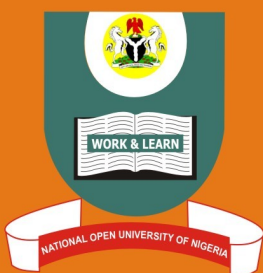


ENG 161 THEATRE WORKSHOP



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

**COURSE
GUIDE**

**ENG 161
THEATRE WORKSHOP**

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Introduction

Theatre Workshop is designed to acquaint the students with the fundamental principles and multi-faceted issues in play production. This course is a one-semester two credit course, and is suitable for beginners and people with intermediate knowledge of theatre practice.

This course consists of 16 units, comprising theatre history, artistic and technical elements of play production. The material has been especially developed for students in Africa with particular focus on Nigeria.

Knowledge of the elements of drama and theatre may be a pre-requisite for this course. This course guide tells you briefly what the course is all about, what you are expected to know in each unit; what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through the material. It also emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignment is contained in a file to be sent to you in due course. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

What You will Learn in this Course

The overall aim of Eng. 161: Theatre Workshop is to familiarize the students with the complete process of creating and producing a play. Your understanding of this course will equip you with both the theoretical and practical approaches to theatre practice.

Course Aims

The course is to equip the students with the knowledge of the multi-dimensional nature of theatre practice, especially the basic skills involved in realizing a performance. This aim will be achieved by:

- Introducing students to theatre history,
- Introducing you to the techniques of creating a play,
- Teaching you the functions of stage geography,
- Providing you information on how to generate dramatic context,
- Acquainting you with basic acting skills,
- Explaining to you the process of mounting a play,
- Exposing you to the practical means of creating the play's setting, etc.

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set out above, there are overall objectives. In addition, each unit has specific objectives. The unit objectives are

always included at the beginning of the unit. You should read them before going through the units. You should always look at the unit objectives on completing the unit to assure yourself that you have done what the unit required and acquired the competencies it aimed to inculcate.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the entire aims of this course.

On successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Discuss theatre history,
- Explain the various kinds of play house,
- Discuss fundamental principles of playwriting,
- Explain the personality of the character and basic skills in acting,
- Discuss the role of improvisation in theatre practice,
- Explain approaches to directing,
- Analyse and interpret a script,
- Explain the concept of audition, casting and rehearsal,
- Discuss the roles of costume and make-up,
- Explain the concept of scene design and craft.

Working through this Course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and other related materials you can lay your hands on. Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, which you are expected to use in assessing your understanding of the course. At the end of this course is a final examination.

Course Materials

Major component of this course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule

Study Units

There are sixteen study units in this course. They are as follows:

Module 1

- Unit 1 Theatre History: The Classical Period
- Unit 2 Theatre History: The Medieval Era
- Unit 3 Theatre History: Renaissance to Nineteenth Century
- Unit 4 Theatre History: The Modern Period
- Unit 5 The Playhouse

Module 2

- Unit 1 Acting
- Unit 2 The Art of Improvisation
- Unit 3 Directing
- Unit 4 Playwriting
- Unit 5 Play Analysis and Interpretation

Module 3

- Unit 1 Voice and Speech production
- Unit 2 Process of Play Production
- Unit 3 Scene Design and Craft
- Unit 4 Stage Management
- Unit 5 Stage Lighting
- Unit 6 Costume and Make-Up

The first four units in the Module 1 examine the history of the theatre from the Greek times to the contemporary period. Units 2, 3, 4, 5 of Module 2 and Unit 1 of Module 3 explain the artistic compound of theatre production. The rest examine the visual elements of production, the stage, its types and accoutrements.

Textbooks and References

Albright, H.D., et al (1967). *Principles of Theatre Art*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Asomba, Domba (2000). *Scene Design and Craft*. Ibadan: Caltop Books.

(2006). *Fundamentals of Stage Lighting*. Enugu: ABIC Books.

Bowskill, Derek (1979). *Acting and Stage Craft Made Simple*. London: W. H. Allen.

Brockett, Oscar G. (1999). *History of the Theatre*. Eight Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Clurman, Harold (1974). *On Directing*. New York: Macmillan.

DaSylva, Ademola (2003). *Dapo Adelugba on Theatre Practice in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Atlantis.

Duruaku, A.B.C. (1997). *A Handbook on Drama and Theatre*. Owerri: Colon Concepts.

Heffner, Hubert, et al (1959). *Modern Theatre Practice*. New York: Appleton – Century-Croft.

Okagbue, Miriam (2000). “The Importance of Voice and speech in African Theatre”.
M.A.Thesis, Department of Theatre Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Yerima, Ahmed (2003). *Basic Techniques in Playwriting*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.

NOTE: Each unit has a comprehensive list of works cited in it. Make effort to consult them.

Assignment File

This file contains the details of all the assignments you must do and submit to your tutor for marking. The mark you obtain from these assignments, will form part of the final mark you will obtain in this course.

Presentation Schedule

The presentation schedule included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of your tutor-marked assignments and when you will attend tutorials. Remember that you are required to submit your assignments according to the schedule.

Assessment

There are two aspects of assignment in this course. The first aspect includes all the tutor-marked assignments, while the second is the written examination.

In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply the information and knowledge you acquired during the course.

The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment account for 30% of the total mark accruing to the course.

At the end of the course, you will sit for a final three-hour examination that will carry 70% of the total course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

Each unit has a tutor-marked assignment. You are expected to submit all the assignments. You should be able to do the assignments from the knowledge you derived from the course, and information you acquired from the textbooks.

When you have completed the assignment for each unit, send it along with your TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that the completed assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline in the assignment file. If you cannot complete your assignment on time due to a cogent reason, consult your tutor for possible extension of time.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination for ENG 161 will be for the duration of three hours. The examination will carry 70%. It will consist of questions that will reflect the type of self-testing practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have come across. All areas of the course will be examined.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for examination. You will find the revision of your tutor-marked assignments equally useful.

Course Marking Scheme

The table below shows how actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1-4	Four assignments, best three marks of the four count as 30% of course mark.
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course marking scheme.

Course Overview

The table below brings together, the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
	Course Guide	1	
Module 1			
1	Theatre History: Classical Period	1	Assignment 1
2	Theatre History: Medieval Era	2	Assignment 2
3	Theatre History: Renaissance to 19 th Century	3	Assignment 3
4	Theatre History: Modern Period	4	Assignment 4
5	The Playhouse	5	Assignment 5
Module 2			
1	Acting	6	Assignment 6
2	The Art of Improvisation	7	Assignment 7
3	Directing	8	Assignment 8
4	Playwriting	9	Assignment 9
5	Play Analysis and Interpretation	10	Assignment 10
Module 3			
1	Voice and Speech	11	Assignment 11
2	Process of Play Production	12	Assignment 12
3	Scene Design and Craft	13	Assignment 13

4	Stage Management	14	Assignment 14
5	Stage Lighting	15	Assignment 15
6	Costume and Make-Up	16	Assignment 16
17	Revision	16	
18	Examination	17	

How to Get the Most from this Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the advantages of distance learning: you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set for you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate time.

Each of the study units are written according to common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives guide you on what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have completed the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. This habit will improve your chance of passing the course.

READING SECTION

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. So, when you need help of any sort, call on him or her. Do not fail to do so.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly
2. Organise a study schedule or time table. Refer to the course overview for more detail. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit, and how the assignments relate to the units.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason students fail is that they lag behind in their course work. If you get into any difficulty with your schedule, do let your tutor know it before it is too late for help.

4. Turn to unit one and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the overview at the beginning of each unit. You will always almost need both the study unit you are working on and one of your books on your table at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Ensure that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide).

Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials

There are eight hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, time and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you will find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- You have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises,
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, your tutor's comments on an assignment, or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Summary

ENG161: *Theatre Workshop* explains the fundamental principles and skills required in play production. By the end of the course, students should be able to answer questions bordering on: Theatre history, The art of playwriting, Improvisation, Acting, Directing Stage management, Scene design and craft, Process of play production, Costume and Make-up, Play analysis and interpretation, Functions of stage geography, etc.

Theatre is a fascinating human art, an art that requires versatile skills and talents. *Theatre Workshop* is, in the main, designed to equip the students with these multi-faceted skills of play production. Happy reading.

**MAIN
COURSE**

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MODULE 1 THEATRE HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Module 1 examines the history of theatre from the classical to the modern Period, as well as the nature and types of stage and the physical play-house. It comprises five study units. Each unit has brief introduction, objectives, main content, conclusion, summary, tutor-marked assignment, as well as references that will assist the students to gain more knowledge about the subjects.

Unit 1	Theatre History: The Classical Period
Unit 2	Theatre History: The Medieval Period
Unit 3	Theatre History: Renaissance to Nineteenth Century
Unit 4	Theatre History: The Modern Period
Unit 5	The Playhouse

UNIT 1 HISTORY OF THE THEATER: THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 History of the Theatre: The Classical Greek Period
 - 3.2 Dramatic Genres
 - 3.3 Acting in Classical Times
 - 3.4 Masks and Costumes
 - 3.5 The Chorus
 - 3.6 Conventions of the Classical Greek Theatre
 - 3.7 The Classical Greek Audience and Theatre Organization
 - 3.8 The decline of the Greek Theatre
 - 3.9 The Classical Roman Theatre
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A knowledge of the history of theatre of the classical period is very important to any student of the theatre. This is not only because much of the terms by which the theatre is known today originated in this

period, but also because the dramatic activities of this great era provide sufficient basis for comparative study of drama.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- discuss the nature of classical theatre
- explain the nature of acting in classical period
- discuss the role of drama to the Greeks
- discuss those who helped to shape classical drama
- state the sources of classical theatre.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Origin of the Classical Greek Theatre

Theatre generally is a very ancient art. Its exact point of origin is not certain because of its primordial root. However, by 5th Century B.C., Pisistratus, the leader of Athenian democracy gave official recognition to theatre, by making it part of their greatest national festival – City Dionysia. He instituted prizes for the best three plays and actors. This encouraged keen and robust dramatic activities. Dramatists enjoyed the status of nobility, and this helped tremendously in bringing the Greek theatre to a limelight.

Although drama certainly flourished in other Greek city-states, it was from Athens that what we have today as complete examples of Greek plays came. Athens maintained as it were, a certain degree of superiority in theatre of the ancient Greece because it enriched its drama with materials from its immediate past history and mythology. Thus, an understanding of Greek history and mythology is essential to the understanding of the great drama that grew out of them. Homer recorded Greek mythology in two volumes namely, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In these works, Homer recorded some of the Greek gods and how they affected life on earth. Dionysus, the god of wine and vegetation was recorded by Aristotle to have influenced the origin of Greek theatre. According to Aristotle, “tragedy, indeed, originated from those who led the dithyramb”. Dithyramb referred to choral song chanted in honour of Dionysus.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What gave impetus to the development of the Greek drama?

3.2 Dramatic Genres

Three dramatic genres existed in the Greek classical theatre. They include tragedy, comedy and satyr.

Tragedy

Tragedy, which Aristotle defined as an imitation of actions of illustrious men and women, and which aims at the purgation of pity and fear, was by far, the most esteemed of all the genres, and the first to be accorded recognition in City Dionysia. As Aristotle said, it evolved from the improvisations of the leaders of dithyramb. Why did the Greeks esteem tragedy over comedy and satyr? The answer is not far to seek. Tragedy was the only genre that provided the people an opportunity to watch their moral philosophy issue forth in actions. The classical Greek people were quite strong and boisterous in nature. They made a lot of conquest over nations and even over nature, and possessed the ability to meet almost any emergency, but they realized that in spite of the seemingly divine element in man, he has his position, very much lower than that of the gods. So, man should know himself. He should, no matter the strength of his wisdom and intelligence, seek to equate himself with gods, else he will rob himself of his life. Another Greek moral principle which tragedy helped to clarify was “nothing in excess”. According to Bowra:

The Greeks loved and admired intelligence whether practical or theoretical, and no doubt felt that they surpassed other people in their possession of it, but they had qualms about its uninhibited exercise and felt that it must be balanced by other qualities of character and self-control. If a man relied solely or chiefly on it, he was thought likely to frustrate even his own ends by being too clever and even fail to understand much that was obvious to the ordinary man (1975:43).

This is the case with King Oedipus in Sophocles’ play *Oedipus Rex*, written in 5th century B.C. In this play, Oedipus relied heavily on his wisdom and intelligence. He equated his wisdom with that of the gods and thought that he could solve any riddle of life by means of his wisdom. Whatever actions Oedipus performed in the play, he did so out of arrogance, misconceived intellection and sagacity. He felt that he had the will power to do whatever he wanted to do. His belief in his will-power made him to be found wanting in contemplative life. As Knox opines, “in the play, Oedipus’ will to action never falters, and it forces Tiresias, Jocasta and the Shepherd, in spite of their reluctance, to play

their part in the swift progress towards the discovery of the truth and his downfall” (1984:138).

So tragedy was developed to teach the youth, the society’s conventional wisdom. In spite of their boisterous nature, “the Greeks were keenly aware of life’s uncertainty and imminence of death ... the swift passing of all that is beautiful and joyous” (Hamilton, 1973:24). This is why the chorus at the end of the play, *Oedipus Rex* comments:

People of Thebes, my countrymen, look on Oedipus. He solved the famous riddle with his brilliance; he rose to power a man beyond all power. Who could behold his greatness without envy?

Now what a black sea of terror has overwhelmed him. Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day, count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.

Comedy

The Greek Comedy developed much later than tragedy. It was not officially recognized as part of City Dionysia and as such was not granted chorus until 487 B.C. Although from that time onward, comedy became fully part of City Dionysia, it was to find its true abode in Leneia – another form of Dionysiac festival devoted to merry making.

The comedy was a sort of commentary on Greek society, its leadership, literature and above all, the Peloponnesian war. Aristophanes was the greatest of all the classical Greek comedians. A property -owning gentleman, he hated the damaging and protracted war between Athens and Sparta. According to Luis Vargas, “His ideal of Athenian manhood he found in the men who fought a hero’s fight at Marathon to repel the Persian invader and save their country and whose courage and devotion had laid the foundations of Athenian greatness, and had made her the first city state of Greek world”. Comedy in the 5th century B.C. was a mixture of political satire, buffoonery, wit, humour and unbridled fun. Every aspect of social, political, as well as philosophical aspect of life that was deemed bad elicited attention. Nothing was considered sacred, even gods whose activities were questionable were satirized in a bawdy fashion. In a nutshell, the classical Greek comedy exercised great deal of license of tongue. This enabled it to satirize persons, institution and even works of art that were considered sub-standard.

Satyr

Information on satyr is very scanty. This is because apart from the *Cyclops* written by Euripides, no other play of satyr tradition is extant. From available sources, the satyr genre was named after the mythical,

goatish and half-human companions of Dionysus. The satyr came between heavy tragic episodes in order to help reduce tension. It was a highly wild play filled with exaggerated dance.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Why was tragedy so dear to the Greeks?

3.3 Acting in Classical Times

Acting in classical theatre was highly stylized. Speeches were rendered in a declamatory manner. This was essentially because theatre was an open door affair, and the audience was quite large in number. The nature of the performance environment placed considerable task on the voice. According to Oscar G. Brockett, the Greeks “judged actors above all by the beauty of vocal tone and ability to adapt to manner of speaking to mood and character”. Since voice projection was in high demand, adequate voice training and exercises were taken seriously. Acting departed from realism, and tended towards exaggeration because of the problem of visibility. There were too many people in the audience. Hence many realistic movements gestures and mannerism might not reach them. Even the body and height of actors were enhanced by padding and wearing of high-heeled shoes and artificial hair do.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the nature of acting in classical Greek Theatre.

3.4 Masks and Costumes

Masks and costumes played fundamental roles in classical Greek theatre. The masks were not designed for purposes of achieving realism, rather they were employed to achieve symbolic effect. Though masks might carry nuances of emotion, they were conventionalized in use. Tragic masks were horrifying while comic masks exaggerated the attributes of the characters they represent. Masks for the chorus represented animals and birds.

Apart from the conventionalized use of masks, they were equally designed to help enhance the height of actors in order to make them visible to the audience, as well as to enable actors change roles and also to play female roles, since actresses were not permitted on Greek stage.

Costumes worn by actors were modified contemporary Athenian dresses. Tragic actors wore beautiful garments which represented the

aristocratic tendency of tragedy. However, in bitter situations, tragic characters wore torn dresses. We observed this from the statements of actors in some of the plays of Sophocles and Euripides. According to Oscar Brockett:

In addition to the tunic (chiton) both actors and chorus might wear a short cloak (chlamys or a long one (himation). The identity of both actors and chorus might be established in part by symbolic properties: the king by his scepter, the warrior by his spear, the suppliant by his branch, the herald by his wreath, and so on (1999:29).

Apart from the masks and the costumes, tragic actors also wore high-heeled thick boots called kothoroi and an exaggerated hair known as onkus. The purpose of these was to enhance the actors height for easy visibility.

Comic actors wore the dresses of the lowborn and these costumes were made funny by having them ill-fitted, too short and very tight. The essence was to emphasize comic nudity, as Brockett would say. Sexual attributes were equally emphasized through costumes. For example, male characters, excluding the chorus wore phalluses to emphasize the fertility aim of the dionysiac festival.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss the nature of the comic costumes.

3.5 The Chorus

The chorus played significant roles in the classical Greek theatre. It was made of Athenian men who stood on the stage commenting on incidents and characters, as well as dancing and singing in between episodes. Originally, the chorus was said to be fifty in number, but with the introduction of several characters, the number appeared to have been reduced to twelve. In fact, as time went by, the position of the chorus appeared to be crippled. They in fact, were non-existent in some plays of Euripides.

In spite of the fate of the chorus in the 4th Century B.C., it played dominant roles in the Greek theatre of the 5th Century B.C. The chorus performed the following functions:

- In some plays, it supplied ethical and social background. It played this role in *Oedipus The King* by Sophocles, and in *The Oresteian Trilogy* by Aeschylus.
- Sometimes the chorus played the role of characters in plays, giving advice, expressing opinion etc.
- The chorus helped to create mood
- It equally helped to create rhythm and pause to enable the audience to reflect on what has been presented.
- The chorus equally served as idea spectators, reacting to the play in the manner the audience would have reacted
- The chorus equally coloured performances with songs and dances. This helped to heighten dramatic effect.

The Greeks had great interest in dance, and would not tolerate any shoddy performance of it. Consequently, choruses were assigned to playwrights 11 months before the actual performance. Training of the chorus was quite protracted and arduous.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Identify and discuss any two functions of the chorus.

3.6 Conventions of the Classical Greek Theatre

Many conventions marked the practice of theatre in the classical Greek period. These conventions are as follows:

- Because of the sacred nature of the festival of Dionysus, women were never allowed to mount the Greek stage.
- As a result of the foregoing, roles written for women were played by young men, who disguised themselves by wearing masks and feminine dresses.
- Violent actions, such as killing, stabbing, and death, all took place backstage. Victims of such violence were revealed on stage to the spectators by means of a device called ekkyklema.
- Subject matters of plays were drawn from history and popular myths. As a result of this, plays had late point of attack. This means that plots of plays began not from the beginning of the story that informed plays, but always from the crisis point.
- Only three actors were permitted on stage to perform at once.
- All actors, including the chorus wore masks.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

List and discuss three conventions of the Greek theatre.

3.7 The Classical Greek Audience and Theatre Organisation

Theatre going during the classical Greek period was a matter of civic obligation. Since City Dionysia was the greatest Athenian festival, public holidays were declared for the six days the festival lasted. As a result of this, every healthy Athenian citizen, man, woman, girl, boy or slave was expected to attend the theatre. According to Luis Vargas:

A theatregoer in those days would be prepared to spend the whole day in the theatre. If he were wise, he would bring some food and wine with him, and join the hurrying crowd of fellow Athenians and visitors at dawn, anxious to secure the best seat possible (1960:26).

The above statement implies that the Athenian theatregoer regarded theatre going with much enthusiasm, as there were no cinema halls, nor magazines or videos to compete for attention. They expressed their feeling about performances and actors overtly and spontaneously. They catcalled and booed bad actors, as well as applauded wonderful performers. Due to the fact that they held their gods in high esteem, they attacked playwrights such as Euripides who attempted to present their gods in bad light.

The dramatists were looked upon as ministers of religion during the classical Greek times. They played significant role in moulding the “national mind and character”. Because of this sacred role played by the theatre, the city-state catered for the financial requirements of play productions. Playwrights who wanted their plays to be produced were required to apply to the state magistrate known as the archon for approval and for the assignment of the chorus and the choragus who would bear the financial responsibility of training and maintaining the chorus. The chorogoi were wealthy men who acted as financial benefactors to productions. According to Vargas, “they are, the classical equivalent of ‘Angels’ who back plays today on Broadway or Shaftesbury” (27). Generous chorogoi lavished their money on the chorus. This enabled them to earn more respect among the people. The state paid the actors and the winning playwrights out of the public funds. Dramatic contests were very keen and highly competitive. Judges elected by the state awarded prizes. In the competition, each playwright was required to submit four plays, three tragic play and one satyr.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Who sponsored the classical Greek productions?

3.8 The Decline of the Classical Greek Theatre

The classical Greek theatre extended from about 534-300 B.C. Many factors were responsible for the fall of this great theatre. These factors were internal, as well as external.

Internal Factors

The major internal cause was the terrible effect of the Peloponnesian war. This war that lasted between 431-401 B.C. was fought between Athens and Sparta. It caused Athens to lose enormous human and material resources. After the Peloponnesian war, economic and political crisis developed. The result of the war, widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots greatly. This degenerated into bitter class struggle. Athenian democracy suffered terrible setbacks following the death of Pericles in 429 B.C. Uncontrollable suspicion among Athenian leaders encouraged extreme individualism. Individuals began to pay attention to private needs. State and the chorogoi jettisoned theatre sponsorship, and the theatre became extremely aristocratic; only individuals with sound financial standing could afford the pleasure of attending the theatre. Hence the people's theatre made way for Aristocratic pastimes.

Another important internal factor was the growing secularization of thinking which crept into the theatre scenes through the plays of Euripides. Euripides became too advanced in his thinking. He questioned things, which hitherto had been taken for granted. For example he subjected the Greek gods to great scrutiny in order to reveal their vulnerability. As a sophist, he sought to engage the people in argument based on rational thinking. The manner in which Euripides handled the gods especially compelled many Athenians to shun the theatre. In fact, it was on record that he was once stoned out of the stage by angry Athenians for subjecting their gods to human passions.

External Factor

In about 358 B.C., Philip of Macedon and his popular son, Alexander the Great, after series of attacks, conquered all the Greek City-States, including Athens. Material and human resources were greatly dissipated, and this left Athens sore wounded. However, as Athens was nursing the wound of defeat, the all-powerful Roman Empire extended its reign to it. This was the final blow that devastated the classical Greek civilization and theatre.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

What factors brought about the fall of the classical Greek theatre?

3.9 The Classical Roman Theatre

Before their contact with the Greek culture, the Romans had had their own unwritten indigenous theatre forms known as the fescenine verse, and the more popular Fabulla Atellana. The latter was noted for its stock characters and slapstick actions. When they overran and conquered the Greek City-States, “the Roman were content to take over much of the Greek drama as a model but they had themselves a great gift for adopting what they had acquired for their own purposes” (Vargas, 71). They experimented with tragedy and comedy but the mime and pantomime later overwhelmed the stage.

Comedy

The Romans preferred comedy to tragedy because they essentially perceived theatre as means of mere entertainment, and not an avenue to explain moral principles. They imitated the Greeks’ new comedy which centred on domestic affairs such as mistaken identity, marital infidelity, drunkenness etc. Though the Romans emulated the Greeks, they did not just imitate them, but added some changes. The changes are as follows:

- There was no attempt to divide plays into scenes and acts
- The chorus was abandoned completely
- Occasionally, music accompanied dialogue
- Roman comedy dealt with the affairs of well-to-do middle class.
- Roman comedy made extensive use of stock characters.

Plautus and Terence were the most famous comic writers of the classical Roman period.

Seneca and the Tragic Genre

Seneca was the greatest of all the Roman tragedians, and the one who influenced the world theatre tremendously. He was a great moralist who tested the philosophy of stoicism dramatically. He overloaded his plays with moral sentiments about human behaviour. He made use of rhetorical language and extensive use of violence in order to reveal the animalistic tendency of man. He made great use of melodramatic techniques. For example, his characters were either completely good or depraved. He ensured that the villain never escaped punishment. He divided his plays into five-acts, and this was later to influenced Shakespeare and other Renaissance playwrights greatly.

Mime and Pantomime

By the First Century A.D., mime and pantomime had developed to become the most popular forms of dramatic performances. While the Plebeians favoured the mime, the pantomime was championed by the Patricians, that is the upper class. Their themes were drawn from social issues ranging from adultery to more serious but comical ones. Sometimes they mocked and ridiculed Christianity and its values. They used vile tongue and abusive language against the church. The church fought back and got the government whose officials were sometimes attacked to ban public presentation of drama of whatever type.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

What factor led to the collapse of the Roman theatre?

4.0 CONCLUSION

In the classical Greek era, theatre was an act of worship. Playwrights and actors were very highly esteemed. Dramatists were acknowledged as ministers of religion who played the sacred role of helping to mould the mind and the characters of the citizens.

However, in classical Roman society, the theatre was simply seen as a means of entertainment where slaves indulged in slapstick and buffoonery actions to please their masters.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we took a look at the history of the theatre of the classical period. Specifically, we examined the role of the theatre, the nature of acting, the function of the chorus, the type of audience, dramatic genres, how the theatre was organized, as well as the factors that brought about the decline of the classical theatre of Greece and Rome.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the role of tragedy to the classical Greeks.

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UNIT 2 HISTORY OF THE THEATRE: THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

CONTENTS

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- 2.0 Objectives
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 - 3.1 Theatre in the Early Medieval Period
 - 3.2 Theatre in the Later Part of Medieval Period
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 - 3.4 Actors and Acting
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 - 3.6 Contributions of the Medieval Theatre
 - 3.7 Factors that Led to the Death of Medieval Theatre
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The theatre during the medieval or middle ages was very fascinating. One interesting thing about that period was that the theatre lived a chequered life. From the collapse of the Roman theatre up until about 10th Century A.D, which marked the first part of the Christian era, the theatre was highly disparaged by the church, which saw it as an act of paganism. But in the later part of the Middle ages, the church embraced and employed the theatre as a means of evangelization. In this unit, we will look at how the theatre fared during this great epoch in human history. We will examine the types of medieval drama, nature of acting, characterization and the contributions of the medieval theatre to the overall development of the world theatre.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this unit, the students should be able to:

- explain why theatre led a chequered life during the medieval era
- discuss the types of medieval theatre
- explain medieval actors and acting
- discuss the role of the theatre in the promotion of evangelism
- discuss the contributions of medieval theatre.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Theatre in the Early Medieval Period

The period between 7th to 10th Century A.D. was often regarded as the early part of the medieval period. During this period, the theatre was chased into obscurity by the leadership of the church. According to Bernard F. Dukore (1974):

Writing before the fall of the Roman Empire, on the eve of the Middle Ages, the harsh, intolerant, fierce Tertullian (as Mathew Arnorld called him) reflected and also had a great influence on church polity. The first Christian work in Latin to deal with the morality of the theatre for Christians, his *On the Spectacles*, take the position that theatrical spectacles of all types – tragedies, circuses, whatever – are among the sins of the world, offend God, and should be shunned by all good Christians (83).

Tertullian saw drama, in fact, as a form of lust. He concluded that the theatre belonged to the devil. St. Augustine expressed the same opinion. He looked at the theatre as an act of paganism that move people to immorality. In Dukore's view, Saint Augustine "in decrying the depravities and other poets, applauds Plato for having excluded poets from his ideal state" (83).

Although there were almost a general outcry against the theatre during the early part of the medieval period, and virtually non-existent of public theatrical performances, mimers and jugglers performed in secret and in a guerrilla fashion.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the fate of the theatre during the early part of the medieval period.

3.2 The Theatre in the Later Part of the Medieval Period

From about 10th Century A.D., the theatre began to shake off the apathy that overwhelmed it for a very long time. Surprisingly, it was the church which greatly persecuted it that turned around and embraced it tenaciously for the purpose of evangelism. It is important to note that the theatre of the middle ages was not a national affair, but a sort of movement that could be traced in every European country.

The Religious Drama

Talking about the original source of the Medieval theatre, Allardyce Nicoll has this to say:

The characteristic drama of the Middle Ages was an independent development, owing absolutely nothing to the earlier tradition. As is well known, its source is to be sought for in a far different place, in the very heart of the Catholic Church. Finding its basis in the symbolic nature of the service of the Mass, this new drama developed out of a desire on the part of the clergy to place the salient facts of Christ's life more realistically before the congregation (1970:49).

The Mass or the Liturgy is essentially the celebration of the most critical moments in the life of Jesus Christ. It is the enactment of certain activities and speech of Jesus by the priests before the congregation. The Liturgy contains symbolic and mimetic actions, and it is from this dramatic potential of the Mass that the great liturgical drama of the medieval period developed. Christmas and Easter which are the greatest Christian festivals formed the basis for the earliest liturgical drama.

The oldest Easter drama is called the *Quem quaeritis* in Latin. This drama developed from the encounter between the Angel and the three Marys who had gone to the tomb of Jesus to anoint it on the resurrection morning. The *quem quaeritis* consists of "a piece of four-lined dialogue in which a couple of priests, arraying themselves as angels, are confronted by two other priests whose robes show that they are women" (Nicoll, 49). The four-lined dialogue is as follows:

Angels: Whom are you looking for in the tomb, O Christian women?
 Women: Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified O heavenly ones.
 Angels: He is not here; he has risen as he foretold. Go and announce that he has risen from the tomb.

Again, it is natural that after the dramatization of the Easter events, Christmas and other Christian feasts would be dramatized. The Christmas drama developed from the encounter between the angels of God and the shepherds who were watching the flock during the night Christ was born. Describing the early sequence of Christmas drama, Adardyce Nicoll opines:

The shepherds see the star which heralds the birth of Christ, and come to lay their luscious gifts on his cradle. Later three Kings arrive with their

more precious presents; and still later Herod rants and raves when he hears that a King of Kings has been born into the world (50).

The religious drama that began from the simple enactment of the mass or liturgy later developed into a more elaborate form known as the mystery play, and later, the morality play.

The Mystery Play

The mystery play can be defined as a dramatic rendering of the implication of the Holy Scripture. The life of Christ and that of the saints, as well as the genesis and fall of man formed the materials for the composition of the mystery play(s). In the mystery plays, Biblical stories were presented in a picturesque manner before the audience or the congregation.

