

MAKEUP AS A SIGNIFICANT TOOL FOR THE THEATRE PERFORMER

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**Abstract**

*Dating as far back as ancient Greece, makeup was one of the arts of the theatre absolutely fundamental to the origins of drama. The earliest performers of the dithyramb, held in honour of Dionysus, made themselves up, probably by daubing their faces with blood or the dregs of wine when preparing for the performances of their holy rites (Cohen, 2000). Subsequently, these original attempts at makeup were the sources of facial decorations which form the universal symbols of theatre today. Yet ironically, makeup tends to be the last aspect of design technology to be considered in the theatre. Many directors pay little or no attention to the creative role of this element of theatre. Indeed, it is the only major design element whose planning and execution is quite often left entirely to the actor's discretion or at the mercy of amateurs. This paper seeks to guide teachers, students, professionals and non-professional theatre practitioners to a better understanding of the principles and roles of makeup in a theatrical production. It also highlights its importance to the performer and to the entire production.*

**Keywords:** Makeup, Makeup Artist, Significance, Actor, Theatre Production.

**Introduction**

It is common knowledge that makeup is a tool that helps complete the picture created by costume in any given production. It is considered to occupy a curiously paradoxical position in the theatre and is often regarded as a necessary but unfortunate adjunct to dramatic productions (Corson, 1975). Today some actors, producers and directors fail to

realise the effectiveness of makeup in a production; therefore, it has sorely been neglected or regarded as a mere process of painting the face. Baygan submits that in his several years of teaching and interaction with theatre groups he observed that

makeup is often viewed as the bastard child of the theatre, and that there are still producers and directors who do not consider makeup either an art or an important part of an actor's tools in creating a character (1984:xi).

This perhaps explains why it tends to be the last design element to be considered in a production process. Indeed, unlike costume, set, light and even props, it is often applied for the first time at the final dress and technical rehearsal and, in some cases, on the opening night of the performance. Research indicates that makeup is the only element of the theatre for which the planning and execution are often left to the actors' discretion or to that of an amateur. This study, nevertheless, acknowledges the fact that scholars such as Hassan (2004), Thudium (1999), Baygan (1984), have provided books and articles to guide actors and actresses in the technique and step-by-step approach for makeup application.

Our concern in this paper is with the significance of makeup and the makeup artist's responsibilities. This is to serve as a guide to anyone who is willing to learn the benefits of makeup in the theatre. The paper finally examines the basic principles and techniques of makeup to aid the actor in the development and projection of his or her character.

### **Significance of Makeup in Stage Productions**

In general parlance, makeup is the application of cosmetics such as powder, lipstick and eye pencil to the face for the purpose of beautification; but in the theatre, it is an art which adds to the total aesthetic value of a production. It is also, as already mentioned above, an aid to the actor in assuming a character and completing the costume outfit. Makeup is considered as being essential to the actors' visibility

and appearance (Hassan, 2004). This implies that, because of the distance between the stage and the audience in the theatre and the peculiar nature and characteristics of stage lighting, an actor's features will be indistinct and colourless without makeup. Hence, makeup, like costume, helps the actor in revealing the character by establishing physical clues to the character's personality, age, background, race, health and environment. When properly applied, the actor is able to effectively use the face as a vital tool to communicate his or her characters' emotion and mood to the audience. On the other hand, when misapplied, it can destroy the actor's characterisation by projecting an external look that conflicts with the character's inner feeling. Hence, there is the need to pay special attention to all the makeup requirements for a play production.

To portray a believable character on stage, the actor is assisted by the artistry and technical skills of brilliant craftsmen such as the set, lighting, costume and props designers, who create for him the environment in which to perform. However, makeup is personal to the actor; 'personal' because the actor is exclusively the one who knows the best expressions and attitudes the character will exhibit. Also, the actor is in the best position to recognise the special challenges his or her natural features will create in relation to the character he or she is to portray. Therefore, it is appropriate that the actor takes responsibility of applying the makeup personally for a more successful, convincing, and believable presentation of the character. If the actor can do this himself, what then is the role of the makeup artist in a theatre production?

