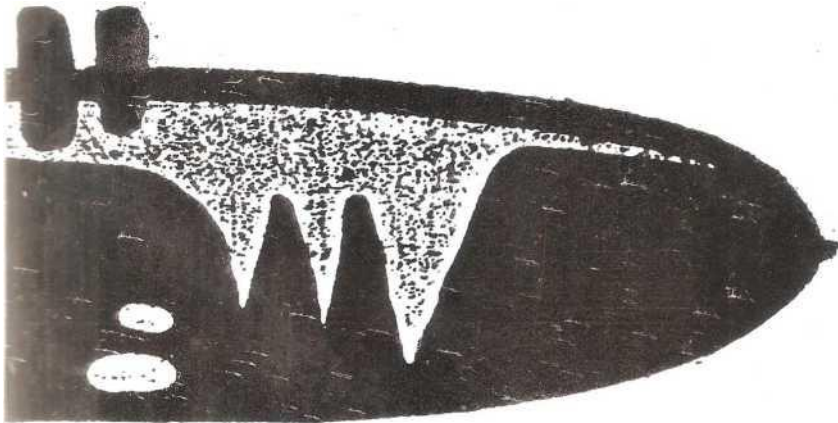


Volume 2 Number 1 June 2009

MUKABALA

Journal of Performing Arts and Culture



Vol. 2, No.]

September 2009

Editorial Board

Editor

Prof. Dapo Adelugba

Assistant Editors

- Prof- S. A. Kafewo
- Dr. M. I. Umar-Buratai
- Dr. I. D. Danbaba

Editorial Assistant

Tobias Banye

Editorial Consultants

Prof. Oga Steve Abah

Prof. John Illah

Prof. Saint E. T. Gbiiekaa

Prof. R. A. Adebisi George

Prof. George Teke

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dramatic Character and the Great Transition: <i>Imminent Paradigm Shift</i> by Iyorwuese Hagher	1-17
Language as Communication and Commitment in <i>The Trial of Dedan Kimathi</i> and <i>I Will Marry When I Want</i> by Mohammed Inuwa Umar-Buratai	18-36
Performance as Enterprise: The Calabar Carnival of Cross River State, Nigeria by Chinyere Lilian Okam	37-55
Metaphors and Cultural Codes as Semiotic Signs in Stage Performance by Nwosu Canice	56-68
Greek Gods, Yoruba Names: The Nigerianisation of Sophocles' <i>Oedipus Rex</i> in Ola Rotimi's <i>The Gods Are Not To Blame</i> by Emmy U. Idegú	69-79
Advocacy as Action, Theatre as Agent: An Overview of the Nature of Advocacy in Theatre for Development (<i>Tfd</i>) in the 'Changing Games' <i>Project</i> by Martins Adegbe Ayegba	80-94
Processing, Perception and Action in Theatre for Development (<i>Tfd</i>) by Samuel Ayedime Kafewo and Olorunfemi Douglas Biodun	95-111
<i>In My Father's House: The Poetics of Performance and the Performance Of Poetics - Femi Osofisan's Theatre as Socio-Cultural Intervention: Lessons for Nollywood</i> by 'Diran Ademiju-Bepo	112-129
The Imperatives of Thematic Thrust in the Nigerian Home Video by Aduku Armstrong Idachaba	130-148
Folklore and the Ideology of Child Education through the Electronic Media by Chiduo C. Obadiegwu.	149-159

Child Development and the Necessity of Participation in Development: An Overview By Rasheedah Liman	160-168
Radicalism, Conservatism Culture and the Epistemological Crisis of Post Jihad Hausa Islamic Society by Abubakar Aliyu Liman.....	169-184
Cultural, Linguistics and Political Identities: A Case Study of the Performance of Bate Besong's <i>Beasts of No Nation</i> by Anne Tanyi-Tang.....	185-203
Francophone African Theatre in the Age of Globalization by R.A. Adebisi	204-219
Le Comportement Des Syllabes Du Fran[^]ais: Des Lemons Pedagogiques par A. A. Illah.....	120-229
Traduction Litteraire et Les Litteratures en Langues Indigenes par Dasuki Danbaba	230-238
Conflit Des Cultures: Effets De L'immigration sur la Femme Africaine Dans <i>Rebelle</i> De Fatou Ke'ita par Doris L. Obieje.....	239-249

