Dramaturgy and Playwriting in the Theatre: Concepts of Conflicting Identity.

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Abstract
This paper is an attempt at providing a template for the discourse of dramaturgy and playwriting in the framework of the theatre. It is motivated by the powerlessness of some scholars to juxtapose dramaturgy and playwriting professionally, thus, muddling both concepts and creating conflicting identity for budding academics in the theatre. Scarcity of rules or ideas that can guide students in the art of dramaturgy and playwriting in a profession where almost everybody calls dramaturgy playwriting and playwriting dramaturgy, hence, there should be an urgent clarification. An accidental sampling of the practice of playwriting shows that many people out there do not fully appreciate the concept of dramaturgy and how it works in an organized theatre. In differentiating dramaturgy from playwriting, this paper observed that dramaturgy transcends a passionate narration of experiences and entails a distinct creative art which equally requires training. In effect, the study posited an intensified research effort that would sharpen the line between dramaturgy and playwriting. The constant exposure in the practice will be clearly evident in the contemporary thinking of theatre practitioners.

Introduction
The theatre appears as one of the oldest and most popular forms of entertainment in the world in which actors perform live for an audience on a stage originally created for such wonderful purpose or in other space designated for the performance, i.e. an improvised stage. The space set aside for performances, either permanently or temporarily, is also known as theatre. The concept of the theatre has since attracted wide explanations, interests and sophistications on how the theatre business is originated, preserved, organized and managed, in rewording Milly S. Barranger in *Theatre: A Way of Seeing*, he submits thus:

> A theatre director in Britain by name Peter Brook has advocated that for theatre to take place, an actor walks across an empty space while someone else is watching. In this empty space, called a stage, actors present themselves in a story about some aspects of human experience. The actors, the audience, and the space are three essentials of theater. The fourth is the performance, or the actors’ creative work in production. The performance is very often a play—a tragedy, comedy, or musical—but it need not be. Theater performances include vaudeville, puppet shows, mime, and other forms of entertainment. (40).

Anthropologists, those who study humankind in all its aspects, especially human culture or human development which differs relatively from sociology in taking a more historical and comparative approach and theatre historians, experts in the study of the chronological account of past events of a period or in the life or development of a people, an institution, or a place, trace the origins of theatre to myth and ritual found in dances and mimed performances by masked dancers during fertility rites and other ceremonies that marked significant passages in life. Untimely societies acted out patterns of life, death, and rebirth associated with the welfare of village tribes. Imitation, costumes, masks, makeup, gesture, dance, music, and pantomime dramatization were some of the theatrical elements found in early rituals. At some unrecorded time, these ceremonies and rituals became formalized in dramatic festivals and spread west from Greece and east from India. Essential to the theatre experience is the act of seeing and being seen. Etymologically talking, the word *theatre* is derived from the Greek word *theatron*, which
stands for ‘a seeing place.’ Right through the history of world civilizations and cultures, actors have used a variety of locations for theatre, including amphitheatres, churches, halls, marketplaces, garages, street corners, warehouses, open fields and formal buildings. It is not the building that makes theatre but rather the use of space for actors to imitate human experience before audiences at any given place and period that makes it.

Besides, the actor and the audience in a space, a written or improvised text - the script, costumes, scenery, lights, sound, and properties (props) play active role in the theatre. A good number of theatrical performances require the collaborative efforts of many creative people working toward a common goal - the production. Theatrical texts often referred to as drama; usually provide the vital framework of a performance. One of the most outstanding classical Greek philosophers and theorists of all times Aristotle, writing in the 4th century B.C. thought of drama as the most direct response to humanity's need to imitate experience in his illustrious treaty branded as the Poetics (335 B.C). The word drama has its source in the Greek verb *dran* which is translated “to do,” “to act,” or “to perform.” Aristotle further defined drama as “an imitation of an action...” His concept of imitation (mimesis in Greek) begins with the playwright's deliberate selection and arrangement of events, words, and images into a dramatic pattern that makes up a meaningful course of human events. In Aristotle's famous definition, drama is an “imitation of an action that is whole, complete and of a certain magnitude or scope...” (15).