### **The Role of the Makeup Artist in Stage Productions**

Professionally speaking, the makeup artist is considered an important person in the realisation of a character in any production. In fact, through specialised technical knowledge which the actor may not possess, the makeup artist is able to ventilate beards on net, or make a plaster cast of

a face for a three dimensional effect, or carry out the art of aging with Kleenex tissues and liquid latex, or build a gunshot wound. In addition to the needed craftsmanship, the makeup artist should realise that the basis of all makeup lies in the character that is being brought to life on stage, and it is the actor that carries this character both physically and psychologically. Hence, in view of Corson's statement that, "makeup is that final dressing of the actor which will enable him to perform his role as fully and effectively as possible" (1975:23), the makeup artist will need to educate and make the actor understand his aims and design, so that the actor can create for him those natural facial expressions that will enhance the projection of a believable character. However, for an actor to produce the right facial expression or contours that will enhance the makeup artist's craft or even his own creation, he will require some amount of training in the art and craft of makeup as well as adequate knowledge of the human anatomy. Expressing his fear about lack of training, Baygan explains that:

There are still performers who regularly do their own makeup and who if they're not trained themselves in this technique, frequently find themselves relying on anyone around who can offer a helping hand. And more often than not, however, the helper's idea and approaches are outmoded, and he simply cannot give an actor the professional guidance needed. (1984:4).

Baygan (1984) further advises, that when a makeup artist is available to carry out the elaborate makeup, the actor on the other hand, must know how to apply his basic straight and aging makeup when necessary. However, he (actor) must seek the approval of a makeup artist who, in turn, sits in the auditorium to view the actors' makeup under a stage light. The makeup artist must ensure that makeup covers all parts of the actor's body not concealed in costume. The performer's face must look right to the audience in the context of the production and its design.

It is important to note that the makeup suitable for one production may not be suitable for another. Therefore, it is desirable that makeup be planned in advance by the makeup artist just as any other element of production. It is not entirely logical to leave each actor to decide his or her makeup when all other elements of production have been planned and designed with care by other designers and after many pre-production conferences. Hence, the need to endeavour to attend the production conference(s) for discussion on issues such as directorial concept, production style, as well as reaching consensual agreement with other designers on the issue of colour scheme.

### **Specific Responsibilities of the Makeup Artist**

- Like other aspects of production, the makeup artist should make sure that the makeup aids understanding of, and is expressive of, the production style.
- The makeup artist must consider the size of the auditorium when planning makeup. For while it should be seen, it should not look grotesque or strange and distorted, unless these qualities are appropriate to the production.
- It is also the makeup artist's duty to ensure that the design helps delineate the role by establishing the age of the character, state of health, race and much more.
- The makeup artist must ensure that makeup indicates the style of the production. For instance in a realistic drama, such factors as age and health are modelled as much as possible on life, whereas in an expressionistic play, more attention may be given to establishing an idea; for example, the actors' faces may be painted white to give the impression that they are ghosts.
- It is also the makeup artist's responsibility to ensure that the makeup establishes the psychological nature of a character. Makeup may be used to establish psychological qualities and to make the face more

expressive. A character can be made to look the stereotype of a witch by employing hot colours and emphasis. For instance, eyes, nose, mouth or other features such as the nails and hair may be overemphasised or subordinated.

- Makeup restores colour and form to the face. Therefore the makeup artist must bear in mind the importance of using the correct combination of colours to avoid a situation where, when under stage lights, an actor would appear either too pale or have their features flattened out.
- It is also important that a makeup artist should consider the fact that ordinarily some type of makeup helps the actor to appear nice by adding more beauty to his or her personality.

### **Types of Makeup**

Makeup comes in different forms. Brockett and Ball (2008:389) state that "makeup effect may be achieved in two basic ways: through painting and through added plastic, prosthetic, or three-dimensional pieces." Painting makeup may involve the application of highlights, shades and colours to the face and other parts of the actor's body that is not covered by costume.

