

Our Princes are in Borrowed Robes: Significance of Expressed Costume Choices by Selected Ghanaian Playwrights

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Abstract: *The playwright's work remains the blueprint upon which all other theatre artists build their craft. This positions playwrights as indispensable artists in theatrical discourse. While some playwrights express specific costume demands in their texts, others leave it to theatre directors and designers to decipher the appropriate costume choices for the plays. The former suggests a stylistic feature by some playwrights; however, less visibility appears to be given to this phenomenon in Ghanaian theatre scholarship. What the significance and implications are for both the costume designer and playwrights is the subject of this exploration. Employing a qualitative approach, this paper samples three Ghanaian playwright educators and their costume choices and examines the dramatic significance of their choices. The findings of the study revealed that the rationale for expressing costume choices was to project major characters, and that the necessity to create special characters, create impression, as well as scene changes and time, all influenced character costume choices. The significance of costume choices was to project a rich tapestry of cultural identity and characters and enforce themes, while the implications of such costume choices were to support costumiers, make issues easier for them and the playwright, and encourage them to be more creative. Ultimately, this study contributes to scholarship on costume usage in theatrical discourse.*

Keywords: characters, costume, Ghanaian, playwrights, significance

INTRODUCTION

Theatre is one of the oldest art forms (Chaturvedi & Merhotra, 2013; Korolkova, 2020; Kumar), and the fundamental act of theatre occurs whenever actors and actresses communicate among themselves and also to an audience through actions and words while enveloped in their costumes (Azunwo, 2014; Shuaib, 2019). Without a doubt, different kinds of theatrical stages across the globe, including Ghana, have been associated with theatrical performances set in diverse periods. To achieve this, a theatre director walks actors through a series of rehearsals to arrive at the desired outcomes. Largely, the theatre director relies on two pillars: improvisation and interpreting a scripted play. In improvisation, actors act on the spur of the

moment in relation to a scenario. The engagement of a scripted play serves as another outlet for theatre directors to interpret the literal ideas of playwrights into visual concrete forms. Although some directors rely on improvisation, "the script still remains a very strong and potent source upon which performances are based" (Johnson, 2004, p. 77). As a result, the artistry of playwrights continues to remain a critical cornerstone upon which theatre is built. In view of the foregoing, Brewster and Shafer (2011) have argued that the playwright's product, the story line, is the main art work upon which the collaborative theatrical experience is explored. Consequently, Azunwo (2017, p. 10) situates playwrights as "the omnipotent designer or master artist in the theatre."

Appiah-Adjei (2015) views a playwright as a spokesperson, historian, designer of standards and values, observer, teacher, adviser and healer. Furthermore, he situates playwrights as society's director, the moral compass of society or group, the reporter or researcher, the critic and the interpreter. With these characteristics of a playwright, Onyijen (2013) observes that playwrights do not hit the headlines like the historian or journalist but painfully and artistically bear the burden of exhuming, schematically and consciously, socio-political happenings around them, even when they are deeply entrenched and sometimes escape the eyes of the average man. Subsequently, playwrights' antennae are such that they are sensitive and pick up every issue for information, education and entertainment. Consequently, Eyo (2015) positions playwrights as artists who are concerned with social reconstruction and sometimes lampoon and ridicule society as they present their artistry. On the part of Wilson (1994, p. 155), "the playwright creates the vision that guides the production and provides a blueprint for carrying it out." Wilson (1994) further asserts that the function of the playwright remains essential regardless of who provides it, and such functions include developing the subject of the play, the purpose, the point of view, the dramatic structure, and the characters. Once these elements are determined, the playwright's main task is to dramatise the story in order to transform it into action and conversation, or dialogue. It is worthy to note that playwrights do not work in a vacuum but rather draw inspiration from socio-cultural conditions, myth, history, politics, legends, folktales and nature, among other sources (Brockett & Ball, 2004; Kwakye Opong & Dennis, 2014), to craft their play texts. The final product of a playwright is a literary composition or text, typically presented in acts, scenes, legs, or movements, among others and usually punctuated with idiomatic expressions, proverbs, imagery, symbols and metaphorical nuances.

Over the years, playwrights have made significant contributions to theatre since its inception in ancient Greece. Notable playwrights include Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus, who crafted plays that have been performed across the length and breadth of the globe, such as *Oedipus Rex* (429 BC), *Medea* (431 BC), and *The Oresteia* (458 BC). Again, playwrights like Shakespeare and Ibsen have also left their footprints in the annals of theatrical discourse, with *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) and *A Doll's House* (1879), respectively. In Africa, a number of playwrights abound. These include, but are not limited to, Femi Osofisan, Conte Mhlanga, Wole Soyinka, and many more. In Ghana, since the Gold Coast era in 1916, playwrights have contributed their quota to the discipline in diverse ways (Collins, 2011). Some notable playwrights at the time were Kobina Sekyi, Mabel Dove, J.B. Danquah, and Ferdinand Kwesi

Fiawoo. Others who have emerged over time also include Efua Sutherland, Joe de Graft, Efo Kodjo Mawugbe, Daniel Appiah Adjei, Faustina Brew, Matin Owusu, and Victor Yankah.

