THE INTERNET AND THE THERMODYNAMICS OF ADAPTING FE/MALE'S ONLINE CHATS AS DRAMATIC TEXTS

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Abstract

Nigeria is one of the leading African countries with a robust playwriting tradition. This is evident in the size of drama that the country has produced. However, with the advancement in cyber-technology qua the internet, it has become imperative to re-conceptualize playwriting and to re/imag[in]e the nucleus of dramatic literature/play-text. The social media is one of the aspects of cyber-technology that questions the extant theorization on playwriting and dramatic literature. This is so because the conversation threads in various instant messaging applications, group chats and/or social networking groups can be argued to be performative and can be adapted into play-texts for theatrical purposes. This study used the principles of thermodynamics in adaptation to argue that online conversations in various chat-threads can pass for a de facto, well-plotted drama script. It is a research in interdisciplinary studies which imposes the principles of thermodynamics, a subject in pure science, on theatre adaptation. The study analyzed the online conversations of some group members of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA) Facebook page and explains how the principles of thermodynamics apply to dramatic art. The study discovered that coordinated online chats can expand the frontiers of playwriting; how people conceive drama or play-text, and most importantly, can lead to the birth of interactive dramas or e-plays.

Introduction

The basis of cyber technology on which web applications operate is the Internet. The Internet is a network that links millions of computers around the world. "It is an interconnection of various networks across

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the globe" (Awoleye et al., 85). Its beginning can be traced back to the 1960s during the Cold War era where Internet was mainly used for military surveillance. However, the Internet nowadays has been democratized and it is a viable tool for every progressive mind in research, business, commerce, communications, entertainment and recently drama. It is useful to all categories of people irrespective of interest or profession. It dissolves the taxonomy created by international governments and all manners of demarcations or boundary systems. One of the ways the Internet defies international boundary system is through its communicative interactivity. The social media platforms constitute part of the interactive experience of the Internet. The Internet 'actively' began in the 1990s with the development and rapid diffusion of the World Wide Web (WWW). The development later brought about Social Networking Sites (SNS) and micro-blogging in the early 2000s (Okhakhu and Omoera 13; Alabi 70).

Today, the Internet is replete with overabundance of social media and micro-blogging websites. This means that citizens across different borderlines could interact, communicate, share videos, pictures, instant messaging, and contribute to existing literary-filmic dialogue or develop a new conversation. Facebook is one of the most populous social media websites because of its diffusion and international usage. For many in the creative industry, Facebook offers a form of interactive online convergence for many groups. However, the nature of the interactivity in different online conversations on Facebook as well as other different social media websites is opening up a skylight in dramatic arts and theatre studies. This can be seen in some of the accessible online chat-threads on Facebook, WhatsApp and Blackberry messenger; some of which could pass for a well-plotted drama script [without the knowing of the chatters]. Such chat-threads carry all the characteristics of drama-text and could be adapted to the theatre stage for performance. This paper examines the fe/male's online chats in the Facebook group page of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA). To do this, it uses the thermodynamics of adaptation to explain the logic of online texts and how they can be adapted for theatrical or dramatic purposes.

Thermodynamics and its Application to the Theatre

The literary theory of thermodynamics is a fundamental law of nature applied to theatre with special emphasis on the triangle of equity expressed as protection, freedom and balance (Binebai, 10). According to Kilty, "the theory has its earlier roots in post World Wars American literature but has been imposed on dramatic literature to establish the profundity of art" (35). Because drama is a sociological art, as Binebai

notes, the theory insists on the presence of protection, freedom and balance to be complete. This is in consonance with the second law of thermodynamics which states that work and heat are different forms of energy. One can be turned into the other but can never get more of one than the other. Thus, both needs protection and freedom to achieve balance. The same principle applies to drama which thrives on conflict. As heat takes process to produce energy, or work to produce heat, the same way the plotting of drama builds to produce conflict and resolution for the theatre. The energy produced from heat, within the context of theatre, is similar to the action that brings about entertainment. Thus, the principle of protection, freedom and balance hold sway in the subliminal process of writing dramatic texts whilst chatting on the internet qua Facebook.

