

COLOUR PSYCHOLOGY AND RESONANCE IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMATURGY: A CRITIQUE OF THE COSTUMING IN SUNNIE ODODO'S *HARD CHOICE'S*

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Abstract

The overall mood of a production is conceived from the drama genre but it is the design that deepens the aura that defines its grave or whimsical ambience. This makes the need to substantiate a specific sensation stimulated in theatre and filmmaking through design to be necessary towards understanding colour psychology and its import in conditioning the mood of the audience. This study focuses on colour psychology and resonance, using Sunnie Ododo's Hard Choice as produced by Sunday Umanah as paradigm. The paper is based on Tzvetan Todorov's conception of Semiotics, which holds that things that set the state of mind is linked to mood motivation, and data is presented in qualitative method. Findings show that colour psychology focuses on the general ambience and mood colour combination stimulates in mind in a production. Resonance is what the mood articulates of the agent (actor) or conveyors of these colours. Findings further show that Hard Choice is a tragedy. It is in the death of Ada Eze who chooses to expiate the ill of the society by sacrificing herself that pervades the atmosphere. However, the colours used to convey the gravity of the tragedy were of tinted hues, which appeared beautiful and scintillating but lacked the graver command that stimulates the sombre and dreadfulness of the tragedy in the content. The paper concludes that costume should not be used for beauty but reasoning. It recommends that colour psychology should be involved earlier there practice to equip the students earlier in life.

Keywords: Colour-Psychology, Costume, Dramaturgy, Production, Theatre.

Introduction

Colour is an aspect of light reflection, which Plato (1982, p 255) describes as "an effluvium from shape which fits the sight and is perceived". The reflection of light permeates many human endeavours, as seen in imaginative crafts such as song, video, painting, and performance. In these areas, especially lighting, scenery, and costume colour is a primary tool for creative expression. Among them all, it is in costume that colour plays a significant role in the reclassification of mood, temperament and even the general perception of the role in play production. By this, the reflection created by colour aids the centralisation of the psychic factors, making colour a unique tool for determining the human attitude, behaviour and the general outlook.

Colour psychology opens the creative mind in theatre to the imposition of meaning based on the reflection of light that establishes a certain colour in mind in which the human mood or temperamental discharges are classified to suggest a system. According to Marina Yalanska:

Colour psychology is a fundamental aspect of branding and product design... Every day, tons of things and factors affect our mood, attitudes, choices, and decisions. For most people, colour is one of the most powerful. It evokes human emotions instantly and builds

strong associations faster than we realise... Designers have to explore how this might work to make interfaces, both functional and emotional.

This means that colours can influence how people act, relate, or feel about a particular object or situation. The linkage of human behaviour and emotions to colour illustrates the concept of colour psychology in Theatre and Film Arts. In other words, recent dramatic compositions in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies show attempts to associate colours with human behaviour and emotions. In contemporary films, such attempts are particularly evident in costume design, where much emphasis is placed on the interplay of colours to highlight human behaviour and mood. This paper critically examines Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice*, focusing on colour psychology and visual resonance.

Theoretical Framework

The primary focus of this work is the identification of human action, feelings or being as conceived from the colour of his bodily gears. This implies that objects, actions, and activities in a specific performance were made so from the angle of a theory which suggests the human conception of meaning from a centre in which every meaning is drawn from an agent. Based on this conception, this paper is based on Tzvetan Todorov's theorisation of semiotics.

Semiotics is a theory, conceived by Ferdinand de Saussure but developed as a field of study by Sanders Peirce, an American Linguist, in the 1960s. Peirce was able to institute semiotics as a field of study within which a scientific tool for establishing concepts and meanings are formally established, making the theory one of the rationalists' instrument of language assessment. According to Haralambos, Holborn and Heald (2008, p. 678), "semiotics is a science that studies the life of signs within society". However, Tzvetan Todorov's (1977, p. 17) view of semiotic is that "things and state of mind are linked by a motivated relation ... One is the image of the other... and their relationship with the state of mind is unmotivated: the one signifies the other without being the image of it". His view mirrors the original conception of the theory in structuralism by Saussure, who speculated two factors, namely the signifier and the signified.

