

Interpreting Dramatic Illusion as Reality on Stage: A Study of Bayo Oduneye's Directorial Art

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Abstract

Throughout the history of theatre, someone has always been in charge of the supervision of play presentations on stage, giving close attention to the details of costume, setting, lights, props and other elements of production. This personnel, known as the "Theatre Director", deploys his creative and interpretive skills to translate and animate the textual composition of the playwright into physical action before an audience. Although the art of play directing on stage is guided by certain given principles, individual directors have always employed different styles and techniques based on their personal knowledge and experience, with the purpose of transforming that illusory and fictive story of the playwright into real dramatic pictures on stage. This paper is an examination of one of Nigeria's most accomplished theatre directors – Bayo Oduneye. The essay discusses Oduneye's directorial style, looking specifically at his methods of working on the script and the actors, as well as his staging techniques. In addition, the paper attempts a qualitative analysis of the characteristics of Oduneye's productions and concludes by describing him as a successful and world-acclaimed director who has done so much for the development of theatre practice in Nigeria, and is expected to still do much more, before he leaves the scene.

Introduction

Oscar Gross Brockett (1923-2010), in his book, *The Theatre: An Introduction* (1969:55), implies that the theatre is as old as man when he states as follows:

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In the beginning, man viewed the natural forces of the world, even the seasonal changes as unpredictable, and sought, through various means, to control these unknown forces and feared powers.

The means through which he sought this control was found in the ritualistic worship of gods and the appeasement of the unknown supernatural forces, and it was the persistence of these ritualistic activities that provided material for drama. Aristotle, (384-322 BC), in the *Poetics*, also states that human beings are instinctively imitative; that they enjoy both imitating others and seeing imitations, because it is one of man's chief methods of learning about his world (Dukore, 1973:34). If these were to be the case of the origins of Theatre, then it seems logical to presume that the "Director" is as old as the theatre since theatre essentially cannot occur without co-ordination and direction.

Although the foregoing rituals and ceremonies were not held inside theatrical buildings and, although the activities were not referred to as "play" per se (because they were organised purely for religious reasons), they however included all the elements of drama and theatre; that is, music, dance, dialogue, incantation, invocation, magic and spectacle. They also had priests acting as performers, and members of the community in attendance as audience and, most importantly, the activities went through certain administrative processes involving planning, coordination, management and direction. In other words, although it might be true that the title "Theatre Director" is seen and regarded as a twentieth century phenomenon, it had existed in various guises since man started the art of imitation.

In Classical Greece, for instance, the choregus was in charge of the co-ordination of the plays presented at the Dionysian festival. In the Medieval period, it was either the Priests, the guilds or lay readers who oversaw the liturgical shows and by the end of

the Sixteenth Century, until almost the end of the Nineteenth Century, the actor-managers took charge of productions. Some famous actor-managers include Molière, Jam. Burbage, David Garrick, Charles Kean etc. Corroborating the foregoing fact, Corrigan (1979:218) observes that

throughout Theatre History, there has always been someone who decided where actors stood for their speeches, how they spoke their lines and which actors were best suited to which parts. Sometimes, it was the playwright, sometimes a stage manager or even a patron. During the eighteenth century and most part of the nineteenth century it was the leading actor.

It is important to note, however, that these functionaries carried out these exercises with particular biases, paying attention to, and laying emphasis on, their main areas of interest. Edward Brawn (1982:7), informs us that, "under this kind of situation, the most fundamental requirement of theatre productions, which is the coordination of expressive means based on an interpretation of the play, was hardly realised."

However, with the emergence of the Director in the modern sense of the term with Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen in Germany (1860), theatrical activities became greatly revolutionised. Duke George II had studied History and Archaeology in the University, but he possessed considerable talent in graphic arts and developed a great interest in the Theatre. Inspired by Charles Kean's revivals of Shakespeare's works, he formed the Meiningen Company which actually performed in many European countries. Duke George II was assisted by his colleague, Ludwig Kranek, and their revolutionary productions, with their new directorial approach, were seen by audience and theatre practitioners everywhere.

The effectiveness of the Meiningen Troupe was largely a result of this careful planning and integration of all

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theatrical elements. Nothing like it had been seen before
(Oscar Brockett, 302).

Cole and Chinoy (1970:2), in their book, *Directors on Directing*, also report that the Duke utilised all the innovation which the theatre had been chronicling in the areas of Acting, Costumes, Set and Management, to achieve a realistic stage picture. Suffice it to say that the authority with which the modern director undertakes his work, the respect which he commands as the controller of the ensemble, and the rights of artistic and creative independence he reserves, are direct heritage of the institution of Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. Robert Corrigan (1979:221) confirms this:

Before long, the Meiningen methods were copied in France, Russia, Germany and England. These new directors were determined to create a "free" theatre – one free of the shoddy practices of the actor-managers of the past. Their conscious impulse was to return the theatre to a condition of purity and power, as when performances were under the guidance of an Aeschylus, Shakespeare or Molière. The first Directors saw that as their mission and took steps to gain the power to achieve it.

