

Communication via the Language of Performance Lighting: A Comparative Study of Two Performances of Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja*

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Abstract

Background: Available literature points to the fact that the actual concern of each professional theatre worker and director is to be expressive, in order to effectively capture and communicate the intended message of the play to the audience. More so, the advancement in theatre lighting technology has come to be used to concrete visual forms that further the meaning of the text; thus, evincing sub-texts. Nonetheless, many theatre lighting designers have paid less attention to deploying the potential of lighting design as a veritable tool in enhancing play interpretation.

Objective: This study sought to demonstrate the significance of deploying expressive or interpretive lighting in play performances as a means for communicating the salient but sub-textual ideas embedded in plays.

Methodology: The outcome of two performances of Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja* (tagged: Performance "A", in which the myths surrounding the hero-gods were not projected, and Performance "B", in which the lighting designer deployed expressive lighting – i.e. using light to tell the story) are compared. As instruments for data collection, a total of 250 copies of the questionnaire were randomly administered to the audience members who watched the performance; interviews were conducted with the play directors and the lighting designers of the two performances; and focus group discussions were also conducted with a class of students specializing in lighting design and some of the audience members. Secondary data were collected from journals, textbooks, the internet and other related extant literature. Simple percentage analysis was used to analyze data for the study.

Results: It was found that the deployment of light and lighting effects to tell the story in Performance "B" could effectively evince and communicate sub-textual ideas such as the myths surrounding the Yoruba hero-gods in the play; whereas, these myths were non-existent in the first performance "A", in which the lighting was not effectively deployed as a tool of interpretation.

Conclusion: Design elements like light and lighting effects can play critical roles in furthering the meaning of texts in plays, if effectively deployed as interpretive or expressive tools, rather than used merely for the creation of visibility.

Unique contribution: The study has shown that in the absence of standard lighting instruments or gadgets conventionally required to produce a particular meaning, commonly found lighting instruments and gadgets can be improvised to simulate and communicate the desired effect and meanings to the audience.

Key Recommendation: For effective interpretation of a play on stage, the lighting designers should always endeavour to go beyond using light(s) merely for visibility to the point of a deliberate deployment of light and lighting effects as expressive tools – this enhances the audience’s understanding of every unfolding scenario in a play.

Keywords: *Yemoja*, Yoruba myth, subtext, communication and interpretive lighting

Introduction

Drama is an enacted story whose function is not just to entertain but also to communicate to and educate a society. This is why it is pertinent to note that when playwrights write plays, it is because they have an idea or a message they want to convey to society – it could be about religion, culture, politics, or to raise point(s) that can address issues that have been bedeviling the human society (Awoyemi 2019, p. 6; Hurwitz 2021, par. 3). When a play director picks a play to direct, the onus rests on the director to do so with the intent to clearly communicate to the audience, without ambiguity, the subject matter of the play. Often, very salient but sub-textual ideas in plays are left untold due to ineffective deployment of the expressive potentials of design elements, like light; yet, some theatre scholars, such as Ayo Akinwale (cited in Adeoye 2011, p.42) and Olympus G. Ejue (Ejue 2019, p.37) have argued against the necessity of employing interpretive lighting in theatrical performances.

Aim and Objective

The aim of this study was to investigate the potential of performance lighting (beyond mere illumination) in enhancing play interpretation. Therefore, as an objective, the study carried out a performance of Ahmed Yerima’s *Yemoja* (deliberately employing expressive lighting in the performance) staged at Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, on the 18th of December, 2021, in order to assess the outcome of how lights were used in the performance in comparison with a previous performance of the same play, which was staged in another Department of Theatre and Media Arts in Western Nigeria, on 21st

of November, 2021. Suffice it to state that since the aim of the comparison is not in any way to promote or disparage any institution but, rather, to validate or denounce the argument that expressive performance lighting can enhance the textual interpretation of plays, the two different performances are identified as “Performance A” and “Performance B” respectively (in the order of the date of their staging).