The adaptors in writing or adapting dramatic works is obliged to protect the authenticity of the text be it written or oral, as he or she expresses his or her freedom in actualizing his or her literary goal. However, as in thermodynamics, balance is required in dramatic text as work can be turned into heat completely but only a portion of heat can be turned into useful work. But how does all these relate to fe/male conversations online and especially on Facebook? As Moh'd and Chua conclude, "young female spend more time on Facebook, has more Facebook friends, and are more likely to use profile pictures for impression management" (1). This submission makes female's Facebook presence a thermostat which triggers heat which in dramatic terms leads to conflict or slows down an already existing conflict. Moh'd and Chua's submission implicates Fagorusi's fundamental question; "what is the gender of Facebook?" And, "how is sex changing gender narratives?" (1). In an attempt to provide answers to this, Goffman in Bailey et al. infers that the gender of Facebook is not predetermined but its instead performed according to time, place, and audience in ways that are influenced by interactivity and community (105). Within the ambience of this intellection, Phillips observes that "the construction of female gender is discursive, interactive process in which individuals are both objects and subjects of gender definition through their physical and textual performances" (312). He goes further to state that gender definition can only be construed within the process of globalization. Fagorusi corroborates this position by noting that "the democratization of the Internet and communication as well as the resultant development of divergent gendered subjectivities is a challenge to understanding gender" (2).

Indeed, the focus of globalization is shifting from technology to people and purpose (Crystal 3; Ilyas and Khushi 51). This implies that socialization is central to the development of a people. If the internet

therefore is a revolution that contributes to socialization then there is
likely to be a conversational, linguistic, literary revolution instituted by
avant-garde approach to conceiving the world; concepts, theories and
disciplines. This literary revolution is evident in the theorization of
Ehiemua and Omoera who assert that "social networking occasioned
by Fb communication interface plays out like a reality drama" (5).
They conceptualise reality drama as "a recorded narrative which
portrays the real-time experiences of certain personae who
subconsciously or consciously play themselves in their natural setting
using an all inclusive real-time language" (3). According to them,

> …The role of the social media in the
> propagation of reality drama is phenomenal
> for the following reasons. One, users and
> their contacts/friends in the chosen social
> medium unconsciously become actors who,
> sub-consciously, create their own narratives
> based on real-time experiences. Two, the
> linguistic freedom and creativity are over-
> stretched that expressions sometimes
> deviate from linguistic norms; and they
> foreground the underlying essence and
> philosophy of reality drama in which the
> regularity and irregularity of daily life routines
> become excitingly novel. Three, the
> democratization, interactiveness, portability,
> accessibility and convenience of social
> media through telephone and computer
> formats further foreground the revolution in
> media technology and functionality patent
> in the new media…. (3-4)

As scholarly as the theorization of Ehiemua and Omoera appears,
the term 'reality drama' seems to be multivalent. At the first level, the
term suggests that other forms of drama are not 'real'; that is, in the
sense or world of theatre. Second, the terms 'reality' and 'drama' (as
in reality drama) are diametrically opposed against themselves. Reality
drama implies that some dramas are f/actual whilst others are not.
The idealization of drama as 'truthful lie' is further questioned by the
inventing or coining of 'reality drama'. Third, from the explication of
Ehiemua and Omoera, reality drama sees social media users and
their contacts as [mere] actors whereas the activities of users and
their contacts transcend acting to involve play-writing as professional
groups could perform their conversation as dramatic text.

