

AFRICAN THEATRE:

STUDIES IN THEORY AND CRITICISM



EDITED BY
ZIKY O. KOFOWOROLA
MARTIN O. OWUSU
ABDULRASHEED A. ADEOYE

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Ziky O. Kofoworola, Martin O. Owusu and AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye

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FOREWORD

Our colleagues, Ziky Kofoworola, Martin Okyere Owusu, and AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye deserve commendation for this book. Impressively, they have assembled, in one volume, a dazzling array of voices in the field of dramatic theory and criticism, drawn from departments of theatre in various universities and higher institutions and from two different countries, namely, Ghana and Nigeria.

It is a unique achievement: rare indeed it is to find instances of such rich and divergent collaboration, where at one single source students and scholars can encounter multiple perspectives and a near-comprehensive mingling of views.

And the diversity is not only geographical: contributors come from different intellectual generations as well as across the gender divide. Besides, because each of them is also a practitioner of many years standing, they speak with authority on their areas of expertise, drawing on concrete knowledge rather than abstract theory, and sometimes questioning prevailing precepts.

Almost all the areas of the arts of the theatre are covered: there are essays on dramaturgy, directing, acting, theatre design and aesthetics, on music and management. There are also very informative interviews with some of the acknowledged icons of the profession, where they offer illumination on their exemplary, innovative visions.

It is inevitable therefore, as it happens with works of similar ambition, that the book's strength may also, paradoxically, constitute its principal flaw. Thus the informed reader will find, for instance, that, although the departures from orthodox positions that we find in some of the essays are undoubtedly daring, they are not, for all that, always convincingly advanced nor, regrettably, supported with irrefutable evidence.

I suspect, however, that this kind of controversy will be very much in accord with the aims of the editors who seem in my opinion to have brought these essays together more in order to stir us into further exploration, than to merely reinforce our entrenched positions. I recommend the book therefore to both the general as well as the specialized readership.

Femi Osofisan

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Socio-Cultural and Historical Realities of Acting in the Nigerian Performing Arts

AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye

Introduction

It is an error of history to trace acting to Thespis – the reputed first actor on the Greek Stage. However, the very beginning of acting should be traced to the father and mother of nations, Adam and Eve. This position is arrived at on account of the omnibus notion that acting begins with the evolution of man which encompasses his tribulations or successes, his trials or triumphs. In fact, acting is life and that it is inter and intra-personal communication. Whether an audience is watching or not, the semiotics and the verbal essence of acting in tragedy, comedy, satire and so on make life an amusing or compelling admiration.

There are various notions, concepts and ideas of acting universally. Thus, acting can be seen as recollection, representation, reflection, impersonation, recreation, creation, enactment, re-enactment, pretention, imitation, reproduction, supposition and so on. Yet, acting has different linguistic and semiotic flavours at least if it related to a particular culture. Culture, therefore, plays a significant role in determining the forms and styles of acting.

Out of the numerous arts of the theatre, acting, a driving force has not enjoyed serious scholarship on the Nigerian theatre. The spontaneous and exogamic notions of acting that should be combined in performance are no longer respected. The new but sad reality is that anybody who has a script is an actor. It is our contention in this chapter that professional acting is a serious job and that the prospective and professional actors need training and retraining which can be recieved through the formal education in drama school, the acting company, the film industry and various traditional festival theatres across Nigeria.

In view of the above, this chapter examines socio-cultural and historical realities of acting in the Nigerian performing arts which of course is a love-flying moment of total theatre. This work is carried out through the deductive and participant-observation methods complemented with the theoretical frameworks of the Constantin Stanislavski's *magnus opus*, "The System" and the critical dimension of the inward and outward essence of Jerzy Grotowski's "Poor Theatre".

Literature Review

In the Western world, Thespis of the Greek theatre (not of several ethnic theatres that predate the evolution of the Greek theatre) remains the first actor and of course, the first pacesetter in formal acting. Thus, all theatre artists especially

actors are Thespians. He, in theatre history, deconstructed the use of pantomimic dramatisation, mask and masking to verbalise theatrical action. In fact, the history of the Greek theatre with its sizzling recall of the popular Dionysus festival is incomplete without reference to Thespis. Reilly and Phillips (1998, p. 14) submit that several poets made the Greek theatre a resounding success and that:

One of the best of these poets was a man named *Thespi*s, and it is he who is believed to have introduced the idea of having the leader of chorus imitates the god Dionysus during performance, thus giving formal birth to the art of acting.

