

AFRO-SEMIO-AESTHETICS AS AN INTERPRETATIVE TOOL IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN DRAMA: JOHN IWUH'S *THE VILLAGE LAMB* AS A PARADIGM

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Abstract

It has been observed that people; readers and interpreters misjudge Nigerian playtexts. This is because African semiotics and aesthetics have been dominated and influenced by Western theorists and critics who often misconceive African semio-aesthetics in African playtexts. Thus the problem of this study centres on the interpreters' perceptions of the aesthetic and semiotic sensibilities of African cultures as "primitive" and inferior. Hence, the study aims at evolving African semio-aesthetic approach that will evaluate, judge, and interpret artistic components and compositions from the point of view of the African and his cultural heritage. Objectives of the study include: to examine African foundations of semiotic and aesthetic analyses for interpretation of playtexts. The study adopts content analysis approach of the qualitative research method. The findings reveal that from the African semio-aesthetic standpoint, Nigerian drama are aimed at effective generation and communication of meaning. Hence, the need for evolvment and integration of African theories of interpretation to permit communication and generation of meanings in Nigerian drama. The paper concludes that cultural elements add to the construct and impact of the dramatic products. Hence, African semio-aesthetics should be applied as interpretative tool in studying contemporary Nigerian drama. The study recommends that African semio-aesthetics should be key anchor as an interpretative tool in contemporary Nigerian play texts.

Introduction

Semiotics as a science or theory of sign is considered by students and scholars of semiotics to be a new area of study. This view by semioticians is relative because since the written languages emerged, we have evidence that human beings dealt with the question of semiotics. Semiotics as separate area of study is actually much older than the philosophy of aesthetics. Because the proponents of aesthetics and semiotics were the same group of scholars before they eventually bifurcated into separate areas of study. The emphasis on semiotics as a science of sign research lies in philosophy and linguistics. Generally, semiotics is subdivided into syntactics; the relation of the signs, semantics; the relation between the signification and the sign and pragmatics; the relation between the signification, the sign and the user. The understanding of these, is the understanding of semiotic principles. Hence, a sign thus represents in cognition of something else than itself, but cognition is more than representation which again is more than signification. Accordingly, “Semiotics has always been the premier ‘science’ of the artificial after all, the sign is only ever meant to stand in for something else (*aliquid stat pro aliquo*), even if it is another sign. The sign is not the designated itself (the real, the referent or the idea)” (Holt 332). Roland Barthes argues that myth: “is constituted when the artificial nature of the sign, its ever-tenuous link to the object, is forgotten and taken as ‘natural’” (231). Any theory of the sign is therefore a theory of constructed meaning. Holt affirms that:

...semiotics identifies three levels, or metafunctions, of meaning in any complex text: representational, interactional, and organisational. Representational meaning is what something is about, interactional meaning is the range of social, affective connotations, and the organisational is the manner in which meaning is derived by the configuration of phenomena. (337)

Aesthetics on the other hand, is a general way of looking at the arts, whether beautiful, ugly or otherwise. However, some basic category of works of art generally or at their best, belong to what is to be observed in any work of art and can probably be found, at least in some grade. Such a principle is the semiotic view of art too, by which the categorization of works of art as, in the broadest sense, signs that are carriers of meaning and reference. There has been a recurrent and serious effort to establish this semiotic view, and thus to subsume aesthetics under the general theory of signs. A work of art is an iconic sign, that is, a sign that refers by virtue of its similarity to something, thereby, pointing at the meeting point between semiotic and aesthetic experience. In line with this view, Holt also explains that aesthetics:

...explores relations between things, how they are organised, how they “fit”, how they materially converse. The aesthetics is also the domain in which concepts are experimented with, worked out, turned inside out and exposed to the counterfactual. Aesthetic activity is the process of counterfactual ‘communication.’ (Holt 340)

Baumgarten was neither the first nor the only one who tried to set up a science of sensual perception. Plato and Aristotle had dealt with perception long before in relation with philosophical research about semiotics; the interconnectedness between semiotics and aesthetics. Thus, the word aesthetics became part of the common language use along with a semantic transformation. It changed from the subject to the object. That is instead of saying, “I aesthetic” one says: “something is aesthetic”. The meaning of the word became more and more imprecise. This means that aesthetics describes the total of designed or created objects, neutralising the word beauty. The design or objects contain the meaning as to whether is beautiful or ugly. The beauty or ugly, the manifestation of art, has to be defined as the sensual appearance of an idea. It is the sensual perception of the design or objects that brings semiotics

and aesthetics together, the design or the objects communicate to the sense to create meaning.

