



CROSSROADS OF CULTURE: THE AFRICAN STORYTELLER AND THE WESTERN THEATRE (DRAMA) ACTOR, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER

Xornam Atta Owusu

Senior Lecturer

Department of Theatre and Film Studies

Faculty of Arts

College of Humanities and Legal Studies

University of Cape Coast, Ghana

xornam.owusu@ucc.edu.gh

Abstract : The paper argues that the storyteller discursively functions as an actor, director, producer, and all in Africa. It investigates the point of emergence and departure between the storyteller in Ghana and the Western theatre stage performer, director and producer. The study regards storytelling art as a literary theory in which the intellectual knowledge paradigm is grounded in values derived from the indigenous cultural experiences of the storyteller. By analysing and drawing particular attention to the roles of the storyteller, this article expresses perspectives based upon the values of using all the necessary communication skills as a viable medium to spur people into action for self-actualisation. The paper attempts to show the strong intertextuality and interconnection between Ghanaian (African) and Western theatre experiences. The selected areas in the article suggest direct and indirect identical traits, weigh the strength of thoughts and practices of the storyteller's various roles, and fix those roles into multiple functions in Western theatre. Implications are drawn based on the critically examined experiences and through analysis of the utilisation of the oral Ghanaian (African) storytelling traditions as a methodological framework. This study, therefore, highlights the essential functions and roles in the Western theatres which the storyteller performs through the development of the dramatic storytelling theatre.

Keywords: African storytelling, Western theatre, drama, actor, director, producer, cross-cultural influences, artistic innovation

CROISEMENT DES CULTURES : LE CONTEUR AFRICAIN ET LE THÉÂTRE OCCIDENTAL

Résumé : Cet article soutient que le conteur fonctionne discursivement en tant qu'acteur, metteur en scène, producteur et tout à la fois en Afrique. Il étudie le point d'émergence et de départ entre le conteur ghanéen et l'acteur, le metteur en scène et le producteur du théâtre occidental. L'étude considère l'art du conte comme une théorie littéraire dans laquelle le paradigme de la connaissance intellectuelle est fondé sur des valeurs dérivées des expériences culturelles indigènes du conteur. En analysant et en accordant une attention particulière aux rôles du conteur, cet article exprime des perspectives basées sur les valeurs de l'utilisation de toutes les compétences de communication nécessaires en tant que moyen viable pour inciter

les gens à agir en vue de l'accomplissement de soi. L'article tente de montrer la forte intertextualité et l'interconnexion entre les expériences théâtrales ghanéennes (africaines) et occidentales. Les domaines sélectionnés dans l'article suggèrent des traits identiques directs et indirects, évaluent la force des pensées et des pratiques des différents rôles du conteur, et fixent ces rôles dans des fonctions multiples dans le théâtre occidental. Les implications sont tirées des expériences examinées de manière critique et de l'analyse de l'utilisation des traditions orales ghanéennes (africaines) en tant que cadre méthodologique. Cette étude met donc en évidence les fonctions et les rôles essentiels du conteur dans les théâtres occidentaux à travers le développement du théâtre de narration dramatique.

Mots-clés : Conte africain, théâtre occidental, dramaturgie, interculturelles, innovation artistique.

Introduction

There is some form of extent recognition to which we can forcibly link the values of socio-cultural structure and the importance of African practices (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005, p. 1), like storytelling, to that of Western plays (dramas) performed on stage before the audience. Drama is, therefore, 'the art of representing for the pleasure of other events that happened or that we imagine happening' (Jacobus, 2001, p. 1). After a hard day's work, children and adults look forward to entertaining themselves by hearing excellent stories and songs. This paper attempts to bring out the elements that point out the emergence and the departure of the Ghanaian (African) storytellers assuming roles such as performer, director, producer, and all as being done by different personnel in the European theatre. The paper argues that the storyteller in Africa functions as an actor, director, and producer, and investigates the differences and similarities between the Ghanaian storyteller and the Western theatre stage performer, director, and producer. The study regards storytelling art as a literary theory grounded in values derived from the indigenous cultural experiences of the storyteller. Hence this paper attempts to show the strong intertextuality and interconnection between Ghanaian (African) and Western theatre experiences by highlighting the essential functions and roles in the Western theatres which the storyteller performs through the development of the dramatic storytelling theatre. The paper draws implications based on the critically examined experiences and through analysis of the utilization of the oral Ghanaian (African) storytelling traditions as a methodological framework. Therefore the objectives of this study is to first of all explore the roles and functions of the storyteller in Africa and compare them with those of the Western theatre stage performer, director, and producer; the study seeks to also to investigate the similarities and differences between Ghanaian (African) and Western theatre experiences. We will highlight the essential functions and roles in the Western theatres which the

storyteller performs through the development of the dramatic storytelling theatre. Finally, we will draw implications based on the critically examined experiences and through analysis of the utilization of the oral Ghanaian (African) storytelling traditions as a methodological framework.