In spite of the ambiguities inherent in the theorization of reality drama, the strengths in Ehiemua and Omoera's theorization cuts across instinctive narratologics, 'real-time experience', neologism, lingo-manifoldness and creative freedom which account owners and their contacts/friends take pleasure in. With all these lacking in conventional drama, reality drama appear to be contesting for space with conventional playwriting especially given its unique form in narrating the experiences of social media user or micro-bloggers. As Ginger in Ehiemua and Omoera 5-6) notes, "while conventional drama basically thrives on human connectivity, the Fb internet medium "is a veritable playground for connectors"; it is where "weak ties can flourish" and where "more opportunities through compounded and elaborate sharing of identities and media can be offered". These experiences are un/veiled in the interactive experience that takes place between certain male and female members of the SONTA Facebook group page.

Methodology
Data Collection
Composite explanatory study was employed for this research using direct observation and interview. The study included over seven vignettes of the conversation that ensued between four online members of the SONTA Facebook Group page. However, only vignettes are presented for analysis. The vignettes were selected and adapted using purposive sampling.

Method of Data Analysis
The data collected for this study were analyzed using explanatory methods. The chat-threads were arranged in simple screen-shots tagged "vignettes" and each vignette was analyzed based on the form, content and language.

Ethical Consideration
Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the respective Facebook users/chatters that make up the dramatic characters for the study. An informed verbal consent was obtained from each of the participants before carrying out the study with the agreement that certain parts of their comments are edited.

Discussions
Summary of the Facebook Chat
The chat centres on the battle of sexes between Uwaoma, Blessing, Victor and Victoria. Prof. Sunny Ododo shares an information asking women to apply for SONTA-Theodora Tdorise Young's Female Thesis

Assistance Grant. The information is greeted with excitement as certain online members of the SONTA Facebook group 'likes', 'comments' and 'shares' the update. Afterwards, Finest Uwaoma asks for a male version of the grant. This catches the attention of Victor who queries the desire of Uwaoma. Blessing and Victoria gets angry as they feel that Uwaoma as well as other males do not like to see their ascendancy in terms of career development. Long deliberations ensue as the two women accuse the male folk of 'dwarfing' their progress irrespective of the certain amount of attention they have managed to gather. Victor is accused of being a sexist. Uwaoma is also accused as gender ultraist. What follows is a series of verbal attacks on feminism, sexism and gendered role-play.

Analysis of Online Chat-threads as Dramatic/Play-texts

Vignette 1. Prof. Sunny Ododo's photo sharing calling for female application for SONTA-Theodora Tobrise Young's female thesis assistance grant.

This information serves as a prologue for the commentaries to follow. It sparks-off its first gender sentiment by the comment posted by Finest Uwaoma who in this thread passes for one of the dramatis personae. Uwaoma's simple thirst for the content of Vignette 1 is greased by Victor's cataclysmic response. He says "Male version?"...

"Is that safe?" This very remark fans the ember of femininity which leads to the introduction of Amadi Blessing and Thespian Victoria to the chat thread.

Like every dramatic piece, the chat starts from a measured plotting and builds into its high point resulting to a simple conflict. The chat starts from simple information shared by Prof. Sunny Ododo and the comments that ensue become a *femme* contestation between female and male gender. The conversation in Vignette 2 shows the development of the story and how the chat progresses into a well-plotted story adaptable to the theatre.
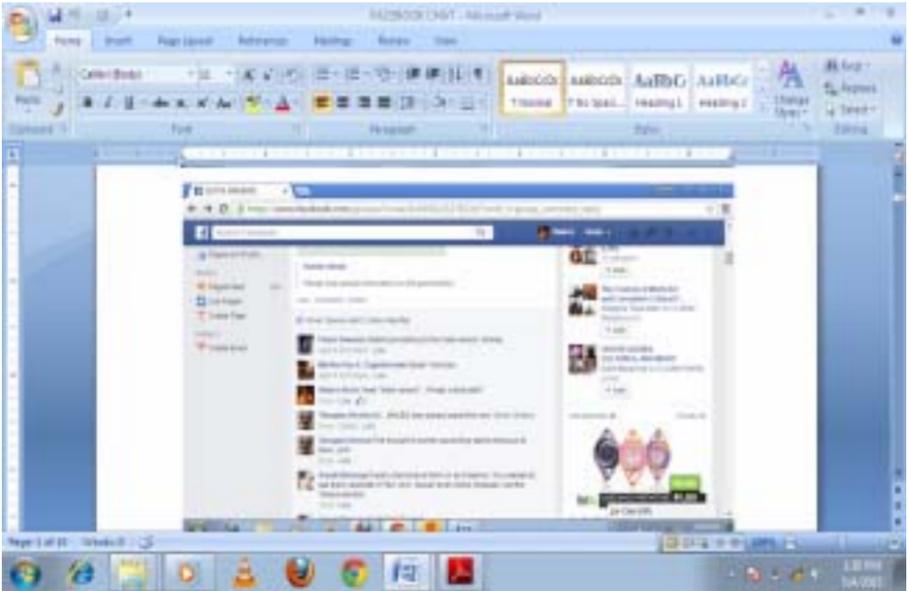

