

Theatre and the Education Reforms in Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

In the present political dispensation, efforts have been made to effect reforms in the education of the country. Many moves have been made to put this in place. For these efforts not to be frustrated, we believe that the performing theatre too needs to be reformed-most especially films and home videos. These duo have gone a long way in influencing the academic performance of the Nigeria students. This is because they have succeeded in gaining the attention of the students more than any other forms of entertainment. In this study, we have examined three sub-headings: The roles of performing theatre to the society, the degeneracy in the film industry, performing theatre as a viable instrument for the education reforms. In the study, we have presented some ways through which the industry can be used in influencing the education reforms positively.

Keywords: Theatre and the Education Reforms, Society

INTRODUCTION

Despite the government's education reforms, the parents are paying dearly for the education of their children while positive improvement is hardly noted on the part of the children. The failure can be traced to the presence of films and home videos. These duo which Obafemi (1999:285) considers as "mediates mode of theatrical presentation" have had a negative influence on the students. It is now not uncommon to see secondary school students going to school with video-tapes with the intention of sneaking out of the school to watch the film in a friend's house.

The affinity which the students are having for films and home videos has caused a serious set-back to the education of the country. The teachers too are not left out of this academic plague. Films and home videos have taken the place of the necessary preparations which have to be made before going to the class. All this mad rush for films and home videos is as a result of certain qualities that are lacking in the film industries today.

In this study, we are going to examine the initial roles of the theatre, its digression and how the government can bring it back to order so as to be useful for education reforms.

ROLES OF THE THEATRE

Since theatre is a genre of literature and performs the same roles with it, we are going to use the eight theses of John Lye (www.brocku.ca/english) in " on the use of studying literature" as the basis of our argument (though there are still some other points we are going to add).

The Wisdom Thesis

Since theatre is a form of literature it is to be staged in such a way to lead into a sober reflection; hence it leads to wisdom.

The Representation or Reflection of Reality Thesis:

Theatre is mimetic because it may be used to represent or to reflect a reality. Through theatre, what is going on in the society may be portrayed. It is also a good means of commending what is going on in the society. It is a good instrument to warn or to reprove a wayward leader.

The Ideology or Worldview Thesis

The tradition of thought and the way the world is viewed are different from one culture to the other. For example, in Yoruba tradition, anybody that does not have an issue is considered as living a wasted life while it is not so in Europe (one may decide to bear children or otherwise). In the play, the ideology of the culture of the actor is presented to the audience. For example, a play by an Igbo actor can help the audience to know the world-view or ideology of the Igbo people. In short, theatre educates.

The Cultural Code Thesis/Cultural Function Thesis

These two theses are going to be discussed together because they both point to the fact that literature in general is a means of presenting the cultural identity of the people involved. Theatre is a good means of demonstrating the cultural identity of the people.

Language Thesis

One of the functions of theatre like any other form of literature ‘ ‘ is to engage oneself in a continuing process of refining one’s capacities to use language and one’s sensibilities to good language use, (Lye: www.brocku.ca/English). Theatre does not only refine the language of the actors but it also helps in building the audience linguistically.

The Subjectivity Thesis

Man as a social animal always has a social role which he is subjected to. Theatre is not all about making money. It should spell out the social role of the audience. The audience gets to know what is expected of him by the society through theatre.

The Exploration or Heuristic Thesis

There are many facts that the audience can discover in the theatre. Since one of the roles of theatre is to criticize, it reveals series of deeds (good or bad) of a given people or a given society to the audience. The audience now goes home with the discovery of new facts.

Beside the above roles theatre has some other roles:

Historical Exposition

There are certain times when the content of the play will be historical. The history will be facilitated by acting it. For example, Duro Ladipo’s Sango Oba Koso is purely a biographical play. A lot of people got to know about the life of the king in question through the play.

Didactic Role

Theatre can be used as a means of imparting knowledge to the audience. The government can pass through it to pass a piece of information to the populace. Series of plays have been used to educate the people on AIDS and some other social problems. Also, plays (texts) and novels can be simplified for the students by acting them.

Entertainment

Theatre is also a means of entertaining the audience. This is where the problem lies. The vast majority of the theatrical audience (most especially the youth) is no more after any other function of theatre other than entertainment. Many of the artists are aware of this fact and they seize the opportunity to enrich themselves. They now entertain the public at the expense of the future of the youth.

Provision of Source of Income

Film industries are among the lucrative industries in Nigeria nowadays. Theatre provides a good source of income to the actors and it equally helps the economy of the country in one way or the other, most especially the ones exported to Europe and America.

Many of the artists have deviated from the above mentioned roles of theatre and this has led to series of problems:

THEATRICAL DEGENERACY

Corruption

The degeneracy on the qualities of theatre has caused a lot of corruption in the country. The youth have been initiated into immoral behaviour through the unbridled types of films they are watching. Sexual perversion is also a result of the unnecessary details of sexual activities in the films. Through the detail and the indecent dressings of some actresses, many ladies have been unconsciously introduced into the world of prostitution while the sexual appetite of their male counterparts has been stimulated.

