



Making Images, Re-making Life:
ART AND LIFE IN AHMED YERIMA

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Chapter Five

LE COUP THEATRAL PAR YERIMA, 2001 ...
(YERIMA'S 2001 THEATRE COUP IN *DRY LEAVES ON*
***UKAN TREES*)**

By

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Preamble

Theatre is action! ... Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal for revolution".
Augusto Boal (155)

The protection of the environment is our responsibility for in doing that, man's existence finds meaning and fulfillment.
Chris Egharevba (95)

Action in theatre, is many times fronted in revolutionary paradigms. Often the plays come from the minds of playwrights who are sore-vexed by orchestrated evils of leadership. Femi Osofisan immediately comes to mind in this regard. In many of his plays, Osofisan lays bare his intoxicated mind against forces of oppression and repression whether clad in the cloak of religion or wearing a mask of tradition and the like. In all, he circumvents evil despite their uncanny resilience and pro-wicked mechanics - overthrowing them with superior might and popular affronts of the people.

Of note also is the credited statement at the opening of this

segment to Chris Egharevba which is actually a line from his write-up on Chris Nwamuo's *The Wisdom of the King* (1996). Egharevba's study is an examination of Nwamuo's text as an Ecodrama. Meanwhile, Nwamuo himself in the prefatory note to his play, states that the play "is a reminder to adult populations inclined to wanton destruction of the ecosystem of the need to conserve nature". It would appear that Esongban in Yerima's *Dry Leaves* totally turns deaf ears to Nwamuo's bidding to conserve nature. For not only does he destroy ecological trees and their functions in a bio-conservation plane; but much worse than that, he is damnably choosy in his destruction of sacred trees that provide succour to both the gods and the human community in a divinated spiritual plane. The consequences of Esongban's whimsical whirligig - knocks the heads of the gods, kings and all - throwing Ewohimi, an Ishan town, into confusion and uncertainty. In the play, the long cord of bitter which hurts in a man, dangles the length of a thousand miles. And at every junction, the venom of its sting only rekindles and waxes its poisonous determinism stronger - boiling up in readiness for the moment of vendetta. This is the drama in *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*, where Esongban, having carried a deadly double-action hurt for long, namely, the loss of his wife, Izaka, to the present Onogie's father, and the loss of the crown to the present Onogie (instead of Idehen), strikes in a most wanton le coup theatral. He cuts down five sacred Ukan trees and also desecrates the Onogie's shrine, with the intention of causing irrevocable damages occasioned by pains of dislocations among the gods and their human devotees. Ironically, the coupist, Esongban, becomes the culprit in a dramatic twist, suffocating under the strangulating hands of the infuriated Olokun. The same Olokun also demands Onogie's life as ransom for the desecration of her 'holy' shrine. Desperate, Onogie, with obvious desire to live, however enjoys sacrificial substitution of death when Ulolo, cast in the type and nuance of Elesin Oba in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, volunteers to die in his stead. But here again, Odion, a master professional strangler, stages another le coup

theatral, which hijacks Udolo's death to a sea of life, while Odion in a grand disguise, takes Ulolo's place. Funny enough, Olokun is all too angry and hungry to lick a human blood of appeasement. Any blood would do without any particular obsession for Ulolo's. This is le coup theatral 2001 par Yerima, in *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* which this paper seeks to analyse.

Introduction

Playwrights right from classical Greece, have often clad their dramatic sequences in the mould of a coup - a *le coup theatral* - in the hope that the audience for whom the drama is meant, would buy off the weapons of war marketed by the stage, to the larger society and inject same into the system for desirable change. Aristophanes in *Lysistrata* (411 BC) stages a marital coup led by Lysistrata, to end the Peloponnesian War. Gasner (61) corroborates the view of *Lysistrata* as a *le coup theatral* in these words

On stage, the women invariably best the men. Spritely old women beat their doddering male coevals, the female battalions beat back the magistrate's police, and Lysistrata and her followers transform the irascible magistrate first to a woman, then into a corpse.

