DRAMA AS A TOOL OF COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A STUDY OF FRANK OGBEACHE’S HARVEST OF CORRUPTION

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Abstract
The role of a writer in our post-independence society is significant. Our society is on the verge of moral rape, social and political destruction. This is because the people at the helm of affairs are no longer representing the interest of those who voted them into power. This situation has led to the wide spread of corruption, kidnapping and other evil occurrences in the society. As a result of hunger, poverty, frustration and despair, people are desperate to survive, they are ready to take any step in as much their needs would be met. Those who are saddled with the responsibilities of making laws and formulating policies are sometimes the same people who break the laws. The security operatives sometimes act contrarily to the ethics of their profession. The society is gradually tilting towards anarchy. In this situation, the literary artist is expected to use his literary prowess to expose and lampoon these vices that have eaten terribly deep into the marrows of the society. It is therefore against this backdrop that this paper is designed to examine Frank Ogbache’s Harvest of Corruption as a play which communicates the ills of the society to readers.

Key words; Post Independence, Corruption, Communication and Society

Introduction
The rate at which our traditional practices; our culture and other age long ideas are fast eroding, is alarming. Everything in all ramifications of life is taking a new shape. In the aspect of teaching and learning, the usual “chalking and talking” has been replaced with the use of white board and marker. Infact, the electronic board has been invented which makes learning more effective and pleasurable. Instead of the conventional practice of pen and paper, many people now write literary works i.e drama, prose, or poetry through the aid of their laptop or palmtop. There is no doubt, we are in another age. Commenting on the characteristics and benefits of this new age, Oyelade (2014) remarks:

We all know either so much or so little about the implication of doing scholarship in the humanities- literary, linguistic and cultural scholarships- with the materiality of technology, especially in this age known as the “information age”, the digital age”, and as the age of the internet”… we have exchanged emails, conversations by telephony, we have uploaded files containing abstracts, essays, queries and other transactions through the shared inter-activities of the wired computer, via optical fibers…

Oyelade’s view reveals a deeply ambiguous watershed in this hemispheric divide. It signals a shift from analogue to the digital. This development undoubtedly queries the conventional conception of literacy as the ability to read and write. In this new age, known as the “digital” or “information age”, the computer
and the internet have inadvertently become a sine qua non for literacy. Confirming this assertion, Oyelade adds that:

*Literacy is no longer a matter of competence in writing in a particular language; it is about the competent cognition of the sign. In this age, literacy must be imagined practically as the acquisition of “competence” with both expiry and extension dates. This is the century where the definition of literacy has become collapsed, wrapped in a flux, proliferated and constantly challenged, that we can speak of the end of conventional literacy.*

The definition of literacy in this new age is not just challenged; it has become complex and thickened to a point that one needs a level of intellectual necromancy to demystify it. Therefore, one can now talk of “digital literacy”. The aspect of creative writing and the production of literary texts is not unaffected by the rapacious upsurge in the development of information technology. Ladele (2014) reveals this:

*The massive deployment of technologies and various others forms of computer mediated technologies such as the internet and the world wide web in the last three decades have provided exponential advancement in human interactions, relationships and communication in unprecedented global scales. The rapid transitions in contemporary society from print culture to electronic media through fiber optical paths, mobile satellite systems, cyber commons, chartrooms and other internet discussion sites have permanently changed the textual forms, as well as their modes of interpretation and theorizations.*

Ladele’s view confirms the rapid change in text construction and interpretation of discourse as well as the mode of human interaction as orchestrated by information technology. In every situation, there are advantages and disadvantages. As greatly rewarding as the information technology seems, it has its own pitfalls. It has inadvertently generated a number of worrisome issues in our society. One of these issues is the beginning of the end of the reading culture. Many students have developed a cold feet towards reading; they give more attention to browsing. Some learners even fiddle with their phones during lectures, while others chart with their boy-friends or girl-friends. Some other people use the internet for less educative purposes i.e watching pornographic films or criminal transactions. There are terrorist groups who use the internet as a ground for posting pictures of captives in order to gain the attention of the government and the larger society.

The role of the creative writer in this regards becomes paramount. He serves as the mirror and conscience of the society. The creative writer raises his literary prowess to address the ugly trends that characterize the “digital” or “information age”. He opens people’s eyes to the rills in the society and satirizes the situation through his efforts, people are intimatd with the adverse effects of corruption and other vices that have terribly deep down into fabrics of the society.

It is therefore on this ground that this paper examines Frank Ogbeche’s landmark play *Harvest of Corruption*, as a tool of communication in the digital age. The paper analyses the message of the playwright as a piece of communication between the writer (encoder) and the reader (decoder).