Even though the historical accounts of the Greek theatre are often traced to the 5 B.C. and to some point, the 6 B.C.; the reality is that, to see Thespis as the first actor is to deny the existence of humanity before the 5 B.C. This is one of the Eurocentric contraptions that should be re-written.

The history of humanity predates 5 B.C. and even if we are not talking of the stone age period that lasted about 2.5 million years; to cut off acting, human interaction and dialogue among people of strong Empires, Kingdoms and Emirates in Africa that have been in existence before 5 B.C is to hit history on the head. Thespis should, therefore, be conceded to the Western theatre as the first actor because it has also been reported that it is Thespis who “acted portions of the play... considered as the interlude” (Cheney, 1935, p. 36) to give life to the dancers, chants and pantomime that dominate the Greek theatre stories of yore.

In this review, it is important to acknowledge that Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, Menander and Thespis define the Greek theatre. The Ancient Roman theatre history cannot be concluded without Plautus and Terence and the Elizabethan theatre at inception was famous through William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon, Richard Burbage and Christopher Marlowe. The force behind the French Renaissance theatre of the 17th century, where the trio of Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine and Jean-Baptiste Poquelin known as Moliere in which “many of the conventions that would characterise theatre today had been established” (Reilly and Phillips, 1998, p. 31). The 18th century Western theatre of Romanticism which deconstructs neo-classicism and favours “the middle-class individual” has great actor in David Garrick while Andre Antoine and Henrik Ibsen made the 19th Century Western theatre a rounding success. Little wonder then that “the period from 1750 to 1850 throughout the world saw a scarcity of good plays and consequently we had an actor’s theatre” (117-118).

In the African theatre, cultural festivals are unique forms in which history of acting can be traced. Most of these cultural festivals are communal in nature and their main style of theatrical enactment is total theatre in which the performance of drama, dance, music and so on are historically fused together to define the life of the people. Thus, this makes the African theatre, a functional theatre in which oral tradition, myth, folklore, ethic, more and so on are passed on from one generation

to the other. Consequently, in the South Western Nigeria, the formal acting in the Yoruba traditional traveling theatre of Alarinjo can be traced to Alaafin Sango of Oyo. Ogunbiyi (1981, p. 6) in a clear reference to J.A. Adedeji captures this scenario succinctly:

Sango, who reigned as Alaafin Oyo, "probably about the fourteen century, is thought to have introduced the phenomenon of the ancestor – worship called *baba* (father) or later *Egungun* (masquerade)". By the middle of the 16th century the institution had become formalised into a kind of festival of "All souls" in which lineage groups presented a dance – display during the highlights of the lineage's history. Invariably, each group became more adept at particular aspects of the dance – displays of each lineage masquerade. The refinement and perfection of those aspects, essentially for purely entertainment purposes, marked, by 1700, the birth of professional Yoruba theatre.

The notion of acting in the scenario of the ancestor-worship above is ritualistic and has various forms especially through masquerade performances. In fact, the account of acting in the same *Ogboni-Egungun-Alarinjo* triad finds theoretical grounding from Adedeji (1981, pp. 222-224) when he recalls the political and counter coups that took place during the reign of Alaafin Abipa in 1590 in which the story of the Ghost Mummies and the Ghost Catchers translates from mask impersonation to proper acting in the palace.

The deconstruction of the gods, heroes, heroines, legendary figures, deified characters and so on also account for the great ritual and ritualised festivals into secular and secularised performances in which the hidden secrets in the sacred grooves are re-lived first, in the living compound, then to the market square before birthing into the proscenium stage. For example, the Ekpe festival of Igbo, Ekong festival of Ibibio, Hausa Yankamanci, Bornu puppet show, Udje of Urhobo, Ananse, Anasewa and Anasegoro of Akan people of Ghana, Obatala of festival of Osogbo, Ogun festival of Ondo, and so on have close related pattern of *trance – ritual – sacred – secularised and popularised* performance motif. Acting in some of these festivals in Nigeria and Ghana above can even take place in three or seven days. Social deconstruction on acting also permeates the phenomenon of the postcolonial theatre. This is because most African experiences during the colonial period are deconstructed within our social reality.