Todorov's position is that it is the state of mind that is linked to a concept based on motivation. The motivation as indicated, rather, widens to cover what Igbo (2003, p. 123) intones as symbolic interaction in which "people come to themselves and the world around them just the way other people see them, i.e. from the perspective of the generalised order". That means, meaning from the state of mind such as colours is still subject to a universal recognition and usage, making it a process practiced and passed on to generation within a system. Universality then delimits to a particular society who have developed their culture of mental association of colours with their activities in life. In Ibibio culture, for instance, it is possible to link love and hatred to red and black. This is because, Ibibio person says "*ima anam esit adad*" (Love makes the heart to be red). To oppose love, one will think of hatred. Therefore, if red mirrors love, the opposite should mirror hatred. Observing Todorov's position, what an object of the mind conceives in terms of effluvia of shapes (colour), there is a natural indicator to colour linkage with social concept. Unlike language which Bressler (2003, p.81) writes that "there is no natural link between the linguistic sign and the reality it represents".

However, Todorov maintains the two pillars in semiotics and structuralism which makes a concept in one's mind to evoke a meaning as society understands. These two ideas are called signifier and signified. This, colour becomes what Saussure cited in Habib (2011, p. 220) intones when he posits that the "signified designates the concept, signifier designates sound, image, and sign designates the combination of these or the entire construct". According to Easthope (1999, p.5-6) "the signified

consists of the concepts or meaning assigned to any organisation of signifiers.... When signifier and signified are joined together they give us a sign”.

This theory is relevant to this essay because it advocates the existence of two ideas in establishing meaning in the society. One is the speculation in mind while the other is the conclusion of that mental image by the society. This makes colour deployment in theatre practice an act from a governable system properly established from the precinct of social the society.

Colour Psychology in Theatre Arts

Colour is often seen as sensation and according to the *Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary*, colour is “any of the manifold phenomena of light (as red, brown, pink, grey, green, blue, white) or of visual sensation or perception that enables one to differentiate objects even though the object may appear otherwise identical”. In applying this manifold phenomenon in practices like filmmaking or photography, “it is only possible to see an object properly if it is lit by light containing some of that object's colour – if not, it will not reflect the light and will appear black...” (Palmer, 2000: p. 140). Along the line, Ochigbo (2011: p 69) corroborates, that “colour exists only in light, but light itself seems colourless to the human eye. All objects that appear to have colour are merely reflectors of transmitters of colours that must be present in light that illuminates them”. To this effect, “everything in the world has colour. Our eyes see grass as green, an apple as red... we know that dogs and many other animals cannot see colours... all we know is that our eyes see colours when light strikes on them” (Encyclopaedia, p. 659). All these are descriptions of colour as sensation and flash of hues from the beam of light, not actually how the hues affect the human mind or influence their mood and attitude.

Colour psychology is the attribution of the human attitude and temperamental discharge to the circumstance of colour. According to Parker and Smith (1996, p. 215) “colour is light” says the physicist. ‘Colour is paint’ says the artist; ‘light merely reveals it’. ‘Colour is in the eye’, says the physiologist... ‘Colour is in the mind’ the psychologist insists”. This analogy reflects the way many people view colours. To this end, what the psychologist conceives of colour is the colouration of the mind, the setting of mood, the stimulation of joy, the dimming of elation, the sparkling of fury, the calmness of nerves and the beeping of the heart from the churning flash of colours.

Colour psychology is the study of how and why colour affects us, our emotions, and behaviours. As soon as we perceive colour, our brain and endocrine system (the hormone producer) receive the input, releasing hormones throughout our body. As a result, this subconscious interaction has a powerful impact on our emotions... people make subconscious snap judgments about an object, person, and environment within 90 seconds of initial viewing. Additionally, an incredible 62% to 90% of that assessment is based on only colour (Yalanska, 2025).

That means, colour psychology is the appropriation of judgment of viewpoint based on the reflection of colour on someone, place or situation.

Colour psychology is the speculation of action or being to have evolved from the effluvium, sensation and reflection of light with a specific dominant hue. “In a simple term, colour psychology has become a popular area of colour theory that assigns emotional and psychological connotations between colours and emotions. Many of these meanings are universal because they have an effect on the brain but some are only cultural” (iondonimageination.com). Apart from the universality and specificity of colours,

Cherry and Gans further write that colour psychology “explores how colour, can influence emotional responses, as well as how responses to colour are affected by factors such as age and cultural background”, and according to Akpan (2024, p. 75) “mood colouration is the atmosphere a specific design intensified in the prevalent emotion”. This means, colour psychology is all about mood colouration especially in observing what people put on as design.

Sunnie Ododo’s *Hard Choice* as directed by Sunday Umanah

Hard Choice is a play written by Sunnie Ododo. Ododo is one of the season theatre scholars in Nigeria. He comes from Kogi State. *Hard Choice* is one of his recent plays. The play focuses on self-sacrifice, the dangers of political machination and the detriment of greed.