Theatre can be designed to entertain, instruct, motivate, persuade, and even shock the audience with maximum reality. Nevertheless, suchlike the intentions of the playwright, dramaturge, director, performer(s), and crew, the result depends on the interface with an audience. The audience affects the performance by providing the performers with immediate feedback, such as laughter, tears, applause, or silence. Each night there is continuous interaction between the auditorium and the stage. Finally, audiences make their judgments known through their attendance or nonattendance. They support what appeals to them and generally fail to support what they find repugnant, offensive, or incomprehensible.

Theatre is a diverse and complex art. It requires collaboration among many artists, crew, and managers in order to create a performance for audiences. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, theatrical events have included such production elements as costumes, scenery, properties, music, and choreography. Lighting and sound are additions that are more recent. Each element in today's theatre has its own playwright, designer, composer, or choreographer, who collaborates with the director to focus the audience's attention on the actor in the special environment or seeing place. The theatre regardless of size or purpose requires artistic, managerial, and technical people as part of a permanent staff to prepare and present productions on a predetermined schedule. Commercial and noncommercial production staff vary only in size and complexity. The artistic or creative staff consists of a director, designers, and actors. Sometimes a playwright, dramaturge (literary manager), choreographer, musical director, composer, voice and dialect coach, and fight director are added to the staff when necessary and affordable. The administrative staff includes the producer, casting director, managers, box-office personnel, publicist, house managers, and ushers. The technical staff includes the stage manager, production manager, technical director, construction staff (scenery, costumes, and properties), sound and electrical technicians, and running crews. In smaller nonprofit, educational, or community theaters, personnel may assume responsibility for several positions or duties.

Representational theatre is a term often used to describe an approach to accomplishing the goals of playwrights, dramaturges, etc. A representational style of production evolved in Europe in the mid-19th century as writers, directors, and designers set about to show candid truths about ordinary existence within recognizable environments. Two movements—realism in the 1850s and naturalism in the 1870s—presented familiar characters in specific environments, such as living rooms, kitchens, or flophouses. The purpose of the detailed environment was to show how a person’s character and life choices are determined in part by environmental or social forces and in part by gender or genetic forces. Visual elements—such as clothing, furnishings, and stage properties—became very specific to the environment. Actors worked within a picture-frame stage—a stage separated from the audience by an arch or
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rectangular frame—with the understanding that the imaginary fourth wall of their environment was removed to allow audiences to look into the lives of the characters. Dramatists who pioneered the writing of plays for the new realist production style include Henrik Ibsen of Norway, August Strindberg of Sweden, Émile Zola of France, and Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov of Russia.

The concept of playwriting and playwright

A play is a creative and artistic letter composed by the supposed conscience of the theatre, first and foremost to the director, actors and other members of the production crew, informing them of his current ideological standpoint, vision and positive commitment to the development of his society. The supposed conscience of the theatre weaves the society of his play through: plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle.

The term playwright appears to have been coined by Ben Johnson in his Epigram 49, To Playwright, as an insult, to suggest a mere tradesman fashioning works for the theatre. He always described himself as a poet, since plays during that time were always written in meter and so regarded as the provenance and ascription of poets.

A “Wright” is a skilled worker. The word carries an implication of superior craft, a pride in one’s work, and respect for one’s materials and equipment. There are nice images as “shipwright” and “wheelwright”; one senses a fascination with quality. “Wright” however suggests ideas about years of apprenticeship, careful work techniques, a concern that project be completed correctly regardless of personal sacrifices. The same images are found in the playwright. The playwright creates, fashions, builds, models and remolds. He also works within physical parameters and lays a foundation upon which pieces are interwoven. The term is not a variant spelling of “playwrite”, but something quite distinct: the word Wright is an archaic English term for a craftsman or builder (as in a Wheelwright or Cartwright). Hence, the prefix and the suffix combine to indicate someone who has wrought words, themes, and other elements into a dramatic form, someone who creates plays. The homophone with write is in this case entirely coincidental. Playwriting has seen many definitions by different authors; hence, Chris Nwamuo defines it thus:

Playwriting is the art of creating replicas of human actions rather than the mere recording of it, as in the novel or responses to such actions as poetry. It is an academic discipline, an adjunct of critical studies and a scholarly activity involving the recreation, reorganization and amplification of human experiences with a view to improving the human beings (qtd. in Ohiri 1).

