foreign tasks in an attempt to bring out some hybrid form of modern African tragedy. His success in this regard can be better measured in terms of the vitality and uniqueness his concept of modern African tragic form is associated with.

Even though the tragic personae neither possess nor command the expected intensity and self-awareness, their respective experiences have a relative universality. For instance, there are fundamental posers on man's relationship with the universe he must live in, and with other persons who, in terms of social relations, constitute his link with humanity. These fundamental questions and the quest for appropriate answers are explored in the three plays with the maturity of a traditional African philosophical mind. In these plays, tragic vision is directed at a closely-knit series of relatively slim episodes.

Suffice it to state also that the seemingly apparent conventionality gains prominence only if an attempt is not made to distinguish the shades of structural boundary. If, however, the characters are made to operate within Clark-Bekederemo's linguistic framework of his plays' hybrid form (traditional African and Western), then his direct and cathartic representation(s) of the suffering that man inflicts on other men and on himself can be appreciated. This is because the shades of structural boundary constituting the integrated forms help to create an almost substantial tragic universe which has since been identified with modern African tragic drama.

Clark-Bekederemo's Trilogy is perhaps best approached as the work of a scholar and an innovator at the same time. The playwright is also not uncritical in the transplantation of borrowed materials, as chairman Mao Tse Tung (1977) rightly advised in his famous Yena Forum Lecture on Literature. John Pepper Clark Bekederemo like his contemporaries- Wole Soyinka in his adapted *The Bacchae of Euripides* and, Ola Rotimi in *The Gods Are not to Blame*, an adaptation of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, - knew what to accept from the western classical or neo-classical tradition and how to incorporate these borrowings into a unique vital structure that constitutes modern African tragic form.

The setting which is common to the three plays is both metaphysical and suggestive. Similarly, the interaction of plot, character, and allusions are so skilfully managed that the plays successfully follow classical precedents and yet stand independently as a truly African tragedy. In the light of this, the basic plot situation in *Song of a Goat*, *The Masquerade* and *The Raft* which places emphasis on the multiple-tragic personae in the course of the heroes' tragic end, is patently existentialist. In addition, the plot derives from the vision that places man against man like we have in *Song of a Goat* and *The Masquerade*, or individual against the universe, as is the case in *The Raft*, with nothing for him to rely upon outside himself.

Even though two quite different structural features dominate the Trilogy, the result has not produced an aesthetic disharmony or chaos. Rather, it has produced an intriguing coherence, a remarkable unity. The thrust of these conjoined different structures in bringing about the demonstration of the universality of the tragic action is largely responsible for this apparent aesthetic harmony. Thus, tragedy and the idea of socioeconomic concern in a post-colonial Nigerian state develop together and foreground *The Raft*; similarly, the idea of tragic cycle is

observable in Zifa/Tonye and continues in Tufa/Titi in *The Masquerade*, even long after the former duet had completed its term within the cycle.

Finally, we must emphasize that in his quest for a truly modern African tragic form, Clark-Bekederemo has succeeded in striking a balance between the pathetic and the tragic. The atomization of tragic qualities among the tragic personae in the Trilogy makes the plays a stimulating experiment in form and different set of values in the true African sense. In essence, the Trilogy, because of its exploratory nature which is open to tentativeness and in some cases, to self-contradiction in the style or the adoption or formulation of traditional material and the subsequent communicated ideas, marks an essential beginning in the emergent modern African tragic drama.

The result of all this is that Clark-Bekederemo's choice of technique appears as a fundamental element inseparable from the conception of reality within the three plays. Furthermore, the significance of the atomization of tragic qualities, as earlier pointed out, is a conscious probative effort on the part of the playwright to emphasize the boundary-lessness or classlessness of the African tragic spirit as opposed to its western classical or Elizabethan counterpart. In addition, the playwright's adherence to some classical conventionalities like the classical unities, etc., notwithstanding, each of the three plays is, on the whole, only barely related to the classical precepts of tragic example. At the same time, the plays are less dependent upon audience expectations for their tragic effectiveness.

If in the words of De La Taille (1939:24) tragedy "is a form and kind of poetry which aims at the utmost elegance, beauty and perfection..." then Clark-Bekederemo, no doubt, has succeeded in achieving real tragic power in contemporary African theatre- the kind of tragic power and influence wielded by Sophocles in classical Greece, Shakespeare in Elizabethan England, and Corneille in "classical" France.

On modern African tragic form, we shall conclude with a brief discussion of two classic African tragic plays which are representative of the complex influence of western dramatic culture. These are Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, and Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides*. The two plays as earlier indicated are adaptations of classical Greek tragic drama: Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, and Euripides' *The Bucchae*, respectively. However, the African versions of the two classical Greek dramas represent some African playwrights' efforts at a deliberate reworking of the plays of other cultures, and through which has evolved a truly African tragic form. Suffice it to state that African plays in the bracket of adapted plays are not just complementary, but serve as alternative options to those of the Clark-Bekederemo school in the quest for an authentic contemporary African dramatic form(s). This is so because while Clark-Bekederemo school casts African traditional loric materials employing, in part, western dramatic mode(s), those African playwrights that we consider as belonging to the alternative options recast materials (plays) of other cultural dramatic subsoil, using in part, African loric, or dramatic culture. It is interesting to note, however, that the direction in either case has always pointed towards the same accomplishable goal - a dramatic form (tragedy, comedy, etc.) that is essentially African.

Translation, transposition and adaptation of plays from one culture to another, as rightly observed by Michael Etherton (:1982), have been endemic in European drama. These also some African playwrights have adopted in their bold attempt to rework the plays other cultures. This, in our opinion, and for many reasons, is a welcome development. Beside the fact that it manifests cultural dynamism, it is a veritable historical process which guarantees the survival of the 'text'

(play). Etherton further identifies five areas of possible changes which are fundamental to the effective adaptation of a dramatic text from one culture to the other:

1. The names of people, place and titles may be changed, as, for example, in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*, based on Sophocles's *King Oedipus*, where Oedipus becomes Odewale, the Greek city of Thebes become Kutuje, and all other names are given Yoruba equivalents;
2. The period or setting may be changed, as for example, in *Everyman* where the late medieval European town of the mid-fifteenth century becomes Oshogbo, a Yoruba town in the 1960s.
3. The framework, or context, may be changed, as, for example, when Sophocles's third play in his Theban trilogy, *Antigone*, becomes a play done by two political prisoners, Kani and Ntshona, on Robben Island, South Africa, in *The Island* by Athol Fugard.
4. The story may be changed: Soyinka introduces the slave leader as an important new character in his reworking of Euripides' *The Bacchae*, which he calls *The Bacchae of Euripides*;
5. The themes may be changed: for example the inexorability of fate becomes instead the issue of personal culpability in Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. (pp. 103-4).

Translation and transposition, we must emphasize, represent the two different levels of adaptation. While the former is a rendering of the original play as accurately as possible in the translator's choice of language without losing its dramatic quality, the latter is a re-definition of the original play's dramatic qualities in terms of theatre audiences in the transposer's choice of society. Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* and Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* belong to the latter.

#### **Ola Rotimi: *The Gods Are Not To Blame***

The play begins with a prologue. A narrator gives an account of the arrival of a new baby boy into the royal house of King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola, as well as the jubilation and festivity that follow. The narrator informs the audience of the despair, the gloom that follow the prophecy on the mission of the ill-fated child: to kill his father and marry his mother; how the plan to halt the life mission of the baby is quickly hatched and implemented through Gbonka. The narrator again expresses the great joy that greets the arrival of another baby boy Aderopo, to the royal house, a few years later. All the actions are in mime with subdued lighting alternating with a bright one, subdued drumming alternating with a loud one for stage effect (lighting and sound) for the purpose of suggesting the different moods of joy, fear, gloom, despair or hope.

Odewale arrives at the scene, taking over from the narrator. He informs the audience of the very long journey he has made to arrive at Kutuje land; how he successfully mobilizes the Kutuje people against the Ikolu (the attackers, in Yoruba) people, and for his reward, how he is made King, even though against tradition. Odewale now as the King of Kutuje, and husband of

Queen Ojuola, the wife of the deceased King Adetusa proudly displays the children Queen Ojuola has for him. Again, we must point out the playwright's effective use of doubling: the dancers also, through chants and dances enact the war which Odewale successfully prosecutes against the Ikolu people. The happiness of the royal household is not to last, however.

The play proper opens with some strange plague afflicting the land of Kutuje. People troop to the place to seek King Odewale's help for solution to the unusual plague. King Odewale is presented as a truly practical man. A devoted and caring king, a good leader of the people. As soon as the cause of the pestilence is revealed, he promises to go to any length to fish out the killer of the former king, Adetusa.

However, despite his many virtues and likeable qualities, King Odewale has his ugly side too. He has his tragic flaw and to which he is grossly culpable. According to Ola Rotimi in one of the earliest interviews he granted Ulli Beier on the play:

Here is a man who feels uneasy because he has been made King of a community he does not consider his own, ethnically. This realization and sense of insecurity drive him to excesses. He has already killed someone who had derided his mother tongue: "I can bear insult to my person, brother," he says in the flashback scene, "but to call my tribe bush, and then summon riff-raff to mock my mother tongue! I will die first." This is a tragic flaw in him. In the end, he discovers that he is in fact a prominent part of that community, that very ethnic group which he has long suspected of tribal treachery against him. He could have found out his true identity earlier, had he trusted the intentions of the chiefs around him. Eventually, when he does realize who he really is, it is too late...