Conceptual Definition of Keywords:

Below are the meanings of some of the keywords in this study; explained in line with purport of their usage:

- *Yemoja*: This is the title of the play which, according to Yerima, is the story of a celebration of the river goddess, Yemoja. It is a self-conceived myth and an attempt at explaining the spread of the worship of the river goddess, from the Yoruba cosmology into the entire diaspora (2002, p. 6).
- Yoruba Mythology: the Yorubas are members of the West African people living chiefly in southwestern Nigeria. They are known to be the originators of the worship of the river goddess, Yemoja. The term, mythology, refers to a traditional story that is accepted as history and serves to explain the world view of a people. Therefore, by juxtaposition, Yoruba mythology in this context is the belief by the traditional Yorubas that Yemoja, Ogun, Sango and Obatala are (their) deities.
- Subtext is used in this study to mean the underlying meaning or the unspoken meaning of a text.
- Interpretive or expressive lighting is used in this study to mean the art of deliberately using or designing light(s) and/or lighting effect(s) to connote, imply, express or give explicit meaning to an action or object(s), or to give a semblance of, or to signify a generally acceptable notion.
- Communication: according to Agber and Ejue (2013, p. 17), communication is a conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and ideas expressed verbal and or non-verbal messages, are sent, received and comprehended.

The Art of Playwriting and the Imperative for Creative Interpretation

A play, unlike other literary works, is a creative work intended to be artistically realized before an audience. Hurwitz (2021) corroborates the above assertion as he avers that:

Playwrights begin with something they believe needs to be said, whether that is a story, a political or religious point, a question to be addressed, or a humorous observation revealing the human condition. The biggest differences between plays and other forms of writing is that plays are meant to be experienced in real time and to be experienced communally (para. 3).

Also, Johnson (2000), in a bid to establish the huge creative responsibilities attached to the art of playwriting, avers that: “tonnes of moulding, creating, crafting, engineering and architecturing [are] involved in this unique business which involves the head, the pen, and the stage necessarily” (p. 11). To further stress on the huge task involved in playwriting which should not be wished away or taken for granted, Johnson juxtaposes the attached “wright” in the word, playwright, to the “wright” in the word, shipwright, as he avers that:

Few words exist with the word wright attached to them. One of such is ‘shipwright’. And strangely enough, it designates a builder of ships. If we can imagine the degree of technology which goes into the creation of a vessel which successfully cruises on the high sea, the intellectual demands carefully translated into physical properties through which the finished product is called ship; then we can appreciate the ingenuity which a man who must set about making plays, needs to reckon with (2000, pp. 11–12).

From the above quotes, it can be deduced that the art of playwriting is a serious task with deliberate intent to communicate to a people; as such, every theatre practitioner must be deliberate too, in carefully deploying every theatre means to elicit every bit of the meanings in every way possible.

An audience does not go to the theatre to hear the story of a play being told in its literal sense. They go to the theatre to watch the literal signs on text being expressed. According to Parker et al. (2009, p. 324): “The basic obligation of stage design is to give . . . meaning . . .” This invariably means that the actual concern of each theatre designer is to use their arts expressively. Parker et al. (2009, p. 324) goes further to aver that: through the manipulation of light in all aspects, the lighting designer assists in reinforcing the theme of a play.

In asserting the expressive power of Light, Appia (cited in Asuquo 2019b, p. 141) avers that: “Light is the most important medium on stage . . . without its unifying power our eyes would be able to perceive what objects were but not what they expressed”. Enna (cited in Asuquo 2009b, p. 27) succinctly adds that: the duty of the lighting designer includes the clarification and intensification of the meanings and concepts of a play.

This underscores the role of lighting designs in any theatrical performance as invaluable.

The Basic Functions of Stage Lighting

According to Boyce (2014, 43), “light is necessary to the human visual system to operate. With light, we can see; without light, we cannot”. The above assertion establishes, first, the prime and incontrovertible function of light in making theatre exist – without light, there cannot be a performance. In asserting the important role of light in theatrical performances, Crabtree and Beudert aver that: “Electric light had so many advantages to play in productions that its presence was unavoidable. Once adopted for the stage, there was no turning back. Electric lighting facilitated translucency effects and it also made radical colour shifts on the scenery on stage” (2005, p. 417).

