

PERFORMANCE, STYLE AND DIRECTORSHIP: REFLECTIONS ON TUNJI AZEEZ'S STAGING OF SOYINKA'S *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN*

Olympus G. Ejue
Department of Theatre Arts,
University of Abuja,
Abuja.
olympusflex@gmail.com

Abstract

On the Nigerian stage new play directors are emerging. Many of whom are bestriding the Nigerian stage with conscious combinations of directorial styles that transcend realism and naturalism and at the same time nourishing the aesthetic and ideological underpinning of their chosen plays. One of such directors is Tunji Azeez. It is assumed that; the directorial approach of any production resides in the artistic truthfulness, intensity and dramatic manipulations of concepts/theories within a chosen production philosophy emanating from a play director. From the aforementioned, varying choices abound for a play director to make the best decision, that will achieve greater standard of aesthetic value of excellence in a production are adopted in the staging of *Death and the King's Horseman* at the Lagos State University in 2008 as part of the convocation ceremony for that year. However, the review probes critically some maladies and challenges afflicting the dexterity and visual projections in recent literary theatre productions. This is due to the inability of some modern directors being able to draw a line between what could be considered as commercial or/and non – commercial theatre before a particular audience. On the strength of this; the paper investigates how the play director's obligations and substance can go beyond the directorial dictates of realism and naturalism to propose some culture – based conceptual reorientation in the staging of the play. In the play, Tunji adapts historic conventions and norms to create a performance that best meet the need of his audience. The article adopts an analytical, participant observation through watching the performance and interview methods. The paper concludes that; the play director had engaged varying directorial techniques that entrenched a materialist critique to foreground and examine ideologically determined beliefs and unconscious habitual perceptions of modern societies not being able to produce true heroes.

Key Words: Director/Directorial, Performance, Audience, Stage, Style.

Introduction

Shakespeare once held forth through Hamlet that: the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure (Hamlet iii, 2:91). This is an indication that theatre bear no resemblance of life; hence live human beings (actors) are the tools upon which typical life experiences are staged for a target audience. Nonetheless, due to the challenges which the reality of our beleaguered existence has imposed on us as a people, every theatre director, it is believed, must pass through an awe-inspiring state that is complex and at the same time be able to evoke a sense of the transcendent, mystical or sublime. This requires artistic supervision, coordination, unique style and rehearsal. It is believed to be a special effort; talent and ability geared towards helping the audience distinguish the substance, form and technique(s) used by the various artists partaking in a play production. This seeming complexity, according to one of the great theatre directors in modern directing history - Peter Brook believes that: theatre production is like climbing a mountain; the summit is never reached (Owusu, 2013:261). This is especially so, as the non – commercial theatres in the ivory towers are habitually encumbered with a play's budget and its demands on the wardrobe, play - readings and workshops that are, most times, tortuous for the director to handle. Again, artistic directors are a bit limited to a company of untried talent (actors) they can cast or stage particular plays with. Therefore, artistic directors of non – commercial theatres are psychologically fixated with the enormous tasks of certifying not only for their theatres to be constantly patronized, but to also meet up with the educational desires of those theatres. This implies that in developing a receptive audience and keeping the theatre afloat, several hurdles need to be scaled through by any theatre director attempting to find an appropriate home where his/her production can take root and consequently grow.

This paper is therefore, set out amongst others to investigate how searching for theory (ies) or adopting how selecting what appears to be a best style otherwise known as eclecticism can engender certain dramatic pathos from amongst audience members in a performance. Tunji Azeez - the director of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* as Lagos State University

convocation play for 2008, seemed to have dealt with the psychic state of man, cultural breakdown, and reciprocal distrust using an existential philosophy as his directorial base. Yet, in the context of existentialism my understanding of his directorial concept did not graphically demonstrate the meaninglessness of situations that can be found in an absurdist play. Rather, it was simply what Bamidele (2000: 94) describes as the recognition of the incompatibilities between the intensity of physical life and the certainty of death. It is an exposition of the conflict between man's insistent reasoning and the non-rational world he inhabits. In fact, like an avant-garde exploring the world, Tunji employed a stylized approach through which a graphic and picturesque interpretation of the play is realised on stage.

