

POST INDEPENDENCE PLAYWRITING IN

GHANA:

A CRITICAL COMPARATIVE APPRAISAL

OF THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF

Asiedu Yirenkyi & Ben Abdallah

By

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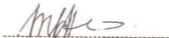
September 2002



Declaration

I certify that this thesis is my own work.
Where references are made to other works, full acknowledgment is given. In addition, this thesis has neither been presented in whole or in part to another institution for a degree.

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Signature



Signature

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Supervisor

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Almighty God first, and then to my

Beloved Spouse Benedicta Akenoo,

Who spurred me on with her fervent prayers and supplications to
make this work possible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I admit frankly that I had the inspiration to embark on this critical work of this nature from Mr. Yaw Asare, my lecturer and friend right from the first year of my studies for the M. Phil degree at the University Of Ghana, Legon. In fact, it was Mr. Yaw Asare who mooted the idea and spurred me on to undertake this great task of critiquing the works of Asiedu Yirekyi and Dr. Ben Abdallah as pioneering work for critical practice in the contemporary Ghanaian theatre.

I am indeed grateful for the encouragement and the moral support Mr. Yaw Asare has given me throughout the course of this work.

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Michael Akenoo,

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Legon.

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ABSTRACT

Post independence playwriting in Ghana is mainly characterized by experimentation and “avant-gardism” that can be geared towards the development of professional theatre.

These characteristics are portrayed in the plays of new emergent playwrights like Efua Sutherland, Joe De Graft, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bill Marshall, Martin Owusu, Asiedu, Yirenkyi, and Ben Abdallah as compared to the pre-independence playwrights like Kobina Sekyi, F.K. Fiawoo and J. B. Danquah whose works were mainly patterned on Western direction and orientation. To this end, the works of the pre-independence playwrights constitute what can be aptly described as “closet drama” from the critical standpoint.

Efua Sutherland pioneered and laid the foundation for professional playwriting and professional theatre in Ghana. This era saw the rapid development of professional theatre in Ghana. The first play written by Efua Sutherland, titled Foriwa, was produced shortly after Ghana's independence in 1957. This was

followed up later with Edufa and The Marriage Of Anansewa respectively by the same playwright.

The evolution and development of professional playwriting and professional theatre in Ghana came to its full apogee with the emergence of Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah on the Ghanaian playwriting scene. Their works, in terms of subject, theme, and style, are a clear manifestation of playwriting, which is unique and distinct from their predecessors' of the pre-independence days.

Basically, the two playwrights blend traditionalism with modernism in their writings; and furthermore, whilst Asiedu Yirenkyi searches for audience awareness, Ben Abdallah, an avant-garde playwright, is steeped in portraying, the "Abibigoro" concept in his persistent search for an African theatre.



Introduction

The ambiguity inherent in criticism makes it stand unique in all the other disciplines as it does not make any absolute claims and also does not make pretence of presenting the absolute truth ¹

"Krisis" and "Kritike" were the Greek words used during the ancient Greek era to denote the art of discrimination and separation of poetic works into categories what is good and what is bad for the domain of criticism is "what is good writing and what is bad writing" as Victor Hugo puts it. ²

Critical theory and practice is traced as far back as the time of Plato and Aristotle of ancient Greece. Notwithstanding this fact, it is probable to trace the origin of criticism of poetry beyond the time of Plato and Aristotle to Homer, the renowned ancient Greek poet. Homer's epics the Iliad and Odyssey were subjects subjected to a sort of critical evaluation ³

The foundation of critical theory and practice were firmly laid by Plato and Aristotle. Western critical theory and practice is firmly rooted in Aristotle's principles of criticism ⁴. It is, therefore, clearly established that critical theory and practice originated from Aristotle of ancient Greece.

From the fifth century B.C. to the present, various critics such as Aristotle, Plato, Dante, Wordsworth, and a host of others have developed principles of criticism that have had a major influence on the on-going discussion of literary theory and criticism. By examining these critics' ideas we can gain an understanding of and participate in this critical debate, while simultaneously acquiring an appreciation for and a working knowledge of both practical and theoretical criticism.

Whereas literary criticism's concerns with morality began with Plato, its emphasis on the elements or characteristics of a work began with Aristotle, Plato's

famous pupil.⁵ Rejecting some of his teacher's beliefs concerning the nature of reality, Aristotle opts for a detailed investigation of the material world.

The Poetics by Aristotle remains one of the most important critical influences on literary theory and criticism. Aristotle's Poetics has become the cornerstone of western literary criticism. By applying his analytic abilities to a definition of tragedy, Aristotle began a logical discussion of literary work that continues to the present day.⁶ Unfortunately, many critics have mistakenly assumed that the Poetics is a "how-to manual" defining and setting the standard for literary criticism (particularly in tragedy) for all time. Aristotle's purpose, however, was not to formulate a series of absolute rules for evaluating a tragedy, but to state the general principles of tragedy as he viewed them in his time while simultaneously responding to many of Plato's doctrines and arguments.

Even his choice of title, The Poetics, reveals Aristotle's purpose, for in Greek the word Poetics means "things that are made or crafted". Like a biologist, Aristotle will dissect tragedy to discover its components or crafted parts.

At the beginning of the Poetics, Aristotle notes that: "epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most forms of flute and lyre playing all happen to be in general, imitations". All seemingly differ in how and what they imitate, but nevertheless, Aristotle agrees with Plato that all the arts are imitations.⁷ In particular, the art of poetry exists because people are imitative creatures who enjoy such imitation. Plato contends that such pleasure can undermine the structure of society and all its values, but Aristotle disagrees. His disagreement is basically a metaphysical argument concerning the nature of imitation itself. Whilst Plato posits that imitation is two steps removed from the truth or realm of the ideal (the poet imitating an object that is itself an imitation of an ideal form), Aristotle contends that poetry is more

universal, more general than things as they are. For, "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened - what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity". It is the historian, not the poet, who writes on what has already happened. The poet's task, declares Aristotle, is to write of what could happen. "Poetry therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular". In arguing that poets present things not as they are but as they should be, Aristotle rebuffs Plato's concept that the poet is merely imitating an imitation, for Aristotle's poet, with his emphasis on the universal, actually attains nearer to the ideal than does Plato's.

But not all imitations by poets are the same, for "writers of greater dignity imitated the noble criticism of noble heroes; the less dignified sort of writers imitated the actions of inferior men". For Aristotle, comedy is an imitation of base men... characterised not by every kind of vice but specifically by the ridiculous; some error or ugliness that is painless and has no harmful effects."⁸ It is to tragedy written by poets imitating noble actions and heroes that Aristotle turns his attention.

Aristotle's definition of tragedy has perplexed and frustrated many a reader: "Tragedy is then an imitation of a noble and complete action, having the proper magnitude. It employs language that has been artistically enhanced by each of the kinds of linguistic adornments applied separately in the various parts of the play; it is presented in dramatic, not narrative form, and achieves through representation of pitiable and fearful incidents, the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents."⁹

When put in context with other ideas in The Poetics, such a complex definition highlights Aristotle's chief contributions to literary criticism.

1. Tragedy, or a work of art is an imitation of nature that reflects a higher form of art exhibiting noble characters and noble needs, the act of imitation itself giving pleasure.
2. Art possesses form; that is, tragedy, unlike life, has a beginning, a middle and an end, with each of the parts being related to every other part. A tragedy then is an organic whole with all its various parts inter-related.
3. In tragedy, concern for form must be applied to the characters as well as the structure of the play. For the tragic hero must be "a man who is eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or fault. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous." In addition, all tragic heroes must have a tragic flaw or "hamartia" that leads to their downfall in such a way as not to offend the audience's sense of justice.
4. The tragedy must have an emotional effect on its audience and "through pity and fear" effect a catharsis - that is by the play's end, the audience's emotions should be purged, purified, or clarified. The universal, not the particular should be stressed, for unlike history which deals with what happens, poetry (or tragedy) deals with what could happen and is therefore closer to perfection or truth.¹⁰
5. The poet must give close attention to diction or language itself, be it in verse, prose or song, but ultimately it is the thoughts expressed through language that are of the utmost concern.

Interestingly, nowhere in The Poetics does Aristotle address the didactic value

of poetry or literature. Unlike Plato whose chief concern is the subject matter of poetry and its effects on the reader, Aristotle emphasises literary form or structure examining the component parts of a tragedy and how these parts must work together to produce a unified whole.¹¹

From the writings of these two philosopher-artists, Plato and Aristotle, issue the concerns, questions and debates that have spearheaded the development of most literary schools of criticism. By addressing different aspects of these fifth-century Greek ideas and concepts, a variety of literary critics from the middle ages to the present have formulated theories of literary criticism that force us to ask different but equally legitimate questions of a text.

From Plato and Aristotle to the present era, the theory of criticism has invariably developed on what Roman Jakobson devised for communication to portray the different viewpoints on the theory of criticism as:



This can be simplified into the shape of a triangle, i.e. A B C in which side A represents context, message contact, code. Side B represents the addresser or the writer and side C represents the addressee or audience.¹²

The term "criticism" prominently came to the fore in the seventeenth century when criticism was vigorously re-activated and practised.¹¹ The theories postulated during the period had a tendency to revisit the classical era of Greco-Roman models and ascribing to new theories that were being advanced by critics and writers alike. There were the dualities of the old and new direction, and a departure from the dogma of the past on such issues like the three unities, language, plot, theme and so on.

Emerging theories of writing poetry sometimes repudiated the theories of Plato,

Aristotle, and Horace.¹⁴

However, there was a point of mediation between the old and new forms of critical concepts, which was masterminded by John Dryden, who is widely regarded as the father of modern criticism. Poet laureate, dramatist, and a critic, John Dryden embodies the spirit and ideals of neoclassicism, the literary age that follows the Renaissance. The most prolific writer of the Restoration, Dryden excelled in almost all genres. His lasting contribution to literary criticism, An Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1668), highlights his genius in most of these genres.¹⁵

The structure of Dryden's An Essay of Dramatic Poesy reflects his brilliance during a naval battle between the English and the Dutch. Four men are floating down a barge on the Thames River, each supporting a different aesthetic theory among those prominently espoused in Renaissance and neo-classical literary criticism. The Platonic and Aristotelian debate concerning art being an imitation of nature begins the discussion. Nature, argues one debater, must be imitated directly while another declares that writers should imitate the classical authors such as Homer, for such ancient writers were, after all, the best imitation of nature. Through the voice of Neander, Dryden presents the merits of both positions.¹⁶

A lengthy discussion then ensues over the Aristotelian concept of the three unities of time, place and action within a drama. Should the plot of drama take place during the 24-hour cycle (time)? Should it be only a simple plot with no subplots(action)? The position that a drama must keep the three unities unquestionably wins the debate.

Other concerns centre on (1) the language or diction of a play, with the concluding emphasis being placed on "proper" speech, (2) The next are the issues of

decorum – whether violent acts should appear on the stage, with the final speaker declaring it would be quite “improper”. (3) The differences between the English and French theatres with the English drama winning out for its diversity, its use of the stage, and its Shakespearean tradition and (4) The value of rhymed as opposed to blank verse in the drama with rhymed verse being victor; although Dryden recanted this position and wrote many of his tragedies in blank verse.

Being a reflection of his age, Dryden sides with politeness, clarity, order, decorum, elegance, cleverness and wit as controlling characteristics of literary works. He did a lot to bridge the gap between the old classical principles of writing and the new emerging ones that were being advanced. He was a sort of mediator between the past and the new ages. It was at this time of critical evolution and development that Thomas Rhymer came out with his theory of Poetic Justice in 1678.¹⁷ Poetic Justice perceives the ultimate resolution of issues taking the form of reward for virtue and punishment for vice. This position of critical theory and practice was severely challenged and repudiated by the Romanticists who believed that truth and happiness cannot be attained in this physical life but that it is only possible in the spiritual realm. The dominant writing at this period pointed to the emotional viewpoint divorced from rigid and dogmatic principles of writing characteristic of the classical era of Greece.

Critical theory and practice did not make any impact during the Middle Ages except the banding and peddling of the various viewpoints exclusively by the theologians and classroom teachers. The period of Renaissance saw the vigorous critical activity with a revisit to the Greco-Roman eras. The dogmatic three unities of time, action and place were followed in addition to the other principles of writing poetry postulated by Aristotle and Plato.

Critical theory and practice has treaded the path of ambiguity, relativity and instability with no single theory assuming finality. It has been a continual search for truth and this has been the nature of critical theory and practice since its birth.

In the Business Of Criticism, the popular maxim that good art is for an age holds true in all circumstances.¹⁸ For instance, what was applauded during the restoration era of artistic creation may not be much appreciated if it is presented to contemporary audience. We live in a world of changing attitudes, mentality and ideology, which invariably affect the artistic creations of the times.

The dawn of a modern era and Darwin's theory of The Origin of Species (1859) has contributed a great deal to the development of writing as well as critical theory and practice.¹⁹ Critical theory and writing during the eighteenth century was based mainly on scientific observation of natural phenomena. Critics and philosophers advocated for naturalism and realism in the art of writing poetry. Critical theories such as Marxism based mainly on economic and social conditions were articulated and regarded as truth and reality in the art of literary enterprise.

As pointed out earlier on, no critical theory has ever gone unchallenged and continues to be challenged up to our present time. It is interesting to note that the famous Aristotle's Poetics was challenged and dismantled by one Ramus, a humanist in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Paris in 1536, which he successfully defended. Thus, it can be clearly seen that all critical theories and practices are ad hoc and subject to revision or change by new emerging ones.

The nineteenth century was a period of intensive and vibrant critical activity, which was spearheaded by Matthew Arnold who is noted for his scholarly common sense criticism. He believed criticism is a disinterested endeavour that seeks to learn and to propagate the best knowledge and thought in the world.²⁰ Fundamental to

Arnold's literary theory and criticism is his reapplication of classical criteria to literature. Quotes and borrowing of ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Longinus and other classical writers "pepper" his criticism. From Aristotle's Poetics for example, Arnold adapts his ideas that the best poetry is of a "higher truth and seriousness" than history or for that matter any other human subject or activity. Like Longinus, he attempts to define a classic, and decrees that such a work belongs to the "highest" or "best class". And in attempting to support many of his other ideas, he also cites the later "classical" writers such as Dante, Shakespeare and Milton.

For Arnold, poetry – not religion, science or philosophy – is humankind's crowning activity. He notes, "more and more (human) kind will discover that we have to turn to Poetry to interpret life for us; to console us, and to sustain us. Without poetry our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry". And in the best of his poetry, he declares, we find "in the eminent decree, truth and seriousness". Equating seriousness to moral excellence, Arnold asserts that the best poetry can and does provide standards of excellence – a yardstick by which both Arnold and his society should judge themselves.

In his pivotal essays "The Study of Poetry" and "The Function of Criticism at the present time", Arnold crystallises his critical position. Like Plato's critic, Arnold reaffirms but slightly amends the social role of criticism, creating "a current of true and fresh ideas". To accomplish this goal, the critic must avoid becoming embroiled in politics or any other activity that would lead to a form of bias, for the critic must view society "disinterestedly" keeping aloof from the world's mundane affairs. In turn such aloofness will benefit all of society, for the critic will be able to pave the way for high culture, a prerequisite for the poet and for his writing of the best poetry



The critic's task is to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. By comparing the newly written lines to those classical poems that contain elements of the "sublime", the critic will instantly know whether a new poem is good or bad.

In practice such apparent objectivity in criticism becomes quite subjective whose judgements, for example, shall we follow? Shall lines written by Homer and Dante be considered excellent? How about Sidney's or even Aristophane's?²¹ Need the critic rank all past poets in an attempt to discover who is great and who is not in order to create a basis for such comparisons and values judgement? And whose moral values shall become the yardstick whereby we judge poetry? Arnold's only?

Such "objective" touchstone theory redefines the task of the literary critic and introduces a subjective approach in literary criticism. No longer then the interpreter of a literary work, the critic now functions as an authority on values, culture and tastes. This new literary watchdog must guard and defend high culture and its literature while simultaneously defining what high culture and literature really are.

Matthew Arnold's death in 1888 marked a transitional period in literary criticism. Like Dryden, Pope and Wordsworth before him, Arnold was the recognised authority and leading literary critic of his day, and it is his theories and criticism that embody the major ideas of his era. The passing of Arnold ended the predominance of any one person or set of ideas representing a broad time period or literary movement. After Arnold, literary theory and criticism became splintered and more diversified, with no one theory or idea dominating for any one great period of time. At the end of the nineteenth century, most critics emphasised either biographical or historical approach to the text. Utilizing Taine's historical interest in a text and Henry James newly articulated theory of the novel, many critics investigated a text as if it was the

embodiment of its author or a historical artifact. No single universally recognised

voice, however, dominates literary theory in the years that followed Arnold or James.

Instead, many distinctive literary voices give rise to a host of differing and exciting ways to examine a text.

What follows in the twentieth century is a variety of "schools of criticism" with each school asking legitimate, relevant but different questions concerning a text. Most of these schools abandon the holistic approach to literary study, which investigates, analyses and interprets all elements of the artistic situation, in favour of concentrating on one or more specific aspects. For example, modernism (and in particular New Criticism, the first critical movement of the twentieth century) wished to break from the past and disavow the cultural influences on a work of literature.²²

The text, these critics declare, will interpret the text. On the other hand, New Historicism, the newest school of thought to appear, argued that most critics' historical consciousness must be reawakened, for in reality the fictional text and its historical and cultural milieu are amazingly similar.²³ For these critics a reader can never fully discern the truth about either a historical or literary text, for truth itself is perceived differently from one era to another. The 'text only' criticism of the early twentieth century therefore appeared biased and incomplete to these New Historicists.

Since the 1960's critical theories such as Deconstruction, Marxism, Feminism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis have successfully challenged the assumptions of the new criticism that dominated literary theory and practice for the first half of the twentieth century.²⁴

Rejecting the new criticism's claim that the new meaning of a text can be found, for the most part in the text alone, post structural criticism developed a variety of critical positions concerning the nature of the reading process, the part the

reader plays in that process and the definition of the text or the actual work of art.

The most recent critical voice to be heard in this discussion is New Historicism.

Influenced by sociological and cultural studies, New Historicism challenges the supposed objectivity of history, redefines the meaning of a text, and asserts that all critics must acknowledge and openly declare their own biases when interpreting a work. That consensus can be found among new historicists concerning theories of art; various terminology and practical methods of interpretation, however, would be an invalid assumption. Embracing different theories and a variety of methodologies, New Historicism is best thought of as a practice of literary interpretation that is still in process, one that is continuously exploring new interests, gaining new followers, and formulating its philosophy and practices.

Although New Historicism's assumptions and practices have been employed by critics for several decades, the beginnings of New Historicism date to 1979-80 with the publication of several essays such as "Improvisation and Power," and texts (Renaissance self-fashioning for example) by the scholar Stephen Greenblatt, and a variety of works by Louis Montrose and others. Wishing to remain open to different politics, theories, and ideologies, these critics share a similar set of concerns, not a codified theory or school of criticism. Of chief interest is their shared view that mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century historical methods of literary analysis are erroneous. History, they believe, should not serve merely as background information for textual analysis nor can it even objectively reproduce "how it really was." In disclaiming this old historicism and formulating its own theories of history and interpretative analysis, New Historicism was aptly named by Stephen Greenblatt in the introduction to a collection of Renaissance essays in a 1982 volume of the journal 'Genre'.

Throughout the 1980's and up to the present, critics such as Catherine

Gallagher, Jonathan Dollimore, Jerome Me Cann, Frank Lentricchio and many others have voiced their concerns that the study of literature and its relationship to history has been too narrow. Viewing a text as culture in action, these critics blur the distinction between an artistic production and any other kind of social production or event. Greenblatt and other New Historicists wish us to see, for example, that the publication of Swift's "A modest Proposal" was a political act, while noting that the ceremonies surrounding the inauguration of a United States president is an aesthetic event with many of the trappings of symbolism and structure found in any poem. Many similar examples highlighting their critical practices can be found in their chief public voice, the journal Representations.

Called a "bastard child of history", considered by some to be hostile to American values, and heralded as subversive and destructive to theory and literary studies, New Historicism does not present a unified front to its opponents. It is in the process of articulating a clear declaration of its purposes and its philosophy. Therefore, its followers continue to call for a reawakening of our historical consciousness about different societies that provide the historical context for various texts we are learning about our own habits, beliefs, and ourselves.

Like other poststructuralist practices, New Historicism begins by challenging the long-held belief that a text is an autonomous work of art that contains in itself all the elements necessary to arrive at a supposedly correct interpretation. Disavowing the old historical assumption that a text simply reflects its historical context (the mimetic view of art and history) and that such historical information provides an interesting and sometimes useful backdrop for literary analysis, New Historicism redirects our attention to a series of philosophical and practical concerns that it

comparatively new as compared to the West. The beginning of modern African Literature can be traced back to the period immediately before and after the end of the Second World War.²⁷ In the 1960's large quantities of African literary works were available and this gave rise to vigorous writing and critical works coming from Africans. Most of the foremost critics of African literature are writers themselves. There is much debate among African critics as to which standard or canon should be used in measuring works of African literature. Whilst renowned African critics of literature like Abiola Irele of Nigeria and Lewis Nkosi of South Africa advocate for sociological and cultural type of criticism for African literature, others like Dan Izevbaye call for new criticism or art for art sake type of criticism. These are contained in the African Literature Today series (No. 9) edited by Eldred Jones.

The battle and search for an appropriate critical theory and practice does continue, and critics and writers of modern African literature have not yet arrived at a consensus on this issue. The extremists in this controversy can be seen from Nigeria, the three critics, Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike, who describe themselves as "bole Kaga" or 'aggressive' who vehemently insist on African standards being used as measuring rod for African Literature. They made such demands in their co-authored book titled, Towards The Decolonization Of African Literature, published in 1980.

If ambiguity and conflict define the arena of the criticism of African Literature, nowhere else has it been so pronounced as in the series of polemical confrontations between major African writers and their more daring critics.²⁸ Having come into prominence mainly through a Western dominated tradition of criticism which packaged and presented him variously as the custodian, champion of the conscience of the race, the repository of social justice, the average African writer acquired the

mien of deity. With hundreds of European critics, editors and researchers trooping in to interview him to address a conference, the African writer was nurtured into a culture of messianism and was flattered into an over-exaggerated estimation of his socio-political importance. In the process also, the writer was bestowed with a feeling of superiority (not just supremacy) over the critic, a point to which the critics themselves have unconsciously acquiesced by virtue of the theoretical and philosophical aridity of their products, a deficiency which makes them appear totally dependent on literary texts for their livelihood. In the process, both writers and critics 'distanced' their practice away from social life.

Thus, when some critics summoned enough courage to subject the craft and social vision of specific writers to vigorous critical analysis, they were walking a terrain beset with landmines. First, they had to contend with the messianic ego of the writers; for in most religions, to affront the ego of a deity is always an act of senseless martyrdom! Consequently, in their polemical responses to their critics, key African writers have displayed characteristic condescension and oracular omniscience. For instance, when Wole Soyinka woke up to find his reputation as a poet threatened by the daring irreverence of the troika of Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike, he invoked "the principle of imaginative challenge" which is one of the functions of poetry and dismissed the critics in question as a three headed "pontifex maximus simplicissimus."²⁹

While restating the centrality of the writer's ego in a possible explanation of the writer-critic controversy in African Literature, it needs to be stated also that economic and ideological factors play a prominent role (even if unconsciously) in aggravating these conflicts. In a situation where ideas, in the form of books and articles, are also commodities whose value is reflected in the balance sheet of

publishers and booksellers, intellectual disagreement cannot but be marred by remote considerations of marketability and the interests of those who own the principal organs in the dissemination of intellectual products. Thus, the writer, while honestly defending his social convictions and artistic philosophy, may in fact be running down his colleagues and indirectly advertising his own works. In the process also, writers adopt favourite critics and deride those critics whom they consider hostile to their works. This is articulated by Chidi Amuta in his book The Theory Of African Literature. The consequence is a complexity of alignments and alliances among writers and critics whose ideological configurations cannot be easily disentangled from the economic and political factors that govern social life in the largest society in question. Lukacs summarises this contradiction in the following terms. "For the writer a "good" critic is one who praises him and attacks his neighbour, a "bad" critic is one who scolds him or promotes his neighbour". For the critic the greatest body of literature represents a dreary livelihood that demands much effort and pain. In this atmosphere where no real criteria exist, where there are political and economic pressures from the capitalist employer, mounting routinism and sensationalism and inexorable competition constantly threatening financial and moral destruction, unprincipled cliques emerge for whose aesthetic and moral level no outsider can have any respect.

In this intellectual free-for-all, certain underlying motivational factors crystallize. Disagreements and quarrels between African writers and their critics have revolved mainly around appropriate values (often racial) for the judgement of our literature, the ideological imperatives for writers given the socio-historical challenges of Africa, matters of craft (levels of obscurity) given what should be the target.

audience of African literature, and the very qualification of the critics (as parasites on the literary artifacts) to pass judgement on matters of creativity and authorial vision

The foregoing aspects of the criticism of African Literature display, in their incoherence, the lack of theoretical mooring in much of the critical practice. Criticism should be guided by theory and theory, in turn, by philosophy.³⁰ In the absence of this chain of relationships, writers and critics of the same epoch and even of the same broad class and ideological origins will display incoherence and indeterminacy in their pronouncements on literature and culture. In the process, their attention may be distracted from the real nature and scope of their historical challenge, while undue attention is paid to rivalry and contest for supremacy

If we look for the closest approximation to critical ideology at least in terms of a body of critical pronouncements formed by a broad but unformed world-view in African Literature, it is to be sought in the erection of the pre-colonial ("traditional") African world view of classical and universal embodiment of philosophical, moral and aesthetic constants. In the thinking of "traditionalists", it is against this absolute that all aspects of contemporary African experience and cultural practice must be actively and constantly related and measured in order to highlight their essential difference from elements of Western culture and civilization. This is the main thrust of what may be called "traditional aesthetics"

The emergence of African Literature in the European languages was greeted by the European literary establishment with a spontaneous spate of reviews and critical essays characterised by a patronising condescension couched in glamorous eulogy.³¹ Underlying these critical celebrations was a certain nebulous universalism which saw African Literature as part of the "human" literary heritage which did not necessitate the adoption of fresh evaluative criteria. The logical index and reference point of

universal humanism was the Western world's standards of performance, and critical values from the Western tradition could freely be adopted for energising and evaluating African Literature. The excesses of colonial criticism have more recently mellowed into a liberal, absolute relativism which, claims that there could be as many evaluations of an African literary work as there are critics, provided we are sufficiently intelligent to distinguish between "good" and "bad" critics.

The necessity for the adoption of African aesthetic criteria has come to be forcefully articulated while attention has duly been drawn to the existence, albeit latent, of a body of aesthetic values and artistic practices in pre-colonial African cultures which only need to be exhumed, refurbished and systematized to provide an alternative and thus call off the bluff of the Western literary establishment³²

As mentioned earlier on, modern African Literature is relatively new as compared to Western Literature. To this end, there is a great deal of controversy and disputes among African writers and critics on the question of critical criteria. In the light of contradictory theories and view-points on what African Literature should be, there seems to be chaos and confusion in the direction of African Literature.

However, in the midst of the confusion and chaos in the arena of African Literature, the varying critical theories advanced from the various quarters seem to have common ground and agreement on the issue of appropriate literature and audience awareness³³. From this critical stand-point there is much hope for further evolution and development of theory and practice of criticism of African literature.

The critical evaluation and appreciation in this volume should be seen as emanating from my modest and fervent desire of the new emerging African critics to honestly measure the works of their fellow African writers from the criteria of

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Chapter 1

BACKGROUND TO POST INDEPENDENCE PLAYWRITING

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Literary drama and, for that matter, playwriting in Ghana was given a great impetus with the founding of the Studio Players and the Experimental Theatre simultaneously by Efua Sutherland and Joe De Graft in 1957.² Thereafter, playwriting in Ghana made a leap forward with the emergence of prominent playwrights whose philosophies, ideas, orientation, and works contributed immensely to the evolution and development of a kind of semi-professional theatre practice in Ghana. This was a period characteristic of intensive and exciting social activities, including drama promoted and supported by Nkrumah's government.³ It was also during this period that playwriting with equal attention to literature and theatre began. Again, in 1962, Efua Sutherland built the Ghana Drama Studio with the express aim of providing a studio for practising playwrights. This atmosphere had a tremendous

effect on playwriting as persons engaged in writing had some contact with the productional aspects of drama through the studio. After creating the drama studio, Efuwa Sutherland engaged herself in the writing and production of plays together with writers like Joe De Graft. Foriwa, the first play written by Efuwa Sutherland, was produced around this time.⁴ Thus, since 1957, Ghanaian playwriting has become production-tailored.

To this end, there is a marked difference in dramatic quality between the plays of the colonial era and those written after Independence. Because the early playwrights' orientation was strongly linked to English literary conventions, their unique contributions were mostly based in the content rather than the possibility of presentation on to the stage.⁵

J.B. Danquah based his themes from various sources, one of which is Akan cosmogony, from which he derived the myth about the Akan hegemony.⁶ Accordingly, his play The Third Woman, covers two worlds – that of the gods named "Nyakonse" or (spirit world) and that of men named "Tekyman", the legendary home of the Akans.

The post Independence era was a booming and prolific period of playwriting and a number of educated Ghanaians produced good works for the stage. Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah stand prominently in the post independence era, as far as their contributions of artistic works for the stage are concerned. Backed by their educational background and orientation, these two playwrights have produced prolific artistic works of high quality for presentation on the stage.

Consequently, the works of these two playwrights have had a great impact on the evolution and development of theatre practice in Ghana since 1957. Their forms, themes, and styles of writing manifest distinctly from their predecessors of the

colonial period, whose works were mostly "closet drama" from the critical standpoint.⁷

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After coming out with her first play Eggrwa, she followed up with two others, Edufa and The Marriage of Anansewa. The artistic works of Efua Sutherland were experimental in outlook and this precipitated and kindled interest in contemporary Ghanaian artistic scene with the emergence of some playwrights who produced works with the purpose of presentation on to the stage.