It should be noted, however, that this new trend in the art of play production was soon to be characterised by a series of constantly changing "isms" as new directors and playwrights emerged with new angles of vision, reacting (sometimes violently) both in aesthetic and philosophical terms, to the dominant "ism" with their own views on the totality of human experience. Hence, theatrical productions had gone through different artistic movements. Conventions earlier set were disregarded, while new ones evolved; production styles varied through the development of new theories, beliefs and ideas. Creative innovations, inventions which usually contradistinguished themselves from their predecessors, claiming

to be empirically superior in meaning, form and relevance, were evolved from time to time. All these were due to several years of experimentation, artistic inspiration, mental and intellectual perception of individual directors and dramatists.

With the foregoing critical differences in preferences and approaches, it becomes necessary to make scholastic inquiry into why conventions and styles moved only with their times, and why a newly evolved style soon became an old one and, more importantly, how these experimentations have expediently served to help the modern director.

This essay examines the concept of the modern theatre director, whether he is a creative or interpretive artist. The essay discusses the basic principles of play directing and focuses on the directorial styles of Bayo Oduneye. To direct a show is one of the great challenges of the theatre. According to Griffiths (1982:12), "It is a rewarding but arduous activity, because the director has to know many things. He needs the ability to choose a play, select a cast, approach the material freshly, and translate the play from the page to the stage." Bayo Oduneye, whose works shall be studied in this essay, has had over five decades of engaging theatrical experience, and has distinguished himself as a forcefully imaginative director whose directorial art of the stage has acquired for itself a quality, which compares in dynamism with the works of Gordon Craig and David Belasco, English directors of the nineteenth century.

Is the Director a creative or an interpretive Artist?

Dean and Carra (1974:17), identify two kinds of artists – "The *Creative* and the *Interpretive*". The composer, the sculptor, the painter, the writer of literature and also the actor, dancer, musician and director (when creating the subject matter) are all creative artists. They explain further that these artists conceive their subjects through the medium of their respective materials and each created work could normally be regarded as complete. However, music, dance and drama often require other artists to give the created product its complete fruition and expression. These artists

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– conductors, musicians, directors, actors, dancers and other workers in the theatre, normally or, in most cases, do not produce their artistic expression out of the void but interpret what is already created. These interpretive artistes must also know their techniques as well as the creative artists, so the Director can be regarded as both a creative and an interpretive artist. In theatrical history, new approaches to theatrical expression have placed the director in roles other than that of interpretation. He may function as co-creator with the actors who are conceiving their own subject matter out of improvisational explorations; he may also act as both philosophical and spiritual guide to the group.

John Dolman and Richard Knaub (1993:3) also believe that though the author, director, designer, actors, musicians, the stage crew and even the audience all contribute to realise a common creative effort, the director it is, who is responsible for the finished product. They feel that the author's work is suggestive and not necessarily conclusive.

...In this sense, then, the director is as much a creative artist as the author himself and he must share the author's creative attitude (p.4).

Continuing, Dolman and Knaub note that the Director must understand fully the feelings and purpose of the author, he should be able to transform a rough and unfinished text, and he should be able to condition or adapt a play for a new type of production and a new audience. "If not a dramatist, he must at least be a competent play doctor"(p.3). A director should not only possess a working knowledge of literature, play text, acting, lighting, stage setting, costume and effects, he must also develop a healthy capacity as a businessman, with a sense of the connection between art and business. The director must manage properly the skills and time of everyone involved in the process of the production; he should

know whether the budget can allow for the necessities of the production, he should strive to minimise expenses and maximise profit. This he can achieve by effective co-ordination and management of the group and also by drawing the interest and attention of the audience.

Brawn (1982:13) says "the director must be a brain". Francis Hodge (1971:7) explains this by describing him as a talker, a verbal imagist, because his primary work is communication, not directly to the audience, but to actors and designers, who then transmit his ideas to the audience. The director possesses other intellectual and intuitive qualities apart from being creative, interpretive and managerial. Hugh Morrison (1973:13) observes that "creativity and scholarship exist in a very delicate relationship." The director, he believes, must be self-disciplined and ruthless...he must be intelligent, deductive, reflective, curious and rational; at the same time, he mustn't let logic and intellectualisation get in the way of intuition, creative thinking and human sympathy. In his book, *Directing in the Theatre*, Morrison provides a rather lengthy definition of the director as follows:

Perhaps the ideal director is someone with a passionate interest in acting, plays, and the creative process that leads to performance, Yet with no desire to take active part in stage managing, acting, or designing; a finger in every pie, overall responsibility for the artistic quality, yet bearing none of the burdens of the individual tasks: something of a dramatist, something of an actor, something of a technician. Whatever balance of these qualities exists in the director they cannot be put to use without a particular attitude to the work; insatiable and broadminded curiosity, love of mankind (and actors in particular), sensitivity to his surroundings in all their social, human, and political fluctuation, indefatigable energy and enthusiasm. In the final analysis, the director seems to be editor and presenter of human beings; of their lives and their joys and sufferings (p.14).

