

OPERATIC ADAPTATION OF DRAMA SCRIPTS:
FEMI OSOFISAN'S *A RESTLESS RUN OF LOCUSTS*
AT UNILORIN 24TH CONVOCATION PLAY

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Abstract

This paper examines the process of adapting a drama script into an opera using an adapted work of a prominent playwright as focus with Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as our reference point. This paper uses the adapted work to analyze and judge the success of adaptation and also points out its shortcomings. In view of this, the paper pervades the process of conducting interviews, participatory observation method with the consultation of relevant books, journals, articles, thesis etc. We observed that the adaptation of the drama script was not totally based on the theories of adaptation which scholars such as Kneupper (1972), Zawidski (2000), Elvira (2003), Hutcheon (2006) and others have researched and developed and that previous adaptations by adapters have sacrificed some inherent dramatic moments for the music itself. The paper concludes and makes recommendations in order to correct some existing challenges for the betterment of the adaptation of drama scripts into operas in theatre schools and theatrical performances.

Introduction

Adaptation in music over the years has produced a dynamic way

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of achieving music performances. Being a process of change from a particular form, its importance is deemed necessary. Its major aim is to substitute for the unavailability of original opera scripts, or lack of quality scripts which portrays the social and human problems of the present day. In the world of music, composition is an important tool that cannot be compromised; it is sine-qua-non to the development and sustenance of music. Adaptation in music has a highly significant reliance on the art of composition. Although sufficient theories on adaptation have not fully emerged, its practice in the theatre world, especially in Nigeria, is beginning to yield positive results.

In theatrical presentations, most especially in the area of music, has remained a veritable tool in the hands of those who have discovered its potency. Adaptation being a process of change has been an emblem of reformation, re-creation and reproduction and has also presented a way of revitalizing existing play scripts into new forms. The final result of operatic adaptation of drama scripts, although arduous and extremely challenging, becomes fulfilling if the work has passed through the required process. That is why Thompson (2002, p.30) affirms that:

Adaptation into an opera is a difficult task. It is a two-in-one volitional and compulsory hurdle that must be subdued. The challenges it poses are often enormous and sometimes seems unrealizable, especially when given a time frame. But when approached with utmost seriousness, interest and dedication, the result definitely brings satisfaction, fulfillment, achievement etc.; it practically confirms the adapter as a composer.

In view of the above submission, one can deduce that adaptation is not an escape route from the requirements of music as it applies to original opera rather, it presents an interesting way of introducing other styles of achieving and producing an opera. Scholars who have written on adaptation have given creditable and useful statement on adaptation. For example, Hutcheon (2006:p.72) enlightens us that “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative, a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic.

We can therefore see that even though adaptation is derived from another script, it is a complete difference from the pre-existing script. The theory of adaptation transcends the realm of changing a script to another form. More importantly, it has to do with a stepwise, careful and procedural way of putting the work into its new form. This will consequently be the bone of contention as this paper proceeds.

Purpose of Study

The major reason for this study is spurred by the level of success that has been recorded through adapted works. Because of this, we decided to take a proper look into how these adaptations are supposed to be approached. The continuous interest, demand and constant need to adapt also contribute to the reasons for this study.

As mentioned earlier, theories in adaptation have not fully emerged effectively in Nigeria, so we thought of taking a research into the process and ways in which these adaptations can be done more importantly in the aspect of music. It is therefore thought that bringing to the knowledge of scholars in music the process of adapting a drama script into an opera will be impacting, and will continue to lay precedence for future use.

Literature Review

In the forefront of every aspect of human life and endeavour, adaptation has been of a very high importance. The definition is somewhat general, but its functions, uses and application as regards different situations, disciplines and areas are quite different. There are several areas in which adaptation can be applied. We have biological, climatic, environmental, psychological adaptations etc. but the one which actually concerns the purpose of this research is theatre adaptation.

In defining adaptation, Encyclopedia Americana (1829: p.151) expresses that:

Adaptation is the action or process of adapting, fitting or suiting one thing to another, the process of modifying a thing so as to suit new conditions: as the modifications of a piece of music to suit a different instrument or different purpose, the alteration of a dramatic composition to suit a different audience.

