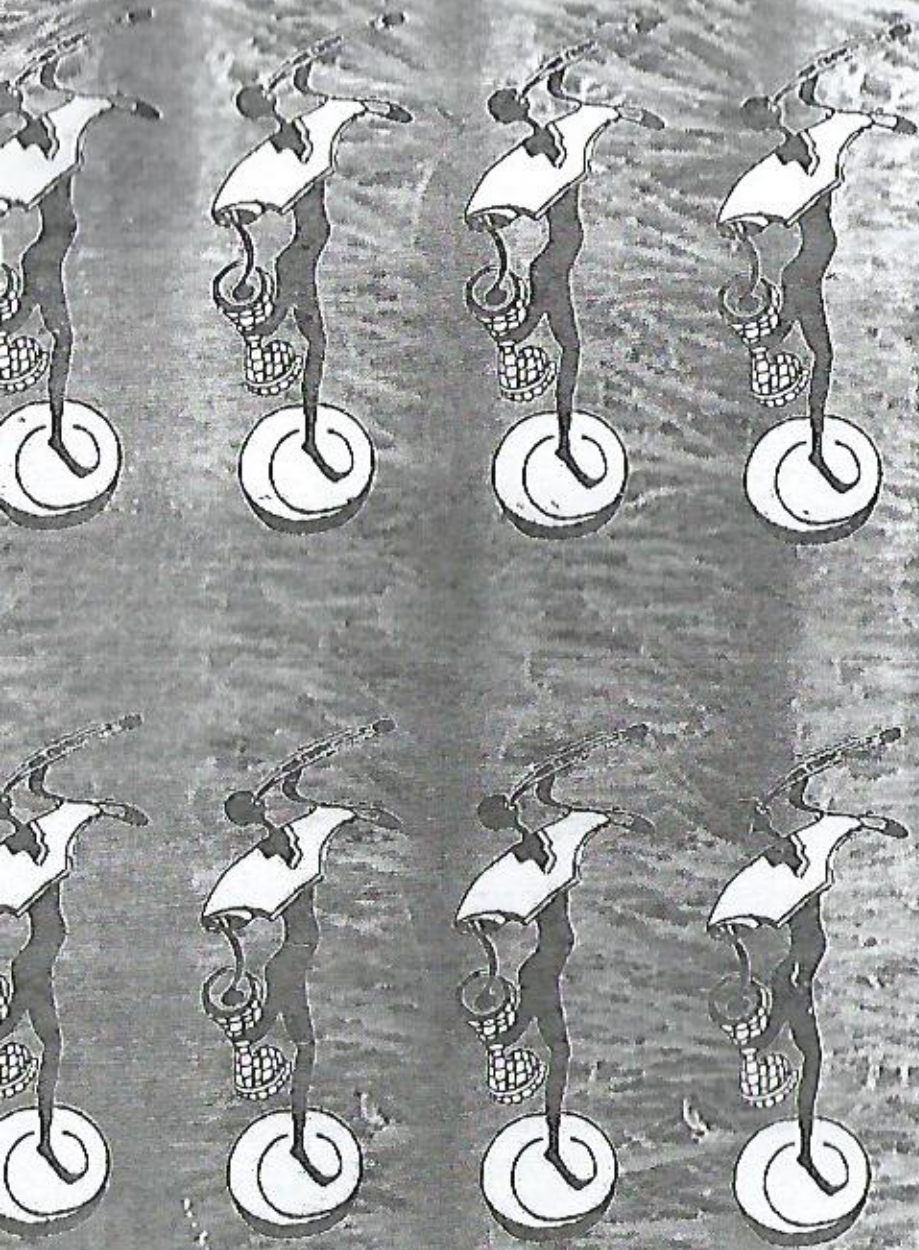


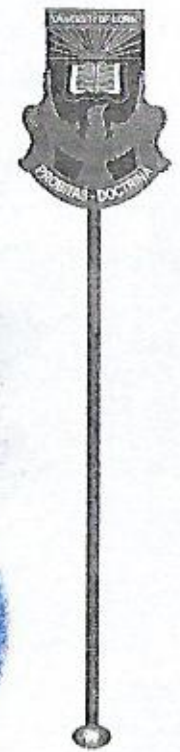


ILORIN JOURNAL OF THE PERFORMING ARTS VOL. 7(2005) and VOL. 8(2006)

ISSN 1595-0972

# The Performer

ILORIN JOURNAL OF  
THE PERFORMING ARTS



VOL. 7(2005) and VOL. 8 (2006)

