

THE DIRECTOR AS A THEATRE CRITIC:

The Case of Dapo Adelugba

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Abstract

Criticism is a vital material for the director to interpret the play text on stage. This is his primary duty in the theatre. It makes the director remain the only one among other critics who has initial and right away contact with the script, stage, improvisation, performers, and performance. This contact does not require a go-between. Once the director chooses a play text as the raw materials, he does his play reading, audition, casts and rehearses with the players. After all these processes the production takes place. However, the dramatic and scholar-critic work directly with the play script. They end there with the publication in a journal article, while the journalist-critic in the media relies on the production put up by the director to write his reviews in the newspapers and magazines. It is only the director who functions completely as an all-rounder-practitioner and in addition criticizes what he practices. This study examines the director as a critic in the arts of the theatre with a special focus on Dapo Adelugba. Through a study of Adelugba's views, the views and reviews of others about his views in the arts of theatre in Nigeria we shall examine Adelugba's critical visions and works.

The Director as a Theatre Critic

To demonstrate the aptness of describing the theatre director as a critic and a grassroots one for that matter Hodge (1971) endorsed him as the "primary critic in the theatre," who has become the

"twentieth century most important stage critic." Musa (2007) has cited various scholars who concur with this view from their descriptions of a director as; a communicator of the highest order (Hodge, 1971:7), the master of all arts of the theatre (Staub, 1973: 6), the artist working closely with the performers in the theatre (Wilson, 1994:125), the controlling artist responsible for unifying the production elements, which often include the use of text, music, sound and visuals (Barranger, 1995:248) etc.

Brook (1968) certified him God of the theatre who "does not ask to be called God yet his role implies it." Such roles that make the director fit in into these titles are his fulfilment of the basic functions that are germane to interpretation of the play text in addition to his pedagogical roles in the entire arts theatre. Oyewo (2000) has made reference to Oscar Brockert (1979) to enumerate these basic functions of the director that makes him a critic thus:

1. He decides upon the interpretation to be given the script.
2. He casts the play.
3. He works with the playwright, designers, and technicians in planning the production.
4. He rehearses the actors.
5. He coordinates all elements into finished performance.

With the forgoing, Oyewo (2000) posited that aside critical and creative process further responsibilities of the director to the theatre are preceptorial and teleological. So he owes it an obligation to teach the actors as well as help them on how to interpret their roles. Oyewo also asserted that Ola Rotimi, Nigeria acclaimed most visionary artistic director supports this view.

The qualities of Adelugba as noted by Patrick Ebewo, his former student and now Head, Dept. of Drama and Film, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa, places Adelugba in this plank "Professor Adelugba is a scholar, theorist, editor, author, critic, academic, theatre director and dramaturge, but above all, he is a mentor par excellence."

Many Faces of Dapo Adelugba as a Theatre Director-Critic

Adelugba's former student, Reuben Abati who is now a journalist with *The Guardian* Newspapers, Lagos, Nigeria went down memory lane of what happened in his undergraduate days to dwell on his many sides: "By the time I arrived at the University of Ibadan in 1986, I met many of the students calling him Baba.

He was, you can imagine, just 47 at the time, but everyone called him Baba, even his own colleagues, because by 47, he had already built a formidable reputation as one of the leading lights in the theatre arts profession in Nigeria and Africa. Actor, stage director, dramaturge, theorist and critic, historian, teacher, researcher, and administrator, Baba has devoted his life entirely to the teaching of other people's children. He is now still teaching at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. What Abati is pointing out is that there had never been an idle moment for him. The evidence to this is that "he was an external examiner in many departments across the country. He was also a practical man of the theatre who adapted plays for production or directed other people's scripts."

Always rehearsing one play or the other as an artistic director is further disclosed by Nehru Odeh, his former student too as part of what makes Adelugba not have the time to rest in his itinerary. He remembered specifically when he visited the University of Ibadan long after graduation to interview Adelugba on contemporary African theatre. He saw him "nowhere else but in the heart of an ongoing student rehearsal."