Johnson (2004) identifies some aesthetic characteristics of a script that prompt a theatre director to choose a play to direct, including but not limited to the cover design of the script, the title of the play, the story of the drama, the language with which the story is told, and the plot on which the story is anchored, among others. Having read a number of play texts for academic purposes as a teacher, a key issue has emerged over the years: the playwright's choice of costumes for characters in their scripts. Observing generally, in most cases, these expressed costume choices are either written in italics or captured in parenthesis within the play text. Undoubtedly, costumes are one of the most powerful visual elements in theatre and how they are employed in weaving the storyline has the potential to add to the depth and breadth of the narrative as it unfolds. While acknowledging that a study by Kwakye-Opong and Dennis (2014) demonstrated that costuming the actor is a shared responsibility among costumiers and other theatre personnel (theatre director, actor, lighting designer, and scenic designer), the motivation and significance for a playwright to express costume choice for his or her characters have not been explored. This is the gap the current study seeks to fill. The study was animated by the following questions:

- a. Why do playwrights' select costumes for characters?
- b. What factors account for playwrights' choice of costumes for some characters in their play texts?
- c. What is the significance of playwrights' choice of costumes for characters in the development of their play texts?
- d. What are the implications of playwrights' costume choices for both costume designers and playwrights?

In the next segment, I explore costume as an indispensable element in the theatrical space.

Costume: An indispensable element in theatrical discourse

There are a number of visual elements that complement the playwright's ideas. These include lighting, make-up, scenic and costumes (Brewster & Shafer, 201; Gillette, 2013; Malloy, 2014). As noted by Adjei (2005), costume is the strongest of all the visual elements because it is always applied directly to the actor's body. Malloy (2014, p. 224) succinctly views costume as "any clothing item that is worn on stage." This means that costumes can include any coverings or items that are applied to the actor's body. These may include, but are not limited to, handbags, pairs of shoes, belts, hats, undergarments, outer garments, and many more. Shuaib (2009) argues that costume remains an indispensable art in theatrical practice owing to its ability to transform actors into specific roles. Linking discourses of playwrights and costumes opens up a new dimension of costume design through the lens of Kurland (2004, p. 2). The author notes that "costumes are not mere garments. They are visual tools used to release the soul of a character—a way to lift a character off the page into a three-dimensional world." The foregoing articulations on costume serve as a catalyst in unravelling the disposition of a character, which is achieved by carefully selecting suitable clothes based on the summary of character analysis. The overarching aim is to suggest a reflection or the disposition of the

character for audience appreciation. This is due to the fact that costumes should project the character rather than obscure it. As a result, costume serves as an interpretive meaning of a character's physical appearance and thus becomes highly symbolic. This is because, taken from specific cultural spaces, costumes serve as unique cultural codes for cultural promotion that convey salient information about characters and the various spaces they hail from in a non-verbal form (Abuku & Odi, 2010).

As expressed by Utoh-Ezeajugh (2015), costume serves as a key driver in theatrical discourse because it improves the aesthetics and characterisation of actors, thereby becoming the most vital and significant element in theatrical discourse. In a nonverbal way, costumes in theatrical productions convey a great deal of information about the wearer to audiences. The time and place, the occupation and lifestyle, the culture of a group of people, the economic and social status, the mood and atmosphere, the gender and age of the actors, and the period of the play are all established through the use of appropriate costumes. (Dasher et al., 2023; Foreman, 2009; Hischak & Robinson, 2022). The foregoing viewpoints offer insightful information about costumes in general and their connection to theatre in particular. Equally pertinent to the ongoing discussion is a reflection on factors that influence costume selection, and the next segment explores this phenomenon to situate the entire study in context.

Factors that influence costume selection for characters

Within the theatrical space, costume selection for characters and actors is a complex task because it involves going through several processes to arrive at a preferred costume (Amidei, 2018; Kwakye-Opong & Dennis, 2014; Olajide & Osazuwa, 2023). Undoubtedly, the pictorial or visual representations of characters in play texts are key to the development of dramatic actions as they unfold. This is because they serve as a guide for readers in general and the costumer in particular. It is on the heels of the foregoing that Figueiredo and Cabral (2019) aver that the thoughtful choice of costumes complements the entire narrative, script, and meaning of the characters, thereby projecting their roles, character development, and finally enhancing their characterisation. This is a demonstration that stories cannot be told in their artistic richness without the use of costumes. Adjei (2005) has indicated that the impression to be created on characters goes a long way in informing the design of their costumes. This is because impression formation about a character by an audience or a reader of a text largely depends on how the characters have been represented based on a preferred impression. Malloy (2022) offers some key considerations that influence costume selection, including gender, age, health, personality, mood, character changes, and development. On gender, Malloy asserts that there have always been gender differences in fashion throughout history and in all cultures. These variations can be used, as required by a script, to reveal, conceal, or even confuse the gender of a character. However, gender-specific attire varies from one nation or society to another. In terms of age, characters' ages might occasionally differ significantly from the actor's age. Additionally, some characters might need to change throughout the play; for example, they might occasionally begin as children or young adults before growing older. The costumes that the character wears throughout the play should highlight these changes, as they correspond to the various developmental stages of the character. Regarding health, while some characters may appear severely ill, others might be strong, vibrant, and physically healthy, living their

