

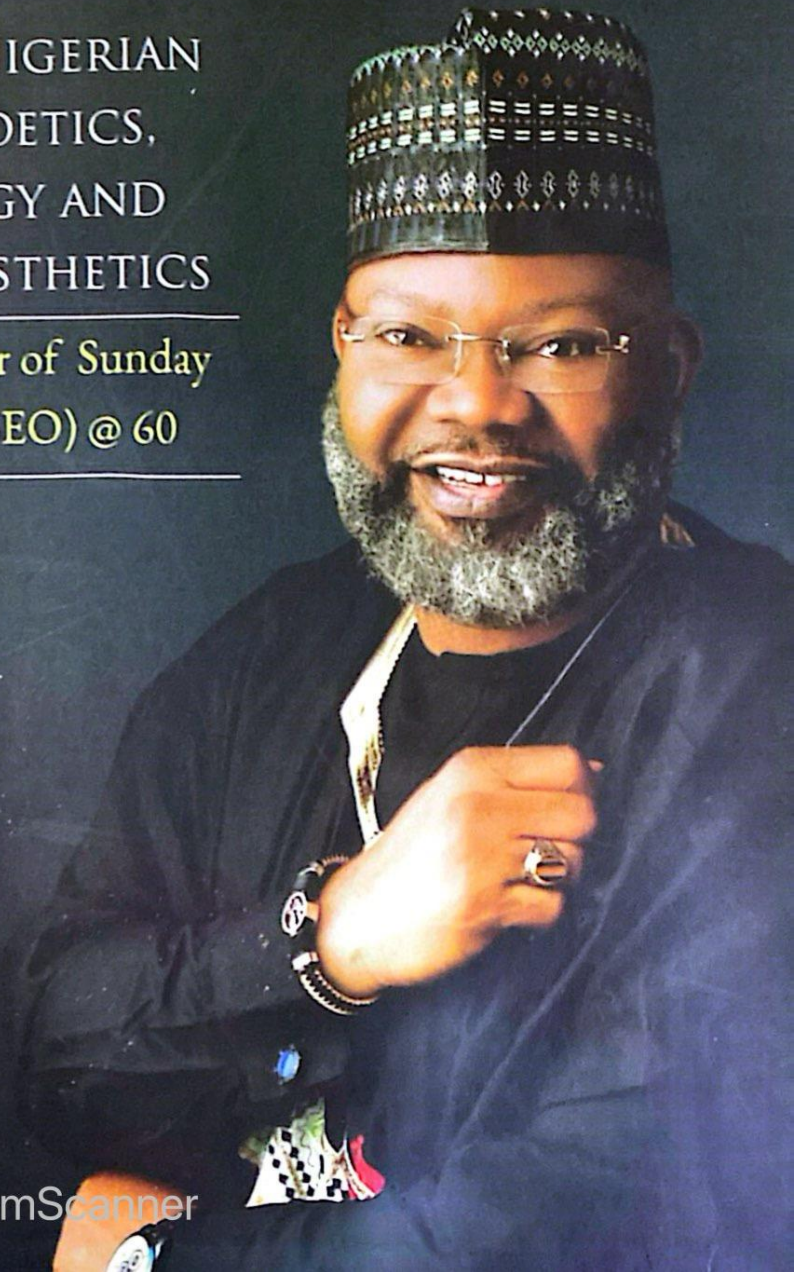
ONE TREE A FOREST

STUDIES IN NIGERIAN
THEATRE POETICS,
TECHNOLOGY AND
CULTURAL AESTHETICS

A Book in Honour of Sunday
Enessi Ododo (SEO) @ 60

Edited by
Osakue S. Omoera
'Bode Ojoniyi

Victor O. Ihidero
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A Book in Honour of Sunday Enessi Ododo (SEO)

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'One Tree A Forest: Studies in Nigerian Theatre Poetics, Technology and Cultural Aesthetics'

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CHAPTER NINE

POETICS ON THE KING OF LIGHT FROM HALF OF HIS WINGS



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Abstract

Cultural production is a series of cascades on man and his restless desire to understand nature, the people around him and himself. It is pre-historic, dynamic and its immanence and currency cannot be overemphasised. Curiously, any producer of culture may want to lean on the ego of arguable juristic tendency which is akin to a poetic of legislation. Interestingly, I do not intend to deconstruct myself nor write within the margin of the border of the self in this discourse but rather to communicate the realities within the poetics of the king of light and half of his wings.