Professional acting in Nigeria can be traced to the doyen of professional theatre in Nigeria, Late Hubert Ogunde (we will return to this through the accounts of Ebun Clark and Ayo Akinwale). After him, sizeable members in the traditional theatre lexicon emerged and graduated first, from strolling players – Alarinjo, then to the living stage, television series and now to the celluloid. After this group comes the establishment of Universities in Nigeria in which acting remains a major

course of study. University of Ibadan sets the blaze here. Ogunbiyi (1981, pp. 31-32) again comments on this, that

the one indisputable fact in the midst of all these, is the contribution of the Ibadan University towards the development of theatre and drama, first through its school of Drama, and subsequently as a full-fledged department of its own. It remained for some time the only training ground for theatre practitioner in Nigeria. For instance, the School of Drama Acting Company which Wole Soyinka set up as Director of the School at the start of the 1967/68 academic session...served as a laboratory aimed at producing actors in an ensemble fashion.

Since then, several Departments of Theatre/Dramatic/Creative/Performing Arts scattered all over Nigerian Universities and Colleges of Education have been established to teach the gospel of acting and its essence which in Africa, and like any other art, has "limitless possibilities...both in concept and in form, even within the same spatial or temporal context" (Kalilu, 2013, p. 8). Using a bit of historical account by Ebun Clark, Akinwale (2005, pp. 2-3) traced professional acting in Nigeria to the doyen of Nigerian theatre, Late Hubert Ogunde. He also conceded to the historical fact that the University of Ibadan has succeeded in producing and training rounded artists and actors such as Late Chief Wale Ogunyemi, Tunji Oyelana, Jimi Solanke and so on.

One interesting reality in this literature review is that, to really understand the contextual as well as the contentual history of acting in Africa, and in Nigeria, the indigenous, popular and literary theatre traditions should be studied as we have partly done in review.

Constantin Stanislavski's "The System" and Jerzy Grotowski's "Poor Theatre" are two theoretical models of acting relevant to this study. First is the Stanislavskian model. This model was created by Constantin Stanislavski, the founder of Moscow Art Theatre at Russia to help the actors and other designers (directors and scene designers) to create intuitively and imaginatively. "The System" essentially aims at making the actor to become a professional. Indeed, "The System" has become a *Bilabial Paperum* not only for the Western Theatre but for the African Theatre that prides itself in the spirit and shadow of the Western Theatre. A critical work on "The System" christened *On Method Acting* (1977) dedicated to Stanislavski's work by Edward Dwight Easy captures the core issues in "The System". These include; sense memory, mental and physical exercise, improvisation, relaxation, concentration, affective memory or emotional recall, imagination, internalisation, externalisation, social mechanism and so on. Fortunately, each key concept above is further broken down and explained for the use of the actor in training and in professional practice.

For example, sense memory "is a remembering of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell. The use of Sense Memory brings a feeling of life to every object that is associated with these five senses" while affective memory "is the conscious creation of remembered emotions which have occurred in the actor's own part life and then their application to the character being portrayed on stage" (Easty, 1977, pp. 35-52). Margeshack (1977, p. 190) in his book, *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage* reinterprets imagination to mean the actor's power and gift of intellectual assumption, reflection, criticism and alertness. It is a critical "state of mind in which all perceptions of the passing moment have disappeared and in which whole of life is concentrated, forcefully and definitely on circumstances given by the play".

Improvisation in "The System" is seen by Easty (1977, p. 113) as capable of "bindings of theatrical conventionality" meant to "lend life-giving freedom of personal expression to a role" while Bowskill (1979, p. 59) sees improvisation as a muse for the actor that "covers many activities... a multitude of approaches". The above and many more are the metaphors and the universal passion that "The System" ignites on the actors and to the theatre artists generally. In Africa, "The System" contains images and symbolisms that are peculiar to our culture and useful to our acting, role playing and impersonation. Indeed, Stanislavski's "The System" can empower serious actors with "a special native ability that sets him apart from other members of the human race" (Easty, 1977, p. 18). As an artistic director, "The System" has been used successfully, by us, intuitively and imaginatively to produce several plays such as Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame*, Isiaka Aligan's *Oba Mama*, Bode Sowande's *Tornadoes full of Dreams*, Wale Ogunyemi's *Queen Amina of Zauzau*, Toyin Abiodun's *Marriage of Arike* and so on. In fact, the natural link between acting in the Nigerian traditional popular and literary theatre traditions and Stanislavski's "The System" is so great that it is difficult for any serious director on the African stage to ignore the good part of the Stanislavskian style and this is in no way a condemnation of other types of acting and performance styles that have been used to redirect plays on the African stage.

