

UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

**THE CREATIVE FORCE AND ARTISTIC
CREATIVITY: FROM THE GARDEN
OF EDEN TO THE GARDEN CITY
OF PORT HARCOURT**

An Inaugural Lecture

By

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated, to The Master Artist Himself – **GOD**, the Author of Creation in the Mythical and Mystical Space of Eden.

And

To Generations of **CRABITES** – Demi-gods of Artistic Creativity in the Magical and Theatrical Space of the Stage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My highest gratitude goes to God Almighty for His adequate grace, profound love, and care which gave me the enablement to make this day a reality. I also thank the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Owunari Georgewill, who, as the authorial symbol of House Manager, has mandated this exhibition under the careful watch of Professor Faith Aminikpo, Stage Manager and head of the performance team today, who, in turn, has nobly acted to ensure that this performance holds accordingly. At this point, permit me to recognize members and associates of the Theatre and Film Studies troupe of the University of Port Harcourt made up of very unique individuals who bear the diacritical mark of the Creative Force, which in turn motivates Artistic Creativity: Professor E.C. Emasealu, Professor I.C. Ohiri, Professor I.C. Krama, Professor John Yeseibo, Professor B. A. Ejiofor and our most diligent indefatigable Head of Department and Amazon at this point, Professor F. I. Ken-Aminikpo. Behind these masquerades are a chain of acolytes already weaned, who in their rights are experts actively energised by the creative force, and who, in their frenzied states of trance and craze for re-creation, the re-imaging of our world continues unabated in their hands, I, therefore, nobly give accolades to Dr. Ovunda Ihunwo, Dr. Edward Imo, Dr. Sam Dede, Dr. Owiye, Dr. Sunday Edum, Dr. Boyle Adikiba, Dr. Emeka Ofora, Dr. Remi Anyanwu, Dr. Nkem Ukagu, Dr. Patrick Agha and a host of others.

May I at this point acknowledge my compatriots, master archers in the field, Professor Femi Shaka, Professor Julie Okoh, Professor Friday Nwafor, Professor Innocent

Ebere Uwah, and all the other members of the newly created Department of Film and Multi-Media, at the University of Port Harcourt. To our other sister departments of Fine Arts and Design and Music, thank you for the camaraderie and the great synergy between us. Let me seize this opportunity to pay homage to all theatre arts Professors in Nigeria, particularly the Nigerian matriarchs of the theatre, Professor Julie Okoh, Prof Mabel Evwierhoma, Professor Charity Angya, Professor Irene Agunloye, Professor Mokwunye, Professor Tracie Ezeaghu, Professor Elizabeth Nyager Professor Osita Ezenwanebe, Professor Christine Odi, Professor Mariam Iyeh, and others my memory cannot immediately recall. My appreciation goes also to past and present Presidents of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists, (SONTA) and their Executives for keeping the Nigeria theatre arts family peaceful and progressive.

Let me at this juncture thank most profoundly all my teachers from A-Z, who in their modest ways made a very great impact on my academic pursuit. At this point, I must pay homage to four of the shapers of my destiny in the academic world: Professor Dapo Adelugba, my very meticulous doctoral thesis Supervisor of blessed memory, the duo of Professors Charles Nnolim and Chidi Maduka who supervised me at the Masters level. The most appreciated of them all is my secondary school English teacher, Chief J.J. Esegbue, who laid a solid foundation for the wordsmith that I have turned out to be. Also set apart for appreciation are the U.S. Department of State and the University of Port Harcourt for the joint sponsorship that enabled me to access the Junior Fulbright Scholarship in 2001. I am also ever so grateful for the

excellent grooming at the Carter G. Woodson Institute, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. In this regard, I will mention a few benefactors: Mr. W T Butler, Ms. Kimberly Fields, Ms. Natasha Griffith, and Mr. Andrew Gibson, for the rich academic partnership. Back home in Nigeria, I have remained active as a Fulbright Alumni and the United States Government Exchange Alumni Association courtesy of our able coordinators at the U.S. Embassy, Ms. Grace Lamon, Ms. Doyinsola Apalara, Mr. Clement Ayegbusi, and others.

I save the best for last...to my wonderful families, the Umukoro and Agha families, for whom I bring a bouquet of love and gratitude. The first and the dearest to my heart is my beloved idol - my husband - Professor Matthew Mevayerho Umukoro, whose academic excellence did not only endear him to me but spurred me on and lured me into the academic world as well .I can openly confess that I have had no regrets whatsoever for saying "Yes I do" over forty years ago, or for toeing the academic path either. It has turned out to be quite an academic-oriented family, beginning with my brother-in-law, Associate Professor Joseph Oghenetega Umukoro, then, my lovely children, Dr. Ochuko Andrew Umukoro, Dr. Omonigho Simon Umukoro, and Akporjevwe Godwin Umukoro (a doctoral candidate awaiting defence). In the same vein, I acknowledge my siblings, Barr. (Dr.) Mic Adams Agha, Dr. Patrick Agha, and Dr. Charles Agha. May God Almighty bless and give them all a greater increase in wealth, wisdom, and most importantly, divine protection. To the rest of the family Francis, Promise, Gogo, Onome, George, Lawrence, Bernard, Mary, Dominic, Stephen, Beatrice, Janet, Sunday, and other members of the extended family, I extend my special love and

greetings. To my mother and anchor (Mrs. Margaret Agha) given the uncommon grace to witness more and more filial glory, I wish you a longer life for greater harvests. *Mbana*. Thank you for always being there for me.

On a more sombre note, I wish to recall the memory of the lost loved ones with the consoling words of that great novelist, George Eliot, that “our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them.”

Permit me, therefore, to pay homage to certain members of my family who, though no longer physically here, have remained evergreen in my heart. As the true African child who subscribes to the idea of life after life, I believe that their spirits are ever with us. In this regard, I appreciate the duo of Pa Patrick Umukoro, and Madam Rose Umukoro, my wonderful parents-in-law of blessed memory, Uncle Francis Umukoro and Auntie Felicia Umukoro Tuedor, a wonderful pair gone too soon to the world beyond. To my late sibling, Richard Agha, I say rest on my beloved, Also my posthumous appreciation goes to my dear father, Mr. Augustine Opute Agha, the one that planted the acorn that has today become an Iroko tree! The greatest teacher of all time! Thank you for the fruitful lessons and also for not sparing the rod... "Come here you scallywag" was just the signal for the swishing sound of the cane, since the best was uncompromisingly expected of the then daughter of a stern Headmaster. Dad, I turned out to be who you wanted me to be – a learned and dutiful wife. How I wish you were physically present today to savour of your only daughter's glory! May you and all the lost loved ones continue to rest in perfect peace.

ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

2.45P.M. GUESTS ARE SEATED

3.00P.M. ACADEMIC PROCESSION BEGINS

The procession shall enter the CBN Centre of Excellence Auditorium, University Park, and the Congregation shall stand as the procession enters the hall in the following order:

ACADEMIC OFFICER

PROFESSORS

DEANS OF FACULTIES/SCHOOL

DEAN, SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

PROVOST, COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

LECTURER

REGISTRAR

DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR [ACADEMIC]

DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR [ADMINISTRATION]

VICE CHANCELLOR

After the Vice-Chancellor has ascended the dais, the congregation shall remain standing for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem.

The congregation shall thereafter resume their seats.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S OPENING REMARKS.

The Registrar shall rise, cap, invite the Vice-Chancellor to make his opening remarks and introduce the Lecturer.

The Lecturer shall remain standing during the Introduction.

THE INAUGURAL LECTURE

The Lecturer shall step on the rostrum, cap and deliver his Inaugural Lecture. After the lecture, he shall step towards the Vice-Chancellor, cap and deliver a copy of the Inaugural Lecture to the Vice-Chancellor and resume his seat. The Vice-Chancellor shall present the document to the Registrar.

CLOSING

The Registrar shall rise, cap and invite the Vice-Chancellor to make his Closing Remarks.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S CLOSING REMARKS.

The Vice-Chancellor shall then rise, cap and make his Closing Remarks. The Congregation shall rise for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem and remain standing as the Academic [Honour] Procession retreats in the following order:

VICE CHANCELLOR

DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR [ADMINISTRATION]

DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR [ACADEMIC]

REGISTRAR

LECTURER

PROVOST, COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

DEAN, SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DEANS OF FACULTIES/SCHOOL

PROFESSORS

ACADEMIC OFFICER

PROTOCOL

Vice-Chancellor, Sir,
Members of the Governing Council of the University,
Principal Officers of the University,
Provost, College of Health Sciences,
Dean, School of Graduate Studies,
Deans of Faculties and Directors of Centres,
Heads of Departments,
Distinguished Professors,
Staff and Students of the University,
Members of the Press,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

PREAMBLE

Mr Vice Chancellor, Sir, permit me to make a few pertinent statements before I commence with this Inaugural Lecture. As I stand to perform this great intellectual task before such an august audience, may I, from the beginning, clarify that graphically, theatrical art is more or less presented like a pie chart where different components are inevitably pieced together to make a whole. Therefore, as the Inaugural Lecturer of the day, I stand here, as the protagonist of an eclectic structure of diverse multi-performers behind and within the scenes to come – ancillary performers, directors, costumiers, make-up artists, house managers, lighting designers, scene designers, musicians, as willing collaborators. The presence of this esteemed congregation completes the show, with a scholar of semiotics and performance studies calling the shots.

