

Chapter Fourteen

DRAMA FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING, CULTURAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL ADVOCACY: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the role of drama in language learning, cultural education and social advocacy. It highlights the complementary nature of language and culture. Also, an attempt is made to x-ray some drama works that are rich in the culture of a people. Finally, the paper evaluates the role of drama in exposing the societal ills and proffering solutions to those ills in a bid to making the society a better place to live in.

Introduction

Language and culture are like two sides of a coin. They complement each other. While language cannot exist without culture, the culture of a people is most often expressed using language. One of the media for showcasing or bringing to light the rich cultural heritage of a group is drama. In drama presentation, one embarks on a journey into the values, norms, customs, traditions and language of a particular group.

Also, some literary works in drama deal on social issues in the society and ways of correcting the ills. Those works that make categorical statements on the social ills in the country serve as tools for social advocacy.

In this paper, some of those drama texts that dwell on a people's cultural heritage and those that attempt to bring to limelight unhealthy social practices are appraised. For ease of study, the paper is broken up into the following sub headings:

- Interplay between language and culture
- Drama for language and cultural education
- Drama for social advocacy
- Conclusion.

Interplay between Language and Culture

The two concepts language and culture have over the years been defined in diverse ways by experts in linguistics, sociology, anthropology and other related disciplines. Language is viewed as a set of rules for generating speech. Ifensor (1) defines it as 'a set of arbitrary

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vocal symbols by means of which people within a social group interact'. It is regarded as a symbolic communication system that is learned instead of biologically acquired. Language is used by man to express his thoughts, feelings, desires etc.

Culture on the other hand is a term that refers to a people's whole way of life. It is the totality of what man acquires from his society. So, it is a learned behaviour that is socially acquired. Goodenough in Hudson (71) opines that a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members. Towing the line of the above submission, Muogbo (57) sees culture as an institutionalized norm of a particular people. It includes a people's way of life, attitudes, behaviours, food, technological and organizational know-how, philosophy etc. Hence, it is regarded as the sum total of the complex social heritage of a group which is created and transmitted from generation to generation.

No doubt, a strong tie exists between language and culture. Both are learned and are identified with a particular social group. Onwuka (5) has it that the bond between language and culture is similar to that which exists between Siamese twins. As Siamese twins are conjoined and cannot be easily separated, language cannot be divorced from the culture of the people that use it. For Hudson (79), a society's language is an aspect of its culture. The relation of language to culture is that of part to whole. However, Brown in Ezike (335) maintains that culture is really an integral part of the interaction between language and thought. He sees culture as a plan for life while language is the vehicle for that plan. It is argued that every language is adequate to express its entire culture. To this end, Brown in Ezike (333) posits that culture patterns, customs and ways of life are expressed in language. Hence, culture's specific world views are reflected in language. So, culture which is the shared language, traditions and beliefs sets a people apart from others. Language on its own part serves to shape the reality of a culture.

Language and culture complement each other in that as the environment changes, they typically respond by creating new terminology to describe it. Hence, any communication encounter is a product of the individual's linguistic capability, cultural background and expectations.

Drama for Language and Cultural Education

Anunike (155) defines drama as 'a story in which actors/actresses impersonate characters in a given medium (radio, television or stage) and produced for an audience'. Drama is creative. It is a literary composition that involves action, conflicts and atmosphere designed to be acted by players before an audience. Confirming this view, Vincent (235) regards drama as a creative activity or process involving both actors and audience in a profound experience of mutual exploration and identification. Because it is creative, everyone involved in the process

of learning through drama has an unfolding experience since it serves as a potent tool for education. Put simply, drama can be used to show case the language and culture of a people. This is possible since all drama is created in a particular cultural context or milieu.

The raw material for drama is usually people interacting in a given society. Vincent (251) argues that as an instrument of cultural education, drama is not merely an instrument for transmitting or preserving society's culture and beliefs and making people aware of the traditional education but a way of adjusting their culture and therefore the people in the light of contemporary experience to achieve full and unimpeded development as members of a society.

To appraise this all important role of drama in cultural education, two Nigerian plays that deal extensively on the culture of the people they represent are x-rayed. They include **Nwokedi** by Esiaba Irobi and **The gods are not to blame** by Ola Rotimi.