In *Macbeth* (1778) Shakespeare presents a *le coup theatral* scenario where Macbeth, propelled hotly by vaulted ambition, kills king Duncan (having already killed Banquo, a fellow General) in an illegitimate and aberated fashion, to grab the throne of Scotland. The stage becomes an arena for a full-blown war where the Old Siward-led English troop in support of Malcolm and Donaldbain (Duncan's heirs) comes from Dunsinane against Macbeth's force for the consolidation of the hi-jacked Scottish throne.

In *The Father*, (1981), August Strindberg, through the instrument of Laura (the Captain's wife) - a woman with negative mastery in scheming, manipulations and auto-suggestions, absolutely demilitarizes the captain piece-meal, in a systematic but instalmental and decimated decay, leading to his unrescued plunge.

In *Waiting for Goddot* (1977), Samuel Becket stages a coup against sanity, meaning, sensibilities and reason. He presents a world caught in a meaningless web where bystanders are totally incapacitated in proffering remedies because there is "nothing to be done" - a line which begins and ends the text suggesting nothingness in absolutism.

In Nigeria, Ahmed Yerima is not the only playwright to convert the stage space to a coup arena. Wole Soyinka, in *Kongi's Harvest* (1974), presents Kongi, who has seized absolute power including the traditional, from Oba Danlola in a *le coup theatral*. Kongi's newly and forcefully acquired absolute power goads him the more to want to preside over the New Yam Festival - a hyper-religious cum cultural rite performed only by the Oba. The dread in Kongi's search for absolute power further entrenches the fight in *Kongi's Harvest* pitching Kongi's Carpenters Brigade against Daudu's farm settlement devotees. At the end Kongi's usurpation drive is halted; Kongi is killed in a failed coup as order returns to Oba Danlola and his community.

In Pedro Agbonifo-Obaseki's play (2003), Obaseki cashes in on the absence of Ovonramwen in exile and plots a palace coup which successfully installs himself as the paramount chief of Benin, leading his people. Meanwhile, Ola Rotimi in the same Ovonramwen saga, had earlier staged a *le coup theatral* in which the British ousted Ovoranwen from the Benin seat of authority, and exiled him to Calabar, while annexing Benin Kingdom as part of Her Majesty's 'commonwealth'.

Backlays Ayakoroma in *Dance on His Grave* (1997) pitches Olotu, the king of Toru - Ama (the husband) against Alaere, (the wife and women's leader) on a war-path, which aims at establishing Womanistic relevance in a male-dominated

community. The women, at best with their between-the-thighs instrument, mixed with penetrating psychological thrusts, force an apparent healthy king to slump in shock to pre-mature death. The male force succeeds in overrunning the women but their king is dead, a significant statement on the triumph of women that they were not totally vanquished, after all.

This author has severally exploited the stage environment as a veritable platform for *le coup theatral*. In *Not Without Bones* (2001) women, led by their cast-iron leader, Eka Iban, bring the whiteman - led colonial authority to a stand still. The destruction caused by unstoppable women, even with dead bodies of fellow women felled by canons of colonial authority, is unprecedented. The whiteman is forced to broker peaceful and compromising negotiations which lead to peace for all. Similarly, in *The Fight Has Just Begun* (2000) the third-term bid by Edidem Ekarika and his stooges is checkmated by the radicals Udobong, Unen and Etido. The death of Udobong in the war against third-termers, does not deter Unen and Etido who explore every imaginary avenue to overthrow the power-drunk and corrupt monger, Ekarika, in a bloody climax which also witnesses the enthronement of Imo.

Indeed the stage has been a platform for coup and shall remain a very veritable one at that, especially in a society replete with monstrous people masquerading as leaders exploiting the citizenry in a wreckless abandon for their gratifications. With playwrights themselves being products of such societies, there will always be *le coup theatral*. For moral morass and bankruptcy, there will be *le coup theatral*. For every ill, shame and reproach as indices in a society's backwardness, there will be the canvassing for coup in a bid to inject correcting notes to the tilted equation and rhythm of society.