Playwriting as a profession is a body of imaginative literature composed creatively for the purpose of sanitizing the society. No wonder Bamidele volunteers that:

Imaginative literature is a reconstruction of the world seen from a particular point of view which may refer to as abstract idealism of the author or the hero, while the writer may be aware of literary tradition, it is the unconscious reworking of experience, fused with his own definition of a situation and his own values that produce the fictional universe. (14).

From the above, it is obvious that playwriting is a cerebral activity engineered by creative imagination. Therefore, it is not merely a letter but a creative one that articulates the vision of the playwright in a given period of human experience, it involves some rules and conventions that are peculiar alone to its practice. It involves the dramatic composition of a play which Yerima observes as “a letter from the playwright to the director, actors, and other members of the production informing them of a particular vision of his or hers” (15). Collaborating with the above ideology, Robert Cohen observes that:

Since drama is a branch of literature, and since many dramatic authors begin (or double) as poets or novelists, it seems convenient to think of playwriting as primarily literary
endeavour, as simply one of “writing”. This perspective, however, obscures the fact that the “playwright” is not simply a “playwright”, and that playwriting always entails considerations not common to other literary forms. By homonymic coincidence, “playwriting” sounds like an extrapolation of “playwright”. But etymologically, the word “playwright” is parallel “wheelwright” or “shipwright”: as a shipwright is one who makes ships, a playwright is literally “one who makes plays; not one who merely writes them. (qtd. in Ohiri 2).

He argues that the distinction is fundamentally vital, since some plays, or portions of plays are never written. He observes that improvisational plays, certain rituals, whole scenes of comic business, subtextual behaviours, and many documentary dramas are created largely or entirely in performance and are learned through oral improvisation and repetition. The playwright is concerned with creation of scripts.

The concept of dramaturgy

Broadly speaking, dramaturgy is a peculiar and practical branch of the theatrical arts which involves bringing productions to life on the stage. It is the art of dramatic composition and the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage. Brockett observes that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing coined the word Dramaturgy as the position of dramaturge was always traced back to Lessing (306). Cardullo in What is Dramaturgy?, posits that “Dramaturgy is a distinct practice separate from playwriting and directing, although a single individual may perform any combination of the three” (4). Cardullo further stresses that “Dramaturgy today denotes the multifaceted study of a given play, its author, content, style and interpretative possibilities, together with the historical and intellectual background” (3). This evidently implies that dramaturgy goes beyond playwriting alone; however, some dramatists combine writing and dramaturgy when creating a drama. Others work with a specialist, called dramaturge, to adapt a work for the stage. Dramaturgy may also be understood more broadly, as shaping a story into a form that may be acted. From the above submissions, one can put forward that dramaturgy is the science and principles of dramatic composition of plays. Dramaturgy gives the work or the performance a structure. From 1767-1770 (Lessing) wrote and published a series of criticisms entitled the Hamburg Dramaturgy (Hamburgische Dramaturgie). These works analyzed, criticized and theorized the German theatre, and made Lessing the father of modern Dramaturgy. Brockett volunteers that:

The dramaturge is not a recent innovation. In Europe the position is usually traced back to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, an eighteenth-century German playwright and critic. In 1767, upon being asked by the newly created Hamburg National Theater to serve as its resident playwright, Lessing declined but proposed instead that he become its in-house critic, offering advice on the selection of plays, critiquing the company’s productions and publishing a journal through which he sought to influence public taste by setting forth his theories about the nature and purpose of drama (306-307)

Dramaturgy is a scholarly and artistic activity engineered by creative imagination. It is the art and techniques of dramatic compositions and theatrical representation. Therefore, it is not merely a letter but a creative one that articulates the vision of the dramatist in a given period of human experience, it involves some rules and conventions that are peculiar alone to its practice.

Another important work to the Western theatre tradition is the Poetics by Aristotle written around (335 BC). In this work, Aristotle analyses tragedy. He considers Oedipus Rex (c. 429 BC) as the quintessential dramatic work that has remained an epitome in all ages. He analyses the relations among character, action, and speech, gives examples of what he considers good plots, and examines the reactions the plays provoke in the audience. Many of his "rules" are often associated with "Aristotelian drama", wherein deus ex machina is a weakness the action is structured economically. In Poetics, he discusses
many key concepts of drama, such as anagnorisis and catharsis. In the last century, Aristotle's analysis has formed the basis for numerous writing guides- stage, screen (film and television), radio, etc. The Poetics is the earliest surviving Western work of dramatic theory. Probably the earliest non-Western dramaturgic work is the Indian Sanskrit "Natayasatra" ('The Art of Theatre') written about 100 AD, which describes the elements, forms and narrative elements of the ten major types of ancient Indian dance dramas.

