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Deconstructing the "Fourth Wall": Metatheatricality in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus and Osofisan's Tegonni*

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Abstract

The Roman theatrical tradition owes a great deal to the spirit of Greek theatre in antiquity, particularly as pioneered by Menander in New Comedy. The reception and subsequent reputation of the Greek theatrical convention among Plautus' audience, has recently been attributed to his skilful re-theatricalisation of the alien drama through the use of what scholars have variously identified as metatheatre, -the self-referentiality of drama. The use of this technique has called attention to the highly metafictional world of Plautine drama and in this case, his *Miles Gloriosus,* which has also been emphasized as metatheatrical. The contemporary Nigerian theatre practitioner/playwright, Femi Osofisan, has also shown metatheatrical moments in his works. Osofisan's *Tegonni,* has betrayed a reception of such metatheatricality as identified in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus.* But beyond hosting own critique, both plays portray an undercurrent of events privileging a socio-cultural hermeneutics, whose currency subsists even in contemporary climes.

The paper examines the reception of Plautine metatheatrical techniques and its attendant socio-cultural interpretations in *Miles Gloriosus,* and in post-colonial Nigerian drama through a reading of Femi Osofisan's *Tegonni*, *an African Antigone.*

Key words: Theatricality; Plautus; Plautine

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INTRODUCTION

Metatheatre or the capacity of stage text and performance to refer to and comment on its own nature as an artistic medium has been an age-long adaptation in western theatrical tradition (Crow, 2002, p.132).

Metatheatricality is a situation in which the playwright consciously draws attention to the play as a play whereby drama makes reference to itself as drama. In other words, "theatre attempts to become more pretentious by hosting its own critique" (Okoye, 2010, p.119). In the words of Slater (Slater, 1985, p.14), metatheatre is theatrically self-conscious theatre, i.e., one that demonstrates an awareness of its own theatricality. However, this literary technique exploits its own conventions and devices to effect comedy and pathos. In other words, this dramaturgical device can become an instrument in the hands of playwrights in deconstruction perceived socio-cultural, and political contradictions.

In acquiescence with Tompkins, metatheatre may also be described, "as locations of deliberate dis-locations of colonial power," as a strategy of resistance. And as indicated in Osofisan's post-colonial dramatic text, *Tegonni*, it is "a self-conscious method of re-negotiating, re-working- not just re-playing the past and the present" (Tompkins, 1995) Hence for Osofisan, this brand of his dramaturgy splits the action into multiple locations, and appropriates them to resist a text or a dominant paradigm. The audience is, however, not left out of this dislocation of text and subtext and 'dominant paradigm (Tompkins, 1995, p.8).

Indeed, of significance in textual mannered performance is the relationship between the performer and the audience, and the nature of this relationship is at the hub of the study of the plays of the Roman comic playwright Plautus. Theatre scholars, however, are quick to remind us of the inadequacy of the text as substitute for performance, since it represents a tiny aspect of the complex system at work in the production of a play, and

thus the clues that texts provide for interpretation are unreliable (introductory comments in Tim Moore, 1998, pp.1-6; Ubersfeld, 1982, pp.22-23; Berkerman, 1990; Bennett, 1990, p.161). This affiliation/relationship i.e., the proper interpretation of text and the playwright's intent on stage, may be dependent on the content, structure and the stagecraft, which are all important in determining how the playwright and characters in the play impact on the audience. Therefore, the dramatist relies on improvisation which slants disproportionately on the non-textual elements of theatre and can be better appreciated through an analysis of the plays.[viii] There are indications in Roman literary history that corroborate the possible circumstances of improvisation in Roman comedy. Indeed, evidence show that 'old Roman theatrical tradition', probably reaching back in the fifth century, has made use of extemporalization, such as ad-libbing by actors. As indicated by Vogt- Spira, (2001, p.95) there is a famous chapter in Livy (7.2) showing that as early as 364 BCE, before literary drama came in with Livius Andonichus in 240BC, there was a partial transition to writing of plays; thus an indication of ad-libbing by characters on stage. There is therefore a plausibility to the claim that the Roman audience, i.e. Plautine audience was sufficiently aware of possibilities of the stage devices and conventions and consequently, were appreciative of their use in the interpretation of actions in the text. The possibility above affects our view of plautine comedy as a written drama from the dawn of Roman literature, behind which lies a long literary tradition. According to Fraenkel these also include perversion of original texts by Roman writers, disregarding rules of logic etc. (Segal, 2001, p.95).

