Abuja Journal of Humanities

ISSN: 1117-8116

A publication of the Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja

Volume 6 (2025), Article 32, https://doi.org/10.70118/TAJH0032

Writing Solo Plays in Nigerian Theatre: Using Sotimirin's *Molue*, Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son*, and Binebai's *Karina's Cross* as Paradigms

Awaritoma Agoma, PhD
Department of Theatre Arts
University of Abuja

Abstract

In Nigerian libraries and bookshops, one can readily encounter contemporary plays by celebrated playwrights, yet the scarcity of solo plays—especially those written by notable solo dramatists—underscores a profound neglect of this subgenre. This paper therefore examines the craft of writing solo plays through the paradigmatic works of Tunji Sotimirin's *Molue*, Greg Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son*, and Benedict Binebai's *Karina's Cross*. Its objective is to explore the aesthetic and dramaturgical elements of solo playwriting and to encourage more Nigerian playwrights to embrace the form. Adopting a qualitative content analysis framework, the paper also employs avant-gardism and the "Less is More" principle as interpretive lenses for understanding the structure and performance of monodrama. Findings reveal that solo playwriting shares foundational principles with conventional dramaturgy, even though it requires heightened creativity in characterization, dialogue, and performance. Moreover, the research highlights that greater visibility and publication of solo plays would expand scholarly access and promote their teaching and practice in Nigerian universities. Consequently, this study argues that the institutionalization of solo performance as a compulsory course—integrating both writing and performance—will not only enrich Nigerian theatre pedagogy but also preserve an important, though overlooked, dimension of African performance heritage.

Introduction

As an advocate of solo performance, my access to Nigerian solo plays has largely been mediated through personal connections with playwrights rather than through mainstream publishing channels. This difficulty in obtaining texts reveals the limited attention accorded to the genre within the country's literary and theatrical landscapes. While shelves in Nigerian libraries and bookstores are filled with hundreds of contemporary plays, it is challenging to locate even a handful of solo plays, a situation Ndubuisi Nwokedi vividly describes when he notes that "the number of professional solo dramatists in the country at the moment cannot exceed the ten fingers of a man's pair of hands" (408). Such scarcity highlights a systemic neglect of solo performance

within scholarly and professional theatre spaces. By contrast, other dramatic genres flourish through publication, annual theatre conferences, and consistent academic engagement, leaving monodrama relatively marginalized.

The implications of this neglect are particularly visible in the teaching of theatre arts, where lecturers often struggle to find adequate texts for practical solo performance workshops. Whereas there is an abundance of contemporary plays to choose from in traditional drama classes, the dearth of solo plays places constraints on both pedagogy and student training. The Nigerian dramatist Ahmed Yerima underscores the precariousness of this situation when he asserts, "In Nigeria you cannot make a living out of playwriting" (13). If conventional playwrights already face such economic marginalization, the prospects for solo playwrights, whose work circulates even less, appear especially tenuous. This condition points to a broader tension between artistic commitment and economic viability within the Nigerian theatre industry.

Solo playwriting, like solo acting, remains an unpopular and underexplored artistic practice in Nigeria despite the global popularity of related solo performance forms such as stand-up comedy. One reason for this is the oral, improvisatory heritage from which many solo performances historically emerged. As Yerima observes, "playwriting in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole, is an imported profession" (10), suggesting that indigenous traditions of storytelling were more orally transmitted than textually documented. This legacy means that even today, Nigerian stand-up comedians often preserve their material through live performance or digital recordings rather than through published texts. By comparison, many pioneering Nigerian solo actors—including those under study in this paper—delayed publishing their monologues for years after their initial performances. Sotimirin's *Molue*, for instance, was first staged in 1989 but only published in 2018, while Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son* premiered in 1991 and was published nearly a decade later, in 2000.

Benedict Binebai's entry into solo playwriting further illustrates how the form is sustained less by institutional structures than by interpersonal encouragement. In an interview, Binebai admits that he was persuaded by his colleague Greg Mbajiorgu—widely regarded as the doyen of solo drama in Nigeria—to attempt the genre after years of writing conventional plays (Uzoigwe 391). His first monodrama, *My Life in the Burning Creeks*, emerged not from an initial fascination with solo performance but from collegial mentorship. This case underscores the precariousness of solo playwriting as a professional path: without deliberate advocacy and peer support, playwrights may never consider venturing into the form. It also reveals how the circulation of solo performance is often driven by personal networks rather than institutional backing.

Compounding this challenge is the lack of archival preservation of earlier Nigerian solo performers. For example, the late Funsho Alabi, once celebrated as "the king of solo," left behind no published scripts despite his many exploits on stage. His absence from the publishing record underscores the ephemeral nature of solo performance in Nigeria and the risks of cultural erasure when oral or embodied traditions are not translated into written texts. By contrast, Binebai, who primarily identified as a playwright rather than as an actor-performer, published his solo plays more quickly, highlighting how the dynamics of authorship influence preservation. This duality—between performers who continually revise their scripts on stage and playwrights who commit their texts to publication—reveals a key tension in solo drama, where the actor and playwright often merge but may also diverge.

