

About the Book

The book is a reminder of the functionality and dysfunctionality of the society. It also discusses the role of art and the artist in identifying and correcting the various ills and vices therein. However, this book is recommended for everybody.

Professor Ayobami Olubunmi Akinwale

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Indeed, all the scholarly contributions are convincing enough for us to assume that this critical work is part of the growing trends of scholarly explorations that are artistically crafted to address socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural challenges that are confronting Africans, and the world at large.

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Dynamics in The Dramaturgy of

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African Culture and Performance Dynamics in the Dramaturgy of AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye



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Ilorin, Kwara State and Department of Theatre and
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Ritualising the Dramaturgy of Neo-alienation Style in Selected Plays Directed by AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye



Arinde, Tayo Simeon, Ph.D.

Introduction

There have been shades of debates, arguments and counter-arguments as to when theatre began and the cradle of the art. Some scholars amongst who are Wilson and Goldfarb (2000, p.10) who claim that: "it started around 5 BC in Greece." As the discourse rages on and perhaps, having searched available records, Wilson and Goldfarb were quick to make a categorical submission that: "no one knows exactly how theatre originated. We know where it emerged: in Greece in the fifth century B.C..." Consequently, they concluded that: "We are concerned not with the origins of the theatre, but with how it developed once it becomes established." (p.10). It is in this same direction that a chronicle of conscious efforts, like Wilson and Goldfarb attempt is done by x-raying the development that live theatre performances witnessed in this paper. Consequently, an attempt is made to put together, scholars and practitioners' ingenuous contributions to making the theatre witness artistic turn-around. This we do by recounting the developmental track of artistic record of tremendous ingenuity that manifests in different production styles that theatre scholars have invented. This paper notes these inventions, which were the means through which the theatre has remained continually inviting to theatre patrons.

Since the art of the theatre became part and parcel of man in his social domain, the need to improve on its mode of delivery as a true medium of exciting socio-cultural antidote, has witnessed tremendous transformations world over; from imitation, to role-playing and to story-telling. As these transformations unfold, styles that did not just make putting plays on stage but making it inviting and rewarding for theatre goers, became the concerns of theatre technocrats. The manifestations of their efforts are found in the various stylistic approaches, methods, techniques and mode of making plays that are truly theatrical menu for patrons of live theatre performances.

In this paper therefore, efforts is geared towards examining the stylistic contribution of a theatre scholar, AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye, whose scholarly contribution (Neo-alienation style) draws from the ritual of "non-cultic". This effort Kirk (1974) cited in Uwatt (2002,p.14) describes as: "those designed to promote fertility in the broadest terms and those connected with social and biological status." His consistency and ritualistic disposition in using his propounded style made us to embark on an exploration of the Dramaturgy of his 'Neo-alienation style' as he ritualistically applies them in some selected plays that he had directed. This is with a view to underscoring his ingenuity, consistency and his experimental contribution to the aesthetics of performance that has made live theatre subsists.

Clarification of Terms and Concepts

Some terms and concepts permeate this paper that we opined may need some clarification as they are used in the context of this work. They include: *ritual*, *dramaturgy* and *Neo-alienation*.

By *Ritual*, we mean actions that constantly run through a person's skill, creativity, or simply put, artistic nuances. *Dramaturgy*, in the context of this work, represents the directorial techniques used by a play director in the scenic compositions of his directed plays. In defining *Neo-alienation*, the paper adopts the theorist's definition, which describes the technique as a theatre style that: "create an alternative vision on stage iconography,...relies heavily on *theatre of performance*, rather than *theatre of literature*,...a realistic working of the robust African festival theatre" (Adeoye 2009, p.vii). These definitions are adopted as representing how the words are applied in the context and content of this work.