Hard Choice was presented during the UNIUYO Season of 2024 Productions, an annual activity in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies. The production came up on the 8th of March, 2024. It was performed in the Dance Studio of the Department. It was specifically schemed for year three THA 300 (Production Participation). The play was directed by Sunday Umanah.

The marriage between two kingdoms (Yoruba and Igbo) survives basically on the understanding of the couple based on mutual love only for the crown of the Yoruba throne to be snatched at gun-point. Eze mounts pressure to regain her honour despite the dishonour meted to her family on her daughter’s wedding. Oba is pensive over the symbol of the Yoruba race taken from him on his way back from his son’s marriage. Adaeze is all out, and no one is ready to look inwards until revelation surfaces that Lolo, Ada’s mother, is responsible. The land must sacrifice to expiate the omen. Ada Eze makes the hard choice. The interplays of characters, scenery and light come alive through the combination of colours. However, mood, emotions and attitude read from the reflections of colour enveloped the production.

Colour Psychology and Resonance in *Hard Choice*

Different lives may convey ordinary flight of fantasy based on the performance they appear; yet it is possible to feel the tragic atmosphere or be inspired by the comic ambience from the prevailing spark of the deployed colours. *Hard Choice* is a tragedy the production by Umanah Tusi ended in self sacrifice of Ada Eze.

Tragic Resonance

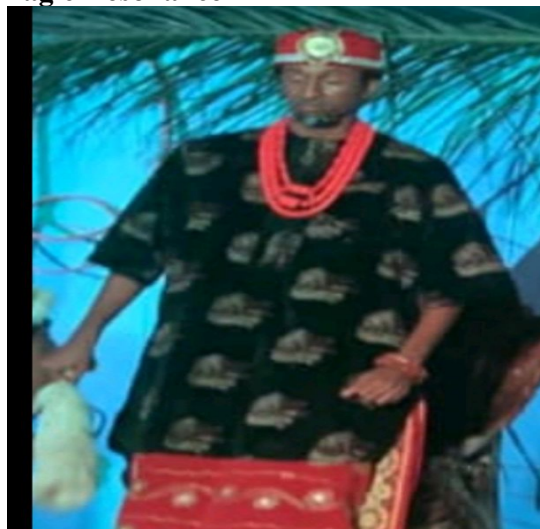


Plate 1: Sombre mood in tender atmosphere (*Hard Choice*)

The use of black inward under the covering of another colour and leaving it outward as the focus for the character may stimulate a varying moods. Black is a negative space and cool green as a positive space in costume may stimulate the phlegm of tragic consciousness in a production.



Plate 2: Unconcerned about grave mood (*Hard Choice*)

Land in this case where a warm colour is dominant and the blackout mere peeps, the pervading atmosphere may not evoke the tragic consciousness.

Tranquil Resonance



Plate 3: Peacefulness of mind (*Hard Choice*)

Overall peaceful and the individual calmness of the mind can be stirred colour combination the white sceptre of Adaeze is meant to stimulate a personal tranquillity, but a Ada is in a very chaotic state over the seizure of his father-in-law's crown. The anxiety enveloping the kingdom is a total negation to this silver costume on Ada's head.



Plate 4: The relaxed mind (*Hard Choice*)

One of the Yoruba chief's practically caution everyone to relax while the mystery of the seized crown is unravelled. He remains undaunted, unperturbed and indifferent in the scenario. In the mix up of anxiety for the stolen relics and the tension of searching to retrieve it, absolute peace as portrayed in the chief seems illogical. His peacefulness evokes indifference. However, there is colour for his mood other than the purity, and tranquillity of the immaculate white. Colour psychology is the mood a colour stirs in everyone's mind in a moment of display. When pure-white is imposed on a sombre ambience, the resonance may be out of focus, leading to anticlimactic mood.

