

PERFORMING VERBATIM ON THE NIGERIAN STAGE: BODE OJONIYI'S DRAMATURGY IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

*Verbatim theatre is still an unexplored area on the Nigerian playwriting scene as well as theatre stage in spite of its popularity and practice in different parts of the world. One of the central spines of verbatim theatre is that it thrives on documentary, the new/social media and journalistic practices involving more than one person who incidentally are co-creators. It is a form of dramaturgy where live interviews, news tit-bits, documented memos, online chat-threads, screenshots, musical lyrics, vox-pop or recorded conversations are creatively edited and used to create drama. One Nigerian playwright whose drama is rooted in verbatim theatre is Bode Ojoniyi. This paper examines the atypical creative energy in the memoir drama of Bode Ojoniyi whose dramatic vision is located within the frame of existentialism, deadness and the undead consciousnesses. This study contends that Ojoniyi's memoir drama is woven around a delicate and life draining human experience attended by the incursions of mythical afflatuses as live characters in his dramatic oeuvre. It uses *For the Love of Sisyphus* and *A Dance of Beasts!*, two play-memoirs on the Uniosun blackmail of the playwright to argue that the premise of Ojoniyi's memoir dramas is rooted in neo-romanticist aesthetics marked by the intersection between theatre and journalism. The study concludes that Ojoniyi's verbatim theatre conveys a crosscurrent of three transcendental conditioning, the mythic, the existential and the material.*

Keywords: *Theatre, Journalism, Verbatim Theatre, documentary, Playwright, Drama.*

Introduction

The development of Verbatim Theatre (VT) is fraught with diverse perspectives depending on place and/or space of the person attempting a conception of the term. However, one commonality in the study of verbatim theatre is that it owes its development to documentary theatre and to the early works of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht and later with Rolf Hochhuth, Peter Weiss, and Heinar Kipphardt. With the development of devices to document events, such as newspaper reports, radio, and the invention of television, and later on, face to face interviews, theatre started to utilize these devices to enable it to cope with the modern political events. This genre has been given the name “Verbatim”. It is a theatre necessitated by the need of the late 20th and early 21st centuries for a dramatic form capable of dealing with the pains, sufferings and disappointments experienced by the people living during the two centuries. The term was first used by Derek Paget during his extensive researches into documentary drama which employs (largely or exclusively) tape-recorded material from the real-life originals of the characters and events to which it gives dramatic shape (317).

Many playwrights crafting verbatim theatre plays believed that the press had failed in their duty to question the political decisions made by big institutions, as information was entirely controlled by the powers that be (Moore, 11). For William Boles, verbatim theatre “does what journalism fails to do (143). It is a kind of theatre where people create and perform their own stories. It is sometimes based on happenings or personal experiences such as a disaster, a particular incident, political issues or a dramatic event. One of the best techniques involved in this genre is the use of real dialogue. The dialogue of verbatim theatre uses the real words from interviews to construct the play. It places interviews with people at

the heart of the process and product, since such interviews provide a foundation from which a script is developed that is then performed by actors (Heddon, 115). What typifies the manifestation of this genre in Nigeria is the blend between 'verbatim' and 'creating'. Three playwrights/dramatists whose works fit well within the spirit of verbatim theatre in Nigeria are Wole Soyinka, Emmy Idegú and recently Bode Ojoniyi. One thread that holds some of the works of these playwrights together is the environmental antagonism they have faced and the traumatic experiences they have had to contend with which to an extent inform their political plays. Their experiences have been captured in plays such as Wole Soyinka's *Madmen and the Specialist*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *King Baabu*; Emmy Idegú's *Beloved Odolu Kingdom*, *Another Odolu Kingdom*, *Great Odolu Kingdom*, *The Conspiracy* and *Truth on Trial* and Bode Ojoniyi's *For the Love of Sisyphus*, and *Dance of Beasts!*. These dramas are testaments to the experiences of these playwrights both at the dawn of post-independence Nigeria and post-military engagements in Nigeria. The dramas display the iniquitous politicking that greet Nigeria since independence and more, the dangerous and unfeeling coldness of the postcolonized Nigerians towards his fellow man and his aloofness to country.

