German Literature And The Nigerian Audience: The Extended Reading Of German Literature In Nigeria.

I. Introduction

1. Reception.

Areas of research on reception are numerous and difficult to outline. Eberhard Frey enumerated a number of areas among which are: "The Reception Aesthetic", "The Aesthetic of Effect/Influence", "History of Effect/Influence" (Frey 1980: 438ff). *Reception* itself has been described in Herder Lexikon as the acceptance of foreign cultural contents including the literary work of an author by people of another culture (Herder: ^{4}1974).

Reception aesthetic has been described as the investigation of the processes through which the reader takes up or adopts a literary work. This is also linked to the history of reception which is described as "the judgement of the century on literary work". This is, in other words, the collected judgement of other readers, critics etc. (Herder: ^{4}1974). In the history of *reception*, each epoch, each ideology discovers anew what the author has as a message.

The two German authors, Brecht and Kafka enjoy reception in Africa which cover the above three mentioned areas. In other words, studies on the above two authors in Africa cover the areas of reception mentioned above. Both authors have been shown to enjoy world-wide reception. They are both on the list of the ten most widely read authors of German Literature.

1.1 Kafka in Africa.

Kafka was introduced to the English audience and other English-speaking audiences by Edwin Muir as far back as the early thirties of this century. Through study abroad, many Africans including Nigerians got to read Kafka in translation. Kafka's world-wide reception was well illustrated by Ronald Gray in his essay where he said,

> I remember looking with interest once at a newspaper article under the headline, "Kafka in Iraq" not knowing that he had ever been there or that his works were read in that country ... (Gray 1962: 61).

Because Kafka's themes cover a number of common problems of this century like alienation, individualism, and conflict of generations, he was and is well read and has influenced many writers all over the world. In Africa, he was said to have influenced the Guinean writer, Camara Laye[1]. In Nigeria where German Language is taught only in some tertiary institutions, Kafka's short stories are often selected for the reading lists of the literature curriculum for Nigerian students of German language studies. In the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the founder of German studies as a degree course, (Edith Ihekweazu) has always found this inclusion of Kafka a necessity[2].

In addition to the experimentation by the founder herself, she has supervised a masters' degree investigation on the reading of Kafka by Nigerian students[3]. The result of the above investigation which covered three consecutive years of second year students of German language study has shown that Kafka was liked by Nigerian students in spite of the difficulty in understanding some of his texts. Investigation has shown that the good reception of Kafka by Nigerian students was and still is because many of Kafka's stories allow many possible interpretations. It became clear that any literary text that has no fixed line of interpretation is better appreciated by the students.

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[1]Camara Laye's *Le regard du roi* is often compared with Kafka's *Schloss* and there is a belief that Laye wrote his under Kafka's influence.

[2]In a number of her works, Edith Ihekweazu has tried to show her "experiments" (as she called it) with Kafka in the reading lists she drew up for her students. Edith Ihekweazu: "Möglichkeiten der Rezeption Deutscher Literatur im Afrikanischen Kulturraum", *Akten des VI. Internationalen Germanisten Kongresses in Basel*. Hrsg. von Hein Rupp und Hans-Gert Roloff. Bonn: Peter Lang, 1980, Vol. 3, pp. 168 - 174. Cf, also, Edith Ihekweazu "Limitations and Possibilities of European Literature in Nigerian Universities: The Case of Germah", *Kiabara*, Vol. 5, Nr. 1, Rains 1982, pp 153 - 172. In the above papers, the author indicated that she has experimented with Kafka for years because she believed he is one of the "modern classics".

[3]Cf., Felicia, Nneka Ibemesi: *Fremde Entfremdung: Kafka Lektüre mit Nigerianischen Studenten*, dissertation as part fulfilment for Master's degree in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1991.

Other Nigerian Universities have also shown, during one of the seminars of teachers of German where curricula were shared, that Kafka also has a place in their reading lists. The reading audience of Kafka in Nigeria remains, however, restricted to the tertiary institutions.

