

Living Culture through Children's Plays: A Close Reading of the Folklore-Based Plays *Akpokplo*, *Gates to Mother* and *the Perpetual Stone-Mill*

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Abstract

*This paper examines three folklore-based plays meant for children. Our objective is, firstly, to explore what contribution the dramatisation of our folklores could make towards protecting and growing our culture in order to safeguard our distinct identity as a people in the face of challenges posed by the thrust of science and technology which is inexorably globalising the world. Secondly, it is to help rejuvenate the study and practice of our folklore because the kind of ebullience that greeted the University of Ghana's Children's Drama Development Project, from which the three plays in this study emanated, appears to have waned over the years. The three unpublished plays are Kofi Anyidoho's *Akpokplo*, Joe Manu Amponsah's *Gates to Mother*, and Sebastian Kumuar's *The Perpetual Stone-Mill*. In *Akpokplo* the play moves from one traditional way of life to another. For instance, the children play games, tell a story and then pose philosophical questions. We travel from light-heartedness (the game of hide-and-seek) to an equally light-hearted play in logic and then to a serious phase where philosophical questions are raised. The other two are thematically existentialist, while *Gates to Mother* appears to be a surrealistic representation of a troublesome boy's futile journey to the 'ghost land' to look for his deceased noble mother in order to escape the vagaries of life, *The Perpetual Stone-Mill* presents an Ewe folktale that is symptomatic of the Akan Ananse stories. We see Yiyi, an 'over-reacher,' cheating and futilely snaking his way to undeserved fortune.*

Keywords: culture, folklore, folktale, spirit world, fantasy, existentialism.

Introduction

The folktale is a big subset of folklore which is one of the most important means of expressing African culture. Various views have been expressed on the value of folklore in the African experience and development. Barbara *et al* (1961) writing on Nigerian folktales have asserted that in spite of the growth in formal education and, "... despite a marked increase in the literacy rate, the oral tradition is still very strong..." Cowley (1971) in an open lecture at the University of Ghana, Legon, also emphasises that "... folklore, i.e. orally transmitted tradition, is not at all limited to the illiterates in a literate society, but rather can be found at virtually every level in every society, and is in no danger of *dying out*."

The folktale is one of the most functional aspects of the traditional verbal art, and through it the beliefs, mores and social attitudes of the people are transmitted from one generation to another. So powerful is this medium that it survived the destructive influence of missionary activity and colonialism. The irony, however, is that in contemporary Africa there is a dearth of official patronage of this cultural means of expression, especially, as an academic area of study and

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investigation. In view of this, one cannot say with any measure of equanimity that the highly educated segment of our people knows and gives it worthy notice. Hence, Sutherland (1976) describes as 'unfortunate' the necessity to encourage our playwrights to acquire more knowledge of their own indigenous games in the first place. She explains that

... the necessity arises because of the dreadful history of how these games have been discouraged, or virtually banned by educational policy; neglected or regarded with disdain in educational institutions.

Why have traditional games been discouraged and virtually denied by officialdom? Intellectuals concerned about the deliberate desecration of African culture and who are also concerned about the need to reassert African values ought to remember that for one thing, the mission of the West to Africa after the partitioning of the continent was largely a cultural one. Dzobo (1981) has pointed out that:

the West through its missionaries accepted the 'burden' of destroying, undermining, denigrating and subverting the indigenous African culture and alienating ('saving') Africans from it through vicious and transcendentalised propaganda and through the medium of paternalistic gospel.

In fact, since the early nineteenth century it has been the overweening ambition of Christianity to 'save' Africans from their presumed primitive cultures. According to Poku (1970) Casely-Hayford, in his book *Ethiopia Unbound*, reports the imperialists at a conference as saying,

We shall go to the Ethiopians (Africans) and shall teach them our religion and that will make them ours, body and soul – lands, goods, and all, for all time. And the saying pleased them all.

