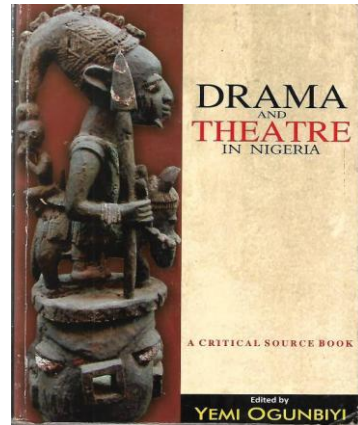


**Theories & Perspectives:
Descriptive Review of
'Drama and Theatre in
Nigeria – A Critical Source
Book'**

Emeka Aniago*



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In *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, the editor Yemi Ogunbiyi has brought together in one volume a collection of essays on different kinds of theatre practices from parts of Nigeria by thirty-one major scholars. The book has nine parts and thirty-one essays.

The introduction of Yemi Ogunbiyi, 'Nigerian Theatre and Drama: A Critical Profile', explains the widely held opinion about the origins of Nigerian theatre and drama as that which is speculatively linked to numerous traditional, religious and functional rituals practiced in Nigeria. This lengthy introduction attempts to be an overview of highlights of essays in the collection. It touches on the sides and nuances to the debate on the contexts, forms and functions of ritual and drama as well as the debate about the evolution of ritual to drama and opposing views of the evolutionary and relativist schools of thoughts

* Emeka Aniago (✉)

Department of Theatre & Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria
e-mail: emekaaniago@gmail.com

on the traditional drama in Nigeria. This introduction offers a development of contemporary modern drama and theatre in Nigeria, the emergence of tertiary institution based theatre and the perusal of major Nigerian modern playwrights.

The chapter titled 'Aspects of Nigerian Drama' authored by J. P. Clark, at the time a playwright, poet, critic and retired academic assesses the roots of drama in Nigeria. Clark categorizes Nigerian drama into two broad groups – the traditional and modern drama. He again sub-divides the traditional drama into Sacred and Secular drama. Again, the sacred drama is classified into further sub groups, namely ancestral or myth plays, and masquerade or plays by age groups and cults. Clark discusses several examples of Nigerian performances which he categorizes into one category of drama or another. The other highlight of the essay is Clark's insistence that these several examples of traditional performances are dramas of Nigeria people and that these drama perform certain specific functions such as to record the origins and *raison d'être* of the institution and people who own them, some are manifestations of a special religion, some serve a civic and social purpose by educating and initiating the young into the ways and duties of the community, some help to foster good relations between members of one village and another, some provides the avenue and environment for mass return of sons and daughters resident outside their villages, some create atmosphere for spiritual alignment, some are platform for social criticism, comment and orientation, and lastly, most provide atmosphere of leisure and entertainment.

The third chapter in this section dedicated to 'Traditional Theatre 1: Dramatic Ritual' is 'The Drama in African Ritual Display' by Ola Rotimi. It sets for itself the task of explaining 'what really drama is, and what is not'. From the outset, Rotimi indicates that he will strictly examine which African performance can be categorized as drama based on Greek definition of the word drama. Rotimi offers several examples and elaborations in his attempt to illuminate sufficiently the criteria in these performances that qualifies them as drama or not.

The next chapter is captioned 'The Gods as Guests: An Aspect of Kalabari Religious Life' by Robin Horton and focuses on the festivals of Kalabari religion. Horton reviews the worldview of the Kalabari as it relates to their perspective of their universe – which is placed into two great orders of existence. Horn explains the place of gods in scheme of things in line with the worldview of the Kalabari – thus, he

elaborates on the various modes of dramatisation of the gods such as through mime, masquerade, and possession.

In the essay titled 'Ekpe Festival as Religious Ritual and Dance Drama' by James Ndukaku Amankulor, the focus is on Ekpe festival's significance as a religious ritual and its potentialities as dance-drama. Amankulor explains the Ekpe ritual cycle which is annual event that takes place in the month of December, the Ekpe dance-drama, focusing on the performance production and processes and the performance significance. He also attempts a comparative analysis of the Ekpe cycle and the Greek Dionysia. He points out that similarities though exist but marked dissimilarities are expected because of cultural differences.

