

The Yoruba Fool Insignia: Beyond the Shakespearean Tradition

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ABSTRACT The Shakespearean fool is identified by his motley, the asses' ears, coxcomb or foxtail. He also exhibits certain characteristics and displays some antics. The Yoruba fool of Nigeria also has his/her hallmark traits which are identical to that of Shakespeare in certain respect. However, the Yoruba fool tradition on the screen veers from the Shakespearean fool culture. Unlike the western fool who is predictable to a certain extent, the Yoruba fool seems to be amorphous for s/he appears in different colours and shades. The treatise of this paper is to bring to the fore the emblems of the Yoruba fool. The study examines the paraphernalia, vis-à-vis its function. It concludes by drawing attention to the new trends in costuming the fool in Yoruba video films.

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare – employed in a general sense to refer to both his person and plays – is a global phenomenon in literary studies, and as such a number of individuals of diverse cultures who appreciate his artistic deftness have made efforts to adapt, appropriate and translate his texts into different languages other than English, which is the source language of his plays. This has implicitly or explicitly led to a form of 'cultural exchange' (Ewbank 1995:1) or 'interculturalism' (Wells and Stanton 2002: xv). The individuals have tried as much as possible to creatively rework Shakespeare as to assimilate it 'into vastly different cultural and national traditions' (Wells and Stanton 2002:xv). Many critics have since come up with studies indicating the mobile and dynamic nature of the Shakespearean plays, which include 'Shakespeare in Africa: Between English and Swahili Literature' (Mazrui 1996); 'The Example of Shakespeare: acting over and rewriting Shakespeare in Malawi, Ghana and Nigeria' (Gibbs 2001); 'Shakespeare and Africa' (Banham et. al. 2002); 'International Shakespeare' (Dawson 2002); 'Shakespeare on the Stages of Asia' (Gilles et. al 2002); 'Touring Shakespeare' (Holland 2002) and 'Shakespeare in North America' (Morrison 2002). The list of Shakespeare's peripatetic incursion to different cultures is inexhaustive.

All these seminal studies have assisted us to know different things that people of new generation drawn from different cultural backgrounds do with the works of William Shakespeare. In other words, the Shakespearean

enthusiasts have breathed new life into the sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century materials in order to attune them to their contemporary socio-political needs. This is the reason why, he 'has become many things' to different individuals, cultures and societies (Falk 1965:102). Excerpts from his works are either quoted verbatim or paraphrased to add spice to serious discourse as most of his texts have a penetrating force on the soul and nature of man in its totality. In sum, a number of people draw copious aphorisms to unleash tirade on political class that has fallen short of expectations. For instance, one of the Ogoni human activists in Nigeria – the late Ken Saro-Wiwa - appropriated Cassius' utterance in *Julius Caesar*, before the tribunal that finally sentenced him to death: 'I predict that the scene here will be played and replayed by generations yet unborn' (Gibbs 2001:13); the original utterance by Cassius is:

...How many ages hence
Shall this our scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents
yet unknown!
Julius Caesar, III, i, 111-113.

It has since been discovered that the issue of appropriating Shakespeare's material transcends linguistic realm. Some do appropriate his plots, his themes, his images or his characters. It all depends on individual whims. The Shakespearean touch, at thematic sphere, is felt in Herman Melville's writings. Falk (1965:102) reports: '... Melville was obsessed by the evil characters in Shakespeare. He was fascinated by the moral ambiguity of Edmund ... who revealed to him that "the infernal nature often has a valor denied to

innocence''. Just like Herman Melville and Henry James (cited in Falk 1965:102), the African theatre adherents in general, and the Yoruba playwrights and videographers of the south west of Nigeria in particular, are also so much in love with Shakespearean texts such that they adapt and translate these texts into Yoruba. In fact, Banham et. al. (2002:298) assert that every part of Africa re-echoes Shakespeare's nuances:

Over the years Shakespeare has intrigued and challenged African audiences, playwrights and actors. His work has been translated, closely or broadly adapted, or drawn upon in the creation of new work that relies upon its audience's awareness of and affection for Shakespeare.

For instance as far back as 1968, Wálé Ògúnnyemí had adapted Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and came up with . His characters are given Yorùbá names so as to properly Africanize his presentation. (Duro Ladipo also adapted *Macbeth*, and titled his adaptation). Of late the videographers have gone ahead to translate Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* into the medium without changing the names of the dramatis personae¹. This is beyond the scope of the present study. Apart from engaging in adaptation and translation exercise, the playwrights and videographers have appropriated the Shakespearean fool phenomenon in their presentations².

