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The Actor's Art on Screen: Inspirations from John Howard Swain

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ABSTRACT

Acting is meant to be a conscious effort at creating a living being from a somewhat inanimate character from the pages of a script. With proper interpretation, acting and real-life can have a semblance that makes it difficult for the audience to distinguish between the actor's character life and the life of the actor himself. Many actors find it difficult to create this semblance due to their desperation to copy the style of other actors they refer to as mentors, which has given rise to repetitive and plastic kind of acting which does not show creativity. John Howard Swain provides a whole new dimension that breaks down the study of acting in order for the actor to fully come to terms with his potential in his book *The Science and Art of Acting for the Camera*. Consequently, the study discovers that the bane attached to the acting profession is inseparable from the following; actor's laziness and redundant attitude toward learning, lack of self-confidence, pride, and unprofessionalism. Therefore, this paper recommends that actors pay close attention to their script, ceaselessly possess the habit of learning newer ideas, hard work and diligence, and ultimately live their characters' lives rather than merely acting them.

Keywords: Acting, Characterization, Performance.

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1. Introduction

Over centuries, art has been an intrinsic part of humanity, servicing him in various forms and dimensions. Art, in general, is the birth result of genius thinking or what is known widely as creativity. No question the phenomenon commandeers the idea of 'originality. Whereas it involves technical and imaginative skills, art exists in the following forms; painting, sculpture, drawing, fashion, writing, visual and performance arts. Typically, art as a discipline within academic parlance or even as a phenomenon in a layman's view is a broad concern. No wonder it has been long sectionalized and studied accordingly. 'Performance arts are art forms in which artists use their voice and the movement of bodies to convey artistic expressions' (Dokubo, 1). Specifically, 'acting' is a significant arm of performance arts. Relatively, artists who perform this art are known as actors or actresses alike.

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The art or occupation of performing fictional roles in plays, films, or television is acting. Acting can be defined as an activity in which a story is told employing its enactment by an actor or actress who adopts a character either in theatre, television, film, radio, or any other medium that uses the mimetic moves. The phenomenon further defines ‘the performing art in which movement, gesture, and intonation are used to realize a fictional character for the stage, for motion pictures, or for television’. (<https://www.britannica.com/art/acting>).

Taking from the definitions above, the art and act of acting do not exist on stage alone, but in film, television and radio. Be that as it may, acting for the film (screen) seems to be a more significant enterprise than other mediums. This reality is incredibly apparent in contemporary times, perhaps because of the massive development and wide acceptance of media technology and cinematic culture, which brightly coincides with viewers’/audiences’ easy accessibility, comfort-ability, economic friendliness and schedule control power. Consequently, the world is today littered with more screen actors than any other kind of actor. It is, in fact, the easiest and fastest medium for any actor to sell.

However, while acting for a film now commands the day, the big deal about acting is tied to interpretation. ‘Character interpretation sometimes can be technical, but it is the actor's role to interpret that character with his/her body and voice. (Dokubo, 1). Fully realizing a character is the ultimate goal of an actor in every of his/her professional exploits. As one can hardly lie to himself, this task is undoubtedly a hard one.

2. The Actor’s Art

Swain’s first effort is to explain the job description of an actor. This explanation he clearly gives by juxtaposing actors and baseball players. Stating verbatim he divulges that:

The difference between actors and ball players is that actors know well in advance where, metaphorically, each ball is going to be hit. That doesn’t mean we (and I include myself here as I am proud to say I made my living as an actor for nearly forty years) can relax, but rather the opposite—we need to be fully engaged at every moment. Our tools are more intangible than the bats, balls, and gloves of a baseball player. We are story interpreters, and to play our “game” we use words, movement, and action. We are story interpreters, and to play our “game” we use words, movement, and action. We use these things to evoke emotions, not only in ourselves but in other as well. If our actions aren’t carefully planned and executed we will be regarded as bush leaguers, unworthy of the price of admission. (2).