Illusion may be not the aim of every theatre, but its necessity cannot be trivialised in the analysis of the works of Plautus and Osofisan. In the words of Styan, " to play with the idea of illusion itself, to mock the very thing it most tries to create- and the audience that accepts it (Styan, 1975)." An illusion exists in Plautus, for instance, when an audience expects an old man (*senex*) to oppose his son's a*mor* and accepts his doing so as a convincing illusion, while Osofisan's audience are kept under the illusion that they are watching oppressive White British officials, albeit, in Black skin, and are actually convinced that the action on stage is reality.

The concept of 'dramatic illusion', regardless of its inherent problems (Sifakis, 1971, pp.7-14), was used by Berthold Brecht to show the difference between drama and epic theatre, where in the former, actors communicate with the audience indirectly, while in the latter, they go all-out to make the audience aware that they are in a theatre and are observing a performance technique. According to Okoye, "Osofisan proceeds through this dramaturgy to undermine this predetermined western-style space by aesthetically crashing the fourth wall and reuniting audience and performers (Okoye,2010, P.125)". Both playwrights appear to have contrived this technique in achieving their criticism of such socio-cultural peculiarities as seen in their climes.

Scholars (Fraenkel, 1960, pp.135-221; Slater, 1985; Beacham, 1991; Wright, 1974, pp.183-196; Barchiesi, 1970; Muecke, 1986; Frangoulides, 1997) generally agree that Plautus' plays, which are also adaptations from Greek comedies, are more self-consciously theatrical, even than their Greek originals, with such dramatic antics as audience address and theatrical reminders. For Osofisan, the borrowings are varied; in his words, "certainly all of our playwrights who come after owe a debt of gratitude to those imaginative pioneers (Osofisan, 1998, p.20)." Plautine comedies, and Osofisan's plays, make use of such devices as play-within- the play.

In this paper I wish to argue that beyond the self-reflexive tendency in both plays, there is an underlying deliberate deconstruction of an existing socio-cultural status quo, skilfully ensconced within a comic dimension- their individual peculiar strand of comic technique through which both playwrights scoff at the illusion of authority/paternal power. Despite the tragic atmosphere in Tegonni, the metafiction environment provides some breathing space for the audience through the comical splices; while Plautus' comedy is enveloped in the deception of the two major characters- the soldier and his slave, Sceledrus. As revealed in the structure of both plays, both writers attempt a deconstruction of plots in the original plays through a restructuring that is wrapped in their strand of metatheatricality, while nudging at perceiving socio-cultural complexities. An essential feature of this framework is that the playwright could and did on occasion draw attention to the artificiality of his creation, whereby the play, which avers to be a representation of truth, is shown to be a simulated entity, through the deliberate shattering of the illusion of reality.

1. MILES GLORIOSUS

Plautus' major contribution to comedy is his inclusion of self-conscious awareness of theatrical conventions in his novel concept of comic heroism that emerges vividly in performance. This convention, encourages the audience to view the play on two levels, both as affectation of reality and also as an unreal piece of dramatic fiction. Nonetheless, there are scholars who do not share Styan's view on metatheatricality, but share a consensus on the basic parameters of metatheatre as, "an awareness on the part of characters that they are on a stage, as they self-consciously draw attention to their status as actors playing parts; a tendency to improvise, thus usurping the role of the playwright; usage of the 'play-within-the-play', as these characters consciously take on further roles as part of the dramatic action" (Maurice, 2007, p.408).

Miles Gloriosus contains a play-within-a-play featuring two designs, both of which are woven around Pyrgopolynices, the braggart soldier. Palaestrio the slave

of Pleusicles, is abducted, Pleusicles goes in search of her slave and lover, she finds herself in the house of Periplectomenus, next door neighbour to Pyrgopolynices their abductor. Philocomasium visits Pyrgopolynices through a hole dug in the wall between the two houses. However, Sceledrus, another slave of the soldier, has spied Philocomasium embracing Pleusicles in Periplectomenus'house.