One may keep wondering why the playwrights and videographers persistently feature the fool figure that is regarded as a character of low esteem. Some reasons may be adduced for this. It would seem that the fool character has provided an outlet for the dramatists to criticize and expose the anti-social activities of various people, social institutions, and, more importantly, the political class, without fear of being prosecuted. It is through the fool figure that the ineptitude of his betters is projected. As aptly noted by Goldsmith (1974), the fool plays the role of satirist, critic, and moralist. It also affords the dramatists the opportunity to provide comic relief for the members of the audience at reasonable intervals through this jocose creature, so as to avoid a monotonous presentation that may breed boredom. The dramatists may sometimes use the fool figure as 'a mere time filler' (Videbaek 1996: 2). Besides, the fool figure plays the intermediary

role between the different characters in the play on one hand, and he equally mediates between the readers/the members of the audience and the remaining characters in the text on the other hand. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Volume IV* (1974:220) sums it up, 'The figure of fool . . . clowns, addresses the audience, and even makes satirical comments on God'. However, our preoccupation in this piece is the insignia of the fool in Yoruba plays as compared with the Shakespearean fool which happens to be one of its antecedents. The treatise will equally make reference to the insignia of the fool of the Elizabethan era. It will also consider the semiotic quality of the fool insignia.

Though Shakespeare popularised the fool tradition, the genre had been in place before his involvement in drama or even his birth. We should remember that the fool's literature flourished as far back as the 15th century in Europe with the appearance of 'The Ship of Fools'. As gathered in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Volume IV*,

The first outstanding example of fool's literature was *Das Narrenschiff* (1494), a long poem in rhymed couplets by the German Humanist and satirist Sebastian Brant, in which over 100 fools are gathered on a ship bound for Narragonia, the fool's paradise. An unsparing, bitter, and sweeping satire, especially of the corruption in the pre-reformation Roman Catholic Church, . . . (p.220)

Again, we need to recall that Shakespeare's date of baptism is documented to be 23 April, 1564, and this fell within the Elizabethan times; the Elizabethan period, when loosely applied, covers 1550 -1625. Elizabeth Tudor's reign between 1558 -1603 overshadowed the reigns of her predecessors - Edward VI (1547 -1553) and Mary (1553 - 1558) - and that of her successor, James I (1603 -1625). This is borne out of the fact that many of 'the actors, plays, theatres, and audiences continued more or less in the traditions established under Elizabeth' (Richmond, 2002:253). However, critics have come up with new classification in order to distinctively mark out the periods covered by other monarchs, hence James I period is referred to as 'Jacobean', while the time of King Charles I (1625-42) is identified as the 'Caroline' era. Some other critics have opted for the term 'Early Modern' covering 1500

– 1700, (that is, 16th century to 18th century). But, for convenience sake, in this paper we adopt the term “Elizabethan”.

Furthermore, before Shakespeare ventured into the creation of fools on stage, there was one Lockwood, who was Queen Elizabeth’s first jester; he performed as a solo entertainer round the country between 1542 and 1572. He came before Richard Tarlton, usually referred to as the ‘King’s Jester’ or ‘the Queen’s Jester’ depending on who occupied the throne. Tarlton later joined the Queen’s Men Company in 1583. It has been strongly suggested that William Shakespeare might have been recruited into that Company during the tour of the Queen’s Men to provincial cities which included Stratford-upon-Avon in 1587 (Richmond 2002:374). It is plausible to suggest that William Shakespeare possibly learnt the art of fool genre on stage from the Queen’s Men. It was not a surprise that he opted for Robert Armin, who had had a stint with both the Queen’s Men and the Company of Lord Chandos, to succeed Will Kemp, who ‘may have been obliged to leave for persistent overplaying’ (Richmond 2002:30). As reported by Richmond, Robert Armin was said to be ‘the physically ugly kind of fool’.