In other words, tribalism and not cholera, as previously argued by critics, in the opinion of the playwright, is the tragic weakness of King Odewale. But then, tribalism is something curable, given the right approach. This possibility makes such a weakness like tribalism less than tragic, in so far as it is curable, even though in Nigeria it has brought the country untold tragic consequences. Tribalism is taught and therefore man-made. In essence, society can be re-taught true patriotism and brotherly love in order to foster national unity. We are not sure we can do the same thing about a real tragic flaw. It is not man-made and it is innate, therefore it cannot be reordered or changed through man's will. To this end, Ola Rotimi's understanding of a tragic flaw, particularly as tribalism in King Odewale is unconvincing, regardless of whether or not King Odewale confesses it before his "kinsman", Alaka.

Similarly, tribalism could not have been responsible for King Odewale's rudeness to the revered institution of Ifa represented by Baba Fakunle; or even his rejection of the wise counsel of Aderopo who suggests to Odewale that the message from the oracle in Ile-Ife had better be delivered to him in privacy; or his uncontrollable cholera against his "kinsman" Alaka, who merely states the fact of his parenthood. A more cultured person no matter how highly placed, is likely to handle Baba Fakunle with extreme caution for the unusual behaviour of the old man, and not rush to a conclusion. It will be recalled that King Odewale does not accuse the old man of tribalism, but of corruption. He suspects Baba Fakunle to have taken a bribe from the

presumed murderers of King Adetusa. Furthermore, a more prudent person is likely to take Aderopo's cue, or probably dismiss Alaka's "reckless" statement about his parenthood.

It is therefore obvious from the above that Ola Rotimi has not succeeded in creating a tragic hero that is quite distinct from the original Greek hero, Oedipus. The playwright's conscious attempt to pin down King Odewale's tragic flaw on tribalism alone, if at all, is not tenable, is illogical and unacceptable. Therefore, both Oedipus Rex and King Odewale are highly choleric, irreverent, proud and intransigent, and in the case of the latter, tribalistic.

Another notable point of controversy often expressed by some critics regarding the problem of transposition in Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*, is the Yoruba concept of 'pre-destination' or, simply put, 'destiny'. Critics including Michael Etherton (1982:124) consider destiny to be synonymous with 'fate'. They are of the opinion that it is very unthinkable and, therefore, un-Yoruba that the Ifa Oracle which is the last resort could ever fail to provide a solution to any problem "under the sky", and that unlike the Greek Olympian pantheon (Zeus, Apollo, etc.) whose divinities pursue vendettas against each other (sic) and against mortals, the Yoruba gods are not capricious..." (125)

We shall attempt to rest this controversy once and for all. We must correct first, the general impression that fate is synonymous with destiny or pre-destination in a true Yoruba sense. Fate as a concept does exist in the Yoruba worldview, and so does destiny or pre-destination. A pre-destination which is strictly negative and unfavourable is a high level of fate, but that which is positive and quite favourable is not fate. Fate connotes doom, something deadly. Fate therefore, to the Yoruba mind, is more usually an imposed curse on a person or family lineage. The curse could have been mere mischievous vendetta. In which case the rightness or the wrongness of such a curse is, indeed, immaterial. This is the case with King Odewale, which we shall return to later. In a case of this nature, the Ifa Oracle the medium of Orunmila, the divinity who, according to Bolaji Idowu (1977) serves

as witness of all secrets connected with man's being and as one who is in a position to plead with Olodumare on behalf of man so that unhappy issues may be averted or rectified. (77)

Bolaji Idowu opines further on why man should adopt Orunmila as his divinity;

to make sure that his happy lot is preserved or in order that an unhappy lot may be rectified. One of his (Orunmila) appellations is smaller Okitibiri, a-pa-ojo-ikuda "The great changer, who alters the date of death" (77)

A consultation with Ifa is bound not only to reveal the source and nature of one's fate but also recommends the appropriate propitiation (sacrifice) as solution.

From Bolaji Idowu's submission, two major points are very clear: that good fortune can be altered by some mischievous force (often through the employment of witchcraft, etc); that it is possible to preserve good fortune or change fate (or misfortune), or "bad lot" to a "good lot" through the assistance of Orunmila divinity. In other words, fate at this level is alterable. A .1 example outside Yoruba culture is the Biblical Jabesh whose parents had brought upon him at birth a bad lot as indicated in his name. Through prayer and supplication to God his fate was reversed to fortune.

Predestination or destiny to the Yoruba mind is a little different from the nature of fate we have described above. By the very nature of destiny, according to Bolaji Idowu (1977), it is unalterable, especially as it has been doubly sealed, i.e. in the act of its conferment and finally at the “gate” (175). Idowu explains further:

It appears, then, that there is nothing anybody can do about it henceforth (175).

Destiny is that which man chooses by his free volition in the pre-life existence before Olodumare (God) who seals it and is also confessed at the “gate” between the heaven and the earth. Hence the double seals. The Yoruba say: “A-kánLe-yàn ni à-d’dyJ ba”, that- which-is-chosen-kneeling is that-which-is-our-lot-on-getting-to-the- world.

In the strict sense of Yoruba belief, destiny is unalterable and no sacrifice can change it, however horrible. It informs the saying: “Ayànmò’ o gbdgun” i.e. No ritual, no medicine, nothing a man can do can change his own destiny. The unalterability, however, should be understood from the point of view of the man desiring a change of his own destiny. Because he is the principal factor in the choice of his own destiny, a principal party to the decision and agreement on his own destiny of which Olodumare is the second party, and the keeper of the “gate” the crown witness. “Ayànrno” or kàdàrd’ that is, destiny can, however, be altered by agents of evil forces by sheer vendetta, provided Olodumare permits as He often does. Contrary to Bolaji Idowu’s assertion, this is the belief of the Yoruba:

In the Odu which is called Ogbe-Ate, there is mentioned in this connection one Labode, omo Otunba: -Labode, the son of Otunba... “It is said that the whole world will do their best to thwart him; but the chief-in-Heaven will keep blessing him” (175)

The above instance is a case where “Ajalarun” (or Olodumare) - the “Lord of the heavenly host/army” does not permit the evil forces to prevail (on Labode). Instances abound where Olodumare permits evil forces to change man’s destiny. In an Ekiti “Oriki ale ule” (a family praise-chant) by Omoboyode Arowa, one of the Yoruba Festival chants recorded by Oyin Ogunba in the mid-1970s, reference is made to a mythic-legend, Awoyasosi, who ordinarily was destined to favourable times as a warlord but some evil force changed all that to a bad lot, so he met his untimely death by drowning while escaping from a lost battle:

Me a sàré Awóyàsosi li temi  
Ojó ki mo sàréAwóyàsosi  
Se ni mo wemiwemi I’Igede.

May I not run the Awoyasosi Race  
The day I ran the race of Awoyasosi,  
I swam endlessly.

This is why the Yoruba pray: Kayé ma pa kàdàra mi da: May the powers of the world not change my destiny. This belief that some forces are capable of changing man’s “kádàrá” or destiny is not



limited to the Yoruba rate. In the Bible, God granted the request of Satan to deal with Job and for that period of Job's trials, his destiny was changed, even though God later reversed it.

We therefore suspect a problem in the way Ola Rotimi handles the issue of pre-destination in his transposed play. Since there is no clue suggesting that King Odewale is responsible for the choice of patricide and incest in his pre-life existence, and, since there are enough reasons pointing to the fact that it is an imposed curse by the gods (or some malevolent supernatural forces), it is sheer vendetta, fate, and therefore alterable. It is un-Yoruba to suggest that Orunmilà cannot proffer solution(s) to King Odewale's problem. However, if King Odewale's fate is consequent upon his own personal choice of an unfavourable destiny in his pre-life existence, then, Rotimi is right to have incapacitated Orunmilà. But there are no grounds to suspect this.

Also we quite appreciate the fact that if Ola Rotimi has "empowered" Orunmilà to solve King Odewale's fate-problem which, traditionally, is quite possible and in order, then the play could have ended there, technically. Ola Rotimi has a duty to ensure that he pursues his artistic vision to a logical conclusion. He is neither a historian nor an anthropologist, he is an artist, a creator, and therefore, not bound by the pedagogy and details of a historian or a traditionalist. This is where the meaning and/or significance of the play becomes relevant in this study. We must, however, add that we have chosen to discuss these seemingly minor issues here because they are vital to the overall understanding of the play.

When the play was first produced by the playwright in 1968 at the Oriolokun Cultural Centre in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, it had a mixed reception. One of the earliest interviews the playwright had granted was quite revealing. He had highlighted the factors that prompted his writing of the play. The prevailing circumstance which informed the play was the raging civil war (1967-1970) in Nigeria. Foreign powers like America, Russia, France, England, etc., were cotidemned for their diabolical role in the thirty-month civil war. It was this insinuation, among others, that Ola Rotimi had reacted to with the title, *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. The gods, in this case, are not the African mythological or mystic deities; rather, they allude to the international political powers that dictate the pace of world political affairs.

