

**AESTHETICS OF FOLKISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AHMED YERIMA'S  
ABOBAKU AND ORISA IBEJI**

**BY**

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BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A HONS.) DEGREE IN THEATRE AND MEDIA ARTS.**

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**ATTESTATION**

I, ABE SEFUNMI GRACE, hereby attest that this research report was carried out by me and that I am solely responsible for all errors and omission, if any.

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Signature and date

## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by ABE SEFUNMI GRACE with the matriculation number (TAM/14/2100) in the department of Theatre and Media Arts faculty of Arts, Federal university Oye-Ekiti, under the guidance of the following.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth. I also dedicate this research work to my parents the ones who truly care.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My gratitude goes to Almighty God who has seen me through the struggles, and my parents for their financial and spiritual assistance, to all my friends and families who contributed to the success of this project.

## ABSTRACT

*Under the condition of cultural hierarchy, playwrights, theatre operas, the symphony, musicians and galleries were funded by wealthy patrons present and in order to preserve the best of African tradition. The point is that while the western world tends to see and cherish their arts as the storehouse where their culture could be expressed and preserved. In many Nigerian community today, our arts, culture and belief systems are viewed as self-seeking, barbaric, outdated and therefore deemed not fit, but relegated and considered 'idolatrous' because of the foregoing, many of the indigenous cultural practices in contemporary Nigeria are at the verge of extinction. Some ethnic groups have been redesigned and stripped of the cultural imports which make them 'tick'. So many cultural practices in Nigeria today are at the point of extinction or are already redesigned out of the cultural significance of the people, especially the marriage practices of many Nigerian ethnic groups. It is in this context that I examine the king's horseman (royal family) and twins' rites amongst some ethnicities in Nigeria.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

There is a rich, fertile legacy of folklore in Africa. On this vast continent, folktales, myth and storytelling serve as a means of handing down traditions and customs from generation to the next through **FOLKISM**. The term 'Folkism means, to base literary plays on indigenous history and culture, and to perform them in accordance with the aesthetics of African folktale, composition and performance'. Some features of **Folkism** are Narrator, Storytelling, Proverbs and adage, myth and superstition, historical beliefs, cultural values.

Beyond moonlight tales, folktales in Africa are performed in special occasions and ceremonies. They are sung by griots and minstrels that abound in the land. Isidore Okpewho's edited volume discussed several oral performance modes in Africa many of which are the performance of folktales. Ropo Sekoni (1990) in that collection, discusses the rendition of two tales *The Story of Two Wives* and *The Tortoise and the Iroko Tree*. The *Ozidi* was also dealt with by Okpewho (1990). I have gone to this extent to talk about the folktale because it is the bedrock for the literary theatre created by Sam Ukala called **FOLKISM**. The folktale as we have identified is an oral performance that is based on the stories of the people. They could either be tales about ancestors, spirits, animals and inanimate objects which help to teach morals, values and the way of life of the community. The source of this theatre is not a script but the ability of the performers to remember the tales in the community's oral repertoires or the performers' dexterity to weave out new stories from the environment.

After studying several folktales and works by writers that have written drama from folktales, Sam Ukala came up with the eight laws of aesthetic response which if applied the folktale would do better as a literary text. The laws are:

1. The law of opening;
2. The law of joint performance;
3. The law of creativity, free enactment and responsibility;
4. The law of judgment;
5. The law of protest against suspense;
6. The law of expression of the emotions;
7. The law of ego projection; and
8. The law of closing (Ukala, 1993).

This research will also encourage young writers to reflect their cultural and traditional values in their literary text as a means of cultural preservation through documentation. As every African can only be identified with our cultural values.

## **1.2 Statement Of Problem**

Oral folktale has been shared in every society to entertain, educate and preserve culture. But as civilization and social transformation demands renewed dialogue among communities, educators and artists are to be motivated to protect and promote oral tradition and related cultural heritage. In this global world Africans are no longer identified by their culture and tradition due to the new technologies that gradually draw us farther away from our source. However, the influence of Folkism will help to create awareness of our indigenous cultural values to the upcoming generation that knows nothing about their village or even their culture, customs and tradition.

Although many research has been done on Sam Ukala's theory of Folkism but this research work will attempt to encourage young writers and the society at large to promote our cultural entity and also using the theory as a means of cultural preservation, correction and creating awareness of some Yoruba indigenous tradition particularly concerning the royal house and the goddess of twins.

### **1.3 Objectives Of The Study**

This study is meant to educate beginners on Ukalas technique. It will expose the technique used in Ahmed Yerima's plays Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji. This showcase the aesthetics of Folkism in the selected plays. This is why the project is being done to appreciate culture and custom, especially in Yoruba Land as touching the king's horseman and the twin effigy.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The project hopes to address the lapses in the society as the new generation tends to forget their source. It will be beneficial to artists, scholars, students and writers as it will expose the general public to the advantages of Sam Ukala's theory. And how to bridge the gap drilled into indigenous tradition.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is strictly confined to the plays Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji. The literary aspect of the plays will be critically examined in accordance to the major purpose of Folkism.

### **1.6 Research Method**

In carrying out this research work, the sociological and the literary methods will be used in order to have an accurate result. The literary method will be used in the area of literature review, which are books while the sociological method will be used in terms of oral interview with the playwright for a more accurate result.

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

The researcher's greatest challenge is finance which was not available to carry out the research and the limited time is a challenge to the researcher.

