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Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

BOOK REVIEW

Ahmed Yerima's *Basic Techniques In Playwriting* (2003). Place of Publication: Ibadan, Nigeria. Publisher: Kraft Books. Number of Pages: 165. Binding : Paperback. ISBN: 978-039-101-0. Price: N1,000.

Reviewed By:

Oguntoyinbo Deji

Faith Academy,
Canaanland, Ota,
Nigeria.

Playwriting is not a gift. It is a skill to be consciously learned. An aspiring / potential dramatist or theatre practitioner must learn the rope of playwriting so as to produce good play scripts. Also, the preponderance of poor scripts being churned out by self professed “gifted” playwrights is at an alarming rate. Herein, lies the relevance and necessity of Ahmed Yerima’s *Basic Techniques in Playwriting*- as a writer’s own quota in arresting this ugly trend. With more than thirty published plays and six critical works, Ahmed Yerima has in-depth experience to write on such a topic. Trained under the “endlessly fertile” Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, the award winning playwright is a man that practices-what-he-preaches—and-preaches-what-he-practices.

Written in a language devoid of cant and grandiloquence, the author tries to take the prospective reader on an adventure on the intricacies of playwriting. As a trained dramatist, he delves into the issue at hand from the purview of being both an experienced dramatist and a theatre scholar. The book is divided into eleven chapters with different but relevant headings.

In the first chapter titled ‘The Playwright and The Theatre ‘, the author expatiates on the types of theatre stages, arena staging and formal staging (Proscenium stage, Pit Theatre, Theatre-in -the-round and Thrust stage). The functions of key personnel in the theatre industry are given. They include the Director, Actor, Set Designer, Costume Designer, Lightning Designer and the Critic. Also, procedures before performance are given attention. They range from choosing the story, audition, reading, casting and rehearsals. The chapter ends with the importance and levels of responses by an audience while performing a play. The second chapter ‘Elements of a Play’ is about the rudiments of a play which a playwright should be accustomed with. Conflict, which is the soul of drama, is one of these rudiments. In the author’s own words “without a conflict, a play would easily fail to hold the attention of the audience” (33). Furthermore, he explains some other necessary elements of drama. Premise and the opening; protagonist and language constitute this group. An explorative study of the kinds of play forms the pivot of the third chapter. Provenance and vast number of examples are used

to attenuate the drama types. These types of drama include tragedy, comedy, satire, experimental and historical plays.

A thorough and lucid distinction between an idea of a play and plot forms the fulcrum of the fourth chapter. How an artist creates; what reality there is in art and what reality there is in life constitute ideas upon which plays are based. This is different from the plot which is the sequential or chronological order of actions in a literary work. The author delineates on the necessity of dramatic dialogue in the fifth chapter. Clarity, economy of words and avoidance of long speeches are some hints given to the budding playwright. Dialogue is important because it is “the playwright’s skilful manipulation of words and the arrangement of such words that creates in turn, the character, the plot and the play as a whole” (76). The creation and manipulation of characters constitute sixth chapter. In this chapter, the author gives yardstick to the new playwright on what types of character exist and why he/she must be careful in the creation of characters. Quoting Oscar Brockett, he gives the four levels of characterisation traits. They are physical, social, psychological and moral traits.

In the seventh chapter titled ‘Writing the Play’, Yerima adroitly explains on stage directions, the unscripted plays, playmaking in the local professional theatre (especially that of Zaria), rehearsal, amongst others. Necessary steps to be taken in writing drama for children are the focus of the eighth chapter. He gives recognition and attention to important details like ideas, character, plot and language as it concerns children drama. In the next chapter ‘The Art of Adapting Plays’, the author discusses criteria to comply with when adapting a dramatic work. This is spiced up with numerous examples. Tips on how to write for the television and radio form the crux of chapter ten. In the last chapter, he gives solutions to imminent or obvious challenges to be encountered when writing a play. These tips are highly illuminating and instructive.

The use of apt quotations at the beginning of each chapter, infusion of relevant references and experiences garnered over years of successful theatre practice adds to the already enriched content of the book. The conversational mode of discourse is another plus to the book. The long bibliography section is a mine of information. This section contains adaptations unpublished, institutions offering Creative Arts/ Dramatic/Performing/Theatre Arts, publishing houses amongst others.

This book will constitute an invaluable companion for budding and experienced playwrights, theatre arts scholars, lovers and critics; and students of theatre arts. Also, this book is highly recommended for the general reading public, as a whole.