

THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND RE-INTERPRETATION OF
THE TEXT: A PERFORMANCE OF JAMES ENE HENSHAW'S
A SONG TO MARY CHARLES AS PARADIGM.

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Abstract

*Stage productions are products of a theatre menu prepared by the arts of the theatre. Each art of the theatre is important yet none can exist in isolation. Hence they say: 'theatre is a collaborative art'. Its' symbiotic relationship works together for good with a Master artiste called the Director. Creative directing is the forte of the Auteur Stage Director whose functions includes critical and creative interpretations and not limited to the analysis of ideas and images contained in a selected play. Interpretation, re-interpretation, composition, acting and style are major concerns of a creative director. The ability for the director to merge the intrinsic and extrinsic interpretations, distinguishes her as a creative director because she brings to bear in the production the play's meaning, her point of view, and the needs of her audience. Invariably, the creative director is a 'Heretical' director and not 'Worshipful'. This research examines the processes of interpretation and re-interpretation of a selected script for a creative production. Using content analysis of Ene Henshaw's *A Song to Mary Charles* and an in-depth analysis of its performance, the paper argues that there are no bad or good scripts, and no stage performance can be replicated especially*

in terms of acting and emotions. The paper therefore concludes that a creative director can creatively orchestrate historical or old plays with fresh ideas that will benefit contemporary audience.

Introduction

Directing is an art that unifies all the arts of the theatre. The art of directing functions as a life-wire that re-connects several members of these organs. It is a unique art of creativity that harmonizes both creative and non-creative works. Hence, directing is the director's creative and articulate manipulation of ideas and substance through the use of composition, picturization, balance, tempo, and mood into visual and auditory sound in order to formulate a complete and whole theatre experience. Ejeke opines that "theatre directing is regarded as the melting pot of all the arts of the theatre" (56). Directing therefore is an organ of the theatre from which other organs connect in order to function and be alive. In this light, Dean and Carra see directing as a "presentation on the stage for an audience, interpreted in terms of dramatic action and dramatic sound and in terms of the emotional and intellectual concept of an author's script" (22).

Thus, the importance of the theatre director is obvious; yet, the absence of the playwright, actor, costume and make-up artist, stage and light designer as well as the theatre manager is inconceivable. This is because no part of the theatre forms the whole. The stage director functions beyond specified terms of reference in a production, "since a production occurs through time, it is important for the

director to see that the movement, the pace and the rhythm of the play are correct” (Wilson, 133). But the director’s creative process begins the moment a play production is conceived. From the selection of the play; its several readings, the selection of appropriate theories and approaches, analysis and interpretation, which often times is prior to audition and casting, down to blockings and the synthesizing of all other arts of the theatre. The role of the theatre director extends beyond the performance for it is also the concern of the director to strike the set used for the production.

Just as the actor does not exist in isolation on stage, a performance could be termed a failure due to the director’s dull interpretations, acting deficiencies or an inept scenic treatment. It could also be that the script is bereft of universal theme or the theatre administrator is unable to admit audience at proper time and or, not a conducive atmosphere. From the foregoing, it’s obvious that theatre is an ensemble art of which the absence of any part of the organ malfunction the rest.

The director’s importance in the theatre is a question that cannot easily be waved off. “It is true that gifted directors with the collaboration of responsive casts have occasionally made lively theatre out of feeble scripts” (Clurman, 5) but the director is not the only artist (e) that gives theatre its direction. It is a collaborative art, a symbiotic relationship, a communion that definitely requires the director to depend on his collaborators. This paper opines that the director chooses a play from where her creativity will have a bearing, of which Blood agrees that:

The director functions somewhat like the playwright. She is also a primary artist and might extensively revise or cut a playwright's text. Communicating her interpretation of the text to the audience is her primary goal" (1).

When a director intends to faithfully produce a writer's script on stage, her directorial aesthetic sensibilities and that of her collaborative artistes often produce somewhat a creative production. This happens because the production team led by the director share the vision share the vision of the stage director.