Afro-Semio-Aesthetics Explained

African Semio-Aesthetics: *Afro-Semio-aesthetics*, as coined by this researcher, is a conceptual amalgamation of both semiotics and aesthetics designed to bring some strands of semiotics that are relevant in the interrogation of aesthetics in the selected play of study from the African/Nigerian perception. It implies that if both concepts deal with sensual perception as posited by the researcher, it therefore means that “Afriacan semio-aesthetics” in Afro-postmodernist era, simply means the ways Africans perceive their signs and signification which is African semiotics and the sensual perception of their work of art and culture which is African aesthetics.

Though it must be noted that different aesthetics scholars of African extraction have questioned whether there can be meaning of African aesthetics different from the universal meaning of aesthetics imposed by the West with their Euro-American hegemony. This researcher dare answer the question that there can be different meaning of aesthetics that is different from the universally accepted meaning of aesthetics which is sensuous perception of art and culture. The argument is that perception of the White man about African culture and art may not be the same sensual perception of Africans about their art and culture. The White man’s perception is Euro-centric in nature. For instance, it is the sensual and biased hegemony of the White as portrayed by Soyinka in *Death and the King’s Horseman* that made Simon Pilkings to intervene in the ritual suicide of Elesin. While Pilkings on one hand through his sensual perception kicks against the ritual adventure of Elsin and sees that adventure as crime, the people of old Oyo see it as smooth and a ritual death that Elesin must embark to put the kingdom at peace, which expresses the perception of

Africans about their culture. In the same vein, Gbemisola Adeoti posits that:

Pilkings attitude to the people and their culture, like those he represents, is condescending. Unfortunately, with his unsolicited but supercilious intervention, he ends up bringing upon the people and their cosmology, incalculable damage. To him, Elesin is about to commit suicide or “ritual death” and he has to be saved from himself at all cost. (18)

Pilkings does this out of lack of understanding of the people’s culture and tradition. Even when his house boy Joseph tries to explain, he does not listen because, he already has a preconceived notion against the people and their culture. Joseph explains it from the logic of the culture that Elesin: “will not kill anybody and no one will kill him. He will simply die” (167). “But Pilkings ignores this. Instead, he orders the arrest and detention of Elesin. He takes this steps without consultation with Elesin and the people for whom he thinks he is acting” (Adeoti 18). Again, in the play selected for this study, such example abounds. Janet in Iwuh’s *The Village Lamb* for instance, from the Euro-centric perception never sees the mark on Amadi as a sign of a lamb, hence she argues with Amadi and does not believe that anything can happen. While Amadi from Afro-centric perception makes her to see why the marks are true of Africans and they portend meaning which even Amadi him himself could not interpret as a diasporic African (character).

African critics see African aesthetics directly or indirectly in their quest to propagate Afro-postmodernist drive. The term African aesthetics refers to the African perception and appreciation of the nature, beauty, and value of artistic expressions or representations. The essence of the African semiotics and aesthetics is its representation as a construct of African people on the continent and people of African descent in the diaspora that articulates African culture. African semio-aesthetic perception may be seen as how

Africans consciously define their own concept of beauty that is, the African-derived standards of perceiving, appreciating, appraising, or applying semio-aesthetic values or knowledge of things in Africa. The African semio-aesthetics is African centered, and it reveals the cultural bond between Africans in the continent and abroad. African semio-aesthetics embraces a rich variety of creative forms and styles peculiar to people of African origin that incorporate a combination of practical, physical, material, temporal, and spiritual aspects.