Mr Vice Chancellor, Sir, I thank you for this opportunity to exhibit to the world what my academic and artistic musings these several years have been. The Crab, the University of Port Harcourt Theatre, where I belong, despite its micro size, has produced a great number of alumni who are making incredible contributions to Nigeria's theatre industry, especially in Nollywood, her film upsurge. The Crab is 'Home' to the Port Harcourt-bred creative artists who, at a staged homecoming during my tenure as Head of Department in 2012, took on the tag 'Crabites'. The Crab, therefore, is the crucible of artistic creativity at the University of Port Harcourt. Aside from providing a platform for the leisure and pleasure of the community, it serves the veritable purpose of image-making for the institution. The Crab has had a great number of

theatre minstrels who in their rights have become maestros of creativity in the Garden City of Port Harcourt and beyond. We have an array of Crab professionals, most of whom are still around today and who, if nothing at all, created the Crabites who hold the reins of creativity in Nigeria's Nollywood and other creative economies of our time here and elsewhere.

Mr Vice-Chancellor sir, permit me to highlight my intellectual and artistic contributions at this point. Apart from my scholarly publications, I am a literary artist with a number of titles to my credit: *Oshimili* (1990) *Nightmare* (2003) *Adams Family*, (2012) *Marriage Coup* (2013) *Three Tales Three Tribes*,(2019) and, *Konye* (2023). By these templates, I have created characters in drama, poetry, and prose; through the medium of words that speak passionately to the soul. In my creative journey through the rough and tumble of scholarship, I have embraced the dictum, "the pen is mightier than the sword", considering that the word is the most lethal weapon of combat and human control. As Phillips Dick puts it, "the basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meaning of words, you can control people who must use the word" (Philip K. Dick (1928-1982).

Therefore, I have tried to find a meeting point between beauty and ugliness, just by the wielding of my pen and the manipulation of words. I have thoroughly enjoyed the licence to freely craft phantom beings, whose destinies are in my power to make them hate, love, grieve or die as I deem fit! Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, the significance of this cannot elude us; the creative artist, imbued with the diacritical mark of artistic creation and re-creation is indeed the demi-god of his phantom

empire. As an academic and a thoroughbred creative artist, for whom WORDS are the greatest energizing factor of the creative force, I consider myself as the merchant, who herself is also the merchandise. It is pertinent to state clearly that I am a specialist in semiotics as revealed by the general focus of my works. My semiotic exploration began with my Ph.D. Thesis titled "Costume, Make-up, and Hairstyle as Visual Text: A Study of Two African Historical Plays" (Umukoro, Julie, 2004). It is a comparative analysis of two historical dramas on the same historical subject and successfully clarifies the dynamics of the visual sign in drama. Charting the way forward, there have been several other scholarly studies on the **stage costume, performance, society, and culture** as attested to by the titles on my reference list. (See: Umukoro, 2008, 2008, 2009, 2012, 2012, 2021, 2022). Beyond my study of visual and verbal texts in communicative processes, I have, in my literary diversity, traversed other areas of interest in cross-fertilizing semiotic principles. In this regard, I have displayed a keen interest in the intriguing issue of feminism in the portraiture of *womanhood* in **playwriting** and **play-production**. This can be glimpsed from the entries that echo the feminine themes (See Umukoro: 1994, 1995, 2002, 2007, 2011, 2011. 2017, 2021, 2023).

At the apex of the feminist-oriented group mentioned above are two of my most recent publications: "SHE-menism: Girl Trafficking and the gendered experiences of forced migrations in Soji Cole's *Embers*" (2021) and "The Coin: A Feminist Metaphor" (2023). In the first of these two articles, I engaged in neologism by adding a brand new word to the English Lexicon - SHE-menism - a construct that derives

from the male psyche of perceiving the female body as a field to possess. This tendency of the male to possess the feminine body is the driving force of the she-menist consciousness. SHE-menism is a literary concept founded on a triadic analytical frame. It is, therefore, a literal tool or device by which SHE (Woman) is perceived as an acronym either as sweetheart, slut or slave (**S**), who is housed, hired, or hijacked (**H**) for male entertainment (**E**). Thus, following "his" prevalent vision of derivable pleasure or leisure from the feminine body, 'SHE' is perceived as a mere object for sexual gratification either as a wife, mistress, prostitute or sex-slave. The concept of SHE-menism draws from the theory of objectification of the female body. Again, from a semiotic standpoint, the second article gives a brand new interpretation to the word, 'WOMAN'. Anchored on the Christian theology of Creation the paper asserts that Woman is a kind of man... the 'WO' kind. Below is the reading of the coinage, WOMAN:

What is W-O-MAN if not Wife-Of-MAN? Reading further, the question that ought to be asked is, can a WIFE be without a WOMB? The answer is NO. It follows therefore that W-O-MAN is indeed Womb-Of-MAN or, put succinctly, she is the man with a womb. What this reveals is that a woman is also a man differentiated only by the womb. The deduction from the foregoing is that the union of Man and Woman as one indivisible entity is imperative to assert the class "human beings". Like the tortoise and its shell, man and woman are inseparable for no man can do without his womb.

(Umukoro, Keynote address, 30th May 2023)

The paper concludes that the Feminist Movement has made an appreciable impact in Nigeria as this is felt in the attitudinal

change towards female education and other areas. To buttress this, the researcher notes that statistics have shown that the female population in Nigeria's tertiary institutions out-number that of males.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, a Professor as an academic brand is a master extraordinaire in his or her chosen field; and in my scholarly disposition, I have risen steadily through the ranks to the pinnacle of my profession. Here at the University of Port Harcourt, professorship is an academic rank meritoriously earned. I am proud to say, I have appropriately earned my Chair in Semiotics and Performance Studies. I graciously thank the University of Port Harcourt for the recognition. I also will like to put on record that this inaugural lecture is the fourth from the stables of Theatre & Film Studies, the first being the 11th inaugural lecture in 1991, *African Dramatic Literature: To be or To Become*, by Prof. Ola Rotimi (of blessed memory). The second, given by Prof. Julie Okoh, is the 94th inaugural lecture in 2012 titled, *Towards Feminist Theatre in Nigeria*. This was followed by Professor Henry Leopold BellGam's 142nd inaugural lecture in 2017 titled, *Processing the Processes for National Development: A Theatre Director's Approach*. Today, another landmark is attained as the Department of Theatre & Film Studies presents her fourth inaugural lecture titled, *The Creative Force and Artistic Creativity: From the Garden of Eden to the Garden City of Port Harcourt*, by Professor Julie Nwabogo Efemena Umukoro, the present speaker.

This lecture is in the realm of semiotic analyses, the first from our department in this area of specialization. Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, may I thank you once more for this

opportunity to be numbered among the ancestral league of 'Unique Uniport' Professors who, permit the language, have become MASQUERADES in the order.

Vice Chancellor, Sir, I crave your indulgence to take this distinguished audience on an epic intellectual journey from the mythical Garden of Eden, a masterpiece of God's creation, to the terrestrial Garden City of Port Harcourt where in semblance of the Master Artist Himself, humans engage in the process of artistic creation and re-creation.

Introduction

Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe – a Spirit vastly superior to that of man.

Einstein

Permit me to align with the analogy of Matthew Umukoro that the university is a factory, (Umukoro, 2011: 136) or Sylvanus I. Udoidem's notion of the university as a market place (Udoidem, 2021: 9) not for the production or buying and selling of goods and merchandise but one designed for the creation and marketing of ideas crucial to the development of human societies. In the same vein, I see the theatre artist as a merchant whose sole intent is the creation and marketing of himself or herself as the merchandise. Just as the numerous ideas brewed from our educational factory are geared towards development, so is the theatrical merchandise groomed towards developing and building nations. Therefore, I declare that the theatre artist is the merchant who himself is the merchandise. That is to say, he is himself the good that he must market.

Yet again have I found my thoughts aligning with Matthew Umukoro's vision of the artist, in his eponymous poem, *The Artist* (see below).



Burna Boy



Ovunda Ihunwo



Omah Lay



Duncan Mighty

The Artist

The artist is an explorer
In the trackless wild
Impelled by peripatetic quest
For the primeval magic stream
To dissolve the eternal mystery of creation...
(Umukoro, 2002: 49)

As a scholar-artist in the world of research, I am indeed an explorer, and today, my quest to dissolve the eternal mystery of artistic creation takes me to the magic space - the stage.