Ultimately, the scarcity of solo plays on Nigerian bookshelves signals a missed opportunity for scholarship and artistic development. As Binebai himself notes, "the subject of vision and philosophy in the writing of monodrama has not been explored by literary scholars" (376). Despite this neglect, he insists that monodrama remains a potent, though underutilized, format within Nigerian theatre (380). This study therefore issues a clarion call to scholars and playwrights alike: solo performance should not remain a peripheral experiment but rather be recognized as a central and vital component of the Nigerian theatrical tradition. By documenting, analyzing, and publishing solo plays, scholars and practitioners can ensure the growth and sustainability of this unique form, while also offering students and audiences access to a richer diversity of theatrical experiences.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts of "play," "playwriting," and "playwright" are fundamentally interwoven, as all three share the root term "play," which signifies their collective grounding in performance and dramaturgy. According to *Webster's Reference Library Dictionary and Thesaurus*, a play is defined as "a literary work for performance by actors" (247). While this definition captures its essence, it remains somewhat limiting when applied to the diverse practices of theatre in Nigeria. Plays may exist as published or unpublished texts, but they may also manifest as improvised or embodied performances not yet committed to writing. In the case of solo performance, the actor often embodies both the role of script and performer, blurring the distinction between text and enactment. As such, this paper adopts an expanded definition of plays as both written texts and performed works that may exist in oral, improvised, or experimental forms. This more inclusive approach allows us to account for performances like Sotimirin's *Molue* and Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son*, both of which were staged long before their eventual publication.

Playwriting itself has been variably defined, often reflecting tensions between formal instruction and innate creativity. Ahmed Yerima describes playwriting as "the act of putting words together to form dialogue existing in its logic and reality," while also acknowledging that "there is no one definition to playwriting or who the playwright is" (*Basic Techniques* 9). This ambivalence reflects the dual nature of the craft as both a learned skill and an artistic calling. Alexandre Dumas fils, in his essay "How to Write a Play," similarly highlights the accessibility of dramaturgy, noting that audiences can readily judge plays since they reflect the language and sentiments of everyday life (720). These perspectives collectively reveal that while some view playwriting as a teachable discipline requiring training and practice, others regard it as an intuitive craft grounded in lived experience and storytelling ability. This debate remains central to contemporary discourse on Nigerian theatre, where playwrights navigate between indigenous oral traditions and Western dramaturgical models.

The question of whether playwriting can be taught has long divided scholars. Effiong Johnson observes that there are "two schools of thought" on the matter, citing Anderson's view that "truly creative writing cannot be taught" alongside the position at Yale University's School of Drama, which insists that playwriting can indeed be learned as a craft (210). The Nigerian context provides compelling evidence for both positions. On one hand, playwrights such as Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan demonstrate rigorous training in dramatic structure and form; on the other, figures like Tunji Sotimirin exemplify the intuitive, improvisatory dimensions of storytelling that emerge organically from performance. Oscar G. Brockett and Robert J. Ball reinforce the iterative nature of dramaturgy when they argue that "plays are not written but rewritten" (305), emphasizing the labor of revision and experimentation.

In solo playwriting especially, this process of constant rewriting—often in response to live audience feedback—underscores the hybrid nature of the craft as both taught and lived.

Given these perspectives, this paper aligns with the position that playwriting is both teachable and intuitive, a craft honed by practice but also enriched by inspiration. The proverb that "you cannot learn to swim without entering the water" aptly applies: mastery in playwriting emerges through continuous experimentation, error, and revision. Yerima himself concedes that playwriting is ultimately about "telling a good story through characters and dialogue" (58), highlighting narrative and interpersonal exchange as its core. Within the realm of solo plays, these principles are amplified since one actor must embody multiple characters and sustain dramatic tension without the aid of a full cast. Thus, solo playwriting may be seen as a distilled version of dramaturgy: stripped of ensemble dynamics, it places extraordinary weight on story, characterization, and audience engagement.

Playwriting

Playwriting as a creative practice occupies a unique position among the arts because it is simultaneously literary, performative, and collaborative. Unlike painting or sculpture, where the artist's work can exist independently of interpretation, plays require the mediation of actors, directors, and audiences to achieve their full expression. As Dietrich, Carpenter, and Kerrane argue in *The Art of Drama*, the dramatist writes not primarily for readers but for "spectators" who encounter the text in embodied performance (2). This relational quality differentiates playwriting from other literary forms, underscoring its inherently dialogic and social nature. For this reason, Thornton Wilder identifies four conditions distinguishing theatre from other arts: it relies on collaboration, addresses the collective mind, depends upon pretense, and unfolds in the perpetual present (886). These conditions are particularly heightened in solo plays, where the playwright entrusts a single actor to navigate collaboration, audience address, and temporal immediacy in ways that are both intimate and expansive.