lives to the fullest. Some physical limitations as a result of an accident, such as limping or needing a wheelchair, also impact costume selection based on the health of the character. In all, costumes can serve to uphold and illustrate these ideals.

In yet another account, Gillette (2013) agrees with Malloy (2022) and expands the frontiers of considerations to include the need to highlight a historical period or context of characters, advance the socioeconomic status of characters, and project occupation, climate, and season as key pillars to situate the character into context through the use of costumes. Similarly, Adjei (2005) again suggests two factors that influence costume selection for characters. These are for dressing the main characters more prominently and showing character relationships. The need to represent leading characters for readers or audiences is anchored on the kind of costumes offered to such leading characters. By doing so, leading characters are offered very sophisticated or more complex costumes to distinguish them from supporting characters. On the part of Hodge and McLain (2015), the political and religious dimensions of a given setting also serve as indicators for selecting costumes for characters. This is because through the use of costumes, readers can associate themselves with the setting in which the character has been situated through the use of some specific costumes, such as the hijab, among others.

DeCoursey (2014) argues that the need to express cultural symbolic meanings with costumes is a key factor in selecting costumes for characters. By this, costumes are mainly selected to affirm the cultural practices of a given society and project its beliefs and value system. Subsequently, Al-Shehri and Dabbagh (2021) have argued for the inclusion of traditional costumes in the curriculum to improve students' awareness of their cultural background because of the cultural connotations associated with them. Among the several considerations is a suggestion from Crist (2014, 17), who has observed that quick scene or character changes require the use of limited time to change costumes; hence, the theatre artists must be guided by this principle in their duties. Haven presented a wealth of scholarly insight into factors that influence costume selection for characters. In the next segment, I will explore the significance of costume choices for characters in the development of play texts.

Significance of costume choice for characters

As admitted by Kwakye-Opong and Adinku (2013), costume helps to understand characters and their cultural background or expression. This serves as a link to heritage and tradition and offers insight into the historical narratives of costumes worn by a group of people within a particular space. It also reveals the past and present-day appeal, showcasing various stages of their civilisations and developmental phases. This is because costumes have rich cultural histories and meanings that mirror society norms and values. It is on the heels of the forgoing that Karunaratne (2018) asserts that in a cultural setting, costumes have long been used to denote a specific historical period. On the part of Bonds (2008), the purpose of costume design is to set a dramatic text in its proper context, facilitate readers' interpretations, help readers visualise the concepts of the chosen characters, and establish the fundamentals of both the character and the plot. On the part of Sosnovskaya (2010), costumes are expressed to enforce themes in the text. These postulations by Bonds (2008) and Sosnovskaya (2010) have implications for the current study in that the tendency for playwrights to craft their text

punctuated with various costume expressions within the Ghanaian setting may be associated with diverse connotations to set the dramatic text in motion. This further serves as an impetus to undertake this study to help fill the existing lacuna in the literature. Beyond these, costumes are also used to reflect status identification, mood and situations, protection, prestige, beauty, or personal adornment (Risteski & Srebrenkoska, 2020; Tortora & Marcketti, 2021; West, 2011).

Costumes are selected and worn to signify the position or authority an individual occupies within a given space. A study by Dennis and Danquah Monnie (2023) on *Clothing selection and appearance of Pro-Vice Chancellors: A case of University of Cape Coast, Ghana*, revealed that female Pro-Vice Chancellors selected specific costumes that resonated with their position (Pro-Vice Chancellor). One such costume was the “Kaba” and “slit” ensemble. This was because the costume was revered as a special traditional attire. Subsequently, it was worn to special university programmes such as congregation, among others.

Implications of costume choice for both costume designers and playwrights

It is important to acknowledge the paucity of literature on the implications of costume choices and, for that matter, the need to draw inferences from general perspectives to help situate the discussion in context. This situation also suggests that research in the area of costumes has not focused on issues related to the current phenomenon; hence, this study comes in to fill the needed knowledge gap.