Following this rudimental essentialities, Swain uses headlines to break other relevant points for easy comprehension. Stating them chronologically with transitory elucidations, he begins the first with a question;

What does it take to be an actor?

Here, Swain theorizes strongly that; actors are the hardest working people. Backing this solid opinion, he opines that:

When we first start out we often have juggle a full-time job or several part-time jobs around audition and/or rehearsal schedules. Factors in an acting class once a week and you’re rapidly approaching overload. Yet we do it. We work eight hours at a temp job or wait tables at two different restaurants and then go to a rehearsal where we spend four to six hours each night blocking, running lines, digesting into the emotional lives of our characters, which also means dredging up our own emotional experiences. It staggers the mind. And yet we do it. Every actor I’ve ever known has done it. (2).

The basic tenet of this proceeding is that the job of an actor is not just complex but tough, rugged, highly demanding yet fitted with a lot of criticisms. Swain goes on to maintain that actors are some of the bravest people in the world cognizant of the fact that acting is the only profession on earth that requires professionals to do almost everything they are told by the script to do as blocked by the director. According to him,

I don’t say this to diminish the heroic deeds of many other professions—police and fire personnel, the military, etc. - but actors, in order to do our job properly, do something every time we work that most people, given the choice, wouldn’t do in a thousand years. We do in public what most people won’t/can’t do in private. We allow other people to see what we are feeling. This isn’t easy because from the day we’re born we’re assigned certain roles to play and

we are programmed to act accordingly. Girls play with dolls; boys play with guns. It's okay for girls; it's not okay for boys to cry. (2).

Decorating the above, be mindful that actors are only trained as actors nonetheless, they reenact the life and patterns of several other professions such as doctors, lawyers, police, military personnel, chefs, teachers, dry cleaners, clergies etcetera. This is to an ordinary person a huge mountain to climb. On the question of the motivating factor for the actor, Swain opines,

Thousands of years ago, the religious leaders in ancient Greece realized their citizens needed an outlet, a public forum where they could express the intense emotions they were feeling. To accomplish this they created theatre, large interactive events where the combined efforts of the priests and the audience would culminate in a "play". This emotional channel was so important those early "plays" become a form of worship. Today human beings feel those same emotions but our inhibitions, our fear of being inappropriate, hinder us from expressing them in public. (3).

Stomaching this concerted truth raises a wonder of; why actors perform so fearlessly on stage in front of large crowd and on the screen to an insurmountable amount of people from diverse localities. Resolving this puzzle, Swain blames this mad courage on passion. He is of the strong opinion that, passion is that driving force that bestows the spirit of fearlessness, hard work and tirelessness on actors.

3. The Actor's Function

To a layman's understanding, acting means the art and practice of reenacting life experiences on stage or screen. As essential as this definition is, acting to a large degree means more than just reenacting life experience or clever forgeries, noting that all of the actor's resources are put into work, including his intangible resources. Swain shares this light by explaining that acting means reacting; nevertheless, he must know and understand what his character stands for an actor to have an honest reaction. Furthermore, achieving this requires a bunch of homework.

For Swain, the technique is the science that turns acting into art. (7). This opinion shows how vital technique is playable to believable, honest yet entertaining acting. Ample light will be shown in this area as the discussion progresses. As essential as it looks, playing numerous forged characters as creatively designed by playwrights or scriptwriters is not the only function of actors. However, as long as the list can be, Swain, in a concise manner, explains that actors are interpreters who bring the writer and director's visions to fruition. Enlightening further, he opines that:

We are also the gatekeepers of emotions, the torchbearers who hold up the light so each audience member can peer into his/her soul. Moreover, because of this, the actor's job is more important now than ever before. The more intricate and complex the world becomes, the more meaningful our work is. Our job, first and foremost, is to serve the story, the script. In order to do that, we need to understand the arc of the story. Once we know the arc of the story, we then need to determine the emotional journey our character will take to fulfil that arc. (4)

Having discussed some fundamental rudiments of acting, exposing their challenges and vitality to film making and entertainment in general, Swain salutes actors for being a great deal to society. He maintains,

Acting is an honourable and noble profession. It is also a profession that will test the limit of the actor's courage and endurance. Along the way, there will be laughter, tears, frustration and great triumphs. In the end, however, the actor will have the satisfaction of knowing he has done his part to make the world a better place. (7).