Stage lighting has other objectives beyond creating visibility (Shelley, 1999, p. 29). These objectives include (but not limited to): providing illumination in a three-dimensional form of light and shadow . . . , composition and creation of mood. Corroborating this, Brockett states that light is used: to create visibility, selective visibility, and to aid composition; by directing the eye to the most important elements, it creates emphasis and subordination; light is also used to affect perception of dimensionality (alter apparent shape and dimension), and to enhance mood and atmosphere (1992, pp. 397-8). Brockett goes further to add that: lighting, among other functions, may reinforce "style", reflect the time of day, weather conditions, or season, and may suggest a play's period through the kind of lighting fixtures used on stage (1992, p. 400).

Synopsis of Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja*

The play, *Yemoja*, is a mythology on Yoruba hero-gods – Ogun, Sango, Orunmila, Obatala, Esu, and, very importantly too, on the emergence of the river goddess, Yemoja. All these deities are endowed with human feelings, attitudes and frailties. The story begins with a town-crier announcing to the town's people that the Kabiyesi wishes to celebrate Yemoja - the river goddess.

The next scenario reveals Ogun visiting his lover, Yemoja, at her hut. He dances to her admiration and professes his love for her. In the midst of this romantic summit, a voice calls on Ogun to join them in a war against the people of Ijase Oke (who have come to molest his people). Ogun becomes enraged and responds that he is joining the warriors at the battle front. But Yemoja begs him not to go, asking that he spends the night with her. Instead of heeding her plea, Ogun calls on Esu to keep Yemoja company

till he returns from the battle. He then hands Yemoja his "calabash of life" and charges her never to open it nor look into it. He leaves for the battle.

Esu sees his company with Yemoja as a perfect opportunity to get back at her for turning down his love overtures in the past. He then tricks Yemoja into opening Ogun's calabash of life as a result of which she becomes partially paralyzed; at the same time, Ogun is seriously wounded at the war front by "a little boy". Yemoja begs Esu for help, but he stoutly tells her that the only condition on which he would agree to save her life would be if she would spend some nights with him. Yemoja argues that she does not want to be unfaithful to Ogun. After a series of arguments and bargaining, Yemoja agrees that she will spend a night with him. Esu then calls on Obatala to come and heal Yemoja.

While Obatala begins the treatment, Esu dashes to the battle-field and lies to Ogun that Yemoja deliberately opened the calabash of life because she wanted to have him (Ogun) killed; and that, at the very moment, she is having amorous affairs with Obatala. Ogun becomes enraged and dashes to Yemoja's abode for a confrontation with Obatala. He meets Obatala and challenges Obatala to a fight to death at the market square. Obatala in turn, runs to Sango (Ogun's foe) to fight in his stead.

Yemoja runs to Orunmila (a diviner) to help her consult *Ifa* to know what to do to avert the duel between Ogun and Sango. During the consultation, Orunmila reveals to Yemoja that she has a greater mission to fulfill - going into the river to become the mother of all sea creatures, answering to the needs of those who call on her for help. Therefore, as Ogun and Sango meet at the market square for the showdown, Yemoja steps forward to intervene. She explains that she cannot keep quiet and watch Ogun allow his temper to take hold of his manly wits; thus, bringing her love for him to the market square to ridicule. She asserts that she shall not be the reason the two men would fight and kill each other; rather, she would step into the deep blue sea answering to the different needs of all who call on her for help. Suddenly and supernaturally, she transforms into a mermaid and wriggles her way into the sea.

Methodology: Content Analysis and Survey methods were used for this study. Under Content Analysis methodology, data were gathered from Ahmed Yerima's play, *Yemoja*, the video-recordings of the two performances, tagged "Performance A" and "Performance B", from the live performances (via observation by participation) and from some related extant literatures. Under the Survey method, focus group discussions and (Face-to-Face and Telephone) interviews were adopted as instruments of data collection.