Keywords: SEO, Cultural production, King of light, Intercultural theatre, *Facekuerade*.

Introduction

Two questions are inevitable in my attempt to unveil the king of light and half of his wings. The first is that: who is the king of light? The second question is tied to the shadow of the first question: who is the person behind half of the king's wings or is it the king himself? The king of light is living excellently to his diligent, determined, dexterous, highly-spirited, dynamic, unassuming and massive identity. It is the cerebral Sunday Enessi Ododo who can only be introduced to

those who are not part of the Nigerian, African, Asian, European and American theatres in the last 40 years. He is the king of light whose half wings remains Rasheed Abiodun Musa, who is now known as AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye. Having established the owner of the DNA of the king of light and its genetic mode, it is now important that I proceed to recalibrate on the genetic fingerprinting whose essence cannot die if theatre and performance, theatre technology, dramatic theory and criticism and cultural studies are ever contemplated.

We are all familiar with the power of the boardroom guru but with the king of light, his lecture room was always saturated with fanfare because he was more than a guru. He was a constant performer in class, singing trado-modern songs and creating new ones, and he has no dull moment while impacting knowledge. He used to explain complex concepts with illustrative examples and he dictated notes with the rhythm of an actor who has mastered the essence of articulation, projection, resonance and tonal variety. Ododo the teacher was a light of grace and knowledge, and he was good at unchaining the chained hands of unwilling students. His massive image in the early 1990s was too intimidating that you cannot even miss his class. With him, lazy drones cannot survive, and any lecture from Ododo will make you to learn many things within the space and 'spacelessness,' the centre and the periphery, the border and the margin of the theatre. He was not a "kind person" if you miss his lecture or fail to submit assignment. He made lectures easy for us and he was the don who was feared even more than the professors in the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin that he joined in 1993. We always wait patiently for his arrival and he was an excellent, detailed and brilliant teacher in effective communication, social amicability and knowledge impartation. One other unique thing about the king of light was his shifting prowess and the alertness with which he combined communalism and cosmopolitanism. He was urbane and shared the main themes and tendencies of the rural dwellers with us in class.

The palace of the king of light; his office, was a consecrated prison. He used to bury himself deep into the night, burning a candle at both ends and maximizing his productivity with critical reading and writing. To knock on his door will be an unpardonable crime and we were very careful not to put our hands into the mouth of an intellectually rampaging cobra. He refused to go to bed and succeeded in turning his office into the palatial mansion of imagination, creativity and ingenuity. The future of this scholarship was predicted early enough with his red-eyes from sleepless nights when most of his colleagues were enjoying life.

The sword bearer of half of the wings of the king, Musa, now Adeoye, joined the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin in 1999. In one of the lectures that he had with students, he was at his best; discussing the Bertolt Brecht's Brechtian theatre in PFA 434 (20th Century Western Drama). He delivered the lecture extempore and after the lecture, some students met with the then Mr. Ododo to eulogise his style and mode of lecture delivery. He appreciated them and told them that; "he is half of my wings!" The students delivered the message of the king of light to me in 2001 and I confirmed to them that he was right and that, "I am indeed the proud owner of half of his wings". He was the head and he later confirmed openly, in his Handover Notes when he completed his term as Ag. Head of Department in 2003, that, I was indeed the trunk.

