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THE PERFORMER

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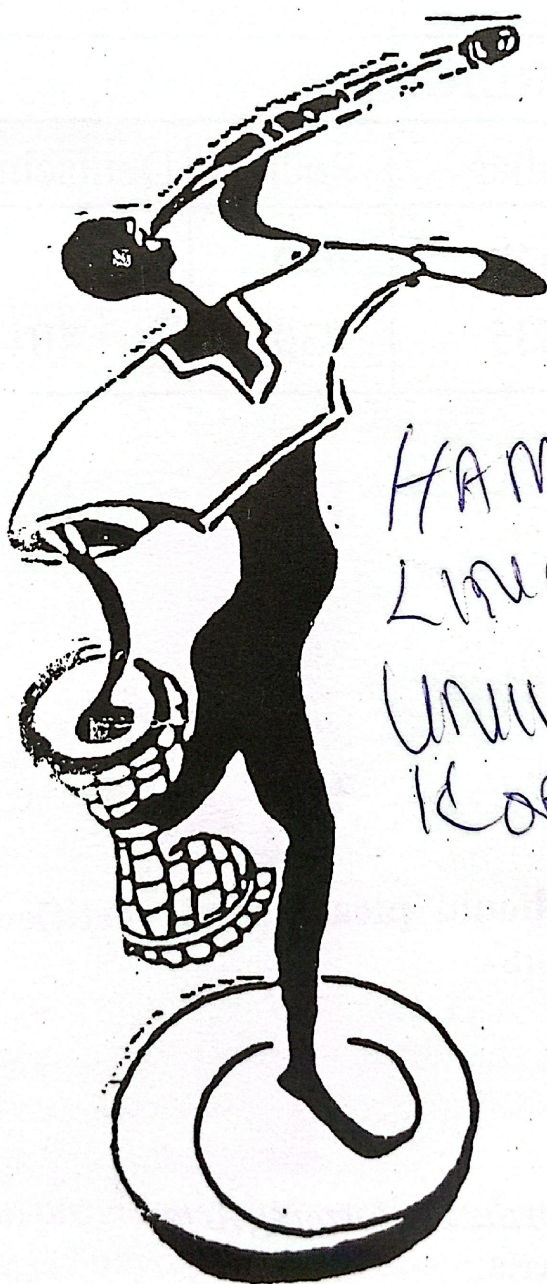
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The Editor

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Editorial Comment

In the recent history of the Nigerian theatre scholarship, *The Performer: Ilorin Journal of the Performing Arts*, the official journal of the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria has proved to be one of the leading journals that serves as the intellectual hub for the sustenance and promotion of the arts of the theatre through constant publication. Consequently, it is important to commend the vision of the founding fathers of this journal. Their prompt decision has redefined the Nigerian theatre scholarship.

The search for original and illuminating essays rather than mere rehash of outdated works, the changing culture of interdisciplinary dialogue within the holistic cycle of life as theatre and theatre as life and the peer-review editorial philosophy among several others, are some of the reasons while the present Volumes 9 (2007) and 10 (2008) of *The Performer* are delayed. It is my humble opinion that this delay is for the growth of our intellectual heritage.

Out of the 98 articles that we received in the last one year, only 36 are found worthy of publication. To this end, Volume 9 (2007) contains 18 well-researched articles on Dance, Music, Theatre Management, Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Playwriting, Media Arts, Play Directing and so on that critically challenged existing theoretical and conceptual positions. Volume 10 (2008) also contains 18 well-written essays within the borderline and dialectics of Dance and Choreography, Highlife and Traditional Music, Theatre for Development, Costume, Dramatic Communication and Advertisement, Aesthetics and Dramaturgy, Contemporary Stage Design and so on.

It is interesting to note that this present assignment given to me has shown that there is pain and gain in editorial work. The pain of having to re-read and correct, and severally too, vestiges of linguistic and typographical errors, and the gain of transforming an academic work in progress into the reality of publication. I, therefore, agree that editing is "beyond mere gatekeeping". It is a call to duty for serious intellectual engagement where illusion or emotion has no place to hide.