Literature Review

Prior to late 19th and early 20th Century, employing an approach that one can refer to as styles in the theatre was not pronounced. Style in the theatre, according to a submission in the theatrecrafts.com (2018, n.p), emerging styles in the theatre came as:

An attempts to create a perfect illusion of reality through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies: detailed, three-dimensional settings; everyday speech forms (prose over poetry); a secular world-view (no ghosts, spirits or gods intervening in the human action); an exclusive focus on subjects that are contemporary and indigenous (no exotic, otherworldly or fantastic locales, nor historical or mythic time-periods); an extension of the social range of characters portrayed (away from the aristocrats of classical drama, towards bourgeois and eventually working-class protagonists); and a style of acting that attempts to recreate the impression of reality (often by seeking complete

identification with the role, understood in terms of its 'given circumstances', which, again, transcribe Darwinian motifs into performance, as advocated by Stanislavski).

The above narrative opened us to the first attempt to define the essence of style as a tool of bringing plays truthfully to the view pleasure of theatre audience. This also tallies with Willett (1982, p.15) who, in reflecting on various aspects of contributions on Brecht submits that: "Changes in his exterior continually lead to an inner reshuffling...We have to show changes as they are." Drawing from this, theatre scholars see the need to put dynamism into performances in the theatre as a way of constantly reacting to social changes. The effort, which Huizhu (nd, n.p.) in his praise for previous edition of *Performance Studies: An Introduction* cited in Schechner (2013, p. ii) says: "Isn't merely the musings of a theatre director who never stops innovating. It is a global thinker's striking, historic way of understanding human nature from a surprisingly practical perspective, which can be adopted in countless areas at numerous levels" This, no doubt, is the reason for the various innovations that come in new styles that are propounded by theatre theorists and players in the business of performing arts. From all intent and purposes, they are with a view to providing answers to challenges that confront human race on regular basis.

Theatre in responding to the dynamic nature of life and in keying into the societal yearnings have the following theatre scholars: David Garrick (1717-1779), Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Lee Strasberg (1901-1982) and Stella Adler (1901-1992), to mention just a few, made significant contributions to theatre development through the various styles that they have invented. For instance, David Garrick, a British actor, Manager and Playwright, made unforgettable contribution to the reforms, to the extent that his rapid change of passion and humour in both the way he switches his voice and gesture make him to be referred to as the father of *transubstantiation*. Transubstantiation is the ability of an actor to switch from one role to another without traces of the former nuances in the current role.

Stanislavski, who propounded the theory known as *System*, emphasises method acting, an approach where actor uses subliminal to create a truthful action on stage to the believability of the audience. Bertolt Brecht, in his contribution, radically departed from the postulation of Stanislavski's concept of emotional recall, which recommends that the actor live truthfully the character. Brecht proposes learning from past historical errors of judgment and alienating from the effect, which he christened *Verfremdungs effect*. Just like Brecht, Strasberg, although drew from Stanislavski's *Method acting*, embellished with lively trialling and passion. This he describes as a recall from affective memory. Another contribution to theatre development and performance canon is found in the postulation of Stella Adler, who emphasises that the theatre exists in imagination. Therefore, the actor's emotional concerns

into captivity. The Sango's mistress, Oya who is rechristened Magdalena is sold to a Frenchman, Talbot. Talbot seeing her beauty decides to take her as a wife, and together they live until the Frenchman decides he wants to go home. Consequent upon this, he decides to sell all his property including Magdalena, his wife and children. This angers Magdalena and she poisons Talbot, an action that leads to the freedom of the black race from the shackles of slavery.

On the other hand, Kola Ogunmola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1972) (An Opera), which enumerates the follies and foibles, vanity and futility of human desperation, revolves around Lanke (Omuti), a young man who becomes addicted to palmwine drinking. He, in his sleep, dreamt that his palmwine tapper confidant, Alaba, falls from a palm tree and dies. Lanke, in his quest to unravel why Alaba should die, decides to go to the land of the dead to bring Alaba back. During his journey to the abysmal world of the spirits, he meets a young beautiful lady (Bisi) that falls in love with him. He gets to the land of the dead where he found Alaba, who says he will not be able to return with him, but gives him an egg with an instruction that anytime he needs palmwine he should throw the egg into a bowl of water, assuring him that the water will turn to palmwine. He tests it as Alaba directed in the process of the excitement that trails the magic egg, the egg falls and brakes signifying Alaba's second death. It was in this painful mood that Lanke's friends come to wake him up from his dream and charge him to prepare for his wedding to Bisi.