Nigerian playwrights must also contend with the challenges of audience reception in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Plays often incorporate indigenous languages, idioms, and proverbs, as seen in Sotimirin's *Molue*, where Yoruba expressions enrich the humor and authenticity of the performance. Such strategies not only localize the play but also affirm the cultural identity of the playwright and audience. However, they also demand from the playwright a keen awareness of how language operates theatrically across diverse audiences. Yerima's reminder that "playwriting is a subjective art, dependent on aesthetics, pleasure and enjoyment" (*Basic Techniques* 11) becomes particularly relevant here: the playwright must balance personal vision with the collective sensibilities of an audience whose expectations are shaped by culture, tradition, and lived experience.

The practice of playwriting in Nigeria also reveals the economic and institutional challenges that shape dramaturgy. As Yerima bluntly notes, "In Nigeria you cannot make a living out of playwriting" (*Basic Techniques* 13). This reality has discouraged many from fully investing in the craft, particularly in subgenres such as solo drama that already face marginalization. Nevertheless, playwrights persist, driven by a belief in theatre's capacity to educate, entertain, and provoke reflection. In this respect, solo playwriting functions as both a pragmatic and aesthetic choice: pragmatic in that it requires fewer actors and lower production costs, and aesthetic in its ability to amplify singular voices with clarity and intensity. This convergence of practicality and artistry

positions solo plays as an underexplored but potentially transformative mode within Nigerian theatre.

Playwright

A playwright may be simply defined as one who writes plays, yet this term carries connotations of craftsmanship, construction, and imagination that exceed mere writing. The *Webster's Reference Library Dictionary* describes a playwright as "a writer of plays" (247), but as Johnson explains, the suffix "-wright" suggests a maker or artisan, akin to a shipwright, who fashions and engineers theatrical experience (208). This image highlights the dramaturg's dual identity as both artist and craftsman, combining intuition with technical precision. For Yerima, a play functions as "a letter from the playwright to the directors, actors, and other members of the production, informing them of a particular vision of his or hers" (*Basic Techniques* 15). In other words, the playwright sets the imaginative foundation upon which the entire collaborative process of theatre is constructed.

However, the role of the playwright becomes particularly complex in the context of solo drama. Because solo plays often originate from performers themselves, the playwright is sometimes simultaneously actor, director, and storyteller. This convergence collapses traditional hierarchies in theatrical production, as the solo playwright-performer assumes control over vision, embodiment, and delivery. Gareth Armstrong reminds us that not all playwrights are comfortable writing for monologues, as solo plays demand a distinctive dramaturgical approach that foregrounds character voice and inner dialogue (11). Yet those who embrace this challenge create works that distill the essence of theatre into its most elemental form: one actor, one audience, one story.

The playwright's craft is also inevitably shaped by cultural and historical contexts. In Nigeria, where oral storytelling traditions remain influential, many playwrights draw inspiration from indigenous practices of narrative performance. The storyteller's role as a communal educator and entertainer resonates strongly with the solo playwright's responsibility to captivate audiences through direct address. As Richard Schechner argues, performance is not merely a genre but "a mode of behavior that may characterize any activity" (22), suggesting that the playwright's task is less about invention than about shaping everyday performance into structured drama. Within this framework, the playwright becomes a cultural mediator, transforming lived realities into theatrical narratives that reflect, critique, and inspire.

Ultimately, the figure of the playwright—whether working in ensemble-based drama or in solo monodrama—embodies the intersection of artistry, craftsmanship, and cultural responsibility. Nigerian playwrights who venture into solo playwriting, such as Sotimirin, Mbajiorgu, and Binebai, demonstrate that the craft requires not only literary skill but also a deep understanding of performance dynamics. Their works reveal that while the role of the playwright may evolve in form and function, its essence remains rooted in the creative act of shaping stories for communal reflection and engagement.

Solo Performance

The term *solo* universally connotes singularity, independence, or the act of being alone. In the context of performance, it refers to artistic presentation by a single individual before an audience, embodying multiple roles or presenting a singular narrative. Richard Schechner, in his foundational *Performance Theory*, cautions that "performance

is an extremely difficult concept to define," noting that it encompasses a wide spectrum of human behavior (22). Erving Goffman similarly posits that performance can be understood as a mode of behavior in any situation where individuals present themselves before others, thereby making performance a quality rather than a genre. Roselee Goldberg reinforces this view by asserting that performance art resists fixed definitions, embodying instead a live, ephemeral quality that defies rigid categorization (184). Within this theoretical backdrop, solo performance emerges as a distinctive mode in which a lone artist assumes the full weight of communication, improvisation, and audience engagement.

Globally, solo performance has assumed diverse forms, from dramatic monologues to stand-up comedy, performance poetry, and even ritualized storytelling. Each of these variations underscores the capacity of a single performer to command attention, provoke reflection, and sustain narrative complexity without the support of an ensemble cast. In the African context, solo performance resonates deeply with traditional practices of oral storytelling, where the griot, praise singer, or village storyteller would hold an audience through memory, voice, and gesture (Okpewho 17). Nigerian theatre, therefore, inherits a dual legacy: Western dramaturgical traditions that valorize the written script, and indigenous oral practices that privilege performance as primary text. Solo performance sits at the intersection of these traditions, offering both continuity with the past and experimentation with modern forms.