Jerzy Grotowski's theory of poor theatre through his experiment captured in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) is another universal acclaimed acting style in which the excessive use of costume, make-up, lighting effects and stage décor are substituted for the skillful, creative and imaginative power of the actor through his acting prowess, his sheer ingenious interpretation and his dexterity at role playing. In fact, Grotowski (1968, p. 19) cautions that his style can eliminate "whatever proved superfluous" and that "theatre exist without make-up, without economic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, "live" communion". The Grotoswskian model is useful in some Nigerain/African rites, rituals and festival

performances such as Ekuechi and Ololu Masquerade performances in which the masklessness of the masquerades become iconic symbols of semiotics in acting.

The challenge posed by Grotowski has led to the mis-interpretation of his experimental style. However, the truth is that Grotowski proposed poverty in the theatre and condemned 'Rich Theatre'. In summary, Grotowski believes that it is "theatrical for the actor to transform from type to type, character to character, silhouette to silhouette – while audience watched in a poor manner, using only his own body and craft" (Grotowski, 1968, p. 21). In the Grotowskian sensibility, "variation of performer – audience relationships is possible" and "that actors can play among the spectators" through passive roles.

In the Grotowskian "Theatre Laboratory": the actor makes a total gift of himself. This is a technique of the "trance" and of the integration of all the actor's psychic and bodily powers which emerged from the most intimate layers of his being and his instinct, springing forth in a sort of "translumination" (Grotowski, 1968, 16). The multi-dimensional perspectives of acting have a great burden on the actor who is enjoined to be truthful, creative and gifted.

As important as acting is, there is no sufficient scholarship on it on the Nigerian theatre. It is sad to state that critical works on acting from 1960s (when serious theatre scholarship) takes its root in Nigeria, to date, have been scanty. Works on acting appear occasionally and in an average of twenty critical works, one may be lucky to find one serious article or book on acting. This rationalisation does not in any way water down such works on acting from Soyinka (1976), Adelugba (1979), Ogunbiyi (1981), Akinwale (1989 and 2005), Hagher (2000), Bakare (2000), Fosudo (2002), Asigbo (2008), Utoh-Ezeajugh (2011) and others that have been written to improve, historify, conceptualise and anatomise acting on the proscenium stage, acting in the Western play and especially oral performance and its dynamics. Apart from Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's brief brilliant article, "Acting African Plays for the African Audience: The Need for a Re-orientation", the realities of critical but relevant works on acting do not extend to the socio-cultural and historical realities of acting on the Nigerian performing arts. His paper only insists that, our orientation must change and be in tune with acting a real African play without unnecessary recourse to Western styles of acting.

Socio-cultural and Historical Realities of *Textualised Acting* in the Nigerian Performing Arts

Textualised acting is conceived in this study to mean acting out a published or written work within the large expanse of textuality and literariness. The crux of the matter in the socio-cultural and historical realities of *textualised acting* in the Nigerian Performing arts has to do with the place of society, culture and history of a particular play in the critical interpretation or acting of the actor. The second face value of this submission has to do with the omnibus notion and question of whether our actors are capturing the very basic essence of our culture, society and

history within the challenge which acting posed on the imposed proscenium and Western theatre that influenced the African theatre.

As an artistic director who has worked with budding and experienced actors on the Nigerian stage in the last twenty five years, we have come to accept the inherent problem of lack of understanding of our culture, society and history by most Nigerian actors. This is the reality affecting stage interpretation of plays. For example, key words in indigenous languages that are prevalent in most of the classical plays in the Nigerian theatre are often mis-spelt or ignored by actors. These key words or even concepts served as linguistic flavours that can colour serious interpretation of most of these classical plays. Whether in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* and *The gods Are Not to Blame* or Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, the hybridism of Western English and Yoruba language cannot be ignored by a serious actor or director.