Le Coup Theatral 2001 de Yerima...
(Yerima's 2001 Theatre Coup in Dry Leaves...)

Esongban, treacherous, murderous, unforgiving and a

damnable demoniac, very witting and wary of the inflammable consequences of his actions (as an elder statesman) to Ewohimi Community and the Onogie in particular, cuts down the five sacred Ukan trees and defiles Onogie's personal shrine. These obnoxious acts he perpetuates because he is boiling with pains and bitterness over the loss of Izaka, his wife, to the Prince, the present Onogie's father (in his youthful days). But the act of the Prince is much interceded for by the entire community. Even Esongban's sister and first wife of the Onogie, Omoze, personally pleads with her brother, Esongban, to forgive the Onogie, and goes the extra mile of accepting Izaka as a respectable second. Yet these intercessory and mediated deeds remain the issues in Esongban's for which he must revenge at the right opportunity.

Similarly, Esongban is also sore-vexed by the enthronement of Onogie asking, the very son of the man who snatched his wife, Izaka, from him. According to Esongban, Onogie is undeserving of the throne whereas Idehen, his sister's son, being the first son of the Onogie is not crowned the Onogie. Interestingly, Esongban is the only character in the play who is championing the cause of Idehen as the rightful successor to the throne of Ewohimi. Idehen's mother is silent. All other chiefs are silent. The Ogiebo, the representative of the gods, is silent. Worse still, Idehen himself does not see the enthronement of Onogie in his stead as a cheat as purportedly flaunted by Esongban as the *raison detre* for his coup.

IDEHEN: May the spirit of our late father find peace with Osanobua. His wisdom of giving you the crown and me, coins, turns us into the great protectors of our land. My lord, these are your gifts from Warri. (37)

This, then, makes us question the claims of Esongban of fighting the cause of the unjust denial of Idehen the position of the

Onogie. Esongban's lip-located claim can be thrown away as false! Of particular suspect is the use of Idehen's matchet in the horrendous act of felling the Ukan trees. Did Esongban not have his own matchet or could he not find any other matchet, preferably a neutral matchet void of any clues for suspicion in his detestable and dastardly acts? And by the way, how many instrument(s) does one really need in cutting trees? Is it not basically a matchet and only a matchet? Yet, Esongban deliberately leaves the 'popular' matchet with a glaring insignia of its ownership behind, with a calculated intent to link the owner and not the coupist in the feigned and shallow claim of forgetting it in a bid to hurry. Was Idehen party to the plot? Did he give him permission to use his matchet? Truth is, Esongban, being the devil that he truly is, wanted to implicate Idehen's neck for the killing. Ogie-obo, the oracle of the gods, rightly describes him as "the devil in a man's dress walking hand in hand with death" (46).

The consequences of Esongban's ignoble and atrocious actions are too grave for his act to pass for an oversight. His cheap and shallow claim: "my sister's son Idehen would be made king" (43) is a substance-begging, value-wanting, empty claim. Therefore fronting the crowning of Idehen as one of his reasons for the damnable act, is to beg the question.

He clearly wants Idehen dead. With the full weight of the accoutrement of Ishan culture of which Esongban in his capacity as high chief is a custodian, the repercussion of capital punishment to the recalcitrant was wantedly schemed. Esongban indeed plans a coup which is intended to wipe Idehen out. And he nearly succeeds! Recall that the Queen mother on being told by Ohen-Olokun of the ungodly destructions with the evidence of Idehen's matchet at the gory site of the evil, sends this loaded message to Onogie, her son.