Going by the *Chambers English Dictionary* meaning, ‘insignia’ refers to ‘marks by which anything is known’. Different things mark out the fool in the society. Willeford (1969:9) suggests that the actual way to have deep insight into the fool’s personality is to ‘consider the physical deformity, the dress and the psychic aberration of many fools’. For instance, some fools are identified by their physiological defect – deformed, dwarfish, and crippled fools. Some may be outright imbecile fools as a result of psychological deficiency. The sociological status of the fool in society equally marks him/her out from the other beings. In short, the physiological, sociological and psychological (PSP) make-up effectively marks out the fool, as it does for other characters (Adeleke 1995, 2001). And, indeed, the Shakespearean fool has his hallmark traits that make him stick out like a sore thumb among other actors. Touchstone’s garb shows him as the court fool to Jacques at their first meeting in the forest, ‘Motley’s the only wear!’ (*As You Like It*; 2.7: 34; p 637). Generally, the fool often wears a ludicrous garb which can either be over-sized or too tight, but usually over-sized apparel that may include baggy trousers and shapeless shoes like

the ones worn by Charlie Chaplin (Willeford 1969:16). In other words, the fool is identified by the motley or the articles of dress he dons before anything else. Hear what Willeford (1969:21) says, ‘The costume of the fool actor often expresses (even more immediately than do his words, gestures, and actions) qualities characteristic of the fool’s inner life’. Wiles (1967:69) also affirms that, ‘The fool’ was a role identified by an iconographic costume; a costume containing the insignia of ‘folly’. This shows that the fool’s identity first manifests at the tangible level before the intangible; for, as Polonius declares in *Hamlet*, ‘the apparel oft proclaims the man’ (Shakespeare 1999:659; 1.3.72). In this paper, therefore, attention is paid to the fool’s paraphernalia as they give ‘symbolic expression’ as regards the problems in their immediate society. Attempt is also made to allude to the physiognomy of the fool, especially the female fool, in Yoruba texts.

THE SEMIOTIC QUALITY OF THE ELIZABETHAN FOOL’S COSTUME

The Elizabethan fool may mask or paint his face black, dress in the conventional jester’s costume of motley cap (which could be simple pointed cap tipped with a bell, or a fantastical one), and bell; put on an eared hood/ cowl-shaped hood adorned with ear, hare’s or rabbit’s scut, fox-tails, cockscombs, calf skins, long petticoats or jerkin of motley and feathers, too, small jacket, a cockscomb on the head, tinkling bells, sword, bauble, bladder or marotte in the hand, or ladle or cane, a handkerchief (Goldsmith 1974:1-5; Lukens 1977:74; Welsford 1966: 72; 121-124, Wiles 1987:183; Willeford 1969:9-24). In Barton’s (1963:221) account, ‘A pouch at the belt was part of the jester’s equipment’; other things listed include zany, a doll’s head on the end of a stick. Some of the Elizabethan fools may wear costly fabrics such as velvet, while few others do wear rags (Goldsmith 1974:3; Videbaek 1996:3). The fool’s livery could bear his master’s coat of arms as a badge (Barton 1963:219). Wiles (1987:17) reports that the English fool could appear ‘in foul shirt without a band and in a blue coat with one sleeve, his stockings out at heels, and his head full of straw and feathers’. It is important to quickly add that the fools have other colours apart from blue, and these include yellow and green, and sometimes red (Goldsmith 1974;

Lukens 1977; Videbaek 1996; Wiles 1987). According to Wiles, the fool's fantastical cap was usually in the typical colours of blue and yellow; however, the straw hat would be dyed in red and blue. In other words, the parti-coloured motley and all other articles of dress served as the emblem of the fool's office.

The insignia marked him out as a licensed fool who could babble and release tirades on his betters without attracting any penalty. It has also been suggested that the animal elements being donned by the fool shows him as 'a descendant of the old sacrificial victim', that is, the scapegoat who is 'essentially a ritual character' (Welsford 1966: 72). This scapegoat in the primitive society was made to be the carrier of all the ills and sins committed by his society (cf. Sofola 1983:141-146). Beyond this general notion, we may give a semiotic quality to the animal apparel worn by the fool in a manner as to illuminate his hallmark traits. The animal materials on the fools serve as personality metaphor. For instance, the coxcomb which is regarded as the fool's cap might suggest pride on one hand and lust for sex on the other. It is also possible to see the coxcomb as a metaphor of consciousness as it is the role of the fool to jolt his betters who are dead asleep, as a cock would do at dawn to jolt beings out of their sleep. But if it were to be a material made of hare or rabbit's skin, it would refer to the fool's ability to constantly keep his ears open as to pick up salient information, which is of immense value to both his master and the general public. This must have been hinged on the fact that the hare is endowed with two long ears. Besides, the hare's skin on the fool may be an allusion to his antics of introducing irrelevant subjects to serious discourse. This may be a subtle way of regarding the fool as a harebrained figure. The calf-skin might connote his stupidity, while the fox-tail could stand for his cunning. As regards the feathers and the bells on the fool's outfit, they suggest the merry nature of the fool. These elements may further portray him as a noisy merry maker. The feathers may signify his ability to border-cross at will; he may at one moment be a bird of height which does not fly low, and at another time, he could decide to be like a perching one on a tree or walk on land. This shows the unlimited freedom of the fool to interact between the characters within the text, and between the characters and the audience. It is imperative to declare that the women of ancient Egypt, as far back as 4000 B. C., had great taste