For our purpose the veracity or otherwise of Casely-Hayford is immaterial. It is the persistent danger of acculturation that confronts Africans and their culture (and for which reason his words are so meaningful and necessary) that is germane to this paper. Have the Europeans, after all, not succeeded in that mission Casely-Hayford exposes? Indeed, has the implied prognostication of the cultural and mental enslavement carried in Casely-Hayford's claim not been proved accurate in actuality? Mbiti (1979) sees modern Africans as living in "two half cultures" which he describes as "shallow at least on African soil." He declares:

It is a culture of the alphabet and comics, of pop music and the transistor radio, of television and magazines with pictures of semi-naked women, of individualism and economic competition, of mass production and ever accelerated speed of life.

That is why we think Sutherland's call above imposes an intellectual responsibility on African writers to take a critical look at the need for the literary expression of African culture through dramatised folklore. Fortunately, some of the playwrights under the auspices of the Children's Drama Development Project started doing that in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the folksy plays analysed in this paper we find that the stories provide themes on morality and

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existentialism, among others, and children as well as adults learn lessons from them for the promotion of traditional culture.

Akpokplo

Kofi Anyidoho's *Akpokplo* begins with a play and 'play' is the language of children. This introductory play of the children involves word-juggling which excitingly establishes an uncanny rapport between the characters and the audience. The children display a lot of maturity and intelligence in handling words to prepare the minds of the audience for the philosophical questions to be raised later. The following is an illustration:

Atsu: Who are you, I say?

Voices: Who are you, we say?

Atsu: Your mother.

Voices: Your father.

Atsu: Look, if I get hold of you, you'll see.

Voices: See, if you get hold of us, we'll look.

Atsu: All right, come on here, if you're your father's sons.

Voices: All left, go off there, if you're your mother's ghost.

Thus is the audience, particularly that part with adult prejudices and subterfuges, pulled to the level of children and thus, too, is the audience purged of prejudices in regard to children's intelligence. To that extent we have fascinating audience-conscious opening. The popular game of hide-and-seek of normal village children follows, during which the audience is tantalised by a seemingly foolish laughter by one of the players called Senyo who remarks tongue-in-cheek that: "if I, Senyo Katakumbe, am not a human being, how can Akpokplo be even an animal?" We see a pattern emerging; in fact, the target of the abuse, Akpokplo, is not around but when Atsu insults Senyo the latter in turn rather insults Akpokplo, all in the course of the artistic enactment of a folk-game which both pleases and instructs. Just before Akpokplo himself appears, Senyo extends his vilification of the former into a song of abuse in which he picks on Akpokplo's unattractive features. He describes Akpokplo as having the eyes of a toad and also that he has no buttocks at all. We note that a story is being told, hence Senyo's song of abuse which is in the tradition of Ewe halo poetry. This type of poetry is very abusive and bitter in tone and is often a running commentary on others. And so, Senyo, in spite of Kokui's admonition, goes on with his abuse of the innocent Akpokplo. Ironically, Kokui suddenly joins Senyo in abusing Akpokplo:

Senyo: Akpokplo is a sack of fresh cassava dough.

Kokui: His mouth spreads from ear to ear.

Senyo: His ears like tobacco leaves.

Kokui: His ears like sails.

Senyo: Yes, really like sails.

There is humour in spite of the song of abuse and we find that the value of the play is embedded in its dramatic presentation of a traditional art form which is expressive and which in a way encapsulates the African's pride. This heritage which appears to have been submerged in a cultural mix-up following alien evangelism and colonialism which saw it as profane, undesirable and unworthy of study in schools, is being restated here with poetic poignancy. Through folklore

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Africans are able to explain the whys and the wherefores of nature or creation and this fact is captured in the unfolding drama.