Afro-semio-aesthetics includes African artistic expressions: visual and performative images, signs, symbols, verbal arts (poetry, oratory performance), rhythm, music (song and dance), dress, hairstyles, cosmetics, designs (African architecture and decorative patterns), and crafts in and from Africa. From the above, African semio-aesthetics therefore can be seen by the current study as the way African conceives his numerous artefacts, the meanings of these artefacts and their religious, social, political, economic values. African semio-aesthetics constitutes the factors both tangible and intangible in form and ideas to represent African world-view. In recent times, Afro-semio-aesthetics is at the core of Nigerian plays directly or indirectly. For more than two decades now, Nigerian playwrights have explored Afro-semio-aesthetic approaches to present and explore African sensual perceptions of semiotics and aesthetics in the writing of their plays. This has helped them in great measures to achieve presentation of Afro-semio-aesthetics through the medium of playwriting.

The concept of Afro-semio-aesthetics dwells on the premise that every clime has its culture, so does Africa. African semio-aesthetics leans on the idea and correctional impetus against the euro-centric domination of the African semiotics and aesthetics. This correctional impetus is that Africa has semiotics and aesthetics. African semiotics and aesthetics deals with the philosophical sensual perception of the African man and his cultural heritage. The African perception of his culture lies with how he

perceives his culture and tradition, his arts and artifacts, mythologies, legends, symbols and signs which are relatively African. Thus African has that aesthetic and semiotic sensibilities that are different from the Euro-American aesthetic and semiotic sensibilities. In other words, African semio-aesthetics is the manner Africans evaluate, assess and judge his arts and culture.

African semio-aesthetics therefore, is geared towards evolving a concept or theory that can be used in the reading and interpretation of African playtexts with a view of revealing those afro-semio-aesthetic ingredients fused in those playtexts by the playwrights that can assist in the generation of meanings and communicating effectively. Concretely, African semio-aesthetics emphasizes that Africans have aesthetics and semiotics, that Africa has semiotics and aesthetics why deal with the way Africans perceive their culture and arts, these perceptions influence the reading and interpretation of African playtexts. This is the position of the current study. It does this through Afro-semio-aesthetics.

Furthermore, Afro-semio-aesthetics deals with the ethnographies of the African people as most of the African plays are re-writing of African culture, tradition and arts. Thus, they are reflected in the plays conspicuously in the process of the construct of their plays. Hence, the ethnographies of the African people should be well understood for the reading and interpretations of African plays to enable free flow of meaning generation and effective communication. The ethnographies include – the language, food, clothes, ceremonies, medicines, burials and so many others. Therefore, in an African play, before a reader condemns the character and language of any character in the play, he must understand why such character does what he did? This is simple, because he should understand what does the culture of the people permits and what it does not permit. Thus the reader/interpreter will be well guided through all the aforementioned elements of African semio-aesthetics.

Afro-Semio-Aesthetics as an Interpretative Tool in Contemporary Nigerian Drama

Here it should perhaps be noted that a 'text' can exist in any medium and may be verbal, non-verbal, or both. Corroborating this, Gracia defines a text as: "a group of entities used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey a specific meaning to an audience" (4). And: "Some interpretations presuppose the understanding of the texts they interpret" (Gracia 231). The term text usually refers to a message which has been recorded/encoded in some ways, these could be written, audio- and video-recording so that it is physically independent of its encoder or decoder. Examples of the physically independent of its encoder (playwright) can be found in contemporary Nigerian drama. A text therefore, is an assemblage of signs such as, symbols, language, words, images, sounds and/or gestures shaped and interpreted with reference to the harmonies associated with a genre and in a particular 'medium' of communication. "Semiotics permeates all aspects of human communication and serves as a platform for the understanding and decoding of meanings" (Ekweariri and Nwosu 60). These aspects of human communication are enshrined in contemporary Nigerian drama.

