

CHAPTER FIVE

ART ORINATION WITH HUMAN EXISTENCE & DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

That human activity that expresses human feelings is the 'Art'. It existed even before human creation which man puts into action as he develops. Art expresses thoughts, dreams, and hope in the form of dance, music, drawing, poem, song and drama. The primitive man as was told in human history communicated with the gods and spirits in some rituals through Art which he imitated so well. Dance is believed to be the oldest form of Art that existed through man's imitativeness of the objects he saw while in his daily work/duty. The dance itself cannot exist without the act of music and song. The man also drew and painted whatever he also saw. This piece of work is to bring to knowledge that Art came, existed and developed Man, hence the Art Origination with human existence and development.

Keywords: Art, origination, human existence, development.

Introduction

Writing about Art, the great Russian writer Tolstoi in Machlis said that Art “is a human activity whose purpose is to transmit to us the highest and best feelings to which man has risen” (p. 3). Machlis went further to explain that:

Art expresses certain thoughts and emotions of the artist – his vision of beauty, his feeling about life, his hopes and dreams. All this he put into his work. Each work of art, whether it is a poem, a painting, a piece of sculpture or a piece of music has a secret at the heart of it, a personal message from the artist to you.... Art brings us its message in various ways: through the words of the poet, the colours of the painter, the marble of the sculptor, the movements of the dance. Music speaks to us through sound. Utilizing the sounds that travel so lightly through the air, music arouses our emotions and sends forth patterns of beauty that brings joy to millions of people all over the world (p. 3).

Generally speaking, Art has been in existence since the world began and has gone through several changes the world over in different forms, such as being used in ritual sacrifices, performance and so many other things before it became a part of ritual practice, as will be examined in this paper. The existence and origin of Art are traced to the prehistory of man. Dance as the oldest of all Art is believed to have started from the time of our ancestors as an imitation of certain things such as animals.

In the olden days, precisely during the stone age, records showed that Africans were mostly

wanderers moving from place to place and living inside caves. The major occupation of the people at that time was hunting which also served as food for them. And when a man comes home from hunting in the evening, he tells his family stories of his exploits for the day, imitating the movements of the animals that he encountered in the forest. It was from his imitation of the movement of birds that 'Dance' was born. In the actual sense, the dance originated from the imitation of the primitive man of the things around him and later became a ritual practice. According to Braide:

Human history states that primitive man's attempt to communicate with a god or a spirit was an indissoluble part of his communal life. The man was first a farmer or a hunter and in reacting to his physical environment, he began to develop a religious disposition. His awareness of certain ritual forces in his environment involved him in the acts of stepping out of himself through dance and certain associated rhythmic activities including the use of voice, speech and other percussion instruments (p. 1).

This means that dance through imitation, went into rituals and Man is prone to imitate and imitation is natural to man from childhood. This is one of man's advantages over the lower animals that makes him the most imitative creature in the world and learns first by imitation. So man learnt glance first through imitation before any other thing.

The art of dance performance became a medium or link between man and spiritual forces or a bond between spiritual forces and the community. As a dynamic art form dance has remained relevant and serves as a point for the unification of various ethnicities, played and is still playing a vital role in African ritual ceremonies and festivals. Dance as art has moved from generation to generation to this day (Yeside, 2012).

Just as it is in dance, so it is in other works of art. Macgowan and Melnitz (1955) said that: Drama and theatre are older than religion. They begin with the first man who thinks that by imitating animals around the campfire, he can increase the game and ensure good hunting. Drama and theatre grow and become more elaborate as man moves beyond imitative magic. He discovers how to use dance and make music as well as masks in rituals that hopes will bring rain and increase his crops. He invents initiation ceremonies that require dialogue. His ancestors become gods and he worships them with dance and songs. Worship breeds myth and myths must be acted out if his race is to live. At last, he is devising tragedy and after that Bacchic comedy and then plays that are acted just for the fun of it (p. 2).

Let us look at this from this perspective, the man began as a hunter and whenever he could not spring on his prey from behind trees, if his quarry is in the open, he would disguise himself as the thing he hunts and would imitate its movements in dance, music, mask and drama. This act opened the way for more purposeful movement and dramatic action.

Mask is another form of art that is older than theatre and worn by primitive hunters as a disguise. The masks he used played a most important part in the ancestor worship from which true drama arose.

Art as a part of ritual practice

Religious belief and practice were an essential part of life in Africa and every religion gives birth

to drama. Initiation into the various rites often entails participation in music, drama and dancing using sculptural materials to beautify the three other arts, this entails that traditional theatre must have evolved from borrowings from traditional beliefs. In some parts of Africa, they believe that the gods are ancestors and the men are heroes and the cult of the heroes thus holds an important place in tradition.

As such, rituals cannot be discussed without religion, ritual exists out of religious practices and so the ritual is done to get a result at the end. Ritual is a belief performed at a specific time, a place to achieve an end. There is always the desired end in ritual performance, ritual is, therefore, result-oriented. In most cases, rituals are addressed to supernatural beings and the result could be real or imaginary. We can now say that rituals are practices and their essential beliefs, which are performed at specific times and places with the sole aim of obtaining a result or benefit.