As far as Ola Rotimi is concerned, these forces are not to blame for the civil war which caused an unprecedented loss of lives and property. Instead, the playwright locates the root cause in Nigeria's "lingering mutual ethnic distrust which culminated in open hostility. The frightening ogre of tribalism stirs in almost every form of our national life." Ola Rotimi had opined that, so long as this was allowed to continue and disharmony flippantly incited, so long should the external powers remain inculpable for seizing upon Nigeria's ethnic and tribal disunity for their own exploitative interests. As it was then, so it is now. In other words, there is no use looking for scapegoats for faults that were, and still are, ours and so we conclude our study of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. Other matters regarding a comparative analysis of this play and its Greek original, etc. have been concisely discussed in one of the early chapters.

### **Wole Soyinka: *The Bacchae* of Euripides**

Wole Soyinka's play which is based on Euripides's *The Bacchae* is not just a transposed play the way we seem to understand Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not Blame*. Rather it is a bold attempt to rework the Greek original with a touch of Africanness which is informed by a definitive sense of social commitment. The Africanness, in this case, necessarily widens the scope of references beyond the classical Greek world and her pantheon to embrace Africa and her cosmology. It enhances and enriches the quality of the play's level, and use, of symbolism. New epic similes

are introduced which embrace the African pantheon in addition to its Greek counterpart. On the whole, Soyinka succeeds in creating another original play from the Greek original, even though it is still about a Greek god, Dionysus.

Soyinka's version is thematically preoccupied with the universal need for the complete emancipation of man. What triggers off the dramatic action is the revenge being sought by Dionysus for the injury done to his name and, particularly, the quest to save his mother's fame:

Thebes taint me with bastardy. I am turned into an alien, some foreign outgrowth of her habitual tyranny.

The plight of Thebeans as well as, the tyranny under reference is amplified by the slaves' cry for justice. It is instructive to note that Soyinka's version introduces the slave leader, an important character which is not in the Greek original. The conflict in the play necessarily transcends that between a divinity who fights for the right of the Thebeans and a tyrant.

The Greek original shows Dionysus as a ruthless god seeking personal vengeance. But Soyinka introduces modern sociological dimensions, thereby making the play more relevant and meaningful to the present. Dionysus is made to "flush the long parched throats of men and release their joy. This sacrament of life". Soyinka for reasons of social commitment, among others makes the slaves, the slave leader and Bacchantes play leading roles. The slave leader smells freedom in the abundance of nature with wine hanging with fruits like "the breasts of the wives of Kponos." The playwright then introduces the feast of Eleusis expressing and exposing the tyranny of the oppressive government. But in the Greek version, Euripides does not seem to see anything good in the Dionysian worship. The theme of oppression is rather implicit.

Soyinka as a satirist condemns Greek civilization which fails to give equal treatment or opportunity to her citizens. Every year, slaves are offered as sacrifice for the purpose of cleansing "the new year of the rot of the old, or the world will die". But despite these sacrifices involving the killing of slaves, the slaves do not gain anything in return. Greek civilization does not recognize nor attach any importance to the lives of slaves. They are not regarded as feeling beings, people with flesh and blood, real human beings. But the society is proved wrong. The slaves prove to be human beings with feelings and a conscience. Even though they are slaves and strangers, they prove to know "the meaning of madness". They do have human compassion which their masters lack.

Furthermore the playwright deliberately dilutes Dionysus' hypnotism through his use of the symbolic communion cup as the primary source of Pentheus's mystification which facilitates the shifting of emphasis away from Dionysus' total mystic power. By this act, the power or essence of wine is brought to the fore: that wine, "lightens all burdens" and "that wine makes man see reason". Therefore, it is only then Pentheus begins to see the danger in Dionysus. Even the victorious Dionysus is not fully happy about his victory over Pentheus.

Imagery, particularly the use of symbolism, is very significant to the understanding of the play. For instance the use of symbolism has a universal dimension and it is closely knitted into the theme which is informed by the motif of scapegoatism. The first symbolic element is the Christ's figure. This on the whole puts Dionysus in Soyinka's play on a universal pedestal. In the two wedding scenes, the fate of Dionysus' past and future is graphically represented. The Dionysus fawn skin of the bridegroom, regardless of its scantiness, horrifies the aristocrats who cannot comprehend nature. Similarly, the second wedding scene clearly shows the traditional Christ figure with halo of the Dionysian thorn-crown. This is in contrast with the awesome mask

of the bride in the first scene. The mask of the woman anointing the feet of the Christlike figure (re-Mary Magdalene in the Bible) is beautiful and, more importantly, radiates eternal peace. Again, trouble is averted by the Christ-like figure who improvises wine at the wedding. This alludes to Jesus Christ's miracle at Cana of Galilee where He turned water to wine because there was no more wine and the celebrants were extremely worried. Closely linked with the use of symbolism is the theme of scape-goatism. This is more or less a universal theme, too, with antecedents in Greece and Africa. Therefore, the feast of Eleusis readily comes handy. One suspects that Soyinka has found something interesting and, perhaps, an answer to the quest of political salvation. In some parts of Africa, the carrier (-hero) has always provided the safety valve; his voluntary sacrifice serves as a life-sustaining tank for the whole society. It is a situation where an individual chooses to die in place of the entire society.

It is, therefore, not unlikely that Soyinka recognizes this apparent universal relativity and or correspondence in both classical Greek and traditional African cultures. In other words, Soyinka seems to suggest that there is need for individuals to volunteer and help save the dying world not by human rituals and sacrifices, but through self-determination and a daring promethean spirit to confront and pull down the stronghold of all agents and forces militating against man's progress: imperialists and exploiters both international and local, including home-grown tyrants. This, to our mind, is what has informed Wole Soyinka's human rights activities over the years. It is a different matter altogether whether or not he succeeds. Our problem with the monomental hero being suggested by Soyinka is the tendency for the society to put its destiny in the hands of an individual instead of making it a collective responsibility, the task of working at the society's salvation. It is a risk the people in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* take and are disappointed.

Suffice it to add also that this theme is similarly pursued in his characterisation of Eman (*The Strong Breed*), Elesin-oba (*Death and the King's Horseman*), and Pentheus (*The Bacchae of Euripides*). In other words, Eman, Elesin-Oba or his son Olunde C?), and Pentheus are seen as sacrificial goats. Dionysus declares, while referring to Pentheus;

You alone made sacrifice for your people,  
You alone the role belongs to a king like  
These gods, who yearly must rent to  
Spring anew, that also to the fate of heroes.

Therefore like every intention of a rite-of-passage, Soyinka's sacramental dimension recognizes the sacrifice as a re-generation process in which the society essentially experiences a rebirth, or a new life.

**Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo: *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi***

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Micere Mugo and Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a deliberate effort by the two playwrights at deconstructing the existing mutilated history of the liberation struggle of the Kenyan people against imperialism in the pre-independence Kenya setting. No doubt, before the writing of the play the intention of the Maji-Maji and Mau-Mau liberation struggles had been cruelly distorted and falsified by western historians and their African adherents. This was deliberately so in their bid to justify their imperialistic occupation of Kenya. It is in the light of this that Ngugi and Mugo choose not to see the seeming setback and temporary failure in the course of the people's struggles as a lamentable dead-end. Rather they consider it as a challenge

that is capable of generating a philosophical catalyst that can possibly bring the struggles to the anticipated successful end. The moving spirit of the liberation struggles artistically represented in the play under reference is Dedan Kimathi. To some, including Ngugi and Mugo, he is more of a legend, justifiably raised to a mythical pedestal ... 'Kimathi will never die (Preface); a kind of mors mortis philosophy. Ngugi and Mugo commenting on the source of the materials for the play declare:

(It is) an imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement. (Preface)

What we however consider to be of interest in this regard is neither the issue of the horrors of colonialism nor the pains of liberation struggles of the Africans against imperialism. Ralph Ellison for example, in his essay *The World And The Jug*, (1964) opines:

It takes fortitude to be a man and no less to be an artist... a Negro writer's work depends upon how much of his life the individual writer is able to transform into art. What moves a writer to eloquence is less meaningful... than what he makes of it (44, our emphasis)

Therefore, what is of immediate relevance to us in this play is not so much the thematic preoccupations of the co-playwrights, since there are many existing African works in virtually all the generic forms which have dealt with similar topicality. Rather, we are thrilled by both the social and artistic sensibility of the playwrights: the art-history connection and their use of artistic devices to bring about a new and refracted form of drama.

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is a further confirmation of the fact that life is indeed chaotic but art is orderly. Therefore, out of the chaos of real life, the playwrights have succeeded in creating a well, patterned and artistically organized fictional world. They are able to devolve formal techniques and principles of organization which in turn, engender a much more intelligible exploration of human experience, as well as a crystallization of a deep insight into human life, society and nature. All these are silhouetted against man's desire for freedom and self-determination, and his resistance and promethean courage against every clog in the wheel of his desire.