The dramatic oeuvre of Bode Ojoniyi falls within aforementioned boundary. His dramaturgical memoir mingles verbatim documentation processes in the created play process inasmuch that the plot is contentious and challenges the reader-audience opinions about such matters as truth, post-truth, media and mediatization. In fact, his audience-readers are mostly unsettled by the unusual way his memoir dramas are constructed in that they shift away from the traditional or known form of writing or performing drama. His plays create real atmosphere and intimacy between the audience and the events of the play in that the real names of the people involved in events as well as documented conversations are used in his plots. In some cases, he makes allusion to other canonical play-texts, draws inspiration from other

mythical characters deployed in other text, and more, use verbatim the speech of dramatic characters from other plays in his dramaturgy. This study examines the dramaturgical intersections in reading the theatre of Bode Ojoniyi.

Conceptual Premise

The term ‘verbatim’ theatre owes its development to Derek Paget during his broad examination into the work of those early contemporary practitioners of the form operating in the 1960s in regional Britain, amongst whom were John Cheeseman, Chris Honer, Rony Robinson, David Thacker and Ron Rose. Paget himself notes that the works of these practitioners were clearly indebted to the British documentary films of the 1930s and 1940s and the European plays of Brecht and Piscator (Paget, 318-319). Andersen and Wilkinson observe that this form of theatre was committed to give a public voice to specific regional communities in the United Kingdom suffering traumatic events, like the closure of factories, which were their livelihood and lifeblood (Gibson, 2). According to Paget, these theatre-makers were committed to presenting ‘authenticity’ by transcribing and feeding back to their source communities through performance the exact life stories, oral histories remembrances garnered from tape interviews (320). The goal was to provide an arena for the silent or marginalized to vent their concerns in the wake of their marginality. Janet Gibson notes that out of these early productions, the fundamental architecture of verbatim theatre was established (3); that is, the alignment of the old art of storytelling with newer technologies like taping, in order to make a performance script out of the words of the original storytellers (Brown, npag.).

Since its early usage and practice in the 20th century, the term ‘verbatim theatre’ has taken different dimension and nomenclature depending on the country of practice. In the United States it is mostly referred to as documentary theatre—used in the context of capturing its origins in the telling of ‘true’ stories and

also possibly to acknowledge the migration of these 'true' stories from documentary screen to stage. In the UK and Australia, it maintains the name 'verbatim' because of the works of early television series and programs in the mid-20th century. Over the years, many scholars (Salz, 1996, Claycomb, 2003, Forsyth and Megson 2009 amongst others) experimenting on the concept have used different neologism to describe the term. Some of these terms include 'the theatre of testimony', 'staged oral history', 'documentary' and 'fact-based' theatre and even 'documentary verbatim theatre'. Gibson notes that the form has continued to diversify away from its origins in interviews and storytelling, to include a more varied range of data than just interviews alone (3). To buttress their claims, they cite the archive, testimony, orature and anecdote, along with an arsenal of self-reflexive performance techniques (4). What this implies is that a form of "reality" or a "truth" often seems crucial to the experience of verbatim plays because there is the notion that the audience is getting the dialogue 'word for word' and straight from the mouths of those involved. However, one thing that may evade the audience is the balance between verbatim and creative editing in the process of co-creating or playwriting (Coutlas, 38).

Melanie Moore notes that, the term is a production technique where a voice, that is not part of the narrative, is used in a radio, television production, filmmaking, theatre, or other presentations (11). For Anas Mohammed, it may involve recorded voice delivery where the actors listen to recorded interviews during their performance, so as to correctly imitate exact words and phrases, accents and speech mannerisms of the actual person represented by the character (20). Melanie Moore sees it as a form of documentary theatre that uses transcripts as the dominant source of its dialogue –through the practical exercise of playwriting (ii). According to Youker et al, the concept could also be considered to have emerged from documentary traditions which can be comprised of materials including newspaper reports, interviews, government

reports and other correspondences, and may include fictitious, poetic and ironical elements (203). This kind of theatre is best described as ‘journalistic theatre’. By journalistic theatre, we mean the kind of theatre that thrives on the excavation of archival news materials like news reports, documented interviews, autobiography, notes diary as well as other forms of documentary in the new media. The term falls within the bracket of applied journalism and can also be used to describe the crossroads between theatre and journalism. It thrives on the failure of mainstream media to report issues as they are said due to excessive control of news editors. Robin Soans explains it better thus:

We live in a dishonest age: photographs are faked, television competitions are won by people who haven’t entered, newspaper articles are fabricated, weapons of mass destruction cannot be found in Iraq... [verbatim theatre is] a potent and relevant form of theatre...the audience assumes an active rather than passive role...the verbatim play must be more than just a collection of monologues if it’s to sustain interest (Soans, 17-20)