1.2 Brecht in Africa.

Many works already exist on this topic and therefore, our treatment of it here is only intended as a preamble to the main theme of this paper, "The Extended Reading of German Literature in Nigeria ..." In one of her papers, Edith Ihekweazu has suggested that Brecht be read by Nigerian students because of a great number of Nigerian adaptations of him (Ihekweazu 1980: 168ff). Africans, including Nigerians, who studied the *Arts* abroad read and were influenced in their works by Brecht. For instance, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o have been shown to be influenced by Brecht. Both have adapted Brecht's dramas to their own (Enekwe & Ihekweazu: forthcoming).

Publications on Brecht in Africa originated from Joachim Fiebach of the Berlin Humboldt-University and from Michael Etherton, then at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Both are Brecht transmitters. Fiebach compares Brecht with Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka. Both Soyinka and Ngugi got to know Brecht through their studies abroad in the University of Leeds. Soyinka's Brecht adaptation is entitled, *Opera Wonyosi* which is an adaptation of Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* and John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (Enekwe & Ihekweazu 1984: 93ff).

In their works on Brecht, Ossie Enekwe and Edith Ihekweazu have dealt extensively with Brecht in Africa and in particular in Nigeria. There has always been the view in those works, that Brecht transmission goes from university to university. That is to say, that the Brechtian audience in Nigeria is limited to the universities, where he is read, not only in the German literary studies, but also in the Departments of Dramatic and Theatre Arts (Ihekweazu 1983: 25ff).

The above view is no longer tenable today because the reading audience of Brecht in Nigeria has extended beyond the university circles to include youths and adults in other institutions of learning. It is the reading of Brecht by this extended audience that we want to discuss in this paper. Before we go into the discussion, we will briefly refer to the concepts of

intercultural studies with a view to finding its relevance to the analysis of Brecht by Nigerian audience.

2. Intercultural Literary Studies.

Intercultural literary studies is an all-embracing, multi-perspectivistic approach in literary studies. In German studies, it has recently received emphasis, hence the foundation of the new discipline called *Interkulturelle Germanistik* (Wierlacher 1985). Intercultural German Studies has been described as a "discipline in Germanic Studies which does not rank the perspectives of various cultures on the Germans in any hierarchical order nor regards them as an obstacle but recognizes them as a source of better understanding" (Ihekweazu 1991: 1). There are many controversial questions that arose on the concepts of Intercultural German Studies[4].

Brecht continues to enjoy reception in Nigeria while German experts busy themselves with arguments on the new discipline. Are the Nigerian analyses of Brecht's dramas including *The Good Woman* anything near the German or other western analyses of them? Why do Nigerians have to read *The Good Woman*?

We will present in this paper the reading of Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan* by a Nigerian audience and then relate the analysis to the ideas of Intercultural German Studies.

II. The Extended Reading of German Literature in Nigeria.

1. Small amount of Literature for a Wide Audience.

German literature has a good audience in Nigeria. Even though the amount of literature in question is small, the audience is large. Compared with the German reading of African literature in general and Nigerian literature in particular, the newly enlarged reading audience of Brecht in Nigeria today

[4]Cf. Leo, Kreutzer: Literatur und Entwicklung. Studien zu einer Literatur der Ungleichzeitigkeit. Frankfurt a.M. 1989.
Cf. Alioune, Sow: Germanistik als Entwicklungswissenschaft? Hildesheim, New York, Zurich, 1986. Cf. also Peter, Zimmermann (ed.): *Interkulturelle Germanistik. Dialog der Kulturen auf Deutsch*? Frankfurt, Bern, New York, Paris: Peter Lang Verlag, 1989.

is something to write home about. Not only that this reading is not limited to German studies in the Universities, for Brecht is read, adapted and dramatised in Theatre and Dramatic Arts Departments of Universities, but Brechtian audience has gone beyond the university circles to include those in Nigerian secondary schools.

In the universities, the most frequently read dramas are, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle, Mother Courage, Three Penny Opera, The Good Woman of Setzuan, Puntila and his Man Servant.* Almost all of the above have been adapted to Nigerian dramas by Nigerian dramatists (Enekwe & Ihekweazu: Forthcoming). In the Dramatic Arts Department of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, copies of Brecht's dramas in translation are available for students' consultations.