QUEEN-MOTHER: The son of the leopard is a leopard The son of a cobra is a cobra, yet the son of man, may not

be the son of man. This is a mystery known only to Osanobua. Obeni, this is a task for you. Tonight, when the full moon is up, and the night birds are gathered, fly to me, and I shall address the park. But first hurry to my son, tell him what you have heard. Give him the cutlass, and tell him to do what his fathers command regardless (25)

Let us look at this critically. First of all, the Queen's voice in Ishan community is nearly inviolate and sacrosanct. It can hardly be ignored. Her suggestion cannot be taken lightly. Secondly, the startling evidence of whose matchet is involved in the desecrations, could only spell death to Idehen. Thirdly, the statement "what his fathers command..." adds irrevocable divine dimension to the Queen mother's cry for a deserving punishment. Then "regardless" is Queen mother's auto-suggestion to her son, Onogie, to carry out the execution of Idehen without recourse to kithy and kinly ties. And Esongban knew all these, yet he planned and executed the set up with the mastery of the archer.

By this act, Esongban does not want Idehen alive. Perhaps Esongban is not happy at all about the good relationship Idehen maintains with his half-brother, the Onogie. He feels disappointed by that; and since Idehen does not cast his character as a deserving antagonist, he is not fit to live. Idehen is truly a good brother. He accepts Onogie as the choice of the gods and he remains satisfied with his bequeathal, namely, riches. He is kind-hearted and shares his blessings with his brother. From a heart such as Idehen's, we can deduce truth enough to believe his sincerity. He loathes the abominable acts against the Ukan trees and Onogie's shrine. He desires punishment for the offender. If Idehen were involved in any wise, he would not have been so forth-coming in his pronouncements, oaths and curses:

ONOGIE: (Pause) Someone cut

the Ukan Trees. And since then, the whole village has been in pains.

IDEHEN: Abomination! The shrines of Olokun defiled? Abomination!

ONOGIE: As if that was not enough, my sacred pot of life was also defiled.

IDEHEN: An enemy of the crown. May Osanobua destroy the person's...

ESONGBAN: (*Rushes to stop him*) Don't be too quick to spit judgment and a curse at the same time my son. It was your royal cutlass that was used to cut the trees.

IDEHEN: My royal cutlass?

ESONGBAN: Yes. It was found at the foot of the tree trunks, with the fresh milky liquid of the trees.

IDEHEN: Ogiesan! The noose tightens. What has Olokun said?

OSOH: We are waiting for her action against the person.

IDEHEN: (*Runs to kneel before the Onogie*) My lord, the hand of your brother is clean. This is a plot to destroy me with my brother. (38)

Indeed, it is a "plot", a coup plot, systematically sponsored by Esongban. That is why he rushes to stop Idehen from pronouncing curses. He thinks at this time that he will survive his deeds and remain unknown. Sadly, though, Idehen battles to assert his innocence in the face of an apparent super-twined imbroglio, trapped in a death-prone cocoon, he is not believed by the brother. As far as Onogie is concerned, death must be rather slow in

consuming Idehen. When Idehen "coughs violently", for example, the king retorts "Are you well, brother?" And to Idehen's reply that he might have caught cold, Onogie replies with that subtle wish to see him die, "you feel no other pain?", to which Idehen (perhaps shocked) responds "should I my lord?" (37-38).

The dangling sword of Damocles over the neck of Idehen, could only be dropped down by the testimony of the gods alone, through their authentic oracle, Ogie-Obo: "Prince Idehen did not cut the trees my lord... Idehen's hands are clean, even though he must make sacrifice to appease the goddess Olokun for the use of his cutlass to commit the evil act" (9)

Esongban who is a witness to the trial and near-death and resurrection of Idehen, most certainly but silently, swallows bitter pills somewhat in a bewildering scheme-defeatism and cantankerous - countering! What a coup!

Albeit, one victim yet, is disentangled from the death-prone snare and Esongban is caught in the jaundiced web of a desperado. He does not want to think of the possibility of failure. Never. His mind is running riot in a wickedly consuming abandon. Someone must die and if Idehen has escaped, then, the most hated age-long 'bastard' must be dead! After all, what use are bastards like him? It is not surprising therefore that, Esongban, can look at the gods (via Ogie-Obo) one on one, and regardless of their canniness and sagaciousness, declare "Then if I cannot be saved, please do not save the king. He must die too" (45). On why the king should die as queried by Ogie-obo, he retorts with the bitterest venom of a coupist "Because he must, he should, he has to die" - his response being far from the planes of mere repetition to a much deeper plane of desiring above all things that the king DIES!