What the above statement implies is that verbatim theatre uses real people and events in its representations. It draws attention to problems of representation, including those playing out in the mass media. What Bode Ojoniyi has succeeded to do with his memoir drama is to strike a balance between representations of reality, between a narrative that creates intrigue and a play that provokes ethical thought using the names and speeches of real persons in a real life event—the blackmail of his person—as characters and dialogue. With this, his theatre breaks away from the traditional Western ideas about characterization and plot development. Unlike other emerging playwrights, he is freed from the burdens of conventional playwriting where emphases are placed on the linear narrative of cause and effect. Rather, his memoir

drama, if not his entire oeuvre, is marked by a triadic aeration of action, reaction and counter-action. This makes his memoir drama to take on the form of an expanded journalism. This is consistent with the suggestion of Richard Norton-Taylor which notes that the space of the theatre creates a place for a form of enhanced journalism in order to truly drive home the journalistic story of societal injustice through emotional connection, noting:

Theatre can be an extension of journalism in the best possible way – that is, by communicating and explaining contemporary issues, scandals and events in a unique, fair and positive and intellectually honest manner.... a group of actors on a stage can... give a sense of context much more effectively than can the written words alone. The experience of watching leads to an understanding that goes beyond the mere intake of information; it involves empathy for the victims. Second, that witnessing the search for truth and the exposure of injustice as a group of spectators places a corporate responsibility on the audience to acknowledge that injustice – and potentially, to act to prevent future injustices. Third, that there is a serious, unsensationalised manner – and that the stage is the perfect place to do so ... Reading aloud on the stage – using material with much more effect than if the same words had been read in a newspaper or even a book. A live audience concentrated and listened – and became horrified – together (Norton-Taylor, qtd in Coultas 42).

What Richard Norton-Taylor is saying is that verbatim play has a greater effect upon the audience than the written word. Melanie Moore puts verbatim theatre into subcategories such as historical verbatim drama, tribunal, literary, expository, and participatory verbatim theatres (23). These subcategories are based on archives that privilege either “text” or the “aural” testimony. The

first three subcategories (Historical Drama, Tribunal, and Literary) are text-based on an increasing scale, as sources used in these forms are generally received by the playwright as a textual secondary source. The latter subcategories, Expository and Participatory, are aurally based –meaning that the playwright or collective has sourced, performed, recorded, and ultimately transcribed interviews for its play dialogue (Moore, 25). One common ground of literary verbatim play is that it is premised on the documented writings of a subject in question. According to Moore, “the writings are creatively edited to develop narrative structure, but are predominantly the “exact words” of their original author” (28). As the words in question are of written origin, literary verbatim is the most text-based of the verbatim subcategories.

In spite of the widespread development of verbatim theatre, it is mostly queried on the ground that the association between the terms “verbatim” and “truth” is problematic in that theatre itself is illusive. More, there is also the contention that verbatim theatre displaces the playwright and in its stead recognizes the position of the editor.

In this paper, we perceive verbatim theatre as a neologism that incorporates varied product that owes its origins to both written and spoken text. We use the term as a portmanteau word to describe a type of playwriting process takes place in the theatre, the traditional media, the new/social media and journalistic practices involving more than one person who incidentally are co-creators or dramaturges. The premise of our study is anchored on the argument that verbatim theatre is a form of dramaturgy where live interviews, news tit-bits, social commentaries, documented memos, online chat-threads, screenshots, musical lyrics, vox-pop or recorded conversations are creatively edited and used to create drama and in some cases, used to heighten the on-screen or on-stage drama. Our point of reference is the memoir drama of Bode Ojoniyi set on the Uniosun blackmail and defamation of the character by Femi Makinde of Punch Newspapers. The two playtexts under

considerations are *For the Love of Sisyphus* and its sequel *A Dance of Beasts!*

Synopses of the Plays

For the Love of Sisyphus is woven around a life draining human experience. It tells the story of a grand blackmail to cover the manipulation of over 90 final year results by the staff members of Osun State University and the use of Femi Makinde of Punch Newspaper to cover up for the culprit Dr Amao. Dr Amao Temitayo manipulates over 90 results of graduating students in the Department of English and International Studies and she is being investigated by Dr Wale who has overwhelming evidence against her. To cover up her crimes, Professors in the University, Christopher Alebiosu, Olukoya Ogen, Akintayo Idowu and others sets Dr Wale up with a lady, Ikwue Ejiro Mercy in a grand-styled conspiracy to blackmail him to drop his evidences against Amao. Their plan is to use a video of him and the lady (made by the lady) to negotiate a settlement of Amao's case with him. In the process, two SSS men are recruited to claim that they made a video of Wale as the evidence that he is the one changing results of students for sexual gratification. But, at the height of this ostentatious treachery, Wale refuses to negotiate with them drawing inspiration from the legendary mythic transcendental character, Sisyphus. His refusal to accept all the entreaties to negotiate with his blackmailers forms the basis of the dramatic conflict in the play.