The court scene at the opening of the play is followed by the brief flashbacks on the history of the Black Man. This is a necessary exposition of the apprehensions and horrors of colonialism and, or imperialism in the first three phases. The brief flash-forward in the fourth phase is an artistic representation of the immediate future struggles for liberation. It must be emphasized too that the detailed stage directions and techniques throw a great deal of light on the topicality of the play, as well as confirm both Ngugi and Mugo as great dramatists, stage directors and stage technicians. The effect of this rounded theatrics becomes evident in the terse, incisive style, the mythic structure and the sophisticated coordination of the three Movements in the play, all of which help to lead the action briskly and inevitably to a convincing climax. At the same time they help, to a great extent, to indexicate the playwrights' wealth of complex

imagination and their deep insights into individual and social psychology. To this end, Kimathi, the 'central' figure in the play, is deliberately and continuously juxtaposed between his physical essence and what he actually symbolizes, the moving spirit of an otherwise most resilient people (Femi Osofisan, 1982:7)

Kimathi believes, like his 'creators' in this play, Ngugi and Mugo, that the world is changeable and the problems of his people can be overcome through dogged determination, and armed resistance against imperialism and colonialism (external) and its home-grown agents (internal). This is with a view to building a strong and egalitarian society, a society meant for all and of equal opportunity. We are further informed in the Preface to the play that 'Kimathi never fought in that war'; rather, "(he) evolved his brilliant guerilla tactics and his enormous organizing capacity from the needs of the struggle."

Kimathi in the play transcends his physical limitations. He assumes the position of the ideal revolutionary, and yet an omnipresent spirit, a philosophical realm similar to Caesarism in William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Therefore, just as Caesarism equips the friends of Caesar with strong and determined optimism, it disarms the conspirators of their initial courage, haunting them with predictable failure and an inevitable tragic end.

In the same manner, Kimathism, an evolved mythological philosophy equips the disciples of Dedan Kimathi with a strong, never-say-die-spirit, ever optimistic of a victorious end. At the same time Kimathism sends a nerve-racking fear down the spines of the enemy of the people, the British imperialists. It informs the latter's desperate bid to destroy the physical Kimathi as we are made to observe in the court and prison trials. What the enemy fails to recognize is the fact that should Kimathi be physically destroyed by them, as was the case of Julius Caesar, his spirit shall keep marching on to victory in those that keep on with the liberation struggles. Shakespeare rightly identifies the attribute of the human spirit in the following lines in his play, Julius Caesar:

Nor stony tower; nor walls of beaten brass, nor airless  
dungeon, nor stony links of iron, Can be retentive to the  
strength of spirit... (Cassius 1. iii)

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is structurally divided into three main movements. The first Movement introduces us to a colonized society of black people, pauperized, and discriminated against - a police state of some sort. We are made to catch a glimpse of the prevalent political unrest: clashes between the forces of the settlers and the guerillas whose leader is standing trial. We also encounter 'BOY' and 'GIRL' in their rustic mental state. The 'BOY's encounter with 'WOMAN' gradually jogs the former to self-realization that consequently enables him in the last two Movements to acquire a more realistic perception of reality. The omnipresent voice of 'WOMAN' declares:

The day you'll ask yourself... what can I do that another  
shall not die under such grisly circumstances... that day  
you'll become a man, my son (22)

The moment he forgets and does anything contrary to the instructions of 'WOMAN', 'BOY' usually feels; "as though she (WOMAN) is watching me admonishing me. I feel so ashamed" (41)

It boils down to suggest that for one's desires, aspirations, perceptions to be meaningful or purposeful, one must know who he is (Ralph Ellison 1964) This is a necessary step to self-reclamation and psychic retrieval of the subconscious perception of reality. On the question of identity and consciousness, Chinweizu in an interview conducted by G.G. Darah, warns:

In our mad rush for what we are being told is (literary) development, the role of literature gets either forgotten or slighted even by literary professors in the Universities.. .what we need to bear in mind is that in so far as literature is crucial in shaping the mentality of a people, it is crucial in shaping their identity. Therefore... we may be transforming ourselves into things we may not like to be if we don't recognize who we are and what our historical task should be. In so far as literature has a fundamental part to play in shaping people's consciousness, it is not secondary. (Our emphasis)  
(Punch Review, Saturday, Nov., 27, 1981, p7)

In the Second Movement the audience is made to encounter Dedan Kimathi - the visionary, ideologue and poet. It affords the audience the opportunity of assessing, as well as weighing the instruments of the two conflicting forces - the tricks, subterfuge, deceptions, coupled with divide-and-rule tactics employed by colonialists; and the equally effective redemptive violence of the guerilla warfare employed by Kimathi and his people. The means employed by both forces in order to achieve the desired goals are poles apart. While the colonialists do everything possible to hold tenaciously to power in the bid to perpetuate the exploitation of Africans, the Dedan Kimathi people's goal seeks for justice, and self-determination.

The Trial is perceived and treated on three distinct but related (literal and philosophical) levels. The first treatment is on the Judiciary. To this end, Kimathi is seen standing trial in the imperialist court. The various overtures made to Dedan Kimathi by the enemy of freedom constitute the bulk of his temptations (or trials) at the secondary level of meaning. It is also similar to the temptations (trials) of Brother Jero in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*. We have similar occasion in T.S. Eliot's neo-classical play, *Murder In the Cathedral*, at Archbishop Beckett's encounter with the Tempters. The "trials" are made to assume a metaphoric meaning. In the words of WOMAN', "(It is) the trial of our strength, our faith, our hopes... The Trial of loyalty, our cause..." (14)

Similarly, the third and final meaning of Kimathi's Trial is in his fear that the revolution might die not only in him but also with him, hence his direct appeal to the human imagination and general perception in his rather poetic rhetoric;

... Our struggle must therefore continue  
... If I died today  
Would our people continue the struggle?  
I would look at the braves  
killed  
I would say:  
If I died to-day  
Will this blood ever be

betrayer  
That was my Trial  
But now I know that for  
every traitor  
there are a thousand patriots.(82-83)

In the third Movement, we are treated to some guerilla tactics employed in the rescue plan made for Kimathi and how they are gradually implemented. It is interesting to note that in spite of the temporary setbacks; the people are determined to secure Kimathi's freedom at all cost. Ngugi and Mugo are sincere not to romanticize either the revolutionists who have traitors lurking in their midst in particular, or the Kenyan society which is infested with compradors, political mercenaries and self-centred business financiers in general. Therefore, we are confronted with a society under severe imperialist pressure. It is evident in a society with all its shades of imperfection as obvious in the 'trial' scenes in the court as in the prison and at the guerilla camp. The play, while it winds up acquires a swift but gradual tempo towards a definite but hardly predictable resolution. The plot moves to a climaxing end in the death sentence passed on Kimathi by the Judge, as well as the James Bond-styled seizure of power by the vigilant youths (BOY and GIRL).

The secret of these playwrights' success is in their thorough grasping of the situation and their mastery of artistic devices that are capable of containing the complexity of the subject matter. The play is definitely quite involving. Through a very effective use of cinematographic devices, the audience is thrown several decades back, like is the case in Awoonor's *More Messages* (Senanu & Vincent, 149-150) or Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) or Ouelouguem's *Bound To Violence* (1977), into the unpalatable history of the Blackman - all at a glance at the very OPENING of the play - as shown in phases 1 to 3; while phase 4 points at the NOW of the struggle - a period of armed resistance, of protests and conflicts 51 which are to graduate into a mature, definite and inevitable liberation for the self-determination of the masses of the people.

The episodes which involve the encounter between 'BOY' and 'GIRL' (15-21) in which 'BOY' keeps terrorizing 'GIRL' while 'GIRL' fails to put up any resistance is an attitude which in effect encourages 'BOY' to terrorize while 'GIRL' keeps running to nowhere and everywhere. Similarly, we witness a sudden drastic change in 'GIRL' as she puts up a definite resistance (pp. 41ff) - at the same time we see the 'terrorists' - 'BOY' cowing back. These episodes form the subplot of the play. That is to say. Africans have been rather resilient - they, like the Waddilove students who had a tradition of harassing new comers in Stanlake Samkange's *The Mourned One*, have actually allowed themselves to be bullied, terrorized and kept in perpetual captivity because when they ought to have resisted like courageous men they have kept running, like the running 'GIRL', victims of imperialism (41), or like the faceless running nigger, the protagonist, in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The moment 'GIRL' comes to a point of self-reflection and self-realization, confident of her identity - a human being that deserves the right to a decent life too! That moment she is capable of identifying the weakness of her 'tormentor' - a mere bully. In her own way of rejecting oppression, she declares defiantly:

. . .Brute. I'll not run away from you.  
I'll never run away from anybody. Never (42)

The episode further confirms that the salvation of the oppressed is in their own hands. This is what Kimathi and his followers have come to realize. Hence the era of resistance is here to stay... against the very logic of imperialism. Before this can be fully actualized however, there is need for unity and solidarity among the warring tribes and the need to resolve their differences and bury their hatchets in the head of their common enemy - the white oppressors and their local agents. This is clearly shown in the quarrelsome 'BOY and GIRL' who having resolved their differences, join forces together and serve as co-facilitators to the subsequent liberation of Kimathi and Kenya in particular, and Africa in general, at the end of the play. The dialogue between 'WOMAN' and 'GIRL' is apposite here:

WOMAN: (Proud): That is the way it should be. Instead of fighting against one another, we who struggle against exploitation and oppression should give one another strength and faith till victory is ours.