One would think that these venomous wishes, decrees and pronouncements are meted out to a genuinely deserving wicked opponent, who has hurt him beyond irredeemable passions. But no; for, ironically, the man who must die by all means, to appease Esongban, happens to have the very Esongban at the zenith of his

lofty regards. "Haa, Esongban, my trusted friend". Again, "My trusted eyes" (32) both exclaimed within a short gap in one brief scene. When Onogie's high-profile trust-worthiness of Esongban is matched with Esongban's disdainful condemnation of Onogie, it becomes intriguing the obvious perplexing ironies of character nee personality contrariness in human relationships. One at once is reminded of the classic case of betrayal of Jesus Christ by the kiss of Judas Iscariot in *Matt. 26:49* and Abiola's sweetly-killing tea(?) Who says that Yerima's *Dry Leaves* ... is out moded?

Odion's de facto Parallel Coup

Secretly, but subtly and successfully, the strangle man, Odion, has been plotting a coup against the enslavement of man by another man for generations. Detailed to carry out the horrible job of strangling the king's slaves to accompany their departing lords, and serve them across the borders of mortality, Odion has been looking forward to a day when he would revolt against the inhuman tradition; even at the expense of his own life. Then fate, it would seem, orchestrates a pact between Odion and Osehijie, Ulolo's grandfather. Not only (rather strangely) is it possible for Osehijie to befriend a strangler, but they are even very close, such that, at the instance of Odion's performance of his ignoble responsibility, namely, strangle Osehigie to die and accompany his Onogie, they have come by a discussion on the issue of reincarnation, where Osehijie challenges Odion that he would return again to life to confront Odion. Perhaps not fathoming that possibility at all, Odion has sworn that should that ever happen, he would spare him his life.

The sex-maniacal Osehijie, with the stunning record of deflowering six virgins in one night (while Odion could only contend with one) also ravishes kolanut and savors palm-wine. The mixed-blend aroma of kolanut and palm-wine is to be the identifying smell in the mouth of the re-incarnate. (I wonder why Yerima did not include the multi-type odour of fornication

especially from six local virgins). Well, tonight as Odion comes in the pretext of carrying out his assignment, he confirms that Ulolo is Osehigie re-incarnated! Not only with that familiar and striking smell of kolanut and palm-wine, but much more vividly, with a scar, the same scar at the same spot which was on the body of Osehigie. And as if to seal every yawning doubt that this is not a dream, Ulolo, in an answer to Odion's "who are you?" question, answers unflatteringly, revelatorily "Osehijie, you old cat!" (p 62).

Odion, though he probably believed in re-incarnation, but most possibly, did not expect that Osehijie would ever return to catch him in his line of duty. So, he had entered into a bet with the dying man, avowing that should he ever come back and established his convincing authenticity beyond bubbling doubts, he (Odion) would spare him dying again in his hands.

Given the person and posture of Odion, there is little doubt, if any, that he would still have carried out his bet. But to compound and compel him to do so, is the relationship of Ulolo with him. Ulolo is married to Idahota, who happens to be Odion's grand-daughter, from his son Akhabosi. She is the only treasured daughter among twenty sons! Odion had heard her moan in loneliness, in a love-sick spree all night, for Ulolo, whom Onogie "technically" prevented on their marriage night from their ravished consummation. Above all, Odion would want Ulolo, whom he has "drugged" with re-incarnate-stimulants of kolanut, (to blend with palm-wine which Ulolo apparently drank before now) and the invoked powers of re-incarnate spirits induced upon him by his incantations, to mount his wife Idahota, tonight, such that, the outcome might have brought forth Odion, back to the human side of earth as a freeborn. Odion, fully persuaded by the fulfilment of the prophetic utterance of Osehijie, two generations ago, whose present reality is the encapsulation of Ulolo, would want a similar event re-played tonight, for the facilitation and actualization of his come-back as well.