The play **Nwokedi** deals extensively on the music, dance, ritual, tradition, festival etc of Osisioma land (Ngwa people) in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. Infact, songs, dancing, procession, chorus, dirge among others run through the play. The procession of people singing and dancing called "Otaekpe" sing the old year away with its calamities on 31st December of every year (16). Also, there is a dirge on page 83 that narrates the encounter between Nwokedi and his father. The dirge is titled "Udu m akuwaala" and it symbolizes the death of Nwokedi Snr as his son dreamt it.

Interestingly, almost all the songs are rendered in Igbo Language as in the scene after the severing of the goat head by the Ekpe harbinger (92). The procession also sing a ritual song when they dance round Arikpo (Nwokedi's in-law) (19). The preponderance of songs in the work is summed up by Nwokedi:

the night is perfumed with songs (38).

The Ekpe festival which is the annual ritual of the people is analyzed. The festival symbolizes life and is a renewal of their agricultural season. A ram is slaughtered for the festival. It also involves the masking of the spirit (Nwokedi) that will cut the head of the ram. The following dialogue between Mrs Nwokedi and Arikpo explicates this:

Arikpo: Masked?

Mrs Nwokedi: Yes, Masked. Didn't you know he is the spirit in the mask.
The one who cuts the head of the ram at the festival (71).

Nwokedi confirms that he performs this task in his discussion with Habiba (37)

The beauty of the play also lies in its use of proverbs as in the scene where Nwokedi infers that he will do away with his father.

Father, if the butterfly must fly, the caterpillar must die (79).

Similarly, when Nwokedi fights Awado (the soldier) at the camp, his defiance is manifested in this proverb:

A stubborn dog dies barking, his eyes bloodshot, a symbol of his times (28).

Nwokedi Snr. recounts the role of his wife and son in his political down fall using these proverbs.

It is always a man's dog that bites him to death (16).

The rabbits set a trap for the tiger, crippled the tiger, then came to collect their debts (65).

The elephant has fallen. They dug a hole for the elephant but they borrowed the hoe from my family (65)

Some of the beliefs of the people are highlighted in the work. There is the belief in 'Osiogun', the god of peasants. He is "the god who guards the tubers we plant into the entrails of the earth from the envy of the beetles and the menace of the season" (91).

Again, the presence of 'Ekumekus' 'Ufo-bearer,' 'harbinger' are all part of the cultural heritage of the people. Similarly, **The gods are not to blame** is obviously rich in the ideas, values, customs and beliefs of the Yoruba people. Much emphasis is placed on songs, dance and proverbs. For instance, the townspeople sing a dirge (3) when the Ifa Priest divines that a child born by Queen Ojuola and King Adetusa will kill his own father and marry his mother.

Also, we have war songs when Ikolu attackers invaded the palace while Kutije people run for dear lives (5). Royal bards (praise singers) and drummers usher in king Odewale (36). Some of the songs are rendered in Yoruba and then translated into English (17-18). An example is where the townspeople sing and pay homage to king Odewale after the town crier's announcement. However, at the arrival of his brother and master, Alaka, King Odewale sings a 'native' song while Alaka dances (43-44). Use of the local language in this song is symbolic. Odewale identifies with his brother whom he has not seen for several years. After all, language specifies a particular social group and sets it apart from others. There is a

highlight on the customs and traditional practices of the people. Their manner of greeting is shown when Odewale recounts how he greeted his father's brother.

I lay flat in greeting as custom says (59).

Also, it is their custom to consult the god of war and iron 'Ogun' whenever there is problem in the land and when they want to know what the future holds for them. For instance, when a child is born into the royal family, the priest is summoned.

Then they call a priest of Ifa as is the custom to divine the future that this boy has brought with him (2).

The beauty of this work lies in the use of Yoruba proverbs. They add local flavour to the English language and helps to emphasize the identity of the people in the play. Some instances of the use of proverbs are mentioned here. When Odewale greets his father's brother, he replies:

The butterfly thinks himself a bird (59).

Also, at the end of the play, Odewale is about to leave with his children. The chiefs want to stop him. He replies:

When the wood insect gathers sticks, on its head it carries them. (72)

The Royal bard uses a lot of proverbs in praising Odewale:

"The lion's liver is vain wish for dogs"

"Meat that has fat will prove it by the heart of fire"

"An eagle does not go to the market place unless there is something there" etc (37).