In the traditional African scheme of things there are causal relationships in almost all things that happen in human affairs. It is the philosophy behind traditional scientific exploration of the universe and human existence. Anyidoho appears to be engaged in such a scientific investigation in the explication of Akpokplo's creation and near-hideous appearance. The play moves from the known ugly features of Akpokplo (and therefore the familiar physical entity) into a rather detached and weird realm as Akpokplo whispers the question: "Do you know what happened to my head?" Akpokplo answers his own question in a way that may confound or befuddle non-Africans and alienated Africans alike because of the apparent superstition. However, Akpokplo is gifted with a supernatural capability to see beyond mundane things. Although it appears surrealist, it is by this means of gifting humans, animals and even non-living things with supernatural insights that we are able to probe into what defies ordinary comprehension.

This approach may be similar to the Euro-American scientific means of exploring nature and it is an important source of much native wisdom. According to Akpokplo, when God created him he was not ugly but as he stood drying in the sun he saw that God had made an ugly creature because He (God) had been very busy, as always. Akpokplo laughed and angered God whose "long arms stretched out and clapped my head." Though not yet dried he jumped into his mother's womb, an act which resulted in his poor features. Two major lessons may be gleaned here. First, the tale tells us that the African concept of God was not received from the tutelage of evangelising colonisers. In other words, the tale deprecates the assertion of the paternalistic alien religions that God, the Supreme Being, had no place in African consciousness before the coming of the missionaries and that Africans only worshipped rivers, trees and stones; second, like the Bible, the tale condemns those who deride God. Akpokplo laughed at God and God's "long arms" (a vivid symbolism of omni-presence) punished him.

Akpokplo then claims that God has forgiven him and so would have to go back to him for the necessary corrections to his ugly features. This means death; but "life here" on earth "is big fun" and Akpokplo must play with his friends before the destined end and return to God. The ensuing play is a lesson in logic for the children. Kokui is not and does not want to be a witch; Senyo is not and does not want to be a wizard. Akpokplo points out to them that if they are accusing each other of witchcraft and wizardry then their parents are evil people. They protest against this but Akpokplo pricks them more: "Does the crab ever give birth to a bird?" They have given themselves a very simple lesson in logic and they understand that. We notice, as Sutherland (1976) puts it, that,

... as the children play the game while dramatising the folktale, the game becomes a vehicle for lessons in the folktale while sustaining interest and enhancing enjoyment. The children have had a lesson in logic but then there is what appears to beat logic: "Why do people die?" When people die "where do they go?" and, "where do people come from any way?" Silence is the answer. The children would like to know but even their parents do not appear to know; certain complex questions in human existence defy quick solutions and glib answers. We think that the inability of the children (and by extension the playwright) to answer those fundamental questions of human existence clearly provokes deep reflections in the minds of the audience, condensing the atmosphere and thereby encapsulating everyone in its movement.

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The art form that has been drawn upon in *Akpokplo* is a significant factor in the total contribution of the people to the development of philosophy and humanity in general. It is an art which helps to sharpen the child's intellect whilst making them appreciate the value of their culture. Indeed, *Akpokplo* carries in its movement what Sutherland (1976) calls "authentic expressibility" because it is an example of the work of an artist who has made an adequate observation of children and also because the play represents children "faithfully in its artistic scheme and expression."

From the above, we find that the domains of folklore are limitless. Folktales can scan physical existence and rummage through the subterranean realm as well as the firmament. But while in *Akpokplo* we only have report of what happens in Heaven, in Joe Amponsah's *Gates to Mother* we experience a visual exposition of what exists outside our own world. We note that in the denouement of *Akpokplo* one of the unanswered philosophical questions posed is where people go when they die. The answer is provided by *Gates to Mother*. People go somewhere when they die but one's fortunes in the after-life are determined by the nature of life one leads in the human world. Of the subterranean world we have a graphic representation in *Gates to Mother*.