Future contributors should note that their articles are welcomed for publication in this annual journal. We are conscious of time and we know the essence of prompt publication. However, a

scholar in haste and hurry may not find a place in *The Performer*. We will continue to improve and take this journal to greater height by following the editorial philosophy of its founding fathers. As much as it is good to publish for promotion, let us not forget also that it is equally important to publish for posterity.

I thank Professor Ayo Akinwale, the present Head of Department, who appointed me as the Editor of *The Performer*, almost a year ago having served under him as Assistant Editor. I am equally indebted to the entire members of the present Editorial Board (for their support and team-spirit), our Editorial Consultants (for their willingness to assist), our Assessors (for prompt and fair assessment) and the Contributors (for believing in the editorial philosophy of *The Performer*).

To scholars, researchers and students in the Humanities and related disciplines, it is my hope that the present Volumes 9 (2007) and 10 (2008) of *The Performer* will give room for different intellectual explorations, create positive room for the re-imaging of the Nigerian theatre, open new perspectives in the interpretation of African theatre and contribute to the development of the global theatre scholarship.

Dr. AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye
Editor

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Science, Technology and the Myth of Sàngó in the Aesthetics of Yoruba Creative and Literary Arts

By

S.A.O. Hamzat*

Introduction

Studies abound to show that Africans have indigenous method of exploiting nature for their benefit, the result of which is botanical, zoological and medical sciences. These according to Layiwola (2007) are what stimulate oral and literary creation. The interest of this paper is in the functional definition of arts and of aesthetics as “things created to realize a particular end” (Davies in Musa, 2003:3). It is on this premise that this paper investigates drama on the theme of Sango's thunder fit to move beyond cultural jamboree, to serve a particular end of redirecting attention to the theme of science and technology in the natural phenomena of thunder and lightning. The function of art as an eye opener that calls on developing nations like Nigeria to look inward for scientific and technological breakthrough is explored through the artistic impressions of Yoruba artists in this paper to portray culture as the bedrock of development.

The organisation of this work puts the definition and an amplification of the concepts; culture, religion and science first, then follows their point of interception, next is the image of thunder in Yorùbá culture and in science generally. A literary interpretation of Sàngó's prowess in the thunder magic as expressed by Yorùbá dramatic and literary artists, Ladipo D. and Òkédìjí O., is done to bring out its social relevance to Yorùbá society.

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Culture, Religion and Science

What is said to be the earliest definition of culture by Edward Barnett Tylor in 1871 indicates that every society has some knowledge that is peculiar to it, i.e. what the society has faith in, like philosophy, myth, religion, taboos and rules used in guiding the peoples moral. In his words, culture is

a complex whole including the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals and customs acquired by human beings as members of society (*Encyclopedia Encanter*, 2005).

From Tylor's definition of culture, which emphasizes knowledge possessed by the society, it is clear that every culture has its own knowledge about its surroundings. The earliest knowledge about the nature of the world was previously provided by religion. In this paper therefore, we adopt Olájubù's (2003:291) opinion, in which culture is defined as:

An aggregate of the total way of life of a people. It includes the thought and belief systems, customs and habits, the arts and language, pastimes, folklore, history and civilisation, occupations, social and political institutions, education and child learning and of course medicine and science.

What distinguishes this last definition from the first one is the inclusion of language, medicine and science. Science, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary of English Language* centers on knowledge, especially one gained from experience by observation. Identification, description, experimental investigation and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena (Williams, 1981:1162). Also, Olajubu (2001:291) calls it a body of knowledge organized into a system, which depends on examination and testing of facts and stating general laws. It is the exploitation of nature for human benefit. This implies that culture does not exclude science.

While many scientists may want to create a dichotomy between culture and science, many studies have shown that science is an integral part of the cultural heritage of humanity. Within every people's culture is one form of science or another, which they use in controlling their local environment. Science is said to rest on theoretical concept that seeks to find out and interpret the claims of culture.

Fadipe (1978:293), acknowledges that the Yoruba have the knowledge and the control of natural phenomena, to a great extent, but he maintains that we will be stretching the meaning of the word science unduly if we speak of Yoruba as possessing scientific knowledge. This is as a result of the weaknesses he identifies, such as:

- i. Lack of any technique to discriminate between the essential and unessential: between what constitute a thing and what are merely accidental properties.
- ii. Lack of ability to reduce general principles from particular experiences.