In the post independence era, particularly after the sixties, literary drama in Africa has drawn its vision, themes and technique from the continent's own longstanding creative traditions, struggles and experiences of the people.⁸

The developments of drama in Ghana may be classified under three stages or periods: 1. The period of Protest Drama, 2. The period of Local Language Plays, 3. The National Theatre Movement.⁹ Protest Drama began during the era of the Gold Coast colonial experience. The main playwrights of the era were Kobina Sekyi, Rev Kwasi Fiawoo and J.B. Danquah. Kobina Sekyi wrote The Blinkards and directed it at the Cape Coast Town Hall in 1915. The play was, however, not published until 1963. Rev. Fiawoo, the Headmaster of the Zion College of West Africa at Anloga, wrote The Fifth Landing Stage in 1925 and directed it during the School's Speech and Prize-giving day. J.B. Danquah's highly philosophical play, The Third Woman, was written in 1939. This play was published in 1943.

cultural and political role and recognized by its advantage over the print media by its powerful visual image. The visual advantage of drama, to Ghanaian plays, can be recognized through the element of human character.¹¹ This trend drew affirmation from Aristotle's view that "the plot is the first principle, and it is the soul of tragedy".

Plot in drama is only a progression. What an audience concerns itself within a play, above all other elements of the drama, is character. Eric Bentley, a theatre critic and playwright, says on structure "the characters of the play is the drama". This is stated in his book titled, The Life Of The Drama, published in 1954. The Ghanaian theatre and plays have been consistent in their projection of a cultural battle: the projection of target audience and the definition of the functional role of drama produced in the Ghanaian theatre, a type of drama in which the storyline has been sacrificed for the character element. The plot in Ghanaian plays, therefore, tends to be uninspiring as they avoid creative challenge. A study of the character element in Ghanaian plays can substitute for one's understanding of the Ghanaian theatre and drama. The pioneer of the character-centred drama in the Ghanaian theatre is Kobina Sekyi.

In Sekyi, characters are individuals but they are also labels representing ideas and the playwright's frustration. A couple spends a few months in Europe and returns to Africa more European than the Europeans themselves. Sekyi labels them "Brofosem" or the "European imitators". Sekyi's character is his metaphor and his message in The Blinkards. Africans culturally live in a kind of inferior world in which the leaders mislead the less fortunate ones. The Brofosem (European imitator) returns after a short stay in Europe only to mislead his less fortunate Africans about European traditions. The danger inherent in this situation is that, his community, in their ignorance, trusts and makes the Brofosem stereotyped models of civilized European

standards. The "Okrado" (or the blind fellow) and the "Tsibu" (or the brainless and the rich farmer merchant class) also seek their identity by copying the Brofosems. Meanwhile a whole wealth of tested traditional value system symbolized in the character of Nana Katawera is sacrificed for what is not even a European way of life. What, to Sckyi, the African needs, are the values represented by the Kataweras; the strong, firm and highly principled with well motivated ego but not the spineless leaders, their equally ignorant followers and their brainless rich class who want to eat *fufu* with a fork and knife because they are European cutlery items

Rev.F Kwasi Fiawoo in The Fifth Landing Stage perceives his play and his message from the character angle. The playwright opens his play with summary of the plot in the play thus: "There lived in the reign of King Zanyidi certain scoundrels who disturbed the peace of the country for a long time. The most notorious among them was Agbebada. All attempts on the part of the parents to correct this young villain proved fruitless. Agbebada and his friend Kumasi were wooing a young girl by name Fudzikomele. Seeing that the girl was favourably disposed toward his opponent, Agbebada spared no efforts to slander Kumasi with false reports. He succeeded in creating a serious conflict between the family of the girl and that of his rival Kumasi"

The plot reveals lead characters who are all labels. First of the characters is Kumasi. Kumasi, in the Ewe language, means "one who has conquered death". The second character and antagonist in the play is called Agbebada, which again in the Ewe language, means "a thoroughly bad person" And the third character, around which the rest of the moral position in the community is going to be demonstrated in the play, is called "Fudzikomele" or Innocence

Fiawoo gives us a play in which goodness is in conflict with villainy and the effect of the clash between good and evil play on the innocent and the defenceless

victims of the society. The playwright however takes a moral position on the question of good and evil.¹² Any doctrine that provides shelter to negative forces as represented by Agbebada is a society endorsing the punishment of their innocent and defenceless ones and the only fitting answer to the likes of Agbebada is The Fifth Landing Stage.

The ritual trial by ordeal and the deterrent of swift punishment of The Fifth Landing Stage is, to Fiwoo, the only answer if Africans want to maintain their high moral order set before Europeans introduced their models of social values on the soil of Africa. Fiwoo's label characters, the spirituality of African values, and the traditional world view which equates and recognises crime as an offence against the gods; punishment that follows crime, are all the playwright's concern which are communicated through his label name characters. Fiwoo's drama is in his characters and these characters are the definition of his moral position.

J. B. Danquah was a philosopher and the author of a book on comparative religion with the title The Akan Doctrine of God. This book compares the Akan worldview and the Christian doctrine. To Danquah the basis of the two religions are the myths of their origins. The myth about the Garden of Eden can, therefore, be compared with the myth about the origins of the Akan ethnic group.¹³ Similarly, the Christian doctrine of the trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost can be compared to Ananse Kokroko, the supreme Being; Odomankoma, the God of intelligence and creativity, and Kweku Ananse, who is the younger brother to Ananse Kokroko and represents him on earth. Character selection in Danquah's play is designed to parallel the Christian World view. First of the comparison is the Christian Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Danquah sees such also in the Trinity of Akan myth on Ananse Kokroko, Odomankoma and

Kweku Ananse. These Akan mythical characters, to Danquah, also perform well-defined roles as the Tripod in Christian doctrine.

Character, in Danquah, also exists on three layers. There is a recognised mystery figure in Akan thinking. Thus, they say "Obosom Anim wɔkɔ ɔmpɛrisa - one consults a god three times"; "Odo nsa da -Love never ends". Kobina Sekyi's imitators also operate on three levels - "The Brofosem", "the Okrado's" and the "Tsiba's"

Danquah sees and equates the numeral three in Akan traditions similar to the Christian Trinity. His characters are, therefore, the comparative embodiment of Christian and the Akan worldview. In his play, The Third Woman, characters follow the embodiment of the playwright's point of view of the Akan worldview. At the top of the hierarchy of the Gods by Danquah's interpretation are: 1. Ananse Kokroko: God the Creator, 2. Odomakoma: God of Creativity, 3. Kweku Ananse: God of intelligence. Since the time of creation, Odomankɔ Bɔɔbɔɔ Oboadee has created three types of women. They are 1. Nsia: The First Woman, 2. Aso: The Imperfect Woman, and 3. Oni: The Perfect Woman. Adwoa Korang, the dealer of false hair, who offended the dwarf in the play, has three children: 1. Kofi Manu: The physically strong, 2. Ama Dede: Trader and 3. Yaw Preko: The Wealthy One. The fourth child of Adwoa Korang had been "Piesie". Unfortunately, "Piesie", as the recognised fool of the family, is always ignored and not mentioned. Man is a product of Oni (The Being), Okra (Soul) and Sunsum (Spirit).

The Third Woman opens with a mission or journey and ends with a marriage. According to their myth of origins, the Akans emerged from a big cave at Takyiman and travelled to Kong, a mythical city where they were to live in harmony with all. Meanwhile, in the play, the city of Kong had been taken over by evil spirits symbolized by the dwarf (motia). The "motia" had been brought to the city by Adwoa

Korang, who deals in wigs for trade. The trader came across a small boy with a lot of hair and shaved it. Now the dwarf demands his hair back and every time it weeps an important person in Kong, starting from the Chief and then to the General, dies. Adwoa Korang must restore the hair early enough to save the city.

The woman first takes the "motia" to her wealthy son, then next to her physically strong son but they both could not help with either their wealth or their strength. Meanwhile, Oni, the Third Woman and the most perfect creation of god is on her way to Kong. Must the evil force represented by the "motia" still keep control and welcome a perfect human represented by Oni to the town?

Adwoa Korang finally takes the "dwarf" (motia) to her stupid son Piesie who for his stupidity has been exiled from the town. Piesie lives on the outskirts of the town where he has made for himself a sand bed in which he plays all day. The favourite pastime of dwarfs is to play in the sand. On seeing Piesie's sandbed, the dwarf immediately jumped into it and scattered the sand all over. Piesie, after listening to the mother, demanded of the dwarf that it should also restore every grain of sand that it had scattered around before he (Piesie) may also restore its hair to its original position. Seeing how impossible it is to restore every grain of sand to a sand bed as it is to restore a shaved hair to its original position, the dwarf gave up its demand. It is driven out of Kong and peace is restored in the city on time to welcome Oni into the city. Oni finally marries Piesie and it is expected that the match between Oni the perfect woman and Piesie the creative being will produce the most perfect human race.

Character in J.B. Danquah, therefore, is the philosophy and his message. The myth of the origins of the Akan from Techiman and the folk story about Piesie - the

play is performed. The final item involved a feast, where food items contributed by the school children were prepared and served to all the children. In the cities, the elite social clubs may perform plays or organise ballroom dances. Once a while, however, a British professional drama company was invited by the Governor to perform a play. The play by the Professional Company was meant to be the model of excellence in dramatic performance, and the drama societies in the country were expected to emulate its organisation and production techniques

The use of the theatre between 1925 and 1950 to alienate the educated African from his cultural roots was so effective that most African elite before Independence, either did not want to have anything to do with things African or were even ashamed to be remotely associated with African forms of expression. The theatre had been used to brainwash the African to the point of self-rejection. The same theatre after Independence must be used to restore values in African Performing Arts and his cultural and social identity. Hence, the use of the word "theatre", as a symbol of Nationalist cultural revival. This period of cultural revival also marks the early stages of renewed seriousness in theatre as a profession in Ghana.



The Nationalist search for a new identity was seen also politically as an ideological battle where the art of the theatre is to lead a search for a dramatic form and the design of a theatre house that may represent the African experience and aesthetics.¹⁹ Okomfo Anokye's Golden Stool by Michael Dei Annan, Foriwa by Efuah T. Sutherland, Sons And Daughters by Joe De Graft, The Dilemma Of A Ghost by Ama Ata Aidoo, Amma Pranaa by Asiedu Yirenkyi, The Story Ananse Told by Martin Owusu are all plays whose central objective is to articulate the vision of a New African Dramatic Form and to rediscover a new African Aesthetics. Thus, if Michael Dei Annan puts Okomfo Anokye (traditional priest) on stage and Sutherland in The

mien of deity. With hundreds of European critics, editors and researchers trooping in to interview him to address a conference, the African writer was nurtured into a culture of messianism and was flattered into an over-exaggerated estimation of his socio-political importance. In the process also, the writer was bestowed with a feeling of superiority (not just supremacy) over the critic, a point to which the critics themselves have unconsciously acquiesced by virtue of the theoretical and philosophical aridity of their products, a deficiency which makes them appear totally dependent on literary texts for their livelihood. In the process, both writers and critics 'distanced' their practice away from social life.

Thus, when some critics summoned enough courage to subject the craft and social vision of specific writers to vigorous critical analysis, they were walking a terrain beset with landmines. First, they had to contend with the messianic ego of the writers; for in most religions, to affront the ego of a deity is always an act of senseless martyrdom! Consequently, in their polemical responses to their critics, key African writers have displayed characteristic condescension and oracular omniscience. For instance, when Wole Soyinka woke up to find his reputation as a poet threatened by the daring irreverence of the troika of Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike, he invoked "the principle of imaginative challenge" which is one of the functions of poetry and dismissed the critics in question as a three headed "pontifex maximus simplicissimus."²⁹

While restating the centrality of the writer's ego in a possible explanation of the writer-critic controversy in African Literature, it needs to be stated also that economic and ideological factors play a prominent role (even if unconsciously) in aggravating these conflicts. In a situation where ideas, in the form of books and articles, are also commodities whose value is reflected in the balance sheet of

publishers and booksellers, intellectual disagreement cannot but be marred by remote considerations of marketability and the interests of those who own the principal organs in the dissemination of intellectual products. Thus, the writer, while honestly defending his social convictions and artistic philosophy, may in fact be running down his colleagues and indirectly advertising his own works. In the process also, writers adopt favourite critics and deride those critics whom they consider hostile to their works. This is articulated by Chidi Amuta in his book The Theory Of African Literature. The consequence is a complexity of alignments and alliances among writers and critics whose ideological configurations cannot be easily disentangled from the economic and political factors that govern social life in the largest society in question. Lukacs summarises this contradiction in the following terms: "For the writer a "good" critic is one who praises him and attacks his neighbour, a "bad" critic is one who scolds him or promotes his neighbour". For the critic the greatest body of literature represents a dreary livelihood that demands much effort and pain. In this atmosphere where no real criteria exist, where there are political and economic pressures from the capitalist employer, mounting routinism and sensationalism and inexorable competition constantly threatening financial and moral destruction, unprincipled cliques emerge for whose aesthetic and moral level no outsider can have any respect.

In this intellectual free-for-all, certain underlying motivational factors crystallize. Disagreements and quarrels between African writers and their critics have revolved mainly around appropriate values (often racial) for the judgement of our literature, the ideological imperatives for writers given the socio-historical challenges of Africa, matters of craft (levels of obscurity) given what should be the target.

audience of African literature, and the very qualification of the critics (as parasites on the literary artifacts) to pass judgement on matters of creativity and authorial vision.

The foregoing aspects of the criticism of African Literature display, in their incoherence, the lack of theoretical mooring in much of the critical practice. Criticism should be guided by theory and theory, in turn, by philosophy.³⁰ In the absence of this chain of relationships, writers and critics of the same epoch and even of the same broad class and ideological origins will display incoherence and indeterminacy in their pronouncements on literature and culture. In the process, their attention may be distracted from the real nature and scope of their historical challenge, while undue attention is paid to rivalry and contest for supremacy.

If we look for the closest approximation to critical ideology at least in terms of a body of critical pronouncements formed by a broad but unformed world-view in African Literature, it is to be sought in the erection of the pre-colonial ("traditional") African world view of classical and universal embodiment of philosophical, moral and aesthetic constants. In the thinking of "traditionalists", it is against this absolute that all aspects of contemporary African experience and cultural practice must be actively and constantly related and measured in order to highlight their essential difference from elements of Western culture and civilization. This is the main thrust of what may be called "traditional aesthetics".

The emergence of African Literature in the European languages was greeted by the European literary establishment with a spontaneous spate of reviews and critical essays characterised by a patronising condescension couched in glamorous eulogy.³¹ Underlying these critical celebrations was a certain nebulous universalism which saw African Literature as part of the "human" literary heritage which did not necessitate the adoption of fresh evaluative criteria. The logical index and reference point of

universal humanism was the Western world's standards of performance, and critical values from the Western tradition could freely be adopted for energising and evaluating African Literature. The excesses of colonial criticism have more recently mellowed into a liberal, absolute relativism which, claims that there could be as many evaluations of an African literary work as there are critics, provided we are sufficiently intelligent to distinguish between "good" and "bad" critics.

The necessity for the adoption of African aesthetic criteria has come to be forcefully articulated while attention has duly been drawn to the existence, albeit latent, of a body of aesthetic values and artistic practices in pre-colonial African cultures which only need to be exhumed, refurbished and systematized to provide an alternative and thus call off the bluff of the Western literary establishment.³²

As mentioned earlier on, modern African Literature is relatively new as compared to Western Literature. To this end, there is a great deal of controversy and disputes among African writers and critics on the question of critical criteria. In the light of contradictory theories and view-points on what African Literature should be, there seems to be chaos and confusion in the direction of African Literature.

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In the post independence era, particularly after the sixties, literary drama in Africa has drawn its vision, themes and technique from the continent's own longstanding creative traditions, struggles and experiences of the people.⁸

The developments of drama in Ghana may be classified under three stages or periods: 1. The period of Protest Drama, 2. The period of Local Language Plays, 3. The National Theatre Movement.⁹ Protest Drama began during the era of the Gold Coast colonial experience. The main playwrights of the era were Kobina Sekyi, Rev. Kwasi Fiwoo and J.B. Danquah. Kobina Sekyi wrote The Blinkards and directed it at the Cape Coast Town Hall in 1915. The play was, however, not published until 1963. Rev. Fiwoo, the Headmaster of the Zion College of West Africa at Anloga, wrote The Fifth Landing Stage in 1925 and directed it during the School's Speech and Prize-giving day. J.B. Danquah's highly philosophical play, The Third Woman, was written in 1939. This play was published in 1943.

In the period between 1935 up to the early days of Ghana's independence, there emerged a number of local language plays. The first of these plays Nana Agyeman Hwehwe, was written in Akuapim Twi by Emmanuel J. Osew and published in the same year by the Presbyterian Book Depot, Accra. The local language plays were so popular that Osew's play between 1941 and 1947 was reprinted ten times. The market potential of the local language encouraged a host of playwrights who wrote in Akuapim Twi, Asante, Ewe, Ga and Fante. The mission schools provided ready market for these and used them as textbooks. Ironically, it was the Post Independence Educational System that discouraged the use of these plays, but at the same time the government invested heavily in building the Bureau of Ghana Languages to encourage more publication in the local languages.

The age of the local language plays was terminated by the era of nationalistic atmosphere of the late 1950's until the overthrow of the first Republic in 1966. The theatre and plays during the three periods in the development of the theatre in Ghana shows that theatre played the most singular and very important role in the Ghanaian search for cultural identity¹⁰. Plays during the three periods by their content either precisely rejected foreign cultural imposition, or sought to favourably compare the local culture with the new foreign culture by affirming the wealth of local languages. While pre-independence theatre used the medium of local languages, post independence theatre attacked and rejected foreign cultural imposition by seeking to discover new African forms of theatre that may define African drama. Drama in Ghana thus was identified as a potent tool for the assertion of the African identity and to make an original contribution to world dramatic literature. Drama in Ghana is, therefore not just an art form for social diversion, it is definitely justified by its socio-

cultural and political role and recognized by its advantage over the print media by its powerful visual image. The visual advantage of drama, to Ghanaian plays, can be recognized through the element of human character.¹¹ This trend drew affirmation from Aristotle's view that "the plot is the first principle, and it is the soul of tragedy".

Plot in drama is only a progression. What an audience concerns itself within a play, above all other elements of the drama, is character. Eric Bentley, a theatre critic and playwright, says on structure "the characters of the play is the drama". This is stated in his book titled, The Life Of The Drama, published in 1954. The Ghanaian theatre and plays have been consistent in their projection of a cultural battle: the projection of target audience and the definition of the functional role of drama produced in the Ghanaian theatre, a type of drama in which the storyline has been sacrificed for the character element. The plot in Ghanaian plays, therefore, tends to be uninspiring as they avoid creative challenge. A study of the character element in Ghanaian plays can substitute for one's understanding of the Ghanaian theatre and drama. The pioneer of the character-centred drama in the Ghanaian theatre is Kobina Sekyi.

In Sekyi, characters are individuals but they are also labels representing ideas and the playwright's frustration. A couple spends a few months in Europe and returns to Africa more European than the Europeans themselves. Sekyi labels them "Brofosem" or the "European imitators". Sekyi's character is his metaphor and his message in The Blinkards. Africans culturally live in a kind of inferior world in which the leaders mislead the less fortunate ones. The Brofosem (European imitator) returns after a short stay in Europe only to mislead his less fortunate Africans about European traditions. The danger inherent in this situation is that, his community, in their ignorance, trusts and makes the Brofosem stereotyped models of civilized European

standards. The "Okrado" (or the blind fellow) and the "Tsiibu" (or the brainless and the rich farmer merchant class) also seek their identity by copying the Brofosemes. Meanwhile a whole wealth of tested traditional value system symbolized in the character of Nana Katawera is sacrificed for what is not even a European way of life. What, to Sekyi, the African needs, are the values represented by the Kataweras; the strong, firm and highly principled with well motivated ego but not the spineless leaders, their equally ignorant followers and their brainless rich class who want to eat *fufu* with a fork and knife because they are European cutlery items

Rev.F Kwasi Fiawoo in The Fifth Landing Stage perceives his play and his message from the character angle. The playwright opens his play with summary of the plot in the play thus: "There lived in the reign of King Zanyidi certain scoundrels who disturbed the peace of the country for a long time. The most notorious among them was Agbebada. All attempts on the part of the parents to correct this young villain proved fruitless. Agbebada and his friend Kumasi were wooing a young girl by name Fudzikomele. Seeing that the girl was favourably disposed toward his opponent, Agbebada spared no efforts to slander Kumasi with false reports. He succeeded in creating a serious conflict between the family of the girl and that of his rival Kumasi".

The plot reveals lead characters who are all labels. First of the characters is Kumasi. Kumasi, in the Ewe language, means "one who has conquered death". The second character and antagonist in the play is called Agbebada, which again in the Ewe language, means "a thoroughly bad person" And the third character, around which the rest of the moral position in the community is going to be demonstrated in the play, is called "Fudzikomele" or Innocence.

Fiawoo gives us a play in which goodness is in conflict with villainy and the effect of the clash between good and evil play on the innocent and the defenceless

victims of the society. The playwright however takes a moral position on the question of good and evil.¹² Any doctrine that provides shelter to negative forces as represented by Agbebada is a society endorsing the punishment of their innocent and defenceless ones and the only fitting answer to the likes of Agbebada is The Fifth Landing Stage.

The ritual trial by ordeal and the deterrent of swift punishment of The Fifth Landing Stage is, to Fiawoo, the only answer if Africans want to maintain their high moral order set before Europeans introduced their models of social values on the soil of Africa. Fiawoo's label characters, the spirituality of African values, and the traditional world view which equates and recognises crime as an offence against the gods; punishment that follows crime, are all the playwright's concern which are communicated through his label name characters. Fiawoo's drama is in his characters and these characters are the definition of his moral position.

J. B. Danquah was a philosopher and the author of a book on comparative religion with the title The Akan Doctrine of God. This book compares the Akan worldview and the Christian doctrine. To Danquah the basis of the two religions are the myths of their origins. The myth about the Garden of Eden can, therefore, be compared with the myth about the origins of the Akan ethnic group.¹³ Similarly, the Christian doctrine of the trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost can be compared to Ananse Kokroko, the supreme Being; Odomankoma, the God of intelligence and creativity, and Kweku Ananse, who is the younger brother to Ananse Kokroko and represents him on earth. Character selection in Danquah's play is designed to parallel the Christian World view. First of the comparison is the Christian Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Danquah sees such also in the Trinity of Akan myth on Ananse Kokroko, Odomankoma and

Kweku Ananse. These Akan mythical characters, to Danquah, also perform well-defined roles as the Tripod in Christian doctrine.

Character, in Danquah, also exists on three layers. There is a recognised mystery figure in Akan thinking. Thus, they say "Obosom Anim w_{ok}o imperisa - one consults a god three times"; "Odo nsa da - Love never ends". Kobina Sekyi's imitators also operate on three levels - "The Brofosem", "the Okrado's" and the "Tsiba's"

Danquah sees and equates the numeral three in Akan traditions similar to the Christian Trinity. His characters are, therefore, the comparative embodiment of Christian and the Akan worldview. In his play, The Third Woman, characters follow the embodiment of the playwright's point of view of the Akan worldview. At the top of the hierarchy of the Gods by Danquah's interpretation are: 1. Ananse Kokroko: God the Creator, 2. Odomakoma: God of Creativity, 3. Kweku Ananse: God of intelligence. Since the time of creation, Odomanko Borebore Oboadee has created three types of women. They are 1. Nsia: The First Woman, 2. Aso: The Imperfect Woman, and 3. Oni: The Perfect Woman. Adwoa Korang, the dealer of false hair, who offended the dwarf in the play, has three children: 1. Kofi Manu: The physically strong, 2. Ama Dede: Trader and 3. Yaw Preko: The Wealthy One. The fourth child of Adwoa Korang had been "Piesie". Unfortunately, "Piesie", as the recognised fool of the family, is always ignored and not mentioned. Man is a product of Oni (The Being), Okra (Soul) and Sunsum (Spirit).

The Third Woman opens with a mission or journey and ends with a marriage. According to their myth of origins, the Akans emerged from a big cave at Takyiman and travelled to Kong, a mythical city where they were to live in harmony with all. Meanwhile, in the play, the city of Kong had been taken over by evil spirits symbolized by the dwarf (motia). The "motia" had been brought to the city by Adwoa

Korang, who deals in wigs for trade. The trader came across a small boy with a lot of hair and shaved it. Now the dwarf demands his hair back and every time it weeps an important person in Kong, starting from the Chief and then to the General, dies. Adwoa Korang must restore the hair early enough to save the city.

The woman first takes the "motia" to her wealthy son, then next to her physically strong son but they both could not help with either their wealth or their strength. Meanwhile, Oni, the Third Woman and the most perfect creation of god is on her way to Kong. Must the evil force represented by the "motia" still keep control and welcome a perfect human represented by Oni to the town?

Adwoa Korang finally takes the "dwarf" (motia) to her stupid son Piesie who for his stupidity has been exiled from the town. Piesie lives on the outskirts of the town where he has made for himself a sand bed in which he plays all day. The favourite pastime of dwarfs is to play in the sand. On seeing Piesie's sandbed, the dwarf immediately jumped into it and scattered the sand all over. Piesie, after listening to the mother, demanded of the dwarf that it should also restore every grain of sand that it had scattered around before he (Piesie) may also restore its hair to its original position. Seeing how impossible it is to restore every grain of sand to a sand bed as it is to restore a shaved hair to its original position, the dwarf gave up its demand. It is driven out of Kong and peace is restored in the city on time to welcome Oni into the city. Oni finally marries Piesie and it is expected that the match between Oni the perfect woman and Piesie the creative being will produce the most perfect human race.

Character in J.B. Danquah, therefore, is the philosophy and his message. The myth of the origins of the Akan from Techiman and the folk story about Piesie - the

fool of the family who later proved to be the wisest, are only substructure to embellish the character base of Danquah's The Third Woman.

The strongest evidence in Ghanaian plays is their overreliance on the character element. Plots in local language plays tend to be either contrived or may rely on the fantasy style of folk story. Character and the use of the character element to drive home the message of the play has, however, been consistent. Invariably, the thematic concerns of the writers dominate. The moral tone of the literature, its concern of the role of plays as tools for education dominates.¹⁴ The message, however, depends highly on the dramatic character who may either represent an idea or bring out the thematic mission of the playwright

Local language plays, started as Twi literature series, promoted by the churches, were read mainly in the mission schools of the Gold Coast. They were so popular in the late 1930's and through Ghana's pre-independence era that, as mentioned earlier on, some of the publications were reprinted ten times within five years. The first local language play was written in Akuapim Twi by Emmanuel J. Osew titled Nana Agyeman Hwehwe. In the introduction to the play, Rev D. Bensies, the head of the literature committee of the Scottish Mission Council, described the play as "an experiment in the art of writing Twi."

The character element and the functional role of the character within the Akan traditions seem to be the dominant focus and the main motivation of the playwright.

Character, therefore, is the social position; it is the role and finally the drama. The main characters appearing in J.E. Osew's Nana Agyeman Hwehwe include "Omanhene" (Paramount chief), "Okyeame" (the linguist), "Osafohene" (war-captain) "Opayin" (an elder), "Omamma" (A citizen), and "Ohemmaa" (The Queen mother). Following the same sense of characters representing a social group, Osew

also invented characters to reflect occupational group such as "insugarefo" (A swimmer). The use of the element of character as the focal point in Ghanaian plays, it must be noted, did not change with the change of language from plays written in English to the new plays written in Akan. Even in the Akan semi-dramatic technique literature, the dominance of character element as a device of dramatic communication is not sacrificed.

Character operating as individuals in human stories started in local language plays written between 1970 and 1980. Ghanaian local language achieved the highest in the development of the element of character in Ghanaian local language plays as recently as in the 1970's. Plays of this school include E.O.Koranteng's Guasohantan, A.K. Ampoe's Kaku Nkwohou Buluku, a collection of seven short plays for children, and Twer Nyame by Kobina Gyate Akwa.

The plot of the local language plays may either be of a strong sentimental nature such as in Sam K Otoo's Nyame Bekyere or of an adaptation from a fantasy world of folklore such as J.A.Williams' Abowatsia Komfo.¹⁵ Whatever the style, however, the element of character or the character-driven elements technique in the play seem to be the main focus of most of the local language plays. The central objective of the playwright is to advance their moral message through a clearly defined role of the dialogue form for the teaching of the local languages. The plays also serve as medium of instruction in the classroom of the mission schools but dialogue, as the focus and the spoken word are put across through the character in the plays. It must, however, be mentioned here that by the 1970's the treatment of the character element in Ghanaian local language plays had developed round individual dramatic characters of the plays written in English. These had been introduced in the post independence Ghanaian theatre.

Ghana's independence was led by the Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, one of the most radical minds of the Black race during the last century. Nkrumah recognised the freedom of the black man and the recognition and respect for the Black race. In pursuance of this objective, Nkrumah encouraged and associated cultural identity with nationalism.¹⁶ Just before Ghana's independence in 1957, a cultural movement called the National Theatre Movement was formed.

The years immediate to Ghana's independence marked the period of strong social and cultural conflict. The colonial system was not only assessed for its political domination but it was also identified with the culture of Europe. The way forward for the new African state, it was believed, was to attach African liberation and freedom with African's own cultural identity. The African Identity or Personality became the call of Nkrumah and the principal concern of the early nationalists of Ghana's Independence movement. A nationalist cultural movement called "The National Theatre Movement was, therefore, founded."¹⁷ The movement identified the theatre with nationalism as it was considered that the theatre as an art form can effectively project the total way of the African life.

