

Tracing the Authorship of the World's Oldest Extant Literary Drama to an African Scholar.

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Key Words: extant, drama, literary, playwright, adaptation, language

I. Background

Although drama is a term that has been used very often for centuries, its definition has been quite complex. The term has been often used to mean an activity that involves role playing. That is, drama is now viewed by many scholars as something that is done. This idea of activity could be either physically or mentally. This is seen in publications such as (Wessel, 2003, Heathcote, 1991). Prince & Jackson (1999, p.7) reveal that the term drama comes from the Greek term "dran" which means "to act" or "to do". For this reason, Philips (1999) holds that when children perform in drama, it helps them to speak. These scholars see and use the term as something which one does. However, this activity that one undertakes for whatever reason is underlay by an idea that he or she intends to portray. When this idea is not the motivation by the portrayal of the action which one imitates; the action ceases to be referred to as drama. Drama in this sense could be seen as an imitation or duplication of reality by performance.

On the other hand, some other scholars such as Shapiro (1999) see drama as the playwright's idea that is performed. This idea about the term drama has been supported by KDEA (1995) which believes that drama is the produce of the playwright's imagination. Here, drama is seen as that which is performed and not the performance. The process involved in the production of a playwright's imagination is a very important one since without drama (text) there can be no dramatic performance or theatre. This makes the playwright a very important person not only for the production of drama but for the existence of theatre as well.

Although it will be difficult for one to tell when the production of drama as a material (text), intended for performance for any reason took rise, some drama scholars like Worthen (2004) and Prince & Jackson (1999) supported that *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Media* by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides respectively were the earliest surviving dramas from BC 500 in ancient Greece. Although Prince & Jackson (1999) have proved that some temple inscriptions in Egypt had hinted the existence of literary drama in Egypt as early as BC 4000, *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Media* were considered the earliest extant texts of drama in the world because we still have them, can read and stage them.

However, this argument was vehemently challenged by Walls (1891) who argued that the Book of Job in the Holy Bible was drama. This is because it possessed the basic characteristics of drama such as characters, plot, themes and dialogue. He therefore did not hesitate to break down the Book of Job into prologue, acts, scenes, prologue and epilogue to support his claim. He also carried a critical analysis on the book to show its dramatic nature which made his work credible by the standards of dramatic literature. It was based on this argument of Alfred Walls regarding the genre of the book of Job that this study is founded. For this reason, the book of Job in this study is considered as a drama.

Perhaps, Wall's greatest argument about the book of Job was not about the genre of the book but his claims that the book was the oldest extant drama in the world. This claim brought into view so many questions to mind. Who was the author of the book and when was the book written are possible questions that can lead us to our understanding of Wall's argument that the Book of Job was the oldest surviving text of drama.

II. Authorship and Date of the Book of Job

The search to finding the author of the book of Job was really tough one since many scholars; both ancient and recent have had challenges in agreeing on who the author was. This was because, the author was not declared in the book as many other books of the Bible declared their authors in the early pages. However, whereas many people have credited the authorship of the book of Job to Moses, many different authors and scholars argue that people such

as Job himself, one of his friends of Job who visited him during his ordeal or even Solomon, who was once the King of Israel could be the probable author of the book. (Walls, 1891, Copeland, 2009)

There are others who also believe that Moses must have acted as the translator of the book into Hebrew, years after Job had written the book by himself in Aramaic which was mostly spoken by the people of near east. (Elzas, 1972). This notwithstanding, Seltzer (n. d) and other authors argue that Job cannot be the author of the book of Job.

Scholars who believe that Moses cannot be the author mostly hold that the date of the writing of the book either was earlier or later than the time of Moses. Again, they hold that the Original language in which the book was written was Arabic which Moses could possibly not have enough knowledge of. Furthermore they argue that Moses must have talked about the Israelites or a part of their history which is very common of his Pentateuch should he had authored the book of Job. Lastly, they hold that the book of Job has a mixed adaptation style which could suggest that it was not written by one person. (Dell, 1991)

This notwithstanding, many authors who believe in Moses' authorship of the book hold as their basic source of argument that Jewish tradition as was documented by their rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Baba Bathra 14b attributed the book of Job to Moses (Hankins, 2017).

From the arguments that are never ending on the authorship of the book, I want to have my own stance. From my point of view, I support the fact that Moses is a probable author of the book of Job if the book is considered a drama if Alfred Walls' claim that the Book of Job is a drama is anything to go by.

III. Moses

Now that I have clearly made my stance, it is prudent to uncover the identity of Moses. The Bible provides a detailed biography and autobiography of Moses.