The next text, 'Masquerade', written by Onuora Nzekwu, discusses the aura that pervades the masquerade in Igbo village which gradually is fading because masquerade has lost most of the religious ideas which brought it into being and sustained it mainly due to the people's growing penchant for Western ideas. This paper elaborates on the masquerade cult membership, aesthetics of performance, other functional and utility attributes, on the periods of performances and the symbolic essence of each masquerade.

'The Dramatic Limit of Igbo Ritual' chapter, by M. J. C. Echeruo, examines the claims that festivals within the Igbo sense are drama, hence he attempts to analytically distinguish between drama and festival, not on the basis of their external 'dramatic' characteristics but their elaboration of action, whether or not this action is accompanied with sufficient dialogue (as that which is distinct from speech). Echeruo emphasis on the drama elements such as narrative or plot content and dialogue to be fully evident in a masquerade performance before it can be referred to as drama.

The chapter titled 'Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland' by Ossie Enekwe is a critical response to Echerue's essay 'The Dramatic Limit of Igbo Ritual'. Whereas Echeruo contends that Igbo festival needs to be forced to yield its story, Enekwe in his chapter contribution debates that Igbo festival performances such as some masquerade performance are indeed drama of a different form that emerges because of peculiarity of the environment and needs of the people that created it. Enekwe elaborately relates an example of such Igbo masquerade performance in Odo masquerade enactment of a story to emphasize his perspective that there is clear evidence of enactment of story embedded in some Igbo masquerade performances.

‘Traditional Forms of Hausa Drama’ written by E. O. Kofoworola is a critical discuss of some relevant concepts of drama without getting entangled in dramatic theory and criticism. Kofoworola includes a broad classification and discussion of forms of Hausa drama. He also examines the enabling situations that nourish each form of Hausa drama that he listed in his analysis. He also adds the social significance and functions of the forms of Hausa drama listed in the discussion.

The next chapter, ‘Ritual, Drama and the Theatrical: The Case of Bori Spirit Mediumship’, by Andrew Horn attempts to explain the proper classification of various entertainment events and performance in Africa where he observes an unnecessary impression of nomenclature whereby regardless of formal or functional qualities the tendency is to identify any performance as drama. Thus, Horn argues that though Bori spirit mediumship performance of the ethnic Hausa in Northern Nigeria contains attributes of drama, it is not drama. The paper elaborates on the meaning of Bori, the contexts and dimensions of performance, its functional attributes and attempt to distinguish broadly between possession and mediumship, between the ‘real’ and the simulated trance. Furthermore, he looks at ritual and drama comparing the contexts of intersections and divergences.

‘Trance and Theatre: The Nigerian Experience’ by Dapo Adelugba examines the intersections of trance, spirit mediumship, spirit possession, shamanism, and related phenomena within a theatrical point of view. Adelugba strictly looks at the phenomenon of trance in the following Nigerian societies, the Hausa, Kalabari, Ijaw and Yoruba. He goes ahead to relate analogically the performance realities of the trance to the enactment in some Nigerian plays he witnessed and studies. Furthermore, the paper attempts to postulate about the interrelatedness of trance and theatre.

The Part ‘Traditional Theatre II: The Popular Tradition’ starts with the paper ‘Alarinjo: The Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre’ by Joel A. Adedeji. This paper traces the beginning of Alarinjo theatre to Ologbin Ologbojo who established the Alarinjo as a permanent part of court entertainment in the Old Oyo under Alaafin Ogbolu. The Alarinjo theatre is said to have emerged from the dramatic roots of the Egungu (masquerade) as ancestor worship and during the reign of Alaafin Ogbolu, who acceded to the throne at Oyo Ighoho about 1590 as a court entertainment. The paper discusses the performance process, its history and the performance content, the routine, the periods and time of performance, the politics that surrounds the performance

according to the perception of the royalty and social perspective on the performance, the theatrical construct, historical background, professional practice, system of operation as travelling theatre.

It follows 'The Kwagh-Hir Theatre' by Edith Enem. This paper discusses the context and performance process of Kwagh-Hir, which is described as composite art which can take almost a whole night to perform in an open air environment. This type of puppet performance includes accompanying narratives made by a narrator, and songs by the chorus usually at the beginning and towards the end of the enactment. The paper also elaborates on the paraphernalia of performance. The paper describes Kwagh-Hir as that which does not strictly enact the same and single story; rather it incorporates the societal realities, both historical and the subsisting.