The texts of mystery plays ran in cycle and so did their performances. And this is the reason the mystery plays are often referred to as the cycle plays. Specific plays that examined the miracles performed by Jesus Christ himself and those performed by his apostles and the Saints were known as the miracle plays.

By 14th Century, the production of the mystery plays became an event for the whole city in France and England. Public holidays were granted for the people throughout the period the performance lasted. Also, “the feast of Corpus Christ, which was first celebrated in 1311 A.D. gave a further impetus to the movement, as the feast was celebrated by a procession and consequently became the central occasion for the performance of these pieces, all of which were religious in character” (Vargas, 78). In England, the Chester, York and Wakefield mystery plays survived. Examples of the plays include:

The Second Shepherd Play, Abraham and Isaac, and The Woman taken in for adultery, etc.

The Morality Play

The morality play was the last type of dramatic form developed during the medieval period. The morality play was, in the main, a dramatization of the struggle between vice and virtue for the soul of man. Luis Vargas opines that:

The moralities were plays which dealt in personification of human characteristics, vices or virtues. It was a convenient and effective way of telling a tale on the boards and pointing a moral (79).

The morality plays held all manners of vices to scorn, but they extolled and glorified all forms of virtue. Although the moralities had religious undertone, they aimed at cultivating right attitude to life than propagating faith. Often in the morality play, man is misled by his evil human nature, to live ungodly life, but he usually repents and turns unto the path of righteousness. The major goal of the morality play is to reconcile man to his creator. The characters of the moralities are no longer scriptural, but mainly abstract qualities whose purpose is to heighten the intellectual appeal of the drama.

The most popular of all the surviving morality plays is *Everyman*. In this play whose author is unknown, God sends his messenger, Death to summon Everyman to come and render account of his stewardship on earth. Everyman tries to get some of his earthly friends and companions to accompany him on the journey, but they refused. In the end, he is deserted. Only Good-deeds accepts to go with him. But on earth, Everyman's store of good-deeds is so weak and insignificant. Finally, the feeble good-deeds leads Everyman to confession and after penance, Everyman finds himself in a state of Grace. Under the state of Grace, Good-deeds accompanies him to the grave.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Distinguish between Mystery and Morality plays.

Drama outside the Church

By the later part of the 12th Century, the dramatization of the mass and the miracles appeared to be submerging the essence of church services and Christian festivals. "Then came doubt in the minds of the ecclesiastical authorities, for the thing which they had called into being was becoming too great" (Nicoll, 50). People no longer paid attention to the didactic element or dramatized message, but went to the church to enjoy the entertainment aspect of the drama. Not so long, the church authorities pushed drama out of the church. But "the drama however, had been born and had grown into a lusty and lovable child; it could not die now, and the role of guardian was assumed by the laity"(50). When the laity took over the drama, they widened its scope by introducing circular matters. This was followed by mounting criticism from the church authorities. Finally, the ecclesiastical authorities followed up their criticism with series of prohibitive edicts. However, according to Oscar Brockett:

The trend toward secular concern was gradual but continuous. It was a time of transition and change during which medieval ideas and practices coexisted with others that would give rise to the Renaissance (91).

Vargas suggested that these might well have been the time when the descendants of the ancient mimes, the minstrels and wandering tumblers, were called upon to add their professional skill in order to season and spice the theatrical dish.

A major development in the theatre outside the church was the introduction of vernacular. Inside the church, Latin which was the language of the service, and a language in common use by scholars was equally employed in dramatic productions. But once the drama was taken out of the church, vernacular languages were caused to replace Latin in order to make the theatre truly the people's affair. Oscar Brockett expressed the view that the change from Latin to vernacular, led to the substitution of spoken for chanted dialogues and facilitated the transition from clerical to non clerical actors, as well as indicated a major step toward national, and away from international drama, which Latin had encouraged (93).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Why was drama taken out of the church?

Actors and Acting

Acting was banned during the early part of the Middle Ages. However, acting by this time was sustained by mimers, tumblers and jugglers who performed in a guerrilla fashion.

Nonetheless, when the need to dramatize church services encouraged the ecclesiastical authorities to embrace the theatre, priests were employed as actors. At this point, acting was stylized and dialogues chanted in Latin. When the theatre was driven outside the church, it grew elaborately, and a considerable number of actors were needed to produce plays, which now ran in cycles. Brockett records that "For the *Acts of the Apostles*, presented in Bourges, the 494 roles were distributed among 300 actors". He, however, notes "most plays of this scope date from the 16th Century and seem to mark a considerable increase in numbers of roles over earlier works (97). This indicates that role doubling then was a common practice.

Actors were drawn from the local people, especially from the traders, members of guilds and working class people. In France and England, actors were paid certain salaries which appeared to increase as time went by. In England, actors appeared to be only men. In France, there are records of women participating in production prior to 1550. Allardyce Nicoll recorded that “one young amateur actress at Metz in 1468 spoke no fewer than 2300 lines as Saint Cathrine – winning as her reward the hand of a gentleman in marriage”(65). Though some scholars described medieval acting as crude, Allardyce Nicoll expressed the view that air of seriousness pervaded it. Violent actions were demanded by the audience. For example, Herod had to rant on the pageant and on the street. The effect of Christ’s crucifixion could not be complete unless the actor himself suffered (66). There was great attempt to achieve realism on stage. But according to Oscar Brockett:

Attempts to be realistic occasionally exposed performers to considerable danger. At Metz (France) in 1437, the actor playing Judas almost died while being hanged; at Seurre (France) in 1496, Satan’s costume caught fire. Actors in Hell scenes were often injured by cannons and other devices used to create noise, fire and smoke (98).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss the nature of acting during the medieval period.

3.5 Other Forms of Theatrical Activities

Apart from the great liturgical and cycle plays, other forms of theatrical activities existed to enliven and cheer the spirits of both the courtiers and the common folk, and these forms appeared to have influenced greatly the great Renaissance drama that followed.

Tournaments, Pageant and Mumming

Tournaments began in the early part of the Middle Ages as a means of training the knights. According to Brockett, “During thirteenth century, because a number of contestants had been killed, reforms in the conduct of tournaments were introduced, and by 1300 dramatic elements had begun to creep in (114). In this courtly combat and form of entertainment, religious symbolisms were given secular twist.

The pageant referred to brilliant and royal entry of kings and their retinue in colourful costumes and in a spectacular processional form. The pageant could be a herald for warfare, or an avenue for

entertainment, and means of paying royalty to ruling or visiting kings. It was usually accompanied by music and fanfare.

Mummings and disguising were performed at courts when tournaments were over, during weddings and other occasions of merriment. In gay occasions, as well as in dull weathers, young men dressed in extravagant and spectacular costumes to enliven the banqueting halls of the kings and the noble men.

When plays were produced or staged within the church, ecclesiastical authorities sponsored and organized productions. However, when the church drove the theatre outside, and the theatre got severed with the church, plays which had already meant much to the people were taken over by trade guilds. According to Vargas, in England where the trade guilds took over the task of training the actors and financing productions, the great cycles of plays – centered around towns such as York, Wakefield, Chester and Coventry.

In France, the same arrangement obtained. Plays were organized and financed by a group known as *Confrerie de la Passion* established in Paris by Charles VI on 4th December, 1402. Allardyce Nicoll, posits that “It is with the establishment of this company at the Hospital de la Trinite that we first meet in Europe with a permanent dramatic troupe settled at a definite theatre” (65). Apart from financing productions, craft guilds also maintained close contact with the Churches. Each had a chaplain and a Patron Saint. They equally helped in charity work, as well as in sponsoring capital intensive church activities.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Who sponsored play productions during the medieval period?

3.6 Contributions of the Medieval Theatre

The Medieval theatre contributed the following towards the overall development of the theatre:

- Evolution of stag lighting
- Development of simultaneous staging
- Development of machinery for scenic effects.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What is simultaneous staging?

3.7 Factors that Led to the Death of the Medieval Theatre

Many factors were responsible for the collapse of the medieval theatre. They include the following:

Interest in Secular Affairs

By the end of the 15th Century, wealthy Italian businessmen and patrons of the theatre showed great enthusiasm and flair for plays based on the classical Greek and Roman theatrical models. This new interest in plays with secular subject-matters impaired the writing and production of religious drama.

Wrangling Within the Church

During the greater part of the Middle Ages, the Pope was at the helm of both religious and secular life worldwide. However, Oscar G. Brockett observes that:

As nations began to take shape, Princes sought ways of gaining control over religious affairs within their territories.... By the fifteenth century, therefore, the church had been greatly weakened and many of its practices, perhaps most notoriously the selling of indulgences (or spiritual pardons), had led to demands for reform.

Martin Luther in Germany and Henry VIII of England were notable figures, who challenged the supremacy of the Pope and certain catholic doctrines. In 1534, Henry VIII abandoned the Church of Rome and founded the Anglican Order. This led to bitter wars of which drama was occasionally employed as means of warfare. By 1548, France banned the production of religious drama in its territory. England and Spain did likewise in 1588 and 1765 respectively.

The Evolution of the University

By 12th Century, universities began to spring up in European countries. These universities began to challenge orthodox and certain religious beliefs. Special attention was paid to man and his potentials as well as the natural environment and phenomena. This new spirit of scholarship drew many people away from religious matters, leading to the decline of religious drama.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Discuss one factor that helped to bring about the end of religious drama of the medieval period.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained that the drama of the medieval period, which lasted for about 600 years, developed from the liturgy. This great drama utilized Latin which was the language of services in the church, as well as language of scholarship. This gave medieval theatre an international character. We equally maintained that the liturgical drama was born out of the need of the ecclesiastical authorities to make biblical messages very clear and graphical to the masses.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we explored the origin and nature of medieval theatre. We also examined the scope and types of medieval drama, as well as the nature of acting and the factors that brought medieval theatre to an end.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Trace the source of medieval drama.

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UNIT 3 HISTORY OF THE THEATRE: RENAISSANCE TO NINETEENTH CENTURY

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Concept of the Renaissance
 - 3.2 Factors that Influenced the Renaissance
 - 3.3 Italian Renaissance
 - 3.4 The Elizabethan Age
 - 3.5 The French Neoclassicism
 - 3.7 Romanticism
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, attempt is made to discuss the history of the theatre from the great age in history of human civilization known as the Renaissance period to the 19th Century. In this study, we will trace the factors that brought about the Renaissance, the distinguishing features of Renaissance drama, as well as that of the Restoration, and the Romantic theatre of the 19th Century. We will examine the dramatic genres, acting, theatre organization and certain playwrights who made the epoch under discussion great.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is believed that at the end of this unit, the students should be in a position to discuss the following:

- The concept of the Renaissance,
- The nature of Renaissance theatre,
- The Neoclassical ideals,
- The major playwright of the period,
- The nature of the Restoration theatre,
- What Romantic drama is all about,
- The factors that brought about these dramas,
- The reasons for the collapse of each dramatic culture under survey,
- The conventions that governed dramatic practices during the period.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Renaissance

The great age in human civilization, which historians tagged the Renaissance, was a landmark in the history of human development. The Renaissance was the forerunner of modernity. Everything we consider modern today took root in this great epoch of human history. In their great book, *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish state unequivocally that:

The idea of the Renaissance is a singularly complicated one. Historians differ sharply as to when it began and when it ended. Some see its beginning as early as the 12th or 13th Centuries; others prolonged the Middle Ages until as late as the 17th Century. Some historians date the Renaissance from the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, on the grounds that this drove Greek scholars westwards into Mediterranean Europe; others hold that the Renaissance was really set in motion by the rapid printing of books from movable types, which was introduced about 1451 and became common 50 years later (22).

We will not go into the debate about the origin of the Renaissance. However, it is important to note that all the factors above helped to promote the Renaissance in one way or another. Indeed, the Renaissance was a complex period.

Apart from the problem of dating, one undeniable factor that characterizes the Renaissance as a complex period is its backward and forward-looking tendencies. In the first place, interest in classical learning led to the revival of the works of ancient Greek and Roman authors. In the theatre, the plays of Greek tragedians, and notably those of Seneca, Plautus and Terence were discovered, studied and produced according to the artistic precepts of Horace and Aristotle. It is in this regard that the Renaissance is often described as the revival, or a derivative period whose golden drama was a return to the past.

In its forward-looking tendency, the Renaissance is seen as the forerunner of modern civilization. This is because individualism, capitalism, humanism and empiricism, the secular concept of the state, huge scientific discoveries and great voyages of exploration all took root in this age. In its forward-looking, the Renaissance man freed himself from the clutches of medieval thought, and sought to discover the wonders of life and the world based on scientific thinking and

discoveries. There was a fierce belief in human possibilities. As Bronowski and Mazlish would say, “men became self-willed, and this self-made man of the new Renaissance wanted to grasp men and nature through senses, physically in handfuls”. There was a mounting impatience as men strive to attain glory, fame, as well as to know, discover and invent. A belief in the unlimited endowment of man made him a habitual explorer of the unknown.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Why is the Renaissance said to be a complex period?

3.2 Factors that Influenced the Renaissance

Many factors were responsible for the emergence of the Renaissance. Some of them include the following:

Humanism

Humanism was the thought that guided the Renaissance. It is by definition, the movement of thinking towards the upgrading of human dignity. According to Oscar Brockett, it “marked a return to concern for the worth of humanity and earthly life, not merely as a preparation for eternity but as valuable in themselves”(121). The humanists believed that man was endlessly gifted and that his genius must be allowed to flower. Humanism called for secularization of thinking and a new evaluation of the value of man as a being with rationality. It greatly opposed the medieval notion of man as a dependent creature in dire need of salvation.

Upsurge of Interest in Classical Learning

Because the classical world of Greece and Rome provided a model in drama, a deep-rooted passion for the classical artistic beauty and form led to the revival of classical scholarship. This interest in the newly found classical styles and genres created models for dramatic composition in which the qualities of poise and balance, decorum and verisimilitude were highly prized, especially in Italy and France where they were made into rules. In these countries the infatuation for the writings of Horace and more importantly that of Aristotle, led the enthusiastic followers of the theatre in classical fashion, to carry things to the extreme, to the point that geniuses were hindered from flowering.

The Fall of Constantinople

The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 equally helped to facilitate the development of the theatre during the Renaissance period. This fall accelerated the movement of Greek scholars to Italy. However, it is necessary to observe that the impulse for classical learning was already in existence before the influx of scholars from Byzantium. This movement of scholars was just a catalyst that helped to intensify the reaction against the medieval theology and philosophy, which was already in progress.

Quest for Knowledge and Adventure

Another factor that promoted the Renaissance was the quest for new knowledge and the spirit of adventurism. With the humanist feeling that man was endlessly gifted and that knowledge is boundless, men began to scientifically question existing order, unbelievable ideas were rejected. The quest for new knowledge led to many breakthroughs in the theatre, especially in the playhouse.

Emergence of the Printing Press

The invention of the printing machine by Guttenberg in 1451 helped in the mass production of plays, critical essays and commentaries.

The Economic Factor

Italy then was a major terminus of trade routes for Europe, Asia and Africa. As a result of its position, many trading cities developed. Money made from trades by the growing middle class helped to encourage urban life and to destroy feudalism. In important trading cities like Venice, Florence, Vicenza, etc., the middle class merchants who were now urbanized, used their profit to finance the construction of expensive theatre buildings and to promote play production.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List and discuss two factors that influenced the Renaissance.

Italian Renaissance

Italy was the birthplace of the Renaissance. In Italy, the theatre underwent great revolution in dramatic literature, architecture and scenery. It recorded tremendous achievements in theatre architecture and scenery. This will be discussed in separate unit dealing with the playhouse.

In terms of dramaturgic writing, Italy failed to attain the height which was attained in England and Spain with the plays of Shakespeare and *lope de Vega*. Insistence upon the dramatic precepts of Aristotle and Horace as we mentioned before, became according to Luis Vargas, “the rock’ upon which the theatre of the Renaissance in Italy finally shattered itself and dissolved into a thousand useless splinters”(83). Fanatical misapplication of rules prevented eager playwrights from writing “plays which would satisfy the yearnings of an adventurous, spacious, rich and dangerous age”(83). Fed up with the heavily rule-governed plays, the audiences according to Vargas, “soon grew restive and paid more attention to the *intermezzi* between the acts, which were mostly more uninhibited items in which music played a predominant part”.

Other forms of theatrical activities apart from tragedy and comedy include the pastoral, which dwelt on nomadic lifestyle especially their love affair; the opera, an essentially musical drama, as well as *commedia dell’arte*. *Commedia dell’arte* gave Europe its first professional troupe of actors. In the words of Luis Vargas:

Commedia dell’ arte was a form of play unique in many ways. In the first place, there was no written script, no part to be learned by heart. The actors, in effect, had to be their own authors, they were presented merely with the outline of scene to be played, it was up to them as experienced professional actors to supply the appropriate words and actions to obtain the necessary theatrical effect desired. This form of improvised drama could only be successfully handled by groups of actors who had undergone rigorous training in the special techniques required (85-86).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Why did Italy fail to produce great plays during the Renaissance?

The Elizabethan Age

The English counterpart of the Italian Renaissance was the Elizabethan age, which began around 1588 when Queen Elizabeth I ascended the throne of England. It ended with the death of William Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist of the period. According to Bronowski and Mazlish, “the Elizabethan Age is a difficult period to describe fairly because it is so rich, so wide in its cultural reach and so full of great men...”(155). These authors in describing the temper of this period noted that it was an “age of great tempestuous passion”, where “all life seemed to be heroic, endless new worlds awaited discovery, and no boundary existed to knowledge” (166).

Factors that led to the Greatness of the Elizabethan Period

Many factors accounted for the greatness of the Elizabeth age. A few of them are:

1. The spectacular and obvious cause of England's greatness of this period could be traced to the navigational achievements of men like Raleigh, Hawkins, Cavendish and Drake, among others. These navigators explored and annexed territories, bringing home great treasures and gold.
2. The presence of puritans helped to transform England into a business and manufacturing state.
3. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 made England to bestride the whole world like a colossus. Bronowski and Mazlish express the view that, "the Elizabethan's age great literary adventure sprang from the optimism and sense of destiny which the defeat of the Armada, almost by divine intervention, inspired in the minds and hearts of Englishman" (156).

The Elizabethan Theatre

From about 1550, English drama began to free itself from the medieval influence. The inns and the universities had touch of classicism "but before long attention was shifted to popular interest."

In fact, the latter plays of the Elizabethan age were written for the popular audience who never cared for rule-governed plays. This audience needed plays that were truly English, both in temper and taste, plays that would marry their native theatrical activities with the passions of the period. Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare specially got hold of the audience by writing and producing plays that corresponded with the temper and taste of the age.

Marlowe portrayed clearly, and in true colours, the Elizabethans' lusts for gold, knowledge and power. He gave the Elizabethans the scenes of vigour, sensation and spectacle that thrilled them. In *Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, *King Edward II* and the *Jew of Malta* Marlowe captured the "enthusiasm of the audiences for whom play going had become a passion" (Vargas, 101).

According to Oscar Brockett:

Shakespeare was by far the most comprehensive, sensitive, and dramatically effective playwright of his time. He attempted almost all the popular dramatic types and subjects of his age, and in each instance gave them their most effective expression (157).

With him, the Elizabethan age attained its zenith in theatrical productions. Shakespeare never cared for any rules; he mixed the gay with the serious the patricians with the plebeians in the same dramatic pot. Oftentimes, his plays defy classification. His scenes appear closely interwoven as in the lives of human beings. Andrei Serban rightly observes that:

It never takes more than three pages for the situation of a Shakespeare play to change completely as if another play has entered and interrupted the action. A play by Racine or Corneille establishes a single mood that continues for two hours, but Shakespeare gives us a kaleidoscope of moods, presenting many shifting aspects of life and the human condition (252).

Shakespeare was at his best in mingling various kinds of moods and human emotions in *Merchant of Venice*. With a collection of thirty-seven marvelous plays, he became the darling of not only the Elizabethans, but of all ages.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Why is William Shakespeare seen as the greatest dramatist of all times?

The French Neo-Classicism

In France, the Renaissance found its counterpart in Neo-classicism. Although France began to feel the impact of the Renaissance by the 16th Century, in the drama of this period, medieval and Renaissance elements lived side by side, and were actually mutually influential. But by the early 17th Century, the influence of classicism had dominated the religious drama. Unlike the English and the Spanish dramatists that cared little about rules, and mingled both comedy with tragedy, the French playwrights followed the Italians in making sharp distinction between genres, and in observing the three unities. Because of the French love for order and symmetry, ideas borrowed from Aristotle and Horace were codified into rigid rules now referred to as the neo-classical principles. In fact, an Academy promoted by Cardinal Richelieu (1586-1642) was charged with the duty of enforcing the rules. The French Academy censored plays. For example, the play, *Le Cid* by

Pierre Corneille was condemned for violating the neo-classical ideals. This generated uproar throughout the country, which in no small measure affected playwriting in France.

Neo-Classical Principles or Ideals

The neo-classical principles include the following:

Verisimilitude

This rule insists that dramatic event must be very similar to life or the tradition of the people. Issues raised in plays must be believable. This rule derives impulse from Aristotle's concept of plausibility.

Decorum

This rule insists that characters must be true to type. For example, there are certain roles which according to custom are exclusively for men. Women must never be assigned to play such roles in a dramatic production. Also, weak people should never be allowed to perform heroic deeds.

Purity of Dramatic Genre

This rule implies that tragedy must be tragedy, and comedy must be comedy. There should be no admixture of the gay and the serious.

Five-Act Structure

This rule insists that all plays must have five acts, no more no less.

The Three Unities

This is the most celebrated of all the neo-classical ideals. The three unities include the unity of action, unity of place and unity of time. Unity of action implies that a play should be based on a single plot. This does not allow any room for sub or double plot. Unity of place implies that a play should occur within one place. This does not permit shifting of events of the play from one country or town to another as are evident in the plays of William Shakespeare. Unity of time is a rule which demands that all the actions of the play must be such that are capable of taking place within a single day. These rules confined the French dramatists to work within a strict framework. Geniuses were not allowed to develop.

However, as the academicians were engaging themselves in academic tussle through debates on the right type of tragedy, Moliere was

delighting the people with his lively comedies which subject matters were drawn from social scenes. According to Luis Vargas, “As a critic of the social scene, Moliere represents the man of good sense who deplores all excess, affection or aping of the habit or modes of behaviour of others” (124). In his time, Moliere had no rival in comic writing. As social commentaries, his plays “embroiled him in much controversy’ (Brockett, 224). His play, *Tartuffe* is a biting satire on religious hypocrisy. It still engages the attention of modern audience as it did the French audience of the seventeenth century.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

List and discuss two neo-classical ideals.

3.6 The Restoration Drama

The period between 1660-1700 is often referred to as the Restoration period in English literary history. England was not at peace in 1640s. Following the beheading of Charles I, the parliament headed by Oliver Cromwell took over the British leadership. This period known as the Commonwealth era lasted for eighteen years. By 1660, Charles II who spent his maturing age in France was restored as the English monarch. The theatre was abolished by the puritans during the Cromwell era. But Charles II, who had acquired French taste in art opened the closed down theatres on ascending the throne. Because of the classical leaning of the early Restoration drama, it attracted only the aristocrats.

However, due to the bastardization of the works of the Elizabethan playwrights, notably Shakespeare, the people especially the young men about town no longer take the classically inspired plays seriously. They wanted plays that would portray the decadent state of the English society. This quest led them to embrace Moliere’s comedy of manner which was popular in France at that material time, and which approximated their taste.

The Restoration Comedy

Although there were attempts to create tragedies modeled after the French classical playwrights like Racine and Corneille, the taste of the period inclined more to comedy. Sir, George Etherege (1634-1691), William Wycherley (1640-1716) and William Congreve (1670-1729) were the major comic playwrights. The personages of the Restoration drama were taken from the rich who most of the times preoccupy themselves seducing and sexually ravishing unsuspecting women victims. Oscar Brockett expresses the notion that “the subject matter and tone of the Restoration comedies of manners have led to much

debate over their moral viewpoint”. This is because in these plays “the wise are rewarded, the foolish are duped and virtue consists of unsentimental self-knowledge” (239). Furthermore, in these comedies, the self-deceived are ridiculed and galled, often by protagonists who use their own superior (if sometimes cynical) insights to justify their own treatment of fools” (239). Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* written in 1675 A.D. provides a great insight into the above argument.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Why did the English audience of the Restoration period reject classical inspired plays?

3.7 The Era of Romanticism

By the latter part of the 18th century, the influence of classicism in the theatre began to wane. Emphasis on man as a rational being started to make way for “faith in feeling and instinct as guides to moral behaviour” (Brockett, 326). The French revolution of 1789 “ushered in a new conception of freedom, a fervent nationalism and swept away hosts of the old theories” (Vargas, 153). Efforts were made everywhere to destroy all sorts of restraints that hinder political progress and the flowering of geniuses in the arts. Consequently, in the theatre “the romantics rejected the unities of time and place, the strict separation of drama into genres, the rationalistic outlook and narrow didacticism” (Brockett, 327).

As a conscious movement, Romanticism began in Germany and spread to other European countries and America. Johan Wolfgang Von Goethe’s (1749-1832) performance of his play, *Goetz Von Berlichingen* in 1773 and its rapturous reception marked the official opening of the Romantic theatre. It is important to observe that the romanticists saw in Shakespeare, an already made romanticist, and sought to model their plays on his works. Hence in a reference to Shakespeare in a lecture he gave in 1771, Goethe remarked, “the unity of place seemed to me irksome as a prison, the unities of action and time burdensome fetters to the imagination” (Vargas, 154). However, the person who formulated and disseminated romantic theory in Germany was August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845). In England S.T. Coleridge adopted Schlegel views on Romanticism and spread them across the country. Schlegel was said to have been the first person to use the words, classicism and Romanticism, as polar terms.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Distinguish Romanticism from Neo-classicism.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this study, we looked at the history of the theatre from the Renaissance to the Romantic period. We examined the specific features that marked the Italian Renaissance plays from those of the Elizabethans. We also examined the French neo-classical theatre, as well as that of the Restoration period.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined the concept of the Renaissance. We equally considered why the Renaissance is often seen as a complex period. We examined the factors that brought the Renaissance into being. An overview of the drama of the great Elizabethan age was given. Attention was also given to why Shakespeare attained greatness. We discussed the basic rules that guided the neo-classical drama, and the tenets of Romantic theatre.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Why do we consider the Renaissance as a complex period?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 4 HISTORY OF THE THEATRE: THE MODERN PERIOD

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- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Origin and Factors that Led to the Birth of the Modern Theatre
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The history of the theatre in modern times is full of reactions and counter reactions. John Gassner captures this tendency of the modern theatre clearly when he states that the “theatre in our own times is like passing fancies” for “successive stimuli and responses aroused enthusiasms which generated shift of conventions from time to time”. In this unit, we will examine some of the strands of the modern theatre such as Realism, Nationalism, Symbolism, Absurdism, Expressionism, etc.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- it is hoped that by the end of this unit, students should be able to:
- discuss the concept of the modern theatre
- trace the factors that were responsible for the emergence of the modern theatre.
- explain the features of Realistic theatre.
- distinguish between strands of the modern theatre.
- discuss the conventions that marked the practice of each strand of the modern theatre
- discuss playwrights that promoted each strand of the modern tradition.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Origin and Factors that Led to the Birth of the Modern Theatre

The origin of the modern theatre is usually traced to the second half of the nineteenth century. By this period, scholars and writers had begun to react against the escapist disposition of Romanticism. The ugly effects of industrialization pushed them to pay increasing attention to “ordinary people and the contemporary scene” (Hewitt, 27). There was a kind of movement from the bizarre to the familiar. “The creation of realistic illusion increasingly became the aim of theatre art” (28).

Many factors brought the modern theatre into existence. They include the following:

Industrial Revolution

By nineteenth century, industrial revolution led to the invention of manufacturing machines. These machines, to a very great extent, replaced human labour. Loss of job generated a lot of despair among the people, making pessimism to rule the thought of men. In an atmosphere of poverty, decay and hardship, writers saw Romanticism and its flight from the real world as a complete falsehood. In the theatre, the quest to present life the way it is lived gave rise to Realism.

Comte’s Theory of Positivism and Darwin’s the Origin of Species.

August Comte and Charles Darwin affected the modern world in a very significant way. Comte opines that Sociology is the summit of all the sciences because the goal of all knowledge is the health of society. He “demanded that metaphysical explanations of event and behaviour be abandoned in favour of material explanations based on observation and analysis” (Brockett, 378). He argued that to find out the causes of social problems and the remedies would help to bring about desirable change in human society. Realism owes much to Comte’s ideas often referred to as the theory of positivism. Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, among other things, states that the primary causes of behaviour are heredity and environment. This view highly influenced the concept of Naturalism in theatre.

The Theory of Dialectical Materialism

The theory of dialectical materialism attributed to Karl Max sees capitalism as evil and calls for its replacement. Marx argues that socialism will encourage the realization of the full potential of every

individual. This theory advocates the use of revolution as the last option of ensuring social change. This facilitated the evolution of revolutionary aesthetics in the modern theatre.

The World Wars

The first and the second world wars traumatized the western world as they almost destroyed the foundation of its great civilization. Human and material wastage compelled thinkers to review the long held opinion of man as a rational being. The theatre of Absurd was an offshoot of this radical thought.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss two factors that led to the birth of the modern theatre.

3.2 Realism and Naturalism

Realism in theatre is used to describe plays and productions that appear lifelike both in form and content. According to Barnard Hewitt, “the movement was doubtless stimulated by the development of photography, for it was more and more a photographic realism which the nineteenth-century theatre artist sought, more and more a look at the world as if through the eye of a camera” (28). Realistic plays are written in everyday language. Characters are expected to be normative both in speech and in conduct. Realism insists that all human problems should be brought in the open, including issues previously considered unsafe for public discussion. Consequently, the question of paternity of children, sex, and divorce which were formerly seen as unspeakable issues found expression in the realistic theatre. Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian “gave the moment shape and direction, buttressed its strength, and consolidated its position by the swift succession of challenging master pieces he flung into the theatrical arena” (Vargas, 169). In *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen displayed mastery of his new style and established himself as a world acclaimed playwright. August Strindberg (Sweden), Hauptmann (Germany), Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekov (Russia) were famous playwrights in the realistic tradition. These authors examined biting domestic issues in bold and outspoken manner. They made no effort to fantasize reality in their plays.