A goalless enterprise is bound to fail; a calmer effect may, however, see such an outfit growing sluggishly. Every professional is expected to live his/her career pursuing goals if success must be attained. Weighing this position, to be a well-liked and efficacious professional in the business of acting, an actor must be efficient in getting his job done. This kind of job attitude will help ease the production process and ultimately make an actor attractive to directors and producers. Such reputation is a vital feat for any actor who aims to be a legend. Expanding this light, Swain divulges a crucial and notable point;

An actor needs to do his work quickly so the crew can move on to their following setup. Too often in our business, art is compromised by commerce. So, the faster and better the actor is at doing his job, the more attractive he becomes to producers. The goal is to have his craft in such good shape that he can, without sacrificing any of his character's integrity or emotional honesty, plug himself into whatever the situation is, do his job, disengage, and be ready the next time needed. (10).

Acting professionals must realize that each production they get involved in is a contract and should be treated as such. Any director cum producer who happens to contact such person will have problems working with them but will see them as bunches of regret. Swain emphasizes the need for an actor to see beyond the script and work on his inner self to wake up creativity to play a "living character." He opines,

As an actor, when you receive a film script, you will have at best 30 per cent of the information necessary to create a fully realized character. The rest is up to you, and you will need to fill in many blanks. Even minor characters have meaningful lives. We may not see the entirety of those lives played out on the screen, but that does not mean those characters do not have them. It would be best if you explored those lives so that, regardless of the amount of screen time your character has, we see a real, complete human being. (11).

Swain's spill-out here is despite its simplistic presentation and outlook of one of the biggest problems in the acting profession. Climbing this enormous mountain is a tough challenge for an actor, but how does one reach a milestone? To answer this question, Swain is of the view that preparation is the crucial thing. "The better prepared you are, the better job you'll do. The better you make your director look, the more that director, and subsequently other directors, will want to work with you. And so it goes." (11). Through decent preparation and organization, an actor improves his standard. When that happens, he challenges his co-actors to meet his standard. Such a feat will not only be beneficial to the acting profession but to the overall production process as well. Another advantage of the proper preparation technique, as summarized by him, is that; its thoroughness and attention to detail provide actors with the potential to create that "magic" that can serve throughout their career.

Swain believes that nobody knows what makes the actor tick more than the actor himself. According to him, "every event the actor experiences has an impact on him." (12). Moreover, nobody other than oneself knows best the factors that trigger all the different emotions and feelings, whether good or bad.

The value of the above position to an actor is that he utilizes his same experiences, original emotions, and truth to make an effective, efficient, and realistic acting statement. "Emotions are our stock in trade, and your emotions, and the memories and events that sparked them, are money in the bank." (12). Nevertheless, getting the best results depends on how wide an actor's experience is and how well he can manipulate and influence them to his advantage.

4. Stage and screen: A comparative analysis

Undoubtedly, stage acting is squarely different from screen acting. Whereas stage acting involves performing live for a live audience, screen acting is some recorded acting where actors perform before the face of cameras. To instil clarity, Swain divulges that:

In theatre, we are trained to reach the guy sitting in the last row of the third balcony, vocally and physically and emotionally. We want him to see, hear and feel the things we are trying to convey. After all, he is the guy who wants to play, and the nosebleed seat he bought is the only one he can afford. Much of that change when an actor prepares for a role in films or TV because everyone in the audience, whether in a movie house or at home, is metaphorically moved up to the front row. (4).

In further elucidation, he simplifies these disparities by divulging that much of what the audience sees on stage is based on their choice and angle of perception. Screen acting, on the other hand, differentiates this system by the dictate of the director. In a film or a TV show, the director dictates what the audience sees and the size of what they see. Suppose the movie is about a guy gambling away his fortune. In that case, the director will probably start with a wide shot of a casino, cut to a single protagonist, then to a close-up of the worried look on his face, then to an extreme close-up of his right forefinger nudging his last poker chip into the pot. (5).