### **1.8 Definition of Terms**

- Aesthetics: It is the artistic beauty derived from an art work.
- Folkism: A tendency to base literary plays on indigenous history and culture and to perform them in accordance with the aesthetics of African folktale composition and performance.
- Folklore: Na'allah (1994) asserts that the "folktales are stories told at moonlight. The older members of the community gather the children and teach them about various matters of life. These stories, which the Hausa call *Tatsunoyi* and the Yoruba *Alo* are folktales" Stories, tales, legend and superstition of a group of people that defines them.
- Indigenous: innate or inborn attitude that connect one to his/her source.
- Myth: a traditional sacred story, regarding a god, a hero, the origin of the world or a group of people.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Ever since the advent of the modern Nigerian drama and theatre there has been the search for an authentic African form of drama, one which can bridge the divide between the oral performances of traditional African theatre and literary drama of the western mould. Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Biodun Jeyifo and many other African theorists and writers have tried to proffer solutions to that seeming large problem. Consequently, several theories and dramatic formats have emerged. One of such theories is Folkism formulated by Sam Ukala. This research joins in the search by looking at Sam Ukala's Folkism to see whether it adequately solves the problem. Using Ahmed Yerima's **Abobaku** and **Orisa Ibeji** as a model, the paper deploys content analysis to agree that the model is a landmark development in modern African theatre. Hence, it posits that with constant application all the shortcomings would be overcome and the answer to a truly African theatre would have been found. Drama is a study in conflicts and crises by obstacles and oppositions in a way of the protagonist. This essay could be considered as an expansion of the application of Folkism as a tool, vehicle or technique to the building literary texts as this statement insinuate.

“...a keen understanding and appreciation of the truth behind the historical subject matter is imperative for the effective dramatization of history. Through this, the playwright can infuse history with a new meaning and imbue the historical play with a life of its own. (Yerima, 62)”

## 2.1 FUNDAMENTALS OF PLAYWRITING

Umukoro 2010-2018; The whole business of writing involves creating a crisis and resolving it. This presupposes the presence of a protagonist and an antagonist or the hero or villain who works at cross purpose and whose conflicting aspirations advance the cause of the play. The seed of the conflict are to be found, not in the abstract theme which exists as a vague, indeterminate idea that can be captured in a single word or phrase, but in the action theme which takes the form of plot or fleshed out storyline .Six basic types of conflicts:

- Man versus the supernatural (conflict with fate or divine forces as in classical Greek drama)
- Man versus man (conflict between individuals in most modern plays)
- Man versus nature (conflicts with natural forces such as thunderstorms, earthquakes or sea)
- Man versus society (an individual against the state as in Henrik Ibsen's 'An enemy of the people')
- Man versus self (internal psychological conflict as in Becketts Krapp's 'Last Tape')
- Society versus society (which usually translates into a war play such as Wale Ogunyemi's 'Ijaye War', with identifiable leaders on both sides of the divide)

### *Hierarchal list of elements of drama*

1. Plot comes ahead of character because character only serves as the agent of conflict and discord needed to galvanize the dramatic action
2. Characters are the live-wire at dramaturgical art, embodying the suffering, the gloating villain or the comic protagonist

3. Language, the linguistics form in which dialogue is couched, which comes in various form and shades, ranging from poetic verse to binal prose depending on the demands of the play. As Ahmed Yerima counsels, “The only way to find out the limitations and types of dramatic languages is to write and use them in dramaturgy language is for both communications and characterization.

A character’s mode of speech is an unmistakable pointer to his or her status and educational background, while physical appearance through costume and make-up speaks volume of his or her economic status and psychological well-being.

The classical five acts structure traceable to Horace and popularized by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, continues to serves as a fundamental guide in the dramaturgical art. This forms the logical basis of which the present writers has come to identify as the 5c’s of dramatic construction, which includes

- Conflict
- Complication
- Crisis
- Climax
- Conclusion.

The seed of conflict are sowed in Act one, compounded or complicated in Act 2, resulting to a major crisis in Act three which develops into climax in Act four and is concluded and resolved in one way or the other in Act five.

Every play starts with a viable idea which can be gotten through observation, listening, imagination, inspiration, reading or personal experiences or combination of any of these factors.



Observation results from seeing with concentration while **listening** is a consequence of concentrate hearing. A writer should develop the right ear for dialogue through habitual listening to conversations in different circumstances in real life, while effective **observation** of events around me is a potential source of dramatic ideas. **Reading** is the cheapest and safest form to travel, remains the greatest source of dramatic ideas. A prolific writer is invariably an avid reader of other people's works, most especially biographies and autobiographies. For each scene, the scenario should indicate the temporal and physical settings, the characters involved, the opening stage directions, a brief outline of the main dramatic actions (without the dialogue), and the closing stage directions. Before the introduction of the dialogue in step five to flesh out the physical framework but the crucial fourth stage of character analysis comes before the dialogue stage, during which the major character which emerges in the course of the first three stages are first closely identified and described.

A young playwright needs extensive practice in dialogue writing which is the process of fleshing out the skeletal framework of the unfolding script. The dialogue is meant to flow in the manner of a linguistic chain reinforced but the logic of communication. Dialogue also serves the purpose of motivating and canalizing the dramatic action, which finds visual manifestation in expression. Dialogue is indicative of both action and characterization and it is the moving power behind the play.

## 2.2 WRITERS AND PATRONAGE

Whatever a writer does in his closet is eventually what others read in the wider society. Therefore before a writer sets out to write he/she must have a targeted audience in mind. The writer must always remember his potential readers to whom the writing is directed. As a Nigerian playwright, cultural values, practices (heritage) should always be induced in our writings as a reliable means of promoting the cultural value. We presently bemoan a lackluster reading culture in our society, obviously attributable to a number of factors beyond the control of the writer, as the writer is at the fountain of book chain. The young and upcoming writer must not shy away from accessing their cultural practices and infusing traditional morals, laws, folklore, myth and ethics in order to elongate, preserve, promote and apprehend it.

Ola Rotimi's 'Hopes of the Living Dead' is also an art of folkism, according to he affirms in Ola Rotimi's Drama and Theatre Issues and Perspectives, edited by Bakare, Ojo Rasaki that "Hopes of the living dead emanated from historical antecedent of the leper's Rebellion in Nigeria between 1928 and 1932" (page 209) to further assure this point in the same book Joe Umukoro says:

Rotimi writes against the background of his traditional experiences, in fact He is very conscious of the Nigerian heritage as manifested mostly in his Yoruba tradition. It does seem that he is more interested in recreating a Whole traditional way of life, bringing out the varying degrees of realism... Profound allusions are made to the people's custom, traditional ceremonies Communal festival, polygamy and its attendant problems, beliefs, taboos and ritual.