Realism in its extended form is known as Naturalism. This form derives its impetus from Charles Darwin’s view that heredity and the environment are the causal factors of human behaviour. Naturalism in theatre was introduced by Emile Zola (1840-1902). In the preface to his play entitled *Therese Raquin*, Zola states:

The stage is to become a laboratory for the study of life – a laboratory where the motives and behaviour of human being are to be viewed with complete objectivity; a place where case studies could be lucid before an audience with scientific detachment of a lecture hall and with greater vividness and clarity; a place where a bleeding slice of life might be held up for study and analysis.... Life is to be seen naked, and romantic illusion of life should be abolished, not pain nor ugliness should be spared.

He finally states “I am waiting finally until these evolutions take place on the stage; until they return the sense of science to the study of nature... to the painting of life in an exact production”. So, in the main, Naturalism attempts to bring issues closer to science. Characters are torn by inner and external passion, while language reflects the speech of the humble. Plays explain locales of actions in order to reveal how the environment can influence behaviour. According to Hewitt, Naturalism “rested on the idea that men and women are products of heredity and environment, that their actions are dictated by instinct rather than reason, and that they can be understood only in term of the physiological and psychological laws to which, like other animals, they are subject”(56).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is Realism?

3.3 Symbolism

Symbolism was the first reaction against the Realist theatre. It was launched in 1890 in France by Maurice Maeterlinck with the production of *The Intruder* and *The Blind*. In the main, the symbolists saw Realism as drab, something uninspiring and incapable of arousing the human imagination. Hewitt expresses the view that the symbolists “sought the truth about man not through objective observation and deductive reasoning, but through subjective feelings and visions. And they proposed to express that truth in the theatre “through mood-inducing symbols, not through the creation of illusion of everyday life”(74). In other words, the symbolists concerned themselves with the portrayal of inner truth “Maeterlinck believed that the greatness and beauty of tragedy are not expressed in the actions of the characters, but in their apparently superfluous words and in their silences, for it is the inner dialogue, the character’s communion with his soul, and his soul’s communion with the forces which moves the universe that matters” (75).

In a bid to strip their plays and productions off the garments of Realism, “the actors spoke in a staccato chant like priests, and according to some critics, behave like sleepwalkers, their gestures were strongly stylized” (Brockett, 439). Also, actors were occasionally caused to perform behind a veil in order to remove them steps away from the world, and to reduce them to mere shadows and fragments of the imagination. They employed poetry to help restore grandeur and imagination to the stage and to produce images of the soul’s reality. Although symbolism influenced playwriting, it found its true home in stagecraft. In stagecraft, designers created world of fantasy. The works of Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craing exemplified the objectives of the symbolist.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is Symbolism?

3.4 Expressionism

The expressionist theatre developed in Germany in the early part of the twentieth century as a conscious reaction against Realism and Naturalism. It began shortly before the first world war, and became a major force in discussing the destructions and the disorderliness that followed the war.

Like the symbolists, the expressionists rejected the idea of a photographic presentation of life and event on the stage, but the two forms differed in some ways. In the first instance, “while the symbolists sought to escape the materialism and ugliness of their day by mystical flight into the ideal world of universal truth and beauty, the expressionists savagely satirized the materialism and ugliness of the modern world, or cried out in anguish against its inhumanity”

Secondly, according to Hewitt, “sometimes the hero of expressionist drama is Dionysian, he attempts to embrace life, to live to its fullest, or, prevented by society and convention, he commits suicide’(104). A typical example of this kind of hero is found in Eugene O’Neill’s play, *Emperor Jones*

In expressionist drama, great effort is made to create language that is significantly a departure from the commonplace language. For example, sometimes articles, adjectives and preposition are omitted. Oftentimes, language appears terse, rhetorical or even esoteric.

Both in language and action, there is a certain inclination towards nihilism, and the overriding atmosphere is that of disillusionment. Apart from the plays of Eugene O' Niell, Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* and *The Subway*, as well as John Howard Lawson's *Rodger Bloomer*, among others, show us in an expressionist tradition, the effects of modernity on the psyche of an increasingly disillusioned mankind.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss two characteristics of Expressionism.

3.5 The Epic Theatre

The Epic theatre is “a strongly didactic theatre” which “grew out of the social and economic upheaval in Russia and Germany after World War I, spread through Europe and the United States in the wake of the economic depression of 1930s, and was sustained by the political aftereffects of world war II” (Hewitt, 140).

Epic theatre drew inspiration from the doctrines of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel, the world's most popular critics of capitalism. Drawing inspiration from views expressed by Marx and Engel against capitalism, “in the late 1920s two young men, Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), a director, and Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), a playwright, dissatisfied with the subjectivity of expressionism and with the limited scope of realism, laid the groundwork for a theatre of political and social ideas, a didactic theatre, to which they applied the term ‘Epic’ in order to denote its broad canvas and its narrative character” (146).

Epic theatre is a theatre of reason, not the type that evokes emotion. In it, the members are expected to think as they watch the unfolding of the dramatic event. They are not required to empathize with characters. In fact, the Epic theatre launches an attack against psychological drama. Brecht feels that empathy draws the audience away from the message. He argues that it is only when the members of the audience detach themselves from the action of the play that they can be in a position to reflect and form good judgment about the play. Brecht's methodology of realizing his objective in drama is known as alienation technique, which in fact, is a collection of many artistic devices aimed at preventing the audience from identifying with the play psychologically. One of these devices is called historicification. This implies that “action must not take place in the total present but in a strictly defined past” (Esslin, 13). Here, contemporary social scenes are presented as if they had occurred in the distant past. The aim is to stir the audience's mind to think.

Secondly, scenes of plays are disjointed and presented in a cinematic fashion. Relevant songs are inserted here and there.

Thirdly, in order to destroy the magic of the theatre, all technical elements of the theatre such as lighting instruments and devices of songs are placed in the full view of the audience. Sometimes actors interact with the audience. They are not encouraged to identify with characters they are imitating. They are told to view themselves in the “third person”

Another significant device is the narrator or the narrating voice. The narrator intervenes between the scenes of a play and the audience in order to provide certain missing links in the play. Such links often include the background information and causes of certain events not directly presented in the play.

Characters are social types. They hardly change. It is either that a character is good or bad. There is no attempt at character transformation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Discuss the aim of the Epic theatre.

3.6 Theatre of The Absurd

According to Barnard Hewitt, “the suffering and destruction of World War II, the continuing threat of the atomic bomb, the tension between East and West, and the stress attendant upon the emergence of new nations in the Middle East, Africa and Asia gave rise in the arts to a new reaction against logic and reason”(159). In the theatre this new spirit manifested itself as the theatre, of Absurd.

World War II had left Europe and America in complete despair and pessimism. Hunger, starvation and diseases compelled the survivors of the war to look at the world as a meaningless place, a place with terrible moral standards and in complete want of rationality. Theatre of the Absurd was developed to portray this senselessness and illogicality of human existence. And this meaninglessness was celebrated both in form and content of the play. Martin Esslin opines that there is a tendency towards a radical devaluation of language. There is no attempt to obey the rule of grammar. Sentences do not follow in sequence. In terms of characterization, dramatic personages appear to have neither past nor future; they live only in the present. This lack of history makes it difficult to trace the causes of actions. According to Martin Esslin, “the hallmark of (the theatre of Absurd) is its sense that certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away,

that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions”(4). Absurdism derived impetus from an essay by the existentialist philosopher and playwright, Albert Camus. Lamenting the terrible effect of the World War II, in that essay, Camus writes:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and light, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promise land.... The world itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said (6ff).

Examples of absurdist plays include, *Waiting for Godot*, *The Zoo Story* and *Oh Dad Poor Dad*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What factors led to the birth of the theatre of Absurd?

3.7 Theatre of Ritual

“The impulse to transform theatrical art into a kind of religious experience appeared early in the twentieth century” (Hewitt, 160). The effort became a formidable force to reckon with in the 1950s and 1960s. Inspiration was drawn from many sources namely, the Greek theatre, Roman Catholic doctrines, the Noh theatre and the African masked theatre. This theatre aims at expressing the spirit of man, Gordon Craig sees the stage as a temple and the actor as holy as the priest offering a mass.

Antonin Artaud sees the theatre in its ritual form as a kind of safety valve through which unwanted emotions could be caused to escape. “To Artaud, the most important aspects of existence are those submerged in the unconscious, those things that cause division within people and between people and lead to hatred, violence and disaster. He believed that if given the proper theatrical experiences, people can be freed from ferocity, and can then express that joy that civilization has forced them to repress, for theatre can evacuate those feelings that are usually expressed in more destructive ways” (Brockett, 472).

Artaud’s theatre is called the theatre of cruelty because he sought to use unfamiliar and shrill sounds, physical action, intimidating lighting, incantations, masks, apparitions, groans and cries etc. to attack the audience’s nervous system. Artaud expressed the concept of his theatre in a book, *The Theatre and its Double*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Discuss the aim of Theatre as Ritual.

3.8 Eclecticism

Today, the theatre can best be described as eclectic, both in terms of playwriting and production. Subjective and objective approaches to art embrace each other in one production in a brotherhood fashion as Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Absurdism and Ritual theatre, as well as the Epic Theatre mingle. Dramatists borrow and mix freely known dramatic theories in order to represent adequately the multi-dimensional nature of man and his artistic preoccupations since the dawn of human civilization.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Why is the theatre eclectic today?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The history of the theatre in the modern period exhibits frequent changes. It is “one of rebellion and reaction, with new forms challenging the old, and the old forms in turn providing the basis for the new” (Styan, xi). Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Absurdism, Epic theatre, among others, are some of the many strands of the theatre in the contemporary times. Dramatists develop these forms in quick succession in order to reflect the rapid transitions that characterize the modern society. Realism examines the physical world as can be observed with the senses. Naturalism sees man as soulless, a product of heredity and environment. Symbolism, Expressionism and Theatre as a ritual concentrate on the spirit of man, while Epic theatre devotes itself to the revival of rationalism. The above notwithstanding, the theatre today appears to be more or less eclectic in nature. Dramatists no longer care for purity of form. They borrow ideas from available traditions and mix them up thoroughly in order to reflect the many dimensional aspects of life adequately.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined the history of the modern theatre. We traced the origin of the modern theatre to the second half of the nineteenth century. We observed that many factors facilitated the emergence of the modern theatre. Notable among these factors include the industrial

revolution, capitalism, August Comte's theory of positivism, Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, Marxism, and the two World Wars. We noted that these factors were responsible for the fluctuating tendencies of the theatre in modern times. We finally examined the many strands of the theatre in modern times. And these strands include Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Epic theatre, Absurdism and Theatre as Ritual.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss two factors that helped to bring about the modern theatre.

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UNIT 5 THE PLAYHOUSE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term, playhouse, is used here to refer to the place where performances take place. It denotes kinds of performative spaces. These spaces include the place used by the actors during the performance and the one occupied by the audience. The place where the actors occupy during productions is known as the stage, while that used by the audience is called the auditorium. The playhouse developed from the natural playing grounds such as we find in traditional societies, to assume a complex in-door affair. Since the ancient times, the playhouse has undergone many changes and development. In this unit, we will examine these changes through historical and typological approaches.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that at the end of this units, students should be in a position to:

- explain what a playhouse is
- discuss the constituent elements of a playhouse
- discuss changes that occurred in the development of the playhouse
- list and explain types of staging arrangements
- discuss the factors that influence changes in staging techniques.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Classical Greek Playhouse

The classical Greek theatre or playhouse was an open-air theatre situated on the hillside near the Acropolis that accommodated the temple of Dionysus. The playhouse was made up of localized spaces for the actors and the audience, as well as the chorus.

THE STAGE

The Greek stage was rectangular in shape. Apart from the acting area, an essential aspect of the Greek stage was the orchestra or the dancing space. According to Oscar G. Brockett, “originally, it was the only essential feature, since the audience sat or stood on the hillside to watch the choral performances which predated tragedy”(31). Allardyce Nicoll recorded that according to “excavations undertaken in Athens” the original Dionysiac “orchestra had a diameter of 78 feet” (10).

The Scene-Building

The scene building which approximates the backstage in the contemporary theatre practice, was a later development in the classical Greek stage structure. It was an addendum, a child of necessity. Tracing the evolution of the scene-building, Allardyce Nicoll posits:

With the introduction of two or more actors, whom the necessities of the performance constrained to appear in a diversity of parts, it became imperative that a hut should be erected at the convenience of those concerned in the production. In Athens, the proximity of the old temple of Dionysus would have rendered the building of such a hut impossible, and it is likely that the moving of the ancient orchestra some 50 feet northward was dictated by this consideration: the result of this change in position was that a free space was left at the rear of what had been the acting area, and here a small wooden (skene, Scene-building was set up (11-12).

Whatever the method of setting the scene-building, “its original function was unquestionably a purely practical one, the provision of a concealed location in which the actors, out of sight of the audience, could make themselves ready, and which they might retire when their particular actions were done”(12). As time went on, the scene-building especially its part began to be used for the purpose of illustrating backgrounds of actions. Symbolic paintings were done to indicate locations of actions.

Sophocles, a fifth century Greek tragic playwright was said to have introduced scene painting in the classical Greek theatre.

At “about 425 B.C., a firm stone basis was laid for an elaborate scene-building consisting of a long front wall interrupted at the sides by projecting wings”(Nicoll, 13). Through these wings the members of the chorus made their entrances and exits to and from the orchestra. By the end of the 5th century, B.C., it became a two-storey building. The upper house was used to keep the machines that were employed to secure scenic effects, especially for the appearances and disappearances of the gods.

The scene-building had three doors on the side facing the audience. A.M. Naglar observes that “of the scene-doors the middle opened either into a palace, grotto, hall, or whatever was first distinction in the play; the right-hand door was a retreat for the next in rank; and the left, which had a very miserable aspect led to some desolate temple, or had no house”(8). People of low birth and prisoners made their entrances and exits through the left door.

The Auditorium

The Greek theatre was a festival theatre, and as such, it had a nationwide audience. The Athenian auditorium, according to Vargas, accommodated an assembly of 20,000 people for that was the capacity of the Athenian theatre (26). It was semi-circle in shape “Originally spectators stood to watch performances, but wooden stadium like seating may have been erected during the late sixth century” (Brockett, 35).

By the fourth century B.C., due to the influence of the Hellenistic culture, the wooden seats were replaced with the more durable stone seats. Then too, the centre of attraction shifted from the orchestra to the stage.

In the words of Allardyce Nicoll:

Instead of a low stage, the actors were set up on a long elevated platform 10 to 13 feet in height, supported by rows of columns between which painted wooden panels were commonly inserted.... In this hellonistic theatre, the rear of the stage had a wide, ample façade with three huge openings (called thyromata) into which huge painted pinakes could be set, and we may believe that in accordance with the subject-matter and tone of the new comedy, these pieces of scenery tended at least towards the realistic (18).

Equipment for Scenic Effects

The classical Greek theatre people developed certain equipments that enabled them to achieve some scenic effects. These equipments include the following:

Ekkyklema: This is spelt eccyclema by some authors. According to A.M. Naglar, “the vehicle [ekkyklema] is an high seat, upon wooden steps, adjoining to which is a throne: it brings forth to view secret transactions in the subscenery apartments”(9). During the classical Greek period, perhaps because of the sacred nature of the festival of Dionysus, violent actions including death were not permitted to occur on the stage. They were performed behind the stage, and the victim(s) were wheeled onto the stage by means of ekkyklema.

Peraktoi: These refer to wooden triangular prisms, on each side of which was painted a certain background environment or scene. They were placed on central pivots and caused to rotate to reveal required scenes. Apart from cities or country sides, Naglar expressed the opinion that the peraktoi were directly used in revealing “seagods and whatever was too unwieldy for the vehicle (ekkyklema) to bear”(8).

Machane: This is a cranelike device used in suspending the gods in the air. The machane was held in position with ropes fastened, at the upper part of the scene-building. Euripides made extensive use of the machane in his plays. It was from the use of machane that the term *deus ex machina* was coined. At first, the term was used to describe the appearance of the gods who came to resolve problematic plays, but now it is seen as “a dramatic device introduced for the purpose of bringing a problem or an action to a swift, and often to an unsatisfactorily artificial conclusion” (Nicoll, 22).

Anapiesmata: This is a kind of trap door. During the classical Greek period, furies or ghosts made appearances from the trap door. It can be compared to a tomb.

SELF ASSESSMENT Exercise 1

What factor led to the introduction of scene-building?

3.2 The Roman Playhouse

The Romans worshiped a multitude of gods and goddess, and offered plays to them during their specific festivals. Scholars argued that it was not possible to build permanent theatre structures for these many gods and goddesses. However, by 55 B.C., the great Roman leader, Pompey constructed the first permanent playhouse in Rome. This theatre was modeled after the Greek playhouse, but was built on a level ground. The stage was low and deep while the orchestra was reduced to semi-circle in shape, and importance. In some playhouses that followed the Pompey's theatre, seats for distinguished members of the audience were actually placed in the orchestra. According to Nicoll, whereas the Greek theatres had always been composed of either two or three parts, here the entire tread was towards the creation of a single architectural whole. This implies that the stage, the orchestra and the auditorium were joined together. And as time went by, a roof was erected over the entire playhouse to protect both the actors and the audience from the hazards of the weather, and the now massive walled theatre. Pompey's theatre was said to have a diameter of 500 feet. Brockett compared the length of the stage to the modern football pitch.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Distinguish between the Greek and the Roman playhouse

3.3 The Medieval Playhouse

There was basically no single type of playhouse during the Middle Ages. Rather what existed was multiple staging arrangements. At the beginning of the liturgical drama, the church served as the playhouse. The altar served as the major acting area, but "the whole nave of the church could be used by the ecclesiastical actors, and within this space different particular fictional localities could be indicated" (Nicoll, 51). This type of stage arrangement is known as simultaneous staging.

When the drama was pushed out of the church, simultaneous staging was retained, but mansions were erected to represent fictional palaces. The spaces between mansions were for wayside events. When the mystery plays became so elaborate, the stationary simultaneous staging arrangement was replaced by the movable type. In this new style, mansions were placed on wheels and dragged from place to place. This new staging technique was referred to as pageant. Like mansions used in the stationary settings, these movable pageants were sometimes made in symbolic representation of the locality, or scene they were intended to indicate" (59).

Equipment for Scenic Effects

The Medieval theatre made giant effort in achieving realistic effects. These equipment were many in number, but we will examine a few here

The Hell Mouth

The hell mouth was an imposing and terrifying machinery used to create the effect of hell in a realistic fashion. This equipment belched out fire and smoke as it opened to swallow damned souls.

Device for Paradise

Mechanical device to create the illusion of paradise is said to be sublime and very difficult to achieve for it “presents a more complicated arrangement” (53).

Other devices include the one that made the status of Virgin Mary to move her head and neck and to lift her eye to heaven, the one that permitted angels to fly from heaven to earth; we have also effect for burning altar. etc. Brockett maintains that “machines for special effects grew in number and complexity during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the machinists abilities to contrive seemingly miraculous events increased”(104).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is simultaneous staging?

3.4 The Renaissance Playhouse

The discovery of the architectural writing of the classical Roman author, Vitruvius helped greatly in revolutionarizing the theatre architecture during the Renaissance Italy. Vitruvius’s work supplied information on the ancient Roman theatre, which designers during the Renaissance sought to recreate. But as time went on, the highly inquisitive painters, designers and artists became dissatisfied with the reconstruction of the ancient Roman playhouse, but “were animated by the desire to achieve things fresh and new” (Nicoll, 69). This desire led to the introduction of perspective painting.

Perspective painting refers to the art of painting scenic environment in a way that gives an impression of the object’s right height, size, width and depth as it appears from a distance. On the perspective stage, scenic environment is recreated in excellent painting. In perspective scenery, the scattered mansions of the medieval playhouse were united as a single unit resembling a street, palaces, churches, cities, etc. In order to ensure proper sight-line, that is to ensure the every member of the audience sees the stage well, the semi-circular auditorium was made to

give way to a new one that is oval in shape. Sabastiano Serlio sought, through the wonders of the perspective, to represent tragic, comic and satirical scenes truly. Teatro Olympico at Vicenza, constructed in 1585 by Andrea Palladio (1518-1586) and Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552-1616) still stands as a typical example of this type of theatre, even though it was made of wood.

The Era of Changeable Scenery

In the words of Allardyce Nicoll, “the Renaissance theatre was not content to stay still”, to make do with “stabilized setting”, for as time went on, the “spectators instinctively craved for movement and variety”(82). This quest for movement and variety led to the evolution of movable scenery. The task of doing this and placing “a final seal on the development of the Renaissance playhouse, was credited to Bernardo Buontalenti (1536-1608). In 1555, he introduced movable scenery in the playhouse he was commissioned to build at Uffizi in Florence. Nicoll writes that, “instead of a single unaltered setting, however beautiful, being placed immovable behind the actors, the spectators saw a continual series of ever-changing and ever-dazzling scenic displays set before their wondering eyes”(84).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Trace the development of the playhouse during the Renaissance.

3.5 The Modern Playhouse

From the later years of the eighteenth century, the passion for what was real began to seize the attention of theatre workers. By the second-half of the nineteenth century, Realism had taken over the theatre. Efforts were made to achieve complete illusion of life on stage, “to create a setting which did not merely look like the kind of place in which the action of a realistic play might be expected to occur, but which was the only setting in which the action of the particular play could occur”(Hewitt, 64). In other words, the stage was made to appear as real as possible. Real properties were brought on stage; costumes resembled the historical period of plays, while gas lighting and subsequently lighting by means of electricity helped to provide authentic illumination and moods. The audience now sat in darkened auditorium to watch the dramatic actions as they unfold on the brilliantly lit stage.

THEATRICALISM

Theatricalism is used to describe staging arrangement that tends towards the symbolic. Proponents of theatricalism argued that authentic Realism cannot be realized on stage, and as such, they revolted against it. They sought to make the stage completely artistic by relying heavily on the symbolic and the unnatural. Gordon Craig would want to turn the theatre into a temple. He rejected details and painted scenery. To break the idea of a “peep-show” theatre which Realism represents, some designers go for a total theatre where the audience will encircle the performers. Craig used mass light and towering scenery to break the notion of illusionism. The essence of the various shades of theatricalism is to constantly remind the audience that it is watching an art, a theatrical performance, and not a slice of life put on stage.

However, in spite of the division between Realism and Theatricalism, the tendency today is towards the eclectic. We have a situation where the Realist ideals are mingled with the theatricalist conventions.

SELF ASSESSMENT Exercise 5

Discuss the concept of theatricalism.

3.6 Kinds of Theatre Structure

Albright et al posit that “theatre structures differ widely in their basic architectural organization, a circumstance which in turn dictates the relationship between actors, stage, setting and audience”(147). In the discussion that follows, attempt will be made to examine some theatre structures.

The Arena

This is the oldest form of theatre arrangement. It is used to describe the performance space used by the ancient, and even in the modern times, traditional societies. Village and market squares are typical examples of the arena theatre. Arena stage often lacks scenery. Albright *et al* observe that:

Nearly every time that the theatre died down and then was reborn, it reverted to the pure arena form at the beginning, even though it often developed very quickly a specialized pattern of organization. So it was with the interlude players who were the ancestors of the Elizabethan companies, with the drama which arose in the church at the end of the Middle Ages and with the comedian dell’ arte (148).

The arena encourages direct communication between the spectators and the actors, and “even a physical mingling of the two groups, as when the demons in primitive dances attempt to frighten the audience”(149). There is hardly any distinction between the stage and the auditorium.

Simultaneous Staging

Describing this type of staging technique, Albright *et al* state that “simultaneous staging is an organization of the scene in which several unrelated locales are represented at the same time around a common playing area used for all locales, and in which each incident is located by the way in which the actors relate themselves to one or more scenic units”(153). In other words, it is the type of stage in which the scenes in a play are laid out in the acting space at the same time. The Medieval theatre artists made extensive use of simultaneous staging arrangement.

The Proscenium Theatre

This form developed during the Renaissance, and in fact, has dominated theatrical practice in the modern times. In this type of theatre, the stage is framed. The proscenium arch is the key “architectural feature through which the audience views the performance at some distance, psychological, as well as physically” (Albright *et al*, 147). The audience watches the performance from the broken down forth wall. Watching a production mounted on a proscenium stage is like watching a television programme. Actions come mainly from one direction. According to Ahmed Yerima, the acting area is like a square with one side of the square open for the audience to see through the stage (18). Proscenium staging requires series of scene changes which are often done in blackout.

The proscenium staging arrangement has a lot of constraints. Albright *et al* list some of the limitations of the proscenium stage to include the following:

1. The actors, separated from his auditors by the gulf of the orchestra pit the psychological barrier of the curtain line, and the darkness of the auditorium, felt handicapped in his efforts to gain their attention and sympathy.
2. Spectators in seats far from the stage complained of the oppressive tunnel-like feeling forced on them by the narrow auditorum, the impossibility of seeing the facial expression from the gallery or the rear of the auditorium and the difficulty of hearing caused by the built-in-echoes and reverberations which plagued most proscenium theatre seating more than a few hundred persons (208). The reasons

above among many others, gave rise to the agitation of a more comfortable theatre.

The Open Theatre

The arena stage is a kind of open theatre. But, we have another kind of open theatre staging arrangement where the audience surrounds the actors on three sides, that is, their front as well as their two sides. The seating arrangement “barely exceeds a semi circle”(209). This kind of open air theatre is called the thrust stage.

This is a variation of the open stage. Although the gap between the actors and spectators appears to be bridged in some cases, the stage is raised up to prevent the audience from crowding on the performance space.

The Pit Theatre

In this type of staging arrangement, “the acting area is set in a hollow and the audience sit on the raised edge of the theatre”(Yerima,18). According to Yerima:

There are two very good examples of a pit theatre in Nigeria. One is at the African Studies Department building of the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ife. The Ife pit is square in shape, while the one at Ahmadu Bello University theatre studio is round (19).

Bernard Beckerman states that, “the spatial pattern is determined by the degree and manner of contact between the presentation and the audience” (240). Expressing the nature of playhouse in mathematic terms, he observes that the proscenium type of theatre deals with “face-to-face relationship where a performer may face the audience without pivoting more than 180⁰. He explains that in the thrust stage and certain kinds of amphitheatre, “the performer must pivot as much as 270⁰, whereas in “the arena, the performer pivots a full 360⁰ in order to address the complete audience” (240).

It is important to note that the nature of drama influences its setting. Realist, as well as Naturalist drama is intensive because it occurs mostly in sitting-rooms and extends to other parts of the middle class homes. This explains why “it relied on a setting congruent to actuality”, and it is possible to make the “dimensions of stage space’ and “of fictive space nearly equal” (244).

On the other hand, “extensive drama does not make such assumption, for the magnitude of action is greater than can be physically accommodated on stage” (244). Shakespearean plays are examples of extensive drama. This is because they embody wide range of actions, and places that can never be realized on stage realistically. This is why even during this contemporary time of marvelous technology, signs and symbols are still used in the production of Shakespearean plays to achieve dramatic truth.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

List and discuss two types of theatre structure.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We explained that playhouse refers to the place of performance and that it is made up of two localized area, the stage and the auditorium. We noted that the stage denotes the actual place of performance, while the auditorium means the place where the audience sits or stands to watch the performance. We looked at the changes that occurred in the development of the playhouse historically and typologically.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined the meaning of and nature of the playhouse by specifically examining the nature of the classical, Medieval, Renaissance and the modern playhouses. We identified types of theatre structure to include the arena, thrust, proscenium, pit, as well as the simultaneous staging.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is a playhouse?

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INTRODUCTION

The module examines the concept of acting, the art of impersonation, directing, playwriting, as well as play analysis and interpretation. It is made up of five units, which embody the above listed areas of theatrical practice. Each unit of study has an introduction, objectives, main content, conclusion, summary, tutor-marked assignment, as well as references that will assist the students to gain more knowledge about the subjects.

Unit 1	Acting
Unit 2	The Art of Impersonation
Unit 3	Directing
Unit 4	Playwriting
Unit 5	Play Analysis and Interpretation

UNIT 1 ACTING

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Concept of Acting
 - 3.2 The Actor
 - 3.3 Acting Techniques
 - 3.4 The Actor's Tools
 - 3.5 Acting Styles
 - 3.6 Actor's Training
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Acting is a very fascinating aspect of the theatre. It is, indeed, the core of theatre art. The theatre does not exist without acting. In this unit, we will examine the concept of acting, the actor and his techniques, approaches to acting, the actor's tools, as well as the various styles of acting.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this study, the students should be able to:

- define the concept of acting
- explain who the actor is
- discuss the actor's tools or instruments
- list and explain approaches to acting
- discuss styles of acting.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Acting

John Fernald expresses the view that “Acting is an activity which is misrepresented and misunderstood as any that has occupied man throughout his entire history”(65). This misconception is borne out of the fact that oftentimes, people see acting as merely “pretending to be someone else”. While indeed acting involves pretense, it is more than pretense in a professional sense, for above all, stage acting is communication. It is a process of handing a “finished theatrical product to the audience in an understandable way. Because acting is a complex process, it is often difficult to embody its totality in a definition. But because “theoretical works attempt to provide a way of understanding an art, a way of bringing knowledge about is within discursive thought” (Shank, 2), it is difficult to avoid definitions. Taking cognizance of the above, John Fernald posits:

Acting is communication. It is difficult to define its totality, but if I had to define it, I would say that it is the discovery of a truth implicit in an author's words and the communication of that discovery to a live audience, some elements of which are a good deal further away from the actor than people normally are when the communication with one another by unamplified speech (65-66).

Whatever defect the above definition may contain, it throws a great deal of light on the concept of acting. It demonstrates that stage acting is a difficult affair. This is because not only that the actor must pretend, he must be a communicator of the truth implicit in the dramatic text. According to Fernald, “Historically, there seems always to have been a sort of dialectic between the truth of acting and the giving of that truth to the audience”(66). He further states that “sometimes the emphasis has been laid on sincerity and honesty of interpretation; sometimes it has been on the technique of how the audience is actually ‘hooked’ by the actor's power”. But Fernald rightly concludes that “the facts of the matter are that the sincerity and the technique go together; the discovery

of truth goes hand in hand with the discovery of how this truth reaches the audience, undistorted and unweakened by the process of communication” (66).

Acting is not a lazy man’s affair. It demands hard work because it is a creative process of interpreting and communicating the message(s) implicit in a dramatic text to the audience. Acting requires imaginative identification with the character being represented by the actor in order to be able to communicate the emotional status of the character to the audience. Great training in voice manipulation and projection, as well as physical body movement are required in acting.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is acting?

3.2 The Actor

The actor is that person who makes possible the business of acting. An actor is that theatre worker whose duty as “a kind of salesman”, to use Duruaku’s term, is to offer the finished theatrical product to the audience. The actor derives his raw material from the playscript or by means of improvisation.