Dramaturgy is a comprehensive exploration of the context in which the play resides. The dramaturge is always the occupant devotee, authority, specialist, buff, and an expert in the neighborhood of dramaturgy considering the physical, social, political, and economic environment in which the action takes place, the emotional foundation of the characters, the variety of allegorical cum figurative expressions in the play of thematic concerns; as well as on the methodological consideration of the play as a piece of writing: structure, rhythm, flow, even individual word choices. Whereas a dramaturge can be playwright, dramaturgy is a much broader field. Dramaturges can equally write plays, but they can as well edit and restore plays, support with adaptations of stage works, and work on musical productions such as operas. A playwright may work with a dramaturge on the development of a play, and dramaturges can also be retained by composers as consultants. In addition to being involved with the language and music of the stage, dramaturgy also involves staging itself, including blocking of actors, set design, and the aesthetic composition of theatrical productions. It also includes choreography and position of aesthetic elements on the stage, amid dramaturges study topics like lighting design, costuming, props, and set design in the course of their training. It equally involves criticism from the theatrical point of view, which is why some theatre directors, producers, and advisors are trained in this area.

**Functions of a dramaturge**

The position of a dramaturge in a production can be quite varied, depending on where he or she trained and the philosophy of the theatre the dramaturge is working for. Generally speaking, dramaturges function basically as literary managers whose job according to Brockett include “finding, developing or shaping scripts or as production dramaturges whose focal point is working directly with the directors on specific productions of plays” (307). In contemporary theatres, the dramaturges have been boxed into literary management as Brockett volunteers that “Literary managers read, or arrange for others to read, scripts…. Literary management may also include new play development. This involves working with playwrights to help them realize the full potential of their scripts” (309). The dramaturge finds plays from the past that seem particularly relevant to current interests and issues. In considering plays for production, one of the dramaturge’s duties is to unravel the mystery behind the scripts, period and the writer’s ideology. The dramaturge prepares the script for translation if it is written in a foreign language and adapts them to suit the present circumstance. It is worthy of note for us to understand that the production dramaturge works for the most part intimately with the director, however, working with the designers, and other members of the production crew, as well as those commissioned with publicity and programme designers are all his responsibility. Because of the high-handedness of some dramaturges, some directors refuse working, seeing them seeing them as commandeering their functions with them. The production dramaturge helps the director in decision making through asking fundamental questions seeking for proper clarifications on the goals of the production and interpretation of the scripts to suit the contemporary audience. It is in the domain of the dramaturge to research the writer’s life and writings in an effort to understand more fully the concerns that shaped the play. The dramaturge for the purpose of easy realization of the script, explores the period or cultural milieu of the writer and the positions of critics and reviewers as touching previous productions. All these efforts are to assist in increasing the voice office and audiences’ interest to theatrical productions and the director’s understanding of the scripts and the context of existence. On the dramaturge’s relationship with the commissioned publicity managers and programme designers, Brockett submits that “he supplies them with information about the play, its past production, or other matters that will help those who do publicity to make the play more attractive and accessible to an audience” (312). Finally, the dramaturge is concerned with ensuring that the final version of the script realizes the playwright’s intentions and that those intentions are embodied on the stage. The dramaturge is the person who acts as the advocate for a play and also serves as the
person who provides all of the contextual and historical research. Basically, he is the walking library of a production.

**The Reason a Dramaturge may not be a Playwright: Positions of Dramaturges and Playwrights on their Discipline.**

The reason a dramaturge is not a playwright and playwright a dramaturge cannot be overstressed as their ideological standpoints differ and vary relatively from each other, thus, the first question that appears very convoluted for people to answer is: Who is a dramaturge, what is dramaturgy and why is dramaturgy different from playwriting? To answer these questions, let us make an attempt listening to dramaturges describe the subject matter and elucidate their roles in the theatre.

A versatile, rapid and unpredictable former artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre, Robert Brustein submits that “The most delicate and difficult function of all remains that of internal critic—finding a way to communicate your views about particular productions, and about the conduct of the theatre, without arousing the defensiveness of the artistic or hurting the feelings of the company…As the humanist in the woodpile, it is the dramaturge who must act as the conscience of the theatre, reminding it of its original promise, when it threatens to relax into facile, slack and easy path” (qtd. in Brockett 313).