Painted makeup includes:

- Character Makeup (Aging): the actor's face and other parts of the body revealed to the audience are made to look older, fatter, or thinner. In other words, character makeup changes the actor's looks or features completely to portray the character.
- Straight Makeup: this is described as "the most fundamental technique" (Delamar, 2000:15). It aims at making the actor's face look exactly the same on stage in costume and under stage light as it would in real life.
- Stylised Makeup: this is determined by the style of the play.
- Special Effect Makeup (otherwise known as fantastic makeup): this includes "clown makeup, distortions for stylistic reasons, and

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decorative designs painted on the face (such as tattoos and markings used by some tribal peoples)" (Brockett and Ball, 2008:390).

To effectively achieve the application of any of the above-listed makeup types, a grounded understanding of the following is essential.

### **Makeup Plot**

The plot is a "chart recording basic information about the makeup of each character. It will indicate the base colour, liners, eye shadow, powder, special feature such as beard or enlarged nose or any changes to be made during the performance" (Brockett and Ball, 2008:389). In other words, the plot serves both as a guide for applying makeup and a check on how the makeup of each actor relates to that of all other performers. The table gives basic information about the makeup for each actor, scene by scene; it also provides details of changes in the makeup as the play progresses. Below is a table illustrating the makeup plot for three characters from the production of Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*.

**Table One: Makeup plot for Kongi's Harvest**

| Character          | Movement       | Makeup                                                                     | To do |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Oba Danlola</b> | <i>Hemlock</i> | 1. Base (colour 2, dark brown)                                             | Pull  |
|                    |                | 2. Powder                                                                  | Pull  |
|                    |                | 3. Gray colour water proof paint to whiten the temple, beard and moustache | Pull  |
|                    |                | 4. Black Eye liner to create the shadows                                   | Pull  |
|                    |                | 5. Highlight                                                               | Pull  |
|                    |                | 6. Powder – loose translucent form                                         | Pull  |

|              |                   |                                            |      |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|------|
| <b>Kongi</b> | <b>First Part</b> | 1. Base/foundation (colour 2, dark brown ) | Pull |
|              |                   | 2. Powder- loose translucent form          | Pull |
|              |                   | 3. Eye liner loose powder                  | Pull |
|              |                   | 4. Black Eye liner                         |      |
|              |                   | 5. Powder- loose translucent form          | pull |
| <b>Segi</b>  | <b>First Part</b> | 1. Base (colour 1, light brown)            | pull |
|              |                   | 2. Hot pink and blue Eye shadow            | pull |
|              |                   | 3. Light Red blusher                       | pull |
|              |                   | 4. Mascara                                 | pull |
|              |                   | 5. False eyelashes                         | pull |
|              |                   | 6. Hot red lip colour/lip sticks           | pull |
|              |                   | 7. Powder – loose translucent form         | pull |

### The Actor's Anatomy

The word anatomy as defined in the *Oxford Encyclopaedia* is "...a medical term which signifies the cutting up or dissection of the body with the intention of revealing the structure of the parts in relation to the whole." It further explains what the body is in shape and form. For a clearer understanding of this study, we shall quickly look at how shapes and forms in the body help or can enhance makeup. We will in the course of this paper, restrict ourselves to the part of the actor's body known as the face, which is one of the actor's basic tools.

### **The Face**

The actor's face is his or her weapon of expression; hence, there is the need for a critical analysis of the face and facial bones. The shape and form of the facial bones contribute to the expression on the face. When makeup is applied to enhance the facial features, it can only be effective when properly employed. There is the need to understand that, on the human face, there are what is known as the strong and weak areas. Once we understand and identify these areas we will know where to emphasise and where to minimize makeup. The bones of the actor's face play an important role in the advancement of the character's age because facial muscles lose their texture when we grow old, the skin begins to sag and the flesh is no longer firm. The face automatically begins to give the impression of a skull draped with a skin.