The British Colonial Government in 1925 introduced a new educational policy, which targeted at breaking the link between the educated African and his traditional past. The policy was effectively implemented by the governor, Guggisberg. The full impact of the Guggisberg administration of the Gold Coast is yet to be fully assessed but what is not missed by a cursory observer of the governor's impact was his well applied stick and carrot methods in the handling of the affairs of his "colonial subjects". He built good schools such as Achimota, extended the railway line to Kumasi and satisfied the health needs of the colony by building the famous Korle Bu Hospital. But whilst his social services were well appreciated he was also dividing

politically chiefs from the local intelligentsia at the same time as he introduced a new thrust in educational direction that set the African to self reject themselves and to scorn every value in their traditions and way of life. In the period before Guggisberg, the Basel missionary Rev D. Bensies noted in the forward to E. J. Osew's play and wrote: " In an age when widespread European civilisation is drowning so much of the old Africa it is valuable for the Twi folk to have the record of the customs of their fathers".

The Guggisberg Educational policy targeted three key areas in the social life of the colonial subjects. First, is the educational system which at the time was in the hands of the churches, and second the acceptable social values and cultural life of the educated African, and third, the programmed recreational activities for the colonised citizens.

Under the first category, government re-classified all mission schools in the country and directly subvented the schools according to classification. The direct subvention to the schools allowed government to take over and re-direct emphasis on cultural direction in all previously church social clubs such as the Catholic Youth Organisation (C.Y.O.), the Sunday School and Church Youth Choirs. The take over by government of the schools allowed for the mission school church plays to be substituted with secular English and American stage plays.

The recreational activities here packaged around the Empire Day celebration, which was recognised as the main European social event in the colonies. A day's programme for the Empire Day celebration started with a march-past, followed by the reading of the Queen's address, which was often delivered by a prominent person in the town or village.¹⁸ This was followed by sporting activities to end the morning part of the celebration. The afternoon started with cultural activities during which a

play is performed. The final item involved a feast, where food items contributed by the school children were prepared and served to all the children. In the cities, the elite social clubs may perform plays or organise ballroom dances. Once a while, however, a British professional drama company was invited by the Governor to perform a play. The play by the Professional Company was meant to be the model of excellence in dramatic performance; and the drama societies in the country were expected to emulate its organisation and production techniques

The use of the theatre between 1925 and 1950 to alienate the educated African from his cultural roots was so effective that most African elite before Independence, either did not want to have anything to do with things African or were even ashamed to be remotely associated with African forms of expression. The theatre had been used to brainwash the African to the point of self-rejection. The same theatre after Independence must be used to restore values in African Performing Arts and his cultural and social identity. Hence, the use of the word "theatre", as a symbol of Nationalist cultural revival. This period of cultural revival also marks the early stages of renewed seriousness in theatre as a profession in Ghana.



The Nationalist search for a new identity was seen also politically as an ideological battle where the art of the theatre is to lead a search for a dramatic form and the design of a theatre house that may represent the African experience and aesthetics.¹⁹ Okomfo Anokye's Golden Stool by Michael Dei Annan, Foriwa by Efua T. Sutherland, Sons And Daughters by Joe De Graft, The Dilemma Of A Ghost by Ama Ata Aidoo, Amma Pranaa by Asiedu Yirenkyi, The Story Ananse Told by Martin Owusu are all plays whose central objective is to articulate the vision of a New African Dramatic Form and to rediscover a new African Aesthetics. Thus, if Michael Dei Annan puts Okomfo Anokye (traditional priest) on stage and Sutherland in The

Marriage of Anansewa defines the African beauty as "Jet Black", the two playwrights' attempt is to arrive at a well-defined position of the National Theatre Movement and of their search for the African personality and a renewed Nationalist identity.

The first to set the pace of the theatre of the Nationalist movement was Michael Dei Annan's Okomfo Anokye Golden Stool. Michael Dei Annan's play was commissioned and performed as part of Ghana's Independence programme at the Roger Club in Accra in 1957. The all-Ghanaian cast led by George Andoh Wilson was flown from London.

The play is concerned with spirituality and thus opens with words of invocation and ends on the magic of Okomfo Anokye's command and conjuring of the Golden stool.²⁰

The writer selects an Asante myth in which the conjuring of the Golden Stool of Asante by the powerful priest Okomfo Anokye onto the spiritual foundation of the Asante nation. Dei Annan does not interpret the Asante myth. He only portrayed the idea of a supreme prophet, who provided for the Asante nation, a spiritual bond and unity. Nor does he portray Osei Tutu's bravery and statecraft as the founder of the Asante nation.

Ntim Gyakari, the King of Denkyira, also does not carry the antagonist tag of a wicked king of Denkyira from whom the Asante liberated themselves. The whole focus in Michael Dei Annan's Okomfo Anokye's Golden Stool is on Anokye, the lead character in the play. Anokye, as a lead character, has very few lines. He is in a trance for most parts in the play. Dei Annan spends the whole act one of his play announcing his birth and continued in devoting the following scene on his childhood magical feats. Anokye's mystical powers, is, therefore, well established even before

the time of conjuring the Golden Stool. Michael Dei Annan's Okomfo Anokye's Golden Stool is, therefore structured around the character of Okomfo Anokye. The choice and the character of an "Okomfo" or a priest, in the play, however, represents an ideological battle between an African identity and colonial European attitude towards institutions.²¹ Western European Christian doctrine had condemned almost every African institution as either primitive or backward. Principal among these institutions are African religion and worship. Okomfo Anokye is asserting the claim on the viability of an African set of values.

Character in Ghanaian dramatic literature in Micheal Dei Annan can be said to have developed from the use of label name in Kobina Sekyi, Fiwwoo, and the local language writers to the use of characters of a strong individual whose action or actions are central to the development of the dramatic action. This feature is manifested through the plays that have been written after Ghana's Independence.

Efua T. Sutherland is synonymous with the theatre in Ghana. She, like Joe de Graft, can be credited with many ideas and innovations in the theatre in Ghana as well as the definitions of form in African theatre. The treatment of the character element by the two innovators of the theatre in Ghana in their plays show more of rounded and fully developed and more artistic handling of human diverse characteristics.

To understand Sutherland's major contribution to the developments of the character element in Ghanaian plays, one must first understand the creative technique of the playwright. Sutherland's playwriting technique relies heavily on workshop improvisation. Foriwa, her first play, was improvised by the original (Akan) Studio Players led by Alex Mensah. The Marriage of Anansewa, her last and the climax of her whole career as a playwright, was improvised by Kusum Agromma Group led by Egya Ampah; Kusum Agromma was a "Concert Party" theatre group. The Marriage

of Anansewa, therefore, has traces of concert drama techniques blended with Chinese traditional representational drama technique. Sutherland's creative technique starts by narrating the story line to a theatre group; the theatre group improvises and develops the stage version in the Akan language. It is then translated into English. Because of Sutherland's writing technique, characters in her plays bore the personal traits of the original actors who improvised the plays.

Sutherland's first major play was Foriwa. The original version of the play in Akan was performed at the University of Ghana Drama Studios in 1963. Foriwa was originally a short story titled Progress In Kyerefaso published in Langston Hughes's Collection Of Short Stories of Akan Treasure. Characters appearing in the short story were models well known to Efuwa Sutherland, in her pioneering role as a gender advocate. Important among the inspiration and creative sources in Efuwa's life was the Queen mother Nana Okoampa of the village of Atwaa, a small fishing community near Mankessim in the Central Region of Ghana. Nana Okoampa was a highly successful ruler of her people. The Queen mother's character in Foriwa drew her source and model from Nana Okoampa who was also a great inspiration to Sutherland's life and works. The Queen mother hosted a regular Anansesem story telling programme on Radio Ghana. And Sutherland's keen interest to develop Ananse play theatre must have had its source from that inspiration. The improvisation of Foriwa as a stage play used the personality of Mrs. Rosina Oku-Ampofo playing the role of the Queen mother.

Mrs Rosina Oku-Ampofo, a powerful woman, drove all the way from Mampong Akuapim every evening to attend rehearsals. Her personal concern with gender issues, which later resulted into her involvement in social work, are all the stamp one sees in the character of the Queen mother in Foriwa.

By adopting a workshop type creative process, Sutherland can be said to have consciously introduced realistic details in her handling of character in her first play Foriwa. Sutherland's theatre practice is not, however, only restricted to this play.

Efua Sutherland's contribution in the search for authentic form of drama that may be identified with African traditional roots led to the building of the Drama Studio in 1962.²² The Drama studio architecture is an experiment with the African compound house idea in which knowledge about African realities may be shared in common. The climax of Sutherland's whole theatre life, however, is embodied in her major play The Marriage of Anansewa. Before The Marriage of Anansewa, Efua Sutherland wrote and directed an Akan Ananse story play Wohye Mebo in 1964, and Medidi me Nyansa Ho in 1967. The Marriage of Anansewa shows richer development of handling the Ananse folk story from her earlier two plays. Sutherland's great mastery and confidence is in handling the traditionally set material by adding new dimensions and creating new characters such as Anansewa, a character which does not exist in the traditional medium

Ananse, the hero in the folk story, is still retained as the lead character but more characters are introduced to expand and to modernise the traditional folktale. The four chiefs from North, South, East, and West are all inventions and additional characters in Anansem to bring about a totally new form of theatre she called "Anansegoro" or Ananse play.²³

In The Marriage of Anansewa, therefore, Sutherland extended beyond the traditional demands of Ananse stories by expanding the traditional narration and by introducing modern realistic characters that have developed from present political and cultural realities. Sutherland, therefore, developed new extensions to her handling of characters at the same time as she provides realistic details to characters in her play.

Joe de Graft and Ama Ata Aidoo have retained conventional... such to character development in their plays. The two Ghanaian playwrights wrote for the theatre. The handling of the plot element in their plays, therefore, follows strictly along lines of conventional European literary definition of a play. For example, in Sons and Daughters, de Graft spends the first twenty pages of the play on the background information to the play. He then introduces the conflict in the next ten pages. Then he follows the use of sheer theatrical gimmicks in which a lecherous lawyer is introduced to project the social balance. The main character is Mr. Fosu, a typical semi-literate; Hanna his illiterate and good wife, and lawyer Bonu, a typical old man who has passion for young girls. In Through a Film Darkly, another play by Joe de Graft, the characters are the sentimental and jilted former girl-friend and the European housewife, who dotes on her domestic pet.

Joe De Graft's fervent quest to bridge the yawning gap between the European influence and his traditional African identity had been his fervent wish. This wish was finally discovered in his last published play Muntu. Muntu is an artistic statement on the African myth of origin and African history. Through rituals of communal workshop and sheer management of theatre of stage gimmicks, Joe De Graft is able to develop a powerful play that may do better as a stage production as well as to make powerful statement on African philosophy, African religion, African politics, African economics and African culture.²⁴ The powerful African base of the play, however, restricted Joe de Graft to fall on characters representing group identity or ideas. Thus, Muntu, the main character in the play, represents the past of Africa, which knows only harmony.

The traditional African world of Muntu seems to have influence on the playwright, the group sense through which the play communicates its powerful message. Character, as one of the most essential dramatic elements in Ghanaian plays, is still evident in Joe de Graff. The world of his play changes from the Western drawing room straight drama into a form of play that shows the playwright's awareness of his African traditional roots.

Ama Ata Aidoo gives us the element of the character type in her play, The Dilemma of A Ghost. Aidoo gives us Ato Yawson, an African type of character, who spends a few years in America and returns home with an African-American wife, just to show her off to his people. The playwright also gives us an African-American woman who has no sympathy for African things.

Anowa, another creative work of Ama Ata Aidoo, is a highly emotive drama, which carries the venom of a woman berating a man who has lost his manhood. The Dilemma of A Ghost treats the subject of culture clash. The family of Ato Yawson invests heavily in the education of their son. The son returns from university in the U.S. with an African American wife. The rational understanding is that Ato and his wife have a complex of some sort and therefore get along well. Eulalie Rush, the African American woman, is an Afro American with non-African mind. The clash of the two minds, the African and the American cannot be resolved when the two characters operating within a cultural environment in which the sense of the individual is heavily subscribed.

In Anowa, the second play with which Ama Aidoo is largely associated, the playwright lifts a traditional folk story into a modern stage play. The play Anowa is the same folk story that is represented in Asiedu Yirenkyi's Amma Pranaa. But whilst Asiedu Yirenkyi preserves the full story as it is narrated in the tradition, Aidoo

appropriates the full story to make her political comments. The background to the character of Anowa in the play is also carefully drawn; Anowa in the play was born to be a traditional priestess.²⁵ She is, therefore, pictured as wild, with supernatural powers, and the only child of Badua and Osam. Kofi Ako, the man Anowa later married, is described as handsome but useless – a “cassava-man”.

In the plays of Ama Ata Aidoo, therefore, character is a vehicle through which the playwright stamps her message. It is the most essential dramatic element and the core of her plays. Character and characterisation are twin, sharp instruments which make her plays not only dramatic but also highly artistic. Ama Ata Aidoo, however, has an artist twist of using a character where label name depicts the opposite of her character. For example, Monka (patience) in The Dilemma Of a Ghost, is the most unforgiving of all the characters in the play !

The dream of the Ghanaian theatre movement was to elevate the arts to the level of academia. In the early nineteen sixties, therefore, music, dance and drama became a department in the University Of Ghana, Legon. The two playwrights, namely Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah, whose works are examined and evaluated from a critical perspective in the next chapters, are among three outstanding playwrights produced by the Drama School at the University of Ghana. Asiedu Yirenkyi is a graduate of the University of Ghana Drama School, and the prestigious Yale Drama School in the U.S. Ben Abdallah also graduated from the University of Ghana Drama School and the University Of Texas in the U.S., where he obtained his Ph.D. The other outstanding playwright produced by the University of Ghana Drama School is Professor Martin Owusu, who also obtained his Ph.D. degree at the Brandels University in the U.S.

The specialised knowledge of these playwrights of post independence Ghana makes them conscious of the essential demands of the playwright in a theatre. These playwrights are also aware of form and meaning in the craftsmanship of their works.²⁶ Some of these writers may want to experiment with form, and their background and ready access to research information in the theatre of the 1960's gives them an advantage over the earlier pioneers of the Ghanaian theatre. The plays of this new school of playwrights, therefore, can be said to be more of improvements in experimentation over the earlier playwrights. For example, Sutherland in The Marriage Of Anansewa was influenced by the traditional representational drama of S.I. Husing's Lady Precious Stream. Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright had modernised the Chinese representational form in his drama of non-illusion technique. Sutherland, therefore, must have gone back to a form that had already been improved upon in the Western theatre of the 1930's and 40's. Martin Owusu seemed aware of this development and therefore in his The Story Ananse Told, he used more of the Brechtian technique.

The two selected playwrights, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah, in comparative critical analysis in the next chapters of this volume, can be said to have high intellectual background to the theatre and its development as an art form. The awareness of form and the meaning of the play give these playwrights a sharper analysis of the conditions in their plays.

The argument put forth in this discussion points to the conclusion that in Ghanaian literary writing, the development of drama is as yet minimal. This is the direction in which our literary drama has moved thus far. Although the plays highlighted in the discussion can stand as theatre, not all of them can be considered literature; in general they are limited in the imaginative and linguistic tension, all of

which can contribute to the literary interest of drama. Thus, the two plays of the 1940's and four post-independence ones, namely The Dilemma Of A Ghost, Anowa, Edufa, and Through A Film Darkly, may be liberally admitted as having some measure of these basic requirements which seem to suggest that the direction in the development of our literary drama is towards theatricality.²⁷

Nkrumah did not allow for political dissension. Censorship and the fear of censorship were not, however, the most important factors in contributing to the literary silence of the Nkrumah years. It would be in fact a distortion of history to dwell on this. Many writers and political activists were engaged in the task of nation building in a very practical and immediate manner. They were involved in massive literacy and adult education programmes. In addition, private investment was strictly controlled and limited by state, so little money was available for private presses such as the ones that were developed in Nigeria. This is of course something of an oversimplification of the Nkrumah period. Those were very heady years and the sense of cultural nationalism was stirring the very rapid development of Ghanaian writing in the area of poetry. A number of young poets were translating traditional poetry and Albert Kayper Mensah published much of his poetry in the 1950's and 1960's. Moreover Michael Dei Annan published three volumes of patriotic poetry, Africa Speaks (1959), Ghana Semi-Tones (1962), and Ghana Glory with Yaw Warren (1965); and Frank Kobina Parkes published Songs From The Wilderness (1965). A good deal of this verse is apprenticeship poetry marred by too much uncontrolled exuberance, but a lot of young writers were also being inspired to develop their talents.

At the University of Ghana, there was a good and exciting atmosphere for talent development of creative writing. The journal Okyeame was a medium in which



a great deal of literary works were displayed. Writers such as Efua Sutherland, Kwesi Brew, Kofi Awoonor, Frank Parkes, Albert Kayper Mensah, Ama Ata Aidoo, S. Adali Moty, and J.C. de Graft, wrote for this journal

Despite the fact that there was a lot of attention to post independence Ghana to the development of elite drama and theatre, they never quite got off the ground the way *popular Concert Party* did.²⁸ Three names stand out in the development of elite drama and they are: Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Sutherland and Joe de Graft, but collectively they have written a little over six plays

Ghanaian literary drama is at present in its seminal stage. Its identity on form; whether it should be pseudo-Ghanaian drama, a mere imitation of other cultures or whether it should be fully Ghanaian will depend to a large extent on the kind of theatricality it exploits.

A clear feature of the Ghanaian literary theatre is its emphasis on dialogue with action as opposed to the music, speech, and action of the Concert Party theatre which is due to its aim to appeal to an educated audience. There is, however, an exception to this general rule in the works of Ben Abdallah, one of the new playwrights to appear on the contemporary Ghanaian theatre scene after Ghana's Independence. Abdallah stands unique as a Ghanaian and African playwright, who artistically makes heavy use of dance, music, ritual, as well as dialogue and spectacle to develop his plots in his plays, which are somehow similar to the Concert Party tradition.²⁹

The contemporary Ghanaian Theatre has a feature of Western outlook. However, there is the recognition of the playwright, to blend elements from indigenous theatre tradition with elements of Western drama in order to evoke a type of theatre that might be Ghanaian in outlook. Albert Gerald's comment on African

literature is valid in this perspective of Ghanaian plays: "the literature of present day Africa emerged from the cross fertilization of conservative and innovating trends and colonial tradition has influenced the orientation". Albert Gerald made this comment in one of the series on African Literature Today edited by Eldred Jones.

Drama, according to Alvin B. Kerman, operates on two dimensions simultaneously. "It has the specific in that it deals not with abstraction but with particulars i.e. particular character, a definite setting, an action located in specific time and place, and it is universal in that its specific parts are arranged to show a crucial and enduring human situation".³⁰ Drama, therefore, presents two challenges: the arrangement of specific dramatic elements and the demonstration of the human condition. The demonstration of some general truth about the human condition projected in a play is what defines the meaning of the play.

Drama is about human character. It is a form set on imitation and defining human character and human relationships. The plot element requires and hangs on human interaction. A study of the craftsmanship of the playwright should involve a careful study of the central role of character in a dramatic composition. The theatre of Ghana, traced from the early pioneers to the present, offers diverse impressions and interpretations of dramatic characters in the body of its literature.³¹ A critical study of the literature shows not only the use of character element as the core of Ghanaian drama but it also reveals the sophistication in Ghanaian thinking from the beginning of the 20th Century into the 21st Century.

As two of the important and outstanding playwrights of the Post Independence era of the contemporary Ghanaian theatre, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah have each contributed significantly to the evolution of the theatre in Ghana through the works that they have produced so far for the stage. The examination of

their works forms the subject of the next chapters. Both playwrights have written voluminously and still continue to write for the Ghanaian stage although quite a number of their plays have not yet been published, especially in the case of Asiedu Yirenkyi.

Currently, Ben Abdallah is working on his newest play titled Song of Pharaoh, which is expected to advance further his ingenious theatrical experimentation dubbed "Abibigoro".

NOTES

- 1 K E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana" (1920-1957), 1990, page 51.
2. Richard Priebe, Ghanaian Literatures, 1988, page 185.
- 3 Richard Priebe. Ghanaian Literatures, 1988, page 14.

4. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays" page 128.
5. K.E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana" (1920-1957), 1990, page 5.
6. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays", pp.68-70.
7. Richard Priebe, Ghanaian Literatures, 1988, pp. 172-185.
8. Cosmos Pieterse & Donald Munro, Protest And Conflict In African Literature, 1956, pp.1-12.
9. Lewis Nkosi, Tasks & Masks In African Literature, pp. 185-195.
10. K.E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", 1920-1957, 1990, pp.15-17.
11. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays", pp. 120-130.
12. Raman Selden, The Theory Of Criticism, 1988, pp.9-10.
13. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays" pp. 68-111.
14. Cosmos Pieterse & Donald Munro, Protest And Conflict In African Literature, 1956, pp. 10-14.
15. Raman Selden, The Theory Of Criticism, 1988, pp. 46-50.
16. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays", pp. 110-120.
17. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays", pp. 110.

18. K.E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", 1920-1957,1990, Introduction
19. Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, page 34.
20. G.C.M. Mutiso, Socio-Political Thought In African Literature,1974, pp. 9-13.
21. George M. Gugelberger, Marxism And African Literature, 1988, pp. 10-11.
22. Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, page 35.
23. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays", pp. 124-125.
24. Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, page 13-29.
25. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "The Development Of Character Element In Ghanaian Plays", pp. 130-131.
26. Lewis Nkosi, Tasks & Masks In African Literature, page 173-193.
27. K.E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", (1920-1957),1990, pp 4-17.
28. K.E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", (1920-1957),1990, pp. 1-13.
29. K.E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana" 1920-1957,1990, Introduction.
30. Jeremy Hawthorn, "Unlocking The Text", pp 23-29.

CHAPTER 2

Philosophy of Asiedu Yirenkyi

Ghanaian writers since the beginning of literary history in Ghana have been highly consistent in the native role as investigators by constantly calling for a new order.¹ Kobina Sekyi's The Blinkards, R.E. Obeng's novel Eighteen Pence, The Third Woman by J.B. Danquah, and Rev. Fiwoo's The Fifth Landing Stage all seek to make highly sensitive statements of their times. Some are still valid today.

The first or the most primary concern of the post independence Ghanaian writers is to destroy the literary form introduced by the colonial order.² Asiedu Yirenkyi, a prominent Ghanaian and African playwright who emerges in the post independence era of Ghana's theatre, is no exception to the direction of breaking from the colonial or Western oriented kind of play writing. Like most contemporary African writers, Asiedu Yirenkyi addresses the basic socio-political issues of his society in his plays.

Yirenkyi was born in the Oyoko royal clan and was educated in a mission school.³ While he was assisting his late grandfather in the Oyoko black stool room, he was at the same time enrolled in Basel Boarding School at Akropong Akwapim. His plays may, therefore, be set in a westernized environment such as Blood And Tears or it may be set in an African compound traditional environment such as Kivuli or also in a traditional folkstory world as in Amma Pranaa.⁴ His main concern however, is either to preserve the past or to correct the present. Thus, in Amma Pranaa, the playwright's main concern is to re-organize a traditional folk story for the modern stage.

Asiedu Yirenkyi's world is full of the realities of either the dualities of human contradiction or the problem of the differences between human appearance and human realities. To sum up, the overriding theme that one can find in Yirenkyi's plays as an analogy to Shakespeare's plays is in Much Ado About Nothing, in which appearance and deceit of human nature is the dominant theme.⁵ The question of dualities of human existence seems to be the main focus of Yirenkyi in his craftsmanship as a playwright.

Human dualities may be a result of cultural clash but deep into the study of human behaviour is the twin questions of morality and human identity. The modern African is generally unprincipled and undisciplined. This may be due to the influence of Western education and values, which the African has consciously or unconsciously imbibed to his own detriment as far as the traditional customs and values of his own society are concerned. In Dasebre, army generals who have sworn to defend the state have never defended the state. Presidents are often illegitimate leaders in Dasebre. Leaders in Kivjals have no backbone or ego. The educated in Blood And Tears cannot even make a sparkling plug. And the rich in Lovenet make their wealth through smuggling.

There is this deep frustration of the lawyer in Lovenet which sums up:

Lawyer

I am in the wrong world.

(The reply to the lawyer from all the other characters:)

All

You'

Obviously a model of excellence, a social character such as a lawyer and a leader of his people should see his world in a more acceptable shape. If such a model of society is frustrated what about all of us at the bottom of the social ladder?

Social criticism obviously is the social concern of Asiedu Yirenkyi in his plays.⁶ The plays can be categorized into two groups, namely

1. The social plays set in the present. Examples of these plays are Blood And Tears and Lovenet.
2. The social plays with the background distanced into the African past or tradition. Examples include Kivuli and Dasebre. Characters in the plays of Yirenkyi are either about modern Africans or traditional Africans. Thus, Charles Brown in Blood And Tears comes from an African educated class, Kumi Mensah in Kivuli is the head of family and can be a head of state. Dasebre in Dasebre may be an illegitimate head of state who had forcibly imposed himself on his people. Characters in the plays of Yirenkyi, therefore, become the source of his message. Again, character following the duality in the world of the playwright also exists to demonstrate human condition and meaning of his plays.

Men seeking quiet, married life often end up with a female partner that may turn out to be the opposite, and so could a woman of quiet and peaceful nature end up with a husband who is the opposite. Human experience is full of this contradiction, and characters of Asiedu Yirenkyi seek to draw one's attention to these human contrasts. In Blood And Tears, Flora Koomson wants a settled life but meets a man who cannot even decide on solutions to his domestic life. When Flora moved into her own private house, she is at this time confronted with a man who wants her that she does not want. Probably, however, the most visible of these human contradictions may be seen in the Lovenet. The subject matter in the play seems to be raw. Basically,

the subject of the play deals with corruption. The definition of corruption is broad, and Yirenyi highlights the aspect of corrupted human bodies, which must be diagnosed in hospital laboratories. But the interpretation of corruption does not take away the character relationship, which brings into sharp focus to the meaning of the play. In Lovener a rich businessman who can afford to support a large family happened to have no child whilst a poor lawyer, who cannot afford to support any more children, happened to have many children. A faithful woman is married to a playboy lawyer. A young woman dates grown up men as the young medical student dates older women. People want to do what they do not want done to them. It is when they are all exposed that the contradictions in human existence dawn on them all.

Like Mathew Arnold, the great English critic and writer of the nineteenth century, Hendrik Ibsen, and Anton Chekhov, Asiedu Yirenyi set himself up as a critical commentator of his society in his plays through the creation of symbolic characters.⁷ Thus, Yirenyi's characters are more of becoming a statement than meaning or demonstration of human conditions.

The term "form" may refer to the various dramatic genres or nomenclature. Thus, form may refer to dramatic modes such as tragedy, comedy, and melodrama. Form may refer also to body or structure, the overall design or arrangement of the dramatic material.⁸ By this definition, form and structure are synonymous and may be used interchangeably in looking at the plays of Yirenyi.

The definition of form in African playwriting and, for that matter, drama, poses a problem, as there is no clear-cut definition.⁹ There is a distinction between African and Western drama, hence it will be a fallacy and an error to attempt to look at form in African drama just as in the case of Western drama.

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Asiedu Yirenkyi's worldview is full of realities of human contradictions, and these manifest in a form of social plays in his craftsmanship as an African playwright. Yirenkyi's perception of dualities in human nature, constitute a strong influence in his creative works.

A critical look at his plays reveals a continued quest or search for a form that would be unique in the African tradition. As a moderate traditionalist from the influence of precolonial and colonial African traditional values, Yirenkyi seems to advocate a mediation or compromise of the two in the modern African situation.

Obviously, the Western culture introduced to the African at the time of colonization has considerably affected the African socially, politically and psychologically and these in turn have affected the African way of thinking or mentality, which is popularly termed "colonial mentality". In short, the mentality of the African has been affected as a result of the introduction of colonialism in the African environment. This issue is what Asiedu Yirenkyi addresses either covertly or overtly in his plays. For instance, when Yirenkyi takes the theme of corruption in his comedy LoveNET, it evokes a close scrutiny of the way the modern African leads his life in the modern society, which is a replica of colonialism. The setting of the play in a hospital's surroundings is a manifestation of colonialism. The nurse, the doctor, the pharmacist, and the laboratory technician are all representations of colonialism. The formal education, received by the doctor, the nurse, the pharmacist, and the laboratory technician are all manifestations of colonialism. The hospital buildings and logistics are all vestiges of colonialism. The corrupt practices by the various characters in the play, which smack of immorality can be understood as an influence of the European way of life. It is arguable that the precolonial society of the African was comparatively better in terms of morality and discipline."¹¹



The traditional system that existed before the advent of colonialism was structured in such way that largely discouraged immorality and indiscipline. The communal nature of the African society where almost everything is done in common and every man is his brother's keeper contrasts sharply with the European or Western society where individuality reigns supreme and "every man for himself and God for us all" is the order.

It is also arguable that the individual life style of the European with its competitive nature, to some extent, nurtures and precipitates selfishness, greed, and hatred, which eventually lead to corrupt living. By embracing colonialism, the African unfortunately lost hold of his pristine life, which is a prerequisite to his indigenous society. Consequently, the African became corrupted in his life style as an indirect result of his colonial orientation¹¹

In portraying the modern African in a modern society that has been created by Western colonialism, Yirenkyi speaks through his characters and situations and metaphorically highlights the corruption of the modern educated African. As a writer in the contemporary scene, both in Ghana and in Africa, Yirenkyi is a moderate traditionalist who believes in a tradition that is susceptible to modification. To this end, Yirenkyi looks at the African tradition that is capable of growing alongside other traditional cultures of the world.