**Greek Gods, Yoruba Names: The Nigerianisation of
Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not
To Blame*.**

Emmy Unuja Idegu
Department of Theatre and Performing Arts
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Resume

L'un des traits communs des premières oeuvres littéraires nigérianes et cela semble s'appliquer aussi à toutes les premières oeuvres africaines est qu'elles sont influencées, bien qu'elles décrivent les situations locales des Africains, par les travaux des étrangers. Dans cet article, l'auteur jette un regard sur l'une de ces pièces et voit comment le dramaturge a été influencé par la tradition grecque dans le choix des thèmes et du dénouement de sa pièce « Nigerian.

Introduction

The origin and development of theatre and theatre practice all over the world has remained a subject of controversy when the issue of its globally accepted starting place is discussed. As appropriate or otherwise as this issue has lingered in theatre scholarship, the contact of Nigerian theatre practitioners, as one may argue for the entire Africans, with foreign theatre practices has in no small way, greatly influenced the works of Nigerian authors. Whether by adaptation, adoption, or even transposition, there has been a fundamental presence of Greek, Roman and Elizabethan theatre practices in our literary creativity and appreciation. One of such is the attempt by Nigerian playwrights to draw parallels or similarities between foreign plays and what they write within the cultural configurations of Nigeria to suit the plot structure, thematic pre-occupation and even mythopoetic meeting points with western forms of theatre as exemplified in their plays.

Several examples abound. But suffice to mention just a few of such works; which include Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* vs *The Bcicchae* by Euripides, and his Opera Wonyosi vs John Gays' *The Beggars Opera* and Bertolt Brecht's *Three Penny Operas* Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin* vs Nicolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* and his *The Midnight Hotel* vs Georges Feydeau's *L'Hotel Par ad is o* Dapo Adelugba (etal)'s That Scoundrel Suberu vs Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*; Biodun Jeyifo's *Haba Director* vs Bertolt Brecht's *Puntila and His Man Matti*; Ahmed Yerima's *An Inspector Calls* (same title by J. B. Priestly) and *Sakapin Sarki Wayo* (a Bilingual adaptation of Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*) and his *Otaelo* vs Shakespeare's *Othello*; and several other attempts.

These play texts no doubt; contribute to theatre scholarship in Nigeria and beyond. Cross - cultural discourse in dramaturgy is greatly enhanced by and with the appreciation of such play-texts. This notwithstanding, there is quite a presence of mishandlings of issues in their original play-texts and the Nigerian versions. We are not unaware of the fact that domesticating such stories to fit the Nigerian setting cannot be as exact as they ought to be, the intention of the playwrights notwithstanding. There are procedures and rules to be followed in transposition, adaptation or adoption. When issues like the plot, and the story of foreign theatre practices is or are literally forced and forged to suit an indigenous Nigeria environment, then such attempts will need some revalidation and corrective appraisal. This paper will, therefore, focus on one of such "Nigerianized" plays, *The Gods Are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi seen to bear much similarity with Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.

Oedipus Rex and the Gods are not to Blame

The emphasis of this paper is not a comparative analysis of these two plays, but a close look at the role of the gods in Rotimi's play and how "Yorubaic" or Nigerian they are. Nevertheless, *Oedipus Rex* is seen as one of the clearest and most vivid illustrations of Greek tragedy and as defined by Aristotle in the classics. Its success lies greatly in Sophocles' ingenious blend of plot and characterization to produce the glaring tragedy, which is the essence of the drama. If Oedipus were not both well meaning and assured of his own righteousness, as is established in the opening of the play, the story would have broken down with the revelation of Teiresias. But

as only the impetuosity of Oedipus could ignite Teiresias to speak out, so only his quick temper could make him ignore Teiresias' revelation of who he is. A comment on the tragic hero, Oedipus, will lead us into our appraisal. As rightly observed by Hadas (1982:76), no

Greek hero was wholly perfect. Only a proud and impatient man - one who would kill in a traffic dispute - would also have the fortitude to pursue the truth as Oedipus did. His sins were committed unwittingly; by human calculations he had behaved well as a man. When a man behaving admirably as a man is nevertheless tripped up by forces beyond his control and understanding, we have tragedy.

Oedipus then is a perfect example of a tragic hero.