Overview of Storytelling Tradition in Ghana (African)

The Ghanaian (African) storytelling tradition is the oldest dramatic ritual art form in almost all Ghanaian (African) cultures across the continent, and sitting around the fire in the calm night after a hard day's work sets the tone for the enactment of the stories. It has been part of the seven major dramatic processes that (i) are verbally passed down as oral history; (ii) are orally passed down to the next generation as community's folktale (traditional story or legendary); (iii) are entertainment source for the people, (iv) teaches morals/lessons and instructs in proper conduct, (v) use beasts, plants and nature as characters, (vi) teach historical lessons, and (vii) engross audience participation to make the stories exciting and captivating through the audience's attention and enthusiastic response.

Storytelling is [one of the most widely known African theatre, or drama] which has been and is still a 'vehicle for oral, artistic composition and transmission (Eldred et al., 1992, p. 2). Wole Ogundele, in 'Orality versus Literature in Mazisi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great*' asserts that the performance in African setup is produced, transmitted and carried out on the anti-literary campaign and in the performance medium rather than in that of written text and structure (Eldred et al., 1992, p. 9). Eldred Jones also asserts that 'Drama similarly has its African roots, but the stage play, while being very African in material, shows heavy influence from the Western theatre tradition' (ibid, p.6). Storytelling or folktale (folk narrative) 'is an art form transmitted from antiquity to the present...in which ancient values and mores find expression and validation' (Noss, 1970, p. 41).

Storytelling, as often marked by dramatic embellishment, is a method of recording and expressing feelings, attitudes, and responses to one's lived experiences and environment. Storytelling within the Ghanaian (African) culture is an important shared event with people sitting together, listening and even participating in accounts of past deeds, beliefs, taboos, myths, codes, values of acceptable behaviour, upholding and preserving good social order (Tuwe, 2016, p. 2). In explanation, the presentation of the tale is a dramatic performance by which the performer is entirely free to create and interpret the aesthetic principle underlying the version of the story with devices (Finnegan, 1970, pp. 315-380; Tuwe, 2016, p. 4).

For a narrator's creativity and measured standard, the narration combines singing, drumming, percussion instruments, clapping, and dancing—the

utilisation of proverbial songs highlights the expression of the characters. A storyteller's tools are not just words to edutain the audience and to enhance the performance, but they are a combination of gestures, singing, facial expressions, riddles, proverbs and myths, body movements and actions to make stories memorable and exciting, and sometimes the use masks and costumes (Finnegan, 1970, p. 386; Yeboah-Dankwa, 1988, p. 36). A storyteller can perform epics that can be hours or even days long that relate history and genealogy, battles and political uprisings of a community.

Storytelling Tradition in Africa: Style and Structure

The story's structure illustrates its importance (Tuwe, 2016, p. 4) to the storyteller, who is a dramatic creator rather than a writer. Conventionally, there are techniques and methods used by the playwright and director to create the desired stylistic effect, and this has not excluded the African storyteller in any way. Almost all the storytelling sessions within the Ghanaian (African) cultural setting have similar structures in their tales. The structure is divided into three major parts, namely the story's organisation: the introduction (beginning), the body section (middle), and the conclusion (ending) (Tuwe, 2016: 4; Anyidoho, 1997, p. 137; Ametewee, 1997, p. 206; Kovey, 1998, pp. 8-19; Nyador, 2000, pp. 51-2).

In the beginning, after the narrator engages (addresses) the audience participation with the words 'Mise gli loo! = Listen to a story! the audience responds, 'Gli neva' = Let the story come!' the storyteller sets the scene by introducing the characters through the interactions between the artist-audience relation (face-to-face encounter) with the following expressions 'Gli tso vuudu vuudu dādze 'A', 'B', 'D', etc., dzi!' = The story goes around to fall on 'X!', 'Y!', 'Z!' as the audience respond Wòdze edzi gbloo' = It heavily falls on them!' (Anyidoho, 1997:137; Ametewee, 1997:206; Kovey, 1998:8-19; Nyador, 2000:51-2). Among the Gbaya of Cameroun, the narrator begins, 'Great men, or young men, listen to a tale!' while the audience responds, 'A tale for laughter, for laughter,' Listen to a tale, a tale for laughter' (Noss, 1970, p. 42).