The significance of solo performance lies not only in its artistry but also in its economy and accessibility. Unlike large-scale theatrical productions requiring elaborate sets, multiple actors, and significant resources, solo performance often requires minimal infrastructure. This aligns with Jerzy Grotowski's theory of "poor theatre," which privileges the actor-audience relationship over spectacle and technology (Grotowski 19). By stripping performance down to its essentials, solo work emphasizes the communicative power of the body, voice, and imagination. In resource-constrained contexts such as Nigeria, this makes solo performance not merely a stylistic choice but also a pragmatic response to financial and institutional limitations. Thus, solo performance embodies both an aesthetic and socio-economic strategy, positioning it as a form uniquely suited to Nigerian theatrical realities.

Solo Plays

Solo plays, also referred to as monodramas, are dramatic texts or performances designed for a single actor to embody multiple characters or perspectives. Awaritoma Agoma defines them as "play texts or scripts that are designed to be performed by only one actor on stage" ("Directing Solo Plays" 272). While solo plays may take inspiration from stand-up comedy, performance poetry, or storytelling, they are distinct in their structural and dramaturgical rigor. Unlike improvised comedy routines, they feature a clear narrative arc, with a beginning, middle, and end, as well as sustained character development. They may be scripted, improvised, or evolve through iterative performances before final publication. The Nigerian examples of Sotimirin's *Molue* and Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son*, which were performed for years before publication, exemplify this iterative process from stage to page.

The defining quality of solo plays is their ability to merge narrative, performance, and audience engagement into a concentrated theatrical event. Gareth Armstrong, reflecting on his experience as a solo performer, observes that "just as solo performing isn't for everyone, not all playwrights are comfortable with writing monologues" (11). This observation highlights the unique challenges faced by solo playwrights, who

must craft narratives that can sustain audience attention without the interplay of multiple onstage actors. Nigerian solo plays achieve this by weaving together satire, social critique, and humor, often drawing upon indigenous performance traditions. Sotimirin's *Molue*, for instance, uses the metaphor of a crowded Lagos bus to comment on corruption and survival in urban Nigeria, while Binebai's *Karina's Cross* dramatizes the plight of women and girls in the Niger Delta. These examples reveal that solo plays can function as vehicles for both personal expression and socio-political critique.

Solo plays also complicate the relationship between actor, playwright, and director. In many cases, these roles collapse into one, as with Mbajiorgu, who not only wrote but also directed and performed *The Prime Minister's Son*. This blurring of boundaries emphasizes the integrated nature of solo play production, where the performer is often the script's interpreter and co-creator. At the same time, not all solo plays emerge from this tripartite merging; Binebai, for example, published *Karina's Cross* without performing it himself, suggesting that solo dramaturgy can also thrive through separation of authorship and performance. This duality underscores the flexibility of the form: it may be intensely personal and performative or primarily textual and literary. Either way, solo plays contribute to broadening the horizons of Nigerian theatre by challenging the dominance of ensemble-based dramaturgy.

Solo Acting / Monologue / Monodrama

Solo acting, often referred to as monodrama or dramatic monologue, constitutes one of the most demanding forms of theatrical performance. It requires the actor to sustain an entire narrative alone, embodying multiple characters, shifting registers of voice and gesture, and maintaining audience engagement without the support of co-actors. Bruce Miller underscores the distinctive demands of monologue acting, noting that "a monologue situation is specialized and requires that the acting skills take on a different order of importance than in a play where characters are dealing with each other" (155). Solo acting therefore intensifies the requirements of voice, timing, imagination, and physical presence, placing extraordinary emphasis on the performer's craft.

Unlike traditional acting, solo performance resists easy categorization and defies many of the conventions of ensemble theatre. Michael Kearns explains that solo acting "is not traditional acting… it's intended to look easy, relaxed, personal, and improvisational," requiring performers to abandon certain rules of acting and adopt new skills (12). This sense of intimacy and immediacy makes solo acting particularly powerful, as audiences feel addressed not through a fictional fourth wall but through direct and personal communication. Edward Wright further stresses the rigor involved, emphasizing that solo performance demands "hard work and serious vocal, physical, and mental training" alongside imagination, persistence, and discipline (125). These qualities distinguish successful solo performers from those who approach the form casually.

Solo acting also requires a fusion of raw talent and refined skill. While natural charisma and storytelling ability are important, they must be supplemented with technical training in voice, body, and dramaturgical analysis. Deborah Lubar emphasizes that training must cultivate "strength and flexibility of body, voice, imagination, emotional accessibility, and responsiveness" (12–13). This holistic preparation allows solo actors to sustain performances that may embody multiple characters, switch rapidly between emotional registers, and animate complex narratives with minimal props. Glenn Alterman describes this capacity as one of the

most exciting dimensions of monodrama: even with only one actor on stage, multiple voices, conflicts, and perspectives can be dramatized (4).

