

A DIRECTOR'S READING OF TRACIE CHIMA UTOH'S *OUR WIVES HAVE GONE MADE AGAIN!*

Sunday Edum

Department of Theatre & Film Studies
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

*Directing is an interpretative exploration anchored on the harmonization theory, which reconciles different perspectives. This process involves an understanding and manipulation of a script, stage and actors and other production items. Among these, the script, written, improvised or devised is primary to the interpretive processes. This paper is thus an attempt to use the artistic and literary methodology to engage a directorial analysis of Tracie Chima Utoh's *Our Wives Have Gone Made Again!* It is observed that fundamental to directorial success is textual analysis of the script to be produced. A foundational premise worthy of note is that the title, characters and characterization, language and thought use are serious areas that the director must pay attention to, in understanding Tracie Chima Utoh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!* The above considerations, which are primary to directing, as a craft remains crucial and core to dramatic action and the framework of the entire play as an interpretive act. .*

Key Words: *Directorial, Title, Characterization, Script, Analysis, Feminist Insanity and Language*

Introduction

The script remains one of the vital elements of every theatre experience irrespective of the style of production. What makes up a theatre experience consists the idea/product. Such familiar items include poetry, drama, musical or dance, either

written, improvised or devised. However, performers made up of actors, and designers, the environment or a playing space where the idea will be expressed and members of the audience who consume the product interpreted by the performers in a specific space make up mix. The consideration of these different elements ends with the target audience. But it can only occur when the script is carefully organized. The idea determines the executioners, where it will be displayed and who must consume it. The director makes the theatre and must be conversant with the play as text. Yerima defines text as, (is) a letter from a playwright to the director, actors and other members of the production informing them about a particular vision of his or hers" (15). This paper therefore, is evaluative as it also is analytical. Hence it engages a textual analysis of Tracie Chima Utoh's *Our Wives Have Gone Made Again!* The objective is to rely on the text as a foil to highlight directorial considerations either for screen or stage.

Theatre Directing / Director

The art of interpretation is not new in human history. Hence the human's understanding of the environment and choice-making is hinged on interpretative ingenuity. Directing centres on interpretation through a harmonization processes. Directing is traceable to God the creator who is biblically recorded as the first interpreter and harmonization expert of nature. His creative ingenuity brought about a spiritual harmonization of the various elements that lacked form and void. Such harmony as enacted by God informs our sense of order and the way we enjoy synchrony in our world. According to Cohen:

directing is not simply a craft; it is *directing* in the dictionary as well as in the theatrical sense: it is to lead, to supervise, to instruct, to give shape. In other

words, it is to do, what is necessary to make things work (492).

The process of directing is indeed centred on leading, supervising, instructing and shaping with the aim of artistically doing the needful to achieve a desired goal. In a parallel vein, Clurman sees the art of directing as a craft. Calling it direction, he sees it as a job, a craft, a profession and at best an art. He went on to describe the director thus:

The director must be an organizer, a teacher, a politician, a psychic detective, a lay analyst, a technician, a creative being. Ideally, he should know literature (drama), acting, and the psychology of the actor, the visual arts, music, and history and above all, he must understand people. He must inspire confidence. All of which means, he must be a "great lover."(14)

The above qualities define the status of the modern director in contemporary theatre practice. The contemporary director must have some leadership and analytical qualities to create a believable production to the satisfaction of the audience with collaborators. The director's role is that of a creator, creating from what is shapeless and disjointed to have form. Peter Brook's description of the director in line with the creative ingenuity of God becomes necessary to this essay.

Though the director has not asked to be God and yet his role implies it. He wants it be fallible, and yet an instinctive conspiracy of the actor is to make him the arbiter, because he is desperately all the time. In a sense the director is always an impostor, a guide at night who does not know the territory, and yet has no choice-he must guide, learning the route as he goes (33-34)

Indeed, the director is a God implied on the performance floor because his job is to create that which is needed by the audience. The director as we know and enjoy today is a child of necessity to the performance world. Like most renowned personalities in history, the director has come to be the messiah of the collaborative processes in the theatre. Historically, Clurman asserts that:

The director we know today is a product of the nineteenth-century theatre. For convenience sake (I will not dispute the accuracy of this statement with scholar or historian) let say that modern direction began in 1866 with the duke of Saxe-Meiningen, who was chiefly a painter and a stage designer (8)

Brockett, Pickering, Wright, Whiting, Wilson and Goldfarb and Dean and Carra hold the same view with Harold Clurman that the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen is the father of modern directing. However, they disagree with Clurman's 1866 date as the year that the Duke popularized his directorial prowess. In their separate works they unanimously echo 1874 as the year the duke of Saxe-Meiningen experimented the concept of directing as we have today. According to Wilson and Goldfarb:

It is true that beginning with the Saxe-Meiningen, the director emerged as a full-fledged, indispensable member of the theatrical team, taking a place alongside the playwright, the performers and the designers. However, though the title may have been new, the function of the director has always been present in one way or another (58)

The importance of the director to the production processes is so important that scholars refer to the status in the

following imageries as Father-figure, mother, ideal pattern, teacher, ghost, invisible-present, third eye, voyeur, ego or super ego, leader of an expedition to another world, autocratic ship captain, puppet master, sculptor, visual artiste, midwife, lover, marriage partner, literary critic, trainer of an athletic team, trustee of democratic spirit, psychoanalyst, listener, surrogate audience, author harrower, gardener, beholder and recuperator of the maternal days. Defining the role of the director, Edward Wright opines that:

It is the role of the director to create the complete and accurate theatrical effect demanded by the play type, style, spirit, and purpose and to project this creation through such visual and auditory stimuli as will produce in the audience a definite emotional and/or intellectual impression (108)

In doing this, the director must be familiar with basic theories and social dimensions in the environment in which he draws his interpretation. For Antoine the "directors, in collaboration with playwrights and other artists and assistants, interpret and shape performances as theatrical metaphors of the world (213). The director therefore interprets textually before placing his actions on stage.

It is not enough to be talented in the interpretation of plays, neither is it enough to possess some extraordinary qualities in the management of human resources what is paramount on the performance floor is a grasp of the needed style and approach at a particular time. The director must have the critical mind and the will power to manage human and material resources that will culminate into the final product that will meet the target audience. One can therefore submit that the director is an exceptional being in the theatre that understands what to do at a particular moment with the right materials in the right place.

The Director and the Script

Having established who the director is, it is pertinent to evaluate the director in relation to the script. Understanding, interpreting and presenting the script has been the core mandate of the director in the theatre. Brockett, Clurman, Dean and Carra and Francis Hodge to see the director as a critic who understands what works and may not work in a play on the performance floor. Cameron and Gillespie are of the opinion that:

No matter what the orientation toward the text, the director must now work to analyse it part, reduce it to its smallest components, "understand " it (to understand does not mean to "turn the script into a rational description of itself" it mean, rather, to make the director capable of staging it). The job of interpretation has many aspects, which are often explored simultaneously both before and during rehearsals. (154)

The analysis gives the director proper understanding of the script which is the primary material. The development of concept, casting, budgeting, rehearsals, blocking and subsequent presentation is derived from the play. It means that the manipulation of the different directorial codes is determined by the director's knowledge of the script. Cameron and Gillespie identify six parts which include spectacle, story, character and dialogue, action and progression, idea and environment as some of the areas the director should analyze and discover to aid his understanding for interpretation. Agreeing with the issue of analysis, Wilson and Goldfarb insist that:

...director begins with a close examination of the text. This is true whether the play is from the past-a work of Shakespeare or Moliere, for instance-or

is a new work that has not been produced before.
(60)

The analysis does not respect the style of the director or the approach utilize in the rehearsals but guides in the breaking of conventions if need be or project the admired convention. Wilson and Goldfarb further inform that the director must analyze the text to understand dramatic purpose and subsequently ask the following question:

What is the playwright's intention: to entertain, educate or to arouse strong feelings in the audience, what is the playwright's point of view towards the characters and events of the play: does he them as tragic or comic? How has the playwright developed the action in the play: in other words how is the play constructed? Such considerations are crucial because the director is the one person who must have and overall grasp of the text, in order to guide the performance and making it come alive. If an actor or actress has any question about a character or the meaning of a scene, the director must be able to provide an answer (61)

To understand the playwright's vision, the director must discover the meaning and structure of the play through analysis in with a view of expressing the target message to the audience, some of the vital areas that reveal the structure and meaning of the play includes: characters and genre of the play, language and spectacle. This analysis helps the director to develop a concept and approach for the production. Directorial approach and concept can simply be seen as the manner and the matter of a performance. This means that directorial concept is the matter intended for the audience while the approach is the manner in which the matter is interpreted and presented. In his

examination of Ola Rotimi's directorial approach, Emasealu posits that:

The directorial art involves the ability to peruse a playwrights script thoroughly, discover the intended message for the audience and be able to communicate such a message to the actors and actresses who, ultimately constitute the conduit between the text and the audience ...it is the task of director to fashion the way of achieving expressive and communicative movements, gestures, appropriate verbal nuances, songs, dance, music, stage business(no matter how minute) and effective use of eloquence silences (73)