When we now talk about the origin and existence and development of Art before it finally became a ritual practice today, we will not forget to go back to the origin of the creation of man. When man was created, he thought of knowing how some things came about as a result when he could not get any means, he started imitating certain things (music, drama and dance) which later resulted in ritual for man and became a common practice.

That is why some writers claim that the origin of Art started from ritual practice without having in mind that Art has started existing before rituals came into practice. That is why also the understanding of music is traced back to the most logical historical starting point in ancient Greece, the superior civilization that linked the East to the West and left its unmistakable imprint on the art and intellect of the Western world. Thus, "the ancient Greeks emphasized the arts" (Daramola, 2012).

The result of this is that the golden Age dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides made music an essential component in their tragedies. And music played a natural part in their dramas since Greek tragedy originated in the dithyrambic choral hymn sung in honour of the god Dionysus. Tragedy, therefore, became partly a musical experience: the dialogue was delivered in a musical voice and commentary was sung by a chorus. This became a ritual practice in Greek tragedy at that time.

Likewise, the dance which is considered the oldest of all art and important art that started as an imitation to animals was later cultivated into the Greek traditional games where dance favoured running, skipping and jumping movement. Dance, therefore, became part of the Egyptian's religious ceremony and also served as entertainment for the royal courts. As a matter of fact, about the ninth century A.D., dance was included in the ritual of the Christian churches as drama became the visual illustration of Christian doctrine in mystery and miracle plays and morality plays as well. Even up to this day, dance and music have become the ritual practice of all religions (Christianity & traditional religion) with an exception of the Mohammedan religion where they have not been allowed to develop musically. In Nigeria, we can see that dance and music are well developed and practised in "Aladura" churches where it is accompanied by African instruments and different dance styles.

Before drama/theatre came to be what it is today, its history is traced to the prehistory of the colonial era. Religious ceremonies became popular drama when Thespis and his cart left the shrine at Icaria in Africa and took his chorus to alien towns" (Macgowan, et al, 1955).

Although some writers have not yet agreed or accepted that theatre was in existence before it came to Greece just like it is written here by Macgowan *et al* (1995):

When we watch primitive man today and we study old myths and legends, we see theatre come to life. But we don't see the theatre. We don't see a functioning playhouse and all it has come to mean in terms of plays as well as players. When we do find the theatre, when at last we discover a complete organism, we run up against a very curious and baffling fact. Though this theatre is made by civilized men – highly civilized men though it exists in a time when writing has become an art, this theatre has practically no history. It has no definite past and except for the extant plays, hardly any present. Unless time destroyed some manuscripts, no writer of the fifth century B.C which was the great period of Athens, took the trouble to tell us exactly how the theatre evolved or to describe its early plays. The Greek theatre springs at us full-armed like Athena from the head of Zeus. Suddenly, it exists – glorious and complete in the great tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides... (p. 22).

This writer made mention of seeing theatre in the studied myths and legends and when looking at the life of the primitive man, which means that theatre has been before the Athen's theatre, it had been with the primitive man even though to him it has not been made clear how it (theatre) evolved.

Before the Greek theatre, there might have been no proper record of events because there were no proper information links as it is today where we have Information Technology (ICT). Some other writers claimed that theatre started in Egypt because of the Abydos passion play “Osiris”. This could be true because they had a lot of ceremonies and through these them, theatre came to be because most of these ceremonies had theatrical elements.

Again, Hartnoll still emphasized the primitive existence of Art/theatre to its ritual practice traced the origin of the theatre (music, dance and drama) back to the past, to the religious rites of the earliest communities. According to him: “Throughout the history of mankind, there can be found traces of songs and dances in honour of a god, performed by priests and worshippers dressed in animal skins and of a portrayal of his birth, death and resurrection” (p. 2).

The main point here is that theatre as an art has been with the primitive man before eventually turning to ritualistic practice today.

The origin of the modern theatre that is traced to the dithyramb sung is around the altar of Dionysus, the wine god. And during the Greek festivals, the drama was presented in honour of this god. Apart from the ritual practice involved in the festivals, drama, music and dance were presented as part of the ceremonies and it became a ritual practice every year in Greece. In the history of Western theatre, we can see that the Greek and the medieval people had their roots in religious rituals and spiritual legend.

Finally, let it not be forgotten that as soon as man was created, he thought of knowing certain things in life, as a result, he ended up being imitative and believed that through imitation, he could obtain that which he desired through ritual enactment, he thus became a performer, performing simple imitations of real actions, dressing in masks and skins.

Conclusively, Bakary (1972) in tracing the beginning of African theatre and linking it up to ritual claimed that:

African theatre is communion with cosmic Nature. Man in his struggle against the forces of nature wants to turn these forces to his advantage and affirm his power over them. He invents myths in which he expresses his dreams, his troubles, his hopes. From these popular symbols, he has made a whole that glows with humanity – the theatre... Through ritual and the representation of subjects borrowed from everyday life, it illustrates scenes from religious, social and even political life (p. 114).

All these indicate that music, dance, drama (Arts) existed with humans.

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