Content Analysis: the decision to adopt content analysis method is to give room for a detailed and systematic examination of the text and the performances investigated in this study in order to ascertain the existence or absence of the theme of Yoruba mythology (which is the subject of discourse) both in the text and in the performances. After being in a live audience of the first performance, tagged in this study as “Performance A”, a scrutiny of an unedited video-recording of the performance was also carried-out by the researcher. However, in order not to limit the judgment to only the researcher’s view(s), a survey method is also adopted.

Survey Method: The decision to adopt survey was to allow for an intimate setting for a free-flow discussion in order to extrapolate empirical data from audience members who watched the performance under study. The focus group discussions were carried out with two categories of audience members; information was gathered from participants for data analysis. The first focus group discussion was organized with a group of 8 technical theatre students. The second focus group discussion was organized with 93 people (who watched the unedited video recording of “Performance A”). The participants were chosen based on two criteria: those who indicated interest, who as well watched the live performance under study, tagged “Performance B”. The participants were assured that they would only be mentioned as participants. A face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with the director and lighting designer (respectively) of “Performance A”. And a total of 250 (randomly picked) out of the 345 members of the live audience (of “Performance B”) were administered with copies of a questionnaire. The following questions guided the discussions and interviews:

- 1). From the author’s note in the play-text, do you understand that Yoruba mythology is one of the major themes in Ahmed Yerima’s *Yemoja*?
- 2). Do you agree that characters like Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja are portrayed as deities in the play-text?
- 3). Do you agree that “Performance A” effectively communicated the myths surrounding the characters of Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja as supernatural beings or hero-gods in the play?
- 4). Do you agree that “Performance B” effectively communicated the myths surrounding the hero-gods in the play?
- 5). Do you agree that the use of light as an expressive tool in “Performance B” aided in evincing and communicating the myths of supernaturalism surrounding characters like Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja?

Results from the Audience: Out of the 250 administered copies of the questionnaire (which contained the options: “Agree”, “Strongly Agree”, “Disagree”, and “Strongly Disagree”), 240 copies (i.e. 96%) were retrieved. 223 (i.e. 92.9%) respondents strongly agreed that the lighting in the scene helped them to understand that Yemoja entered into water (river), 7 (i.e. 2.9%) ticked “Agreed”, no (i.e. 0%) respondent ticked “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree”. But 10 (4.16%) respondents did not tick any option.

Results from Focus Group Discussions: A total of 8 Technical Theatre students and the researcher made up the Focus Group Discussion. The participants were all allowed to watch the unedited video recording of “Performance A”. After watching the video, 3 of the students admitted that though the myths surrounding the Yoruba hero-gods in the play were not effectively communicated, they could still identify the characters of Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja as beings with supernatural power because they were already familiar with the Yoruba myth surrounding their persons; they said that “Performance B” produced better information about the myths surrounding the characters. Five (5) members of the Focus Group Discussion claimed they could not gain any insight about the myth surrounding the Yoruba hero-gods from “Performance A” until they watched “Performance B”.

A group of 93 non-technical theatre audience members were also gathered for a focus group discussion. This was carried out to determine if the difference in the lighting of “Performance A” and “Performance B” could affect the perception of non-technical audience differently. 91 (i.e. 97.8%) out of the 93 non-technical theatre audience members said that although they were familiar with the Yoruba myth surrounding a character like Sango, it was only in “Performance B” that his fire-spitting prowess was communicated. The entire 93 participants averred that Ogun’s portrayal in “Performance A” only communicated him as a strong man; that it was not until the lighting that separated him (at Yemoja’s house) from the warriors at the forest in “Performance B”, that he was portrayed as a supernatural being with the ability to hear from/communicate with people miles away. 34 (36.5%) said even when they watched “Performance B” and saw the ambience transformation when Yemoja transformed into a mermaid and wriggled her body to the edge of the market square, they could not understand that she was entering into water (river) until they saw the projected scene on the backdrop as she was swimming in the river. 59 (i.e. 63.4%) participants said that the ambience transformation via the lighting aided them in understanding that Yemoja was entering into water. In the end, the entire 93 participants said that not only did the expressive lighting

in “Performance B” aid the interpretation of the unfolding scenarios in the play, but it also made the performance to be more aesthetically appealing to them.