for clothing with feathers or plumes (Barton 1963). Even today some women adorn their hats with feathers and also use hand fans made of plumes. It may not be wrong, therefore, to suggest that the plume could be a means of making the fool an effeminate figure.

The fool figure in animal materials may signify the primitiveness of man and his wild life. The animal skins have thus presented man as 'a social animal, a tool-making animal, a speaking animal, a thinking animal, a religious animal. . . also a laughing animal' (Sypher 1981:24). We should also note with this animal apparel, 'the fool is set apart, dedicated, if not outcast, beaten, slain' (Sypher p. 40). Furthermore, we should not be taken aback if man, in his uproar laughter, laughs like a jackal, especially when in a festive mood. Man is only making recourse to the primitive stage of his existence.

The Elizabethan fools fraternized with different colours – blue, yellow, green, red, and black – that make them to be recognized. Beyond the level of beautification and perhaps identification, these colours function as language, because these colours are symbolic to both the fool and his master. Wyler (1992: 168 -169) notes that colour description in literary texts is hardly ever colour description for its own sake. Its function is to make the reader visualize a scene, or a person's coloured world where colour is part of this scene, or part of this person's world.

In other words, these colours are not an end in themselves but a means to an end, for they are communicative signs that transcend the verbal discourse, and they thus become a form of communicative metaphor or symbols (Lindgren 1997:70-73; Ogundeji 1997:145). Wyler (1992:138-139) aptly observes that 'in certain contexts' colours can 'be given specific meaning' that enable them to 'acquire significance and act as signals' 'in order to effect certain behaviour'. As a result of their contextualizations, these colours worn by the Elizabethan fools now have semiotic values other than literal or lexical values. These colours are then re-contextualized in consonance with their new environment. This is what Wyler (1992:148) refers to as 'semantic compatibility'. This has to be so for we do know that a symbol is anything which stands for another thing. However, the symbol may require a courier to give it the required 'syntactic compatibility',

to use Wyler's term. Invariably, the Elizabethan fool will now become what Ogundeji (1997:147) calls 'courier', while the colours lining his costumes are taken as 'symbols'. It then implies that the human agent as the courier of the various colours sheds more light to both the primary and secondary codes of these colours; the attributes from the primary codes are subsequently transferred to the secondary codes in order 'to establish the links of association' that will eventually affirm 'the power of colours as symbols' (Wyler 1992:154). I need to give a caveat that, generally, these colours as symbols can be utilized in 'a poly-functional' or 'ambivalent manner' (Wyler 1992: 171); this suggests that colour can take both positive and negative connotations.

A critical examination of the Elizabethan fool's costume's colours reveals the duplicity of a single colour not to talk of when these colours are combined harmoniously to evoke symbolic functions in literary texts. It will be appropriate at this juncture to recall an excerpt rendered by the Prologue in *Henry VIII* (All is True), which is said to have been co-authored by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher:

... Only they
That come to hear a merry bawdy play,
A noise of targets, or see a fellow,
In a long motley coat guarded with yellow,
Will be deceived
(Shakespeare 1999:1195).

Perhaps, if we link yellow with gold, the import of that statement may dawn on us, more so, if we then link it with the commonplace aphorism that 'Not all that glitters is gold'. This may be some sort of constant reminder to the powers-that-be that power is transient. This becomes more obvious if also we link yellow with traffic signs. Under the traffic light signs, yellow is known as amber, and it suggests either prepare to 'go' or 'stop'. This colour plays an intermediary role between green (go) and red (stop); it appears momentarily only to disappear and resurface again after a long interval. The fool as a character in drama does the same thing. Just as the amber provides the necessary link, so do the fools offer the salient connection between the various characters in the text on one hand and between the text and the audience/reader on the other. The momentary appearance will seem to suggest an erroneous impression as to the personality of the fool figure as a being too small to be valued. The