This account summarizes the essence of a typical Greek tragic hero; one who is "tripped by forces beyond his control and understanding". Because our analysis focuses in these "forces", the gods, we shall now comment on how the playwright Ola Rotimi, in *The Gods Are not to Blame*, succeed in fostering this Greek standard on a Yoruba, nay, Nigerian setting. In our treatment of the tragic hero, we shall see Odewale in the following segments; His Birth, His Exile, His Sojourn, His Return to Kutuje, and His tragedy.

a. His Birth

At Odewale's birth to king Adetusa and Queen Ojuola, as the custom and tradition of Kutuje stipulates, his future is sought from Baba Fakunle who declares that Odewale "will kill his own father and then marry his own mother" This is by all standards, a terrible revelation for the royal house. [But rather than the king asking for an alternative to this evil omen, they resort to "thy will be done" response of the typical Greeks to their gods who i must never be questioned. So they resort to the only way out as (declared by the unquestionable gods); kill the innocent boy. In most Nigerian societies, as one may say for Yorubaland which setting Rotimi wrote the play, because gods are not blood thirsty tyrants but creations who oversee the well-being of the living, they are most often, interrogated when a demand of this level of calamity is put forward by them.

In *Fires Bum and Die Hard (Birthdays are not for Dying)*, Osofisan (1990) presents a situation where an entire society is on the verge of disaster over a hideous crime committed by one of the market women that led to the burning of the community's market. A new market is built and due for commissioning for use, but Chief, (the Ifa diviner) reveals thus, "Ifa warns strongly that this unknown woman will soil the new market unless she is first purged of her crime before moving in. She has offended the gods of the land, the gods of the market. Unless she confesses, and the appropriate rites are conducted, she will carry a curse along with her which will destroy you all" - (P. 80). Reacting to the demands of the gods and the near impossibility of its execution, the living interrogate the gods "Is there no other way out. Baba? (P. 81), to which Chief answers, "There is. There always is. Ifa did suggest another solution.... The alternative is this. Ifa says that if the real culprit will not own up, to perform the necessary rites, then either of you, as the chosen leaders of the women, must agree to stand in, in her place, and make the sacrifice "(emphasis mine) (P. 81) *In No More the Wasted Breed (Morountodun and Other Plays)* Osofisan (1982:108), when the gods of the land demand sacrifice, the living again dialogue thus

Only a happy people pay homage to their gods. We fed you with the best of our seasons, praying for peace and abundance. But instead, you brought us the white slavers who carried off our best men to the far plantations. To anguish and humiliation ...
What do you do goddess? You watch and let them pass, leaving us with our hands empty.

At the end of Biokun's dialogue with the gods, Olokun the god of the ocean admits,

He has spoken the truth. I am filled with shame..
They have eaten the salt of freedom and moved beyond our simple caprices. We must fulfill our appetite by other means, for they do not demand protection any more, but food; but justice. I have no choice, I must respond. Therefore by the burst womb of our mother Yemoja, I command you: let the man live" (P. 109).

And so the son of Biokun the carrier, who the gods would have had as the sacrificial lamb, is, after this mutual discussion, set free by the same gods.

We are not ignorant of the ideological leaning of Osofisan in his treatment of socio - cultural issues in his plays. Our preoccupation here is his presentation of the gods as they are in virtually all Nigerian cultural beliefs. There is hardly any god that can be so unappeasable on the Nigerian soil as presented by Rotimi in his play. Even if the gods will end up doing what they decree, the humans in Rotimi's play should have put up some spirited effort than the total acceptance of the gods' verdict that he presents in his play.

The choice of Gbonka by the priest of Ogun to carry out the sentence of the gods on Odewale is unacceptable. The narrator says, "Priest bears boy to Gbonka, the king's special messenger and orders him to go into the bush with the little boy to the evil grove (emphasis mine). (P.4). Gbonka is neither an acolyte to Ogun nor an assistant to the Ogun priest. How can he therefore, be entrusted to execute a verdict of the gods, which the priest himself abdicates? Here, Rotimi gives a spiritual assignment to Gbonka a secular staff in the palace. This is deliberate for it accounts for the failure of Gbonka to carry out the judgment ifi order to facilitate the little boy's race into exile so that the gods will eventually exert their wrath on him, the people and the land.