In this kind of setting, his students who are part of such a play must learn not only acting styles but critical cannons of the theatre. This has imbued Adelugba with being one teacher and practitioner in the theatre arts in Nigeria who has put in time into "the training of actors, actresses, playwrights, and in short a whole generation," which theatre directors and critics are inclusive. Abati again also recalled that Adelugba took his job very seriously and expected his student to do his bit.

This informs why his full-time doctoral students were made to teach courses in the department. "I remember teaching at various times Directing, Special Author: J M Synge and Wole Soyinka, Theatre Arts Theory and Criticism, and another course focusing on the Anglo-Irish Drama of the 19th Century and Modern Nigerian Theatre. The late night notwithstanding, Baba will arrive in the class on time, and you wouldn't dare stutter while teaching. He would sit at the back of the class watching you, intervening occasionally to teach you, the teacher and the students.

In fact after submitting my Ph.D thesis to the Graduate School, he had on one fateful evening asked me to follow him home. "You go through that bookshelf there and this one and that one and that one, and select fifty books on Irish Drama, on Theory and Criticism, and Dramaturgy." I couldn't get his drift. But I complied with his directive. When I was through, he went through the books one by one, removed some and added others, making sure that the books were up to 50. Now, you take a notebook, record all these books, and keep them in this corner. I want you to read each and every one of them and write a review of every book. When you finish with this, then we can talk about your Ph.D thesis again," I didn't know whether to say yes sir or to burst out in tears.

Then he added: "By the time you are through with those

books, if there are still any gaps in your head, we would have filled them. Good night." Last year, I met Baba at the Oduduwa Hall of Obafemi Awolowo Univesrity, Ile-Ife, and he kept talking about my Ph.D thesis that was completed in 1990."We need to get back to that thesis and publish it as a book. Your chapter on Revolt. I have been thinking about it."

Dapo Adelugba was born on March 9, 1939 in Ondo. The young Dapo had his primary education in Ondo and Efon Alaaye. He proceeded to Government College, Ibadan for his secondary school education, which he finished in 1955, and moved in for Higher school in the same GCI. In 1958 he entered University of Ibadan and took an Honours' degree in English. He went to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for a postgraduate study in Theatre Arts. As he returned to Nigeria he started teaching at Ibadan Grammar School and later moved to the Theatre Arts in Faculty of Arts of the University of Ibadan in September 1967. He retired as a professor of Theatre Arts in 2004. Before retirement he worked with many theatre scholars like Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Niyi Osundare, Steve Abah, Abiola Irele, Martin Banham, Ziky Kofoworola, Patrick Ebewo, Osita Okagbue, Chuck Mike, Ayo Akinwale, etc.

He has written many seminal books, and translated from French to English Bakary Traore's *Le theatre negro-africain et ses fonctions sociales* (The Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions). He was director of Wale ogunnyemi Langbodo, Nigeria's drama entry to the Second World Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77), in addition to being the chairman of Oyo State Council of Arts and Culture, the Arts Director of University of Ibadan, Theatre Arts.

Ebewo stated that his attribute as a theatre director and critic

in addition to his obsession to theatre practice were taken into consideration when he was chosen to direct Nigeria's Drama FESTAC'77 entry. In an interview with Segun Ajayi in Daily Sun of Tuesday, July 6, 2000 Dapo Adelugba's confirmed all the testimonies that he is a theatre director who is a critic "I see myself more as a theatre critic, a theatre director, and as an actor. To me, theatre is play and criticism. So, my area of focus is theatre arts praxis.

Essentially, I believe in the indissoluble unity of theatre arts theory and practice." Adelugba also recalled his role models who made him walk tall in his adventure in the theatre. "As a young scholar in the 1960s, Molly Mahood, the Head of Department of English was definitely my role model. The lady was not just the Head of Department; she was very much of a mother to us all. I picked the love for scholarship from her. Another person whom I consider a role model was Mr. Geoffrey Axworthy, the first Director of the School of Drama. I considered him a role model because he would knock nails into planks without worrying about getting his hands dirty. There was also Martin Banham, a young lecturer and a friend. He too was committed to the theatre like Axworthy.

