

**EXPLORING FORESHADOWING IN DIALOGUE THROUGH THE
CHARACTERS OF SAY TOKYO KID AND SALUBI IN WOLE SOYINKA'S THE
ROAD**

OLUBUNMI, Russet Iyanuolu

Email: olubunmirusset@gmail.com

Phone No.: 08109711777

Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

OLUBUNMI, Regina Ileriolu

Email: riolubunmi@lautech.edu.ng

Phone No.: 08079575879

Department of Theatre Arts, Ladoko Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria

Abstract

Characters are very important pillars of drama; they are a product of the playwright's imagination. It is through characters that the playwright conveys their thematic preoccupations, either directly or indirectly, through their actions and inactions. This study consequently investigates foreshadowing as embedded in dialogues in two characters, Salubi and Say Tokyo Kid. It portrays how the duo indirectly foretold the fall of the protagonist, the professor in The Road, even when they did not see themselves as instruments through which an end would be brought to the deeds of the Professor from the outset. This work is investigative and descriptive. The approach uses close reading and focuses on textual analysis of the play The Road. It also draws on other plays and relevant scholarly works. Findings reveal clues about the protagonist's recompense to come in the witty dialogues of the two minor characters. These clues appear in different conversations. The study concludes that hints about future events in a play should not be overlooked, no matter the dramatic style or tone of the dialogue. It proposes that just as readers instinctively track every clue in a detective novel or crime film, the same attention should be adopted as default when reading any play especially for rehearsal, performance, deep appreciation or academic study.

Keywords: Drama, Character, Dialogue, Foreshadowing, Thematic Preoccupation.

Introduction

Of the three prominent classical playwrights, Aeschylus is often regarded as the one with the greatest innovation because of his introduction of the second actor. This paved the way for dialogue instead of monologues between two characters. The backbone of a playwright's art is dialogue. It is the playwright's central tool for storytelling, developing the plotline, expressing themes and character development in drama. Aristotle in *Poetics* elucidated the elements of drama, viz, plot, thought, character, diction, and spectacle. The outline has since been a blueprint for many writers since classical times. Drama, according to Yerima (2006), contains characters who act out the idea of the play. In lieu of this, it is the scripted conversation that enables bringing characters to life.

In drama as literature, characters' speeches are crafted to suit the demands of a storyline, driving interactions between characters. Zheltukhina (2016) stated that the creation and development of dialogues are central to dramatic arts as they determine how conversations between characters determine how it functions within acts and scenes. For a dialogue to achieve its fullest dramatic impact, it should leverage a wide range of communication tools, beyond just linguistic structures and styles, to maximize its expressive and narrative potential in a play (Yaxin & Shu, 2025). Hence, dialogue in drama is the artful exchange of words that breathes life into characters and advances the plot.

Roles of Dialogues in Drama

Plays, unlike other literary form, are intended to be read as literature or seen as theatre (Fergusson, 1977). This is why playwrights come up with befitting settings, plot and even characters that accentuate themes other than the other genres of literature. Dialogue is a vital tool in this process, driving the narrative and bringing the story to life through spoken interaction on stage.

In addition to forming a storyline, it also serves other ends, especially during performances that the actors rely on to keep the play moving. Also, dialogues in drama serve multiple purposes; they expose characters' personalities, motives, and relationships with one another, enriching the narrative and driving the performance. It also builds tension, either resolves or builds conflict. As stated by Yerima (2006), a play without a conflict will bore its audience. Conflict, however and foreshadowing are interconnected dramatic devices; they heighten the audience's engagement. In light of this, foreshadowing is intricately linked to conflict.

Foreshadowing

Callahan (n.d) says that the "I knew it" feeling, the clues were right, I just didn't pay attention to it, are subtle ways foreshadowing plays out. It is a dramatic device employed by a playwright to sustain the interest of an audience or of the reader of a play. It is giving a hint of a future occurrence in the audience or a reader's mind or the audience's (Mitra, 2007). Foreshadowing creates a sense of anticipation. This dramatic tool, playwrights and filmmakers adapt to provide clues about where a plot is headed.