In *Kurunmi*, words and concepts such as "feast of Ororun", "the frog is kicked-*kpa*", "Ogun as lord of the battle", "*Aruku*, the corpse that was carried to the market that did not sell" (Rotimi, 1971, pp. 12-71) and so on are often given wrong interpretation by actors. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, words and concepts such as "The great *araba* falls? Did you hear it", "To search for leaves and make *etutu*", "Brother to *sigidi*, bring home my wine", "The cloth of honour is *alari*, *Sanyan* is the band of friendship" (Soyinka, 1988, pp. 150-156) and so on necessarily call on the actor to appraise them within their cultural context for effective dramatic communication.

Textualised acting of historical plays pose more challenge to the Nigerian or African actor. For example, actors who will act the roles of some heroes, heroines, legends and historical figures such as Ogunmola, Ibikunle and Kurunmi in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*; Ovonramwen in Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen N'ogbaisi*; Elesin Oba, Iyaloja and Praise-Singer in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*; Idia, Oba Esigie, Iyase, Oliha, Ologbose, Ezomo, Esogbon and Ihama in Irene Salami-Agunloye's *Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin*, Ata-Igala in Emmy Unuja Idegbo's *Ata Igala, The Great*, Aole in Ayo Akinwale's *This King Must Die*, Sultan Attahiru in Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*, Sango in Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso* and so on deserve special handling by actors. This is because most of these characters have lived before. Therefore, serious research on their physical, moral, psychological and social traits should not be ruled out. This same approach can be extended to the drama of the African gods such as Ogun, Sango, Oya, Obatala, Osun, Osanyin, Orunmila, Esu and others in our fruitful search to locate the gods and goddess within our immediate historical realities. This is because these gods and goddess have different but unique attributes that define them. They must be characterised within their separate historical and cultural identities.

Textualised acting in the historical plays must make actors to appropriate the characters of these heroic figures and enter the spirit of their beings through the adaptation of the Stanislavskian and the Grotowskian experimental models. If these

gods speak slowly in myth and history (Orunmila and Obatala) or if they speak fast (Sango and Ogun), actors must also learn to pace up to the reality, and use their muse of creativity as they characterise and historify these larger – than – life personalities.

Within the *textualised acting* in Nigeria, Africa or indigenous songs have suffered. Here, we are not talking of the orchestra songs and their singing prowess but some brief but important occasion in which the historical figures are meant to sing in a production. What is real here is that actors who are not into the culture or setting of the play or who are alien to such cultural contraption often fail miserably in role playing. One can imagine an actor acting Obatala or Orunmila who cannot chant or praise the Odu (the Yoruba Ifa literary genre). Therefore, actors should note that “thinking is not unifying or making the appearance familiar under any guise of a great principle, thinking is learning all over again” (Camus, 2005, p. 41). The urge to learn the ancient voice and the singing pattern of yore should not escape them in communicating the theatre of heroes.

Social events in a textualised play are often ignored by the postmodern actor acting in the postmodern theatre. The wisdom behind the cultural essence of social events has much to do with communal issues, social ceremonies, environmental issues and social institutions and should not be ignored in a textualised play. Behaviours in an Oba’s palace, an Emir’s court, an Obi’s palace and so on are cultural in nature and will add special meaning to the overall interpretation of the play as well as behaviours during a traditional marriage, a naming ceremony or a burial ceremony, etc. The reality here is that social events in plays with cultural settings are not being given adequate interpretation in recent times. It is important to state that attitudes, customs, manners, mannerisms, gestures, gesticulations and so on are all accessories of a unique African acting style requiring special artistic, aesthetics and conceptual principles.

Social-cultural and Historical Realities of *Total Theatre Acting* in the Nigerian Performing Arts

The rhythm of total theatre permeates most theatres and festivals in Africa. It is an apt combination of dance, music, drama, pantomime, acrobatic display, invocation, evocation, chanting, praise poetry and so on in one historic performance. This multidimensional essence of the *joining together* of several arts is a challenge to the actor who has been confirmed as “the chief vehicle for the production and communication of meaning on stage (Illah, 2000, p. 155). Acting in the Nigerian total theatre performance has been turned into a kind of decompartmentalised form in which actors now make the holistic blend, difficult to achieve. Bakare (2000, p. 108) speaks about “artistic unity...the use of the body and space as well as nuances - speech mannerisms, gesticulations and manners of walking, greeting or reacting to issues” as important factors that “the African audience unconsciously identifies with”.