The directorial creative interpretation of a text for production involves the thematic emphasis, character analysis and relationships as well as all the suggestive visual and auditory images from which a production concept is realized. The concept forms the parameter from which a performance is brought to life. According to Blood (1), "the director who is working with an existing text will develop his production concept before the first production meeting with other visual and aural artists and before casting actors". The creative re-interpretation of the text is a process that continues with the collaborative input of other artists until later in the production. It is the production concept that guides the directing style of the director and as such forms the totality of a unique performance style; - actually, it is the concept that guides the cast and crew and define the artistic limit and parameters by which the principles of the world of fiction could be applied. It is Sievers who opines that "before a

director can begin his work with his cast (or even choose a cast intelligently) he needs to evolve and crystallize in his mind an interpretation of the play” (31). Thus the director’s interpretative art requires her to re-read the play each time with a different purpose so as to determine the meaning of the play and the form by which the interpretations and analyses can translate to a meaningful, unified and coherent performance for an audience.

The recent orchestration of *A Song to Mary Charles* at the New Chinua Achebe Auditorium, University of Calabar, is an affirmation that directing is a creative art that is capable of turning history into an art and translating a script into a contemporary fabric of the society. The choice of *A Song to Mary Charles* to buttress this point is necessitated by its unique structure as it contains both historical and poetic truths, hence, its re-interpretation will help shape and classify the play, bringing out its meaning and latitudes so as to enhance its appreciation and appeal.

The Unifying Artist of the Theatre

Theatre exists before drama; hence the play is not actually the text but the performance seen on stage. Creative directing is therefore a process involving ensemble playing of which its product is the performance. There are many production styles as there are diverse cultures but all are geared towards achieving a successful and meaningful production. Therefore, an actor looks beyond a play script in his interpretation just as the selected script for a production is merely a guide to the director. Clurman quotes Gordon Craig as saying that a play “is not a text on which actors, setting, music, etc are

super imposed but a single body of which all the separate elements are parts” (9) and as such, “we need not dwell on the playwright who only partially, understands the significance of what he has written or appreciates the theatrical potentialities of his script (10).

A budding director bears in mind that “the style of drama and the style of theatre are not the same thing. More specifically, a play written in one style may be effectively interpreted in different styles” (Heffner et al, 65). Hence, conscious of the fact that plays could be interpreted worshipfully in its traditional and historical state, such productions are approximations of the original in modern context. Thus, the director explores beyond what Musa (34-38) refers to as the Inner and Outer Resources directing style, the Director’s Theatre directing style or the Improvisational Directing Style as means to achieve a faithful interpretation of a play. The director interprets the text, searching for meaning within and outside the environment of the play, extending its creative searchlight to the environment of the target audience, season and reason for the scheduled production as well as the people’s socio-political and economic conditions. As a creative art that strives hard to meet its audiences’ expectations, directing serves as a medium to the interpretation of other arts of the theatre, unifying all into aesthetic and compositional form to affect the audience. In order to achieve directing functions and concerns, the play text may have to under-go series of theatrical x-rays and surgeries to meet up with the expected effects.

Through the re-interpretation of a chosen play, a director avoids such directorial blemishes as “miscasting”,

'blocking errors' or possibly misinterpretation. Apart from series of byplay invented by actors, a creative director makes effort to interpret a known text in such a way that the theme, plot structure, polar attitudes, previous actions, character relationships, metaphors and idioms of the play are projected to the audience meaningfully and coherently. She further makes a mental picture of the subject/issues raised in the play and how it can be inter-woven with the aesthetics and technical elements of the play because "the play's scenic arrangement...for which the director is responsible even when he has had little to do with their actual design is another contribution to the shaping of the play's meaning" (Clurman, 7), and the director bears responsibility for its success or failure.