As a creative artist, I have carried out penetrating studies in the world of theatre semiotics. Today, the central focus of my discourse is creation and re-creation. Let me at this point draw attention to the prefix of this inaugural lecture title - the creative force and artistic creativity - given vent to by the Christian theology of creation. The creative force, as conceived here, is indexical of some second-order energy - artistic creativity. This second-order energy is consummated in the world of reality and illusion. This is to say, the creative force necessarily provides the impetus for artistic creativity, and this, in turn, becomes the energising stimulus for artistic creation or

re-creation. In a logical sense, therefore, if 'x' represents creative force and 'y', artistic creativity, 'z' then is the energising stimulus for creation or re-creation in the artistic sense. To venture further into the meaning-making process, it is pertinent to see the concept of force or energy from one linear perspective of its source 'x' by which 'y', artistic creativity, is ignited or powered to give birth to 'z', the potent manifestation of artistic creation or re-creation. Following the line of thoughts being pursued here, the creative force 'x' epitomises the latent energy of the Almighty God as the Creator - of all things, living or not. On the other hand, artistic creativity, 'y', symbolizes Man, - created - but who in exception, is created in God's image and likeness; and so as alter ego draws from His grace the creative essence - that latent energy to be creative. Thus, when God's divine potent creative force ignites the force of the artistic creative essence in man, he becomes physically and mentally charged to create 'z'. Here, 'z', represents the material culture borne out of the creative enterprise of an identifiable class - creative artists. The theoretical concept being espoused here is tangentially related to Ugiomoh's notion that man, as a being "created in the image and likeness of God, should, in turn, make his creations in his own image and likeness" (Ugiomoh, 2012). Also in tandem with the reasoning of this discourse is Ahmed Yerima's view that the artist by the power of inspiration shares the creative essence of God. (Inaugural lecture June 25th, 2013, Redeemer's University). Yet another great thinker and renowned theatre Professor, Edward A. Wright, whose ideas cohere with the ideals of this Inaugural Lecture, posits that "man created the theatre in his own image" (Wright, p.3).

As the very essence of the creative force in our universe, God is the prime mover, who wields the magic wand to create by declaration, while man, His alter ego, is wired to use his resourcefulness to artistically re-create through imitation and imagination. "Our ability to create and be creative is certainly an expression of Him in us." (Esler, 2016.). Through this spirit of imitation comes the birth and rebirth of a multitude of splinter images of creative energies in artists charting their courses in real and imagined worlds. The creative artist is a being invested with the ability to make or devise new things built on innovative, imaginative, and aesthetic principles. Therefore, suffused with the sublimity of the creative force, he creates as he deems fit. Of the vast multitude and variety of creative artists that abound in our universe, the focus of today's lecture is the performing artist in his spatial domain of spatial illusion. The spatial domain in this context is the artist's workspace, while spatial illusion designates the illusory content of performance within the artistic space. This discourse takes the liberty, therefore, to coin the following kinds of artistic workspaces: the mystical space, the universal space, and the magical space - the third being the artistic workspace of the theatrical artist, exemplified in such cognate artists as the playwright, director, actor, costume designer, stage designer, lighting designer, makeup designer, and a host of others. Together, in a symbiotic relationship, they apply their talents to create the magical world of the theatre, which Shakespeare succinctly captures as follows:

...and as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

(Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Act V,
Scene 1)

Spatial Illusion: The Garden of Eden as a Mystical Space for Creation

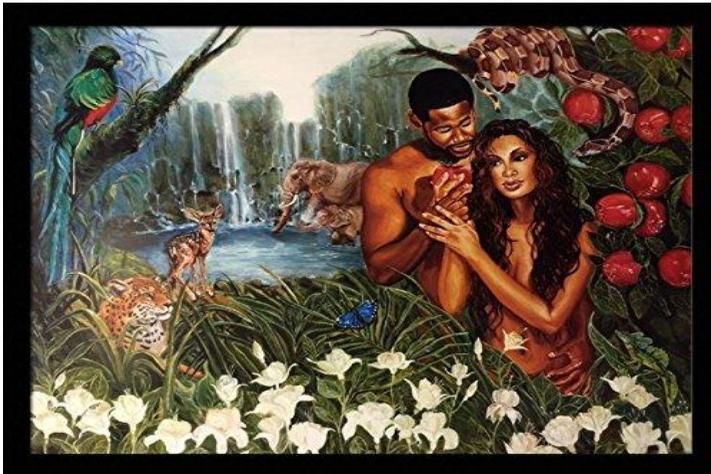
Space, in the context of this discourse, is the work-space of an artist. The choice of the term 'mystical' to designate God's work-space is based on the spiritual and enigmatic nature of God who, at the dawn of creation, first created His mystical space and then created man and his universal space. The Biblical creation myth described as "the magnificent poem of creation...a seven-day wonder story" (The New Community Bible, P. 8) is seen here in the light of a live performance orchestrated by God Himself. The performance which enunciates the creative force of God in the image of a creative artist, presents Him at once as a scenic designer, lighting designer, costume designer, director, and performer. As Playwright, God created the story, characters, dialogues (word), actions, and visual texts; as a scenic designer, He first created His mystical work-space "the Garden of Eden" in which He was said to have enshrined, "Every kind of tree that is pleasing to see and good to eat" (Gen. 2:9).



Garden of Eden

This insinuates an environment of wondrous beauty, profiling the grandeur and aesthetic perfection of God the creator in the image of a scenic designer par excellence. In an amazing transformation of the Garden of Eden into an artistic creative space, the Bible reveals that God in the image of a costumer "made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and with these he clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). As Lighting Designer, he created light by his declaration, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3) and light came to exist, separating light from darkness, night from day and sun from moon. In setting the stage and in performing His act, as the director, God only needed to speak, decree, or instruct, to have the actions effected with aesthetic lushness, separating sky from sea, dry land from vegetation, trees from bushes, and flowers from shrubs. Also created in that tradition, were animals of different species, including birds for the sky and fishes for the sea who served as the audience for the performance. All these had coalesced into the spatial illusion of the Garden of Eden; an idyllic stage setting where two human characters He had created, made their entries

and exits according to the creation script. These two human characters, He had created in His own image and likeness; the first, a male, He named Adam, and the second, a female, He named Eve. The creation play also introduces animal characters of kinds, the most outstanding, being the serpent, who, conniving with Eve, the woman, led man to disobey God's instruction not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.



Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

The Almighty God had instructed the pair to freely eat the fruits of the trees in the Garden of Eden except one – the mystery tree of life in the middle, which, they were never to meddle with. However, the Serpent craftily lured the woman to eat the forbidden fruit and she, in turn, lured Adam to do likewise. Having eaten the forbidden fruit, their inner eyes were opened and both, seeing they were naked, made leaves of the fig tree to cover themselves in what seems to be the earliest

attempt at costume building. With this act of disobedience, the duo are made to face the wrath of God and are sent away in ignominy to the universal space of the earth; thus bringing the creation story to a calamitous end. This performance is perhaps the first known extant tragedy.

Spatial Illusion: The Universal Space as a Creative Space

The universal space is man's work-space. Man's escapades on earth are rife with the tendency to 'make', 'build' 'assemble', or 'form' towards the desire to "create or re-create" material wealth for pleasure and leisure just like God his creator. The artistic consciousness to build or to create that underpins this discourse is anchored on apriority – that foundational knowledge of the 'how' the 'whys' and the 'wherefores' drawn on established dogmas that mobilize creative actions. However, to accomplish these set objectives, man must do so not by the flourish of such mystical potent utterances of God, his benefactor, but by a persevering life of work and struggles "through the sweat of his brow." (Gen.3:19). This involves experiential and experimental learning processes; hence the vision of creation in the universal space has rested wholly on learning theories. Through the partnership of God's creative spirit as the reactive agent in him, man, in his quest had, in fulfillment of God's creation mandate, been motivated to:

Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,
and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of
the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every
living thing that moveth on the earth.

(Genesis 1.28)

Man's prowess in creation is appreciated in his creative works scattered all over the universe where he has conquered space with spaceships of kinds, land with automobiles of kinds, and sea with ships of many designs. In making the universe his home, he has skyscrapers modelled on the Tower of Babel and, for longevity, he has a world full of antidotes.

Man's escapades of creation in the scientific world have moved from Dolly, the first cloned sheep, to the world's first 'test tube' baby in 1978. This phenomenon, popularly known as in Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is no longer new in our world with a multiplicity of women visitors to fertility hospitals and several recorded births thereof. Electricity and, more recently, solar energy, have greatly improved man's living conditions in the universe. Satellites, the Internet, and celluloid have also created new paths in our communication styles. In 1969, Neil Armstrong made history as the first astronaut to land on the moon. Talking more about man's breakthrough concerning energy, China has recently announced the creation of an artificial sun! Quite often, man has been found to encounter mishaps in his quest for new creations, and very often, deaths and disasters occur. There have been airplane disasters, shipwrecks, and even worldwide pandemics threatening the universe with extinction. The Corona-Virus saga of 2020 is a veritable case in point where man's escapade has caused humanity great pain. In summation, man's creations may not always be measures to promote pleasure and leisure. The universe here is thus presented as the workspace of man and that, as creative beings in a representative capacity, man has been destined to play his God-given roles, to be "fruitful" and to "multiply" and to

"replenish the earth" and "subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). This vision had motivated Shakespeare's analogy of the world as a performance stage as quoted below:

All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players;/They have their exits and their entrances/And one man in his time plays many parts. (*As You Like It* – Shakespeare).

Spatial Illusion: The Magical Space and Theatrical Creativity



Cinema Hall



Photo Studio

The artistic muse is the driving force of artistic inventiveness or creative consciousness attributed to a certain creative force – aptly, the creative muse. In Greek mythology, the Muses were inspirational goddesses, nine of which represented disciplines in the arts and literature as listed below:

- Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry
- Clio, the Muse of History
- Erato, the Muse of lyric poetry
- Euterpe, the Muse of music
- Melpomene, the Muse of Tragedy
- Polyhymnia, the Muse of sacred poetry
- Terpsichore, the Muse of Dance and Chorus

- Thalia, the Muse of Comedy and idyllic poetry
- Urania, the Muse of Astronomy

From the motivational angle of this discourse, the Muses jointly serve as the engine room of the creative artist whose innate resources are constantly put to task to create a world of geniuses, greatly inspired and driven by their imaginations.