In the story's inner (middle) structure, among the Eves of West Africa, just as the glitola (narrator) and the glisela (audience or listener) finish engaging themselves with the introduction of characters, the glitola proceeds the story proper with the defining plot structure and the conflict through the use of all sorts of techniques: gestures, proverbs, facial expressions, voice variation, the dramatisation of the characters, and songs introduction (mmoguo among the Akans, or gliha or glimedeha among the Eves). This is another significant aspect of the narrative moment of the events' sequence. Two types of songs have been distinguished: the first is usually performed by the storyteller and frequently joined in by the audience, which is integral to the plot, and the second type serves

as an interlude which an audience member introduces according to the procedure (Anyidoho, 1997, p. 138; Yeboah-Dankwa, 1988, pp. 33-4). This song interlude is often presented at critical moments in the tale when the narration is flagging.

The introducer has a particularly significant relation in the artist-audience-art complex by announcing their presence in the enactment of the event then (Anyidoho, 1997, p. 138; Yeboah-Dankwa, 1988, pp. 33-4). The introducer starts with 'Gbe ma gbe mele etefe = That day I was there!' as the narrator gives the introducer chance to tune the song with the expression 'Aha, neva míase! = Yes, let it come!', and when the song is over, the song introducer gives the narrator a chance to continue with the expression 'Kpɔ aɖe! = Watch your tongue!'. For example, in Zimbabwe, among the Eves of West Africa and the Gbaya of Cameroun, the audience performs a real dramatic play by joining the storyteller in singing, dancing and rhythmically shouting in response (Kovey, 1998, pp. 8-19; Tuwe, 2016, p. 4; Finnegan, 1970, pp. 315-88).

The Importance of Songs to the People

The song is an integral element of the tale and encourages audience participation. The performer(s) use(s) songs to manipulate the audience's reaction, but in the song, he invites the audience into full participation, participation which must be controlled if he is to be able to continue his tale. Through the song, the emotion of the tale comes into focus (Noss, 1970, p. 44). The song may be used for comic relief. It may indicate the passage of time or repeated action, which also may remind the listener of what has happened, suggest what will occur, and show the height of triumph or the depths of fear and defeat. However, above all, it draws the listener into the performance.

This same song interlude serves as a source of education. It is from the songs that one can understand what should and should not be done in a particular manner. It allows one to learn how to speak and dance in public. Mostly, children learn a lot from the adults during the storytelling session through the song interludes. Some later become great songsters, musicians, dancers and performers. It is also a way of controlling people's behaviour in a particular community. During this session, everyone learns one or two things from the gathering, which helps shape their lives. It is a source of reference point. When one forgets something and remembers the song in the narration, he quickly recollects all the matters surrounding the circumstances (Kovey, 1998, p. 19).

The story's closure procedure contains a different structured ending that differs from the beginning and the end. Also, it emphasises a moral or final statement initially indicated in both (the) introduction and (the) body section. From among the Gbaya, there is a statement at the end: 'My tale is set right under the kolo tree gbat!' or 'Strike the kolo tree with the boar spear rok' (Noss, 1970, p.

42). The narrator in Eves has it in this format 'Esi megbona la, eye nyagãdeđi ade tsɔ blem eye nye hã metsɔ ble mì loo = On my way here, I met an old woman who deceived me with it, and I have come to deceive you with it'. At the same time, the audience responds, 'Yoo, dzenume wò' or adzonume wò = Yoo, you have a spicy tongue', and the narrator ends it all with 'Yoo, adzo se to globoe mì = Yoo, you have a good ear listening container' (Anyidoho, 1997, p. 137; Ametewee, 1997, p. 206; Kovey, 1998, pp. 8-19; Nyador, 2000, pp. 51-2).

It is important to note that the narrator concludes with a reminder to the audience that they have just been deceived (Anyidoho, 1997, p. 137). In telling the tale, in Eve setup, one does not give an endless tale. However, if the need is that for the sake of time, it is late in the night, and they have to stop the tale or an urgency occurs that they have to quit the tale, the storyteller (glitola) uses this expression 'Glitakpo dzo do ave! = The headless tale runs into the forest!' (Nyador, 2000:51). The implication is that the tale continues till the end but not at that moment.