What makes solo acting especially significant is its ability to function simultaneously as theatre, storytelling, and pedagogy. The solo performer, by embodying a range of characters and situations, invites audiences into a shared imaginative space where social critique, humor, and empathy converge. Nigerian solo actors such as Sotimirin and Mbajiorgu exemplify this, using solo performance not only to entertain but also to critique political corruption, social inequality, and cultural contradictions. In this sense, solo acting becomes more than an artistic choice; it becomes a mode of social intervention, amplifying individual voices to reflect collective experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Avant-gardism

The concept of avant-gardism, from the French meaning "advance guard" or "vanguard," signifies those who break away from established norms to pioneer new artistic expressions. Edward E. Wright observes that the term, originally military in nature, has come to designate artists who "seek to transform the conventional into something they consider more vital and meaningful" (69). Avant-garde theatre therefore challenges tradition, often discarding established forms to create new principles and rules. Olu Obafemi explains that experimental or avant-garde theatre thrives on "breaking rules or traditions by creating new rules and traditions" (18), making innovation its central ethos. Richard Schechner reinforces this view, describing avant-garde practice as "rule-breaking activity" (13). These insights frame solo performance as inherently avant-garde, since it subverts ensemble expectations by reducing the cast to one, while simultaneously expanding creative possibilities through imaginative embodiment.

The relevance of avant-gardism to Nigerian solo theatre lies in its emphasis on experimentation and innovation as necessary for survival. As Akpos Adesi argues, twentieth-century drama evolved precisely through experimentation, "breaking the conventional mode of drama and theatre" (401). This trajectory resonates with the history of Nigerian monodrama, where playwrights like Sotimirin and Mbajiorgu deliberately adopted unconventional structures, blending satire, improvisation, music, and indigenous performance traditions into hybrid forms. In doing so, they positioned themselves as trailblazers within a national theatre context that often privileges ensemble plays. Avant-garde practice in this regard is not mere aesthetic rebellion but also a strategy of cultural survival, ensuring that Nigerian theatre remains dynamic, responsive, and relevant to contemporary realities.

Moreover, avant-gardism emphasizes the minority position of innovators who, though sometimes marginalized, play a crucial role in theatre's evolution. Wright notes that avant-gardists "are creating new principles, establishing new rules for the game," and though often misunderstood, they keep theatre alive by infusing it with ideas (69). Solo playwrights in Nigeria exemplify this role. Their persistence in producing and performing monodramas despite limited institutional recognition positions them as cultural innovators who expand the boundaries of Nigerian theatre. By insisting on new forms of storytelling and performance, they contribute to the diversification of the national dramatic canon, creating space for alternative voices and marginalized narratives.

The "Less is More" Concept

The principle of "less is more," often associated with minimalist aesthetics, finds powerful expression in solo theatre. Originating with Robert Browning's formulation of restraint in art, the concept was later expanded in theatre through Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Grotowski argued that elaborate productions risk distracting from the essential relationship between actor and audience, advocating instead for stripped-down performances that emphasize authenticity and immediacy (19). Louis Catron applies this logic to solo performance, observing that monodrama embodies the "less is more" principle by focusing attention on the actor and story, discarding nonessential spectacle (33). In this way, the concept becomes both a philosophy of performance and a practical strategy for production.

In Nigerian solo theatre, the "less is more" approach resonates with both economic and aesthetic realities. Productions such as *Molue* or *The Prime Minister's Son* demonstrate how a single performer can conjure entire worlds—buses, families, communities—using only voice, gesture, and minimal props. This economy of means not only reduces production costs, as John Cairney observes in his discussion of solo performance (1), but also enhances audience engagement by stimulating imagination. Rather than passively consuming spectacle, audiences actively co-create the performance by envisioning settings, characters, and situations suggested by the actor. Thus, "less is more" transforms limitation into opportunity, making the performance space a site of imaginative collaboration.

The principle also foregrounds the vulnerability and virtuosity of the solo actor. With no co-actors to deflect attention, the performer is fully exposed, compelled to carry the narrative with skill, charisma, and discipline. This exposure reveals both strengths and weaknesses, demanding that the actor draw upon training, improvisation, and deep emotional reserves. At the same time, it allows audiences to experience the raw intensity of performance unmediated by spectacle. For Nigerian solo theatre, where resources are often scarce, "less is more" is not simply an aesthetic preference but a pragmatic necessity that aligns with indigenous traditions of storytelling, where imagination and voice carried the weight of drama long before modern theatre structures.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, which is well-suited for examining the dramaturgical structures and thematic concerns of solo plays. Content analysis allows for systematic interpretation of texts, focusing on narrative elements, stylistic choices, and recurring motifs. In the case of Nigerian monodramas, the method involves close reading of published scripts, such as Sotimirin's *Molue*, Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son*, and Binebai's *Karina's Cross*, as well as drawing upon reviews, interviews, and performance documentation. Glenn Alterman recommends that budding monologists study the works of others they respect, as such comparative analysis provides valuable insight into the diverse possibilities of the form (xxiii). This methodology is therefore not only analytical but also pedagogical, intended to guide both established and emerging playwrights in their engagement with solo playwriting.