BAYO ODUNEYE – THE MAN AND HIS CAREER

Adebayo Adetokunbo Oduneye was born to Alhaji Tijani Oduneye and Mrs. Sadia Oduneye in Badagry on November 4, 1936. He had his early education at Saint Patrick, Idumagbo, Lagos, and Secondary education at C.M.S. Grammar School, Lagos. Though he had shown strong signs of creativity, agility and adventure while in school because of his deep involvement in sports and cultural activities, hardly did he know that he was a man cut for the world of poetry and theatre. After his secondary education, Oduneye proceeded to England in September 1955 to further his studies. He recalls in an interview with Professor Adelugba how his life drastically changed after the first few months in Europe...

My parents wanted me to do medicine: so I went to England at a very early age; unfortunately, on getting to England, I had a guardian who was very much in the arts. Instead of concentrating on my science, I was very much involved in productions with local groups.

In 1960, five years after he got to England, he was eventually admitted into the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), London, for a formal training in the theatre, and he specialised in Stage Management. After his training, he moved out of London to Oldham, where he came in contact with Geoffrey Axworthy, who invited him to come to Nigeria.

Geoffrey Axworthy was then the Director of the School of Drama, University of Ibadan. Oduneye returned to Nigeria in 1964 and started as Stage Manager/Technician with the University Drama School, between 1964 and 1969 when he left on the Ford Foundation Fellowship Award to further his studies at Carnegie Mellon University, United States of America. He was actively involved in productions at the theatre both with the School of Drama and Wole Soyinka's Orisun Theatre Company, as well as

with other amateur theatre groups. These, according to Adelugba, "were very important years in the artistic life of the University." It is to my mind, a great privilege to be part of this history-making experience. Notably, among the many productions which Oduneye worked on, are *The Road* by Wole Soyinka at the Commonwealth Arts Festival, Theatre Royal, Stratford, England (1965), as Leader of the gang and musician; Nkem Nwankwo's *Danda* and Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* at the 1st Negro Arts Festival in Dakar Senegal in 1966, as Stage Manager. Others include Ben Jonson's *Alchemist* (1967), as Stage Manager and a dance by the Cultural Dance Troupe to Mexico Olympics (1968), as Production Manager.

In less than three years in America, Oduneye's versatility, talent, and perceptive imagination were discovered, and while still a student, he was himself employed to teach both at the Black Students' Programme of the University of Pittsburgh, and the Union University, Cartham College, Pittsburgh. According to him, when he was busy trying to get his M.F.A. project together, he was invited to New Orleans to become the Artistic Director for the Free Southern Theatre and, at the same time, he was working as a part-time teacher at Xavier University, New Orleans.

After his programme at Carnegie Mellon, he was asked to come back to the Free Southern Theatre, New Orleans, but the University of Ibadan also recalled him and he chose to return home to Nigeria. On arrival, in 1972, he was immediately asked to direct a play *Hassan*, by Elroy Flecker, as the Department of Theatre Arts' entry to the National Arts Festival in Kaduna. Oduneye approached the production of *Hassan* in a way that the memory of its experience still lingers on in the minds of most of those who witnessed it. Professor Adelugba comments on the production:

...And I saw that fulfilment of aims with that large space in Kaduna. It went extremely well in the sense of a pageant: the movements came out clearly, and I remember one night – or, maybe, it was the only night of performance – at the middle of the performance, some

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people who were sitting near me said, "This is a grade one University".

Since then, Oduneye has established himself as a giant of the stage, directing, supervising or coordinating productions and leading theatre and cultural troupes for Arts festivals both within and outside Nigeria. For instance, he was the Production Manager for the Cultural Festival Dance Troupe for Mexico Olympics (1968); the Artistic Director, Western State Dance Troupe to Kaduna for the 4th National Festival of Arts (1974); Director of Drama for the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC, 1977); Artistic Director of the Unibadan Performing Company – a fully professional Theatre Company, (1979).

Bayo Oduneye has also served directly under the Nigerian Federal Government (on matters relating to Arts, Culture and Human Relations) in various capacities as, Chairman, Nigerian Film Corporation, 1982; Chairman, Review Panel on Government owned Film and Theatre Institutions, 1984; Participant, all Nigerian Conference on Foreign Policy, Jos 1986. He was appointed the Artistic Director of National troupe of Nigeria in 1994. Oduneye later retired as Senior Arts Fellow from the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, where he taught Stage Management, Acting and Directing for twenty five years, before moving to Pec Repertory Theatre as Artistic Director (Nigeria's first non-profit performing company). He later took up a contract appointment with Ogun State University as Senior Lecturer between 2001 and 2008 and finally retired from active service in 2009.