This definition makes it clear that it is a transfer from one place to another or one thing to another; it also establishes that it can be an action or process. This means that adaptation is an act which is supposed to undergo a process. In the same vein, the New Encyclopedia Britannica (1768, p.89) also re-iterates that adaptation

is a shift in function or form, or both that ensures fitness in a certain environment on the part of living organisms, it supposes an adjustment of requirements and tolerance and the achievement of a certain efficiency. The case of humans is hardly different even though social and psychological

requirements may have precedence over climatic and physiological ones.

The reason for going through the above definitions as we have observed is that in every facet of human life, animals, plant and even situations, there is a constant need to change and adjust for better options. This is why Orzack and Elliot (2001, p.44) confirm that:

The complexity of the total adjustment of plants, animals and even human beings alike, to all the elements of their habitat leads to this ultimate paradox; no species encounters in any one environment optimum conditions for each and every phase of its life cycle.

In this manner, the adaptation of drama to opera also shares the view of the above assertion. This is why Iyeh (2007, p.139), a dance adapter contributes that adaptation *is* “a word coined from the word **adapt** which means to make something suitable for a new or different use or situation by means of changes or modification. Modification here may imply transfer from one medium to another”

The modification in the above corresponds accurately with the central focus of this work. Adapting a drama piece into an opera is in actual sense a modification of drama into another medium i.e. opera. This new medium (opera) has therefore been implanted in another form of communication which implies that the spoken words as it were in its dramatic form will change into rendition of the lines as songs with the accompaniment of different musical instruments. To buttress all the above submissions, Zawidski (2000, p.28) opines that “adaptation in music is an acknowledged transposition of a

recognizable other work or works; a creative and an interpretative act of appropriation and salvaging”

It is interesting to note here that adaptation can also be viewed from the angle of salvaging a situation probably lack or unavailability of readymade opera scripts. Although the idea to adapt in our present system has an affinity with the purpose of salvaging, it would not be out of place to suggest that adaptation should also be approached from the angle of creating more opera typologies and creating more theories of adaptation.

Adaptation as a concept of choices

The question of adaptation as a choice or alternative is two-sided. This is because of the various applications of the word. Adaptation as it applies to several disciplines and life situations can be viewed from the perspective of making a choice. In actual sense, for someone or something to adapt to another situation, it has to be the choice of the person.

It is pertinent to note here that at some point, adaptation is irresistible. The possibility of not getting fulfillment or satisfaction from a particular place or situation makes you adapt to the other. Thus, adaptation is a choice because at every certain point in one's life, one is left with no other choice but to adapt, in order to adjust to the conditions of the new situation and level. It is clear that no man encounters total satisfaction and optimum conditions for every phase in his life cycle.

However, in the adaptation of drama to opera, adaptation can actually be seen as a choice, and also an alternative. This is so because of the perspective from which European adapters view adaptation and the prevalent situation of the scarcity or unavailability of Nigerian operas, and the fear of not totally, accurately and adequately interpreting the western operas. In line with this, Zimmerman (2005:p.27) states that European

adapters purposely and intentionally choose to adapt drama scripts into opera because of the various reasons:

- ✎ to break new grounds in the world of composition
- ✎ to bring into existence a theory on how adaptation should be done.
- ✎ to research fully present new, outstanding and contemporary way of producing operas.
- ✎ to experiment, explore and compare adaptation with operas.

This has actually served as a guide and a platform without which this paper may not have been successful. In the Nigerian perspective, adaptation is clearly viewed as an alternative to the scarcity and unavailability of opera scripts. This is the reason for adapting; it is therefore observed that nowadays, adequate effort to go in search of an opera script has reduced. This is so because adaptation presents an alternative. Another viable reason is that some musicologists/music directors and composers have witnessed the success of the production of an adapted work, and such became interested in adapting. Very importantly, some of the available opera scripts may not possess adequate dramatic content and story line compared to the drama script of choice. Elvira (2003, p.6) buttresses here about adaptation as an alternative “this phenomenon asks for interpretation. Its reasons may be manifold: the inadequacy of contemporary dramatic materials in the eyes of the director, or its lack of philosophical treatment of social and human problems”.

From the artistic point of view, we wish to submit that adaptation can be a choice and also an alternative depending on the motive and reasons of the adapters. Be it a choice or an alternative, the purpose and process of adapting the script means the same.