Although it is essential for a play director to give proper attention to the period in which the play is set, but how far can his/her quest for period accuracy achieve excitement whilst following the requirements of the script? It is in this guise that Tunji to an extent employed symbolic treatments within a realistic production in order to heighten dramatic tension and give the performance a greater stage effect. Besides, it is believed that, in the performance of a historical play or period play, for instance; history comes alive by taking a leap from the page to the stage, while theatrical conventions of the distant past are vividly recalled." (Umukoro, 2010:145). This practical visualization or realisation explains the artistic director's show of a complementary attitude towards the playwright's script as a material for the performance. Undeniably, directing *Death and the King's Horseman* reveals this director as one, whose adherents sought to represent feelings and moods rather than objective reality: which often distorts forms and colour in order to flourish in the stage performance. In the stage performance, one experiences a represented external reality in a highly stylized and subjective manner, attempting to convey a psychological or spiritual reality rather than a record of actual events. Otherwise, how would one interrogate the director's choice of casting a woman to play as *Olohun Iyo*, the *praise singer* to *Elesin Oba*? This is undoubtedly employing stylization in order to escalate the performance and enable it lift to a more telling effect.

Synopsis of *Death and the King's horseman*

In *Death and the King's Horseman*, Soyinka reveals an African traditional world in which traditional rites form a predominant part of the play. The plot of the play is based on a real life situation which took place in Oyo town 1946. Alafin is dead, and tradition demands that *Elesin Oba* (the king's Horseman) should voluntarily commit suicide in order to make the Oba's passage (transition) to the ancestral abode a peaceful and smooth one. This traditional obligation *Elesin Oba* fails to carry out due to his pathological weakness for beautiful women, thereby presenting himself as one who prefers carnal pleasure to spiritual empathy. This act of changing the direction of a unique sacred task led to a delay long enough to attract the attention of the District officer, Mr Pilkings who ignorantly commits an abomination as he arrest *Elesin Oba* thereby disrupting the rite of passage.

The news of the Alafin's death, prompted *Olunde*, *Elesin Oba*'s son to journey home from London where he is studying Medicine with the view to burying his father. However, on reaching home, news and realization that his father (*Elesin Oba*) was still alive, meaning that he (*Elesin Oba*) had failed to engage in the ritualization of death, this impelled *Olunde* to commit suicide in place of his father. This swift act by *Olunde* became a reanimation of *Elesin Oba*'s languid spirit, who out of surprise, embarrassment and shame commits suicide himself.

Directorial Power/Concept

Along with making the choice of play, casting flawlessly, arriving at superb artistic decisions in terms of interpretation and production philosophy; a play director must embrace aesthetic style(s) of whether the play needs to be performed in a presentational or representational; illusionistic or non-illusionistic manner. All of these are what form the production's unity which he (director) tackles during rehearsals. In this semblance; Gbilekka (2013:174) believes that a director is a master craftsman, and artist of the theatre who combines artistic leadership with an overall knowledge of the theatre. This view assumes that, through the theatricalization of humour, excitement, spectacle and provocative dramatic irony in *Death and the King's Horseman*, the play director essentially had to create a perception of proper balance, variety, point of emphasis, and great dramatic meaning that carries the story's ingenious ideas of interpretation and other embellishments through. This is owing to the fact that, it is most times

a peculiarly indefinable job. He makes conscious use of fastidious speech pattern and sensitivity to language, physical movements, definite poses, gestures, and voice inflections in a graphic representation of the play. For example, all the actors seems to have been given explicit instruction(s) to pay attention to the music and dance steps that is akin to the *bata* drumming and dance prototype.