relevance of the colour to the fool's master will be in terms of the waning power. When leaves are on the verge of withering, the greenness will turn yellowish. Thus, yellow colour functions as loss of power and authority. Perhaps, if King Lear had been conscious of the symbolic function of the yellow colour, he may possibly have escaped that tragedy. It would seem that Lear had been carried away by the splendour of the colour, hence he largely relies on the face value of the colour, and that is why two of his daughters – Goneril and Regan – are able to gull him. Having been rejected by Goneril and Regan, Lear is under severe heat in the heath as he has to contend 'with the fretful elements' (Shakespeare 1999: 958; 3.1.4). The 'heat' here refers to hardship or trouble. Yellow is now associated with sun, one of the important elements in nature, though the Elizabethan 'elements' referred to earth, water, air, and fire (Richmond 2002:164).

The common norm is to associate green colour with leaves or grass. This could be a way of bringing a group or individual closer to nature. In that wise, the green colour in the fool's apparel may then suggest a forest at the deeper level. Shakespeare utilizes the forest for plot development in a number of his texts. Richmond (2002:187) attests to this claim:

One of the classic progressions in Shakespearean plots is the removal of a group or individual from a sophisticated, highly structured environment, in which individual personality is defined and secured by social consensus, to an unstructured 'natural' environment in which humanity tends to lose bearings and from which it usually re-emerges having undergone a profound catharsis, of which Lear's trauma in the storm on the heath is probably the extreme example

To then take the green colour as metaphor of 'life, freshness, or vitality' and perhaps re-invigoration and rebirth will not be wrong. This is the positive aspect of the colour signifying the youthfulness of the fool for the fool's role is usually played by a boy or a lad. At least we do hear King Lear constantly referring to his fool as 'my boy' (Shakespeare 1999: 1.4.97). In other words, the colour green lining the fool's costume seems to suggest the fool's agility as well as his immaturity. In relation to his superior, the semiotic quality will border on virility and energy. The

colour is not devoid of negative interpretations. For instance, when it collocates with other nouns in order to have compound words or morphemes, such as, 'green snake', and 'green grass', it may highlight bad nature of man. Let us consider this common statement; 'He is a green snake under the green grass'. This would definitely give a mental picture of a prankster or a sly being. And sometimes the fools do engage in pranks. It may also be plausible to insinuate that the colour in its symbolic function is 'disguise' or 'pretension' of man to others.

With regard to the colour blue, it is used as a symbol for water, one of the Elizabethan elements that had earlier been mentioned. It is impossible to sustain life without water, which, in essence, makes it a universal commodity. Then, the use of blue may be a way of presenting the fool as a companion who is invaluable to his betters in the play and to the audience. In another sense, the semiotic quality of the blue colour may suggest that the entire 'world loves a lover and that the course of true love never runs smooth' (Lehmann 1981:102). The symbols being conveyed by the red colour on the fool's costume also vary according to the persons involved. Red may be taken as a metaphor of scapegoatism or object of sacrifice, if perceived from the saturnalian angle. The primitive culture flourished in blood spilling for purification of ills in any given society. Again, it could also be taken as the symbol of love, life and royalty of the king. At another level, red could suggest aggression and danger that hover over the kingdom or society.

THE SEMIOTIC QUALITY OF THE FOOL'S COSTUME

In society, the fool's costume is at variance with the Shakespearean tradition. It is only one of the gods in the Yoruba cosmos, that appears in more than one colour unlike other gods who have their favourite colours; red is for white for and indigo for is the mediator-fool in the mythological realm (Adeleke 2004). In real Yoruba mythology devoid of either western or Judaeo-Christian sentiments, he appears in black and red, or black and white. His costume contains only two colours at any given time; but black is constant. The semiotic reading of the two colours, black and red, signifies the hallmark traits of

as a mediator- fool. The black aspect of costume connotes the unknown future firmly concealed. If viewed from a physiological point, it can imply the crude and unrefined aspect of human culture. Let us take our mind to the subject of blood circulation in the human body, and the issue with regard to refined and unrefined will be very clear. At the psychological realm, and following Freudian theory, the blackness of apparel can equally suggest the sub-consciousness of the human mind, which Freud terms the 'Id'.