For a Nigerian actor to act efficiently in the total theatre idiom, he should note that socio-cultural and historical realities and the basis that defines total theatre need be considered by them. Here, we agree with Bakare (2000, p. iii) who insists that actors in the African plays should

be interested in learning the eyes of their people, their use of space, their use of body, their mannerism, gestures, ways of walking; ways of talking and of course, they must be interested in acquiring some basic skills in dancing, single instrumentation and even the art of masquerading.

Certainly, Bakare's opinion above is apt but we disagree with him when he also insists that "aspiring African actors must not follow styles legislated by the Western schools of acting or model their ways of acting after the Euro-American star actors" (Bakare, 2000, p. iii). The truth is that the "Stanislavskian" and the "Artaudian" acting models that Bakare condemns are indeed brilliant when in synergy with Nigerian nay African acting models especially in a play based on English as medium of expression. This researcher has indeed benefitted tremendously from the "Stanislavskian" and the "Artaudian" acting models.

Socio-cultural and Historical Realities of *Nollywoodian* Acting in the Nigerian Performing Arts

Acting in the Nigerian *Nollywoodian* industry has helped the industry to its present enviable stage. However, the representations of the socio-cultural and historical realities of the Nigerian culture, society and history have suffered in this industry. Examples of this include instances when Obi's, Oba's and Emir's are not properly represented vis-avis the portrayal of a royal touch, the majestic carriage and gesture expected of these caliber of personalities or the slow but penetrating speech and the communal respect meant for Obi's, Oba's and Emir's. These have often been mis-interpreted and regimented thus creating a situation of "anything goes", which has beclouded the gaze of the postcolonial theatre.

Various attempts at imitation of known models or successful actors by budding actors in the *Nollywoodian* industry is also circumspect. The imitators often create fake stereotypes and the naturalness which acting requires is often sacrificed and uncomfortable to people who understand good acting. In spite of the fact that technology is being manipulated to create make-belief reality in the *Nollywoodian* industry; our history, culture and society suffer in the hand of actors who know close to nothing about the art of their people in some culture based films.

Socio-cultural and Historical Realities of Acting in the Oral Performance in the Nigerian Performing Arts

If there is a media that can adequately represent our history, myth, folklore and tradition in the Nigerian performing arts, it is in acting in an oral performance.

Sadly enough, only a few can partake in acting in an oral performance. Utoh-Ezeajugh (2011, p. 15) provides a brilliant profile as she conceptualises oral performance insisting that

pre-contact African society employed the oral form of literary transmission, especially the folkloric tradition in recording the people's norms, mores, values and indeed the totality of their world experience, Oral literature has such genres as prose narratives made up of myths, legends, folktales, sayings, proverbs, dialectical speech and folk songs. It also includes riddles, tongue twisters, lullabies, incantations and work songs.

No doubt, the institution of oral performance and oral performers are the real makers of acting in the Nigeria socio-cultural and historical realities. However, the roles of oral performers have been greatly reduced in the *textualised acting*, *total theatre acting* and even the *Nollywoodian acting* because of the fact that people see the art as a family art forgetting the fact that the skills for oral performance can be taught and acquired. Oral performance mode influenced the conception of Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* and Femi Osofisan's *Twingle-Twangle, A Twynning Tale* in which the dynamism of acting will be needed for the performances of the two plays to be electrifying.

Suggestions and Recommendations

It is glaring from our discussion so far that most actors in the Nigerian performing arts do not consider the details involved in the socio-cultural and historical realities during interpretation. Consequently, we want to make the following suggestions and recommendations, that:

1. detailed research should be carried out by actors and artistic directors on the culture in which a play is set;
2. socio-cultural issues such as cultural mannerisms, acting dynamics, greeting forms, speech patterns and so on should be considered by actors in their business of creative interpretation;
3. historical realities of a given people such as their legends, heroes, heroines, myths, folklores and deified characters should be considered in serious acting;
4. the Stanislavskian and Grotowskian models be blended with the acting styles of the culture in which a play is set;
5. speech defects such as poor dental structure, nasal voice, sloppy speech, tightness of the throat, chest breathing, lazy tongue and so on should be corrected through constant voice training;
6. the dramatic reality of physical, moral, social and psychological exercises in acting process is important; and
7. the near extinction of oral performers and rounded actors necessary for total theatre performance should be halted through special training for the actors by oral performers, musicologists and choreographers.