A good actor must be gifted with judgement and good taste. He must be cautious because the theatre is a field where vulgarity can thrive as easily as good taste, where foolishness can be decked out to look like wisdom, where self-indulgence and the desire for self-aggrandisement actually pay dividends, the temptation to be merely effective instead of true is strong”(Fernald, 69). Some actors in self exhibitionism pander to the base taste of the audience. In a state of self-indulgence, they falsify the truth of the dramatic text. Whatever imaginative flavour or perspective, an actor must introduce into a performance, it must help in bringing out the hidden truth in the dramatic text. Because it is easy for an actor to be self-indulgent, a true actor must be an unselfish person. This will enable him not to exceed the bounds of good taste in the enjoyment and application of his techniques.

An actor must show total commitment to the role he plays. This will enable him to bring out his best in interpreting and communicating the required traits of the character and the emotions he is recreating. In the words of Derek Bowskill, “the actor has much in common with the priest – both are intermediaries between what endures and what is transient”. To him, both the actor and the priest aim to “celebrate the joys and fears of human condition – both do it in public as elevated representatives performing on behalf of the community”(8). The actor

must go all out to touch the spirit of the audience. “It is his job to reach out to them – not theirs to struggle to contact him”(8). Total commitment ensures that the actor works at optimal level.

An actor must possess power of imagination. Although the director and an older actor can suggest ways and means of realizing a role, “to a young actor, part of the actor’s task is to offer “personal comment and enlightenment on the role he plays”(7). Imaginative thinking enables the actor to assess his role after reading the script or after being presented with a scenario in the case of improvisation, and form basic judgments about his role. An actor ought not to be a passive tool in the hand of the director. He should play active role in developing his part. Imaginative thinking enables the actor to see far into his role, to live out his part clearly in the mind. Ken Farmer in his book, *Acting is Storytelling* cites Ron Howard to have said:

I don’t look for a puppet or someone to recite the lines when I cast, I look for actors who can bring something special to the story, hopefully something no one has thought of yet. I look for creativity.

This implies that at the root of creative acting lies imaginative thinking. Actor must aspire to achieve clarity both in speech and movement if he hopes to affect his audience significantly. He must not allow his technique to come between the message and the audience. According to Bowskill:

It may be possible to justify obscurantism in esoteric, minority sub-cultures, but the essence of theatre is that it speaks to all men. It can never be truly itself nor work at optimal level when this is not the case (8)

Acting requires that the actor should be audible enough, exact in pronunciation and precise in movement.

An actor must be an ardent observer. In the society, life provides diverse circumstances and mannerism often analogous to stage activities. The actor must be a keen observer of the circumstances provided by actual living. This will help him in interpreting his role on stage. To Bowskill, “chance enters the prepared mind and an actor’s mind must be prepared to observe and select in all occasions” (9).

An actor is a deep meditator. Meditation is crucial in acting because it encourages absorption and concentration. It enables the actor to wade into the unknown and to acquire wafted in the spiritual realm. Because of the invaluable function of meditation in acting, current trainers of

actors draw influence from Yoga, the Zen Buddhist approach of educating the mind. Meditation enables the actor to pay attention to details.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss two qualities of an actor.

3.3 Acting Techniques

According to A.B.C. Duruaku, “In order for the actor to accomplish his task successfully, he needs to be well equipped”(45). The method of equipping the actor is referred to as acting technique. Bowskill identifies two basic acting techniques. The first approach is to outline the dramatic experience to be communicated to the audience and leaves it to the actors to find their own means of expression. The second approach is to give the actors series of objectively described tasks – movements, words and gestures and then allow the actors to inject these tasks with meaning. Theatre directors are now aware that these approaches are not opposed to each, but that they play complementary role of helping to build the actor, his resources and the performance.

In the first method, actors are encouraged to use their imagination and their observed human qualities to be creative. The essence is to place the actors in front of their experiences and imagination to enable them to use them for artistic expression. According to Bowskill, the second approach is excellent in the beginning of creative work, that is when the actors are still in their embryonic stage. It is here that the concept of acting by design comes to play. However, there is no reason while these approaches should not be used in a single performance. “What is important is that the students should never be in doubt as to which method is being employed” (10).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What do you understand by acting technique?

3.4 Actor’s Tools

Actor's tools are encapsulated in the actor's total being. But for the purpose of clarity, the actor's tools are his voice and body movement.

The Voice

In literary based performances, the actor's voice is an indispensable tool of acting. Fernald cites the great Italian actor, Salvini as defining acting as voice. Thus to him, "Acting is more voice and more voice and again more voice"(69). In modern times, "without effective vocal instrument, the actor is useless; however perspective he may be about human psychology and character, he lacks the means to convey his message" (Fernald, 69-70). For the actor's voice to be effective, "it must be coloured by feeling; it must be capable in fact of conveying a great many kinds of feeling" (70). Speech and voice will be given a detailed treatment in a separate unit.

Body Movement

No matter how great and wonderful, how musical and resonant the voice is, acting is possible without it. According to Fernald "A gesture, a turn of a head, sitting down, standing up, moving away a couple of paces – all these things can often take the place of the words which the author has written"(71).

A good actor never makes nervous or careless movement as this can impair understanding on the part of the audience. A disciplined actor selects his movements and gestures and makes them where they seem most appropriate. Fernald states that "to use the body as an effective instrument of expression usually involves using one part of the body only – that part of it which is appropriate to the effect which the actor wants"(73). He further maintains that "the rest of the body must be at repose, other wise it will distract by the kind of unconscious movement which the 'ordinary man' is always making" (73).

One quality of stage movement is balance. Bowskill rightly observes that "to retain a state of balance, any movement needs to be countered by one which is equal and opposite" (114). Moving both left leg and left hand forward at the same time when walking often generates awkward movement which the body usually resists. An actor must be conscious of balance if he must avoid nervous movement on stage. On stage the actor is expected to make measured movement in order to ensure balance. The stage is an organized place, and as such the actor must know details of his movement so as to know when and how to make each one. Bowskill states that "a careful and probing analysis of crucial moments will enable him to create the general rhythm within which he will work (115).

Stage movement is influenced by period and age, among other things. Bowskill opines that “period movement grows out of a way of life”. He goes on to particularize clothing as a major contributory factor at work. He is of the opinion that “the garments and perhaps more importantly the under-garments – of any period encourage certain patterns of movement and discourage, if not totally prevent, others”(121).

Age is a major factor that influences stage movement. Young people appear to be more brisk in movement than old people. Sometimes an actor may be required to play the role of a character whose age is far removed from his. In Nigeria, there is a tendency for young actors to stoop and speak in quivering voice when playing the role of old men. They do this as if bending down and speaking in shaking voice are archetypes of old age. Although loss of flexibility, agility, speed and effortless exactitude”(122) often accompany old age, it is important to observe that men and women vary in degree of possessing certain traits known to accompany old age. Certain occupations and sicknesses can make people to bend or speak in shaky voice at old age, but there are people who remain erect at old age and who never lose their voice until they die. The late great Zik of Africa was a typical example of a man filled with age but who never lost his voice and never stoops until death took him away in 1996. This may be attributed to certain types of job and good health condition. It is, therefore, necessary to do both occupational and health research on the character to be played in order to know the kind of movement that may be suitable for him or her.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Discuss one actor’s tool you know.

3.5 Acting Styles

Different styles of acting exist. They include classic, Romantic, Realistic and theatricalized acting.

Classic Acting

The classic style of acting is “characterized by a careful analysis of role to discover in it, a single – all pervading quality like ambition, pride, love of hearth, love of country and so on”, and the so discoursed quality is “then expressed with decorum in sing-song speech or in alternated passages spoken in different tones, in beautiful sculpturesque poses, and in graceful, dignified action” (Hewitt, 11-12). Operatic performances are mostly done in classic style. This style of acting is often used to describe the acting style of “John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) and Sarah

Siddons (1757-1823), in England, Hyppolite Clairon (1723-1803) in France, August Wilhelm Iffland (1759-1814) in Germany, and Ivan Dimitrevsky (1734-1821) in Russia” (11). The classic style of acting dominated most part of the eighteenth century often referred to as the Age of Reason. Most contemporary Indian films make use of classic style of acting.

Romantic Style of Acting

John Talma (1763-1826) is said to have evolved romantic acting style. A French “rebel in politics as well as in art”, Talma provocatively explored the power of emotion rather than reason in acting. According to Barnard Hewitt, Talma “found his character’s humanity in his capacity to feel, expressing the deepest and strongest emotions in frenzied speech and violent movement”(12). In Romantic acting, the actor aspires to lead us into the unfathomable bottom of human passion.

Antonin Artaud proposed this type of acting in his theatre of cruelty. He wants his audience to be swept up in a flood of cries, groans, apparitions, surprises, incantational voices, etc. Although Romantic acting in its exploration of deep human emotion in tragedy many have “impressed many spectators as a more lifelike than classic acting, it was not realistic” for “the actors in his character still addressed asides and soliloquies to the audience”(Hewitt, 17). Romantic acting is “filled with raw emotion, of such characters as Richard III, Logo, and Shylock” (Brockett, 334). Most Shakespearean plays are acted in this tradition of acting.

Realistic Acting

Although since ancient times, theatre artists have been infusing productions with certain elements of realism, realistic style of acting was born in the second-half of the nineteenth century. The credit of evolving realistic style of acting is usually given to Andre Antoine (1875-1943), the French amateur actor who founded the Theatre Libre in 1887 in France. In his theatre, Antoine ensured that “actors had to learn to speak and move like ordinary human beings in ordinary environments, not like idealized or typical characters on an platform (Hewitt, 63). In realist acting, the stage appears like a normal living room with real furniture and household utensils at their appropriate places. Actors address one another as if the audience is not there. Hewitt opines that speech embodies “the tentativeness, the elisions, the incoherences of speech in ordinary life” (23).

Constantine Stanislavski, a co-founder of The Moscow Art Theatre took the final step in consolidating realistic acting style. Through his

exploration of the psychological disposition of his characters, he extended the frontiers of Realistic acting. Barnard Hewitt observes that he “progressed in acting and production from a meticulous exterior realism to the re-creation of the inner emotional life of characters with a truth undiluted by stage tradition and undistorted by the actor’s ego”(68). In order to touch the inner life of the character, Stanislavski advocated the concept of emotional memory. In this technique, the actor is encouraged to make a mental journey to his past experience, in order to be able to create appropriate emotions on stage. Emotional memory would enable the actor to behave as if he is the character. Emotional memory or “the Magic IF, as it is sometimes called, is aimed at improving the actor’s ability to feel or empathize. Lee Strassberg and Elia Kazan, among other people connected with the “New York Actors” adapted Stanislavski’s ideas on acting in America. They called their technique – **Method Acting**. Actors trained in this technique are referred to as method actors. Stanislavski’s ideas on theatre and acting in particular are embodied in his books such as *My Life in Art, An Actor prepares, Building a Character and Creating a Role*.

Realistic acting emphasizes ensemble performance. In ensemble acting equal attention is paid to every actor. The idea of the star actor(s) is de-emphasized. Interest is on total dramatic effect not on the promotion of star actors.

Theatricalised Acting

This is perhaps the oldest form of acting. Theatricalized acting is characterized by symbolic movements, and stylized gestures. Speech is declaimed, sung or chanted. The masked actor, the Kabuki and Noh actors of Japan, as well as the expressionist actor, among others, exemplify theatricalized acting. In addressing the expressionist actor, Paul Kornfeld is cited by Barnard Hewitt to have written in the epilogue of his expressionist play thus:

Let not the actor ... behave as though the thoughts and words he has to express have only arisen in him at the very moment in which he recites them.... Let him dare to stretch his arms out wide and with a sense of soaring speak as he has never spoken in his life.... Let him pick out the essential attributes of reality and be nothing but a representative of thought, feeling or fate (115).

Although we have outlined some identifiable acting styles, it is important to observe that classic, romantic, realistic and theatricalized styles should be “recognized as shorthand symbols to describe the basic

colouring” (Vargas, 152) of performances. Too often, a performance is “an amalgam of diverse elements”(152). In a romantically dominated acting, one can find elements that are typical of classic, or realistic or theatricalise acting. We are trying to highlight here that acting styles are not mutually exclusive; they benefit and borrow from one another, especially in modern times.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What do you understand by realistic acting?

Exercises/Actor’s Training

- Exercises constitute a significant part of an actor’s training. They enable the actor to service his tools just like the owner of a car would service his car.
- Exercises enable the actor to have a perfect control of every part of his body, and not to make nervous movements while on stage.
- Exercises furnish the actor with necessary energy to perform unnatural and superhuman activities.
- Through exercises the internal body organs such as the lungs, the heart and the liver can be made to function well.
- Exercises enhance actor’s agility.
- Exercises that border on meditation help to educate the imagination of the actor and to make him to have power of imagination.
- Through exercises an actor can learn to relax, concentrate, breathe well, as well as to take certain postures which an ordinary man cannot take with ease.

Exercises should form a regular part of an actor’s approach to his work. They are useful to him whether he is rehearsing or in actual performance. Bowskill argues that “approached with concentration and pursued with diligence, they will reward the student with a slow but regular growth towards increased sensitivity and sensibility” (52-52).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

List and explain two functions of exercises in an actor’s development.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We explained that Acting is not merely pretending to be someone else. We described it as an interpretative means of communicating the

message inherent in a dramatic text to the audience. We maintained that in Acting, voice and body movements constitute the actor's major tools.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined concept of Acting. We equally discussed who the actor is, as well as the qualities an actor should possess. We examined acting techniques, the actor's instruments, which we identified as the actor's body and voice. We finally examined acting styles, as well as the roles of exercises in the training of the actor.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is Acting.

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UNIT 2 IMPROVISATION

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- 1.0 Introduction
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Improvisation as a pathway to open expression and creativity performs invaluable role as a training tool in acting. In this unit, we shall explore the meaning and uses of improvisation in the theatre. We shall equally examine sources of improvisation, types of improvisation, as well as suggest situations for improvisation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this study, the student should be able to:

- define improvisation
- trace sources of improvisation
- discuss types of improvisation
- discuss the functions of improvisation as a training tool in acting.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Improvisation

Improvisation as an experience pervades all aspects of life. According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*, “The skills of improvisation can apply to many different abilities or forms of communication for example, cooking, presenting a speech, sales, personal or romantic relationships, sports, flower arranging, martial arts, psychotherapy, the arts and much more”. The same encyclopaedia further states, “Extemporize”, “to vamp”, “ad lib” and “riff” all have basically the same meaning as improvisation. Colloquial terms such as “lets play it by ear”, “take it as it comes” and “make it up as we go along” are all used to describe improvisation”.

To extemporize, according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* means to “speak or perform without previous preparation”. To do something in an ad lib manner, according to the same dictionary, is to do something “in a spontaneous way” at the spur of the moment or impromptu. In a nutshell, ‘improvisation is the art of acting and reacting, in the moment, to one’s surroundings’, ideas or emergency situations. “It often focuses on bringing one’s personal awareness “into the moment” (Wikipedia). Improvisation is an experiential response to a situation. In our daily life, we often encounter situations that require that we respond immediately, and when we act on the spur of the moment to address such situations, we engage in the act of improvisation. So, everybody in one way or another is an improviser.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you understand by improvisation?

3.2 Improvisation in Theatre

To A.B.C. Duruaku, “in theatre, the word improvisation should be thought of in terms of invention, exploration and “experimentation” (28). It is a “free and unrestricted approach to creativity”, an uninhibited “deeper search into the meaning of things and how to overcome odds” (28). According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedic*, improvisation to the theatre artist, “is the primary interface with the Muse and is therefore, at its most fundamental level a form of soulful or spiritual communication”. Muse in a nutshell is the goddess of creativity, the source of creative inspiration. Therefore, *Wikipedia's* view of improvisation is that it is a means of connecting with creativity itself. “By inspiration, learning is immediate expression, an unrehearsed pulling out of knowledge, skills, attitudes, awareness, and perception into something that has personal meaning”.

It is important to note that the word theatre can be used to describe anything that can be turned into performance. Thus one can talk of dramatic improvisation, musical improvisation, dance improvisation, singing improvisation, etc.

MUSICAL IMPROVISATION

Creativity in performance is something elastic, something not foreclosed but ongoing. In music, improvisations take place as a solo performance, or independently in ensemble with other players” (Wikipedia). The same *Encyclopaedia* expresses the view that “musical improvisers often understand the idiom of one or more musical styles e.g., blues, rock, folk, Jazz and work with the idiom to express ideas with creativity and

originality”. On stage, the classical musicians, Bach, Beethoven and Mozart were known to have thrilled audiences with their improvisatorial arts. In an essay “EDN: probe: Learning as improvisation”, the author posits:

For Bach, Beethoven and Mozart Improvisation was an assumption in their musical creativity. Bach was an incredibly inspired improviser, Beethoven was known To vary his compositions in live Performance. Mozart literary lived and breathed a life of improvisation. It was practical means by which they built incredible musical compositions for human kind.

In the oral tradition, improvisation in music, song and dance is the only means of expressing expertise, the only means of introducing variation and colour and rhythm to what the people already know.

DANCE IMPROVISATION

Improvisation can be used as choreographic tool in dance. According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*, “Experimenting with the concepts of shape, space, time and energy while moving without inhibition or cognitive thinking can create unique and innovative movement designs, spatial configuration dynamics, and unpredictable rhythms. Improvisation without inhibition allows the choreographer to connect to their deepest creative self, which in turn clears the way for pure invention”.

DRAMA IMPROVISATION

In drama, improvisation can be a source for play-making, and a means of training of actor. Most community theatres create their plays through improvisation. Ahmed Yerima observes that in community theatres, “improvisation and continuous experimentation of scenario and its logic is the bulk of their rehearsal schedule and practice” (102).

‘Improvisation improves the training of an actor by stimulating his dramatic imagination, enhancing his response time in given situations, encouraging spontaneity, improving his tolerance threshold, developing the character, honing his movement skills as well as grooming his feeling of ensemble’

(Duruaku, 37).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What does improvisation mean in theatre?

3.3 Sources of Theatrical Improvisation

Theatrical improvisation can be sourced from imagination, personal experience and observation of human qualities and conditions of life in society.

EXPERIENCE

Experience they say is the best teacher: John Lock once said that the human mind is an empty or blank sheet, and that whatever impression it has is made by experience. To this seventeenth century philosopher, “knowledge was not imprinted, once and for all, on a man’s brain by God; it was to be discovered, by experience, in the world” (Bronowski and Mazlish, 235). To Lock therefore, man acquires knowledge through experience. Theatrical improvisation draws largely from live experience. Duruaku opines that “the store of experience of the individual greatly appreciates his ability to respond to situations and execute movements consequent upon unexpected conditions” (29). Stanislavsky advocates emotional memory as technique of character development. This technique involves the actor taking a mental tour to his past experience in order to be able to recreate desired passions on stage. Method actors rely heavily on their past experiences in order to actualize their roles on stage.

IMAGINATION

Imagination is that aspect of our mind that enables us to create mental images or picture. It is the nerve-centre of creativity because it is the only faculty of man that connects him to the source of inspiration. Before its physical realization, creativity first takes place in the imagination as a “flash of insight”. Actor who stretches his imagination can delve into the unknown as well as recall past events. This helps him to handle emergence situations and to predict future happenings.

Apart from being the repository of creative ideas and talents, liberating the imagination increases absorption and concentration. The actor encounters fleeting and often times contradictory ideas. Absorption and concentration will enable him to select ideas that would not make him to loose touch with his role but those that will promote its development.

Again imagination encourages sublimity in acting. According to Bowskill, “when improvisation is working at optimal level the student is in complete solitude and his creative imagination takes him into a living dream” (62). In this condition, the actor can move from the world of the possible into that of the miraculous, and that is when he can develop skills

that will launch him into the world of unique actors. Bowskill cites Lonesco as saying:

The free development of the powers of imagination must not be restricted. There must be no canalization, no directives, no preconceived ideas, not limit. I believe that a genuine work of art is one in which the initial intentions of the artist have been surpassed; where the flood of the imagination has swept through the barriers or out of the narrow channels in which the first tried to confine it; extending beyond messages, ideologies, and desire to prove or teach. This absolute freedom of imagination is called escape or evasion by the gloomy critics of our time; whereas it is true creation (62-63).

To Lonesco, therefore, “to make a new world is to satisfy the insistent demands of a mind that would be stiffened if its needs were not fulfilled” (63). Imagination enables the actor to give “insight into related ideas or occurrence” (Duruaku, 30).

OBSERVATION

Theatrical improvisation can be based on things observed from the society. In the society, the actor is surrounded by a ‘busy world.’ filled with good and ugly events, men, women and children of diverse behaviour and attitude to life. An actor must be conscious of the trivia of this so called busy world. What he observes makes impressions on him; he must listen and look at all manner of things. The more the actor takes in the more he brings to bear on his work. Bowskill insists that “for the actor, there can be no looking without seeing, or listening without hearing”, the actor “must see and hear anything that will shed light upon the human condition”(9).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain one source of improvisation in theatre.

3.4 Functions of Theatrical Improvisation

One of the objectives of improvisation in theatre is to help the actor to get away from “the dull, the routine and the clichés” of acting. Bowskill notes that “if the student is to create new and rich dramatic experiences, or to offer new insights into them, he must be ready to leave behind the probable and excavate from within his resources the unexpected”. And through the digging out of the unexpected, the student is encouraged to

deal with “change and its possibilities”. Since our society is dynamic, the good student is equipped through improvisation to live in a changing society. “This practise in innovation should cover movement habits, clothes, speech, make-up and all those aspects of behaviour that students generally accept as unchanging” (63).

In an internet essay entitled “END: Probe: learning as improvisation”, the author writes, “with respect to learning, improvisation allows us to open ourselves up and literally play with the things that we think, feel and do. Through improvisation we discover our own unique expression and identity through open expression in our particular circumstances”. In learning, improvisation encourages immediate response to situations, and shatters the idea of convention, that is the static approach of doing things. “Improvisation forces content (i.e. knowledge and skills) to be responsive to the moment and sensitive to the existing circumstances. What was once imposed as static content becomes malleable and dynamic under the pressure of improvisation”, the author further states.

Again improvisation promotes flexibility in acting. Bowskill opines that in “performance its function is to enable the actor to give a free-wheeling flexible response to the audience’s reception of his performance” (63).

Improvisation promotes creativity. Duruaku posits that improvisation “tasks the imagination and improves the creative power through an exercise of the faculties” (31). Improvisation implies that the person is the source and origin of design. It enables us to “explore what our lives can do and how we can connect our lives to the sources of inspiration greater than ourselves”. According to Duruaku, “creativity is not possible without imagination because the creative ability evolves from the ability to synthesize experience and re-work it to accommodate present circumstance” (30).

Furthermore, improvisation enhances the actor’s physical abilities. Through unhindered and constant experimentation, the actor can acquire unique movement designs, unnatural postures as well as dynamic rhythms. With a lot physical skills and abilities, the actor can introduce outstanding novelties and produce an infinite variety of effects during productions.

Improvisation helps the actor to build a lot of confidence in himself. If through improvisation an actor has mastery over all the members of his body and voice, he does not fear to take up acting challenges. On stage, he executes movements and speeches with precision. He never makes nervous movement nor falters in speech. Even if he loses his lines, he

fills the missing link with stored vocabulary, and never gives the audience a chance to feel that something has gone wrong.

Improvisational exercises help the actor to build and sustain energy, the ability to work tirelessly on stage. Certain role requires that the actor should possess wonderful kinetic energy. For example, it requires the possession of extra ordinary energy to play the role of Macbeth or King Lear. An actor that will play the role of Macbeth must have enough force that can impel him to do exploit on stage for about three hours. He must, therefore, indulge in serious physical exercises that will enable him to build up the energy required to perform the role.

Again, improvisation is a tool for exploratory rehearsal. Apart from certain objective blockings by the director, the actor is often encouraged to research into his role through improvisation. The objective of this is to enable the actor to find hidden truth about the personality of the character he is playing. During this exploratory rehearsal, the actor experiments with his total physical and psychological being in order to discover in great detail, the physical and emotional dispositions of the character he is recreating.

Improvisation is a means of soul-searching. This is because through exercises in meditation, the actor builds connecting bridge from the purely physical realm to the spiritual. The aim is to pull out hidden knowledge from the abode of inspiration. Greatness in acting depends largely on this encounter. For the actor, therefore, to loose contact with improvisation is to sever himself from the Muse, the source of inspiration and creativity. "Improvisation places us into direct and intimate contact with our own identity, our own interior world, and inspires us to pursue purpose and meaning in life" (See the essay, EDN: Probe: Learning as improvisation).

Improvisation encourages ensemble or team work. In group improvisation, "the strong can work with the weak, helping them to build confidence in this non-competitive situation, thereby diminishing showmanship (Duruaku, 33).

Finally, improvisation is a means of entertainment. According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*, "improvisational comedy is a common art performed throughout the world and throughout history". In the University of Nigeria, we have an improvisational group called the Comedy Squad. This group goes about performing improvised drama. Some of the more famous North American comic improvisational groups are the Upright Citizens Brigade of New York City, the Groundlings of Los Angeles, the Second City group in Chicago, etc. There are many such groups in the United Kingdom.

“Whose Line Is It Anyway” is for example, a popular Channel 4 TV programme based purely on improvisation. In oral tradition artists perform music, song and dance “without the bias of print manuscripts, musical notation, musical theory or sheet music....improvisation is so prevalent in this tradition that it becomes hard and perhaps impossible to isolate, separate it, and classify it” (EDN: Probe: Learning as improvisation).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

List and discuss two functions of improvisation

3.5 Approaches to Improvisation

Three approaches to improvisation can be isolated. They include private improvisation, leader-directed and group improvisation.

PRIVATE IMPROVISATION

In private approach to improvisation, the individual is both the source and origin of the design. A good actor thinks about his role all the time. He knows that character development does not end until the last production night. He therefore, makes ceaseless attempt to improve his role. Through private improvisation, he can open up new vistas, new ways of interpreting his role. In private improvisation, the actor embarks on a grand journey of self-discovery, without anybody accompanying or directing him.

LEADER-DIRECTED IMPROVISATION

This mostly occurs in class or workshop situation. In this type of improvisation, the leader presents the student or group with a theme or idea and asks him or it to flesh it up with spontaneous speech and action. The suggested idea carries sufficient charge in order to impel the student or group with readiness to express it. This is what Bowskill implies when he states that if the student is to be involved in improvisations, (as relationships) that stimulate his urge to expression and communication, the content must be charged with symbols he will immediately recognise and wish to pursue” (60).

THE GROUP APPROACH

Group improvisation can either be leader-directed oriented or trainees oriented. The most important thing is that group improvisation involves ensemble or team spirit. In a class or workshop situation, the leader may divide the students into group and assign each group a task to

perform or each group can be made to originate an idea and develop it. Whatever the case is, “the responsibility for producing end products lies with them. Not only do they have to negotiate with each other the choices they wish to make about the scene created, but they have to use their own resources for ideas” (Duruaku, 36-37). Group improvisation plays tremendous role in the realization of workshop plays. In fact, complete plays are known to have been created through group improvisation all over the world.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Discuss any one approach to improvisation you know.

3.6 Situations For Improvisation

Improvisation can be based on all dimensions of life. No aspect of the human condition or preoccupation is immuned to it. However it is necessary to observe that dramatic improvisations are usually based on situations that are rich in conflict. In a group improvisation, every imaginable obstacle should be caused to stand between characters. Vargas opines that “without conflict of some kind in a play, if there are no twists, turns and surprises up there on the stage, you will very soon have an in attentive and yawning audience out in front” (19).

Below are some situations the students can be asked to improvise.

MARITAL INFIDELITY

A man is caressing a concubine in his office when his wife makes an unsuspecting entry. The woman saw the act but the man attempts to defend himself with a fake excuse.

THE DELIQUENT CHILD

A delinquent child enters the kitchen where his mother is preparing their dinner. His mother has just gone to her bedroom to pick an item. No sooner than the child picked up a piece of hot meat from the pot than his mother appeared. The child should try to hide the meat in his pocket.

THE GOSSIPS

A group of the three women are gossiping about one of their friends who is nearby eavesdropping. In the heat of the gossip, the subject bursts into the room without knocking at the door. The highly embarrassed women find themselves in a fix to change topic.

MIMICRY

A young undergraduate male student is mimicking his Professor before his class. His mimicry touches on the Professor's voice, mannerism and gesticulation. As he appears to be in his best, the professor enters without announcement. The student on seeing the Professor rushes to the blackboard and begins to wipe it with his hand.

ROBBERS

Three armed robbers are caught by the police patrol team. The robbers begin to blame one another for their trouble.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Create one situation for improvisation.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We explained that improvisation is a vital tool in acting. We observed that through improvisation, the student can build up confidence to take up acting challenges, gain mastery over his body and voice, as well as come in contact with the source of creativity.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined the concept of improvisation, the objectives of improvisation as a tool in actor's training; we looked at the sources of improvisation, its approaches and functions, as well as the situations for improvisation. We equally suggested some scenario that the students can improvise.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List and discuss two functions of improvisation.

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UNIT 3 DIRECTING

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Directing is an invaluable aspect of theatre practice. This is because it is the means of getting the play script on its feet. Without directing, the script remains cold, dead and latent. In this study, effort will be made to explain the concept of play direction and its origin, the director, his functions and qualities, approaches to directing, as well as directing process.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this study the students should be able to:

- explain the concept of Directing
- trace the origin and development of play directing
- discuss who the Director is
- list and explain qualities of a Director
- state and discuss the functions of the Director
- examine approaches to Directing
- discuss play direction process
- attempt to direct a play.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept Of Directing

Hubert C. Heffner, Samuel Selden and Hunton D. Sellman define “directing as the art of interpreting a play for a specific audience through the means of theatre art”. They further state that the art of directing “cannot be learned from reading a book about it or from hearing lectures on it”. They feel that books and lectures are highly important to teach the learner principles and methods, which he must apply in practice, but his learning is incomplete if he does not go on to practice, preferably under the guidance of an experienced director – teacher” (273). The implications of Heffner and his colleagues’ views above include the following:

- That directing requires creativity and not just reproducing the script on stage;
- That even though the director is at the apex of directing, it is nonetheless a collective art since the actors are also involved in play interpretation;
- That there are basically two means of play interpretation, the actors and the technical elements such as costumes, lighting, sound and the set pieces;
- That training is important in directing;
- That the proper place to learning directing is on the stage

According to Dapo Adelugba, “the question of moving from a cold script and giving it life is probably the very heart of directorial art” (104). From Adelugba’s point of view, we gain the insight that script is never to be regarded as drama until it is energized and actualized by means of impersonation through the difficult and complex process of directing.