In addition to textual analysis, the study employs a theoretical framework grounded in avant-gardism and the "less is more" principle. This dual lens enables a richer understanding of how solo plays innovate through rule-breaking experimentation and minimalist aesthetics. For example, *Molue* demonstrates avant-gardist impulses in its

satirical improvisations, while *Karina's Cross* illustrates minimalist restraint by focusing on a single character who embodies multiple social issues. By situating these plays within broader theoretical debates, the study highlights how Nigerian solo theatre simultaneously participates in global avant-garde traditions and adapts them to local cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the methodology acknowledges the iterative nature of solo performance, where scripts evolve through repeated stagings and audience feedback. As noted earlier, both *Molue* and *The Prime Minister's Son* existed as performance texts for years before publication, illustrating the fluidity between stage and page in Nigerian monodrama. Content analysis therefore extends beyond the written text to include performance as an evolving archive. This approach not only honors the embodied dimension of theatre but also recognizes the collaborative role of audiences, whom Awaritoma describes as the "dialogue in the monologue" ("Dialogue in the Monologue" 13). Ultimately, the methodology is designed to foreground the interconnections between text, performance, and reception in the study of Nigerian solo plays.

Play Synopses

Molue

Tunji Sotimirin's *Molue* is structured as an episodic satire that uses the metaphor of a crowded Lagos bus to dramatize Nigerian society's struggles, contradictions, and resilience. The play depicts urban life as a relentless journey, where individuals compete for space, survival, and recognition within an overcrowded system. Characters are drawn from everyday archetypes—conductors, passengers, hustlers—each revealing corruption, moral compromise, and survivalist wit. The bus itself functions as a microcosm of Nigeria, with its chaos reflecting the larger disorganization of national life. The transient nature of human existence is captured through the metaphor of passengers boarding and alighting, echoing the inevitability of entry and exit from life itself. By framing the story around a public vehicle, Sotimirin critiques structural failures while celebrating the ingenuity of ordinary Nigerians who navigate hardship with humor and resilience. The play's cyclic structure, beginning and ending with the conductor's calls for passengers, underscores the repetitive, almost Sisyphean rhythm of life in urban Nigeria.

The Prime Minister's Son

Greg Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son* centers on the tragic life of a young man born through the Prime Minister's illicit affair with a housemaid, Ezinma. The Prime Minister denies responsibility for the pregnancy, forcing Ezinma and her protector Emenike into precarious survival on the margins of society. Though the couple eventually marries, tragedy strikes when Emenike dies, leaving Ezinma and her son vulnerable. The mother's struggles intensify after losing her source of livelihood to government demolition exercises, ultimately leading to her descent into madness and eventual death. Only after this loss does the son discover the truth of his paternity, but his attempt to reconnect with his father fails. He ends up as a wanderer, lamenting his fate and questioning the cruelty of human existence. Through this narrative, Mbajiorgu critiques political irresponsibility, class injustice, and the structural violence that condemns the marginalized to cycles of poverty and despair.

Karina's Cross

Benedict Binebai's *Karina's Cross* dramatizes the plight of women in the Niger Delta, particularly the systemic oppression of the girl child within patriarchal culture. Karena, the protagonist, narrates her personal journey of suffering, which includes forced marriage at thirteen, denial of education, sexual violence, and trafficking. The play situates these experiences within the broader socio-cultural practices of the Owei-ama community, where traditions such as circumcision and child marriage are rationalized as cultural imperatives. However, Karena resists these structures, demonstrating resilience and determination to reclaim agency. Her eventual survival and transformation symbolize the triumph of hope and justice over oppression, offering inspiration to women in similar conditions. The play employs Karena's voice as both character and narrator, making her testimony representative of the struggles of countless women. In its fusion of personal narrative and collective critique, *Karina's Cross* embodies monodrama as a form of resistance and social advocacy.

Excerpts and Performance Dynamics

The opening sequences of all three plays reveal common dramaturgical strategies while showcasing individual stylistic differences. Sotimirin's *Molue* begins with music and audience engagement, as the performer enters singing and dancing, collapsing the distance between stage and spectators. This aligns with traditional African theatre, which often blurs ritual, performance, and communal participation (Barber 25). By contrast, Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son* opens in a graveyard, where the protagonist laments beside his mother's tombstone, establishing a somber, elegiac tone. This direct confrontation with death foregrounds tragedy and alienation as central themes. Binebai's *Karina's Cross*, meanwhile, opens with Karena sitting in mourning attire under a tree, accompanied by a song of lamentation. Here, performance poetry and personal testimony intertwine, creating an atmosphere of grief that gradually unfolds into empowerment. Across these plays, music and song serve as recurring devices, establishing rhythm, cultural resonance, and emotional immediacy.

Dialogue in these monodramas further illustrates how single performers embody multiple voices. In *Molue*, the conductor shifts seamlessly between addressing passengers, mocking "staff" passengers, and ridiculing an "American Yankee," using humor and code-switching to capture linguistic diversity. Mbajiorgu's text demonstrates a different strategy: the protagonist embodies multiple characters, from the Prime Minister to Ezinma to neighbors, shifting registers to animate absent figures. In *Karina's Cross*, Karena alternates between her own voice and those of oppressive male figures, such as her father, who insists that education for women is "a waste of money and time" (Binebai 13). These strategies highlight the versatility required of solo actors, who must conjure entire communities through voice, gesture, and imagination. They also reflect the dramaturgical challenge of writing solo plays: crafting dialogue that allows one performer to animate multiple roles without losing narrative clarity.