Bayo Oduneye has directed several plays both at home and abroad, which include J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* at Carnegie Mellon University (1971), and *Masquerade*, Pittsburgh (1972); Wale Ogunyemi's *Langbodo*, *Ijaiye War* and *The Divorce* at the University of Ibadan in 1974, 1975, and 1981, respectively. Others

are Wole Soyinka's *Childe International* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*, University of Ibadan (1973), Eugene Ionesco's *Foursome* Ibadan, 1974, Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Ibadan (1981), C. B. Akinyemi's *Skeletons*, National Theatre, Lagos (1982), *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*, Ibadan (1987), Peter Luke's *Hadrian the 7th* and Jean Anouil's *Antigone*, both at Pec Repertory Theatre, Lagos (1988), Akinwumi Ishola's *The Spirit of Lagos*, National Theatre (1993), Ahmed Yerima's *The Gods Are Silent* National Theatre (1995), Rotimi's *Ovoramwen Nogbaisi*, National Theatre (1997) Agbeyegbe's *The King Must Dance Naked*, National Theatre (2000) to mention but a few.

BAYO ODUNEYE'S DIRECTORIAL ART

This segment deals with the techniques and beliefs of Bayo Oduneye in the art of play production, his approaches and style of directing for the theatre and in doing this, we shall cite practical examples from productions such as Wole Soyinka's *Death the King's Horseman*, *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*, his adaptation of Donald Jack's *Exit Muttering*, Peter Luke's *Hadrian the 7th* and Wale Ogunyemi's *The Divorce*.

Adelugba once wrote ...

Fondly called Uncle B both by young and old, Bayo Oduneye has brought to the artistic culture of the University of Ibadan, a charm and personality which is unique.

This unique personality derives from a paradox. Oduneye's frank disposition to strict discipline in the theatre, his distaste for indolence, his seeming reproach and harshness on slothful theatre apprentices and professionals alike, all seem to give a spurious impression that he is an intimidating personality. In reality, Bayo Oduneye, or "Uncle B" as he is fondly called, is a jolly mentor of young talents, determined to help willing learners in all ways possible, in order to discover themselves and be truly fulfilled in

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their chosen careers. He only wishes this to be done in a manner which truly reveals the artiste as "another soldier", well tutored and well guided for a vocation which requires a high sense of commitment and unparalleled dedication. This paradox is also explained in Francis Hodge's description of the artist who truly possesses the unique qualities of a director, a kind but usually misunderstood person (1971:8).

Working with the Script

This task includes choosing a script and analysing it. Grotowski (1974:58) informs us that "Theatre is an encounter and that it proceeds from fascination." As applicable as this may be to Oduneye and other directors, experience has shown that even when circumstances forced scripts on him, he approached them with artistic ingenuity. Although he claims that he has a soft spot for absurd and avant-garde plays (especially because they are intellectually tasking), he has directed several kinds of plays – comic, tragic, farcical, historical, melodramatic, and satirical, either chosen by himself or prescribed by a producer. In essence, Oduneye does not discriminate against types and kinds of plays. He believes that any play with substantially good dramatic material can be made stage worthy. Like Reinhardt, Oduneye sees "each play" as "a new problem" demanding "a new solution." Reinhardt constructed or modified theatres to provide the physical arrangement he thought best for each type of play (Cole and Chinoy, 1970:64).

When Oduneye makes up his mind to direct a play, he reads it thoroughly. He takes the analysis of a play as a serious business. He spends at least approximately three hours every day with the script, not only during the analysis period, but throughout the period of the production. He believes as he says "Every time you carry your script to read, you will discover something new." Then, he breaks the play up into scenes or beats and classifies them

with titles in order to derive the idea, purpose or thought behind each of the situations as prescribed by the author.

Working with the Actors

His contact with the actors starts from the auditions to the casting and rehearsal periods. Bayo Oduneye's method of auditioning and casting is very discreet and practically, more "closed" than "open". Oduneye possesses a keen sense of discernment and evaluation. He sums up people's abilities quite intuitively and while reading a play, he recalls that he immediately begins to see figures moving in front of him on the pages of the play script. He sees the characters' personalities, their heights, weights, sizes and physical endowments; he resolves immediately to contact those actors who suitably *share* or *could meet* those physical expectations of the characters and a private discussion with these actors could earn them the parts *tentatively*. According to him, he adopts this style in casting *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*, his adaptation of Donald Jack's *Exit Muttering*, and also in Wale Ogunyemi's *The Divorce*.