This study of the creative artist toes the path of semiotic studies in appraising the divine and the human duality of creativity echoed in the prefix of the title "The Creative Force and Artistic Creativity..."

That creativity is the nucleus of the world of the theatre practitioner, is stating the obvious. It is therefore not only critical to appraise what begets the stimulus and the stages of creativity but also imperative to ascertain how artists create vibrant ideas or become innovative. This has stirred in me some rhetorical questions: By what artistic techniques do creative artists get their inspiration? What is that unique spark that ignites the creative genius? These are questions begging for answers. Quite often, the creative impulse is sporadic and the genius, given to complexities and oddities, is often cast in the mould of the supernatural being; and so considered more extraordinary and too complex to comprehend. In its entirety, the creative index issues from a dynamic interplay of thoughts and emotions established through the human processing systems of words, actions, and textual or contextual elements of signification. Built on binary terms of thoughts/inspiration and ideas/enactment, the overall concept of creativity is based on professionalism and dynamism in practice. The British psychologist, Graham Wallas, in his book, *The Art of Thought*,

propounded a theory of the creative process. According to him, there are four stages of the creative process: (i) preparation (ii) incubation (iii) illumination (iv.) and verification. These may not always happen in a step-by-step orientation as they may come juggled up. That is why a creative piece, say drama, may start from the end and make the exposition of other background information, a flashback. A good example is Yerimah's *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen* (Yerima: 1998).

Given the parameters of this discourse, the general concept of spatial illusion as the work-space for the creative artist holds sway at all times. The creative performance space is any bare surface earmarked for the desired creative expression. The artistic work-space varies with recourse to the designated stereotype. Work-space for the writer, painter, sculptor, make-up artist, and performers ranges from paper surfaces, canvas, and wood to the human body or the bare stage. For performing artists such as stage designers, actors, dancers, and singers, the stage personifies this work-space and in existence are different kinds – the Proscenium, the Thrust, the Arena or, theatre-in-the-round etc.

The Theatre Artist and Artistic Creativity



HOMECOMING 2012



CARNIRIV 2012



HOMECOMING 2012



CARNIRIV 2012

The theatrical artist, as the demi-god of his world, has in his amazing attempts at creation, created first his work space - the magical space - where his imagination holds sway in creative reinvention of both self and the material world around him. The 'magical' space, in this instance, is the stage. The spatial paradox in this context can best be understood through the analogy of Peter Brook's seminal text of modern theatre, 'The Empty Space', or Stanislavski's Magic IF, which encourages the theatrical artist to imagine and reflect on past experiences to enable and sharpen his creative instinct. Note that the thematic thrust of artistic re-creation is the simulation of reality. The Stanislavski's Magic IF approach, Stephen Inegbe explains, encourages actors to "observe the manner in which emotions are expressed in real life" which, according to him, "is at the root of the magic IF." (Inegbe. 116). According to Julie Umukoro, drama "in its fully realized state is appreciated from the three dimensions of Sound, Sight, and Speech ...the three "S" factors ("S³F") of aesthetics." These parts of sound, sight, and speech should also "establish between them a visible or inherent contiguity" in harmony with this aesthetic ideal (Umukoro: 2012:50) She therefore sees all three factors as

equally significant in the meaning-making chain. She likens the process to a jigsaw puzzle, which can only form a complete picture with the proper fitting of its components. Going by this allusion, she says the success of a performance depends on the proper matching of the different components and also how well ensconced in the S³F of aesthetics. The stage or work-space of the creative artist, the magical space, provides the impetus for fantasy and glamour which wields the potent power to lure and arrest its audience. Spectacle encompasses all the visual elements: the stage and scenic background or the illusory visual content of the magical space. Umukoro states further that:

The phrase, scenic background, describes the totality of the elements of the visual aesthetics of drama; in other words, the stage setting and all its visual paraphernalia, costume, and accouterments inclusive,

(Umukoro: 2009:100)

For artistic creations with a theatrical orientation, the premium is on the overriding power of the spectacle or visual elements (sight) to wield the magical spell of the magical space. This is a handsome departure from the ideals of Jerzy Grotowski, the great proponent of the Poor Theatre approach to theatrical display. His view that theatre is essentially "what takes place between spectator and actor" (action, movement, speech) is incontestable but stating further that, "all other things are supplementary" (Theory and Criticism, 988. Qtd in Emasealu, p. 55) is to attach little or no importance to the magical power of the spectacle. By attaching greater importance to the actor's act (voice, speech, bodily movement, gesture, etc) Grotowski

reasons that theatre can do without the appurtenances of make-up, costume, lighting effects, and simulated scenery. However, Umukoro states that ignoring them is to take for granted the import of the sign in non-verbal communication; preeminently pervasive in all facets of African cultural society. The power of signs and symbols in the African non-verbal communication system is such that their alienation may mar contextual meanings. In drama, therefore, scenic background and accompanying visual elements are powerful indices of signification.

By acquiring a meaning-making disposition, scenic elements of production assume more or less the structure of a macro-sign, as they identify, characterize, and analyze actors in their different roles. Acquiring, thus, the role of an index, they establish a chain of signals and levels of meanings.

(Umukoro: 2009: 100-101)

Grotowski's vision, that "all other things are supplementary", runs counter to the semiotic principle which underscores the meaning-making disposition of the sign object on the stage. This researcher, therefore, submits that those "supplementary" elements employed to make the act more dramatic are indeed the indispensable magic-makers of the magic space. If nothing else, it is the spectacle that serves as the magnetic pull on the audience to spend a pleasurable evening in the theatre. Thus, just as the yearnings to entertain the ears is the attraction to good classical musical rendition, the yearnings to entertain the eyes is the lure to the theatre. To preen the theatre clean of spectacle is to present nothing other than a rehearsal session. To this researcher, it is the visual elements of costume,

makeup, scenery, and lighting that create the magical and enabling effect that transforms and transports the actor away from his real being and his real world and indeed brings about a welcoming feeling of being another person. This invariably helps to crack down inhibitions, paving the way for good acting. On the other hand, when all is right with the visual portraiture of the actor who, on account of this magnificent transformation, is led to truly depict the character, the live theatre audience in turn gets optimal fulfillment for their money and time.

One Nigerian contemporary theatre director who, in his lifetime, reigned supreme as the lord of the magical space in the manipulation of spectacle - colourful costumes, lights, and sceneries - is Ola Rotimi.



Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi

Buttressing his ability to hold the audience spellbound, Femi Osofisan reveals that Ola Rotimi "has no equal on the Nigerian stage when it comes to the control of the physical space or the

manipulation of audience response. In the words of Osofisan, Rotimi is:

The lord of the arena stage and his link with the audience is immediate, tactile, and sensual... euphonious songs and heart-rending dirges, poetry dense with echoes of traditional wisdom, the colour, and glitter of costume, the synchronism of gestures in mime and dance, the seduction of lights, the dazzle of the war spectacle, the rapture of ritual... ("The Place of Theatre" 179 qtd. in Emasealu, 74.)

Further paying tribute to the Rotimian style, Nwadiwe describes his play directing as "a building process which enriches the script with a myriad of extra-textual and multi-media materials that transport literature to the sublime realm of performance ("The Techniques", 3-4 qtd. in Emasealu,74.). This corroborates the view that Rotimi is not given to Grotowski's vision of the bareness of the creative object or subject in the magical space. Rather, by his approach to creativity, he buttresses the vision of the spectacle as the magical spell that summons, and like bees to the honeycomb, instigates a fraternity between the audience and performers as well as creates a roundtable platform or meeting point for lovers of the arts, attracted by a common desire to appreciate artistic excellence. On the veritable use of spectacle for dramatic effects, the present speaker, who identifies with the Rotimian ideals, admits that "performance... is the propelling force by which theatre practitioners are driven to give their utmost commitment and proficiency". Commitment and proficiency here are the motivating creative force for the pursuit of excellence. This, in other words, is the driving verve for creativity, which can only be summoned by the artistry of

the scenic background and dramatic spectacles. Umukoro affirms the significant role of "the visual paraphernalia of costume and accouterments" in drama (Umukoro, 2009: 100). Since they acquire a meaning-making disposition, scenic and costumed elements assume the position of a macro-sign with the power to enunciate, characterize or analyse. To this effect, visual elements of drama embody a chain of signals and levels of meanings. As a result of their overriding signifying power to define the actor's contextual relevance, all such visual elements are indexical. This corroborates the statement, "All that is on stage is a sign." (Honzl, 1940. Veltrusky, 1964. Bogatyrev, 1976). That all theatrical signs (actor, space, and artifact) are engineered to speak to the audience is not hard to see. Ferdinand de Saussure defines the sign as "a two-faced entity, linking a material vehicle or signifier with a mental concept or signified". (qtd. in Keir Elam, 1980:6).