In an exclusive interview he granted me, Yirenkyi observes,

I am an African and I identify myself with my roots as an African, but I also believe that tradition should grow with the times, we must keep traditions and at the same time modify them to suit our needs. We should not keep traditional values that will not promote progress and the welfare of the people.

In his two major plays Kivuli and Amma Pranaa, Yirenyi projects his traditional beliefs in the themes and settings of the plays as well as the dialogue and characterization of the characters. There is that traditional concern for values of the African heritage. In Kivuli, Kumi Mensah is a true representation of the typical African elderly man who is an embodiment of the traditional values and customs. Lawyer Blankson and the headteacher, Mr. Adom, also represent the typical colonial African, who, through formal Western education, has been transformed and, therefore, becomes a reflection of both European and African culture.

Yirenyi believes in the modernization of the African traditional cultures and, for this reason, he creates characters in his plays to reflect the dualities of leaning towards traditional African values and European values. The worldview of Yirenyi on human dualities forms the main basis of his creative works.

Asked in an interview on his writings whether, as a writer, he subscribes to the ideology of Negritude or Pan Africanism, Yirenyi asserted:

"I am an African and I believe in the identity of the African. Negritude and Pan Africanism are both slogans, which mean very little to me as an African" ¹²

Yirenyi strongly believes in the identification of one's roots as an African. He argues that Negritude and Pan Africanism have been wrongly represented by those who advocate for either of these two concepts in the contemporary African scene, and he observes:

Africans have never been truly one as a family, but divided and inflicting cruelties in one form or the other on each other, how then do you talk about Africanism or Negritude in this regard?

According to Yirenyi, Art should help one to understand one's life and environment better. It must liberate in the same way as education liberates men and equips them with tools to help one to survive in one's environment.

According to Aristotle's order of priorities of dramatic element in a play, the plot is followed by character and finally the intellectual content or educational value. These are the three most important choices the playwright must make. Though plays and other works of art are to be considered first and foremost for entertainment; they must also have higher educational appeal. The educational content in the play comes from the quality of interpretation that the playwright stamps on his work of art. Analysis of social values, interpretation of the meaning of man's existence, the affirmation or rejection of traditionalism, are all lessons that one may draw from quality interpretation of one's works of art .

One cannot help observing around his environment. All beings are, therefore, constantly involved in the observational process. Due to the voluminous nature of the things one observes, he or she is bound to forget some observed situations easily. Good observation involves the eye and the mind functioning simultaneously. When the mind joins the eye, one may begin to see more than the ordinary eye can see, and what has been observed can always be easily remembered.

Observation usually involves noticing characters and events, which are attractive to the human eye. In creative writing, however, there is more to observation than what meets the human eye. In order for a writer to be able to adequately observe his subject accurately, he will need to add the mind and his sense of feeling to what he may notice. He or she must possess good judgment skills and his selection of events must be done with good sense and objectivity. Most importantly he must develop a personal attitude to his or her materials. Developing a personal attitude to the materials involves the application of the writer's sense of judgment to the material. The end result of the process is the creation of original and unique characters of the writer's own creation.

The theme of a work of art is the central philosophical statement of that work. Closely related to this philosophical statement however, is the writer's own point of view or the personal judgment one may exercise. The point of view of the writer is simply the manner in which the writer analyses things. It is closely linked with one's personality and personal attitude. A person may lack sympathy for anything and hence, condemn issues. On the other hand, another person, because of his sufferings in life, may not wish to see others suffer and will hence be more sympathetic. Attitudes may reflect in theme statements. The point of view of a writer is formed when the writer takes a strong personal position in relation to a particular subject.

In Lovener, Yirenkyi takes a personal position in relation to both corruption and identity.¹⁴ Yirenkyi's personal point of view on the issue of corruption is that corruption dehumanizes people and anybody who, therefore, indulges in it is "sick". On the subject of identity, his personal point of view is that it is only when Africans have lost any identity left in them that they call on their traditional past to save them.

As an African playwright, Yirenkyi is of a strong view that African playwrights who desire that their work should be meaningful and of relevance to their societies must first of all have an obligation to the nation and the society in which they live. To him, therefore, a playwright must deeply analyze the various rituals performed in his society.¹⁵ He must be very knowledgeable of the society structure and elements of communication of his people. These include the use of the narrative, characterization, and the difference of characters. Knowledge in traditional African oral literature and the role of the critic in traditional African society must be carefully understood and affirmed.

The educated African often finds himself in a dilemma; he is a child of two worlds: the traditional African society and modern Western colonized society to

which he belongs.¹⁶ Such a difficult situation sometimes leads the African to lose his identity or roots. It is this situation that alienates the educated African from his people or his traditional society. By virtue of his Western education, he discards the values of his traditional society and acquires European values, which are detrimental to his personality as a human being. It is this unfortunate situation in which the educated African finds himself that Yirenyĩ strongly castigates in no uncertain terms. He categorically declares

I am an African and I am proud to be an African. I live by my traditional values as an African and I delight to find my roots as an African. I cherish all that are good in the traditional African society.

Yirenyĩ's position as a contemporary Ghanaian and African writer is clear-cut as a modern African traditionalist who extols all that is good in traditional African culture. Having emerged from a stool home of his Oyoko clan, Yirenyĩ is an embodiment of the indigenous African values and that of the modern post-colonial African values. This gives him an ideological orientation as a contemporary African playwright.

Drama or playwriting, for Yirenyĩ, is not only a medium of communication but it also involves a cultural concept of communicating emotive sensibilities and social values. Good drama, therefore, begins from assessing the people and the culture for which the art is being created. He believes that African traditional cultures have nothing in common with European values and traditions. It is important, therefore, for African playwrights to have this understanding. African traditions offer a more varied and richer experience in solving communicative problems. The varied use of communicative elements must be pursued by the modern generation of creative writers or these unique peculiarities or African mode of communication will be lost from the continent of Africa forever.

There is the dilemma of translating this rich store of wealth of communicative elements into bodies of knowledge that the Westernized African education has created on the continent. Creativity involves problem solving. It is the calling of the creative individual not to abandon the past experience of the African but to ensure that a more creative solution is offered to develop the past into the present. The dilemma of the African playwright seeking to develop form from past experience is the same dilemma of the African continent, who must measure her development in relation to giving creative solution to the African past knowledge in science, agriculture and all other aspects of the African life. Like the playwright's dilemma, it is only when this creative solution has been achieved that the African world can be assured of meaningful development.

In a paper titled "Creative writing in the socio - economic development of a nation" delivered at Valco Trust Fund Writers Workshop at Sekondi - Takoradi Workers College in August 1989, Yirenkyi asserts: The role of the creative writer in the socio - economic development of a nation can be likened to the Akan proverbial "Asantrofi" bird. Asantrofi is a wayside bird and mythical symbol of human dilemma; if one comes across the bird and takes it home one has taken home a misfortune.¹⁷ Conversely, if one leaves the bird by the wayside one leaves behind a fortune. Creative writers may be likened to the wayside bird. When a nation nurtures its creative spirit, it must invariably contend with having to deal with major social rebels from within; on the other hand, a nation invites stagnation if it ignores its creative artists' potentials.

Yirenkyi continues in his exposition in the paper he delivered that, there are two ways that one can approach a discussion on the role of the writer in national development. First, is the view held by the users of creative products, such as

educationists, cultural policy planners, and cultural workers. Second, is the view held by consumers of creative products who equate the creative writer to a moderator of his society. The writer, as a moderating influence on his society, attacks outmoded values and social excesses as a process of recreating a new order. The second approach of looking at the creative writer in national development is the view of writers held by philosophers and psychologists that the writer, from historical and emotional perspective, links the creative process with invention in engineering, mathematics, and science.¹⁸ Writers invariably are creators of a new order in art and science and have in the past suggested, and continue to inspire and lead in the crusade towards national development.

Yirenkyi is of the opinion that development may be physical and social. Development also means growth or change. He believes that whatever the views of development, whether physical or social growth, it begins with humans. First one has to develop the human mind. It is to the human mind that the creative writer directs his energies and seeks insights, and to redirect thinking about new possibilities open to an old order of things.

Writers and artists are probably the most misunderstood individuals in most societies. They are sometimes identified as unmistakably queer. Sometimes they are referred to as the eccentrics of the society; they may even be daylight dreamers of the society or the emotional individuals and traditional troublemakers. Eric Bentley, a renowned American Theater critic, aptly illustrates this situation by referring to the English playwright George Bernard Shaw as "a man who walks on his head and sees the whole world turned upside - down".¹⁹

In his introduction to his book titled, The Creative Process, Breuster Ghishin tries to justify the creative individual. To this end, he writes:

Writers are not queer individuals. They are people who exercise no more than a sense of self-surrender to an inner necessity. The world glittering signs of material wealth that may be the priority of the average citizen may not be the concern of a creative person. The creative mind is spiritually deeper and always answers to an inner and urgent call. It is a deeper felt spiritual calling that cannot be replaced by contemporary material gains.

Writers are not the eccentrics of the nation, they are rather individuals who have admitted to the mind a flood of stimulating and nourishing experiences that had been excluded from others, and it allows a fresh examination of reality and fresh formation of meaning and assignment of values.

The creative writer all through his or her life imbibes experiences and observations that may not be open to other people. Through this exclusive he is able to project into the future.

The writer is not a dreamer for the sake of it; he is more of a visionary prophet. His dreams of today become our realities of a nation tomorrow. The star wars - a future formula for warfare was a dream, today scientists have worked to bring this vision into reality. So are many dreams of yesterday become the comforts that mankind enjoys today. The airplane, and the submarine were all creative dreams of yesterday. Creative writers are not the over-temperamental and emotional beings that society may observe them to be. The Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi²⁰ puts it in this way: "A writer is cursed with over-sensitivity. Society needs the over-sensitivity of the creative artists; it is a civilizing value."

Creative writers are not confused social rebels. They are about the most organized and disciplined individuals. According to Ghishin however, the creative person is not organized to obey the existing values, he recreates the human mind and soul, and in the process creates new works of art.

Yerenkyi believes that development to the creative writer occurs when one applies his creative potential to improve his surroundings. It is self-generated. It is

incited. It sometimes even means challenging established order and value judgement. It also sometimes emerges as rebellion against any forms of cruelty that stand in the way of mankind's quest for liberation and assertion of oneself.

For Ghana to develop into a modern state, it is necessary to first break out of fundamental traditional rationale of holding onto old customs and beliefs; and start thinking about more efficient ways of preserving our way of life. To this end, Yirenkyi observes that there is no rule that kenkey should always be wrapped in corn husks or dry plantain leaves; that it should take us three hours or more just in preparing fufu and palm-nut soup. There are certainly more hygienic and efficient ways of doing many things in life. One should not hide behind past traditions or culture and do things today the way they were invented centuries back. It becomes the lot of our novelists, poets, and playwrights to investigate, agitate, and lead the way to a new order and move the nation forward in efforts towards development. Since the beginning of literary history in Ghana, writers have been consistent in their active role as instigators by constantly calling for a new order, and Asiedu Yirenkyi is no exception to this kind of ideological orientation. As a post independence playwright, highly conscious of developing the contemporary Ghanaian and African theatre, Yirenkyi has continually been searching for a new form of writing which is unique and distinct from the colonial orientation.

According to Yirenkyi, since he began writing in the 1970's, he has been seeking to create audience awareness on the Ghanaian stage and for that matter the African stage in his plays.²¹ His first published play *Kivuli*, is a manifestation of this inclination. The setting of *Kivuli* is in a typical farming village in rural surroundings. Kumi Mensah, the protagonist, is a true representation of the African cultural heritage

and its values. Kumi Mensah is, therefore, portrayed as a traditionalist who upholds and values the African tradition.

Appropriate literature and audience awareness which are cardinal focuses of major African writers, provides for Yirenkyi a serious concern and attention in his plays.²² Conscious of this factor, Yirenkyi creates his plots, characters, and dialogues and sometimes backs these with music and dance to meet this objective. For instance, in Amma Pranaa, Yirenkyi lifts a folkstory and puts it on stage with little modification in terms of modern theatrical demands and allows the story teller to narrate the story in a typical indigenous theatre fashion backed with music and dance in the unfolding of the tale.

Yirenkyi's philosophical ideas in relation to the development of the contemporary theatre in post independence Ghana is mainly based on nationalism and development; hence, his inclination towards writing social plays like Blood And Tears, Amma Pranaa, and Lovener. In these social plays, Yirenkyi keeps on referring to the dualities of the human nature. In Blood And Tears, the protagonist Charles Allen Brown shows gross infidelity towards his lawful wife Elsie by having extra marital affairs with an intimate friend of his wife. Amma Pranaa, a pretty girl blinded by her sparkling beauty, rejects suitor upon suitor suggested by her parents only to end up yielding to a suitor who is a lion transformed into a human being. The elements of beauty and morality are the two opposing issues that Amma Pranaa battles with and the end result was that her pride as a beauty is destroyed by her yielding to a lion in human form. In Lovener, the businessman Mr. Ntifo and Lawyer Frempong are characters that lack discipline and end up in sexual immorality with a loose and depraved woman.

Thus, one sees in Asiedu Yirenkyi the human character, which is weak and unreliable in any given situation. The human being, and for that matter the African, is the cause of his woes as a result of his own actions. Honesty, they say, is the best policy but one sees in Yirenkyi's characters the opposite which often makes them look guilty and queer to themselves and characters they relate to in their actions. Charles Brown is disgraced in Blood And Tears as a result of his duality and dishonesty actions towards his wife Elsie. Amma Pranaa is humiliated by her pride and Mr. Ntifo and Lawyer Frempong are exposed and disgraced as corrupt individuals in Lovenet.

The overriding theme of Yirenkyi's social plays is that Africans are not honest enough first to themselves, and secondly to the society to which they belong. Implicitly and explicitly there is an indication, as far as Yirenkyi's philosophical ideas are concerned, in writing of his plays, that there is a general canker or malaise in the socio-political body of the modern African society, which is a strong impediment to development. This constant and clarion call by Yirenkyi to the African condition is obvious to any critical social analysis of the contemporary situation on the continent of Africa.²¹

Indisputably, the modern African society is a manifestation of a mixture of indigenous African and Western cultures, which is at variance with the true identity and welfare of the African. This situation constitutes a dilemma and an impediment to the true evolution and development of the African mentality and consciousness as a God created free human being. Africans have consciously and unconsciously imbibed Western European culture through colonialism, which has affected their way of thinking and doing things as a people unique from other peoples of the rest of the world.

The social plays of Asiedu Yirenkyi, which can be categorized as the distant past and this present highlight this dichotomy of the modern African society and precipitates the idea of a new order - a suitable way that will lead to the true identity of the African and the handling of his own affairs towards the realization of his own destiny as designed by his creator.

The present socio-political and economic woes of the African continent can partly be attributed to the influence of European culture and thinking of Africans which is alien to the indigenous and natural conditions prevailing in Africa in precolonial times.²⁴ To this end, Africans find themselves in an awkward position in their efforts to progress and develop as a people. Thus, European way of thinking and values becomes a hindrance to the natural way of thinking of the African which is ideal and suitable to his natural environment. The African problem becomes more complicated when he adopts European formulas in the solution of his problem. The hydra-headed politico-social and economic problems facing the African continent today is the result of this blunder on the part of Africans. Africans should solve their own problems divorced from any European influence and orientation. This will surely pave the way for genuine progress and development on the continent which will make the African to be recognized and respected as a human being by Europeans.

Post independence Ghana and, for that matter, Africa is no better than the colonial era. This sad state of affairs is the result of the mentality the African inherited from the colonial period. The leaders of the new independent states of Africa are dishonest and corrupt and are self seeking and disloyal to their people who gave them the power they wield. In the light of their Western form of education and training which is a manifestation of colonialism, the young leaders of Africa today are misleading and misdirecting their people to their, the leaders own self interests.

Because the young leaders of Africa today are dishonest and disloyal to their people, they create a lot of hardships for the people they rule. By their cupidity, subtle devices and tricks, they condone and connive with the Western powers to manipulate and to exploit the people of Africa.

It is arguable that the precolonial society in Africa was in its pristine purity, decency and sanity state before colonialism set in to obliterate this prevailing condition through the inculcation of European customs and values as a result of the introduction of Western formal education.²⁵ As time went on, the indigenous African society became contaminated with European cultural influences which ultimately affected the way of life of the people and mentality which is simply described as "colonial mentality". Thus, the onset of colonialism on the continent is the bane of the African cultural heritage.

Yirekyi writes with conviction on the interplay of European and African cultures on the modern African. He leaves no shade of doubt in the creation of his characters to exhibit this duality of cultural orientation. As an educated African who is conscious of his traditional roots as an African, Yirekyi artistically and symbolically comments on the issue of cultural mechanism in the transformation of the indigenous African society to the modern one. As a moderate traditionalist by orientation, Yirekyi believes that some old customs and values of the African society need to be modified to ensure progress and development of the people.

Yirekyi's philosophical ideas are summed up in three words as "The African Identity". The African identity is a very important factor to distinguish the African from other races of mankind. "The African must identify his roots", Yirekyi declares in an interview he granted to this writer. Yirekyi strongly and in no

uncertain terms deplores the attitude of most educated Africans towards the indigenous customs and values of the African society.

It is due to the loss of African values and traditions through a misplaced formal education introduced by Europeans that has caused most of the problems that militate against the progress and advancement of the African people. In view of this major problem facing Africans today, Yirenkyi is calling for a new lease of life for the African who will trace back his roots and identity to enable him to make an impact in his evolution and developmental path.

By highlighting and making bare the ills and weaknesses of the modern African society, Yirenkyi is calling for a reawakening of the African consciousness to effect a change that will see the African as a dignified human being. In one of his major plays titled Dasebre, Yirenkyi tackles the issue of illegitimacy in the socio-political body of the modern African society where there is greed for power and the accession to power through illegal means.

The present political, social and economic conditions prevailing in Africa are not all that palatable that Africans can be proud of. The constant upheavals and troubles that often lead to coup d'etats, which set up military leaders, tend to entrench dictatorship and inordinate ambition for power by both civilians and soldiers. Thus, there is an "Orgy of power and emperor making". Lawful governments are established, only to be overthrown the next day! Consequently, there is instability and chaos resulting in stagnation on the continent of Africa today. As a result of constant coups and changes of governments in Africa, there has been little or no progress at all in post independent states of Africa.

In Dasebre, one sees the negative tendency of acquisition of power through illegal means and the consequent abuse of the power so acquired. In Ghana the

frequent chieftaincy disputes and stool lands that emanate from royal lineage and inheritance are the issues that can be related to the theme of illegitimacy in Dasebre.²⁶

On the contemporary African political scene, one observes the spate of coup d'états that occur only to deepen the misery of the people. Rulers get access to power either by fair or foul means to cater for their selfish interests at the expense of the people they rule. There is a great deal of political manipulation and graft among individuals of the ruling class who vie for power. The constant struggle for power among the ruling class in the modern African society tends to make the seizing of power a fashion that indisciplined people dare to wrestle from the established order.

In a nutshell, Yirenyi's philosophical ideas behind his plays do speak for the modern African to re-examine himself in relation to his indigenous traditional heritage so that he can make his life better, which in turn can enhance progress and development both in his nation and Africa at large. Yirenyi's awareness of the need for a cultural re-awakening and his regard for traditional African customs and values are evident in his works as an African playwright who is proud to identify with his roots. For example in Kivuli, one of his major plays, he exhibits covertly and overtly, this disposition towards the African cultural heritage. His choice of the title Kivuli connotes the African ideal. Kivuli is a Swahili word meaning language, an aspect of the African cultural heritage.²⁷ The philosophy behind the choice of this word is to show to the entire world how Swahili, an East African language, is an important tool for the development of literature just as English and other European languages are. The choice of Kivuli as a title of a play denotes the playwright's intention to project the African heritage to the rest of the world. By choosing the title Kivuli, Asiedu Yirenyi demonstrates practically his African philosophy and ideological orientation as a playwright.

Swahili and other African languages can be used effectively in creating works of art, just like English and other European languages. African playwrights and writers of fiction must begin to write in their local languages to a target African audience. Undoubtedly, this is an ideal and a valuable objective for which all well-meaning African writers must aspire to achieve. It is in line with this laudable objective that one sees Ngugi Wa Thiongo, one of the leading African writers of fiction, deciding to abandon the English language and use his local language Gikuyu in creating his works of art.²⁸ This is a modest beginning and it is hoped writers will follow suit to project the African cultural heritage.

Finally, as a moderate modern traditionalist who holds in high esteem the African cultural heritage, Asiedu Yirenkyi wishes to see this ideal manifest in the works of modern African literature so as to enhance a modern African society that will reflect the African identity.²⁹ This cosmology will precipitate and promote progress and development for Africa.



NOTES

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Chapter 3

The Plays Of Asiedu Yirenkyi

As I pointed out in the last chapter, the plays of Asiedu Yirenkyi have subjects and themes that are related to the social issues of the indigenous or traditional African society. The plays may be categorized into two main groups; as social plays of the distant past and social plays of the present.¹

Yirenkyi's plays are character-based and he uses dialogue which is often backed by short, crisp and action-motivated words to convey his ideas and messages.² In addition, Yirenkyi employs music, dance, and spectacle which are, however, not as elaborate as that of Ben Abdallah, to convey his message to his audience.³ Yirenkyi's plays are written in an unconventional style. He uses Movements and Acts without subordinated scenes. His plays are symbolic and metaphoric, a typically African theatre format.

With metaphorical language combined with African rituals and games, especially in Daseberg, Yirenkyi unfolds his plots in a skilled and subtle manner to convey his messages.⁴ Yirenkyi displays great skill and mastery in the use of dialogue in his characters unlike Ben Abdallah who makes his characters move with powerful dialogue often backed with spectacle, grace and beauty. Abdallah also shows great skill in the use of dialogue but his characters use language which is frank, blunt, and un-ming in real life situations, which sometimes smacks of indecency and profanity to many a lay person in the theatre. To me, however, Abdallah's use of language is real and portrays contemporary life situations in which one sees a great deal of hypocrisy, lies, immorality and dishonesty. Unlike Asiedu Yirenkyi, Abdallah's use of language is elaborate, real and natural in varied and peculiar

circumstances of his characters. Abdallah's characters often speak the plain rustic language of the common people in a typical modern African society whilst those of Yirenkyi are inclined towards the indigenous or traditional African society with its culture and euphemism in the use of language of the people. However, Yirenkyi's weakness seems to be his conscious attempt to control the dialogue in his characters, and this results in contrived decisions and actions by his characters. For instance, one sees this kind of weakness in Kivuli when Kumi Mensah had to decide between using his money to hire more lawyers in a land dispute and the payment of school fees in order for his son Apeah Kumi to continue his education. Thus, the following exchange between Kumi Mensah and his wife, Comfort speaks for itself:

Kumi Mensah

Comfort

Comfort

Yes. K

Kumi Mensah

Do you still think we should hire a second lawyer?

Like I said, my opponent was represented by three lawyers last week and for the first time, it looked like I had lost the case already.

Comfort

Kumi, if more lawyers are necessary to help win the case, then, I say, HIRE MORE LAWYERS! You must not allow this land to be taken away from the family. Land is not property. It is LIFE. You are not engaged in a fight for a piece of land. You are fighting for the very survival of the family. You can't afford to lose this case.

Kumi Mensah

But money ! I'm being drained out----- before this land dispute first came up, I could say with confidence I was a man! Now I am almost ----- [Pause] Last year, I had to stop Yaa Asi from school. This year, Appeah's college fees----- well----- I don't know-----

Comfort

But where is your problem, Kumi?

Kumi Mensah

Don't you see----- [After a short pause]

If I didn't fight this case to the end, it will bring a big disgrace on me. I would have failed in my very important collective commitment to the family.

On the other hand, my son's education is my personal commitment; if I ignore that, what is ----- the rest of the village going to say about me? I don't know what to do now-----.

Comfort

Kumi, you don't want to compare the value of acquiring land to that of educating a child. My uncle used to say, "Educate a child and you have provided a life-style for a single individual! Buy land and you have provided permanently, for the whole generation of a family". That is why my uncle stopped me from school. And I don't regret it. Why? Educated men die and get buried with all their knowledge; but the lands my great-grand fathers bought are still servicing the family. But, Appeah is not my son. I can't suggest anything about his future to his father.

Kumi Mensah's weakness is that he cannot take independent decisions concerning the welfare of his family; and this undermines his personality as the head of the family.

In Dasebere, one of his major plays, Asiedu Yirenkyi treats the theme of illegitimacy. Set in semi-urban surroundings, Dasebere is a play that portrays the incessant chieftaincy disputes in the typical Ghanaian and African society along the lines of lineage and blood succession and accessions to stools of state.⁵ Dasebere is a play that deals with corruption, greed and inordinate ambition for power. Thus, plots, intrigues and violence are employed by self-seeking individuals to unseat one ruler and set up another.

Dasebere, the protagonist in Dasebere proclaims himself the paramount chief by manipulating the kingmakers and finally assassinating the queenmother Sakyibea, the soul of the state in order to achieve his selfish motive of getting access to the Black Stool of the Oyoko Clan.

Set up in a typical African traditional milieu, Dasebere exhibits, through rituals and games, the paraphernalia of African traditions and values to present the story in five acts devoid of scenes and flashbacks.⁶

The play opens with a prologue portraying the ravages of a town torn in civil war and the consequences that show widespread and large-scale destruction and ruin! This opening scene is somewhat similar to the opening scene of The Trial Of Mallam Ilya by Ben Abdallah, where there is a shoot out by the warriors of Malwal before Ilya is arrested and put before a court for trial.

In Dasebere, Asiedu Yirenkyi creates characters to represent the moral dilemma of the modern African society. Army generals who have sworn to defend the state have never defended the state. Chiefs are often illegitimate leaders in Dasebere. In

the prologue, Dasebere forces himself on the people as a paramount chief, as the following dialogue from pages 15 to 19 shows:

Kwafum

That is no more our case, my mother.

We now have a more serious case. Dasebere has come!

Sakyibea

Who?

Kwafum

Dasebere

Sakyibea

My left ear is playing tricks! Again!

Kwafum

Dasebere, the younger brother to our late king. He is back.

Sakyibea

Back to where?

Kwafum

Back here.

Sakyibea

Back here for what?

Kwafum

Back to claim the stool.

Akoto

Dasebere is also of the royal lineage.

Kwafum

He married into Takyiman accompanied by drums.

of rum and bones of bullets.

Sakyibea

Dasebere is touched by a knife

Akoto

But he shot his way into every home Fire and bullets----

---steel and sword. And blood----- blood----- spilling like hot sweat

Sakyibea

Dasebere is circumcised. Dasebere is deformed.

Akoto

My royal one

Sakyibea

Dasebere has taken up arms against his own royal ones.

He has stained his hand with the blood of my innocent citizens----- Our women have been stripped naked in public He has shed the blood of his own people and blood is bitter.

Kwafum

Time changes, my mother.

Sakyibea

You mean, you my generals advise that I give

you a circumcised and blood stained murderer to sit on a Royal Stool of our holy ancestors?

Akoto

Please mother, don't

Sakyibea

You swore an Oath ----- you swore an Oath on the
sacred sword of the state You swore to defend the people.⁷

Akoto

My mother

Sakyibea

Fiam! Fiam! Fiam!!! You are a chief. You were
selected by your people You represent your ancestors and your elders And you
swore to the whole state that you will not turn your back on your people You swore
to defend your people, and through fire and bullet! Where are the men in you? I
banished Dasebere from the state He stood up against his own royal blood He
brought strife, divided my sons into enemy camps He may control tons of
gunpowder and loads of bullets but he shall not touch the sacred royal stool!

Kwafum

Mother of the nation, our past mistakes should guide us
not to call for another war. We have been in this evil war situation for the past five
years Adonten stood behind you, my royal mother and fought on the side of Ntifo.
Many died and many still maimed Last week all the factions sued for peace Three
days later, Dasebere, backed by superior arms invaded.

Sakyibea

Have my generals lost the nerve to fight?

Kwafum

Nobody wins a civil war We must be fools sometimes
submitting to somebody and live in peace

Akoto

And in peace-----

Kwafum

My kind Queen - mother- your generals are still men but
the warriors have also filled their heads with rum and some of the chiefs lined their
pockets with gold Too much corruption The evil anarchy has sapped all decency
from our men We must give in to Dasebere.

Sakyibea

What are you generals saying? What is coming to you,
Akoto Kwafum, you are known for your wise counseling, what is this coming from
your noble tongue?

Akoto

Mother we are

Sakyibea

No ---- I did not hear you well I don't understand I do
not stand in the way of any royal prince becoming the next chief. But there is a
system, I the mother and the soul of the nation, give you a chief and that is the system
No--- Tano--- you commune with the gods What do you say to this?

Tano

We need peace

Sakyibea

No! It is only the weak that is meek and is always an
excuse for cowards! [Grabs state sword] I swear! I swear by the three sacred oaths of
the state I swear by Tano! By Asraman, the snake god! I swear by Bosompo the
snake god! I swear by Bosompo the sea god that you generals will not allow an
unqualified and circumcised war monger to sit on the Black Stool of this state

Kwafum

What do we do now? What do we do? -----

Sakyibea

You will follow me to war or I will expose my body -----

I will show you the blood of a woman's circle ----- [Queen mother starts taking off her clothes, Generals go down on their knees]

Kwafum

I beg ----- don't

Akoto

Forgive

Sakyibea

You all deserve to be slapped in the face with menstruation cloth Why? Have you Generals ceased to be men? ----- Look at my body -----

Kwafum

No! No!

Sakyibea

You call yourselves men and you are afraid to bravely look at a woman's naked body? What kind of men are you? Do your guns shoot straight at dawn?

Kwafum

Awo wodo bim. My old woman, you are right

Sakyibea

Ah! Ah! Ah!

[Drum]

Ntua ta mu short and precise - Ntua ta mu short and precise

Sakyibea

Ah! My elders, you have mangled my intestines, you have

stabbed the whole state from behind. Oh -----

Oh ----- where is the saviour⁸ to save a drowning nation?