Although this method may appear risky because the decision could turn out to be an overestimation of the actors in question and an "opportunity cost" for better but perhaps untested actors, it is a valid method. It is what Dean and Carra (1974:309) describe as the "personal-interview" method, and it has always worked for Oduneye. Nevertheless, he also encourages, in no small measure, open auditions where parts are given only on merit in performance at test readings and try-outs. In most cases, however, he combines both methods in casting, such as he did with *Death and the King's Horseman*, *Ijaiye War*, and *Langbodo*.

Before rehearsal commences, that is, the blocking out period, Oduneye sits the actors down to discuss the play, its theme, content, plot, and characters. Tayo Obisesan, the diarist of Oduneye's production of *Death and the King's Horseman*, records how Oduneye called the cast and the entire production crew together during one of the early rehearsals to discuss the play, with the director emphasising the integrative structure that the play

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incorporates and how it relies heavily on music. Also, actors were asked questions, such as:

- (a) If Olunde hadn't the opportunity of going out, would he take it upon himself to carry what should have been his father's ritual suicide?
- (b) What is the relationship between Olunde and Elesin Oba (before Olunde's departure and after his arrival)?
- (c) If Olunde had not killed himself, would Elesin Oba have died?

This exercise provides opportunity for the actors to understand the inner motives of their characters, the desire, will, moral stance and decorum, those elements which Francis Hodge (1971:44) suggests should be considered in order to grasp the overall actions taken by an individual actor in the course of the play.

Oduneye has a special technique of getting the best out of his actors. His relationship with his actors is cordial. He could be described as a "system director" or a system actor-trainer. He works on his actor and makes him to shed all stock mannerisms, dropping traces of traits in parts played in previous productions – in short, removing him from himself, and then, through a gradual process of emotional and psychic penetration, he begins to tune the actor for his present challenges. He achieves this through:

- (i) Games and improvisation – running of lines on stage with the "script distraction" exercise.
- (ii) Questioning – discussions of the play and the characters; collaborative thinking.
- (iii) Private rehearsal – personal relationship, intimate rapport.
- (iv) Environmental Psychology – creating a socially free and friendly relationship which helps creativity, imaginative thinking and spontaneity.

In an this interview by Sola with Femi Ogunjobi, who played the lead role in Bayo Oduneye's production of *Death and the King's Horseman*, Ogunjobi commended Oduneye's directorial style which involves making his actors feel at ease, asking them questions about their parts, explaining the play from day to day, and sharing tea with his actors in the same cup. He disagreed with the suggestion of harshness on the part of 'Uncle B', describing this perceived harshness as "necessary harshness" aimed at making his actors understand and like the play, even if quarrels arise in the process. Femi described how Oduneye often handled such quarrels, if and when they did arise:

...after quarrelling with you, Uncle B will call you to his office, or on to the stage, you and him alone, and he will begin to discuss the play with you and he will share tea with you again, and then you will begin to think that the man perhaps meant well after all, and gradually, you begin to like the play.

Unlike other directors, "Uncle B will never come on stage to demonstrate how he wants you to do or say something," concludes Ogunjobi.

In another interview with Tunde Euba, who played Olunde, in *Death and the King's Horseman* and Bishop in *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*, he says

Working with Uncle B makes you creative, because he only tells you what to do, where and when to do them, and he leaves you with *how* to do them and that is when you begin to create as an actor.

Bayo Oduneye employs the "pre-blocking" style for his productions; he doesn't believe in the improvisational technique. To him, it is "an act of unpreparedness." The diarist of *Death and the King's Horseman* reports her experience of Oduneye's blocking...

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...Actors are given specific blockings, which the director insists should be noted in their scripts. The play is read again and for the first time, the movements are tried.

In an interview with Bayo Oduneye himself about his style of blocking, he says "I pre-block days before meeting the actors, but I am not rigid with it." Some of the actors who have worked with him feel that the pre-blocking style makes actors mechanical. Emmanuel Oga, who doubled as Pilkings in *Death and The King's Horseman* and played Sola in *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*, says "Pre-blocking style imprisons me." Also Yomi Yinka who once played Sanmi Ajao in Oduneye's production of Wale Ogunyemi's *The Divorce* says:

Pre-blocking style is not bad altogether, but it makes you uncomfortable sometimes and if you tell the man, he might insist or even get angry; it depends, it really depends, if you give him something else and he feels it's good, not necessarily better, he might take it.

But Oduneye, like Gordon Craig, believes that the director is in charge and should tell the actor what he wants specifically. Gordon Craig's style is confirmed in an interview he had with a playgoer as reported in Cole and Chinoy's *Directors on Directing*, (1970:157).

Play goer: Would you have the stage director control the movements of whoever might be impersonating the character of Romeo, even if he were a fine actor?