The following parts are the areas that are affected during aging:

- The frontal eminence/superciliary arch – this is popularly known as the forehead.
- The maxilla and the mandible – these are the upper and lower jaws.
- The zygomatic arch – this is what is commonly called the cheek bones. It is necessary to observe the cheekbone closely because some people have prominent cheekbones that may not be difficult to locate while others may need to use their fingers to find its precise location because they have too much flesh on their cheeks. For easier identification therefore, it is advised that the actor with the tip of the finger, touching the cheek area on the face, identify the top of the cheekbone, feel the curves around and underneath it and once this is achieved then the cheekbone has been located.
- Nasal bone – this is the bony part of the nose, also known as the top of the nose.

- The orbital fossa – these are the hollows of the eyes commonly known as the eye sockets. They are clear cut and easy to locate.
- The temporal fossa – this is the part of the face that we refer to as the temple. There are also hollows in the temporal fossa but they are not so deep as we find in the orbital fossa.
- The infratemporal fossa – this is another hollow located below the cheekbones; because it is located in a fleshy area, it gives a sinking impression underneath the cheekbone, especially in aged people.

### **Tips on step-by-step process of applying makeup**

Having understood the different parts of the face, the actor needs to know how and what type of makeup to apply to the parts of the face in order to achieve the desired effect. Meanwhile, it is very crucial to note that before we begin to apply any makeup on the face or any part of the body, the actor needs to know the exact type of makeup he wants to achieve. Is it a straight makeup, character makeup, stylized or fantastic makeup? For straight makeup the aim is to make the face appear exactly the same on stage in costume under stage lights as it does in real life.

### ***Process of application: (achieving straight makeup)***

- To begin, clean the face with cotton wool soaked in cleansing lotion or cold cream, or wash the face with soap and water and dry it with a towel. Sit in front of a mirror with bright light surrounding it
- Choose the right tone of foundation depending on your skin coloration or complexion. Sometimes you may need to combine different shades of foundations to get the exact colour desired. Using a foam sponge or an applicator, rub foundation over face and neck when not covered by costume. Make sure the foundation is light and spread evenly.
- The actor needs to check if he or she will need to correct some of the features on the face to enhance his or her look. For example, it may be appropriate to pay attention to around the orbital fossa (eye socket)

using highlight to eliminate all kinds of discoloration under his eyes, blending this in with a small soft brush.

- The next step is to choose the right rouge. This depends on the colour of foundation used. The rouge is usually applied to the area of the face known as the cheek bone to brighten up the face. It must be smoothly applied and blended into the foundation, so that a tint of it reflects on the face.

- The eye shadows are applied to the eyelids. It should be closely related in tone with the foundation. For a three-dimensional look a highlight can be applied over the eyelids close to the eyelashes.

- Using a very sharp black or brown eyebrow pencil and with the feather stroke technique, fill in the empty area slightly above the eye sockets on the forehead.

- The eyeliner could come in the form of liquid, dry or in a pencil. It is advisable to use brown or black eyeliner. If it is in liquid form, use an eyeliner brush to apply. The effect of the eyeliner is to make the actor's eyeballs distinct, bright and expressive. Also to achieve brilliantly bright eyes, a touch of mascara and eyebrow pencils to darken the lower lashes is necessary, but make sure it is not heavy. Mascara can also be applied to the upper eyelashes.

- Line the lips with a darker shade of lips liner before applying the shade of lipstick desired.

- Powder the entire face with translucent or preferably a white baby powder. Do not use a dark-brown powder because this will change the highlights used.

- Finally, if and when necessary, a touch of dry rouge or blush on the forehead and over the chin, may create a natural effect.

At the end of the above process, the face should look beautifully set as though nothing has been added to it. However, note that the head, neck

and arms, if exposed by costumes, must be made up for equal skin discoloration.

The next interesting makeup that an actor must be able to handle without any difficulty is "character makeup". Character makeup is a process in which the face is made to look older, fatter, thinner, changing the actor's features completely to create the character.

### **How to achieve character makeup**

This is a simple method of painting to create aging, with highlight and shadows. The basic principle governing this type of makeup is simply to darken the depressed areas of the muscle and bone structures, and highlight the areas to give the wrinkles created with the required depth.