Eden and the City of Port Harcourt: 'Garden' as Metaphor

According to the Bible, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God." (John 1:1). In Biblical parlance, as exemplified in God's creation, the Word is the proven potent artistic vehicle of God's creative force just as the word, written or spoken, is the exerting potent energy that ultimately gives vent to the creative impulse of the performing artist. Judging from the foregoing, words and language, now indispensable aspects of human existence and no less sign-vehicle for forms of creative expressions, have become part of the super-structure of knowledge. Furthermore, the probability that words and speech are communicative variants derived from the

act of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of knowledge is very high. It may not be a coincidence that other creatures dispossessed of Eden alongside Adam and Eve who did not eat of the fruit of Knowledge are incapable of speech. The assumption here is that the access to knowledge may have eluded the other creatures by their lack of contact with the 'deadly' fruit of Eden; and consequently, they are denied the power of speech and the optimal brainpower of human beings in the universal space of man. There are, however, arguments by Biblicists that suggest that animal creatures in the mystical space of Eden, *ab initio*, could speak and interact with human characters, as did the snake to Eve in the story. In the same manner, one may become a laughingstock trying to convince a bunch of kid-adherents of the Disney world of animation and cartoon movies that animals do not speak the way humans do. Such are the great achievements and contributions of the creative and performing artists of the magic space of the theatre, who have taken creativity to the realm of anthropomorphism in the machine and internet age.

As a scholar-artist in performance, my creative index is anchored on WORDS, SPACE, ACTION, and MOVEMENT. Words have denotative and connotative meanings; hence signification is greatly conditioned on apriority. Thus the garden motif in my title, "The Creative Force and Artistic Creativity: From the Garden of Eden to the Garden City of Port Harcourt" is metonymical in more ways than one. In tandem with the vision of the "garden" as a designated space or place, The Garden of Eden, and The Garden City of Port Harcourt are conceived as creative work spaces and therefore, magical spaces for creation or artistic creativity. Just as

horticulturists manage, cultivate, tend, and beautify the garden, so do performing artists, re-assemble, re-build, re-create, tend, and promote aesthetic values on the stage – their own garden. Thus, in taking on the image of a garden, the heavenly Eden and the terrestrial Port Harcourt city become ‘gardens’ of creation and artistic creativity as they metamorphose into happy-hunting grounds for creative interventions or explorations. Following this trend of thoughts or reasoning, the artist, by implication, acquires the image of the creative gardener.

Conceived as an artistic workspace by resident performing artists, since the 1970s, the Garden City of Port Harcourt, from its little beginnings, is today a significant market-place for artistic offerings. Its origin is marked by three artistic creative schools as follows: The Uriel Paul-Worika cum Comish Ekiye led Rivers Council for Arts and Culture school, The Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi led Uniport Theatre school, and the Kenule Saro-wiwa led Basi and Company school. From 1974 to 1978, the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture, under Uriel Paul-Worika, its pioneer Executive Director, became the hub of artistic activities in the Garden City of Port Harcourt. There were performances such as Paul-Worika’s *The New Testament*; Henry Bell-Gam’s *The Hidden Truth*; Zulu Sofola’s *The Wedlock of the Gods*; and Okogbule Wonodi’s *A Wife for Two*, among others. Inspired by the, build-up in audience turnout, Paul-Worika opened his doors to popular troupes and performers from outside to boost further the growing entertainment culture of the Garden City. In this regard, Barclays Ayakoroma (2022) refers to the novel stage editions of the original cast of the popular television

series *The Masquerade*; and also the stage expeditions of **Baba Sala troupe** led by the great comedian himself, Moses Olaiya Adejumo, alias Baba Sala. With the coming on board of Comish Ekiye as Executive Director of the Council for Arts and Culture the tempo gained ascendancy with greater theatrical outings. Comish, himself a prolific dramatist, with over a dozen stage and television dramas to his credit, staged most of his plays, making the centre a bee-hive of live theatrical performances. The outstanding and most popular of his works include: *The Wrath of Maluma* (a dance drama), *One Stroke of the Machete*, *Omoro* (later titled, *Strange Affair*), *Finest Hour*, *Song of Desire*, *You Can't Take Your Wife to New York*, *Mending Socks*, *Eezeedor*, and *Sarah's Dream*. During the period he was also manning the Rivers State Television, and was the moving force behind such popular TV-drama series as *Inside Out*, *Obigbo Connection*, as well as *The Hermit*, an adaptation of Lobsang Rampa's novel, *The Hermit*. The most popular among Comish Ekiye's many plays, is *The Family*, an outstanding domestic comedy. To satisfy the ever-growing appetite for more entertainment of the Garden City audience in the early 1980s, Ayakoroma (2022) informs that the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture under the leadership of Comish Ekiye designed variety shows, tagged, "Show of the Month", and which alternated with full-length drama productions. He also revealed that among the dramas staged were J.P. Clark's *Ozidi*, *Song of a Goat*, *The Raft*; Elechi Amadi's *Isiburu*, *Road to Ibadan*, *Pepper Soup*, *The Woman of Calabar*, *The Dancer of Johannesburg*, and so on. Notable celebrity actors of this period were Amatu Braide, Columbus Irisoanga, Arthur Willie-Pepple, Sam Dede, Allwell

Fiberesima, and Emmanuel Okutuete, just to mention a few. The creation of the Rivers State Council for Arts and culture did more than kick-start a culture of theatrical performances in and around the Garden City of Port Harcourt as it had also led to the re-invigoration of indigenous popular cultures of masquerade festivals such as the *Odum* water display of Okirika, the *Ogu Ogwein* water masquerade, highlife music, cultural dance, and acrobatic displays.

The Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi led Uniport Theatre School the University of Port Harcourt Theatre, aka the Crab, established in 1977, is another of the Garden city theatrical performance hot-spot. This has been attributed to the famous theatre expert Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi, simply known as Ola Rotimi. He is one of Nigeria's multi-talented thorough-bred theatre idols, revered as an all-round theatre artist for being all at once a playwright, theatre director, choreographer, actor and theatre critic. His collection of plays include: *The Gods Are Not To Blame* (1971), *Kurunmi* (1972), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974) *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977), *Holdings Talks* (1979) *If...A Tragedy of the Ruled* (1983), *Hopes of the Living Dead*, (1983), *Akassa You Mi: An Historical Drama*, (2001), among others. Alongside the Uriel Paul-Worika & Comish Ekiye-led Rivers Arts and Culture school, the Ola Rotimi led Uniport Theatre school with its lavish sophisticated style created a balance and a meeting point between town and gown. Under Ola Rotimi's leadership, the Uniport Theatre flourished as a theatrical tradition in academia, charged with the grooming of professionals. Alongside to carry out this onerous task were



Prof. Emmanuel Gladstone
Olawale Rotimi



Prof. Juliana Omoifo Okoh



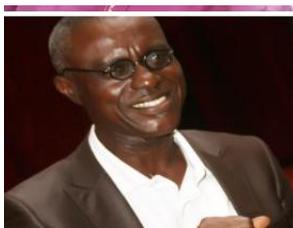
Prof. F.O. Shaka



Prof. E.C. Emasealu



Prof. I.C. Ohiri



Prof. B.A. Ejiofor



THE CRABITES
(First Generation)

Caroll Dawes, Henry Leopold Bell-Gam, Stanley Obuh (of blessed memory), Femi Shaka, Innocent Ohiri, Julie Okoh, Benjamin Ejiofor, John Yeseibo, Amatu Braide (of blessed memory), Alani Nasiru, Columbus Irisoanga, Barclays Ayakoroma. Emmanuel Emasealu, Julie Umukoro, Faith Ken-Aminikpo, Friday Nwafor, Michael Ogbolosingha, Shanka Ikhagiangbe, Clive Krama, Sam Dede, and Ken Njoku, 90% of whom are today Professors of Theatre Arts. By and by, the growing Uniport Theatre family came to include Faith Ken-Aminikpo, Friday Nwafor, Emmanuel Otete, Tony Gyapong, Ovunda Ihunwo, Imo Edward, Somiari Owiye, Boyle Adikiba, Emily Gods'presence, Nkechi Bature-Uzor, Patrick Agha, Harold Fynface, Margaret Ukwu, Chika Onu, Dike Nwachuku, Chioma Ekheyemhe, Remgius Anyanwu, Emeka Ofora, Sunday Edum, Emenike Azunwo, Tekena Mark Jasper, Ohia George, Nkem Ukagu Charles Okwuowulu, Richard Iloma, Felix Agbata, Gogo Gladys Oriekeme, Grace John-Ogbonnaya and Rita Ikeakanam. His rich legacies have continued to

flower as Uniport Theatre has continued to grow in leaps and bounds with its festival of plays. Being an educational theatre, the Crab as always is a bee-hive with its numerous activities running back to back, week after week. Varieties of performances such as plays, dance-dramas, musicals, chorals to poetry renditions constituted the numerous packages, ranging from departmental productions, staff productions to student productions. There were also command performances ordered and sponsored for special events such as convocations or other university-wide celebrations. Departmental or staff productions usually are model productions. They serve as learning grounds for students. There were also a variety of student performances mounted as practical examinations just as there were productions for mere entertainment and relaxation. Examples of staff/departmental productions hosted by the Uniport Theatre include Bell-Gam's *Orukoro*, *King Jaja*, *Hidden Truth*, and *Odum Egege*; Ejiofor's *Who then is Sane?*; Emmanuel Emmasealu' *The Gardeners*; Barclays Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave* and *A Matter of Honour*, Julie Okoh's *Closed Doors*, and *Edewede*, Julie Umukoro's *Oshimili*, *Adams' Family*, and *Marriage Coup*, Innocent Ohiri's *Hire and Fire* and *No confusion* etc.