The Plot Structure of the Story

Aristotle defines plot as 'the arrangement of the incidents in a literary of art' (Ukala, 1992, p. 63). He considers six elements essential to good drama, namely the Six Elements of Drama. These are *plot* which he refers to as the action that tells the primary storyline and what happens in the play; a *theme* which he refers to as the meaning (the main idea or lesson) to be learned from the play; *characters* whom he refers to as the people (sometimes animals, or ideas) the actors portray in the play which the move the actions in the plot forward; *dialogue* which he refers to as the words the playwright writes that the characters in the play speak to help move the play's actions along; *music/rhythm* often featured in the drama, he refers it to the rhythm of the actors' rising voices as they speak; and *spectacle* which he refers to everything that the audience sees as they watch the play and it is the visual elements of a play: sets, costumes, special effects, etc. These elements could be more exceptional in African storytelling dramas.

Aristotle, again, recognises two kinds of plots; a simple plot which has one continuous action directed to its events that are arranged in a way that could predict the end and without peripeteia, which is a change by which the action veers around to its opposite, subject always to the rule of probability or necessity (Ukala, 1992, p. 63), and a complex plot which has a change in the action that is accompanied by peripeteia and recognition which suggests a change from ignorance to knowledge. There are three kinds of plots in Ghanaian (African) tales: single plot, which corresponds to a simple plot; double plots, which corresponds to a complex plot; and multiple plots though most African tales are of single plots.

In the plot structure, there is an *initial incident* and *exposition* which talk about the 'who, when, where and what' part of the story as the events get the story unfolding; a *preliminary event* which also portends whatever takes place before the actions of the story that is directly related to the story; a *conflict* which explicitly identifies the internal and/or external struggle, clash, and fight between opposing forces, ideas, and interest which then create dramatic tension as the *rising action*: a series of events that follow the initial incident leads up to the dramatic climax that builds up; the *climax*: the turning point or high point of a story where events can go no farther; *falling action* is the series of events that follow the climax; and *denouement* or *resolution* which unravels that everything comes to equilibrium though not as things were before the conflict.

The Point of Convergence and Divergence: Audience Consideration

This is the group of people who watch the play. Many playwrights, directors and actors consider the audience an essential element of drama, as all the effort put into writing and producing a play is for the audience's enjoyment. Audience participation is most often an essential part of African storytelling, and the audience is not captive and will only listen for a short time to pure didacticism, however instructive (Noss, 1994, p.41). The stories are told and exchanged in social gatherings. In some cases, it is clear that specific stories are designed primarily for children and are told to them by other children or older women. This points out the rise of the question of the audiences for whom the stories are intended. It also emphasises that specific stories are felt to be preserved for children and most suitably told by children and to them, although adults know them and sometimes join in (Finnegan, 1976, p. 376).

To be even more successful in choosing an appropriate form of story to tell, consideration is given to the (characteristics of) audience, enabling the narrator to utilise the identified ways. This helps enhance the narrator's communicative capacities (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005, p. 20). Another characteristic of the oral tradition related to the nature of performance is the involvement of the community in the process as well as criticism (Bodunde, 1992, p. 24). Finnegan explains further that in the creative version, audience members neither listen silently nor wait for the performer's invitation to join in. Instead, the audience breaks into the performance with additions, questions and criticism (ibid, p.24-25). Criticism always emerges when the audience feels the narrator is hoaxing or deceiving them.

Acting

The role of the folktale artist may be compared with that of the actor in a dramatic production (Noss, 1971, p. 41). In telling the tale, the narrator is a performer acting out an ancient play before his audience. The performer becomes

the actor on stage as he begins the tale, and the ancestors' words with the link between past and present are found in the tale through the performer. Like the Gbaya tradition of the tale, everyone is a performer. Once he mounts the stage, he is responsible for all aspects of the performance. To enhance his artistic delivery conventionally, he can exploit all the art forms, music, songs, dance, ideophones, etc.

He is also likely to introduce his favourite tricks of vocal style and presentation and to be influenced in his wording by the audience and occasion; thus, he will produce linguistic variations on the basic theme different from those of his fellows or even from his own on an extra day or occasion (Finnegan, 1976, p. 386). The actions of a theatre performer in a professional sphere depend solely upon the source material, which usually consists of a script filled with dialogue and stage directions written by the playwright, which the performer is obligated to observe (Miller, 2000, p. 16).