Contrary to this belief, some other scholars (Ogunade, 2003:408-818, Olajubu 2003:291 and Dopamu, 2003:442-464) hold the view that Africans possess scientific knowledge since they have been able to tap nature's potentials and resources to meet their needs. They maintain that the people have devised some technology which can only be explored by the way it is done and the effect it will produce, but one may not be able to explain in direct verifiable scientific way, what and what have interplayed or interchanged to produce such an effect. Fádípè (1978:293) while examining the phenomenon of "Epe", a sphere of magic, argues that it borders very closely on science in that a very considerable element of experiment, specialisation and verification of hypothesis is involved. They have material and the person, who, after a long period of experiment hit upon a truly effective one can decide to market it to interested buyers.

According to Olájúbú (2003:291), African science can be found in African culture and tradition... it expresses itself through her folklore, i.e. taboos, music, dance, myth, legends, tales, proverbs, jokes, belief system, riddles, drama, divination, superstitions, blessings, curses, oath and so on. Crockett (2001) in Olajubu (2003:646) also notes that manifestations of African science include magic or mystical practices and incantation, and magic is described as an attempt to control and utilise natural forces in ways that affect the society significantly either positively or negatively through different methodologies.

This brings us to the realm of magic as a form of science in African religion. Among the Yoruba one can say that a discussion of

magic involves a discussion of curative medicine, of poison, charms including amulets, the witchcraft, sorcery and religion for there is no clear distinction between medicine and magic since they bear the same linguistic connotation, 'Òògùn'. Every 'Òògùn' is anchored either immediately or remotely in something material. This material is primarily botanical as the alternative name for medicine, 'egboogi' (i.e. root) connotes (Fádípè, 1978:291). The belief is that by the virtue of the fiat these materials received at creation, and the effect they have been known for generations to produce, they will always work if everything is done and used as prescribed by the specialist. The interaction of religion and magic manifests when, religion is invoked to strengthen faith in "Òògùn", magic assumes the efficacy of a power that is invisible and may not be analysed by ordinary senses according to Dòpámú (2003). Since the mystical aspect of African science finds no footing in the materialistic view of modern science it remains underdeveloped and limited to a few people today.

Thunder in the Perspective of Yoruba Culture

The Yoruba myth of the lightning and thunder that are said to have emanated from the Šàngó deity. In Yoruba society, as Fádípè (1978:293) notes, almost every òrìṣà (deity in Yoruba pantheon) has some powerful òògùn (medicine, charm) to enforce respect, to inspire fear and to punish if necessary, hence the saying. 'kò sí òrìṣà tí kò ní ìgbé' (literarily, there is no deity without bush, i.e. trees, roots, leaves and such things that are used in preparation of òògùn).

According to Ìṣòlá (1987:93), Šàngó is a god of retribution who punishes offenders with thunder and lightning, but he is also benevolent to his followers. He notes that the Ifa divinatory poetry, Odù Ogbètúrá, Odù Òtúá Oríkò and Òwónrínýèkú give details of Šàngó's origin as one of Yorùbá deities being worshiped in Ilé-Ifè. According to the Ifá corpus, Oòduà gave the "conquering sword" and thunderbolts, the symbol of Šàngó to Jègbè, the first Aláàfin of Òyó, to be his guiding spirit when he was going to found the new city called Òyó. Ìṣòlá (1991:94) has debunked the myth, which links this theological Šàngó with the fourth king of Òyó thus...

The first Alaaafin established the worship of Šàngó and made it the state religion with himself being the chief priest

and Šàngó incarnate... the fourth Aláàfin was Babáyemí Ìtíolú, who was versed in the art of medicinal charms. The important tradition in Oyo is to deify each Aláàfin. When on the throne, he incarnates Šàngó, and when dead, is deified and called Šàngó. In that regard Aláàfin is Šàngó, so the fourth Aláàfin could be called Šàngó.

Therefore, the fourth Aláàfin of Òyó, the son of Òrànmiyàn whose maternal lineage was traced to Tápa Ìbàrùbá race was Babáyemi Ìtíolú. This king was metaphorically named Šàngó because of his magical prowess, and with time the two personalities became one. The king's negative attributes were transferred to the theological Šàngó who is thus portrayed as the wicked, mischievous, tyrant king who hung himself.

