IGBO CONTEMPORARY DRAMA:
EARLY BEGINNINGS, BIBLIOGRAPHY AND
CLASSIFICATION

The Early Beginning

Apart from the traditional Igbo drama, the Igbo have a written
drama which is a little more than two decades old. The first Igbo play
appeared in 1974 with A.B. Chukwuz’s Ugo Ka Mme. In that same
year, Uma Ejime, written by Onyechere Mezu, appeared also.

Ugo Ka Mme is a tragical comedy and a satire in which envy,
greed and valuing ambition near their ugly heads as Obiakwe, the
protagonist, usurps Maduka’s piece of land. This inordinate ambition
leads to a total breakdown of law and order, permanent disruption of
social and economic life between two sister communities, Umunna and
Nelupu. Eventually, the two families engaged in the land battle enter
into marriage relationship, and peace reigns again. Uma Ejime, on the
other hand, is a comedy - a comedy of errors - in which two identical
twins separated early in life, cause a lot of mistaken identity and actions
to a point of serious crisis. At last, when they come together face to
face, the ugly situations created are totally resolved in the amusement
and joy of all.

With these two plays, Igbo written literature added another
dimension to its growth. The first was the novel which made its debut in
1933 with Pita Nnamdi’s Onyeoma, a biography of Chief Igwegbe Okon,
alias Onyema, of Anaduzia. One would want to probe the cause(s) of the late arrival of
the Igbo play, 41 years behind the prose fiction. The following reasons can be
adduced:

Firstly, Igbo written literature as a whole was born into the era
of Igbo orthography controversy which raged from 1929 to 1941, the
bitterest of its kind in the world of literary studies. A new orthography,
the ‘Africa-Script’, designed by the International Institute of African
Languages and Cultures (IIALC) for the development of African
languages had been introduced. Many languages of Africa accepted
and adopted it, but for the Igbo, it sparked off a controversy which
retarded Igbo studies for three decades. The CMS, one of the leading

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have a written first Igbo play. In that same period also, in which envy, Ogbuewe, the dinar ambition for disruption of the Umunna and cross over to Efik, on the one hand, two identical forces and actions are together face to the amalgamation... added another undue to depict in Igbo theatre, the arrival of the Englishmen can be seen into the era 29. In 1964, the renaissance in Igbo theatre, and the increasing interest in their language studies. They preferred speaking English and writing in English to speaking Igbo and writing in Igbo. This assertion is best appreciated in the following statement by Okigbo (1957):

"...the boy experienced an "awakening of interest in literature" but it was not a genuine and continuing interest in VERBAL ARTS, Grammar, the children, having been taught to read vernacular prose, were tested on by their parents so as to teach them the language of opportunity. In this way he knew and gained a position of power in the colonial and post-colonial social and administrative order in Nigeria, but the new language was exploited (p. 99)."

Sixth, apart from gifted playwrights like Chukwuem  and Menzi who are not in Igbo studies, there were no formal educated Igbo in the art of play-writing. Had there been dramatic arts graduates in those...
years, perhaps, Igbo drama could have made its debut earlier than 1974. To justify this statement, it was only when some works graced the Igbo studies from the 1970s that there was an upsurge of Igbo plays as we shall see in the bibliography.

Severally, the Osota Market Literature noted the show from Igbo plays. Many of this ‘popular’ literature were plays, and the Igbonian, perhaps, thought that since there were plays written by Igbo people in the medium of English, there was no need to do the same in the vernacular.

The State of Igbo Plays Today: A Bibliography

Despite the late arrival of the drama in the theatre of Igbo literature, a reasonable number of plays has been recorded. This researcher could not, however, retrieve all that have been published since there is no one central publishing house or a depository where all can be collected, therefore, a very few may have eluded this list. In the following bibliography, we shall adopt J.B. H. Hart’s (1967) style of using dates (beginning with the earliest date of publication) as the prime factor of documentation instead of the alphabetical order of authors’ names so as to show some sort of progressive order, beginning from 1974 when the first Igbo written drama appeared.

The Plays

1974 - S.O. Mere - Ouma Kinta - Black Academy Press
1977 - B.I.N. Osogbo - Nwa Ngwet Poo Este - UPC
1977 - I.E. Amezi - Odihya - Oxford
1977 - Onuguma - Ogunzota - Macmillan
1979 - W. Emele - Echi Di Jen - Macmillan
1979 - C. Chukwu - Ogunzota - Macmillan
1979 - J.C. Madumtoro - Otu Mepi - Longman
1980 - G. Echendu - *Ujoma - Evans*
1980 - K. Ogie - *Obi Nuwe - Evans*
1980 - G.O. Orjiah - *Nwata Rie Awp* - UPC
1981 - M.L. Okoro - *Ugori* - UPC
1982 - G.O. Oyekanwo - *Obi Uyak Dau Obosu* - Longman

Igbo Drama: A Classification

Apart from the conventions of Comedy and Tragedy, Igbo drama, following themes which they reflect, is divided into subcategories: Ambitious and Good; (1) Folklore As at today; Igbo - *Ogban'j* - by the Odube Artists; legendary wrestler who wrestled it. Aljama - the human, the animal in the human and animal worlds are
than 1974, the number of Igbo plays as we know them is Igboemmen, to I-go people in vernacular. A striving of Igbo a researcher in since 1974 all can be followed using dates as a factor of time so as 1974 when the

Igbo Drama: A Classification

Apart from the conventional broad classifications of plays into Comedy and Tragedy, Igbo drama may be classified according to the following themes which they reflect: 'Folklore', 'Satiere', 'Revenge', 'Vendetta', 'Agnosticism', 'Corruption', 'Family'.