**The Concept of Drama**

The word “drama” stems from the Greek word “dran” which means “to do” or “act”. This means that the central point around which drama is weaved, is performance or action. Drama encompasses all forms of action whether verbal or non-verbal. Nwabueze (2011) submits that:

*Drama is a work of art which delineates human life and activity through the presentation of actions by means of dialogue between characters though a literary work, drama is mainly be acted on stage. This is why it is referred to as the playwright’s art.*

The above definition makes drama relevant to human beings and the society. It is concerned with the activities of man in all ramifications of life and presented through action and dialogue. The definition also states that the original destination of drama is the stage. Nwabueze adds that.

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….. a play must imitate and impersonate, and must deal with actions of human beings, with the aim of instructing and entertaining a target audience. Drama is usually composed in prose, tells its story by means of action and dialogue, and portrays life through characters with the aim of entertainment and edification.

What crystallizes from the above definition is the nature and purpose of drama. According to Nwabueze, drama educates, entertains and focuses on human life and activity. Again, he opines that drama must look real even portraying a fictional account. It must not be devoid of reality. Abdulrazaq and Micheal, etal (2016) give a panoramic view on the meaning and nature of drama. According to them; The word “drama” comes from the act of performance. It tells stories through actions, recreation and imitation. It is that form of literary writing intended majorly for presentation by performing, speaking ad acting on the stage… Drama is majorly characterized by the following: it is a “dramatic act” in the sense that it deals with role playing and imitation. It has a strong visual component: it is an auditing act: likewise it could be physically produced on the stage for the audience to see.

The above definition is Akin to the aforementioned. It also spells out in clear terms what constitutes the meaning and nature of drama. In the definition, words like “action”, “performance” and “limitation” occupy the centre stage. From the foregoing, drama can be viewed as the genre of literature which tells a story through the portrayal of action. Communication on the other hand simply means the exchange of information between one person and another or between one organization and another. It is a term that reflects all fields of human endeavour. This is because people talk to one another in all situations. Even in the field of creative writing , there is communication. The creative writer i.e a poet, playwright or novelist sends a message (his creative piece) to the reader (the decoder) who reads and interprets. The writer also gets the feedback, just like what obtains in other forms of communication. This feedback could be positive or negative. For instance, a reader could smile or frown after reading a literary work or make comments like “waoh! This is great,” “this is boring”, etc.

Ogbeche’s Harvest of Corruptions as a Tool of Communication

The role of the African writer in this age of social and political ineptitude is quite tasking. The society expects much from the African writer. He is expected to use his creative talent to combat all the forces that man the threshold of corruption, tyranny, insurgency, nepotism and other banes that are characteristic of our post-independence African society. Apronti (1978) understands this situation. He explains that;

…. The modern African writer must be in the forefront of those who are causing progressive change in Africa and that this is one way in which he can demonstrate immediately his relevance to his people on the one hand, and on the other his right to take the place of his traditional counterpart in our modern world.

Apronti’s view shows that the cardinal role of a writer is to bring about a positive change that world culminate in progress in all ramifications of life. To him, this is the only way the modern African writer can maintain his relevance. He adds that:

…. The writer, like every other artist needs to be committed to a set of social, political or ethical ideals. He should be one who does things, not one who to whom things are done. More than other ‘leaders of thought’ in contemporary Africa, he must be in the vanguard of those who are articulating the goals of our continent, formulating our aesthetics, serving our community and raising the level of political and cultural consciousness of our people.
Here, Apronti makes his view more palpable by asserting that the African writer should promote the ideals of his society and be pragmatic in his dispositions. He also feels that the African writer should conscientise his people. In this connection, the personality of the African writer as the mirror and conscience of the society would be fully understood.

Frank Ogbeche is a budding playwright and a rising voice on the Nigerian dramatic landscape. He is a civil servant who worked in the presidency in Abuja. He is an indigene of Cross River State and an alumnus of the University of Cross River. Ogbeche is a member of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). A closer look at Ogbeche’s background, experience and exposure reveals that he has an in-depth understanding of the Nigerian socio-political landscape. As a civil servant, he has seen the rains come and go, he has seen the sun rise and set. He has told his story from the ocean of information available at his disposal. As a member of the Association of Nigerian Authors and as a journalist, one is not surprised at the elegant language, excellent technique and wits with which the play is written. Though, an upcoming writer, Ogbeche rides on the shoulders of the older generation of Nigerian writers.

The play, Harvest of Corruption, satirizes the corrupt practices of public servants in a fictional country known as Jacassa. The protagonist, Chief Haladu Ade Amaka, is the Minister of External Relations who personifies corruption, pen-robbery and sexual pervasion. He has several girls at his disposal. Apart from exploiting these girls sexually, he uses them to run his cocaine trips. Chief has his accomplices who soften the ground for him and give him the motivation to run his business of corruption. Some of these characters include: Madam Hoha, Ochoule, Justice Odili, the Commissioner of Police etc.