In this regard, the playwright or contemporary dramatist fuses his playtext with signs, symbols, language, images and other non-verbal cues to communicate his idea to the people. For instance, the characters in Idegu's *Tough Man* are symbolically divided into two, the living characters and the dead characters. Efi-ile and efu-ojaegwu symbolize two worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead. A replica example can also be drawn from Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, where Elesin Oba represents the black man and Simon Pilkings represents the White man. Hence for the interpreter to understand and interpret the play justifiably, he may understand these worlds of the black and the white. The dramatist communicates with the two worlds as they are

not just there for visual pleasing, they are there for semiotic and aesthetic purposes. The worlds as presented by the playwrights cited above can only be understood through Afro-semio-aesthetics.

John Iwuh's Biodata

John Iwuh: Enyeribe John Jones Iwuh, born on the 25th December, 1963. A playwright and Associate Professor of Scenography and performance Aesthetics. He went to the university of Calabar, Calaber, 1985 – 1989, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2002 – 2004 and University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2005 – 20012. He is interested in Scenography and Performance Aesthetics, Theatre Administration & Performance Management and Performance Criticism.

Iwuh taught in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan as a Fulbright scholar from 2005-2007 and moved to Igbinedion University 2007-2008. He worked with the Collective Artistes, Performance Studio Workshop, Lagos and designed performances with local and international directors, among other commissioned projects. He worked as a pioneer manager with The MUSON Centre, Lagos before going into full blown academics.

Iwuh has the following published plays to his credit: *The Village Lamb* (2008), *Spellbound* (2009), *Ashes and Daydream* (2007), and *Birthright* (2016), and *Eshe* (2016). Iwuh is at present, an academic staff of Redeemer's University, Nigeria

Synopsis of John Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*

Amadi has been chosen from birth by the gods that he will be used as sacrificial lamb in the next victory festival as it is stipulated by the community's law that anyone who has that mark must be trained; an all-important person. Amadi was sent abroad for further study. Amadi is at the verge of rounding up his programme, he begins to receive series of letters from his father telling him not to return home because he knows the detail about his son Amadi. But Amadi would not listen because he vows to help his people

after his programme abroad. Ujowundu insists that Amadi remains abroad and would not tell Amadi the reason for his insistence in telling Amadi to stay away from home because he is under oath.

But in his attempt to avert the death toll on his son he made different efforts by speaking to his son in different languages. Finally Amadi returns home. It is time to celebrate the victory festival. The elders start coming to remind Ujowundu of the lamb in his custody. They make him realized after much arguments with them that the lamb in his compound is the community's property and not his, so he should release him. Amadi is suspicious of the incessant visit to his father's compound because he thought they are planning to fight his father. He prepares for them. Amadi's quest to know his true self was heightened as every attempt to touch any girl in the village resulted in their running away as the mark is understandable to them. This aggravated Amadi's quest to know why girls in the village would not want him to touch or cohabit with them. As Amadi makes effort to discover the mark the more it becomes complex.

Afro-Semio-Aesthetics as an Interpretative Tool in *The Village Lamb*

The essence of the African semiotic and aesthetic concept is its representation as a construct of African people on the continent and people of African descent in the diaspora that articulates African culture. Hence, "Africanist art historians have begun not only to reexamine their Western-derived methodologies but also to search for theoretical alternatives, lest they lose the 'African' in the African Art" (Abiodun 20). To this study, African semio-aesthetic perception may be seen as how Africans consciously define their own concept of beauty that is, the African-derived standards of perceiving, appreciating, appraising, or applying Afro-semio-aesthetic values or knowledge of things in Africa. This African semiotic and aesthetic tool of interpretation is needed in the following dialogue from John Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*:

BOY: (*Panting*) Please help me. They... they ... they're after my manhood! (*Runs his hand across his face and with some realization*). Oh no! You can't help me. You're on the run as well. (*Sadly*) From our act you receive the baton of your race. (*Runs out*)

AMADI: Come back! (*Almost going after him. Ujowundu entering with a bag, catches the sight*)

UJOWUNDU: Who was that with a lightning speed?

AMADI: I can't tell. (*Pause*) Reminds me of what happened today, Father.