Gbetodeme, Amankwa, and Dzegblor (2016) have suggested that clever use of line as a design element can produce a visual illusion, which can help performers' body sizes psychologically. Vertical lines tend to lengthen the body and make it appear slimmer, whereas curved lines tend to add softness and femininity to a design. The wearer's width is also increased by horizontal lines. Huston (2015) also explores ways in which colour choices for costumes can affect the emotions and perceptions of viewers, proposing that costumiers use specific colours to signify particular characteristics or elicit particular feelings. This is because colours connote different meanings, and such understandings are appreciated in the various cultural spaces where the colours originate. Russell (2017) brings a different dimension to the fore when he asserts that costume choices have the impulse to breed creativity among costumiers thereby sprouting a sense of innovativeness in their artistry. These dimensions highlight the richness and complexity of costume design as a field of study and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of costume choice for costumiers and playwrights.

Haven examined the implication of costume in the theatrical space; in the next thread of discussion, I focus on the research methods for the study.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative approach to research. This was anchored on the premise that, in order to fully comprehend and appreciate human thoughts, the qualitative approach aims to produce a detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences, interpret the

meanings of their actions, uncover the participants' inner experiences, and determine how meanings are shaped (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Eyisi, 2016; Rahman, 2020). By this, the inner experiences and significance of the phenomenon being explored, i.e., expressed costume choices, are best understood through the qualitative approach. The population of the study comprised all playwrights' educators in the four public universities in Ghana where theatre is taught as an academic programme. These were the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ghana; the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Cape Coast; the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Education, Winneba; and finally, the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, University of Development Studies. The accessible population comprised playwright educators in these institutions who craft play texts that are characterised by expressed costume choices for their characters.

Upon reading a number of plays by playwright educators of these institutions, it turned out that play texts of playwright educator at the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, University of Development Studies was not associated with expressed costume choice. This outcome was also justified by the educator through a telephone conversation. The purposive sampling technique was employed to sample three playwrights whose play texts were characterised by an air of expressed costume choices in their storyline. A playwright each was selected from the three academic institutions. Again, a play text of each of the participants was also sampled for analysis. Qualitative content analysis was employed to identify the stylistic use of costumes that punctuated the play texts. These were *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* (2017), *Murder of the Surgical Bone* (2010), and *Freedom in Chains* (2017). A semi-structured interview guide was employed to elicit participants thoughts and ideas on such an approach to playwriting. A semi-structured interview guide was preferred over others because it allows researchers to further probe for insight from participants (Aung, Razak, & Nazry, 2021; Kumekpor, 2002). With the permission of participants, the interview was recorded, and a session lasted approximately thirty (30) to forty-seven (47) minutes.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data were manually transcribed, coded, and themes generated, and a qualitative thematic analysis tool was used to analyse the data. The selected play texts were then analysed using the qualitative content analytical method.

Ethical considerations

Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were taken into account in conducting this study. Pseudonyms, other than participants' original names were used to represent excerpts of information provided by participants. As a result, the interview data of participants were represented with the pseudonyms such as playwright educator one, two and three.

Additionally, the participants' consent was requested. By doing this, participants agreed to the terms of the consent form and acknowledged that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The participant gave permission, even though the sample might be clear. Because of this, I think the paper respects participants' privacy. The study's findings were disseminated to participants so they could verify or dispute the content of their submissions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General biographical data

Participants involved in the study were three playwright educators in public universities in Ghana, specifically University of Cape Coast, University of Ghana and University of Education, Winneba. They consisted of two males and a female. Two of the participants were associate professors in playwriting, while the other was a senior lecturer in the same discipline. The age range of participants was between 56 and 66 years. From the data, it emerged that playwright educator one started writing plays in 1979. Writing plays was a practice the participant engaged in while awaiting A-level academic results. This was a period when the participant had no formal training in playwriting. The participant continued to write plays and also directed a number of plays during his first-degree education until he had formal education in playwriting in 1989. In 1990, playwright educator two also began writing plays. This was done before the participant began taking formal playwriting classes in 1991. Playwright educator three also began writing plays in 1982 and continued in 1989 after obtaining formal training in the field, much like playwright educators one and two. From the foregoing, a key issue arises; prior to receiving training in playwriting, all participants had a strong desire to fulfil a lifelong ambition to write plays. Therefore, before receiving formal education in playwriting, participants had either written short or full-length plays as well as a few collections of poems. Upon receiving formal training in playwriting, some participants revised their original scripts to incorporate their newfound understanding.

Furthermore, considering the years of writing plays by playwright educators one, two and three, i.e., forty-four (44), thirty-three (33) and forty (40) years respectively, it serves as a testament that participants in the current study bring to the fore a wealth of experience in the field and, as such, can be revered as gatekeepers in the discipline. Again, all participants acknowledged that expressing costume choices in their play texts remains a stylistic feature. However, such artistic expressions do not occur in all of their play texts. While playwright educators one and two introduced such features in five and four play texts, respectively, playwright educator three had only a play text characterised by expressed costume choices. This positions playwright educator three as an artist who engages in expressed costume choices on a minimal level, as opposed to playwright educators one and two, who appear to be engaging in this phenomenon on a high level.