The foregoing, sums up vividly, Yirenkyi's portrayal of the moral decadence in the modern African society. Army generals are found to be disloyal and violate the oath they had sworn to defend the state. Corrupt, ambitious and indisciplined men like Dasebere use material means like rum, gold to influence and win support for entoolment as a paramount chief of state, when he knows he had not fulfilled the qualification for such a position.

In Dasebere, one sees the constant conflicts that often lead nations and states into civil wars, with their attendant widespread destruction and loss of human life.⁹ The contemporary African political situation is replete with conflicts and civil wars that have caused a lot of suffering to the people. Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa, and Rwanda and Burundi in Central Africa, are cases of reference to this socio-political predicament that bedevils the continent of Africa.



The Trial Of Malam Ilya by Ben Abdallah has a similar theme of conflict and military action that bring into power leaders through a revolution. In the Trial Of Malam Ilya, Ben Abdallah employs a large cast and long narrative style to develop his plots and subplots to render the story of Malam Ilya with the support of heavy music, dance, and spectacle in a typical African style. On the other hand, Dasebere has a fairly large cast; there is also music, dance ritual, and African games to unfold the story. Whilst Abdallah's dialogue is very powerful and blunt in moving his characters to action, Yirenkyi's dialogue is short, quick, ephemeral, and sometimes contrived to move his characters to action. In the opening scene of Dasebere one finds the following:

Yaa

Save us ----- Help me! I am orphaned ----- My
father is gone, my mother, burnt to death, my brothers all butchered and my small
sister violated The roof of our house is on fire ----- save me ----- Protect the
orphans!

Kwafum (in whispers)

What do we do now?

Ataara

All your fault, All your fault!

Akoto

How?

Ataara

It is the owner, not the hungry one that eats the food

Akoto

Not again Adonten -----

Ataara

Allow me to shout out whatever is on my chest! You
know, and I know too, that every dawn bird knows that Ntfo is circumcised He does
not sit on a Black stool of our ancestors But we are so blinded by a few drops of
cheap rum. Now look at all the ruins! Look at how we sell our young maidens to
danger. All because, of one uncircumcised dog!

Akoto

Up young woman, on your feet!

Yaa

Thank you Nana

Kwafum

So! What do we do? What do we do now? We must do something

Ataara

Do something?

Kwafum

Yes ----- protect the maidens. The women, the children ----- the helpless targets of our dirty war ----- we must do something.

Ataara

Yes. We must do something. Unite. Correct the wrong. Show that you have a spine! The Queen mother is still alive. She is our divine soul. She is our spine! She is the only one who can make and unmake chiefs. She has decided now. Unite behind her decision.

Akoto

There now. There he goes again. Don't you see there is still a problem?

Ataara

Fiaw! There is no problem.

Akoto

The Queen - mother is human.

Ataara

She is divine. She is our back. She is our spine!

Conversely, in more powerful words, one finds in Abdallah's The Trial Of Malam Iya the following dialogue in the opening scene

Iya

(with intense fury)

I have known the world for almost seventy-two years. I have been where you are Where I am, you may never be, young man. What if I lie ----- it is profitless. I cannot lie! I came into this world through a conspiracy in which I was no participant. For fifty- five years I lived in relative obscurity ----- Employing my brain to fill my belly ----- as the saying goes-----

(Pause)

----- Wait ----- where is my wife? Where is Halima? Young man, what have you done with Halima my wife?

Malwal

Old one, you are the one on trial not your wife You will waste no more of our precious time, continue with your story -----

Ilya

Answer my question, young man.

[Pause Ilya descends into the audience and stands over Malwal]

You may kill me if you wish but until you tell me what you have done with my wife, I will not say a single word

(Long pause. They stare)

Malwal

Your wife Halima, daughter of the Grand Imam ----- she is well ¹⁰ We hold her captive Your life and hers depend upon your co-operating with us I know you have no fear of death I also know that you will not drag an innocent woman to the grave with you ----- Go on Ilya, we have no time for trifles

[Pause They stare at each other for a long time Malwal drops his eyes]

Ilya

Look at me young man, look at me ----- Something tells me you lie But you have the brow of a true man. Allah help you if you hurt a single strand of hair on Halima's head

[Pause, Ilya goes back on the stage]

Ilya

In case there are any amongst you who do not know it. I had followed at the heels of Immam Abass for thirty-two years of my life From the time I learned to talk my father handed me over to him to be brought up in the path of Islam I lived with him, learned from him, and to this day I have no other feeling for him but love and deep respect ¹¹

Since Immam Abass had no son of his own, he brought me up as if I was to take his place on earth when he moves up to his rightful place in paradise That is not to say he had no child of his own. He had only one child a daughter ----- A beautiful girl called Halima. We grew up together like brother and sister Halima grew into a beautiful woman

[As Ilya speaks the men set the stage for his sleeping room.]

I watched with secret amusement as men, young and old stole glances at her at the corner of their eyes wherever Halima passed I was not surprised when the rumours started. But I did not believe it. Not until the day Dikko stole into my sleeping room Dikko the Holy man's wife, Dikko, my mother and Halima's?

[Fade out as Ilya crosses to his room]

These two texts from Dasebere and The Trial Of Malam Ilya explicitly portray the approach to the use of dialogue by Asiedu Yirenkyi and Abdallah in their creative works as playwrights. Both playwrights are circumspect of the kind of dialogue they ascribe to their characters in order for them to move in cohesive action on stage

To this end, Asiedu Yirenkyi's use of dialogue in his craftsmanship as a playwright invariably denotes carefully chosen words that move his characters to action in a coherent and logical direction as far as the central theme is concerned. In one of his major plays, Kiyuli Kumi Mensah the protagonist is a character that has no backbone and allows his wife Auntie Comfort to influence his decisions concerning his family¹². In act one of Kiyuli one can observe this weakness in Kumi Mensah when he engages in the following dialogue with his wife

Comfort

But where is your problem Kumi.

Kumi Mensah

Don't you see ----- (After a short pause) If I didn't fight this case to the end, it will bring a big disgrace on me. I would have failed in my very important collective commitment to the family. On the other hand, my son's education is my personal commitment, if I ignore that, what is ----- the rest of the village going to say about me? I don't know what to do now-----

Comfort

Kumi, you don't want to compare the value of acquiring land to that of educating a child? My uncle used to say, educate a child and you have provided a life style for a single individual! Buy land and you have provided permanently, for the whole generation of a family! That's why my uncle stopped me from school. And I don't regret it. Why? Educated men die

and get buried with all their knowledge. But the lands my great great grand father's bought are still servicing the family. But Appeah is not my Son. I can't suggest anything about his future to his father.

Kumi Mensah

Hmmm well Tomorrow's problem may bring its own solution.

In Kumi Mensah, one finds a character that is in conflict, a man who has a duality of projecting himself as a traditional man in the eyes of his fellow citizens in the society and that of commitment of educating his son Kumi Appeah. Thus, when Mr. Adom the headmaster came to see him concerning his decision to terminate the education of his son Kumi Appeah, Kumi Mensah bursts out angrily.

Mr. Adom

Appeah came to tell me this morning that you stopped him from school-----

Kumi Mensah

(In fits of anger.)

Did Appeah come to tell you that? Did he come to you with that?

Mr. Adom

Mr. Mensah.

Kumi Mensah

Did Appeah come to you?

Mr. Adom

Don't be annoyed over this -----

Kumi Mensah

(suppressing his anger) I am not annoyed No, I'm not! But I must tell you, that boy is ----- he is -----[Bursting out in anger.] where is he? Where is that Appeah?

Mr. Adom

Mr Mensah, I only -----

Kumi Mensah (Anger)

Where is that boy? Appeah! I want to see his face!

Where is he? Let him come here and tell it to my face what he said I told him this morning! (Calls) Appeah, Appeah! [Enter Comfort with schnapps]

Comfort

The schnapps -----

Kumi Mensah

[Snatches the bottle from his wife and throws it away]

Where is that Appeah?

Comfort

I am not Appeah.

Kumi Mensah

Where is he? Where is that hoodlum?! That -----

As pointed out earlier Kumi Mensah has no backbone or principles in directing his life as head of his family He is under the control of his domineering, youthful wife Auntie Comfort. Comfort seems to direct the affairs of Kumi Mensah especially towards the needs and welfare of his children with his first wife, Yaa Asa and Appeah Kumi. In this way, Kumi Mensah becomes a typical representation of the modern African who cannot manage his affairs properly owing to the colonial influence of his

way of thinking. The “colonial mentality” inherited from the colonial era is still influential in the outlook of the modern African towards commitment.¹³ For instance, most of the modern food items like salad, butter or cheese are still a staple or delicacy for many Africans especially the educated elite. The colonial influence is also shown in the way of clothes and dressing by the modern African. Dressing in suit and wearing bow or long tie is a colonial inherited legacy.

Mr. Adom, the headmaster, is a representation of the colonial education order and he is a product of that kind of training, whilst on the other hand, Kumi Mensah is a traditional man who is an illiterate in terms of the formal education of the colonial order, however, as a citizen of the society he interacts with educated people like Mr Adom, the headmaster, and lawyer Blankson who to some extent influence Kumi Mensah with their life styles in their way of looking at values and traditions in the modern African society. Thus, in the following dialogue, Yirenyi alludes to this subtle influence in the lives of traditional people in the African society like Dasebere

Kumi Mensah

You are exactly on time, Mr. Lawyer.

Mr. Blankson

Time! Time! Time is money! [Laughs loud.]

Kumi Mensah

I'll take your bag, Sir.

Mr. Blankson

Thank you [Puffs a thick plume of smoke.]

Kumi Mensah

----- And your hat

Mr. Blankson

Thank you very much. [Produces a handkerchief], Oh

rough, rough and tough! Very tough!

Kumi Mensah

I never thought one could drive through on a bush path.

Mr. Blankson

I ploughed through it alright The new car I have bought,
this ----- powerful Powerful but very expensive! [Laughs ! Comfort positions a
chair]

Comfort

Sit down, Mr Lawyer

Mr. Blankson

No ----- No ----- not yet [Gruns] I have not greeted
You formally you know The custom ----- custom ----- custom, they say 'make
or models manners of man ' [Laughs loud] or you think because I came from the city,
I have no respect for our sacred traditions! No----- no No Sir. No tradition, no
lawyer Blankson! [Shakes hands with Kumi Mensah] How are you old man?

Kumi Mensah

The gods are on my side ¹⁴

Mr. Blankson

[Laughs seductively at Comfort. Puffs from cigar.]

Uuuhhhh ----- and eh---- this charming lady ----- she's the daughter of yours
you were talking about the other day Right?

Kumi Mensah

That is my wife, Comfort

Mr. Blankson

Oh, well ----- I see ----- [Trying to be humorous] Well

old man, I must say you have such perfect taste Just perfect ----- [Shakes hands with Comfort] how are you, Mrs Mensah?

Comfort [Recites]

Pretty well, thank you.

Mr. Blankson

Frankly, Mr Mensah I nearly ----- well, I thought she was your daughter. I was going to say, 'How on earth didn't I come to this house before!' [Laughs loud] Oh yes. I am joking Not all You provincials have a monopoly on true beauty [Pointing and almost touching Comfort] Just you look at such a perfect woman A truly faultless figure of perfect woman. Perfect with no paints, no ponds and no simulations! That's beauty truly blending!

Comfort [Flattered]

Oh Mr. Lawyer

Mr. Blankson

I mean it, I really do You know, the kind of woman one sees around the cities these days, one can't tell whether the face is painted or scaled or sprayed! And the skirt? Right this high Dsgusting! That is the trouble, one can't find -----

Kumi Mensah

Won't you sit down sir?

Mr. Blankson

Oh ----- Thank you. Thank you. [sits]

Thank you very much much Well----- well----- sometimes I just keep running on---
---- like ----- like a tap! [Laughs loudly]



Kumi Mensah [Calling.]

Appeah! Appeah!

Voice

Yes, Father.

Kumi Mensah

Bring the lawyer some good drinking water

Mr. Blankson [Sneezes]

Oh ----- terrible! Just suffocating! Wish I could take

my coat off

Kumi Mensah

Comfort. Help the lawyer with his coat!

Comfort

Let me help you with your coat, Sir

Mr. Blankson

No, no no. I can't take off my coat. I mustn't.

Mr. Blankson

[Puffs thick cigar smoke, Kumi Mensah and Comfort are

uncomfortable. Enter Appeah with the water.]

Kumi Mensah

Appeah, you shouldn't have used the mug! Where's my

drinking glass?

Mr. Blankson

It's alright, Mr. Mensah. I love drinking from a mug! In

fact a calabash would have made me feel even more at home. [Gets up and pours

libation.]

Here is to you, our great ancestral spirits Make us rich and powerful! [Sips some water] [Points] This is your son No mistake this time!

Kumi Mensah

Yes. My eldest son by my late wife. I have another boy who is about four -----.

Asiedu Yirenkyi uses his characters to explicitly articulate his message to his audience. Kwadwo Akoto, the parasite, is a typical representation of able-bodied people who are regarded as unsuccessful in life and, therefore, are dependent on others in the society for their livelihood and survival. This is a common feature of the traditional African society in which these kinds of individuals are looked down upon and have no respect or dignity.

In Dasebere, one sees Yirenkyi's attempt to lay bare the functions of the modern African society in terms of African values, customs, and traditions which are essential for its survival¹⁵

Dasebere is a well plotted play set in the rural milieu of the modern African society that portrays the moral degeneracy and the resultant chaos, instability and decay.

Asiedu Yirenkyi shows mastery and skill in writing comedies in the modern African society with Blood And Tears, Love net, and The Red Ants. These three plays constitute the core of his comedies¹⁶. The others are Ammā Pranaa and The Firefly.

Set in a middle class bourgeoisie background, Blood And Tears opens in the living room of Mr. Charles Brown, the protagonist. Mr. Charles Brown, an electrical engineer of about twenty-eight, is a married man. He is married to Elsie Brown, a woman of about thirty- five years of age.

Charles Brown is portrayed as irresponsible and unfaithful to his wife Elsie Brown. To this end, he develops a sexual relationship with Flora Koomson, his wife's intimate friend. Eventually, Charles Brown is shut out of his own house by Elsie, his wife. Consequently, Charles Brown rushes to the house of Flora Koomson - this house was bought by Charles Brown and offered as a gift to Flora Koomson his girlfriend - Unfortunately, Charles Brown had a brush out with the police in the house of Flora Koomson. Consequently, he is exposed in his secret love affair with Flora and this episode is summed up in the following text in the final movement as

Smart

Open the door

Elsie

It is my bedroom

Smart

Open the door

Inspector [Tries lock]

The door is locked. Why? Who is there?

Elsie

My child

Smart

Sir, she's telling a lie again! [Shouts] Charles! Charles! I know you're in there!

Elsie

Terrorising women and children ----- women and children ----- That's, all the forces are good for! Go, take somebody of your size-----

Smart

Come out there, or I'll smash my way in! Charles, I know you're there! Don't attempt anything foolish ----- come out quickly and give yourself up.

Inspector

Sergeant!

Smart

Sir!

Inspector

When persuasion fails one uses force.

Smart

Yes, sir! Charles, come out now or I'm coming in ----- you have ten seconds----- one ----- two ----- three.

Charles

Okay ----- Okay ----- I'm coming out ----- I'm giving up----- Door swings open. Charles, wielding broadsword, slashes his way through, knocks Sergeant Smart down.

Smart

Ahhh!

Elsie

No Charles ----- Please don't

[Slashes at her]

Sword flashes

Inspector

[Takes over]

Charles

[Flees.]

Smart

I'm wounded

Elsie

Ahh!

Inspector

Sergeant ----- what -----?

Smart

Get him ----- don't let him get away.

[Inspector blows whistle, whistle sounds almost like a kettle.

Whistle then fades away. Elsie and Smart wailing and moaning in pain.]

Elsie

Ahh ----- Blood ----- blood

Smart

Shut up. That's what you assimilated people brought to us
poor people ----- blood --- blood ---- And Tears!

Charles Brown ends up as a disgraced person owing to his own misguided
action towards his wife, Elsie Brown.

Similarly, one sees inconstancy and infidelity in Lovengit and The Red Ants. In
Lovengit, Mr. Ntifo the businessman clashes with lawyer Frempong over Alice a
teenage girl. Both men claim Alice to be their girl friend. Lawyer Frempong and Mr
Ntifo the businessman are not faithful to their wives, hear them in the following text

Ntifo

You don't know? She is my girl, my serious girl friend.

Lawyer

Impossible. She is my girlfriend.

Ntifo

No she is mine.

Lawyer

She is mine. I drove her here.

Ntifo

Ask her; she was in my house only yesterday.

Lawyer

She is my serious girl friend, ask her too!

Nyarko

Stop, you two!

Ntifo

Why should I? She is my girl friend. I have every right ---

Lawyer

She is mine.

Ntifo

She is mine.

Lawyer

She is mine.

Ntifo

Mine.

Lawyer

Mine.

Nyarko

Stop that, you two!

Lawyer

Don't interfere

Nyarko

Why shouldn't I?

Ntifo

Why should you? Is she your sister?

Nyarko

She is my girl friend

Ntifo

Impossible. I saw her only last night

Lawyer

She is been with me all this morning.

Nyarko

Keep quiet, you all! Alice which of all the men here is
your boyfriend?

Alice

You. Eric.

Lawyer

What?

Ntifo

You must be ill. Come let us go to the doctor [Pulls Alice
roughly]

Alice

Let go of me.

Ntifo

What! You? A woman talking to me like that?

Alice

You can go hang yourself.

Both Lovenet and The Red Ants are plays that are set in hospital surroundings. This is symbolic of the various kinds of ills that human beings of the likes of lawyer Frempong and Ntifo in Lovenet and Joe Dennis in The Red Ants do have and as a result create problems for themselves and the society in which they live.

Joe Dennis, the hero in The Red Ants, is a typical playboy and irresponsible, who has many children like red ants in number with different women although he is married to a woman called Doris. By his infidelity and irresponsible sexual immorality, Joe Dennis creates a problem for himself and the society in which he lives. The children that he brings forth by different women will end up as liabilities in the society since they will not have any parental care and upbringing to become responsible adults in the future.¹⁷

The play opens with Joe Dennis in a hospital bed fighting to recover from a strange and terrible disease. The hospital is significant and symbolic of all the ills that plague people in the society like Joe Dennis who are seriously 'sick' in morals and therefore need a cure. Doris, his wife, comes to the hospital to visit him, and there is a serious argument and hot exchanges between the two of them; each one trying to put blame on the other for their woes. Joe Dennis claims he has sacrificed very much for Doris his wife but to him she does not seem to recognize this and becomes grateful.

On other hand, Doris also accuses Joe Dennis of ingratitude although she has sacrificed so much for him as a wife.

In The Red Ants, Asiedu Yirenkyi creates characters like Joe Dennis who are irresponsible and will not accept any blame but hold others as blamable in order to cover their misdeeds. In the modern African society, individuals of the likes of Joe Dennis abound and they constitute a great hindrance to the progress and advancement of the society as a whole.

The Red Ants is symbolic of the modern African society whose survival is threatened by self-seeking individuals who are liabilities to the society in which they live. The aspiration and progress of the society is undermined by such immoral and corrupt individuals like Joe Dennis. There are parasites such as Kwadwo Akoto in Dasebere who are dependent on others for their survival in the modern African society.

Similarly, in the Land of A Million Magicians by Ben Abdallah, one sees the utmost effort for survival in a society, which is disorganized and is in moral decay. Abdallah paints a sordid picture of a society which has lost its moral values to exist as a respectable and dignified nation.¹⁸ Set in Ghana, the Land Of A Million Magicians represents a true picture of many a nation in post colonial Africa which are plagued with socio-political and economic crises that often reduce the dignity and respect of such nations to almost indebted and beggar states.

In Amma Pranaa, Asiedu Yirenkyi creates an impression of innovation and a departure from the common practice of most African playwrights. He lifts a traditional folktale and puts it on stage in its raw state without any modification in the elements. By this approach, Yirenkyi shows a clear departure from the usual practice



of most African playwrights who sieve the elements they select to suit the modern stage for theatrical expediency. Thus, Amma Pranaa opens:

Master Drummer

Hey, hurry up there with the drums! You can't waste too much of our good audience's time

[Enter four men carrying Atumpan drums.]

Master Drummer

Good, hurry You two, fix the drums here [Stage right.]
You, and you, run up and bring ----- Let me see-----one, two, three, four-----
four stools. Hurry up We don't always have to be late in everything

[Lights dim Exit all except Master Drummer Four or six members of the 'audience' enter and sit in the auditorium. Spotlight is thrown on the drums]

Master Drummer

Kron! Kron! Kron!

Listen, the master drummer speaks. The Tall Drummer whose name is Tweneboa Kodua, the estimable Master Drummer says

I have come from Kotoko

Wherever I have been

I was, held in esteem.

Kron! Kron! Kron!

Faithful drum stick carved of the great 'Ofemma' tree

The umbrella drum sticks whose name is 'Sakyi'?

My Confidence

Have my confidence for your trouble

Kron! Kron! Kron!

Finally, the folktale of Amma Pranaa ends as in the following

Chorus

Anansesem yi yedereko oo.

We are taking it away, this our

Ananse story. We are taking it away

[They all go out as they have come in taking everything away

with them Bare stage solitary spotlight on the Master Drummer]

Master Drummer

Kron! Kron! Kron!

The Drummer calls again

What has the master drummer to say?

The master drummer says

Condolence, condolence,

Accept my condolence.

For the cold night -----

I wish you condolence.

For the thick darkness.

Sleep well, sleep well tonight;

Sleep well----- like the python

In Amma Pranaa therefore, we see the typical African folktale scene put on stage unrefined by Asiedu Yirenkyi.¹⁹ The moral issue raised in Amma Pranaa is somewhat similar to what we see in Anowa, a play by Ama Ata Aidoo, a Ghanaian

woman playwright.²⁰ Both protagonists, Amma Pranaa and Anowa reject suitor upon suitor who proposed marriage only to end up with the wrong husband! Whilst in Anowa – a tragedy – Anowa and Kofi Ako commit suicide, in the end, Ama Pranaa in Amma Pranaa – a comedy – is miraculously saved by a hunter, her first suitor, from being eaten up in the forest by her “lion-turned – into – man husband.” Both Amma Pranaa and Anowa, out of pride, ended up choosing the wrong men as their husbands. Whilst Kofi Ako, the husband of Anowa, was impotent and could only preoccupy himself with the acquisition of wealth and slaves, the husband of Amma Pranaa was a real lion who had transformed itself into a man in order to enable it to devour Amma Pranaa

Amma Pranaa refuses many suitors who proposed marriage to her, in spite of her parent’s advice to marry the hunter whom they had approved of.

Agya AMOA

Amma, we are still waiting

Amma Pranaa

I won’t have him And that’s final

Agya Amoa

And I say you’re marrying him, that’s my decision And it

is final

Amma Pranaa

The matter is closed

Agya Amoa

You want to kill me and your mother What

is it you’re doing? We are both old You are our only child

Amma Pranaa

If you two are both old that's no reason why I should assign myself to that worthless hunter. I deserve a much more presentable man.

Eventually Amma Pranaa ends up yielding to a young man who proposed to her. This young man happened to be a non human being! Kwame, her husband, was in reality a lion who had taken the form of a human being!

Having performed the marriage ceremony as custom demands, Kwame hurriedly takes his wife away into the forest where, to her utter dismay and anguish, Amma Pranaa realizes that she had made a mistake by marrying a lion who had assumed a human form! At this stage Amma Pranaa is stunned and stupefied as her pride quickly melts! Her "lion - husband " gets ready to devour her but fortunately for her, the hunter whom she had rejected as a husband appears on the scene and saves her by shooting and killing the lion instantly. The hunter takes Amma Pranaa home and they get married!

The moral issue of pride is the dominant theme in this traditional folktale around the heroin Amma Pranaa. The case of Amma Pranaa is valid in the modern African society where young women of marriageable age like Amma Pranaa are a problem to the society in which they live. Beautiful young women often end up in prostitution, which is a social menace to the traditional moral values.

Culturally, pride is not acceptable in the modern African society as it precipitates a lot of social havoc that shakes the very foundation of the modern African society as a communal and collective unit.²⁴ Pride has led many people, both high and low as well as kings, to near destruction as in the case of Amma Pranaa, who nearly met her untimely death in the forest as a result of pride. Pride often leads to

many inhuman decisions and actions that bring about untold hardships and suffering to people in a society. Chieftancy disputes can lead to civil wars and destruction as a result of the actions of proud and ambitious individuals such as is the case of Dasebere in Dasebere, who seizes power by force and imposes himself on the people as a paramount chief! The frequent military coups in Africa may to some extent be attributed to the pride and inordinate ambition of some selfish and self-seeking individuals in the society. Thus, the moral issue is crucial to the survival of the modern African society.

In all, Asiedu Yirenkyi has written about twenty-five plays, most of which are unpublished. Like William Shakespeare, Yirenkyi believes he publishes a play when it is produced on stage for an audience.²² The publishing houses may undertake to publish them later, as in the case of Shakespeare in the Elizabethan period of theatre in England.

It is indisputable that Asiedu Yirenkyi has distinguished himself as a professional playwright in both the contemporary scenes of Ghanaian and African theatre. His first play, Kivuli, was published by Heinemann Publishing Company in London, which is world famous in the African Writers series. This was a recognition of his stature as a major African playwright. His contribution to the development of the theatre in Ghana after independence is significant.

His main concern in his plays for the stage has been a continual search for a form and a fervent yearning for the creation of audience awareness in the Ghanaian and African contexts.²¹

NOTES

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CHAPTER 4

Philosophy of Ben Abdallah

The philosophical and ideological orientation of Ben Abdallah as a playwright in both the Ghanaian and African contemporary scenes are synonymous with the theatre of revolt and cruelty by Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet of the twentieth century. This is obvious as a result of his constant searching and experimentation as a professional playwright in the art of writing his plays.

Ben Abdallah is an avant-garde playwright and for that matter a dramatist of significance in the contemporary Ghanaian and African theatrical scenes.¹ The philosophical and ideological orientation behind his plays smacks of a rebellion to the stereotypes of African play writing. This critical view is evident in the collection of plays he has so far written and published.

The Trial Of Mallam Ilya, Verdict Of The Cobra, The Witch Of Mopti and Land Of A Million Magicians are all plays that portray Abdallah's vision of a new African theatre he advocates in his philosophical and ideological orientation as a dramatist. Abdallah's main concern is the reawakening of the African to his own identity and to the realization of his full potential as an endowed God created being.² To this end, he maintains in his "Bobokiyi's Lament" that

the time test of the new and evolving African theatre and its practitioners is the ability to recognize the potentially useful achievements of Western theatre and use them for the development of a truly vital, vibrant and necessary African theatre.

He concludes in this dialectical perspective that the most important ingredients of this essential African theatre are to be found in our own backyard.

By his dynamic concept of "Abbigoro" (which is African play), Abdallah provides insights into some of the vast potentials that must be tapped, especially in collaboration with music, mime, and dance as well as other rituals and cult elements such as the concept of sacrifice and possession³ "Abbigoro", as the branch of Abdallah in the context of African theatre, is a philosophical proposition that will require painstaking research and sustained experimentation, and this will eventually create a vital bond between the evolving new African theatre and African spirituality, a distinguished feature of ancient African theatre that could be a major contribution of Africa to World theatre at large⁴

The ideological orientation of Abdallah is geared towards the achievement of what he calls a theatre of relevance or theatre of necessity⁵ From all indications, it seems Abdallah has a commitment for a revolution in the search for a true African theatre, hence his continued and sustained experimentation in his creativity as a playwright As a chronicler of the African ideal in the pursuit of his "Abbigoro" philosophy, Abdallah is daring and explorative into the African culture and cosmology, and consequently poses and advocates ideas that are challenging to the total emancipation of the African⁶ The following extract from his thought-provoking essay titled "Bobokykyi's Lament" testifies to his philosophical and ideological orientation as an African playwright

Needless to say I write with a specific African audience in mind While I believe in the power of works of artistic merit to achieve universal appeal, I do not trust the judges and their criteria of universality, criteria born out of a certain imbalance within the psyche of the Western man, where, as Brook puts it: 'The golden calf of the intellect is worshipped at the cost of true feeling and experience', criteria which, like many Western values, norms, traditions and even institutions, are being rapidly and indiscriminately grafted into African and other post-colonial cultures⁷

All my playwriting so far has been a series of difficult steps towards the realization of the African theatre I envisage This search has taken me so far into the domains of history, myth, the festival, religious ritual and the tale as a literary form

As already pointed out, Ben Abdallah is an avant-garde playwright who is preoccupied with continual experimental practices in his research for a true African theatre. To this end, obviously Abdallah becomes a major dramatist of significance in the Ghanaian and African theatrical scenes.

Born in Kumasi and of Ghanaian and North African descent, Abdallah grew up in the Kumasi Zungu community where he imbibed the Moslem faith, which has considerably influenced his personality and his creativity as a playwright. Abdallah is a true African who is proud of the African cultural heritage, this is manifest in the philosophical ideas behind his creative works. In fact, Abdallah believes strongly that the African can be self-reliant and be able to solve his own problems without looking up to the West or elsewhere. Notwithstanding this belief, Abdallah also believes that Africans can borrow what is good in Western culture and values and add to their own. Abdallah, however, cautions that we should not be too keen in borrowing from the West else we lose our own identity as Africans.