Neo-Alienation in the Production of *Tornadoes Full of Dreams* and *The Palmwine Drinkard*

The two plays that were directed by Adeoye, which have been selected for these analyses were produced for the Convocation Ceremonies of the University of Ilorin in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Directing Bode Sowande's *Tornadoes Full of Dreams*, according to Adeoye (2015, p.4) was: "Directing history...as reliving reality in which the African "pasts"-tribulations, victories, wars, betrayals, disasters, weakness and strengths are dramatised on the living stage." In the same token, in directing Kola Ogunmola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*, Adeoye (2016, p.4), stating his directorial interpretation of the play, submits that his direction epitomises:

The re-invention of folkloric tradition of the Yoruba Opera in which the interplay of folk songs, chants, myths, proverbs, magical displays, and so on, are connected to other aspects of the African total theatre aesthetics... (and), also draws its strength from the trado-modern dance, and a little spice of the enervating popular music.

A close study of the making of the two plays under examination reveals that Adeoye used not less than six, out of the twelve theatrical aesthetics of his Neo-alienation style. This in

essence is an indication that not all the twelve theatrical aesthetic features of the style, may be deployed in a scoop in all the play productions that a director is working on. Nevertheless, it does not indicate that the style was not exhaustively employed, giving the fact that plays differ in terms of genre, plot layout, elements, technical demands and story structure. Some of the theatrical aesthetics employed in the plays under examination are enumerated in this paper to include: The aesthetic of theme song of audience/players' systemic fraternisation; the aesthetics of artistic deconstruction; the aesthetics of human props and demystification; multiple narrators' aesthetics; photoramic/captions' aesthetics; the modern operatic aesthetics; trado-modern dance aesthetics; and the critical recalling curtain call aesthetics. These theatrical aesthetics are explicated as follows.

The modern operatic aesthetics; trado-modern dance aesthetics; and the critical recalling curtain call aesthetics

The Aesthetic of Audience/players' Systemic Fraternisation

One of the styles that Adeoye constantly employs in his play productions and in keeping to the concept of his Neo-alienation style, is the *performance aesthetics of audience/players' fraternisation*. He does this by exciting fraternisation between his players (actors) and the audience. Usually, he introduces a song that will be easy for the audience to understand, as well as direct his actors to hold materials that will be shared in form of information leaflets that usually contain theme and sub-themes of the play. This he artistically does by demystifying the concept of the fourth wall, promoting call and response or questions and answers fraternisation. In doing this, an actor raises a song while the audience reacts, thereby promoting systemic fraternisation. As he did in *Palmwine Drinkard* with the following songs:

Call: Talo bami romo mi (2x) o	Call: Has anybody seen my child for me
Response: Jalolo jalolo	Response: Jalolo jalolo
	And
Call: Emu oguro mo moriki re o	Call: Palmwine I know your appellation
Response: Momo riki reo	Response: I know your appellation

The Aesthetics of Human Props and Demystification

In play performances, properties, which for short is called 'props' in the theatre, plays significant role in giving meanings to the content of the play, status of the character and environmental description. In the play, *The Palmwine Drinkard* human props was used in a way that the hitherto sacrosanct unmovable static property is demystified, not only made

mobile, but made functional as part of the player. This is shown in the picture in figure 1 below:



Figure 1(a) and (b): Aesthetic of Human Props and Demystification (Source:- Unilorin Educational Technology)