In addition to this, a dramatist may be aptly described as the 'connecting rod' between culture and the society. Musa further affirms Ola Rotimi's prospect by adducing that 'drama is a form of

literature which demonstrate, celebrates, recreates, reproduces, imitates and expresses the cultural essence of man and it is a veritable act of presentation which is a performance’.

### **2.3 AESTHETICS: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

Aesthetics is generally believed to be coined by a German philosopher named Alexander Baumgarten in 1735, which has its root in the Greek word ‘aisthetikos’, which means “sense of perception, sensitive, sentient”. Aesthetics is defined as a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the appreciation of beauty and good taste. According to Zikky Kofoworola, in Khali Gibran’s book, “Wisdom of Gibran”, he asserts that:

The thing called beauty or the pleasant which is intangible. Its emblem or traces can never be found in the perceived object neither in the properties that makes the whole; but rather in the hearts of the perceivers which is now reflected in a form of judgment and reactions. (2004.3)

Having clarified what aesthetics peripherally means, it then suggests that beauty is objective not subjective and the judgment of aesthetics is based on individual’s point of view; as connecting the general saying that “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder”

Africans generally believes that beauty means good, majority of Nigerian languages translates “Beauty” for “Good”, for example Hausa calls it “Kyau”, Ibo calls it “Mma” and Yoruba calls it “Ewa or Dara”. This generally suggests that beauty only refers to good things in the mind of an average African man.

## **2.4 FOLKISM: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

Sam Ukala is a Nigerian playwright, poet, short story writer, actor, theatre director, film producer and academic. Currently Professor of Theatre Arts and Drama at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. Ukala has also been Professor of Drama and Theatre Arts at a number of Nigerian universities, including Edo State University. In 1993/94, as an academic staff fellow, he also researched and taught at the School of English Workshop Theatre of the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. As an academic, he propounded the theory of 'folkism', the tendency to base literary plays on indigenous history and culture and to compose and perform them in accordance with the aesthetics of African folktale composition and performance. He is currently Chairman of the Delta State Chapter of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA).

### **Writings**

Ukala's published plays include *The Slave Wife*, *The Log in Your Eye*, *Akpakaland* (winner of the 1989 ANA/ British Council Prize for Drama), and *Break a Boil*. His "Iredi War", a 'folk-script', won the 2014 Nigeria prize for Literature. It is based on the 1906 uprising of the Owa Kingdom (now part of Delta State) against oppressive British rule. As in previous pieces, he utilises and brings new life to oral literature and folk-based theatre forms. "A convincing blend of history and fiction..." Kester Echenim. Ukala has also worked with the British theatre Horse and Bamboo Theatre in 1999 and with Bob Frith wrote the visual theatre piece. *Harvest of Ghosts* , which toured the UK and the Netherlands. This was an experimental piece for Ukala, which relied on dance, music, and powerful visuals rather than the spoken word. Ukala is also a poet, prose fiction writer, and a screenwriter.

## 2.5 A REVIEW OF BELIEFS AND WORLDVIEW OF FOLKISM

Folkism refers to “an indigenous dramatic aesthetic principle” which “may derive from the use in the African literary theatre of folk linguistic, structural and performance styles” (Ukala 38). Folkism cannot be contracted from folktale “a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally” or “stories invented by a known author” (Abrams 124).

The folktale is part of the oral performance art of the people. The *Dictionary.com* (2016) defines the folktale as “a story originating in popular culture, typically passed on by word of mouth”. Abdul Na’allah (1994) states that the “folktales are stories told at moonlight. The aged members of the society gather the children and teach them about various ethics and morals of life through significance of the stories they tell. These stories, which the Hausa call *Tatsunoyi* and the Yoruba *Alo* are folktales.” He also refers to these stories as “lie stories” since they are usually fictitious. Ukala (1999) defines the African folktale as “any traditional oral narrative that is purely fictional or is based on factual history which has however been so embellished and distorted that it cannot be fruitfully subjected to any empirical proof or verification”. He argues that the folktales include the epic, the legend novella, marchen, saga animal tale, fable, anecdote, among others.

Beyond moonlight tales, folktales in Africa are performed in special occasions and ceremonies. They are sung by griots and minstrels that abound in the land. Isidore Okpewho’s edited volume discussed several oral performance modes in Africa many of which are the performance of folktales. Ropo Sekoni (1990) in that collection, discusses the rendition of two tales *The Story of Two Wives* and the *The Tortoise and the Iroko Tree*. The *Ozidi Saga* was also dealt with by Okpewho (1990). We have gone to this extent to talk about the folktale because it

is the bedrock for the literary theatre created by Sam Ukala called *Folkism*. The folktale as we have identified is an oral performance that is based on the stories of the people. They could either be tales about ancestors, spirits, animals and inanimate objects which help to teach morals, values and the way of life of the community. Ugwu and Orjinta (2013) record a lot of comments by scholars like Ossie Enekwe, Ahmed Yerima and Sam Ukala on the irrelevance of the early literary drama and call for a relevant theatre.

Over these years, there has been a critical development in African theatre to bridge the lacuna between the literary and the popular theatre but has there been a form of literary theatre that captures the nuances of traditional African performances? Should this kind of theatre have the “spice” of traditional performances yet discussing contemporary issues? Some theories have been propounded to chart a way forward in this regard. Ugwu and Orjinta further discuss Soyinka’s mytho-poetic approach, Emeka Nwabueze’s masquerade dramatic theory, Sam Ukala’s folkist theatre and Ola Rotimi’s paralinguistic and traditionalist approaches as examples of African theatre theories (2013). As well, there has been the Facequerade theory by Sunnie Ododo, which is derived from observing the dramatic forms of the Ebara people of Kogi State of Nigeria (Ododo, 2008; Omoera, 2012). How well can we say these theories of the written theatre have helped in the development of African theatre in Nigeria? Sam Ukala’s Folkism is one of the several African theories that try to carry over the dramatic and theatrical forms from the traditional arena to the modern literary stage.

