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Scenic Design, Aesthetic Interpretation and Expression in the Production of Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*

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Abstract
This study explores the dual function of scenic design as an interpretive tool and aesthetic expression in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, a final year production of the Department of Performing and Film Arts, University of Ilorin, employing semiotic and hermeneutic frameworks to analyze the translation of dramatic text into theatrical reality. The research reveals that scenic design actively participates in storytelling through visual metaphors, symbolic representation, and atmospheric creation. In *Kurunmi*, scenic elements such as traditional Yoruba huts, circular motifs, and bamboo-like structures establish historical context and convey cultural identity. The analysis demonstrates how visual elements combine to create harmony, with earthy tones grounding the narrative and dynamic lighting manipulating mood and emotional resonance. The study concludes that effective scenic design operates as a sophisticated semiotic system, requiring hermeneutic engagement from audiences and becoming an active narrative participant. This research contributes to understanding African theatre's strategic appropriation of Western conventions and maintenance of indigenous aesthetics, highlighting scenic design's crucial role in enriching audience engagement with historical and cultural narratives.

Keywords: *African theatre, cultural narrative, Hermeneutics, Scenic design, semiotics, visual metaphor*

Introduction

Theatre encompasses multiple artistic disciplines. While components such as the script, direction, and acting frequently receive prominent attention in theatrical analysis, the

visual environment of a production, developed by the scenic designer, also serves a critical function. They "constitute the integrative dynamics that are not only at work in giving rise to a play production experience, but also such as characterize it" (Chukwu-Okoronkwo & Eseka, 2023, pp.6-7). Scenic design, also known as set design or stage design, involves the intentional creation of the physical setting within which a theatrical performance takes place. This discipline extends beyond mere decoration, functioning as a vital narrative element that influences audience perception, establishes mood, and provides contextual information (Bature-Uzor, 2018, p.37). It fundamentally shapes the aesthetic expression of a play, guiding the audience's emotional and intellectual engagement with the dramatic narrative. In the context of Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, an examination of its scenic elements reveals how the stage environment can actively interpret and enhance the play's historical and thematic complexities, rather than merely serving as a backdrop.

This study, therefore, examines how the strategic deployment of scenic elements in *Kurunmi* contributes to a deeper understanding of its narrative and thematic content. Specifically, it analyzes how the visual spatial arrangements and symbolic objects within the set design function as interpretive tools, enriching the audience's engagement with the play's historical context and dramatic tensions. Through this analysis, the paper aims to highlight the often-underestimated role of scenic design as an active participant in theatrical storytelling, particularly in productions that draw heavily on historical narratives and cultural specificity. This exploration will further elucidate how effective scenic choices can underscore directorial intent and amplify the playwright's vision, demonstrating that the visual realm is as integral to theatrical meaning-making as dialogue and performance. This study posits that an integrated approach to scenic design, deeply rooted in the play's socio-cultural milieu, can effectively communicate nuanced directorial interpretations and augment the playwright's overarching message (Akpore & Oyewo, 2022, p.165). The interplay between textual elements and their visual representation on stage inherently forges a holistic experience that profoundly transcends individual artistic components. Effective scenic design unequivocally transforms the stage into an immersive world, enabling the audience to directly experience the play's environment as a tangible entity, not merely a representation.

How Scenic Design Functions as a Tool for Interpretation and Aesthetic Expression in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*

Despite its undeniable impact, the precise mechanisms through which scenic design operates as a powerful tool for both interpretation and aesthetic expression have consistently lacked systematic exploration. Scenic designers are tasked with translating the abstract ideas, emotional landscapes, and narrative intricacies of a dramatic text into a tangible, three-dimensional reality. This intricate process involves not only an understanding of architectural and artistic principles but also a profound engagement with the script's thematic content and the director's conceptual vision, thereby shaping the audience's perception and emotional connection to the unfolding drama (Yang &

Qin, 2024, p.86). Also effectiveness of scenic design lies in its capacity to evoke specific moods, underscore character relationships, and subtly foreshadow plot developments, thereby enriching the overall theatrical experience. This transformative capacity emphasises the need for a rigorous analytical framework to examine how these visual elements contribute to the overall dramaturgical impact of a production. The dramatic text, an intricate construct of an imaginary world, is transformed into a performative reality. Stage directions, including scenic cues, serve as critical interventions guiding both readers and spectators into the play's universe (Moghaddam, 2016, p.79). In the case of Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, understanding how these visual cues are actualized on stage becomes paramount to appreciating the playwright's engagement with historical narratives and the complexities of human conflict. This study aims to bridge this analytical gap by dissecting the specific strategies employed in the scenic design of *Kurunmi* to illuminate how spatial arrangements, symbolic props, and visual textures contribute to its interpretive depth and aesthetic resonance.