Gates to mother

Our folktales allow easy interaction among humans and those of the spiritual realms. Indeed, as Mbiti (1979) succinctly states, in the African peoples' spiritual and for that matter cultural world, "... the spiritual universe is a unit with the physical, and that these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw the distinction or separate them." In *Akpokplo* and *Gates to Mother* the spiritual and physical worlds indeed dovetail into each other. Thus, in *Gates to Mother* Amofa through whom we scour the underworld for knowledge is not dead. He is a victim of excessive abuse from his step-mother, something that is not an unusual phenomenon. Amofa himself is a troublesome boy and therefore adventurous. He takes the seemingly crazy decision to go into the subterranean world to look for his mother. Initially, we may be confused by this weird decision but the decision springs from expediency. The tale, like modern science, has a didactic objective of exploring the unknown and the means is justified by the end achievement.

Amofa's journey begins at the first gate to the underworld where he meets Kayera who advises him to return to "live in the world again" since "only the dead ones pass this side." But Amofa who has "passed through the anthills" and seen "great crows on the silk cotton tree" cannot return to the world of the living. He tells Kayera,

I drop like flies into the sea,
And from the boat that sets out
I shall have to take the net
To fish for the good.
Spare me my life,
My dear mother is waiting for me
In a beautiful place,
I am troubled in the world.

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The image of flies dropping into the sea conjures a pathetic spectacle that demonstrates Amofa's haplessness. If his journey is terminated and he is unable to see his mother he might be condemned to a life of terrible labour in the physical world. The above speech which he repeats at the second and third gates becomes his armour in his precarious adventure to his mother, Densu, whose good deeds when alive is his second and most powerful armour. Indeed, when Kayera who has been moved to pity hears Densu's name he kindly comments: "Densu? Oh, she was a good woman and she continues to be good." For this reason Kayera facilitates Amofa's journey by giving him three 'asaman' (that is, ghost) coins one of which he is to offer at each of the next two gates. At the second gate Amofa encounters Sasabonsam, "keeper of the gate to the red river with jewels more precarious than gold." He threatens to devour Amofa, but after hearing about the dangerous journey he has already undertaken and also that he is the son of the good woman, Densu, Sasabonsam, like Kayera, tells Amofa: "Oh, son, pass on, for she was a good woman and she continues to be good." The same pattern is followed at the third gate which is manned by Akro. He threatens Amofa with a painful death if he does not go back but Amofa replies that if he goes back, "the woman at home will kill" him. Akro also makes a similar comment when he hears that Amofa is Densu's son: "She was a good woman and here, we all like her." Amofa ultimately reaches the land of ghosts where he meets his mother. However, there is a frightening snag; if he can live with his mother in the 'ghost land' he would need an *asaman* coin. Remembering that at the first gate Kayera had given him coins he is elated but this immediately 'vapourises' when he realises he has lost the last coin in his haste. He has seen his mother but cannot touch her; a yawning chasm separates them.

We notice that Amofa is able to make the hazardous journey largely because of two factors; first is the ill-treatment he suffers in the hands of his step-mother as a result of his own stubbornness; second, and most significant is the uprightness of his mother while alive and even in death. Uprightness therefore is the moral of the play. Obviously, Amofa and his mother are morally poles apart. He is not only disobedient but also hasty. No one would want to undertake that perilous adventure unless they are stubborn, and his inability to achieve his aim, in a way, foreshadows what Detsoevi tells Yiyi in our next play, *The Perpetual Stone-mill*: "Yiyi, hasty climbers usually suffer sudden falls." Indeed, the two plays' existentialist approach is didactic and profitable as the children are sensitised to the need to be good and upright since they would ultimately be responsible for their actions. Amofa wants to die before his time but this is not in tune with the laws of nature albeit it is part of the play's universe of fantasy. Indeed, the play brings to mind Amos Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952) with its investigation into something beyond the physical world. In *Gates to Mother*, perhaps Joe Manu Amponsah's presentation of Sasabonsam appears to be the most fascinating thing. In our folktales, Sasabonsam is the supreme epitome of evil but in this play he is seen astonishingly certifying the virtue of righteousness. Thus, through Sasabonsam children are brought to the awareness that for the righteous there is a special place of rest after death. Again, judging from the hazards Amofa undergoes and the futility of his mission, children are educated that they risk their happiness in the other world if they do evil and are uncontrollable and hasty.