Interpreting a character is not just about reenacting life resembling situations and representing personalities of real-life personages to the believability and enjoyment of viewers. Nevertheless, as simplistic as this may seem, it is quite a big mountain to climb; hence, it poses a fundamental challenge to actors. This typical headache faced by actors is nonetheless what Ihunwo's VIBE tries to clarify. According to the former, the acronym 'VIBE' is used to mean two things, and while one bears a connotative meaning, the other is somewhat denotative. Creating clarity, Ihunwo (270) explains both meanings of his creation (VIBE) thus; "First is the term itself which refers to the mood or character of a place or situation. Second is the underlying meaning which makes it an acronym for Voice, Intellect, Body, and Emotion." (270)

As an actor, achieving the best character characterization means being as authentic as possible, and that depends on the perfect marriage and creative playability of the VIBE features. Endorsing this familiar thought, Ihunwo divulges that;

The actor's mind propels the body and voice, which works with intellect and emotion to create a believable performance. Benedetti also agrees that the mind is one of the most critical parts of an actor. Other parts include; the body and, most importantly, the voice, but if the actor's mind is not stable and tension-free, characterization is as good as "dead". An unstable mind leads to stage fright. Some actors tend to have severe stage fright, making them fidget when they find themselves in front of a large crowd. (270).

Fidgeting on stage cannot be an actor's only possible injury while on set. Just as a semi-lunatic would, as expected, perform incoherently in several situations, an actor having a rickety kind of mind would offer misjudgments in several circumstances while working to interpret a character. The best result one can perchance gain from such kind of expedition would not even get near average.

Apart from having an unstable mind, an actor working without the right motivations would still not perform up to par in a bid to interpret his role. However, talking about character interpretation concerning the mind, Ihunwo (270) tries to bring aid to actors by relishing Stanislavski's Public Solitude principle. Embedded in his publication titled Actor's Handbook, Stanislavski (9) opines that; "Public Solitude is the ability to experience yourself as though you were in private, even though you are in public." (Qt. In Ihunwo, 270). Complementing Stanislavski's Public Solitude, Ihunwo (270) brings to limelight Benedetti's Dual Consciousness principle. Broken into two nuggets, Dual Consciousness is just about a twofold awareness on stage which is; "The character pursuing his/her objective and the actor observing and adjusting the performance for the sake of spectators."

5. The What ifs

Whereas actors are encouraged to approximate real and past life experiences as well as real emotions on set, one has to be aware that certain situations may place actors in a fix where they have nothing from real life experience or emotions to use. Most actors encounter this kind of situation as often as they do not and while it is a proven challenge in the acting profession, Swain calls it "The What ifs".

To tackle this sort of challenge in an acting endeavor, he advises actors to take the closest experience available and start adding the "what ifs". Simplifying graphically what he means, he heightens the puzzle by asking these questions; "What if the day Buster ran out into the street he had been hit by a car and injured? Or what if he ran away and never came back? Or what if he got sick and died?" Nevertheless, to clarify his readers, Swain explains that the "what ifs" can go on until you have "what if'd" yourself into the emotional level you want to achieve for your character. (13) While this technique presents a salvaging tool in the face of the "what ifs" situation, "the real" stuff remains the best method for real acting. According to Swain:

Charles Durning, a wonderful character actor and the recipient of a Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award, once told a story about being at his mother's wake. He was from a big Irish family and it was an emotional day for everyone in attendance. In the midst of the tears and sadness he was experiencing, he had the thought: "This is good. I'll be able to use this one day." (13).