Vignette 2. Show of femininity and gender difference between Group chat members.

The affective emotions and gendered expressiveness which the chatters infuse into their dialogue reveal the enclosed perception of women and how they feel men see them. Victoria and Blessing's point of attack on the other sex spews out the feeling of male's attempt of not wanting to lose out to women. The content of the dialogue in vignette 2 divulges male's fear of female ascendancy.This is done with much expressiveness and emotion as Victoria notes in her dialogue.   In vignette 3 as well as other vignettes examined, emotions are luxuriantly displayed. The insensateness of the male gender rather than cause dissonance between the contesting genders propels Blessing and Victoria to begin to define the female sex as they want it to be, not as

Uwaoma and Victor think it should. The chat thread in vignette 2 raises a fundamental question. Have women really earned their place in Nigeria's socio-political space or are their present successes a tokenism from the male gender to divert their attention from other areas needing attention?

For students of drama, Blessing and Victoria raise a fundamental ecclesiastical question in terms of the canonical formation for drama. How many femme plays or dramas are entrenched in the list of plays or curricula of Theatre Arts and English departments across Nigeria in spite of the considerable amount of feminist works in Nigeria? In vignette 3, Victoria use such words as 'conquered',   'torturous', and so on, to explain the subtle removal or less attention to feminist works. For them, the dramatic oeuvres of Tess Onwueme, Mabel Evwierhoma, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Julie Okoh, Tracie Utoh are only a small amount of the extant feminist dramaturgy and performance aesthetics in Nigeria. Other feminist works abound however the challenge of negotiating a speaking space among the canons has been hindered by the ecclesiastical authority in the Nigerian drama culture. This plays out in the chat thread as Blessing narrates her encounter with Victor on a debate they had during the 28th SONTA Conference in Lagos. The chat thread is further 'heated up' when Uwaoma resurfaces to take on the conjectures of Blessing and Victoria. Uwaoma's reappearance engenders conflict and more disagreements on the foundation of feminist movement. Uwaoma and Victor coming together to challenge feminist aesthetics dissipated the sexed intellection of the female gender by picking holes in feminist struggle. In their dissipation, Blessing and Victoria draw strength from Ayakoroma's heroine, Alaere in Dance on the Grave. For them, the strength men think they possess is the one given to them by women.
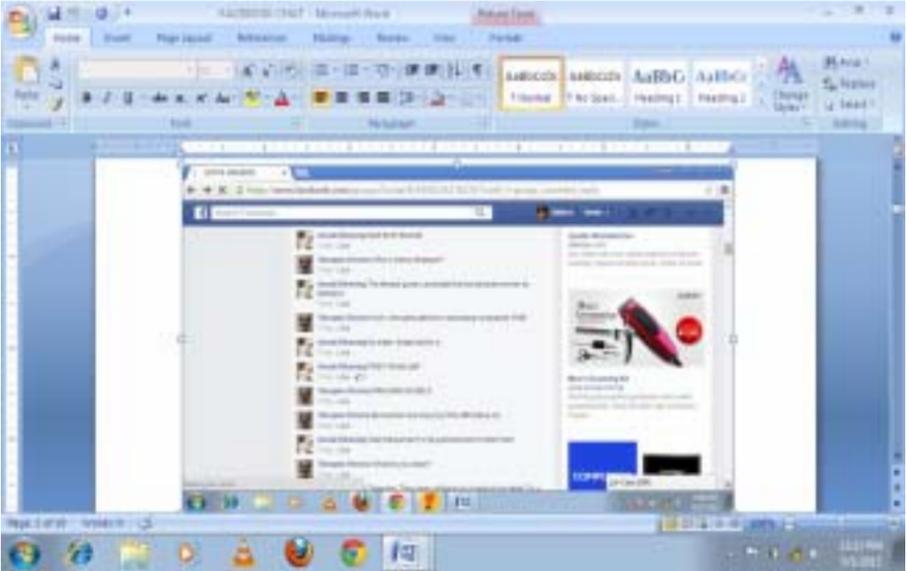
Vignette 3. Chat examining feminism and male tokenism.