Adaptation Process


In order for an adaptation to be complete and successful, there are some necessary processes it should undergo. Hutcheon (2006, p.28) clearly posits a step by step process for adapting a drama into an opera. They are


- ✎ Sourcing for a script;
- ✎ Study and read the to be sure of its adaptability;
- ✎ Edit, restructure and re-arrange the script to suit the purpose of the production;
- ✎ Study and read again to ascertain the compactness of the script in comparison to the original form;
- ✎ Start your composition;
- ✎ Search for possible areas of musical exploration;
- ✎ See through for possible additions and subtractions;
- ✎ Score your compositions; and
- ✎ Set your compositions into dramatic performance.


In furtherance to Hutcheon's theory, all the points shall be properly developed to give an insight into each level of process and ascertain when to move to the next stage.

- ✎ **Sourcing for Script:** A script is a written working document in drama, prose or poetry, which is to be actualized on stage. Before an adaptation can take place, there has to be a script to work with. In other words, the adapter is saddled with the task of searching for a suitable drama script that would fit into his or her style. This serves as a first attempt at adapting.
- ✎ **Read and Study the script to be sure of its adaptability:** This is a very important stage because it is not all drama scripts that are adaptable. As such, adapters must be careful by understanding the possibility and plausibility of adapting a script.




Kneupper (1972, p.10) educates that “in attempting the delicate task of adapting, adapters must recognize two essential points: 1. the importance of adapting a script capable of effective presentation; and 2. the necessity of maintaining the integrity of the adapted work”. Kneupper's thoughts reveal that the adaptability of a script has to do with it having effective presentation, while also staying in tune and in line with the original script itself. In actual fact, if it is not adaptable, it might not be successful.

 **Edit, Restructure and Re-arrange the Script:** A theatre director (in this case an adapter) has the liberty to edit the play in which he/she is directing. This is needed because the director or adapter might not need every bit of the lines in the play as he or she is re-interpreting the lines on stage according to his or her concept and framework. In operatic adaptation, there is a very vital need to restructure and rearrange some part of the script so that it will fit into the singing style. Some lines have to be broken in bits in order to conform to the singing style.

 **Read and study the script again to ascertain the compactness of the script in comparison to the original form.** After the script has been edited, re-structured and re-arranged, one has to be sure that some important aspects or the messages have not been edited out or diluted. This will ensure that the script has not lost focus, and it is not out of point as it is in the original script. Iyeh (2007, p.139) re-iterates here that “adaptability to the new form is very important because it will be useless and annoying if at the end of the day, the new medium fails to communicate as much as the original form”

 **Start your composition:** This is considered the most important aspect of the adaptation process because it is basically concerned with the transfer of the lines into music. It is definitely not an easy task; it usually takes a longer period than all other aspects. It demands concentration, time, focus, creativity and observation etc. the adapter/composer must possess all the necessary musical skills and knowledge needed for this work.

The composer at this point has three options with which he/she can approach the composition,

-  Composing the lines using the tonic sol-fa notation
-  Composing and singing the lines directly as the tune comes to the mind.
-  Recording the songs in a tape or CDs


Established by John Curwen in 1840, the tonic sol-fa *d: r: m: f: s: l: t: d'* is a syllabic representation of the Western diatonic scale. One of the easiest ways to do an effective composition is to make use of the tonic sol-fa. This is because it is the tonic sol-fa that makes the tunes accessible. However, while using the tonic sol-fa to teach the tunes, care must be taken never to allow the unmusicological actors sing *saw* instead of *sol* as observed and corrected by Ikibe (2013, p.2).

Singing the lines is very temporal, considering the fact that these words are what we use as our basic means of communication, and as long as we leave the composition to discuss or do other things, the music in the lines fizzle away. Once the sol-fa notations are used, it sticks and can be applied directly to the lines. Recording the songs in the tape or CD is also a very good way of keeping the compositions intact. This is because the original composition will be documented therein, and may even aid the teaching of the songs by giving

these tapes or CD to the casts to listen.


The composer of the adapted work must make use of most (if not all) of the compositional techniques in music, in order to give the work its desired musical taste and flavor. Such compositional techniques usually familiar with adaptation are: *Elongation, retardation, extemporization, sequence, repetition, variation, quotation etc.* These techniques though will only be seen when the compositions are scored, the composer needs to reflect them as soon as he composes with the tonic sol-fa.


The composer must also make proper use of dynamics as at when due. The dynamics are vital musical terms and they add spices to musical composition. Some of such dynamics are *forte, pianissimo, allegro vivace, moderato, a tempo, andante, sostenuto*. When all this is done, the most sensitive part of adaptation (composition) would have been taken care of.