As funny as this realistic scenario is, achieving proficiency in the acting profession depends largely on an actor's ability to collect and use emotional memories on set. Therefore, be mindful that as

basic and crucial as the body and voice is to actors, converting emotional memories on set is no less than the duo very vital to art and act of acting. Ultimately, actors are molded to interpret stories created by others. Meanwhile, an actor's goal is to live inside those stories through the process of telling them. (13). Living inside stories that are not an actor's original creation is perfect acting however, achieving a perfect acting is not as common as it is said. No wonder Swain opines that 'being a professional actor is like being a professional athlete. You have to constantly practice to stay at the top of your form'. (13).

6. The core of Screen Acting

Having ample knowledge of the nitty-gritty of screen acting is just not enough to secure an actor or a prospective actor the best of spot in the acting profession. Knowing and understanding the nitty-gritty is a good way to start but reaching the "magic stage" and remaining there for the rest of a professional lifetime may only end up being a farcical myth to actors who are careless about the core of screen acting. The core here is not only related to techniques of acting but is non-different from it as well. Nevertheless, when one talks of technique, note that it is a wide, multifaceted and complex thing to talk. This outlook can be easily upheld owing to the fact that, techniques are not only numerous but are perceived, discussed and theorized differently by various acting dynamos as well as theorists. While Howard Swain has followed the leadings of Egri's sentiment which is inscribed in his book, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* to construct a technique called "The Bones", he still talks about "The Method Acting" as developed and prescribed by the prolific acting fellow, Constantine Stanislavski. Relatively, both techniques may be pointing at an exact picture; nevertheless, they are perceived, conceived and theorized differently.

An idealistic system based on the premise that everything an actor does in a performance has to be justified by the character's internal need (Datubo, 10), is Stanislavski's theoretical tenet. Nevertheless, just as Stanislavski's "The Method Acting" technique prescribes, "The Bone" techniques lays emphasis on those internal qualities of a character. Noting that most of these internal details are hidden or not stated literally in the body of the screen play, it practically behooves on the actor to decipher them. In a screenplay, the writer is more concerned with structure than character development. One of the biggest dilemma actors face is how to take the little bit of information they are given and use it to create fully realized characters. (Swain, 22) "The Bone" is nonetheless a technique intended to help actors live their character's life as lofty and sublime as they can. In achieving this feat, Swain opines thus:

Part of your job as an actor is to take whatever information you're given and use that as home base, a place to start creating not only a life for your character but a history as well. If you do this, your character will show up a fully realized human being. If you don't, you run the risk of your character coming across as a one-dimensional stick figure. (22).

Upholding the above recommendation, the latter's theorization reaches a conclusion that "The Bone" consist of three sections which are; the physiology, sociology and psychology. Each of which have special constituents living in them. They are outlined as follows;

- **Physiology**

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Height and weight
4. Colour of hair, eyes, skin
5. Posture (How do I stand? How do I carry myself?)
6. Appearance (How do I dress for work? Leisure?)
7. Defects (Physical faults)
8. Heredity (Inherent physical traits; the good, bad and the ugly)

- **Sociology**

1. Class (Upper, middle or lower)
2. Occupation (Type of work, hours, union/non-union, conditions)
3. Education (Kindergarten through grad school, or none at all)

4. Home life as a child (Who are/were my parents and what did they do? Number of siblings? Position in the family? Was I adopted? Home life as an adult: Do I have a spouse, a partner, Children, etc.?)

5. Religion

6. Race, nationality

7. Place in community (Leader, follower etc.)

8. Political affiliations, beliefs

9. Amusements (What do I do for pleasure or fun?)

• **Psychology**

1. Sex life (Moral standards, fantasy, and romance)

2. Personal premise/ambition

3. Frustrations, disappointments

4. Temperaments

5. Attitude towards life

6. Complexes, obsessions, inhibitions

7. Extroverts/introverts or a little of the both?

8. Abilities (languages, music etc.)

9. Qualities (Imagination, judgment, poise)

10. IQ (Street smarts, book smarts, people smarts etc.)

As simplistic as this outline looks, owning all of these qualities particular to a forged character who is more often than not strange or completely alien to any actor is a big task. Fully abreast of this foundation, Swain offers systematic tips in tackling this actor's challenge.