In his conclusion to his "Bobokiyi's Lament" essay, Abdallah makes the following observation:

Of course African theatre is and will continue to be part of the world heritage of performance arts and can therefore not afford to isolate itself from all Western influences - especially those technical influences that must be adapted and properly used. Nor can African theatre continue to be measured by Western criteria⁶, for this will only lead to chaos and eventual doom. In the aftermath of the African Holocaust ours is a search for a theatre of necessity. What Brook calls 'the essential theatre' as Theatre that would at last become a truly popular art open to everyone. For a piece of theatre would make total sense, regardless of language or class wherever.⁸

It is a fact that many a renowned writer, in his early writings, has been influenced in one way or the other by past great writers. For instance, John Dryden, a writer and father of English criticism, was influenced by Shakespeare. George Bernard Shaw, the great Irish dramatist and critic, was influenced by Henrik Ibsen.⁹

Ben Abdallah seems to show some inspiration from the works of Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright. The Brechtian philosophical and ideological orientation seems to manifest in some works of Abdallah such as The Trial of Mallam Ilya and Land Of A Million Magicians. In an interview, Abdallah has categorically denied this allegation that he is a disciple of Brecht. He asserts: "I believe in theatre of relevance and that is what I subscribe to."

From a critical standpoint, Abdallah is unique and the youngest among Ghana's post-independence playwrights. His uniqueness stems from his constant experimentation in the theatre. He is the only Ghanaian post independence playwright who adds a flavour of the Islamic faith in his works. The Trial of Mallam Ilya, The Fall Of Kumbi and Land Of A Million Magicians are typical examples of this flavour of the Islamic faith.

As an avant-garde playwright, Abdallah is always experimenting with new ideas and innovation in the theatre. With the "Abibigoro" concept, which he had conceived and nurtured over the years, Abdallah hopes to create a new African theatre. He is constantly working towards this objective. By his "Abibigoro" concept Abdallah has his vision for the African theatre, which will appeal to his audience. To this end, Abdallah is working towards what I will describe as appropriate plays and audience awareness.¹⁰

After propounding and advocating the "Abibigoro" concept and being its chief apostle for some time now, Abdallah has radically intensified this call by advocating for what he calls "gatecrashing" method. By this method Abdallah envisions a theatre that artists do not borrow elements from the cultural milieu to create their works but are part of the cultural milieu. In other words, the artist's works must integrate the various cultural festivals of the continent. For instance, a Ghanaian cultural festival

such as Odwira should be seen as an integrated artistic event that involves every aspect of the Odwira festival. To this end, Abdallah introduces an innovation whereby the artist does not select some elements of the cultural ingredients within the festival but "gatecrashes" into the entire festival as a method of his creative skill.

Abdallah's "Abibigoro" concept is somehow synonymous with Wole Soyinka's Survival Patterns, which, in short, articulates the preservation of the African cultural heritage.¹¹ "Abibigoro" which literally means "African play" is a lofty philosophical concept that tends to portray the African identity in theatre. By the "Abibigoro" concept Abdallah concerns himself mainly of the African ideal as far as theatre is concerned. His "Abibigoro" ideas are the embodiment of his artistic approach as a playwright.

Abdallah's basic philosophical ideas behind his writing is to awaken the African to the realization of his true identity as a God created free human being who has his own unique destiny to work out. By this ideological orientation and leaning, Abdallah writes his plays to satisfy his audience that he has in mind. Abdallah therefore thinks of plays that will satisfy the various social structure or layers of the society.¹² For instance, in one of his plays titled: Land Of A Million Magicians, Abdallah makes an attempt to cater for the interests of his audience right from the labourer at the bottom of the social ladder to the university professor.

As an artist who identifies himself with the masses, Abdallah believes in a theatre that will make provision for the ordinary people who live in the deprived and slum areas of the society. The Western theatre of nobility and bourgeoisie class inclination does not excite the fancy of Abdallah so much in his creative output. To this end, Abdallah often addresses himself to the issues concerning the ordinary people in the society. This inclination is seen in The Trial Of Mallam Ilya where part

of the trial session is moved into the audience and Mallam Ilya the hero is subjected to some questions from the audience. In fact, this is a novelty, a practice that makes room for audience involvement in play production and it is also an evidence of the "Abibigoro" concept where all hands are on deck to accomplish a common objective.

In the "Abibigoro" concept, Abdallah envisions a theatre that is identifiable within the African cultural milieu and cosmology. It is all encompassing in terms of the African cultural heritage. Comparing Abdallah's "Abibigoro" concept to that of Efua Sutherland's "Anansegoro", one sees similarities. There are, however, the distinctions that show that "Abibigoro" is a broader concept than "Anansegoro" which is limited around the creature Ananse (spider) within the Ghanaian culture and cosmology.

Abdallah mainly uses history, myth, folklore, festival, religion, and rituals to create his artistic works as a playwright.¹³ He stands unique as a post independence playwright who is daring and innovative and does not follow the stereotypes of African playwrighting. By this ideological and philosophical inclination, Abdallah believes in a unique African theatre but at the same time having some attributes of the West or the East in the context of universality.

In an essay titled "Character Elements In Ghanaian Plays", Asiedu Yirenkyi, a fellow Ghanaian post independence playwright, makes the following vivid comment on Abdallah's use of language: "Abdallah's use of language is probably the sharpest that one may credit the Ghanaian theatre". To some extent this observation coming from a fellow contemporary Ghanaian playwright may be true but certainly Abdallah can be vindicated, in a way, by this seemingly use of coarse language in his plays. Abdallah's critics and even some of his ardent admirers do accuse him of profanity and the use of language and obscenity in the actions of some of his characters.



From a critical standpoint, Abdallah stands for reality and truth and does not compromise on this issue when he is writing his plays for the stage. The contemporary society is full of hypocrisy, lies and dishonesty. Abdallah picks his subjects and themes on these vices without any compromise. Like Anton Checkhov, the Russian dramatist of the nineteenth century, Abdallah presents his plays to his audience and seems to say: 'This is how your society looks like. It is highly immoral and full of lies and hypocrisy and I am portraying these to you without any compromise'¹⁴ Honestly, the accusations levelled against Abdallah, of profanity and obscenity in his plays are not justified. A playwright of Abdallah's stature should be able to comment on the various social issues without any compromise to his audience.

Social situations around mankind that force man to target his survival above everything else is demonstrated in one of his plays titled: The Witch of Mopti. In this play, one sane leader in a country where everybody is mad is forced to take off his clothes in order to be accepted by his people. In his most recent play titled The Fall Of Kumbi, he tackles the struggle for the control of the human soul on the African continent.

The human condition that is created by a vast number of people without souls are the social conflicts inspired by religions and the jealousies that the continent finds itself in. In The Trial Of Mallam Ilya, Abdallah ingeniously addresses these ills that bedevil the continent of Africa in a revolutionary manner. The problems that confront the people of Africa are in reality self-created and there is the urgent need for Africans to come together in unity and solve these problems. The frequent military coups and civil wars on the continent today is a clear indication of Africa having lost her soul as a free God created entity. Consequently, she becomes a victim of both internal and external forces, which militate against her interests.

As an avant-garde playwright, Abdallah does a lot of experimentation, even to the extent that he sometimes borrows from the concert party tradition to embellish his plays.¹⁵ To this end, he makes a lot of room for dance, music, and spectacle in his plays. These aspects of the theatre are the most used by the concert parties in their performance. This kind of presentation has made the concert parties popular in Ghana as far back as the early 1920s. The concert party is a manifestation of popular theatre in Ghana and this appeals mostly to the masses; unlike the Western oriented theatre which appeals to the elite and the bourgeoisie. In order to make his plays to cut across the various layers of the social order, Abdallah borrows from the concert party tradition to meet this objective. This approach and ideological orientation makes Abdallah distinct from Asiedu Yirenkyi, his compatriot.

Abdallah's treatment of his subjects and themes in his plays also makes him different as compared to that of Asiedu Yirenkyi. Whilst Abdallah tackles his subjects and themes in a direct and frank manner without any euphemism, Asiedu Yirenkyi assumes a sort of tact, subtle euphemism in the handling of his subjects and themes. For instance, whilst Asiedu Yirenkyi portrays the sex act covertly and in secrecy in Blood And Tears, Abdallah is open on the sex act in The Witch of Mopti.

In the opening of his brilliant essay titled "Bobokiyiki's Lament", Abdallah postulates the following:

The colonization of Africa is a continuing act of violence. It takes place in the African mind, in the African psyche, in the totality of the African personality

Political independence was indeed a very important first step in the African liberation process. But it is now more than ever before very clear that the liberation of the continent will take a lot more than the mere creation of over four dozen nation states with colourful flags, emotional anthems, divisive national and regional boundaries, and chaotic economies; for the emancipation of the African must evolve on many more levels than the political and economic ones.¹⁶

This is a graphic picture of the state of affairs in contemporary Africa, and Abdallah as an African playwright of today has a special ideological focus on which

his plays are created. As a radical and dynamic playwright, Abdallah embodies a philosophy that seeks to liberate the African totally from overdependence on the West. To Abdallah, therefore, the mind of the African is the most vulnerable in terms of Western ideology and influence.¹⁷ Abdallah believes that one of the complex arsenal of tools and weapons used by imperialism to wreck havoc on multiplicity of levels on the African personality was and still is theatre, in its broadest sense, including the stage, cinema, television, and all its other adjuncts and peripherals.

As a traditionalist, who values and respects African customs and values, Abdallah has a special interest in popular theatre which caters for the needs of ordinary people in terms of education and entertainment. The proletariat or the ordinary people of the bulk of the society wield great power, and for this reason, any change or revolution that occurs usually starts from the masses. The privileged or the noble class is often in the minority and although they constitute the ruling class and therefore, wield power over the ordinary people, they can be resisted and overthrown by the masses through organized revolutions.¹⁸ Thus, social revolutions or changes are effected through the strong will and determination of the ordinary people in the society. In *The Trial of Mallam Iya*, Abdallah portrays this social factor that precipitates a revolution.

Abdallah's heavy use of music, dance, and spectacle in his plays is mostly to appeal to the emotions of his audience, especially among the ordinary people. As he sometimes remarks "I will like to see a kind of theatre that will appeal to the labourer as well as to the university lecturer." Based on this concept is the structure of Abdallah's plays. Abdallah's plays often satirizes social evils with bluntness and frankness. Abdallah is alleged to have been warned by the Nigerian High

Commissioner in Ghana not to produce his newest play, Land Of A Witch

Magicians during the Non Aligned Movement Conference in Accra in 1991.

Abdallah ignored this warning and went ahead to produce the play. In excitement, Abdallah remarked later: "I have not been arrested nor my play banned." This is a clear indication of Abdallah's calibre as a playwright who is fearless and frank in commenting on contemporary social and political issues of the African society. Abdallah is very bold and radical in his ideological orientation and this attribute makes him stand unique among the post independence playwrights in Ghana. It also makes him stand as one of the major playwrights of contemporary Africa. Like Wole Soyinka, Abdallah treats subjects and themes of his plays with a clear conviction of what he stands for. Abdallah will, therefore, like to see his audience see the problems of his society with an open eye rather than with "closed eyes".

In reaction to his critics about profanity in his plays, Abdallah replies: "What a hypocrisy in our society; "I will like to see a child having sex on the stage than to see one shooting and killing somebody." By this assertion, Abdallah implies that there is too much hypocrisy in our contemporary society where a lot of people pretend to be what they are not. The immoralities in our contemporary society are so much entrenched that everybody seems to close his eyes to these social evils and assumes the position of innocence. This state of affairs has encouraged every kind of crime that one can think of in our society. From the grassroots level to the top, everybody seems to be living in falsehood and no one is prepared to face the realities of the society. Bribery and corruption abound and all seem to be well! This decadent and morally ill society is what Abdallah portrays raw in his plays as a playwright who does not compromise in his commentaries. In Abdallah one sees a playwright who calls a spade a spade and does not care much about the reaction of his target audience

The motivation of Abdallah in writing his play is mainly to affirm

cultural heritage which has somehow been contaminated by colonialism.¹⁹ The modern African is both a reflection of colonialism and African cultural heritage. To this end, the modern African is often a bewildered and confused person who has no bearings of his own. The modern African finds himself in a dilemma and does not know clearly which way to proceed. He is a victim of western cultural influences which he finds very hard to denounce. Such a position is unpleasant and miserable, and it does not make the African look like a truly dignified and respected human being in the eyes of the West.

In his projection of his philosophical ideas based on the African myth, gods, history, folktale, religion, and festival, Abdallah aims at the reawakening of the mind and psyche of the African to the self-realization of his potential as a highly endowed and free human being created by God. In the context of theatre, Abdallah seems to be telling his colleagues: why do you look to Europe or elsewhere for your material whilst all the ingredients are in your own backyard? This is a connotation of the true liberation of the African in terms of his natural endowment. The African is capable of managing his own affairs and destiny and does not need any direction from anywhere. The African must awaken to his God given abilities and natural endowments to work out his own destiny.

Political and social upheavals that have plunged the African continent into chaos is the result of imperialism or neo colonialism which keep on haunting Africans in their struggle to survive.²⁰ Not until the African's mind is truly liberated and set free in order to think and do things in a truly, African way, he will continue to be in chains and subject to the whims and caprices of Europeans and their customs and values which are antagonistic to the African cultural heritage. Abdallah's point of

view as an African playwright is to address the mind and psyche of the African to think properly and naturally as an African

As a major dramatist of the contemporary Ghanaian and African scenes, Abdallah displays a rare skill in his craftsmanship as a playwright by selecting some elements of the African cultural heritage and some Islamic elements and artistically weaving them in the form of ritual, dance, music and spectacle as a theatrical presentation to his target audience. Abdallah's plays may be conveniently categorized into two divisions, namely historical and socio-political plays. The historical plays such as The Fall of Kumbi and The Ahen King are the re-enactment or the re-telling of the events as they really happened, however, with some distortions in an attempt to present the truth. In The Trial Of Mallam Ijya, Abdallah makes a bold attempt to present a historical event with, however, some distortions in order to arrive at a specific message to his audience.

The essence of imaginative writing is to present truth in its most acceptable form, although it may be considered relative to the absolute truth. In his attempt to present truth in its most conceived form, Abdallah skillfully treats his subjects and themes to the point of establishing realities that may evoke little or no controversy by a critical evaluation. The objective approach to realities of the society in which he lives probably is the overriding factor to which Abdallah is driven to describe his philosophy as theatre of relevance, which smacks of Chekhovian influence and orientation. Abdallah's theatre of relevance, as he describes it, is significant in relation to the various issues of our contemporary time in which the problems facing the society are hydra-headed, deeply entrenched and volatile. Abdallah's philosophy of theatre of relevance or "Abbigoro" concept seems feasible in addressing the various socio-political and economic problems facing the African continent today.

As a modern traditionalist who is so much concerned with what happens in his society, be it historical, political or social, Abdallah boldly and radically and sometimes with a revolutionary zeal tackles the problems of his society with open mind and objectivity that go a long way to prick the conscience of the dishonest, hypocritical, and the unprincipled in the society.²¹ By this kind of philosophical approach in terms of writing his plays, Abdallah seems to be making the clarion call of awakening the society from slumber. Symbolically, Africa is a sleeping giant who needs to be awakened from his deep sleep and face his problems so as to find solution to them in a herculean or gigantic fashion. To Abdallah, therefore, the society must be sustained on social moral principles that will pave the way for progress to be achieved.²² Abdallah's philosophical message echoes to all sectors of the social order, and he simply calls on the African to awaken to the truth of his being.

In Verdict Of The Cobra, Abdallah makes allusion to modernism and traditionalism when he discusses the issue of northerners having to leave their tradition of working on the farmlands in the north and running down to the south of Ghana only to end up as labourers or conservancy labourers ("night soil carriers") in the bustling cities of the south. Thus, Abdallah highlights the allurements of urban and city life, which is a manifestation of modernism. The Northern environment background of The Alien King and Verdict Of The Cobra is a clear manifestation of Abdallah's inclination towards traditionalism.

Abdallah has a belief that the history of the world, especially that of the African continent, has been falsified and wrongly presented by the West. In his philosophical and ideological orientation towards his writing, he sees this problem as a major challenge to the African cultural heritage, and he devises a concept like "Abibgoro" to reassert the cultural identity of the African. To this end, Abdallah

throws a searchlight on the modern African society and subjects it to a close scrutiny. Although the modern African society has been influenced by imperialism and colonialism, the twin evils of the West, Africans are still in a position to direct their own affairs in their natural environment instead of being too dependent on the West. Abdallah, therefore, believes that the civilisation of Europe should not be regarded as a curse of Africa but rather a sort of catalyst to the advancement of the African people. Some European cultural values may not be good for the advancement of the modern African society. Therefore, modern Africans must learn to discriminate and to spurn all European cultural values that are detrimental to their advancement as a unique people.

In Abdallah, therefore, one sees an embodiment of an African philosophy that manifests in its widest sense as survival patterns or the "Abibigoro" concept that probes into Africanism or the African cultural heritage. Abdallah's writings are mainly based on the "Abibigoro" concept that he ingeniously devised to articulate the true emancipation of the African from the clutches of European imperialism and colonialism. Abdallah's main task as a playwright is to unmask the African to see his real state of being and to work towards his own redemption within his natural environment and endowment.²⁵

Like Wole Soyinka, Abdallah's handling of modernism and traditionalism in his plays is an ardent commitment to the African cause and ideal in our contemporary time. Whilst Wole Soyinka shows this commitment in "Survival Patterns" or "Ogunism", Abdallah portrays it in "Abibigoro".²⁶

Notes

- 1 Edwin Wilson, Theatre Experience, 1994, page 421.
- 2 Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, pp. 68-74
- 3 Ben Abdallah, "Bobokiyki's Lament", 2000, page 12
- 4 Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, page 35.
- 5 Robert Brustine, Theatre Of Revolt, pp. 139-159.
- 6 James Gibbs, Critical Perspectives On Wole Soyinka, 1980, pp. 45-68.
- 7 Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, page 34
- 8 Christopher O'Reilly, Post Colonial Writing, 2001, pp. 29-33
- 9 George M. Gugelberger, Marxism And African Literature, 1988, pp. 10-17.
- 10 Jean Edades, Drama of The East And West, 1956, pp. 355-356
- 11 Chidi Amuta, The Theory of African Literature, 1989, pp. 107-112.
- 12 Wole Soyinka, Art Dialogue And Outrage, 1988, pp. 134-146
- 13 George M. Gugelberger, Marxism And African Literature, 1988, pp. 50-62.
- 14 Chidi Amuta, The Theory of African Literature, 1989, page 35.
- 15 Robert Brustine, Theatre of Revolt, pp. 139-179.
- 16 K. E. Agovi, "Origins of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", (1920-1957), pp. 15-17
- 17 George Gugelberger, Marxism And African Literature, 1988, pp. 1-18
- 18 Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, pp. 13-29.
- 19 G. C. M. Mutso, Socio-Political Thought In African Literature, 1947, pp. 9-13
- 20 Christopher O'Reilly, Post Colonial Writing, 2001, page 6.
- 21 Lewis Nkosi, Tasks And Masks In African Literature, 1981, pp. 185-195
- 22 Raman Selden, The Theory of Criticism, 1988, pp. 9-10.

23. Chinweizu/Jemie/Madubuike, Towards The Decolonization of African Literature, 1980, pp.239-299.
24. Ben Abdallah, "Bobokiyi's Lament" ,2000, pp 1-13

CHAPTER 5

PLAYS OF ABDALLAH

The Alien King is the first of Abdallah's plays. It is set in the northern Nigeria environment of the Hausas and the Fulanis, precisely at Kano, a stronghold of the Hausas. The Alien King shows weaknesses of an inexperienced playwright who has just begun to write; and so Abdallah can be exonerated from these early problems which often confront every writer of any worth.

The Alien King is structured on traditional story telling pattern; and a play is rehearsed within a play whilst the story unfolds. This technique is similar to Pirandello's Six Characters In Search Of An Author. However, whilst Pirandello skillfully weaves his story in a play within a play to a clear and convincing end, Abdallah appears to be a little jammed with this kind of technique. The narration of the story seems to be fused into the play that is being rehearsed. This creates a problem of identifying the real story line, and enactment of the story itself. At the end of the play, there is an indication that all the events that had taken place were in fact a rehearsing of a play. This is not convincing enough and does not also make us to identify the "play within a play".

Another weakness discernible in the Alien King is the plot. The crisis that built up to the point of conflict between Ada, the chief of the Fulanis and Kumbaru, the King of Kano, appears to be contrived and not convincing enough to start a war between the two leaders. Apart from Bagunsuwa's attempt to seduce Ada, there should have been a further criminal act besides whipping Bagunsuwa with a whip on the part of Ada to incite a serious conflict that will lead to a war instead of a mere slap

of a woman! To illustrate this point, when Ada was brought before Kumbaru to be executed, the following discourse took place:

Ada

Every individual is responsible for the actions committed in the name of the people.

Kumbaru

And am I not a King? Are mine not a people of individuals?

Ada

I do not know, all I know is that you stood in my way. I betrayed our friendship to provoke Hausaland. I did what none but the king should do ----- But I failed to provoke Hausaland ----- I failed ----- until the woman started the fire.

Kumbaru

Did you slap my wife just to start a war?

Again the use of language in the Alien King appears to be too vulgar and unpolished. For instance, Ada spits out when he was brought before Kumbaru to be executed on the allegation of having slapped Bagunswa:

Ada

You would have listened to me. I know perhaps you would have heard me. But your people. "It is not easy for the cripple to fall into the pit latrine!"

Written in a form that departs from the old formats of playwriting which indicate Acts and Scenes, Parts or Phases, Abdallah presented the story of The Alien King based on an old story of Hausaland. Despite the weaknesses inherent in The Alien King, Abdallah makes a bold attempt in his play to re-enact a traditional story in a traditional milieu to project the African cultural heritage.¹

The historical event between the Hausas and the Fulanis of northern Nigeria has significance and implications in the present day relations between the two ethnic groups who assert their dominance over the rest of Nigeria, the largest populated country in Africa! The ethnic factor has been the bane of Nigerian politics since independence. A critical analysis shows a constant Hausa-Fulani alliance in the dominance of Nigerian politics. Abdallah's Alien King traces the beginning of the Hausa-Fulani hegemony of northern Nigeria to establish a historical fact which has a repercussion on present day social and political situations in Northern Nigeria. Abdallah uses music and dance in the art of telling the story of The Alien King in traditional, cultural, and Islamic perspectives in search of an African total theatre.²

Verdict Of The Cobra, Abdallah's second play, takes a step forward in search of a new African theatre that caters for the needs of all people from the peasant to the university professor.

Set in the northern part of Ghana, Verdict Of The Cobra opens with an initiation ceremony in which a virgin is dedicated to the shrine of Ewe cult. This scene provides a very beautiful spectacle in which music and dance accompany the initiation ceremony of a virgin. The scene depicts rich African culture; custom and values are in full display and glare in an initiation ceremony of a cult.

The first scene of Verdict Of The Cobra is spectacular and captivating and opens with a sharp and powerful language that can stir any audience. Thus, it opens:

Grandmother's Voice

Nunyira! Nunyira! Where are you, Nunyira? Nunyira. Nunyira my child!
Nunyira! Oh, there you are. Nunyira! Poor child, he is asleep. Nunyira! Wake up,
Nunyira, it is time to go home. I have been looking all over the place for you
Nunyira, it is not good to frighten your grandmother like that.



Child

The dream, Nana I dreamt the dream again.

Grandmother

What dream, Nunyara? I have told you not to stay out so late. I have told you that when the birds begin to fly across the sky towards their nests and the sun turns into a huge orange calabash behind that big baobab tree, that is the time to stop whatever you are doing and run home to grandmother. (Child sees the audience and smiles, obviously pleased) That is the time to eat, bath and sleep.

Child

Look, grandmother, look! They have come! They have come to hear the dream!

Grandmother

Who have come? What dream?

Child

The dream, Nana. The dream of the story.

Verdict Of The Cobra is symbolic of the northern and southern Ghana ethnic prejudices and persuasion. Abdallah paints a picture of this feeling and thinking when Grandmother reacts to her child in an exchange.

Grandmother

They leave their people, their farms and their livestock and run away to the south. To work, they say. But what kind of work is this that yields so meager a reward for so much pain, suffering and insult? Labourers!

(They do a garbage collectors' dance.)

Latrine Boys!

(They do a soldiers' dance. They may be joined in all these dances by more performers.)

The north needs them. They run away to the south and the south spits on them. My twins ——— his father and his uncle were no different. They run off as soon as their father died.

(Grandmother joins the twins in a farewell dance. She tries in vain to convince them to stay. In the end, she gives up and gives them some advice, food for their trip, talismans and amulets for protection against evil and they leave sadly.)

The elder twin, the child's father, went to Eweland. And the younger, his uncle went to Asanteland. The elder twin fell in love with a beautiful Ewe girl, a dancer, a neophyte, an initiate at one of the many shrines in Eweland.

The title, Verdict Of The Cobra is significant in suggesting the theme of the play which is truth and justice.³ The Cobra is supposed to give a verdict in the controversial issue between the twins as to who is truly the real husband of the Ewe girl. Truth and justice is supposed to come from the Shrine of the Cobra. In traditional African religion, the gods at the shrines are believed to dispense truth and justice when cases or questions are brought before them for a solution. Thus, the African who is highly religious has a strong faith in the gods and goddesses of his ancestors. He believes that the gods and the spirits wield considerable power and influence over his life. He also believes that the gods and goddesses of his ancestors demand obedience to them. They also expect a sound moral life and conduct from him. To this end, the African believes that these powers are an embodiment of truth and justice and anything coming from the gods and goddesses are regarded as sacred



Abdallah uses the story telling technique to put his message across in Verdict Of The Cobra. He uses Grandmother as the storyteller. Grandmother accepts to tell the story after persistent demand from the child who is called "The mad child" by the people. Grandmother also accepts to tell the story upon condition, and the condition is that the child should come home with her after she had finished telling the story. The story then unfolds about the identical twins who resembled each other in all aspects and they had between them a mental bond of sympathy. If one fell ill, the other was sick, what one liked the other also liked and what one felt was the feeling of the other.

In Verdict Of The Cobra, Abdallah again uses music and dance as dramatic elements to achieve his objective of searching for a new African theatre. To this end, the traditional customs and values are heavily featured in Verdict Of The Cobra. The chief, the high priest, "the mad child", drums, rattles, acolytes, virgins, shrine and attendants are all elements of the African traditional heritage which Abdallah portrays in Verdict Of The Cobra. The question of the true husband of the Ewe girl or the Stranger Woman to the identical twins who shared her together as wife is the climax of the story. The resolution to the claim of the true husband of the Stranger Woman by Verdict Of The Cobra is highly symbolic of the African tradition and cosmology.

Although based on a simple plot, the language used by Abdallah in Verdict Of The Cobra is "hard, "coarse" and unrefined. Despite this flaw, Abdallah succeeds in articulating his ideas and message in a convincing manner. Verdict Of The Cobra is highly rich in African tradition, myth and metaphor, and Abdallah's experimental devices towards a new African theater is visible and emerging.

The Trial Of Mallam Ilya is indeed a great play in which Abdallah displays great skill and craftsmanship as a playwright. With a very large cast, Abdallah

develops his plot and subplots in a delightful manner which only few playwrights can match in contemporary African playwriting. A lengthy play, which stretches about two and half hours performance, The Trial Of Mallam Ilya opens on a powerful note with a black out and shooting scene in which Mallam Ilya, the hero of the play, is captured by Malwal and his armed men. Mallam Ilya is quickly put before a court and his trial begins:

Malwal

Mallam Mohammad Ilya, you stand accused of ----- Mallam, how old are you?

Ilya

Ten days from now, ----- on the twenty-second day of the month of Rabi Anwal, I shall be seventy-two years old ----- if I live.

Malwal (furious)

Seventy-two years, brothers, seventy-two -----(Pause)

Brothers, the prisoner before us is an extraordinary man; the epitome of the nauseating characteristics of a generation of vultures ----- A filthy generation that must die! (Pause)

Mallam, you were a young man in the days of glory; an eye witness to pillage and rape ---- You saw the coming of the Moors. You bathed in the stream of integration out of which my generation sprung. (Pause)

In short, Mallam, you have lived through the periods of glory, humiliation, assimilation, rejection, and freedom! And by the standards of your generation, you and many like you, have come out of each period very well off! Many years ago, Ilya, you were arrested, charged with conspiracy to commit treason, tried, found guilty and sentenced to death. By the accident of fortune, however, you were

catapulted out of prison ----- out of the jaws of death, brothers, ----- into a position of honour as hero of the oppressed. But as the years passed and the rulers came and went, you failed to fulfil the promises implicit in your tacit acceptance of the position of honour. Today, we charge you with the same crime. We charge you with conspiracy to commit treason and treason! Brothers, I suggest that we help Mallam Ilya to defend himself and to re-enact his famous exploits. Take your places, Brothers.

The foregoing is the electrifying mood in which The Trial of Mallam Ilya opens. Certainly, this is the greatest of the plays of Abdallah so far! The Trial of Mallam Ilya is satirical, symbolic, and metaphorical. The central theme which is oppression and injustice portrays the human nature which invariably becomes volatile depending on circumstances.⁴ Abdallah skillfully weaves his story around Mallam Ilya, the protagonist, and through a series of conflicts and intrigues, presents his message to his audience.

The Trial of Mallam Ilya, a partly true story with, however, some exaggeration and fiction, is intelligently woven in a dramatic fashion by Abdallah to present a message that has to do with the power politics of contemporary Africa. A carefully structured play which shows complicated plot devices that harmoniously combine music and dance as well as spectacle, Abdallah in a revolutionary manner satirises and ridicules the existing political systems on the continent of Africa with a particular focus on the first republic regime of President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana.⁵

The Trial of Mallam Ilya can be aptly described as the past, present and future of the political trends in modern Africa. Through intrigues, scheming and revolts, revolutions are ushered in which call for a new order that seem to be a mirage! Abdallah paints a sordid picture of modern African regimes which foment and

perpetrate oppression, corruption, and injustice, which inflict hardship and suffering on the common people. Thus, Mallam Ilya suffers and emerges as the hero of the oppressed for daring to speak his mind freely.