This version of the myth which according to Ìṣòlá emanated from the European manipulation of history was popularised through the European print media of anthropologists, missionaries, colonial administrators and writers, such as Leo Frobenius, S. Johnson and Hethesett. The obvious distortion of this myth is what Ìṣòlá in Ògúntóló-Laguda (2002:66-78) calls religious politics. It appeared by mistake or design in Hethersett's account in *Ìwé kíkà Èkerin Lí Èdè Yorùbá*. Owómóyèlá (1997:234-240) has debunked the distortion by Western Church Missionaries Societies that Šàngó is the same thing as the king who was reported to have set his war lords Gbònkà and Tìmì against each other and took his own life by hanging. Isola (1991:98) maintains that this version of the story is a ruse since it does not have the backing in Ifa corpus and the large body of praise poetry (oriki) in Yoruba tradition.

What qualifies as Sango's magic, science or medicine is the means to invoke lightning and thunder bolt. Going by Dopamu's (2003:44264) classification of Yoruba 'magic', we will literally translate Šàngó's fit as "Òògùn Àrá or Òògùn Òjò". It will be assumed that the Yoruba myth about the thunder fit was once potent only in the hands of Šàngó. After his ascension to heaven his followers inherited the "thunder magic". It is believed that the deity if invoked to mediate in a robbery case will visit the culprit with thunder. This magic is what the historical Aláàfin Šàngó, the Òyó king, researched into and succeeded in acquiring. He utilized this

power in fighting his enemies.

Thunder in the Perspective of Science

According to Owólabí (2003:320), the phenomenon of light experienced in the sky was of the same nature as the one observed in the experiment performed in the laboratories. He shows that the positive and negative electrical charges that are associated with lightning and thunder, which started in the early years of the seventeenth century, have earlier existed in people's consciousness.

This explains the existence of many taboos and protection devices which are considered necessary to avoid the devastation effect of lightning and thunder strike. For example, it is forbidden for one to smoke if there is rain cloud, to stretch one's hand directly to collect rainwater, or stand close to the wall and the doorway when it is raining. The relationship between science and culture is laid bear in many Yoruba taboos. These taboos correspond with the scientific precautions against thunder strike as found in Owólabí (2003:325), such as avoiding staying near metal doors and windows, chimneys and extended walls. He advises that people should stay near the middle of the rooms, keeping away from radio and television sets which are connected to external or internal aerials. Also, one is advised to avoid points at which extended metallic objects such as cookers, refrigerators, bathtubs, water and gas pipes, telephones and cables enter a house. Through these taboos and precautionary measures there seems to be a correlation between the natural and supernatural claims on lightning.

Thunder in the Aesthetics of Yoruba Artists

The view of many Yoruba artists about Šàngó's thunder magic could be explained from cultural and scientific points of view. From the cultural perspective, thunder is associated with the Šàngó deity who could emit fire through supernatural means that many scholars call African magic or science. In an African way of explaining nature, thunder is an expression of God's wrath, which can be conjured through the manipulation of material and non-material elements, such material elements are roots and herbs that the expert prepare.

After the experience of colonialism, the oral tradition reveals itself in theatrical performance of dramatists like Dúró Ladipo (1971) and literary artist Oládèjò Òkédìjì (1987) as it is espoused in the play-texts *Oba kòso* (The king did not hang) and *Ẹ̀sàngó*. It is on record that Ladipo's intention as an artist was to preserve the *Ẹ̀sàngó* myth in peoples' memory (Ògúnbíyí, 1985:340), but as Ìṣòlá (1991:93-99) notes, he only succeeded in preserving the colonial version of the myth due to the influence of colonial literature on him. In other words, Ladipo fell victim to the presumed authority of the book he read, and he sold the idea of *Ẹ̀sàngó*'s hanging through his folk opera. *Oba kòso* (*The king did not hang*). Which was performed in many of the world's major cities? The Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, sponsored the play.