Each vignette discusses different situations within the bracket of feminist aesthetics. However, in completing the drama adaptation of Facebook chat and claiming copyright of the play script, the adaptor should locate himself or herself in a particular relationship with the source text. This researcher does this by being involved in the conflict under adaptation. The complete vignettes are translated below.

Happenings One

Prof. Sunnie Ododo shares information online calling for female thesis assistance grant application. Ojieson, Martins and three others like it the post.

Uwaoma: Great! Just waiting for the male version (smiles)

Martins: Great visionary.

Victor: "male version"… Finest, is that safe?

Victoria: (enters as she laughs) Males. They always want their own (She calls out to Silver Ojieson who ignores her)… The thought of women ascending to the top tortures them (She shakes her head in pity)

Blessing: (She speaks as she enters) It really does torture them. Sad! (She joins Victoria as they shake heads). Sad!

Victoria: I thought patriarchy is being conquered (She pinches herself)

Blessing: My sister, forget dat tyn o.

Victoria: But women are enjoying the 35% affirmative action they have always fought for.

Blessing: Was that earned? Or it's just a tokenism by men.

Victoria: What do you mean?

Blessing: Tokenism. They gave us that to oil the gods of our heart. Do you really think it would remain so? (She rolls her eyes about searching for nothing. Victoria laughs)

Victoria: Who knows?

Blessing: Maybe Finest and Victor know.

Victoria: Well, my take? I think we earned it. You're acceding knowledge to them. See? (Blessing laughs)

Blessing: You got me there.

Victor: (Passes) But that is just the reality. You will always depend on us (Tongues out as he exits)

Blessing: Tonguing out? If not for God, I would have called on my village deity to force that tongue in forever. Gawd!

Victoria: That's gutsy!

Blessing: Oh you? You this unrepentant sexist!

Victoria: You know him?

Blessing: I do know him. But more like an acquaintance.

Victoria: Huh!

Blessing: We had a robust-turned-gendered discussion last SONTA. Dis man na masochist. Enemy of feminism, if you like.

Victoria: (Mimick) 'Unpleasant fellow'. God bless his soul.

Blessing: 'Nemy na understatement o.' So you see? With men like this on our classroom you think the literary canons would ever change?

Victoria: Can't figure out what you mean. Please explain.

Blessing: Check the syllabus of Theatre Arts departments across Nigeria. How many female playwright works do we study?

Victoria: I haven't given that a thought.

Blessing: But I did long ago and when I asked my HOD why he
               threatened me.

Victoria: Really? Where there are no women in the department
               you could run to?

Blessing: Who is the HOD and…. (Uwaoma walks in)

Uwaoma: I am just thinking of gender equality.

Blessing: Women ke? Who could withstand that Pharaoh of HOD?
               Ah! Make I call him name? Him dey dis group o (She
               seals her mouth)

Victoria: Ah! Seal it well o (She laughs). But you've graduated
               already now. He cannot do anything to you.