The traditional beliefs of the people are sustained in the work. They believe that 'Oya' is the one that gives children. Alaka in appreciation of the reception given him by Ojuola says:

Let Oya, the mother of children grant you increase (42).

There is the belief in charms. In the encounter between Odewale and the old man over the land ownership, Odewale uses tortoise shell talisman pendant to mesmerize the man's thugs while the old man uses his own charm of dried eagle's skull, vulture's skulls, bright-eyed parrot tail feathers to face Odewale (47-48). In fact, the presence of the narrator, royal bard, customary form of greeting, Ifa priest, reference to Ogun, Sango etc, Yoruba proverbs, songs in Yoruba language, reference to places like Epe, Kutuje, Ijekun and preponderance of Yoruba names are pointers that this work is a journey into the cultural milieu of the Yoruba people.

In Summary, the instructive roles of these works are hinged on the aspects of the culture they represent. This confirms the assertion that the journey through drama in the life of a people makes us aware of the wealth and health of their culture.

Drama for Social Advocacy

Drama serves as a mirror through which a society views itself. This means that some issues in the society can be re-enacted in drama and appraised. The aim is to advocate for change in the system where necessary. Advocacy is employed in those works of arts wherein the writer is concerned with the oppression of the common man by the ruling class and campaigns against such ills. They include unemployment, hunger, oppression, exploitation, tussle for political power, child abuse etc.

Mkaneem (86) captures the situation more aptly when he writes that social advocates mirror the changing Nigerian society and voice the discontent of the exploited class and herald the dawn of a new era. This group of writers and their works expose the socio-political structures. Jenkwe (116) on his part, laments that the continued decline in the standard of life of the governed and the sharp rise in cases of oppression...gave rise to concerted advocacy aimed at salvaging the nation. Hence, the writers take part in offering solutions to the political, social and moral problems in the country. In this paper, **Nwokedi** by Esiaba Irobi and **A parliament of vultures** by Emeka Nwabueze are appraised.

Nwokedi digs into the ills of the political class. They are represented in this work mainly by Nwokedi Snr and Arikpo (his in-law). The politicians loot the treasury, wreck the economy, stash money away in foreign countries, build mansions etc. Mrs Nwokedi describes the extent of the wreck in her address to her husband and Arikpo:

You can decide between the two of you to go to Switzerland and bring some of the money you stashed away there. The money you use to buy houses in New York and London, you can bring it home and build some industries and employ the youngmen (55).

These politicians are also morally bankrupt. They involve themselves in ritual killing. In this work, Nwokedi accuses Arikpo of killing his wife and children and using them for ritual to fortify his political career (62-63). Arikpo admits that he killed them.

My political opponents made me do it (88).

Also, thuggery is the order of the day in politics. Nwokedi Snr is worried on how he can replace Ozoemena's document with his own if the young man agrees to step down for him. Arikpo dispels his fears in these words:

Is that a problem? It is not. We can employ some thugs to burn all the files containing documents bearing the young man's name and replace them with yours (67).

Cases of unemployment rank high in the society. Arikpo reports how some unemployed youths burnt his house at Ugep. The case is not different in Osisioma where Nwokedi came from. Infact, his age group (Ekumeku) constitute the cream of the 'Unemployed Youths Associaion' in his town (10). As a result of all these ills, the youths become disenchanted and resolve to revolt. This resolve culminates in Nwokedi addressing his father thus:

Father, I hate you. I hate you and your roguish generation (77).

In his address to the people after his nomination, Ozoemena says:

Time is when young men flex the muscles of a new resolve and decide to change their fate.... (13)

Nwokedi defies and challenges Awado (a soldier) in the camp (27). When the Adjutant tries to intimidate him, he says,

I am a rebel... A rebel is the man who says 'no'. The man who says "It is enough" who refuses to conform to a rotten authority and threatens the establishment, shakes up the creaky system (31).

The defiance of the status quo is also seen in Nwokedi's behaviour during the singing of the national anthem. He refused to stand up. Habiba comments:

He was defying the old order (48).

Nwokedi supports the peasants who fought government for 7 months. When they remind him of the death toll of the peasants, he screamed,

At least, they dared" (29).