In the stage performance of '*Oba kòso*', the drumbeats, dance steps and technical realism of thunder and lightning are no more entertainments, they bring to life the presumed *Ẹ̀sàngó* deity, it enliven the myth of *Ẹ̀sàngó* in the peoples' minds and hearts. It brings to life the peoples knowledge of their environments as in, their culture, folktales, songs and dances, their liturgies, shrines, proverbs and pithy sayings:

Bójò bá sù ẹ má mà mu sígá o, oíúkòso o gbodò rína o...

Although Dúró Ladipo misleadingly portrays the king as the deity *Ẹ̀sàngó*, he succeeds in using local technology to emit fire, the symbol of *Ẹ̀sàngó*.

Òkédìjì (1987) in the play-text, *Ẹ̀sàngó* also utilizes the theme of *Ẹ̀sàngó*'s thunder magic. The Aláàfin *Ẹ̀sàngó*'s quest for the control of nature in the middle of the play results in thunder and fire which he uses to fight his enemies. The king in blind rage uses this quest for scientific power to cause the fire that destroys his people and properties. In order to correct the impression that the mythological *Ẹ̀sàngó* in traditional religious belief hung himself from frustration as popularized by the European print media (defamatory statement about the deity, which occurred in European manipulation of history), he creates the dialogue between the two slaves in the opening of the play. Àyòká upholds the traditional belief that *Ẹ̀sàngó* ascended to heaven while Àjàní holds the belief that *Ẹ̀sàngó* is not worthy of the deification accorded him in Yoruba land. Òkédìjì demonstrates the

magical or technical power attributed to Šàngó in African traditional religious faith through the thunderbolt that hit Àjàní. He also corrects the notion of his hanging when Àjàní professes that the deity did not hang as erroneously believed by the majority during colonialism.

The effect of thunder on Àjàyí can be explained from the scientific point of view. From Owólabí's (2003) scientific explanation, thunder, during lightning is generally regarded as the result of high-pressure shock wave explosion caused by the intense lightning current heating up the channel. The large dangerous electrical current will bypass trees to flow through the person to the earth, depending on whether one is barefooted; standing on wet ground or one is wearing insulated shoes standing on dry land. The effect of the current on the person would also depend on where the flash enters the body.

From this scientific explanation the effect of thunder on Àjàyí can be regarded as a selective strike, which may be due to his standing posture and location. The two slaves are outside in the rain but Àjàyí is the one not washing, he may be standing by the wall, which may be responsible for the devastating effect of thunder and lightning on him. Àyòká's washing posture (bending) may be her saving grace if we consider Owolabi's (2003:328) safety measures against thunder strike.

A producer's knowledge of the scientific workings of thunder will stimulate quality production of this play on stage. The literary artists and the performance can utilize the interplay of the aesthetic of the elements of production such as ritual magic, spectacle physical movement and surprises, Menegbe (2007:105) when such scenes that are not common phenomena are brought to life on stage it affect the sensibility of the audience/readers. Thus, drama is used to explain the scientific claim of culture.

Recommendations and Conclusion

From cultural point of view, Òkédìjì upholds the traditional belief about the deity Šàngó. Every structure that is put in place by the society has its usefulness. The usefulness of thunder myth in indigenous society includes guidance of morals. It can be said that the fears that are generated in such cultural realities are more alive in the

peoples' mind than the written laws or constitution of the modern day. This explains why it is more effective in curbing social ills in the olden days. It is through such philosophy that the social norms are maintained, i.e. it is guidance for morals and any attempt to disobey it can disrupt social equilibrium, it is clear that we can't escape sadist leaders who will always use their knowledge and power to destroy humanity, every society must put in place structures that can protect its existence. Literary and dramatic artists should sustain the practice of focusing on traditional, scientific and or technological knowledge as a form of science fiction, teaching the lesson that not all science and technology work for the benefit of man. They should also sensitize the government to look inward for indigenous technological breakthrough.

The meaning one can read into this incident is that the intricacies of nature are what scientists work on through experimentation, observation and verification of hypothesis in order to exploit nature positively or negatively. Based on the findings of this study, one would recommend that culture should be studied from the scientific point of view to demystify dangerous traditional beliefs. The scientific method can be used to explain religion and culture, where applicable. We should seek technical explanation to our traditional knowledge and only African scientists who are well rooted in African culture can do this. Sàngó's magical expertise is a challenge to Africans to engage in research into indigenous science and technology that must be used wisely for human development.

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