Aesthetic Elements/Concepts

Applying Richard Schechner's concept of performer – training, the play director – Tunji Azeez-propelled the actors towards achieving artistic skills, aesthetic ideas and beliefs with which they achieved the interpretation of the dramatic text. There is no gainsaying that he considered the playwright's text primacy in generating performance and theatre. Through rigorous training and exercises the actors attained flexibility that engendered them towards interpreting the variety of events in the text in different styles as if replicating the emphasis of Stanislavski and Grotowski's training for self- expression as an example. Tunji had gone on to lay emphasis on self- knowledge in developing character that is totally truthful, convincing and believable.

Indeed, through an eclectic directorial style, the actors became transparent and almost faithful to their roles. This is an indication that the director understood the idea of performance text and performance knowledge as he combines dance, music, songs, gestures, words, pantomime, costumes, incantations, masquerading and a network of artistic behaviours which the actors use to transmit their message. It reveals that, a director's knowledge as a theorist and critic cannot suffer complexes, particularly that; a person cannot teach what he does not understand (Nwezi, 1988:9). In *Death and the King's Horseman* for example, the director should rather focus on the evocation of the mystery and ritual of Yoruba life than just simplifying its thematic preoccupation to a 'clash of cultures' dramatization. In fact, this style is not with regards to the politics of recontextualizing the play, but by proving revealing insights into ways in which meaning(s) is/are adopted as cultural appropriation rather than adaptation. This tends to be in line with the playwright's preface to a would-be producer/director of the play. He cautions that; a director should rather direct his vision instead to the far more difficult and risky task of eliciting the play's threnodic essence (Soyinka, 1982: authors note).

This inimitable temperament of the director seems not only to gauge and harness the individual talent of the actor(s), but also other theatre workers and collaborators. It is perhaps in this regards that Brown (1997:135) submits that, a director must help the actors, and the designers, composers, technicians, and every other member of the team so that they work to the best of their own abilities for the production. This is evidenced in the way and manner we perceived the actors on stage with line – delivery and actions that edify them (actors) as 'formally controlled' through the directorial uniqueness and sometimes hostile actions of the director. It is this clout that Musa (2004:174) sees as "that unique power that makes the theatre director a **primus inter pares** among other theatre workers". It is however, worthy to note that; depending on how and the manner in which the director employs his power and concept; his production can both witness a commemorating success or a smothering and counterproductive performance. A case in point is that which reveals the physical character portrayal through costuming and speech pattern of Mr and Mrs Pilkings. At this instance, the personality of the director in the meanings of their speech, socio/economic status and their interrelationship with others on stage tend to amplify race, beliefs, mood, environment, genetics and consequent success of the play.

Seeing the play on stage, one is quick to observe that; the play director also evolved romantic techniques that foreshadowed elements of realism and expressionism. He was obviously more interested in creating mood, imagination and atmosphere than in developing complete believable characters on stage. This could be due to lack of sufficient time to rehearse, particularly so that the students (actors) still and all, need to essentially give attention to other literary pursuits within the same time frame a would director require of their "souls". For example, the outlook and gesticulations of Sergeant Amusa and his two constables at a converted cloth stall in the market with the agitated hum of women made the 'Native Administration' policemen look like clowns and unserious even with their batons out. Indeed, this action(s) appeared to be imbued with an excellent challenge of rigid artistic categorizations and aesthetic convention of character(s) presentation on stage. This dramatization rather

propelled an appreciation of the external nature of Sergeant Amusa and the two constables. Perhaps, in keeping with the concept of the production, the play director did not see anything wrong with employing symbolic treatment within a realistic production, in order to give the performance greater dramatic effect. From a stylization point of view; Hobbs (1995:89) believes that, this necessity can arise in certain instances, when the effect required could not possibly be presented with enough power in normal realistic terms. Alternately, and in my opinion, most hopefully the audience should be made to see this whole sequence as exciting and depicting the feeling of combat through a stylized approach that expresses something in an amorous, idealistic or sentimental way. This way, the play director would have achieved a more poignant telling effect.