The Dreadful/Foreboding Resonance

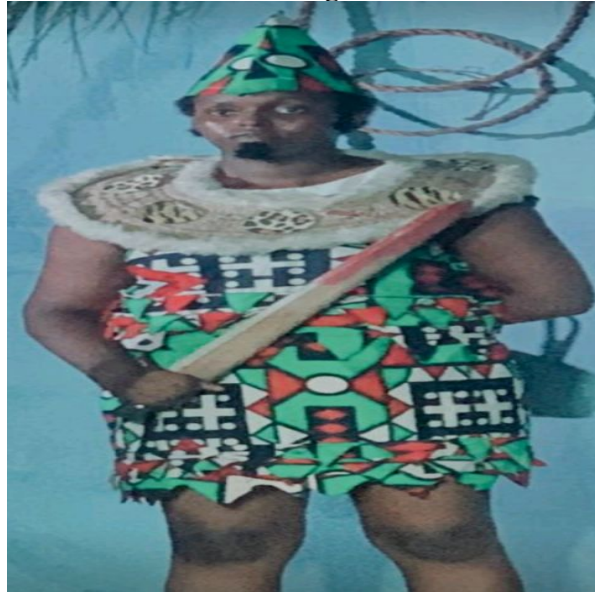


Plate 5: The Chief Security/ Sight of Terror(*Hard Choice*)

This is the Igbo society's chief security. He is the epitome of protection, evincing fear and terror to frighten away enemies and sending shivers down the spine of perpetrators in the kingdom; but his bodily gears are more of tinted hue, making him a rather sparkling and lively but inexperienced persona in appearance. The stimulation of his outlook may not frighten an intruder; it may, on the other hand portray the warrior as a chip-on-shoulder and repulsive fellow.

The Free-Bird/Indifference Resonance



Plate 6: Unperturbed by the tension but passionate (*Hard Choice*)

Grey hardly tilts towards sombre or foreboding psychological resonance except it is shaded and given a graver background. Grey may easily evoke the unattached, the indifferent, and the unconcerned in any situation. The issue on ground in the land is terrible, and here is a prominent figure that is neither sorrowful nor happy. The resonance of the character's costume stimulates some unconcerned attitude to the situation on ground whereas this is one of the affected chiefs. However, having this neuter colour on a tinted-red is stirring something completely out of the tragic impulse the play is projecting.

Romance/Tenderness Resonance



Plate 7: Intense love (*Hard Choice*)

The use of red/crimson in the wedding scene lights up a lighter and romantic resonance. A red band on the head may tune the mind to adjudging a heart filled with the fantasy and delight of love. The use of red cloth as the apparel enveloping the torso may easily convey the common resonance of the “sweetheart”. Red colour easily strikes its sensation, and swerves the eye, if not the psyche, towards what the redness of the moment really communicates.

Royalty/ Brilliance Resonance



Plate 8: The upright and passionate personality (*Hard Choice*)

Certain colours actually appear bright, scintillating, and sparkling stimulating brilliance or purity of discretion from someone in power (king). As seen in the costume on the box above, the use of red beads on the sparkling purple warm and hearty-prince or an affable king in love. The resonance, then, is agreeable since the character is a prince in-love.

Immaturity/ Green-fag/ Resonance



Plate 10: The amateur (*Hard Choice*)

The use of green colour in a production may stimulate life regeneration and, on the other hand, stir coldness to romantic passion. In a situation tinted-green is engaged, as seen in the character in the picture, its tinted, light and faded hue is stimulating the aura of a comic green-fag. The coldness of the cool green is defeated for the sparkling of near-grey-greenness to surface. Costume covers the body but its colour colours the mood that pervades the mind in a production.

Colour psychology is a way of reasoning the air, ambience and the general atmosphere a specific effluvium of light sparks of in the mind. Besides the colours themselves, darkness is actually graver in a dark hue; brightness is dazzling in bright hue; so thus the unconcern gets wholly detached in the not-dark, not-light and a colourless grey, believed to have swallowed all combination to lost its direction to side any emotion in theatre resonance. It is only on rare occasions that colours shaded from their original tone convey solemn mood or heighten the grotesqueness of its serious undertone that characterises tragedy. Resonance of colour allows for the consideration of the penetrating impact a specific hue stimulate in scene - in a production.

Conclusion

The evaluation of Ododo's *Hard Choice* as produced by Sunday Umanah has indicated that mood creation is subject to the components of the spectacle deployed for a scene and the overall production. Using warm colours to articulate tragic circumstances may not repel the inexperience audience; it may even add to the fantasy of their daily sights especially in trending create-laughable-content society of today when dialogue and dramatic actions are properly pushed to crash. In a situation cool and shaded colours enunciate graver content, what may make the audience to wince can make them shudder; what should have make them to shiver only can make them wail; and what needed to make them whisper

can cause them to roar. That is costume communicating. The use of cool colours which are obviously tinted may be reasoned as the presentation of a graver human condition in a laughable mod. Colour psychology conditions the viewers mindset based on the natural feeling a specific colour stimulates. In the theatre, this should help the audience to deepen their insight on the prevailing atmosphere a production stimulates.

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