I also admire Soyinka, even though he did not stay long enough to establish himself in the sense of departmental leadership. I remember that in a particular year, Soyinka was away for as many as six months in one single session. But that did not detract from the fact that he was outstanding as a promoter of national culture, national arts, national achievement and scholarship.

In terms of creative writing, Adelugba did not contribute much except for adaptations or translation of other people's works. That *Scoundrel Suberu* is one play he adapted.

This and his English translation of Bakary Traore's *Le Theatre Negro Africain* (The Black African Theatre and its Social

Functions) have remained popular and refreshing in Nigeria's theatre circle. However, the Bakary's book is not a play. In fact Professor Harold Whitehall, an American who taught at the Department of English in the 1960s at the University of Ibadan was quite pleased with Adelugba's translation of Bakary Traore's book. Alongside, Dan Izevbaye, Egbe Ifie, Adelugba coordinated call for papers in 2004 for a Festschrift to celebrate the 70th birthday of Professor Wole Soyinka. The big volume of 1072 pages, *Wole Soyinka at 70 Festschrift* was eventually published in 2006. The book divided into five sections used Tributes and Reminiscences, Essays on Selected Works of Wole Soyinka, Essays on Apostles of the Creative/Performative Arts, Dance Composition, Essays on Culture, the Humanities and the Social Sciences to honour the first African to win Nobel prize for Literature.

However, *That Scoundrel Suberu* is yet to be published. On why the play is not yet published Adelugba said he did not see the work quite the same way as people are seeing it, rather he saw it as a work in progress and an experiment. This informs why he told Ajayi in an interview that he would rather remain a theatre critic, actor and director, than a dramatist. Despite this he is an erudite scholar and one of Nigeria's pioneering Theatre Directors, whom the volume of his creative writings, cannot be used to judge his erudition. He even admitted that there are a few books which he has not completed which he will have the leisure to complete in the period of his retirement. In terms of critical writings, he stands tall. There is no area in the theatre he has not written about. This is a fact Abati has attested to. "He was actively involved in the documentation of theatre history and the work of other practitioners through the LACE Occasional Publications which he funded with his own resources.

He is widely published in academic journals." He wrote "Trance and Theatre: The Nigerian Experience" in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a critical source book* edited by Yemi Ogunbiyi

(1981) where he highlighted the relationship between trance and the theatre. In *Theatre in Africa* edited by Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (1978), he wrote "Wale Ogunyemi, Zulu Sofola and Ola Rotimi: Three Dramatists in search of Language." Also his stance as a director-critic is demonstrated in his critical appraisal of most plays he has directed, the works of people he directed their plays and even actors he has directed on stage.

For instance he wrote "Langbodo: The Concept of Theatre as exploration," in *Nigerian Magazine*, In a book *Chief Wale Ogunyemi At Fifty: Essays in Honour of a Nigerian Actor-Dramatist*, he edited he contributed, "A Tribute to Wale Ogunyemi on his fiftieth Birthday," "The Anonymous Everyman and Wale Ogunyemi's Eniyan: Dialogue Between Medieval European Theatre and the Contemporary Nigerian Theatre," and "Wale Ogunyemi As Actor. Then in his Inaugural lecture he wrote on "Theatre Arts Studies: Old and New Challenges," etc.

In the tribute to Ogunyemi he mentioned his directorial prowess how he "re-cast in adaptive version and re-directed Luigi Pirandello's *The Jar* which was earlier directed by Wole Soyinka." Also there are others plays like John Pepper Clark's *The Masquerade*, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, *Eight Irish Plays* directed also by Adelugba. Apart from these he directed many other plays. In an interview with Musa (2005), Ziky Kofoworola confirmed that in his undergraduate days Adelugba's directing style on *Kiriji* and several of Wale Ogunyemi's plays inspired him. Adelugba admitted that he has worked with Ogunyemi as he watched him grow for up to 30 years in the theatre. Despite this his instinct as a critic did not stop him from descending his critical scalpel on Ogunyemi as he writes about his adaptation of *Everyman* to Eniyan:

Indeed one is reluctant to describe Eniyan as 'adaptation' of

everyman, even though the playwright, himself does. A good deal of the vibrancy of the Ogunyemi drama derives from or is initiated by the very characters absent from his original source of inspiration. If Eniyan must be described as an 'adaptation' of *Everyman*, then such a description would have to be qualified by the word 'loose' (Adelugba, 1993: 18).