Let us use the story of two friends who thought nothing could make them quarrel. While the discussion as to their unbreakable ties was on, just passed between these two friends in his double coloured outfit – one part black and the other part red – in a manner that each of the friends was only able to see one colour. The first friend, while appreciating 's costume mentioned black, while the other friend said that his friend must have been a blind man in taking red for black. They exchanged hot words and finally engaged in a physical fight. While the fight was on, re-emerged and ensured that these two friends saw the other colour not seen at his first appearance. Through the use of the mediator-fool's costume, the unsophisticated or refined thought of man as regards the mystery of life is exposed. Black will then be synonymous with obscurity or opaqueness. In another context, black represents 'sorrow' or 'death' which perpetually lurks around man. It may be a way of reminding man of the ultimate end. It can also symbolise the evils that men do in the dark. It is important to say that there are few occasions when black can take positive connotations. It can be employed to mean 'beauty' - ' (He-who-is-black-and-does-not-have blemish); or to mean 'strength / vigour / age' –

(Let us use the black hair to work, because of old age'). It is believed that youth are very energetic and also endowed with black hairs, unlike the aged who have grown grey hairs and become weak in physical strength. Then the red colour on 's toga will then suggest 'rot' or 'suffering'.

But when is clad in black and white the symbolic force becomes more apparent. It is true, as observed by Wyler (1992: 156), that 'black is often understood in antithetical opposition to white'. If considered critically from a structuralist

point of view, rather than the binary opposition being emphasised by Wyler, the binary complementarity premised on co-existence of god and goddess, immortal and mortal, male and female, the ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor, becomes more illuminating. The Yoruba believe that there is some sort of symbiotic relationship between both black and white colours; hence the saying:

(Black thread and white thread do not contradict each other). This seems to confirm that there is harmony in contradiction, and that human existence or survival has its basis in contradictions. This affirms the unity of the opposites *per se*. It even allows man to moralise on evil and good, as these two colours are so distinct to the extent of breeding no confusion at all. 's dressing may therefore be indicative that there is unity in contradictory situations within Yoruba Society.

However, the total cladding of in black clothing is suggestive that is the Devil or Satan as perceived by Christians or Muslims. The semiotic quality of black is, therefore, the groping of man in darkness. It then means that whosoever romances with is doomed for hell and not paradise. In that context is no longer a mediator-fool, he has turned into a trickster-fool (Adeleke 2004)⁴.

This may have been responsible for the non-utilization of colour for the clown-fool in the Ogunde dramatic tradition.

THE INSIGNIA OF THE FOOL IN THE BABA SALA SCHOOL OF OGUNDE TRADITION

Hubert Adedeji Ogunde began the professional modern theatre in Yoruba in 1945, and many others later followed suit. The Modern Yoruba theatre profession is therefore labelled Ogunde Dramatic Tradition by Ogundeji (1988). Within the Ogunde dramatic tradition, another school has emerged, and this is called the Moses School (Jeyifo, 1984:12-13). However, we prefer to call it the 'Baba School' instead of the Moses School on the ground that the stage name – Baba – has overshadowed the real name of this precursor of the clownery in Yoruba modern theatre. Even out of stage, he is still called 'Baba Sala'. Lakoju's (1984:38) plausible suggestion for this is that, 'Baba 's

fictional character on stage and his public image in real life have merged into one'. His real name is Moses but he is venerated as Lamidi Sanni Baba ('s Father) on stage. There are other theatre artists who have taken to buffoonery like Baba , such as the late Ojo Ladipo (Baba), Sunday (Ajimaja-san), Babatunde Omidina (Baba Suwe), (Jinadu Baba), and a host of others. These entire male clown –fools have their different insignia. Omidina the female fool, has her own typical insignia also.

Unlike the Elizabethan fools who normally appear in the typical fool's parti-coloured motley, the Yoruba clown-fools, especially the males do appear in absurd paraphernalia. Let us use Jide description of Baba 's outfits as cited in Lakoju (1984: 38), "His paraphernalia (sic) on stage include a cap, a table clock for wrist watch, a larger than life tie, a small ladies umbrella, a coat over local baggy trousers and an antique pipe to match".

A close look at the set of Baba 's outfits reveals a combination of traditional materials with the foreign ones. The combination of these materials drawn from two different cultures is riotous since these paraphernalia are incongruous to one another. The costume combinations should be seen in themselves as satirical comments of the fool on a society that does not cherish its own culture. Baba in that costume combination is an exaggerated depiction of an average poor Yoruba man's mentality who would always want to be an (the educated) but does not possess the wherewithals.