 **Search for possible areas of musical exploration:** This is an aspect which continues the composition, giving finishing touches to it. Here, the composer highlights areas where harmony is to be included i.e. giving different parts to some particular aspects of the lines known as chorus. These parts can be the four major conventional parts i.e. **soprano, alto, tenor and bass**, or might include few others. The essence of this chorus is to create emphasis and add more musical feeling to the opera. Exploring with the **duet, trio, quartet, sestet** etc is also very necessary as this will create variations in the patterns and medium of singing. Variations, they say, is the spice of life.

The collaboration of what the instrument will play with the entire opera will also come up here. Different instruments and

how, when and what to play will also come to bear.

 **See through for possible additions and subtraction:** After the compositions must have been completed, and the adding of the musical exploration, another cross-check is deemed important. The pattern of composition especially in adaptation is such that the compositions are never stagnant, it goes through a continuous process of reformation, which might involve removing some parts that may be considered as excess and adding some other parts; all in the spirit of improvement and perfection.

 **Score your compositions:** This aspect has to do with the documentation of the composition in musical notation. This is very necessary because there has to be a working manuscript which will be given to the cast, and will be used in teaching them the songs. Another important reason why the compositions need to be scored is that they need to be kept in the archives to serve as a reference materials for the future. The essence of adaptation will not be complete without scoring the compositions because apart from the performance, it is the only proof that a drama script has been adapted into an opera.

 **Set your compositions into dramatic performance:** This is the final hurdle in the adaptation process. It is an aspect where all the musical compositions will be dramatized on stage. The music and the dramatic actions will be combined together to give it an operatic form. Here, all the dramatic concepts, patterns and movements will be infused to give it shape, and to present the storyline, just as it is designed.

However, the adapter must be careful not to allow the music overshadow the dramatic content of the opera so that some

details will not be missed out. Having gone through the processes, the adaptation of a drama script to an opera would have achieved its desired aim.

Synopsis of *A Restless Run of Locust*

A Restless Run of Locust centers on Chief Michael Kuti, a politician whose ultimate quest is power. Chief Kuti kidnaps Tunde Adeniyi, his political rival, and turns the whole town in disarray. He uses his thugs to kidnap him so that he wouldn't be available for the elections. Ironically, Chief Kuti's wife, Ronke and his daughter Iyabo are of subtle characters. Ronke a loving and caring wife detests her husband's strong appetite for power and politics and often restrains him whenever he uses his thugs to perpetrate his evil act. Chief Kuti out of his desperation borrows money from the bank for his campaign using his furniture as collateral. The major turn-around in the play is when Chief Kuti's daughter, Iyabo, falls in love with Sanda Adeniyi, Tunde's brother. Chief Kuti tries all he can to stop the union between Iyabo and Sanda, but his efforts proved abortive, as Iyabo is already pregnant for Sanda.

Meanwhile, Sanda determines to replace his brother in the election against Chief Kuti, and Iyabo supports Sanda. On the long run, chief cannot bear the fact that he is unable to pay the bank loan coupled with the union between his daughter, Iyabo, and his supposed enemy, Sanda, he later resolves to commit suicide. His daughter's union with Sanda is blessed by his wife, Ronke. Thus his quest for power is in vain.

Structural Analysis of *A Restless Run of Locust* as an Opera

In adapting the play, different musical forms and styles were used. These forms range from highlife to *woro*, *fuji*, *reggae*, calypso and afro-beat. The adaptation also made use of

traditional forms like *senwele*, *apala* and *dadakuada/baalu* just to create a fusion of good musical quality. Each of these musical forms and styles were spread across the four (4) scenes of the play, with each scene having its own musical taste and difference.

SCENE 1

The play starts with Iyabo singing in *woro* beat. This beat portrays the kind of emotion for the beginning of the play as she was surprised to meet Sanda her fiancé unconscious, and the house scattered. The rendition of her song starts slowly and changes from *woro* to highlife where Sanda says

Sanda : I must have been a fool, I am going after them.

The beat changes here because the mood and emotions changed to that of anger. When the party leader comes in, the beat changed back to *woro*. The use of highlife and the interchange to *woro* helps regulate the emotions of this part of the play.

The first scene ended with reggae beat and this started from where Sanda assumes the responsibility of taking his brother's place in the elections, the party leader also goes ahead to congratulate him singing in reggae.