The king of light represents the multiple images of a scholar with many parts. The first remains his affinity with light and with due apology to Sàngó, the Yoruba's god of thunder and lightning, his extension to the larger umbrella of Theatre Technology. This is an expansive area where the king of light, Prof. Ododo did his M.A and Ph.D. respectively. The M.A was on Technical Aids in Play Production while his Ph. D. was on *Facekuerade* Theatre, an original performance model and technical aesthetics from Ebira-Ekuechi festival of his people in Kogi State. I will return to the ingenuous *Facekuerade* Theatre shortly.

The Prodigious Forte of the King of Light

The king of light is a rounded artist and he has re-defined the technophobic and multi-rhythmic essence of the African total theatre aesthetics with ease. Through three major media of acting, directing and theatre technology, one can see that he is indeed an original finger in every pie. His practical engagements in acting include his roles in eight major productions such as Lawyer Buraimoh in Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* in 1983, Prof Ajia in *The Aftermath* coordinated by Late Zulu Sofola in 1985, Edufa in Efua T. Sutherland's *Edufa* in 1985 and 1987, Dabira in Bode Sowande's *The Night Before* in 1985 and 1988, Claudius in Femi Osofisan's *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* in 1994, Oba of Benin in Wale Ogunyemi's *Langbodo* in 1994, Tobi in *The Crown of Death*, a Home Video production in 1997 and in series of TV dramas from 1986 to 2000.

His acting has also helped his directing and vice-versa. Indeed, his artistry as a committed artistic director, video director and leader of production team cannot be overemphasised. He directed Kole Omotoso's *The Curse* in 1986, Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* in 1997, his own opera – *To Return*

from the Void in 2006, Bode Sowande's *The Night Before* in 2007 and Umar B. T. Dingse's "The Wedding of the Sahel" in 2014. He set forth early as director through his leadership and artistic role as the Leader and Artistic Director of Gongola State NYSC Theatre Troupe in 1986/1987 service year, apart from his outstanding role as the Standing Assistant Director of Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* in 1998; a Unilorin Convocation Production.

What the king of light did with acting and directing will pale into insignificance if we compare these with his works in Theatre Technology. His place in the Nigerian theatre has been assured as a technical theatre director, consultant on theatre building facilities and installations, a stage make-up kit creator, designer and creator of six channels Dimmer Boards and Colour wheel, lightning designer, costumiers, make-up artist, property manager and set designer. He was the technical director of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* in 1994, Ben Tomoloju's *Jankariwo*, Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso*, Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* and *Esu and the Vagabond Mistrels* all in 1997. He participated actively on the technical team led by Duro Oni for the opening ceremony of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Abuja CHOGM – 2003), Nigeria International Bank's production of Wale Ogunyemi's *Langbodo* and several convocation performances at the University of Ilorin. He has served as Technical Consultant to Nassarawa State Government of Nigeria on NAFEST and recently too, to Atiba University in Oyo, Oyo State.

An important wing in the several wings of the king of light remains his creative writings. To date, he has written ten original works such as stage plays, short stories, TV screen plays, operas and poems to his credits. Two flagships are inescapable here and these are *To Return from the Void* and *Hard Choice*. The half of his wings was also involved during the productions of the two original creative works. A major face has travelled across the globe, preaching the ideas of Ebira-Ekuechi festival theatre. It is the king of light's *Facekuerade* theatre. This is a re-invention of the Ekuechi masquerade festival performance model from its original form to a literary tradition (Omoera, 2012). Ododo's total theatre in the *Facekuerade* Theatre bears testimony to Wole Soyinka's ritual theatre and shared from Arnold van Gennep's liminality and the rite of passage in which a tripartite sequence of ritual observance of separation, tradition and incorporation for social regeneration (Gaur, 2022, p.1) cannot be overemphasised.