#### ***Process of application: (The step by step process of creating aging makeup)***

- To begin, clean the face with cotton wool soaked in cleansing lotion or cold cream, or wash the face with soap and water and dry it with a towel. Sit in front of a mirror with bright light surrounding it.
- Make a face at yourself in front of the mirror to find the frown (wrinkle) lines on the forehead, known as the frontal eminence.
- Gently trace out the lines with a dark-brown or black pencil, and highlight using a brush to draw the line vertically until the wrinkles are achieved.
- Smooth and blend in the highlight carefully to avoid smearing; work on the edges and avoid looking artificial.
- To create extra depth, certain areas on the face, like the temple (infratemple fossa) and the cheek bone can be worked on. Wrinkle lines around these areas can be traced out, using a dark-brown or black pencil and highlight, making sure the lines do not look drawn.
- For the infratemporal and temporal fossa, shade the areas with a darker tone. These will help reveal the hollows that exist and emphasise the sinking effect below the cheekbone.

- To make the look convincing, depending on the age desired, it may be necessary to add some touch of grey to the hair. This can be achieved with the use of what is called hair whitener. This is available in liquid and stick forms and it comes in white, yellow, light blue-grey colours. The hair whitener is applied to the temple of the hair and gradually graduates to the whole of the hair, depending on how old the character is. Make sure the grey penetrates through the thickness of the hair and not just on the surface. Grey can also be applied on the moustache, beards and eyebrows to create balance in the look of the character.

After this, take a look at the mirror and if the makeup appears very obvious, then you need more practice. But when it looks natural, you are making progress. With these illustrations, it is clear that understanding the human anatomy will not only enable the actor to correctly apply the appropriate makeup, but also affords him or her the knowledge to emphasise specific areas. The study thus sharpens our knowledge on how the bones on the face can aid the application of makeup, because it is the bones that form the shape of the face.

### **Makeup Materials and Tools**

Knowing the necessary tool and materials is essential to every artist. The best way to achieve good makeup is by practice. Therefore, make yourself up and see what is wrong, then wipe it off and start again. Once the basic technique has been mastered, then it can be extended to include all other categories of makeup. However, to accomplish this, a variety of makeup materials are available from different manufacturers. The following materials are basic items that normally should be found in a makeup kit:

a) Face foundation: could be hard/ soft grease paints. It could also be in pancake form.

- b) Lining colours and rouges: these can be in the form of grease paint or dry, they are supplied in small tins.
- c) Eye pencils: these come in black and brown colours mostly.
- d) Mascara: this comes in tubes or block forms with brushes.
- e) Cleansers: cleansers come in both liquid and solid forms.
- f) Applicators: these are brushes that come in different sizes and are used for specific tasks.
- g) Powder and powder puffs – the translucent powder/baby powder used to set the makeup. The powder puff is a kind of applicator.
- h) Putties – the putty comes in wax form. It is used for building up facial features like the nose.
- i) Adhesives – adhesives are used for makeup effects and for attaching artificial hair and wigs (liquid latex and spirit gum).
- j) Loose artificial hair – this is known as crepe hair used for the creation of moustache and beards. It comes in black, grey, white and brown colours.
- k) Wigs – These are artificial hair made to suit any face.
- l) Lipstick – This comes in a different range of colours.

The following tips are recommended as suggestions on how upcoming actors/makeup amateurs can help themselves as they grow in the art of the theatre.

- It is important to regularly visit portrait galleries so as to study paintings and sculptures.
- Collect photographs of interesting faces.
- Look in photographer's windows.
- Photograph your friends for close-ups of faces.
- Carefully inspect masks, museums, and art galleries as well as those supplied on stage.
- Lastly, design and create your own face picture.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to encourage and educate actors on the use of makeup; to make them masters in applying their own makeup to achieve a desired character; and to build confidence in upcoming actors who with regular practice will become the stars of tomorrow.

Nevertheless, this paper does not intend to give the impression that the job of the makeup artist is less important than that of the other designers who contribute to the total creativity of the actor. While actors are encouraged to learn how to make themselves up, they are advised to rely on professional makeup artists when particularly difficult or unusual technical problems are presented.

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