ODION: You were born as his neck

went limp under the pressure of my palm. I loved him like a brother. I always knew he would come back. Your father was not him... but you... tonight... you remind me of our earlier encounter, and this frightens me. (65)

Odion, the old wise cat has read the circumstances all right. He is very certain that this would do the magic. What is best, Ulolo presents himself a willing instrument in Odion's malleable maneuvers. Deep in the desires of Ulolo is the craving craze to be with Idahota. He is a man adrift between two worlds, namely, the passionate, tasty promises which life holds, versus the sacred but tradition-imposed voluntary death for a so-called Onogie. But there is a betrayed and obvious tilt in Ulolo's mind towards his preference for life, especially life anticipated to be laced with the voluptuousness of Idahota in an unbottling bubbles of many-seasoned love.

ULOHO: Then what am I doing here? If I were a man, my new wife would be clutching on to me. Her young nipples firm and pointed Not me clutching on to the memories of an ebbing life (61)

Again Uloho further bares his mind on which side of the divide he would have wished to belong if he had the privilege of choice making.

ULOHO: I carry my debt with a slight of relief. For later than this I would have loved life more... (61)

So the stage is set for Odion's *coup de exchange*. If

Esongban had a double-action point of hurt to strike in his coup, Odion has a triple-dose justification for his own. They comprise his utmost desire to be "born again" via another life; to please a languishing grand-daughter with her love desires, and of course, the willing and ready spirit of Uloho in the choice to live.

Whereas Onogie and other chiefs had since concluded that Ulolo voluntarily stepped into the grave meant for Onogie, as a worthy loyal slave to save Onogie from dying; to appease Olokun whose shrine was desecrated by Esongban; unknown to them, a coup had been successfully hatched. Instead of Uloho, an old ragged man who has nothing to lose because he "has seen it all" (69), Odion, the old strangler, this time, would not dare strangle his son-in-law, but would rather voluntarily adorn his neck and ankle with slave bonds in disguise as Uloho to die for the satisfying pleasures of tomorrow. Odion, most probably strangles himself, after all, he had had all the expertise and experientiality in the strangle business.

Do you think that Uloho could have wished for any better deal for himself than this? Or are you thinking that he was forced out of his genuine commitment to die for the cause of Onogie? I do not think so. If he would, then he most vehemently would have resisted all the allurings of Odion. He would have remained stuck to his uncompromising determinism, namely, die for his friend, the Onogie. But this is not what he did. Look at this;

ODION: Go Son. Go. Take my wrapper, tie it. (*Odion takes off his wrapper and reveals that he is wearing the same short skirt as Uloho*)

ULOHO (Uloho is shocked). Old man, you are not going to die in my stead, are you? But you are a freeborn.

ODION: Who told you?... Go Son. Go! I have a friend to meet

ULOHO: But... but... I thought...

ODION: Go Son, go! Through you I shall return, then we all shall be free for ever! Go Son, go.

ULOHO: How shall I know you?

ODION: By the smell of the kolanut and palm-wine. Remember? Now, go! (*Uloho runs out. Odion kneels waiting. Two priests come in followed by the Ogie-obo*)

From this last-minute matter-of-fact exchange, it is clear that Ulolo does not affirm his commitment to die for Onogie, at all. By asking how he would recognize Odion when he would have re-incarnated, Ulolo had since pitched his tent on the side of life, and that, life with Idahota, with the projection of procreation of which one of such seeds might be Odion. Of course, drawn more by the persuasion towards the "sweetness" out there with Idahota, he runs out to life, to live, and leaves Odion to face his chosen death.