In picture (a) and (b) above, the two palm trees are made mobile; closeness in (a) and a split in (b), an artistic manoeuvring of human in the property of a palm tree. Adeoye employs this in the production of *The Palmwine Drinkard* as an artistic tact, to create a sustained illusion, and to demystify the fact that properties that are classified unmovable is capable of moving for the purpose of creating a lasting aesthetics in the mind of the audience, thus transforming the theatre into house of realistic happenings

Multiple Narrators' Aesthetics

The use of narrator(s) in a play production is one of those artistic tactics to keep a performance flowing, removing intermission that often bring boredom, as well as detach audience from undue suspension. This is to ensure that there is a free flow of information in the theatre. Narrator is introduced to further promote fraternisation between the actors and the audience. This artistic ingenuity Adeoye employed, during the production of Bode Sowande's *Tornadoes Full of Dreams*, was performed at the Performing Arts Theatre of the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, to mark the University's 32nd Convocation Ceremonies and the 40th Year Anniversary of the University on 19th October, 2016.

In the production, Adeoye, relishing of the concept of *multiple narration aesthetics*, live faithfully to this by not just introducing two narrators but four. Apparently, to create a lasting cultural aesthetic in the mind of the audience when one looks at the costumes that the narrators are clad in as shown in the pictures in figure 2(a) and (b) below:

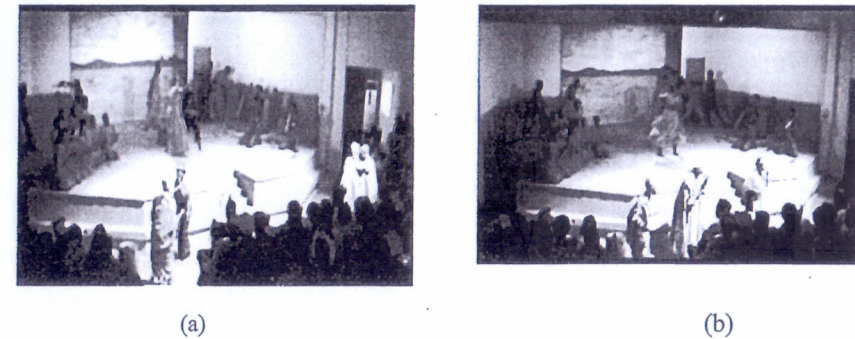


Figure 2(a) and (b) Multiple Narrators' aesthetic in the play 'Tornadoes Full of Dreams' (Source: Unilorin Educational Technology)

Photographic/captions' Aesthetics

The word, photoramic, according to street directory (2018, p.1), "is a compilation of images that are used to express a certain theme...a photographic compilation forming a single image...often photographic, but can include others types of media such as art drawings, painted backgrounds and other graphic images."

Adeoye, explores this artistic ingenuity, deposited in the repertory of the set designer, to bring to the aesthetic pleasure of the audience a photoramic/captions' aesthetics, visibly made manifest in the set designs for the production of both *Tornadoes Full of Dreams* and *The Palmwine Drinkard*. Used to express certain theme, locale, and given circumstances, as contained in the photographs in figure 3 below are photoramic/captions' aesthetics:

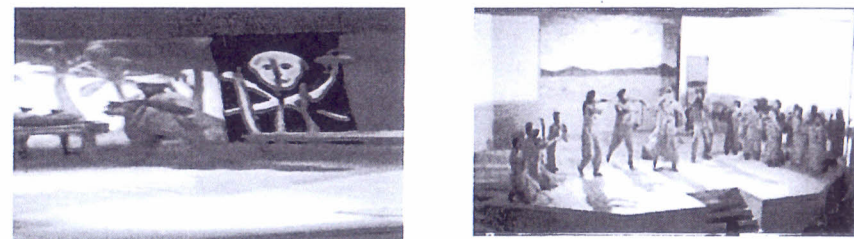


Figure 3 (a) Photographic/captions' aesthetics Figure 3 (b) Photographic/captions' aesthetics



Figure 3 (c) Photoramic/captions' aesthetics
(Source: Educational Technology, Unilorin)

The backgrounds of the pictures in figure 3 (a), (b) and (c) above are compilations of images and captions, which showcase the artistic tact, figurative personifying images in photoramic/captions' aesthetics that Adeoye deploys in expressing significant moments in the plays under examination. Figure 3 (a) and (c) are artistic photoramic expressions indicating the "Death" grotto and different locales of forest scenes in the play *The Palmwine Drinkard* while the picture in figure 3 (b) is a photoramic display of an open place where Sango and Ogun met in a battle of supremacy. The above photoramic/captions are by no mean exhaustive of others that are prevalent in the plays.