The next chapter 'A Borno Puppet Show' contributed by R. E. Ellison, the performance mode and process of Bornu puppet show of the Kanuri of Northeast Nigeria is discussed. The movements and manipulations of the puppets are accompanied by the shrill words of the manipulator referred to as *dogodogoma* in Kanuri language. Ellison describes the kind of dramatic portrayal that is enacted in the puppet show. The paper also relates the oral history of the origins of Borno Puppet as related by a Yelwa dogodogoma.

'Yankamanci: The Craft of the Hausa Comedians' by C. G. B. Gidley is a study of a Hausa entertainment of the Hausa minstrels who traditionally specialise in comedy. Gidley's paper attempts to reveal the full content of 'Yankamanci for the first time in perspective, to illustrate it with authentic material and to prove that local audiences appreciate a brand of 'satire' performed according to standards which have become traditional. Thus, the paper discusses the mode of performance, the source materials, the performance process and the social relevance of the performance.

Part IV of the book, 'Modern Traditional Theatre: Yoruba Travelling Theatre', starts with the paper titled 'Ogunde Theatre: the Rise of Contemporary Professional Theatre in Nigeria 1946 – 72' by Eburn Clark is an exploratory study of the Ogunde Theatre which provides a historical documentation of the development of the theatre from 1946, the year he formed his professional company to the year 1972. Thus, this paper provides vital insights to the person of Ogunde; his career works and highlights his performance and theatre company operational approaches.

The chapter titled 'E. K. Ogunmola: A Personal Memoir' by Ulli Beier is an account of Beier's firsthand experience of 'Yoruba Opera', particularly the performances of Hubert Ogunde and his concert party. Beier relates her encounter with E. K. Ogunmola in Ikere Ekiti in southwest Nigeria during her first visit there. She discusses her perspectives of Ogunmola's company. She relates the content, the dynamics, the creativity, the highlights of Ogunmola's career and his exploits. Thus, this paper offers a personal account of the writer's account of Ogunmola's career highlights, twists and turns.

The next paper is 'The Popular Theatre: A Tribute to Duro Ladipo' by Yemi Ogunbiyi. It relates the personal account of Ogunbiyi's encounters with Ladipo. Thus, the paper provides firsthand information on the person of Ladipo, his contributions to the development and growth of travelling theatre in Nigeria. The paper also provides information on Ladipo early life, his career growth and accomplishments in theatre in Nigeria.

Section 'The Literary Tradition' referred to as 'Part V' starts with Michael J. C. Echerue's essay titled 'Concert and Theatre in Late Nineteenth Century Lagos'. The paper examines the Lagos concert performances, the mode of performance and staging, and the promoters of the concerts. The study also discusses the nature of challenges that faced the concert productions and how the tradition of the theatre suddenly died out.

'The Advent of Television Drama in Nigeria', by Segun Olusola, traces the emergence of TV drama in Nigeria in the pioneering works of Lekan Ladele, a TV producer and Funmi Dominu, a playwright. The author relates how television drama was largely inspired by the experience of writers and producers of radio features and dramas of the mid-fifties. The paper presents the several variables and realities that enabled the development of TV drama in Nigeria, it also relates the challenges that were encountered pre and during the beginning of TV drama in Nigeria.

'The Nigeria Theatre and the Playwright' essay by Femi Euba concerns with the Nigerian playwright's appropriation of the English language as medium of expression, and the burden of applying and projecting the realities in the society. The paper attempts to discuss the theatre structure and to project it in the light of the problems of the Nigerian playwright. It also analyzes the place and force of the audience in the sphere of encouragement for the playwright. Thus, the

paper analyzes the centrality of language in judging the strength and weakness of the Nigerian playwright.

The next chapter is titled 'Modern Yoruba Drama' by Akinwumi Isola. It discusses the modern Yoruba plays, which the author describes as a departure from the unscripted, oral based Yoruba travelling theatre shows and masquerade performances of the Alarinjo era. It looks at the common and prominent source material for the plays of the era, the structure, the feature of total theatre concept such as songs, drumming, and dancing, which are infused in the plays. The paper also attempts an analysis of forms of modern Yoruba plays under the following groupings, historical, didactic, and protest plays. There is explained how Yoruba audience characteristics naturally adds to the success or otherwise of the playwrights of the period.