Staging the Rite of Passage

There are two essential generic ideas for the director, Brockett (1974: 465) reminds us that, there are two schools of thought of which one sees him as an interpretative artist whose purpose is to serve the playwright by translating the script as faithfully as possible into theatrical form. The other views him as a creative artist who uses all the elements of theatre, of which the script is merely one, to fashion his own art work." This was confirmed in an interview the author had with the play director. He explains his directorial approach thus:

As a director, I don't get limited by theoretical positions...maybe it's safe to say that my directorial style is eclectic. In the case of *Death and the King's Horseman*, I found it difficult to subject such a culturally rich play to some limiting Euro – American directorial dictates (8th December, 2017).

This becomes crystal clear that, going by the second school of thought as revealed by Brockett, a director as a master artist, can exude the liberty of shaping scenery, costumes, lighting, and other dramatic elements as best gratifying to him/her with a view to increasing the chances of enhancement and realization of a play on stage. Against this backdrop, one observes Tunji's posture as a director assuming some responsibilities of the playwright as he strives to convey the message of the play as truthfully as he could, thereby making him his own writer – adapter.

Tunji premised his staging of ritualized communal tragedy in traditional African societies using different phases of socio/cultural processes associated with a compelling adaptation of dramatic elements among ethnic groups to their external environment. Artistically speaking, the experience of *Death and the King's Horseman* on stage is a transformative traditional rite in a stylistic manner that conjures communal rejuvenation through supernatural forces. Tunji's creative power manoeuvre his cast, costume, make – up, mask, orchestral accompaniment, dance, solo, narration and chant exposed the audience to a supernatural, transformative and effective process of ritual drama exposing the cosmic continuum within which man situates his fearful existence. This is in tandem with the reasoning of Turner in Dasylyva (1996:4) that, institutionalized ritualizations of the transformative process or activities are usually employed under circumstances especially specified for communication with supernatural forces believed to be the source of all effects. This cultural process as typified by the actors as they reveal major classifications and contradictions of the significant series of changes happen naturally. Through the actions on stage, the actors anchored their skilfulness in the paradigm inherent in the experiences and philosophy of the Yoruba cosmology. It is a peoples' mythology in which the play comes alive as part of contemporary experience that the people can cherish and benefit from.

It is common sense that, for a would-be director of a play like *Death and the King's Horseman* which has come under severe attack, particularly, by African critics of Marxist persuasion who see the play as extremely brutal, barbaric and instigating meaningless deaths; to be more artistically and creatively geared up in the process of interpreting the play especially on the contemporary Nigerian stage, that would – be director must be very tactful. Above and beyond this; one perceives that the plot and even language of the play for example, can be extremely complex and tortuous if handled with kid-gloves. Therefore, such a director in the words of Wilson Knight must make a leap to the inward meaning and use the play's surface as expression (Cited in Ejue, 2013:243). Consequently, the theatrical potential and peculiarities of traditional ritual actions in staging the cosmic human condition may still require certain restrictiveness by a play director. Layiwola (2001) said:

It is difficult to draw the line between what constitutes a residuum of ritual, and what constitute real – life theatre. There is always a total theatre context where songs, music, mime, action and dialogue commingle, and one is often left in no doubt that visual images are contrived derivatives of the rituals and festivals, we see at harvest along the boulevards and the arena of kings (p.220).

However, in order to achieve the aim of the performance, the play director exploits ritualistic elements in a manner that the same elements of dance, song, chant; masks and music in a total theatre paradigm are used to reinforce the mystique and didactic thrust of his directorial style. In the play performance, Tunji explores the richness of songs, dance and spectacle to enact the representation of a mythical personality of a human actor. The dexterous depiction of Elesin Oba's individualization of character on stage with a conscious mental reaction accompanied by detailed physiological and behavioural changes explains the African cosmology in terms of carriage, gestures, speech mannerism, which expresses the significance of the role of the traditional carrier. Clearly, the audience witnessed an Elesin Oba whose blockings revealed him a visibly – stunned celebrity through definite sequence of movements and gestures; as he makes efforts to indenture the extra-terrestrial continuum within which he allays his innate fears. In fact, Elesin Oba adhered to these predefined typologies of actions as assigned to him such that Mr. Pilkings disruption of the rite of passage for example rather elicited laughter from the audience as a stupefied Elesin Oba could not make out at that moment whether the disruption was a welcomed development or not.