But the famous dramaturge to Iowa playwrights workshop, Art Borreca is of the view that “Dramaturgy, that ambiguous profession, may be ambiguous partly because its products are invisible. Dramaturgy contributes criticism and scholarship as well as emotional, moral, and psychological support of the theatrical process, but its products and effects are not as visible to the naked eye as the work of the directors, performers, and designers” (qtd. in Brockett 313).

This position was taken to the next critical level by a no nonsense production dramaturge, Michael Lupu, a senior dramaturge, Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, thus, “dramaturgs—that is, individuals holding such a paid or unpaid position in a theatrical institution—not necessarily indispensible. But dramaturgy—that is a complex, creative, intellectual activity inherent with the universe of drama and theatre—is indispensable. There is sufficient proof that bringing a play to life on stage can happen without the involvement of a dramaturg. For practical purposes, though, the production will fail or will not happen at all if dramaturgy is blatantly ignored” (qtd. in Brockett 313). This point is further buttressed by Mark Bly, an associate artistic director of the Yale Repertory Theatre and chair of the playwriting and dramaturgy programs at the Yale school of Drama like this, “When pressed for a definition of what it is that I do as a dramaturge, both in a rehearsal hall and in the theatre at large, I generally answer, ‘I question’… On individual projects, the dramaturge can be that artist who functions in a multifaceted manner helping the director and other artists to develop and shape the sociological, textual, directing, acting, and design values” (qtd. in Brockett 312).

It is worthy of note that the dramaturge serves a multidimensional critical and advisory function, assists in articulating the production, seeks to help define, clarify, redefine and refine that vision during rehearsals, seeks to prepare audiences for experiencing the results after the production ends. On the other hand, playwrights’ comments on playwriting show that the profession is indeed different from dramaturgy in the theatre, thus, Arthur Miller volunteers that “The very impulse to write, I think, springs from an inner chaos crying for order, for meaning, and that meaning must be discovered in the process of writing or the work lies dead as it is finished” (qtd. in Brockett 302).

Marsha Norman, a critical playwright submits that “I’m a purist about structure… In plays you have eight minutes at the beginning in which to let the audience know what’s at stake, who this is about and when they can go home. I think audiences get real nervous if you don’t do that” (qtd. in Brockett 301). For George Bernard Shaw, “Only geniuses can tell you exactly what is wrong with a scene, though plenty of people can tell you something is wrong with it. So take note of their dissatisfactions, but be very careful how you adopt their cure if they prescribe one” (qtd. in Brockett 301). In some practical cases the playwrights present an outline, situation, or idea to a group of performers who then improvise on this material; a story, movement, and dialogue, the dramatists select and shape what seems most effective.
until a script has emerged but the situation is otherwise for a dramaturge whose job basically is consulting the playwrights for the directors as they help the director ascertain the playwright’s ideological standpoint, social vision, motivation, aim and objectives for embarking on such project, etc. The dramaturge holistically demonstrate himself as a professional in-house critic, offering advice on the selection of plays, critiquing the company’s productions and publishing journals with the power of influencing the public taste by setting forth theories about the nature and purpose of drama. In some situations, the dramaturge appears like a mere messenger of the director describing to the writer what they find in the script and asks if that is what was intended and if the opinion differs, in discussing with the playwright, he helps in clarifying the writer with distinction on what he is seeking to express and in other cases, he appears as a chief executive officer or a powerful mysterious monster in a production, usurping the authority of the director and causing countless delays and pains for productions.

In conclusion, playwriting is in free variation as the writers have different compelling approaches in achieving and expressing their thought pattern while dramaturgy is in complementary distribution, complementing the works of the playwrights, directors, actors and all members of the production crew, offering positive and valid points that in most cases, advances the goal of every production. The playwright and the dramaturge perform different functions, task and activities in the theatre, their duties frequently congregate. The playwright is primarily interested with the creation or making of the scripts, whilst the dramaturge’s activity lingers within the realm or ambit of ensuring complete realization of the playwright’s script - vision, desire, ideology, intensions and thoughts and all these are made flesh on the stage through the effort of the artistic director.

Works Cited