Introduction into Crime

Through films and home videos, many have been introduced into the world of crime. It is very common nowadays to see films with full details of how criminal acts are perpetrated. Through films, many youth have learnt how to break into other people's house. They've equally learnt how to escape punishment through the same means.

It is true that criminal plots usually end with the culprits being punished but what the youth in question usually do is to study the mistakes that have led to the capture of the culprits and try to avoid them. That is, they will be watchful in their criminal acts.

Promotion of Money Consciousness

Today, many films preach ostentatious living through the wealth display of the actors and through the expensive settings they are using. This is preaching the supremacy of money over education. It can equally force the youths to go into crime.

Encouragement of Occultism

Many youth have been tempted to believe that the solution to their problems is in occultism instead of facing the reality of life. Many of the local film writers are now fond of acting

plays which are full of incantations and invocation of all forms of magical powers. Though this is still part of African tradition, it should not be elevated beyond the reality.

Overproduction

The market is now saturated with films and videos because majority of the artists are no more looking for a way of producing qualitative films but to release as many as possible within a year. This has not only affected the quality of the productions but it has also succeeded in keeping the youth busy with the home videos as they will not want to leave any available films unwatched.

Enculturation

Many of the film and home videos are too Eurocentric and celebrate the supremacy of the European culture over that of Africa. This should not be so. It is like justifying the European writers unto whom “the Blackman is an inferior being belonging to an inferior race” (Nweze, 1978:50). They see the Africans as tabula *rasa* and they are treating them accordingly.

Introduction of Linguistic Impurity

In Nigeria today, theatre has done a lot in polluting both the local languages and the official one - English. It is a medium through which vulgar language is spread to the pleasure-seeking youth who are ever ready to “swallow” all the slangs in the play. It is a way through which the language of the touts are spread. Through this medium, the local languages have lost a lot of their savours. For example, in Yoruba setting, it is now common to hear the youth saying “emi o ma ri tie yen ro” instead of the normal “tie yen ko ba mi” (I am less concerned about your affairs). Equally, jargons have been introduced into the spoken English through the same medium. For example, it is now rampant among the secondary school students to say that something is “fanimorous” when they mean that it is more attractive. The word “fanimorous” is a coined word from Yoruba word “Fanimora” (to be attractive). This is causing a lot of linguistic havocs.

Misrepresentation of Reality

Theatre is one of the means through which historical facts are to be learnt by the youth. As a result of the laziness on the parts of the producers, the historical plays in Nigeria are usually faulty. This is because the producers are too “busy” to make proper research before bringing the film into limelight. Many of such films have stuffed the heads of the youth with faulty historical facts.

THEATRE - A VIABLE INSTRUMENT FOR THE EDUCATION REFORMS

Performing theatre is a very powerful instrument, which, if well utilized, is capable of aiding education reforms in the country. Beaumarchais in Rupert (1995:403) is of the opinion that: “Le theatre est un geant qui blesse a mort tout ce qu’il frappe.

That is: “Theatre is a giant that wounds unto death all that it hits” (our own translation). If theatre is endowed with such a titanic power, the Federal Government should use it in pulling down the walls of ignorance and mediocrity.

To make a good use of this giant that has been using its power to have a negative influence on the youth of this country, all the government has to do is to tame it and tend it towards positive use.

The Taming

To restore sanity into the youth, efforts should be made by the government to sanitize the theatre and film industry. This can be done by establishing a body that will be censoring all the theatrical productions in the country. This will surely lead to the desired expectation. It will also aid in correcting all the anomalies already mentioned above.

The Tending

Having tamed the theatrical giant, the government should use the power of the theatre in the education reforms campaign. This can be guaranteed by tending the theatre towards the development of education. To tend the theatre towards having a positive influence on education, the government should see the adoption of community theatre (which is theatre that sensitizes the people on the way to improve their lives) as a solution to the problem. The government has to address this at two levels - the production level and presentation level.

The Production Level

The government in his education reforms should carry along the producers. They should be encouraged to produce the types of plays that will fight against all obstacles of education. The performing art students too should be sensitized on the importance of education reforms and they should be encouraged to be producing in favour of education.

The Presentation Level

The government should involve the electronic media houses in the reforms by encouraging them to be presenting the types of play that will promote the government's education reforms. For the benefit of the less privileged ones, mobile films on the importance of education should be taken to every nook and cranny of the country.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it is examined how the government can make use of the theatre in the on-going education reforms. To carry out this, we examined the roles of the theatre and we equally proved that the theatre has digressed from its original roles. We also suggested how the government can restore it to its position and how it can be made use of in the education reforms since as a result of its great potential in influencing human being.

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