He was born as a son to two slave parents from the house of Levi, who were with the bond people of Israel in Egypt. Painfully and fearfully, the parents of the baby could no longer take care of him after three months of his birth because his cry was loud enough to bring trouble to the family and the baby from their masters who had ordered the killing of every male born to the Hebrews. He was put in a basket and set afloat on a river under the watch of his sister, Miriam. After he had been found as a baby in a floating basket on the river in which the princess of Egypt, who took pity of the poor baby bathe, upon the inquiry of Miriam, the baby was given to his original mother to take care of him until a certain age. When the baby had been raised up to a certain age, the princess adopted him as his son, named him Moses and raised him in the palace of Egypt. (Exodus, 2:1-10, NKJV, Acts, 7:20, 21)

Moses from this time as an African by adoption studied diligently to become a very powerful scholar who according to Stephen, the deacon in the early church after Christ's ascension "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts, 7:22, NKJV). Various Bible Commentaries reveal that the expression: "in all the wisdom of Egyptians" means that he was educated in various expensive knowledge of the world at the time. This wisdom must have included astrology, "the interpretation of dreams, medicine, mathematics, and their sacred science or traditional doctrines about religion, which were concealed chiefly under their hieroglyphics" (Albert, 1870). Here, Albert Barns also reveals that Moses was not just a scholar in all these enumerated list of educational fields; he could talk about them and practice them as well. Albert Barns further mentions that Moses was a phenomenal scholar because; he had gained all this wisdom from the most powerful nation on the face of the world of his time.

When Moses was forty, he identified his true origin, killed and buried an Egyptian task master who molested an Israelite which not long after came to the knowledge of the king. Moses in a self-imposed exile fled to Media where he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro; the priest of Media and stayed for forty years until he had encountered God and accepted the responsibility to go back to save the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt.

IV. Possibility that Moses is the author of the book of Job.

a. Knowledge in drama

It is imperative to question how Moses could document a dramatic literature. Was drama part of the great deal of Egyptian wisdom that Moses was instructed in? This is a very important question that can help establish that Moses is a probable author, if Alfred Wall's argument is anything to go by. In order to know whether Moses had any knowledge of drama, it is expedient to first know if Egypt, Moses' adopted nation had any knowledge in drama at all.

In the first place majority of theatre scholars in theatre history believe that Egypt marks the origin of theatre by BC 2600, although the Greeks are credited with the structures that they put in place for theatre which has brought about the theatre conventions as we have today (reshafim.org.). This earliest form of theatre in Egypt was called the Egyptian Passion Play. White (1963) reveals that drama performance referred to as the *Passion Play* was one of the main activities of the Egyptian annual festivities. This *Passion Play* was written about by Ikhernefret around BC 1878-1843. Ikhernefret was someone appointed to write about the setting and the entire performance of the theatre production by Sesostri III who was a king during the 12th dynasty of Egypt. Similarly, Malikpur (2004) mentions that apart from Ikhernefret, Herodotus (c. 484-c. 425 BC) and Plutarch (c. AD 40-c. 20) who were Greek Historians also wrote about this theatre production. This performance of the play which had however begun about five (5) centuries earlier took place in cities such as Heliopolis, Buto Saia, Letopolis and Busiris but the most spectacular of all the performances of the *Passion Play* happened in Abydos.

Nevertheless, the different accounts of the drama that was performed, Malikpur (2004) has it that the drama upon which this performance was based told the story of Osiris, the eldest child of Geb who was considered the earth god and his wife Nut who was considered the sky goddess. The siblings of Osiris were Isis, Seth and Nephthys. Osiris; who was the legal Egyptian king married his sister Isis who became known as the goddess of earth and they had Horus (the sun god) as their son. Their reign was a very successful one. Out of jealousy, Seth, Osiris' junior brother who was later called the god of darkness ambushed him at the bank of River Nile in Abydos, violently murdered Osiris and buried the mortal remains there.

The story reveals that Isis' bitter tears caused the Nile River to overflow and uncovered the corpse of Osiris and was properly buried. Following this, Horus began to wage war of vengeance for Osiris against Seth, who later unburied the corpse of Osiris and cut it into 72 pieces and threw them across the Egyptian land. Isis once again tried as hard as possible to gather all the pieces of Osiris' body and gave it another burial. Isis breathed into Osiris and brings him back to life to become the king of the dead. Together with her son, they avenged Osiris and won back his throne (Theatre History.com, 2002).

Fifer (2013) establishes that the actors of this drama must have included the priests, who wore masks to represent various gods, and people from the general public who were selected to be part of the play as extras. Most of the actors who performed in the drama as warriors in the battle between the army of Osiris and Seth may have died from wound secured from the performance (Theatre History.com, 2002).

It is worthy to note that in the history of the Egyptians, the Pharaoh was initially considered as the servant of the gods but this conception about the Pharaoh changed over time as he was later seen as a god. Therefore while the Pharaoh was alive, he was considered as Horus, son of Osiris. When dead, the Pharaoh was considered as Osiris (McConachie, Nellhaus, Sorgenfrei&Underiner, 2016). This makes it clear that the Pharaohs of Egypt who lived within the period that the *Passion play* was enacted must have played a very significant role in seeing to it that the annual ritual drama was successfully enacted since whoever played the role of Horus in the performance represented the king. It was therefore not surprising that Sesostri III contracted Ikhernefret to document the production as has been stated earlier.