These characters make up the two deceptions establishing the metatheatricality of the play.

But beyond its self-reflexivity, the *Miles,* could be read as a deconstruction of an existing socio-cultural status quo, in Roman antiquity. The comedy appears to be making a subtle commentary on the 'paternal power' structure, as it affects the place of women in the Roman society. Both designs are woven around Pyrogopolynices-the braggart soldier, and his slave Sceledrus, who on the orders of his master has gone in search of his master's lady.

After the initial introduction to Pyrgoploynices in the first scene, he disappears for the whole of the main plot, which is independent of the second in terms of the action. The first deception, however, parallels the second by stressing not just the ideas of role-playing and acting, but also a portrayal of the illusion of paternal power play, while ridiculing the characters that perpetuated such tradition. This emphasis on the illusory power of drama highlights the character of Pyrgopolynices, whose whole life is an illusion.

Plautine prologue is also an important template for assessing audience reception of the metafictional world of the actors on stage. In *Miles*, for instance the prologue is an invaluable interest that anticipates the audience reactions to the fictional stage entertainers. Using the *prologoi*, ; the imaginary wall of the ancient Greek *proscenium,* in order, not just to connect, but also to ensure the transmission and reception of the underlying message of the play to his audience.

In the fictional world of Plautus' comedies, the sense of dramatic illusion is never disconnected from the audience who is constantly reminded that they are watching a play.

The humour in Plautus' prologues has a penchant for infiltrating the frontiers of the fictional world of the plays and the experiential environment of the theatre where the action is taking place. This awareness can be gleaned from the "metatheatrical comments, with which the Plautine *prologi* intersperse their introductory remarks, stress their consciousness of belonging to both worlds and thus serve as a transitional step for the spectators between their own everyday concerns and the action of the play that they are invited to enjoy" (Kirichenko, 2007, p.206). In Plautus' prologues the narrator can be either located outside the fictional world of the play, or, as is the case in *Miles*, play a leading part in it; a speech by Palaestrio after the first scene was intended to give the audience the impression of the play as a play. But then the playwright makes use of the full potential of the metatheatre, when the narrator makes a sudden entrance into the fictional world created in the first scene and engages in a repartee with spectators; he expresses pleasure at explaining the supposed *argumentum*, ordering the audience to pay attention. (pp.79-87, 98). He then gives an exposé of the impending actions in the play; he and his friends will make Sceledrus uncertain of what he sees; thus compounding the illusory world on stage,

> et mox ne erretis, haec duarum hodie vicemet hinc et illinc mulier feret imaginem,atque eadem erit, verum alia esse adsimulabitur (150-2). And so that you won't be mistaken, this woman will take on the appearanceof two people in turn, in this house and in that one, but both will be the sameperson, she will really be pretending to be another'(Maurice, 2007)

The illusion created by the playwright on Sceledrus' confusion, that is, the uncertainty of what he sees, foregrounds this resistance against the traditional authority, which is given a comic dimension. Indeed, it is a veiled satire on the two characters and their likes, whose penchant is the perpetuation of 'paternal power and authority', and by extension male domination in fifth century BCE, Rome.

The use of the play as play instrument is also seen in the doubling of Palaestrio as the *prologu* and a character in the play who reveals an action he was yet to carry out (237-241); then he refers to Philocomasium's *imago* (151). This is a further reference to the artificiality of the play. Indeed, Plautus, as the creator of the fictional world of the play, conflates the play's two deception plot scenes as play–within- the play, while Palaestrio and his *camaraderie* are presented as comic actors performing these actions. But, then, In furtherance of the metatheatricality of Plautus, Palaestrio is introduced in his new added role as a playwright who plans the deception of Sceledrus, while Periplectomenus intimates the audience the game plan against Sceledrus as usual, most of the scenes in both plots of deception are devoted to a demonstration of theatrical ability, but this time not by Palaestrio but by Periplectomenus, as the slave becomes the admiring audience that Periplectomenus himself had been in the first scene.