He or she uses performance elements like (a) *acting* and *speaking style* which help him to use the facial expression and the body physical- the nonverbal tool - to convey mood, feeling, lines, and the personality of the character he plays all in accompaniment of voice and vocal expression to portray the character's roles; (b) *character motivation* which he has the reasons for a character's behaviour; an incentive and inducement for a character's further action; (c) *character's analysis* where he responds to dramatic art, the process of examining how the elements of drama -literary, technical, and performance -are used; (d) *empathy* where he has the capacity to relate to the feelings of the audience member when he is or not on stage; (e) *breath control* the situation of him properly making use of the lungs and diaphragm muscle for efficiently maximum capacity of breath for speaking; (f) *inflection* and *projection* the situation of him changing loudness pitch of the voice and how well the audience receive the voice; (g) *diction* and *language* which aim at the pronouncement of speech clarity in the drama by coining and phrasing selected words that suggest a class of character; (h) *gestures* where any movement of the actor's head, shoulder, arm, hand, leg, or foot conveys meaning; (i) *style* which is the shaping of dramatic material, settings, or costumes in a deliberately non-realistic manner; and (j) *monologue, soliloquy* and *suspense* where either a long or a short speech made by one actor who is alone on stage (a monologue may be delivered alone or in the presence of others) mix with feeling of uncertainty as to the outcome, used to build interest and excitement on the part of the audience. The storyteller utilises these skills that are vibrant and full of images and symbols through the language and the action as he imitates many characters in the story.

Directing

The 'director is responsible for conveying the script's story and meaning to the audience clearly and powerfully. It is *always* the actor's responsibility on stage to deliver the story and meaning' (Miller, 2000, p. 14). The theatre director is the artistic manager and inspirational leader of the production team who ultimately coordinates the work of the actors, designers, and crew so that the production accurately expresses the production concept through the director's vision, energy and ability to focus everyone else's efforts on the common goal; he is also the same person responsible for the unified creative interpretation of the script, creating a viable production concept, and directing the actors (Gillette 2000, p. 8 & p. 565). The theatre director has so much power in professional theatre, and the curious paradox is that the playwright is also not seen on the stage but through the actors and the physical staging provided by the designers. However, the storyteller visibly appears and runs the performance with the apparent capacity to directly affect coordination, rhythm, and mood on the stage before the audience.

In contrast to the professional director, whose primary work is done through actors and designers who transmit ideas and energies to the audience (Hodge & McLain, 2010, p. 2), the storyteller is a communicator just like the director, yet he does everything himself. Though the director's ultimate responsibility is to touch and move the audience with a play, the director cannot do so by themselves; instead, they communicate to the audience how they think and feel through his cast and crew.

Producing

The role of the folktale artist may be compared with that of the actor in a dramatic production. However, he is, at the same time, the producer, concerned not only with entertainment but also with interpretation (Noss, 1970, p. 41). A producer is a person who puts a production together, or in the case of a non-profit company, the artistic director who selects the play to be presented and then decides who will carry out each function: design and all other elements (Wilson, 2011, p. 144). Just as the producer is the ultimate authority in the organisational structure of a theatrical production (Gillette, 2000, p. 7), the storyteller is the leading authority and the most influential when the platform is given to him to narrate the story to the audience.

Unlike the professional theatre producer who secures the rights to perform the play, hires the director, designers, actors, and crews; leases the theatre; and ensures the financial backing for the play (ibid), the storyteller does not do any of the above roles specified since he is not into a profit-making organisation. In African societies before the advent of Europeans, things were

done in the barter rather than the monetary system. This, therefore, leaves little room for the box office during the performance of the tales.

The Ghanaian (African) Theatre Space

The Ghanaian (African) theatre and/or drama of storytelling is a way of communicating to the masses. It is usually dismissed as inconsequential since it is an indigenous communication system than the Eurocentric mainstream, which has theoretical and analytical in-depth discussions. The African theatre scene is complex due to the heterogeneous nature of cultural traditions and the variety of historical factors shaping theatrical forms' function, structure, and content. The modern African theatre practice displays a complex mixture of coexistence of foreign, predominantly European dramatic genres and indigenous dances, storytelling, miming and recitations. Theatre is here taken to include any performing art representing symbolic images of life or artistic expressions in action that can be danced, dramatised, mimed, narrated, recited or a combination of these. Each society has its theatre, whose characteristics are shaped by its specific socio-economic structure. Theatre is, after all, any art form where human beings perform both animate and inanimate objects as human beings, setting out, imitating, and representing humanness by using bodies, voices, intelligence, and spirit to another group of human beings who witness the event as the audience.

In the performance elements, the primary ingredients of the drama are *characters* represented by players; *action* described by gestures and movements; *thought* implied by dialogue, words, and action; *spectacle* represented by scenery, music, and costume; and finally, the *audiences* who respond to this complex mixture (Jacobus, 2001, p. 1). The background to the theatre in Africa is best understood by dividing theatre into two major categories: the theatre of the domination class, which is usually the minority, and that of the dominated majority. The theatre space used by the indigenous storytellers is either a circle (which the modern Western adopted as arena theatre today) where the narrators position themselves at the centre and a semi-circle (the horse-shoe-like formation) where they position themselves at the centre of the audience as well.