UJOWUNDU: Where?

AMADI: At the village square during the new yam outing ceremony.

UJOWUNDU: It is a big event, something is always happening. All who were there merely sniffed a popular o dour. Let us hear it, anyway.

AMADI: It was magical. I can't tell actually what transpired. But at appoint two youths, a lad and a beautiful maiden tore their apparels to consume some raw yams. They could have been possessed or mad. Now I know they're mad. I recognize the boy to be that... (28)

This requires Afro-semio-aesthetic analysis in the interpretation. Another important element, particularly in a comparison of verbal and non-verbal communication, is the notion of code or sign system. A code functions as a system of rules. These codes, symbols, index among others are elements of semiotics and aesthetics. They deal solely with sensual perception of the reader/interpreter. Language on the other hand, is a code and linguistic competence, that is understanding the elements and structure of language, should be foremost on the agenda of the reader/interpreter. Like understanding the language of the boy to Amadi.

One of the major challenges before Amadi is his inability to decode what his father Ujowundu was saying as can be seen in John Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*. Amadi does not even understand his own existence and cultural background and thus finds it difficult to know himself. This may equally pose a challenge for a reader/an interpreter, because the character himself is an element of communication and symbolic in nature. We could say the character is an element of semiotics just as language does. The same discourse about language was discovered with the characters of Uzokwe, Ujowundu and Ikekwe in Iwuh's *The Village Lamb* thus:

UZOKWE: (Clearing his throat) Like a goat and cords,
the tapper with roots and herbs.

UJOWUNDU: (Not looking back) How does the hen
feed her chicks but by sound?

IKEKWE: Whoever inherits a good tradition guards it
jealously. His father was the finest wine
tapper that ever lived, have you forgotten?

ALL: Who will? (They all laugh). (9)

Through language, the above exchange reveals a lot about the character of Ujowundu and his background; his family. This may need to be deconstructed through Afro-semio-aesthetic as an interpretative tool used to drive home more meaning from the play text by the reader/interpreter.

Canice Nwosu among others have succinctly captured the term African aesthetics directly or indirectly in their quest to propagate Afro-postmodernist drive. As it is said that: "The term *African aesthetic* refers to the African perception and appreciation of the nature, beauty, and value of artistic expressions or representations" (Shava 11). The conversation between Amadi and Janet in *The Village Lamb* reveals a lot:

AMADI: I have a deadly sickness. I'm told it was
planted in me but I don't believe it. (*Janet is
too shocked to talk*) But something tells me

there's a cure. *(Pause)* You'll be the first to extract this secret from me, because you're the first, the only and probably ...

JANET: How sweet and romantic! But you haven't told me anything yet.

AMADI: Listen. I have a problem beyond medical capability. Tests prove me a normal human being. But believe me, I'm not. The cure is only in my country. (38)

Janet could not deduce meaning because she is not an African. The sensual perceptions of Africans about their works, nature and culture (Afro-semio-aesthetics). By extension it is the perception and appreciation of nature, art and beauty of artefacts by Africans and for Africans at home and in the diaspora. It is embedded in the plurality of African cultures, and embodied in people's art and practices within their lived African societal contexts. The use of language for Amadi's return here calls for Afro-semio-aesthetics as an interpretative tool to generate meaning too:

UJOWUNDU: Well, after a successful tour the king's kola returns to him. The orange peel that reaches the refuse dump has indeed got home...

UZOKWE: I'll say why we're here quickly and briefly. There's no need for details because if we probe our past with serious scrutiny we shall uncover the albino's privacy. *(Sternly)* Ujowundu! The lamb is back. Have you told him what he should know, or do you require a special skill to do so?

UJOWUNDU: You don't force a mother on the child. A sensible child would ask for his mother.

MADUAKO: Must we wait until then? Enough!
We're tired of your slipperiness. We need not
breast-feed you on matters of our tradition!