Having explain the composition of folkism, there are some features attributed to this theory which will be discussed alongside the selected plays (Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji), these features includes:

- i. Narrator

- ii. Story telling
- iii. Proverbs and adages
- iv. Myth and superstition
- v. Historical beliefs
- vi. Culture and value of people.

## **2.6 FOLKISM: A VEHICLE FOR CULTURAL PRESERVATION**

Folkism refers to “an indigenous dramatic aesthetic principle” which “may derive from the use in the African literary theatre of folk linguistic, structural and performance styles” (Ukala 38). Folkism manifests etymological and functional relationships with African folktale – “a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally” or “stories invented by a known author” (Abrams 124). Ukala is right when he notes that the African folktale provides a structural framework or a mold for the creative vision of folkism. He points out that the folktale can easily be employed in composing literary drama because it shares a lot of features in common with a literary play. Both are narratives which can be realized in performance. They are “temporal, mimetic, interpretative and synthetic”, both involve much speech, and to transform the folktale successfully, the Nigerian literary playwright should “study deeply the techniques of the African folktale” (Ukala 38).

Drama and literature is often seen as a reflection of life as it is in society, in other words, drama is a mirror through which the people in any given society can actually see the reflected cultural images of all human activities, the essence and vanities of life and indeed, anything related to life. Sociological essence of drama itself derives from the truth that the literary artist (dramatist) himself/herself is a social animal who does not live in an isolated island. As said

earlier, a writer is an active observer of the changes taking place in his/her environment as on every other member of the society. This is the idea that any literary artist expression is never created from a vacuum. They are often influenced by the events happening around them. In agreement to this Sam Ukala adduces:

Nigerian literary plays draws their subject matter from the histories and cultures of Nigerians and yet many of them are not accessible to the populace because of their difficult language, their distortion of source material beyond recognition, complex sentence structure, and mode of presentation that is foreign and strange. Because of these, the audience finds it difficult to comprehend and identify with the plays. (285)

The above further suggests that the use of English could diminish the density/emphasis of folkism in a play, the use of Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka's choice of sentence structure popularly known as YORUBANGLISH is encouraged. The need for a modern theatre that has its roots in the Nigerian soil and can absorb foreign elements without losing its original character.

Commenting specifically on the creative use of rituals, Adebayo Williams notes the contrasting apprehension of ritual in western societies, beginning with the enlightenment and in the emergent post colonial cultures of the third world of all such writers, I consider Ahmed Yerima exemplary in his enlistment of rituals for ideological purposes as well as an organizing principles. Similarly, Eni-Jones Umuko states that "The ritual icon in theatre may be one of the most enduring, **indispensable** keystone to understanding of African indigenous theatre practice" he further expatiates that Abobaku and Death and the King's Horseman can be presented authentically and truthfully as "A ritual for the stage". As it were, Oloruntoba-Oju reflects that the emergence of the drama in African, through the agency of the numinous is well established.



Anthropomorphic representative of ancestral spirits which emerges during festivals or other rituals and myth have reconstructed in the indigenous communities. Total theatre in Nigerian context is defined in terms of the relative degree of drumming and singing, drama and audience participation. In contemporary Nigeria theatre output from stage and literary theatre, we find a continued quest to represent the cultural nuances of traditional African in dramatic forms. As a matter of fact the form of popular drama was created in the 1940s by the late Hubert Ogunde out of the traditional Alarinjo Theatre, its formal structure includes substantial elements in music and dance and even in acrobatic as well as drama and it is tied to traditional Yoruba metaphorical and religious beliefs.

Although not all aspect of our cultural heritage are documented through the ages many of them have been preserved not only through oral tradition but also embedded in the arts of our people, in our songs, dances, drama, paintings, sculptural pieces, festivals and marriage system. Ikenga Metuah claims that, the ability of Africans to prescribe their culture is in the art forms, he posits further that “information on African tradition...is sift-able from the institutionalized devices for preserving and transmitting the beliefs and practice (of the people)” facts are in general embellished in art forms like songs, dances, painting, festivals, institutions and oral tradition.

## **2.7 TASK OF AN ARTIST**

Under the condition of cultural hierarchy, playwrights, theatre operas, the symphony, musicians and galleries were funded by wealthy patrons present and in order to preserve the best of African tradition. The point is that while the western world tends to see and cherish their arts

as the storehouse where their culture could be expressed and preserved. In many Nigerian community today, our arts, culture and belief systems are viewed as self-seeking, barbaric, outdated and therefore deemed not fit, but relegated and considered 'idolatrous' because of the foregoing, many of the indigenous cultural practices in contemporary Nigeria are at the verge of extinction. Some ethnic groups have been redesigned and stripped of the cultural imports which make them 'tick'. So many cultural practices in Nigeria today are at the point of extinction or are already redesigned out of the cultural significance of the people, especially the marriage practices of many Nigerian ethnic groups. It is in this context that I examine the king's horseman (royal family) and twins' rites amongst some ethnicities in Nigeria.

Literature had generally been viewed as an instrument for cultural transformation and preservation. Drama can be further described as a genre of literature written and intended to be performed by actors before an audience wherein, the dialogue and actions of the characters tells the story, as a display of emotions, a representation of relationships and the portrayal of the different phases of human life. Mandy Chen explains that amongst the various functions of drama is its ability to provide a means for a society to reflect upon itself and its beliefs, to enhance knowledge and stimulate social change. It is from this standpoint that I x-rayed Ahmed Yerima's 'Orisa Ibeji' and 'Abobaku' and how they have been used as vehicle for preserving cherished but dying aspect of the royal house and deity of twins in Yoruba Land.

In conclusion, a dramatist can be aptly described as the 'connecting rod' between culture and the society. Musa opines that conceptually, drama is a form of literature which demonstrates, celebrates, recreates, reproduces, imitates and expresses the cultural essence of man and its veritable act of presentation which is a performance on stage. It has four basic elements which are:

1. The script
2. The actors
3. The stage
4. The audience

Though in some instances, it can occur without a script, thus drama is a play, a scripted or improvised piece performed to an audience just as it performs social, political, educational, engineering and moralizing functions in the society apart from its aesthetic values. The new generation of African writers, scorch the African pantheon, myths and legends for deity, heroes capable of stimulating the creative imagination and dramatic action of illuminating the human situation.