Directing as a creative art of the theatre is entirely a modern development that became defined in the theatrical years of Richard Wagner (22 May 1813 – 13 February 1883), Otto Brahm (1856–1912), and George II (1826-1914): the Duke of Saxe Meiningen (tour of Europe from 1874 to 1890) whose attempts to synthesize the arts of the theatre into a unified production elicited a responsibility that fell on the Regisseur-the Director. While the Saxe-Meiningen players concentrated on ensemble playing with Ludwig Chronegk as its creative director, the Duke was the founder of the Company. It was actually Otto Brahm (1856–1912) that "set the tone and the style and placed the stamp of his personality on his Company" (8). But according to Clurman, there may be no need to dispute the disparities in dates as to when Modern Directing began, but:

“Let us say that modern direction began in 1866 with the Duke of Saxe Meiningen, who was chiefly a painter and a stage designer. The actual staging of his productions was done by Ludwig Kronek but the Duke himself was the founder and moving force of the Meiningen players” (8).

However before the birth of the nomenclature ‘theatre director’, “Aeschylus is said to have directed his plays, as we know Moliere did his. The Choregus (leader of the Chorus) in the Greek theatre was in effect a director” (8). The modern theatre director therefore coordinates the various arts of the theatre and is capable of transporting his creative vision with that of the playwright and actors from script into visual and auditory aesthetics. On the creative craft of the director, Nwamuo sees the art of directing as that which “blends the art of the theatre into a unified whole in such a way that it is both aesthetically satisfying and pleasing to the audience” (164). Hence, the modern theatre perception of the theatre director is conceptualized by Hodge as quoted by Musa (28), as a:

Highly sensitive craft involving intensive play analysis, exceptional skills in communication and approaches to the making of style... stimulation and arrangement of the doing of the others, a very complicated process requiring many exceptional skills of its own.

On the other hand, Brook says that the director “does not ask to be God and yet his role implies it” (38). Ipso facto, the role of the modern theatre director is challenging. Outside directing functions, the major concern of the stage director includes interpretation, composition, directing actors on stage and the manipulation and articulation of the arts of the theatre into an intelligible production. The art of interpretation and analysis of a chosen text, to a large extent, requires, if need be, the editing, x-ray and surgical cutting of Scenes and Acts to meet the taste and needs of a target audience. Wilson notes that the director is:

The chief interpreter of an established script. For the most part, spectators see theatre as a unified experience; but as pointed out before, theatre is a complex art involving not one or two elements but many simultaneously: script, performance, costume, scenery, lighting, and point of view. These diverse elements—a mixture of the tangible and intangible—must be brought together into an organic whole, and that is the responsibility of the director. (123)

The concern of directing is interpretation of the playwright’s idioms and imageries coded in signs and symbols through its agents. Here the director becomes the critic, the actor and the audience; “the director must analyze the script in much the same manner as the literary critic” (Pickering, 135). The

director functions in all other arts of the theatre. Wilson observes that “today, however, because style, unity and a cohesive view of society are so elusive, the director’s task is more important” (122). Hence, analysis, interpretation and creative presentation of a known text requires the director’s creative manipulation and imagination, sometimes, “it may be helpful ...to study the actual ‘soil’ from which a dramatist’s work has emerged” (Clurman, 34).

The Creative/Auteur stage director

Basically, drama is action expressed variously, expressively, representational or presentational. Agu opines that “drama should be capable of making a statement, take a position or point of view” (12). Thus, a creative/auteur stage director, with a selected script in hand, reads the play severally to appreciate its aesthetics and issues raised by the playwright. But it is germane that the director gets acquainted with the type of performance venue she is creating for, because “any directorial interpretation of any play for production must take the production venue available into serious consideration” (Ejeke, 19). Ejeke stresses that “Movements blocked for a particular stage may not be ideally suited for another because of dimensional differences or the type of stage” (19). Obviously, the creative exercise involves studying how the interpreted visual images and symbols can be orchestrated on a Proscenium, an Arena, a Thrust or a Created/Found stage space.