Director’s Remark: According to the director of “Performance A”, “we tried our best in interpreting the play with available resources . . . ; yes, I believe the audience enjoyed it. But I must admit that the use of lighting designs in the second performance [‘Performance B’] produced a better and deeper interpretation.”

The Theory of "Form Follows Function": The concept of “Form Follows Function” is a design theory propounded by Louis Sullivan in 1896. This theory was initially associated with modernist architecture and industrial designs in the 20th century. The thrust of this theory is that the form of a building or object should be primarily based on its intended use, function or purpose. Beyond architecture and industrial designs, the theory has come to be applied in different fields of human endeavours. According to Sullivan (cited in Dubois 2021, para. 3), the phrase, “form follows function”,

. . . is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.

Dubois (2021, par. 3), in summarizing the ideology behind “form follows function” states that, the “why” of what is to be built or designed should take precedence over “how” it is built or designed – this is the law! In other words, relating this theory to theatre practice (i.e. especially the area of lighting design), the reason for which any lighting (as a design element) is introduced or used in any theatrical performance is what should guide **how** the lighting is applied in the performance.

According to Parker et al., theatrical form in its simplest description is the communication of ideas between the performers and the audience (2009, p. 3). Therefore, in expressing or communicating the playwright’s and/or the director’s vision to the audience, the **form** of light (in any theatrical performance) **must follow** the rule of **expressive** or **communicative** engagements because, according to Appia (cited in Asuquo 2019, p. 141), light is a unifying factor for projecting the communicative or interpretative import of any theatrical performance. Therefore, not using light for an interpretive purpose(s) in theatrical performance is a negation of the rules of deploying design elements in theatrical performances; thus, it gives grounds for interrogation.

Communication via the Language of Performance Lighting in *Yemoja* Performances: A Comparison between “Performance A” and “Performance B” Versions

According to Agber and Ejue (2013, p.16), "It is through language that we express our ideas and feelings. These ideas are expressed verbally or through non-verbal means such as . . . anything to which people can attach meanings." Agber and Ejue (2013, p. 17) define communication as conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and ideas are express verbal and or non verbal messages, sent, received and comprehended.

According to Danesi (cited in the “Forward” to Thomas A. Sebeok’s book, *Sign: An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2001), “. . . communication is grounded in the semiotic system of organism”. However, Sebeok (2001, p. 5) defines semiotics as “the phenomenon that distinguishes life forms from inanimate objects . . . the instinctive capacity of all living organisms to produce and understand signs”. More so, Saussure (cited in Sebeok 2001, p. 5), defines sign as “a form made up (i) of something physical – sounds, letters, gestures, etc.”, which he terms as the **signifier**; and (ii) “of the image or concept to which the signifier refers”, which he terms as the **signified**; while the relation that holds between the “signifier” and the “signified” he calls **signification**. Sebeok (2001) goes further to aver that the “signification” is an arbitrary one that human beings and/or societies have established at will (6). For example, according to Brawne (2003, p. 147), "How light is reflected and what we read into the qualities of that reflected light affects our perception . . ." In other words, the lighting serves as the signifier, while what we perceive serves as the signified – that is, the meaning. Barry (1999, p. 2) defines meaning as:

the referent of the sign [for example]: the mental representation of a preceding rainstorm as the meaning of wet streets, the mental representation of a feline as the meaning of the word “cat” or of a drawing of a cat. . . They are the meanings arrived at as a function of the denotations and connotations of these signs.