To Albright *et al*, play direction is “the direct translation of the form and purpose of a play into the expressional mode of the stage” (323). This is a very poor perception of the idea of directing. Directing cannot be said to be complex and tasking process if it is just to photocopy the script on stage. It is more than that. It involves creativity on the part of the Director. In fact, directors who merely put the script as it is on stage is often called the ‘playwright’s director’. In most cases, the term is not a compliment. A director is supposed to be creative. A creative director hardly works with the playwright because their concepts of the play are often at variance. This is exemplified by the conflict between Samuel Beckett and the American Repertory Theatre (ART) ably represented by its artistic director, Robert Brustein. The conflict was generated by ART’s interpretation of the play, *Endgame*, which ignored the directives of the playwright. In reaction to the ART’s production, the author wrote in complete rejection of the production thus:

Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage direction is completely unacceptable to me. My play requires an empty room and two small windows. The American Repertory Theatre Production which dismisses my direction is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Any one who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this (54).
Samuel Beckett.

In response to Beckett's view above, the artistic director of American Repertory Theatre, Robert Brustein has this to say:

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATRE

Samuel Beckett's plays are among the most powerful documents of the modern age-but except in published form they are not etched on stone. Like all works of theatre, productions of *Endgame* depend upon the collective contributions of directors, actors and designers to realise them effectively and normal rights of interpretations are essential in order to free the full energy and meaning of the play. Each age, furthermore, brings fresh eyes to the works of the past. It was Beckett's *Endgame*, ironically, that inspires Peter Brook's radical new reading of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. We believe that this production despite hearsay representation to the contrary, observes the spirit of the text of Mr. Beckett's great play- far more so, in fact, than a number of past productions, which to our knowledge evoked public protest from Mr. Beckett's agent. One of these recently performed in Belgium in 1983, was set in a warehouse flooded with eight thousand square feet of water; another produced in New York in 1972, substituted American colloquialisms for Beckett's language. Indeed, when directing his work, Mr. Beckett makes significant revisions of his own text and stage directions, suggesting that even he recognises the need for changes with the passage of time. But even were own production far more revisionist or radical, it is the public that must be the final arbiter of its value. This is not the first appearance of *Endgame*, nor is it likely to be the last. Like all works of theatrical art, the play is open to many approaches, and each new production uncorks new meanings. To threaten any deviations from a purist rendering of this or any other play- to insist on strict adherence to each parenthesis of the published text, not only robs collaborating artists of their interpretive freedom but threatens to turn the theatre into waxworks. Mr. Beckett's agents do no service either to theatrical art or to the great artist they represent by pursuing such rigorous control (55-56).

Robert Brustein, Artistic Director

The message gained from the above is that once a play is published, it is subject to all manner of interpretation. There is no one correct way of

interpreting the play. Again the success of any production depends largely on its acceptability by the audience.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define Directing in your own language.

3.2 The Origin of Directing

The idea of co-ordinating performances is very ancient, indeed, as old as the theatre itself. During the classical times, the job of co-ordinating productions was borne by the playwrights who were also known to have acted in their own plays. Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy opine that “the playwright- director’s key role is indicated by the term applied to him, didaskalos (teacher), for he was considered to be the instructor of both the performance and the audience” (24). During the Middle ages, the job was done by the paymasters appointed by the clergy, confraternities and trade guilds who sponsored productions at that material time. From the Renaissance to the later part of the nineteenth century, the actor-manager supervised productions. However, “the director, as we think of him today is a recent phenomenon in theatre history” (Clurman, 7). According to Albright et al, “by the end of the nineteenth century , theatre workers began to recognise that a single individual with the function of patterning and co-ordinating all the elements of a production could give it unity and proportion, and could assist each artist to make his maximum contribution to the play”(323). The idea of popularising the concept of directing and the unique function of the director as the head of theatrical production is credited to George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. The highlighting Directing as a specialized and enviable aspect of the theatre practice fosters an unprecedented development in the theatre. This is not only because people now take up Directing a job, a worthy profession, it has resulted in quality, deep and electrifying performances all over the world.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Trace the evolution of Directing.

3.3 The Director and His Functions

Albright *et al* posit that the purpose of dramatic production is to “project complete and accurate theatrical effect to the audience and such an effect is a composite pattern of visual and auditory stimuli which produces an intellectual or emotional response on the part of the spectators” (323). In most cases, a play elicits both responses. In theatrical practice, the director is the leader of the collective efforts and

processes of realising a performance. As an interpretive theatre worker, Brustein argues that “his job is to find free pathways in the heart of the text” (76).

The first duty of the director is to choose a play to direct. In selecting a play to direct, the director should “bear in mind the atmosphere, the environment and the social realities of the time” (Adelugba, 104). Also, the director selects a play that interests him. If the play is not attractive to him, “nothing but frustration and unhappiness is caused when a director is involved in the production of a play with which he cannot totally identify” (Bowskill, 266).

In the game of directing, the director functions as a coach. In this capacity, he can impact stimulating ideas, as well as harness the creative and imaginative talents of the cast, the actors and actresses.

Apart from dealing with the actors and actresses, the director coordinates the activities of the technical theatre workers such as the set designer, the costumier, the make-up artist, the producer of sound effects, as well as the lighting designer and the master electrician. This task requires administrative ability, as well as a sense of diplomacy. Heffner et al maintain that “the ability to deal with others harmoniously, with tact, with diplomacy, and with leadership, is an asset which comes partly by inheritance, but largely by training” (274-275).

The Director is a creative artist. Adelugba expresses the view that “what makes a great director is bringing some elements of innovativeness, bringing the charm of novelty to bear on what is being built”. He feels that “mundane and old script that have been read by hundred of thousands of people can suddenly be transformed by the genius of a director into something new and that would make the audience feel that, that gentleman or lady who directed this play has added some new thinking”. He further maintains that the “transformation from what is generally known to what is not known through the power of his inner eye, the text in the case of the published play or the improvisatory work in the case of the unscripted play, becomes the mode of transformation through the power of the director’s genius” (103). In a nutshell, Adelugba means that what makes the director creative and therefore relevant, is “his or her being able to read new meanings or seeing in the script may be what all other directors had not seen before; a valid creation – not just inventing for the sake of invention but validly” (103).

Furthermore, the Director functions as a super – audience or what Jerry Pickering calls “cheerleader”. During rehearsals, the Director tends to react to the activities of the actors in the way the audience would during normal production. He appraises “every phase of the preparation, and

strive with his associates – actors, designers, technicians and perhaps the playwright – to heighten the effectiveness of the whole and of each part” (Albright *et al*, 323).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List and discuss any two functions of a theatre Director you know.

3.4 Qualities of a Good Theatre Director

In explaining certain attitudinal differences between, the actor and the director, Derek Bowskill rightly observes,” Actor needs those qualities which typifies an adolescent: an urge towards growth, exploration, explosion and discovery of important frontiers while “a director needs qualities that are paternalistic,” which will enable him as a kind father, “to guide, foster, encourage and strengthen the actors in their efforts to master their roles. No matter how good an actor may be, he needs a director who will inspire him to bring out his best. No matter how good an actor is, he may never feel fulfilled without a director appraising and urging him on.

Moreover, a director must avoid the idea of playing God on stage. A director may block movements and gestures etc, but his major task is “to help the cast to discover their needs and their ways of meeting them” (266). As Bowskill would say, it is not the director’s job to “train actors until they are automatons or zombies” (266). There are a good number of reasons why the director should not make this his objective and Bowskill outlines them thus:

- He may not be able to do (what he would want the actor to do) it well. The words in the parenthesis are mine.
- He may do it so well that it leaves the actor little chance to use his initiative and imagination.
- He may do excellently well that the actor feels inadequate.
- It unnecessarily illuminates his own acting ability without any guarantee that it releases the actor’s (266).

The process of getting a play alive is a compound of joy and frustration. Brustein observes that just as a playwright is often sad for not seeing his vision realized on stage, the director with a preconceived idea “experiences frustration at not seeing his idea realized on the first rehearsals. He, however, cautions that if such a director “has any sense, he steps back, recognizes that his idea is much less important ultimately than what emerges from the collaborative and collective effort of the entire company” (94).In essence, the director must not insist on his ideas. He should be open to suggestions and even draw inspiration from

innovative activities of the actors. After all, in the final analysis, performance nights belong to the actors.

The director needs to be the reservoir of enthusiasm, sympathy and energy. He must always show concern to the problems of the actors. He must be tolerant but not indulgent; kind and compassionate but not soft or sloppy.(Bowskill, 268). It is important that while the director should not be excessively lenient, he should not be a terror because no actor can bring out his in an atmosphere of intimidation and fearfulness “An actor can feel hostile as a result of being bullied, misunderstood, satirized or just hurt,” and this becomes worse if the director is authoritarian in approach (270).

Acting and even directing thrive on change. A good “director must be prepared for change. He should be in a position to accept fruitful changes because as a creative process, acting feeds on experiment and innovation” (Bowskill, 270) Harold Clurman opines that a director who insists that he is always absolutely right is indulging in his ego” (166).

The director should be a very sincere and honest person. It is his duty to tell the cast the truth at all times and in all circumstances. Bowskill notes that the more the director “can build up a reputation for sincerity and frankness, the more will the cast respect him,” if he can do this without hurting feelings, so much the better” (270).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss two qualities of a good director.

3.5 Approaches to Directing

There is no single approach to directing, no one correct way of interpreting a play on stage. According to Jerry V. Pickering, “There are as many directing techniques as there are directors, and many directors even vary their methods to suit the special problems that are presented from script to script” (178). In complete agreement with this view, Harold Clurman states that “every director makes his own laws, depending not only on his own temperament and artistic inclination but on the circumstances of production”(x). So, the idea is that directors should use whatever methods or techniques that work well for them. Clurman gives examples of how varied directing approaches can be. According to him:

- Many English and American directors require actors to commit their lines to memory before rehearsals have begun. To other directors such a practice is sinful.

- Many directors see little value in having the cast sit together for more than one or two sessions reading the play. They wish to have the cast on their feet, in movement from the very first day of rehearsal.
- Some directors like the late French director Jean Vilar writes that cast should spend one-third of the rehearsal time ‘script in hand with buttocks on the chair’ (ix-x). But this is absolutely unacceptable to many directors. Examples are endless.

However, for purposes of teaching and learning we will classify directing approaches into two broad groups,, the overall or general interpretive approach and moment-to-moment technique.

OVERALL APPROACH

In this type of approach, the director moves from the general to the particulars. Before the commencement of rehearsals, the director already has what he wants to achieve in his head. He has already known what the play’s spine is. He has formed a concept of the production and as well has chosen what style he will use to realize his objective. Having a fore knowledge of what he wants enables the director to be focused during rehearsals. During rehearsal he only strives to translate his concept of the production into stage languages. In other words, in overall interpretive approach, the director’s concept serves as a “springboard for interpretation”. If for example the director’s concept of the script is poverty he makes sure that not the setting of the play nor costumes nor actors’ speeches and movements radiate affluence.

MOMENT-TO-MOMENT APPROACH

Some directors navigate the complex world of directing through moment-to- moment technique. They believe that the personalities of the characters can only be adequately gradually discovered. Clurman cites an American director, Richard Foreman as saying that, “when you get a play on its feet, what surfaces surfaces. I don’t plan which aspect of it is going to surface” (95). Foreman “wants all “the possible interpretations playing with each other at the same time”. To directors who employ moment-to-moment techniques, changes come intuitively. They think only by doing things. According to Foreman “the problem is you always have to get the play staged before you can see all the things you are doing wrong” (96). Directors who make use of this method believe that it is not possible to do a wholesome interpretation of the play at once. Hence, they continue to juggle up ideas until they arrive at the acceptable ones. They indulge in trial and error because they know that creativity feeds on experiment and innovation. So dazzling arrays

of aids are available to them. Moment-to-moment approach to interpretation will enable the director to know whether the lines that appear to “soar in the script can really soar when the actors begin to speak there on stage”.

It is not, however, our ambition here to demonstrate which of the two techniques is better than the other; our obligation is to examine the implications of each method. We maintain that a director uses whatever method that best helps him in realizing a good performance.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What does overall approach to directing entail?

3.6 Process of Directing

- The first step the director takes towards the realization of a performance is to select the play. Factors that influence the director’s choice of play have been discussed else where in this study.
- The second step is to read the play as many times as possible. During these readings, the director notes down new insights or commit them to memory.
- After the reading and analysis of the play the director does the casting.
- After the director has read the script sufficiently, he must have accumulated a lot of questions to be answered practically on stage. These questions often border on the nature of visual effects, characters moods and sentiments, the message to be communicated to the audience, and finally the means of embodying all this. In fact, the questions amount to finding out what Jacque Copeau calls the ‘play’s spine’. Today, the spine of the play or its main action is generally referred to as the Director’s concept. Harold Clurman posits that the director’s concept is “the key or the springboard of his interpretation” (30). It is upon this that the director instructs the actors. It also influences the style of the production, the nature of the setting and the other technical elements of production. It is in this connection that Clurman observes that “a production is ideal only in relation to its director’s vision of it and to a particular spectator’s taste” (168). Defining the concept is a very important artistic step in directing because “where a director has not determined on a spine for his production” and commence rehearsals, “each scene follows the

next without necessarily adding up to a total dramatic statement” (30).

- Having arrived at a concept, the next step is to find appropriate style that will enable him to articulate his concept. Style refers essentially to the “particular tone, mood, atmosphere, emphasis and ‘dimension in which the idea is conveyed” (30). Theatricalisms, Realism, symbolism, etc., are some of the examples of theatrical style. The chosen style should reflect on acting, setting, costumes, make-up, sound and lighting. However, it is important to note that what is now fashionable is eclecticism. Directors now borrow and mix styles freely, at least to capture the many sides of human existence.
- Ideally, after the choice of concept and style has been made, the director meets with the technical crew in order to deal with the technical elements of the production – costumes, setting, lighting, sound effects, and so on. If the technical requirements of the production are enormous, it is always better to start putting them together, even before the beginning of rehearsals. If it is possible, the model of the stage could be shown to the actors during their first rehearsal. This will enable them to visualize the environment of the performance. This is important because the actual putting up of the set often comes a few days before the production.

In the meeting with the members of the crew, especially the designers, the director should not be dictatorial. He should make suggestions regarding his vision of the performance, and then allow them to use their creative talents to realize them.

- Actual direction begins with the first rehearsal. It is necessary that the director should intimate the cast with changes he made in the script before they commence the rehearsal. Changes can occur in form of cutting. Portions of the scripts which the directors consider irrelevant or redundant are often removed from the scripts in order to sharpen them and to make them focused. In directing, script cutting now appears inevitable. Early rehearsals may be reading rehearsals for some directors, but for other, as we have earlier mentioned, the play is placed on its feet and blockings begin during the very first day of rehearsal. In building up the character on stage, the director relies on the script, there actors’ total beings, as well as his own imaginative talent. We will examine rehearsals in detail in the unit dealing with production process.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What is the spine of a play?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained that directing is a means of transforming the dramatic text into a theatrical expression on stage. We maintained that directing is a creative thing and not just a means of reproducing the playwright's script on stage. We stated that the director is at the head of the creative effort to stage a play. We explained that for the director to execute his function as a harnesser of talents, he must himself be creative, diplomatic, compassionate and honest in dealing with his cast.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined the concept of directing, its origin and development. We discussed the personality of the theatre director, pointing out his qualities and roles in theatrical production. We also looked at directing approaches. Here, we noted that directing techniques are many and diverse, and that directors use whatever approaches they feel can help them to effectively realize their directorial concepts, and objectives. We explained certain steps taken by directors in order to realize performances.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is directing?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 4 PLAYWRITING

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- 3.0 Main Content

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Playwriting is a dominant aspect of the theatre today. This creative process of putting a play together in a dialogic form so pervades the world of theatre that it appears quitesential to the existence of contemporary theatre practice. Since the Greek times, people have taken up playwriting as a profession, an enviable means of livelihood.

In this study, we will attempt to examine the concept of playwriting, the meaning of play, the play structure, the qualities of a good playwright, where and how does he derive his materials, artistic devices, as well as the mechanics of play composition.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that by the end of this study, students should be able to:

- discuss the concept of playwriting
- explain who is the playwright
- discuss what a play is
- list and discuss the qualities of a good playwright
- list and explain known dramatic structures
- explain where the playwright gets the materials he uses in composing the play
- list and explain certain artistic devices a playwright can employ in play-making
- examine the mechanics of play composition
- discuss the nature of characterization
- discuss the essential qualities of dialogue
- attempt writing a play.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Playwriting

Playwriting is a creative process of putting a play together by means of written language. It is a means of distilling thoughts, experiences, ideas, beliefs, faiths, even dreams, in a conversational manner, in order to situate characters properly in their environments, and to give fresh and penetrating insights and meaning to the chaotic situations of mundane life. It is indeed, a creative dramatic situation of deploying language in order to find out the unsaid things of life or to reveal the many-sided dimensions of man. It is an intuitive process of gaining insight into human qualities and nature. It is the creative process of involving the marriage of the experience and unique gift of inspiration. This marriage involves the combination of mental images derived from experience and knowledge to generate new meaning.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain what you understand by playwriting.

3.2 The Play

Bernard Beckerman defines a play as a system of action which gives an illusion of wholeness to the disorder of life. It is an arrangement of segments of action. And this arrangement Beckerman further states, is “the playwright’s imprint of meaning upon man’s passage through time”. Although a play is said to convey sense wholeness, it is no more than an abstract of a larger or extended action. This is because the incidents it contains are usually a portion of all the events that comprise its story. Certain ideas that are well beyond the limits of stage resources or even those actors are not often directly expressed. Some can be simulated by means of sound, while others are reported. Because there are limitless possibilities in a given story, a play usually embodies essential moments of the story that informs it. In selecting the crucial moments, the playwright is guided by the objective he seeks to realize in the play, as well as the audience’s expectation.

The mode of dramatic activity a play makes use of is chiefly determined by the social reality of that particular period and the prevailing dramatic conventions inherent in the historical epoch in which the play is composed. Dramatic activity expressed in a play can either be artificially constructed or it can be derived from real life. According to Beckerman, in “abstracted activity, we expect the appearance of every day behaviour, if not every day’s circumstance”. In this kind of dramatic activity, what is done on stage is normative. Artificially derived activities, according to Beckerman, “are products of artistic traditions intended to refer the audience not to personal experience but to socio-aesthetic conventions”, that is, the artistic devices of the period.

For example, speaking in declamatory voices or blank verses are not normative.

THE PLAY STRUCTURE

A play, according to John Howard Lawson, “embodies a vision, poses an ethical or emotional problem, praises heroes or laughs at fools”. Though “the playwright may not be conscious of any purpose beyond telling tale”, his play nevertheless embodies “a point of view, a judgement of human relationships”, and the “the structure of a play, the design of each scene and the movement of the acting to its climax, are the means by which the concept is communicated” (vii).

When we talk of a play’s structure, we refer to its pattern, how the play is put together or organised. Basically, we have two major play structures. They are the organic and episodic structures.

ORGANIC STRUCTURE

The theory of organic structure was formulated by Aristotle following his study of the tragic plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The theory of organic structure emphasizes structural unity. This means that a play should neither begin nor end haphazardly. Incidents should be arranged in a logical progression, in such a way that the removal of a portion of it should be capable of disjoining the entire system. Aristotle in this theory states that the play’s events should revolve around a major character, and that change of fortune should be brought about by reversal or recognition or both, according to what is probable or inevitable.

EPISODIC STRUCTURE

This is the type of structure that does not adhere to logic in terms of the arrangement of incidents in a play. Scenes do not follow one another in a clear chain of cause and effect. Episodic plot moves across filmic space and time. This is to say that an episodic play covers an extensive period of time, sometimes many years. In one play one can go anywhere and encounter all sorts of people. There are many sub-plots which at times appear parallel. Ideas are consistently clashing and scenes oppose each other for purposes of creating ironic situation that man finds himself in life. In a nutshell, episodic plot is the cinematic way of patterning a play. In Epic theatre unity is only achieved through the narrator or the narrating voice.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is a play?

3.3 Dramatic Action

Dramatic action is not synonymous with plot as Aristotle would want us to believe. This is because while dramatic action refers to the totality of the dramatic activities, Burns (1990) posits that plot is the “structural principle that knits together, all the various incidents in a drama to achieve a meaningful pattern”. While dramatic action refers to what the actors do on stage, plot means the story of what the actors do. So, here, we take the whole events of the play to mean the dramatic action. Aristotle divides dramatic action into three parts namely beginning, middle and end.

THE BEGINNING

The contemporary term for what Aristotle regards as the beginning of the play is exposition. The opening scene(s) reveals the major character, his social environment and antecedent actions that may be far beyond the limit of stage resources and representation. Apart from the background and setting of the play, the beginning indicates the mood of the play. John Howard Lawson maintains that the expository scene is “the point at which dangerous decision is made” (234). He further states that the opening scenes of a play show the setting up of a goal under conditions which make the setting up of such goal seem necessary” (235). This is akin to what is referred today as the dramatic question. In Ukala’s *The Slave Wife*, the dramatic question can be how can Oba Ogiso beget a male child? In *Oedipus The King* by Sophocles, the goal is how to find out who killed Laius. The need for the search is necessary because the great pestilence being suffered by the Thebans has been linked to the killing of Laius. The beginning segment of the dramatic action is usually over when the dramatic question is made clear.

Exposition can be in form of monologue as we see in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, or presented in form of dialogue as we have again in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. The young playwright is not confined to any model, he can employ any form that he can effectively use to communicate his play’s background, setting and mood.

THE MIDDLE

The middle part of the dramatic action is the most extensive part of the play’s action. The middle now known as the rising action consists of chain of complications that appear to constitute stumbling blocks between the major character and his project or goal. When there exists a gap between the character and his objective, tension is produced. And the more constraints between the character and his project, the greater

will be the dramatic tension. In performance both the characters and the spectators undergo this emotional response we call tension from moment to moment. Tension can be generated through fear of failure, mysterious occurrences, surprises, suspense and dilemma of choosing between options.

Lawson rightly posits that “the changes in the characters and environment which constitute the play’s progression lie in the rising action” (245). In this portion of the play, both the expected and the unenvisaged begin to surface. Characters make great efforts to grapple with these difficulties. The middle of the play comes to an end when the climax is attained, the climax being “the point of maximum clash of opposing wills, the test of possibilities” (245).

Another important component of the rising action is the obligatory scene.

OBLIGATORY SCENE is the scene of great expectation in a play. Lawson cites, Francisque Sarcey as describing it as that scene “which the audience (more or less clearly and consciously) foresees and desires, and the absence of which it may with reason resent” (262). Sarcey further states that “it is precisely this expectation mingled with uncertainty which is one of the charms of the theatre”. Every good playwright should strive to “provide a point of concentration toward which the maximum expectation is aroused” in his plays. Aristotle opines that in a good play, change of fortune should be brought about by reversal and recognition. The obligatory scene is the scene of recognition. In this scene, opposing forces or characters face each other in full knowledge of the matter at stake. In *Oedipus The King*, the scene where Oedipus gains the knowledge that he is the actual killer of Laius is the obligatory scene of the play. In Ukala’s *The Slave Wife*, the scene where the supposedly drowned male child of Igbon – the slave wife returns to reveal himself as Oba Ogiso’s heir – apparent, is the point of maximum expectation and possibility in that play. The audience expects and awaits that scene eagerly, and Ukala deftly weaves it into his dramatic action. That scene reveals everything. Oba Ogiso becomes aware of many things. He becomes aware that Obu – the medicine man never misrepresents the message of the gods; he becomes aware of Igbon’s innocence and the wickedness of his other wives. He becomes aware that his throne will never become vacant when he is no more. His wicked wives become aware that the gods ensure that evil never pays.

THE END

The end comprises the falling action or the denouncement and the resolution. Since the obligatory scene answers the dramatic question, the purpose of the end is to bring back equilibrium and to conclude the

system of things in a reasonable manner. However, it is important to note that a good number of fine plays end almost immediately after the climax, perhaps after the great catastrophe in the case of tragedy. Many scholars view the idea of falling action as unnecessary. They see no reason in allowing a play to extend far beyond its vital action. To them, such effort usually results to anti-climax, which does not usually go down well with the audience.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What does the middle of a play entail?

3.4 The Playwright, His Tasks and Qualities

The playwright is the composer, the man behind the process of play creation. According to Luis Vargas; the playwright's "path is littered with obstacles which simply do not exist for the novelist". This is essentially because of the enormous artistic license which is "unthinkable for the playwright but within the beck and call of the novelist. Vargas further states that "the novelist can take his time to tell his story. He can digress as often as he likes. He can spend twenty pages describing the outside of a house, and then he can take us inside and in a few sentences neatly disposes of two of his characters by murder" (22). This artistic license is inconceivable for the playwright who is guided by "dramatic time" and, therefore, has to work "with utmost economy and precision" (22). The playwright must execute his work within the modern dramatic time of not more than two and half hours.

Apart from the fore-going, the playwright has to bother about the stagability of the actions, how to create believable characters. "He has to think in terms of entrances and exits and timing with one eye on his watch. If he packs a character off the stage for a legitimate reason to collect a suitcase from the bedroom" for example, "shall we say – which enables the two remaining characters to exchange secrets not meant for the ears of the one who is absent, he must be careful that the absentee is not away longer than would be necessary to collect a suitcase unless he can think of a good excuse to cover the delay" (22).

Again the playwright thinks about how to suit words to actions. Vargas maintains that "there must be no flat passages". To him, "It is easier to excuse a novelist his dull pages, once his characters have caught the interest of his readers, for there is always the thought that the next chapter may be better. A playwright "cannot afford one scene, one speech, in fact, one sentence which does not directly contribute to develop the plot, create tension or build up character or atmosphere" (22).

QUALITIES OF A GOOD PLAYWRIGHT

Because of the enormous tasks facing the playwright, he must possess the following qualities to enable him take up the challenges effectively. A few of these qualities are:

- A good playwright must be a great thinker. This is because the first step in play creation has to do with the formulation of concept; that is, the idea to write on. Great thinking enables the playwright to generate profound ideas.
- A good playwright must have a firm sense of direction. He must be focused. John Howard Lawson rightly points out that every play “embodies a vision, poses an ethical or emotional problem, praises heroes and laughs at fools” (vii). This implies that the dramatic action always embodies “a point of view, a judgment of human relationships”. A firm sense of direction will enable the playwright not to confuse issues. Aristotle suggests that one way of avoiding confusion in a play is to rely on a single plot. His view is that multiple plot situation can introduce extraneous material capable of derailing the playwright’s point of view. Firm direction entails possessing a good sense of order and logic.
- A good playwright must possess a very high sense of imagination. This will enable him to able to combine mental images derived from knowledge and experience to produce fresh meaning. The idea of newness of meaning or originality arises from the manner of selection and arrangement of incidents and this is where the sense of beauty and logic lies.
- A good playwright must be skilful in the use of language. He must be able to create levels of language in order to properly delineate character, establish mood, create pace and layers of meaning.
- The playwright must be a good communicator. This is because communication is the primary essence of making the theatre. If at the end of the play the spectators begin to ask one another what the playwright has said, it means that the play fails in terms of communication.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss any one quality a good playwright must possess.

3.5 Sources of Materials for Playwriting

The playwright has an ample stock of materials to draw from. They include the following:

- The people's myths and folklores,
- The people's past history,
- The people's political activities,
- Economic conditions,
- The thinking of the age, that is, the prevailing thought of the playwright's period.
- Social or class relations,
- Religious activities,
- The people's traditions,
- Dreams, etc.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Where does the playwright derive the materials he uses in play construction?

3.6 Instruments of Playwriting

Theatre is communication. In communication, people share ideas, and exchange messages. A play's idea or message is embodied in the story which informs the play. This story is called plot in drama. So, the first tool the playwright requires is the plot. A sound plot is the starting point of a successful and interesting play. Aristotle regards plot as the soul of tragedy because, according to him, the elements that enable tragedy to achieve its effect (catharsis) reside in the plot. These elements are peripeteia (reversal) and anagnorisis (recognition). This is an incontrovertible fact because there can never be a tragedy without "a fall from grace to grass". Plot is a quintessential tool in playwriting because it tells us what the play is all about.

According to Grebanier, the plot serves three purposes. It tells us the condition of the action, the cause of the action and the resulting action. He explains these purposes as follows:

- The condition of the action is the first significant event of the play, the event which holds the root of the cause of the action. For example (tentative) Romeo falls in love with Juliet at first sight.

- The cause of the action is the event which follows from the condition of the action, and which raises a question which the rest of the play must answer. For example, (tentative), Romeo marries Juliet.
- The resulting action will answer the question raised by the cause of the action, the question which is the chief business of the plot. For example, will Romeo find happiness with Juliet?" (89).

It is, however, important to observe that Grebanier's proposition is for plot that follows the law of formal logic. As we have explained elsewhere, a plot can be episodic. Nonetheless, plot articulates the actions of characters and the conditions that make such actions possible.

Another vital tool in play composition is language. In fact, a play is a system of dialogue. Language is used to communicate ideas, delineate characters, clarify mood, reveal thought, describe the play's atmosphere and environment, as well as kindle emotion.

Character is a major instrument of playwriting. A play, after all, is a pattern of representation involving the conduct of characters in relationships. There are four levels of characterization. They include physical, social, psychological and moral characterization. Physical characterization involves supplying the external attributes of the dramatic personae, including size, colour, age, height, sex, etc. Social characterization includes family relationship, economic standing, religion, profession, and in fact, all those factors that place the character in his environment". According to Beckerman, Psychological characterization refers to the depiction of the character's "habitual responses, attitudes, desires, motivations, likes and dislikes – the inner workings of the mind – both emotional and intellectual, which lead to action". Moral character is revealed by the nature of character's choices and decisions.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Discuss any instrument of playwriting you know.

3.7 Guidelines for Writing a Play

• ON THE PLOT

A good play must have a clear plot. Clarity of plot makes it possible for the audience to comprehend the playwright's point of view. It makes

meaning clear and unambiguous. Vargas states that “Many a promising play has been ruined because the author, starting off with a clear idea, appears to stumble across a more promising theme, abandons his original intention and changes his mind and direction half-way through the play”. This often results to “a frustrated and disappointed audience, and a play that fails to run” (23).

To ensure effective handling of the plot, an aspiring playwright should make do with single plot, one major character or two. Before writing, he or she should break the story into bits known as synopsis. The synopsis must reveal the condition of action, the cause of action and the resulting action.