Rationale for expressing costumes for characters

A consistency was identified within the interview data analysed for the study. All three participants acknowledged that they offer descriptions of costumes for some of the characters they create, but not all. Again, a careful reading of some play texts by participants of the study also affirmed that participants offered costume choices for selected characters. For example, in *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* (2017), the playwright explicitly expressed costumes in two instances. First, in movement one, step one:

In the darkness, background noises filter in; an admixture of cheers, catcalls and political songs. This fades out gradually to be replaced by

the sounds of nature: birds, cricket chirping, etc. We hear the sound of a car engine and the tooting of a car horn. Lights come on. A man in military uniform darts onto the stage, looking furtively left and right. He moves to the exit and ushers in NAA ATSWEI in traditional "Kaba" and slit, and beaded around her neck and wrists. She is followed by ESI her attendant. Jonnie exits (p. 6).

Second, in movement one, step one, the following descriptions were given with an air of costume choice by the playwright:

Enter DZIFA, with YAWA in mourning clothes. Dzifa stops and takes an initial sweep of the scene before her, then moves and takes a closer look at Atswei (p. 14).

Similarly, traces of expressed costume choices also abound in *Murder of the Surgical Bone* (2010) in scene one as follows:

Kwame Abrebrese: Thank you very much sister (AUNTIE COMFORT begins to cry. Lights fade out) (The lights fade in again as the court clerk returns. He wears a jumper over his shirt and puts on a cap-this change is done on stage...) (P. 5).

Once more, the following suggested costumes are mentioned in scene one:

Narrator: (the narrator takes off his priestly garments, wears his cap and winks at the audience) (p. 8).

In *Freedom in Chains* (2017), the playwright expressed costume for Brayie, a major character in the following:

BRAYIE (Dancing in Dansinkran out-fit. She pays abeyance to the Chief and the elders. She steps out of the crowd and moves towards the audience. Dances to depict a happy marriage ceremony begin by the royal dancers of Fawohodi. Nana Asuo stands in admiration. Nasaki and Obenewaa kneel before the royal family and the marriage rites are performed) (pp. 11&12).

Evidently, all three play texts are characterised by expressed costume choices for some characters. In movement one, step one of *The Pretty Trees of Gakwana* (2017), a military uniform was prescribed for a character who was referred to as a man by the playwright, while Naa Atswei, the first lady of Gakwana's expressed costumes were, *kaba* (blouse) and *slit* (long skirt usually with waist casing). Again, in movement one, step one, Yawa's prescribed costumes were mourning clothes. In *Murder of the Surgical Bone* (2010), costumes prescribed by the playwright for Kwame Abrebrese, a major character were a *jumper* (a loose-fitting men's top without a collar but with an opening of about four to five inches at the centre front characterised by a short or three-quarter sleeve length where the garment usually ends at the hip area of the wearer) over his shirt and a cap. Again, the narrator's prescribed costumes were his priestly garments and a cap. In *Freedom in Chains* (2017), *Dansinkran* outfit (a costume

achieved by draping the chest with a two-yard piece of cloth, the length of which typically ends at the wearer's knees. Like queen mothers' costumes in southern Ghana, the second piece of fabric is draped over the first, with one end pressed against the chest, then carried over the left shoulder, around the back and brought under the right arm to the front. The wearer's hairstyle, which defines the oval shape of their head, is a perfect match for the costume. It involves cutting the hair close to the skin on the sides of the head. Next, a natural black mixture that resembles pomade is applied to the hair to give it an intense blackened appearance) was the costume expressed for Brayie, the major character in the play text. The forgoing is a testament to the expression of costume choices for characters in the various play texts. What is important here is that all costumes expressed by participants are traditional Ghanaian costumes, and ultimately, this has the potential to promote "Ghanaianess" through costumes. Having offered some examples of costume expressions by participants, the next thread of discussion is devoted to the discussion of the interview data on the rationale for this practice.

Stated differently, all playwright educators offered similar views, albeit from distinct angles, on their rationale for selecting costumes for major characters. From the point of view of playwright educator two, the issue of costume usage in the theatre is the responsibility of the costume designer and not the playwright. However, the fear of the playwright is that costumiers may not get the right costume for some of the key characters to establish them, hence the need to offer costumes for major characters to amplify their role(s). What is of essence within the participants submission, which is also echoed in the thoughts and ideas of the other two playwright educators, is that issues about costumes lie at the door of the costumier, however, playwrights come in to complement this role in their writings.