b. His Exile

Gbonka's inability and obvious incapacitation to carry out a ritual assignment he is not after all equipped to do, lands Odewale in the hands of hunter Ogundele at the sacred grove all the way to Ijekun - Yemoja his village; where with his wife, Mobike, Odewale grows to see them as his parents. Peace reigns until one day that a man he had all along known and related with as an uncle calls him a butterfly that thinks himself a bird. Odewale consults the oracle and he is frightened by the revelation that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Thinking hunter Ogundele and Mobike are his parents, Odewale runs away after making his trusted friend, Alaka swear not to come and look for him till his parents were dead. One will ordinarily think that because of the trust Odewale and Alaka have for each other, Odewale would have confided in Alaka to tell him his findings. If this happens, Rotimi's agenda on prosecuting a Greek tragedy may be aborted. So every speech, action and mood is guided by Rotimi to fulfill his

purpose. It is with such manipulations that Yerima (2003: 76) asserts that a play is made up of words, and it is the playwright's skillful manipulation of words and the arrangement of such words that creates in turn the character, the plot and the play as a whole. It is such careful use of words that helps to bring out the magic of words. So without his trusted friend Alaka knowing why Odewale is running away from Ijekun Yemoja, Odewale begins a journey, guided by the tyrant vexed gods, to return him to Kutuje for punishment; but after a stopover at Ede.

c. His Sojourn

At the death of hunter Ogundele and the ageing of Mobike, Alaka traces his friend Odewale to Kutuje to break the news. Our focus in this segment is what happens at Ede between Odewale and Adetusa on the farmer's farm. Odewale gets to his legitimate farm and meets a man harvesting his own labour. The rational African thing to do is for Odewale to report back to the man who gave him the land. The issue of Adetusa, a king, personally going to the farm for harvest, as Rotimi portrays here is another seeming incongruity of action viz avis the status of the king. Nevertheless, rather than report back to the original owner of the farm who leased it to Odewale, he engages the man in a fight and kills him. With this kind of shock, one would have expected Odewale to rush back to Ijekun Yemoja to see Alaka, or at least send for him and seek advice on what to do. He doesn't do that, he doesn't open up to anybody in Ede, but Rotimi makes him to sojourn back to Kutuje crossing seven rivers. We can see a well-planned plot structure here working out to make Odewale face the reality of what he "ran" away from as a baby.

d. His Return to Kutuje

Odewale returns home to Kutuje to meet the entire village and people in crises. Rather than mind his own business, he "gathered the people of Kutuje under my power. We attacked the people of Ikolu, freed our people seized the lands of Ikolu, and prospered from their sweat" (P.6). The question then is simple. In what capacity is Odewale leading this battle of the Kutuje people? And with the death of their king, Adetusa, why does Aderopo the Prince not mount the throne of his father and lead the battle, or whoever Aderopo as king would have chosen as "the war leader? That vacuum exists so that Odewale will much later fill it, and by so doing, the gods will be getting closer to venting their final raw anger on him. After the

battle, Odewale tells his friend Alaka “the people made me king. Me of Ijekun tribe. They broke tradition and made me, unasked, king of Kutuje” (emphasis mine). (P.7). A few questions can be raised here. The people of Kutuje knew Odewale as a man of Ijekun tribe, yet “they broke tradition” and made him king even without his asking. Why did this people not break the same tradition at the birth of Odewale when their gods opined he should be killed because of the curse the gods placed on him? Why did this people putting tradition aside now not even as much as question that same tradition while Odewale was sentenced to death as a baby. Tradition is not static, but dynamic. Nevertheless, this sudden dynamism in the tradition of Rotimi’s Kutuje has no clear justification, at least within the confines of the events in the play. What a dynamic change that allows a foreigner to occupy the sacred throne of the king of the people. It may be difficult, if not impossible to have, within the context of Nigerian traditional monarchical set ups, to let what Rotimi does here, happen. Take this illustration for instance. Mallam Abdulwahab Abdulmalik, a Hausa sojourn to Ife (Yorubaland) meets the people in war. He leads them to victory and the king makers in Ife, rubbish the tradition of kingship in the great Ife and crown him as the Oni of Ife. This cannot happen. Rotimi’s personal creative agenda in this matter contradicts the reality in the society that is the setting of his play. For art to be relevant, it must reflect the heartbeat of the society for which it is written. It must possess the qualities of self - identification. Yerima (2003: 237). One doubts, if by the tenants of the Yoruba tradition, this proposal Rotimi advocates in this play can hold. Remember the premise by which the Kutuje people make Odewale their king is rigidly hinged on their knowledge of him as an Ijekun man. For now, the people of Kutuje do not have knowledge of Odewale’s origin as a son of the soil. It is only Rotimi’s “Yoruba gods” that know the truth for now.

e. His Tragedy.