Set Design

The theatrical equipment, such as curtains, flats, backdrops, or platforms, used in a dramatic production to communicate the environment is called scenery. Since no specific raised platform is built for the performances in the African storytelling session, the use of flats, drapes, and other set building materials are separate from them; hence no specific design is found in the background. They usually use trees as their background whenever they sit in a horse-shoe-like formation (semi-circle) or a circle if they hold the performance on a durbar ground, with the narrator positioning himself at the centre of the audience. The

storyteller almost always describes the scenery through ideophones as he continues to narrate the tale.

Light and Sound Design

Lighting is the placement, intensity, and colour which help communicate environment, mood, or feeling. Moonlight, a fire set by the people, lanterns, and light lit in earthen bowls are significant sources of sunshine for the indigenous African storytelling seasons. With lanterns and lights lit in earthen bowls, lighting areas are provided within the acting arena to create a smooth light wash. Just as the lighting designer is responsible for raising and lowering the intensity of one or more lighting instruments to appear during production (Gillette, 2000, p. 569), an individual among the audience is equally responsible for turning the lantern low or high or better still, re-adjusting and repositioning the lights lit in the earthen bowls through his observation or narrator's instruction. From the Western standpoint, there is the use of special light effects like the dimmer, the gels, the par cans, Fresnel, strobes, ultraviolet lamps, follow spots, et cetera, with someone responsible for giving that effect in the well-structured house that had raised platform. On the other hand, 'the effects an audience hears during the performance to communicate character, context, or environment is the use of sound through a style embroidered with ideophone', and this is one of the characteristics of a compelling African storyteller (Finnegan, 1976, pp. 384-5). The use of raising and lowering of voices, ideophones, aerophones, gongs and drums, as naturally produced sounds like birds chirping, owls hooting, etc., are the primary sound effects used in the performance of the storytelling session.

Unlike the Western ways of providing good scoring in the background, in the storytelling session, there are no music effects tracks to be played at a low loudness level throughout the scene(s) by the sound designer, whose job is to record and playback all sound effects (Gillette, 2000, p. 574). Though indigenous African storytelling does not make use of these Western sound effects that make use of instruments which can record and playback the sounds during the performance, the aerophones, which include horns, whistles, bamboo flutes and bugles, are most of the instruments used by the narrator and the participatory audience to provide the sound effects. The ideophone may be used in the tale purely for description. Through this, the listener sees, hears, or feels what is being described, whether it is a sound, sensation, emotion, colour, texture, movement, state, quality, or anything else that is describable. Even if it cannot be described, there will be an ideophone to describe its state of indescribability. It may also be and occur as part of the plot and the climax of the plot (Noss, 1970, pp. 45-6).

Costuming and Makeup

The costume is 'Anything worn onstage...whether it be layers of clothing or nothing at all' (Gillette, 2000, p. 385). It could also be the physical representation of a person's dress worn before another person at a particular time. Makeup is a vital element in creating the total appearance of the character on the stage. For instance, throughout central and western Africa, striking and imaginative costumes and masks are used in various ceremonies (Wilson & Goldfarb, 2008, pp. 3-5). They often use percussion instruments, shows, and costumes to entertain while telling their stories. Costumes, wigs, and body paint often transform an actor into a character. During the storytelling session, sometimes the costumes are described by the performer. This happens when the performer switches mood and the story to suit the environment. Again, since they mostly are in their simple attires, they cannot go home to pick the kind of costume before continuing the narration, unlike when they are costumed for the stage in European drama.

Using Properties

Properties (props) are such elements as furniture, lamps, pictures, table linens, bric-a-brac, and window drapes that provide the finished set with visual character (Gillette, 2000, p. 12). Any article, except costume or scenery, used as part of a dramatic production; any moveable object that appears on stage during a performance is a property. These items are divided into set, hand, and decorative props. The set props are generally defined as oversized movable items not built into the stage that the actors use in some way, such as furniture, floor lamps, rugs, stoves, tree stumps, swings, etc.

The hand props are small items handled or carried by the actors, such as plates, cups, letters, books, fans, lanterns, etc. The decorative props enhance the setting visually but are not explicitly touched by the actor (ibid, p. 268-9). Out of these three categories of props used, the indigenous African storyteller uses the set props and hand props. Because no raised platform is built for performances, the storyteller uses decorative props differently than Western theatre practitioners.