Progressively, the selected script is interpreted beyond its plot structure/ sequence, thematic preoccupation, character and diction, spectacle and music to other extraneous

resourceful elements. The re-interpretation extends to the environmental factors, given circumstances, polar attitudes of the characters, previous action, socio-political, economic, cultural and religious factors in the world of the play and that of the intended audience. The spine of each scene is linked to the sub-theme and the sub-theme linked to the central action. All these help figure out the point of view of the director which is obviously different from that of the playwright. The auteur director in the cause of a re-interpretation exercise, deviates from the point of view of the playwright and produce a different interpretation which may contain the general idea of the playwright but an emphasized point of view geared towards impacting the target audience, especially with a contemporary statement. Thus, the auteur director analyzes the playwright's viewpoint, the audio and visual sound of the play and their signifiers, interpreting them in such a way that it fits into the needs of the target audience for whom she is directing for (here it becomes the director's viewpoint) or retain the playwright's viewpoint.

Thus, the auteur stage director may mutilate the script, cutting off and adding together to arrive at her own interpretation. According to Wilson (122) "He would rewrite or eliminate text in order to present his own vision of the material." This makes the Heretical director's approach different from the Worshipful director's approach which is what Nwamuo quoting Keneth Cameron and Patti Gillespie describes *inter alia*:

The Worshipful director job is to mount the playwright's work as faithfully and as correctly" while "the

Heretical director according to the altercation should be seen as one who interprets the play text with a view to making a theatrical entity of it for the audience (24).

It is plausible then to say that a creative interpretation of a script often detracts from the playwright's interpretation.

When a creative/auteur stage director is confronted with a play text that fails to observe one of the three Unities of Time, Action and Place, the challenge is on the creativity of the stage director to bring these Unities on the physical stage. How she goes about it is dependent on the interpretation she has given the text. What she wants to project, the production concept adopted and the performance style are all dependent on her interpretation of the chosen text. Also, "Some contemporary plays pose no great difficulty but the more complex modern plays and great plays from the past often require considerable study" (Heffner et al, 31) and this extends to historical and biographical play texts. Certain ingredients in these texts make them vital materials to discuss contemporary issues which will be of immense benefit to the audience. Obviously, the auteur director in this regard employs the script as his guide. Also there is the need to research outside the script so as to comb out other details that may prove useful in the orchestration of a historical play on stage. The script is re-worked to serve as the director's vision. It is the director's theatre.

The creative experimentation proffered above will be applied to the performance of James Ene Henshaw's *A Song*

to *Mary Charles*. The choice of this play's performance is necessitated by its unique nature as it contains both historical and poetic truth. A 120 paged play in Five Acts with all the verisimilitude that extends the action to the streets, airport and pigeons by the riverside, the locales are situated in Dublin, London and Calabar. The performance took place at the New Arts Theatre Auditorium at the University of Calabar and was directed by Kelechi Stellamaris Ogbonna.

Synopsis of *A Song to Mary Charles*

James Ene Henshaw's *A Song to Mary Charles* was written in honour of a Reverend Sister, an Irish Sister of Charity named Mary Charles Walker (1881-1981), "her story, like that of Mary Slessor before her, was a saga which started from Europe, spread to the Calabar area" (Henshaw, i). *A Song to Mary Charles* centers on the historical and biographical story of Reverend Sister Mary Charles Walker, whose zeal and compassion for the poor triggers off a saga which trails her from Europe to Calabar (Nigeria), and back to Europe, then, to Chikuni in Zambia where she dies. The convent of the Irish Sisters of Charity in Dublin enjoyed its calm and serenity until the arrival of Monsignor Joseph Shanahan's letter from the Southern Vicariate of Nigeria inviting the Irish Sisters of Charity to come and assist in God's work in Nigeria. Some Sisters were in support of the Missionary work and volunteered while others express their fears. Among the first volunteers is Sister Mary Charles while Sister Mary Adrian, Fr. Kilbride and several others oppose the invitation; painting a faint picture of what the Calabar people are like. The Mother General invites the Reverend Fathers to come and address the