Endings in the three plays also reflect their thematic preoccupations. *Molue* closes with the conductor exiting amid drumbeats, his calls for passengers echoing the cyclical futility of survival. *The Prime Minister's Son* ends with the protagonist lamenting human enslavement under unjust systems, his rhetorical "Why…?" underscoring existential despair. *Karina's Cross*, in contrast, concludes with an empowering chorus urging women to "stand and fight," transforming personal suffering into collective resistance. These divergent closures demonstrate how solo plays can oscillate between

satire, tragedy, and advocacy, reflecting both individual artistry and the broader socio-political commitments of Nigerian playwrights.

Analysis

From a dramaturgical perspective, the three plays illustrate both the possibilities and constraints of solo performance. One notable feature is their minimal use of stage directions, which leaves interpretive freedom to the actor while foregrounding the centrality of performance. Lighting, costumes, and basic props are mentioned sparingly, in line with the "less is more" principle (Catron 33). Music, however, emerges as a vital tool across all plays, serving not only entertainment but also audience engagement and cultural anchoring. This aligns with Awaritoma's observation that in solo performance, "the audience is the dialogue in the monologue" ("Dialogue in the Monologue" 13). By incorporating songs familiar to audiences, playwrights create interactive spaces where spectators are co-creators rather than passive observers.

Another striking feature is the use of indigenous languages and idioms. Sotimirin intersperses Yoruba phrases with English, creating humor and authenticity while reflecting Nigeria's linguistic hybridity. Mbajiorgu integrates Igbo dirges and proverbs, situating his play within Igbo cultural expression while appealing to universal themes of grief and injustice. Binebai employs Ijaw-inflected speech and cultural references, embedding *Karina's Cross* in the Niger Delta's socio-political context. This multilingualism situates Nigerian solo plays within broader debates about postcolonial identity, where language becomes both a marker of resistance and a vehicle for authenticity (Ngũgĩ 29). The integration of indigenous languages into monodrama therefore expands its pedagogical function, affirming cultural heritage while critiquing contemporary injustice.

Finally, the plays collectively reveal the socio-political potency of solo performance. *Molue* critiques corruption and survivalist chaos in urban Nigeria, *The Prime Minister's Son* dramatizes the devastating consequences of political irresponsibility, and *Karina's Cross* challenges patriarchal oppression and gender violence. These themes illustrate how monodrama, far from being a minor or peripheral form, can powerfully engage national discourses. By distilling complex issues into the voice of a single performer, these plays amplify marginalized perspectives and challenge audiences to confront uncomfortable realities. In this sense, Nigerian solo plays exemplify avant-garde experimentation not only in form but also in political function, affirming theatre's role as both aesthetic practice and social intervention.

Conclusion

Engaging in solo playwriting within the Nigerian context presents both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the scarcity of published solo plays and the limited institutional recognition of the form highlight a systemic neglect that threatens to marginalize this unique subgenre. On the other, the examples of Sotimirin's *Molue*, Mbajiorgu's *The Prime Minister's Son*, and Binebai's *Karina's Cross* demonstrate that monodrama possesses remarkable potential for aesthetic innovation and socio-political critique. By drawing from indigenous storytelling traditions while simultaneously embracing avant-garde experimentation, Nigerian solo playwrights extend the possibilities of theatre beyond conventional ensemble dramaturgy. Their works remind us that solo performance is not an ancillary form but a vital mode of cultural expression.

This study has shown that solo playwriting, though often overlooked, is neither structurally alien to nor more difficult than conventional playwriting. The essential ingredients—story, character, actor, and audience—remain consistent, though their intensity is magnified by the singularity of performance. The solo actor must embody multiple roles, sustain narrative coherence, and engage audiences through improvisation, music, and direct address, thereby demonstrating a unique synthesis of artistry and discipline. In this respect, solo performance exemplifies the avant-garde's call for innovation and aligns with the minimalist aesthetic of "less is more." It thrives precisely because it challenges boundaries, inviting playwrights and performers to experiment boldly with form and content.

Moreover, solo plays serve as powerful vehicles for social critique. Whether through *Molue's* satirical portrait of corruption, *The Prime Minister's Son's* tragic indictment of political irresponsibility, or *Karina's Cross's* feminist resistance against patriarchy, these plays illuminate pressing national concerns. In amplifying marginalized voices, they transform the stage into a site of testimony, critique, and advocacy. Nigerian solo plays thus reveal how theatre can confront injustice while simultaneously offering hope and resilience. Their themes resonate not only within Nigeria but also within global discourses on inequality, oppression, and human dignity.