Literature Review

Evolution of Scenic Design and Key Movements in African Theatre

The trajectory of scenic design is co-extensive with the history of theatre itself, evolving from rudimentary and symbolic manifestations to increasingly intricate and verisimilar environmental constructs. In ancient Greek theatre, the skene served as a fundamental backdrop, primarily facilitating the ingress and egress of actors. While its principal function was practical, it also provided a fixed architectural element capable of denoting the theatrical location. Similarly, in medieval European theatre, mansiones provided distinct loci for episodic narratives, each suggesting a particular setting through symbolic representation rather than realistic depiction (Limon, 1999, p.68). The Renaissance introduced principles of linear perspective and forced perspective, fundamentally altering the spatial relationship between audience and stage, thereby enhancing the illusion of depth and realism. This shift marked a significant move towards creating more immersive theatrical environments, enabling a more profound connection between the dramatic narrative and its visual representation. The subsequent development of Baroque theatre further amplified these optical illusions, employing elaborate machinery and painted drops to create spectacular, transformative scenic effects. The advent of naturalism in the late 19th century further propelled scenic design toward hyper-realism, seeking to replicate everyday environments with meticulous detail to reflect socio-economic conditions and psychological states. This evolution culminated in a dynamic interplay between aesthetic functionality and narrative support, reflecting broader shifts in artistic philosophy and technological capabilities.

Concurrently, African theatre has forged its own distinct aesthetic in scenic design, often prioritizing symbolic representation, ritualistic elements, and a dynamic interplay with indigenous cultural forms over strict verisimilitude (Hauptfleisch, 1985). This

approach frequently integrates traditional artistry, such as intricate carvings, vibrant textiles, and culturally significant artifacts, into the stage environment, creating a visual language deeply resonant with the audience's cultural heritage. For instance, the use of a simple, open space that can be transformed through movement and minimal props is a standard feature, reflecting a communal and fluid approach to performance often found in traditional African storytelling. This stands in contrast to the Western theatrical tradition which, particularly since the proscenium arch became prevalent, frequently emphasizes a clear demarcation between the performers and the audience, with elaborate sets creating an enclosed, self-contained world. However, a critical aspect of modern African theatre, particularly as exemplified in works like Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, lies in its strategic appropriation of Western theatrical conventions, including elements of scenic design, to articulate distinct African narratives and perspectives (Oguibe, 2002). This strategic appropriation allows for a rich synthesis, where traditional African performance aesthetics coalesce with adapted Western design principles to forge a unique visual lexicon that resonates with both local and global audiences (Ogunbiyi, 2016, p.96). This fusion, therefore, decisively enables a nuanced exploration of historical and societal themes, utilizing visual cues that are simultaneously culturally specific and universally comprehensible. This hybridity unequivocally underscores a deliberate artistic choice to move beyond Eurocentric theatrical models, emphasizing an aesthetic rooted in indigenous African performance traditions while selectively incorporating elements that demonstrably enhance narrative impact and audience engagement.

Functions of Scenic Design in Kurunmi

Beyond its historical evolution, scholarly discourse has identified several key functions of scenic design that extend far beyond mere decoration. As Klingelhoefer (2016, p.34) suggests, scenic design is an integral part of the storytelling process, creating an immersive environment that draws the audience into the world of the play. This involves establishing the play's setting its time, place, and social context providing crucial information that helps the audience orient themselves within the narrative. A dilapidated set might immediately convey poverty or neglect, while an opulent one suggests wealth and power.

In *Kurunmi*, the scenic design plays a crucial role in establishing the historical and cultural context of the 19th-century Yoruba kingdom. The use of painted backdrops depicting traditional huts and natural elements (as seen in the provided images) immediately situates the audience within the play's setting. These elements, while not hyper-realistic, serve to create a recognizable and immersive environment. Furthermore, scenic design plays a vital role in establishing the mood and atmosphere of a production. Through the careful manipulation of colour, texture, light, and form, designers can evoke a wide range of emotions, from joy and whimsy to dread and despair. The use of stark, angular lines might create a sense of tension, while soft, flowing fabrics suggest romance or tranquility. The set also serves to define the relationships between

characters and their environment, influencing their movement and interactions on stage. Entrances and exits, levels, and the arrangement of props all dictate how actors navigate the space and relate to one another.