In narrating the sad story of the post-independence Nigerian society, Ogbeche is able to make a clear distinction between faction and fiction. He is able to fictionalize the situation and creates a willing suspension of disbelief. The play is characterized by the use of symbolism especially at the level of characterization. This exempts Ogbeche from a crop of the new generation Nigerian writers that are described by Uwasomba (2014). Uwasomba laments that;

\[\text{It is likely that the imagination of the current generation of writers has been heavily and significantly assaulted and affronted by the Nigerian reality to the point that fiction has become less effective than reality. In fact, factional realities have become more fictitious than fiction in contemporary Nigeria with the way things are unraveling. Writers who are confronted with such a dire situation must rise above by sharpening their imaginative power.}\]

One of the Major symbolisms in Ogbeche’s Harvest of Corruption is Chief Haladu Ade Amaka, the Minister of External Relations. This character symbolizes the three major Nigerian tribes. Haladu symbolizes the Hausa community, Ade symbolizes the Yorubas while Amaka symbolizes the Ibos. This connotes that the message of the play is designed for the entire nation. Again, Chief Haladu’s antics and negative exploits symbolize the various issues that are swept under the carpet in the Nigerian civil service. At a point, one wonders if the Nigerian society is a replica of the one portrayed by Armah in his The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.

Other symbolic characters in the play are Justice Odili and the Commissioner of Police. Justice Odili pervers justice for kickbacks from Chief Haladu while the commissioner shields the chief and his retain of thieves from the wrath of the law. This situation typifies the post-independence Nigerian society.

Aloho, an erstwhile born again Christian who falls a cheap prey of Chief Haladu’s deception and gets punished in the end, symbolizes desperate graduates who lack unbending will and strength of purpose. Such people in the Nigerian society can do anything to survive. They are characterized by gullibility. In the same vein, wile Jacassa symbolizes Abuja. Maitama, a popular location in the Federal Capital Territory, is symbolized by Maissama in the play.

Ogeyi, Aloho’s true friend, who upholds her virtue to the end without bowing to societal pressure, is not unaware of Aloho’s demise and promises to avenge her death and bring all the perpetrators of the evil to book;

\[\text{Ogeyi: Justice must be done.}\]
\[\text{I will make sure of that even if}\]
that is the last thing I do 
so long as her soul is appeased. (p.92).

The playwright does not just paint the gory picture of corruption in the Nigerian society, he shows the grave consequences through the instrumentality of characterization and the unfolding event in Jacassa. For instance, besides Aloho who betrays her background and upbringing, Chief Haladu, the protagonist pays dearly for his gross misconduct. This is where satire as a dramatic technique occupies the centre stage. Chief Haladu is brought to book. The minister of External Relations is relieved of his highly exalted position and sentenced to “twenty-five years imprisonment with hard labour”. The judge declares without any aorta of doubt that Chief Haladu and his cohorts “are the real robbers that the Jacassa people should be afraid of” (p.117). The Commissioner of Police and Justice Odili are not spared. They are equally made to face the wrath of the law.

The judge declares:

Judge: Greed and avariciousness have blinded you against the ethical demands of the profession and you have to pay for your sins (p.119).

Both of these characters are sentenced to twenty-five years imprisonment with hard labour. Madam Hoha’s Akpara Hotel is closed down for being the rallying point of criminal activities, she and Ochoule are also sentenced to ten years imprisonment with hard labour.

The character who speaks the mind of the author and constitutes the acceptable model projected by the playwright is ACP Yakubu, the police officer who stands for the truth and does not waiver in his utmost commitment. As the title of the play implies Harvest of Corruption, the playwright paints the picture of corrupt practices in Jacassa and the harvest-punishment which attends the culprits. There is a correlation between the title of the play and the unfolding events. The structure of the play is also worthy of note. It follows the cause-effect pattern.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Our post-independence society is littered with numerous heartbreaking situations that keep one wondering if we are really independent. The worst of these issues is corruption which has palpably become a way of life. People defraud the governments and private organizations. As a result of high level of poverty, people are desperate to make ends means. This desperate spirit ushers people into prostitution, armed-robbery, kidnapping and other despicable practices in our society.

In the face of these challenges, the African writer has a great role to play. His first role is to create awareness on the part of the people. Through his literary prowess, people must understand their plight and how they should respond to situations. No writer writes for nothing, every writer writes for a particular audience and would not be fulfilled until his work is read.

This paper posits that the African writer communicates through the power of the pen. His message is encoded in a literary text (i.e. Drama, Prose or Poetry) and he is the encoder (the sender). The reader is the decoder (the one who interprets the message). The writer gets the feedback (responses) from the reader and this could be positive or negative.
References