This observation is made in a book that celebrated Ogunyemi at 50 which Adelugba himself edited and contributed articles to. J.P Clark Bekederemo, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola etc are among playwrights, artistes, and even theatre directors Adelugba has done a critical appraisal on their works and practice. For instance in his essay in *Theatre in Africa*, he examined the dramatic efforts of Ogunyemi, Sofola and Rotimi.

In the article, "Wale Ogunyemi as Actor," he made a strong criticism on Soyinka's theatre practice as a director by citing an interview he had with Ogunyemi in 1984. Soyinka's style of directing is described as "Free directing" where Soyinka will always impose on you things to do on stage...He will first of all give you free hand. Then later he will prune you down or add to your own creation..." Even when he writes Introductions of books on theatre and drama Adelugba makes serious critical statements. For instance in his Introduction in Brian Crow's *Studying Drama* (1983), he descended hard on the original position of academics, scholars and intellectuals that drama had no place in Universities or in educational institutions, by arguing that "this position is of course no longer fashionable" Part of why Adelugba picks interest in *Studying drama* is that it offers practical guide to dramatic criticism that would help African students in dramaturgy.

Even as the director of *Langbodo* for the FESTAC '77 he was happy but lamented over lack of fund because "the levels of

representation at FESTAC '77 recommended by the committee could not be effected due to the traditional Governmental arguments of scarcity of funds." However, the style he adopted in directing the play underscored him as a democratic director that encouraged criticism. This is because despite this financial problem, he preached inventive frame of mind to the group and this boosted great stimulus to the troupe's collective frame of mind. It also developed versatility where real spirit of learning prevailed. As such they "all attempted to master the styles of performance." This worked out because:

A basic principle was established that every member of our national repertoire should take on as many aspects of production and performance as was within his/her ability and expertise.(see pp.4 of Nigerian Magazine vol. 54, no2, April-June 1984).

As result of this, the large body of experts in the team were dramaturges, drama directors of experience, designers, choreographers, costumiers, costume makers, props specialists, scenographers, technical theatre experts, technologists, dancers, business management experts, media producers, directors and executants of various shades and degrees of specialization and actors. So the production of the play really tested Adelugba's "managerial ability and directorial acumen" in handling a group of people who are critics in their own right.

Adelugba as a Social Critic

As theatre director, Adelugba delves into sociological criticism. Yerima (2007) calls for the consideration of the relevance of drama thematically and socially.

This is also the beginning of the function of the theatre as a base for sociological criticism. It means that the theatre has

something to do with the society of man. Sociological criticism is one of the 20th century approaches to literary criticism. It is an approach that looks at the literary society. That is the society presented in the text. It also examines the relationship of the society of the text to the real society it imitates. This is what Yerima (2007) has summed up to be the living stage as a social criticism.

The word living is the immediacy-that relationship which drama and theatre have with life the relationship between the living stage and the society is that its experiences and messages can be shared experiences within a given community or society. This theory is based on the concept of truth. The living stage must portray life (Yerima, 2007:52).

However, Umukoro (2002) has posited that from inception, theatre has always been an important social institution that emerged in classical times. Even as it appeared to be performing a purely religious function, the ancient Greek theatre performed a remarkable social service...and provided some useful food for thought for what amounted to be a national audience.

In modern times, the theatre has continued to grow in influence and significance, performing the traditional functions of information, entertainment and education, in addition to effective use for political propaganda and ideological position. In Nigeria, specifically the theatre is currently engaged in three-pronged campaign for socio-cultural, preservation, religious propaganda and educational propagation. These 3Ps, relating to society/culture, religion and education respectively, constitute the fundamental responsibilities of drama and theatre in developing African society (Umukoro, 2002:115). It is obvious that this has been what Adelugba since he started directing and staging plays in the theatre in his school days till date had been underscoring.