Through his (Tunji's) blockings, body positioning and environment he divulges the inner workings of the actors mind preceding their actions. For instance, we witnessed the behaviour and responses of Jane to Olunde who had just came back from Europe and decide to visit Mr. Pilkings. Their actions and physical appearance on stage actually defined their character(s) and genetic recombination. It is this recombination that the director employs to draw into the play greater depth of characterization between the two actors. In fact, the level of psychological activism of Olunde who the director positioned down – centre to say to Jane Our king is dead. But i knew i had to return home at once so as to bury my father (Soyinka, 1982:52) This line, as it were, conveys from Olunde, a lot of agitation and anxiety in his (Olunde) rendition and mannerism. Conversely, the attitude and movements of Jane in response to Olunde manifest a rather lackadaisical show of someone with a mindset that is apathetic to the socio/cultural peculiarity which Olunde tries to uphold. We see Jane moving away from Olunde and saying in the most ironic manner: "Well, thank God you don't have to go through that agony: Simon is going to stop it (Soyinka, 1982:52) Without doubt, this is to heighten characterization, motives, choices and conflicting desires of the two actors on stage. It is clear here that; the director had assigned certain individuality that reveals Olunde for instance as victim of circumstance. Indeed, he presents Olunde as a sympathetic actor with major virtues and lesser quirks.

Talking about costume and other dramatic elements reveals the richness in Elesin Oba's costume, dance, acting, songs, mime and spectacle. Apparently, the audience see a man vast in the Yoruba culture, yet expresses his sex gusto and taking a new bride as part of the conditionality for an honourable suicide he (Elesin Oba) needs to get on with for the sake of the late king. His acting capacity on stage and great sense of individuality had a deleterious consequence on Iyaloja – the leader of the women as the dialogue between them alternate amid chanting to the music with accompanied dance steps and stylized gestures depicting clearly the tradition of the Yoruba ethnic nationality. This clearly reveals how the events in scene five where Pilkings and Jane goes off, but warning Iyaloja not to cross the line or go close to Elesin Oba's cell door is inventively handled by the play director. At this point the audience experienced a sudden change in mood and frame of mind of Elesin Oba as his response to Iyaloja became that of a seeming regret. The sagacity of the play director placing Elesin Oba in a limited space emphasizes personal disappointment, penitence and level – headedness through his Elesin Oba's gestures, facial expression, and body language. This is the point he says to Iyaloja: I don't ask you to take pity on me Iyaloja. You have a message for me or you would not have come. Even if it is the curses of the world, i shall listen." Soyinka, (1982:67) Elesin Oba is

put on a pitiable stance before the audience who see him as one whose life is in content and yet a self-indulgence one.

However, his quick change of countenance into lamentation and then again, pathological weakness for beautiful women is so dramatic and professionally handled. The style and behaviour of the actor(s) while rendering the songs, music and chant at this point revealed clearly an engendering of a certain re-creation of the spirits and at the same time heightening of the mood and disposition of the play. This governing feeling which is like some kind of spell in the audience is also experienced at the point Olunde, the eldest son of Elesin Oba arrive the village without prior notice and sought to know the whereabouts of his father.

There is an indication that; between cultural codes and aesthetics in the play, the director it seems, observed the characters and imbued their behavioural traits in the actors' mannerisms action, and dramatic actions. Without a doubt, the artistry of the text is noticeable in the way and manner the actors identified with the dignity of ritual and/or significance of the role of the traditional carrier and at the same time appreciation of the traditional Yoruba world view. This is exemplified in the stage business between Elesin Oba, Olunde and Mr. Pilkings. The play director was able to dexterously establish the dramatic irony within the context of the interaction through which Pilkings tries to unravel the mystery and ritual of Yoruba life based on the way he (Pilkings) conceives of it.