UZOKWE: Maduako, be patient. Stones and grains
don't go well in the mouth. The tooth should
know better. Ingrates forget the importance
of their toilet sticks until they are pressed.
(Pause) Ujowundu, where is Amadi? (*The
Village Lamb* 11)

The exchange above needs Afro-semio-aesthetics for interpretation. The mark on Amadi as the chosen one that carries the burden of the community calls for appropriate deconstruction through semiotic and aesthetic analysis. The mark is a signifier that points at Amadi as the man that would be sacrificed to the gods to beseech blessing from the gods for a better tomorrow. Amadi like Olunde in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* studied abroad but has a mark on him that portends him as a carrier.

Barry describes this as the structuralist approach to literature. In Barry's words he submits that: "there is a constant movement away from the interpretation of the individual literary work and a parallel drive towards understanding the larger abstract structure which contain them" (91). It is claimed that the act of reading, rather than the interpretation of one work, engages the reader in discovering a network of textual relations. Tracing those relations is, in fact, interpreting the text, that is, discovering its meaning, or meanings. Reading thus becomes a process of 'touring between texts'. "Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations" (Allen 1). Furthermore, Amadi's conversation with Ujowundu in *The Village Lamb* is explicit to Afro-Semio-aesthetics:

AMADI: Father, why are those men here? Twice
I've seen them and each time you cried like a
child roused from a horrible dream. (Pause)

Perhaps, I've been away for too long. Do they envy you? (*No answer*) Perhaps, I'd prepare for a fight. I'm sure they will come again.

UJOWUNDU: No, son, you can't do that while I live. The lame says his first loss was enough lesson, adding his eyes would be more than sacrifice. No matter how difficult, a man doesn't use his thatch-roof for real.

AMADI: Don't mystify them, father. Those men were mortals; I could strangle them all in one hold! I'm trained in various acts of self-defence, you know. (25)

Amadi as a young sharp could not deduce meaning from the language of Ujowundu, his father. Or better still, one could say he was making a different meaning from what his father was saying and it landed him into serious trouble. Amadi is not aware of the reality of the mark and the signal he was receiving, but the community knows about it. That is one of the reasons why no girl in the community would want to marry Amadi. All the aforementioned call for the application of the principles of Afro-semio-aesthetic analyses for meaning generation through the eye of the reader/interpreter. The mark on Amadi like symbol, icon, sign and other non-verbal cues were meant for communication which the interpreter/reader must deconstruct through Afro-semio-aesthetics if he wants to make meanings from the text.

Even Amadi could not understand the language of Ujowundu, his father. Ujowundu talks about the gods while Amadi refers to the elders. Again, the exchange here could only be understood through Afro-semio-aesthetic values, the interpreter: "examines the texts inside nature thereby developing the quest to take an adventure into knowing what the play is all about on the part of the reader of a play" (Ricoeur 1624). African semio-aesthetic elements lay bare for play analyses of the case study. How

his happiness is not at home, but he can find happiness anywhere in the world. This is reflected in *The Village Lamb* in the following dialogues:

UJOWUNDU: Stop crying, my son. (*Pause*) Indeed, and by all means I wanted you to take a wife there because your happiness and safety is anywhere but here.

AMADI: In my native land, Father, is such rejection?

UJOWUNDU: Things could work in reverse order. We're haunted so much by our past. The termite is a dangerous insect to swallow alive, my son.

AMADI: But could I have stayed there all my life without you? No, I couldn't. I'd rather die.

UJOWUNDU: Now I see that what is dead is not worth living for.

AMADI: What are you really talking about? Well I sojourned and came back to my place of birth. I am happy, the people love me, and the elders almost worship me.

UJOWUNDU: You assessed yourself wrongly; Son. You assessed society wrongly too. An escaped prisoner of war doesn't walk back into the enemy's camp.

AMADI: Is anywhere better than home, and with you? (27)

Ujowundu's language speaks volumes that Amadi cannot understand. Because: "discursive and non-discursive symbolism" of Langer lay bare. Through this, the 'difference' between Ujowundu and Amadi is explicit. The conversation may be interpreted from the hegemony of positive like that of Amadi and it could be interpreted also from the perception of negativity, just like the interpretation of Ujowundu himself. Again, for a reader/an interpreter to deduce meaning he must be able to deconstruct the character through psychology, physiology and sociological

influence of Amadi, then he would know why Amadi could not deduce meaning from the whole thing.