ON DRAMATIC ACTION

A good playwright fills his play with attention arresting actions. Dramatic action is at its best when it maximizes the use of conflict. Yerima (2003) posits that the “new playwright must avoid presenting an aimless, talkative bore on stage”. He argues that this situation “occurs when both the idea and conflict of the play have not been well thought out”. He maintains that “in talking too much, and not allowing action and character to play out the conflict of the play the inexperienced playwright gives room for the audience’s mind to wander, and sometimes loose totally, the thematic thrust of the playwright” (38). The point here is that conflict is at the heart of drama. Every aspiring playwright should note this well. He or she should know that a play engages attention if every imaginable obstacle is placed between the protagonist and his goal. Without sufficient conflict, “if there are no twists, turns and surprises up there on the stage, you will very soon have an inattentive and yawning audience out in front” (Vargas, 19).

ON CHARACTERIZATION

Aristotle opines that character is a by-product of action. In acknowledgement of this fact, Lawson cites W.T. Price as saying that “characters can be brought out in no other way than by throwing people into relations” (280). Character can also be revealed by pitching man against the supernatural forces as well as man against himself. In regard to this, Kitto writes that “the essence of the old tragedy was not one character joined in conflict with another but the hero facing his own destiny or playing out an inner drama of his soul” (31). Character is,

according to Beckerman, “a summarized perception” or, according to Styán, “the impression left by the action of the dramatist personae” (210).

Also, the new playwright should know that characters are differentiated from one another by three means, namely; variation in manner of behaviour, given circumstances including social status, and physical image – the external appearance. He should be aware that stock character type emerges from rigid social and temperamental features, while the dynamic ones are marked by behavioural changes due to new awareness or revelation or change in social arrangement.

ON LANGUAGE CUM DIALOGUE

Every good playwright must be conscious of language. Theatre is communication. This implies that any playwright who wishes to communicate must use the living language of his people. Ahmed Yerima, remarks that it is “the management of diction, the choice of correct and meaningful words which would not only give meaning but say exactly what the playwright intends his characters to say” (40). The playwright who uses esoteric language, that is, language filled with strange and far-fetched imagery and metaphor no doubt has a specialized audience in mind, and certainly not the larger community of the average literate persons. Drama is a temporal art; and as such, the audience has no time to figure out meaning. Language is an essential tool of communication and should remain so in all its usages.

Every play exists in dialogue form, that is, in conversational manner. How a playwright manages his or her dialogue determines the success or failure of the play. A clear, charming and riveting dialogue enhances memorization on the part of the performers, and comprehension on the part of the spectators. A dialogue that is incoherent and clumsily put together is a complete bore to the audience.

QUALITIES OF GOOD DIALOGUE

- A good dialogue should be effective. To be effective is to perform its basic functions. And the basic function of every dialogue is to communicate.
- Good dialogue must reveal character, mood and setting of the play, as well as the playwright’s point of view.

- Good dramatic dialogue must be economical. The young playwright must be aware that dramatic time in modern times is not more than two hours and therefore should not waste words. To be economical with words is to be precise, to avoid the normal interventions and unnecessary repetitions.
- A good dialogue should embody gestural possibilities. According to Beckerman, stage dialogue should be “written with elasticity so that a performer’s imagination has room to expand into action” (234).
- A good dialogue kindles emotion.
- A good dramatic dialogue must help to enhance the progression of the plot and the dramatic action.
- A good dialogue helps to create rhythm and tempo in a performance.

Writing a good dialogue is not an easy task. In fact, many a good playwright distrusts his or her dialogue, never satisfied with it. A good playwright never concludes his or her play in a hurry. He or she writes and rewrites dialogue, always feeling that more effort could yield good result.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

List and discuss two qualities of a good dramatic dialogue.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We explained that playwriting is a creative process of uniting experience and imagination. We said that a play is a system of dialogue and that the action it embodies is usually a portion of the story that informs it. We explained further that a playwright must be a great thinker, a skilful user of language and a good observer in order to be able to generate penetrating idea, communicate effectively and represent human qualities well.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined the concept of playwriting. We explained what a play means, the personality of the playwright and his tasks. We also looked at the various sources of the playwright’s materials, the structure of a play, as well as articulate some guidelines for writing a good play.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is a play?

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UNIT 5 PLAY ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Concept of Play Analysis and Interpretation
 - 3.2 Process of Play Analysis and Interpretation
 - 3.3 Functions of Play Analysis and Interpretation
 - 3.4 Approaches to Play Analysis and Interpretation

- 3.5 Useful Questions on Play Analysis and Interpretation
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Play analysis and interpretation is an essential component of play direction and production. What a play says depends largely on the director's analysis and interpretation of the script. In this unit, effort will be made to explain the concept of play analysis and interpretation and its significance in theatrical production.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, the students should be able to:

- explain the concept of play analysis and interpretation
- discuss the goals of play analysis and interpretation
- read a play script, and analyse it
- what to look for in script analysis
- explain the significance of play analysis and interpretation.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Play Analysis and Interpretation

The concept of play analysis and interpretation deals with a careful study and in depth evaluation of the play script in order to discover all that are there to be known about the play in terms of the meaning of the play, the play's implicit activities and how the component parts of the play relate to one another. Play analysis is at the root of directing and acting. This is because as Heffner et al opine, "Knowing how to direct will be of little value if the director does not know what to direct" (31). This is equally applicable to the actor. He must know the desired effect he is to communicate to the audience.

Apart from a thorough examination of the play script, play analysis and interpretation benefits from studious research. The research areas include the historical background of the work, the traditions that have emerged in producing the play, and the period costumes and movements, (if it is an old play). Adelugba believes that research is equally necessary in a new play. The director must know "what is this new writer trying to say to us? What school of thought does he belong to?" He further argues and I think he is right, that "Every writer is likely

to fit into some ideological mode or other – and this ideological mode would also be evident in how you start the production and how you go about making sure that the impact of the ideological message reaches out to the audience” (105). Research needs to be carried out on character, theme, plot, and so on. Information in all this can be obtained from books, and articles on the nature of drama, period history, costumes and movements. Because of the avalanche of materials, many renowned directors attest that they spend considerable time, sometimes many years, in order to find out all they could know about the play they intend to direct. “Meyerhold once said that with the ordinary script he had to deal with – a new Soviet piece, for example – he found six to eight weeks a sufficient time to prepare and rehearse the production. But, he added, he had been thinking about certain plays such as Gogol’s *The Inspector General* for years, during which he sets down notes, drew sketches, read commentaries and dreamed about the project. The same he said was true of his plan to direct *Othello*. (He never did). The project, he remarked, occupied his thoughts, for even a longer time than the Gogol play – for one does not improvise Shakespeare! Not, at any rate, in ‘respectful’ interpretation” (Clurman, 26). Meyerhold’s view above throws profound light on the tasking nature of play analysis and interpretation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you understand by play analysis and interpretation?

3.2 Process of Play Analysis and Interpretation

Play analysis and interpretation commences with the reading of the play. The first reading of the script should be quick and without interruption. The first reading of the text enables the director and even his associates, to have an overview of the play’s landscape in terms of the plot, the people in the play, the setting and the bone of contention or what the struggle in the play is all about. This overview of the play is often referred to by some directors as the “first impression”. According to Harold Clurman, the director “must regard the first two or three preliminary readings as first impressions” (24). Because of the conventional notion that first impression is often deceiving, Clurman further suggests that the director should read the script again and again. But the director does not need to read the script “in consecutive daily sessions”. In fact, he would do well if time permits to set it aside for a while after each reading and check on what he remembers of it. He might even try to forget it. He should let it work on him before he works on it” (24).

Reading a play is quite different from reading a novel. Usually, “the novelist supplies the reader with all kinds of descriptions and psychological analyses, telling the reader exactly what is going on in the minds and feeling of the people of the story” (Heffner *et al*, 343). The play director does not have this kind of advantage. Although some plays, especially modern one have stage directions, they merely give skeletal information on scenic environment and properties, attributes of character and certain limited action. Many plays do not have stage directions. The director must fill this missing link. He does so through analytical and interpretive inferences. The director should read the play “with a kinetic energy” (33). He should visualize sights and sounds, as well as the action in his mind’s eyes. This implies imaginative reading. According to Bernard Shaw, as cited by Clurman, “The director, having considered the play and decided to undertake the job of directing it, has no further concern with its literary merits or doctrine (if any)”. The director’s major task now is how “to translate the script’s words into the language of the stage where men and women of flesh and blood who move in three dimensions among real objects are to replace description” (24). The play first springs to life in our imagination and except the director possesses “vividness” of “visual imagination” (Boulton, 22), he may never come to terms with much of what the play says.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Reading a play is different from reading a novel. Why?

3.3 Functions of Play Analysis and Interpretation

According to A. B. C. Duruaku, play analysis and interpretation “opens up the inherent meaning of the play which is the eventual basis of the production”. He further maintains that “the business of play production involves team work and if each person” is allowed to proceed “along his own thought or understanding of the play, there will be confusion. Every production aims at unity of effect. Duruaku is of the view that “unity of effect is only achievable when there is a common understanding of what the play means” (86). Therefore, play analysis and interpretation fosters a common understanding of the chosen meaning of the play. I say chosen meaning because as Bernard Beckerman rightly posits, “a play *does* not mean, it provokes meanings” (166). To buttress this fact, Clurman notes:

We never see Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* onstage, only that of Walter Hampden, John Barrymore, John Gielgud, Nicol Williamson and so on and on. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* exists solely in the book. A vast literary

fraternity has argued for centuries what it connotes
(39).

It follows, therefore, that what a play means depends on what the director chooses to emphasize, what best illuminates his creative spirit and energy.

Old scripts often have accumulated traditions of production. However, analysis and interpretation can help the director to “find fresh pathway into the heart of the text” (Brustein, 76), a pathway that has never been discovered nor walked by anybody. There is hardly any definitive analysis and interpretation of a play. Robert Browning is quoted by Robert Brustein to have said that once a play is released, “it becomes part of the atmosphere, open to interpretation by every body” and “who knows whose interpretation is correct?” (91). A good play, Brustein says, is always there to be confronted, to be reinterpreted, to be refreshed through the vision of a great director. In the process of analysis and interpretation, the director is at liberty to do whatever he wants with the script but he has to ensure that “what results is persuasive, enriching and consistently coherent in itself” (Clurman, 40).

Analysis helps to reveal implicit activities in the text. The script is not self-sufficient. It does not contain all there is in a play. It merely gives a sort of glimpse into the play’s actions and requirements. Through script analysis the director gains a fuller knowledge of what the play entails. Implicit activities include characters’ reactions, timing, and pause, in fact, every bit of action or event not explicitly explained by the text. For example, most plays do not tell us how characters communicate or react to one another by means of gestures. The choice and execution of gestural language is chiefly the duty of the director and the actor. Beckerman posits that analysis of a play should lead one to an understanding of what gesture is needed to express the action” (231).

Analysis and interpretation helps the director to articulate the three appeals or values of the theatre. These appeals include intellectual, emotional and aesthetic appeal or value. Intellectual appeal deals with the ethical construct of the play, the message which the play passes on to the audience. Emotional appeal refers to the passion which the play communicates, “the depth of feeling the audience would share with the character’s problems and dilemmas as well as the way the play determines their response to it (Duruaku, 87). Aristotle considers the role of tragedy from this direction. To him, tragedy is a kind of safety valve by means of which the dangerous emotions of pity and fear can be expunged from the human system. This is what the concept of catharsis is all about

Aesthetic appeal deals with the beauty of the performance in terms of colour, language, movement, and scenic environment, in fact, the pleasure derived from sights and sounds of the play.

Through play analysis and interpretation, a lot is revealed to the director about the personalities of the characters. Character analysis enables the director to understand both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the characters, as well as characters' relationships. Characters can be analysed in terms of number, age, height, size, sex, major or minor. They can also be analysed in terms of their given circumstances, that is, socio-economic and cultural background, as well as their drives or motivations.

Through analysis, the director should be able to know whose play is it. The play as a whole is often propelled by the action of the protagonist, but each bit, moment or segment of the play often belongs to a character who is not necessarily the major character. A careful analysis and interpretation will reveal to the director, the pattern of ownership in the play.

Play analysis and interpretation helps the director to gain detailed information on the setting of the play. Apart from the stage directions, the director can acquire useful information on the play's setting through the dialogue of the play, study of photographs and records of past productions.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss two functions of play analysis and interpretation.

3.4 Approaches to Play Analysis and Interpretation

There are no hard and fast rules about play analysis and interpretation. A play script can be studied in many ways because it can be an avenue of understanding period in the history of man, an age in the national life, social attitudes of a people at a given time, dominant ideas popular within certain periods or moral attitudes of a time and a people" (Heffner *et al*, 51). However, Heffner *et al* identify two most useful approaches of play analysis and interpretation. They are:

1. The study of drama in terms of its spirit or meaning
2. The study of drama in terms of its construction.

Although these methods are usually treated in isolation in critical discourses, the director must see them as two sides of a coin.

Every play is a comment of some sort on human life and condition. In recognition of this fact, Heffner et al aver that:

Whatever the initial reason for its composition, every play, even the most trivial, makes some statement about life and about human nature. That statement may be trite or platitudinous or it may be profound. Plays are interpretation of meaning of life and the nature of man. They are means through which human beings may come to realize the rich variety of human existence, human thought, human emotions and human nature (52).

So, one of the basic approaches to analysis and interpretation aims at hitting on the spirit of the play, its meaning or message.

To explicate the meaning of the play naturally “requires analysis, that is, the breaking down of the play into its part, in order to discover how it is put together and how it creates its effect” (55). This implies that the director must know the form or the structure of the play. Is it a tragedy or comedy? a farce or melodrama? Is it an historical play or a pastoral? Understanding the form of the play will enable the director to pattern his effect.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

List two approaches to script analysis and interpretation.

3.5 Useful Questions on Play Analysis and Interpretation

Heffner *et al* articulated useful questions that can help the director in the business of play analysis and interpretation. They are:

1. Why does the play arouse interest, sustain interest, and satisfy interest?
2. What kind of emotional effects does the play produce?
3. Is the effect dominantly serious, comic or a mixture of the two?
4. Which are the big scenes of the play, what is the nature of each, and what does each accomplish?
5. Is there a conflict in the play, what is its nature?
6. What is the nature of plot progression? What is the main question in the play?
7. How is the question answered?
8. What are the complications of the action?
9. What is the argument of the play?
10. What kinds of characters appear in the play?

11. What are the characters relations to each other?
12. Whose play is it?
13. What kind of world does the play create?
14. What are the apparent motives, drives, desires and decision of the chief characters?
15. What are the setting in which the action of the play occur?
16. Could the play be staged without settings?
17. Does the play have any moral message?
18. What important thought are prominent in the play?
19. How would you describe the whole story line of the action?

Many more questions can still be generated.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Who is the protagonist of a play?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We explained that play analysis and interpretation is an aspect of theatre direction which deals with a thorough and patient examination of the play text, in order to understand much of what the play can say. We maintained that through careful and imaginative analysis and study of the play, the director can find fresh pathway into the heart of the text, as well as gain insight into implicit activities inherent in the play script.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we specifically examined the concept of play analysis and interpretation, how to read a script, the functions of play analysis and interpretation, as well as the approaches of studying a dramatic text. We finally listed certain useful questions that can aid play analysis and interpretation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss one function of play analysis and interpretation.

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MODULE 3 VOICE PRODUCTION AND OTHER STAGE CRAFTS

INTRODUCTION

This module examines voice and speech production in theatre, process of play production, scene design and craft, stage management, stage lighting, as well as costume and make-up. It contains six study units which embody the above mentioned areas of theatre studies. Each unit

has an introduction, objectives, main content, conclusion, summary, tutor-marked assignment and references.

Unit 1	Voice and Speech Production
Unit 2	Process of Play Production
Unit 3	Scene Design and Craft
Unit 4	Stage Management
Unit 5	Stage Lighting
Unit 6	Costume and Make-Up

UNIT 1 VOICE AND SPEECH PRODUCTION

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	The Concept of Voice and Speech
3.2	The Significance of Voice and Speech in Theatre
3.3	The Need for Quality Voice and Speech in Nigerian Theatre
3.4	Voice and Speech Training
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Voice and speech are quintessential elements of oral communication. Like oil and salt, they go together in human expression especially in interpersonal, inter-group and international communication. In this unit, attempt will be made to explain the role of voice and speech production in theatre practice. We will equally attempt to examine problems associated with voice and speech production and how they can be ameliorated.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is believed that by the end of this study, the students should be able to:

- explain the concept of voice and speech production
- distinguish between voice and speech
- explain the role of voice and speech in theatre practice
- identify problems associated with voice and speech production in theatre

- outline and examine measures of dealing with voice and speech defects.

3.1 The Concept of Voice and Speech Production

An internet source describes voice as the “sound produced by humans and other vertebrates using the lungs and the vocal folds in the larynx, or voice box”. This organ called the larynx is located inside the neck. The visible projection in the neck which is usually very prominent in males called the Adam’s apple is the front part of the larynx.

Voice is produced when air generated by the lungs during respiration is pushed through the vocal cords within the larynx. During respiration, if the air possesses sufficient force, it will vibrate the vocal cords or folds and then voice is generated. Voice is not always produced as speech. “Infants babble and coo; animals bark, moo, whinny and meow, and adult human laugh, sing and cry”.

Attributes of voice include pitch, amplitude and quality. Pitch deals with the highness and lowness of sound based on the frequency of sound waves. Amplitude is the perceived volume of sound, while quality is the distinguishing character of sound. It has to do with voice being either good or bad. A good voice must have these attributes in a promising degree.

Voice is impaired if the pressure of air in the larynx is not strong enough. Voice impairment can be caused by so many things. They include poor breathing habit, excessive smoking, infection of the respiratory system, cancer, accident, poor surgery within the neck, paralysis of the vocal cords, cold, etc. Voice impairment can also be congenital.

SPEECH PRODUCTION

Miriam Okagbue defines speech as the “audible expression of the human voice when talking” (2). An internet source sees speech as the process through which “humans express thoughts, feelings, and ideas orally to one another through a series of complex movement that alter and mould the basic tone created by voice into specific, decodable sounds”. As we have noted, voice is not always produced as speech. Two factors are needed in order to translate the basic vocal tone into speech. They are articulation and resonance.

Articulation, according to Bowskill, is the process of “shaping voice into different sounds that constitute speech”, and this is “achieved in the main by the lips, tongue and teeth” (78). Health scientists say that

words are formed when the air emanating from the vocal folds is altered by the palate, tongue, teeth and jaw.

Proper articulation creates rhythm, which is “the flow and movement” that gives a sense of vitality to speech. Rhythm is controlled essentially by the beating of the heart. Improper beating of the heart produces irregular rhythm. Bowskill notes that “total lack of rhythm suggests complete weakness or death”, whereas “over-active rhythm suggests lack of control – even panic” (78). This implies that the heart must beat appropriately in order to generate proper rhythm necessary for good speech production. Proper heart beating can be cultivated through proper breathing habit and sufficient exercises. “The ability to improve the sense of rhythm lies within us all and is not, as many pundits claim, one of those things you happen to have, or have not” (81).

An essential aspect of rhythm is pause, which is the delay between letters, words, phrases or sentences that enables the spectators to assimilate and digest what is said. As an effective aid in speech communication, a pause guide rate of delivery, guarantees audibility and intelligibility, as well as enhances emotional impact of words, phrases or sentences. Bowskill expresses this succinctly when he states that, “the use of a carefully considered pause before a word, draws attention to that word, and brings it into sharper focus”, as well as “adds weight to the meaning and charge to the feeling behind it” (83).

Articulation problem exists when the speaker produces words, syllables or sound incorrectly and incoherently so that the listeners do not understand the meaning of what is said. An internet material says that “an articulation problem sometimes sounds like baby talk because very many young children do mispronounce sounds, syllables, and words”. It further states that “words that sound cute when mispronounced by young children interfere with communication of older children or adults”.

Sound errors fall into three major groups namely omission, substitution and addition. Examples of error of omission include “ouse” for “house”, “at” for “hat”, “and” for “hand”, etc. Examples of error of addition include “hopen” for “open”, “hanswer” for “answer”, etc.

Articulation problem can be caused by many factors, including physical handicaps such as cleft palate, loss of hearing, dental problem, cerebral palsy and so on. However, it is important to note that “most articulation problems occur in the absence of any obvious physical disability”, and “the cause of these so called functional articulation problems may be faulty learning of speech sounds”. It is this aspect of articulation problem that will elicit our attention in this work.

Resonance has to do with the quality of depth and richness of sound. “The human resonators are mainly the cavities in the mouth, nose and throat”. It is said that “the more these cavities are made available, the more the voice can be resonated” (Bowskill, 77).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How is speech different from voice?

3.2 Significance of Voice and Speech Production in Theatre

Good voice, as well as speech production is an invaluable asset in theatre practice. To underscore the eminent position of voice in theatrical practice, Salvini, the great Italian actor, is cited by John Fernald to posit that “Acting is voice, voice and more voice, and again, move voice” (69). What Salvini is saying is that in a speech dominated theatre, the actor is useless “without effective vocal instrument” (69). Stage voice and speech are efficient means of communicating meanings and messages. Beckerman posits that dramatic speech can be used to “encounter thought and to force confrontation” (235). He further maintains that poetic speech makes it perfectly “plausible for characters to articulate grief or joy, outrage or dismay” (235). This implies that voice and speech are the most potent instruments for making passionate appeal. The pragmatic status of speech which Beckerman alludes to in the above statement is clarified by John Austin, an Oxford philosopher. Keir Elam cites him to say that in ‘issuing utterances, we are not only or always producing a certain propositional content, but are above all doing such things as asking, commanding, attempting to influence or convince our interlocutors’ (157).

According to Bernard Beckerman, “every audience brings an expectant ear to a performance” (235). And this “auditory expectation defines not only the boundaries of writing but the characteristics of delivery” (236). For example, the audience frequently expects in a performance, a melodic pattern in speech, which is capable of instilling “an aural memory in the listener” (238). The audience goes to the theatre expecting to be confronted with riveting speeches capable of arousing sufficient theatrical excitement, not dull, monotonous babbles that conjure up sleep.

QUALITIES OF GOOD STAGE VOICE AND SPEECH

Albright *et al* state that “the first requirement of stage dialogue is a simple and obvious one: audibility” (111). They further argue that “with speech, as with movement, the actor seeks to communicate meaning; but

the auditory ‘meanings’ that cannot be heard are merely annoying to the audience in the theatre” (111). In Nigeria, because of the poor training of actors in voice and speech production, the problem of poor projection remains intractable. The constant shouting of voice, projection or volume during productions is an indication of poor voice and speech productions in our theatre. In place of projection, most of the actors and actresses merely shout. It is said elsewhere that “whenever you hear an actor shout, you know that you are in the presence of an amateur”. With reference to the Nigerian theatrical environment, Miriam Okagbue observes that “Nigerian student – actors and actresses mumble their lines in fast, droning, monotonous voices --- shouting in piercing, whining, shrill and colourless voice qualities, with wrong stress on words” (23).

Audibility alone is not the only quality of a good stage voice. John Fernald expresses the opinion that “a good theatrical voice must be coloured by feeling: it must be capable, in fact, of conveying a great many kinds of feeling” (70). He further notes that “the voice which can convey the necessary variety and subtlety must, in fact, be a musical instrument, which, if it were a man-made product, would be described as sophisticated and complex” (70). This implies that a good stage voice must be as malleable as soft clay in the hand of a ceramist. It must be fluid, not rigid. Indeed, it must be capable of being used in a good number of ways. Deploring rigid, and inappropriate voice in theatre, Clifford Turner remarks that “there is a place in the theatre for voices of many types, but no room whatsoever for any voice that is incorrectly managed or for the voice and speech by reason of their differences or their rigidity, are not appropriate to the play in the services of which they are being used” (1).

Another major quality of good stage voice and speech is clarity. Clarity means that stage voice and speech must be very clear. Sometimes, as actor can achieve volume without being clear. Many, factors are responsible for this. They include poor elocution, enunciation or pronunciation of words, swallowing up of endings of words, wrong stress on words and syllables, production of echoes while speaking, speaking through the nose, mumbling the lines, as well as poor delivering rate, among many others.

Clarity makes for audibility and intelligibility. Albright et al observe that “when a member of a theatre audience claims that he cannot hear, it may be that what he really means is that he cannot understand” (15). So, when clarity is on trial, no amount of shouting can help out.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List and discuss two qualities of voice and speech production.

3.3 The Need for Quality Voice and Speech Production in Nigerian Theatre

In his article, “African and the Tragic Form”, Onuora Ossie Enekwe explains convincingly why Africans sometimes laugh at tragedy. He argues that “Africans laugh when some tragic scenes are enacted on stage”, not because of “major psycho-cultural differences” as K.A.B. Jones-Quartey would want us to believe, nor because as Joseph Okpaku would say, “the concept of killing what one loves out of love is to the African, absurd and ridiculous” (31). In dismissing the cultural approach to the problem, Enekwe rightly argues that:

Appreciation of drama or literature has little to do with culture, for a work of art can possess its own culture. The genius of the artist can create an environment which while contradicting tradition, is, nevertheless, powerful and capable of suspending our sense of disbelief. This is why great works of art are appreciated beyond the cultural areas of their creators (33).

Enekwe argues that two factors can make people, including African to laugh at certain enactment of tragic scenes. According to him, “I think Africans laugh not at Tragedy as a form, but at poorly constructed plays”. He further argues that “the fault might well be with the workmanship, not with the medium or form” (34).

Our interest is in the last point. Poor workmanship denotes poor acting, and therefore, poor voice and speech production. William Shakespeare recognized that poor voice and speech production can mar a performance. He therefore, uses the character, Hamlet in his play of the same title, to highlight this in the play within the play thus:

Speak the speech I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, tripling on the tongue: but if you mouth it as may of your players do-O, it offends to my soul to hear a robustious periwig –pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ear of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I will have such a fellow whipt --- (Act III ScI).

Like the “robustious periwig – pated fellow” of Hamlet’s speech, most Nigerian actors and actresses do not speak their lines appropriately.

They masticate them, produce sounds akin to a coiling cassette. Whenever this is the case, the emotive power of even a well written tragedy is often grossly affected, and this gives the audience an impetus to laugh. What is laughed at is not the tragic form, but the poor aesthetic quality of the performance.

Again, accident of history makes the use of English language in Nigeria as an official language inevitable. According to Cordelia U. Ogbuehi, “the situation where the users have their own indigenous languages, but use English mandatorily in official and public life” is “because of the existence of a multi-lingual culture” (15). She further states that, “a major obstacle in the use of English as a second language is that of interference of mother tongue” (19). An aspect of the mother tongue interference problem that will elicit our attention here is the phonological issue. Most Nigerian actors and actresses find it extremely difficult, if not impossible to keep their vernacular tone apart from that of English. Frequently, one finds it extremely hard to distinguish when some actors are speaking their indigenous language and when they are speaking English on stage.

At the heart of this phonological problem is faulty teaching and learning of English speech sounds. According to Miriam Okagbue, “speech production is one of the disciplines which requires the teacher to serve as a model” (66). She further rightly submits that “a good speech teacher does not only teach by precept alone; he teaches by example. Unfortunately, there is an acute lack of model speech teachers in Nigeria. Most of our teachers of spoken English are charlatans. Okagbue said that at best such teachers merely teach students theories and show them diagrams of the speech organs. According to Pauline O. Ilechukwu, “effective oral language learning presupposes the continual presence of a tested model” (13). Tested model speech teachers can help the actors to drop phonological inhibitions and learn correct speech sounds. Speech is a human habit. Feyi Ekundare is quoted by Ilechukwu to have said that “the adept speaker can keep two or more languages or varieties of the same language apart and in place” (13). In his inaugural lecture, Dapo Adelugba discusses how an American, Charles Mike Jr., who played the role of Baba Fawomi in Femi Osofisan’s *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* through constant practice, “gradually habituated himself to new modes of vowels and consonants usage, syllabic stress and overall pronunciation” (6) of Yoruba speech sounds.

Besides, due to the nature of the lungs, most people “breath shallowly, using nothing more than the top of each lung” (Fernald, 74). Consequently most of us can never breathe fully and, therefore, fail to obtain “the capacity and reserve of breath we would need to take a long

speech in our stride” (74). An actor’s job is an onerous one. He needs a lot of energy to execute long speeches and unnatural movements and gestures. He, therefore, “has to learn to develop his full, and not merely a sixth of his lung capacity” (74). He should be able to contract and expand all the segments of his lungs at will. Albright et al state that “the relatively shallow breathing needed for ordinary conversation in living room classroom, or office will simply not give adequate support for a tone that must project beyond the footlight” (111). They posit that the “shallow breathing with the inadequate breath reserves that inevitably accompany it, results in a voice that lacks firmness and body, as well as variety and stay power” (111). Most problems of articulation, which Nigerian actors and actresses suffer on stage can be attributed to poor breathing habit.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Give one reason why the Nigerian actor needs training.

3.4 Voice and Speech Training

Voice and speech training helps to reduce tensions and energizes lazy muscles of the organs of voice and speech, with what John Fernald calls “a positively acrobatic agility” (73). Breathing exercises are mainly the training required to release the organs of speech from rigidity.

Speech training can take many forms. We have touched on one which is the model approach. Adequate model teachers, guarantee effective and efficient learning of correct speech sounds through imitative teaching-learning technique.

Text-tape exposure is another technique of voice and speech training open to people who make use of English as a second language. This is a combined approach to correct pronunciation of English speech sounds that makes use of the written text of English sounds, and the verbal production of these sounds recorded in a tape. The tape enables the actor to listen and imitate how the different speech sounds are produced. The actors are expected to repeat the speech sounds after the tape. It is expected that through constant practice, actors can familiarize themselves with the correct pronunciation of English speech sounds.

Different ethnic groups have peculiar problems with English speech sounds. A few examples will suffice from specific linguistic groups. Common speech sound problems among the Igbo linguistic group include the following:

“nwen” for ‘when’

“load” for “road”
 “rove” for “love”
 “raidy” for “lady”, etc.

For the Yoruba, we have the following sounds errors:

“ouse” for “house”
 “and “ for “hand”
 “at” for “hat”
 “chow” for “show”, etc.

For the Hausa, we have the following problems:

“bery” for “very”
 “fifle” for “people”
 “quantrol” for “control”, etc.