Crucially, scenic design can also serve as a powerful tool for character development and narrative progression. The physical environment can reveal aspects of a character's personality, social status, or psychological state. A cluttered room might suggest a disorganized mind, while a meticulously ordered one could indicate a desire for control. Changes in scenery, or even subtle alterations within a fixed set, can signify shifts in time, location, or emotional states, guiding the audience through the play's journey. In essence, the set becomes a silent character, actively participating in the unfolding drama. In *Kurunmi*, the progression of the war and the changing fortunes of the characters is subtly reflected in the scenic elements, through changes in lighting or the introduction or removal of props that symbolize victory or defeat.

Theoretical Framework

This paper seeks to elucidate the functions of scenic design as a potent instrument for both interpretive analysis and aesthetic communication in theatrical productions. To achieve this, it will draw upon two pivotal theoretical frameworks: semiotics and hermeneutics. These frameworks, though distinct, offer a synergistic perspective for comprehending the intricate relationship between the visual components of a stage and the meanings they convey.

Semiotics in Scenic Design

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their interpretation, offers a powerful lens through which to analyze scenic design. It essentially examines how meaning is not only generated but meticulously conveyed through visual cues. When applied to scenic design, semiotics reveals the stage as a sophisticated system of signs, where every deliberate visual element, be it a prop, a specific colour choice, a piece of furniture, or the overarching architectural structure, functions as a precise signifier. Designers strategically employ these signifiers to point to a deeper, intended signified meaning, thereby actively shaping audience perception and understanding. This approach acknowledges that the aesthetic research of interior spaces, including theatrical sets, often incorporates semiotic principles to interpret visual elements and ornaments as artifacts imbued with symbolic values, reflecting past and present meanings within a specific cultural context (Permatasari, 2018, p.68). This interpretive process moves beyond simple denotation to explore the connotative layers of meaning embedded within the scenic elements, thus allowing for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the theatrical narrative (Ehses, 1984). For instance, the strategic placement of a specific cultural artifact within the set can evoke profound cultural associations and historical narratives for an informed audience. Similarly, the analysis of exhibition galleries demonstrates how semiotic theory can be applied to understand the relationship between signs and symbols and what they represent, especially concerning their form

and reference in the physical or conceptual world (Baniyamin & Rahim, 2019). Within this framework, the interpretation of scenic elements in a theatrical context as semiotic signs undeniably provides a comprehensive analysis of how visual communication fundamentally contributes to the overall narrative and thematic development of a play. By analyzing scenic design through semiotics, we can deconstruct the visual language of the stage and understand how designers construct meaning through their aesthetic choices. It allows us to move beyond simply describing what is seen and delve into what it means and how that meaning is conveyed.

Hermeneutics in Scenic Design

Hermeneutics, broadly defined, is the theory and practice of interpretation. In the context of scenic design, hermeneutics focuses on how audiences actively engage with and interpret the visual elements of a stage, constructing meaning based on their individual backgrounds, cultural knowledge, and experiences (Fahreza & Sastrosasmito, 2018, p.132). This interpretive process is not passive; instead, it involves a dynamic interplay between the scenic elements, the performance, and the spectator's cognitive framework, ultimately leading to a unique understanding of the theatrical narrative. It recognizes that meaning is not solely embedded within the design itself but is co-created through the audience's engagement with it, emphasizing the subjective and contextual nature of interpretation. This perspective aligns with the idea that interpretation is an ongoing process, influenced by the interplay of text, context, and the reader's pre-understanding, making each audience member's experience potentially distinct (Biggs, 2008). Consequently, hermeneutics offers a framework to explore the multifarious interpretations that arise from a singular scenic presentation, acknowledging that the scenic design acts as a catalyst for diverse audience understandings.

While semiotics focuses on the signs themselves, hermeneutics delves into the process of understanding and the act of interpreting. In the context of scenic design, hermeneutics helps us explore how the audience engages with and makes sense of the stage environment, and how the design itself serves as an interpretation of the play's text. This framework acknowledges that the interpretation of theatrical elements is a dynamic, dialogical process, where the audience actively constructs meaning rather than passively receiving it (Cañete et al., 2025, p.18). The scenic designer, in their creative process, acts as an interpreter of the playwright's vision. They read the script, analyze its themes, characters, and setting, and then translate this understanding into a tangible, three-dimensional world on stage. This act of translation is inherently hermeneutic; the designer is interpreting the text and offering their own visual commentary on it. The choices they make, the scale of the set, the materials used, the spatial relationships all contribute to this interpretation. Furthermore, the audience's pre-understandings, shaped by their individual experiences and cultural backgrounds, significantly influence their interpretation of these design choices, completing a hermeneutic circle where new horizons of understanding are acquired with each

engagement (Farooq, 2018, p.17). This dynamic interplay between the designer's interpretation and the audience's engagement creates a rich culture of potential meanings, highlighting the collaborative and evolving nature of theatrical understanding.