Facekuerade Theatre(Re)Interrogated

The postcolonial performance ideas in Ododo's models resonate more on the continental and intercontinental levels, to situate the theatre as a unique force

beyond border. In fact, Kennedy (1973, p.42) revisits the powers of the African theatre through the Ghanaian theatre as that which should be viewed as “a total creation, volcanic eruption of the art forms caught in the middle of the culture of a particular African society.” Ododo's appropriation also finds corresponding relevance in intercultural theatre, performative aesthetics of India Rasa, the cultural revolution of Chinese's Mao Zedong and Japanese aesthetics led by Zeami Motokiyo. I have found, materially and dialectically as well, that the *Facekuerade* model, for a long time, will continue to be the iconic performance model of the postcolonial theatre despite its root in ritual aesthetics of the masquerade dominion. I also have it as a duty to recall the 15 features in the transition of the masquerade theatre in the theoretical cant of *Facekueradism*. These are that:

- a. they both have ancestral linkage perceived as sacred arts;
- b. they exclude mystifying aura and as such their performative contexts are revered, feared and respected;
- c. their performance are often realised under festive conditions and to also honour the living or commemorate the dead;
- d. the force of prophetic proclamations is present in both;
- e. human agency is involved;
- f. besides, mask disguise elements are intensified;
- g. only male performers are involved while there is the hidden spiritual involvement of women;
- h. communal and audience participation;
- i. intensive rehearsals are often times involved;
- j. procession performance is a common feature to both;
- k. open space and ritual networking required for effective performance;
- l. intense traditional musical accompaniment;
- m. both are open to patronage from wealthy citizens, organisations, lineage heads and other member of the community;
- n. there is no gate takings; and
- o. sumptuous feasting is a key feature common to both too (Ododo, 2015, pp. 8-9).

It is also important to appraise the main themes and tendencies of *Facekuerade* theatre from the iconic dramatist and king of light, (Ododo, 2015,

pp. 10 – 11). Table 1 below will serve as critical anchor for this ingenious comparative theoretical submission.

	Masquerade	<i>Facekuerade</i>
1.	Mask presence essence for dramatic distance.	Mask absence essence or face presence essence for dramatic proximity.
2.	Closed secret as the human agency involved is completely sealed up in costume and mask.	Open secrets because there is facial presence but mystic. The 'facekueradic' essence is sustained by wilful suspension of disbelief.
3.	Enactments (role playing) because there is character impersonation. It is therefore representational in style	It is the act (playing) itself because it is the living experience and not relived. It is therefore presentational in style.
4.	Performance abstraction to mystify and render complex.	Performance is simplified to make accessible and to penetrate the soul of humanity.
5.	Static communication signal because of the mask that is rigid and static.	Elastic and dynamic communication signals because of the flexible facial interaction it transforms radiating layers of meanings.
6.	Male and female audience participation.	Male audience participation only
7.	Overt female participation because of their physical presence and active involvement in music and dance.	Covert female participation because of their metaphysical involvement in intervening on spiritual matters.
8.	Multiple dramatic casts for masquerade performance because the mask hides the human agency involved. The masquerade retains one identity throughout the performance, but the performer changes with invisible identity.	Singular dramatic cast for <i>Facekuerade</i> performance because the performer has facial presence. The <i>Facekuerade</i> and the performer retain one visible identity throughout the performance.
9.	Performance time is diurnal and nocturnal because of the presence of the mask.	Performance time is nocturnal only; darkness is used as a masking agency.
10.	Communal and individual authorship of songs. Except for a few exceptions, the masquerade does not generate the sing songs.	<i>Facekuerade</i> performer generates and sings his songs, and therefore has authorial license over them.
11.	Muffled voice because of masking.	Vocal clarity and distinction because of 'faceking'.
12.	Some are whip-carrying	Not whip-carrying, but tongue lashes through satirical compositions.