## **2.8 FOLKISM VERSUS DRAMA**

They say drama as we see it today originated from the contact of the Africans with the white man. They say our traditional forms at best can only serve as religion. This debate formed the larger part of Yemi Ogunbiyi's book on Nigerian drama and theatre. The debate dwelt on the presence or absence of drama in traditional African ritual displays. J.P. Clark (now Clark Bekederemo) explained that as the roots of European drama date back to festivals of Egyptian Osiris and Greek Dionysus so also the origins of Nigerian drama are to be found in the early religious and magical ceremonies and festivals that abound in Nigeria (1981). Although Ola Rotimi agrees that there are certain aspects of the ritual displays that can be called drama, those spectacles without elements of mimesis and without plot and suspense and conflict are not (1981). M.J.C. Echeruo then claims that there are dramatic limitations in Nigerian ritual displays

and unless they yield their stories (1981). Ossie Enekwe disagrees, saying that in Nigerian ritual displays there are a lot of drama and theatre as the religious tone surrounding these festivals is no longer there (1981). If the argument cannot be settled as to the presence of theatre in Nigerian festivals, some other scholars tried to look for the answer in other dramatic forms. Andrew Horn argues that any structured performance before an audience whether it is drama, dance, musical recital, group ritual, secular ceremony and even lecturing, is theatre. Quoting E.T. Kirby, he gives seven categories, namely:

- “(1) Simple enactment
- (2) Ritual and ritualized enactment
- (3) Story Telling performances
- (4) Spirit cult enactment
- (5) Masquerade and masquerade enactments
- (6) Ceremonial performances
- (7) Comedies” (1981).

He reiterates that most of the divisions are merely spectacle and less of drama. He went on to distinguish between drama and religion and between drama and theatre. All these arose because of the desire to place African or Nigerian drama within the mould of European drama and theatre. One may be tempted to agree with the above categorization but this will put almost all activities where people are gathered in Nigeria to be theatre. However, some of these activities could be said to be, because if it has been alleged by A. Bodunrin, Oyin Ogunba, Bode Osayin and Biodun Jeyifo, among others, that the plays, written in English, by Nigerian literary playwrights are usually unpopular with the Nigeria’s socioeconomic problems. The unpopularity of the Nigerian literary plays has been attributed by these critics, mainly to language:

- (i) The language is foreign and illiterate Nigerians do not understand it;
- (ii) It is deliberately made too difficult for the average literate Nigerian to comprehend.

The criticism that the plays are ineffective in helping to tackle Nigeria's socio-economic problems is expressed in three main ways:

- (i) Subject matter does not reflect the recent history and current aspirations of Nigerians and is, therefore, irrelevant;
- (ii) Subject matter may be rooted in Nigeria's history and culture but it is often distorted beyond the recognition and appeal of the Nigerian masses, as a result of which values are lost which the plays were intended to communicate;
- (iii) Subject- matter may be rooted in Nigeria's history and culture and may not even be distorted beyond recognition, but it may be presented in such a foreign or unfamiliar manner as the generality of theatre is play or entertainment there are a lot that in Africa.

The above argument has arisen because of the non-literary form of traditional Nigerian theatre which is largely oral. Beyond the oral traditional form of theatre, there is still the search for an authentic African theatre written by Africans and that could be read and performed. The literary theatre was said to have taken roots in the drama school of the University of Ibadan, though there had been several performances and written plays before then (Ogunbiyi, 1981). The question has been whether the literary theatre is purely African without much influence of Western forms. The first generation writers such as Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark and Ola Rotimi had been accused of kowtowing to European Aristotelian principles of drama and theatre. However, from this period there had been a desire to formulate a purely Nigerian literary theatre, one that will not only discuss the issues relevant to the people but uses theatrical forms that are close to them. Biodun Jeyifo (1981) opines that the early literary drama was not popular with the people as compared to the theatre of Hubert Ogunde, Ojo Ladipo and others that were derived from the

performance patterns of the people. There is the need, therefore, to break the schism and bring the people at par with the theatre. The problems of those plays may have arisen because of the language the plays were written and the style of staging. Jeyifo adds that: The real significance of this important critical perception is that the union of western-oriented textual dramaturgical modes with our own indigenous techniques must become a conscious attempt to achieve greater directness, greater clarity, and greater popularity (1981). Ugwu and Orjinta (2013) record a lot of comments by scholars like Ossie Enekwe, Ahmed Yerima and Sam Ukala on the irrelevance of the early literary drama and call for a relevant theatre. They even quoted Ukala to the effect that: Nigerians may not identify with. Over these years, there has been a critical development in African theatre to bridge the lacuna between the literary and the popular theatre but has there been a form of literary theatre that captures the nuances of traditional African performances? Should this kind of theatre have the “spice” of traditional performances yet discussing contemporary issues? Some theories have been propounded to chart a way forward in this regard. Ugwu and Orjinta further discuss Soyinka’s mytho-poetic approach, Emeka Nwabueze’s masquerade dramatic theory, Sam Ukala’s folkist theatre and Ola Rotimi’s paralinguistic and traditionalist approaches as examples of African theatre theories (2013). As well, there has been the Facequerade theory by Sunnie Ododo, which is derived from observing the dramatic forms of the Ebira people of Kogi State of Nigeria (Ododo, 2008; Omoera, 2012). How well can we say these theories of the written theatre have helped in the development of African theatre in Nigeria? Sam Ukala’s Folkism is one of the several African theories that try to carry over the dramatic and theatrical forms from the traditional arena to the modern literary stage.

## 2.9 FOLKISM AND DRAMATURGY

Bakery Traore opines that we return to the rich repertory of folklore as an authentic source from which workable themes can be drawn (65).