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*The Performer* is published by the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The editor welcomes articles in any area of the performing arts. Reviews of relevant publications as well as of performances will also be considered for publication. The journal is published once in a year. All correspondences, inquiries and articles should be addressed to the Editor, *The Performer*, Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

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# The Performer

ILORIN JOURNAL OF THE  
PERFORMING ARTS



Vol. 7, 2005

Published by the Department of the Performing Arts,  
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|                  | Dollar  | Pounds | Deutschmark |
| Individual N500  | \$30    | #25    | 35          |
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*The Performer*: Ilorin Journal of the Performing Arts  
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## **The Transference of the Aesthetics of Folktales on the Nigerian Mass Media: A Case Study of Kwara State Television (KWTv)**

By

**Fatima Binta\***

### **Introduction**

Folktales are oral narrative stories, culturally composed by adults, for inoculating children and adolescents, into the norms, social dictates, rules and regulation of the community. They are stories meant to aid children acquisition of cultural codes of conduct, taboos, mannerisms, societal expectation and practices. Children become acculturated with the structural ingredients, put in place, in forms, theme, plot, characterization and settings of the stories. The stories are given didactic tones in order to perfect their function. The timing of folktales is also at moonlight times, when both children and adults are at leisure or relaxation after the day's hard work. Folktales therefore are meant to serve both didactic and entertaining purposes. Mass media folktales serve as purposeful portrayals of cultural constituents through use of gadgets. Haynes (1997:18) describes mass media story telling forms as: "an existing art with features, put on air and screen publicly with the use of projectors or television monitors".<sup>1</sup>

The art of folktale is from the traditional practices of the people and as the case is in natural setting, the mass media also at achieving effective communication and realization. The duty of educating, moralizing, entertaining and interpreting culture through the use of mechanical gadgets is the main concern of the media. Hence, the attempt is to capture considerable aesthetic consciousness. This is why the television in particular carries out the processes of planning, writing editing, practicing, directing and designing before acting. However, this attempt by the mass media to, retain, develop and possibly improve tradition becomes ironical as certain aesthetic values become degenerated in the process of transference and can actually not be visualized.

This article supposedly negates the generating conception that mass

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media presentation of folktales is a technological lift of the native tradition. The two modes of folktale presentations should be viewed as different art forms, each having its unique principles and forms of aesthetic. The aesthetic status of the mass media folktale presentation has been observed to be far below the more popular cultural perception, of folktales in the natural environment.

Quite glaring to a layman, is the fact that the mode of transmission of stories by the mass media is foreign and has its own internal logics, merits and demerit. The questions that readily come to mind are:

- (i) Does the Nigerian media form of story telling adequately transmit the culture of the Nigeria people?
- (ii) Does the media actually function as a culture-re-awakening forum?
- (iii) How resourceful is the technological art?
- (iv) Why are folktales considered essential in the mainstream of global art?

Generally, story - telling in the natural setting are tailored toward educating the young ones in line with cultural requirements while those presented on media programmes are rather entertainments, comic relief and critically minded using sensitive and emergent voices. The function of the mass media presentation of folktales is also political, as opposed to the social communal function of traditional folktales. Folktales therefore serve as communication medium in both cases between the young and the old members of the community.

### **A Qualitative Assessment of Nigerian Folktales**

The most important function of Nigeria folktales, samples from Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Efik, Nupe, Ibibio e.t.c is the teaching of moral lesson and tradition, directed at the young children, across the different ethnic settings.

Folktales introduce to Nigeria children, the cultural practices of their immediate societies. These include their customs, cultural, political institutions, hierarchical orders of age groups and titles, expected behavioural altitude and ideologies. The stories are waved around the peoples' general beliefs, metaphysics, cosmology, worldview and vision. Through folktales, the Nigeria child learns the basic philosophies of life and how they affect him or her. Folktales help to further expose the child, to the general universe. Folktales develop in the child the power of rhetoric and eloquence in the use of the native language. They also develop a sense of communal responsibility and collectivity in the child. Folktales give the child the knowledge and skills on how to solve individual problems and problems that can affect the society. Hence, children develop, meaningful

psychological and physical traits through story-telling sessions. And since folktales deal directly with rural and peasant aspects of the culture, they also expose the child to the ability to control and manipulate his environment, this physical environment includes the sounds of birds, movement of waters, times of seasons, voice of rain, thunder, use of leaves for herbal cure.