Playwright educator one shared in the ideas of playwright educator two when the participant noted:

There are some specific characters that playwrights are interested in because they are characters you are creating for a special purpose and if you are creating such characters, you want the audience to have a certain impression about those characters. So, those are the characters whose costumes you will describe in detail. It is not all of the other characters. Some may be minor, and for them, I don't bother about what they will wear. But I am interested in the major characters. For the other characters, I leave them to the directors and costumiers to decide what costumes they think will fit that role.

Implicit in the submission of playwright educator one is the need to prescribe costumes for major characters to generate the needed impression to advance the dramatic action as it unfolds. Prescribing costumes for major characters is anchored on the assumption that such major characters are the drivers in the play text, and as such, their representation cannot be compromised. Hence the need to offer the reader or theatre audience a pictorial format about such characters to serve as a springboard to visualise what other minor characters may also look like. Subsequently, as the main character, for the audience or readers to better relate to such characters, it is expedient that some level of costume be prescribed to affirm whether the play text is a tragedy, comedy, etc. For example, as submitted by playwright educator one, "if you are writing about a comedy and you want your characters to appear more comic, you can

look at it from the costume perspective. You can give the major character a costume that will portray that this is a comic character.” Playwright educator three shares in the submission of playwright educator one when the participant succinctly affirmed that he engages in expressing costumes for major characters "to put a message across a character through his or her costumes." Ultimately, costumes convey messages in non-verbal terms and seek to offer vital visual cues to readers and audiences. Prescribing costumes for major characters to project them and promote their characterisation thereby offering impressions about their role(s), is systematic with literature as advanced by Figueiredo and Cabral (2019) that costumes aid in the entire understanding of a script, meaning associated with characters and the entire characterisation. Again, selecting costumes for main characters to project them is affirmed by Adjei (2005) who asserts that costumes for main characters seek to promote them to audiences and readers.

Factors that influence choice of costumes for characters

On factors that influence the choice of costumes for characters, playwright educator two submitted in the following words:

I was exploring the form in indigenous storytelling and combining it with conventional form. I wanted to show as many parts of the storyteller, who is present at every stage, as possible. Because of time and scene changes, I decided he should change his costume on stage, therefore breaking the fourth wall to interact with his audience. While wearing a shirt, he also wears the jumper over it. This is because a jumper is easier to wear because it has no buttons to be worn. So, I carefully selected the kinds of costumes based on the role of the character in relation to scene changes and time.

From the submission, the need to explore a hybrid approach to storytelling from the traditional Ghanaian space and conventional forms served as a springboard for prescribing costumes for characters. Thus, assigning the storyteller multiple roles in the same play text. Consequently, assigning a character multiple roles calls for different representations of such a character through costumes and perhaps other vital transformative elements such as voice, switching of mood, acting, and many more. Since costume is a transformative visual element, it was employed in the realisation of this idea. Here, two considerations inform the kinds of costumes to be selected, thus time and scene changes. Undoubtedly, time and scene changes are two important considerations in any production. This is because when time for scene changes drags on too much, it detracts from the flow of the dramatic piece, hence the need to find suitable avenues to bridge them. It is noteworthy that costumes come in handy to alleviate this challenge. By this, the use of costumes that have the potential to overcome such scene changes, such as jumper was relevant. Apparently, the participant relied on the stylistic features of a jumper, which facilitate its easy wear and removal from the human body. This stems from the slit or opening incorporated in the construction of a jumper as well as its loose-fitting nature. This means there is no need to wear buttons and also call for assistance in fixing a cufflink, as in the case of a long-sleeve shirt associated with such a design feature. These unique structures in a jumper ultimately served as a guiding post for the participant to prescribe the jumper to be worn over the shirt. What is of significance is that the playwright had a deeper understanding

of the features of some costumes in the Ghanaian space, which served as the basis upon which such costume expressions were founded. Selecting costumes based on scene changes and time is consistent with literature by Crist (2014), who admonished theatre artists' to be guided by the principle that quick scene or character changes necessitate the use of limited time for costume changes.

From a different perspective, playwright participant one, disclosed that the kind of impression he wanted to create served as the basis for expressing costumes for major characters. The participant divulged:

...because I am portraying those characters in a certain light, I think about what costume I will give to them that will match the impression I want to create.

Insight from the forgoing submission is that the main driver for costume expression is the impression the playwright seeks to project. By this, costume prescription is anchored on the manifold of impressions the playwright seeks to project. These impressions can range from emotional depth, intellectual stimulation, symbolism and many more which can be translated using costume as a visual tool to communicate non verbally. By this, costume serves as a tangible element of both visible and invisible situations created by playwrights. Prescribing costumes for characters based on the impression to be created is affirmed by Adjei (2005) who argues that the character impression to be created serves as an indicator in framing costumes for theatrical purposes.

While playwright educator one and two relied on scene changes and time and impression to be created respectively as factors that influence choice of costumes for their characters, playwright educator three also brought to the fore, a varying perspective. The participant revealed :

....I do so when the characters are going to portray a special character, then I will prescribe their costumes. However, because I want my plays to be staged everywhere such prescriptions are very minimal.