GIRL: (Despondently): It is hard. It is hard seeing that we are weak.

WOMAN: United, our strength becomes faith that moves mountains. (60)

In the play, deeper meanings are given to terms like brotherhood and manhood. True brotherhood must both recognize and necessarily 'honour the oath of unity' and equally uphold the struggle for liberation from slavery and exploitation'. In this regard, true brotherhood and not kindred blood (74) is capable of advancing the people's struggle. Thus, 'WOMAN' seems to conclude her lesson on true brotherhood in the following words:

... Brotherhood, Uncle, kinsman, Clansman  
... When will you learn?  
We shall continue to suffer  
Until that day...  
We can recognize our own  
Our true kinsmen  
When we can correctly  
Identify our enemies. (73-74)

Similarly, the question of manhood is given a new interpretation which is perceived through the collective. In other words, heroism is no more a monopoly of the individual. Every member of the collective struggle is equally important; manhood transcends the physiology, physiognomy, and the bio-genealogical. To this end, when someone unconditionally and selflessly responds to the call of his people (19), such a person has attained true maturity, irrespective of his /her age and sex-type, he is a MAN.

In the clarion call for a united front for the execution of the liberation struggle, the two playwrights employ myth. This is graphically externalized on stage for the purpose of a total and positive transformation of the entire Kenyan nation. To this end myth (history) and art are made to blend together to give meaning to the intended liberation message.



The main plot of the play itself includes Dedan Kimathi's prison and later, court trials and the subsequent death sentence the trial judge passed on him. This is closely followed by a swift twist of events culminating in the liberation of Kimathi and his people.

Through the use of series of flashback the audience is made to partake of a worthwhile experience - a gradual psychic retrieval of characters like 'BOY' and 'GIRL' whose complete psychosocial emancipation is intended to send the right signal to the audience. Similarly, we witness an externalization of Kimathi's thoughts on the immediate future of his people through the aid of a cinematographic (flash-forwards) device.

In addition, the lighting device employed in the play helps to locate and situate both the temporal and spatial settings via changes in the intensity of the hues of light (bright, dark, twilight, etc). Such changes may also suggest the apparent different moods.

Besides the very effective lighting technique, other artistic devices employed in the play include poetry, particularly, its lyricism; the use of powerful symbols and symbolism, which to a great extent, assume a universal dimension. The main characters are artistically cloaked in the beauty of powerful symbolism. For example, it is hardly possible to ignore the overwhelming influence of Kimathi, the visionary and philosopher like Old Major in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, or Bakayoko, the moving spirit of the railway workers' strike in Sembène Ousmane's epic novel, *God's Bits of Wood*. Similarly, 'WOMAN' represents mother Africa, who, like the biblical Rachel, though she laments the loss of her children's freedom, is always there and willing to assist in their liberation struggles. At another level, 'WOMAN' symbolizes the old generation while 'BOY' and 'GIRL' represent the new generation which ensures the continuity of the revolution as evident at the tail end of the play.

Another dramatic element that the playwrights have put into effective use is dialogue. Commenting on the significance of dialogue in a drama, Oyin Ogunba (1977) opines, '...good dramatic dialogue is often a product of contrast in character and situation in a play'. (96) There is no doubt, that both Ngugi and Mugo are in agreement with Oyin Ogunba's submission. To this end, the dialogue between 'WOMAN', 'BOY' and 'GIRL' clearly shows a marked contrast in the level of perception of reality between the 'uninitiated' BOY and GIRL operating at the physical level and 'WOMAN' whose psychic rebirth is evident in her philosophical perception of reality. God,; rather than be seen as a passive God, is now perceived as the fighting 'God' on the side of the oppressed victims of imperialism. Furthermore, at the symbolic (universal) level, consider the following dialogue;

BOY: I don't know how to thank you...  
...But... but... If I can do something  
...like deaning. . .weeding. .even  
washing your clothes -

WOMAN: (angry): you want to change masters!  
A black master for a white master!  
Have you no other horizon?  
Except to be a slave! (20)

There is an indication that the co-playwrights are opposed to neo-colonialism which has characterized the so-called independent African states. To Ngugi and Mugo, total independence is not the same thing as partial dependence - rather, it is self-reliance and self-realization that

cannot be measured by the number of tall buildings and other existing social infrastructures only. True independence manifests in the individual's ability and capability to exercise and develop one's self to the point of fulfilment. (36)

Symbolism in this play is better considered in two opposing perspectives. The exploiters and enemy of freedom are portrayed as somewhat brutal and wicked 'modern cannibals', while for the struggling masses of Kenyan revolution the imagery portrays a selfless sacrifice and determination as expressed in such lines as, 'Streams of blood and Rivers of Sweat'.

Similarly, the diction of the play is relatively simple but highly poetic, and often couched in beautiful imagery. For example, Kimathi admonishes his people to appreciate the need for unity and discipline as a necessary weapon that is capable of guaranteeing the success of their struggle:

. . . Our love of freedom is our bullet  
Our successes are our newspaper  
But  
Stronger than any machinegun fire  
Stronger than the Lincoln and  
Harvard bombers  
Mightier than their best generals  
Is our unity, discipline... (69)

In spite of the seriousness of its topicality, the playwrights being Marxists, consciously save the audience the pains and despair usually associated with a reflectionist tragedy by refracting the informing history, reconstructing reality as it ought to be, at the tail end of the play through the intervention of BOY and GIRL in a typical conventional tragi-comic spirit. In addition, the actions are occasionally injected with comic relief. The scene where 'BOY' mimicks the American tourist both in action and language is a typical example;

(boy walks along pretending to be tourist)

A beautiful country... a beautiful ciddy  
...beautiful people en? (17)

It is interesting also to note that Kimathi, no doubt, has a soft spot for Christian religion. Kimathi has this to say concerning the Bible:

I only read those sections necessary to  
our struggle. (40)

Therefore, allusions are made to a number of bible passages: the sixty years of Kenyan people under the yoke of imperialism is linked by Kimathi to the 400 years of Israel's sojourn in Babylon (41); and the justice of the colonial court of Pilate's moneyed justice is likened to the corrupt colonial court in Kenya under reference. Kimathi describes his own Christ-figure trial:

Moneyed justice  
Thirty pieces of silver (depicting  
temporary material gain enjoyed by the -)

Judases. Traitors. (79)

Thus in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, the co-playwrights' conscious reconstruction of an otherwise mutilated and distorted history serves to give direction to the vision of the oppressed Kenyan people. The playwrights, no doubt, understand the very nature of the black man and that the problems confronting him can best be tackled by getting at the root, the human psyche, which must undergo a thorough emancipation if s/he must be free from, in William Blake's expression in a poem, "London", the "mindforged manacles", fetters, mental and physical. To this end, history is put in the service of art. At the same time, both art and history are, in turn, made to serve humanity for greater achievements. There, in our candid opinion, lies the interconnectedness of Art and History.

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## Lecture Nine

### Modern African Comedy

#### **Kobina Sekyi: *The Blinkards***

AT the literal level a blinkard is one who habitually winks as a result of a defective or imperfect sight. This meaning is quite applicable to some principal characters in the play, particularly, those in Mrs. Brofusem's group. This is suspected to be so not because this category of characters have visible defective sight, but more importantly because of their opaque perception of what is supposed to be European culture resulting in badly digested European habits. The term "blinkard" is, therefore, more appropriate for the group of satiric butts in this play at the metaphoric level because they are, more or less, psychotic cases. We shall return to this later.

*The Blinkard* is a good example of a satiric comedy. The Introduction to the play gives an insight to the bone of contention which informs the playwright's social and artistic vision. For example, Kobina Sekyi expressed his disappointment at the pettiness of the English native culture which he was privileged to observe on his visit to England: a highly stratified society with a racist and condescending attitude to non-indigenes. The playwright also expressed serious concern on the growing evil influence of the third-rate English social class whose culture was being uncritically imitated by the African "Been-to 's", like Mrs. Brofusem, as well as the likely effect on the home-grown African traditionalists. Indeed, it was often the case of the blind leading the blind. Again, the term "blinkard" may yet have a clearer meaning if we consider the adage: "Among the blind, the one-eyed (blinkard) is king." Mrs. Brofusem is the chief blinkard.

Even though the setting of the play is the former Gold Coast, now Ghana, and the natives are Fanti, the subject matter and thematic concern cut across all the colonial African states. The plot is clear enough.

Mrs. Brofusem, a "been-to" by virtue of her short stay in England, takes delight in showing off her newly acquired "social status" by expressing both in action and utterances, her preference for English mannerisms over native custom. This gets to a climax when she insists on giving Miss Tsiba an "English" education. As a result of Mr. Okadu's similar half-baked education, his habitual display of the so-called English mannerisms and of rather superficial love advances to Miss Tsiba, Mrs. Brofusem arranges to make their English-style engagement a reality. But then there are oppositions leading to a clash of principles between representatives of the half-churned English culture (Mrs. Brofusem and her group), and the African traditionalists, including the father of Miss Tsiba. Nnasumpa, Mr. Tsiba's wife, reacts against the procedure but dies of heart failure.