Treating from the physiology, if you are dealing with a completely strange character, it is best you start climbing this mountain by using the known to attack the unknown. This very recommendation of Swain is clearly stated when he posits thus:

Try not stray too far from your own physical reality. Usually one of the reasons you've been hired is because your body type and physical traits coincides with the writer's and director's visions of the character. Of course, if the script says you're blonde and you're not, hair and make-up will take care of that. If blue eyes are called for, and yours are brown, they'll give you contact lenses. (24).

Although the costume and make-up and other impersonation stuff including natural physical attributes are provisions that can ease things for an actor, a good actor should be more prepared than ever. This warning is aptly credible because an actor can find himself faced with a situation where he is requested to play a character that is completely alien to him both physically and otherwise. And even though the employment of costume and make-up can help put an actor in a suitable physical shape, if he is unable to appropriately carry himself physiologically to suit the demand of his character, then the impersonation attempt and the entire effort becomes a mess.

In terms of the sociology, the first thing an actor should come to terms with is that; in most cases, if not all cases, the sociological details of the characters he is being faced with would not synchronize with his natural sociological features. As the actor is an actor by profession, as often as expected, he is employed to play a gladiator, pastor, teacher, police officer, politician, and sportsman and so on. All of these above listed professions and more are hardly in tandem with the social, economic, educational class of an actor. So, how does an actor deal with the dilemma of realistically assuming the social demands of his characters? Well, Swain is of the opinion that here an actor is not expected to use his very qualities to achieve a fine show. As a matter of fact, in most of the cases actors do not even have much in their natural bank to employ. Therefore, it is recommended that they pay attention to the screen writer's sociological provision of characters. According to him:

The key here is not to write perfect prose but to plumb the depths of your character. In this section you probably won't be using you own personal information as the basis for your answers, not like you did in the physiological section. Here, you will be using the information

the writer provided, regardless of how much or how little detail he gave you, and you imagination to fill what is left out. (25).

Swain however concludes by opining that; ‘if your real life parallels your character’s real life, and you’re comfortable using that information, then use it. However, whatever the case may be, a good and sublime actor is not expected to glorify the excuse that the writer did not provide him sufficient sociological history of a character. Just as said early, a situation like this requires a fine actor to use his/her imagination to fill in salient gaps in order to achieve his/her goal.

In the context of the psychology, the truth of the matter is that nothing comes first but the same old story. Hence, just as it goes in the physiology and sociology section, here to challenge this mountain requires an actor to blow the little details as provided by the script to its elastic limit. When doing this, an actor uses his prior knowledge and experiences of life, compounding it with the scriptural details to create a life for the character. Swain in likelihood insist that if an actor want his characters to be as alive as possible, then, the more life he gives them, the more alive they would be. (25) Doing this means that the actor must have had as much as he can from what the writer puts in the script. On a general however, gaining whatever details of a character from the script basically comes from the writer’s minor and major descriptions of characters, situations and plot design. But most importantly, paying deep attention to what the character says of himself, what other characters says of him and the emotions and desires he freely expresses tells even more details than what any writer could ever provide. Nevertheless, to achieve a perfect acting, knowing the psychology of the character alone or the sociology and or physiology would not do thus, a sublimed combination of the trio (Physiology, sociology and psychology) guarantees an ultimate result. No wonder Stanislavski long proposed that:

The creation of physical life is half the work on a role because, like us, a role has two natures, physical and spiritual... a role on the stage, more than action in real life, must bring together the two lives – of external and internal action – in mutual effort to achieve a given purpose. (Stanislavski, 219).

To avoid any misperception of ideas, it is imperative to note that the latter calls internal action, spiritual action and external action, physical action. Therefore, both the psychology and physiology discussed by Swain when analyzing “The Bones” matches well with Stanislavski’s internal and external actions. Even though, the sociology is not referenced literarily by Stanislavski here, it is still in view.