- Folklore: As at today, Igbo has only one play based on folklore - 'Onye Nnuk'.
- Satiere: The protagonist, is an Igbo legendary wrestler who wrestled in the three worlds created by Chukwu阿纳: the human, the animal and the spirit worlds. His encounters in the human and animal worlds are evolved by philotheology when he tries...
After investigating the allegations of the murder of a prominent local businesswoman, the detective found evidence that linked the suspect to the crime. The suspect was previously known for his involvement in illegal activities and had a history of violence. The investigation revealed that the suspect had a motive for the murder, as he was jealous of the victim's success and feared losing control of the business. The detective's team worked tirelessly to gather evidence and build a case against the suspect. The trial was set to begin in a few weeks, and the community was eagerly awaiting justice. The detective was confident that the evidence would be enough to secure a conviction. The community was left to ponder the consequences of this senseless act of violence and the impact it would have on the local economy and society.
In Udo Ka Mma, the plot is set in a small village where the chief character, Udo Ka Mma, is faced with a moral dilemma. He is asked to officiate at the funeral of a woman who has committed suicide. The community is divided on whether the woman should be buried properly. Udo Ka Mma struggles with his own moral beliefs and the expectations of the community.

In Obioma, the protagonist, Obioma, is faced with a similar dilemma. He is asked to officiate at the funeral of a man who has been killed in a tragic accident. Obioma is torn between his sense of justice and the community's desire for closure.

In both stories, the characters are faced with the challenge of making a difficult decision. The community's expectations and their own moral beliefs collide, leading to a complex struggle for justice and closure.

This theme of moral dilemmas is common in Igbo drama, as it reflects the importance of moral values in Igbo culture. The stories encourage the audience to reflect on their own moral beliefs and the impact of their actions on others.

In conclusion, the theme of moral dilemmas is a powerful element in Igbo drama. It highlights the importance of moral values and the challenges faced by individuals in making difficult decisions.

Example Sentences:

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In these plays, the reader is made to learn some lessons from what befalls the characters or how they react to situations because experience, directly or indirectly acquired, is the best teacher in life. For example, in *Nweta Bele Agwu*, Awaon accuses his wife falsely of poisoning his food, arranges with some men of the underworld to kidnap his wife and daughter and he sells them off into slavery. After several years, he unknowingly marries the daughter of his, thus committing incest and abomination. When the hidden comes to light, he takes his life in order to evade his fate. On the other hand, his wife, Obiwa, learns the hard way for rejecting her suitor, Aweon, and sleeping with Awaon, a renowned wrestler whom she thinks is a saint.

(6) Corruption: Corruption, here, does not only mean the taking of bribes, it also includes living the negative aspects of life, such as exhibiting immoral and abased living. A character can be corrupted by power, greed, selfishness, envy, hatred, moral ambition or any other vice. In *Ogware*, Chinyere corrupts her lecturer, Dr. Emeemina, by offering him a present in order to induce him into revealing his examination questions to her. This leads to the sack of Dr. Emeemina, his imprisonment and the cancellation of Chinyere's degree result. In *Alajebipny*, the murder desire to acquire vast wealth leads Chief Alajebipny into ritual murder and which causes the disintegration of his family and his subsequent death. In *Ugbomas*, Ugboma is corrupted sexually, having pretended to be a saint for so long. At last, as in one Igbo proverb, Ugo, the king of the birds, descends too low to eat the dirty food when she (Ugboma) falls to a poor wrench in the person of Osioba who impregnates her and she faces the disgrace and satirizes of the entire community.

What we have done here is merely grouping the different genres, for it is not an easy task to classify matters of art such as novels, drama, poetry, music, painting, or sculpture. This is so because sometimes, some aspects of them defy classification since one type can conveniently fall into many other genres as we saw above. Again, this classification is by no means exhaustive and final; what we have done is to help the student of literature to appreciate literature and to have a better grip of it.
Conclusion
Judging from 1974 when the first Igbo play appeared, it is not
mistaken to say that a lot of progress has been made—over forty in
number produced in less than twenty years if we Discount the
war years (1967-1972). If we compare this number to that of Igbo
novels which are about sixty in number (cf. Nnadike, 1996) "The
Igbo Novel: A Bibliography and Categorization", There Journal of
Language, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 116-125), one is not mistaken in asserting
that Igbo drama has made a very fast progress. But whatever is the
same, the novels and the plays belong to us, and the veracity or paucity
of any one genre is to our detriment. In the light of this, therefore, all
authors should be on deck to do Igbo proud by proliferating the literary
genre, including poetry. To fold our hands is to kill our culture, our
future.

Bibliography
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Nwadike, U.U. "Research Notes" and "PO Classroom Notes".