Already, Miss Tsiba is pregnant even before marriage, contrary to native custom, and yet has a church wedding. At the wedding reception, however, Nana Katawarwa, Mrs. Tsiba, who also is Nnasumpa's grand-mother, makes a direct attack on, and cautions against, the evil and dangerous influence of alien culture now threatening the existence of indigenous African culture. She takes away her granddaughter. Lawyer Onyi takes up the case of bi-gamy and wins, in favour of the Tsiba family, much to the delight of everyone including, strangely enough, Mrs. Brofusem.

As a satiric comedy, the playwright employs the usual traditional tools which include exaggeration and irony. The blinkards are set against the almost faultless indigenous African

ways and customs on the one hand, and sensible unpretentious characters with a proper education, Mr. Brofusem and Lawyer Onyi, on the other hand. The naivety of Mrs. Brofusem is exposed through the cigar ashes she insists on spreading on the carpet because she heard while she was in England that it was good for killing moths in carpets. At her first appearance, she is a ridiculous sight for not knowing the proper use of lorgnette. Another indication of her naivety is her hypocrisy in speaking perfect Fanti at home but never in the public where she pretends not to understand. But on page 34, she is caught speaking Fanti by Miss Tsiba; her incapability to speak good English despite her pretension; her wish to be called. Duckky, a name which was mistaken for a pet-name but which, as a matter of fact, is a derogatory remark on someone's wife's fatness and duck-walk. Other observable uses of irony include Lawyer Onyi's preference to speak in Fanti, even though well educated, while Mr. Okado, a half-baked, insists on speaking in badly expressed English.

We shall quickly examine the context of the play for the purpose of locating Kobina Sekyi's weaknesses and strengths as a dramatist. One suspects a weakness of plot in *The Blinkards* not so much with the characters as it is with the problem one has in determining whose story it is, Miss Tsiba's? She is conveniently disposed of. Who is the possible hero here? Lawyer Onyi? And does the marriage of Miss Tsiba constitute the central theme? (p. 121) Compare Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*. Is Mrs. Brofusem's final conversion the real issue or goal of the play? How do problems arise and how do they get solved? Do we have the events linked, and do events proceed from characters? These questions are fundamental to the suspected problem of the plot of *The Blinkards*. All the above areas of plot-weaknesses notwithstanding, Sekyi has his areas of strength which constitute his assets, too.

No doubt, *The Blinkards* is a brilliant satire of contemporary African society indicating, among others, a high sense of humour- blushing (p. 33), or the romance scene on p.49; an impressive power of observation; a good knowledge of his milieu; a keen moralist vision and the ability to capture the frailties of men and women, in particular, Sekyi's ability to see the contrasts in characters and arrange them accordingly. In the play, too, there is an observable interesting use of dialogue, the interesting and comedic element being the misuse of English. Other elements of comedic dimension are the use of character-types as it is the case with the doctor, the merchant, the nouveaux riches, and, for example, the parson who quotes the Bible out of context (p. 117), or the 'been-to' who wants to be exactly like the English.

A significant asset which the playwright possesses is his recognition of the right values, the socially acceptable, positive and healthy values that we identify in the Lawyer, for example. We recognize in the playwright, too, a definite point of view, a definite social position. Thus he consciously asserts the right value-the African value (p.125), our simple morality (p. 132), the joy of native dress. The concluding statement of Mrs. Brofusem is very important here: It (the English Custom) is not for us.

We are not totally at a loss as far as locating the theme of the play is concerned. A clue to the theme is in Father's statement:

Lord what fools these mortals be?  
The fooleries of those whom I have fashioned after me  
distress and weary me.

## **Wole Soyinka: The Trials of Brother Jero**

The play, also a satiric comedy, is very important for two principal reasons: its theme, and the playwright's choice of technique. The play is the second most popular of Soyinka's plays among West African students, the first being *The Lion and the Jewel*. The success of the two plays has been traced to their relative accessibility of language, considered in many quarters as very unlike Wole Soyinka, and relevance in terms of its immediacy or contemporariness of topicality.

*The Trials of Brother Jero* is thematically preoccupied with the attendant problems of the moral atrophy of religious institutions, as well as of general social life right from the top to the bottom rungs of the social ladder. In other words, the thematic focus is on the society's rejection of God and His replacement with a new god, mammon. This is very similar to Elizabethan society as represented in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. The concern of the two playwrights even though separated by four centuries, is the tragic consequences of a Godless-society, should the trend persist. Like *The Blinkards* which is set in Ghana but which has a theme applicable to all colonial African states, *The Trials of Brother Jero* is set in Nigeria but the theme is applicable to, largely, post- independence African states.

There is a deliberate commercialization of religion by custodians of the otherwise sacred institution. In this case it is not only Christianity; Brother Jero represents all religious institutions. Similarly, the commercialization is motivated by the newly acquired "cargo culture", an obsession for wealth and material acquisition through illegal means. The spiritual leaders have also capitalized on the religious bigotry of their members. The worshipper's gullibility is in turn, motivated not by any holy desire to be truly close to God but out of sheer desperation to satisfy selfish desires, the ultimate goal of which is the get-rich-quick syndrome. It is this bigotry and the desperation for wealth acquisition, among other selfish motives of worshippers, which make the spiritual leader's exploitation of members possible. The victims include market women as represented by Amope; office messengers (Chume); people with genuine and pathetic cases like the penitent woman who desires for a child; the politicians who are also hungry for power.

Indeed, the rate of corruption and spiritual decadence is so alarming that the playwright seems to point, out through the unfolding syntax of actions that a society such as this is at the brink of total eclipse and extinction. A society so morally decadent, whose secular life is morally bankrupt and even for those that care to seek refuge in God (and religion) fall prey to religious vultures. A few examples will suffice here.

At the social or secular level, most of Brother Jero's victims do not deserve our sympathy. Chume is a cheat, an office messenger who, rather than do the job he is employed and paid to do, takes sick leave from some faceless medical doctor (also at a fee) to engage in church activities with the hope of an elevation without any justification for the desired elevation. Similarly, the politician, another cheat, rather than occupy himself with the problems of the people he intends to serve and work on possible solutions, is busy trying to improve on his speech ability and seeks spiritual means to succeed at the polls. The Sanitary Inspector, referred to by Amope, is a cheat, too. The issue here is not whether he qualifies to ride on a motor-bike. He probably does, judging by his official status as a Sanitary Inspector. After all, Chume an office messenger owns a bicycle. Our major concern is that he takes bribe at the expense of official responsibility. Again, the motivating factor in the Inspector's case is the obsession for wealth acquisition.

Furthermore, at the spiritual level, Brother Jero, a self- confessed religious charlatan makes his feelings known to us: as a "shopkeeper" waiting for "customers", not as a 'true

shepherd of God's flock'. Therefore, regardless of the pathetic case of the penitent woman, rather than offer genuine advice that could help the woman, he most callously treats her as a customer, a client. Like a traditional trickster he employs all pranks and tactics to exploit the gullibility of the society, his worshippers and non-members like Amope to dazzle and control them completely, mentally and physically.

The satiric elements, in summary, at the level of commerce include (a) religious institutions: exploitation of worshippers; (b) deceit and subterfuge: Brother Jero versus his victims, Churne leaving his office under a false pretext, Politicians feigning commitment; (c) abnormal profiteering: Amope versus Brother Jero, and later, Amope versus the fish seller. At the level of social disharmony, we have instances of a break down in communication leading to dispute and, or rancour. Examples abound in Amope versus Churne (domestic), Amope versus Brother Jero, Amope versus the fish seller, woman versus the drummer boy, woman versus Brother Jero, and finally, Churne versus Brother Jero. Similarly, on the society's individualism and passivity, the playwright does not seem to spare it. For example, at the scene of the encounter between Amope and Brother Jero, members of the public simply look on as passive observers without intervening to help settle the misunderstanding.

The summary of the whole play and the significance of its thematic preoccupation are evident in the satiric elements highlighted above. It is the playwright's concern for a society obsessed with the pursuit of material acquisition, ironically, at the expense of its survival.

Technically, this is a very successful drama. One of the observable facts here seems to be the playwright's strict adherence to the Aristotelian unities of time, place and action. There are parallels in *The Lion and the Jewel*, and *Death and the King's Horseman*. On unity of time: Brother Jero declares at the beginning of the play his intention to let the audience know the ordeals he has in just one day, a memorable day in his life. So the play does not exceed the twenty-four hour duration as suggested in Aristotle's *Poetics*. On the question of unity of place the entire events are limited to a locality (the Beach and Brother Jero's house, not so far from the Beach). Unity of action is also apparently complied with, as there is a singularity of action. Only an action takes place at a time on stage. Therefore, we have at every event any of: Brother Jero and the Old Master; Brother Jero and Churne; Amope and Churne; Amope and Brother Jero; Brother Jero and a group of worshippers, etc. Even where there seems to be more than one action at a time, for example, Brother Jero and the worshippers-the woman pursuing the drummer-boy, either it is technically subdued, or the action is reduced to miming while the other is active in order to avoid any distraction. This is also the case with Brother Jero while praying for the MP before the sudden appearance of the matchet-wielding Churne.