In the second half of the play, Palaestrio shows off his star actor, and takes on the role of director-playwright. He describes the plan that he has devised and the actors he will need to perform the ploy, sends Periplectomenus off with his orders (765-804), and indeed, when Palaestrio first introduces Periplectomenus at his first entrance, refers to him specifically as a *senex lepidus* (155).

> At quidem illuc aetatis qui sit non invenies alterumlepidiorem ad omnis res nec qui amicus amico sit magis (659-60)'You won't find another man of that age more delightful in every way, nor another who is more of a friend to a friend'(Maurice, 2007)

These are all illusion of dramatic parts, rather than serious statements of mind-set, as the playwright scoffs at the perpetrators of such perceived social anomy, which incidentally also underscores Periplectomenus' last words on the matter, as he declares:

> *hau centensumampartem dixi atque, otium rei si sit, possum expromere*, (763-4)'I've scarcely told you a hundredth part of what I could display, if there was time for this' (Maurice, 2007).

The self-conscious infringement of the dramatic illusion that inevitably results from this humorous conflation is obviously not a mimetic flaw but one of the primary catalysts of the spectator's laughter that guarantees the success of the play (Kirichenko, 2007, p.206).

2. TEGONNI

Perhaps it is instructive to say here that the play *Tegonni* by Femi Osofisan is remarkable in not only theoretically observable life, past and present, but also re-theatricalising an alien play to suit the sensibilities of his Nigerian spectators. Osofisan arguably one of the front liners in the world of Nigerian dramatic arts, is known for his progressive stance against oppression and tyranny. His works have also betrayed sympathy for an advocacy of social change.

The fabric of his plays and other writings is usually critical of the disequilibrium in the social structure, thus always creating a conflict between the indigenous and imported cultures; an alternative tradition in popular literature, he says should be a model for a new society. Incidentally, most critics are hard put to determine his philosophical bent. Some writers like Niyi Osundare, see his works as having tendencies ranging from liberal through the radical to the revolutionary. But others dismiss this reading of ambiguity, perceiving rather a Marxist leaning in the conflicts that characterize his plays.

> As ideological aesthete, Osofisanconstantly experiments with forms and enduring artistry to embody humanistic social, philosophy. It is this search for forms that has taken him to the primordial sources of African indigenous performative provenance." (210)

This revolutionary tendency in Osofisan, and his advocacy for social transformation has in the words of Olu Obafemi (Drama of Osofisan, p.21, led the playwright to search for forms in the primal roots of African traditional mores and lore. However, his search for form is not only limited to the traditional African provenance, but also extends to the Greek world of Antiquity.

Osofisan thus exhibits his creative ingenuity in the reconstruction of history, myth and consensus opinion in an attempt to create a more acceptable paradigm for the society.

As also captured in Okoye (2011, p.323) Osofisan's dramaturgy "ostensibly adopts a materialist approach to received canonical narratives, both indigenous and western, subjecting them to a rereading that can be said to be, however, palimpsestic: leaving their original traces while he inscribes upon them new visions that are simultaneously similar and different".

Greenblatt's "The Improvisation of Power" which he defines as "an ability to transform given materials into one's own scenario, and demonstrate... the European's (African'*s)* ability again and again to insinuate themselves into pre-existing political, religious, even psychic structure of the natives and to turn those structures to their advantage (Stephen, 1980, p.227)", perhaps best situates the attributes which best describes *Tegonni,* as the Nigerian-*African Antigone,* which *O*sofisan has cloned, albeit through a different genre, with an effective management of theatrical devices akin to those improvised in the Plautine plays to achieve the same effect Plautus had on his audience both in antiquity as in contemporary times. But besides the above, Osofisan's Tegonni lends itself to a different reading which echoes the words of Goff (2011) "that…the play deconstructs colonial and other types of authority, including paternal power and the domination of the male…" The self-conscious metatheatricality is the instrumentality he deploys in achieving this intent. Tegonni, the nineteenth century Yoruba Princess, is not only spiteful of some traditional no-go areas, but also rebels against the authority of the British colonial overlords. Her resistance is double pronged; for example, she does not only go against the traditional paternal power, by going into a vocation an exclusive preserve of the male, but caps it by dressing as *Egungun* masquerades with her female companions and contracts a barrier breaking marriage with Captain Allan Jones. In the second of the double-pronged resistance, she brazenly flaunts Governor Carter Ross's express orders against burying Oyekunle, an enemy of the colonial authority.