Reverend Sisters on this issue of joining the Missionary work in Nigeria. It turns out that these Reverend Fathers highlight the dangers of joining the Foreign Mission in Nigeria. Now, Sister Mary Charles becomes the only volunteer on the list. She perseveres and appeals to the Pope. She is granted permission to join Monsignor Shanahan in Southern Vicariate, Nigeria. Sister Mary Charles serves with dexterity and commitment in Calabar for ten years. Owing to the collapse of girls education at the Calabar Convent, Sister Mary Charles “had a strong conviction that it was the will of Divine Providence that she should come out to Nigeria and work, and if need be, to die and be buried in Calabar” (Henshaw, iii). Her innovations include the teaching of Domestic Science, Religious and moral education, training of teachers, and introduction of Montessori system of education. Before leaving Calabar, her most outstanding achievement is the first Congregation of Native Sisterhood in Nigeria known as “The Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus”. Sister Mary Magdalene, as Sister Mary Charles is fondly called in Nigeria, leaves for London from where she is deployed to Chikuni in Zambia. While serving in Zambia she dies. Her corpse is brought back to Calabar as that was her desire.

Plot

The plot of *A Song to Mary Charles* is loosely organized and not organically structured. The plot of this play violates the three unities of Time, Action and Place. The text has a single plot which is that of the action and the desire of the eponymous heroine to serve God in Calabar. The story is stretched just as it happened in real life. For instance, the

plot, which is Sister Mary Charles' determination to answer Mosignor Shanahan's call runs through the entire play in such a way that Act one, and Act two centre on that point. The scene at London where Sister Mary Charles prepares to leave for Nigeria has no strong purpose in the play except to establish that she is sailing from London to Nigeria. If that scene is removed, the play will still be intact. The conference which begins from Act One, Scene Two, runs through to Scene Five and ends with a resolve which Superior General summarizes thus: "Mary Charles, you are no doubt aware that the General Assembly of this Order has overwhelmingly voted against the Nigerian Mission" (Henshaw, p.47). Act Two deals with Mary Charles' appeal to the Pope and "A farewell to Europe" (p.59) while Act Three dwells on "Calabar: Vicariate of Southern Nigeria" (p.75).

In creative re-interpretation of *A Song to Mary Charles*, the director edited the script, re-wrote parts of the text, for example the scene she titles 'preparations-from London to Nigeria', and changes it with the scene which she titles its spine as 'debate- foreign mission or not'. The sprawling nature of the story and the debate did not destroy the play's appeal; rather it becomes a source of attraction as the debate is in itself enlightening. While Act Three shows Sister Mary Charles' work in Calabar, Act Four is a concert party. Act Five tells of Mary Charles' return to the Irish Sisters of Charity in Dublin, her preparation to leave for Zambia and her death.

But the scenes are extraneous and do not have a probable development. However, each Act is created on a series of argument that leads to the conflict, resulting to the

climactic Scene- appealing to the Pope. Since drama is all about conflict and resolution, this appeal to the Pope and insistence on joining the Nigerian foreign Mission becomes the conflict that Henshaw will need to resolve.

Characterization

Though there are no contrivances in presentation, the audience learns of each character and actions through their speech, hears each character's point of view, motivation and trait and learns of the previous actions through what each character says of the other. The play boasts of a large cast of thirty; excluding Dancers, Drummers, Cheer Raisers, Praise Singers and a Domestic Science Class. All characters are individual characters. There is no information on their physical attributes. However, their psychological moods are emphasized through what they say or what other characters say about them.

The dominant drive of the play is established through the character of Sister Mary Charles Walker. She is resolute, determined and assertive. Her character is polarized with Sister Mary Patricia, Sister Mary Marcella and the Superior General, while Sister Mary Anne is polarized with Sister Mary Patricia. Other secondary characters are creatively employed to fulfill their dramatic function. Sister Mary Adrian is comic, useful, and dramatic.