For the audience, hermeneutics highlights their active role in constructing meaning. When an audience member views a stage production, they are not passively receiving information. Instead, they are actively interpreting the scenic elements, connecting them to their own experiences, and forming their own understanding of the play's world and message. This interpretive process is dynamic and subjective, influenced by individual perspectives and cultural backgrounds. Key aspects of hermeneutics relevant to scenic design include the Hermeneutic Circle, which suggests that understanding a part requires understanding the whole, and vice versa; in scenic design, this means that a specific prop contributes to understanding the overall world of the play, and the overall play informs the understanding of the prop. Additionally, audiences bring their own pre-existing knowledge, beliefs, and expectations to a theatrical experience, and this pre-understanding significantly influences how they interpret the scenic design. Furthermore, the theatrical experience can be seen as a dialogue between the world presented on stage and the audience's own world, facilitating a fusion of horizons where new understandings emerge through this interaction. This dialogical condition, conceptualized as a universal aspect of human understanding, emphasizes that interpretation is not merely a cognitive exercise but a fundamental mode of being, inextricably linked to one's existence (Gadamer, 2006, p.132). By employing hermeneutics, it is possible to appreciate scenic design not just as a static backdrop, but as an active participant in the interpretive process, shaping how the audience experiences and comprehends the theatrical narrative. It emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the designer's interpretation, the stage's visual manifestation, and the audience's individual understanding.

Interplay of Semiotics and Hermeneutics

While semiotics provides the tools to dissect the 'what' and 'how' of meaning-making through signs, hermeneutics offers insight into the 'why' and 'how' of interpretation. Together, they form a robust framework for analyzing scenic design. A designer uses semiotic principles to encode meaning into the set (e.g., a broken clock signifying decay), and the audience employs hermeneutic processes to decode and interpret that meaning within the broader context of the play. The aesthetic expression of the scenic design, therefore, is not merely decorative; it is a carefully constructed semiotic system that invites hermeneutic engagement from the audience, leading to a richer and more profound theatrical experience.

Scenic Design as Interpretation in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*

Scenic design is fundamentally an act of interpretation. The designer, much like a director or an actor, delves into the dramatic text to unearth its layers of meaning, its

emotional core, and its inherent theatricality. This interpretive process is then translated into a tangible, visual language that shapes the audience's understanding of the play. In Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, this interpretive function of scenic design is crucial for conveying the historical context, cultural nuances, and dramatic conflicts of the 19th-century Yoruba war.

Script Analysis and Conceptualization

The interpretive journey of a scenic designer begins with a rigorous and in-depth analysis of the script. This goes beyond merely identifying the required locations or props; it involves a deep dive into the play's themes, character motivations, historical context, and stylistic demands. The designer asks critical questions: What is the playwright trying to say? What is the emotional landscape of the play? What kind of world does this story inhabit? This initial script analysis forms the bedrock of the design concept, which is the designer's overarching interpretive vision for the production. For *Kurunmi*, the script analysis would reveal the need to depict a traditional Yoruba setting, transitioning between peaceful village life and the harsh realities of war. The play's central conflict Kurunmi's defiance against the Alaafin of Oyo and the ensuing war demands a scenic environment that can interpret both the established order and its violent disruption. The conceptualization phase for *Kurunmi* would involve decisions on how to visually represent the power structures, the cultural identity of the Ijaye people, and the escalating tension of the conflict.



Fig. 1: Shows the presence of traditional huts and natural elements in the images above indicates an interpretation that grounds the play in its specific cultural and historical setting.

The relatively simple, painted backdrops suggest a focus on symbolic representation rather than hyper-realism, allowing the audience's imagination to fill in details, a common approach in African theatre that prioritizes storytelling and performance over elaborate spectacle.

Visual Metaphors and Symbolism: Translating Abstract Ideas into Concrete Forms in *Kurunmi*

One of the most potent ways scenic design interprets a dramatic text is through the use of visual metaphors and symbolism. Rather than simply depicting a literal location, the set can become a powerful visual representation of the play's underlying themes or character journeys. These visual metaphors are semiotic in nature, functioning as signs that convey complex ideas without explicit verbal articulation.



Fig. 2: Shows the painted circular motifs on the backdrop, particularly the one depicting an archer symbolize the martial prowess of Kurunmi and his warriors.

The use of bamboo-like structures represent the natural environment of Yorubaland, the resilience and strength of the people. The choice of materials, colours, and forms all contribute to this symbolic language. Through such deliberate choices, scenic designers interpret the abstract and often intangible aspects of a play, giving them concrete, visual form that resonates with the audience.