Folktales across Nigeria settings are flexible and not fixed. And for this reason, they are at the service of the individual composer even right there during performance. Children within the cultural system are expected to learn how to sing and compose different types of songs and rhythms that could be used to accomplish the appropriate moods and themes. Among the qualities of folktales are, familiar range of tricks, verses, drama plays, nonsensical songs, tongue-twisting rhymes and so on. With this capability and ability, the child unconsciousness heralds his/her initiation into adulthood.

A Nigeria child, for this focus, might compose a song about his father's activity or about another adult and sing it out. Folktales are dependent on culture. They are unlike media programmer's view, experience and technical observations. There exists close intimacy between actual creation and onward transmission of folktales to children in the traditional setting. A kind of direct communication close rapport among children and adults exists, in the community. The child or adult narrator (as opposed to the view of the media recorder) even has more visual resources at his disposal, in spite of lack of projectors and other gadgets.

The narrator is face to face with children and he or she takes due advantage of this, to enhance his compositional variation and change his mood, as he moderates the story to suit the situation at hand. The quality of unending continuity is also apparent in the plot development of traditional folktales. As stories are being told, they are adjusted and expanded based on the reactions/response and emotions of the children who serve as the audience in this case. The stories are also open to reactions according to the human behavioural developments as they are meant and designed to check such. Music by clapping, and beating of mere available objects and dance, act as the sustainers of children's interest. Performance in oral narratives is therefore, essentially exhibited, in the said dance form and this itself contributes most importantly to the child's comprehension of the picture being presented. Besides, as the child participates in the chorus, his interest is not only being sustained but meanings and situations are being revealed better. Truer and clearer pictures are seen as a result of the personal participation of the audience in the performance. Hence, traditional folktales serve as cultural repertoire and archives for the Nigerian populace

and the media. How then do we retain these crucial aesthetic parts aforementioned in folktales when it comes to the recording and interpretation of them on the screen?

The major finding of this article is that direct rendition before a live audience and instances of the practical bearings in folktale performance are difficult to bring on television screen. Some of the other visual resources quite natural in traditional folktales such as character imitations, dressing, costuming, cultural accoutrements, bearings of the performer, dialogue insertions, all manipulate the audience's sense of humor. These elements are rather polished and decorated on media programmes. And implanted skills and external devices decolorizes the essence of the elements. Continuity of delivery and spontaneous rendition of intuitive knowledge at the traditional setting, aid Aesthetic effectiveness. Aesthetic effectiveness includes language use in specialized cultural nuances, such as proverbs, involving wits and humor that give a perfect environmental relaxation.

Linguistically, Nigerian folktales have elements of antithesis, parallelism, metaphors, symbols, contrasts and other stylistic features, i.e. one animal's behavior may be put in contrast to the other, in order to bring out more vividly, the good and bad aspects of human life. The animals, in such cases, become symbolic of man and his characteristics. The purpose of such intrigues of life is to put children through with societal expectations, manners of behaviour and clarify societal taboos and negations. Hence, the traditional narrator initiates, innovates, invokes and coin new forms in the process of his/her compositions. He even does it with accuracy and authenticity from memory and artistic acquisition, of the culture, he has imbibed since birth. Therefore, orders i.e. sequence of events and episodes are never the same even in similar stories and this is in essence, what Finnegan (1968:9) refers to as "one of the charms of native tales". Finnegan's notion of 'charms' includes the dynamic nature of African folktales. She presents traditional folktales has living events not as history that is fold in the remote past. The stories are adoptable to developments and adjustment based on the source and background. The existing themes of folktales therefore, serve as the root from where the branches of similar stories across the nation grow. Hence, children audience identify themselves with the narrator.

Challenges and clarifications at times are requested by the young folk in the process of narration. For this, the audience also asks questions at random, because, they have enough time at their disposal, and have the opportunity of the narrator's presence before them. This opportunity is not opened to the viewers on the television programme and those outside the programme. Tales generally therefore, are part of the didactic aesthetic

framework that define the societal set up, and which children need to know as they grow. Folktales further serve as elements of controls in the society. And communal common beliefs and general social relationship, claustrophobic nature of being, are part and parcel of the discourse in the societal tales. And on the screen, there are loss of symbolic values of culture as there is no physical representation of a live environment. No room for free compositions, restricted language usage and format. Language use and story formations are over-developed and become ambiguous, flamboyant, full of assumptions and generalized concepts, which all together make the stories on the television too unnatural and artificial.