Blessing: Hmmm. I am not going to jeopardize my younger sister's
               chance o. She likes theatre arts too much.

Victoria: (Laughs) Who says women have no head? (Laughs
               again). Very thoughtful of you. But come to think of it,
               why are there a minute amount of feminist play texts in
               theatre arts departments (She tries to gather support
               from others). Or, is there any canonical authority that
               determines what drama text to be studied by students?

Blessing: Me nor know o. I think the men and maybe two or three
               women, in theatre departments sit to decide the text to
               be studied.

Victoria: That's really not good. I think that should be discussed
               in the SONTA conference.

Blessing: Are you attending? Just try to avoid Victor and others. I
               would inbox you the list of them to avoid. I think you
               should avoid Uwaoma too.

Victoria: Why is that? (Victor enters)

Victor: Ahhhh! Blessing, how is this different from witchcraft? I
               read through the thread and don't know what to think.

Victoria: Not even on the sexist masochistic accusation? (She
               winks)

Victor: I am used to Blessing accusing me thus. Just because
               I gave her a run on a femme-based debate and scored
               points she since then accuses me thus.

Victoria: (Laughs). Are you really a sexist or you simply scored
               points? (More laughter)

Victor: Thespian Victoria, come to SONTA.

Victoria: Begging the question like a thespian that you are…

Blessing: (Laughs). I am gonna tell the world, Vic (Uwaoma enters)

Uwaoma: (Gives a long laughter) Blessing, whereas I've decided
               to be an observer in this plenary session in order to
               digest the dividends of feminism. Victoria, fear me not
               I'm not chauvinistic unless nature insists. See you in
               SONTA in Abuja.

Blessing: Uwaoma, what is the gender of nature?

Victoria: True, what could be the gender of nature?

Uwaoma: Kai! These comrades have teamed up against me oh.
               How can I come out of Vicky's hand whose digital photo
               is Soyinka, a male? To face the question, nature is of
               womanism instead of feminism. Where because I'm a
               woman does not exist; where both men and women can
               work nocturnally yet the woman must breastfeed the
               baby! Racing out oh! (Victor laughs uncontrollably)

Blessing: Womanism, motherism and every other gendered isms
               are offshoots from feminism. Soyinka? Huh! He's on my
               digital photo stand for one reason…

Victoria: and what could that be?

Victor: (Laughs) The answer is in the question. The gender of
               nature is Victoria's DP (Laughs out loud)

Blessing: Come back o. We got to settle this before SONTA o.
               Else I go put stone for pocket come there o (Uwaoma
               enters laughing)

Uwaoma: Madam B for Blessing, I'm there oh. Victor will make the
               stones to turn to bread. I'm here ma.

Victoria: I'm being bullied here. Trying to analyze Uwaoma's post.
               What is the meaning of 'work nocturnally'? And 'Woman
               will breastfeed the baby'?

Victor: Yes we will make bricks with the stones, marry them and
               put them in the house (He holds his heads and gives a
               long rhythmical laughter). Victoria, you haven't seen
               anything yet. 'working nocturnally' means that the person

that is on top is boss and the person below is the one to breastfeed the baby. Or do you ladies want to alter nature?

Victoria: Chineke!

Uwaoma: (He guffaws) Victor, you want 1929 riot to happen again oh. Odikwa risky oh.

Victor: Omo, you sure sey that one go make anybody budge now? This generation children go just bring out their phones, tablets and begin snap the spectacle then upload ahm to Facebook and Instagram immediately.

Victoria: Now I see why Victoria calls you an unrepentant sexist.

Uwaoma: B for Blessing, the magic man is here. He is ready to settle the matter in a traditional way by conducting mass wedding. Are you now running? (Victor laughs then covers his mouth)

Victor: Tch! Theatre arts is an ensemble as we are taught. Theatre arts permits polygamy in an Antoine Artaud's way. Now Uwaoma, take Blessing

Uwaoma: Bro Victor, e be like sey you don win oh. Dem don run oh. More women needed for theatre of the absurd oh! Who dey house?