Creating Atmosphere and Mood: Interpreting Emotional Landscapes in *Kurunmi*

Scenic design is instrumental in interpreting the emotional landscape of a play and translating it into a palpable atmosphere and mood on stage. The overall feeling of a scene whether it's tense, joyous, melancholic, or chaotic is heavily influenced by the visual environment. This is achieved through a careful orchestration of various design elements.



Fig. 3: Shows how lighting plays a significant role in establishing mood with its dominant red lighting, immediately conveys a sense of danger, conflict, and heightened emotion.

This use of colour in lighting is a powerful interpretive tool, signaling to the audience the emotional tenor of the scene without explicit dialogue. The relatively simple set pieces, combined with dramatic lighting, allow for quick and effective shifts in atmosphere, which would be essential for a play like *Kurunmi* that moves between different emotional states and locations. The scale andproportion of the set also contribute to atmosphere; while the images show a relatively open stage, the painted huts and foliage create a sense of enclosure and community, which can then be contrasted with the open space of battle.

Character and Narrative Development through Design: Revealing Backstory and Relationships in *Kurunmi*

Finally, scenic design interprets and illuminates character and narrative development, often revealing backstory, relationships, and psychological states without a single word being spoken. The physical environment can be a direct extension of a character's personality or circumstances.

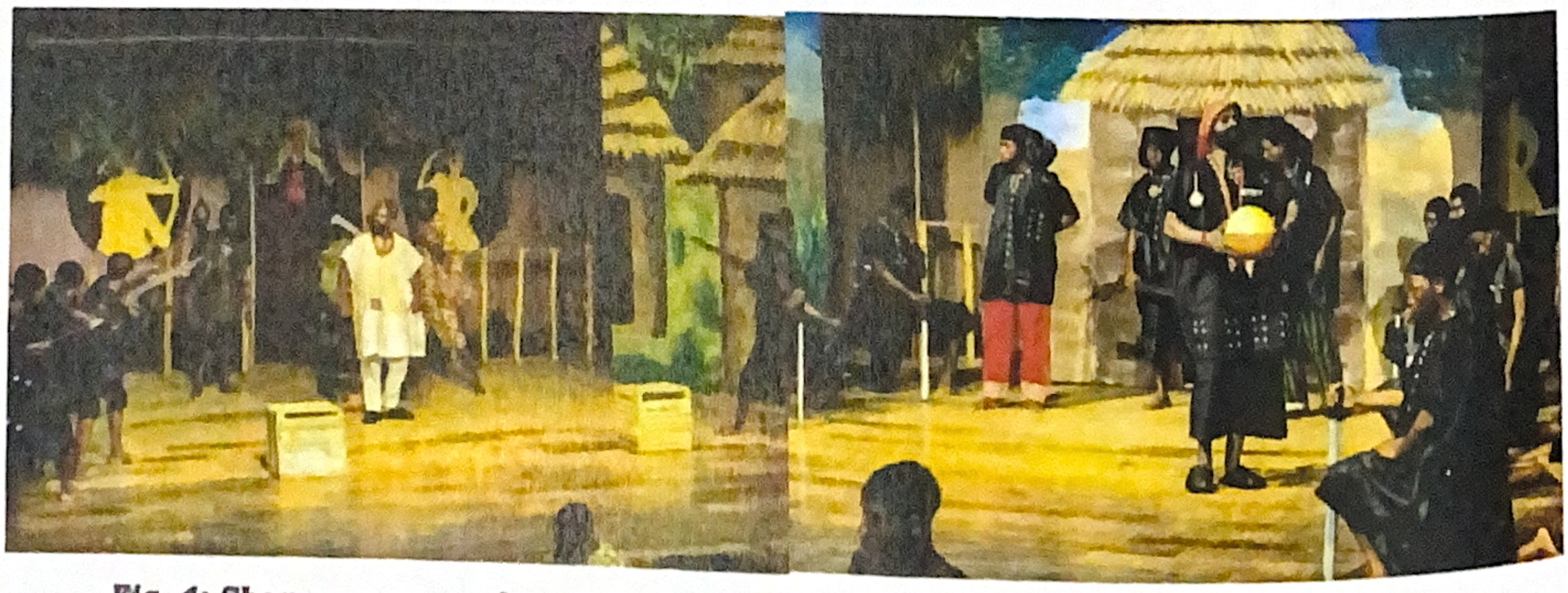


Fig. 4: Shows presence of traditional Yoruba attire and props, the traditional weapons.