In the process of interpreting the plays under study, the directors should attempt a blend of the presentational and representational approaches. Whereas the presentational style is a theatrical concept that is non-illusionistic in portraying a story on stage, the representational is realistic to the extent that it attempts to present actions on stage in a natural manner. Emphasis in the interpretations should aim at achieving what John Lewis refers to as "inner movement". According to him:

By 'inner movement' being the form in realistic production, the following is meant: The drama in a realistic play communicated by the building of scenes purporting to show their inner intention; what each character **wants** in a scene; **why** he wants it; why he says what he says; the **psychological justification** for his actions. This logical, 'inner' line is developed so that we see what each character, through his **behavior** in each scene, what he stands for, throughout the play. And finally, through the relationships and conflict of desires of each character,

we see what the play as a whole 'wants to say' – namely, the authors intention (295)

The director in expressing his concept can rely on these inner movement in their use of realistic movements, line delivery, set, lighting, props, costumes, make-up and sound that can be easily decoded by members his target audience.

One cannot ignore but say that the playwright may be died on the performance floor, the play remains a soul of the production. It means that for one to expose the content of the soul, one must understand it and appease it with the necessary rituals. This is where textual analysis becomes necessary for the director before meeting with his cast and crew to express himself creatively.

Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!: A synopsis

Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again! is a text that focused on the abuse of the feminist ideology by elitist females in the society. Set in an urban society, the play projects power-play, politics, family crisis, prostitution, girls' trafficking, role reversal, sex battle, infidelity, blackmail and assassination. The story revolves around different families with serious supremacy crisis. In an attempt to have superior control as politicians, Ene frustrates her husband Inyang out of his matrimonial home; Chief Irene divorces her husband Felix for Gambo while Ifeoma murders Zeus through a fight. However, the Police Officer who came to arrest Ifeoma for murder is lured with money by Chief Irene and commissioned to assassinate an opponent. The play ends with a clear mockery of the Nigerian Police who resorts to accepting bribe from Chief Irene and her allied for assassination and other atrocities and allowing the campaign to continue.

Directorial Analysis of *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!*

Directing *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!* calls for an understanding of the dominant metaphor that guides the director's interpretation. Budding directors are encouraged to trace the playwright's metaphor from the title, characterization, language and thought of the play because there is a clear relationship between these elements and the content of a play. In an attempt to interpret this play, the director has identified feminist insanity as the directorial concept that will be expressed to the audience. The title of the play *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!* denotatively narrates the insanity of some female folks. However, because the drama deals with the implied, the connotative, the derivative, the metaphorical and figurative, it will be highly misleading for a director to begin to expect from the title of *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!* a story made up of insane women walking along the streets or under the bridge and so on, from the grammatical position. For knowledgeable directors, the play by Ola Rotimi, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* easily comes to mind considering the title of Utoh's text as entitled. One may see the play as a response or a female version of Rotimi's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!* considering the gender of the author. Such knowledge helps a director to understand the differences and similarities in a particular play that possess similar titles or that thematised same issues. Indeed a clear knowledge of Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* enhances one's understanding of *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*. In *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* like Rotimi did in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Utoh examines the excesses of feminist agitation and political quest for leadership by misguided women. For Rotimi, a mad-husband Lejoka Brown is the subject of focus, whereas in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, collective activism is in focus and the mad-wives include Irene, Funmi, Mairo, Ene and Ifeoma. They are considered mad because they break all the rules

associated with decent politics and matrimonial living; probably in our clime. From the title of this play therefore, the metaphor of deviant behaviour by women holds sway

There is the need to consider the play as metaphor. The first point to consider here is characterization which can be deduced from what they say, what others say about them, their actions, thoughts and the playwright's description. In the Character Page, one observes that it is only a female character that has the usual title Chief associated with men in most African cultures. Similarly, female action characters appear to be more than male action characters as we have Odera, Inyang, Felix, Zeus and Gambo who are mere passive characters in the play against Funmi, Ene, Ifeoma, Mairo, Irene and Rosandra who are dominant carriers of the dramatic actions in the play.

