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Review of Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *The Last Don*

Overview

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *The Last Don* published in 2024 by Pearl Publishers International LTD is a powerful and thought-provoking play that delves into the pervasive issue of sexual abuse within Nigerian tertiary institutions. Set against the backdrop of Academia, the play serves as a critical examination of the socio-cultural, economic, and political realities that define contemporary Nigerian society. Azunwo's work not only highlights the systemic failures that allow such abuses to persist but also calls for a collective awakening to the urgent need for reform and justice.

Storyline

The narrative unfolds in a university setting, where the character of The Don, a middle-aged, corrupt lecturer, exploits his position of power to manipulate female students. He engages in sexual coercion, demanding sexual favours in exchange for academic assistance. The play primarily follows the interactions between The Don and his students, particularly Celine, who finds herself caught in his web of exploitation. Dr. Felix, a principled lecturer, becomes aware of The Don's immoral activities and attempts to challenge him, advocating for the rights of the students. The tension escalates as The Don resorts to intimidation and violence to maintain his

dominance, culminating in a confrontation between the two characters that forces the university community to confront the pervasive culture of sexual abuse.

Contextual Background

Nigerian drama has historically been a medium for interrogating and evaluating the social realities of its time. From the colonial era to the present, playwrights have used the stage to reflect on societal issues, making it a vital part of cultural discourse. "The Last Don" fits into this tradition, tackling the sensitive topic of sexual violence against female students in universities, a subject that has garnered increasing attention in recent years due to numerous reported cases and societal outcry.

Plot Analysis

The play opens with a glimpse into the university environment, establishing it as a space meant for learning and moral development. However, this ideal is quickly subverted by the introduction of The Don, whose corrupt practices reveal the darker side of academia. As Celine seeks academic help, she becomes increasingly entangled in The Don's manipulative schemes. The audience witnesses her internal struggle as she grapples with the demands placed upon her. Dr. Felix's attempts to intervene highlight the growing tension between those who uphold integrity and those who exploit their power. The climax occurs when Dr. Felix confronts The Don, challenging his authority and exposing his corrupt practices. This moment is fraught with tension, as the stakes are raised for both characters. The confrontation serves as a turning point in the narrative, forcing the university community to reckon with the reality of sexual abuse.

Following the confrontation, the repercussions of The Don's actions begin to unfold. The play reveals the broader implications of sexual abuse on victims, emphasizing the emotional and psychological toll it takes on individuals. Dr. Felix's commitment to justice becomes increasingly evident as he works to support the victims and advocate for change. The resolution of the play underscores a glimmer of hope amidst

despair. While *The Don* faces potential consequences for his actions, the play leaves the audience with a sense of urgency to address the systemic issues that allow such abuses to persist. The final scenes call for collective action and societal change, emphasizing the need for reform within academic institutions.

Plot Narratives

The narrative is structured in a series of scenes that effectively build tension and develop character arcs. Azunwo employs sharp, impactful dialogue that reveals the underlying power dynamics and moral dilemmas faced by the characters. The pacing allows audiences to absorb the gravity of the issues presented while engaging with the emotional experiences of the characters.

The dialogue is rich with dramatic irony, particularly in the interactions between *The Don* and Dr. Felix. The audience is often left in suspense as they witness the unfolding conflict, knowing the potential consequences of *The Don's* actions. This technique serves to heighten the stakes and draw viewers deeper into the narrative.

Themes

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

At the heart of *The Last Don* is the theme of sexual abuse, which Azunwo explores through the character of *The Don*. This character embodies the predatory nature of certain academic figures who exploit their authority to manipulate vulnerable students. The play vividly depicts various forms of sexual abuse, including unwanted advances, harassment, and coercion for academic favors. *The Don's* interactions with female students, particularly Celine, illustrate the power dynamics at play. He offers academic assistance in exchange for sexual favors, creating a toxic environment where students are forced to compromise their dignity for educational advancement. This exploitation is not merely an individual failing; it reflects a broader societal decay where moral values have eroded, and the very institutions meant to foster knowledge and integrity are instead breeding grounds for corruption.

Corruption in Academia

Azunwo's portrayal of academia reveals a deeply entrenched culture of corruption that undermines the integrity of educational institutions. The Don's character is not an isolated example; he represents a systemic issue where faculty members prioritize personal gain over their ethical obligations to students. The play exposes how this corruption permeates every level of the academic hierarchy, from the administration to the classroom. Dr. Felix emerges as a counterpoint to The Don, embodying the struggle for integrity within a compromised system. His attempts to challenge The Don's immoral practices highlight the difficulty of fighting against entrenched corruption. The play suggests that while there are individuals committed to righteousness, they often face insurmountable obstacles in their quest for justice.