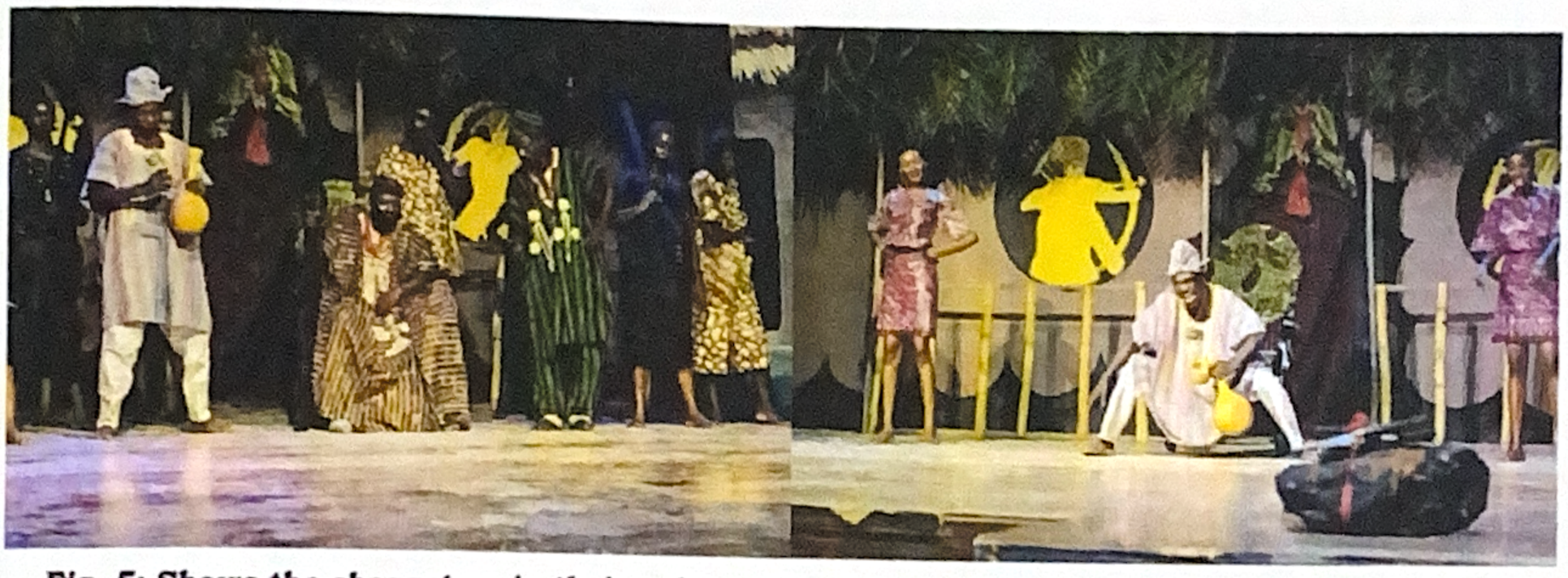


Fig. 5: Shows the characters in their cultural identity and historical period, the depiction of a throne-like chair which suggests the presence of authority and leadership, central to the play's themes of power and governance.

Changes in the set, or even subtle modifications within a fixed set, can interpret narrative progression. While the provided images show a relatively consistent backdrop, the movement of actors and the introduction of specific props.

