



TECHNIQUES USED IN MAJOR PLAYS OF WOLE SOYINKA

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Abstract

Wole Soyinka's theatrical techniques align with those of his contemporary dramatists, particularly the Absurdist and to some degree the Existentialists in terms of plot and action, yet he surpasses them by skilfully integrating European theatre with national ritual elements like dance, mime, drums, and masks.

Keywords: Theater, Dance, Mime, Drums, and Masks.

Introduction

He has adapted dramatic texts and ideas from Euripides, Swift and has openly admired Brecht for his complete freedom with the medium of theatre. The influence of

John Millington Synge, Eugene O'Neill and, of course, Shakespeare, is easily discernible in his plays: some of his plays, particularly *Death and the King's Horseman* have close affinity with the plays of W.B. Yeats. But, as Derek Wright observes, Soyinka's works are really artistic hybrids of mixed Yoruba and European parentage, blending African themes, imagery, and performance idioms with Western techniques and stylistic influences.

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The Road (1965) combines absurdist dialogue with the masquerade spectacle of festival and the slapstick satire of the Yoruba *Alawada* or comic folk-theatre. Soyinka is undoubtedly the most eclectic and syncretic of writers. He admitted to having been influenced by everything he has read and refuses to 'preach the cutting off any source of knowledge: Oriental, European, African, Polynesian or whatever.'¹³

In *The Lion and the Jewel* conventional motifs twisted from English Jacobean and Restoration Comedy and the masked comedy of the *Commedia dell'arte*-namely, of ancient deceit foiling young love-join hands with the idioms of the Yoruba masque (in the closing bridal masque a child is revealed strapped to the dancer's back to indicate Sidi's conception by the aging village chief). In *The Swamp Dwellers* Soyinka applies the poetic naturalism of John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey to an African peasant society and tackles the parallel problem of finding equivalent English idioms for utterances from another language and culture. His adaptation of *The Bacchae* of Euripides (1973) and the novel represents Season of Anomy-miz Greek and Yoruba mythology, and *Madmen and Specialists* underpins a demonic, Swiftian satire with Yoruba songs and incantatory chants.

As far as stage direction and the stage techniques are concerned, Soyinkas' plays

are quite innovative and well ahead of their time. In his important Myth, Literature and the African World Soyinka refers to "The Dionysian-Apollonian-Promethean essence of Ogun." His stage directions create an effect that is very important because it represents a shift from the traditional Greek theory of retribution and presents Soyinka's belief in a "unitary philosophy which accommodates the principle of continuity and rebirth."

In his plays, he uses modern theatrical techniques of presentation that are far more effective and innovative than what Euripides had introduced as stage technique. For instance the dramatic contraption of 'deus ex machina' by means of which a god was lowered on to the stage to resolve some knotty situations. The stage direction is given in detail by Soyinka: "The theme music of Dionysus begins, welling up and filling the stage with the god's presence. A powerful red glow shines suddenly as if from within the head of Pentheus, rendering it near-luminous. The stage is bathed in it and instantly, from every orifice of the impaled head spring red jets, spurting, in every direction. Reactions of horror and panic. Agave screams and flattens herself below the head, hugging the ladder." (CPI p.307.)

Conclusion

Such a detailed presentation makes the play highly sensational and though it may appear morbid yet an extraordinarily innovative use of light and sound creates the proper ambience of transubstantiation of death as a promise of regeneration. The majesty of Dionysus is beautifully communicated, not in so many words of Dionysus in Euripides but by creating spectacle which communicates the Dionysiac spirit far more effectively. Tiresias who is blind cannot see what is happening on the stage but he is sensitive to a total change.

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