Odion himself seems to delight in dying. Not necessarily as a pay back for all the people - fellow slaves, he had strangled. But because he has a friend to meet. Note that he is very descriptive with the word "a friend". For, soon after this, two priests and the Ogie-obo come in, apparently to carry out the last ritual enactment for the passage. One might be tempted to think that Odion had possibly arranged with them in his coup plot, to come and free him. But that is not so, for the reasons that: he had clearly said "I have a friend to meet", not friends. So it is most likely that Odion has a mind-set to die in pleasant readiness to be linked up with Osehigie, the only person in his entire wretched life he had ever used the term "friend" in reference. Whereas his is a happy death, having fulfilled his essence in life - "I have seen it all" (69) for seven times in quick succession, Odion laces his defences to Ulolo. And seven is the number of perfection, simply attesting that Odion has completed his destiny cycle. There is nothing more to live for.

Like Jesus Christ attested "it is finished" and Paul too "I have finished the race..." in *John 19:30* and *2nd Timothy 4:7* respectively, Odion has seen it all, and can leave the scene happily, to re-unite with his bossom friend, Osehijie, having meticulously tidied arrangements to guarantee his come back. But Ulolo's death would have been a pathetic regret. He hasn't seen anything yet. Not even a moment's taste of his yearning wife's body!

In comparing the two coup(s) in the play, one crashes so woefully in all details, and buries the master strategist, Esongban, in its debris. The other succeeds so amazingly in all details, bringing a dawning pleasantness to all the parties involved, namely, Odion and Ulolo.

Conclusion

Ahmed Yerima has, in , *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*, established his ingenuity as a good writer. His use of language, though acknowledgeably very elevated, stands tall in the list of the play's positives. Writing with evidential knowledge of stage limitations is also obvious, so as to facilitate performance-possibilities. A good director could easily construct three sets on stage, and plan actions to rove through them simultaneously. The songs and ritual enactments would attract the total theatre aesthetic nuances of production, to guarantee the play's spectacular essence as an African cultural celebration.

But if I directed the play, I would have splashed it with the spine approach, and typically clad it in the thrust of a *le coup theatral* such that ample *opportunities would be created to show the play's synergism* from the perspectives of the two coup(s).

This is no doubt a beautiful **work**, one crafted in a painstaking language and character evolution. One with a beautiful story spiced with realistic ornaments and cultural accoutrements. Be that as it may, Yerima, twice in the run of events, obliquely skewed the constructions and he obviously mismanaged transitions. On page 31, Onogie says "I wish Esongban were here, he would know what I should do". Then the very next thing reads

(*Esongban comes in, runs to the Onogie and kneels*). One wondered whether Chief Esongban was waiting in the wings for the Onogie's prompting. That was skewed. Time should have been allowed for a more believable but mature handling of the sequence; that sequence of action.

Similarly, on page 51, Osoh suggests that they (chiefs) should call the Ogie-obo from Ebele, to match his 'seering' with their own (Ewohimi) Ogie-obo, in unraveling the circumstances leading to Esongban's death. The first rather skewed and screwed twist, is Elohor, who was detailed to Esongban's house, and found him dead, though, and had since reported same to the Onogie and fellow Chiefs without any additional attaché. Yet, Elohor, is the sudden, very discernibly intelligent, mind-reading chief, who had used his private discretion to arrange for the *two* Ogie-obo(s) to come to the palace because the Onogie, in collaboration with his chiefs, would need clear deductions about the mysterious death of Esongban. This is very unlikely of Elohor's, and it smacks of mechanical contraptions.

Far worse than the above is the orchestrated entrant of the desired duo-from different villages, yet they both arrive at the same time! They also arrive at the nick of time when a desire for them had just been expressed! I guess there was an excellent brilliance of telepathic information and transportation facilitating their speed and accuracy!

The scene between Uloho and Odion also looks too long and very boring. If I directed the play, I would definitely cut off segments without losing any meat of the scene's essence.

The above criticisms notwithstanding, Yerima's *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*, comes across as a reading delight and by extension, a performance possibility. It is a work I would recommend to anyone for many reasons, but definitely, for the intelligent *le coup theatral* crafting of the plot and its passionately moving, interest-generating, suspense-dangling sequences. Yerima has, no doubt, arranged for Fresh Leaves, on Ukan Trees, for Ewohimi!

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