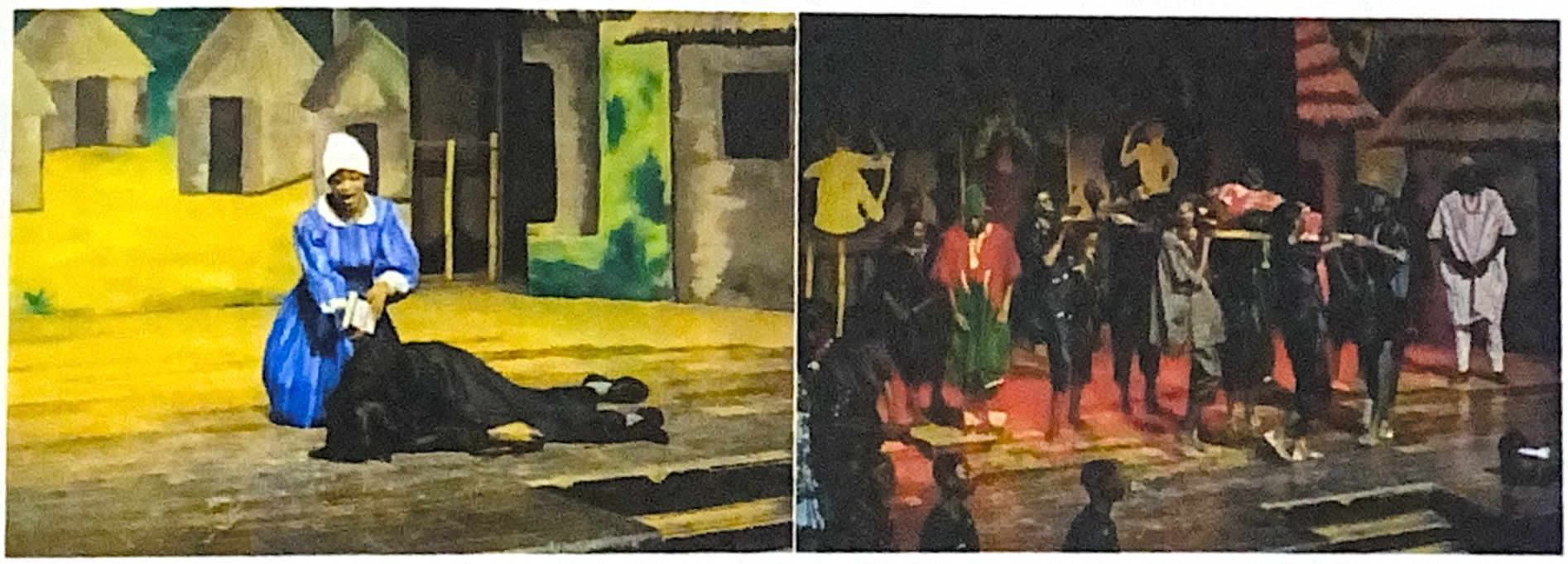


Fig. 6: Shows the fallen character and the carried body which indicate shifts in the narrative, from moments of peace to conflict and its aftermath.

Through these interpretive design choices, the scenic environment becomes an active participant in the storytelling, providing visual cues that enrich the audience's understanding of the characters' journeys and the unfolding narrative.

Scenic Design as Aesthetic Expression in Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*

Beyond its interpretive function, scenic design is a powerful medium for aesthetic expression. It is an art form that engages the audience on a sensory and emotional level, creating a visually compelling world that enhances the theatrical experience. The aesthetic choices made by a scenic designer are not arbitrary; they are carefully

considered decisions that contribute to the overall beauty, impact, and coherence of the production.

Elements of Aesthetic Expression: Colour, Line, Form, Texture, Space in *Kurunmi*

The aesthetic expression in scenic design is built upon the fundamental elements of visual art: colour, line, form, texture, and space. Each of these elements is manipulated by the designer to create specific visual effects and evoke particular responses.

Colour: In the *Kurunmi* production photos, colour is used both realistically and symbolically. The earthy tones of the huts and natural elements ground the setting in a natural, traditional environment. The vibrant red lighting is a striking example of colour used for aesthetic and emotional impact, instantly conveying a sense of urgency, conflict, or ritualistic intensity. This dramatic shift in lighting colour demonstrates how a single element can profoundly alter the aesthetic experience and emotional response.

Line: The lines in the scenic design for *Kurunmi* are predominantly organic and curvilinear, reflecting the natural forms of huts and foliage. The painted outlines of the huts and trees create a sense of softness and fluidity, contrasting with the sharp, linear forms often found in more modern or industrial settings. The vertical lines of the bamboo-like structures provide a sense of height and natural growth.

Form: The forms present in the *Kurunmi* set are primarily those of traditional African architecture the rounded, thatched roofs of the huts and the organic shapes of the foliage. These forms contribute to the authenticity and cultural specificity of the aesthetic. Even the props, such as the gourds, exhibit natural, rounded forms, reinforcing the organic aesthetic.

Texture: While the set appears to be painted, implying texture rather than actual three-dimensional texture, the visual representation of thatched roofs and rough-hewn suggests a tactile quality. The wooden stage floor itself (visible in all images) also contributes a natural, worn texture, adding to the overall aesthetic of an authentic, lived-in environment.

Space: The stage space in *Kurunmi* appears to be utilized to create both intimate and expansive areas. The arrangement of the huts suggests a village setting, providing defined spaces for interaction, while the open central area allows for dynamic movement, particularly evident in the battle scenes. The use of levels, though subtle, such as the slight rise in the stage floor, can also define spatial relationships and create visual interest.

Composition and Visual Harmony: Principles of Design in *Kurunmi*

Just as a painter composes a canvas, a scenic designer composes the stage. The principles of design, including balance, rhythm, emphasis, unity, and variety, are crucial for achieving visual harmony and practical aesthetic expression.