Amadi's attempt like Elesin Oba to deposit a seed proves abortive as the ladies (Africans) who understand the mark on Amadi know the consequences if he eventually mate with them. Linking this to African semio-aesthetic values, this is symbolic because it connotes continuity. It can also be understood from the point of view of Langer's non-discursive symbolism. Aesthetic wise, it also denotes beauty and ugliness, leaning on non-discursive symbolism. Beauty in the realm of begetting a son even when the father has a death mark on him. The ugliness of it is that he is going to be born without a father or he who impregnate a maiden is going to die before the baby is born. This abovementioned can only be understood through Afro-semio-aesthetic analyses. The matter heightens up when Amadi narrates his ordeal in the village when he comes across a girl to Ujowundu. This is succinctly captured in *The Village Lamb* thus:

AMADI: Father, I met a girl any man should desire for a wife. But she told me scornfully that rats of different colours do not cohabit. Is that one of the numerous proverbs?

UJOWUNDU: My son, there's something about the shrew that makes it smell.

AMADI: What do you mean?

UJOWUNDU: Let me advice you, son. Don't think much of what a lady tells you; else you will embrace a quick suicide. Their tongues are sharp and their words are sour. (*Laughs*) But seriously, son, you can't get a wife here.

AMADI: (*Surprised*) Father! (26)

Again, the exchange here could only be understood through Afro-semio-aesthetic analyses. It should also be understood through Langer's discursive and non-discursive symbolism. The white lady

Janet (European) who saw the mark on Amadi and the scratching of body never believe in it perhaps because of cultural variations/differences and Euro-centric sensual perceptions. Here, according to Ricoeur, the interpreter: “examines the texts inside nature thereby developing the quest to take an adventure into knowing what the play is all about on the part of the reader of a play” (1624). The cultural variations could be studied also through binary oppositions. There is variation because the cultures are saying something opposite of one another. What the African culture accepts, is what the white culture rejects. This alone calls for the application of Afro-semio-aesthetic values to the interpretation of African play texts. We see more from the discussion between Amadi and Janet in *The Village Lamb*:

AMADI: I have a deadly sickness. I’m told it was planted in me but I don’t believe it. (*Janet is too shocked to talk*) But something tells me there’s a cure. (*Pause*) You’ll be the first to extract this secret from me, because you’re the first, the only and probably ...

JANET: How sweet and romantic! But you haven’t told me anything yet.

AMADI: Listen. I have a problem beyond medical capability. Tests prove me a normal human being. But believe me, I’m not. The cure is only in my country. (38)

There is a shocking revelation about Amadi. Confusion like Pilkings intervention in the ritual suicide mission (African cultural practice) of Elesin because of the former’s lack of understanding of the culture of the people of old Oyo. Hence: “the interpreter digs deep into the text for deeper understanding and seeks to bring out the hidden ingredients of the text” (Ricoeur 1625). Janet does not understand Amadi’s plight because of cultural binary oppositions. Amadi tries to explain further:

- AMADI: My village is a community of few literate people. They look up to people like me for ideas toward development.
- JANET: Shall we go together, there's nothing stopping us now? (*Begins to kiss him all over*) I'll love to have a baby for you, Amadi. A black boy.
- AMADI: I'll love him; I don't mind the colour. A life of brotherhood has no eyes for colour or race.
- JANET: I'll love to go to Africa, meet your parents. Will they welcome me? (*Pause*). (41-2)

The conspiracy by the elders to kill Ujowundu and their conversations also calls for the application of Afro-semio-aesthetic elements to drive meaning home. For instance, in Iwuh's *The Village Lamb*, the following dialogue can be considered for what the character knows about himself and what other characters know about him:

- BOY: (*Panting*) Please help me. They... they ... they're after my manhood! (*Runs his hand across his face and with some realization*). Oh no! You can't help me. You're on the run as well. (*Sadly*) From our act you receive the baton of your race. (*Runs out*)
- AMADI: Come back! (*Almost going after him. Ujowundu entering with a bag, catches the sight*)
- UJOWUNDU: Who was that with a lightning speed? (28)

From here Amadi becomes fully aware of his ownership of his newly discovered consciousness. The boy ran away by discovering the mark on Amadi through non-discursive symbolism of Langer. This act explains the difference between Janet and the boy as aboriginal person. But at a point Amadi does not know who he is. Hence: "the interpreter digs deep into the text for deeper understanding and seeks to bring out the hidden ingredients of the

text” (Ricoeur 1625). The dialogue reveals Amadi’s character for effective communication.

Afro-semio-aesthetics is being proposed as a model/approach for interpretation of playtexts. This, Afro-semio-aesthetics holds that for a playtext to be understood, the cultural background of the playtext should be understood first. If the culture of the play is understood, then, the west and some diasporic Africans/Nigerians would not have the essence to misinterpret African/Nigerian playtexts. The Afro-semio-aesthetics model/Approach therefore, would serve as a means towards the deduction of meaning from African/Nigerian playtexts. Afro-semio-aesthetics emphasizes that every facet of the culture of the play crafted by the playwright in any part of Africa is crafted in the ethnographies of the people which the west must read first before interpreting African playtexts. Hence, language, symbols, codes, signs, logo etcetera which form the cultural elements; cultural background of African/Nigerian playtexts, African aesthetics and semiotics, may be well understood and comprehended through the reading of ethnographies of the culture of the playtexts before the White/African; Nigerian can interpret African/Nigerian playtexts.

Recommendations

Therefore, from the discussions above, the research observes and believes that theorists and critics of Nigerian drama are capable of achieving or attaining the feat of developing models/theories/approaches that can help in the further study and interpretation of Nigerian playtexts. This will help Nigerian drama to make more meaning and communicate effectively and efficiently to the reader/interpreter. Effort can be geared towards the evolution of theories and approaches that can help in the interpretation of playtexts with emphasis to the backgrounds of the playtexts, as bases for African semio-aesthetics. It is based on these observations that the following recommendations are made:

Consequently, the contemporary African/Nigerian playwrights should begin to think the way of African postmodernism and embrace the model of African semio-aesthetics as an Afro postmodern concept/model to enable integration of theories/approaches in a multi-cultural world of today.

The threat of mono-culturalism in this postmodern era is alarming. Thus, it has affected the interpretative acumen of the West who now misjudge and misconstrued the Nigerian/African playtexts. There is therefore the need for a multi-cultural approach of theory that will absorb the oral literature/performance of the Nigerian/African people that form the sources of their playtexts.

African theorists have made concerted efforts in the evolvments of theories that can fit into the study of African/Nigerian playtexts. Efforts should be invigorated to evolve more to assist in the study of indigenous playtexts such as the ones selected for this study.

Conclusion

There is need for Afro-semio-aesthetics approach which posits that for interpretation of playtexts to take place, the origin of such playtexts must be put into consideration, which is why the White misinterpret African, especially Nigerian playtexts. Because the background of these playtexts are neglected. Therefore, not put into the front burner of textual analysis. African semio-aesthetics therefore can be seen by the current study as the way African conceives his numerous artefacts, the meanings of these artefacts and their religious, social, political, economic values.

Afro-semio-aesthetics as an interpretative tool proposes that for a playtext to be understood, the cultural background of the playtext should be understood first. If the culture of the play is understood, then, the west and some diasporic Africans/Nigerians would not have the essence to misinterpret African/Nigerian playtexts. The Afro-semio-aesthetic model therefore, would serve as a means towards the deduction of meaning from

African/Nigerian playtexts. Afro-semio-aesthetics emphasizes that every facet of the culture of the play crafted by the playwright in any part of Africa is crafted in the ethnographies of the people which the West must read first before interpreting African/Nigerian playtexts.

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