One striking feature of the play is that it is set in a world in which the barriers between humans and spirits are dispensed with so that they all interact on the same plane. This is done to facilitate investigation of our complex physical world and the beyond. After rummaging the spirit world we discover that there is no short-cut to salvation. Amofa comes very close to salvation yet remains very far from it. What *Akpokplo* and *Gates to Mother* succeed in doing therefore is that

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they, as noted by Owomoyela (1979), present some of our "behavioural values" and the cumulative wisdom of bygone ages to the present generation thereby preserving "them for posterity."

The Perpetual Stone-Mill

We have another case of fantasy where a stone produces corn-flour in Sebastian Kuamuar's *The Perpetual Stone-Mill*. For many, including most educated post-colonial Africans, a situation where a mere stone produces corn flour may be rather problematic but we need to understand that it is in the grain of African culture to peruse spiritual phenomenon in order to understand the universe.

The central concern of Kuamuar's tale is the menace of greed; his main character, Yiyi, who will not live and let live, and who ultimately suffers ignominy, is presented as greed incarnate. The play falls directly into the corpus of our folktales. Yiyi, in fact, is the Ewe version of the popular ever-cunning Ananse of the Akans, also of Ghana. Ananse's subterfuge is of such a monstrous proportion that, save God, no one ever escapes from his web of greed and trickery. In Akan folktales he very rarely suffers sanctions, punishment or even a mere reprimand. However, what we have in *The Perpetual Stone-Mill* is unique; Yiyi cheats his benefactor of his property but uncharacteristically he is unable to get away with it. This is unique and the author's technique of using a narrator to explain things is equally unique.

Unlike the other two playwrights, Kuamuar uses a narrator whose role is to ensure the conscious involvement of the audience in the play's movement. Sutherland (1976) attests to the effectiveness of the audience-consciousness of the play and the use of the narrator. According to her, during one of the test-productions of the play the audience who were largely children thought that they were actually being ordered to go away and some even got up when the narrator asked, among other things, "what have you come to do here?" at the very beginning of the play. One of the children registered his protest: "I have paid ten pesewas!" and when the narrator said further, "You'd better go back home" one boy replied, "then give me back my ten pesewas." The narrator, as if really accosting them then asked, "Are you still determined to stay?" to which came the emphatic answer, "Yes!" By this device the children, and for that matter the audience, are motivated or stimulated to ensconce themselves in the play's rendition. Much might be lost if the playwright allows their maturity to cloud their judgement so that they are unable to go down to the child's intellectual level. Through Kuamuar's dramaturgy, therefore, the seemingly disingenuous behaviour of Yiyi in depriving his own son of his *akple* (an Ewe dish) would make much sense to the children and prepare them to rejoice when they see the greedy Yiyi in agony in the play's exciting denouement.

There is famine and not even the cunning Yiyi whose otherwise famous belly has dwindled, has been able to escape the scourge. In such circumstances children are the most vulnerable lot who deserve kindness; but there is nothing like kindness, sympathy or pity in Yiyi's psychology. He is shocked that there should be "noises of joy" in Detsoevi's house and so he sends his son, Dzeha, to find out. Dzeha is to pretend he is fetching burning charcoal. When he returns to Yiyi, Dzeha is holding *akple*. Instead of allowing the hungry boy to eat the food, Yiyi cunningly cheats him out of it: "What poison? Who gave you this? It's bad. Turn your back and let me throw it away." Yiyi actually eats the food and pretentiously bemoans someone's treacherous attempt to