Two key issues emerge from the participants submissions: First, a key factor in expressing costume is when the character is going to portray a special character. This means that when the playwright does not seem to create any special characters, it suggests that he will not engage in any form of costume expression. This filters into the second issue that the data reveal: the participant does not engage in costume prescriptions on the high side because the participant believes that his plays ought to be performed everywhere. As a result, the participant believes that such prescriptions could restrict the play texts' ability to be performed globally. As a result, these prescriptions are somewhat infrequent. However, I contest this aspect of the participant's submission. Since most of the costumes expressed are brewed in the Ghanaian setting, my argument is based on the idea that such costume prescriptions in play texts have the potential to showcase Ghana's creative culture, including the rich costume, to the entire world. By doing so, individuals beyond the boundaries of Ghana will at least acquaint themselves with the Ghanaian traditional costumes when they read the play text. It is important to note that literature appears silent on relying on creating special characters to express costume choices for characters.

Significance of costume choices

The significance of expressing costume choices for selected characters was stressed by participants from varying perspectives. A synthesis of the data revealed that all the participants for the study wanted to form an opinion about specific characters at the exposition stage of their play text that will resonate with the kind(s) of role(s) such characters are playing, or just to create some contact or distinction with characters. A participant opened up:

....The main significance is to uplift or make people aware of the cultural milieu where the character is coming from. Therefore, if I choose any costume for any character, then I want to place my character in a certain cultural background [Playwright educator three].

The foregoing information acknowledges that costume serves as a medium that projects the culture of a group of people. This is because various civilisations and ethnic groups are defined by unique costumes that seek to portray such cultural spaces at a glance. Consequently, descriptions of such costumes may include the kinds of fabric, colour, patterns, and even the general outline of a costume to encompass traditional accessories like headgear, footwear, and other embellishments. Ultimately, it serves as an avenue for cultural appropriateness and signifiers embedded with symbolism. From the ensuing discussion, I argue that playwrights' knowledge of the costume culture of a given society serves as a catalyst to identify a specific costume for a character to project the culture of a specific group of people. Costumes serving as an avenue to promote the culture of a group of people are affirmed by Abuku and Odi (2010), who offered that costumes are visual elements that seek to promote the culture of a group of people. Beyond this, playwright educator one, also brought to the fore, manifold significance of expressing costume choices. The participant submitted:

It projects the characters effectively and creates the believable characters that I want to portray. For instance, in the Preety Trees of Gakwana, when the first lady comes on stage, she is still in her kaba and slit and meets her husband. All through the play, she is in her traditional costume (kaba and slit). It is necessary for the characterisation...it also fits the theme that I am talking about. This is because the first lady is very traditional and wants us to revisit our traditions. If you read the play, she says those days we used to go into the bush and hunt for snails and all that...things about going back to that kind of life. But unfortunately, she had to maintain her personality in the wake of a changing world. I am very interested in presenting the first lady as a very traditional person. She, for cultural reasons, is very interested in the environment, and she comes from a rural area. Remember, she is going back to her rural home to visit. She is very traditional in everything. You see, mostly, first ladies want to be seen in western clothes. But I want to see her as a first lady who is down to

earth with her people. This is because the kaba and slit are traditional costumes for women in Ghana [Playwright educator one].

From the forgoing submissions, two issues arise. First, costumes help project characters effectively and create believable characters as well. Accordingly, costumes help to suggest and promote the status of the character. From the data, the first lady of *Gakwana*'s expressed costume, "Kaba and slit," was one that could situate her in her role as a first lady. Again, the "Kaba and slit" ensemble was used to explore the relationship between the first lady and her people. This was because the community members of *Gakwana* could identify with the style. This is devoid of some first ladies in the African space who relegate their traditional costumes to the popularity of costumes from Euro-American civilisations. Ultimately, the "kaba and slit" ensemble helped to enhance the depth of the character (the first lady) at *Gakwana*. Costume used to project characters effectively and create believable characters as well is in consonance with literature by Utoh-Ezeajugh (2015), who asserts that costume enhances characterization and serves as a key driver in theatrical discourse. Again, costume sowing relationship between characters is also acknowledged by Adjei (2005) who asserts that costume help identify the relationship among characters.