I want to contend at this point, that the concept of metatheatre is not only an attribute of comedy, but as aptly shown by Osofisan in *Tegonni,* it is even a cleverer object for facilitating the acceptance of a tragic play to the admiration of his audience. In other words, both strands of dramaturgy are equally useful agency in achieving the intent of the playwright. Aligned with this view of Osofisan's dramaturgy is the statement by Dunton, that "some of Osofisan's techniques are closely influenced by Brechtian theatre: for example, the deliberate introduction, as the play proceeds, of disjunctions in style, tone, narrative flow; or the exposure by the cast of their own status as actors (Dunton, 1992, p.69)". As noted by Crow, a pervasive feature of African contemporary drama is "the persistence with which playwrights foreground the act of performance itself"; as revealed in his dramaturgy, is a "deep-seated pleasure in many African cultures in theoretically and comic, often satirical observation and parody of different kinds of behaviour at the everyday social level." This is characterised by his use of music, song and dance and an audience that demand and respond to very direct relations with performers skilled in the art of stimulating and manipulating audience response.(134)

In *Tegonni*, the prologue is no less strategic an instrument in the hands of Osofisan as he perhaps echoes Kirichenko (p.206), at the start of the play. The prologue here is equally an invaluable intertext in the dramatist's

attempt at creating a link between the fictional world of the actors and his audience. Osofisan's stagecraft is clearly seen in the self-conscious interchanges between actors and the director of the play:

> Act: Man, is the play starting or not?
> Act: why are we wasting time? The audience is already seated.
> Dir.: I need white actors for the roles of Governor, his ADC, and the D.O.
> ACT: well, how about me?
> Dir.: I said white actors.
> Act: And I said try me!
> ...
> Act: But use your imagination, man! Theatre is all about illusion, isn't it?
> ...
> Act: A house of Dreams! So, just a little make up, I announce my role to the audience, and we are set to go!

The audience of course is part and parcel of the interchanges between actors and the director; more importantly, the dramatist here exploits the power of illusion as he creates the fictional world on stage, (in which actors can, short of bleaching their black skin white, pretend to be white in order to live out their illusion around the spectators. "Of course! All are illusion here, and everyone in the audience has come to play his or her own part in a dream. And dreams are where anything can happen". (14) The dramatist here adroitly shows his mastery of stage craft as he undeniably establishes the concept of "play as play" in the prologue. The audience is aware that the actors are a troupe of actors performing a play, and is given the impression that they can manoeuvre themselves in between roles, i.e. role-play in the play. The picture of a performance is more vivid here as the Director invites the costume manager (CM) to hand out wigs to the swelling rank of volunteer "white" actors. This is further replicated in scene 12 where the audience again is made aware of the dual role of Antigone, who is not just an actor, but also a playwright; as she apportions roles to her crew, who had earlier complained of being weary of their earlier part as soldiers.

The play opens with the playwright subverting the "aesthetic distance" contracting time and space, to enhance the theatricality of the play, as he creates an illusion of Yemoja the Yoruba water goddess arriving on stage with Tegonni as the incarnation of the ancient myth of Antigone on board (17).

It is the day Tegonni is supposed to get married to Alan Jones, the white district officer in-charge of Oke-Osun. In the meantime, Carter Ross, the colonial governor, has ordered that Oyekunle's body be brought into town and be laid out in front of the palace, not to be buried. Apparently, Antigone has journeyed through the long route of myth and history so that she can lend support to her fictional incarnation who, she is aware, would rebel against the Governor's instructions concerning Oyekunle. In this metafictional world made by the dramatist, Antigone exists for Tegonni as a source of inspiration, a role she maintains through the duration of the play. The dramatic contrivance of a marriage between Jones and Tegonni is a further reference to the artificiality of the play; especially in the context of the nineteenth century Oke-osun, it was bizarre and was never to be. Even her staunch supporter, Baba Ishokun, the poet, who had helped her earlier when she took on a weird career in bronze-casting (a vocation exclusively for men), along with all citizens of Oke-Osun, consider this latest move an abomination.