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kill his son. However, if only Yiyi can “get another lump like that!” He compels his son back to Detsoevi's house and again cheats him out of the food he gets. For the third time the greedy Yiyi sends Dzeha to Detsoevi's but this time round the nonplussed Detsoevi gives him an insulting admonition: “... tell your mother to learn how to light a fire properly.” Detsoevi nonetheless gives the boy some more food which is again eaten by the unscrupulous Yiyi. Clearly, Yiyi's behaviour at the expositional stage of the play leaves the audience bemused and depressed as they yearn for a reversal. The benevolent Detsoevi reveals the secret source of his happiness to Yiyi and promises to take him to that source upon Yiyi's promise to keep the transaction secret. The avaricious Yiyi immediately swears by his dead father's coffin and declares: “I will never tell what you say to anyone on earth, under the earth, in the sky or ... not even to my wife Funo.” Thus, Detsoevi gives his word that they would set out “when the chief's big red cock crows at dawn.” But immediately Detsoevi leaves the scene the impatient greedy Yiyi laments,

But we have the whole evening
and the night to wait before
the cock crows! I wish I had
the power to push back the sun
to the East now and call the red
cock's attention to it! Get back to the East
and give us light!

Even though it is only tomorrow that they would start the journey and Yiyi is in cahoots with Detsoevi, greed needlessly throws the former into insomnia. He cannot wait till the crow of the red cock. So, even before the chicken “settle down to sleep,” Yiyi wakes up his neighbour and pleads with him to start the journey. This peremptory behaviour compels Detsoevi to issue a new condition: “If the chief's big coconut falls come and call me.” This instruction makes the impatient Yiyi to throw needless tantrums. He just cannot wait till the coconut falls and so decides to try another trick. We do not forget that Yiyi and cunning are synonymous but his cunning is not used for the common good; egocentricity is his all. His deeds, his avid propensity to move from one repulsive act to another is such that we wish for some divine intervention. Yiyi cannot wait till the coconut falls. Therefore, he embarks on another bizarre subterfuge; he forces his son into a sack in order to drop him like a coconut from the rafters,

I have told you already about the plan.
Now, when I let you fall from the rafters,
Please for our stomach's sake, don't shout.
Be a man.

Yiyi's evil deed does not escape his neighbour's watch and as he goes for the second time to his door Detsoevi teases,

Well, how is your son faring from the fall?
Have his ribs been broken?
I woke when he fell and saw him
scrambling up the wall.

Obviously, Detsoevi needs not honour his promise but the story cannot terminate here because it must demonstrate what greed and avarice finally lead to. That is the meaning of Detsoevi's

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caution, "Yiyi, hasty climbers usually suffer sudden falls ... stop being anxious." Yiyi fails in his dangerous experiment with his son's life but until he falls into the sea like a fly there cannot be any let up. He steals Detsoevi's hunting bag, punches holes in it and lines it with ashes: "Yes, that will leave a trail which will give him away if he goes without me." Indeed, by this means he is able to visit the "marvellous grove" and returns with much corn-flower. But then, greedy people are invariably clever cheats and Yiyi is symbolic of that trite truism. At the beginning of the penultimate scene the narrator asks the audience: "Why is it bad if someone tells you that you are as greedy as Yiyi?" Not surprisingly, one week after knowing the sacred grove Yiyi muses: "This stone-mill, I must get for myself." He tells Detsoevi that when he was going to sleep he recalled what his grandfather Ayitevi had told him before, that

the stone-mill grove was found by
my great grandfather before the
Ashantis crossed the Volta into
Ewe-land. It was handed down to
my grandfather and to my father,
and by virtue of my birth it
became my bona-fide property.

Yiyi has become more than an 'over-reacher' and there is the need for an intervention. The narrator does this by trying to appeal to Yiyi's conscience:

Yiyi don't do it. You don't live in
this world alone. You can't own
everything in it alone. The greedy
belly is bound to burst with the
slightest strain. Don't try to seize
the stone-mill for yourself alone.