Second, expressed costumes also help to enforce themes in play texts. As indicated by the participant, the choice of the "kaba and slit" ensemble for the first lady was to affirm a specific theme, thus, restoring the environment will promote good living. Hence, endorsing the Ghanaian culture through costumes, a local art form that has existed for centuries with varied modifications while remaining relevant over the years to present. Thereby, an association with the "kaba" and "slit" ensemble, a costume that has existed for decades when the environment was in its good state, will help to promote the theme of restoring the environment. This stands to reason that although there have been modifications in the ways of living that pose a threat to the environment, there is a need to make sure that such modifications do not destroy the environment; rather, engaging in sustainable approaches is the way forward. For example, in the play text, while illegal mining methods had destroyed several lands at *Gakwana*, thereby making it lose its essence, the first lady advocated for better or improved ways of mining. Throughout the plot structure, the first lady's expressed costumes were "kaba and slit". Ultimately, it is when these are achieved that they will tie in with playwright educator two who averred, "I want the meaning of the play text to come out in a specific way. I do not want the meaning to be distorted." Costumes used to enforce themes in play texts are confirmed by Sosnovskaya (2010), who disclosed that costumes are among the various art works used to project themes in the theatrical space. Again, the wearing or use of "kaba" and "slit" ensemble, a traditional costume within the Ghanaian space, especially by women in authority, such as the first lady of *Gakwana*, is in consonance with literature by Dennis and Danquah Monnie (2023), who revealed that "Kaba" and "slit" are costumes worn by women in authority, including Pro Vice Chancellors.

Implications of costume choice for costume designers and playwrights

Prescribing costumes for some characters was embedded with implications for both costume designers and playwrights. A synthesis of the ideas of playwright educator two revealed that some costumiers tasked with costuming plays offer costumes that do not in any way project

the characters. However, playwrights do not in turn take over the roles of costumiers, but rather try to assist. Playwrights assist costume designers in knowing what to do, even when they seem not to have understood the play. Although some costume designers do better at interpreting the text on stage, there are others who may not do justice to it, especially non-professionals. Ultimately, this aims to assist costumiers in their costume-making process while the playwright creates the needed impression. Playwright educator one shared the ideas of playwright educator two when the participant noted:

...simple. It simplifies things for costumiers. I have described what I want. You don't have to struggle; you may get what is close to what has been described. You may not get exactly that, but at least you know what is required.

Playwright educator two's view evokes the idea that although the implication for prescribing costumes for some characters is to simplify things for the costumier, the costumier has the liberty to choose alternate costumes that may be closer to what has been prescribed. In terms of implications of expressed costumes for playwrights, playwright educator one advanced that he tries to direct his plays the first time, and that helps him to find out if he has achieved what he wanted before finalising the play. Consequently, it simplified things for him as well. Literature appears silent on expressing costume choices to assist costumiers in their costuming process and also to simplify issues for both the costumier and playwright.

From a different perspective, playwright educator three also informed:

As a playwright, the implication of my costumes is to extend the creativity of the costumier. Sometimes it is also good to test the abilities of costumiers, whether they can conform to whatever choice you have made. So, it is an extension of a learning process for myself as a playwright and the costumier. If, at the end of the day, the costumier gets back to tell you the costumes you prescribed and we cannot find out or get them, then there is a need to think through. Not only costumiers, but all theatre crew members. And that is why it is good to be trained as a playwright. Some people write plays without considering anything. I wright having in mind all crew members in mind. That is why you have to be trained as a playwright, at least to know the conventions.

Implicit in the foregoing submission is the need to ascertain if costumiers can creatively build the various costumes that have been expressed in the text. What is of essence is that it serves as an avenue for the costumier to appreciate costume as a multipurpose task that spans various costume elements beyond what the costumier is familiar with. Beyond this, it also has the ability to enhance the construction abilities of the costumier because he or she will be handling other costumes that perhaps do not fall within the pool of costumes he or she is familiar with constructing. Subsequently, it will broaden and sharpen the creative abilities of the costumier. On the part of the playwright, it also serves as an avenue to receive feedback from costumiers whether their expressed costumes can be assessed with ease or otherwise. Therefore,

having the various crew members in mind while crafting play texts is the way to go. While this appears beneficial, the need for playwrights to receive formal training in writing plays is crucial, as this serves as an avenue for them to acquaint themselves with the conventions needed in crafting play texts and how to negotiate a path for incorporating visual effects such as costumes into the entire text. Russell (2017), confirms that expressing costumes extend the creativity of the costumier and further adds that it has the potential to ignite innovation in the entire costume architecture.

CONCLUSIONS

Playwrights all over the world have crafted their works over time to either represent artistic expressions that deepen our understanding of the human condition, provoke thought, or help preserve a society's cultural heritage. It is intriguing to note that the stylistic approach to playwriting varies from one playwright to the next. Be that as it may, there are some playwrights who express costume demands in their texts, hence the need to explore this unique phenomenon in the performing arts discipline. This focus is particularly relevant because it adds to the scholarship in theatre arts, especially the dynamic relationship between playwriting and costume design as unique fields consciously woven to produce unique artwork. The findings of the study showed that the purpose of expressing costume choices was to project major characters, and that character costume choices were influenced by scene changes, time, and the need to create impressions and unique characters. While the implications of such costume choices were to support costumiers, make issues easier for them and the playwright, and encourage them to be more creative, the significance of such choices was to project culture and characters and enforce themes.

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