Soothsayer: Beware the ides of March

Caesar: What man is that?

Brutus: A soothsayer bids you beware the ides of March

Caesar: Set him before me; let me see his face

Cassius: Fellow, come from the throng; look upon Caesar

Caesar: What say'st thou to me now? speak once again

Soothsayer: Beware the ides of March. (Shakespeare, 1991)

The question “why” and “what” will swell up in the mind of the audience who is watching or the reader, why should Ceaser beware of the Ides of March, perhaps the question what, what will happen on that day. The audience will therefore be anticipating. What the playwright in *Julius Ceaser* employed to create such expectancy is foreshadowing. In essence, foreshadowing creates suspense and fulfills it.

It can come in different forms, as prophecy, what a character says about himself, or the remark a character passes or conceives of another character or might be in the stage direction. The presence of a character with a supernatural ability of prophecy foretelling an action that befalls a character or how a plot will unfold, this happens with precision. Characters with such roles are usually flat characters like the Soothsayer in William Shakespeare’s *Julius Ceaser* and Baba Fakunle in the instance of Ola Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not To Blame*.

“This boy, he will kill his own father and then marry his own mother” (Rotimi, 1971)

In addition, the central and governing theme of waiting in the play *Waiting for Godot* was hinted at already from the simple line Vladimir one of the characters uttered in the first act.

“**Vladimir:** We’re waiting for Godot” (Beckett, 1954)

Simple as it may be and as one may probably overlook or pay little attention to when watching play or reading the play, it established the central idea of waiting as a central focus that propels the audience or the reader to anticipate who Godot is and the kind of man Godot is and when he comes around and the question of why they await him.

Furthermore, the playwright’s instruction, setting, character, actions or props hint at a future event or happening, it can be symbolic or not. In Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (2013)

The Younger living-room would be a comfortable and well-ordered room if it were not for a member of indestructible contradictions to this state of being. Its famishing are typical and undistinguished and their primary feature now is that they have clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years - and they are tired. (Hansberry, 2013).

The "tired" and living room condition of the Younger family hints at the family’s struggles with poverty, confinement, and unfulfilled dreams, while the “indestructible contradictions” foretell the tensions among family members-Walter's.

Wole Soyinka’s *The Road* revolves around a Professor and his morbid fascination with death. With the professor, the protagonist and the owner of the *Aksident Store* and the other layabouts in these categories, the drivers, touts, drummers, chanters, or singers. It was a typical car park setting next to a church and a cemetery. Part of these characters included Salubi, an unemployed passenger driver and SayTokyo Kid a driver of timbers and the leader of touts. With characters as the foundation of a drama, their role is brought to life through the interplay of dialogues.

Character Analysis of Salubi and Say Tokyo Kid

Salubi:

He was a minor character in the play. He is often seen alongside his friend Samson and their dialogue supplies much of the play's humor through their banters and bickering. One reputation preceded him as the play began, even without knowing what his means of livelihood was, the reputation that he pays no attention to his oral hygiene. Salubi wishes to be a private driver; he has a uniform, but he is without a license. He approaches the Professor, who runs the *Aksident Store*, notorious for his illegal operations of selling forged licenses and accident spare parts.

Professor sees him as a pawn and at every instance of asking the professor to forge him a license. He is asked to get a driving job but he retorts, "A man cannot get a job without a license" (pg 4). Drawn to the Professor's promises of forging him a license, his fear and mistrust of the professor's mythical obsessions keep him at arm's length. He passes the knife to Say Tokyo in the last scene. It is safe to assume that Salubi had been with the knife since the inception of the play.

Say Tokyo Kid

He was a foil character to Salubi, Samson and even the Professor. He thrives on expediency and intimidation. The captain of thugs consulted by Chief-In-Town a politician who comes to ask for protection, also a driver but he is known to drive to timbers, high-quality timbers. He says, "You know I drive nothing but timber," pragmatic.