Here again, we see the effective use of the narrator as a device. He intervenes at the appropriate time to make the audience know the direction of the play. He sums up the general feelings of the audience who have been moved to pity and fear by Yiyi's destructive behaviour and through him we anticipate what might befall Yiyi.

Yiyi returns to the sacred grove and brings home the stone-mill. In the safety of his room he hopes to have absolute monopoly of the stone and thereby enjoy an easy source of food and wealth in these times of hunger and poverty. However, the mystery stone's haven is not the vile Yiyi's house. It refuses to come down but sits on Yiyi's head still producing corn-flower to fill the calabashes of the choruses, (that is, the representatives of the people.) Partly to save himself from his agony and partly to deny the people more corn-flour Yiyi runs away amidst hooting to the sacred grove to put the stone-mill back in its proper place.

The Perpetual Stone-Mill is a masterpiece and undeniably a glittering evidence of the richness of our oral tradition. Greed has its nemesis. Yiyi's greedy escapades please no one, and through the dramatisation of the folktale, children and society in general get positive delight and instruction.

Conclusion

We have endeavoured in this paper to re-ignite a vigorous interest in the study of African culture through dramatised folktales for Ghanaian and, for that matter, African children. It is this paper's standpoint that through the dramatisation of African folklore, African culture could be re-asserted to deprecate western assertion that the African had been oblivious of culture until he was cruelly robed in European religion and culture. Indeed, through acculturation present-day Africans have virtually come to accept everything European or American as the *ultima thule*. This tendency is what ought to be repudiated by African intellectuals, particularly, literary writers by studying and expressing our folklore for the edification and mental emancipation of the African child. According to Lynch (1971) E.W. Blyden, commenting on the mental enslavement of Africans, declares that,

the African has been made to disregard anything African. He even sometimes accepts that he himself and his culture are inferior to the European and European culture. There is even a want of faith in anything remarkable done or projected by their own people.

Appalled by this dangerous self-abnegation, Blyden feels that,

... it is incumbent upon the intelligent among the African race, to discountenance as much as possible this servile feeling, and to use every means to crush it wherever it appears, for its influence on the mind and the morals and general progress of the race is fearfully injurious.

We note that the injury has already been done but the thesis of this paper is that in spite of that unsavoury historical development, a conscious effort to inculcate in African children a study of African culture, especially through our folktales, could lead to a cultural renaissance. Immorality, fuelled by a blind imitation of European and American cultural mannerisms, greatly assails African societies today. And, as the three plays explicated in this paper demonstrate, unless vices like violence, child-disobedience, oppressive parental behaviour, greed and avarice among a myriad of other challenges are targeted for control in educational policy, from African perspectives, Africa would continue to be disparaged in the world's inescapable globalisation process because we would only be mimicking the ways of the white people. Therefore, it is worth giving an ear to Dzobo (1981) who justifiably points out that the true identity of Africans and their culture is found

... in the essentials of the culture, such as the concept of life and man, of human relationship as a category of being and in the tenets of the value system, and in the logical structure of the African mind and being. It is in the fundamental orientations of life that we see the essentials of the indigenous African culture.

Finally, in the effort to teach and promote African culture Blyden's admonition below may be instructive, especially, for African writers. According to Curtin (1972) Blyden said, while addressing the Freetown Unity club in 1903, that

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Your first duty is to yourselves... You need to be told to keep constantly before yourselves the fact that you are Africans and not Europeans, black men, and not white men – and that in your endeavour to make yourselves something else, you are not only spoiling your nature and turning aside from your destiny, but you are robbing humanity of the part you ought to contribute to its development and welfare.

It is the reason the study and dramatisation of African folklore should be considered utilitarian enough to merit pragmatic attention. We believe that the value systems and the generality of African culture could be studied, enriched and promoted through folklore-based drama to generate the new African child.

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