This call to return to the use of folkloric materials has been accepted and is now being practiced by a majority of contemporary literary dramatist in Nigeria. However the use of performance spaces that are appropriate to the traditional folkloric environments from where these materials are drawn are not been considered for the performance of theses plays, rather, these plays are largely written with the proscenium theatre in mind. This is against the traditional wisdom suggested by cultural norms and available spaces for folkloric performances, as well as other African theatrical festivities: these do not have definitive architectural structures like western theatres, but are usually presented in open courtyards, marketplaces, town or village square. The use of folkloric form has been recommended as most adequate for the use in African drama for the purpose of making the performances more popular and accessible to majority of the audience.

This has prompted Sam Ukala to theorize the concept of 'Folkism'. This concept, however has not considered the visual and traditional space used in the performance of folktale since these plays have been performed in proscenium theatres which has further diminished audience/performers relationship, emphasized in the concept of folkism.

Nigerian playwrights face the problem not only of finding ways of communicating with their audiences which address popular concerns in an assimilable manner, but of deciding the appropriate language in which to do so, in a notion which embraces many language groups and cultures, the solution of employing English as a lingua franca poses problems hung over from the

colonialist past-and tendency for plays to be written in English also to employ an inappropriate western dramaturgy.

The concept is coined as a response partly to the prevalent criticism of Nigerian literary plays as irrelevant and unpopular, and partly to his findings that the unpopularity and relative irrelevance of Nigeria literary plays derive from their unfamiliar dramaturgy which are alien to the folk and a majority of the supposed educated audience. Sam Ukala finds that:

Nigerian literary plays draw their subject matter from the histories and cultures of Nigerians and yet many of them are not accessible to the populace because of their difficult language, their distortion of source material beyond recognition, complex sentence structure, and mode of presentation that is foreign and strange. Because of these, the audience finds it difficult to comprehend and identify with the plays. (285)

It is therefore the quest to perform typical folkloric plays in an original environment that has informed the use of folkism as appropriate for this experimentation. Folkism therefore, is dazed on African folkloric performance formula. Sam Ukala theories the concept of folkism as: the tendency to base literary plays on the history, culture, of the filk and to composing and performing folktale.(285).

Furthermore, such a theatre may not be adverse, to global appeal. It is a skillfully hybridized theatre mold, deriving from the syncretism of Nigerian's indigenous theatre forms and the Western oriented dramatic conventions, in such a way that the Nigerians elements constitute the dominant and basic structural frame of the artistic combination. Ossie Enekwe alludes to this global concept of a relevant Nigerians literary theatre, when he writes:

I do not object to foreign influence; after all, no culture can grow without them. But I deplore a cultural contact that lead to the destruction of our culture, thereby inducing in our people a sense of rootlessness. We need a modern theatre that has its roots in the



Nigerian soil and can therefore absorb foreign elements without losing its own character. We must insist that the Nigerian culture be the medium within which synthesis of values occurs so that the indigenous culture does not become a mere shadow of the European culture. Nigerian dramatists must study the aesthetic habits of our own people so as to create a relevant and viable theatre (64).

On the negative polarity, an irrelevant Nigerians literary theatre refers to a play text or its stage production which is alluded to in the following views of Chinua Achebe and Sam Ukala. According to Achebe, "it is clear to me that an African writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from flames"<sup>78</sup>.

In support of this Isidore Okpewho in *The Oral Performer and his Audience* cites Harold Scheubs report on a folkloric performance by women among the Xhosa people of southern Africa:

There is full participation ... by the members of the audience in the unfolding story. No proscenium arch exists, there is no safety in distance or darkness. Everyone is known: the artist emerges from the audience and her narrative complete, is again swallowed up by the audience. The separate emotions and experience of individual members of audience are woven into the narrative being evoked.(161).

In the florid theatre of Ukala, provision is made for the audience to collaborate with the performance at will with the introduction of M.O.A (Members of audience). These members of audience are rehearsed and placed in strategic positions in the proscenium audience in order that they can integrate freely during the play performance. To achieve this, The Law of opening, the Law of Joint Performance, The Law of creativity , free Enactments Responsibility, the Law of the Urge to Judge, the Law of Protest against Suspense, the law of Express.

A creative observation of these laws in playwriting culminates in Nigerian play texts that can be read and staged as models for the relevant theatre being searched for.

Law1- The law of Opening – examines the opening techniques of traditional folktale performance. These include the narrator’s arousal of the audience, his introduction of the play’s major character and its settings the arousal is achieved through “a call” made by the narrator, to which the audience respond, or a song in which they join. The audience may, at times, join in a dance with the narrator.

Law 2- The law of Joint performance- exploits the participatory nature of the audience in indigenous folktale performance. Here, “the traditional African audience co-performs” with the narrator, “asking questions or making comments to remove vagueness, playing roles in the enactment of part of the story and taking over the tale from a failing narrators” (34). A playwright should embody in his composition, some artistic devices that may in performance unobtrusively draw the audience physically or verbally into some parts of the action. Laws 1 and 2 reflect the joint responses of the narrator and the audience to a performance situation.

Law 3 - The Law of creativity, free Enactment and Responsibility. On the play text, which is also the initial raw material for staging, the playwright demonstrates his dexterity in crafting dramatic language; he exhibit his skills in using folktale structural frame and domesticated English language, to interpret socio-political and economic conditions of contemporary society. Under law 3, the text manifests the art of the narrator as a free actor who can take up any role in the play when necessary and later revert to his part as the story teller. The playwright is underlined here has a creative artist, dramaturgically showcasing in his script, a folktale performance in which the story teller narrator) fleshes out the tale with adverse aesthetic devices, thereby providing a relevant material for Nigerian stage. In the word of Ukala, the law of creativity is observed when he opines that:

The traditional African narrator fleshes out the memorized bone-structure of the tale in dramatic language-pleasant to speak and to hear, easy to understand and yet rich in texture. He adapts new experience to the tale to replace obsolete parts, enhance contemporary relevancy or provide new interpretation..... (36)

The Third Tier of law 3\_ Responsibility \_ may be observed in a play text in which the playwright assumes responsibility for his work. This may be achieved by use of a folktale which he creates out of his artistic initiative and vision.