In the same context, as stated above, this study uses the denotations and connotations of different lightings used in the play performances in the study to refer to what they mean or communicate.

Though some signifiers have universal connotations and denotations, it is important to mention that where a signifier has different meanings for different people, the ostensible meanings alluded to the use of any light as a signifier in this study is culturally driven. This is because just as a culture of a people may differ from the culture of other people, meanings (the

signified) from different signifiers may also differ from one culture to another culture. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the inferences drawn from the signifiers (the lightings) are majorly situated within the cultural milieu of the Yorubas. This is so decided because Ahmed Yerima's play, *Yemoja*, used as a case study in this research, is contextually situated within the Yoruba cultural milieu.

According to Sebeok (2001, p. 9), there are six major types of signs that semiotics has cataloged and investigated. These are “symptom, signal, icon, index, symbol, and name”. This study, however, focuses only on signal, icon, index, and symbol because of their relevance in this discourse.

Pictorial Representations of some of the Scenes

Below are some of the scenes in the play that require expressive lighting.

Second Scene – Yemoja's abode (which simultaneously accommodates the situation where the Warriors at the battle-front are calling on Ogun to join them at the battlefield).

Performance “A” Version



Picture 1 Scenario: Ogun dancing to the admiration of Yemoja, but he is interrupted by the call from the warriors, telling him to join them at the battle-field (Yerima 2002, pp. 18 - 20).

The scene Lighting: As Light reveals Ogun and Yemoja, the voice of the warrior who is calling on Ogun is heard from outside Yemoja's hut. It can be observed here that the warriors who are calling on Ogun to join them at the battlefield are not seen. This way, the information of where they are calling from, is not properly interpreted and transmitted to the audience. By so doing, the audience is only left to engage in guesswork (as per whether the warriors are within Yemoja's abode), which can actually result

in misconceptions; whereas, the text says they are calling from a battle-front.

Performance “B” Version



Picture 2 Scenario: Ogun dancing to please Yemoja, but is interrupted by the call to join the warriors at the battle-field (Yerima 2002, pp. 18 - 20). This is a scene with a simultaneous setting – the scenario on stage right (from actor's point of view) is the war-front where the warriors are calling on Ogun to join them in the battle against the people of Ijase Oke. While on the stage left is Yemoja's abode, where Ogun is with Yemoja.

The Scene Lighting: In establishing the two different locales and their atmospheric conditions (with activities happening simultaneously) without the audience being confused, the lighting designer had to creatively employ the controllable qualities of light (i.e. colour, direction, movement and intensity) to enhance a clear interpretation of the scenes – while the greenish ambience is created for the warriors' scene in the forest to communicate a mangrove milieu of a forest scene (the battle-front), light is also used to create a clear atmospheric milieu around Yemoja's abode to communicate a normal daylight. This way, though the warriors at the battlefront are communicating with Ogun who is at Yemoja's abode (as the play stipulates), the audience can clearly see and understand that the two scenarios are happening at different places.

N.B. The above expressive lighting not only allows the audience members to see, understand and enjoy the actions happening in the two different locales simultaneously but enables the audience to witness Ogun's supernatural extra-sensory powers. The fact that Ogun (who is at Yemoja's abode) can hear the voices of the warriors who are in a faraway battlefield helps to interpret and/or implicitly communicate Ogun's **supernatural ability (of extrasensory perception and communication)**. To hear voices miles away is a rare attribute only associated with a deity – a salient theme not explicitly stated by any character in the play but implied in the text; this way, the lighting, beyond revealing actors and scenery, **expresses the**

inner essence of the playwright's/director's vision (the Yoruba myth that Ogun has supernatural powers) to the audience.