While Lucio (2013) concluded his work on the Abydos *Passion Play*, he mentioned that the play must have begun about a 1000 years before the birth of Moses. It is very interesting how he ties the birth of Moses to the *Passion play*. This could not be accidental. Perhaps, Mariah Lucio by tying the birth of Moses to the origin of the Abydos *Passion play* wanted to establish the possibility of Moses' knowledge and perhaps involvement in the production. Well, notwithstanding whatever Lucio's motivation was, Moses, who according to Mark (2016) lived around BC 1400 must have had a very close experience of this dramatic enactment for close to 40 years as he lived in the palace of the Pharaoh as an adopted son of the princess of Egypt.

As it has been mentioned that Moses learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, it is very possible that he chanced on the document of the *Abydos Passion Play* written by Ikhernefret as it has already been established. This could have given him the finest experience with which he authored his play while he was in a self-imposed exile in Media.

The use of language

In the first place, Moses could be the author of the book because he must have had great knowledge in both the Hebrew and Aramaic languages which scholars' claims to be the two main languages that the book was first written in.

Moses' knowledge of the Hebrew language must have taken root from his upbringing in his biological Hebrew language from his biological family which acted as a foster family to him (Exodus, 2:1-10, NKJV). Some authors defend that this African scholar of high esteem applied his knowledge of the Phoenician alphabets to

develop the Hebrew alphabets with which he wrote the book of Job. This perhaps is the reason why scholars who argue that the kind of Hebrew language with which the book of Job was written is an archaic form of the language (Towns 2006, Gilad 2016).

On the other hand, Moses must have had his knowledge in Aramaic language which according to Young (2014) had become the official language throughout the Middle East by BC 650 within the forty years he stayed in exile in Media. This was after his association with the Hebrews had been made clear and his life was in danger; following his killing and burying of the Egyptian who was bullying a Hebrew. Staying with Jethro (the priest of Media), marrying Zipporah and settling for a period of forty years until he had encounter God and accepted to go on his errand, to free the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage was enough time for a scholar of his caliber to learn a new language and use it distinctively . (Exodus, 2:11- 4:17, Acts 7: 22-34, NKJV). Moses must have written the book while he was in exile in Media. This is because, throughout the book, he never mentioned Israel or any knowledge of Israel.

These are possible reasons to support my claim that Moses is the author of the book of Job.

V. Why the Book of Job is considered the oldest drama in the world.

Since my claim about Moses' authorship of the book of Job has been substantiated, I will move further to prove why I strongly believe that the book of Job is the oldest existing literary dramatic piece in the world.

As has been stated earlier, Moses was lived around BC 1400. This means that the book of Job was written between BC 1400 to BC 1300. The reason is that as has been established in the early parts of this paper, Moses fled from Egypt to Media when was about 40 years. He also stayed in Media for about 40 year. If Moses wrote the book of Job in Media, then it means that the book dates as far back as between 1400 to BC 1300.

This brings me to the crux of the matter that the book must be the oldest of all extant ancient dramas. This is because, the earliest Greek classic dramas which are still extant date BC 500. That was about 8-9 centuries after Moses. This makes Alfred Wall's claim that the Book of Job is the oldest drama in the world very credible.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, two things must be considered from this historic literary research. These are Alfred Walls' claim that the book of Job is a drama and the oldest one for that matter. The second is the trace to identifying Moses as the author of the book of Job.

To this point, I argue that the scholar who authored the oldest drama is an African Scholar. As it has been established, although Moses was born an Israelite, for close to 40 years, he lived as an African, an Egyptian and occupied a very important position in the palace of the Pharaoh (as a grandson of the Pharaoh). More to this, existing documents have revealed how much he was schooled and learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts, 7:22, NKJV).

This proves that the long existing idea that the oldest existing dramas in the world were authored by the Greeks in BC 500 are highly false and cannot be accepted as truth in this 21st century. It must then be emphasised that the origin of literary drama, that is the dramatic text originated from an ancient African; Egyptian scholar called Moses, who later become the redeemer of the people of Israel from their Egyptian captivity.

VII. Recommendations

African dramatists and theatre scholars and practitioners must be proud of this revelation that has come to discredit the long existing tails about the fact that the earliest literary works of drama originate from the Greeks. It should encourage drama and theatre scholars and practitioners to find out more about African drama and theatre and to defend Africa's share in the history of drama and theatre in the world. This should not be done only by arguments but by the adaptation and development of drama and theatre in the African way since this will help make our stance in the world history much substantiated and credible.

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