Stage Director: Most certainly; and the finer the actor, the finer his intelligence and taste, and therefore the more easily controlled. In fact, I am speaking in particular of a theatre wherein all the actors are men of

refinement and the director a man of peculiar accomplishments.

Bayo Oduneye's pre-blocking style recognises picturisation, composition, balance, levels, planes, emphasis – the fundamentals of directing suggested by Dean and Carra (1974:47). Oduneye's use of space is rational, organic and balanced; his actors are placed in meaningful relationships which express the emotional and social interaction between the characters and which unfolds the folklore before the audience.

Working on the Production: Staging the Play

Like David Belasco, the English director of the nineteenth century, Oduneye believes in the philosophy of "creating atmosphere for the actors;" an atmosphere or environment devised with furniture, props and other effects to support the actors and make their characters come alive. Production style is being determined here by the type and kind of set, costumes, lights, make up and props, used by individual directors and at the same time the type of setting, lighting and other effects used is determined by the type of play, be it comedy, tragedy, or melodrama.

Although Oduneye's staging style is rather difficult to define, like Craig, he thinks of the theatre as a place where the inner beauty and the meaning of life is revealed. *World Drama Encyclopedia* (1972:27) says of Craig:

Recognising that the experience of theatre is a combination of many arts – acting, directing, music movement, mime, design, make up and lighting – his aim was total theatre with one man being responsible for harmonising every aspect of the play produced, so that it might achieve its fullest and natural effect.

Oduneye also employs all the arts of the theatre in his productions in order to achieve variety and the "total theatre" effect. Even though he believes that scenery should primarily be to support the actors and not be unduly attractive or obstructive to the actions, he

seeks to achieve a believable setting, both to the actors and the audience. Apparently, he stylises his productions employing symbolism, theatricalism and a tinge of realism. In short, Bayo Oduneye's staging technique could simply be referred to as "eclecticism". A staging style favoured by many modern directors, eclecticism refers to the free but rational use of various styles from several choices in order to have an aesthetically satisfying production. In some cases, eclectic staging is made conditional because of technical limitations and, in some cases, it is due to a deliberate stylisation by the director. His approach is not dissimilar to the generally accepted principle of holding talks with his designers in pre-production meetings and arriving at a decision.

Setting: In the production of *Death and the King's Horseman*, the set and lights were initially designed by James Olu Aborisade while costumes and make up were handled by Esohe Omoregie Suinner, who were at that time members of the teaching staff of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan. Olu Aborisade has a preference for elaborate and magnificent scenery, one which is achieved through transcendental imagination and experimentation. He once said in a post-mortem of Omoregie Suinner's adaptation of Dario Fo's *We won't pay, we can't pay, We no go pay, we no fit pay* organised by the Association of Theatre Arts Students University of Ibadan, that it was high time we began a theatre of challenges, the kind of theatre which, far from being merely illusory, must be real, big, challenging, and experimental; we should be able to build skyscrapers on stage, tar roads, and construct bridges.

Whereas Oduneye also believes that a dam could be constructed on stage if the funds and materials are available, he prefers it to be made more "easy to manage" and effective than being elaborately obtrusive and obstructive. To him "a set that takes more than two minutes to change will just not work." That

was why Aborisade's set was dismantled because of the difficulty in striking it and setting for Scene Two – Simon Pilkings's house – and a simpler set with platforms and risers was built on the second day by Wasee Kareem, then a student in the department, who also designed and constructed the sets for *The Visit of Bishop Alaba* and *Hadrian the 7th*.

In the production of *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*, and *The Divorce*, both comedies, Oduneye used interior settings, well constructed, well decorated. The set of *The Divorce*, for instance, creates an illusion of a duplex with an inner stair case leading to bed-rooms upstairs. There is a settee, dining table and chairs, shelves of books and menagerie in the sitting room as can be found in many modern homes today. The set of *Bishop Alaba* portrays that of a typically polygamous house with several bedrooms, with a central sitting room and furniture.

Costuming: The costuming of Oduneye's plays is realistic, an English character is dressed like an English, a nun like a nun, while a traditional Chief is costumed in "Aso Oke" as ceremonially worn by Yoruba traditional chiefs. Like setting, he does not fancy excessive ornaments which are capable of obstructing movements and actions. Everything must be simple, but believable. In *Death...*, Elesin was dressed in rich 'Dansiki', praise singer put on "Aso Oke", Olunde was dressed in suit, the Police Officers had khaki shorts and shirts with fez hats, while the market women put on assorted casual wears ranging from "ankara", "adire" and cotton. In *Bishop Alaba*, the Bishop was dressed in suit with a dog-collar. Auntie Lolade dressed in maxi with a wig, Tokan, Aramide and Sola were casually dressed, while Mimi was suggestively dressed in short pants and loose blouse in consonance with her seductive character.