The work ends with the slaughter of Nwokedi Snr and Arikpo who symbolize the old order, and the triumph of the Ekumekus (the youths). Similarly, in **A Parliament of Vultures**, Emeka Nwabueze decries the evils of the politicians. Moral decadence is at its peak. The over riding theme is corruption. The playwright refers to them as "Vultures" while Jenkwe (170) describes vulture as a 'repulsive and despicable bird of prey'.

Reverend gentlemen are not left out in this tale of moral decay. Rev. Jossy represents them and he was put in the parliament so as to lend credibility to their programmes (4, 13). Also, action is drawn to the illicit affair between Madam Omeaku and Mr Brown (70). The politicians lure girls to their party (the senior girls on campuses and the Jambites). Madam

Omeaku volunteers to employ her daughter to get the younger generation (57). Cases of embezzlement and diversion of funds run through the entire work. For instance, the chairman (Habamero) says if the committee needs supplementary funds, it can be diverted from the education allocation (44).

In Habamero's house, Mr Brown requests for more drinks and asks the speaker to put the expenses into the entertainment votes (12). The initial amount approved by the house for honouring invitation for harvest and thanksgiving was N10million. Another sum of N2 billion will be disbursed as expenses for making of dresses for members and hiring of band (47). Also, Madam Omeaku reports that she has sent her children abroad, erected three buildings, set up business for her husband, and has an estate. Yet she says she has not achieved anything (69). Corruption in the house is unparalleled. Members are removed at random. The secretary of the house (Otobo) is removed to pave way for them to loot the treasury (32). Again, all the land allocation by the previous administration are revoked (73). There is indiscriminate appointment of chairmen of boards and unqualified persons are nominated (50-51). Most of the positions are not open for nomination as attested by the speaker (51).

Again, police is used to silence 'trouble makers'. Otobo and Parkers are arrested (60). However, their arrest is the last straw that broke the camel's back. Consequently, the youths (students union) and Men of Destiny say 'enough' to the politicians. They clamour for change (72). Members of the house call them 'unemployed graduates' (73). These youths resolve to set the parliament building on fire. At last, members of the house are arrested signifying the end of the oppression and a change in the status quo (76).

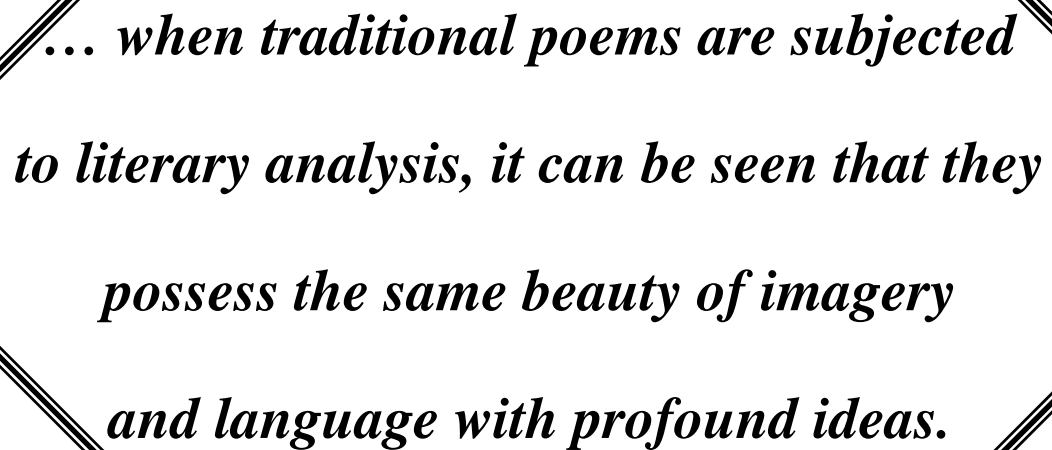
These works celebrate the defeat of the old order. This confirms the position of Jenkwe (165) that there is advocacy for the change in the nation calling for an end to corruption and oppression failing which the masses should forcibly intervene. In these plays, the Ekumekus and the youths take the bull by the horn and oust the politicians.

Conclusion

Almost all dramatic literatures reflect the world view, temper and attitude of their age. The drama texts studied in this paper are no exceptions. They can be said to be living relics of the society that produced them in terms of embodying the cultural practices of the people, exposing the societal ills and in proffering solutions to those problems.

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*... when traditional poems are subjected
to literary analysis, it can be seen that they
possess the same beauty of imagery
and language with profound ideas.*