But then it is the arrival of the mythical Antigone in the third scene that introduces the play- within- the-play, interspersed with such devices as the self-conscious interchanges with the other actors. Believing she may have arrived late to the play, Antigone approaches one of the actors:

> Ant: Greetings. Has the play started?
> Fad: Who are you, and where do you come from.Ant: Please tell us first.
> Fad: Well, look for yourself. (*Indicating the audience*.)
> Ant: My name is Antigone. These are my body guards...I heard you are acting my story...
> Yem: Your story! Sorry, you are mistaken. This is the story of Tegonni, our sister, Funny, the name sounds almost the same, but- ... (25)

This scene is reminiscent of all Roman plays which are seen as part of 'ludi'("games") (Knapp, 1999, p.45); the actors in their self-conscious lines make it clear that they have come to perform or are performing a role: "We're metaphors. We always come in the colours of your imagination." And in response to Yemisi's invitation, Antigone says: "That's why we came in this shape, my friends! We've had long rehearsals of your customs. But go ahead we'll catch up with you."(25)

Soon after the prologue the spectators realise that Antigone, besides being an actor, is also a Director in her own right, and she converts members of her crew into a detachment of the Hausa constabulary sent by the Governor to guard the body of Oyekunle. She is seen handing out roles to her crew: "it's not our story, we're from other times. It's just history about to repeat itself again". The spectators are constantly made aware of the unrealness/ artificiality of the situation and the dramatic creations in performance. Of course, the dramatist had earlier warned, that "anything was possible in a dreamland."

Osofisan's, as much as the Plautine stage, is neutral (Slater, 1985, p.11; Styan, 1975, pp.180-81), not bound by time, space or realistic plausibility, thus able to manoeuvre within the illusory and non-illusory ambit of this play. This indeed, explains the structural elasticity of *Tegonni*. Osofisan has skilfully adopted an essential ingredient of illusion of reality through his infinitely flexible infusion of the present to the past and even the future. In the words of Styan, "the neutral stage allows an inexhaustible succession of dramatic images." This is obvious in his transmutation of the myth of the dead Antigone of 5th century Greece into the pulsating presence of the nineteenth century history of Oke-Osun in western Nigeria, among other metatheatricalities.

> Ant: There is only one Antigone.
> Kunbi: But that is impossible. She is from Greek mythology.

> Ant: And so am I. From the Greek and other Mythologies. ...
> Antigone belongs to several incarnations.

Another instance of flexibility of Osofisan's dramatic space is further demonstrated in the surrealistic invocation of the 'spirit of stories'(94-95*ff*) to aid Tegonni's narration of the story of "The Tiger and the Frog", exposing the playwright's skilful manoeuvring of space and time. The message /communication is of course clearly embedded in the song's refrain:

> "Ekun! Is not your friend"
> "Run away oh, run away oh,
> Don't delay oh, ay!"
>
> Ekun! Ekun will swallow you!"
> "Run away oh, run away oh,
> Don't delay oh, ay!"

By so embedding them, Osofisan is able to contrive a highly successful dramatic communication, thus creating a convention that is effective as a dramaturgical invention. The dramatist's deliberate footprints at strategic points in the play can be gleaned through these rather skilful metatheatrical devices. Sometimes when there is a need to resolve a situation he interrogates, as it was, the myth of Antigone. For instance, when Tegonni seeks the advice of her friends on whether to apologise publicly as demanded by Governor Carter Ross, she is made to search for Antigone:

> Teg: I came to find you.
> Ant: I was expecting you.
> Teg: Just now I spoke to the girls seeking their advice, you said nothing.
> Ant: It's not my story... I'm just a metaphor from the past- ...
> Teg: So why didn't you just stay where you were, a relic in the memory of poets?
> Ant: You're angry. But suppose i tell you that i couldn't offer advice because i myself, i am no longer pure?
> Teg: what's that suppose to mean?
> Ant: That I am contaminated. This Antigone you see is not the one you know. Not the hero men remember, but one sullied by history. (125)

Osofisan here invokes the power of an elusive past to contrive an immediate reality, that is equally artificial; "you are angry, but suppose I tell you that I couldn't offer advice because, I myself, I am not pure?" Even then it would appear that the playwright was uncertain of his basis for proffering a solution to Tegonni's predicament. Introducing the illusion of Antigone, he proffers a reality which *ab initio* appears unattainable, because the self-confessed 'metaphor from the past' is 'contaminated' and has been 'sullied by history' and may in fact have become a 'riddle'. But inexorably, he tests the tenacity in the power of drama to resolve this 'riddle.' Antigone says:

> Give up, I would have said.
> Because I've learnt from history, and I have grown wise.
> Freedom is a myth which human beings invent as a torch to kindle their egos.
> In the end it all comes to same thing, men and women slaughtering one another to the applause of deluded worshippers. (126)

This evidently, is the illusion created by Carter-Ross and his clique, which must be rejected by Tegonni and her friends. Strategically placed metatheatrical punctuations, such as "it's not my story"; "Leave my story" "You and I have nothing to share," in the play heighten not just the involvement of the audience but also the self-consciousness of the actors to the artificiality of their role-play, a constant reminder perhaps that they are all playing a part in an artificial reality/an illusion of reality.

However, Osofisan deconstructs Tegonni's metafictional world, when a couple of lines later, Antigone confesses jubilantly:

> Come, my sister, embrace me! I was testing you. And now I find you're a true believer, like me! Yes, it is true that many tyrants have marched through history. That for a while, people have been deprived of their freedom. But oppression can never last. Again and again it will be overthrown, and people will reclaim their right to be free! That is the lesson of history, the only one worth learning... Ozymandias will rise again! But so will Antigone! Wherever the call for freedom is heard! (127)

The emphasis on the illusory power of drama is highlighted in the character of Antigone whose dramatic life has been mythical, based on illusion, thus further illustrating the capability of the power of illusion to be mimetic of reality.

CONCLUSION

There is no gainsaying that this study has shown both playwrights, Plautus and Osofisan, ennobling the theatricality of their plays via the boisterous praxis of metatheatricality, and in the same breath, casting a pall on existing societal contradictions. *Tegonni* reveals an atmosphere of socio-cultural contradictions just as the *Miles Gloriosus* (though not contextually similar), while the latter is couched in deception of the chief character, the braggart soldier, and his slave- Sceledrus who was persuade to believe that his man was hallucinating, hence did not see what he saw. But, under the direction of Palaestrio, Sceledrus allows himself also to be convinced that he has not seen what he did indeed see, and is persuaded to doubt the empirical evidence of his eyes. The ruse in Osofisan, on the other hand,is Tegonni's resistance of colonial and traditional authority, (both of which are paternal authority) metatheatrically couched in the illusion of the reality of a mythical Antigone, who would provide a springboard for Tegonni's escape from Governor Carter-Ross' tyranny. Just as the playwright observes, "theatre is all about illusion...a house of Dreams..."

This intertextuality of the play-within-play woven around Tegonni; the introduction of an ancient myth of Antigone and Tegonni's barrier breaking marriage to Captain Allan Jones and other events in which Tegonni resisted the traditional paternal authority , combine in deepening the metatheatricality of the play, inducing in the spectators an awareness of the artificiality of the performances on stage, as actors merely acting out their part

in a 'dream'. 'The role-play of Antigone convinces Tegonni and she is persuaded that her experience is not only similar to that of the elusive mythical Antigone, but this experience would provide a solution for Tegonni's contemporary predicament. The use of this dramatic technique by both playwrights in *Miles Gloriosus and Tegonni* calls attention to the paradoxical nature of drama, which persuades despite being created on nothing more than an illusion, thus demonstrating the domain of the power of true theatre.

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