The Choice of Story as the Play Script

The playwright, the director and the producer use a genre known as the type of play to produce an exceptional performance. Comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, farce, melodrama, mystery and historical play are different genres. In African storytelling, the genre could be folktales, narrative poeties, myths, historical genealogies, histories and historical events, epic, etc. The performer selects a high-quality story. The script, as an overwhelming majority, that theatrical production begins with could be different sometimes in the storytelling

tradition. Before [directors can] commit themselves to direct any production, they must be fully conversant with the script, which must be available to actors on a sign-out basis before auditions (Stillings, 1997, p. 11). Therefore, the director's primary tool, which is the unique characteristic of the playwright's thought of making, the thing that differentiates the playwright's dream flight from other writing (Hodge & McLain, 2010, p. 5) is the improvisation that the writer shapes within the mind. The director considers both vocal and visual instruments (the actors) and the audience's place to gather to hear and watch the story (ibid).

However, the storyteller uses folktales, narrative poetics, historical genealogies, histories and historical events as the script to narrate these stories through memorisation and recitation of the events to the audience. It is universally and cheaply accessible as it imposes no language problems on the host audience. It is mainly interactive, utilising the sense of sight and sound in face-to-face encounters, maximising the audience's active participation in the communication process. More so, the story provides teaching and initiation to impart traditional aesthetic, historical, technical, social, ethical and religious values as a legal code that rests on spoken words.

Casting

Storytelling session is highly infused with specified music, and cultivated conversation creates popular and highly valued occasions just as the evening wears on and the stories are delivered with more art and, relatively, more seriousness (Finnegan, 1976, p. 374). When these stories are told by the local conventions about the suitable personnel and order— sometimes by just a few outstanding narrators, sometimes according to a rotation round of each participant in turn, or sometimes by whoever has the story thrown on to him by the last teller, it would still be considered as the introduction of new cast on to the stage (ibid). However, because the indigenous storytelling tradition is not structured for profit making, there is no provision for auditioning before casting, followed by a production conference which is the first production meeting after the audition. Another significant feature in storytelling is the introduction of the cast onto the stage. The narrator is the first cast who interprets various roles in the scene. He can then invite the audience to join him through the song interlude. Again, he can digress by introducing different casts to enact some roles through interplay. All these are sources of casting in the storytelling session to quickly switch mood and atmosphere to suit the environment in which he tells the story.

Rehearsal

This unique job orientation was invented to avoid the embarrassment of on-the-job training before an audience. This rehearsal is supervised by the production director (Conte & Langley, 2007, p. 60). Technical rehearsals are

devoted to integrating the sets, props, lighting, and sound with the actors into the action of the play. Just as the indigenous performer memorises the whole tale just upon his ground of listening to the narration or singing the songs that accompany the story, the Western performers and the directors go through a series of rehearsals: reading, blocking, line rehearsals, dress and technical, mock performance, and performance night alongside prompting to help facilitate memorisation of the script. However, storytellers do not have a specific time to rehearse the stories, unlike the songs, music and dance. They only repeat words, phrases, gestures and verses or stanzas; repetition techniques make it easy to understand and recall the stories from memory (Tuwe, 2016, p. 3).

Blocking

Blocking is the movement of patterns, usually of actors on the stage (Gillette, 2000, pp. 4-5). Although the storyteller's position is the centre of his sitting audience's circle or horse-shoe-like arrangement, he moves from place to place by imitating and mimicking action. This could also mean that s/he uses space and blocks himself themselves by positioning themselves at a particular location throughout the performance.

The Importance of Storytelling to the Audience

Storytelling has been identified as mediating and transmitting knowledge and information across generations, conveying information to the younger generations about the culture, worldviews, morals and expectations, norms and values (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005:19-21). That is not the same as reading a story aloud or reciting a piece from memory (Tuwe, 2016, p. 2). The storyteller creates a series of mental metaphors associated with words packed in forms, songs, music, dances, plays, dramas and poetry with specific musical instruments (ibid). These stories often have some meaningful life morals (lessons) to learn within and often explain why nature is the way it is. The stories are primarily orally based and rooted in the local cultures that entertain, enlighten (or educate), and stress moral values (Tuwe, 2016, pp. 2-3; Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005, p. 21; Ametewee, 1997, p. 206). Again, the stories serve society by mobilising people's awareness of their histories, magnifying past events and evoking deeds of illustrious ancestors (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005: 21) in which the ancestors become reference points to remind one another and to admonish them in terms of sanctioning and justifying the people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has explored the captivating crossroads between African storytelling traditions and Western theatre practices, with a particular focus on the roles of African storytellers in acting, directing, and producing.