Props: Oduneye uses both realistic and symbolic stage properties in his productions. Whereas he brings real flowerpots on stage in Pilkings house for Scene Two and provides real Benson and Hedges for Jane and Sergeant Amusa in *Death...*, he fills beer bottles with coloured water to represent beer, mixes water and coca

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cola to represent whisky in *The Divorce* and constructs a box to represent a camera in *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*.

Stage Management: As a stage management graduate from Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London, Oduneye holds the stage management of his production dear. In most of his productions, the stage manager has two assistants who make sure that actors are on cue at all times. Like every professional director, Oduneye abhors technical hitches and errors; thus, he pays particular attention to the avoidance of such errors. However, bearing in mind that human beings cannot be perfect, errors are sometimes inevitable. But Oduneye would rather stay out of the theatre than contend with the technical or artistic hitches during the run of the play. According to him, after the "dress and tech", the play becomes the stage manager's show.

Use of Space: The use of the stage space was rational in both productions under reference. The arrangement of actors took cognizance of the principles of compositional balance and emotional relationship – this is quite visible in the crowd scenes of *Death...*, such as the market scenes and final ritual scene. Actors opposing one another are either facing away or walking away from each other while discussing, such as happened severally between Elesin and Pilkings; Olunde and Pilkings; even between Pilkings and Joseph in *Death...* Also between Tokan and Ladi, the Bishop and Auntie Lolade, between Tokan's three wives Sola, Aramide and Mimi in *Bishop Alaba*.

Lighting: Lighting was appropriate in both productions. There was an effective depiction of mood. The happy and day scenes were all illuminated with floods while the night scenes were dimly lit. Spotlight was used on "Elesin" in *Death...* at the police cell to portray loneliness, while coloured lights were used in the cell and final scene to complement the ritual mood.

Technical Cues: Technical cues were promptly taken in both productions, sound cues were on time, door knocks, opening

and closing were exact, scene changes were swift and speedily done, especially in *The Visit of Bishop Alaba* and *The Divorce*; such details that make comedies really entertaining. No moment was dull even when the stage was quiet. It was observed that the audience looked on with rapt attention, responding actively to every moment of the productions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BAYO ODUNEYE'S PRODUCTIONS

Although, we have noted earlier that Bayo Oduneye is an eclectic director who rationally combines different production styles, his productions have certain marks with which they can be readily identified. Bayo Oduneye combines intuition and imagination, talent and training in theatre productions, and his many years of experience have gained for him a particular personality which is almost always reflected in his works. To this end, when Oduneye directs a play, certain salient qualities are either consciously or unconsciously derived. These include: (a) Grandeur, (b) Precision, (c) Variety and (d) Synthesis.

Grandeur: Actions and movements in Bayo Oduneye's productions appear mostly imperial. Objects and props are usually gracefully applied, the stage is actively colourful, while the story unfolds and no part of the play, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, is left to "suffer". Even the most casual situations of Oduneye's productions are given special attention and nourishment which lend to them a compelling vitality and make them appear visually magnificent and pleasing to the eye. He achieves this through a conscious and imaginative arrangement of "matters" on the stage, and also through a careful selection of action and business both intrinsic and extrinsic (but not extraneous) to the demands of the situation. Several situations in *Death and the King's Horseman* support this point. For instance, in Scene II, when Sergeant Amusa is asked by Pilkings to write his report on the pad on the table. Sergeant Amusa is made to act as follows:

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- (i) Moves to the table;
- (ii) Finds a burning cigarette originally lighted by Jane;
- (iii) Takes it;
- (iv) Looks around;
- (v) Smokes it (and suddenly realising the implication of the smoke in the room),
- (vi) Begins to blow the smoke off with his mouth and hands;
- (vii) Then puts the cigarette in his pocket,
- (viii) And begins to write the note, somewhat "laboriously", before going out.

This brief but big moment attracted special applause and laughter every night of the production. Some other directors would have approached it simply by asking Sergeant Amusa to

- (i) Move to the table
- (ii) Write in the pad on the table
- (iii) Perhaps read through what he has written before going out.

Also in Scene III, Sergeant Amusa and two constables go to arrest Elesin Oba and are barred by the market women who later begin to tease the desperate and agitated Police Officers. Eventually, the women become provoked, seize the police officer's hats, batons and beat them before chasing them away. The actors on stage at this particular time number about twenty. The situation is a typically rowdy one, but Oduneye handles it with "controlled regionalisation." The women are grouped into three with each group holding on to each of the police officers. All three groups remain emphatic and although they are distinctly separated, they glaringly relate with other.