Ododo's experimentation in the *Facekuerade* theatre also moves from the ideals of the theory to the castle of creative writing. This is because his *Hard Choice* demonstrates the affinity of the text with the corollary of the pre-text which finds ambience in the organic tenor of the *Facekuerade* theatre, concluding on a transition of the traditional to the literary, and from the indigenous to the site of the postcolonial. The king of light's *Facekuerade* theatre is a successful hybrid theatre performance in Nigeria which Dugga (2017, pp.9-10) christened Creolisations with its attendants crossbreeding to the borders of the intercultural and multicultural. The inextinguishable light of the king of light is extended to the act of gatekeeping in the territorial vault of the editorial. He edited all together, twelve editions of *The Performer: Ilorin Journal of Performing Arts* from 2001 to 2005, *Alore: Ilorin Journal of Humanities* from 2004 to 2006 and serves as the foundation Editor of *Scene Dock: Journal of Theatre Design and Technology* from 2015 to 2022. He was one time editor of *Liwuram: Journal of Humanities* and, at present, the editor-in-chief of the *National Theatre Monograph Series*.

His assessments are always studies in serious scholarship while his eye for details and critical submissions are poetics of realities within the expanding border of 21st century scholarship. His depth of knowledge on the social sciences, sciences and humanities has continued to project him as an accomplished master in the editorial field. He is always current, resourceful and intellectually constructive while providing guides and directions. With him, scholarship is a serious painstaking art, and with his editorial assertiveness, many have been helped through his uncommon, rigorous and innovative interventions. Either alone or with Duro Oni, Ade P. Dopamu, I. O. Umejiesi, P. O. Amanze, V. A. Alabi, Greg Mbajorgu, Sola Fosudo, Olu Obafemi, Charles Bodunde, Hope Eghagha, JOJ Nwachukwu-Agbada, Tunde Omobowale, Akeem Adeyanju, Osakue Omoera, Chike Okoye, Abba Tijani, Raimund Vogels, Osita Ezenwanebe and so on; Prof. S. E. Ododo has published sixteen critical books on theatre, performance, marketing and cultural entertainment, technical theatre, African religion, Olu Obafemi, J. P. Clark, Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma, media arts, liminality, critical nationalism, cultural sustainability and so on. He has published seven and edited fourteen books by himself or with his academic partners mentioned above.

Ododo's scholarship is better evaluated through his 66 critical works published in local, national and international journals, and as chapters in books. The themes of his publications move from theatre technology to dramatic theory and criticism, performance aesthetics, children theatre, media arts, theatre and

national culture, gender and womanhood, musical art, theatre production, effective communication, culture and cultural vitality and the Nollywood. His sense for details, data analysis and presentation, language deployment and dexterity, illustrative examples, comparative analysis and creative inventiveness make him to be ranked among world scholars. The juristic asset of the king of light has also paid off through his roles as Chief Judge of Literary Prizes for Association of Nigerian Authors from 2006 to 2009. He has also put himself forward to be judged and assessed by highly revered organisations and he passed through the awards of competitive Fellowships on him. Thus, he is Fellow of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) in 2013, Fellow of Nigerian Academy of Letters (FNAL) in 2019, Fellow of Theatre Arts (FTA) in 2021, Fellow of Society of Nigerian Artists (FSNA) in 2021, Fellow of Association of Nigerian Authors (FANA) in 2021 and Fellow of Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (FNIPR). These fellowship awards are testimonies to his academic and professional distinctions in theatre practice and scholarship; visual art and public relations.

Ododo's prodigiousness is always laced with questions that border on his time managements, creative restlessness, versatility and audaciousness. Thus, it is very difficult to say, apology to Kafka (1954, p.237) whether Ododo is a cage in search of a bird or whether he is the bird that is trying to escape the cage. In all, Ododo is an intellectual question that we could not provide enough answer to. Even as the half of his wings, I agree that Ododo falls into the thesis of excellence and that the more we want to know him, the more "there are questions which we could never get over if we were not delivered from them by the operation of nature" (Kafka, 1954, p.240).

Conclusion

The nature in Ododo's scholarship is eternal and effervescent. I have not involved myself in the postcolonial narrative of illusion but I have engaged myself in the favours received through the king of light. These favours are many and they are tropes that have partly contributed to my scholarship. For the king of light, the maker of the modern National Theatre of Nigeria, Sunday Enessi Ododo, and diamond is good but it is just the beginning of the notes of platinum jubilee.

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