At the level of characterization, the sense in a play is expected to be clearly exposed in the first appearance of each of the characters. The first situation which is set in the sitting room of the Mpangs reveal the metaphor of Feminist insanity as the stage description which reads thus: *Inyang is busy sweeping and dusting, as an Ene, Funmi and Mairo enter the room. Halfway in, Ene comes to a standstill and surveys the room with disgust and disapproval (22)*. The action of Ene and that of Inyang are examples of oppression and insanity. In the Nigerian context, from the cultural point of view, a wife sweeps while the husband disapproves (if need be) and so it is insane for a wife to assume the role of a man in a male dominated world like Nigeria. To expose further the spine of the play, Ene's first lines reveal her personality and the relationship between her and her husband as demonstrated in the following dialogue:

ENE: (waves her hands expensively.) Inyang!
What is the meaning of all this?

INYANG: (straightens up.) what? Madam Ene you have come. Welcome Madam Funmi and Madam Mairo welcome.

ENE: (stand-offish.) welcome yourself, foolish man (pointing) Look at the clock. Is this the time your mates clean the house? Lazy idiot! (Ene expresses her disgust and then marches to a settee as the other women move towards the settee, Funmi ...)(22)

The text above and its line of communication is an example of absurdity in the context of marriage as it conveys female domination against the usual chauvinist domination. The actions and dialogues between the couple are highly unfriendly and insane. The audience impression of the Character of Ene as announced is that of a pompous, bossy, and a rude woman, who does not respect family union. Her friends who failed to caution her during her unnecessary ranting and abuse of her husband gives us the impression that they are all birds of the same Feathers.

Apart from the character of Ene that manifests in her home, the other women who are her friend behave in the same manner at their different homes. Ifeoma nags her husband Zeus into daily fighting and through the advice of her friends she clubs him to death during a fight. This action is revealed when she narrates to her friends thus:

Ifeoma: (breathlessly) He is dead

Ene :That sound like good news. Good riddance to bad rubbish

Ifeoma: (still agitated) I killed him

Funmi: it sounds like self-defence to me

Ifeoma: I hit him on the head with a pestle and he died (65)

Similarly, Chief Irene divorce's her husband for Gambo after she laments of his infidelity and the need for a change of emotional partner.

The issue of genre is critical to the understanding of the play for the directorial interpretation. A critical view of the play from use of language, characterization, thought and dramatic reveals that the play is of the satiric comic genre mode built on the incongruous, ridiculous, ludicrous and irony. For example situation two reveal the characters of these allied women who parade themselves as politicians and breed winners in their respective homes as incongruous and ironical in their actions. In the meeting of all the major characters, there is a clear contrast and incongruity between the men and the women. The men were rather being subservient to the wives while the wives dominate them through dialogue and actions in the situation. The entire situation projects the female characters as evil purposeless and politicians who engages in the politics of blackmail, assassination, prostitution and corruption. This contrast clearly demonstrated in the group conversations between Inyang and his friends and Ene and her friend. For example is incongruous and ironical that Ene and his friends were discussing on the ordeal of a man whose manhood has been cut off by his wife and how to engage the barmaid on sex whereas Ene and her friends were discussing serious issues of political victory. Their interest is to device means of getting into power through well-mapped out political campaign stratagem

Another pointer to the metaphor of feminist insanity is deduced from the setting of the play. *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!* is structured in five situations. Each of these situations is well plotted with appropriate dramatic features. The first movement starts from the sitting room of the Mpangs revealing the relationship between Ene and Iyang. Situation two narrates the clash between husbands and wives in a bar as Felix, Inyang and

Odera are been gate crashed by Ene, Mairo, Fumi and Chief Irene. In Situation three the family of Zeus and Ifeoma is revealed with special emphasis on their relationship. Situation four presents the decision of the women concerning their emotional lives and the bribery of the Police to conceal the murder of Zeus by Ifeoma his wife. The last situation reveals the political campaign programme of Chief Irene of the LPP. In all these situations there appear to be a serious contrast between conventional politics and social action as demanded of politician in a civilized environment.

Another important area that the analysis must cover is the thought of the playwright. It is important to note that every playwright consciously or unconsciously expressed his thinking on issues/happenings within his society. Understanding the thought of a writer is not easy to come by as one cannot tell the mind construction of any individual from the facial expression. However, one can decode the thought of a playwright by examining his use of characterization, language style, techniques and setting. In the play understudy, Tracie's thought is drawn from the feminist agitations that started in Europe and finally gets to African in different brands and approaches such Black Feminism, Womanism, STIWANISM, Motherism, African Feminism, and Sisterhood etc. Nigerian Feminist scholars in Africa believe that the African culture may not have been fair to the woman amidst bride prize wealth, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood rite, fattening, wife inheritance, and property right. For some feel that the African woman has no reason to join her western counterparts in this feminist train because she does not face the same challenges like her western counterparts. It is this debate that may have informed Tracie to craft *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again!* as a check mirror to the African elite woman.