There is also something significant in Soyinka's characterization through the use of language. This possibility is equally explored in *The Lion and the Jewel* and later in *Death and the King's Horseman*. In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, the protagonist, Brother Jero, by virtue of his religious calling, belongs to the middle class. His polished English readily conforms to his social status. Amope and the Fish Seller are character-types. They represent the market women, housewives, etc., therefore, the social habit presumably characteristic of the group is exhibited in the nagging Amope in her interaction with Brother Jero, or Churne her husband. This is also observable in the use of invectives by the two women, Amope and the Fish Seller. Churne, too, like Amusa in *Death and the King's Horseman*, occupies a lower rung of the social ladder. A messenger with a low education, if any, expresses himself in pidgin English or badly expressed English. In Churne, Soyinka does not score a complete success in his characterization through the use of language. The playwright does not seem to be consistent. At times Churne speaks direct,

impeccable English (pp 30 & 32), and at times he relapses into pidgin English (p. 41). We are not sure we can use language as basis of characterization in the case of Chume. We suspect that Chume's language expressions are more determined by his mood and not his social class.

However, the MP/Politician's characteristic use of bombast and flavoured expressions to exhibit his power of public oration and level of education of his prototype is very apparent and successfully represented.

Other techniques which are characteristic of a satiric comedy are noticeable too, for example, the use of irony and exaggeration. It is an irony that a highly intelligent MP (or the Politician) can be so fooled, while Amope refuses to be fooled, by the feigned holy appearance and utterance of Brother Jero. Similarly, the gullibility of Chume is rather exaggerated if indeed he discovers that he is being fooled by Brother Jero; a discovery that leads to his expression of freedom and which motivates him to dare and chase his master with a matchet. His sudden relapse to his old self thereby becoming even more gullible than he ever was becomes problematic for lack of plausibility or conviction. In addition, the MP considered to be very intelligent, also carries his gullibility too far to think that Brother Jero who runs and disappears because the enraged Chume is at his heels has, indeed, "Vanished," that he is Transported. Utterly transmuted..."

Furthermore, the success of the play is much more seen in the ability of Soyinka to use suspense and at the same time sustain its use for as long as he wishes. For example, Amope-Jero-Chume have all a common link without any of the three knowing it. Amope does not know there is any link between her husband, Chume and Brother Jero her debtor. Chume, too, does not know that the person owing his wife some money is indeed his master, Brother Jero. The Prophet, Brother Jero, too does not know that the woman he owes money is the wife of his assistant, Brother Chume: It is interesting to note that it is Chume's sudden awareness that leads to the resolution of the conflict that terminates the plot.

Aside from the use of suspense, the playwrights effective management of conflict at the different levels of the play is noteworthy. Conflict in any drama is an essential ingredient. The conflicts in this play include Jero and the Old Prophet; Jero and Amope; Amope and Chume; Amope and the fish seller, the Drummer-Boy and Woman; Woman and Jero; Jero and Chume. On the whole, even though the playwright employs an Aristophanic classical Greek model, *The Trials of Brother Jero* remains, essentially, an authentic modern African comedy.



## Lecture Ten

### Neo-Rationalist Theatre

NEO-RATIONALIST drama, we have explained earlier, is the last of the dramatic form categories we have identified under modern African drama in this study. We have further attempted a definition of what we believe is the vision or the informing ideology of the playwrights in this category. We must quickly add, too, that our choice of Femi Osofisan's plays is largely due to the fact that besides his pioneering role in evolving this unique dramatic form, he remains to date, the most prolific and the most ideologically consistent playwright, dramatist and director in this category. He pioneered this "novel" dramatic form, at least, in Africa. In *Excursion in Drama and Literature* (1993), a book of interviews with Femi Osofisan, its author, Muyiwa Awodiya, describes the playwright as a second generation Nigerian playwright who provides an "alternative tradition different from that of older writers, especially Wole Soyinka and J.P Clark". (15)

Awodiya also identifies the basic distinguishing characteristics that make Osofisan's drama different from those of his contemporaries. According to the critic:

The significant thing about Osofisan's drama is not so much its philosophical content as its posture of revolt: its restless search for fairness in a world of abandoned justice (13).

Therefore, enacted myths of rebellion are common to all Osofisan's plays. It is a rebellion pitched against all manner of betrayal. A rebellion that informs Osofisan's deliberate subversion of loric traditions suspected to facilitate such betrayal of trust, and perpetration of oppression, in virtually all his plays. A rebellion that is akin to Bertolt Brecht's social vision in his Epic drama. A social vision that reduces kings and the 'high' to buffoons and satiric butts, while riff-raffs, beggars, local tramps are elevated to a heroic pedestal. A rebellion that rejects discrimination against women, etc.

Awodiya has, no doubt, captured the essence of Osofisan's dramaturgy. However, there is need to correct one or two impressions here. The critic's attempt to locate Osofisan's dramaturgy without reference to a theatrical framework of which an antecedent exists in the Brechtian epic tradition is a little disturbing and a little farther from the truth. Osofisan's theatre is a good example of the European influence on modern African dramatic form - the epic theatre. The interesting thing here, however, is that, like Soyinka or Clark Bekeremo, the transplantation of the epic theatrical form onto the African dramatic subsoil by Osofisan has not been uncritical. Just as it would be wrong to refer to Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* as wholly Aristotelian as some critics would have us believe, but then we cannot close our eyes to the Sophoclean element in, or classical Greek influence on, Ola Rotimi's tragedy.

Similarly, it may not be absolutely right to describe Femi Osofisan's theatre as Brechtian without some qualifications, as Niyi Osundare (1980) does in his review of *Once Upon Four Robbers* and *Morountodun* just as the influence of Brecht's dramatic philosophy on Osofisan

cannot be denied too. From this point, it is easy to locate areas of similarity and of divergence for the purpose of authenticating the Africanness of Osofisan's drama.

Even though a lot of critics seem to misconstrue Osofisan's position on whether or not he is a Marxist, the playwright has, indeed, not denied that he is an apostle of Marxist ideals. His concern, however, is the extent of bastardization that Marxism has been subjected to, particularly in Nigeria, and in Africa in general. The playwright describes the bastardized version of Marxism and silhouettes this against the true Marxist ideals which he takes time to re-define, and finally locates his ideological alignment within these ideals. Osofisan identifies extreme romanticism in the bastardized edition of Marxism being uncritically hoisted on Africans by some self-seeking opportunists. Osofisan (1993) then asks:

Isn't it that ideas are not fossils, that they must grow according to history and context, that Marxism itself has first to be reintegrated into our own specific circumstances, to be thoroughly indigenised, that is, before it can become a useful tool for us? (37-38)

The playwright, in other words, calls for a necessary Africanization of Marxist ideals in order to make Marxism relevant to the reality of our existence as a people.

From all indications, therefore, Osofisan is a "Marxist" without the tag, just as Bertolt Brecht was a "Marxist" without a party membership card. Like Brecht, Osofisan is a revolutionary, a theatre reformer who is not blinded by Marxian party slogans and dogmatism. His Byronic romantic spirit is therefore largely responsible for his "subversive" activities the theatre affords him (in form and content).

Having located Osofisan's artistic vision and informing ideology to be "the left" (Michael Etherton, 1982:285), or "Marxism", we may now examine the extent of Brecht's epic theatrical influence on his drama. We may now put those distinguishing features identified by Awodiya in their proper perspective.

Contextually, social revolt dominates both Brecht and Osofisan's plays. The two playwrights have always employed their characters to enact such revolts that embody the vision of salvation of their respective societies. However, while in the plays of Brecht the ensuing dialectics remain unresolved, in Osofisan's there are few indications of resolved conflicts as in the case of *The Midnight Blackout*. In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, however, the debate remains inconclusive. Brecht's plays are episodic in plot-structure, so are Osofisan's. The plays in either case often assume a narrative mode of a traditional story telling. Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and Osofisan's *Morountodun* have their materials sourced from local myths, legends, or some other local materials.

Also, present in the drama of both playwrights is the use of alienation effects/technique. For example, the stage of the plays of both playwrights is made quite unemotional and unattractive. In Brecht's *Galileo* there is a display of screen on which there is written an introduction to the next scene. In Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*, actors dress for the performance in the full view of the audience. Director who is also one of the actors introduces the play at the beginning of the action and he reminds the audience that where they are is a theatre. Through the use of the alienation technique the audience is not made to suffer any illusion.

The ideal of a collective hero is common to the plays of both playwrights. In Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* we have Azdak and Grusha who are made to attain heroic stature.

Similarly, in Osofisan's *Morountodun* the peasant farmers led by Marshal, Bogunde and Baba, joined later by Titubi (Moremi figure) constitute the collective or plurimental (Ibitokun 1986) hero, in the play. Further to the idea of heroism is the fact that both playwrights draw their heroes from the "wretched-of-the earth", riff-rafs, drunkards and social outcasts, etc. Therefore in Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robbers*, the four robbers are led by Aihaja to bring about a necessary change for the purpose of re-organizing the society. There is the banishment of the spectacular; however, songs abound in the plays of both playwrights.

In order to justify the Africanness of Osofisan's drama, however, a number of factors must be considered. They include the source of the material for the play, theme, setting, language, imagery, and characterization, among others.