Sister Mary Charles is a complex character and it is through her that the playwright embodies all the action. She moves the action. At first, she only expresses her willingness to participate in the Nigerian Foreign Mission, but as the play progresses, she becomes resolute. In her very words:

Sister Mary Charles: We here have eaten the feast. Many baskets of charity still remain. I want to go over there and gather them up. I am going to Africa with the hope of never returning...so that God could do whatever He wants with me. I pray also that one-day, our society will send Sisters to join me out there (p.53).

The spine of the entire story is weaved around Sister Mary Charles. She is the centre of concern for the playwright and the vehicle that propels the action. The complexity of the eponymous heroine is juxtaposed with other secondary and primary characters who are invariably the 'blocks' she must encounter in order to achieve her set goals.

Diction

Henshaw's medium is prosaic and elevating. He employs much of simple English language. In approximating everyday speech, each character achieves clarity. Also language is used here to individualize the characters. For instance, Sr. Mary Adrian is a comic character with clichés. Every sentence of hers contains such phrases as: "Bless my soul! God save us! Me thinks!" her character is diplomatic but encouraging.

Staging and Spectacle

The setting of *A Song to Mary Charles* ranges from the Conference Room at the Irish Sisters of Charity in Dublin to a comfortable interior of a sitting room in London and

Calabar. In Calabar, much exposition is not given except for a Domestic Science Class. This however is a sharp contrast created to illustrate the two worlds. The basic scenic elements are chairs and tables which of course depicts the action and condition of the time: poverty, teaching and learning. Much of the visual effects are the costume, the procession and the ikombi dancers at the concert scene. Other aural appeals are songs, dialogue and dances.

Performance

The staging of *A Song to Mary Charles* presented its own challenges. It was painted against the backdrop of simultaneous staging on a Proscenium; with Dublin at Stage Right, Calabar at Centre Stage and an invented scene tagged 'Reflections' at the Stage Left. This pattern of simultaneous staging enhanced directorial Emphasis, Sequence, Stability and Balance (ESSB) of the entire production. It was necessary to marry the intrinsic and extrinsic interpretative directing in order to justify the staging of a historical drama for a contemporary audience. Thus, the improvisation of the Scene-'Reflections' helped to outline the motives for which the playwright documented the events in the life of Sr. Mary Charles Walker. Each scene had its spine and all are linked to the central spine of the production. The creative nerve that carved the reduction of such sprawling story to a production of one hour-thirty minutes, utilized directorial license which led to the removal of certain parts of the script and editing of relevant scenes. In fact, the direction of the play required a marriage of several theories and concepts and an adaptation approach in order to reduce the sprawling narrative and

historical events into a stage performance of one hour thirty minutes.

The structure and style of *A Song to Mary Charles* falls under the melodramatic. This is because it employs the characteristics of a melodrama. According to Brocket,

Melodrama means a combination of music (melo-) and drama...This music underlined the emotional qualities of the scenes and helped in achieving the desired response from the audience...Most melodramas include incidental songs and dances and, depending upon the actors, these portions might be expanded or contracted in any given production.

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A Song to Mary Charles' melodramatic content are evident in the interspersed songs in-between the scenes and the embodiment of music into the performance. On stage, music and dance were elaborately used to suit the mood of the characters, to comfort in time of despair, to inspire, rejoice, teach, and to entertain. However, to enhance the play's visual appeal, realistic costumes were worn and selective realism was applied to the make-up, props and sets.