It should also be noted that, in the Performance “A” version of the play, the voice calling on Ogun to come and join them in the battlefield was heard from behind the stage (and no lighting was used to establish the locale of the scenario). By so doing, the audience members were left to wander about who is calling on Ogun, and where he or she is calling him from. Thus, the information or message is not properly interpreted and transmitted to the audience. The problem, here, is that the audience members who have not read the play before watching the performance are thrown into confusion and forced to start guessing where the voice is coming from. Some might have even assumed that the battleground was behind Yemoja's hut (since the voice is coming from there). And the audience's assumptions/interpretations would be as divergent as their individual discernment levels are diverse; as a result, not every audience member would get the right information that Ogun possesses supernatural powers (as a god).

In explaining the use of greenish ambience to communicate the mangrove environment of the war scene in the forest, this researcher situates the explanation within the ideology of "icon" as one of the "signs" in the field of semiotics. Sebeok (2001, p. 9): “an icon is a sign that is made to resemble, stimulate, or reproduce its referent in the same way”. So, the greenish colour in the lighting was used to simulate the natural ambience of a forest scene.

Performance “B” Version



Picture 3 Scenario: On sighting Ogun at his arrival at the market square, Sango begins to spit out fire.

Remark on the Lighting: Apart from a bright illumination to communicate a morning scene, the added light used here (by the lighting designer) for

the “B” version of the performance is a fire effect.

According to Yoruba myth, Sango is a Yoruba hero-god that spits fire (especially when he is angry). As a way of communicating this myth of Sango's fire-spitting prowess, the lighting designer had to use the fire effect to do a practical interpretation of the subtext. By creating this fire-spiting effect, beyond the aesthetics, the audience members, especially those who might not know who the character is (perhaps, because they arrived at the theatre late, after the name of the character was mentioned or that they have no prior knowledge of the myth that surrounds the person of Sango), without the fire effect, might have mistaken Sango for any other ordinary person who has come to fight Ogun. But with the use of the fire-spiting effect, the communication of the Yoruba myth on Sango is deepened and the audience is better informed of the nature of this special character and the unfolding scenario – an assertion which was confirmed by 99% of the respondents who filled the administered questionnaire.

According to Sebeok (2001), an index is a sign that refers to something or someone in terms of its existence or location in time and space, or in relation to something or someone else. For example, smoke is an index of fire (pointing out where the fire is); cough is an index of cold (10). Here, the fire is used as an index of the myth surrounding the temperament of the Yoruba hero-god, Sango (when angry).

To buttress the (above) assertion that the fire effect helped in clarifying the identity of the character, during the performance, immediately the character started spiting fire, many of the audience members (possibly those who are conversant with the Yoruba mythology) started shouting, "Sango"! But the fire-spiting effect was non-existent in the Performance “A” version of the scene, and the name-hailing at the character’s appearance on the scene was non-existent in Performance “A”.

Performance “A” Version



Picture 4 Scenario: At the Market-square, after Yemoja stops the fight between Sango and Ogun, contrary to the play-text, she walks out of the scene; rather than transform into a mermaid in the presence of the town's people, as the text stipulates.

Performance "A" Version



Picture 5 Scenario: Yemoja walks back to the scene after changing into a mermaid costume.

Observation: It is observed from "Performance "A" that beyond its use for illumination, light was not used to communicate any meaning about the supernaturalness of Yemoja, nor about her metamorphosis from a human to a mermaid transiting into the river – which is the core subject matter of the entire story. As such, the myth of her supernatural transformation from a human to a mermaid was played down or even nonexistent; she merely walked out of the scene and returned after a short while in a shining dress – as such, she could have been mistaken as an ordinary human being in the performance.

Performance "B" Version



Picture 6: Market-square. **Time:** Day, **Scenario:** As Yemoja is about transforming into a mermaid, thunder stricks, lightning flickers and the atmosphere becomes cloudy.