Adelugba adapted and directed Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* (The Trickeries of Scapin) for the Nigerian students. That was in 1960, when the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in their conference chose a theme of that Independent year as "The Relationship between the University and the Nation." By this the great Nigerian students were to join in nation building. Hence their idea was to leave the University Environment so that the Universities would take their positions in the development of Nigeria.

To achieve this social responsibility, there was the University College, Ibadan Dramatic Society which Adelugba was the president. He used this opportunity and connected the student's idea to the theatre. This brought about the idea of play production which would be taken round the country. Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* came up for consideration. Then because it would tour the country adaptation to use the language people would understand was the next option.

The first production we took out was Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, adapted by Dapo Adelugba, Alfred Opubor, Browson Dede and Ayo Amu. They called, *That Scoundrel Suberu*. Their aim was a production so completely Nigerian that it could be mistaken for a modern Nigerian play, not impossible since Moliere's plays dealt with arranged marriages and mischievous servants-still familiar figures of Nigerian life (Axworthy in an interview in Yerima, 2005: 27).

With that decision, Adelugba embarked on the assignment and later called in others who assisted with the Pidgin English section of the translation. The social context of the play at the first production was underscored from the laughter it generated among

the audience over the rascality of Suberu, the major character.

However, as a play that engineered the spirit of risible by generating for the people the message the audience should take home is that knavery does mankind no good. So the basic objective of the play was to entertain the people and make them laugh at human nature and follies. Axworthy highlighting the productions of University Traveling theatre in an interview with Yerima (2005) noted that even as it induced laughter:

Ever since this first production, *That Scoundrel Suberu* remained the peoples' play whenever it goes on stage. This is to the extent that it brought Adelugba close with French. That was when he led his group to the French Cultural Centre, Lagos, twice to stage the play. The first time was in 2002, and the second in 2004. The reason for the demand of the play from the French is because of its aesthetic appeal and social relevance. Responding to Ademola (2003) question on how as director he would choose a convocation play for a University in the interview book, *Theatre Practice in Nigeria*, Adelugba did not hesitate in saying that:

The first thing to bear in mind is the atmosphere, the environment, and the social realities of the time. There is no point doing a play that does not relate to the social ways of the time (Adelugba in response to Ademola, 2003: 104).

This timely and relevant social impact Adelugba meant is demonstrated in the recent production of J.P. Clark Bekeremo's *All For Oil* which toured many Nigerian cities and towns and Inegbe (2007) asserted that "it was under the direction of Dapo Adelugba, a notable Nigerian theatre critic, director, actor and playwright."

It is not only on stage that Adelugba used his directorial skill through adaptation to showcase sociological criticism. He wrote

radio and television play sketches where he adapted some and wrote some originally. He adapted a medieval farce, *The Second Shepherd's Play* during a Christmas and titled it "Happy Cow Christmas." His aim was to say "Happy Christmas" to Nigerians in the traditional African way. Indeed most of Adelugba's adaptations which he directed are also inspired by the social relevance of the themes contained in the original works.

Adelugba's Oral Critical Commentaries

This section shall comprise of critical commentaries Adelugba made orally. In his presentation of the outline for Diagnostic Criticism to a theatre director Hodge (1971) highlighted the concepts of merely "talking" your criticism. Though he noted that it encourages looseness of expression as well as mushy thinking, "he admitted that "oral discussion is the most important thing, because a director must verbally articulate." Izevbaye (2003) has posited that Adelugba himself has argued that traditional oral culture is in decline.

However, Oyatoye (2002) traced the origin of theatre criticism to oral tradition when men as a community started interacting with the purpose of entertaining one another. The interaction and entertainment were done in such a way that commendations and corrections were effective. The corrections and commendations were impressionistic criticisms which the critics did subjectively from their opinions. Ajadi (2007) averred that such entertainment was done in spoken expression, sung expression, and oral theatricals which he itemized as traditional legends, tales, ballads, songs, proverbs, riddles and plays. These form the popular entertainment of primitive peoples.