When, how and why of all the above dramas by Brecht did the *Good Woman of Setzuan* get into the Nigerian Secondary School Curriculum?

2. The Good Woman of Setzuan in Nigerian Schools[5]: Why? When? and How?

Many African scholars who got introduced to Brecht and his dramatic theories during their study sojourn abroad became writers later in life. Because a lot of African writers including Nigerians are also usually university teachers, the Brechtian influence got into English, Dramatic and Theatre Arts Departments of the universities. The West African Examinations Council incharge of the Secondary School Certificate makes use of experts from the above departments for the literature aspects of the School Certificate Examinations. The literature curriculum for schools is structured such that children who do literature are required to demonstrate competence in drama, prose and poetry. In addition to African drama, prose and poetry, they are required to read non-African drama, prose and poetry. Readings in African literature usually include texts by English- and French-speaking African writers. The French texts are read in English translations.

[5]Text edition used for this paper is: Bertolt, Brecht: Parables for the Theatre, *The Good Woman of Setzuan, The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. For 1991 - 1993 SSS Syllabus, the revised English version by Eric Bentley, Penguin Books, 1987 edition. Printed by Ishola Works Ltd., Ibadan, 1987. Copies are not sold outside Nigeria.

In the past, the non-African readings were selected solely from English literature. It was only recently that other national literatures in English translations were considered. Thus in 1991, Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan* became one of the two non-African dramas to be read in all the Nigerian schools for the West African School Certificate making it compete with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Schools that have good literature teachers read all the required texts leaving the candidates in a good position to tackle even the multiple choice questions that come from different sources.

We do not need to look far to find out why Brecht's was the German text selected. We have discussed the Brechtian influence on Nigerian writers including the Nobel prize winner Wole Soyinka. The good reception of Brecht by the Nigerian audience was the reason for his selection in the secondary school curriculum. His admirers also see his theatre as educational and if not for any other reason, a drama that educates the public should be given good recommendation.

But why *The Good Woman of Setzuan*? Brecht himself has called his *Good Woman* "Parabelstück". Looking at the drama as a parable, Setzuan province serves as an example of all places where similar occurrence as depicted by the drama occur. We believe therefore that those who selected the text for Nigerian schools see things in it that are applicable to the Nigerian society. It is also for this reason of applicability that Wole Soyinka adapted it to his *Opera Wonyosi*. We also believe that this drama has some biblical undertone that will make it appreciable to a great percentage of the audience in Nigeria.

It should also be noted that the newly extended audience includes both the students and adults teaching them, who are not experts of German studies. Many of the hundreds of literature teachers in Nigerian secondary schools were never introduced to Brecht before his drama was included in the school curriculum. There is yet another group of Brechtian audience in Nigeria. Many experts from different areas of the Humanities Studies get involved in the marking of the literature papers of the West African School Certificate Examinations. There are French majors, Classical Studies (Greek and Latin) experts and Theatre/Dramatic Arts experts marking the examination along with Literature in English experts. All these assessors have to be well tutored in the recommended texts to be able to assess the candidates.

There is no doubt that the reading of a text by a writer will enkindle the reader's desire for other texts by the same writer and yet similar texts by others and possibly other texts of the same origin if the said text is found interesting.

We shall present in the next paragraph, the reading of Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan* by the Nigerian audience.

2.1 Analytical Reading (With Set Questions) of *The Good Woman of Setzuan.*

There are usually two examinations per year for the West African School Certificate; the May/June for candidates in their final year of Secondary School Education and the November Examinations which are meant for external candidates; that is, for those people who could not pass in all their papers during the May/June Examinations[6]. The following are some of the questions asked on the *Good Woman of Setzuan* since 1991:

1. Discuss the type of society presented by Brecht in the play, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*!
2. Describe the role of Wang in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*!
3. Describe any two amusing incidents, showing their contribution to the development of the play!
4. What aspects of Shen Te's character do you admire? Illustrate your answer with incidents from the play!
5. Discuss any two dramatic techniques adopted by Bertolt Brecht in developing the theme of the play *The Good Woman of Setzuan*!
6. Describe Shen Te's problems in the play and show how she overcomes them!