Laws 4,5,6,and 7 concern the audience's evaluation of the narrator's abilities and the character's conduct; the audience's questions and comments; their free expression of emotions of grief, pleasure, scorn, fear and sympathy; and their "idiosyncratic interjections aimed at attracting attention to themselves as potential narrators" respectively (Ukala 38). These laws are reflected in the text for the reading audience and for the stage viewers.

Law 8 – The last law of folkism known as 'The law of closing', demands for a reflection in the script of stage performance, of the traditional folktale technique of bringing a story to an end. This involves a closing remark rendered by the narrator, the foregoing elaboration of the laws, as they can be observed in the play text.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the methodology that was employed in this research work. In order to achieve the main objective of this study is to examine Folkism in the literature sense plays a major role in informing the society our cherished and almost forgotten customs.

#### 3.2 SOURCES AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

This research digs critically into the meanings on the surface and the deeper meaning that represents ideas or qualities of the plays.

This study made use of qualitative methods to gather data as well as library based research and interview method of data collection. The researcher visited the writer of the two literatures to conduct intense interview on folkism in relation to his plays Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji. The researcher drafted out five (5) questions for the first interview, sprouting four (4) follow up questions and four (4) for the second interview and two (2) follow up questions.

#### **The first interview questions are:**

1. What is your motive on Folkism?
2. While writing Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji did you have the intention of playing by the rules of folkism?
3. How can young writers adhere to folkism?
4. What are the challenges, young writers face nowadays?
5. What advice can you give anyone who reads this research work?

**The follow up questions are**

1. What do you literarily means by 'IKU' in your play Abobaku?
2. So folklore, myth and storytelling cannot be separated from Folkism?
3. How far did you go in order to obtain an accurate history of Abobaku?
4. Can young writers always trust the internet for reliable historical source?

**The second interview questions are:**

1. How far can story telling go?
2. Can history be successfully passed from generation to generations without it being compromised and manipulated?
3. The ritualistic aura attached to Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji, are they still real?

**Follow up questions**

1. Did you write Abobaku to promote the practice?
2. Should aspiring writers also go miles in gathering information?

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will discuss extensively the literary texts used in this research paper: *Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji* by Ahmed Yerima. Furthermore the researcher uses narrative analysis. This chapter will also discuss the answers to the interview questions (primary data) and how it has helped the development of the project.

#### **4.2 A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ABOBAKU IN RELATION TO FOLKISM**

*Abobaku* by Ahmed Yerima is a play centers on ritual as a means of influencing the behavior of their god for good. The play bases its emphasis on Death and how it strikes without remedy, giving little or no reason to strike. It is a general practice in the Yoruba land that when a king climbs the thatched roof, a prior appointed man must commit a ritual suicide in order to escort the king to the world beyond, in Yoruba land death is not cessation of existence but a mere transition into the continued existence. Therefore the king is not thought dead but passed to another existence where he will be waiting at the gate for his *Abobaku*. It is the *Abobaku's* duty to also cross and escort the king to the next world with honor. The seriousness of the responsibility vested on him is stressed by the *Abore* and *Ilari*. *Ajibade* the volunteered *Abobaku* married to *Faramola* an *Abiku*, whose father *Ilari* has sworn his life to the king as the mouthpiece of the royal house. *Destiny* an uncheatable phenomenon that always finds a way of unwrapping itself announces his arrival with *Oba Karunmi* who climbed the royal thatched roof. In the quest

to escape shame Faramola and her mother Mama arranges for Ajibade to escape but in return Faramola and the unborn child pays for it as she disguises as the Abobaku and joins her mate, but Ajibade comes back too late to perform his duty, as Ilari kills himself for betraying the royal house and Ajibade unable to bear the consequences of his action also joins his wife. The death misery unwrapped as Ilari blows off the candle that represents three lives (Ajibade, Faramola and the unborn child)

#### **4.3 A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ORISA IBEJI IN RELATION TO FOLKISM**

Orisa Ibeji is a 2014 drama text written by Ahmed Yerima. Undoubtedly, Orisa Ibeji celebrates the philosophical belief of twins as a special gift from Olodumare. Yerima criticizes the abandonment of orisa Ibeji (the goddess of twin) it satirizes failure to idolize twins as a gift from heaven.

In the authour's note, Yerima posits that Orisa Ibeji centers on the duality of human personae, the symbolic essence of the effigy of the twin as it's main thematic preoccupation.

Having established this, the play focuses on the life of Oba Adedeji Adedigbawhoses life is at the verge of transmitting to the ancestral. With his looming death vision and the fear of dying without an heir to the throne. Oba Adedigba discovers his problem as his failure to heed to the warning of not killing the Balogun of Atiba which happened to be his twin brother.

Unarguably, Yerima through this plot reveals the tradition prevalent among Yorubas of not having twins in the royal house. On page 33 of the play text, Oba Adedeji Adedigba's submits that:

Adedigba: may the gods forbid....twins in this palace? May the gods forbid! Ogun will have their heads at the shrine before you can sing your lullaby.

Also, through the characterization of Oba Adedigba, it is stated that its forbidden to have twins in the palace. All these, culminates the untimely death which accompanies Oba Adedigba.

So as to separate the king from the dead and put an end to the killings, chaos and other suicidal danger that grips the town, Oba Adedigba revokes the law that forbids the birth of twins in th palace and recognizes Orisa Ibeji as a goddess of blessings and bearer of good tidings. He also commands the people of Ibeko to worship Orisa Ibeji every year.