The Ken Saro-Wiwa-led Basi and Company school, on the other hand, spearheaded the contemporary rustic forms which largely explored the mundane escapades of social life, from 1986. They were mostly comedy formats created for the evening relaxation of the middle working class citizens of the Garden City. These kinds of drama which formed a bridge between the more serious dramas of the other two schools were either physically staged and taken round the city or aired

as serialized television dramas. Alongside the Basi and Company were other recognised groups such as Kune Igoni's **Atlantic Promotions**, Uriel Paul-Worika's **Sete Productions**, Adonye Omubo-Pepple's **Delta Heritage & Eureka International Productions**, particularly Innocent Ohiri's **Wizi Travelling Theatre** and its *Hot Cash* series which had sent the Garden City agog with the horror of the disappearing ghost, Willy-willy. Also in vogue was the comedy series of James Afolabi Afolayan, alias Jagua of "my belleooo, my headooo" fame. These, and other TV-drama series of the Nigerian Television Authority and the Rivers State Television were of significance to the burgeoning artistic performance world of the Garden City in the 1980s and early 1990s. The growth has been quite phenomenal and the Garden City of Port Harcourt has not only grown into a commercial nerve centre but a nucleus of the arts today. At its apogee of artistic excellence, coincident with the tenure of Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi as Rivers State Governor, the Garden City of Port Harcourt had in seven years (2008-2014) acquired a global status. Beginning with Kalango's 2008 Garden City Literary Festival initiative; the 2008 Annual Carnival (CARNIRIV), the 2009 Port Harcourt Bollywood and Nollywood star hosting, and the 2012 Crabites Homecoming, the Garden City of Port Harcourt, has since become a city with a robust artistic tradition. Created as the Port Harcourt City annual literary and performing artists gathering respectively, the Garden City Literary Festival (renamed Port Harcourt Book Festival in 2014) and the Rivers State Carnival, ran concurrently for seven consecutive years (2008-2014). By 2014, remarkably her Golden Age, Port Harcourt city was declared UNESCO World

Book Capital of the Year. Today, the city is a global artistic centre and haven for performing artists from different parts of the world. All of these have attracted artistic international presence to the Garden City of Port Harcourt with such world-renowned literary specialists as Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Elechi Amadi, Okey Ndibe, Kaine Agary, Petrina Crockford, Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, J.P. Clark, Gabriel Okara, Buchi Emecheta and many others. Although the literary annual tradition (Book Festival & CARNIRIV) came to an abrupt end after the 7th edition of 2014, following the exit of Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi as Governor, Port Harcourt city, having already taken its pride of place as a global art and performance centre was already marked out for greatness. Growing in leaps and bounds, the city continued to flourish and had alongside acquired a magnificent film and cinema culture with a resounding echo in Nollywood, the Nigerian film prototype.



CARNIRIV 2014

What, then, is the place of the Garden City of Port Harcourt in the artistic worldview of performance in Nigeria today? As there are different kinds of creative artists in the Garden City

of Port Harcourt, so there are available, different kinds of work-spaces, and each kind as earlier iterated varies considerably from the other regarding the specificity of the kind. This presents the Garden City of Port Harcourt as a hosting ground for a variety of creative artists, most especially the performing artist. Talking about performance spaces and grounds within the macro-space of the Garden City, we have the Council for Arts and Culture, the radio and television houses, the institutional-based theatres (universities and secondary schools), hotel courtyards, and auditoriums of corporate establishments, church yards or fields, professional theatres, cinema houses, civic centres, event centres, market places, beaches, water-fronts, river surfaces for regatta performances and indeed the open streets of Port Harcourt that hosted the annual Carnival – CARNIRIV - for seven consecutive years.



CARNIRIV 2014

Having been transmogrified into an artistic performance centre through the infusion of the artistic creative energies of performing artists, the Garden City has become, for the performing artist, a magical work space. Thus, like God his

creator who fashioned him in His image and likeness, man did not only create the phantom world – Theatre – but also created the performing artist in his own image and likeness thus assuming the image of "creator" or producer. By this token also, the performing artist assumes the image of a demigod in his magical space, the stage. This has in turn instituted the social grooming that has superimposed on the city of Port Harcourt the image of the mythical EDEN along with its aesthetic aura. The Garden City of Port Harcourt, as a creative space, is seen here as an earthly representation of the Garden of Eden. However, in contrast to Eden with only one supernatural being as Creator - the ALMIGHTY GOD - the creator image in artistic re-creation in Port Harcourt is provided by diverse art practitioners who, working towards a common goal, bring to fruition the artistic vision. The analogy here is that while only one multi-talented Gardener tended the Garden of Eden, numerous gardeners, specialists in their rights, engineer the gardening process in the Garden City of Port Harcourt, and as professionals of artistic creativity, are by their individualised training, perceived as splinter images of God's creative essence who piece together their artistic ideas to create the complete picture of a dynamic artistic creation. From these springs the new-class - performing artists - greatly venerated for their rare ability to practically re-create from imagination the illusory content of the dramatic performance. The performing artist rules supreme in his phantom world where he exercises his power to re-create through the interplay of WORDS, ACTION and MOVEMENT in SPACE. The concept of God's divine power vis-à-vis the artistic power of humans corroborates M.J.C Echeruo's notion that "power is not

a divine prerogative, as humans also have their own power" (Qtd. in Diala:28) This is an indication that in every artist, is God's essence: that catalytic ingredient of man's psyche that has facilitated his portrayal as an artistic demigod in his phantom world of the stage. However, unlike the Garden of Eden, there is absolute freedom in the Garden City of Port Harcourt to eat or experience EVERYTHING; from the city's culinary arts to its creative arts; and here MONEY as bait assumes the image of the SERPENT.

This artistic accolade to the Garden City of Port Harcourt would be incomplete without putting on record highlights of my modest contributions and achievements as a scholar-artist and practitioner in the famous terrestrial garden; or without paying homage to other such Garden City theatrical colossus who have made the Garden City of Port Harcourt a world-class creative economy. Being one of the many gardeners of the Garden City, I have, in partnership with other trainers, tended, groomed and re-produced gardeners of different kinds and each, in individual peculiarity, has in turn replicated self in an evolutionary chain. Like the sower in the biblical parable of the sower, I have widely and richly sown on the proverbial good soil, and the harvest has been quite awesome. Indeed, the Garden City of Port Harcourt holds the image of the fertile soil bringing forth well-endowed professionals valued for their worth in Nollywood and everywhere else they exist. For example, my former students are today at the helms of affairs leading in training and re-training of theatre practitioners.



Dr. Ovunda Ihunwo



Dr. Sunday Edum



Dr. Imo Edward,



Dr. Agha Patrick



Mr. Columbus Irisoanga



Dr. Sam Achibi Dede

Typical examples are Professor Faith Ken-Aminikpo, Head of Department of Theatre and Film Studies; Prof. Friday Nwafor, Head of Department of Film and Multi-media; Dr. Imo

Edward, Director of the Institute of Arts and Culture; Dr Sunday Edum, Associate Dean, Student Affairs, all of the University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt. Also included are Drs Richard Ilomah and Emenike Azunwo, the immediate past and present Head of Department of Theatre & Film Studies at Rivers State University, respectively. Dr Charles Okwuowulu, Immediate past head of Theatre Arts, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ebonyi State, Others who have also been former students and direct beneficiaries of my mentorship and who have been absorbed into the academic system of University of Port Harcourt as trainers are: Drs. Emily Gods'presence, Nkechi Bature-Uzor, Ovunda Ihunwo, Edward Imo, Sunday Edum, Ohia George, Emeka Ofora, Boyle Adikiba, Remigius Anyanwi, Nkem Ukagu, Patrick Agha, Harold Fynface, Margaret Ukwu, and Owiye. Also, I have some of my former students who are now lecturers at the Rivers State University (Theatre and Film Studies). They include Tekena Gasper, Moniviv Dede-Sanipe, Ibe O. Ibe and others. In Nollywood, I also have great accolytes, who as former students and ambassadors of Uniport, are making us proud in Nollywood. Examples are Ejike Asiegbu, Bob Manuel Udokwu, Basiene Nko-Taria, Yul Edochie, Rita Dominic, Monalisa Chinda, Julius Agwu, Charles Inogie, Francis Duru, Walter Anga, Yibo Koko, Uche Jombo, Gift Uwame, James Okparaekeocha, Milicent Jack, Dan Kpodoh, just to mention a few.

As earlier stated, I have a number of published resource materials to my credit; plays, poetry, prose, monographs and over fifty journal articles and chapters in books. Also on record are stage productions of my plays,

Oshimili (1994 & 1997) *Adams Family* (1995, 1999, 2005, 2010 & 2014), *Marriage Coup* (1996 & 2012), each of which has been staged at different times in the Garden City. In addition, one of the tales in *Three Tales Three Tribes* (2019) titled **the Queen and the Prince** was harvested as a dance drama at the CRAB by Dan Kpodoh in 2009 under the title **Queen Morenike**. My most recent creative work in prose is *Konye* (2023) which has had favourable mention in many quarters in the Garden City and beyond. All these have served as great materials for entertainment and education. Below is a table reflecting my artistic preoccupation in the Garden since the 1990s.