The 'Literary Drama and the Search for a Popular Theatre in Nigeria' by Biodun Jeyifo approaches the divergence between the literary and the popular in contemporary Nigeria drama. The author explains the opinions and nuances on schism between the literary and the popular traditions in drama.

The Part VI titled 'Theatre Management, Organisation and Production' starts with Olu Akomolafe's paper 'Theatre management in Nigeria: Appraisal and Challenges' that is based on a managerial examination of theatre business in Nigeria in 1960s and 1970s. The paper likewise examines the scope of expression in terms of organisation and management within the various types of theatre forms functioning in Nigeria. It also discusses the operational methods of the Nigerian professional theatre in relation to the problems involved. The role of a theatre manager in the promotion of Nigeria theatre will be extensively discussed.

The paper 'Music, Dance, Drama and the Stage in Nigeria' by Meki Nzewi argues that the idea of 'dry theatre', which he describes as drama of unrelieved dialogue and stage movement, is practiced mostly within Euro-American literary stage practices. However, he contends that the Nigerian theatre goer expects dance and songs to be subsumed in drama. Nzewi illustrates his point with forms in traditional folk drama, and modern Nigerian literary plays. He explains the realities, problems and aesthetics of music and dance inclusion and exclusion in drama in different forms of drama. The paper also discusses the ideal role and functional role of music and dance in drama in Nigerian perspectives and sensibilities. Thus, the author suggests best ways of appropriating the advantages of music and dance in drama.

‘Towards a True Theatre’, written by Wole Soyinka, is a perceptual, melodramatic, critique of the apparent incongruities that represent the theatre buildings in Nigerian tertiary institutions in relation to the National Theatre in Kampala.

The next essay ‘Search for a New African Theatre’ by Demas Nwoko bemoans the acculturation of Africans with Euro-Americaness and sensibilities and the struggles Africans have to contend with to integrate Africaness and African sensibilities in an already Euro-Americanized pattern and systems. Thus, Nwoko illustrates how the need to establish the ‘African Theatre’ through a conscious effort is being stifled by a system that demands and upholds theoretical academics than practical academics. More so, Nwoko examines what ‘African Theatre’ and ‘New African Theatre’ imply through what several scholars have contributed on the topics.

In Part VII, ‘The New Media: Nollywood and Nigerian Cinema’, the first paper is titled ‘Will Nollywood Get Better (Did Hollywood and Bollywood Get Better)’. Biodun Jeyifo examines the phenomenal growth in relation to impressive economic strength and global visibility that Nollywood have attained in few decades in comparing to Hollywood and Bollywood. The paper looks at what constitutes the scope of Nollywood, where the hopeful signs of its future growth, improvement and development may come from. Jeyifo examines the major production, distribution and audience consumer features and realities of Nollywood.

Part VIII tagged ‘Postscript’ and starts with Wumi Raji’s ‘New Nigerian Playwrights: AN Update’ – about the developments in Nigerian dramatic writing since 1981. The paper attempts a classification and discussion of Nigerian playwrights as second and third generation Nigerian playwrights.

Next Part is ‘Appendix: Play-Texts’, firstly bringing Robin Horton’s paper ‘Ikaki – The Tortoise masquerade’. It provides an insight into the Kalabari of Niger-Delta social worldview defining their Ikaki (tortoise) based stories. Horton looks into the performance ideological, philosophical and didactic nuances. Also, Horton illustrates the procedural pattern of performance of Ikaki performance.

The ‘Ezeigboezue: An Igbo Masquerade Play’ by Nnabuenyi Ugonna presents the text of a tape-recorded Mmonwu poetic drama. The edited transcript translated freestyle into English was recorded during an arena performance at Ihitenansa on January 27 1973, in honour of Dr. H. S. Corran who was then visiting the town. The paper

attempts to draw critical attention to the subject of Mmonwu drama, a form that is rightly regarded as perhaps the most important genre of Igbo oral and performance genre.

Finally, 'Dramatic Presentation in Udje Dance Performance of the Urhobo', written by G. G. Darah, attempts a descriptive review of Udje festival dance performance practiced by Urhobo nationality of Delta State, Nigeria. The paper presents ideas about the origins of the performance, explanation on the performance content, process, sites, and purposes, and occasions.

In its entirety the volume *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book* synthesizes significant perspectives upon the practices developed in Nigeria that deserve to be better known and professionally interpreted - as the authors of this book have succeeded to offer to readers.