Observant he was as he was the first one who noticed Murano, the god apparent, acts funny (pg 89). He comes to the joint but does not reckon on staying long in the same place as the professor, as he was rather indifferent to the mythical antiques of the professor, their relationship being transactional. When the professor reenacted the ritual to make him commune with "The Word", he confronted the professor, told him that he is fooling around where he has no business (pg 93). Say Tokyo is always ready to use coercion, assisted by Salubi. He stabs the Professor.

Foreshadowing in dialogues in *The Road*

These two characters' remarks about the Professor in the first part of the play foretell an end to the deeds of the Protagonist. In Say Tokyo Kid's dialogue with Samson before Professor comes in, the following excerpt:

Particulars Joe: Say Tokyo Kid!

SayT.: I'm all right boy.

Particulars Joe: No dirty timber.

SayT.: No borer in re ol bole.

Samson: Oh what wouldn't I give for Professor to enter now.

Sayt. [spits.]: That's what would happen if your professor came in. I don't give a damn for that crazy guy and he know it. He's an awright guy but he sure acct crazy sometimes and I'm telling you, one of these days, he's gonna go too far. (Soyinka, 1965)

The unusual traits and behavior of the insane ascetic Professor were not new to Say Tokyo; even as superstitious as Say Tokyo is, he intuited early on that the Professor's absurd traits would one day drag him to the furthest limit beforehand that those traits of the Professor would become the propelling force for him to go all the way to the edge.

Likewise, in another Salubi's response to Samson

Samson: You are lucky Kotonou is asleep. The Professor put him in charge against that sort of thing. If he wakes up he will report you and the Professor will deal with you.

Salubi [Scampering.]: Don't think you can frighten me with that, I don't care one *panla* for your Professor. He can't do me anything.

Samson: Good. Very good. I'll tell him when he comes. I'll tell him about this morning. And he'll send the word to get you in the dead of the night.

Salubi: Tell him if you like. One of these days the police will catch up with him. And they'll put him where he belongs- in the lunatic asylum of the prison. Don't think you can scare me with that word business (Soyinka, 1965, pg 32)

To Salubi, he expressed a strong certainty that the long arm of the law will catch up with him. The law would probably have caught up with the Professor long ago if police officers like Particulars Joe had not been in question but Salubi indirectly also hinted that one day the Professor would cross the unforgivable line.

These dialogue excerpts subtly points to the end of a former lay preacher turned corrupt entrepreneur so consumed by his search for the "Word", profanes the ultimate taboo of bringing the *Agemo* masquerade out of season for his death-obsessed mystic and in turn, he meets his end from one who would do anything to put an end to the sacrilege.

Conclusion

Often times as readers of the works of art or as audience, we even as members of the audience, we wait for grand gestures or especially the presence of a mysterious character to herald the fate of another character while we pay less attention to the subtle clues that drive the plot. These hints should consequently not be overlooked, irrespective of the dramatic style or the tone of a dialogue, as it is a deliberate effort by a playwright. This work has shown the extent to which playwrights devise foreshadowing as it is often purposeful to heighten the dramatic irony in drama as literature or as theatre.

People, however read plays for many overlapping reasons such as reading out of convenience or pleasure, studying and literary experience, preparation for performance because plays are written to be read and also performed, no matter what the context is, that a reader is reading from, the text is complete itself. Accepting that the playwright is deliberately hiding things in plain sight will limit the oversights for whichever reason one decides to read a work.

Since great playwrights do not write carelessly, every line in a work of art is believed to have earned its place. The playwright has agreed to give you, somewhere, every piece of information you will eventually need in order to understand the ending and the characters motives but almost never in an obvious way. Instead, the crucial clues are disguised as throwaway remarks, jokes, stage setting, props that seem merely atmospheric.

It is hereby prescribed that the careful way readers go through crime in an investigative novel, drama, or movie should be adopted on default especially when reading a play in preparation for performance, literary experience and studying or scholarship.

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