Executive Producers - CRABITES Homecoming 2012



Uniport Nollywood Workshop 2017



Adams Family 2021



Independence Day Children Celebration 2023

S/NO	TITLE OF ARTISTIC EVENT	PLAYWRIGHT	PLACE OF EVENT	ROLE	YEAR
1	Women Palaver	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Arts Theatre	Director	1990

2	A Night of Chekov Plays (<i>The Proposal, The Bear & Cherry Orchard</i>)	Chekov	Uniport Arts Theatre	Director	1992
3	<i>Oshimili</i>	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Arts Theatre	Director	1994
4	<i>Adams Family</i>	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Theatre	Director	1995
5	<i>Marriage Coup</i>	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Theatre	Director/& Costumier	1996
6	<i>Oshimili</i> (Convocation Play)	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Theatre	Costumier	1997
7	<i>Childaffair Carnival</i>	Rivers State Govt.	Tourist Beach	Event Manager	1999
8	<i>The Miser</i>	Moliere	Uniport Theatre	Director	2005
9	<i>Dinner for Promotion</i>	James Ene-Henshaw	Uniport Theatre	Director	2007
10	<i>A Fairytale</i>	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Theatre	Coordinator	2008
11	<i>Comments</i>	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Theatre	Coordinator	2008
12	<i>Queen Morenike</i>	Julie Umukoro	Uniport Theatre	Coordinator	2009
13	Rivers State Carnival (CARNIRIV)	Rivers State Govt.	Port Harcourt Town	Judge	2010
14	Crabites Homecoming Carnival	Crabites	University of Port Harcourt	Executive Producer	2012

15	<i>Marriage oup</i> (Convocation)	Julie Umukoro	Univ. of Port Harcourt	Executive Producer	2012
16	Amatu Braide Dance Prize	Departmental Prog.	Amatu Braide Lecture Hall	Executive Producer	2014
17	Uniport World Peace Day	Dept.of Theatre Arts	Amatu Braide Lecture Hall	Coordinator	2015
18	World Theatre Day Celebration	Dept of Theatre Arts & NANTAP	Uniport Theatre	Coordinator	2016/ 2017/ 2018
19	American Corner Events Unipott	American Embassy	American Corner Uniport	Resource Person	2018- 2020





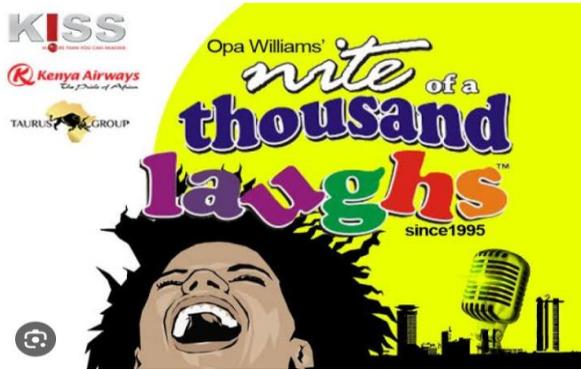
The Crabites – Demi - Gods of Artistic Creativity

CONCLUSION

Being a revered artistic creative centre, the Garden City of Port Harcourt, has become one of the preferred tourist destinations in Nigeria for its serenity and the amusement, laughter and happiness uniquely built into its entertainment structure.



Standup Comedy



Beginning with the entry of Stand-up Comedy merchant, Opa Williams, into the Garden City of Port Harcourt in 2000 with his *A night of a thousand laughs*, came a magnificent burst of creativity that brought into the limelight an array of well recognised Nigerian stand-up comedians such as Ali Baba, Yibo Koko, Francis Duru, Michael Ogolo, Ayodeji Makun aka AY, Julius Agwu of the *Crack Ya Rib* fame, Basketmouth, I go Dye, Bovi, I Go Save, Gandoki, Teju Baby Face, Maleke, Holy Mallam Gordons, Michael Ogbolosingha, Charles Inojie, Aboki for Christ, Klint de Drunk, Dan d' Humourous, Princess and Lepacious Bose just to mention a few. Vice Chancellor Sir, what is most significant here is that among the above listed are six of my former students who are graduates of theatre Arts, University of Port Harcourt. They are: Yibo Koko, Francis Duru, Michael Ogolo, Julius Agwu, Charles Inojie and Michael Ogbolosingha of blessed memory. It is important to remark that the comedy adventure has grown further with its emancipation, growing from a mere course in the curriculum **“Comedy and other Comic Forms”** to become upgraded as a specialist area with different units. In this regard, my very good student now one of my colleagues in the department, Dr

Imo Edward, indeed, our first scholar in the area, is doing a great job as we already have a number of his products trending today as stand up comedians in the Garden City. Examples are Ambassador Induz, Dr *Virus*, Pastor Bonface, and Kaduna First Son.

Looking into the future I can see a looming renewal in the creative energy of the Garden City with the growing allure of the digital age. New generation gardeners of the Garden city, having embraced the reality of the Internet and its social media platforms of YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, X, Tik Toks etc, have gone headlong into the shooting of drama skits with comedy orientation, and have strongly gained attention in the Garden City since the lockdown of COVID 19 in 2020. Today, we have the likes of Mark Angels of the Mark Angel comedy series, Angel de laff, Kunle Tatafo, Tekena Iyalla, and Sabinus (Onwuka Ugochukwu Richard) alias Funnybros, Arinze Baba, Mudiaga, Prince Hezekiah, etc. There is also the advent of Port Harcourt Child actors as Emmanuella (Emmanuella Samuel) and Aunty Success Madubuike of Mark Angels comedy.

In June 2023, the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP) under the leadership of Dr Ovunda Ihunwo and in conjunction with the Theatre Arts Departments of Universities in Rivers State, launched the *Garden City Theatre Festival* which hopefully shall be held annually. The 2023 edition and the first was co-hosted by the Department of Theatre & Film Studies, Rivers State University. This suggests that the Garden City of Port Harcourt with an image ingrained in the artistic creative firmament will,

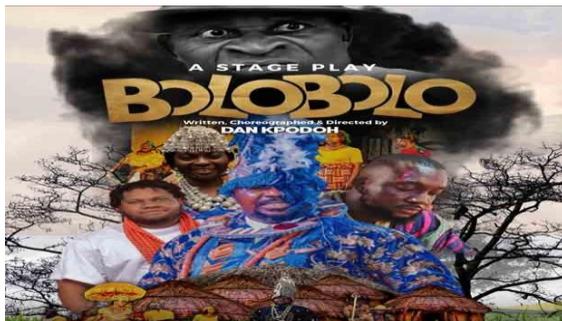
like the heavenly Garden of Eden, remain evergreen as an earthly El Dorado.

In the words of Edward A. Wright, Art or to be precise, theatre is, “A magical communion between company and audience where, for a little moment, each person gives and receives something beyond himself to create a thing which has never been before and will never be again”(Wright: 1972. Preface vii). This emphasises the ephemeral nature of the live stage performance art, which, beyond the actual experience, is perceived and preserved only in our imagination, Nevertheless, by the strategic art of scholarship and other multimedia initiatives premised on photographic and audiovisual resources, the experience may yet have another lease of life. It is significant to note that multimedia resources are not as effective as the art of scholarship in enunciating the artistic experience. In the academic exercise of scholarship, lies the capacity of the intellect to unleash and elicit unlimited conversations, debates and critical analytical contents for the continued rejuvenation of an artistic creation. It is in this light that this Inaugural Lecture, which captures an epoch in the history of the Garden City of Port Harcourt, stands at this point in time as one of the most veritable scholarly contributions on the life and times of the Garden City of Port Harcourt. Hopefully, it should serve as a useful resource material to fellow creative artists and others alike.

A great number of the Garden City resident performing artists who, having found the city a congenial work-space to practice their arts, have kept the performance legacy alive. Among them are scholars in theory and practice of the arts - playwrights, directors, choreographers, actors, dancers, scene

designers, lighting designers, costume designers, makeup artists, musicians, fine artists, art historians, cinematographers, poets, and troubadours. Some of them are remarkable indigenous artists such as Paul-Worika, Comish Ekiye, Kenule Saro-Wiwa, Alabo Bourdilon Tonipre Christian Epe, Barara Soky, Columbus Irisoanga, Amatu Braide (of blessed memory), Adiele Onyedibia, Doye Agama, Arthur Willie Pepple, Adonye Pepple, Elechi Amadi, Yibo Koko, Millicent Jack, Walter Anga, Hilda Dokubo of the *Street to Stars* fame,, Julius Agwu Ovunda Ihunwo, Monaliza Chinda, Gift Uwame (Muma Gee), Tonto Dike and so on, some of whom are leading practitioners in Nollywood today. The list also includes such great Rivers State musical artists as Duncan Mighty, Mercy Chinwo, and Burna Boy, just to mention three. This boomerang effect is attributed to the powerful allure of the strong theatrical tradition of the Crab, University of Port Harcourt Theatre, initiated by the theatre expert, Late Professor Ola Rotimi and his followers. This theatrical engine-house, the Crab, is the *sine qua non* for the artistic consciousness that has created value and has brought about excellence in the artistic world of the Garden City of Port Harcourt. Today, in response to this rapid artistic growth and development, the University of Port Harcourt has since established full-fledged departments for the training of fine artists and musicians while also spreading its tentacles towards the study of film. This is visibly exhibited in the metamorphosis in 2013 of the Department of Theatre Arts to the Department of Theatre and Film Studies and yet again in 2022, the University created another unit – the Department of Film and Multimedia – which, however, is still in its budding stage at this point in time. Again, three other

institutions in Rivers State - Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Rivers State University, Nkpulu-Oroworukwo, and Federal College of Education and Technical, Omoku – have also established departments dedicated to theatre studies. It is pertinent to note here that the human capital base of the staff component of these newly established departments for theatrical studies in River State is over 85% of *Crabites* the Uniport Theatre professionals. Therefore, the University of Port Harcourt Theatre stands tall as the cradle of artistic creativity in the Garden City of Port Harcourt in Rivers State (Nigeria) and beyond. Having been blessed with such a stupendous history of artistic entertainments - musical and cultural displays, festivals, carnivals, dances, and dramatic performances - the Garden City of Port Harcourt is today, a one-stop place for sport and recreation alongside the local cuisines and delicacies. We can hardly erase the evergreen memory of Rex Jim Lawson, the highlife music maestro from Buguma, Ovunda Ihunwo's scintillating stage re-creation of Julie Umukoro's *Adams Family*(2014), the gripping performance of Dan Kpodoh's *Biokpo* (2019),