As the new king of Kutuje, Odewale fulfils the second part of the curse placed on him by the gods. He discovers later that the man he killed at Ede was his father. Because of the attributes of the “Yoruba gods” Rotimi presents in this play, they do nothing to Odewale until after eleven years on the throne as husband to his mother and father to his brothers (Adewale, Adebisi, Oyeyemi, Adeyinka). The truth of all matters is unraveled as the people suffer untold hardships, ailments and death and the entire land of Kutuje is in grief and tragedy. Queen Ojuola, on discovering who Odewale

is, commits suicide and Ode wale plucks off his own eyes, leading his children into a thick dark unknown. Wallowing in self-condemnation, Qdewale exonerates the gods of all these avoidable crises, “No, no! Do not blame the gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people learn from my fall” (P.71). These “Yoruba gods” must be really callous and unAfrican by all ramifications.

Greek Gods, Yoruba Names.

It is obvious from our understanding of the characteristics of ancient Greek gods that Rotimi’s play has succeeded in forging their high-handed unquestionable, “all in all”, “supreme” and tyrannical nature on Yoruba gods that ordinarily look after the welfare of the living and encourage cordial relationship between the living and their gods. In Greek mythology, the humans are nothing but as pawns are to the kings in chess game. Whatever the Greek gods determined, they executed without regards to the feelings of the humans who are after all, at the beck and call, the whims and caprices of the Greek gods. Rotimi had his artistic license to do whatever will project his personal intent and message he was out to project. Dauda E. Musa in *Eqwugwu Illah* (2002:61) however, opines that armed with such poetic license, the playwright in his work should “reflect, refract and mediate the cultural and historical reality of his environment”. *The Gods Are not to Blame* considering the gods in the play may most probably not reflect the cultural reality of the Yoruba entity. As opined by Friere (1972: 19), all plays should bear the imprint of the environment and period in which they are created.

Rotimi may have attempted to look at the universality of what Sophocles submits in *Oedipus Rex*. But even at that, he ought to have known, and identified such universalities that do not contradict, but enhance the indigenous cultural milieu he was out as a Nigerian playwright to expose. As Dasylva (2004: 35) asserts,

The whole concept of universality has to do with the sense within a play, in which characters, whether individualized and recognizable as persons, or presented as types of symbols, reach beyond their circumstances to wider implications. What is happening to these characters happens, or might happen to anybody outside the world of the

theatre... It is the measure of such universal thrust, that is, seeing beyond the immediate (known) events of the drama, that it achieves a lasting philosophical significance, (emphasis mine)

It is the degree to which we can identify the Odewales and the “Yoruba gods” outside the play in the real Nigerian Yoruba environment that authenticates or otherwise, the “Yorubanness” of the essence of the play. Rotimi’s play, no doubt is another instance of a work that came out of our contact with foreign theatre practices. Dasylyva (2004:119) summarises the implications of such contact that,

The African playwright constantly draws his materials and inspirations from the rich African philosophical hermeneutics and loric tradition. At the same time, since he is exposed to western education, more often than not, contemporary African drama usually benefits from the influences of western dramatic forms and traditions, the dual exposure of the African playwright has immensely contributed to the rich and unique hybrid form (African and European) of what has now come to be known as modern African drama.

It is the level of acceptability of this hybridization that grants elastic relevance to a work. Rotimi used his own style and sets the play open for the theatre scholar’s judgment. Talking about personal influence in works like this *Yerima* (2003:239) agrees that,

.. .the issue of style or the technique employed by an artist to inform the audience of his idea is personal.

It is often dictated by the mood of the period, by the level of anger and thirst of his intended audience.