There are also many objective questions on the drama which were framed to test candidates on the contents, themes and characterisation of the drama. Some of the questions here listed are discussed in the following

[6]The author of this paper participates in the marking of the two examinations by West African Examinations Council every year i.e. May/June and November examinations. The presentation here deals with some of the analytical questions asked of the students in the above two examinations. In summary therefore, these analyses present the reading and reception of *The Good Woman* by the extended audience.

paragraphs. The analyses of Brecht's drama by the Nigerian audience generally cover the important aspects of the drama; contents, themes, characterisation, motive and exposition.

1. The Nigerian reader sees the society presented in the *Good Woman of Setzuan* as the society of the unemployed, the displaced and the wretched of the earth. It is a poverty-ridden society that can only be saved by the gods (prologue). The moral tone of the society presented is questionable for in the play prostitutes, liars, thieves, dupes and people of questionable characters milk others in order to survive (p. 23). It is a society made up of prostitutes and the wicked. Justice is always perverted. Individuals make incessant frivolous claims in order to survive (p. 25). Shen Te gives herself out to be able to pay her rent (pp 24 - 27).

The society in this drama is noted for its "malevolent tongues" (p. 79). Shu Fu gives Shen Te a blank cheque to claim any sum in the world to marry him. This is expected to keep Shen Te's lover Yang Sun off the stage.

The members of this society are ever ready to sponge upon those who are ready to supply their needs as experienced by Shen Te (pp. 36 and 56).

This society is so bad that "heaven is quite disturbed at all the complaining" of evil in the world. As a cleansing mechanism, the three gods are then sent to the society but the people reject them thinking that they are crooks (prologue).

Brecht presents a picture of a society that is corrupt, indifferent and exploitative. The society is so bad and beyond redemption that the gods cannot even find enough people who will redeem it from evil (p. 108).

2. The Nigerian reader finds one of the chief characters of the play, Shen Te, a generous lady. The people who live in the area where she lives are mostly the unemployed, the displaced; yet she provides for all of them (p. 30). This quality in her is seen as admirable.

She is never tired of doing good as seen on p. 53. She never inquires into the truth of what people who come to her claim. She is ever willing to assist (p. 36). She is loved by all because of her openness (p. 79). Even as a prostitute, Shen Te is the only person in Setzuan to offer her hospitality to the three gods when no one else would (p. 25).

The other side of her as Shui Ta is also admired and seen as a defence mechanism to enable her do without injury to herself for the world knows no moderation in the way they sponge upon those that are ready to supply their needs (p. 41).

As Shui Ta, Shen Te establishes a tobacco factory with which she helps people to help themselves. The visiting gods recommend that Shui Ta should come to regulate Shen Te's goodness once a month. Shen Te is sympathetic. She cries when Yang Sun narrates the story of his life (p. 49). She offers money to Wang for the treatment of his scorched hand (p. 81).

Shen Te has problems which she tries to overcome. She lives in an environment that is made up of the oppressed group in an unjust society, that is, the slum. Most of the inhabitants are lazy, idlers, unemployed and spongers. Shen Te's major problem is therefore how to fend for this class of wrteched people. Most of these people approach her for help. Some of the requests are genuine while others are not. She listens to different requests and assists as much as she can.

Most of the characters are out to extort money from her. A good example is the marriage between her and Yang Sun. Yang Sun is interested in getting money from her for his job and not necessarily out of love. She trusts everyone.

Her openness brings her a lot of discomfort as Shu Fu notes:

> "You have sacrificed your own love and happiness so as not to hurt a dear old couple" (p. 79).

Shen Te overcomes her problems by accepting the advice of her first dependents to transfer the ownership of the Tobacco Shop to an imaginary owner - Shui Ta (p. 31). Also, by assuming the dual personality of Shen Te and Shui Ta, she plays down on her generosity with the strictness of Shui Ta.