Dan kpodoh's Bolobolo



Yibo Koko's *Seki dance*

The classic performance of Bimbo Manuel's *Philomena* (2022), the razzmatazz of Yibo Koko's *Seki dance* (2022), and the more recent of Kpodoh's enigmatic and entrancing dance drama *Bolobolo* (2023). Also on record are musical shows from the early 20s till date, with celebrities such as Muma Gee (Gift Uwame), P- Square (Peter and Paul Okoye), 2-Face Idibia (Innocent Idibia), Faze (Chibuzor Orji), Davido (David Adedeji Adeleke), Wiz-Kid (Ayo Balogun), Mercy Chinwo and Duncan Mighty (Duncan Wene Mighty Okechukwu), just to mention a few. Again we cannot forget so soon the ripple effects of our own Amatu Braide, the nimble feet dancer and choreographer, of blessed memory.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, permit me, at this juncture, to thank the University of Port Harcourt Management for immortalizing Amatu Braide, a member of the foundation staff of Theatre Arts, by naming a Lecture Hall after her, following the proposal made during my headship of the Department in 2013. In the same spirit, I strongly recommend that a large and befitting Arts Theatre be built in honour of late Professor Ola Rotimi, founding Head of our university's Department of Theatre and Creative Arts, and first Inaugural Lecturer from this

Department, for his invaluable and indelible contributions to the growth of the performing arts, not only in the University of Port Harcourt, and Rivers State, but in Nigeria as a whole. By August 18, 2025, it will be exactly 25 years that Professor Ola Rotimi untimely left us. That should be the most opportune time to accord him the honour he truly deserves. Ahead of time, the University Senate is hereby implored to proclaim August 18 every year as *Ola Rotimi Day*, to be marked with an Anniversary Lecture and a Commemorative Performance in the proposed Arts Theatre, in perpetual honour of one of the greatest icons of Nigerian Theatre and African Theatre as a whole. This will further enhance the image and uniqueness of the University of Port Harcourt.

At this juncture, as I assume the status of an artistic seer, permit me to unfold my vision of our own Delta Park reinvented and transformed truly into an Arts Village that is a meeting point for all arms of the art. A Delta Park with a state of the arts, **Arts Theatre** edifice hosting a multiplicity of Performance Spaces:



Exhibition Hall



Cinema Hall



Dance Studio



Photo Studio



1,500 Capacity Auditorium



Delta Park Reinvented
(A modern Arts Village)

A huge auditorium of no less than 1,500 seats, a Cinema place, a dance studio, a fine arts studio and an exhibition hall. Imagine such a centre with a calendar of well mapped out artistic seasons; seasons programmed and advertised months ahead and tickets sold out in lieu! Imagine Delta Park, truly an Arts Village taking its pride of place as one of Nigeria's International holiday resorts to art enthusiasts! Imagine our own Delta Park becoming indeed the crucible of the arts at the University of Port Harcourt boosting and maintaining her pride of place as the giant of the creative enterprise in the Garden city of Port Harcourt! Imagine an artistic home that should

have an enigmatic pull that brings together our Nollywood stars and other artistic ambassadors; our pride! Imagine our University Guest houses, Chalets and tickets all sold out in advance for the annual seasons of artistic events of theatre, music, films and art exhibitions! Perhaps I am dreaming, yet dreams do come true. A dream in the spiritual realm can, with a great determination, materialize in the physical. I hope and believe my humble visionary projections will receive the positive encouragement of the University Management.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I thank you fervently for providing me this opportunity to engage with fellow academics and the larger members of the unique Uniport community, bringing my scholarship over the years to a fitting climax. More importantly, in humility I pay homage to God, the MASTER-ARTIST himself for His choice of me - a SCHOLAR-ARTIST - to deliver this historico-semiotic testament on Creation and the artistic creative enterprise in the ephemeral world of the theatre. Lastly, I thank immensely this wonderful congregation, who have effectively played the role of the audience; without whom a theatrical performance is incomplete. This has lent greater credence to my earlier assertion that this inaugural lecture is in itself a performance. Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we have now come to the end of our epic journey from the mythical Garden of Eden to our familiar terrestrial world. Welcome home to the University of Port Harcourt in the Garden City of Port Harcourt!

Thank you all for your patience and attention.

Julie Umukoro

*Professor of Semiotics and Performance Studies,
2023 Inaugural Lecturer*

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CITATION ON



PROF. JULIE NWABOGO EFEMENA UMUKORO

Dip. (Ibadan) B.A.(Ibadan), M. A. (UPH), Ph.D. (Ibadan.)

Professor Julie Nwabogo Efemena Umukoro was born on the unique date of the twelfth day of the twelfth month of the year, 12th December 1960, to Mr and Mrs Augustine and Margaret Agha of Ase in Ndokwa East of Delta State. After her secondary school education at St. Mary Magdalene Girls Grammar School, Ashaka (which later became known as Ashaka Grammar School, Ashaka), from 1971-1976, she enrolled at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, for her tertiary education where she obtained a Diploma in Theatre Arts (1982), B. A. Degree in Theatre Arts (with Second Class Honours Upper Division) in 1986, and a Ph.D. in Theatre Arts in 2004. Earlier on, she had joined the staff of the University of Port Harcourt in 1989 where she subsequently obtained an M. A. degree in English Studies in 1996. As a member of the academic staff of unique Uniport, she rose steadily through the ranks and was pronounced a Professor of Semiotics and Performance Studies in the Department of Theatre and Film

Studies, in 2015. She won a Junior Fulbright Fellowship in 2001 to study at the University of Virginia (UVA) under distinguished scholars and has remained a prominent member of the National Association of the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nigeria which honoured her with an award of distinction in 2022.

Our Inaugural Lecturer of today is a well-known scholar in the discipline of Theatre Arts who has researched and published articles widely in several reputable journals both locally and internationally, with a number of books to her credit. Furthermore, she has taught many generations of students at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in over thirty years of academic service. She has also served the university in different administrative capacities, including her memorable tenure at the headship of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies from 2012 to 2014 during which she won an award of excellence and distinction presented by the SERVICOM Office of the university.

Professor Umukoro has also been invited by other universities in different capacities as an External Examiner, Academic Assessor of candidates for promotion to the professorial level, as a Visiting Professor on sabbatical leave and other collaborative engagements. These universities include the University of Ibadan, Bowen University, Iwo, Igbinedion University, Okada, University of Jos, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and others. She is a member of many learned societies and professional bodies which include Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA), National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP), Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), International

Association of Theatre Critics (IATC), the Nigeria Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), to mention but a few, and has attended several local and international conferences for fruitful interaction with academic and professional colleagues.

Apart from pure academic scholarship, Professor Umukoro is also involved in artistic creativity in the three literary genres of drama, prose, and poetry, with a number of published titles which include *Oshimili* (1990) *Nightmare* (2003) *Adams Family*, (2012) *Marriage Coup* (2013) *Three Tribes Three Tales*,(2019) and, *Konye*, (2023). Beyond her accomplishments on the physical stage, she is a prominent figure in media scholarship and practice with artistic and professional experiences which cut across the television, film and radio broadcasting, dating far back to 1980.

In terms of community service, Professor Julie Umukoro has had a robust involvement in the activities of her immediate community and the wider socio-political space. She served meritoriously as the Woman Leader of Ndokwa Neku Union, the Apex body of Ndokwa people, World-Wide from 2021 -2023. In recognition of her position as the first female professor in her Ndokwa East Local Government Area, and her other outstanding community roles, the Igwe of Ase Kingdom, in 2018, conferred on her the chieftaincy title of *Kpakpando furu neze* (meaning “the star that befits the throne”).

Professor Julie Umukoro enjoys a solid domestic background support from a loving family. Her marriage to Professor Matthew Umukoro, which is now more than forty years old, has been quite fruitful with children and grandchildren. Her aged mother is lucky to be alive to witness her daughter’s rise to academic and social fame.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, our Inaugural Lecturer of today. Professor Julie Nwabogo Umukoro, is hereby invited to deliver her Lecture entitled: "The Creative Force And Artistic Creativity: From The Garden of Eden To The Garden City of Port Harcourt".

Professor Owunari A. Georgewill,
Vice- Chancellor.