#### Comparism between Traditional Folktale and the Television Media Folktale Programmes: Kwara Television (KWTV) as an Illustration

On the screen creation of the illusion of reality is inadequate. And this is further accentuated by other observants. According to Odekunle (1997: 11) the pattern of timelessness, for example, incorporated in the oral narration is not achieved by modern technology". Odekunle presupposes that ideas either-to contrived in media folktales, are given wider and freer imaginations in the oral traditional setting. The oral narrator has so many resource repertoires to exploit. But the screen narrator can use only a few of this resources and even then he uses them ineffectively and with difficult despite gadgets.

Kwara State Television Service improvised a folktale programme titled "Kiddies World" in 2004, it is a programme presented for children and adults consumption on the screen. It is scheduled to be presented every Thursday at 8.00pm. The series of stones are usually programmed to last not more than 30 minutes. The setting of "kiddies world" is an open serene arena around the television house involving orderliness and calmness of the children to enhance effective recording of the programme. The natural essence of passer-by is lacking besides the assess to sticks, -tins, gourges, buckets and other objects beaten for interplay and reinforcement of mood is hundred. The time of this type of folktale on the television can not be at night i.e this type of folktales is not means for relaxation. The purpose is perhaps to indicate bring children together under a collective forum and at the same time, develop their intellectual acumen. this why questions are raised, at the end of the stones for children to answer. Kiddies world like traditional folktales begin with the opening formula's such as story, story or once upon a time. Its themes range from tortoise and the pig, the elephant and the animal grasshopper, the hare and the dog e.t.c problem of famine or hunger are created in the animal kingdom by story teller who takes due advantage of the to develop his plot into conflicts and climaxes. The

resolution accentuates the didactic function of the stones character portrayal is enhanced by what each of the animals' do. Tortoise for instance is presented as a cunning, greedy and lazy animal. Dog on the other hand is very hardworking. Songs are used as choruses that cushion, the diverse moods and themes at each point in time. In one of kiddies world series II the animals went looking for tubers of yams in the elephants farm. The Elephant ran after them both. But dog was able to escape while tortoise was caught and taken to the kings house and killed. The hare that stole 50 eggs in one of the stories and kept the eggs in its ears does not only have its ears enlarged but also vomited all its life.

The characters are usually animal characters such as the tortoise, hare, lion, cat, rat, monkey etc. The animal figures are used to indicate the supremacy of man among men in addition to the exposition of man's greed, wickedness, and instability. The stories are didactic in nature as they usually teach lessons and these lessons are usually accentuated by the narrator and chorused by the children audience". Kiddies World" is a Kwara Television prearranged, revised and well-structured programme. Benches are arranged in a circle, with the narrator on a chair in the middle of the children-audience, the presupposed relaxation mood is however, not achieved through this structure even though themes are borrowed from the existing folkloric literature. For instance, in a story "why the tortoise has cracks at its back" there is a etiological explanation of the present reason for certain misfortunes. Children are rather exposed to trickster figures, fearsome stories. This media house tries to embellish, what is already in existence, but, the traditional oral narrator creates and re-creates stories based on his intuitive knowledge.

One wonders whether the purpose of the media programme is perhaps to help children understand specified terminologies, programmed for their development in languages use. However, part of these terminologies may be out of children's cultural context, as they are more likely to be political terminologies rather than socio-cultural ones, for a clearer distinction.

Osundare (1951:4) tabulates a contrastive summation of traditional folktale production and the mass media folktale programmes as follows:

| Traditional Folktales Narration                  | Television Folktale Programmes                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| i. Phonoaesthetic/oral/natural setting           | i. Programmed/graphemic/written for production on transmission |
| ii. Timeless                                     | ii. timed                                                      |
| iii. Communal/Social                             | iii. societal/political                                        |
| iv. Use of the reasoning Faculty for creativity. | iv. Textual references are used to aid memory.                 |
| v. Has more ear or auditory effect.              | v. Has eyes or visual effect/fantasy                           |
| vi. Face to face contact with the audience.      | vi. Instrumental contact external audience.                    |
| vii. original innovations                        | vii. Adaptational recordings                                   |
| viii. More effective for communication           | viii. Less effective in communication/one sided communication. |
| ix. Natural composition.                         | ix. Artificial and over blown composition                      |
| x. Permanent (daily use)                         | x. Temporary (weekly programme)                                |
| xi. Dependent on intuitive knowledge.            | xi. Dependent on memory, cramming and interpretations.         |

### Conclusion

The conclusion is that 'new' globalization is holding tight to the 'old' global village patterns. The former is however not able to do that effectively. The question therefore, is how does the village-globalize itself as well is through the manufactured media gadgets? Where lies the globalization in developing countries taking Nigeria as a case study? Is it not the developing nations actually globalising the gadget world in this sense?

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