Through our analysis, we have discovered striking similarities between the indigenous African storyteller and the intricate workings of professional theatre presentations. Comparing the African storyteller to the playwright, we find that both possess the remarkable ability to weave words and ideas together, crafting narratives that captivate and resonate with their audiences. Similarly, the performers in theatre bring these words to life through their embodiment of characters and emotive delivery, just as the African storyteller enlivens their tales through vivid performances. The director in theatre plays a crucial role in integrating various artistic elements, such as staging, lighting, and sound, to create a cohesive and impactful production. Similarly, the African storyteller assumes this multifaceted role, seamlessly incorporating music, dance, gestures, and other performative elements to enhance the storytelling experience. Furthermore, akin to the producer or manager who coordinates the business aspects of a theatrical production, the African storyteller takes on the responsibility of managing the entire process, from conception to performance. They become a Jack of all trades, simultaneously mastering each aspect. They harmoniously blend all the elements to create an artistic whole, providing audiences with a complete and immersive theatrical experience.

By recognising the interconnectedness of African storytelling and Western theatre, we celebrate African artists' ingenuity and creativity and acknowledge their immense contributions to the global theatrical landscape. This convergence of cultural traditions fosters artistic innovation, stimulates cross-cultural dialogue, and enriches the diversity of narratives on stage. However, we must also acknowledge African storytellers' challenges navigating the Western theatre industry, including representation and cultural appropriation issues. By fostering inclusive and respectful collaborations, we can ensure that these cultural exchanges are conducted with sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect. Finally, the African storyteller and the Western theatre practitioner are united in their shared dedication to storytelling. The African storyteller's ability to encompass multiple roles and integrate diverse elements mirrors the collaborative nature of professional theatre. Together, they embody the transformative power of storytelling, bridging cultures and creating profound connections between artists and audiences worldwide.

References

- Agbemabiese, P. (2007). *The Origin, Relevance and Genderized Issues in Ewe Proverbs: A Socio-Cultural Study of Proverbs in the Ewe Community*.
- Ansu-Kyeremeh, K. (Ed.) (2005). *Indigenous Communication in Africa: Concept, Application and Prospects*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.

- (2005) *Indigenous Communication in Africa: A Conceptual Framework*. In Kwesi Ansu-Kyeremeh (Ed.) *Indigenous Communication in Africa: Concept, Application and Prospects*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Anyidoho, K. (1997). 'Ewe Verbal Art', in *A Handbook of Eweland, Vol. I, The Ewes of Southeast Ghana*, Ed. Francis Agbodeka, Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.
- Eldred, D.J. et al. (Eds.) (1992) *Orature in African Literature Today*. London: James Currey.
- Finnegan, R. (1970) *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Hodge, F. & McLain, M. (2010). *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*. (7th ed.) Boston: Allyn & Boston
- Gillette, M. J. (2000). *Theatrical Design and Production: An Introduction to Scene Design And Construction, Lighting, Sound, Costume, and Makeup*. (4th ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Greenwald, M. L. et al., (2002) *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre: A Global Perspective*. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers
- Hodge, F. & McLain, M. (2010). *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Jacobus, A.L. (2001). *The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama*. (4th ed.) Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Kovey, J.A.S.Y (1998) *Tɔgbui Evemegã Akpa Gbãtɔ*. Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages.
- Miller, B.J. (2000). *The Actor as Storyteller: An Introduction to Acting*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company
- Noss, P. A. (1970). 'The Performance of Gbaya Tale', in *Research in African Literatures*. The African and Afro-American Research Institute. Vol. 1, No. 1
- Nyador, E. (2000) *Ekekevo Fe Gbenjutise (Grammar) Na BECE Kple WASSCE*
- Stillings, C. (1997). *Stage Management Handbook*. Kent State University.
- Teach Africa (2000) *The Oral Traditions of Africa*. Houston World Affairs Council of Houston
- Tuwe, K. (2016). *The African Oral Tradition Paradigm of Storytelling as a Methodological Framework: Employment Experiences for African Communities in New Zealand*.
- Ukala, S. (1992). 'Plot and Conflict in African Folktales', in *African Literature Today, Vol.18, Orature in African Literature Today, (Eds.), Eldred d. Jones et al.* London: James Currey.
- Wilson, E. & Goldfarb, A (2008). *Living Theatre: History of the Theatre*. New York: McGraw Hill Company, Inc.
- Yeboah-Dankwa, J. (1988). 'Storytelling of the Akan and Guan in Ghana', in *Ghanaian Literature*, Ed. Richard K. Priebe. New York: Greenwood Press.