Away from these dramatic manipulations, it can be safely assumed that technological innovations have impacted greatly on different aspect of the theatre – viz, set, costumes, sound and lighting, etc (Oni, 2004: 26) Within the total theatre context of interpreting *Death and the King's Horseman* therefore, Tunji attempts to use these theatrical elements as aesthetic considerations to simulate foot path, market place, forest, urban housing structure, and so on through a level of technological sophistication. For example, the inventive partitioning of the playing area to replicate several stalls and hitherto creating sizeable parts within which actor(s) had seeming unobstructed movements and dances created a dramatic ambience of a real market environment and the use of stage set. We see this in the complex set of movements that he created on stage to express the characters' emotions and relationships. Given the size of the not too big a stage and the various dances and crowd scenes in the play, the actors, to a large extent, fared well without obvious bumping into each other as they moved and rendered their lines in crowded scenes. Even so, the positioning of the actresses at the opening of the play as Elesin Oba enters along a passage before the market, pursued by his drummers and praise – singers almost thwarted his movements and actions. Certainly, his dance, chants and recital of the story of the *Not-I bird* for example, left him almost squeezing through the women as he struggled to meander through in a bid to use the entire stage. Nonetheless, putting the spot light on Elesin Oba in a Prison cell did not only direct the audience's eyes, on what to behold on stage, but went ahead to make the colour of the light red and interspersing it with a bright light on the other actors on stage was very suggestive of the way and direction the story was progressing. Besides, the rapid movements and stage actions of Mr. Pilkings, and the consequent placing of Elesin's carriage which remained rooted in one spot conjured the mood and a feeling of emphasis, authority and control of Mr. Pilkings. While that of suppression and subordination is obviously assumed on the part of an Elesin Oba already incarcerated. In other words, their entire existence and stage business is centred on moments of intense activity and near – panic of who the in – charge is. These are all techniques through which the director seemed to direct attention, create focus and emphasis on stage.

The use of songs, music and dance to advance the plot, characters or thought of the play cannot be overemphasized. For example, Tunji employs grand movement and rhythm in scene five of the play as part of his directorial exploit in the masque at the great hall of the Residency. Costuming the actors in a variety of fanciful European clothing and make – up, and creating some sort of visual interpretation through stage positioning of the actors that strikes a resonant chord of picturization and composition, he impel them (actors) to move rhythmically to the Western music as played by the band. This sense of stage picturization and composition made known understandable blockings that warranted the "Resident" and "Pilkings" to move down stage right for a private discussion without necessarily masking other actors on stage. Besides, this action which now pre-empted a swift switch – over to pantomimic dramatization by the

dancers and a tune - down music only heard at the background, made it clear that the director dexterously intended to emphasize the “Resident” and “Pilkings” discussions without necessarily interrupting or stopping the dance. This technique appears to have an accord with the supposition of Dean and Carra as cited by Arinde (2014:609) were they opine that: “most people are visually minded and therefore are more deeply impressed by what they see than what they hear.”

The obligatory use of character and characterization as essential elements of communication is clearly developed through the speech pattern and behaviour of the actors on stage. In analysing the various roles of the actors, the play director displayed great respect in employing four levels of characterization - physical, social, psychological and moral consideration in the descriptions of his stage directions. It is interesting to recall the character depiction of “Mr. Pilkings”, “Jane”, “The Resident”, “The Prince” and “Aide-de-camp” who are all supposedly Europeans in the play. Within the context of casting, acting, and make – up, it is understandable, in the sense that; all of these characters, though played by Nigerians who through aesthetics in make – up and costume looked in a particular way and had volume of coloured hair, and basking in the euphoria akin to that observed with the early Europeans in colonial Africa portrayed their roles convincingly. It is clear that the play director realizes that: “in the theatre, make-up is indispensable to ideal character depiction, especially in the university theatre where plays are performed using (mostly undergraduates) student actors.” Johnson (2004:161-162) indicates that, there is no gainsaying, the actions on stage were obviously motivated and clarified by typifying qualities of the aforementioned elements which for example, revealed the actor(s) attitudes, motivations, desires, sex, size, economic status, and moral decisions. Even their habitual responses in terms of physical agility, creativeness and psychological stability reflected and established their performance profile in accordance with the play’s spirit.