Mallam Ilya is suddenly thrown out of prison to regain his freedom only when a group of warriors had seized power and immediately set all the prisoners of the deposed regime free. This dramatic event is recapped by Mallam Ilya in the following:

Ilya

"That same day at break of dawn, the information was whispered from cell to cell throughout the dungeon. A rebellion of warriors led by the young obscure warrior Patapa had swept through the land like a forest fire and seized power in the absence of the Black One. Suddenly, I was a hero, and so were anybody who had so much as breathed a single word of open criticism of Kumrahn before he was overthrown. Before we knew what was happening, the gates of the prisons were thrown open and we were being thrown into the streets like tenants who had not paid their rent for years ----- not so much because they were anxious to set us free but because they needed room for their new prisoners. One moment, the cells were all empty. The next moment, they were filled with the former followers and admirers of Kumrahn the Black. The ship was the same, only the captain had been changed. (Pause) And meanwhile I got married".

Written in an unconventional format without Acts and scenes, The Trial of Mallam Ilya is a play of novelty, and Abdallah displays great dramatic skill in fusing the elements of ritual, music, dance, spectacle and of course a powerful and effective language to communicate his message through the characters Mallam Ilya, Malwal, Kouyate, Samburu, Abdul Karim, El-fasi, Halima, and others. In fact, there is much

character development in The Trial of Mallam Ilya, especially in the case of the hero Mallam Ilya as well as Kouyate Malwal and Abass.⁶

Abdallah's use of a sharp, powerful and effective language in The Trial of Mallam Ilya makes him distinct and unique as compared with Asiedu Yirenkyi and other post independence playwrights of Ghana. Other qualities which make Abdallah distinct and unique from his contemporaries like Asiedu Yirenkyi are his use of the Islamic faith in his plays and his story telling technique. Furthermore, Abdallah is constantly experimenting and exploring with his "Abibigoro" concept in his search for a new African theatre.⁷

In The Trial of Mallam Ilya, Abdallah comments on the socio-political situation in modern African politics and hints of a possible uprising of the masses against oppressive and corrupt leaders like Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Mobutu of the Congo and other tyrant leaders on the African continent. Thus, in The Trial of Mallam Ilya, one can discern a clarion call by Abdallah to modern African leaders to put their houses in order, lest they incur the wrath of their people to revolt against their authority.

Reminiscent of the characteristic fashion in which military adventurers exploit the prevailing unhealthy political situation to launch their so called revolutions, The Trial of Mallam Ilya ends with the following powerful and emotional lines:

Court Crier (clears his throat)

People of Angah ! Open your ears and let them hear. Shortly after sunset today, while our latest group of warriors were busy trying their captives, another warrior revolt was afoot.

(Pause. Clears his throat.)

It has not yet been revealed who the leader of the revolt is. But it is certain that Malwal and his group of warrior rulers have been overthrown. The victors wish me to announce that they are here to stay! They will stand no opposition and take no nonsense. They demand obedience, instantly and without question! Above all, they will have it understood that they have nothing to do with the former junta that was overthrown by Malwal and his henchmen.

(Fade out as he talks on-----)

Slow down, brother, slow down. The foolish man says "No one can beat me." You may say that brother, but sooner or later, the machine owner will arrive ---- While the one who will rub your nose in the mud has not yet come, you say "No one can beat me!"

In The Witch of Mopti, Abdallah presents a new style. He uses the Abibigromma Theatre Company members as his mouthpiece in the presentation of the story. Thus, the Abibigromma Company members become the story tellers as the story of The Witch of Mopti unfolds. This method and approach is unique from the rest of his collection of plays.

Again, Abdallah departs from the conventional acts and scenes format and writes freely and begins:

Abotsi

Good evening ----- (or afternoon ---- whatever the case may be.) My brothers and sisters! My name is Abotsi and this is Abibigromma I am sure you are wondering what Abibigromma means and what we do.

(While Abotsi is talking, Kofi Onny with concern on his face has moved out of the group to Abotsi.)

Kofi Onny

(Whispers in Abotsi's ear.)

Abotsi

----- What did you say?

Kofi Onny

(Whispers in Abotsi's ear again.) Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ----! That's very funny?

Did you hear what Kofi said? Ha ----- ha ---- ha ---- ha ---- He says you are probably staring at me so sheepishly because you don't understand a word of what I am saying.

My brothers and sisters, Kofi Onny says you don't understand a word of the white man's English ---- he says ----

Kofi Onny

Oboa, manka saa. Abotsi me mpe saa oo! Oboa, manka se monte Brofo. Me se enye obiara a owo ha na ote Broni Kasa ase.

Abotsi

But, Kofi, how do you know that all the people here understand Akan?

Kofi Onny

Manka se obiara a ote ha biara te Twi ----

Abotsi

But I am sure everybody here understands English even if they cannot speak it.

Kofi Onny

Ah! Abotsi paa. Wo dee woasei! Hwe! M'adamfo Kwashivi sei. Oye Ghana ni nso onte Akan Kasa biara. Na, wo gye di se woantumi ansua Twi a eye. Ghana ha kasa no anka ono ara ne kasa a yede woo no ho a, eye den na otumi sua Brofo Kasa a eye Oburoni kasa ka?

Nii Sai



Ooh. You people are wasting our time, do you think these people came here to watch you carry on a stupid argument?

Abotsi

My brother, stand aside and let me talk to these people, O.K? ----- As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted; this is Abibigromma

Thus, Abdallah opens The Witch Of Mopti in this manner of bilingual use of language - English and Twi for the benefit of his audience who do not understand the English language.⁹ Abdallah creates this device in order to meet all layers of the society, namely from the labourer to the university professor. This also presents us a manifestation of Abdallah's search for a new African theatre.

As usual, Abdallah makes use of music, dance, ritual as well as spectacle to tell the story of The Witch of Mopti in a flowing language that is pregnant with wit, irony, metaphor that portrays traditional African cultural values and customs. The Witch of Mopti is heavily rich in African folklore and Abdallah presents it in the typical "Abibigoro" concept in a typical African cultural milieu and cosmology.¹⁰

In The Witch of Mopti, Abdallah portrays the African cosmology in which the belief and practice of witchcraft and black magic is very strong. The King of Mopti engages in a fearful duel with Maimuna, the witch of Mopti. The conflict between the King of Mopti and Maimuna is on the issue of the King's refusal to marry Samake the daughter of Maimuna.

The opening scene depicts the celebration of the King's marriage to Fanta and his enstoolment to the utter jealousy and anger of Maimuna, the witch of Mopti and aunt to the King. In reaction to Maimuna's jealousy and anger, the King of Mopti calls on his people not to hoot at her and says:

The King

People of Mopti! Please do not hoot at her. She is my aunt. My father's own sister. She is angry because I have refused to marry my cousin, her daughter. She says I have disgraced the stool and the royal family by marrying the daughter of a poor fisherman. She has sworn to bring me down. She has sworn to turn my people against me. She has promised that the very people who are today jubilating and celebrating my marriage and enstoolment, will very soon cry out for my blood and for my destoolment. But of course, my people I know better. She is only a sick witch. I do not fear her evil powers. She is harmless. She is only jealous and power hungry. I forgive her. I ask you all to forgive her. Please continue with your celebrations

Kofi Onny

Mmo ne kasa! Nana, mmo ne kasa! Oba nyansafoo neno! Mo impene noee!

All

He e e e e e!!!

(Music and dancing resumes and continues as Togbi steps out of the crowd and is picked by a spotlight. The scene shifts from one place to another according to his narration. Music continues in the background as he speaks.)

Togbi

So it was that the new king of Mopti incurred the wrath of his aunt Maimuna the Witch. And it is true that from that moment Mopti was never the same again. The festivities continue deep into the night.

(At the durbar grounds, the king says goodnight to the people and they escort him and his new bride to his residence.)

Our new King and his new bride are now in the King's bed chamber. They embrace and laugh and say sweet things to each other as they prepare for the night of passion and love. But the Witch has sworn to bring down the new King.

The central theme, which is struggle for power, develops from this point of the king's refusal to marry Salamatu. This develops into a strong hatred on the part of Maimuna and she plans to take a revenge against the King. Thus, a feud develops between the King and Maimuna and this brings into the fore the deep and vicious practice of witchcraft and black magic which turns the world of the play into fathom and fantasy of struggle between good and evil forces.¹¹

Although well plotted and structured in a dramatic fashion using the necessary devices, which makes the play a novelty, the inherent weakness in The Witch of Mopti is the use of language. Here, Abdallah appears to exceed his limit of free expression which borders on extreme profanity and obscenity. The following extract from the early stages of the play illustrates this point:

Maimuna

Just watch, my daughter. It is not for nothing that they call me the Witch of Mopti. Come my sister, let us give the prince the taste of our magical powers. (She puts her hand into a sack and produces a wooden penis with a rope running through a hole in its base.) Come, my sister. You will represent our prince. Take off your clothes and put on the prince's. They say he is strong and well endowed!

(The first witch takes off her clothes and is in tights and leotards. Maimuna ties the penis around her waist. Fade in the King's Bed chamber. The courtship dance has now reached its peak. The King is standing in his big gown with his legs wide apart and hands on his hips; his eyes rolling and his chest heaving up and down,

visibly excited as the bride drops the last item of clothing. She simulates nudity in tights and leotards. Her breasts nipples, pubic area and buttocks are accentuated with paint and make-up. Her hips, ankle, knees and arms are heavily loaded with beads. The scene in the King's chamber and that of the Witches place proceed simultaneously.)

Maimuna

And you, my sister, will represent the King's bride. Take off your clothes. (The second witch undresses and reveals her nakedness in tights and leotards and heavy beads. Maimuna dips a calabash into the boiling pot and hands it to the second witch)

Drink my sister, drink the magic potion which will stir the deep well of desire in the king's bride and make her ache for love.

(As the second witch drinks the boiling liquid, its effect is obvious on Fanta, the King's bride. Both the second witch and Fanta begin to dance with seductive movements clearly meant to sexually arouse their partners.)

Yes my sister, move! Show him what you can do with your breasts, your waist and your hips move! Sister, Move! Yes ----- I can see ----- you begin to achieve the desired effect upon our Prince! His eyes begin to roll faster and his chest ----- look how it heaves. His heart beats like a mighty drum.

(She dips the calabash into the boiling pot again and puts it on the lips of the first witch.)

Drink my sister, and let the young king stir and rise! Let him show the power of his manhood!

(The first drink begins to have an immediate effect upon the king. The first witch tightens the penis around her waist and rotates her hips in response to the movements

of the second witch. Slowly the king's gown rises like a tent as he develops a huge erection. The two scenes mirror and anticipate each other, each female teasing and tempting her male. Maimuna and Samake, her daughter urge them on with encouraging words and ooohs! And aahs! The two females slowly dance their way into a position on all fours ready to be taken from behind. Suddenly the witch picks up a long rope and ties it around the base of the wooden penis of the first witch.)

The battle of witchcraft and magical powers continues between the King of Mopti and Maimuna, culminating to the point where the king had to admit defeat by deciding to drink from the well which had been poisoned by the witch of Mopti through the devil. She had to sacrifice the soul of her daughter, Samake to the devil to enable her to conquer the King of Mopti.

After drinking the water from the well, the consequence was immediate and disastrous. The King became insane! As a result he is hailed by the crowd of lunatics. Thus, everybody in Mopti including the King became mad as a result of the witchcraft and magical powers of Maimuna, the Witch of Mopti. Thus, Abdallah ends this play in a controversial manner as to who is the winner in the battle between the Witch of Mopti and the King of Mopti in the spirit of "Abibigoro" concept.

The next play of Abdallah titled The Slaves discusses the subject of the Slave Trade traffic, and raises thought-provoking questions. With a simple plot and a setting at the Elmina Castle during the early days of the Slave Trade, Abdallah re-enacts the story of the Slave Trade in a simple but sharp language which revolves around Naa, a slave woman. Abdallah makes a bold attempt to portray the evils which are associated with the Slave Trade. In a glowing, humorous and emotional but couched in a sharp and blunt language, Abdallah develops the plot of this play and

combines it with music and dance as well as other dramatic elements to put his message across.

The Slaves portrays the evils that have been inflicted on the blackman; and Abdallah tells this story in an objective manner that raises a lot of questions concerning the evils that have come up from this inhuman practice. Abdallah presents The Slaves in a fair and unbiased manner that will prick the conscience of rational people from all walks of life; be they white or black. Employing dramatic elements of music and dance, that provide spectacle, Abdallah moves his story set in a dungeon at the Elmina Castle in a logical, emotional and sympathetic manner that raises controversial questions concerning the Slave Trade.

In The Slaves, character development is minimal and Abdallah makes effort to develop the crises, climax and the resolution in a convincing manner. Cruelty and hatred constitute the overriding theme in The Slaves and Abdallah seems to pose this question: Who is to be blamed for the Slave Trade? Is it the white man or the blackman? The answer to this question is controversial and may be subjective or objective as is evident in the following:

Man

Ah, ah! Baba! No! White man will buy you, yes. He will take you in a big boat to his country; if you get there alive he will sell you to another white man who will make you sweat so that he can live like a king. But the white man is not guilty in the first place.

Priest

How not guilty?

Man

Who took you away from your homes ---- your wives and children ----? (To
The Priest) Your grand children ---- and sold you to the men who brought you here?
Tell me. Answer! all of you.

Priest

Who?

Man

Yes. Who, man? Blackman! Your own brother. Black man!

Segou

You are right, my brother. The men who raided our village one night were not
white men. It was a full moonlight and all the tribes had gathered under the big
baobab tree to dance. You should have seen old Segou. Drenched in sweat. I beat the
soul out of his drum and infected men and women with rhythm of joy. Then suddenly
a woman screamed ---- one loud scream! And everything was over. Like that ----
(Snaps his finger.) The village burnt down! Men, women and children in chains.
Old men and old women all killed. And the raiders, my brother, they were black men.
Black men like you and me.

Margan

But the white man, what's wrong with him? Does he not know the difference
between man and goat? If I want meat I get a cow, sheep or goat, not a man --- or a
useless woman. (Indicates Naa)

Naa

What do you mean? ----

Man



Now, listen to me. It is not meat the white man wants. It's a slave he wants. A slave to work and sweat and suffer for him to enjoy. He does not buy his brother white man to make him suffer; no! He comes to a place he calls Africa and the black man sells his black brother to him. And when our brothers have sold us into slavery we sit here and bite each other like captive dogs. Why must we not think of a way to free ourselves and stop the slave traffic?

Margan

Perhaps you are right. Perhaps instead of spiting on this ----- this ----- woman, I should knock the brains out of her little puppy of an overseer so that we can charge out and castrate the hell out of those white devils.

Priest

Olon! But can we face the guns?

Abdallah takes the subject of the Slave Trade and discusses it in such a way that will make Africans to take a dispassionate look at the evils of the Slave Trade and find out whether Europeans or Africans should be blamed. Implicitly and explicitly, The Slave Trade has inflicted on Africans severe suffering which is not only physical in manifestation but mental and psychological. Africans are victims of mental slavery from colonialism which came in the wake of the Slave Trade.¹² Thus, today Africans are dominated and influenced by Europeans in all aspects of life which make them look inferior to the whites. This mental slavery is so deadly that it has in a way enslaved the black man to the white man!

Like the plot which was hatched among the slaves in the dungeon at the castle to regain their freedom, Abdallah portrays in The Slaves the challenge for Africans to organize themselves and come together and fight the white man and reassert their freedom from all forms of slavery they had hitherto been subjected to. The message

of The Slaves is, therefore, significant and crucial to the total emancipation of Africans from the clutches of imperialism and colonialism

The Fall of Kumbi, a historical play, is presented by Abdallah in a carefully plotted story that has a large cast and full of action and spectacle.

Set in a Tuareg camp in Kumbi, Abdallah unfolds the story of The Fall Of Kumbi which is characterized with a powerful and pointed dialogue. Abdallah introduces an early conflict in The Fall of Kumbi with the sudden elopement of Zainata and Amu Diata accompanied by gun-shots in a fast moving action. The elopement takes place as Amu Diata suddenly appears in a hole through the tent cloth as Zainata panics and reacts in the following dialogue

Zainata

Who is there?

Amu Diata

Shh. It's me. Amu Diata (Amu Diata enters. Zainata springs up and embraces him)

Zainata

Oh, Amu. I knew you would come tonight. What are we going to do, Amu? They are marrying me off to Akkil tomorrow ----

Amu Diata

I know. Zainata. That is why I am here. Listen carefully woman. Hurry up, and put on some clothes.

Zainata

Are you taking me away? Oh Amu -----

Amu Diata

Shh! Listen! Keep dressing. Listen I am not alone. I have a few men with me. (He takes off a black hooded gown and helps her put it on.) Put this on. In a moment you will hear gunshots and a lot of noise on the east side of this camp. We will give them a few moments to really get going. You see that opening?

Zainata

Yes. You just made it.

Amu Diata

Yes. Stand there and look out. Make sure no one sees you. When I give the word, get out and start running to the west. Once you are outside, don't stop. Keep running. I will catch up with you. Leave the rest to me.

Zainata

Oh, Amu. I have waited so long for this moment and now that it is here. I am so afraid. Feel how my heart pounds.

(There are gunshots followed by screams, running noises and general commotion. Zainata runs to the opening in the back of the tent and Amu Diata runs to the entrance.)

Amu Diata

Ready, Zainata! Now, as fast as you can, to the west, run! Run, woman, run!

(She runs out. Amu Diata runs after her, Commotion and shooting grows louder. Tani runs into the room.)

Tani

Zainata! Zainata, my child. Where are you?

(She looks around, sees the opening in the tent. She realizes what has happened and screams.)

Such is the powerful opening of The Fall Of Kumbi which signals ensuing action-packed events. Amu Diata declares an offensive war on Audaghast after snatching Zainatu, the would-be-bride to Aklil prince of Audaghast. Having eloped with Zainatu, Amu Diata King of Kumbi, made a demand of Zainata's jewels and other belongings accompanied by maiden slaves ---- six virgins not more than seventeen years old. Failing to realize his desire Amu Diata launched an offensive war on Audaghast and managed to take thirty Tuareg maidens as slaves.

Meanwhile Aklil seeks assistance from Ibn Yacin from an island on the River Niger who readily agrees to help Aklil in the crisis and the following dialogue transpires between them:

Ibn Yacin

(Pause) I grieve with you, my son at the death of your father. By Allah I swear the crimes of Kumbi shall not go unpunished. Go home, my son. Put your house in order. Organise what is left of your father's army and meet me outside the city of Kumbi three days from now. Bin Talal!

Guard

(Runs to the door and calls)

Bin Talal

My Lord.

Ibn Yacin

Tell the men we march tonight on Kumbi by our command !

(Bin Talal bows out.)

Ibn Yacin

Aklil, my son come. Your people await you. I will see you in three days at Kumbi.

Akli

I am at loss, I don't know what to say. I am confused ----

Ibn Yacin

I understand, my son. Come, you must leave for Audaghast now.

In The Fall Of Kumbi, Abdallah displays great skill in the use of rituals, music, and dance to develop the story. There is much colour of traditional religious practices at the shrine of the father of the gods at Kumbi, and Abdallah skillfully presents these in a glamorous style backed with the right dialogue steeped in religion and myth.¹¹ There is a clash of faiths of Islam and traditional religion as is evident in the following dialogue:

Bin Talal

Yes, Great one. That is Khunata, the virgin. The mad princess of Kumbi, daughter of the savage dead king and his wife Astimalinke. She was born mad. But the infidels believe her to be the incarnation of some taboo ----

High Priest

A daughter of the gods. Khunata was chosen by the gods on the day she was born. She is dedicated to the gods of my people. She knows no man and speaks to none. She communes only with the shadows and the gods. He who touches her risks the wrath of the gods.

Pasha

Gods! There is no god but Allah, infidel, and Mohammed is His messenger

Ibn Yacin

That is enough. Pasha! (Pause) Bin Talal!

Bin Talal

My Lord!

Ibn Yacin

I want all the women moved to the island in the river ----- Put them in the castle with other slaves.

Bin Talal

The Queen too, my Lord?

Ibn Yacin

The Queen too. Bin Talal. She is like the rest now. She is a slave. Take special care of the mad one. I have plans for her. Strip the temple of all the gold and destroy the idols.

Pasha

And the High Priest?

Ibn Yacin

He dies! (Pause) I am a man of God. I do not believe in your idols and your witchcraft. But you may pray to your gods for the last time ---- if you so wish.

The Islamic faith is much pronounced in the development of the story of The Fall Of Kumbi by Abdallah Ibn Yacin the Pious is projected as the defender and advocate of the Islamic faith whilst Amu Diata, Princess Khunata and her mother Astamalinke represent idolatry and traditional worship. Abdallah weaves his story around Aklil and Zainata to present this historical story in a series of episodes that lead to the capture of Kumbi by the Moors led by Ibn Yacin and General Pasha.

Abdallah presents The Fall Of Kumbi with the religious factor very strong as he develops the story line to the point of conflict, crisis and its resolution in a convincing manner to trace the Islamic or Desert faith in the midst of opposition from infidel and pagan kingdoms like Kumbi. Thus, the Tuaregs who are apostles of the

Islamic faith move their forces against Kumbi and conquer it easily in the name of Allah.

Land Of A Million Magicians which is the newest play by Abdallah is basically a satire and Abdallah again employs a large cast backed with music and dance as well as spectacle in an "Abibigoro" fashion to develop the plot.¹⁴ Set in the locale of Niiman, "the city-within-a-city", Abdallah paints a sordid picture of the slum areas of big cities like Accra, Lagos, Nairobi, Dakar, Johannesburg, Harare, and others on the continent of Africa.

In a narrative style, Abdallah begins the play with the hero Mummuni in a speech directed at the audience that gives a vivid insight into the environment of Niiman and its general life style.¹⁵ Shortly after this episode the gods made up of the Cardinal, Imam and Okomfo come on to the scene on a visit to Niiman to appraise the living conditions over there.

On entering Niiman, "the city-within-a-city", the gods made up of the Okomfo, Cardinal and Imam enter into conversation with Mummuni, the water seller as follows:

Cardinal

Oh, stop complaining! We are almost here. I can hear some music and plenty of noise

Imam

Look over there! There is a man looking directly at us. He seems to be expecting us!

Okomfo

My God! You are right, there are sounds of merriment and plenty of music. It seems there is one big party going on around here. I thought we were supposed to pick the poorest neighborhood.

Cardinal

This is the poorest neighborhood, you fool! They are so poor they have to do something to keep their spirits up (to Mummuni). Greetings, my son.

Mummuni

Greetings to you. Respected ones! You are most welcome.

Imam

Salaam Alaikum!

Mummuni

Alaikum Salaam!

Okomfo

Tell me son, what place is this?

Mummuni

This is Numan, Honourable Elders, "the city-within-a-city". I am Mummuni the water seller; and you are most welcome.

Cardinal

Thank you my son. I see you have been expecting us. Are we expected?

Mummuni

Err ----- yes ----- under no ----- I mean yes! Honourable elders, what I mean is Er --- who are you? I mean are you the gods we are expecting? ----

Cardinal

Er ... hem ---- en

Mummuni

Of course, you are! Of course! What is the matter with me? Please forgive me. Of course, you are the gods! And are ----- I mean you are expected.

Imam

You see, I told you they have made preparations to receive us. All those construction works, renovations and road repairs going on -----

Cardinal

My friends, don't deceive yourselves. Construction and road repairs have nothing to do with special guests. They are a matter of routine maintenance with these people!

Mummuni

But seriously, Your Holiness ---

Cardinal

No, no, no, Eminence, my son, Eminence! "Holiness" is reserved for the Pope!

Mummuni

Yes. Your Eminence! I'm sorry. But you are expected. I'll take you to the authorities.

Imam

No! You will do no such thing! Not the authorities -----

In a language that is "coarse" and somewhat unrefined, Abdallah paints a horrible picture of the slum areas of the cities of Africa. The central theme which is poverty is presented in a satirical and humorous language that alludes to the neglect of the slum areas of the cities in Africa by the ruling authorities. The ruling



governments of modern African states such as Ghana, have for long neglected the slum areas of the cities which leads to overcrowding, filth, poverty, sickness, and suffering of the people.

In Land of A Million Magicians, Abdallah draws the attention of the governments of Africa to the plight and living conditions of the slum areas such as Niiman in Ghana. Land Of A Millton Magicians is also symbolic and metaphorical for the poor and indecent living conditions in Ghana as a whole and for that matter the rest of Africa.¹⁶

Abdallah develops his plot around Mummuni, the water seller, and Hasana, the prostitute, to put his message across to his audience. The unhealthy economic situation in Ghana today is vividly portrayed in Land Of A Millton Magicians in the following dialogue:

Okomfo

Then, supposing you are a lucky one and you are able to stretch your salary to last two weeks ----- or ----- how do you survive the remaining two weeks? (Both Hasana and Mummuni burst into fits of laughter)

Seriously, I wish to know ----- how do you survive?

Mummuni

Oh, Respected Gods, that is a very big question, sirs ---- it is a question. I surely cannot answer ----

Hasana

My Lords ----- it's true ----- We can't explain ----- We manage -----yes. We ---manage ----

Imam

How?

(Hasana and Mummuni burst out laughing again)

Hasana And Mummuni

We manage!

Hasana

It's a mystery It's ---- like --- everybody knows nobody's money is enough.
Yet everybody survives ---- It's like magic.

Abdallah portrays in A Land of A Million Magicians the greed, selfishness, dishonesty and corruption that engulf a nation like Ghana whose people survive through all sorts of dishonest means and scheming. Thus, when Mummuni and Hasana received the money from the gods to use it to improve the living conditions of the people of Niiman, the element of dishonesty and corruption is evident when the IRS men came to assess the tax on the money owned by Mummuni and Hasana. The element of corruption and dishonest living is a national problem as the following exchanges between Hasana and the IRS men indicate

Hasana

Gentlemen, you wish to know how much I have?

First IRS Man

And how you made that much money!

Hasana

How much money do you make a month? ----- Each of you? -----

Second IRS Man

He! Lady, we ask the questions, not you. You owe the IRS. We collect!

Hasana

Come on, my friends, there is no need to get upset over so simple a matter ---
Just tell me ---- truly ---- how much do you make a month? ----- As tax collectors --
--fifty thousand?

(They burst out laughing)

One hundred thousand?

(They laugh louder)

First IRS Man

Sister, listen, don't make fun of us, we are only doing our job ----

Second IRS Man

We don't make fifty thousand a month, not even forty ----but ----

Hasana

But here is five hundred thousand for you and five hundred for you ---and five
hundred thousand for the state Now what do you say?

First IRS Man

I say, you are the best and the most law-abiding citizen of this land! ---

Second IRS Man

---- And I say you an angel straight from heaven! -----

Hasana

My receipt please ----

(First IRS Man uses the back of Second IRS Man as "table" to write the receipt)

First IRS Man

Your receipt, Madam You have more than fulfilled your tax obligations
Goodbye.

Hasana

Won't you join our party? We have plenty to eat and drink.

Second IRS Man

Thank you, Madam. You have been kind enough to us. Another time, maybe.
Goodbye.

Hasana

Goodbye and thank you.

Abdallah calls for a re-awakening of the people of Niiman to organize themselves and work out their own salvation without looking up to any "authority". Thus, at the end of the play, Hasana, a major character in the play says:

Hasana

My people we are "authority". We are the source of all power. Yet we wade day in and day out in filth and stench. We starve! We have no roof over our heads and barely any clothes on our bodies. And yet the authorities continue to carry on as if we do not exist. We must change the situation, my people, we must!

(The people have started leaving one by one.)

Please don't leave. Don't turn your backs on me. We have work to do. Magajiya, please call them back. Mummuni, I need you ----- We have work to do --- --- please don't go! You can't turn your back on me ---- not you, Mummuni.

(Mummuni turns away from Hasana and takes off his big fancy gown. He walks slowly towards his water containers. He picks them up and, without a glance at Hasana, he walks out.) Mummuni ----- Mummuni! ---- Magajiya, he is gone! Mummuni --- Magajiya ----- my sister, they are all gone! What are we going to do? How do we change the land, Magajiya? How? How? How? Magajiya -----

In Land Of A Million Magicians, Abdallah attacks poverty and its attendant evils and crimes such as stealing, armed robbery, prostitution and drug abuse. When people live in poverty and squalor it breeds all kinds of evils that dehumanize them.

An African nation such as Ghana is the reference point from which Abdallah highlights his theme of poverty in Land Of A Million Magicians. He unfolds his story around the central characters, Mummuni the water seller and Hasana the prostitute who constitute the common folk of Numan. Numan and other slum localities in Africa are symbolic of poverty, crime, disease and squalor! Abdallah therefore calls for a new order in which the people are expected to rise up and fight these social evils that bedevil the continent of Africa.

Thus, implicitly, Abdallah highlights the poverty-stricken African nations like Ghana which make the people to live like magicians through dishonest and corrupt practices. Land of A Million Magicians is indeed a great play in which Abdallah skilfully discusses his subject and theme in a satirical manner with a sharp and blunt language that evokes humour and admiration. In Land of A Million Magicians, character development is highly appreciable and Abdallah combines all the dramatic elements such as music, dance and spectacle in a typical "Abigoro" fashion to present the story to his audience.

Notes

1. James Gibbs, Critical Perspectives On Wole Soyinka, 1980, pp. 45-68.
2. Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, pp. 34-50.
3. Richard Dutton, An Introduction To Literary Criticism, 1984, pp. 11-14.
4. Charles E. Bressler, Literary Criticism, 1994, pp. 8-9.
5. Kwame Arhin, The Life And Work Of Kwame Nkrumah, 1991, pp. 1-23.
6. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "Character Element In Ghanaian Plays", 1979.
7. Ben Abdallah, "Bobokiyiki's Lament", 2000, pp. 12-14.
8. Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, pp. 13-29.
9. Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, pp. 107-112.
10. James Gibbs, Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka, 1980, pp. 45-68.
11. G. C. M. Mutiso, Socio-Political Thought In African Literature, 1989, pp. 13-29.
12. Christopher Oreilly, Post Colonial Writing, 2001, pp. 29-33.
13. Wole Soyinka, Art, Dialogue And Outrage, 1988, pp. 134-146.
14. Edwin Wilson, The Theatre Experience, 1994, page 198.
15. Edwin Wilson, The Theatre Experience, 1994, page 422.
16. Edwin Wilson, The Theatre Experience, 1994, pp. 33-35.