The list is quite inexhaustible. Special attention must be paid to these multi-lingual peculiarities in training Nigerian actors and actresses in voice and speech production.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

List any four speech sound problems peculiar to Efik ,Ijaw, Kanuri, Edo and Itshekiri lingual groups.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained that voice and speech constitute a major instrument for the actor. We said that they are the most effective means of communicating messages, encountering thoughts and forcing confrontation in theatre. We maintained that a good voice must be capable of being used for many purposes other than projection.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined specifically, the concept of voice and speech production. We maintained that voice is produced as a result of the passage of air through the larynx. We said that voice is not always produced as speech because infants babble, animal whinny, adults laugh, cry, etc. We equally explained the significance of voice and speech production in theatre, qualities of good stage voice and speech, as well as outlined the reasons which make quality voice and speech inevitable for the Nigerian actors and actresses. Finally, we examined approaches to voice and speech training. We insisted that in a country where

English is a second language such as Nigeria, the place of model teachers can never be overestimated.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Define speech.

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INTERNET SOURCES

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UNIT 2 PROCESS OF PLAY PRODUCTION

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- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Choosing the Play
 - 3.2 Audition
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 - 3.5 Performance

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The process of play production is a very tedious and challenging one. This is because it deals with the harmonization of the efforts of people with different socio-cultural and psychological make-up. It is a process in “which many things can go wrong and upset the director”, because “the activity involves many people, some of “whom may have personal problems disturbing them, irritating idiosyncrasies and habits, deviant attitudes and orientation” (Duruaku, 1997: 113). The director’s ability to put up with all this, “leading to a successful production”, is what “is so exhilarating in the end” (114).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that by the end of this study, the students should be able to:

- explain why production process is said to be a difficult task
- list and explain factors that influence play selection
- discuss the concept of audition
- list and discuss casting types
- explain what rehearsals entail
- discuss the factors that can make a production to succeed or fail.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Process of Play Production

Although there is no dogmatic rule governing how a production can be organized, a seemingly acceptable and time-tested procedure appears to exist. This ‘rule of thumb’ procedure comes in the following order of arrangement: choosing the script, audition, casting, rehearsal, and performance.

CHOOSING THE PLAY

Play selection is the first step in the process of mounting a production. The choice of the play script by the director is influenced by a good number of factors, including the following:

THE OCCASION FOR THE PERFORMANCE

The occasion for the performance plays a decisive role in the choosing of the script. Is it a marriage anniversary, or the celebration of the dead? Is it a fund-raising ceremony, or opening of a new capital territory? Certainly, the nature of the occasion for the production will help the director to select an appropriate play in terms of genre.

THE SOCIAL REALITY

The social reality of the time performs outstanding role in play selection. In fact, Dapo Adelugba is of the opinion that “there is no point of doing a play that does not relate to the social ways of the time” (104). What is the social atmosphere like? Is it a period of great economic depression or boom? Are we in a political transition or in a war situation? A good play must capture the mood of the time.

THE AUDIENCE FACTOR

There is no gainsaying that the audience is the reason a performance is organized. The nature of the audience is a primary determinant in play selection. Is the play to be addressed to an assembly of primary school pupils or undergraduate students? It is for a collection of professionals such as doctors, nurses, lawyers, accountants, economists, or government officials? A play must have a target audience.

THE STRENGTH OF THE CAST

The strength of the cast goes a long way in influencing the director’s choice of the script. It will be quite preposterous, for example, to select William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* for a cast of primary school pupils. They can never scratch the play.

THE BUDGET

Some plays are quite capital-intensive to produce; others are simply not costly to mount. The funds available to the director play a significant role in influencing his choice of script.

If a director has a meager purse, but decides to choose a capital intensive play, he may end up embarrassing himself and the spectators with

aesthetically poor performance. Poor financial standing can limit the director's choice of the script.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

The place of the technical elements of lighting and sound, costumes, make-up, set and scenic effects technology in modern performance can never be over-emphasized. They help to intensify tension, create mood, atmosphere and interpret character. Some plays make great technical demands.

A good play is expected to have colour, and colour can be chiefly achieved through the technical elements of production. A director who does not intend to disappoint the audience must ensure that he selects a play that he can afford its technical requirements.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

List and discuss two elements that influence play selection.

3.2 Audition

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines audition as "a short performance given by an actor, a singer, a musician, etc. to test whether he or she is suitable for a particular role".

Audition is a kind of performative examination. Indeed, Bowskill rightly observes that "audition and examination are performances and should be approached with the same rhythm as for an opening night" (334). Since the "purpose of the audition is to sell yourself and your abilities in an economic way," (333), the auditionee is expected to prepare himself or herself in a wide range of materials because he or she may never know the shape the audition may take.

Audition depends largely on context. Adelugba makes an elaborate explanation of this when he postulates that:

It depends on auspices. Who is producing what? What does the producer want? Does he want something limited to the Department? Or is the area of casting the entire country, the entire world? You have just to go for the kinds of persons and materials that you think would be closest to how you have envisioned the character and the entire layout (105).

Most educational theatres organized audition within the members of their Departments. Wealthy commercial theatre groups often organize international audition. So, as Adelugba says, it depends on auspices.

Audition takes many forms. You may be given a prepared speech to read out and interpret before auditioner(s), or you may be assigned a particular role in a short scene. Audition may also take the shape of improvisation. The essence of improvisation may be to test the actor's creative ability or "sharpness of imagination".

Audition can also take the form of chatting or interview. It can be either solo or group affair. The type to be used is determined by the director or the audition committee where such exists. Because oftentimes, the auditionee is not always told beforehand, the material he or she is to present, it is always advisable that the auditionee prepares a wide range of materials before attending the audition.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is audition?

3.3 Casting

Casting is the by-product of audition. It is by definition, the actual assignment of roles to the actors and actresses consequent upon audition. The term 'cast' is the collective name for all the actors and actresses selected for a performance.

TYPES OF CASTING

There are many types of casting. A few of them are discussed below.

CASTING BY APPEARANCE

Casting by appearance otherwise called type-casting is a common kind of casting method. Here certain actors and actresses are given certain roles because their physical appearances seem to be in agreement with the physical attributes of the characters as described by the playwright. These physical attributes include colour, size, shape, height, body-build, and so on.

Although type-casting appears to make the director's job very easy, it is necessary to remark that "looking the part" as perceived by the

playwright is not all the director needs in creating characterization. This is because ‘looking the part’ is not the same thing as good acting. Harold Clurman buttresses this point when he posits that “An actor’s looks will impress an audience initially but after his first minutes on stage, it becomes aware of what he or she communicates (or fail to communicate) through acting” (68). There are certainly some roles in which physical qualities are desirable, but such roles must not possess strong “dramatic bone”, which the actors’ inability to showcase on stage through good acting, will make the audience to complain. “It is on record that, Edmund Kean who was of small stature, made a great Macbeth” (69) on stage. Acting evidences show that sometimes an actor who appears rugged physically often excelled in playing romantic character than executioner. Whereas a soft-looking actor may be more convincing on stage playing a mean and tough role of an assassin. The implication of all this is that there is more in a person than meet the eyes.

Again, a role can be seen from different directorial prisms. The character, Shylock in William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* is known to have been played in ambivalent manner. He has been interpreted as a tragic character, as well as a comic character. So, there exist a lot of possible ways of interpreting a role. A single meaning is only possible when the director has chosen to interpret a play in a particular way. Choice is always necessary because the playwright may endow a character with so much talent that may be impossible to be located in any single living human being. When this is the case, what should inform the choice of the actor is the aspect of the character’s personality which the director decides to emphasize, and which best helps him to realize his concept through acting on stage. In summary, type – casting may appear expedient but it can also be misleading. As Clurman would say “there is no absolute in casting” since “a director’s choice in casting is delicately nuanced and motivated by a variety of considerations” (70).

CASTING BY EXPERIENCE

Certain actors and actresses are sometimes assigned some roles because of their wealth of experience. In a commercial theatre, “it is customary to seek stars for leading roles” (66). In places where people are conscious of the theatre, some people patronize the theatre even if the play is a poor one, at least, to admire their cherished actors and actresses. Even in educational theatre, there is the tendency to over use certain student-actors and actresses because of their experiences. However, Duruaku rightly posits that “casting by experience is

especially good for major roles when there is perhaps little time to start looking for suitable actors”.

CASTING BY NECESSITY

Necessity they say is the mother of invention. Sometimes, according to Clurman, “the problem of casting often reduces itself not to the question of the best actor for a particular part but of “who can you get” (66). Casting by necessity obeys the dictum, “if the admirable is not available, the available becomes admirable”.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss one type of casting method you know.

3.4 Rehearsal

Rehearsal is the level of actual interpersonal relationships, where the actors and actresses communicate with one another, and occasionally with themselves and the audience, in order to artistically embody the content and form of the play audio-visually. It is the process of group exploration, experimentation and innovativeness.

Pre-rehearsal individual reading of the script, creative experimentation and research into the characters and their given circumstances must have equipped the cast with certain “modes of external expression” which will make them to enter the rehearsal arena in high spirit, a “state of confidence” and preparedness” (Bowskill, 272).

EARLY REHARSAL

In educational theatre and in certain theatre groups, members of cast are drawn from the Department and group members. Hence, there is no need for formal introduction of cast members. But in some wealthy commercial theatre groups, members of cast can be drawn from many sources, even internationally. When this is the case, the director’s first task during the first rehearsal is to formally introduce members of the cast to one another.

For many directors, early rehearsals are dominated by reading rehearsals, while for others, the play is “put on its feet” during the first day of rehearsal. Dogmatism in theatre, whether in theory or practice, has been proven to be detrimental to the growth of the theatre.

However, it is advisable that during the early rehearsals, the director should endeavor to make all the members of the cast, even the crew members, to have a complete feel of the entire play, before individual

players begin to concentrate on the scenes where they feature. Bowskill is of the opinion that such a help from the director has an invaluable advantages of helping the cast to “build up an affection for the play”, and to, become involved in the possible varieties of meaning and experience to be found in the play” (269).

At this stage of rehearsal, it is necessary for the director to define the ethos of the production by letting the cast to know the concept behind his chosen interpretation of the play. This has the advantage of aiding the members of the cast to tailor their various efforts towards the realization of the director’s notion of the play. It is ideally also at this stage, for the director to make available the rehearsal schedule to every member of the cast. Rehearsal schedule should indicate the total length of time in which the rehearsal of the play is expected to take, as well as specific time allocated to daily or each stage of rehearsal. It should equally specify the venue for the different kinds of rehearsals.

BLOCKING THE PLAY

Early rehearsal which constitutes the formative stage in the rehearsal process, is immediately followed by the type of rehearsal which in theatrical parlance, is referred to as blocking. Blocking is the crucial stage of rehearsal because it marks the actual commencement of getting the shape of the play. By definition blocking is the positioning of the actors and actresses on stage; the varied forms in which the members of the cast relate to one another in terms of movements and postures within the stage space. Blocking is the crux of play direction. Harold Clurman rightly observes that it does not only give “the production bone structure”, but that it is “the heart of direction, brain, blood, nerve and spirit” (109) that give the play life.

It is on record that some directors insist on the cast getting their lines committed to memory before blocking starts. There is nothing wrong in this method if the director has ample time at his disposal to rehearse the play.

However, other directors cause memorization of lines and blocking to occur simultaneously on stage. This approach helps the director to cut off lines which fail to work on stage without qualms. My experience as a theatre director indicates that there is always a problem in cutting off portions of the play which the actors have committed to memory. Sometimes, you find some actors unconsciously rendering certain lines which the director had cut off because they had internalized them before blocking. In fact, in the plays I have so far directed, I allowed the actors to go on stage, scripts in hand, not only because I never had the whole world to rehearse those plays, but essentially because I see blocking as a

period of exploration, innovation and experimentation. I see it as a period in which the director's genius and ingenuity should be stretched to their very limit.

It is during blocking that the director showcases his creative spirit. It is through it that the director translates his theoretical knowledge of sublimity, pace, rhythm, tempo, colour, balance, etc. into concrete practice. Through the way the director positions the actors on stage, the audience perceives mood, atmosphere, and even human qualities such as affection and hatred, courage and timidity, etc. Apart from the director's ingenuity, blocking is, however, influenced by other factors such as the stage design and geography and even the arrangement of the playhouse itself.

Because blocking feeds on innovation and experimentation, it is never done in a hurry. It is never a one attempt effort. The director's original blocking in his prompt book should be seen as a preliminary thing, something to be improved upon, and not something final. Theatre is a group affair. Consequently, the director does not need to be a dictator. The players' opinion ought to be respected in matters of blocking. They should be given a certain latitude to exploit their own creative spirit. As Jean Vilar would say, "the actor is not a machine, neither parrot nor robot". He is a homo-sapient, a creative and thinking being. On stage, he must not be caged; his genius must be allowed to flower.

RUN-THROUGH REHEARSAL

Blocking is usually done scene by scene. Sometimes, a director may wish to block the final movement of the play before the very first scene of the play. He may decide to start blocking with the most difficult segments of the play before the less difficult ones no matter where they occur in the play. However, after satisfying himself that all the segments of the play have been thoroughly blocked, he calls for a run-through rehearsal in which the actors and actresses are caused to present the play from the beginning to its end without any interruption. The purposes of the run-through rehearsal are to harmonize all the scenes of the play which are usually separately blocked, and to time the performance, in order to see whether the time it lasts actually corresponds to the normal dramatic time, usually not more than two hours in the modern times. If the director is not satisfied with the first run-through, he can call for special rehearsals to correct certain identified problem areas; and then asks for another run-through.

TECHNICAL AND DRESS REHEARSAL

This is the final stage in preparing a play for performance. Technical and dress rehearsal is like the production night, except that it does not have a paid audience. During this rehearsal, all the technical elements of lighting, sound, scenery, props, make-up and costumes are caused to accompany acting. Technical and dress rehearsal is a period of artistic integration. Before it, “all the members of the production team have been working independently” and “it is only when all these individual elements of production have been integrated and the play runs through without hitches, that the play will be deemed ready to go on stage” (Anagboso, 1988:17). During the process of technical dress rehearsal, certain technical and artistic problems that can mar the production are identified and dealt with. During the technical night, often called the preview night, the director, the crew members, as well as some experts and patrons of the theatre invited by the director offer constructive criticisms aimed at making the performance an electrifying one.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What is blocking?

3.5 Performance

Performance is the actual making out of the final product of the corporate efforts of the playwright, the director and the cast and crew to the audience. It spells out the success or failure of these groups.

Although the proceed from the box office can economically testifies whether a performance is a success or failure, the major determining factor vis-à-vis the success or failure of a performance is its audience. Duruaku notes that “bad plays have been known to attract great audience while some good plays fail to pay their way” (130). Audience turn-out can make a play to succeed or fail economically, but in terms of satisfaction and quality, success or failure of a play depends on whether or not the play meets the expectation of the audience with respect to acting and aesthetic value.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What factors can make a performance to succeed or fail?

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have explained the process which the director follows in a bid to realize a performance physically on stage. We maintained that

even though there are no dogmatic rules about play production procedure, there appears to exist certain time-tested rules of thumb, which according to their ascending order include play selection, audition, casting, rehearsal and then performance.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this study, we specifically examined the factors that influence the director's choice of script, the nature of audition and its context, casting types, the various stages of rehearsal and what they entail, as well as the factors that can make a performance to succeed or fail.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is blocking?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 SCENE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Concept of Scene Design

3.2	Factors that Influence Scene Design
3.3	Functions of Scenery
3.4	Qualities of a Good Scene Designer
3.5	Means of Expressing Scene Design
3.6	Stage Geography
3.7	Scene Construction
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Creating appropriate environments for theatrical productions is a very ancient art. However, it was during the Italian Renaissance that scenography assumed the status of a profession. Since the Roman times, scene design has been an adjunct of architecture and painting. During the Renaissance, renowned painters and architects such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Sabastino Serlio (1475-1554), Nicola Sabbattini (1507-1573), and Aristotle de San Gallo (1481-1551), among many others gave scene design and construction enviable position in theatrical practice.

In spite of the concept of “the poor theatre” championed by Jerzy Grotowski, and the notion of the “empty space” envisioned by the American director, Peter Brook, which are frequently misinterpreted and misrepresented, contemporary theatre practice in its tendency towards realism, lays great emphasis on scenography as a means of enhancing meaning, clarifying emotions and moods, as well as depicting background of dramatic action.

In this unit, attempt will be made to explain the concept of scene design and construction, the nature and functions of scenery in productions, stage geography and the functions of the acting areas, as well as the factors that influence the practice of scene design and construction.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that by the end of this study, the students should be able to:

- explain the concept of scene design
- list and discuss the factors that affect scene design
- discuss the functions of scenery in productions

- explain the functions of stage geography
- explain the concepts of ground plan, elevations, model, and sightlines
- explain the nature of scenery
- examine the factors that influence scene construction.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Scene Design

Scene design is defined by Domba Asomba as “the art of conceptualizing, planning or conceiving suitable dramatic environment to house a dramatic action” (6). Asomba further remarks that dramatic environment denotes “the totality of all the pieces of scenery including stage properties that culminate in defining the locality of the action” (6). From the fore-going, it is clear that scene design is an abstract effort. In design, one operates in the realm of dream and vision. Scene design involves thinking out the form and dimensions called up by the human imagination, and setting such ideas down on paper in form of a drawing or floor plan. At the level of scene design, we operate at the level of impression not actuality.

The setting of a play can be conceived in two broad ways. It can be conceived as two-dimensional, or as a three-dimensional solid object. It, however, can be projected by light. But we are not interested here in projected scenery. In the words of Domba Asomba, “a two-dimensional scenic unit is characterized by two perceptible dimensions, height and breadth.” He further states that in most cases, two-dimensional scenic unit “is unframed and soft due to the fact that it is made of fabric and allowed to drape or hang loosely on designed positions” (114). Examples of two-dimensional set include curtain, flat, and cyclorama.

On the other hand, a three-dimensional set unit is fundamentally characterized by three perceptible dimensions, length, breadth, (thickness) and height, and it is in “solid form” (133) Asomba expresses the view that this type of scenery is “designed and constructed as weight-bearing structure” (133). They carry the weight of the actors and actresses. Examples are chairs, tables, rostrums, benches, ramps, etc. Scenery can either be representational or symbolic. According to Bowskill, “the aim of representational setting is to create the appearance of external actualities”, while the aim of symbolic setting is “to fire the imagination of the audience and suggest the presence of external actualities” (133).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you understand by scene design?

3.2 Factors That Influence Scene Design

Scene design is a dependent art. It, therefore, can hardly exist on its own. It is influenced by a good number of factors. Firstly, according to Albright et al, “scene design is an interpretative art”, because “a master plan-the script already exists” (234). A good design must meet the specific demands of the script. This is what Albright et al have in mind when they posit that “the best design gives visual substance to the same emotions and ideas as are revealed in the course of the performance” (234-5).

Another factor that influences design is the director’s concept and interpretation of the play. The designer must suit his ground plan or design to the director’s interpretation if unity of effect is to be guaranteed.

Scene design is also largely influenced by the nature of the stage on which the performance is to be given. It is quite preposterous, for example, to design a very elaborate scenery for a very narrow stage. So design is limited by the size of the stage and even the auditorium and the entire theatre architecture.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss one factor that influences scene design.

3.3 Functions of Scenery

Although it is very much possible to do a performance “without the design element adduced to it” (Oni, 2005:76) it is eminently palpable that the design elements play interpretative and aesthetic functions in theatrical productions.

Aesthetically, scenery adds colour and grandeur to performances. It is on record that during the Italian Renaissance, many people attended productions merely to enjoy the wonders of perspective painting. According to Oscar G. Brockett and Franklyn Hildy, “it is not difficult to appreciate the fascination that perspective drawing had on the Renaissance mind, for it seemed almost magical in its ability to manipulate illusion”(129). By the eighteenth century, the Baroque style with its interest and tendency towards “grandeur, richness, movement and monumentality” (125) turned the living stage into “Alice in wonder land”.

Furthermore, scenery enhances believability. It helps the audience in its willing suspension of disbelief. Adepeju Layiwola explains this very well when he writes that scenery helps “the audience transcends the realm of illusion and begin to react as though the whole performance were real” (105).

Again, scenery helps to highlight human conditions. Through appropriate scenery, characters’ given circumstances, moods and temperament can be deciphered.

Symbolic setting encourages imaginative exploration. From what the audience sees, it can make an excursion into the unknown, in order to be able to gain knowledge of the subtext or the implicit meaning of the play.

Scenery can be a means of gaining knowledge of human history and cultural movements. It can tell us about aesthetic habit of different cultures and periods.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List and explain two functions of scenery.

3.4 Qualities of a Good Designer

Although there is now an increasing tendency towards Realism on stage, it is not possible to achieve complete Realism on stage. What is possible is Selective Realism. As a result of this, a good scene designer must possess superb imaginative ability. This will assist him in making judicious selection of ideas that can be of help in interpreting the scenic environment of the play appropriately.

A good scene designer must be versatile in his knowledge of spatial art techniques. This is imperative because the designer’s language is not literary, but the “language of lines, mass, colour and dimension” (Asomba, 2000:14). This implies that the designer should know how to measure, draw and paint, etc.

Scenery plays supportive role in a dramatic production. It is, therefore, important that at the level of conception, the designer should be “thoroughly informed by the aesthetic and technical needs of the drama and its theatre, otherwise, it would lose its dependence and relativity” (8). What Asomba implies here is that the designer should from the period of conception, ensures that the setting helps to enhance the overall meaning of the play, and not to call attention to itself. In fact, he clarifies this when he observes that the constituents part of the

scenery “are expected to be expressive of the action, and collectively or individually assist in advancing it in time and space” (9).

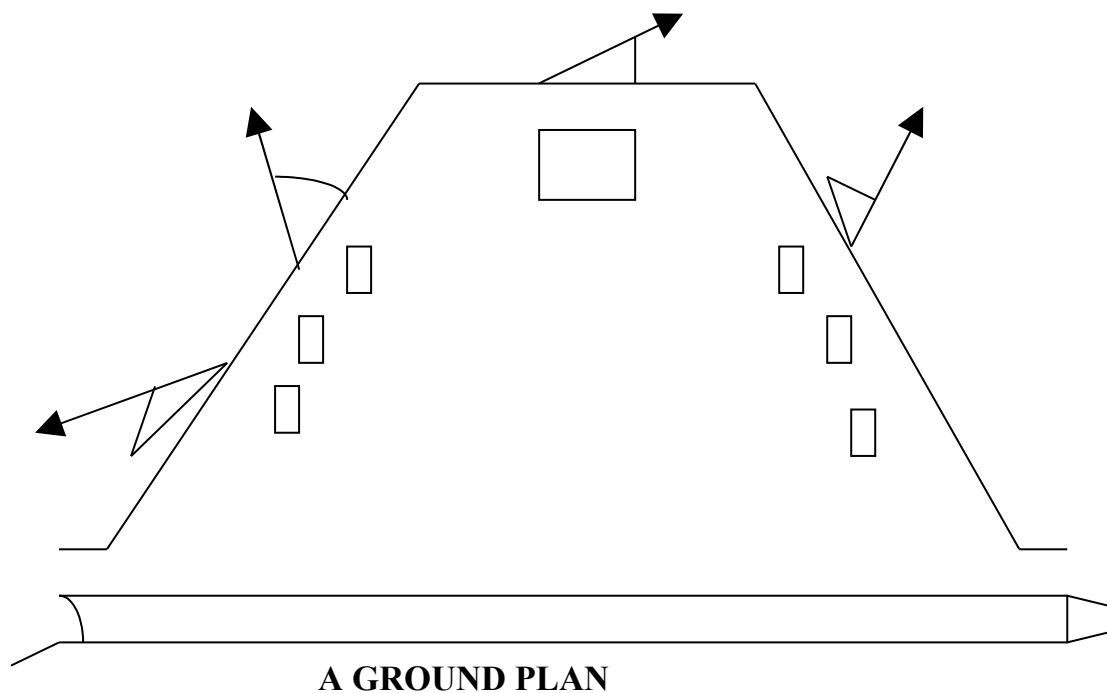
3.5 Means of Expressing Scene Design

We have already noted that the scene designer is a dreamer, a visioner. How then does he let others share his dream or vision? Asomba is of the express opinion that the scene designer “effects communication through varied mechanical drawings such as ground plans, elevations and detailed drawings of particularly complex and intricate structures in the setting” (15-16).

The designer’s concept of the dramatic environment can be expressed in three major ways: ground plan, perspective painting and three-dimensional model.

GROUND PLAN

The ground plan also referred to as the floor plan is an architectural way of depicting the arrangement of scenery on stage. It is “a comprehensive view of the stage perceived as if the compositional elements are each horizontally sliced into two, exposing their respective interior arrangements” (16). A ground plan is the design of the scenery as can be seen from above. A ground plan may be preceded by a sketch, but professionally, it is usually done to scale, taking the actual size and shape of the stage into cognisance. In ground plan, “positions of all items of scenery, props, doors, entrances, exits, as well as indications of height, sizes of steps and ramps, etc., as required by the particular productions are shown” (16). In ground plan, what the designer does is to attempt to economically share the available stage space to the many scenes (especially the major scenes) conceived by the playwright and the director.



PERSPECTIVE PAINTING

This is a method of using colours to paint the picture of the setting as it would appear when completed. Although “the details of sketch provide adequate guide to the construction and assemblage of the elements of the environment to the technicians “(Asomba, 19), it is inherent with some problems. Firstly, it is time consuming. Secondly, it does not indicate height and sizes of scenic units.

MODEL

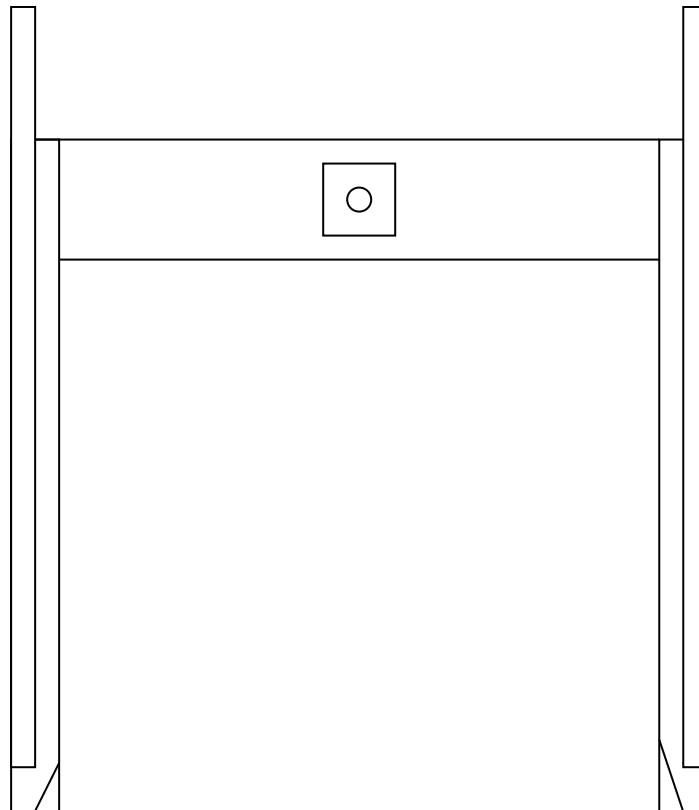
Model is a three-dimensional solid structure indicating how the stage will look like when fully constructed. It is the stage in its miniature form. It is highly useful in explaining complex design. It shows all the items of the scenery, including the positions of lighting instruments. Although model is time consuming, it is the most unambiguous way of communicating the implications of design to the building crew. Asomba explained the advantages of a good model to include:

- A good model conveys a clearer picture of the proposed setting.
- It is a convenient single approach to communicating a designer’s vision to members of a production team, particularly to some of them that are not sufficiently literate in the language of two-dimensional sketches.
- A good model exposes some constructional problems hitherto unenvisaged in conception.

- A good model helps the director in assessing the effectiveness of his kinaesthetic directions.
- Also, when students create models, they learn the practical process of scene craft.

ELEVATIONS

Ideally, the scene designer should follow his ground plan and perspective up with elevation drawings. Elevations are vertical views of scenic units. Elevations can show the front, top and side views of pieces of scenery. They are informative because they equip the technicians with the shape; size and in fact, all the dimensions of set pieces. According to Albright et al, Scene design is a spatial art, and as such, “the same principles of scale, balance and proportion which make the works or architecture, sculpture and painting pleasing to the eyes apply with equal value to the composition of the scene” (225). Apropos of this, Asomba notes that elevation drawings do not only “indicate the height and overall width of separate set piece”, they “more accurately represent the compositional arrangements” of all the set pieces “and arrangements” of all the set pieces “and their relationship in respect of proportion and distance from one another” (18).



Front elevation of a reading table.

SIGHTLINES

Sightlines can be better described than defined. How does the audience see the scenery from the auditorium? Are there portions of the set that are not visible to the audience? Answers to these questions will give us an idea of what sightlines means. A good designer ensures that he does not limit what the audience can see on stage. If some or any part of the scenery are hidden from the view of some members of the audience, it means that any dramatic action enacted there cannot be seen by such audience. Sightlines are lines of visibility.