It is observed that some radical or misguided women in Nigeria appear to have misinterpreted or misapplied the feminist principles to the detriment of the society rather than developing society. Irene, Funmi, Mairo, Ifeoma and Ene are women who feel the only way to be equal with men is to treat them the way men do to women and as such they disobey all matrimonial rules in order to be above their husbands. They assume the role of men and force their men to behave like women. It is this reversal, corruption and politics of calumny that Tracie feels is madness. The African woman is known for high sense of moral value, respect for human life, rule of law, social engineer and not a murderer, blackmailer, divorcee and victimization her union counterpart. When an African woman especially a Nigerian as seen from the names of the different characters go contrary to the social structure then she is mad.

From the thought of the playwright women have gone senile because every sane woman will not be involved in such nefarious activities carried out by the female characters in the play. As politicians they are worse than what men do and society tries to condemn. In the attitude of the women in their quest for political power, Irene, the presidential candidate of the LLP who emerged after blackmailing and assassinating some of her contenders. In her campaign promises express thus:

Irene: This country is ripe for a woman president. I have to right the wrongs that have been perpetuated against each and every one of you. If you give me your votes I will build all your roads. I will install electricity and pipe borne water everywhere. I will initiate an employment scheme for unemployed husbands. I will build a home for all orphans. I will create jobs for school leavers. I will give salaries to every

unemployed citizen of this country from the age of twenty two years upwards... (79-80)

This is what we see in the Nigerian political arena where promises are made without the needed framework to actualize it.

Conclusion

To decipher a believable interpretation, scholars have insisted that the director begins with analysis of the script. This means that the art of play interpretation after script reading is analysis. Francis Hodge's position is that: the director must perceive; he must evaluate, he must make a diagnosis; and he must devise remedies in his effectiveness. The success or failure of a production is determined by the director's proper approach of arriving at his intended concept which is the message. This implies that the director in an attempt to interpret a text must not ignore the dominant message in the play in order to achieve a robust interpretation that can communicate effectively to the audience.

The director's function which includes selection of materials, budgeting, interpreting the material through rehearsals, blocking and overall presentation of the play cannot be effectively achieved without thorough understanding of the play. From our submission in this paper, the choice of actors in casting, choice of materials such as costumes, makeup, light, set, props and other production elements is made easy after a thorough analysis that the play has undergone in the hands of the director. The crew hands expected in the production is made clear through this analysis as the director has already visualized the hands that can collaborate in the interpretative adventure.

The analysis of the play also prepares the director on the content and form of the play thereby giving him the necessary

confidence in performing his critical roles. It is there for highly recommended by this paper that directors must analyze the script to achieve an interpretation that is creative and audience friendly

Works Cited

- Dressler E. Charles. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. London: Prentice Hall international, 1998. Print
- Cohen, Robert. *Theatre*. (6th. ed). USA: Mcgraw-Hill, 2003. Print
- Cameron, M. Kenneth and Gillespie, P. Patti. *The Enjoyment of Theatre* USA: Macmillan, 2000. Print
- Clurman, Harold. *On Directing*. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1972. Print
- Cole, Toby and Chinoy, Helen Krich. Ed. *Directors On Directing*. London: Bobs Merrill, 1963. Print
- Dean, Alexander and Carra, Lawrence. *Fundamentals of Play Directing*. 3rd Ed. N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1974. Print
- Downs, Missouri Williams et al. *Experiencing the Art of Theatre*. USA: Holly J. Allen, 2007. Print
- Effiong, Johnson. *Play Production Process*. Lagos: Concept Publication Limited, 2001. Print
- Emmanuel, Emasealu. *Theatre of Ola Rotimi: Production and Performance Dynamics*. Mina: Gurara, 2010. Print

- Meyer-Dinkgrafe, Daniel. *Approaches to Acting: Past and Present*. Continuum, New York, 2001. Print
- Lesser, Wendy. *A Director's Call*. Faber and Faber. London, 1997. Print
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar. "Stiwanism: Feminism in an African Context" *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. (Eds.) Tejumola O and Ato Q. U.S.A: Blackwell Publishing Limited. 2007:534-542. Print
- Cameron, M. Kenneth and Gillespie, P. Patti. *The Enjoyment of the Theatre*. (5th ed.) Macmillan: USA, 1999. Print
- Tracie Chima Utoh. *Our Wives Have Gone Made Again!* Awka: Valid PC, 2001. Print
- Yerima Ahmed. *Basic Techniques in Playwriting*. Ibadan: Kraft, 2003. Print