A Dance of Beasts! is a sequel to *For the Love of Sisyphus*. It narrates the machination leading to the illegal dismissal of Wale (who in this case is the Narrator) from the University after the conspiracy against him by the media; and his appearances in diverse kangaroo fact-finding committees and investigative panels. News of Wale's purported scandalous affair with Mercy Ikwue Ejiro breaks out on the internet via the publication of Femi Makinde of the Punch Newspaper Online. Discontented with the lies in the media reportage, he summons the transcendental essence of Four Beasts who not only unveils the mysteries of humankind to him but also

becomes the spiritual vortex that let loose the gaffs and in/actions of Femi Makinde, Hameed Oyegbade, Tunde Odesola, Gaffar Shittu, Professors Ogunola Alamu, Christopher Alebiosu, Olukoya Ogen, Idowu Akintayo, Kizito and other henchmen in the play. The transcendental Sisyphus as well as Four Beasts appears to press Makinde, Odesola, Hameed on their roles of the blackmail and defamation of the character of Wale. They confess of being put under pressure by the University authority to blackmail Wale. The University disciplinary panel unjustifiably dismisses Wale on the pages of the newspapers in spite of the overwhelming evidences before them indicting Amao and the conspiracy to blackmail him by the henchmen led by Alebiosu and Olukoya Ogen. The play ends when Four Beasts and the transcendental Sisyphus leave Wale to continue his existential pursuits even as a newly appointed Vice Chancellor promises to stand on the path of truth when the matter is brought up in council.

The Manifestations of Verbatim Dramaturgy in Bode Ojoniyi's Theatre

The nerve centre of Bode Ojoniyi's theatre is premised on three essentialities; existential transcendentalism expressed in the in/action and counter-action of his dramatic characters, be they mythic or imaginative; the apprehension of intentionality, that is, the total existential prompt of dramatic characters at the intuitive and reflective levels of their consciousness and lastly the probity of his dramatic hero in apprehending his [own] fallible experiential encounters. A close analysis of these essentialities implies that Ojoniyi's theatre can be read from the lens of psychoanalysis and phenomenology. The three triadic bastions combine to form agent provocateurs of conflicts in his drama at two levels of human existence: psychological [personal] level and existential [communal] level. Of the two levels, Ojoniyi's memoir drama on the Uniosun blackmail can be said to fall within the precinct of the psychological-personal level of human existence and furthermore

poses critical perception in verbatim theatre. Even though he warns his readers at the beginning of the plays that the dialogue takes place in the imagination of Wale, this caution can be dispelled on the ground that he extensively uses live and documented memos in the plotting narrative of the two plays [*For the Love...5; A Dance...1*] and he also clearly spelt it out that “*All characters in this play bear their names in real life, [A Dance..., 1]*. It is on the premise of these that we argue that the corpus of Bode Ojoniyi's memoir drama is rooted in the spirit of verbatim dramaturgy. This is evident in his resort to wide-ranging use of documents, memos, news report, and recordings in the two plays under study.

The superfluity of verbatim dramaturgy first exhibit itself within the first happening in *For the Love...* where Wale performs the speech of Femi Makinde before Sisyphus.

[*He goes to one of the shelves and brings out a newspaper. He reads*] Listen Sisyphus, Femi Makinde wrote in *The Punch* of August 13, 2016 page 12: “Alebiosu, who was the chairman of the Staff Disciplinary Panel set up by the University to investigate allegations of unlawful adjusting of students marks by some lecturers, said his panel set free the female lecturer because eight persons had the password to the computer from where the marks were adjusted and it would be wrong to pin it down on her. He explained that after that, another evidence was brought against Dr Amao and she was eventually sacked due to fresh evidence against her. He added that Prof Ogen brought the sex video before the panel as an evidence against Ojoniyi... Alebiosu said, “Prof Ogen, who is now the chief executive of the Adeyemi College of Education came to testify and showed the video that has unfortunately gone viral as a testimony against Ojoniyi. “My panel was investigating allegation of mark adjustment and we reported the new evidence to the management and advised him to go and make peace with

those in his department. He confirmed he was the one in the video” [*For the Love of Sisyphus*, 8-9].