All in all, through the characterization of Oba Adedigba, Olori Mojisola, Iyalode, Balogun, Tade and Jaguna, Yerima has been able to emphasis the prevalence of the goddess over man. And bringing man to understand the importance of paying homage to the goddess that blesses with two children (twins)

#### **4.4 CULTURAL BELIEFS AND RELEVANCE OF ABOBAKU AND ORISA IBEJI IN YORUBA LAND**

Abobaku is an old practice in Yoruba land about 400years ago, it is performed in the assumption that it can influence the behavior of their god for good, the main purpose is for purification of both real and symbolic evil. According to Wole Soyinka he asserts that “I insist on collective good as an expression which refers to the total, to the masses, of society not as expressed or as defined by the propaganda machinery of a privileged minority”. This further explains that the practice is a collective good towards the progress of the society. The Abobaku is believed to follow the dead king to next world and serve him there, since he has sworn his life and death to the king. But the colonial period changed a lot of our cultural practice which includes the Abobaku, although the aura still exists but not as original as before, the colonialist



called our culture a barbaric practice. Since then the practice has been taken with levity which leads to the missing Abobaku almost every time.

Orisa Ibeji is the name of a goddess that gives twins, in Yoruba culture and spiritually, twins are believed to be magical and are granted protection by the Orisa. If one of the twins should die, it symbolizes bad luck for the parent and they will go to an herbalist to carve a wooden Ibeji to represent the deceased twin, and the carved image will be taken care of as if they were real. The first born of the twin is known as Taiwo and the second is Kehinde but the Kehinde is the older one.

Concerning the royal house in Yoruba land, twins are forbidden, even though Mary Slessor stopped the killing of twins and made the Yorubas believe that twins are blessing not curse from the gods. The royal house in Yoruba land strictly kicks against the birth of twins as it symbolizes confusion in the palace.

#### **4.5 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH AHMED YERIMA**

The researcher employed the primary method of data gathering by arranging a face to face interview with the writer of the selected play texts in person of Professor Ahmed Yerima at The Redeemers University Ede, Osogbo, Osun state in Nigeria. These are the answers Professor Ahmed Yerima gave to the sketched out questions.

Question 1: Professor Ahmed Yerima said, he sees Folkism farther than what Sam Ukala said it is, he sees it as a combination of Folklore, myth and storytelling, he goes further to explain the meaning of the three acts that structured Folkism.

Question 2: Professor Ahmed Yerima admits that he consciously wrote both plays in unintended adherence to the theory of Folkism. He adduces that though he is not a Yoruba man, he strives to globalize the important cultural practices in Yoruba land which is gradually fading away.

Question 3: Professor Ahmed Yerima urges young writers to go extra miles, beyond internet source to get concrete information on the subject they are writing on. He submits that before he wrote the play text Abobaku, he had to go the Alaafin of Oyo to source for the original mode of this cultural practice, and he finds out that Abobaku is an honorable post, that never witnessed any alteration in the practice until the colonial era when the white man tries to stop the practice.

Question 4: young writers do not read again, they hardly go out of the educational curriculum to build their intellect.

Question 5: Professor Ahmed Yerima said, the most important advice he has for anyone reading this paper is that in our little way, we should endeavour to promote, encourage or discourage some cultural practices we know in our different hometown. He explains that he doesn't agree with the practice of Abobaku in the Yoruba empire, to buttress this point we both read the last page of Abobaku, Mama's last lines.

Answers to the follow up questions

Question 1: Professor Ahmed Yerima explains that he intended to project the different kinds of death in the play Abobaku, not just the death of Ajibade. These are the death he mentioned: Iku Oba, Iku Ajibade, Iku Abiku, Iku Ilari and Iku Ori.

Answers to the second interview question

Question 1; Professor Ahmed Yerima assures the researcher that story telling goes a long way in shaping children's life. He told the researcher a story about the cunning tortoise that stole a hot porridge and put it in his cap, the porridge burnt his head and that is why tortoise is still bald. The children understand that it is bad to steal.

Question 2: Professor Ahmed Yerima, asserts that history changes from generation to generation and the original story is altered leaving just a sense or aura of the event.

Question 3: Professor Ahmed Yerima believes in paying homage to the goddess of twins but kicks against the Abobaku practice, when Mama says in page 71 "Oh, how sad. So all these sacrifices were nothing? Orun indeed is home, but to whom? Stupid disillusioned fools."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 SUMMARY

The study investigates the aesthetics of Folkism the features, laws and how they were portrayed in the selected play text written by Ahmed Yerima, Abobaku and Orisa Ibeji. The researcher observed that Folkism is an essential part of every literate person's life. We practice it in one way or the other, Folkism serves as a museum for storing the original works to disagree, agree, create awareness of it or correct it. The Aesthetics of Folkism simply means appreciating the beauty of documenting histories and indigenous practice. The westerners have successfully undressed Africans off their original culture, religion, dressing and way of life, but the researcher is encouraging the society to endeavor to consider syncretism, which means hybridizing our dying cultural practices into the influence of the colonialist to bridge the gap that western influence has had on our indigenous practices.

Folkism is a means of communicating a message to a targeted audience in a special way that the audience feels and become active in the course of the play. Sekoni, using Broderick's view on oral narratives, is of the opinion that to communicate in this way, the narration is patterned for the purpose of conveying meaning and attaining aesthetic experience. To him the aesthetics experience in play texts is made up of three inseparable components: "captivation of readers, retention of readers and transfer of cognitive experience to the society. These elements are inseparable; they can only survive in their being together" (1990).

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATION**

I therefore recommend that folkism goes beyond the stage performance and theatre, into literature works and be embraced as one of the latest and most far reaching techniques for ensuring a fully relevant Nigerian literary theatre in relation to the dying culture and tradition of Nigerians. I propose that Folkism be introduced into the eacademic curriculum in all African countries, starting from the primary school all the way to tertiary level. I am not advocating for total negligence of western influence but a merge of African cultural practices into the western influence which could be conceived as cultural hybridization to bridge the gap and also create a mobile museum for African culture. In our own little way, Africans should endeavour to uphold our cultural values so as to promote this theory.

## **5.3 CONCLUSION**

'Folkism' as an alternative aesthetic device for creating a popular and relevant Nigerian literary theatre has been vindicated here through the plays discussed. It has been emphasized here that Ahmed Yerima went a long way to create a literary theatre which embodied important elements of indigenous Nigerian theatre particularly the cultural practice of king's horseman and the goddess of twin (specifically in the royal house).

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