How to guarantee proper sightlines is one of the major tasks of the designer. It is possible to ensure adequate sightlines if the designer knows the dimensions and shape of the stage his design will be realized on, and if such stage is not poorly constructed like most stages in Nigeria. However, in a nicely constructed stage, the designer ensures accurate sightlines through “sightline checks”. To carry out sight line check, a straight line is extended from the extremes of the last auditorium seats to whichever part of the stage with doubtful visibility. If the persons seated at those points can see that portion well, then adequate sightline is guaranteed, but when contrary is the case, necessary adjustment can then be made on the set.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

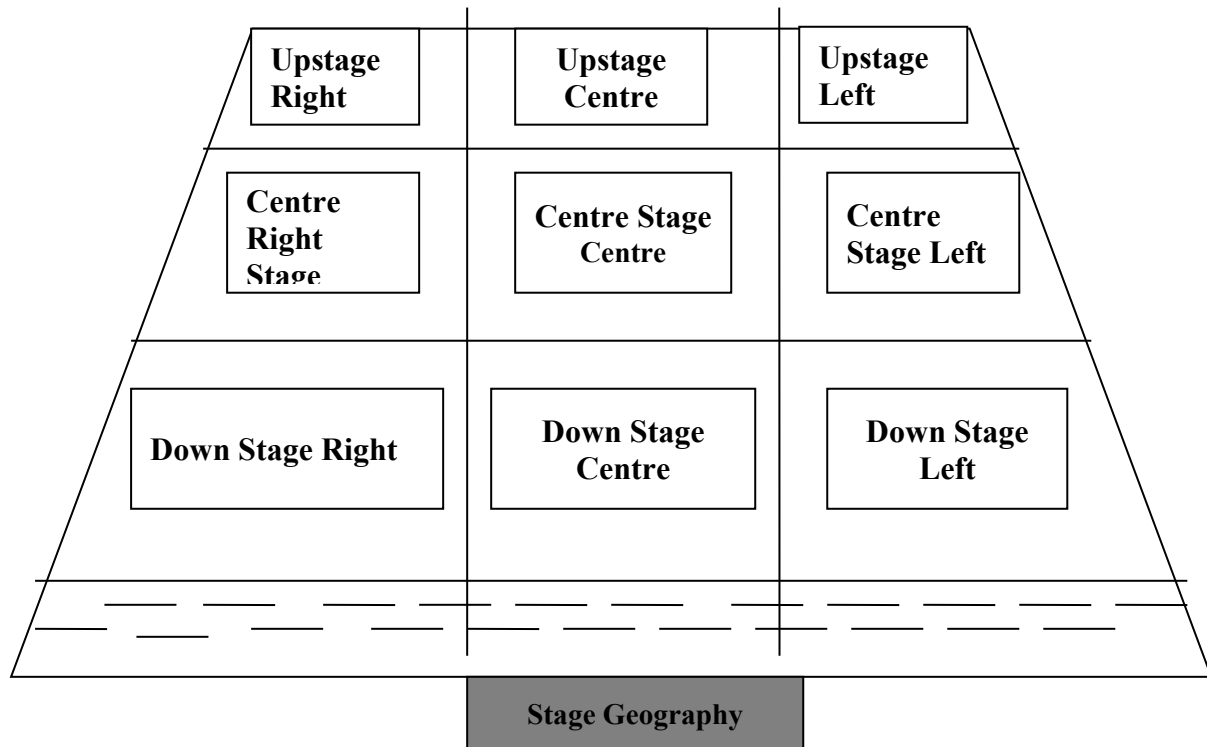
What is a model?

3.6 Stage Geography

For purposes of effective dramatic communication, the acting area is usually divided into imaginary parts like the lines of the equator. The composite form of these various parts of the acting areas is what is referred to as the stage geography. Basically we have nine parts. They include upstage right, left and Centre; Centre stage right, left and Centre, and Down stage right, left and centre. The down stage areas denote the acting areas very close to the audience, while the centre stage areas are those acting areas between the up stage and down stage regions.

Heffner et al cite Alexander Dean as positing that “these stage areas could each be differentiated in terms of strength”, and that each has “a distinct mood value” (289). For examples, the upstage areas are used for the enactment of remote actions and for the featuring of less important characters. Downstage areas are areas of dominance and authority. Powerful actions and characters are featured here. The centre stage is also an area of dominance. It is essentially used for greater focus and emphasis. A director, for example, can spoil “focus by

upstaging the actor who is supposed to be the centre of interest” (286). Centre stage area is, therefore, the centre of attraction.



SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What do you understand by stage geography?

3.7 Scene Construction

Scene construction deals with the actualization of the dream or vision of the designer in concrete terms. It is the process of building all the different set units and putting them together to form the dramatic environment. It is the translation of the language of lines into tangible objects.

At the head of the construction team is the technical director. In educational theatres, the designer sometimes doubles as the technical director. The technical director begins his work by “analyzing the designer’s plans, acquiring necessary materials that are needed to realize the design, preparing the work schedule by grouping it into series of project thus making a master schedule to guide construction” (Asomba, 2000:103). The building crew should possess sufficient skill in carpentry, or must be guided by a master carpenter.

Although the art of scene construction resembles industrial construction, the materials used in scene building differ from those used in industrial

construction in terms of strength. Theatre is a temporal art. This temporal nature of the theatre, to a very large extent, dictates the kind of materials employed in constructing theatrical environment. In recognition of this fact, Asomba observes for example, that “the theatrical wall is designed and built for temporal habitation by characters in a dramatic action while the real house is for permanent occupation” (107). Bearing this in mind, the technical director or his agent should not go for very strong materials but for fragile ones. However, such materials should be “sufficiently solid and firm to withstand and absorb the often rough handlings and movements always associated with theatre productions and performances, and most importantly sustain the life span of the production” (106). In support of this idea, Albright et al state that “the permanence of drama, like the permanence of music, occupies a comparatively brief time, and although the script of a drama may be performed many times, each performance is a complete work of art” (226). In making flats, table, windows and doors, etc., white woods are recommended as against hard ones. Joinery should be done in such a way as to guarantee easy dismantling of set pieces. In painting, emulsion should be used instead of gross.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

How does theatrical scene construction differ from industrial construction?

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we explained the concept of scene design and construction, highlighting its role in theatrical productions. We maintained that in spite of the ideas of ‘the poor theatre’ and “empty space”, scenery plays interpretative and aesthetic functions in performances.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we specifically examined the concept of scene design; factors that influence scene design; functions of scenery; qualities of a good designer; means of expressing design; stage geography; and the idea of scene construction. We noted that the temporal nature of the theatre affects the choice of construction materials.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is a ground plan?

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UNIT 4 STAGE MANAGEMENT

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Concept of Stage Management
 - 3.2 The Stage Manager
 - 3.3 Functions of the Stage Manager
 - 3.4 Qualities of the Stage Manager
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Stage management is now practised as a profession in itself in Europe and America, where professional theatrical practice pays great dividends. In Nigeria, stage management merely exists as an integral part of theatre curriculum in the universities. In this unit, we will attempt to explain the following: Stage management, the stage manager, as well as the qualities and responsibilities of the stage manager.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this study, the student should be able to:

- explain the concept of stage management
- discuss the qualities of a stage manager
- list and explain the responsibilities of the stage manager in theatrical

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Stage Management

Stage management can be described as the art of controlling and caring for the stage, its properties and the cast, for the purposes of promoting smooth and efficient stage transactions. According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*, “Stage management does not only refer to the seamless management of the technical aspects of a production, but of the human aspect as well”. It combines the administrative functions of co-ordination and leadership with profound, as well as creative ingenuity of an artist. The purpose of stage management is to ensure smooth running and hitch-free productions.

In large scale productions, especially in Europe and America, we have stage management team, or multiple stage managers. According to *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*, “the division of a British stage management team varies according to the type of production, but can consist of stage manager (over seeing the smooth running of the show, scene changes and so on), deputy stage manager (commonly called DSM). The deputy stage manager maintains the prompt book, calls the show and ensures that rehearsals run on time. “The assistant stage manager (commonly called ASM), generally works in the props and scene change area, and sometimes operate recorded or live sound.

In America and Britain, the Actors’ Equity Association (AEA) and British Union Equity (BUE) respectively control the affairs of professional actors and stage managers. They, in fact, define their functions and how their welfare can be taken care of in performances.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is stage management?

3.2 The Stage Manager

Derek Bowskill observes that “the director may devise artistic possibilities and opportunities, but he will get nowhere without a stage manager who can efficiently create the practical conditions for their realization” (293). The statement above highlights the crucial role of the stage manager in any theatrical production. Generally speaking, the job of the stage manager is fluid in nature. He is an administrator, a creative artistic, and in fact, the communication hub of the entire production team. For the sake of convenience, and purposes of clarity, we will attempt to break down the functions and responsibilities of the stage manager.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Who is a stage manager?

3.3 Functions of the Stage Manager

The stage manager plays varied roles in theatre productions. These roles commence from the moment he is appointed and extend from the rehearsals to the last curtain call.

THE PRE-REHEARSAL FUNCTIONS

The stage manager performs the pre-rehearsal functions of accompanying the director to meetings, especially those organised between the director and the technical crew such as the scene designer, the lighting and sound designer, as well as the costume and make-up artist. He equally records the preliminary cuttings of the script in his note book and initiates the process of preparing the stage manager's prompt book.

REHEARSAL FUNCTIONS

The stage manager performs the following functions during rehearsals:

- He traces the exits and entrances with chalk on the floor to facilitate on the stage.
- He keeps the cast abreast of the director's overall design of the play, it and details of changes the director makes.
- He prepares a prompt book where he records the director's blocking of elements and postures.
- He ensures that everybody is on cue.
- He ensures that rehearsal venue is tidy, and in good shape.
- He enforces discipline during rehearsals.
- Though the use of the stage hands, he feeds in elements of setting are developed, in order to facilitate the actors' interpretation of the play.
- He keeps the register of the production team, and takes role call before,
- He ensures safety of both the production team, and the technical
- He takes full responsibility of the entire rehearsal process in the

THE PERFORMANCE FUNCTIONS

From the dress rehearsal through the last production night, the stage manager becomes the officer in charge of the production. Parker W.

Oren posits that “once the house opens, the stage manager essentially takes control, calling the cues for all transitions (this is known as “calling the show”), as well as acting as communications hub for the cast and crew” (263).

Apart from calling the show, the stage manager acts as a morale booster to the cast, to ensure that each person is in high spirit. He equally ensures that every actor or actress is on cue, that all the materials needed for the production are ready, and that nothing is left to chance. He keeps an eye open for safety.

Again, after the opening of the production, “the stage managers is also responsible for calling brush up, put in and understudy rehearsals to make sure that the show’s quality is maintained”.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List and discuss any two functions of the stage manager.

3.4 Qualities of the Stage Manager

As we can see from the foregoing, the stage manager performs multi-dimensional functions, and as such, the position must be occupied by someone with varied outstanding qualities. Below are some of the qualities expected to be possessed by a good stage manager:

- A good stage manager must be highly creative. According to *the free encyclopedia*, “typically in theatre, the stage manager acts as an adjunct to the director in recording the blocking and seeing that cast members stay on cue, have necessary props and follow the director. Beside this, the stage manager takes charge of rehearsals in the absence of the director. He must be able to give for him to take up the job of play direction whenever the director is away, and for him to enjoy the confidence and support of the members of the cast when he actually becomes the director’s surrogate.

- A good stage manager must exhibit a sense of discipline and dedication. It is his job to maintain discipline and to ensure that nothing goes out of joint during rehearsals. The stage manager must exhibit forthrightness because one does not give what one does not have. The actors must see him obey the director before they can obey him. If he expects to be respected, he must respect the actors’ feelings as well as that of the director.
- A good stage manager must be charismatic leader. He must possess what A.B.C. Duruaku calls “power of organisation”. An actor’s mood is not static but dynamic. It is like a river with many courses. Sometimes, an actor can become angry, sad, intolerant, and sometimes extremely boisterous. A charismatic stage manager is a

mood reader, and therefore, should be able to harness the actor's moods in order to get what he wants from them.

- A good stage manager must be sufficiently energetic. The business of an arm-chair affair. It requires peripatetic movement. The stage manager is constantly in the auditorium to the stage and from the stage to the back stage and then back again frequently moving from the director to the technical crew, passing on significant groups. He, therefore, must not be a weak person but someone who is physically fit

- A good stage manager must possess adequate communication skill. friendly to all and to be able to elicit whatever information he needs from any of the

- A good stage manager must be a reliable fellow, someone that can

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss one quality of a good stage manager.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We explained that stage management deals with the organization of both men and materials, in order to ensure smooth and efficient running of theatre productions. We maintained that in Europe and America, Equity regulate the affairs of stage managers. We also explained that stage management combines artistic and administrative functions, and that a good stage manager must be disciplined, charismatic, creative and energetic.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we specifically examined the concept of stage management, the personality of the stage manager, as well as the various duties of the stage manager in theatre productions.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List and discuss two duties of the stage manager.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 STAGE LIGHTING

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The concept of Stage Lighting

3.2 Origin and development of Stage Lighting

3.3 Functions of Stage Lighting

3.4 Qualities of Stage Lighting

3.5 Lighting Instruments

- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Stage lighting is one of the elements of design, or technical aspect of theatre, which cannot be ignored in modern theatre practice. According to Domba Asomba, “the art of stage lighting is, at its best, science and technology in service of the art of the theatre” (ix). The implications of Asomba’s statement above are as follows:

- Theatre can be done without stage lighting.
- Theatre and the art of stage lighting observe master-servant
- Stage lighting plays supportive role in theatre.

Although stage lighting is not quintessential in productions occurring during the day, it is crucial to night performances. In modern times, most productions are night affairs.

In this unit, attempt will be made to trace the origin and development of stage lighting, as well as the purposes of the art of stage lighting in theatre practice.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is believed that by the end of this study, students should be able to:

- trace the origin and evolution of stage lighting
- explain its functions in theatre practice
- discuss the qualities of stage lighting
- state and explain types of lighting instruments
- discuss the importance of colour in stage lighting.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Stage Lighting

Stage lighting is an art of using artificial light (now mostly electric light) to illuminate the stage, in order to showcase actors in their dramatic world, to punctuate their moods and emotions, to fire their imagination and that of the audience, as well as to lay bare, the actors’ fields of thought. In the words of Asomba, “the art of stage lighting goes beyond switching on and off the stage lights to provide illumination” (xi). It is a creative art “absolutely aimed at aiding/supporting the actor, the chief

priest of the enactment, in expressing directly to an audience, the spoken and unspoken thoughts and feelings of the character(s) in the action” (xi). This means that apart from revealing the actors in their dramatic environment, stage lighting is employed creatively to accentuate emotions, externalize thoughts, indicate time, as well as weather conditions.

In the light of the above, stage lighting can never be a business for all and sundry. It must be handled by someone who is knowledgeable in the value of light; one who understands the impacts of colours in human psychology, as well as their conventional usage.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How is stage lighting different from ordinary lighting?

3.2 Origin and Development of Stage Lighting

Although some writers suggest that lanterns were used to indicate night scene during the classical Greek period, and that the addition of roof on the Roman theatre necessitated the use of torchlight on the classical Roman stage, the Renaissance “was the first time stage lighting became one of the powerful tools in theatre performance”. Not only that “Chandelier was invented for illumination of the stage and auditorium”, “it was the period light fading after each scene became important” (Ugwu, 2005: 4-5).

To secure scene change at this period of stage lighting development, “open cylinders were suspended above the lamps and lowered over them to darken the stage, or raised to brighten it, or all lamps might be mounted on rotating poles that could be turned either toward or away from the visible portion of the stage” (Brockett, 1999: 142).

There was an attempt to introduce colour in stage lighting during the Renaissance period, but the scientists of this era had little control over colour, and even intensity. Thus Brockett observes that “since the intensity of lamps and candles was so limited, producing an adequate level of illumination took precedence over other functions of stage lighting” (142).

Because of the problems of haze, fumes and heat generated by this crude method of stage lighting, scientists, continued to attempt on improvement. A more scientific way of controlling and manipulating stage lights in order to create various atmospheric conditions and moods was attributed to a French man, Louis – Jacques Daguerre (1787-1851),

whose interest in optics even led him to invent “the first effective form of photography in 1839” (348). In 1822, gas lighting was introduced.

However, Thomas Edison’s invention of electric lamp in 1879 revolutionized stage lighting. Brockett posits that “in 1881, The Savoy Theatre became the first in London to be lighted throughout with electricity and by 1900 almost all English theatre had followed its example” (399). Earlier in 1860, the incandescent lamp had been placed in a housing and equipped with lens to create a spotlight” (399). By 1913, the use of colour media had become common throughout Europe and America. The invention of computer in the twentieth century makes precision in stage lighting possible.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Trace the origin and development of stage lighting.

3.3 Functions of Stage Lighting

Generally speaking, light functions as a means of illuminating dark environment. In the theatre, light is not only a means of ensuring visibility, it can be a source of delight, glamour and wonder. It can be used to accentuate emotions, depict time, atmosphere and weather conditions. But for theatre lights to achieve the above, they “must spring from the text and action of the play” (Bowskill, 1979: 301). For purposes of clarity and easy comprehension, we will attempt to explain these functions one after another.

•VISIBILITY

As the theatre moved indoors from the arena, the need for visibility became imperative. This *led* to the first attempt at stage lighting. Talking about the importance and inevitability of visibility, Michael J. Gillette states that “if you can’t see them, you can’t hear them” (289). Trevor Griffith buttresses this idea when he opines that “without a creative and technically approach to lighting the audience cannot fully appreciate the set and costumes, and most importantly, the actors on stage” (93). In essence, light ties all the aspects of production together.

•INTERPRETATION OF MOOD

A creative function of stage lighting is its ability to accentuate emotions. Through mood accentuation, stage lights help the actors to externalize their thoughts and feelings and by so doing, they bring out the implicit meaning of the play, the subtext. According to Domba Asomba, “the mood of a drama is what moves an audience beyond itself, from its real

self into the virtual space and time of the action”. He further observes that “the mood of a play is not something that a lighting artist brings into a theatre but something inherent in the drama in focus that he only strives to heighten and reinforce, through associative employment of symbols and exploitative manipulation of the variables of light” (115). The implications of the above statements include the following:

- The lighting artist must read the script thoroughly, in order to become attuned with the emotional implications of the play.
- He must know the symbolic meaning of colours and their values, as qualities of light.

•MEANS OF SCENE CHANGE

Light plays a major role in scene changes. James Roose-Evans remarks that light serve not merely to illuminate what is happening on stage but to highlight the emotional mood of a scene from moment to moment”. In support of this notion, *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes that “the dynamic potentials of lighting are best realized when the changes of light underscore and propel the development of drama” (607). As a means of scene change, stage lights help to add rhythm and create pause in performances. The pause enables the audience to contemplate on what has been presented. As a mobile factor in theatre production, Charles Ugwu posits that stage lighting “should not be stagnant but should be changing frequently, from moment to moment, in order to heighten the tempo of the production” (10).

•AESTHETIC VALUE

Ugwu Charles opines that “colours add immeasurable beauty” to productions. When colours are mixed appropriately to blend well with the setting, mood and atmosphere of any performance, the entire stage picture can be a wonder to gaze at, a glamour to cherish, and a marvellous beauty to behold.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List and discuss two functions of stage lighting.

3.4 Qualities of Stage Lighting

Stage lighting possesses four variable qualities, which include intensity, colour, movement and direction.

INTENSITY

When we talk of intensity, we mean the lowness or brightness of illumination, the fluctuating tendency of light. With reference to stage lighting, Asomba sees intensity as the “actual amount of light, the quantity that strikes the stage at any given moment in the revelation of action” (102). Intensity is a major means of accentuating mood and atmosphere in theatre production. Intensity of stage lighting can be regulated by the use of control device such as the dimmer, colour medium or “by changing the position of the lighting instrument” (102). A good quality light, according to Albright et al, should possess “intermediate value. Its intensity should neither be too soft nor too high. Very soft light blurs vision, while too bright one can be blinding. Under each case, the spectators will have “difficulty in distinguishing details of form, or subtleties of expression” (294).

MOVEMENT

Light, as we have earlier noted, is a mobile factor in theatre production. Movement entails “visible change of any of the qualities of light” (Asomba, 2006:103). Increase or decrease in colour intensity, or change in direction of lighting instrument constitutes movement. The essence of movement of light is to direct, or focus attention, to create emphasis.

COLOUR

Colour is, perhaps, the most influential quality of stage lighting in terms of production of variety of mood. Although the use of colour is highly conventionalized, and its emotional response very much subjective, Bowskill rightly observes that:

- Warm colours tend to advance
- Cold colours tend to recede.
- Reds and oranges are powerful and strong; assertive, aggressive and
- Yellow is gay, happy and cheerful. It stimulates.
- Blues and greens are tranquilizing, restful and cold.
- Purple and magenta are pompous, regal, powerful and stimulating.
- White stimulates (easily over stimulates).
- Black depresses (easily over depresses).
- Grey neutralizes (309).

Colours can be used to create a wide range of emotions and meanings on stage. It can be used to create natural, as well as abstract effects. Consequently, the lighting designer must work in concert with the set, costume and make-up designers, in order to avoid creating colour riot on stage.

COLOUR MEDIA

These refer to the means of creating the various colours required for stage use. They are usually “chemically engineered and manufactured to filter out undesired colours” and to boost the wavelengths of the needed colours. They are placed in front of the lighting instruments and activated by the light source to produce the required colours. Colour media include dyed gelatine, coloured glass and dyed plastics.

DIRECTION

Direction has to do with the angle from which the light throw emanates. The course of the stage light is very important. In fact, its usage appears to have been conventionalized. For example, “natural effects are created with light coming from the top of the stage, unnatural effects can be created with light coming from below the stage” (Ugwu, 2005:30)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Why is colour very important in stage lighting?

3.5 Lighting Instruments

According to Asomba, “stage lighting instruments are classified into two broad categories based on whether they are engineered to use lenses or not, and they include spot lighting and flood lighting instruments”.

FLOODLIGHT

This instrument has a single permanent reflector which enables it to throw out light without change. It has no focusing lens and, therefore, throws light out evenly on stage. It produces soft beam of light and used for mere illumination. Flood light instruments are usually “available as individual units or linked together to form a baton, or through” (Bowskill, 1979:302).

SPOTLIGHT

This is the type of lighting equipment with lens. It is used to focus light as demanded by the production. It is used for selective lighting aimed at emphasis. It is used for versatile purposes.

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEM

The control system is the heart of stage lighting. It is the means by which the intensity of light is regulated. Today, the dimmer is the device used in regulating the flow of current into the incandescent lamps. It is a sort of remote control that has continued to be modified as a result of improvement in electrical and electronic engineering. Certainly, there must have been computerized dimmers to help make stage lighting more precise and less cumbersome.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is a floodlight?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained that the art of stage lighting is a child of necessity. This is because it was developed to solve the problem arising from indoor and night performances. We explained that apart from general or mere illumination, stage lighting can be used to accentuate moods, highlight thought, indicate time and clarify atmospheric conditions, etc.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we specifically examined the concept of stage lighting, its origin and development, functions and qualities of stage lighting, as well as stage lighting instruments.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Distinguish between flood and spotlighting.

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UNIT 6 COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

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- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Concept of Costume
 - 3.2 Styles of Costume
 - 3.3 Functions of Costume
 - 3.4 Qualities of Costume Make-Up

- 4.0 Conclusion
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Costume and make-up play fundamental roles in defining characters. They help to bring out the actors' stage personalities, or the playwrights' conceptions of what the actors' physical appearances are. Heffner et al opine "that in supplementing the art of acting with the visual artistry of dress and facial make-up, the actor disguises his own personality in that of the part he is portraying". (562).

In this unit, attempt will be made to explain the significance of costume and make-up in theatre productions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this study, the students should be able to:

- explain the concept of costume and make-up
- discuss their functions in theatre practice
- explain types of costume
- list and discuss types of make-up
- discuss how costumes and make-up can be procured for productions.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Concept of Costume

Generally speaking, costume can be described as stage dress, or wear, and its accessories like headgear, hat, ear-rings and necklace, etc. A costume can be derived from every day dress, or it can be symbolic. A dress made for a ghost, must of necessity; depart from the natural dress worn by a human being. It is usually symbolic.

TYPES OF COSTUME

Costume can be categorised into two major groups, period and ethnic costumes.

Period costume refers to a particular stage dress worn during a particular historical era. Thus, we can talk of 5th century B.C. costume, Renaissance costume, Elizabethan costume, nineteenth century costume, etc. Period costume is largely regulated by fashion. An important point about fashion is that it is cyclical. For example, the dresses worn in

Nigeria in the 1960s and 1970s, which were abandoned in the 1980s and 1990s, are now fashionable in the country among the youths. They refer to those dresses as “old school”.

Ethnic costume is a cultural marker. This is because it tells you where somebody comes from. According to Julie Umukoro:

The African continent is a conglomerate of varying ethnic groups marked by notable cultural differences. This dichotomy is most visually perceived through features of dress ---- consequent on geographical, cultural and socio-political factors, consistent patterns are gradually evolved and features become repeatedly accentuated in their design. Over the years, their unique attributes become distinctive qualities of their kind, and by and by, they assume the image of cultural symbols indicative of their specific ethnic groups (1-2).

In Nigeria, ethnic groups can be identified by their indigenous wears. For examples, the Hausas have the “Danciki” or what is today popularly referred to as the “Agbada”; the Igbos have the “Isi agu”; and the Yorubas – the “Aso-oke”. Although the quest for national integration has made cross-cultural dressing acceptable in Nigeria, in theatre practice, these dresses are used as means of character portraiture, to depict characters ethnically.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

List and discuss the two types of costume.

3.2 Styles of Costume

Stage dress can either be draped or fitted. According to Albright et al, “the art of draping is the art of securing abundant folds and graceful gathers by the way the cloth is hung about the body” (270). Draped costumes are generally loose and flowing. A good example of draped costume is the “Agbada”. In Europe we have the Greek Chiton and the Roman Toga. Draped costume is usually held in position at the shoulder, and or the waist areas. It permits graceful movement. On stage they are best, for Kings and the nobles, or the wealthy. Draped costume is at its best when the weight of the material is caused to accumulate at the hems.

The fitted costume is the type of costume made to suit the shape of the body of the wearer. It, in fact, reveals the outlines or contours of the body. The essential difference between the draped and fitted costume is that “the fitted costume directs attention to the physique of its wearer; the draped costume to the wearer’s movement” (Albright et al, 269). Fitted costume is best for activities that require versatility in movements and gestures; such activities include dancing, acrobatic display, fighting, etc. However, depending on the roles to be played fitted design can co-exist with drape design in one costume.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is a draped costume?

3.3 Functions of Costume

•Mark Twain in his “The Czar’s soliloquy” clarifies the role of costume eloquently states:

There is no power without clothes. It is the power that governs the human race. Strip its chiefs to the skin, and no state could be governed: naked officials could exercise no authority: they would look (and be) like every one else—common place, inconsequential. A policeman in plain clothes is one man; in his uniform he is ten. Clothes and titles are the most potent thing, the most formidable influence, in the earth. They move the human race to willing and spontaneous respect for the judge, the bishop, the ambassador, the frivolous earl, the idiot duke, the Sultan, the king, the emperor.

No great title is efficient without clothes to support it (1).

Twain is very clear in telling us that clothes are means of distinguishing personalities. From the type of clothes an actor puts on, you can say much about his political power, economic standing and social class. You can say whether the actor is rich or poor, a master or servant. In fact, in theatre, costumes are means of depicting characters’ given circumstances.

•Costumes can be used to describe age and historical period of a play or a medieval play?

•Costumes can be used to accentuate mood. Is the character mourning or sad or happy?

- Costume can be used to distinguish occupation. Is the character a doctor, soldier or a farmer?
- Costume is a cultural marker. Is the actor from Tiv or Igbo, Housa or Yoruba?
- Costume can tell the time and weather of the play. Is the action taking place in the morning or night? Is it occurring during the harmattan or winter?

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List and discuss two functions of costumes in theatre production.

3.4 Qualities of Costume

A good stage costume is expected to possess the following qualities:

- It must agree with the overall style of production. According to *Albright et al*, the style of costume in any production is the externalization of the spirit of the play, the sobriety or flippancy of its attitude toward life and the dignity or triviality of its theme, and on the occasion of its composition” (267).
- A major quality of stage costume is mobility. An actor’s costume should be flexible enough to permit him free access to execute his various stage business. Derek Bowskill says that there is a two-way movement between actor and clothes according to him:

The character created by the actor will suggest the clothes to be worn. The clothes themselves will suggest variations within that character and dramatic possibilities (295).

The above statement implies that costume should not be made for its own sake, but must stem from the script. It equally suggests that costume should be mobile enough to stimulate creativity on the part of the actor. Indeed, “it is the quality of the costumes’ movement and the way they look in motion which is the final measure of their effectiveness” (*Albright et al*, 275).

- Again costumes are frequently changed by the actors in the course of a play. Change of costumes is expected to occur within a twinkle of an eye. The audience is not supposed to know that the actors are changing. This can be made possible if the costumes are mobile.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Why does a costume need to be mobile?

3.5 Make-Up

Make-up essentially refers to the natural, as well chemically engineered cosmetic worn by the actors and actresses, in order to highlight their outward appearances as prescribed by the script, or interpreted by the director. “As one of the visual elements of production, make-up complements consumes in revealing the character embodied in the actor through his physical appearance” (Uto-Ezeajugh, 2005:157). Make-up reveals age, period, culture and mood.

TYPES OF MAKE-UP

There are basically two types of make-up. They are straight make-up and character make-up. Straight make-up is make-up merely worn to brighten up appearances. It is worn to accentuate the personal features of the actor. It also refers to the type worn for evening walk.

Character make-up aims at camouflage or transformation. Through character make-up, a young man can be turned into an octogenarian. Through character make-up, an actor is bequeathed the physical features of the character he is recreating, but which he lacks in a very promising degree. In character make-up, special attention is given to the face and the head. Head transformation, for example, can be achieved through weaving, hair cut, or through fixatives such as the wig. Character make-up is mostly used where the major features of the character are lacking in the actor.

APPLICATION OF MAKE-UP

The first stage in wearing make-up is the cleaning of the face. The face can be cleaned with water and soap, or by means of astringent-a cleansing lotion. This is followed by the application of the basic facial colour of the character. This step is known as the foundation because it is the first way of saying that the character is white or black or coloured. The next stage requires creativity. This is because this is the stage of painting the required features of the character. If he is an old man, this is the stage to reveal it. The final stage is the highlight stage. Here all the features painted are highlighted by means of highlight liners. The highlighting or the lining stage brings out the details of the lips, eyelids, wrinkle and other significant features on the face of the character.

NEED FOR LOCALLY MANUFACTURED MAKE-UP

Overemphasis on imported make-up leads Tracie Uto-Ezeajugh to stress the need for local alternatives. She laments that while “it is obvious that stage make-up existed in the Nigerian traditional society, and also played similar roles as they do in the theatre of today, these local sources of stage make-up have remained largely unexplored” (168). Certainly, the high make-up demands of our daily exploding entertainment industry makes it imperative that we explore the possibility of generating our own make-up locally. Nigeria has abundance raw materials for the production of make-up. We have black indigo, camwood, yellow ochre, charcoal and colour chalks, among others.

Explorations of local sources can equip the make-up artists with divergent skills. It can also be an attractive means of livelihood. In fact, Mrs. B.N. Chibuzo had started enjoying some financial rake in from her locally made costumes and make-up, before death untimely snatched her away from us. Samples of her ingenuity in this direction can be seen in the costumes and make-up room of the Department of theatre Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka, where she served as a technical staff.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What is character make-up?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained the functions of costume and, make-up as visual elements of production. We explained that these elements can be used to clarify the status, period, age, and in fact, the given circumstances of the actor- which include his economic and socio-political attributes.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this study, we explained specifically, the concept of costume and make-up, their typology, as well as their complementary role in bringing out the physical aspect of the character’s personality. We equally highlighted the need for a local alternative to foreign make-up.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss two functions of costume.

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