Evident in the rendition above is the literal copy-pasting of the words as reported in the said newspaper publication. For the performer-reader, there is a swift shift from the speech patterns of Wale, the *dramatis personae* whose character is being defamed to Femi Makinde, his blackmailer. The implication of this on the text and performance is that one has to adequately know the behavioural patterns and speech of the characters being represented in verbatim theatre dramaturgy to truthfully represent them. In other words, it can be stated that characterization in Bode Ojoniyi’s verbatim theatre, as in other dramatic works rooted in verbatim dramaturgy, is not fixative. It is fleeting depending on the character being acted out. This kind of dramaturgy, in some ways, follows Bertolt Brecht’s theorization of *vefredungseffekt* only that in Ojoniyi’s memoir dramaturgy emphasis is placed on multiple voices and movements which must match those of the original speakers. For example, as Wale reads Makinde’s publication to Sisyphus, there is a linguistic variation in the parlance of the two speeches, both originally from their speakers [Wale and Makinde]. This is manifested in Wale’s riposte to Sisyphus,

...Tell me, how can an evidence be brought against me that I was changing results for students for sexual gratification as alleged by them and the solution or other judgment will be that I should “***go and make peace with those in my department***”? What is the correlation? [Emphasis is the dramaturge] [*For the Love of Sisyphus*, 10]

With this, there is a phrasal shift in the manner of speaking; more like a multivalent dialoguing that takes the dramatic characters in and out of the role being played and plunged into a tripodal depths—of Wale vis-à-vis his encounter with his

transcendental mythic characters and trauma, his detractors and the preemption of their counter-action and lastly, the embodied incursions of animist intellection/characters in the pursuit for justice. Between these three, Ojoniyi places Wale at the centre of the apocalyptic politicking of humankind as well as the eternal anguish of mythico-divine characters. His agony can be perceived and appreciated more from the eternal passion and suffering of pantheistic vortex evident in diverse world religion. Within the Yoruba cosmic vortex for example, archetypal characters such as Ogun and Obatala accommodate this suffering. This is evident in Ogun having to suffer to cement the three worlds and Obatala being imprisoned by his friend, Sango. Though Bode Ojoniyi reminds the reader (in *A Dance of Beasts...* 8) that he will not be any of those mythical characters, his dramatic characters cannot be estranged from their passion. The struggles of these archetypal characters including Ojoniyi's eponymous hero, find expression in the two plays under consideration. This is accountable for why Wale is referred to as "Being-Beast" (*A Dance of Beasts*, 65) by Beasts. Alebiosu's statement lends credence thus: "Dr Wale, you seem to be in your own world!" (*For the Love...*,32). Akintayo goes further to describe him as "one way traffic" (34). Wale's response to his christening is elemental. His reaction to the setups and blackmail as championed by the Uniosun University Management helps him to realise one existential path. He concludes "I am crushed Sisyphus. I have found my rock at the foot of the hill. And, from now, I will roll it up the hill till I breathe my last" (*For the Love of Sisyphus*, 54).

The Four Beasts surface as torturous characters in the affairs of the apocalyptic politicking. The principal character Wale or Narrator (as in *for the Love...* and *A Dance...*) adorns the persona of the Being-Beast who pursues justice with watertight documentary evidence at the request of its readers. Sisyphus takes us to one of such thus: "I have listened to the recording of your meeting of November 23, 2015 with them on YouTube at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zKyU_iKYhw&t=8s (*For the Love of Sisyphus*, 30). This hyperlink and many other documentary evidence in the play form part of what may be described as neo-dramaturgical pressures on the Nigerian stage. In *For the Love of Sisyphus*, Ojoniyi draws from and presents diverse hyperlinks from external sources in his plot structuring. What Bode Ojoniyi does with this is to question the canonical of crafting plays or drama in the Nigerian playwriting scene. Even though his approach to playwriting, especially in his memoir drama, throws up sundry questions relating to copyright rights issues *a la* ownership of the hyperlinks he uses or questions of their temporality on the internet space, his very style of writing detour from other Nigerian playwrights. He is more of a verbatim dramaturge than a playwright considering the many evidences he bring to bear in his dramatic oeuvre. Throughout the plot in his memoir drama, he presents for its readers diverse texts, recordings, written memos, direct speeches and renditions from other playtexts, and correspondence letters with dates.