Remarks on the Lighting: Sebeok (2001, p. 10), states that: “an icon is a sign that is made to resemble, stimulate, or reproduce its referent in the same way”. Examples of an icon include: photographs (because they reproduce their referents in visual ways). Sebeok (2001, p. 11) goes further to aver that a "symbol is a sign that stands for its referent in an arbitrary, conventional way”; for example, a cross figure can stand for the concept of Christianity while white colour can be symbolic of cleanliness, purity, innocence, etc. Therefore, the use of lighting effects to produce a sudden thunder-strike and lightning, and the atmospheric transformation from the bright clear morning atmosphere to a bluish ambience, was first, to establish and reinforce the idea of a supernatural occurrence occasioned by Yemoja's metamorphosis from a human to a mermaid; secondly, to simulate a natural cloudy ambience of an impending rainfall. (This is because, according to the Yoruba mythology, Yemoja is a supernatural being associated with water); and thirdly, it is to enhance the illusion of a supernatural invocation of an aquatic milieu that would aid Yemoja's movement into the river (as implied in the play-text).

Performance “B” Version



Picture 7: Market-square. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** As Yemoja metamorphosed into a mermaid, Iyaji, the head of Yemoja's priestesses, begins to eulogies her. Then she begins to wriggle her body away from the market-square.

N.B. As implied in the play (at page 60 and 62) by Yemoja, and the stage direction (respectively), after Yemoja metamorphosed into a mermaid, she moves into a sea. Yemoja: ". . . I shall today step into the big blue sea answering to the different needs of all who call me Yemoja," (Yerima 2002, p. 60).

N.B. Since the play explicitly states that Yemoja left for the sea (as the playwright attempts to communicate the origin of the worship of the river goddess), it becomes very germane to express the moment of Yemoja's entry into the river to become a river "goddess" – this is fundamental information which no word of any character (in the play) effectively communicates to the audience. As such, this very significant information on the incipience of the worship of the river goddess could have eluded the audience, if not expressed via lighting design. Therefore, a vivid stage picture of Yemoja entering a river had to be created via lighting design. As she wriggles her body towards the edge of the market space, the area is transformed into water which links her to the sea.

Performance “B” Version



Picture 8: Market-square. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** As Yemoja gets to the edge of the market-square, the area turns to water (see **Down Stage Left** area of picture 8 above). The water serves as her links to the sea. The priestesses sing and dance in honour of her; which marks the incipience of the worship of the river goddess (picture 9 below).

Performance “B” Version



Picture 9: River Bank. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** After Yemoja had disappeared through the water by the market, the people sang in her praise, then left. Afterwards, through the use of a lighting device known as projector, Yemoja is seen swimming in a deep blue river as she had said; and the people gather in worship of Yemoja (as it is today) at the river bank. A careful scrutiny of the picture above shows the image of Yemoja swimming behind the motif on the backdrop.

Performance “A” Version



Picture 10: The Market-square. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** Rather than see Yemoja enter into the water or river as stated in the play-text, in the Performance “A” version of the play, Yemoja is seen returning to embrace Ogun.

Conclusion

In performance “B”, not only does the use of lighting design to establish and differentiate the battle-front from Yemoja’s abode help in communicating to the audience that the two simultaneous scenarios on stage are happening at two different locales, but the existence of the conversations between Ogun and the warrior at the battle-front (despite being miles apart) communicates and reinforces the Yoruba myth of Ogun’s possession of supernatural powers as a deity. Also, the creation of the fire-spitting effect by Sango and the creation of water and river effects that Yemoja entered into serve to communicate and validate the supernatural powers that these characters possess as well as the Yoruba mythology which surrounds the incipience of Yemoja and its worship. In Performance “A” version of the play, the water which Yemoja is to depart into (as the text implies) is not realized; instead, Yemoja merely walks out of the scene. This runs contrary to the longstanding myth which holds that Yemoja left the terrestrial world for the aquatic realm to become a river goddess who is worshiped today by different people in different parts of the world. This misrepresentation of the fact is one of the problems of not

using light for textual interpretation of plays.

Since a play performance is intended to be an interpretation of a text, the deployment of a design component, like light, must be for interpretive purposes. It is by so doing that even the minute but salient sub-textual information in a play can be effectively expressed, without ambiguity, for audience consumption. Expressive lighting also enriches the aesthetics deployed in play performances, thereby swelling audience interest and patronage.

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