Conclusion

We have argued in this study that the socio-cultural and historical realities of acting in the Nigerian performing arts are certainly ignored by the Nigerian actors in role playing and interpretation. We explained the basic facts behind this failure through acting in the *textualised*, *total theatre*, *Nollywoodian* and *oral performance* forms. Suggestions and recommendations are also offered to stem the tide of poor acting. We insist that since acting is impersonation, recreation, imitation, reproduction, supposition, reflection and pretension, it should be taken seriously. Though it is important to speak the Queen or the British English in core English plays, local flavours, mannerisms, historical and socio-cultural issues should also be considered as we lift the standard of acting in the Nigerian or African performing arts.

In conclusion, there is urgent need for the service of speech experts so that causes of speech defects and impaired speech forms can be corrected. Actors should be properly trained to be professionals as they act in the theatre of their people and as they strive for excellent dramatic communication through perfect script interpretation in which the socio-cultural and historical realities of the African people will be considered.

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THE EDITORS

Ziky O. Kofoworola holds B.A. Hons from the University of Ibadan and Ph.D in Drama from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He is widely travelled and has attended conferences, workshops, seminars, teaching and theatre performances in the United States of America, United Kingdom, India, Bulgaria, Germany and Ghana. His published plays *Futonje* and *Queen Ghasengeh* have been nominated for the Association of Nigerian Artistes Prize (2007) and Nigeria LNG Prize for Literature (2010) respectively. He was Awarded the British Council Fellowship which took him for research at London University as well as the Centre for West African Studies at Birmingham University in U.K. he has worked at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Ohio State University; Columbus; Wilberforce University; Technical University; Mansfield; College of Education Technology at Marion; and Graham School, Columbus where he served as Director of Culture all in the United States of America. He also worked at the University of Cape-Coast in Ghana. He is currently a Professor of the Performing Arts Department of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria where he also serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the West African Theatre and Performing Arts journal (WATPAJO).

Martin O. Owusu is a renowned professor of drama and theatre. He is the Head of Department of Theatre Arts at the Methodist University, Accra, Ghana. He is also an adjunct lecturer with the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Before his current assignments, he had taught at the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana. Martin Owusu has supervised many postgraduate students in several universities and also presently doubles as a mentor to several younger lecturers in different Ghanaian Universities. His professional achievement is largely in playwriting and directing where he excelled in his unique directorial styles which are in conformity with African folklore. He is one of the inventors of the unique African folkloric theater known as *Ananse* in which dramatic communications and dialogue are composed in metaphoric language for metaphoric messaging. He is well travelled and has attended seminars, conferences and workshops in different parts of the world. He is a member of several national and international organizations and is today regarded as one of the pioneers of modern Ghanaian drama and theatre.

Abdul Rasheed A. Adeoye is a Professor of Performing Arts and the present Head, Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. He holds Masters Degrees and a Ph.D. in Theatre Arts from the Universities of Ilorin and Ibadan respectively. He has taught Play Directing, Playwriting, Acting, Theatre History, Media Arts and Theatre Practical/Workshop Courses in the Performing Arts Department, University of Ilorin, Ilorin since 1999 to date. He is a member of several theatre organizations including the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), International Theatre Institute (ITI), International Research and Development Institute, Performance Philosophy, Committee for Relevant Arts (CORA), among others. He has edited eight volumes of the *The Performer: Ilorin Journal of the Performing Arts*, the official journal of the Department of Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. In addition, he has directed many African and non African plays including Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Tewfik Al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach*, Wale Ogunyemi's *Queen Amina of Zazzau*. Bode Sowande's *Tornadoes Full of Dreams*, Kola Ogunmola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* and others. He is also presently a member of the Governing Council of University of Ilorin, Nigeria.