All of the evidence he presents ask existential questions about the deadness of human soul and the actions in the un-dead consciousness of the dramaturge; actions that Sisyphus says “are motivated by a form of a leapt of faith in the dark”. Narrator goes further:

I will not be Ogun of Soyinka’s *Fourth Stage*. I will not be the Dionysus of Euripides. I will not be an Apollo or an Obatala of great myths. No Sisyphus! I will be a stranger in an alien world of a timeless history... I will be a lost soul in a lost history of nobility (*A Dance of Beasts*, 8).

The above speech bespeaks the neo-romanticist existential choice that Narrator (Wale) is made to make faced with life draining human experience—to become dead in the midst of blackmail by a parade of elephants. Deadness here is ambivalent. It implies both a refusal to capitulate to the demands of his traducer in

spite of the consequences and the extraterrestrial consciousness to resist their plot.

For the Love of Sisyphus and *A Dance of Beasts* place Bode Ojoniyi as a neo-verbatim dramaturge. This is because his memoir drama detour from extant works in the field of verbatim dramaturge. *A Dance of Beasts* for example lends credence to this regard. From the opening of the play, the reader is introduced to a text message sent to the Narrator by Prof. Dennis Akoh as well as the projection of a daily publication on Punch Newspaper of August 11, 2016. From pages 10 to 23 and from 28 to 47, Ojoniyi releases his arsenal of verbatim documents to stake his un-dead stance. What is important here is that almost half of the play is not solely the creation of Bode Ojoniyi. They are verbal presentations contained in both electronics and print forms. These electronics or print data are collected and presented as dialogue in the play. Ojoniyi is more like an aggregator of these data; a kind of researcher-createur and an imaginative journalist that dramatizes news reportage. This is evident in the presentation of factual data from pages 69 to 79 where the screenshots of WhatsApp chat threads between co-conspirators journalist were added as part of the dialogue. The conversation takes place in the UniOsun Forum on WhatsApp, a group where the blackmailed is a member. It is through the hand of transcendental intervention that the co-conspirators failed to realize that the subject being blackmailed (Wale) is within the WhatsApp group. He is spoken about as if absent ye present. He attains a status of invincibility in his pursuit for justice thereby reasserting his being-Beast stature as earlier noted by Sisyphus. Within the plots of the two plays, he displays his invincibility by overcoming diverse dramatic situations thrown at him. He overcomes 'death' by dying in the process of his new *becoming*. Hence, rather than conclude the dramatic action with a dirge, Wale (Narrator), the voice from whom the dramaturge speaks in the play, celebrates the aspersion (or is it lionization?) of his cosmic pursuits whilst directing the attention of

the readers to the debasement of supposed intellectuals in contemporary Nigerian society. Narrator says:

...Our play must not end with a dirge. Sing “Ere la o f’Omo ayo se!” Let the whole world know that we are the disciples of the Beasts and that this is a dance of the Beasts with the Beasts and for the Beasts! (*Dance of Beasts*, 63).

The above concluding remark sums for the reader the quintessential spirit of Bode Ojoniyi’s dramaturgy, dying, deadness, un/deadness and above all, the existential question of ‘choices’. Rather than take the path to suicide which classical existentialists are known to favour thereby leading human society to dirge, Ojoniyi chooses otherwise—to celebrate his becoming.

Conclusion

The Nigerian theatre scene has produced diverse playwrights-dramatists of different ilk with varying thematic or ideological commitments. Whilst the playwrights within the first four decades of Nigerian literary drama have been eulogized for the quality of their dramatic output and canonized, the works of more recent playwrights have not been given the same attention that the pioneering playwrights enjoyed in spite of the universal currency in the works or experimentations of emerging playwrights. The memoir drama of Bode Ojoniyi, like many other recent drama experiments, is one of the works that have received very little critical attention. His works is laden with over-current of artistic ingenuity considering how his two memoir dramas import verbatim theatre to the Nigerian theatre stage; and more, tailored to fit the fine arts of playwriting in a way that the Nigerian drama critic has never imagined. Only Wole Soyinka has successfully imported and tailored verbatim acts in the same way Bode Ojoniyi has done in *For the Love of Sisyphus* and *A Dance of Beasts* so much so that the leitmotif of myths is not lost in the plot. One thing Bode Ojoniyi

brings to the acts of verbatim theatre is his trifocalization of existentialism which he hinges on dying (a process), deadness (a state) and the un/dead (a penumbra—partial shadow) consciousness in his plot structure so much so that his readers or actors are compelled to experience two of the three forms between dying and un/deadness—all putting a question mark on existence.

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