The semiotic quality being suggested with these absurd combinations is disorder arising out of culture conflict. It also seems to highlight the confusion often precipitated in an attempt to fuse two distinctive cultures together. And, indeed, many an African is often in a schizophrenic state when confronted with Western and African values simultaneously. He is often in a dilemma as to what step or action to take. This contradiction in dressing tends to call attention to Africans in labyrinth as related to striking a balance between western civilization and African culture. The chaos often bred in an open culture is aptly iconized with the clown-fool's costume. Baba

's 'larger than life tie', 'a table clock' and 'a small ladies umbrella' would seem to connote the obsession of Africans with foreign values or the insatiable lust for foreign materials.

It equally reveals the poor sense of dressing as often generally exhibited by some people who constantly appear in wrong outfits at the wrong season. I need to say, at this moment, that Babatunde Omidina who is venerated on the screen as Baba Suwe, just like Baba Sala, usually appears in hybridized apparel. He is one of the most popular clown-fools, if not the most popular of them all as of today, for Baba Sala, perhaps as a result of aging, has given more time to church activities than to theatre. Instead of a tie, Baba Suwe is accustomed to a turtle neck sweater anytime of the day or occasion or season. Let us take note of attitude to Baba Suwe's absurd dressing in the video film titled 2 4:

Sesan : Hah, look here, she has asked me to mind the kind of people I would be relating with now; they should be responsible, and good mannered people. She said the way you put on the raining season dress during the dry season is displeasing to her.

Baba Suwe: I suspect she must be crazy?

: You've come again. You always abuse people.

Baba Suwe : May God never deny me of the sweater in my life. That is the stuff which makes females run after me.

: He will always appear in raining season dress in the dry season.

Some characters, as a number of the members of the audience do, are put off with the fool's clothing without giving adequate thought to the semiotic significance of the dress. In 2 4, there is chaos at the family level, as demonstrated in s inability to harmonize her domestic duty with her liquor business. Baba Suwe's

riotous attire is symbolic as it signifies the series of disorder which occur in the video film 2 4.

The Yoruba clown-fool may also wear two types of traditional trousers, (a pair of short trousers with big opening on each side) and (a pair of longer trousers with moderate opening on either side). Baba Suwe often puts on underneath his pair of trousers. It conforms to a popular saying in Yoruba,

(Saturday appears under Sunday). This suggests that an unexpected thing can happen or that things done in the dark will eventually come into the open. The latter meaning is clearly conveyed in the Yoruba axiom:

(The corpse interred at dusk, its legs are visible). Both Baba Suwe and are friends. But is dating . secret amorous dealing with , comes into the open on the day Deji and Bisi are formally engaged as a would-be couple. Incidentally, is Bisi's father while is Deji's mother. To rub salt on the fresh wound, Bisi is already pregnant for Deji, so also is pregnant for , Bisi's father. Through this absurdity in dressing, a serious message is conveyed with regard to a conflict that cuts across various social institutions.

In another context, the may as well connote the human suffering and success as highlighted in this aphorism or song:

(The world has no interest in your troubles; the trousers that are at full length are what the mortal beings take interest in). It may function as a symbol of masculinity and physical strength as encapsulated in another Yoruba song:

(Wait for me to put on my pairs of trousers; The lazy one has taken to his heels). We need to add that Baba Suwe normally fastens his with a very thick rope meant for tying a cow. The Yoruba, when offering a piece of advice to anybody who has no helpers, may say, (Fasten your trousers rope tightly or very well). In other words, the thick rope is suggesting to the characters in the text and the audience to always be on guard and always be prepared as a man of courage for the human life is not devoid of twists.

The Yoruba male clown-fools wear caps from western culture and the Yoruba community. Baba Sala, Baba Suwe, and Baba Latin do enjoy donning the western caps or hats. Other fools wear different traditional caps, depending on

individuals' taste. The semiotic quality of the cap in Yoruba varies from context to context. For instance, a proverb in Yoruba likens the female to a cap -

(A female is a cap; whosoever head it fits will wear it). This may suggest the freedom of having different options of associating with different beings of one's choice, just like a woman who can opt for the man of her choice.

Some Yoruba male clowns sometimes appear in women's outfits. This goes beyond laughter provocation or mere disguise; it symbolizes poverty at its extreme. We should be cautious not to confuse this issue of border crossing as regards dressing with that of religion, where the priests of different deities could appear as the alter-egos of such deities. We are also aware that some clown-fools, such as *Alakida*, do appear in tattered outfits that equally suggest penury. But the semiotic representation of a ragged apparel on the fool is more than that in the Yoruba context. It connotes human transition. This is firmly established in this maxim:

(The aged had a blissful time some time ago; The rag also had its day of impressive outing). It therefore implies that there is a specific season for everything. As time passes by, all things will begin to lose their glamour and value.