3. The dramatic techniques of Brecht are discussed as follows: The theme of the play is goodness or the reward of goodness. Brecht uses prologue and epilogue (pp.21 - 27, 109). The prologue reports the visit of the three highest gods to Setzuan, the aim of their visit and the efforts of Wang to receive and house them. The epilogue leaves the audience to find a happy end to the play by finding ways whereby good men can arrive at happy ends.

Brecht also uses dreams, etc. (p. 53). The gods appear to Wang in his dreams. Dreams are the only media by which the gods can receive reports as to whether Shen Te has continued to be good and the only good woman in Setzuan. He uses flashback. The past history of Setzuan (p. 21 prologue), Shen Te's past life (p. 26), Shen Te's new shop (p. 29), all are shown in flashback.

Brecht uses chorus/song. Like the chorus in ancient Greek drama, the chorus draws the attention of the audience to what cannot be presented on the stage (p. 35). Shen Te is heading for disaster by her overgenerous absorption of guests. On page 61, Shen Te's exploitation is revealed to the audience.

Brecht uses the gods who are introduced as the only agents who can purge Setzuan of evil doing and poverty. He also uses disguise (p. 38 ff), where Shen Te plays Shui Ta whenever it is necessary.

4. Discussing the relationship between Wang and the gods, it is observed that at the beginning of the play, Wang anxiously looks forward to the arrival of the gods. "I've been coming out here to the city gates for three days now to bid these gods welcome. I want to be the first to greet them" (p. 21). Wang thus demonstrates initial interest in the gods.

Wang is very friendly with the gods and so ready to demonstrate maximum hospitality. He tells the gods: "The whole town is at your service" (p. 21). He holds the gods in very high esteem: he consistently refers to them as the "Illustrious ones" (pp. 21, 37, 53, 77). Shen Te eventually joins Wang in showing reverence to the gods as she too refers to them as the "Illustrious ones" (p. 108).

Wang finds accommodation for the gods. His attitude may be contrasted with that of Mr. Cheng: "Keep your gods. We have our own troubles!" (p. 22). Then on page 23 a gentleman says, "A new way of finding free rooms for a gang of crooks".

Wang and the gods exhibit reciprocal care: While Wang tries to find accommodation for the gods, the third god makes sure Wang does not lose his carrying pole (p. 25). Wang has told the gods about his dream, the third god asks: "Well, but what do you suggest, my dear Wang?" (p. 86). Then

follows a harmonious exchange of ideas. Also, both share in the irony that Shen Te, the prostitute, is in fact the good woman of Setzuan, as shown by the utterances on page 106, "Continue to be good, good woman of Setzuan".

From the above, it can be said that the relationship between Wang and the gods is cordial. Wang often informs the gods about progress in the life of Shen Te, for example: When Shen Te acquires a tobacco shop, when she accommodates eight people; that her generosity is beginning to constitute a problem for her. Also, he informs them when She Te is in love with Yang Sun etc. He is therefore the link between Setzuan and the gods. The following paragraph is, in a nutshell, the analysis of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* by the Nigerian audience:

> Setzuan stands for all places where exploitation and all sorts of evils exist. Brecht's Good Woman - Shen Te is a nice girl who over-indulges in natural kindness. In a better society, she would not need her brutal cousin Shui Ta. She only needs him as a defence mechanism to protect herself while doing good. Wang is the link between the investigating gods and Setzuan - the land under investigation. He is friendly with the gods and is ready to show them maximum hospitality even when some others regard the gods as a "gang of crooks"

The analysis presented in this paper centres mainly on the society of Setzuan, the chief characters of the play and the dramatic techniques employed by Brecht in the drama.

III. Concluding Remarks.

1. Vindication For Intercultural German Studies.

Our study on the Nigerian reading of Kafka showed a good reception of the author by Nigerian students. The reason for the above was shown to be that Kafka short stories allowed many possible interpretations. Nigerian students of German Literature would rather read and interprete literary works their own way than get subjected through traditional lines of interpretations.