Conclusion

Post independence playwriting in Ghana has brought into focus a new era of transition in the contemporary Ghanaian situation.¹

During this era of transition, professional playwriting and theatre in Ghana took a new turn, which saw a new group of talented playwrights like Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah emerging out as outstanding in their philosophies and orientation as Ghanaian playwrights. With their new vision of playwriting for the Ghanaian stage, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah each uniquely introduced a new form of writing for the stage that shows a clear departure from their predecessors of pre-independence days.²

Both Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah have amply demonstrated in their plays a degree of good writing ability and a determination to develop their writing in the context of African culture and cosmology.³ Through their plays, both playwrights have brought a new epoch in the Ghanaian theatrical scene. Apart from being recognized in Ghana for their significant contributions to the development of the theatre through their plays, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah have gained international recognition as major African playwrights.

Asiedu Yirenkyi came into the limelight as a significant African playwright by the publication of his first play, Kivuli, by the world-famous publishing organization, Heinemann in its African Writers' series. Yirenkyi followed up with other plays like Daseberg, Lovenet, and Blood and Tears. Most of Yirenkyi's plays are yet to be published by publishing organizations. As mentioned in chapter 3, Asiedu Yirenkyi believes that his plays are published when they are produced on stage for an audience.

In all, Asiedu Yirenkyi has written about twenty-five plays out of which a great number have been produced on the Ghanaian stage.

Ben Abdallah's first play was his historical piece titled The Alien King. It was received with mixed feelings when it was produced on stage at the University of Ghana, Legon. The reaction of the educated elite at Legon served as a catalyst to spur Abdallah on in his career as an up and coming young Ghanaian playwright. Abdallah's next play, The Slaves, was received with much acclaim and much appreciation when it was performed on the Ghanaian stage. Abdallah made a great impact on the Ghanaian stage with the production of these two plays which gave an indication of the birth of a great playwright on the contemporary Ghanaian theatrical scene after Ghana's independence.

Having come into fame and recognition as a great playwright who has emerged on to the Ghanaian theatrical scene, Abdallah followed up with other plays like The Trial Of Mallam Ilya, which further boosted and enhanced his image as a significant playwright on both the Ghanaian and African contemporary playwriting scenes. Like his compatriot Asiedu Yirenkyi, Abdallah's plays get published when they are produced on the stage for an audience. To this end, Abdallah assumes that his plays are published when they are produced for public performance.

As a reaction to popular demand from theatre lovers for the publication of his plays, Abdallah has recently managed to have his plays published by Woeli Publishing Services, a local Ghanaian publishing company. As a result, Abdallah has managed to come out with a collection of his plays in three volumes.

As an avant-garde playwright, Abdallah is continually experimenting in the theatre through his writings. Abdallah's vision and focus as a dramatist is his persistent quest for a new African theatre that will be unique and relevant to the

contemporary African milieu, culture and cosmology.⁴ Through his indefatigable efforts, Abdallah has managed to devise a kind of approach to African playwriting through his "Abibigoro" concept which he describes as "gate-crashing" method.⁵ By this kind of method, Abdallah asserts that Ghanaian and African playwrights should no longer borrow elements of African cultural festivals and weave them into a play but they should rather create a play to be part of a festival situation. This is a novelty and an innovation which Abdallah believes will contribute a great deal towards the creation of a new African theatre that will be unique from that of the West.

As complementary and corroborative to his famous "Abibigoro" concept, Abdallah asserts in his "Bobokyiky'i's Lament" a thought-provoking article he published in 2000 that, "all the material for an African theatre can be found in our own backyard. To this end, African playwrights and other artists need not to look up to Europe or elsewhere for the creation of their works". All that African artists should do is to exhume the rich material, which is hidden and lies buried in our backyard and make use of it.

Besides a number of plays coming from post independent Ghana's playwrights such as Efua Sutherland, Joe deGraft, Ama Ata Aidoo, Martin Owusu and Bill Marshall, the plays of Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah have contributed a great deal to the evolution and development of professional theatre in Ghana. By virtue of their background and training for the theatre, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah have demonstrated great skill and ability in the writing of their plays for the purpose of staging them.

Unlike early Ghanaian playwrights like J.B. Danquah and F.K. Fiawoo during the colonial period, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah are focused on the development of the theatre in Ghana. By their philosophies and ideological

orientations, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abadallah have both proved through their plays that they are of a new breed who are highly conscious of the mechanism of the theatre.

During the period from 1660-1740 of drama, critical theory moved from a formal analysis of dramatic structure based on what critics thought to be rationalist principles to affective theory in which response of the audience was the crucial test of a play. In short, it changed from the prescriptive theories of Francois Hedelin, Abbe D'Aubignac to those of the Abbe Du Bos with their rejection of mechanical principles of taste. The practical question of audience to a medium such as the drama, however, was crucial.

In my position as a critic in the evaluation of the plays of Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah, it is obvious that I have taken a critical standpoint synonymous with Abbe Du Bos with the rejection of mechanical principles of taste. In rejection of the prescriptive or from the Horace standpoint, I have inclined myself to the appreciation of the plays of the two playwrights on the basis of the current critical theory dubbed New Historicism, which is complex in nature and has not yet arrived at agreed principles of evaluating literary works.⁶

New Historicism, which is based mainly on the works of Michel Foucault, discusses the history of institutions, the history of sexuality and the history of subjectivity. New Historicism does not name a school but rather serves to denominate a general tendency within the field of literary and cultural studies. On the basis of how New Historicism functions, I have devised what I call "heterocriticism" which can be identified with the concept of New Historicism. By "heterocriticism", I imply the fragmented and eclectic theatrical methods and works that we witness in our contemporary world today.⁷ My concept of "heterocriticism" is, therefore, embodied

in New Historicism, which is all embracing, and encompassing as far as critical theories are concerned.

In a comparative criticism of the two playwrights, Asiedu Yirenkyi and Ben Abdallah, I have tried to evaluate and appreciate their plays from the basis of the four co-ordinates of critical theories namely author, universe, code, and audience in the context of the most up to date critical theory, New Historicism. In the light of my approach at looking at their plays, I have swerved away from a critical scrutiny of the structure of the plays, and I have also dwelt mainly on the explication aspects in terms of the interpretation and meaning of the plays, and relied more on the appeal and receptability from audience perspective.⁸

Finally, I am highly optimistic of the future of the writing career of the two playwrights; and as they are still active in writing, it is my fervent hope that the new plays that will come out from them will further contribute immensely to the development of the theatre in Ghana and in Africa.

Notes

1. K.E. Agovi, "Origins of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", (1920-1957), pp. 15-17.
2. K.E. Agovi, "Origins of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", (1920-1957), 1990, pp. 1-16.
3. Emmanuel Obiechina, Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel, 1975, pp. 3-28.
4. Robert Brunstine, Theatre of Revolt, pp.139-159.
5. K.E. Agovi, "Of Actors, Performers and Audience", 1981.

6. Raman Seldon/Peter Widdowson, A Readers's Guide To Contemporary Literary Theory, 1993, pp.161-197.
7. Edwin Wilson, The Theatre Of Experience, 1994, pp. 53-63.
8. Jeremy Hawthorn, Unlocking The Text, 1987, pp. 23-29.

APPENDIX A

COLONIAL THEATRE

Ghanaian writers since the beginning of the literary history in Ghana have been highly consistent in their active role as instigators by constantly calling for a new order.¹ Kobina Sekyi's The Blankards, R. E. Obeng's novel, Eighteen Pence, The Third Woman, by J. B. Danquah, and Rev. Fiawoo's The Fifth Landing Stage, are all plays that call for a new order.

The popular theatre in Ghana prominently featured Master Yalley's "concerts" of the Twenties, which were performed for "very big people, lawyers and other professional men of social standing" Master Yalley's performances were in support of Empire Day celebrations. Later, however, in the thirties, Ishmael Johnson and his Two Bobs took over Yalley's tradition and expanded its conception and redirected its appeal to a wider and a more proletarian audience.

While there was a clear obsession with a healthy vision of theatre development, there were no corresponding concerns to develop effective strategies to neutralize the atrophies of the colonial past in terms of theatre education.

It was the church missions who propagated an active policy of theatre promotion in the country as part of their programmes to win more converts. Through their schools and church institutions, chapel choirs, and Sunday school programmes, they succeeded in establishing a tradition of religious plays. Between 1931 and 1932, there was a proliferation of drama and cantata in Accra, Nsawam, Cape Coast and Sekondi.

Groups such as the Wesley Choir, the massed Sunday School Choir of the Holy Trinity and St Mary's Churches and others performed such plays as The Rolling Seasons, Nativity, Esther the Beautiful and Bethlehem.² By 1934, both Church

schools and Government schools in the rapidly expanding elementary school system had also taken to secular plays such as Macbeth performed by the Asuboi Methodist School. These schools were officially encouraged to put up special plays for Empire Day Celebrations.

By the mid-forties Ghanaian nationalism was on the ascendancy and political matters had dominated all other matters in the colony. The British Council was established to undertake and continue the role of imperial cultural dissemination and enlightenment. Through the patronage, encouragement and propagation of English theatre and drama, particularly by means of its branches through select urban centres in the country, the British Council came to play the combined roles of theatre development and indoctrination.

It became the official policy formulator of the colonial government on cultural matters. It provided financial and material support for school productions and occasionally it sponsored plays for selected audiences – privileged African teachers, children of chiefs, rich traders, civil servants and professional men, a sprinkling of brilliant pupils from white mission areas, and colonial officials.

In order to remind colonial subjects of British cultivation in terms of theatre and culture in their true forms, the British Council sponsored groups of British actors and performers to undertake tour of colonies.

These performances, including occasionally the free donation of literature books, were closely related to school examination syllabuses. Thus, from 1943, the British Council gradually came to replace both formal and informal Colonial policy initiatives consciously used as part of the network of British theatre and culture in colonial Ghana.

Local Language plays, started as Twi literature series promoted by the churches, were read mainly in the mission schools of the Gold Coast. The first local language play was written in Akuapim Twi in 1935 by Emmanuel J. Osew and was titled Nana Agyeman Hwehwɛ

The National Theatre Movement was founded ³ The movement identified the theatre with nationalism as it was considered that the theatre as an Art Form can effectively project the total way of the African life

The development of drama in Ghana may be classified under three stages or periods.

- 1 The period of Protest Drama ⁴
- 2 The period of local language plays
- 3 The National Theatre Movement.

Protest Age of drama began during the era of the Gold Coast colonial experience ⁵ The main playwrights of the era are Kobina Sekyi, Rev. Kwasi Fiawoo and J. B. Danquah. Kobina Sekyi wrote The Binkards and directed it at the Cape Coast Town Hall in 1915. The play was published in 1963. Rev. Fiawoo, the headmaster of the Zion College of West Africa in Anloga wrote The Fifth Landing Stage in 1925 and directed it at the School's Speech And Prize Giving day in the same year. J. B. Danquah also wrote a highly philosophical play titled The Third Woman in 1939. The play was published in 1943.

A special column was created in the Gold Coast Spectator for music and stage from 1929-1933. It was manned by the columnist Musing Light. From 1934-1938 another music and drama critic took over and styled himself "Impresario"

In 1931 a performance of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night at the Palladium in Accra by Accra High School was described as an important contribution towards the growth of drama in the country

St Nicholas Grammar School, Cape Coast, advertised its intention to produce Sophocle's Antigone in September 1933 Musing Light described the announcement as a milestone in the advancement of culture

Through these guided activities of colonial theatre, the British influenced the people with their kind of culture of which the people became imitators.

Notes



- 1 Asiedu Yrenkyt, "Creative Writing In the Socio-economic development of a nation," 1989
- 2 Edwin Wilson, The Theatre Experience, 7th Edition, 1998, page 454
- 3 K. E. Agovi, "The Origin Of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", (1920-1957), 1990, pp. 1-15.
- 4 Cosmo Pieterse & Donal Munro, Protest & Conflict in African Literature, 1969, pp 93-124.
- 5 Chidi Amuta, The Theory of African Literature, 1989, pp 68-74,

APPENDIX B

POST INDEPENDENCE THEATRE

The second phase of the National Theatre Movement was ushered in somewhere in the late 1950's until the overthrow of the first Republic in 1966.¹ The theatre and plays during the three decades in the development of the theatre in Ghana shows that the theatre played the singular and very important role in the Ghanaian search for cultural identity.² Plays during the three decades by their contents either precisely rejected foreign cultural imposition or sought to favourably compare the local culture with the new foreign culture.

The use of local language again established the clear wealth and advantage of the local medium over foreign language as it rejected foreign culture by affirming the wealth of local languages. In this view therefore, foreign language becomes a potent tool for cultural domination, which can be avoided by projecting the richness of the local language.

While pre-Independence theatre used the medium of local language, post Independence theatre attacked and rejected foreign cultural imposition by seeking to discover new African forms of theatre that may define African drama.³

The immediate post-independence theatre movement encouraged research oriented plays. Some of these plays include Edufa, Marriage of Anansewa by Efua Sutherland, Anowa by Ama Ata Aidoo, The Son of Umbele by Bill Marshall, Adventures of Saga and Esi and The Story Ananse Told by Martin Owusu and Amma Pranaa by Asiedu Yirenkyi.

First to set the pace of the National Theatre Movement was Michael Dei Anang. He wrote Okomfo Anokye's Golden Stool. This play was commissioned and

performed as part of Ghana's Independence Day programme, at the Rodger Club in Accra in 1957.

Efua Sutherland is synonymous with the theatre in Ghana. She, like Joe De Graft, can be credited with many ideas and innovations in the theatre in Ghana as well as the definitions of form in African Theatre.

Efua Sutherland's contribution in the search for authentic form of drama that may be identified with African traditional roots led to the building of the University of Ghana drama studio in 1962.

The School of Music And Drama was also established in 1962 at the University of Ghana to promote the development of the performing arts in Ghana.

The plays of the post independence era show improvement in experimentation more than the earlier plays of the colonial era.⁴

Some post independence plays and their authors:

The Dilemma of A Ghost: Ama Ata Aidoo

Anowa: Ama Ata Aidoo

Stranger To Innocence: Bill Marshall

The Son of Umbele: Bill Marshall

The Sudden Return and other plays: Martin Owusu

The Story Ananse Told: Matin Owusu

Adventures Of Saga And Esi: Matin Owusu

Sons And Daughters: Joe De Graft

Through a film Darkly: Joe De Graft

Foriwa: Efua Sutherland

Edufa: Efua Sutherland

The Marriage of Anansewa: Efua Sutherland



The Legend Of Aku Sika: Martin Owusu

Kivuli and other plays: Asiedu Yirenkyi

The Fall Of Kumbi: Ben Abdallah

The theatre in Ghana went through a transition after independence, and made some strides towards improvement. This eventually resulted into the building of a magnificent national theatre for the nation under the auspices of the N D C government headed by Jerry John Rawlings. This occasion marked an important milestone in the evolution and development of the theatre as it set an orchestrated theatre consciousness and nationalism for a cultural revolution.⁵

Notes

1. K. E. Agovi, "The Origin of Literary Theatre In Colonial Ghana", (1920-1957), pp. 1-15.
2. Wole Soyinka, Art, Dialogue And Outrage, 1988, pp. 107-112.
3. Lewis Nkosi, Tasks And Masks In African Literature, 1981, pp. 185-195.
4. Edwin Wilson, The Theatre Experience, Seventh Edition, 1998, page 451.
5. Chidi Amuta, The Theory Of African Literature, 1989, pp. 13-29.

APPENDIX C

THE FUTURE OF THE THEATRE IN GHANA

The future of the Ghanaian theatre is bright and promising, and with the erection of a national theatre building the pace is set for acceleration of the development of a national theatre psyche

With new plays coming from Asiedu Yurenkyi, Ben Abdallah and their contemporaries like Martin Owusu and Bill Marshall and of course from the young playwrights like Efo Mawugbe and others, the theatre in Ghana will definitely blossom to a high degree of maturity and efficacy

The National Commission on Culture is an organisation which is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the development of the arts in Ghana. It is therefore expected that this important organization will initiate and implement important policies and decisions that will help to promote the arts in the country.

The government of the N.P.P. should take more interest in the development and promotion of the arts in Ghana by giving financial and moral support to the arts. To this end, the N.P.P. government should give the arts a priority attention in its policies and actions.

The erstwhile N.D.C. government showed keen interest in the promotion of the arts in Ghana, which culminated in the building of a magnificent and imposing national theatre building for the country. It is therefore the expectation of all well meaning Ghanaians who have the theatre at heart that the ruling N.P.P. government will emulate the good example of their predecessors, the N.D.C. government, by taking bold and pragmatic actions to further develop and promote the arts in Ghana. Tayeb Sadiki a renowned Moroccan dramatist once said. "If you want to build a nation, start with a national theatre"¹ Ghana is fortunate to have a national theatre at

the moment and the acceleration for a total development of the nation will revolve around the theatre. This will definitely in turn usher the country into a new era of national consciousness, progress, stability and development.²

Notes

1. Bakary Traore, Black African Theatre And Its Social Functions, 1972, pp 116-117
2. Asiedu Yirenkyi, "Creative Writing In The Socio-economic Development Of A Nation", 1989

APPENDIX D

Interviews Granted By The Two Playwrights Asiedu Yirenkyi (AY)

and Ben Abdallah (BA) to Michael Akenoo (MA):

A. The following is what transpired between MA and AY:

MA:

Good Afternoon, Sir!

AY:

Good Afternoon!

MA:

I am here this afternoon to interview you concerning your writings as a playwright in the Ghanaian and African theatre contexts. I hope you will readily grant me this interview.

AY:

I will.

MA:

Thank You Sir. First of all, may I know about your early background in terms of education and also your parentage?

AY:

I was born at Akropong, Akwapim, in the Eastern Region of Ghana. I come from the Oyoko clan. My parents were mainly peasant farmers in the Akwapim area. I had my early schooling at the Salem Presbyterian Boarding School.

MA:

How was life at the Presbyterian Boarding School at Akropong?

AY:

Well, as you know, the wellknown Presbyterian type of discipline prevailed in the school and everybody had to conform to it.

MA:

I think the Presbyterian type of discipline you had at the Salem Boarding School at Akropong has tremendously influenced your life up to the present.

AY:

Certainly it has.

MA:

Can you please tell me what really made you to develop the creative spirit as an artist?

AY:

Naturally, I come from a family of creative artists. And I think my spirit of creativity came up naturally. I only had to nurture and develop it.

MA:

Can I safely conclude that your creative spirit came up as a result of the genes inherent in your family circle?

AY:

Certainly.

MA:

Where did you have your early formal training in the creative arts?

AY:

I had my first training in the creative arts at the School of Music and Drama under the Institute Of African Studies in the 1960's.

MA:

Did you come under the influence of Joe De Graft, the first Director of the school?

AY:

Yes. Joe De Graft was my teacher.

MA:

Did Joe De Graft influence you in a way as far as your playwriting career is concerned?

AY:

Yes. In a way, I think he did.

MA:

After your schooling at the School Of Music And Drama under the Institute Of African Studies at Legon in the 1960's, where did you go?

AY:

Well, I taught for a brief period and then left for the Yale School Of Drama at the University of Yale in the U.S.

MA:

How long did you spend at the Yale Drama School before returning to Ghana?

AY:

I spent three years at the Yale Drama School and graduated in Playwriting, M.F.A., before returning to Ghana.

MA:

Can you recall some of the great teachers who taught you at Yale?

AY:

Yes. I can remember some great teachers like John Gassner, Nagler, and Robert Brustine.

MA:

Have these great teachers at the Yale School Of Drama influenced your playwriting career in any way?

AY:

Yes. They have.

MA:

Your plays seem to comment mainly on social issues just like Henrik Ibsen, the great Norwegian playwright of the eighteenth century. By the way, is Ibsen your model in your creative works as an artist?

AY:

No. Ibsen is not my model. I create out of my own ingenuity and this happens to be similar to that of Henrik Ibsen.

MA:

Can you please tell me of your philosophical and ideological orientation as a playwright?

AY:

Well, my philosophy is the African Heritage and my ideological orientation is based on the liberation of the African mind from colonialism.

MA:

Do you believe in or subscribe to Pan-Africanism and Negritude?

AY:

As far as I am concerned, these are mere slogans, which have no meanings whatsoever. Those who profess these slogans are not serious. Africans are divided against themselves and will not see eye to eye. Wherein lie the meanings of these two slogans? To me, we should stop deceiving ourselves by these empty slogans which have no bearing at all in the lives of Africans.

MA:

As far as your philosophical and ideological orientation is concerned, are you a modernist or a traditionalist?

AY:

Well, I am neither of the two. But I believe that we must be moderate in our beliefs and practices, and see that we move abreast with the times. What this implies is that we must make room for changes in our traditional beliefs and practices as Africans. In other words, as Africans, we must move forward with the times and stop glorying in the past. In fact, this is the main reason for our present underdevelopment in Africa. It is our inability to move the past into the future that hinders our progress as Africans.

MA:

Oh! I see. This is very serious.

AY:

Yes. It is.

MA:

Am I right? Is Kivuli your first play to be written?

AY:

Yes. It is.

MA:

Is Kivuli a Ghanaian word? What is Kivuli?

AY:

In fact, Kivuli is not a Ghanaian word. It is Swahili.

MA:

What is the meaning of Kivuli?

AY:

In the Swahili language, Kivuli simply means language.

MA:

So? This is very interesting!

AY:

Yes. It is!

MA:

What is the rationale behind choosing this Swahili word as the title for your first play?

AY:

I wanted to use the word Kivuli to address the issue of the African Heritage and Unity, the need for unity among Africans.

MA:

Ngugi Wa Thiongo of Kenya, a prominent African writer, has switched from the use of English Language to the local language, Gikuyu, in his writings. As a writer, what do you say on this move? Is it appropriate?

AY:

Well, Ngugi Wa Thiongo may think that the time is ripe for African writers to communicate in their own local languages. I will not do this now.

MA:

Why?

AY:

Africans must be able to develop their languages to meet international standards for reception just like the English Language, French and the other major languages used in the world today. When we are able to do this, then we can resort to writing in our vernacular languages.

MA:

Among your plays written so far, which of them are more appealing to you as a playwright?

AY:

Well, I see all my plays as appealing, from my creative standpoint.

MA:

Are you still writing?

AY:

Yes, I do.

MA:

How many plays have you written up to date?

AY:

So far, I have written about twenty-five plays.

MA:

Have you published all of them?

AY:

No.

MA:

Why?

AY:

Well, I write my plays with the intention of producing them on the stage for an audience. That is all. The publishing houses can publish them later.

MA:

Are you following the example of William Shakespeare of the Elizabethan period in England? He wrote and produced his plays on the

stage only. He never published them. Shakespeare's plays were published later. Are you following the example of Shakespeare?

AY:

Yes. I think my plays can be published at the appropriate time.

MA:

As a playwright in the Ghanaian theatre with some experience since Independence, what do you say about the future of the theatre in Ghana? Is it bright or bleak?

AY:

I don't know how to answer this question satisfactorily. Anyway, there is hope for the theatre in the future.

MA:

Well, I am highly optimistic of the future of the theatre in Ghana. The first reason is that Ghana now has a national theatre building to promote and to develop the theatre in Ghana. We have also up and coming young playwrights like Efo Mawugbe, who are fast developing their talents as playwrights. With this atmosphere prevailing in the Ghanaian theatre at the moment, the future is highly promising!

AY:

Well, Michael, let us hope so.

MA:

Thank you very much for granting me this special interview.

AY:

Thank you also.

B. The following is what transpired between MA and BA

MA:

Good Morning Sir!

BA:

Good Morning.

MA:

I have come to you this morning to ask you some questions concerning your writings as a playwright in the Post Independence Ghanaian Theatre.

BA:

Is it an interview you want to have with me?

MA:

Yes

BA:

You are welcome.

MA:

Thank you sir! Sir, the first thing I will like to know about you is your roots.

BA:

This is very interesting! My roots can be traced from Ghana and North Africa, Morocco (the Moors).

MA:

That is very interesting. You are of dual descendancy, that is, Ghana and Morocco.

BA:

Yes

MA:

Where did you have your early education?

BA:

I had my early education in Accra and Kumasi.



MA:

Did you attend Wesley Grammar School in Accra and Wesley College in Kumasi?

BA:

Yes, I did.

MA:

How did you develop the creative spirit as a playwright? Do you have artists in your family circle?

BA:

Yes, in my family we have creative artists.

MA:

Can I therefore conclude that your becoming a playwright was not by chance?

BA:

Yes. It was not by chance.

MA:

Can I also say that you inherited your creative talent as a result of the genes working through your family line?

BA:

Yes. This is true.

MA:

Did you pass through the walls of the School of Performing Arts, Legon to have formal training in the theatre?

BA:

Yes. I did receive formal training in the theatre at Legon. During that time the school was under the Institute of African Studies known as School of Music and Drama. There was nothing like the School of Performing Arts at that time.

MA:

Were you taught by Professor Joe De Graft?

BA:

Yes. He taught me.

MA:

After your basic training in the theatre at the School of Music and Drama, where did you go?

BA:

I went to Wesley College to teach.

MA:

So, you went back to your alma mater to teach.

BA:

Yes.

MA:

When did you leave Ghana for your postgraduate studies in the U.S.?

BA:

I left Ghana for the University of Georgia in the U.S. in the 1970's. From the University of Georgia, where I obtained the MFA degree in Theatre Arts, I continued my postgraduate studies at the University of Texas where I obtained also the Ph.D in Theatre before returning to Ghana in the early 1980's.

MA:

Was it in 1982?

BA:

Yes.

MA:

Sir, you seem to have a very sound knowledge of the theatre in general. How did you achieve this?

BA:

When I was a student at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels I took interest in every aspect of the theatre, hence my wide knowledge of the theatre.

MA:

As one of your students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, I have found that you are equally good at writing and directing a play. Which of the two aspects of the theatre is more special to you?

BA:

I don't know how to answer this question. You are the better judge of the two aspects of the theatre as a critic.

MA:

You write and direct your own plays very well. However, I think you have a little edge as a playwright over your ability as a director.

BA:

Your judgment is good.

MA:

What do you say about Wole Soyinka as far as these two aspects of the theatre are concerned?

BA:

I think Wole Soyinka is a better writer than he is as a director.

MA:

I am of the same opinion.

BA:

It is very interesting to know that Wole Soyinka was once my teacher.

MA:

Is The Alien King your first play?

BA:

Yes.

MA:

What about The Slaves? When did you write it?

BA:

I wrote The Slaves during my student days at Legon.



MA:

Which of your plays are more appealing to you?

BA:

As a playwright I think all the plays I have written appeal to me.

MA:

What is your philosophical and ideological orientation as a playwright?

BA:

I am an African and I project the African personality and values. I also believe in modernism and universality in the broadest sense.

MA:

You published the essay titled "Bobokiyiki's Lament" in 2000?

BA:

Yes I did.

MA:

In "Bobokiyiki's Lament" you talked about the theatre of relevance and necessity. What do you mean by this terminology?

BA:

By theatre of relevance and necessity, I am referring to the fact that Africans should have a theatre that will address to their needs and aspirations.

MA:

People often accuse you of profanity and the use of coarse language in your plays. What do you say about these accusations?

BA:

Well, I do not compromise in my writings as far as the subjects and themes are concerned. I think this is where many people find it difficult to understand me.

MA:

You were alleged to have defended yourself against these accusations by saying that our society is full of hypocrisy and that people pretend to be what they are not. You also said that you would like to see a child having sex on the stage rather than seeing one shooting somebody with a gun. Do you still stand by this conviction?

BA:

Yes, I do.

MA:

Can you please tell me the greatest play you have written so far?

BA:

To me, all my plays are great. I do not underrate any of my plays.

MA:

You recently mentioned to us in a class that you were working on a more complex and action-packed play titled Song Of A Pharaoh. Are you ready with it?

BA:

Not yet. I am still working on it.

MA:

How long will it take you to finish writing this play?

BA:

I don't know exactly. But I hope to finish writing it very soon.

MA:

How many plays have you written so far in your writing career?

BA:

I have written about twelve plays.

MA:

Have you published all of them?

BA:

No, but I have managed to publish some of them.

MA:

Who published them? It is Woeli Publishing Company in Accra New Town?

BA:

Yes.



MA:

Why don't you publish your plays immediately you finish writing them?

BA:

Well, I believe I publish a play when I produce it on stage for an audience.

MA:

By this practice do you follow the example of William Shakespeare of the Elizabethan period of the theatre in England?

BA:

Yes, I think so.

MA:

What is your view on the future as far as the theatre in Ghana is concerned?

BA:

Well, there is hope for the future.

MA:

You were instrumental in the putting up of the National Theatre building when you were the Minister of Education and Culture during the erstwhile PNDC/NDC era. Do you think the National Theatre building will contribute positively to the promotion and development of the theatre in Ghana?

BA:

Yes, I think so. We have a National Theatre building now. But we also need a national theatre psyche, which I will say honestly that it does not exist at the moment. This is our main problem now concerning the promotion and development of the theatre in Ghana.

MA:

Do you recognize any up and coming young playwrights in the Ghanaian Theatre like Efo Mawugbe and others?

BA:

Yes I do. I think there are quite a number of young aspiring playwrights in the Post Independence Ghanaian theatre like Efo Mawugbe and others who I think can contribute to the development of the theatre in Ghana.

MA:

Thank you very much for granting this special interview on your writings.

BA:

I also thank you for this opportunity to talk to you about my writings.

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