Blessing: Take? I can't be taken like some 19th century's woman. Who win? Victor? Na God win oh and God is female.

Victoria: True. God is female in Ijaw.

Victor: Story for the gods! Blasphemy!

Blessing: Men? We have their medicine (She covers her leg and seats properly. An insect flies past her thighs as she hits it down. Victoria looks at her)

Victoria: My womanhood is being hurt here. Where are other ladies? Going out of gas.

Victor: Calling other ladies to come to your rescue? Check the time please. Oh! It's 10:38pm. Nah, they can't come to your rescue. They are 'working nocturnally' (He mimics Uwaoma. Uwaoma laughs)

Uwaoma: Remember some professors are reading oh (He laughs. Victor begins to speak in tongues as Uwaoma laughs)

Blessing:	Una no dey shame. Na for our bodi una dey flex muscle abi? Ok na. I go save this thread and forward it to Professors Irene, Julie, Tracie and all of dem woman professors. I dey wait for una Ph.D defence.
Victor:	Come Blessing stop that rough play o (Victoria bursts into wide laughter). So na intimidation una wan use now? Una no go dance for my grave. I can't be that character in Barclays Ayakoroma's play (Blessing joins Victoria in laughing)
Victoria:	What a play! I love the way the play ended with all its symbolisms of victory.
Victor:	Ah! I sympathize with Olotu. But Blessing don't put your confidence on Alaere, your heroine in that play oh. I'm an Edo man and we don't die. May the day break.
Blessing:	… and break on your head! (She laughs)
Victor:	God pass you. Book don spoil you finish. Abeg I wan sleep. Go join Oreame people abeg.
Blessing:	E good. We will remain your protectors.
Victoria:	Weaklings! Thank God they have us.
Blessing:	… Yes, at their front for that matter.
Victor:	You meant to say at the back…
Blessing:	Nope. In front and on top.
Victor:	On top? Huh! Na wa o. May the world not go upside down.

Adapting Facebook Text to the Theatre

There are three contexts on which the adaptation of [Facebook] texts to the theatre can be viewed. They are; generic context, authorial context and theatrical (medium-specified) context. The adaptation of the online chat applies Cardwell's line of thinking which requires that adaptation should belong to a specific genre of theatre making (19). The degree to which the adaptation complies with familiar genre conventions should allow the audience to draw conclusions about the interpretative approaches of both the script and the production. This is connected to the positioning of the stage adaptation of 'Online Chats' in relation to literary text to film and novel to stage adaptation. For example, the Facebook online chat is an interactive story that reinforces the battle of sexes; a comic hybrid that partly satirizes aspects of the female battle for equity in new world order, partly educational, and

partly informative. The trajectory of the adaptation may draw on and refer to television genres but is generically a chat-thread in a poststructuralist mode. The adaptation of Internet chat thread to the theatre stage sought to disturb the genre location of playwriting.

For authorial context, the source text remains largely written by the participants of the online chat because their individual posts unknowingly build up into a story. Hence, the source text can be argued to be written by all the chat participants. For stage adaptation, the adaptor may become the playwright since the online chat requires certain level of creativity to make meaning out of a chat-thread. The theatrical (medium-specificity) context brings the online audience to the theatre stage but this time the audience is compelled to accept the adaptor's version of events and his or her sympathies. In the adaptation of the chat under study, the adaptor-playwright presents all the issues raised in one single 'happening' which could have be broken down into several other happenings using the entry and exit points of the male characters to begin or end any of the happenings. Whilst this study recognizes Cardwell's distinct tripartite concept for adapting text for different genre of the performing arts, the three cannot be extricated or separated in adapting online chat-threads to the theatre stage because of the several issues (authorship and medium specificity most especially) which such adaptation brings. To conclude, well-plotted social media chats that subconsciously advance social, national or any inter-relational narrative can be adapted to the theatre stage, and if well written or so adapted, they can become an important trend in contemporary playwriting.

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