An exotic work of art can and does appeal to exotic senses. It is usually noted that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. A literary work can indeed enjoy more success with a foreign audience than with a native audience. Again, Kafka became popular in Britain and America as early as the thirties before it was re-discovered in Germany in the fifties, having been banned in the Nazi Germany (Hibbert 1975). There are literary texts that are meant for a specific audience while some texts can be classified as universal in outreach. In every national literature, there will be works in the above two categories.

The said controversies arising from the concepts of Intercultural German Studies should not continue to heighten. Such controversies are not peculiar to German studies. Chinua Achebe and some experts of African literature and culture do not believe that Europeans and Americans can rightly interprete African literary works. To Achebe, "No man can understand another whose language he does not speak ..." (Achebe 1975: 48). Still there are many European and American experts on African culture including literature. Studies of foreign cultures continue. The world has become so small today as a result of technological advancements that people sit within the four walls of their room today and learn so much about people, things and events from other parts of the world very far away from theirs. People should be free to say what they perceive of a work of art. Others are free to react to perceptions that are not theirs. To the question on his experiences with the reception of his dramas abroad Friedrich Dürrenmatt said,

> "Nun, verschiedene. Es gibt Stücke, die für gewisse Länder vielleicht geeigneter sind als andere (...) Es ist eben so: jedes Land reagiert wieder sehr verschieden (...) Jedes Stück wird ja wieder in jedem Land auf eine bestimmte Weise missverstanden, auch das ist etwas Legitimes und ich nehme es durchweg durchaus nicht tragisch"(Bienek ^{2}1962: 110f)

Which view can explain better that there is lack of danger in intercultural studies?

The *Good Woman of Setzuan* is approached as a parable of life by critics from different parts of the world[7]. This drama is in short a universal drama. Its theme and contents are as indigenous to non-German audience as they are alien; hence, is its adaptations by many foreign dramatists.

It was the author who first called his drama "Parabelstück". According to the above definition, Setzuan stands for all places where people are exploited and where all sorts of evils exist. Brecht's case of a good person who cannot really be good in our present world is presented in such a universal manner that it is bound to touch almost any audience irrespective of the ideology of the individual spectator.

The above point calls to mind the Nigerian situation. In Nigeria as in other places, people aspire to be in power. Many do so for selfish reasons while a few want it for genuine reasons. This second group of people are the well-meaning citizens who want to serve the nation to improve the lots of the masses. But once in power, pressures start to build up from all sides. This is the time that these well-meaning power seekers are made to realise that they should accept the fact (a sad one for that) that they must seek and bring their share of the "national cake" home for their home people only. Others can wait because it will be their turn later when a son of their soil will get into power since it is the way it is done. Failure to satisfy one's home people in Nigeria when in power means a shameful return home after service. Success in doing so means chieftaincy titles and like awards on return. Many therefore find it hard to keep to their philosophy in life when they get into power. It becomes hard to be a good leader in Nigeria and still live among one's home people. This is the problem that many leaders face in our society.

"How to be good and yet live", the pinching irony of life presented by Brecht in his *Good Woman* is applicable to many people in many different ways. Brecht however leaves every audience to find a solution to the problem posed by this drama of life.

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[7]Cf. Claude, Hill: *Bertolt Brecht*. Boston: Twayne Publishers. G. K. Hall & Co., 1975. Cf. also Henning Rischbieter: *Brecht. 2*, Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1968, p. 39 ff. Also Helmut Jendreiek: *Bertolt Brecht*. Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1969, p. 209 ff.

The drama also has religious undertone. The christian audience compares the events in it to those in the Old Testament, to Sodom and Gomorrah. Which society deserves survival and which deserves destruction?

We have tried in this paper to show that the audience of German literature in Nigeria is not negligible. Although it was for years restricted to university circles, today it has widened to include teachers and students of literature in Nigerian secondary schools. There are also other readers from different areas of the Humanities who participate in assessing the students for the West African School Certificate. Having compared the analysis of this drama by experts in Germany and other parts of the world we have concluded by calling it a universal analysis of life, for not only does it have world-wide audience, critics interprete it along similar lines.

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