The female clown-fool - puts on a traditional female over a number of wrappers known as *ilori*. She ties her head-gear *adire* abnormally. She then excessively masks her face with white powder. She also darkens her two lips. She displays two pot-breasts that regularly attract vitriolic attacks from other actors, especially male clown-fools such as Baba Suwe. The semiotic value of her two pot-breasts is twofold: sexuality and fertility. As regards sexuality, her breasts usually attract her male counterparts in foolery. Her big breasts appear to present the mythical image of *Alakida* as the plentiful pot-breasted mother in the spectacle (Lawal 1996: 71-72). Apart from exhibition of her extra-ordinary bust, she often holds tightly to her Moslem rosary, as the Elizabethan fool would do with his bauble. This extra-ordinary rosary is the index of her office as the Moslem women leader *Alakida*. It does not establish her as a devoted Moslem; it only reveals the pretensions of many people who go about with religious symbols without

practising it. It is also meant as a caustic comment on the hypocrisy of some religious bigots. *Alakida* does this in

But of late, it is noticeable that she alternates her traditional outfit with the western long gown, just like her male counterpart, Baba Suwe appears in well-cut foreign outfits. This is visible in 2

4. The semiotic quality borders on opulence being enjoyed in the environment in which he or she has found himself. In *Alakida* and *Okinni*, Baba Suwe appears in a security man's attire and a chauffeur's apparel respectively. The two different outfits are descriptive of his (i.e Baba Suwe's) professional assignments in these two films.

CONCLUSION

My discussion has been on the insignia of fool figures drawn from two literary cultures – the English fool of the Elizabethan period and the Yoruba fool in the Baba *Alakida* School of the 20th and early 21st centuries Nigeria. The symbolic functions of their insignia vary considerably as a result of cultural context. The western fools cherish animal skins and colour combination, while the Yoruba fools relish foreign and local fabrics. The insignia of the western fool thus portrays him more as a product of the fool tradition than the Yoruba fool⁵. Of all the Yoruba fools, only *Alakida* appears in symbolic functional colours like the Elizabethan fools. The poly-functional nature of these colours has enhanced the ambidextrous personality of the fools in both cultures. It has also allowed us the opportunity of having 'an unlimited number of possibilities' as regards interpreting the roles of the fool vis-à-vis the other characters and the members of audience. As earlier noted in this paper, the fools' insignia help greatly to foreground different 'components of the text where again their functions may be manifold: descriptive, suggestive, symbolic, or semiotic' (Wyler 1992: 179). More importantly, the insignia of the fools from the two cultures, notwithstanding the divergence, suggest self, others and the audience, as well as defining the complexity associated with beingness of individuals irrespective of social status, as the fools serve as "the consciousness of a split society" (Danby 1961:113), to "a point where we experience folly that cannot be captured in a description as it belongs too much to the basic

texture of our lives” (Willeford 1969: xviii). It is now apparent that the Yoruba fool’s costume, which is primarily meant for the clowning purpose and to evoke laughter, is also capable of generating other socio-cultural and serious aesthetic significations.

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NOTES

1. Earlier one Yoruba writer, A. Durojaiye had translated *Julius Caesar* to Yoruba text with the title *Julioosi Sisa*. Besides, Adeboye Babalola (1967) also adapted Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to a Yoruba narrative poem with the title ‘Omo-Oba Hamlet’
2. In a personal interview with Adebayo Faleti who first introduced the ‘fool figure’ in his text, *Idaamu Paadi Minkailu* (1972), claimed that the “fool figure in formalized drama came from the west”. The argument regarding origins is not foreclosed.
3. We may have to add that, even the boys were playing the female parts in Shakespearean plays during the Elizabethan era.
4. Though ‘fool’ is used interchangeably with ‘clown’, we have decided to use compound words for different kinds of fools in the Yoruba literary texts. Esu in Yoruba mythology is therefore regarded as mediator-fool, while he becomes a trickster-fool in religious literature (Adeleke 2004). This is embarked upon so as to delineate the roles and figures of different Yoruba fools. We need to emphasize that the Yoruba writers and film/video producers have fashioned fool figures in line with the Yoruba cultural tradition.
5. Further archaeological and social history research may yet prove this position wrong.

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