Although there are various methods through which casting a play is depended upon; the auditioning and casting the play – *Death and the King’s Horseman* is worked around the student – actors of the Department of Theatre Arts and Music and some from Department of English through an open tryout and invitational process. However, in setting out to find the actors who seem most capable of embodying the director’s concept of the characters, Tunji went an extra mile to get his lead actor, and this is the reason for mentioning the invitational process. The lead actor – Ropo Ewenla (Elesin Oba) was employed from the professional domain in order to rather give the performance pep and verve. This seems to explain Ayckbourn (2004) believe that casting is everything a director requires to get it right. In this regards, he says that:

It is my view that this process is the single most important action or series of actions you will make on a production. Most things are reversible, but if you have the wrong actor, however good an actor they may be, in the wrong part, your job as director is reduced to one of damage – limitation specialist. (p.26)

Significantly notable is that although the director’s intent was to be as truthful as he could afford to be to the script, but still, he took the liberty of casting a woman to play Olohun Iyo – the praise – singer to “Elesin Oba”. Arguably, it is an indication that the actor with better personality, carriage and inventiveness that best interpret the director’s vision and that of the playwright is more important and suited, not minding his/her sex. Nonetheless, this female actor is seen with domineering personal attributes, matching physic, voice quality, comportment and commanding stage presence that is emblematic of a man’s attitude expected of her as she plays the role. Her speed, vocal inflections, general flexibility, role interpretation and image altering is estimable. This directorial concept leaves one with the impression that, the play director has a good understanding of the world of the characters and the vision of the playwright. Inyang, (2005) underscores this point by saying:

A director cannot conduct an effective casting, audition or rehearsal without first having a good understanding of the script he intends to produce. The director must first of all endear himself to the world of the play before

he can come to terms with the sociological, physiological, ethical and social outlook of the characters in the play.
(p.62)

Without a doubt, the play director looked out for players that are multi – talented, flexible and with great acting capacities that are quick in assimilating direction. In other words, the search was for those with great singing aptitude, skilful in acting and dance prowess and having the ability to play certain musical instruments. Under this circumstance, the accepted cast was on the basis of personal qualities and physical attributes of the selected actors. This was a major demand for performance as total theatre.

Conclusion

In this paper, attempts have been made towards evaluating the directorial concept employed by Tunji Azeez in staging *Death and the king's Horseman*. There is no doubt that Tunji as a director in a literary theatre is full of exciting new ideas to experiment on. *Death and the King's Horseman* as directed by Tunji Azeez was fully realized through the evocation of music, dance, song, proverbs, and figurative expressions using metaphysical confrontations which positioned "Elesin Oba" as a vehicle of transition that can lubricate the culture and Yoruba world – view. We have seen that theatrical conventions and practices vary widely from one period to another and from one culture to another. The total stage picture was worked out carefully moment by moment to reveal Elesin Oba's pride and arrogance and yet, the seriousness of his communal undertaking with great directorial precision, variety and emotional power. The director employed a dramatic action that is clear, simple with natural acting emphasizing inner truth rather than external effect.

The director stretched the imagination of his audience to conclude that what appears real in the performance could actually be real in ritual. In other words, he maintains a conflation of ritual and theatre which is like a cul-de-sac in a given unity of time, place and characterization. This gives a background upon which the sense of tragedy in the play is revealed and understood on stage. The performance simply portrays that wishes into reality can be inherent in faith and belief. In fact, certain actors in the performance are somewhat pictured in a manner described by Layiwola (2001:218) as the kind of conceptualization (is) responsible for the creation of transvestite figures of dramatic art. It is a case where the unexpected happens -Elesin Oba reneges on a religious responsibility thereby forestalling a planned ritual. Here, the play director enacts an extraordinary tableau as the overt linguistic dialogue between Elesin Oba and the women through dance and musical communication process. The actions of the actors went beyond mere theatricalization of ritual because its interpretation was by virtue of individual creativity.