The Modern Operatic Aesthetics and Trado-modern Dance Aesthetics

Although, what we today refer to as 'modern' is a concept which Gbilekaa (2016, p.17) painfully expresses as: "Born and nursed in a hostile atmosphere...in which the imperial holocaust had dealt a deadly blow to African social relation and communitarian values associated with the village mode of production." This notwithstanding, Adeoye in his utilitarian sagacity explores the aesthetics of modern dance and this was uneconomically used in the play *Tornadoes full of Dreams* as captured in the picture in figure 4 below:



Figure 4

Modern dance aesthetics: The players dance to a modern song signifying the freedom of the slaves. (Source: Educational Technology, Unilorin)

In another development, Adeoye, through the visible experimentation of the use of Neo-alienation style, a pro-thesis of Brecht epic of holistic theatre motif dance explored with music and drama, would not in the area of dance use both modern and traditional dances in plays he directs. Below is the traditional dances done by Sango and his acolytes in the pictures in figure 5 (a) and (b).



Figure 5(a)



Figure 5 (b)

Sango and his acolytes doing a Traditional dance to a modern drum ensemble

The Critical Recalling Curtain Call Aesthetics

There are two important segments in play production and performance processes that must be treated with artistic finesse attention. The first being the opening of a play, which is the first contact an audience have with a play and by extension the first visual impression. The second being the closing of a play, an event that normally leaves an enduring and a lasting impression in the mind of the audience, eventually, culminating in a lasting experience. The closing is the curtain call and all the ceremonies that showcase the aesthetics of a meaningful play ending. Not minding the fact that the use of 'curtain' in this modern era is archaic, yet, it subsists based on the fact that the expression 'draw the curtain' usually signals the end of an event. One would then understand why curtain call is still relevant in theatrical performances.

Out of the twelve possibilities that Adeoye enumerates as features of Neo-alienation style, one that he pays attention to is the curtain call. Little wonder why he describes the event as a 'Critical recalling curtain call aesthetics'. This are pictorially illustrated in figures 7 (a) to (e) below:

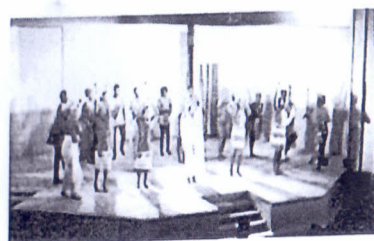


Figure 7 (a)



Figure 7 (b)



Figure 7 (c)



Figure 7 (d)



Figure 7 (e)

The above pictures chronicled simultaneous curtain call arrangements in Adeoye's directed plays, especially those of *Tornadoes Full of Dreams*. (Source: Educational Technology, Unilorin)

Conclusion

Although, twelve aesthetics possibilities are the features of Neo-Alienation style propounded by AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye, it is obvious that all the twelve features may not be put to use in every play production, in order to avoid aesthetics suffocation. In the two productions under examination, there were robust uses of seven out of the twelve aesthetic possibilities in Adeoye's directing style. Our findings reveal that the use of the Neo-alienation style, undoubtedly, provides lasting aesthetics in the production of the plays under

examination. It is also this paper's finding that if a play director faithfully uses the Neo-alienation style in his/her directed plays. He/she would have minimised the problem of intermission. Consequent upon this, this paper recommends that theatre scholars should be more prolific in evolving more production styles that will make theatre more inviting thereby making life theatre an enduring art.

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