The immediate society provides the necessary inspiration for the playwright, like his contemporaries. The materials, as we have shown elsewhere in this study, are sourced either from written history (*Once Upon Four Robbers*) or oral (including legends and myths, as in *Morountodun*), or even ritual. Except that Osofisan's theatre, like Brecht's, does not regard ritual or local myths with the kind of reverence identified with most conventional plays. There is a deliberate demystification here, unlike what we have in the plays of his contemporaries. For example, even though Wole Soyinka in *A Dance of the Forests* attempts to make the divinities that people its universe appear a little less than gods, he does not consider them replaceable. Therefore, his effort lacks the boldness and the thrust with which Osofisan goes all out to desecrate the "divine" by unmasking the "masquerade" of indigenous African beliefs and in their place erect new mythic structures to perform new and relevant roles. This is what he has done in *No More the Wasted Breed*, and *Morountodun*, among others. It may again be argued that this idea of replacing the old myths with new ones is not only found in Brecht or Osofisan's plays; that, for example, in Ngugi's *Black Hermit* or Ngugi/Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, which we have already treated earlier in this chapter, we have a similar idea of playwrights evolving new myths. We must quickly add that this is characteristic of the Marxian dimension to art generally. Nevertheless, Osofisan's drama is quite distinct in form. While Ngugi's remains within the boundaries of conventional drama, Osofisan's drama because of its hybridity of form is African, as well as Brechtian. It is for this reason, among others, that we say that it is not enough to identify Osofisan as a second-generation African playwright. By virtue of the uniqueness of his theatrical form, which is neither comedy nor tragedy, even though he exploits the resources of the comedic and the tragi-comedic, Osofisan's drama stands out among his contemporaries and is best categorized as neo-rationalist theatre.

### **Once Upon Four Robbers**

Four robbers, Angola, Hasan, Major and Aihaja, receive a charm called *tira* from a muslim priest which enables them to rob the people in the market. Soldiers are mesmerized, Major turns greedy and get arrested by the police and is later tied to the stake to be shot. Afa's coup d' état saves Major. But the question then is, who is the robber? One could trace the narrative source of the play to the traditional trickster-story of the tortoise and the dog that went to steal from a distant farm during a famine. The tortoise got caught for his greed which is suggestive of the tortoise link with Major in this play.

### **Morountodun**

Theme from history (The Ugbo raids of Ife) mythology (Moremi) and contemporary history (The Agbekoya Peasant Uprising) are among blended in this play.

Titubi the young daughter of an affluent Alhaja aspires to be Moremi - the legend. She agrees to be captured by the revolting peasants so that she can facilitate the arrest of the peasants' leader(s). The ironic twist is that Titubi later identifies with the peasants' just cause. She returns and denounces the establishment.

Both plays, *Once Upon Four Robbers* and *Morountodun* according to Niyi Osundare in his review (West Africa, Jan. 27, 1980) titled "Social Message of a Nigerian Dramatist", are Brechtian. For example, Osundare explains further, characters are made to speak directly to the audience. And like Brecht's use of the alienation technique, Osofisan's theatre is also anti-illusion. This is noticed as the four Robbers and Aafa try to convert the theatre into a debating hall by asking the audience whether they still feel armed robbers should or should not be executed. Four people are made to participate in the debate, two for and two against.

Similarly, as part of anti-illusion campaign, actors dress up for the performance in full view of the audience. At the beginning of the play, Director, also one of the actors reminds the audience that they are in the theatre, "a house of dream and phantom struggles". At the end of the performance, Director then calls out the characters one after the other asking each the part played and what he thinks of it. The issue of unresolved dialectics manifests in *Once Upon Four Robbers* in which the debate on whether or not to execute the robbers continues among members of the audience, even after the play is ended. Osundare then concludes that Osofisan does not only aim to relieve people's minds of the stranglehold of myth, he also tries to demythologize the theatre as a medium of socio-artistic communication.

### **Two Midnight Plays**

*Midnight Hotel* and *The Midnight Blackout* are among the series of Osofisan's *Midnight* plays. The former is a criticism of a society lost in the pursuit of wealth, a society lost, morally, physically and spiritually. Again, in a vein similar to Soyinka's thematic concern in *The Jero Plays* on the commercialization of religious institutions, *Midnight Hotel* and *Midnight Blackout* are direct attacks on the moral atrophy of the intellectuals in the field of politics, business academics, or the clerics. For example, in *Midnight Hotel*, Pastor Suuru is not only engaged in extra-marital affairs, he is also a business contractor, no longer the shepherd of the Lord's sheep. Similarly, Professor Juokwu in *The Midnight Blackout* is involved in extra-marital affairs.

In both plays the comedic and satiric interweave through characterization, situations and events. In *Midnight Hotel* we have characters like Jimoh, Bicycle (a tell-tale name) a stark illiterate, Asibong the half-deaf businessman. We also have Awero the parliamentarian, who always insists on "sampling"; the three daughters of chief Alatishe and chief Alatishe's speech mannerism. In *The Midnight Blackout*, similar characters abound; Professor Juokwu and his queer behaviour - his "blackout" formula through hypnotism, as well as his affairs with Akubundu's wife; Iberibe a highly placed diplomat, making amorous advances to his host's wife, Obioma.

Some events also manifest the comedic, as well as the satiric. For example, such notable events in *Midnight Hotel* include the following: Pastor Suuru caught red-handed by Chief Alatishe; the Pastor's fruitless attempt to lie; Chief Alatishe's attempted suicide; the ghostly Asibong and the dustbin; the three "innocent" daughters of Chief Alatishe having fun with the soldiers; the meeting of Awero and the husband, and Pastor Suuru.

Ordinarily, the Brechtian theatre discards with the use of suspense, a significant element in the conventional drama. Regardless of the relative influence of the Brechtian epic theatre on Osofisan's drama, the playwright exploits the resources of suspense in both *Midnight Hotel* and

*The Midnight Blackout*. Like Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* where the use of suspense significantly strengthens the plot of the play, Osofisan is able to employ, effectively, the use of sustained suspense in *Midnight Hotel*. For instance, just as Chume is unaware of the relationship between Amope and Brother Jero, so is Asibong unaware of the relationship between Pastor Suuru and Awero. In addition, Jimoh's promised chieftaincy title in Kano remains a suspense throughout the play. In the end nothing tangible seems to have been solved, except the suspense.

In *The Midnight Blackout*, the discovery of the strange piece of cloth apparently torn off someone's shirt which heightens the tempo of the play to a definitive climax serves as a necessary suspense. So is the mystery of the professor's escapades sustained for as long as the playwright considers it necessary?

Again, unlike Brecht's epic theatre of which the dialectics remain characterically unresolved, Osofisan offers a definitive resolution to the complication (conflicts) in *The Midnight Blackout* in three instalmental phases:

- (a) the first phase being in scene 27 (p.97), a mysterious piece of cloth found by the window leads to the mix-up between Chinwe and Obioma, compounded by Okoro.
- (b) the second phase of the resolution begins in scene 31 (p.105) as Oboma declares; "listen, I'll confess everything to you..."
- (c) the third phase is in scene 33 (p.108).

Both *Midnight* plays have, largely, the features of epic theatrical form. They are narrative in form, episodic in plot-structure abounding in songs and poetry. Often the songs afford the playwright's echo, comments and criticism of the society. *Midnight Hotel* is a one-act play with short scenes. In the *Midnight Blackout*, there are thirty-three scenes of varied length. The prelude has two songs. There are about ten songs in all. The songs are either at the beginning of a scene or at end of a scene. The songs serve as comments on what has taken place or is about to take place in the plays.

On the whole, we indeed acknowledge the efforts of critics like Awodiya (1993 and 1996), who are doing a laudable task of documenting and calling the attention of the reading public to the invaluable legacy which Osofisan is handing over to our generation and generations of Africans yet unborn. No doubt, the Osofisan theatre, like Brecht's Epic drama, constitutes a separate class of contemporary African drama.

## Conclusion

Traditions go, traditions come. Some critics hold the view that current dramatic principles evolve from the ashes of the old ones. This, to us, sounds too absolute. Instead, we like to align with Isidore Okpewho's (1983) position on literary canons and approaches that the old and/or seemingly extant literary theories, and in this case dramatic principles, are still relevant today. The new, as well as emerging approaches are simply complementing not replacing, existing ones. This is evident in the present book.

We are not particularly keen on providing any conclusion in a strict orthodox sense, for this book. This is because the present effort is meant to be a continuous one to the degree that drama is life itself and as such, any discussion on drama, no matter how comprehensive or global it may appear to be, cannot be final.

Different critics of dramatic literature do predictably find different approaches to the many questions arising from the study of drama as literature. We also recognize the fact that our present effort, which is this book, may not have answers to all of the questions. In the light of this, and as a way of accommodating the general as well as specific needs of students of dramatic literature, we have chosen to cover as many relevant aspects of drama as possible. They include in particular, aspects representative of seminal topics on the possible origins of drama, dramatic principles, ideas, concepts, traditions, dramas, forms, informing milieu, topicality, textual analyses, etc., all of which we regard as the fundamental truth of dramatic literature.

While illustrating the different aspects, using carefully selected drama texts, we have endeavoured to treat the same as concisely as possible for the purpose of meeting the basic needs and expectations of our target audience.

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