Balance: The scenic design for *Kurunmi* appears to achieve a sense of balance through the distribution of elements across the stage. The huts and foliage on either side of the stage create a symmetrical or near-symmetrical balance, providing a stable and grounded visual foundation. The placement of actors and props within this framework further contributes to the overall visual equilibrium.

Rhythm: Rhythm is created through the repetition of elements, such as the multiple huts and bamboo poles, guiding the audience's eye across the stage. The dynamic movement of the actors, particularly in the action shots, also establishes a visual rhythm that enhances the narrative flow.

Emphasis: Specific elements are emphasized to draw attention to key narrative points. The circular motifs with figures serve as focal points, drawing the eye and potentially highlighting themes of strength, destiny, or cultural identity. The use of strong, contrasting colours in costumes, the red and green in can also create emphasis on particular characters or groups.

Unity and Variety: The overall design demonstrates unity through a consistent aesthetic, characterized by natural forms, earthy colours, and traditional motifs. Despite this unity, there is also variety in the details of the painted backdrops and the arrangement of props, preventing monotony and maintaining visual interest. The different postures and groupings of the actors also add variety to the stage picture.

Evoking Emotion and Sensory Experience: The Impact of Aesthetics on the Audience in *Kurunmi*

The aesthetic expression of scenic design has a profound impact on the audience's emotional and sensory experience. Beyond conveying explicit meaning, the visual qualities of the set can directly evoke feelings, create a sense of immersion, and stimulate the senses. In *Kurunmi*, the aesthetic choices contribute significantly to the emotional resonance of the play. The warm, natural tones of the village scenes evoke a sense of community and tradition, while the stark red lighting in battle sequences creates an immediate sense of danger, chaos, and heightened emotion. The visual simplicity of the set, combined with the vibrant costumes and dynamic movements of the actors, allows the audience to focus on the human drama unfolding, fostering a deeper emotional connection. The aesthetic dimension of scenic design thus moves beyond intellectual interpretation to a more visceral and immediate connection with the audience.

The Role of Technology in Aesthetic Expression in *Kurunmi*

Modern scenic design increasingly leverages technology to expand its aesthetic expressive capabilities. Advancements in lighting technology, projection mapping, automated scenery, and digital media have opened up new frontiers for creating dynamic and immersive environments. While the provided images of Kurunmi suggest a more traditional approach to set design, the effective use of lighting demonstrates how even simple technological elements can profoundly impact the aesthetic expression. The ability to change the colour and intensity of light instantly allows for rapid shifts in mood and atmosphere, enhancing the dramatic impact of the production. While more advanced technologies like projection mapping could further improve the visual storytelling, the current aesthetic relies on a blend of painted scenery and dynamic lighting to create a compelling and expressive theatrical world. When integrated thoughtfully, technology can elevate the aesthetic impact of scenic design, creating truly breathtaking and unforgettable theatrical moments.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how scenic design functions as a powerful tool for both interpretation and aesthetic expression in stage productions, using Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* as a central case study. Through the lenses of semiotics and hermeneutics, the study has analyzed how designers translate the abstract ideas and emotional landscapes of a dramatic text into a tangible, visual language that shapes the audience's understanding and experience. In *Kurunmi*, the scenic design, characterized by its blend of traditional Yoruba elements and symbolic representation, serves as a vital interpretive tool. It establishes the historical and cultural context, uses visual metaphors to convey complex themes, creates a palpable atmosphere and mood, and subtly contributes to character and narrative development. The provided production images illustrate how elements like painted backdrops, traditional props, and dynamic lighting work in concert to achieve these interpretive goals. The simplicity and evocative nature of the set allow the audience to engage actively in the interpretive process, filling in details and connecting with the narrative on a deeper level. Furthermore, the aesthetic expression of the scenic design in *Kurunmi* is evident in the deliberate manipulation of visual elements such as colour, line, form, texture, and space. The use of earthy tones, organic forms, and strategic lighting creates a visually harmonious and engaging environment. The aesthetic choices are not merely decorative but are integral to evoking emotion and enhancing the sensory experience of the audience, transforming the stage into a vibrant and meaningful world. While the production may not rely on cutting-edge technology, the effective use of lighting demonstrates how even basic technological elements can significantly contribute to the overall aesthetic impact. In conclusion, Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* stands as a compelling example of how scenic design, when thoughtfully conceived and executed, transcends mere backdrop to become an active participant in the theatrical experience. It interprets the play's essence, expresses its aesthetic vision, and ultimately enriches the audience's engagement with the profound historical and cultural narrative. The interplay of interpretation and aesthetic

expression in scenic design, as demonstrated through *Kurunmi*, underscores its indispensable role in the art of theatre.

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