Each scene in the performance was taxonomic of the sociology of the people for which the scene represents; the two worlds with their values and culture. The Dublin Scenes started with the Conference- the arguments against the Foreign Mission, the questioning of the volunteers and the withdrawal of some volunteers from the list. The spine of the

entire scenes in Dublin can be dubbed 'To Be or Not to Be' and Sister Mary Charles' resolution to join Monsignor Shanahan in Nigeria as she emphatically express:

Sr. Mary Charles: I do not pray to be a martyr Mother General, because I am not worthy. I want to go where no one at home will ever know anything of me, or remember anything about me. I feel I am still at the edge of what I want to do for God. I want to launch into the deep. To fish for Christ. (Henshaw, p.53)

While the invented scene 'Reflections' played out Sr. Mary Charles' appeal to the Pope, the directorial license enabled the director to improvise arguments between Sr. Mary Charles with Sr. Mary Adrian and Sr. Mary Patricia before her voyage to Calabar. The import of this scene is to understand the inner turmoil of the eponymous heroine of the play, her deep desire to serve humanity and keep her vow. The improvisation for this scene was necessitated by the play's wordiness and arguments which did not reveal more of Sr. Mary Charles' inner struggles.

The scene placed at the Centre Stage- Calabar, is naturally placed for emphasis, for it is at Calabar that the essence of the play is achieved. Here, the eponymous heroine is presented before the audience who scores her actions; selflessness, will-power, faith, divine call and charity effortlessly. The songs and dance injected into the

performance classified the mood, raised the tempo and helped the audience vivify the events in the story.

What then is the idea in *A Song to Mary Charles*? And what are the problems that the performance resolved? This we have gathered through what each character say of each other. Hence we can rightly say that Henshaw seeks to solve the problem of inhibition within the ordained organizations where the people are bound by oath and vows. The playwright created a character whose strong-will destroyed the 'inhibitions' without being disobedient.

Challenges

The play *A Song to Mary Charles* captures how determined character traits and commitment in the midst of a crowd can influence the life of others. The play pitches one character's will-power against other. But the form and style for which this play is written, fails to take into cognizance the limitations of the stage. It will rather be a scintillating story for the film and celluloid which has the capability to transcend the action.

It is the language that reveals most of the actions of the play. The audience is therefore tasked to lend their ears to be able to appreciate the performance. Since every character in a play is a vehicle carrying a message, the script's wordiness denies the characters elaborate pantomimic dramatization. Hence, the emotions, actions and deeds of the characters in the play can best be effective and affective in the celluloid medium. However, a creative re-interpretation of the play manipulates the characters into 'living their parts' and not reciting their lines.

Although no two directors or critics may discover the same spot as the spine of the play, but the subtext here lies on the eponymous heroine. Thus, the ability of the playwright to transcend the character into dimensional changes and at the same time weave the plot of the play around her is a plus. It is germane to say that a creative presentation of *A Song to Mary Charles* begins and ends with Sr. Mary Charles.

Conclusion

Interpreting a known text on a paper by a director is a demanding task because the pages of paper is not her forte, rather, the master artiste will be more comfortable within the confines of the stage. Here, the master artiste display talent and wit in working with actors, actresses and crew members whose collaborative creativity achieves an aesthetic appeal. A script may be good or bad, a character may be comic, cynical or serious and the gravity of the subject matter may not be appealing to the spectators but how well the director has manipulated her creativity to suit the targeted audience achieves the functions of drama to a chosen audience.

Obviously drama deals with human concerns and in spite of the period for which the drama is written, the form or style, issues are drawn from mankind's experiences. These experiences are often interesting, educative, sometimes bizarre and awful. The dramatic literature (Script) serves as a guide to a creative director whose craft provides certain license for her to turn realistic and fantastic themes into a corrective social action for the contemporary audience. One may therefore question the relevance of such a production to a contemporary audience. The thematic preoccupation of the

production of *A Song to Mary Charles* is captured in three words: Service to Humanity. This is a universal theme that needs re-echoing because “Mother Mary Charles Magdalene Walker lived out the preaching of being all things to all people as she engaged in any ministry that would uplift the standard of life of the people she served” (Handmaids, 1). The Spine: Service to Humanity forms the concept of the production and was further highlighted in the inner struggles, motives and objectives behind Sr. Mary Charles’ actions. Painted against the backdrop of all the oppositions she encountered at The Irish Sisters of Charity in Dublin, Sr. Mary Charles’ perseverance and service to humanity is worth a contemporary theme.

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