7. Living “The Now” When You Know the Future

Swain argues that it is bizarre to say the least when one knows that if one makes a trip, it would lead to death, yet, the person still embarks on the journey. Actors are constantly faced with the challenge of being expected to behave naturalistic, realistic and believable even when they are already abreast of how their characters would end up. According to him,

One of the biggest obstacles actors face is staying “In the moment.” While we’re working on a scene, we live a very schizophrenic existence. We know everything that’s going to happen before it happens. We know the beginning, the middle and the end of a scene before the scene starts. We know who wins and who loses each battle long before the first shot is fired, and then we have to pretend we don’t know what we know. (79).

This is indeed a very absurd situation actors live in, yet, their professional counterpart and the world at large expects them to be as normal as others in and out of their job. ‘This is hard. It goes against all natural instincts known to be associated with humans’. (79). It is even more when one considers the latter’s (79) sentiment again that; ‘staying present, being “in the moment,” night after night or take after take can be difficult when we have so much prior information.’ Swain further explains that some actors can actually manage to stay good being in the moment when their character is talking, but when another character is talking they tend to go adrift. Such blameless inconsistency can cause problems if proper care is not taken. This could even be worse when the actor is involved in a very emotional scene. Nevertheless, whatever the case may be, being conscious of yourself, the character you are playing, and your goal goes a long way in seeing you through as an actor in the face of this sort of adversary. Focus and high alertness is summarily the key here.

From the foregoing, the big question then is; how does an actor achieve focus and high alertness when he can be spontaneously thrown adrift sequel to the bizarre situation he finds himself? In response to this, Swain responds thus,

The best way to accomplish this is to learn how to be an active listener. Being an active listener doesn't mean you move around a lot or make facial expressions or tilt your head from side to side. It means, when the other character is speaking or engaged in an activity, you're making a series of discoveries about what he is saying or doing. If you make honest, interesting discoveries, you become interesting to watch. The more interesting you are to watch, the more the audience wants to engage in your character's journey (80).

Being a good listener as prescribed by Swain can only come from deep concentration. More often than less, the audience will wish to foldaway with an actor's character if he remains interesting throughout the plot. However, being interesting does not solely depend on the characterization a writer bestows upon a character within a well-designed and interesting plot. An actor can however remain interesting within a film's plot if he keeps wowing the audience with surprises each time his character shows up. Such ability is an ingenious art on the part of actors beyond what is written in the script. To understand this scenario better, Swain provides a good example. According to him:

If you're playing a bad guy, the audience knows he's bad because he's doing and saying bad things. If you play him solely as evil and/or mean, your behavior becomes predictable. When that happens, the audience will start to second-guess you. If the audience gets ahead of you, you lose the element of surprise. If you lose the ability to surprise the audience, they will lose their willingness to participate and they'll resist going on the journey you're trying to create. (43).

To treat this issue, Swain ably recommends that actors should not give a very honest or straight picture of their character. Creating and mixing an alternate persona different from your character's original personality (playing the chameleon game) may be the answer. The truth about all humans is that we are a mixture of good and bad. Therefore, good people do bad things and bad people do good things. (43).

8. Summary

Other than the already said, an excellent character interpretation could be achieved in an environment whereby the actor is married to the character he/she is to interpret.

In a typical sense, acting involves a conscious activity in which stories are told via people's physical and oral portrayal and events by actors who assume characters. However, whether in theatre, film, television, or radio, the practice of acting embroils an expansive range of skills, as well as well-built imaginative excellence, emotional bank, physical fluency in expressivity, good vocal projection, clarity of speech, and ultimately the ability to interpret drama. Acting also demands an actor to employ languages in the company of correlated accents, improvisation, observation and imitation.

The ownership and proper utilization, dexterousness of the identified acting qualities are essential tools needed in an actor's arsenal yet, not easy to acquire. To this end, many actors have seen the need to train at length in special programs or colleges to develop these skills even after attaining higher education. A vast majority of professional actors known today, even in the Nollywood picture, have undergone several training programs to groom their art. Bearing in mind that acting is a viable occupation, coupled with the fact that the art is becoming more competitive as the days go by, improving oneself as an actor cannot be overemphasized continually.

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