The personal influence in works dictates the ideological focus of the writer, because according to J. S Illah in *Eqwugwu Illah* (2002:5), “whatever the paradigm we adopt, it has implications for the ideological project, especially in Nigerian Drama. While this cannot be personnel in terms of a dichotomy, it will dictate what values to uphold and promote and what visions to share since ideological production necessarily mediates the mode of consumption” and critique.

Conclusion

A play maps out its own country, and it is left to the discretion of the playwright adapting the play to know what he intends to do with the plot and characters. One method of drawing a response from the audience, especially in the adaptation of a foreign play is to make the characters and the plots like that of the audience as much as possible. Yerima (2003:124)

Rotimi may have attempted an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in his play *The Gods Are not to Blame*, because of the close affinity of plot, characterization, story, thematic thrust and other dramatic elements employed in the play. In Soyinka's adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* titled the *Bacchae of Euripides* for instance, Soyinka "built in his own idea of Yoruba while at the same time explaining to his audience his awareness of the similarities and differences between Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, fertility and creativity and Dionysus, the Greek god of the same attributes. He even includes his own beliefs of the parallels with major religions by showing the structural changes in his version. Yerima (2003:125). One can also make reference to Yerima's *Otaelo* an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* in which he based his own play on the Igbo Osu tradition by changing not only the names of characters but also the situations and cultural sensibilities. For example, Yerima used *Jigida* as his own symbol of love that takes over the handkerchief motif in *Othello* but still serves as the "destructive metaphor" in his version.

Adapting plays has its peculiar problems. Even in Yerima's *Otaelo* for instance, the way the protagonist, Otaelo goes about killing Ichiagu, (his wife's suspected lover), his wife Chinyere and himself after discovering the *Jigida*, (the destructive metaphor) with Ichiagu instead of being worn on the waist of Chinyere his wife, is unAfrican. Otaelo marries Chinyere with the consent of his father-in-law, Igwe Ochendu and the elders of the land. When troubles shoot out in the marriage, it is African to report back to his father - in-law and the elders for their intervention even if he will end up breaking the marriage. But Yerima, heavily influenced by the tragic end of *Othello*, where he derived his inspiration to adapt *Othello*, forces the plot structure of that original play and imported tragedy on Otaelo who becomes unAfricanly rash about his response to his wife's "infidelity". Yerima (2003:13) advises that the playwright must have all the perception to realize when imitativeness begins to cripple his original creativeness. He must understand his objectives ... without losing touch with humanity, with the currents of the life of his own times. He must find a point of departure; he

must attempt to abandon his mentor's works and begin to create his. There is nothing as terrible as a bad imitator or a crazy idol worshipper. Even the idol worshipped disowns the playwright if the plays are bad imitations. Rotimi's "Yoruba gods" in his play are terribly and heavily endowed with bad imitations of the ancient Greek gods.

Emmy Idegu in Egwugwu Illah (2002:17) reacts to the response of theatre critics to creative works when he admits that the theatre practitioner interprets reality and the results of that interpretation are mediated in the artwork, which is perceived by the public, the audience, on whom it exerts a certain intellectual and emotional impact. The society's reactions to his work via criticism helps in his perception of the world, sometimes better and clearer than he even thought of. The critic in this way influences the theatre artist by influencing his artistic personality shaping his self control and generally adjusting his artistic activities. With this dual relationship of the theatre practitioner and the theatre critic, chances are that adaptations of foreign plays will blend in structure and culture with our indigenous realities and social responsibilities. Rotimi, therefore, may be right after all. The gods are actually not to blame; the playwright is to blame.

References

- Dasyiva, A-O, (2004), *Studies in Drama*, Ibadan, Stiring-Hprden Publishers.
- Freire, Paulo, (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, England, Penguin Books.
- Illah, Egwugwu, (ed) (2002). *Theatre, Politics and Social Consciousness in Nigeria*, Jos, Leadership Production Press.
- Moses, Hadas, (1982). *The Complete Plays of Sophocles*, New York, Bantam Books.
- Osofisan, Femi, (1990). *Birthdays Are Not for Dying*, Lagos, Malthouse
- Osofisan, Femi, (1987). *Morountodun and Other Plays*, Ibadan, Longman.
- Yerima, Ahmed (2003). *Basic Techniques in Playwriting*, Ibadan, Kraft Books Ltd.
- Yerima, Ahmed, (2003). *Fragmented Thoughts and Specifics*, Ibadan, Bookplus Nig. Ltd.