SCENE 2

The second scene starts with Mrs. Kuti singing in highlife trying to control his husband to stop pacing around and it continues with highlife until later when the thugs come in. Because of the lifestyle associated with thugs, and because of the setting of the play which is Yoruba, *fuji* which is a popularly known form and style of music is used here to distinguish their

character. This *fuji* adds colour to the operatic adaptation because of the wide acceptance of the genre of the music. It also serves as a new development in the adaptation of drama to opera especially in the Performing Arts department.

The style and form of the music changes from *fuji* to *woro* after the exit of the thugs. At this point, Mrs. Kuti is questioning her husband on why the thugs came to the house and what he gave to them. This same style and form of music continues all through to the end of scene 2 where Chief Kuti commits suicide.

SCENE 3

This scene starts with calypso from where the four elders come to meet Sanda, and it changes to funk where Obe, one of Sanda's boys, was with him. A knock comes on the door and it is Mrs. Kuti who comes in singing in blues. This scene actually has a different segment and succession of musical styles and forms compared to the first and second scenes. At a point, the style shifts to the traditional form known as *senwele*. Mrs. Kuti was sings:

Mrs. Kuti: You marry my daughter,
By what scale do you weigh,
You politician.....

Senwele is a style of music which takes the call and response pattern. As Mrs. Kuti sings, the chorus responds.

After *senwele*, the style goes back to the blues where Sanda pleads with Mrs. Kuti, all through to the end of the scene.

SCENE 4

Highlife starts this final scene and dovetails into *woro* style. Reggae style is also evident in this scene. The reconciliation

between Mrs. Kuti and Sanda and the acceptance and blessing of their union is established with the use of the soft blue style to create the appropriate emotions; this runs through to the end of the play.

It is pertinent to note here that apart from all this musical forms and style, there is a theme song specifically composed in the afro beat style and the theme song serves most times as the bridge between scenes, instrumental intros also serve the same purpose. The fusion of all this different musical forms and styles are instrumental to the adaptation of the opera.

Adaptation of the Play

The operatic adaptation of Femi Osofisan's *A Restless Run of Locust* was performed on the 23rd of October, 2008 in the 2500 seat auditorium on the main campus as the University of Ilorin 24th Convocation play by the staff and students of the Performing Arts. As a participant observers, the writers of this paper observed that the challenges encountered in the adaptation of this script were considerably minimal.

As researched, the crew had some difficulty in getting an opera script and therefore decided to adapt. The storyline was interesting to the group more importantly because it dealt with the prevailing political situation of the country. The process of adaptation being known encompasses some of the processes. The compositions here were much easier and simple because the drama script is considerably moderate.

The way the playwright constructed the lines in the play also favored the aim of adaptation, as the lines were written in bits, and also in simple terms. However, the crew had the challenge of time in composing the music. The compositions took much time due to the lack of time in composing a full-fledged script. This affected the rehearsal schedule. This is

because when the dramatization was supposed to be going on, the compositions were not yet finished.

We also observed that there was a collaborative effort between the Music Director and the crew members. This particularly reduced the work load of the adapter/composer, especially with the presence of some very good play directors who helped in the blockings and dramaturgy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the latter end of the production had to be tidied up at the last minute. The composition of the music also took so much time, such that the dramatic aspect would have been affected but for the experienced play directors such as Professor Kofoworola and Dr. Adeoye who were on ground to assist in the production of the adapted play into an opera.

It is important to note that the less the volume of the drama, the less the stress of adapting it, therefore, shorter plays should be sought for when opting for drama adaptation. On the other hand, very good editing of the play should be done in order to shorten it and at the same time, not cutting off the play's essential portions. It is therefore believed that with the proper use of this process of adaptation, the adaptation of operas will be a lot easier, and much more successful.

For adaptation works to continue to move forward, it is needful to follow the theories and processes given by the research efforts of Western scholars, it will not be out of place, if scholars in Africa and Nigeria in particular can also build on these theories. It will increase the knowledge of theatre scholars about operatic adaptation, and also the art of music composition.

Recommendations

Having discussed the processes of adaptation and how it has been used in our study, it is pertinent to give necessary recommendations that will be of future use to intending adapters and music directors. First, it is pertinent that the adapters be made to score their compositions. This authenticates the composer's right as the composer of the music. Moreover, adapters and music directors should develop more interest in adaptation, so that more creative works and theories can emerge. Apart from adapting drama scripts, there should be collaboration between playwrights and music composers on operatic compositions like W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan did on several operas: one writes the libretti, the other composes the music.

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