Resistance and Hope

Despite the overwhelming darkness that pervades *The Last Don* Azunwo infuses the narrative with a sense of hope through characters like Dr. Felix. His unwavering commitment to justice and his willingness to confront The Don serve as a beacon of resistance against the tide of corruption and abuse.

The play suggests that change is possible, but it requires collective action and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. Dr. Felix's character illustrates that while the battle against sexual abuse and exploitation is fraught with challenges, it is a fight worth undertaking. His determination to protect his students and uphold the values of integrity and morality serves as a rallying cry for audiences to engage in the fight for justice.

Character Analysis

The Don

An antagonist, manipulative, corrupt, and self-serving. The Don is the embodiment of the systemic issues within academia, representing the exploitation of power dynamics that allow sexual abuse to thrive. His character serves as a stark reminder of the dangers posed by those in positions of authority who abuse their power for personal gain.

Dr. Felix

A protagonist, ethical, courageous, and principled. Dr. Felix stands as a moral compass in the narrative, representing the struggle for integrity within a corrupt system. His character arc demonstrates the complexities of fighting against established norms and the personal sacrifices required to uphold one's values.

Celine

She is the victim of exploitation vulnerable yet resilient. Celine's character highlights the plight of many female students who face pressure and coercion within academic settings. Her journey reflects the internal conflict many victims experience as they navigate the demands placed upon them by those in power.

Structure and Style

The Last Don is structured in a series of scenes that effectively build tension and develop character arcs. Azunwo employs sharp, impactful dialogue that reveals the underlying power dynamics and moral dilemmas faced by the characters. The play's pacing allows audiences to absorb the gravity of the issues presented while also engaging with the emotional experiences of the characters.

Dramatic Techniques

Azunwo's use of dramatic irony, particularly in the interactions between The Don and Dr. Felix, enhances the emotional weight of the narrative. The audience is often left in suspense as they witness the unfolding conflict, knowing the potential consequences of The Don's actions. This technique serves to heighten the stakes and draw viewers deeper into the narrative.

Additionally, the play employs symbolism to convey its themes. The university setting itself becomes a character in the narrative, representing both a place of learning and a site of moral decay. The contrast between the ideals of academia and the reality of corruption serves to underscore the urgency of the issues at hand.

Societal Relevance

Addressing Sexual Abuse

The main theme of the play focuses on the sexual abuse of female university students, a significant concern in Nigeria and various regions globally. By bringing attention to this societal problem, Azunwo participates in vital conversations regarding gender-based violence and the infringement of human rights. The characters, especially the Don, represent the entrenched misuse of authority, exploiting vulnerable learners for their own interests. This depiction resonates with real-life experiences of similar exploitation, emphasizing the critical need for societal reform.

Moral Decay in Academia

Azunwo provides a sharp analysis of the ethical decline present in academic institutions, proposing that these establishments, which should foster principled leaders, are in fact nurturing corruption. The play showcases how patriarchal systems allow offenders to act without consequences, often suppressing victims through the fear of being stigmatized. This mirrors wider societal problems where those who have experienced sexual violence are often pushed to the margins and their stories dismissed.

The Role of Authority Figures

Dr. Felix symbolizes the battle against corruption, reflecting the pursuit of justice and integrity within a flawed system. His dedication to opposing the Don's immoral actions acts as a light of hope, indicating that meaningful change can occur even when confronted with significant challenges. This interaction highlights the necessity for accountability among those in positions of power in both educational environments and broader society.

Artistic Expression

Azunwo skillfully employs dialogue and character development to communicate the emotional depth of the topic. The exchanges among characters are filled with tension, highlighting the intricacies of power, fear, and ethical decisions. The play's organization, featuring intense scenes and powerful confrontations, captivates the audience and encour-

ages thoughtful contemplation on the moral consequences of the characters' behaviors.

Conclusion

The Last Don is a compelling and thought-provoking play that addresses critical issues within Nigerian society, particularly in the realm of education. Azunwo's work serves as a powerful commentary on the need for reform in academic institutions, urging society to confront the realities of sexual abuse and corruption. Through its exploration of complex themes and richly developed characters, the play challenges audiences to reflect on their roles in combating these issues and advocating for justice.

Recommendation

This play is a must-read for anyone interested in social justice, gender studies, and the complexities of the educational system. It provokes a revolutionary thought for the cleansing and restoration of the hallowedness of the university. Azunwo's narrative encourages audiences to engage with the pressing issues of our time and to take action against the injustices that persist within our society. The Last Don is not just a play; it is a call to action, urging individuals to rise up against the forces of corruption and to champion the cause of justice. As the characters navigate the treacherous waters of academia, they remind us of the importance of integrity, morality, and the relentless pursuit of truth in the face of adversity.