This dramatization of the rite of passage in *Death and the King's Horseman* unveils the essential idea one seeks to make, which tends to present ritual to the modern man from a realistic perspective. The result is a perspective that revealed moments of truth from a forgotten past the same way it would in real life.

References

- Arinde, T. S. (2014) "Artistic Direction and Directorial Exploration in Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's *The Gods and The Scavengers* and *Once Upon a Tower*". *Uncommon Artistry: Understanding Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's Dance, Drama and Theatre*. (Eds.) Abdulrasheed A. Adeoye, Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu, Solomon Ejeke and Etop Akwang. London: SPM Publications. Pp.594-610.
- Ayckbourn, A. (2004) *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*. London: Faber and Faber Limited. P. 126
- Bamidele, L. O. (2000) *Literature and Sociology*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig) Ltd. P. 94
- Brockett, O. G. (1974) *The Theatre: An Introduction*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. P. 465
- Brown, J. R. (1997) *What is Theatre? An Introduction and Exploration*. Boston: Focal Press. P.135
- Dasylva, A.O. (1996) *Understanding Wole Soyinka: Death and the King's Horseman*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman Educational and Communication Services. P. 4
- Ejue, O. (2013) "Directing Pathways: Script Understanding, Analysis, Interpretation and Working with Actors". *Script: Understanding, Analysis, Interpretation for Performance*. (Ed.) Effiong Johnson. Ghana: University of Cape Coast Press. P. 243
- Gbilekka, S. (2013) *Another Voice: Meta-Critical Essays in Drama, Theatre and Politics*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited. P.174

- Hobbs, W. (1995) *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen*. London: A & C Black (Publishers) Limited. P. 89
- Inyang, O. (2005) "Acting: Auditions, Casting and Rehearsals". *The Art of Acting: A Student – Friendly Anthology*. (Ed.) Effiong Johnson. Lagos: Concept Publications. P. 62
- Johnson, Effiong. (2004) *Aesthetics: The Dialectics and Theatrics of Theatre and Communication*. Lagos: Concept Publications. Pp. 161-162
- Layiwola, D. (2001) "Is Ritual Drama Humanistic Methodology: Thoughts on the New Theatre". *Cross – Currents in African Theatre*. (Ed.) Austin Asagba. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited. P. 220
- Layiwola, D. (2001) "Is Ritual Drama Humanistic Methodology: Thoughts on the New Theatre". *Cross – Currents in African Theatre*. (Ed.) Austin Asagba. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited. P. 218
- Musa, R. A. (2004) "Culture and the Limit of the Directorial Power: A Reflection on the National Question and the Theatre of Nudism in Nigeria". *Nigerian Theatre Journal*. (Ed.) Jenkeri Zakari Okwori. Abuja: Madol Press Ltd. P. 174
- Nwezi, M. (1988) "State of Literary Music in Nigeria: A Review". *Nigeria Magazine*, Vol. 56, Nos. 3 & 4, July-Dec. P. 9
- Oni D. (2004) *Stage Lighting Design: The Nigerian Perspective*. Lagos: Concept Publications Limited. P. 26
- Owusu, X. A. (2013) "A Scene by scene Analysis of Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* for University of Cape Coast Theatre, 2009: A Director's Concept. "Script: *Understanding, Analysis, Interpretation for Performance*. (Ed.) Effiong Johnson. Ghana: University of Cape Coast Press. P.261
- Shakespeare W. (2002) *Hamlet*. Wordsworth Editions Limited. P. 91
- Soyinka, W. (1982) *Death and the King's Horseman*. London: Methuen Ltd. P. 52
- Soyinka, W. (1982) *Death and the King's Horseman*. London: Methuen Ltd. P. 67
- Umukoro, M. M. (2010) *The Performing Artist in Academia and other Essays on Drama, Theatre and the Media Arts*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited. P. 145
- Azeez, T. (2017) Oral Interview. Director, *Death and the King's Horseman* a Convocation play for Lagos State University, 2008.