Also Asigbo (2005) has noted that in the communal mode of living in Africa native humour or satire is a source to use as a watchdog for social etiquette and orderly behaviour. Citing

Bamidele (2001) to demonstrate the validity of his assertion, Asigbo (2005) further avers that satire and humour are aimed at correcting manners, morals and ideals. This in itself is criticism which could be done in form of lampoon.

This section of this essay is not on oral drama performance but with the background we have just given it becomes pertinent to showcase where Adelugba has used the concept of oral theatricals to generate humour which we have noted is a source of correction that sociological criticism tends to emphasize. Abati has used the encounter Adelugba used to have with his students to present what will serve our purpose in this example. "We were so taken up by him that we all specialized in mimicking him: his turn of phrase, his humour and his mannerisms.

Adelugba in a good mood will break into raucous laughter in a deep guttural voice, as he stammers out his excitement: Ahn han Han, omo buruku, han han an hu hu hu, omo buruuku uuu... (with the laughter becoming a graduated echo). Where is Emmanuel Oga, please? And Marcellinus Okhakhu, Henry Foluso, Femi Shaka, Onookome Okome and Sola Fosudo to come and act it all out. And as the laughter stretches out, the old teacher will place his left hand behind his back and scratch his lower back or navel, his right hand holding his heart, as he infects his audience with innocent laughter." However, the forgoing may not have been exactly relevant but it represents our purpose as there is element of acting in it and calling for people to come and act, which is the duty of a director.

Other oral media Adelugba has used to showcase his critical ingenuity as director includes his comments in interviews, where those who see him as a model and also those he had worked say what he had said. Primary method of research of using one-on-one interview is not part of our research methodology in this study,

so most of these comments people represented on Adelugba are collated from interviews (not conducted by this present writer) published in books, newspapers, journals, and internet etc.

In the same interview with Musa (2005), earlier mentioned Ziky Kofoworola described Adelugba as his mentor and role model whom he tries to emulate. Kofoworola highlighted the comments Adelugba used to make orally that are theatrically critical when he is directing a play. Kofoworola specifically mentioned how Adelugba demonstrated 'critiquing the critic' on those who criticize actor that play minor roles in the theatre.

.....He (talked)

about the cameo part usually in play production. Usually, people always assume that somebody who has a big role to play in a play is the one who carries the play BUT Professor Adelugba, Uncle Dapo is the one who made me to realize that the person who play cameo part (that is, the small part) is like someone who holds the key that can open or close the applause of a play. Essentially Adelugba goes for details and even if you are playing a major role in a production, it doesn't matter to uncle Dapo Adelugba. Assuming that your role is just to come in and go out, he gives you the attention (Kofoworola in an interview with Musa, 2005: 176).

The reason for the parenthesis which is mine on the word talked is to stress our use of oral in this section. Also the interview conducted by Ademola (2003) with Adelugba on Theatre Practice in Nigeria is a medium where Adelugba used oral evidence to make critical comments. The volume is now documented as a book and it is the first publication under the ISESE interview series which is a

project of the Ibadan Cultural Studies Group of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

In his preface the interviewer pointed out that "it is a rich contribution which among other things sheds light on the cultural milieu and heritage that produced Adelugba." The only way such contribution can indeed be rich is to listen to the man involved talk about his experience. Izevbaye (2003) in his forward in the book has described the interview itself, "as oral...and given its dialogue format...it brings into the open the subtext of a cultural resurgence that leans towards a new iconoclasm, but also in the critical engagement...the conversation in this volume is often stimulating. A number of fundamental issues are raised..."

Going through the book, some of such issues raised are purely critical as they indeed "highlight Professor Dapo Adelugba's contribution to the emergence and development of Nigerian Theatre...as a teacher of theatre, a foremost director and a cultural nationalist," as well as a robust theatre critic. Adelugba has further achieved the oral demonstration through talk shows that he featured in. There was a time that he held series of talks in the electronic media on dramaturgy. In the interview book, Adelugba confirmed that "There were also talk programmes that I participated in, and there was a time that I held a series of talks on the Nigerian manifestation of comedy, which I did on WNTV/WNBS."

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