Precision: Movements and actions in Bayo Oduneye's productions, apart from being highly stylised, magnificent, and graceful, are executed with exactness. Every move is timed, every action is calculated. Technical cues like door knocks, bell rings, music plays, lights on and off, are specially rehearsed and mastered. He achieves this through tidy blockings and punctuation of actions. In *Death and the King's Horseman*, the collision of Sergeant Amusa on the flower pot while retreating on seeing Pilkings and Jane in the "Uniform of death" was timed, the number of backward steps to be taken was executed as prescribed and rehearsed. In *The Visit of Bishop Alaba*, the situation where Ladi, Aramide, Mimi, and Bishop were frantically searching for themselves through the doors in the house was practised times without number so that the activity could become second nature and the cues, unmistakably precise.

Precise actions and prompt observation of cues always have a compelling aesthetic value. They produce rhythm, tempo, and a dynamic visual and auditory pleasure; one might almost think that one is in a cinema watching a well-shot, well-edited motion picture. This is the kind of illusion created in Oduneye's productions. He once said in an interview with this writer...

Play directors should know how to select and edit, not only the script, but also the actor's movements and actions, like film editors do with various shots, so that the play, when presented on stage, would be visually and emotionally appealing, giving the audience a sort of kinetic experience.

Variety: Variety, in Oduneye's productions, derives from both emotional, intellectual and entertainment values. On the first level, variety is achieved with the rational arrangement he makes of the actors and objects on stage with the use of composition, level, planes, body positions and areas. On the second level, he infuses variety into the dramatic content of his productions with the use of music, sound, dance etc. For instance, the dense music element in *Death and the King's Horseman* was used to achieve

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this variety in entertainment value, apart from being functional in the story itself. The praise singer's rigorous "bata" dance at the end of Scene One was mainly to thrill. On many occasions, "Elesin" the Praise singer and Iyaloja were seen swinging and moving in graceful dance steps while delivering their lines. Background music was very much used both in *The Visit of Bishop Alaba* at the Bar scene and *The Divorce* where Sanmi Ajao brought his secretary home for some "urgent assignment" and his wife met them together while he, Sanmi, was trying to help the pretentious secretary to remove the speck in her eyes.

Synthesis: Not only can we notice a quality of "fluidity" as the story unfolds in Oduneye's productions, but also that of "integration". All the actors who have worked with Bayo Oduneye and whom this writer interviewed agreed that there is a pervading spirit of ensemble among the members of cast and crew in his productions. Femi Ogunjobi says "there is an air of utmost involvement by everyone"; Emmanuel Oga says "there is an atmosphere of seriousness and co-operation"; while Tunde Euba says "there is always a high level of co-ordination." Bayo Oduneye achieves these through group discussion, group exercises, and personal care and interaction. Before the curtain rises every night of performance Bayo Oduneye performs a brief ritual with the cast and crew of his productions by bringing them together in a circle, asking them to hold hands, close eyes and to *think* about the play, their parts, individually and collectively, and make a solemn determination to "make it work" together.

Conclusion

It should be noted that "play directing" is an area of the theatre commonly flirted with by playwrights, actors and, in some cases, stage managers and designers, whereas it is an area which requires much more than their individual creative, technical or administrative talents to practice. Although, it is true that we do

have people who are competent in two or more of these areas, for effective and judicious practice, play directing requires a concentrated specialisation.

With over five decades of active and engaging practice of the theatre as a "Director", suffice it to say that Bayo Adisa Oduneye is a successful "Theatre Director" whose directorial records and achievements are, to my mind, enough to earn him the highest honour and global acclaim in the theatre profession. I am impelled to think that, at almost eighty, with such a huge amount of talent, capabilities, and achievements, he should have something to look back upon with satisfaction when he eventually leaves the scene. Although, after his retirement from the University of Ibadan, he worked briefly on contract at the Performing Arts Department of Olabisi Onabanjo University, he ought to have established a private theatre or opened a "Theatre studio", or "School", where he can train actors and directors and also run shows. Examples of this kind of experiment can be drawn from the Polish, Jerzy Grotowsky's theatre laboratory founded in Opole, South-West Poland in 1959; or, back home, Bode Osanyin's yet to be completed "Artistes' or Writers' Resort" in Sango Ota, a professional performing company or school which could be operating either with resident artistes, actor trainees or like a repertory. I believe that Bayo Oduneye has the charm, ability, experience and connection to make such an idea come into actual existence.

In fact, it bothers me to think that none of our modern literary, drama originators or theatre practitioners is currently leading a professional performing theatre company since the demise of "Orisun theatre" founded and led by the 1986 Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka in the 60's. It is high time some of our theatre teachers and modern theatre practitioners, especially those who have more flair for stage practice than the classrooms, left the Universities and ventured into full-fledged professional cum commercial theatre practice, so that the profession can be made viable and accepted by the relevant audience just as, or even more than, the famous indigenous travelling theatres that dominated the

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theatrical scene for many years before the advent of the currently popular video and film productions.

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