For Nigerian theatre pedagogy, the implications are significant. Making solo performance a compulsory component of theatre arts curricula would ensure that students engage with its unique challenges and potentials. This would encourage the development of new scripts, enrich the repertoire available for performance, and foster a culture of documentation that prevents the erasure of important voices, such as that of the late Funsho Alabi. By institutionalizing solo playwriting and acting, universities can nurture a new generation of playwrights who expand both national and global conversations about theatre. In so doing, they would affirm solo performance as a crucial tool for cultural preservation, artistic experimentation, and social transformation.

Ultimately, this paper argues that Nigerian solo playwriting deserves sustained scholarly and creative attention. It is a form that bridges past and present, oral tradition and written text, individual artistry and collective engagement. As more playwrights embrace monodrama, the Nigerian stage will continue to diversify and grow, offering audiences powerful encounters with stories told through the concentrated brilliance of a single voice. Solo performance, in this sense, is not a marginal experiment but a central contribution to the vitality and resilience of Nigerian theatre.

Works Cited

Adesi, Akpos. "My Heritage as a Dramatist and My Monodrama." *50 Years of Solo Performing Art in Nigerian Theatre 1966–2016*, edited by Greg Mbajiorgu and Amanze Akpuda, Kraft Books Ltd., 2018, pp. 400–406.

Agoma, Awaritoma. *Solo Performance in Modern Nigerian Theatre: A Study of Select Solo Actors – Greg Mbajiorgu, Tunji Sotimirin and Rachael Tuodonye.* PhD thesis, University of Abuja, 2019.

---. "Directing Solo Plays on the Nigerian Stage." *Directing on the Nigerian Stage*, edited by Ejue G. Olympus and Sunday Edum, 2019, pp. 256–74.

---. "The Dialogue in the Monologue: The Audience in Solo Performance." *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture (MAJAC)*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1–15.

Alterman, Glenn. *Creating Your Own Monologue*. 2nd ed., Allworth Press, 2005.

Armstrong, Gareth. *So You Want to Do a Solo Show?* Nick Hern Books, 2011.

Barber, Karin. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond.* Cambridge UP, 2007.

Binebai, Benedict. *Karina's Cross.* Temple Publications, 2018.

---. "My Monodrama: The Vision and Philosophy." *50 Years of Solo Performing Art in Nigerian Theatre 1966–2016*, edited by Greg Mbajiorgu and Amanze Akpuda, Kraft Books Ltd., 2018, pp. 376–86.

Brockett, Oscar G., and Robert J. Ball. *The Essential Theatre.* 10th ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011.

Cairney, John. *Solo Performers: An International Registry, 1770–2000.* McFarland, 2001.

Catron, Louis E. *The Power of One: The Solo Play for Playwrights, Actors and Directors.* Heinemann, 2000.

Dietrich, R. F., William E. Carpenter, and Kevin Kerrane. *The Art of Drama.* 2nd ed., Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.

Dumas fils, Alexandre. "How to Write a Play." *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*, edited by Bernard F. Dukore, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, pp. 719–20.

Goldberg, Roselee. "Performance Art from Futurism to the Present." *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*, edited by Michael Huxley, Routledge, 1996, pp. 184–89.

Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre.* Routledge, 2002.

Johnson, Effiong. *Play Production Process.* Concept Publications, 2001.

Kearns, Michael. *The Solo Performer's Journey from the Page to the Stage.* Heinemann, 2005.

Lubar, Deborah. *For Love of the World: A Harangue with Practical Guidance on Writing & Performing Solo Dramas That Matter.* Heinemann, 2007.

Mbajiorgu, Greg. *The Prime Minister's Son.* 20th Anniversary ed., Kraftgriots, 2011.

Miller, Bruce. *Acting Solo: Roadmap to Success.* Limelight Editions, 2010.

Murray, Logan. *Be a Great Stand-up.* McGraw-Hill, 2010.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.* James Currey, 1986.

Nwokedi, Ndubuisi. "Mbem Ijele: An Emerging Solo Dramatist." *50 Years of Solo Performing Art in Nigerian Theatre 1966–2016*, edited by Greg Mbajiorgu and Amanze Akpuda, Kraft Books Ltd., 2018, pp. 407–18.

Obafemi, Olu. *Politics and Aesthetics: Essays in Drama, Theatre and Performance.* Haytee Press, 2008.

Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory.* Routledge Classics, 2004.

Sotimirin, Tunji. *Molue and Other Plays.* Legendaire Books, 2018.

Uzoigwe, Paul. "Interview with Benedict Binebai." *50 Years of Solo Performing Art in Nigerian Theatre 1966–2016*, edited by Greg Mbajiorgu and Amanze Akpuda, Kraft Books Ltd., 2018, pp. 287–99.

Webster's Reference Library Dictionary and Thesaurus. Geddes and Grosset, 2006.

Wilder, Thornton. "Some Thoughts on Playwriting." *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*, edited by Bernard F. Dukore, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, pp. 886–93.

Wright, Edward A. *Understanding Today's Theatre.* 2nd ed., Prentice-Hall, 1972.

Yerima, Ahmed. *Basic Techniques in Playwriting.* Kraft Books, 2003.